



REPORT: LATEST ANTI-SEMITIC OUTBREAKS IN THE EURO-ASIAN REGION

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EURO-ASIAN JEWISH CONGRESS

Latest anti-Semitic outbreaks in the Euro-Asian region against the backdrop of Israel's war with the terrorist group Hamas and local conflicts

Russia

A series of current events forces us to ask difficult questions.

The latest events are unfolding against the backdrop of Israel's war with the terrorist group Hamas, which began on October 7, 2023 with a barbaric terrorist attack on Israeli territory, when 1,400 people were killed in Israel (as of October 28), 229 were taken hostage, 5,412 were injured, more than 8,000 missiles were fired. These days, the Russian-Jewish segment of social networks is discussing relations between Israel and Russia in the light of what is happening. In Russia, the press and social networks also addressed this topic.

According to the research conducted by the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress in 2021, a high level of hidden, "latent" anti-Semitism was identified in Russia, revealing prejudices against Jews when answering indirect questions, which, according to our forecasts, could potentially develop into open forms if triggered by external factors.

Unfortunately, we have to admit that the current outbreak of anti-Semitism is not happening out of the blue, but against the backdrop of ongoing contacts between official Moscow and Hamas terrorist group, the lack of a clear position on their terror attack, and a number of blatantly anti-Semitic statements by high-ranking government officials over the past years.

Background

In May 2022, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's comments about Jews and Hitler in an interview with the Italian television company Mediaset caused a wide international response: "I could be wrong, but Adolf Hitler also had Jewish blood. This means absolutely nothing. The wise Jewish people say that the most ardent anti-Semites are usually Jews themselves. Every family has its black sheep, as we say."

The then head of the Israeli government, Naftali Bennett, condemned the attempt to "blame the Jews for the most terrible crimes in history that were committed against them, and thereby absolve Israel's enemies of

responsibility." The chairman of the Yad Vashem memorial, Dani Dayan, pointed out that Lavrov turned "victims into criminals by putting forward a completely false claim that Hitler was of Jewish origin." Later, the Israeli Prime Minister's Office reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin apologized for Lavrov's words, which was never officially confirmed¹ by the Kremlin.

The same minister, speaking at a press conference on January 18, 2023, on the eve of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day established by the UN, compared the conditions of international isolation of Russia that developed during the war in Ukraine with the murder of Jews in Europe during the Holocaust. In a response statement, the Israeli Foreign Ministry noted: "Any comparison or juxtaposition of current events with Hitler's plan of Jewish extermination distorts the historical truth, desecrates the memory of the dead and survivors and must be resolutely rejected."

In August 2023, after public protests in Israel related to the Russian - Ukrainian war, a private organizing company canceled the tour of the Moscow Lenkom Theater to Israel, which caused another surge in anti-Israeli rhetoric in expressions surprisingly similar to the period of the fight against cosmopolitanism in USSR, as well as accusations against the Israeli authorities.

In a statement by the Moscow State Theater, it is noted that at the initiative of "the Israeli 'Ivans', writhing in helpless anger, who do not remember their kinship", the guest performers "were hit by a barrage of low-class garbage verbiage, interspersed with threats of a "shtetl communal kitchen" and were upset by "neither absence of articulated position from the² Habima theater or the Israeli authorities, nor any security guarantees."

And more about culture. On September 3, 2023, the grand opening of the 8th Moscow Jewish Film Festival took place at the Moscow Oktyabr Film Center, which was opened by the Russian premiere of the military drama "Golda. Judgment Day" by Israeli director Guy Nattiv (starring Oscar-winning British actress Helen Mirren). Regarding the release of the film in Russian distribution, the All-Russian public organization 'Officers of Russia' sent an open letter to Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov and Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation Olga Lyubimova, signed by the chairman of the presidium

¹ <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/2022-05-02/ty-article/turning-victims-into-criminals-yad-vashem-blasts-russian-fm-over-nazi-comments/00000180-98a4-d691-abe3-9da787e60000>

