

# Simon Dubnov's Theory of Autonomism and Its Practicability in the CIS

By Michael Beizer<sup>1</sup>

In 1898, when speaking at the Zionist Congress in Basle, the *maskil* (secular scholar) and liberal Jewish activist from Odessa, Mikhail (Menashe) Morgulis (1837-1912) wrote in the journal *Voskhod*<sup>2</sup> that an independent state would not increase the security of the Jews. A small state, like Bulgaria or Serbia, would not be able to pursue an independent policy. Moreover, “the hostility, which now exists towards the Jews, would be transferred to their state.” Furthermore, being concentrated in a small area, the Jews would be facilitating the work of the antisemites, who would not even find it necessary to drive the Jews into one place.

What would be the significance of a Jewish state? Just the same as that of other comparable states, artificially created. But as regards a Jewish state, one might also say that the existing enmity towards the Jews would be transferred to their state, to a specific “centre”, the destruction of which would destroy all Jewish interests. At present, as they don't have before them a specific Jewish centre, the antisemites have to struggle in different countries with various Jewish interests. ... Present them with a state for a target, as the concentration of all the interests, which they can attack, and they will find some kind of political misanthrope, who for one reason or another will consider it his duty to wipe them all out together with their national interests.<sup>3</sup>

Morgulis did not speak out only against Zionism. He did not consider that Simon Markovich Dubnov's theory of “autonomism” could be put into practice, either. Morgulis answered his “Letters on the old and the new Jewry”<sup>4</sup>, especially the fourth and fifth letters, in the article “Nationhood and Assimilation”, published in *Voskhod Pamphlets*<sup>5</sup> in 1902. He pointed out that Dubnov's plan for autonomy was not realistic,

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<sup>1</sup> Published in *Writer and Warrior. Simon Dubnov: Historian and Public Figure*. Editors: Avraham Greenbaum, Israel Bartal, Dan Haruv. The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, Jerusalem, 2010, pp. 87\*-102\*.

<sup>2</sup> M. Morgulis, “The present dangers facing West European Jews”, *Voskhod*, No. 1, 1898, pp. 108-122, No. 2, pp. 72-90, No. 3, pp. 3-21.

<sup>3</sup> *Voskhod*, No. 1, 1898, p.116.

<sup>4</sup> Dubnov's fifteen letters were published between 1897 and 1907, and then appeared in a separate collection: S. M. Dubnov, “*Pis'ma o starom i novom evreistve* (Letters on the old and the new Jewry)”, St. Petersburg, 1907. (henceforth: *Letters*)

<sup>5</sup> *Knizhki Voskhoda*, 1902, No. 5, pp.99-115, No. 6, pp. 35-58, No.7, pp. 62-78. Dubnov replied to

for two reasons.

1. In free countries, the Jews themselves do not want national autonomy, which for them would be equivalent to returning to the ghetto<sup>6</sup>, whereas in police states no such autonomy would be allowed. So where would one find it?
2. In today's centralized Jewish community, consisting of individuals (and not only of traditional Jews), differences of opinion inevitably arise on the principal problems – the place of the religion and the synagogue, the language of teaching in schools and so on. Differences of opinion lead to violence by the majority against the minority, or make a monolithic policy in relation to the human environment impossible. And then aims of unity would not be achieved either.

Leaving aside discussion of how far Morgulis' predictions in relation to a Jewish state have come about, we shall try to understand whether he was right in relation to autonomy, and to analyze to what extent this theory is realized in the area which was formerly the Soviet Union. For it was Russian Jews that Dubnow had in view, in writing his "Letters".

Let us take as a starting-point, that in the course of the twentieth century certain changes have taken place in the Jewish world, which Dubnow couldn't have foreseen, and this has to a considerable extent destroyed the basis of his theory.

According to Dubnow, the basis of Jewish autonomy, in the diaspora, should be the running of their own community, freedom of development for Jewish languages, and autonomy for Jewish\* schools<sup>7</sup>. Of course, even then Dubnow had his opponents, who did not believe that the countries, where the Jews were living, would give them the right 'to free internal development in the sense of distinctiveness'<sup>8</sup>. Meanwhile, it did not occur even to those who sided with Dubnow, that Jewish communities, language and schools would in fact be utterly banned. However, that is precisely what happened in the Soviet Union. Not even Morgulis, speaking about the police state,

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Morgulis' criticism in his Letter no. 10 ("On the lost intelligentsia", *Letters...*, p. 245-280).

