



# **BASIC HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF THE BABI YAR HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL CENTER**

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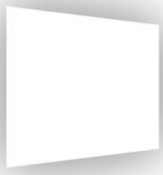
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*The ways in which the Holocaust was forcibly ignored as well as remembered in Kyiv, Eastern Europe, and the World, and the perpetrators prosecuted. The Holocaust as a challenge.*



## INTRODUCTION

### **1/ What is the place of Babi Yar within the Holocaust?**

In September 1941, for the very first time in history, a metropolitan city in Europe lost virtually all of its remaining Jewish inhabitants to premeditated murder. On the edge of Kyiv (Kiev), in and near the ravine called Babi Yar, more Jews (33,771—according to the murderers) were slaughtered in two days during World War II than in any other single German massacre.

The Babi Yar massacre is the most widely known instance of a specific type of killing in the Holocaust: mass murder near the places where the victims, often not even registered first, used to live. This was massive *local* death. Its aftermath was also specific—locals led their lives next to the mass graves of their school mates and neighbors—often unmarked graves, but present all the same.

*Massive* and *local*—these were the predominant features of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe. This is still the lesser known part of the Holocaust. In other regions in Western and Central Europe, and partly also western Ukraine, the killings took place after transportation further away.

### **2/ What was the Holocaust?**

The Holocaust was the systematic extermination of Jews, or more precisely: the systematic state-sponsored murder of millions of people persecuted just for being Jews, by Germans and those assisting them, during the Second World War. The Holocaust prematurely ended the lives of almost six million men, women, and children. Thus at least three-quarters of the Jews who ever came within reach of Nazi Germany and its allies were killed.

The Holocaust additionally imposed suffering and trauma upon millions of others who somehow survived. And the Holocaust had a huge impact on still others, not Jews themselves, who had to live with the awful memories and losses.

The extermination was shockingly fast and large: In just twenty months, from June 1941 to February 1943, three quarters of the nearly six million were killed. It was also confined to a special part of Europe: until the spring of 1943, perhaps



nine-tenths of the victims died in the Central and Eastern European states that existed before 1939, including Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, and the Soviet Union.

Years of persecution had preceded the Holocaust. (An alternative perspective would be to say that the Holocaust itself began earlier than 1941, gradually, with non-lethal persecution.) No explanation of the extermination can omit these years. Beginning in the German Reich after Adolf Hitler became Chancellor in January 1933, this persecution was extended to the Saar region (in 1935), and then (from 1938) to annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia. During the Second World War, unleashed in Europe by two cruel and spiteful totalitarian regimes led by Hitler and Joseph Stalin, and in the context of German occupation, the Nazi anti-Jewish campaign radicalized into mass murder.

From mid-1941, the Nazis began systematic killing in Eastern Europe, and from 1942 the process began including victims from Western Europe. Persecution was also extended to regions in North Africa occupied by German and Italian armed forces.

### **3/ Can we really understand the Holocaust?**

On September 30, 1941, the second day of the Babi Yar massacre, a Kyivan called Iryna Khoroshunova wrote in her diary: “Some people are saying that the Jews are being shot with machine guns, being shot one and all. Others are saying that sixteen special trains have been prepared for them and they will be sent off. Whither? No one can answer. Only one thing is known for certain: all their papers, belongings, and food are being taken away from them. Then they’re driven to Babi Yar and there... I don’t know what happens there. The one thing I know is that something monstrous, something terrible, something unimaginable is happening, something that cannot be understood, realized, or explained.”

Iryna’s response was humane and does not surprise. Those of us living so many decades later can also conclude that the why and how of Babi Yar, indeed of the Holocaust as a whole, are beyond our reach. These events can seem to be incomprehensible. By responding in this way, we distance ourselves from something that disgusts us. But we must try to understand the Holocaust, one of the



best documented events in world history. It is no less comprehensible than other parts of the past. If we do not believe this, then we, as the American historian Peter Hayes has written, “capitulate to a belief in fate, divine purpose, or sheer randomness in human events” and “duck the challenge to our most cherished illusions about ourselves and each other.”

#### **4/ Why is it important to remember the Holocaust?**

This project is not only of intellectual interest, but also speaks to present-day and future interests. We must learn about the perpetrators and the circumstances under which their atrocities became possible. The setting and the background of the Holocaust are highly relevant to us today, because a country deemed civilized and obsessed with “race” and “enemies” carried out this utterly primitive act.

The story of millions of Jewish victims must be passed on to future generations. We must tell the story of their lives and explain the relationship between Jews and non-Jews in Kyiv, Ukraine, and beyond.

We must remember those who helped the victims. This narrative includes a framework for describing the responses of Jews and of attempts by Ukrainians and others to help Jews. This framework enables curators to make considered choices in selecting for presentation the histories of Jewish, Ukrainian, and other individuals and families.

And, painful as it may be, we must talk about the involvement—the sometimes deep involvement—of non-Germans and of locals in occupied countries in the Holocaust. No society where Jews were living during the Holocaust ultimately looks quite so principled or to have been active enough in resisting it. That is another reason why humanity should remember the Holocaust.

Holocaust remembrance helps in our thinking about good and evil, and about human capacities. Hopefully this knowledge, and the discussion about it, will enable Ukrainians and other citizens of the world to safeguard our societies from future crimes against humanity.

Debates over the meaning of this past, as with other parts of the past, are not a weakness. They are signs of vitality and strength. The open exchange of views is absolutely necessary for the sustenance and survival of democracy. The BYHMC



strongly supports Ukraine's endeavor to develop as a self-reflective, deliberative democracy based on the values of human rights and mutual respect.

### **5/ How does the narrative define “Europe,” “Ukraine,” its “neighbors,” and “Eastern Europe”?**

*Europe* is defined in geographic terms, which traditionally place it from the western coasts of Ireland and Portugal (10°W) to the Ural Mountains (60°E). Within this European geographic space, Ukraine lies mostly in the eastern half (Europe's middle line of longitude runs through Ukraine's western regions).

Public works of history and museums of the history of Germany, the United States, and other lands recognize that the country at issue, or parts of it, in the past had alternate names and borders, different from today's. But because those works and museums are meant to meet the needs felt by contemporaries – today's citizens of those countries, and foreign visitors with an interest in them, museum narratives cover the events within contiguous territories defined by current borders.

Therefore, in referring to *Ukraine*, the narrative means the territory of the state of Ukraine today, within its internationally recognized state borders. This is fully in line with global practices. (The narrative follows the United Nations General Assembly in considering Crimea, Sevastopol, and all of the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts to be part of Ukraine.)

At first sight this can seem self-evident – a matter of course. After all, Ukraine as an independent state since 1991 has not undergone territorial changes that have been internationally recognized. Before then, there was the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic, which was a dependent, non-autonomous entity within a larger state, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, that, paradoxically, after the Second World War became a separate member of the United Nations. Moreover, the borders of Soviet Ukraine were stable for decades, changing for the last time as long ago as 1954.

Still, it is also well known that before and soon after the Second World War, the Ukrainian Soviet Republic underwent very significant territorial changes. Various regions were not part of Soviet Ukraine before the Second World War: western





Volhynia, eastern Galicia, Transcarpathian (Zakarpatska) Oblast, Crimea, northern Bukovina, and southern Bessarabia.

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***Postwar Changes in the Border of Soviet Ukraine***

The addition of western Ukrainian lands to Soviet Ukraine was formalized in a border treaty between the Polish and Soviet governments in August 1945. In the process, the Przemysl region, which had been within Soviet Ukraine in 1939-1941, was given to Poland. In 1951, other, minor modifications of the Polish-Soviet border took place. The 1940 Soviet annexation of some Romanian territory received international recognition after the signing of the peace treaty with Romania in February 1947. Transcarpathia became part of Soviet Ukraine on the basis of a Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty in June 1945. Finally, in February 1954, Crimea officially was transferred from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to Soviet Ukraine.

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Defining Ukraine’s *neighbors* during the Holocaust can be done in two ways. One would be to look at which countries border on Ukraine today, which produces a list of seven states: Poland, Belarus, the Russian Federation, Moldova, Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia.

The BYHMC, however, opts for a flexible approach that also takes into consideration geopolitical ties during much of the century in which the Holocaust unfolded. In the narrative, the neighbors are Poland, Belarus, Russia (shorthand for the Russian Federation), Moldova, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. In shorthand, the BYHMC refers to them as *Eastern Europe*, although more exact would be the rendition “Eastern and part of Central Europe.” Hungary, excluded from the list of neighbors, still does appear in the narrative about Eastern Europe, because of its actions in Transcarpathia and the rest of Ukraine. Today’s Kaliningrad province of Russia, which used to be East Prussia, in this narrative is excluded from discussion of the Holocaust in occupied Russian regions.

As for the English and other spellings and versions of places in the narrative, it is very hard to be simultaneously fully consistent, historically accurate, and



accessible to the non-specialist. This issue is not closed yet and will be discussed along the way toward the exhibition.

## **6/ Why is the narrative about Ukraine and its neighbors?**

The historical developments easily justify inclusion into the narrative of the lands that surround Ukraine. To describe only events in today's Ukraine, when Germany and its ally Romania ruled adjacent regions in single administrative entities astride today's international borders, would distort the historical record. For one thing, the Reich Commissariat Ukraine included Polissia, a large area to the north of the Pripet River with forests, marshes, and cities such as Brest-Litovsk and Pinsk – all of which today are part of Belarus. For another, the territory occupied by Romania and named Transnistria included not only lands within Ukraine's contemporary borders, but also some of the territory of today's Moldova.

In addition, eastern Galicia cannot be understood without proper attention to the Polish lands west of the Bug that were under German rule, and which housed, for instance, the death camp in Belżec, where also many Galician Jews were murdered. Finally, many Ukrainian Jewish refugees were overtaken by the German occupiers further east, in Russian regions such as the North Caucasus, and were murdered there.

## **7/ Is the narrative only about mass shootings?**

Among all Jewish victims in Europe, about 2.6 million were murdered in death camps such as Auschwitz, Belzec (Belżec), Sobibór, and Treblinka. About 2.2 million were killed in mass shootings. About one million died in ghettos and other detention places. Inevitably, these are estimates and simplifications, which silently include a host of categories such as drowning, burning, burial alive, mobile gassing, hanging, and throwing people down mine shafts.

In Ukraine and its neighbors, most Jews died from bullets, but by no means all of the Jewish victims did. There were also Jews killed in other ways. In the Soviet Union according to its borders of 1946, for instance, of the area's about 2.5 million Jews who died from the Holocaust, almost 18 percent were *not* killed in mass shootings. For Ukraine, the percentage is as high as 25.



Most of these Jews died after deportation to death camps or in gas vans. Approximately 300,000 Jews from the Soviet Union (in its 1941 borders) were deported to camps and killed there, including 230,000 from eastern Galicia. Others were deported from Minsk in Belarus or Vilnius in Lithuania to Sobibór. Tens of thousands of still other Jewish victims were moved in the final phase of the war from the camps in the Baltic region to the camps in the Reich of Stutthof (near Gdańsk) and Dachau. If postwar borders are applied, the figure is even much higher, since at least three-quarters of Jewish victims from Carpathian Ukraine, 72,000, were murdered in the Auschwitz camp in the city of Oświęcim in Poland.

The German police also used so-called gas vans to murder its victims, specifically constructed vehicles, where the exhaustion fumes were used to kill the persons locked in the freight compartment, for example near Minsk in the Maly Trostenets camp and the adjacent forest. The gas van was also deployed in Kyiv during certain periods.

Tens of thousands of Jews died in ghettos and forced labor camps in Ukraine and its neighbors, from malnutrition, disease, or ill-treatment. In Odessa and other places, Jews were burned alive.

The mass shootings of Jews were specific to Eastern Europe, particularly in the occupied Soviet Union according to its (unrecognized) borders of early 1941, but the German authorities employed them not only there, but also further west and southwest. In occupied Serbia, the German military shot all male Jews. Some 200,000 Jews were shot in mass “Aktions” in occupied Poland, for example during the so-called “Harvest Festival” massacre in November 1943, when 40,000 Jews in three camps were shot in two days. German occupiers also shot masses of Jews in Poland, if they were unfit for travel, if no trains were available, and in remote places. Jews apprehended in hiding were generally shot, not deported. And all over Central and Eastern Europe, there were mass shootings of Jews during the final period of the war.

### **8/ Is the narrative only about Jews?**

The word “Holocaust” often carries a wider meaning than in the definition employed by the BYHMC. For instance, United Nations General Assembly Resolution No.



60/7, “Memory of the Holocaust,” of November 1, 2005, states that the Holocaust “led to the extermination of one third of Jews and an innumerable number of representatives of other minorities.” On Holocaust Memorial Day in January 2017, UN Secretary-General António Guterres gave a similar interpretation.

Even more common and longstanding is the implicit inclusion in Holocaust remembrance of the non-Jewish victims of Nazi Germany. Those victims were recalled, for instance, in the speech of UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan on January 24, 2005: “They treated Roma or Gypsies with the same extreme contempt as the Jews. Almost a quarter of a million Roma living in Europe were killed. Similarly, Poles and other Slavs, Soviet prisoners of war (POWs), as well as people with mental and physical disabilities, died cold-bloodedly. Different groups, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and homosexuals, as well as political opponents and cultural figures, were subjected to extremely cruel treatment.”

Although the narrative of the BYHMC employs a specific definition of the Holocaust, it also provides a lot of information about the non-Jewish victims of the horrendous German and Romanian mass killings. Thus, the memorial center by no means is a place only about Jewish suffering.

This is intellectually sound, in showing why the Holocaust was without precedent (“unique” is not the operative term). It is also done because historians agree that the persecution and murder of Jews was inextricably interwoven with the crimes against other groups like Soviet POWs, non-Jewish citizens of Poland, the Soviet Union, or Yugoslavia, non-Jewish concentration camp inmates, and people with mental or physical disabilities. For example, some Soviet POWs were gassed even though they were not Jewish. Jews were primary targets in German reprisal shootings; ghettos were exterminated under the cover of anti-partisan “Aktions”; and many camps and prisons held both Jews and non-Jews.

This inclusion is all the more relevant because the predominant method of murdering the Jews of Ukraine and its neighbors—the mass shootings—was also employed against others. As in the case of the region’s Jews, the mass shootings were also the major method for murdering non-Jewish civilians.



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***German Shootings in Nazi Europe***

Historians estimate that throughout Europe, German occupiers killed up to 1.5 million non-Jews by shooting. The long list began already in 1939, when German police started killing the so-called Polish intelligentsia in occupied Poland. Later they also shot Polish civilians in anti-partisan operations, and inmates of prisons and psychiatric institutions. Approximately 800,000 non-Jewish civilians were shot over the course of German anti-partisan warfare, first on Soviet and Yugoslav territory, from 1943 on in Greece and Italy, and finally also in Slovakia and France. In addition, some 150,000 Soviet POWs were shot by the German military or police, mostly in occupied Soviet territory. Roma who fell victim to the Nazis were also usually shot.

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Of slightly less than one million Roma believed to have been living in Europe before the war, the Germans and their Axis partners killed up to 200,000, deliberately and cruelly, and others were often sterilized. Alleged rationalizations and limited exceptions do not disprove that it was deliberate mass murder, fitting the UN definition of genocide. That is why these victims are prominent in national and international Holocaust commemorations.

The largest group of *German citizens* murdered were actually not the 165,000 German Jews killed, but people with mental or physical disabilities. Between 1939 and 1945, an estimated 300,000 of these people were murdered under the pretext of “euthanasia”: 216,000 in Germany and annexed Austria and 70,000 elsewhere in Europe.

In late 1941 and early 1942, approximately 400,000 Soviet POWs died every month. In all, between 2.8 and 3 million (over half of the total number of Soviet POWs) died in German hands, mostly from German-imposed hunger, and mostly (2 million) within the first year. Much of this history resembled the Holocaust, or was related to it. Many Germans considered these deaths desirable; the treatment was hateful and brutal; many were killed on death marches; much of the process went on in full view; and at least 50,000 of the victims were Jews.

The narrative also provides information about other non-Jewish target groups of Nazi killings: Non-Jewish political opponents, Poles, “Easterners,” and victims of



anti-partisan warfare. The narrative also notes the victims of German-imposed famine and deportation.

**9/ Does this project create an artificial distance between Jews, Ukrainians, and others?**

Every effort is made to avoid the unconscious application of Nazi views and terminologies about “Jews,” “half-castes,” and “race.” In referring to Holocaust victims, the general line is one of speaking of Jews, or of Ukrainians (or others) of Jewish descent, as is appropriate, and with the understanding that those people may have had multiple identities.

An extremely accurate narrative about the Holocaust would always place the word “Jew” in quotation marks. The Nazis and other persecutors never consistently defined Jews and instead, simply declared certain people to be Jews. On many occasions these people had not done so themselves, or organized Jewish communities had not recognized them as Jewish.

However, repetition of quotation marks is contrary to all respected forms of Holocaust remembrance, quickly looks pedantic, and hardly can be said to promote understanding.

The issue of ethnic labeling is equally delicate in references to others. Ukrainians, for instance, are identified here as people who identify themselves as Ukrainians mostly because of their linguistic, religious, and cultural characteristics: they spoke Ukrainian or mixtures of Ukrainian and Russian or Ukrainian and Polish; they were Orthodox or Greek Catholic; and/or they followed Ukrainian folk customs.

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***Other Definitions of Ukrainians***

Many people were (also) Ukrainian according to the obligatory “nationality” line in prewar Soviet identity papers. Today, Ukrainian law states that all citizens of the country are members of the Ukrainian political nation. And the present-day Constitution of Ukraine says that all citizens of the country are Ukrainians. Large parts of public memory about Ukraine tend to ignore non-Jews who were not Ukrainians.

It would be mistaken to generalize, explicitly or implicitly, and always to call providers of help and rescue (or, conversely, those who cooperated with the Germans)



Ukrainians. And it would be mistaken not to mention an ethnic background (Ukrainian, Russian, etc.) for such people if that can be established with some degree of certainty.

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**10/ Which other concepts does the narrative use, and why?**

The word *Holocaust* derives from the ancient Greek term for a religious sacrifice (“offering totally consumed by fire”). Besides Holocaust, there are other terms, such as, *Katastrofa* (in Russian), *Khurbn* (in Yiddish), and *Shoah* (in Hebrew and French, for instance; also has a religious connotation). However, much speaks in favor of the word *Holocaust*: its use by the United Nations, by organizations such as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, and by the wider public. And this has a long history: used only rarely during the event itself, it came into use in North America at the end of the 1960s, in Western Europe in the 1980s, and then worldwide in the 1990s.

The term *extermination* is far from ideal, because the word is still used in completely different contexts. However, there are two good reasons not to discard it completely here. One, it has wide currency, and second, those using it today do not mean to obfuscate the event or to dehumanize its victims—on the contrary.

The authors of this narrative do consider *Final Solution (of the Jewish Question)* an inappropriate term if quotation marks are not added. It is true that from 1941 it lost its prior ambiguity and began to mean mass murder. However, using it without qualification simply repeats the euphemistic language of the murderers.

The narrative also has the term “*liquidation*,” in quotation marks; this term is commonly used by Holocaust scholars for the violent eviction of Jews from ghettos (a term itself undefined, then and also in this narrative) so as to abolish the latter. The word “*Aktion*” or “*action*,” also in quotation marks, can refer to a an ultra-violent eviction as well, or to a mass shooting.

The narrative shuns the terms *executions* and *penal measures*, even though German and non-German sources of the time use them. This avoidance is because these terms imply that some kind of legal process took place.

The term *perpetrators* is used, even though it is not optimal because the term, derived from the study and practice of law, can seem to let non-state active



persons off the hook, and to put the spotlight only on those clearly responsible for violent acts.

In describing the German regime of those years, the concept is National Socialism, and the actors are called Germans and Nazis. The authors of the narrative consider the terms *fascism* and *fascists* inaccurate and unhelpful in describing German perpetrators. National Socialism was a movement of the fascist type, but many features, in particular the Holocaust, make it distinct from the larger fascist phenomenon. Moreover, in public life, *fascist* has gained a very wide meaning.

Another well-known concept is *collaboration*, which in serious historical scholarship refers to aiding in the war effort of the enemy occupier by serving in its military, police, or administration. The problem is that the term is often associated with “treason,” a violation of a loyalty. This ignores the self-understanding of those “collaborators” who considered themselves servants of their state. A good example of this problem is the stance of those members of Baltic societies who felt loyal to their independent statehood that had been abolished in 1940.

Although public debate keeps using the term “collaboration,” using it in this narrative would seem to have more drawbacks than benefits. It is possible to do without the term in references to acts of cooperation and those engaged in them.

In explaining *antisemitism*, which is such a big part of the story of the Holocaust, the narrative follows the working definition used by the IHRA (which as of early 2018 has been officially adopted by eight countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Israel, Lithuania, Germany, North Macedonia, Romania, and the United Kingdom). This definition speaks of “a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.” Again following the IHRA, as well as many institutions, scholars, and usage in Ukrainian and other non-English languages, this narrative employs the unhyphenated spelling. The older English spelling *anti-Semitism* leaves room for confusion, in suggesting there is an opposite entity called *Semitism*.





The narrative employs the term *Second World War*, which, according to common practice, it considers to have begun in September 1939 (even though Japan had been at war with China since 1937). During that month, Germany and then the Soviet Union invaded Poland, and soon France, the UK, and the British Commonwealth declared war on Germany.

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## **JEWES IN EASTERN EUROPE**

### **The Jews**

In the year 1900, there were about 10.6 million Jews in the world; in 1939, 16.7 million. In Europe, in the late 1930s, there were 10 million Jews. Over 2.7 million of these lived in the present-day territory of Ukraine in the middle of 1941.

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### ***Estimating the Number of Jews in Ukraine in mid-1941***

According to the 1939 Soviet census, in the Ukrainian SSR plus the Crimea there were 1,598,228 Jews. According to the 1931 Polish census, in the regions of Lviv, Drohobych, Stanislav, Ternopil, Volyn, and Rivne there were 714,199 Jews. Taking into account a natural increase and the arrival of refugees from central Poland, the number would be approximately 880,000 by mid-1941.

According to the 1930 Romanian census, 103,000 Jews lived in the Chernivtsi and Izmil regions. Taking into account a natural increase, the number would be approximately 123,000 by mid-1941. According to the 1941 Hungarian census, 101,854 Jews lived in the Transcarpathian region.

Therefore, in the territory of Ukraine according to today's border, in mid-1941 there were approximately 2,705,000 Jews.

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After the Holocaust, in 1945, the world had only 11 million Jews left. Today, there are 15 million or more, the vast majority of them living outside Europe—in Israel and the United States. Most others live in seventeen other countries that each have 18,000 or more Jews. Those countries include Hungary and, in Eastern Europe, Ukraine and the Russian Federation. All other eastern European countries have fewer Jews.

There are many definitions of Jews. The broad definition employed in this narrative is persons who considered themselves Jews, or were considered by others as Jews. Before the Holocaust, the basis for these considerations varied a

great deal, generally along an east-west gradient. In Eastern Europe, where most Jews were traditional, spoke a distinct language, and lived in dense concentrations, Jews and non-Jews alike tended to see Jewishness as primarily religious, but increasingly also began considering Jews as a national group. Still further east, in the Soviet Union, law even codified Jewishness as a national category. In Germany, meanwhile, Jewishness was both a religious tradition and a matter of ancestry. Further west, many citizens of Jewish origin considered Jewishness an exclusively religious category—Judaism—within a larger whole, such as the French people.

Before the Holocaust, Europe's Sephardi Jews were living in France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Italy, the Russian Soviet republic (Crimea), Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey, for instance in Thessaloniki and Istanbul. These Jews descended from Jews who had been expelled from Spain in 1492, and many spoke a Romance language called Ladino or Judeo-Spanish (besides also Judeo-Greek and Judeo-Italian). In the Caucasus lived Mountain Jews, whose ancestors had come from ancient Persia.

Most Jews in Eastern Europe were Ashkenazim, however, who came from Germanic Central Europe and spoke Yiddish, a Germanic language with Hebrew and Slavic elements. In the Middle Ages, fleeing persecution, these Ashkenazi Jews had moved east, mostly to Poland and then to the east of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth—today's Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, and Ukraine.

Thousands died or fled (sometimes temporarily) from Ukraine during the Cossack revolt against Polish rule led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky in the mid-seventeenth century. That was when, in Ukraine, Hasidism emerged. This new form of Judaism was less about the traditional study of Jewish texts than about the immanence and worship of God in the material world, and a central role for the rebbe (tsaddik).

One of the major centers of Ashkenazi Jewry was Galicia, in the Habsburg Empire. Ashkenazi Jews also lived in Bessarabia, Bukovina, Slovakia, Subcarpathian Rus', and the Habsburg capitals of Vienna and Budapest.

To escape poverty (many Jews barely survived as peddlers) and pogroms, a mass migration of Ashkenazi Jews began from Eastern Europe to Western Europe and the United States.

## **Jews in the Russian Empire**

From the late eighteenth century, most of the Jews in Eastern Europe fell under the Russian tsars, who barred those living in the Russian-controlled Kingdom of Poland and what was called the Pale of Settlement from the empire's interior. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Pale included fifteen gubernias: Vilna, Kovno, Grodno, Minsk, Mogilev, Vitebsk, Volhynia, Podolia, Kiev (without the city of Kyiv), Chernigov, Poltava, Ekaterinoslav, Kherson, Tauride, and Bessarabia.

Quite unlike the Polish authorities that had invited the Jews centuries earlier, the Russian imperial authorities did not officially recognize Jewish cultural and legal institutions but strove for the full integration of Jews. In the end, they did more to restrict the Jews than to emancipate them. In the 1860s, for instance, Jews (and Poles) were forbidden from owning any land in some gubernias, such as Kiev and Vilna.

There were violent attacks on Jews in the Russian Empire, called pogroms. Those that erupted after the assassination of Emperor Alexander II in 1881, the government implicitly blamed on Jewish "exploitation" of the "native population." Thus, the Jews were accused of creating their own misfortune.

In a pogrom in Chişinău (Kishinev) during Easter 1903, nearly fifty Jews were murdered. When the Tsar offered freedom in a Manifesto on October 17, 1905, Jews stood accused of defaming the trinity of Orthodoxy, Tsar, and the Russian people. Pogroms ensued, the deadliest ones taking place in Odessa, Rostov-on-Don, and Ekaterinoslav (Dnipro), with, respectively, some 400, about 150, and 95 killed.

Moreover, the government tolerated far-right organizations (which it sometimes funded); ignored antisemitic propaganda; refused to offer financial support to pogrom victims; and hardly prosecuted pogromists.

During World War I, which brought the collapse of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, the bloodiest clashes of the war took place in Galicia, where the frontline shifted back and forth. Civilians suffered greatly in what one observer of the lootings, expulsions, and killings (the Yiddish writer S. Ansky from Belarus) called Galicia's "destruction" (*khurban*). Ukrainians, the majority population of the region, faced arrest, deportation, and lethal violence by the retreating Austro-



Hungarian army, the Russian army, and an anti-Ukrainian Tsarist occupation regime. The Russian authorities deported thousands of Galician Jews and Germans east, as alleged enemies.

### **A Sense of Crisis**

In Jewish lore, several cities in Europe during the 1920s were beloved, or functioned, as “new Jerusalems.” These were, in Western Europe—Amsterdam; in the Balkans—Thessaloniki; in the north in Lithuania—Vilnius; and in the Soviet Union—Minsk and other cities. In the 1920s, Minsk and Kharkiv were the main Soviet centers of Yiddish culture. The Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic, of which Minsk was the capital, until 1938 even had Yiddish as one of its four official state languages.

In this decade, for the first time ever in Jewish history, every European country in which Jews resided recognized them as citizens. Paradoxically, thinking about where exactly Jews belonged in the larger society—an issue long known as the so-called “Jewish question”—became an obsession, for Europe’s Jews and non-Jews alike. Jews as Jews faced two key problems. One was concern about how they viewed themselves; the other problem came from the non-Jewish world.

### **Jews: Numerical Decline, Secularization, Acculturation**

In interwar Europe, the Jewish birthrate was in decline, emigration of large numbers out of Europe was ongoing, and both marriage outside the Jewish community and the abandonment of religious practice were on the rise. Various historians see little sign of rejuvenation at this time. They conclude that Jews opted not for a secular Jewish identity but for acculturation to non-Jewish culture, even assimilation.

The Jewish vernacular languages definitely were fading away. In the Soviet Union until the late 1930s, the state did more to promote Yiddish education than any government in history had done. But it merely delayed its decline, as Jewish parents and children realized that, given the absence of higher learning or jobs in Yiddish, not that language, but the Russian language was the best vehicle for success in Soviet society.



## **Non-Jews: Aversion to Jewish Emancipation**

More and more Jews—often more literate than non-Jewish society at large—took advantage of the new equality. But they soon found the path to assimilation and integration blocked by jealousy, suspicion, and hostility. In Germany and across Europe as a whole, antisemitism reached a feverish pitch and scope.

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### ***Defining Antisemitism***

Antisemitism is not necessarily a government policy, but a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward them. Its rhetorical and physical manifestations strike Jewish individuals, non-Jews perceived to be Jewish, non-Jews linked to Jews, and/or their property. Antisemitism is also directed toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities. It employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.

Often Jews are blamed for conspiring to harm humanity. There can be allegations about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions. Antisemitism can also hold Jews as a people responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews. Antisemitic discrimination is the denial to Jews of opportunities or services available to others.

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Antisemitism had emerged well before Christianity, and became embedded in European Christian culture from the early Middle Ages. Jews, blamed for the death of Jesus, were considered pernicious and dangerous for Christian society. They were tightly restricted to specific professions and often kept in separate quarters, which after the 16th century were often called ghettos.

During the Middle Ages, most European Jews lived in the western parts of Germany. Due to pogroms and massacres, from the 13th century many of them moved to Poland, which invited them with privileges to settle there. Several other countries, but also individual towns, expelled all their Jewish inhabitants. In the early modern age Jews were still on the margins of society; only a few, exceptional families made their way into the business elites.



Only during the late 18th and early 19th centuries did the position of European Jews start to change. In Central and Western Europe Jews strongly participated in the upsurge of the new bourgeois societies, both in the growing industrial economy and in education.

Almost in parallel, anti-Jewish sentiment rose within society and acquired a new quality. Among the Christian majority there remained the old religious and economic prejudice, but now the Jews were also made responsible for all the consequences of the modern world viewed as negative: secularization, monopolies in big business, the destruction of traditional cultural values, and socialism.

This new anti-Jewish drive came to be called *antisemitism*. It mixed with racism, considering the Jews to be a cultural or biological race, and with nationalism. Radical nationalists saw the Jews as a cosmopolitan force, as enemies of their own nation building.

Around the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, antisemitic organizations and even political parties surfaced in several European countries, including but not only in Germany. And even the most far-reaching ideological element of antisemitism can be dated to that period: the allegation that “World Jewry” was conspiring to take over the globe. Thus in this sense, prior to the First World War all elements of modern antisemitism were already in existence.

Yet after World War I, modern antisemitism became full-blown. The Jews were blamed for attempted and actual revolutions and for stabbing Germany in the back; and racial antisemitism became a widespread genre. While democratic advances had lifted restrictions on Jews, for example, in the former Russian Empire, antisemitic violence was on the rise in Hungary, Poland, and Ukraine.

### **Jews in Politics**

In democratic societies, Jews participated in national politics as individuals. In Eastern and Central Europe west of the Soviet Union, the main political groups were peasant parties, clerical parties, and nationalist parties. All of these, at the very least, did not welcome Jews. One of the alternatives appealed to Jews, but by no means to all: Zionism, predicated on the notion that Jews would never be fully accepted in Europe. The Zionist movement promoted and supported Jewish political



independence through a homeland or state in the lands defined as the historic Land of Israel, at that time within Palestine, a former Ottoman territory transferred by the League of Nations to the United Kingdom to be ruled as a mandate.

The other remaining political orientation offering acceptance to Jews was the left. In Germany, Karl Marx and other thinkers of Jewish origin (Moses Hess and Ferdinand Lasalle) actually had been among the founders of the socialist movement. In the Russian Empire, Jews had been prominent among the early leaders of the Social Democratic Workers' Party, especially the Menshevik wing. Because in that empire, Jews (like ethnic Germans) were more urban and literate than the Slavic populations, but were restricted in where they could live, their profession, and their access to education, it was not unsurprising that some decided to engage in revolutionary activity. In the interwar period, Jews in Eastern and Central Europe were relatively prominent and numerous in socialist and communist parties.

### **Jews in Eastern Europe until 1939 West of the Soviet Union**

The variety in Eastern Europe of Jewish life and of political and social challenges posed by non-Jewish society requires a look at individual countries and regions. Chosen here, as representative examples, are Subcarpathian Rus' (Transcarpathia), Romania, Lithuania, and Poland.

Subcarpathian Rus'. From a Jewish perspective, compared to many other countries in the region, community life was least modern, and the challenges posed by the state, the least disruptive, in Subcarpathian Rus'. Previously ruled by Hungary, it now belonged to Czechoslovakia. In this region marked by poverty and unemployment, most Jews were Hasidic and spoke Yiddish, and there was little assimilation or intermarriage. The region's main Jewish center was the city of Mukachevo, where 43 percent of the population was Jewish. Resentment of the Jews' dominant position in trade likely existed, but there is little evidence of deep-rooted antisemitism among their East Slavic neighbors, generally called Rusyns or Ruthenians. Subcarpathian Rus', today's Transcarpathian Oblast of Ukraine, was ruled as an autonomous province, and the state did not systematically discriminate against Jews.





Romania. In the aftermath of World War I, successor states to the collapsed Russian and Habsburg empires faced foreign-imposed Minorities Treaties, which ethno-nationalists (as distinct from civic nationalists) there deeply resented. The state of Romania was just one of several thus forced to grant civil rights to non-Christians such as the Jews. After the war, Romania also ruled newly annexed regions with Jewish inhabitants: Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transylvania. While in the “Old Kingdom” (Romania within its “old,” pre-1918 borders), a Jewish middle class supported integration of Jews into Romanian society, the Jews in Bessarabia and Bukovina were at a greater distance from Romanian culture. In formerly Russian-ruled Bessarabia, they were mainly Yiddish-speaking and Hasidic, and often had been educated in Russian schools; in the former Habsburg province of Bukovina, Jews were often close to German culture, especially in Cernăuți (Czernowitz); and Jews from Transylvania were often educated in Hungarian.

Under the influence of these Jewish communities outside the Old Kingdom, Jewish pride and nationalism in Romania gained in strength. In the second half of the 1930s, Jewish community leaders created a Central Council of Romanian Jews, led by Wilhelm Filderman. They felt the need because of the threat posed by Nazi Germany and because democracy in Romania itself was collapsing.

Romanian antisemitism became intense and attacked most sharply the Jews of the new regions, who were accused of treason (on behalf of Hungary) or Communism. Organized Christian antisemitism, in the form of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, later renamed the Iron Guard, became Europe’s third largest fascist movement after Italy’s fascists and Germany’s national socialists. Also antisemitic was the National Christian Party.

Jews in Romania now faced verbal and physical antisemitic violence, and the onset—or rather, return—of legal discrimination and segregation: Jews in prominent economic positions were forced to accept ethnic Romanians as co-managers.

Lithuania. In Lithuania, 154,000 Jews (1923) were the largest group (7.6 percent) after the ethnic Lithuanians. The predominantly Polish-Jewish area of Wilno/Vilnius was conquered by Poland in 1920 (and not returned to Lithuania until 1939, with Soviet assistance). Jewish community life was diverse and strong. Its

status of autonomy was supported by a special Ministry of Jewish Affairs. Jewish education received state funding.

But democracy in independent Lithuania eroded, the autonomous status was lost in the early 1920s and in 1926—like in Poland—an authoritarian regime was installed by a *putsch*. Even though ethnic Lithuanian nationalists pushed for measures to stop what they considered economic competition from Jewish merchants and artisans, however, no antisemitic laws were adopted. It was not the state, but society that turned more and more antisemitic in the second half of the 1930s.

Poland. In the Republic of Poland, Jewish autonomy was off the table from the start. In this state, revived after the partitions of the late eighteenth century, there were 2.8 million Jews, over ten percent of the population. They lived mostly in towns and cities, and engaged mostly in trade and industry, all over the country (unlike Poland's largest non-Polish group, the Ukrainians, who lived mostly in eastern Galicia and Volhynia).

Jews had many self-help organizations, such as social services departments and credit unions, which somewhat alleviated the widespread poverty. If Jews emigrated, they mostly went to Germany.

Although not legally recognized, in reality Jews as a community enjoyed a great deal of autonomy. There were Jewish schools (although most Jews attended Polish public schools), yeshivas (schools for the study of the Talmud and Torah), a Yiddish Scientific Institute (YIVO, in Wilno), countless Jewish periodicals in Yiddish, Hebrew, and Polish (such as *Chwila* in Lviv), and Yiddish films. In addition, among young Jews there was a lively subculture and a number of youth movements of various political hues.

The three main political orientations among the Jews were socialism (the Bund), Orthodox Judaism (Agudas Yisroel), and Zionism. Whatever tactics these three political groups chose, their joint goal—an absence of discrimination by the state, inspired by the diversity in religion and ethnicity of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth—was not attained. This was because many of their fellow-citizens wanted Poland to be a nation state, where only the titular group, ethnic Poles, enjoyed full rights. Some Ukrainians in Galicia, discriminated as Ukrainians,

concluded that violence was required. Their Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), founded in 1929, strove toward an independent Ukraine. The Polish government responded harshly.

The discrimination of Jews, Ukrainians, and other non-ethnic Poles intensified after the death of Marshal and de facto President Józef Piłsudski in 1935. Antisemites, based among other places in the large National Democratic Party (or Endecja), campaigned to reduce the number of Jewish university students. The number of such Jewish students declined by half in five years, and those enrolled were harassed: Jewish students were often forced to sit in the back on “ghetto benches.” Physical violence against Jews grew, culminating in several pogroms and clashes. For instance, in March 1936, farmers attending a fair in the overwhelmingly Jewish town of Przytyk rioted when the police tried to arrest a man who was calling for an economic boycott of Jews—but then faced an armed Jewish self-defense group. The overall result, besides demolition and injuries, were the deaths of a non-Jewish Pole and then of two Jews.

In 1938, when many Jews with Polish citizenship fled Austria after the German annexation (Anschluss), the Polish government and parliament made a move that was implicitly antisemitic and was widely seen as such at the time: Polish citizens staying abroad for more than five years, they quickly determined, could be stripped of their citizenship.

### **The Ukrainian Struggle for Independence from 1917**

After the collapse of the Romanov monarchy in February 1917, the Russian Provisional Government abolished all restrictions on national and religious minorities. On June 23, 1917, the Ukrainian parliament in Kyiv, the Central Rada (Council), declared Ukraine an autonomous entity within the Russian Republic. Jewish political parties and organizations held 50 of the 822 seats in the Rada and five of 55 places in its executive organ, the Little Rada. In July, a position for Jewish Affairs was created; initially a vice-secretary, upgraded to secretary and minister, in November and January, respectively.

On November 20, 1917, almost immediately after the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia, the Rada declared a Ukrainian National Republic (UNR), and



soon, in the Fourth Universal dated January 22, 1918, it declared state independence. The government requested German assistance, and the German army arrived.

But meanwhile, in Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine, a Congress of Soviets (councils) of workers', soldiers', and peasants' deputies established another government, subordinate to Vladimir Lenin's Bolsheviks in Petrograd (St Petersburg).

### **War and Pogroms, 1918-21**

Now a fight between the Red Army and the UNR army began. The conflict then grew in scope as other combatants joined: the monarchist Whites (Volunteer Army), the Anarchists, the "Greens" (with no distinct political outlook), and the Polish army.

In the years 1918-21, there were an estimated 1,200 pogroms in Ukraine, the key battleground of what is often called the "Russian Civil War." Estimates of the death count range between 50,000 and 200,000. About a quarter of these dead were female. Some 200,000 other Jews were seriously wounded. An estimated 50,000 women were raped, and property was looted or destroyed.

A power vacuum and anarchy had traditionally been the most dangerous situation for Jewish civilians. But the mortality figures of 1918-21 suffice to make these pogroms stand out compared to their predecessors, and in need of additional explanatory factors. Every town with Jews was affected, and many of the pogroms were wholesale slaughters irrespective of age or gender. Anti-Jewish aggression of this scope and nature had no precedent in modern Europe.

The first pogroms of the period were carried out in April 1918, the most severe one taking place in Hlukhiv (Sumy Oblast), where over 100 Jews died. These early pogroms were carried out by members of the Red Army, who accused the Jews of being counterrevolutionaries shooting the Red Army in the back and welcoming the Germans. Later, Red Army men perpetrated pogroms in the village of Rossava near Bohuslav (late February-early March 1919) and in Uman (March 1919). The First Cavalry Army commanded by the Russian Semen Budenny perpetrated pogroms in 1920 during its retreat from the Polish front. (The Bolshevik

leadership attempted to fight the antisemitism in the Red Army with a mixture of propaganda and repression.)

In May-July 1919, after the Ukrainian government led by Symon Petliura had to move west ahead of the Bolshevik Red Army, no one had control over Ukraine. Those who disliked Jews used them as sources of loot and as scapegoats—for the Bolshevik advance, the war, and the economic collapse. Multiple participants, from ordinary peasants to right-wing militias, wanted to rob Jews and came to believe that massacring innocent Jews would solve their problems. The pogroms of 1918-21 therefore originated in greed and, above all, antisemitism.

### **The Ukrainian Government and its Enemies**

Another important factor was that the nascent governments vying for authority failed to act decisively to prevent or punish the pogroms. Instead, they seemed to yield, or actually yielded, to the anti-Jewish prejudices among their troops.

Among the Ukrainian leaders, the inexperienced Symon Petliura, fearful of losing all authority over his disintegrating armed forces, accepted compromises—relations with men such as Otaman Il'ko Struk—that were at odds with his morals and political leanings. Ukrainian leaders did speak out against the pogroms: Volodymyr Vynnychenko in January 1919; the Directorate's "Central Information Bureau" in February 1919; Borys Martos in April 1919; and, after numerous appeals by Jewish political representatives and community leaders, Symon Petliura himself in August 1919.

In late May 1919, the Council of National Ministers and the Directorate (Petliura) created the Special Investigative Commission to Study the Anti-Jewish Pogrom Events, a body meant to collect information and then bring the perpetrators to justice. In mid-August, it de facto became a state agency. It brought one investigation to a conclusion, concerning the city of Proskuriv (Khmelnysky), where about 1,600 people (one tenth of the Jewish population) had been killed within four hours. The main perpetrator of the pogrom there was executed. In July 1919, the Directorate set aside funds to aid pogrom victims, and it doubled the amount in October.



Many members of the White movement's Volunteer Army were so antisemitic that killing Jews either meant nothing to them, or was felt to be a crucial component of their anti-Bolshevik struggle. Several directives by the Whites threatened pogromists and insisted on the defense of the Jews, but, unlike in the case of the Ukrainian government statements, they were mostly insincere.

There were also non-military perpetrators: groups of independent local peasants with young and charismatic leaders, using not guns but sabres and other cold weapons. One of the pogroms of the latter category took place in July 1919 in the town of Slovechno in the Zhytomyr region; 72 local Jews were killed.

### **Other Consequences of the Pogroms**

Jews created self-defense units, and increasingly began to believe they would be safest under the Bolsheviks. Jews also tried to save their lives through flight in various directions. Most migrated between towns in Ukraine, but a large minority, some 200,000, fled westward to Poland, and then on the Americas or Palestine. As a result, many Jews who remained in their country of birth in the 1920s had global family networks. They could spend foreign currency in special hard-currency stores (Torgsin), where produce and goods were sold at high prices. (Later, official Soviet paranoia about spying reduced the ties, so that by 1941, few Soviet Jews had regular contacts with emigrated relatives.)

The pogroms also meant that when the Second World War broke out, local extermination of Jews was a pattern in living memory in Ukraine. Unlike in regions that the Nazis deemed more civilized, such killing had taken place recently there, and hence it was *not* as “unthinkable” as further west. Among Jews and Ukrainians alike, there was a memory of murderous banditry against Jews (and other groups such as Mennonites). And there was also a living memory of German occupants who did *not* engage in anti-Jewish violence.

### **The Myth of “Judeo-Bolshevism”**

From 1917, an antisemitic stereotype spread all over Europe: “Judeo-Bolshevism.” (The Polish form became “Żydokomuna.”) This concept held that Bolshevism (Communism) was merely an instrument in the hands of “world Jewry” to maintain a

reign of terror over non-Jewish people, or even to exterminate them. The “Judeo-Bolshevism” stereotype was powerful as it helped to explain baffling events and to “externalize,” declare as fully alien, the Bolshevik and Communist movements and regimes. The myth also served to frame and seemingly justify anti-Jewish violence as a matter of self-defense. Being attacked as an ethnicity, as a nation, by Soviet terror and deportations, a counter-attack could target Jews, the alleged masterminds behind the Soviet regime.

In the regions occupied by the Soviet Union in 1939-40, the stereotype of “Judeo-Bolshevism” gained strength when Jews suddenly became much more present and thus visible in state functions than before.

Jews had been suppressed in the Russian Empire until March 1917. Only now, finally, equal rights were granted to them. Many Jews—though, it must be emphasized, far from all—hoped for emancipation through left-leaning parties and movements. But all Jewish political parties disapproved of the Bolshevik coup of November 1917.

Jews became visible in parts of Lenin’s and the first decade (until the late 1930s) of Stalin’s regime. Between 1919 and 1921, about a quarter of the members of the Bolshevik Party’s Central Committee were of Jewish origin. Prominent leaders of Jewish origin such as Leon Trotsky made it difficult for many to disassociate Bolsheviks from the vast majority of other Jews. In 1922, only 4 percent of the members of the 24,000-strong Bolshevik Party were Jews. Both within and beyond the Soviet Union founded that year, most Communists were not Jews. And conversely, most Jews were not Communists.

In the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s, the number of Jews in the Soviet political police, the OGPU-NKVD, grew. The number of Jews peaked in 1936 at 43 persons (39 percent) in the upper levels of the NKVD. By 1941, only ten Jews (5.5 percent) remained there. By then, the central NKVD was dominated by ethnic Russians (84 percent), followed at a distance by Ukrainians (6 percent) and Jews (5 percent—189 persons). Ultimately, this math involves such low numbers of people as to be meaningless when thinking about the larger national groups of Jews—or of Russians, of Ukrainians, or others.



## **Jews in the Soviet Union, 1922-41**

According to Soviet censuses, over 2.6 million Jews lived in the Soviet Union in 1926, and over 3 million in 1939. At both times, over 1.5 million were living in Soviet Ukraine.

**Table 1.1. Jews in the Soviet Union, 1926 and 1939 censuses**

	1926	1939	1939 as % of 1926
Soviet Ukraine	1,574,411	1,532,776	97.4
Soviet Belarus	407,059	375,092	92.1
RSFSR	585,295	956,599	163.4
USSR as whole	2,672,499	3,028,538	113.3

The legal restrictions on Jews had been lifted in February 1917, but Lenin's "War Communism" struck them hard. Banks and large industry were nationalized; industrial management was centralized; private enterprise and exchange were banned; and trade became a state monopoly. Those employing hired labor, receiving income from sources other than employment, or working as private merchants lost their political rights. In each category, Jews were predominant, so many Jews in small towns (shtetls) who had private businesses as merchants, businessmen, and artisans, as well as rabbis, became "disenfranchised" (*lishentsy*). In the mid-1920s, 45 percent of those disenfranchised in Soviet Ukraine were Jews. They were evicted from their houses and apartments, and their children were not accepted to high schools and universities. The overall result was poverty among small-town Jews.

This was one reason why many Jews migrated to the cities. Moscow, Kyiv, Leningrad, Odessa, and Kharkiv each had a Jewish population of over 100,000 by 1939, and together one third of all Soviet Jews lived in these five cities. Kharkiv, outside the former Pale of Settlement, attracted many migrants because it was the capital of Soviet Ukraine until 1934.



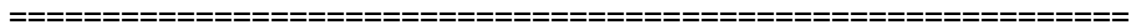


**Table 1.2. Jews in Selected Soviet cities, 1939**

Moscow	250,181
Kyiv	224,236
Leningrad	201,181
Odesa	200,961
Kharkiv	130,250
Total	1,007,170

### **The Bolsheviks and the Jews**

The Bolshevik leaders were internationalists who dreamt about a World Revolution and thought that over time, all nations would disappear. They presented themselves as anti-antisemitic, but also denied the idea of a Jewish nation, because Jews did not have their own language, territory, and economy. Stalin called them “a people without a future, whose very existence still has to be proved.” However, Jews like others were considered a “nationality.”



### ***Ethnicity in Prewar Soviet Life***

In the Soviet Union, ethnic identity and the official category of *nationality* (which had nothing to do with citizenship) were an ambiguous and complicated set of issues. The nationality of persons aged sixteen and above was printed on all Soviet “passports” (the name for urban identity documents, which had nothing to do with travel), introduced in 1932, and birth certificates.

*Nationality* derived from the background of the parents: if both parents were registered as, for instance, Jews in their identity documents, a child would be a Jew as well. However, if parents had two different nationalities, they could choose one of them for their child. For instance, if the father was Ukrainian in his passport and the mother Jewish, their child could have either Jewish or Ukrainian nationality--to be chosen by the parents or even by the official, who often chose the nationality of the child’s father, without asking. There were parents or adults who changed a documented nationality by bribing the state officers responsible for inscribing it in official documents.



Still, Jewish first names, patronymics, and surnames, were usually quite different from those of Ukrainians, Russians, Poles, or Romanians.

Soviet citizens understood national identity as the sum of ethnic, linguistic, and religious specifications. One could find, for instance, Orthodox Christian persons with all their documents certifying them as Jews. In some cases, people combined in their everyday lives the customs of Judaism and the larger Soviet society without any apparent contradiction. There were also acculturated Jews, especially in big cities.

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From the first days of their rule the Bolshevik authorities began to eliminate Jewish (as well as non-Jewish) political parties and organizations, as well as independent Jewish communal and religious institutions. They were especially hostile toward Zionist organizations. The Bolsheviks banned the use of Hebrew in 1919, and the last legal Jewish party, the Communist Po'alei Zion (Workers of Zion), in 1928.

To spread their propaganda on "Jewish Street," while combatting other Jewish political orientations, the regime created the Jewish Commissariat (1918-23) and, within the Communist Party apparatus, Jewish Sections (Evseksii, 1918-30); and promoted Yiddish secular culture. The Soviet Union's leading Yiddish newspaper was *The Truth* (Der emes); Soviet Ukraine's was the daily *The Star* (Der Shtern), with a circulation of 12,000.

In the second half of the 1930s Soviet policy toward national groups, including Jews, suddenly shifted. Instead of encouraging the development of the various national cultures of the multinational population of the Soviet Union, the authorities decided to emphasize the dominant Russian culture, and the cultures of titular nationalities at the expense of all others and those with ethnic territory beyond the Soviet state border in particular, such as Poles, Latvians, and Germans. The repression of Jewish culture took place simultaneously with the persecution of Ukrainian and Polish cultures.

## **The Issue of Antisemitism in the Soviet Union**

The Bolsheviks declared antisemitism to be a remnant of the tsarist regime and were certain that it would disappear from socialist society. Instead, it increased at the grassroots level. In response, in 1927–1932, fifty-six books were published in the Soviet Union that denounced antisemitism. Antisemites were afraid to attack Jews openly, as one could be accused of counter-revolutionary activity and persecuted as an “enemy of the people.”

In 1936, condemning fascism for its hostility toward Jews, government head Viacheslav Molotov cited a previously unpublicized comment by Stalin: “antisemitism, like any form of racial chauvinism, is the most dangerous vestige of cannibalism.” Molotov added that “brotherly feelings for the Jewish people” would “define our attitudes toward antisemites and antisemitic atrocities wherever they occur.”

When in the 1930s the Soviet nationality policy shifted, not all Jewish specialists could be replaced by non-Jews instantly. But from the late 1930s, the position of Jews (and other non-Russians) in Soviet society and the regime sharply declined. In a secret policy ordered by the Stalinist leadership against a perceived Jewish dominance, Jews were often demoted within or dismissed from state, party, and police bodies. Moreover, most Jewish scholarly, educational, and cultural institutions were closed. Historians continue to debate if and when “state antisemitism” commenced in the Soviet Union. Most suggest that it emerged after the war. In any case, there was a transformation away from the policy of internationalism for more than a decade, with the first signs in the second half of the 1930s.

When the Soviet press covered the “Kristallnacht” pogroms that took place in Germany in November 1938, it referred to the “massacre of a defenseless Jewish population.” This was while, unbeknownst to outside observers, in Soviet Belarus, several Yiddish writers were shot (along with Belarusian ones), and in Soviet Ukraine, in the summer of 1939 the NKVD began an inquiry into a “Jewish nationalist-fascist underground,” which supposedly included writers such as Itsik Fefer, Leib Kvitko, and Der Nister. But they were not arrested then.

## **Jewish Autonomy, Farmers, and the Holodomor**

For two decades, the Bolshevik authorities believed that equality among the different nations would be possible through territorial autonomous institutions. Thus Jewish national districts, Jewish soviets (councils), and Jewish departments in the police and the courts were established. Jewish national districts were created: three in Soviet Ukraine (Kalinindorf, Novo-Zlatopol, and Stalindorf), two in Crimea (Freidorf and Larindorf), and one in Birobidzhan close to the Chinese border (in 1934 transformed into a Jewish autonomous province). In Ukraine, the authorities thus attempted to unite existing Jewish agricultural colonies in one area with a predominantly Jewish population.

Jewish “national soviets” developed faster in Soviet Ukraine than in the Belarusian and Russia republics. At the peak of their development in 1932, there were 168 Jewish national soviets in Ukraine. The Jewish national soviets had almost completely disappeared by 1939. Yiddish-language courts were established in the Soviet Union in 1925, in cities and towns where at least 10,000 Jews lived. By the late 1930s, most were gone.

Only one percent of Jews in the Russian Empire lived and worked in agricultural settlements. The Bolshevik regime wanted to transform most Jews into industrial workers and peasants, and indeed, with the support of Western Jewish philanthropic organizations, succeeded in resettling a significant percentage of Jews on the land. By the end of the 1920s about 20,000 Jewish families in Ukraine and about 10,000 in Belarus were working as farmers, and in 1931, over 11 percent of economically active Jews were employed in agriculture.

As a direct result of the forced collectivization of agricultural production and Soviet attempts to break resistance to it, there was a terrible, artificially created famine, the Holodomor. Starting in 1929, all the peasants had to join collective farms, and the authorities expelled or deported any who rose up, resisted in some other way, or merely seemed to be doing so. These peasants were labeled *kulaks* who, as Stalin put it, had to be “liquidated as a class.”

Assisted by poor peasants, urban workers, and the Red Army, party officials conducted a virtual civil war and confiscated grain. The result in the years 1932, 1933, and 1934, was famine that directly killed, in Soviet Ukraine alone, 3,94



million people. Conditions were so bad that cannibalism became common. The regime, however, kept silent about the famine. This Holodomor was part of an attempt by Stalin to kill the most active and engaged Ukrainians, not only in the countryside but also in cities. While individual Jews acted on behalf of Moscow and prevented grain from reaching starving people, other Jews shared the Ukrainians' misery and despair.

