

# Jerusalem Letter

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## JEWISH LIFE IN UKRAINE AT THE DAWN OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: PART ONE

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### Contemporary Ukraine

Ukraine is a country in transition between a Soviet past and an uncertain future. Since declaring independence in 1991 at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has provided cause for both hope and despair. On the positive side, it has disarmed its nuclear capacity and is ethnically stable. Its large minority Russian population, 23 percent of Ukraine's total of 49.5 million inhabitants and concentrated in the eastern part of the country adjacent to a long border with Russia, remains calm. Although both Ukrainian and Russian extremists express various grievances, and other ethnic groups, most notably Jews, encounter episodic bigotry that is ignored by the state, the Ukrainian government itself has refrained from inciting ethnic chauvinism.

However, Ukraine has failed to embrace the political and economic reforms that will bring it into twenty-first century Europe. Its state institutions, particularly those that promote the rule of law, are weak. It is ruled by competing oligarchies that skirmish over the division of resources and power. Its leadership resists constructive change, preferring a course of stagnation that benefits themselves and their associates. Freedom of the press appears endangered. President Leonid Kuchma has even been accused of complicity in the murder of an outspoken journalist who had dared to criticize corruption at

the highest levels of the Ukrainian government.

After a continuous and severe decline during the 1990s, the Ukrainian economy is experiencing modest growth in the early years of the current century. However, privatization of the economy is incomplete and characterized by massive corruption. The economic base is narrow and concentrated in areas where foreign markets are highly competitive, particularly agriculture, chemicals, and heavy industry (mining, steel, machinery, transportation equipment, and military hardware). Further, recent gains will do little to offset the enormous decay of the last decade. Capital needs in basic infrastructure -- health care, education, communications, and transportation -- are almost beyond calculation. Ecological degradation is severe, causing untold damage to the health of local residents and to the well-being of the entire country. Skilled professionals continue to emigrate, seeking political and economic stability elsewhere.

Average per capita income in Ukraine is less than \$600. Many payrolls are about 20 weeks overdue. Pensions range from about \$9 to \$15 monthly, obviously inadequate in a society where the poverty line is about \$30 monthly. Barter dominates a large segment of the economy, a reality that erodes much of the potential tax base. The existing tax system is capricious and often punitive, and corruption in tax collection is rampant. Consumer price inflation in 2000 was 25 percent, a significant increase over that of 1999. International lenders, such as the International Monetary Fund, point to several systemic problems in the Ukrainian economy, including unrealistic budgeting, an oversized bureaucracy, partisan political interference in routine government and economic decisions, delays in privatization, inadequate legislation governing business transactions, and excessive international debt.

Severe budgetary problems afflict most cities and institutions. Heat and hot water, which are centrally controlled by municipal authorities, are turned off in some cities for months at a time. Hospitals and universities have closed entire departments. The situation in smaller cities and towns is especially bleak.

The population of Ukraine has fallen precipitously since 1991, from 52 million to 49.5 million at the turn of the new century. Reflecting economic distress and gravely compromised health care, Ukraine (and Russia) are suffering serious demographic decline. The largest Ukrainian cities are: Kyiv, the national capital (about 2.6 million people) in central Ukraine; three industrial centers in eastern Ukraine -- Kharkiv (1.5 million), Dnipropetrovsk (formerly Ekaterinoslav) and Donetsk (each about 1.1 million); and the Black Sea port of Odesa (about 1

million).

Relations with neighboring Russia, although mostly stable, are nonetheless complex and often contentious. Ukraine seeks political independence from Russia while remaining economically dependent on it. As is the case with other post-Soviet states in the European part of the former USSR, Russia controls Ukrainian energy supplies, a situation providing the former imperial power with significant leverage. Further, many Russians continue to regard Ukraine as an intrinsic province of greater Russia, and some in Russia consider the Crimean Peninsula essential to Russian naval operations in the Black Sea. Russia is aggravated by the vigorous efforts of the Ukrainian government to spur "ukrainianization" of the country, encouraging use of the Ukrainian language in place of Russian and development of a separate Ukrainian identity. Control over the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, the predominant Ukrainian confession, is contested by rival Russian and Ukrainian patriarchates, each with the support of the respective government. Russia also is irritated by the renewed activities of the Roman Catholic Church in Lviv. A separate Lviv-based Ukrainian Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church follows Eastern rites, but is loyal to the Vatican and also attracts Russian ire. The Vatican named the leaders of both Lviv churches as cardinals in January 2001.

