



## EUROPEAN JEWISH DIGEST: LOOKING AT THE HEADLINES ACROSS JEWISH EUROPE

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 5: MAY 2015

### 1 / ISSUES CONCERNING ANTISEMITISM

#### *Violence, Vandalism & Abuse*

As in previous months, episodes of violence, vandalism and abuse were once again registered in several countries in May. France, in particular, came under the spotlight. At the start of the month, two Jewish men were attacked in Paris by a gang of about 40 people. The victims, both in their early 20s, were slightly injured in an area that is home to many Jewish-owned businesses. The assailants were identified as members of 'Gaza Firm,' a pro-Palestinian group that is involved in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement. In Lille, at least six tombstones were smashed at the Jewish cemetery, with the vandals also pouring paint on the gravestones. A few days later, a 16-year-old boy, who was wearing a *kippa*, was attacked while returning home to prepare for Shabbat dinner in Paris. He was approached by four men who robbed him, took his shoes, and smashed his phone into the ground. Two of the attackers held the victim down while a third repeatedly delivered blows to his body and head, injuring one of his eyes severely. The National Bureau for Vigilance Against Antisemitism (BNVCA) classified this attack as antisemitic. Also in Paris, a Jewish woman was slightly injured by three African women who assaulted her because she complained to them about the behaviour of children, whom she thought belonged to at least one of them. Whilst allegedly assaulting her, witnesses heard the African women shouting antisemitic remarks, including "Hitler didn't finish the job" and a statement about Jews being "a filthy race."

Also in France, the Jewish director of the Technical University Institution (IUT) in Saint-Denis, near Paris, who has received multiple death threats this year, was targeted by unknown individuals who sent five of his colleagues text messages reading "You too will fall. You work for Jews." A Star of David was also painted on the door of an office of a teacher at IUT. BNVCA co-founder, Sammy Ghozlan, said that "the antisemitic climate at this university has been worsening for several years." At the start of the month, the memorial plaque in memory of Ilan Halimi, the 23 year-old who was tortured and murdered in 2006, was found smashed in Paris. Bagneux mayor Marie-Hélène Amiable said she was "extremely shocked" by the incident and described the vandalism as "outrageous" and "unacceptable." Towards the end of the month, BNVCA revealed that there has been an average of around three antisemitic incidents a day in France since the supermarket murders in Paris earlier this year and that there have been even more antisemitic crimes than it has recorded because French Jews are reporting hate incidents "less and less." BNVCA co-founder Sylvain Zenouda said "the general atmosphere in France has been very morose since the Paris attacks and it is amplified in the Jewish community. Some people don't want to invest any more in community projects. It's difficult to pray, all the synagogues have reinforced security and three or four soldiers outside. That's why there are more and more attacks on young people or people on their own – they cannot attack the community centres anymore."

In Belgium, a municipal security officer posted that he would kill "each and every Jew" during a debate on Facebook. He wrote that "the word Jew itself is dirty. If I were in Israel, frankly, I would do to the Jews what they do with the Palestinians – slaughter each and every one of them." Going by the pseudonym *Bebeto Gladiateur*, the officer ignored requests from others in the discussion to tone

down his statements. Joël Rubinfeld, president of the Belgian League against Antisemitism (LBCA) expressed concern on the grounds that “a ‘guardian of the peace’ would publicly speak something that is so antithetical to the values he is supposed to embody, promote and defend” and that antisemitic speech is “increasingly uninhibitedly in certain circles.” Also in Belgium, a Jewish family from Rhode-Saint-Genese near Brussels received a letter with a swastika and the words “dirty Jews.” Another antisemitic threat was received by the Jewish museum’s spokesperson, Chouna Lomponda, a woman of African descent, on Facebook, which said “stop showing and talking for Jews. It could be dangerous for you.”

In Hungary, an Israeli diplomat was accosted and subjected to antisemitic abuse. Israeli Consul Motti Rave was called a “dirty Jew” and was told that Hitler “should have finished the job” by a local man who overheard him speaking Hebrew. Rave, a child of survivors who is fluent in Hungarian, understood the insults and called the police, who arrested the culprit. Israeli officials praised the Hungarians for acting swiftly to deal with the incident.

In Austria, a Jewish resident in Vienna was ordered to remove an Israeli flag that was inside the window of his apartment, or face eviction. This followed a neighbour complaining that the flag “hurt his feelings.” In addition to ordering the removal of the flag, the main tenant then told the sub-tenant that his *mezuzah* also had to be removed. Oskar Deutsch, the president of the Vienna’s Jewish community, said that “this course of action is an abhorrent form of antisemitism and is especially objectionable in Vienna.”

In Poland, vandals destroyed a monument commemorating Holocaust victims at the Jewish cemetery in Rajgrad. Former chairman of the Jewish Community of Warsaw, Piotr Kadłcik, said it was hard to call this an ordinary act of vandalism. He added that “the destruction of a massive monument located away from the city requires careful planning.” Police are investigating the incident. In Sweden, an exhibition on Sweden and Denmark’s “White Bus” operation which rescued people from concentration camps at the end of World War Two, was vandalised, with the perpetrators cutting out a large chunk of text concerning the Jews who were saved. Reverend Mikael Ringlander, one of the organisers, said that “they have consciously cut out the part that concerns the Jews. Nothing else was touched. We held a ceremony in the synagogue yesterday. It must have angered someone.”

