
The Jewish Diaspora and the Russo-Ukrainian Crisis



Olena Bagno-Moldavsky

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- “The Conditional Effect of Network Diversity and Values on Tolerance”, *Political Behavior*, forthcoming (with Pazit Ben Nun Bloom);
- “The Ukrainian Crisis and the Middle East”, INSS Strategic Assessment, No. 17-2, July 2014 (with Zvi Magen and Sarah Fainberg);
- *The Voice of the People: Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2012*, Memorandum No. 126, INSS, 2013 (with Yehuda Ben Meir).

Abstract

Two questions arise when the role of a diaspora in crisis is considered. Do diasporas embody an internal threat to the security of the nation state? And why do some efforts to use diasporas as a tool of international politics succeed while others fail? In this paper, the Ukrainian 2014-2015 crisis involving Russia is analyzed in order to suggest answers to these questions. The author examines the political reactions of a specific diaspora group: the Jews in Ukraine and Russia.

The author finds that the diaspora became divided across the fault-line of a clash between the two states, Russia and Ukraine. She concludes that, ultimately, the political power of the diasporas in Russia and Ukraine is limited, and cannot really diverge from the political line of the host state. Concerning the diaspora-host-homeland relational triangle, the paper suggests that the neutral position of Ukraine toward Israel allows more freedom for diaspora organizations to advance an independent political agenda, while the difference in foreign-policy goals between Israel and Russia means that the diaspora organizations have no choice, but to limit their political activism to the permitted cultural-economic spheres.

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Introduction

Two questions arise when the role of a diaspora in crisis is considered. First, do diasporas embody an internal threat to the security of the nation state, be it host or home state? Second, why do some efforts to use diasporas as a tool of international politics succeed while others fail? In this paper, the diaspora role in conflict is addressed on two levels: institutional, and individual. Diasporas as institutions represent long-distance ethno-religious groups and build relations with both the host and the home states; diasporas as social networks or individual political entrepreneurs facilitate these relations between the community, the host and the home.

In political science and international relations literature, diaspora involvement in conflicts is a burgeoning field;¹ and the participation of European and North American passport-holders in violent movements such as ISIS is the ultimate example of diaspora involvement in political processes. The role of diasporas in the Ukrainian crisis, as this paper suggests, provides a less spectacular, but more politically complex example, where diasporic organizations act strategically to protect themselves in the host states by either siding with the policies of the hosts or avoiding activism that openly diverges from the political agenda advanced by their respective nation states. The crisis directly affects Russian-speaking Jews in Ukraine, and indirectly touches those who live in Russia and in Israel through the mutual, Ukrainian and Russian, allegations about implementing "fascist-style policies" toward minorities (Ukraine blames the RF for oppressing the Crimean Tatars, while the RF accuses the Ukrainian "junta" of neo-fascism and discrimination against Russian speakers). Jewish organizations across the globe and in Israel have been traditionally sensitive to the neo-fascist rhetoric; the crisis in Ukraine thus provoked strong reactions across

¹ For example, F. Adamson, "Displacement, Diaspora Mobilization, and Transnational Cycles of Political Violence" in J. Tirman (ed.), *Maze of Fear: Security and Migration After September 11th*, New York, New Press, 2004, p. 45-58; S. Howell and A. Shryock, "Cracking Down on Diaspora: Arab Detroit and America's 'War on Terror'", *Anthropological Quarterly*, No.76-3, 2003, p. 443-462; H. Smith and P. Stares, *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-Makers or Peace-Wreckers?*, Tokyo: United Nations Press, 2007; Y. Shain, "The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Perpetuation or Resolution" in *Kinship and Diaspora*, Michigan University Press, 2007, p. 104-122; M. Koinova, "Diasporas and Secessionist Conflicts: the Mobilization of the Armenian, Albanian and Chechen diasporas", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, No.34-2, 2011, p. 333-356.

the Jewish world, and especially among the Russian-speaking Jews residing in Ukraine and Russia.

Ukrainian Jews and the Crisis

The Crisis

In 2013-2015 Ukraine has experienced unprecedented political and security turmoil, triggered by the refusal of then President Viktor Yanukovich to sign the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement. The protests started on 21 November 2013, and escalated in February, when the Russian Federation became involved actively, which led to deep political changes in Ukraine. The first of the most important changes was the overthrow of Yanukovich, and the subsequent victory of Petro Poroshenko in the first round of presidential elections in May 2014, even though his pre-February popularity rating had never crossed a 5 % threshold. Second, in March 2014, the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by the Russian Federation had been followed by multiple economic sanctions by the West on a limited number of Russian companies and individuals held directly responsible for the escalation in Ukraine. Third, limited-scale war between Russian-backed insurgents (*opolchency*) and the Ukrainian security forces and battalions of volunteers (*dobrovol'cy*) in eastern Ukraine (mainly the Lugansk and Donetsk regions that share a border with the Russian Federation: 746km including 569km land border in Lugansk, and 311km including 178 land border in Donetsk). This struggle has led to a drastic worsening of living conditions and personal safety among local people; and it created a growing number of refugees and asylum-seekers, moving to the central regions of Ukraine². The OCHA and World Health Organization reported that, as of 6 January 2015, 10,468 people, including 120 children, had been wounded and 4,808 people, including 45 children, killed (source: OCHA/WHO, including flight MH-17 victims).³ The number of undocumented deaths is much higher; thousands of people are missing and no reliable reporting from the zone of conflict is available.

