

**1 / Issues concerning antisemitism**

Violence, vandalism and abuse

Incidents of violence, vandalism and abuse were reported in the media across Europe in December. In France, fourteen people were mildly poisoned by a toxic substance applied to the keypad of an electronic lock at a synagogue Bonneuil-sur-Marne, south of Paris. The victims suffered from strong burning sensations in their eyes and itchy rashes on their skin. Police believe the substance was deliberately placed there to cause harm. A few days earlier, a man threatened and insulted a group of French Jews whilst travelling on a train in Paris. The man, who was of Algerian descent, verbally assaulted

the Jewish passengers, saying “you band of motherf\*\*\*er bastard Jews. You band of bitches; you dirty bastard race.” He added that “if only I had a grenade here...I would blow up this wagon with the f\*\*\*ing Jewish bastards.” The outburst was caught on a cell phone. In a similar incident in Hungary, several men shouted antisemitic insults at visitors to the historic Jewish quarter of Budapest, calling them “dirty Jews” and accusing them of “killing Jesus.”

In Poland, vandals painted antisemitic and pro-ISIS graffiti at the Jewish cemetery in Sochaczew. The graffiti were painted on the Ohel Tzadikim memorial and included the slogans ‘Holocaust never happened,’ ‘Allah bless Hitler,’ ‘Islamic State was here,’ ‘Islam will dominate,’ and ‘F\*\*k Jews.’ The Sochaczew Museum, which cares for the cemetery, appealed to residents of the city for help in removing the damage. Pawel Rozdżestwieński, the museum director, said that “we discovered this barbaric behaviour at the cemetery with disbelief; it is not consistent with human decency. As museum professionals and at the same time residents of Sochaczew, we are ashamed of such behaviour.”

In the UK, swastikas were daubed on Jubilee Primary School in Stoke Newington, London. The Jewish neighbourhood watch group, Shomrim, said its volunteers removed the graffiti from the entrance of the school before children could see it on their way into school the following day. They added that swastikas have been painted on buildings on a number of other occasions this year.

In Greece, a senior bishop of the Greek-Orthodox Church, said the “international Zionist monster” was behind a planned law that would grant same-sex couples more rights, in line with EU requirements. Bishop Seraphim of Piraeus said the cohabitation bill is a result of the “constant war against the true faith” being waged “by the international Zionist monster,” which controls the Greek government. The bishop has a long history of making antisemitic comments and in 2010 he told a Greek TV station that Jews had orchestrated the Holocaust and were behind Greece’s financial crisis.

**/ 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](http://www.jpr.org.uk).

In the UK, a caller was allowed to stay on air for nearly thirteen minutes during a BBC radio programme denouncing Jews and their “rule” over British society. ‘Andy from St. Margaret’s’ called up Radio London’s Simon Lederman programme and started by saying that the world is “not free” and “they are trying to control us more and more and more. They want to put a chip up our backsides... the elites... A ring through our noses, and a visor for our horizons... the Rothschilds... It’s about the Zionists.” He further claimed that “the Rothschilds, the people who own the Bank of England, the people who own the Federal Reserve, they’re all Zionist Jews. The people who own the corporate America, the media, you’ll find if you just do a little bit of research, they’re all Zionist Jews. We are ruled by Zionist Jews.” Marie Van Der Zyl, Vice President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, said “it is disgraceful that an obviously antisemitic caller was able to speak for thirteen minutes on air in a way which was likely to incite racial hatred against Jews. We call on the BBC to hand his details to the police so that action can be brought against him and also explain why they did not cut the caller off when it was clear that his views were virulently racist.” A BBC spokesperson defended the decision to allow the caller to go on speaking, saying that “the aim of the programme is to discuss and debate issues raised by our listeners. This was a live phone-in and the caller was challenged on his views throughout the conversation.”

Across Europe, a series of court cases were heard involving antisemitic incidents previously reported in the media. In France, Farid Haddouche, who stabbed a Jewish man and assaulted a rabbi and his son in Marseille in October, was sentenced to four years in prison. Haddouche’s victims were returning from the synagogue when they were assaulted. In addition to the four-year sentence, Haddouche was given a suspended sentence of eighteen months.

In Germany, a Berlin court fined Danish Imam, Sheikh Abu Bilal Ismail, €1,300 for incitement to hatred, after convicting him of calling for the extermination of Jews during Israel’s Operation Protective Edge. In a July 2014 sermon, Ismail said it was necessary to “destroy the Zionist Jews...,” and to “count them and kill them to the very last one. Don’t spare a single one of them... Make them suffer terribly.” The verdict stated that he had delivered a “hostile and hate-

filled view toward Jews as a population group in Germany.” Also in Germany, Marcel Zech, a far-right German politician, was charged with incitement for publicly displaying a large tattoo of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp on his back. Prosecutors announced that he is accused of violating Germany’s ban on the public display of Nazi symbols. Zech’s tattoo was visible when he visited a swimming pool in Oranienburg in November and another visitor took a photo of it.

In the Netherlands, a court acquitted Ismael Houllich, a Muslim rapper, who insulted Jews and gays in his first single, singing “I hate those f\*\*\*ing Jews more than the Nazis,” “don’t shake hands with faggots” and “don’t believe in anything but the Quran.” In a joint statement, the Centre for Information and Documentation on Israel and the COC umbrella group of gay organisations said that the judge determined that while the rapper’s statements “are of an offensive nature,” it was protected under freedoms ensuring “artistic expression.” The two groups called on the prosecution to appeal the “disquieting sentence, which appears to be a carte blanche for discriminative statements as long as they are made in a rap song.”

