

RESEARCH REPORT

Institute of Jewish Affairs IJA
sponsored jointly by the
Anti-Defamation League and
the World Jewish Congress
11 Hertford Street, London W1Y 7DX
TEL 01-491 3517 FAX 01-493 5838
823 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017
TEL 212-490 2525 FAX 212-867 0779

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Central and East European Jewry: the Impact of Liberalization and Revolution

SUMMARY: The Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe have been deeply affected by the collapse of Communism. Jewish life, even in very small centres of population, is being transformed.

For most, a stagnant stability prevailed, with religious and cultural life rigorously curtailed and controlled by the authorities. Even in countries where some degree of freedom was granted to the Jewish community, the regime's motives were often dubious and their policies two-faced. But political liberalization in the wider society has led to the more open expression of Jewishness in most of the Jewish communities.

The patterns of development in the seven countries covered by the writers of this *Research Report* are remarkably similar albeit varying in intensity: a revival of Jewish cultural life; people who had denied their Jewish origins now identifying themselves as Jews; young people discovering their Jewish identity; the ousting of Jewish communal leaders who had been closely identified with the Communist authorities; an increasing desire to participate in European and international Jewish activities.

Of special importance to the strengthening of Jewish identity in the communities is the re-establishment of diplomatic ties between the new governments and Israel. Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia have restored full diplomatic relations, Bulgaria is about to do so, East Germany wants to but this now depends on the pace of reunification, and Yugoslavia is currently holding back because of internal ethnic tensions.

The new freedom brings with it the licence to indulge in antisemitic propaganda. Apart from Bulgaria, antisemitism has been a political factor in each country. Emerging nationalist groups have made antisemitic statements—even some mainstream political groups have used antisemitic innuendo. Despite such worrying trends, the encouraging possibilities now open to these Jewish communities, many of whom are revising upwards their population estimates, are a wholly welcome consequence of revolution and liberalization.

Antony Lerman, Editor

CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN JEWRY: THE IMPACT OF LIBERALIZATION AND REVOLUTION

HUNGARY

Jewish population: 80,000-100,000 (Ashkenazi)—first settlement: Roman times—highest population: 725,000 in 1943—600,000 died in Holocaust—central body: Central Board of Hungarian Jews (affiliated to WJC)—26 synagogues—13 rabbis—1 school—rabbinical seminary—museum, library and central archives—press: *Uj Elet* published fortnightly, *SZOMBAT* monthly—hospital, nursing home, orphanage, 3 homes for the aged—important Jewish historical sites

Hungary has the largest Jewish population of all East European countries (except the Soviet Union)—80,000 to 100,000 according to conventional estimates. Consequently, Jewish life went on even in the darkest period of the Communist regime. In February 1950 the Hungarian authorities centralized all Jewish activity in the local *kehilot*, which were combined in one central, national body. Concessions were only made for the orthodox who were allowed to form a special 'section' within the centralized communal structure, in which the majority was Neolog (roughly corresponding to the Conservative trend in American Judaism). But although all cultural organizations also became part of the centralized structure, the *kehilot*, for a long time, restricted themselves to strictly religious activities, which they carried out with considerable freedom and even financial help from the government.

Treating Jewry exclusively as a religious community corresponded to how Hungarian Jews saw themselves, as opposed to Jews in neighbouring countries who, between the two world wars, were organized as national minorities as well as religious communities. It also fitted in well with the Communist approach which regarded anything Jewish beyond the realm of religious Judaism as 'national' which, in the context of the politics of the time, would mean 'Zionist'.

The relaxation of Communist rule did not start in Hungary in the years 1988-89. It was a very gradual process, beginning under Janos Kadar in the mid-1960s, and growing in strength as the years went by. From the Jewish point of view, an important date was 1975, when a courageous non-Jewish writer¹ broke the taboo on the Holocaust imposed by the Rákosi regime and wrote a stirring article, later expanded into a book, about the Hungarian nation's responsibility for the extermination of 600,000 Hungarian Jews. This led to a growing debate in the media, gradually encompassing the whole complex of the 'Jewish question', including the problems of assimilation and antisemitism. Another important date was 1984, the 40th anniversary of the

¹ György Száraz, 'Egy előtétel nyomában' (In the footsteps of a prejudice), *Valóság*, August 1975; published as a book by Magvető Publishers, Budapest 1976.

deportations from Hungary, which intensified the debate and led to the publication of a number of important Jewish books on the subject.²

Relations with world Jewry

As state control was further relaxed, the community also felt freer to extend its activities beyond the strictly religious, notably by beginning some cultural activity and even establishing contacts with Israel.

World Jewry's awakening interest in the Hungarian community also played a pivotal role in this development. The Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, which for some years had supported Jewish publication and research activities, established a centre of Judaic Studies at one of the Budapest universities. However, the most decisive event in the development of relations with world Jewry was the holding of the World Jewish Congress Executive Meeting in Budapest in 1987. The meeting was also a turning-point in relations between world Jewry and the Hungarian authorities.

The WJC meeting was followed by meetings in Budapest of the Memorial Foundation, ORT, and by numerous delegations from other Jewish organizations in the West. A big exhibition on the history of Hungarian Jewry by the Tel Aviv Beth Hatefutzot (Museum of the Diaspora) was also staged in Budapest. The popularity of Hungary as an ideal holiday destination for Israelis, further helped Hungarian Jews to rediscover the living reality of world Jewry. Consequently, official relations with Israel improved, leading to a greater Israeli presence in Hungary, albeit not on a high diplomatic level.

The revival of Hungarian Jewish life

This process came to fruition towards the end of 1988, well before the development of the revolutionary movement towards pluralistic democracy. A new generation of Jews—not all young, but almost all seen as a post-Holocaust generation—had come to understand the negative impact of the failed 'Communist assimilation' (which followed an equally negative attempt to assimilate to the Magyars' nationally) and also absorbed the positive impact of contemporary Jewish reality. This generation established a new Jewish identity: entirely secular, Jewish only in the ethnic sense, but not to the point of complete separateness; they now declare themselves people of 'dual roots' and 'dual ties'—Jewish and Magyar—and try to immerse themselves in Jewish culture to satisfy their sense of Jewishness.

In November 1988 a group of young intellectuals—writers, journalists, broadcasters, academics—set up a Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association, which generated a remarkably strong response. Some sixteen groups are in operation, representing a wide variety of interests. There is a folk dance group for youngsters, a senior citizens' circle (which includes a literary

² Most important was Hanák Péter (ed.), *Zsidókérdés, asszimiláció, antiszemítizmus* (The Jewish Question, Assimilation, Antisemitism) (Budapest 1984).

section), a Chagall circle on art, a Buber Circle for religious and philosophical studies, a Ben Yehuda Circle which runs Hebrew classes, a Yad Vashem Group on the Holocaust, a Hanna Szenes Women's Group, an amateur drama ensemble, a Kadimah Scout Club and a Maccabi Sports Club. There is also a group devoted to Jewish-Christian dialogue and a Herzl Circle (the beginning of a revival of the Zionist movement). In 1988, a Student Section was created which affiliated itself to the World Union of Jewish Students. After a year the section launched a monthly journal, *SZOMBAT* (Saturday), which is well produced and of high quality. However, they keep apart from the official community, not only because of their secularism but also because they regard the community's leadership as tainted with collaboration with the Communist authorities.

The activism of the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association jolted the official community out of its previous passive attitude towards non-religious cultural activity and it created a cultural centre of its own, which arranges concerts—both classical and liturgical—in the great Dohány Street synagogue, theatre and film performances, commemorative meetings and light entertainment evenings in the community's Goldmark Hall, as well as courses in Hebrew. The community is, of course, better-equipped with premises and financial support than the struggling Cultural Association but lacks the charisma, novelty and popularity of the latter's enthusiastic voluntarism.

Hebrew teaching is now particularly well-developed in Hungary. Learning the language has become a kind of positive symbol of Jewish identity. There are many courses and *ulpanim* in Budapest and three provincial cities, and Hebrew has become part of the curriculum of the Anne Frank Jewish High School. Much of the stimulus for Hebrew came from the presence of Israeli emissaries and teachers sent by the World Zionist Organisation (WZO).

The input from non-Hungarian Jewish organizations is of great importance. Both the World Jewish Congress and the Jewish Agency opened offices in Hungary and the Joint Distribution Committee also extended its activities from welfare work into the cultural field. Some 300 youngsters were invited by the World Zionist Organization to Israel in 1989 to summer camps and kibbutzim and another 200 single people and young families were invited to an aliya orientation programme. Four Israeli emissaries were sent to run the summer camp for Jewish youth in Hungary. Youth leaders and counsellors are taken to Israel for training and the eighteen-member executive of the Cultural Association was invited to Israel for a two-week seminar and orientation programme.

The most recent developments include the purchase of a site for a Jewish Youth Camp, to be run by the official community, which can provide holidays for 300 children. The community intends to re-establish a Jewish primary school in a former Jewish school building which has space for 840

pupils. Dissatisfied with the proposed religious character of this new school, the Cultural Association is working to set up its own secular Jewish school. Elections for the leadership of the community are due in June 1990 and it is already clear that many former leaders will be voted out. But an alternative leadership has not yet emerged.

