

# ANTISEMITISM WORLDWIDE REPORT FOR 2023



**The Center for the Study of  
Contemporary European Jewry**  
The Lester and Sally Entin  
Faculty of Humanities  
Tel Aviv University

With the support of The Adam and  
Gila Milstein Family Foundation

**The Irwin Cotler Institute  
Democracy | Human Rights | Justice**  
The Lester and Sally Entin  
Faculty of Humanities  
Tel Aviv University

With the support of Richard and Elaine  
Dubrovsky | Sara Vered







# ANTISEMITISM WORLDWIDE REPORT FOR 2023



**The Center for the Study of  
Contemporary European Jewry**  
The Lester and Sally Entin  
Faculty of Humanities  
Tel Aviv University

With the support of The Adam and  
Gila Milstein Family Foundation

**The Irwin Cotler Institute  
Democracy | Human Rights | Justice**  
The Lester and Sally Entin  
Faculty of Humanities  
Tel Aviv University

With the support of Richard and Elaine  
Dubrovsky | Sara Vered





**The Center for the Study of  
Contemporary European Jewry**  
The Lester and Sally Entin  
Faculty of Humanities  
Tel Aviv University

**The Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University** supports research on Jewish history, culture, politics, and interfaith relations. It publishes the flagship annual Antisemitism Worldwide Report and the annual For a Righteous Cause Report. Every year, the Center organizes three seminars on Jewish affairs that are open to the public and publishes eight issues of Perspectives – analytic essays on contemporary Jewish life and thought.

You are welcome to visit: <https://cst.tau.ac.il>



**The Irwin Cotler Institute**  
**Democracy | Human Rights | Justice**  
The Lester and Sally Entin  
Faculty of Humanities  
Tel Aviv University

**The Irwin Cotler Institute at Tel Aviv University** is devoted to instruction, training, and policy-oriented research on human rights, democracy, justice, and the fight against antisemitism and racism at large.

You are welcome to visit: <https://cotler.tau.ac.il>



**ADL** is the leading anti-hate organization in the world. Founded in 1913, its timeless mission is “to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” Today, ADL continues to fight all forms of antisemitism and bias, using innovation and partnerships to drive impact. A global leader in combating antisemitism, countering extremism and battling bigotry wherever and whenever it happens, ADL works to protect democracy and ensure a just and inclusive society for all. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, ADL takes no position in support of or in opposition to any candidate for political office.

You are welcome to visit: <https://www.adl.org>

The views and opinions expressed by the authors in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the Center for Contemporary European Jewry, or the Cotler Institute.

# RUSSIA

## FASCISTS GOING FROM BAD TO WORSE

In 2023, the level of antisemitism in Russia intensified in comparison to the previous year. Senior Russian officials, including President Vladimir Putin himself, have systematically used antisemitic tropes and Holocaust distortion to promote their political interests. Statements by government representatives encouraged and legitimized antisemitic discourse in traditional media and on social networks. Following the massacre in southern Israel on October 7, the antisemitic discourse escalated even more and translated into antisemitic events in the North Caucasus republics of Russia.

During a press conference on January 18, 2023, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov compared Nazi Germany's policy for the "Final Solution" of the Jewish question to the efforts of Western countries to bring about the "Final Solution of the Russian question." He also compared the US-led coalition to help Ukraine in its war against Russia to Adolf Hitler's army that invaded the Soviet Union. The White House, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, the Anti-Defamation League, and the European Jewish Congress condemned Lavrov. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a statement of condemnation in which it emphasized that any comparison of the Nazi plan to exterminate Jewish people to contemporary events is unacceptable. However, Lavrov refused to apologize, and the Kremlin did not respond either.<sup>1</sup>

Against the background of Russia's failures in the war against Ukraine, Russian leaders continued to delegitimize the Ukrainian government through antisemitic statements against Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. These statements were based on the misguided hope that employing them would help legitimize the war. At the St. Petersburg Economic Forum, a well-attended international conference held in June 2023, Putin stated, "My Jewish friends tell me that Zelensky is not Jewish; he is a shame of the Jewish people." He also said that during the Second World War, 1.5 million Jews perished in Ukraine, most of whom were murdered by "[Stepan] Bandera's people."<sup>2</sup>

Putin spoke again on these issues at the meeting of the Presidential Committee for Patriotic Education "Pobeda" (Victory) on September 5 and claimed that 1.5 million Jews were killed in Ukraine by "Ukrainian nationalists and antisemites, supporters of Bandera, while the SS units did not even see fit to participate in these killings."

