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2006: A Year in Review Anti-Semitism in Ukraine

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Introduction

Anti-Semitic attacks targeting individuals, synagogues, and Holocaust memorials occurred frequently throughout 2006. While there are certainly other contributing factors, this upsurge in anti-Semitism can be partially attributed to the activities of Ukraine's largest private university, the Interregional Academy of Personnel Management (MAUP). MAUP is believed to be the largest disseminator of anti-Semitic literature in Ukraine and has previously issued statements supporting the destruction of the State of Israel.

The Ukrainian government has taken actions to condemn anti-Semitism. In January of 2006, Boris Tarasyuk, Ukraine's then-Foreign Minister, spoke out on national television against MAUP's activities. He declared that MAUP carried out "unlawful and wrongful actions" and that "there is no place for any form of anti-Semitism or xenophobia in Ukraine." These proclamations were followed by the Education Ministry's disbanding of seven branches of MAUP in June 2006 and, in October, the revocation of 4655 diplomas issued to MAUP graduates. A month later, however, MAUP successfully appealed the decision to close its branches and their license was renewed. In a meeting with NCSJ, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich committed to appealing the reopening of the regional offices.

While these actions highlight the Ukrainian government's resolve to fight anti-Semitism and extremism, more action must be taken. The government must continue to publicly condemn anti-Semitic acts and properly utilize already-existing legislation designed to quash extremism. The Ukrainian government must make a concerted effort to educate the public and diffuse tensions within Ukrainian society.

Chronology

Anti-Semitic attacks occurred frequently throughout 2006:

- On February 3, security guards thwarted an anti-Semitic attack at the Central Brodsky Synagogue in Kiev. A man entered the synagogue and asked to meet the rabbi. The man then pulled out a knife and shouted that all Jews should be killed. The guards turned the man over to police.

- On the night of February 21, a Holocaust memorial in the town of Feodosia was defaced with paint and anti-Semitic graffiti. The incident was not reported to the media until the first week in March.
- At the end of February, MAUP commemorated the 1911 death of a Christian boy. In 1911, a Jew had been accused of ritual murder of the 13-year-old boy, but was acquitted of all charges two years later. In an article commemorating the boy in a MAUP publication, it was reported that he “was sacrificed to dedicate the Chasidic Lubavitch central synagogue.”
- On March 5, a yeshiva student dressed in traditional Orthodox garb was attacked in Kiev. The three attackers assaulted the student in a subway station, but the victim was able to escape after firing an air pellet gun. Police were able to detain the attackers.
- On the night of March 22, a Holocaust memorial was vandalized in the city of Sevastopol. Assailants covered the monument in black swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti. An investigation was opened, but no one was charged.
- In early April, Vladimir Katzman, the editor of a Kiev newspaper, was attacked by two young men with baseball bats outside of his apartment complex. He suffered head trauma and a broken hand, but survived the assault. It was suspected that the attack was related to a series of articles recently published in the newspaper that condemned anti-Semitism and xenophobia.
- During the Passover holiday in mid-April, the Choral Synagogue in Kirovograd was vandalized. Unknown assailants threw stones at the synagogue, shattering several windows.
- On the night of April 19, a Holocaust memorial in Odessa was vandalized. Black swastikas and black paint were discovered on the memorial the following day. Police investigated the crime, but had no leads.
- On April 20, Adolf Hitler’s birthday, a series of anti-Semitic events occurred in the town of Dnepropetrovsk. First, anti-Semitic graffiti was discovered. Then, four yeshiva students were attacked by a group of thirty skinheads as they left synagogue in the evening; the students were uninjured in the assault. Later, a 20-year-old rabbinical student was attacked by the same skinhead group; he sustained stab wounds in his chest and multiple head injuries, but survived the attack.
- In early May, a synagogue in Simferopol was vandalized by two teenage boys. A security camera revealed the young men throwing stones at the Ner Tamid shul and stealing the other security camera. No one was injured in the attack. It was later revealed that the police did not promptly arrive on the scene.

- On June 10, a Holocaust memorial in Sevastopol was vandalized for the second time within three months. It was suspected that it was members of the local neo-Nazi skinhead group who defaced the memorial with pink paint and swastikas. No one was charged.
- On June 23, the Choral Synagogue in Kirovograd was vandalized for the fifth time in 2006. Unknown assailants threw stones at the building, shattering two windows. No one was injured in the attack.
- In mid-July, vandals severely damaged a memorial commemorating the Jews that died at Babi Yar during World War II. The perpetrators smashed the inscription plate, causing significant damage to the memorial. Although no suspects had been detained, it was rumored that the police would only charge the perpetrators with “hooliganism.”
- On August 1, anti-Semitic graffiti was discovered on a Ukrainian State Agency building in Dnepropetrovsk. One slogan proclaimed: “Palestine for Arabs: Babi Yar for Yids.” It has been speculated that this graffiti was in response to a pro-Israeli rally that took place in the city the preceding week.
- In mid-October, former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, David Duke, was again invited by MAUP officials to give a lecture on “radical Jewish extremists.” This event further confirmed MAUP’s reputation as an anti-Semitic institution in Ukraine.
- On December 10, three Orthodox Jews dressed in traditional garb were attacked in Kiev, not far from the main synagogue. Witnesses saw ten young men violently strike the three victims; two were not seriously injured, while the third victim sustained a concussion. No one was arrested, and the incident was not reported to the media for a week.

The first month of 2007 has already been marred by an anti-Semitic incident:

- On January 11, three newspapers associated with MAUP published blatantly anti-Semitic material. The publications featured an appeal by the Conservative Party, led by MAUP president Georgy Schokin, which blamed Ukraine’s problems on the Chabad Lubavitch movement. On January 24, Vadim Rabinovich, the leader of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress, petitioned to Ukrainian’s government to suspend these publications.

Action Recommendations

The Ukrainian government must set a stronger example that anti-Semitism and extremism will not be tolerated. The government needs to elaborate on its current strategy and make use of legislation, the media, and educational programs to combat anti-Semitism:

1. The Ukrainian government must continue to strongly condemn anti-Semitism and institutions such as MAUP that polarize Ukrainian society. The government must make it a priority to utilize and enforce anti-extremism legislation; this will enable the Ukrainian government to assert its position as a firm opponent of anti-Semitism and ethnic hatred. Training law enforcement to properly recognize and prosecute hate crimes will lead to more consistent apprehension of perpetrators and send a clear message that hatred will not be tolerated.
2. The media is an important avenue by which the Ukrainian government can spread a central message of acceptance. The government must use the media to speak out against extremism and build a national identity that takes pride in Ukraine's diverse culture. Moreover, the media must make it a priority to promptly report anti-Semitic crimes, as numerous incidents were not reported until weeks after they actually occurred. Prompt reporting will enable prompt condemnation of such acts and increase the chance that perpetrators will be swiftly apprehended.
3. The numerous incidents of Holocaust memorial vandalism signify the need for Holocaust remembrance programs. In addition, the government should fight ignorance by implementing educational programs geared towards understanding different ethnic groups and promoting intercultural communication.

The Ukrainian government has taken the important step of recognizing and condemning the issue of anti-Semitism; now the government must build upon this foundation and progress further. In order to accomplish this, a more aggressive approach is necessary to apprehend and punish accordingly those who commit anti-Semitic crimes. In this way, a clear message will be sent to the Ukrainian people that acceptance and tolerance will lead to the formation of a stronger and more prosperous nation.