The community and the state

It is of course true that during the years of Communist rule the Jewish community leadership had perforce to work with the government, or rather, according to the instructions of the government, which exercised tight control over all religious denominations through its Office for Church Affairs. This office was disbanded in May 1989 and replaced by a far less important Secretariat for Church Policies under the Council of Ministers. The head of this new Secretariat, and former Deputy Head of the Office for Church Affairs, Barna Sarkadi-Nagy, honestly admitted in a recent interview that 'the declarations about separation of State and Church simply did not conform to the facts', and that appointments of Church functionaries previously required the approval of the government, not to speak of the other restrictions and the curtailment of Church sovereignty.³ Whether the Jewish leaders were really 'serving the regime' or whether, in their inevitable encounters with the government, they did their best to get maximum concessions for maintaining Jewish communal life, only history can judge. Whatever their attitude, they carried on under difficult and sometimes dangerous circumstances (some community leaders were, after all, arrested under Rákosi). Without that, the flame of Judaism might have been completely extinguished.

The impact of Israel can be felt everywhere. The re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Hungary and Israel in the summer of 1989 was a tremendous boost for Jewish self-identification in Hungary. In December 1988—some nine months before diplomatic relations were restored—a Hungary-Israel Friendship Association was established with the help of sympathetic non-Jews, which arranged an impressive Yom Haatzmaut celebration in May 1989 and an even larger commemoration of the 45th anniversary of the execution of Hanna Szenes in November 1989. In both instances, leading government figures participated.

Antisemitism and the new Hungarian politics

The new freedom, which has enabled a Jewish revival to take place in Hungary, is not without its dark side. Popular antisemitism continued to exist during the years of the Communist regime, but since 1956, there has been no institutional antisemitism. As the atmosphere of reform developed, the

³ Ilona Benoschosky and Sándor Scheiber (ed.), *A budapest Zsidó Múzeum* (The Jewish Museum of Budapest), (Budapest 1987).

authorities began to assist Jewish cultural initiatives. For example, the Jewish Museum was renovated and a lavish volume displaying its treasures was published.⁴ Also published were an illustrated volume on the (mostly destroyed) synagogues in Hungary,⁵ facsimile editions of the rare collection of Judaica (the famous 'Kaufmann collection') belonging to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, including a beautifully illustrated *Megillat Esther*.

Nevertheless, popular antisemitism has now come disturbingly to the fore and, some claim, with great force. There are numerous stories of individual incidents which are difficult to assess. However, antisemitism is now clearly apparent in the political arena. Some of the new political parties declare themselves 'Christian', which in Hungary has traditionally meant the exclusion of Jews. Many of the parties are openly nationalist. In Hungarian history nationalism has been less a matter of confrontation with an external enemy abroad and more a question of identifying as the enemy the minority groups within the country. Some of the parties have adopted a populist stance. In the past this approach created open conflicts with the so called 'urbanists', the intellectuals and bourgeoisie of the cities, who in Hungary happened to be overwhelmingly Jewish.

The revival of some of these old notions of the 1920s and 1930s frightens Hungarian Jews. The situation is aggravated by the fact that one of the new and more successful political parties, the Free Democratic Alliance (SzDSz), which emerged from former dissident groups, has to a large extent a Jewish leadership. In the electoral battles leading up to the elections of 25 March, this fact led some of their rivals to attack them as 'aliens', 'rootless cosmopolitans', and pointedly appealed instead for the support of the wishes of the 'true Magyars'.

A reassuring feature is that when the Communist parliament, in consultation with the then extra-parliamentary opposition over reform legislation, agreed to amend the Penal Code and exclude from it all political crimes, they kept one: incitement to racial or religious hatred.

The most recent development is the parliament's adoption of a law allocating parliamentary representation to eight 'national minorities'—including the Jews. As mentioned above, Hungarian Jewry never claimed the status of a national or ethnic minority, and the community is now very divided on whether to avail itself of the offer of this new status.

What happens in the future will partly depend on the outcome of the elections, and on other developments in the rest of Eastern Europe and on Hungary's relations with the West. Meanwhile, Jewish life revives and antisemitism reappears—and there is undoubtedly a connection between the two.

Stephen J. Roth

⁴ *Magyarországi zsinagogák* (Synagogues of Hungary) (Budapest 1989).

⁵ *Népszabadság*, 5 September 1989.

ROMANIA

Jewish population: 23,000 (mostly Ashkenazi)—first settlement: 4th century—highest population: 800,000 in 1939—385,000 died in Holocaust—central body: Federation of Jewish Communities (affiliated to WJC)—84 synagogues—talmud torah classes for 500—press: *Revista Cultului Mozaic* published fortnightly in four languages—convalescent homes, six homes for the aged—historical sites in Dorohoi and Jassy

Under Nicolae Ceausescu, Romanian official policy towards the Jewish community was two-faced. On the one hand, Romania was the one Soviet bloc country not to have broken off relations with Israel in 1967 and Romania's Jews enjoyed a degree of autonomy unknown in other Communist countries. On the other hand, antisemitic writing of a sometimes virulent nature was tolerated by the authorities. What effect the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime will have on the Jewish community is yet to be determined. One fear is that there will be resentment of the relatively better treatment meted out to the Jews during the Ceausescu dictatorship. Another is that extreme right politicians, emerging from years of silence or returning from exile, will whip up antisemitism.

The Jewish community under Ceausescu

Any account of the experience of Jews in Ceausescu's Romania or, indeed, in post-war Romania is dominated by the person of Rabbi Moses Rosen, who has been Chief Rabbi since 1948. During his term of office Romanian Jews have enjoyed better conditions than Jews in other East European countries and other ethnic minorities in Romania. There are forty-one active synagogues and Hebrew lessons are easily available. There are Jewish choirs, ten kosher restaurants and Jewish old-age homes. Furthermore, Jewish emigration proceeded apace from Romania at a time when it was practically impossible for a Jew to leave the Soviet Union. Over the past forty years, 400,000 Jews have gone on aliya. The estimated 23,000 who are left are mostly old people: it is estimated that 60% are above 65 years of age.

These benefits have not come free, however. On the most basic level, it is claimed that Israel paid Ceausescu dollars (estimates vary between \$1,000 and \$3,000 and according to one report, 'well-qualified' Jews could fetch up to \$25,000)¹ for those Jews allowed to emigrate, and even then, the process often took up to a few years. More complex is the role of Rabbi Rosen. Now that Ceausescu has been overthrown Rabbi Rosen is being accused by certain Jews in the West and in the Israeli press of having compromised himself by

¹ See Glen Frankel, "'Saving Jews': Ceausescu's high price', *International Herald Tribune*, 22 February 1990.

remaining silent about human rights abuses in Romania, a silence which greatly helped Romania acquire the economically advantageous most favoured nation (MFN) status with the United States.

Rabbi Rosen consistently rebuffs these charges. In interviews with Western journalists and in a lengthy article in the Romanian Jewish community's paper *Revista Cultului Mozaic* (no. 685, 1 February 1990), he defends his own efforts to obtain MFN status for Romania as his 'duty . . . both for my Jewish brothers and for the Romanian people'. He also contends—citing detailed evidence—that he repeatedly lodged complaints with Ceausescu when the latter wanted to tear down Bucharest's synagogues and when antisemitism surfaced in official publications. Finally, he argues that most of the concessions made to the Jewish community were made before Ceausescu assumed absolute power. The fact is, however, that in a totalitarian state, any of these rights accorded the Jews could easily have been taken away. In his article, Rabbi Rosen says 'Ceausescu was an antisemite'. And antisemitism did not disappear from Ceausescu's Romania. On the contrary, virulently antisemitic poems appeared on several occasions during the 1980s.² The poems' authors were often well-known celebrants of the Ceausescu personality cult. The poems that were in book form were withdrawn from bookstores after several interventions by Rabbi Rosen, an expression of concern from the US State Department and a visit to Bucharest by the B'nai B'rith president, Jack Spitzer. But Ceausescu never made a public disavowal of the antisemitic attacks and never gave the Jewish community permission to publish their own rebuttal of the accusations made in the poems. According to some Romanian Jews,³ Ceausescu made concessions to the Jewish community in order to marginalize them. Whatever his ultimate intentions, Ceausescu benefited from being seen to grant autonomy to Romania's Jews and from being the only Soviet bloc country not to sever relations with Israel in 1967. Not only did Romania acquire MFN status from the US, it also received millions of dollars worth of credits, some guaranteed by Israel. More recently, when disastrous economic policies and Ceausescu's determination to repay foreign debt created famine conditions, Israel sent food and transport aid.

After Ceausescu

While the momentous changes in the rest of Eastern Europe happened relatively peacefully, it took a bloody revolution to end the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu. Only one Jew, according to reports, was killed in the fighting—by a stray bullet. Rabbi Rosen has pledged his support for the government of the National Salvation Front. The political situation, however, remains extremely unstable and potentially still violent. The question is, will

² See Vladimir Socor, 'Antisemitism in official Romanian publication recurs', Radio Free Europe, Romanian SR, 14 June 1984.

³ See 'Roumanie: les libertes en suspens', *L'Arche*, February 1990.

antisemitism become a political tool in the fight between the various forces now vying for power? So far, there are no hard facts to support an argument either way but Rabbi Rosen, for one, warns that a burst of nationalism might well be accompanied by antisemitism, especially because Jews are associated, in the public mind, with the Communist regime. The fact that the present Prime Minister, Petre Roman, is of Jewish descent is being pointed out in nasty graffiti on Bucharest walls and among some opposition politicians.⁴ George Galloway, a British Member of Parliament, cites Iftene Pop, the Vice-President of the National Peasants' Party (the leading opposition group), as saying that '[Jews] have made their contribution to our culture—but their influence is now out of proportion in an unhealthy way'.⁵ (The present Foreign Minister, Sergiu Celac, and the Front's former 'ideologist', Silviu Brucan, are also of Jewish descent.) More sinister is Mr Pop's comment, as reported by Mr Galloway, that the claim that 40,000 Romanian Jews were sent to perish in the Holocaust by the wartime fascist regime was 'an extraordinary lie'. At the same time there are reports in the Romanian press about the return from the West of former members of the wartime fascist Iron Guard. This might very well, however, be part of a campaign to turn people against the newly reconstituted parties like the National Peasant's Party in the run-up to the general elections.

