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The Phoenix Revisited – The Jewish Community of Russia Since Perestroika: a View from Jerusalem

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This essay examines the roots of Jewish revival in Russia from the late Brezhnev period to the present. The development of the various institutions existing in today's Jewish community in Russia is surveyed and their strengths and weaknesses are discussed. Particular attention is paid to the emergence of a stable indigenous community leadership. The essay looks at the internal social and political relations within the Jewish community as well as the relations of the community with the changing post-Soviet Russian regimes.

Introduction

The Jews of Russia number between 350,000 and 910,000 today, depending on the counting methods adopted.¹ Though this number is the lowest that Russia's Jewish population has been for the past century, and is declining rapidly as a result of biological attrition, intermarriage, and emigration, Russia's Jews today are as yet the most numerous Jewish community in the FSU, and constitute a higher percentage of FSU Jews than previously. From 1959 to 1989, Russia's Jews were 39 percent of the Jewish population of the USSR. Today they make up 60 percent of FSU Jewry.²

Perhaps more significant than the concentration of a majority of FSU Jews in the Russian Federation is the fact that for the first time since "The Black Years of Soviet Jewry" – the 1948-1953 Stalinist campaign that destroyed both the leadership and the institutions that had maintained some communal identity for USSR Jews – an independent and institutionalized Jewish community now exists in Russia, with a wealth of religious, cultural and social institutions.

There are four principal indigenous nationwide organizations, tying together a multitude of local organizations. There is the Va'ad, formed in December 1989 as the umbrella organization of the new local Jewish communities forming under *perestroika*; the Russian Jewish Congress (RJC), set up in 1996, attempting to unite, expand and raise local funds for all types of Jewish activity; the Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations of Russia (KEROOR), formed in 1993, one of two major religious associations, that includes all non-Hasidic Orthodox communities and confederated with ORISIR (the Union of Religious Institutions of Contemporary Judaism in Russia) representing 30 congregations identified with Reform Judaism; and finally, the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FEOR), created in November 1999 by the Lubavitcher (Habad) Hasidim as a competitor to the RJC and KEROOR, although up to then Habad representatives had participated in KEROOR.

Though reliable statistics are hard to come by, it has been stated that there are 554 Jewish community organizations in Russia, with over 70 of them in Moscow alone.³ New local community groups are forming on a continuous basis. A 1997 inquiry found that no less than 30 percent of a sample of Jews surveyed took part in some community activities.⁴ A more detailed estimate gives an overall participation figure of 15-20 percent, ranging from 5-7 percent in the large cities, to 100 percent in the smallest communities, a pattern resembling Jewish life in other countries.⁵ The emergence, activities and interrelations of these organizations, as well as their relations with the Russian state and its authorities, will be the main theme of our discussion.

In addition to the indigenous Jewish organizations, there are a number of foreign Jewish institutions that work among Russia's Jews. One of these is the State of Israel which, through the Jewish Agency for Israel and even earlier through the Prime Minister's Liaison Bureau for Contact with Soviet Jews, maintains cultural and educational activities focused on ultimate immigration to Israel. Another major foreign institution is the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which was active in Russia in famine relief at the beginning of the 1920s within the structure of the "Hoover Commission," and later was active in financing and supplying Jewish agricultural settlement in the USSR in the late 1920s, until banned by the Stalinist regime. Other smaller groups from various countries support various local projects, and maintain exchanges of delegations.⁶

In addition, there are numerous local cultural and social, as well as religious, centers throughout Russia. There are said to be at least 197 local Jewish religious communities registered with the authorities, 50 of them with their own synagogues, as well as others that are as yet unregistered.⁷ Many of these received their initial impetus through funds and advice provided by private, largely anonymous, Jewish donors abroad, even before local and foreign organizations appeared on the scene. There are numerous other institutions forming that will deepen and enrich the content of community activities, promoting the Jewish component of the younger generation's identity. The success of these institutions in rooting themselves in Russian society will be a major factor in determining the development and stability of the Jewish

community in Russia. At the Choral Synagogue in Moscow, a cantorial seminary has been established, along with a Jewish music and art center.⁸These activities not only link Moscow's main synagogue to others across Russia, but attract those of the younger generation who have an interest in Jewish art and music.

By 1999, some 70 universities of the FSU had programs of Jewish studies with a total enrolment of 2,500 students.⁹By 2001 this had grown to 95 universities, with five in Moscow alone, and two more in St. Petersburg.¹⁰The Center for Jewish Studies, which opened recently in Moscow State University's prestigious Institute of Asian and African Studies, had 85 students enrolled in the 2001 academic year. In addition, there are Jewish universities in both Moscow and St. Petersburg with full academic programs. The Moscow Jewish University recently celebrated its tenth anniversary.¹¹

As we shall see, libraries, kindergartens and day schools, some 200 community centers, an association of Jewish historians, and a lively Jewish press and literary life in the Russian language, all combine to provide both communication and specific content to the community. The academics associated with Jewish studies programs, the writers and journalists specializing in Jewish themes, and other cultural and scientific persons, constitute an indigenous intelligentsia that is already deeply immersed in questions regarding the nature and identity of the new Jewish community and society and its place in both the Jewish and non-Jewish world.¹²

According to one scholar who has done systematic research as to the trends in the Jewish community, there is a growing demand for Jewish social and cultural events, for Jewish secular education and a growing readership of the Jewish press in Russia.¹³In Moscow, fifteen district community organizations are attempting to organize regular contact among the Jewish residents of each district, inviting them to religious, cultural and educational activities where they can strengthen their ties to their co-nationals and become part of the intellectual ferment that has developed in the community. Should this attempt succeed, it would be a model of intra-community communication to be followed in other metropolitan areas and would considerably raise the percentage of participation in community activities in the larger cities. These indicators would seem to augur well for the future of the community.

As may be easily understood, the state of any community's educational system reveals much of its future, for one of the main roots of socialization of the younger generation to the values of the community is the system of both formal and informal education. An examination of the various educational institutions maintained by Russia's Jewish community will clarify both the strengths and the limitations of the community to date. In the 1999-2000 school year, there were 120 educational institutions run by the Jewish community, serving 8,117 pupils. This was almost double the number of institutions that had existed in 1992.¹⁴Of these institutions, 13 are kindergartens, 21 are day schools, and 86 are classified as "supplementary" educational institutions, including after school religious and cultural studies, youth clubs with study courses, and Sunday schools. These supplementary institutions serve some 3,812 children.

The community's present limitations in supporting these schools may be seen in the fact that 34 percent of them receive financing from various offices of the government of Israel, 13 percent from Jewish religious funds outside Russia, 11 percent from the Joint, 9 percent from Russian state institutions, and only 10 percent from the local Jewish communities. The remainder receive funds from a variety of lesser sources, while a few are private institutions. The central rationale of the Russian Jewish Congress was, and remains, to organize the community for maximum local support for its cultural and social institutions.¹⁵However impressive the achievements of the Jewish community of Russia in its first decade of renaissance, the need and potential for further growth toward a flourishing independence are even greater.

But what is the social and psychological structure of the people who make up this community? This is an important factor in the long-term resolution of the current struggle to determine the direction and nature of the community's transition. It may be suggested that a community rooted in long-time traditions of history, culture, and belief will be more enduring than one existing primarily as a reaction to contemporary events.

Professor Zvi Gitelman, a veteran observer of this Jewish community's development, notes that both factual knowledge and religious belief are conspicuously absent in the identity of most Russian Jews. Instead, their Jewish identity is based primarily on feeling – to be proud of one's nationality and to defend Jewish honor and dignity. Among respondents in Gitelman's survey, these values far outweighed Sabbath observance, marking of holidays, or avoidance of intermarriage.¹⁶Similar results were obtained by Rosalia Ryvkina, a sociologist affiliated with Moscow's All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM). In a study conducted in 1995 she found that a sample population, chosen for their Jewish surnames, identified themselves overwhelmingly as Jews, but knew little about Judaism, and felt distant from traditional Jewish culture, identifying much more with Russian culture.¹⁷It is not hard to understand this situation when one considers the background of religious and cultural deprivation of the Jews of Russia, together with the high rate of intermarriage that has existed for close to three generations. Eugene Satanovsky, one of the veteran activists of Russia's Jewish community and today the president of the Russian Jewish Congress, defined Russia's Jews as "the first post-assimilationist Jewish community, formed by Jews who identify their Jewishness first and foremost as a nationality, and not as a religion."¹⁸

It is within this context of secularist nationalism that Habad is mounting its campaign of religious revival, working at multiple levels: ritual observance centered around the synagogue, historical-religious tradition in the community centers' celebration of holidays, and education of children and youth through a chain of kindergartens, day schools, summer camps, and, ultimately, theological seminaries (*yeshivot*) for those who accept the Habad way of life. The road to a strong and rich positive Jewish identity would seem to be a long one, but at least the road is now open and there are available sources for learning.