## Jewish History and Demography

Jews have resided within the boundaries of contemporary Ukraine since the tenth century. Approximately 300,000 Jews are believed to have lived in the country in 1648. Between 1648 and 1651, Bogdan Khmelnytski and his Cossack troops marauded throughout central and western Ukraine and into Belarus, slaughtering 100,000 Jews and destroying some 300 Jewish communities. Russian expansion westward through the partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793, and 1795 brought tens of thousands of additional Jews under Russian control and led to the establishment of the Pale of Settlement to which all Jews in imperial Russia were confined by laws enacted in 1795 and 1835. All of Ukraine, except for the area around Kharkiv adjacent to Russia, was within the Pale. It was within this expanse and during this period that many hasidic dynasties emerged, responding to the partitions of Poland, the Khmelnytski and other massacres (particularly the eighteenth-century Haidamak attacks), and repeated crises in Jewish leadership, including the appearance of false messiahs. By 1847, the Jewish population in Ukraine had

reached 900,000, excluding those areas of contemporary Ukraine that were then under Polish or Romanian rule. By 1897, the Jewish population in the same area had risen to almost 1.9 million.

Ukraine experienced a massive loss of Jewish population in the first decades of the twentieth century, beginning with large-scale emigration before World War I. Perhaps 50,000 Jews were killed in pogroms during the Civil War of 1918-1921. Significant Jewish migration from towns and villages to larger cities during the Soviet industrialization drive from the mid-1920s through the mid-1930s led to a lower Jewish birthrate. By 1926, the Jewish population of Ukraine had declined to 1.5 million and by 1939 to 1.3 million. Soviet annexations of Polish and Romanian territory in 1939 and 1940 brought additional Jews into Soviet Ukraine, nearly doubling the Ukrainian Jewish population to 2.5 million by June 1941 when German troops invaded the USSR. Nazi forces occupied all of Ukraine and, with local sympathizers, murdered Ukrainian Jews in multiple mass shootings in forests, ravines, and pits. In all, about 1,850,000 Jews were killed in the *Katastrofa* in Ukraine. The first postwar Soviet Ukrainian census counted 840,000 Jews in the country. By 1970, the Jewish population had declined to 770,00 and by 1980 to 634,000. Official Soviet figures registered 454,000 Jews in Ukraine in 1990.

Credible estimates of the current Jewish population in Ukraine range from 250,000 to 325,000 individuals, scattered across the country in as many as 250 cities, towns, and villages. The overwhelming majority are concentrated in the five largest cities of Ukraine: Kyiv (70,000-100,000 Jews), Dnipropetrovsk (40,000 to 45,000), Odesa (34,000 to 36,000), Kharkiv (30,000 to 34,000), and Donetsk (approximately 18,000). Lviv, Simferopol, and Zaporizhya each have Jewish populations of approximately 8,000. Perhaps fifteen cities -- including such storied Jewish centers as Berdichev, Chernihiv, Chernivtsi, Khmelnytsky (formerly Proskurov), Vinnytsya, and Zhytomyr -- retain Jewish populations of between 1,000 and 6,000 individuals. Even fewer Jews remain in more than 200 depressed towns and villages, many of which are former shtetls or remnants of agricultural settlements organized by Agro-Joint, a pre-war agricultural resettlement program of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. In most instances, Jewish populations outside the major centers are elderly and impoverished; young Jews leave for larger cities or, more frequently, for foreign shores.

Ukrainian Jewry continues in steep demographic decline due to a low birth rate and high mortality rate, heavy emigration of the younger, more vital segments

of the population, and assimilation. The average age of Ukrainian Jewry is believed to be close to 60, and the death to birth ratio is believed to be about 13:1, i.e., approximately 13 Jews die for every Jew who is born. The Ukrainian Jewish population diminishes by at least 10 percent annually due to emigration alone. Inter-marriage is believed to occur at a rate of 70 to 80 percent, severely reducing the number of Jewish families and accelerating the rate of assimilation of Jews into the general population. Although the trend of mixed marriages may have reached a plateau as a consequence of the post-Soviet introduction of Jewish day schools, Jewish student programs, and other Jewish identity-building activity, the legacy of the high inter-marriage rate will be long lasting. The Jewish family, traditionally the core institution for transmitting Jewish identity, is now a rarity in Ukraine.