In the UK, the Southwark Crown Court sentenced neo-Nazi Joshua Bonehill-Paine to more than three years in prison after posting “vile” antisemitic material online. Bonehill-Paine posted the messages ahead of a far-right “anti-Jewification” protest he planned in Golders Green. Detective Chief Inspector Andy Barnes, who led the investigation described the material Bonehill-Paine posted as “illegal” and “damaging to communities.”

In Italy, Rome prosecutors have opened an investigation into a posting on an extremist website of a list of people identified as prominent Italian Jews. The list of ‘influential Jews in Italy,’ was posted on the Italian section of Radio Islam, an antisemitic, anti-Zionist website founded in Sweden in the 1990s. The investigation is looking into pressing possible charges of threats and defamation, aggravated by racial hatred. Renzo Gattegna, President of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, called the investigation “an important step.” He added that such lists recall a time “not so long ago when to be indicated as a Jew signified exclusion for the world of school and work.”

In the Netherlands, the Anne Frank Foundation revealed that 4,092 cases of racism, extremism and antisemitism were reported to the police in 2014, an overall decrease from 2013 of over four percent. Though the total number of incidents dropped, abuse against Muslims in particular was up by over fifty percent, as part of an overall 26 percent rise in racial abuse cases to 2,764. Some 76 occurrences of antisemitism were reported in 2014, also up from 2013, when the count was 61. The report stated that “many of these incidents took place in the summer months during ‘Protective Edge,’ the Israeli military operation aimed against Hamas.”

In UK, a new study by polling agency YouGov released in December showed that British Jews are generally regarded very favourably by their fellow citizens. The survey revealed that Jews are the most favourably regarded group from the study when compared with Chinese, Afro-Caribbeans, Muslims, Pakistanis, Poles, Australians and whites. The survey also showed that women, Conservative voters, people aged over forty and members of the middle class view British Jews more favourably than the average citizen. Conversely, British Jews are viewed less favourably by men, Labour voters, people aged under forty and members of the working class, than by the average citizen.

However, in contrast to this, the latest statistics released by London’s Metropolitan Police showed that there has been a 61 percent increase in antisemitic crime in the past twelve months, with a total of 483 antisemitic crimes committed up until November 2015, increasing from 299 crimes over an equivalent period up to November 2014. The areas which have seen the biggest increases included Westminster (178 percent), Tower Hamlets (100 percent), Lambeth (200 percent) and Hackney (87 percent). The Metropolitan Police said they are “committed to tackling hate crime in all its forms,” and that they “take positive action to investigate all hate crime allegations, support victims and their families and bring perpetrators to justice.” They added that “there has been a rise in faith/religious hate crime, however the Met Police believes these increases are down to a range of factors, including the improvements in crime recording, a growing willingness of victims to report hate crime, and an improved awareness of Met Police staff to identify these offences.”

#### Violence, vandalism and abuse links

- / Paris synagogue goes mildly poisoned by irritant smeared on lock (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 17, 2015)
- / Antisemitic Vitriol Spewed at Jews on Paris Train Horrifies Passengers (*The Algemeiner*, December 15, 2015)
- / Antisemitic slurs hurled at group visiting Budapest Jewish quarter (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 30, 2015)
- / Jewish Cemetery in Poland Vandalised; Graves Covered in Antisemitic, Pro-ISIS Graffiti (*The Algemeiner*, December 16, 2015)
- / Police investigate after swastikas daubed on primary school sign in Stoke Newington (*Evening Standard*, December 19, 2015)
- / Prominent Greek bishop blames ‘Zionist monster’ for same-sex cohabitation bill (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 21, 2015)
- / Caller’s shocking antisemitic rant on BBC radio phone-in (*The Jewish Chronicle*, December 29, 2015)
- / Marseille attacker of 3, including rabbi, sentenced to 4 years (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 11, 2015)
- / Berlin court convicts Danish imam for seeking murder of ‘Zionist Jews’ (*The Jerusalem Post*, December 12, 2015)
- / German politician charged with publicly displaying Auschwitz tattoo (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 16, 2015)
- / Dutch court acquits Muslim rapper who insulted Jews, gays (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 9, 2015)
- / Far right activist Joshua Bonehill-Payne jailed for antisemitic posts (BBC News, December 17, 2015)
- / Rome prosecutors investigating list of Italian Jews posted on extremist website (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 23, 2015)
- / Muslim abuse, antisemitism and racism on the rise in Netherlands (*NL Times*, December 7, 2015)
- / Poll: Jews in Britain Are Viewed Favourably (*Tablet Magazine*, December 18, 2015)
- / Met Police figures show 61 percent increase in antisemitic crime (*Jewish News*, December 23, 2015)
- / Antisemitic attacks in London soar by 60 per cent in 2015 (*The Independent*, December 29, 2015)

## Politics

In France, the far-right National Front failed to win in any of France’s thirteen regions in run-off elections. This followed the first round of elections in which they won 28 percent of the vote nationally and claimed victories in six of the thirteen regions. The result follows Haim Korsia, France’s Chief Rabbi, calling for a “civic uprising” of voters in the second round “to breathe life into

democracy... in these particularly troubled times for the nation.”

