

**CLINTON SAYS RUSSIA IN COMPLIANCE WITH 1974 LEGISLATION ON EMIGRATION**

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Sept. 21 (JTA) -- Jewish groups are backing President Clinton's decision this week to certify Russia in compliance, for the first time, with the terms of the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment.

That determination will exempt Russia from the annual presidential review of its emigration practices that has taken place since Congress adopted the Cold War-era amendment, which denies most-favored-nation trade privileges to countries that do not allow free emigration.

But the State Department will still be required to issue semi-annual reports to determine whether Russia remains in compliance.

Clinton's decision, conveyed in a letter to Congress on Tuesday, came one day after the National Conference on Soviet Jewry broke with 20 years of policy by issuing a statement urging such a presidential determination.

The president is expected to announce his decision next Monday before meeting at the United Nations with his Russian counterpart, Boris Yeltsin. The two leaders will return to Washington for a two-day summit later in the week.

The National Conference, the leading agency representing the American Jewish establishment on the issue of "Soviet" Jewry, recommended that Clinton take the step to end the annual review of Russia's emigration practices in a statement Monday.

"This was not an easy decision, because we're dealing with people's lives. But it is the right decision," said Mark Levin, National Conference executive director. "We did this knowing that it's always possible that the situations could change. It's about recognizing progress when progress takes place."

A Major Departure For The Jewish Community

Levin hailed Clinton's decision as "an appropriate step."

The move, which appears to have broad support, marks a major departure for the Jewish community, which lobbied heavily for the amendment. Sponsored by the late Sen. Henry "Scoop" Jackson (D-Wash.) and former Rep. Charles Vanik (D-Ohio), it became a major tool in pressuring the Soviet Union to liberalize its emigration practices.

Each year since 1990, the National Conference and other Jewish groups have recommended that the president issue one-year waivers of the amendment's trade sanctions against first the Soviet Union and later Russia, in recognition of the substantial increase in Jewish emigration that has taken place since former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev first allowed tens of thousands of Jews to leave the country.

But until now, groups monitoring the rights of Russian Jews have insisted that trade benefits for the Soviet Union and its successor states be linked to an annual presidential review of their emigration practices.

Clinton's determination that Russia is in compliance with Jackson-Vanik does not mean that the National Conference has called for a repeal of Jackson-Vanik. It also does not mean that Russia is being permanently "graduated" from the Jackson-Vanik process.

What it does mean is that the conference -- an umbrella body representing 50 national Jewish agencies and more than 300 local federations and community councils -- recommended that there no longer must be annual certification that Russia is in compliance with the terms of the amendment, explained Levin.

"The determination does not close the books on the amendment but recognizes that there has been unbelievable change in the way Jews are being treated by the government," said Richard Wexler, National Conference chairman.

"Under the amendment, a country determined to be in compliance continues to have its emigration policies closely monitored by the United States," the National Conference noted in its statement.

"Should there be a deterioration of Russia's emigration policies, the president has the legal authority to revoke the finding of compliance," it said.

'Jackson-Vanik Is Flexible'

Jerry Goodman, founding director of the National Conference and a current member of its board, said the group's statement is "a good thing, for two reasons: one, to show that the Jewish community is responsive to changes; and two, that Jackson-Vanik is flexible and can be used to respond to those same changes. This is what the amendment was designed to do."

It also "supports the president," he explained. "The president makes the judgment whether they are in compliance, and therefore the responsibility falls in the president's hands."

The National Conference statement makes note of the fact that "since 1989, more than 200,000 Jews from Russia have been permitted to emigrate," mainly to Israel. And in the same time period, the number of so-called "refusenik cases" -- Jews refused permission to emigrate -- "has been reduced significantly."

Clinton's decision and the National Conference statement appear to have broad appeal among Soviet Jewry advocacy groups.

