

1 / Issues concerning antisemitism

Violence, Vandalism & Abuse

In Germany, acts of vandalism at several Jewish cemeteries and memorials were reported at the beginning of February. In Berlin, dozens of the Stolpersteine (“stumbling block”) memorials were defaced. The small, brass blocks which denote where Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust had lived, were covered with grey paint. A Jewish cemetery near Hanover was also vandalised a few weeks earlier. These events followed the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in Kropelin in January. In Poland, it was reported that antisemitic graffiti sprayed at the Jewish cemetery in Sochaczew still remained two months after

the incident. The wintry weather was cited as the reason for the delay in removing the graffiti.

In Spain, the Jewish community has threatened legal action for a Nazi-style cartoon published by the Barcelona-based satirical magazine *El Jueves*. The cartoon showed hook-nosed Israeli soldiers urinating on Palestinians and physically abusing Jesus. The soldiers explain to their victim: “You don’t understand. My parents were in a concentration camp.” David Hatchwell, the head of the Jewish community of Madrid, said that this “is absolutely outrageous and obviously we are going to be seeking legal remedies.” He added that it is “absolutely unacceptable” to engage in “antisemitic attack and slanders against the Jewish people ... This [cartoon] could be taken from the Nazis’ *Der Sturmer* and nobody would notice the difference ... These are lies, totally non-factual, and it’s done in a sophisticated enough way that people who know nothing about the conflict will think that Israelis are Nazi-like oppressors and it affirms every myth [about Jews] in Europe [held] for thousands of years.”

In the Netherlands, a new government-commissioned report on discrimination in education stated that antisemitism is a persistent problem in some Dutch schools and especially among some Muslim pupils. The report, called ‘Two Worlds, Two Realities – How Do You Deal with It as a Teacher,’ is based on visits to schools and on conversations with dozens of teachers since January 2015, and noted that teachers sometimes feel powerless to change the deep-seated biases and violent attitudes of some pupils. One teacher in a high school in Amsterdam said that following a programme about democratic values and against discrimination, a female pupil of Moroccan descent stood up and said: “if I had a Kalashnikov, I’d gun down all the Jews.” She then made shooting gestures and sounds. Jet Bussemaker, the Dutch Education Minister, wrote in the report that the document “shows a reality that is inconvenient and sometimes painful” but must be confronted and dealt with “in accordance with democratic values.”

Also in the Netherlands, Lodewijk Asscher, the Deputy Prime Minister, said he has stopped interacting on social media because of antisemitic

/ ABOUT EUROPEAN JEWISH DIGEST

Written by **Richard Goldstein**, JPR’s Director of Operations, 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.

/ 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 offer 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. Download JPR’s publications free of charge from our website: www.jpr.org.uk.

abuse. Asscher, who has Jewish ancestors, listed the handles of several Twitter users who used antisemitic language against him. One wrote “the Zionist dog Asscher skips U.N. meeting on racism, not antisemitism. The former doesn’t interest him.”

In Lithuania, the Vilnius Municipal District Court found a woman from Vilnius guilty of writing comments on the internet which denigrated and derided Jews. She was sentenced to 33 days in prison, but since the court found that her sentence had already been served, she was released.

In the UK, the Community Security Trust (CST) said that the number of antisemitic incidents reported had dropped by a fifth last year, although the figure was still the third highest on record. There were 924 incidents reported during 2015, including 86 violent assaults, which represented a 22 per cent reduction from the record level of 1,179 antisemitic incidents in 2014. David Delew, Chief Executive of CST, said that the number was still “unacceptably high” and that “the Jewish community has a right to expect antisemitism to be opposed wherever it occurs. It should have no place in our society.” Home Secretary Theresa May said that “while a fall in antisemitic incidents should be welcomed, there are still too many cases of this type of hate crime. We also know that these types of crimes are often underreported. We must give victims the confidence to come forward to report these terrible acts.”

In the Netherlands, news website *Geenstijl.nl* collected nearly \$30,000 for an elderly couple who are Holocaust survivors and were robbed and beaten in their Amsterdam home. Jan Roos, a journalist for the website, presented octogenarians Samuel and Diana Blog with a cheque for €25,672 to compensate them for losses they suffered during the 2015 attack. Diana Blog is no longer able to walk on her own after the attack and her husband was rendered blind and confined to a wheelchair. Whilst presenting Blog with flowers and a cardboard cheque, Roos said that “we know you suffered a lot of pain, but you also lost a lot of money.” The money was collected online through crowdfunding.

In the UK, Alex Chalmers, Co-Chair of the Oxford University Labour Club (OULC), a leading student Labour group, quit his position, accusing his colleagues of having “some kind of problem with Jews.” His decision came after the

OULC endorsed Israel Apartheid Week, and he claimed that his fellow students had expressed “solidarity” with Hamas and had asserted that any accusations they had received about antisemitism were “just the Zionists crying wolf.” Chalmers said that “a large proportion of both OULC and the student left in Oxford more generally have some kind of problem with Jews. The decision of the club to endorse a movement with a history of targeting and harassing Jewish students and inviting antisemitic speakers to campuses, despite the concerns of Jewish students, illustrates how uneven and insincere much of the active membership is when it comes to liberation. I am now in a position where I can no longer in good conscience defend club policy, but I do not regret my time in OULC. I’m proud of the work I did.” Following his resignation, the Oxford University Jewish Society (JSoc) said they were “saddened” but unsurprised of the reports of antisemitism, claiming some students have been “laughed at and mocked” when attempting to raise the issue in the past. A JSoc spokesperson added that “it is not the first time that Oxford JSoc has had to deal with antisemitic incidents within the student left and it will not be the last. It is a significant and worrying issue and one that, on many occasions, Jewish students have felt that they are fighting alone. We are grateful that Alex Chalmers has made the statement that he did and has brought the issue of antisemitism to the fore in a way that Jewish students have so far been denied.”