### **Jewish Religious Life and Education in the Soviet Union**

In the 1920s Soviet authorities closed many churches, mosques, and synagogues. The local and regional Jewish Sections organized a campaign against clericalism, *cheders*, and religion, which featured lectures and show trials. The authorities kept under their control all religious organizations, and they had to provide the names of their core group of members.

In 1929, an outright war on religion began. The authorities closed and repurposed or destroyed most houses of worship, including the synagogues and Jewish prayer houses. The League of the Militant Godless also published in Yiddish. The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Joseph Isaac Shneerson, was expelled from the country. Many clergy of different religions were arrested and sentenced to death or long terms in the camps. In 1938, the rabbi of the Choral Synagogue in Moscow, Shmarya Yehuda Leib Medalia, was shot.

After banning Hebrew, the Soviet authorities closed Hebrew schools and traditional Jewish religious schools, *cheders* and *yeshivas*; those that remained existed unofficially. A higher proportion of Jewish children studied in Yiddish schools in Belarus (almost a third) and Ukraine (over half) than in Russia (less than a fifth), where the Jews were more assimilated and often did not know Yiddish. The number of students in the state Yiddish schools decreased in the second half of the 1930s, as national cultures as well as national education began to be discouraged with increasing vehemence. By 1941 these schools functioned only in Birobidzhan and in the Jewish national districts in Ukraine and the Crimean autonomous republic.

## **Soviet Jewish Culture**

While Moscow, Leningrad, and Odessa were centers of Russian Jewish cultural activity, Kyiv and Minsk were the centers of the Soviet Yiddish culture. Minsk eventually lost its status as the main Soviet Yiddish cultural center to Kyiv.

In 1918, Jewish intellectuals, together with leaders of the Jewish political parties Bund, Po'alei Zion, Fareynigte, and Folkspartey, had founded in Kyiv the Jewish Secular Cultural-Enlightenment organization Kultur-Lige (Cultural League). In 1924, all of its educational institutions were subordinated to the People's Commissariat of Education of Ukraine, and most of its other institutions were dissolved. Some prerevolutionary Jewish cultural and scholarly institutions continued to function until 1930.

In Minsk a Jewish Department was established at the Institute for Belarusian Culture, and in Kyiv an Institute for Jewish Proletariat Culture. Many of their scholars were arrested in 1936-38 and were either shot or sentenced to long terms in the GULAG. The only Soviet Jewish scholarly institution thereafter was the Department of Jewish Language, Literature, and Folklore at the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

Among the Jewish theaters in the Soviet Union, one of the most prominent was Habimah in Moscow, which performed in Hebrew until its closure in 1926. In 1933-34, there were eighteen Yiddish theatres in the Soviet Union, and twelve in 1937-38. Most prominent was the Moscow State Jewish Theater; its actors, Solomon Mikhoels and Veniamin Zuskin, became national celebrities.

Jewish clubs and libraries, and Jewish publishing houses and presses operated until the late 1930s, except for Der Emes, which lasted until 1948. Jewish publishing houses worked in Moscow, Kyiv, and Minsk. In 1935 eighteen Yiddish newspapers were published in the Soviet Union, by 1939 seven.

Two Jewish museums operated in the European USSR: the Museum of the Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society (1916–1929) in Petrograd/Leningrad and the Mendele Moykher-Sforim All-Ukrainian Museum of Jewish Culture in Odessa (1927-34, reopened in 1940-41), and several other museums had Jewish departments. Along with the display of Jewish arts, the museums and departments



organized anti-religious exhibitions and spread communist propaganda; this push came from both Jewish and non-Jewish activists

Most Hebrew poets and writers emigrated. Many Yiddish poets, writers, and literary critics lived in Kyiv, if not permanently, including David Bergelson, David Hofstein, Itsik Fefer, Yeheskel Dobrushin, and Der Nister. Prominent writers in Russian based in Ukraine included Vasily Grossman and Isaac Babel; among the poets, Eduard Bagritsky, Osip Mandelstam, Samuil Marshak, and Iosif Utkin. The most prominent writers in Ukrainian were Leonid Pervomaisky, Ivan Kulyk, and Sava Holovanivsky.

**The Great Terror of 1937-38**

Although the presence of Jews in the ranks of the NKVD might suggest otherwise to some, Jews constituted a high proportion of the victims of Stalin’s repression, especially in the years of the Great Terror of 1937-38. During the interbellum in Soviet Ukraine, 264,000 Jews were convicted on political grounds; another 87,000 were connected to criminal cases. As many as 70,000 adults and 35,900 children, who were family members of convicted Jews—“public enemies”—were sent into inner-Soviet exile. The former members of Jewish political parties and organizations, Jewish activists, religious leaders, and many acculturated Jewish intellectuals were also “purged.” The higher the position a person achieved in society, the greater was the probability that he or she would become a victim of political repression. Fear paralyzed Jews and Soviet society as a whole.



***Soviet Shootings in Kyiv during the 1930s***

From 1930 to 1936, the Soviet political police shot over 800 people from Kyiv and the surrounding area as alleged counterrevolutionaries. Unprecedented mass murder, the Great Terror, arrived under Soviet Ukraine’s People’s Commissars of Internal Affairs Izraïl Leplevskii (appointed in June 1937) and Aleksandr Uspenskii (appointed in January 1938). Both acted under specific directives from Moscow, but the ethnic Russian Uspenskii seemingly believed that almost all Ukrainians were nationalists and that all ethnic Germans and Poles were spies and saboteurs. From August 5, 1937, to November 27, 1938, at least 12,823 persons were shot in Kyiv, almost all on the decision of extrajudicial *troikas*, groups



of three officials. The figure included 1199 of the NKVD’s own officers. Thousands more murders were committed up to September 19, 1941, the day when the German army occupied Kyiv. The victims also included 1745 alleged German spies and close to 2000 Polish citizens, mostly military men imprisoned in 1939.

The main killing locations were the regional NKVD headquarters at Rosa Luxemburg Street (now Lypky Street); the republican NKVD headquarters on Instytutska Street, known as the October Palace (rebuilt after the war and now the International Center of Culture and Arts); the Lukianivka prison; and the police prison at Korolenko Street (now Volodymyr Street). The corpses were first buried at the edge of the Lukianivka Cemetery near Babi Yar, possibly also at two other sites; and then near the hamlet of Bykivnia across the Dnieper River. It was a covert operation from start to finish: the arrests, the interrogations, the shootings, the transports of the bleeding corpses, and the burials all took place in the dark of the night.

The total number of people shot in Kyiv in the Stalinist terror through mid-1941 is still unclear, but the Security Service of Ukraine says it can document the burial in Bykivnia of 14,191 named people.

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### **The Period of the Soviet-German Pact, August 1939–June 1941**

In May 1939, Stalin removed Maksim Litvinov, who was Jewish, from the position of Commissar of Foreign Affairs, appointing instead the Russian, Viacheslav Molotov, who was simultaneously Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars.

From May 1939, when negotiations with Nazi Germany took off, agitation against “fascism” basically ceased. Anti-German and anti-fascist films and plays—particularly well-known was *Professor Mamlock* (1938)—were removed from the repertoire. All negative information on Nazi Germany disappeared from the Soviet press. Instead, Stalinist propaganda switched to criticism of the Western “bourgeois democracies.”

On August 23, 1939, the Soviet Union and the Third Reich signed a non-aggression treaty that became known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. It included a secret clause that divided Poland into Soviet and German spheres in the event of war. Thereby two totalitarian regimes facilitated the start of what became the Second World War.





War came when on September 1, Germany invaded Poland. Two days later, Britain and France declared war on Germany. On September 17 the Soviet Union invaded from the east and annexed Poland's eastern half, while proclaiming the "reunification" of "Western Ukraine" and "Western Belarus" with the Ukrainian and Belarusian Soviet republics. This way, western Volhynia and eastern Galicia became six Oblasts of an enlarged Soviet Ukraine. The two aggressors also formally became allies, through a Border and Friendship Treaty on September 28.

Official propaganda described the pact as a vivid manifestation of the "Soviet policy of peace and friendship among peoples" and "the reflection of the Stalinist peace policy of the Soviet government aimed at establishing friendly relations with all countries." Publications contained approval for the actions of the Wehrmacht and German policies, and even the speeches of the Nazi leaders, which were studied in the politics courses of the Red Army.

### **Minds and Migrations**

While Soviet Jews could be positive about the accession of Western Ukraine and other lands, which seemed to save their brothers from the Nazi threat, many intellectuals among them were taken aback by the Pact's political cynicism. Those familiar with Stalin's practice of Sovietization assumed that the joy of liberation from "capitalist oppression" would soon be followed by mass repressions.

The Pact produced considerable migration flows in various directions. About 350,000 (according to a more conservative estimate—150,000) Jews fled from German-occupied Poland to the Soviet-held eastern zone. An additional 14,000 Polish Jews arrived in Vilnius (which the Soviet Union handed over to Lithuania in October 1939). Many officials arrived in the newly Soviet regions from east of the 1939 Soviet border.

The new arrivals were not acting just on their own and not only by means of terror. Pro-active local Jews and others, the so-called "promoted workers," began filling "vacancies" left by representatives of the Polish elite. Among the workers promoted to the local authorities of western Ukraine and western Belarus, Jews usually took second place behind Ukrainians and Belarusians. For the three groups,



this was a great contrast to the prewar years, when administrative and police positions were held by Poles.

Jews remembered the violence (pogroms), “ghetto benches,” and job discrimination. The Soviet system at that time provided Jews free access to education and government. Some Jews, primarily representatives of the left parties and youth from towns, took an active part in the temporary government bodies and “labor militia” organized in September 1939. Along with non-Jewish colleagues, Jewish teachers went to villages to promote the Soviet system and collectivization.

Meanwhile, Soviet deportations from occupied eastern Poland affected 315,000- 320,000 people, mostly women and children, including Poles (over 57 percent), Jews (around 22 percent), Ukrainians (over 10 percent), and Belarusians (almost 8 percent). Apart from these deportees, 110,000 others were arrested, 30,000 were shot, and 25,000 died in captivity. Thus, in total, nearly half a million Polish citizens were “repressed,” as it was called at that time. From western Ukraine alone, 191,100 were deported, including more than 100,000 Poles, almost 60,000 Jews, and 25,500 Ukrainians.

The Polish language lost its priority, but Ukrainian, Belarusian, etc. did not become the government languages. The employees sent from the East rarely spoke Ukrainian at work, and young promoted Jews oriented on making a career quickly started mastering Russian, considering it as “more promising.” Poles cooperating with the new regime also preferred to switch to Russian.

### **The Soviet attack on Jewish Traditions and Zionism in the New Soviet Regions**

For most Jews in the dissolved Polish state, Sovietization was a disaster, a kind of reprise of the “destruction” (*khurbn*) during the First World War. And it was not due to the significant drop in living standards, the disappearance of a number of goods, shortages and queues, but because Soviet rule meant the destruction of traditional ways of Jewish community life. Hebrew became a forbidden language, religion was displaced, and the Zionist ideology supported by tens of thousands was proclaimed anti-Soviet.



The Zionist organization Hashomer Hatsa'ir ("Young Guard") created an underground network in western Ukraine and western Belarus, with a center in Lviv, which distributed anti-Communist and Zionist leaflets. In March 1941, an open trial in Lviv sentenced seven of its leaders to 7-10 years in jail. The members of the Jewish workers' organization, the Bund, one of the most powerful left-wing political parties of interwar Poland, were also prosecuted.

### **The Summer of 1941**

In the summer of 1941, when Germany invaded, many Zionists, as well as representatives of left-wing Jewish parties, such as the Bund, arrested before June 22, were killed by the NKVD in the prisons of Lviv, Dobromyl, Stryi, Sambir, Zolochiv, Lutsk, and Dubno during the retreat of the Soviet authorities in the summer of 1941. Jewish victims of these NKVD shootings comprised up to 10 percent.

About 1.5 million Jews were evacuated from the western Soviet republics to the Soviet rear—almost one sixth of the 8.5-9.5 million evacuees in total, including from Ukraine. At the same time, out of almost 2 million Jews living in the new western Soviet regions of the Soviet Union, that had recently been annexed, only a small part managed to evacuate.

About 700,000 Jews moved from Ukraine according to its 1939 borders to the east. Among the total number of evacuees from Ukraine, Jews ranked second after Russians. Ukrainians, the vast majority of the population in the republic, were only the third largest group.

The relatively large number of Jews among evacuees was first of all due to their high proportion among those categories of people who were subjected to evacuation in the first place: residents of large cities, specialists with higher education, and intellectual elites. Stalinist deportation and evacuation policy did not focus on official "nationality" but on the perceived social, economic, cultural, and political value of individuals and their families.

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## THE ROAD TOWARD NAZI MASS MURDER

### **Nazi Antisemitism**

The National Socialist German Workers' Party (or Nazi Party), which came into being in 1919-20, had hatred against the Jews as a core element in its ideology. Until 1923, the Nazi Party was only a minor political organization, restricted to Bavaria. From 1929, it gained political success at the regional level, and from 1930, throughout the German Reich. Like other extreme movements, the Nazi party was violent, acting through its militias, the SA (Stormtroopers) and the SS (Protection Guards). During the global economic crisis, the Nazis became the strongest party in the elections of 1932, and finally were entrusted to form a government with their conservative allies on January 30, 1933.

What was specific about Nazi antisemitism? First of all, antisemitism played a central role in the propaganda and policies of the Party. It was a highly racist antisemitism, which considered the Jews to be a distinct biological group with different "blood." Second was the crucial role of Adolf Hitler. In his worldview, he interpreted history as a struggle between races, including the "Aryan race" against the Jews, blamed, among other things, for the loss of the Great War in 1918. Moreover, he considered the Jews to be a global danger, so he envisaged the elimination of "World Jewry" as the solution to all problems.

In 1933, about 500,000 people of Jewish faith lived in Germany, constituting 0.7 percent of the overall population. The Nazis at that stage did not have a concrete plan for their antisemitic policies. The Nazis had to cooperate with the conservative elites in order to achieve full power. Hitler pursued a double strategy. First, his militias took over the police and terrorized political opponents and Jews on a local basis. Second, he agreed with his conservative partners to restrict Jewish life on a "legal" basis. For example, Jews were dismissed from public service. In 1935 the Nuremberg "race laws" were issued, prohibiting the marriage of Jews to non-Jews and criminalizing sexual relations.

## Who Was in Danger as a Jew?

Though the responsible German politicians claimed to follow biological racial concepts, of course they were unable to define the “racial” specificity of Jews. Instead, they relied on religious criteria and labelled everybody a Jew who had three grandparents now deemed “racially full Jews,” because they were registered as being “of Jewish faith.” Thus, even converted Jews were included as “racial” Jews.

Certain people were proclaimed to be “half-castes,” *Mischlinge* in German. The key determinant in the Nazi stance toward them was whether the mother or father that was deemed to be non-Jewish was also considered to be “Aryan” in some way—that is, in possession of “German blood.” If “German blood” was assumed, as was often the case in the Reich, these “half-castes” were not included in the persecution as “full Jews.” The risk of annoying the non-Jewish German relatives of these people, and of unrest, was seen as too high. If no “German blood” was not assumed, however, the “half-caste” person was generally persecuted and, later, murdered. This was the case in Eastern Europe.

## The Persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany

Jews were gradually driven out of the economy through various coercive measures, such that shopkeepers were forced to sell their businesses at low prices. Finally, in 1938, all remaining Jewish entrepreneurs were expropriated and their businesses “aryanized,” that is, taken over by non-Jewish German competitors.

The general objective for Nazi anti-Jewish policies during the 1930s was forced emigration. These policies radicalized with the annexation of Austria in March 1938 – the Nazis developed new means for impoverishing Jews and forcing them to emigrate without most of their belongings. Later that year, the Nazi leadership finally found a pretext to launch a major pogrom within Germany and Austria. A young Polish Jew, whose parents had been deported from Germany to Poland, shot a German diplomat in Paris. Right away all Nazi organizations started to stage a wave of violence in November 1938, known as the “Night of Broken Glass” (*Kristallnacht*): synagogues and Jewish shops were demolished; 28,000 Jewish men were taken to concentration camps; and more than 1,000 Jews were



murdered at home or in camps, or committed suicide. As before, the goal was through sheer terror to force Jews to emigrate quickly in an impoverished state.

### **War and Mass Murder**

The first major turn toward Nazi mass murder came with the beginning of the war in September 1939. The war against Poland affected not only the policies against Jews, but also against other groups. The German SS and Police had planned to “decapitate” the Polish state and society. This meant elimination of the Polish “intelligentsia” and certain explicitly anti-German groups. Thus, tens of thousands of Polish teachers, priests, and members of anti-German organizations were shot at the turn of 1939/40. By the summer of 1941, the total stood at 60,000.

The German leadership used the war also as cover for another program of mass extermination, the killing of the mentally disabled. Inmates of Polish psychiatric institutions were the first to be murdered, and this was the first case in which toxic gas was used for killing. In January 1940 the systematic killing of specific people with mental disabilities started in Germany as well; 70,000 were murdered up until mid-1941.

Right after the end of military fighting German-occupied Poland was divided into annexed territories in the West, and the so-called General Government in central Poland. The German leadership proposed schemes for the demographic restructuring of Poland, including deportation plans for up to three million inhabitants. In practice, almost 400,000 of them were soon deported from the annexed territories to central Poland. This “ethnic cleansing” demonstrated the logistics of how large population movements could be organized, acting as another precursor for the subsequent “Final Solution.”

The SS developed a plan for a “Jewish reservation area” east of Kraków, to which Jews from Poland and from the Reich, including Bohemia, would be deported. This “reservation” was meant as a death zone: Jews should perform forced labor and would be subjected to such harsh conditions, that they were doomed to die in the long run. However, after some deportations, the “Lublin reservation” never materialized and the idea was abandoned.

After the German attack on Western Europe in May 1940, another reservation scheme was discussed by German diplomats and police. The island of Madagascar, then a French colony, should serve as a deportation destination after the defeat of France. The German fleet, however, never defeated the British Royal Navy, which was a precondition for the Jews to be transported there by ship.

German plans for an overall “Solution of the Jewish Question” in 1940 reached a kind of deadlock in the fall. In occupied Western Europe the process of outlawing, dispossessing, and isolating the Jews started only gradually. The Germans, together with the Vichy government, which decided to rule on behalf of the Germans in occupied France, but also with non-German administrations in other European regions, started to repeat the process of persecution that had taken place in Germany, with a series of anti-Jewish laws and “aryanization” measures.

At that time, the German policies toward the Jews in occupied Poland were much more radical than in Central and Western Europe. In spring 1940 it became clear that there would be no general deportation in the near future, so the Germans started establishing ghettos, as an interim “solution.” The first Nazi ghetto in Poland was established already at the end of 1939 in Piotrków Trybunalski. But the major ghettos were planned in the cities with the largest Jewish communities, in Łódź and Warsaw. Nevertheless, since the process of ghettoization was not centrally coordinated, depending on local considerations, in some places ghettos were not established until 1942, and some ghettos remained unfenced, facilitating illegal trade with local non-Jews.

Life in the ghettos was almost unbearable: without proper housing, nutrition, and medical services. During wintertime, there was a lack of heating material. Severe overcrowding also led to the spread of disease, particularly typhus. Especially in the ghetto in Warsaw, from autumn 1940 on, thousands of the more than 400,000 inhabitants died every month. The many problems related to the ghettos in occupied Poland radicalized German discussion of the “Jewish question.” A consensus emerged among the occupiers that getting rid of this larger “question” required radical means.

## **The German Attack on the Soviet Union**

With the German attack on the Soviet Union, at least part of Soviet Jewry was doomed from the beginning. The German leadership planned the attack as a war of extermination. So as to conquer the most territory in the shortest time and to supply the rest of occupied Europe, and Germany itself, with food, the German army wanted to confiscate the bulk of agrarian produce (the harvest of 1941) and force part of the population to die of starvation, possibly, tens of millions of civilians. And the German leadership decided to “decapitate” the Soviet state, meaning to kill those parts of the population which were considered most dangerous from the Nazi perspective: communist Party members and state personnel, and especially the male Jews, believed to be Bolshevism’s main supporters. Hitler and his inner circle also believed this would make the Soviet state collapse.

Under Hitler’s guidance, from March 1941 on the police and Wehrmacht leadership negotiated the preparations for this extermination: the Wehrmacht was ordered to kill all political functionaries among the Red Army, while the SS and Police would send specific units behind the fighting armies to detect and kill “dangerous” sections of the population. The military leadership granted the SS and Police a free hand in areas where the fighting had ceased. At the same time, the Wehrmacht denied Soviet POWs and the civilian population all protections of international law right from the beginning. No German soldier or policeman would face the threat of punishment for crimes against them. It was a crucial step.

There has been considerable debate as to what specific orders the mobile SS and Police units, the *Einsatzgruppen* (Operational Groups), received prior to the attack on the Soviet Union. Judging by what actually happened during the first weeks of the military campaign, they were not yet ordered to murder all Jews at that time, but rather to kill specific groups among them (POWs, state and party officials, “intelligentsia,” and a varying range of military-age men), and besides this, to apply all measures necessary for rear area “security” in the Nazi sense.

From the start, the *Einsatzgruppen* targeted the Jewish “intelligentsia,” such as teachers and administrators, but increasingly also all Jewish men of military age, between 18 and 45. The mass killings began on June 24, 1941, in the Lithuanian town of Gargždai, two days after the German military attack.



Over the next two months this pattern was more or less maintained. (Exceptional murder of Jewish women and children took place from mid-July into early August 1941 in Dobele, Silene, and Jelgava, in Latvia; in Plungė, Mažeikiai, Biržai, Linkuva, and Akmenė, in Lithuania; and in Chomsk, Motal, and Telekhany, in present-day Belarus.)

The Romanian extermination campaign against the Jews, which started very early in Iași, in Romania itself, on July 2, 1941, expanded to include women and children in Bessarabia. Up until mid-1941, the Romanian army and police killed as many Jews as their German counterparts.

From mid-August, one *Einsatzgruppe* after another started to expand the killings to women and children. One of the worst massacres occurred in Kamianets-Podilskyi in Ukraine. There the German military administration complained that Hungarian forces had expelled thousands of Jews from Hungarian occupied Transcarpathia into the city. After negotiations between the military administration and the SS, it was decided to kill them. On August 26-28, 23,600 Jews from Transcarpathia and from the city itself were shot in one of the largest crimes of the Holocaust.

From August 1941 on, the *Einsatzgruppen* assisted by other mobile killing units (SS Cavalry Regiment 1) turned to a third stage: after the killing of adult Jewish men and the extension of the murders to women and children, now complete Jewish communities were to be exterminated in newly occupied towns and cities. Heretofore, this had been exceptional. The total extermination is what happened in Kyiv on September 29-30, 1941.

### **Decision-Making for the Holocaust**

The war against the Soviet Union played a decisive role in the discussion among Nazi elites on the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question.” On July 31, 1941, Reinhard Heydrich, the Head of the central security police apparatus in Germany, the Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt), was entrusted by Hermann Göring, who acted as a kind of chief of the war cabinet (Ministerrat für die Reichsverteidigung), to prepare an “Overall Solution to the Jewish Problem.” There has been considerable historical debate on how to interpret this document, but



circumstantial evidence indicates that this was not yet the order to exterminate all Jews everywhere in Europe. Heydrich took over all responsibilities in the “Jewish Question,” which meant at that time: the coordination of killings in the Soviet Union and preparations for the deportation of all other European Jews to these territories.

In the end of September, early October, however, it became evident that mass deportations on that scale were not possible as long as the war in the Soviet Union was not proceeding according to German plans. The German military completely denied any possibility of implementing deportations far into the occupied eastern territories. At the same time, requests from various German regional officials were addressed to Berlin, asking for the Jews in their areas to be deported. The German Gauleiters of the Nazi Party wanted the Jews deported to free up housing space, for example, for the victims of Allied bombings.

Obviously at the end of September, or beginning of October 1941, a decision was taken in Berlin to send only part of the Jews, especially those from the Reich, to the western part of the occupied Soviet territories and to western Poland, and to kill part of the Jews in Poland—and at the very least, those unable to perform forced labor, who were doomed to starve or die from disease.

Thus, by October 1941 Nazi leaders had taken central decisions to exterminate the Jews not only inside the Soviet Union, but also in Poland and Serbia, and to expand mass murders from east of the former Nazi-Soviet border to regions further west. A parallel step in this acceleration of the Holocaust was Hitler’s decision to have the Jews deported from the Reich — from Germany, Austria, and the Czech lands.

The first Jews were deported to the Łódź ghetto on October 15, 1941, and one month later the transports headed into occupied Soviet territory, beginning with Minsk. Still, these Jews from the Reich and Central Europe were not meant to be murdered immediately. Rather, in accordance with Nazi thinking and practice, space was supposed to be created for them through the murder of Soviet and Polish Jews. Although 6,000 German Jews were murdered upon arrival in Riga and Kaunas in November 1941, these apparently were regional initiatives, not based on orders from Berlin. Heydrich and Heinrich Himmler, the Head of the SS and Police, ordered them stopped in early December.

## **A Second Phase, December 1941-June 1942**

Though historians do not agree on the actual trajectory of decision-making, there are indications that Hitler issued a further order in December 1941. On December 4-6, the German army suffered a heavy defeat in the Battle of Moscow, and on December 11, Hitler came to the aid of his ally Japan and declared war on the United States. In Hitler's perception, the European Jews were a kind of hostage he held against the United States (which he considered to be ruled by "World Jewry") in order to stop the Americans from entering the war. Now, after the Japanese attack on the US at Pearl Harbor, this "role" for European Jewry had expired. In Hitler's eyes, the World War had started in earnest and the whole of continental Europe had to support the German war effort. In the Nazis' antisemitic rationale, all Jews were considered as potential partisans and thus a danger to Germany. Therefore, the policy of mass murder was extended to all European Jews. This was also communicated within the Nazi leadership. The speed and extent of the murder policy would depend on regional needs, they were told.

In order to coordinate the bureaucracies concerning the "Final Solution," Heydrich, who had been entrusted as its main executor, convened a conference of involved state and party organizations. The infamous "Wannsee Conference," named after the lake near Berlin where it took place on January 20, 1942, did not decide upon the mass extermination, but debated its European-wide course and practices, especially the responsibilities of the different institutions. The so-called "half-castes" in the Reich were also discussed, without a clear outcome. Nazi Germany was aiming to kill eleven million Jews, as the protocol of the meeting confirms.

The systematic mass extermination of Jews in annexed western Poland started on December 8, 1941, in the Chełmno extermination camp. Three months later, the first death camp in the General Government was established in Bełżec, where the mass murder of Jews from Lviv and Lublin started on March 15 and 17, 1942, respectively. Two months later a second death camp opened in Sobibór. The first transport of Jews arrived in Auschwitz in March 1942, but Jews were not killed there upon arrival before June 1942.



The months between December 1941 and June 1942 can be considered as second phase of the “Final Solution” as mass murder, after the massacres east of the 1941 Soviet border. During this period a comprehensive program of mass murder was developed in Berlin and the occupied territories. Jews from the Reich were sent to Poland, the Baltics, and Minsk (and shot by the thousands there), but before May 1942, they were not *systematically* killed.

Jews as a labor force continued to be debated. After December 1941, the German economy suffered from a severe labor shortage. German men were sent to the East to replace the heavy losses of frontline troops. Thus the hunt for non-Jewish forced laborers intensified, while some Jews were also considered to be essential for the German war effort in occupied Europe. Ghettos and camps continued to exist for the exploitation of Jewish labor. In April 1942, Himmler issued an order to temporarily spare able-bodied Jewish men aged between 16 and 35, for work. This explains why most of the victims of the death camps during this period consisted of children, women, and elderly people.

In July 1942, the core phase of the Holocaust would begin, aiming at the total destruction of Jewish communities in Poland according to its borders of 1939, and the deportation of Jews from Western, Northern, and Southern Europe to the death camps in the east. On July 22, 1942, the Germans started deportations from the Warsaw ghetto to the newly built Treblinka death camp. On July 17, deportations from Western Europe to Auschwitz began. That was when the “Final Solution” was fully underway: with simultaneously mass shootings and mass gassings.

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## KYIV AND BABI YAR BEFORE AND DURING THE HOLOCAUST

### Jews in Kyiv, 1900–1940

#### Before the February 1917 Revolution

Jewish merchants of the first and second guilds, persons with higher education, i.e. *gymnasium* (advanced high school) and university students, retired soldiers, and some artisans were allowed to settle in Kyiv starting in 1859–1861, in the relatively liberal early years of the reign of Tsar Alexander II. However, the city remained outside of the Pale of Jewish Settlement. With many other Jews thus barred, Kyiv's Jews had a peculiar structure. At the turn of the century, 13 percent were lawyers, medical doctors, writers, journalists, and other members of what was called the intelligentsia.

In Kyiv itself, the percentage of Jews among merchants and industrialists was significantly higher than the percentage of Jews in the city's general population.

Besides its pleasant look and mild climate, many factors made Kyiv desirable for Jews. It was the fifth largest city of the Russian Empire; it was an important political, economic and cultural center, offering relief from the population density and chronic unemployment of the shtetls; it housed *gymnasiums*, a university, and polytechnic and commercial institutes. Kyiv was a major trade and industrial center; and the Pale of Settlement was nearby, enabling close connections with it. Jews were able to make their mark with, for instance, the city's first highrise building; the first movie theater, and funding for the Bessarabian Covered Market.

At the same time, to Jews Kyiv was also *Yehupets* (a nonsense word resembling the Ukrainian word for "Egypt"), as the wellknown Jewish writer Sholem Aleichem called it, in the sense of a place of uncertainty and danger. Numerous antisemites agitated against Kyiv as a "Jewish city," and schools, hospitals, and clinics accepted Jews only reluctantly, and to a certain degree. Due to the great difficulty in obtaining permission for legal residence, thousands of illegal Jews lived



in permanent insecurity and faced arbitrary behavior by the police. Jewish women had the additional problem that their legal standing depended on the status of their husbands, which made them easy targets for expulsion in the event of divorce, the death of their spouse, or even the draft of the husband into the army.

Whereas thousands of Jewish merchants and peddlers provided necessary goods for the city population, for middle class and poor Jews, the cost of living was high. In 1904, 10,000 of them, one in five of Kyivan Jews, lived below the poverty line, in the three districts Plosskii, Lybid, and Podil, in terrible hygienic conditions, with tuberculosis being the main cause of death.

Despite the restrictions, the Jewish community grew to become one of the largest in the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (while lagging in numbers behind Odessa, which in 1910 had close to 173,000 Jews).

**Table 3.1. Jews in Kyiv according to the census, 1910-39**

	Total population	Jews	Percentage
1910 census	527,000	50,792	10.8
1919 census	544,368	114,524	21.0
1926 census	512,088	140,256	27.0
1939 census	846,724	224,236	26.5

Although the Kyiv Jewish community was one of the wealthiest in the Russian Empire, and Jewish philanthropic organizations provided various kinds of financial aid and gave small loans for the establishment of businesses to individual Jewish artisans, these efforts could not overcome Jewish poverty. Its roots lay in the illegal status of many Jews and restrictions on the education of Jews.

In general, Kyiv was a city where merchants dominated the city council (duma) and community organizations. Israel Brodsky and his two sons Lazar and Lev (Leon) led the Jewish community from the mid-1860s to October 1917. The

Brodskys participated in almost all Jewish charitable organizations and initiatives in Kyiv. The Kyiv Jewish hospital, subsidized by the Jewish community, provided free treatment for Jewish and non-Jewish patients. At the same time, Jewish leaders in Kyiv supported emigration from the Russian Empire earlier than those of other Jewish communities. The Jewish Emigration Society based in the city operated in the fifteen provinces of the Pale of Settlement and the Kingdom of Poland, assisting emigration to the United States and other countries.

In the wake of the new mood engendered by the Great Reforms of the 1860s, there was significant financial cooperation, mutual support, and cultural exchange between Jews and non-Jews. For example, the Brodsky family brought their business into a cartel with other rich sugar producers, including the Ukrainians Tereshchenko and Kharitonenko, the Russian Bobrinskii, and the Pole Jaroszyński, turning Kyiv into imperial Russia's "sugar capital."

Before 1917, Kyiv did not have as rich a Jewish cultural life as St. Petersburg or Odessa. However, there were public lectures, art exhibits, theatrical and musical performances, and the celebration of Jewish holidays. Sholom Aleichem lived in the city, and so did the poet Yehalel (acronym of Yehudah Leib Levin) and the artist Abram Manevich.

Based on Kyiv's status outside of the Pale of Settlement, for a long time the local authorities did not allow traditional Jewish religious schools or synagogues. This situation changed for the better only in the 1890s, when Lazar Brodsky, due to his connections in St. Petersburg, received permission to build a synagogue in downtown Kyiv and to open a Jewish artisan school. Gabriel-Yakov Rozenberg built a synagogue, claiming during construction that it was a private house. The authorities relented and allowed this synagogue, which was in the Plosskaia district, to operate. Later the Choral Synagogue, the Merchant Synagogue, and a synagogue near the Jewish market, were opened. But the interest of Jews in religious life actually declined in Kyiv, as in the other large cities of the Russian Empire.



## **Violent Persecution of Jews before 1917**

In the wake of the assassination of Tsar Alexander II on March 1, 1881, anti-Jewish violence in Kyiv began on April 23, 1881, and due to inaction by the local authorities, it became larger in scale than pogroms elsewhere in the empire that year, in terms of the number of rioters and the losses.

Kyiv became one of the centers of Russian antisemitism. Thus a new pogrom, in October 1905, had a completely different character. It was a political act, following the Tsar's October Manifesto promising basic civil rights and an elected parliament. The pogrom was provoked by the xenophobic and antidemocratic Black Hundred movement of Russian nationalists, which had two years earlier published *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, fabricated minutes of a fictional, secret meeting of Jews planning world domination. (Later translated into many languages, it became, besides Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, the mostly widely disseminated antisemitic tract preceding the Holocaust.) The Black Hundreds organized "patriotic demonstrations," which usually began near churches, beat up Jews they encountered, and stole Jewish property. Most Jewish stores, houses, and apartments in Kyiv were looted; 100 Jews were killed and 406 wounded.

In 1911, the Black Hundreds, with support from the local and higher authorities, organized the "Beilis Affair": they blamed Mendel Beilis, a brick factory manager, for the death of a Christian boy, Andrii Yushchynsky, accusing him of ritual murder.

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### ***The Myth of Jewish Ritual Murder***

The myth claims, without any factual basis, that (i) Jews kidnap and murder innocent Christians, particularly young boys, because (ii) Jewish religious ritual requires their blood. Judaism actually forbids human sacrifice in any form. The accusation, for centuries often really taken for a fact, in modern times took on additional significance. If Jews act this horribly on principle, the thinking goes, they as a group are too dangerous to be granted equal rights and opportunities.

The accusation (along with another myth—that Jews pierced consecrated Eucharist wafers, or Hosts) has a long past. It was first expressed in the thirteenth century in the Holy Roman Empire. From the 1880s up to World War I, it was often made, and in Germany,





Austria, Hungary, and Russia, there were even six public trials based on it. A late echo came in the Polish city of Kielce in 1946, where a pogrom targeting Jewish returnees from the Soviet Union, where they had survived the war, was preceded by the same accusation.

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Beilis supposedly wanted to use the boy's blood to prepare matzos for Passover. Actually, the boy had been killed by criminals after he had said he would denounce them to the police.

The prosecution was initiated by an organization of Russian nationalist youth, the "Two-Headed Eagle." The Russian government sent special investigators to replace those in Kyiv, so as to make the case for ritual murder. A jury acquitted Beilis in October 1913, but, to the great satisfaction of the Russian Ministry of Justice and Russian nationalists, it also ruled that the murder had been ritual. Tsar Nicolas II fully supported these conclusions.

### **Revolution, Ukrainian Independence, Civil War (1917-20)**

In 1917 there were approximately 87,000 Jews in Kyiv, less than one fifth of the population. Two years later, their number had risen above 114,000; their proportion was 21 percent. (The largest ethnic groups were Russian and Ukrainian—43 and 24 percent, respectively.) A time of great hope after the collapse of the monarchy quickly ended for the Jews of Kyiv. A period of promising autonomy ended in massacres, torture, robbery, and mockery.

Yiddish poets, writers, and literary critics living in Kyiv, known today as the "Kyiv Group," included David Bergelson, David Hofstein, Itsik Fefer, Yeheskel Dobrushin, and Der Nister (pseudonym of Pinkhas Kaganovich). Although in the early 1920s most emigrated due to the very difficult conditions of life, many subsequently returned to the city or went to other Soviet cities.

In 1918, Jewish intellectuals, together with leaders of the Jewish political parties Bund, Po'alei Zion, Fareynigte, and Folkspartey founded in Kyiv the Jewish Secular Cultural-Enlightenment organization Kultur-Lige. It became a source of many innovations in Jewish cultural life in and beyond Kyiv. Civil war, anti-Jewish



pogroms, and widespread anarchy soon overwhelmed many of these positive initiatives; for example, the new Jewish University disintegrated.

Power changed hands in Kyiv fourteen times during the revolution and the civil war, which from a national Ukrainian perspective was a war for independence. Many of these changes were accompanied by bombardments, street fighting, and anti-Jewish pogroms. During all the pogroms in Kyiv during these years, about 1,000 Jews were killed out of a total Jewish population of 114,000. And yet, compared to other places, Kyiv was a safe haven. Jews thus fled there from elsewhere: some 10,000 such refugees were in the Podil district by the fall of 1919.

The key events involving the persecution of Jews as Jews were as follows. The Ukrainian Central Rada fled Kyiv in the night of January 25-26, 1918, in the wake of a pro-Bolshevik uprising in the Arsenal district. Before then, Jews had been attacked and now, Yona Gogol, the head of the Union of Jewish Combatants of the Kyiv Military District, was found killed. Jewish politicians believed he had been shot by the Ukrainian city commandant, M. Kovenko, possibly because of Gogol's vow to remain politically neutral.

The Volunteer Army under the command of General Anton Denikin took Kyiv on August 31, 1919. Contrary to what Jews had expected, Denikin's troops killed Jews picked up randomly on the streets, accusing them of being Bolshevik sympathizers. In the middle of October 1919, the Red Army occupied Kyiv for one or two days. Then Denikin's Army returned and carried out a pogrom for several days, killing hundreds of Jews and wounding others. Historians conclude that the operation was almost business-like: with focus and hardly any material destruction.

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### ***The White Pogrom in Kyiv, October 17-20, 1919***

"Groups of armed people entered apartments, often leaving a lookout outside of the building. One of the soldiers present would accuse the Jews inside of Bolshevism, of deserting the Volunteer Army, and of shooting at Volunteer forces from their windows. As compensation, the robbers demand jewelry and money, threatening to ransack the home and shoot the owners if valuables were discovered. If the proffered sum satisfied these scourges of Bolshevism, they would take their leave. Otherwise, they would line the



inhabitants of the house up against a wall, as if to execute them. They would then place the barrel of a gun against a child's head or use other means to get what they wanted.

In the suburbs outright looting took place, and the local populace often joined in completely emptying Jewish homes of everything that was inside. Executions would occur in secluded places and were often unrelated to the looting; in most cases unfortunate passers-by were the victims. In some instances people were able to pay off their would-be executioners and thereby save their lives." (This description was written by the historian Oleg Budnitskii.)

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On May 7, 1920, Polish and Ukrainian troops jointly took Kyiv. They controlled it for a little more than a month. Like most of the Ukrainian and the White Russian troops, Polish soldiers tended to think that all Jews were Bolsheviks or supported them. It was new that they chose as their targets religious Jews, whom they identified by their appearance and presence in synagogues. They forced Jews to clean horses, stables, and toilets, and to do other arduous manual work. Jews were humiliated, beaten, and robbed. Their Polish commanders neither condemned nor punished this violence and robbery.

The Bolsheviks terrorized in another way, and imposed on the city a large levy, which was paid mostly by Jews. In the summer of 1919, the Cheka in Kyiv had 300 civilian employees and up to 500 armed men. They shot those they arrested with revolvers in a special garden near 40 Instytutska Street (the office of the Provincial Cheka, led by Petro Dehtiarenko)—or released them, for no apparent reason. On some days, more than fifty people were shot.

### **Jews in Kyiv under Soviet Rule (1920-40)**

Kyiv was one of the largest Soviet urban population centers, where over a quarter of the inhabitants from the mid-1920s up to 1940 were Jews. The city had many opportunities for employment and education, and a rich cultural life. Moreover, in 1934 it became the capital of the Soviet Ukrainian Socialist Republic.

After the Bolsheviks consolidated their power in Kyiv in 1920, they took control of all Jewish institutions, and closed some of them. The Kultur-Lige's activities were restricted and then often banned, and many prominent members

decided to leave the country. Only the publishing house—the largest Yiddish publishing house in the Soviet Union in the 1920s—continued to work, until 1930.

The Bolsheviks were especially hostile toward Zionist organizations in Kyiv. In 1919 they banned Hebrew as a “counter-revolutionary” language. By the mid-1920s only one legal Jewish party, the Jewish Communist Workers’ Party Po’alei Zion, was left in Soviet Ukraine; it was eliminated in 1928.

The liquidation of Jewish institutions and organizations was entrusted to the so-called *Yevsektzii* (Jewish sections) within the Communist Party, which, in 1921, even “sentenced” Judaism to death in a public tribunal. The closure of synagogues in Ukraine was protested by believers, who were sometimes violently suppressed. In 1926, the Brodsky synagogue in Kyiv was transformed into the Central Club of Jewish Handicraftsmen; in 1929, the synagogue in Podil was closed; the last ones in the city in the mid-1930s. From 1940, all former synagogues were used for purposes not at all related to Jewish cultural life. Silver ritual objects were melted down, and Torah scrolls were archived, sold, or used to make drums.

None of this was initiated in Ukraine; its Communist Party and government were completely subordinated to Moscow. Among its leaders were several Jews; most notorious among them was Lazar Kaganovich, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine in 1925-28.

Until the early 1930s, Soviet and Ukrainian leaders encouraged the development of secular national cultures in Ukraine and throughout the Soviet Union. Kyiv became one of the major centers of Soviet Yiddish culture. Jewish state scholarly institutions operated there: the Jewish Historical-Archaeographical Commission (1919-29), the Institute of Jewish Proletarian Culture (1929-36), and the Department of Jewish Language, Literature, and Folklore of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences (known as the Department of Jewish Culture) (1936-49). (Many leaders and workers of these institutions were later imprisoned, and some were shot.)

The formation of a new Jewish Department within the Academy of Sciences, later renamed the Institute of Jewish Proletarian Culture, meant the beginning of the end for the Jewish Historical-Archaeographical Commission, as the Academy then claimed that it did not need two Jewish scholarly organizations.

Overall, the Jewish proletarian organizations founded by the *Yevsektzii* and the Soviet authorities destroyed more than they created. And then the authorities liquidated them as well.

At the same time, the Bolsheviks applied a policy of carrot and stick toward the “new intelligentsia.” The regime badly needed obedient and faithful writers to glorify it. Thus, it created favorable conditions of life for the new Soviet elite and strict censorship and political repression for freethinkers. David Hofstein joined the Jewish section of the All-Ukrainian Proletarian Writers Organization and founded the proletarian Yiddish journal, *Prolit*. Some writers, such as the Yiddish poet Itsik Fefer, became secret informers of the NKVD.

The Soviet Yiddish writers, as well as all other Soviet writers, continued to compose their positive works and praise the “wise” Soviet government and Communist party. Fear of arrest kept most of the Soviet intelligentsia away from any form of political protest. The small minority who dared to show their dissatisfaction with Soviet policies were either shot or disappeared for many years into the prisons and camps. Even some loyal Yiddish writers and literary critics became victims.

In the 1920s-30s, several Jewish theaters were opened in Kyiv. The Sholom Aleichem State Jewish Theater moved there from Kharkiv in 1934 and merged with the Kyiv State Jewish Theater. It performed Jewish and international classic plays and the plays of Soviet Yiddish writers, always in Yiddish. Its director, Boris Vershilov, barely escaped arrest in 1937, surviving because the Russian director Constantin Stanislavsky was able to call him to Moscow.

In the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s many Yiddish schools and several Yiddish colleges operated in Kyiv. At that time the Soviet authorities encouraged Jewss to send their children there, considering these places powerful antidotes to Judaism and Zionism. The schools were not popular, and they were closed in the mid-1930s. At one of the congresses of the Communist Party of Ukraine in June 1938, First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev, looked back and blamed “enemies” for having “dragged Jews by force to Jewish schools. They did this to make the people angry, and on the other hand to create nests of enemies.”

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## **Kyiv and Babi Yar, 1941-43**

### **Evacuation and Flight**

Jews could escape from Kyiv in several ways. Some of them were ordered to evacuate and did not have any freedom in decision-making. Others, and this was a much bigger category, could attempt to join the state-run evacuation program on their own volition. In order to implement their decision to evacuate, they had to overcome numerous bureaucratic obstacles. Sometimes it was feasible, sometimes not.

At any rate, the first thing that could move them to flee was information. Kyiv's inhabitants felt the war from its very beginning. The city was bombed on June 22, in the first night of the war with Germany. The bombardments continued also over the following days. Starting from the first day of the war, thousands of young Kyivans were drafted into the army. Evacuation of civilians and factories commenced, but its dimensions were still small and did not inspire masses of Jews to follow suit.

Soviet coverage of the war with Germany and Nazi anti-Jewish atrocities was another important factor. Soon there appeared references in newspapers and radio broadcasts to German discrimination and mistreatment of foreign Jews, Nazi racial antisemitism, and ultimately of the mistreatment, to the point of murder, of Soviet Jews.

From early July, the mood of the Soviet Ukrainian propaganda changed notably, with the main propaganda mouthpieces calling to strengthen resistance and to create partisan units. But such articles were frequently counterbalanced by numerous articles highlighting a "business as usual" mood in the city, thus asserting that the situation was fully under the control of the authorities.

Soviet measures aimed at curtailing free dissemination of war-related information, dubbed "rumors," played a highly detrimental role. Meanwhile, official Soviet reports on the actual state of affairs at the front, namely the proximity of the Wehrmacht to Kyiv, were entirely out of touch with reality.

That the situation of the Red Army continued to slowly deteriorate, as German armies drew closer, Kyivans could recognize to some extent, for there were



more and more German bombardments of the city. Nevertheless, for some inhabitants of Kyiv this could not be interpreted in a clear-cut manner—that a German land attack was imminent. During this period, however, the Soviet media gave a bit more information on German atrocities against Jews in occupied Europe and Soviet territories.

The situation at the front produced other sources of information for Kyivan Jews. There appeared numerous wounded Red Army men in the streets of the city, as well as refugees, many of whom were Jews who were fortunate to escape from the Western areas. The latter tried to arrange for themselves further evacuation eastwards and in the meantime, came into contact with local Jews. Their very appearance in Kyiv made a profound impression. Both groups, the refugees in particular, sometimes explained their experiences, which served as an important alternative source of information.

How did the Kyivan Jews respond to these messages? The city was very conveniently located for those eager to be kept abreast of wartime developments as it was at the crossroads of Jewish and non-Jewish migration. Some Jews fled Kyiv well before its occupation by the Germans, as the result of an encounter with Jews or non-Jews who urged them to leave the city immediately. Other Kyivan Jews mentioned an outburst of manifestations of antisemitism in Kyiv in the first weeks after the beginning of the Soviet-German hostilities that led them to consider evacuation or even precipitated it.

At the same time, pleasant memories of the German occupation in 1918 compounded with other factors, such as lack of trust in Soviet reports in general and in their coverage of Nazi persecution of Jews, led some Kyivan Jews to refrain from evacuating in 1941. Some families split. A younger generation was especially pro-Soviet and was frequently willing to join the Soviet war effort. In contrast, an older generation remained more immune to Soviet propaganda, but when it came to the critical decision on evacuation this disbelief proved a fatal mistake.

Some Kyivan Jews were eager to flee but were prevented from doing so by their superiors (evacuation prospects depended on where a person worked and his or her personal connections), family circumstances (for example, illnesses or conscription of family members), the rapidly changing war situation around the city,



and ambiguity in Soviet evacuation policies. Sometimes the realization came too late, as evacuation could be best achieved before early August 1941. Finally, many people believed that due to Kyiv's importance for the Soviet Union, the Red Army would be able to successfully defend it against the Wehrmacht.

### **The Occupation of Kyiv by German Troops, the SS, and Police**

Around noon on September 19, 1941, units of the 71st and the 75th Infantry Divisions and the 99th Light Infantry Division, which belonged to the 29th Army Corps, entered Kyiv.

At this time, the city still had about 400,000 inhabitants. Out of 930,000 inhabitants, in the middle of 1941 about 200,000 had been drafted into the Red Army and 325,000 had been evacuated.

Together with the forward units of the Wehrmacht, eight vehicles came with an advance detachment—53 SS men led by SS Obersturmführers August Häfner and Adolf Janssen—of Sonderkommando 4a from the *Einsatzgruppe C*, as well as a part of *Einsatzgruppe C* headquarters. The full staff of the Sonderkommando, led by SS Standartenführer Paul Blobel, arrived in the city on September 25, along with the headquarters (Gruppenstab) of *Einsatzgruppe C*. Sonderkommando 4a began operating in the city with the permission of the 6th Army the very next day.

At the same time, Police Regiment South arrived in Kyiv, in the form of the 45th Reserve Police Battalion (commander—Major of Police and SS Sturmbannführer Martin Besser) and the 303rd Police Battalion (commander—Major of Police and SS Sturmbannführer Heinrich Hannibal), and so did a part of the Staff (Stab) of the Higher SS and Police Leader (HSSPF) for “Russia-South,” SS Obergruppenführer Friedrich Jeckeln.

Thus, in total at the end of September 1941, besides German military, there were over 1,500 German SS men and policemen in Kyiv.

### **The Ukrainian Auxiliary Police**

The Melnykites weremembers of the part of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which, after the split of the organization in 1940, had remained faithful to Colonel Andrii Melnyk. They arrived in the capital of the Ukrainian SSR on



September 19, 1941, and made an important contribution to the formation of auxiliary police there. On September 21, 1941, the activist of the OUN(M) Petro Onufryk (Bohdan Konyk) and a “detachment of 18 Cossacks,” who were policemen from Zhytomyr, arrived in the Ukrainian capital, as an advance team. Two days later, a “Cossack hundred” arrived under the command of another Melnykite, Ivan Kediulych (who later was to become prominent in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army). On September 29, the Headquarters of the City Police was operational, commanded by Anatolii Konkol, alias “Orlyk.”

Then a police force was created for each city district, so that, in the fall, the Kyiv police had the Kyiv Battalion, the Bukovinian Battalion, and a so-called “Battalion for the districts.” One of the earliest public orders issued by this police (in turn stemming from German orders) was a death threat to house custodians who failed to report inhabitants who were Jewish, NKVD officers, or Communist party members.

After some time, on the basis of these units, a city police was formed, where many Melnykites served, such as Petro Zakhvalynsky, Anatol’ Kabaida, Ivan Kediulych, and Petro Oksentiiev. These activists organized meetings between the leading OUN(M) activists who arrived in Kyiv with sympathizing police officers. For instance, in December 1941, Oksentiiev organized a meeting of Police Commander Arsen Melnychuk with Colonel Mykola Kapustiansky.

There were members of the OUN(M) among the translators of Sonderkommando 4a, which shot the Jews. For instance, among those surrounding the road that led the Jews to Babi Yar, there was the forty-years-old Melnykite Stepan Fedak, who was well-known for having shot at Marshal Józef Piłsudski in Lviv in 1921.

It is not known in detail whether the entire Bukovinian Battalion was in Kyiv at the beginning of the mass shootings in Babi Yar on September 29-30, 1941. At least two groups of members arrived — one in September 1941 right after the Germans, another in November 1941. But it is likely that part of this unit was in the Ukrainian capital at that time and that it stood in the midst of the shooting site.

The Jewish survivor Viktor Stadnik saw in the afternoon of September 29 on Yaroslaviv Val Street “near today’s Karpenko-Kary Theater Institute (no. 40), a



military unit, the soldiers of which spoke Ukrainian among themselves. Above the main entrance into the building hung, at the corners, a huge yellow-blue flag, and on it, reaching almost up to the cornice, a trident. [...] Later, when on Artem Street, a bit beyond the crossing with Turgenev Street, I saw a subunit of those Ukrainian soldiers walk down Artem Street, three in a row, with rifles, in the direction of Babi Yar.” Earlier, on the way to Kyiv, the Bukovinian Battalion participated in anti-Jewish actions.

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***The Bukovinian Battalion before the Events in Kyiv***

In the Bukovinian village of Miliieve/Mille in Bukovina, on July 5, 1941, about twenty volunteers led by Voinovsky, armed with rifles, pistols, knives, pitchforks, and various farm tools found and shot about 120 Jews. Bukovinian Battalion members also contributed to the German “action” that resulted in the shooting of 12,000 Jews in Berdychiv on September 15, 1941, which was carried out by the 45th Police Battalion and the Staff of the Higher SS- and Police Leader, Gruppenführer Friedrich Jeckeln.

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**Preparations for the Mass Murder of Kyiv’s Jews**

Immediately after the occupation of the city, the occupation authorities began to persecute the Jewish population that remained in Kyiv. At the same time, the first anti-Jewish measures were carried out—not by units of *Einsatzgruppe C*, but by the Wehrmacht. In Kyiv, during the first days of the occupation, the 29th Army Corps was deployed (the corps commander was General Hans von Obstfelder), which consisted of five divisions: the 71st, 75th, 95th Infantry Divisions, the 99th Light Infantry Division, and the 299th Infantry Division. Each division was located in a certain area of the city.

On September 19, the 75th Infantry Division ordered that Jews be involved in the clearing and demining operations. On September 21, the 95th Infantry Division issued an order to “control the male population of Kyiv,” according to which, early in the morning of September 22, it was necessary to conduct a sudden arrest of the male population of draft age, to place the detainees in the “investigatory camp,”



where Abwehr officers, with the help of reliable Ukrainians, would check them. They should send the identified “soldiers in plain clothes, partisans or released criminals, then Jews” to Dulag 201, in territory controlled by the 95th Infantry Division. In contrast, the 75th Infantry Division, in the order to “purge the city of Kyiv,” issued on that same day, ordered that commissars and “released criminals” be handed over to the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*, Intelligence Service of the SS). The execution of that order was nevertheless postponed due to a lack of forces, especially Ukrainians, who were still only being selected and themselves had to be verified.

On September 22, with reference to the order of the 6th Army dated September 19, 1941 on the arrest of men of draft age, the Corps Commander ordered the arrest also of Jewish men along with disguised Red Army men. On September 23, von Obstfelder held a meeting with the subordinate six divisional commanders, and pointed out again that patrols must arrest Jewish men in the first place, and that Jews and POWs should be assigned to work.

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### ***Early Arrests in Streets and Homes***

The testimony by Genia Batasheva, seventeen at the time, shows the increasing anxiety among Jews. Her family, aware of arrests in the streets of Jews and Communists, feared going out to fetch water. They already knew of the arrest at home of a neighboring Jewish family when again, Germans appeared in the yard, four or five men.

