

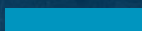


EAJC — 2022



Michael Mirilashvili

EAJC President





We live in very vulnerable times. The disastrous war, the ongoing political crisis in Israel, the division among the Jewish people. It is in times like these that our influence and diplomacy are most valuable: saving lives, bridging gaps, and bringing peace. So it's time to show what the Global Jewish Community and we, the leaders of the organized Jewish World, are capable of.



Euro-Asian Jewish Congress Annual Report

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A WAR THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING



Photo: Hillel Kharkiv facility
just a few days before the
war and after a rocket strike.

As a result of the war outbreak in Ukraine, the local population, including Jewish people, were badly affected and found themselves in a difficult humanitarian situation. Many Jews, mostly women, children and elderly fled to European countries, around 14 thousand made Aliyah. Although we don't have accurate numbers, we know that many Jews have stayed behind. We see Ukrainian Jews enlisting in the army, praying and even celebrating Jewish holidays in military uniform. We know about several casualties among the community. A new reality emerged and we must deal with it.

Humanitarian Aid Fund for the Jews of Ukraine ■

The leaders of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress acted quickly and took several steps: assistance to refugees in Moldova and other countries, evacuation to Israel and comprehensive humanitarian and financial assistance for the remaining Jewish communities in Ukraine. We immediately created a humanitarian aid fund and started collecting donations.

Helping refugees in Moldova and other countries ■

The Euro-Asian Jewish Congress has urgently provided significant financial assistance to the Jewish community of the Republic of Moldova as well as in other countries to evacuate people from the war zone and help the accepting communities to accommodate them. JCRM has organized 11 temporary accommodation centers for Ukrainian Jewish refugees all over the country. Moldovan Jewish community

representatives expressed their gratitude to the EAJC leadership for the assistance.

Humanitarian initiative has been launched in Austria to help Ukrainian refugees with the resettlement, providing them with primary counseling assistance, medicines and food. The initiative is headed by the newly elected Vice President of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress Matvei Hutman. He also financed the recreation in a health camp for Ukrainian children who suffered from hostilities in the country.

A hotline to help Olim from Ukraine ■

The non-profit organization Lemaanchem (For You), with the support of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, has opened a special telephone hotline for Jews from Ukraine who are applying for the status of repatriates in Israel. The hotline is designed to facilitate bureaucratic procedures when registering for immediate care at medical institutions.

Hotline number is *6884. Russian-speaking doctors and vol-

unteers are helping those, who have already arrived in Israel, but have not yet received an ID, to navigate in the field of health insurance and related services.

Strategic vision ■

The war presented many complex, strategic questions concerning the future of Jewish life in the region. As a local and international leader, EAJC initiated dialogue about the current situation and perspectives of tomorrow at the highest level.

8+

million people
left Ukraine*

13,000+

made Aliyah
since the
outbreak of
the war**

* according to the United Nations
High Commissioner for Refugees

** according to the Israeli Ministry
of Aliyah and Integration
as of October-November



It's a High Time For Unity

An address by the EAJC President Michael Mirilashvili

We live in very vulnerable times: the disastrous war, the ongoing political crisis in Israel, the division among the Jewish people.

More than any other year, lots of people worldwide, especially in our region, needed our urgent help this year. Therefore, this year we had to focus on providing significant financial and humanitarian aid to those harmed by the war. At such times, more than anything else, saving lives – is our true mission and purpose. In this, we, the leading Jewish organizations of the world, have to be united – to be ready to react, respond, and come to the rescue when needed.

It is precisely why the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress organized the strategic conference in past December: to gather the world's Jewish leaders to reflect on what has been done and to discuss our next steps.

We must continue to strive and do whatever we can to end this deadly war. But, in a sincere hope that it will end soon, we have to consider “the day after” as well – what will the Jewish world be like, and what consequences will we face?

However, we shall not only discuss – we got to act. It is in times like these that our influence and diplomacy are most valuable: saving lives, bridging gaps, and bringing peace. So it's time to show what the Global Jewish Community and we, the leaders of the organized Jewish World, are capable of.

Therefore, I call on my colleagues: let's mobilize around the Jewish communities of the Former Soviet Union, as once the Jewish World rallied around the Soviet Jewry. Let's help those who decided to make Aliyah, to emigrate to other countries, or to stay in their community. It is our duty to help them out, whatever their decision is.

Four years ago, we established the Institute for Euro-Asian Jewish Studies. We have already conducted several large-scale surveys of the Jewish Population in the post-soviet countries. We support in-

depth historical studies and closely monitor what's happening in our region. We believe it's crucial to analyze the situation, to rely on scientific data and opinions of the experts, and not just assumptions.

In times of massive outreach through social networks and the instant spread of information, populism becomes a tool for easy and quick engagement of the masses. People are attracted by simplistic, shallow ideas not backed by any credible data. We fight this fiercely when it comes to anti-Semitic theories and hate speech. But we do not always notice when misleading statements spread among the Jewish community. When the atmosphere in social media is tense and emotional, and the flow of fake information is uncontrollable, we must be much more cautious and accountable for what we say.

This applies to the situation in Israel today and starts from the very top.

We call on Israeli leaders to unite and put aside our internal conflicts. Today it's crucial to overcome the extended political crisis and cease the feeling of division and hostility. To act and talk responsibly. To compromise, to be partners with disagreements on the one side but with a deep sense of shared mission on the other.

Today, as Israel becomes more and more powerful, the worldwide Jewish community sees the Jewish State as a great source of inspiration and pride. An old dream of a Jewish State as the center of the Jewish world, the light for the Jewish Diaspora and nations of the world – is no longer just a dream. We have all the means to realize it. And we should always be aware – the Jewish world watches us with great expectations. The stronger the Jewish State becomes – the more eyes on us and the more responsible we become for the safety and well-being of Jews of the Diaspora.

Thereby, the Jewish world needs us to be strong and dependable. When we are so deeply divided by our internal disagreements, we won't be capable of helping our brothers and sisters in Diaspora when needed. Today, more than ever, unity among Jewish people is critical. Therefore, a clever, balanced, and coherent state work with the Diaspora is essential.

The Euro-Asian Jewish Congress is not a political structure. We always support the Jewish State and work with every government to be established. But we expect every government to always bear in mind the bigger picture, considering our relations with the global Jewish community and playing an active part in the life of the Diaspora.

At the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, we will continue our efforts of building bridges, promoting unity, and bringing different parts of the Jewish people closer. Together, united as one, as our people have been for centuries, we will overcome these difficult times.

Photo (on the right): President of the EAJC Michael Mirilashvili with the Israeli Minister of the Diaspora Affairs, Amichai Chikli.

Photo: EAJC Leaders: Michael Mirilashvili (President), Haim Ben Yakov (Director General), Menachem Bushuev (Treasurer) with the President of Israel, Isaac Herzog.



The Future of Jewish Life In Post-Soviet Countries

The war undoubtedly entailed multiple global processes, but it impacted in some less obvious ways as well. One example of such impact is the future of Jewish life in affected countries of the region. A new reality emerged with complex questions that must be addressed. In this regard, the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, together with Jerusalem Post, held the conference 'The Future of Jewish Life in Post-Soviet Countries' on December 6. It reached **439,000 views**.

The conference hosted some of the best minds of the Jewish world: President of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, Dr. Michael Mirilashvili; EAJC Chairman of the Board, Aaron G. Frenkel; Former president of the Supreme Court of Israel Aharon Barak; President of the World Jewish Congress, Ronald S. Lauder; Aliyah and Integration Minister Pinna Tamano-Shata; Diaspora Affairs Minister Nachman Shai; Agriculture Minister Oded Forer; MK Simcha Rothman; Israel's Ambassador to Russia, Alexander Ben Zvi; Israel's Ambassador to Ukraine Michael Brodsky; President and Chairman of the Jewish Federations of North America, Eric Fingerhut; Vice Chair of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Malcolm Hoenlein, and other distinguished guests.

During the past year, the Jewish communities of Ukraine and Russia were divided into several parts: those who, despite circumstances, decided or were forced to stay, those who immigrated to Israel, and those who migrated to third countries.

First, we have to understand what numbers we are talking about. There are different approaches to estimating the size of the Jewish population in the former Soviet Union. The differences in approaches and the difficulty in accurately estimating numbers are due to various factors, such as the inaccuracy of censuses and the ambiguity of Jewish identity and self-determination models in the FSU countries. Meanwhile, meeting the criteria of Israel's Law of Return is the broadest



category of eligibility for the Jewish population, which includes both ethnic cores and "second generation" Jews, as well as non-Jewish family members.

Using the estimate of Sergio Della Pergola, one of the leading specialists in Jewish demography, we estimate that between 850,000 and 930,000 Jews were living in the former Soviet Union, of whom 40-45% are ethnic Jews (up to 30% of the total are of monogenic Jewish origin, plus descendants of mixed marriages with a stable Jewish identity). Among them, about 200 thousand lived in Ukraine before the war and about 550 thousand in Russia.

However, estimating the scale of Jewish migration is much more challenging. If we have exact figures for Israel: in 2022, about 60 thousand people repatriated (14 thousand came from Ukraine and more than 35

thousand from Russia), so it is not so easy to identify Jews in the flow of migrants to other countries.

This complex migration picture has presented the state of Israel, European and American Jewry, as well as regional and international Jewish organizations, the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress included, with many complex questions.



The first question is what to do with the communities that chose to stay. Their activities have been significantly reduced and reformatted. However, many Jews have remained in their communities, which have become places of unity and much-needed assistance. At the same time, we are unable to guarantee the safety of these Jews today. It raises an ethical dilemma. Should we encourage emigration to Israel or other safer places or continue supporting local activities? And if we support, to what extent, given that activities, though much reduced, have narrowed to direct questions of survival and most basic needs. This issue is exacerbated by a significant loss in the solvency of the population and, most importantly, of local donors who used to take an active part in financing Jewish life.

The second question is: Is Israel ready to accept new repatriation waves? The repatriates of the latest wave face not only major bureaucratic problems and inflexibility of the Israeli state system but also a total lack of understanding of the needs of today's repatriates, which raises questions about the efficiency of the absorption processes. While the Israeli system continues to work according to old patterns, both the urgency of the situation and the changed face of repatriation require new approaches and reforms. The conflicts and tensions over this issue peak in light of the considerable debate over changing the Law of Return and the abolition of the so-called 'grandchildren clause'.

It is worth noting that the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress is unequivocally against the abolition of the 'grandchildren clause'. We believe that in this matter, it is necessary to consider the specifics of the post-Soviet Jewry

identity and the difference between regional and universal models of Jewish self-determination. The statistics clearly demonstrate this. According to extensive research of the Jewish population conducted by EAJC in 2019-20, about 80% of respondents permanently or in certain circumstances consider themselves Jewish. Moreover, for the majority to consider themselves Jewish means belonging to the Jewish nation, its history, culture, and traditions (about 70%), rather than religious adherence and halakhic rules (16%).

As former President of the Supreme Court of Israel, Aharon Barak, stated during the conference, the Law of Return should be treated as the Basic Law, given its utmost importance and symbolism for the State of Israel.

Hence, any change to it should reflect the deep consensus in society and be carried out with great caution. We couldn't agree more. The Euro-Asian Jewish Congress leadership has recently met with Israeli Minister of Diaspora Affairs Amichai Chikli and Minister of Aliyah and Integration Ofir Sofer. In a productive meeting, where we discussed the cooperation between our structures, we also conveyed the message that Jewish leaders all over the world pin their hopes and expect to see thoughtful and balanced policy regarding Diaspora relations.

