



## 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 in September. In the Netherlands, an elderly Jewish couple, both Holocaust survivors, were subjected to antisemitic violence by thieves who broke into their Amsterdam home. Shmuel and Diana Blog, both in their late eighties, were tied up and brutally beaten, whilst the assailants emptied the flat of jewellery and other valuables. The two men knocked the elderly couple to the ground, kicking them repeatedly. Shmuel was left blinded and suffered a broken thigh bone, while Diana was left confined to a wheelchair with severe bruising. Mrs Blog said “they called us ‘dirty Jews’ and said ‘You don’t need your jewellery anymore. You’ve been wearing it for too long. Now it’s all ours.’”

In France, a Jewish teenager reported being assaulted near Paris by three men who hit him and called him a “dirty Jew.” The incident took place in Montreuil in Paris, according to the National Bureau for Vigilance Against Antisemitism (BNVCA), a French watchdog group. The victim, Ruben Am, 18, said he had been approached near the Robespierre metro station by a tall black man who asked him for a lighter and who then asked about his religion. Concerned, Am replied that he was a Moroccan Muslim. But the man, subsequently joined by two accomplices, then punched him in the face, saying he could not be Muslim, as he attended the Daniel Mayer Jewish vocational school. The three then fled the scene.

In Belgium, a European Union official is the subject of an investigation by Belgian police after he allegedly attacked a co-worker physically and verbally, calling her a “dirty Jewess” during an antisemitic tirade. The Belgian League Against Anti-Semitism (LBCA) said that it had filed a complaint against 45-year-old Maltese official Stefan Grech, who is president of an EU labour union called Generation 2004. According to reports Grech, whilst drinking in a bar, was apparently eulogising the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini while holding up a licence plate carrying his name, when a woman pointed out that “Mussolini was always a dictator.” Grech then began ranting about the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis, and when the woman argued that “we should not confuse Israeli government policy with the Jews,” he replied, “Dirty Jew... Hitler should have exterminated all the Jews, just as they today are exterminating the Palestinians.” The woman, who is not Jewish, told the police he started to attack her when she told him “I could be Jewish.” She added that “that’s when all of a sudden the man took the sign in his hand and hit me in the face near my left ear. He then tried to take my neck in his hands to strangle me and said ‘you should have all been killed.’” After filing her police complaint, the woman was taken to hospital where she was treated for concussion. Grech has since resigned from the labour union.

In Germany, a 31-year-old at an Oktoberfest celebration was caught pulling the hair of a sixteen year-old girl in the small Bavarian town of Adelsberg because she had a Jewish-sounding name. After sharing her name, a man standing nearby apparently grew “aggressive” and asked her where her “foreign-sounding name” was from. He then began pulling her hair and screaming, “You Jew!”

Bystanders were able to restrain the aggressor, allowing the girl to escape. The teenager then filed a complaint with police against the man for assault and verbal abuse.

In the UK, two teenagers from Manchester were jailed for a total of two-and-a-half years after brutally beating up a Jewish seventeen year-old and leaving him with a serious skull fracture. Moshe Fuerst suffered a potentially serious brain injury when he and three other Orthodox Jewish boys were attacked by the thugs. Chief Superintendent Wasim Chaudhry of North Manchester division said “this was a vicious and unprovoked attack which has left a young man with a serious head injury and with on-going psychological issues. He is scared to leave his home and is understandably anxious about going into public as a result of this attack.” All synagogues in Manchester were put on high alert following the attack.

In Ukraine, the Bar Yar memorial, which commemorates the 33,771 Jews murdered in the ravine during a two-day massacre by German forces and Ukrainian collaborators in 1941, was vandalised for the sixth time in the last year. According to the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, on the first night of *Rosh Hashanah*, the vandals put tyres around the menorah memorial and set them on fire. The blaze was initially so intense that it charred and even melted parts of the menorah’s bronze and stone façade. The flames were seen and extinguished by the night guard watching over a neighbouring Orthodox Church. In a letter to World Jewish Congress CEO Robert Singer, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk wrote there is “compelling evidence” that “we are facing well-planned and thoroughly prepared provocations” whose purpose is to “throw discredit upon Ukrainian authorities and to destabilise the internal political situation in Ukraine.” Leaders of the Jewish Council of Ukraine, the Jewish Forum of Ukraine, the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Jewish Committee and other groups demanded in a statement “immediate and effective steps to prevent vandalism in the future along with the strengthening of criminal responsibility for vandalism and punishment of the organisers and executors of this crime.” Ukrainian Jewish leaders also commented that “almost no reaction of civil society and mass media, no feedback from authorities and law enforcement agencies in respect to the events in Babi Yar clearly indicates ignorance of the society in respect to the large-scale tragedy that happened to the Jews of Ukraine during the Holocaust.”

