

Brussels call for lower kosher tax

Asher Gold
BRUSSELS

PROPOSALS to reduce the tax that is levied on meat products received a favourable response this week at a high level rabbinical conference on kashrus issues in Brussels. Delegates at the three day meeting of the Rabbinical Council of Europe (RCE) were in broad agreement that the tax which supports the rabbinate, mikvoos and other communal facilities should be reduced to facilitate increased consumption of kosher food. They also urged greater cooperation between the different kashrus organisations, such as using the same abattoir, for example.

Over one hundred rabbis and representatives of the world's most prominent kashrus authorities heard that while the supermarket Tesco sells a whole chicken for £2, its kosher counterpart of similar weight costs five to six times more. This situation, delegated were told, obtains throughout Europe, although the continent may be divided into two categories: those countries where it is not possible to obtain any kosher meat whatsoever and those where the price of kosher meat is prohibitively high.

"The current price of kosher food in Europe deters tens of thousands of Jews from buying kosher food," said Rabbi Aryeh Goldberg, deputy director of the RCE. "Their failure to eat kosher erodes their Jewish identity and encourages their assimilation into non-Jewish society."

A special panel consisting of representatives of the Manchester Beis Din, the Federation of Synagogues in London and others, examined the causes for inflated prices. It was agreed that there are factors that affect the prices of kosher food in Europe that do not apply in other countries. For example, in many European communities there is a special tax imposed on the purchase of meat to help support the community's educational institutions. The panel decided they would lobby to cut these taxes.

The rabbis explained that high kosher food prices often put them at a disadvantage when they attempt to present Torah Judaism in a positive light. Many members of Orthodox communities in Europe are not Torah-observant in their personal lives. When a rabbi attempts to persuade an individual to begin purchasing the kosher meat made available by his kashrus organisation, he is often met with the question, "Why should I pay five times as much for meat which is the same as in a supermarket?"

Another kashrus issue raised was the problem of parasite infestation in fish. There was a fiery debate between Rabbi S.Z. Revach, head of the Institute



L to R: Rabbi Weisberger, Dayan Lieberman, Rabbi Cohen and Dayan Elzas.

PHOTO MEIR DAHAN

for the Mitzvos Pertaining to Eretz Yisroel, and Rabbi Dov Landau of Badatz Chug Chasam Sofer. Both rabbis were visiting from Israel. Over the past several years Rabbi Revach has waged a campaign to make the public aware of the existence of these parasites and of the need to examine every fish before consuming it. Rabbi Landau, on the other hand, argued firmly that according to the *Shulchan Aruch* it is permissible to eat these particular parasites and there is no need for such a campaign.

One of the guests at the conference, Rabbi Chaim Lasry, represented the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. He is responsible for the approval of products imported from Europe. Rabbi David Werner, rabbi of Chadera and chairman of the Conference of Shechitah Organizations in Israel, was the guest of honour.

Interfaith charity warning

Gila Fisch
JERUSALEM

RAV Tuvia Weiss and Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv have renewed their ban on mosdos receiving funding from the Christian-backed IFCJ (International Fellowship of Christians and Jews). A previous ban on the organisation headed by Yechiel Eckstein was issued by the *Edah Charedis* some eight years ago. As highlighted by the *Jewish Tribune* in a series focusing on the charity over the last two weeks, the IFCJ fund many charitable activities in Israel and the Former Soviet Union (FSU). Just recently, two Charedi educational networks usually supported by Lev Leviev and the Reichmann family have accepted IFCJ funds during the financial crisis. According to the *Jewish Tribune* and a previous exposé in America's *Jewish Observer*, Rav Elyashiv had verbally castigated this funding more than once but would not put this in writing despite an

appeal from *Lev Achim*.

In Rabbi Elyashiv's written endorsement, he reportedly added, "We regret to say that we have learned that several institutions, organizations and charity groups have made mistakes of this nature but taking money from this fund remains an "unclean act." Rav Shmuel Auerbach and Rav Nissim Karelitz have likewise joined the list of prominent Rabbonim who have forbidden this funding.

Stung by the public criticism, Mr Eckstein reacted by threatening to list all Charedi organisations who accept his huge funds. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, he will "in the interests of transparency" also include soup kitchens in Bnei Brak, social outreach in the Gallil, and homeless children in Odessa - all run by strictly Charedi personalities and organisations. However, another group has promised to proudly list all those who have selflessly refused IFCJ's funding in the past.

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