The third question is: what do we do with Jewish refugees in Europe? Will they assimilate into the local non-Jewish society, integrate into the system of existing Jewish communities (and can these communities accept them), or remain a separate, autonomous unit, forming their own institutions?

Finally, an essential question: if and when the war ends, will these Jews wish to return home? Either decision must be respected and supported by the Jewish leadership, according to the Executive Vice Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Malcolm Hoenlein.

With so many unknowns and unpredictable futures, making long-term strategic decisions is tough, but we cannot stand by and simply watch. We have to discuss it and come up ready for several scenarios.

Israel Should Redefine its Global Role

75 years after, it's time for us to admit, that Israel is no longer just a local power - we must think and impact globally.

This year we marked the 125th anniversary of a First Zionist Congress in Basel and once more reminded ourselves what a truly remarkable history we share. Five years after the Congress, in his famous 'Altneuland' the mastermind of the World Zionist Organization, Theodor Herzl, allowed himself to dream big, maybe even too much. One can't help but smile reading it today. Brought up in an totally European manner, Herzl wanted to bring the Europe itself, all its essence, culture and progress to the Middle East. As many early theoretical and political zionists, he even saw a key in it as to getting along with local Arab population and peaceful coexistence. When it came to the real life and practical deeds, history got in the way of those dreams. But one cannot deny how right Herzl was in his general vision.

All in all, Zionist project succeeded in building a contemporary state, although the way to it was extremely hard, and sometimes, at the very crucial moments, maybe even seemed unachievable.

"To say the least, at the moment our chances are very weak. To be more frank, we have to admit that the enemy has a huge advantage," assessed Israel's chances Yigael Yadin, the commander of Haganah operations at the time and the forthcoming IDF chief of staff. According to Ben-Gurion, these words were heard at a meeting on May 12th, only two days before the historic declaration of independence.

The atmosphere among Israeli leaders at the time was very tense, full of most complex emotions. The War of Independence began long before that day. By May 1948, the hardest battles were already going on throughout the country. Jerusalem was under heavy siege. The day before the proclamation, on May 13th, four kibbutzim of



photo: National Photo Collection of Israel, Photography dept. Government Press Office

Gush Etzion fell, to be revived only decades later. After the proclamation, the war broke out with renewed vigor, on several fronts, and the first weeks of the new Jewish state turned out to be maybe the most complicated, if not decisive. The final ceasefire agreement was signed only in the summer of 1949.

However, despite the dire forecasts, Israel heroically withstood this war and everything that happened after – 74 years full of events, victories and successes, as it is said, – is already a history.

Today the Jewish people do have a fast-growing, modern, democratic state. Although democracy should never be taken for granted. It's something we are quite lucky to have it in Israel. Something we must cherish and stick to it. By ensuring the continuity of democratic traditions and developing the stable system of checks and balances, we are ensuring the very future of our State for years to go.

At the very first Zionist Congresses, delegates argued whether it's more important to make political moves rather than actually populate the land. We know it today as political and practical wings in Zionist movement. Well, ensuring the work of democracy in Israel is indeed a practical Zionism of today.

In general, it seems like misconception to claim that Zionism fulfilled its mission and eventually lost its relevance as an ideology. The fact that we indeed populated the land, built a state and reached political recognition among the nations doesn't mean that the work is done. We still can redefine the same aspects, we still have a lot of political, practical and spiritual work to do. In the routine of everyday life we tend to forget that our

'founding fathers', both of the ancient and the modern Jewish nation, dreamt of not less than making a world a better place. That precisely what binds Judaism and modern Zionism. The idealism of Torah and the command to serve as a role model to other nations through building a close to an ideal, prosperous state with a just society served as inspiration for Zionist pioneers and statesmen. That is what we must not forget today. We have to revive and give another chance to such visionary, dream-like Zionism.

Therefore, building just a good enough state wasn't the plan and we are only halfway to go. Luckily, we are growing fast and today the State of Israel is already considered among others as a role model in several aspects of life.

Obviously creativity, technologies, as well as diplomacy have to be included in this list. Historically the Land of Israel has always been the crossroads of continents, empires and nations. This delicate position among the numerous neighbors, who were not always friendly, alongside with difficult climate, harsh conditions and scarcity of natural resources has not been making our life any easier neither in ancient times nor today. However, it taught us to look on the brighter side of life, find positive in negative and most importantly to adapt.

Lack of alternatives made us think out of the box. Creativity led to the boost of technology when the time came. Technology allowed the small Jewish state to become one of the leading economic forces, gained us a solid international status and strengthened our diplomatic positions.

In light of recent developments, Israel has received a fair amount of criticism in the world press and social media regarding its positions. However, in this criticism, if it does not turn into explicitly anti-Semitic comments, there is a very important and positive grain for us. Our opinion and our position are important to the world and to the Jewish communities. Today, we, as a state, are expected to be a full-fledged participant in the global agenda. We gained our international status, though our self-perception yet has to keep up.

We still live in a complex region, fundamentalist ideologies of hatred towards the Jewish state are still strong. Even after 74 years, Israel is still forced to face existential threats, all the same fears of society and leadership. However, if at the beginning our 'newborn' state had to literally fight for its existence and solve many internal problems, today Israel is no longer just a local force – we have to think and act globally.



Aliyah 2022: Is Israel Really Ready For Waves Of Immigration?



photo:
INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP
OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

This year the whole world, including the worldwide Jewish community and the State of Israel, continue to face a series of global changes and severe challenges. The Russian invasion on the territory of Ukraine and the devastating consequences of the war caused large-scale migration processes. Israel, as expected, is still one of the main directions for the Jewish population of the former USSR countries. As of June, nearly 51,000 people have made Aliya, according to the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration. Mostly from Ukraine and Russia.

Another large wave of repatriation raises all the same questions about the readiness of the Israeli state to accept repatriates in such numbers in a short period of time; the quality of the repatriation and absorption processes; and whether the Jewish state understands the needs of the current repatriation wave. While satisfactory rate with the state services remains quite high, there are still voices of criticism towards state structures in social networks and public platforms, among repatriates themselves, as well as among opinion leaders and people working with them directly. These voices shall not be ignored.

Usually, the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress does not operate in Israel. The sphere of interests of the organization is located in the Euro-Asian region. Community activities in the region and the establishment of Israel's ties with the Diaspora are among the priorities of our work. Nevertheless, we consider repatriation as an integral part of the Jewish life of the region, and in 2019, an according resolution was adopted at the EAJC General Assembly. In addition, the leaders of Jewish communities and organizations expressing more and more concerns, claiming that the problem of repatriation and absorption requires careful study – especially in terms of a current severe humanitarian crisis. The EAJC also receives many direct requests from repatriates for help.

In this regard, the EAJC Board decided to hold a special forum in order to formulate the main problems that Russian-speaking repatriates of the last waves face in Israel. A report was presented to the Minister of Aliyah and Integration.

Representatives of public organizations, private initiatives and individuals, who work directly with new immigrants, were invited to the forum.

As a result, we compiled a report, based on the quantitative and qualitative answers of the preliminary survey as well as opinions expressed at the forum. The report was presented to the heads of Israeli state structures and large public organizations.

A survey by the Ministry of Aliya and Integration, that was presented at the forum, showed a high degree of immigrant's satisfaction with the work of public services. Nevertheless, the forum participants identified a number of issues in each of the stages of repatriation and absorption, which repatriates usually complain about. Based on the identified problems, we present our recommendations below.

Submission and review of documents, reception, provision of primary services, informational support

Issues:

- Excessively long queues for consular checks, obtaining in ID card at the Ministry of Internal

Affairs and certificate of a new immigrant at the Ministry of Absorption.

- Lack of transparency regarding queues and reviewing documents, lack of uniform rules and clear deadlines.
- Incompetence of employees, inability or unwillingness to provide quality service.
- Lack of a single, high-quality and up-to-date source of information.
- Insufficient coordination between government agencies and the non-profit sector.

Recommendations:

- Clearly described procedure of submitting documents both for consular checks in the countries of origin and at the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Israel, containing clear and transparent deadlines for reviewing and issuing visas/ID cards/certificates.
- Transparency of document review status and periodic notices.
- Automation of basic services, such as issuing an Ulpan voucher, referral to open a bank account, signing up for a health insurance fund, sending relevant instructions for confirmation of education, etc.
- Consideration of implementing a "one stop shop" service, where an immigrant could receive all the necessary services and obtain all primary documents (for instance at the airport).
- Implementing a separate queue and a counter at the Ministry of Internal Affairs departments, only for repatriates.
- Development of a single online information center, including:
 - a detailed step-by-step immigrant's checklist-questionnaire for the preparation and processing of all primary paperwork and the completion of priority tasks;
 - a database of up-to-date data, articles divided into topics, relevant to the completed questionnaire;
 - personalized offers relevant to the completed questionnaire;
 - opportunity to ask a community of experts a question or to request volunteer help;
 - base of experts, volunteers and providers of various services.

- Improved coordination with non-profit organizations that help repatriates in various areas.
- Informational support for those organizations and initiatives.
- Tenders in the non-profit sector for the provision of certain services.

A clear procedure, defined deadlines and notifications about changes in the status of applications will eliminate the uncertainty factor and reduce the burden of unnecessary communication of employees with worried candidates. A “one-stop-shop” service, where in one iteration an immigrant will be able to obtain or order the issuing of the maximum possible amount of documents, and appoint all the necessary queues with an employee on the spot, as well as the automation of basic services (for example, issuing universal vouchers for Ulpán) will significantly reduce bureaucratic procedures, queues and workload of branches, and will also make the process much shorter and more understandable. Step-by-step instructions with relevant information in one place online will allow immigrants to control the process and always know what to do next.

Financial safety

Issues:

- Distrust of the new immigrants among the banks, exaggerated demands and refusals to open accounts.
- Refusal to transfer money even from non-sanctioned banks.

Recommendations:

- Explanatory work with banks. Development of exemptions system and a basic package of services for new immigrants in order to reduce refusals.
- The developed, up-to-date guidance on working with new immigrants and instructing employees will help to avoid more frequent conflict situations.

Housing

Issues:

- Lack of funding for housing programs for new immigrants, especially for elderly.
- The actual absence of state social housing, the lack of informational and actual support for immigrants in the private market.
- Lack of support for new immigrants during communication with the landlord and signing the contract.

- Distrust of new immigrants among landlords, deliberately exaggerated requirements for them.

Recommendations:

- Informational support, help of volunteers, involvement of the non-profit sector.
- Support for immigrants in the form of state guarantees for landlords.
- Considering development of the incentives system for landlords to rent out housing to new immigrants.

The lack of funding for public housing programs must be compensated by solid support for new immigrants in the private market.

Professional adaptation, confirmation or continuation of education, recertification and re-training

Issues:

- Lack of structured and relevant info on confirmation of higher education diplomas.
- Lack of system flexibility even in the state of emergency.
- Unawareness of new immigrants of the local labor market specifics.
- Lack of economic and social motivation for employers to hire new immigrants.

Recommendations:

- Conducting assessment tests and preparing repatriates for the specifics of the labor market at the early stages of repatriation planning. Presenting realistic perspectives.
- A structured and more transparent system for offering career opportunities (retraining courses, obtaining or confirming education, etc.) based on tests.
- State funding and informational support for non-profit organizations, acting in this area.
- Information campaign about the economic and social benefits of hiring new immigrants.
- Creating an accessible professional pool of new immigrants for HR professionals and employers.

Early preparation of new immigrants for the realities of the local labor market and realistic forecasts will help balance expectations and reduce dissatisfaction upon arrival.