In France, a controversial sculpture by Sir Anish Kapoor at the Palace of Versailles was vandalised for a second time. The huge installation, called Dirty Corner, was covered with slogans, some of which were antisemitic, including “SS blood sacrifice” and “the second rape of the nation by deviant Jewish activism.” The graffiti has since been covered in gold leaf. In Germany, vandals smeared antisemitic graffiti on Munich’s Haus der Kunst museum. Four swastikas were scrawled over the main entrance which is near an installation called ‘Résistance’ by the French Jewish artist Christian Boltanski. The vandals also drew a Star of David over a floor installation by the German-born Polish Jewish artist Gustav Metzger called ‘Travertin/Judenpech,’ which is outside the building. The museum was opened by Adolf Hitler in 1937 and promoted art which reflected the National Socialist understanding of the so-called Master Race. In recent years the museum has made concerted efforts to challenge and confront its history.

In Ireland, a man pleaded guilty to sending former Minister for Justice Alan Shatter a series of antisemitic emails in which he was called names such as a “perfidious Jew” and “Yiddish whore.” John Dillon sent ten such emails over a five-week period to Mr Shatter’s email address. In his statement to the Gardai (Irish national police) Mr Shatter said “I got them because I am Jewish, no matter how much a hard neck you have, persistence of that nature is upsetting and distressing.” Mr Shatter said in court that he was left distressed and did not know what would happen next after he received the emails. Judge Halpin said that Dillon has taken responsibility for his actions, shown remorse and provided references to the court.

In Scotland, a Scottish Member of Parliament apologised for posting an antisemitic message on Twitter accusing Jews of persecuting civilians in Gaza. Scottish National Party (SNP) MP Paul Monaghan said that he regretted having posted it, adding that “I am sorry for my comments, they were certainly not intended to cause offence and I have removed them to ensure no further upset is caused.”

Also in the UK, the Metropolitan Police announced that hate crimes against London’s Jewish community have surged over the last year, with an increase of 93.4%. In the twelve months from July 2014, police recorded 499 antisemitic crimes in London compared with 258 in the same period the preceding year, with Hackney and Barnet the worst boroughs affected. In a statement the police said, “in light of recent world events, we know communities in London are feeling anxious. Local neighbourhood policing teams are providing a more targeted presence in key areas at key times, such as school routes, holy days and prayer times to give extra reassurance.” The police say the increase is largely due to victims becoming more willing to go to the authorities with allegations of hate crime, as well as its officers becoming more aware about identifying such offences. Similarly, British football anti-discrimination group ‘Kick It Out’ also reported a 14% increase in antisemitic incidents during the 2014-15 season, with 65 cases brought to the attention of the authorities. A spokesperson for the Board of Deputies said “we have been warning for some time about a renewed increase in racism on the football terraces. We call upon the FA and the clubs to take a stand against those who would tarnish the beautiful game with ugly racism.” Also in September the BBC apologised for publishing an antisemitic caricature of renowned Jewish violinist Leopold Auer in a programme for its annual summer concert festival. A BBC spokesperson said “we use a range of caricatures and illustrations in our concert programmes and wanted one of Leopold Auer. We’re sorry to anyone who was offended by the image choice – this was never our intention.”

In Belgium, a French national, suspected of having helped a compatriot shoot dead four people at the Jewish museum in Brussels last year, was taken into custody and charged. France extradited 28-year-old Mounir Atallah to Belgium in July and he has subsequently been charged “with being the perpetrator, the co-perpetrator or accomplice of a quadruple attack in a terrorist context.”

- [Elderly Jewish couple brutally attacked in Holland](#) (Arutz Sheva, September 6, 2015)
- [Jewish teen assaulted near Paris](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 10, 2015)
- [EU official is accused of antisemitism and resigns as chairman of trade union](#) (The Brussels Times, September 6, 2015)
- [Oktoberfest in Bavaria Town witnesses hair-pulling antisemitic assault](#) (The Algemeiner, October 1, 2015)
- [Two teenagers plead guilty to attack on Jewish boys which left one with brain injury](#) (Manchester Evening News, September 11, 2015)
- [Two teenagers jailed over brutal assault that left Jewish teenager with horrifying injuries](#) (The Mirror, October 2, 2015)
- [Manchester: Synagogues on security alert after four Jewish men beaten in antisemitic assault](#) (International Business Times, September 8, 2015)
- [Ukraine’s Babi Yar Holocaust memorial vandalised, again](#) (i24 News, September 17, 2015)
- [Ukrainian PM: attacks on Babi Yar are meant to ‘destabilise’ us](#) (The Jerusalem Post, September 30, 2015)
- [Antisemitic graffiti to be removed from Kapoor’s Versailles ‘vagina’ sculpture](#) (France 24, September 18, 2015)
- [Vandals smear antisemitic graffiti on Munich’s Haus der Kunst](#) (Artnet News, September 18, 2015)
- [Man admits to sending Alan Shatter antisemitic emails](#) (The Irish Times, September 8, 2015)

