

**Address of Ukrainian President Mr. Leonid Kravchuk
to the Knesset Plenum
Jerusalem, January 12, 1993**

(Unofficial translation – the speech was delivered in Ukrainian)

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, honored Knesset, honored citizens of Israel; first and foremost, I would like to thank you for the honor of appealing to you from the greatest political platform in Israel. I see this as a proof of our great desire for increasing ties between the two countries. I see this as a good sign on the way to building friendly relations and cooperation between Ukraine and Israel.

The trip from Kiev to Jerusalem was short, but the path to Ukrainian independence, which allowed for the visit of a Ukrainian President to Israel, was long and hard. In Israel it is said sometimes "for the first time in a thousand years". This expression also applies to our circumstances. For the first time, an official Ukrainian delegation is visiting Israel. The fates of the two nations share much in common.

For many generations the possibility of establishing an independent nation was denied from both of them. Both of them experienced forced assimilation, were scattered in many other nations in the world, suffered troubles in the 20th century, for example the "artificial hunger" of 1933, oppression at the hands of the Stalin regime, World War Two; troubles whose scope allow a comparison with the Jewish Holocaust.

For many hundreds of years, there existed in Ukraine one of the biggest Jewish communities in the world. An original Ukrainian-Jewish culture was formed, which is an inseparable part of the two nations' cultures, a culture created by Shalom Aleichem, Haim Nachman Bialik, Shaul Tchernichovsky, authors, artists, scientists and many other cultural figures.

For many years the Ukrainians felt like, as the Jews, strangers in their own land and often they were in conflict with each other and were used one against the other. It was easy, and many rulers took advantage of this method. .

I understand the importance of discipline in the Knesset, but I will allow myself to stray a bit from the protocol. We truly do not want to silence the dark pages that were in our history and it is impossible to forget the past; we must learn from history.

I want to remind you of one thought. The reasons lie not just in the history of the two nations, but also outside our nations, and the role of the historians is to explain all the historical aspects of the different periods, and we must do everything we can in order that history will not repeat itself.

Times have changed. At the end of the '40s, the Jewish nation succeeded in realizing its dreams to establish an independent nation on the lands of its ancestors. The representatives of the Ukrainian nation in the United Nations supported the revival of the Jewish nation in 1947.

More than a year has passed since the Ukrainian nation approved, through the expression of their will by way of a referendum, the Ukrainian declaration of independence. It should be noted that for this choice more than 72% of the electorate voted in favor of including Jews with Ukrainian citizenship.

Here in the Knesset, I would like to mention the words of the exemplary Jewish figure Zeev Jabotinsky, who was born in Ukraine, loved Ukraine and supported Ukrainian matters. Eighty years ago Jabotinsky wrote: 'There is no doubt that the fate of the national character of the Russian Empire is completely dependent on the position taken by the Ukrainian nation, which numbers 30 million people. If it agrees to assimilate, Russia will continue on its way; if it does not agree to assimilate, Russia will go another way.'

In December 1991, the Ukrainian nation, numbering 52 million people, did not agree to lose its uniqueness. It chose the path of independence. Our nation voted for an independent Ukraine as a free democratic society based on the respect for human rights, freedoms and values. Our nation voted for a country that promised equal rights for all ethnic and national groups and which will allow the free development of their national heritage and religion.

Our nation voted for peace, tranquility and stability in our land. That is what we are striving for today, despite many difficulties, chief amongst them a deep and dangerous economic crisis that has hit all of the territories of the former Soviet Union.

Israel was one of the first nations in the world that recognized Ukrainian independence and which established diplomatic relations in December 1991. We greatly appreciate this step.

Among the important achievements of an independent Ukraine in the first year of its history, one must consider the democratic process on the foundation of a transfer to a market economy while maintaining internal stability, peace and brotherhood. This, in our opinion, is a very important point. If you look at the map of the post-communist world, you can see the arc of fire of civil wars and bloody territorial conflicts, extending from Tajikistan to Yugoslavia; from Nagorno-Karabakh to Pridnestrovie. To its great fortune, Ukraine exists outside this burning arc.

I am convinced that we all need to recognize the importance of the changes that humanity is encountering on the edge of the 21st century. We need to insert corrections in our policies. Perhaps it is appropriate to remember the active positive role of the UN in the '60s on the matter of freeing nations from colonialism.

The time has come to pay special attention to the building of a global security system in the context of the UN that will allow for assistance to young countries to protect them from aggression on the part of those who will not forfeit their colonial ambitions.

From its first days as an independent state, Ukraine declared its willingness to live according to the cultural rules of coexistence and cooperation; it declared its desire to build relationships with countries in the world and its rejection of unequal rights and dictatorship.

For us, the drive for peace, friendship and tranquility between all nations is the A-Z of foreign policy. The world needs to know that an experienced and hard-working nation has come to it. Due to its patience, it deserves a better fate; a nation that has felt the breath of death of the Chernobyl disaster and wants to free itself from the nuclear idol; a nation that is ready to escape from the nuclear weapons that are found in its territory; a nation that does not want to cut its ties with its neighbors in the former Soviet Union, rather the opposite, it will do all it can to develop these connections on the basis of equal rights and mutual benefits rather than return to the old imperial structure.

