

EUROPEAN JEWISH DIGEST

JUNE 2014

1 / EUROPE POST-EU ELECTIONS

Following the success of far-right, Eurosceptic, antisemitic and extremist parties in May's elections for the European parliament, not everything has been going their way. Some far-right parties have been unable to form a bloc in the European Parliament which would allow them access to more funding, staff and speaking time. In order to establish a parliamentary faction, at least 25 MEPs from a minimum of seven EU countries have to come together. Marine Le Pen's French National Front and Geert Wilder's Dutch Freedom party failed to achieve this basic requirement. Potential allies such as Britain's UK Independence Party (UKIP) and Beppe Grillo's Italian Five Star Movement found Le Pen's party too toxic to work with and managed to form their own new "Europe of Freedom and Democracy" bloc with like-minded parties from Sweden, Latvia and the Czech Republic. Le Pen's and Wilder's failure to find suitable partners was helped by the fact that they considered Greece's Golden Dawn and Poland's Congress of the New Right too extreme even for them. This blow followed a very public row between Le Pen and her father Jean-Marie Le Pen after he made antisemitic comments in a video posted on the party's website.

There has also been some other positive European Union news in June. Under the aegis of a new EU co-funded project called "10 Stars", the Jewish community of the Czech Republic is due to reopen fifteen Jewish sites, mainly synagogues and schools, in ten cities across the country. The EU contributed 85% of the funding with the rest sponsored by the Czech government. Gary Koren, Israel's ambassador to Prague, called it "a symbol of a revival of Jewish life" at the reopening of the Brandýs synagogue in Brandýs nad Labem near Prague.

In addition, Israel and the EU have signed a breakthrough agreement giving Israel access to Horizon 2020, the new EU research and innovation flagship programme which has a budget of nearly €80 billion. The EU has granted Israel the same access as other EU countries and it should greatly enhance science, technology and innovation cooperation between Israeli and European researchers.

- [Le Pen and Wilders fail to form anti-EU bloc](#) (BBC news, 24 June, 2014)
- [Israel is now associated to the EU's flagship research and innovation Horizon 2020 programme](#) (European Jewish Press, 11 June 2014)
- [Czech synagogues make comeback thanks to EU grant](#) (The Times of Israel, June 23, 2014)
- [Le Pen's 'anti-Semitic' wisecrack throws Front National into turmoil](#) (RFI, June 9, 2014)

2 / AFTERMATH OF THE ATTACK AT THE JEWISH MUSEUM IN BRUSSELS

In the aftermath of the shooting at the Jewish Museum in Brussels, a thousand people attended a ceremony at the Great Synagogue in memory of the victims. The service was attended by several government ministers as well as Christian and Muslim leaders.

In the days after Belgian Foreign Minister Didier Reynders called on the European Union to help with the security of Jewish communities. Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo also pledged to establish a joint commission with the World Jewish Congress and local Jewish leaders to support security for Jewish communities, battle racism, strengthen Holocaust education and further exchange of information between authorities.

However antisemitic incidents in the country continued. Most notably, in Antwerp, a Jewish school bus carrying kindergarten children had rocks thrown at it by Muslim youths. A source at the Coordination Forum for Countering Antisemitism (CFCA) said that the children learning at the Antwerp Hayder School were returning from a swimming pool at the time of the attack when a gang surrounded the bus and began throwing rocks. No-one was hurt in the attack. Dr. Shimon Samuels, Director for International Relations at the Simon Wiesenthal Center, wrote in a letter to Belgian Interior Minister Joëlle Milquet, that the stoning of the bus crossed “a new threshold in the spiralling violence against the Jews of Belgium.”