² 633,523, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report of 9 January 2015), central European countries and the Russian Federation (593,622). See "Ukraine. Situation report No.23", Report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 9 January 2015, <<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Sitrep%2023%20-%20Ukraine%20-%209%20January.pdf>>.

³ *Ibid.*

Among these internally displaced were members of the Jewish communities who evacuated their synagogues and community centers, moving from Donetsk and Lugansk to Kiev⁴ and Dnepropetrovsk. The non-affiliated Jews from these regions faced the same dilemma as the rest of the civilian population: to stay in the zone of conflict and risk their lives, or to escape the conflict and leave behind possessions, businesses and jobs, while facing an uncertain future elsewhere. Many families decided to split, leaving one adult to watch over the property, while the rest evacuated from the zone of conflict.

Ukrainian Jewish diaspora's reactions

Former Soviet dissident and Ukrainian Jew Semen Gluzman⁵ represents a trend suggesting that Jews in Ukraine do not form a community due to their geographic dispersal and low levels of participation. He stated:

“As a specialist in social problems, I clearly understand that in Ukraine there is no Jewish community (*obschina*). Community is based on self-management and self-control. We do not have that. When some Jewish ‘generals’ present themselves as representatives of the Jewish community, it provokes an ironic smile. Most of my acquaintances, Jews from Kiev, have never heard the surnames of these self-professed Jewish leaders (*vozhdej*).”⁶

Gluzman correctly defined the situation of the Jewish community; however, this definition overlooks the institutional nature of modern diasporas, where an active institutional core is more important for political representation than the sheer numbers or universal engagement of the rank-and-file members. Although only about 15 % of Jews in Ukraine are actively engaged in diaspora institutions, they determine the political façade of the community, whose reaction to the crisis has received media coverage and provoked visible international political response.⁷

⁴ D. Margolin, “Exiled in Kiev, Donetsk Jewish Community Prepares for the High Holidays”, *chabad.org*, 19 September 2014, <www.chabad.org/news/article_cdo/aid/2707727/jewish/Exiled-in-Kiev-Donetsk-Jewish-Community-Prepares-for-the-High-Holidays.htm>.

⁵ Executive secretary of the Ukrainian Association of Psychiatrists.

⁶ Semen Gluzman, interview (in Russian): “Semen Gluzman: “In the USSR, there was one more type of the “Jews”, these were the Ukrainians”, February 2012, <<http://www.lechaim.ru/ARHIV/238/gold.htm>>.

⁷ For example, A. Higgins, “Among Ukraine’s Jews, the Bigger Worry Is Putin, Not Pogroms”, *New York Times*, 8 April 2014, <www.nytimes.com/2014/04/09/world/europe/ukraines-jews-dismiss-claims-of-anti-semitism.html?_r=0>; M. Blumenthal, “Is the US Backing Neo-Nazis in Ukraine?”, *AlterNet*, 25 February 2014,

Overall, the Ukrainian Jewish diaspora is a remnant of what once was the Soviet Jewry, a group of 1.5 million people, now scattered across the world in the aftermath of the fall of the USSR in 1991. Jews make up about 0.15 % of the population of Ukraine (103,000 in 2001 and an estimated 70,000 today⁸). Ninety-eight percent of Ukrainian Jews are part of a larger Russian-speaking group, which constitutes about 40 % of the total population. Among the Russian-speakers, only about 17 % are ethnic Russians; the remainder is comprised of Ukrainians and other nationalities. Jews are a predominantly urban, educated and aging group, with negative demographic dynamics. In contrast to other Russian-speakers in Ukraine, who never organized around non-governmental institutions other than these belonging to communist, and other pro-Russian political forces, the Jews, in two decades of Ukrainian independence, have developed a web of mostly religious, but also cultural, social and transnational communal organizations, partly imported from Israel and the US.

Relative to the size of the Jewish population, the number of Jewish transnational umbrella organizations and unions is large. According to the State Committee on Ethnicities and Religions, at the beginning of 2010⁹ in Ukraine there were 288 Jewish organizations, 297 synagogues and more than 100 registered charities. Data from 2013 suggests that the number of religious organizations increased from 297 in 2010 to 305 in 2013. The decrease in the Jewish population (in 2001 the census data showed that 56 % of the Jewish community members were aged 56 years or more), accompanied by the spread of organizations a decade later, reflects the institutional nature of contemporary diasporas as opposed to the communal nature that diasporas used to have in the past.

