

London's landmark discussion on Jews and new Ukraine

(Full English transcript)



(Left to right): Mark Freiman, Board Member, Ukrainian Jewish Encounter; Peter Pomerantsev, Senior Fellow, London School of Economics Institute of Global Affairs; Professor Yaroslav Hrytsak, Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv, Ukraine; Iosif Zissels, chairman of the Vaad Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine.

Panel discussion with Professor Yaroslav Hrytsak, Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv, Ukraine; Iosif Zissels, chairman of the Vaad Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine; Mark Freiman, Board Member, Ukrainian Jewish Encounter, Toronto, Canada. Moderated by Peter Pomerantsev, Senior Fellow, London School of Economics Institute of Global Affairs. Organized by the Ukrainian Institute London in partnership with the Ukrainian Jewish Encounter and the Jewish Community Centre JW3. 29 January 2019, London, UK.

Peter Pomerantsev: Thank you so much for coming this evening. I'm very lucky to have with me a very distinguished and exciting panel to sort of work through an immensely complex subject which, I hope, we're going to actually embrace in its complexity. We'll talk for about an hour and then, I think, at least for half an hour talk with the audience. I was just thinking as this was starting. I guess I qualify as a Ukrainian Jew: I was born in Kyiv; I'm Jewish. But growing up in London, I would never have thought of myself as a Ukrainian Jew. There was no Ukrainian Jewish community. There was no identity or even a story around this idea that I could associate myself with. When the [Maidan](#) started (the revolution in

Ukraine in 2014), I had my relatives who also were born in Ukraine and Jewish but now lived in the U.S. all calling me saying: "This is terrible! Fascists have taken over Ukraine!" I was like: "What are you talking about?" They said: "We know, we remember our families, you know, the pogroms. We remember how terrible it was for Jews in Ukraine. And I was like: "I think you may be getting some sort of poorly informed background on this." But this is an incredibly complicated and kind of dynamic area to look at. And it's one that's being created: What is the Ukrainian-Jewish Encounter? What does it mean to be a Ukrainian Jew? That's what we'll be thinking about today in various aspects. We will dip into history; we'll look at the presence; we'll think about the future.

So, the panel today is, going from right to left: [Mark Freiman](#) is a board member of the UJE, who are one of the co-organizers of this event. To my left is Professor [Yaroslav Hrytsak](#) of the [Ukrainian Catholic University](#), who also taught at Harvard and Columbia. On my far left is [Josef Zissels](#), who is currently the director of [VAAD](#), which is a civil society organization that brings together Jewish organizations and communities in Ukraine. He is also kind of a very important figure in Ukrainian history. He is a very, very famous dissident and spent six years in political camps in the Soviet Union, and we'll be dipping into that as well. I think we'll start with history though. We'll take a step back to try to somehow contextualize this very rich and difficult subject of Ukraine and Jews. Yaroslav, you're a historian, so I'm going to start with you. How can we talk at all about the idea of Ukrainian Jews, of Jewish self-identification in Ukraine? And you can start as early as you like, the medieval period or... Give us a little bit of context on this subject.

Yaroslav Hrytsak: Probably the best way to start is in the late medieval to early modern times. But not to complicate things too much, think about Ukraine in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. It [was] one of the territories which [had] the largest number of Jews in the world. Kyiv or probably Lviv, these two largest cities in Ukraine, had many more Jews in the nineteenth century than, say, New York, or Moscow, or Saint Petersburg, or even Vienna. Basically, the majority of Jews lived in this territory called Yiddish Land, a former Polish territory, and some large chunk was living in Ukraine. To put a long story short, there were many Jews in Ukraine, probably too many Jews in Ukraine, but there were no Ukrainian Jews. This has provided some kind of introduction to this research. So, basically, Ukrainian Jews as a kind of identity, as a kind of group is a very recent phenomenon. We may argue about when it started but at least in the nineteenth century. Since I'm a historian of this century, I can tell you confidently that there were some Jews who were speaking Ukrainian; there were some Jews who were marrying Ukrainians; there were some Jews who also died for the Ukrainians cause, but there were no Ukrainian Jews. And this is a kind of general tendency, especially in this region between Berlin and Moscow, in the territory with an extremely mixed population— ethnically, religiously, or in any terms. So, basically, the story is that you have mainly two groups, and each of the minority groups tended to support the ruling elites, which was very rational. So, Jews were not an exception in this case. You may have many Jews in Slovakia, but you don't have any Slovak Jews. You

have many Jews in Transylvania, but they are probably mostly Hungarian Jews, never Romanian Jews, and so on and so forth. This is basically the story.

When was the turning point? At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Most importantly and probably surprisingly, it comes with the emergence of [Zionism](#). There are two nationalisms: Ukrainian nationalism and new Zionism, which is kind of another version of nationalism in that region. And quite suddenly, they found a common language, and the common language was because they had a common enemy. In the Russian Empire, it was the Russian Empire, the imperial rule, and in the Polish territory, it was the Polish rule. It was still the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but for a variety of reasons we should explain, it was basically Polish rule.

For some reasons, for sure, Ukrainians are known for their anti-Semitism, and this is a long story to tell, but we should also take into account that Ukrainian anti-Semitism was no exception but, rather, a rule. In a sense, Polish anti-Semitism was much stronger than Ukrainian anti-Semitism. Therefore, it was quite natural for Jews, especially Zionists, to look for allies, and their natural allies were Ukrainians, who were also against the Poles or against the Russian Empire in this period.

To cut a long story short, just probably a kind of paradoxical thing that you probably know: Jews were not recognized as a nation logistically. They were either a religious group or an ethnic group but never as a nation, because a nation presumes some political rights and cultural rights. So, the first national group that demanded that the Jews were supposed to be recognized as a nation was Ukrainians. And they did it in the Austrian parliament. There [was] a clear statement in 1909; there [was] a Ukrainian deputy member of the Austrian Parliament who demanded that the Jews were supposed to be recognized officially as a separate nation with all the implied rights and all kinds of things.

So, basically, I'm saying that there was a long tradition of the Jewish-Ukrainian dialogue, reconciliation, rapport or whatever you [may call it]. This is one part of the story. The other part of the story is that, for sure, Jews were living in this territory and were a small minority; there was my middle man. Most Ukrainians were living in the villages; Jews were more educated and living in urban areas, etc. So, what I'm saying here is that you have a lot of ground for the animosities—social, ethnic, religious. If you look at Ukrainian proverbs or sayings of the time, you will clearly see that Jews in the popular understanding and consciousness were the absolute Other. There was nothing that local peasants could identify with in the Jews. And since peasants made up the majority of the population, ninety percent of the population, you can easily imagine the scale of anti-Semitism.