50+

thousand
people made
Aliyah from
FSU countries
in 2022

13,694

from Ukraine

29,894

from Russia

1,591

from Belarus

about

5,000

are awaiting status
change in Israel
(mostly repatriates
from Russia)

according to the Israeli Ministry
of Aliyah and Integration

Cultural absorption

Issues:

- New immigrants receive very fragmentary information about the specifics of Israeli society and the history of the state, which doesn't create a sufficient background for understanding civil processes and leads to conflicts.

Recommendations:

- Development of "crash courses" on the history of the state and the specifics of modern Israeli society. Possibly a tender in the non-profit sector to cover this need.

A profound, meaningful course on the state functioning and its history will accelerate the process of integration of new immigrants into civil society.

A detailed version of the Forum Report can be found by the following link: bit.ly/alayah-report.

Summing up the forum, Director General of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, Dr. Haim Ben Yaakov, noted that over the past months, the EAJC has been engaged in "personal, targeted assistance" in special cases. Today, there are more and more such "special" stories. "We need to consider how to automate many common processes, and direct the main resources to solving such exceptional cases. This can significantly improve the quality of service for repatriates," he said.

As we can see, the numbers show us that subjective feelings do not always reflect the real picture. Obviously, mostly negative cases are reported on social networks, which creates a feeling of general dissatisfaction, but problems cannot be ignored, because it is the quality of absorption that can affect the decision of a fifth of the repatriates whether to remain in the Jewish state or not. It is in our common power to make this process more comfortable and meeting all contemporary requirements.

Aliyah 2022: Who Are They?

According to a study, conducted by the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, as of November 2022, 51,000 Jews from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus moved to Israel. This is more than four times more than the last year (12,989). Among them, 13,694 came from Ukraine, 35,894 came from Russia, 1,591 came from Belarus and a smaller number came from other countries of the former USSR. According to the Ministry, since the end of February till the end of March, the largest group was from Ukraine. At the time – in March, there were three times more of those who came from Ukraine than from Russia. However, then the trend changed: now there is significant rise in Aliyah from Russia and a decrease from Ukraine.

According to the Academic Chairman of the The Institute for Euro-Asian Jewish Studies (IEAJS), Prof. Ze'ev Khanin, Aliyah from Russia will continue to grow, given the queues for consular checks and tightening political climate in the country.

The average age of this wave of Aliyah is low, which may have a positive impact on the demographic composition of the Russian-speaking Israeli population as a whole. **Another characteristic feature of the current wave of repatriation is a high level of education.** More than half of the Jews who arrived in Israel in 2022 have secondary technical and higher education. There are many people with a PhD (19%). We can admit, that the current wave, to a certain extent, representatively shows the entire cross-section of the expanded Jewish population of Russia and Ukraine.

The most popular occupations among newcomers are in the field of trade, services and marketing (16.5%), the number of engineers and technicians is much lower (6.5%). Then, in descending order, we have economists and lawyers (3.9%) and representatives of the IT sector (2.3%). More than half registered as “not having an occupation”. It is worth mentioning that often those who have a higher education, have not worked a single day in their field of education. More than 80% of repatriates are graduates of humanitarian faculties.

Reasons for coming to Israel. Repatriates from Russia twice as often (68.4%) comparing to those from

Ukraine (37.2%) reported to sociologists that they were determined to leave anyway – it happened “coincidentally”. This is also why most repatriates from Russia went through the standard repatriation procedure. Approximately one third of the surveyed immigrants (31.8% - from Ukraine and 24.6% - from Russia) – “only considered a move, but the war prompted them to make a final decision.” At the same time, another third of the Ukrainian repatriates (29.6%) noted that they were not intending to move, but the war changed their plans (in comparison to those from Russia, there were only 8.1% of such answers).

If we compare the latest data with the EAJC study, conducted among the Ukrainian Jewish community in 2019-2020, then of those people who were not going to emigrate (31%) or were thinking about leaving (41%), the majority are already abroad, a significant part of them – in Israel (29.6% and 31.8% respectively).

Due to the continuation of active hostilities on the territory of Ukraine, the ways of arrival of repatriates from different states differ significantly. Thus, 64% of immigrants from Russia reported that they arrived in Israel according to the standard procedure. Whereas among the Ukrainian repatriates, this share is only 14%. The opposite situation is observed regarding the urgent repatriation process through the “green route” - starting abroad and ending in Israel: 74% of immigrants from Ukraine and only 1% from Russia made Aliyah this way.

Assistance in repatriation to the vast majority of immigrants from Russia and Ukraine was provided by state or near-state structures. According to the survey, two-thirds of repatriates from Ukraine were helped to move to the Jewish state by embassies, consulates, Nativ and the Jewish Agency (66.6%). For immigrants from Russia, this figure is two times less (34.8%). A third of people from Ukraine (32.5%) and only 4.5% of people from Russia reported that they were helped by Jewish religious and other community structures. Other organizations and local volunteers helped 8.4% of Ukrainian and 4.5% of Russian Jews. Relatives, friends, acquaintances in the country of origin, Israel and elsewhere helped in 3.9% of cases from Ukraine and 4.5% of cases from Russia.

Repatriates of the current wave mostly received all the necessary information about moving and obtaining Israeli citizenship from the Jewish Agency (74% - from Ukraine, 67% - from Russia); from Nativ - 26% and 24%, accordingly; from the employees of the Ministry Aliyah and Integration - 6% of Ukrainians and 16% of Russians.

In addition, the data indicate that repatriates from both Russia (83.4%) and Ukraine (65.5%) left a large number of relatives in the countries of origin. Including parents (44.4% - among immigrants from Ukraine, 75.1% - among immigrants from Russia), brothers and sisters (37.5% and 49.5% respectively), children (30.7% and 21.7%). A characteristic feature of this wave from Ukraine is its gender homogeneity: only women and children can leave the country, since men are mobilized or cannot cross the border. Thus, almost half (45.8%) of repatriates from Ukraine told sociologists that their spouse remained in the country of origin. Grandparents, in turn, remained in the country of origin for every fourth repatriate from Russia (24.5%) and every fifth - from Ukraine (19.8%).

"The center of the transnational Russian-speaking Jewish diaspora is moving from the territory of the former USSR and Europe to Israel. Public organizations will have to deal with this circumstance in the near future," Prof. Khanin summed up.

The degree of satisfaction with the first steps in Israel among new immigrants of the latest wave remains high. The average is 70%. 74% are "extremely satisfied" with state support in the form of cash payments (6% are dissatisfied), the same number (74%) with the housing conditions of primary placement (9% are dissatisfied) and the placement of children in educational institutions of various levels (12% are dissatisfied). A slightly smaller number of respondents (70%) were satisfied with the processes of opening a bank account and transferring money (13% dissatisfied), as well as informational support about the local labor

79%

of those who came are planning to stay in Israel

market (68%, 14% dissatisfied) and the convenience of obtaining services at the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration (67%, 13% - dissatisfied).

Among the priorities that repatriates set for themselves, the most common are desire to find **permanent housing** (66%), **suitable work** (63%) and **learning Hebrew** (73.7%). It is followed by **placement of children in the education system** (57%), **understanding of Israeli society** (54%), **confirmation of education and obtaining a professional work license** (42%), **professional development or retraining courses** (34%) and **continuation of the former (foundation of a new) business** (22%).

The linguistic nature of the current repatriation wave. Not only almost 100% of people from Russia and Belarus (99.2%), but also two-thirds (65%) of people from Ukraine reported that their usual language of communication in family, with friends and at work is Russian. Both languages - Russian and Ukrainian - are another 16.7%. **18% of repatriates from Ukraine consider themselves to be exclusively Ukrainian-speaking.** Both Aliyah and the transnational diaspora will remain Russian-speaking in the short term, which is also shown by age-related data: the difference between very young and elderly repatriates is small. **At the same time, about 67% from Russia and 60% from Ukraine - a few weeks or months after their arrival - already consider Israel as their country.**

According to the survey data, 83% of repatriates from Russia believe that they will stay in Israel (47.3% of which are "sure about that" and 35.7% "think they will stay"). 17% of them are not planning to stay or don't know yet. In the case of immigrants from Ukraine, the indicators are similar - 78.5% intend to stay in the country (41.5% - "sure yes", 37% - "think so"). No or do not know - 21.5%.

The database of the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration (about 20,000 people) was taken as the basis for the sociological study. Sample contained 1090 people. The statistical error is 1.5% to 2.5%.

Safety And Diplomacy – Our Answer To Terror

In a little more than a year we've witnessed major outbreaks of violence and two waves of massive rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip. Our support for Israel's security must be unconditional. Our answer should be strong defense, safer living conditions and solid diplomacy.



"...When a living people yields in matters of such a vital character it is only when there is no longer any hope of getting rid of us, because they can make no breach in the iron wall. Not till then will they drop their extremist leaders whose watchword is "Never!". And the leadership will pass to the moderate groups, who will approach us with a proposal that we should both agree to mutual concessions. Then we may expect them to discuss honestly practical questions..." – wrote in 1923 Ze'ev Jabotinsky in his famous article 'About the Iron Wall'.

It's remarkable how visionary Jabotinsky was at the time. Yet in 2022 the terror and 'extremist leaders whose watchword is "Never!" ' are still very much present and the time of the 'moderate leadership groups' hopefully is yet to come. So far, in a little more than a year, we have witnessed an ongoing wave of terror attacks and two outbreaks of massive missile barrages against Israel.

During the operation 'Guardian of the Walls' in May 2021 we saw an unprecedented number of events, supporting Israel's right to defense throughout Jewish communities of the region: from a demonstration in the center of Tbilisi or Chisinau to the giant Israeli flag flying over the sky of Kyiv. One of the Jewish parliamentarians of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine even proposed a bill, condemning Hamas attacks and declaring it a terrorist organization, which we, at the EAJC, unanimously endorsed.

Maybe even more significant reaction to those events was the project initiated by the Jewish National Fund (KKL) and the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress 10 days after the end of the anti-terrorist operation. A project aimed to enhance the defensive infrastructure and to build a dozen of mobile protective units in southern Israeli settlements, close to the border with the Gaza Strip.

In addition to bomb shelters, the program also included the construction of a "Safety Road" in kibbutz Nir Am for the needs of the IDF and security forces. The project was



implemented in close coordination with local settlement councils and the Israeli Ministry of Defense. Particular attention was paid to the border farmland area to ensure the protection of farmers during potential shelling from the Strip. On September 22, an opening ceremony took place. The project was financially supported by the President of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress Dr. Michael Mirilashvili, EAJC Vice-Presidents David Yakobashvili, Victor Naishuller and Boris Spektor.

Just like this, a better safety, each additional concrete shelter for Israeli citizens is yet another brick in the symbolic 'Iron Wall' in some way. Well, in the article Jabotinsky expressed some skepticism about being recognized by other Muslim forces in the world, mostly because in his view 'we had nothing to offer them in return'. Maybe it was the case back in 1923, but it is not so today. Israel has lots of things to offer. Throughout Israeli history, in the difficult conditions of wars and terror from literally

It reflects in practical deeds and gestures as well. In April 2021, the UAE became the first Muslim country to officially celebrate Israeli Yom HaShoah (27th of Nisan according to the Jewish calendar) along with the International Remembrance Day. In the summer of 2021, for the first time in the Arab world, the UAE hosted an exhibition dedicated to the Holocaust at The Crossroads of Civilization Museum in Dubai.