The reaction of the organized Ukrainian Jewish diaspora toward the crisis varied, especially at the beginning of the 2013 protests. Jewish organizations whose leadership associated with Viktor Yanukovich's Party of Regions did not participate in the public

<www.salon.com/2014/02/25/is_the_us_backing_neo_nazis_in_ukraine_partner>; E. Divinsky, "Jewish Blood Spilled in Kiev Again", *A Jewish Israel*, 19 January 2014, <<http://ajewishisrael.com/jewish-blood-spilled-kiev/>>; The Jewish Federations of North America, "Unrest in Ukraine", October 2014, <www.jewishfederations.org/page.aspx?id=267327>; "AJC Praises Ukraine President Address to U.S. Congress", *AJC*, 18 September 2014, <www.ajc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=7oJILSPWfJSG&b=8478375&ct=14200899¬oc=1#sthash.8FDMOI7Q.dpuf>; "Russian Jewish Leader Urges Silence Over Crimea", *Jerusalem Post*, 3 April 2014, <www.jpost.com/International/Russian-Jewish-leader-urges-silence-over-Crimea-344188>.

⁸ Author's estimate based on the Ukrainian census data (2001) and the natural rate of decline in the Jewish population recorded for the Russian Federation in 2002 and 2010 (156/233=.64). Ukrainian Jews are demographically similar to Jews in the RF, therefore their estimated number should be around 103,000*.64=66,309.

⁹ The committee was reorganized in 2010 and became part of the Ministry of Culture <<http://mincult.kmu.gov.ua/mincult/uk/publish/article/246857>>.

discourse and did not put any political content on their websites (e.g. the Jewish Foundation of Ukraine and the Jewish Forum of Ukraine). Similarly, Alexander (Aharon) Levin, the founder of the World Forum of Russian-speaking Jewry (WFRJ) and Yukhym Zvyahilsky, former Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine, an associate of Yanukovych and a native of Donetsk, were cautious in their assessment of the situation. Mr Levin wrote letters to the US ambassador in Ukraine expressing concerns, and recorded a few appearances in the regional US newspapers to show his disquiet about the lack of response to the anti-Semitic attacks during the protests in Kiev in January 2014. Remarkably, six months later in June 2014 during the annual conference of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, Mr Levin changed tone and joined the majority of the Ukrainian Jewish community organizations in support of the new Ukrainian leadership.¹⁰

In response to the situation that developed in 2014 in Ukraine, Jewish notables, including Chief Rabbi and president of the Jewish Federation of Ukraine, Jacob Dov Bleich, called on Russia to “stop its aggression against Ukraine” and pull out its troops. Jewish cultural organizations sent a message to the international community to “stop [the] foreign invasion into Ukraine and brutal interference into our internal affairs”.¹¹ In Crimea, Rabbi Michael Kapustin of the Ner Tamid Reform synagogue in Simferopol stated back in February 2014:

“The city is occupied by Russians. Apparently Russians intend to take over the Crimea and make it a part of Russia. If this were the case, I would leave the country, since I want to live in Ukraine.”¹²

Ihor Kolomoisky’s role

Some Ukrainian politicians of Jewish origin were more outspoken than the religious leaders: “as citizens of Ukraine, [Jews] are united in condemning the Russia intervention,” stated MP Oleksandr Feldman of the Ukrainian Jewish Committee, while a governor of the Dnepropetrovsk region, Ihor Kolomoisky (president of the European Jewish Union, a major donor to Jewish causes, head of the European

¹⁰ “Ukraine: Anti-Semitism is a Tool of ‘Failed Politicians’”, *EJP*, 22 June 2014, <http://ejpress.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49459&catid=11>.

¹¹ “Ukraine’s Religious Communities Ask Russia to Pull Out Troops”, *JTA*, 2 March 2014, <www.jta.org/2014/03/02/news-opinion/world/ukraines-religious-communities-ask-russia-to-pull-out-troops#ixzz36aJaVflu>.

¹² A. Borschel-Dan, “Crimea’s Sole Rabbi Advises Jews ‘Not to Become Targets’”, *The Times of Israel*, 2 March 2014, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/crimeas-sole-rabbi-advises-jews-not-to-become-targets/#ixzz35kWmqPLE%20s/AuthorPage.aspx?id=191%22%20t%20%22_blank%E2%80%9D>.

Jewish Council and benefactor of the Ukrainian National Security Forces) went personal and called Russian President Vladimir Putin “a schizophrenic who became fixated on reviving the Russian empire ... [and] can bring the world to disaster”.¹³ Mr Kolomoisky, who is worth about US\$3.3 billion, holds triple Ukrainian-Israeli-Cypriot citizenship. The Dnepropetrovsk region, which has a predominantly Russian-speaking population remained stable and violence-free. During the crisis, Kolomoisky as a governor of Dnepropetrovsk *oblast* (region) made many theatrical gestures, including offering a \$10,000 bounty to anyone who captured a Russian soldier on Ukrainian soil. In retaliation, in neighboring Donetsk and Lugansk, branches of Privatbank owned by Mr Kolomoisky have been looted. He is a much brighter phenomenon in Ukrainian politics and business, compared to other fellow oligarchs of Jewish origin, such as Alex Feldman, Natan Shulman, Yukhim Zvyahilskiy or Victor Pinchuk. Some admire Kolomoisky’s resilience in the face of attacks launched on his assets in Russia¹⁴ and ability to withstand the pressures of pro-Russian business interests in the Dnepropetrovsk region. Others on the contrary, are critical of his intimate (many would say corrupt) relations with Ukrainian officials in Kyiv, including Prime Minister Yatsenyuk and President Poroshenko,¹⁵ which allow Kolomoisky to advance his business interests.