As to how many Jews will remain in Russia to form such a community, Ryvkina found that out of 1,000 Russian Jews whom she interviewed, 62 percent were in favor of Jews remaining in Russia and maintaining their national, cultural and linguistic identity, while 23 percent advocated emigration to Israel, and 15 percent were in favor of assimilation into Russian society. Thus, it would appear that within the limits posed by the Jewish community's demography (which resembles very much the patterns of aging and numerical decline of numerous European and South American Jewish communities), there will remain a considerable nucleus of Russian Jews, concentrated in Moscow, to realize the vision of building a full-fledged Jewish community in Russia. The attitude of this nucleus has been present and has grown in its relative weight in the community, since it first surfaced in the debates among Jews that arose during *perestroika*. For example, two of the early advocates of this view, both of whom are married to ethnic Russian women, embraced a Jewish

ethnic-cultural identity, not as a factor separating them from their environment, but as a contribution to a universalist human identity within a multi-national society.¹⁹

The Beginnings of Community

A recent *Izvestiia* article claimed that the Soviet regime kept only two secrets from its public – Jews and sex. Indeed, the greater part of the Brezhnev period was, for the Jews of the Soviet Union, a “period of invisibility.” Beginning soon after the 1967 Middle East war, Jews were not fired from their jobs, but in many institutions and sectors of the economy they were not hired nor were they promoted. The Jewish presence in science, technology and culture, which had been so marked in the earlier years of the Soviet Union, was now left to wither on the vine. Jewish culture, only little recovered from the ravages of the late Stalin period, was at a minimum. The propaganda waged by the Soviet Union in support of the Arab countries and against Israel, took on an increasingly general anti-Jewish cast, and questions regarding current Jewish affairs in the Soviet Union simply did not appear in the media.

The combination of the closure of opportunity and the denial of identity was to awaken a growing desire to emigrate among Soviet Jews. For the older generation, this was largely because of fear that their children would be denied the educational and occupational opportunities, as well as the upward social mobility, that they had enjoyed during the period of the Soviet Union’s rapid expansion in the 1920s and 1930s, and in the post-war reconstruction.²⁰ For the younger generation, the denial of a positive Jewish identity aroused rebellion.²¹ This was the era of *samizdat* (underground publications) in the Soviet Union, and Jewish *samizdat* soon found its niche among the many national, religious and political expressions that flourished.²² Here the foundations of future community were laid as various groups and individuals developed historical, ethical and cultural viewpoints that in the era of *perestroika* grew into informal, and later into formal institutions. All the trends to be found in today’s community, pro- and anti-Zionist, particularist and universalist, secular and religious, political and cultural, appeared in the 1970s as incipient trends of thought. In its search for identity, the younger generation of Jews was no different than the same age group throughout society. Even the question of emigration was not unique to the Jews. Leonid Gruzman writes that the post-war generation of intelligentsia was a multi-national social group that grappled with problems common to all of them, and that for any of them, of any ethnic background, the question “Why do I stay?” was as natural as the question “Why do you leave?”²³

However, like all *samizdat*, Jewish discussions and publications were outside of any official framework. Moreover, the majority of these expressions were by people seeking to emigrate at a time when emigration was not encouraged. They were, therefore, completely illegitimate in the eyes of the authorities, subject to suppression and, as a result, the majority of cautious Soviet Jews were only passive receptors of these ideas. The era of mass spontaneous activity was still in the future.

Perestroika and the Building of Community

The ascendancy of Mikhail Gorbachev, in March 1985, did not bring with it any immediate change in Soviet policy toward Jews. Like the Siberian spring, the thaw came slowly, with recurrent frosts. The campaign of repression continued and even intensified through 1985 and 1986 against the cultural and political activities led by those who had been refused emigration permits. A combination of domestic political change and international pressures eventually led to a new line of thought and action beginning in 1987.

It was, however, only a year and a half later, in the summer of 1988, at the 19th Extraordinary Conference of the CPSU, in the context of discussing a special plenary session of the Communist Party’s Central Committee to be devoted entirely to the national question, that Gorbachev suggested that “members of peoples dwelling outside the borders of their national state, or peoples not possessed of such entities should have an opportunity to realize their national-cultural needs... through relations with members of their peoples...and through establishing national-cultural centers.”²⁴ At this point, the Central Committee was still by and large an obedient tool of the Secretary General, and when the plenum was actually held a year later, the new nationalities’ program affirmed the right of national minorities, through their cultural centers, to maintain contact with citizens and states of a similar ethnic or cultural background.²⁵

The period of invisibility had come to an end, and everywhere there were public efforts to gain recognition for Jewish aspects of Soviet history. Recognition of the Holocaust was high on the agenda of all the Jews of the Soviet Union. In place of the semi-clandestine gatherings that had been growing in recent years, public ceremonies, sometimes with the participation of local officials, began to be held at various Holocaust sites – Ponary near Vilna, Romboli near Riga, and Babi Yar in Kiev. At the same time, all those previously illegitimate seminars, cultural groups, Hebrew language classes, and other organizations, together with a growing number of *neformal’nye* (the informal, unregistered organizations) that had been founded through 1987 and 1988, gained a new status and were integrated into Jewish cultural centers that sprang up in almost every city with a sizeable Jewish population.²⁶

The first of these, the Moscow Jewish Cultural and Education Association, which began its activities in 1987, strove from the outset for recognition by the authorities. Among those active in this effort were figures who, to this day, are central to the activities of Russia’s Jewish community, notably Mikhail Chlenov, Zinovii Kogan, Roman Spektor, and Eugene Satanovsky, all of them figures linking the intellectual and administrative aspects of today’s Jewish community.²⁷ Shortly after Gorbachev’s above-mentioned suggestion to the 19th Party Conference, these and eleven other Moscow Jewish activists addressed a letter to Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov requesting the registration of a Jewish cultural center in Moscow.

The time was ripe, and in mid-October 1988, the center was formally registered under an agreement signed between the Soviet Ministry of Culture and the World Jewish Congress, represented by one of its vice presidents, Isi Leibler of Australia.²⁸ This established a pattern of official co-optation of the Jewish movement, and in most localities, the Jewish cultural centers were allotted space in official premises (frequently the local *Dom družby narodov* – House of Friendship of the Nations), with the original activists who headed these organs being replaced by persons – usually local Jewish

party members – more acceptable to the authorities. However, by this time, the Communist Party was so badly split that party membership was no guarantee of the old ideological orthodoxy. Armed with Gorbachev's pronouncement, and later with the Central Committee plenum documents, many of the new appointees identified fully with the spirit of their Jewish cultural centers and served their constituents rather than their old-line party bosses.

The next development was the bringing together of representatives of all the various Jewish community groups of the USSR. Here again we have an example of the turbulent unpredictability of the politics of the period. A request to hold such a meeting in Moscow was turned down by the authorities on the grounds that there was no suitable hall available in the city to host the meeting. After some quiet lobbying by the meeting's initiators, an invitation was extended by the authorities in Riga, and on 21-22 May 1989, representatives of 42 Jewish cultural organizations from 34 cities across the Soviet Union met, together with numerous foreign guests, including non-Soviet representatives of the World Jewish Congress, to prepare the calling of a full-scale convention of Soviet Jewish organizations for the end of 1989.²⁹

This convention was held in Moscow on 18-21 December 1989, in rather stormy circumstances, with demonstrations of the Russian nationalist and xenophobic *Pamyat* activists protesting the establishment of a nationwide Jewish organization. Public order was maintained by the Moscow militia, and the 414 delegates, representing 204 Jewish organizations in 77 cities of the USSR, established the Va'ad, an umbrella coordinating body for all Jewish community organizations in the Soviet Union.³⁰ The work of the founding convention of the Va'ad included ideological as well as organizational matters.

The meeting defined itself as a gathering of "community organizations," leaving the content and nature of each organization – religious, cultural, educational or social – to its local membership, with the president-elect, Mikhail Chlenov (who remains at the head of the organization to this day), enunciating in his keynote address the principles of "autonomy, democracy, and legality" as the guiding operational rules of the new body.³¹ The initiators understood that only on the basis of local self-determination would it be possible to evoke any degree of cooperation and mutual aid in such a diverse public. The task of the central bodies of the Va'ad was to find the means of aiding the localities in the building of an effective program of activities by raising and distributing funds, and other resources such as book collections and audio visual equipment. To this end, the Va'ad became the representative of Soviet Jewish organizations in relations with foreign Jewish bodies such as the World Jewish Congress, the American Joint Distribution Committee, and various Israeli institutions.

It must be remembered that this was December 1989, when the great wave of Jewish emigration was beginning to swell, pushed by a conjuncture of growing economic and political uncertainty within the Soviet Union. The question of emigration, if it did not totally dominate the convention, was certainly prominent and featured even in Chlenov's programmatic speech. He quoted the words of writer Grigorii Kanovich who, when asked during a lecture in Kaliningrad, "Must we go?" answered, "Is it possible to stay?"³² The learning of Hebrew, and programs centering around Israel were at the heart of the activities discussed at the founding convention of the Va'ad, and Chlenov predicted that there would be 100,000 immigrants to Israel in the coming three years. In fact, close to 400,000 Jews of the FSU went to Israel between October 1989 and the end of 1992. As might be expected in such a mass emigration, the most active in Jewish affairs tended often to be the most likely candidates for emigration. This proved to be one of the major problems of the fledgling community centers in their early stages. Leadership often changed frequently due to the emigration of activists as well as of many of the rank and file participants. Only very slowly has it proven possible to create a stable indigenous leadership and embark on long-term development of programs and institutions.

