

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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House of Commons Written Answer

Hate Crime: West Midlands

Emma Reynolds (Labour) [146848] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment he has made of the reasons for the 12 per cent rise in recorded hate crimes in the West Midlands in the last year, and if he will make a statement.

Victoria Atkins: It is for Police and Crime Commissioners, with their Chief Constables, to consider hate crime trends for their local areas.

In England and Wales, the most recently published statistics on police recorded hate crime, for 2016/17, showed that there were 80,393 offences recorded by the police in which one or more hate crime strands were deemed to be a motivating factor. This was an increase of 29% compared with the 62,518 hate crimes recorded in 2015/16.

The 29% increase is thought to reflect both a genuine rise in hate crime around the time of the EU Referendum and Westminster Bridge terrorist attack alongside improved identification of hate crime by the police, willingness of victims to come forward and an overall improvement in how police now record crime.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-22/146848/>

TOP

Holocaust

Westminster Hall Debate

Polish Anti-defamation Law

col 33WH **Alex Sobel (Labour Co-op):** ... This debate takes place in the context of the fact that the Polish President signed the Bill into law while also referring it to the Polish constitutional tribunal for review. I am pleased that the Polish prosecutor general has issued a legal opinion stating that in part the law is unconstitutional ...

It is only appropriate to start this debate by paying tribute to the thousands of Poles who

helped the Jews during the second world war ... The righteous among the nations are a group of non-Jewish people who have been recognised for their great sacrifices and bravery in helping Jewish people during the holocaust. The title is awarded by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, and Poles constitute the largest national group of the righteous, with 6,706 people listed. We must remember that the punishment awaiting those who provided any kind of help to Jews was death for them and their entire family. At liberation, around 50,000 Jewish survivors were on Polish soil. It is estimated that about 30,000 to 35,000 Jews, only about 10% of Poland's Jews, survived, and around 1% of all Polish Jewry was saved with the help of Poles and thanks to the devotion of the righteous among the nations. ...

Poland was the only occupied country to set up a committee to aid Jews, Żegota, which provided food, shelter, medical care, money and false documents to Jews. ...

col 34WH However, I return to the law passed on 26 January by the Polish Parliament and signed into law by the Polish President in early February. The fact that the President referred the law to the constitutional tribunal for review has not stopped the first case being brought. If nothing else, the nature of this case needs to make us stop and think about the nature of the law and its potentially far-reaching consequences, not just in Poland but globally. ...

The lawsuit focuses specifically on a photograph that accompanied an article about the 1941 massacre of Jews in the Polish village of Jedwabne. The Polish League Against Defamation claims that *Página/12* was being “manipulative”, as the image is of four Polish anti-communist fighters in 1950, while the article is about the 1941 pogrom while Poland was under Nazi occupation, and that by linking the two events the publication was “harming...the reputation of Polish soldiers”, and trying to make Poland appear anti-Semitic. ...

col 35WH Although the article was published in December, before the law took effect, and may not be admissible, it clearly shows the dangers the law could pose. ...

When laws are passed that are regressive in nature, they have a wider societal effect than just the intended function of the law. ...

My fears have already been realised, as can be seen from the actions of thousands of individuals against the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum. The staff were subjected to a wave of, in their own words, “hate, fake news and manipulations”. ...

Protesters have also been targeting the museum's guides. They claim that the guides are trained to promote “foreign narratives” and that only Polish people should be allowed to work as museum guides. Videos of protesters, including convicted anti-Semite and local politician Piotr Rybak, harassing guides during the tours have been posted online. In March, the home of an Italian guide was vandalised with graffiti on his door that said “Poland for the Poles” and graffiti equating the Star of David with a Nazi swastika, with “Auschwitz for Poland guides!” daubed on an adjoining wall. ...

After my letter to the Foreign Secretary and after applying for the debate, I have not been immune from such abuse ... I will read one example. I apologise in advance for its language and its anti-Semitism, which is some of the worst I have ever seen. I want to be very clear that I am quoting; these are not my words. It says: “You Talmudic piece of shit...Fuck off—leave Poland alone. Keep your Talmudic noses out of Polish affairs, Satan's Brood. The Synagogue of Satan will go down in flames”.

col 36WH Another email had pages and pages of graphically anti-Semitic images. On Twitter, I received this comment: “People like you are the very reason we have the need for this legislation. Jewish Amnesia Syndrome is back. Denying there were Jewish perpetrators is after all denying one Holocaust Narrative.” ...

col 37WH **Daniel Kawczynski (Conservative):** ... Jan Kawczynski, the brother of my grandfather, knew ... that Poland was the only country in occupied Europe where helping Jewish people carried the death penalty, but he took that risk anyway ... and he hid various Jewish friends and neighbours on his estate in western Poland. ...

