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FOREIGN POLICY AUDIT: UKRAINE- ISRAEL

DISCUSSION PAPER





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1. INTRODUCTION

Relations between Ukraine and Israel could be described as distant and close at the same time.

There are numerous links between the two countries: religious, ethnic, historical, etc. As a home for the largest Jewish community in Europe before the World War II, Ukraine, in a certain historic moment, has become the cradle of Jewish culture and country of origin of prominent Jewish artists, religious and political leaders. Perhaps, there is no other country in the world where so much of the political elite have Ukrainian origins; in Israel, those are presidents and prime ministers Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, Ephraim Katzir, Moshe Sharett, Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, and the current Speaker of the Knesset Yuli Edelstein. Moreover, Ukraine is also the birthplace of the Hasidic movement, as well as the destination of the annual religious pilgrimage to the grave of rabbi Nachman of Breslov.

In turn, Israel has also been and remains a place of pilgrimage for Ukrainian Christians, as, per the Scripture, Jesus Christ lived and was crucified there. Following several waves of emigration of Ukrainian Jews after the collapse of the Soviet Union, strong people-to-people contacts have been established between Ukraine and Israel. There is also high tourism potential between the two countries: since 2012, when Ukraine and Israel had abolished the visa regime, the flow of tourists has been growing every year (e.g. 13% in 2016), and Tel Aviv remains the top destination from Boryspil airport.

Furthermore, in the last three years, Israel has been increasingly referred to as the “transformational role model” in Ukraine as a country that managed to achieve prosperity amid permanent armed conflict, as well as to ensure self-sufficiency in terms of security. Israel is one of the top 10 countries named by Ukrainians as role models for Ukraine’s foreign policy¹.

¹ *What Do Ukrainians Think about their Country’s Foreign Policy? Institute of World Policy, Kyiv, 2016. <http://iwp.org.ua/eng/public/2115.html>*

On the other hand, the bilateral agenda has its “other side.” In historical terms, it is the heritage of Jew bashings, and later the Holocaust, which is associated with Ukraine in the collective memory of the Israelites. In political sphere, the two countries seek mutual support in the international arena: Ukraine needs Israel's assistance to counter Russian aggression, while Israel needs Ukraine's backing in the confrontation with Palestine. This pursuit for national interests and dependence on the broad geopolitical context do not always allow the two states remain allies consistently and sometimes lead to mutual distrust and deterioration of relations. Accordingly, the enemy of Israel is not Russia, but Iran and Hamas.

The usual coordinate system with focus on pro-European vector of development and European values does not work in relations with Israel. Despite being a participant of the European Neighborhood Policy along with Ukraine, Israel's policy toward the EU are completely different from Ukrainian one. As explained by Israeli diplomats, “we do not claim that Israel is a part of Europe, and we do not want to be a part of Europe; nevertheless, we strive to be as good as Europe.” On the other hand, Israel considers the Jewish culture as the cradle of the “European values” in their modern Western meaning and regards them as borrowed from Jewish social and political tradition depicted in the Old Testament.

Despite all the differences, Ukraine and Israel are valuable partners for each other. Particularly, for Ukraine, relations with Israel are a conduit for effective and successful Middle East policies, while for Israel, Ukraine is a valuable (potential or real) ally.

The mutual interests of Ukraine and Israel coincide in two areas:

1. Voting to support each other in international organizations, especially the UN;
2. State politics of memory: while Israel expects Ukraine to recognize the involvement of some representatives of the Ukrainian national liberation movements in the Holocaust, Ukraine expects Israel to recognize the Holodomor as the genocide of Ukrainian people.

Moreover, Ukraine is interested in attracting Israeli investments and import of technology and high standards in numerous areas, from agriculture to defense and security; Israel, in turn, seeks to protect the Jewish community in Ukraine from anti-Semitism.

This paper is an attempt to analyze the key issues that form today's Ukrainian-Israeli agenda and find the points of intersection for their implementation.

2. UKRAINE'S INTERESTS TOWARD ISRAEL AND ISRAEL'S INTERESTS TOWARD UKRAINE: POINTS OF INTERSECTION

2.1. POLITICAL DIALOGUE: DIVIDING COMMONALITIES

Israel is a special partner for Ukraine in the Middle East region. It is noteworthy that the dynamics of bilateral relations between Ukraine and Israel is higher than similar indicators for other countries in the Middle East and Africa, and even some member states of the European Union.

For instance, within the last three years, President Poroshenko has visited Israel twice, while Foreign Minister of Ukraine Pavlo Klimkin has had three visits. The interparliamentary dialogue is equally intense, as the MPs of both countries have met both within the dialogue at the level of the interparliamentary friendship groups and beyond. The intensity of bilateral contacts has reached its peak in 2016, the anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Ukraine and Israel, when Ukraine has been visited by Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, Speaker of the Knesset (for the first time in 20 years) Yuli Edelstein, while President Poroshenko had a meeting with Prime Minister and concurrently Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem. Similar high pace has been observed at the level of business relations and contacts between civil societies, which allows to suggest that the Year of Ukraine in Israel and celebration of the 25th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations had real, not symbolic meaning. This dynamic persists in 2017: in May, Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Hroisman visited Israel, and the visit of Speaker of the Parliament of Ukraine Andriy Parubiy is currently in preparation phase.

However, this dynamic of bilateral relations has not been observed consistently. There were several momenta for strengthening the relations: symbolic and historical (the anniversary of the tragedy in Babyn Yar), geopolitical (Russian-Ukrainian conflict), and institutional (the non-permanent membership of Ukraine in the UN Security Council in 2016-2017).

