

Chronicle of Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia in Ukraine

Monthly online information bulletin of the National Minority Rights Monitoring Group

#9 (97) September 2015

*Bulletin compiled by
Tetiana Bezruk, Vyacheslav Likhachev*

Contents

1. Manifestations of xenophobia

1.1 Vandalism. Arson

1.2 Public manifestations of xenophobia

1.3 Homophobia

1.4 Unconfirmed reports

2. Manifestations of xenophobia in the occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea

3. Actions undertaken by civic organizations

4. Actions undertaken by law enforcement and government bodies

1. MANIFESTATIONS OF XENOPHOBIA

1.1 Vandalism. Arson

On **September 6**, yet another act of vandalism was discovered against the “Menorah” memorial in the “Babiy Yar” State Historical and Cultural Preserve. The “Menorah” commemorates Jews killed during the Holocaust. Unknown vandals drew a swastika on a stone at the foot of the memorial¹.

On **September 13**, the night before the Rosh Hashana (Jewish New Year) celebration, the “Menorah” memorial in Babiy Yar was desecrated yet again. The act of vandalism took place between two and three A.M., and the perpetrators remain unknown. The vandals piled tires on and around the memorial, doused them in an incendiary mixture and set them aflame. The fire was noticed and put out by the caretaker of a nearby church belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Patriarchy².

As it later became known, criminal proceedings were instigated according to Article 296, Part 1 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code (“hooliganism”)³.

This is the sixth incident of vandalism against the “Menorah” memorial since the beginning of 2015.

Notably, a similar desecration (utilizing car tires and incendiary mixture to set fire to a Holocaust memorial) took place three weeks earlier in Melitopol (see bulletin for August for details).

The sheer scale of vandalism in Babiy Yar and the obvious absence of adequate action by the government has garnered a wide resonance and drew the ire of Jewish organizations both within

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/nmrmng/photos/a.301261026707333.1073741828.293839707449465/533998416766925/>

² <http://www.eajc.org/page16/news52661.html>

³ Answer of the First Deputy Chief of the Main Investigation Department of the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs Y. Pedos to the request of Alexandra Sverdlova (Project “No borders!” of the Social Action Center”). #13/C-249zi, given on September 30, 2015.

and outside of Ukraine.

Various Jewish groups and international organizations adopted statements and calls for the Ukrainian government to punish the vandals and protect the memorial and cultural preserve⁴.

On the night of **September 18**, unknown vandals set fire to the *ohel* (a structure built over the grave of a righteous person, used for prayer) of a *tsaddik* at the Memorial Jewish Cemetery in Kolomyia (Ivano-Frankivsk Region). The fire was noticed and put out by a police patrol that had been passing by.

A day earlier, in the night of **September 17**, criminals cut down and stole the wrought iron gate from the cemetery's fence⁵.

The police instigated criminal proceedings according to Article 194 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code ("willful destruction or endamage of property"). The local Jewish community promised a reward of 10 thousand hryvnias to anyone who could help find the criminals that desecrated the holy site.

The National Minority Rights Monitoring Group investigated the context of the incident, which greatly helped elucidate its causes.

The 1,4 ha plot of land on which the Memorial Jewish Cemetery is located is part of a town park. The cemetery itself has stood practically demolished since Soviet times. Over twenty years ago, the town council decided that this plot of land is a "memorial cemetery territory" (according to town council decision #86, "On providing local enterprises and organizations with plots of land"). The Kolomyia Orthodox Jewish community was given permission to develop a project to improve the memorial cemetery's territory.

It took a long time to find funds for the restoration project, but finally the community was able to collect enough donations from private sources in different countries, prepare the project, and start the work. According to the project, the cemetery will be well-lit, the asphalt pathways will be replaced with stone-block paving, and the territory will house many trees. "Walls of memory" will stand alongside the pathways, containing preserved fragments of *matzevahs* (tombstones). Approximately 1300 *matzevahs* in varying conditions were found across the city. In the Soviet Union they were used for paving streets and courtyards.

Before starting repairs, the community notified the city council that it is planning to close off access to the cemetery. The community had planned to open the territory to the public in two years, once the renovation was completed. However, the town council insists that the community did not receive approval for the renovation project and had no right to close off the park.

On Thursday, September 17, the community closed off passage through the cemetery, notifying the locals with the following sign: "Passage to cemetery closed from 17.09.2015 to 01.10.2017 for renovations and to ensure the safety of visitors." Many of the city's residents were indignant. The park is more than just a customary place for rest and relaxation - for those who live on Leontovich street it is also the shortest way home. As far as the monitoring team was able to establish, the community made no attempts to reach out to the locals beforehand. Even community hearings, which are formally mandatory in such cases, were not held⁶.