Romania's President, Ion Iliescu, has assured officials from the American Joint Distribution Committee (or Joint) that the present National Salvation Front government will guarantee the wellbeing of the Jewish community.⁶ Nonetheless, the Jewish Agency is expecting, according to its chairman Simcha Dinitz, half of Romania's remaining Jews to come on aliya this year because of the unstable political situation.⁷ Although Iliescu has said that Jews are free to emigrate, or indeed, to go back and forth, this assumption is disputed by other observers of the Romanian situation on the grounds that most Romanian Jews are too old to leave. The Joint is, accordingly, focusing its \$4 million annual Romanian programme budget on aid to the elderly. The Joint will also be providing non-sectarian aid to Romania, principally to help in the fight against AIDS, which has affected hundreds of new-born babies.

Maria Balinska

4 See Peter Hillmore, 'Nasty writing on the wall for Jews', *Observer*, 11 February 1990.

5 See George Galloway, 'Fresh horrors haunt a troubled land', *Sunday Times*, 25 February 1990.

6 See Gil Sedan, 'Romanian Jews worry about future, despite assurance from government', Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin (JTA), 16 February 1990.

8 See 'Ceausescu fall spurs exodus', *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 January 1990.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Jewish population: 12,000 (Ashkenazi)—first settlement: 10th century—highest population: 357,000 in 1935—277,000 died in Holocaust—central bodies: Council of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic and Union of Jewish Communities in the Slovak Republic (observer in WJC)—13 synagogues—1 rabbi—press: *Vestník* published monthly—outside bodies provide welfare assistance—very important historical sites in Prague

The liberation of Czechoslovakia from Communist rule has given the country's small Jewish community¹ a new lease of life. It has been freed from the constraints the fallen regime imposed on all religious organizations and from the special limitations imposed on Jews, such as an informal ban on many forms of contact with Israel. Like the rest of the Czechoslovak population, Jews now enjoy complete freedom of travel for the first time since the Communist takeover in 1948. And for the first time since the suppression of the 'Prague Spring' of 1968, Jewish issues are being discussed freely and sympathetically in the mass media.

Since Czechoslovakia has only lived through two brief democratic interludes in the last fifty-two years (1945-48 and 1968-69), many of her people feel that they are emerging from a long totalitarian nightmare. The feeling was aptly expressed in a letter which the leadership of the Czech Jewish community sent from the Old-New Synagogue in Prague on the seventh day of Hanukah—29 December 1989—to Vaclav Havel to congratulate him on his election to the presidency of Czechoslovakia. The signatories said that those present in the synagogue had prayed for Mr Havel as the head of state, 'according to an ancient tradition'. They went on to say that 'the last time we could and wanted' to follow that tradition was after the election of 1935, when Edvard Benes, the last democratically elected candidate, gained the presidency.²

The remarkably swift overthrow of Communist rule in Czechoslovakia started with the brutal suppression of a student demonstration in Prague on 17 November and the resulting wave of public anger at the authorities. Daniel Mayer, the rabbi of the Czech lands, was among the first public figures to protest at the authorities' behaviour. In a letter to Prime Minister

1 The number of Jews registered with Jewish religious communities is usually given as 6,000, of whom about 1,000 live in Prague. There is, however, confusion as to whether the total figure refers to the whole of Czechoslovakia or the Czech lands only. See, for example, Michael Wise, 'Czech Jews dump hardline leaders', *Jerusalem Post*, 19 December 1989, and Jana Smidová, 'They used to be here . . . and they are here!', *Svobodné Slovo* (Prague), 17 February 1990.

2 The letter was published in the February issue of *Vestník*, the Czechoslovak Jewish monthly published in Prague. It was signed by Rabbi Daniel Mayer, Dr Desider Galský (chairman of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech Socialist Republic), Viktor Feuerlicht (chairman of the Prague Jewish community) and Dr Pavel Bergmann (who included a reference to his membership of the Co-ordinating Council of Civic Forum, the highest organ of the anti-Communist coalition).

Ladislav Adamec, dated 20 November, he said he had been shocked by the merciless and arrogant action of the security forces against peaceful demonstrators and appealed for dialogue as the only way to overcome social tensions.³ Faced with massive demonstrations which culminated in the two-hour general strike on 27 November, the Communist leadership, headed by Milos Jakes, stepped down and the Party dictatorship quickly crumbled.

Developments in the Jewish community

Events in the Czech Jewish community in the following weeks closely paralleled events elsewhere in society. In many political and social organizations and enterprises throughout the country, members and employees took matters into their own hands and replaced officials and managers tainted by their loyalty to the old regime with men and women who are trusted by their fellow-citizens. In the Czech Jewish community the main issue in this respect was the conduct of Bohumil Heller, the chairman of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech Socialist Republic (CJRC), and of Frantisek Kraus, the Council's secretary-general. Both had been criticized from within the community for some time.⁴

The presidium of the CJRC held an extraordinary meeting in Prague on 3 December, at which Mr Heller was removed from his post and Mr Kraus stepped down. As in the months preceding the revolution, younger Jews played an important role in the removal of the leadership. Dr Desider Galský was elected chairman. The latter had, in fact, already held the office between 1980 and 1985, when he was forced out because his close links with the West had made him suspect in the eyes of the authorities.⁵ No similar changes have been reported from the Union of Jewish Communities in Slovakia whose leadership has, however, wholeheartedly welcomed the changes in the country at large and drawn attention to the sorry state of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries.⁶

Dr Galský sees a great potential for extending both the reach of the community and its activities. In his estimate, the number of Jews in the country is three times higher than the number of registered community members. As in 1968, now that being Jewish no longer bears any kind of political stigma, some of the 'unregistered' Jews may come to participate in community activities again. According to Dr Galský, there are far more young people interested in Jewish religious and cultural activities than is commonly assumed. One new venue for such activities will be the 'Hakoach'

3 *Vestník*, December 1989.

4 See Joan Friedman, 'The last Jews of Czechoslovakia?', *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1989, and Michael Wise, 'Prague Jews blast leaders', *Jerusalem Post*, 23 May 1989.

5 *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts for Eastern Europe* (SWB, EE), 7 December 1989. Cf. Michael Wise, 'Czech Jews . . .', *Jerusalem Post*, 19 December 1989.

6 *Vestník*, January 1990.

association which started its work in January. It wants to educate its members and a wider audience in modern Jewish history, including Zionism, and, being primarily a youth organization, wants to take up the tradition of Jewish sports clubs as well. Another novel feature of community activities will be participation in the work of the newly-established Editorial Board of Religious Life at Czechoslovak Radio. The community also wants to establish a close relationship with the State Jewish Museum in Prague which is itself undergoing restructuring.⁷

Jews in the public arena

As in other East European countries, and possibly more so in the case of Czechoslovakia, the demise of the Communist regime and the emergence of a pluralist democratic system have brought into the forefront of public life a number of personalities who are of Jewish descent. It would be wrong, however, to speak of them as Jews. Due to the high degree of assimilation even in pre-war Czechoslovakia, there are many people in the country who are aware of their Jewish ancestry without, however, identifying with Jewishness in any positive way. Czechoslovakia's new ambassadors to the superpowers are as good an example as any. Both had spent part of their childhood as emigrés in the countries in which they are now accredited, after escaping from the Nazis with their families. The fathers of both were prominent Jewish Communists. Rudolf Slánský junior, the ambassador to the Soviet Union, is the son of Rudolf Slánský, the former general secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia who was executed after the most notorious of the antisemitic show-trials in Eastern Europe in 1952. A former party member and dissident economist, Rudolf Slánský junior has no known connection with the Jewish community from which his father was already alienated. The new ambassador to the United States, Mrs Rita Klímová, is the daughter of Stanislav Budín who was editor of the party daily *Rudé Právo* between 1934 and 1936. When asked about her background recently by a Czech journalist, she chose a negative definition of Jewishness by saying her family 'were Jews according to the Nuremberg laws'.⁸ There is, of course, a whole spectrum of identity varieties among publicly active people of Jewish descent, reaching from Ivan Klíma, one of the best Czech writers, whose sensitive novels and stories contain echoes of his childhood experience in the Theresienstadt ghetto, to Dr Valtr Komárek, the popular Deputy Prime Minister, whose only Jewish connection seems to be that the Gestapo considered him of Jewish origin and that he was saved from persecution by a brave Czech family who hid him until the end of the Nazi occupation.

7 Jana Smídová, *Svobodné Slovo: Jewish Chronicle* (London), 8 December 1989; *Vestník*, February 1990.

8 Ivana Hudcová, 'The ambassadress', *Kvety* (Prague), no. 5, 1 February 1990.

This is not to say that there are no Jews active in the larger social arena. At least two, Dr Leo Pavlát and Dr Pavel Bergmann, are members of the Civic Forum, the political umbrella organization which emerged during the November upheaval to challenge Communist rule. Both criticized the previous leadership of the Jewish community for their subservience to the authorities.⁹ A stronger Jewish presence in public life can also be perceived through the fact that many Jewish émigrés, such as the writer Arnost Lustig and the historian Erich Kulka, have been able to visit their homeland and have been the focus of media attention.

