

# Jewish Ukrainian leader Zissels calls for united effort to confront Russian aggression

by Oksana Zakydalsky

TORONTO – On March 3-7, the vice-president of the World Jewish Congress and chairman of the Confederation and Communities in Ukraine, Josef Zissels, spoke to both Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking communities in Toronto and Ottawa. During the Soviet period, he was active in the dissident movement, serving six years in penal colonies. In 1988 he set up Ukraine's first Jewish organization and has been a fervent defender of Ukraine's independence and democratic path. Mr. Zissels' visit to Canada was sponsored by the Ukrainian Jewish Encounter (UJE) and supported by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) and the Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Center (UCRDC).

An interview with Mr. Zissels was published in The Ukrainian Weekly on August 17, 2014, when he last visited the UCRDC and explained how former Soviet Jews in Ukraine have today become Ukrainian Jews and are identifying with Ukraine and its struggle against Russian aggression.

The purpose of his visit this time was to propose a project – the Coalition for Democratic Choice – to stand up to Vladimir Putin's armed aggression. He suggested that countries and communities which oppose Mr. Putin's belligerence should unite and form a coalition. Because Ukraine is the first post-Soviet country that has been able to resist Russia's aggressive policy aimed at re-integrating post imperial territories into a new Eurasian Union, Mr. Zissels proposed that such an initiative should come from Ukraine.

He explained that the war launched against Ukraine is a new type and is being waged on three fronts: propagandistic, economic and military. The most wide-ranging aspect of this war is propagandistic, and Russia is using many channels to disseminate its propaganda – the media, diplomacy, intelligence, culture and corruption. The propaganda war is global and is being waged in many languages, with old and new technologies. In order to obtain a fair reaction from the global community, Ukraine needs to find solutions to this propaganda. Fortunately, Ukraine has a well-developed civil society, but it also needs material and intellectual resources and allies, he noted.

To organize this coalition, Mr. Zissels proposed a systemic search for potential allies, involving not only other governments and countries, but ethno-cultural, religious and inter-governmental approaches to engage them in a system of informational security, and in learning



Josef Zissels

from others how to use informational campaigns to defend national interests.

Mr. Zissels advised that there was a possibility of creating many Coalitions for Democratic Choice in various countries, using the example of the formation of the Jackson-Vanik Graduation Coalition in the U.S. that succeeded in persuading the U.S. Congress to graduate Ukraine from the

Jackson-Vanik Amendment.

[Passed in 1974, the Jackson-Vanik Amendment imposed trade restrictions on the Soviet Union in response to its poor human rights policies, particularly restrictions on the emigration of religious minorities. The amendment stated that non-market economies that continue to impose emigration restrictions on their citizens would not be granted permanent normal trade relations or most favored nation status by the U.S. The Jackson-Vanik Graduation Coalition created a network of support, made up of 250 businesses – Ukrainian American, Jewish American and non-governmental organizations – and developed an action plan to work with Congress to remove Ukraine from the restrictions of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment and grant normal trade relations treatment to the products of Ukraine. It was passed in 2005.]

He outlined some goals and aims of the coalitions: to attract allies who are interested in strengthening democracy; to counter Russian propaganda in their respective countries; to put pressure on their own governments to do more to protect the interests of countries that chose the democratic

path of development; and to force NATO to return to the principles it was founded upon, i.e. to the defense of people who chose the democratic path of development.

Mr. Zissels also proposed where to look for members of these coalitions. He said that the Ukrainian World Congress member groups could become the core of coalitions in different countries and added that he could see the following groups as potential allies in the coalitions: governments, embassies and diaspora groups of the Turkic-speaking states, Eastern European countries, post-Soviet countries that are trying to follow the democratic route, Jewish organizations and wide profile human rights organizations.

Their possible venues of activity could be the Internet, TV, radio and printed media. They could hold rallies, events and marches to attract mass public attention and use them as news hooks, and they could lobby through parliamentary and government channels.

His proposed project is a massive initiative, but Mr. Zissels said he sees Russian aggression as a long-term problem that requires the marshalling of all possible resources to combat it.

## Is a Savchenko deal in the offing?

by Daisy Sindelar  
RFE/RL

Mark Feigin, a lawyer for the jailed Ukrainian pilot Nadiya Savchenko, claims to have new evidence proving that his client was not involved in the deaths of two Russian journalists.

Speaking to Ukraine's 24 TV, Mr. Feigin said a video shot in June 2014 in the Luhansk Oblast shows Ms. Savchenko, then a member of the Aidar volunteer battalion, being taken prisoner hours before the journalists, Igor Kornelyuk and Anton Voloshin, were killed.

The shaky video, shot during a roadside battle, shows a female figure dressed in a striped paratrooper's shirt and a camouflage jacket, her face covered with a blue-and-yellow scarf printed with the words "Maidan Self-Defense."

"I'm not a sniper," the figure says in response to a volley of questions from her apparent captors. Asked who she is, she replies simply, "I'm a gunner."

The fleeting exchange is just a tiny fraction of a seven-minute video reportedly shot on June 17 in the village of Metalist, the scene of heavy fighting between Ukrainian soldiers and militia-men from the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic.

The video, which intermittently shows the logo of Russia's pro-Kremlin Life News channel, was apparently posted online on June 19, 2014.

With her face completely covered, the woman in the video cannot be positively identified as Ms. Savchenko. But speaking to 24 TV, Mr. Feigin said the video shows specific details of the day's fighting that can be traced to 10 a.m. – a full two hours

before his client she is accused of phoning Aidar commander Serhiy Melnychuk with the coordinates of the two Rossiya TV journalists, who then died in a shelling attack.

"They died around 12 o'clock," Mr. Feigin said. "By then, Savchenko had already spent more than two hours in captivity. Of course, she wasn't able to make any kind of phone call. They had taken her mobile phone. In that video, you can see that they've put that balaclava or whatever on her and that she's in the custody of the [pro-Russia] Zarya battalion."

### "Inconvenient people"

Mr. Feigin says the footage will be submitted to experts to determine if the voice is, in fact, Ms. Savchenko's and to check for any altering of the video, which was reportedly shot by a Russian citizen, Yegor Russky, now serving as the self-declared mayor of the Luhansk village of Lutuhino.

If valid, the video may add to speculation that Ms. Savchenko, 33, is soon to be released from Russian pretrial detention, where she has spent the past eight months, including 83 days spent on a highly publicized hunger strike aimed at securing her release.

Mr. Feigin himself has hinted a deal may be in the offing. Speaking on March 9, he said he had already begun the first steps toward her transfer back to Ukraine, adding that a "secret protocol" prevented him from giving further details.

Days earlier, on March 5, the United States, Britain and the United Nations had called for an emergency session of the U.N. Security Council to pressure Russia for Ms. Savchenko's release.

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