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BY JC REPORTER

► ISRAEL'S CHIEF Rabbinate has struck a deal with a body of European rabbis to recognise each other's conversions – a move that could affect thousands of Jewish converts across the Continent.

Under the agreement, the Conference of European Rabbis (CER), an Orthodox umbrella body, will become the sole authority recognised in Israel for Jewish conversion in Europe.

In return, the European rabbis will not recognise private conversions within Israel.

Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, the CER's president, welcomed the agreement: "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."

The CER said it had always accepted Israeli conversions but that it was "incredibly significant" that the Chief Rabbinate would only send its rabbis to Europe with the CER's consent because it allowed European communities to control their own conversions. The arrangement will also allow European Orthodox converts to enjoy

European and Israeli rabbis agree new conversion rules



PHOTO: MICHAEL WUERTEBERG

CER President Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt welcomed the agreement

the same rights as Jewish converts in Israel, including having a religious marriage.

But non-Orthodox denominations remain excluded, leaving many converts in a state of uncertainty, according to Rabbi Chaim Weiner, the director of the European Masorti Beth Din.

"While I am pleased to see the mutual recognition of conversions between the Orthodox rabbis in Europe and Israel," he told the *JC*, "this deal still leaves many converts to Judaism liv-

ing in limbo with conversions recognised by some and not others.

"We need mutual recognition of all conversions that meet the basic halachic requirements – and a Jewish state whose religious authorities recognise all streams of Judaism."

Israel does have Reform and Masorti conversion authorities, but a report ordered by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu found these programmes "rarely seek to have their conversion recognised by the [Chief] Rabbinate".