On the one hand, you have this kind of a very positive message, or record, of Ukrainian-Jewish relations [with] the elitist leaders [talking to] each other, and on the other hand, you have a society, mostly Ukrainian society, which is just not ready for this kind of dialogue,

which is not quite their perception. Therefore, Ukraine is known for a variety of reasons as a territory of stable anti-Semitism.

So, it is very hard to tell one story of Ukrainian-Jewish relations; there are several stories, and there is always the story of what will prevail. To put the story short, on the one hand, we have this history of Ukrainian-Jewish relations with an old tradition, which comes very close to Jews identifying with the Ukrainian cause but not becoming Ukrainian Jews. On the other hand, we have a long record of anti-Jewish violence, anti-Semitism starting with [Bohdan] [Khmelnysky](#) and linked with the Second World War, and this is a very painful long record. So, [there is need for] ideas about what to do and how to find a balance between these two stories.

I believe that a crucial point came after the Second World War, because after the Second World War this distinction between Ukrainians and Jews started to disappear. First of all, Ukrainians ceased to be a peasant nation and became very much an urban, educated nation. So, social distinctions disappeared. On the other hand, both Ukrainians and especially Jews became secularized, so religious differences didn't play that much of a role, either. Also, because they found themselves in the Soviet Union, there was a lot of this dialogue between Ukrainian and Jewish dissidents, so there were many chances for this reconciliation.

But the turning point was the establishment of the Ukrainian state. Since Ukraine became independent, these tendencies started to work, because Jews are supposed to solidarize, to sympathize, and to find support for the ruling elite, and since the ruling elite becomes Ukrainian, by definition there was a chance for the emergence of Ukrainian Jews. But this is not an automatic process—this is just a possibility. This possibility was realized only with the second Maidan. I believe that the second Maidan was really a turning point, and I won't tell the story—I'll save the story for Josef to tell—but I believe still that the Second World War was a turning point.

I believe Peter was modest enough, because I do remember his article in the *London Review of Books*, which has a very interesting title "I'm Ukrainian." And many Jews at that time in Ukraine specifically discovered their Ukrainian identity, because suddenly this Ukrainian identity was quite different than the previous historical record of this anti-Semitism, of this kind of violence, all these kinds of things. Quite suddenly, the Ukrainian cause appeared very much attractive, very much liberal, very much pro-European, and with European values and identify. And this greatest kind of breeding ground for the emergence of the Ukrainian identity among the Jews.

We are still discussing whether the Ukrainian Maidan, the second Maidan, marks a turning point or point of no return in many senses. Unfortunately, we can't say that economic reforms get too far, or political reforms are very successful. So, we are still discussing whether we have the turning point in this kind of political and economic reform, but what I

believe the turning point in the Jewish Ukrainian identity has been already [passed]. So, there is no coming back. For the first time, we have this Ukrainian Jewish identity, and this is something we have to cherish, specifically Ukrainians.

Peter Pomerantsev: I'm just thinking what language I should ask you questions in. Are you going to speak Russian or Ukrainian? Which is more convenient to you?

Josef Zissels: We will now talk about identity...

Peter Pomerantsev: OK, then. Then I'll speak Russian to have a third language. But I don't want to send the translator mad, so I'll stick to English. Josef, I have to pick up on a point, though, that Yaroslav raised here. When you were in the Soviet political prisoner camps, which mixed obviously political prisoners and criminals, were there ethnic subgroups, like Jewish prisoners, and Ukrainian prisoners, and Russian ones? Or did you all just become one group of political prisoners?

Josef Zissels: Well, first of all, I want to say good evening and then thank the organizers for the opportunity of this discussion and also thank them for the invitation. I am very happy to participate. Mr. Hrytsak has left me almost nothing to add to the historical aspect, so I will not dwell on this. But I will say that the identity, the collective identity of the European Jews, has never been the same for a long time. It changed over time. It was modernized, just like other collective identities. To add to what Mr. Hrytsak said, the turning point was the French Revolution, because it was after the French Revolution that the identity of European Jews changed significantly. They began to see themselves as citizens; they became emancipated in Europe. And a strange formula emerged: a Frenchman of the Mosaic Law or a German of the Mosaic Law. It was the moment when civic political nations were formed and all the minorities that were in those states began to associate and identify themselves with the state. This was a state-oriented, civic approach to the nation. But because denominations and religions were different, it was a difference marker, an identification marker. This lasted a long time, and in the late nineteenth century the new, Zionist identity emerged, as Mr. Hrytsak described: the Jews no longer wanted to assimilate, acculturate, but they wanted to create their own state in order to continue to be Jews there.

Many different things happened, but there was some kind of ill fate in the relations between Ukrainians and Jews on the territory of Ukraine for many centuries, that is, a very strong negative aspect. Despite all the ties, joint work, cultural ties, and so on, there were terrible events in the seventeenth and eighteenth century: Bohdan Khmelnytsky's wars in the seventeenth century, the [Koliyivshchyna](#) uprising in the eighteenth century, [pogroms](#) in the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth century, then a civil war with its mass murder of Jews. Ordinary citizens, not researchers, had the impression that all attempts of Ukrainians to create their own state and implement a social or national process entailed big problems that were tragic for the Jews.

This changed, but only in 1991 when Ukraine became an independent state. For the first time, we see that the Ukrainians' attempt to create their own state is not only successful, there is no going back, and this is the main factor. The same thing happened with the attitude towards minorities, particularly the Jews. This is because, as my friend [Myroslav Marynovych](#), a well-known dissident and vice-rector of the Ukrainian Catholic University, says, Ukrainians now have a new image, a model of the future. Unlike colonial life in the Russian Empire, this new future has no place for anti-Semitism of the kind there was in the Russian Empire or in the Soviet era.

Unfortunately, the identity of Jews in Soviet times was subject to strong assimilation. But we must consider that before launching powerful assimilation and an offensive on religion and ethnic differences, the Soviet authorities destroyed all who resisted it, particularly the Jews who were against the Soviet authorities, and drove all others into emigration. Thus, only those who were able to adapt were left behind. And these included Ukrainians, Jews, and all others. The violence and lies in which the Soviet authorities operated forced them to adapt to that shameful social system called the Soviet Union. The Jews began to lose all that they had in the way of identity: all religious and historical roots, language, literature, etc. And so it continued until 1991.

In the years that I remember—1960s, 1970s, 1980s—fewer and fewer people spoke Yiddish, while just a handful knew Hebrew. Few knew history. I remember the story of the [Torah](#) a little bit because my father once told it to me in the 1950s, but there was no specifically Jewish education and upbringing in Soviet times. And so it was until the creation of an identity in which there were only two elements that I can single out: first, state anti-Semitism, which urged Jews to remain Jews, because they had no place to go from that. Second, the covert sympathy for the State of Israel which came into being in 1948. These two factors were the only ones that bound together Soviet Jews in that state.