In Ukraine, following the election of newly appointed Mayor Artem Semenikhin, residents are expressing shock about his behaviour. Semenikhin, from the neo-Nazi Svoboda party, apparently drives around in a car bearing the number 14/88, a reference to the phrases “we must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children” and “Heil Hitler”; he has replaced the picture of President Petro Poroshenko in his office with a portrait of Ukrainian national leader and Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera; and he refused to fly the city’s official flag at the opening meeting of the city council because he objected to the star of David emblazoned on it. Vyacheslav Likhachev, an antisemitism researcher with the Va’ad of Ukraine and the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, said that “Ukrainians are afraid of the Russian threat, not the threat of national radicalism,” and that “Semenikhin has successfully created himself an image of a defender of Ukrainian independence, and voters were able to support him, not paying attention to the radicalism of his views.”

In Hungary, in the wake of an international outcry, plans to erect a statue in honour of Bálint Homan, who drafted anti-Jews laws prior and during World War II, were withdrawn. Homan served as Minister of Education and Religion in the 1930s and 1940s and was partly responsible for drafting legislation in 1938 and 1939 to restrict the rights of Jews in Hungary. The city council of Székesfehérvár voted against the proposal of the private Bálint Homan Foundation to erect the statue in memory of Homan. The foundation had received a grant from the Hungarian government for the statue. Late in the campaign, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán also announced his opposition saying in parliament that “the government cannot support the erection of a statue for a politician who... collaborated with Hungary’s oppressors, regardless of what other merits he had.” Ronald Lauder, President of the World Jewish Congress, said “Prime Minister Orbán’s clear statement on this matter comes very late, but it is nonetheless welcome. I thank him for making the standpoint of the Hungarian government very clear: no honours must be given to those who prepared the ground for the mass murder of 600,000 Hungarian Jews by Nazi Germany in 1944. It would have been a travesty if the taxpayer, including more than 100,000 Hungarian Jews,

would have had to contribute toward a statue for a man who not only hated Jews, but who helped actively in their persecution.”

In Belgium, at a public candle-lighting ceremony to celebrate *Chanukah* in Brussels, Jan Jambon, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister, said that his government has made the battle against radical extremism and terrorism a top priority since the terrorist attack on the Jewish museum. He also admitted that “we are not going to dismantle the ideological frameworks of Islamic State and similar organisations as easily as that. Their antisemitism is impossible to erase in the blink of an eye.” At the event organised by the European Jewish Association, Jambon also said that whilst the government has allocated €4 million for the security of the Jewish community, “for us it is unacceptable that whole communities feel unsafe and would hesitate to stay in our country for that reason.”

In the Netherlands, Eberhard van der Laan, the Mayor of Amsterdam, pledged \$1.27 million for the protection of Jewish institutions. He said that he was allocating the funds next year to fifteen Jewish organisations that asked for security-related subsidies and were deemed to be at risk. The Dutch Jewish community spends approximately \$1 million annually from its own budget on protection.

In Sweden, Isaac Bachman, the Israeli ambassador, called on the government to increase security measures around Jewish institutions. This followed the publication of new figures that show an increase in antisemitic hate crimes in the country. Bachman said that “many times we think that security should be tighter and the police should be present more often and more noticeably.” However, he also praised the Swedish government for being attentive to the problem of antisemitism, noting that it remains to be seen whether the trend of increasing violence against Jews can be halted.

In Poland, the Union of Jewish Religious Communities has condemned a claim by a prominent politician that a group which has organised anti-government street protests was financed by “a Jewish banker.” The Union said the comment by Paweł Kukiz was antisemitic and demanded a “firm reaction” from President Andrzej Duda and Prime Minister Beata Szydło. Lesław Piszewski, head of the Union of Jewish

Religious Communities, said Kukiz's comments set a worrying precedent, adding that "for the first time since [Poland's] democratic elections in 1989, a politician in parliament, who has run for the presidency, has used such obvious antisemitic rhetoric." Kukiz, who heads a parliamentary grouping which includes radical right-wingers, said that accusations of antisemitism against him were baseless.

In the Crimea, the Jewish community has condemned a speech by Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko in Israel, in which he accused Russia of provoking antisemitism. Community leaders from Simferopol, Yalta and Sevastopol issued a joint statement saying "Jewish organisations of Crimea firmly state that these allegations are false and are a clumsy and hopeless attempt to distort the true picture of the existing inter-ethnic peace and harmony in the Russian Crimea. Today, we are under the protection of the Russian state. However, we love and remember the real Ukraine, with its national colours, rich culture, hospitable people, where it was before the rampant nationalism and Bandera." Rabbi Boruch Gorin, a senior Russian rabbi also accused President Poroshenko of glossing over his country's record in the Holocaust and lying about Russia's treatment of Jews. He called Poroshenko's claims fabrications, and said that he was "using the Jewish card and slandering and lying."

Whilst in Israel, President Poroshenko said in a speech to the Knesset that "we must remember the negative events in history, in which collaborators helped the Nazis with the Final Solution. When Ukraine was established [as an independent state in 1991], we asked for forgiveness, and I am doing it now, in the Knesset, before the children and grandchildren of the victims of the Holocaust... I am doing it before all citizens of Israel." In response, Oleh Lyashko's, head of the Ukrainian Radical Party, said "this kind of humiliation of Ukrainians has not been recorded in our history yet. This is exactly [the] situation if we would accuse Georgians and Jews in the Holodomor, appealing to the atrocities of Dzhugashvili, Beria, Kaganovich, etc. The Knesset has not recognised the Holodomor as the genocide of the Ukrainian people. That is a goal for Ukrainian authorities visiting the Holy Land rather than belittling Ukrainians [and] proclaiming inferiority of his people on the international level." Just a few days after the visit to Israel, a video of a Ukrainian

opposition parliamentarian saluting Adolf Hitler was posted on the internet. In the video, Artyom Vitko, a member of Lyashko's Radical Party, can be seen sitting in the back of a car wearing camouflage fatigues and singing a song extolling the virtues of the Nazi dictator. Vitko sings that "Adolf Hitler, together with us, Adolf Hitler, in each of us, and an eagle with iron wings will help us at the right time."