For instance, the Union of Councils, an umbrella body of grass-roots advocacy groups that has often sought more stringent requirements of the Soviet Union and its successor states than the National Conference, is in agreement with the decision despite lingering reservations, including the occurrence of a new refusenik case.

Both groups said that a year-old Russian government panel, the Lavrov Commission, is showing itself to be a dependable instrument for hearing appeals on existing refusenik cases.

"We wanted to try to be able to support the program that Mr. Yeltsin has made, yet we need to make it very clear that he still has a way to go in order to be in full compliance," said Pamela Braun Cohen, president of the Union of Councils.

But one longtime activist expressed dismay upon learning the decision.

"Even though the number of refuseniks is very low compared to years ago, the battle is not over, and we should not abandon our soldiers in the field," said Glenn Richter, national coordinator of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry. "When you're so close, you don't give up."

The statement issued by the National Conference is directed at Russia, which is considered the successor state to the former Soviet Union, said Levin of the National Conference. "We will deal with each of (the other successor) countries on a case-by-case basis," he said.

The statement was approved unanimously Monday by the National Conference's Board of Governors during a telephone conference call.

It reads: "Following an extensive review of the evolution of Russia's emigration practices and policies, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry concludes that the Russian Federation continues to make significant progress in this area."

It later adds that "based on these developments," the National Conference "will recommend and support a presidential determination that Russia is in compliance" with Jackson-Vanik.

Levin said the National Conference took the action "because we believe that it is important to recognize continued progress by the Russian government, and we felt with the upcoming summit, along with the ongoing progress, that this was an appropriate time to make this decision."

Added Wexler: "Certainly, from all the reports we have received, including our regular contacts with the Vaad -- the organization of Russian communities -- free emigration from the Russian Republic is a reality."

(JTA correspondent Matthew Dorf in Washington contributed to this report.)

OSI FILES SUITS TO REVOKE CITIZENSHIP OF 2 ACCUSED OF WAR CRIMES IN LITHUANIA
By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Sept. 21 (JTA) -- The U.S. Justice Department has filed suits to revoke the citizenship of two men accused of war crimes in Lithuania during World War II.

One of the men, Aleksandras Lileikis of Norwood, Mass., is accused of having been the chief of the Lithuanian version of the Gestapo, which was responsible for particularly brutal atrocities against Jews and others during World War II.

The case against Lileikis, a 87-year-old retired publishing employee, is being heralded as one of the most important cases the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations has ever prosecuted.

The case cites documents with Lileikis' name ordering the arrest and transport of thousands of Jews to their execution.

The other man charged, Juozas Budreika, a 77-year-old retired cook living in Gulfport, Fla., is accused of participating in Nazi-sponsored acts of persecution while serving in the Lithuanian Schutzmannschaft (Protective Detachment) during World War II.

The case against Budreika was filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Tampa, Fla., by OSI and the U.S. Attorney's Office in Tampa. It alleges that Budreika, who is also known as Joseph

Budreika, joined the Schutzmannschaft in August 1941.

The government complaint charges that Budreika gave false testimony and willfully concealed his wartime service when applying to immigrate to the United States in 1958 and when he applied to become a U.S. citizen in 1967.

The battalion Budreika allegedly joined, known as the 2nd/12th Battalion, was armed, sponsored and controlled by Nazi Germany. In 1941 and 1942, this battalion murdered thousands of unarmed Jews and other civilians in Lithuania and Byelorussia (now called Belarus) because of their race, religion, political beliefs or national origin.

The Massachusetts man, Lileikis, is "the first Lithuanian police official ever prosecuted in connection with crimes of the Nazi period," Eli Rosenbaum, acting director of the OSI, said in a telephone interview Wednesday morning.

'One Of The Most Important Nazi Cases'

He described the case as "one of the most important Nazi cases brought anywhere in the world in recent history."

The suit against Lileikis, filed in U.S. District Court in Boston on Wednesday by OSI and the U.S. Attorney's Office in that city, charges that Lileikis was chief of the Lithuanian Security Police, known as the Saugumas, for the entire Vilnius Province during the German occupation.