The event that had probably the greatest impact on foreign policy of Ukraine in the last three years (Russian aggression) has advanced the rapprochement between Ukraine and Israel. However, this is not about solidarity in fight against a common enemy. Ukraine and Israel have rather found themselves in similar positions on defending their interests on the global scale, as two countries in a state of armed conflict. Moreover, none of them can go beyond their own national interests in expressing support for each other. However, it should be considered that Israeli-Palestinian and Russian-Ukrainian conflicts have too different historical backgrounds and any parallel would be far-fetched at least.

Ukraine has been traditionally trying to take a “balanced” stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, without associating itself with any party and opposing another. The reason for this were two opposing “leverages,” a “special partnership” with Israel on the one hand, and the large Arab market on the other. Another factor that has traditionally influenced Ukraine’s policy on the Middle East conflict was the position of the European Union, which Ukraine sought to coordinate with.

Israel sees Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the context of its own security challenges

On the other hand, Israel sees Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the context of its own security environment, with its own challenges: from the conflict with the Palestinians to Iranian nuclear program and the war in Syria. Moreover, in this environment Russia is considered by the official Jerusalem as not an enemy, but rather as a powerful actor that can deliberately disrupt the balance of power in the region. Therefore, Israel refrains from condemning Russian aggression publicly, as well as from sanctions against Russia. According to Israeli sources, such steps as public condemnation or introduction of sanctions against Russia could have existential consequences for Israel, e.g. support for terrorist groups, such as Hamas or Hezbollah.

Israel also draws its own lessons from Russian aggression in Ukraine, referring to the failure of the Budapest Memorandum as the precedent for (non)compliance with international security guarantees and stressing respectively on the meaninglessness of similar

guarantees in case of Israel's consent to the establishment of a Palestinian state².

Russian factor also affects the bilateral relations in terms of military and technical cooperation. It is known that Ukraine has repeatedly expressed interest in purchasing Israeli military equipment, including air drones and communication hardware. However, in 2014, the agreement on purchase of Israeli drones, agreed by the defense institutions on both sides, has been blocked by the Israeli Foreign Ministry due to reluctance to irritate Russia, as reported by some media³. Currently, Ukraine chooses a supplier for communication hardware and, among others, considers the Israeli company Elbit Systems. Despite Ukraine's further interest in Israeli technologies, close ties between Israeli and Russian armies, as well as striking similarity between Russian hardware and Elbit Systems products⁴ constrain the potential cooperation.

At the same time, Israel (also in line with its national interests) opposes redrawing of the borders and publicly expresses support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine. For instance, Israel has closed its honorary consulate in Crimea after the annexation. Furthermore, after MP Yaakov Margi visited Crimea, the Knesset issued a public statement on illegality of such actions; later, the MP himself admitted that it was an ill-conceived act. Moreover, Israel provides assistance in treatment and rehabilitation of Ukrainian soldiers wounded during the conflict in eastern regions, allocates funds for training of

2 M. Gerstenfeld, "Why Israel Should Monitor the Ukraine Conflict Closely," *The Jerusalem Post*, 17.05.2014. <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Why-Israel-should-monitor-the-Ukraine-conflict-closely-352559>

3 "Israeli Diplomats Nix Drone Sale to Ukraine – Report," *The Times of Israel*, 15.09.2014. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-diplomats-nix-drone-sale-to-ukraine-report/>

4 V. Badrak, "Jaded Nerves of the Army," *Dzerkalo Tyzhnya*, 12.05.2017, https://gazeta.dt.ua/internal/rozhitani-nervi-armiyi-chomu-na-chetvertomu-roci-viy-ni-zsu-yak-i-ranishe-ne-zabezpecheni-suchasnoyu-zahischenoyu-sistemoyu-zv-yazku-242255_.html

Ukrainian doctors in Israel, and helps implement clinical and training programs in Ukrainian military and civilian hospitals⁵.

Voting in the international institutions, mainly the United Nations, is one of the main expectations of the two states towards each other

Voting in the international institutions, mainly the United Nations, is a key challenge for the bilateral relations and one of the main expectations of the two states towards each other. It is equally important for both Ukraine and Israel: for Ukraine, in the context of condemnation of Russian annexation of Crimea and aggression in the East; for Israel, in terms of defending its interests in the conflict with the Palestinians. Representatives of both states recognize that they would like to see greater commitment in the voting from the other side; however, the “national interests vs. special partnership” dilemma takes its toll.

For instance, Israel did not participate in four of five UN votes on the issues that were critical for Ukraine in 2014-2016⁶. During the crucial vote on the resolution on Ukraine’s territorial integrity in March 2014, the Israeli representative was absent; the Israeli side explained that by all day long strike at the Foreign Ministry. While Ukraine has repeatedly rebuked Israel for that incident, for the official Jerusalem this policy is an essence of Israeli “neutrality,” where “abstain” means silent support.