Holocaust Remembrance Day is also officially marked in Albania – a Muslim-majority country. In 2020 a monument to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust was opened in Tirana. They are very proud of the fact that during the Second World War, Albanians fiercely defended local Jews, and this area became the only one in Europe where the Jewish population actually increased during the war. This story was specially marked on a gala reception during the Albanian Prime Minister's Edi Ram visit to Israel. As part of the evening, Honorary



every side, we persistently offered peace to our neighbors. And finally it is bearing fruits. The recently signed Abraham Accords have led to an unprecedented level of Israeli cooperation with the Gulf and North African states.

We, as well as our partners, already see how much the peace process, the rich scientific, cultural and technological exchange lead us to incomparably more than senseless enmity. It doesn't mean that we have to agree on everything, but it does mean that we are carrying on a civilized dialogue and can discuss our differences patiently and respectfully. And thus, we are on the right path.

We see more and more public figures and religious authorities among Muslims, often with a large number of followers in social networks, who resist the wave of hatred towards Israel, support the Jewish state and call for peace. Muslim and Christian Arabs, citizens of Israel, call for an end to disinformation campaign and speak up about free and dignified life in a democratic state.

President of the EAJC Alexander Mashkevich, together with EAJC President Michael Mirilashvili, honoured the head of the Albanian government with an award for special merits in maintaining Israeli-Albanian relations and supporting the local Jewish community. It should be noted that Albania also was the first Muslim-majority country in the world to endorse and adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism to fight it legally.

This shift in a Muslim world towards the State of Israel, the dialogue instead of hatred, the recognition instead of denial, give us hope that even the most difficult and seemingly insoluble disagreements sooner or later come to an end. We hope that this reconciliation and our honest interfaith dialogue will serve as an inspiration to the rest of the world. That is what the Torah commands us to do – to inspire others by our own example and thereby change the world for the better. And this is one of the few things that Jabotinsky, now almost a century ago, maybe he could not imagine and predict at the time.

In 21st Century Religions Are Building Bridges



In September 2022, world leaders gathered in Astana, Kazakhstan, to discuss the role of religion in today's world order.

Kazakhstan, well-known for its diversity, peaceful and respectful coexistence of different religious groups, including the Jewish community, is becoming a new center for interfaith dialogue and international relations. The 7th Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions gathered on one platform the Pope, both Chief Rabbis of Israel, the most influential Muslim leaders from Egypt, UAE, and even Iran. Jewish communities of the region were represented by the delegation of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress.

It's quite remarkable to witness how history eventually puts everything into place. Once sidelined and even oppressed during the 20th century, Judaism, despite its relatively small numbers, has finally regained its deserved place among the leading religions. The world has finally accepted us as an equal partner and watches us with curiosity and sometimes even admiration.

A major part in this process was undoubtedly played by the Biblical miracle of the modern Jewish State, a reborn representative of everything Jewish among the nations. Yet the discussion of Judaism and its role in Israel and the Jewish world itself, namely how modern Jewry practices Judaism and whether it is possible to be Jewish while not observing the commandments, is gaining momentum.

It is curious to see how American Jewry, in terms of assimilation, is going through similar processes that Soviet Jewry experienced long ago. A modern, free and diverse life always challenges the foundations of age-old traditions. For many Jews in the early Soviet years and even earlier, socialism and a new society formation were the ways out of the old world. While some Jews, who cherished their heritage, were forcefully deprived of it, many families became strangers to

their own culture by choice, long before the years of raging state antisemitism.

All of this together formed a very interesting and problematic modern dynamic among post-Soviet Jewry. It led to generations of Jews knowing almost nothing about being Jewish and its meaning. According to the large-scale survey conducted by the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, the Soviet legacy continues to allocate a moderate role to religion in Jewish life, making the connection between Judaism and Jewish identity less straightforward.

Nevertheless, the growth of interest in Judaism and religion in the post-Soviet years has indicated stable “adherence” to Judaism in the broader sense. Observing “easier” and more social traditions, such as lighting Hanukkah candles or attending the Passover Seder, prevail over more demanding and personal aspects, such as keeping kosher, Sabbath observance, or fasting on Yom Kippur.

In general, 48% of those surveyed do not consider themselves religious, 27% say they are observant, and 25% found it difficult to answer. While 43% reported that Judaism is their religion, 14% of those surveyed responded that they consider both Judaism and Christianity their religion equally. Among those who do not consider themselves religious, 32% still called Judaism their religion above all others.

While the debates and even quarrels regarding what it means to be Jewish among post-Soviet Jewry are very much at their peak, we still witness the phenomenon of post-assimilation and rising interest in Judaism. So after all, we can make a cautious assumption that the war on religions, declared a century ago by the communists, given still lot of influence today, is gradually coming to its end.

Though historically, civilizational borders, built by religious institutions, alienation and religious wars,

brought much suffering and turned many people away from religion, it has become obvious with time – it is human misconceptions, that lead to distortions of religious ideas. In the wrong hands, religious attitudes are subject to misinterpretation and can easily become weapons. As the history of the last century teaches us, those who strongly opposed religion, eventually came up with a fanatic faith of their own.

Religion, for its part, was always an integral part of human civilization and culture and can serve as a significant source of values, righteousness and wisdom.

Humankind has come a long way, and today we have finally come to the ideas of acceptance, dialogue, respect and multiculturalism, both in secular and religious societies. The fact that we see the world differently does not mean that someone is necessarily right and someone is wrong. This means that we have something to talk about and can learn from each other. As Jewish people say: “Not all wisdom was given to us by the Almighty.”

In the modern world, we don’t have to be identical to feel unity in pursuing universal human values. We are united by the same values that we draw from our sacred scriptures and learn from our prophets and sages, such as the sanctity of life, striving for a just society and changing the world for the better.

When we don’t try to outshout each other, we can begin to distinguish voices and realize that often we are talking about the very same things.



'We Have No Time – We Must Save People'

Retrospective: the Jewish community of Ukraine – about the first days and months of the war, which caught everybody off guard.



The war in Ukraine has been going on for more than a year. During this time, according to the UN, more than 8 million people left the country. Half of them are children. The Jewish community of Ukraine was severely affected as well. Before the outbreak of the war, the Jewish community of Ukraine numbered more about 200 thousand people. The Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, which unites Jewish communities in more than 20 countries, has an ongoing communication with the Jewish community of Ukraine. We talked to its leaders amid a humanitarian crisis to find out how the war has changed their personal lives and the life of the entire community.

Iosif Akselrud, Director of Hillel CASE, Executive Director of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress

All branches of Hillel CASE – in Belarus, Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan – function as usual, except the ones in Ukraine. In almost every city where Hillel operates, it is usually a key Jewish organization, while Hillel in Chisinau (Kishinev) is truly showing miracles of heroism nowadays. The Jewish community takes out a huge number of people from Ukraine to Moldova. From there, they are making Aliyah to Israel. Hillel students work almost 24/7 and don't even hold their own events anymore – there is no time for that. I am sincerely grateful to our headquarters in Washington, who provided support to the office in Chisinau so that they were able to provide assistance to the refugees.

Most of the students of Ukrainian Hillel remain in the country, while about a third left. In a couple of weeks we are planning to relaunch our regional office operations from Israel. In total, the Ukrainian Hillel gathered a community of about five thousand students. Almost all of our activists, around 90%, are now acting as volunteers.

The most beautiful and large Hillel chapter in Ukraine – in Kharkiv – is now completely destroyed due to the rocket attack. For us it was a big shock. The big Hillel center was in the very heart of the city. For those who used to attend it, that was a real tragedy, almost all of the Kharkiv students and volunteers left – some went abroad, some relocated to other cities of Ukraine. Only two employees remained in the city. We are keeping in touch and helping them as much as we can.

Some fellows, for instance, were evacuated to Lviv, which remains relatively peaceful. Hillel there works on humanitarian aid and the reception of refugees almost the same way as in Chisinau. Students joined in helping the evacuation of civilians at bus and train stations. They coordinate their actions with the local territorial defense, accommodate refugees in the community center and at the Hillel facility itself, distribute food kits, help with finding medicines, and provide first medical and psychological assistance. They help the refugees to spend their free time as well, just to escape the horrors of war: they hold various educational events and arrange Shabbat services. There are now more than 200,000 internally displaced persons in Lviv, while more than a million people made their way to the Polish border through the city.

A large volunteer center has been set up at Hillel Odessa as well. They are helping

those in need, provide the elderly with food. In Dnipro, Hillel volunteers prepared everything necessary to be able to survive the state of emergency for a long time. Activities continue no matter what: the recent ceremony of Kabalat Shabat took place both offline and online.

Many students went to the front: some joined the territorial defense detachment, some were drafted into the army, some work in hospitals. I'm very worried about the guys. One of our students is an ambulance driver. Sometimes he gets so knocked down that he sleeps right in his vehicle. Students and staff of the Hillel Kyiv joined the volunteer organization Zgraya, headed by our graduate Zhenya Talinovskaya. Our other star, Iлона Ilchenko, works as a nurse in a hospital that was at the epicenter of hostilities near the capital. Refugees from Chernihiv were accommodated in the premises of Hillel Kyiv at the request of the Joint Distribution Committee.

Mostly, students are busy with lots of volunteer work now. Therefore, regular educational and entertainment Hillel programs are significantly reduced. At the same time, despite all the horrors of the war, we try to distract ourselves and hold some online meetings. For example, we recently hosted an international online Shabbat, attended by more than 100 people. Students and leaders of the international Hillel took part in our traditional Shabbat celebration and made kiddush together. Now we are preparing a project for Pesach. We will conduct an online training for the guys, where we will teach how to conduct a Seder. Such events are now more than needed. It gives hope and inspiration. I am sincerely grateful to those who are with us during this difficult time.



Liron Edery, Head of the Association for the Development of Jewish Communities of Ukraine, Rabbi of Krivoy Rog

I have been working 24/7 for weeks now, including Shabat if necessary. We managed to somehow spend the last Saturday without phones, this was already a good sign. In addition to the community of Krivoy Rog, I'm also responsible for the recently opened refugee and logistics centers in Uman. We provide food, clothes, medicines for everyone who lives within 250 km from Uman.

At first, I have to say I didn't just hope this madness wouldn't happen – I was absolutely positive about it. Moreover, if I were brought back in time, I would say it one more time – this is indeed just some crazy idea. I still don't quite comprehend what is going on. I just don't have a rational explanation for it.

Before it all started, I ended up in Kyiv. Since I am the head of the Association for the Development of Jewish Communities in Ukraine, I do teach in Kyiv two days a week and have to meet with people, politicians, etc. That very Thursday, February 24, I woke up early, at five in the morning, and received dozens of disturbing messages and calls that Ukraine is being attacked. Of course, I immediately got into the car and drove to Krivoy Rog for whole ten hours instead of the usual four and a half.

Like everyone else, I was at a loss and did not understand what was happening. The first reaction was anger. But we organized evacuation routes very quickly,

thousands of people were evacuated without even asking if they were Jewish or not. Then we bought food and medicines, realizing that there could be a shortage. It was enough for a few weeks. Then, frankly, we calmed down a bit. We saw that Ukraine reacted like one huge entity, like a living organism. The cities did not give up, and this greatly encouraged everyone, including the Jews. We are very proud of Zelensky. We believe that Ukraine is a unique country with a Jewish president, and we are ready to stay in Ukraine and fight for its existence. It is a place where a large number of Jews have lived for at least the last 800 years.