Relations with Israel

Jewish life in Czechoslovakia will naturally be strengthened by the rapid re-establishment of contacts and diplomatic relations with Israel. This has, indeed, been one of the priorities of Czechoslovakia's new foreign policy. President Havel even mentioned the issue in his New Year's Day address in which he said he 'would be happy if before the [first free] elections we succeeded in establishing diplomatic relations with Israel'.¹⁰ A quick exchange of visits ensued, with a delegation from the Czechoslovak foreign ministry going to Israel in mid-January and Israeli Deputy Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, visiting Prague between 21 and 23 January.¹¹ The Israeli Foreign Minister, Moshe Arens, who stayed in Prague between 8 and 10 February, was already able to sign an agreement about the full resumption of diplomatic relations.

On 28 February, a WJC delegation led by Edgar Bronfman visited Prague, and was received by President Havel, Prime Minister Marian Calfa and other Czechoslovak ministers and officials. (The WJC delegation had last been in Prague in November 1989, when they met with the soon-to-be-replaced Communist leadership.) At an official meeting with the Prime Minister, discussions took place on relations between Israel and Czechoslovakia and a broad extension of bilateral commercial, tourist and cultural exchanges between the two countries.

Of the five Warsaw Pact countries which had broken off their relations with Israel in 1967, Czechoslovakia was the second after Hungary to 'remedy this nonsense'.¹² President Havel has accepted an invitation to Israel and will probably travel there in late April. He has also suggested that Czechoslovakia could mediate between Israel and the PLO and has invited PLO Chairman,

9 A year ago, Pavlát was the first signatory of a letter criticizing conditions in the community. The text of the letter is included in the documents section of the forthcoming issue of *Soviet Jewish Affairs* vol. 19, no. 3, 1989.

10 An English translation of Havel's speech can be found in *Eastern European Reporter* (London), vol. 4, no. 1, winter 1989/90.

11 See Jiri Pehe, 'Diplomatic relations with Israel to be resumed', Radio Free Europe, *Report on Eastern Europe*, vol. 1, no. 5, 2 February 1990.

12 Thus Czechoslovakia's Foreign Minister, Jiri Dienstbier (Czechoslovak Radio, 9 February 1990).

Yasser Arafat, to Prague.¹³ Under President Havel's guidance, Czechoslovakia has undertaken to phase out its weapons exports, which will be a disappointment to some of her erstwhile Arab clients.

The sudden liberalization of foreign travel in Czechoslovakia and the thaw in relations between Prague and Jerusalem has enabled Rabbi Mayer and Dr Galský to visit Israel for the first time ever. Dr Galský attended the international conference of Jewish media in January, while Rabbi Mayer toured Israel in February as a member of an official party headed by Josef Hromádka, the Czechoslovak Deputy Prime Minister in charge of religious affairs. Hromádka's delegation was in Israel at the invitation of Zevulun Hammer, the religious affairs minister, to negotiate the expansion of cultural, educational and religious contacts between the two countries. In the meantime, a Friends of Israel Society was set up in Prague to promote bilateral relations. Its preparatory committee is headed by Rudolf Battek, a prominent non-Jewish Social Democrat.¹⁴

While there is no doubt that the overthrow of Communist rule in Czechoslovakia has had a positive effect on her Jewish population and on her relations to the Jewish state, the future may bring some negative trends as well. The abolition of censorship and other forms of central political control will probably bring forward some expressions of more or less veiled antisemitism from sources different from the official or semi-official ones which peddled their 'anti-Zionist' wares under the Communist regime. The danger seems to be more acute in Slovakia than in the the Czech lands. The Slovak press has already noted the appearance of anti-Jewish (and anti-Gypsy) graffiti in Bratislava. There has also been an attempt to justify the anti-Jewish policies of the semi-independent Slovak state during the Second World War, but it has to be noted that this provoked a number of authors to publish refutations.¹⁵

Peter Brod

13 The mediation offer was repeated at a press conference given by President Havel during his recent trip to the United States at the United Nations headquarters (RFE correspondent's report from New York, 22 February 1990).

14 Czechoslovak Radio, 29 January 1990, 12 February 1990; SWB, EE, 26 January 1990.

15 For a reference to the graffiti, see *Smena* (Bratislava), 13 February 1990. The controversy over the treatment of Jews by the Slovak state resulted from reports about a public appearance of Pavol Carnogurský, who had been a member of the Slovak parliament during the Second World War and is the father of Ján Carnogurský, a deputy prime minister in the current Czechoslovak government. For the reports and rejoinders from various authors, including the younger Carnogurský, see *Smena*, 28 December 1989, 6, 11 and 20 January; *Lud* (Bratislava), 12 January 1990.

POLAND

Jewish population: 6,000-12,000 (Ashkenazi)—first settlement: 9th century—highest population: 3.5 million in 1939—3 million died in Holocaust—central body: Coordination Commission of Jewish Organizations and Institutions (observer in WJC)—4 synagogues—Jewish Historical Institute, Yiddish State Theatre—press: *Folks-sztyme* published weekly—Central Board of the Cultural and Social Association of the Jews of Poland provides welfare aid—very important historical sites throughout the country

For Poland, 1989 was, by any measure, a political watershed, most succinctly summed up, perhaps, by the passing of the Polish People's Republic (PRL) and the rebirth of the Republic of Poland (RP). For the estimated 6,000 to 12,000 Jews of Poland, the year was not so much a turning-point as a continuation of the existing processes of Jewish-Polish dialogue and of official courting of world Jewish opinion. It was also a year, however, which saw outbursts of antisemitism both during the June election campaign and as a result of the controversy over the Carmelite convent in Auschwitz.

Jewish communal life

For the Jewish community,¹ one of the most symbolic events of 1989 was the arrival of Menahem Pinhas Joskowitz (Yoskovich) from Israel as Poland's first resident rabbi since 1968 when over 8,000 Jews left the country as a result of an official antisemitic campaign. This did not happen suddenly, however. Discussions had been going on for years between the religious organization of the Jewish community (Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego—Religious Association of the Mosaic Faith) and the Polish government who, initially, were opposed to allowing a non-Polish rabbi to take up a permanent post in Warsaw. In the mid-1980s this attitude changed. The delay of the past few years can be explained by the difficulties of finding a Polish-speaking rabbi willing to live in Poland and the money with which to pay his salary.

The then Communist authorities' receptiveness to Jewish concerns reflected growing popular interest in Poland's Jewish heritage but, more importantly, was the result of a deliberate policy to woo world Jewish opinion. The Jaruzelski régime, isolated in 1981 by its declaration of martial law, was anxious to cultivate a more positive image. By organizing solemn commemorations of the 40th and 45th anniversaries of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, to which Jewish leaders from all over the world were invited, the Polish government were appealing not only to Jewish but also to world, and particularly United States, opinion. Nor were they likely to have overlooked

¹ For a detailed account of Jewish community life in Poland in the 1980s see Lukasz Hirszowicz, 'Judaism in Poland', *Religion in Communist Lands*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1987.

the investment benefits that could stem from their efforts. (Some well-known Jews living in Poland—the most prominent of whom was Ghetto Uprising survivor Marek Edelman—denounced the official activities as a public relations stunt and mounted their own commemoration ceremony.)

The conciliatory attitude on the government's part was, however, of direct benefit to Poland's Jews. In addition to allowing a permanent rabbinical post, the government relaxed its restrictions on the activities of international Jewish organizations within Poland. In 1981 the American Joint Distribution Committee (the Joint) which had been expelled twice—in 1950 and again in 1968—was allowed to provide, once again, financial assistance to the Jewish community. And it is the New York-based Lauder Foundation which is financing the stay of Rabbi Joskowicz. The Lauder Foundation is also involved in assessing how best to preserve the buildings of the Auschwitz concentration camp and has agreed to fund the upkeep of the Jewish Museum's archives. The other foundation to have been active in Poland since the mid-1980s is the Nissenbaum Foundation whose primary concern is the preservation of Jewish monuments, chief among which are an estimated 800 cemeteries. In 1989 restoration work proceeded slowly, however, according to Jewish activists in Cracow and Warsaw—mostly because there is too little money.²

Another benefit of the Lauder Foundation's involvement in Poland has been the establishment of camps for young people of Jewish descent to initiate them in Judaism and Jewish culture. Young people have also taken their own initiative. Within the officially-recognized Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (TSKZ), a number of young people (whose ages range from fifteen to forty) set up, in 1989, their own 'youth groups'. Activities include Jewish song and dance lessons as well as lectures in religion and culture. Membership is small—sixty in Katowice and thirty in Warsaw—but their existence is, nonetheless, significant.³ Ironically, the advent of a Solidarity government has, temporarily at least, deprived the youth groups of a source of funding. Until now, the TSKZ was financed partly by the government. The new government's economic programme, designed to combat hyperinflation and decentralize the economy, has, among other things, slashed government subsidies to organizations like the TSKZ. What has changed for the better is that the TSKZ will be able to solicit its own funding now: the Communists only allowed donations from the Joint.

Another development of significance to the community is the American Jewish Congress's decision to establish a liaison office in Warsaw. This came about after the AJ Congress's Executive Director, Henry Siegman, and its

2 For a progress report on the restoration of Jewish monuments see interview with Jan Jagielski in *Folks-sztyme*, 1 December 1988. More recent information obtained in telephone interviews with Jewish activists in Cracow and Warsaw.