<sup>6</sup> So it was. In modern Hungary, in 1902, the Jewish community rejected the status of national minority proposed to them, fearing that it would become an obstacle to Jewish integration into Hungarian society. (Jewish Budapest, *Frojimovics*, 1999, p. 448-449).

<sup>7</sup> "The internal national and cultural autonomy of the Jewish people rests on three foundations: on the management of their own community, freedom of language and independent schools." "Letter no. 5. On Jewish education", *Letters...*, p. 113.

<sup>8</sup> Thus Dubnow quotes Lilienblum, who raised an objection. p.194.

envisaged such a tragic turn of events.

In his “Letters”, Dubnow discusses the possibility of Jews emigrating in an organized fashion to countries, where their chances of free national development would be greater<sup>9</sup>. This corresponded to Dubnow's view of Jewish history, as a series of Jewish national “centres” in the diaspora. (Poland and Russia would be superseded by America and Palestine).

Emigration, according to Dubnow, was the most important vehicle of national salvation. “Take away from the Jew the hope of emigrating, the hope that in the bad times he will be able to get out of danger to a place, where thousand of his brothers have gone...”, he wrote, “ then he really will fall into utter despair ... Look, the enemy is coming, lie down and die!”<sup>10</sup> Historical experience gave Dubnow to believe, that they could drive the Jews out of any country, but up till then they hadn't started detaining them forcibly. However, that is precisely what happened to the Jews in the USSR, where for long decades the cornerstone of state policy was the principle of “sealed borders”.

It was not just Dubnow, for no-one, at the beginning of the twentieth century, foresaw the Holocaust. Arguing against Ahad-Ha'am, Dubnow wrote: “I willingly concede, that a handful of Jews in Palestine can lead a “fuller Jewish life” than in the diaspora, and I rejoice at that, but I am also preoccupied by the fate of the masses of Jews left in the diaspora. Or, could it be that Palestine will be like Noah's Ark, where only a fraction of the Jews will be saved from a world-wide cultural Deluge, while all the rest perish? But of course, such a cruel sentence for the diaspora, doesn't enter into the spiritual Zionists' programme”<sup>11</sup>.

We should note that here he is speaking only about a *cultural* deluge. Dubnow couldn't even imagine the physical annihilation of millions of Jews. Finally, a few years after the historian perished, the State of Israel was created. At the beginning of the century, however, that seemed to Dubnow, even in the best scenario, an event of the distant future. Basing his prediction on the rates of Jewish emigration to Eretz Yisrael of that time, by means of simple computation, Dubnow <sup>12</sup>came to the

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9 “Letter 15. The emancipation and emigration movements”, *Letters...*, p. 351-368.

10 *Idem*, p. 355.

11 “Letter no. 7. The nation of the present and that of the future”, *Letters...*, p. 202.

12 In the course of 17 years of hard work (having in mind the period 1882-1898 – M.B.), with increased immigration, massive expense and with the help of the Rothschild millions, we succeeded in settling on

conclusion that by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there would be no more than half a million Jews living there. And what is one to do with the remaining 10 million Jews in Europe? - asked Dubnow. Unfortunately, as it turned out, a solution was found for them.

We should mention now, that national ex-territorial autonomy, according to Dubnow, can be cultural and political. Both kinds of autonomy are based on the existence of a democratic Jewish community, which is concerned with religious, educational, cultural and charitable activity, and also, if possible, a health service, employment, emigration, legal aid and so forth. Communities form a central body “an association of Jewish communities”, which coordinates all this activity.

1. Cultural autonomy presupposes recognition by the State of the Jews' right to develop their own language and culture, and to the teaching of the national language in schools, and also its use in State institutions.
2. Political autonomy means the presence of representatives of the Jewish communities or democratically elected representatives of the Jewish minority on the local and central authorities.

After the fall of the Soviet regime and the Soviet Union, conditions were created in the post-Soviet states for a revival of religious, communal and cultural life. After more than a decade has passed, it is reasonable to ask: are Dubnov's ideas about national autonomy being put into practice now in the former USSR?