From its founding meeting, the Va'ad was involved in the general politics of Russia, as well as in intercommunal relations. Among the resolutions that we find adopted by the founding convention is an explicit expression of support for Gorbachev's *perestroika*, as well as an appeal to the Soviet government to cease its anti-Zionist propaganda, and a call to Soviet Muslims to eschew all forms of religious and political extremism.³³ Despite weaknesses that were inherent in the structure of the Va'ad from its outset, and the instability of its constituency, the organization succeeded in growing. At the Va'ad's second congress held on 21-25 January 1991, 574 delegates represented 283 organizations from 85 cities.³⁴ The third congress of the Va'ad was held in Odessa in May 1992, after the dismembering of the USSR. The delegates decided that it would be inappropriate to maintain an "international" Va'ad of the former Soviet Union, and the umbrella organization disbanded into national units. Chlenov continued as president of the Va'ad of Russia.

Only in early 2002 did a new supra-national body of any significance emerge. In March, the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress was formed, uniting the Jewish communities of 28 states: all the former Soviet republics except the three Baltic republics which joined the European section of the World Jewish Congress; India, Mongolia, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and the Jewish communities of various Pacific islands. According to the founders, the new organization represents 2.3 million Jews, and 1,500 Jewish organizations. The delegates elected Alexander Mashkevich, a wealthy banking and mining businessman, active in Kazakhstan, and President of the Jewish Congress of Kazakhstan, as president of the new Congress. The secretary general is Mikhail Chlenov, and the chairman of its Chamber of Representatives, Joseph Zissels, is president of the Va'ad of Ukraine.³⁵

One of its, the structure chosen might appear to be a tactic to avoid domination by the Russian Jewish Congress, but reports and discussions of the new institutions' founding indicate otherwise. Moscow's financial and political role vis-à-vis those states making up the Euro-Asiatic Jewish Congress can be compared with that of Washington or New York for Jews of the Americas. In addition, it is claimed that the delicate task of reestablishing communication with the Jewish communities of Iran, Iraq and Syria, a task for which neither Washington nor Jerusalem is suited, can be successfully accomplished from Moscow, through the good offices of the Russian Federation's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.³⁶ It may be worth noting here that Satanovsky, through the Institute for the Study of Israel and the Middle East that he established and which he funds, has assiduously developed relations with Russia's Foreign Ministry, inviting its representatives to the various meetings and conferences held at the Institute. There is an indication of long-range strategic thinking here.

From its inception, the Va'ad had both domestic and external difficulties. First and foremost was its lack of financial resources. The new body had no independent source of funding that would enable the executive of the Va'ad to establish new cultural and educational centers and strengthen those that had arisen through their own efforts.³⁷ The sources of such funds as were available to the central executive were from foreign groups, primarily the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, both of which had their own agendas, bureaucratic interests, and methods of operation. Lacking funds, the Va'ad could not gain acceptance in all its constituent communities, and could

only take on an auxiliary role in the expansion of Jewish cultural, social and educational activity in Russia. Lacking prestige and full acceptance at home, the Va'ad had difficulty in gaining recognition, support, and acceptance as an equal in the international bodies that represented the many Jewish communities of the world. Even today, the Va'ad chairman writes of "the stigma of transition" cast over the new Russian Jewish community, and sets acceptance as an equal in all international Jewish bodies as one of the five main problems facing Russian Jewry.³⁸ This would appear to be one of the goals that the new Euro-Asiatic Jewish Congress is meant to achieve.

The seeds of future friction were also being sown in that the outlook of the Va'ad activists, despite the presence of religious groups among the founding members of the Va'ad, was purely secular. In planning their programs they neither consulted with the few rabbis and religious bodies that existed, nor did they initiate assistance to the new synagogues and congregations that were being set up. Though many of these had the support of private Jewish initiative, the Lubavitcher Hasidim (Habad) were moving steadily towards filling this niche in an institutionalized manner.

An additional weakness of the Va'ad was its concentration on emigration. This may have had a basis of justification in the emigration fever of 1989-1991, but it resulted in the organization being over-identified with the Jewish Agency and with its efforts to organize a maximum of emigration. Such an approach quickly began to stir resentment among those who were not oriented towards emigration. They felt that an excessive portion of the limited resources of the community was being devoted to ends that did not serve their interests and that would, in the long run, weaken and even destroy the fledgling Jewish community of Russia. Among those who had such a view were not only the "Yiddishist-Communists," and extreme Hasidic sects such as followers of the Satmar rebbe, who have always been anti-Zionist, but also many ordinary Russian Jews who, for a variety of reasons of their own, had no intention of emigrating.

Indeed, there was a view other than that of those emigration-minded persons who saw the future of Russia's Jews only in Israel or America.³⁹ Immediately after Kanovich's statement, mentioned above, Leonid Gruzman and Alexander Etkind published a reply entitled "Why We Are Not Going." They declared that they stayed in the Soviet Union, not out of fear of losing status if they emigrated, and not from fear of the economic hardship faced by new immigrants in America or Israel, but because they were bound by bonds of friendship, family and profession to their native communities. They dismissed Kanovich's fear of anti-Semitism, claiming that it was primarily a bureaucratic, rather than a popular phenomenon (i.e., party policy that clerks everywhere – including those who were themselves of Jewish origin – had to carry out during those years, whatever their own personal feelings toward Jews might be). The clear implication was that now that times had changed and the Communist Party was changing, discrimination against the Jews would abate.⁴⁰ Given the high rate of intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, emigration very often posed the dilemma of splitting, rather than reuniting the family – all the more in cases in which some emigrated to Israel, some to America or Germany, and others remained in Russia. In the Russian Federation in 1988, 73.2 percent of Jewish men and 62.8 percent of Jewish women marrying took a non-Jewish spouse.⁴¹ The result was that when questions of emigration arose, a growing number of mixed families had to decide from which part of their family to be separated.

In fact, the view that a viable Jewish community in Russia was a worthy and realistic goal was not at all foreign to many of the Jewish activists. Chlenov himself never spoke of emigrating personally, and despite the dominance of the emigration fever at the first congress of the Va'ad, he did insert in his address the sentence that "We must make sure that something is done for those whose fate it is to remain."

A far more detailed idea was presented in 1992 by Eugene Satanovsky, then a rising young business executive.⁴² At age 33, he was already the founder and president of the Ariel Corporation, a large and diverse industrial conglomerate. Although he had been a participant in all the early organizing activities of the Moscow Jewish Cultural Center and of the Va'ad, Satanovsky was not active in the formal leadership of the Va'ad. He held the view that the Russian Jewish community had the potential to be very much like the American Jewish community. It could be affluent and politically influential within Russia, and at the same time could be supportive of Israel with advice and financial contributions. An organized Jewish community in Russia could create and support its own social, cultural and educational institutions, thus providing a basis for identification of individuals, and particularly of the younger generation with the community, helping to assure its continuity into the future.

Where these ideas first originated has not been revealed as yet. They were, however, the basis of thinking on which the Russian Jewish Congress was based when it was formed in 1996. Meanwhile the concept of an independent and self-sustaining Jewish community in Russia gained momentum despite mass emigration and political and economic turbulence which wracked the country. In 1993 Mikhail Chlenov, then president of the Va'ad of Russia, expressed the desire for a Jewish community resembling that of other countries. He pointed out the need to realize the growing economic and cultural potential of Russia's Jewish community, and to use it as a basis for a relationship of equality with the Jews of the world, in place of the patronizing relation that was still dominant four years after the founding of the Va'ad. Chlenov's ideal strongly resembled that of Satanovsky – mutual interdependence of world Jewry and Russia's Jews, making use of the political, economic, and cultural resources of each community for the common benefit of all.⁴³

Intracommunal Communication

An important factor in any community's existence is the communications network that helps form a common outlook and a common agenda for the various members of that community. For Soviet Jews, as for many other groups in the USSR, independent communication began with *samizdat* publications – local efforts, generally short-lived and with very restricted circulation.⁴⁴ With the change in atmosphere in 1988, community newspapers and bulletins began to appear. In 1988 there were 12 such publications, and by 1991 there were 69, representing all the outlooks and organizational tendencies in the Jewish community of Russia. Funding difficulties, shortages of ink and paper, and emigration of editors caused many of these to cease publication after a relatively brief existence.⁴⁵

The Moscow Jewish Cultural Center published the *Vestnik Evreiskoi Kultury* which, from April 1989 became the *Vestnik Evreiskoi Sovetskoi Kultury* with Tankred Golempolsky as its editor. This was part of the co-optation of the center by the authorities at the time. A year later the name of the paper was changed to *Evreiskaia gazeta*, and it remains under this name to the present, with the addition of *Mezhdunarodnaia* (International) to its name. Golempolsky is still presiding,

though not the official editor. The only change today is that it is published by the Russian Jewish Congress, and both Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt and Dr. Eugene Satanovsky sit on its public advisory council.⁴⁶

