POOR UKRAINIAN ECONOMY RESULTS IN MORE JEWISH EMIGRATION

Left to right: Elena Proskurnya (head of Chesed) with Tanya Sidelkovskaya (head of Adopt-a-Bubbe in Ukraine) in front of Chesed building, Melitopol

Although there are no official figures, unemployment is high in Melitopol, Ukraine. Factories close and lay off large numbers of workers. Small businesses close, too. Those with salaries are taxed 45%, and the government wants to raise that to 50%. After graduation, there are no jobs. As a result, young people leave for Israel. “These young people are our future and they are leaving.”

Melitopol has no transportation system, so people take taxis. The Jewish community pays 600 hrv. or $75 per week to be able to request an unofficial taxi.

The minimum pension is 400 hrv./month or $50. Subsidies are supposed to bring pensions up to 1,000 hrv./month or $125, but the government has no money. “We’re like Greece!” Retirement age for men is now 65 and they want to change that to age 67. Women retire at age 60. Women used to retire at age 50 and men at age 60, so these are huge changes.

There are around 3,000 Jews in Melitopol out of a total population of 168,000. There has been no increase in the total population for the last seven years, which is unusual for cities. The oldest gravestones in the Jewish cemetery date to 1716.

The Chesed center we were in was built in 1790 and was originally a school for young children. The small building next door was the rabbi’s home. There used to be two synagogues. The remaining smaller one on the street is in very bad shape and cannot be used. The larger one was destroyed in WWII.

In 1997 the building was given back to the Jewish community and Chesed (the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) repaired the building and re-opened it as a Jewish community center in 1998.
ADOPT-A-BUBBE VISITS IN 2013

Right: Zoya Avronova, born in 1948 in Poltava, Ukraine. Zoya lives with her disabled son, Maxim, born May 15, 1992. In the photo, she is showing us clothing and shoes received from Adopt-a-Bubbe for Maxim. She also receives food. Zoya used to teach Soviet history and studied English for three years, although she no longer speaks it, but understands.

Zoya does not know exactly what is wrong with Maxim, but he is obviously disabled. He was often ill as an infant and at age six couldn’t walk alone. He walks and talks strangely, but is quite likable. He cannot be left alone, either inside or out. He gets lost outside and gets into trouble in the apartment. He sees a neurologist and is on medication, but in 2012 he got into the supply, took too much and had to be hospitalized.

Because of the stress of taking care of Maxim, Zoya has heart trouble. She needs more tests done, but they cost too much. Her pension is 1,000 hrv. or $125/month. Maxim is considered Disabled 2nd Class and receives a pension of 900 hrv. or $113/month. They have a subsidy for rent and utilities which is 362 hrv. or $45/month. Maxim’s meds cost 130 hrv. or $16/month.

Maxim went to a good school which used the Montessori method, and Zoya attended with him. He reads well, but is unable to do math or use a computer. He recited some poems for us and sang.

Roza’s pension is 1,050 hrv. or $131/month. Her rent and utilities are subsidized at 200 hrv. or $25/month. She also rents out a room to a 20-year-old female student for 400 hrv. or $50/month, but has to keep quiet about this or she will lose her rent subsidy.

Roza is a Type II diabetic and also has hypertension. Medicine is paid for from her pension. A month ago, she had surgery to remove her gall bladder, and she is still recuperating. She is just now feeling better and ready to go outside.

Roza receives clothing, food and artificial sweetener from Adopt-a-Bubbe. Today’s food package contained chicken, fish, apples, cheese and a liter of cooking oil. She is very grateful.
The following items are part of e-mail messages received on antisemitism in the FSU.

August 28, 2013; Derbent, Russia: According to Jewish staff for Alexei Navalny who campaigned for mayor of Moscow, he never made a statement praising the Holocaust. The statement was false and reportedly part of a smear campaign to damage Navalny’s image with liberal voters.

September 29, 2013; Russia: Sheriff Akhmedov, alleged shooter of Rabbi Artur Ovadia Isakov in Dagestan, Russia, was killed in a raid by Russian security forces. Akhmedov had been wanted since 2011 for alleged involvement in bombings and attacks on police. He is believed to be behind the July 24 shooting of Isakov as he left his car and headed into his home in Derbent. Rabbi Isakov was seriously wounded and is recuperating in Israel, but plans to return to Dagestan.

Last October, unknown assailants detonated a bomb in the interior yard of Derbent’s main synagogue. No one was hurt. Some 2,000 Jews live among a predominantly Muslim population in Dagestan.

October, 2013; Medzhbizh, Ukraine: Two hasidic men were beaten while on a pilgrimage to the birthplace of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, founder of the hasidic movement. The two were chased by seven Ukrainians screaming, “Jews stink!” before the beating.


October 15, 2013; Kiev, Ukraine: Ira Forman, the Obama administration’s special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism, cancelled his attendance at a landmark conference in Kiev due to the U.S. government shutdown. Forman was scheduled to be opening speaker at the two-day conference marking the 100th anniversary of the Menachem Mendel Beilis blood libel trial.

The Beilis trial was based on an anti-Semitic blood libel that czarist Russian authorities fabricated in Kiev. Beilis was acquitted in 1913 of allegations that he murdered a Christian to use his blood for worship. Beilis’ grandson, U.S. born Jay Beilis, attended the conference.

Gideon Behar, Forman’s Israeli counterpart, told the conference that, “Unfortunately, blood libels are still around even 100 years after the trial of Beilis, largely thanks to Iran’s efforts to propagate them.”

October 24, 2013; Balta, Ukraine: The Jewish community of Balta in Ukraine lost its bid to gain possession of a former synagogue. The 100-year-old Savranskaya synagogue, now abandoned is owned by a communications company Ukrtelecom.
Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation as allowed by law payable to Action for Post-Soviet Jewry:

NAME____________________________
ADDRESS_________________________
CITY__________________ STATE_____
ZIP CODE __________________
E-Mail ___________________________

Please charge my donation to:
[ ] VISA     [ ] MasterCard
[ ] American Express   [ ] Discover

Acct#______________________________
Exp. Date mm/yy________________________
Signature_____________________________

[ ] $1,000   [ ] $500   [ ] $100   [ ] $50
[ ] Other _____________

Raisa was born in 1937 and spent a year in the Melitopol ghetto with her mother. However, she only has one living witness, so receives no Claims Conference funds. This witness lives in Israel. Raisa showed us an official letter, which verifies the time spent in the ghetto.

Another woman who was in a concentration camp and has a number tattooed on her arm, receives compensation every three months. As Raisa said, “I guess they couldn’t erase the tattoo!”

We met Raisa Zeligman at the Melitopol Chesed center where she came for a Kabbalat Shabbat service and a hot meal.

A portion of funding for Adopt-a-Bubbe is made possible by the Combined Jewish Philanthropies and the Dnepropetrovsk Kehillah Project of the JCRC of Greater Boston.