3 Interview with Piotr Kadlcik who is one of the organizers of the youth groups.

President, Robert Lifton, visited Warsaw in December and met with both the Polish Prime Minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, and the Polish Primate, Cardinal Jozef Glemp. The idea, according to Stanislaw Krajewski, a leading Jewish activist in Poland and the AJ Congress's 'consultant' in Warsaw, is for the AJ Congress to promote better Catholic-Jewish relations in Poland, keep tabs on the building of the new ecumenical centre in Auschwitz and even arrange business contacts for would-be investors. Similarly, other world Jewish leaders have been visiting Poland. Most recently (27 February), World Jewish Congress leader Edgar M. Bronfman was in Warsaw and met with Prime Minister Mazowiecki and President Jaruzelski but not Cardinal Glemp.⁴

Relations between Jews and Poles

The founding of Solidarity in 1980, and the spirit of pluralism and openness this engendered, also fostered debate on hitherto taboo subjects, including the history of Poland's Jews. Interest in Poland's Jewish heritage continued to grow during the 1980s, expressing itself, for example, in Jewish culture weeks organized by the Club of Catholic Intelligensia, university seminars and conferences, films, books, non-Jewish participation in the effort to preserve Jewish monuments and radio broadcasts on Jewish holidays. Nineteen eighty-nine saw the continuation of this trend. In February Polish radio started broadcasting a weekly thirty-minute programme 'Menura' about Jewish history, culture and customs. There were exhibits in Wroclaw and Kielce about those cities' past Jewish communities. Of particular interest in the latter was the fact that the organizers did not shy away from showing photographs from the pogrom of 4 July 1946. What attracted most attention was the 'Polish Jews' exhibit in Cracow which assembled over 1,000 paintings depicting not only Jewish life in Poland from the seventeenth century to the Holocaust, but also the enormous contribution individual Jews made to the Polish culture Poles know today through painting, music and so on. The exhibit opened in June and was due to close in August but it proved so popular that it was extended and then transferred to Warsaw for a further few months.

In 1989, the establishment of the Polish-Jewish Society and the Polish-Israel Association provided an institutional framework for the promotion of better understanding between the two communities. The fact that the Citizen's Committee, established by Lech Walesa prior to the 1989 Round Table negotiations between the government and the opposition, included an Ethnic Minorities Committee is proof of the importance Solidarity attached to recognizing the needs of the Germans, Ukrainians and Jews living in Poland. The present lower house of parliament (Sejm) also has such a committee.

A balance sheet for 1989 of Polish-Jewish relations would also include

⁴ For report on Mr Bronfman's visit see *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 28 February 1990.

negative entries, however. On the most basic level there were several Jewish monuments damaged by vandals. The most serious attack was that against the Jewish State Theatre in Warsaw in October, where the perpetrators scrawled their message on the wall: 'This is for the convent'.⁵

The reference, of course, was to the Carmelite convent at Auschwitz (Oswiecim).⁶ According to the 1987 Geneva Agreements between representatives of the Catholic Church and representatives of the Jewish community, the nuns were to have been moved by April 1989 from the present convent, which is on the site of the 'Old Theatre' where the Nazis stored the Zyklon B gas they used in the gas chambers. The deadline was, however, not met and subsequent Jewish protest initially hardened the Church's stand. Cracow's Cardinal Franciszek Macharski (in whose diocese Oswiecim lies) announced he would not honour the agreement, to which he was a party, and Cardinal Jozef Glemp charged the mass media — 'which is at the disposal of the Jews' — with 'kindling anti-polonism'. Cardinal Glemp's homily of 26 August⁷ has been interpreted by some analysts as an attempt, by appealing to latent Polish antisemitism, to establish a power base for a segment of the Church that would like to ally itself with more radical nationalist opinion. The response from influential Solidarity and lay Catholic circles was swift and critical.⁸ And, although many ordinary Poles may have applauded Cardinal Glemp privately and some expressed their approval anonymously in graffiti, their resentment of what they see as the Jews' appropriation of all the suffering of the Second World War has yet to find a choate voice. Meanwhile, the Carmelite controversy appears to be drawing to an end. After an intervention from the Vatican, the Polish bishops pledged to move the nuns and, in mid-February (1990), Cardinal Macharski removed the first symbolic spadefuls of dirt on the site of the future interfaith centre. Furthermore, Prime Minister Mazowiecki (who in the past has been instrumental in promoting better understanding between Poles and Jews) has named a commission to recommend changes at the Auschwitz museum itself so that it more accurately reflects the role the camp played in Hitler's plan to exterminate the Jews.

Another potential source of antisemitism is the nationalist message of some of the political parties now emerging (or re-emerging after fifty years). Jews are not only Poles, the argument goes, they are also often associated in the public mind with the previous Communist regime, particularly during the harsh Stalinist years. So far, these newly-constituted parties cannot claim wide popular support. Nor would it be fair to equate all of them, or everyone in

5 Associated Press dispatch, 'Jewish theatre vandalized, revenge for convent claimed', 8 October 1989.

6 See Karen Adler, 'Controversy over the Carmelite convent at Auschwitz', *IJA Research Reports*, no. 6, 1989.

7 For a full text of Cardinal Glemp's homily see *Christian Jewish Relations*, vol. 22, nos 3 and 4, 1989.

8 See Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, 'Polish responses to the Carmelite convent controversy', *IJA Research Reports*, no. 5 (forthcoming).

them, with anti-Jewish prejudices. It is significant that scurrilous leaflets designed to cast opprobrium on certain well-known Solidarity candidates—the most prominent of whom are Adam Michnik, Deputy and Editor of the Solidarity daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Bronislaw Geremek, Deputy and Leader of the Solidarity-backed parliamentary group, and Deputy Jan Litynski—in the June 1989 elections by pointing out that Jewish origins had very little effect on people's voting. This may change, however, when the vote is no longer a clear 'no' to Communism and 'yes' to Solidarity and if the economic situation is such that a scapegoat is convenient. In fact various political groups are likely to play the Jewish card to further their political ends. The 27 May local elections will provide some indication of the appeal of these new parties.

Relations with Israel

Poland, like the rest of the Soviet bloc (with the exception of Romania), broke off diplomatic relations with Israel after the Six-Day War in 1967. In the 1980s, parallel to the official courting of world Jewish opinion and with the implicit approval of the Soviet Union, Poland (and also Hungary) began to take steps to renew relations with Israel.⁹ In September 1985 it was agreed that interest sections of each country would be opened. Since September 1986, then, Israeli diplomats have been stationed in Warsaw. Then Deputy Premier Shimon Peres' visit to Poland in November 1989¹⁰ marked a new stage in relations between the two countries and hastened the re-establishment of diplomatic relations which took place on 27 February 1990. The Polish government used this occasion, which took place during Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Arens' official visit to Warsaw, to apologize publicly for the antisemitic campaign of 1968. Poles also want to improve trade with Israel and Mr Peres returned to Tel Aviv with requests for Israeli help in the hotel and catering industry as well as in agriculture, health and telecommunications. Mr Peres predicted that trade between the two countries would double from its present level of \$25 million. Improvement in Polish-Israeli relations has been most visible in the steadily increasing number of Israeli tourists in Poland. It is estimated that 30,000 Israelis visited Poland in 1989. Many of them are coming to see the land of their or their parents' birth. Plans to establish a Polish-Israeli-Diaspora foundation for the preservation of Jewish monuments will ensure that the past the two countries have in common will not disappear.

Maria Balinska

9 See Raphael Vago, 'Recent trends in Soviet and East European relations with Israel', *IJA Research Reports*, no. 2, 1988.

10 For a report on Peres's visit see Roman Stefanowski, 'Peres visit points to improvement in Polish-Israeli relations', *Radio Free Europe, Report on Eastern Europe*, vol. 1, no. 2, 33-4.

YUGOSLAVIA

Jewish population: 5,500 (equal Sephardi and Ashkenazi)—first settlement: Roman times—highest population: 82,000 in 1941—60,000 died in Holocaust—central body: Federation of Jewish Communities (affiliated to WJC)—12 synagogues—1 rabbi—Hebrew evening classes in Zagreb and Belgrade—Jewish museum, Judaica library, archive collection—press: *Jevrejski Pregled* published bi-monthly—home for the aged—important historical sites

Today's Yugoslavia, a national patchwork of six republics and two autonomous provinces, has a population of 22 million. According to Yugoslav Jewish communal sources, the current Jewish population is between 5,000 and 6,000. (It numbered some 82,000 before the Nazi invasion in April 1941, and was reduced to approximately 15,000 by the end of the war.) Official Yugoslav statistics, however, indicate that in 1981 there were about 1,385 Jews in the country. According to Yugoslav communal records, the figure of 5,000-6,000 Jews listed includes the spouses and children of mixed marriages.¹

Yugoslav Jewry is an ageing community with a very low birth-rate. The Jewish population, divided almost equally between Sephardi and Ashkenazi, comprises at the present time over thirty distinct communities. The majority of Yugoslavia's Jews are concentrated in the three major cities of Belgrade, Zagreb and Sarajevo and most enjoy a relatively high standard of living.

The basic organizational framework of Yugoslav Jewry is the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, which is recognized by the government. President of the Federation since 1964 has been Dr Lavoslav Kadelburg. The individual Jewish communities are voluntary associations which are not entitled to levy taxes and are financed by voluntary donations. Although Jews are formally recognized as a religious group they enjoy many of the rights available also to national groups. The Federation is affiliated as a full member to the World Jewish Congress. For the most part, Jews in Yugoslavia concentrate on their ethnic rather than their religious identity.

Jewish communal life

Basically secular, the Jewish community is vigorous, with a strong sense of cultural identity, and communal life may fairly be described as vibrant. According to many reports, there is now something of a Jewish revival in Yugoslavia, with all the communities reporting a trickle of new members.² One of the reasons for this revival is that, with the exacerbation of tensions between the various Yugoslav nationalities, Jews, who do not regard

¹ See Ivo Goldstein, 'Yugoslav twilight', *The Jewish Chronicle* (London), 1 November 1985.