In the Czech Republic, the Prague’s Jewish community annual report on antisemitism revealed that the number of antisemitic incidents rose by more than 200 percent in 2014. 46 incidents were registered across the country, compared to thirteen incidents the previous year. Jan Munk, chair of the Jewish community of Prague, said “it is clear that the Czech Republic’s Jewish community becomes a target of antisemitism in relation to the situation in the Middle East. Czech Jews are perceived by some groups as envoys of the State of Israel and are blamed for its political decisions.” However the report added that the Czech Republic ranks among the countries where antisemitism is not significantly present, either in mainstream society or among politicians. In Germany, the number of antisemitic offences also rose. Thomas de Maiziere, Interior Minister, announced that crimes against Jews were up 25.2 percent (1,596 in total) in 2014 from the number in the previous year.

- [40 Person Mob Assaults 2 Jews on Paris’ Boulevard Voltaire](#) (The Algemeiner, May 1, 2015)
- [Vandals target French Jewish cemetery, Vienna’s Freud museum](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 15, 2015)
- [Jewish teen, woman lightly wounded in Paris-region antisemitic attacks](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 18, 2015)
- [In Belgium and France, Jews and Jewish museum employee threatened](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 29, 2015)

- [Suburban Paris memorial to Ilan Halimi is vandalized](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 3, 2015)
- [Three Jew-hate incidents 'every day' since Paris](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, May 28, 2015)
- [Belgian official says he'd 'kill each and every Jew'](#) (The Times of Israel, June 1, 2015)
- [Hungarian man arrested for shouting antisemitic curses at Israeli diplomat](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 27, 2015)
- [Vandalism destroys monument to Polish Jewish community killed in Holocaust](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 10, 2015)
- [Swedish exhibition on WWII rescue attacked](#) (The Local, May 9, 2015)
- [Antisemitism in Malmö reveals flaws in Swedish immigration system](#) (CBC News, May 22, 2015)
- [Landlord tells tenant to remove Israeli flag](#) (The Local, May 26, 2015)
- [Report: Last year saw rise in antisemitic incidents in ČR](#) (Prague Daily Monitor, May 5, 2015)
- [Antisemitic, right-wing attacks rise in Germany](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 10, 2015)

## Politics

In Greece, a series of disturbing events took place which resulted in the cancellation of a ceremony to dedicate a new Holocaust memorial. Just days before the ceremony was scheduled to take place, the mayor of Kevala, Dimitra Tsanaka, called the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece to express her objection to the Star of David engraved on the monument. She asked for the removal of the symbol in order not to cancel the inauguration event. The Jewish community rejected this demand as “unacceptable, unethical and insulting” and considered the decision as a “clear attack against the religious feelings of Greek Jews, citizens of this country, as well as a brutal insult to the holy memory of the victims of the Holocaust.” Secretary General for Religious Affairs Giorgos Kalantzis declared “as an orthodox Christian I feel deeply insulted by this issue, because it would be as if someone asked us to erase or modify for ‘aesthetic reasons’ the symbol of the cross on the tombs of our grandfathers executed by the Germans. The Greek Jews who were murdered by the Nazis have no tomb in the soil of our country to be marked with the Star of David, as their tombs lay in the sky and under the earth where their ashes from the crematoria were spread upon.” All major political parties also criticised the decision of the Mayor of Kevala. The governing party Syriza stated that “the postponement of the event for the unveiling of the Holocaust Memorial in Kavala insults historic memory and the democratic and anti-Nazi struggles of the Greek people. It is an act which foments antisemitism and intolerance and as such it cannot be tolerated.” Amid all the outcry, the mayor eventually agreed that the ceremony and the memorial would go ahead as planned at a later date in June.

In Belgium, a memorial ceremony and visits by senior politicians marked the one year anniversary of the murder of four people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels. Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel took part in the ceremony and Brussels Mayor Yvan Mayeur said that “a year later we must maintain a sense of indignation and anger against this violent act. It’s a terrorist and antisemitic act which is unacceptable for us, especially in a city like Brussels which is an open and cosmopolitan city where 160 nationalities live together.” In a visit with the cabinet, Jan Jambon, Home Affairs and Security Minister, said “this Museum is a permanent reminder of the dangers we still face. With this visit, we became aware of the importance of our work, and were reminded why we think about security every day... A year after the attack, we cannot say another attack has become unlikely, but we can say that security has been improved. I hope that one day we can lower the threat level, for the Jewish Museum and other Jewish institutions. However, that is not yet the case.” King Philippe Léopold Louis Marie of Belgium held his first meeting with rabbis and officials of the Jewish community since he came to the throne in 2013. He said that he wanted to invite them to the palace to express his solidarity, and especially to hear whether Belgian Jews are considering leaving the country for fear of their safety. At

the meeting, the Prime Minister promised that the government's budget will include over €4.5 million to increase security in Jewish areas.