In his article<sup>13</sup>, published in 1995, Prof. Benjamin Pinkus points to the rapid growth of the number of Jewish organizations in the middle of the Gorbachev era (240 at the end of 1989, 500 by 1991) and to the formation of the VAAD (Federation of Jewish Organizations and Communities in the CIS) in December 1999, as the organizational

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the land in Palestine only about 3,600 settlers, which amounts to about 21 people per year. Let us assume that the Western Zionists' committees work with considerably greater capital and energy, and settle in Palestine every year not 200 but 1,000 (which would require the expenditure of some millions of rubles), then *in 100 years* Jewish rural settlement of Palestine would reach 100,000. Multiply this figure by five, adding natural growth and a stream of industrial population to the town, then we get, after 100 years, half a million Jews in Palestine, that is, a slightly larger population than the Jewish population of the Province of Kiev (428,000 souls by the latest census). Of course, the hope of seeing half a million of our brothers in our ancient homeland at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is very dear to our hearts, but how could that solve the problem of 10 million Jews, who are scattered and will remain scattered all over the earth?” (Letter no. 6. The Utopian and the practicable elements in Zionism”, *Letters...*, p. 171-172).

13“The Development of the idea of Jewish National Autonomy and its application in the Soviet Union from Lenin to Gorbachev,” *Shvut*, 1995, #1-2 (17-18), pp. 80-123.

expression of Jewish cultural autonomy, which developed in the Soviet Union between 1987 and 1991. In comparison with the “scorched earth” of the Brezhnev-Andropov period, such a development really captured the imagination.

Since then, more than ten years have passed. The number of Jewish organizations continues to grow.

In 2002 in the CIS, with the support of the Joint, there were:

- 170 Jewish communal centres,
- 184 libraries (some of them computerized), to which 800,000 books were sent by the Joint over 10 years,
- 36 kindergartens for 1,600 children.

More than 100 academic programmes on Jewish subjects were running in universities, attended by more than 1,000 students.

- Social assistance was provided for 250,366 pensioners and poor people in 2,640 cities and small towns. This was provided by a network of 162 charitable centres, built with the help of the Joint (Khasadim). In 2001, more than 4,000,000 portions of hot food were given out to people in need<sup>14</sup>.

This work was carried out with the help of sixteen offices of the Joint in the CIS, in which 20 representatives of that organization controlled a considerable staff of local workers, not counting those who supported these and other programmes from Jerusalem. According to the calculations of another international Jewish organization, working in the CIS, the Sokhnut (Jewish Agency) in 2002:

- 31,449 people studied Ivrit (Hebrew) in 382 Ulpanim (study programmes) in the former USSR, with the help of 759 local teachers.
- 4,469 people studied in the “Open University”.
- 36,143 people were included in the “Jewish consciousness” programme.
- 57,007 people took part in work in youth clubs, and students' clubs.
- 12,494 boys and girls went to summer camps, and 1,941 to Sokhnut winter camps.
- 105,048 people took part in communal celebrations of Jewish festivals.

This and other activity took place with the help of 25 representatives and 230 provincial departments of the Sokhnut in 324 towns<sup>15</sup>. Of course, the Sokhnut programmes were also supported by its Jerusalem office.

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<sup>14</sup>Yearbook. JDC in the Former Soviet Union, p.8, 16.

<sup>15</sup> HaSokhnut Hayehudit le'Eretz Yisrael, *Hever Hamedinot Ha'atzmaiot*, Kartis Pe'ilut 2002.

In addition to this, numerous professional skilled communal workers were trained - social workers, specialists in the sphere of Judaism, Jewish history and culture.

- in 13 years, 244 communal leaders were trained in Israel in the special Buncher programme<sup>16</sup>.
- thousands of social workers, librarians, Jewish school teachers were trained for work in Jewish communities.
- Whereas on the eve of the fall of the USSR about 90 newspapers and periodicals were published<sup>17</sup>, in 1998-99 in the former USSR, 214 periodical publications came out<sup>18</sup>.

In addition, Jewish communities owned considerable property, the material basis for their activity. First of all, about 100 synagogues were returned to the communities, some new ones built and a number of old ones refurbished<sup>19</sup>. Secondly, on the initiative of the Joint, in many cities buildings are bought which are converted into Khasadim, communal and cultural centres (Moscow, Odessa, St. Petersburg, Dnyepropetrovsk, Chelyabinsk, Kharkov).

