



EUROPEAN JEWISH DIGEST: LOOKING AT THE HEADLINES ACROSS JEWISH EUROPE

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1 / ISSUES CONCERNING ANTISEMITISM

Violence, Vandalism & Abuse

Incidents of violence, vandalism and abuse were again reported in the press this month. In Sweden, the National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet – Brå), announced that a total of 6,270 hate crimes were reported to Swedish police in 2014, a rise of 14% from the previous year. Sara Westerberg, a researcher for the agency, said that “it’s the biggest increase so far, ever since we started keeping statistics on hate crimes.” Also in August, police discovered what they called a well-made fake bomb at the Chabad House in Gothenburg.

In the UK, a swastika was daubed on a fence outside a Jewish school in Hackney. The graffiti was discovered outside Beis Chinuch Lebonos Girls with the words “yid s**t”. Michael Scher, from the neighbourhood watch group Shomrim, said it was the second time the school had been targeted in little over a month. Also in London, vandals desecrated a Jewish-funded memorial statue with raw meat in an apparently antisemitic attack. The drinking fountain was paid for by local Jewish residents in 1911 to commemorate the death of King Edward VII.

In France, an historic 19th century French synagogue burned to the ground in the small French town of Maizières-lès-Vic at the beginning of the month. The synagogue had not been used in decades and it is not clear how the fire started. Arson was not being ruled out – Mayor Alain Guise said that “the synagogue had no electrical feed and it didn’t burn itself down.” Also in August, soldiers guarding a synagogue and Jewish school in the Paris suburb of Auverville, arrested a man who hurled objects at them. The man, who was not named, was intoxicated and subdued by the soldiers within minutes of the attack.

In Ukraine, it was reported that at the end of July, nineteen tombstones were smashed at the Jewish cemetery in Uzhgorod by unknown vandals. In Hungary, vandals are thought to have smashed a large stone slab that served as a memorial for the local Jewish population murdered during the Holocaust in the city of Nyiregyhaza.

In Norway, DNB Bank, the country’s largest financial institution, apologised for issuing a credit card featuring an antisemitic image. The image, printed on the card, featured a hook-nosed, bearded Jew wearing a kippah and a *tallit* laughing against a background of gold coins. Even Westerveld, DNB’s executive vice president for communications, wrote in a letter to the Hallelu Foundation “we have been notified about a Visa card issued by us, with a picture of an antisemitic drawing of a Jew. We looked at the case immediately, and found out that this was produced due to a system we have where clients can upload their own pictures and get them printed on their card. We have, however, strict guidelines for what kind of pictures are allowed, and this control is manual. Unfortunately, our manual control has failed in this particular case, and we are deeply sorry for that. This card should never have been printed.”

In Slovakia, an antisemitic caricature was published in the Bystrický Kraj (Bystrica Region) newspaper of an old man with a big nose, grinning while holding a bunch of banknotes. The caricature accompanied a story entitled “We release the region from debt slavery!” The newspaper is issued by the office of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region and is delivered free to mailboxes within the region. Ľubica Laššáková, Banská Bystrica regional deputy, said “I believe that in the past the picture was associated with a topic which nobody can be proud of and which is still highly topical to this day,” and she added that she considers it unethical to have been published in a newspaper which is delivered to people living in various regions within Slovakia. However, the regional prosecutor’s office in Banská Bystrica said that they had checked the caricature and text before printing, but did not find any indications of criminality.

In the UK, antisemitic tweets caught the attention of the press in August. Dominic Kennedy, the Investigations Editor at *The Times* apologised after tweeting that many VIPs accused of being paedophiles were “Jewish or gay” and should be identified using “a system of triangles and stars.” Jonathan Arkush, President of the Board of Deputies, said “what he said was stupid. I suppose he was being satirical but I find such comments extraordinarily misplaced and offensive.” Later in the month, Oxford Jewish Society criticised Kiran Benipal, Oxford University Student Union’s racial awareness and equality campaign co-chair, for posting a tweet which said “Lool what kind of Jews do you f**k with coz they don’t let a single joke slide b4 saying ‘antisemitism.’” Benipal apologised for the tweet saying “I apologise unreservedly for this tweet. Belittling antisemitism is never acceptable, so I profoundly regret what I wrote in the heat of an argument.”