- [Scottish MP Paul Monaghan apologises over antisemitic tweet](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, September 2, 2015)
- [Antisemitism in the UK: Hate crimes against London's Jewish community surge by 93%](#) (International Business Times, September 7, 2015)
- [Met Police step up patrols to tackle rise in Islamophobia and antisemitism](#) (The Docklands & East London Advertiser, September 7, 2015)
- [Antisemitic incidents in football up by 14 per cent](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, September 4, 2015)
- [BBC apologises over 'antisemitic' illustration in Proms programme](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, September 18, 2015)
- [Belgium charges French national over Jewish museum attack](#) (Yahoo news, September 29, 2015)

## Politics

Leading politicians voiced their opposition to antisemitism in the run up to *Rosh Hashanah* in September. In Belgium, during a visit to Antwerp with Jan Jambon, federal minister of security and interior affairs, Prime Minister Charles Michel said that “antisemitism is unacceptable. I want a zero tolerance policy on it.” In France, Prime Minister Manuel Valls said the battle against antisemitism in the country “must be renewed.” At an evening event at Paris’ Nazareth synagogue, Valls stated that “there is this rampant Holocaust denial, hatred of Jews who grew up in our neighbourhoods... that has contaminated the minds of some of our youth. Today the fight must be renewed.” He added that the government had proposed a plan to combat antisemitism after the January terror attacks in Paris and that “each prefect, each [local] prosecutor was instructed to implement the regional component [of the national plan], especially its enforcement dimension, to punish offences with all the severity of our laws.” President Francois Hollande, in sending his New Year wishes to European Jews, promised his firm commitment to fight “against all words and acts of an antisemitic nature, and to allow everyone to live together, without exception, with the same values of freedom, tolerance and community.”

In Austria, President Heinz Fischer spoke out in support of “the common interest of Jews in Europe,” as he sought to renew Austria’s ties with Israel. He said that “Austria remains committed to the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms in Europe and the world, and to the safeguarding of minorities including the Jewish community in Austria, which has always strongly influenced our country’s culture.” In the Netherlands, Prime Minister Mark Rutte recalled his country’s endorsement of a joint statement on antisemitism at an informal meeting of the United Nations General Assembly last January. He said that “I share your concern about rising antisemitism in Europe. This scourge affects Jewish communities first, but in essence it is a threat to society as a whole.”

In the UK, Prime Minister David Cameron said in his message for the Jewish New Year that “as Jewish communities unite in prayer across the world, thoughts will turn to the tragic loss of life that we have seen following a number of horrific and abhorrent antisemitic attacks over the past year. Jewish communities must not be left to live in fear. As prime minister, I will do everything I can to stamp out such hatred now and in the future.” He also added that “I deeply admire the way Jewish communities emphasise their responsibility for creating a better, fairer society for everyone. This is one of the reasons the community has made such an immeasurable contribution to all areas of British life.”

In Greece, the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party made slight gains in national elections, remaining the country’s third largest party. Golden Dawn received 7% of the vote, giving it nineteen seats in the 300-member national parliament, a gain of two seats. This was despite most of its leaders being jailed amid an ongoing crackdown on the party leadership on charges of heading a violent criminal organisation.

Minos Moisis, president of the Jewish Community of Athens said that “this is a worrying outcome. A party that is clearly a Nazi organisation that is accused of criminal acts, that takes extreme stances against immigrants and refugees, and that claims that Greece is victim of Zionists worldwide, has cemented its position as a major political power.”

Also in Greece, a deputy minister in the new government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras was forced to resign less than twenty-four hours after being appointed, over several antisemitic and homophobic remarks that were attributed to him. Dimitris Kammenos, the new deputy transport minister, was forced to stand down after posting tweets suggesting Jews were to blame for the attack on the World Trade Centre, showing a doctored photograph that replaced the words ‘Arbeit macht frei’ on the gates of Auschwitz with ‘We’re staying in Europe’ and mocking the Athens gay pride parade. Following his resignation, the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece wrote to Prime Minister Tsipras expressing satisfaction that “on Yom Kippur, a person that had expressed hideous and insulting views against Jews, civilisation and democracy... was removed from your government.”

