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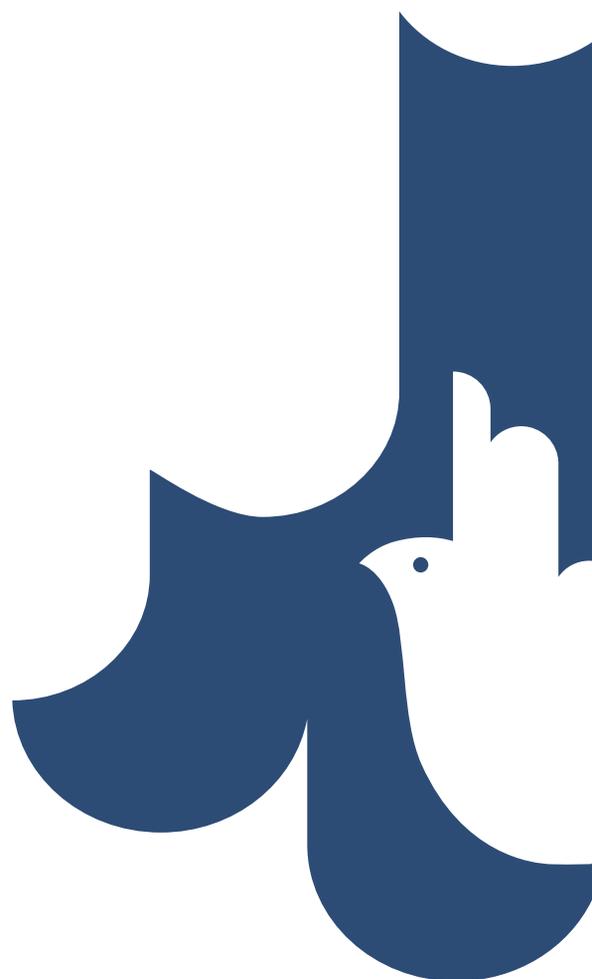


SOVA CENTER FOR
INFORMATION
AND ANALYSIS

REPORT

ON ANTI-SEMITISM IN RUSSIA

2019



MANIFESTATIONS OF ANTISEMITISM IN 2019

The level of antisemitic violence remained low in 2019. A decrease in antisemitism among the media has also been recorded. Public manifestations of antisemitism in mass media, as well as outside it, have caused a negative reaction from the public, the journalistic community and the government. But pressure put forth by the government on Jewish organizations has continued at the same rate.

THE MOST EXTREME MANIFESTATIONS OF ANTISEMITISM

The level of antisemitic violence remained very low. We are aware of only one attack that was related to antisemitism: in May, a taxi driver in St. Petersburg beat the musician Alexander Zaslavsky. First, he stated that he didn't like the fact that the musician got into his car with a bottle of beer, but when the musician got rid of the bottle, the driver started yelling antisemitic insults, locked the taxi doors and attacked Zaslavsky.

In comparison to 2018, the level of antisemitic vandalism has grown slightly. We are aware of at least five cases of such vandalism—one more than the year before. One of these cases was rather dangerous: in April vandals set fire to one of the buildings of the Yeshiva "Torat Haim" in the Ramensky District of the Moscow Oblast on the eve of Passover (Pesach). Luckily, there were no casualties. The vandals painted a swastika and the numbers 88 and 130 (presumably a reference to the 130th anniversary of Hitler's birth) on the wall.

Additionally, in Kaliningrad in March, a tombstone on the grave of the 19th century Jewish preacher Israel Salanter was desecrated with Nazi symbols. The grave is located in the Jewish cemetery in the area of Lithuanian Wall, which has been vandalized numerous times before. In June, a woman spray-painted a red star of David and the word MOSSAD on the walls of a building nearby the Moscow Choral Synagogue. In September, one of the locals drew a cross on a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, established by the Russian Jewish Congress in the village of Aksay, in the Oktyabrsky District of the Volgograd Oblast. In Lipetsk, next to a public bus stop, an antisemitic graffiti was displayed from July to October, with no attention being paid to it by the public works institutions until the citizens complained.

ANTISEMITISM IN PUBLIC LIFE

The tendency towards the decrease of antisemitic remarks in mass media continues—compared to the previous year, we noted a smaller number of statements with antisemitic connotations. Such statements were very rare on federal channels, where we can, however, note a tendency to manipulate the Jewish topic by the government.

