Eastern Europe

Soviet Union

National Affairs

As Communist party leader Mikhail Gorbachev pressed ahead with programs of political and economic reform in 1987, politicians, economists, and cultural figures engaged in open debate over these plans. The Soviet press, radio, and television, once dull and predictable, became livelier and more appealing. The media not only revealed more of the crimes and abuses that had occurred under Stalin, they also discussed hitherto taboo subjects, such as the shortcomings of “corrective labor” camps, environmental pollution, youth crime, AIDS, and abuses of their power by the police and the KGB.

The new policy of glasnost’, or openness, also allowed the formation of grassroots groups espousing a variety of ideas and causes. By the end of the year, the Communist party newspaper Pravda estimated that 30,000 nonofficial associations had been formed around the country, some of a political nature with names like “Federation of Socialist Clubs,” “Club of Social Initiatives,” and “Perestroika Club.”

Pravda criticized some of the groups for “chauvinism, Zionism and anti-Semitism.” One group that received a lot of media coverage was Pamiat’ (“Memory”), originally formed to preserve Russian cultural monuments and traditions. Together with affiliated groups in several places around the country, Pamiat’ spread ideas about a “Zionist-Masonic conspiracy” to rule the USSR. Criticizing the organization, the youth newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda, among others, argued that it actually played into the hands of Zionists because it gave them “a reason to yell loudly about anti-Semitism in the USSR.” The press reported receiving letters from readers who supported the theory of a “Zionist-Masonic conspiracy” or who blamed the “period of stagnation” under Leonid Brezhnev on Jews. One reporter referred to a statement made at a public lecture, “Nothing can be changed in our country without renouncing Marxism as a profoundly Zionist teaching,” with the observation that “this really takes the cake.” Admitting that it had not exposed anti-Semitic expressions in the past, the government newspaper Izvestiia argued that publicity might have aroused “uncalled-for feelings in some of our readers,” tacitly admitting
that popular anti-Semitism did exist. The party historical journal criticized a book on Zionism for taking a "subjective" approach and implied that the author's anti-Zionism had spilled over into anti-Semitism.

At a party Central Committee plenum in January, Gorbachev called for secret balloting and a choice of candidates in party and local Soviet elections. In June Gorbachev advocated a series of economic changes that included profit-and-loss accounting, linking a collective's income directly to its performance, decentralizing decision making, reforming the price system, and promoting individual initiative. Small-scale family farming was to be encouraged; farm managers were given greater say over what and how much they would grow and were permitted to sell up to 30 percent of their production above the quota at unregulated prices. These reforms did not meet with universal acclaim. Economists, historians, and other social scientists debated them in the media and in scholarly journals, while many middle-level party and state officials, fearful that the reforms would threaten their jobs or at least their routines, fought them with bureaucratic stratagems. Yegor Ligachev, a Politburo member often seen as second only to Gorbachev, publicly expressed his reservations about reforming the system too hastily and extensively.

A law was passed in June allowing citizens to initiate legal appeal against actions of public officials who violated their rights. Another expression of liberalization was the permission given to thousands of people to travel to the West, especially the United States, to visit relatives. By the fall, the U.S. embassy was issuing several thousand visitors' visas a month. A few exit visas were granted for visits to Israel. In addition, increasing numbers of émigrés now living in the United States were allowed to return to the Soviet Union for visits with relatives.

As a result of the campaign against alcoholism, consumption of legal vodka was down 43 percent from 1984. However, there were at least 390,000 arrests in 1987 for illegal home brewing, compared to fewer than 70,000 in 1985. One consequence of illegal alcohol manufacture was a sugar shortage in the country. Reduced alcohol consumption was said to be a possible reason for the rise in the Russian birthrate, although the national average was still short of that needed for population replacement. Infant mortality rates were still more than twice as high as in the United States.

**Relations with U.S.**

The Soviet Union continued to improve its relations with several countries, including the United States, from whom it resumed buying corn and wheat at prices subsidized by the American government.

At a summit meeting held in Washington in December, Secretary Gorbachev and U.S. president Ronald Reagan signed the first treaty reducing their nations' nuclear arsenals. They agreed to dismantle all Soviet and American medium- and short-range missiles and established the most extensive inspection of weapons ever negotiated between them, including placing technicians on each other's territories. As
the two leaders seemed to establish better personal relations, it was decided not to let Reagan's "star wars" missile-defense system block negotiation of a new strategic missile pact. At the same time, economist Abel Aganbegyan reported that the USSR had received 300 proposals for joint economic ventures, 45 of them from the United States. By year's end, 13 such ventures were in operation, 1 with the United States.