The government complaint against Lileikis alleges that from August 1941 until the German occupation ended in July 1944, Lileikis directed his force to seek and arrest Jews, particularly those who escaped or attempted to escape the ghettos.

The case is supported by captured wartime records that have been preserved at the Lithuanian State Archives.

Records quoted in the complaint against Lileikis show that he repeatedly issued orders directing that Jews who were arrested be held at the Vilnius Hard Labor Prison, known as the Lukiski Prison, and then be executed by either the German Security Police or the "Special Detachment," a killing squad.

Most of these victims were executed by gunfire at pits dug in the nearby Ponary forest.

At least 40,000 Jews were shot to death at this site, including a 6-year-old girl, Fruma Kaplan.

Rosenbaum expressed gratitude to the Lithuanian government for its help in pursuing the case against Lileikis.

"The free access we were granted to Lithuanian archives proved decisive in the development of this important case," Rosenbaum said.

"The story of what happened to little Fruma Kaplan and countless other Jews who vanished from the face of the Earth there is told in documents -- specifically, in orders signed and issued by Aleksandras Lileikis," Rosenbaum said.

Lileikis reportedly has denied the charges, telling the media on Wednesday that he had nothing to do with the Jews.

Since OSI began operations in 1979, 50 Nazi persecutors have been stripped of their U.S. citizenship, and 42 of these have been removed from the United States.

OSI is currently investigating more than 300 persons, Rosenbaum said.

NEWS ANALYSIS:
**WRESTLING WITH HIMSELF AND HIS NATION,
RABIN MAY HOLD THE KEY TO A NEW PEACE**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Sept. 21 (JTA) -- Among the longest-standing axioms of Middle East politics is the belief that without Syria, there can be no durable peace in the region.

This is accompanied by a second axiom: that peace between Jerusalem and Damascus depends on one man -- Syrian President Hafez Assad.

Without detracting from the truth and validity of the two axioms, perceptive observers here are suggesting that the one man on whom peace between Israel and Syria now depends is not Assad, but rather Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

According to these observers' readings of the current state of play in Middle East politics, Assad has, in effect, crossed his Rubicon.

But the Israeli leader, they believe, is wrestling with himself, with his divided nation and with his place in history.

Rabin's internal struggles take on added significance as momentum continues to build on the Israeli-Syrian diplomatic front.

Israeli newspapers have revealed that secret Israeli-Syrian negotiations are taking place in Washington between Israel's ambassador to the United States, Itamar Rabinovich, and his Syrian counterpart, Walid Mualllem.

This "back channel" of negotiations is said to be run directly and exclusively by Rabin. Only one or two top Israel Defense Force generals share the information with the prime minister -- and even they are not privy to all of it.

On Tuesday, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres confirmed for the first time that these contacts in Washington were indeed taking place.

On the publicly visible "front channel" of negotiations, meanwhile, President Clinton this week dispatched Dennis Ross, the U.S. coordinator of Middle East peace talks, to Damascus and Jerusalem in an effort to build upon the progress made by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who has made several regional peace missions in past months.

Assad Has Taken Fateful Step

Joining Ross for this latest round of shuttle diplomacy was Martin Indyk, a member of the National Security Council who is expected to be appointed the next U.S. ambassador to Israel.

After meeting previously with Christopher, observers here say, Assad has already taken a fateful step.

Granted, the step is not irrevocable, and is conditioned on his repeated demand that Israel return every inch of the Golan in exchange for peace with Syria.

But just the same, Assad has finally gulped hard and breathed out the fateful words: peace, normalization, diplomatic relations, open borders.

While Assad has not yet shouted these words from the rooftops or minarets of Damascus, he has mouthed them, barely audibly, to international mediators and statesmen.

While there is still much bargaining and bluffing to be done, Assad has already set himself on a course that could lead to peace with Israel.