For example, on the program “Who’s Against?” on Russia-1 channel, Vesti FM’s DJ Anna Shafran stated about the inauguration of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, that she thought it was a “*strange situation*” for a Jew to swear on the Bible, and mentioned that both, the Ukrainian President and Prime Minister were Jews. A day before the program went on the air, she tweeted a similar remark on her Twitter page.

In August, the anchorman of “Who’s Against?”, Vladimir Solovyov, commented on the antisemitic acts of vandalism in the Nikolaev Oblast to the Federal News Agency and once again made a negative remark on the Jewish origins of the Ukrainian President. According to Solovyov, waiting for the West to respond to this incident is an exercise in futility, since Volodymyr Zelensky is “*clearly a man of Jewish origins. And this means that there is no point in speaking about Ukraine being under the rule of Banderian ideology, that we are free to ignore the complete revision of history and the desecration of graves.*”

At the same time, Russia-1 channel started practicing expulsion of its guests from the studio for any antisemitic statements—real, or seen as such by the channel’s anchormen. Most often, the scandals that took root in the fertile soil of antisemitism were started by Vladimir Solovyov himself. In March, Solovyov removed from the program “Who’s Against?” the Middle East Specialist Arak Stepanyan, blaming him for antisemitism, though the expert’s remark actually had the opposite meaning. Stepanyan drew an analogy between the dissolution of the Ukrainian communist party and approval of extermination of Jews, speaking ironically: “*Who are these Jews? Kill them. The hell with them!*” The anchorman removed another participant of the show together with Stepanyan. This was Greg Vainer, who started to insult Stepanyan in efforts to provoke a scuffle. In April, Solovyov, now on the program “Sunday Evening”, removed the Polish expert Jacob Koreiba for antisemitic remarks. Koreiba suggested that some citizens of Poland may pretend to be descendants of the Jews-victims of the Holocaust, in order to benefit in some way from such ancestry. With that, Solovyov also mentioned his own Jewish descent again.

In November, another anchorman from “Who’s Against?”, Dmitri Kulikov, removed the Ukrainian expert Kirill Zhivotovsky from the studio for stating that “when Jews raise the issue of antisemitism, they are trying to sell the same bank for the third time.” Other participants of the program condemned Zhivotovsky, while the anchorman stated that the expert’s remark is unacceptable.

The leader in antisemitic remarks the previous year—radio-station Echo of Moscow—did not come under radar for any antisemitic statement in 2019. This is related to the fact that the main supplier of antisemitism on the station—Maxim Shevchenko—publicly apologized to the RJC President Yuri

Kanner for practically equating the latter to fascists in one of his 2016 publications. The president of the RJC accepted his apology and withdrew the suit against Shevchenko because, according to him, his purpose was *“to attract attention to this unconscionable event, to show that in today’s Russia public expressions of intolerance mixed with national and regional factors are unacceptable and, what is particularly important, subject to a lawsuit. That’s what needed to be shown.”*¹ . After this, Shevchenko stopped speaking out any direct antisemitic remarks on the air, though he still continued to show his disagreement with Israel’s actions.

On the other hand, the newspaper “Zavtra”, which frequently allows for antisemitic publications, has printed materials that contain clear antisemitic remarks at least three times. In January, one of the newspaper’s journalists—Alexey Ivanov—was outraged by the suggestion of the writer Dmitry Bykov, who said in one of his speeches that Hitler could have been popular in the USSR *“if the eradication of Jews (and Gypsies) wasn’t his main goal.”* In his article, Ivanov called Bykov “a failed lampshade” and used the newspaper’s favorite trick of “unveiling pseudonyms”, reminding the readers that Bykov’s “real” last name was Zilbertrud. Another antisemitic article was published by the same author in October. Referencing Mel Gibson, Ivanov “revealed” the secret practices of the Western political and Hollywood elite. Among all else, Ivanov blamed the “global elite” in “blood libel”, supporting his accusation by imitating a Jewish dialect: *“A widely spread elite pedophilia—fact. The road from pedophilic fun to sacrificing children is not that long. Is it possible that ‘the blood of newborns’ has a place to exist?”*²

In May, not an ordinary author of “Zavtra”, but Vladimir Putin’s adviser on regional economic integration—Sergey Glazyev—published in the newspaper his opinion on the situation in Ukraine. In the article titled “Occupation” he suggested that the victory of Volodymyr Zelensky in the presidential election *“is connected with the general lean of the Trump’s administration’s towards the extreme right-wing forces in Israel,”* and that Trump plans to populate the territory of Eastern Ukraine, which is *“cleansed of the Russian population”* with the inhabitants of the *“Promised Land”*³ . (Glazyev was later released from his post but for reasons other than this episode.)