In France, following a disciplinary hearing, Jean-Marie Le Pen was suspended from the Front National, the party he founded. Le Pen also faces being stripped of his role as honorary president of the party at an extraordinary general assembly to be held within the next three months. He said he plans to set up his own 'grouping' in order to "weigh in to restore the political line that was followed for decades."

Also in France, Prime Minister Manuel Valls was honoured by the Conference of European Rabbis with the organisation's Lord Jakobovits Award for his "exemplary determination in the fight against antisemitism." Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, the president of the Conference of European Rabbis, said that "there are some voices asking if there is a future for the Jewish people in Europe. I say this question can only be answered by European governments themselves. And, if that answer is to be a positive, then they must follow the example of Prime Minister Valls." However it has also been reported that protection of some of France's smaller communities has been unofficially declining, with some noticing that soldiers are present at the start of some evening events but leave well before they are finished. Some small synagogues claim to have been told that they will not be guarded for an event that has fewer than ten participants.

In Germany, at a ceremony marking seventy years since the liberation of Dachau, Chancellor Angela Merkel reiterated her condemnation of antisemitism, saying "we are all forever called upon to never close our eyes and ears to those who today accost, threaten and attack people when they identify themselves somehow as Jews or also when they side with the State of Israel. We all are forever called upon to make unmistakably clear that Jewish life is part of our identity." Also in Germany, following criticism for failing to invite Jewish members to join a new committee to promote the interests of Germans Jews and to fight antisemitism, the government confirmed the appointment of Andreas Nachama, director of the Topography of Terror museum in Berlin that documents Nazi-era crimes, and Marina Chernivsky, director of Change Your Outlook, an educational initiative against intolerance and antisemitism.

Also in Germany, an appeals court in the Essen District upheld January's verdict of incitement to hate in the ground-breaking case against Taylan Can, who unsuccessfully argued that his chants at an anti-Israel demonstration last summer were purely political. In her verdict in January, Judge Gauri Sastry stated that calling for "death and hate to Zionists" was tantamount to antisemitism and sentenced Can to three months of probation and a fine of about \$200. The appeals court has upheld her verdict and extended the probation period to ten months. Sacha Stawski, founder and president of the German media watchdog Honestly Concerned, called the decision a milestone and said that the demonstrations were "filled with hate – antisemitic hate, which hid behind the 'facade' of supposed 'criticism' of Zionism and of Israel. The judges in this case very correctly came to the conclusion that criticism is absolutely acceptable; but what we saw had nothing to do with voicing concern over the defensive measures of the Israeli army."

In the UK, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, apologised to Britain's Jewish community for antisemitic behaviour and comments emanating from the Anglican Communion. He also vowed to take rising antisemitism in the UK and within his church "seriously." At a dinner organised by the Board of Deputies of British Jews he said "within the Christian community we need to stand against our own tendency, well exhibited over many centuries, to violence: violence against each other, and, above all, violence against Jewish communities, in horrendous and horrible ways going back well over a millennium." In London, the police admitted that they are powerless to prevent a far right demonstration due to take place "against Jewish privilege" in Golders Green in July. Golders Green is one of the most densely Jewish areas in the country. Local MP, Mike Freer, said that he had asked the Home Office to ban the protest and added that "the rally is not about free speech but a deliberate

attempt to provoke tension and antisemitism.” (Note that the police have subsequently forced the demonstration to take place elsewhere in London instead – away from any Jewish population centre – and information about that will be included in the June digest).

In Denmark, the head of the country’s intelligence agency stepped down as an investigation criticised parts of the police response to February’s deadly attacks in Copenhagen. His resignation came hours before the publication of a police report that revealed it took almost four hours from the moment gunman Omar El-Hussein shot dead a filmmaker outside a cultural centre, until police were deployed outside Copenhagen’s main synagogue, where a Jewish man, Dan Uzan, was shot and killed whilst protecting a bat mitzvah celebration. Justice Minister Mette Frederiksen said “that is too long, it’s obviously not satisfactory. It can’t be explained.”

Antisemitism involving football fans in the Netherlands continued to be an issue in May. The Public Prosecutor is investigating chants by supporters during celebrations marking FC Groningen’s KNVB Cup win. Mocking Ajax fans, it is alleged the song ‘*En wie niet springt die is een Jood*’ (‘Who does not jump is a Jew’) was heard. Following antisemitic singing by FC Utrecht fans in April, the Dutch football association (KNVB) has proposed fining the club €10,000 and closing the hardcore supporter section, nicknamed the ‘Bunnikside,’ during the next home match against Ajax. Since this incident, professional clubs and the KNVB have agreed to crack down on the offensive chants in every stadium. KNVB contacted several Jewish interest groups to help to devise a joint, structural approach to raise awareness among football fans across the country. Possibly as a result of this, a group of Cambuur fans were banned from watching their team play Ajax in the Amsterdam Arena when Mayor Eberhard van der Laan sent a whole bus full of fans back to Leeuwarden for chanting antisemitic slogans.

