

Ukrainian National Police official demands a list of Jews living in Kolomyya

By Jason Melanovski
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A high-ranking official in Ukraine's National Police made international news last week after it was revealed that he sent a letter to the head of the city's Jewish community demanding a list with the names and personal data of Jews residing in the western city of Kolomyya.

The letter, which was dated February 18, 2020, was signed by Myhaylo Bank, an officer in the national police force who handles organized crime. The contents of Bank's letter were made public on Twitter last week by Eduard Dolinsky, the director of the Ukrainian Jewish Committee. He described the letter as a "total disgrace and open anti-Semitism."

The letter reads: "Please provide us the following information regarding the Orthodox Jewish religious community of Kolomyya, namely: The organization's charter; list of members of the Jewish religious community, with indication of data, mobile phones and their places of residence."

Bank also requested the personal information concerning Jewish students studying in the region's universities. He attributed the request to a "fight against transnational and ethnically organized groups and criminal organizations."

In addition to targeting Kolomyya's Jewish community, Bank sent a letter to the representatives of ethnic Poles living in the city, demanding similar information.

Jacob Zalichker, the head of Kolomyya's Jewish community, declined to provide the requested information without a court-ordered warrant and ultimately shared the letter with Dolinsky, who initially thought it was a joke.

Far from a joke, the letter is further proof that far-right and racist elements openly operate within the US-backed Ukrainian state. Such elements have only

been strengthened since 2014, when they were employed by a section of the Ukrainian ruling class to overthrow the elected government of President Viktor Yanukovich, with the full support of both US and German imperialism.

Ukraine's National Police force was formed in 2015 as part of the "reforms" initiated by former President Petro Poroshenko following the United States-backed coup in 2014.

Since its inception, the organization has been led by the Ukrainian minister of the interior, Arsen Avakov, who has well known ties to the country's most notorious fascist militia, the Azov Battalion. Avakov has denounced any attempts by the US Congress to designate the group as a terrorist organization.

Avakov is the only holdover from the Poroshenko regime to remain in the government of Volodymyr Zelensky, who succeeded Poroshenko after winning the presidential election of April, 2019. The former US ambassador to Ukraine, Marie Yovanovitch, warmly praised the Zelensky government in her testimony before the House of Representatives during the Trump impeachment investigation last year.

Under Avakov's leadership, Ukraine's far-right groups have been given free rein to carry out a range of targeted political assassinations and attacks on ethnic minorities. The culprits are rarely arrested or, if arrested, are punished with minimal sentences. Meanwhile, the groups with which they are affiliated, such as the Azov Battalion and the neo-Nazi C-14, are allowed to continue their operations. They maintain close ties with representatives of the Ukrainian government.

In October of 2019, Zelensky's former prime minister, Oleksiy Honcharuk, attended a neo-Nazi-organized rock concert and gave a speech

while positioned in front of a swastika flag.

Last week, following protests by the Israeli ambassador to Ukraine upon news of Bank's letter, the head of Ukraine's National Police, Gen. Ihor Klymenko, announced that he was opening an investigation into the matter rather than immediately firing Bank for an obvious case of anti-Semitic persecution and intimidation.

President Zelensky has not made a single statement on the case. Late last year, his government, following in the footsteps of Poroshenko, named a series of Nazi collaborators as "national heroes."

While particularly egregious and scandalous, the case in Kolomyia is only the latest in a long series of state-led crackdowns and efforts at intimidation of religious and ethnic minorities.

Last month, in the western city of Ivano-Frankivsk, which is located just an hour from Kolomyia, Mayor Ruslan Martsinkiv ordered local police to remove Roma from the city and transport them to the country's Transcarpathia region. After being notified by police that 12 Roma individuals refused to leave, Martsinkiv angrily snapped, "What does 'refused' mean? And why weren't they packed up? You are the police. You must resolve this issue by next Tuesday. We gave you a bus. The police asked for a bus and we gave it to you. Why weren't they packed up and taken out?"

Martsinkiv, who is a member of the far-right Svoboda Party, which was intimately involved in the 2014 coup, also suggested that Roma were responsible for spreading COVID-19 within Ukraine.

In January, in Ivano-Frankivsk, local officials, including Martsinkiv, attended the funeral of a veteran of the Nazi-led SS Division Galicia, which was made up of Ukrainian volunteers who committed atrocities against ethnic Poles in western Ukraine. During World War II, approximately 1.5 million Ukrainian Jews were killed by the Nazis and their Ukrainian fascist collaborators.

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