- [1000 people attend synagogue ceremony for the victims of Brussels Jewish Museum attack](#) (European Jewish Press, June 3, 2014)
- [Belgium’s foreign minister: Jewish security should be handled at ‘European level’](#) (The Jerusalem Post, June 26, 2014)
- [Alleged Brussels museum shooter appeals extradition order](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 29, 2014)
- [“Stoning of Antwerp Jewish School Bus Marks a New Threshold in Spiraling Anti-Semitic Violence”](#) (Wiesenthal Centre, June 17, 2014)
- [Belgian Jewish leader: We are watchful but we don’t live in fear](#) (The Jerusalem Post, June 26, 2014)

3 / ONGOING CONCERN IN FRANCE

The month of June was yet another turbulent one for Jews in France. Several violent antisemitic incidents were reported, including an assault on Jewish students in a library in Paris, a group of Jewish teenagers being tear-gassed in Sarcelles, a synagogue in the 20th district being approached by men armed with an assault rifle, and a near escape by Jewish teenagers from an axe attack. At the same time there were many press reports concerning French Jews making *aliyah* (emigrating) to Israel or moving to the UK. Joel Mergui, chairman the National Union of French Synagogues (the ‘Consistoire’), said “You can feel the bite at every level. Emigration means less worshippers, less kids at school, less donations for Jewish charities. At some synagogues, whole benches are suddenly empty.”

President Hollande has spoken out forcefully against these acts of antisemitism. In a meeting with an international delegation of Jewish leaders from the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Hollande spoke of the steps he has taken to protect the Jewish community and reportedly said “we would like to set an example to the world in fighting antisemitism”.

- [In some synagogues here, whole benches are suddenly empty](#) (The Jewish Chronicle, June 27, 2014)
- [Anti-Semitic Assault and Stabbing in Paris Library](#) (Arutz Sheva, June 24, 2014)
- [French Jews leave for Israel in increasing numbers](#) (Daily Mail, June 19, 2014)
- [French Birthright expected to increase tenfold this year](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 10, 2014)
- [Men, apparently armed, threaten Paris cops outside synagogue](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 16, 2014)

- [Jewish teens say they escaped axe attack near Paris](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 8, 2014)
- [France's Jewish community elects new grand rabbi](#) (The Times of Israel, June 22, 2014)
- [Hollande's stand on anti-Semitism impresses delegation](#) (The Canadian Jewish News, June 17, 2014)
- [French president vows to 'set example' in fighting anti-Semitism](#) (The Times of Israel, June 12, 2014)

4 / WATCHING DEVELOPMENTS IN UKRAINE

Amidst the turmoil of developments in the battle for eastern Ukraine, accusations of rampant antisemitism by Russian authorities have been found wanting. Despite some incidents of an antisemitic nature, Jewish communal leaders in the Ukraine are agreed that these are of a low level nature and there is no discrimination at a government level. The recent presidential election marked a failure for extreme right-wing parties, with Josef Zissels, Chairman of Ukraine's Vaad (Association of Jewish Organisations and Communities), maintaining that "the failure of far-right groups in the elections proves everything we knew to be true about the tolerant nature of Ukrainian society". In the elections, the leader of the extreme right Svoboda party, Oleh Tyahnybok, won just over 1% of the vote, whilst Dmytro Yarosh of the ultranationalist Right Sector movement, received even less than 1%. An openly Jewish candidate, Vadim Rabinovich, received more than their votes combined.

- [For Ukrainian Jews, far-right's electoral defeat is proof that Putin lied](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 2, 2014)
- [Ukraine: Anti-Semitism is 'a tool of failed politicians,' large portion of members of newly-elected government are Jews](#) (European Jewish Press, June 22, 2014)

5 / LEGISLATING BRIT MILAH (CIRCUMCISION) IN NORWAY

In a move welcomed by the local Jewish community, the Norwegian Parliament passed legislation protecting circumcision as a legal right. The bill states that its purpose is "to ensure that the ritual circumcision of boys is conducted in a safe manner, and to ensure that an offer of ritual circumcision is available". The law requires that circumcisions must be performed by a licensed physician, but allows it to be performed by others "if the physician is present and is responsible for the procedure." Ervin Kohn, president of the Jewish Community in Oslo, said "the act changes the paradigm of the debate about ritual circumcision in Norway in a very positive way and is therefore very significant. I am proud of my parliament and country for making the right decision".

- [Norway passes act that regulates circumcision](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 27, 2014)

6 / SIGNS OF RESURGENT SELF-CONFIDENCE

Alongside stories of antisemitism and the worrying rise of extreme right political parties, June has also seen encouraging signs of resurgent self-confidence in Jewish communities across Europe.