Following this, Labour Students, the Labour party’s national student organisation, announced it was launching an inquiry into allegations of antisemitic behaviour and intimidation at OULC. Ed Miliband, the former Labour leader, said that he was postponing his visit to address the club’s annual John Smith Memorial Dinner in light of the events and that he was “deeply disturbed” by the reports. John Mann, Labour MP and Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group against Antisemitism, called for the party to cut ties with the club, saying “I have written to the Labour Party asking for an investigation as a matter of urgency. It is hugely embarrassing for the Labour Party. This is something Jeremy Corbyn should personally look into.” More than thirty former and current chairs and executive members of OULC and others signed a letter condemning the club’s decision to endorse Israeli Apartheid Week. The letter stated that Israeli Apartheid Week promotes a “one-sided narrative, seeking to

dismantle the only majority-Jewish member-state of the United Nations.” It also adds that “we are troubled by OULC’s decision and feel compelled to speak out. In a climate of rising antisemitism, we have a duty to oppose initiatives that foster an intolerant political culture which intimidates Jewish students.”

Whilst the OULC executive committee said it was launching an investigation and claimed they were “horrified at and condemn antisemitic behaviour in all its forms,” Oxford JSoc members came forward with more examples of antisemitic behaviour of OULC members. One allegation included the claim that an OULC member organised a group of students to harass a Jewish student and shout “filthy Zionist” at her. Another alleged that “one member, then on the committee, stated that all Jews should be expected to publicly denounce Zionism and the State of Israel, and that we should not associate with any Jew who fails to do so.” Towards the end of the month, the Labour Party announced a fresh investigation into the allegations of antisemitism at the OULC to be led by Baroness Janet Royall, Labour’s former leader of the House of Lords. Labour Students handed over to the new investigation their report detailing the harassment and intimidation of Jewish students, but the findings were not published. A Labour Students spokesperson said “we unequivocally condemn any form of antisemitism. We are taking these allegations very seriously and will do whatever is necessary to ensure every Labour Club is a safe space for Jewish students. We are proud of the long history we have of working with the Union of Jewish Students and the National Union of Students to protect Jewish students on campus and this will always be a top priority for Labour Students.”

Also in the UK, a judge in London resigned prior to his impending removal over antisemitic comments he made on Facebook. Following an official year-long investigation, the British Judicial Conduct Investigations Office found that Abul “Abz” Hussain posted racist comments on social media as far back as 2010. His posts included: “u know the worlds coming to an end when a Jew accuses another of being his kind!” and “Jews like u are boring so find everything lame, here’s a penny go put it in the bank and u just might get a pound after ten years’ interest!” (sic). Hussain stepped down from judicial office in August

2015 before he could be removed by the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice.

Ofcom, the British broadcasting standards regulator, warned *Peace TV Urdu* that it faces sanctions after showing antisemitic lectures by a preacher who called Jews a “cursed race.” *Peace TV Urdu* was found in breach of television standards for broadcasting two recorded lectures by the late Dr Israr Ahmad in September last year. Ahmad said Jews were bent on a vendetta and enmity for the Prophet Muhammad and “they do not take advantage of the opportunity to repent, which is why they are afflicted by great calamities, and the example is what happened to them at the hands of the Germans.” Ofcom stated that “in our view, the terms used to describe Jewish people

Violence, vandalism and abuse links

- / Memorial monument, 2 Jewish cemeteries vandalised in Germany (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 5, 2016)
- / Dutch news site collects \$30,000 for assaulted Holocaust survivors (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, March 1, 2016)
- / Two months later, antisemitic graffiti remains at Polish Jewish cemetery (*The Times of Israel*, February 29, 2016)
- / Oxford Labour antisemitism row: Jewish students ‘unsurprised’ by reports of left-wing bigotry (*International Business Times*, February 16, 2016)
- / Spanish magazine may face legal action over ‘antisemitic’ cartoons (*The Jewish Chronicle*, February 19, 2016)
- / Labour opens inquiry into antisemitism allegations at Oxford student club (*The Guardian*, February 17, 2016)
- / Antisemitism a ‘recurrent problem’ in Dutch schools, government report says (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 8, 2016)
- / Jewish Society makes new allegations in Oxford Labour antisemitism row (*The Jewish Chronicle*, February 17, 2016)
- / Dutch deputy PM: Antisemitic abuse keeps me off social media (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 9, 2016)
- / Labour launches fresh antisemitism inquiry amid accusations of a ‘cover-up’ (*The Telegraph*, February 27, 2016)
- / Vilnius Woman who posted antisemitic internet comments convicted (Jewish Community of Lithuania, February 15, 2016)
- / Magistrate quits as judiciary rules he should be fired for antisemitism (*Jewish News*, February 8, 2016)
- / CST figures reveal 2015 was third worst year for antisemitism (*The Jewish Chronicle*, February 4, 2016)
- / Ofcom warn TV channel over broadcasts calling Jews a ‘cursed race’ (*The Jewish Chronicle*, February 22, 2016)

such as ‘like a cancer,’ ‘evil genius,’ ‘their poison,’ ‘cursed people,’ and ‘cursed race’ were particularly strong and inflammatory,” and that the lecturer repeatedly portrayed Jews in “overwhelmingly negative and stereotypical terms.” *Club TV*, which holds the licence for *Peace TV Urdu*, told Ofcom it “sincerely regretted” the broadcasts, which were not consistent with its beliefs and would not repeat them.

Politics

Neo-Nazi marches were held in both Hungary and Lithuania in February. In Hungary, extremist groups and Nazi sympathisers from abroad met in the city of Székesfehérvár to commemorate the 71st anniversary of the attempt by German and Hungarian troops to break out of Budapest, which had been encircled by the Soviet Army. The “Remember the heroes of the breakout” event featured a torchlight procession led by men wearing SS uniforms. The memorial ceremonies began with a mass held in the basilica for the Hungarian soldiers who lost their lives during the breakout. Representatives of the Catholic Church refused to explain why the mass was being held, or who had requested it. The extreme right-wing party, Jobbik, was initially involved in promoting the event, but withdrew after learning that an SS veteran was also scheduled to speak. However, its allies attended, including the New Hungarian Guard (successor organisation to the banned Magyar Gárda), as well as the openly pro-Nazi “64-county youth movement” (HVIM) and Betyársereg (Army of Highwaymen). The Simon Wiesenthal Centre condemned the neo-Nazi event, with Mark Weitzman, the Centre’s Director of Government Affairs, saying that “the event, in featuring a SS veteran and neo-Nazis ... is another blatant attempt to honour and glorify the perpetrators of the Holocaust. For such an event to be allowed to go forward, without any condemnation in the country that is currently chairing the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and has a law against Holocaust denial, is an exercise in political and historical hypocrisy.”