² <https://rg.ru/2023/08/29/rg-publikuet-otkrytoe-pismo-lenkoma-v-sviazi-s-otmenoj-gastrolej-v-izraile.html>

of this public association, Hero of Russia Major General Sergei Lipov, which mentions speech by Russian President Vladimir Putin³ (September 5, 2023) at a meeting of the Russian organizing committee "Victory" and emphasizes "the openly Russophobic context of this propaganda product of the British film industry." In the statement, the filmmakers are accused of trying to "create a split in Russian society, including along ethnic and religious lines, in order to pit the Russian and Jewish peoples against each other." 'Officers of Russia' demanded to "check the film for compliance with current Russian legislation and give it a legal assessment, as well as for compliance with the tasks of preserving and strengthening traditional Russian spiritual values and maintaining harmonious interethnic harmony in Russian society⁴."

Russian President Vladimir Putin on September 5, 2023, at a meeting of the Russian Organizing Committee "Victory", and then in a conversation with a VGTRK journalist, emphasized the "ugliness" of the fact that Jews "cover up the glorification of Nazism": "Western curators put a person at the head of modern Ukraine - an ethnic Jew, with Jewish roots, with Jewish origin. And thus, in my opinion, they seem to cover up such an anti-human essence, which is the foundation, the basis of the modern Ukrainian state. This makes the whole situation extremely disgusting in that an ethnic Jew covers up the glorification of Nazism and covers up those who at one time led the Holocaust in Ukraine, and this is the extermination of 1.5 million people⁵," said Putin.

A dangerous precedent of accusing Jews of justifying terror and even of some Jews joining terrorist organizations was voiced by Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor Roman Silantiev, head of the laboratory of 'destructology' at the Moscow State Linguistic University (MSLU named after Maurice Thorez). Testimony from Prof. Silantiev formed the basis of a criminal case against the Jewish theatre director Evgenia Berkovich convicted of justifying terrorism in one of her plays: "This is unacceptable, especially when theater awards are given for it. Even when, excuse me, people of Jewish nationality do this. This is not the first time I have observed that Jews are actively speaking out for the Wahhabis, it feels like it's out of spite for the Russians. We have a whole group of Jews who joined this organization and died thereafter. Observing this from the side of the Jews, despite the fact that the Wahhabis want to cut out all the Jews, is already

³<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6198377>

⁴ <https://www.oficery.ru/2023/09/08/britanskij-film-proveryat-na-razzhiganie-mezhnacjonalnoj-vrazhdy-posle-obrashheniya-oficerov-rossii/>

⁵ <https://tass.ru/politika/18661771>

postmodern, to be honest ... This disgrace must be stopped, there are really uninvented claims here. The play is really about the justification of terrorism, about those who went to kill⁶,” said the ‘expert’ in a video interview, despite the fact that in the written transcript of the video message published by the telegram channel, there is no fragment about Jews and Wahhabis.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, during the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) on September 12, 2023, spoke about iconic Russian figures who recently left for Israel⁷. Speaking about the former deputy prime minister of the Russian government during the time of President Boris Yeltsin, and the special representative of the President until 2022, Anatoly Chubais, Putin noted: “The fact that Anatoly Borisovich is there for some reason is hiding... They showed me some photograph from the Internet, where he is no longer Anatoly Borisovich Chubais, but some Moisha Izrailevich who lives there. Why is he doing this? He ran away...” In addition to hints of unscrupulous economic behavior, everyone who grew up in the USSR felt in the words of the President, a caricatured anti-Semitic reference to the publications of the "Crocodile" magazine and folk mockeries about Moisha and Sarah from the state anti-Semitism period of the last century. The question of whether it is so remains open, but on social networks this message was heard.