Israel expects the same level of support, both silent and public, from Ukraine in the context of votes in international institutions, as the UN resolutions are used as an instrument of constant pressure on Israel by the international community and are usually instigated by Arab states, while the organization itself is known by disproportionately large number of resolutions condemning Israel on its settlement policy in East Jerusalem and the rights of Palestinians compared to any other country. On the average, the UN adopts over 20 resolutions condemning Israel every year, whereas, for example, in 2016,

⁵ B. Kostyuk. “Medical Brothers in Arms,” *Radio Svoboda*, 19.01.2017, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/28243782.html>

⁶ S. Briman. “Ukraine-Israel: Exchanging Slaps,” *Novoye Vremya*, 25.12.2016, <http://nv.ua/ukr/opinion/briman/ukrajina-izrajil-obmin-ljapasami-358033.html>

the General Assembly adopted only 6 critical resolutions concerning other countries (3 resolutions on Syria and 3 documents regarding Iran, North Korea, and human rights situation in Crimea)⁷. Ukraine's position in the vote on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unchanged: Ukraine condemns Israeli settlement policy as one violating the international law, and, obviously, after Russian aggression, consistency with this position has become even more vital for Ukraine.

In turn, Israel reacts fiercely to the adoption of such resolutions, which also affects the bilateral dialogue with countries supporting them.

This explains the diplomatic scandal that arose between Ukraine and Israel in late 2016 amid thriving diplomatic relations and on the eve of the planned visit of Ukrainian Prime Minister to Jerusalem. Following Ukraine's vote within the UN Security Council in favor of the Resolution #2334 on Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories, Israel in response canceled the visit of Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Hroisman (ironically, the first Ukrainian Jewish government official slammed by Israel's doors⁸). Despite the fact that some commentators view this incident as "the greatest scandal in 25 years of relations between Ukraine and Israel," as well as its significant media resonance, in fact it is more a lesson of understanding Israeli diplomacy and further development of relations with this state.

It should be noted that this "slap" fetched to Ukraine by Israel was not a purely Ukrainian-Israeli conflict. Immediately after the vote, Israel announced the temporary suspension of diplomatic relations with all countries who voted for the resolution: except for Ukraine, it is 13 permanent and non-permanent members of the UN Security Council (the only exception is the United States that abstained). The situation has been interpreted as "scandalous" only in Ukrainian media due to cancellation of the scheduled visit of the Prime Minister. According to Israeli sources, that action was "nothing personal," as

⁷ "UNGA Adopts 20 Resolutions on Israel, 6 – on Rest of the World Combined," UNWATCH, 21.12.2016, <https://www.unwatch.org/unga-adopts-20-resolutions-israel-4-rest-world-combined/>

⁸ S. Briman. "Ukraine-Israel: Exchanging Slaps," *Novoye Vremya*, 25.12.2016, <http://nv.ua/ukr/opinion/briman/ukrajina-izrazil-obmin-ljapasami-358033.html>

the same measures would have been taken towards, for instance, the French Prime Minister, if their visit had been scheduled for the same time⁹. Moreover, immediately after the vote, at the first meeting at the Foreign Ministry of Ukraine, the Ambassador of Israel reassured his Ukrainian counterparts that real cooperation between the two countries will not be affected¹⁰; as an evidence of that, Hroisman's visit to Jerusalem has been finally organized in mid-May 2017.

The only thing exclusive to Ukrainian-Israeli track in this situation was communication between the two countries on the eve of the vote. It is known that Israel repeatedly appealed to Ukraine to abstain during the vote (incidentally, four days before the vote on the Resolution #2334, Israel voted in favor of the resolution on the human rights situation in Crimea, which explicitly condemned the annexation of Crimea by Russia). Therefore, Israel was trying to secure at least symbolic support from Ukraine. However, Kyiv has not reacted until the vote. Perhaps, if the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry had clearly articulated their position on the eve of the vote, Israel would have reacted with greater understanding. In addition, the Israeli side reacted to numerous arguments, voiced by Ukrainian counterparts after the vote, with suspicion: according to some Israeli diplomats, if one names so many reasons, none of them is true.

However, it would be unfair to claim that Israel is completely devoid of Ukrainian support. In several cases, Ukraine voted in accordance with the expectations of their partner. For instance, in 2009, Ukraine voted against the UN resolution demanding investigation of crimes against human rights, committed by Israelis and Palestinians during the war in the Gaza Strip, under the so-called "Goldstone report." Furthermore, in 2011, Ukraine abstained during the vote on granting Palestine the status of a member of the UNESCO; in 2012, Ukraine did not participate in the vote on the observer status at the UN for Palestine; finally, in May 2017, Ukraine did not support the UNESCO's Jerusalem resolution. Voting "in favor" of Israel is also possible in the future, provided that the respective resolutions are not sensitive for Ukrainian situation and the consensus among the Western states.

⁹ *Interview with an Israeli diplomat, April 2017*

¹⁰ *Interview with a Ukrainian diplomat, April 2017*

2.2. HISTORICAL DIALOGUE: THE HOLODOMOR AND THE HOLOCAUST AS DEFINING CONCEPTS OF POLITICAL AGENDA

Another key point of intersection of the mutual interests of the two states is memory politics. Interestingly, this page of bilateral relations can only be compared with Polish-Ukrainian dialogue in terms of temperature of emotions. Another common feature for Ukrainian-Polish and Ukrainian-Israeli dialogue is the fact that both sides in each of them are “victim nations,” which, subsequently, complicates the discussion that aims not only at reconciliation, but also at identifying the culprits.

For instance, Israel's key demand toward Ukraine is recognition of Ukrainians' involvement in the Holocaust. In the minds of the Israelis, the Holocaust is particularly linked to Ukraine, since about 1.5 million Ukrainian Jews have been exterminated during the World War II, i.e. every fourth (!) victim of the Holocaust in Europe¹¹.

