

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS ANTISEMITISM AND HATE SPEECH IN BULGARIA: THE OPINION OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

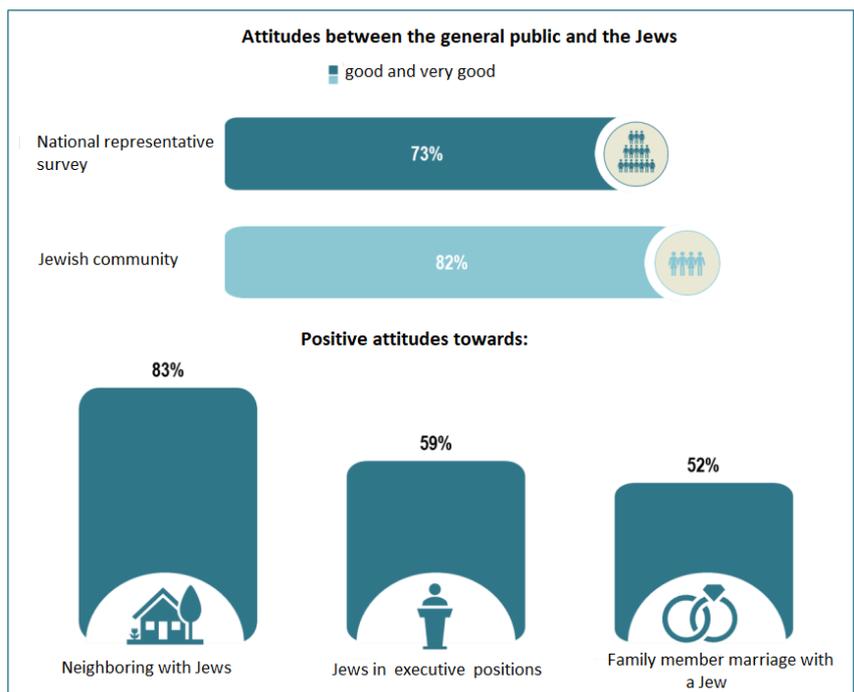
Executive Summary

The survey “Public Attitudes Towards Antisemitism and Hate Speech in Bulgaria” was conducted by Alpha Research Ltd. as part of the project “Strategic cooperation between Bulgaria and Norway in support of Bulgaria’s international commitment to combating antisemitism and preserving Jewish heritage”, implemented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria in partnership with the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the State Institute for Culture to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies. The research consists of two blocks: a /national representative sample among 1000 Bulgarian adults from all over the country on the age of 18-55 and a survey among the Jewish community in Bulgaria (100 successful interviews). The survey was conducted on the ground in the period of 5-21 February 2022. The questionnaire was suggested by an expert group within the project and coordinated with Alpha Research Ltd. The information was collected through direct standardized tablet interviews and online surveys.

Interethnic relations and social distances: Relations between the ethnic and religious communities in a country are extremely important indicator for the integrity and cohesion in the community, for the degree of tolerance and reciprocally respect between the citizens, or on the other hand, an indicator for the increase of tensions and xenophobia.

The current survey, similar to many others before, shows that the interethnic relations in Bulgaria have been experienced and appreciated as good except those with the Roma community.

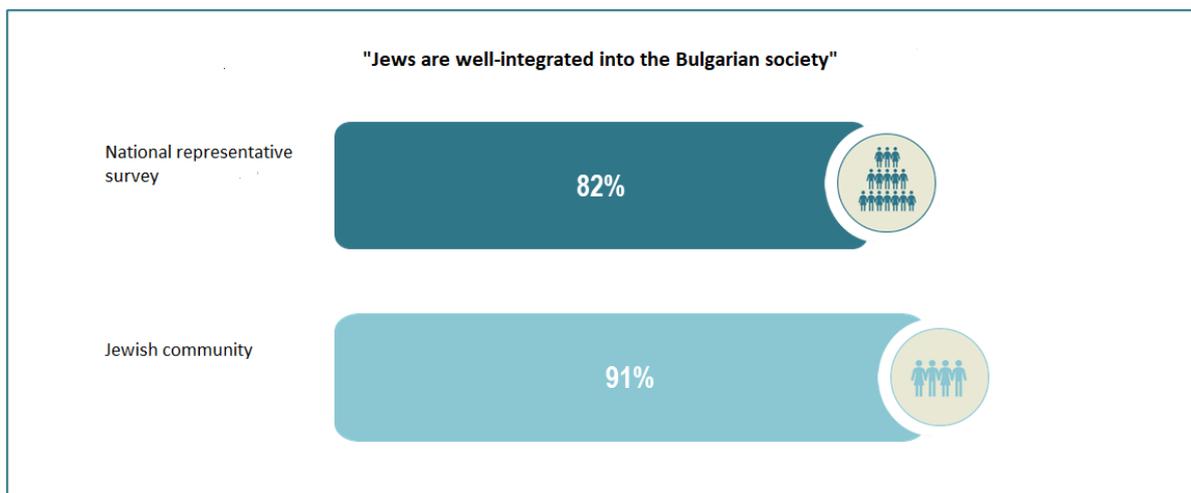
The relations between the Jews and the majority are evaluated by both sides as *good and very good* (82% from the Jews and