In France, Prime Minister Manuel Valls said that the government condemns boycotts of Israel, warning against the phenomenon of organisations criticising Israeli policies turning to antisemitic activities. Valls said "let me say this as clearly as possible: we condemn any campaign of boycotts against Israeli products. Unfortunately, there are too many initiatives that intentionally mix legitimate criticism of Israeli policies with anti-Zionism that turns into antisemitism. I am warning anyone who takes part in such activities. Behind the scenes, they are taking part in activities that are not criticism of one policy or another, but a condemnation of Zionism, which has truly become antisemitism."

In Germany, the Federal Constitutional Court announced that it would open proceedings next March on whether to ban the far-right National Democratic Party (NPD), increasing the likelihood that the party could be prohibited and disbanded. This followed a petition in December 2013 by the governments of the country's 16 states to ban the NPD, which the domestic intelligence agency deems "racist, antisemitic and revisionist". A previous attempt to ban the NPD failed in 2003. Charlotte Knobloch, World Jewish Congress Holocaust Memory Commissioner, welcomed the decision saying that "the Nazi ideology, on which the NPD is based, must have no place in today's political culture in Germany." She added that "we cannot and must not tolerate the existence of any extreme right-wing political party in Germany."

In December, the European Commission appointed Katharina von Schnurbein as the body's first coordinator on combating antisemitism. Alongside von Schnurbein, a German national who had previously coordinated relations with religious organisations, the Commission also appointed David Frigierri, an official to combat anti-Muslim hatred. Joel Rubinfeld, the founder of the Belgian League Against Antisemitism, said

**Politics links**

- / Far-right National Front roundly defeated in French run-off elections (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 13, 2015)
- / Jews, Muslims, feminists urge unity against Le Pen (The Local, December 8, 2015, 2015)
- / Local Jews in shock after Ukrainian city of Konotop elects neo-Nazi mayor (*The Jerusalem Post*, December 21, 2015)
- / Plans to honour antisemitic former Hungarian minister with statue cancelled (World Jewish Congress, December 18, 2015)
- / Belgian Deputy PM Jan Jambon at Chanukah lighting in the midst of EU institutions, 'Antisemitism is impossible to erase in the blink of an eye' (European Jewish Press, December 18, 2015)
- / Amsterdam pledges \$1.27M to protect Jewish buildings (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 22, 2015)
- / Israel's envoy to Sweden calls for better protection of Jewish sites (*The Times of Israel*, December 15, 2015)
- / Jewish community accuses prominent Polish politician of antisemitism (Radio Poland, December 22, 2015)
- / Crimean Jews angry after Poroshenko says Russia instigating antisemitism (*The Jerusalem Post*, December 27, 2015)
- / Senior Russian rabbi accuses Ukrainian president of 'using Jewish card' (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 27, 2015)
- / Ukrainian legislator toasts Adolf Hitler (*The Jerusalem Post*, December 27, 2015)
- / French PM Valls condemns BDS: 'Criticism of Israeli policies that turned into antisemitism' (*The Jerusalem Post*, December 19, 2015)
- / German supreme court moves closer to banning extremist and antisemitic party (World Jewish Congress, December 8, 2015)
- / European Commission appoints German official to combat antisemitism (*The Jerusalem Post*, December 3, 2015)
- / EU mulls adopting definition of Jew hatred, says new antisemitism czar (*The Times of Israel*, December 22, 2015)

that "we welcome the creation of these positions and welcome the appointment of Mrs. von Schnurbein to this post, which is very important for Europe in today's context. It's good news that finally Europe appointed a coordinator exclusively dedicated to fight the plague of antisemitism... It will now be up to her to embody this new position, make it an efficient instrument in the fight against the rising antisemitism in our countries, and restore confidence of one in three European Jews who, according to the 2013 FRA report on antisemitism, is considering leaving his

country because he no longer feels safe living there as a Jew. The challenge is huge but also vital as, in my view, the fate of European Jewry is the litmus test for the European democracies."

Towards the end of her first month in the role, Katharina von Schnurbein said that the European Union may formulate a clear definition of antisemitism in a bid to better fight the phenomenon. Following a request by Israel, von Schnurbein said that "the definition of antisemitism is very disputed, even among Jews themselves. The main dissent revolves around the question of manifestations against the State of Israel. We're currently looking into this issue. One thing is clear: antisemitism can sometimes hide behind anti-Zionism. That is certainly our understanding here."

## 2 / Chanukah candle lighting

**There were many public events for the lighting of the *Chanukah* candles throughout Europe.** These included in Belgium, where a public candle-lighting ceremony was held in Brussels organised by the European Jewish Association. Jan Jambon, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister, attended and made a speech about antisemitism.

Events took place throughout Spain, with the northern municipality of Estella-Lizarra celebrating Chanukah for the first time. One of the most colourful events took place in Toledo, where the local municipality hung neon Chanukah decorations over streets in its old Jewish Quarter. The celebration began with the lighting of the first candle on a large menorah at the former Synagogue of El Transito, which was converted into a church and currently serves as a museum.

In the Netherlands, Chief Rabbi Binyomin Jacobs lit possibly Europe's largest menorah, built by the Christian Zionist organisation. The menorah, which stands 36 feet high, was lit opposite the town hall in Maastricht in front of an estimated crowd of 1,000, including representatives from the Christian and Muslim faith communities.