Most of those Jews in Ukraine who sustained a strong sense of Jewish identity into the post-Stalin era emigrated from the Soviet Union when conditions permitted in the 1970s and 1980s, leaving behind a large group of Jewishly uninformed and detached individuals with little inclination to relate to a seemingly remote peoplehood. Although Jews in Ukraine may be closer to their roots than are many Jews in Russia, proximity to Jewish history (e.g., shtetls, centers of hasidism, massacre sites of the Shoah) is seen by many Ukrainian Jews as a twist of fate, an existential circumstance that does not necessarily suggest any contemporary identification with the Jewish people.

## Antisemitism

Reports of increased antisemitism in Ukraine are widespread. Its growth is attributed to continuing economic distress, Ukrainian nationalism (particularly in western Ukraine), envy of welfare assistance provided by the comparably well-organized and well-financed Jewish community, and, in some cities, to propaganda efforts of Arab students enrolled at local universities and other post-secondary institutions.

Contemporary antisemitism in Ukraine emanates "from the street," rather than from the government as was common during the Soviet period. Jewish youngsters in some areas report routine antisemitic taunting in schools. Public school education in human rights and tolerance is lacking, and teachers and other school officials do not always respond appropriately to incidents of bigotry. Admission to some institutions of higher education is limited by antisemitic quotas. Antisemitic sentiment common in Ukrainian nationalism

sometimes appears in new Ukrainian-language literature endorsed by the government in its efforts to encourage use of the Ukrainian tongue.

No anti-hate legislation exists in Ukraine. It is unlikely that the Rada (Ukrainian parliament) is strong enough to enact such laws. It should be noted, however, that a Ukrainian non-governmental organization, the Association of National Cultural Unions of Ukraine, filed a legal complaint against the Kharkiv chapter of another NGO for "infringing on the rights of man and citizen, and the national dignity of Jews" by publishing a September 1999 children's newspaper with antisemitic content. ANCUU won the court case in 2000 and the offending organization was fined.

However disturbing Ukrainian antisemitism may be to its victims and to observers, repeated Jewish Agency for Israel surveys of Ukrainian Jews emigrating to Israel show that antisemitic bigotry is not a major factor in encouraging Jews to leave Ukraine. Economic opportunities, fear for the future of one's children in Ukraine (in an economic sense), and family reunification rank far higher as reasons stated for departure.

## Ukrainian Jewish Leadership

Responsible indigenous Ukrainian Jewish leadership has been slow to emerge, the legacy of seven decades of Soviet rule too burdensome to overcome in a mere decade of Ukrainian national independence. The grim heritage of the Soviet Union and the rawness of post-Soviet Ukraine have done little to produce Jewish volunteer or professional leaders who are passionate in their concern for the Jewish people, visionary, tolerant, diligent, honest about the prospects for Jewish community-building, and uncompromising in the standards that they set for themselves and for others. Individual initiative, accountability, consensus-building, recognition of conflict of interest situations, planning and priority setting, and transparent budgeting are elusive concepts and skills. Jewish professional leadership is encumbered by a dearth of role models, a paucity of good practice as example, lack of skills in social work and related fields, limited management experience, a deficiency of research and literature, poorly developed collegial relationships, and the absence of a professional ethic.

Too often, those who have stepped forward as leaders have been motivated by visions of economic gain, raw power, or, in some cases, even the hope of

legitimacy and credibility against potential prosecution for criminal activity. Numerous indigenous Jewish leaders have emerged as local tyrants, obstructing the very community they claim to represent. Their shortcomings are magnified by the respect conferred upon them by poorly informed representatives of foreign organizations. In at least a half dozen cities across Ukraine, disreputable individuals have been accorded recognition as legitimate Jewish leaders by international organizations attempting to operate programs by remote control from Jerusalem or other distant centers.

Several organizations, from Chabad to secular groups, have found that even two-year programs of leadership education are inadequate for the transformation of Soviet-style bosses into responsible civic leaders. For the Joint Distribution Committee, the World Union for Progressive Judaism, and even the few local efforts of B'nai B'rith, eagerness to create local representations without the investment of substantial resources in leadership selection and training has undermined potentially credible programs and created local autocracies that reflect badly on the parent organizations.