There is even this anecdotal story. Peter asked, so I cannot resist. The traditional Australian Jewry in Australia is very similar to the British Jewry, which is only natural because in both cases their roots are from here. They have been watching the waves of Jewish emigration from all over the world to Australia over the past thirty years. And they distinguish three groups of Jews, of which two are not perceived as Jews at all. Of the third they say: "They are a little like us." I won't keep it secret: the Australian Jews do not perceive the Soviet Jews as Jews at all because the latter know almost nothing from their own history. I'm speaking about Soviet times, before 1991. Second, they do not accept Israel as Jews for Israel has a new Israeli identity, which is very different from the identity of both the British and American Jews. There is even a sociological [study](#) by [Charles S.] Liebman and [Steven M.] Cohen in the 1990s showing that these are two different identities, two different nations, even though both consider themselves Jews. Finally, there are the Jews of South Africa who went to Australia, and they are accepted. Thus, scholars see three types of Jewish identity in the world today: Western European, which includes American, Canadian, and Australian

Jewish identity; Eastern European (Eastern Europe and former USSR republics); and Israeli identity.

It was only in 1991 that we had an opportunity to teach our children. We started opening schools, teaching, restoring traditions, rebuilding synagogues. All of this was being done in an independent Ukraine. I can't say the state helped us a lot, but it didn't hinder us, either. Since the 1980s, after my release, I have been involved in the restoration of Jewish life. We have implemented everything for which we had enough money, energy, and professionalism. And no one has been hindering us.

To me, the turning points are the Maidans. Why? In fact, they are not turning points. The thing is that identity evolves gradually. His Beatitude [Lubomyr Husar](#), Cardinal of the Greek Catholic Church, said: "Let people grow in freedom." Since 1991, both Ukrainians and the minorities, including Jews, have lived in freedom in Ukraine, shaping their lives on their own. This is a very important factor. This is what changed identity. The accumulation of these new features of identity resulted in the Jews taking part in the Maidan in 2004. But there were not many of them. In 2013, there were more of them. Thus, I came up with this formula: Soviet Jews, Jews of Ukraine in the interim years, in the 1990s, and Ukrainian Jews, whose numbers are growing and whose proportion will increase with time. This is the modernization of this political nation. What unites them with Ukrainians? Together, they are building a state, a political nation, and this joint work is what binds them together. At the same time, in society there are Soviet Jews and the Jews of Ukraine, who are still undecided, and Ukrainian Jews. I am closer to Ukrainian Crimean Tatars, who together with us are rebuilding Ukraine, democracy, and freedom than to those Jews who have remained Soviet, although we share ethnic and even religious traits. This is the story of the peculiar transformation of Jewish identity in Ukraine. Thank you.

Peter Pomerantsev: Mark, I wanted to say something that Josef touched on there. We get back into Ukraine. It is the question of diaspora through that charming anecdote about Australian Jews. Why are there no Ukrainian Jews in the diaspora? I mean Russian Jews, yes. Or even Soviet Jews? I have relatives in Brighton Beach, and there's a clear conception of Soviet Jews there.

Mark Freiman: Well, it's exactly what Professor Hrytsak was talking about. It's only recently that the idea of a Ukrainian polity actually became concrete in the world, so that there is a state to which people can owe allegiance. Prior to the establishment of a real Ukrainian state—because the Ukrainian SSR is not really a state, it's a figment on paper—there was no polity. There were Ukrainians in the sense of people who profess an ethnic Ukrainian nationality, but prior to the twentieth century they often called themselves Rusyns or Ruthenians rather than Ukrainians. There was no way that Jewish people would identify themselves as belonging to that nationality. As they emigrated to the diaspora, they would certainly not identify themselves with that ethnic group. So, there was no real way to establish that sort of national identity. If people did remember their homeland in terms of

Ukrainians, as you mentioned in your introduction, it would be to remember the pogroms or at least to remember a story about the pogroms. In terms of remembering who they are, I always say: if you go to North America, and I'm sure it's the case in Britain as well, and you ask Jewish people where their family comes from, the answer will be Poland or Russia. The reality is that over half of the people whom you asked that question really have ancestors who come from the territory of modern-day Ukraine. They either come from [Galicia](#) or they come from the [Pale of Settlement](#). Galicia was assimilated into Poland and the Pale of Settlement was ruled by Russia until after the Second World War. So, that's where the imagination of the diaspora still exists. Of course, our history is quite unique, because for linguistic reasons we're still back five hundred years ago with the [Commonwealth](#) of Poland and Lithuania, so people are either Galicians [Galician Jews] or [Litvaks](#).

Peter Pomerantsev: Hold on, so you're telling me that JFS, JW3, New London Synagogue, all these institutions where people think they're Russian or Polish Jews and they're actually Ukrainian Jews, actually most of North London are Ukrainian Jews? I'm not talking about [indistinct]. That's different.

Mark Freiman: They're Ukrainian Jews if you're going to look at a modern-day map. Of course, somebody who says he was born in [Munkatsch](#) would tell you: "That's ridiculous! Don't look at a modern-day map." Because somebody who had been born in Munkatsch at the turn of the century could within his lifetime be a citizen of Austria-Hungary, or, I guess, Russia, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, Slovak Republic, Hungary, who knows. You would know better, but at least five or six different countries. The map keeps moving, and people have to keep up with it. The Jews have to learn each language in succession in order to keep up with it.

Peter Pomerantsev: Yaroslav, coming back to the present day, is Ukraine an anti-Semitic country? What does the polling tell us, and how can we even try measuring this, because it's certainly something that creeps up in the media quite a lot?

Yaroslav Hrytsak: I think about how to answer this question. In a sense, yes, in the sense that every country is anti-Semitic. In this sense, yes. Most unfortunately, anti-Semitism is a global phenomenon, and whatever country you pick, so there is some kind of anti-Semitism. The real question is: To what extent is the country anti-Semitic? I would answer in this sense that Ukraine is increasingly less and less, and less and less, anti-Semitic. There are some objective measures like [indistinct] scale if you know what I mean. There's the scale that social scientists use that measures the distance to different ethnic groups, very certain groups, and also some groups like homosexuals, because they're even much more alienated as a group. So, let me put it this way: on this scale, Jews have the same positions [as] Poles and Canadians, which means neither positive nor negative, rather positive than negative. The most negative groups are Arabs, as strange as it sounds.

Peter Pomerantsev: Are there any Arabs in Ukraine?