- [Greek Mayor Flip-Flops Over Holocaust Memorial Unveiling](#) (Tablet Magazine, May 18, 2015)
- [The Greek Political Parties Condemned the Postponement of the Unveiling Ceremony of the Holocaust Memorial of Kavala](#) (Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, May 18, 2015)
- [Hundreds pay tribute to Brussels Jewish Museum dead](#) (Yahoo News, May 24, 2015)
- [Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel at a memorial ceremony for the four victims of last year's attack at the Brussels Jewish Museum](#) (European Jewish Press, May 24, 2015)
- [Jan Jambon visits Brussels Jewish Museum with his cabinet](#) (The Brussels Times, May 24, 2015)
- [King Philippe of Belgium Meets with Jewish Community Leaders and Vows Support](#) (JP Updates, May 31, 2015)
- [Jean-Marie Le Pen suspended after Front National disciplinary hearing](#) (The Guardian, May 4, 2015)
- [France National Front: Jean-Marie Le Pen to set up 'grouping'](#) (BBC News, May 11, 2015)
- [French prime minister praised by European rabbis for taking 'decisive action' against antisemitism](#) (World Jewish Congress, May 13, 2015)
- [Hollande warns of new hate at ceremony for resistance fighters](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 29, 2015)
- [Only five months after the horror, shul security is waning](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, May 28, 2015)
- [Toulouse still struggles with daily life](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, May 28, 2015)
- [Merkel in antisemitism warning as marks Nazi camp's liberation](#) (Yahoo News, May 3, 2015)
- [Germany appoints two Jews to antisemitism commission in response to criticism](#) (i24 News, May 21, 2015)
- [German man loses appeal on 'anti-Zionist' chants](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 27, 2015)
- [Archbishop says sorry for Anglican antisemitism](#) (Church Times, May 8, 2015)
- [Police powerless to stop neo-Nazi rally in Jewish area of London](#) (The Guardian, May 20, 2015)
- [Antisemitism prompts Scottish Jews to consider leaving the country](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, May 23, 2015)

- [Danish intel chief steps down over failure to avert antisemitic attack](#) (The Times of Israel, May 6, 2015)
- [Public prosecutor investigates 'Jews' chant at Groningen cup win party](#) (DutchNews.nl, May 7, 2015)
- [Amsterdam blocks football fans chanting antisemitic slogans](#) (NL Times, May 11, 2015)
- [Antisemitic chants may cost FC Utrecht €10k, hardcore supporter ban](#) (NL Times, May 26, 2015)

### ***Conferences to Combat Antisemitism***

In Toulouse in France, the biennial forum of the Conference of European Rabbis (CER) brought together 250 participants devoted to finding solutions for challenges facing European Jewry. Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of CER, said that Toulouse was chosen as the venue for the event to demonstrate European Jewry's "determination to stand firm against the new wave of terrorism designed to intimidate Europe and its Jews." First vice president of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, told the conference via video-link that "Europe without the Jews is no longer Europe" and vowed that the "European Commission and the European Union would fight antisemitism wherever it rears its ugly head."

In Jerusalem, the fifth Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism (GFCA) took place. It brought together Jewish community leaders, civil society representatives, diplomats and researchers (including JPR representation) to discuss ways to combat rising levels of anti-Jewish prejudice. Several imams spoke at the conference, including Imam Yahya Pallavicini, preacher at the Al-Wahid mosque in Milan, and an advisor to the Minister of Education in Italy. He said that antisemitism is on the rise in Europe and added that "we had hoped as European citizens and as Muslim leaders that diseases such as antisemitism would decrease. But unfortunately the misleading interpretations and mentality and narrative of the antisemitic approach is increasing and influencing the young generation in Europe." The conference issued a series of recommendations to governments and websites to reduce cyber hate, and to European governments to reduce antisemitism. Included were recommendations to Internet providers to adopt a clear industry standard for defining, reporting and removing hate speech and antisemitism and for governments to establish national legal units responsible for combating cyber hate.

The conference coincided with the publication of [JPR's extensive new report on antisemitism in the UK](#), which takes an objective view of existing sources of data to make an assessment of what is currently going on in the country. Drawing on our own work, as well as that of others, we conclude that long-term investment is needed to professionalise research on antisemitism, as poor analysis and competing claims do little to help clarify reality for European Jews, or to inform the development of intelligent policy about how best to combat it.