In the UK, an estimated crowd of 7,000 people joined London Mayor Boris Johnson for a Chanukah candle lighting ceremony in Trafalgar Square in central London. In Bournemouth, Mayor Cllr John Adams lit the first candle of the menorah on the seafront. He said: "it's great to

be here on Chanukah and it is my honour to light the Menorah,” adding that the message of the festival “lives on eternally” and that the candles “symbolise the gift of religious freedom – peace, harmony and ultimate unity of all mankind. When that happens the world will be bliss. Lighting the Chanukah candles reminds us that until then we pray for that to happen.”

In Russia, President Vladimir Putin lit Chanukah candles at his office during a meeting with Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar.

In Lithuania, a large crowd witnessed Rabbi Sholom Krinsky light the Menorah in Vilnius in front of the capital’s Mayor and the Israeli Ambassador to Lithuania, Amir Maimo. This was the 22<sup>nd</sup> Chanukah event in Vilnius. In Kaunas, a candle lighting ceremony took place on the Laisvės alėja, the main pedestrian street, with the head of the Kaunas Jewish community, Gercas Žakas, and one of the deputy mayors of the Kaunas municipality, Vasilijus Popovas. The Kaunas Choral Synagogue was not involved in candle lighting, as Mauša Bairakas, a representative of the Kaunas Jewish religious community, maintained that “Litvaks don’t have a tradition of celebrating Chanukah in public. Chanukah is not even a Torah holiday. We do congregate on the first day to light candles, but it is observed mostly within families and communities.”

In Poland, representatives of the Polish Jewish community lit Chanukah candles with President Andrzej Duda at the Presidential Palace in Warsaw. President Duda said “I would like this

Chanukah candle to shine all over the country giving joy and warmth, and a sense of community that we all so desperately need. Let there always be a great hope for the chosen people, for all the Jews in Poland and around the world.”

In France, an estimated crowd of 6,000 people gathered in Paris for the public lighting of the menorah candles at the base of the Eiffel Tower, despite security concerns in the wake of the October terrorist attacks. Chief Rabbi Haim Korsia lit the first candle of a thirty-foot menorah in a ceremony attended by French Jewish leaders and government representatives.

### 3 / Revisiting Holocaust issues

In Germany, the higher court of Rostock ruled that a 95-year-old man who served as a paramedic in the Auschwitz death camp, is fit to stand trial. The court overruled a lower court decision that Hubert Z., who is accused of being an accessory in the murder of at least 3,681 people at the Nazi camp, was too frail to undergo a trial. According to the indictment, Hubert, a sergeant in the S.S., served in Auschwitz from October 1942 to September 1944. He is not accused of being directly involved in any murders, but of knowingly participating in the running of the camp’s activities.

Also in Germany, a new version of Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, with critical notes by scholars, is to be published for the first time since the end of World War Two. The Institute of Contemporary History (IfZ) in Munich says it will print up to 4,000 copies with explanations, comments and notes. Andreas Wirsching, IfZ director, says the text with expert comments will “shatter the myth” surrounding the manifesto. Christian Hartmann, who led the academic team, said that “we firmly connect Hitler’s text with our comments, so that both are always on the same double page. I could describe it in martial terms as a battle of annihilation – we are encircling Hitler with our annotations. On the right side at the top is Hitler’s text from the first edition, to the right of that some differences between different editions where changes were made, and the bulk of each page is our annotations. We doubled the book in size to write our commentary, which acts as a counterstatement to his book. Our principle was that there should be no page with Hitler’s text without critical annotations. Hitler is being

#### Chanukah candle lighting links

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| / Dutch rabbi hosts Muslims at lighting of giant Christian-built menorah (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 11, 2015)        | / Chanukah candle lighting returns to Polish Presidential Palace (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 10, 2015)        |
| / Chanukah in Kaunas with Chassidic pop and traditional latkes (Delfi by <i>The Lithuania Tribune</i> , December 9, 2015)      | / In Paris, public Chanukah ceremonies held despite security concerns (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 6, 2015)    |
| / Bright messages during 22 <sup>nd</sup> Vilnius menorah lighting (Delfi by <i>The Lithuania Tribune</i> , December 11, 2015) | / Bournemouth’s giant menorah lit up for Jewish festival of light ( <i>Bournemouth Daily Echo</i> , December 10, 2016) |

interrupted, he is being criticised, he is being refuted if necessary.”

The German Teachers' Association wants the new edition of Hitler's manifesto to be taught in secondary schools in order to “inoculate adolescents against political extremism.” Although it has never been officially banned, its publication in the original German has been prevented since 1945 by the state of Bavaria, which owns the copyright. Many groups are divided over the idea. Josef Schuster, President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, said that “knowledge of Mein Kampf is still important to explain National Socialism and the Holocaust,” but Berlin Rabbi Yehuda Teichtel warned the “risk is greater than the benefit.” Charlotte Knobloch, Chair of the Jewish Community of Munich and Upper Bavaria, said that “this deeply antisemitic diatribe of all texts does not belong in the classroom,” whilst Angela Merkel's coalition partners, the Social Democrats, have supported the call for the book to be taught in schools. Ernst Dieter Rossmann, the party's education spokesman, said that “Mein Kampf is a terrible and monstrous book. It is appropriate as part of a modern education for qualified teachers to unmask the history of this antisemitic inhuman pamphlet and explain the propaganda mechanism behind it.”