In Spain, Jewish-American reggae and hip-hop star Matisyahu eventually performed at the Rototom Sunsplash Reggae Festival in Valencia after being disinvited following pressure from the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. His invitation was initially revoked because he would not publicly endorse Palestinian statehood. Criticism came from both Spanish and Jewish sources. The Spanish Foreign Ministry said that “imposing a public declaration [from Matisyahu] puts into question the principles of non-discrimination on which all plural and diverse societies are based. The Spanish Constitution forbids discrimination on the grounds of birth, race, sex, religion, opinion, or any other personal or social condition or circumstance.” Ronald Lauder, President of the World Jewish Congress, described the decision as a “clear instance of antisemitism.” Ultimately, stung by the criticism, the festival organisers backtracked. In a statement which condemned antisemitism, the Rototom Sunsplash organisers said that they “would like to publicly apologise to Matisyahu” and that they “made a mistake, due to the boycott and the campaign of pressure, coercion and threats employed by BDS País Valencià because it was perceived that the normal functioning of the festival could be threatened. All of which prevented the organisation from reasoning clearly as to how to deal with the situation properly.” Matisyahu ultimately decided to participate in the festival, and following his performance, he said that he felt the audience was full of hatred. He stated: “people were standing on each other’s shoulders with [Palestinian] flags giving me the middle finger. It was intense. It was not peaceful. It was like ‘F** you, Matisyahu.’ I’ve never had the experience of anything like that, as a Jew or anything in my life.”

Two incidents involving football were reported in August. In Germany, according to German police, an amateur match in Berlin descended into a mass brawl that left two players injured after fans and players from both teams exchanged antisemitic and anti-Muslim insults. A police spokesman said that the trouble started when a fan of TuS Makkabi, a Berlin-based Jewish club, insulted a player from the rival team BFC Meteor. The dispute ended in a tussle involving more than twenty people, forcing the referee to cancel the match. According to Makkabi, the brawl was triggered when a Meteor fan shouted “s** Jews” at team members during the game. Members of the Jewish team then reportedly responded with “s** Arab” and the fight ensued. They also added that Meteor players had used antisemitic insults such as “Jewish pigs” and “dirty Jews,” and had physically attacked its members.

In the Netherlands, a 29 year-old man was arrested in The Hague following an ADO Den Haag fan protest. The man was arrested for gross insults and shouting antisemitic slogans during the protest march. The Public Prosecutor is also investigating the antisemitic slogans shouted by ADO supporters.

Also in the Netherlands, a Dutch man offered to pay €10,000 to anyone willing to kill his Jewish neighbour. The offer was made on Facebook together with antisemitic statements in connection with his long quarrel with his apartment building neighbour, Gabriela Hirschberg, and her partner. He posted that “anyone may come along as long as I have the pleasure of punching their lights out” and asked his Facebook friends to help find “a final solution” to the problem – echoing Nazi language about Jews during the Holocaust.

In the UK, a 23 year-old man from Kilmarnock has sent to jail for six months after sending a photo of himself with a swastika flag to a Jewish woman two days after the seventieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. In sentencing Nicholas Goodwin, Sheriff Elizabeth McFarlane said she had “rarely heard of such disgusting behaviour.” In Liverpool, neo-Nazi group National Action were forced to cancel their march through the city centre following a huge backlash by anti-fascist campaigners. Hundreds of counter protesters surrounded suspected members of the white supremacist group inside Lime Street Station, leading them to be locked inside a lost baggage facility at one point. Joe Anderson, Mayor of Liverpool, said “I think the reaction that they got in the city was not unexpected. I think the city is, for me, a city that is proud of its tag that we are called the world in one city. I think whenever the city is bullied or intimidated or threatened we all come together and we stand together.”

In Scotland, the police have launched a campaign to combat rising antisemitism in the country. The campaign, which is called “Scotland: No place for prejudice,” and seeks to “encourage more people to come forward and speak out and report hate crimes,” will last a month and incorporate messages against racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism (offences against disabled people) and religious discrimination. Ephraim Borowski, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (ScoJeC) director, welcomed the campaign saying that people in the community were “pretty happy with how the police are dealing with these things. We don’t have a lot to complain about, either about the police, the Crown Office or the courts.”

