



January 19, 2014 WASHINGTON, D.C.

TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

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

UKRAINE UPDATE #10

Tensions in Ukraine escalated sharply today, as pro-Russian military forces seized two airports in Crimea. Several government buildings in the regional capital of Simferopol, including the parliament building, were seized yesterday.

Crimea, the only region of Ukraine where ethnic Russians dominate in numbers, has been the last stronghold for the ousted president Viktor Yanukovich. Signs of separatism have been on the rise in Crimea, as ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians voice their suspicions of the new Ukrainian government.

While there is no direct evidence that Russia sent the military units responsible for the takeover of the government buildings, Russia has played a major role in indirectly supporting separatism in Crimea. It has announced military exercises along the Russian-Ukrainian border and placed its troops on high alert. Ukraine's interim Interior Minister Arsen Avakov has described the latest moves in Crimea as "military invasion and occupation."

U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel warned Russia on Thursday to stay out of the turmoil in Ukraine, saying, "We expect other nations to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and avoid provocative action."

Meanwhile, Viktor Yanukovich, speaking from Rostov-on-Don, Russia, today declared his ouster illegitimate, calling the new government "nationalists, pro-fascist people, and gangsters." However, he supported territorial integrity of the country and spoke out against "an intervention to break the sovereignty of Ukrainian territory."

NCSJ has spoken with Chairman of Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Crimea Anatoly Gendin. Unfortunately, he reported an incident of desecration of one of the synagogues in Simferopol.

Last night, the entrance to the Ner-Tamid synagogue was vandalized with swastikas and other anti-Semitic signs. It is unclear who is behind the desecration, but according to Mr. Gendin, this could have been a provocation to further destabilize the situation in Crimea.

Josef Zissels, Chairman of Association of Jewish organizations and communities of Ukraine also said that this incident is most likely a provocation, aimed at discrediting the new government.

Mr. Gendin added that except for this incident, the 10,000-strong Jewish community of Crimea has not been singled out during the crisis. However, there is a growing concern about the effect of the dire economic situation on the Jewish community, and the danger of being possibly scapegoated for the problems in the country.

We remain in contact with the Ukrainian Jewish community and will continue to closely monitor the situation.

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.

Website: <http://WWW.NCSJ.ORG>

[NCSJ](#)

email: ncsjinfo@ncsj.org

phone: 202-898-2500

NCSJ is a beneficiary of [The Jewish Federations of North America](#) and the [National Federation/Agency Alliance](#) through its network of Federations.