Filling this void of Jewish leadership in both the national and local arenas have been rabbis, almost all of them foreign-born, foreign-educated, and hasidic. The majority bring credentials as qualified clergy, skilled leaders, and community-dedicated mentors to a population long starved for such capacity. Most hasidic rabbis settle into municipalities with their families, providing a sense of continuity and stability that representatives of other international Jewish organizations, such as the Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish Agency for Israel, cannot convey. (Representatives of these organizations usually are posted in various cities for terms of two to four years. Their families often remain in Israel during this period.) For many hasidic rabbis, their work in Ukraine (or in neighboring Belarus) is a return to their history, for it is in these or adjacent lands that their dynasties emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century and flourished until the twentieth century.

Two large-city rabbis, Yaakov Dov Bleich, a Brooklyn-born Karlin-Stolin hasid now in Kyiv, and Shmuel Kaminezki, an Israeli-American follower of Chabad now in Dnipropetrovsk in the eastern region of the country, dominate Ukrainian Jewish leadership ranks. Once established in Kyiv in the early 1990s, Rabbi Bleich was asked by rabbis in other Ukrainian cities at that time (Rabbi Kaminezki in Dnipropetrovsk, Rabbi Moishe Moskowitz in Kharkiv, and Shaya Gisser, an acting rabbi then in Odesa) to represent all of them in dealing with the Ukrainian government and with various Kyiv-based organizations. With

their endorsement, he thus became Chief Rabbi of Ukraine. Also holding the title of Chief Rabbi of Kyiv, Rabbi Bleich works concurrently in local Jewish affairs, on national Jewish matters, and as the representative of Ukrainian Jewry in international Jewish and non-Jewish organizations. He is highly respected by the Ukrainian government, and his American roots provide comfortable access to various United States representations and agencies, where he also is admired.

Rabbi Bleich has earned the respect of rabbis in the Chabad movement for assistance when required, such as in the mid- to late 1990s in Kharkiv, when the authority of Chabad Rabbi Moishe Moskowitz was threatened by a local individual in a dispute over the Kharkiv choral synagogue. More recently, Rabbi Bleich flew into Zaporizhya in a chartered aircraft with fourteen other rabbis in a show of support for the Chabad rabbi in that city, Nachum Ehrentroi, an Israeli. Elements supporting an anti-religious and anti-Zionist Jewish day school in Zaporizhya had attempted to force the revocation of Rabbi Ehrentroi's Ukrainian visa and cause his expulsion from the country when he opened a second Jewish day school, one that supports Jewish tradition and Israel.

Rabbi Kaminezki is broadly recognized as one of the most effective community rabbis in all of the post-Soviet states. Politically astute and perhaps the first rabbi in the post-Soviet states to be successful in major local fundraising, he has developed an unparalleled network of local Jewish institutions. One measure of the scope of his operations is that he has attracted seventeen additional Chabad rabbis to Dnipropetrovsk, each of whom is engaged in Jewish communal endeavors. Further, Rabbi Kaminezki has proved to be a moderating force in the face of confrontational tactics of certain Chabad major international donors, particularly Levi (Lev) Levayev, whose business and personal ambitions have generated significant tension in post-Soviet Jewish life.

The Chabad movement is dominant in Ukraine, an area of great significance in Chabad history. Joining Rabbi Kaminezki in the ranks of outstanding rabbis in eastern Ukraine is Rabbi Pinchas Vishedski, highly regarded for his energy and accomplishments as Chief Rabbi of Donetsk. Additional outstanding Chabad rabbis in Ukraine are Rabbi Shlomo Wilhelm of Zhytomyr (2,500 to 5,000 Jews) and two rabbis of even smaller Jewish population centers in southern Ukraine, Rabbis Shalom Gotlib and Yosif Wolf of Mykolayev (Nikolayev) and Kherson respectively.