Karl Linnas, an Estonian sentenced to death in the USSR for having killed people in a Nazi concentration camp, was deported from the United States to the Soviet Union in April. While awaiting action on an appeal for a pardon, Linnas, age 67, died in a Leningrad hospital.

Relations with Israel

Cultural and diplomatic contacts between the USSR and Israel increased significantly during the year, reaching levels higher than at any time since 1967. The Soviet Gypsy Theater gave eight performances in Israel in March; the Bolshoi Ballet and Red Army Chorus scheduled Israeli appearances for 1989; and an Israeli film company agreed to make a film with a Soviet counterpart about a non-Jew from the Georgian Republic who travels to Israel.

When Syrian president Hafez al-Assad visited Moscow in April, Gorbachev remarked publicly that the absence of Soviet-Israeli relations "cannot be considered normal," and suggested that Israel was at fault. "We unambiguously recognize—to the same extent we do for all states—Israel's right to peace and a secure existence. At the same time, the Soviet Union continues to categorically oppose Tel Aviv's policy of force and annexation," Gorbachev said.

Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres met with Yuri Dubinin, Soviet ambassador to the United States, in May, to discuss an international peace conference on the Middle East, and there were other Soviet-Israeli diplomatic contacts as well. The most dramatic event of the year was the arrival of eight Soviet officials in Israel in July, led by the deputy chief of the consular division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Yevgeny Antipov, and including Alexei Chistyakov, deputy chief of the Foreign Ministry's Middle East Department. The delegation, whose stated task was to survey property belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church and renew the passports of Soviet citizens, had its original three-month visas extended, in October, for another three months. In an interview with Izvestiia, Antipov emphasized that "our trip has nothing to do with the problem of restoring relations." He noted that "Israeli officials have . . . taken an understanding view of the group's tasks and have given it all necessary assistance. . . . The Israelis' attitude toward us has been, on the whole, interested and well intentioned" (September 27, 1987). He noted, too, that Israel's climate was very hot, prices high, and soldiers ubiquitous.

The Soviet Union warned Israel several times not to continue development of the Jericho II medium-range missile, which was capable of reaching areas of the southern USSR. Foreign Minister Peres was reported to have refused a Soviet offer to establish interests sections in Tel Aviv and Moscow on the ground that while
interests sections might be suitable to smaller powers such as Poland and Hungary, only full diplomatic relations would suffice for the USSR and Israel.

In October the USSR voted to exclude Israel from the UN General Assembly session, as it had in the past. Czechoslovakia, however, joined Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria in not taking part in the vote. Romania and Yugoslavia voted for Israel's admission, leaving only the German Democratic Republic from the East European states voting with the USSR to exclude Israel.

**Human Rights**

Early in the year it was announced that 140 prisoners convicted of subversive activities had been pardoned and that a comparable number of cases were being reviewed. Religious and political dissidents, as well as activists in behalf of several national movements, were among those released. In July 300 Crimean Tatars marched outside the Kremlin for over 24 hours. A commission headed by Anatoly Gromyko, chairman of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet, was appointed to look into their grievances.

In September, 17 campaigners for Jewish rights were arrested before they could launch a public demonstration against anti-Semitism. Permission to hold the demonstration was denied by Moscow city officials. There were other instances of harassment of human-rights activists, but a large group of them —eventually numbering some 400 and coming from Czechoslovakia, Sweden, and the United States, as well as the USSR—gathered for an independent human-rights seminar. In late December the Soviet government invited a delegation from the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights to visit Moscow for a week of discussions with Soviet officials.

**Jewish Community**

**Demography**

No new data were available on the Jewish population, assumed to be about 1.8 million people. Mark Kupovetskii published a historical analysis of Moscow's Jewish population in *Sovetish haimland* (No. 7, 1987), in which he estimated that in the late 1970s there were 220,000–225,000 Jews in Moscow, where they constituted the second largest ethnic group. About 125,000 Jews were said to have migrated to Moscow, mostly from the Ukraine, in the years 1924–1933, after which migration to the capital was strictly regulated. Kupovetskii estimated that between one-third and one-half of the middle and younger generations of Moscow Jewry were married to non-Jews.
Emigration and Emigration Activists

On January 1 a new law on emigration took effect, restricting family reunification to first-degree relatives, defined as parents, spouses, children, and siblings. The law also spelled out several procedures and regulations hitherto not publicized. Some viewed the statute as simply codifying existing practice, while others saw it as narrowing the possibilities of emigration. In practice, Jewish emigration increased dramatically, from 914 in 1986 to 8,011 in 1987. Only 2,108 of the emigrants went to Israel, the rest going to the United States and other Western countries.