In Lithuania, approximately 250 people attended a march commemorating nationalists who are accused of complicity in the murder of Jews during the Holocaust. The march in Kaunas was organised on Lithuania’s independence day by the Union of Nationalist Youth of Lithuania under

the banner “We Know Our Nation’s Heroes.” Dr. Efraim Zuroff, from the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, said that “there were the usual nationalistic slogans, and they announced that they are honouring the heroes of Lithuania who are being discredited by the enemies of their country. All of those are people who murdered Jews during the Holocaust.”

In Hungary, a street protest in Budapest prevented the planned unveiling of a statue honouring a Holocaust-era politician who supported antisemitic legislation. The organisers of the unveiling stopped the event after several dozen demonstrators gathered at the site of the statue of Gyorgy Donath, a lawmaker when Hungary was under the control of pro-Nazi governments. Gergely Gulyas, a deputy speaker in parliament, and former Prime Minister Péter Boross, both officials from the Fidesz ruling party, had been scheduled to attend the event. Mazsihisz, the umbrella group of Jewish communities, condemned both the unveiling and the scheduled attendance of the officials. In a statement, Mazsihisz wrote of Donath that this “far-right, antisemitic politician deserves no statue in Hungary.” The district government that commissioned the statue said the unveiling will take place at an unspecified time in the future. This is the second time in three months that Mazsihisz has challenged the existence of a statue for a Hungarian politician in a pro-Nazi government.

In Croatia, pressure increased on the government to fire Culture Minister Zlatko Hasanbegović, who authored a book denying the Holocaust. It is claimed that in his book, Hasanbegović, a politician from the centre-right Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), specifically denies the murder of some 32,000 Jews by Croatia’s pro-Nazi regime, the Ustasha, and has reportedly promoted it on several neo-Nazi and White Supremacist websites. The Simon Wiesenthal Centre called on the Croatian government to remove him from his position, while leading Croatian think tank, the Adriatic Institute, and the International Leaders’ Summit urged European states and the United States government to send a strong message by pressuring the Croatian government into removing Hasanbegović. Joel Anand Samy, co-founder of the International Leaders’ Summit, said foreign ambassadors in Zagreb should be speaking up in protest, and that “the rise of antisemitism in Croatia and efforts of those connected to

the HDZ political party to apply a revision of history – with attempts to remove the facts on the Holocaust which killed six million Jews – should be denounced by strong rule of law nations and Western diplomats based in Zagreb. The world cannot remain silent or look the other way.”

Two memorial services were held for young Jews murdered by antisemites. In France, a ceremony was held in Bagneux, south of Paris, to pay tribute to Ilan Halimi, on the tenth anniversary of his murder in an antisemitic attack. Aged 23, Halimi, was kidnapped and held for three weeks, during which he was tortured whilst the gang tried to extort his family for ransom money. The gang leader assumed that the family was rich because they were Jewish. Halimi was found on a railway track in Essonne, naked, gagged, handcuffed and with burns and other signs of torture on his body. He eventually died of his wounds. Bernard Cazeneuve, Interior Minister, said that “ten years later, we are still experiencing collective remorse,” and that the attack was an omen of the “rampant spread” of antisemitism and “hatred of the other.” Marie-Hélène Amiable, Mayor of Bagneux, announced that a park in the town, to be established during the next three years, will be named after Ilan Halimi. Chief Rabbi Haim Korsia said that “ten years ago Ilan Halimi was a victim to horror and antisemitism; tonight we honour his memory, so that the silence that followed that drama will not repeat itself.”

In Denmark, Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen marked a year since a gunman killed a filmmaker and a Jewish security guard in attacks in Copenhagen. He honoured the victims by leaving flowers outside the cultural centre and the synagogue. Rasmussen said that “the Danes have shown that we insist on living our peaceful life. That is perhaps the most important message we can send here today – that we will never give in, we will never give up.”

Heinz Becker, an Austrian Christian Democrat member of the European Parliament, called for a swift EU action plan against growing antisemitism. Becker, who sits on the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, urged “comprehensive educational work, cooperation with media and stricter legislation, including EU-wide rules against hate speech and incitement.” He added that “all EU member states need to come together against growing

antisemitism,” and warned that “antisemitism in Europe is increasing. The Jewish population in Europe is threatened again and is under police protection, some of them leave the continent. We can’t accept this.” Katharina von Schnurbein, the EU Coordinator on Combating Antisemitism, said that “fighting antisemitism is a responsibility for the society at large and must not be left to the Jewish community. It needs to be fought on all levels and by all possible actors. That’s why the European Commission brought together political actors, community leaders, civil society, NGOs and religious representatives for a colloquium last October.”

Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)

Issues surrounding the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement made the press in February. In Germany, the City Council of Bayreuth voted to suspend the award of the city’s annual tolerance prize to an American NGO after revelations that some of its members were linked to the BDS movement and to Holocaust deniers. Brigitte Merk-Erbe, Mayor of Bayreuth, stopped the award to the activist group ‘Code Pink’ because of the ties of some of its members with alleged deniers of the Holocaust, and the group’s support for the anti-Israel BDS movement. She said that “I consider it correct to refrain from awarding the prize out of a sense of historical responsibility, and out of respect for the victims of National Socialism.” The \$11,000 Wilhelmine-von-Bayreuth Toleranz Prize is awarded annually by the city to individuals or organisations active in promoting peaceful coexistence and tolerance. Felix Gothart, the head of Bayreuth’s Jewish community, said that he agreed with Merk-Erbe’s decision, calling Code Pink activists “antisemites.” Code Pink called for the elimination of Israel at an AIPAC conference in 2015 and its activists chanted “The State of Israel has to go” and “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” Other activists unfolded a banner at the Western Wall in Jerusalem urging the world to boycott Israel.