“These Germans were coming for us. You must understand, people in our yard treated us very well. But someone had been found, someone sent them to our house. We had an attic and mama asked us children to run there. We did not do that. So mama had to run and open the door, and we stayed in the apartment, we did not go up the attic.

And the Germans loudly entered our apartment. They began to scream, ‘Juden! Juden!’ And they began... you know, the Jewish language is a bit similar, so that we understood them somewhat. [...] And suddenly they are asking us questions such as, do we own factories, do we have cars.

And you know, we stood like chicks next to mama. Some were asking, others—all of our things literally flew through the air. The whole apartment flew, they ransacked absolutely everything. What they were looking for – I still do not know. And they...



So we, in spite of such a situation—we understood how this could end—my sister and I smiled and said, “No.” And I went to the other room, pulled out my father’s suitcase with my father’s tools and began to show them and to explain, father was a carpenter. Well, that convinced them. [...] They left without us. Why, I cannot understand. But when they left, we had such a mess in our apartment.”

Batasheva’s tale continues with what amounted, as for other Jewish children, to the abrupt end of childhood:

“My mother stood all upset in the middle of the room, and then she fell on the sofa. She was sobbing so much, her shoulders were shaking. It was obviously already a fit. She lamented, ‘What have I done! I ruined you and I did not take you away.’ We calmed her down, said that ... we found some words. We calmed her down, with difficulty.”

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On September 24, explosions and fires began, set off by Soviet mines, which Red Army and NKVD engineers had placed there for this purpose. They resulted in the death of a large number of German soldiers and officers. For instance, there was a fire in Field Commander’s Office. The buildings of Sonderkommando 4a and the headquarters of *Einsatzgruppe C* were also partially destroyed. Meeting that day with SS Obersturmführer Häfner and SS Obersturmführer Janssen, either the commandant of the city, Major-General Kurt Eberhard, or von Obstfelder, demanded that the SD shoot all Jews in the city, by way of retaliation.

It is very likely that the order to conduct mass murder in Kyiv as retaliation for the explosions was approved by the commander of the 6th Army at that time, Field Marshal General Walther von Reichenau, whom von Obstfelder met on September 25. During this meeting, he certainly reported to von Reichenau about the explosions and fires, as well as about who, in his opinion, was involved. On the same day, the 95th Division ordered its anti-tank battalion to prevent all attempts by the Jews to leave the city.

On September 26, after the arrival of the main forces of the Security Police and SD (Sipo/SD) in the city, city commander Eberhard held a meeting with HSSPF Jeckeln, Chief of the *Einsatzgruppe C*, SS Brigadeführer Dr. Otto Rasch, and Commander of Sonderkommando 4a Blobel. They discussed the details of the upcoming “retaliation action.” Sonderkommando 4a was supposed to conduct it. At

the request of Blobel, Jeckeln allocated two police battalions—the 45th and 303rd, as well as the 1st platoon of the 3rd squadron of the 9th Reserve Police Battalion (the 3rd platoon of this squadron was already assigned to Sonderkommando 4a) to help with rounding up the victims, escorting them to the shooting site, and providing internal and external cordons.

On September 27, von Obstfelder held a meeting in a narrow circle: with Eberhard, Commander of the 113th Infantry Division Friedrich Zickwolff (then the head of the Kyiv garrison), and majors of the General Staff Winter and Herbert Gebauer.

On the same day (probably after a meeting with von Obstfelder), a larger meeting was held, with the Abwehr officers of the 29th Corps, the subordinate divisions and the City Commandant's Office, representatives from the Sipo/SD, the police, the Secret Field Police, the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, and the Reichskommissar of Ukraine. According to the testimony of the former Head of the Reconnaissance Department of the 29th Army Corps, Gerhard Schirmer, who was holding the meeting, although participants referred to an “evacuation” of the Jews, it was clear to everyone that it was actually their murder.

The Wehrmacht was also responsible for the allocation of ammunition for mass shootings. Subdivision South (*Außenstelle Süd*) of the General Quartermaster reported on September 27 the allocation of 100,000 bullets to the Higher SS and Police Leader.

### **First Shootings of Jews, September 27-28**

The Jews arrested by the Wehrmacht patrols on the order of the 29th Army Corps dated September 22, as well as the Jews arrested by the Sonderkommando 4a were shot already on September 27 when—as can be seen from the report of the reconnaissance department (1c) of the 113th Infantry Division—“a Jewish action began in Kyiv, conducted by Police Regiment South.” The victims were not only civilians, but also Jewish POWs. The latter were selected in the prison camp (Dulag 201) on Kerosinnaya Street (now N. Sholudenko Street), and were shot within six days, from September 28 to October 3, 1941, in Babi Yar.

### **Mass Murder, September 29-30, 1941**

On September 27, 1941, in the 6th Army's printing house "Ostfront," 2000 wall announcements for Kyiv were made, with an order to the Jews of Kyiv and its environs to appear on Monday, September 29, 1941, at 8 a.m. at the corner of "Melnikova and Dokterivska (near the cemeteries)." Jews were also obliged to take documents, money, valuables, warm clothes, linens, etc. with them.

On September 28, members of what an SD report called "the Ukrainian militia," thus meaning the auxiliary police, pasted the above-mentioned announcements in three languages (Russian, Ukrainian, and German) around the city. At the same time, a rumour was spread that the Jewish people were being collected for resettlement. The poster caused great consternation. Frida and Khaisia Lev, for instance, from 40 Turgenev Street, ran to their neighbors screaming, "They will kill us!" (Both young girls were murdered at Babi Yar.)

At 4 a.m. on September 29, police battalions began cordoning off streets that were to be used by the victims, as well as the killing site. At about 6 a.m., Sonderkommando 4a gathered for a meeting to distribute the tasks: the registration of victims, the internal cordon, and the appointment of "shooters." The Jews of Kyiv began to gather near the Jewish cemetery on the north-western outskirts of the city.

Those who did not leave their apartments voluntarily were thrown into the street by German policemen from the 45th battalion, who sometimes killed Jews on the spot. They were actively assisted in this by some residents of the city, who detained and concentrated Jews and then handed them over to the German police. And on the day of the mass shooting such people even brought Jews to Babi Yar.

The SD had expected five to six thousand Jews, which Sonderkommando 4a would shoot in a single day on their own, without involving "outsiders." However, since the "resettlement" attracted not several thousands, but tens of thousands of people, at Blobel's request that morning, Jeckeln ordered the allocation of a firing squad from the 45th Reserve Police Battalion.

The Germans sent the Jews who came to the Jewish cemetery to the left to the eastern fence of the neighboring military cemetery, where they took from them their warm clothes, jewelry, and documents. An interpreter told the arriving Jews that their luggage would be delivered to them by rail. At this moment, many victims



realized what awaited them. Adults started screaming or fell into a stunned silence, and some began thinking of how to escape. There were terrible dilemmas, as this also would mean abandoning relatives.

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***The Stripping away of Identity, Property, and Dignity***

Ruvim Shtein, then a teenager:

“a terrible picture opened up there, and we realized instantly that it would be bad for us as soon as we were brought there. ... In one place, [the Germans] were taking documents, and what is interesting is that they instantly threw the documents that they were confiscating onto a bonfire. Passports, and photographs, and documents that people had. They were already depersonalizing the people, you understand.

We were brought to another spot; there they were confiscating belongings, suitcases. There was such a mountain of these suitcases already; a huge one, you understand! As though half the world had brought those things there; like a mountain.

In a third area, valuables that people had on them: wedding rings, earrings, bracelets, chains. Well, everything that people valued most; they were confiscated there, and all this was placed in chests.

In a fourth area, outer clothing was removed: coats, jackets, woolen things, well, whatever people were wearing. They were left only in their underclothing: underwear, such light clothing, you understand.

And they began sorting the people. Women and children, including infants, were placed into a vehicle with closed bodywork, and the doors were shut tightly. What was this, were these mobile gas chambers or were these simply closed doors, so that nothing could be seen? That is why great horror, crying began; people were screaming for help, mothers were tearing out their hair. Everyone realized now: if everything is being seized and you are left with nothing, then you are only being led away somewhere to be exterminated.

Columns of teenagers, men and teenagers, were formed, and they were sent under escort down the road to Babi Yar.”

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Then the Jews were escorted by German policemen to the right, along the southern fence of the military cemetery, after which they turned right again, walked



through a grove, passed two chains of Germans threatening them with dogs, and beating them with sticks.

The Jews came to a wide platform next to Babi Yar's south-eastern spur. Here the policemen forced the Jews to take off their shoes and, at least, the outer clothing, if not to undress completely, beating those who were too slow. This was also done by translators, among whom were ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche).

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### **Final Moments**

Genia Batasheva: “... on that road we already heard shots. We heard the shots, and understood everything. We already understood everything. And between those trees were standing Germans. Here were standing Germans. (That is, there were [auxiliary] policemen and Germans and... at Babi Yar over there were Germans, but it was [also] filled with policemen. Filled. They... they behaved terribly, simply terribly.) But here there were Germans. And they were standing with dogs, with submachine guns, and clubs. At this point they were not standing on ceremony. They drove us like cattle. I always use this word because no other word will do. They drove us, those who were walking, properly—[*gesture of beating with the right arm*] with clubs. And if people stopped, they set the dogs [on them] [...].

Mama cried and cried. She was crying so much that I was petrified. I remember mama and Liza crying, but I and Grisha were not. I was simply petrified. And if I tell you what I was thinking then: I realized that I was going to my death. And I thought: “My teeth will never hurt again.” I suffered a lot, my teeth often hurt me. This was the only way I could get some relief. Crying, mama somehow tried the whole time... I remember her arms, the whole time she tried [*gesture of embrace*]... to cover us with herself. The whole time. We [*gesture of pushing away*] her this, but she, all the time... She cried so much along the way, so much. And then, this road was not long. On this road people were already tearing out their hair. And there was such an outcry!”

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At the edge of the site there were elevations, and between them there were narrow passages through which the Jews were driven into the center of the Yar. In the ravine, several killing teams from the SS squadron, Sonderkommando 4a and the 45th police battalion, distributed along the entire length of the southern part of



the ravine, killed them with shots to the back of the head. The victims had to lie down first on the ground or on the corpses of those already killed, or kneel, bending their backs to their knees and tilting their heads. Each German had a specific task, such as charging weapons. Alcoholic beverages were given to the shooters.

A part of the Jews had gone to Lukianivka railway station, located behind the Lukianivka cemetery, probably thinking that there was already a train waiting for them to be taken to a new place of residence. However, at the station they were met by police and SS men who forced them to abandon their luggage and then to go to Babi Yar.

Members of a squadron (commanded by SS Obersturmführer Bernhard Grafhorst) of the Waffen SS troops given to *Einsatzgruppe C* shot as well. As for the 303rd Police Battalion, its members were used mainly for cordoning off the killing site externally, as well as for guarding the Jews' baggage, and searching for weapons and documents inside sealed apartments. Blobel himself also sought to ensure that until the very last moment the Jews did not suspect too much.

The firing squads that operated in different parts of the Yar consisted of several shooters armed with machine guns or pistols; two men who loaded them; and several others who took the victims from the edge of Yar down to the specific murder site. Officers of the Sonderkommando controlled the activities of the firing squads. Thus, SS Obersturmführer Häfner on both days monitored the activities of the shooting squads of the SS troops. At the end of the second day, on the order of SS Brigadeführer Rasch, Häfner went down into the ravine and finished off people who were still alive.

Dina Pronicheva, then 30 years old, was one victim down there on the first day. She pretended to be dead and later got out. (After the war, she described this several times, and she was filmed while doing so during a tribunal in Kyiv.)

On the evening of the first day of the massacre, some Jews who had arrived at the gathering point were not shot because of the onset of darkness, and were locked up in garages nearby. When the shooting was over, valuable items were taken by Sonderkommando 4a to School No. 38 (now School No. 106) on Nekrasov Street. Valuable clothing, like fur goods, was brought to a sewing workshop. The Wehrmacht took out various things from such furs. Valuable items were found in



large numbers and were put aside. Gold, jewelry, watches, and other valuable items were bagged. All these valuables were apparently sent to the Reich Security Main Office in Berlin.

On the first day of the massacre 22,000 people were murdered, and on the second—about 12,000. In total, German detachments reportedly murdered 33,771 Jews. To cover the bodies, the edges of the ravine were blown up by the 113th Sapper Battalion on the evening of September 30, and then about a hundred Soviet POWs levelled the surface of the grave, as a number of German photographs also show.

Jeckeln organized a “comradely party” for the mass murderers, so that they could relax. In his speech at this “party,” he attempted to justify the murders. On October 2, 1941, Heinrich Himmler, to whom Jeckeln reported on the results of the murder operation, flew to Kyiv for an inspection. The apartments vacated by the Jews, which had already attracted the attention of Wehrmacht representatives during preliminary meetings with Sonderkommando 4a, were allocated to the city administration.

### **The Perspective of the Victims**

When the poster appeared, most Jews sensed an immediate threat to their lives. After all, they had been informed they would be shot for *not* showing up. It was widely known in the city that Jews arrested earlier never returned, and there was news of earlier massacres of Jews in western regions. What Genia Batasheva recalls—the coexistence of fear and hope—was probably typical. (This topic has barely been researched, but can be demonstrated using a range of testimonies.) There had been fear before, when Germans invaded her home and cursed her, her mother, and little brother as Jews. Her mother reproached herself for not trying harder to leave. And yet, on September 29, they set out as ordered, even though a neighbor urged them to stay put and said he would investigate for them first. Batasheva explained the obedience during the early stages of the long walk, a time when escape was still possible, *without* reference to the threat on the poster.

Batasheva has stressed several other points.

1/ Virtually all Jewish male adults had left the city, either as evacuees or as soldiers.



2/ There seemed to be safety in numbers—to kill all members of that immense crowd seemed impossible.

3/ There was a hope that they would indeed be evacuated because there was a railway freight station nearby, and some people, who were walking in the opposite direction, urged all to keep going because one train had already left.

4/ Germans on cars drove by and were smiling and laughing.

5/ The sound of the shooting apparently did not carry far.

### **Kyiv's City Administration and the Jews, 1941-43**

During and immediately after the Babi Yar massacre, Kyiv's new auxiliary city administration (uprava) was headed by the historian Oleksandr Ohloblyn. In an order published in the one city newspaper *Ukrainske Slovo* (Ukrainian Word, edited by activists of the OUN-M), Mayor Ohloblyn ordered all owners, renters, and custodians of apartments to collect and make lists of the furniture, clothing, food, and other items of Jews and others who had "left" Kyiv. Hiding such items would be punished, he added. This was the same periodical that, just days after the main massacre, called the Jews "the greatest enemy" who deserved no mercy whatsoever.

Melnykites such as Yaroslav Haivas met with Ohloblyn's successor from October 1941 as chair of the Kyiv administration, Volodymyr Bahazii, "daily and even went to his apartment for lunch and dinner." Bahazii publicly proclaimed loyalty to Melnyk, whom he said all Ukrainians were supporting. Bahazii, who was arrested by the Germans in February 1942, and shot, and various Melnykites were involved in robbing the property of the killed Kyivan Jews.

Some non-German administrators were antisemitic by conviction. There is no information on the activities in September-October 1941 of Leontii Forostivsky, who after Bahazii became Kyiv's third German-sponsored mayor. In May 1943, he wrote that when seeing the children who died in the city as a result of Soviet bombing, "we recognize the face of Jewry that hates us Ukrainians so much." In September 1943, on the occasion of the second anniversary of Kyiv's "liberation from the Judeo- Bolsheviks," he thanked the Germans for bringing a "genuine,



humane, free life.” His leaflet said the war had been unleashed by capitalists (in the UK and the US) and by “Red Moscow,” “in the interests of world Jewry.”

### **The Perspective of Non-Jewish Kyivans**

Few Kyiv residents seem to have considered the possibility of mass murder, and many non-Jews seem to have believed that the Jews were being deported. Few of them failed to witness or at least glimpse the procession on September 29. Those who wrote about it indicate it made them feel terrible, as most of the Jews were moving about in a self-absorbed manner, in silence, and with an expression of deep fear.

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#### ***Shocked Observers of the Walk toward Babi Yar***

The Ukrainian engineer Fedir Pihido saw on September 29 “many thousands of people, mainly elderly – but middle-aged people were also not lacking – were moving towards Babi Yar. And the children – my God, there were so many children! All this was moving, burdened with luggage and children. Here and there, old, sick people who lacked the strength to move by themselves were carried on carts without any assistance, probably by sons or daughters. Some cried, others consoled. Most were moving in a self-absorbed way, in silence, and with a doomed look. It was a terrible sight.”

The middle-aged Russian teacher L. Nartova wrote in her diary: “People are moving in an endless row, overflowing the entire street and sidewalks. Women and men are walking, young girls, children, old people, and entire families. Many carry their belongings on wheelbarrows, but most of them are carrying things on their backs. They walk in silence, quietly. How awful. It went on like this for very long, the entire day, and only in the evening did the crowd become smaller.”

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It is certain that not all the onlookers of the procession were sad. In various places, locals jeered at the Jews leaving their homes. The medical doctor Fedir Bohatyrchuk recalled “quite a few of my co-religionists watching this exodus with a happy face.” It appears that the denunciation and looting of Jews was also rampant, both in September 1941 and afterwards. On September 30, the second day of the



massacre, dozens of locals in the Podil district engaged in a pogrom that eventually killed seven Jews, who were hastily buried in graves dug nearby.

### **October 1941: More Shootings, and Visiting Foreign Correspondents**

Shootings of Jews in Kyiv on a much smaller scale were conducted during the first half of October 1941, especially of Jews who had fled or had been found hiding. When in early October SS Obersturmführer Häfner returned from Volhynia to Kyiv with a replacement car, he re-visited Babi Yar. Small-scale shootings were carried out there. When he asked about the number of those shot, he was allegedly told the number of 35,000, which included the main massacre.

Police Regiment South, which stayed in Kyiv until October 14, 1941, carried out four more “actions according to the customs of war” (*Aktionen nach Kriegsbrauch*) on October 1, 2, 8, and 11 in the city. As Jeckeln’s report made clear, this was a euphemism for shooting Jews; at least several hundred people were shot.

Starting from October 19, the 304th Police Battalion (commander— Major of Police and SS Sturmbannführer Karl Deckert) was deployed in Kyiv. On October 21, its members shot 80 Ukrainians for sabotage as hostages, “aside from 9 women and 3 children”; those women and children were probably Jews.

A number of Jews were shot in Kyiv in the first half of October by yet another entity: *Einsatzkommando 5* (commander—SS Obersturmbannführer August Meier, which arrived in the city on September 30. Among those shot were Jews, who for various reasons had not been killed earlier, as well as Jewish POWs. In mid-October, this team shot 300 Jews with mental disabilities, and in the following months, especially in the winter of 1941-42, at least several hundred Jews who were hiding in the city.

The Wehrmacht also continued persecuting the Jews. Thus, in early October 1941, the Secret Field Police reported that it had found a place in Kyiv where, among other people, Jews were hiding.

Soon after the massacre, in a sign of their supreme confidence, the Germans took 28 foreign correspondents from ten countries on a tour from Berlin to Poland and Ukraine, including Kyiv. A Ukrainian representative of the new city



administration told the group that there used to be 350,000 Jews in the city (the real figure had been much lower); but today, there were no more Jews.

In his report as published in the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* in Turin on October 30, 1941, Felice Bellotti reported this statement, and he wondered where the Jews had gone. In contrast, the report sent earlier, on October 14, by the head of the Berlin bureau of Associated Press, Ernest G. Fischer, was silent about the city's Jews. His article stated merely that 300,000 of the city's population had left the city before the Germans began to close in, and mostly described the damage from Soviet bombs.

In general, the massacre was far from secret beyond Ukraine. German soldiers and officials home on leave sometimes talked about it. The news also arrived from Soviet intelligence officers and from escaped prisoners who had to cover corpses in the Babi Yar area, such as Aleksei Popov, whose testimony was used in the press and even by the Soviet government. On November 19, 1941, the leading Soviet newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* wrote that a foreign news agency had reported "the Germans killed 52,000 Jews in Kyiv—men, women, and children." Ten days later *Pravda* referred to the "pogrom" in Kyiv which had killed 52,000 (while adding that besides Jews, Ukrainians and Russians had also died in it).

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### ***The Soviet Media during the Holocaust***

No later than August 1941, various sources told Stalin and his associates that the Germans and their allies were exterminating all Soviet Jews and Roma. The dictator decided to publicize the atrocities, using the large body of evidence including German captured documents, personal letters, photographs, and testimonies. On November 6, 1941, Stalin himself spoke of "medieval Jewish pogroms."

Many statements by Jews and non-Jews that passed Soviet censorship said that all the Jews of Europe were being killed. On December 18, 1942, the Soviet newspapers published a long, joint Allied condemnation of the "extermination of the Jewish population of Europe."

It was impossible to conceal such a large crime as Babi Yar. News of the mass murder of the Jews of Kyiv soon spread and by late 1941 reports began to appear in the Soviet press. On January 7, 1942, *Pravda* published an official statement condemning the



shootings of Jews in Kyiv and other cities: “A horrific massacre and pogroms were committed by the German invaders in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv... A large number of Jews, including women and children of all ages, were assembled at the cemetery of the city of Kyiv; before the shooting everyone was stripped naked and beaten... They were shot with submachine guns. There were many mass murders... and these bloody executions were especially directed against unarmed and defenseless Jewish working people.”

Starting in 1943, the Soviet media generally stopped openly identifying Soviet Jewish victims as Jews, but they remained visible in various articles, published documents, and investigative reports. Moreover, Europe’s other Jews now began to be identified more often, for example in items about Majdanek and Auschwitz. In December 1944, an article in *Pravda* by the writer Ilia Ehrenburg noted: “In the countries and regions that they occupied, the Germans killed all the Jews—elderly people, babies.” Any German prisoner asked for the reason why his compatriots “exterminated six million innocent people” would answer that they are Jews, of “another blood.”

From today’s perspective, the Soviet media “buried” the Holocaust. This was largely due to antisemitism—a sentiment in and near Stalin’s inner circle, and also a mind-set among a significant proportion of Soviet citizens whose antisemitic belief in the phenomenon of “Judeo-Bolshevism,” Stalin feared, would be encouraged by reports about Jews as victims. But there was no conspiracy of silence. Soviet readers and radio listeners who wanted to know about the extermination of the Jews were able to find references to it.

Historical research has not found much that was specifically “Soviet” in all this, and it leads to the conclusion that in the unoccupied Soviet Union, in the United Kingdom, and in the United States, reporting on the Holocaust was essentially the same--both in its tendency to “bury” and in the reasons for doing so.

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### **The Winter of 1941/1942 until 1943**

In the winter of 1941/42 and in 1942-43, at least a thousand more Jews hiding in the city were killed by Einsatzkommando 5, and then (from February 1942) by the Commander of the Security Police and SD (KdS) in Kyiv, which in 1942-43 was headed by SS Obersturmbannführer Erich Ehrlinger. (His deputy in the first half of 1942 was SS Hauptsturmführer Hans Schumacher.) These units tracked down and fought partisans, agents, saboteurs, and other enemies of the regime, and they also arrested and murdered all Jews without distinction.



Throughout the occupation, there were locals who identified Jews and arranged for their handover to the German military, civilian, and police bodies, after which the Jews were incarcerated in the former NKVD prison on 33 Korolenko Street. The victims were killed by a gas van that was at the disposal of the KdS. After the gassing in the yard of the prison, the victims were transported to an anti-tank ditch on the northern outskirts of Kyiv.

### **The Number of Jews Murdered**

On the basis of the foregoing, we can conclude that in Kyiv in late September and early October 1941, 37,000 to 38,000 Jews were killed. And for the entire period of occupation the number is at least 40,000.

The above-mentioned number of Jews killed in Kyiv is confirmed not only by German documents. The Polish underground in Lviv, in a radiogram to the Polish government-in-exile in London on November 13, 1941, reported mass killings of Jews in Kyiv and named the number of victims—35,000.

A report by the Central Headquarters of the Partisan Movement “On the situation in the city of Kyiv and the districts of the Kyiv region” (as of October 10, 1942) says that in the fall of 1941, 40,000 Jews were shot. There are also testimonies by former prisoners of the Syrets concentration camp, who participated in burning the corpses in Babi Yar in August-September 1943, recorded soon after the liberation of Kyiv from the German occupiers in November 1943. According to their estimates, about 45,000 corpses of Jews and about 25,000 corpses of non-Jews were burned.

During his interrogation by Soviet investigative bodies, SS Obersturmführer Walter Ebeling, former head of section IV (Gestapo) at the KdS in Kyiv, spoke of about 35,000-40,000 Jews killed.

### **Labor Camps for Jews**

From spring to fall of 1942, a forced labor camp for Jews existed near the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, the Orthodox Christian monastery. For the camp, the territory of an artillery warehouse was used, which was opposite to the main gate of the Lavra. The camp contained 75 to 80 Jews aged 15-16 taken there from Western Ukraine.



The territory of the courtyard of the artillery warehouse was fenced with barbed wire and guarded by German soldiers. In the building of the warehouse the SS unit was located, which had vegetable gardens near the Lavra. The camp prisoners had to work in these gardens. The camp was liquidated in fall 1942 after the end of the harvest. First a large pit was dug in the garden. The next day the Jews were shot there. In the spring of 1943, the site was ploughed and potatoes were planted.

During 1942, a house on 5 Instytutska Street served as another labor camp for Jews. The camp contained about 150 Jews (probably POWs) guarded by Ukrainian policemen. These prisoners were used to repair the building, where the NKVD of Ukraine had been. The conditions of detention in the camp were inhuman: due to hunger and cruel treatment in the camp, five or six people died every day, who were buried in the courtyard. The camp was liquidated in late 1942 by transferring the remaining prisoners to the Syrets camp.

### **The Elimination of the Evidence**

In mid-1943 in Ukraine and other regions, on the order of the Reich Security Main Office, the evidence of mass murder began to be destroyed – in the so-called Operation 1005. The RSHA's plenipotentiary for it was Paul Blobel, the former commander of Sonderkommando 4a, who was subordinate to the head of the German Gestapo, SS Gruppenführer Heinrich Müller.

Blobel appointed SS Sturmbannführer Hans-Fritz Sohns as his deputy for the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. Sohns formed two teams (Sonderkommandos) for the destruction of the existing mass graves: in the second half of August 1943 in Kyiv a team called 1005a, and in late August 1943 in Dnipro—1005b. Each team included several security police officers and a platoon (30-40 people) of the protection police (Schutzpolizei). (The latter were requested from the Chief of the Order Police in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, Lieutenant-General von Bomhard.) Like the SS men, they were repeatedly reminded of the need to preserve secrecy about the operation, and they also signed declarations to this effect. So-called “weather reports” referring to “cloud height” were used to tacitly name the locations of mass graves and the number of corpses.

By agreement between Blobel and the Chief of the Security Police and SD in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, SS Brigadeführer Dr. Thomas, team 1005a was headed by SS Obersturmführer Ernst Baumann; and its protection police platoon was headed by Lieutenant Alfred Winter. (Team 1005b was headed by SS Hauptsturmführer Fritz Zietlow; and its protection police platoon by Lieutenant Max Hanisch.) Security police officers directed the removal and burning of corpses, while the other policemen guarded the area as well as the prisoners who extracted and burned the corpses. As a rule, the workforce comprised Jews who had been kept alive as “specialists.”

The burning of corpses in Babi Yar was begun by 1005a. On or after August 18, Kyivans noticed the smoke rising into the sky. On September 10, 1005b was sent from Dnipro to help out. . The protection police were stationed separately from the SS men in barracks and houses in Lukianivka’s old Jewish cemetery. The worker-prisoners spent nights in dugouts outside the cemetery close to Babi Yar. From mid-September 1943, 100-150 policemen, 20 SS men, and about 330 worker-prisoners were involved in burning corpses.

The course of this action is described in detail in the testimony and memories of the surviving prisoners who were forced to carry out this work. Yakov Steiuk, who was sent to work in Babi Yar with 100 other Syrets camp prisoners on August 18, 1943, told interrogators of the NKGB for Soviet Ukraine (on November 12 and 15, 1943) that about 45,000 corpses were burned, 500 of which were taken from the earth in the forest near the Kirillov hospital, and the rest – in Babi Yar.

Steiuk’s information is confirmed by the testimony of the German police officer Franz Adametz in 1947, according to which the largest grave contained 40,000-45,000 corpses, while Sohns assumed there were only 30,000 corpses. Other former prisoners (Davydov, Berliant), during interrogations (on November 9 and 16, 1943), said that each stack consisted of about 3,000 corpses and that, in total, about 70,000 corpses were burned, including about 20,000 POWs.

Already after the first burning, dozens of worker-prisoners were shot and burned. On the night of September 28-29, several dozen prisoners managed to use pliers and a chisel, which they obtained while working on the excavator, to unhook their leg-irons. Then they opened the lattice-door of the dugout, in which they were



kept, with a specially prepared key and escaped. However, only about 15 of them were able to survive. Since the day before some of the policemen had drunk a lot of alcohol, the initial pursuit of the fugitives achieved little success. For alleged neglect of their guard duties, 14 policemen and Hanisch were arrested by the SD and were placed in the Kyiv prison for about ten days. They were released on October 10, after which they resumed their service. in 1005a. All the other prisoners were shot on September 30, 1943, and the activities in Babi Yar ended.

### **Non-Jewish Victims in Kyiv**

Altogether, in Kyiv in 1941-43, at least 6,000 non-Jewish civilians, and 20,000 POWs were killed.

#### Hostages

In October-November 1941, over 900 hostages were shot in Kyiv. Thus, on October 21, 1941, the 304th Police Battalion shot 80 Ukrainians for sabotage (“apart from 9 women and 3 children.”) The City Commandant, Major-General Eberhard, issued an announcement on October 22, 1941, about the shooting of 100 residents of the city for sabotage. It was possibly the same event. On November 2, 1941, Eberhard announced the shooting of 300 residents of the city as retribution for arson and sabotage. An *Einsatzgruppen* report of December 8, 1941, contains information on the shooting of 414 hostages by *Einsatzkommando 5* from November 2 to 8, which included the hostages whose shooting was publicly announced by Eberhard on November 2. On November 29, 1941, the City Commandant announced the shooting of 400 more men as retaliation for damage to communications; these hostages were shot in an anti-tank ditch near Babi Yar.

#### “Political Functionaries, Saboteurs, and Robbers”

On September 26-27, 1941, in the camp for civilian prisoners and prisoners of war Sonderkommando 4a discovered and shot 10 “political commissars,” 14 partisans and three “Jewish party functionaries.” Until February 1942, Einsatzkommando 5 shot or suffocated in gas vans a minimum of 1,300 people in these categories. The



shootings were carried out in an anti-tank ditch. Corpses from the gas vans were also thrown in there.

### People with Disabilities

On October 18, 1941, Einsatzkommando 5 shot 300 Jews with mental disabilities from a psychiatric hospital in Kyiv. On February 7-8, 1942, 365 patients were killed with a gas van; on March 29, 1942—90 patients; and on October 17, 1942—30 patients. A total of 785 patients were murdered. The corpses were thrown into pits in the Cyril Grove (Kyrylivsky lar) near the hospital.

### Members of the Communist Underground

In total, during the years 1941-43, in Kyiv, German forces killed 617 members of the Communist underground, among them 129 women. The shootings were carried out in an anti-tank ditch, as well as in pits that were dug in the open area in the Babi Yar district (but not in Yar itself). When the victims were killed in gas vans, the corpses were thrown into the anti-tank ditch.

### Ukrainian Nationalist Activists

During the years 1941-43, the German occupier in Kyiv murdered dozens of members of the OUN. The shootings were carried out in an anti-tank ditch, as well as in pits that were dug in the open area in the Babi Yar district (but not in Yar itself). If gas vans were used, the corpses were thrown into the anti-tank ditch. There may also have been a third location.

### Roma

Before the war, there had been a Roma crafts cooperative in Kurenivka, with 27 families. Perhaps already in the first days of the occupation, three camps of Kurenivka Roma were shot “behind the Church of St. Cyril.” Also, an unknown number of Roma were shot in the period from late 1941 to early 1942. According to the census conducted by the city administration, 40 Roma still lived in Kyiv as of April 1, 1942.

### Syrets Camp Prisoners

The camp functioned from May 1942 to September 1943. Its prisoners included partisans, underground fighters, people suspected of links with partisans, communists, and captured Jews, not only from Kyiv, but from other settlements in the Kyiv and Poltava regions. In the camp, prisoners who had become incapable of working, as well as prisoners connected to the escape of other prisoners were shot. Prisoners also died frequently from hunger and disease. After the German retreat, six pits were found in the camp territory, in which 650 corpses were buried. The camp had a branch in the village of Myshelovka (now within the city, Holiivsky district), whose prisoners were used in agricultural work. This branch also witnessed the shooting of prisoners who had become incapable of working and of prisoners connected to the escape of other prisoners. In a pit on the territory of the village 18 corpses were found.

### Soviet Prisoners of War

In late September and early October 1941, Dulag 201 was deployed in Kyiv, and Dulag 205 was deployed in Darnytsia, a place officially part of Kyiv. Longer-lasting was Stalag 339, located in that same place in the period from October 1941 to March 1943. Thereafter, the camp was managed by Stalag 384, until July 19, 1943, when The Darnytsia camp was dissolved. Sick and wounded prisoners (466 people) were left behind, and the other prisoners were taken westward.

In October-November 1941, more than 20,000 prisoners were in the camp. A report by the Chief of the Rear Area of Army Group South on December 30, 1941 refers to a transfer to Stalag 339 of 1,348 prisoners from Piriatyn and the surrounding area. In 1942-43, the number of prisoners ranged from 5,000 to 15,000 people.

The camp was located on the outskirts of the village Darnytsia between a highway and a railway track, on the left bank of the Dnieper, 12 kilometers (km) from the center of Kyiv, where the railway lines connecting Kyiv with Moscow and Kharkiv converge. It is located in a forest expanding far toward the north and east. The camp occupied a huge area: its length was 1.5 km and its width was about 1



km. The territory was fenced in by three or four rows of barbed wire, up to 3.5 meters in height. The same grid fenced the camp itself into separate sections.

Around the camp there were armed sentries with dogs. Inside there was wild, unbridled arbitrariness. Cruel treatment, torture and mockery of the most elementary human rights, complete deprivation of food for long periods, cold, lack of warmth and other unbearable conditions all resulted in the complete exhaustion of the inmates, the massive spread of disease and, as a consequence, very high mortality.

On the territory of a former car repair plant, there was a separate section of the main camp, also fenced with barbed wire and divided into sub-compartments of different sizes. Here, in a small building was located the so-called “infirmary” for POWs. The sick and wounded received no treatment – they just lay there in old bandages soaked in pus, their wounds infested with worms. Linen and other necessary help was not provided. The food was disgusting. The natural consequence of such conditions was mass mortality.

The number of victims of the camp was also constantly increased by systematic shootings. In the pine forest north of the camp, the Soviet Extraordinary Commission (ChGK) discovered four pits measuring 12x6 meters each, and one pit measuring 6x6 meters. According to the testimony of eyewitnesses, from October 1941 through March 1942, over 500 Jewish prisoners and about 1,500 commanders and political workers of the Red Army were shot in these pits.

Taking into account the number of prisoners in October and November 1941, new arrivals in December 1941, and the number of prisoners as of February 1, 1942, it can be assumed that approximately 13,000 prisoners died in the Darnytsia camp from November 1941 to February 1942. Thousands more prisoners died in the subsequent period, especially in February-June 1942. Perhaps as many as 20,000 overall died in the camp.

### **Criminal Cases in Relation to Babi Yar**

Blobel was sentenced to death in Nuremberg and hanged; his superior Rasch died in custody. The most significant criminal investigation of the shootings in Babi Yar was the case charging former members of Sonderkommando 4a. In the 1960-63,



the Central Office in Ludwigsburg conducted a preliminary investigation, after which the materials were transferred to the Attorney General's Office in Frankfurt am Main. This prosecutor's office conducted further investigations for three years, and, finally on January 12, 1967, charged ten people. Only nine of them were accused of involvement in the murders in Babi Yar. They were accused of murdering Jews, people with mental disabilities and Soviet prisoners of war in Sokal, Lutsk, Rivne, Novohrad-Volynsky, Berdychiv, Zhytomyr, Radomyshl, Bila Tserkva, Vasylkiv, Ivankiv, and Kharkiv.

The trial, held in the Darmstadt District Court from October 2 to 24, 1967, ended with only five prison sentences in connection with the murders in Babi Yar. Kuno Callsen was sentenced to 15 years in prison, Adolf Janssen and August Häfner, Blobel's adjutant, was received 9 years and Christian Schulte got a term of 4 years and 6 months. The cases of the the three other defendants in relation to Bab Yar were closed. Two other former members of Sonderkommando 4A received prison sentences for crimes committed elsewhere. Häfner's initial sentence was slightly reduced after a review of the Darmstadt verdict by the Federal Supreme Court in 1973.

Engelbert Kreuzer was the only member of the 45th Police Battalion whom the Regensburg District Court sentenced, to seven years in prison, on August 5, 1970. He was also accused of shooting Jews in Berdychiv, Khorol, Slavuta, Shepetivka, Sudilkov, and Vinnytsia.

No *Wehrmacht* general, officer, or soldier was ever tried for involvement in the Babi Yar massacre. Two key figures were no longer alive – von Reichenau died in 1942, and Eberhard killed himself in American captivity in 1947.

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## THE HOLOCAUST IN EASTERN EUROPE

### German Policies and Structures of Extermination

#### Nazi German Aims

German rule aimed to destroy existing Eastern European political and social structures in order to set up a “New Order” and to restructure whole societies or regions. In the beginning German occupation policies focused on “security,” i.e. the complete destruction of all forces considered potentially dangerous for the occupation. The primary political goal of the occupation was, however, economic exploitation in order to conduct and win the world war, with continental Europe as Germany’s hinterland and resource base.

At the same time, antisemitism was crucial to the Nazis’ worldview, and widely spread among other Germans. Thus, all occupation policies were related to the persecution and murder of the Jews. Jews were expropriated from the outset, and isolated from all social activities, exploited as forced laborers and killed without hesitation, if they were viewed as an imagined threat to German rule. In Nazi perceptions, all Jews in the Soviet Union were considered supporters of the Bolsheviks and the social basis of the regime, even though only a small percentage of Jews actually joined the communist party or served in the state apparatus.

From fall 1941 at the latest, German anti-Jewish persecution was driven not only by alleged “security” and economic considerations, but also by the desire of the Nazi regime to murder all Jews, the so-called “Final Solution of the Jewish Question.” These policies were pursued by nearly all institutions engaged in the German occupation.

#### German Structures of Occupation and Extermination

The occupation administrations were either civilian (in Poland and the western parts of the occupied Soviet Union) or military (in the eastern parts of Belarus, Ukraine,



and all of occupied Russian territory). The most infamous administrators included Hans Frank in the General Government (central and southern Poland), Artur Greiser in the “Wartheland” (Poznań area), and Alfred Rosenberg in charge of the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (the occupied Soviet Union according to its unrecognized borders of mid-1941) with his representatives Hinrich Lohse in Reichskommissariat Ostland (Baltics and Western Belarus) and Erich Koch in Reichskommissariat Ukraine (Volhynia, Polissia, Central Ukraine including part of Podolia, and Southern Ukraine). These administrations were responsible not only for the general policies of occupation, but also for aspects of persecution, like expropriation, setting up ghettos, and restricting food supplies. Therefore, they played key roles in the mass murder.

The executive force for the mass crimes consisted of the SS and Police. The SS as the alleged elite of the Nazi Party had been combined as early as 1936 with the German police, a state institution. During the initial conquest, mobile SS and police forces advanced directly behind the German armies: so-called *Einsatzgruppen* (about 3,000 men), units of the Order Police (about 4,500 men), and units subordinate to the *Kommandostab Reichsführer SS* (almost 18,500 men).

Later on a stable SS and Police structure was set up, with Higher SS and Police Leaders in each region, to whom both branches of the police were subordinated, the Security Police and the Order Police, a police force for general tasks like protection duties, mass arrests, etc.

Central to the organization of mass murder was the Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt, RSHA), led by Reinhard Heydrich from September 1939 until his death in June 1942. It included the Gestapo (Geheime Staatspolizei, Secret State Police), which was entrusted with combating alleged enemies of the German empire, state, and Nazism, both political and “racial,” i.e. Jews. Together with the Criminal Police and the Intelligence Service of the SS, the SD (Sicherheitsdienst), they planned and supervised the killing operations in each locality. That said, not they alone but also the German political framework of the occupation, first military then civilian, determined the extent and the speed of the mass murder campaigns.

Within German occupational rule there were distinct patterns, which also affected the persecution and murder of the Jews. During the first two weeks of occupation in an area or a city, German combat units and military commands controlled the occupation, which, however, soon departed. Together with the Wehrmacht units, mobile commands of the Security Police and the Security Service (SD), entered the area right after the German conquest, first the so called Sonderkommando (special unit), then the Einsatzkommando (operational unit). Both were parts of the infamous *Einsatzgruppen*.

These units were entrusted with searching for alleged political enemies and “enemy material,” i.e. communist party files, but primarily also with the persecution and murder of the Jews. Together with the military administration, which set up Feldkommandanturen (Field Commands) in the larger cities and towns, and Ortskommandaturen (Local Commands) in all other areas, they prepared the anti-Jewish policies. This included in the first place registration of the Jewish population, which was forced upon the local administrations, but often also the establishment of a compulsory Jewish Council (Judenrat), and in some places even the setting up of an improvised ghetto. In several places, the whole male population was arrested and confined in improvised camps in order to uncover all concealed Red Army soldiers, who were put in POW camps, and all Communists and Jews, who were killed.

During the first two weeks of occupation, the Sonderkommandos and Einsatzkommandos also killed a specific section of the Jewish population: Jewish males, who were considered to be Communist functionaries or members of the “intelligentsia.” Only from September/October 1941, did the *Einsatzgruppen* units start to organize the complete extermination of all Jewish inhabitants in those areas, which were conquered from that time on. This included Kyiv.

After the combat units and the Sonderkommandos had moved on, a stable occupation structure was established. In the military zone, the Feldkommandanturen and Ortskommandanturen were left behind by the advancing troops and largely stayed in place. In the areas under civil administration, civilian administrators arrived and established regional structures, the so-called Gebietskommissariate (each combined several Rayons into a district (Gebiet)), and

in the larger cities – Stadtkommissariate. The Gebietskommissare (district commissioners) were often radical Nazi leaders without any administrative knowledge. Their presence was restricted to the main towns of the Gebietskommissariate, beyond that there were only some German agricultural managers and policemen in the countryside. A similar structure was set up in the District of Galicia (roughly Halychyna), which was attached to the central occupation structure in Poland, the General Government. There the civil administrators were called Kreishauptmänner, and they had more personnel at their disposal than the administrations in Reichskommissariat Ukraine.

In both military and civilian areas, the SS and Police installed a stable structure, often led by SS- and Polizeigebietsführer (district SS and Police leaders), who controlled the Schutzpolizei (City Police) in the larger towns and cities, but mostly the Gendarmerie in the countryside, comprised of about 5 German policemen in each Rayon. The Security Police and SD, the main organizers of the Holocaust, were concentrated in the Generalkommissariat capitals like Zhytomyr or Mykolaiv, or in Lviv, the capital of Distrikt Galizien, but had some branch offices in larger towns, such as Vinnytsia and Kirovohrad (Kropivnytsky). Within this system, the SS and Police had some larger mobile units of the Order Police (police battalions), which could be deployed for large-scale police actions like the mass shootings of Jews, but also for raids to round up forced laborers, anti-partisan operations, or overseeing collection of the harvest.

Besides the German occupation administration and the SS/Police, there were many other German organizations active in the occupied territories, engaged especially in economic activities, such as the recruitment and exploitation of forced labor, railway and communications services, or the Organisation Todt, which was responsible for infrastructure construction and deployed Jewish forced laborers. However, German rule in the occupied Soviet Union would not have been possible without considerable assistance from the locals.

The local and regional non-German administrations continued to operate, although most communists were dismissed. They were entrusted with the registration of Jews and others, setting up ghettos, confiscating Jewish property, and often even covering the mass graves of murdered Jews.

Most important for the Holocaust, however, was the local auxiliary police, which existed in different forms in most occupied areas all over Europe (with the exception of annexed Western Poland). While in most countries the local police continued to work with traditional personnel, in the occupied Soviet Union the auxiliary police was set up from scratch in order to avoid communist cadres. It consisted predominantly of released POWs, but also of local volunteers, and to a limited degree, of Soviet militia men.

The Germans used various names for the auxiliary police, including *Hilfspolizei*, *Schutzmannschaft* (“protection squads”), *Ordnungsdienst*, and *Miliz*. The auxiliary police existed in all territories, primarily consisting of the predominant ethnic group in each area. In Ukraine, there were only several thousand German policemen, but tens of thousands of locals in the auxiliary police. Most of its branches were subordinate to the German Order Police, but also the Security Police had its own local personnel.

Nearly all branches of the administration and police, both German and local, participated in the Holocaust. The looting of the Jews and their confinement in ghettos, for example, both required large numbers of administrative and executive personnel. But this also applied to the murders. In particular, the killings after October 1941, that is the “second wave” of killings in the western half of Ukraine, involved a highly concerted mass murder operation, which was carefully planned and coordinated by the Security Police.

In most cases, Jews could only survive with the assistance and support of non-Jews. Connections and relationships to non-Jewish relatives, friends, former work colleagues or teachers played an important role. They provided – for example in Minsk – shelter during the massacres, supplied their Jewish acquaintances with food, scouted escape routes from the ghetto, established contact with potential supporters, or offered hideouts.

### **The Logistics of Local Mass Murder**

Several days prior to the crime, there were meetings between the Police and the administration in order to prepare the anti-Jewish “Aktions.” Routes and killing sites were designated. Soviet POWs, or other requisitioned laborers, often local men and

boys (or even the Jews themselves), had to dig large pits for the mass shootings. Police battalions, sometimes also Schutzmannschaft battalions consisting of non-Germans, were given orders. German employers were also informed of the upcoming events. Often, posters or loudspeakers ordered the Jews to show up for the purpose of “resettlement.”

On the day of the mass murder, German Order Police together with local auxiliary police surrounded the ghetto or Jewish quarter. (In small villages, Jews were arrested in their homes on the basis of lists of names.) Small groups of German and local policemen entered the ghetto and dragged the inhabitants out of their houses. Everyone who did not comply, including small children that had been left behind, was killed on the spot. Patients in Jewish hospitals that existed in some ghettos were also killed. Then the other victims were driven to a central place, where a selection was conducted. German employers and labor exchange personnel selected their workers, sometimes including the families of the latter, and temporarily spared their lives.

The majority of the Jews, however, were escorted, sometimes in trucks or horse-drawn carts, but usually on foot, by German and local policemen to the killing sites. These were often in forests a few kilometres outside of town, and sometimes also within towns, especially in Jewish cemeteries. The guards were under orders to shoot anyone trying to escape.

Near the killing site, the victims were assembled and robbed of their last possessions. Often they had to wait for hours, while hearing the shots nearby. Eventually they were escorted closer to the shooting site in small groups, and forced to undress. (Their clothes were later distributed or sold.) Then they were led to the pit and shot by German policemen and sometimes by local policemen, usually in the head, so that the bodies fell into the pit. Many victims were not killed immediately, but were severely wounded. Small children were often not shot, but thrown alive into the pits, to be suffocated by the corpses that fell on top of them.

Many local non-Jews saw the “journey” and then heard the shouts, shots, and screams. Still others observed from hiding places. Thus it could happen that children saw and heard their schoolmates’ horrific last moments.

After the main massacre, often a small detachment of Jewish men were ordered to cover the graves, and were the last to be killed. But as with the digging, requisitioned locals could also be told to perform this gruesome task. The killers often enjoyed food and drinks, which they requisitioned from the local population.

In order to reduce the psychological effects on the men involved in mass shootings and to speed up the process, from the fall of 1941, German SS and Police units in Eastern Europe, including the *Einsatzgruppen*, started deploying mobile gas vans. Gas vans were vehicles converted to serve as mobile gas chambers. They had a capacity to murder around 50-70 people at a time. Frequently, the victims would be murdered on the drive out to the burial site at a trench or ravine, where the corpses were unloaded and buried. The Security Police deployed gas vans to murder Jews, the disabled, and other victims in places ranging from Belarus and Ukraine, to the northern Caucasus. A gas van operated in Kyiv as well, mostly in 1943.

### **Deportations to Death Camps**

From the district of Galicia and from Transcarpathia, a large proportion of the Jews were not shot in place, but deported to the extermination camps in Bełżec and Auschwitz. In these cases, the “ghetto clearances” ended at the railway stations. The victims had to enter freight cars, which in some cases had more than 150 human beings crammed into one car. The conditions on these transports were unbearable. It often took days to cover a short distance (for example, from Lviv to Bełżec), and there was no food or water, nor any toilets available. Probably 5-10 percent of the deportees did not survive the journey.

The Galician Jews were sent to the Bełżec death camp, where almost all of them went to the gas chambers successively in groups and were killed by the exhaust fumes of a large combustion engine. Their death struggles often lasted more than 20 minutes. The corpses were taken by Jewish forced laborers to gigantic pits. Starting in early 1943, all 450,000 corpses in Bełżec were burned within a few months.

The Jews from Transcarpathia were taken to Auschwitz. There, the infamous selection took place at the ramp. Around 20 percent of the deportees, the able-



bodied, were directed to one side and became concentration camp inmates, and thus had a small chance to survive the war. All others were taken directly to the crematoria buildings in Auschwitz-Birkenau with their underground gas chambers. The victims were killed with poison gas, the cyanide-based pesticide (Zyklon B). Then the corpses were brought up to ground level and were incinerated immediately in the ovens.

### **The Attempt to Destroy the Evidence**

After the Battle of Stalingrad, the Germans started to destroy the evidence of their crimes, not only documents, but also the mass graves. In summer 1943, a Security Police operation given the code name “Operation 1005” was set up, which tried to establish the locations of all the mass graves on German-occupied territory, in the Soviet Union, Poland, and in Serbia. Small police units assisted by prisoner-laborers, either Jewish men or Soviet POWs, opened the graves and burned the corpses. But due to the rapid advance of the Red Army, these special units were unable to remove all traces of the mass murder.

The remainder of Section 4 focuses on eight specific regions. These are: (1) Central, Eastern, and Southern Ukraine; (2) Eastern Galicia and Volhynia (Western Ukraine); (3) Northern Bukovina, Bessarabia, and Transnistria; (4) Transcarpathia (Subcarpathian Rus’); (5) Belarus; (6) Occupied Russian Regions; (7) Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia; and (8) Poland. These brief regional surveys mostly express the perspective and actions of the perpetrators.

Curators of the memorial must humanize these data by adding testimonies and other materials expressing the features and perspectives of the Jewish, Ukrainian, and other members of the local communities facing the genocidal onslaught imposed from abroad.

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## Central, Eastern, and Southern Ukraine

Before the war, about 1.275 million Jews lived in these regions of Ukraine altogether, divided up here as follows (present-day Oblast borders):

Podolia: Khmelnytsky Oblast (121,000) + small part of Vinnytsia Oblast

Rest of Central Ukraine: Kyiv Oblast (297,000); and Zhytomyr Oblast (125,000); + part of Vinnytsia Oblast (88,000)

Eastern Ukraine: Chernihiv (31,000), Donetsk (65,000), Kharkiv (136,000), Luhansk (20,000), Poltava (47,000), and Sumy (16,000) Oblasts

Southern Ukraine excluding Crimea: Dnipropetrovsk (129,000); Zaporizhzhia (43,000), Mykolaiv (37,000), Kherson (28,000), and Kirovohrad (26,000) Oblasts.

Crimea (65,000)

Almost 60 percent of these Jews—some 750,000 people—left the region ahead of the invaders, or were drafted into the Red Army. Notably, the percentage that managed to evacuate increased considerably further to the east. The German Army occupied Central and Southern Ukraine between July and September 1941. Most of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea were conquered by the end of the year. These latter regions did not receive a civilian German administration.

From July to August 1941, the *Einsatzgruppen* shot members of the Jewish intelligentsia, Jews employed by the Soviet state, and Jewish POWs. Then teams of the Security Police/SD and police battalions began to massacre literally all Jews, that is, children in addition to adult Jews. This radical change occurred between 19 August and 22 August 1941 in Bila Tserkva, when a detachment of Sonderkommando 4a, shot hundreds of children for the first time. The Germans conducted mass shootings without establishing ghettos in numerous places, for example, in Lubny, Dnipro, and Mariupol in October 1941. More than 250,000 Jews were shot in these regions by the end of 1941.

Many decisions key to the implementation of the extermination were taken by local actors. Various factors impacted them: German orders and threats, obedience, ambition, avarice, ideology, brutalization, and peer pressure. The Security



Police/SD also traced and exterminated “Jewish members” of “mixed” families, “half-Jews,” and even “quarter-Jews,” who were mostly children and even babies.

Initially the German military administration let local mayors organize local police forces, known variously as *Miliz* (militia), *Ordnungsdienst* (Order Service), or *Hilfspolizei* (auxiliary police).

When control over **Podolia** was transferred to the civil administration on September 1, 1941, the local militias there were dissolved and re-established as a *Schutzmannschaft* (local police), subordinated to the German Order Police. During this process, German authorities dismissed men suspected of working for the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and others of suspect loyalty. By July 1942, there were around 2,500 local policemen deployed in Podolia; in the fall, Germans began to use conscription to boost the number. These were mainly Ukrainians, but there were also other nationalities, with ethnic Germans holding some leading positions.

In non-Podolian **Central Ukraine**, some Soviet prisoners of war of Ukrainian nationality were released home to serve in the local police. In the fall of 1941 and in early 1942, the local militias were reorganized as a *Schutzmannschaft*, subordinated to the German Order Police and given uniforms, if available. A few men viewed as unreliable were dismissed. In each *Rayon* there were about 30 *Schutzmänner*, supervised by 3 NCOs and 4 German Gendarmes. In July 1942, more than 4,000 *Schutzmänner* served respectively in General Commissariats Shitomir and Kiev. In the Shitomir Commissariat, the number then doubled in 1943.

Local police forces in **Eastern Ukraine** included Russians and ethnic Germans, as well as Ukrainians. In Kharkiv, the auxiliary police was organized by members of the OUN-M, who had arrived from western Ukraine, but also included former members of the Communist Party. From March 1942, there was a gradual exclusion of Ukrainian nationalists from the police, which turned into outright repression in the summer. By then there were several thousand auxiliary police in eastern Ukraine.

In German-occupied **Southern Ukraine excluding Crimea**, by the end of 1942 there were more than 10,000 local police auxiliaries (supervised by around 1,500 German policemen). Most were ethnic Ukrainians, besides a number of ethnic Germans and men of other nationalities, including Russians. The ethnic Germans often took on key functions as NCOs and translators.



In all regions, tasks of the local police included guarding ghettos, escorting Jews to mass killing sites, and tracking down Jews that had evaded the roundups. They were among the beneficiaries of Jewish property.

In a few places, such as in Ustynivka, Myropil, and Henichesk, individual local policemen participated in shooting Jews at the pits. They also shot individuals and small groups of Jews, sometimes without direct supervision. Some local policemen warned Jewish acquaintances about upcoming roundups. Local policemen in Shapovalivka, where four well-integrated Jewish families lived, ignored an order to shoot the Jews, reporting instead that the task was completed, permitting the Jews' survival.