Interior Minister Aleksandr Vlasov claimed that only 732 people were barred from leaving in the first 11 months of 1987, mostly for state security reasons. Gorbachev had mentioned the figure of 220 such persons just a week earlier, but most observers felt that both figures were far too low. In an interview with American television broadcaster Tom Brokaw, Gorbachev charged that the campaign for Jewish emigration was an attempt to organize a "brain drain," and that the USSR would "never accept a condition when people are being exhorted from outside to leave their country." He also asserted that the only reason people were not allowed to leave was security considerations. Indeed, on February 12, Vechernaya Moskva published a list supplied by OVIR (Office of Registration and Visas) of eight Jews who would not be allowed to leave on security grounds. Included were well-known refuseniks Alexander Lerner, Vladimir Slepak, and the Khasin family. In February public protests were mounted for several days in Moscow, demanding the release of Yosif Begun, a Hebrew teacher and aliyah activist who had been exiled, arrested after his return in 1978, and rearrested in 1983, sentenced to seven years in jail and five years in exile. On the fourth day of protest, plainclothesmen roughed up demonstrators and detained a few briefly. One week later Begun was released from Chistopol prison and was greeted by a crowd of about 100 people upon his arrival in Moscow.

In March, 75 wives of Prisoners of Conscience, members of separated families, and long-term refuseniks marked International Women's Day with hunger strikes and appeals in nine cities. Also in March, Michael Shirman, a 32-year-old leukemia patient, died in Israel, as his sister, who had been detained for over two years by Soviet authorities, arrived in Israel for a bone marrow transplant, too late to save him. Nine cancer patients in the USSR were denied permission to go to the West for treatment. Inna Meiman, a long-time refusenik, was allowed to leave without her husband, to undergo cancer treatment in the United States, but died soon after. Refusenik Yuri Shpeizman, a cancer victim, was allowed to leave but died in Vienna on his way to Israel.

Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress, and Morris Abram, chairman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, met in March with Soviet officials Anatoly Dobrynin and Alexander Yakovlev. They were assured that there would be a major increase in Jewish emigration, direct flights to Israel via Bucharest, Romania, and
improved opportunities for Soviet Jews to study Hebrew and religion. Abram reported that a kosher restaurant might be opened in Moscow and that Soviet rabbis would be trained, perhaps in the United States. If improvements were made, Abram told the Soviets, he would recommend repeal of the Stevenson amendment to the Foreign Trade Act, which limited credits to the USSR, and a waiver of the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which barred the Soviet Union from getting most-favored-nation status. Bronfman and Abram were told that “substantially all” who had been refused permission to emigrate would be allowed to leave within the year, except for those who had access to state secrets. Some Soviet Jewish activists criticized Bronfman and Abram for advocating concessions on the basis of dubious assurances.

In an unprecedented gesture, U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz attended a Passover seder at the American embassy in Moscow, to which 50 refuseniks had been invited. Among them were Lerner, Slepak, Ida Nudel, Begun, Abe Stolar, Yevgeny Yakir, and Arkady Mai. Gorbachev commented to visiting American congressmen, “Not a single normal person was there, only people who complained.”

In February Zionist activist Roald Zelichonok was released from prison after serving half his three-year term. In the spring, imprisoned Zionist activists Yosif Berenshtain, Yakov Levin, Mark Niepomniashchy, and Vladimir Lifshitz were released before completion of their respective sentences. Later, prisoners Leonid Volvosky, Yuli Edelshtein, and Alexei Magarik were also released. This reduced the number of known “Prisoners of Zion” to near zero. (Edelshtein went to Israel in July.) In the fall, a few weeks before the summit with the United States, some well-known long-term refuseniks were given permission to emigrate. They included Yosif Begun, Viktor Brailovsky, Arkady Mai, Lev Sud, Lev Ovsishcher, and Simon Yantovsky. Ida Nudel, a refusenik for 16 years who had been exiled in Siberia from 1978 to 1982, was allowed to depart for Israel, as were 17-year refuseniks Alexander Lerner and Vladimir Slepak.