² See, for example, Wendy Rosen, 'Yugoslavian Jewry said to be experiencing rebirth', *Canadian Jewish News*, 29 January 1987; William Frankel, 'Yugoslavia: better times ahead', *Jewish Chronicle*, 3 February 1989; Edward Serotta, 'The rebirth of Yugoslavian Jewry', *Forward* (New York), 12 May 1989.

themselves as Serbs, Croatians or any of the other nationalities, are turning to their Jewish roots as a means of discovering their identity. They are sustained by the influence of Israel and there is considerable financial assistance from Western Jewish organizations. The active role Yugoslav Jews played in the Second World War is perhaps the greatest source of their self-respect today.³

Perhaps the liveliest Jewish community is that of Zagreb, the second largest community numerically. Slavko Goldstein, the current president of the Zagreb community, is the former director of the Zagreb University Press, a publisher and editor, and was a partisan fighter in the Second World War. The Jews in Zagreb maintain a comprehensive range of cultural and social programmes: lectures, exhibitions, concerts, seminars, a youth club, a Sunday school, a sports club and a women's association all take place in the community building. Also based there is the Moshe Pijade⁴ Zagreb Jewish Choir; not all its members are Jews but the choir features Jewish works in its repertoire and is highly regarded.⁵

In the summer of 1988 the Zagreb Museum sponsored a major exhibition on Yugoslav Jewry in co-operation with the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia. The exhibition, which included concerts, films and talks, was described by the museum's director as 'the cultural event of the year'.⁶ Its 340-page catalogue (available in English) demonstrates the richness of the Jewish heritage in the country, ranging from fourth-century archaeological finds to a pictorial record of the Nazi era and the heroism of Jewish partisans.⁷ At the beginning of 1989 the exhibition was shown in Belgrade. Its organizers hoped to bring it also to London, New York and Jerusalem.⁸

As elsewhere in Eastern Europe, Yugoslav Jewish youth too have rekindled their interest in the Jewish religion. It remains to be seen, however, whether this phenomenon will translate itself into a greater demand among the secularized Yugoslav Jews for religious services: at the turn of the decade, *minyanin* (synagogue quorums) were possible only in three cities in Yugoslavia—Belgrade, Zagreb and Subotica—and there was only one full-time rabbi in the entire country.⁹

At the beginning of 1990, Yugoslav Jews were reported to be optimistic about the future, following the political and economic changes which had taken place in Eastern Europe during the past year. The country's first truly free elections since 1945, scheduled for April 1990, are intended to lead to the creation of a multi-party democracy. From April onwards, Yugoslav Jews

3 Richard Burns, 'Exhibition in Belgrade', *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 February 1989.

4 Moshe Pijade was an outstanding Jewish combatant in World War II. A close associate of Marshal Tito, he died in 1957, while president of the National Parliament.

5 Frankel.

6 Burns.

7 Frankel.

8 Burns.

9 JTA, 7 December 1988.

expect to play a bigger role in public affairs and, for this reason, to take more interest in the organization of the community and to increase its activities.

There are hopes that the introduction of a free market economy will provide a firmer basis for the funding of communal activities. Attempts are being made to initiate a number of major projects. These include the building of a synagogue and community centre in Zagreb on the site of the building destroyed by the Nazis in April 1941; a new wing for the Lavoslav Schwartz Home for the Aged in Zagreb; and the development of a variety of cultural and educational activities and programmes, including a kindergarten in Zagreb, which is supported by American and British Jewish charities.¹⁰ The energy and vibrancy of the Jews of Yugoslavia belie their small numbers.

Israel and the Middle East conflict

Following the creation of Israel in 1948, Yugoslavia was the only Communist-ruled country which permitted the free emigration of Jews to the Jewish state. Of the 12,495 Jews who had survived the war, 7,578 emigrated to Israel.¹¹

Though not a member of the Warsaw Pact, Yugoslavia joined the USSR and several other East European countries in severing diplomatic relations with Israel at the time of the Six Day War in 1967. In order to strengthen her role as a leader of the nonaligned movement, Yugoslavia adopted a strong pro-Palestinian posture. Though Tito supported the 1975 United Nations resolution equating Zionism with racism, he remained opposed to attempts to exclude Israel from the United Nations on the basis that such an action could well lead to the break-up of the world organization.

President Tito's death in 1980 brought about an immediate change in Belgrade's attitude towards Israel and, as Yugoslavia's role in the nonaligned movement weakened, some of the new Yugoslav leaders began to indicate their willingness to normalize relations with Israel. A meeting in July 1987 between the then Yugoslav President, Lazar Mojsov, and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres was widely reported in the Yugoslav media. Several weeks later, Yugoslavia's state-run news agency Tanjug re-opened its Tel Aviv bureau for the first time in twenty years.¹²

Despite the absence of diplomatic ties, Yugoslavia has maintained bilateral economic and cultural relations with Israel. However, trade with Israel remains small by comparison with Yugoslavia's other Middle East trading partners. Thousands of Israeli tourists nonetheless visited Yugoslavia in the 1980s, the figure rising steadily.

10 See Srdjan Matić, 'Yugoslav hopes for future', *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 January 1990.

11 Slobodan Stanković, 'Yugoslav-Israeli relations to be normalized?', *Radio Free Europe*, 15 December 1986.

12 Milan Andrejevich, 'Yugoslav-Israeli relations heading toward normalization', *Radio Free Europe Research*, 26 August 1987.

In May 1988 Jewish and Serbian intellectuals in Belgrade formed the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society. Within six months the society's membership had grown to 3,500. At the present time, the society's primary goal is the restoration of Yugoslav-Israeli diplomatic relations.¹³

As the 1980s drew to a close, it seemed only a matter of time before Yugoslavia followed the example of several East European states and restored full diplomatic ties with Israel.

Anti-Jewish prejudice

There is no tradition of antisemitism in Yugoslavia, notwithstanding the vigorous pro-Arab orientation of Yugoslav policy after the Six Day War. Yugoslav anti-Zionist rhetoric was not as a rule characterized by the excesses of the propaganda in the USSR and some other Soviet bloc states.

A relatively minor exception to this rule were the apparently spontaneous displays of anti-Jewish feeling—the daubing of swastikas on Jewish targets and suchlike—which followed Israel's intervention in Lebanon in the early 1980s and, in particular, the massacre of Palestinian Arabs in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.¹⁴

As elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, however, the increasing *glasnost* in recent years has led to growing antisemitic activity. Not being a member of the Warsaw Pact and having pursued an independent path, Yugoslavia has been subject to considerably fewer constraints with regard to freedom of expression than most of Moscow's allies.

In 1989, a number of fairly serious incidents occurred, among them the publication and distribution of the antisemitic forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*; following Jewish protests, the publication was banned.¹⁵

A particularly worrying incident was the publication in the Slovenian republic in 1989 of *Wanderings of Historical Truth*, a book by Franjo Tudjman, a historian and leader of the nationalist Croatian Democratic Union, the largest local opposition party. 'A Jew is still a Jew', Tudjman wrote. 'Even in the [Nazi] camps they retained their bad characteristics—selfishness, perfidy, meanness, slyness and treacherousness.'¹⁶

At the outset of the 1990s, Yugoslavia continued to be plagued by serious economic and political problems, not least by an outbreak of ethnic violence. There could, of course, be no guarantee that the Jews would remain untouched by these intractable problems.

Howard Spier

13 Paul Lungen, 'Society links Jews and Serbs in friendship', *Canadian Jewish News*, 25 January 1990.

14 Stanković.

15 See Srdan Matić, 'Anger over historian's slur', *Jewish Chronicle*, 16 February 1990.

16 *Ibid.*

BULGARIA

Jewish population: 5,000 (largely Sephardi)—first settlement: Roman times—highest population: 50,000 in 1945—central body: Social, Cultural and Educational Organization of Jews in Bulgaria and the Jewish Religious Council (observer in WJC)—3 synagogues—press: *Evrejski Vesti* published fortnightly—Sofia Central Synagogue of historical importance

The 5,000 Jews who live in Bulgaria today are mostly old and assimilated. The Sofia synagogue—one of Europe's most beautiful—has been closed for repairs for a number of years. There are two central communal bodies—the Social, Cultural and Educational Organization of Jews in the People's Republic of Bulgaria (known as OKPOE) and the Jewish Religious Council—but little organized activity. And yet, even this community, situated on the fringe of the Eastern European communities covered in this survey, has been directly affected by the collapse of Communist power in Bulgaria itself, and by the changes elsewhere on the continent.

Todor Zhivkov, who led the Bulgarian Communist Party from 1954, was ousted on 10 November 1989. Since then, the liberalization process has proceeded rapidly. The leading role of the Party has been abandoned, religious freedom has become a fact of life, the press has thrown off the shackles of the last four decades, and free elections are to take place in May.

Although the ousting of Zhivkov and the beginnings of democratization took most observers by surprise, pressure for change had been building up for some time among the country's intelligentsia. The regime's close links with Moscow meant that Bulgarian intellectuals, reading the increasingly unrestrained Soviet press, demanded the same openness and freedom for themselves.