In addition to this publication and its more recently founded Habad rival, *Evreiskoe slovo*, (The Jewish Word), the number of publications had grown steadily to 87 newspapers, journals and bulletins by the end of 1999 and, according to a conference report on Jewish community press held in Moscow in February 2002, there are well over a 100, with new publications appearing almost weekly.⁴⁷ Some of these are independent, while others are published by the Russian Jewish Congress, the Va'ad, or the Jewish Agency.⁴⁸ Among the projects supported by the JDC are the newspapers *Ami* (My People) with a circulation of 10,000 in St. Petersburg, *Menora* (The Lamp) in Ekaterinburg, and *Vestnik shalom*, (The Courier of Peace) serving the west Siberian region of the Va'ad, and published in Omsk, which claims a readership of 44,000 in 19 Siberian cities.⁴⁹

A mutually satisfactory relationship has been created, within which the JDC funding continues from year to year as long as the newspapers are published, (*Ami* since 1995 and *Vestnik shalom* since 1994) and the newspapers publish regularly as long as funding is available. All of these newspapers are published in the Russian language so as to reach the broadest possible audience. Both local events and high level politics of the Jewish community find expression and are available to whomever may be interested. In addition, today there is a wealth of current and classical Jewish literature, both original and in translation, as well as all kinds of works on Judaism, Jewish history, and all aspects of Jewish existence, both secular and religious, originating in Russia and abroad, and all available to the interested reader in a language he fully commands. The Jewish community in Russia lacks nothing regarding communication. In addition, the network of community centers provides face-to-face contact and in Moscow an effort is being made to overcome the anomie of the big city by bringing personal involvement down to the neighborhood level.

Full-blown Community

The Jewish community of Russia took on substance as an indigenous organization with the formation of the Russian Jewish Congress in 1996. In essence this was the realization of the views of those who saw their remaining in Russia not as "fate," but as a natural choice. The key element was the active initiative of Vladimir Gusinsky, one of Russia's richest men, who was willing to put a great deal of his own money, energy and organizational skills into the project, and had the ability to draft others into the new institution as well.⁵⁰ A substantial number of Jewish businessmen were each willing to put up \$50,000 annually to be included in the inner circles of the Congress. Thus, two elements which were absent in the structure of the Va'ad, strengthened the Congress – a leader of national and international standing, and a solid financial base.

The Russian Jewish Congress was intended to serve as a central fundraising and distributing organ, and as a lobby for the Jewish community of Russia vis-a-vis the government. In addition it would serve as the representative of Russia's Jews in their corporate relations with other ethnic minorities in Russia, to represent Russia's Jews as equals to other communities in regional and world-wide Jewish bodies, and as an eventual replacement for Israeli and American organizations in providing funding for educational, social and cultural activities. This is, of necessity, a long-term aim, for the volume of resources and skills demanded to maintain community institutions takes time to develop. In addition, there arise such contentious questions as the schools and summer camp programs financed from Israel that are part of the Jewish Agency's program to encourage Jewish emigration to Israel, and that compete with similar programs financed by the JDC and the JRC, regardless of objective need. As regards the social welfare program, "what began as a program of a few thousand dollars has grown into \$40 million a year, aiding 175,000 people (throughout the former Soviet Union) through 80 community centers largely dependent on JDC funding....In 1998 alone, the JDC provided training in social work for 5,000 volunteers in Russia."⁵¹ The JDC cooperates with other organizations, providing funding for the Va'ad, as well as technical aid and training for the activities of the Russian Jewish Congress, and attempting to avoid internal community frictions. Its declared principle is to give assistance to any and all local efforts, responding to local initiatives. The reality is that in many cases the JDC initiative was the necessary catalyst for awakening local activities, as self-sustaining community is not built overnight.

Despite its limitations, the Russian Jewish Congress made impressive progress in its first five years. One of its important innovations was that it made the religious sector of the Jewish community a full partner, consulting and cooperating with the two leading Rabbis of Moscow, Rabbi Adolph Shayevich, the rabbi of the Moscow Choral Synagogue, and recognized until recently as the undisputed chief rabbi of Russia, and with Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, a Swiss-born Orthodox rabbi, resident in Moscow for the past decade, who acts as the representative of non-Hasidic Orthodoxy in Moscow and throughout Russia. A second important innovation was that the Congress brought the local Jewish communities to engage in local fundraising to cover a part of their own needs rather than relying exclusively on outside funding.

In the first three years of the Congress's existence, the 45 regional branches of the Congress raised \$5.2 million for their own needs, with Samara and Kazan raising a million dollars each. In the same period, the central bodies of the Congress distributed some \$15 million.⁵² The 1999 budget of the Congress included the following items: social and cultural projects in the Moscow Jewish community – \$500,000; Jewish higher education – \$310,000; primary and secondary schools – \$250,000; press, media and the countering of anti-Semitic propaganda – \$250,000; funding for the Ministry of Education national program for teaching tolerance in schools – \$250,000. In addition, the Congress is funding a two-year, \$15,000,000 construction program for a Central Moscow Jewish Community Center on Arkhipova St., opposite the Choral Synagogue.⁵³ There was a weakness to this activity, however, in that 60 percent of the budget came from only two donors, Vladimir Gusinsky, and his close associate, insurance magnate Boris Khait.

The budget of income and expenditure for the calendar year 2000 shows growth of revenue to \$7,805,943 and expenditures to \$7,553,323, with the regional branches raising \$5,248,000.⁵⁴ This was a considerable achievement since the Congress president, and main contributor, Vladimir Gusinsky was arrested in mid-year, throwing the Congress's workings and finances into confusion. Secular Jewish higher education received \$850,000 and a number of special programs received a total of \$787,900. A broad spectrum of religious, educational, social, cultural, and community relations programs was covered. Two of these were particular "outreach" programs: one, the creation of a special

"Children of Chechnya Fund," offering aid to war victim children of all ethnic backgrounds; the second was the continued funding of the country-wide program for the teaching of ethnic tolerance in the schools of Russia, initiated by then Deputy Minister of Education Alexander Asmolov who, in March 2001, was elected a member of the RJC governing board.

The dynamism and businesslike professionalism of the Congress founders won them followers among the less affluent and less well-organized Jewish groups, and in September 1997, the Va'ad, and the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations and Communities (KEROOR) joined the Congress in formally establishing "The Jewish Community of Russia." In the wake of this meeting, Gusinsky, who had already received recognition internationally, and had been elected a vice-president of the World Jewish Congress, could claim to be the foremost leader of the Russian Jewish community.

At the founding meeting, Chlenov claimed that there were 500 Jewish groups active in Russia, and that KEROOR included 60 non-Habad Orthodox and Reform congregations. The mention of Habad at this "unity" meeting, and the non-participation of Habad in the "Jewish Community of Russia" raises the possibility that this unification move was motivated, at least in part, by a desire to create a united front against the growing activity of the Hasidic movement that was branching out from the purely religious to community social and educational activity.

Enter Habad: Intra-communal Rivalries

With the focusing of our attention on Habad, we come to the last major element in the structure of today's Russian Jewish community. The Habad Hasidic movement began in the Russian Empire in the late eighteenth century, and with Jewish migrations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, became a world movement, distinguished by its affluence and its cohesive and disciplined structure.⁵⁵ Though its center moved from Russia to Williamsburg in Brooklyn during the Soviet period, the movement continued to function underground within the USSR.⁵⁶ When *perestroika* made a revival of the Jewish religion possible, the movement had both the funds and the available manpower to renovate and operate the synagogue buildings that were being returned to the Jewish communities of Russia. The Habad emissaries worked in pairs in each community; a volunteer from America or Europe teamed with a local adherent; the first familiar with the movement's religious doctrine, the second knowledgeable in the ways of Russian society. Their doctrine was: "First the Synagogue, and later the community center."

Over the years, Habad has built up a network claiming 85 religious congregations and 70 community centers throughout Russia.⁵⁷ The head of this operation is Rabbi Berl Lazar, an Italian-born rabbi, in his mid-30s, who has been working in Russia for the past thirteen years, but who is said to speak a limited Russian even today, although he is able to communicate conversationally.⁵⁸ For their work in the FSU, the Habad activists claim to have a budget estimated at \$70 million annually, provided by their movement, with substantial support from Russian-born Israeli financier Lev Levayev, himself a disciple of the movement, who is said to have contributed millions of dollars.⁵⁹ Levayev gave \$10 million for the construction of a 75,000 square meter, seven-story community center beside the Habad Marina Roshcha Synagogue in Moscow. The center includes restaurants, separate sports halls for men and women, a computer lab, two ritual baths, a library and restaurants. This financing allowed the Habad movement to complete and inaugurate its community center while the KEROOR center stood unfinished due to financial problems. President Putin attended the opening and it was billed as "the first Jewish community center in Eastern Europe."⁶⁰ In stark contrast to the Va'ad and the Congress, Habad adhered to the doctrine "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." The Habad emissaries and rabbis took no stand in Russian political affairs, whereas political influence within Russia was one of the explicit goals of the Russian Jewish Congress, and as we have already noted, the Va'ad had included political resolutions in its agenda from its founding congress.