The number of central Jewish communal organizations has grown. On 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1996, in the Russian Federation, the Russian Jewish Congress (REK) was formed. The KEROOR - Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations and Unions Russia, which is, essentially, a department of the REK, still exists. In November 1999 under the aegis of Chabad (Rabbi Ber Lazar), the Federation of Jewish Communities in Russia (FEOR) was formed, in competition with the REK. In 2001, there were 113 Jewish religious communities in the KEROOR, and 145 communities (of which 15 were not yet registered in FEOR) was at that time 197, evidently, the representatives of KEROOR had counted unregistered communities, for some tens of communities were recognized by both FEOR and KEROOR<sup>20</sup>. FEOR has the official support of President Putin, and so is fast gaining strength. But the REK also, in which Leonid Nevzlin, and then Evgeny Satanovsky, replaced Vladimir Gusinsky as president, stresses its Russian patriotism. In 2002, the World Congress of Russian-speaking Jewry was formed, with

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16See: *The Buncher: Community Leadership Program, Alumni Directory*, 1989-2002.

17M. Beizer, "Jewish Newspapers and Periodicals in the USSR, 1990-1991," *Jews and Jewish Topics in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, 3(19), 1992, pp. 62-77.

18A. Frenkel, E. Valk, A. Zeltser, "Jewish Periodicals in the Former Soviet Union," *Jews in Eastern Europe*, 1(44), 2001, pp. 92-146. The bibliography of this periodical occupied more than 50 pages.

19See: M. Beizer, *Our Legacy: The CIS Synagogue, Past and Present*, Jerusalem-Moscow, 2002. Work for the return of Jewish property is supported by the Joint.

20S. Charny, "The Russian Jewish Community: the current situation", *Jews of Eurasia*, 1, (2002), p.20.

representatives in Moscow, Jerusalem, New York and Berlin. It included Jewish organizations of 22 countries. Valerii Engel became the executive director. The president of the Coordinating Council – was the Israeli, Shmuel Azarkh, who was soon replaced by Bezalel Schiff, also an Israeli. One of the main officially proclaimed aims of the Congress is “the consolidation of Russian-speaking Jewry in support of Israel, however, it seems, rather, that it aims to achieve the hegemony of Moscow in the Russian-Jewish diaspora.

In parallel, under the presidency of the Kazakh businessman, Alexander Mashkevich, the Euro-Asiatic Jewish Congress was formed, the aim of which, according to the president, is “the preservation of the Jewish people”. The founders of the Congress were the Jewish organizations of Kazakhstan, Russia and the Ukraine.

The VAAD itself, which is by now the Russian VAAD, declared at its third congress in November 1999, that it represents the religious, cultural, charitable, and educational organizations of Russia, with a total membership of 23,000. It is true that Jewish activists and whole organizations are often members of more than one central body, and transfer from one to another. At a local level, the creation of parallel structures in competition with each other is a common occurrence.

In the Ukraine, where there are at present about 500 Jewish organizations and communities in existence, the Jewish movement has also split up. It now has three “umbrella” organizations – the Jewish Confederation of the Ukraine, the Federation of Jewish Communities of the Ukraine and the All-Ukraine Jewish Congress (president – Vadim Rabbimovich)<sup>21</sup>.

In Byelorussia, Putin's policy has been copied by President Lukashenko, with whose support, together with the Association of Religious Communities of Byelorussia (president – Yuri Dorn), a Chabad block and the secular cultural association of Byelorussia (name??) headed by the architect, Levin, a member of the Soviet Byelorussian Establishment, have been formed.

Thus, Morgulis' prediction that a monolithic community, not traditional, but made up of individuals, is not possible, is also fully justified.

On the other hand, all this activity is an unmistakable indication of the reality of Jewish

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21 On Jewish Communal life in the Ukraine, see, for example, the article by the president of VAAD (Ukraine) I. Zissels: “The Development of the communal process in the Ukraine”, *Jews of Eurasia*, 1 (2002), p.25-30.

autonomy.

A legislative basis for Jewish autonomy has also appeared. On the 17<sup>th</sup> June, 1996, President Boris Yeltsin signed a law “on national-cultural autonomy”<sup>22</sup>. According to this law, national-cultural autonomy “has the right to receive support from the organs of state power and organs of local government, essential for the preservation of national distinctiveness, the development of the *national (native) language and national culture.*” The rights to autonomy include the setting up of cultural societies, publishing newspapers and other media in the native language, the possibility of maintaining contact with citizens and organizations of other countries. The law bestows the right to develop and preserve the native language, to receive education in the native language, the right to possess property, premises, houses.

