

Major Instances of Anti-Semitism in Russia and their Underlying Reasons

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The Russian cultural tradition of applying double standards to Jews still remains. Jews are pictured as a powerful and cunning people, responsible for all important political and economic events. Those views have lately tended to increase due to the state media's anti-West propaganda and the general level of xenophobia. Even the famous opposition politician Boris Nemtsov, recently murdered, is now described by patriotic bloggers in social networks as having been a pro-American Zionist who betrayed his nation. This is an example of a major way anti-Semitism and xenophobia is expressed in modern Russia, the tendency to ascribe religious or territorial characteristics to ethnicity; for example, "a good Jew is one who does not engage in politics".

However, it would be wrong to say that to be anti-Semitic is mainstream among Russian politicians. Senior state officials are open to dialogue and support the Jewish clergy in Russia. This trend also applies to regional leaders. However some of the most odious deputies and officials quite often make anti-Semitic jokes in public in order to maintain their popularity among the masses. It is part of their conception of being loyal, patriotic and an anti-West fighter for Russian national interests.

At the same time, Russia leads the world in its number of Nazi and neo-fascist organisations. The number of anti-Semitic websites is also constantly growing. Since they do not meet significant opposition from the authorities, this indulgence toward them suggests that neo-Nazism in Russia is increasingly becoming an acceptable ideology. An illustrative event was the recent Far-Right 'International Russian Conservative Forum' that took place in Saint-Petersburg in March 2015. During the Forum, Russian parties met with high-ranking members of some of Europe's most

controversial parties; this itself can be considered an attempt to unite European Far-Right forces under the Russian 'conservative' umbrella.

As for European anti-Semitic tendencies, my guess is that it is still integral to the political culture of Europe and is used as a resource by radical forces when there is a need to blame "others" for the troubles of "us". Jews still play their traditional role of the guilty "others". It has worked well in the past and works nowadays among the conservative part of society. This discourse is easily maintained since today, politics are discussed much more publicly than ever and the European Union is experiencing hard times. It seems like these radical forces have indeed found a powerful ally in Eastern Europe.

Back in Russia, it should be noted that in spite of the above mentioned tendencies, anti-Semitism is not the major issue in the nation's complicated interethnic relations that it was at the end of the late 1990s and early 2000s, when it provided the main content of nationalist propaganda. The growth of anti-Semitic crimes in Russia is associated with an overall increase in the level of xenophobic violence. It seems like anti-Semitism of the late XIX - early XX centuries has turned today into xenophobia against Caucasians, Asians and other minorities.

Likewise, one cannot say that there is the kind of state anti-Semitism that existed in Soviet times when Jews were fearful to be Jews. Formally, there was no state anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. The only formal anti-Semitic law that existed in that period was the law for the redemption of the Jews - Jews immigrating to Israel had to pay for their higher education. All other instructions were unwritten. When hiring one could be said: "... you know, the Jews cannot be more than a certain percentage". Similar quotas existed for representatives of other ethnic groups and the responsible people used to be aware of it. Everyone knew that these rules existed and were expressed by corresponding numbers. In this sense, state anti-Semitism in Russia does not exist anymore.

The North Caucasus partly shares the anti-Semitism tendencies of the general Russian population, since local culture here has been a part of Russian culture for hundreds of years. Local views and attitudes are quite the same, however and again, cannot say that anti-Semitic views are a topical issue and Jews are the most suffering minority. On the contrary, the positive attitudes, or let say suspicions, such as, for instance, Jews are smarter, more successful and supportive in contrast to

other locals, are widespread. In this regard, I would note that the word 'hatred' seems to not be sufficient to define the whole spectrum of contemporary anti-Semitism as a multidimensional socio-cultural phenomenon. Positive stereotypes are also should be considered as a manifestation of a mythical perception of Jews, the opposite side of negative attitudes. In this case, the positive myths are also counterproductive in terms of a common generalized perception of Jews regardless of particular personality features and given historical and cultural circumstances. This kind of perception has a permanent potential to be converted into hatred and be used to accuse Jews during sudden or unexpected social and political disasters. The most tragic example is the Holocaust.

The example of the Holocaust clearly shows the advantage of learning from peaceful experience rather than conflict – we remain not worried until disaster happens. We consider the peaceful coexistence of different peoples as something natural without thinking about on what this peace and cooperation is grounded on, on what are the structural reasons for this the peace, and how this foundation is linked with the particular system of values in a particular society. Therefore, if we don't know, we are not able to notice when these grounds are collapsing and, thus, providing an opening for another wave of violence. And I believe that this knowledge would benefit not only Jews as a minority group, but the whole society in terms of its stability/instability.

If my view on anti-Semitism could be expressed in one sentence, and let it be my main conclusion, I would use the words of a famous Russian writer and playwright, Jew and WWII soldier, Vasily Grossman: "Anti-Semitism is a mirror of the shortcomings of individuals, the social order and public systems. Tell me what you accuse the Jews of and I'll tell you what you are to blame".