For the Jewish community, Communist rule in Bulgaria has never meant the same repression and officially inspired antisemitism that have been the rule in other Eastern Bloc countries. Of the 50,000 Jews in Bulgaria at the end of the Second World War, about 90% emigrated to Israel. For many years, Bulgarian-born Israelis have been able to return to Bulgaria to visit their families and friends. And Bulgarian Jews are allowed to travel freely. Bulgaria has no diplomatic ties with Israel—these were severed at the time of the Six-Day War—but since relations between Bulgarian-born Israelis and their country of birth are remarkably good, Israel has maintained good links with the country.¹

Relations with Israel and world Jewry

Even before the fall of Zhivkov, Bulgaria had begun to show increased

¹ Thomas S. Kahn, 'Hanging on. Yes, there are still Jews in Bulgaria', *Jewish Monthly*, November 1989; *Jewish Chronicle*, 15 December 1989.

openness to Israel and world Jewry. In November 1988, Lyuben Gotsev, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, referred to meetings that had taken place between Petar Mladenov, then Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs but subsequently the reformist successor to Zhivkov as Party leader, and Shimon Peres, then Israel's Foreign Minister.² Although Mr Gotsev insisted that Bulgaria was not ready to restore diplomatic relations with Israel, he did refer to the establishment of contacts on other levels, including the economic. In the same month, the European Jewish Congress participated in a two-day conference in Sofia examining Bulgaria's role in saving 50,000 Jews from the Nazis.³ In July 1989, the government simplified the entry of Israeli tourists into Bulgaria by lifting the requirement on obtaining entry visas before leaving Israel—a sign of increased efforts to promote Israeli tourism to Bulgaria. In the same month, trade agreements between Israel and Bulgaria were formally underwritten, and in December the first formal agreement was concluded for scientific co-operation and exchange between the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, although scientific contacts between the Hebrew University and Bulgarian scholars had existed for some time.⁴

On 15 November, Edgar M. Bronfman, President of the World Jewish Congress, visited Bulgaria on the invitation of the former Communist leader. Bronfman, WJC Secretary General Israel Singer and other WJC leaders were the first foreign visitors to meet the newly-appointed Party chief, Petar Mladenov.⁵ After the meeting, the WJC reported that Mladenov had given every indication that contacts with Israel would continue to improve, and that there would be increased opportunity for Bulgaria's Jewish community to develop closer ties with Jewish communities in other countries.

Changes within the community

Early in March, the WJC claimed that Bulgaria would soon re-establish full diplomatic relations with Israel and that arrangements were being made for Israel's Foreign Minister, Moshe Arens, to visit Sofia. According to the WJC's executive director, Elan Steinberg, Bulgarian officials in Brussels said 'they would move rapidly toward re-establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel, once internal political conditions in their country were settled.'⁶

Members of the community and observers agree that Jews in Bulgaria suffer no antisemitism. In some other Eastern European countries an upsurge of grassroots antisemitism has accompanied the liberalization process, but

² Bulgarian Telegraph Agency, 18 November 1988, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts for Eastern Europe* (SWB, EE), 28 November 1988.

³ *Forward*, 28 April 1989.

⁴ Israel Defence Forces radio, 11 July 1989, SWB, EE; *Folks-sztyme*, 4 August 1989; *New Zealand Jewish Chronicle*, December 1989.

⁵ JTA, 21 November 1989.

⁶ JTA, 5 March 1989.

since there is no recent history of even suppressed anti-Jewish prejudice, it seems highly unlikely that antisemitism will become a factor in the Bulgarian situation.

The president of OKPOE, Yosef Astroukoff, was removed early in February and replaced by Mr Stein and Mr Samuel Franses. The organization announced its intention to apply for full affiliation to the WJC. The old leadership was closely associated with the regime of the former Communist leader, and it was not unpredictable that in the new, more liberal environment, a reawakened community would wish to sweep away its own old regime.

Not that there is very much in the way of traditional Jewish life. Despite being closed for repairs the Sofia synagogue is open every day for prayers, but there is not always a minyan. Provincial synagogues open for High Holy Days (outside of Sofia, most Jews live in the city of Plovdiv). In 1989, Maxim Cohen, an accomplished Bulgarian physicist by profession, was studying in New York to become a cantor. He announced his intention to return to Bulgaria as the community's cantor, and in the absence of a rabbi (there has been no real rabbi for the past 25 years), he will officiate at weddings, funerals and synagogue services.

Antony Lerman

GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Jewish population: 400 (Ashkenazi)—first settlement: 4th century—highest population: 503,000 in 1933—170,000 died in Holocaust—central body: Union of Jewish Communities in the GDR (observer in WJC)—6 synagogues—library—press: *Nachrichtenblatt* published quarterly—home for the aged—historical sites in East Berlin

The momentous events which forced East Germany—one of the most orthodox, and seemingly inflexible Communist regimes—to dismantle the Berlin Wall, hold the first free elections of any former Eastern Bloc country and embrace reunification with West Germany, have obviously affected the tiny Jewish community in the German Democratic Republic, both politically and, even more so, psychologically.

The East German Jewish community is the smallest in Eastern Europe. It has a registered membership of under 400 in eight cities, including 204 in East Berlin, and is much less politicized and was, for that matter, less ideologically Communist than its sister communities in the East. When Helmut Aris died on 22 November 1987, he had been Chair of the Union of Jewish Communities in the GDR for twenty-five years. His death marked a symbolic breaking of the bond between pre-war Jewish Communists and their

peers among the Central Committee members of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED), the Socialist Unity Party.

Since 1988 Siegmund Rotstein, 65, the Chair of the Jewish community in Karl-Marx-Stadt (formerly Chemnitz) has been President of the Union of Jewish Communities in the GDR. Dr Peter Kirchner, 54, is Chair of the East Berlin Community.

In a statement released at the beginning of November 1989, which was reprinted in full on 6 November in the Communist Party's official newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, the Union confronted the Communist regime with long-standing concerns and thus joined the surging demand for reform expressed throughout the country. The statement called on East Germany to accept, after forty years of denial, its responsibility for the Holocaust, to establish diplomatic relations with Israel and to acknowledge the prevalence of antisemitism. The statement expressed support for the reform process and demanded that it include a reassessment of the treatment of the Nazi past, particularly with regard to the rewriting of history textbooks and education of the young in general. Never before in its history has the East German Jewish community been willing and able to speak in such clear terms and be given such wide publicity for its demands.

In addition to the few registered members of the community, it is estimated that there may be up to 5,000 who do not identify themselves as Jews, of whom most were or became Communists, or are the children of pre-war party members who denied or were unaware of their Jewish origins. But estimates of unidentified Jews vary widely.¹ According to Dr Kirchner, the community might double in size, but, he said, proper registration would depend on rabbinical decision 'and there are no rabbis in the GDR.'²

No doubt the East Berlin Jewish community will benefit from the services of the well-established West Berlin community. Meetings have already taken place between representatives of the Central Council of Jews in West Germany and Mr Rotstein, and unification of the communal and religious structures in Berlin is, in effect, a matter of practicalities.

The election of Gregor Gysi, 41, who is of Jewish origin, as Chair of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS)—to which the no-longer dominant communist SED had changed its name—has to an extent boosted morale among some East German Jews; others see cause for concern. Gysi's father Klaus is only partly Jewish, and he served as Secretary of State for Religious Affairs until his retirement. In this position, he arranged funding for the Jewish community. Gregor Gysi's contact with the East Berlin Jewish community has been through attending their cultural events which bring

1 Dr Irene Runge, of East Berlin's Humboldt University, who is also spokesperson for the Jewish community, says there are 'probably 1,000 or so in East Germany who could be counted as Jews under Hitler's race laws' (*New York Times*, 11 December 1989).

2 *Allgemeine jüdische Wochenzeitung*, 15 February 1990.

together younger people who, although they are not practising Jews, are close to the community. His credentials as a reformist and a lawyer who defended dissidents are impeccable.

Because the community is so small and, even under the Communist regime, was able to conduct its internal affairs in relative freedom, there have been few internal changes of note. Of particular interest, however, are developments in three important areas: neo-Nazism and antisemitism, reparations and relations with Israel.

Neo-Nazism and antisemitism

Newspapers somewhat misleadingly reported a new wave of neo-Nazi and antisemitic incidents, coming in the wake of the political upheavals since November 1989 and affecting the entire country. In great part, this is the continuation of a trend that has been noted for some time.

It has been assumed that the hooliganism and street violence of disaffected East German youth was an expression of apolitical alienation. The politicization of this delinquent behaviour was first indicated in October 1987 when a group of skinheads stormed the Berlin Zion Church, headquarters of the East German Green movement, shouting 'Sieg Heil!', 'Jewish Swine!' and similar abuse at people attending a punk concert. The incident and the following trial were widely reported in the East German press. After a seven-week trial, four skinheads, aged 17 to 22, were sentenced to between one and four years for 'Western-inspired hooliganism'.

For the last two years, the East German government has been seriously concerned about antisemitic and neo-Nazi activity. The well-publicized attack on the giant Soviet memorial in Treptow, preceded and followed by incidents of swastika daubings, desecrations of Jewish cemeteries and antisemitic slogans in provincial towns, led a spokesperson for the General Prosecutor's Office to announce that in 1988 there had been 44 court actions over neo-Nazi activities involving 185 people, rising in 1989 (until November) to 144 involving 296 people. Since January 1988, 481 neo-Nazi incidents were investigated by the police and there are about 1,600 neo-Nazi militants.³

Paul Hockeney, writing in the *Village Voice*,⁴ suggests that fascist-type movements in East Germany tend to fall into three overlapping categories: skinheads, neo-Nazis and 'fascos'. Skinheads, who are between 14 and 20 years old, express the crudest form of reactionary protest, venting their bigotry violently in public places. There are estimated to be about 600 in East Berlin with another 2,000 or so hangers-on. The skinheads' targets are mainly Communists, punks and gays. A more organized and politicized group calling themselves 'neos' (neo-Nazis), split off from the skinheads. Finally,

3 Hermann Baumann, 'Die DDR und die Rechten', *Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung*, 18 January 1990; see also Christopher Husbands, 'Haunted by the ghost of Nazism', *Independent*, 10 January 1990.