In the UK, publicly funded authorities will be prevented from boycotting Israeli goods under new government procurement guidelines. The guidance will make clear that ministers consider procurement boycotts by public authorities to

be “inappropriate, outside where formal legal sanctions, embargoes and restrictions have been put in place by the government.” Matthew Hancock, Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, said that “we need to challenge and prevent these divisive town hall boycotts,” and that the guidelines “will help prevent damaging and counterproductive local foreign policies undermining our national security.” A spokesman for Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour Party leader, said that the guideline plan is “an attack on local democracy.” He added that “people have the right to elect local representatives able to make decisions free of central government political control and that includes withdrawal of investments or procurement on ethical and human rights grounds.” Robert Singer, the Chief Executive of the World Jewish Congress, welcomed the decision by the British government, calling the new rules “a significant step and a major victory against the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement which unfairly singles out Israel.” He added that “over the course of the last years, the UK has been a hotbed for BDS activity. We saw a number of universities and local councils adopting boycott resolutions against the Jewish State, severe actions in supermarkets, and attempts to hamper trade relations between Britain and Israel. It’s therefore important and welcome that the British government has now decided to take action. While individuals remain free to express their opinions towards Israel, no matter how hypocritical they may be, it is critical that public authorities uphold the law and do not unfairly single out for punitive actions the only democratic state in the Middle East.”

In another defeat for the BDS campaign, a boycott motion at Warwick University was beaten when 644 students voted against it, with 376 in favour and 249 abstentions. The university’s Jewish-Israeli society, led by president Sam Shindler-Glass, campaigned against the proposal which had called for the removal of “any companies or organisations on campus which directly or indirectly benefit from the illegal occupation of Palestine.” The group, which has around sixty members, built ties with other student societies to secure backing for their counter campaign.

In London, hundreds of posters marking Israel Apartheid Week were plastered on underground trains, targeting a security firm for close business ties to Israel as well as the BBC for “biased”

reporting in favour of the Jewish state. The Brighton BDS movement tweeted that over 500 London tube trains were plastered with posters for the four million passengers to read as part of a guerrilla advertising campaign. A spokesman for Transport for London said that the posters were unauthorised “vandalism” and were being removed.

In Austria, the city of Vienna was seeking to pull the plug on BDS events due to take place in early March in a municipal-funded building. Martin Ritzmaier, a spokesperson for Vienna’s Mayor Michael Häupl, said that “we would like a cancellation,” adding that “the city of Vienna rejects boycott calls against the State of Israel and the association BDS-Austria receives no funding from the city of Vienna.” He also said that the city of Vienna had contacted the management of the Amerlinghaus Cultural Centre to urge a cancellation of the BDS activities.

New surveys

In February, the results of two surveys were published. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) released a survey of leaders of European Jewish communities, which, among other issues, showed that 40% of respondents said antisemitism is the most serious threat to the future of Jewish life in their country. The figure was the highest recorded by JDC since it launched its first survey of this kind in 2008. That year, only 10% of respondents ranked the phenomenon as the most serious threat facing their communities.

In France, a survey conducted by the Fondation du Judaïsme Français and Ipsos suggested that 59% of French people think Jews are at least partially responsible for antisemitism; over half said that they believed Jewish people had a lot of power and were richer than the average French person. A total of 13% thought there were too many Jewish people in France. Among the general population, 53% said that they believed French Jews are more attached to Israel than to France. Part of the survey was for Jewish respondents, of whom 92% said antisemitism had increased since 2011, 45% said they had experienced antisemitic abuse and 11% said they had been the victims of antisemitic violence. 61% said that Jews were safer in Israel than in France, and 26% said they were seriously considering emigrating to Israel.

Politics, Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) and New surveys links

- / Nazi sympathisers hold memorial events in Székesfehérvár followed by holy mass (*The Budapest Beacon*, February, 7 2016)
- / Wiesenthal Centre condemns Saturday's 'neo-Nazi' event in Székesfehérvár (*Budapest Business Journal*, February 8, 2016)
- / Wiesenthal Centre protests Lithuanian neo-Nazi march (*The Jerusalem Post*, February 17, 2016)
- / Street protest halts unveiling of statue honouring Holocaust-era Hungarian lawmaker (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 24, 2016)
- / Croatian government urged to fire Holocaust-denying minister (*Arutz Sheva*, February 11, 2016)
- / French hold memorial ceremony for young Jewish man murdered 10 years ago (*i24 News*, February 14, 2016)
- / Danes honour victims on terror anniversary (*i24 News*, February 14, 2016)
- / 'Fighting antisemitism is a responsibility for the society at large and must not be left to the Jewish community' (European Jewish Press, February 10, 2016)
- / German city suspends award of tolerance prize to anti-Israel group (World Jewish Congress, February 16, 2016)
- / Councils and NHS trusts to be blocked from boycotting Israeli products (*The Guardian*, February 15, 2016)
- / Boycott at Warwick defeated (*The Jewish Chronicle*, February 18, 2016)
- / London Underground trains splashed with anti-Israel ads for Israel Apartheid Week (*The Jerusalem Post*, February 22, 2016)
- / Vienna mayor wants BDS events cancelled in city-funded building (*The Jerusalem Post*, February 26, 2016)
- / Poll of EU Jewish leaders shows rising fear of antisemitism (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, March 1, 2016)
- / 6 in 10 French people think Jews are responsible for antisemitism, survey finds (*The Independent*, February 3, 2016)
- / Austrian MEP Heinz Becker calls for swift EU action plan against growing antisemitism (European Jewish Press, February 8, 2016)

2 / Revisiting Holocaust Issues

In Lithuania, a book by Ruta Vanagaite on Lithuanian accomplices to the Holocaust has caused much debate in the country. Called 'Musiskiai' ('Our People'), and co-authored with the Wiesenthal Centre's Efraim Zuroff, it is a travelogue consisting of interviews with witnesses to the atrocities perpetrated by

Lithuanians against their Jewish neighbours. This was once taboo in the country, and is still a very controversial subject. Dovid Katz, a Yiddish scholar in Vilnius, said that "in one fell swoop, the book has brought a wave of truth telling about the Holocaust to the mainstream of society who follow the large media outlets. It is of notable importance that a born and bred Lithuanian author tells the simple truth as it has never been told in a trade book not intended for scholars and specialists." Geoff Vasil, a spokesman for the Jewish Community of Lithuania, said "the turning of the tide within Lithuanian society" on this issue "now appears to be taking place like never before."