Regarding the assessment of the person of Yandex co-founder Arkady Volozh, who called himself a ‘Kazakhstan-born Israeli IT entrepreneur’ after opposing the war in Ukraine, which is not directly related to the topic we are considering, President Putin turned to the unexpected and alarming aspects: in his view Volozh was allegedly “forced to make certain statements” in order to live in Israel “at a good level and have good relations with the authorities.” The President's statement was perceived as an accusation against the Israeli authorities, who were also criticized for insufficient assistance to Ukraine and pro-Russian sympathies.

Israel's war with the terrorist group Hamas

Against the backdrop of Israel's war with the terrorist group Hamas, which began on October 7, 2023 with a barbaric terrorist attack on Israeli territory, the popular Russian newspaper ‘Moscow Komsomolets’ published an openly anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic article on October 21, 2023 with the subtitle “A

⁶ <https://amp.rbc.ru/rbcnews/politics/17/05/2023/64648f459a79471bc32ca2c8>

⁷ <https://www.rbc.ru/economics/12/09/2023/650008979a7947b071b235b5>

professional patriot has decided on his homeland⁸.” The article was published in connection to a video interview⁹ with political scientist and orientalist, president of the Russian Middle East Institute, member of the Public Council under the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, and former president of the Russian Jewish Congress Evgeniy Satanovsky and his subsequent dismissal from a popular Russian TV channel for insulting government officials Mikhail Bogdanov and Maria Zakharova.

The author of the article, popular journalist Dmitry Popov¹⁰, informs the reader : “Bogdanov (Mikhail Bogdanov - Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation) and Zakharova (Maria Zakharova - official representative of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, director of the Department of Information and Press of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) express the state position of the Russian Federation condemning Israel's apparently disproportionate response to the terrorist attack, which has resulted in the death of hundreds of innocent civilians and the destruction of homes, hospitals, churches and mosques. You can't even take into account that Israel is a loyal ally of our main geopolitical enemy.” The author concludes his material by pointing out that Jews in Russia lack complete loyalty towards the state and warns of a future increase in tension: “Satanovsky is not the first to decide on his homeland. And not the last - the conflict has not yet flared up in fully. There will be even more ‘coming outs’ of such kind.” This short article from a popular publisher aimed at the widest audience frankly formulated the position of the Russian Federation regarding the “disproportionality of the Israeli response to terror,” which was known from official statements of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, pointed out some conflicting interests of Israel and the Russian Federation and once again accused Jews of dual loyalty.

This episode was also commented by Russian political scientist and diplomat Sergei Markov, who noted that there is an “huge ethnic imbalance” in the leading television program, where Satanovsky is an expert, and where “many experts fail to balance between Russia and their ethnic identity” and that “Russia's relations with Israel are now deteriorating.”

⁸ <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2023/10/21/satanovskiy-osatanel-gryazno-obozval-v-efire-mariyu-zakharovu.html>

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxIZVJv9a5k>

¹⁰ Dmitry Popov - Political columnist, laureate of the Moscow Government Prize in the media field. Recognized as the best journalist of MK in 2019. Publicist, covers the most pressing socio-political topics.

The tension reached its peak when, on October 26, 2023, it became known about a visit to Moscow by a Hamas delegation led by Abu Marzuk, a member of the organization's Politburo.

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that "Hamas is a terrorist organization worse than the ISIS (banned in Russia). <...> Israel views the invitation of senior Hamas officials to Moscow as an obscene step that supports terrorism and legitimizes the atrocities of Hamas terrorists," and Russian Ambassador to Israel A. Viktorov was summoned to the Foreign Ministry, where it was explained to him that "...Israel is seriously considering the lack of unequivocal and clear condemnation by Moscow of the terrorist organization Hamas, as well as Russia's actions in international organizations. The visit of Hamas leaders, who are directly responsible for the deadly terrorist attack on October 7, taking of hostages and murdering of more than 1,400 Israelis, creates the impression of legitimizing terrorism against Israelis."