In the last days of 1986 and early 1987, several dozen families of Soviet émigrés to the United States returned to the USSR to resume permanent residence there.

Culture

Among the grassroots organizations permitted by glasnost’ were some aimed at promoting Jewish culture. In Moscow a retired military officer, Yuri Sokol, established a Jewish library of some 500 books in his apartment. He also applied to Moscow municipal authorities for a permit to open a museum featuring Soviet Jewish heroism in World War II. In Samarkand, Uzbekistan, a “Club for the History of the ‘Eastern’ Neighborhood,” formerly the Jewish quarter, was formed under the leadership of Benyamin Benyaminov. In Baku, Azerbaijan, more than 70 Jews signed up for the first officially sanctioned Hebrew course, taught by Vladimir Farber, which was registered within the framework of grassroots organizations.

Jewish manuscripts in the Institute of Oriental Studies in Leningrad were de-
scribed in an article in Palestinskii Sbornik (No. 28). There were 1,148 manuscripts in the collection, the oldest from the 9th century, most from the 16th through the 19th centuries. At the Fourth All-Union Conference of Young Orientalists, several scholars presented papers on Jewish subjects, including Hebrew language, other Jewish languages, and Krymchak (Crimean Jewish) family names. A hitherto unknown, unfinished story by Isaac Babel, "The Jewess," was published in Yiddish translation in Sovetish haimland (No. 9). Tass announced that a two-volume collection of Babel's works would be published the following year.

On the centenary of his birth, an exhibit of 90 paintings and 200 graphics by Marc Chagall opened at the Pushkin Fine Arts Museum in Moscow in September. (The Russian-born artist, who left his native land in the 1920s, died in France in 1985.) There were reports that a museum devoted to his works would open in his native city of Vitebsk. Sovetish haimland (No. 6) reproduced in color seven Chagall paintings, described as "relatively unknown," that were in Soviet collections.

Cultural performances of Jewish interest included a staging in Tbilisi, Georgia, of Arkady Stavitsky's play 40 Sholem Aleichem Street, which dealt with Jewish emigration. A "mono-opera" based on Anne Frank's diary was staged by O. Iancu at the Kishinev Actors House. Fifty years after its debut, the film Seekers of Happiness, about the early settlers in Birobidzhan, was screened in the Minsk Literary House, in a Minsk theater, and on Belorussian television. Commissar, a film made in 1967 by Alexander Askoldov, a non-Jew, was finally released for showing to small audiences of foreigners and selected Soviet citizens at a Moscow film festival. The film portrayed Jewish suffering and bravery during the civil war, 1918-1921. A Russian version of the musical Fiddler on the Roof was performed in Odessa.

"Jewish Folk Music in Moldavia and Bukovina" was the subject of a lecture at the All-Union Geographical Society. Vladimir Bitkin of Kishinev accompanied his lecture with recordings of cantorial and folk music which he had made in those areas.

At the Sixth Moscow International Book Fair in September, three thousand publishers from 103 countries, including Israel, displayed their publications. The Association of Jewish Book Publishers in the United States was able to bring in books that had been banned at previous fairs. Even a Soviet newspaper (Literaturnaya Gazeta, September 16, 1987) admitted that the Jewish book displays were crowded, though it charged that "the exhibitors were interested in creating a propaganda stir, a sensational scandal... rather than in serious work."

It was announced that Birobidzhan would have its first institution of higher learning, a pedagogical institute. The plan called for an enrollment of 1,400 students and 150-180 faculty, including teachers of Yiddish language and literature. The school was scheduled to open in 1989-90. On a visit to Birobidzhan, New York Times reporter Philip Taubman was told that of 70,000 books and periodicals in the local library, 4,000 were in Yiddish. The mayor of the city of Birobidzhan, Mark
Kaufman, and the head of the Communist party organization, Boris Korsunsky, were Jews, as was the director of the largest industrial plant.