However intra-communal politics are a different question. There the Habad activists see in the Russian Jewish Congress and its allies not only ideological rivals whose doctrine of Judaism is repugnant to Habad, but also rivals for control of budgets, synagogues, and other community facilities that give prestige and power in the community to those controlling them. This was not the first time in the history of Russia's Jewish community that Habad had clashed with the religious establishment over primacy of influence in the community. In the early years of the Soviet regime, a similar struggle had taken place in Leningrad.⁶¹ In addition, an even more important factor came into play toward the end of 1999.

Jewish Politics and the Kremlin

Although Jewish communal politics could have played out without impinging on the general politics of Russia, changes were occurring in Russian politics that created an influence in Jewish affairs. In mid-August 1999, the appointment of Vladimir Putin as prime minister signaled the advent of a new rising elite to contend against those surrounding the failing President Boris Yeltsin. In particular, limiting the influence of the first generation of post-Soviet oligarchs in the politics of Russia became a priority goal for the aspiring politicians around Putin, who appear to come primarily from conservative backgrounds linked to various aspects of national security. Putin, his supporters, and those who backed him had already seen the effective use of money and the media on Yeltsin's behalf in the 1996 presidential elections. Vladimir Gusinsky, probably Russia's most effective media oligarch, was the man generally credited with having rallied the contributions and media support that brought Yeltsin his victory in the second round of those elections. In addition, from the time that Putin became identified with the uncompromising policy of war against the Chechens, media outlets identified with Gusinsky had been harshly critical, repeatedly exposing government misdeeds and misinformation. Since Putin's strong Chechen policies appeared to be the foundation of his popularity with the public, this made Gusinsky and anyone else who might challenge these policies into a prime target for suppression.

Another aspect of a more personal nature also appears to have come into play here. President Putin is a compulsive winner. Journalists have noted this characteristic in his "friendly" encounters with locals in physical competitions during his tours of the country. In addition, he comes from a career background of training to be immediately and unconditionally obeyed as a representative of the security authorities – the *organy*. Elevated to the office of president,

this tendency was only strengthened, and Putin has repeatedly demonstrated the approach that *l'etat c'est moi*. Gusinsky, a self-made oligarch, is said to have a similar approach. Thus, it was not only a policy question that set the two men apart, but a clash of power and personalities – the state against plutocracy. Putin let it be known that he would brook no loud criticisms of his Chechnya policies. Gusinsky ignored the hints and advice and persisted. The result was a clash in which Putin prevailed and Gusinsky was forced to leave Russia.

At just this time, in November 1999, a meeting of delegates from Habad-controlled congregations, led by several rabbis who had previously left the ranks of KEROOR, resolved to form the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FEOR). The new federation was immediately registered with the authorities as uniting 76 congregations.⁶² Here was a direct organizational challenge to the Gusinsky-led alliance, "The Jewish Community of Russia." The following month, then Prime Minister Putin attended a festive Hanukkah candle-lighting ceremony as guest of the Habad leadership, a clear signal that the new federation had his approval.⁶³ The first open conflict between the two groups appeared in December. The KEROOR leadership had been negotiating with the government for possession of a number of Torah scrolls that were stored in the State Archive for Ancient Documents. These were part of a larger number of Torah scrolls confiscated by the Soviet authorities during the years of the Soviet regime, and others taken from synagogues by the Nazis and later captured by the Soviet Army. It had been agreed that the scrolls would be presented to KEROOR to be displayed at its fourth conference. On the eve of the transfer, a letter from FEOR claiming a right to at least half the scrolls, caused the government to cancel the transfer, and set off acrimonious exchanges between the two rival federations, with FEOR claiming that rather than spending huge amounts of money (\$20,000 per Torah scroll) on buying new scrolls abroad, they preferred to use the money to set up social welfare and educational projects within Russia. KEROOR countered with the accusation that Habad wanted to get the scrolls in order to send them abroad, trying to brand the movement as foreign to Russia.⁶⁴ But this was only a diversionary foray, a signal to the public that a larger battle was in progress.

The true battle came with Gusinsky's arrest in mid-June, 2000. At almost the same time, an assembly of 26 Habad rabbis declared Berl Lazar chief rabbi of Russia, a title hitherto held by a Gusinsky ally, Rabbi Shayeveich of the Moscow Choral Synagogue. This evoked indignation and an attempt at ridicule from the Va'ad and KEROOR sources, but the proximity of Gusinsky's arrest to the Habad challenge did not escape notice.⁶⁵ The oligarch's followers had been put on notice that politics were the monopoly of the Kremlin, and that the Russian Jewish Congress had best tread carefully.

By September, the Congress was feeling the impact of Gusinsky's forced absence. A meeting of the leadership of the Russian Jewish Congress scheduled for September was postponed "because of a lack of funds and the inability of the group's leader to attend the meeting."⁶⁶ Gusinsky's absence not only deprived the RJC of its dynamic leader, but of a good deal of its finances as well. What might or might not have been additional pressure on RJC by the authorities came with the arrest in St. Petersburg (on charges of suspected involvement in kidnapping) of Mikhail Miralishvili, St. Petersburg chairman of the RJC.⁶⁷

A rethinking of strategy began in the upper echelons of the RJC in December. Eight of the most prominent supporters of the Congress convened in Moscow, and donated a quarter of a million dollars each to keep the Congress programs from collapsing. It would appear that they also gave some thought to reorganizing the leadership and policies of the Congress in light of the changed political environment. This appears to signal the emergence of a leadership cohort regarding the Jewish community's existence not as an instrumental or personal matter, but as an intrinsic value to be preserved and nurtured at any cost. The emergence of such a community-oriented cohort within the RJC signals the beginning of maturation of Russia's Jewish community as an institutionalized entity.

What appeared to be a near-capitulation of the anti-Habad forces came when the scheduled Fifth National Congress of KEROOR, was suddenly and unexplainably converted into a conference on "Prospects of Community Building." In addition to 78 Moscow delegates, 84 from 46 cities of the Russian Federation attended. This was considerably fewer than the 63 cities that had been expected to send representatives. The sensation of the conference was a call by pharmaceuticals tycoon Boris Shpiegel, the president of KEROOR, for unity with the Habad federation. There were also references to Rabbi Lazar as chief rabbi of Russia, a formulation that had always been anathema to KEROOR supporters, but which since then has become almost standard usage, with even the Russian Jewish Congress newspaper, giving Lazar and Shayeveich equality as chief rabbis, adding their organizational affiliation in parentheses.⁶⁸

The financial woes of KEROOR were mentioned openly, and Leonid Nevzlin, first vice-president of the giant YUKOS Oil Co. was elected chairman of the coordinating council of KEROOR, perhaps in hopes that he and his company's president, financial tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, would make up at least some of the funds formerly provided by Gusinsky. In addition this was apparently an attempt to give Nevzlin, who had not previously been involved in Jewish community affairs, exposure to the top community leadership, and a sense of what the organized Jewish community was about. It must have already been decided, in some circles at least, that Nevzlin would be a suitable replacement for Gusinsky. The only defiant note at the conference was struck by Chlenov who spoke angrily and at length of his discomfort with foreign rabbis who "speak a poor Russian."⁶⁹

The prospect of total collapse must have brought the remaining leaders of the Russian Jewish Congress, and perhaps Gusinsky as well, to the decision that a new leader and a new policy were, indeed, needed. Two weeks after the "community-building conference," Gusinsky resigned from the presidency of the RJC, and Nevzlin was appointed acting head of the Congress. A number of other new faces were added to the Congress Presidium, and a new director of the Regional Affairs Department was appointed.⁷⁰

Nevzlin lost no time in making public a new policy line. In his first press conference as acting president he stated: "When I agreed to take up this post, I made it clear that I was willing to take part exclusively in the organization's non-political activities." In addition, he emphasized the need to unite the positions of all Jewish organizations with regard to the authorities of the Russian Federation and Russian society.⁷¹ The understanding offered by Nevzlin was made explicit in an editorial article in *Evreiskaia gazeta*. "As an organization representing a broad spectrum of Jewish community groups, the Russian Jewish Congress cannot allow itself to become embroiled in the political conflicts of the society around it. The authorities, if they want to be a civilized democratic institution respected by their citizens, cannot treat a national organization as though it were an opposition political party."⁷² As his top priority activity he designated the educational campaign against intolerance, already funded by the RJC for several years.⁷³

The appointing of an acting president apparently ended the paralysis of the RJC. On April 12 it approved the budget for 2001, albeit only \$6 million as against the \$10 million of the previous year, called for the 3rd Congress to convene in mid-May, and named new vice-presidents, including Eugene Satanovsky who continued in his previous post as chairperson of the Congress Board of Directors as well. The Presidium also co-opted Alexander Asmolov, the initiator of the educational program on tolerance, and currently chair of the Psychology Department of Moscow State University, as a member.⁷⁴

The RJC Congress met and, as expected, confirmed Nevzlin as president by a vote of 148-0 with only a single abstention. The Congress did not go entirely smoothly, however, for Rabbi Lazar, bolstered by having been appointed in March as a member of President Putin's Advisory Committee on Religious Affairs at the expense of his KEROOR rival, Shayevich, announced that he was suspending his RJC membership "in protest against its undemocratic ways." To keep the opposition off balance, FEOR's executive director for all FSU activities, American-born Avraham Berkowitz stated that he expected relations between FEOR and RJC to improve with Nevzlin's election.⁷⁵ This was evidently a hint to Nevzlin that additional conciliatory gestures were expected by the Habad camp.