Yaroslav Hrytsak: Exactly! Arabs are mixed with Muslims, and since Muslim is very much taken as a point of the anti-terrorism. To put it differently, let me finish this way: the most hated groups, or alienated groups, are Roma, Arabs, and homosexuals. The closest group are the Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians and Belarusians. That's it. The Jews are somewhere in the middle. In comparison with other countries, surprisingly as it sounds and looks, Ukraine has a very positive tendency in the sense that you can feel much closer to Jews than, say, Poland, than Poland and Russia as a country. You can google [Pew](#). This is a famous international sociological firm. It did this study recently [about] Ukraine and anti-Semitism and presents Ukraine in a very much attractive way. It doesn't mean to say that there's no anti-Semitism in Ukraine. There is anti-Semitism in Ukraine, but they have to locate who the anti-Semites are and what kind of rhetoric they use and for what purpose they use it, so to say. If I may end [with something like this]. If Ukraine would be a better-off country, if Ukraine would have better standards of life, more stability and there is no war, I believe that many Jews would consider this country as a potential place to live, because they are much more secure and much more comfortable [in Ukraine] than living in other countries. So, this will probably be the shortest answer to this question.

Peter Pomerantsev: I think it is the first time in recent memory that we see the entry of Jewish political figures very actively into the politics of the country. The prime minister is Jewish. How is that treated inside the political discourse by journalists, by the political establishments? Are they treated as Jewish politicians? How is this framed?

Josef Zissels: [Prime Minister] [Volodymyr Groysman](#) is perceived more as a manager and administrator than a politician. He is the prime minister, he is not in parliament, and he is not the president.

But I'd like to speak about something else. Perhaps, the only topic where I feel I'm almost a professional is precisely the question of monitoring and analyzing anti-Semitism. I have been doing this for the past thirty years. I have been building different networks since Soviet times, and these networks study this phenomenon in this territory. I also know the situation in the world, I even know the situation in the UK. I do not know how many of you present here know how many anti-Semitic incidents occur in Britain per year. Is there anyone who knows this? I know: six hundred, around six hundred.

Mr. Hrytsak is right in that anti-Semitism is everywhere. The question is: what kind of anti-Semitism? For example, since 1991, as I said, there has been no state anti-Semitism in Ukraine. There is not a single element in state policy that would be directed specifically against the Jews. The definition Europe has adopted for anti-Semitism necessarily involves the presence of hatred of the Jews in words or incidents. Thus, one needs to distinguish these things and understand that there is an international classification. It records certain

manifestations. There are European institutions that are dealing with this. In Western Europe, this is, above all, Germany: there are about two thousand anti-Semitic incidents per year there. What is called an anti-Semitic incident? This is either a physical assault on the grounds of hatred, anti-Semitism, or an act of vandalism against Jewish property, or a wall inscription, graffiti, swastikas, etc. on Jewish objects, perhaps private or communal property, on synagogues, etc. These are incidents. Besides hate crimes, there is also hate speech. They are recorded separately. And it is very unprofessional when all these things are lumped together and counted together. It is necessary to distinguish and compare the individual components.

We track these parameters very thoroughly. We have in our employ one of the best experts in Eastern Europe on monitoring and analyzing anti-Semitism—[Vyacheslav Likhachev](#). Each year, he issues a report. Here is one for 2017. The 2018 report is already ready. And we know how many incidents in Ukraine, how many cases of anti-Semitic vandalism in Ukraine, and you will not believe it: the numbers are much lower than in Western Europe, even lower than in the Czech Republic. There are around two hundred cases per year there. In 2017 and 2018, in Ukraine there was not a single attack on the grounds of anti-Semitism, no physical assault. I am telling you this responsibly. No expert in the world, neither from Canada, nor from the United States, can add a single incident to our monitoring figures. This is a very professional, responsible, and honest monitoring. We do not want to either diminish or exaggerate the manifestations of anti-Semitism in Ukraine.

As far as vandalism is concerned, there were 12 cases of anti-Semitic vandalism in Ukraine in 2018. The total is still 12, because there were no attacks. [Compare:] 12 and 600, 12 and 800 in France, 12 and 2,000 in Germany, 12 and 200 in the Czech Republic. That is the picture of anti-Semitism in Ukraine. It exists but at a very low level. And it is perhaps not so much about Ukraine but about various continental factors.

Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe is significantly different from anti-Semitism in Western Europe. In Western Europe, there are two powerful factors that determine anti-Semitism. First, it's the radical wing of the Islamic diaspora that produces the bulk of attacks, graffiti, and acts of vandalism. The second factor is more interesting: it is very fashionable in circles of the leftist liberal intelligentsia—hypertrophy of human rights violations. This gives rise to the anti-Israeli attitudes of these leftist circles. And you know that even in Britain now the Labour Party is opposed to Israel. Because of such supplanting, sublimation, anti-Israeli attitudes turn into anti-Semitism. We, the Jews, see these things the same way: to us, an anti-Israeli stance is an anti-Semitic stance. And we are in complete agreement on this. These two powerful factors—the liberal hypertrophied attitude and the radical Islamic extremism—are non-existent in eastern Europe. So, I disagree with Professor Hrytsak on one thing only: if the standard of living in Ukraine goes up, it will become attractive to migrants, especially from the Arabian East. The Islamic factor will emerge, which can also give us an increase in anti-Semitic incidents. The Ukrainian contribution is minimal, and I believe that this will continue to be the case.

Peter Pomerantsev: I've been tapped on my shoulder by various people; very briefly on the subjects. I do want us to move on, because our time is limited, and we have to cover one thousand years of history and at least five or six issues on the political spectrum. Mark?

Mark Freiman: I'm obviously here under false pretenses. The closest I ever got to serving time in prison was in 1967 when I naively drove a rented car across East Germany trying to cross into West Berlin in a rented car with "We stand by Israel" plastered across the windows and was invited to... I stepped into a room plastered with pictures of the Leipzig trade fair of 1953, and thought I was about to be shot. Although I did for a time teach at a university and I do, by accident, hold a PhD in English literature, which will not help me tonight. But I was for a time, again by accident and by a mistake, appointed Deputy Attorney General for the province of Ontario, so I know a little bit about hate literature and about the prosecution of hate literature.

I'd like to think about the concept of anti-Semitism slightly differently. It seems to me that we've been talking about the idea of a new Ukraine and the opening up of Ukrainian nationhood and a feeling of belonging in a way that, unfortunately, resembles the [indistinct] view of history, the inevitable triumph of liberalism. Jews traditionally have been attracted to a liberal opening and the idea of a pluralistic state, a meritocracy where everyone is accepted on the basis of their talents and not on the basis of who they are. That's one view, and that's our view of the new Ukraine.