Writing in *Sovetish haimland* (No. 7), Viktor Lenzon noted that the audience for the Moscow Drama Theater-Studio, a Jewish theater, had declined. As the novelty of Jewish theater dissipated, audiences were becoming more demanding, he claimed. In Lenzon's view, Yiddish theaters were underestimating their audiences and offering them too much light fare. In addition, the attempt to mix Russian and Yiddish had not been successful. “It's hard to imagine the Moscow Gypsy Theater visiting Japan, for example, and the Gypsies speaking Russian,” he said. “Why, then, does the Yiddish theater at home act with such carelessness toward the Yiddish language?” Noting that the Yiddish theater is more a “theater about Jews” than a “Jewish theater,” because the director and most of the actors lack sufficient knowledge of Jewish culture, Lenzon suggested that the theater make use of the more than 20 veterans of the former State Yiddish Theater still living in the USSR.

**Religion**

According to the journal *Nauka i Religiia* (Science and Religion, No. 11), which published figures on the number of officially registered Jewish congregations, there had been a steady decline from 259 registered in 1961 to 109 in 1986.

The mikvah (ritual bath) at the Marina Roshcha Synagogue in Moscow, closed in 1986 by the authorities, was reopened this year. It was announced that kosher food, imported from Hungary, was being made available for lunches at the main Moscow synagogue on Arkhipova Street.

**Personalia**

The Order of Lenin was awarded to Lev Borisovich Shapiro, first secretary of the (Birobidzhan) Jewish Autonomous Province party committee, on his 60th birthday.

Among prominent Jews who died during the year were Esther Karchmer, one of the first actresses in the State Yiddish Theater, in which she played over 50 roles, aged 88; sculptor Peisakh (Piotr Moiseevich) Krivorutskii, of Leningrad, whose subjects included many Jewish writers and actors, aged 66; Anatoly Efros, famed director of the Taganka Theater, aged 61; Arkady Raikin, the country’s best-known humorist and satirist, aged 76; and Shaye Bronshtain, an artist who made scenery and costumes for the State Yiddish Theater, aged 78. Academician Yakov Borisovich Zeldovich, a physicist, a three-time winner of the Hero of Socialist Labor Award and the Lenin and USSR State Prizes, died at age 73. Rivke Rubin, Yiddish writer, critic, and translator, who had been on the editorial board of *Sovetish haimland* and later taught a course on Y. L. Peretz at the Gorky Literary Institute, died at age 81. Academician Mark Mitin, a philosopher, died at age 86.

ZVI GITELMAN
Soviet Bloc Nations

Czechoslovakia

The regime in Czechoslovakia continued in 1987 to be one of the most conservative in the region. Seemingly traumatized by the unsuccessful attempt at economic and political reform in 1968, it did not rush to embrace the reforms being discussed in the USSR. In fact, it was political dissidents who took up the slogan of "Long live Gorbachev!" as their ironic rallying cry. In Jewish matters, too, the regime remained cautious, anti-Zionist, and highly critical of Israel.

A Communist party delegation, headed by Michal Stefanak, head of the Central Committee's International Department, visited Israel as guests of the Israeli Communist party. The Czechs met with a broad spectrum of Israelis. There was some speculation that this might lead to the kind of improvement in relations with Israel that had been observed with regard to Poland and Hungary.

Jewish Community

The Jewish community was said to number some 5,000, though exact figures had not been available for many years.

In February a synagogue was consecrated in Karlovy Vary by Rabbi Daniel Mayer of Prague. It was housed in a building originally built for another purpose. The former main synagogue in this Bohemian spa and resort town had been blown up by the Nazis. Rabbi Mayer, educated at the Budapest Jewish Theological Seminary, was the only rabbi in Czechoslovakia, which had been without any rabbi for about 20 years.

Hungary

In contrast to Czechoslovakia, Hungary had pursued a reformist economic course since 1968. The leadership took satisfaction in Soviet acknowledgment that Gorbachev's reforms were inspired in part by Hungarian precedents. However, Hungary was experiencing serious economic difficulties. Her foreign debt of $13 billion was the highest per capita among the socialist countries. The government announced plans to introduce a value-added tax and a significant income tax in 1988, with rates of the latter to reach as high as 60 percent. In March, 1,500 people marched in Budapest, demanding more political freedom and a reduction in Soviet influence in Hungary. Janos Kadar, party leader since 1956, was said to be less and less involved in administration and decision making. Major changes in leadership were expected.
During the course of the year several Israeli officials visited Hungary, mainly on commercial and cultural business. Jozsef Gyorke, deputy head of the party Central Committee's foreign department, led an official party delegation to Israel in April. Agreements were reached with Israel on cooperation in agriculture and irrigation. In September Hungary and Israel agreed to open interests sections in each other's capitals, each to be staffed by five diplomats. Deputy Foreign Minister Gabor Nagy said that the sections would facilitate contacts between the two countries. He reported that 20,000 Israelis were visiting Hungary annually and estimated that there were about 200,000–250,000 Israelis of Hungarian origin. The Israel Chamber Orchestra gave concerts in Budapest in September, and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra toured the country the following month. Israel's Habimah Theater was invited to perform in Budapest, and the Hungarian National Theater was scheduled to appear in Israel, both in 1988.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