Certain steps in this direction have already been made: during a visit to Jerusalem on December 23, 2015, President Poroshenko apologized for some Ukrainians' involvement in the Holocaust, and that has not gone unnoticed by Israel. However, Ukrainian public memory politics (which, ironically, took the Israeli model as an example during Viktor Yushchenko's presidency) remains a constant irritant to relations with Israel.

One of the first steps of Ukrainian authorities that did not find understanding in Israel was the Hero of Ukraine title granted posthumously to Roman Shukhevych, the commander of the UPA, in 2007¹². Adoption of the law “On the Legal Status and Honoring the Memory of Fighters for Independence of Ukraine in the XX Century” honoring the memory of OUN and UPA, that are considered involved in the extermination of Jews during the Holocaust by Israel, has been also perceived in Jerusalem as an unfriendly act. Similarly, Israel was

¹¹ H. Nadolenko, “We Honor, We prevail,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 09.05.2015, <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/We-honor-we-prevail-402577>

¹² Y. Hrytsak, “The Holocaust and the Holodomor: The Challenge of a Collective Memory,” *Krytyka*, February 2011, <https://krytyka.com/en/articles/holocaust-and-holodomor-challenge-collective-memory>

shocked by erection of the monument to Ukrainian poet Olena Teliha, a member of the OUN shot by the Nazis, at Babyn Yar. The speech by President Rivlin in the Verkhovna Rada, in which he accused the OUN of exterminating Jews at Babyn Yar, was a symbolic boomerang that returned to Ukraine after having been launched on the day the Parliament of Ukraine voted for a number of decommunization laws in the presence of Bronislaw Komorowski, which has been interpreted in Poland as a humiliation of their President.

Rivlin's statement surprised Ukrainians, and Ukrainian Foreign Ministry interpreted it as a personal position of the President of Israel. At the same time, the personnel involved in the preparation of Rivlin's speech claim that the work-in-progress version of the address contained even sharper statements.

Paradoxically, the fact that Israel has its own catastrophe does not facilitate Israel's recognition of the Holodomor in Ukraine as a genocide, dividing the two countries instead

For the Ukrainian side, the "stumbling block" in bilateral relations is Israel's recognition of the Holodomor in Ukraine as a genocide of Ukrainian people. Paradoxically, the fact that Israel has its own catastrophe does not facilitate the alignment on this issue, dividing the two countries instead. The philosophy of understanding

the Holocaust in Israel is different from understanding of any other genocide and lies in the interpretation of the Holocaust as a catastrophe of cosmic proportions and, importantly, a catastrophe without any rational purpose other than desire that the Jewish people ceased to exist. Therefore, for Israel, recognition of any other genocide would mean "trivialization of the catastrophe."¹³

Moreover, Israeli sources note that the people of Israel know virtually nothing about the Holodomor (unlike, for example, the Armenian genocide) and therefore, before the issue of recognition of the Holodomor as a genocide is put on the agenda, not only Israeli MPs, but also the public should be aware and confident of that. The Holo-

¹³ Z. Khanin. "The Holodomor and the Holocaust Are Not Obstacles: Why Current State of Relations between Ukraine and Israel Can Be Described As a Strategic Partnership," 112.ua, 24.11.2016, <https://ua.112.ua/mnenie/holodomor-i-holokost-ne-pereshkoda-chomu-vidnosyny-ukrainy-ta-izrailiu-sohodni--stratichne-partnerstvo-355018.html>

domor is not studied neither in schools, nor in history departments of Israeli universities. Filling this gap is critical for both Ukraine and Israel in terms of dissemination of knowledge about the tragedy of Ukrainian people and the tragedy of Jewish people who were victims of the Holodomor and further Soviet repressions. This fact is the link that Ukraine could use to spread knowledge about the Holodomor among Israelis. Incidentally, representatives of Jewish community teach Ukrainians, Armenians and Crimean Tatars about the Holocaust within special adult education programs in the schools through inscribing the Holocaust in the national history, highlighting the tragedies of these people in parallel¹⁴.

Ukraine indeed recognizes that active joint projects with the Israeli side related to the issue of the Holodomor have been launched only in 2016. In particular, following the initiative of the Honorary Consul of Israel in the Western region of Ukraine Oleg Vyshniakov, a visit to the "Holodomor victims' memorial" has been included into the program of the Israeli MPs visiting Ukraine to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the tragedy in Babyn Yar. This visit impressed the MPs, and later, one of the members of the delegation, Vice-Speaker of the Knesset Nava Boker, included the proposal to recognize the Holodomor as a genocide into the agenda of the Knesset for the first time in the history of Israel. This proposal, however, had been withdrawn from the agenda due to concerns that it cannot get enough votes. Nevertheless, this precedent is an evidence that hard diplomatic and advocacy work can achieve substantial bilateral rapprochement.

It is noteworthy that certain efforts aimed at the rapprochement between Ukraine and Israel in terms of historical issues are conducted by NGOs, e.g. the Israeli Friends of Ukraine initiative¹⁵. Last year, this group of Israeli activists held a seminar "No Monument Stands Over Babyn Yar?" dedicated to the anniversary of the tragedy and Ukrainian-Jewish dialogue in Tel Aviv. In September 2017,

¹⁴ "O Lord, Open Thou My Lips..." *Josef Zisels' interviews with Iza Chruslinska, Kyiv, DUKH I LITERA, 2017. P. 292.*

¹⁵ *Israeli Friends of Ukraine FB-page* https://www.facebook.com/IFofU/?ref=br_rs

the group will organize an event dedicated to the Holodomor and the Holocaust, involving Ukrainian and Israeli historians and journalists.

