
IN MOLDOVA, JEWISH TEENS GO TO SCHOOLS TO DISPEL ANTI-SEMITIC STEREOTYPES

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Larry Luxner

Fifteen Christian seventh-graders at the City Theater School in this capital city sit in a circle listening attentively while two Jewish teenagers visiting their classroom talk about Jewish traditions.

What do you think a Jew looks like? asks Arina Andriuschenko, standing at the blackboard with a piece of chalk in her hand.

As the students offer responses, Arina draws their description: a stick figure of an Orthodox Jew with a huge nose and sidelocks playing the violin.

The other Jewish visitor, Nikita Bivol, passes around a blue-and-white kippah for the kids to try on. He also has a menorah to help explain the holiday of Hanukkah and some matzah, which he passes around for tasting.

After finishing their presentation, Nikita and Arina invite the students to ask questions.

Why did Hitler hate the Jews so much? asks Linda Papoulidu, a 13-year-old in a pink sweater. Her classmate, Xenia Godoroja, inquires why Jews love money.

Well, the Jews didn't have their own country, so they had to move from one country to another, and they weren't allowed to get regular jobs, so they went into business, Nikita replies. Anyway, that's just an old stereotype.

Nikita and Arina are volunteers for a program called Likrat Moldova, which brings together Jewish and Christian Moldovan teenagers in an effort to dispel the negative and sometimes insidious myths about Jews that have permeated Moldovan society for centuries.

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