With no firm data available on the size of the Hungarian Jewish population, estimates ranged from 35,000 to 100,000.

In May the enlarged executive committee of the World Jewish Congress met in Budapest, the first time such a meeting was held in Eastern Europe. Hungarian president Pal Losonczi, Prime Minister Gyorgy Lazar, and Foreign Minister Peter Varkonyi met with WJC leaders. The latter attended the graduation exercises of the Rabbinical Seminary and also laid a wreath at a monument to Raoul Wallenberg that was unveiled in Budapest. The seminary, founded in the 19th century, was the only one of its kind in the socialist countries. It had in 1987 about a dozen students, half of them from Hungary and the rest from other socialist countries, including the USSR. The monument to Wallenberg, who was arrested by the Soviets in 1945 and whose fate remained unclear, was erected, without any public announcement, in a quiet residential section of Buda in April. Funds for the monument were provided by former U.S. ambassador Nicolas Salgo, a Jew of Hungarian origin. In January, Dr. Andras Losonci, president of the Central Board of Hungarian Jews, told New York City's mayor Edward Koch, who was visiting Hungary, that the Jewish community needed financial assistance. It was receiving $1 million annually from the Joint Distribution Committee, mainly for caring for the elderly, meals for the homebound, and elementary Jewish education, but the needs of the nursing homes and Jewish hospital were not being met.

In July the executive committee of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture convened in Budapest, the first time this organization had met in Eastern Europe. On this occasion, three recently published Hungarian-language books on Judaism were introduced, and the Center for Judaic Studies, the only one of its kind in Eastern Europe, was inaugurated. Organizationally part of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the center was located in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of the Eotvos Lorand University in Budapest.
An exhibit on the history of Hungarian Jewry was mounted in Goldmark Hall in Budapest. American actor Tony Curtis established the Emanuel Foundation, named for his Hungarian-born father, Emanuel Schwartz, to assist in the restoration of Budapest's Dohanyi Street Temple, the largest Jewish house of worship in Europe.

Poland

Economic difficulties and political instability continued to plague Poland. Party leader Wojciech Jaruzelski enthusiastically embraced Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms, and many Poles hoped that liberalization in the USSR would spill over to Poland. In a remarkably frank article written by Jaruzelski, he described how the Polish Communist party was decimated by the Comintern in the late 1930s, and how the USSR divided Poland with Germany. These issues were hitherto almost unmentionable in the press, let alone in the Soviet and Polish party theoretical journals where his article appeared.

Poland's foreign debt rose to about $35 billion, more than it earned in hard currency in 1986 or 1987. Sharp increases in the prices of gasoline, food, and beverages brought protests from the Catholic Church and Lech Walesa, former leader of Solidarity. In February, U.S. President Ronald Reagan lifted economic sanctions against Poland on the ground that the human-rights situation had improved and political prisoners were being released. After four years without top-level diplomatic representation in either country, the United States and Poland agreed to exchange ambassadors. Vice-President George Bush visited Poland in September.

General Jaruzelski met with Pope John Paul II in Rome early in the year. The pope refused to establish diplomatic relations with Poland until disputes between the government and the local bishops were resolved. John Paul visited Poland in June and came out strongly for human rights, pointing to the Solidarity movement as an exemplar of those rights. Eight Jewish representatives from Polish-Jewish bodies were among those who met with the pope.

Polish-Jewish Relations

Early in the year Catholic officials from Poland, France, and Belgium, meeting at the chateau of Baron Edmond de Rothschild in Geneva, agreed with European Jewish leaders that the Carmelite convent near the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camps should be closed, and that the ten nuns living in the convent would be relocated to an interreligious center a mile from the camps. The agreement had not yet been implemented by year's end.

