

Anti-Semitism is still alive in Germany as Jews face ‘disturbing’ discrimination

BERLIN — When telecommunications manager Mikhail Tanaev emigrated to Germany in 1998 from his native Russia as a teen, his Jewish faith didn’t matter to classmates or neighbors.

That’s because Germany has taken extraordinary steps since the end of World War II to atone for the Holocaust and prevent anti-Semitism from taking hold again. The country has paid reparations to Jewish victims of Nazi persecution, erected dozens of memorials to those murdered and turned anti-Semitic speech into a crime.

Yet Chancellor Angela Merkel’s decision in 2015 to open the nation’s arms to 1 million mostly Muslim refugees has created a double threat for Germany’s roughly 120,000 Jews: rising anti-Semitism from the newcomers and a resurgent right-wing nationalist movement spawned by the arrival of so many immigrants.

The anti-Semitic sentiment has become more public and virulent, said Tanaev, 32. “When I arrived in Germany ... I never saw such displays.”

Last week, thousands of protesters in Berlin burned Israeli flags to protest President Trump’s decision on Dec. 7 to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. The flag-burning prompted a national outcry.

“I never thought that could happen in the middle of Berlin. That’s something you see in other parts of the world. It’s really disturbing,” Tanaev said. “It feels like we’re being threatened because you never know how people will react further when something like this occurs.”

Other instances of anti-Semitism in Germany have become more common and brazen recently. Last month, thieves in Berlin made off with more than a dozen cobblestone-sized plaques embedded in sidewalks memorializing victims of the Holocaust. And the German military found Nazi memorabilia in soldiers’ barracks over the summer.

In 2016, Germany recorded 1,468 anti-Semitic incidents, an increase from previous years that has put Germany's Jewish community on edge, According to a recent survey by the Bielefeld University in western Germany, 62% of Jewish respondents said they experience anti-Semitism in their everyday lives, while 28% said they were victims of verbal attacks or harassment in the past year.

The survey points to increased anti-Semitism by Muslim newcomers and a strengthened right-wing nativist movement, said Andreas Zick, who led the study.