- [Record increase in Swedish hate crimes](#) (The Local, August 5, 2015)
- [Fake bomb found at Swedish Chabad house amid reported rise in hate crimes](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 14, 2015)
- [Swastika daubed outside Jewish school in London in second antisemitic incident in weeks](#) (The Independent, August 17, 2015)
- [‘Disgusting’ raw meat stuck on patriotic Jewish memorial in east London](#) (London 24, August 20, 2015)
- [Historic former French synagogue burns down](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 11, 2015)
- [Attacker of French troops guarding Paris-area synagogue arrested](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 31, 2015)
- [Ukraine Jewish headstones, Hungary Holocaust monument smashed](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 7, 2015)
- [Norway bank apologizes for credit card with antisemitic image](#) (September 2, 2015)
- [Banská Bystrica’s regional newspaper publishes antisemitic caricature](#) (The Slovak Spectator, August 5, 2015)
- [Times Investigations Editor apologises for ‘vile’ Holocaust paedophilia tweet](#) (Jewish News, August 5, 2015)
- [Oxford student union officer criticised for antisemitic tweet](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, August 26, 2015)

- [Matisyahu row: Spain censures festival over Jewish singer](#) (BBC News, August 19, 2015)
- [Spanish festival reinvites Matisyahu after worldwide criticism](#) (The Jerusalem Post, August 19, 2015)
- [Spanish broadcaster apologizes for 'Jewish Satanism' show](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 28, 2015)
- [Conflicting reports on what started soccer brawl in Berlin involving Jewish team](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 1, 2015)
- [Football fan protest investigated for antisemitism](#) (NL Times, August 10, 2015)
- [Dutch man offers money on Facebook to kill 'devilish' Jewish neighbour](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 24, 2015)
- [Racist thug receives six-month prison sentence after taunting Jewish victim with Nazi flag](#) (Daily Record, August 9, 2015)
- [National Action call off Liverpool march in face of huge anti-fascist backlash](#) (Liverpool Echo, August 15, 2015)
- [Scottish police launch campaign against hate](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, August 17, 2015)

Politics

In Ukraine, leading politicians and other public figures led calls condemning antisemitism. At the end of July, a group of Ukrainian Jewish leaders met with President Petro Poroshenko in Kiev who told them that “in Ukraine, we won’t tolerate any kind of racism, whether it targets Jews or any other minority.” Towards the end of August, World Jewish Congress (WJC) leaders, including Chief Executive Officer Robert Singer, met with the head of the Ukraine Orthodox Church, Patriarch Filaret, who strongly condemned antisemitism, saying “the Ukraine Orthodox Church is not interested in antisemitism” and “a good Christian cannot be an antisemite as a good Christian must love everyone.” The WJC delegation went on to meet with Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk and mayor of Kiev, Vitali Klitschko. Yatsenyuk said that his government would continue to be “very tough and adamant on fighting antisemitism and xenophobia,” adding “these are not just words. They come from the bottom of my heart.”

Leaders from the European Commission also spoke out against antisemitism in August. In an opinion article in Euractiv.com, Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President of the European Commission, and Věra Jourová, EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, said “we must address the fact that racist, xenophobic and antisemitic crimes and hate speech go unpunished in some countries, and the problem of politicians who trivialise or ignore the seriousness of hate speech and hate crime.” They further added that “never again should we tolerate antisemitic or racist discourse. Never again should European and other Jews feel that they have to emigrate.”

In the UK, concern was expressed in the Jewish community about the track record of Labour party leadership contender Jeremy Corbyn on issues to do with Israel and his links with antisemites and Holocaust deniers. Front page headlines in the Jewish Chronicle claimed that Corbyn associated with “Holocaust deniers, terrorists and some outright antisemites.” Shadow cabinet minister Ivan Lewis claimed that Corbyn expresses support for, and fails to condemn, people who have engaged in antisemitic rhetoric. Corbyn responded to these claims as “beyond appalling, disgusting and deeply offensive” and vowed to fight racism “until my dying day.”