Starting in summer 1941, the German authorities created more than 200 (open or closed) ghettos and over 100 forced labor camps for Jews in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, where the extermination was completed in late 1942. On September 5, 1941, Reichskommissar Erich Koch ordered that in towns with a notable Jewish contingent, ghettos were to be installed that were strictly isolated. (Ghettos were not to be created in places with less than 200 Jews.) In response, more ghettos were set up in late 1941 and the first months of 1942. Most ghettos were overcrowded with inadequate food supplies, leading to the spread of disease, especially typhus.

Some forced labor camps for Jews existed even up to the end of 1943. Most (over 40) in Ukraine did so because of the construction of Transit Highway IV, which ran along the route: Lviv – Ternopil – Volochysk – Proskuriv (Khmelnysky) – Letychiv – Lityn – Vinnytsia – Uman – Kirovohrad (Kropivnytsky) - Kryvyi Rih – Dnipropetrovsk (Dnipro) – Donetsk – Taganrog. German road construction companies provided technical supervision, and the road and the camps were guarded by a special Police Guard Battalion and subordinate Lithuanian, Latvian, and Ukrainian policemen.

The Germans established Jewish Councils in the main centers, which were compelled to assist with ghettoization, to collect and pass on valuables, and to select forced laborers. Some selections occurred in conjunction with mass shootings, which meant a decision between life and death. The councils were held responsible for implementing German orders; and the punishments for disobedience were draconian.



They were assisted by a Jewish police force in implementing these tasks; in some places Jewish policemen were armed with clubs and they were resented for enforcing German demands.

Spiritual responses have only rarely been documented. In Pulyny (Chervonoarmiis'k) in central Ukraine, the Jews started to pray when they were on their way to the pits. In the camps of Nemorozh and Smil'chyntsi, Jews tried to maintain their spirits by telling each other stories and singing songs.

**Podolia** had around 40 ghettos, mostly in *Rayon* centers serving as concentration points for the Jews of the respective *Rayon*. A few ghettos, such as those in Kupil' and Balyn, were established by the German Army in the first weeks of occupation. Some early ghettos only existed for a few weeks, as they were targeted by the Germans' first wave of killings in the second half of 1941.

By mid-August 1941, Ukrainian residents had been evicted from the old city in Kamianets-Podilsky and the Jews had been resettled into their "future ghetto." The Jews could only take 50 kilograms of luggage with them. Deported Hungarian Jews were among those crammed into the ghetto. In late August, Higher SS and Police Leader (HSSPF) Friedrich Jeckeln organized the slaughter of some 23,000 Jews in Kamianets-Podilsky, Thus he also "resolved" the issue of Hungarian deportees before handing authority to the civil administration. This became the first mass shooting of Jews in the entire Holocaust with more than 10,000 victims. Selected craftsmen were placed in a small remnant ghetto.

But most Podolian ghettos were set up by the civil administration under Generalkommissar Heinrich Schoene. Some ghettos were enclosed by a fence, but others remained open.

A few Jewish Councils or local Jewish groups organized soup kitchens to ameliorate starvation in the ghettos. The German authorities banned the supply of medicine to the ghettos, but Jewish doctors improvised as best they could – in Starokostyantyniv and Shepetivka, local Ukrainians helped smuggle medicine into the ghettos.

During the ghetto "liquidations" in the summer and fall of 1942, most Jews were shot in pits dug only a short distance away. They usually were marched there on foot, with



the aged and sick taken on carts. In Podolia, three local concentration points were used to collect Jews from several ghettos for shooting: in Manivtsi, Starokostyantyniv, and Yarmolyntsi.

From Podolian ghettos, around 2,000 Jews were selected during the roundups in August 1942 and were sent to the labor camps along German Transit Highway (DG) IV.

The German authorities established more than 70 ghettos in the **other part of Central Ukraine**. The first were established in July 1941 under military administration. Jews were forced to wear armbands and distinctive badges and were not permitted to leave except for work assignments. Most ghettos were established on a few designated streets, but due to their improvised and short-term nature, a few were established in barracks, kolkhozes, and barns. Jews were also brought into ghettos from the surrounding rural areas.

The large ghettos in Berdychiv and Zhytomyr existed only a few weeks before the SS shot all Jews, except for selected skilled workers. Some ghettos, including those in Lityn and Uman, were established just *after* mass shootings, to house remaining workers; these resembled labor camps or remnant ghettos.

A number of ghettos in the region were wiped out in the fall of 1941. Then a “second sweep” took place in 1942, after the murder of 5,000 Jews in Vinnytsia on April 15, and most ghettos were gone by June 1942. These mass shootings were organized by the Security Police and SD, assisted by the Gendarmerie and *Schutzmannschaft* (local police). The Jews were rounded up in the ghetto by the local police on German orders. They were then escorted to a nearby pit that had been prepared in advance. Shootings were carried out mainly by the Security Police with the other German and local policemen acting as perimeter guards. Smaller actions were conducted by Gendarmerie officials assisted by the local police. Local inhabitants were conscripted to fill in the graves.

In some places, especially in the ghettos near Uman (such as Zvenyhorodka and Shpola), selections were conducted so that able-bodied Jews were sent to road building camps. Some Jewish craftsmen and their families were also temporarily spared in summer 1942. All these exempted Jews were murdered during the course of 1943.

The around 14 ghettos in **Eastern Ukraine** were mostly small and short-lived. Some were not enclosed by a fence. The ghetto in Zinkiv consisted of a single house. These ghettos were essentially places where Jews were concentrated shortly before their extermination. By July 1942, all of the ghettos had been abolished. The two largest ghettos were in Kharkiv, where 10,000 Jews were housed for a few weeks in the barracks of a factory district, until their murder at Drobitsky Yar in early January 1942, and in Donetsk (formerly Stalino), where 3,000 Jews were moved into the “Belyi Karer” settlement at a former quarry. In both cities, the local administration participated in establishing the ghettos.

Very little information is available about the Jewish Councils in Eastern Ukraine. In Kharkiv a “Jewish Committee” was established on the orders of the municipal administration on November 5, 1941, one month before the creation of the ghetto. It was headed by a seventy-one-year-old doctor of medicine and professor, Efim Gurevich. He was the only Jew permitted to enter offices of the city administration.

In **Southern Ukraine excluding Crimea**, German authorities established around 18 ghettos between August 1941 and the spring of 1942, which held around 20,000 Jews. On August 28, 1941, General Franz von Roques, commander of Rear Area Army Group South, ordered that ghettos were to be established in places with a large Jewish population, but only if this was necessary or useful. As a result, ghettoization in the south was not systematic. In many places, the Jews were rounded up and shot without the establishment of a ghetto. The two largest ghettos were in Mykolaiv and Kherson, both of which existed for only two or three weeks. Several open ghettos existed northeast of Kryvy Rih in Soviet Jewish agricultural settlements established around Stalindorf.

In only a few cases is information about the existence of a Jewish Council, or Jewish elder (*starosta*), available for southern Ukraine. In Kherson, two doctors were among members of the Jewish Council and there was also a Jewish police force during that ghetto’s short duration. As Kherson’s Jews were escorted to the prison, prior to being shot, a rabbi walked at the head of the procession, singing Hebrew prayers.



**Crimea's** Jews were registered and compelled to wear six-pointed stars and perform forced labor. *Einsatzgruppe D's* units exterminated the vast majority of Crimean Jewry in mass shootings between mid-November 1941 and mid-January 1942. Only then was a local police established that became actively involved, together with local informers, in the pursuit of remaining Jews. Numerically large groups of Jews survived this initial wave, either because EG D exempted them from extermination (Jews in mixed couples, their children, and converts) or because the area of their residence was not yet under effective German control. During the course of 1942, murders were increasingly conducted using a mobile gas van.

The Krymchaks were declared to be Jews and killed, but the Karaites were deemed non-Jewish by race and exempted from the killings.

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***Crimean Karaites and Krymchaks during the Holocaust***

Karaites are members of a Jewish sect that was founded in the early medieval period. They have lived in Crimea for more than 500 years and differ from rabbinical Jews in that they reject most of the oral law. The precise origins of Crimean Karaites remain disputed. They have their own language that is Turkic-based, but includes some Hebrew words. In the nineteenth-century Russian Empire they achieved a greater degree of emancipation than Ashkenazi Jews. They still used Hebrew for prayers until the early twentieth century, when new doctrines and then Soviet atheism caused most Karaites in Crimea to abandon the language.

Krymchaks are mainly the descendants of Jews that came to Crimea over many centuries and maintained their religion. In terms of language they adopted one of the Tartar dialects, but they retained Hebrew for sacral use. Before 1917 they were treated much like Ashkenazi Jews, but they only started to intermarry with them, and also with Crimean Tartars, under Soviet rule.

Around 6,500 Karaites and 6,000 Krymchaks resided on the peninsula before the Germans' arrival in late 1941. The Germans pursued quite different policies with respect to the two groups. Following a central decision taken by Heinrich Himmler in December 1941, the Karaites were exempted from the mass murder of the Jews. This followed a pseudo-scientific assessment that found a non-Jewish racial background, even though the Karaites practiced the Jewish religion. The Krymchaks, however, were viewed by the Germans as



Jewish by race. The German security forces killed them wherever they found them, usually only a few days after they murdered the Ashkenazi Jews.

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There were Jewish Councils in Simferopol, Sevastopol, Yalta, and Yevpatoria, but they existed only briefly, as generally the Germans did not want to establish ghettos here. The one full-fledged Crimean ghetto—and the only urban place where Jews were separated from non-Jews—was in Yalta. That ghetto was guarded by Russian policemen, who did tolerate contacts between the roughly 1,500 Jewish inmates and their non-Jewish spouses residing outside. The single rural ghetto in Crimea was in the village of Voikovstat (Kerch raion) and held over 100 Jews, guarded by Romanian soldiers. When Soviet troops landed in the area in late December 1941, most of these inmates escaped to the Soviet mainland.

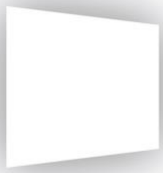
From mid-December 1941, in an apparent attempt to create a single camp with all Crimean Jews, more than 700 Jews were held in a camp in Dzhankoi. The German and Russian guards frequently maltreated and even killed them. On December 30, 443 of these Jews were shot near the road to Simferopol.

In total, apart from Crimea, about 460,000 Jews were murdered in Central, Eastern, and Southern Ukraine (of which some 38,000 were in the area of German military administration). The largest totals were in the [present-day] Khmelnytsky (115,000); Vinnytsia (80,000; excluding the part under Romanian rule); Kyiv (77,000); Zhytomyr (55,000); and Dnipropetrovsk (35,000) Oblasts.

Jewish death rates were lower further to the south and east in the Donetsk (16,000); Kherson (15,000); Poltava (13,000); Mykolaiv (13,000; excluding the part under Romanian rule); Kharkiv (12,000); Kirovohrad (12,000); Zaporizhzhia (7,000); Chernihiv (4,000); Sumy (3,500); and Luhansk (2,000) Oblasts. The figures for Zhytomyr and Khmelnytsky Oblasts include some 13,000 Jews deported from Hungary.

In Crimea, 30,000 to 35,000 Jews were exterminated, half of them in Simferopol, where the main shooting action took place in the second week of December 1941.

From August 1943, two special Security Police detachments, Sonderkommando (SK) 1005a in Kyiv and SK 1005b in Dnipro, burned around 85,000 excavated corpses



in seven main locations: Kyiv, Bila Tserkva, Dnipro, Uman, Mykolaiv, Kherson, and Voznesensk.

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## **Eastern Galicia and Volhynia (Western Ukraine)**

### **Anti-Soviet Uprising and Declaration of Statehood**

When Germany attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, in Eastern Galicia and Volhynia, often summarized as Western Ukraine, thousands of members of the Ukrainian nationalist underground forces of the Bandera wing of the OUN began an anti-Soviet uprising with the aim of establishing a Ukrainian state. They did not only attack Soviet troops, but also initiated and organized new local administrations and militias in most cities and villages. However, the Germans did not accept the declaration of Ukrainian independence by Yaroslav Stetsko, Bandera's deputy, on 30 June 1941 in Lviv, but arrested Bandera and Stetsko some days later.

### **Initial Anti-Jewish Violence by Locals and Germans**

Anti-Jewish violence by locals was widespread in the western regions added to the Soviet Union during the German-Soviet non-aggression pact. The overall number of Jewish victims for Eastern Galicia in the summer of 1941 was 7,000-11,000. For Volhynia, the question of pogroms has been much less researched, but the basic known features were similar.

Antisemitism was almost never the only causal factor for deadly violence. Additional circumstances were the following.

### Encouragement of and participation in the violence by German forces

These forces were primarily *Einsatzgruppe C* and units commanded by Higher SS- and Police leader Friedrich Jeckeln. Their actions followed Reinhard Heydrich's instructions to his *Einsatzgruppen* that they secretly encourage "self-cleansing attempts by anti-Communist and anti-Jewish circles."

### Violent excesses by the Waffen-SS Division "Wiking"

Parts of this division played a central role in the violence in Zolochiv, Zboriv, Ozerna, Hrymailiv, Skalat, and most of all in Ternopil, where as many as 2,300-4,000 Jews were killed.



Violent acts by insurgent Ukrainian adherents of Stepan Bandera's OUN and by local militias established by them

German (or in the Southern parts of Galicia: Hungarian) forces did not exert very much control over many towns and villages during the first days of the German occupation. During that period, insurgents or OUN-led local militias in many localities "punished" as part of the change of rule those whom they considered to be supporters of Soviet rule, "traitors" or enemies of the Ukrainian nation and state. Instructions from the OUN-B allowed for "cleansing hostile elements from the terrain of" and described Jews as supporters of Soviet rule. Ivan Klymiv, commander of the OUN-B's underground in the region, introduced tribunals that asserted the right to penalize families and national groups.

Earlier NKVD killings

In various localities anti-Jewish violence took place after corpses of prison inmates who had been killed by the Soviet authorities before their retreat were discovered. In Lviv alone about 2,500 inmates had been murdered. In that city and in other localities, inhabitants helped the militia in bringing Jews to the prisons as workers for the retrieval of the corpses, so as to allow relatives to identify and to bury them. The public harassment was also a kind of public celebration of the end of Soviet rule. Thus hundreds of Jews were killed in Lviv alone.

**Eastern Galicia, 1941-43**

In eastern Galicia, the Nazi campaign of concentration, deportation, forced labor, and murder directed against the Jews took more than two years to complete. This comparatively long time-span was partly due to the large Jewish population and to the continued German need for some Jewish workers. Approximately 550,000 Jews were exterminated in total.

**Deportations and Mass Shootings in Eastern Galicia**

In summer 1941, squads of the Security Police and SD conducted shootings against the Jewish intelligentsia and Jewish Soviet officials. From October 1941, total extermination began. In today's Ivano-Frankivsk, then

Stanislawów or Stanyslaviv, on 12 October 1941, the largest mass shooting in this period took place, when about 9,000 Jews were shot.

Deportations to the Belżec extermination camp began in March 1942: in total more than 200,000 Jews from eastern Galicia were deported and gassed there until its closure nine months later. Some sources report deportations to the Sobibór extermination camp thereafter, but the evidence is inconclusive. Further deportations, sometimes to the Majdanek concentration camp in Lublin, did take place up to the summer of 1943.

As news spread, people desperately sought work cards that might protect them. Conditions in the cattle cars were lethal. Hundreds of Jews broke holes in the railcars and jumped from the trains headed to Belżec. One of the “jumpers,” survivor Leon Weliczker Wells, commented: “Those who did escape, though, returned to the ghetto – where else could they go?”

The murders then continued in 1943 through “Aktions,” meaning mass shootings. The SS and Police, under the direction of SS and Police Leader (SSPF) Friedrich Katzmann, “liquidated” the remaining ghettos by June 1943 and most labor camps by the end of July. Only a few Jews remained, working in the oil industry or in agriculture through the end of 1943.

### **Forced Labor Camps for Jews in Eastern Galicia**

The SS operated a large network of more than 150 forced labor camps for Jews, which exploited tens of thousands of laborers. In November 1941, the systematic recruitment of able-bodied Jews to work in such camps began, to support the German road construction project DG (Durchgangsstrasse or Transit Highway) IV, the oil and gas fields around Drohobych and Boryslav, and the plantations for the production of synthetic rubber. The DG IV camps were examples of “destruction through work.” A mass breakout from the Sasiv camp enabled at least 17 men to survive.

The largest camp in eastern Galicia was Janowska (Ianivskiyi) in Lviv, which in July 1943 held 8,000 prisoners. It was a site of forced labor, transit, and mass killings. Tens of thousands of Jews were shot in the nearby sandy dunes; their graves were erased from the summer of 1943 by a squad of



more than 120 prisoners. A similar excavation and burning took place in Stanyslaviv (Ivano-Frankivsk) in early 1944. The Nazis did not destroy mass graves elsewhere in eastern Galicia.

### **Ghettos in Eastern Galicia**

Until November 1942, ghetto formation in eastern Galicia was sporadic and prolonged, and dependent on local German decisions. The first ghettos were established in Rohatyn in late July and Ternopil in September. The Ternopil ghetto was not enclosed by a fence until December 1, 1941. More ghettos began to be planned, in a German attempt to isolate the Jews and to confiscate urban space.

Ghettos often were created following mass shootings, for example in Ivano-Frankivsk after October 12, 1941; there the ghetto was enclosed on December 20. But in Lviv attempts in November-December 1941 to establish a ghetto were postponed when typhus broke out. The Lviv ghetto, ultimately one of the largest in Nazi Europe, only emerged after a large “Aktion” in August 1942 had removed more than 40,000 Jews from the city.

A wave of ghetto formation accompanied the start of deportations in spring 1942. Thus the number of Jews living in smaller towns and villages declined steadily. The final round began on November 10, 1942, when it was decided to confine all Jews within 32 ghettos by the end of the month. All Jews found outside a ghetto and not in a labor camp now were supposed to be shot.

Living conditions in the ghettos deteriorated as the Jews exhausted their last reserves and their enclosure limited access to food and heating. Overcrowding, malnutrition, and poor sanitation caused disease to spread.

In the first half of 1943, with Belzec unavailable, SSPF Katzmann resorted to mass shootings to exterminate all remaining ghetto Jews. Some ghettos were initially reduced in size, others completely “liquidated.” Remaining ghettos now often resembled labor camps, and the remnant ghetto in Lviv literally was renamed a “Jewish Camp.” In Ternopil and elsewhere, new labor camps were established outside the ghetto. During and after the mass shootings of ghetto Jews, the German Police assisted by the Ukrainian Auxiliary Police searched for Jews in hiding. Those captured were shot on the spot or murdered in batches later.



## **Jewish Councils and Jewish Life in Eastern Galicia**

The first Jewish Councils in eastern Galicia were established in July 1941 by German and Hungarian occupying authorities. Their tasks included collecting forced contributions and meeting quotas for forced laborers. They were assisted by a Jewish police called the Jewish Order Service. Council members were held personally responsible for implementing German demands, and many were murdered and replaced. Inevitably corruption and favoritism crept into their work. In an attempt to improve conditions, they often bribed German officials and the auxiliary police, but in the long-term, this strategy offered no protection.

Some councils consisted of 12 or more members, and the councils employed considerable staff. The Lviv *Judenrat*, for example, supervised 23 separate departments. In Kolomyia the Jewish Council had about 300 employees. Some councils represented the Jews of an entire *Kreis* by supervising the councils in outlying communities.

In many places, along with the Jewish Police, the councils were involved in selecting Jews for deportation. Most complied with the German demand, but in Dolyna council chairman, Julius Weinreb, refused to take decisions over the lives of individuals.

The Jewish Order Service in Lviv was established in connection with the first resettlements into the ghetto. By spring 1942 it had around 750 members. They earned a bad reputation. In filling deportation quotas, Jewish policemen could either consign people to their deaths or grant a temporary reprieve (sometimes for bribes). In their defense it should be considered that they feared death themselves and that very few survived.

As schooling and public worship by Jews were banned, such activities were driven underground. In many places Jews continued religious observance by praying and burying the dead in accordance with tradition. Schools operated clandestinely and underground publications circulated. In the Borshchiv ghetto, some inmates wrote poems and songs, but relatively few manifestations of cultural life in the camps and ghettos of Distrikt Galizien have been preserved.



In 1942, the Jewish Social Self-Help, based in Kraków, set up branches in eastern Galicia, but this support was woefully inadequate and short-lived.

### **The Ukrainian and Other Auxiliary Police**

During deportations and mass shootings, policemen recruited locally, the so-called Ukrainian Auxiliary Police (*Ukrainische Hilfspolizei*), played a subordinate but important role. Occasionally, such policemen would assist Jews they knew. But numerous descriptions by survivors and in German, Polish, and Soviet trials implicate them in beating and shooting Jews, and in hunting for those who escaped from ghettos and camps. In cities, the German Criminal Police supervised separate police sections manned by Poles and Ukrainians. One was the Polish Criminal Police, which also played an active role in finding Jews following denunciations. The German Security Police employed its own auxiliaries, often ethnic Germans, who took part in the mass shootings.

### **Volhynia, 1941-43**

In summer 1941, mass murder remained sporadic, resulting from small pogroms and killings by the *Einsatzgruppen* and Police Battalions as they advanced through the region. These actions claimed around 10,000 Jewish victims. The total extermination of Jews began in Volhynia in the fall of 1941. The largest mass shooting of Jews in this stage took place in Rivne on November 6-7, 1941, with about 17,000 Jews murdered.

In the first four months of 1942, there were almost no mass shootings, as the German civil administration focused on the ghettoization of the Jews. The massacres resumed in May 1942. The vast majority, some 85 percent, of Jews killed in the Volhynia and Rivne Oblasts were murdered during so-called ghetto “liquidation Aktions,” carried out by the German Police and their local auxiliaries between May and December 1942. These were usually conducted in one or two “Aktions” in each place; the Jews were escorted to nearby pits, where they were shot.

## **Forced Labor Camps in Volhynia**

More than 20 forced labor camps for Jews existed in the region of the modern Volhynia and Rivne Oblasts. The first opened in the summer of 1941. The Jews were engaged in various tasks including digging peat, forestry, agriculture, roadwork, and airfield construction. Jewish elders were appointed in some and in one, run by the SS, there was a Jewish camp police. Conditions were harsh with long hours of work, inadequate food, beatings, and other forms of abuse. The prisoners, mostly men, but sometimes including women, were guarded by local auxiliary police, usually Ukrainians, and slept in barns or buildings converted into barracks.

In the summer and fall of 1942, the inmates generally were sent back to nearby ghettos, to be murdered together with their families. But in some places, such as Dubno, Kolki, and Rozhyshche, small labor camps, resembling remnant ghettos, were established after the main ghetto “liquidation Aktions.” These sometimes existed for up to 8 weeks and performed crafts. The remnant ghettos were also used to lure surviving Jews out of hiding.

Some who escaped from the labor camps (for example in Lutsk, after armed resistance) tried to meet up with their families, while others joined the partisans or sought refuge with local peasants, especially Baptists, who viewed Jews favorably. A group of 15 Jews that escaped from a remnant ghetto in Ratne were then disguised as forestry workers by a local Ukrainian in Smolne.

## **Ghettos in Volhynia**

In September 1941, Reichskommissar Erich Koch ordered the establishment of ghettos in towns with a notable Jewish population, but not in places with less than 200 Jews. The main Nazi aims in *establishing* ghettos were to isolate, concentrate, and exploit the Jews. The Jews received only a bare minimum of food supplies, such that those without work would starve within months.

The German civil administration established 64 ghettos in Volhynia between August 1941 and summer 1942, in successive waves. In many cases the Germans ordered Jews from the surrounding *Rayon* brought into the ghetto. After a first wave

of ghettoization in fall 1941, a second wave took place in the spring, when ghettos were established in places including Kamin-Kashyrskiy, Kovel, and Olyka.

Sudden relocation meant the loss of property, identity, and self-esteem. Jews driven into ghettos from the villages received the worst living quarters. Overcrowding was severe, ranging from 8 to 15 people per room. In smaller ghettos, Jews could still obtain food through barter. It was smuggled into the ghetto by Jews working outside, or by children sneaking under the ghetto fence.

Jews were subjected to forced labor and some able-bodied Jews were sent out to labor camps. From late 1941, hundreds of Jews from Volhynia were sent to work on construction in Vinnytsya and Kyiv.

The Lokachi ghetto was initially open, but the Jews were forced to construct a wooden fence in early 1942. Its completion was accompanied by the imposition of severe punishments for leaving the ghetto. When a Jew was shot on March 16 for leaving it illegally, black-market food prices instantly soared. In some places, there were two or more ghettos, usually divided between those able to work and the others. This was in preparation for “Aktions” conducted in May 1942, in which people deemed unfit were killed. Such “Aktions” took place in Dubno, Kolki, and Verba.

By the summer of 1942, many Jews recognized that the plan was to kill them all. Jews considered escaping to the partisans, but were reluctant to abandon family members. Many Jews constructed bunkers and other hiding places, mostly inside the ghettos. Other sought to hide with acquaintances outside.

In fall 1942, almost all remaining ghettos were destroyed; the last skilled workers were killed shortly afterward. The German police, assisted by the *Schutzmannschaft* (local police), shot the Jews close to their home towns in pits. The region’s last remnant ghetto or camp, in Volodymyr-Volynskiy, was destroyed by German Security Police on December 13, 1943.

### **Jewish Councils and Jewish Life in Volhynia**

The German authorities established Jewish Councils in Volhynia from July 1941. Some were organized by the Jews themselves, others were selected with input from German-appointed mayors. Jewish leaders from the Polish period, including rabbis,





teachers, lawyers, and community activists, were among those appointed, together with a few refugees. The German authorities held Council members responsible for the community's obedience, killing and replacing several in the first months of occupation.

The Jewish Councils were assisted by a Jewish police force, the Jewish Order Service. Among their main tasks were supplying forced laborers and meeting German demands for contributions. In Lokachi, when the District Commissioner demanded a poll tax, the Judenrat and Jewish Police with 15 Jewish muscle men broke into homes shouting: "Give us the money!" Everyone was very angry at the Judenrat, but the money had to be turned over. In Rokytna a religious interdiction (*cherem*) was imposed to enforce a local tax. In Volodymyrets the Jewish Council received assistance from a Catholic priest to meet a large contribution.

Many Jewish Councils did their best to spread the burdens and distribute meager rations fairly. Yet labor assignments fell mainly on the poor, as others bought exemptions. Some Jewish Councils were accused of corruption; the use of force by the Jewish Police was especially resented. Ultimately the behavior of Jewish leadership relied much on the qualities of individual local leaders. Attempts at bribery were ineffective in the long term against the German drive to eliminate the ghettos.

In some ghettos, considerable efforts were made to bury the dead and religious and family holidays were observed, if more modestly than before. Schooling was continued in some ghettos through private initiatives. Due to forced labor and nightly curfews, little time was left for prayer. Over meals, or when Jews gathered, they spoke of hopes for a turn in the fortunes of war, focusing on any positive news.

As the last days for some ghettos coincided with the high holidays, people gathered in remaining synagogues or prayer houses to pray. There were even "yearnings for redemption" in smaller towns, where individuals saw visions and spread this news. Some rabbis used the final gatherings to speak words of consolation, or urge their congregations to revolt.

Even in despair, many Jews demonstrated defiance. In the Lokachi ghetto, people decided to destroy remaining property, to deny it to their tormentors. Jews



imprisoned in the synagogue in Kovel after the ghetto “liquidation” wrote desperate last messages on the walls.

### **The Auxiliary Police in Volhynia**

The local auxiliary police was first recruited under German military administration and was known as the *Miliz* (militia) or *Ordnungsdienst* (OD). In many places, Ukrainian nationalists established local militias before the Germans arrived. There was considerable anti-Jewish violence and anarchy during the first weeks of German occupation. Members of the militia beat Jews and arrested them arbitrarily, in addition to participating in pogroms and some mass shootings.

When a German civil administration took over, the initial militias were reorganized. Renamed the *Schutzmannschaft*, they were subordinate to the German Order Police, whose attitudes generally shaped the behavior of the local police toward the Jews.

The local policemen were recruited initially on a voluntary basis. The overwhelming majority (more than 90 percent) were ethnic Ukrainians. A few ethnic Germans also played a role as translators. Some local policemen had Jewish friends before the war, but most such relationships soured under German occupation.

The *Schutzmannschaft* played a key role in guarding the ghettos, escorting Jews to the sites of mass shooting, and searching for Jews in hiding after the ghetto “liquidations.” Many survivors comment on the brutality of local policemen and their participation in shootings. Among the main reasons for local policemen to participate in anti-Jewish violence were access to plunder, brutalization, and peer-pressure, reinforced by alcohol abuse.

In 1941-42, during the anti-Jewish killings, the local police remained relatively small, consisting of posts with 20-30 men. In July 1942, there were around 4,000 local policemen in Volhynia. From spring 1942, the *Schutzmannschaft* was instrumental in deporting people to Germany for forced labor. From late 1942, when partisan warfare intensified, the *Schutzmannschaft* was expanded such that 12,000 men served altogether through 1944.

In spring 1943, around 4,000 *Schutzmannschaft* members deserted their posts in Volhynia and joined the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). The ranks of the UPA were also swelled by non-police recruits. The UPA fought Soviet partisans and Germans, but most of its violence was directed against ethnic Poles. Jews that had fled the ghettos were also among their victims. The Ukrainian deserters were mainly replaced in the *Schutzmannschaft* by ethnic Poles.

### **The OUN and the Jews**

Since the end of the 1930s antisemitic ideas had become more influential within the OUN, but neither branch of the organization considered Jews the main enemy – this remained the Soviet Union or Poland – and they did not think that removing Jews would solve all or most political and social problems. But the OUN did widely see Jews as supporters and beneficiaries of Soviet rule. The announcement “Ukrainian People!” posted by the OUN(B) in Lviv and Kyiv on June 30 and September 25, 1941, respectively, declared: “People! Know! Moscow, Poland, the Hungarians, the Jews are your enemies. Destroy them.”

Moreover, Yaroslav Stetsko informed the Germans in July 1941 that he supported, as the German translation prepared at that time put it, the “German methods in the fight against Jewry in Ukraine.” (The Ukrainian original was far more blunt: “I therefore support the destruction of the Jews and the expedience of bringing German methods of exterminating Jewry to Ukraine, barring their assimilation and the like.”) He did not spell out what he had in mind. But compared to the OUN(B)’s stance toward Jews, usually OUN punishments meted out against fellow-Ukrainians were milder and did not strike their families.

The local militias, which the OUN-B had established in many localities in Eastern Galicia and Volhynia during the first days of the German invasion, participated in the first German mass killings of Jews in early July 1941 by arresting and escorting the victims. In Lviv, for example, they arrested most of an estimated 2,000 Jews murdered on July 5 by *Einsatzgruppe C*; and they arrested about 2,000 Jews on 25 and 26 July, of whom about 1,500 were murdered by the German Security Police. By that time, the militia in Lviv had about 270 members.

From August 1941, with the introduction of the civil administration, the local militias were replaced by the “Ukrainian auxiliary police” (“Ukrainische Hilfspolizei”) in Galicia and “Schutzmannschaften” in Volhynia. Known members of the OUN-B were often removed, and sometimes replaced by OUN-M members. In September German arrests of members of the OUN-B started and from November a number of those arrested were killed.

The OUN-B tried to retain their own people secretly in the police forces, also when, in early 1942, the Second Congress of OUN-B decided “at the present moment” not to take part in German “anti-Jewish actions.” In the fall of 1943, the OUN-B gave instructions to prepare documents that could show that the Ukrainian police and Ukrainians as such had not at all been involved in the German extermination of the Jews.

Members and sympathizers of both branches of the OUN worked in the press, which, as in all regions under German and German-allied rule, was full of antisemitism. On 1 September 1941, for instance, the editor and writer Ulas Samchuk, who was close to the OUN-M, wrote in the Rivne-based newspaper *Volyn'* about Jews in terms identical to Nazi German antisemitic propaganda: “That entire element that populated our cities, be it Jewry or the Polish influx, must disappear from our cities. The Jewish problem is in the process of being solved and it will be solved within the framework of a total reorganization of the new Europe.”

### **The Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Jews**

Many aspects of the highly controversial question of UPA’s attitudes and acts towards Jews in 1943 and 1944 have not yet been researched in depth. The foundation of the UPA during the last months of 1942 marked the beginning of the OUN-B’s more active resistance to German rule. The UPA drove the Germans out of some parts of Volhynia. In spring 1943, its ranks were swollen with policemen who had deserted, and the UPA began attacks on Polish villages. In summer of that year it became an attempt at “ethnic cleansing” Volhynia of Poles, a campaign which was extended in the beginning of 1944 to Galicia. Tens of thousands of Poles were killed.



While in August 1943, the OUN-B's "Third Extraordinary Assembly" approved a measure of democratic reorientation in its political program, and a more positive attitude towards national minorities, actual practice contradicted these modifications. Moreover, as before, the OUN and the UPA were publicly silent about the extermination of the Jews.

Various UPA units killed Jews. The numbers are controversial. Some historians even believe there is no proof whatsoever. Other researchers count 1,000-2,000 killed in Eastern Galicia and Volhynia, or assume the figure must have been still higher.

In UPA attacks on Polish villages, Jews hiding there were killed along with the Poles. Another context for these killings of Jews was the belief among UPA units that Jews whom they met in the forests constituted a security risk. (Roma were killed as well, and for the same reason.) Yet another factor was that former policemen likely wanted to eliminate witnesses of their deeds in German service.

Seemingly—and if so, contrary to the Soviet partisans and to some extent also the Polish partisans and self-defense units—the UPA hardly ever accepted Jews into their ranks. There were some Jews in the UPA in specialist functions, mostly as medical personnel, but there are strong indications that they too, eventually, were mostly killed. Some other units merely sent those specialists away, however.

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## **Northern Bukovina, Bessarabia, and Transnistria**

Measures introduced by the Romanian government ended the lives of 280,000-380,000 Jews, mostly beyond today's Romania, in Northern Bukovina, Bessarabia (comprising much of modern Moldova), and Transnistria, meaning the region between the Dniester and Southern Bug rivers. Jews were killed, starved, deported, imprisoned under inhuman conditions, and abused in many other forms. The qualitative difference compared to German policies did mean that in the spring of 1944, when the Red Army arrived, tens of thousands of Jews in camps and ghettos were still alive.

### **Persecution and Mass Murder in Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia**

The historical debacle of June 1940, when these territories were annexed by the Soviet Union, pushed Romania into the arms of the Germans and drove anti-Jewish sentiment to record heights, with the accusation of "Judeo-Bolshevism" taking center stage in official rhetoric. The failed rebellion by the Iron Guard on January 21-23, 1941, was accompanied by a pogrom in Bucharest, in which 125 Jews were killed. Then, shortly after Romania's joint attack on the Soviet Union, together with Nazi Germany, more than 13,000 Jews from Iași/Jassy were murdered in nine days. On June 29, 1941, Romanian and German soldiers, members of the Romanian Special Intelligence Service, policemen, and locals, shot thousands of Jews, all of whom were accused of treason. The others died of exhaustion in two sealed death trains that circulated without food or water for eight days.

Upon arriving on Bessarabian and North Bukovinian territory, in the summer of 1941, the Romanian army units, gendarmerie, police, and various units of *Einsatzgruppe D*, were all involved in the killing of 45,000-60,000 Jews.

The Romanian Gendarmerie, commanded by Constantin Vasiliu, was informed that Ion Antonescu's order for "cleansing the terrain of Jews" demanded the extermination on the spot of all Jews residing in rural areas, enclosing the urban Jewish population in ghettos, and arresting anyone suspected of being a communist or who held a significant position in the previous Soviet administration.

In late June-July 1941, Bessarabian Jews were massacred in numerous villages and small towns, such as Pepeni, Cepeleuți, and Mărculești, and in cities such as Chișinău, Bălți, and Orhei. Some Bessarabian peasants joined the frenzy of killing, hunting down and murdering their Jewish neighbors. Bessarabian men, women, and children also participated in the mass plunder of Jewish property.

In Bukovina, Sonderkommando 10b shot Jews in Chernivtsi/Cernăuți and Khotyn/Hotyn. In addition, mass killings of Jews were conducted on the basis of Romanian orders and instructions in July 1941 in most of the settlements of the region, sometimes involving the local non-Jewish population. For example, on the very first day of the occupation in Storozhynets, 4 July, Romanian soldiers, accompanied by peasants from the outskirts of town, shot 200 Jewish men, women, and children, in the streets and in their homes, which they also looted.

In Vyzhnytsia/Vijnița, Ukrainian nationalist activists killed 21 Jews, and in the village of Milieve/Milie, as many as 176. The latter murder, on July 5, was committed by a unit of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists led by Petro Voinovsky, the official leader of the OUN in Bukovina. When, that same day, Voinovsky's unit tried to kill the Jews of Ispas, Mayor Ivan Denys stopped it. The locals rescued all fifteen Jewish families.

Jews were also killed on the orders of the Bukovinian OUN in many other villages. For instance, in Nyzhni and Verkhni Stanivtsi (Vashkivtsi district), Ukrainian nationalist activists armed with rifles, knives, sticks, and stones killed 80 and 33 Jews, respectively. In the village of Nepolokovtsi (Kitsman district) up to 30 Jews were clubbed to death and dumped in the Prut River. Some 150 Jews from the villages of Borivtsi and Kyseliv (Kitsman district) were taken to a small lake and shot there. No Germans or Romanians were present during these killings.

### **Ghettoization and Forced Labor**

The elimination of any “Jewish presence” was one of the main concerns of the Romanian military leadership. In their view, this was required to secure the army's rear area. After Bessarabia's capital, Chișinău, was captured, a Jewish ghetto was established in the lower part of the city. Makeshift barriers were set up. The Romanian authorities appointed a Jewish Ghetto Committee, composed of twenty-



two people led by the well-known community leader Guttman Landau. The Committee made some decisions with respect to work assignments, deportations, and providing help to inmates of the ghetto who were poor, sick, or who had disabilities. The ghetto held up to 11,525 internees, mostly women, children, and the elderly.

Daily, hundreds of detainees from Bessarabian camps and ghettos were sent out to work on road construction, clearing rubble, and other forced labor. Starvation, disease, brutality, and physical exhaustion became part of daily life for the Jews in Bessarabia.

On August 1, 1941, Einsatzkommando 11a with the support of Romanian soldiers took 450 Jews from the Chişinău ghetto to the suburb of Visterniceni and shot almost all of them. The 39 survivors were ordered to inform the rest that they faced something similar, if they did not “stop signaling with lights to incoming Russian planes.” About a week later, 525 people were taken out of the ghetto; as many as 325 of them were then machine-gunned by a Romanian company commanded by Captain Radu Ionescu.

In the first ten days of July, simultaneous to the events in Bessarabia, the Romanians in northern Bukovina concentrated Jews in camps and ghettos in the towns of Novoselytsia, Storozhynets, Vashkivtsi, Vyzhnytsia, and Hertsa, and the villages of Luzhany, Chudei, and Stara Zhadova.

### **Deportations across the Dniester River**

The Romanian regime began deporting Jews across the Dniester River on July 13, in the Sokyriany/Secureni and Kelmentsi districts in today’s Chernivtsi Oblast. It succeeded in ferrying Bessarabian and Bukovinian Jews into Ukraine’s Vinnytsia region, but then the Germans began to stop such crossings. Romanian gendarmes then murdered some of the Jews, and placed the rest in camps in northern Bessarabia, in particular, in Sokyriany.

To cope with the overpopulation, about half of the inmates in Sokyriany were moved to a new camp in Edineţ, also in northern Bessarabia. By September, there were 12,250 and 10,200 Jews in Edineţ and Sokyriany, respectively; including





almost 2,000 Jews from Lipcani, who had evacuated earlier with Soviet troops across the Dniester.

In addition to the camps in Sokyriany and Edineț, Jews were also located in the following places on 1 September 1941: Chernivtsi – 49,497, the district of Storozhynets – 4,312, Khotyn – 559, for a total of 54,368.

Given the fact that the majority of Jews in the Sokyriany and Edineț camps were from Northern Bukovina and also considering the presence of several thousand Bukovinian Jews in the camp in the village of Vertiujeni, created by the Romanians for those Jews the Germans had sent back to Bessarabia from across the Dniester, by September, 76,000 to 77,000 Bukovinian Jews were still alive. This means that the number of Bukovinian Jews had declined by approximately 25,000. About 11,000 of them had likely been killed, while the others had either evacuated in time to the Soviet rear, or had been deported by the Romanians across the Dniester River.

Axis successes at the front and the annexation by Romania on 1 September 1941 of the territory between the Dniester and the Southern Bug Rivers allowed the Romanian occupation authorities to carry out the plan that had failed in the summer. The march into what became Transnistria was a separate phase of the Holocaust. About 20,000-25,000 Bessarabian and Bukovinian Jews died just during the period of deportations and were hastily buried in pits.

On 4 October, the headquarters of the commander-in-chief of the Romanian army passed on an order from Antonescu to the commandant's office in Chernivtsi about the deportation of all Jews from Bukovina to the east of the Dniester River within ten days. On the basis of this order, on 10 October, the Governor of Bukovina, General Corneliu Calotescu, ordered the creation of a ghetto in Chernivtsi and the Jews' deportation from this ghetto into Transnistria. By 15 November, a total of 28,400 Jews had been deported from the city.

On 4 and 11 October, respectively, transfers of about 20,000 Jews from the Sokyriany and Edineț camps began, ending on 8 November. The deportation from Sokyriany was entrusted to Lieutenant Augustin Roșca from the Gendarme Legion of Roman. He was told by the commandant of the Khotyn/Hotin Gendarme Legion, Major Drăgulescu, that laggards had to be shot on the spot, "by order of the High



Command.” Lieutenant Roșca strictly followed these orders, which resulted in the shooting of about 500 Jews along the route. The same system was used for convoys from Edineț led by Lieutenant Popovici. Those unfit to travel were shot as well.

On 22 October 1941, Jews from the Chernivtsi and Rădăuți districts, gathered in Chernivtsi, were sent by train to Transnistria via Mărculești (present-day Moldova) and Cosăuți, where they arrived on 27 October.

Between October and November 1941, more than 55,000 Bukovinian Jews (including several thousand from the camp of Vertiujeni) were deported across the Dniester River. Close to 20,000 remained, almost all in Chernivtsi. In June 1942, 4,000 more were sent; and in September, another 500. In total, more than 75,000 North Bukovinian Jews were deported across the Dniester River in 1941 and 1942, and more than 55,000 of them died there.

On October 8, 1941 the first column of about 2,500 Jews from the Chișinău ghetto set off for the Dniester River on foot. By mid-November, only 118 Jews were left in the ghetto. In 1942, Guttman Landau took his own life.

The Jews were very concerned about what would be done to them on arriving in Transnistria, given the difficulties of the journey through the cold and rain, and the lack of proper food and clothing. A small number of Jews, upon paying exorbitant sums of money and valuables to Romanian officials or military personnel, managed to flee from Bessarabia to the Old Kingdom, or to Chernivtsi. Governor Constantin Voiculescu strongly opposed this. In November 1941, he declared Bessarabia “cleansed of Jews.” By the end of December 1941 about 56,000 Jews had been forcibly taken into Transnistria.

The leader of the Romanian Jewish community, Wilhelm Filderman, tried to stop the deportations to Transnistria, collected and sent aid there, and sought the help of international Jewish organizations. He also appealed to government officials, including Ion Antonescu, his former classmate. In mid-1943, he himself spent two months in Transnistria as a deportee, but interventions by King Michael, Queen Mother Elena, National-Peasant Party leader, Iuliu Maniu, as well as diplomatic pressure, secured his return to Bucharest.

Dr. Traian Popovici, a Bukovinian Romanian, was Mayor of Chernivtsi from 1941 to 1942. When in October 1941, the Governor of Bukovina, General Calotescu, announced his decision to deport all 50,000 Jews from Chernivtsi to Transnistria, Popovici secured a major agreement with Antonescu: 20,000 Jews were to remain in the interest of economic stability. Thus about 14,750 Chernivtsi Jews were able to survive as specialists needed by the Romanian authorities, employed as forced labor by the Romanian state, the army, and private individuals. This policy was fully supported by the German consul. In practice, permission to stay in Chernivtsi could be purchased. The remaining Jews did not feel safe and were subjected to arbitrary checks and abuse.

The crying and pleading of the Jewish women and children reached far beyond the fences of Bessarabian ghettos and transit camps. Moved by the inmates' suffering, various locals brought food and water to prisoners in the summer and fall of 1941. That said, when the deportees were marched through Bessarabian and Bukovinian villages, some villagers again gave food and water, but others stole Jewish belongings. There was even a sordid "trade" between Bessarabian peasants and Romanian convoy guards over the property of well-dressed Jews.

### **Jewish Life and Death in Transnistria**

An estimated 130,000-170,000 Ukrainian Jews perished in "Transnistria." This territory came under the authority of Romania as a result of an agreement signed in late August 1941 with Germany. It comprised the area between the Dniester and Southern Bug rivers; Gheorghe Alexianu, a Romanian lawyer and professor, served as its governor.

Thousands of local Jews had managed to escape as part of the Red Army's retreat before Romanian and German troops arrived, yet tens of thousands still remained in what became Transnistria. The new authorities immediately began to identify and assemble them. All Jews had to present themselves to the authorities on pain of death.

Upon entering the region, both Romanian and German forces started arresting and killing Jews and former Soviet officials. Passing through during the

summer of 1941, *Einsatzgruppe D* shot thousands of Jews. Einsatzkommando 12a ordered the newly appointed mayor of Dubăsari/Dubossary on the Dniester River, Aleksandr Demenchuk, to force locals to dig trenches outside the city, ostensibly for the preservation of vegetables. About 300 diggers got to work. On September 12-28, some 6,000 Jews from the town and its surrounding area were shot and buried in the pits. When *Einsatzgruppe D* left Transnistria in September 1941, its job was not complete: about 190,000 local Jews remained alive.

The intended Romanian strategy to solve its Jewish “problem” was the continuing expulsion of Jews deeper into the occupied Soviet territories. All indigenous Jews were incarcerated in 175 makeshift ghettos and camps, many on the Southern Bug River, ready for immediate expulsion. Jewish deportees from Bessarabia and Bukovina were herded into these places as well. However, the plans for further eastward deportations came to nothing when the military advances of the Axis ground to a halt.

### **Odessa, October 1941**

On October 22, 1941, a bomb set by Soviet security forces exploded in the Romanian military headquarters in Odessa, killing 61 people, including a Romanian General. On Ion Antonescu’s orders, harsh reprisals against “Communists” and “Jews” began. About 5,000 people, mostly Jews, were hanged in public squares or shot on October 23.

The following day, an enormous column of Jews was escorted out of the city towards the village of Dalnyk, with those lagging behind being shot. According to some sources, the mayor of Odessa, Gherman Pântea, intervened, and as a result a part of the Jews were temporarily spared in Dal’nik. On the road to Dalnyk some of the Jews were then shot in anti-tank ditches. Thousands of others were crammed into artillery storage houses located on Lustdorfsky Street, and were then machine-gunned and the buildings set on fire.

The next day, at 5:45 p.m. (the same time that the Romanian headquarters had been detonated) one of the buildings containing imprisoned Jews was blown up. In total around 25,000 Jews were murdered in and around the city in just two days.



Another 40,000 were marched out of the city over the following two weeks to the camp at Domanevka and from there on to Bogdanovka. Tens of thousands more remained in Odessa and would be deported from there by rail in 1942.

### **Ghettos and Camps in Transnistria**

Many of the sites chosen for ghettos and camps had been ravaged by the war and accompanying bombardments, such that the Jews were crowded into half-destroyed buildings without proper sanitation or heating facilities. Still, because no mass shootings were conducted there, the chances of survival in these places were higher than in German-occupied Ukraine or in the Golta (Holta) and Berezovka (Berezivka, Berezovca) counties of Transnistria. The Mohyliv-Podilsky (Moghilev-Podolsk) district was the most densely populated, containing 53 ghettos and one camp. Sharhorod was the largest ghetto, holding 5,300 Jews in January 1943; nine other ghettos also had more than 1,000 prisoners. In most ghettos local Romanian authorities appointed Jewish Councils and a Jewish police. Overall, there were over one hundred ghettos and camps in Transnistria by then.

Due to the Germans' continued refusal to permit the Romanian authorities to deport the Jews collected in Transnistria across the Southern Bug River, the Romanians faced a crisis of overpopulation in a war-ravaged territory, for which they were unprepared. Truly abysmal were the concentration and labor camps along the Southern Bug River, in Golta and Berezovka counties. Unlike ghettos, many of them were on the premises of former Soviet state farms. The deportees were placed in buildings previously used for storage or sheltering farm animals. Labor camps were set up with the purpose of accomplishing certain tasks – such as constructing roads, bridges, or buildings – and frequently counted among the laborers were deported Jewish communists, or other Jews sent from central Romania.

Those Jews who escaped the killings from the summer of 1941 and the deadly marches to sites of imprisonment in Transnistria were then confronted with another lethal danger – starvation. If the Romanian authorities fed them, which was rare, the food was either scant or almost inedible. One way to survive was to work illegally. Jewish adults, teens, and children escaped and harvested crops, cut logs,



cared for cattle, cleaned houses, cooked, sewed, and performed many other jobs for the non-Jewish population. Former city dwellers learned peasants' domestic work; a number of Jewish women learned to knit socks, gloves, sweaters, and other items for the peasants, who would pay for them with food. For children, begging was the main way to stay alive.

From August 1942, thousands of Jews from Transnistria were deported into Reich Commissariat Ukraine for forced labor along Transit Highway IV and at other construction sites, including bridges across the Southern Bug River.

### **Bogdanovka and Other Killing Sites**

The Romanian and German allies jointly committed one of the most atrocious crimes in Transnistria at Bogdanovka in the winter of 1941/42. The Bogdanovka concentration camp was established in September 1941. By December 1941, tens of thousands of Jews (estimates range between over 40,000 and over 56,000), deported from places in Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria, were crammed into pigsties on the premises of a former collective farm. Given the appalling overcrowding, freezing temperatures, lack of food, water, or any proper sanitation, an epidemic of typhus broke out. This supposedly endangered the Ukrainian and ethnic German populations living nearby.

On the orders of the Romanian district head, about seventy auxiliary policemen from Golta (formerly Pervomaisk) county, under the direct control of the Romanian gendarmerie, together with more than sixty ethnic German policemen under SS command, shot all the inmates on December 21-25 and also, after a Christmas break, from December 27 until mid-January 1942. The bodies were burned by 150 Jewish forced laborers. Many thousands more Jews were murdered in a similar manner in Domanevka, and at other locations in the Golta and Berezovka counties.

Fearful of typhus, which severely ravaged most Jewish ghettos and camps in the winter of 1941/42, and in thrall with an ideology that demonized Jews as an undesirable population, the Romanian authorities sealed the Jewish sites off hermetically, condemning thousands of inmates to a horrible death. Tens of



thousands of Jews died of typhus throughout Transnistria in the first half of 1942, until some medical aid from the Jews of Romania was permitted to get through.

Some labor camps shifted those unfit for work to nearby “death camps,” where they were abandoned to die of hunger with no food supplies and no possibility to exit in search of food. Camps of this type included those in Pechiora (Pechera) and Akhmechetka/Acmecetka (Akmechetski Stavky).

### **Initial Responses by the Local Non-Jewish Population of Transnistria**

A local police force, recruited from Ukrainians, Russians, and Moldovans, guarded the ghettos and camps serving under the direct supervision of the Romanian gendarmerie. Later, it was deployed during mass killing actions against the Jews.

While Bessarabia and Bukovina experienced a number of deadly pogroms with civilian participation in the summer of 1941, the same cannot be said of Transnistria. Sources mention cruel treatment there by policemen or specific individuals, but not by groups. Historians are not of one mind about this. One interpretation emphasizes that most local non-Jews in Transnistria were either indifferent to what happened to the Jews, or actually eager to see them being deported and even killed. Another interpretation acknowledges antagonism, but sees it as one among many responses.

Betrayal was a phenomenon in Transnistria. Primary sources reveal this for Odessa, where non-Jews informed the authorities about Jews in hiding. Most denunciations seem to have come from local agents recruited by the Romanian authorities, such as janitors (*dvorniki*), who were held responsible for reporting any Jews in the building. Still, it is estimated that by 1944 a few thousand Jews were still living in Odessa, some using false documents, some hiding in the catacombs, and some sheltered by non-Jewish families.

Some Jews managed to stay alive in the camps of Transnistria thanks to assistance from the locals. About 900 Romanian Jews, primarily women and children, were taken from Dorohoi (Romania) to Sharhorod, and were supposed to move on the next day, despite the snow and cold. Ukrainian peasant women not only crowded around the deportees and gave them food for the journey, they also went to the office of the praetor (head of the local administration) and knelt down



and blocked the road, asking to delay the convoy until the weather improved. This remarkable action delayed the convoy's departure.

The antagonism displayed towards deportees sometimes reflected locals' anti-Jewish feelings, but at other times it had more pragmatic roots. The arrival of tens of thousands of people strained an already devastated economy and increased the danger of epidemics and a food crisis developing in the region. This awareness sparked protests among Ukrainian villagers, who sometimes reacted negatively to the perceived endless influx of Jewish deportees.

One survivor deported from Odessa to Domanevka recalled that during the winter of 1941–1942, “villagers with pitchforks and spades stood on the roads, so that not one Jew would get into the village.” Villagers who shared common water sources with the deportees grew especially anxious and hostile, fearing epidemics.

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## **Transcarpathia (Subcarpathian Rus')**

Transcarpathia or Subcarpathian Rus', now called the Zakarpatska region (Oblast), lies at the western tip of Ukraine. In the interwar period it belonged to Czechoslovakia. In early 1941, around 854,000 people resided in the region, of which some 102,000 were Jews. The vast majority of these Jews did not survive the Holocaust.

### **Carpatho-Ukraine and Hungarian Annexation**

After the Munich Pact of September 30, 1938, Hungary first annexed southwestern Transcarpathia, including the towns of Uzhhorod (Ungvár) and Mukachevo (Munkács). The rest of the region formed an autonomous Carpatho-Ukraine with its own government in October. During the brief period of Carpatho-Ukrainian autonomy, some Jews were terrorized by a paramilitary force with many OUN members (the Carpathian Sich), while others were forced into the Hungarian-occupied zone. The rest of the region was annexed by Hungary when the rump Czech state was demolished in March 1939.

Under Hungarian rule, there was systematic oppression of Jews, Roma, and Carpatho-Ukrainians aimed at controlling or even driving them out. This was similar to Hungarian policies in other occupied regions. In late July 1941, large-scale Hungarian deportations of Jews and Roma from the territories taken from Czechoslovakia and Romania began. At least 7,500 of around 15,000-20,000 Hungarian Jewish deportees forced into Galicia and Podolia were from Transcarpathia; many of them were massacred by the German SS and Police at Kamianets-Podilskyi in August 1941.

More than 40,000 Hungarian Jews, who were barred from army service, were placed in Labor Companies behind the Eastern Front. It is likely that more than 10,000 Jewish men from Transcarpathia were called up for these companies. Most were killed in battle, or died from starvation, disease, and overwork.