In federal and local budgets, items should be included for the support of national-cultural autonomy. In fact, in several cities and regions in Russia, Jewish organizations have combined and registered as national cultural autonomous entities. As a result, they received some support from the authorities, for example, local organs of power could help with the repairs to the synagogue, or give premises for a Jewish school or kindergarten. In the media, on television, there were letters and broadcasts about local Jewish organizations.

On the whole, the economic effect was not great, but I consider that the law had some influence on public morale, and on the acceptance of the Jews' rights to their own organizations. Nothing further has happened in respect of Jewish cultural autonomy in the Russian Federation. In the other countries of the CIS, there is no legislation about national-cultural autonomy, but in practice it also exists there, even if not backed up by law.

There is no direct state interference in the curriculum of Jewish schools, or in the content of Jewish newspapers, or Jewish cultural life, at least in Russia and the Ukraine, and if there is, it is not more than in the comparable activity of non-Jewish institutions. The question of the CIS Jewish organizations' independence of the Jewish organizations of other countries is more complicated. Dependence here appears in the first place at the financial level.

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<sup>22</sup> Federal law of 17<sup>th</sup> June, 1996, No. 74-F3 “On national-cultural autonomy”. Passed by the State Duma on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1996. Approved by the Soviet of the Federation on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1996.



The main foreign sponsors of Jewish activity in the CIS are:

the American Joint (the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee);

The State of Israel, through “NATIV” (the Israel Cultural Fund) and the Ministry of Education;

The Jewish Agency (Sokhnut);

The Lubavich Hassidic movement Habad (through its funds, especially “Or Avner” of Lev Livaev).

In order to understand the scale and significance of this help, I shall cite two examples:

The Joint's Budget in the CIS in 2002 consisted of \$20,260,000. A further \$273,000 was allocated to the Baltic States. In addition, the Joint distributes aid provided by other organizations, for example, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, in the sum of \$41,212,000 in the CIS and \$704,000 in the Baltic States<sup>23</sup>.

The budget for 2002, in the former USSR, just for the Educational Department of the Sokhnut, was \$15,078,000<sup>24</sup>.

We have no data on the participation of Israel in the support of Jewish life in the CIS, but, in any case, this support plays a decisive part in the organization of education in Jewish schools.

At the same time, the budget of the Central Russian Jewish Congress (REK) for 1999 was \$2,600,000<sup>25</sup>; in 2,000 – considerably less. Before that, in 1998, under Gusinsky, the REK budgets were substantial (8 million - Central REK, 2 – regional)<sup>26</sup>.

The FEOR budget in 2001 was \$10,000,000. Half of this money is collected abroad.

The KEROOR budget was only \$1,000,000<sup>27</sup>.

The annual budget of VKRE consisted of about \$3,000,000.

Jewish education and social services in the countries of the CIS are realized almost entirely on the means provided by external organizations. In the words of the chairman of the Ukraine VAAD, I. Zissels, “Foreign participation in the financing of “Jewish life”

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23 *Jewish Responsibility: The Global Strategy of the JDC. A Report of the National Agencies Committee*, The AJJDC, August, 2002, p.11, 16.

24 *Hamakhlakah lehinukh yehudi tsioni, hadesq lehinukh be'ever medinot 'atsmai'ot, Hever Hane'emanim*, 5762, Jerusalem.

25 Z. Gitelman, “Former Soviet Union”, *American Jewish Year Book*, 2000, p. 402. According to Charny's data, the budget of RJC in 2000 was \$25,000,000, and in 2001, \$3,500,000. (Charny, p. 21). In my view, this is a mistake of some sort.

26 *Russian Jewish Congress*, Annual Report 1998.

27 Charny, p.21.

in the Ukraine constitutes more than 90%<sup>28</sup>.

Thus, the lion's share of Jewish activity in the CIS is funded by money coming from abroad<sup>29</sup>. That, without doubt, leaves a lot of scope for the influence of sponsors on the character of that activity, also on the staff of Jewish organizations. It also casts doubt on the ability of Jewish autonomy to survive in the CIS if the foreign aid is sharply cut back or is cut off altogether as a result of a reduction in collections amongst American Jewry or as a result of a change of policy by the CIS government.