I worked almost non-stop for two weeks until Purim. On Purim, we worked almost until the start of the meal. I told my colleagues in the synagogue, "Get ready for a hundred people." They told me, "What are you talking about? We evacuated thousands." Eventually, two hundred people came. I remember how I entered the hall, and there were not enough chairs. And I personally rushed to find them, apologizing to people for the fact that we had not prepared for their arrival. It means two things. First, the Jewish people tend to unite as always, especially at such moments. Secondly, a large number of Ukrainian Jews have not gone anywhere. Mostly women and children left. We have 300 children at school, 100 of them are abroad, and 200 are just outside the city. The old people evacuated as well. Those who are defenseless left. Many men sent their wives and children away, while they themselves remained in the city and helped in any way they could.

I'll tell you a story. In Uman, we organized a center for the reception of refugees, because Uman is kind of a transit point for further departure abroad. It's like a narrow bottle neck. At times, the traffic jam there stretched for 10-15 kilometers, people stood there for more than a day. I recently got a call from a woman who left Krivoy Rog with her children on Saturday at 6 am and reached Uman only on Sunday afternoon. It's only 250 kilometers away. Therefore, we decided to establish a transit point there for people who just need to eat, sleep, and relax. One Saturday I was in Uman. There were four families that were just stuck in the city. One of the families escaped from Mariupol which has been under massive attack. When the "green corridor" was opened, they decided to leave, which apparently



We made a big Shabat meal for them. And they literally cried all night, just looking at the food.

was no less risky. They traveled 200 kilometers in 12 hours. They were searched at Russian checkpoints 10 times. Before crossing the Zaporizhia border, they survived a brutal rocket fire, and the Ukrainian troops, at their own risk, not checking who was in front of them, opened the gates at the checkpoint and let them in without a search. Two grandmothers, a mother, a husband and a small child. We made a big Saturday meal for them. And they literally cried all night, just looking at the food.

Now we are focused on one thing: saving people. Almost nothing in Krivoy Rog is working. That is 600 thousand unemployed people. Therefore, it is more difficult to provide the same attention to the sick, the elderly, and others in need. It is better to take them away and hand them over to people who can take care of them, and switch to those who need our help here.

Routine is what we have lost with the outbreak of the war. The return of routine will mean the return of confidence. This will give us strength.

We are currently working on the Seder Pesach. As in previous years, we plan to receive 600-800 people. It is necessary to agree with the city authorities on indulgence in the curfew so that Seder guests could return home later. We will not let them break us and we are trying to keep working the way we worked in peacetime.

200000+

Jewish people lived in Ukraine before the war

That night the chief nurse of the hospital near Chernihiv was also with us. A road bridge was blown up there last Friday. She and her son ran across the pedestrian bridge, but her husband stayed in Chernihiv to repair the car. And after she crossed the bridge, it was also blown up. Chernihiv was blocked. This woman came to us in Uman and also did not stop crying. Because of the elderly parents who stayed there, because of the husband who also did not leave. She must now take the child abroad and return back to the hospital. And these are only two stories.

The entire educational process in Ukraine has been suspended. Children study at our school via Zoom – but it has been only the first week. The principal of the school claims that the presence is one hundred percent: children do miss normal life.

If and when this craziness stops, then we will try to get back to normality as soon as possible. But you must understand: Ukraine will not be the same. It will be a completely different country. It will be a European country. We are confident that Jewish life will flourish here even more.

Moshe Reuven Asman, Chief Rabbi of Ukraine

When it all started, I thought it was a bad dream. It just didn't feel real. Understanding came when I saw anti-tank 'hedgehogs' in Kyiv, when I heard the first explosions of the rocket attacks, when planes and helicopters covered the sky – then my world truly turned upside down.

People divided into those who need help and those who could provide it. We evacuated a lot of people and continue to take them out of the city. I don't have exact figures on how much already left. Tens of thousands. Including from hot spots – Chernihiv, Mariupol, Kharkiv. At some point, those who need help overwhelmed those who can help.

We help refugees find safe place, but of those who have remained in their homes, there are many old people who need medical care, food and water. Among them many elderly people who used to have nurses at home, and now they are left alone. People in war zones are hiding in basements. Many of them have nothing, no means to get out, and they also need help.

At the beginning of the war, my phone was bursting with calls, and as a result, we set up a call center of my number: on the issue of evacuation – press 1, other help – 2, volunteers' help – 3. So you can't call me directly any more.

At first, every volunteer in Kyiv did what he wanted. They acted a bit like partisans. Then I realized that it was necessary to create a system – and now everyone is responsible for a certain type of activity: one prepares food, the other collects medicines, the third is responsible for logistics, the fourth delivers everything by car, the fifth evacuates people. In addition, we have teamed up with volunteer organizations. In order not to interfere with each other, we act together. We made an agreement on the medical equipment supply from Israel, made a deal with Ichilov Center to deploy a field hospital in Poland, in addition to Kokhav Meir, which operates today in the Lviv region. We also deal with individual cases: someone was arrested, someone was detained, someone disappeared. A lot of questions have to be solved at the same time.

From the very beginning of the war, many people called from Israel and other parts of the world and asked for help, to save people from Mariupol, Irpin. There are people who do not know where their relatives are and whether they are still alive. Several families constantly

called me, and sometimes we simply have nothing to tell them, there is no connection with these cities.

Most people try to return to everyday routine. At first, people were scared because there was uncertainty. Now we're even a little used to it. People began to return to Kyiv from Western Ukraine. There they feel like refugees, they have nowhere to live – but here, they think, although it is hard and dangerous, but at least they are at home. Not that the situation is much better, but this is how human psychology works. Now people are even going out. Recently there was a violin concert – one member of our community arranged it. She is a volunteer. She has a Jewish family. Mom, dad and three children – they run the kitchen at the synagogue. Now she helps with cleaning and cooking, but in peacetime she studied at the conservatory and played the violin. And she decided to arrange a concert, we showed it live on Facebook.

People come, join, try to help. Everyone offers something. We try to set tasks to everyone as far as we can. We get a lot of feedback from people. Many Jews, rabbis call from all over the world. They want to help, they send humanitarian aid. In particular, the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress helped at the very beginning. But there is simply no time to track every donation and thank people personally, we need to save people.



Shlomo Wilhelm, Chief Rabbi of Zhytomyr

I have been living in Zhytomyr for 28 years. During this time, we managed to build a strong Jewish community here. There is a cultural center, an orphanage, a synagogue. The last months before the war, at least 400-500 Jews gathered here during the week. Minyans, prayers, Torah lessons, celebrations, events for the elderly, youth activities, canteen, school. We survived the pandemic and lived quietly, peacefully, we were one hundred percent sure that no war was possible. That it's all just rumors.

On Thursday morning, February 24th, my wife was at the Boryspil airport, on her way to Antwerp, to visit her family on Shabbat. I stayed with the children. My wife calls at quarter to five. Her plane was scheduled to take off at 5:40, she was waiting for departure. But the flight was cancelled. They said, "The war has begun." Everything was like a bad dream. I opened my eyes. "War? What war? The confusion began. A few minutes later I heard a siren, and then a loud sound, as if something had fallen and exploded. Planes were flying. Five minutes later I received a call from the town where our orphanage is located: the children heard the sounds, they are crying, what do we do? Five minutes ago I was an optimist, but then it all changed in a moment. I understood: "That's it, the war began, a rocket fell in Zhytomyr. Our children will not live here while it is happening." The next moment I was already calling to order buses from a friend, a Chabad envoy in the city of Chernivtsi. Then everything was mixed up: one hotel, another hotel, the buses to take the children there and so on.

The third bus was ordered to the Ivano-Frankivsk region. While I stayed in Zhytomyr, I organized food for people, storages, so that there would be something to provide and help – including non-Jewish people too. We bought 30-40 tons of products: sugar, flour, butter, canned food. The synagogue was literally packed with food. We began to arrange buses to the border every day. We had a deal with three hotels: one in Chernivtsi, the second in Yaremche, the third in the Carpathians.

Then I received instructions from my superiors that I also needed to leave the city, because this way I could help more efficiently. And a week after the outbreak of war, I also got on the bus, and we went to Chernivtsi, and then towards the border.

Our orphanage remained in Chernivtsi, but the siren sounded there from time to time too, so we decided that we needed to take them out of Ukraine. Thank God, a great miracle happened,

thanks to the Ukrainian and Israeli authorities, who made it possible to take all the children out – without even passports. They were firstly transferred to the city of Cluj in Romania. There is also a Chabad shliach there. We were there for Shabbat. It was already the second Shabbat since the start of the war. There were about 150 people there. And another 50 people from the Cherkasy community. Then we went to Israel, where we got support from the Jewish National Fund JNF-KKL.

That's it, the war began, a rocket fell in Zhytomyr. Our children will not live here while it is happening.

Now the Jewish community of Zhytomyr is divided into three parts: one part is in Israel, those who came with us. The second part is in Chernivtsi, with is more than 100 people. And more than 300 families, almost a thousand people, remained in Zhytomyr. There are also children there.

They are eager for peace. There are those who go to the minyan all the time, work as volunteers and distribute the food. They are doing everything possible to return to normal life. In the evening you cannot leave the house due to curfew. But people are still trying to live a normal life, trying to return to routine. Schools have resumed learning only remotely.

After a month of war, people began to open up shops. They understand that they need to try to live a life they used to. Just like it happens in Israel at the times of escalations. The Jewish school and synagogue in Zhytomyr are guarded 24/7. Thank God everything is good for now. Everyone is waiting for when it will be possible to return back.



'When I Come Back, I Will Kiss Our Torah Scrolls'



Ten months after the war started, leaders of the Jewish community of Ukraine talked about their personal and collective experiences of the most challenging period in the country's history.

Iosif Akselrud, Director of Hillel CASE, Executive Director of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress

During these months, Hillel in Ukraine has taken on new rails. One of the areas of our activity – volunteering – has increased dramatically. Today in all the cities of Ukraine where Hillel works (including Chisinau), the guys are volunteering almost 24 hours a day. That's the most urgent need of the Jewish community today – for young people to help.

Moreover, in the Kharkiv office, which was wrecked due to the bombing, the folks already gather for Kabalat Shabat on Fridays. The Kharkiv office is located in a building belonging to the city. Our task: as soon as it is safe to return to Ukraine – take the first flight and restore the premises. If possible, we'll rebuild it with the help of the local authorities. If not, we'll build a new one. But, unfortunately, we can't do anything while the bombs are still going on. When the war began, most of the Hillel students from Kharkiv moved to Lviv and started to work there actively with locals. Several of our participants stayed in Kharkiv, though.

Only a few people left Ukraine. Regarding executive staff, only myself, the program director, and the two directors of the Hillel branches have migrated. Most of the students stayed: the border is closed for the boys in Ukraine, but only a few of the girls left as well – about 80% remained. The number of Hillel students has mostly stayed the same. New participants are coming. They bring their friends. The folks feel very needed there.

For example, our students in Kyiv deliver food in their cars and don't ask for any money, even though it's hard to get gasoline in the city. They feel at the center of things: they come, pack food packages, deliver them, and don't ask any questions.

In addition to volunteering, we hold regular programs, combining offline and online. For example, Hillel's calling card is Intellectual Wars. It's a big project that takes place annually in Odessa and brings together about 150 students from many countries. Unfortunately, we couldn't make it live this year, so we held it online. More than 200 people participated – even more than before.

Despite the tiredness of previous years from “Zooms” and online projects, the need to get together in such a terrible time is felt. So we hold events whenever possible. We have a project – a summer student forum. This year we broke it down into five mini-camps. We held them separately: in the Caucasus, Moldova, Crimea, Belarus, and Western Ukraine. There were more than 80 participants, more than in the past years.