We’d like to note that the Ukrainian events are still a reason for some public figures to demonstrate their antisemitic views. Although, less so now than before. For example, the actor Ivan Okhlobystin published an antisemitic post on his VKontakte page in April. Right before this, Okhlobystin together with Mikhail Porechenkov released a video, supporting the then Ukrainian presidential candidate Zelensky, who called both actors idiots. After this, Okhlobystin wrote that Zelensky is in danger because of his ethnicity: *“Why would a Jew crawl into our shouting match? Of course, we’ve got plenty of Jews here, but they’re our Jews... If I were a member of the secret Zionist league, I’d put all my efforts into ridding ourselves of a brother like that.”* The post created a negative whiplash, including from Okhlobystin’s colleagues in show business, and the actor deleted it soon after.

1 How to put a stop to it // Blog of Yuri Kanner in Echo of Moscow (Russian radio station). 2019. April 18th. [https://echo.msk.ru/blog/y_kanner/2410183-echo/]

2 Global elite, pedophilia, satanism, ‘blood of newborns’. // Zavtra. 2019. October 6th. [http://zavtra.ru/events/global_nie_eliti_pedofiliya_satanizm_krov_mladentcev]

3 S. Glazyev, “Occupation” // Zavtra. 2019. May 6th. [http://zavtra.ru/blogs/glaz_ev_raskol]

We'll also mention the unexpected antisemitic remark of the Lipetsk acting mayor Yevgenia Uvarkina. In April, at a public hearing on the construction of nurseries she requested a participant who asked her a question to provide his last name. Upon hearing the answer, she said: *"I thought it would be a Jewish name,"* because in her opinion, the man was asking too many questions. Uvarkina later apologized for her comment, acknowledging that it was *"totally inappropriate"* and may have hurt some people's feelings.

Public antisemitic statements and actions were recorded outside mass media throughout the year, as well. The campaign against the Chabad Lubavitch organization that began in two regions of the country simultaneously, should be noted first and foremost.

In Perm, the opponents of the organization continued protesting against the construction of a new Hasidic center. In the spring, a group of the opponents of construction, led by local journalist Roman Yushkov, tried to prevent regular public hearings on the construction issue. A banner reading "They want to build a synagogue for the fascist sect of CHABAD" was posted at the construction site, and antisemitic leaflets were scattered in the entrances of a residential building. Yushkov was fined 20,000 roubles for distributing the leaflets, while his associate Dmitry Razzhivin was fined 10,000 roubles. Despite this, in August, the same group tried to jeopardize another hearing by screaming during its session, and then, Yushkov and his supporter—journalist Tatiana Krotova—made nationalistic speeches, "explaining" to the people that gathered, that "Chabad Lubavitch" is a sect that's *"being controlled from New York"*. They did not receive support from the hearing's participants. Due to this, another legal case was initiated against Yushkov, under Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code—incitement of hatred. In October, opponents of the construction held a prayer against "the satanic filth of the Jews" at the construction site. According to Yushkov, the blessing for the prayer was given by hegumen Sergiy (Romanov)—the priest of the Middle Urals nunnery named in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary "Browner of Breads", the alleged confessor of State Duma deputy Natalia Poklonskaya.

In Krasnodar, a group of local citizens who call themselves "People's Control" and the citizen's of the USSR, lead by Marina Melikhova (Mesheryakova), actively fought against the local synagogue "Or Avner". The group tried to enter the synagogue territory several times, allegedly wanting to pass on some message. In August, they succeeded in getting through security, and spent several hours asking rabbi Arie-Leib (Yury) Tkach questions, trying to reveal his connection with the CHABAD "sect". All of this was published in video format on social media, accompanied by a tirade of xenophobic comments, as well as sympathetic articles in certain local newspapers. In September, the rabbi complained about Melikhova's actions to a number of state bodies. In November, a legal case was started against Melikhova under to Article 319 of the Russian Criminal Code (insulting a representative of power), the basis for which was Melikhova's behavior when she tried to get inside the synagogue.