## **Ghettoization**

On March 19, 1944, German forces rapidly occupied Hungary to bind the country tightly to the Axis and secure its resources. The newly installed pro-German government soon embraced German plans for a rapid “solution of the Jewish question.” In April, its declaration of Transcarpathia as a zone of military operations prepared the ground for the ghettoization and mass deportation of the Jews, which was implemented here earlier than anywhere else in occupied Hungary.

Small special detachments (*Sonderkommandos*) of the Security Police and SD, subordinated to Adolf Eichmann, relied heavily on the support of the Hungarian administration. The German authorities ordered the creation of Jewish Councils, but then the Hungarian government ordered the registration of Jews and the creation of ghettos. Some Transcarpathian Jews were removed to ghettos in neighboring counties. In Munkács, posters were put up on April 17 informing Jews they had just ten hours to move into the ghetto area. Hungarian gendarmes then started to round them up at 4:30 A.M., seizing any valuables.

The Jewish Councils supervised a Jewish Police. Conditions in the ghettos were very overcrowded with 15-20 Jews occupying a single room. Soon Hungarian authorities began requisitioning able-bodied ghetto inmates for forced labor such as road construction, carrying ammunition, and digging trenches. In the brickyard ghetto in Munkács, Jewish women were forced to carry bricks needed for construction.

Somehow the Jews in the ghettos adapted to the new situation and attempted to maintain their traditions. It was very hard. On one day, Hungarian gendarmes took the Orthodox Jews of Munkács into the synagogue, forced them to demolish the interior, beat them, and then shot several outside the building.

## **Deportations to Auschwitz**

More than 95,000 Jews were deported from Transcarpathia to Auschwitz, most (84,818) from the following eight locations in Transcarpathia between May 14 and June 6, 1944: Munkács (28,589); Beregzász (10,849); Ungvár (16,168); Ökörmező (Mizhhirya) (3052); Nagyszöllős (9810); Huszt (10,825); Aknaszlatina (3317); and Técső (2208). In addition, another 10,000 Transcarpathian Jews were deported



from the Máramarossziget ghetto. All this was part of a larger total of some 440,000 deported Hungarian Jews.

The Transcarpathian Jews were routed via Kassa (now Košice in Slovakia). Images of their arrival and selection in Auschwitz exist in a unique collection of photographs: the “Auschwitz Album.” Many individuals in the photographs have been identified. Around 75 percent at once were sent to the gas chambers, as the deportees consisted mainly of women, children, and the elderly. When the Soviet Ukrainian Front’s First Army (around 37 percent of which had soldiers of Ukrainian nationality) liberated Auschwitz on January 27, 1945, most prisoners had been evacuated on what for some turned out to be “death marches.”

### **Rumors, Rescue, Property**

Jewish refugees from Poland and Slovakia that escaped to Transcarpathia from 1942 onward brought with them information about the unfolding mass murders. However, their hair-raising stories were often met with disbelief. Others put their faith in the imminent arrival of the Red Army. Some Jews hid in bunkers, cellars, or on farms, and some joined local partisan units aligned with the Soviet forces. There were a few attempts to get people out of the ghettos to the comparative safety of Budapest. Overall, rescue attempts by non-Jews were few. The short period of ghettoization and the indifference, hostility, and fear of much of the local population seem to have been important factors.

In the wake of the deportations in the second half of 1944, the Hungarian authorities sought to erase all signs of Jewish presence in the landscape, while local inhabitants, in line with a European-wide pattern, plundered the empty Jewish houses.

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## Belarus

The German occupation cost the lives of a quarter of the population of Belarus, more than 2.2 million inhabitants (including combat losses), of which more than 550,000 were Jews.

### Administration and Police

Belarus was divided. The largest area in the east remained under military administration for more than two years, as the Rear Area of Army Group Center. The Białystok district was attached to East Prussia. In the south, territories were allocated to the Reich Commissariat Ukraine. The remaining territory was the General Commissariat White Ruthenia, itself part of the Reich Commissariat Ostland. In the latter, auxiliary police were called Protection Squads (*Schutzmannschaften*), and in the territories under military administration they were referred to as the Order Service (*Ordnungsdienst*).

Nationalist Belarusian organizations were involved in the General Commissariat, but played only a minor role. In the military zone the German-organized “Russian National People’s Army” (RNNA) participated in ghetto “liquidation” operations – alongside the *Ordnungsdienst* and Ukrainian auxiliaries.

### Persecution, Murder, and Ghettoization as a Single Process

The German attempt to incite pogroms against Jews and communists was largely unsuccessful. Then disenfranchisement, expropriation, humiliation, obligatory marking, exploitation, forced self-organization, and ghettoization began, in many cases initiated by the first military commanders. Parallel to these first persecution measures, murders of Jewish men began, in individual cases already carried out by front-line troops. In many Belarusian towns, the Wehrmacht interned the male population of military-service age. After their arrival all the commandos of Einsatzgruppe B needed to do was to search these so-called civilian internment camps for “enemies.” Thus, in Minsk, for instance, where 10,000 civilians had been interned, more than 200 people were shot every day in July 1941.



On 19 July 1941, the German Field Commandant in Minsk ordered the Jewish population to move into an enclosed “Jewish residential area.” Some 55,000 people were forced into two square kilometres. They had to wear yellow patches.

The German authorities did not establish ghettos everywhere and some only existed briefly. Altogether there were more than 190 (open and enclosed) ghettos or points of concentration. They were severely overcrowded, epidemics of typhus and other diseases linked to malnutrition, exposure, and overcrowding were common. A large number of inmates starved to death. Jews were subjected to forced labor. In many places the Germans set up Jewish Councils.

The period of ghettoization, which extended from July 1941 until the summer of 1942, was accompanied by the mass murder of the Jews by units of the Security Police, Wehrmacht, Order Police, SS, and various non-German auxiliaries. From the end of July 1941 onwards, women, children and the elderly were also murdered; and from October, entire ghettos in Belarus were exterminated.

In the eastern regions, i.e. the so-called old Soviet territories, the German occupation administration had murdered almost all of the Jews by the first months of 1942. In the western territories, the civil administration also intensified the policy of murder in October-November 1941, but 145,000 Jews were kept alive as workers until the summer of 1942.

As of early 1943, only a tiny fraction of the prewar Jewish population was still alive, above all skilled laborers in a few large production sites and service locations, such as Minsk, Lida, and Glebokie, as well as some smaller ghettos and camps. These were dissolved by the fall of 1943, their occupants either murdered on site or deported to concentration and extermination camps. In October 1943, the last ghetto was dissolved in Minsk.

### **Maly Trostinets and the Murder of Jews from Abroad**

Minsk (like Łódź, Riga, and Kaunas) was an important destination for German, Austrian, and Czech Jews deported to the east. In November 1941, to create space for the first arrivals, around 7,000 people, 12,000-14,000 local Jews were shot. Between May and October 1942, sixteen deportation trains with 16,000 people arrived from Vienna (nine), Theresienstadt (Terezín) (5), Königsberg (Kaliningrad)



(1) and Cologne (1). They were shot or suffocated in gas vans immediately, in the village of Maly Trostenets, in the Blagovshchina forest. That forest was also one of the central killing sites for Jews from the Minsk ghetto. In October 1943, an attempt was made to obliterate the corpses through excavation and burning, as was done elsewhere in Belarus. While the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission assumed 206,500 people were killed at Maly Trostinets (and a monument unveiled in 2018 also mentions this number), recent research puts the total at 40,000-60,000.

### **Reactions of Non-Jews**

The reactions of the non-Jewish population ranged from assistance and support for the Jews to direct participation in German anti-Jewish policies. The German occupying power attempted to obtain and encourage the cooperation of the non-Jewish population via the ostracism, isolation, and robbery of the Jews. As long as massive plunder did not take place, in many places the possessions of expelled or murdered Jews could be purchased for small sums of money from the occupation authorities shortly after the massacres. Earlier, the Jews in the ghettos were forced to sell much of their property to the non-Jewish population in exchange for food.

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## **Occupied Russian Regions**

### **Southern Russia, including the North Caucasus**

German forces occupied large parts of Southern Russia during the offensive towards Stalingrad and the Caspian Sea in the summer and fall of 1942. Southern Russia included Stalingrad Region (Oblast), Rostov Region, Kalmykia, Stavropol Territory, Krasnodar Territory, Kabardino–Balkaria, and other places in the North Caucasus between the Sea of Azov, the Black Sea, and the Caspian Sea, near the mountain range that traditionally is considered the boundary between Europe and Asia. Here *Einsatzgruppe D* organized the killing of more than 44,000 Jews, mostly refugees from Ukraine, Bessarabia, and Crimea.

### **German Institutions Involved in the Holocaust**

The North Caucasus was a vast area, where during the German summer offensive of 1942 Soviet armies retreated but were not encircled. In principle, this was beneficial to the Jews there. Following the smooth German takeover of the North Caucasus, in the absence of serious Soviet military resistance, with only low-key partisan activity, the Germans did not conduct anti-partisan sweeps nor exploit the pretext of “military necessity” to justify the immediate extermination of Jews in the region.

For the vast Caucasian region, German troops (both of the Wehrmacht and *Einsatzgruppe D*) were inadequate to cope with all the security tasks (among which the “solution of the Jewish problem” figured prominently). Although almost the entire *Einsatzgruppe* was deployed in the Caucasus throughout the short period of German occupation and it was able to carry out extermination actions in every locality, it was completely insufficient to comb the area. Because of this, and also for political reasons, there were almost no mopping-up operations in the Caucasus. In order to seize the Jews in the long run, the Germans had to rely mainly on a network of informants, which, given the relatively short period of occupation, allowed the Jews better chances of survival.

The extermination of Jews by *Einsatzgruppe D* began within weeks. In almost all urban localities Jews were registered, then compelled to wear six-pointed stars and perform forced labor. Camps and ghettos were rarely established. Usually only a single, comprehensive “Aktion” was conducted. A singular development in this region was that financial indemnities were frequently imposed on the Jews, probably because evacuated Jews were considered well-off.

### **Two Occupations, Two Waves of Murder**

The first large concentration of Jews to be exterminated in the North Caucasus was in the city of Taganrog in the western part of the Rostov District. Two weeks after its occupation in mid-October 1941, the entire Jewish population, about one thousand people, was shot by Sonderkommando 10a.

The German army occupied Rostov-on-Don on November 21, 1941. The city’s Jews were required to register and, according to some sources, to wear six-pointed stars. On November 22, German authorities ordered the establishment of a Jewish council. However, it appears that these orders were largely ignored because Rostov’s Jews, like the rest of the population, spent the week sheltering from Red Army artillery fire. Fearing encirclement, the Wehrmacht pulled out of the city on November 28.

The second German offensive in the direction of the North Caucasus took place in summer 1942. It brought large sections of the North Caucasus under their control, including the whole Rostov district, the territories of Stavropol and Krasnodar, the autonomous republic of Kabardino-Balkaria, and a large part of the autonomous republic of Northern Ossetia. Local populations found themselves under German occupation for up to five months. The area’s Ashkenazi Jews were exterminated during the first two months.

German conquest of the North Caucasus with its vast oil fields was regarded as one of two main goals for the summer offensive in 1942. The army remained the only German agency in many towns and villages. But the military was often under pressure to make its presence felt in every spot of the vast newly conquered territories. The military Commander-in-chief in the region exercised supreme





authority in the whole North Caucasus, tipping the balance of forces between the Wehrmacht and the SS in his favor.

In the North Caucasus, the Wehrmacht was involved in carrying out some phases of the Holocaust, especially those preceding the physical onslaught on the Jews. The army, specifically the Local and Field Headquarters units in the main urban centers, registered the Jews, then established Jewish councils, and proclaimed assembly orders for the Jews. The army sometimes also shot Jews.

The penetration of the Wehrmacht into the North Caucasus was followed by the entry and rapid deployment of almost all units of *Einsatzgruppe D*, which included a “Caucasian” unit raised from Soviet prisoners-of-war of Caucasian and Crimean Tatar descent.

In most Caucasian towns the whole Jewish population was registered at once. Usually it was a Jewish council that carried out the registration, but sometimes the Germans implemented this alone. The next stage in most Caucasian towns involved forcing adult Jews and children over 12 to wear identifying badges – six-pointed stars.

Apparently, because of its manpower shortage and logistical shortcomings, the *Einsatzgruppe* was only marginally involved in the establishment and functioning of the Jewish Councils in the Caucasus, and only slightly more in issuing and enforcing the orders to assemble. *Einsatzgruppe* involvement grew considerably only during the extermination actions. The unit also handled special cases, such as the murder of Jewish children in orphanages.

From time to time, Caucasian Jews were physically abused by their oppressors before the killing operations. This included beatings and – in places where the non-Jewish population could not witness it, such as detention centers and Jewish apartments – rape. In other places Jews were beaten publicly and while performing forced labor. Where the destruction of Jews in Caucasian towns was not immediate, the Germans made them perform forced labor. The forced labor order applied to almost the entire Jewish population, including children over 10, pregnant women, women with small children, and old people up to the age of 90.

The Germans often exerted economic pressure on the Jews, such as the imposition of financial contributions. The contributions were very large and had



nothing to do with the actual number of Jews in the respective towns. The enormous size of the contributions can be explained by the German assumption that the Jewish population, which consisted mainly of evacuees from Soviet cities, was well-off. In several Caucasian towns with considerable Jewish populations, Jews became subjected to various forms of economic boycott.

At times the Germans segregated Jews in one form or another from the rest of the population. In the city of Essentuki the Jews were prohibited from changing apartments. In Novorossiisk Jewish houses and apartments were marked distinctively. In Essentuki the Jews were also banned from moving around the town or from leaving town. On the whole, the segregation had a minor effect on Jews' prospects for survival, given otherwise lenient German population policies in the region.

Following a period, which ranged from one-to-two weeks up to four months, Jewish inhabitants of the North Caucasian towns were ordered to assemble in preparation for a killing action. For failure to comply with this order, Jews were often threatened with severe punishment. Jews were required to leave their apartments intact and were permitted to take with them only a certain amount of money, valuables, and personal possessions.

The Germans conducted killing operations in Caucasian towns throughout almost the entire occupation period. The extermination was constrained solely by the logistics necessary for the Germans to prepare the ground for the actions to be carried out smoothly (most specifically, by the redeployment of necessary *Einsatzgruppe* forces).

In August 1942 it was the turn of the Jews residing in the most populous and presumably main regional centers of the German-controlled Caucasus. On August 11-15, the Germans destroyed the large communities of Rostov-on-Don (at least 2,000 Jews) and Stavropol (3,000), and on August 21, of Krasnodar (2,000). In September 1942, the Germans wiped out the bulk of Caucasian Jews in four neighboring resort towns of the Stavropol Territory: Essentuki, Kislovodsk, Mineralnye Vody, and Piatigorsk (around 7,000 people).

Thereafter, the pace of the Holocaust in the Caucasian towns slackened considerably. In October 1942 more than 1,000 Jews were destroyed in the recently



occupied harbor town of Novorossiisk, together with more than 600 Jews from Essentuki and Kislovodsk. In November, some 600 Jews were killed in the recently seized town of Nalchik.

In light of a possible German withdrawal from the North Caucasus, a large-scale wave of actions swept the towns and took the form of mopping-up operations. After the actions in Caucasian towns, the Germans revealed Jews in hiding as part of a concerted Jew-hunt, but also in “security” measures directed against the general population.

German tactics towards the Jewish population in the Caucasian countryside reflected supreme confidence about the prospect of killing Jews in rural areas at any time without serious hindrance. This destruction was very overt and frequently involved the physical abuse of Jews in public and the plunder of their property. Scarce German security and military presence in the vast Caucasian countryside inevitably led to a considerable reliance on auxiliaries for implementing the extermination.

Jews were exterminated in the Caucasian villages throughout the whole period of German occupation. The destruction was intensive in the first weeks after the Germans’ arrival (August 1942) and was carried out in many cases on the very first appearance of German forces in a specific village. Because the occupation coincided with fall harvesting, the Germans widely employed Jewish forced labor in rural areas. The extermination of the Jews was mainly immediate and only rarely delayed for some days, while the Jews were imprisoned. Almost all of the “formal” stages preceding the physical annihilation (registration, forced labor, etc.) were skipped.

In most cases, the Germans shot adult Jews, but the use of gas vans was also extensive throughout the whole occupation period. Thousands of Jews were killed in them in August-September and November-December 1942. Some Jewish children may have been killed using ingested poison. Only rarely were local policemen and administrators employed in carrying out the extermination actions, but they did prove indispensable in tracing Jews in hiding after the main actions.



At first, Mountain Jews, a local Caucasian group of Jewish origin, were exterminated, but most remained untouched, after the Germans investigated their background.

### **Jewish Councils, Ghettos, and Camps**

In the North Caucasus, Jewish councils were set up in those towns with the largest Jewish communities: Essentuki, Kislovodsk, Krasnodar, and Stavropol. In Cherkessk and Novorossiysk their functions were assigned to a single person – the starosta. Councils were set up very soon after the start of the occupation. In the Caucasian towns they served as a convenient instrument in German hands for the smooth implementation of a whole complex of anti-Jewish measures; these ranged from registering the Jewish population to assignments for forced labor. Finally, it was through Jewish Councils that Jews were squeezed of their property and forced to assemble for extermination.

In the unique case of Essentuki, the Germans allowed the Judenrat to pursue activities in the medical and social fields, albeit only for a few days. In this town there was a medical commission under the auspices of the Judenrat, which examined patients and directed them to a Jewish hospital if necessary. Only in Essentuki was the Jewish council permitted to establish a hostel for sick and homeless Jews. A commission for social affairs handled the requests of Jewish refugees, who flocked to the town from neighboring villages. The Judenrat in Essentuki also engaged in distributing bread to those Jews who performed forced labor.

In the North Caucasus, the policy of confining Jews to ghettos was applied only in a few towns, which contained a medium- (several hundred) or small-sized (up to one hundred) Jewish population. In the ghettos the Jews were placed in separate locations hardly fit for human beings, and were forbidden to leave without the authorization of the Germans or the local administration, unless they were sent to perform forced labor. Jewish councils were not involved in running the ghettos, for these simply did not exist there. The life of the ghettoized Jews was regulated solely by the Germans.



The ghetto inmates were not engaged in industrial production but only in humiliating work, such as cleaning lavatories and sweeping the streets. There was no provision of food. In order to survive, the Jews had to rely on the sale of their possessions and handouts from the local non-Jews when the Jews left the ghetto for forced labor. As a result, the Jews suffered from terrible malnourishment. In almost all the ghettos in the North Caucasus the Jews were subjected to physical abuse and continual plunder of their property. Almost all the ghettos were wiped out with their inmates during the main wave of extermination in August–September 1942.

**Table 4.1. Jews Murdered in the North Caucasus/Southern Russia**

<b>Region, 1939</b>	<b>Jewish population, 1939</b>	<b>Jews murdered</b>
Volgograd (Stalingrad), occupied part only	Ca. 5,000	500
Kabardino-Balkaria	3,414	200
Kalmykia	139	350
Krasnodar Krai	7,351	12,000
Rostov Region	33,024	8,000
Stavropol Krai	7,791	23,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>56,791</b>	<b>44,050</b>

### **Central and Northwestern Russia**

Central and Northwestern Russia comprises thirteen regions (Oblasts) of modern Russia, namely Leningrad, Pskov, Novgorod, Smolensk, Briansk, Tula, Moscow, Kaluga, Tver, Orel, Kursk, Belgorod, and Voronezh. The territory was first occupied by German troops between July and October 1941 (Voronezh was occupied in July 1942). Before the war with Germany, over 100,000 Jews lived here, sometimes in former shtetls such as Lyubavichi and Rudnia in the western part of the republic. Many evacuated or fled in time, but the others were either exterminated at once, or first

registered, labelled, robbed, and ghettoized. There were 39 ghettos in this area, which held more than 23,000 Jews. The vast majority were in the Smolensk (15 ghettos, with 11,000-12,000 inmates), Pskov (9 ghettos with 4,000 inmates), and Briansk regions (7 ghettos with 6,000 inmates).

Several dozen ghetto inmates managed to escape, and about 470 (in Kaluga, Iino [Kalinin region], and Usviaty [Pskov region]) were liberated from their respective ghettos by the Red Army. That most of Kaluga's Jews survived the occupation was atypical, due to its brief duration.

The extermination was carried out by squads of the two *Einsatzgruppen A* and B, and detachments of the Security Police and SD in Estonia and Ingermanland, with the involvement of local and German policemen.

**Table 4.2. Jews Murdered in Northwestern and Central Russia**

Region	Jewish population, 1939	Jews murdered	
Briansk, 1944 boundaries	31, 000	8,000	
Voronezh, 1939, occupied part only	9, 000	200	without taking into account Hungarian Jews (2,000 deaths?)
Kalinin (Tver), 1939, occupied part only	13, 000	1, 500	without taking into account 150 Polish Jewish deaths
Kursk, 1939	7, 539	500	
Leningrad, 1939	10, 000	1, 500	
Moscow, 1939, occupied part only	2, 000	100	
Orël, 1944 boundaries	4, 000	400	
Smolensk, 1939	33, 020	10,000	without taking into account 1,000 Polish Jewish deaths



Tula, 1939, occupied part only	3, 500	200	
<b>Total</b>	<b>113,000</b>	<b>22,400</b>	Some murder figures derive from the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission and are perhaps unrealistically high

Overall at least 66,450 Jews are estimated to have died on the German-occupied territory of the Russian Federation, not including more than 3,000 Jewish laborers that were brought in from the west and also perished on Russian soil. The numbers remain uncertain, as accurate figures for the number of Jews that managed to flee, or conversely of fleeing Jews that were trapped in this territory, are unavailable.

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## Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia

For Jews in the Baltic States German occupation meant almost complete destruction. The persecution and murder of the Jews was a joint enterprise conducted by Germans, the main actors, and non-German locals.

After the first onslaught through pogroms, massacres, and early mass shootings, a systematic extermination policy was implemented in the provinces. Partly in parallel, partly afterwards, Jews in the cities were selected and murdered. The remaining ghettos existed for the purpose of forced labor. In 1943-44 they were subordinated to the SS and with the end of German rule, the inmates were either deported to concentration camps further west or murdered nearby. Just a few hundred Jews survived in hiding within the region.

**Table 4.3. Jewish Losses in the Baltic States**

Country	Jews murdered	Jewish survivors
Lithuania	200,000	10,000
Latvia	70,000	3,000-4,000
Estonia	1,000	Few
Reich Jews	31,000	1,100
Total	302,000	14,600

The killing of over 95 % of the local Jewish population was very rapid and began earlier than in most other German-occupied regions. By the end of 1941, about 210,000 people had already been murdered, more than half of them in the provinces.

### German Rule and Baltic Cooperation

The German army conquered Lithuania within one week. But the overall progress of the German attack on the Soviet Union was slower than that expected by the Germans. Thus the main function of Lithuania under German occupation was to serve as a rear area to support the front. The economy and society were to be





mobilized intensively for the German war effort. Because the Germans lacked sufficient personnel these goals could only be achieved if local willingness to cooperate was maintained. Throughout the occupation, German authorities faced difficult choices between exploitation and maintaining stability. The Germans needed support for the war and the Baltic peoples wanted to restore the nation states that were lost in 1940.

### **Anti-Soviet Uprisings in 1941**

In Lithuania and Latvia various nationalist groups supported the initial German attack to further their aims of resurrecting national independence. In Latvia around 7,000 so-called nationalist partisans revolted against the Soviet regime; in Lithuania about twice that number, organized by the Lithuanian Activist Front, participated in the uprising in late June 1941. Many anti-Soviet partisans came from antisemitic groups, such as the “Iron Wolf” in Lithuania or the Perkonkrusts in Latvia. But the nationalist uprisings and the antisemitic outbursts were not one and the same thing, despite this overlap in personnel. Local aspirations to restore national governments were soon suppressed by the Germans.

### **German Administrative Structures**

In the second half of 1941, a German civil administration was established in *Reichskommissariat Ostland* (RKO), ruled by *Reichskommissar* Hinrich Lohse. The transfer from military to civilian control was completed on December 5, 1941. The RKO consisted of four regions (*Generalkommissariate*): *Weissruthenien*, *Litauen*, *Lettland*, and *Estland*, each governed by a *Generalkommissar*. In April 1942, a strip of territory east of Vilnius was moved from *Weissruthenien* to the *Generalkommissariat Litauen*.

A widely spread postwar myth claims that German civil administrators held little power compared to the SS. This legend is not supported by the evidence. Until the fall of 1943, control over Jewish policy lay firmly with the civil administration. Only in the last year of occupation did the SS gain control over most aspects of Jewish policy. Moreover, the Germans could not have organized the destruction without close cooperation from non-German administrative and police forces.



## **Non-German Administrations**

In Latvia and Lithuania so-called *Generaldirektoren* were formed in August 1941 under General Oskar Dankers and General Petras Kubiliūnas respectively. In Lithuania nine General Councillors replaced the provisional government, established at the start of German occupation. In Latvia there were up to seven *Generaldirektoren*, who supervised the former ministries, apart from war and foreign affairs.

Very few Germans served at the lowest administrative level as commissars in the cities and local districts (*Stadt- und Gebietskommissariate*). These officials depended heavily on non-German cooperation, such that many Jews hardly ever encountered a German. At the beginning of 1944, there were 900 German administrators in Lithuania, as against 20,000 Lithuanians.

The Germans only permitted the locals to serve as auxiliary policemen (*Schutzmannschaften*) under German command. These paramilitary forces helped the Germans significantly in the persecution and murder of the Jewish population. Certain special detachments were used almost exclusively for mass killings: including the Arajs-commando in Latvia, and the *Ypatingasis Būrys* and Hamann-commando each composed of Lithuanians. These were just the last link in a long chain of persecutors. Local police and administrators prepared the mass murder by registering, guarding, and robbing the Jews. German district heads (*Gebietskommissars*) and police chiefs issued the orders, but much of the work on the ground was done by non-German locals.

## **Pogroms, Massacres, and Mass Shootings in 1941**

No evidence that a crowd led by activists murderously attacked a larger group of Jews without any German initiative has surfaced for Lithuania and Latvia. But as in Western Ukraine there were also targeted killings by insurgents without much German interference. Although in sources they often appear as “pogroms” they were rather planned killings of alleged Soviet supporters. In Lithuania there may have been an additional element of terrorizing the Jews in order to make them flee along with the Soviet authorities.



Over 1,000 Jews were killed in programs in Lithuania and a few hundred in Latvia. Far more were murdered in early mass shootings carried out on a variety of pretexts. Initially mainly Jewish men were killed, but the murders escalated rapidly and included women, children, and elderly men by August 1941. Eventually whole Jewish communities were wiped out, starting in the rural areas of Latvia and Lithuania.

### **A Different Holocaust in Estonia**

The history of the Holocaust in Estonia was different due to its small Jewish community. During the first months of occupation, most Jews were arrested by the Estonian Self-Defense Force and the Estonian Security Police, acting on orders from *Einsatzgruppe A*. The prisoners were shot by these units soon afterwards. Estonia was reported to be “*judenfrei*” on January 14, 1942. 963 Jews were murdered; 2,500 had managed to flee in time.

From September 1943, tens of thousands Jews from Lithuania, Latvia, and other European regions were deported to Estonia to work in subcamps of the Vaivara concentration camp. The Klooga subcamp was the largest with more than 2,000 inmates, many of whom were shot and burned in September 1944.

### **Extermination in the Rural Areas, Ghettoization in the Cities**

In Lithuania more than 18,000 Jews were shot by the end of July 1941. In August and September 1941 ghettoization was implemented in the cities. And in the rural areas 90,000 Jews were confined to about 100 improvised ghettos. Hunger, overcrowding, forced labor, and brutal treatment characterized their situation. There was no possibility for resistance.

In August a comprehensive attack was launched on the Jews in the rural areas of Lithuania. It started in *Gebietskommissariat Schaulen* (Šiauliai region), and spread to the other districts. The improvised ghettos existed just a few weeks until the murder began.

The antisemitic “logic” behind these killings reflected various concerns, real and imagined. These included forestalling resistance, fear of disease spreading in and from the overcrowded ghettos, and concern of food scarcity for non-Jews. In

several places a conscious decision was taken to kill the Jews, rather than letting them starve slowly. By the end of 1941, more than 150,000 Jews had been murdered on Lithuanian territory.

In Latvia over 20,000 Jews were murdered by the end of September 1941, while the remaining 30,000 were ghettoized in Riga in October. At least 4,000 Jews and 1,000 Communists were shot in the Latvian capital by the German Security Police and the Arajs commando. The Arajs commando also toured the countryside in buses to murder the Jews in the provincial towns. A key role was played by local Latvian officials and Self-Defense forces, acting sometimes with little aid from outside. Many of the short-lived ghettos were “liquidated” in August 1941. The Jews confined here suffered from overcrowding, hunger, and violent assaults from the non-German guards. Only the Ludza ghetto lasted until spring 1942, and the ghetto in Liepāja was not established until July 1942.

The ghetto in Riga was closed on October 25, 1941, containing 29,600 Latvian Jews. When Jews from central Europe were deported to Riga, local Jews were killed to make room for these deportees. In late November, 1941, a selection was conducted in the ghetto to decide who would remain left alive for forced labor. In two “Aktions,” on November 30-December 1 and December 8, 1941, 25,000 Jews were murdered, leaving just 4,500 men and 500 women in the small ghetto. In February 1942, the Riga ghetto consisted of two sections, one with over 4,000 Latvian and several hundred Lithuanian Jews and another with more than 12,000 mostly German Jews.

German, Austrian, and Czech Jews were deported to Riga and Kaunas from the end of 1941. Almost 5,000 German and Austrian Jews were shot in Kaunas and 1,000 Jews from Berlin were shot in Riga.

The surviving 50,000 Jews in Lithuania and Latvia lived in ghettos (later in concentration camps), performing forced labor and trying to cope with hunger, cold, and scarcity, in overcrowded conditions. Jewish councils were intended by the occupiers to alleviate the German burden in controlling the Jews. But most councils worked hard to ease the lives of the suffering Jews. In the ghettos in Lithuania relatively large Jewish administrations developed. The councils also commanded a Jewish police force (*Ordnungsdienst*).



News about the Holocaust in Riga spread not only to the British and American Secret Services, but also to the Jewish Agency in Geneva. One could read about specific details in the *Palestine Post* in November 1942.

### **“Liquidation” of the Ghettos and Concentration Camps, 1943-44**

On April 4, 1943, 4,000 Jews from smaller ghettos east of Vilnius were murdered in Paneriai. The Vilnius ghetto was “liquidated” on September 23-24, leaving 2,600 Jews in work camps. The remaining children were murdered in March 1944, the last surviving Jews being killed on July 2 and 3, 1944.

On October 26, 1943, able-bodied Jews from Kaunas were deported as forced laborers to Estonia and over 750 children and elderly people were sent to Auschwitz. 8,000 Jews remained in the Kaunas Concentration Camp and 5,000 were spread among work camps nearby. 1,800 children and elderly people were taken on March 27, 1944, either deported to Auschwitz or murdered in Fort IX.

From Šiauliai, about 780 children, elderly, and sick people were deported to occupied Poland on November 5, 1943. Around 7,000 Jews from dissolved concentration camps were deported in July 1944 to Stutthof and other camps.

In Latvia 13,000-14,000 Jews were still alive in 1943, mostly in Riga. The Germans established a new concentration camp in Riga-Kaiserwald and surviving Jews were distributed among its subcamps in Spilve, Stradsenhof, Dundaga, Eleja-Meitene, and other places. Children from the Riga ghetto were deported to Auschwitz on November 2, 1943. The camps were dissolved later and surviving Jews deported to Stutthof in 1944.

“Operation 1005,” the exhumation of mass graves and the burning of corpses, started in Kaunas, in October 1943. In March 1944 this work was conducted also in Riga, Salaspils, and Bikernieki Forest.

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## Poland

Until June 1941, in comparison with other places in Europe, the Jews in Poland experienced the worst conditions. And they were in a desperate situation during the winter of 1941-42. There was no way to leave the country any more, as there had been in September 1939. A large proportion of the Jews were already confined to ghettos and isolated from the Polish population. Inside the ghettos, Jewish families were crammed into a very confined space, sometimes with two families sharing one room. The food rations were very sparse and there was only meager pay for forced labor. In order to survive, the Jews were dependent on black-market trading or smuggling in food. From October 1941, leaving the designated ghetto area was punishable by death. Poles caught helping Jews faced the same threat.

More than three million Jews had come under German rule (within Poland's 1939 borders) by the summer of 1941. Many of them already lived behind ghetto walls, especially in the large ghetto of Warsaw with up to 450,000 inmates; tens of thousands had died from starvation and disease. After the German attack on the Soviet Union, some German regional leaders proposed initiatives to kill at least part of the Jews in Poland, especially those they considered "unfit for work." All German plans to deport Jews from Poland into the Soviet Union had to be abandoned by September or October 1941, as the Germans' military campaign failed to meet their expectations for a rapid victory.

That same October the systematic mass murder of the Jews was set in motion. In Eastern Poland, which had been annexed by the Soviet Union in 1939, mass killings of Jewish men had already started in late June 1941; The German SS and Police units had initially killed Jewish men of military age, but also all members of the Jewish "intelligentsia." Several thousand Jews were murdered during pogroms instigated by the German police and military or by local right-wing forces, especially in Ukraine's Eastern Galicia, but also in places in the Łomża area such as Jedwabne. As a second step, by October 1941, the genocidal policy was expanded to include the murder of Jewish women and children. The biggest massacres occurred in Stanisławów/Ivano-Frankivsk in October 1941 and in Równe/Rivne in November 1941.



The first of the regional initiatives came, however, from the administration of the “Wartheland,” the region of Poznań-Łódź in Western Poland. The chief of the civil administration, Artur Greiser, and the SS demanded the killing of all Jews who were not engaged in forced labor, and negotiated with the Berlin authorities the murder of 100,000 Jews in the area. A police unit, which had killed the mentally disabled in 1939-40, was now reactivated. Already by October 1941, this unit had shot several thousand Jews from the Polish city of Konin. Right after that, the men started to establish an extermination center in the village of Chełmno (German: Kulmhof).

The police leadership in Berlin had a special van constructed, in which humans could be killed by using the vehicle’s own exhaust fumes, and sent the gas van to Chełmno. On December 6, 1941, the first Jews from the region were transported to the Chełmno extermination camp and murdered there. The Jews were brought to a train station in the region, and then transported to the camp. Inside a building they were forced to undress and enter the rear of what looked like a furniture van. Then the car engine’s exhaust fumes were directed into the rear of the van and the victims were killed by asphyxiation. The van drove to a forest nearby, where the corpses were unloaded and put into mass graves, then later burned.

### **The First Half of 1942**

In January 1942, the deportations of persons “unfit for work” to Chełmno started from the Łódź ghetto. One of the most tragic events of the Holocaust was the exclusive deportation of children from the Łódź ghetto to the death camp in September 1942. The parents were forced to surrender their own children. In April 1943, the Chełmno extermination center was dissolved; almost 150,000 human beings had been murdered there using gas vans, their bodies burned.

At the same time, while the Chełmno camp was being planned and established, the SS and Police leadership in the district of Lublin in central Poland conducted negotiations regarding the murder of Jews in their realm. In November 1941 construction work started on an extermination camp in the village of Bełżec, half-way between Lublin and Lviv. Here, fixed gas chambers were installed in a building, based on the experience of the “Euthanasia” program in Germany, the murder of people with



mental disabilities. The camp's personnel were recruited mostly from among the "Euthanasia" perpetrators.

The Belżec camp was intended as an extermination center for the Jews of central and southern Poland, in the so-called General Government. During spring 1942, another extermination camp was built near the Western Bug River, not far from the village of Sobibór.

From June 1942, the death camp system run by the SS and Police Leader in Lublin was called "Aktion Reinhard," in honor of the main organizer of the "Final Solution," Reinhard Heydrich, who had been assassinated by the Czech underground. Late on March 14 and 16, 1942, deportation trains to Belżec left Lviv and Lublin, respectively, arriving early the next morning. German SS and Police ordered the Jewish Councils, the forcibly appointed Jewish administration, to compile lists of deportees, under the pretext that these people would be sent to Ukrainian regions for forced labor.

Nevertheless, from the beginning, force was applied. SS and Police units, often with the assistance of local auxiliary police and units of foreign auxiliaries from the Trawniki training camp, surrounded the ghettos and forced the inmates out of their houses. Everybody who resisted or was physically unable to move was shot on the spot. Then a selection process took place — all persons with labor cards could return to their homes, the others were driven into freight cars and transported by rail to the death camp. Within the camp, only very few people were selected to serve as slave laborers, all the others were herded into gas chambers and killed the same, or the next, day.

Almost every day approximately 4,000-5,000 Jews arrived in the death camps and were immediately murdered. During the spring of 1942, the Germans undertook such ghetto raids in almost all towns of the Lublin district and Eastern Galicia. In June they extended their killing strategy to the Kraków region. Until mid-July, those killed were predominantly Jews that did not have labor cards. The German labor administration had distributed these cards earlier, and now it cancelled them and re-issued only enough for the workforce that would remain alive according to the extermination plan.



## **July-December 1942 as the Core Period of the Entire Holocaust**

On July 22, 1942, however, the total destruction of the Jewish communities in most parts of Poland began. Already by May/June 1942, preparations for the wholesale murder of Jews in central Poland had been completed. The German labor administration determined how many Jews would be spared from the killing and the regional occupation administrations were informed. After the districts of Galicia and Lublin, the third region, that around Kraków, was integrated into the extermination process in June. Lublin SS chief Odilo Globocnik and his team had established the third and largest camp of “Aktion Reinhard,” near the village of Treblinka northeast of Warsaw.

An SS and Police squad entered the building of the Warsaw Jewish Council under Adam Czerniaków and ordered him to deliver them daily 5,000 ghetto inmates for deportation. By this time the policy to murder the deportees was known among the Jewish Councils. Czerniaków committed suicide the following night. Nevertheless, German SS and Police combed through the Warsaw ghetto, including the ghetto enterprises, where forced labor was performed. Even people with work permits were sent to the “Umschlagplatz,” a kind of transfer camp at the northern limits of the ghetto. From there every day 5,000, then 10,000 Jews, were sent to the Treblinka death camp.

Since more and more Jews tried to hide from the German ghetto raids, on September 5, all Jews from the ghetto were herded together to the “Mila cauldron,” an intersection on Mila Street. Most of the encircled Jews were then brought to the “Umschlagplatz” and sent to Treblinka. All in all, by September 12, more than 255,000 Warsaw Jews were murdered, among them nearly all the children in the ghetto and a large part of the women. Most famous is the case of Janusz Korczak, the leader of an orphanage in the ghetto, who had the opportunity to go into hiding, but decided to accompany his children on their last journey. The ghetto territory was greatly reduced in size, and approximately 60,000 Jews, mostly workers, remained.

At the end of July, not only the Warsaw Jews, but also those from all communities faced absolute destruction. SS chief Himmler had ordered all Jews in the General Government who did not work for the German war effort, to be killed by the end of 1942.



Thus, from late July to late October 1942, every day between 10,000 and 20,000 Jews were deported to the three camps of “Aktion Reinhard” or to the Lublin-Majdanek concentration camp, and murdered there. In addition, from November 1942 the ghettos in the Białystok, Dąbrowa/Silesia, and Ciechanów regions were affected by the mass deportations. From the Białystok area Jews were sent in November 1942 to Treblinka, then in January 1943 Jews from Prużana (today in Belarus) and later from Białystok were sent to Auschwitz, which was also the destination for Jews deported from the Dąbrowa, and Ciechanów regions.

This was the core period of the Holocaust, since the mass shootings in Eastern Poland (mainly in Western Belarus and Western Ukraine) were intensified at the same time, and deportations from all over Europe to the death camps started. A majority of all Holocaust victims died between July and December 1942, especially from all regions of Poland, including those which subsequently became part of the Soviet Union.

The Jews in Poland were completely isolated in ghettos, and the number of ghettos had also been drastically reduced. Most of the sealed quarters were now turned into “work ghettos,” and many labor camps for Jews were established during the fall of 1942, such as the infamous Plaszów camp in Kraków. From summer 1942, the Jews, but also the Christian Polish population were fully aware of the purpose of the deportations, which was evident from the violence during the German ghetto raids: Often hundreds of inmates were shot, leaving corpses lying in the streets.

Thus the ghetto inmates became more desperate to find ways of surviving, either by acquiring a workplace, which was important for arms production, or by escaping. After the first wave of ghetto raids in July/August 1942, tens of thousands of Jews fled to the countryside or sought shelter in forests. But without food, many of them soon had to return. Hiding in cities and towns was very difficult, because in most cases it depended on non-Jewish hosts, who thereby put their own lives and those of their families at risk. And there were some Jews who managed to buy false “Aryan Papers” in order to pass as Christians. But like the Jews in hiding, they were at constant risk of being denounced. Both the German and Polish police were searching for Jews in hiding.

Small groups among the ghetto inmates made preparations for armed resistance, probably beginning in the Vilnius ghetto in early 1942. During the ghetto “liquidations” in



Eastern Poland in the summer and autumn of 1942, the Germans first encountered armed Jewish resistance in occupied Poland.

### **Developments in 1943 and the First Half of 1944**

In January 1943, the Germans had to interrupt the next deportation operation inside what remained of the Warsaw ghetto due to the armed resistance there; sporadic attacks by these Jews then continued for the next three months.

In all regions of the General Government, the SS and Police destroyed the “work ghettos” and most of the labor camps for Jews between January and July 1943. While deportations from most regions west of the Bug River to Sobibór and Treblinka continued, in 1943 the Jews in District Galicia were killed in mass shootings, as had been the case in 1941. The Belżec death camp was closed down in December 1942, and it took the guards and some of the prisoners several months to burn the 435,000 corpses of the victims. Around 170,000 human beings were killed in Sobibór up until October 1943, among them more than 25,000 deported from the Netherlands. In Treblinka, almost 800,000 Jews were murdered by August 1943, including those deported by the Bulgarian authorities from Macedonia and Thrace.

The remaining Jews from the Białystok and Dąbrowa regions were deported to Treblinka or Auschwitz by September 1943. In German eyes, the “Final Solution” in these territories was more or less completed by August/September 1943, as had been planned in spring 1942. Only some labor camps, which were considered important for the war effort, remained. The Radom region had been the central industrial area of Poland, where now the German armaments industry had taken over and exploited around 100,000 Jewish forced laborers. In the Lublin region, SS leader Globocnik had tried to establish a specific SS economy with Jewish forced labor camps, but also in Lublin-Majdanek there were Jewish inmates. Most of these laborers had been deported from Warsaw or Białystok.

On November 3-4, however, in the so-called “Operation Harvest Festival,” the SS shot all the Jews in the three largest camps in the Lublin area, Trawniki, Poniatowa, and the Lublin-Majdanek concentration camp. 42,000 human beings were killed in just two days. This was probably connected to the successful prisoner uprisings in two of the death camps, in August in Treblinka and in October in Sobibór.



At the beginning of 1944, the only ghetto that still existed was in Łódź, since its textile industry, mostly producing Wehrmacht uniforms, was deemed important for the German war economy. But when the Red Army approached Warsaw during its summer offensive, the decision was taken to abolish this last ghetto. The Jews from Łódź were deported to Auschwitz, some to the (re-opened) Chełmno death camp by August 1944. Some of the deportees sent to Auschwitz were not killed right away, but were transferred to other German concentration camps further west.

Meanwhile, during the last year of German occupation in Poland the German and Polish police busied themselves with the “hunt” for Jews who had gone into hiding. Only some Poles who assisted Jews were sentenced by German courts, often to death. Only few Jews were liberated when the Red Army entered the country during its summer offensive of June/July 1944.

The inmates of those camps that were still operational in 1944 were forcibly evacuated to other concentration camps in Germany. The last remaining camps were located mainly in the Radom region, where Jewish forced laborers were deployed in various branches of armaments production, such as airplane construction. And most of the 64,000 inmates of the Auschwitz concentration camp were Jewish. They were forcibly evacuated in January 1945 in response to the Red Army’s winter offensive. Many of the evacuees died during the Death Marches.

Poland according to its August 1939 borders was the epicenter of the Holocaust. In total, out of the 3.3 million Jews residing there, three million were murdered.

Approximately 1.8 of the 3.3 million died in the extermination camps, 800,000 were shot near their hometowns, and around 400,000 died in other camps or in ghettos.

About 200,000 Jews managed to survive by escaping to the Soviet occupation zone in 1939, from which many of them were forcibly deported by the Soviet authorities to central Asia; 30,000-40,000 Jews survived in hiding in Poland; and 30,000-40,000 were liberated in camps in Germany.

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**5**

**RESPONSES BY JEWS AND AID TO JEWS BY OTHERS**

This chapter offers a framework for describing the responses of Jews and of attempts by Ukrainians and others to help them. It should enable curators to make considered choices in selecting for presentation the histories of Jewish, Ukrainian, and other individuals and families.

**Responses by Jews**

**Five Broad Categories of Responses by Jews**

As the pace of the Holocaust was very rapid, no one was able to assess correctly what was happening to the Jews and the murderous extent of German plans. Official restrictions on movement, with incessant round-ups and security checks, made it difficult to learn about the Holocaust in neighboring areas and to take necessary measures.

Jews did respond to the persecution and mass murder everywhere; but not uniformly and those responses often changed significantly over time. Moreover, various groups could consider or apply more than one response. It is deeply mistaken to think in terms of “right” or “wrong” responses, for once the Jews were trapped, no survival strategy or tactics could have led to the survival of the Jewish community.

It is possible to broadly classify five kinds of responses, while leaving aside Jews fighting in various armies, in particular the Red Army.

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***Jews in the Red Army***

During the German-Soviet War, up to 500,000 Jews fought in the Red Army, in a proportion to non-Jews only slightly below that of Jews within the prewar Soviet population. (Jews comprised between 0.6 and 1.5 percent of the units driving the Germans from Ukraine in 1943-44.)



Among all the Soviet nationalities, Jews had the highest percentage of officers, and about 200 became generals and admirals. Jews also accounted for a significant percentage among military occupations that required professional training, such as doctors, engineers, and political workers. The commissars of ammunition and the tank industry were Jewish as well (Boris Vannikov and Isaak Zaltsman).

Jews were also often decorated with orders and medals (numerically, forth in a line-up of Soviet nationalities), and 157 Jews (including 72 from Ukraine, such as submarine commander Izrail Fisanovich) were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Among editors of the army newspapers, as of 1943, Jews occupied second place after the Russians. One prominent Jewish Russian journalist on the road with the Red Army was the writer Ilya Ehrenburg, who was among the first non-Germans to grasp the vast scale of what we now call the Holocaust. Another, also a native of Ukraine, was Vasili Grossman.

The Soviet Yiddish newspaper *Eynikayt*, founded in 1942, was full of Jewish pride and references to “our people” and even the “great Jewish people.” Jewish heroism, also in the distant past, was a prominent theme in the paper, after the Jewish Antifascist Committee decided in May 1942 to collect systematically material about Jews at war. But beyond publications in Yiddish, Jews proudly fighting as Jews in the ranks of the Red Army were almost invisible in the Soviet media. The Soviet mainstream published the orders for awards, but otherwise gave a distorted picture of Jewish contributions to the fighting. Published works of fiction mostly studiously avoided mentioning Jewish fighters. Hardly anything was done to counter an antisemitic myth that was widespread in the ranks of the Red Army, of Jews shirking the fight out of cowardice.

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Five of the main Jewish responses were:

- 1/ Openly remaining in place, sometimes attempting to comply with Nazi rules.
- 2/ Cooperating.
- 3/ Evading the perpetrators (through migration, identity change, or hiding places).
- 4/ Harming the perpetrators.
- 5/ Committing suicide.

**1/ Openly remaining in place, sometimes attempting to comply with Nazi rules**

In those ghettos that did exist for more than a few weeks, people attempted to maintain their dignity in a variety of ways. These ranged from organizing

educational and cultural activities or political underground work, to the observance of religious rites. Even the organization of soup kitchens or the smuggling of vital goods contributed to the struggle for survival. In some ghettos in the Baltic region, such as in Vilnius, the period of relative stability from the end of 1941 until the summer of 1943 made it possible to establish a very rich cultural life, with theaters, concerts, schools, libraries, and all kinds of other secular and religious activities.

One activity that was sometimes attempted and achieved, was keeping a record. In many ghettos, attempts were made to record the crimes. For Ukraine, however, such records have generally not survived.

Many Jews believed that if they could prove their economic use to their persecutors, their lives might be spared. This would buy them some time, possibly until the end of the war. This option generally did not work under Nazi rule, however. It was tried in many places, and some time was gained, in ghettos such as Vilnius (by Jacob Gens), Białystok (by Efraim Barasz), and Łódź (by Mordechai Rumkowski). But ultimately, such efforts were futile—the Nazi German determination to see all the Jews of Eastern Europe dead as soon as possible was simply too great. At best, a few able-bodied Jews managed to survive. The harsh truth is that no survival strategy under German occupation could significantly increase the Jewish rate of survival.

The only place where a particular survival strategy could work was the zone of Romanian occupation. In the town of Zhmerynka in Transnistria, the “rescue through work” strategy did save lives, of 3,000 Jews, including hundreds who had fled from Reichskommissariat Ukraine or had been deported to Transnistria from Bukovina and Bessarabia. Adolph Herschman, head of the Zhmerynka ghetto’s labor department and then ghetto head, along with the other Jewish Council members, created a productive workforce for both the local Romanian administration and German construction firms, appealing to their greed. To make the project long-lasting, the Council imposed very strict discipline. All the while, Herschman and the other Council members helped the town’s pro-Soviet underground by providing them with documents, and supplied food and medicines to partisans outside.

## **2/ Cooperating**

Cooperating often ended up with participating in the persecution, or facilitating it. This was part of the German divide-and-conquer strategy, applied in ghettos, camps, and elsewhere. The Germans favored for a while some Jews with privileges and exemptions, if they helped to control the others. These favorites worked under a clear threat of death themselves. In several ghettos in Ukraine, such as Kremenets, members of the Jewish Council were killed by the Germans for refusing to implement their instructions. As nobody else was willing to take the job, they were replaced by more pliant and corrupt leaders. The Jewish Councils in turn, attempted to ameliorate German policy through generous bribes, but this had no chance of success in the long-term.

A key element was the Jewish police, officially called the Jewish Order Service, composed of young males and strongmen. The Jewish police often resorted to force to fulfill incessant Nazi demands for money, taxes in kind, and laborers; sometimes they even rounded up more laborers than the authorities demanded. Not surprisingly, many ghetto inmates hated them. But some Jewish policemen were active in and had contacts with the underground, preparing armed resistance and flights from the ghetto. For this reason, almost all the Jewish policemen were shot in Riga and Kaunas in October 1942 and March 1944, respectively.

There were also cases in which Jews betrayed each other. Survivors from Uman, for instance, recall a Jewish policewoman, Ida Teplitskaia-Shkodnik, as brutal to her fellow-Jews.

## **3/ Evading the perpetrators**

This could take the form of migration; identity change; and hiding places.

### Migration

Escaping from the ghetto and the ensuing attempt to find a place to hide or a route to the partisan formations was an option considered above all by young people without children. Initially, Jews who fled went from towns to villages, where there was food and fewer Germans. Later, when it became impossible to hide in villages





as well, they tended to leave Crimea and other zones of German occupation altogether, sometimes reaching and crossing the frontline.

The North Caucasus stands out in this respect, because movement restrictions were not severe and, more generally, the Germans did not carry out their anti-Jewish policy simultaneously in all places. This offered more opportunities to learn about the killings and escape. The main direction of fugitives' movement in the Caucasus was from villages into towns, mostly because of strong antisemitic feelings in many Cossack villages. Fewer residence and especially, movement restrictions in the North Caucasus made it easier for Jews to move around unimpeded. It is of note that food generally was available in the Caucasus and hence did not play a substantial role in Jews' decisions about where to go.

#### Identity change

Another, very widespread form of evasion was to change one's identity, i.e. to obtain documents that proved a non-Jewish or even an "Aryan" identity. One possibility was to buy falsified documents. Another was to declare in certain circumstances a non-Jewish identity, which then allowed one to obtain documents (for instance, from the Polish underground) confirming that new identity. Such identity changes were possible only for Jews who were assimilated to Polish, or sometimes also, Ukrainian culture, spoke Polish or Ukrainian without an accent, and whose appearance did not attract suspicion. Some Jews seem to have tried to register as ethnic Germans.

In general, Jews who changed their identity also had to leave the localities or the region where they lived, in order to avoid accidental recognition. Mostly, this also required the help of non-Jewish acquaintances in finding housing, etc., in their new places of residence.

There were also Jews who were deported to Germany as Polish or Ukrainian forced laborers, or who volunteered for the "Organisation Todt" and were sent as Polish or Ukrainian workers to central and eastern Ukraine. Wearing uniforms, such men were sometimes able to escort Jewish women along with them. A number of Jews from Galicia and Podolia moved on to Romania or regions under Romanian occupation and survived the war there.



The presence of numerous non-Slavic ethnic groups in Crimea and the North Caucasus made it comparatively easier there for the Jews to change their identity, as here seemingly non-Slavic facial features, a specific accent (from Yiddish), and even circumcision, were not exclusive to Jews.

In the North Caucasus a Jew could sometimes survive without any ID, because there were few security checks and registration of the population began only at the end of German occupation. At the same time, most of the Jews there were refugees from places further west, mainly Ukraine. Largely ignorant of local conditions and local geography, they did not know where to go, whom to ask for help, and, being unemployed, lacked suitable connections.

### Hiding places

When the round-ups for mass shootings or deportations from ghettos started, many Jews began to build hiding places (“bunkers”). These bunkers were often constructed to conceal whole families, including old people and children. Most of these efforts ultimately failed. When the final “liquidation” of the ghettos started, the houses were thoroughly searched and all the Jews found were shot. Only a small percentage managed to evade the searches and escape to the forests, usually at night, in the period after the main killing “Aktion.”

### Hiding places in populated areas

Usually, the following types of places were selected for secrecy:

- attics or cellars in private houses
- storage rooms, larders, barns, pigsties, cattle sheds, or henhouses
- closets and wardrobes in city apartments
- vacant commercial premises

In some places Jews constructed a special hidden room, which was situated behind the wardrobe or under the stairs. In private houses a “secret compartment” could be dug out as a continuation of a basement or cellar. Another popular hideout was a pit dug in the ground, sometimes in barns, or even under haystacks.



Many Jews changed their hiding places frequently for security or other reasons. Thus, they hid on peasant farms, in the forest, and in apartments and houses in towns and cities.

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***Escapes from Ghettos and Camps in Eastern Galicia and Volhynia***

Almost every ghetto in these regions included a minority (or even a majority) of inmates who favored open resistance. In the ghettos of Dubrovysia, Sarny, Sosnove, and Volodymyrets, these more militant Jews made plans to resist, but the Jewish councils forced them to desist. Thus when young Jews from Dubrovysia, who worked outside the ghetto, planned to disarm their guards and flee, the council warned them that unless they abandoned this plan, it would have them sent to a camp. Likewise, plans for armed resistance in Kovel and Dubno came to naught.