The combination of Nevzlin's program and the Habad reaction gave rise to an impression that Nevzlin had been chosen rather than one of the other wealthy businessmen more closely involved in Congress activities, at the direct behest of Putin.⁷⁶ While such direct involvement of Russia's president appears unlikely, the two sides, Congress and the government, had evidently clarified their mutual expectations and found an acceptable solution.

Now that it senses its rising status, FEOR, is on the offensive. Habad is already moving to put more emphasis on cultural and social activities of a non-religious nature, and recently appointed a young secular historian, Valerii Engel as its executive director for Russia, expanding the activity of FEOR in the secular social and cultural sphere. The resolution of the problem appears to hinge largely on two points: the success of the RJC in reestablishing a sound financial base, and its ability to convince Putin's government that although it is still supported largely by first-generation oligarchs, the RJC as such has given up the idea of acquiring political influence in Russia.

In December of 2001, there was an important new development for Russia's Jewish community. Leonid Nevzlin, whose tenure as president of the Russian Jewish Congress had not been marked by the same dynamism and activity as that of his predecessor, was tapped by the Kremlin for a seat in the Council of the Federation, Russia's Senate, representing the Republic of Mordovia. Here we have a clear sign of the political favor with which Nevzlin, Khodorkovsky and YUKOS are regarded by the Putin regime. He resigned his presidency of the RJC and in his place Eugene Satanovsky was elected president.⁷⁷ Although Nevzlin has resigned the presidency of the RJC, it is a good omen that he is maintaining his public contacts with the Jewish community, and appeared at the side of Satanovsky at an evening marking Holocaust Memorial Day in Moscow.⁷⁸

Satanovsky's election marked the advent of a community leadership based not only on wealth, but on long service as well. As we have noted, Satanovsky has been active in the building of Jewish community institutions since their earliest emergence from the underground. He has been particularly involved in Jewish education, serving as the chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Moscow Jewish University. His views have developed over the years, and he clearly has a sensitive ear for the politics of Russia. Interviewed in 1999 he defined the priorities of the Jewish community as "the memory of the Holocaust and the danger of a return of Fascism; the well-being of the State of Israel; and Jewish civilization and culture. Religious life is a priority also, but a lesser one."⁷⁹

In an interview shortly after his election, Satanovsky defined his view of community priorities somewhat differently. In first place he put non-interference in political affairs, in keeping with the policy laid down by his predecessor, Nevzlin, and with the ambience of the Putin regime. Construction of schools, universities, religious establishments and welfare institutions came next in his list, followed by closer ties with Israel. Regarding Russia, Satanovsky declared: "This is our Motherland. We are all in the same boat. We shall either swim or sink. We are eager to swim together to a civilized future." As an addendum Satanovsky noted that it was important to improve relations with FEOR. Although Rabbi Lazar had been invited to the Presidium meeting of the RJC that was scheduled to hold the election for the new president, Lazar did not attend.⁸⁰

In addition, although Rabbi Lazar attended the founding meetings of the Euro-Asiatic Jewish Congress, and long negotiations were held with FEOR in which their movement was offered double representation, both as a national organization, equal in number to that of Ukraine's Jewish community, and as part of local delegations, the representatives of FEOR refused to participate unless given a full half of the delegates in the Congress's Chamber of Representatives. Within a short time, Satanovsky was establishing his imprint as president on the Congress in undertaking to fund the restoration of the Gunsburg collection of early Jewish books and manuscripts held in the public libraries of Moscow and Saint Petersburg, as well as funding a Jewish reading room in the Moscow library.⁸¹

An additional initiative was an April 11, 2002 meeting of representatives of branches of the RJC to review their activities in 2001 and their programs for the current year. From the reports given, the focus of their work – 80 to 90 percent of their budgets – was on social support for the aged and ill, and for drawing their communities into activities marking the Jewish holidays. As in the period of Gusinsky's incumbency, emphasis is on developing local self-financing, with the Moscow community raising \$4 million dollars and all the others a total of \$2 million in 2001. At Satanovsky's urging, a model of community-based Jewish Charitable and Cultural Federations (as in America) is being promoted as the most efficient way to recruit local community leaders and achieve equitable distribution of resources. A difference of opinions appeared regarding relations with FEOR, with the representatives of several regions relating positive experiences in their cooperation with local representatives of FEOR, supported by the view of the executive vice-president of KEROOR, Anatolii Pinsky. "A more pessimistic view of these relations" was offered at the meeting by the "Chief Rabbi of Russia, Adolf Shayevich."⁸²

Meanwhile, the acrimonious nature of the relations between the RJC and FEOR is clear. The RJC Information Bulletin reporting on a Holocaust Memorial evening organized by the Russian Jewish Congress "attended by the leadership of all the representative Jewish organizations of Russia" notes that although Rabbi Lazar attended and addressed the meeting, he attracted journalists' attention by "leaving the memorial meeting immediately upon finishing his presentation." The same report includes a remark that despite the solemnity of the date, a concert of "Songs of the Jewish Shtetl" was held

that evening, and that one of the sponsors was the FEOR newspaper, *Evreiskoe slovo*.⁸³

Among the suggestions for calming the internal politics of Russia's Jewish community is one based on making use of a 1996 federal law establishing cultural-national autonomies for ethnic minorities in Russia. To date, twelve ethnic minorities have established such autonomies, theoretically making them eligible for governmental budgets for their activities. These include Germans, Koreans, Ukrainians and Jews. Jewish autonomies have been established in 29 localities and regions, and these have chosen a federal council of Jewish national-cultural autonomy, FENKA, with a directorate comprised of Alexander Osovtsov, Executive Director of the RJC, Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, and Michael Chlenov. The proposal that this federal council should be the "super-umbrella" of the Jewish community, working out all community disputes "in-house" had been put before Nevzlin for consideration during his tenure as RJC president, but has not as yet come formally before FEOR.⁸⁴

Clearly, FEOR will demand representation, if not parity, on the directorate before joining such an institution. A FENKA structure that included Habad representation would quite naturally be a testing ground to see whether ideological and administrative co-existence of the two rival tendencies is possible. It would also appear to be a way to isolate intra-communal Russian Jewish politics both from the Russian authorities and from intervention by interested Jewish groups outside Russia. It also puts Russia's Jewish community squarely within the framework of the state, while still leaving room for the civil status of the individual community organizations. Rejection of this proposal by any substantial part of the Jewish community of Russia would mean endangering the impressive network of community institutions that has emerged over the last decade, and leave the fate of the Russian Jewish community largely in outside hands. This would be in direct negation of the underlying ideas of the RJC that based itself on the concept of integration of the Jewish community as a natural and equal part of Russia.

It is worth noting that from the very beginnings of the emergence of Jewish institutions during *perestroika*, the two dominant trends in Jewish life have been integration in Russia's life while preserving an ethnic and cultural identity, or emigration. Unlike the Jewish community in pre-Soviet times, there has been no tendency to set up purely Jewish political parties, nor have the Jewish institutions identified themselves with any one party. In addition, while Hebrew and Yiddish are both taught in community schools and Joint-sponsored schools, Russian is clearly the language of the community. In these attributes, the Jewish community of Russia today is the intellectual and spiritual heir of the Russian-Jewish Enlightenment of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As noted above, administrative, financial and intellectual elites have emerged and have shown themselves able and willing to devote all their considerable resources to crystallizing an identity and an organizational structure for such a community. They have evolved considerably over the first decade of their independent existence, while demonstrating remarkable continuity and stability in the face of a turbulent environment fraught with uncertainties. The test facing these elites today, maintaining continuity in circumstances involving both a change of leadership and an adjustment of goals and values, will determine whether the community has the resilience and public roots to survive.