In a number of regions anti-Israeli rhetoric, including in the speeches of high-ranking officials, has already led to mass street protests, demands to cancel flights from Israel, and mass searches for Jews and Israelis allegedly staying in some hotels.

Anti-Semitic stories received their ominous continuation in the North Caucasus, where on October 28, in the city of Cherkesk, the capital of the Karachay-Cherkess Republic, a mass rally was held demanding the eviction of Jews from the region and a ban on Jews entering the republic. Calls not to rent housing to Jews have become widespread.

On October 29, the unfinished building of the Jewish religious national cultural community center in Nalchik (Kabardino-Balkarian Republic) was set on fire.

In the city of Khasavyurt (Dagestan), a message was disseminated that in the Flamingo Hotel there was supposedly "a person who looks like an Israeli citizen," after which the crowd conducted searches in the hotel rooms and cars in the area. Moreover, in Makhachkala an angry crowd actually seized and destroyed the international airport where a Red Wings flight from Tel Aviv landed on the evening of October 29. For several hours, until security forces took over the situation, the crowd shouting "death to the Jews" was desperate to find any. Only thanks to the belated actions of security and police officers was it possible to prevent the massacre. A variety of anti-Semitic motives were heard on social networks and in street speeches by

activists¹¹, including stories of anti-Semitic propaganda with a religious basis, such as the “blood libel in Buinaksk”; a petition was sent to the President of Russia calling on him to accept refugees from the Gaza Strip and condemn Israel¹².

“The whole world does not want to hear the voices of poor Palestinian children - victims of Israeli aggression... Israeli fascism in its cruelty towards Palestine is not inferior to, and perhaps even superior to, Hitler’s,” said the head of the Chechen Republic, Colonel General of the Russian Army, Ramzan Kadyrov in his Telegram channel¹³.

It has become clear that there has been a sharp cooling in Russian-Israeli relations at the moment, which has a significant impact on Jews in Russia, but it is not yet possible to claim that state anti-Semitism as we knew it is back. At the same time, it is important to document the increasingly frequent injections of Jewish topics with a negative connotation into the public information field and the legitimacy of the discussion of the “Jewish question” both in state media and on social networks, emanating from the most authoritative state and quasi-state Russian Federation sources.

All of this, considering that about 14 million Muslims live in Russia, can become a hazardous tinderbox for a widespread revival of various forms of anti-Semitism on Russian territory, which we have already seen in the republics of the North Caucasus these days.

The Euro-Asian Jewish Congress called on the Russian authorities to urgently take control of the situation, ensure the complete safety of Jewish communities throughout the country, prosecute to the fullest extent of the law any form of intolerance against Jews, and take timely measures to suppress anti-Semitic incitement.

So far, Russian authorities have undertaken to investigate the incident seriously and have promised to bring those responsible to justice. However, whether it’s only one temporary outbreak or just the first crest of a new wave of hitherto dormant anti-Semitism in Russia, we are yet to find out.

¹¹ The WhatsApp group “Anti-Jews” collected the entire range of anti-Israeli and anisemitic statements.

¹²

https://stav.aif.ru/society/zhiteli_severnogo_kavkaza_sobirayut_podpisi_dlya_evakuacii_palestincev_iz_gazy

¹³https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/4056

Armenia and Azerbaijan

Over the past years, we have also seen outbreaks of anti-Semitism in the South Caucasus, amid tensions and military clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Background

As noted by experts from the Institute of Euro-Asian Jewish Studies, operating under the auspices of the EAJC, the Jewish topic is actively heard in the South Caucasus, but it is promoted almost entirely by external interests, the leading role among which is played by the Iranian regime.