In Germany, the Jewish community in Thuringia state criticised Jena Mayor Albrecht Schröter after he accused the Jewish state of partial responsibility for the Syrian refugee crisis overtaking Europe. Reinhard Schramm, the chairman of the Jewish community in Thuringia, said that Schröter “fosters antisemitism” in blaming Israel and following the “age-old cliché ‘The Jews are to blame.’ The cliché was false in the Middle Ages and false today. And it can lead to pogroms.” Andreas Neumann, a German Jew, filed a criminal complaint against Schröter, alleging he incited hatred toward Israelis because of his call to boycott products from the Jewish state and blaming Israel for the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe. Neumann said “Schröter’s call has a clear antisemitic character and is, in my view, clearly incitement to hate.” Neumann is a member of a messianic Jewish community in Augsburg and not a member of the town’s official Jewish community. Dr. Shimon Samuels, the Wiesenthal Centre’s director for international relations, said that “it would be a good sign if the court sees him [Schröter] as an antisemitic agitator. Schröter has a very confused form of antisemitism. He is not a clear antisemite but a confused antisemite.”

At the end of the month, the European Union’s Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) declared in a report that European nations lack systematic methods of collecting data on antisemitism, contributing to “gross underreporting of the nature and characteristics of antisemitic incidents that occur.” The new report on data availability said that “few EU member states operate official data collection mechanisms that record antisemitic incidents in any great detail” and this lack “limits the ability of policy makers to deal effectively with growing hate crimes. Incidents that are not reported are also not investigated and prosecuted, allowing offenders to think that they can carry out such attacks with relative impunity.” Constantinos Manolopoulos, head of the FRA, warned of a “climate of intolerance” in Europe and called for “immediate and decisive action to combat extremist, xenophobic, and antisemitic discourse and crimes”. Following the publication of this report, Frans Timmermans, first Vice President of the European Commission, announced that he would become the EU’s first envoy on antisemitism at a colloquium aimed at combating antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred at the beginning of October.

- [Zero-tolerance policy on antisemitism, Belgian PM vows](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 3, 2015)
- [French PM says battle against antisemitism 'must be renewed'](#) (i24 News, September 9, 2015)
- [Ahead of Jewish New Year, Europe's leaders reaffirm their commitment to fight antisemitism](#) (European Jewish Press, September 8, 2015)
- [In Rosh Hashanah message, UK's PM blasts antisemitism](#) (The Times of Israel, September 13, 2015)
- [Neo-Nazis win more seats in Greek election](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, September 22, 2015)

- [Greek PM sacks minister over antisemitic tweets after only a few hours in office](#) (World Jewish Congress, September 24, 2015)
- [German Jews blast mayor who blamed Israel for Syrian refugee crisis](#) (The Jerusalem Post, September 29, 2015)
- [Criminal complaint filed against German Mayor for anti-Israel and anti-Jewish hate](#) (The Jerusalem Post, October 2, 2015)
- [‘Gross under-reporting’ of antisemitism plagues Europe, says EU agency](#) (The Jerusalem Post, September 30, 2015)
- [Major EU states report spike in antisemitic abuse](#) (EU Observer, October 1, 2015)
- [EU official to act as envoy on antisemitism](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, October 1, 2015)

## 2 / REVISITING HOLOCAUST ISSUES

Potential Nazi war crimes trials made the news in September. In Germany, Reinhold Hanning, aged 93, a former Auschwitz guard accused of complicity in the murder of 170,000 Jews, was due to face trial in Dortmund. However, this was subject to a medical report deeming him mentally competent to stand trial. Hanning has admitted being at Auschwitz, but denies participation in any crimes committed there. Also in Germany, it was announced that a 91-year-old woman, also alleged to have been a Nazi SS member working in Auschwitz, was charged with 260,000 counts of accessory to murder. German prosecutors said that the woman, whose name was not disclosed, is accused of serving as a radio operator for the camp commandant for two months in 1944. Schleswig-Holstein prosecutors’ spokesman, Heinz Doellel, said that although there are no indications that the woman is unfit for trial, the court would be unlikely to decide on whether to proceed with the case until next year.

In the Netherlands, the Amsterdam authorities announced that they will reimburse the families of Jewish Holocaust survivors for back taxes and fines they paid for failing to pay their rent while they were in hiding or in concentration camps. During the war, the city even imposed fines for late rent payments on houses confiscated and used by the Nazis and members of the NSB Dutch Nazi party. It was reported in 2013 that the city authorities pursued survivors as late as 1947 for back taxes and associated fines when other Dutch municipalities waived such debts. The survivors or their families have a year to request the refund from the independently run Foundation for Individual Refunds Amsterdam. The average compensation is estimated at about £1,320.

