

Open letter of Ukrainian Jews to Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin

To the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin

Mr. President!

We are Jewish citizens of Ukraine: businessmen, managers, public figures, scientists and scholars, artists and musicians. We are addressing you on behalf of the multi-national people of Ukraine, Ukraine's national minorities, and on behalf of the Jewish community.

You have stated that Russia wants to protect the rights of the Russian-speaking citizens of the Crimea and all of Ukraine and that these rights have been trampled by the current Ukrainian government. Historically, Ukrainian Jews are also mostly Russian-speaking. Thus, our opinion on what is happening carries no less weight than the opinion of those who advise and inform you.

We are convinced that you are not easily fooled. This means that you must be consciously picking and choosing lies and slander from the entire body of information on Ukraine. And you know very well that Victor Yanukovich's statement used to describe the situation after the latest treaty had been signed – "...Kyiv is full of armed people who have begun to ransack buildings, places of worship, and churches. Innocent people are suffering. People are being robbed and killed in the streets..." – is simply a lie, from the first word to the very last.

The Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine are not being humiliated or discriminated against, their civil rights have not been infringed upon. Meanderings about "forced Ukrainization" and "bans on the Russian language" that have been so common in Russian media are on the heads of those who invented them. Your certainty about the growth of anti-Semitism in Ukraine, which you expressed at your press-conference, also does not correspond to the actual facts. Perhaps you got Ukraine confused with Russia, where Jewish organizations have noticed growth in anti-Semitic tendencies last year.

Right now, after Ukraine has survived a difficult political crisis, many of us have wound up on different sides of the barricades. The Jews of Ukraine, as all ethnic groups, are not absolutely unified in their opinion towards what is happening in the country. But we live in a democratic country and can afford a difference of opinion.

They have tried to scare us (and are continuing their attempts) with "Bandera followers" and "Fascists" attempting to wrest away the helm of Ukrainian society, with imminent Jewish pogroms. Yes, we are well aware that the political opposition and the forces of social protests who have secured changes for the better are made up of different groups. They include nationalistic groups, but even the most marginal do not dare show anti-Semitism or other xenophobic behavior. And we certainly know that our very few nationalists are well-controlled by civil society and the new Ukrainian government – which is more than can be said for the Russian neo-Nazis, who are encouraged by your security services.

We have a great mutual understanding with the new government, and a partnership is in the works. There are quite a few national minority representatives in the Cabinet of Ministers: the Minister of Internal Affairs is Armenian, the Vice Prime Minister is a Jew, two ministers are Russian. The newly-appointed governors of Ukraine's region are also not exclusively Ukrainian.

Unfortunately, we must admit that in recent days stability in our country has been threatened. And this threat is coming from the Russian government, namely – from you personally. It is your policy of inciting separatism and crude pressure placed on Ukraine that threatens us and all Ukrainian people, including those who live in Crimea and the Ukrainian South-East. South-eastern Ukrainians will soon see that for themselves.

Vladimir Vladimirovich, we highly value your concern about the safety and rights of Ukrainian national minorities. But we do not wish to be "defended" by sundering Ukraine and annexing its territory. We decisively call for you not to intervene in internal Ukrainian affairs, to return the Russian armed forces to their normal fixed peacetime location, and to stop encouraging pro-Russian separatism.

Vladimir Vladimirovich, we are quite capable of protecting our rights in a constructive dialogue and in cooperation with the government and civil society of a sovereign, democratic, and united Ukraine. We strongly urge you not to destabilize the situation in our country and to stop your attempts of delegitimizing the new Ukrainian government.

Signed:

Josef Zisels Chairman of the Association of Jewish Communities and Organizations of Ukraine (VAAD) Ukraine, Executive Vice President of the Congress of National Communities of Ukraine

Alexander Suslensky D.Sc., Vice President of the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine, businessman

Andrei Adamovsky First Vice President of the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine, member of the “Hillel” Jewish Student organization Observation Council (citizen of Russia)

Evgen Chervonenko Vice President of the European Jewish Congress, businessman

Rabbi Alex Dukhovny Head Rabbi of the Ukrainian Progressive Judaism communities

Rabbi Reuven Stamov Head Rabbi of the Ukrainian Traditional Judaism communities

Alexander Paskhaver Member of the VAAD Ukraine Coordination Council, economist

Leonid Finberg Director of the NaUKMA Center for the Studies of History and Culture of Eastern European Jewry, VAAD Ukraine Vice Chairman

Anatoliy Podolsky Director of the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies, Vice Chairman of VAAD Ukraine

Igor Kuperberg Chairman of the Zionist Federation of Ukraine, Vice Chairman of VAAD Ukraine

Semen Belman Vice President of the Jewish Council of Ukraine, President of the Chernigiv Jewish Community

Alexander Gaidar Leader of the Union of Ukrainian Progressive Judaism Religious Communities

Vyacheslav Likhachev CNCU Chief expert in monitoring and analysing xenophobia and anti-Semitism, member of the VAAD Ukraine Coordination Council(citizen of Russia and Israel)

Michael Gold Editor-in-chief of the VAAD Ukraine newspaper “Hadashot”

Galina Haraz Engineer (citizen of Ukraine and Israel)

Igor Turov PhD in history, Director of the Jewish Studies Certificate Program of VAAD Ukraine, VAAD Ukraine Presidium member

Diana Gold VAAD Ukraine Presidium member

Alexander Roitburg Artist

Evgen Greben Director of the “Maccabi” Jewish Cultural and Sports Society (Kyiv)

Grigoriy Pickman “B’nei B’rith Leopoldis” President

Igor Kerez VAAD Ukraine Trustee Board member, businessman

(Signatures still being collected)

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