After the "liquidation" of the ghettos and most of the camps in spring and early summer 1943, out of an original population of some 550,000 living in Eastern Galicia in June 1941, only about 20,000 Jews remained alive. About half were in camps, but the other half were in hiding.

In Volhynia, where the main wave of mass shootings took place in the summer and fall of 1942, most escapees left only hours before, or during, the "liquidations" of ghettos and camps. Sometimes hundreds of inmates escaped. For instance, from a camp in Sarny, which in late August 1942 held thousands of Jews and one hundred Roma, when the killing started, Jews, who had bribed a guard, removed the fence and Roma set fire to the shacks. About one thousand prisoners escaped as a result. Possibly more than 30,000 Jews fled during this final phase in Volhynia, which would be around one sixth of the roughly 180,000 Jews that were living in ghettos in spring 1942. However, many of those who initially escaped were killed in the searches that ensued shortly thereafter.

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**Hiding places in forests and other remote areas**

Jews who had managed to flee sometimes *returned* to the ghettos and camps, because survival outside seemed impossible – as long as there was not a significant number of Soviet partisans in the vicinity. The Germans even established small remnant ghettos just after the main "Aktions," so as to lure surviving Jews out of hiding with false promises, and then kill them. Such ghettos were established, for

example, in Snou in Belarus and in Dubno and Verba in Ukraine. Only in 1943-44 were more non-Jews willing, for a variety of reasons, to hide Jews, as by then it no longer seemed likely that the German occupation would last indefinitely.

The relatively large number of Jews who escaped from the ghettos in Volhynia was related to the region's large forests and swamps, especially in the north and northeast of the region, which offered better chances of escape and hiding than in other regions. In some localities, armed resistance by ghetto inmates against the final "liquidation" of ghettos facilitated mass escapes (see, for example, Tuchyn). In northern Volhynia many towns and ghettos were surrounded by forests, which made a quick disappearance possible. In addition, when the ghetto "liquidations" took place in the late summer and fall of 1942, the weather conditions and the availability of fruit and vegetables made it easier for Jews to survive initially. However, conditions became much harsher in the winter and many fugitives died from the cold, hunger, and disease.

Despite favorable conditions in some areas, many Jews were killed during the searches by the German and local police, while others were denounced to the police by the local population or even killed by them. Detailed research on these events (which also took place west of the Bug River) is still in its infancy.

To survive in the forest was extremely harsh, and an additional risk lay in the antisemitism of some partisan groups, especially the Polish, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian ones. Many more Jews were killed during this period when UPA and Soviet partisans were fighting each other and when the UPA began its attempt to evict the Polish population from the region. But even the Soviet groups were not free from antisemitism.

The Soviet partisan movement, which grew considerably from 1942, improved the chances of survival for local Jews escaping from the ghettos. The Jewish underground in the Minsk ghetto worked within the framework of a broader underground network operating across the city (and led by Isai Kazinets, born in Ukraine and himself of Jewish descent), and it focused from late 1941 on organizing escape attempts for Jewish individuals and small groups, above all children. An unknown number of Jews, including approximately 500 children from children's



homes, succeeded in fleeing the Minsk Ghetto and going into hiding or finding their way to the Soviet partisan formations.

#### **4/ Harming the perpetrators**

This involved assaults by ghetto inmates; assaults in other circumstances; aid to Soviet partisans; Jews as Soviet or Polish partisans; and Jewish partisan units.

##### Assaults by ghettos inmates

In the ghettos and camps of western Belarus and western Ukraine there were both isolated acts of resistance, which had mainly a symbolic significance, and also large mass escape attempts, usually during the ghetto “liquidation” “Aktions,” that enabled thousands of Jews to flee into the forests.

For example, when the German district commissar visited Liubeshiv (near Kamin-Kashyrsky) in August 1942, and told the local Jews that they would be killed, a dentist attacked him, severely wounding him with a razor blade.

That same month, during the “liquidation” of the ghetto in the Volhynian village of Turiisk, Berish Segal managed to seize a German sub-machine-gun and wounded several policemen before being killed. Two women also attacked the German who led the action and wounded him before they were killed.

In western Volhynia, there were uprisings by Jewish groups in Kremenets', Tuchyn, and Mizoch in August, September, and October 1942, respectively. A detailed example of how Jewish resistance was organized is provided by the case of Tuchyn. The ghetto in that small town in Volhynia did not include all local Jews. When in September 1942, the remaining Jews were ordered to move there, the Jewish council together with young men and women planned resistance and somehow obtained handguns, rifles, and grenades. On September 22, German and Ukrainian policemen surrounded the ghetto. In the early hours of the 24th, shots were exchanged and the inmates set the ghetto on fire. About two thirds of them, some two thousand people, initially escaped into the woods. Council chairman Getzel Schwarzman gave himself up on the third day of the uprising. Of those who escaped, many were captured and killed by the Germans and local police over the ensuing days.



When, on December 12, 1942, a labor camp for Jews in Lutsk was “liquidated,” the prisoners offered resistance with mostly improvised weapons and were able to wound several policemen. During the “liquidation” of the ghetto in Brody (Region of Lviv) in May 1943, the Jews offered resistance and killed four Ukrainian policemen and several Germans; two Jewish partisans also killed a prison official in the town.

In some places in Belarus, mass escape attempts took place in the context of revolts in the ghettos and camps (documented, for example, for Hantsavichy, Navahrudak, Kletsk, Niasviž, and Slonim). Plans for armed resistance in the event of the dissolution of ghettos – and thus the imminent death of the inhabitants – were made in many Belarusian ghettos. Thus, in the ghettos in Slonim, Niasviž, Kapyl, Mir, Kamyanyets, Hlybokaye, Navahrudak, Kobryn, Lyakhavichy, and Dziarečyn, Jews armed themselves with – in some cases home-made – weapons. In Dzisna, Druya, Sharkaŭshchyna, and Niasviž, among others places, Jews also set fire to numerous buildings within the ghetto and attempted in this way to impede or prevent the murder.

On April 19, 1943, the Germans began their armed assault on the Warsaw ghetto with large-scale SS and police forces. Using prepared bunkers and weapons they had acquired, the Jewish resistance fought an epic but uneven battle that lasted for four weeks. In May 1943, the last Warsaw ghetto inmates were shot or deported. Subsequently a concentration camp was established on the site of the destroyed ghetto to recycle useful materials from the rubble.

#### Assaults in other circumstances

In October 1942, Jews gathered in Yarmolyntsi in Podolia were concentrated in a former military barracks near the train station. About 300 Jews who were brought there last were shot in pits visible from the barracks. The other Jews disarmed and killed a Ukrainian policeman who tried to force them out and reportedly put on display his decapitated head. The Jews fired at and wounded several guards, until a fire set off by the Germans forced them out.

The Janowska camp in Lviv was “liquidated” on November 18-19, 1943: the remaining 3,000 or so Jews were called on parade and then taken



in small groups to be shot in the “Piaski” sandpits nearby. But news spread before the “Aktion” and some Jews, as well as some of the guards, managed to escape. There were also attempts at resistance in the workshops with improvised weapons, which succeeded in wounding some of the guards.

There were uprisings in August 1943 in Treblinka and in October 1943 in Sobibór. Only about 100 of the Jewish resistance fighters from the extermination centers ultimately survived the war. The uprising in Sobibór, beginning on October 14, was led by Aleksandr Pechersky, a Soviet POW born in Kremenchuk, Ukraine. After careful planning, the fighters killed eleven SS men and some Trawniki guards, and enabled the escape of more than half of the Jews, some of whom joined partisan units.

#### Aid to Soviet partisans

A group led by Joseph Blinder operated in the Bershadt ghetto in Transnistria from 1942 to 1944. This group established cooperation with the partisan detachment led by Yakov Talis, which operated in the area. The Jews provided the partisans with money, clothes, and medicine, and also hid some partisans in the ghetto. In retaliation, 173 Jews were shot on February 11, 1944, and 154 Jews were shot on March 11, 1944. Joseph Blinder and Eli Marchak were among them.

#### Jews as Soviet or Polish partisans

Some Jews were members of the Communist underground in Kyiv. Tetiana Markus was in a subversive group linked to the underground Party committee for Kyiv led by Volodymyr Kudriashov (shot in July 1942) and then Oleksandr Falko. She participated in the killing of several Gestapo agents and personally shot one of them. The group also forged documents. Markus was arrested when trying to leave for a partisan detachment outside the city, in August 1942. She was shot on January 29, 1943.

Perhaps as many as approximately 34,400 Jews were Soviet partisans – that is, partisans loyal to Moscow, 14,000 of whom Jews in Belarus. Thousands of Jews fought against the Nazis in Soviet underground organizations and partisan detachments in Ukraine. Of these, 2,929 are known by name.



Early Soviet attempts at organizing partisan groups in the autumn of 1942 seem to have relied quite heavily on Jews who had fled from the ghettos.

In Crimea a comparatively large number of Jews joined. Contributory factors were the many combat-age Jewish men not drafted into the Red Army; the comparative ease with which they could join from the many Jewish rural settlements; and the willingness of the partisans to accept them. By contrast, in the North Caucasus Jews were almost completely absent from the Soviet partisan units.

Several hundred Jews, who had escaped from ghettos, joined Polish self-defense units in villages and towns, found shelter there, or were accepted into Polish partisan units. A partisan detachment headed by David Erlbaum consisted of Jews who had fled from ghettos and joined the Polish Gwardia Ludowa, which operated around Boryslav and Sambir (Region of Drohobych) in 1943 and 1944. But many partisan units were reluctant to accept Jews and some rejected them completely. There are also reports of Polish partisan units killing Jews.

Underground groups which planned for an armed uprising existed in the Baltics in Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai, Švenčionys, and Riga. In January 1942 the FPO (Fareynikte Partizaner Organizatsie) was founded in Vilnius, a union of Zionist, Bundist, and Communist Jewish groups. But armed uprisings proved to be unrealistic or impossible, and the organization of escapes from the ghettos became the major activity of these underground groups. Over 750 underground members from Vilnius and 350 from Kaunas fled to the partisans in the forests. Unorganized Jews also managed to flee (400 from Vilnius, 150 from Kaunas, 60 from Šiauliai, and 90 from Švenčionys). Most of the escapees joined the Soviet partisans in Lithuania or Belarus, while a few hundred others organized Jewish family camps in the forests.

### Jewish partisan units

Alongside the multinational Soviet partisan formations, there were also Jewish partisan units, mainly in Belarus (e.g. under the leadership of Lev Gilchik, Boris Gindin, Izrail Lapidus, or Hirsch Kaplinskii, and the non-Jewish Russian Pavel



Pronyagin). These units developed because ghetto escapees without their own weapons or any military training were often refused entry into Soviet partisan detachments that feared they would become a burden. In view of the increase in escape attempts, the regional leaders of the partisan movement and members of the Minsk ghetto underground agreed in spring 1943 to establish a special unit.

This unit, No. 106 (also referred to as the Zorin Unit after its commander, Shalom Zorin), also accepted children, women, and men of all ages who could not or chose not to fight. Its membership rose to as many as 800 people between May 1943 and June 1944. The largest so-called family unit was that commanded by Tuvia Bielski, known unofficially as the “Bielski Otriad” (from 1943 it was called the “Kalinin Otriad”). Numerous such “family units” existed in the German-occupied territories of the Soviet Union. One estimate indicates that up to 9,000 Jews found refuge in them (more than 3,700 of them in Belarus alone). These family camps provided important support services to the fighting forces, such as gathering food or repairing weapons and clothing.

In western Ukraine, too, small Jewish armed groups emerged that were engaged mostly in protecting and supporting larger Jewish “civilian camps” in the forests. Often they cooperated with Soviet partisans or joined them. Toward the end of the occupation, when the Soviet partisan movement had gained in strength, in some places it protected and supported such civilian camps. The historian Shmuel Spector estimates that about 1,700 to 1,900 Jews served in the Soviet partisans in Volhynia at the end of 1943, which at that time had 13,710 members. He believes that 2,500 people were in the civilian camps, of which about 1,500 survived.

In total, several thousand people fought in these Jewish partisan detachments and squads in Ukraine. Partisan detachments and groups consisting almost exclusively of Jews existed in Volhynia, Eastern Galicia, and in the Vinnytsia region in the summer of 1942. The Jewish partisan detachments were created by those Jews who fled from ghettos and camps to avoid being killed by the Nazis. (Prior to that, many of the organizers of Jewish detachments had been members of underground organizations in ghettos.)

Jewish partisan groups also acted in Eastern Galicia. A detachment formed by Jews who had escaped from the ghetto operated in the area of Boryslav for more



than a year. In the spring of 1942, a group of underground members from the Borshchiv ghetto (Region of Ternopil) went into the woods and formed a Jewish partisan detachment. In November 1943, they attacked the prison in Borshchiv and released 50 prisoners.

A detachment of Jews who had escaped from a ghetto operated in the area of the Chorny Lis Forest in the Region of Stanislav (currently Ivano-Frankivsk) in 1943. All of them were killed in a battle with German forces.

A separate Jewish company led by David Mudryk, a Soviet officer who had escaped from captivity, fought in the 1st Lenin Regiment of the 2nd Stalin Partisan Brigade in the Region of Vinnytsia. In August 1942, a group of escaped prisoners established a partisan camp, and then other Jews (including the elderly, women and children) joined them. There were 250 people in this unit, 96 of them took part in combat operations. Many of the fighters were killed during severe battles at the end of 1943 and in early 1944, when the Germans were scouring the woods.

In Eastern Galicia, many ghettos were “liquidated” only in spring 1943. Also here, it was at this time that large numbers of Jews fled to the forests, though the percentage of Jews that escaped successfully was lower than in Volhynia. The landscape and the more dense settlement of most parts of Galicia made mass escapes, like in Volhynia, more difficult. Nevertheless, in some parts of Galicia, primarily in the forests of the Carpathian foothills, “family camps” of Jews emerged, with many thousands of people.

In contrast to Volhynia, German forces maintained control over most of Galician territory until their retreat in 1944, and after the summer of 1943, they and local police began intense searches in the forest areas. This was not only because Jews who fled from the ghettos, but apparently also in response to a raid by Sydir Kovpak’s Soviet partisans, traversing the region from Volhynia. It seems likely that several thousand Jews hiding in the forests were killed as a result of these operations. Only in the Pidhaitsi and Stryi areas did “family camps” live to see the liberation from Nazi rule.

In late 1942, an underground resistance group led by Jacob Linder and Shmuel Weiler was created in the Brody ghetto. In March 1943, this group established contact with activists in the Lviv ghetto and with a Communist



underground organization in that city (the Ivan Franko National Guard), so as to create an independent partisan detachment. Three bases in the woods were established, where in April, about 70 Jews who fled from ghettos such as the one in Lviv gathered. In the spring, Linder's partisans committed several acts of sabotage. In particular, they attacked an estate, a turpentine factory, and blew up a locomotive with several railcars containing German soldiers. An attack on the labor camp in Sasiv liberated some of the prisoners. However, an attempt to transport a group of partisan recruits out of Lviv in mid-May resulted only in their arrest.

Thirty-three of the remaining partisans died while fighting. SS-Gruppenführer Katzmann, the leader of the SS and police in the Galicia District, reported on June 30, 1943, that these Jews shot a Polish forester participating in the action and thereafter refused to surrender to the gendarmerie, Ukrainian police, and two Wehrmacht companies scouring the woods for them. Twelve Jews managed to escape to the ruined synagogue in Brody, but a local policeman reported them to the German gendarmerie, which ordered the local Jewish police to arrest the partisans. Six of the twelve were then captured and were shot by the German gendarmerie.

## **5/ Committing suicide**

Suicide was the least common response, chosen usually when the German's murderous intentions were clear and it at least granted the Jews control over the manner of their own deaths. Cases are documented for a number of ghettos in Volhynia. In Rivne, for instance, two members of the Jewish Council committed suicide on July 13-14, 1942, as they did not want to assist the Germans with the ghetto's "liquidation."

The North Caucasus was seized in the course of 1942, when news of the campaign to exterminate the Jews had already spread far and wide. Jews calculated their steps accordingly. Those who had initially managed to escape to the North Caucasus and then were overtaken by the Germans were well aware of what was in store for them. This helps to explain the high rate of suicide among these Jewish refugees just as the killing "actions" started. =====



## **Aid to Jews by Others**

The history of attempts at support and rescue by members of the non-Jewish population provides many examples of heroism and sacrifice, but also stories of greed, exploitation, betrayal, and murder. Rescue acts removed Jews from life-threatening conditions in order to save them. These acts could be brief or prolonged; and a single person could be rescued multiple times.

### **Punishments Imposed on Non-Jews, and Rewards**

It was officially forbidden to shelter or feed Jews, or to help them in any other way. Warnings to this effect were published in local newspapers and posted on placards hung up in public. The threat of being detected came more from neighbors or the local police than from Germans, because it was much more likely that the former would notice.

The punishment for helping Jews varied according to the different zones of occupation. For Ukraine, the situation looked as follows.

In eastern Galicia (and the rest of the General Government) and the military administrative zone: death by shooting or hanging, sometimes along with the rescuer's family members. Their property was often looted as well. In some cases, however, not death but imprisonment was imposed.

In Reichskommissariat Ukraine: death by shooting or hanging, rarely also for family members.

In Transnistria: officially, not death, but a fine or months/years of forced labor or imprisonment.

Not uncommonly in practice (depending on the whim of a Romanian or German official, soldier, gendarme, or village mayor): beatings and summary death by shooting.

In other regions, motives were often a key determinant. For instance, in Lithuania, if Germans determined the motive for aid to have been money, there was a three-



month prison sentence. But if ethnic motives were uncovered, the punishment was death, also for family members.

For Germans who helped Jews the risk was much smaller. Often they were arrested or removed from their positions. Many Germans did not have to face serious consequences for protecting Jews.

Rewards from the occupation authorities for revealing where a Jew was hiding, or for taking a Jew to the Germans or local police included the following items: cigarettes, vodka, salt, sugar, chocolate, canned goods, or money.

There were humanitarian motives for helping, but paid rescue was also quite common. Non-Jews often wanted compensation for risking their lives for Jews. The payment could be money, jewelry, any property or valuables; labor; or sex (usually involving Jewish women). Jews sometimes promised ample reward after the war.

### **Rescued Jews: Who Were They?**

Rescued Jews were not always individuals: sometimes groups (mostly families) received help from a single non-Jew. Jews could receive help because of their skills; these were mostly men. Jewish women, who worked, usually did so in the house.

Jewish children received help more often than adults. First, to rescue a child was much easier than an adult person, especially in families that had some children of their own. Second, children were considered to be “innocent” and to help them was viewed by some as a moral obligation.

Girls were more likely to be saved than boys who were circumcised, but this factor was less significant in places such as Crimea, where some rescuers were Muslims, who also practiced circumcision. Younger children needed more intensive care and special food, especially milk. In Transnistria, the Kyiv region, and elsewhere, groups of Jewish children were saved in orphanages.

### **Forms of Non-Jewish Aid and Rescue**

The most common form of help in all occupation zones and localities was supplying Jews with food and sheltering them for short or long periods. One historian (Anna Abakunova) has categorized the main forms of non-Jewish aid and rescue.



1) One-time assistance (frequent; mostly involving strangers), including:

- shelter for a night or for a few days
- food
- clothing
- warnings
- physical protection from torture or killing

2) Provision of documents (“Aryan papers”—passports, birth certificates, baptismal certificates), through:

- forgery
- other people’s documents (deceased, frontline soldiers, missing people)
- handing over one’s own documents

3) Provision of a job

4) Bribing occupiers and auxiliaries

5) Silence about Jewishness

6) Adoption, by:

- officially including the Jews (mostly children) in one’s own documents as family members, or
- presenting Jews as non-Jewish family members

7) Religious rites, involving

- baptism
- vouching for Jews as Christians or Muslims
- teaching Christian or Muslim prayers and rituals

8) Long-term shelter



- in cities (where this was extremely difficult, despite the greater anonymity there): hiding places (closets, chests, etc.) or “secret” spaces and rooms
- in villages: remote and more spacious places such as cellars, attics, and sheds

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### ***Life in the Hide-outs***

Life in the hide-outs brought extreme hardship for the people who had to stay there for many months or even years. They had to endure the constant fear of being detected. Often they had to spend long periods of time in small rooms built underground, without daylight, together with several other people. Personal hygiene was difficult and sometimes, especially in hide-outs in forests and fields, it was very hard to obtain food or heating in the winter.

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- in churches and monasteries
  - in hospitals while disguised as patients

### **9) Crossing borders into safer areas**

-For example, from the Reichskommissariat Ukraine into Transnistria.

A resistance movement in Riga smuggled people across the Baltic Sea, until this was discovered.

### **Who Helped and Rescued?**

In Ukraine, Ukrainians were the largest group, followed by Russians and Poles (mainly in eastern Galicia), ethnic Germans, Moldovans, Romanians, Czechs, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Italians, Armenians, Crimean Tatars, Greeks, and Roma. These were people from all walks of life – from lawyers, doctors, and teachers to peasants.

Peasants helped more frequently than those who lived in towns or cities. This was determined by living conditions in the village areas: food was accessible because they produced their own food, creating a shelter was much easier than in



an urban area, and in some areas villages were situated close to woods, where Jews could escape quickly in case of danger.

At the same time, peasants were also exposed to great danger. In villages information spread quickly and if somebody helped a Jew, the entire village, or at least neighboring houses, were likely to find out.

Generally, women were more active as helpers and rescuers than men, partly because the men were mostly serving at the front, with the partisans, or in other underground movements. Many other men, especially those who were Communists, were killed or imprisoned by the occupiers.

Many Orthodox and Catholic priests were involved in rescuing Jews by baptizing them (not always for humanitarian reasons, but also to convert them to Christianity). Those included Aleksej Glagolev and his wife Tatjana in Kyiv. In eastern Galicia, the Greek Catholic community headed by Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky was actively involved in the rescue of hundreds of Jews, including children.

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***Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky, Rescuer of Jews***

For over four decades, Andrei Sheptytsky (1865-1944) was Archbishop of Lviv and Metropolitan of the Greek Catholic Church in Galicia. He supported Ukrainian political aspirations while never wavering from Christian morality, and while condemning political assassinations. During the Holocaust, Sheptytsky hid fifteen Jews on his personal premises, the St. George cathedral complex. These included Rabbi David Kahane of the Ose Tow Synagogue and the sons of Rabbi Ezekiel Lewin of the Reformed Synagogue (himself murdered soon after bringing them).

In addition, in cooperation with his brother Clement, the Proto-Hegumen of the Studite Order, and Ihumena Josepha, the Mother Superior of all Studite convents, Sheptytsky made parish priests organize escapes of Jews to the monasteries. One who thus survived was Adam Rotfeld, a future Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland.

In all, the metropolitan helped save about 150 Jews, mainly children. Sheptytsky, a fluent speaker of Hebrew with a long history of friendly relations with Jews, thus risked his life, without seeking anything in return.





Sheptytsky spoke out in remarkable ways. A pastoral letter issued in Lviv on 1 July 1941 welcomed the German army as a “liberator from the enemy,” and recognized the new government proclaimed by the OUN. But, possibly because of concern with the ongoing pogrom, Sheptytsky added that all citizens had to be treated equally. Other pastoral letters, in early 1942, implicitly encouraged his flock to rescue Jews. There were times, Sheptytsky wrote, when Christians just had to risk their lives for others. A pastoral letter of November 1942 bravely expressed the Christian commandment not to kill.

Unlike any other church leader in all of Nazi Europe, Sheptytsky sent, in February 1942, a letter (not preserved) to Himmler. It bravely asked Himmler to stop using Ukrainian policemen in the murders of the Jews.

In spite of the long list of actions and statements in support of Jews, Sheptytsky is controversial. This is mainly because of his appointment of chaplains to the new Galician Division of the Waffen-SS in 1943. Pastoral care that saves souls is a core component of the Catholic tradition. Perhaps Sheptytsky also considered the establishment of this Division with Ukrainian soldiers the best way of controlling young nationalists who were thinking of joining the UPA.

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Thanks to the repeated appeals by the leadership of the Catholic parish of Bukovina to the Romanian authorities, baptized Jews there were left alone. Many Catholic and Protestant believers, including especially Baptists and Adventists, rescued Jews. In the zone of military administration and especially in Crimea, Muslims, mostly Crimean Tatars, helped Jews to survive.

The Moldovans Paramon and Tamara Lozan, having learned that all the Jews of their town of Nisporeni (Bessarabia) would be shot, released all of the Jews imprisoned in the local school building. Paramon, a teacher there, was shot in punishment for this action. In Chernivtsi, Jews were rescued by Iosif Vasilkovskii and Vasilena Vasilkovskaia, and by Vasiliu and Ekaterina Kovtsun. In Transnistria, locals reportedly “adopted” hundreds of Jewish children from the convoys passing through.

Those in official functions meant to support the Germans and their allies could also help. In Transnistria, for instance, there were cases where auxiliary policemen (Ukrainians) turned a blind eye to helpers giving food to Jews being held in barns or stables. Some heads of villages in Reichskommissariat Ukraine –

usually local Ukrainians appointed by the Germans – helped by warning Jews about upcoming shootings. Near the border with Transnistria, an ethnic German who served with the Nazis warned Jewish families about a mass shooting and helped them to hide. In the military administrative zone, some soldiers of the Wehrmacht helped Jewish women to forge documents and escape.

In public statements in 1943, Stalin issued orders to the Soviet partisans to “save Soviet people from extermination and deportation to slavery in Germany.” Jews were not mentioned specifically, but such language could serve to motivate and justify actions taken in their support.

When what later became known as the Holocaust was unfolding, neither the Melnyk nor the Bandera branch of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists ever made a public statement about it. There were some rescuers of Jews within its ranks, such as Fedir Vovk and Olena Witer, a Greek-Catholic nun with the religious name Abbess Iosefa. Also, there were some cases of aid being given to a group of Jews by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in Volhynia, though the motives can be discussed.

In the Polish countryside, social control was high, but nevertheless thousands of non-Jewish Poles supported Jews at the risk of being killed by the Germans together with their entire families. Only a small proportion of those who went into hiding survived, however. There was the constant risk of denunciation, because the German authorities offered rewards for this. Some Poles denounced Jews solely for profit, first extorting bribes from the hidden Jews, and then informing the German police to claim the reward once the Jews had run out of money.

The apprehended Jews were killed by the German Gendarmerie, but also by the Polish Police, and in many instances by individual Poles. When the German police started to deport Poles from the Zamość area in order to “clear” the region for German colonizers, thousands of Poles fled into the forests, where some of them found Jews in hiding and killed them.

There is considerable debate about the behavior of Polish society and the Polish state during the Holocaust. The ethnic Poles themselves faced an extremely harsh occupation; they were completely outlawed by the Germans.



Solidarity with Jewish Poles, who faced complete extermination, was limited. Both the dominant Polish Catholic Church and the Polish Underground displayed an ambivalent stance towards the anti-Jewish persecution until 1941, and some even during the extermination period of 1942-44. The Polish government-in-exile in London also considered the Holocaust rather as a secondary problem compared to the suffering of Christian Poles.

Nevertheless, important assistance was given. The government created in late 1942 a Council for Assistance to the Jews (*Żegota*), which supplied Jews, for example, with false papers. In Western Ukraine, it did so mainly in the Lviv region and thus saved hundreds. Members of the Polish national resistance movement *Armia Krajowa*, which operated mainly in Distrikt Galizien, but also partially in Reichskommissariat Ukraine in Volhynia, were actively involved in rescuing Jews as individuals and as groups. Left-wing and liberal underground groups constantly reported on the persecution and murder of the Jews, and even announced that they would execute Polish denouncers of Jews.

Tens, or hundreds of thousands of ethnic Poles assisted the Jews, often at the risk of being murdered.

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## THE HOLOCAUST BEYOND EASTERN EUROPE

The course of the Holocaust can be divided into four distinct geographical patterns: the shooting of Jews inside occupied Soviet territory, the murder of Polish Jews inside Poland, the deportation of the Jews from the German Reich including Austria and Bohemia/Moravia, and the deportations from all over Europe to extermination camps, predominantly to Auschwitz. This section will describe the last two geographical patterns.

### **The Holocaust in the German Reich (incl. Austria and Bohemia/Moravia)**

The Jews in Germany suffered the longest continuous period of persecution, but as in Austria from 1938, around half of them managed to emigrate to other countries. Those that remained were in a deplorable situation by 1941: completely robbed and outlawed, isolated within the major cities of the Reich, in Austria nearly all of them in Vienna. Plans for wholesale deportations of Jews from the Reich had already been in existence since the end of 1939. With the apparent German success in the war against the Soviet Union, their general deportation was put back on the agenda. In September 1941 Hitler decided to approve this program. The transport destinations remained, however, unclear. Since it was difficult to deport Jews during the German offensive in front of Moscow, the first transports were directed to the Łódź ghetto, which was already overcrowded.

At the other destinations like Riga and Minsk, local Jews were massacred in order to make space for Jews arriving from the Reich. In Kaunas, however, all 5,000 Jews arriving from Germany and Austria were not taken to the ghetto, but shot immediately.

The Nazi regime always felt insecure about German public opinion and hesitated to murder the Jews openly within Germany. German Jews had been murdered in the more or less secret “Euthanasia” program and as concentration camp prisoners. Systematic killings did not start before February 1942, when Germans and Austrians were killed

near Riga. In May the full-scale mass murder of Reich Jews began: Germans and Austrians were taken from the Łódź ghetto to the Chełmno death camp and were killed at the Maly Trostenets camp near Minsk.

To give the impression that elderly Jews were receiving adequate treatment, from November 1941 a special ghetto for Jews aged over 65 or with World War I decorations was established in Western Bohemia in Theresienstadt (Terezín). In fact, this was a gross deception intended to fool both the Jews and public opinion. The Jews in Theresienstadt lived under unbearable conditions, such that 31,000 died there. But most important, Theresienstadt was in fact a Transit station on the way to the extermination centers. This also applied to all Jews from Bohemia and Moravia, predominantly from Prague.

In 1942 the destinations for deportations of Jews were expanded: starting in March Jews were deported to ghettos in the Lublin district, from which local Jews had been sent to the Bełżec and Sobibór camps just prior to this. And, from June 1942, the trains from Germany and Austria headed directly to the killing centers, starting in fall 1942, also to Auschwitz.

By March 1943, the German authorities considered the Reich to be “free of Jews.” There were, however, still about 20,000 Jews in Christian-Jewish mixed marriages, and about another 20,000 in hiding. During the last year of the war, the Nazi regime intensified the persecution of Jews in mixed marriages and so-called “half-castes” (*Mischlinge*) with both Jewish and Christian ancestors. Many of them had to perform forced labor.

All in all, about 165,000 out of the 500,000 German Jews were murdered, some 65,000 out of the 205,000 Austrian Jews, and 80,000 people from Bohemia and Moravia. Only the German and Austrian Jews had a real opportunity to emigrate up until 1939-40, but they also had to endure the longest period of persecution.

### **The Holocaust in Western Europe**

During the German attack on Western Europe in May 1940, the “Jewish Question” was not considered important. When the “Final Solution” emerged in the autumn and winter of 1941, the deportation of Jews from France, Belgium, and the Netherlands was discussed by the occupation authorities. As in Germany proper, the regional leaders

were keen to deport the Jews as soon as possible to the occupied Soviet regions. After attacks by the French resistance on German personnel, the occupation authorities refrained by and large from reprisals against French Christians and in March 1942, they deported 5,000 French Jews to Auschwitz instead.

The German Security Police started its preparations for full-scale deportations in May 1942. Since they had very few of their own personnel at their disposal, they needed others. The Vichy government, which controlled unoccupied Central and Southern France, was reluctant to hand over the Jews. However, it agreed to the deportation of Jewish immigrants without French citizenship. When deportations began throughout Western Europe, the children of Jewish immigrants, who had acquired French citizenship by being born in the country, were also included. (In Tunisia, the French colony in North Africa briefly occupied by Germany, the Jews were persecuted but not subjected to systematic murder.)

The roundups of Jews were highly dependent on the local administration and police. The most infamous of them was on July 16-17, 1942, when 13,000 Jewish immigrants in Paris were arrested. The Vichy police was very active in deporting Jews from the zone unoccupied by Germany. Tens of thousands Jewish refugees had been interned in camps in Southern France, and could be transported easily to the North. The Dutch police also fully complied with the German orders. In occupied Belgium, the situation was rather different. While the police in Antwerp, home of one of the largest Jewish communities, fully cooperated with the Germans, the police in Brussels did not, which affected the rate of survival. The Jews were taken to the transit camps of Drancy in Paris, Mechelen/Malines in Belgium, and Westerbork in the Netherlands. From there they were transported to the extermination camps, predominantly to Auschwitz, but, Dutch Jews especially, also to Sobibór.

Unlike in occupied Eastern Europe, in the West there were still elements of an open public sphere. Especially the Churches issued protests against the mass arrests, as soon as it became clear that the Jews were being sent to their deaths. More and more Jews went into hiding or, after the Germans entered the unoccupied zone of France in November 1942, fled to the area of Italian occupation around Nice-Monaco. While the deportations continued almost uninterrupted in the Netherlands, in Belgium and France the Germans faced more and more difficulties. After the toppling of

Mussolini in August 1943, however, the German Gestapo entered the former Italian zone in Southern France and deported thousands of Jews from there.

In Northern Europe, Denmark and Norway had been occupied since April 1940. Their small Jewish communities faced discrimination and were partly expropriated. While 800 Norwegian Jews were deported to Auschwitz in November 1942, the Danish Jews were never directly affected, because they left the country secretly for Sweden after they had been warned.

Within Western Europe, the Dutch Jews, especially, were by and large murdered, 102,000 out of 140,000, in Belgium 28,000 out of 60,000, in Luxemburg 1,500, and in France 75,000 out of 280,000. In France and Belgium, Jewish immigrants were those most affected by the Holocaust.

Jews from most European countries were deported to the Auschwitz concentration camp. The camp was originally established in Eastern Upper Silesia in 1940 for Polish political prisoners. From July 1941, selected groups of Soviet POWs were sent to be killed there. In September to October 1941 the erection of a new giant camp for Soviet POWs began, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and at the same time the first mass murders using the toxic pesticide Zyklon B. Jews were transported to Auschwitz from March 1942, and probably in spring or summer 1942 the decision was taken to make the camp an extermination center for all Jews from outside of Poland and the occupied Soviet territories. Two improvised gas chambers were installed during that summer, and approximately 80 percent of the deportees from each transport were murdered right after their arrival. In spring 1943, new large crematoria with attached gas chambers were erected, and Auschwitz became the center of the Holocaust in 1943 and 1944.

### **The Holocaust in the Countries Allied with Germany**

Several countries with close political ties to Hitler's Germany pursued antisemitic state policies, like Romania in 1937, Hungary, Italy, and Slovakia after 1938, and Bulgaria and Croatia in 1941.

Already prior to the onset of the "Final Solution," the Fascist Ustasha movement, which took power in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, started a radical campaign against all minorities, primarily against the Serbs, but also against the Jews and Roma. The first camps were established in May 1941, and among Serbian and Jewish



prisoners there was a high death rate. The situation worsened when a new camp system in Jasenovac was set up. Thousands of Jews, especially from Zagreb, were brought there and killed in the camp. One year later, in August 1942, the Ustasha government sent the remaining Jews to Auschwitz.

Romania was not only the first country apart from Germany to introduce anti-Jewish laws, but also led its own war of extermination against the Jews in the Soviet Union, especially in Bessarabia (Moldova) and Transnistria. But the Romanians were committed against not only Jews in the regions annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940, but also against their own Jewish citizens, in Southern Bukovina and in Iași, where Romanian institutions already organized the massacre of 14,000 Jewish inhabitants at the end of June 1941.

Hungary took part in the German war against the Soviet Union. The administration used this opportunity to deport foreign Jews from Transcarpathia, which had been annexed by Hungary in 1938-39. Tens of thousands of Jews were herded into Western Ukraine in August 1941 and killed there, predominately in Kamianets-Podilskyi and in Stanislawów (Ivano-Frankivsk).

### **German Demands to Deport the Jews**

At the turn of 1941/1942, the German Foreign office started to negotiate with the allied states in order to have the Jewish minorities in these countries deported “to the East,” including those Jewish citizens, who already lived under German occupation, for example in France.

The first country to comply with this request was Slovakia, a state created by Hitler in 1939. The Slovak government under Jozef Tiso was highly antisemitic and keen to expel as many Jews as possible. In March 1942 deportations to German-occupied Poland began, to the Auschwitz concentration camp and to the Lublin region, including the Majdanek camp. Most of the deportees had died by the summer. Only after protests by the Vatican and other influential forces in society did the Slovak government stop its participation in the Holocaust in August 1942, after 58,000 Jews had been deported to their deaths.

After the August 1941 deportations, the Hungarian state continued its anti-Jewish policies, but did not comply with German requests to deport all Jews from Hungary to



the extermination centers. The Romanian government, which had organized the massacre of 250,000 Jews up until early 1942, also stopped its participation in the German “Final Solution” in August 1942, when the project to deport all Jews from old Romania (the Regat) to the Belzec death camp was suddenly stopped. The motives behind this reversal were manifold: there was dissatisfaction with German cooperation in the war against the Soviet Union, but also conflicts over the confiscation of Jewish property.

The Bulgarian response to the German demand to deport the Jews developed differently. The government remained reluctant to deport Jews from Bulgaria, but not so with regard to the regions occupied by Bulgaria in April 1941. After lengthy negotiations, in March 1943 the Bulgarian government decided to hand over all Jews from occupied Western Macedonia (Yugoslavia) and occupied Eastern Macedonia and Western Thrace (Greece). While the German occupiers deported 58,000 Jews from the largest Sephardic community in Europe, Thessaloniki, to Auschwitz, deportations from Bulgarian-occupied Greece were even undertaken without the assistance of German police. Almost all the 13,000 deportees were sent to the Treblinka death camp and murdered there. But under pressure from the parliament and the Church, the government finally decided not to deport its own citizens. Nevertheless, the Bulgarian government and administration were highly complicit in the Holocaust, also confiscating much of the Bulgarian Jews’ property.

### **Changes from August 1943**

Germany’s relationship with its allies started to change in August 1943, when Mussolini’s government was overthrown in Italy. The Italian leadership had followed the German anti-Jewish example since 1938, but did not participate in the mass murder. While Mussolini was highly antisemitic and at times expressed support for the Holocaust, some of his generals and administrators in the Italian-occupied areas objected to the killing of Jews, probably out of both political and humanitarian motives. In occupied Croatia and Bosnia/Herzegovina, the Italian authorities moderated Ustasha violence, but also subjected Jews to internment. Jews in the Italian zones in Southern France, in Western and Southern Greece, and in occupied “Greater Albania” were also discriminated against, but not violently persecuted by the authorities.

The situation changed however in September 1943, when the German army entered Italy and the Italian-occupied zones around the Mediterranean. (Earlier, in 1941, German entry into Italian Libya had brought persecution and then death to an estimated 1,000 Jews.) On October 16, 1943, the Germans, together with Italian police, organized the roundup of Jews in Rome. In the end, they managed to send more than 1,000 of them to Auschwitz. But in Rome, as in other Italian cities, the majority of Jews succeeded in hiding, many of them in monasteries. Apparently the Vatican intervened on behalf of the Jews. In Northern Italy, however, in Mussolini's small puppet state, the Italian Social Republic, the drive against the Jews was more violent, as also in the German-occupied coastal region around Trieste, where one of the worst camps in Italy was established, the Risiera di San Sabba. Around 8,000 out of the 48,000 Italian Jews were murdered in 1943-45.

Hungary was the next Axis ally to be occupied by Germany in March 1944, since Hitler feared the country would leave the war because of the advancing Red Army. At the time 400,000 Jews lived within Hungary's prewar borders and another 320,000 in Hungarian-occupied territory. The Germans even included all Christians of Jewish descent and counted 800,000 inhabitants, who were in immediate danger. With breathtaking speed the occupier and the new administration of the state under Miklós Horthy negotiated the deportation of the Jews. The Jewish minority was forced into improvised ghettos, robbed, and abused. Under German guidance, already in May 1944 the Hungarian Gendarmerie started to deport the Jews, first from the occupied areas, then from the Hungarian provinces. No less than 437,000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz within three months.

At the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp, 25,000 of them were selected as prisoners, and another 78,000 temporarily kept in the camp, in order to be transported on to work in the subcamps of various concentration camps. All the other 334,000 human beings were sent to the gas chambers and murdered there.

In early July 1944, Chief of State Horthy suddenly stopped the deportations, which he had previously authorized. There was a variety of motives behind his move, not the least because Horthy did not consent to the mass murder of Budapest's Jews, who were highly integrated within Hungarian society. When it became obvious that Hungary wanted to leave the Axis, Hitler had Horthy overthrown by the fascist Arrow

Cross party under Ferenc Szálasi, who installed a new government, and resumed implementation of the Holocaust in Hungary. Budapest's Jews were driven into a ghetto and terrorized by Arrow Cross gangs – approximately 9,000 of them were murdered within the city. Around 78,000 Jews were ordered to march in the direction of Austria. There they had to perform forced labor, mainly digging fortification works to defend against the advancing Red Army. Approximately 500,000 Jews from “Greater Hungary” were killed during the Holocaust, among them around 200,000 from Hungary in its prewar borders.

The last Axis ally to be occupied by their German partner was Slovakia. When a revolt against the Tiso government broke out in August 1944, the Wehrmacht entered the country. A Security Police unit now resumed the deportation of the 12,000 Jews, who were left in the country after the cessation of deportations in August 1942. The victims were sent to various concentration camps and to Theresienstadt, but none were sent to Auschwitz. Nevertheless, most of these people did not survive.

### **The Last Chapter of the Holocaust**

In summer 1944 the SS began the evacuation of German concentration camps. Due to the large deportations of Jews from Hungary and elsewhere, Jews made up a high proportion of these prisoners. Some were brought from other camp types into the concentration camp system. According to the general orders of the SS leadership, weak prisoners were to be murdered prior to evacuation, and no Jew should be left behind to be liberated. During the summer of 1944, these evacuations were undertaken by train in a comparatively orderly fashion. The extermination facilities in Auschwitz were dismantled, while all traces of the “Aktion Reinhard” extermination camps had already been erased at the end of 1943.

After the Red Army's winter offensive in January 1945, the decisive phase of the evacuations began, now partly on foot as “Death marches.” Among the groups affected most severely were those Jews, who had been deported from the Baltic region to Stutthof concentration camp, located near Gdańsk (now in Poland). The Stutthof prisoners themselves were forcibly evacuated in two directions, to the West, as were Jews from all other camps, but also to the East, on the Samland peninsula (now in

Kaliningrad Region, Russia). There the guards systematically shot the Jewish prisoners on the shores of the Baltic Sea, which cost 7,000 lives among them.

The Auschwitz camp system was also emptied by January 1945, consisting of the old camp (for Poles), Auschwitz II Birkenau (for Jews), and the subcamps including the Monowitz factory. 58,000 prisoners, most of them Jews, were marched in a westerly direction through the snow. Only 7,000 prisoners were left behind in the camp.

Thousands of prisoners, who were too weak to march on, were shot along the roads leading westward. The Jewish prisoners from the Gross-Rosen concentration camp in Lower Silesia were taken by train to central Germany, but then they were also marched through Western Bohemia.

With the Soviet offensive on Berlin in March 1945, the third wave of evacuations and Death marches was set in motion. Now the large camps in Central, Northern and Southern Germany were evacuated under horrible circumstances. One of the main evacuation destinations was the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Northern Germany, which once had served as a special camp for Jews with Allied nationality, who might be exchanged for German prisoners. But from the summer of 1944, the camp was totally overcrowded with new deportees, who were not being properly fed anymore. Disease spread and tens of thousands died in the camp. Mass dying continued even after the camp's liberation by British troops, because the prisoners were too weak to survive. During the evacuations, approximately 250,000 of the 720,000 concentration camp prisoners died, and probably 200,000 of these victims were Jewish.

### **The Holocaust as Seen in Its Entirety**

The Holocaust impacted the respective national Jewish communities to a greater or lesser extent. In occupied Polish, Baltic, and Soviet territories, where the majority of European Jews lived before the war, more than 90 percent of the Jews who came under German rule there were murdered. Only in the Soviet Union was large-scale evacuation of Jews possible. But the rate of destruction was also very high in Yugoslavia and Greece, in Czechoslovakia, and in the Netherlands.

German rule in Poland and the Soviet Union was extreme, against both Jews and non-Jewish groups; there was no international, state, or societal protection for



them. And the Jews had few resources to help them survive; the majority of them were by and large poor.

On the other hand, very often the life and death of the Jews depended on immediate political decisions, like in the Axis states, whose leaders decided to participate in the Holocaust only temporarily and regionally, as shown by the cases of Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria. The Vichy government had the ability to negotiate with the Germans over who would be deported and who would remain, at the expense of the Jewish immigrants.

All in all, Germany set in motion the largest mass murder campaign in history, but over time and space it found helpers everywhere. As a result, the Jewish world of Europe was by and large destroyed, with 5.6-5.8 million human beings murdered.

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### ***Counting Victims of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe***

Why is it difficult to give precise data about Holocaust victims in Eastern Europe?

*Missing names.* Whereas in some countries, such as Luxembourg or Norway, the names of almost every victim are known – this is not true for most of Eastern Europe, including Kyiv.

*Migrations.* The flight, deportation, and evacuation of hundreds of thousands of Jews from West to East in 1939-42, makes detailed accounting especially difficult. Some Jews who migrated East were still captured and killed after their initial flight. Most of the Jews murdered in the North Caucasus were evacuees from Ukraine.

*Difficult records.* In addition, there can be a wide disparity between the numbers found in German reports and those given by Soviet investigations. The German records were often incomplete, and the Soviet ones prone not only to exaggeration, but also to obscuring the identity of the victims.

*Non-Jewish victims.* In some places, Jews and non-Jews were buried alongside each other in the same mass graves.

*Postwar migrations and border changes.* There was mass movement of people after the war, and movement of the borders themselves. Poland in 1945 became quite a different country from Poland before 1939.

In providing a geographical distribution of Holocaust victims, historians so far have generally used the European borders as they existed in 1937. Table 6.1 shows this. This is not only out of convenience, as prewar statistics are available, but also reflects how Jewish



survivors viewed their own identity. However, these outdated borders are not helpful to understanding the full impact of the Holocaust on the states that exist in Eastern Europe today.

**Table 6.1. Deaths in the Holocaust per Country (1937 borders)**

Austria	65,000
Belgium	28,000
Czechoslovakia	260,000
Denmark, Luxemburg, Norway, North Africa	3,000
Estonia	1,000
France	75,000
Germany	165,000
Greece	59,000
Hungary	200,000
Italy	8,000
Latvia	67,000
Lithuania	160,000
Netherlands	102,000
Poland	about 3,000,000
Romania	350,000
Soviet Union	about 1,000,000
Yugoslavia	65,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>at least 5,600,000</b>



For instance, using the 1937 borders, it is generally accepted that some 3 million Jewish victims were from Poland. Yet this figure includes some 770,000 people who were residents of places now in Ukraine. At least another 300,000 were from areas now in Belarus or Lithuania.

To do full justice to all the victims of Nazi Germany, it is important to get the numbers right. Fortunately, reliable estimates can be given for Ukraine, by cross-referencing data from the local, regional, and national levels. By incorporating census information, allowance can be made for population flows. By applying this approach to all of Eastern Europe, a new understanding of the Holocaust can be achieved, in alignment with today's borders.

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Close to one million Jews managed to survive, but remained severely traumatized. Only in a few countries, like France, could Jewish life be partially restored to something resembling its prewar status.

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## 7

### **NON-JEWISH VICTIMS**

#### **Soviet Prisoners of War**

Between 2.8 and 3 million Soviet POWs died in German hands—over half of their total number. They mostly died from German-imposed hunger, and mostly (2 million) within the first year.

The German political and military leadership decided at the end of 1940 to prepare a war of extermination against the Soviet Union, which they viewed as their ideological arch-enemy. In it, the upper strata of the Soviet system, but also a large part of the Jewish population, were to be murdered, Soviet agriculture would be completely exploited, leading to the starvation of millions of inhabitants, and Soviet POWs would be excluded from the protections provided by international law.

The German leadership had always been ambivalent regarding the international laws of warfare, which had been established by the Hague conventions of 1907 and the Geneva Convention of 1929. The restrictions imposed by the international convention on the treatment of POWs and foreign civilians were viewed as an obstacle to German conduct of all-out warfare. During the German-Polish War of 1939, German military units shot thousands of Polish POWs and civilians, often as reprisals for alleged resistance. Polish POWs were generally treated in accordance with international law, but Jewish POWs were separated and treated much worse. The majority of Polish POWs, however, were transferred to a forced civilian status, so as to exploit their forced labor for the German war economy.

Allied POWs captured during the German offensives in Northern and Western Europe were, with only a few exceptions, treated according to international rules. Nevertheless, German units killed more than one thousand North African soldiers from the French colonies (on racist grounds), after they were captured.



In April 1941 the Wehrmacht invaded Yugoslavia and Greece and captured hundreds of thousands of foreign soldiers. They were dealt with in contrasting ways. While Croatia was considered a new German ally and Croatian men were released, Serbians and men of other nationalities were kept as POWs, and there was a general order to treat Greek POWs harsher than the others. Later on most of the Jewish men among these POWs were sent back to their home countries and fell victim to anti-Jewish persecution.

German policies toward Red Army soldiers were different. For the first time it was stated explicitly that they would not be treated in accordance with international law, and that specific groups should be killed immediately after capture.

The German invasion in June 1941 initially focused on the northern direction leading to the Baltics and only after several weeks did German forces make the progress expected for conquering Ukraine. By October 1941, almost all of the territory of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic was under German rule.

Hitler and the Wehrmacht leadership had envisaged a real Blitzkrieg of just 8-12 weeks, in which tank forces would thrust into Soviet territory and, together with the slower Infantry units, would encircle the majority of Red Army forces in large pockets. Thus millions of Red Army soldiers would fall into German hands. When the Wehrmacht prepared its POW system in spring 1941, German industry was expecting to receive a large workforce of Soviet prisoners from the summer of 1941.

But things turned out differently. The German advances slowed already in July 1941 and Hitler forbade the transport of Soviet POWs into the Reich, fearing that German society might become “infected” with Bolshevism. Ultimately, most of the POWs remained in camps on occupied Soviet and Polish territory, even though tens of thousands of POWs were sent to camps in the Reich, some of them working already in July and August 1941 on German construction sites and elsewhere.

### **High Numbers of Prisoners**

German Army Group South (*Heeresgruppe Süd*), which was responsible for conquering Ukraine, up to April 1942 – according to its own statistics – captured 1.4 million Soviet POWs. Especially during the battles of Uman and Kyiv, the Wehrmacht claimed to have captured 100,000 and 660,000 POWs respectively;



then in 1942 the major battles of Kerch (100,000) and Kharkiv (240,000) netted another 340,000.

In 1941 one million less Soviet soldiers were reported missing than were officially captured according to the Wehrmacht figures. This enormous discrepancy, which is only visible for 1941, has not been fully explained. The Red Army, during its retreat in 1941, suffered from a breakdown of organization and presumably efforts were made to minimize the scale of reported losses. But there are also other explanations.

As some Wehrmacht reports admit, the POW figures also included other uniformed personnel apart from members of the Red Army, such as NKVD soldiers, railway officials or others, and they included units consisting of civilians, like the People's Regiments or construction units recruited to build anti-tank fortifications. Thus one can assume that a certain percentage of those called "POWs" by the Wehrmacht were not actually Red Army personnel. Among the POWs were also women, but their status, number, and history is unknown.

The figures may also be distorted by tens of thousands of Soviet POWs that escaped, or by the same person being captured twice.

### **Transit Camps and Stationary Camps**

The German divisions quickly transferred POWs to the so-called Army POW collection points (*Armee-Gefangenensammelstellen*), which sent them on to the transit camps (*Durchgangslager* or Dulags) under military occupation. The latter were already established larger camps, though often without the required facilities, not even sufficient shelter for the POWs. The term transit camp already indicates their purpose: a transitional imprisonment before final transfer to the west. Nevertheless, due to the German military failure and the debate on transport into the Reich, many POWs ended up staying a long time in these transit camps.

As the final destination for POWs, the Stationary camps (*Stammlager* or Stalags) were established, within the Reich, but also in occupied Poland and under civil occupation in Ukraine, in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, or in the district of Galicia, which had been annexed to the so-called German-run General Government in 1941. Only very few Stalags existed in the military zone of occupation. These



facilities were established within or on the outskirts of Ukrainian cities. Being German military units, they remained mobile. Thus the units moved from one camp site to another and assigned their respective numbers (for Dulags numbers 100 thru 299, for Stalags from 300 on up) to the camp sites they used.

There is to date no comprehensive overview of all the POW camps on Ukrainian soil. There were approximately 20-25 Dulags and 25 Stalags within Ukraine, not counting Crimea. However, this is the number of POW camps according to the military unit designations. As can be seen in Table 7.1, some Stalags operated several subcamps in other cities and towns around the Stalag's main base.

With the advance of the Wehrmacht some of the camp units moved further into Crimea or Southern Russia. On the other hand, there were lots of branch camps, which have still not all been identified. So far, there is a list of 223 POW camps or sub-camps, with the smaller branch camps situated in or close to villages. Not all camps were created from scratch; in many cases older installations, such agricultural or industrial facilities were taken over and transformed into camps.

**Table 7.1. Stalags in Reichskommissariat Ukraine in 1942**

Number of Stalag	Location	Prisoners on May 1, 1942	Branch Camps on November 25, 1942
301	Kovel (moved to Slavuta in August 1942)	8,473	Iziaslav, Shepetivka, Zvyahel
305	Kirovohrad (Kropyvnytsky)	15,040	Novoukrainka, Pervomaisk, Znamianka
329	Vinnytsia	12,497	
334	Bila Tserkva	18,709	
338	Kryvyi Rih	5,219	
339	Darnytsia (in Kyiv)	7,941	
345	Bobrynska	6,283	

348	Dnipropetrovsk (Dnipro)	10,994	Zaporizhzhia, Pavlohrad, Kamianske
349	Uman	8,122	Haisyn
355	Proskuriv (Khmelnysky)	10,620	Letychiv, Dunayivtsi, Kamianets-Podilskyi, Starokostiantyniv
357	Shepetivka (moved to Poltava in November 1942)	8,991	Romodan
358	Zhytomyr	11,544	Berdychiv
360	Rivne	5,629	Dubno, Zdolbuniv, Lutsk
364	Mykolayiv	17,212	
365	Volodymyr- Volynskyi	6,214	
370	Kherson (in Simferopol from September 1942)	9,034	
<b>16 camps in total</b>		<b>162,322</b>	

Responsibility for the camps was in the hands of the German occupation authorities. Under military administration – that is, in most areas east of the Dnieper River -- the Commander of the Rear Army Area South (rückwärtiges Heeresgebiet Süd) supervised nearly all camps through his Commander of POWs (Kommandeur der Kriegsgefangenen beim Berück Süd). In the Reichskommissariat the POWs were not directly subordinate to the civil administration, but remained under army supervision, carried out by the Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Ukraine (WBU).