... although my family have been recognised, we are typical of so many different Polish

families who suffered as a result of helping their Jewish friends and neighbours. In actual fact, I have to say that the Polish underground resistance actually punished Poles who committed crimes against Jews. ...

col 38WH I have counted many occasions when the BBC has referred to “Polish death camps”. Think to yourselves for a moment how you would feel as a Pole about a reference to something as a “Polish death camp”. There is no such thing as a Polish death camp. They were concentration camps set up by Germans in German-occupied Poland; they were run by Germans, maintained by Germans and initiated by Germans. ...

Germans invaded and persecuted Poles and Jews and killed millions. I want to say also that, as the Polish Prime Minister said very eloquently, “Arbeit macht frei” is not a Polish expression. ...

col 39WH **Gregory Campbell (DUP):** ... [Do you] agree that there needs to be clarity and certainty about what happened in the past and that what is currently happening in terms of anti-Semitic behaviour across the globe but particularly in western Europe needs to be highlighted? We need to get more information so that people can eliminate the perceptions and the paranoia that sometimes exist when talking about both Israel and Jewish activity; others seem to want to believe that there is a worldwide conspiracy, and the reality and the truth must be brought to bear on that perception. ...

col 40WH **Daniel Kawczynski:** ... We must never allow a situation to occur in which people are discriminated against because of their religion or background—but we see it happening again. We see the rise of anti-Semitism in certain countries, which is breathtaking. ...

Stephen Pound (Labour): ... The Act submitted to the Sejm on 26 January 2018 was not intended, nor can it be seen, as an act of anti-Semitism. It is an Act specifically to address a concern that is viscerally agonising for the Polish people—the constant repetition of that inaccurate, brutal, cruel phrase “Polish death camps” or “Polish extermination camps”. ...

col 41WH This process was not sought by the Polish Government or the Sejm. It was a reaction to a circumstance that seemed to be gathering in pressure and strength. Many are concerned, as my hon. Friend implied, that this legitimises and opens the door to anti-Semitism. In Poland, however, exactly the opposite applied. It was felt that the constant reference to Polish death camps opened the door to something even worse—reversionism, an attack on Polish history and an assault on the contributions that the Poles made. ...

col 42WH Look at what is happening nowadays in Warszawa and Kraków. There is a holocaust memorial museum and the complete rebuilding of the ghetto, where there are Jewish restaurants and a whole Jewish quarter. In fact, they do not use the word ghetto any more ... South of Kraków, at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the air falls still. In the forest there is no birdsong. Something so terrible happened there that the weight of history still presses down on those people who approach it. Something has sucked the energy out of the air. Visitors pass beneath that awful sign, which the hon. Gentleman referred to.

I hope that no one in the world thinks for a second that this was anything other than the planned, industrial and mechanised extermination of a people by the Nazis—not by the Poles. ...

Louise Ellman (Labour Co-op): ... [Do you] agree that, while it certainly untrue that the Nazi extermination camps were in any way Polish death camps, there are still graphic examples of Polish complicity in the atrocities that took place against Jewish people in Poland at that time? ...

Stephen Pound: ... I would need to see the evidence for what she says. I would also need to understand and be educated as to the realities of life under occupation—the second occupation, because Poland was occupied twice—and what it must have been like in those days. I am not aware of Polish complicity in Auschwitz-Birkenau, but I will not say that I know everything about the subject and I am more than happy to speak to

my colleague. I do know for certain that to try to tar the whole of the Polish nation with the brush of anti-Semitism on the basis of a few lunatics, a few foul anti-Semites and some obscene Twitter users is unfair, wrong, painful and hurtful to the Polish people. ...

col 43WH John Mann (Labour): ... When I visited eastern Poland with a Jewish family to look at their historical roots there, we visited the Jewish cemetery. ...

col 44WH There are plenty of people living in that village, but none of them are Jewish. That is not a surprise. There were 3 million Jewish Poles; there are now under 1,000. It is a thriving rural village, like many others in Poland, with a Jewish graveyard. ...

col 45WH We can all rewrite our history, sanitise our role in things and glorify what we were good at—the little bits. “Oh, we had the Kindertransport here. Weren’t we brilliant?” We let a few Jews slip in. What about the rest?

Well, that is what is going on in Poland—an attempt to rewrite history—and we should not accept that. Yes, it is true that the Poles did not run those camps—that is a fact—unlike in some neighbouring countries; but we can also look at the language. I keep reading and hearing about the 3 million Jews in Poland—the 3 million Poles; the 3 million of our citizens who were Jewish, who were murdered and lost everything. It is not a surprise that there is not much of an eyewitness record there compared with anywhere else, because few survived. It is harder for the dead to be eyewitnesses. ...

col 46WH I will end with a recent quotation from a radio reporter in Poland, Marcin Wolski of TVP2. What did he describe? He said, “Let’s rename the death camps. They’re not ‘Polish death camps’, they’re ‘Jewish death camps’.” He said that on Polish radio recently—because the Sonderkommando ran the death camps, we should therefore rename them “Jewish death camps”. Bring in this kind of law and that kind of racism and anti-Semitism is unleashed. ...