2.3. BUSINESS AND INVESTMENTS: UNFULFILLED POTENTIAL

The key interests of Ukraine in Israel are attracting Israeli investments and import of Israeli technologies in numerous industries, such as agriculture, IT, and defense industry (including production of air drones and cyber security). In this context, Ukraine is interested in both production technology and the experience of the role of government in supporting business and start-ups.

According to Ukraine's Ambassador to Israel Hennadii Nadolenko, 50% of Israeli bread had been made of Ukrainian grains

Currently, Israel is an important trading partner for Ukraine. In 2016, the volume of mutual trade amounted to 861.7 million dollars, down from 1 billion baseline of the recent years¹⁶. The export from Ukraine to Israel significantly exceed imports, and its dominant components are the agricultural industry products, such as grains, seeds, oleaginous fruits, milling industry products, sugar and sugar confectionery; in addition, Ukraine exports ferrous metals. According to Ukraine's Ambassador to Israel Hennadii Nadolenko, 50% of Israeli bread had been made of Ukrainian grains¹⁷. That is why Ukraine has been negotiating an FTA with Israel since 2012, and recently, President Poroshenko and Prime Minister Netanyahu have agreed to complete these negotiations by the end of 2017¹⁸.

¹⁶ "Trade and Economic Cooperation between Ukraine and Israel," Embassy of Ukraine in Israel, <http://israel.mfa.gov.ua/ua/ukraine-il/trade>

¹⁷ S. Briman. "Hennadii Nadolenko: With Israeli Agricultural Technology, Ukraine Could Feed Half of the World," Channel 9, 27.04.2015, <http://9tv.co.il/news/2015/04/27/202642.html>

¹⁸ "President of Ukraine Had a Phone Conversation with Prime Minister of Israel," Official Website of President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko, 3.05.2017, <http://www.president.gov.ua/news/prezident-ukrayini-proviv-telefonnu-rozmovu-z-premyer-minist-41218>

Furthermore, Ukraine is interested not only in selling agricultural products to Israel, but also in adopting Israeli production technology, which is considered among the most effective in the world: while Israeli farmer produces enough for 95 people, their Ukraine colleague produces enough for only 15. Thus far, only one project in this area has been implemented in southern Ukraine, providing five thousand Ukrainian farms with upgraded irrigation systems with Canadian investments and Israeli technology¹⁹. Furthermore, Israel contributes to the development of agriculture and health care in Ukraine through MASHAV state fund scholarships for Ukrainian entrepreneurs (700 persons within the last 25 years), enabling them to study the best Israeli practices²⁰.

In terms of investments, this niche of bilateral relations remains almost empty. Israeli investments in Ukraine amount to 50 million dollars, which is 0.1% of the total foreign investments in Ukraine. Ukrainian investments in Israel simply do not exist. Remarkably, those Israeli entrepreneurs who are still doing business in Ukraine (financial and insurance activities, real estate, construction, IT, etc.) indicate that the Israeli experience of armed conflict helps them in business, as they know that war is not an obstacle to prosperity and foreign investments²¹. However, not all potential Israeli investors follow their example: only three new Israeli companies have entered Ukrainian market in 2016.

Unlike other developed countries, Ukrainians do not show strong presence in the Israeli market as labor migrants, as it is extremely difficult for the foreigners to get a legal job in

Those Israeli entrepreneurs who are doing business in Ukraine indicate that the Israeli experience of armed conflict helps them in business, as they know that war is not an obstacle to prosperity and foreign investment

¹⁹ V. Kudryk. "Hennadii Nadolenko: Israel Supports Ukraine, but Jerusalem is Afraid of Russia," *Apostrof*, 27.08.2016, <http://israel.mfa.gov.ua/ua/embassy/ambassador/interviews/4844-izrailiy-podderzhivajet-ukrainu-no-ochen-y-boitsya-rossii>

²⁰ "Shalom Club: The MASHAV Program Graduates," Embassy of Israel in Ukraine, http://embassies.gov.il/kyiv/mashav/Pages/Shalom_%D0%A1lub.aspx

²¹ "ISRAEL IN UKRAINE: Real estate developer Ari Schwartz takes a long-term view on Ukraine," *Business Ukraine*, 09.06.2016, <http://bunews.com.ua/investment/item/israel-in-ukraine-israeli-real-estate-developer-ari-schwartz-takes-a-long-term-view-on-ukraine>

Israel. The exceptions are government quotas for certain nationalities and certain specialties; for instance, Ukraine considers ratification of the agreement on employment of 20 thousand Ukrainian builders in late 2016 as a major diplomatic success.

3. WHO IS WHO: INTEREST GROUPS AND GROUPS OF INFLUENCE

At the level of state key players the person who forms policy of Israel towards Ukraine is the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who also holds the position of Foreign Minister. An important stakeholder is also the Parliament, where the bilateral dialogue is conducted at the high level – Co-chairman of the Inter-Parliamentary group of friendship with the Israeli side is the Vice-speaker of the Knesset Tali Ploskov, and from the Ukrainian side the relationship with Israel is personally overseen by the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs Hanna Hopko and the Speaker Andriy Parubiy.