### **Abuse and Murder before and during Transports**

The aggression toward the Soviet POWs started already on or close to the battlefields. An unknown number of POWs were shot immediately after capture. These were not only alleged political functionaries, who were killed according to the

so-called Commissar Order. Several thousand alleged or real Red Army Commissars were murdered in Ukraine. In most cases these on-the-spot killings were motivated either by feelings of revenge or by military considerations, in order to avoid tying up precious frontline troops with the transfer of prisoners to the rear areas.

The actual transfers also proved to be murderous. Since transport by train was often denied, the exhausted and sometimes wounded soldiers had to march west in columns, over hundreds of kilometres. Out of the 665,000 prisoners captured in the Battle of Kyiv, 320,000 were transferred to the RKU, half of them on foot. Thousands of POWs that collapsed along the route were shot. Especially after the large pocket battles of 1941, the Ukrainian roads were littered with the corpses of POWs shot by their guards. The most murders occurred after the Briansk-Viazma Battle of Army Group Center, but similar cases are known in Ukraine, for example, on the way from Donetsk to Zaporizhia or near Khorol.

Around 2.5 million Soviet POWs passed through the camps in Ukraine and around 1.5 million were registered in the Stalags; but we do not know how many there were on specific dates. Statistics are only available for the WBU, who claimed that his camps had capacity for 445,000 POWs, and was probably only responsible for about half of the POWs in Ukraine. The largest camps were situated rather in the West under the WBU, in places like Shepetivka/Slavuta, Kirovohrad (Kropyvnytsky), Bila Tserkva, Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk (Dnipro), Proskuriv (Khmelnysky), and Mykolaiv, each with an average of 20,000-30,000 inmates, and at times many more.

But most Red Army soldiers came through the camps under military administration, for which almost no documentation has yet been found. In the Dulags, the POWs were generally registered, in the Stalags individually. Many of these registration cards are in the archives of the Russian Defense Ministry.

### **Appalling Conditions in the Camps**

The camps themselves were rather improvised. Especially the transit camps were often unable to house all arriving POWs, because insufficient barracks had been built. In several camps, such as at Kherson, the POWs had to prepare dugouts in the ground, or were put in tents. It has been estimated that approximately half of the

POWs had to live under open skies in the autumn of 1941. This also led to further disorganization inside the camps. The delivery of meals often proceeded in a chaotic fashion, such that weaker POWs didn't receive anything to eat.

Lack of housing was one basic problem, nutrition was the other. It seems that up until September 1941, sufficient food was delivered, although the quality was poor. But already during this month, with the mass arrival of POWs from the Battle of Kyiv and total overcrowding inside the camps, the first signs of starvation began to appear. In the Shepetivka camp cases of cannibalism were reported. Not only were the camps inadequately prepared for the arrival of more than 600,000 people. In September and October 1941 the Nazi and military leadership discussed changing the ration system. In October 1941, when the monthly death rate was already at 6 percent, it was decided to cut the rations for POWs considered unfit for work (*"arbeitsunfähig"*). This further accelerated the already existing horrendous death rate, which reached a peak at the end of the year, especially around Christmas 1941. The WBU reported for November that in the camps in his area of operations 2,500 prisoners were dying from exhaustion every day. By December, this figure had risen to more than 4,000 POWs per day.

A description of the appalling conditions is given by Gustav Getroy, a Jewish doctor from Lviv, who was in Stalag 339 from October 1941. The so-called "balanda" was cooked from unpeeled potatoes together with their dirt. Some flour was added and this "balanda" was served as food once a day every second day, alternating with soup made from frozen beetroots. Such inadequate food for exhausted Soviet POWs resulted in a daily death rate of 100 to 120 persons. The wounded POWs in the infirmary were completely naked, without shirts and pants, wrapped only in blankets.

Death resulted not only from lack of food, but also from a variety of other causes. Many POWs were already weakened or even wounded on arrival in the camps and were not given proper care. The actual amount of food delivered to the camps varied greatly from place to place and over time. The situation was worse in camps in northern Ukraine compared to the southern areas.

An important factor was the lack of housing. Especially when it rained, a large proportion of the POWs had no roof over their heads. Thus diseases,



especially typhus, began to spread among the weakest prisoners and could not be isolated. In response, some camp commanders concentrated all the weak POWs together in specific barracks that simply became death zones. In the camp in Donetsk, all the POWs considered unfit for work, were crammed into large barracks so overcrowded that the inmates were unable to sit or lie down before they died.

The military hierarchy responded with an intense debate on how to save the able-bodied POWs, in order to keep them available as a workforce. Especially the Armaments Inspectorate (*Rüstungsinspektion*) in Ukraine intervened and sent plenipotentiaries to the regions in order to find workplaces and to improve the supply of food. In December 1941, only around 50,000 POWs under Army Group South and around 100,000 under the WBU actually had a workplace.

In early 1942 the death rate began to decline, although it remained high until June. Several factors contributed to the decline: in some camps almost all the prisoners had died by early 1942, transports to the Reich had started on a much larger scale, and the deployment of POWs as laborers within the occupied areas had increased. But this did not always enhance their chances of survival. In August 1942, 20,000 POWs were sent to work in the Donbas coalmines. They were in bad shape, still without proper housing, and had to perform exhausting physical work in the mines. As a result, they died in large numbers. Of the 40,000 POWs working in the Donbas in October 1942, 17,000 died within six weeks.

The massive losses during the winter of 1941/42 were not repeated the following winter; nevertheless, mortality was again high in some camps, such as those in Donetsk, Sumy, and Yasynuvata (Donetsk Oblast).

### **Releases of POW Camp Inmates**

But most important for their survival was the decision to release certain groups of POWs. This was another aspect of the racial policy applied by the Nazi and Wehrmacht leadership. Certain nationalities were considered not only as racially superior among the POWs, but also as politically more sympathetic to Germany. This applied in the first place to the ethnic Germans, then to the Balts, and in a quantitative sense, most importantly – to the Ukrainians. Already in July 1941, the



Quartermaster General issued an order that permitted the release of specific groups.

No breakdown by ethnicity has been found for the POWs, so the available information is based on estimates. The majority of all POWs were Russians, but probably one million of them, maybe even 1.3 million were of Ukrainian nationality. The number of captured Jewish Red Army soldiers is estimated at between 60,000 and 80,000. It is even more uncertain what the ethnic composition was like in the POW camps on Ukrainian soil. According to the statistics for releases, most Ukrainian POWs were held captive in Ukraine.

The release of Baltic and Ukrainian POWs was ordered at the end of July 1941, but it only started to be implemented in late August. Military commanders restricted releases to the rear area of Army Group South, sometimes only to those POWs whose hometown was not far away. We do not have precise information on the course of the releases, but already in November Hitler ordered them to stop. The administration feared that the released POWs might join the partisans, or from October on, that they would spread epidemics from the camps. In total, around 300,000 POWs were released in 1941, most of them Ukrainians, and mostly from the camps inside Ukraine.

Release from the camps did not actually mean complete freedom. Most of the released POWs were obligated to join German auxiliary forces, either as Hiwis (“*Hilfswillige*” – “voluntary auxiliaries”) for the Wehrmacht, as auxiliary policemen for the German Police, or even as an auxiliary for the SS in the Trawniki training camp in Poland (or other SS forces, including units supporting the *Einsatzgruppen*). The release of POWs continued after November 1941, especially for work on farms, and from the summer of 1942, once more for the German army and police. In total, up until 1944 about 600,000 POWs left the camps, the majority of them Ukrainians.

### **Shootings of POW Camp Inmates**

The Nazi and Wehrmacht leadership had planned right from the outset of their military campaign to kill specific groups of POWs, like the commissars, but probably also all Jewish POWs. During the first months of the campaign, even Asiatic POWs



or Kalmyks, and some Caucasian nationalities, were considered racially inferior and were shot. In some camps, Red Army officers were singled out to be killed.

Except for the murder of political functionaries (“Commissars”) of the Red Army, the crimes against specific ethnic groups were delegated to the *Einsatzgruppen* of the Security Police and the Security Service (SD) of the SS. Until October 1941, a debate continued on whether the *Einsatzgruppen* units should also have access not only to the Stalags, but also to the Dulags near the front. Although this was officially granted only in October, many camp commanders allowed them in already in July and August. The Rear Army Group Area Commander granted access to the killing units in August.

The first known mass shootings of POW camp inmates occurred in mid-July 1941 in Zhytomyr. *Einsatzgruppe C* started to search the camps for Jewish POWs. The Jews were identified and separated out by the camp officials and were then shot by the SS-Police units. For example, in the Melitopol camp, more than 100 Jewish prisoners were shot by *Sonderkommando 10a (Einsatzgruppe D)* over the course of several days in mid-October 1941.

The Wehrmacht POW organization was strongly implicated in these crimes and provided its almost unrestrained support. Especially the camp intelligence officers and physicians selected Jews and alleged Commissars, many of whom were denounced by their comrades. Only in exceptional cases, for example in Vinnytsia, did a commander deny access to the killing squads.

In several camps the Wehrmacht did not wait for the *Einsatzgruppe*, but did the shooting themselves. This is well-documented in the case of Adabash (near Novo-Ukrainka), a branch camp of Stalag 305. In November 1941, about 100 Jews selected in the camp were held in three railway cars for several days without food, in anticipation of their transfer to the rear. As a result, several dozen prisoners died. When the locomotive did not arrive, the commandant was ordered by the Commandant of Stalag 305, Oberstleutnant Hiltrup, to shoot those Jews that were still alive – “to end their torments.” The shooting was conducted by twenty camp guards, who were soldiers of the 783rd Land Rifle Battalion (*Landeschützenbataillon 783*).



At the end of 1942 these mass crimes started to decline in scale and frequency. Very few new POWs entered the camp system, the “Commissar” order was revoked in June 1942, and the captive Jewish Red Army soldiers had been almost completely exterminated.

In most of the mass killings in 1941-42, dozens or hundreds of POWs were shot; for example, in Bila Tserkva between May 1942 and August 1943 at least 800 POWs were shot by their guards. There are no overall statistics on the crimes in Ukraine, but it is reasonable to assume that they took place mostly in the Dulags and Stalags, taking the lives of at least 20,000 people, probably many more.

In Ukraine alone 700,000 to one million POWs died.

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***The Number of Soviet POWs who Died in Ukraine***

Like the total number of POWs who were imprisoned in Ukraine, the number of those that died is also unknown. The Soviet Extraordinary Commission (ChGK) on Nazi crimes claimed that around two million POWs died in occupied Ukraine. Their findings were based on fragmentary information and only some exhumations of mass graves, which resulted in very high estimates. For example, the ChGK estimate for the Slavuta camp may be as much as seven times the actual number of deaths.

The general findings of the ChGK on Soviet POW victim numbers are probably an overestimate by around 100 percent, thus one can assume that the real figure is rather around one million deceased POWs. Other estimates based on a limited set of registration data indicate that approximately 1.2 million died in Ukraine.

Therefore, it is safe to assume therefore that at least 700,000 to one million POWs died there in World War II. That means, as with the Holocaust, that Ukraine was also a central site for the mass murder of Soviet POWs and other people interned in the POW camps: Approximately one third of these victims died in Ukraine.

Using the new internet database of the Russian Defence Ministry, it might be possible to establish the names of most of the POWs who suffered or died within Ukraine, which in turn would be an important step in the commemoration of these long-neglected victims.

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## **The Local Civilian Population and the POWs**

The inhabitants of Ukraine were quite well informed about the POWs: many of them saw the POWs on their march into the camps, they witnessed their ill-treatment and sometimes the killings on the roads, and people were aware of the camps themselves and the horrific conditions there. Women travelled long distances to try to find their captured husbands, brothers, or sons in the camps.

Especially in those towns and cities where the camps were located, the population was quite aware of the mass mortality among the POWs. Many inhabitants provided individual help, and in several places, especially in Western Ukraine, local committees were set up to provide assistance to the POWs.

It depended very much on the camp leadership whether it permitted assistance from outside or even cooperated with these committees. Apparently the camp commanders became more reluctant in the late fall of 1941; and some of them even ordered that civilians be shot on sight when approaching the camps to throw food over the barbed wire. German Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, Alfred Rosenberg, wrote in February 1942: "In most cases, the camp commanders prohibited the civilian population from supplying food to the POWs and preferred to let them starve to death."

Any assistance given to escaping POWs was punishable by death. But there is only sparse information on the shooting of civilians in this context. Since little historical research has been done on local society under the German occupation, there is no overall picture on the relationship of the local population to the POWs. But when American social scientists interviewed Soviet citizens who had left their homes in 1944 and were living in exile, they found that the treatment of the POWs was considered to be the worst feature of the German occupation.

## **A Central Site of Nazi Mass Murder**

The POW camps were a central site of Nazi mass murder, more than almost any other places of detention during the occupation. The German leadership had planned to treat Soviet POWs much worse than any others, such as the French, Polish, or Serbian POWs.



It was also envisaged to supply the German army from Ukraine's grain and other food supplies, which would leave millions of civilians, especially in the cities of Russia and Eastern Ukraine, without sufficient food. Not the civilians, but the POWs were hit hardest by these plans, because (a) they were considered racially inferior and politically dangerous, (b) not enough of them were recruited for labor tasks and they were trapped in camps, and (c) the German campaign did not succeed as a Blitzkrieg, and proved to be far more difficult, even threatening to exhaust the German army's supplies.

The situation in Ukraine resulted in part from the course of the campaign, and major pocket battles in Belarus and Central Russia also produced millions of POWs. However, the specific unfolding of events was guided by German racial policy towards the POWs, which led to hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians being released from the camps in 1941-42, while the others were left to die. By mid-1942 this policy changed, but the treatment of POWs remained inhumane.

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## Roma

The Roma are a traditionally (but in modern times hardly always) nomadic ethnic group originating from the Indian subcontinent. Roma is how they are known in contemporary discourse in English, although not all Roma themselves use the word. The exonyms *Gypsy*, *Zigeuner* (the traditional German term, also used by the Nazis), and *tsyhany* (цигани) reflect the prejudice and ignorance within the surrounding society.

The Roma were deliberately and cruelly killed, to a very considerable extent, particularly in Ukraine and the neighboring countries. They were also subjected to sterilization. Alleged rationalizations and limited exceptions do not exclude this from genocide, which is why the event is now prominent in national and international Holocaust commemorations. The Germans and their allies killed up to 220,000, around 25 percent of the Roma believed to have been living in Europe before the war of slightly less than one million.

In the occupied Soviet Union including the annexations of 1939-40, German military and SS-police units shot over 30,000 Roma, whereby *Einsatzgruppen* and other mobile killing units murdered Roma at the same, or almost the same, time that they killed Jews and other victim groups. The vast majority were killed in Ukraine, which was the destination for many Roma deported from Romania.

**Table 7.2. Roma victims in selected countries**

Country	Deaths in genocide	Pre-1939 population
Ukraine	30,000 (including deportees from Romania)	10,443
Belarus		3,632
Russia		61,262
Lithuania	1,000	1,000
Latvia	2,500	5,000
Estonia	1,000	1,000



The bulk of the historical evidence, as well as a growing legal consensus, argue for defining the wartime persecution of the Roma as genocide. But there was no unified central plan for this persecution and no uniform policy vis-à-vis the Roma. Rather, policies depended on the geographical region and administrative jurisdiction—more precisely, on the input of the German administration at the lower level—both in the Reich and in the occupied territories, and therefore these policies were full of paradoxes and contradictions. Practices often depended on the predominance of any one occupational authority: the civil administration, the SS, or the Wehrmacht. A key regional variation was that, as argued by nearly all historians, in the occupied Soviet territories, the official differentiation between itinerant and sedentary Roma existed only on paper.

The reasons for the persecution and murder generally fall into two categories. (Scholars disagree about their relative weight.) One was “spies and criminals”: the Nazis exploited the prevalent cliché that “Gypsies” practiced espionage and crime, and had links with the partisans. The other was “race”: according to a malicious interpretation, the sum total of the Roma’s purportedly inherent social traits amounted to a negative racial type.

The persecution and murder consisted of (1) mass shootings and, mostly further west, (2) ghettoization and deportation.

### **Mass Shootings**

The mass killing of the Roma began already in the fall of 1941 under civilian Nazi rule. From the spring of 1942 onwards, the systematic extermination of local Roma began, primarily in the military zones of German occupation in the Soviet Union. Episodes from the sparse documentary record including the following.

In Ukraine, members of *Einsatzgruppe D*, moving eastward in the rear of the Eleventh Army, in Mykolaïv province in September 1941 murdered between 100 and 150 Roma, including women and children. According to unverified reports, in and after September 1941, several Roma caravans in Kyiv were exterminated, and additional testimonies mention the destruction of 30 Romani women and children at Babi Yar.

Often the German killers engaged in the total murder of the “Gypsies” as the second step in their genocidal program, which began with the Jews. For example, in Artemivsk (Bakhmut) in the Donetsk region in February 1942, all of the twenty or more Roma were shot by Sonderkommando 4b in a former alabaster mine.

Events in the Ukrainian city of Chernihiv are comparatively well documented. On July 10, 1942, the local security police chief ordered the Roma, in an announcement in Ukrainian and Russian, to assemble “for resettlement to new places of residence,” or else receive “severe punishment.” The Roma were also told that they would be resettled in Serbia and therefore should take their money and valuables with them. The Roma from the surrounding towns, villages, and hamlets flocked to Chernihiv. In August, they were taken to a local jail, where the half-naked and barefoot Roma were kept 25 people to a cell. On September 30, 1942, they were taken in groups to a nearby forest and shot. Estimates of the number of victims range from several hundred to two thousand.

On trial in Nuremberg after the war, Otto Ohlendorf, the former leader of *Einsatzgruppe D*, stated that the “Gypsies” had to be treated “like Jews” because, “as itinerant people,” they had a traditional “inner willingness” to engage in espionage. But he never distinguished sedentary from itinerant Roma and aimed to kill them all. In Simferopol, which had a special “Gypsy quarter,” the killings began at once and continued more or less in tandem with the murder of the Jews, as more than 800 Roma were killed.

Overall, however, in Crimea the German perpetrators mostly found it hard to identify their victims. Most local Roma had lived for centuries in towns and had assimilated as Muslims among their Tatar neighbors. Here too, as most historians agree, the persecution and extermination of “Gypsies” in the Crimea was systematic and total. That nevertheless approximately 30 percent of the Crimean Roma survived was largely due to the attitude of the local Tatar population toward their fellow-Muslims.

In Reichskommissariat Ostland, there were relatively few Roma. On December 4, 1941, Reichskommissar Hinrich Lohse issued a decree defining anti-Roma policy in the Baltic States. In Latvia the killings continued unimpeded from

April 1942 to March 1943, murdering half of the 3,800 Roma there. Between 1941 and 1943, the Nazis also killed virtually all Estonian Roma.

In northern Russia, the area of Army Group North and *Einsatzgruppe A*, an order of the army group command issued on November 21, 1941, differentiated between “itinerant Gypsies,” who were to be “handed over to the nearest *Einsatzkommando* of the SD” (to be shot), and “sedentary Gypsies, who had already lived in their place of residence for two years” and were “neither politically nor criminally suspicious,” who should be left where they were. But in reality, as in the other German-ruled Soviet regions, there was no difference in the respective treatment of these groups.

The Smolensk region in Russia was one of several Soviet regions with a relatively compact and sedentary Roma population. A number of “national Gypsy kolkhozes” had been founded in this region in the 1930s, which were ethnically mixed when the Germans arrived. The Nazi persecution of the Roma here sought their complete extermination. For example, the 176 Roma of the village of Aleksandrovka were shot in April 1942, after the Roma were selected from the non-Roma using local registration lists. In other places nearby, sometimes a gas van was employed.

In the Northern Caucasus, the Roma genocide started in 1942; available documentation for this region is very sparse.

### **Ghettoization and Deportation**

The German authorities deported the first groups of Roma from the Greater German Reich into occupied Poland in 1940 and 1941. Most of the people that survived the dreadful conditions were gassed subsequently in Belżec, Sobibór, Treblinka, or Chełmno. In December 1942, Himmler ordered the deportation of all Roma from Germany except for certain categories; these exemptions were often ignored. Some 23,000 Roma were deported to Auschwitz, where at least 19,000 died. In a special “Gypsy” compound in Birkenau (Auschwitz-II), families lived together. Approximately 3,500 adult and adolescent Roma were in other German concentration camps. There, as in Auschwitz, pseudoscientific tests were carried out on selected Roma.



In March 1943, approximately 1,700 Roma from the Bialystok region, who had recently arrived in Auschwitz, were gassed. In May of the same year, the SS sealed the Roma compound so as to take all those inside to the gas chambers. The Roma refused to leave, having been warned and armed themselves with iron pipes and shovels. The SS leaders chose not to confront the Roma directly and withdrew. Some 3,000 of these Roma were transferred as laborers to Auschwitz I and other concentration camps in Germany. On August 2, the SS gassed almost all of the remaining 2,898 inmates, mostly the sick, elderly men, women, and children.

In Germany and most other countries beyond Eastern Europe, Nazi policy towards the Roma was dominated by deportations. Even in German-ruled central Ukraine this could happen: 26 Roma were deported from the Zhytomyr region to the Kraków-Plaszów concentration camp. The children transferred from there to Litzmannstadt (Łódź) reportedly arrived back home in 1945. Their parents had been deported further into Germany and France.

In Eastern Galicia, in late April 1942, 536 foreign and 670 Polish Roma were targeted for “resettlement.” Roma were shot (at Horodok) or sent to forced labor camps (from Drohobych and Boryslav). During the “liquidation” of ghettos in 1943, the Roma were murdered along with the Jews.

In June-September 1942, nearly 25,000 Romanian and Bessarabian Roma were deported to Transnistria, close to 12 percent of all Romanian Roma. So-called “asocial” Roma, not considered nomadic were sent last. Due to the lack of food, clothing, medicine, and other essentials, 11,000 died.

According to the 1930 census, there were 1,442 Roma in Transcarpathia, but the actual number was probably higher. In April 1941, Hungarian officials in Uzhhorod proposed to lock up all Roma and put them to forced labor. Here and elsewhere, many caravan camping grounds became guarded ghettos, where the Roma starved to death. In 1944, the German military command effectively sanctioned this practice. The number of Roma who perished in Transcarpathia or were deported to their deaths in Hungary's interior and/or German camps remains unknown.

In the Baltic region, deportations took place alongside local mass killings and back-breaking forced labor. About 1,000 Lithuanian, 2,500 Latvian and 1,000



Estonian Roma were deported to Germany and even France. In November 1942, for instance, all remaining Lithuanian Roma were first incarcerated in the Ežerėlis concentration camp and then mostly transferred to the Pravieniškės labor camp; about 500 were shot, the others, about one thousand, were deported to Germany and France.

### **Roma Survival Strategies**

Surviving as a Roma was more likely than surviving as a Jew. The persecution and murder began later, and the Roma genocide had many significant local variations; and some Roma had close ties even to distant relatives. Unlike Jews, therefore, in many cases Roma were able to survive in forests on their own.

Help was provided in all occupation zones and took various forms, but it was more limited than aid to Jews, even though helpers did not always risk their own lives. Whether those who denounced Roma were rewarded is unclear. Those helping Roma were mostly villagers and collective farm members. Rescue mostly took place in exchange for a negotiated payment, often proposed by the Roma themselves.

In Reichskommissariat Ukraine and the military administrative zone, the most common form of aid (and thus, often, rescue) was warning about Nazi intentions. Those Roma that received warnings were mostly residents working on local farms—and hence, neighbors and relatives. In Galicia, the most common form of help was supplying Roma with food.

In Crimea and Transnistria, there were cases in which entire villages or family groups took part in hiding and passing on Roma children. Other Roma in southwestern Ukraine were transferred from the most dangerous German zone of occupation to the Romanian or Hungarian controlled zones.

In Transnistria, where Roma were kept in barns and pigsties in the same manner as Jews, other residents sometimes fed them, and, crucially, gave them proper shoes and clothes.

The most common way for Roma to survive in all the occupied territories of Ukraine was by forging identity documents, which could be done only with the help



of the local Ukrainian (and sometimes Russian, Tatar, or Moldovan) authorities.  
Forged documents in Crimea granted Roma Tatar or Turkish nationality.

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## **People with Disabilities and So-called “Asocials”**

Between 1939 and 1945, in a campaign sanctioned by the signature of Hitler himself, the Nazis murdered an estimated 300,000 people with disabilities, of whom 216,000 were in Germany and annexed Austria, and around 70,000 elsewhere in Europe. In the Reich, the pretext of “euthanasia” was used, while attempting to deceive the victim’s relatives (a project known as “Aktion T4”). By contrast, in Eastern Europe it was unvarnished and public mass murder that left virtually no survivors.

Nazi racial theory provided for a wide application of social engineering: “cleansing” society from “sick,” “inferior, and “work-shy” people, who allegedly were nothing but a financial, spatial, and social burden, and hence “life unworthy of life.”

The notion of people with disabilities as a burden weakening society came from the eugenics, “racial hygiene,” and social-Darwinist discourse of the late nineteenth century. The key target group became indeed those people with disabilities, in particular mental ones such as Down syndrome and manic depression (bipolar disorder), but also others such as people with epilepsy.

Shortly after the outbreak of war in 1939 in the German provinces of Pomerania, East Prussia, as well as in occupied Poland, representatives of the *Einsatzgruppen* murdered German and Polish hospital patients, thus vacating these premises for the needs of the SS and the Wehrmacht. From June 1941, the practice extended further east. Einsatzgruppen kommandos, in cooperation and in coordination with the Wehrmacht command, murdered people in psychiatric hospitals and psychiatric departments in city hospitals, and patients with physical disabilities via mass shootings, gas vans, on-site gas chambers, lethal injection, explosions, starvation, and freezing. Sometimes these methods were combined, although gassing received priority, after a successful experiment in a psychiatric hospital in Mahiliou/Mogilev in Belarus in September 1941.

The murders were carried out with the participation of the military command and partly on its initiative. The key role was played by *Einsatz-* and *Sonderkommandos* and later, the security police. Guarding the victims and driving the vehicles were carried out by members of the *Sonderkommandos*, Wehrmacht

soldiers, and local police, and POWs were employed as “voluntary assistants” (“Hiwis”). Sometimes German soldiers voluntarily took part in the shootings.

The removal of mental patients from the hospitals was usually carried out under the pretext of transferring them to a new and better facility or of an excursion. Most of these patients did not realize what would happen to them until the moment of shooting or loading into the gas vans. In Kherson, German doctors first used tranquilizer injections.

In some cases first Jews were selected from among the mental patients for immediate extermination: for example, about 300 Jewish patients were selected in October 1941 in Kyiv in the Pavlov Psychiatric Hospital. Ultimately, in four waves over the course of one year, almost eight hundred patients from Kyiv were shot or gassed, and buried near Babi Yar. Likewise, 20-30 Jews were selected in the Lviv Psychiatric Hospital.

The murders of people with mental disabilities were mainly carried out by (i) shooting near prepared graves and anti-tank ditches, (ii) gassing in gas vans, (iii) lethal injections, and (iv) starvation. Children were either murdered first, or along with adults.

In Ukraine (current borders), at least 8,450 were murdered (6,809 shot, gassed, or poisoned; the 1,641 others died from exhaustion); in southern Russia, at least 1,716 were killed. Specific cases included the following.

### **Gassings and Poisonings**

At the Crimean Psychiatric Hospital, head physician Naum Balaban, himself of Jewish descent and sensing the danger, made his staff send some patients home or to distant relatives. On March 7, 1942, Germans came and murdered the about 425 remaining patients in a gas van. Balaban and his wife Elizaveta are said to have died from cyanide taken while under arrest.

On October 9-10, 1942, 214 children from the Orphanage for Children with Down Syndrome and Bone Tuberculosis, which had evacuated from Simferopol in 1941, were murdered in the town of Yeisk, Krasnodar region. They were thrown into gas vans on the evening of October 9 and the morning of October 10, 1942, while onlookers managed to rescue some of the frightened children.



## **Starvation**

In the Svatove Oblast psychiatric hospital in eastern Ukraine, 212 patients starved to death, but a larger group was rescued by the staff.

During the winter of 1941/1942, about 600 patients of the Kolmov Psychiatric Hospital in Novgorod died of starvation. The other patients (the most severe cases) were either killed by a lethal dose of drugs or asphyxiated in gas vans.

In the Baltic states, the people with intellectual disabilities were killed by the security police or by locals on the initiative of the Reichskommissariat Ostland administration. Shooting them was the rule in Latvia, but exceptional in Estonia and Lithuania, where local sentiment mattered to the Nazis on the ground. There, starvation was used, a means that permitted local healthcare practitioners to believe that they were not involved in murder.

Scientific ruthlessness was common among physicians in the early twentieth century; the view that people with intellectual disabilities were inferior was widespread. This helps to explain why many Lithuanian professionals conducted medical experiments on the 1,200-1,500 starving patients.

## **Other Victims**

Suicides by locals suffering from mental stress and deprived of a support system ought to be part of the discussion as well.

Little is known about the lives of those physically disabled people in Ukraine and its neighbors during the Holocaust who were neither hospitalized nor able to work. Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that those without known relatives had good reason to fear being shot or given a lethal injection.

## **So-called “Asocials”**

“Asocials” was the general term used by the Nazis to denigrate a diffuse range of people who did not conform to national-socialist norms: beggars, vagrants, those allegedly unwilling to work, and pacifists. Roma were often included in this group as well. In concentration camps in the Reich before the war, “asocials” were the largest group. Such prisoners were forced to wear a black triangle.



From early 1942, prostitution was severely persecuted if it took place outside the official brothels. All prostitutes found to have venereal disease were very likely to be killed. For instance, in Mariupol in April 1943, the security police shot fifty women with such diseases, “so as to avoid any further distribution.” It is not clear if that was the alleged reason for the gassing in Kyiv in the fall of 1943 of about a hundred naked young women, which was witnessed by Jewish survivors at Babi Yar. These women are said to have been from a brothel.

Otherwise, knowledge about the treatment of the so-called “asocials” in Ukraine and its neighbors is very limited.

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## **Non-Jewish Political Opponents**

### **Communists as Victims of Nazi Germany**

Right after the takeover of power in January 1933 the German Nazis and their conservative partners started to persecute German Communists, tens of thousands of whom they put in prisons and concentration camps, where thousands of them died. The practice was extended to Austria in 1938, and then to all of the conquered countries. However, it was only during the German war against the Soviet Union from 1941 on, that Communist functionaries were systematically killed.

Due to the Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 1939, German propaganda temporarily interrupted its anti-Communist program, which spoke mostly of “Bolshevism” rather than “Communism.” When preparing the attack on the Soviet Union, the German leadership and the Wehrmacht discussed mass murder of Soviet Communist functionaries. In May 1941, the German military was entrusted to kill all of them among the Soviet POWs, calling them, rather imprecisely, “Commissars.” Special units of the SS and the police were ordered to kill both Soviet state functionaries and Bolshevik agitators.

Right on the first day of the German attack, June 22, 1941, German units started murdering Red Army political functionaries. This was done even though at first it was unclear how to identify them—the official position of commissars within the Red Army did not exist until mid-July 1941 and most of the captured political officers were “pompolits” and “politruks,” middle and lower ranking political leaders.

The victims tried to hide by tearing off their specific insignia. Nearly all Wehrmacht divisions registered their killings of what they called “commissars,” about 5,000 in total, including some actual commissars.

Soon discussion began among the German military leadership whether the “Commissar Order” of May 1941 was not counterproductive, since it became known within the Red Army and thus stiffened military resistance. In May 1942 the order was temporarily lifted. (The killing of captured Jewish POWs, however, continued.)

There had been internal discussions on the killing of Soviet civilian political functionaries, as well, but the German SS and Police did not have clear guidelines on how to deal with them. The one thing that was clear was that those whom the





Germans considered Communists were supposed to be killed sooner than other non-Jews that were also targeted. On a regional and local basis, German units, sometimes in cooperation with OUN activists, killed local Communists functionaries like local Party or Komsomol leaders, or NKVD personnel. In comparison to the Jews killed by those units, the number of non-Jews killed was much smaller.

After the installation of a stable military occupation, the local administrations had to register not only Jews, but also active Communists residing in their areas. Although most had left with the Red Army, still probably more than 100,000 party members remained. Their treatment varied: some were shot at once, mostly upon denunciation, others were put into camps for civilians, and some managed to conceal their prewar positions and joined the local administration or the auxiliary police.

Communists were often taken as hostages by the occupation powers, and shot after partisan attacks or acts of sabotage. From mid-September 1941, the Wehrmacht demanded the slaying of between fifty and a hundred “Communists” for any German person killed by “Communist insurgents.” At all times, the German police searched for Communists, especially if they received information or rumors about the existence of a Party underground organization. Suspects were imprisoned, very often tortured, and then killed.

Some of these suspects were taken to German concentration camps like Mauthausen in Austria, where approximately half of them died.

Estimates of the numbers of murdered (non-Jewish) Communists during the occupation in Ukraine run into tens of thousands. Unlike most of the Jewish victims, these Communist activists were publicly honored in the Soviet Union after 1944, if they had worked in the underground or joined the Soviet partisans.

### **Ukrainian Nationalists as Victims of Nazi Germany**

As in other regions of Ukraine, in the east and center members of the marching groups of the OUN (Banderites and Melnykites) tried to infiltrate the structures of the auxiliary police and self-administration as far as possible. It was an attempt by the OUN activists to spread to central and eastern Ukraine the “Ukrainian National



Revolution,” which had experienced some success in the summer of 1941 in eastern Galicia and Volhynia.

To do this, the Banderites sent their “marching groups” (*pokhidni hrupy*). The Melnykites were mostly translators in various military structures; the only structured Melnykite “marching group” was the Bukovinian Battalion headed by Petro Voinovsky.

In Reichskommissariat Ukraine and the zone of military administration, German security forces started shooting members of the OUN(B), or Banderites, at the beginning of September 1941. From November 25, 1941, the *Einsatzgruppen* had an official policy to shoot all of them. On July 25, 1942, SD members who went to arrest Dmytro Myron (Orlyk), the regional leader of the OUN(B) in central and eastern Ukraine, shot and killed him.

Hundreds of other Banderites were imprisoned in Auschwitz—mostly from Kraków (July-August 1942) and Lviv (November 1943). They included Stepan Bandera’s younger brothers Oleksandr and Vasyl, who died there.

Bandera and his deputy Yaroslav Stetsko were detained in early July 1941 and eventually taken to the separate “Zellenbau” section of Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin, from which Bandera was released in September 1944 with orders to remain in Berlin. It was also at this time that about 300 other OUN members were released from various other German camps.

Several dozen OUN members fell victim to the Germans in Kyiv. These were mostly Melnykites, who up until then had coexisted and cooperated with the occupiers.

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***Controversies around The Numbers of OUN(M) Victims in Kyiv***

Although successors to the OUN(M) in modern Ukraine and in the Ukrainian diaspora state that the Germans killed as many as 621 activists of the movement in Kyiv between 1941 and 1943, careful calculations show this number to be incorrect. A shorter list, of 62 names, mentioned on a memorial cross placed in 1992, also requires verification, as at least some of these OUN members were not victims of Nazism. For instance, Roman Fodchuk served as a translator for the Wehrmacht on the Eastern front. His official obituary noted that



“wearing the military uniform, he crossed all of Ukraine up to Rostov,” and placed his death on March 5, 1942, “in front positions on the borders of the Donets basin.”

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The shootings were carried out in an anti-tank ditch, as well as in pits that were dug in the open area in the Babi Yar district (but not in the ravine itself). If gas vans were used, the corpses were thrown into the anti-tank ditch. There may have been a third location.

The Melnykites did not view the Germans as enemies and did not conduct any anti-Nazi activity. Nevertheless, the occupying power rightly saw them as potential opponents and adversaries. Already in the late fall of 1941, persecution of OUN(M) activists began in Kyiv. The Ukrainian National Council, led by Professor Mykola Velychkivsky and founded in Kyiv on October 7, 1941, was disbanded in November of the same year.

On November 21, 1941, OUN(M) activists held a large demonstration in the town of Bazar to commemorate participants of the Second Winter campaign of the Ukrainian People’s Republic killed by the Bolsheviks. A few days later, about 200 Melnykites were arrested. In early December, some were shot in the Maliovanka suburb; dozens of other victims followed.

That month in Kyiv, Germans tried to persuade employees of the newspaper *Ukraïnske Slovo* (Ukrainian Word), which carried antisemitic articles, to cooperate with them unconditionally. Among these people were Ivan and Anna Rohach, Petro Oliinyk, and Yaroslav and Daria Chemerynsky, who had arrived in the Ukrainian capital as members of the Propaganda department “U.” The next month, they were briefly held under arrest. Rohach and his entourage were obliged to regularly report themselves to the police, and they were invited to visit the Reich for an “internship” in German publishing, where they could “learn about National-Socialism, and gain relevant knowledge and practical experience.” After an initial refusal, they began to prepare for the trip. Then, in January 1942, the above-mentioned five people were arrested by the Kyiv SD and shot dead.

On February 7, 1942, the SD arrested about 200 OUN(M) activists in Kyiv. Having been arrested at that time in the house of the Writers’ Union of Ukraine,

Olena and Mykhailo Teliha were shot in the second half of February or in March of that year. From October 2, 1942, about 30 other members of the OUN(M) were arrested, of which at least three were shot at once, including the leader of the OUN(M) in the Skvyra district of the Kyiv region, Sotnychenko.

Many detained nationalists were first detained in the SD prison at 33 Korolenko Street (today Volodymyr Street). For instance, in cell no. 30 was Zenon (Zynovii) Domazar, who for a long time had served in the police. Before his death, he left on the wall the dates of his imprisonment, his signature, and a Melnykite slogan: “Dom Zen 5.7.[19]43 - 5.9.[19]43. God and Ukraine.”

Oleh Kandyba, alias Olzhych, fled from the city but was killed in Sachsenhausen concentration camp in 1944. As for the leader Melnyk himself, he was taken to Sachsenhausen in late February 1944 and then released in September.

In spite of German persecution of Ukrainian nationalists, various Melnykites continued to serve in the ranks of the Kyiv police – at least until the spring of 1943. On October 3, 1942, Anatol’ Kabaida, an OUN(M) member and police chief in Kyiv, wrote in one of his reports that two types of Ukrainians were serving as members of the units subordinated to him: “locals” and “Bukovinians.” Kornii Tovstiuk, an official translator at Department I-B of the Police Headquarters in late 1942, had arrived in Kyiv as part of the Bukovinian Battalion.

The leadership of the OUN—like that of other political opponents of the Nazis—deemed such infiltration useful. This was analogous, for instance, to the long-maintained attempt by the OUN(B) to keep its people in the local police forces in Western Ukraine, in order to maintain influence, access to weapons, and a form of military training. There were also pro-Soviet and Communist agents in the police.

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## **Victims of Anti-Partisan Warfare**

Around 800,000 civilians were killed in German anti-partisan operations all over Europe. Nazi German anti-partisan policy was based on a radical strategy to terrorize and intimidate the population in those areas where armed resistance was encountered. Especially in occupied Eastern and Southeastern Europe, the Germans and their allies did not feel bound by international law, which restricted the dimensions and procedures for reprisals after civilian attacks on the troops. Although there were already some massacres of Polish civilians in 1939 and 1940, actual anti-partisan warfare started in the spring and summer of 1941 in Yugoslavia and the occupied Soviet Union. It was extended in 1942 to Poland, in 1943 to Greece and Italy, and finally in 1944 to France and Czechoslovakia.

The most extreme single case of killing civilians as a revenge for armed resistance occurred in August-September 1944 in the Polish capital of Warsaw. After the Polish Underground started a major uprising in the city, German SS and Police troops were ordered to exterminate the population. In two quarters, Wola and Ochota, all inhabitants were dragged out of their homes and shot in the streets and courtyards. During four days, around 25,000 civilians were murdered. The German leadership, however, reversed this policy once it realized that it only intensified resistance. In total 150,000 to 200,000 Poles were killed during the uprising, of which 16,000 were actual resistance fighters. Some 150,000 survivors were deported for forced labor or sent to concentration camps, and around 15,000 fighters who surrendered ended up in POW camps in Germany.

The most radical anti-partisan warfare focused on Yugoslavia and the occupied Soviet Union. Already in May 1941, the German military occupation in Serbia announced that for every German soldier shot by a civilian, 100 local inhabitants would be shot. For the planned invasion of the Soviet Union, a ratio of 1:30 was under discussion. Sporadic partisan attacks already started in the occupied Soviet Union in July 1941 and intensified during fall of that year.

Having almost ceased during the winter of 1941/1942, in spring 1942, a coordinated Soviet partisan movement started to emerge, concentrated in several regions of Belarus, and in the regions around Leningrad and Briansk. Within



Ukraine, partisan groups operated predominantly in the northern and northeastern regions, and on Crimea, all of which had forested areas. Communist Underground activity in other regions of Ukraine was limited to certain cities.

Both the German military and the SS/Police killed civilians en masse following armed attacks, but also after acts of sabotage, such as the severing of communication lines. In the beginning, German reprisal violence focused on specific groups of civilians, like Russians in Belarus and Ukraine, and especially Jews, thus “sparing” the local ethnic majority. This changed in November 1941, when a leading officer of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army command was killed. From then on, Ukrainians were also chosen as victims for massive reprisal killings.

In occupied Belarus and Russia, in spring 1942 the German military and SS started to organize large anti-partisan operations (“Bandenunternehmen”), which encircled partisan areas and then tried to strangle the local basis of the resistance. In the process, inhabitants of villages that were considered to be “pro-partisan” were summarily killed, including women and children. In many cases, these people were locked inside their houses and burned to death there.

In Ukraine, the focus of German anti-partisan warfare was regionally limited to northern Volhynia, to northeastern Ukraine, especially Chernihiv and Sumy Oblasts, and Crimea. Late in January 1943, Ukrainian national partisans, eventually called the UPA, attacked German policemen, their auxiliaries, and prisons. In the month of April alone, these attacks cost the lives of hundreds of auxiliaries and 252 Germans.

The German response was not large operations, but mostly local killings. All in all, in Ukraine alone, almost 50,000 civilians were killed and around 300 villages destroyed. Two extreme cases occurred in autumn 1942 in northern Volhynia, in the towns of Kozary and Kortelisy, in each of which around 2,000 locals were murdered.

In February 1943, Soviet partisans led by Oleksii Fedorov attacked the garrison in the small town of Koriukivka in the Chernihiv region, in an attempt to liberate hostages. The garrison consisted of German soldiers, Hungarians, and auxiliary policemen. In the revenge that followed, on March 1 and 2, the entire town was annihilated. Survivors were finished off on March 9. Koriukivka had become an ash heap filled with the remains of thousands of people. =====



## **Poles and “Easterners”**

During the occupation of Poland, Nazi Germany subjected the Polish population to widespread terror. Believing in their racial superiority, the Nazis murdered part of the intellectual class and anyone suspected of resistance. Hundreds of thousands of Poles were imprisoned and sent to concentration camps. Nazi racial policies included the displacement of Poles from territories annexed to the Third Reich and the “germanization” of Polish children. Polish civilians were slaughtered in “reprisals” following attacks on individual Germans. During the Nazi occupation around 2 million Polish non-Jewish civilians lost their lives. Around one million were killed in concentration camps, during the extermination of the “intelligentsia” and the mentally disabled, or during the Germans’ violent suppression of resistance, especially the Warsaw Uprising in 1944.

### **Before June 1941**

In September and October 1939, the German Army and Police shot tens of thousands of civilians throughout Poland. Many were shot or hanged for alleged acts of resistance, but civic leaders were arrested as hostages, and in some places shot. In West Prussia, as it was called, the Gestapo and an ethnic German militia (Selbstschutz) systematically arrested Polish teachers and the Polish “intellectual class.” They were kept in brutal prison camps in northwestern Poland, where regular mass shootings took place.

Between May and July 1940, under the leadership of the Security Police Commander (BdS) Bruno von Streckenbach, around 3,500 members of the Polish intelligentsia were murdered, mostly by shooting. This was called an “extraordinary pacification action.”

### **Deportations and Resettlements of Poles**

Hundreds of thousands of Poles were deported to concentration camps during World War II. Of 1,780 Polish priests sent to the Dachau concentration camp, almost half died. Between 1939 and 1944, 920,000 Poles were deported from territory annexed by Germany. Of these, some 630,000 were expelled from the



Wartheland into the General Government. Between November 1942 and March 1943, more than 100,000 inhabitants of the Zamość region were sent to Germany for forced labor or to concentration camps.

**Murder of Poles in the Nazi-Occupied East, 1941-43**

On July 1, 1941, Heydrich instructed the *Einsatzgruppen* in the occupied Soviet territories that measures against the Polish intelligentsia would be deferred, as they could be used in some places “for pogroms, or as informants.” Poles are mentioned only rarely as victims in the *Einsatzgruppen* reports for 1941. One key incident was the murder on Himmler’s orders of more than 40 professors at the University in Lviv in July 1941. In Ternopil, some Poles were killed by the Ukrainian militia (*Miliz*).

In western Belarus, around Baranavichy, the German police arrested hundreds of Poles in late June 1942. Most were shot within a few months or sent to the concentration camp in Kaldycheva (Kołdyczewo). Victims included priests, schoolteachers, lawyers, and doctors, but also their family members. The arrests and killings of Poles in this region continued in 1943.

During the Warsaw uprising described above (under “Victims of Anti-Partisan Warfare), 150,000-200,000 Poles were killed, the vast majority not actual fighters.

**Crimes against Polish Children**

The Germans took tens of thousands of Polish children from their families and subjected them to “germanization” policies. Children were sent to “Lebensborn” facilities to become integrated within German society. The children of forced laborers, including Poles, were put in separate child-care facilities, where many died of abuse and neglect.



***Nazi German Authorities and the Massacres of Poles in Volhynia in 1943***

The German authorities were well aware of what they called the “extermination (*Ausrottung*) of Polish settlers in Volhynia” by the OUN(B)-led UPA. For instance, in May 1943, the German *Einsatzgruppe Schultz*, deployed around Sarny, reported that “Ukrainian bandits” had murdered the Polish population in Horodets, “to the last man.” The Generalkommissar in





Volhynia-Podolia noted in June 1943 that: “many Polish families were wiped out and whole Polish villages burned down.” The Germans did not initiate, condone, or support these killings of Poles—but many historians see a continuity in personnel, as the UPA contained many men who had deserted from the German-run local police. The Germans fighting the UPA also used Polish personnel.

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### **“Easterners”**

This was a term sometimes used by Germans and others for Soviet civil employees and military servicemen (with their families) who in 1939-40 had been sent to the western regions of Ukraine and Belarus, and also the Baltics, and had been unable to escape in 1941.

The Germans treated these “Easterners,” whom they also called “Soviet members,” “Soviet immigrants,” or “Russians,” as Bolsheviks and potential enemies, regardless of the latter’s actual conduct. Hence they exposed them to various restrictions and persecutions.

The “Easterners” lost property, were crammed into smaller living spaces, were put to forced labor, and were the first to be sent to Germany for forced labor there. With the growth of partisan activity from 1942, they actually began to be equated with Jews and were shot along with them. Between September 20 and November 2, 1942, just one battalion of the 15th Police Regiment shot 894 “Easterners”—men, women, and children—in the Brest Gebiet, and transferred 79 others to the SD (Security Service).

In the Baltics, “Easterners” apparently were not shot, but measures were taken to isolate them. Thus, in Vilnius in the fall of 1941, they were placed in a “ghetto” created in two houses along Subačiaus Street, 37 and 39, where there used to be a Jewish almshouse for disabled, lonely, and impoverished elderly people. By November 1941, this “Russian ghetto,” guarded by the Lithuanian police, held 776 family members of Soviet officers and employees of Soviet institutions, nearly half of whom were under the age of 16. In the fall of 1943, its inmates were transferred to camps.



It is possible to expand the list of non-Jewish victims, but details are sparse. So far, for instance, nothing is known about persecution of homosexuality in wartime Ukraine. It seems that Evangelical Christian groups that were persecuted elsewhere in Europe were left alone in large parts of occupied Ukraine.

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## **Victims of German-Imposed Famine and Deportation**

### **German-Imposed Famine**

Hundreds of thousands of non-Jewish Soviet civilians starved to death in the area around and in besieged Leningrad, in various occupied Russian cities, and in Ukraine including Crimea. On the latter peninsula, in the winter of 1941/1942, hundreds, if not thousands, of civilians and prisoners of war starved to death.

Nazi and army leaders considered these famines not simply inevitable. They found them useful—they got rid of allegedly inferior human beings they considered useless or dangerous. Callousness and a desire to look away did the rest. These famines were at least as devastating as those in the large east-central European Jewish ghettos, in Athens in 1941-42, and in the western Netherlands in the winter of 1944–1945.

The famine deaths in Kharkiv and Kyiv were *artificial*—they were foreseeable and due to deliberate German action. This was starvation of civilians as a method of warfare. There was plenty of food around these cities, even in late 1941, and peasants were eager to visit to barter with the proceeds of their harvests. But police cordons with the express purpose of confiscating “surplus” food, and which confiscated everything unless a large bribe was paid, blocked many peasants and city dwellers from venturing into or outside. These blockades were not total, but they took many lives.

Wehrmacht leaders mentally prepared the rank-and-file by underlining an alleged need to live off the land and to supply food to the Reich, while blaming current and future food problems on the Soviet regime.

In early September 1941, the Economic Staff East issued strict orders regarding food and city-dwellers in the “East,” and replaced them with even stricter



ones in early November 1941. The city commander of Kharkiv, which for long periods was only fifty kilometers away from the frontline to its east, demanded “extreme harshness” toward the locals. He had, as he wrote to other Germans, “no interest whatsoever” in feeding them. On July 15, 1942, the Germans banned free and illicit trade in Kyiv and attempted to seal off the city. This reinforced the tendency of German and auxiliary policemen to confiscate food transports. Kyiv’s Ukrainian officials were unable to organize a steady food supply.

Among all cities in Europe occupied by the German armed forces, Kharkiv was one of the largest in population size, and it also stands out as the one where the most non-Jews suffered and died from famine. Here, individual Germans also plundered food from canteens and markets, and also from households that were forced to offer them shelter. The results of actions by the auxiliary administration were ambiguous.

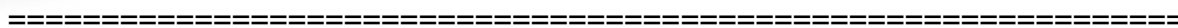
Most vulnerable were members of the intelligentsia, the sick and elderly, and people with disabilities, if only because few of these people had looted Soviet stocks during or after the change of regimes. Death rates in institutions such as children’s homes, homes for people with disabilities, and hospitals, where the people had the least access to the black market or other additional food sources, rose steeply.

Burial was problematic during snowstorms and heavy frost, and it was costly. City streets and roads into the city sometimes were littered with the corpses of starved people. Informed estimates are that at least 30,000 residents of Kharkiv and 10,000 residents of Kyiv starved to death.

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### ***Famine and Population Decline***

German-sponsored censuses refer to 456,000 inhabitants of Kharkiv in December 1941, declining to 230,000 by July 1943. Officially, the population of Kyiv declined as follows (in rounded figures): October 1941—400,000 (after the main Babi Yar massacre); January 1942—330,500; April 1942—352,000; the middle of 1943—295,600. Besides famine deaths, other factors behind these huge declines were flight, deportation to Germany, and Nazi shootings. On the other hand, many individual deaths went unrecorded, and during certain weeks, famine deaths in Kharkiv were not counted at all.



## **Deportations to Germany**

Between 55 and 65 million Soviet citizens experienced the German occupation. From the Soviet regions under military administration alone, almost 1.4 million people were sent to the Reich as forced laborers. Not only are these high numbers striking, but also the utter violence and lethal danger to which these “eastern laborers” (Ostarbeiter), the great majority ethnic Ukrainians, were exposed. They were treated worse than any other foreign laborers.

The German campaign to obtain laborers for factories and farms in the Reich began early in 1942, to alleviate the unexpected labor shortages there. Those sent to factories and living in camps often suffered abuse, bad housing, and bad food, and had to wear a badge with the word *OST*. Those sent back, in cargo trains without any assistance, often died on the way.

After news spread about the bad working conditions, people became terrified of being sent there and, in order to be disqualified, often mutilated themselves. Many afflictions became permanent and some even became lethal. There were also cases of suicide.

Soon there were no more volunteers, and Fritz Sauckel, the German Plenipotentiary General for Labor Allocation, sent out commissions to carry out the deportations, who threatened the local administrators with death if they could not supply the assigned total of “recruits,” which, eventually, simply meant all people of a certain age. (In late 1943, for example, everyone born in 1926 and 1927 was supposed go.)

The Germans burned the homes of those who refused to go, and confined relatives to labor camps as hostages. Entire villages went up in flames. German policemen, raion leaders, city mayors, and local policemen hunted and arrested people for deportation, and shot at those who tried to escape, killing many. The boarding of the deportation trains produced highly violent and emotional scenes, as relatives usually were prevented from handing over food or clothes.

Tens of thousands (one estimate is 50,000 to 150,000) did not survive these deportations and the forced labor. They were shot attempting to flee, could not bear



the bad conditions on the way or in the Reich, and died there from Allied bombardments, in concentration camps, or were simply killed as insubordinate or useless inferior beings.

Forced labor was always a pervasive feature of the German occupation and could also involve constructing fortifications for the Wehrmacht. Near Kharkiv in June 1943, for instance, this involved as many as 60,000 Ukrainians, mostly women and children.

### **German Evacuation Crimes**

The retreat of the Wehrmacht was accompanied by extreme, often lethal violence. In late February 1943, Hitler ordered that any retreat of the German armed forces was to be marked by a scorched earth policy. The economy and infrastructure of abandoned areas were to be destroyed. Heinrich Himmler confirmed this: abandoned land had to be “completely burned and destroyed.” Indeed, the occupation power not only systematically destroyed infrastructure, but in many instances also housing facilities.

Hitler also ordered that those able to work were to join the treks westward. He and the Wehrmacht wanted to preclude local acts of resistance; and, above all, to deprive the Red Army of laborers and new army recruits. The effort to evacuate the able-bodied population to Germany for forced labor (or to concentration camps) largely failed. Still, according to German statistics, from all Soviet territories, about 2.3 million citizens were made to move west, mostly by force. (There were many eager to leave among the 700,000 locals working for the Wehrmacht and the 400,000 working for the German police.)

Children were separated from parents, as able-bodied adults were preferred, and if the latter refused, they were either taken forcibly, or—possibly upon a general order—shot. The children and elderly were killed on the spot. It was not uncommon for those unable to keep up with the pace of the columns to be shot as well.

As for other adults—those unable to work—their lives were in greater danger than ever: German withdrawal, Himmler told Waffen-SS division commanders in Kharkiv in April 1943, had to include *Menschenvernichtung*—“the destruction of human beings.” The goal was to have “dead zones,” regions where the Red Army



would encounter destroyed infrastructure and no living persons. Thus there were also cases when retreating soldiers would shoot at anyone on sight. As for prisoners of the Germans, in Kharkiv and Uman they are known to have been systematically shot on the eve of the German retreat. The German police also systematically destroyed its documentation, in a further effort to cover up its crimes.

A major evacuation crime took place in Ozarichi, Belarus, in 1944.