The communal heavyweights, such as the oldest Jewish organization, the Va’ad (Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities), have openly sided with the new regime and actively advertised their position from the first days of the unrest. Yozef Zissles, head of the Va’ad, who is also a chairman of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress (EAJC) General Council, addressed the EuroMaidan in 2013, and initiated a report on hate-based crimes produced by the National Minority Rights Monitoring Group associated with the Congress of Ethnic Communities of Ukraine.¹⁶ The report aimed at countering claims that the leaders of the Ukrainian opposition encourage xenophobic and anti-Semitic sentiments. Thus, according to that report and the data from the Moscow-based Sova Information and Analysis Centre, in Ukraine the last ethnically motivated murder was recorded in 2010, while in 2013 21 people suffered injuries as the result of racially or ethnically motivated attacks, whereas in Russia in the same year 199 people were attacked, and of these 21 were murdered.¹⁷ The Moscow

¹³ 3 March 2014, *Ukrainian Pravda*, video interview, <www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/03/3/7017368/>.

¹⁴ A. Temkin and E. Akhmadiev, “Natsional-milliarder: kak Ihor Kolomoyskiy teriaet aktivy v Rossii” [Nationalist billionaire Ihor Kolomoisky Loses Assets in Russia], *rbc.ru*, 4 September 2014, <<http://top.rbc.ru/politics/04/09/2014/946908.shtml>>.

¹⁵ G. Kanevskiy, “Why is it Good to be Ihor Valeriyavich?”, *Economic Pravda*, 5 November 2014, <www.epravda.com.ua/rus/publications/2014/11/5/503267/>.

¹⁶ “Comparison of Xenophobia in Ukraine and in Russia”, *khpg.org*, 1 May 2014, <<http://khpg.org/index.php?id=1398892043>>.

¹⁷ Relative to the population size (roughly 44 million in Ukraine and 144 million in

Human Rights Bureau reports similar figures for Russia in 2013 (205 victims of racist attacks and 25 killed). The report may be criticized for lack of accuracy, as it was almost impossible to effectively monitor hate crimes when corruption levels in the police were skyrocketing in both countries. However, the use of the report by the Ukrainian Jewish Va'ad to counter accusations that the Ukrainian leadership is anti-Semitic is interesting as a symbolic expression of solidarity between the Jewish institutions and the Ukrainian state.

Russia) Russia has a population three times larger, but the number of hate crimes is 10 times greater compared to Ukraine. In Ukraine there were 20 acts of xenophobic vandalism in 2013. In Russia, the Sova Center reported 70 such cases. In the first four months of 2014, monitors in Ukraine identified five victims of xenophobic attacks. In Russia, according to preliminary data from the Sova Center, 31 people suffered from racist violence, while eight were killed during the same four-month period. In addition, in 2014 there were 11 cases of xenophobic vandalism in Ukraine (four of these in Crimea), as against 17 cases in Russia.

Bilateral Relationships between Russian and Ukrainian Jews

Reactions of Russian Jewish community

In Russia, the Jewish community is twice the size of the community in Ukraine, at 156,801,¹⁸ and is also predominantly Russian-speaking (99 %), urban (97 %), educated, and secular. It is declining steadily as a result of both emigration and a negative demographic balance.¹⁹ Official statistics in 2013 reported a total of about 600 Jewish organizations; almost half of them (267) were religious (including 218 ultra-orthodox).

Demographically and institutionally, the Russian and Ukrainian Jewish diasporas have much in common. Moreover, their umbrella, transnational organizations (e.g. World Congress of Russian-speaking Jewry, Eurasian Congress for Russian-speaking Jewry, World Forum of Russian-speaking Jewry) usually appeal to the same audiences and are often managed by the same people. However, when the Ukrainian crisis unfolded in 2014, Jewish organizations in Russia chose not to comment publicly on the political position of Ukrainian Jews, while some urged their “brethren” to “stay away” from the conflict in Crimea because it was “not connected to the Jews”. It was also suggested that “Jews and rabbis should stay away from politics”.²⁰ Overall, major Jewish organizations such as the Chabad-run Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia and the Russian Jewish Congress produced less vocal and more sophisticated expressions of support for the Russian Federation (RF) leadership: for example, they initiated via the local Jewish community and broadly advertised in the media a distribution of humanitarian aid to Ukrainian refugees in Tyumen²¹ (a Siberian region 2,500 km from Moscow).

¹⁸ Rosstat, Census 2010,

<www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-01.pdf>.

¹⁹ G. Zvi, *Jewish Identities in Postcommunist Russia and Ukraine: An Uncertain Ethnicity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

²⁰ “Russian Jewish leader urges silence over Crimea”, *op. cit.* [7].

