NCSEJ Condemns SS Galicia Division March in Lviv, Ukraine

April 30, 2018

WASHINGTON, D.C. – On Saturday, April 28, a march in Lviv, Ukraine marked the 75th anniversary of the creation of the SS Galicia Division, also known as the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS, a Nazi German military group comprised of mostly Ukrainian volunteers. The march featured displays of Nazi symbols and Hitlerian salutes.

NCSEJ resolutely condemns this display of adoration for a Nazi group on the very streets where Nazis and their collaborators annihilated tens of thousands of Jews in the Holocaust. NCSEJ urges the Ukrainian government, on both the national and local level, to denounce this march and its supporters. They are an openly hostile threat to all ethnic and religious minorities in Ukraine, including the country's Jewish community, and an affront to Ukrainian democracy.

The Galicia Division was a Nazi German military formation of predominantly Ukrainian volunteers that existed from 1943-1945. Certain factions of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and their fighting battalions, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), supported formation of the Division. The Division bolstered the Nazi army's forces against the Soviet army and many Ukrainians, opposed to the Soviet takeover of Ukraine, joined. Some in Ukraine celebrate the group as heroes who fought for Ukrainian independence.

The march has been held annually every April since at least 2010. Reports indicate that as many as 1,000 individuals participated this year. Though displaying the swastika is illegal in Ukraine, other Nazi symbols, including Nazi-era renderings of the Reichsadler, or German Imperial Eagle, were on full display. Marchers chanted slogans including "Galicia are heroes of Ukraine," "Remember foreigner, Ukrainians are the master here," and "Ukraine above all." Other Ukrainian nationalist groups participated in the march, including the Azov Battalion, a group NCSEJ closely tracks for its far-right, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic allegiances among members.

Expressions of ultra-nationalism, membership in far-right political groups, and unabashed glorification of nationalist fighters whose groups committed atrocities against Jews in the Holocaust, have risen since Russia illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula and invaded Eastern Ukraine in 2014. NCSEJ has noted an uptick in public expressions of anti-Semitism in Ukraine, including repeated desecration of Holocaust monuments, anti-Semitic graffiti, and anti-Semitism at political rallies.

Some of these incidents connect to Russia-backed provocateurs and propaganda campaigns; the Kremlin frequently uses displays of Ukrainian nationalism to portray the country as anti-Semitic and to delegitimize the government. Regardless, Ukrainian authorities have not adequately addressed or distanced themselves from far-right groups that openly foment anti-Semitism and Holocaust distortion.

The Ukrainian government must speak out against the Galicia Division march. Such displays undermine the progress Ukraine has made in forging a pluralistic and democratic society. NCSEJ has stood by Ukraine and supported its national sovereignty, efforts to form democratic institutions, and adoption of difficult political and economic reforms. NCSEJ will continue to advocate for Ukraine's Jewish communities, whose ability to flourish depends on a Ukraine that disavows ultra-nationalism.

NCSEJ has reached out to Ukrainian and American officials to call for action. We will keep you updated as the situation develops.