Important figures that influence policy-making are the ambassadors of Israel and Ukraine – respectively, Eliav Belotserkovsky and Hennadiy Nadolenko. The history of Hennadiy Nadolenko's work at the ambassadorial position in Israel is notable for the fact that he led the mission during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovych, but after the Revolution of Dignity was not replaced. During the Euromaidan he got the trust of the pro-Ukrainian activists, supporting the position of the people of Ukraine and went for a dialogue with the protesters, who demonstrated in front of the Ukrainian Embassy in December 2013.

In what regards professional Ukrainian-Jewish studies, both policy and academic, in general, the relevant departments and centres could be counted on the fingers of one hand. For example, in Ukraine the key branches of Judaism are in Kyiv (Research Centre of History and Culture of East European Jewry (leader Leonid Finberg) and the Master Program of Jewish Studies at National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Centre of Holocaust Studies), Lviv (Program of Jewish Studies at the Ukrainian Catholic University led by Yaroslav Hrytsak, the Centre for Municipal History) and Dnipro (Ukrainian Centre of Holocaust Studies “Tkuma”, director Ihor Shchupak). In Israel, Ukrainian studies as such form part of Slavic studies, however have not yet developed into an independent area. Currently, Ukraine and the Jewish heritage and modernity in it is the object of interest among some researchers in Israel, such as Professor Zeev Khanin, Professor of Bar-Ilan and Ariel Universities, Chief Scientist of the Ministry of Absorption, Professor Semion Goldin, Director of the Leonid Nevzlin Centre in the Hebrew

University of Jerusalem, Professor Wolf Moskovich from the same university, and so on.

The key non-governmental stakeholder, which affects the agenda of bilateral relations, being its object at the same time are the communities: Jewish in Ukraine and immigrants from Ukraine in Israel. Incidentally, the Euromaidan events became some specific kind of the “no return point” in the attitude of both communities regarding Ukraine.

It should be said, that about half a million immigrants from Ukraine live now in Israel, which is almost 7% of Israel's population. This number is comparable to the most numerous Ukrainian communities in Western Europe, however further comparison is not relevant as far as Ukrainian immigrants in Israel are not labour, economic or political migrants, they are repatriates, coming to the country as Jews, not as Ukrainians. As a rule, those citizens identified themselves with the “post-Soviet Jews”, rather than Ukrainians²², and were interested in events happening in the country of their previous residence on the everyday life level only. However, the situation has changed in some way – straight after Euromaidan and Russian aggression against Ukraine, in Israel appeared some communities that started to help Ukraine actively. The key case in point is “Israeli Friends of Ukraine”, a volunteer initiative, who organized the treatment of wounded Ukrainians in Israel, trainings for Ukrainian doctors, transfer of donations and humanitarian aid, that the “Ukraine International Airlines” ship free of charge. During three years their activity grew to include public and business diplomacy, for instance, organization of intellectual events on historical issues, cultural festivals “Etnokhutir” and business events²³.

Whereas, it would be exaggerated to say about some unanimous moods Russian speaking Jews in Israel have – either pro-Ukrainian, or pro-Russian. Israeli society exists in its own “Middle East” coordinate system, in which the usual labels and integration vectors which would be usual in Ukraine are not working, and so it projects the

²² Gold M. “Israel: between «ukrs» and «kolorads»”, *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, 08.11.2015, https://gazeta.dt.ua/international/izrayil-mizh-ukrami-i-koloradami-__.html

²³ Israeli-Ukrainian Entrepreneurship Forum <http://iualliance.com/>

Ukrainian realities on its own challenges. For example, even the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is interpreted by Israelis with the projection on their own conflict with Palestine, with the understanding of “aggressor” and “victim” also differing depending on the political sympathies and convictions of every individual: “If Israel is Ukraine, the Donbas is Judea and Samaria, and the Crimea is Gaza. But if Israel is Russia, respectively, Ukraine is Judea and Samaria, and the picture turns upside down”²⁴.

And even in this perspective not many Israelis generally have any position on the conflict in Ukraine. For example, a survey conducted in Israel among Russian citizens indicated that the issue concerns an extremely small percentage of the Israeli population. According to the data delivered by Dr. Zeev Khanin in the interview to “Dzerkalo tyzhnia” newspaper, “asked whether Israel should choose an active role in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, 4% of respondents said that Israel must declare the support of Russia and 6% believe that the Jewish state should be on the side of Ukraine. Sympathizes with Ukraine, but believe that Israel should maintain neutrality – 27% of respondents. Another 13% share Russia’s position, but they believe that Israel should not interfere in the conflict. And 50% do not sympathize with any party or have no position on this issue, not relating to the topic at all”²⁵.

Remarkably, the threat of Russian propaganda in Israel is also not as acute as in the European Union and post-Soviet space – talking about the threat of propaganda Israelis would rather imply Arabic. While Israeli media almost never write about Ukraine and the Russian-speaking Israelis get information from existing Russian channels in Israel, there is another important source of shaping public opinion on events in Ukraine – Ukrainian Jewish community. Due to the large number of friends and relations in Ukraine at least part of Russian speaking Jews in Israel became clear of the following: Russian media did not reflect the full picture. This awareness is so strong that, according to the aforementioned survey, even among immigrants from Russia there

²⁴ Gold M. «Israel: between «ukrs» and «kolorads»», *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, 08.11.2015, https://gazeta.dt.ua/international/izrayil-mizh-ukrami-i-koloradami-_html

²⁵ *Ibid*

are more supporters of Ukraine (23% vs. 17%). This percentage is even higher among immigrants from Eastern Ukraine (38% vs. 9%).