Other Chabad rabbis serve as community rabbis in the Ukrainian cities of



Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy, Cherkasy, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Khmelnytsky, Kirovohrad, Kremenchuk, Kyiv, Luhansk, Odesa, Simferopol, and Zaporizhzhya. All but the rabbi in Kyiv, Moshe Asman, are endorsed and partially funded by the Federation of Jewish Communities (FJC), a Chabad umbrella organization financed and strongly influenced by Levi Levayev, a Tashkent-born entrepreneur and diamond magnate who maintains residences in Israel, Moscow, and Antwerp. FJC-associated individuals without rabbinic ordination serve as acting rabbis in Chernivtsi and Ivano-Frankivsk, and acting rabbis or young rabbis are to be sent by FJC to seven additional smaller Jewish population centers (Dniprodzherzhynsk, Kryvyi Rih [Krivoy Rog], Lubny, Melitopol, Pavlohrad, Shostka, and Sumy). Some of these cities have fewer than 1,000 Jews; all such populations are aging and without potential for revitalization.

The Chabad movement, at the behest of Levi Levayev, and Rabbi Bleich appear to be engaged in a turf battle, each attempting to place rabbis in Jewish population centers that earlier had been deemed too small, i.e., a Jewish population under 5,000, to justify a residential rabbinic presence. In most instances, the new rabbis are serving towns previously unserved by any rabbi, but duplication has occurred. For example, rabbis representing each of the rival camps have recently assumed responsibilities in Chernihiv, a city rapidly losing many of its barely 3,000 remaining Jews to emigration.

Rabbi Moshe Asman in Kyiv follows Chabad practice, but operates independently of FJC. One of his primary financial backers is Vadim Rabinovich, a Kyiv businessman on the "watch list" of the United States government, i.e., barred from entering the United States for alleged involvement in organized crime, money laundering, narcotics trafficking, weapons sales to North Korea and Iraq, contract murder, and other offenses. Rabbi Asman, who is a native of Leningrad (St. Petersburg) and emigrated to Israel as a young man, presides over the well-known and newly renovated Brodsky Synagogue in central Kyiv.

Among other Orthodox rabbis in Ukraine, two men identified with the development of residential schools for underprivileged Jewish children are notable. Rabbi Shlomo Baksht, an Israeli associated with the Ohr Somayach organization, is one of two chief rabbis of Odesa. He operates a large day school and residential programs for boys and girls in the Black Sea port city. Rabbi Aharon Berger, an independent rabbi who identifies most closely with the Lelov hasidic movement, has earned great respect for his work as Chief

Rabbi of Korosten, Novohrad-Volynsky, and Ovruch, three smaller cities with Jewish populations of approximately 800, 400, and 250 respectively. Even in this area of sparse Jewish habitation, Rabbi Berger has developed a boarding school for about 30 boys from around Korosten and nearby southern Belarus. He also operates a summer camp for boys and a dining program and other services for local elderly Jews. Although independent, Rabbi Berger receives some financial support from the Chabad-controlled FJC.

In addition to Rabbi Bleich in Kyiv, Karlin-Stolin hasidim are represented by Rabbi Mordechai Bold, Chief Rabbi of Lviv in far western Ukraine. Rabbi Shlomo Breuer of Berdichev, a town rich in Jewish history but now home to perhaps only 1,000 Jews, is a Skverer hasid.

Typically, Orthodox rabbis in larger Jewish population centers develop a municipal network of community institutions, including a synagogue, preschool, day school, adult Judaic studies program, a welfare center and nutrition program for impoverished Jewish elderly, community celebrations of Jewish holidays, a monthly local Jewish newspaper, a weekly or monthly local television program, and a summer camp for youngsters. *Mikvaot*, cemeteries, and kosher food distribution also are on their agendas. Most rabbis are able to enlist the support of the Joint Distribution Committee in operating welfare programs, and many attract subsidies from the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) for their summer camps. Increasingly, relations between the rabbis and local representations of JDC and JAFI are constructive and friendly, as each party comes to recognize that none can serve the multiple needs of the community alone.

As rabbis gain experience and influence in their communities -- most in the larger cities have been in their posts for eight to ten years -- they are expanding Jewish educational options (including yeshivot and boarding programs) and welfare services. Some in the larger population centers also nurture local leadership and develop local financial resources in support of their increasingly comprehensive community programs. In less populous centers (10,000 or fewer Jews, the majority of whom are elderly), the number of capable individuals may be too small for encouragement of indigenous community governance.

Many rabbis in Ukraine are strongly Zionist, some as an outgrowth of their own Israeli roots and core religious convictions. The Zionism of others is more pragmatic in nature, as they see only a limited future for young Jewish families in impoverished Ukraine. Some have developed ties with a range of post-

secondary Israeli educational institutions, so that graduates of their own high schools are able to make a smooth transition into Israel life.