In France, the remains of Jewish victims that had been stored by a Nazi anatomist, were buried two months after they were discovered at the University of Strasbourg. Several hundred people attended the burial ceremony Sunday at the Cronenbourg Jewish cemetery in Strasbourg. The remains belonged to several people, but only one of them has been identified – Menachem Taffem, a Polish Jew who was deported to Auschwitz.

In Israel, a timetable from a Holocaust-era Jewish school in the Krakow ghetto in Poland was published. The timetable was among some 7,000 items donated to Holocaust researchers over a year ago. Dated 1941, it sheds light on how the Jews of Poland dealt with the draconian measures imposed by the Nazi occupiers. The timetable was sent from the Jewish Council in the Krakow ghetto to its counterpart in the Lublin ghetto in response to a request about the school system. The timetable, the first of its kind discovered from the Krakow ghetto, shows how many hours each class of students should dedicate to Jewish studies alongside their education in secular subjects such as mathematics, Polish language, art and geography.

In Austria, seventy-five Holocaust historians from around the world condemned the scheduled incarceration of a scholar for restitution fraud after he criticised the country's failures to compensate victims. Stephan Templ was to begin serving a one-year jail sentence in September for a 2014 conviction over his omission of a relative from a restitution form he filled out for his mother in 2006. In a letter to Hans Peter Manz, the Austrian ambassador in Washington, the seventy-five historians wrote that "the Austrian government's decision to intervene by prosecuting and jailing Mr. Templ will be seen as an extreme overreaction to Mr. Templ's important book." This was in reference to his 2001 book on restitution in which he criticised the Austrian state and society's theft of Jewish property and failures to offer restitution. Many Austrian Jews said they considered the conviction to be a result of a vendetta against Templ.

### ***Focus on Lithuania***

In Lithuania, numerous cities and towns held memorials and ceremonies to commemorate the Holocaust as part of an officially dedicated week called the "Days of Remembrance of the Genocide of Lithuanian Jews," which marked the 72<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto. In Kaunas, two plaques in honour of Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara were unveiled. Sugihara issued thousands of transit visas to Jews in 1940 to help them escape Nazi persecution during World War Two, defying orders from the Japanese Foreign Ministry. On the day before Lithuania's Holocaust Memorial Day, Parliamentary Speaker Loreta Graužinienė and Government Chancellor Alminas Mačiulis paid tribute to victims of the Holocaust at the Paneriai Memorial near Vilnius. Graužinienė said that "forgetting, deleting or ignoring the experiences would be the same as justifying the crimes that were committed. Therefore, we focus on getting the young generation of Lithuania to know the page in history." Government Chancellor, Mačiulis, said that the genocide was one of the most horrific episodes in the history of Lithuania and that "no wars, fires or plague epidemics will be as terrible as the (developments in) Paneriai. People were annihilated here under a murderous plan. At all times of the year, day and night. Nearly all of the Lithuanian Jerusalem was annihilated here."

Holocaust commemorative events took place throughout the country. In each ceremony, members of the public were invited to take turns in reading aloud from a list of former Jewish residents. Many of the events came as part of an initiative of an informal group known as 'Vardai' or 'Names' which maintains that the Holocaust is "our history, our memory." The group argues that "when one whispers the names and professions of the people who lived here, one can no longer forget. These readings bring us nearer to the historical truth that cannot be hidden or distorted." In Vilnius and in Sveksna, enlarged photographs of former Jewish residents were attached to the outside walls of Jewish historic sites as a reminder of those who once lived there.

President Dalia Grybauskaitė awarded 47 people, the majority posthumously, with 'Life Saving Crosses' for saving Jews from the Nazis. During the ceremony the President said that "many of those decorated today are no longer among us. But their heroism lives on in our hearts and in our minds. I wish that it should inspire and give strength to each and every one at all times and in every place to defend our freedom, protect the human being and promote democracy." In Vilnius, Mayor Remigijus Simasius unveiled a sign on the first street in the country named for a non-Jew who risked her life to save Jews in the Holocaust. Ona Šimaitė, a Vilnius University librarian, helped rescue numerous Jews from the Vilna ghetto. She was also involved in forging identity documents, helping to smuggle provisions into the Vilna Ghetto and carrying letters between ghetto inmates and residents of the city outside the ghetto gates.

In another initiative, over 100 schools and other educational institutions took part in a walk called 'Memory Road.' Organised by the International Commission for Historic Justice, the initiative involved school children walking to massacre sites along the paths that Jews were forced to take to their death.

In preparation for this, the students gathered information about Jews who lived in their cities and towns, their customs and traditions, lifestyles and occupations.

Also in September, President Dalia Grybauskaitė posthumously stripped a Lithuanian anti-communist fighter, Pranas Koncius, of a state honour because of his complicity in the murder of Jews during the Holocaust. She said “he was never worthy of this award.” Efraim Zuroff, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre office in Israel said that whilst he was very pleased that the president revoked Koncius’s award, he was only “one of several people who are in the same situation, among them people who have been prominently honoured in Lithuania and have streets named for them or other institutions named for them.”