²¹ “REK pomozhet ukrainskim bezhentsam po vsej Rossii” [REK Helps Ukrainian Refugees all over Russia], Russian Jewish Congress, 30 June 2014, <<http://help.rjc.ru/site.aspx?SECTIONID=85646&IID=2610617>>.

Support of the RF policy on Ukraine was not limited to organizations; Russian artists of Jewish origin were heavily over-represented among more than 500 signatories of two open letters that urged support for the policies of President Putin on Ukraine and Crimea.²² Among the vocal expressions of loyalty toward these policies were projects launched by a former senator of the Russian Federation Council and now a full-time president of the non-governmental organization World Without Nazism (WWN), the Ukrainian-born, Russian Jewish businessmen Boris Spiegel.²³ In early February 2014, a WWN delegation met with Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in a show of support for his embattled presidency. Senator Spiegel urged Yanukovich to stand tall against the forces of “extremism and neo-Nazism” that were demonstrating on the streets of Kiev. The World Without Nazism website was at that time full of articles about the specter of Ukrainian neo-Nazism.²⁴

In summer 2014, WWN sponsored a trip of Jewish elected officials and representatives of the Orthodox communities from Israel, Russia and North America to take part in commemoration events in the annexed Crimean peninsula. Moreover, individual representatives of the Russian Jewish elite frequently featured in the media, expressing support for the country's leadership and its policy in Ukraine (among these were the iconic Soviet movie star Elina Bystrickaya, Soviet-Russian singer Yosef Kobzon, and actor and performer Roman Karzev). The intellectuals also joined in; for example, a popular radio commentator, businessman, public intellectual and president of the Institute for Middle Eastern Studies, Yevgeny Satanovsky, consistently criticized the Ukrainian opposition forces, using the adjectives “neo-Nazis” and “fascists” introduced by the official media.²⁵ A few protest voices that belonged to Jewish and non-Jewish representatives of the Russian *intelligencia* (e.g. Victor Shenderovich) were marginalized as belonging to those of “national traitors” (*nazional-predateli*). Remarkably, major national Jewish diaspora groups in Ukraine (e.g. Va'ad) refrained from openly

²² This list can be found at: <<http://mkrf.ru/press-tsentr/novosti/ministerstvo/deyateli-kultury-rossii-v-podderzhku-pozitsii-prezidenta-po-ukraine-i-krymu>>.

²³ D. Fishman, “Why Vladimir Putin Will Keep Playing Jewish Card in Ukraine Crisis”, *The Jewish Daily Forward*, 11 March 2014, <<http://forward.com/articles/194212/why-vladimir-putin-will-keep-playing-jewish-card-i/>>; “Zayavlenie v svyazi s raspravami nad mirnymi gitelyami na Ukraine” [Statement in Connection with the Killings of Civilians in Ukraine], *Mir bez natsizma [World Without Nazism]*, 24 September 2014, <http://worldwithoutnazism.org/articles/tegi/zayavleniya_liderov_dvigeniya/zayavlenie_v_svyazi_s_raspravami_nad_mirnymi_gitelyami_na_ukraine/>.

²⁴ “Boris Shpigel: Pravoradikalnie partii ukraini aktivno zanimayutsya geroizaciei natsizma” [Boris Spiegel: “Ukrainian Right-wing Parties are Actively Engaged in the Glorification of Nazism”], *Novosti Ukrainy [Ukrainian News]*, 3 February 2014, <<http://from-ua.com/news/298448-boris-shpigel-pravoradikalnie-partii-ukraini-aktivno-zanimayutsya-geroizaciei-nacizma.html>>.

²⁵ “Vojna protiv vsekh” [War Against All], *Vesti FM*, 14 October 2014, <http://radiovesti.ru/episode/show/episode_id/29634>.

addressing the stance of their co-ethnics in Russia.²⁶ When confronted with questioning on this in a TV interview, the head of the Va'ad commented that, since independence “we have increasingly become the Ukrainian Jews, while [they] have become the Russian Jews”.²⁷

Divisions between communities

Overall, the empirical evidence suggests that, in 2014, transnational and local Jewish organizations, created by and for former Soviet Jews in Russia and Ukraine, were on opposite sides of the political barricades, expressing divergent views on the role of Russia in the annexation of Crimea and the unfolding crisis in eastern Ukraine.

The discrepancy of Jewish reactions in Russia and Ukraine invites a question. What makes the views of Jews so different in their assessments of the same event, when they share language, culture, socialization and many years of common Soviet experiences? Media priming is obviously important for the formation of views, and the media outlets that broadcast from Russia and Ukraine do show very different versions of events, but Jewish populations in Ukraine and Russia are urban and educated, and, at least hypothetically, are exposed to alternative sources of information, available *inter alia* on the Internet. A more plausible structural explanation follows from the logic of relations between diaspora and the state: Jews in the two countries have developed visions of loyalty²⁸ to their respective host states that put them at odds with each other. Similar trends of country-specific loyalty among Russian-speaking Jews can be found in Belarus.²⁹ Indeed, this phenomenon is by no means *Jewish*: Christian Armenians in Turkey, the largest Christian community in the country, are loyal subjects of their host state.³⁰ In 2008 during the Russo-Georgian war, the Georgian diaspora in Russia (about

²⁶ Despite the inclination of the Ukrainian Jewish organizations not to comment on the position of their co-ethnics in the Russian Federation, some Ukrainian Jewish notables, such as Moses Fishbein, an activist, poet and translator, criticized Jewish leaders in Russia for attempts to impair Ukrainian sovereignty using the “Jewish card”.