Why is UJE in existence? To bring about a dialogue between Ukrainians and Jews based on a realistic view of their history and a view of a new Ukraine. That's one view. There's another view that is based on the very ethnic definitions that in the past, as Professor Hrytsak said, excluded Jews from the definition of Ukraine, just as it excluded Jews from the definition of who's a Czech, the definition of who's a Hungarian, the definition of who's a Bulgarian—all through that region. I'm not confident that the final struggle over what it means to be a Ukrainian has taken place yet. It's certainly all over the world that struggle is still taking place. To me, anti-Semitism in Ukraine is associated with an atavistic nationalism with the right-wing form of anti-Semitism, not the left-wing form that Mr. Zissels has rightly talked about, which is not present in Ukraine. But it is very much rooted in the Second World War and in the run-up to the Second World War, which nobody on the panel has talked about it. But Ukrainian anti-Semitism in its most virulent form, which I think still exists in some places and we have to talk about it realistically, is based on a warped anti-communism that identifies Jews with Judeo-Bolshevism and says that communism is Jewish. That has not disappeared yet, and that's one of the areas where one has to confront anti-Semitism and one has to continue the struggle.

Peter Pomerantsev: We're actually going to get into that for the meat of our discussion, but you raised an important point here, which is about Ukraine and to what extent it is

imagining its future as a political Ukrainian community or as an ethnic one. I mean, in my understanding, I've met personally, after Maidan on during the Maidan, I met people who advertised the idea of an ethnic Ukrainian state. They actually believed (they were from the [Right Sector](#)), and they believed that there was a Ukrainian chromosome that had developed there from Paleolithic times, because the people who live there had fought mammoths and they had a special hero experience which had been passed on. Their best friends were Russian Nazis, who also believed in a Russian chromosome. They wanted to bring together all the different fascist movements, la la la la. During the Maidan, we were incredibly alarmed by these people. Then they got under one percent in the elections. They had one glamorous guy who became a deputy. But how strong is this idea of an ethnic Ukrainian future in Ukrainian politics? Is it something we should be scared of? They've been writing so many articles about these people in the Western Jewish press that we kind of started getting scared of them. And then the election happens, and they're like: "Oh my God! We've been writing about freaks!"

Yaroslav Hrytsak: There is a danger, without a doubt, which is constant there. There's no denying. [I want to add to the question that was addressed to Josef.] There is recently a new topic, whatever you may say, in Ukrainian public discourse that Ukraine is ruled by Jews. They even call it worse: "Jewish yoke over Ukraine". And this is directly related to [Petro] [Poroshenko](#), the president, Groyzman, the prime minister, and several ministers who are of Jewish origin or are presumed to be of Jewish origin—and also [Yulia Tymoshenko](#), who is also believed to be a Jew, a typical Jew of Armenian origin. So, the story goes, and [it is run] by the Ukrainian nationalists of this exact milieu which Peter was referring to, that, actually, Ukraine is now ruled by the Jews, this kind of Semitic plot made by [George] Soros, [etc.]. So, there's a new topic there.

The irony is that all the main candidates for the next presidential elections, we have this in March, they're all either Jews or presumed to be Jews. This gives you an idea about the new reality in Ukraine, the importance of the Jewish issue, Jewish identity, and the emergence of this identity. This is the kind of story which is probably not quite serious but should be taken very seriously.

Also very important is another part of the story. This is exactly one of the [types of] rhetoric used very intensively and persistently by the leaders of the separatist Donbas. They believe they fight against Ukraine, they fight against Judeo-Masons [indistinct] by Soros, by Rothschild, etc. They exactly use the example of Poroshenko as, supposedly, Waltzman, Groyzman, etc. Even though they hate each other, in many senses Ukraine's and Russia's nationalists are very similar, because they have a similar line of argument, because they believe that Ukraine is ruled by Jews. I would refer here to the point of Likhachev, which, I believe, is the perfect expert and this is what Josef Zissels was referring to. He made this very important point that even though we have this kind of phenomenon in Ukraine, we have it everywhere in this region, without a doubt. [It would be a] wonder if [there wouldn't be] such a phenomenon in this country, given the history and the political circumstances.

There is a one crucial difference between a Ukrainian nationalist, a Russian nationalist, a Polish nationalist, a Hungarian nationalist, etc.: they never get more than one percent of the votes, and this is, I believe, a crucial difference. [indistinct] They could always get more [votes], but the real state nowadays is that they have this kind of a very marginal position. Most likely, not most likely—definitely, they will have no chance in the presidential elections. [indistinct] They will not even get more than ten percent, less than that. They have some chance in the parliamentary elections. Let's wait and see. But even so I would say their chances are not [high]. If I may conclude [with something like this]. We have a lot of verbal anti-Semitism, verbal violence but not physical violence or political violence. I believe this trend is rather stable, and the trend is still less and less ethnic and more and more [toward a] civic nation.

Peter Pomerantsev: I want to move on because, you know, this is a potential problem but overall if we look at the movement in historical context, it's clearly positive. But where it does get interesting and a mainstream debate is how a country, a new country like Ukraine, still tries to make sense of its history. And its histories are deeply fractured in a sense. I don't want to drag people into sort of more complex and occult bits of this debate. It's a very virulent debate in Ukraine and among people who are experts on Ukraine. I'm oversimplifying here: one person's Ukrainian freedom fighter during the Second World War is another person's anti-Semite who wants to clear Ukraine of Jews or who wants an ethnically pure Ukraine. I mean, I think we have very similar problems in our history here. Certainly, in all our history and how we think about Northern Ireland; we have this problem all the time. Are [Sinn Féin](#) heroes, or are they just terrorists? And virtually all national liberation movements, I think, anywhere in the world have this paradox. In Britain, of course, we have the much deeper paradox that we've never dealt with: how do we deal with our colonial history? How do we teach history in a classroom where there are Indian kids and English kids who oppressed the Indian kids' grandparents? Largely, we just don't talk about it. So, how is Ukraine dealing with this? Because there is a wave of statues going up and so sometimes they see posts going: "Oh my God!" You know, a statue has gone up to someone who was genuinely a Ukrainian freedom fighter, but you then look at their statements about Jews, and they're pretty appalling. So, how do we even approach this? I think we should embrace the issue in its complexity, because I think it doesn't help to whitewash it either way. Yaroslav, even on the level of tuition in schools, and what sort of universities and in schools, and in terms of national memory, how is this playing out and what could be the way forward?

Yaroslav Hrytsak: Ukraine's situation is hardly unique. You could hardly find a country which is not divided on many issues of its own history. Ukraine is probably more divided as a country, but still there are some points which unite the country. Therefore, the historical narrative is built around this kind of figure that could unite the country, so to say. Definitely, there are historical figures [before the] twentieth century like Kyiv [an prince], Khmelnytsky, by the way; the national poet [Taras] [Shevchenko](#), who is very much like the

Russian [Alexander] [Pushkin](#) and Polish Adam [Mickiewicz](#); historical or sports figures; rock figures, etc. They are there. Therefore, you could build some kind of narrative, but there is one thing that I believe is very important here. Once you bring [up] the issue of this national fighter, you immediately get a dividing effect. If you want to see Ukrainians divided, start talking about [Stepan] [Bandera](#).