Controversy erupted over a symposium on antisemitism co-sponsored by the Lithuanian Jewish community in Vilnius for including figures accused of distorting the Holocaust. Local historian Dovid Katz and the Wiesenthal Centre’s Efraim Zuroff accused some of the speakers of obscuring the Lithuanian role in the genocide of the country’s Jewish community. Katz said that “of course, it’s impossible to know for sure, but it seems this may be another conference with lavish funding whose real purpose is to... obfuscate the situation rather than fight antisemitism, racism and extremism.” Zuroff said it had been “designed to give the impression that the community is working hard to combat antisemitism and even Holocaust denial and distortion. However, he added that “a closer look at the identity of the speakers... leaves the informed observer totally confused, since among the participants are an outspoken opponent of Holocaust distortion like Prof. [Leonidas] Donskis, alongside key players in the [Lithuanian] government’s Holocaust distortion industry, such as Sarunas Leikis.”

- [93-year-old Auschwitz guard faces trial pending medical clearance](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 18, 2015)
- [Woman, 91, Charged With 260,000 Counts Of Accessory To Murder At Auschwitz Nazi Death Camp](#) (The Huffington Post, September 22, 2015)
- [Amsterdam repays families of Jews fined over rent in Holocaust](#) (The Guardian, September 4, 2015)
- [Holocaust victims’ remains discovered at French medical school are buried](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 6, 2015)
- [School timetable offers glimpse into Jewish life in Krakow Ghetto](#) (The Times of Israel, September 3, 2015)
- [Holocaust historians slam jailing of Austrian scholar over restitution claim](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 21, 2015)
- [Hermann Goering’s ‘full catalogue’ of looted Nazi art published for first time](#) (The Telegraph, September 30, 2015)
- [Sugihara, Japanese diplomat who saved thousands of Jews, honoured in Lithuania](#) (The Japan Times, September 5, 2015)
- [Remembering Jewish Names in Lithuania](#) (Huffington Post, September 18, 2015)
- [Lithuanian politicians pay tribute to genocide victims in Paneriai](#) (Delfi by The Lithuania Tribune, September 22, 2015)
- [Lithuania pays tribute to rescuers of Jews from Holocaust](#) (Delfi by The Lithuania Tribune, September 22, 2015)
- [Lithuanian school students to walk on Memory Road for Holocaust](#) (Delfi by The Lithuania Tribune, September 23, 2015)
- [Lithuania’s first street honouring Holocaust Righteous unveiled in Vilnius](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 25, 2015)
- [Lithuania posthumously strips Nazi collaborator of honours](#) (The Jerusalem Post, September 24, 2015)

- [Lithuanian PM pays tribute to Holocaust victims in Jerusalem](#) (Delfi by The Lithuania Tribune, September 8, 2015)
- [Speakers at antisemitism confab accused of Holocaust distortion](#) (The Jerusalem Post, September 30, 2015)

### 3 / FOCUS ON REFUGEES

In September, Jewish communities across Europe spoke out in favour of supporting and helping refugees. In Hungary, the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities (Mazsihisz) and the Hungarian Autonomous Orthodox Jewish Community (MAOIH) released a statement concerning the refugee crisis stating that “for the Jewish communities it is of high importance to help those in despair. Supporting outcasts and refugees is a commandment of Judaism. We are concerned and shocked about racist hate speech often directed against those arriving to Hungary... We are grateful for the help civil society is providing and we ourselves offer further assistance in order to ease the trouble of those in need.” Mazsihisz organised a collection drive where they raised nearly \$5,000 and half a ton of food and non-perishables for refugees. Zoltan Radnoti, chairman of the Mazsihisz rabbinical council, said “there are currently between 100 and 150 Hungarian Jews that I know of involved in the relief effort.”

In Italy, the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI) president Renzo Gattegna announced that the organisation had decided to dedicate the Day of Jewish Culture to the issue of the refugees in order to raise awareness of their situation. He said that “the responsibility for all the horrors that are happening does not rest only on the extremist groups or regimes who commit them, but also on the people who stay silent and are not willing to fight for human rights, but instead look the other way. For this reason, I want to dedicate this day to those who are forced to flee their home country to save their life and the life of their children.” The Jewish Community of Florence was at the forefront of Jewish efforts to offer relief for the refugee crisis. When the Municipality of Florence appealed to private citizens and institutions to contribute in order to help solve the emergency of the growing wave of immigration, the Jewish community was the first to respond, making an apartment available to accommodate some of them. Sara Cividalli, president of the Jewish Community of Florence, said “in times of need, our community considers a moral imperative to do its part. Welcoming people in need is ingrained in the Jewish identity. Wasn’t the tent of our forefather Avraham Avinu open on all sides, precisely for this purpose?” The Turin Jewish Community followed Florence’s example with Dario Disegni, the community’s president, announcing that they will offer the municipality an apartment to shelter refugees. Also during the summer, the Jewish communities of Milan and Genoa collected food, clothes and toiletries for the migrants.