Louise Ellman: ... This is a time of great concern, because there is an increase in both holocaust denial and anti-Semitism right across Europe. Given that background, it is extremely concerning that legislation has been passed in a European country that could be seen as trying to stifle debate, discussion and research about the holocaust.

It is certainly true that Nazi death camps—Nazi camps of extermination—are not Polish death camps. That is clear; that is unambiguous. However, the legislation about which we are very concerned goes much wider than that and could make it illegal to discuss any Polish association with the extermination of Polish Jews. That extermination and persecution took place not only in those Nazi death camps—those Nazi camps of extermination. It also took place within Polish communities in civil society, and it is extremely wrong to try to shut down debate and knowledge about those activities. ...

The relationship between Jewish Poles and the wider Polish community is indeed very complex. At Yad Vashem, which I visited in Jerusalem only last week, 6,700 Polish people are recognised as righteous among the nations. They were Polish non-Jews who supported Jews in those terrible times, on many occasions risking their own lives. They are rightly recognised and honoured there.

col 47WH However, there is also a lot more in that complex history to be recognised—for example, the massacre at Jedwabne in 1941, when all but six of the town’s Jewish inhabitants were set upon by their non-Jewish neighbours and burnt alive in a barn. That was truly horrendous, and it was not an isolated occurrence. Before the Nazi extermination began, the Jewish communities in Poland were very strong. They were majorities in significant areas of Poland, yet today there is hardly a Jew left. ...

col 49WH Peter Grant (SNP): ... I find offensive any suggestion that the Polish Government, either directly or indirectly, collaborated with the Nazis, and I well understand why the people of Poland today find such suggestions greatly offensive. However, I am not convinced that criminalising the actions of a newspaper or a television programme is the right way to deal with that offence. ...

Stephen Pound: ... Holocaust denial is a crime in many parts of the world. Does he suggest that we should repeal all legislation on holocaust denial?

Peter Grant: Absolutely not. I was coming on to that. One of the first steps towards being

prepared to allow a repeat of the holocaust is to deny that it ever happened. We also must be careful about denying that it could have happened in other places. ...

It is a fact that Nazism was born and developed in Germany, but the holocaust was not a battle of nationalities; it was about an ideology of sheer evil that was able to spread across Europe so quickly because it had its proponents in many more countries than we might like to think. It was certainly born and brought up in Germany, but it could have been a child of almost any nation in Europe and, it must be said, it could have happened in the United Kingdom. There were periods in the United Kingdom's past when anti-Semitism had become so virulent that it would have been possible, if the right group of people had got together, for Nazism or something very like it to take hold. When I talk about the dangers of holocaust denial, I am talking not simply about the denial of a clear historical fact but about the denial of a clear acceptance that it could have happened in other places as well. ...

col 51WH **Khalid Mahmood (Labour):** ... My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) made the key point that there were 3.3 million Jewish people living in Poland who had property and assets. Most of the descendants of those Polish Jews now live in the United Kingdom. Clarification is still needed about the property that was originally taken by the Nazis and then nationalised by the Communist Government that followed. That issue has to be addressed if we are to address all the issues post-Nazi occupation. The law that the Polish Government have passed does not recognise the heritage of those people who live in the United Kingdom in relation to their families' assets and properties. In that respect, a resolution calling for restitution has been passed by 46 other nations and endorsed by the US and the European Parliament. That is important, because that resolution confirms the history of the Jewish people in Poland. ...

col 52WH On 12 March my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), the shadow Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, wrote to the Secretary of State to ask a significant question: what action have the Government taken to press for the restoration of property seized by the Nazis in Poland? To date, he has not replied. ...

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin): ... The Government understand how painful any false attribution of Poland's culpability in Nazi crimes may be, whether explicit or implicit. As we have heard from various hon. Members, some of the most infamous sites associated with the holocaust were located in what is now Polish territory. Many of us have visited Auschwitz-Birkenau with the Holocaust Educational Trust, a programme that we have recently expanded to include UK university campuses. ... it is a matter of historical fact that, of the more than 3 million Polish Jews living in Poland in 1939, fewer than 400,000 were still alive in 1945. It is also well known that many Polish citizens risked their lives to save them and the nearly 2 million non-Jewish victims of the Nazis. ...

col 53WH It is clear that the horror and pain of the holocaust are still deeply felt in Poland and around the world more than 70 years on. That is why the desire to reject any misleading attribution of Nazi crimes to the Polish nation or state is entirely understandable.