In Austria, Salzburg University posthumously stripped Nobel Prize-winning zoologist, ethologist and ornithologist Konrad Lorenz of his honorary doctorate due to his enthusiastic embrace of Nazism, a fact which he had denied after the war. In his 1938 application letter to the university, Lorenz described himself as “always a National Socialist” and added that “I can say that my whole scientific work is devoted to the ideas of the National Socialists.” After the war Lorenz long denied having been a party member until his membership request turned up, and he also denied having known about the extent of the genocide in spite of having held a post as a psychologist in the Office of Racial Policy. He also denied having ever held antisemitic views, but was later shown to have used antisemitic language in a series of letters to his mentor.

In the Netherlands, it was announced that Amsterdam's tram network will stop in commemoration of a general strike coordinated 75 years ago in protest of the Nazi persecution of Jews. The network will observe a moment of

inactivity on February 25, 2016, the anniversary of the 1941 strike following the roundup of 427 Jewish men, which began with tram drivers. The strike was a rare show of public disobedience over the fate of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. Amsterdam's municipality will also open a photo exhibition on the lives of the Jews deported in the roundup at a square where the so-called February Strikes are commemorated annually. Also in the Netherlands, the city of Vlissingen announced in December that it would erect an 8.5-foot tall monument in memory of the forty Jews deported to their deaths from the city in 1941.

In Switzerland, banks have published the names of more than 2,600 people whose accounts have lain dormant for more than sixty years, giving them, or their heirs, one last chance to claim their wealth before it returns to the state. The World Jewish Congress (WJC) has been in consultation with the Swiss Bankers' Association on this issue and it was agreed that the WJC would disseminate the link to the published dormant accounts.

In France, more than 200,000 documents from France's Vichy government, which were previously classified or difficult-to-access, have been made accessible to the public. The newly opened police and legal archives from the Nazi puppet regime include files on Jews, members of the French resistance and communists. Some of the documents were already available to researchers, but many could be obtained only after submitting time-consuming and complex paperwork. Gilles Morin, an expert on the Second World War, said that “Many people who were doing research about their father or grandfather who had been deported for example, as we often see, were blocked by these administrative obstacles. Let's be clear, there won't be any revolution in what we already know about World War II. But we'll finally have the possibility to work, understand several things, the Franco-German relationships, between Vichy and the collaborationists, the people, the elites.”

In the UK, the Royal Mail announced that it will issue a commemorative stamp featuring Sir Nicholas Winton, known as the ‘British Schindler,’ in March next year. It will be part of a set of six stamps honouring British humanitarians. Sir Nicholas, who helped rescue 669 children from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia, died in July aged 106.

**Revisiting Holocaust issues links**

- / Former SS officer who served at Auschwitz is fit to stand trial, court rules (World Jewish Congress, December 2, 2015)
- / Amsterdam to halt trams in memory of strike over Nazi persecution of Jews (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 24, 2015)
- / New Mein Kampf refutes Hitler's rants (*The Times*, December 2, 2015)
- / Swiss banks release names of holders of dormant bank accounts / Consultation with WJC (World Jewish Congress, December 16, 2015)
- / German teachers call for Mein Kampf to be put back on the syllabus (*The Telegraph*, December 21, 2015)
- / France's darkest secrets will be revealed today: Archive naming collaborators who helped Nazis round up Jews are finally opened 70 years on (*Mail Online*, December 28, 2015)
- / Late Austrian scientist Konrad Lorenz stripped of doctorate for lying about Nazi past (World Jewish Congress, December 18, 2015)
- / Royal Mail announces stamp for 'British Schindler' (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 30, 2015)

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

In Lithuania, a number of stories impacting the Jewish community made the news. At the initiative of the Cultural Heritage Department, a Jewish Cultural Route Association was officially established. The Association is tasked with the aim of developing an officially sponsored programme of Jewish cultural tourism in the country, including an itinerary of major sites of Jewish heritage. At the meeting, Diana Varnaitė, Director of the Cultural Heritage Department, said that “we have rich resources in Jewish cultural heritage: synagogues, religious schools, cities and towns along with surviving historical shtetls, old Jewish cemeteries, many Jewish figures who have made important contributions to Lithuanian and global history, culture, science, education and economy, and their spiritual legacy, traditions and music. An extraordinary phenomenon characteristic of our region exclusively is wooden synagogues.” Faina Kukliansky, Chair of the Lithuanian Jewish Community added that “I would like to thank you for the efforts made to preserve our cultural heritage and to present it to the world. Synagogues and Jewish cemeteries are today being renovated

and put in order. There is still some suspicion in talk about us, characterising relations with Jews as ‘us and them,’ but I would disagree with that sort of attitude.”

The Lithuanian Cultural Heritage Department of the Culture Ministry has also placed a small, nineteenth century wooden synagogue in Tirkšlių on its Register of Cultural Properties. This followed some preservation work carried out on the synagogue. Preservation projects on several Lithuanian wooden synagogues are underway or planned. In Vilnius, the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum announced the establishment of its new branch – the Centre of Litvak Culture and Art. At the Centre material on Litvak cultural heritage will be collected, researched and promoted. It will also be involved in protecting the Lithuanian Jewish community’s ethnic identity, strengthening and developing ties with Litvaks residing around the world, and cooperating with other Lithuanian and foreign museums and private collectors. Funded by the Lithuanian government, the new centre will place a special emphasis on the “dissemination of information and education in order to overcome negative stereotypes, stubborn myths and antisemitic views,” and on “promoting tolerance and mutual understanding in society.”