Relying on these foundations, we have succeeded within one year to lay the foundations for our relationship with other countries. This is expressed in the 70 bilateral agreements, between nations and governments, agreements that arrange joint work in areas of diplomacy, economics, science, technology, environmental quality, culture and more.

Ukraine is considering the changes in the global political situation and is building its foreign policy, which includes the Middle Eastern region among its priorities.

In its foreign policy, Ukraine has aggressively rejected the ideological path of the Soviet Union. We are striving for stable and balanced relationships with all of the countries in the region, both the Arab countries and Israel. Promises of peace, stability and security in the Middle East coincide with the interests of Ukraine. Therefore, we welcome and support the peace process that began at the Madrid Conference.

Ukraine is aware of the complexity of the conflict in the Middle East, which is one of the longest lasting international conflicts. Ukraine consistently supports respecting the principles of international law and of a political settlement of this conflict, on the basis of the execution of the resolutions of the Security Council. Despite this, Ukraine is not pretending to teach someone or to force on the two sides its recipes for a solution for the Middle East problem. There is only one thing that is not subject to debate: The only way to solve the problem is peace talks, as long and hard as they are, whether it be principles of sovereignty, the integrity and the independence of the countries in the region, including Israel and its right to live in peace within the framework of safe international borders or the fulfillment of the legal rights of the Palestinian people.

Ukraine supports, not simple methods that are disconnected from reality, but a precise program that will be formulated after constructive Israeli-Arab discussions on the basis of mutual compromise.

It especially worries us that the expulsion of Palestinians is likely to cause damage to the process of searching for a deal in the region and will awaken a new wave of violence. In our opinion, UN Security Council Resolution 799 is a foundation to solving the problem.

In contrast, Ukraine strongly condemns all instances of terror. This is written in the memorandum of mutual understanding and fundamental principles of cooperation between Ukraine and Israel.

We all hope that all of the agreements that are supposed to be signed during this visit will lay a strong foundation, legally, for cooperation between the two sides. Spacious openings are opening for cooperation between us, and this stems from many objective causes. Among them, it is appropriate to remember the close geographic location between the coasts of our countries, the ease of transportation between Ukraine and Israel, the great potential for multilateral cooperation between our countries in the fields of economics, agriculture, culture, science, technology and more.

The presence of thousands of Ukrainian-born people in Israel, who came at different times, and who preserve their memories from the land upon which they were born and experienced poverty and also happiness, these people who recognize the language, culture and the history of Ukraine, are able to help in the establishment of efficient connections between our two nations and countries.

Obviously, the fact that Jews are leaving Ukraine bothers us, but also in the future we will help to fulfill the legal rights of people to choose their place of living; we will act in accordance with international law

We, as representatives of a young country, are interested in understanding your experiment in building an independent country, a market economy, stabilizing the financial system, the functioning of trade unions, political parties and more. It is understood that during the process of building our relations, it is impossible to ignore the difficult legacy that we have received. The prophet Jeremiah was correct when he said "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." I assume that today, the time has come to quit having our teeth on edge, if there are any left. It is appropriate to give up ideas of hatred of Jews and hatred of Ukrainians.

I see great importance in the transfer from emotional evaluations that appeal to myths and sometimes false understandings to understandings of the reality in all its complicated aspects. The new period of relations between the two nations, facing forward, will be based on the principles of equal rights, mutual understanding, mutual respect, cooperation and not intervening in internal affairs. Ukraine chose this approach and it stems from our being convinced of the essential need to put an end to the inequality between the rights of nations.

Ukraine does not only promise equal rights to all nations within it, but it also promises its protection to the preservation of ethnicities, cultures, languages and religions and for allowing good conditions for their free development. Every ethnic group in Ukraine lives according to its own internal laws, its tradition and leaders and every one of them will not be restricted to borders of a national minority, but all of them will unite to one political organization with the name – the Ukrainian nation. This increases our strength and will help us to continue the social processes.

We are renewing the cultural and social life of the Jewish nation in Ukraine. In more than 70 cities in Ukraine, Jewish associations and organizations have been created, more than 20 Jewish religious organizations have been registered, theaters have been opened, Jewish schools have opened, newspapers and journals have been published and the Jewish cultural institution has begun its work.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, honored Knesset, the Ukrainian delegation; allow me once again to stray from the text. We have been in Jerusalem for two days. Today we took a trip in the Old City, we walked in the streets where the prophets lived, great philosophers, in the streets where civilization was born, where spiritual principles were born, where humanity knew revolutions, ages, cultural exports, and we came to the most important conclusion for us, which is that we need to protect this land - where the biggest cultural roots in the world are found - from the attacks of those who want to destroy the results of civilization. Ukraine declares this idea not just as a slogan.

Tangentially, when Iraq began its aggression against Israel, we were prepared to do as much as possible in order to protect Israel from the missiles flying from Iraq. We want to convince you that in the future we will do all we can in order to help Israel reach a peace with its neighbors.

Only when we came here were we able to understand the depths of the eternal principles of humanity. How can we not remember the words of the prophet Isaiah "and they shall beat their swords into plowshares.... No nation shall lift up a sword against any other nation; neither shall they learn war anymore."