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Anti-Semitism in Ukraine: Post Jackson-Vanik Graduation

Aaron Ostrovsky, Research Analyst, Eurasia Center

The Eurasia Center's Program on Civil Freedoms, Religious & Ethnic Toleration



“Judaism without Embellishments”-Trofim Kichko

Anti-Semitism has continuously embedded thorns into the democratic stability of Ukraine. The issue of anti-Semitism has contributed to the reasoning behind Ukraine's delayed Euro-Atlantic integration and EU membership. In accordance with EU regulations, certain levels of human rights violations will inhibit a country from membership. Historically rooted in Ukrainian society, anti-Semitism has unfortunately paralleled Ukraine's evolution as a democratic state. Following Ukraine's graduation from Jackson-Vanik, it has become increasingly clear that issues such as anti-Semitism and racism plague the underbelly of Ukrainian life. The underlining question which needs to be addressed is whether or not Judaism has a chance to survive and prosper in today's Ukraine?

Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the mass emigration of Jews, Ukraine still contains one of the largest Jewish communities in the world; Ukraine's Jewish community is ranked the eleventh largest in the world and fifth in Europe. In 1992, it was estimated that around 100 Jewish organizations had emerged in Ukraine following Ukraine's independence; this figure grew at a rate of 50 new organizations annually in 1992-1994.¹ By 2000, there were approximately 500 Jewish groups in Ukraine.

The Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine (AJOCU) reported that following a short period of relaxation in 1990-1991, new signs of anti-Semitism emerged. The new forms of anti-Semitism seemed to be defined in both the political and media spheres. For example, anti-Semitic articles began to appear more frequently in the press, from between 20 to 30 in 1992, to 200 in 1995, and to around 400

¹ Khanin, Vladimir: "The Post-communist Order, Public Opinion, and the Jewish Community in Independent Ukraine." Harvard Ukrainian Studies XXIII, 1999: 85-108.

in 1998. A poll was conducted in 1990, which showed that Ukraine contained the highest level of hostility towards Jews in all of the Soviet Union². However, another survey was conducted by an American-Russian research team in the major Jewish populated centers of Russia and Ukraine in 1992-1993, and again in 1997-1998, which showed that a relatively small proportion of Ukrainian Jewish respondents have experienced anti-Semitism in any form over the past decade.

Since 1991, the Ukrainian government has offered limited support to Jewish cultural activities, not only because of resource depletion but also because of mixed attitudes among officials who felt that a Jewish cultural re-birth shouldn't take place in Ukraine. The international relationship between Ukraine and Israel has also affected the treatment of local Jews. In the early 1990s, Ukrainian poet Dmytro Pavlychko, who was then the presidential adviser on international relations, promoted the notion that Ukraine should develop a strategic partnership with Israel. Unfortunately, the partnership couldn't be obtained, but nonetheless, the popularity of Israel in the eyes of Ukrainian politicians remains high, regardless of their feelings towards a Jewish state.

In November of 1996, President Kuchma went to Israel to strengthening relations; Kuchma thought Israel could serve as the bridge between the United States and Ukraine. Kuchma and his advisor believed that a liberalization of their "Jewish policies," would enhance local Jews willingness to work for the sake of Ukraine. For example, contemporary Ukrainian leaders pursued a policy which focused around the financial capabilities of prominent Jewish businessmen, including Vafym Rabinoyich. The multi-millionaire used his connections in American Jewish and non-Jewish circles to lobby for

² Khanin, Vladimir: "The Post-communist Order, Public Opinion, and the Jewish Community in Independent Ukraine." Pg. 87

the cancellation of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. In many ways, the Jewish community during this time period underwent a renaissance or revival of Jewish culture, religious practice, and even education. However, by 1999 a new wave of anti-Semitic trends began to plague Ukrainian society. Unfortunately, numerous Jewish sites were vandalized by gangs of hooligans. Jewish cemeteries in the cities of Chernovitsy, Simferopol, Kalinovka, Serna, Uman, and Slavuta were desecrated by anti-Semitic graffiti, i.e. swastikas.