73% from the general public), enabling conditions for integrity and sense of security. Radicalizing social distances are not observed, nor ideological grounds for rejection, hostility, or aggression towards the Jewish community.

A total of 83% from the general public have a positive attitude towards neighbouring with Jews; 59% have a positive attitude towards the possibility for Jews to hold senior executive positions in Bulgaria; 52% have a positive attitude towards the opportunity for member of their family to marry a Jewish man/woman.

Level of integration and security of the Jews in the Bulgarian community:



82% of the general public considers that Jews are well-integrated in the Bulgarian society. 91% of the Jewish respondents are on the same opinion. 88% from them declared that they feel safe in their daily lives – half of them *fully* and the other half *to certain extend*. A proof of this security in the daily life is the fact that only 11% of Bulgarian Jews have avoided visits to Jewish organizations and institutions or participation in events related to the Jewish community out of concerns for their safety. In comparison, according to a survey of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) from 2018, 34% of the Jews in 12 countries surveyed avoid visiting such places, because they do not feel safe.



At the same time, however, one should not overlook the fact that the concerns of growing antisemitism in Europe and fears of such a wave in Bulgaria increase the feeling of anxiety among the Jewish community in the country. The fact that 43% of Jews only to some extent feel safe shows that although far from escalating manifestations, Bulgaria is also not immune to them. Therefore, the commitment of state institutions for counteracting antisemitism as an ideology and as concrete manifestations, is an important task.

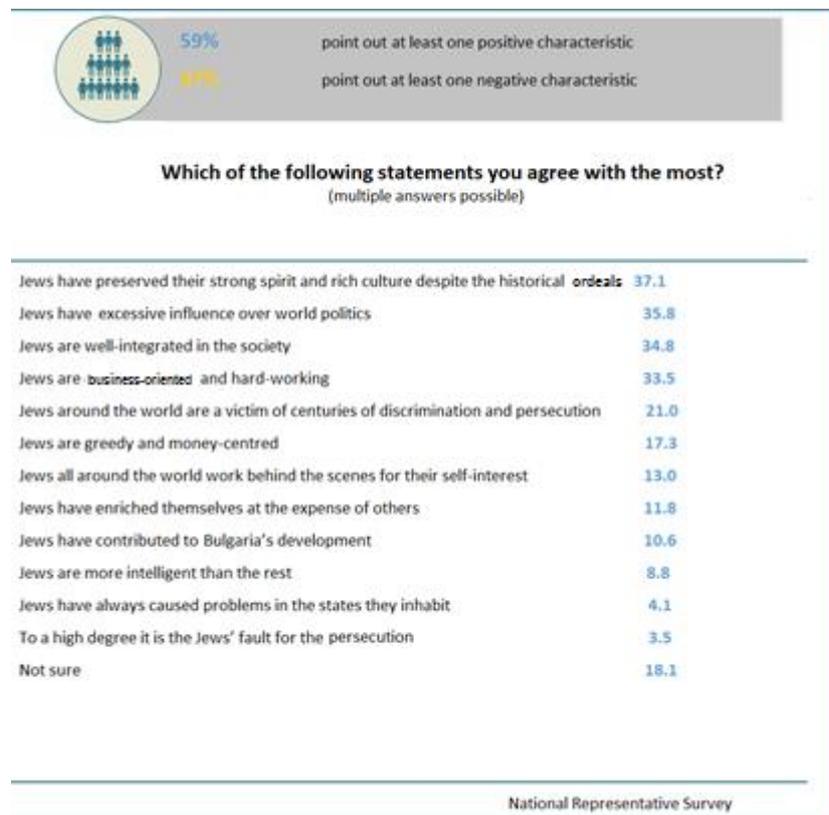
Knowledge and recognition of Jewish identity and contribution:

One of the most resistant barriers against any form of xenophobia and antisemitism is the knowledge of the "others", the respect towards them and understanding that everyone has the right of free manifestation of their ethnic and religious identity. A total of 37% from the general public are able to name at least one Jewish holiday, as two of the most common are Hanukkah (23%) and Pesach (17%). A slightly lower proportion (30%) mentioned a name or names of notable Bulgarians of Jewish origin who contributed to the development of Bulgaria. Overall, from the 38 names mentioned, the most popular, with 21%, is the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Solomon Passy, followed by famous musicians, actors, and poets such as Etien Levi, Itzhak Fintzi, Dora Gabe and Valeri Petrov.

The image of the Jews in Bulgarian society is multifaceted. In it, as in most stereotypes about different ethnic communities positive and negative characteristics coexist. In general, positive attitudes prevail and there is a lack of unified support for the most frequently circulated antisemitic propaganda theses.

59% of the respondents have pointed out at least one of six positive characteristics related to the Jews, and 47% at least one of six negative.

The first five statements, most common associated with the Jewish image, are: *The Jews have maintained a strong spirit and rich culture despite their historical ordeals* – 37%; *The Jews have excessive influence over world politics* – 36%; *The Jews are well integrated in the society* –

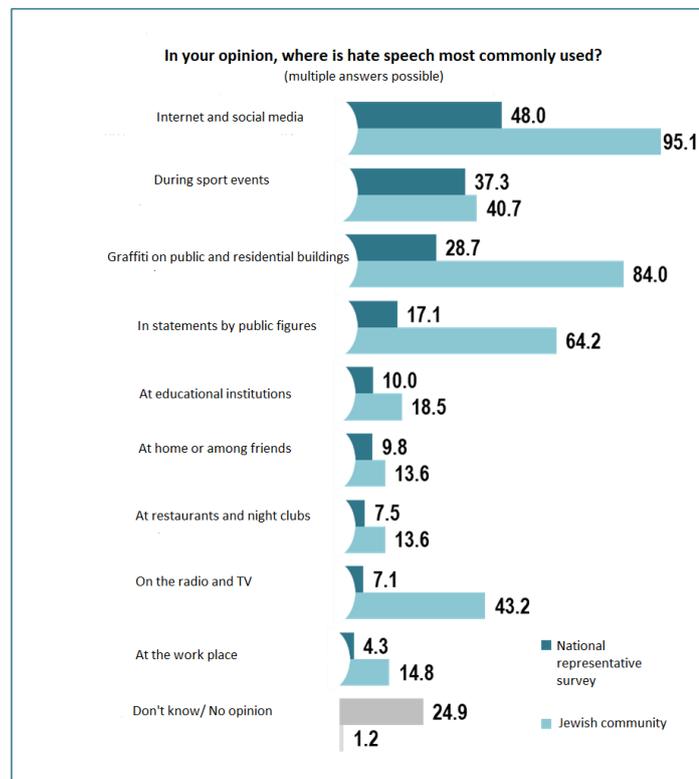


35%; The Jews are business-oriented and hard-working – 34%; The Jews around the world are victims of centuries of discrimination and persecution – 21%. Only under 5% of the respondents have chosen only negative definitions.

Hate speech – recognition and manifestations: Not unequivocally, the general public in Bulgaria manages to identify the term “*hate speech*”. For 80%, it means preaching or inciting discrimination, violence or hatred based on race, nationality or ethnicity. The education and the level of awareness are the factors with greatest influence on the accurate identification of hate speech.

Among 70% of the representatives of the Jewish community prevails the understanding that “hate speech is problem in Bulgaria”, while in the national representative survey only 37% think so. The higher the share of those who do not recognize hate speech and its purposeful manifestations, the higher the risk it is used to label "enemies" and incite to hatred and aggression.