²⁷ Video interview, 17 June 2014, <<http://iton.tv/vse-programmy/razbor-poletov/item/763-evrei-rossii-podderzhivayut-putina>>.

²⁸ Similar trends of country-specific loyalty building are recorded in Belarus, where the Jewish community is supported and guided by the state. Vladimir Lameko, the deputy representative for minorities and religious affairs in the government of Belarus, in an interview with the Jewish newspaper *Aviv* stated: “Everyone should be proud of the state, where s-he lives” (*Aviv*, March-April 2014, p. 2).

²⁹ *Idem*.

³⁰ B. Baser, and A. Swain, “Diaspora design versus homeland realities: Case study of Armenian diaspora”, *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, No. 3, 2009, p. 45-62, <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/754065711?accountid=14771>>.

250,000 individuals; 7 % of the Georgian population) did not side with Tbilisi in its dispute with Moscow over Abkhazia and South Ossetia; despite strong ethnic identification with the homeland, Georgians in Russia did not engage in public protests or express public discontent. Similarly, the representatives of the Ukrainian diaspora in Russia (two million people) remained politically invisible during the events of 2014-2015, in contrast to feverish protests and volunteering by Ukrainians in North America, mostly, and also in Europe.

These opposing responses to the “Euro-Maidan”, the annexation of Crimea and the military crises in Eastern Ukraine have two practical implications. First, Jews in Ukraine and in Russia, for the time being at least, are walking along (?) different political paths. Second, given these observations, the answer to the first question – Do diasporas embody an internal threat to the security of the nation state? – is negative. The loyalty of diaspora organizations depends on the aptitude and willingness of the host state to produce legal conditions and a social environment that restrict diasporic discontent or disloyal activism.

The “Jewish Card”

Historical background

The second question posed in the introduction was: Why do some efforts to use diasporas as a tool of international politics succeed while others fail? In Soviet-Russian politics down to the current crisis, the “Jewish card” has been used instrumentally many times, and a brief overview can suggest an answer to the question.

During the 20th century, Soviet Jews became a tool that helped to advance the foreign policy goals of the Soviet state at least three times. First, during World War II, representatives of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (with the acronym EAK in Russian) – an organization founded on the instruction of Josef Stalin – actively campaigned in the US to harvest financial and political support for the Soviet Union in its war against the Third Reich. During the war, Soviet Jews expressed unprecedented levels of loyalty to the state. Their motivations were complex (including the desire to get revenge on the Nazis for perished relatives, pure Soviet patriotism, and understanding that they had no chance of surviving in captivity). After the war all prominent members of the EAK were murdered or sent to the Gulag labor camps, while the communal structure was destroyed (schools, synagogues, theatres, publishing houses were all shut).

Years later, in the 1970s, the Soviet Jews were again subject to Soviet foreign policy, this time as dissidents and alien (*chuzdye*) elements. They were allowed to leave the USSR for Israel (though most settled in the West). The exodus of Soviet Jews in the 1970s is explained by the soviet-american relationships, especially strategic ones. The change in policy on the Soviet Jews that allowed their emigration was an act of “good will” on the part of the USSR that helped to facilitate the SALT talks with the US throughout the 1970s.³¹ Thus, lifting restrictions on Jewish emigration served as a background in talks between the two superpowers, and nurtured the myth about the unprecedented power of the “Jewish lobby”. The third main case of Soviet Jews being used to help advance the foreign

³¹ In the period 1969–1976, the US and USSR sought to improve bilateral relations, at a time when their geo-political interests overlapped with those of the US Jewish community, whose organizations lobbied for the departure of dissident Soviet Jews for Israel and the West.

policy goals of the Soviet state was in the late 1980s; during rapprochement with the West, President Gorbachev again used the issue of emigration, and allowed a massive exodus of Soviet citizens (mainly Jews but also Germans,³² Armenians,³³ Georgians, Greeks, and others) from the USSR, which continued on a huge scale well into the mid-1990s.

“Antifascist” discourse and its instrumentalization

In 2014, the Jewish issue was instrumentalized again. In February/March 2014, high-ranking Russian Federation (RF) officials (such as Russian Ambassador to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin,³⁴ Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov,³⁵ Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin,³⁶ and President Putin³⁷) discussed in various international and local formats and forums alleged official Ukrainian fascism and anti-Semitism. The Ukrainian opposition, protesters at the Maidan (Independence Square) and specifically the Right Sector and the associated political party Svoboda were referred to as neo-Nazis, fascists and anti-Semites, who in addition to anti-Semitism allegedly harbored ambitions to annihilate the Russian-speaking population of eastern Ukraine. Russian media coverage, produced by both state and privately owned channels, supported the official rhetoric referring to the Ukrainian opposition as a “fascist junta”.

