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CER to handle all European conversions

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In a move that could affect thousands of European converts, Israel's Chief Rabbinate has agreed to stop sending Israeli rabbonim to perform conversions in Europe.

Instead, the Chief Rabbinate will recognize the Conference of European Rabbis as the sole authority over Jewish conversion in Europe.

In return, European Orthodox rabbis will not recognize conversions performed each year in Israel in private courts that the Chief Rabbinate does not recognize.

Israel sees about 4,000 conversions annually that are recognized by the Chief Rabbinate, according to a report on conversions in the Jewish state commissioned last year by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The agreement between the European group and the Chief Rabbinate follows a period

of uncertainty regarding the Chief Rabbinate's recognition of conversions performed abroad, said the CER president, Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt. In recent years, institutions of the Chief Rabbinate have not recognized some Orthodox conversions performed abroad by prominent Orthodox rabbonim.

Under the new agreement, "Israeli rabbis will no longer set up a rabbinical court for conversions in a European country, independently to that community's existing Jewish community," Rabbi Goldschmidt said.

Rabbi Goldschmidt argued that the deal means that the "Rabbinate's influence in Europe will diminish". He also said that "few converts will be affected" by the agreement, which he said is not designed to change reality on the ground but to "formalize jurisdictions".

Rabbi Goldschmidt added: "This arrangement will ensure that standards of

conversions are maintained across Europe and in Israel. Our position has always been that we only accept Israeli conversions made by the Chief Rabbinate. However, it is incredibly significant the Israeli Chief Rabbinate will only send its Rabbis to Europe if we consent, allowing European communities to lead on their own conversions. This shows the Chief Rabbinate's understanding of European communities and the standing of our Rabbis in Israel.

"Conversions have always been an important issue and we need global standards to ensure that those who have already converted are able to travel freely throughout the Jewish world. This is an important step towards that goal and we are proud that as a result of this decision, we are closer to a stronger and more united global Jewish community."



Rabbi Goldschmidt: move will formalise jurisdictions PHOTO FLASH 90