Peter Pomerantsev: Do we know who Bandera is? For the non-Ukrainian experts, Bandera was one of the leaders of the Ukrainian national movement, first against the Nazis, then against the Soviets. By 1941, he was in a German concentration camp, but interestingly, he then became a kind of figure of adoration by some Ukrainian nationalists, a sort of a bogeyman in Soviet propaganda, and now increasingly one of these very divisive nationalists.

Yaroslav Hrytsak: There is hardly a Ukrainian figure that has got [more] international fame recently than Bandera. This figure is discussed in Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Germany, Israel, and North America. [indistinct] He didn't kill him [a Polish official] himself because he was in concentration camps, but the movement which bears his name, *banderivtsi*, did kind of very [many] atrocities which could be probably even said [to be] a genocide against the Poles. There are many, many records. So, the point is, if you want to see Ukrainians divided, start talking about Bandera. There [will be] differences that could be hardly reconciled. This is true, and this is the problem which we're dealing with.

But if you want to see Ukrainians united, start talking about [Joseph] [Stalin](#). Suddenly, Stalin unites Ukraine as an antihero. This has an explanation because nowadays more and more the symbol of the famine, of the Holodomor, becomes increasingly important. Since many Ukrainian families have this memory as a personal memory, which was forbidden in the Soviet Union, now this is [official] historical memory which resonates with the personal stories. Russians see Stalin as a nation builder, as one who raised Russia from a benign state to a world power, who fought against Nazis, and all these kinds of things. [No] such meanings are [there] in the Ukrainian case, because in the Ukrainian case Stalin is always [associated with] the fight with the famine and with the repressions.

So, I'm saying here, without a doubt there are dividing things, but there are some things which are uniting there. How could [they] be reconciled? What I'm trying to say here is an important point. Ukraine has many problems. [One] problem is reconciliation with Jews. [Another] problem is reconciliation with Poles. But believe me, they have many more problems with reconciliation between themselves. The major problem in Ukraine is Ukrainian reconciliation, especially nowadays since Ukraine has become a civic nation. So, my answer would be: since the Ukrainian situation is not unique, there were several recipes [about] how to reconcile these kinds of narratives. I won't go that far, because there is a lot of literature about these things. But first of all, you should say history clearly and describe the fact clearly and say: yes, Bandera was a hero, but he is responsible for many atrocities, these kinds of things. So, this is basically the most responsible answer to this question. And

this is what liberal historians say, basically. The message here [is] we should accept Bandera; we could not neglect Bandera. Let's face it, he was a hero in a sense that many heroes are very close to bandits because the difference is very slim, so to say. We know the story. But let's face it: he was a hero, but he was responsible. And this must be said clearly. But the other story is: if you want to have this kind of reconciliation, don't talk big stories, don't talk ideologies. Talk simple stories, stories [of] the people from below, the complicated stories, how they managed to survive, how they betrayed each other, how they helped each other, because this is the most important point of reconciliation. It's not unique, again. It has been [done]—everything. [This] helps Ukraine nowadays, because Ukraine is nowadays in the war, and people know a complicated story. Since they know their own complicated story, they could resonate with the story of the past. The [indistinct] was that much simple.

I'm not saying Ukrainians are doing that only. There's one thing about Ukraine, an important thing, and it's very good of Ukraine: there is no single narrative. There's no dominant narrative. It's a beauty of the country. There is no monopoly. There are several narratives, some of them competing with each other, some that could be consistent with each other. So, actually teachers could pick whatever [they want]. Basically, what I'm saying here is that there are some attempts to write good historical books along these lines. Will they be successful? I don't know, but at least we have to give them a try and credit to society so that this might work.

Peter Pomerantsev: Josef, you worked with this very closely both in your communication with other minorities and with, you know, the Ukrainian authorities. How do you see this coming together? Do you think Ukraine will be able to have these sorts of competing narratives at the same time?

Josef Zissels: I have already told you about real anti-Semitism. But in addition to real anti-Semitism, there is mythical anti-Semitism. There are many myths and legends that are today united by, above all, Russian propaganda. Mr. Hrytsak has spoken about one of the branches of this Russian propaganda according to which the Jews have seized power in Ukraine, and this is a [Mason](#) plot and a threat. This propaganda targets the young generation. But there is another branch, a more powerful one [which says]: fascists have come to power in Ukraine, ultranationalists who are a threat to everyone and everything—democracy, Jews, and all other ethnic minorities.

One needs to distinguish myths and the reality. The heroization of collaborationists or the heroization of executioners is one of the myths, which has virtually no reality to support it. To me as a Ukrainian Jew, things are very simple here: an armed person who robs, rapes, and kills is a criminal. And there is no statute of limitations on this, and this person should be prosecuted even eighty years later, because he used weapons against a peaceful population. At the same time, a person who, with weapons in their arms, defends their family, home, village, and state against foreign invaders is a defender and, rather, a hero.

And these things need to be distinguished. I say: neither [Roman] [Shukhevych](#), nor Bandera are my personal heroes, because I am a Jew and have ancestral memory. But I understand why they are heroes to half of Ukrainians: they died for Ukraine's independence. And this is already sufficient. I don't think that there are people in Ukraine, in that half, who glorify these heroes for allegedly killing Jews or treating Jews badly. Nobody thinks about that at all. They died for Ukraine, and this is sufficient.

What unites us is not heroes, I agree with Mr. Hrytsak. What unites us with Ukrainians and others is our common future where there is democracy, independence from the new Russian empire, and where there is no anti-Semitism and xenophobia, and where there is sustained economic growth. This is what unites us with all the minorities and the majority of Ukrainians, even though Ukraine is divided—not along ethnic lines but rather between East and West, between Eurasia and Europe. What is now going on in the Donbas [is that] members of various ethnic groups are fighting—there are both Russians and Jews fighting on the Ukrainian side. Just like in the Maidan, first an Armenian died, then a Belarusian, and there were three people of Jewish origin in the [Heavenly Hundred](#). This is what unites us—Ukraine's common future.

Now, pro-Russian people are in each ethnic group—Ukrainian, Jewish, and any other. But this is our past. The Heavenly Hundred has drawn a dividing line in Ukrainian history, a point of no return. It's the line that separates the past from the future, the authoritarian from the democratic. And I hope it's all behind us.

I know about 2,500 Ukrainians who saved Jewish lives during the Holocaust. I want to [live] in a Ukraine where there are the descendants of these people rather than the descendants of the villains who helped give up and kill Jews.

Peter Pomerantsev: I'm quite keen to get into questions because we have until nine o'clock. Is that right? Is that my time frame? Do you have something? I don't want to censor. Are there any questions? If not, I'll ask them, but maybe some people have some. Why don't we take them in bunches? Don't be scared. Hey, let's move from the back down. There is one right at the back and then we'll take two or three going down. Just wait for the microphone to come to you, and if you could very briefly introduce yourself.

