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Conference of European Rabbis

Coverage Update

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Poland's Chief Rabbi Sides With Chabad Shaliach After Local Thugs Threw His Out Of Shul

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Chief Rabbi of Poland, Rabbi Mordechai Sedrick, has come out in support of Chabad Shaliach Rav Mordechai Gurary in the [machlokes](#) surrounding a Shul in Krakow.

Rav Sedrick, a member of the Conference of European Rabbis and Chief Rabbi of Poland, has come out in support of Rabbi Mordechai Gurary regarding the Krakow kehilla ousting him and the mispallalim from the shul he was renting. According to Rabbi Gurary, he has a ten-year lease with an automatic renewal option, but community leaders decided to oust him by changing the locks of the Isaac Shul and bringing in local





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thugs to keep them out.

Rabbi Sedrick sent a letter to the head of the local Jewish community, Tadeusz Jakubowicz, to refrain from ousting Rabbi Gurary and his tzibur from the shul.

“We have known each other for decades. We both know that the task of a Jewish community is to protect, enhance and deepen Jewish life. That is the essential responsibility of every Jewish community, its core value.

“We have a situation in Kraków in which the Gmina has become the heir of Jewish communal property and therefore is responsible and obligated to use these properties to enrich Jewish life and observance in Kraków and not to treat them as private properties, only concerned with maximizing profit.

“The Izaak Shul is the one place in Kraków with a steady daily minyan. The one place in Kraków where Jews can come every day to study Torah and Yiddishkeit. The activities of Rabbi Gurari and Rabbi Baumol are filled with Torah learning and Jewish values.

“Thanks to them and to many others, the Izaak Shul is fulfilling the responsibility of our Jewish community in Kraków. This should be supported and applauded.

“Instead, the electricity was cut off and then the water was cut off. And this morning, armed, masked guards were posted to prevent Jews from attending the morning minyan. No matter what the nature of the dispute is, I call upon the Gmina to fulfill the most elemental responsibility of every Jewish community —open the doors of the synagogue and allow Jews to pray to God.

“Please learn from this week’s Parsha of Korach that we must always find a way to support each other and to never to work against each other.”

The Conference of European Rabbis announced it is joining in, supporting the position of Rabbi Sedrick. The Conference calls on the community leaders to refrain from the “Chilul Hashem” and to “immediately open the doors and the shul to the rabbonim, Rav Baum and Rav Guraryeh, to permit them to continue their work and limud Torah.

<https://www.theyeshivaworld.com/news/general/1751802/polands-chief-rabbi-sides-with-chabad-shaliach-after-local-thugs-threw-his-out-of-shul.html>



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Jew vs. Jew in Cracow, as established community clashes with Chabad

Cracow Liphshiz, JTA Jul 18, 2019 International, News 0

CRACOW – When burly guards working for the Jewish Community of Cracow blocked the entrance to a Chabad-run synagogue, it was the culmination of a series of clashes between the local establishment and the chasidic outreach movement.

That scene on July 1 also echoed numerous previous clashes – some physical – across Europe.

In 2016, guards working for the Jewish Community of Lithuania ejected the Chabad emissary to that country, Rabbi Sholom Ber Krinsky, and his followers from one synagogue. Krinsky was officially banned from entering another synagogue in 2017. In 2004, a similar showdown in Vilnius ended in a brawl.

They are extreme examples of tensions that pit relatively small Jewish community associations concerned with preserving traditions (and sometimes control of restitution money) against what they perceive as ideologically driven outsiders.

The local “communities” – that is, officially sanctioned governing bodies that represent Jewish interests – often accuse the *haredi* Orthodox Chabad of displaying little sensitivity, patience and diplomatic skills in dealing with native co-religionists.

Chabad denies the claim, saying the rabbi-and-wife teams they send to establish



Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich (Mateusz Włodarczyk/NurPhoto via Getty)





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synagogues and Jewish centers across Europe are providing essential services for historic Jewish populations depleted by time and tragedy.

The movement says it opens doors to Judaism for Jews of all backgrounds, despite its adherence to strict Orthodox practice.

The Cracow version of last week's clash was sparked by a property dispute between the Chabad-run Izaak Synagogue and the Jewish Community of Cracow, from which it rents the space.

Men hired by the community – their faces masked under balaclavas – blocked the synagogue doors while worshippers gathered to pray on the sidewalk. Pictures of the standoff shocked people abroad.

In a sign of growing acceptance of Chabad in Europe, the Cracow incident sparked vocal protests even from top religious representatives of groups seen as Chabad's rivals.

Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis, which has clashed frequently with Chabad, called the synagogue's closure "immoral and opposed to Jewish tradition."