On March 23, 2006, Ukraine's graduation from Jackson-Vanik marked a transitional period in which the remnants of the Cold War were finally being outgrown by democracy. The amendment served as an archaic reminder of a once bi-polar world. However, Ukraine's graduation might be a step forward, but have the relics which led to the creation of Jackson-Vanik been eradicated?

In 1972, following Leonid Brezhnev's "diploma tax", the United States implemented the Jackson-Vanik amendment which prevented 'normal trade relations' with particular countries possessing non-market economies and a poor record on emigration rights. At first, the amendment offered no real help to Soviet Jewry. The restrictions caused by Jackson-Vanik led to a decrease in exit visas for those wishing to leave the Soviet Union; this was due to the Soviet Union's desire to save face and not to fold due to external pressures from the West. In 1975, approximately 500,000 refugees, mainly Jews, Evangelists, and Catholics departed the Soviet Union and headed towards the United States. In addition, around 1 million Jews immigrated to Israel. State Representative Mark B. Cohen of Philadelphia, a strong advocate of the Jackson-Vanik

Amendment and of Jewish rights, stated in response to the implementation of the amendment:

The genius of Jackson-Vanik was that it found a constructive long-term way to help solve the problems of late 20th century victims of communism without use of military force. It helped change the direction of American anti-communist movements from a focus on domestic supporters of communism, which had led to McCarthyism, and military involvements, which had led to the quagmire in Vietnam, to a focus on using American economic strength to serve as a new underpinning of American values. It was a brilliant public policy innovation.³

The Jackson-Vanik Amendment is still functioning today in countries such as Russia, and China. Many argue that the amendment is a lingering product of the Cold War which is causing problems in the free trade market. Others defend the amendment's initial role as a tool in fighting discrimination, racism, and anti-semitism in Eastern Europe. On December 6, 2005, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) pleaded with the U.S. House of Representatives to delay Ukraine's graduation. ADL's national director, Abraham H. Foxman stated:

We expect more from democratic states than we do from totalitarian ones. This year alone has seen a steep increase in acts of violence and vandalism against Jews across Ukraine. There have been attempts to ban everything from Jewish organizations to Jewish holy texts. The university MAUP, with more than 50,000 students enrolled, actively promotes anti-Semitism of the most vicious kind. While we recognize that Ukraine's President Viktor Yushchenko has issued a statement against anti-Semitism, we believe the government must go beyond words and take the kind of strong action we expect from a democracy. Until then there is no reason for the House of Representatives to agree to remove Ukraine from Jackson-Vanik and grant beneficial trading status. We should remember that it was the struggle against anti-Semitism which inspired Jackson-Vanik in the first place. That struggle is not over.⁴

According to Ben Cohen, ADL's director of European affairs, Ukraine has not taken the proper steps in battling anti-Semitic organizations and institutions such as MAUP (*Міжрегіональна Академія управління персоналом*, or Interregional Academy of Personnel Management). In many ways, Jackson-Vanik placed pressure on the

³ www.wikipedia.org- Jackson-Vanik Amendment

⁴ http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ASInt_13/4834_13.htm

Ukrainian government to deal with issues surrounding discrimination and anti-Semitism. ADL was concerned that once Ukraine graduates, there will be no immediate reason to face up to these injustices. Ben Cohen, along with other ADL representatives, believes that Ukraine's inability to protect its citizens from hate crimes is a clear indication of its failure to function as a democratic state. Cohen argues that organizations such as MAUP must be held accountable for its fueling of anti-Semitism in Ukraine; between 70-80% of all anti-Semitic literature in Ukraine is produced by MAUP. With MAUP's assistance, other publishing houses such as *Personal Plyus* and *Bukva* continue to create damaging press material which focuses on renewing the cycle of anti-Semitism in Ukraine. The Anti-Defamation League hoped to see more radical changes in Ukraine before Ukraine was accredited with a democratic re-birth.