Two or more rabbis contend for authority in three of the four largest Ukrainian Jewish population centers. In Kyiv, Rabbi Bleich's local authority is modestly challenged by Chabad Rabbi Moshe Asman, whose increasing influence is facilitated by his control over the prestigious Brodsky synagogue and by Rabbi Bleich's frequent absences from the city in fulfillment of his responsibilities as Chief Rabbi of both Kyiv and Ukraine. Rabbi Asman's dependence on Vadim Rabinovich for major financial support has not yet threatened his moral authority, a concept that may be poorly developed in Ukraine. Similarly, issues such as the level of Rabbi Asman's rabbinic ordination and his lack of a recognized international support group find little resonance among local Kyiv Jews. His community programs continue to grow, and he has been successful in attracting several local donors in addition to Rabinovich, as well as contributors from among Ukrainian Jewish emigres in the United States.

In Odesa, Rabbi Shlomo Baksht arrived in 1993 from Israel, determined to establish a day school that reflected the philosophy of Ohr Somayach, the outreach organization with which he is associated. The school that he created is now large and thriving, along with a residential program for disadvantaged children and adolescents. Although one of two chief rabbis of Odesa, Rabbi Baksht continues to be identified mainly with the school and the residential program. The second chief rabbi is Rabbi Avrum Wolf, a Chabad follower, who previously served in Kherson. The dominant rabbi in Kharkiv is Chabad Rabbi Moishe Moskowitz, now supervising completion of the restoration of the choral synagogue in that city after some years of competition over its control with Eduard Khodos, an individual then associated with the World Union for Progressive Judaism. Khodos eventually was forced out of the competition over the synagogue by municipal authorities embarrassed over his confrontational tactics, which included an arson attack on the synagogue and other forms of extreme harassment. The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (OU) sponsors a day school and youth program in Kharkiv, which are led by an Israeli rabbi and a team of Israeli educators. The OU rabbis generally remain in the city for terms of two to three years and do not challenge Rabbi Moskowitz's authority as chief rabbi.

In Dnipropetrovsk, the second largest Ukrainian Jewish population center, Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki has thwarted efforts of several non-Chabad Jewish organizations (ranging from Aish Hatorah to the World Union for Progressive

Judaism) to establish a presence in the city. Rabbi Kaminezki asserts that Dnipropetrovsk must be preserved for Chabad in respect for the sacrifices that Rabbi Levi Yitzhak Schneerson, father of the late Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, made while serving as rabbi of then Ekaterinoslav from 1909 until imprisoned by the KGB in 1939. Only the local Hillel student organization and the local *hesed* (welfare center) are permitted to operate their own, non-Chabad Jewish religious and educational activities in Dnipropetrovsk. Rabbi Kaminezki maintains sufficient influence with local Jewish and municipal leadership that his views are honored.

Rabbi Alexander Dukhovny, a Kyiv native and the sole Progressive rabbi in Ukraine, is the leader of Hatikvah congregation in that city. Operating with minimal funding and no communal facilities, Rabbi Dukhovny has yet to develop the educational, cultural, and welfare programs that would earn him and his movement the credibility accorded to his Orthodox counterparts and their operations in Ukraine. More than 30 additional representations of the World Union for Progressive Judaism exist across Ukraine, most headed by local individuals with a smattering of WUPJ training. Poorly supervised by WUPJ, only a few of these local initiatives amount to more than small social clubs or facades for commercial enterprises or power schemes.

No Masorti (Conservative) rabbi is active in Ukraine. The Masorti movement ventured into Kyiv only in mid-2000, initiating a family Sunday school and several youth activities. Its earlier operations had been confined to smaller Jewish population centers in western Ukraine, including a day school in Chernivtsy (modeled after the Tali schools in Israel), a limited number of youth activities in other small cities in western Ukraine, and a summer camp.