It is now for Rabin to take the hard and

painful decisions that his side of the land-for-peace equation requires.

In making these wrenching decisions, Rabin must take into account the opinions of the people who put him in office -- the Israeli electorate.

Visiting Israel's northern border this week, President Ezer Weizman noted that it would be "very hard to make peace without Israeli public opinion."

He complained that Assad, as yet, had done "virtually nothing to woo or win Israeli public opinion."

Weizman urged Assad to take dramatic steps designed to persuade Israelis -- "a vulnerable and sorrow-tried nation," as Weizman described them -- that the Syrian leader has genuinely resolved to forsake the military option and to embark on a new era of peace and normalization with the Jewish state he for so long vowed to destroy.

Along with the Israeli electorate, Rabin has to contend with his own principles.

Rabin is the man who so constructed the self-rule agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organization that no Jewish settlement -- no matter how isolated or illogical its location -- need be abandoned in the autonomous Gaza Strip.

The same Rabin, a true and loyal son of the Ahdut Ha'avodah socialist settlement movement, now wrestles with the prospect of dismantling settlements on the Golan Heights.

Opponents In Knesset Could Tie Rabin's Hands

Former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's adage that Israel has no foreign policy, only domestic politics, has always been well-accepted here. But if proof were needed, the political situation in Israel at this time surrounding the Golan negotiations provides that proof.

Knesset members on the right flank of Rabin's ruling Labor Party have threatened to team up with the opposition Likud bloc to pass legislation that would effectively tie the government's hands in its negotiations with Syria.

Rabin, who has solemnly pledged to submit any planned withdrawal from the Golan to the entire nation in a plebiscite, may find himself stymied by a Knesset majority that opposes returning the strategic Golan Heights, even for a peace-with-normalization package.

The opinion polls are not easy to read. But the prime minister's aides say he is confident that if and when he decided to put a yes-or-no question to the country -- and throw all his prestige and credibility behind it -- he will get the "yes" answer to a Golan withdrawal that he wants.

But these aides do not conceal their concern that clever parliamentary tactics by opponents of the pullback within the Labor Party could prevent the premier from posing the question altogether.

After all, the Knesset would need to pass enabling legislation for a referendum to be held.

But before that obstacle is confronted, there remains the deep and apparently anguished debate going on within Rabin's own head.

The conventional wisdom is that Rabin is holding his cards close to his chest. Well-placed observers suggest the prime minister is running the Syrian track alone, without the usual backup task force of aides or ministers.

This is not -- or not only -- a matter of operational discretion, but also perhaps because Rabin himself has not yet made up his mind.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
FOR UKRAINE'S MULTITUDE OF JEWS,
A SINGULAR QUESTION: TO STAY OR GO?
By Lisa Glazer**

KIEV, Ukraine (JTA) -- For the Jewish community of Ukraine, one of the world's largest, the future looms like an ominous question mark. The dreams, desires, anxieties and uncertainties can be reduced to a single query: To stay or to go?

Emigration to Israel is accelerating so rapidly that Ukraine now has the fastest-growing emigration rates in the former Soviet Union, according to officials with the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Yet at the same time, Jewish life is beginning to flourish, with schools, camps, Yiddish clubs, newspapers, cultural groups and religious organizations expanding by leaps and bounds.

Not surprisingly, planning ahead is difficult, especially in an unclear political situation.

"I have no sense of what's going to happen," said Rabbi Ya'akov Bleich, the chief rabbi of Ukraine's approximately 500,000 Jews. "I don't think everyone is going to move out in the next three or five years, but then again, I wouldn't advise building a new synagogue."

"The more people go, the more people come. This is our paradox," said Kira Verkhovskaya, a Jewish leader from Odessa, referring to the simultaneous trends of emigration and new affiliation with the Jewish community.