Additionally, in at least two regions of the country, the celebration of Hanukkah caused protests among local families. For the second year in a row, a lawyer in Bryansk is demanding that Hanukkah celebration on the city square be forbidden. He sees this to "violate the rights of the citizens". This year, the former secretary of the local chapter of the communist party of Russian Federation, Alexander Kupriyanov, joined the protests. In their appeal to various authorities, including the FSB, they

called the Jewish organization “Hesed Tikva”, which organized the celebration, a foreign agent. They also saw signs of extremism in the organization’s literature. In Orenburg, the leader of the party “Derzhava”—Andrey Prikazchikov—saw the placement of an ice menorah on the local pedestrian street as a provocation. His statement was the cause for many arguments on social media about the acceptability of the Jewish symbols in public space, but his position did not receive definite support.

As in previous years, on November 4th, during the annual nationalist “Russian March”, there were heard antisemitic statements.

We’ll add that the Orenburg Antimonopoly Service recommended that the factory “Slavitsa” in Naberezhnye Chelny stops using its current names for ice cream, “Khokhol”, “The Poor Jew” and “The American”. Unfortunately, the company did not react to the warning issued earlier by the prosecutor’s office and continued to produce its ice cream with the names that many found insulting.

On the contrary, a St. Petersburg construction company reacted to the discontent of local residents, who considered antisemitic the advertising banners of the “Novoselie” apartment complex, with the image of a religious Jew holding out his hand and saying: *“Goodbye rent! Mortgage without a down payment.”* The discontented citizens complained to the Large Choral Synagogue, which organized a survey on social networks and found out that 75% of the participants of the survey confirmed that they saw signs of antisemitism in the advertisement. The company’s management conducted its own research, and while most participants in this case did not think the advertisement to be insulting, the company decided to remove the questionable billboards from the streets.

Unfortunately, the pressure put forth by the government on the Jewish organizations remains a fact. In February, Velvel Belinsky and Asher Altshul— the foreign lecturers for the “Jewish Life Hacker” seminar for the Jewish youth in Novosibirsk—were held administratively liable for “illegal” missionary work. Their participation in the seminar was seen as such because when they applied for a visa, they stated that their goal for travel was tourism. Each of them was fined 2,000 roubles under Article 18.8 of Russia’s Administrative Code (violation by a foreign citizen of the rules of entry into the Russian Federation).

In March, Russia’s Ministry of Justice included the Saratov Regional Jewish Charity Center “Khasdey Yerushalaim” (Miloserdie) into the register of non-profit organizations acting as a foreign agent.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

The number of known criminal convictions for hate propaganda has fallen dramatically compared to the previous year: no less than 59 versus no less than 216 in 2018. Based on the data provided by the Supreme Court for 2018 and the first half of 2019, the ratio is similar: about 200-250 people convicted wholly or mainly for “extremist statements” in 2019, versus no less than 618 in 2018. This is related to, first of all, the decriminalization of Article 282 of Russia’s Criminal Code (incitement of hatred or enmity) starting from January of 2019.

Additionally, many convictions that were carried out based on this article were cancelled throughout 2019. Some of them were cases of antisemitism propaganda. In particular, in January, the St. Petersburg City Court overturned the sentence issued to Ivan Barbakov, who was fined 300,000 rubles in November 2018 for posting on VKontakte several xenophobic materials, including antisemitic ones. And in February, the Zubovo-Polyansky District Court of the Republic of Mordovia commuted the sentence of the leader of the banned movement “People’s Militia named after Minin and Pozharsky” (NOMP), Vladimir Kvachkov, who was convicted and already in custody under Article 282 for publishing an antisemitic video, and released him from prison. Due to the partial decriminalization of Article 282, at least one case was dropped: the case of Anton Angel, a resident of Zarinsk in the Altai Krai, accused of publication of antisemitic images.

However, throughout the year, at least 43 sentences were carried out under Article 280 of the Criminal Code (public call for extremism), and a part of these sentences were related to antisemitism propaganda. Most often, the sentences had to do with propaganda on the Internet.