We need financial support. First, we have lost part of our budget from internal sponsors. Our Board of Trus-

tees cannot support us for obvious reasons. In addition, there is extreme inflation in Ukraine: the salaries we used to pay are just irrelevant today – it's impossible to live on them.



Moshe Reuven Asman, Chief Rabbi of Ukraine

The situation has changed considerably recently, and priorities have changed. At the beginning of the war, we were engaged in evacuation. We were evacuating tens of thousands of people. We had to build the logistics so that everything would be quick. And that given it was not clear how to move safely. Now – not that everything has calmed down, the war continues – but we managed to streamline this work.

Nevertheless, life is constantly making adjustments. Today our volunteer work is delivering food kits, medicine, and generators. It's not just the Jewish community that needs this: we help all people in need. There are huge water problems in the southeastern areas. The Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, represented by its president, has donated devices for obtaining water from the air. Recent rocket attacks have badly damaged the city's infrastructure. Machines for generating light, heat, large generators, and stoves have become abruptly needed. People can simply freeze to death.

We are also helping those who moved to Israel. My son Shmuel opened a center to help repatriates.



Many people are in Europe. Some of them began to return when life in the capital stabilized a bit, although I warned them not to go back because the situation might change. And we saw this on the first day of Sukkot. My wife and young children returned, my son and his children returned – and rockets flew right into the center of Kyiv. The very next day, Kyiv was deserted – and we sent our relatives to safety again. The situation constantly changes, so I don't recommend people return now. The Kyiv administration says that a hard winter is coming. There is already no electricity in homes for most of the day. There is no water and no sewage. This obliges us to act quickly. Let's say the elderly live on the tenth floor, and the elevators don't work. Volunteers have to carry food to the tenth floor on foot.

Lately, new people who have not been in touch with the community have been coming to synagogue. With the start of the war, their connection to Jewry intensified. The tough situation has awakened the Jewish soul and identity. Those who want to help come, but most of them need help themselves. Even non-Jews come. I talk about Judaism and spiritual things in my social networks, and tens of thousands of Ukrainians are following me. I tell them about the Seven Commandments for all humanity. They listen to the word of mine, though they want to hear the word of G-d. There is no anti-Semitism in sight. May God grant that it will always be that way. There is a sense of cohesion in the community. Even those not in good relations before the war are made up now. There is no time for petty quarrels and arguments when there is a danger to life. Former enemies have become friends and help each other.

Mikhail Gold, journalist and editor-in-chief of the Jewish newspaper Hadashot (Kyiv)

Since mid-March, Michael left his day job and began recording the testimonies of Jewish refugees, posting



them on his Facebook page. To date, he has interviewed about 150 people from half a dozen Ukrainian cities. The result should be the Exodus-2022 portal with published stories, photos, and videos in Ukrainian, Russian, English, and Hebrew. In addition, there are plans to publish a separate Book of Testimonies with 50 of the most dramatic refugee stories.

"Observing the 'exodus' in the early days of the war, it seemed crucial to record this slice of history because, since World War II and the creation of Israel, the world has not seen such a flow of Jewish refugees. It is also some kind of a point of no return for the identity of the Ukrainian Jewish community on the one hand and the Russian-speaking Jewish world on the other. You see, except for one Ukrainian-speaking Jewish religious woman, all my respondents chose to communicate in Russian. At the same time, most of them see themselves not so much as Russian-speaking Jews today but as Ukrainian Jews who speak (for now) the familiar (Russian) language.

The last thing I wanted to do was to act as a journalist, broadcasting my point of view, although I certainly have one. My goal was to give a voice to people who had survived artillery shelling and bombing, often in basements, without electricity, gas, communications, and minimal water and food, who had experienced the tragedy of the evacuation, the pain of losing loved ones, and so on. I urged them to focus specifically on their personal experiences. Not what they had heard from third parties or read in the media, but the events they had witnessed and participated in.

The vast majority of those interviewed did not expect war. Or rather did not believe that it would begin. And when it did start, they hoped it would end quickly. Because, after all, this is the 21st century... The idea that "we should not have been liberated from anyone" was common. It does not mean that all respondents were associated with their pro-Ukrainian stance. Still, for everyone, the invasion of Russia was an apparent evil, an act of undoubted aggression. Although, and it is

important to understand, the main blow was received by the eastern and southern regions of the country, where pro-Russian moods were quite strong not so long ago. “What kind of compatriots are they to me?!” asked an elderly from Kostyantynivka, Donetsk region, whose house was destroyed by two Iskander rockets at 3 a.m. His grandparents were shot by the Nazis in the ghetto, his father is Jewish, and his mother is Russian.

Everyone had his own “Jewish” war experience. One woman recalled how on Passover eve, she baked matzo on an old Soviet primus and then felt for the first time “here and now coming out of Egypt”. Another, when the electricity was cut off, used Hanukkah as a light to give her paralyzed mother an insulin shot. A third, during the occupation of Mariupol, hid a Star of David for the first time in her life.

These 150 people are not reducible to a common denominator. Among them are students and the elderly, secular creative elites and rabbis, successful entrepreneurs, and those in need. People who knew almost nothing about being Jewish (one respondent was told three months before the war that her biological mother was Jewish) and a Chabad family from Odessa with 13 (already 14) children, religious communities heads, and heads of secular Jewish organizations.

Why did many choose to immigrate to Israel? Some had relatives here, some sent their children to study under youth programs, and for some, it was the only way out – evacuation from Mariupol, for example, was highly problematic – Jews were sent to Russia, and only then they (sometimes from Georgia) managed to get to Israel. There are truly detective stories that you could make a movie about. Though, with the current pace of life and information flow, I don’t have an illusion that the world will not forget what these people have gone through after a while. Preserving these priceless testimonies is all the more important as long as some are willing to talk and others are willing to listen.

I still keep in touch with many of my interviewers, such as a woman from Izium in the Kharkiv region whose entire family (mother, husband, and son) were killed in a rocket attack. She was gravely wounded and lay in her house for eight days without a roof at -10°C until her neighbors found her. Now she is in Netanya, still walking with a cane, and only recently found out where her relatives were buried... I also keep in touch with a refugee from Mariupol who was well known in the city’s Jewish community, whose children

received a Jewish education (her daughter was accepted to the Beit Ulpan religious school in Jerusalem) but who cannot get repatriate status. Unfortunately, some refugees’ problems do not end after repatriation but become of a different nature. However, that’s another story.

Yosef-Itzhok Wolf, Chief Rabbi of Kherson and the Kherson region

At the time of our conversation with the EAJC press office, Wolf, for personal reasons, had left Kherson with his family - and hoped to return to the city soon. All this time, he continued to remotely manage the affairs of the region’s Jewish community. Before the outbreak of hostilities, it numbered about 3,000 families.

“After the 24th of February, as you know, Kherson very quickly came under the control of Russian troops. In the beginning, the issue of lack of food and medicine became acute. So we saved people from starvation. And to this day, we are still doing that. Now, after the withdrawal of Russian troops, the situation remains dangerous. The city is under fire. There has been no electricity and no water for weeks. The city is completely de-energized. You can imagine what it’s like now when the temperature is already reaching sub-zero. We are still advising people who are struggling to go to a safer place. The authorities advise people to leave because it’s obviously not easy for them to get the infrastructure working and water and light restored.



It is tough, but the community helps with food. Flour, cereals, canned goods, water, household chemicals, hygiene products – people can come to get it all. But it is getting colder. The temperature in the houses is dropping every day. Those who didn’t leave did so for different reasons. Some - because of the elderly parents, it’s physically demanding for some to move from one place to another. After all, it’s a hard road. It is impossible to get there by the usual route. It takes 24

hours to get somewhere. Some people can't leave the city in such a difficult time, so they stay. Our job is to help these people survive what is happening.

At a time like this, everyone wants a little support and warmth. Indeed, people who were not involved in community life before have become very active. I really want to go back, but for now, I will stay with my family for a while. As soon as I get a chance, I'll be packing right away. The first thing I will do when I return – I will kiss our Torah scrolls. Then I will hug the people who are waiting for our warmth.

Liron Ederi, Head of the Association for the Development of Jewish Communities of Ukraine, Rabbi of Kryvyi Rih

Every day, there are new nuances and 'adventures'. The last two months have turned out very different from the previous ones. At first, it was chaotic: people worked 24/7, including Saturdays, helping evacuate, buying food, medicine, and more. Then a flood of refugees began. More recently, eight months into the war, things have changed dramatically again. As a result of rocket attacks, water, heating, and electricity are gone. It's not a question of having or not having food. It's a question of how to live now. You can remember what happened yesterday – which is still possible to trace – but it is almost impossible to comprehend how life has changed as a whole.

In the public consciousness, there were several phases of perception of what is happening: the first phase is escape. The second phase – euphoria: we're winning, everything is working out, everything is good. People began to return to their homes to restore pre-war lives. The third phase is going on now: there is still a sense that we are winning but that the price will be very high. From this point of view, everyone has to make a personal decision. One stays in the city despite the lack of heating, water, and electricity – or temporarily goes somewhere where it is easier. As it happens, most Jewish communities have generators, wells, and heating systems of various forms. Because of this, we can provide our people with accommodation, water, and electricity today. For example, we didn't have time to make a well in our synagogue, but we had generators. So we offer members of the community to live there for a while. We will equip beds, and people will sleep there.

More people have become involved in the life of the community. My synagogue is full – this has never happened before. New people are coming. They observe Shabat and holidays. The topics being discussed around here range from simple physical needs – when you can't drink at home, take a shower, or take the elevator – to the fact that everyone feels much more united now, able to tolerate much more. But no one understands what the other side is trying to achieve.



A New Life of the Jewish Community of Moldova

Since the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the Jewish communities of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova have been closely cooperating, providing practical assistance in evacuation, temporary accommodation, and subsequent relocation. A special call center operates in Chisinau (Kishinev) to help members of Jewish communities in Ukraine. Temporary accommodation centers in Moldova have provided more than 14,000 Jews and thousands of non-Jewish Ukrainians with the necessary food, housing, medical care, and information support.

In February, the Jewish community of the Republic of Moldova (JCRM) organized 11 temporary accommodation centers for Ukrainian Jewish refugees all over the country. There they can receive necessary information, a place to sleep, transportation, food, and other services. According to Chairman of the Jewish community of the Republic of Moldova and Euro-Asian Jewish Congress Vice President Alexandr Bilinkis, the Jewish community of Moldova acts in coordination with the government of Israel, Israeli Embassy, the Jewish Agency, and various religious organizations in Ukraine. The main goal of these actions is to provide refugees with any assistance possible.



"We established a call center in Chisinau, which receives hundreds of calls daily from Jews from Ukraine. Our colleagues organize evacuation buses from the most affected regions of the neighboring country. We welcome visitors and help in any way we can to overcome this grief together. We have recently started equipping special buses for people with special needs who cannot endure a long journey. I want to note our cooperation with Rabbi Moshe Asman, members of the community in Ukraine, who are doing a great job," said Chairman of the JCRM and EAJC Vice President Alexandr Bilinkis.

'To Unite Around Ukrainian Jews is Our Moral Duty'

In April 2022 EAJC President Dr. Michael Mirilashvili addressed The Jerusalem Post London Conference at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

Now – more than ever – it is a moment when we must speak up in a hope that our voice will be heard. And today we need to talk about peace.

Peace is not just a beautiful word. We say it too often, but sometimes we forget what it really stands for. Peace is a great respect for human life, freedom and opinions of others. It is a cooperation between people and nations. It is an exchange of ideas, scientific and technological progress. Peace is, first of all, humanity, mercy and the holiness of life.