*How can one measure the success of Jewish culture, and of the activities of Jewish organizations, that of Jewish autonomy?*

In our view, the measure of that success is not the growth in the number of Jewish organizations and their budgets, but two main elements:

1. the degree to which the everyday material requirements and the spiritual needs of the Jewish population are satisfied.
2. The continued existence of the Jewish people.

As far as the first criterion goes, the existing network of Jewish institutions (social assistance, communal and cultural) satisfies a large part of the essential needs of the Jewish population. The services provided by these institutions are widely used by Jews, especially older people, and especially in small and medium-sized towns. This is evidenced, for example, by recent research on Moldova<sup>30</sup>. According to this, more than two thirds of the families, asked by researchers, used the social assistance and medical services of Jewish organizations. The percentage of participants in any cultural or religious arrangements was also rather high (44%), while that of those using educational programmes was found to be lower (18%)<sup>31</sup>, evidently for demographic reasons (see below). As a result, the life of the Jewish population is easier and grows longer, and its national consciousness is growing. As for “the continued existence of the Jewish people”, here we are looking at a more complicated picture.

For the ten years of the existence of Jewish autonomy, the size of “the native Jewish

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28 Zissels, p. 29.

29 On a voluntary basis, that is, unpaid, apparently, little is done. This winter I spoke to activists of “Hillel” near Moscow about an underground seminar on Jewish history, which took place in Leningrad in the 1980's. The activists asked me, whether the participants of the seminar were paid to take part in it.

30 M. Kozarim, E. Katz, V. Bruter, *Survey of the Jewish Population in Moldova*, JDC-Brookdale Institute, Jerusalem, 2002.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 17, 23.

population” of the former Soviet Union, that is, those whose answer to the question about nationality in the census was consistently: “Jewish”, diminished from almost one and a half million to 544 thousand, and constituted 37% of the level of 1989. According to M. Tolts' data, “the native Jewish population in 1999 was defined in the following manner:

Russia – 310,000 (54% of the 1989 level); or 60% of all the Jews of the former USSR.

Ukraine – 145,000 (30% of the 1989 level);

Belarus – 28,000 (25%);

Baltic States – 18,000 (45%);

Moldova – 7,000 (11%);

Central Asia – 20,000 (14%)<sup>32</sup>.

If we include in this figure non-Jewish members of "native Jewish" families, then these figures can be multiplied by 1.9 for 1999, which makes 1,030,000 persons<sup>33</sup>. Recent population censuses revealed, in the Ukraine, 103 thousand Jews, and in Byelorussia, 28 thousand.

The reasons for the sharp fall in numbers lies in the low fertility of Jewish mothers, high mortality, the high percentage of mixed marriages, and continual mass emigration.

Thus, in the Ukraine, the percentage of men entering into mixed marriages between 1988 and 1996 rose 54.1% to 81.6%, and women – from 44.7% to 73.7%. In Latvia, the situation is even worse (86% and 83% for 1996).

The number of children born falls consistently; the birthrate is much lower than mortality. In the Russian Federation, in the year 2,000, 613 children were born to Jewish mothers (included in this figure 169, whose fathers were also Jews), while 8,218 Jews died<sup>34</sup>. The decrease in the number of children, whose mothers were registered on birth certificates as Jews, was influenced by the introduction in 1999 of a new system of

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32M. Tolts, “Jewish Demography of the Former Soviet Union,” *Papers in Jewish Demography, 1997*, Jerusalem, 2001, pp. 109-139. (110, 112)

33 According to the estimate of the Sokhnut, the Jewish population of the CIS consisted (evidently, at the beginning of 2002) of 864,000 people, including: Russia – 524,000; Ukraine – 204,000; Belarus – 46,000; Baltic States – 30,000; Central Asia and Caucasus – 49,000; Moldova – 11,000. *Hamaḥlakah leḥinukh yehudi tsioni, hadesq leḥinukh beḥever medinot 'atsmaiot, hasokhnut hayehudit le'erets yisra'el, ḥever hane'emanim*, 5762, Jerusalem.

According to the estimate of the Joint, the Jewish population of the Former USSR (together with the Baltic States), at the beginning of 2002, was 1,319,000 persons. (*Jewish Responsibility: The Global Strategy of the JDC. A Report of the National Agencies Committee*, The AJJDC, August, 2002, p.116, 16). In general censuses, it is not stated who falls under the definition “Jew”.