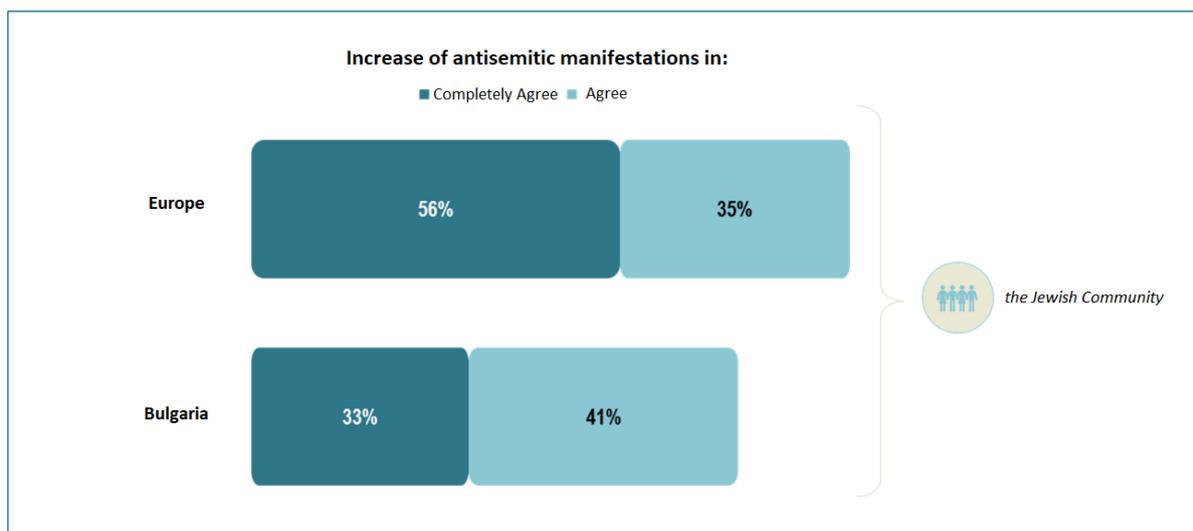
Different sensitivities to hate speech also reflect the ability to identify its sources and specific manifestations. Among the general public dominates the understanding that hate speech primarily covers the non-formal communication and therefore remains solely in Internet and social media (48%), during sports events (37%), or through graffiti on public and residential buildings (29%).



The Jewish community identify to a much greater degree diverse sources of hate speech – 95% note the Internet and social media; 84% – graffiti on public and residential buildings. Simultaneously, nearly two-thirds of the Jewish respondents (64%) believe that hate speech has also penetrated statements by public figures, including radio and television (43%). Among Jews there is a feeling that the phenomenon goes beyond the informal borders and gains a kind of "legitimacy" through its use in the speeches of public figures and politicians, including in the mainstream media.

Antisemitic sentiments – the point of view of the Jewish community and the general public: A number of national and international comparative studies show an intensified perception of the growth of antisemitic sentiment, among both the general public and Jews

around Europe and the world. The present survey also registers a growing feeling of anxiety about the increase of antisemitic manifestations. The respondents' opinion is that this growth is more evident in Europe (90%) than in Bulgaria (73%). According to a survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), around 90% of the Jews in the examined 12 countries report for a sharp (63%) or moderate (26%) increase of antisemitic attitudes in their own countries. Within that framework, the assessments in Bulgaria are more moderate, but that should not be taken as a source of reassurance.



According to the general public, antisemitic manifestations in Bulgaria are not absent, but they are rather weak and sporadic. A total of 70% share the opinion that in the country, or there are no anti-Semitic manifestations at all (15% of the respondents), or rather no (55%). Proponents of radical groups are most inclined to ignore the problem, thus sending a signal to "normalize" this speech in their circles.

Although relatively rare, most of the Jews surveyed said they have been direct witnesses to antisemitic manifestations (17% more often and another 57% less often). The answers to the question about the most common forms of antisemitism among Jews shows the dominance of the indirect over the direct – hate speech on the Internet and social media (86%), offensive inscriptions on public and residential buildings (84%), including vandalism against Jewish buildings, institutions, symbols (71%). Similarly to the subject of hate speech, there are some concerns for "institutionalization" of antisemitic speech. More than half of respondents (56%) recognize antisemitic manifestations and forms of hate speech in radio and television. At present, however, the manifestations of antisemitism have rarely been reported. 40% say that neither they nor their relatives reported in cases where they have felt the object of antisemitic manifestations.

Despite understandable concerns from the Jewish community about a possible escalation of antisemitism, in Bulgarian society there are no manifested negative attitudes towards them. The share of Jewish community members who share that they have often received a negative attitude because they are Jewish is very low (1.2%). 41% rarely felt such an attitude, and 30% have

never experienced that. These data confirm assessments of good and tensions-free relations between Bulgarians and Jews.