In an interview with a state television channel that aired after the committee meeting, Putin said that "the Western masters put a person at the head of modern Ukraine, an ethnic Jew, with

<sup>1</sup> "“Окончательное решение русского вопроса”: Лавров сравнил США с Гитлером, а россиян с евреями,” Newsru.co.il, January 18, 2023, [https://www.newsru.co.il/world/18jan2023/lvrov\\_0015.html](https://www.newsru.co.il/world/18jan2023/lvrov_0015.html).

<sup>2</sup> "Путин назвал Зеленского позором еврейского народа,” RIA, June 16, 2023, <https://ria.ru/20230616/zelenkiy-1878708342.html>. Stepan Bandera was a Ukrainian nationalist, head of the military wing of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, known for his antisemitism and collaboration with Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union.

Jewish roots, with Jewish origins, to cover up the anti-human essence that is the foundation of the modern Ukrainian state and the glorification of Nazism.”<sup>3</sup>

The movie “Witness,” financed by the Russian Ministry of Defense and released in August, constituted another propagandistic attempt to misrepresent the realities of war in contemporary Ukraine through distorted references to Jews. It depicts a Belgian Jewish violinist who visits Ukraine days before the Russian invasion and witnesses the inhumane acts of its government and nationalists. Although the film failed at the box office, it testifies to the mindset of the decision-makers in Russia.

Putin’s statements, which combined severe distortion of the Holocaust and antisemitic tropes, received broad exposure in Russian and international media. The Ukrainian government expressed astonishment at Israel’s silence in the face of Putin’s outrageous words about Zelensky.<sup>4</sup> However, the Israeli Foreign Ministry does tend to respond to statements by Russian diplomats that distort the Holocaust. In June 2023, after Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova criticized Israel’s ambassador to Ukraine for supporting the glorification of Nazi collaborators, the Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman replied that “no country will preach to the State of Israel and its diplomats about the importance of preserving the memory of the Holocaust.”

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs also came out against an article Zakharova published in the official newspaper of the Russian government, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, in which she claimed that the Holocaust does not refer only to Jews but also to other peoples.<sup>5</sup> Israel emphasized its opposition to “any attempt to distort and trivialize the Holocaust, especially those that make political use of the greatest disaster of the Jewish people.”

An escalation in the antisemitic rhetoric was evident not only in Russia’s management of the war in Ukraine but also in its internal discourse. The entanglement of the Russian army and the huge losses it has suffered in Ukraine translates into taking a heavy hand against the “fifth column” and the “traitors,” those liberal and pro-Western circles who oppose the war and who, in Russian discourse, are traditionally identified with the Jews.<sup>6</sup>

In May, the theater director Zhenya Berkovich was arrested and accused of justifying terrorism. However, the real reason for her arrest was her public opposition to the war in Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> A commentary in Russian media in the context of her arrest noted that “the Jews actively support

<sup>3</sup> “Путин заявил, что «бандеровцы и иже с ними» убили полтора миллиона евреев,” *Meduza*, September 5, 2023, <https://meduza.io/feature/2023/09/05/putin-zayavil-cto-banderovtsy-i-izhe-s-nimi-ubili-poltora-milliona-evree>.

<sup>4</sup> Guy Alster, “Senior Aide to Zelensky: It is not clear to us why Israel did not Condemn Putin’s Words [Hebrew],” *Walla!*, June 20, 2023, <https://news.walla.co.il/item/3587963>.

<sup>5</sup> “Памяти всех жертв Холокоста,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, July 19, 2023, <https://rg.ru/2023/07/19/pamiati-vseh-zhertv-holokosta.html>.

<sup>6</sup> According to the latest assessment, Russia lost about 300,000 of its troops since the beginning of the invasion. See here: “U.S. Intelligence Assesses Ukraine War has Cost Russia 315,000 Casualties – Source,” *Reuters*, December 12, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-intelligence-assesses-ukraine-war-has-cost-russia-315000-casualties-source-2023-12-12/>.

<sup>7</sup> “Российский антисемитизм: давно не виделись,” *Riddle*, January 12, 2024, <https://ridl.io/ru/rossijskij-antisemitizm-davno-ne-videlis/>.