In Hungary, the community has united in an unprecedented way to refuse nearly one million dollars in state funds in protest at the government's whitewashing of Hungarian collaboration during the Holocaust. A new group of Jewish communities and cultural organisations has formed a fund-raising alliance instead for projects commemorating seventy years since the deportation and mass murder of Hungarian Jewry.

In Romania, after three years of being active only in the capital, the Bucharest Jewish Film Festival has expanded to several cities across the country. Over 8,000 Romanians have attended screenings in Timisoara, Brasov and Piatra-Neamt. In Poland, the first religious Jewish wedding in 14 years took place in the historic White Stork synagogue in Wroclaw. In order to be a learning experience for Jews and non-Jews, the ceremony was open to all in the city and featured klezmer bands, kosher food, two officiating Orthodox rabbis and loudspeaker explanations of the traditional ritual. Finally in Moldova, Chisinau held its second Limmud Jewish learning conference which received coverage from four national television stations.

- [Boycotting government Holocaust commemorations, Hungary's Jews forge new path](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 10, 2014)
- [Bucharest Jewish film festival expands to four Romanian cities](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 30, 2014)
- [In Polish city, a wedding celebrates Jewish rediscovery and revival](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 24, 2014)
- [For Moldova's impoverished Jews, Limmud conference is big deal](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 20, 2014)

7 / SEPHARDIM IN SPAIN

In June the Spanish government approved a draft bill that offers to grant citizenship to descendants of Sephardic Jews forced into exile 500 years ago. The bill sets criteria for determining Sephardic ancestry including family ancestry records and knowledge of Ladino. It also dispenses with the usual requirement of surrendering foreign nationalities. The draft law has still to be approved by the national parliament.

- [Spanish cabinet approves draft bill for Sephardic return](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 6, 2014)

8 / OTHER ANTISEMITIC INCIDENTS

Beyond those already mentioned, a number of antisemitic incidents across Europe have made headlines over the course of the month. Most have involved vandalism against Jewish sites. The issue of rising antisemitism continues to generate comment across the continent: an article in *The Guardian* by the British economist Noreena Hertz garnered particular attention.

- Europe (general): [Acts of vandalism committed against Jewish sites in central Europe](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 19, 2014)
- Bulgaria: [Anti-Semitic slogan, swastika daubed on Sofia Synagogue](#) (The Sofia Globe, June 5, 2014)
- Greece: [Athens Holocaust memorial defaced with threats against Jews](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 30, 2014)
- Romania: [Firebomb hits former synagogue in Romania](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 3, 2014)
- United Kingdom: [Teenagers arrested over Nazi vandal attack at Jewish cemetery](#) (Manchester Evening News, June 28, 2014)
- Comment: [Europe must face up to the new antisemites](#) (The Guardian, 20 June, 2014)

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

- Spain: [Spanish town named 'kill Jews' seeks Jewish studies center](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 24, 2014)
- Sweden: [Swedish Jews welcome Auschwitz school trip](#) (The Local, June 3, 2014)
- Germany: [Germany seeks to keep effective ban on 'Mein Kampf' reprints](#) (The Times of Israel, June 26, 2014)
- Germany: [Germany to conduct study on anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism](#) (The Jerusalem Post, June 13, 2014)
- Germany: [Berlin prayer house unites Jews, Christians, Muslims](#) (The Times of Israel, June 8, 2014)
- Germany: [Olympic Committee to contribute to Munich memorial](#) (The Times of Israel, June 5, 2014)
- Greece: [Greek Jews rap appointment of rightist Makis Voridis as health minister](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, June 9, 2014)
- Czech Republic: [Britain's Schindler: Sir Nicholas Winton, 105, who saved Jewish children by organising 'Kindertransports' to UK set to receive highest Czech honour](#) (Daily Mail, 18 June, 2014)
- Vatican: [Pope Francis: "Inside Every Christian Is a Jew"](#) (Charisma News, June 16, 2014)
- Russia: [Russian Jewry Relieved After Exams Postponed](#) (Arutz Sheva, June 6, 2014)

/ ABOUT JPR

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

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

/ ABOUT THE EUROPEAN JEWISH DIGEST

The **European Jewish Digest** is a new 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 simply to provide the reader with an overview of incidents and activities that have occurred across Europe in the previous month.

As this is a new service we are particularly eager to receive feedback about it. If you have any comments, positive or negative, please [email us at JPR](#).