Both the National Council on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ) and the American Jewish Committee (AJC) have taken a different stance in dealing with Ukraine's graduation process. According to both Mark Levin, Executive Director of NCSJ, and Sam Kliger, AJC's Director of Russian Jewish Community Affairs, Ukraine's immediate graduation from Jackson-Vanik was a necessary step towards improving U.S.-Ukraine relations, and destroying the harmful stigma of a Soviet past. Now that Ukraine has graduated, both organizations wish to deal with the growing trend of anti-Semitism.

On June 28, 2006, seven branches of MAUP, which were known for supporting anti-Semitism, were closed down by Ukraine's Education Ministry. The closing of these branches seems to resemble a glimmer of hope for the Jewish community. Mark Levin stated, in response to the closing, "This is an important step forward, and we hope that

this is the beginning of appropriate action taken against the leading purveyor of anti-Semitic activity in Ukraine.”

Contrary to Levin’s view, Ben Cohen felt that Ukraine’s Education Ministry’s closing of the seven branches stood more as a battle against poor educational practices than a fight against anti-Semitism. Regardless of the ministry’s intentions, the Ukrainian government is slowly beginning to realize the illegitimacy of MAUP as an institute.

As Ukraine continues to mature as a democratic state, numerous acts of anti-Semitism continuously damage Ukraine’s credibility as a free country. Many individuals perceive the “Orange Revolution” as an act of freedom and change. Ironically, the change only re-fueled dormant anti-Semitism. For example, the re-emergence of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, or *Протоколы Сионских мудрецов* a fabricated 19th century pamphlet which describes a secret plot in which Jews strive for world domination, has inflamed both the Ukrainian-Jewish community, and the American-Jewish community. The Protocols are not only sold in Russian Orthodox monasteries but in local kiosks. The availability of such literature is alarming both in and of itself and due to its adverse affect on Ukraine’s chances of joining the EU. According to the Chief Rabbi of Ukraine Zziel Chaikin and other rabbis “Ukrainian Jewry is convinced that society in Ukraine is mature enough to realize that a threat aimed at one part of the society is equally dangerous for the entire nation.”⁵

As Ukraine moves forward, Western nations begin to question Ukraine’s treatment of minorities. The obstacles placed upon the Jewish community are overwhelming and extremely unfair. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Jewish

⁵ The Federation of Jewish Communities of CIS (FJC) 2003-2006. “Ukraine’s Rabbis, Jewish Organizations Launch Joint Appeal in Wake of Anti-Semitism.” Thursday, September 1, 2005.

community in Ukraine has struggled to survive and to, once again, become a vibrant part of society. If this level of anti-Semitism continues, Ukraine’s hope of EU integration might become a far-fetched goal.

Jews in Ukraine:

Rank ⁶	Country	Jews	% of World Jewish Population
1	Israel	5,313,800	40.6%
2	United States	5,275,000	40.3%
3	France	491,500	3.8%
4	Canada	373,500	2.9%
5	United Kingdom	297,000	2.3%
6	Russia	228,000	1.7%
7	Argentina	184,500	1.4%
8	Germany	118,000	0.9%
9	Australia	103,000	0.8%
10	Brazil	96,500	0.7%
11	Ukraine	80,000	0.6%

Statistics for Ukraine⁷:

Jewish Population

1970: 777,000

2005: 84,000

2020 Projected: 25,000

Percentage of Jewish population that attends Jewish Day School

<15 percent Greater Than

Percentage of Jewish population that marries out

80 percent

Immigration to Israel (Aliyah) in 2004

3,055 Individuals

⁶ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Judaism/jewpop.html>

⁷ 2005 Annual Assessment by: The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute (JPPPI) of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Tourists to Israel in 2004

24,207

Violent Anti-Semitic Incidents in 2004

16

General Facts about Jews in Ukraine⁸:

- Since 1990 Jewish communities' network has grown by 17 times
- 136 Rabbis-62 are foreigners
- 69 former Synagogues were handed back to the Jewish community
- In Lviv Oblast there are 9 Synagogues- 6 are non-functioning
- In 2003 around 10292 Jewish pilgrims from 18 countries came to Uman to celebrate Rosh Hashanah
- In 2000 the Representative Office of the Rabbinical Courts of Israel was opened in Kyiv
- Approximately 50 percent of the Ukrainian Jewish population is elderly
- Ten Jewish newspapers are published in Kyiv, four of which are national with a circulation of 10-15,000. Nearly 20 smaller Jewish newspapers are published in other Ukrainian cities, each with a circulation of about 1,000
- In Ukraine there are 15 Jewish day schools, 70 Sunday schools, 11 day care centers, 8 yeshivas, and 70 ulpany where a total of about 20,000 children and adults study.