Also in the UK, the campaign group, Jewish Human Rights Watch (JHRW), is seeking to take Leicester City Council to the High Court over its boycott of goods produced in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. JHRW filed legal papers seeking a judicial review of the council’s November decision to stop buying items produced in settlements and accused them of antisemitism, likening the council’s actions

to the boycott of Jewish shops in 1930s Nazi Germany. The council has refuted the accusation. In Scotland, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon recognised the fears of the Jewish community over rising antisemitism, telling a meeting at Glasgow's Giffnock and Newlands Synagogue that one instance of antisemitism was one too many. She said that Jewish community members "are scared in many respects but are nevertheless determined to stake their claim to the country they live in, and [they] say to me that they want these concerns addressed. I hope that the message I was giving them of solidarity was well received." Sturgeon added that "whatever the rights and wrongs of the Israel-Palestine situation, it should never be used as some kind of justification for attacks on Jewish people, or abuse towards Jewish people, or Jewish people in any way being made to feel responsible for the actions people are disagreeing with. That's a point that has to be made at every level of Scottish society very, very strongly."

In Austria, the Jewish community of Vienna has accused the prosecutor's office of ignoring antisemitic incitement by pro-Palestinian activists. The provocation took the form of a caricature published in July on the Facebook page of the organisers of the Vienna March of International Quds Day. The caricature displays men wearing Middle Eastern garb and one child pouring water into a hole, at the bottom of which stands a worried, drowning Orthodox Jew holding an Israeli flag with a quote attributed to Ayatollah Khomeini, the late spiritual leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, saying "if every Muslim poured a glass of water on Israel, it would drown." Politicians from across the spectrum condemned the caricature as antisemitic, and several parties filed a criminal complaint for incitement, but the Vienna Prosecutor's Office decided to close the case without filing any charges.

In Romania, nearly 25% of Romanian respondents to a survey on Jews said their country should have no Jewish residents. The survey, commissioned by the Elie Wiesel National Institute for Holocaust Studies in Romania, also found that 11% described Jews as "a problem for Romania" and 22% said they would like them only as tourists. Also in Romania, a new law which prohibits Holocaust denial has provoked criticism from nationalists on the grounds that it restricts free speech. Philosopher Andrei Plesu, a former Culture and Foreign Minister in Romania, claimed that it could stifle historical debate and that communist crimes should be treated in the same way as fascist ones.

In Hungary, a government official was booed off the stage at the Jewish culture festival after he defended an allegedly antisemitic singer. Csaba Latorcai, deputy state secretary of the Prime Minister's Office, was loudly booed and prevented from finishing his speech after defending Maria Petras. Petras's appearance at the festival was cancelled after she had performed at nationalist and far-right events, as well as at the memorial service for the late antisemitic Hungarian writer Albert Wass. Latorcai said the charges against Petras were "unfounded" and "based on lies."

In France, National Front founder Jean-Marie Le Pen was expelled from the party as part of Marine Le Pen's ongoing attempts to detoxify it. At the tribunal which expelled him, Jean-Marie Le Pen said "they have no right to judge me", and insisted that he was facing a kangaroo court filled with "stooges." In a possible split in the party, his granddaughter, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, said that she was against the exclusion, arguing that "it opens the door to new problems."

In Italy, the appointment of a former Italian politician as Israel's ambassador to Rome has raised concerns among the Jewish community. Fiamma Nirenstein, a former Italian MP and journalist, was appointed to the position in August with Rome Chief Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni commenting "I fear there may be problems... just read what's already on the social networks about her dual citizenship." Another member of the community commented "this appointment could create a problem of antisemitism. Over the years, the Jew is always suspected of being a traitor to his country. Placing her in Italy, on the other side of the table, could harm Italian Jews' identity. The absolute majority of them are Zionists, but they're also citizens with all the rights and duties. It's not something to be trifled with."

In Portugal, the Jewish community of Porto helped to quash a bill designed to reinstate an army captain who had been fired and libelled in the 1930s because of his outreach to descendants of Jews. Under the dictatorship of Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, Arthur Carlos Barros Basto made powerful enemies because of his efforts to establish a Jewish community made up of descendants of Jews who had been forcibly converted during the Inquisition. In 1937, Barros Basto was dishonourably discharged from the army, where he had served with distinction, after wrongfully being accused of sexually abusing men. In August 2015, politicians withdrew the bill following complaints from the Jewish community that it was discriminatory since it offered none of the financial compensation given to non-Jewish officers who had been reinstated following persecution by Salazar. The community wrote in a letter to politicians that “contrary to the general law of the land, applicable to all cases of reinstatement, this special law deplorably and scandalously excludes a Jew and his family.”