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***Ozarichi***

The rear areas of the army were overburdened by hundreds of thousands of displaced civilians. In the face of the increasing problems of overcrowding, food shortages, and epidemics, the Ninth Army decided in March 1944 to move “all locals unfit for work” into terrain it was about to abandon. From March 12 onwards, up to 50,000 civilians from the Babruisk region, mostly women, small children, elderly, and sick people, were “evacuated” with the support of *Sonderkommando 7a* of *Einsatzgruppe B*. From the reception camps at the corps railheads, the deportees had to walk over 35 kilometers in the snow.

In the three “final camps” near the village of Ozarichi, there was no form of shelter, heating, food, or water. With the withdrawal of the German army, the camp inmates were left behind. When, on the night of March 18-19, the Red Army started liberating the Ozarichi camps, they found that as many as 8,000-9,000 people had died in them. Another 800 people had died on their journey there.

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In all, tens of thousands of locals must have died in the end phases of German occupation. Violence of this intensity and scope was not practiced during retreats in the face of advances by the Western Allies.

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## **BABI YAR, PROSECUTION, OBLIVION, MEMORY**

### **Perspectives on Kyiv and Babi Yar, 1943–present**

#### **Soviet Suppression of the Antisemitic Nature of the Massacre**

In early November 1943, the Extraordinary State Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes (ChGK) began its investigative work in Kyiv. However, the committee was insufficiently thorough and acted mainly as a political tool of the Soviet government. For example, the concealment of Stalinist crimes played a key role in its activities. The ChGK undertook practically no exhumations of human remains in Babi Yar. Instead, the public learned that in 1943, the Nazis had formed a special Sonderkommando, which was tasked with destroying all traces of Nazi crimes.

In early 1944, the ChGK prepared its draft report, which did not conceal the massacre of Kyiv's Jews: "The Hitlerite bandits... hung an announcement ordering all Jews to go to the corner of Melnikov and Dokterevska [*sic.*] streets on September 29, 1941... The executioners herded the Jews who had assembled to Babi Yar, confiscated all their valuables, and then shot them."

However, in Moscow, after coordination with the senior Soviet Leadership, Georgii Aleksandrov, head of the Propaganda and Agitation Department, edited the document, such that even passing references to Jews were deleted. Instead, the final report, which was published in February 1944 and endorsed by the commission in Kyiv, referred to the victims at Babi Yar in September 1941 only as "peaceful Soviet citizens."

In taking this step toward erasing memory and destroying Jewish identity, the Stalinist government depersonalized the Jewish victims of Babi Yar. Subsequently, Stalinist propaganda and nationality policy were increasingly characterized by the distortion of information to conceal the specifically anti-Jewish nature of Nazi crimes.



After recapturing the territories occupied by the Germans, the Soviet government sought to re-legitimize itself, as it was keenly aware of the Ukrainians' suspect loyalty to the Soviet Union. Soviet security organs reported a dichotomy of feelings among Ukrainians, especially in rural areas. On the one hand, they felt relief at being liberated from the Germans. On the other, they felt alarm due to the return of the "Soviets."

Given this mood, the Stalinist government sought to appeal powerfully to the Ukrainians' national sentiments, presenting itself as their liberator and defender. For example, the report prepared by the ChGK on Nazi crimes heavily stressed the "crimes of the fascist bandits" against Ukrainians and the suppression of Ukrainian culture. However, the corresponding press announcement left a different impression, as the first part was devoted not to war deaths but to the Nazis' economic and cultural looting.

These tendencies became more marked after the war. By concealing the anti-Jewish component of the Nazis' crimes, the Stalinist government tried to avoid providing any pretexts that could confirm the myth that the Soviet government represented the rule of "Judeo-Bolshevism." In this case, the Soviet authorities clearly reckoned with the antisemitic tendencies that were widespread among parts of the Ukrainian population. However, it turned out that owing to its fear of nourishing such sentiments, the Soviet government resorted to actions that were essentially antisemitic. In fact, a substantial number of Soviet political figures, including Stalin, were not lacking in antisemitic prejudices. The next few years, which were marked by the policy of state antisemitism, confirmed this unmistakably.

### **Antisemitism and the Mood in Kyiv after the War**

For the most part, the Jews' return to Kyiv was not welcomed by the city's residents. Many homes that were owned by Jews before the war now had new owners, and attempts by Jews to regain them often led to conflicts. Appeals to fairness had no effect. Instead, new accusations against the Jews emerged along the lines that they had fought "on the Tashkent front," and were demanding "some kind of rights" now. Also shocking were blatant manifestations of antisemitism that went unpunished; for





example, the public use of the word *zhid*, offensive to the Jews, which was unimaginable before the war.

This popular mood also created problems for the Soviet authorities. When the Yiddish poet David Hofshstein attempted to organize a mass demonstration of the Jewish population on the anniversary of Babi Yar in 1944, the authorities forbade this, claiming it might “provoke antisemitism.” And perhaps they were right. In September 1945, just such an anti-Jewish pogrom broke out in Kyiv, after NKGB Lieutenant Iosif Rosenstein killed two local antisemites, who had insulted and beaten him. The funeral procession for the men shot by Rosenstein turned into open violence in which some three hundred rioters participated. As a result hundreds of Jews were beaten and sixteen of them died. The Soviet authorities then reinforced patrols in the city, to prevent the anti-Jewish violence from escalating.

### **Unrealized Projects for Monuments at Babi Yar**

After the war, the massacre site at Babi Yar remained in a sorry and neglected condition for many years. On March 13, 1945, the Soviet Ukrainian government together with the Communist Party decided to build a monument in Babi Yar, but one that would not mention the Jewish identity of the victims. The design envisaged a black granite pyramid with two sculptures at the entrance. However, the Soviet Ukrainian Ministry of Culture denounced the planned project for its “pitiful appearance.” In reality, the problem was not the monument’s design, but rather the Ministry of Culture’s reluctance to construct any monument at all. Rather than openly resist the Soviet Ukrainian government, the antisemitic bureaucrats at the Ministry of Culture claimed that they didn’t like the design. Repetition of this hypocritical claim allowed local authorities to postpone the construction of a monument for more than thirty years.

The real reason was the rise of popular and state antisemitism in Kyiv and the Soviet Union in the postwar years. Some historians believe that the authorities in Kyiv attempted to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the population by siding only with the majority Ukrainian population. In the years of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign in the Soviet Union (the late 1940s-1953), all discussion about building a



monument in Babi Yar ceased. These were the years of the most acute state antisemitism, leading up to the trial of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC) in 1952, in which thirteen prominent Soviet Jews were sentenced to death. Even after Stalin's death, Ilia Ehrenburg's appeal to Khrushchev for a monument to be built in Babi Yar was firmly refused. Khrushchev replied brusquely: "I advise you not to interfere in matters that do not concern you."

### **The Kurenivka Disaster**

Throughout the 1950s, under the guise of planning new roads and constructing residential areas in Kyiv, the authorities took measures aimed at physically erasing Babi Yar. In particular, liquid mud waste was pumped in to fill the ravine, without adherence to proper safety measures. Viktor Nekrasov, a well-known Russian writer living in Kyiv, protested and demanded a memorial. Then on March 13, 1961, disaster struck. The weight of the sludge caused the dam to break, and a wall of mud four meters high came hurtling down, destroying everything in its path. It flooded part of the Kurenivka district, killing 145 people and destroying more than 70 buildings. Many people viewed the mudslide as divine retribution for the attempt to erase the traces of the Babi Yar massacre. Nonetheless, only one year after the Kurenivka disaster, the nearby Jewish Cemetery was also destroyed to make way for a sports complex.

### **Artistic Responses to "Babi Yar"**

On September 19, 1961, Yevgeny Yevtushenko published his poem *Babi Yar* in the magazine, *Literaturnaia Gazeta*. The poem's first line resonated across the country: "No monument stands over Babi Yar." The hundreds of responses by readers showed that Soviet society was deeply divided in their attitude to Yevtushenko's poem and the Jewish question. The poem was denounced by Khrushchev as a "political mistake" and an attempt to divide the suffering of the Soviet people during World War II according to nationality.

In 1962, Dmitri Shostakovich wrote his *Thirteenth Symphony*, subtitled *Babi Yar*, with a chorus adapted from Yevtushenko's poem. The poem and



Shostakovich's symphony directed public attention to Babi Yar and the absence of a monument, such that the authorities could no longer ignore this issue.

### **Abortive Competitions for a Soviet Memorial**

Under pressure from public opinion in the Soviet Union and abroad, in 1965 the Ministry of Culture of Soviet Ukraine initiated a "closed competition" for monuments in memory of Soviet citizens and soldiers, who perished during the Nazi occupation of Kyiv. As a result, about sixty models of monuments were shown at an exhibit in the House of Architecture in December 1965. In one project, Iosif Karakis proposed a memorial park be built on bridges over the Babi Yar ravine, as the ground there was sacred and should not be stepped on. However, the jury somehow construed the project as "Zionist" and rejected it, as it did all the others. It seems the jury simply didn't want a monument at Babi Yar to commemorate Kyiv's murdered Jews.

A second competition was announced under the title: "Road, Death, and Rebirth to Life." The Union of Architects chose a socialist-style project as the winner, presuming that the authorities would approve. However, this conformist proposal was also rejected.

### **Babi Yar as a Site of Political Demonstrations**

On September 29, 1966, around one thousand people attended a huge spontaneous meeting at Babi Yar. Russian and Ukrainian writers came to give speeches about the suffering of the Jewish people and the necessity of the struggle against antisemitism. In one particular speech, Ivan Dziuba appealed for people to struggle against hatred and to respect human life. Meanwhile, Rafail Nakhmanovich and Geli Snegirev were shooting a film documentary of the event.

Soon the police arrived to stop the filming and disperse the crowd. Many of the intellectuals present were subsequently punished by the authorities. Dziuba was kept in prison for 1.5 years for his dissident activities. Yet for decades afterward, Babi Yar began to be perceived not only as a "vale of tears," but also as a place for holding public rallies organized by Soviet Jews protesting against government persecution and in defense of the ideals of freedom and dignity.



The authorities understood the special significance of Babi Yar as well. These events prodded the authorities to adopt active measures aimed at regaining control over the process of memorializing Babi Yar. Soon afterward a commemorative marker was installed between Dorohozhytska and Melnikov streets and the authorities began to organize their own official commemoration events at Babi Yar, within the mainstream of Soviet ideology and propaganda. However, the hypocrisy of these Soviet official meetings at Babi Yar was that they never mentioned the Holocaust, or that the vast majority of victims in Babi Yar were Jews.

Despite the repression, on every anniversary of the Babi Yar massacre, growing numbers of people came for unsanctioned memorial meetings, which took place either before or after the official commemoration ceremony for the “victims of fascism.” The most active unofficial participants were arrested; others were chased away by the police. In 1971, when several hundred Jews gathered from all across the Soviet Union for the protest rally, the militia and “plainclothes officials” soon intervened to rip off any insignia that could be viewed as “Zionist symbols.”

So, by the 1970s, Babi Yar had become a place both for Holocaust commemoration and also public protest against state antisemitism in the Soviet Union. At this time, the Soviet authorities responded to increasing demands for Jewish emigration with a widespread, mass propaganda war against “international Zionism.”

### **The Soviet Monument**

In the late 1960s, due to public pressure, the Soviet Ukrainian authorities decided (again) to erect a monument at Babi Yar, which was intended to demonstrate the heroic struggle of the Soviet people against the “German fascists.” The authorities chose the renowned Ukrainian sculptor Mikhail Lysenko and his assistants to implement the project.

Lysenko’s original design had a Jewish family on the front of the monument. But in the final stages, Lysenko’s design was secretly altered. A sailor, a soldier, and a partisan were placed on the front of the monument instead of the Jewish figures. When Lysenko saw the modified design, he is said to have suffered a heart attack and died soon afterward.



According to one of the sculptors, Aleksandr Vitryk, it was the Politburo that had demanded the Jewish figures be removed. Instead the sculptors preserved them, not in the front, but on the back of the monument. Work on the monument dragged on for seven years, due to this kind of official interference.

Finally, the authorities decided to finish the monument, as they feared that Jewish activists would construct their own Jewish monument. Vitryk recalled that once this rival idea emerged, the authorities rushed the sculptors to complete the official monument. The sculptors had to work day and night under terrible conditions that severely affected their health. When the monument was finally unveiled on July 2, 1976, the sculptors were not invited. Visiting Babi Yar in 1979, Eli Wiesel sharply criticized the commemorative plaque, which contained not a single word about the Jewish victims.

The first public organization for the commemoration and memorialization of the Babi Yar, the Public Historic-Educational Center “Babi Yar,” was only legalized in the 1980s during *Perestroika*, as the Soviet era was closing. The Center proposed the creation of a museum, archive, and library, which would collect materials about “the fascist genocide.” Although the Center bylaws used the term genocide, it still did not mention explicitly who the victims were. Even as the Soviet Union was collapsing in 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev, its last leader, and other Soviet representatives, remained obstinately reluctant to condemn antisemitism or concede that the Jews had been specially targeted by the Nazis as victims.

### **Babi Yar in Contemporary Ukraine’s Official Politics of Memory**

On August 24, 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR approved Ukraine’s Declaration of Independence. Only after the collapse of Communism and the end of state antisemitism, did public discussion of the Holocaust of Jews in Ukraine become permissible.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the Babi Yar massacre, on September 29, 1991, the authorities for the first time admitted publicly that most of the victims at Babi Yar were Jews. The Head of the Verkhovna Rada (soon to be the first President of independent Ukraine), Leonid Kravchuk, delivered a speech that stressed Jews were killed in Babi Yar only because they were Jews. Kravchuk also mentioned the



tens of thousands of Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Soviet partisans, underground members, and hostages, who were murdered later by the Nazis. He emphasized: “Babi Yar became an international mass grave... It will forever be an eternal reproach to humankind, a testament to one of the most shameful of its evildoings.” Kravchuk went on to condemn the Soviet policies of ignoring human rights and suppressing the truth about the Babi Yar. He also issued an apology to the Jewish community.

After 1991, Babi Yar was transformed into a place visited every year by government officials laying wreaths and uttering the customary phrases at a commemorative rally.

In 2004, , while recalling the shootings in Babi Yar of Jews, Ukrainians, and Russians, President Leonid Kuchma unexpectedly mentioned Ukrainian nationalists, who also perished in the area. He proposed a new approach to historical memory, which would condemn all those involved in Nazi crimes, but reject the sweeping thesis, imposed by Soviet propaganda, that all members of the OUN and the UPA were criminals.

The “memory wars” in Ukraine escalated significantly during the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko, who came to power in the wake of the Orange Revolution. Because Yushchenko viewed Ukraine’s history during World War II through the prism of the crimes committed by the two totalitarian regimes, Stalinist and Nazi, he drew a direct equivalence between Auschwitz and the Gulag and between the Holocaust and the Holodomor. He also consistently promoted reconciliation between two groups of World War II combatants: veterans of the Soviet army and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. At the same time, he began focusing attention on Ukrainian nationalists who had been killed in the Babi Yar area

On May 22, 2006, President Yushchenko issued a decree entitled “About Celebrating the Centenary of Olena Teliha’s Birth.” Teliha was a Ukrainian poet and member of the Melnykite faction of the OUN, who was killed by the Germans on February 22, 1942. Yushchenko then authorized the erection of a monument to Olena Teliha at Babi Yar, although this effort was later abandoned by his successor.

In 2007, Yushchenko granted the title of “Hero of Ukraine” to Roman Shukhevych, commander in chief of the UPA, and in January 2010—to Stepan



Bandera, the leader of the OUN(B). However, he carefully avoided the difficult topic of Ukrainians who helped the Nazis in their killing spree during World War II. This showed the limitations of his approach to political memory, which also left him open to criticism.

The expression “Forward to the past!” best characterizes the official politics of memory pursued by Viktor Yanukovych, the fourth president of Ukraine. Compared to all the previous presidents, who had proclaimed, clearly or not very plainly, their desire for the restoration and formation of Ukrainian identity, Yanukovych was the only one who showed absolute indifference and even hostility to this question. President Yanukovych’s rejection and very real denial of democratic values, while still declaring them, particularly in the sphere of the official politics of memory, was one of the causes behind the Revolution of Dignity (Maidan) in 2014, which put an end to attempts to preserve the traditions of the Soviet past and to halt Ukraine’s move into Europe.

The current stage of forming the Ukrainian model of historical memory is proceeding under the extraordinarily difficult circumstances of Russia’s annexation of the Crimean peninsula and the hybrid war in Ukraine’s Donbas region. On April 9, 2015, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted four key laws, the so-called “decommunization packet.” Among the principle changes wrought by these laws were the banning of Communist and Nazi symbols, the declassification of secret police archives, and the replacement of the phrase “the Great Patriotic War” with the term “the Second World War.” Despite some shortcomings, this packet of laws is of strategic importance for Ukraine’s future.

Today the Holocaust, which was suppressed for so long in the USSR, occupies an important place in Ukraine’s politics of memory. In fact, the prospects for consolidating democracy in Ukraine, as well as the literal prospects for the country’s integration into the family of European nations, depend on the degree to which this issue becomes a component of Ukrainian identity.

President Poroshenko’s speech in the Knesset on December 23, 2015, was a momentous event. Emphasizing that Babi Yar is a shared, open wound of Ukrainians and Jews, and noting that 1.5 million Ukrainian Jews perished during the Holocaust, Poroshenko paid tribute to the Righteous Among the Nations, who,



risking their own lives, rescued Jews. He also spoke about the negative episodes in history and about “collaborationists,” who “unfortunately, existed in practically all European countries that were occupied by the Nazis, and helped those monsters to implement the “final solution of the Jewish question.” The president of Ukraine apologized for this to the children and grandchildren of Holocaust victims, and emphasized that future generations would be raised in the spirit of rejecting crimes such as the Holocaust and Babi Yar.

These words, reflecting the Ukrainian state’s official politics of memory, held great symbolic significance. They attested to Ukraine’s readiness to disengage itself from the Soviet past, adopt European values, and become an equal member of a united Europe.

### **Babi Yar Memorialization in Independent Ukraine**

On the fiftieth anniversary of the massacre a first Jewish monument *Menorah* (architect Yury Paskevich) was dedicated at Babi Yar. Since 1991, many other monuments have been built there, dedicated to the memory of members of the resistance movement, Jewish children, the writer Anatoli Kuznetsov (author of the book *Babi Yar* (1966)), prisoners of war, Roma, and other victims. About thirty monuments and memorial plaques are now located in Babi Yar. This is probably overcompensation for the long-lasting prohibition against building any monuments there. Post-communist society was recovering from the suppression of memory.

This does not mean that there is no longer controversy about Babi Yar monuments. Christians have contested memorializing Babi Yar as primarily a Jewish place of memory. Crosses have been erected there dedicated to members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and churchmen, who were killed and buried in the Babi Yar area. Monuments were also built for the victims of the Kurenivka disaster, people with mental disabilities killed by the Nazis, the imprisoned and murdered members of the *Dynamo* soccer team, German prisoners of war who died in captivity, and others. Not all of these people perished in Babi Yar, but the ravine was the chosen place for their commemoration.

In 2003, Ukrainian and Jewish intellectuals created a Public Committee for Commemoration of the Victims of Babi Yar. The Committee set itself the following





goals: the creation of a national historical-memorial park “Babyn Yar,” with a museum and memorial. In 2007, a national historical park was founded and in 2008 responsibility was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance. On February 24, 2010, the president issued a decree granting Babi Yar the status of a national historical and memorial preserve.

Trying to reconcile the competing memories and narratives, the President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, on the 76th anniversary of the massacre (September 29, 2017), citing Ivan Dziuba, called Babi Yar “our common tragedy, a tragedy, above all, for the Jewish and Ukrainian people.” Debates about the memorialization of the Holocaust in Babi Yar will probably continue for a long time.

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## **Criminal Investigations and War Crimes Prosecutions**

Historians and others are not of one mind in their overall assessment of the postwar prosecutions of the Holocaust. One point of view focuses on blind spots and failures, such as the very few members of Police Battalions who were charged and sentenced. Another way of looking at it, however, is to note the unprecedented scale of the investigations over more than fifty years and the fact that many high-ranking perpetrators were punished.

### **The Nuremberg Trials**

In the summer of 1945, the Allied Powers decided to try major German war criminals before an International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg. The trial opened against 24 high-ranking defendants in November 1945. They were charged with conspiracy to commit crimes against the peace; planning, initiating, and waging aggressive war; war crimes; and crimes against humanity. Following the verdict, ten defendants were hanged; Hermann Goering committed suicide. Others received sentences from 10 years to life imprisonment. Three of the accused were acquitted.

The United States then conducted twelve “Subsequent Trials” at Nuremberg. These targeted specific groups or institutions, such as doctors, judges, and industrialists, or the High Command, the German Foreign Office, and the SS Race and Settlement Main Office (RuSHA). The “*Einsatzgruppen* Trial” (officially, *The US vs. Otto Ohlendorf, et. al.*) held in 1947-48 was the ninth of these cases. It dealt with the mass murder of more than a million Jewish victims in the occupied Soviet Union. The prosecution led by Benjamin Ferencz indicted 24 *Einsatzgruppen* members: 14 of them were hanged, including Paul Blobel. *Einsatzgruppe C* leader Otto Rasch died in custody.

The US, British, and French authorities also tried more than 5,000 Germans for war crimes in their respective occupation zones up to 1949. Of these, 806 were sentenced to death, but only 486 were subsequently executed. Many more were tried in the Soviet zone. Jurisdiction over further war crimes prosecutions was then handed on to the respective authorities in West and East Germany.

Of the other major Nazi war criminals, many such as Hitler, Himmler, and Goebbels committed suicide. Mussolini was lynched by Italian partisans in April 1945. The Soviet Union allowed the Polish state to try Erich Koch, the former Reich Commissar of Ukraine. The Polish authorities tried him mainly for crimes committed in the Białystok region and he lived the rest of his life in a Polish jail.

Of the main Nuremberg defendants sentenced to prison, Albert Speer was released in 1966, after serving his 20 year sentence, and the last, Rudolf Hess, died in Spandau jail in 1987.

The Nuremberg Trials served to establish important legal principles regarding war crimes and crimes against humanity, which were adopted and developed further by international criminal courts in the years after 1990.

### **The Punishment in the Soviet Union of Crimes Perpetrated and Overseen by the Nazis**

In the Soviet Union, Nazi criminals and their auxiliaries were prosecuted under Supreme Soviet Decree No. 39, issued on April 19, 1943, which also applied retroactively. The decree mentioned specifically nationals of those countries aligned with Nazi Germany, as well as “spies,” “accomplices,” and “traitors of the Motherland” with Soviet citizenship. Cases were brought before military tribunals. Those convicted faced the death penalty for the most serious offenses, or exile to hard labor for up to 20 years. Division commanders approved the sentences, which were enforced immediately. Those sentenced to death were hanged publicly. When the death penalty was abolished between 1947 and 1950, the maximum sentence was 25 years. The convicts were sent to do the most arduous labor ten hours per day in special regime camps. Initially, they were denied access to correspondence or any wages.

The first Soviet trial took place in Krasnodar in July 1943. In the dock were 11 Soviet citizens who had served as auxiliaries with Sonderkommando 10a. The tribunal sentenced eight men to death by hanging; the other three each received 20 years.

At Kharkiv in December 1943, for the first time Germans were put on trial, attracting international attention. For atrocities against tens of thousands of civilians in the Kharkiv area, three Germans and one non-German were sentenced to death by hanging. This followed shortly after the Moscow Declaration of October 1943, which

asserted that “the Allied Powers will pursue [war criminals]... to the uttermost ends of the earth and deliver them to their accusers in order that justice may be done.”

Shortly after the war, the Soviet authorities conducted a series of collective trials against German war criminals in major cities. In December 1945 and January 1946, these were held in Kyiv, Minsk, Riga, Leningrad, Smolensk, Briansk, Velikie Luki, and Mykolaïv. Eighty-five Germans of various organizations and ranks were tried. Of these, 66 were sentenced to death by hanging, such as Friedrich Jeckeln; the rest received 12 to 20 years of hard labor. Another series of such trials, involving 129 defendants, took place in the fall of 1947. The total convicted in the 20 large public trials held between 1943 and 1947 was 235, including 17 Soviet citizens. The trials in Krasnodar, Kyiv, Minsk, Riga, Smolensk, Mykolaïv, and Chişinău, all mentioned the extermination of Jews alongside other war crimes.

Between 1943 and 1954, hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens and tens of thousands foreigners were sentenced in the Soviet Union for war crimes, espionage, or treason. Official figures indicate that at least 57,000 people were convicted under the Decree of April 1943, and more than 300,000 for high treason under Article 58–1/a of the Russian Criminal Code. In Ukraine alone, the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs and State Security agencies prosecuted more than 93,000 people for aiding and abetting the Nazis, comprising roughly half of all those arrested in this period.

Soviet citizens sentenced to hard labor under the 1943 Decree were amnestied in September 1955, but the amnesty did not apply to those convicted of killing or torturing Soviet citizens. Foreign prisoners were released and repatriated to their native countries in accordance with the USSR’s international obligations. The repatriation of German prisoners of war (including those convicted of war crimes) continued until September 1955, when a further decree regulated the “Early Release of Germans Convicted... for Crimes Committed against the Soviet People during the War.” Most remaining German prisoners were then sent home.

A fresh wave of war crimes trials began in the 1960s, as new crimes were uncovered, including many related to the Holocaust. Some of these trials were staged publicly to reveal war criminals living abroad, as the Soviet authorities sought to discredit the West and émigré groups during the Cold War. For example, in 1961, three

former officials of the Estonian Security Police (including Ain-Ervin Mere, a resident of the UK) were sentenced to death for killing more than 2,000 Jews in the Jägala camp.

In 1961 and 1962 alone, major trials in Stavropol, Rostov-on-Don, Baranovichi, Kyiv, and Vilnius dealt with crimes involving *Einsatzgruppe D*, the Kaldycheva (Kołdyczewo) concentration camp, Trawniki guards, and various Lithuanians. Similar trials were held regularly in the USSR throughout the 1960s, and continued, if less frequently into the 1980s. In one of the last trials, in 1987, three former local policemen, who participated in the shooting of Jews in Myropil and Romaniv (Zhytomyr Oblast, Ukraine), were convicted: two were sentenced to death and one received 15 years of imprisonment.

### **War Crimes Prosecutions by Germany and Other Countries**

The authorities of the Federal Republic of Germany investigated 160,000 people for war crimes up until 2005. This resulted in about 6,400 people being convicted, including 13 sentenced to death (until 1949), 167 to life imprisonment, and 6,201 to various terms of imprisonment.

After a period in the 1950s with relatively few prosecutions, war crimes investigations increased again between 1958 and the early 1970s, following the establishment of the Central Office (Zentrale Stelle) at Ludwigsburg in 1958. In the “Ulm *Einsatzgruppen* Trial” that same year, ten men were charged with the murder of 5,000 Jews in Lithuania. Among the most notable German trials in the 1960s was the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial (1963-65), which revealed to the public the inner workings of the camp, although only the most brutal guards were punished.

The German criminal investigation of the mass shootings at Babi Yar during the 1960s has been discussed above (see Chapter 3, Criminal Cases in Relation to Babi Yar). Another criminal case concerned members of Sonderkommandos 1005a and 1005b. Investigations by the Stuttgart prosecutor’s office between 1962 and 1967 resulted in the indictment of four people; two were sentenced to terms of imprisonment on March 13, 1969.

From the 1950s, the Communist government in East Germany pursued a similar policy of trying and punishing war criminals, including many for crimes committed in occupied Soviet territory. For example, two former members of the Gestapo in Stanislav



(Ivano-Frankivsk) were tried in Erfurt in 1973. At the same time the East German authorities exploited the war crimes issue to try to embarrass the West German government wherever possible, often developing cases to parallel those taking place in the West.

Austria, by contrast, between the 1950s and the 1970s had only 31 trials of war criminals (45 defendants). On top of this, even the few found guilty received such meager sentences, that it appeared only to make a mockery of justice. The so-called Waldheim scandal in the 1980s was a further example of Austria's failure to come to terms with its Nazi past before the end of the Cold War.

In the sentences of West German and especially Austrian courts, punishments were often lenient as the judges believed the criminals had acted out of a false sense of duty. On these grounds, many men were not prosecuted at all. By the 1960s, West German law could only punish war criminals for murder if it was proven that they acted from base motives. This meant that only excessive perpetrators could be convicted.

If the numbers of people convicted of war crimes in the USSR (300,000+) is compared with the more than 100,000 Germans and Austrians convicted all over Europe for Nazi war crimes, it is clear that many more Soviet citizens were punished.

This phenomenon is not exclusive to the Soviet Union: in many European countries such as France, revenge taken against co-nationals was more severe than the prosecution of German war criminals. Some of those co-nationals were summarily shot without any court or investigation, and judicial punishment, especially in the first years after the end of the war, was very harsh.

In Romania, for example, many death sentences were issued by the postwar courts, including for the wartime prime minister Ion Antonescu. Yet a large number of those sentenced to death had been tried in absentia, and within a few years generous rehabilitation was offered to many of those who received prison terms, as the Communist regime sought to create a wider base of support.

In Poland, where many Germans faced severe punishment, cases against Poles accused of individual support of German crimes were dealt with more leniently.



## **International Aspects**

Fear of punishment led tens of thousands of Nazis and non-Germans involved with them to escape west at the end of the war, with many fleeing Europe altogether. Some entered South America and other countries aided by documents issued by the Red Cross and even assistance from the Catholic Church. Only very few, such as Adolf Eichmann, were tracked down in their hiding places overseas and brought to justice. The Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961 finally brought the immense scale of the Holocaust to a broad public audience.

To prevent the escape of war criminals, the United Nations War Crimes Commission (UNWCC) was formed in 1943. It compiled lists with tens of thousands of names, submitted by all of the member countries. However, as the Soviet Union did not participate, the UNWCC lists contained no information about crimes committed on the territory of the USSR. Therefore, those from Eastern Europe who escaped remained protected for many years, as the Western countries refused to take subsequent Soviet allegations seriously. The Soviet Union, for its part, did not present sufficient evidence for the suspects to be arrested, and looked instead to blackmail or expose them when the timing was most convenient.

A partial solution to this problem was found only in the 1980s, when following the lead of the United States, other countries, including Australia, Canada, and the UK, passed legislation and established investigations to deal with Holocaust perpetrators and supporters that had escaped justice. Collecting evidence and conducting such trials fifty years later proved almost impossible, and only one criminal prosecution was concluded successfully in the Anglo-Saxon countries during the 1990s. The US had more success with denaturalizing and deporting the accused, in more than 100 civil proceedings.

The most famous of these last ditch cases was that of Ukrainian-born John Demjanjuk, which ultimately extended more than 20 years. He was extradited from the US to Israel and sentenced to death there in 1988 as “Ivan the Terrible,” a notorious guard at Treblinka. But on appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court he was acquitted, on the basis of KGB documentation indicating that “Ivan the Terrible” was someone else. Captured German documents from several archives did put



Demjanjuk at Trawniki, Sobibór, and other camps. Using these documents and an interpretation of the law that rendered mere service at a death camp as being an accessory to murder, Demjanjuk was convicted by a German court in 2011.

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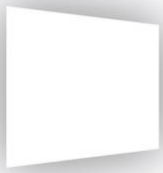
## Compensation and Restitution

The issues of compensation and restitution are enormously complicated and cover numerous, mostly government, schemes to compensate those who suffered and to restore property after 1945. The bulk of compensation was paid by the German state following agreements made in the 1950s that helped reintegrate West Germany into the international community.

Since 1945, the German state has paid more than \$100 billion to survivors, their heirs, and the state of Israel. While Jewish refugees from Germany were paid well, until 1990 German rules excluded many survivors in Eastern Europe. In the 1990s this was changed, but by then hundreds of thousands had already died. Overall, there will always remain a gap between the crimes and the suffering on the one hand, and what perpetrators gained and had to pay. (Another gap existed for former slave laborers employed in German private industry. The German Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future” founded in 2000, cooperated with international partner organizations and paid over 4 billion euros to nearly 1.7 million survivors of forced labor during the Nazi era—Jews and non-Jews.)

Still, hundreds of thousands of Jewish survivors or heirs benefited from negotiated settlements. As of 2018, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany has distributed compensation to nearly 100,000 Jewish survivors, and also funded vital social service agencies.

With regard to restitution, in all of Europe, insensitivity and indifference grew quickly. These sentiments were strongest in Eastern Europe, as even the limited restitution that took place was soon reversed by widespread nationalization of private property under Communism. Even after its collapse in 1989-90, most former Communist countries applied residency and citizenship requirements, which prevented the large-scale restitution of real estate. In response to pressure from the European Union and the US, much Jewish communal property was returned, but most other property restitution remained piecemeal at best.



Even today, thanks to intensive legal efforts, especially in the US, the restitution of some Jewish property, especially artwork, is still proceeding, if slowly.

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## **Mass Graves and Memorials**

After the Holocaust, many of the mass graves remained unmarked, abandoned, and forgotten with time. In the USSR, nothing was done at the state level to identify, to take care of, and to preserve mass grave sites. Therefore, as a rule, the relatives of the victims and Jewish religious community organizations (the only legitimate Jewish agencies after the disbandment of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in 1948) took care of this. Commemoration of Jewish victims was (and still is) one of the main areas of their activity. The Soviet Communist authorities in those years worried that this strengthened Jewish solidarity and suspected ulterior motives.

But Soviet Jews facing difficulties sometimes overcame them. During the Soviet period, monuments did appear, in Ukraine (about 300), Belarus (over 200), Lithuania (100), and Latvia (35). In the town of Snovsk (earlier: Shchors) in Ukraine's Chernihiv region, for instance, local Jews gathered the remains of Holocaust victims, buried them, and were allowed to place a bilingual granite stone atop it. One ethnically neutral text was in Russian, the other in what the authorities assumed was Yiddish. It actually was a Hebrew quotation from the Bible, "Their blood shall I avenge." This difference in the epitaphs was mentioned in Anatolii Rybakov's novel *Heavy Sand*, published in Russian in the late 1970s and widely read.

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### ***Post-1943 Official Policy and Remembrance Attempts in Minsk***

Minsk was occupied by the Germans on 28 June 1941, six days after Nazi Germany began the war against the Soviet Union, and remained under occupation for over three years until 3 July 1944. Because of the sudden occupation of the city, local Jews had very little time to evacuate. The Minsk ghetto was one of the largest in Europe. The ghetto originally imprisoned up to 80,000 Jews from Minsk and refugees from Western Belarus' and Poland. Later, 23,904 Jews from Austria, Germany, and Czechoslovakia were also deported to the Minsk ghetto.



The Nazis killed tens of thousands of Jews during a number of “Aktions” in Minsk from August 1941 to October 1943. During the last “Aktion” on 21-23 October 1943, the Minsk ghetto was completely “liquidated.”

After the war, Jews who had fought in the Red Army, or survived as partisans or in evacuation, returned to Minsk. Also, some Jews from other places moved to Minsk. But the Jewish population of Minsk had declined dramatically from 70,998 in 1939 to approximately 15,000 in 1950-53.

Surviving Jews asked the authorities in 1945 that they be allowed to organize a Jewish religious community in Minsk and received permission in June 1946. The same group of Jewish activists initiated the creation of a monument to the victims of the Holocaust in the city. The community leaders appealed to the City Executive Council for permission to erect a monument in the Yama (Pit), where 5,000 Jews were shot on March 2, 1942. Their appeal was rejected by the authorities, on the grounds that Soviet POWs and Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Roma civilians were also killed there.

Nevertheless, in August 1946 the Jews erected a monument in the Yama to the victims of the Holocaust. The Minsk Jews were too impoverished after the war to afford a new stone for the monument, and purchasing one would perhaps have required official authorization. To avoid these difficulties, the head of the Minsk Jewish community, Moisei Khanelis, authorized the reuse of stone from tombstones in the Jewish cemetery that had been destroyed by the Nazis on the site of the ghetto.

The mason and the foreman of the burial office, Morduch Abramovich Sprishen, carved from the old tombstones a memorial stele with a sign in Russian and Yiddish, “To the eternally blessed memory of 5,000 Jews murdered by the mortal enemies of mankind – German-fascist evildoers.”

The author of the text on the monument, Yiddish poet Chaim Maltinskii, recalled in his memoirs that it was very difficult to obtain permission to put this sign on the monument. The Minsk City Censorship Committee refused to approve the Yiddish text. But for the Minsk Jews, it was very important that the sign mention the Jews and be written in Yiddish, the native language of many of the victims of the ghetto.

Maltinskii wrote that a few months after his return from the hospital to Minsk in the summer of 1946, familiar and unfamiliar Jews visited him with the request that he go to the authorities and ask for permission to put the Yiddish sign on the monument. Minsk Jews believed that it would be hard for the authorities to reject the personal request by Maltinskii, a well-known Yiddish poet and a officer of the Soviet Army who had lost a leg in the battle for Berlin. Maltinskii’s mother, wife, and son were killed in the Minsk ghetto.



The monument was unveiled at a public meeting in November 1946. At the opening ceremony, Rabbi Yakov Berger recited *kaddish* and a memorial service was conducted.

The black granite stele in Minsk was one of the first monuments to the victims of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. The erection of this monument created a precedent, and in the late 1940s – 1951, Sprishen built monuments to the victims of the Holocaust in the towns of Uzda, Uzlyany, and Koidanova (Dzyarzhynsk), Minsk region. In the second half of the 1940s, the Jews used their own resources to build Holocaust monuments in other Belarusian cities and towns: Shumilino, Braslaŭ, Borisov (Barysaŭ), and others. The local authorities allowed the mention of Jewish victims of the Nazi regime in some places, in others they did not. But the construction of Holocaust monuments occurred only in places where local Jews took the initiative into their own hands. The Soviet Belarusian authorities neglected the memorialization of the Holocaust, and some of the Holocaust sites were used for grazing animals.

The author of the sign on the monument, Maltinskii, and the mason Sprishen were arrested in 1949 and 1952 respectively, and both received ten years in concentration camps for “cosmopolitanism” and “Jewish bourgeois nationalism.” However, the Minsk monument and other Sprishen monuments with signs mentioning Jewish victims were not destroyed. Perhaps the authorities did not dare to tear down these monuments, because they were afraid of protests by Jews in the country and abroad. Even during the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, the use of more covert methods was preferred.

In the 1970s–1980s, Jews came every year to the Minsk monument on May 9, Soviet Victory Day. The number of visitors increased every year. The monument became a place for public protest against the discrimination of Jews in the Soviet Union. Semen Sprishen wrote that the “speeches by orators became increasingly sharp, they angrily denounced discrimination against the Jews, and demanded freedom to choose the country where they would live, and composed petitions to the high authorities.” The authorities of Soviet Belarus found a way to shut down the Minsk “Hyde Park.” On May 9, they sent a car with loudspeakers to the monument and played marches and Soviet patriotic songs. This suppression of the freedom of speech at the monument continued until the collapse of Communism.

In independent Belarus, Jews are allowed to publicly commemorate the Holocaust. In 2000 in Minsk, a new monument “The Last Road” (architect Leonid Levin, sculptors Aleksandr Finskii, E. Polok) was built near the original one. Subsequently, a monument to the righteous people of the world in the shape of a Menorah, as well as several memorial



stones to the Jews from Berlin, Hamburg, and other places, who were killed in the Minsk ghetto, were erected there.

However, while Minsk Jewish organizations are doing everything possible to memorialize the Holocaust, local antisemites have vandalized the Holocaust monuments several times.

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### ***Post-1943 Official Policy and Remembrance Attempts in Rostov-on-Don***

On August 11-12, 1942, the Nazis killed over 2,000 Jews in Zmievskaja Balka (Snake Gully) in Rostov-on-Don. Overall, during the two German occupations of the city, approximately 3,500 Jews were shot. Non-Jews were killed as well, but the vast majority were Jews. In 1959 the first modest monument dedicated “To the Victims of Fascism” was erected in Zmievskaja Balka. In 1975 it was replaced by a pompous Soviet memorial park with huge monuments and a museum devoted to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory of the Soviet Union in World War II. So, the Soviet authorities substituted a monument to the victims of the German occupation with a monument dedicated to the heroic struggle of the Soviet people, which did not represent the actual events that occurred in Zmievskaja Balka, but fitted better the Soviet concept of the Great Patriotic War. Neither the 1959, nor the 1975 monuments at the site mentioned the Jews who were murdered there.

In 2004 the Rostov Jewish community with permission from the city authorities set up a plaque at the memorial bearing the inscription: “On August 11-12, 1942, the Nazis exterminated here over 27,000 Jews.” This high and incorrect figure came from a Soviet investigation from the year 1943. However, this sign provoked the wrath of local antisemites, who demanded that the authorities remove the plaque and accused the Jews of “privatizing” the memorial, that had been built with state money.

The city authorities, who had originally authorized the plaque, decided to remove it. Perhaps they shared the antisemitic sentiments, but most likely they were afraid of losing their antisemitic electorate. So according to their decision, in November 2011 the memorial plaque, which mentioned 27,000 Jewish victims of the Nazi regime, was replaced by a sign about the murder of “peaceful Soviet citizens by the Nazis.” The authorities claimed that there is no list of the people killed with a notation of their nationality; therefore, they refused to admit that predominantly Jews had been killed there.

In 2012 the city’s Jewish community tried through the courts to force the local authorities to return the sign about the Holocaust, but lost the case. Then the Chief Rabbi of Russia, Berel Lazar, got involved in case, and the city authorities again reconsidered their



decision. They approved a new “compromise” sign. The new text stated: “Here in Zmievskaiia Balka in August 1942 the Hitlerite occupiers killed over 27,000 peaceful citizens of Rostov-on-Don and Soviet prisoners of war. The representatives of many nations were killed there. Zmievskaiia Balka is the largest place of mass killing of the Jews by the fascist occupiers in the Russian Federation during the Great Patriotic War.”

Perhaps this long sign did not satisfy either side: antisemites, because it mentions Jewish victims, and Jews, because it does not mention that most of the victims were Jews. Yevgeny Yevtushenko published his poem *Storozh Zmievskoi Balki* (The Guardian of Zmievskaiia Balka), in which he describes the shameful behavior of the local authorities, who many times quietly changed the signs under the monument, trying to erase the word “Jews.”

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In other East European countries, including those with Communists in power, Holocaust Commemoration was not staunchly opposed. Thus memorials were erected at Auschwitz and Sobibór, for instance.

Since 2004, the *Yahad – In Unum* international charitable association has engaged in finding mass graves in Ukraine and its neighboring countries. Other organizations and initiatives such as the Belarus Holocaust Memorials Project are also active in marking the sites and placing memorial stones. However, municipal governments are not able to ensure the care of the grave sites, and as a result, they actually still remain abandoned. Many grave sites have not yet been found, especially those located in areas no longer inhabited by Jews, where people even forgot what Jews look like.

It is by no means clear that once the graves are found, the victims should be reburied. Religiously observant Jews believe that bodies buried in the ground should stay where they are; removing them would disturb their sanctity. Only a layer of scattered bone fragments may be buried properly, on the site itself. The view that excavating the scenes of the horrors is sacrilege stands in contrast to the natural impulse of people from a Christian background to rebury the remains, and, often, to the needs of criminal investigators.

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## **Broader Postwar Soviet and Eastern European Contexts**

Before the war ended, Jews and non-Jews alike did not expect that Stalin's regime would attempt to destroy Jewish culture—just as they had not expected Germany and its allies to exterminate the Jews. But the Soviet authorities did make this attempt. Many Yiddish writers were arrested during an “anti-cosmopolitan” campaign in the Soviet Union at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s. Several members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were shot to death on August 12, 1952, including David Hofstein, Itsik Fefer, Leib Kvitko, Perets Markish, and David Bergelson, who in different periods of their life lived in Kyiv, and had praised in their works the system that eventually killed them.

The Communist regimes of Europe propagated the notion that Jews in Europe were somehow linked to the policies of the government of Israel. A Jew living in a Warsaw Pact country already took a risk by refusing to publicly denounce Zionism.

Soviet censors and critics, meanwhile, were ambivalent and confused about the Holocaust. The topic resided in a grey zone between the allowed and the forbidden alongside a powerful narrative called “The Great Patriotic War,” said to have begun with the German invasion. This was the history of tragedy for mostly unspecified “peaceful Soviet citizens,” and, above all, of Russian-led resistance and heroism, in the Soviet hinterland, at the front, in the Communist-led underground, and in a near-instantaneous and massive “partisan movement.” The Soviet state had been right all along and no sacrifice or death could have been avoided.

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## **Western Europe, Israel, and North America during the Cold War**

In Western Europe (Europe outside the Warsaw Pact countries), the Holocaust was more or less ignored publicly until the 1960s. Because overall, the Nazi German occupation there was much less intense than in Eastern Europe, the persecution and murder of the Jews had stood out more. In hindsight, this makes the public neglect in Western Europe all the more striking. When people thought about the murder of the Jews, the focus was on Auschwitz. Other places, such as Sobibór, tended to be unknown or ignored.

Among Jewish survivors, there were individuals who collected information for the purpose of documentation. But it was difficult for the first writers about the Holocaust to make an impact on popular discourse. The now well-known survivors Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi encountered great difficulties in getting their recollections published.

In 1953 the Israeli parliament established Yad Vashem, as the Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority. The name indicated that the focus was not on the perpetrators, but on the Jews.

Milestones in the development of memory of the Holocaust in Western Europe, Israel, and North America were the Eichmann trial in Israel (1960-62), the US television miniseries *Holocaust* (1978-79), the nine-hour French film *Shoah* (1985), the US film *Schindler's List* (1993), and the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (1993). Paradoxically, the US provenance of some of these milestones was partly because US society was *less* involved: Americans were at a distance from the event and from local entanglement, so the Holocaust seemed both more abstract and less difficult to handle.

Over the course of decades, the Holocaust became, in the "West," the main symbol for mass murder and genocide, and a warning against racism and xenophobia. United Germany looked good in the eyes of the world because of its handling of its past, climaxing with the opening in Berlin in 2005 of the massive Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.

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## **Eastern European Approaches since 1989**

Since 1989, Eastern European approaches to the Holocaust have varied widely. Often, the Holocaust and the crimes of Communism, previously marginalized or unacknowledged, began to be seen as in competition. It was difficult to create discourses based on new frames that went beyond prewar nationalist thought or postwar Communist propaganda. Some countries made a remarkable turn toward acknowledgment.

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### **Romania and Holocaust Memory**

In 2003, Romania, faced a diplomatic disaster when the government stated in a press release that there had been no Holocaust in Nazi Germany’s former ally Romania. After intense international (and internal) pressure, fences were quickly mended. An international commission for the study of the Holocaust in Romania, named after Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, was created. An official day of commemoration was chosen and tailored specifically toward Romania’s history: October 9, the day of the first deportation of Jews to Transnistria. Since 2015, it is illegal in Romania to contest, minimize, justify, or approve of the Holocaust in Romania, as well as to celebrate the Romanian fascists. These developments were related to Romania’s path toward membership of NATO (2002-2004) and the European Union (1995-2007).

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### ***Debates on the Holocaust in Poland***

In 2000, a lively debate on Polish society and the Holocaust was sparked by Jan Gross’s short book, *Neighbors*, on the murder of the Jews in the town of Jedwabne by local Polish residents. Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski publicly apologized on behalf of the Polish nation. The central question of the debate, regarding the extent to which Polish society is viewed as complicit in the Holocaust, still resonates fiercely today, far beyond the historical profession.

Inspired by Gross’s work, a new school of historians at the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research in Warsaw has concentrated on the little-known final stage of the Holocaust in Poland, after the liquidation of the ghettos. In the smaller towns of Poland, some ghettos were unfenced and large numbers of Jews managed to flee—possibly as many as 300,000.



According to this latest research, many Jews seeking shelter among the local population did not find it, and fewer than 50,000 survived to the end of the war.

What happened in one region of the Polish countryside in 1943 is described in detail in a book published in 2011 by the Canada-based historian Jan Grabowski, *Judenjagd (Hunt for the Jews)*. Lacking sufficient manpower, the Germans threatened to kill Poles for helping Jews. Fearing these punishments, the Polish Blue Police, with other local inhabitants, occasionally killed Jews they found in hiding. They were careful not to report this to the Germans, so that no non-Jewish Poles would suffer reprisals.

Reluctant to accept these isolated findings at face value, the Centre for Holocaust Research then undertook a more wide-ranging investigation of Jewish survival in the countryside. This produced further evidence that in well-documented cases, Jews were murdered by specific Polish underground units, Blue Police serving with the Germans, or betrayed by the local population.

The reasons for this have been argued to be multi-faceted: ingrained Catholic antisemitism, fear of reprisals, and greed. After their escape some Jews even returned to the remnant ghettos, used by the Germans to lure Jews out of hiding, and this is also said to reflect the great difficulties Jews encountered trying to survive.

This story of lethal hostility towards surviving Jews in the Polish countryside ran counter to the preferred narrative of other Polish historians and of much of Polish society. When discussing the Holocaust, they preferred to focus on those Poles awarded the title of the Righteous Among the Nations. They interpreted the new findings as deeply offensive and sometimes did not hesitate to ask for such statements to be prosecuted.

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## **The Commemoration of Other Victims**

The Soviet Union did not erect a single monument to the genocide of the Roma, but since then, matters have improved. Today, for example, at least 113 sites where Roma were murdered have been identified in Ukraine, the country that, since 2004, officially commemorates the genocide of the Roma on August 2.

The people who were mentally ill or intellectually disabled were the first group to be singled out for systematic murder by the Nazis, and ultimately became the largest group of murdered German citizens. The German state has not granted their families equal status with other victims of Nazi persecution. It has taken a long time for the people with disabilities to receive public recognition as victims. For decades, in east and west, they were “forgotten” in public remembrance and even in family remembrance, partly because of a perceived stigma. In a sign of a change, monuments have appeared in Germany (Berlin, 2014), Ukraine, and elsewhere.

The Soviet POWs who suffered continue to be almost forgotten, however. Only a few memorials commemorate their suffering and murder. Those few who acted on their behalf after the war were unable to create a critical mass of public support, be it in their home countries or in Germany. Those Soviet POWs who survived received no compensation, neither from the German state, nor from the Forced Labor Foundation, unless—which was rare—they could demonstrate having spent time in a regular German concentration camp or working as a forced laborer with civilian status.

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## **The Holocaust as a Challenge**

A country deemed civilized, yet obsessed with “race” and “enemies,” carried out this utterly primitive act and received assistance from many sides, while others seemingly remained indifferent. The history of the Holocaust challenges illusions. Ever since this shattering event, we who are living now are compelled by it to rethink, and possibly to reconsider, our assumptions about ourselves and about our country, people, nation, and history.

Holocaust remembrance helps in our thinking about good and evil, and about human capacities. Hopefully this knowledge, and the discussion about it, will allow Ukrainians and other citizens of the world to safeguard their societies from future crimes against humanity.

Since 1998, there exists an International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. This intergovernmental organization unites governments and experts to strengthen, advance, and promote Holocaust education, research, and remembrance worldwide and to uphold the commitments of the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust. It now has more than thirty member states.

All the same, ever since the Holocaust, there have been political and moral doubts about Holocaust remembrance, all over the world. A significant number of people in all countries have felt and said that the Holocaust, as one historian once put it, “blocks our view of larger and more important vistas.” The Holocaust, it has often been thought and said, by political, civic, and religious leaders, requires study and commemoration, but not too intensely—not too much.

One way, in which such concerns have been expressed, is by avoiding the harshest facts about the Holocaust. All over the world, especially in popular culture, when facing the Holocaust (in writings, monuments, films, commemoration) there is a tendency to search for and find elements that make us feel slightly better, what the English language calls a silver lining. In reality, on closer examination, no country where Jews were living during the Holocaust ultimately looks quite so principled or to have been active enough in resisting it.

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### ***Responses from Outside—Some Issues***

The Jewish population of British-ruled Palestine at the time of the Holocaust, called the Yishuv, consisted of fewer than half a million people, amidst more than a million Arabs. Research has shown that Zionist leaders in Palestine responded to the Holocaust on the basis of political considerations. They wanted to decide exactly which European Jewish refugees should be brought into the country.

During the Holocaust, most people in Europe and the world did not want to know about what was happening to the Jews. This was indifference, and sometimes hostility. In general, the spirit of the 1940s was evasion of mass crimes.

Historians disagree on the issue of whether or not many more Jews could have been rescued, but most tend to respond negatively. At the time of the entry of the US into the war, almost one million Jews were already dead; and by the time of the Normandy landings, five million. On the other hand, there was Soviet cooperation with Nazi Germany until June 1941, and historians and others today talk about the issue of the bombing—effectual or moral—of Auschwitz, a death factory within the range of US, UK, and Soviet bombers.

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There is strong desire among the Dutch, the Danes, and others, all over Europe, to ignore unpleasant facts. Those include the large number of one's compatriots who were prepared to work with the Germans, for instance by joining the general SS or the Waffen SS; the Holocaust in regions occupied by one's own country thanks to alliances with Germany, and today beyond one's state borders; and the low social approval for the aid and rescue of Jews. The desire to look away is also strong in many clerical circles.

Today, as in the past, there also exists a strong sense in many parts of the world that a saturation point has long been reached. We have supposedly arrived at an overemphasis on the Holocaust. The alleged problem is that people can take in only so much. It is a competition, supposedly, and any "overemphasis" on the Holocaust would divert attention from other important matters.

Those other matters, considered equally important or even more important, make for a long list. Leaving aside here concerns about Israel, and also hardcore



antisemitic notions such as “Judeo-Bolshevism,” the lists includes (often in combination):

- loyalty to one’s own state
- pride in one’s own nation or ethnic group
- past victimhood of one’s own nation or ethnic group
- citizenship of one’s country
- awareness of enemies of one’s nation
- heroism during wartime
- social stability
- faith in humanity
- faith and trust in divine powers
- trust in religious leaders
- peaceful coexistence and cooperation between Jews and non-Jews before the Holocaust
- peaceful coexistence and cooperation between Jews and non-Jews in the future
- victims of other genocides and mass crimes, in Europe and beyond before the Holocaust
- victims of other genocides and mass crimes, in Europe and beyond during the Holocaust
- victims of other genocides and mass crimes, in Europe and beyond since the Holocaust
- victims of Communist policies, including Soviet-Nazi cooperation during the pact of non-aggression, and postwar antisemitism

It is increasingly recognized that such concerns cannot be wished away by declaring the Holocaust to be “unique.”

Nor are superficial public “apologies” or simplistic “lessons” of much use. These alleged lessons have included: “Intolerance and prejudice are bad”; “It all starts with hate speech”; “Good people can do something against evil”; “One person can make a difference”; and “Jews must be united and support the state of Israel, their last refuge in a world with few friends.” At issue is not whether these views are



correct, but whether they are really based on an understanding of this part of history.

The better response to concerns about overemphasis, to easy lessons, and, last but not least, to sheer indifference, is the message that a never-ending debate over the meaning of the Holocaust, as over other parts of the past, is not a weakness. It is a sign of vitality and strength. The open exchange of views is absolutely necessary for the sustenance and survival of democracy, for social stability, and for the psychic well-being of people. These three desirables require two things.

One, that all of us shall be exposed to views and topics, sometimes very unpleasant ones, which we do not choose for ourselves.

Second, that all or most of us share the same basic knowledge and experience. The Holocaust did not just happen in countries far away. It impacted “my and your” ancestors, their colleagues, their friends. A broad awareness such as this promotes social cohesion, not discord. It enables diverse, heterogeneous societies to solve social problems.

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