* * *

Notes

1. The lower figure includes only "census Jews," or "core Jews," those identifying themselves in the census as being of Jewish nationality. "Marginal Jews" are those who are of mixed parentage or who did not identify themselves as Jews in the census, or when receiving their internal passports. The "enlarged Jewish population" identified by demographers includes members of households in which there is a family member who is a "core Jew," or a "marginal Jew," thus making the entire household eligible for immigration to Israel as Jews under Israel's "Law of Return." These may or may not have matrilineal Jewish ancestry, which would make them Jews in keeping with Jewish religious law, which determines the personal status of Jews in Israel. One source estimates the number of Russia's Jews under Jewish religious law as 15 percent larger than the number of those declaring themselves Jews in the census. Thus, any person may be subject to three differing sets of criteria as to "Jewishness." For a methodological discussion, see Sergio Della Pergola, "The Demographic Context of the Soviet Aliya," *Jews and Jewish Topics in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, 3 (16) (Winter 1991):41-56. The main portion of this issue of the journal is devoted to demographic analysis of the Jews of Russia. For a more current analysis, see Mark Tolts, "Demography of the Jews of the Former Soviet Union: Yesterday and Today," in Zvi Y. Gitelman, ed., *Russia's Jews After the USSR: A Community in Transition* (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, forthcoming). (The volume consists of papers given at a conference in the Davis Center for Russian Studies, Harvard University, February 1999.) Tolts gives the 1998 number of Russia's "core Jews" as 325,000, and the expanded Jewish population as 585,000. Disputing Tolts's figures as too conservative, Mark Kupovitsky, "Evrei byvshego SSSR: Sovremennaiia etnodemograficheskaia situatsiia," in F. Dektor, V. Mochalova, *Problemy sushchestvovaniia v diaspore* [Problems of Existence in the Diaspora] (Minsk: Sefer, 2001), p. 126, estimates 263,000 "core Jews," 367,000 "marginal Jews," and 280,000 non-Jewish household members, for a grand total of 910,000 as of January 2000. For the rounded number of 600,000 Russian Jews used by the media, see Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) (Moscow), 1 August 2000.
2. See Mark Tolts, "Recent Jewish Emigration and Population Decline in Russia," *Jews in Eastern Europe*, 1 (35) (Spring 1998):6.
3. *Lenta.ru*, 22 December 1999, speech of Mikhail Chlenov of the Va'ad at its tenth anniversary congress. For Moscow, see Associated Press, 7 June 1998. The report describes four synagogues, 5 secondary schools, a theater, a chain of kosher restaurants and food stores, several theological academies, and a community center with 1,000 members.
4. Sarai Brachman Shoup, "The Emerging Jewish Community in Russia." Lecture at Harvard University, 14 February 1999. In the A.P. dispatch cited above, the director of the Jewish community center in Moscow declared that 35,000 of the capital's 200,000 Jews (17.5 percent) participated in community activities.
5. Mikhail A. Chlenov, "The Jewish Community of Russia: Current Situation and Prospects," unpublished ms., 2001, p. 4.
6. See, for instance, Shari Cohen, "Learning From the 'Periphery,'" *Politics and Policy Archive*, Internet (<http://www.claal.org>), 29 March 2002.
7. Paul Goble, "A Religious Flowering in Russia," *RFE/RL Newslines*, vol. 5, no. 79, Part I, 24 April 2001, citing Mikhail Tulskey

in the religion supplement of *Nezavissimaia gazeta*.

8. Ralph Goldman, "The Role of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Helping Reconstitute Jewish Life in the Former Soviet Union," in Zvi Y. Gitelman, ed., *op. cit.*

9. JTA, Moscow, 2 February 1999.

10. Mikhail A. Chlenov, interview in Jerusalem, June 2001. The Moscow institutions include a program in Jewish Studies and Jewish Civilization at Moscow State University's Institute for the Study of the Peoples of Asia and Africa; the Maimonides Academy, training Hebrew teachers; a program in Classical Philology and Cultural Studies at the Moscow State University of the Humanities; programs at the Jewish University of Moscow; and Religious Studies and Language Studies at the Moscow branch of Touro College.

11. See the report of the festivities in *Mezhdunarodnaia Evreiskaia gazeta*, nos. 6-7 (377) (February 2002):2.

12. As an example of such thought see the volume, *Problemy sushchestvovaniia v diaspore* [Problems of Existence in the Diaspora], Dector and Mochalova, eds., *op. cit.* The book is a compilation of lectures and discussion regarding the status and future of the Jewish community of Russia, sponsored by "Sefer," the Association for Scientists and Teachers of Judaica in Institutions of Higher Education, Moscow.

13. Valery Chervakov, lecture at Harvard University, February 1999.

14. These and the immediately following educational statistics are taken from V. Sobkin, E. Eliashevitch, and E. Marich, *Evreiskii detskii sad v Rossii: Problemy, protivorechiia, perspektivy*, [The Jewish Kindergarten in Russia: Problems, Contradictions, and Prospects] (Moscow, 2001), ch. 1.

15. Unfortunately, Sobkin and his colleagues give no indication of the total budget of these schools, nor of how much is given by each source. Only the percentage of schools receiving funding from each source is provided.

16. Zvi Y. Gitelman, "Thinking About Being Jewish in Russia and the Ukraine," in Gitelman, ed., *op. cit.*

17. Rosalia Ryvkina, "Peremeny v natsional'noi samoidentifikatsii Evreev v 90-e gg." [Changes in the Self-identification of Jews in the 1990s], in Dektor and Mochalova, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 143-158.

18. Walter Ruby, "Openness and Inclusiveness Hallmarks of Jewish Community," *New Jersey Jewish News*, 4 August 1999.

19. Leonid Gruzman and Alexander Etkind, "Why We Are Not Going," in D. Pri-Tal, ed., *Jews of the Soviet Union*, 13 (1990):134-141 (Hebrew). Russian original in *Vestnik Evreiskoi Kultury* (Riga), March-April 1989.

20. For the decline in numbers of Jewish professionals employed in the Soviet economy in the Brezhnev period, see Viacheslav Konstantinov, "The Socio-Economic Structure of the Jewish Population of the USSR From the 1960s to the 1980s," *Jews in Eastern Europe*, 3 (43) (Winter 2000):60-61, and Appendix 5.

21. For an analysis of the psychology and motivations of the younger generation that rebelled against "the period of invisibility" and sought to establish a firm, positive Jewish identity, see Mordechai Altshuler, "Changes in Soviet Jewry," *Jews and Jewish Topics in the Soviet Union and East Europe*, 2 (9) (Summer 1989):9-10.

22. The Centre for the Study and Documentation of East European Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem gathered and published some 26 volumes of Jewish *samizdat* writings.

23. Leonid Gruzman and Alexander Etkind, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

24. *Pravda*, 5 July 1988.

25. *Pravda*, 24 August 1989.

26. For a description of the founding and activities of such a center, see Theodore H. Friedgut, "A Revival of Jewish Culture in the Soviet Union: The Donetsk Jewish Centre, 'Aleph'," *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, vol. 19, no. 3:47-60.

27. See A. Torpusman, "An Attempt to Legalize the Jewish Movement: Moscow, 1987," *Jews in Eastern Europe*, 1 (32) (Spring 1997):75-76.

28. "Documents on Efforts to Regularize the Independent Jewish Cultural Association in Moscow," in D. Pri-Tal, ed., *Jews of the USSR*, 12 (1989):203-204.

29. Benjamin Pinkus, *End of an Era: The Jews of the Soviet Union Under Gorbachev, 1985-1991* (Sde Boker, Israel: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1999), p. 284 (Hebrew).

30. Pinkus, *op. cit.*, p. 285, gives the statistics of the meeting, noting that the delegates represented 50,000 members of various organizations, about 3 percent of the Soviet Union's Jews at the time. Pinkus adds the piquant fact that the name *Va'ad* (Hebrew for "committee") was chosen as a historical allusion to the *Va'ad Arbaat HaAratzot* (Council of the Four Lands), the earliest known East European institution of Jewish national-cultural autonomy that functioned from the sixteenth to eighteenth century.

31. See the transcript of the address in *Jews and Jewish Topics in the Soviet Union and East Europe*, 3 (10) (Winter, 1989):91-95. For analysis, see Theodore H. Friedgut, "Jews in the Soviet Union," in William Frankel, ed., *Yearbook of Jewish Affairs, 1991* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 177-187.

32. Grigorii Kanovich, "Is it Possible to Stay?" in D. Pri-Tal, ed., *Jews of the Soviet Union*, 13 (1990):113-118 (Hebrew). (Russian original in *Komsomolskaya pravda*, 5 October 1989.) Kanovich based his approach on the anti-Jewish incitement of such literary journals as *Molodaia gvardiia* and *Nash sovremennik*, expressing a fear common throughout the Jewish public in Russia in particular that pogroms were not only possible, but imminent.

33. For a discussion of the resolutions, see Pinkus, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

35. For notice of the founding of the Congress, see *Mezhdunarodnaia Evreiskaia gazeta*, 10 (380), March 2002, p. 1. *The Jewish Observer* (Ukraine), December 2001, states that Mashkevich holds Belgian citizenship. He is co-founder of Kazakhstan Mineral Resources and chairman of the Eurasian Bank.

36. See the discussion in *Mezhdunarodnaia Evreiskaia gazeta*, 10 (380), March 2002, p. 1.

37. The account of the founding of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress in *Mezhdunarodnaia Evreiskaia gazeta* (see note 35, above), emphasizes this weakness of both the *Va'ad* of Russia, and each of the separate communities forming the new organization.

38. Chlenov, "The Jewish Community," p. 5.

39. Pinkus, *op. cit.*, p. 251, notes the existence of only two ideological trends in Soviet Jewry up to the end of 1987, the Zionist-emigrationist trend that looked forward to Israel, and the Communist-Yiddishist trend that still dreamed of Biro-Bidjan. Pinkus does not devote discussion to the trend to emigrate to America or countries other than Israel, that took the lion's share of the emigration between the mid-seventies and the last months of 1989. He notes the emergence in 1988-91 of the trend expressing a desire for a Jewish community in Russia that would maintain its own identity and activity while cooperating with Israel and other world Jewish communities.