- [Ukraine’s President Meets With Chabad Rabbi, Other Religious Leaders in Kiev](#) (Chabad News, August 4, 2015)
- [Ukrainian Patriarch Filaret condemns antisemitism at meeting with WJC leaders in Kiev](#) (World Jewish Congress, August 27, 2015)
- [World Jewish Congress delegation meets with Ukrainian PM to discuss situation of Jews](#) (World Jewish Congress, August 27, 2015)
- [European Commission speaks-up against antisemitism in Europe](#) (The Brussels Times, August 7, 2015)
- [Jewish Labour MP hits out at Jeremy Corbyn's record on antisemitism](#) (The Guardian, August 14, 2015)
- [Jeremy Corbyn says antisemitism claims 'ludicrous and wrong'](#) (The Guardian, August 18, 2015)
- [Jeremy Corbyn must publicly reject Hamas and Hezbollah, leading Jewish group demands](#) (The Telegraph, August 28, 2015)
- [Jewish group seeks High Court challenge to Leicester City Council West Bank settlements boycott](#) (Leicester Mercury, August 24, 2015)
- [Nicola Sturgeon tells Scottish Jews: 'one instance of antisemitism is one too many'](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, September 1, 2015)
- [Vienna Jews accuse city prosecutor of ignoring antisemitic incitement by Muslims](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 28, 2015)
- [Survey: Nearly 1 in 4 Romanians want their country free of Jews](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 5, 2015)
- [Anti-fascist law criticised for 'limiting free speech'](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, August 12, 2015)
- [Hungarian official booed off Jewish festival stage for defending disinvited singer](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 31, 2015)
- [French National Front expels founder Jean-Marie Le Pen](#) (BBC News, August 20, 2015)
- [French National Front founder’s granddaughter backs him over exclusion](#) (Euronews, August 22, 2015)
- [Fiamma Nirenstein's appointment as Israel's ambassador to Italy raises concerns among Italian Jews](#) (European Jewish Press, August 31, 2015)
- [Jewish community quashes bill to reinstate 'Portuguese Alfred Dreyfus'](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 28, 2015)

2 / REVISITING HOLOCAUST ISSUES

The 72nd anniversary of the uprising at Treblinka extermination camp was commemorated at the beginning of the month. The ceremony was organised by the Jewish Historical Institute and included the last surviving prisoner of Treblinka, as well as Polish Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich and newly-appointed spokesman for the Polish Bishops' Conference, Father Pawel Rytel-Andrianik.

At the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, Andrzej Kacorzyk, Deputy Director, announced that over a million people had visited in the first seven months of 2015 – a record figure for that time period. Kacorzyk said that “last year, when the attendance of the former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp reached the record of 1.53 million visitors, the first million was recorded at the end of August. All indications are that the year 2015 will be marked by the increase in attendance of up to a dozen percent.” Ewa Kopacz, the Polish Prime Minister, visited Auschwitz in August where she laid a wreath at the ‘death wall’ in the courtyard of Block 11. Kopacz wrote in the guest book of the Museum that “I bow my head in respect to the immense suffering that this place recalls. I assert the Polish government’s determination to ensure that the memory of the victims of the German Nazi concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau stays on for future generations; that this place remains always and everywhere an audible warning. No more war!”

Owing to the River Vistula falling to record lows because of a drought, fragments of Jewish tombstones were discovered near Warsaw. Jonny Daniels, head of the Jewish foundation ‘From the Depths,’ said “the Vistula River is hiding no end of secrets. They are everywhere.” The tombstones are believed to be from the Bródno cemetery in the Warsaw’s Praga district. Many tombstones were removed from the Jewish cemetery during and after the war, and used both as building materials and to reinforce the river’s banks.

Outgoing Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski decided not to sign a bill into law that would have restricted claims for the restitution of properties confiscated during and after World War Two. Instead he referred the legislation to the Constitutional Tribunal. The new law would have set a six-month deadline for the rightful pre-World War Two owners of Warsaw properties, or their heirs, to participate in administrative proceedings. It would also have ended the practice of appointing a trustee to represent an anonymous heir and take away the right of an owner to seek the return of properties in public use. Gideon Taylor, chair of operations for the World Jewish Restitution Organisation, welcomed the decision by Komorowski and urged Poland “to reopen the deadline so that there is a fair and open claims process for everyone whether the property is in Warsaw or elsewhere in Poland, and whether the claimant is Jewish or not.”