For those boarding planes to Tel Aviv, financial problems appear to be a primary motivation. While average wages are stuck at about \$20 a month, consumer items like clothing and appliances cost about the same as they do in the West. Industrial production is plummeting, market reform is only hiccuping along and hyperinflation means that Ukraine's currency, the coupon, now runs at more than 45,000 to the dollar.

"For the most part, Jews are leaving for economic reasons," according to Zvi Rom, who oversees the Jewish Agency office in Kiev.

Not Aliyah, But Repatriation

"It's not really aliyah, it's repatriation, because it's not for ideological reasons," he said. "As an Israeli, I would like to see Jews leave Ukraine because they have come to the conclusion that Jews should live in Israel, but that is not what is happening."

Still, a growing proportion of Ukrainian Jews have decided to move to Israel after attending the new Sunday schools for adults and sending their children to Jewish day schools.

Others are leaving to be with loved ones. Nearly every member of the Jewish community here has close friends or relatives living in Israel who are urging them to make the move.

Another push is anti-Semitism. While the new president, Leonid Kuchma, is following the friendly policies toward Jews that have become the norm since independence, the country's sputtering economy is straining his staying power.

But Jew-hating has not disappeared. Interviewed at a Jewish summer camp in Odessa, Igor Bloch, 16, recalled a recent performance of the Jewish theater group he belongs to in the eastern Ukrainian city of Makeyevka.

"Some people cried out, 'Avram, go away to

Israel' and other things I don't want to say," Bloch said. "Our leader said, 'Don't worry, we will go!'"

The number of Ukrainian Jews choosing Israel is constantly increasing. While emigration statistics are dropping slightly in Russia, where the economic and political mayhem has stabilized somewhat, Ukrainian emigration has nearly doubled in the past year, from 1,300 to 2,300 each month, according to Chaim Chesler, who oversees the Jewish Agency in the former Soviet Union.

Despite the many departures, Jewish life continues its vigorous revival in the land that produced Chasidic Judaism, populist Zionism and dozens of gifted Yiddish writers before the dark years of Soviet repression.

Today Ukraine has not one, but two umbrella Jewish organizations.

Kiev, the capital city, is home to three religious congregations and a welfare society serving 6,000 poor and elderly Jews. Active communities also exist in Odessa, Kharkov and dozens of smaller cities and towns.

"Ukraine has a very lively Jewish community," Rabbi Bleich said. "The Jews here are more connected to their Judaism than those in Russia because it wasn't long ago they lived in shtetls. They have an emotional connection, while in Russia, people's relationship with Judaism is more philosophical."

'There Is A Future Here'

Arkady Monastirski, 33, the vice president of the Jewish Council of Ukraine, calls himself an optimist when it comes to a Jewish future here.

"People are working with us, helping us," he said. "Some people say Jews are history, their problems are old problems," he said. "These people don't understand."

One of the organizations providing assistance to Jews here is the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which has offices in Kiev and Odessa.

"There is a future here, if only because there will be hundreds and thousands of Jews here for the next five or 10 years, barring any unforeseen catastrophe," according to Charles Hoffman, a former journalist who oversees the JDC office in Kiev.

"There is no reason why they should be deprived of the basic means and facilities to redevelop a Jewish life for themselves," he said.

Those who remain and redevelop this Jewish life must grapple with the country's troubled past, which includes the Chmielnitsky massacres of Jews in 1648, the Petlyura pogroms of 1919 and 1920 and Babi Yar, where 33,771 Jews were shot and buried in September 1941.

"In Ukraine, anti-Semitism is a tradition; negative views of the Jewish people have been passed down from generation to generation," said Monastirski of the Jewish Council.

"But now many Ukrainians have married Jews and their children are now half-Jews," he said, adding that such intermarriage can serve as a basis for reconciliation.

Zinaida Fourmanova, a screenwriter in Kiev who recently completed a film examining the myths about the relationship between Ukrainians and Jews, believes that while Jewish history in Ukraine "has been very difficult, very tragic," the Jewish connection here is "still very deep."