4 E.g.: <http://eajc.org/page16/news52672.html>

5 <http://www.eajc.org/page16/news52728.html>

6 <http://www.eajc.org/page16/news52732.html>; see also: http://visty.in.ua/news/kolomyia/news_9177/

Many people expressed their resentment at the park's closing online, often in rather strongly-worded terms. Some were puzzled: "That place has not been in use as a cemetery for a hundred years now! The park has nothing to remind that it had once been a burial ground, why did they bring tombstones from all over the city into it?" Others were exasperated: "Let the kikes (zhydy) go to their Israel and block off whatever they want there!" Still others called for action: "As far as I understand, they cut off their "Holy land" so that no Ukrainian could set foot on it. How about we cut off holy Ukrainian land so that no kike could set foot on it!"⁷

In this context, the logic of the unknown vandals, who first used an angle grinder and an autogenous weld to remove the wrought iron gates, which lead into the park from the side of the lake, and then set fire to the *ohel* the next night, becomes clear.

The community decided not to block off the park during the renovation project⁸.

1.2 Public manifestations of xenophobia

On Saturday, **September 5**, a group of provocateurs in Uman attempted to dismantle the tent camping area erected to help prepare for the traditional Rosh Hashana (Jewish New Year) Hasidic mass pilgrimage to the grave of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov.

A group of approximately 30 people began to take apart the fence around the camp, using the passiveness of the police to their advantage. Surveillance cameras and power lines were also damaged in the attack. The group was led by Vladimir Goncharuk, Sergei Alekseenko, and Oleg Voloshin. Anti-Semitic statements and threats were heard from the group as the act took place⁹.

Thanks to the timely intervention of the Ambassador of Israel to Ukraine and high-ranking officials from the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs, the situation was brought under control and further incidents did not take place. The Rosh Hashana pilgrimage, which in 2015 took place on September 13-14, passed without incident.

On **September 5**, Yuri Kot, former front man for the Kyiv Anti-Maidan stage and currently the spokesperson of the so-called "Committee for the Rescue of Ukraine" (a group of politicians from the Yanukovich regime, headed by former Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, who fled the country after the revolution), spoke at the "Novostnoy Front" website¹⁰, which provides propaganda support from the so-called "separatists" with a "prediction" of "Jewish pogroms" in Ukraine. This is a danger because, Kot said, "today the Jews persecute the Russian people." According to Kot, 300 out of 450 Ukrainian MPs are Jewish. He also insisted on calling Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko "Waltzman."¹¹

1.3. Homophobia

On **September 2-6**, several human rights protection events took place under the umbrella title "Days of Equality and Pride" in Mykolayiv. The events were organized by the LGBT Association LIGA. The activists planned a laying of flowers at the local memorial to the heroes of the

7 E.g.: https://www.facebook.com/groups/kolomyia.ua/permalink/438043116381468/?__mref=message

8 E.g.: <https://youtu.be/ggH0YpzNuvo>

9 <https://www.facebook.com/tzvarieli/posts/10206254643258285>; <http://tsn.ua/ukrayina/v-umani-natovp-molodikiv-zistolyarnimi-instrumentami-roztroschiv-tabir-hasidiv-489526.html>; see also:

<http://www.unn.com.ua/uk/news/1498086-zhiteli-umani-demontuvali-ogorozhu-nametovogo-mistechka-dlya-khasidiv>

10 <http://news-front.info/2015/09/05/evropa-otvoryaet-vorota-ada-yurij-kot/>

11 <http://izrus.co.il/diasporaIL/article/2015-09-07/28755.html>

“Heavenly Hundred.”¹²

On **September 1**, it became known that the local division of the Right Sector strongly protested against “manipulating the names of the Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred.” The leader of the Mykolayiv Right Sector, Mikhail Borsuk, appealed to the Chairman of the Mykolayiv Regional State Administration Vadim Merikov¹³ and published a statement in various social media, where he threatened to “give a sharp rebuke to these provocations.”¹⁴

In turn, on **September 2**, the LGBT Association LIGA addressed the governor of the region with a request to “explain to the leaders of the Right Sector that all actions aimed at interfering with respecting the memory of those who died in the Revolution of Dignity are acts of discrimination, as they crudely violate Ukrainian law and assault human dignity.”¹⁵

In the end, representatives of the LGBT community decided to cancel the organized laying of flowers out of concern for safety of the event.

On **September 13**, the website of the Trizub movement named after Stepan Bandera (the organization which later became the basis for the Right Sector) published an indignant outburst about Elton John’s speech at the YES forum (Yalta European Strategy Annual Meeting), where the famous musician spoke out in favor of protecting human rights regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.¹⁶ The anonymous article on the website called Elton John’s speech “propaganda of degeneracy.”¹⁷

On the evening of **September 14**, four unknown attackers beat Nick Carter and an anonymous friend of his. Nick Carter had often publicly defended the rights of the LGBT community. The attack happened near the address 10 Obolonsky prospekt. According to the victim, four persons attacked them at approximately 10 PM when they were returning home from the local store. The attackers were shouting homophobic slurs. N. Carter took severe damage to the face, and his companion received a concussion.