Anti-Semitic stories and conspiracy theories, which have already proven their comparative effectiveness¹⁴ in promoting the interests of Iranian Islamists in a number of Muslim countries, have become part of the propaganda efforts accompanying Iran's geopolitical activity also in the South Caucasus. On the one hand, Tehran's interest in this region is to maximally weaken the Jewish state's close ally, Azerbaijan, a leading supplier of oil to Israel and a large-scale buyer of Israeli military and civilian technology, other hand, in strengthening dependence on Iran of its own strategic partner – Armenia.

In Azerbaijan, despite the fact that the country is Muslim-majority, the tactics of spreading anti-Semitic stereotypes and theories worked less, so Iran limited itself to anti-Zionist attempts to delegitimize the government, portraying President Aliyev as a 'Zionist puppet.' A significant escalation of anti-Semitic rhetoric is observed in Armenia against the backdrop of clashes with Azerbaijan over the years. And in this case as well, we can assume a significant role of Iran with.

Unlike Azerbaijan, openly anti-Semitic clichés are also introduced there. The idea that such messages can be perceived in Armenia is confirmed by two frequently cited studies: the World Antisemitism Index of the Anti-Defamation League for 2014 and a study conducted two years later by the authoritative Washington Pew Research Center on the level of antisemitism in 18 European countries, including Armenia.

Indeed, according to the ADL study, some kind of anti-Semitic stereotypes were characteristic for more than half (58%) of the adult population of

¹⁴Ksenya Svetlova, "Iran Drives Antisemitism in the Muslim World," The Medialine, 01/20/2022, <https://themedialine.org/by-region/iran-drives-antisemitism-in-the-muslim-world/>, <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-723869>

Armenia. 72% of respondents were then sure or could not rule out that “Jews have too much power in the business world” and 68% more or less agreed that “Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the country in which they live.”

The most odious anti-Semitic stereotypes - that “Jews themselves are to blame for anti-Semitism”, that “Jews always consider themselves better than others” were then shared by respectively 63% (that is, almost two-thirds) and more than half (53%) of respondents, and 45% believed that that “the Jews emphasize the topic of the Holocaust too much. Finally, the traditional accusations of Jews that they “control the US government” and have “too much influence on international affairs” were close to the understanding of more than half (51%) of the country’s citizens surveyed, and 38% generally believed that “Jews are responsible for all the wars in the world.”¹⁵

Additionally, 32% of Armenian respondents who took part in a Pew Research Center study in 2015-2016 admitted that they were difficult to accept Jews as fellow citizens (the highest percentage among respondents surveyed in then 18 European countries) and only 18 % were willing to accept Jews as family members by marriage.¹⁶

However, leaders and activists of the local Jewish community, both then and today, insist that anti-Semitic ideas among Armenians are greatly exaggerated – in their opinion, it’s more about latent sentiments that rarely turn into an active phase, and are mainly fueled by the defense partnership between Jerusalem and Baku that concerns Armenia.¹⁷

Nevertheless, in recent years, websites and social networks, especially Telegram channels, have been overflowing with declarations, forum discussions and pseudo- analytical materials containing calls for cooperation with Iran or the Palestinians fighting Jews and Israel, and extolling the role of Iran as the only hope for Armenian statehood.

Moreover, such stories have noticeably replaced the previous, rather marginal discussions on the topic of “Jewish theft of the Holocaust from the Armenians” and other manifestations of common anti-Semitism, along with

¹⁵ See the full ADL research data at <https://global100.adl.org/country/armenia/2014>

¹⁶ "In some countries in Central and Eastern Europe, roughly one-in-five adults or more say they would not accept Jews as fellow citizens", Pew Research Center, 27 March 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/28/most-poles-accept-jews-as-fellow-citizens-and-neighbors-but-a-minority-do-not/ft_18-03-26_polandholocaustlaws_map/

¹⁷ Larry Luxner, "Armenia has had few Jews and a poor relationship with Israel. That could be changing," JTA, 17 October 2022, <https://www.jta.org/2022/10/17/global/armenia-has-had-few-jews-and-a-poor-relationship-with-israel-that-could-be-changing>

the spread of ideas of Garegin Nzhdeh and other sympathizers of the Nazi regime.