Partly as a response to the national debate, the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania announced that it may publish a list of individuals who worked in police institutions during the Nazi occupation of Europe – in other words, a list of individuals who may have contributed to the Holocaust in Lithuania. Terese Birute Burauskaite, who heads the centre, said her institution would "this year try to publish a book" containing names of "over 1,000 Lithuanian residents who are connected to the Holocaust." After initially supporting a delay in the publication of the names after concerns were raised about the degree of guilt of those named, the Jewish community fully supported its publication. Faina Kukliansky, President of the Jewish Community, wrote that "the Lithuanian Jewish Community believes refusal to release the list could have negative repercussions at the international as well as national level and could give rise to various theories that would damage the reputation of the Lithuanian state – for example, that Lithuania is avoiding the criminal prosecution in cases of still-living Holocaust perpetrators." She added that the government must "disclose the identities on the list according to category, describing each category and their actual contribution to the implementation of the Holocaust," and that it must be made known how many of those listed were "honoured by statues whose construction was financed by funds from the state or municipal institutions" or recognised in other ways. Kukliansky also said that anyone who had been granted recognition as a Freedom Fighter should have their honours stripped, with any memorials to their memory torn down, and the names of anyone still fit to stand trial should be turned over to state prosecutors.

Restitution issues also made the press in February. In Serbia, the parliament passed a law offering compensation for Jewish property seized during and after the Holocaust where there are no heirs today. The law offers annual payments of a little over \$1 million for the next 25 years to the country's Jewish communities for property which was confiscated from its Jewish owners during and after the Holocaust. Ruben Fuks, President of the Serbian Jewish Community Association, said that "the law is very important, because there are more than 3,000 immovable assets that are expected to be returned. The process is supposed to be finished in the next three years." Serbia's Jewish community will manage the revenue and use it to finance Holocaust research and education, and scholarships for students. Gideon Taylor, Chair of Operations of World Jewish Restitution Organisation (WJRO), said that "this is a step toward justice and the recognition of history. We look to other countries to follow Serbia's lead and return heirless Jewish property so that it can help Holocaust survivors in need, commemorate those who died and strengthen Jewish life in these communities where so much was destroyed."

In Latvia, the parliament passed legislation providing for the restitution of five pre-war properties to the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia. Three of the properties to be returned are in Riga, one in the seaside resort of Jurmala and one in the western Latvian town of Kandava. According to the legislation, the restitution is intended to amend the historical injustice that Latvia's Jewish congregations and organisations suffered during the Holocaust and Communist regimes. The properties are mostly in poor condition, with the one in Jurmala likely to be pulled down, as it was beyond repair. Gideon Taylor of the WJRO said that bill was an "important first step in addressing remaining communal property issues." However, he added that he looks forward to seeing the government "ensure these properties are transferred, and that additional steps are taken to reconstitute the remaining communal properties." He estimates that another 270 properties have yet to be returned.

Rescuers, victims and perpetrators during the Holocaust were being recognised in February. In Spain, a doctor who rescued thousands of European Jews fleeing the Nazi regime may finally have a street named after him in Madrid. Using the British Embassy as a cover, Dr Eduardo Martínez

Alonso helped refugees fleeing across the Pyrenees and into Spain. Those who reached the tearoom on the ground floor of the British Embassy would be taken to a Madrid apartment or his family home by Dr Martínez, from where he would take care of them by sending them on to the safety of Gibraltar or Portugal.

In Hungary, a promenade in Budapest has been named after the late U.S. Representative Tom Lantos, the only Holocaust survivor to have served in Congress. Lantos was forced into a labour camp in 1944 but escaped to a safe house set up by the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg. Lantos joined Wallenberg's network and delivered supplies to Jews in other safe houses. After the war he emigrated to the United States and was elected to the House of Representatives in 1980. The Tom Lantos Promenade is located near the school the late Congressman attended during his teenage years.

In Lithuania, the town of Moletai has come under attack for its announcement that it intends to name a street after Jonas Zvinys, a local priest accused of organising a gang that murdered the city's Jews in 1941. Ruta Vanagaite, author of the recently published book on Lithuanian complicity in the Holocaust, discovered in KGB archives that the priest set up the gang and one of its leaders was his own brother, who would later confess to his role in the massacre. It was also discovered that Zvinys had been awarded a colonelcy in 2002 by the office of the President at the request of the country's state-sponsored Study of the Genocide and Resistance of the Residents of Lithuania. When asked about honouring Zvinys, the Mayor of Moletai municipality, who is related to Zvinys, queried why there should be a problem in honouring him if he was already honoured by the government. Vanagaite said that "they were all throwing the ball to each other and no one wants to investigate without somebody else asking for it. I think it's good because it shows that the whole system doesn't work. There is nobody who takes responsibility to investigate without anybody asking for it, and nobody asks for it."

In Hungary, the Jewish community received government permission to rebury human remains from the Holocaust found in the Danube River. The bones were discovered five years ago during construction work on the Margaret Bridge and belong to several people who were murdered,

either by being shot on the banks of the river and dumped into it, or thrown into the river alive in 1944 or 1945. The government had planned to bury the bones in a municipal burial site, but, following the Jewish community's objections, subjected the bones to DNA testing that proved that they were likely to belong to Ashkenazi Jews.