For the first time after the events of Euromaidan there is such a phenomenon as the emergence of "Ukrainian Jews"

The change in the identification of Ukrainian Jews held after Euromaidan has its historic and existential importance for Ukraine and, consequently, its relations with Israel and the world Jewish community. According to Vitaliy Portnikov, for the first time after the events of Euromaidan there is such a phenomenon as the emergence of "Ukrainian Jews" who feel part of the Ukrainian nation and protect the interests of Ukraine²⁶. The Professor of Ukrainian Catholic University, historian Yaroslav Hrytsak interprets that, in the case of Jews, who tend not to identify themselves with the weak and oppressed nations, "Identification [...] with the indigenous nations is exactly the point of no return, after passing which it is safe to say that the nation was formed."

Although Jews, like many other nations, are rarely unanimous, in the case of Ukrainian Euromaidan most Jews supported it. So-called Jewish Hundred took part in Euromaidan, and three of Nebesna Sotnya heroes had Jewish roots²⁷. As explained by Dnipro scientist Ihor Shchupak "Jews for many centuries have been following the principle of loyalty to the government, because it was their condition for self-preservation and survival. On the other hand, [...] [if] the government breaks the limit, it becomes godless and loses legitimacy"²⁸.

Thus, the Jews themselves often prevented playing the "anti-Semitic card" during Euromaidan, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and in broadcasting the image of Ukraine abroad in general. Upon the initiative of Josef Zisels, the head of the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities "Vaad", in the beginning of March 2014 the Jewish community of Ukraine published an open letter to Vladimir Putin, rejecting accusations of widespread anti-Semitism and xenophobia in Ukraine,

²⁶ «The birth of «Ukrainian Jew», United Jewish Community of Ukraine, 01.12.2014, http://jewishnews.com.ua/ru/publication/rozhdienie_ukrainskogo_evreya

²⁷ "O Lord, Open Thou My Lips..." Josef Zisels' interviews with Iza Chruslinska, Kyiv, DUKH I LITERA, 2017. P. 274

²⁸ Shchupak I. «Ukrainian Jews: great union», Zbruch, 18.03.2015, <https://zbruc.eu/node/33951>

which Russian propaganda appealed to.²⁹ Similar positions were expressed by Ukrainian rabbis, including Rabbi Kaminetskyi in Dnipro. Some Ukrainian Jews are even more understanding of the Ukrainian politics of memory, than Israeli Jews. In the book-interview with Polish publicist Iza Chruslinska Zisels explains: «I cannot ignore people who are heroes for the half of the nation, among which I live»³⁰.

Overall, as noted by Israeli diplomats and representatives of the Jewish community in Ukraine, there is anti-Semitism in Ukraine, but its level is lower than in EU countries such as, for example, France, Greece or Poland. As it is emphasized in the report of the informal group monitoring rights of national minorities, the number of incidents of violence motivated by anti-Semitism in the years 2015-2016, after growth in the years 2012-2014, decreased to the minimum (in 2016 one such case was recorder). As for vandalism, there were 19 such incidents recorded in 2016, which also shows a tendency of decrease compared to year 2014³¹. Nevertheless, well timed investigation of such crimes is one of the Israel's key demands to Ukraine. According to the Central Investigation Department of the National Police of Ukraine, investigating authorities during 2016 and beginning of 2017 initiated 17 criminal proceedings for offenses motivated by anti-Semitism³².

29 «Appeal to the President of Russia V.V. Putin on behalf of the multinational people of Ukraine, on behalf of national minorities, on behalf of the Jewish community», 05.03.2014, <http://eajc.org/page279/news43670.html>

30 "O Lord, Open Thou My Lips..." Josef Zisels' interviews with Iza Chruslinska, Kyiv, DUKH I LITERA, 2017., P. 273.

31 Lykhachiov V. «Anti-Semitism in Ukraine, 2016», Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, 21.12.2016, <http://eajc.org/page18/news56148.html>

32 Among 17 proceedings:

- 2 proceedings (2016) established the perpetrators of crimes and sent to court indictments of applications for consideration on the merits;
- 4 proceedings (2016 – 3, 2017 – 1) decided to close them under Art. 284 CCOU in connection with the establishment of the absence of corpus criminal offense;
- other 11 criminal proceedings (2016 – 8, 2017 – 3) conducted pre-trial investigation.

4. EXISTING AND POTENTIAL RISKS AND CONFLICTS

4.1. THE DETERIORATION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN UKRAINE AND ISRAEL AFTER UN VOTES

For Ukraine, and for Israel, the UN will remain one of the key areas to defend its national interests – with votes for one country, as has happened repeatedly in the past, may run counter to the national interests of the other.

Probability. *Medium to high.* The consensus for the countries of the European Union and the United States will determine Ukraine's voting pattern, and under President Donald Trump the number of the resolutions of condemnation of Israel in the Security Council may reduce. Accordingly, in the short and medium term Israel may receive higher level of support from Ukraine, as was the case during the voting in May 2017 at UNESCO.

How to avoid. In fact, both Ukraine and Israel understand that the situation with voting in UN relations between the two countries could be best described by the phrase “there are no eternal friends and enemies, there are only eternal interests.” It is important, however, to provide not only voting, but also a public narrative that meets Ukrainian interests. To avoid the effect of “scandal” and “betrayal” that existed in the media after the cancellation of the visit of Volodymyr Hroisman in December 2016, it is essential for Ukraine to communicate its position to Israel clearly and in advance, while Ukrainian MFA should be ready to provide prompt and exhaustive explanation of why Ukraine does so and not otherwise.