⁸<http://www.ukraineinfo.us/about/minorities-jewish.html>



Kyiv June 5, 2006⁹

⁹ http://www.adl.org/Anti_semitism/anti-semitism_global_incidents_2006.asp

Cities with permanent FIC* members



List of Rabbis in Corresponding Cities:

1. Bila Tserkva: [Rabbi Meir Holzberg](#)
2. Bilhorod Dnistrovsky: [Rabbi Fishel Chichelnitsky](#)
3. Berdichiv: [Rabbi Shmuel Plotkin](#) and [Rabbi Moshe Taller](#)
4. Cherkasy: [Rabbi Dov Axelrod](#)
5. Chernihiv: [Rabbi Yakov Muzikant](#)
6. Chernivtsi: [Rabbi Menachem Glitzenstein](#)
7. Dniprodzerzhinsk: [Rabbi Levi Stambler](#)
8. Dnipropetrovsk: [Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetzky](#)
9. Donetsk: [Rabbi Pinchas Vyshedsky](#)
10. Ivano-Frankivsk: [Rabbi Moshe Kolesnik](#)
11. Izmail: [Rabbi Fishel Chichelnitsky](#)
12. Kharkiv: [Rabbi Moshe Moskowitz](#)
13. Kherson: [Rabbi Yosef Wolf](#)
14. Khmelnytsky: [Rabbi Yehoshua Raskin](#)
15. Kyiv: [Rabbi Yonatan Markowitz](#)
16. Kirovohrad: [Rabbi Dan Zakuta](#)
17. Korosten: [Rabbi Aaron Berger](#)
18. Kremenchuh: [Rabbi Shlomo Solomon](#)
20. Kryviy Rih: [Rabbi Leron Ederi](#)
21. Luhansk: [Rabbi Sholom Gopin](#)
22. Makiivka: [Rabbi Arye Spektor](#)
23. Mykolaiv: [Rabbi Sholom Gottlieb](#)
24. Odesa: [Rabbi Avraham Wolf](#)
25. Pervomaisk: [Rabbi Levi Perelstein](#)
26. Poltava: [Rabbi Yosef Segal](#)
27. Rivne: [Rabbi Shneur Shneersohn](#)
28. Sevastopil: [Rabbi Binyamin Wolf](#)
29. Sumy: [Rabbi Yechiel Levitansky](#)
30. Uzhhorod: [Rabbi Menachem Taichman](#)
31. Vinnitsia: [Rabbi Shaul Horovitz](#)
32. Zaporizhzhya: [Rabbi Nochum Erentreu](#)
33. Zhytomyr: [Rabbi Shlomo Wilhelm](#)

Chief Rabbi rebuilding Jewish community¹⁰

Kyiv Post, August 10, 2006

Fewer Jews are emigrating from Ukraine these days, but efforts to rebuild the country's Jewish community and Jews' cultural identity continue, Ukraine's chief Rabbi, Yaakov Dov Bleich, has said. In an Aug. 7 interview to the Post in Kyiv, Bleich referred to "a healthy competition" between various groups in Ukraine that represent its Jews. But, he added, certain Ukrainian publications, like the newspaper Silski Visti, which is associated with the country's Socialist Party, continue to print anti-Semitic material. Regarding Israel's recent military campaign in Lebanon, Bleich said Ukrainians need to understand that it's a fight against terrorism, which affects the lives of Jews and Gentiles in Ukraine and elsewhere

A lot less Jews are emigrating from Ukraine these days, but efforts to rebuild the country's Jewish community and Jews' cultural identity continue, Ukraine's chief Rabbi, Yaakov Dov Bleich, has said. In an Aug. 7 interview with The Post in Kyiv, Bleich referred to "a healthy competition" between various groups in Ukraine that represent its Jews. But, he added, certain Ukrainian publications, like the newspaper Silski Visti, which is associated with the country's Socialist Party, continue to print anti-Semitic material.

