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**TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties** 

FROM: Stephen M. Greenberg, Chairman; Alexander Smukler, NCSJ President; Mark B. Levin, NCSJ Executive Director

## **UKRAINE UPDATE #14**

Yesterday, Acting Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk of Ukraine met in Washington with President Obama and top officials to discuss potential solutions to his country's crisis.

At the meeting, President Obama said the U.S. considers the upcoming referendum in Crimea illegitimate and a threat to the territorial integrity of Ukraine. He added that the United States and its allies are working on finding a diplomatic solution.

However, Obama cautioned, if Russia presses ahead with a referendum, the U.S. will be "forced to apply a cost to Russia's violations of international law and its encroachments on Ukraine."

Prime Minister Yatsenyuk spoke with utmost concern about the threat from Russia, and the need for swift reforms in Ukraine. He also emphasized the importance of signing the political part of the Association Agreement with the EU, and pledged to work closely with the IMF to help resolve Ukraine's economic crisis.

The U.S. administration has pledged economic aid to Ukraine, but the \$1 billion in loan guarantees were not approved by Congress this week, due to disagreements over IMF lending reform. Debate on the bill has been tabled until Congress returns from recess on March 24.

In a strong reaction to the upcoming referendum in Crimea, the leaders of the G7 issued a statement urging Russia "to immediately halt actions supporting a referendum on the territory of Crimea regarding its status, in direct violation of the Constitution of Ukraine," adding that the results of any such referendum would not be recognized.

The EU is prepared to introduce tougher sanctions on Monday if Russia proceeds with the annexation of Crimea. Today, German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned that Russia's

actions in Crimea "would not only change the European Union's relationship with Russia...[but] would also cause massive damage to Russia, economically and politically."

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is traveling to London tomorrow to meet with his counterpart Sergey Lavrov in an attempt to avert a new crisis.

Meanwhile, President Vladimir Putin said today that Russia was not to blame for the situation in Crimea. He said the crisis in Ukraine is of a domestic nature. There have been reports of increased numbers of Russian troops gathering along the border with Ukraine as part of military training exercises.

There is a divergence of views on this crisis among the Jewish communities of Ukraine and particularly in Crimea, mirroring the divisions among the general population in Southern and Eastern Ukraine.

In a statement today, the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress (EAJC) said that there is no united political position in Ukraine's Jewish community and religious organizations on what is happening.

NCSJ spoke today with Ukraine's Chief Progressive Rabbi Alexander Dukhovny, who expressed concern about Russia's actions in Crimea. He also spoke about his participation together with other religious leaders in a national commemoration last Sunday of a Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, during which Prime Minister Yatsenyuk vowed to defend the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

NCSJ is also in touch with the Crimean Jewish community leadership. They reported no new anti-Semitic incidents, and that the situation is peaceful so far.

Today, NCSJ participated in a discussion with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt, who briefed a small group of participants on the situation in Ukraine.

NCSJ will continue to be in contact with the Ukrainian Jewish community and others and provide you with relevant and timely information.

## **About NCSJ**

NCSJ: Advocates on Behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia, founded in 1971, represents the organized American Jewish community in monitoring and advocating on behalf of the estimated 1.5 million Jews living in the 15 successor states of the former Soviet Union.

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