- [EU Commissioner: Europe without the Jews is not Europe](#) (World Jewish Congress, May 14, 2015)
- [Rabbis gather in Toulouse to denounce Islamist terror](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 13, 2015)
- [Muslims and Jews gather to combat antisemitism](#) (Jewish Journal, May 13, 2015)
- [Cyberhate, antisemitism discussed at Jerusalem forum](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 14, 2015)
- [Government antisemitism conference endorses net censorship](#) (The Jerusalem Post, May 14, 2015)

## 2 / MONITORING DEVELOPMENTS IN UKRAINE

In Ukraine, a new report by the Association of Jewish Organisations and Communities (Vaad) of Ukraine showed that antisemitic violence peaked in 2014, but that the surge expected in the wake of the revolution failed to occur. The report recorded 23 incidents over the course of the year within both Ukrainian and separatist-held territory. Incidents of vandalism had previously held steady at nine per year since 2011, having fallen from a peak of 21 in 2006. However, Vyacheslav Likhachev, who monitors antisemitism for the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress and the Vaad said “even though the statistics for 2014 display significant growth in both antisemitic vandalism and antisemitic violence in comparison with previous years, the peak of the crimes remains in the mid-2000s, and when taking the long perspective, the situation over the last five years seems to be relatively stable.”

Concern has been expressed over two legislative initiatives adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament: the establishment of official government commemoration of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which murdered thousands of Jews in the 1940s, and the banning of Communist and Nazi propaganda and symbols. Concerning the former, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) said that the initiative is an “attempt to legislate how the history of Ukraine should be discussed and written, especially regarding the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA).” Regarding the latter, the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, whilst noting that the law’s prohibition does not apply within academic contexts, expressed its concern that it prevents broadcast media from airing material that “justifies the fight against participants in the struggle for Ukraine’s independence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”

- [Report: Antisemitic vandalism spiked in Ukraine in 2014](#) (The Jerusalem Post, May 10, 2015)
- [US Holocaust museum censures Ukraine over decision to honor Nazi collaborators](#) (The Jerusalem Post, May 17, 2015)

## 3 / REVISITING HOLOCAUST ISSUES

Many different Holocaust-related issues were reported in the media in May. In both Poland and Croatia, the topic of pensions arose, albeit for very different reasons. In Poland, new regulations approved by the Polish president a year ago came into effect, which means that a further 20,000 Holocaust survivors will be eligible to receive pensions. The rules remove the requirement for recipients to have a Polish bank account, making it easier for those living in other countries to receive the monthly payment of \$130. In Croatia, both the Wiesenthal Centre and the Coalition of Refugee Associations urged the government to stop paying pensions to former members of the Ustasa and Home Guard veterans, groups complicit in the murder of Jews and Roma during the Holocaust.

The issue of apologies for wartime behaviour also arose. In Austria, the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches both apologised for their antisemitic attitudes and behaviour before and during World War II. Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn said the Catholic Church “must acknowledge its share of responsibility for the creation of a climate of disdain and hatred” for Jews before the Nazi era and that they showed a lack of “pity and solidarity with our Jewish fellow citizens” during the Holocaust. The Protestant Council of Churches expressed “particular shame” for “complicity against Jews and other groups ... that were considered ‘unfit to live’.”

In Norway, the curator of a new exhibition about the collaboration of the Norwegian train company NSB with Germany called on the company to apologise for transporting Norwegian Jews and using prisoners of war during the German occupation. Curator Bjørg Eva Aasen said that “I wish they had

apologised to the Jews, and also to all the East European prisoners of war who were working for them on the construction of the Nordland Line. They say it's a sad story, but they don't apologise." Norwegian journalist Bjørn Westlie said that "this is something NSB has tried to hide for seventy years. They should tell the whole story of what happened." NSB did not send a representative to the opening of the exhibition.

Contrasting approaches to the issue of educating about the Holocaust arose in Hungary and Germany. In Hungary, Pázmány Péter Catholic University (PPKE) became the first higher education institution in Europe to make Holocaust study a graduation requirement in all its programmes. PPKE undergraduates are now required to take two specific courses, regardless of their disciplines: firstly, an introduction to the Roman Catholic faith and secondly, a Holocaust history course.

In a press conference with Israeli ambassador Ilan Mor, PPKE rector Szabolcs Szuromi said that it was the ambassador's comments at an event in 2014, co-sponsored by PPKE and the Hungarian Catholic Conference of Bishops, about how new initiatives are needed to make antisemitism unacceptable among the younger generations, which inspired the university to take this step.

However, in Germany, the governing Christian Social Union (CSU) party in Bavaria's state government lifted a requirement for Muslim students and other immigrant pupils from visiting concentration camps as part of Holocaust educational programmes. In a parliamentary debate about the issue, CSU politician Klaus Steiner said that "there are a lot of children from Muslim families who do not have a connection to our past. We have to approach this topic carefully with these children." Opposition politicians sharply criticised the CSU, with George Rosenthal of the Social Democratic party saying that visits to the "places of the perpetrators is essential for all students."

Two very different approaches to visual representations of World War Two and the Holocaust were reported in May. First, a film about a Jewish Sonderkommando death camp worker, by Hungarian filmmaker Laszlo Nemes, won a Grand Prix award at the Cannes Film Festival. Nemes, director and screenwriter of 'Son of Saul,' told reporters that it was partly a testament to hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews killed during World War Two after Hungarians cooperated with the Nazis in their deportation. Geza Rohrig, the actor who portrays the eponymous Saul, said that Hungarians were growing immune to the suffering of people they see as different, and that he wanted "as many people as possible to watch this film as I believe Hungarians, for some time now, have ignored the pain of certain other people."