4 Reprinted in *New Statesman and Society*, 12 January 1990.

there are 'fascos', the least-known and potentially most dangerous right-wing faction. Apparently older and better educated than the neos, they seem to have established contacts with similar groups in the West. They are well-versed in fascist ideology and regard themselves as the future leaders of right-wing extremism in the GDR.

The repressive former SED regime was able to curtail neo-Nazism and extremist and antisemitic activity with its massive security apparatus. Recent events, however, have created a political vacuum and it is widely held that inhibitions against such activity are perceived to be non-existent. A representative poll conducted among 14 to 25-year-olds in 1988 for the Institute for Youth Research attached to the GDR Council of Ministers, revealed that 65% 'totally reject' skins; 30% 'do understand their behaviour'; 4% regard themselves as 'sympathizers' and 1% 'confess to identify [with the skins]'.⁵

Both the government and Mr Gysi have denounced these developments and expressed serious concern. The authorities are reportedly cracking down on the dissemination of hate propaganda by West Germany's extreme right-wing Republican Party and West German neo-Nazis were stopped and detained when they tried to cross into the GDR. In February, the People's Chamber (Volkskammer) declared as illegal and banned the activity on GDR territory of the Republican Party or any successor or replacement organizations. The SED's reaction was so swift and its rhetoric so dramatic that the party was accused of conjuring up the spectre of fascism to revive its flagging fortunes. In the words of one analyst: 'the charm of the otherwise unelectable party grows proportionally with the perceived strength of the far right'.⁶

Compensation to Jewish victims of Nazism

Since September 1987 East Germany has been reconsidering its long-standing refusal to recognize its responsibility for and compensate victims of the Holocaust. The GDR adopted this position on the grounds that the country only came into existence as an independent nation in 1949 and thus was not responsible for the atrocities perpetrated by the Third Reich. In addition to rejecting any legal responsibility, the SED argued that the GDR is an anti-fascist state and bears no moral or historical responsibility for the policies of the Nazi regime. Thus the GDR refused to participate in the 1952 Luxembourg Agreement, which was signed by the Federal Republic and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany, under which West Germany and the GDR were to share the cost of compensation.

Officials continued to stress that the GDR had paid compensation to Poland and the USSR as stipulated by the 1945 Potsdam agreement, which

⁵ Wilfried Seiring, 'Neonazistische Aktivitäten von Skinheads – Vom Totschweigen bis zur Hysterie', *Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung*, 18 January 1990.

⁶ Anne McElvoy, 'Fictitious Fascists', *Spectator*, 3 February 1990.

imposed severe material hardships on the country. They also emphasized that the GDR was not a beneficiary of the Marshall Plan that provided West Germany with a massive influx of dollars. Also, the GDR has compensated the Jewish 'victims of Fascism' who live on its territory, through pensions and other material advantages. The GDR has never agreed, however, to compensate Jews who formerly lived on its territory and who suffered or lost property under Hitler. Nor has it paid any compensation for the extensive Jewish communal property that came under state control after 1945.

The first indication of a shift in East Germany's position was reported in January 1988 when a WJC spokesperson quoted GDR officials as saying they no longer object in principle to the payments. US State Department sources confirmed this when they disclosed that the then-GDR Foreign Minister, Oskar Fischer, had taken a similar position in discussion with Secretary of State George P. Shultz and leaders of Jewish organizations in September 1987. Further credence was given to the January 1988 report when Heinz Galinski, Chair of the Central Council of Jews in (West) Germany, announced, after meeting with East German state and party leader Erich Honecker in East Berlin in June 1988, that the GDR was ready to pay up to \$100 million to Holocaust survivors. This was Mr Honecker's first official meeting with a West German Jewish leader.

Only a few days before meeting Mr Galinski, Mr Honecker held talks with Siegmund Rotstein and other members of the Jewish community's Presidium. During the meeting, which was prominently reported in *Neues Deutschland* early in June, Mr Honecker proposed to set up a foundation to raise money to restore the Oranienburger Strasse Synagogue in East Berlin that was burnt down by the Nazis and badly damaged during the war. Mr Honecker's publicly announced support for paying reparations marked an important step in the GDR's rapprochement with its Jewish community. But political observers suggested that these moves were addressed to Washington to help obtain a preferential trade agreement—most favoured nation status—for the GDR.

On Mr Honecker's invitation, the WJC President, Edgar M. Bronfman, went to the GDR for a three day visit in October 1988. Mr Bronfman expressed satisfaction with his talks and noted with pleasure that the GDR was 'taking on its responsibilities' for the Holocaust.

Following Mr Bronfman's visit, very little progress was made in talks between East Germany and the Claims Conference. But since the GDR was soon experiencing its most dramatic upheavals since the war it is understandable that there was little development on this front.

Nevertheless, the change in the GDR's attitude was a real one. It therefore came as no surprise to observers when, on 1 February 1990, East Germany's new Prime Minister, Hans Modrow, wrote both to the government of Israel and the President of the WJC, officially accepting the principle that the GDR

pay restitution to the victims of the Holocaust.⁷

Given Mr Modrow's many domestic political problems, this commitment signified the importance the GDR government attached to mending its links with Jewish communities and Israel. How the new government, formed after the 18 March elections, will fulfil its commitment remains to be seen. When the GDR is integrated into the Federal Republic, meeting the claim for reparations will become the responsibility of the new united Germany.

Relations with Israel

East Germany has never had diplomatic relations with Israel. When international recognition of the GDR was achieved in 1973, the ruling SED's pro-Arab foreign policy and its open hostility to Israel, under the banner of 'anti-Zionism', were firmly in place.

Since 1986, however, a low level GDR diplomatic initiative has been evident, involving contacts between Israeli and East German institutions. In June 1986, the GDR Writers' Union officially welcomed a delegation of Israeli writers led by A. B. Yehoshua and the Member of Knesset Mordechai Virshubsky. In 1987 Gershon Schocken, the publisher of Israel's most respected daily, *Ha'aretz*, visited the GDR as a guest of Klaus Gysi. Mr Schocken was followed by Professor Shlomo Avineri of the Hebrew University, a former Director General of Israel's Foreign Ministry, who delivered a series of lectures at East German universities. In July 1988, Israel's senior chess coach, Yisrael Galfer, was invited to lecture at an international conference.

The Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra performed in East Berlin and Leipzig, and the famous Berliner Ensemble theatre group and GDR film-makers visited Israel in return. The Leipzig Radio Choir visited Israel on a concert tour in January 1989. At the same time, Klaus Gysi's successor as Secretary of State for Religious Affairs, Dr Kurt Loeffler, visited Israel for a week, becoming the first GDR official to make such a trip.

Dr Loeffler's visit, facilitated by the WJC, was ostensibly at the invitation of Yad Vashem, the Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem, where an exchange of archive material on the Holocaust was discussed. He also met his Israeli counterpart, the Minister for Religious Affairs, Zevulun Hammer. In December 1989, a delegation of East German historians and archivists handed over to Yad Vashem 50,000 documents pertaining to the persecution of Jews during the Second World War.

In September 1989, representatives of the GDR's tiny Jewish community published a New Year message to their fellow Jews in the official community publication *Nachrichtenblatt* with one significant change from previous years: they expressed the hope that the establishment of diplomatic relations between the GDR and Israel 'will logically unfold'. The publication noted

⁷ See for example *Jerusalem Post*, 9 February 1990, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 February 1990, *International Herald Tribune*, 10 February 1990.

that the outgoing year was the first one in which East German Jews were permitted to observe Israel's Independence Day.

Stronger signals that the GDR was disposed to improve its relations with Israel were given by the Foreign Minister, Oskar Fischer, who was interviewed by *Ha'aretz* in late November 1989. The interview was reported in *Neues Deutschland*.⁸ He disclosed that he had had talks with Israel's Foreign Minister, Moshe Arens, in New York in September. He also acknowledged that the question of reparations was the one major obstacle between them. In December, while drastic changes swept through the SED, Gregor Gysi, backed by Mr Modrow, reiterated the need to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.

Michael Shiloh, senior adviser to Moshe Arens, and Reiner Neumann, from the GDR Foreign Ministry, met for secret talks in Copenhagen at the end of January 1990. This resulted in Mr Modrow's historic 2 February statement on paying compensation to Holocaust victims. Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, said the issue of East Germany's acceptance of responsibility for Nazi crimes was the only outstanding obstacle to the establishment of diplomatic relations, as far as Israel was concerned.

Other developments indicate further progress in relations between the two countries. After many years, the GDR has ended its military training programme for Palestinian terrorist groups and asked those still in the country to leave. The shipment of weapons to the Palestine Liberation Organization has also been halted. The two state airlines, El Al and Interflug, have reached an agreement facilitating the interchange of tickets between the two carriers.⁹

One can confidently predict that full diplomatic relations between the GDR and Israel will be established in a matter of months. (A second round of talks between Israeli and GDR officials began on 7 March.¹⁰) However, this timetable may well be superseded if the unification process is rapid.

Michael May

8 Both papers were quoted in JTA, 28 November 1990.

9 JTA, 2 March 1990 and 23 February 1990.

10 *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts for Eastern Europe*, 10 March 1990.

Contributors: MARIA BALINSKA is a freelance journalist. PETER BROD is a broadcaster with the Czechoslovak service of Radio Free Europe in Munich. ANTONY LERMAN is Director of Research at the Institute of Jewish Affairs (IJA). MICHAEL MAY is Director, IJA London. DR STEPHEN J. ROTH is the IJA's consultant on international legal affairs. DR HOWARD SPIER is Deputy Head of the IJA's Soviet and East European Department.