In France, Chief Rabbi Haim Korsia called on France and the European Union to find solutions for the immigration crisis. He said “France is a land of asylum and hospitality; France, the cradle of human rights, cannot ignore these women and men who fall at the gates of our borders, with the only hope – that of living. France, which radiates around the world through its values of humanism, universality and sharing, cannot be silent while facing the trial of its fellow human beings.” Following his intervention, French Jewish groups signed a declaration of principles for coordinated efforts to provide relief for Syrian refugees which states that each of the six signatories will “act to accompany the refugees, each according to its competences and abilities and with its traditional partners,” and “especially in administrative and medical matters.”

In Belgium, Rabbi Menachem Margolin, director of the European Jewish Association, called on other rabbis to join him on a solidarity visit to a refugee centre in Brussels, where he and his staff intended to speak to people who left Syria and hand out food and other items. He said “European Jewry

well remembers having to flee their homes empty-handed in our recent history. We must use those experiences and all possible tools at our disposal to help these migrants to build their own futures.”

In Switzerland, Herbert Winter, the president of the Federation of Jewish Communities urged his government to take in migrants from the Middle East. In his statement “Refugees: No, the Boat is not Full,” published in the local press, Winter recalled that during World War Two “thousands also were turned away at the borders and murdered in concentration camps.” He added that the Swiss were “privileged” to enjoy good economic conditions and were “morally obligated to act for those less fortunate.”

In the UK, more than 100 rabbis delivered a letter to Prime Minister David Cameron urging him to accelerate and expand proposals for the country to take in refugees fleeing the civil war in Syria. They called on the British government to offer asylum to a minimum of 10,000 “legitimate refugees” in the next six months and urged the government to re-examine asylum policies, in particular to allow refugees to work. In the letter they said “as rabbis and cantors we regularly read the story of a band of refugees who escaped from a tyrant with only the clothes on their backs and a bit of flat bread. They crossed a sea, and they dreamed of a promised land. We call this the exodus, and it is our founding beacon for hope, and our constant reminder in every generation to open our hearts and our doors to the stranger at our gates. We also remember and speak about the brave and committed citizens of this country who opened their homes to welcome 10,000 children fleeing Hitler... it is our turn to open our gates to refugees who are fleeing from tyranny and evil, often with only the clothes on their backs, and their children in their arms”.

- [Hungarian Jews collect money, food for Middle East refugees](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 8, 2015)
- [Moved by own history of woe, Italy’s Jews extend refugees an open hand](#) (The Times of Israel, September 7, 2015)
- [French chief rabbi calls for solutions for Mideast refugees](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 8, 2015)
- [French Jewish groups form task force on refugee relief](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 11, 2015)
- [Recalling failure to save Jews, Swiss Jewish leader urges refugee relief](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 18, 2015)
- [Rabbis urge David Cameron to speed up refugee scheme](#) (The Guardian. September 21, 2015)

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

Some renovation projects were announced in September. Whilst in Israel, in a speech to the Israel Council on Foreign Relations (ICFR) and the World Jewish Congress (WJC), Lithuanian Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevičius promised that a project to mark, memorialise and maintain Jewish burial grounds in Lithuania would be completed by 2017. He said that “I can assure you that this obligation will be fulfilled. The history of Lithuania is unthinkable without the Jewish presence.”

In Poland, the city of Koronowo has agreed to renovate a former nineteenth century synagogue building and to make it available for cultural and educational events. The work will be completed by May 2016. However in Bialystok, the city council agreed to allow a meat production plant to build a high-rise apartment building on the grounds of a former Jewish cemetery. The vote was passed by twelve to eight with one abstention. Council member Zbigniew Brozek said at the meeting that “in the centre of Bialystok there were six cemeteries. If we want to protect them, it would be impossible to build anything [in the city].”

In the Czech Republic, a plaque was unveiled commemorating Fanny Neuda, the author of the first Jewish prayer book known to have been written by a woman for women. The monument in memory of the late author was unveiled in Lostice, or Loschitz, where she lived with her husband when he served there as a rabbi. The event was attended by Czech Minister of Culture Daniel Herman, the Israeli ambassador to the Czech Republic, Gary Koren, and Aliza Lavie, a member of the Knesset. Neuda, was the daughter of a Czech rabbi and wrote her prayer book in 1854 and it has since appeared in more than forty editions in countries around the world. Neuda died in 1894 at the age of 75.