In Poland, a construction crew unearthed bones at the site of the former Nazi concentration camp in Plaszow, near Krakow, whilst repairing a decades-old gas pipeline. The Jewish community of Krakow, which officially owns the property, was not informed of the plans to repair the pipeline. Tadeusz Jakubowicz, President of the Jewish community in Krakow, said that "all the former Plaszow camp area is a cemetery. Also, this area is listed on the register of national historic monuments." The police are investigating the incident.

During a visit to Israel by Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, Jews of Bulgarian descent have proposed that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for its role in the rescue of Jews during the Second World War. Moshe Aloni, Chair of the Bulgarian Israeli Cultural Institute, told Prime Minister Borisov that the formal procedure for the Nobel Peace Prize nomination of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church had already been invoked by the Israeli Bar Association.

In Israel, Samuel Willenberg, the last survivor of the Treblinka death camp in Poland, died aged 93. Only one of 67 people known to have survived the camp, he escaped by clambering over bodies piled up by a fence as the Nazis shot prisoners during a mass break-out. In October 1942, aged 19, Willenberg was among 6,000 Jews from the Opatow ghetto who arrived by train at the camp. They were told that they were at a transit camp and had to undress and shower before being sent onward. In reality, the shower rooms were gas chambers. However, because he was a bricklayer, Willenberg was allocated to manual labour duties and escaped an immediate death. The rest of his transport was killed in the gas chambers. His job was to sort through the belongings of the people sent to the gas chambers. After his escape, Willenberg joined the Polish partisans and took part in the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. Following the war, he moved to Israel, became a surveyor and spent the rest of his life teaching about the

Holocaust, including visiting Poland and Treblinka with high school students. Willenberg said: "I live two lives, one is here and now and the other is what happened there. It never leaves me. It stays in my head. It goes with me always."

Also in Israel, Yad Vashem announced that it was considering partnering with the Kiev Municipality to build the Ukrainian capital's first Holocaust museum at Babi Yar. The announcement came a week after Yad Vashem chairman Avner Shalev met with Kiev Mayor Vitali Klitschko in Jerusalem. The Ukrainians initially approached Yad Vashem in December regarding the project, with Mayor Klitschko saying the memorial was intended to be completed to mark the 75th anniversary of the killings. More than 33,000 Jews were murdered at Babi Yar during a two-day period in 1941. According to Yad Vashem, representatives of the Babi Yar Foundation explained at the meeting in Jerusalem that "the museum will tell the story of the Jews murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators at Babi Yar." This followed recent criticism of the Ukrainian government by Jewish organisations, including Yad Vashem, after the announcement of a state-backed design competition calling for architectural proposals to resolve what it sees as a "problem" of "discrepancy between the world's view and Jewry's exclusive view of Babi Yar as a symbol of the Holocaust."

In Italy, the government released thousands of previously classified documents related to fascist and Nazi war crimes committed in Italy during the Second World War. The historical archives of the Chamber of Deputies put an index of some 13,000 pages of material on its website. The documents reveal details of crimes ranging from anti-Jewish persecution to massacres of civilians that resulted in 15,000 deaths. Renzo Gattegna, President of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, called the move a "historic breakthrough," and said that it "fills a serious gap and announces the start of a new season of awareness about the crimes and responsibilities of fascism and Nazism in Italy."

In the Netherlands, Stephan Steinmetz, a political scientist, revealed in his new book 'Asterdorp', that the capital's housing department profited from the Nazi occupation's persecution of Jews by raising their rent after they were confined to ghettos. According to the book, named after a ghetto in northern Amsterdam where 300 Jews were sent in

1942, the department increased the rent by 25% to 30% as soon as the Jews moved into the ghetto. A similar rent increase occurred in municipal housing that was used for a larger ghetto in the city's south. The Nazi occupation forces never asked the city to raise the rent. The city has never offered to reimburse Jewish families for the rent increase for houses they did not occupy of their own free will, but did submit a bill, equivalent to what is today \$3 million after the war, to the central government for compensation for expenses connected to housing the Jews there.

Also in Amsterdam, at 11am on February 25th, trams, buses and the metro stopped for one minute for passengers to listen to a recorded message from Amsterdam Mayor Eberhard van der Laan. This was to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the mass February strike in the city in response to anti-Jewish measures carried out by the German occupiers of the Netherlands. It is considered to be the only mass protest by non-Jews against the Nazi round-ups of Jews. The strike was called by the then illegal Dutch Communist Party in solidarity with the 425 Jews arrested by the Germans and deported to the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. They issued a pamphlet with the words "Staakt!!! Staakt!!! Staakt!!!", an impassioned call for strike action "to show solidarity with the Jewish part of our society which has been hit so hard." The call was observed *en masse*, with some 300,000 people in Amsterdam refusing to go to work, public transport at a standstill, shipyards deserted, shops and offices closed and schools empty of students.

In Germany, a series of Nazi war crimes trials made the news in February. At the beginning of the month, a court in Hanau announced that a 93-year-old former Waffen SS guard at Auschwitz would go on trial in April, charged as an accessory to murder. The court said that at least three trains carrying deportees arrived at the camp during his time at the camp and that "of the deportees, at least 1,075 people were cruelly and maliciously killed in the gas chambers after their arrival in Auschwitz."

A few days later, the trial of Reinhold Hanning, a 94-year-old former Auschwitz guard, opened in Detmold. He has been charged with at least 170,000 counts of accessory to murder and stands accused of having watched over prisoner selections. He is also accused of having been aware of the regular mass shooting of inmates at the camp,