Poland's chief rabbi, Michael Schudrich, who is not Chabad, on July 2 criticized his own colleagues – in fact, his own employers – for what he described as a greedy power grab that harms the city's most active Jewish Orthodox congregation.

It was especially disturbing to Schudrich because "the Izaak Shul is the one place in Cracow with a steady daily *minyan*," or prayer service, he wrote in an usual open letter to Tadeusz Jakubowicz, the longtime leader of the Jewish Community of Cracow. Jakubowicz is a member of the executive board of the Union of Jewish Communities of Poland, where Schudrich also works.

Schudrich praised Rabbi Eliezer Gurary, the Chabad movement's emissary to Poland, and Rabbi Avi Baumol, a regular at Izaak Synagogue, for their "Torah learning and Jewish





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values.”

“Thanks to them and to many others, the Izaak Shul is fulfilling the responsibility of our Jewish community in Cracow,” the chief rabbi wrote.

“This should be supported and applauded. Instead, the electricity was cut off and then the water was cut off. And this morning armed masked guards were posted to prevent Jews from attending the morning *minyan*.”

Schudrich’s statement was extraordinary as well in that it framed the dispute in terms of money – especially the Jewish property administered by the community since the Holocaust.

He wrote that the Jewish Community of Cracow is “the heir of Jewish communal property and therefore is responsible and obligated to use these properties to enrich Jewish life and observance in Cracow and not to treat them as private properties, only concerned with maximizing profit.

According to the community, the dispute was not over rent but damage caused to the synagogue by the Chabad-led congregation. Gurary denies the assertion.

Critics of the community association object to what they call the opaque management style of Jakubowicz and his daughter, Helena, who runs the real estate portfolio.

The Jewish Community of Cracow has only a few dozen members in a city with hundreds of Jews. Critics also say that its many assets, restituted after the Holocaust, should not be under the control of such a small group.

Ironically, perhaps, the Jewish Community of Cracow is fending off accusations over another of its properties: a former synagogue that renters are being allowed to run as a bar and cafe. Reform Jews and others have said that the bar’s operators are damaging the historical building, but the community denies it.

Schudrich leads an umbrella group that unites regional Jewish communities that follow the European Kultusgemeinde (“*gmina*” in Polish) model – essentially associations reserved to card-carrying members who pay fees and vote on key





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issues.

Chabad operates on the American model of private congregations that depend on individual donations or funding from an external private source.

The latest clash in Cracow comes amid growing cooperation between Chabad figures and established Jewish communities across Europe. This rapprochement in Holland, France, Germany, Russia and beyond follows intense friction in the 1990s and 2000s over control and status in several of those communities.

“The big fight was in 2000, we’re now in 2019,” said Goldschmidt, the chief rabbi of Moscow.

“I think people today are interested to get on with it and to be as beneficial to the community as possible. We have to try to put struggles behind us and come to a modus vivendi between all parts of the community,”

In France, Chabad rabbis effectively run the Jewish education system where many non-Chabad communal leaders send their children.

In Holland, one of the established community’s most prominent rabbis, Binyomin Jacobs, has the official title of the chief rabbi of the Inter-Provincial Chief Rabbinate of the Netherlands. He works from the established community’s headquarters at an office adjacent to that of the chairman of the Organization of Jewish Communities in the Netherlands.

Yehuda Teichtal, the head emissary of Chabad to Germany, is officially a rabbi of the Jewish Community of Berlin and considered by many to be its chief rabbi.

In Russia, where Chabad and non-Chabad leaders clashed openly 15 years ago, they signed a cooperation agreement two years ago in which they formally buried the hatchet.

In some places, peace was achieved because Chabad won the fight. This appears to be the case in Russia, where the movement enjoys the backing of President Vladimir Putin. (In 2005, Goldschmidt, the non-Chabad chief rabbi of Moscow, was temporarily forced to





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leave the country because his visa had been revoked under unclear circumstances and then returned.)

In others, as in Holland, shrinking Kultusgemeindes co-opted well-connected and industrious Chabad rabbis into the establishment in recognition of their contribution.

Friction and even open conflicts between Chabadniks and their peers continue to plague some communities, though.

In Hungary, the Mazsihisz Jewish community has accused the local Chabad group, EMIH, of abetting a government-led campaign to distort the Holocaust. EMIH has rejected the allegation and accused Mazsihisz of using allegations of anti-Semitism for partisan goals.

The two umbrella groups, which had coexisted quietly for many years, recently descended into open conflict, even on how to honor the remains of Holocaust victims.

Even there, however, there are signs that Chabad is gaining recognition.

In October, Robert Frolich, the rabbi of the Dohany Synagogue, said at a roundtable discussion last year: “We need to accept that Chabad is part of Jewish community life in Hungary, let’s not work against it.”