It is exactly what Judaism has taught the Jewish people for centuries. If there is a cult in our tradition, it is the cult of love for human life. Moses in the book of Deuteronomy bluntly tells the Jewish people: between life and death – always choose life. For the sake of life and its salvation, we not only might, we are obliged to violate one of the most important commandments – the observance of Shabbat. In such case, the breach becomes compliance. These days, many were impressed by the photos taken on Shabbat, where religious Jews were sitting in front of computers with their phones. One of them, Rabbi Zilberstein from Chernihiv, explained to his little daughter that G-d had given him a rare opportunity to save 65 lives. Even in the darkest time, there will always be light.

Today is a dark time and we cannot but talk about Ukraine and its tragedy. A terrible humanitarian crisis, destroyed cities and fates, millions of refugees, complete uncertainty and loss...

According to various estimates, about 200,000 Jews and members of their families lived in Ukraine before the outbreak of the war. Jewish life in Ukraine spans centuries. We know from a Jewish letter found in the Cairo Geniza that already in the 10th century Jews inhabited Kyiv. Many spiritual leaders of our people, rabbis, writers and politicians came from Ukraine.

Over the past 30 years, many Jewish communities have developed in large and small cities throughout the country: Kyiv, Odessa, Dnipro, Kharkiv, Zhytomyr, Chernihiv. Today they are at war. Today, the future of Jewish life there is in question.

Many Jews fled, someone, thank God, got to Israel and with God's help will find a new home here. But many remained. And for sure, for many, life will never be the same. We hear calls for help from local rabbis and community leaders. Today, prayers in synagogues are much more passionate, and the doors are open to all those in need. A new reality is emerging and we must deal with it.

Jewish life in Ukraine spans centuries. We know from a Jewish letter found in the Cairo Geniza that already in the 10th century Jews inhabited Kyiv.



We have no right to stay aside. We, the global Jewish community and public figures, must do everything in our power to stop the bloodshed, the human tragedy and bring peace closer. We have an obligation to help all those affected now and we will have to rebuild the Jewish communities later on.

For 30 years, the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, in cooperation with the World Jewish Congress, has been taking care of the regional Jewish communities' needs, and among them, of course, the communities of the former Soviet Union countries. We supported them in the most difficult times, we will support them now. We immediately created a humanitarian aid fund for the Jews of Ukraine. We support them in their needs, we help the Jewish community of Moldova to accept and accommodate refugees. We facilitate the evacuation of people to Israel and help refugees in other European countries.

We believe and pray that soon, the Jews of Ukraine will be able to return to their regular peaceful life, but until then it is our moral duty to unite around them, support them and help them out of trouble.

Once, the world Jewish community rallied around the fate of Soviet Jews. Then, they were deprived of almost all rights, but after decades of state anti-Semitism of the USSR, in the post-Soviet countries, Jewish life truly flourished. Young democratic societies have

realized that anti-Semitism is an outdated disease that must be fought with the strictest measures.

In recent years, we have seen a significant decrease in acts of violence motivated by anti-Semitism in the former Soviet Union countries. However, we have to be vigilant. After all, most anti-Semitic acts in the post-Soviet space are verbal: anti-Semitic judgments, the spread of conspiracy theories, denial or downplaying of the Holocaust.

Unfortunately, we already know that global crises always give rise to lots of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. We saw this clearly during the pandemic, we see and note these phenomena now. We hope that the positive dynamics regarding anti-Semitism in the countries of the region will continue, but we are closely monitoring the situation and are ready to deal with potential threats.

Even now, some people allow themselves to express the opinion that the wars are unleashed by the Jews. But we, the Jewish people, know more than anyone else the price of the terrible wars of the past. We know exactly how precious and hard to achieve peace is today. We know the specific price and the names of the people who died in the struggle for a peaceful existence of the Jewish people and the Jewish state. Every year in Israel, we devote a whole week to remind ourselves of this price.

Starting with 6 million lives lost in the nightmares of the Holocaust to the 24,000 people who gave their lives for the security of the Jewish State. The price is too high.

Modern Jewish State was raised by wars, but our main victories were achieved in peacetime. Science, education, technologies aimed at improving the quality of life and progress – these are the very priceless rewards of peace.

Modern Israel is one of the technological leaders in the world. It is a technological advance that has allowed the small Jewish state to become one of the leading forces in the region and the world. The role of the innovation sector in the Israeli economy can be described just by one fact: since the beginning of 2022, twenty new so-called “unicorn” companies, private start-ups valued at over a billion dollars, have appeared in Israel. In total, there are more than 60 such companies in

of nutrient-rich soil, providing everyone with nourishing, healthy, and natural food.

Watergen-patented technology allows to produce clean, fresh drinking water from the moisture in the air without the need to connect to a water source. Our technology has been recognized by the Israeli Ministry of Economics as one of the 7 most innovative inventions in Israeli history.

And now the countries of the Middle East are coming to the same conclusion of cooperation and partnership importance. The recently signed Abraham Accords have already led to an unprecedented level of Israeli cooperation with the Gulf countries. And our company is part of this process. Together with our partners in the United Arab Emirates we are solving the problems of limited water resources in our region as well.

Our devices are already operating in 85 countries around the world. We are especially proud that several of them have been installed even in the Gaza Strip, where almost two million people suffer from a severe shortage of clean drinking water. Watergen was the only company to work with the Israel Defense Forces and local partners to install dozens of its devices in Gaza. They are connected to solar panels and located in hospitals and other healthcare organizations.

Throughout history, wars have often been waged over water resources. Today we are doing just the opposite – we are making peace and building a common future with the help of water technologies.

I am convinced that most conflicts between people and states are caused by the lack of modesty and the desire to impose one's views, culture, and way of life on the opponent. But only true modesty, acceptance and the ability to recognize the right to a different view open the gates of understanding and mutual respect. It seems to me that, first of all, we have to admit our own mistakes and flaws, while striving to see the opponent's advantages and strong sides. This is the essence of trust and respect, which opens the way to solving the most tense problems and reaching a true peace.

Because peace is beautiful, peace is what we must strive for. Peace is what we have to talk about.



the country – the second place in the world after the United States. 6,400 start-ups per capita provide the highest density of innovative business in the world.

In peace and security, Israel is ready to cooperate and share its technology. Along with the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, I also lead the start-up companies Watergen and Vertical Field, aimed at solving the drinking water crisis and ensuring food security in the world's most problematic regions.

Vertical Field Urban Farms is an innovative and affordable way to grow over 200 types of crops in any indoor or outdoor urban space. The crops, which grow to maturity within 21 days, can be easily planted and harvested, they are pesticide-free and grown on beds

'If you could see what I witnessed in the first days of the war, you just could not remain indifferent.'

Newly elected EAJC Vice President Matvei Hutman helps Ukrainian refugees in Austria.

Austria, among other countries, gave rights to long-term residence, access to the labor market, medical services, and social assistance to Ukrainian refugees in Austria, where they can obtain a humanitarian visa. According to officials, Austria has already hosted more than 200,000 people. In addition, there are a lot of private initiatives and volunteers that also help refugees. One of these initiatives is the Coordination Volunteer Center opened by newly elected Vice President of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress Matvei Hutman two weeks after the outbreak of the war. According to volunteers, they have already helped several hundred people.

"If you could see what I witnessed when I arrived in Ukraine in the first days of the war, you just could not stay indifferent." This is how the EAJC Vice President Matvei Hutman explains the reason why he is running a volunteer initiative to help Ukrainian refugees in Austria. He was deeply impressed by the scene that he saw on the road to the Ukrainian-Polish border, where lots of cars stopped without gasoline and women had to warm the hands of their children with their breath.

Matvei Hutman is a successful Austrian businessman. He is a co-owner of the nation's largest textile company Palmers and runs real estate development firm Valetono Development. Hutman is an active public figure, especially in terms of fighting anti-Semitism. As Vice-President of the EAJC, he now promotes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was created in cooperation with World Jewish Congress (WJC) experts.

However, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, strategic Jewish issues became less urgent. "Yes, we are a Jewish organization, we certainly must take care of our commu-

nities. But we cannot differentiate people when it literally comes to saving their lives," he says.

Hutman's initiative emerged quite spontaneously: he traveled to Austrian railway stations and airports with his employees, helping Ukrainians whose return flights were canceled. They rented apartments with their own funds. Then activists contacted local charitable foundations and started to coordinate their work with volunteers. Soon the Austrian authorities got involved.

Austrian citizens responded to the call for help much more quickly, says Olga Skomarova, project coordinator of the Coordination Volunteer Center. She adds that sometimes, refugees hosted by a local family no longer needed help from the Center because the Austrians took care of the whole routine. "I was personally surprised how helpful they are," says the activist. "Our acquaintances settled in a local family, which took all the issues under control. They studied with the child, found language courses for them, even tried to look for a job. They are very much involved."



We are a Jewish organization, we certainly must take care of our communities. But we cannot differentiate people when it literally comes to saving their lives.

Skomarova explains that her Center coordinates work with volunteers from both Austria and Ukraine. Most often, they contact them in messengers. Then volunteers explain to the refugees how to get to Austria and meet them upon arrival. They help them with bureaucracy, housing, groceries and necessary services, such as psychologists or social workers. In total, volunteers have already managed to accommodate about 200 Ukrainians.

One of them is Olga Polzikova (28) from Energodar. She came to Austria with her four-year-old sister. When the war began, she went to her relatives in Zaporizhzhia. Her town was not safe because of the nuclear power station. A few days later, she heard from friends about the Austrian initiative of the EAJC Vice President and decided to act. She was evacuated by train to the Polish border.

"The atmosphere there was not at all like in an ordinary train," says the woman. "There were a lot of people. Usually there are 4 people in a coach compartment, and here there were 15 people in each one: mothers, small children, the elderly. People changed places, stood in the aisles, someone laid down on the floor in the corridor – the ride took a full day.

In Austria, volunteers helped Olga to find a small apartment and enrolled her sister in the kindergarten. The woman hopes to return to Ukraine in summer – her parents and relatives remained there. "Even when you get to Europe, you understand that there is nothing better than home. Everyone wants to be with their relatives, everyone feels sad," says Olga.

Matvei Hutman emphasizes the importance of helping not only refugees, but also Ukrainians who have remained in the country.

Hutman sees assistance to Austrian charitable organizations with the delivery of humanitarian aid to Ukraine, collected by local citizens, as no less important. According to him, the number of volunteers in his Center depends on workload and counts up to 20 people at a time.

On the other hand, says Hutman, naturally, the longer the war lasts, the less attention Austrian society pays to it. He compares the situation to the security threats in Israel, where "people unfortunately are getting used to the terrible reality and learn to live with it."

"People got used to this situation, and now collecting free humanitarian aid is somewhat hard. Now, if we ask someone to donate goods, then, at best, they can give us some discount," explains the EAJC VP.

According to volunteers, the vast majority of Ukrainian refugees do not intend to stay in Europe for a long time, even though some of the Ukrainian cities were significantly destroyed. "We have several elderly women from Kharkiv, they really want to return," says Olga Skomarova. "But they know at the same time that they literally have nowhere to return. Their houses are destroyed. They say: 'We will go anyway, we need to clean up and rebuild our city, so we will return.' Even though they are 70 years old."

Perspectives of the Jewish Life in the Region: From Academic Point of View

Academic Chairman of the Institute for Euro-Asian Jewish Studies
prof. Ze'ev Khanin talks about the future of the Jewish life in the region.