Revisiting Holocaust issues links

- / Genocide research centre may publish list of suspected Lithuanian Holocaust collaborators (Delfi by *The Lithuanian Tribune*, February 2, 2016)
- / Lithuanian Jews call for government to publish list of Nazi collaborators (*The Jerusalem Post*, February 14, 2016)
- / New book prompts soul-searching in Lithuania about Holocaust-era complicity (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 17, 2016)
- / Serbian Jews to Reclaim Seized WWII Property (Balkan Transitional Justice, February 22, 2016)
- / Latvian Saeima approves restitution of 5 Jewish properties in final reading (*The Baltic Course*, February 25, 2016)
- / Spanish doctor honoured for saving thousands of European Jews who fled Nazi regime (*The Telegraph*, February 4, 2016)
- / Budapest promenade named for late Jewish congressman Tom Lantos (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 4, 2016)
- / Lithuanian town plans to name street after priest who organized gang that murdered Jews (*The Jerusalem Post*, February 28, 2016)
- / Hungarian Jewry to bury human remains from the Holocaust (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 25, 2016)
- / Construction crew unearths bones at site of former Nazi camp (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, March 1, 2016)
- / Bulgarian Jews in Israel Seek Submission of Orthodox Church as Nobel Prize Candidate (Sofia News Agency, February 25, 2016)
- / Last survivor of Treblinka revolt, Samuel Willenberg, dies at 93 (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 21, 2016)
- / Yad Vashem may help in construction of Kiev Holocaust museum (*The Jerusalem Post*, February 18, 2016)
- / Italy releases classified documents related to Nazi war crimes (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 16, 2016)
- / Amsterdam Housing accused of hiking rents on Jews forced into ghettos (*NL Times*, February 18, 2016)
- / Amsterdam marks anniversary of 1941 mass strike in support of Jews (World Jewish Congress, February 25, 2016)
- / Former Nazi, 93, to be third Auschwitz guard to face trial this year (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 5, 2016)
- / Both 94, Auschwitz survivor Leon Schwarzbau faces camp guard Reinhold Hanning in German court (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 12, 2016)
- / Auschwitz guard on trial for helping in 170,000 murders 'made hell possible' says a survivor born inside the Nazi death camp (Mail Online, February 27, 2016)
- / Trial of Auschwitz medic Hubert Zafke suspended in Germany (*The Guardian*, February 29, 2016)

as well as the systematic starvation of prisoners. Hanning has denied participating in mass killings, but prosecutors argue that, as a guard, he helped facilitate the murders. At the start of the trial, Leon Schwarzbaum, who lost 35 family members during the Holocaust, gave evidence. He said that “the SS were cruel and sadistic. The older I get, the more time I have to think about what happened. I am nearly 95 years old and I often have nightmares about this. Why did these people do this? Why did they kill so many people?” He then directly addressed Hanning and said, “Mr Hanning, we are almost the same age and we will soon face our final judge. I would like to ask you to tell the historical truth here, just as I am. Tell the truth about what you and your colleagues did.” Hanning has denied participating in mass killings.

At the end of the month, the trial of Hubert Zafke, a 95-year-old former SS hospital medic at Auschwitz, was suspended after a doctor found that he was unfit to be transported to court. Chief Judge Klaus Kabisch put the proceedings on hold shortly after they opened, saying a doctor who examined Zafke found that he had “suicidal thoughts and was suffering from stress reaction and hypertension” and was thus “not in a state” to be transported to the court or to be heard. He is accused of at least 3,681 counts of complicity in killings.

3 / Other news stories about Jewish life in Europe you may have missed

A number of Jewish sites across Europe were either renovated or restored in February. In Slovakia, the ‘Status Quo’ synagogue in Trnava was reopened after an eight-month long renovation. The synagogue, built in 1897, had been used as a contemporary arts centre since 1994. The renovation, costing €1 million, was carried out by the Trnava Self-Governing Region with funding from the European Union. The Status Quo synagogue stands across the street from the former Orthodox synagogue, a smaller building that was restored and reopened as an art gallery about five years ago. Recently it was transformed into the ‘Synagogue Café,’ a cafe-bar that also sometimes hosts cultural events. Also in Slovakia, the restoration of the long-abandoned synagogue in Lučenec, built in 1926, is nearing completion. It will be officially opened with an inaugural event in

May and will be used as a cultural centre that will include a Holocaust memorial. The restoration was financed by a €2.3 million grant from the EU.

In the Czech Republic, the small mortuary/ceremonial hall built in 1763 in the old Jewish cemetery in Boskovice, was reopened after a complete reconstruction. Previously, the building was a total ruin, and completion of the hall marked the end a lengthy restoration and clean-up of the entire cemetery. Nearly all of the Jewish heritage sites in Boskovice have now been restored.

In Poland, the city council of Grodzisk Mazowiecki has agreed to protect a Jewish cemetery from being developed into a residential complex with underground parking. The council leased the land to the Jewish cemetery within its historic boundaries in order to prevent the developer, Futura GM, from building a residential complex on the land. The local authorities also plan to ensure the cemetery is properly recognised and enclosed. Grzegorz Benedykciński, Mayor of Grodzisk, said that “all work to clean the area will be conducted in a way that guarantees respect for those buried there, former Jewish residents of Grodzisk Mazowiecki, in close cooperation with and supervision of the Jewish Community of Warsaw.”

In Ireland, the last synagogue in Cork has closed, bringing to an end 135 years of Jewish history in the city. Fred Rosehill, Chairman of Trustees at Cork Hebrew Congregation, said that “we are down in numbers. We couldn’t support a rabbi, a Hebrew school, a synagogue. We tried everything. It has come to the stage that there is no money left. If someone gave us money in the morning it wouldn’t matter – we don’t have the members to sustain it.” Most of Cork’s Jews arrived there from Lithuania in the late nineteenth century, escaping persecution, and by the late 1930s the population had reached a peak of about 450 to 500.

In Lithuania, after a public search to find a new rabbi, the Jewish community appointed both Rabbi Kalev Krelin and Rabbi Shimson Daniel Izakson to the position. They will have responsibility for running a wide range of Jewish services at the Vilnius Choral Synagogue. Also in February, a new kosher bagel shop and café opened on the first floor of the Lithuanian Jewish Community building, in a mostly neglected and empty cafeteria hall. New rabbi, Shimson Daniel

Izakson, blessed a *mezuzah*, and spoke in Hebrew, expressing his hopes to rekindle a lagging religious community. Guests included members of the Lithuanian Jewish community, many local non-Jews, reporters and photographers, and even a famous Lithuanian comedian.