However, second, in the Czech Republic, there has been much criticism of a Czech reality television show that sought to recreate life under the Nazi occupation. Called 'In Holiday of the Protectorate' three generations of a family spend two months living among actors playing Nazi soldiers and other residents of their hamlet. They have to wear period dress and survive on rations. If the family can endure the conditions, they win a prize. One episode was called 'With the Gestapo at my back.' One critic asked: "What are they going to do next? Big Brother Auschwitz?"

In Poland, a private entrepreneur announced plans to establish a museum in a house in south-east Poland where Jews hid from the Nazis during World War Two. Orphaned Catholic sisters Stefania and Helena Podgorski, aged 16 and 9, hid thirteen members of the Diamant family in a house on Tatarska Street in Przemysl. Stefania had worked in the Diamant family's grocery store before the Nazi invasion of Poland. The Jewish family remained hidden in the attic for two-and-a-half years and survived the Holocaust. In 1979, the Podgorski sisters were honoured as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem.

Also in Poland, during a final pre-election debate, Andrzej Duda (who was subsequently elected President), criticised outgoing President Bronislaw Komorowski for acknowledging Polish complicity

in the pogrom in Jedwabne in 1941. Repeating his previous comments, Komorowski said during the debate that “the nation of victims was also the nation of perpetrators.” Duda responded by calling Komorowski’s statements an “attempt to destroy Poland’s good name.” Komorowski replied that “difficult and painful episodes in our history must not be hidden. Those who do not see them are closing their eyes before historical truth.”

In Israel, Ziuta Hartman, one of the last surviving participants of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the last known fighter of the ZZW (Jewish Military Union), died. In 2010, Hartman was named an honorary citizen of Warsaw.

In France, a 17<sup>th</sup> century painting that was looted by the Nazis from a prominent Jewish art curator in Munich and ended up in the Louvre in Paris, is being returned to the heirs of its rightful owner. The painting, ‘Portrait of a Man,’ which was owned by renowned art historian and curator August Liebmann Mayer, was recovered by the French government and the U.S. Department of Financial Services’ Holocaust Claims Processing Office, which has helped to recover more than 100 Nazi-looted works of art and returned some \$171 million in assets to victims’ families. The announcement of the painting’s return took place at a ceremony at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York.

At Auschwitz-Birkenau, European Parliament President Martin Schulz told around 1,000 young people from all over Europe “you have brought hope into this dark place” and stated “together we can and will fight the return of antisemitism and racism, intolerance, and ultra-nationalism every step of the way.” The young people were part of the ‘Train 1,000 to Auschwitz’ commemorative event, a train journey from Brussels to Krakow which is part of an educational project aiming to preserve the memory of the Holocaust. Schulz added that “we have come together here in Auschwitz today to keep the memory alive. Remembering is painful. But we must teach every generation how these barbaric acts of evil could happen in one of the most modernised societies of that time.”

- [Polish regulation to give pensions to 20,000 Holocaust survivors](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 22, 2015)
- [Croatia should not pay pensions of Nazi collaborators, groups say](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 26, 2015)
- [Austrian Catholic and Protestant Churches Apologize for Antisemitism](#) (The Algemeiner, May 10, 2015)
- [Norway rail firm 'should apologise' for Nazi past](#) (The Local, May 8, 2015)
- [Hungarian Catholic university requires all students to study Holocaust](#) (Hungarian Free Press, May 27, 2015)
- [German party lifts requirement for Muslim students to visit concentration camps](#) (The Jerusalem Post, May 27, 2015)
- [Hungary Cannes sensation may help country face dark past](#) (Reuters, May 28, 2015)
- [Nazi 'Big Brother' series sparks anger](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, May 28, 2015)
- [Polish home that hid Jewish family from Nazis to become museum](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 25, 2015)
- [No recognition of Shoah killing: Polish president](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, May 28, 2015)
- [Ziuta Hartman, one of the last surviving participants of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, dies](#) (World Jewish Congress, May 20, 2015)
- [Looted Nazi painting being returned from Louvre to heirs](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 5, 2015)
- [U.S. veterans and survivors gather at Dachau to mark 70th anniversary of concentration camp's liberation](#) (Mail Online, May 3, 2015)
- [Martin Schulz to young Europeans visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau: 'We have come together here to keep the memory alive'](#) (European Jewish Press, May 11, 2015)

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

Two celebrations of Jewish life, history and culture were highlighted in the press in May. In Moldova, more than 400 young Jews from across the country gathered for the third annual three-day Limmud FSU conference in Kishinev to attend lectures from Jewish speakers and reconnect with the Jewish past. Alexander Bilinkis, chairman of Moldova's Jewish community, said "in my mind, we have now reached a new age in the community. We can say everywhere 'I'm Jewish' without fear, and this is very important."