The victims were given medical aid, and they filed a statement for the police about the incident¹⁸.

1.4 Unconfirmed reports

On **September 15**, 28-year-old citizen of Israel Amir Ohana, who came to Uman (Cherkasy Region) for the annual Rosh Hashana pilgrimage, went missing in Uman¹⁹.

The body of the man was found in a local lake three days later²⁰. As was later determined, he died of natural causes. The deceased had epilepsy. As best can be reconstructed, he had an attack on the

12 http://www.lgbt.mk.ua/news_Dni_rivnosti_2015.php

13 http://lgbt.org.ua/userfiles/645137_1_w_590.jpg

14 <http://podrobnosti.mk.ua/2015/09/01/predupredili-v-nikolaeev-pravyi-sektor-gotovitsya-dat-otpor-lgbt-soobschestvu.html>

15 <http://podrobnosti.mk.ua/2015/09/01/predupredili-v-nikolaeev-pravyi-sektor-gotovitsya-dat-otpor-lgbt-soobschestvu.html>

16 See text of speech: <http://yes-ukraine.org/ua/news/tekst-promovi-sera-eltona-dzhona-na-12-iy-shchorichniy-zustrichi-yaltinskoyi-yevropeyskoyi-strategiyi>

17 <http://banderivets.org.ua/za-zamovlenniam-oligarhiv-ukrayintsiv-vchat-tolerantnosti-do-lgbt.html>

18 http://upogau.org/ru/inform/uanews/uanews_2743.html

19 <http://izrus.co.il/dvuhstoronka/article/2015-09-17/28846.html>

20 http://jewishnews.com.ua/ru/publication/izrailtyanin_amir_ohan_propavshiy_okolo_umani_nayden_mertvim

shore and fell into the water²¹.

An anti-Semitic crime had been suspected before the true cause of death was determined. Even before the Israeli's body had been found, a video recording had been published on the Internet, where people dressed in military clothes and with a Ukrainian flag mocked and beat a man dressed as an Orthodox Jew. The thugs even imitated shooting their prisoner and threatened to blow him up with a grenade²². Even though the precise time and place of the video shoot remains undetermined, suspicions have been voiced in connection to the video's publication that the young man might have become a hostage of anti-Semites²³. As far as can be determined through circumstantial evidence, the video shoot was staged and has nothing to do with the Uman tragedy.

2. MANIFESTATIONS OF XENOPHOBIA IN THE OCCUPIED AUTONOMOUS REPUBLIC OF CRIMEA

On **September 22**, the occupational "government" of the Crimea strongly recommended local media stop using the word "Mejlis" in their materials. This recommendation was disseminated in a letter written by the occupational "Ministry of Internal Policy, Information, and Communications" and sent to all major media of the peninsula.

The letter contains a reference to an "explanation" signed by the "Prosecutor General" of Crimea Natalia Poklonskaya, which was sent to the "ministry." The "explanaton" states that there are no official organizations titled "Mejlis", "Mejlis Administration" and "Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People" registered in the Crimea and Sevastopol²⁴.

On **September 25**, Natalia Poklonskaya, who calls herself the Prosecutor General of the Crimea, announced that the young man who had been arrested after being accused of the desecration of the Simferopol synagogue, an arson attempt on a mosque, and a terroristic act near the prosecutor's office²⁵, and who had been said to have also been a fighter of the "Azov" battalion²⁶, had "admitted his guilt and gave away the names of others." According to the occupants' proxy, "they're only brave when they have masks on and drink tea with mind-altering substances. When the tea's gone, so is their bravery." Poklonskaya stated that "the criminal proceedings have almost been completed, and the matter will be taken to court shortly."²⁷

On **September 25**, it became known that representatives of commercial structures that received licenses to lease land in Zhigulina Roscha (Mirnoye village of the Simferopol district) near the Meganom shopping center on Simferopol's Eupatoria highway began to demolish buildings erected by the Crimean Tatars on the "protest glade," which has existed for over ten years now²⁸.

3. ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN BY CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS

On **September 2**, it became known that the Assembly of Nationalities of Ukraine filed a complaint to Vasily Gritsak, Chief of Ukraine's Security Services, demanding that it be clarified what exactly Yuri Sirotnyuk, a representative of the "All-Ukrainian Union 'Svoboda'" party, meant when he

21 <http://ru.tsn.ua/ukrayina/vozle-umani-nashli-mertvym-propavshego-bez-vesti-hasida-490014.html>

22 <http://izrus.co.il/dvuhstoronka/article/2015-09-17/28853.html>

23 <http://izrus.co.il/dvuhstoronka/article/2015-09-17/28853.html>

24 <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2015/09/22/7082215/?attempt=1>

25 See: <http://www.eajc.org/page16/news51889.html>

26 Certain circumstances of the case gave cause for doubt to independent observers. See, for example:

http://vyacheslav-likhachev.blogspot.co.il/2015/09/blog-post_30.html

27 <http://ria.ru/interview/20150925/1281000120.html#ixzz3n7KM7LjD>

28 http://freecrimea.com.ua/133304/2015/9/25/Pod_Simferopolem_snosyat_doma_krymskikh_tatar

stated publicly that “kikes” must all go to Israel and “stop interfering with Ukrainians in our own country.” The Assembly of Nationalities believes that Sirotnyuk’s actions are a crime under Article 161 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code, Part 1 (“Willful actions inciting national, racial or religious enmity and hatred”)²⁹.

Former “Svoboda” deputy Yuri Sirotnyuk made the anti-Semitic statements during the charity festival She.Fest (dedicated to Ukrainian national poet Taras Shevchenko; see August issue of this bulletin for details)³⁰.

4. ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN BY LAW ENFORCEMENT AND GOVERNMENT BODIES

On September 24, it became known that the charges for the criminal proceedings instigated after the beating of a dark-skinned youth in the Kyiv metro have been amended from Article 125, Part 1 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code (“Intended minor bodily injury”) to Article 161, Part 2 (“Willful actions inciting national, racial or religious enmity and hatred, humiliation of national honor and dignity [...] accompanied with violence”)³¹.

Recounting the incident, on August 19, a fifteen-year-old dark-skinned youth, Uzu David, was attacked in the Kyiv metro. The attack took place at approximately 7:30 PM. According to the victim, a group of over 40 people entered the train carriage. The young people were acting out of line and violated public order. They accosted the dark-skinned youth with racist slurs and threats. When Uzu David left the train at the Poznyaky metro station, a group of approximately ten people surrounded him on the platform, and began shoving and hitting him. The beating was stopped by other passengers, who interfered. The policeman on duty of the Line Control Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (division responsible for security on railways and metro lines - *transl.*) was absent from his post. The victim filed a complaint with the Darnitsya Regional Department of the Main Department of the MIA of Ukraine in the city of Kyiv (see August issue of this bulletin for details).

On **September 29**, after the official ceremony of laying of wreaths in the Babiy Yar, observing the 74th anniversary of the beginning of the Babiy Yar shootings, the Prime Minister of Ukraine Arseniy Yatsenyuk held a meeting with representatives of various Ukrainian government bodies, MPs that are part of the Ukraine-Israel Inter-Parliamentary Commission, and leaders of Ukrainian Jewish organizations. Yatsenyuk reacted to the increasingly more common desecrations of the Holocaust memorial in Babiy Yar, which garnered a wide resonance both in Ukraine itself and beyond its borders, by giving a number of orders to representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The head of state announced that security measures will be improved, video surveillance systems installed, and additional patrols will be working on the scene. “This holy place is protected and will continue to be protected by the government. And anyone attempting vandalize its memory will be punished,” Yatsenyuk stressed³².

Earlier, the Ukrainian Prime Minister assured World Jewish Congress CEO Robert Singer of the seriousness of the Ukrainian government’s intent to fight manifestations of anti-Semitism in a letter³³.

29 <http://izrus.co.il/diasporaIL/article/2015-09-02/28719.html>

30 <http://ejc.org/page16/news52518.html>

31 <https://www.facebook.com/nmrmg/posts/539974366169330>

32 <http://vyacheslav-likhachev.blogspot.co.il/2015/10/blog-post.html>

33 http://vyacheslav-likhachev.blogspot.co.il/2015/09/blog-post_29.html

The National Minority Rights Monitoring Group was created by the Congress of National Communities of Ukraine in April 2014.

The informational bulletin “Chronicle of Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia in Ukraine” had earlier been published under the title “Anti-Semitism, Xenophobia, and the Rights of National Minorities in Ukraine.” It was published jointly with the Congress of National Communities of Ukraine.

The bulletin has been published since 2006.

Translations from Ukrainian and English into Russian are done by the editors of the bulletin; if in a particular case they are not, an explicit reference is given. The bulletin is translated into English by Kateryna Zorya.

Materials from the media, information provided by Ukraine’s national communities and organizations specializing in protection of human rights, and information provided by activists are all employed by the editors in the compilation of this bulletin.

The editors request that any manifestations of anti-Semitism and xenophobia be reported to them.

The National Minority Rights Monitoring Group can be reached at vyacheslav.likhachev@gmail.com

web: <http://ejc.org/page443>

<https://www.facebook.com/nmrmg>

twitter: @NMMG_UA