It is also difficult not to notice that most of those materials are supplied by Russian-language channels, as well as bilingual publishers. One of these sources is the Telegram Channel “SpitakArch”, which as of November 2022 had about 10 thousand subscribers – a significant number for a country with a population of less than 3 million people. Active users and initiators of discussions do not hide their moods and thoughts. Let’s say in just one discussion thread dedicated to the enemies and friends of Yerevan, there were 1,064 messages of the same kind containing the word “Zhyd” (a contemptuous term for Jews in Slavic languages).

“I am a fascist, an anti-Semite, and I see the salvation of the Armenians in the complete extermination of the Turks and Jews,” one of the participants declares without any hesitation¹⁸. “Hitler did nothing bad to the Armenians. Apart from the fact that he destroyed many Jews, the mountain [Jews], for example, remained,” another interlocutor echoes him. “Of course, I am an Armenian – any normal Armenian has aversion to Jews”.¹⁹

“Their (Iranians’) headache is the Turks and the Jews, and both of these scum are our common enemies with the Persians,” summed up the third chat participant. “And in general, I believe that Iran should become one of our key allies.”²⁰

Related or similar content is also widely presented on the ARMENIAN RADICAL Channel²¹ with almost 20 thousand subscribers; the mood of its users can be judged by statements from the series “I agree with Iran that Israel needs to be wiped off the face of the earth”²². In the same row is the Armenian Life channel²³ with almost 11 thousand subscribers; forum of fascist elements “Descendants of Njdeh” (more than 7,000 subscribers) and many other projects of varying degrees of coverage and influence.

The reasons for this may be both the desire to influence the Russian-speaking audience outside Armenia, and the Russian emigrants in Armenia itself, whose number has reached more than 100,000 people in recent years.

¹⁸ <https://t.me/c/1283571554/918737>

¹⁹ <https://t.me/c/1283571554/913956>

²⁰ <https://t.me/c/1283571554/829885>

²¹ <https://t.me/ARMENISCH88>

²² <https://t.me/ARMENISCH88/37200>

²³ https://t.me/Armenian_Life

Anyway, the incitement against Jews, whether it's infiltrated by Iranians or backed by local radical elements is very much alive in media space and potentially explosive, given the high level of anti-Semitic ideas circulation in the society.

Latest developments

The latest antisemitic outbreak amid Nagorno-Karabakh tensions in September 2023 was not only verbal, but got a violent development as well. On October 3, the media reported an attack on a synagogue in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan. According to published information, the windows in the building were broken and the walls were defaced with paint. According to the Israeli press, the group "Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia" took responsibility for the incident. The message accompanying the attack called the Jews "enemies of the Armenian people."

Israeli Ministry of Diaspora and Fight Against Anti-Semitism also reported "a significant increase in anti-Semitic discourse was detected on social networks in Armenia, which also included calls to harm Jews" after the letter of European Rabbis denounced the Armenian comparison of Nagorno-Karabakh siege with the Holocaust.

Regarding the latest developments in Israel neither Azerbaijani, nor Armenian highest officials took a firm stand. There were some moderate statements by the Foreign Ministries, but not more than that.

Some Armenian media though did criticize Israel for its action in the Gaza Strip. According to the Armenian Weekly article titled 'How the military escalation in Gaza could impact the South Caucuses', "Israelis started indiscriminately bombing Gaza, killing civilians and threatening ethnic cleansing through a land invasion."

As a part of our public diplomacy efforts, Euro-Asian Jewish Congress addressed presidents and prime-minister of numerous states including Azerbaijan and Armenia calling them to unconditionally denounce the Hamas terrorism and increase the security measures for the Jewish community.

We are continuing to closely monitor the situation in our region and fighting anti-Semitism by any means possible.

Dr. Haim Ben Yakov,

Director General, Euro-Asian Jewish Congress