34M. Tolts, “Aliya from the Russian Federation: An Analysis of Recent Data,” *Jews in Eastern Europe*, 1-2 (47-48), 2002, pp. 17.

registration, whereby it is not obligatory to register the nationality of the parents<sup>35</sup>. If emigration (put in figures) can be regarded not only as a result of the economic crisis, but as a result of the activity of Jewish organizations in strengthening Jewish national consciousness, the increase in the percentage of mixed marriages and the unwillingness of parents to register children as Jews would indicate that we are not seeing a reinforcement of the Jewish consciousness of those who remain. Those whose consciousness has become stronger do really tend to emigrate. Thus, out of 244 Jewish leaders, who studied on the Buncher programme, at least 25 emigrated to Israel, and 29 others to other countries of the West<sup>36</sup>.

We do not have available data about conversions in the CIS, but this, evidently, is not such as to have a substantial influence on demographic indicators. For historical reasons, the overwhelming majority of the Jews of the CIS are not religious; anyhow, they don't follow an orthodox way of life.

Thus, if we are to judge by the changes in the numbers of Jews in the CIS, Jewish activity, however intensive it is, does not guarantee that there will be significant Jewish communities in these countries in the next generation. "To blame" for this are the bad demographic indicators and the difficulty of life in the CIS. Consequently, the effect of Jewish activity is limited. Moreover, it is hard to say, what the statistics would be, if there were no Jewish organizations in the CIS.

On the other hand, Dubnow never considered the survival (well-being) of some kind of community essential. He saw the Jewish people as a single whole and wrote about the alternation of Jewish "centres". He wrote a lot about the regulation of emigration. He saw in that (in the choice of direction of emigration and the creation of new Jewish centres) an important task for a democratic community. In that sense one might affirm, that Jewish autonomy in the CIS is effective, inasmuch as it revives "dry bones" and increases the number of Jewish people, if not in the CIS, then in other countries of the world. Considering the fickleness of the world and the problems of the State of Israel, one cannot rule out the possibility that the pendulum may swing in the other direction. Then, the infrastructure of Jewish organizations, created in the CIS, may yet prove useful.

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35 Ibid.

36 *The Buncher: Community Leadership Program, Alumni Directory, 1989-2002*. Even these figures, as far as one can see, are out of date, and the number of emigrants higher.

## CONCLUSION

The fact that now, when one hundred years have passed and after all the trials Jewry has undergone, we can still ask a question about whether the theory of 'autonomism' could be put into practice, bears witness to the fact, that Dubnow was a really exceptional thinker. The Jews of the CIS have achieved very substantial success in building community structures, systems of social assistance, of Jewish education and culture. This was not the national-political autonomy in the diaspora that Dubnow dreamed of, but at least a substantial degree of autonomy of Jewish culture and community life, independent of the state. It is especially just in regard to the Russian Federation (where there is even a legislative basis for cultural autonomy and the Ukraine. The achievements of the Jews of the CIS are striking against the background of the complete lack of national rights, in which they found themselves fifteen years ago.

However, autonomy in relation to the state does not mean the independence of Jewish life. Today, as never before, the achievements of post-Soviet Jewry depend on the aid of international Jewish organizations and Israel. The result of that aid is the influence of world Jewry on Jewish life in the CIS and the uncertain situation of Jewish organizations tomorrow.

One might consider the main aims of national autonomy to be the satisfaction of the everyday needs of the Jewish community on a social and cultural plane, and also ensuring the continued existence of the Jewish people. Therefore, one should assess the degree of its effectiveness not by the number of Jewish organizations or periodical publications, not by the number of "Jewish measures" taken, but by the degree of satisfaction of everyday needs and by the growth in number of those who consider themselves to be Jews. If one analyses this problem within the borders of the CIS, then the success of Jewish autonomy is only partial, on account of the extremely unfavourable demographic indicators and the incessant emigration of the Jews. If one follows Dubnow's concept of the unity of the Jewish people and the alternation of national "centres", if one directs one's gaze abroad, towards Israel, the United States or Germany, where the Jewish communities are substantially supplemented on the basis of emigration from the CIS, then the general picture presents itself in a more optimistic light.

True, if one looks at the Jewish community of the CIS in isolation, then Jewish autonomy

there is not effective, and Jewry is doomed to disappear. But on the global scale, its role is extremely important.