The “antifascist” discourse of Russian officials was more prevalent at the beginning of the crisis; it reached its peak during the annexation of the Crimean peninsula (when the heavily armed “polite

³² V. Tishkov, “Migration in the Countries of the Former Soviet Union”, *Global Commission on International Migration*, September 2005, p. 15, <www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/policy_and_research/gcim/rs/RS3.pdf>.

³³ S. Heitman, “The Third Soviet Emigration 1947-1991”, *Refuge*, No. 13-2, May 1993.

³⁴ “Churkin: Potrebovalis’ gody, chtoby ukrainskaia molodejd’ nachala podderjivat’ fashistov” [Churkin: It Took Ukrainian Youth Years to Support Fascists], 21 May 2014, <<http://odnarydina.com.ua/content/vitaliy-churkin-potrebovalis-gody-chtoby-ukrainskaya-molodezh-nachala-podderzivat-fashistov>>.

³⁵ “Lavrov: Events in Odessa Are Fascism”, *Dni.ru Internet Gazeta [Internet Newspaper]*, 6 May 2014, <www.dni.ru/polit/2014/5/6/270004.html>.

³⁶ “Rogozin v Tiraspole o Sobytiakh na Ukraine: ‘Gadina Fashizma jivucha kara neminuema’” [Rogozin in Tiraspol about the Events in Ukraine: Fascism Snake is Tenacious, Punishment is Inevitable], *Navigator*, 9 May 2014, <www.politnavigator.net/rogozin-zayavil-v-tiraspole-cto-fashizm-zhdet-neminuemaya-kara-foto.html>.

³⁷ “Putin sravnit dejstviia ukrainskoj armii s fashistkoj” [Putin Compared the Actions of the Ukrainian Army to Fascism], *BBC*, 29 August 2014, <www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2014/08/140829_putin_seliger_ukraine_russia>.

people” without insignia landed in the peninsula to, it was claimed, protect the locals from the coming Maidan fascists), and was consistently used throughout the summer in the conflict over eastern Ukraine. Among the most bizarre expressions of the warfare were rumors that circulated on the Internet and among Jewish community members in eastern Ukraine in the summer (in Donetsk and Horlivka) that Jews had to register and declare their property to the new “authorities”. Both sides (the pro-Russian militants and the Ukrainian municipal authorities) distanced themselves from and denounced such “provocations”.

The Ukrainian opposition realized, after a considerable delay, that the “Jewish issue” had to be addressed, and made several moves to counterbalance Russian “anti-fascist” policy and media coverage of the events in Ukraine. Several countermeasures were initiated and covered in the media, such as the hotline between Dmytro Yarosh, the leader of the Right Sector, and the Israeli embassy that was established after the meeting between Mr Yarosh and the Israeli ambassador.³⁸ The ambassador was concerned because, at the time of the protests in Kiev, two ultra-Orthodox Jews were attacked on different occasions on their way to and from the synagogue, and anti-Semitic graffiti was spotted near the Maidan, a major locus of protests. These events were not addressed by the opposition trio; Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Vitali Klitschko and Oleh Tyahnybok failed to publicly condemn or react to these events. This initial lack of reaction to actual anti-Semitic events as well as the closeness of the ultra-nationalist Right Sector leader Dmytro Yarosh to Oleh Tyahnybok (leader of the Svoboda party) linked the Ukrainian opposition to the dark pages of Ukraine’s anti-Semitic history.

On the one hand, the facts on the ground indicate that the Ukrainian leadership is neither particularly xenophobic nor inherently anti-Semitic. For example, scattered evidence from Ukrainian elites; Jewish tycoon Vadim Rabinovich ran as a presidential candidate in May 2014 and ended up with more votes than the representatives of ultra-nationalist forces; the businessman Ihor Kolomoisky (as mentioned earlier in this paper) was appointed and serves as a governor of the Dnepropetrovsk region; and Volodymyr Groisman serves as the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada, while previously being the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine. In addition to having Jews in many key governmental positions, the Ukrainian leadership initiates dialogue with Israel and the diaspora (e.g. President Poroshenko visited Israel as a presidential candidate, while the Prime Minister of Ukraine Arseniy Yatsenyuk addressed in May 2014 the Global Forum of the American Jewish Committee, asking for support for the new Ukrainian government). On the other hand, the Ukrainian leadership was extraordinarily ineffective in responding systematically

³⁸ “Israeli Envoy Opens ‘Hotline’ with Ukrainian Ultra-Nationalist”, *Haaretz*, 7 March 2014, <www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.578537>.

to the propaganda campaign that originated with the Russian Federation, and helped to focus public and international discourse on “anti-fascism” and the “Jewish issue”, linking both to the Ukrainian opposition’s alleged hatred of minorities in general and Russian-speakers in particular.