In Russia, hundreds attended a Limmud FSU conference in Kazan, the capital of the predominantly-Muslim state of Tatarstan. The event emphasised coexistence between different religions and was attended by Kamil Hazrat Samigullin, the grand mufti of Tatarstan, and Vladimir Samoilenko, the archpriest, or senior Russian Orthodox cleric, of the region. Samigullin said that “a day of celebration for the Jews of Tatarstan is a festive day for all in the state, and I wish to extend our Jewish fellow citizens my warmest sympathies on their day of celebration.” A celebration also took place commemorating the centenary of the synagogue in Kazan which was attended by the President of the Republic of Tatarstan, Rustam Minnikhanov, who also praised the coexistence between the different religions. Russian Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar affixed a new mezuzah to the doorframe of the synagogue, where renovations were only very recently completed, in part with government funding.

Also in Russia, rabbis from across the country gathered in the city of Saratov to celebrate the opening of one of Russia’s largest synagogues. The opening ceremony came at the end of nine years of construction, according to the Russian Jewish Congress, which oversaw and initiated the project. At the opening ceremony in front of hundreds of Jews and non-Jews, Yuri Kanner, president of the congress, said that “together with the building, a community was built. Today there are no vacant seats in this synagogue.” In Moscow, a newly established rabbinical seminary in Moscow for Reform Jews received its first class, made up of seven students. Working out of Moscow’s Russian State University for the Humanities, the seminary is designed to address the current shortage of Reform rabbis in the former Soviet Union.

In Ukraine, the annual *Rosh Hashanah* influx of Hasidic Jews to Uman took place with nearly 30,000 mainly Hasidic Breslov members arriving just before the New Year. Most spent a week in quiet contemplation praying by the lake and by Rabbi Nachman’s grave whilst others came for a party, dancing all night to religious techno music.

In Austria, the founding conference of the new Muslim-Jewish Leadership Council (MJLC) took place. The Council was formed to help fight for religious freedom in light of repeated attempts to impose restrictions on circumcisions and ritual animal slaughter in some EU countries. Participating in the MJLC are the Conference of European Rabbis, the World Islamic Relief Organisation, the Islamic Council of the Republic of Germany and the King Abdullah International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID).

In France, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe overturned a two-year resolution calling for a ban on ritual circumcision of children. Following a two-year lobbying effort by Jewish and Muslim groups, the parliamentary assembly overwhelmingly passed a resolution on religious freedoms, which states that it “seeks reasonable accommodations with a view to guaranteeing equality that is effective, and not merely formal, in the right to freedom of religion.” The resolution provides general guidelines to promote coexistence and fight hate speech, allowing religious communities to practice their faith, manage welfare institutions and express their opinions. The resolution also recommended that countries require circumcisions to be performed by people trained to do so, in appropriate medical and health conditions, and that parents be informed of any medical risk to their child. The Conference of European Rabbis President Rabbi Pinhas Goldschmidt called the

resolution “a step forward in our battle to ensure that religious customs can be upheld freely and publicly.”

- [‘By 2017, all Jewish graves will be marked, memorialized and maintained,’ Lithuanian PM pledges](#) (World Jewish Congress, September 9, 2015)
- [19th century Polish synagogue to be renovated for cultural centre](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 29, 2015)
- [Polish city council rejects zoning plan to protect Jewish cemetery](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 30, 2015)
- [Czech author of first women’s prayer book commemorated](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 4, 2015)
- [Coexistence conference features Kazan’s Jews](#) (Ynet news, September 10, 2015)
- [Chabad Russia’s competitors open massive new synagogue east of Moscow](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 11, 2015)
- [Moscow’s Reform rabbinic institute welcomes first class](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, September 11, 2015)
- [Techno, parties and prayer – celebrating Rosh Hashanah in Ukraine](#) (The Guardian, September 15, 2015)
- [Muslim-Jewish council formed to fight for religious freedom in Europe](#) (Ynet News, September 11, 2015)
- [Council of Europe cancels anti-circumcision measure after joint Jewish-Muslim effort](#) (The Jerusalem Post, October 1, 2015)
- [Council of Europe seeks ban on circumcision without ‘requisite skill’](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, October 2, 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.

JPR’s research and analysis offers detailed insights into a wide range of issues, including Jewish population size, geographical density, age and gender structure, education, charitable giving, volunteering, antisemitism, Jewish practice, religious outlook and communal participation. All of JPR’s publications can be downloaded free of charge from our website: [www.jpr.org.uk](http://www.jpr.org.uk).

## / 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.