The city council of Kaunas, the second largest in Lithuania, named a park after Emmanuel Levinas, the renowned Jewish philosopher born in the town in 1905. Levinas left for France at the age of 18 but his relatives remained in Kaunas and were all murdered by the Nazis during the Holocaust. Kaunas already has a street named after Levinas and a memorial plaque at the place of his birth.

In Ukraine, the city of Dnepropetrovsk has announced that it will soon name a street in honour of Rabbi Menachem-Mendel Shneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe. However, according to Yad Vashem, the city also plans to name a street in honour of Roman Shukhevich, who was responsible for the murder of thousands of Jews from the city of Lviv during a notorious 1941 pogrom.

Also in Ukraine, at a ceremony in the Brodsky Choral Synagogue in Kiev, senior government officials and lawmakers returned Torah scrolls confiscated by the communist authorities eighty

years ago during a crackdown on religious freedom. The delegation of officials included Boris Lozhkin, Director-General of the Presidential Administration of Ukraine, Pavlo Petrenko, Minister of Justice, and Oleg Lyashko, leader of the Radical Party, alongside seventy parliamentarians. At the meeting, Pavlo Petrenko said “I am proud to return these Torah scrolls to the Jewish community. They belong to you.” Moshe Azman, the rabbi of the synagogue, said that “the return of the Torah scrolls is a real miracle of *Chanukah*. We are witnessing an independent Ukraine overcome the totalitarian past and build a free future.”

Also in Kiev, experts gathered for a first meeting to discuss plans to establish a Holocaust museum in the empty and rundown ceremonial hall at the Jewish cemetery in Chernivtsi (Czernowitz). According to the Chernivtsi city web site, “the idea is to restore it and create a museum of the Holocaust as a branch of the Chernivtsi Museum of Jewish History and Culture of Bukovina.”

In Poland, a ceremony took place to commemorate the reopening of the small synagogue in the Jewish communal complex in Wrocław, which also includes the historic White Stork synagogue. During the renovation, the original ceiling paintings by local Jewish architects, the Ehrlich brothers, were uncovered and restored. As Wrocław’s Jewish community use the synagogue for services, the ceremony included returning a Torah to the Ark.

In Russia, PJ Library is launching its first programme to provide free Jewish children’s books to families. The monthly book club is introducing this pilot in partnership with the Genesis Philanthropy Group and will distribute Russian-language books in Moscow to initially serve Jewish children aged between four and eight years-old and their families. Its goal is to reach up to 2,000 children and families by August. Harold Grinspoon, American Jewish philanthropist and founder of PJ Library said “we have seen huge demand for PJ Library among Russian-speaking Jewish families. Parents from all Jewish backgrounds struggle with the question of how to raise a Jewish family. The high-quality books introduced into the home through PJ Library empower and equip Russian-speaking Jewish families – whether in the United States or Russia – to engage Jewishly.”

Also in Russia, the federal parliament passed a new law that states that Muslim, Jewish, Christian and Buddhist scripture cannot be regarded as extremist texts. It applies specifically to the Christian Bible, the Muslim Quran, the Hebrew Bible and the Gandzhur, and it states: “their content and quotes from them cannot be regarded as extremist materials. Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism are an integral part of the historical heritage of the peoples of Russia.” It also adds there is a need to have state law conform with principles of freedom of worship.

The beginning of the month saw the opening of a \$20 million Jewish community centre and synagogue in a wealthy suburb of Moscow. The Zhukovka JCC was officially opened in the presence of 400 guests, including Israel’s Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi, David Lau, and includes 54,000 square feet of floor space, a small cinema and 24 luxury guest rooms that are intended to be used free of charge by *Shabbat* overnighters. At the centre of the building is a synagogue with a capacity of 400 people and a still-unfinished *mikveh*. The basement of the centre has a gourmet kosher restaurant. Velvel Krichevsky, a Chabad Rabbi from Israel who will be working at Zhukovka, said: “granted, this place is a little big for the community’s needs right now, but it’s with an eye to the future needs of a growing community.”

Dmitry Medvedev, the Russian Prime Minister, visited the synagogue of Vladivostok shortly after its reopening in December. The synagogue, built in 1916, was confiscated by communist authorities in 1932 and turned into a sweet factory. It was returned to the Chabad-affiliated Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia in 2005 and reopened as the city’s only Jewish synagogue. Along with the Russian Prime Minister, the event was attended by Rabbi Berel Lazar, Chief Rabbi of Russia and Rabbi Menachem Mendel Pevzner, Chief Rabbi of St. Petersburg.

In Denmark, Dan Uzan, the synagogue volunteer security guard who was murdered by a terrorist in February, was posthumously elected Dane of the Year 2015. Dan’s father, mother and sister accepted the award on his behalf. The prize is bestowed annually by the Berlingske Media group following an election that is open to the public. Attending the event, Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen said: “Dan has been a symbol for a year

marked by harsh circumstances. Dan has been a tragic picture of the threat under which Danish Jews are living. But first and foremost, Dan a real Danish everyday-hero. He stood out there at the front, even when it involved taking risks.”

In Rome, Jewish souvenir vendors staged a protest against recent edicts barring street vendors from operating near the Vatican. About 100 mainly Jewish vendors, known as *urtisti*, assembled in front of the Vatican bearing signs with slogans such as “History is repeating itself” and “Pope Francis – Roman Jews ask for help for the right to work.” Souvenir vending is a tradition among some Roman Jewish families going back to the nineteenth century, when a papal edict allowed Jews to sell rosaries to Catholic pilgrims. Some of the protestors wore yellow Stars of David, similar to those the Nazis required Jews to wear. A spokesman for them said that they were worn “because the latest measures taken by the city seem to be aimed at Jews.”