Peter Pomerantsev: Let's start tackling those [questions]. How many Jews are there in Ukraine actually? That's a question for Josef, I think. And are the Austro-Hungarian Jews different to the rest, I guess? I'm not sure the Austro-Hungarian Jews are [there] really.

Josef Zissels: And who asked that question? Tell me how many Jews there are in the UK, and I will tell you how many Jews there are in Ukraine. Look, there are at least three definitions according to which demographers count Jews. The first one is the census. If we had a census today in Ukraine, around 70,000 Ukrainian citizens would call themselves Jews. The second definition is the religious one, the [Halakhic](#) one: whose mother is Jewish

or who has converted to Judaism as a religion. If we count these people, there'll be 150,000 of them. There is the Israeli "Law of Return" according to which a person can go to Israel and receive Israeli citizenship. There are 350,000 people like that in Ukraine today. I don't know if I have answered your question.

Peter Pomerantsev: There was the second part of the question: is Jewish identity different in the West and East?

Josef Zissels: When I spoke about identity, I tried to say that the identity of an ethnic minority is very much dependent on the identity of the surrounding society. To a certain extent, the minority follows the development of the identity of the bigger society. Ukrainians in western Ukraine are somewhat different than in eastern Ukraine, thus the Jews are different as well. With some simplification, the Jews in western Ukraine are more Ukrainian than the Jews in eastern Ukraine.

Let me also remark on whether *Ukrainian Jew* is an incorrect name. This is an accepted name. There are British Jews, French Jews, German Jews, Hungarian Jews, Romanian Jews, and now there are Ukrainian Jews. This is a result of the development of identity over the past two hundred years. The more Ukraine becomes a European country, even though it still has a long way to go, the more Ukrainian Jews, specifically, it will have.

Peter Pomerantsev: Josef, while we have you, who is going to win the presidential elections?

Josef Zissels: I am no political scientist, but that is not what is important to me. What is important to me is that whoever becomes President of Ukraine out of the five leading candidates, I am sure, and this is my subjective conviction, no one will be able to throw Ukraine back to the new Russian empire. Even if it is a more pro-Russian candidate, every president will have the nightmare of the Maidan hanging over their head. Twice in the past fifteen years, attempts to bring Ukraine back to the East clashed with the new Ukrainian identity which led millions of people to the Maidans. This kind of passion can topple anyone. If it overthrew [Viktor] [Yanukovich](#), it will topple anyone who will try to take us back into the past, into an authoritarian system, and into the Russian empire.

Peter Pomerantsev: Mark, this question of a new ideological anti-Semitism emerging. You mentioned the idea of sort of an ethnic nationalist one, which would obviously have a potential, very strong anti-Semitic turn. What are the other ways in which anti-Semitism could return into the mainstream of political discourse?

Mark Freiman: I don't think liberal anti-Semitism has a chance in Ukraine. By any means, it will be the atavistic anti-Semitism that, as Russian propaganda will tell you, has already taken place and is already there.

Peter Pomerantsev: What about anti-capitalist populism? There're more problems; the economy crashing much worse; the elites are all Jews; I mean that kind of stereotype.

Mark Freiman: I think that is a great danger, but I think it's the same danger that we face throughout Europe and throughout North America. We're seeing it. We all assume, naively I think, that it's what [Francis Fukuyama](#) said: we've come to the end of history. The world has unfolded the way it should, and we've come to liberal democracy as the final stage in the evolution of our politics, and we'll live happily ever after. But the twenty-first century is showing us that that's not necessarily the case, and we have to fight for liberal democracy if we believe in it. We are very much in a situation in most Western democracies where these sorts of forces are there to be exploited by unscrupulous politicians who should know better. I think, from what I've seen, and again I'm here under false pretenses—I'm no expert in any of these areas—but anecdotally and from what I've experienced, there's a lot of this going around. And I hear all the same things that Professor Hrytsak talks about. I hear about the “Jewish yoke.” People in the areas that I go to assume I don't understand any Ukrainian, so they feel free to say whatever is on their mind to my face, which is kind of a privilege that I have. So, I hear a lot of things and, again, I do not believe Ukraine is anti-Semitic. I do not believe Ukrainians are anti-Semitic, but I do believe that there is a subterranean anti-Semitism in a lot of places, and I do believe that it's ripe for exploitation, and that there are people who are willing to exploit it.

Peter Pomerantsev: Josef, sorry, you wanted to say something.

Josef Zissels: We are following all right-wing radical groups in Ukraine very carefully and very thoroughly. All of them are, without exception, marginal. None of them is represented in parliament, in contrast to Western Europe where many right-wing radical parties are in parliaments. I believe that our civic society to a larger extent and our state to a lesser extent control the situation with the activity of the right-wing radical groups. I can give you their names, but I'm sure you have never heard of any of them. Only specialists have good knowledge of them.

In the 2014 presidential elections, there were two right-wing candidates: [Oleh Tiahnybok](#) from the [Svoboda Party](#) and [Dmytro Yarosh](#) from the Right Sector which has been mentioned. Together, they garnered less than 2%, while one Jewish candidate, Rabinovich, got more votes, 2.25%, than the two of them. What are we talking about? Right-wing radicals are there, but their influence is minuscule. They are not the mainstream of Ukrainian political life. When they try to scare me with right-wing radicals, I say: “I'm not afraid of them.” I'm afraid of populists. According to opinion polls, one-third of Ukrainians can vote for populists, and this is a bigger threat to Ukraine than the right-wing radicals. Moreover, right-wing radicals are now focused, perhaps temporarily, on one enemy, Russia. And even leftist political scientists, such as [Andreas Umland](#), a German political scientist, believe that this is for a reason, because Russia is waging an aggressive war against Ukraine. All right-wing radicals we know do not engage in anti-Semitic propaganda.

This may be temporary; perhaps they are capable of loading their ideology with it, just like the case in Western Europe. However, I would not place great weight by an ideology, especially in our part of the world, in Ukraine, where political life is not ideology-based. It's just a fight between groups with corporate interests.

Peter Pomerantsev: There's also a question about energy which I don't think any of us is actually qualified to answer, but if somebody wants to, I'd be happy to. It's a super important question, and I know there's a lot of drive to, you know, change energy consumption in Ukraine. I just don't know anything about it. I'm not sure anyone here does. Should we take some more questions? I'm just trying to stick to this Ukrainian-Jewish theme that is dedicated to this evening? This time we'll go from the bottom up. Is that easier for you bottom down? You don't mind? Sorry, I'm making you run around.