Unlike the representatives of the Jewish community, the respondents from the general public state that they have very rarely witnessed antisemitic actions. The most recognizable are the antisemitic symbols and insults to Jews, often expressed through graffiti and inscriptions on buildings. The explicit condemn of these manifestations follows the generally accepted understanding in any democratic society (between 82% and 87% are strongly against such acts). At the same time, some veiled forms do not cause unequivocal rejection, which creates an environment for penetration of potential latent antisemitic sentiments.

Typology of attitudes: based on the data's statistical analysis, a typology of the strongest carriers and opponents of antisemitic attitudes in Bulgaria has been made. Three groups have been identified:

- **First group** – the core, which is made up of the people who express the most radical antisemitic attitudes. They could be distinguished by their open and categorical unwillingness to communicate with people from Jewish origin and at the same time by a tendency to justify various antisemitic manifestations, including acts of vandalism or physical aggression. The group mainly consists of men – young and in economically active age, generally engaged in manual labour. They rely on information mostly gathered from the Internet and in particular Facebook. Their relative share is estimated around 3-4%.
- **Second group** – consists of the carriers of latent antisemitic attitudes. Its members can be characterized by their declarative solidarity with the Jews, but also by their high levels of susceptibility to conspiracy theories. This group encompasses not only low-status people but also more educated individuals from the capital and other big cities. Their main information sources are television, the Internet, newspapers, radio and even podcasts. The group covers around 10% of the surveyed target.
- **Third group** – consists of those actively opposed to antisemitism. It is characterized with an absolute recognition of the Jews and any other ethnic community as part of the Bulgarian society; knowledge about the issues related to the Holocaust and antisemitism; strong condemnation of antisemitic manifestations. The group consists of highly educated individuals, between 30 and 45 years old and covers around 12-15% of the society.

The study shows that in Bulgarian society direct antisemitic manifestations are seen as marginalized, unacceptable and reprehensible. The penetration of negative stereotypes with regard to the Jewish community, however, could be seen in some receptive social groups outside the most radicalized. This creates potential for expansion of latent attitudes of antisemitism in the family, among friends and in general in people's private lives. It is therefore important that a future monitoring mechanism follows not only how the share of their carriers will change, but also whether a social environment will be generated that is more encouraging to the expression of antisemitic attitudes instead of restraining them.

Holocaust, antisemitism, Bulgarian context - awareness, historical memory and memory space: One of the greatest barriers against the reoccurrence of one of the grimmest historical events that led to the execution of hundreds of thousands Jewish people is the awareness and the preservation of the collective memory about the genocide. This survey shows that awareness about the Holocaust, antisemitism, anti-Jewish legislation, etc. is gradually declining among young population in Bulgaria and only remains among older generations.

Only 17% of the respondents evaluate themselves as very well-informed on issues related to the Holocaust, another 42% evaluate themselves as somewhat informed, while 37% evaluate themselves as almost or not at all informed about the events. The level of awareness about the phenomenon of “antisemitism” is even lower. Only 12% self-evaluate as “well aware” and 35% as “somewhat familiar”, while 49% say they are almost or not at all aware about it.

To what degree are you familiar with issues related to:		
	The Holocaust:	Antisemitism:
Extremely well informed	16.9%	12.1%
Rather well informed	41.5%	34.8%
Rather uninformed	18.4%	21.8%
Uninformed	18.0%	27.6%
Not sure	4.9%	3.8%

National Representative Survey

A correlation between the respondents’ level of awareness and their age is clearly visible. The younger a generation is, the lower the level of awareness becomes. If this trend continues, an increasing number of young generations, and society as a whole, will not know these historical events. This hides at least two risks: easier and bigger groups to be influenced by overt or covert antisemitic propaganda, and the possible repetition of the sinister events of the past. It is well known that anyone who does not know history is doomed to relive it.

Self-evaluation of familiarity with Holocaust and anti-semitism by age groups:		
Extremely well informed		
Age group	Holocaust	Antisemitism
18-30	5.9%	4.3%
31-45	19.2%	12.3%
46-55	22.0%	17.2%

National representative survey

All this exacerbates the need to study the past, build places of memory, store artifacts and personal stories such as barriers and preventive measures against the tragic repetition of history. Representatives of the Jewish community greatly support the study of these events in schools and universities – for the vast majority (80%) it is very important. The general public opinion is also positive, but within more moderate limits. 48% consider it important that these events should be included in school textbooks, of which 13% find it "very important". In this regard, 94% of the members of the Jewish community and 53% of the general public approve the idea of building a museum or a permanent exhibition, including online, dedicated to the rescue of Bulgarian Jews during World War II.