In the UK, the town of Oxford held its second annual Jewish street fair with a celebration of the city's centuries-old Jewish culture. The fair, organised by Oxford Chabad, included a Jewish history exhibition, Israeli art, klezmer music, Kiddush cup-making workshops, lessons in making *challah* and food stands offering kosher shawarma, falafel, hummus and bagels. Rabbi Eli Brackman said "the purpose of the fair is to celebrate the full scope of Jewish culture, history and tradition through an informative, fun and educational festival, demonstrating the vibrancy and relevance of Jewish life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the UK and around the world, as well as pride in its long history over centuries in Oxford."

In Lithuania, following more than two years of restoration work, over 400 tombstones were identified and more than 1,300 painstakingly restored or preserved at the Jewish cemetery in Šeduva. A ceremony was held to commemorate the restoration of the cemetery and the dedication of monuments at three sites where local Jews were taken to be killed by Nazis and their Lithuanian accomplices. Sergey Kanovich, the Vilnius-born author and Litvak who led the project, said "our first and primary aim is to memorialise the lives and deaths of Šeduva Jews.... It is time Lithuania rediscovered the rich past and culture of its Litvaks. It is time to comprehend Jewish heritage as more than a problem. It is an asset and an inseparable part of the history of Lithuania." The ceremony marks the completion of what is only the first phase in the development of a larger complex that will commemorate Jewish Lithuanian heritage.

In Portugal, the Jewish community of Porto opened a new museum that attempts to tell the story of 900 years of Jewish presence in the region. The museum is housed on the first floor of the Kadoorie Synagogue and among the items on display is a replica of an inscription on the foundation stone of a synagogue that opened in 1380 in Porto and a list of 842 people tortured by the Portuguese Inquisition.

In the UK, the Manchester Jewish Museum received a grant of nearly £427,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to help build new galleries and learning and event spaces and to restore the synagogue building. The Museum says it will create a new visitor experience to tell the story of Manchester's Jewish community with new exhibitions, including a dedicated gallery about the many Holocaust survivors who settled in Manchester. Volunteers will also help catalogue and digitise the Museum's collection. In Ireland, Dublin's Jewish Museum, which has been under threat of closure, has secured a stay of execution from the trust that owns its premises. For now, the Raphael Siev Charitable Trust appears to have relented, partly due to a letter from the director of the National Museum of Ireland urging the trust to change its position. The museum has plans to enlarge its display space, install a kosher café and increase archive storage and research areas into an expanded building, but it has been unable to raise sufficient financial support.

In Lithuania, representatives of the government and the Jewish community agreed on an action plan to preserve Jewish architectural heritage and cemeteries in Lithuania, as well as raise awareness about Jewish history. The first meeting of a special commission appointed by the government agreed to draw

up a plan for the registration and preservation of Jewish cemeteries, as well as the management of Jewish cultural heritage objects and their adaptation to public needs. The Lithuanian Jewish community said in a statement: "Commission members agreed on the need to make greater efforts to teach Lithuania's children about the history of Lithuanian Jews, including Jewish contributions made in Lithuania and the world, and the Holocaust in Lithuania. This entails a thorough examination of current curricula and textbooks, as well as consideration of other sorts of activities, including student tours at museums and historical sites."

In Poland, a new monument was unveiled on the site of the Jewish cemetery in Pila (near Poznan). The Jewish cemetery was probably founded in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and was completely devastated by the Nazis in 1939. It is now on a site which is occupied by the local police school. In Lithuania, local authorities in Vilnius are preparing to demolish an electric sub-station that was built using tombstones looted from a Jewish cemetery. The use of the tombstones was revealed by a local man who had noticed Hebrew and Yiddish inscriptions on the graffiti-covered walls of the sub-station. Archaeologists confirmed that the tombstones had been removed from a nearby Jewish cemetery. Vilnius Mayor, Remigijus Simasius, said he had asked the utility that owns the facility to find a way to move the tombstones to a "proper resting place." Two other cases are now being investigated: the steps leading up to the Reformed Evangelical Church in Vilnius – which was turned into a cinema by the communists – and a wall outside a high school in the city.

Leadership elections were held in two Jewish communities in May. In the UK, barrister Jonathan Arkush was elected as new president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Following his victory, Arkush said "our mission as a faith community is to demonstrate to British society what a positive and vital role our faith plays in British national life." Alongside Arkush, Richard Verber, Sheila Gewolb and Marie van der Zyl were elected senior vice presidents. Verber is the youngest senior vice president in the board's history. In Hungary, Andras Heisler, incumbent president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary (Mazsihisz), was re-elected to his third, non-consecutive term. He will head the Mazsihisz for a further four years.

In the UK, Muslim and Jewish groups in Nottingham have joined forces to help the city's vulnerable people. The Nottingham Liberal Synagogue and Himmah, a not-for-profit Muslim organisation, have jointly opened a drop-in kitchen called 'Salaam Shalom.' Running every Wednesday from 6 to 8 pm, it will serve food to homeless and needy people. Sajid Mohammed, Himmah co-founder, said that "in the last twelve months we've seen a rise in Islamophobia and antisemitism. Nottingham, for the most part, has been quite sheltered, but we felt that now is the right moment to give hope and demonstrate our communities' values of compassion, dignity and care to others."