The war in Ukraine has a significant impact on the Jewish population and the organized Jewish movement in the post-Soviet Euro-Asia, especially in two largest Jewish communities of the region: Russian and Ukrainian. While the long-term consequences are not yet obvious, we can probably draw some initial conclusions and forecasts.

Local identity and new sub-ethnic Jewish groups

The first expected consequence of the war apparently will be the exceleration of the ongoing processes over the past two decades in the Jewish life of the FSU countries. This includes a serious transformation of the sub-ethnic group of Ashkenazi Jews. This is mainly due to the formation of new local Jewish groups: 'Russian Jews', 'Ukrainian Jews', etc., who have their own, specific communal, subcultural and ethno-political identity, and differ from classical sub-ethnic Jewish groups (such as Georgian, Mountain, Bukharian etc. Jews).

The factors in the formation of these new groups, which are still very close to each other in terms of their cultural and linguistic appearance, are:

- the loss of relevance of the collective 'Soviet Jews' identity, damaged by a new round of conflicts between the post-Soviet states, which demanded from local Jews a completely different level of loyalty to their countries;
- strengthening of the role of the fully post-Soviet generation in the leadership of Jewish organizations, whose self-determination mainly focuses on the local Jewish identity rather than any other;
- a relatively stable identification with the transnational Russian-speaking Jewish community, embraced by a system of closely related and friendly ties of post-Soviet Jews and their families in different states, with the focus on Israel.

Parallel processes are also taking place in other segments of the transnational Russian-speaking Jewish community outside post-Soviet Euro-Asia, including such phenomenon as the 'Russian Israeli' community, the 'Russian-Jewish community of the USA', etc.

Emigration and demographic dynamics

One of the most visible results of the war is a significant increase in both internal and external migration dynamics of the post-Soviet Jewish population, including a return – for the first time in the last 80-90 years in Europe – of the Jewish refugees phenomenon. One of the consequences of this process may be a significant redistribution of influence between the transnational Russian-speaking Jewish diaspora centers, and above all, the demographic and political weakening of the Jewish communities of the former USSR in favor of Israel and Europe.

According to the moderate estimations of the Israeli demographers, the total number of persons eligible for repatriation to Israel – which in many ways also defines the boundaries of the 'Jewish collective' in post-Soviet Euro-Asia – was more than 900,000 people at the end of 2020. This number included about 240,000 representatives of the 'core' Jewish population with a stable Jewish identity, whose median age is approaching 56-58 years, and most of whom are in mixed marriages. In also includes about 210,000 people of homogeneous ethnic Jewish origin who do not identify as Jews, and another 230,000 members of Jewish households who do not belong to these two subgroups.

According to a comprehensive study of the FSU Jewish population conducted by the Institute for Euro-Asian Jewish Studies in 2019-2020, about a quarter of the respondents expected to emigrate from their countries "in the foreseeable future", including a quarter in Ukraine and a fifth in Belarus and Russia.

Moreover, from 40 to 60% of these potential immigrants named Israel as their destination. So the potential number for the emigration of Jews and members of their families as of 2020 could be estimated at 100–120 thousand from Russia; 45–50 thousand from Ukraine and 5–7 thousand from Belarus. Considering that about half of it could be emigration to Israel, it was assumed that, unless something dramatic happened, the realization of this potential would be significantly extended in time.

Indeed, the emigration from these communities throughout 2021 and at the very beginning of 2022 remained fairly moderate. But after the start of the war, we have witnessed a sharp migration surge. According to the Ministry of Aliyah and Israeli Integration, from the end of February to November 2022, about 50,000 new repatriates arrived in Israel from the countries of the former Soviet Union alone (compared to less than 5 thousand in 2021, a little more than 1 thousand in January 2022, and about 800 in February 2022), including 13,694 from Ukraine, 29,894 from Russia, and about 2,000 people from other post-Soviet countries.

About 5,000 more potential repatriates, according to the same data, are going through the process right now. The majority are Russian citizens.

Accurate data on the Jews of the post-Soviet countries who moved to the EU countries (primarily Germany) is not available, but we can cautiously assume that there are at least 8–10 thousand of them (according to other estimates, more than 15 thousand). It is too early to draw a conclusion on how true the popular opinion is that Israel is losing potential repatriates in favor of 'better German or British social assistance packages'.

Therefore, we can assume that the majority of those who in terms of the above-mentioned survey were not sure about their emigration plans (26–41%) have now reconsidered their plans or intend to do so in the near future. A significant part of the respondents, who at the time of the survey did not intend to leave their countries (31–55%), in the current situation probably changed their intentions, too. Moreover, whereas Ukrainian emigrants are literally fleeing the war, emigration from Russia is primarily motivated by negative economic prospects in that country, disagreement with the policy of the regime, and fears of isolation of the country from the civilized world.

Deconstruction and reconstruction of communities

The important question is to what extent these trends will affect the stability and prospects of the organized Jewish life infrastructure that has emerged in the FSU over the past decades. This includes local and umbrella organizations, educational, cultural and charitable institutions, religious communities, memorial and other associations, Jewish media, etc.

In Ukraine, at first glance, the revival of organized Jewish life on the same scale against the backdrop of mass emigration, even if part of the Jewish refugees return to their cities, is hardly achievable. There is also a progressive

disintegration of the infrastructure of not only peripheral, but also large Jewish communities (in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Odessa, etc.), accompanied by attempts to restore the 'organized core' of such communities in other places.

One example is the effort of two Kyiv Chassidic rabbis, Yaakov-Dov Bleich (Karlin-Stolin) and Moshe Reuven Azman (Chabad). Rabbi Bleich managed to partially recreate his congregation in Budapest and the city of Ishava in the Ukrainian west. Members of Rabbi Azman's congregation, were settled in Cyprus and Israel also retain a certain level of community ties. However, it's not quite clear whether these or other Jewish leaders, who are trying to implement similar projects, will be able or willing to return their congregations to their places of origin and restore the infrastructure after the end of the war.

Some kind of reforming of organized Jewish life after the end of the war, according to observers, is very much possible, and the Ukrainian Jewish community, albeit reduced in numbers, will still need the entire spectrum of social, educational, religious, and cultural services. The Jewish community will remain an important factor and symbol of the Ukrainian civil nation, with political and lobbying needs and opportunities corresponding to this status. However, it is too early to draw conclusions – the real situation will become clearer after the end of the war.


It seems to be a somewhat different picture in Russia. There, we should hardly expect a critical reduction in the Jewish population in the main cultural, industrial and business centers of the country or a complete collapse of local communities – unless, of course, the authorities resort to some extent to the open or informal anti-Semitic policy for internal stabilization. However, this scenario seems unlikely to us at this stage.

At the same time, if the Russian Federation does not find itself behind a new 'iron curtain', we should expect a significant increase in the number of Israeli citizenship holders in this country. We can see it already among the current wave of mass Aliyah. Some Russian citizens who arrived in Israel after the start of the war, having received Israeli citizenship, almost immediately returned back. According to the revealed data, about a third of the repatriates who arrived from Russia from late February to late April this year have already left Israel. There are also those who have settled in Israel for the time being, but when the situation changes for the better, they will be ready to return. As a result, at least some of the Jewish communities of large Russian cities may gradually acquire the features of 'expat communities', similar to those that exist today in Japan or the United Arab Emirates.

There is no doubt that this war, no matter how it ends, will require a significant revision of a transnational Jewish organizations' strategy in relation to post-Soviet Jewish communities. In addition to the current tasks of helping the remaining communities, refugees or those who decide to return back, there surely will be new challenges and issues, requiring a fast response.


Research and Data-Driven Decisions

In strategic decision-making, we rely on data from professional surveys, opinion polls, and analytics, which allows us to see the dynamics and outline actual trends. We research the current state of communities and share our results with everybody involved in the Jewish life of the region.



**Jewish Identity
in Post-Soviet
Countries**

research.eajc.org/en/identity



**Anti-Semitism,
Tolerance and Historical
Memory in the Post-
Soviet Space**

research.eajc.org/en/antisemitism

EAJC

Unites unique Jewish communities and organizations in more than 20 countries from the Balkans and Eastern Europe to the Far East and Oceania

The EAJC started in 1991-1993 when the Jewish organizations of the collapsed Soviet Union became part of the World Jewish Congress and formed in its framework a Euro-Asian section, which, in addition to the post-Soviet countries, also included small Jewish communities in the countries of Central, Eastern Europe, and Asia. Later on, the section was renamed the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress.

In 2001, Congress entered the new century as an umbrella organization operating independently under the auspices of the WJC. In the first decades of work, under the leadership of Mika Chlenov and the well-known public figure Alexander Mashkevich, the EAJC is gaining strength and influence, implementing dozens of essential projects, uniting and consolidating the Jewish life of the region. During this period, organized Jewish life in the post-Soviet space truly blossomed and took root.

In 2017, businessman and philanthropist Michael Mirilashvili, who stood at the origins of the organization and for many years supported the activities of the Congress as First Vice President, was elected President of the EAJC. A new chapter in the history of the organization begins.

Today the EAJC is one of the leading Jewish forces in the region. The EAJC is directly involved in the Jewish life of the region, represents and defends the interests of the Jewish communities and the State of Israel in the international arena.



AZERBAIJAN



ARMENIA



ALBANIA



BELARUS



GEORGIA



KAZAKHSTAN



KYRGYZSTAN



INDIA



MOLDOVA



UZBEKISTAN



NEW ZEALAND



RUSSIA



SERBIA



SLOVENIA



TAJIKISTAN



PHILIPPINES



UKRAINE



CROATIA



SRI LANKA



MYANMAR

Focus Areas

Community Life and Historical Heritage

Every year we support Jewish communities and organizations in the region. We participate in the strategic spending of the communities, support functioning projects and successful organizations constantly encouraging new initiatives in the Jewish world.

Jewish Education and Youth Activity

The EAJC emphasizes the fundamental role of the younger generation in preserving the heritage and developing Jewish life in the Euro-Asian region. Therefore, we support youth creativity and innovative initiatives by promoting the latest approaches to Jewish education.

Ties Between Israel and Diaspora

The EAJC supports the State of Israel and helps to strengthen its ties with the Jewish Diaspora and the countries of the Euro-Asian region. The Congress has established close relations with the Israeli government and the Knesset, the Israeli embassies in the region's countries, and the representations of the EAJC member countries in the Jewish state. Furthermore, the EAJC regularly calls on Israeli politicians to maintain and develop relations with Diaspora Jewry.

Fight Against anti-Semitism

The EAJC encourages state leaders to act against hatred and violence towards the Jewish population through diligent monitoring and appropriate legislation to combat anti-Semitism, historical distortions, Holocaust denial, and the delegitimization of Israel.

Social Justice

Support for those in need is one of the essential priorities of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress. We are doing everything possible so that people with disabilities, families with low incomes, and those in Jewish communities who need special care can have a decent quality of life and receive comprehensive assistance.

Holocaust Legacy

The EAJC pays special attention to preserving the memory of the Holocaust and supporting former prisoners of the ghettos and concentration camps. The preservation of historical memory, the fight against Holocaust denial, and the inclusion of its history in official educational programs are the key priorities of the EAJC.



EAJC Leaders and Team

The Euro-Asian Jewish Congress is our leaders: successful businessmen and public figures, united by faith in a strong and prosperous Jewish Diaspora, united around the Jewish heritage and the State of Israel.

MICHAEL MIRILASHVILI

President

AARON G. FRENKEL

Chairman of the Board

**TEMUR (BEN YEHUDA)
KHIKHINASHVILI**

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