In the Vatican, a new document from a Papal commission stated that whilst Catholics are called to witness to their faith in Jesus before all people, including Jews, the Catholic Church “neither conducts nor supports” any institutional missionary initiative directed toward Jews. The document further adds that Christianity and Judaism are intertwined and God never annulled his covenant with the Jewish people. As a result, “the Church is therefore obliged to view evangelisation to Jews, who believe in the one God, in a different manner from that to people of other religions and world views.” How God will save the Jews if they do not explicitly believe in Christ is described as “an unfathomable divine mystery.”

In France, a record high number of French Jews made aliyah in 2015, but the dramatic increase on 2014 figures that was predicted at the beginning of the year failed to materialise. Latest statistics from the Israeli Ministry of Immigrant Absorption showed more than 8,000 French Jews moved to Israel in 2015, up from 7,000 in 2014.<sup>1</sup>

In Germany, the Reform movement awarded Chancellor Angela Merkel its top honour – the Abraham Geiger Prize – for her commitment as

“guarantor of basic democratic values and freedom of religion.” The German Chancellor is donating the funds to the ‘Dialog Perspectives’ programme of the Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich Studienwerk, a foundation for talented Jewish students.

Also in Germany, a new Torah scroll in Marburg was completed with the help of local religious leaders. To commemorate the congregation’s tenth anniversary, Bilal El-Zayat, President of the Islamic Community of Marburg, as well as local Protestant and Catholic clergy and the city’s mayor, helped Rabbi Josef Chranovski write the last few letters of the scroll. El-Zayat said: “especially at a time when agitators draw ever bigger crowds and shout, it’s more important than ever to seek moderation and show what connects us all.”

In Berlin, an argument broke out following the election for the leadership of the local Jewish community. After the results were announced, the Emet party, which came second, said it was considering “further steps” following the discovery of an unopened ballot box. They said it suspected vote manipulation by the winners Koach, led by incumbent president Gideon Joffe. Sergey Lagodinsky, Emet’s candidate, said: “the discrepancy between the results in the polling stations and the absentee ballots, as well as the sudden discovery of a dubious extra ballot box, must be carefully checked.”

In the UK, over 100 Jewish, Christian and Muslims people came together at the Jewish Museum in Manchester to discuss antisemitism and Islamophobia. Chaired by Dr Jane Clements, the Director of the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ), the panels included Dr Dave Rich of the Community Security Trust, Dr Mustafa Baig, from the centre for the Study of Islam in the UK at Cardiff University, Professor Philip Alexander from the University of Manchester, Imam Qari Asim of Leeds Makkah mosque, and the head of RE at King David School, Rabbi Benjamin Rickman. Imam Qari Asim said: “we must join hands and heads to eliminate prejudice, bigotry and intolerance from our society – whether it be antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred or hatred towards other minority communities. There should be no place in Britain for any kind of prejudice and hatred.” The event was hosted by the International Abrahamic Forum (IAF), in partnership with CCJ, 3FF and the Manchester Muslim Jewish Forum.

<sup>1</sup> Note that official statistics from Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics based on last country of residence show counts of 6,547 for 2014, and 6,627 for 2015.

**Other news links**

- / Lithuania: Tirkšlių wooden synagogue listed as cultural monument** (Jewish Heritage Europe, December 2, 2015)
- / Jewish Cultural Tourism Route Association established** (Jewish Community of Lithuania, December 6, 2015)
- / Centre of Litvak Culture and Art to be opened in Vilnius** (The Baltic Course, December 3, 2015)
- / Lithuanian city names park for native Jewish philosopher** (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 18, 2015)
- / Ukrainian city to rename streets after Jewish leader, and antisemite** (The Jerusalem Post, December 14, 2015)
- / Ukrainian government returns Torahs confiscated by Communists** (The Jerusalem Post, December 14, 2015)
- / Ukraine: toward a Holocaust museum in Chernivtsi?** (Jewish Heritage Europe, December 27, 2015)
- / Poland: Small synagogue reopens in Wrocław** (Jewish Heritage Europe, December 13, 2015)
- / PJ Library Jewish book programme expanding to Russia** (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 2, 2015)
- / Russian parliament declares scriptures of major religions non-extremist** (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 10, 2015)
- / In an ultra-wealthy Moscow suburb, a luxurious JCC opens its doors** (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 15, 2015)
- / Russian PM congratulates Jews on reopening far-east synagogue** (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 15, 2015)
- / Jewish security guard murdered outside Copenhagen synagogue elected Dane of the Year 2015** (World Jewish Congress, December 9, 2015)
- / Jewish souvenir vendors wear yellow Stars of David in Rome protest** (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 3, 2015)
- / Cautious steps towards reconciliation between Christians and Jews** (The Economist, December 10, 2015)
- / Vatican rejects 'institutional mission work' directed at Jews** (Catholic Herald, December 11, 2015)
- / Record number of French Jews make aliyah in 2015 – but fewer than predicted** (World Jewish Congress, December 16, 2015)
- / Angela Merkel accepts German Reform movement's top honour** (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 3, 2015)
- / German Muslim leader helps complete writing of Torah scroll** (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 6, 2015)
- / Opposition cries foul in Berlin Jewish leadership elections** (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 21, 2015)
- / Over 100 Jews, Muslims and Christians discuss Islamophobia and antisemitism** (Jewish News, December 8, 2015)