Also in the UK, a new government report shows that faith schools are "dramatically over-represented" in school league tables of the best schools in 2015. In a listing of the "top performing and most improved schools" based on inspection results and the percentage achieving Level 4 or above in English and Mathematics, Jewish primary schools were well represented, including Moriah Jewish Day School in Pinner and Sinai Jewish School in Kenton. Also in May, concern and anger were expressed both within and beyond the Jewish community following the publication of a letter from rabbis representing the Strictly Orthodox Belz schools in Stamford Hill, which banned mothers of children in Belz schools from driving, and proclaimed that the children of mothers who drive them to school would be turned away at the gates. In a statement, the Equality and Human Rights Commission said that "this sort of discrimination has no place in our society and we will be writing to leaders of the Belz educational institutions to underline their legal obligations." A spokesman for the Office of the Chief Rabbi in the UK said "the Belz Chasidic dynasty has contributed significantly to the rich tapestry of our tradition but this particular view is entirely removed from mainstream Jewish practice." In response to the controversy and possible illegality of the ban, the schools appear to have backed down. Ahron Klein, chief executive of the Belz schools, said "the headteacher sent out the letter on behalf of the

spiritual heads of the community who had not taken into account the implications of such a policy. Neshei Belz, which is our women's organisation, also issued a statement saying that our values may be compromised in driving a vehicle, although they added that they respect individual choices made in this matter. However, the message that children will be excluded has not come from the school's Board of Governors who did not approve the letter in advance. The school believes that women have a choice about whether they want to drive or not, and our policy is to accept all children who are members of our community, which we have been doing for the last forty years."

In Switzerland, Rolf Bloch, the long-time head of the Swiss Jewish Community Federation, passed away at the age of 84. World Jewish Congress President Ronald Lauder called him "the towering figure of Swiss Jewry in the past decades and a universally respected leader who will be sorely missed." Bloch represented the interests of the Swiss people and Jewish communities in negotiations with the government over compensation for Jewish assets that Swiss banks seized after their owners were murdered in the Holocaust. This led to the establishment of a \$1.2 billion compensation fund for Holocaust victims in 1998. Bloch also chaired another fund set up by the Swiss Confederation which disbursed 300 million Swiss Francs to Holocaust survivors in need.

- [Hundreds of young Jews attend Limmud FSU gathering in Moldova](#) (The Jerusalem Post, May 14, 2015)
- [Jewish culture highlighted as Oxford hosts a second street fair](#) (The Oxford Times, May 7, 2015)
- [Unique Jewish heritage site opens in Šeduva](#) (Delfi by The Lithuania Tribune, May 28, 2015)
- [Northern Portuguese city opens first museum on region's Jews](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 26, 2015)
- [Heritage Lottery Fund supports Manchester Jewish Museum development](#) (Heritage Lottery Fund, May 27, 2015)
- [Irish museum wins temporary reprieve](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, May 7, 2015)
- [Lithuanian government and Jewish community agree on plan to preserve Jewish heritage sites](#) (Delfi by The Lithuania Tribune, May 8, 2015)
- [Poland: New Jewish Cemetery Monument at Police School in Pila](#) (Samuel Gruber's Jewish Art & Monuments, May 28)
- [Part of Lithuania's power grid coated in Jewish tombstones](#) (The Times of Israel, May 19, 2015)
- [Britain's Jews choose new leadership](#) (The Times of Israel, May 18, 2015)
- [Head of Hungarian Jewish community reelected](#) (The Jerusalem Post, May 11, 2015)
- [Muslim-Jewish kitchen opens to help Nottingham's neediest](#) (Nottingham, Post, May 20, 2015)
- [Jewish primary schools in London among UK's best according to new Government report](#) (Jewish News, May 13, 2015)
- [Orthodox Jewish sect's female driver ban condemned by Nicky Morgan](#) (The Guardian, May 29, 2015)
- [Jewish women's fury at orthodox ban on driving in London](#) (The Telegraph May 29, 2015)
- [Rolf Bloch, who negotiated with Switzerland for survivor compensation, dies](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, May 27, 2015)

## / ABOUT JPR

The **Institute for Jewish Policy Research** (JPR) is a UK-based research unit, consultancy and think tank that specialises in contemporary Jewish issues. Formerly the Institute of Jewish Affairs, JPR has stood at the forefront of Jewish community research for several decades and is responsible for much of the data and analysis that exist on Jews in the UK and across Europe.

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## / ABOUT THE EUROPEAN JEWISH DIGEST

The **European Jewish Digest** is a monthly publication that summarises some of the key Jewish-interest stories in Europe, and provides links to articles about various newsworthy items. Its purpose is to provide the reader with an overview of incidents and activities that have occurred across Europe each month. Note that all details come exclusively from press reports, and have not been verified by JPR researchers.