Peter Pomerantsev: I'm going to take three or four of those [questions] and put them into one. How is the Holocaust and the question of local collaboration—I mean Ukraine was occupied for virtually the whole of the Second World War—taught in schools? How is it faced up to? It's not just an issue in Ukraine. It's an issue in all the countries that were caught in the middle during the Second World War. Certainly, a very big theme in the Baltic States. How is this being tackled just on the level of basic education?

Yaroslav Hrytsak: There is a recent episode. Two scholars from Lviv, which is in western Ukraine and supposed to be the most nationalist part of the country, wrote a textbook for kids in the school in which they clearly stated that Shukhevych, the one who was close to Bandera, was a collaborationist. This [triggered] a scandal, mostly from the nationalist part of our political spectrum which tried to bring these young scholars, historians, to responsibility in some sense. What happened there? It's just an illustration. It raised huge resistance from the community of historians which [signed] letters of support [to say] that there is no way for politicians to interfere into history and the teaching of history. And those historians were right, because Ukraine is basically a free country, and so far as they are professional enough, they are willing to write whatever they will. This is just an illustration.

I don't know for how many years, but for a long time, the Holocaust is a part of the regular [curriculum] in the schools. It has been accepted on the government level and is supported by some international documents and protocols. This is not even discussed, so to say. The other problem is to tackle the responsibility of Ukrainian nationalists. Some of the texts do [the] responsible [thing]; most of them do not, so to say. But still, there is something there. I believe this is your question about Stalin and Bandera. There is a presumption that history and historical memory [are] the same. [They are] not the same, because getting history wrong is a part of being a nation. If history would be getting right, there'd be no nation, so to say. This assumption means that a nation has to have a wrong history and has to have a hero in this sense. So, when I'm talking about Bandera, it is not to say that we're talking about the real Bandera. It's the way it is presented for very political purposes,

specifically in a country which is waging a war against Russia. Presumably, hypothetically, if Ukraine were waging a war against Hitler, most likely Stalin would be a hero in Ukraine as well. [indistinct] So, the point is, and this is, again, about ambivalence. (How come?) Basically, ambivalence is a very natural state of the social consciousness of many Ukrainians. Given good historical data, many Ukrainians who support, who see Bandera as their hero simultaneously see Peter the Great as their hero as well. How come? This is exactly ambivalence. Not Stalin; Stalin is mutually exclusive, but [Peter the Great](#) and Bandera work together very well. Because this is some state of the society which went under trauma, deep trauma. This is a kind of ambivalence that people can reconcile the things which historians or educators cannot reconcile, but people in the street can easily do. Talking about anti-Semitism which Harold raised, without a doubt, there's no denying this fact. Anti-Semitism is a very multilateral phenomenon, one with many faces. It is better to speak about the plural anti-Semitisms, rather than anti-Semitism. This kind of anti-Semitism that Harold described, yes, it exists, very well. But the difference is [that] you could hardly find this anti-Semitism on the level of public discussions on politicians, so to say, very rarely. There [are no] political leaders who dare to produce the kind of anti-Semitic arguments in political discourse, so to say. This is, I believe, the crucial difference. This crucial difference that says something very important about Ukraine.

Peter Pomerantsev: I do want you to touch very briefly, we're running out time, but this question: What was the Soviet Ukrainian Jewish experience? I mean, were there rightists who tried to find a way through it? Was it culturally expressed?

Yaroslav Hrytsak: For a very short period in the 1920s, only in the 1920s, there were some examples exactly of Ukrainian Jewish identity. There were some writers like [Ivan Kulyk](#). They are not known nowadays. In the 1920s, when the Soviet Ukraine emerged, and many believed this was not just Soviet Ukraine but the real Ukraine, there were some groups of Ukrainian Jewish intellectuals who identified themselves with Ukraine. This is a long story, much forgotten, and most of these people perished and were killed by Stalin in the 1930s. So, now this story has to be rewritten.

Peter Pomerantsev: Josef, the last word.

Josef Zissels: If I may...

Peter Pomerantsev: I'll give you six, no, I'll give you a minute.

Josef Zissels: If I only have a minute, it's going to be just the highlights. In the past years, there has been state support for memory policy, in particular the memory of Holocaust victims. There is no time left for me to speak about this; I could talk for an hour. You say that it is a very narrow approach to calculate percentages. But in addition to percentages, we count anti-Semitic incidents. We have figures from opinion polls. I had no time to present them, but if you are interested, I can show them to you later. We do more than

count how many nationalists have failed in parliamentary elections. Jews make up 0.5% of the population in the country, while their share in parliament is more than 10%. Or this, too, is not evidence for you that we have a low level of anti-Semitism? This is like faith. You either have it or you don't. I have been studying this for thirty years, and I assure you that Ukraine now has much less anti-Semitism than before. The peak was in 2007-2008; we do not have state anti-Semitism, and we have much less anti-Semitism than in Western Europe.

Collaboration is a very complicated issue. I am from [Bukovina](#). In 1940, Bukovina was captured by the Soviet Union. It had never been Russian prior to that, never. That was an annexation. And there were Ukrainians, Romanians, and Jews who cooperated with the Soviet repressive authorities. Were they collaborationists? Or do you count only those who collaborated with the Germans? If so, this is double-entry bookkeeping. If you count collaborationists, then you must count both types, or consider whether we designate them correctly.

Is there a future for Jews in Ukraine? If Ukraine becomes, as we expect, a European country some time, in many years, they will have the same kind of future that the Jews in all of Europe have. If, God forbid, Ukraine turns into an authoritarian country, the number of Jews there will, of course, sharply decline through emigration. Do you know that, in the past years, Jewish emigration from France to Israel is higher than that from the Donbas where there is a war going on? That's it.

The identity of Ukrainian Jews is what our discussion with Mr. Hrytsak is about. I believe that such an identity as that of a British Jew, French Jew, or Ukrainian Jew is only possible in a free, independent country and, preferably, a democratic one. There were examples in the past; there were cultural ties. I have read poets who wrote in Ukrainian, but I say that I distinguish between Soviet Jews, the Jews of Ukraine, and Ukrainian Jews, in that succession, I mean Ukrainian Jews after 1991. They identify themselves with Ukraine, even though their identity is Jewish. They speak Ukrainian and know Ukrainian literature and history. Together with others, they are building the future of Ukraine. This is what being a Ukrainian Jew means to me.

Peter Pomerantsev: Okay, we didn't get into the subject I wanted to, which is the influence of what I think is Ukrainian folk culture and literature on [Hasidic literature](#). I consider the Hasidic authors Ukrainian authors writing in the tradition of [Mykola/Nikolai] [Gogol](#) and [Mikhail] [Bulgakov](#), whom I consider Ukrainian authors. But we're not going to do that today. That's going to be a whole different session. Okay, thank you so much and thank you so much for staying later as well.