

# The New Russian Anti-Semitism

By [Victor Davidoff](#)

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Sometimes you're sorry that the Nazis didn't turn the ancestors of today's liberals into lampshades."

That shocking phrase wasn't printed in an obscure neo-Nazi newsletter but was the subheading of an article in the web version of one of the country's most widely read newspapers, Komsomolskaya Pravda. The author, Ulyana Skoibeda, is also widely read and notorious. She first came into the public eye when she proposed euthanizing newborn infants with disabilities and then took the spotlight with her fight for "racial purity" in the Russian state. She criticized the practice of inviting African soccer players into Russian teams and said "foreign citizens" like journalist Vladimir Pozner and writer Mikhail Veller, should be banned from television. Not long ago, Skoibeda got another 15 minutes of fame when she demanded that a text by the Russian writer Dina Rubina should not be used in a nationwide contest because "a citizen of Israel has no right to teach us" about Russia. Skoibeda, with the help of the popular newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda, has helped take the centuries-old phenomenon of anti-Semitism mainstream.

This time Skoibeda's ire was ignited by a post on LiveJournal by the liberal politician [Leonid](#)

[Gozman](#), who also happens to be Jewish, like most of the other subjects of Skoibeda's attacks. Gozman wrote a critical post about the television series "SMERSH," an acronym for the Soviet wartime military counterintelligence agency, because it portrayed the agency's activities in a rosy light.

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"SMERSH operatives didn't have snazzy uniforms, but that's about the only thing that differentiates them from the [Nazi] SS," Gozman wrote. "I don't know how many innocent people they shot, but it was a lot. The acronym SMERSH, like SS and NKVD, should make people shudder in horror and not be used as the name of a group of patriotic soldiers."

Historians are more certain of their figures. At a minimum, SMERSH arrested almost 500,000 people and executed 30,000 or 40,000 of them. Most of them were Soviet citizens who usually didn't even know what crime they had committed, which was typical for the Stalinist period. We do know why one of those thousands was arrested — an Army captain by the name of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. He was sentenced to eight years in the camps for calling Stalin "mustaches" in private correspondence.

SMERSH also was active on Soviet-occupied territories. In July 1945, two months after the end of World War II, a SMERSH unit near Bialystok in northeastern Poland executed almost 600 Poles without trial because they were suspected of having served in the Armia Krajowa, the Polish resistance under German occupation.

But the issue here is clearly not history. Since President Vladimir Putin first came to power, Russia has become a field where the threatening weeds of xenophobia and nationalism grow rampant. In Moscow, thousands have marched in nationalist demonstrations and taken part in riots. Crimes motivated by nationalism are so common that they are barely worth mentioning on the local crime news. Following the dark logic of European nationalism, whomever Russian nationalists start with as their enemy — migrant workers or African soccer players — sooner or later they get to the Jews.

Columnist [Ilya Milshtein](#) wrote on Grani.ru: "From low-grade xenophobia to an attack

on Israeli citizens and blacks to lampshades. That is the historical path: from state patriotism to the crematoria at Auschwitz and the gulag camps."

Anti-Semitism always flares up in Russia whenever the political situation heats up. Today's patriots, like the monarchists a century ago, can't help but notice that there are several Jews among the opposition leaders. They also can't resist the chance to portray the entire opposition as secret agents of "Jewish capital."

Prominent opposition leader and satirist Viktor Shenderovich jokes that his day is ruined if it doesn't begin with an anonymous phone call asking when he will finally emigrate to Israel. Strangely enough, the more he changes his cellular number, the more anti-Semitic calls he gets.

Film critic [Yury Bogomolov](#) wrote on his Facebook page: "A civil war is already being fought, although it's still a cold war. Liberals are not yet being shot, but they are labeled subversives in Komsomolskaya Pravda and on television. ... The ideological basis for savage reprisals has been articulated, and the legislative mechanism may soon be put in place."

Incidentally, lawmakers didn't miss the publication in Komsomolskaya Pravda. The [State Duma](#) decided that three of its key committees, including defense and security, should be entrusted with an investigation. Alas, they weren't tasked with investigating the fascist statement by Skoibeda. Instead, the Duma focused only on Gozman's blog to determine if he violated the law by "equating Red Army troops with SS troops." If not, several lawmakers suggested, new legislation should be passed to make statements like Gozman's that equate - Nazism with Soviet communism a crime.

Vladimir Sungorkin, editor-in-chief of [Komsomolskaya Pravda](#), apologized to his readers for the publication, saying that he is unable to check all the material himself. But a few days later the newspaper treated its readers to another attack on a liberal, who — surprise — is also Jewish. In a comment to writer Mikhail Berg, a Komsomolskaya Pravda journalist regretted that "we can't put people like that on the cobblestones of Red Square just before a convoy of T-90 tanks goes by in a parade."

After that, Skoibeda's dream of making lampshades out of the skin of liberals and their forefathers sounds almost quaint. When can we expect the headline calling for everyone to launch a pogrom?

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