4.2. THE INCREASE IN NEGATIVE RHETORIC BASED ON DIFFERENT POSITIONS REGARDING INTERPRETATION OF HISTORICAL EVENTS

The ability to build their own historical policy and politics of memory and simultaneously maintain effective and constructive relationship with partners makes some equilibrant challenge for Ukraine. It is also challenging for a certain part of Ukrainian society, which is not ready to accept accusations of possible crimes by the only recently publicly recognized heroes – which, in turn, can lead to increased tension between society as it has partly occurred between Ukraine and Poland.

Probability. *Medium to high.* Israel does not share the concept of Ukrainian genocide and at the same time expects from Ukraine more than it is currently able to give, – not only public recognition of responsibility to the Holocaust that has already taken place, but also the conviction on the same grounds of OUN and UPA.

How to avoid. First of all, the decision-makers in both in Ukraine and Israel must accept the fact that the problems of historical dialogue between Ukraine and Israel have a long-term perspective and, therefore, can hardly hope for an easy and quick solution. Both Israel and Ukraine are old nations but young states, and have to go through a series of “state-building complexes” in their own development. It is in both countries’ interests to discuss historical topics unemotionally and to avoid the dominance of the historical track above all the others (currently the parties are succeeding in it) and to engage in this dialogue Israeli and Ukrainian historians, who are trusted and respected by each other (the pool of such experts is already being formed). It is also important that both sides are willing to hear each other.

4.3. INCREASED VIOLENCE AND VANDALISM ON THE BASIS OF ANTI-SEMITISM IN UKRAINE

While the incidences of anti-Semitism in Ukraine (according to both law enforcement agencies in Ukraine and Jewish organizations) have decreased, the main threat for bilateral relations is not so much anti-Semitism in Ukraine itself, but manipulation on this ground by the Russian propaganda and probable provocations.

Probability. *Medium.* Ukraine, which in the minds of people around the world is still stereotypically perceived as “anti-Semitic” country, is at risk of provocations and manipulations, as they fall on the prepared ground and therefore are easy to believe. On the other hand, Ukraine has on its side a powerful player – Jewish community broadcasting facts about the level of anti-Semitism in Ukraine abroad. Remarkably, while writing about Ukraine, the Israeli media reach out to Jews and rabbis living in Ukraine for comments.

How to avoid. The best response to incidents of anti-Semitism, real or provoked, should be timely investigations of Ukrainian law enforcement agencies and the results of the investigations should be made public.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

On voting in the UN:

- Ukraine should clearly state to Israel its “red lines”, that cannot be crossed during the voting in the UN, and, respectively, which issues can make “the room for manoeuvre”. This would help Israel to form realistic expectations from Ukraine and prevent unpleasant surprises for both sides.

On the history policy:

- Ukraine and Israel should launch bilateral institutional mechanism like the Ukrainian-Polish forum for historians in order to establish a permanent and impartial dialogue on Holocaust, Holodomor and other important pages of common history; genuine Ukrainian, not only Jewish, voices that could present Ukrainian views are actually missed in Israel.
- Ukraine should not put pressure on the Israeli side for the recognition of Holodomor as a genocide of Ukrainian people in short term – rather, it should apply serious efforts to promote knowledge about Holodomor in Israel in the way Israel promotes knowledge about Holocaust. In particular, in cooperation with the Israeli Ministry of Education Ukraine should implement adult education course on the Holodomor and the Holocaust.
- while continuing professional historical discussion and investigation, Ukraine could reduce tension by voting an amendment to the law “On the legal status and honour the memory of fighters for independence of Ukraine in the XX century” that the status of fighters for Ukraine’s independence does not apply to people whose actions qualify as a crime against humanity.

On economic cooperation and investment:

- declaring engagement of Israeli investment as one of the priorities of bilateral partnership, Ukraine is demonstrating critically low result in achieving this goal. One of the measures to improve the situation would be to involve Ukrainian entrepreneurs and start uppers as a part of the Ukrainian delegations to Israel and organize fairs of Ukrainian start-ups in Israel.
- in Israel there is still an unfulfilled demand for Ukrainian goods from food to national clothes. Holding a «Made in Ukraine» fair in Israel should be considered, together with the «Israeli Friends of Ukraine» who have already conceived this idea, as a step to increase and diversify the Ukrainian exports to Israel.
- the negotiations on the free trade zone should be completed and the agreement should be concluded as an additional incentive for economic cooperation.

In the area of public diplomacy:

- Ukraine as a whole is still critically losing to Israel in the area of public diplomacy, in which Ukraine is a «target country» for Israel. In the medium term, Ukraine should set a goal of opening the department of Ukrainian studies in one of Israeli universities, thus raising the first generation of scholars of Ukrainian studies among Israeli, and in the short term – to provide scholarships for at least short-term study visits to Ukrainian universities for Israeli students.
- following Israel's example, Ukraine could offer short study tours "Discover Ukraine" for Israeli youth with Ukrainian roots.

On institutional capacity:

- despite the strategic importance of Israel track in the Ukrainian foreign policy, the profile department of the Ukrainian MFA is seriously understaffed. Currently the acting Director General for the Middle East and Africa is responsible for diplomacy with 60 countries, with only one desk officer supervising the relations with Israel. Strengthening the Israeli dimension of the division with human resources would benefit the bilateral relations.

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