Echoes in Israel

Russian-speakers in Israel were split in their interpretation of events in Ukraine, while the official transnational organizations adopted the neutral position of “not having a stance on the conflict” (a quote from World Forum of Russian-Speaking Jewry CEO Alex Selsky, a former spokesperson of Prime Minister Netanyahu). In contrast, Russian North American Jewish diaspora organizations that represent, *inter alia*, Russian-speaking Jews in the US and non-Jewish civil society organizations founded by Russian-speaking Jews (e.g. the Eurasia Democracy Initiative, the Russian office of the American Jewish Committee) unequivocally supported the “European direction of development for Ukraine, which would reduce the influence of the Russian Federation on the country”. Similarly to Jewish Russian-speaking representatives from Germany, activists from the Russian-speaking American Jewish diaspora travelled across Eastern Europe in missions aimed at supporting local democratic institutions and Jewish organizations.³⁹

As regards official Israel, numerous attempts have been made by pro-Russian activists to engage Israel in the discussion of Ukrainian anti-Semitism and neo-Nazism, especially prior to the annexation of Crimea.⁴⁰ Delegations of concerned Jewish groups (e.g. from Kharkiv) were received at a low official level; members of several minor parliamentary commissions in Israel met with these delegations, receiving limited coverage in Russian-language media outlets in Israel and Russia. Ukrainian Jewish organizations were also given a stage in the Israeli media in the Russian language when they leapt into the debate, publishing open letters that denied any linkage between the delegations of activists that visited Israel and the Ukrainian Jewish community.⁴¹

³⁹ “V SSHA nyneshnie vyiboryi prezidenta ukraïnyi schitayut istoricheskimi – nablyudatel” [In the US the Presidential Elections in Ukraine are Considered Historical—an Observer], UNIAN, 25 May 2014, <www.unian.net/politics/921644-v-ssha-nyineshnie-vyiboryi-prezidenta-ukraïnyi-schitayut-istoricheskimi-nablyudatel.html>.

⁴⁰ “Ukrainskie aktivisty—Knessetu: antisemitizm podnimaet golovu” [Ukrainian Activists—Knesset: Antisemitism Strikes Again], Izrus, 19 March 2014, <<http://izrus.co.il/dvuhstoronka/article/2014-03-20/23963.html>>.

⁴¹ “Aktivisty protestuiut protiv provokatsii v Knessete” [Activists Against Provocations

Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, Avigdor Lieberman, himself a Russian-speaker born and raised in Moldova, issued a very general statement that Israel viewed “the events in Ukraine with grave concern, worries for the safety of the Ukrainian people and hopes that the situation does not deteriorate ...”⁴² (March 2014). The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not change its rhetoric or stance on the situation when the crisis deteriorated in eastern Ukraine, and did not join the West in denouncing Russia’s annexation of the Crimean peninsula and instigation of warfare in Donetsk and Lugansk.

On the other hand, Israel did not react to Russia’s position regarding Ukrainian anti-Semitism, and chose to remain as uninvolved in the conflict as possible, given Israel’s vital interest in Russia’s cooperation in relation to Syria and Iran. The Israeli position was accepted with understanding in Ukraine; its Tel Aviv-based ambassador, Genadiy Nadolenko, refrained from assessments⁴³ in contrast to the US Foreign Office, which was openly critical of Israel’s neutrality. In an op-ed published in the left-leaning Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, Mr Nadolenko merely described the Ukrainian stance, while noting that Ukraine had often been on the side of Israel when the UN Security Council voted on resolutions that condemned Israel.

in the Knesset], *Evrejskie Novosti* [Jewish News], 24 March 2014, <<http://eajc.org/page16/news44048.html>>.

⁴² “Israel Breaks Silence on Ukraine: We Hope Conflict is Resolved Peacefully”, Ynetnews.com, 3 June 2014, <www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4495771,00.html>.

⁴³ G. Nadolenko, “Ukraine Does Not Want War”, *Haaretz*, 22 April 2014.

Conclusions

The Jewish diasporas in Russia and Ukraine set their agendas according to their needs, navigating through constraints and opportunities created by the host countries. Thus, the diasporic groups that emerged from a formerly homogeneous population of Soviet-born, Russian-speaking Jews remained only in rhetoric a harmonious Russian-speaking Jewish whole. In reality they gradually develop political loyalties toward their host states in Ukraine, Russia and in the West.

This analysis shows that the political power of diasporas in Russia and Ukraine is very limited and cannot diverge from the policy chosen by the host state. In more politically centralized and conservative Russia, the phenomenon of loyal, puppet diasporas (Georgian, Chechen, Ukrainian and Jewish) is more visible compared to Ukraine, although in the latter identification with the political Ukrainian nation is also a necessary precondition for strong political visibility for both Jews and Crimean Tatars.

Overall, homelands interested in engaging with their diasporas need to understand the constraints that these diasporas have due to the foreign policy goals of the host state. When the host state takes a neutral position on the diaspora homeland (e.g. the Ukrainian stance on Israel), diaspora organizations will have more freedom of maneuver to advance independent political agenda. In contrast, when the host state supports foreign policy goals not shared by the homeland (Russia's policies on Israel, or on Ukraine), diasporas (such as the Jewish and Ukrainian citizens of Russia) have no choice but to limit their political activism to the permitted cultural and economic spheres and find a niche that allows them a comfortable existence in the host state.