However, as the UK Government have made clear in our private discussions with our Polish partners, we believe there are risks to criminalising any aspect of free speech, because it is through debate and analysis that we enhance our understanding of any issue. Rather than risk closing down debate, our preferred approach is to preserve the collective memory of the holocaust and to use that knowledge to learn the lessons of history. ...

We face many more challenges in the future, including some that could threaten the liberty and security of our citizens in the UK and Poland. That is why it is so important that we encourage future generations to study and to remember the horrors of the holocaust. We must use the painful lessons of the past to teach us to avoid repeating the same tragedies in future. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-06-05/debates/51805DA8-4804-4BC9-AC26-FF8F34B5E63C/PolishAnti-DefamationLaw>

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Israel

House of Lords Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

The following two questions both received the same answer

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL8087] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about reports of Israeli soldiers shooting clearly marked medical personnel tending wounded Palestinians during the protests on 14 May.

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL8088] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about reports of Israeli soldiers shooting press representatives and children during the protests on 14 May.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK has repeatedly made clear to Israel our longstanding concerns about the manner in which the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) police non-violent protests and the border areas, including use of live ammunition. The Foreign Secretary raised the high number of casualties with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 16 May. We call directly on Israel to make clear its intentions and to carry out what must be a transparent inquiry into the IDF's conduct at the border fence, including demonstrating how this will achieve a sufficient level of independence.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-05-21/HL8087/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-05-21/HL8088/>

Arms Trade: Israel

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL8090] To ask Her Majesty's Government what categories of arms were sold to Israel in the last two years for which data are available; and whether they included sniper rifles or the component parts of sniper rifles.

Baroness Fairhead: Sales data by region for military exports are published annually on GOV.UK. at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-defence-and-security-export-figures-2016/uk-defence-and-security-export-statistics-for-2016>

The Government also publishes Official Statistics about export licences issued and refused (on a quarterly and annual basis) of licences granted and refused for military exports on GOV.UK. These reports contain detailed information on export licences issued, refused or revoked, by destination, including the overall value, type (e.g. Military, Other) and a summary of the items covered by these licences. These can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/strategic-export-controls-licensing-data>

The data, which includes export values for some licence types, currently provides details of licences up to 31 December 2017. Information about the period 1 January to 31 March 2018 will be published on 17 July 2018.

The Official Statistics show that over the last two years one licence was issued for four "sniper rifles" and "components for sniper rifles" for an Israeli defence

manufacturer to test ammunition.

All export licences are issued in strict accordance with the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-05-21/HL8090/>

Israel: Arms Trade

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL8091] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about the use of arms approved for sale to Israel.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The Government takes its defence exports responsibilities extremely seriously and operates some of the most robust export controls in the world. We assess all applications very carefully against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria and human rights and international humanitarian law considerations are important parts of that assessment. We continue to keep the situation under constant review. We have no information to suggest that UK supplied equipment has been used against protesters. While we do not question the right of Israel to defend its borders, the use of live fire and the resulting loss of life is deeply troubling.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-05-21/HL8091/>

Omar Shakir

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL8092] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about the deportation of Omar Shakir, Israel and Palestine Director, Human Rights Watch.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: It is ultimately up to Israel to determine its immigration policy. The UK's immigration policy is similarly protected. Nevertheless, we raised our concerns regarding this case with the Israeli authorities on 22 May.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-05-21/HL8092/>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Lords Written Answer

Syria: Armed Conflict

Baroness Deech (Crossbench) [HL8062] To ask Her Majesty's Government what estimate they have made of the number of civilian casualties arising from recent Syrian and Russian airstrikes on the Palestinian Yarmouk camp near Damascus.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are concerned by reports of civilian casualties in the Yarmouk Camp as a result of the Syrian regime offensive. The UK does not have an estimate for the number of civilian casualties.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-05-21/HL8062/>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

**** European Union (Withdrawal) Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/europeanunionwithdrawal.html>

Bill as amended in the Lords

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/lbill/2017-2019/0102/AsAmendedInLordsCMP.pdf>

Notice of amendments

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/2017-2019/0212/amend/eu_rm_ccla_0605.1-7.html

Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) (Amendment) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/holocaustreturnofculturalobjectsamendment.html>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/marriageact1949amendment.html>

Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/organdonationdeemedconsent.html>

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Consultations ** new or updated today

Measures to further improve the effectiveness of the fight against illegal content online (closing date 25 June 2018)

https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations/public-consultation-measures-further-improve-effectiveness-fight-against-illegal-content-online_en

Home Education (closing date 2 July 2018)

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-frameworks/home-education-call-for-evidence-and-revised-dfe-a/>

Ecclesiastical exemption and guidance on scheduled monuments (closing date 13 July 2018)

<https://beta.gov.wales/ecclesiastical-exemption-and-guidance-scheduled-monuments>

Antisemitism: Survey of European Jews (closing date not stated)

<http://www.eurojews.eu/>

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