KP: How long have you been in Ukraine?

RB: I've been here for 17 years, since the summer of 1989, when I came to Kyiv to check out the situation.

KP: What was your reason for coming?

RB: I came because I had gotten a job. I came to be the rabbi of the [Jewish] community in Kyiv, and once I came here – also as the chief rabbi of Ukraine.

KP: What are you proud of having accomplished so far?

RB: My mission here has not been a constant one. In the beginning, when I came here, most of the work and most of the people whom I came in contact with were prepared emigrants to Israel and the United States. And over the years, of course, we've been able to develop a local community, which today is a very good and thriving model community, throughout Ukraine. And we've been able to build the trappings of a community, which means infrastructure like schools, and we had an old-age home opened recently – the first non-governmental home in Ukraine. We have orphanages and we have synagogues. We built, renovated, renewed, restored... I think we have accomplished great things.

¹⁰ Plekhanova, Lena. "Chief Rabbi Rebuilding Jewish Community." Kyiv Post <http://www.kyivpost.com/nation/24921/print/>. August, 10th, 2006

KP: What are you now planning to do?

RB: To continue developing. Here in Kyiv, we built a community center ... This is what we're doing throughout Ukraine, upon the ashes of the Holocaust, the ice of the Gulags, we're building a Jewish community in places where many, many people were sure that there would never be Jewish life again.

KP: After the fall of the Soviet Union, the flow of Jewish emigration out of Ukraine was large. Has this trend continued? Has there been a flow back?

RB: ... Very few people have come back ... I think what we see is an expression of what we call today globalization ... People do not have any problems living in Israel, Europe or the U.S. with their families and having a business in Ukraine.

KP: Are Ukrainian Jews still leaving Ukraine, still emigrating?

RB: Some are emigrating but a lot, lot less ... It is definitely not as much as 10 years ago, probably not even as much as five years ago. I think that it has a lot to do with the economy in Ukraine, its growth, the potential, the vision for the future of Ukraine. The people see that Ukraine's developing into a European country. I think there's a lot of optimism.

KP: What is the extent of Jewish business activity, investment in Ukraine?

RB: There is a natural market and there is a natural affinity between the people who grew up in Ukraine and who live today in Israel and the U.S.: they can speak the language [Russian, Ukrainian], they come back, they have contacts, and they can use these contacts ... We have a lot of people coming over and making investments.

KP: Can you name some of those who have come to invest in Ukraine, to do business here?

RB: ... I'm not sure they are interested in promoting themselves.

KP: In 2004, Silski Visty, a newspaper closely associated with the Socialist Party, published anti-Semitic material that caused a negative reaction from the Jewish community. Does any tension remain between the Jewish community and the Socialist Party today?

RB: First of all, our main issue was not with Silski Visty so much as with those giving Silski Visty all of those anti-Semitic ideas and articles: that is, MAUP [Interregional Academy of Personnel Management]. MAUP still exists; it still is publishing different anti-Semitic articles throughout many different journals and newspapers, such as Print and Personal Plus. It's hard to say that we had an issue with the Socialist Party. Silski Visty belongs to the Socialist Party, but the Socialist Party is hundreds of thousands of people and they don't all print newspapers. There's somebody who's responsible for this

newspaper – that’s the editor of the newspaper. The editor of this newspaper is responsible for the content of this newspaper. Silski Visty, as far as I’m concerned, has not turned the corner yet. It still has a long way to go. They still occasionally will print anti-Semitic articles ... I don’t believe that [Socialist leader Oleksandr] Moroz is an anti-Semite ... I don’t believe that [Interior Minister Yuriy] Lutsenko is either – he’s no longer a member of the Socialist Party. I don’t believe that the leadership of the Socialist Party are anti-Semites. What I do think is that the editor of Silski Visty, who is also a prominent member of the Socialist Party – I think that he has a problem with anti-Semitism.

