

# Open letter of Ukrainian Jews to Russian Federation President Vladimir 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 Crimea and all of Ukraine and that these rights have been flouted 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 do not believe that you are easy to fool. You consciously pick and choose lies and slander from the massive amount of information about Ukraine. And you know very well that [former Ukrainian president] Viktor Yanukovich's statement concerning the time after the latest treaty had been signed that "...Kyiv is full of armed people who have begun to trash buildings, places of worship, churches. Innocent people have begun to suffer. People have simply been robbed and killed in the street..." are lies, 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 limited. Meanderings about "forced Ukrainianization" 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 of the growth of anti-Semitism in Ukraine also does not correspond to the actual facts. It seems you have confused Ukraine 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, and 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.

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## SIGNED:

**Josef Zissels**, 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)

**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 Chernihiv Jewish Community

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

**Vyacheslav Likhachev**, CNCU Chief expert in monitoring and analyzing 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'nai B'rith Leopold" President

**Igor Kerez**, VAAD Ukraine Trustee Board member, Businessman

**Artem Fedorchuk**, Director of the International Center on Jewish Education and Field Studies

**Igor Golfman**, Publicist

**Yulia Smelianska**, Director, Judaica Institute (Kyiv)

**Yelena Zaslavskaya**, Designer

**Aleksandr Elisavetskiy**, Educator

**Ada Dal**, Engineer

**Kira Kreydarman**, Psychologist

**Artem Fedorchuk**, Director, International Center of Jewish Education and Field Studies

**Alexiy Krol**, Businessman

**Ihor Shchupak**, PhD, Director, TKUMA Ukrainian Institute for Holocaust Studies, Museum "Jewish Memory and Holocaust in Ukraine" (Dnipropetrovsk); Editor-in-Chief, "Premier" Publishing House (Zaporizhzhia)

**Evgen Levin**, English-language Teacher, Civil Activist (Kharkiv)

**Larisa Kucherevskaya**, Kyiv

**Alfiya Shevchenko**, KNGU, Kyiv

**Vitaly Portnikov**, Journalist, Ukraine

**Leonid Vaydenfeld**, Manager

**Svetlana Pisareva**, Center "Our Kids" for the Protection of Children in Need (Kyiv)

**Mila Braginskaya**, Director of International Programs, Euro-Asian Jewish Congress (Kyiv)

**Boris Finkelshtein**, Engineer

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