In a number of cases, the people found guilty were sentenced to time in prison. A resident of the Kurgan Oblast received the stiffest sentence: in June, he was sentenced to two and a half years in prison under Part 1 of Article 280 of the Criminal Code, for writing slogans on two buildings calling for violence against Jews. In September, for publishing on VKontakte of audio files calling for violence against Jews and immigrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia, a previously convicted resident of the Volzhsky, Volgograd Oblast was sentenced under Part 2 of the same article to one year and eight months in a maximum security prison with deprivation of the right to administer sites on the Internet for two and a half years.

Most often, suspended sentences were set for antisemitic propaganda. Surprising as it is, the longest of such suspended sentences (two years) were given to two women, who were found guilty also under Part 2 of Article 280. In Vladivostok, such sentence was given to the shooter of the paramilitary security center of the Pacific Fleet Logistics Center Anna Skripko, who posted on social media a video titled “Comments of Colonel Kvachkov on the situation of Russian nationalists in prisons”, which contained antisemitic statements. The sentence included deprivation of the right to engage in activities related to public organizations. In Petrozavodsk, the same conditional two-year sentence with the deprivation of the right to engage in activities related to the use of electronic and information and telecommunication networks, including on the Internet, was given to Natalia Kuzmina, an Orthodox activist and an opponent of vaccination and biometric data collection. She

posted on her VKontakte page an image calling for violent expulsion of Jews from the country.

Additionally, in May, under the same article a resident of Smolensk was conditionally sentenced to a year and eight months with a probation period of three years for posting calls for violence against Belorussians, Jews and Ukrainians. A resident of Vladimir and a resident of Syktyvkar received one and a half years suspended sentence for posting materials calling for antisemitic violence, and a resident of Smolensk received a suspended sentence of one year with a probation period of one and a half years for a similar crime.

As before, the information on why exactly the sentences were carried out under this article was not made public in most cases. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that there were more sentences carried out for propagating antisemitism.

Starting in January 2019, acts aimed at inciting hatred and humiliation of dignity, when they are committed for the first time, fall under Article 20.3.1 of the Administrative Code (inciting hatred or enmity, as well as humiliating human dignity). Just in the first half of the year, 158 people were sentenced under this Article. As in the case of the criminal article mentioned above, information on administrative cases is incomplete, making it difficult to assess how many cases that fell under the new administrative article concerned propaganda of antisemitism. Nevertheless, we know of several decisions made by the court concerning propaganda of antisemitism. Most of these also have to do with propaganda on the Internet. Most often, fines were imposed as punishment in these cases.

For example, in April, under this article, the Dzerzhinsky District Court of Perm fined for 20,000 and 10,000 roubles, respectively, the journalist Roman Yushkov and manager of the HOA, Dmitry Razzhivin. As mentioned above, they posted antisemitic statements inside a residential building on the eve of public hearings on the construction of a Jewish cultural center. And in June, Perm journalist Tatiana Krotova was fined 10,000 roubles for her statement in an interview that there were signs of Fascism and Nazism in the ideology of the “Chabad Lubavitch” movement.

In July, three citizens in various regions were fined—10,000 roubles each—for posting antisemitic materials. In Murmansk, the antisemitic writer Anton Blagin was fined for posting a xenophobic article. A resident of Vyazniki in the Vladimir Oblast, S. Kirillov, was fined for posting antisemitic materials on his own site, and in Tula, Alexander Vysokov was fined for posting an antisemitic image and comments on social media. Under the same Article, for similar acts and in the same amount were fined a resident of the Ust-Vymsky district of Komi Republic and a resident of Nizhnekamsk, and a resident of Saransk was sentenced to 40 hours of compulsory labor in December.

We’d also like to add that the Perm activist Roman Yushkov, who has been prosecuted more than once for public antisemitic statements, filed a lawsuit against the state in December, demanding compensation for moral damages in the amount of 6 million roubles for the fact that the prosecutor’s office did not apologize to him in the name of the State after he was acquitted in September 2018 by the Perm Regional Court under Part 1 of Article 282 and Part 1 of Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code (denial of facts established by the verdict of the International Military Tribunal) in the case of the publication of the article on the denial of the Holocaust.