Wahhabism, and there is a feeling that they are doing this precisely against the Russians. We have a whole group of Jews who joined this organization and died in it successfully.”<sup>8</sup>

The toxic antisemitic discourse continued to reverberate through media and social networks without interruption. In August, Svetlana Talyzina, a movie actress, was interviewed on one of the most-watched programs in Russia. In her interview, Talyzina accused a group of artists of betraying Russia while highlighting their Jewish origins and the fact that some of them fled from Russia to Israel.<sup>9</sup> The interview went viral on YouTube and on other social media platforms. While it drew criticism from Russian opposition circles, it was not condemned by a single government official in Russia.

Putin himself contributed to this witch hunt against “Jewish traitors.” Speaking at the Economic Forum in September, he used antisemitic tropes as he railed against the former Deputy Prime Minister of Russia, Anatoly Chubais. Putin also referred to Arkady Volozh, the founder of the Russian giant technology company Yandex. He claimed that after moving to Israel, Volozh had been compelled to criticize the Russian invasion in order to please Israeli authorities.<sup>10</sup> These comments marked the first time since the beginning of the war that Putin publicly voiced dissatisfaction with Israel and identified it with a pro-Ukrainian Western camp (despite Israel’s efforts to maintain a neutral position on this issue).

The intensifying antisemitic sentiment before October 7 explains in part the outbreak of hate toward Israel and antisemitism in Russia after the massacre. In his first response to the massacre, Putin did not condemn Hamas but made sure to point out the legitimate rights of the Palestinians (which, he argued, have not been recognized or obtained). In keeping with the anti-Western rhetoric since the start of the war in Ukraine, Putin blamed the United States for what was happening and for the failure to establish the Palestinian state. No official Russian representative phoned the Israeli prime minister to express solidarity.

Six days after the massacre, Putin mentioned in passing Israel’s right to self-defense, but at the same time, he compared the Israeli military operation in Gaza to the Nazi siege of Leningrad during the Second World War. For context, Leningrad is considered in Russian historical memory to be one of the most terrible crimes committed by Nazi Germany in Russia. Putin’s comparison of the Israeli military to the *Wehrmacht* was echoed in official media. Telegram channels that support Putin and his war in Ukraine did not hide their *schadenfreude* about the tragedy in Israel. They published messages such as “It’s a shame that too few people were killed,” “It’s a shame that you can’t join in,” and “There is no empathy and mercy for the Israelis who are fleeing the enclave cities.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> “Еврейский конгресс заявил в СК на антисемитизм эксперта из дела Беркович,” *RBC*, May 17, 2023, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/17/05/2023/64648f459a79471bc32ca2c8?from=copy>

<sup>9</sup> “Валентина Талызина: Ахеджакова, Брыльска, Зеленский и Гордон,” *Empathy of Manuchi*, August 15, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrlJVIDYmAQ&t=393s>.

<sup>10</sup> “Путин высказался о Кудрине, Воложе и ‘удравшем’ Чубайсе,” *Vesti.ru*, September 12, 2023, <https://www.vesti.ru/article/3546737>.

<sup>11</sup> “Z-каналы радуются нападению на Израиль, завидуют ХАМАС и отправляют Макаревича на фронт,” *Channel Masha Borzunova*, October 13, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8SIC71C\\_BQ&t=393s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8SIC71C_BQ&t=393s).

The antisemitic events in the North Caucasus in late October were a natural result of the anti-Israeli and antisemitic hysteria in Russian media since October 7. Residents gathered in city centers to demand the expulsion of Jews and, in one place, set a Jewish community center on fire. The events culminated in the city of Makhachkala, where rioters managed to take control of the local airport and tried to attack Jewish passengers on a flight arriving from Tel Aviv. Putin accused the United States of attempting to destabilize Russia and sympathized with the residents of the Caucasus protesting in the face of what they described as Israel's war crimes in Gaza. He called on them to join the Russian army fighting in Ukraine "for the sake of Russia and the future of the Palestinian people."<sup>12</sup>

After the war in Ukraine began, the former Chief Rabbi of Moscow, Pinchas Goldschmidt, warned that in the face of military failures, the Russian government's hunt for "scapegoats" would not spare the Jews. Sadly, 2023 proved that he was right.

**– Dr. Yaron Gamburg**

<sup>12</sup> "Что сказал Путин на совещании по ситуации в Дагестане," *Vedomosti*, October 30, 2023, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2023/10/30/1003393-cto-skazal-putin-na-soveschani>.