Following claims that a Nazi train loaded with millions of dollars’ worth of stolen items had been found in Poland, the World Jewish Congress (WJC) urged the Polish government to ensure any goods stolen from Jews be returned to their legitimate owners or their heirs. Robert Singer, WJC CEO, said “to the extent that any items now being discovered in Poland may have been stolen from Jews before they were sent to death, concentration or forced labour camps, it is essential that every measure is taken to return the property to its rightful owners or to their heirs. If no such survivors or heirs can be found, any gold or other property that is found to have belonged to Jewish families or businesses must now inure to the benefit of Polish Jewish survivors who unfortunately have never been adequately compensated by Poland for the unspeakable suffering they endured and their catastrophic economic losses in the Holocaust.”

Monaco's Prince Albert II apologised in August for his country's role in deporting Jews to Nazi camps – 73 years after police rounded up scores of people, including those who had sought refuge from the Holocaust in what they thought was a safe and neutral country. Prince Albert unveiled a monument at the Monaco cemetery carved with the names of deported Jews. On the night of August 27th 1942,

the Monegasque authorities rounded up at least 66 Jews who were among about 90 people deported from Monaco during the war, according to a government report completed this year. Only nine survived. Prince Albert, standing in front of Monaco's Chief Rabbi, said "we committed the irreparable in handing over... women, men and a child who had taken refuge with us to escape the persecutions they had suffered in France. We did not protect them. It was our responsibility. In distress, they came specifically to take shelter with us, thinking they would find neutrality... To say this today is to recognise a fact. To say it today, on this day, before you, is to ask forgiveness."

In the Netherlands, Chief Rabbi Binyomin Jacobs called on the Prime Minister to apologise officially for the kingdom's collaboration with Nazi Germany in the murder of Jews during the Holocaust. He said that following expressions of regret by some army and police units and other institutions, "it is time that the Dutch head of state offer a comprehensive apology." Most of the Netherlands' neighbours have offered such apologies. So far Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte has resisted such calls.

Also in the Netherlands, Christian Zionists who died as a result of their efforts to save Jews during the Holocaust were recognised by Yad Vashem as Righteous among the Nations. Haim Divon, Israel's ambassador to the Netherlands, awarded the honour to Maya Schipper, a granddaughter of Johanna Engelberta Schipper-Kuiper and her husband, Klaas Abe Schipper. The couple saved dozens of Jews with the help of their underground network.

In the UK, the Royal Mail announced that it will issue a commemorative stamp featuring Sir Nicholas Winton, the British rescuer who saved hundreds of children from Nazi persecution. The decision was made in response to a campaign launched by *The Jewish News* and which gathered over 100,000 signatures in an online petition. The Royal Mail said in a statement that "one of the purposes of Royal Mail stamps is to honour those who have made important contributions to the UK, and every year we consider hundreds of subjects for inclusion. It is clear that Sir Nicholas Winton is a worthy candidate."

- [Jewish uprising at Treblinka commemorated](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 3, 2015)
- [1 Million People have visited the Auschwitz Memorial in 2015](#) (Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, August 5, 2015)
- [Polish Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz visited the Auschwitz Memorial](#) (Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, August 18, 2015)
- [Poland drought: Jewish tombstones and fighter plane uncovered as rivers run dry](#) (The Guardian, August 26, 2015)
- [Polish tribunal to take up restitution law on Warsaw property](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 4, 2015)
- [Plunder-filled Nazi train worth millions has likely been found](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 28, 2015)
- [Prince Albert apologises for Monaco's role in deporting Jews to Nazi camps](#) (The Guardian, August 28, 2015)
- [Dutch chief rabbi: Netherlands should apologize officially for Holocaust-era complicity](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 9, 2015)
- [Dutch Christian couple honoured for exceptional Holocaust-era bravery](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 21, 2015)
- [Sir Nicholas Winton, 'British Schindler,' to get own stamp](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 25, 2015)

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

Various renovation projects on Jewish historical sites were agreed in August. In Lithuania, the municipal authorities of the district of Kaišiadorys announced that they intend to renovate the wooden Jewish synagogue in Žiežmariai. Mayor Vytenis Tomkus said “This would pay tribute to the memory and cultural heritage of the Jewish community, which has made a significant contribution to the district’s life and architecture. The renovated synagogue could not just attract more tourists and visitors, it could host cultural and educational events, as well as bring more investment to the district.” The reconstruction will cost over €928,000 and will be funded partly by the European Union.