40. Gruzman and Etkind, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-135.

41. Viacheslav Konstantinov, "The Jewish Population of the USSR on the Eve of the Great Exodus," *Jews and Jewish Topics in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, 3 (16) (Winter 1991):12, Table 7.
42. The following is based on conversations of the author with Dr. Satanovsky in Moscow in 1992.
43. Mikhail Chlenov, "Zionism and the Jewish National Movement in Russia: Agreements and Disagreements," in D. Pri-Tal, ed., *Soviet Jews in Transition*, 16 (1993), pp. 63-64 (Hebrew).
44. In the 1970s and 1980s, there existed two official Jewish publications in the Yiddish language, the newspaper *Birobidzhaner shtern*, and the literary monthly *Sovetish heimland*. There were no Soviet-Jewish publications in Russian or Hebrew.
45. For the beginnings of independent Jewish publications in the USSR, see Pinkus, *op. cit.*, p. 357. For a detailed survey of the Jewish press, see Alexander Lakshin, "Jewish Press in the USSR During Perestroika, 1987-1991," in *Jews and Jewish Topics in the USSR and Eastern Europe*, 1 (17) (Spring 1992):5-26.
46. The advisory board and staff are named in each issue of the paper. According to no. 10 (336), March 2001, the press run of *Evreiskaia gazeta* is 15,000, but according to Natan Roitman, "Sensations in Russian Jewry," *Novaia gazeta – religiia*, 28 February 2001, *Evreiskaia gazeta* has only a circulation of 10,000, while its new competitor, the Habad-sponsored *Evreiskoe slovo*, prints 30,000 copies.
47. A report of the conference appears in *Mezhdunarodnaia Evreiskaia gazeta*, no. 8 (378), February 2002, p. 2.
48. For the growth in the number of publications, 1992-1999, and a complete listing of the currently existing publications, see Alexander Frenkel, Eliyahu Valk, and Arkadii Zeltser, "Jewish Periodicals in the Former Soviet Union, 1998-1999," *Jews in Eastern Europe*, 1 (44) (Spring 2001):92-146. Since the list given in this source is only to the end of 1999, it does not include the Habad organ, *Evreiskoe slovo*, which began publication only in the year 2000.
49. JTA, Moscow, 28 September 1999.
50. A story circulating in Moscow claimed that Gusinsky's motivation for sponsoring the Congress was to gain international status and protection after his offices were raided by forces under the command of the head of Yeltsin's presidential security force, Alexander Korzhakov. Whatever the personal motivation of Gusinsky, the Congress met a real community need, and Gusinsky contributed prestige, skill, and money to the project.
51. Ralph Goldman, "The Role of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Helping to Reconstruct Jewish Life in the Former Soviet Union," in Zvi Gitelman, ed., *op. cit.* Lev Gorodetsky, "Community Centers Become Focus of Jewish Life in the Former Soviet Union," JTA (Moscow), 2 January 2001, puts the number of JDC-supported centers at 100.
52. JTA (Moscow), 22 February 1999.
53. Lev Krichevsky, "Despite Russia's Economic Woes, Funding for Jewish Projects is Strong," JTA (Moscow), 22 February 1999.
54. These and the following figures are taken from *Russian Jewish Congress, 2000*, an annual report of activities.
55. The word Habad is an acronym for the Hebrew *Hochma, Binah, Da'at* (Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge). The Shneerson dynasty of rabbis has been the supreme authority in the movement since the early nineteenth century, interpreting the teachings of the movement's founder, Shneur Zalman of Ladi.
56. For one account of Habad activity in the USSR, see Max Vekselman, "The Lubavitch Hasidim in Uzbekistan, 1918-1995," *Shvut*, (New Series), 8 (24) (1999):133-149.
57. The reader will note that the numbers of congregations attributed to various groupings appear to vary considerably. In part this is due to inconsistent definitions of what constitutes a congregation, in part to considerable flux in the loyalties of individual congregations, and in part to the dynamism of development of the Jewish community institutions, with new social and religious centers forming almost daily. Thus Chlenov, in June 2001, credited Habad with 150 congregations.
58. Mark Zaichik, "Evreiskii universitet v segodniashchei Moskve," *Okna*, 11 October 2001, p. 16, testimony of Professor Veronica Irinoi-Kogan, Rector of the Rambam Academy in Moscow (Russian).
59. JTA (Moscow), 4 March 2001. In comparison, the RJC budget for the year 2000 was less than \$10 million. Chlenov, interviewed in Jerusalem in June 2001, cast strong doubt on the figure of \$70 million, claiming that the combined budgets of the JDC, the RJC and FEOR for Russia probably amounted to something like \$40 million. Michael S. Arnold, "Diamond Mogul and Philanthropist Has Ear of Fellow Jews and World Leaders," JTA (Moscow), 20 March 2002, claims that Levayev contributes \$15-30 million annually to Jewish activity, most of it to Habad projects, in the former Soviet Union.
60. See *Moscow Times*, 18 September 2000, and *Interfax, Russian News*, 18 September 2000.
61. See Michael Beizer, "The Destruction of Jewish Religious Life in Leningrad, 1929-1939," in *Shvut*, 8 (24) (1999):60.
62. Boris Viner, "Whom Do Simple Jews Trust?" *Nezavissimaia gazeta-religii*, 12 January 2000.
63. Michael Wines, "Putin, Making Gesture to Jews, Slips Into a Factional Morass," *New York Times*, 18 September 2000, notes the opinion of observers in Moscow that Putin's favoring of the Habad movement was aimed against Gusinsky. Matthew Brzezinski, "An American Media Mogul Makes Big News in Russian Television," *New York Times Magazine*, 22 July 2001, gives an account of how Putin's regime hounded Gusinsky out of the Russian media, and eventually out of Russia.
64. Viner, *op. cit.*, Viner's article is of particular interest for its clear pro-Habad and anti-KEROOR slant.
65. See the JTA report from Moscow, 13 June 2000. Chlenov is quoted as saying that Rabbi Lazar could only be called chief rabbi of the Russian Habad, and Zinovei Kogan asks rhetorically whether the timing of the Lazar "coronation" and the Gusinsky arrest is coincidental.
66. JTA (Moscow) 10 September 2000.
67. JTA (Moscow), 25 January 25 2001. Miralishvili, owner of hotels and casinos in St. Petersburg, had attracted the attention of the authorities after his father was kidnapped briefly in early 2000, and released unharmed a few days later. A few weeks later, three Georgians were shot dead in a local hotel.
68. See, for instance, *Mezhdunarodnaia Evreiskaia gazeta*, no. 10 (380), March 2002, noting the presence of "Chief Rabbi of Russia Berl Lazar (FEOR) and Chief Rabbi of Russia Adolf Shayevich, (KEROOR).
69. Roitman, *op. cit.*, gives a detailed report of the meeting. His explanation of the capitulation was that the KEROOR rabbis had not received their salaries for four or five months, that a number of the senior journalists of *Evreiskaia gazeta* had resigned, and that despite brave announcements of new congregations formed by KEROOR, some of the old ones had switched their allegiance to FEOR and others maintained membership in both federations.
70. *Evreiskaia gazeta*, 10 (336), March 2001.
71. *Strana.ru*, 14 March 2001.
72. "The Jews and Grand Politics," *Evreiskaia gazeta*, 10 (336), March 2001.

73. "Interview with Leonid Nevzlin on 'Ekho Moskvyy,'" *ibid*.

74. *Evreiskaia gazeta*, 15 (341), April 2001. Asmolov, who for many years served as deputy minister of education, was the initiator of the curriculum for teaching tolerance in the school system. He resigned as deputy minister with the advent of Putin as prime minister and returned to his position as a professor of psychology at Moscow State University.

75. Lev Gorodetsky, "New Russian Jewish Leader Hopes to Make Order Out of Chaos," JTA (Moscow), 23 May 2001.

Berkowitz was the victim of an assault by unknown persons who threw him into the Choral Synagogue ritual bath in mid-June 2000 and threatened to drown him.

76. *Ha'aretz*, 20 June 2001, citing an anonymous "senior official in Israel" (Hebrew). A Moscow source told the author that "Nevzlin put himself forward as candidate," adding that without a doubt the good relations of YUKOS with the government made this choice attractive.

77. RFE/RL *Newsline*, Part I, 7 December 2001.

78. Russian Jewish Congress, *Informatsionnyi biulleten'* (Moscow), no. 5, 11 April 2002, item no. 1.

79. Walter Ruby, "Openness," *op. cit*.

80. Mikhail Dor, "If Not Me for Myself, Who Then?" *Jewish Observer* (Ukraine), 16/19 December 2001.

81. "In Moscow, Hundreds Celebrate Jewish Reading Hall in Major Library," JTA (Moscow), 24 March 2002.

82. Russian Jewish Congress, *Informatsionnyi biulleten'* (Moscow), no. 6, 19 April 2002, item no. 2.

83. Russian Jewish Congress, *Informatsionnyi biulleten'* (Moscow), no. 5, 11 April 2002, item no. 1.

84. Michael Chlenov, interview in Jerusalem, June 2001. Chlenov claims to be the author of this suggestion, but was reluctant to predict the prospects of its adoption by the leadership of the Russian Jewish Congress.

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