And I don’t think that this is only the problem of Jews. I think that it’s a problem of Ukrainian society. A problem when people such as these do irresponsible things, print irresponsible articles and get away with it. I believe in freedom of speech, I believe in freedom of the press. But I also believe that people have got to be responsible for how they use that freedom...

KP: The desecration of Jewish cemeteries has raised concerns of increasing anti-Semitism. Is anti-Semitism really rising in Ukraine?

RB: There have been more acts of violence and anti-Semitism in Ukraine over the past number of years. It’s hard to analyze something like this in hundred percents: blame it on Silski Visti or MAUP or Personal Plus – it’s very hard. At the same time, it’s hard to ignore the connection between dozens of kiosks that sell anti-Semitic literature throughout Kyiv. And they supposedly are breaking Ukrainian law, because they’re selling literature that is being used to incite against national minorities, ethnic minorities such as Jews. And to say that there is no connection to those anti-Semitic attacks would be like a little child’s reaction when it closes its eyes and says: you don’t see me. You cannot totally detach these issues...

I think that lawmakers in Ukraine and law-enforcement agencies have to do their job better to rule out these things that cause crime, because you don’t need to deal with the results if you deal with the cause...

KP: Has Ukraine’s Jewish community been able to return Synagogues lost during the Soviet period?

RB: In Kyiv, Brodsky Synagogue [in the center of town, which was turned into a puppet theater by the Soviet authorities but given back to the Jewish community in 1997] has been renovated. It’s been 10 years already. Galytsky Synagogue, which is behind the Ukrayina department store on Victory Square, has been returned and renovated. And now they are active in the main – the central Synagogue as well. These are the synagogues we have returned in Kyiv. This synagogue [the Kyiv Choral Synagogue] has been active since 1945. It’s been obviously active for all these years. But it also has been renovated.

KP: What are relations like between the various Jewish organizations in Ukraine?

RB: There are a lot of Jewish organizations in Ukraine, and everybody works within the Jewish community. And at times when it's needed for the community, we'll come together. There is a healthy competition...

KP: Many of Ukraine's richest and powerful tycoons have close ties to Ukraine's Jewish community to which they donate money. Do you feel that this furthers negative stereotypes or do you welcome their sponsorship?

RB: These are not stereotypes. It's a fact that these are Jewish businessmen who are part of the Jewish community and donate money to the Jewish community. They identify with the community and they support the community. They do something they are very proud of and we're very proud that they don't forget the social needs of Ukrainians – be they Jewish or not...

KP: Do you support in any way relations between Israel and Ukraine, or are your activities limited to religion and culture?

RB: I keep very close contacts with two schools in Israel that I founded for Jewish children from the former Soviet Union... We have educational programs, but we don't have business programs.

KP: It's been said that the Jewish community in the former Soviet Union has been weakened through intermarriage with gentiles, which is damaging to Jewish identity. How do you feel about intermarriage of Jews today?

RB: Basically we're trying to encourage as much as we can for Jews to marry Jews. We're trying to encourage this for many reasons. One of the reasons is self-preservation. It's important for Jewish life for Jews to marry Jews and build Jewish homes and educate their children as Jews. It's important for Jewish continuity for children and grandchildren to continue being Jews ... In Jewish religion, intermarriage is frowned upon. It's imperative for Jews to marry Jews, people that believe as them – I'm talking about religion, not talking about ethnicity and national identity. And we try to educate the children to marry Jews. This is one of our goals. This doesn't stop them from being good citizens of whatever country they live in...

Unfortunately it's a very hard battle because the fact is that during Soviet times intermarriages were very-very prevalent. Sometimes we have four generations of intermarriages... It's interesting how there was assimilation to such a great extent and today sometimes people are coming back to their roots after almost a hundred years.

Interviews Conducted by Aaron Ostrovsky:

Ben Cohen-Director of European Affairs at the Anti-Defamation League (**ADL**)

Sam Kliger- Director of Russian Jewish Community Affairs at the American Jewish Committee (**AJC**)

Mark Levin-Executive Director of National Council of Soviet Jewry (**NCSJ**)