Also in Lithuania, the municipality of Kaunas, the country’s second-largest city, signed a cooperation agreement with Jewish organisation, Maceva, regarding the old Jewish cemetery. The Kaunas authorities plan to maintain the cemetery in several stages, including the identification of graves.

In Slovenia, the Maribor Synagogue was named a national cultural landmark by government decree. The synagogue was built in the fourteenth century and is among the oldest preserved synagogues in Europe. The synagogue was restored throughout the 1990s, financed by the city and the state, and it opened in 2001 as a Jewish Heritage Centre, administered by the Maribor Regional Museum. Since 2011 it has functioned as an independent institution, the Centre for Jewish Cultural Heritage-Synagogue Maribor.

In Poland, ‘Shavei Israel,’ an Israeli-based organisation which tries to bring people with Jewish roots back into the Jewish fold, announced the opening of the first Jewish kindergarten in decades in the city of Lodz. The kindergarten will open in partnership with the city’s Jewish community of a few hundred members, and the first class of ten children will start in September. Michael Freund, Shavei Israel Chairman, said “There is a growing Jewish community in Lodz, as well as many Poles with Jewish roots who are becoming more and more interested in reconnecting with their heritage... Not only will this kindergarten provide an essential community service, but it will also serve as a symbol of Jewish revival in Lodz. The fact that Jewish children in Lodz will be singing Sabbath songs, learning about the patriarchs and celebrating the festivals is perhaps the best possible revenge for what was done to our people there during the dark days of the Holocaust.”

In Ukraine, a summer camp for Jewish refugees displaced by war in the separatist stronghold of Donetsk, has been opened up just outside Kiev. About forty children and sixty adults enrolled at the Tikva camp, which provides sporting activities, psychological counselling, lectures and computer programmes.

In Lithuania, discord broke out within the Jewish community amid a controversy regarding the government’s plan to build a conference centre over a derelict Communist-era ‘Sports Palace,’ which the Soviets built on what used to be a large Jewish cemetery. Chief Rabbi Chaim Burshtein was fired by the Jewish Community of Lithuania following his objections to the government’s plan, which was agreed to by Jewish Community President Faina Kukliansky. Burshtein had accused Kukliansky of resorting to authoritarian tactics in running the community, and he posted on Facebook that “the many historical Jewish figures buried in the cemetery would never have expected that the fate of their bones... would one day depend on the cognitive processes of the head of a Vilna Jewish community whose heart would be filled with the desire to serve the authorities and find honour in their eyes.” He also called the project an “unacceptable desecration.” Kukliansky said the government’s plans to reconstruct the Sports Palace, which is in part located in the territory of the former Jewish cemetery, was supported by the Jewish Community of Lithuania and the Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe (CPJCE), and that the renovation would be conducted inside the building only, whilst the territory would be preserved as a memorial park. She said “the government made the right decision to renovate the building and establish a centre for conferences and cultural events

there. As the building is listed as architectural heritage, no significant structural changes are allowed, with only interior renovation planned. The territory around the building will be preserved as a memorial park with signs of the prominent people buried there... We should be happy about the agreement we have reached, since it could serve as an example to other governments in this part of the world on how similar challenges should be solved with respect and preservation of Jewish cemeteries and sites of mass massacres of the Holocaust.” Rimantas Vaitkus, First Deputy Chancellor of the Government, wrote to the CPJCE saying “we wish to reassure you that no works will be undertaken without the knowledge of, or consent by, you [the committee] or the Jewish Community of Lithuania, so that the future conference centre may operate while ensuring proper respect for the sanctity of the cemetery.”

In Greece, the island of Rhodes saw the annual pilgrimage in August of descendants of survivors of the Rhodes Jewish community. Jews lived on the island for 2,000 years until July 23, 1944, when the last few were deported to Auschwitz. This year’s event saw more than 500 people attend a concert of Ladino, Yiddish and Hebrew songs performed in the courtyard of the Palace of the Grand Master of the Knights of Rhodes, an imposing Gothic fortress.

In Portugal, researchers believe that a dozen skeletons found in an ancient garbage dump were Jewish victims of the Inquisition more than 400 years ago. The excavation team found the remains at what was called the Jail Cleaning Yard of the Inquisition Court in Evora, 84 miles east of Lisbon. The dump was in use roughly between 1568 and 1634. Writing in the *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, the researchers said that the three male and nine female bodies were “unceremoniously dumped outside the Inquisition Court along with regular garbage.” They demonstrated that “the sediment surrounding the skeletons is indistinguishable from the household waste layer where they were placed, suggesting that the bodies were deposited directly in the dump,” leading excavators to believe those buried at the site were considered heretics within Portuguese society.