In Vilnius, it was announced that the annual St. Casimir, or Kaziukas, street fair will include a Jewish shtetl in the 'village' in front of the Vilnius Old Town Hall in March. It will feature traditional Jewish crafts and the opportunity to browse Jewish literature and try Jewish food. Students from the Saulėtekis High School and the Jewish song and dance ensemble Fayerlakh are scheduled to perform at the fair.

In Poland, a new Jewish museum has opened in the restored pre-burial house at the 'new' Jewish cemetery in Gliwice. Called the Upper Silesian Jews' House of Remembrance, the museum is officially the fifth branch of the Gliwice municipal museum and was funded by the city. The stated mission of the museum is "to study and commemorate the history of the Jews in Upper Silesia, from the Middle Ages to the present day. It is also a space for dialogue among various cultures, religions and nations – a venue for meetings and debates on the history and relationships between the many societies that once inhabited these lands."

In the Netherlands, the government said it plans to limit ritual slaughter through new measures, including a ban on the export of kosher and halal meat. In addition to the ban, the new measures will make the production of such meat subject to the discretion of officials from the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority. Last year, the Authority urged the government to ban ritual slaughter outright, claiming it was inhumane.

In Spain, the city of Cordoba is set to gain a new rabbi for the first time since the expulsion of Jews in 1492. Haim Casas, aged 34, hopes to return to Cordoba following his ordination as rabbi next year at the Leo Baeck College in London. Previously, Casas worked as the Programme Director at Cordoba's Casa de Sefarad between 2005 and 2012 and helped open a Jewish restaurant, 'Casa Mazal,' in a house in the old Jewish quarter of the city. He also co-founded a small, independent congregation in Cordoba called

'Beit Rambam,' which has since moved to Seville. On his return, Casas will focus on developing liberal and progressive Jewish communities throughout Spain, but he also plans to connect Spaniards to the Jewish aspects of their history and culture.

In France, the government named a new Jewish Minister of Culture. Audrey Azoulay is the daughter of Andre Azoulay, an adviser to Moroccan King Mohammed VI, and writer Katia Biami. Previously, she was culture and communications adviser to President François Hollande, as well as a civil administrator in France's National Centre of Cinema.

In Germany, the annual Jewrovision contest was held in Mannheim, with 1,200 young people from sixty Jewish communities around the country competing in the Jewish version of the Eurovision song contest. Held since 2002, Susanne Beinzri, head of the Jewish Youth Centre in Mannheim, says that it is "a show by young people, staged by people not much older, and is one big mix of songs and styles."

Dr. Josef Schuster, Chairman of the Central Committee of Jews in Germany and organiser of the Jewrovision, says that the competition is about creating a sense of community among the far-flung next generation, whatever their secular, liberal or orthodox Jewish backgrounds. He adds that "it's not just about music and dance – it's also about passing on our Jewish values and traditions."

Also in Germany, the country's first feature film about Anne Frank had its world premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival. However, there is controversy surrounding the film's director, Hans Steinbichler, who is also in the running to make a biopic about Hitler's favourite film director, Leni Riefenstahl. Yves Kugelmann, head of the Anne Frank Fond, criticised Steinbichler for using his Anne Frank film credentials to boost his chances to make the Riefenstahl film, calling Steinbichler's new opportunity an "unseemly overlapping" in a private letter leaked to the media.

Abraham Foxman, National Director emeritus of the Anti-Defamation League, received Germany's highest civilian honour in February. He was presented with the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit by Peter Wittig, Germany's Ambassador to the United States, in Washington

D.C. Wittig called Foxman a “tireless and committed fighter” against bigotry in all forms, and said “your voice has been a voice of tolerance and against hate, a voice for responsibility and against discrimination.” In accepting the honour, Foxman said “I never would have believed that I would one day accept and take great pride in accepting an honour like this from the government of Germany ... Germany has shown that it is willing to be a leader in standing up against intolerance. Wherever things go, that instinctive reaction is to be commended. The moral lesson of the Holocaust has been well-learned.”

In the UK, British student Oliver Anisfeld launched J-TV, a new, global Jewish YouTube Channel providing weekly segments on current affairs, Jewish wisdom, movers and shakers and Jewish food. Anisfeld said that J-TV serves as a response to what he sees as a gap in dealing with a crisis of Jewish education in the UK and many other countries. He added that “I think there’s a real need for this. We’ve got to relate to the mediums that people are using. There really is nothing like it for the Jewish community.”

Other news links

- / Slovakia: Renovated Status Quo synagogue reopens in Trnava (Jewish Heritage Europe, February 3, 2016)
- / Slovakia: restoration of Lučenec synagogue nears completion (Jewish Heritage Europe, February 23, 2016)
- / CZ: Boskovice Jewish cemetery mortuary reconstruction (Jewish Heritage Europe, February 2, 2016)
- / Polish town saves Jewish cemetery from developers (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 22, 2016)
- / Fall-off in number of Jews forces only Cork synagogue to shut (*The Irish Times*, February 8, 2016)
- / Two Rabbis coming in February to work in Vilnius (Jewish Community of Lithuania, February 2, 2016)
- / New bagel shop opens with great expectations (Jewish Community of Lithuania, February 4, 2016)
- / Annual Vilnius Kaziukas Fair to include shtetl this year (Jewish Community of Lithuania, February 26, 2016)
- / Poland: Jewish museum opens in Gliwice (Jewish Heritage Europe, February 2, 2016)
- / Holland to ban export of kosher and halal meat (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 17, 2016)
- / First Cordoba-born rabbi since 1492 expulsion set on reversing history (*The Times of Israel*, February 9, 2016)
- / France names Jewish woman as new culture minister (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 21, 2016)
- / ‘Jewrovision’ celebrates being young and Jewish in Germany (*The Irish Times*, February 6, 2016)
- / Debut German film on Anne Frank premiering at Berlin festival (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 15, 2016)
- / Moving celebration for Berlin Jews (*Arutz Sheva*, February 21, 2016)
- / Ex-ADL chief Abraham Foxman receives Germany’s highest civilian honour (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 25, 2016)
- / Jewish YouTube channel launches in UK Parliament (*The Jerusalem Post*, February 28, 2016)