## Ukrainian National Jewish Organizations

Four competing organizations claim to represent Ukrainian Jewry as a national entity. The Jewish Confederation of Ukraine, established in 1999 at the initiative of Chief Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, has the greatest credibility as an umbrella organization. The Confederation reflects a joining of four pre-existing associations: the Va'ad (identified with Yosif Zissels, a longtime Jewish activist and heroic figure imprisoned in the 1980s, and Rabbi Bleich); the Ukrainian Jewish Council (Ilya Levitas, a veteran activist in Jewish culture and strongly associated with the Communist party of Soviet Ukraine); the Kyiv Municipal Jewish Community (Rabbi Bleich); and the Union of Jewish Religious

Organizations of Ukraine (Rabbi Bleich). Its structure provides representation for a number of smaller Jewish groups, such as Magen Avot (a national welfare organization), the Committee on Preservation of the Jewish Heritage (a group that supports preservation of historic Jewish buildings and cemeteries), the Association for Humanistic Judaism, the Association of Jewish [Day] Schools, and the Jewish Press Association. The Confederation publishes a biweekly newsletter, *Jewish Meridian*, in Ukrainian/Russian and English editions.

Rabbi Bleich would like to fashion the Confederation in the image of the Russian Jewish Congress, but three major obstacles deter attainment of this goal. First, the Confederation lacks a single credible volunteer leader able to mobilize the Jewish population and to generate the financial support necessary to maintain and advance key Jewish institutions, such as synagogues, schools, community centers, and welfare services. Three prominent Jewish businessmen -- Yehven Chervonenko and Serhy Maximov, both of Kyiv, and Yefim Zviahilsky of Donetsk -- currently serve as co-chairmen of the Confederation.

Second, the Confederation lacks a chief professional officer who is able to work with the organization's various constituencies and is untainted by financial scandal. The appointment of Yosif Zissels as founding Executive Director may have been necessary for the launching of the Confederation, but his leadership style is inappropriate for the needs of contemporary Jewish organizational life.

Third, rabbis and communities associated with the Ukrainian representation of the Federation of Jewish Communities of the C.I.S. (FJC), a second national Ukrainian Jewish organization, have refused to affiliate with the Confederation. As noted, FJC is the umbrella organization for Chabad in the post-Soviet states, although some FJC officials and most FJC publicity materials conceal or obscure the Chabad identification. The Federation of Jewish Communities is one of several largely undisciplined power centers to have emerged under the Chabad mantle following the death of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson in 1994 without a designated successor. Its Ukrainian headquarters are in Dnipropetrovsk, where it is directed by Rabbi Meir Stambler. Unlike its counterpart in Russia, the FJC in Ukraine does not claim any volunteer leadership structure.

With rabbis in sixteen different Ukrainian cities, including the three primary Jewish population centers of eastern Ukraine (Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, and Donetsk) and the port city of Odesa, FJC is a major force in Ukrainian Jewish life. The absence of FJC rabbis and their institutions from the Confederation

has diminished the latter's credibility as an umbrella organization. FJC reluctance to join the Confederation appears to originate in the personal and political needs of Levi Levayev, its chief sponsor.

A third ostensibly national organization, the Jewish Fund of Ukraine, established in 1997, is identified with Alexander Feldman of Kharkiv, its president and principal donor, and Arkady Monastirsky of Kyiv, its executive vice president, who previously was associated with the Ukrainian Jewish Council. The Jewish Fund of Ukraine operates Kinor, a Kyiv Jewish cultural center offering a variety of programs and sponsoring activities related to Holocaust commemoration, limited welfare programs for Jewish elderly, and interreligious affairs. However, the Jewish Fund lacks an ongoing physical presence outside Kyiv; its national activities are restricted to occasional cultural events in central and western Ukraine and a small representation in Mykolayev, a river port in southern Ukraine with fewer than 5,000 Jews.

The fourth national Jewish organization is United Jewish Community of Ukraine, backed by Vadim Rabinovich, an individual of some notoriety, as described earlier. Established in 1999, UJCU succeeds Rabinovich's earlier organization, the All-Ukraine Jewish Congress, which he founded in 1997. UJCU operates a Jewish community center in Kyiv, which accommodates some activities of both Chabad Rabbi Moshe Asman and the Progressive (Reform) movement. It provides a significant general subsidy to Rabbi Asman and smaller grants to Jewish organizations throughout Ukraine, including the Association for Progressive Judaism in Ukraine. Rabinovich, who holds dual citizenship in Ukraine and Israel, is widely believed to have established UJCU in an effort to enhance his image and to protect him from prosecution by Ukrainian and other authorities.

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Note: All place names use Ukrainian orthography, with the Russian name in parentheses in certain cases.

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