In Austria, 64 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Jewish activists gathered in Salzburg to discuss issues of religion and identity. The inaugural conference was called “Eighteen: 22,” a reference to a passage in Leviticus prohibiting gay sex. Founder Robert Saferstein said that it was created as a way to “transform the world for LGBTQ Jews.” In the UK, Sinai Reform Synagogue in Leeds hosted the launch of the Rainbow Jews exhibition, which documents and showcases Jewish-LGBT history in the country. The shul dedicated a Shabbat to the issue, including a service on Friday night and Saturday morning, before the display was launched. The Shabbat service included alternative texts and liturgy which embraced LGBT issues, and which event organiser Nicolle Levine called “thoughtful, spiritual, sensitive and inclusive.”

Also in the UK, the government pledged to preserve General Certificate of Secondary Education and Advanced Level examinations in Hebrew. In a meeting with the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Schools Minister Nick Gibb said “we are committed to working with the exam boards to ensure that qualifications in minority languages such as Hebrew continue.”

In Germany, about 140 people gathered for the sixth Annual Muslim-Jewish Conference (MJC). MJC co-founder, Ilja Sichrovsky, described the purpose of the event as an opportunity to discuss shared concerns, such as antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism. He added that some participants risked their lives to attend, saying “I have the utmost respect for the Muslim participants and young leaders who are sometimes risking everything, and go back and effect change in the areas where they can.” The conference is sponsored partly by the foreign ministries of Germany and Austria, as well as the German government and industry fund EVZ, which was established to ensure remembrance of the Nazi use of forced and slave labour.

In Hungary, the Chief Rabbi of Budapest, Robert Deutsch, died at the age of 59, following a long illness. He served as the rabbi of the Bethlen Square Synagogue from 1988 until his death, and as chairman of Hungary's Board of Rabbis. The Mazsihisz Federation of Jewish Communities said in a statement that the community was in "shock and deep sorrow" over his death, adding that Deutsch "never broke from ancient tradition and tried to do everything possible to maintain religious Jewish life, turning it into a strong religious community."

- [Wooden synagogue up for renovation in central Lithuania](#) (Delfi by The Lithuania Tribune, August 3, 2015)
- [Kaunas city and Jewish organisation sign deal on cemetery upkeep \(Delfi by The Lithuania Tribune, August 6, 2015\)](#)
- [Slovenia: Maribor synagogue given national landmark status](#) (Jewish Heritage Europe, August 30, 2015)
- [Shavei Israel to Open First Jewish Kindergarten in Lodz](#) (The Jewish Press.com, August 18, 2015)
- [Summer camp for Jewish refugees opens in Ukraine](#) (i24 News, August 8, 2015)
- [Lithuania's chief rabbi fired amid dispute over construction on former cemetery](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 14, 2015)
- [Lithuanian PM: Sports complex in Jewish cemetery to be built with 'proper respect'](#) (The Jerusalem Post, August 25, 2015)
- [Cemetery controversy 'Much Ado about Nothing,' say Lithuanian Jewish leaders](#) (The Jerusalem Post, August 30, 2015)
- [Lauder hails Poland's outgoing President Komorowski as 'principled statesman' and 'friend of Jewish people'](#) (World Jewish Congress, August 6, 2015)
- [On Greek isle of Rhodes, Jews return to celebrate ancient community all but wiped out](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 17, 2015)
- [Archaeologists uncover remains of Jews killed in Portuguese Inquisition](#) (i24 News, August 24, 2015)
- [Inaugural Jewish LGBT Conference Underway in Salzburg, Austria](#) (Tablet Magazine, August 12, 2015)
- [Jewish-LGBT history exhibition launched](#) (Jewish News, August 13, 2015)
- [Government pledges commitment to preserve Hebrew GCSE and A Level](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, August 26, 2015)
- [Muslims 'risking lives' to meet Jews at Annual Muslim-Jewish Conference](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, August 27, 2015)
- [Chief rabbi of Budapest, Robert Deutsch, dies at 59](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 5, 2015)

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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.