The head of EMIH, Slomo Koves, said this recognition owes in no small part to how “Chabad has grown in Hungary and throughout Europe as [*Kultusgemeinde*] communities diminished.”

His group, which was a small stakeholder in Hungarian Jewry 30 years ago, has 17 rabbis now working in Hungary – more than any other denomination.

In Poland, too, some community members were upset when Chabad rabbis met an influential politician, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, saying they papered over the right-wing government’s record on anti-Semitism.

In countries like Hungary and Poland, where the government gives Holocaust restitution and funding to Jewish groups, the fight between the established community and Chabad





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has been complicated by competition for resources and status.

But even in Western Europe, where governments offer less funding to religious groups and minorities, the expansion of Chabad was perceived as bad news by communal leaders when a rabbi from the movement opened a synagogue in Switzerland in 2012.

“We’re not so happy about the synagogue,” Joel Weill, the Basel Jewish community’s head of administration, said at the time. “We fear it will further divide the community. We have 1,000 people who go to synagogues. This isn’t New York.”

In Greece, Victor Eliezer, a vice president of the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, said in 2016 that Chabad brings “extremism and fanaticism that is totally alien to the Jewish community” of his country.

<https://www.ijn.com/jew-vs-jew-in-cracow-as-established-community-clashes-with-chabad/>



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Rabbi spat on and cursed at in Berlin

Rabbi Yehuda Teichtal said two men spat on him while he was walking home from the synagogue with his son. German police are investigating the incident as a religiously-motivated crime.



German police launched an investigation on Wednesday after a prominent Berlin rabbi said he was insulted and spat on while walking down a street in the German capital.

Yehuda Teichtal, a rabbi of the Jewish Community of Berlin, said the incident took place last Friday evening in the city's Wilmersdorf neighborhood.

Teichtal said he was walking home with his son after leading a service at a nearby synagogue when two men started cursing at him in Arabic and spat on him in front of his child.

The incident shows that anti-Semitic incidents are not only occurring in Berlin schools, **but on the streets of the capital as well**, Teichtal said in a statement posted by the Jewish Community of Berlin.

"But I remain convinced that most people in Berlin do not want to accept this aggression against Jews as a sad part of everyday Jewish life," he said.

Teichtal added: "Of course we will not hide now, but rather continue to build on love, tolerance, dialogue and education."

Born in New York, Teichtal has been active in the German capital for some 20 years. He also heads Berlin's Chabad Lubavitch Jewish Educational Center and is known for his work to further dialogue between religions.





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Attacks 'threaten' religious coexistence

The Conference of European Rabbis (CER) told DW that it was shocked by the latest attack on a rabbi in Germany, saying the latest incident pointed to a dangerous uptick in anti-Semitism.

"These incidents threaten freedom of religion and religious coexistence in Germany, thereby jeopardizing an essential characteristic of German society which is known for its religious plurality," Rabbi Gady Gronich, the secretary general of CER, told DW.

Read more: [German official warns Jews against wearing kippahs in public](#)

The police division in Berlin that is responsible for probing religiously-motivated crimes has opened an investigation into the incident, adding that they are still looking for the suspects.

[Anti-Semitic crime is on the rise in Germany](#), with official figures showing the number of cases rose by almost 20% last year.

In June a US-citizen said he was hit in the face *after telling a group of people that he was Jewish*. There have also been reports of people being harassed in Berlin for wearing yarmulkes, a traditional head covering for Jewish men.

There has also been an uptick in anti-Semitic harassment at Berlin schools. Last year, people were outraged when it emerged that a Jewish boy had been bullied and threatened by his peers at a school in Berlin for months over his religion.

<https://www.dw.com/en/rabbi-spat-on-and-cursed-at-in-berlin/a-49834354>



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German police launched an investigation after a prominent Berlin rabbi said he was insulted and spat on while walking down a street in the German capital.

Yehuda Teichtal, a rabbi of the Jewish Community of Berlin, said the incident took place on July 26 in the city's Wilmersdorf neighbourhood.

Teichtal said he was walking home with his son after leading a service at a nearby synagogue when two men started cursing at him in Arabic and spat on him in front of his child.

The incident shows that antisemitic incidents are not only occurring in Berlin schools, but on the streets of the capital as well, Teichtal said in a statement posted by the Jewish Community of Berlin.

"But I remain convinced that most people in Berlin do not want to accept this aggression against Jews as a sad part of everyday Jewish life," he said.

Teichtal added: "Of course we will not hide now, but rather continue to build on love, tolerance, dialogue and education."

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<https://eurojewcong.org/news/communities-news/germany/rabbi-spat-on-and-cursed-at-in-berlin/>