Poland's government took several highly visible steps to improve relations with foreign Jewish communities and their leaders and with the State of Israel. Most observers suggested that the goal was to improve Poland's image among political
and financial influential who could help Poland out of her difficulties. In March
a parliamentary delegation, headed by Politburo member Jozef Czyrek, met with
Edgar Bronfman of the World Jewish Congress, Seymour Reich of B’nai B’rith
International, and Morris Abram of the Council of Presidents of Major Jewish
Organizations. In May the Jagellonian University in Krakow and the Jewish Histor-
ical Institute in Warsaw cosponsored a symposium on Polish-Jewish relations. In
September an international conference, including Israeli scholars, was held in Bia-
lystok on the subject “Five Hundred Years of Jewish Settlement in Podlasie.”

At a four-day conference on the history and culture of Polish Jews, held in
February at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Prof. Jozef Gierowski of the
Jagellonian University in Krakow and director of its Research Center of Jewish
History, stated that the Polish government would soon acknowledge “political
error” in its 1968 anti-Semitic campaign. That campaign, which was triggered by
then party leader Wladyslaw Gomulka’s warning that Zionists had no place in
Poland, had turned into a generally anti-Semitic onslaught led by some of Go-
mulka’s political rivals. It resulted in a mass exodus of Jews, many of whom had
been Communist party stalwarts. Gierowski said that he was authorized to make
his statement by General Jaruzelski. Discussing this topic later, the influential
Polish newspaper Polityka referred to the 1968 campaign in a front-page story as
“infamous” and “an embarrassment” to Poland. On March 2, Trybuna Ludu,
official organ of the Polish United Workers party, stated that most party and
government officials had had nothing to do with the anti-Semitic campaign. “The
Party as a whole and its leadership—though not always effective or timely—none-
thelss tried to discourage an atmosphere of anti-Semitism.” Trybuna Ludu admit-
ted that 13,000 Jews left Poland in the period 1968–1971 and that the purge of Jews
“caused harm to many people” and damaged Poland’s intellectual life and image
abroad.

At the same time, the Catholic newspaper Tygodnik Powszechny featured several
articles debating the Polish role in the Holocaust. The well-known literary critic Jan
Blonski and others discussed whether or not the Poles were guilty of any form of
collaboration in the extermination of Poland’s three million Jews. Not surprisingly,
no definitive conclusions were reached. The major issue was whether Polish passiv-
ity was morally reprehensible or simply realistic, given the circumstances. Wladys-
law Sila-Nowicki, a lawyer who participated in the wartime resistance and who was
once an adviser to Solidarity, wrote that Jewish passivity was “the first and basic
impediment” to Poles helping the Jews more. An international conference on the
extermination of Jews in the Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka camps was held in
Lublin in August. Soviet and East European scholars participated. The U.S. Holo-
caust Memorial Council agreed to exchange documents with the Polish Main Com-
misson for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland.
JEWISH COMMUNITY

The Jewish population of Poland was estimated at 5,000, of whom nearly 2,000 were registered with the religious community.

Ambassador Mordechai Paltzur, head of the Israeli interests section in Warsaw, participated in the commemoration of the Warsaw ghetto uprising of 1943, along with a delegation of Israeli youth. In Kielce, in August, a ceremony was held to commemorate the 1946 pogrom in that city. The ceremony also marked the restoration of the local Jewish cemetery, which was funded by the Nissenbaum Foundation and the Organization of Kielce Jews in the United States.

Romania

The Romanian government was probably the least enthusiastic of any in the region about the reforms proposed in the USSR. Party leader Nicolae Ceausescu's "personality cult" reached heights unknown since the death of Stalin, the economic situation continued to deteriorate, and political repression showed no sign of letting up. At the beginning of the year, U.S. trade representative Clayton Yeutter announced that Romania would lose Generalized System of Preferences benefits, which waived import duties on selected goods from some developing countries. (Romania sold $50–60 million in goods annually to the United States.) In June the U.S. Senate approved an amendment to the trade bill that would suspend Romania's most-favored-nation status for six months after the bill's enactment. Only if the president recommended restoration and could point to assurances that Romania had improved its performance in the area of human rights and contacts could MFN status—first granted in 1975—be restored.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

The Jewish population of Romania was estimated at 21,500.

Jewish cultural and religious activity continued. Immigration to Israel went on at more or less the same levels as before, and Romania's relations with Israel remained cordial. There was considerable Israeli tourism to Romania and trade relations were considered satisfactory.

Zvi Gitelman