Eastern Europe

Soviet Union

National Affairs

Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev continued in 1988 to introduce the most far-reaching changes the Soviet system had experienced since the beginning of the Stalin period. Yet, in the third year of his tenure it was still unclear how deeply his reforms had affected the system and society and whether they were being institutionalized. In 1988 glasnost’, or openness, went quite far. Perestroika, or restructuring, was being proposed and widely discussed, but was being implemented slowly or not at all. It proved difficult to alter habits of mind, patterns of behavior, and vested institutional and personal interests that had developed over many years. Opposition to Gorbachev came from those who felt the reforms had not gone far enough as well as those who felt they had gone too far. Intensive debate of political, cultural, and economic issues continued throughout the year with no clear resolution.

The nearly two million Jews of the USSR were affected by this debate in four ways. They were affected as individuals, in their economic, political, and cultural lives, and as members of a nationality. In addition, more than most of the over 100 officially recognized nationalities, Jews were affected by the vicissitudes of international relations, especially the Soviet-American relationship and, to a lesser extent, the Soviet-Israeli one. Finally, as had happened previously in Russian history, Jews and “the Jewish question” became symbols in the debate over the nature and future of the system. Rightly or not, “Jew” was used as a code word for an internationalist, liberal outlook, and the “Jewish question” became a surrogate for a broad range of issues. Glasnost’ brought the Jewish issue into the open to a greater extent than at any time in the recent past, but the new openness turned out to cut both ways: it allowed more public expression of anti-Semitism as well as criticism of it.

Several times during the year Communist party secretary Gorbachev publicly expressed anger and frustration at the slow pace of reform, though on several occasions he criticized journalists and politicians who were, in his view, too impatient and demanding of results. The overall thrust of Gorbachev’s economic reforms
was to make the economy more efficient and competitive. This involved stimulating individual initiative, getting people to work harder, making more rational use of the country's immense natural and human resources, and eliminating or at least radically reducing corruption.

A major change in the political structure of the USSR was approved by a special party conference, the first such since 1941, held in June, and approved by the Supreme Soviet in late November. A new body, the Congress of Peoples' Deputies, would be constituted, composed of 2,250 delegates—1,500 to be elected from territorial and national districts and 750 from public organizations. This congress would then elect a smaller Supreme Soviet, consisting of only 400–500 members. The congress would also elect a president who would have broad powers in legislation, foreign policy, and defense. It was widely assumed that Gorbachev would be this president and would also continue as first secretary of the party, thus concentrating increased governmental and party powers in his hands. On the other hand, it was recommended that the party's role in economic life be reduced, and that a five-year maximum term of office be set for both party and government officials. Reflecting the controversial nature of the proposals and the fears of some that too much power was being concentrated in the hands of one man, 209 delegates to the conference voted against the proposals.

The new institutional arrangements were severely criticized by Andrei Sakharov, nuclear scientist and human-rights activist, who warned of the dangers of concentrating too much power in one person's hands. The arrangements were also criticized by representatives of the Baltic nationalities, especially the Estonians, who argued that the new system would allow the central authorities to override the republics on important issues and would thus destroy any vestige of federalism.

In September elections in the primary party organizations (the approximately 400,000 basic party units), about half the seats were contested and a substantial number of new leaders came into office.

Glasnost' moved ahead faster than perestroika. Emigré writers such as Vladimir Nabokov and Joseph Brodsky were published for the first time, as was Boris Pasternak's novel *Dr. Zhivago* and other works formerly banned. Some films made years ago but never released were shown to the public for the first time. Attacks on Stalinism continued unabated, but in the spirit of freer expression the media also carried defenses of Stalin and his policies. Nearly 700 victims of the purges were "rehabilitated" by a special commission appointed for that purpose.

Because of uncertainty as to the correct interpretation of recent historical events, especially those connected with the Stalinist period, no final examinations were given in history in the secondary schools. Instead, teachers substituted ungraded oral discussions of current events. This reflected both the uncertainty and fluidity of reevaluations of the system.
Strictures on religion were considerably relaxed during the year, perhaps because the Russian Orthodox Church, the largest denomination in the country, celebrated the millennium of Christianity in Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia. The campaign against Islam, very militant in previous years, was somewhat toned down; Jewish religious groups were by and large allowed to function unharassed; and Christianity was treated with a respect it had not enjoyed since World War II. Konstantin Kharchev, the government official in charge of religions, claimed that in the first half of the year alone, almost 160 new religious congregations had registered with the authorities. Cathedrals in Klaipeda and Vilnius in the Baltic were returned to the Catholic Church after they had been used for other purposes during many years.

Problems with nationalities surfaced and loomed very large during the year, the most dramatic events taking place in the southern republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan and in the Baltic republics. In the former, there were violent clashes reflecting deep-seated ethnic tensions, traditionally denied by Soviet officials. As a result of the continuing unrest, thousands of Armenians from Azerbaijan took refuge in Armenia, and large numbers of Azerbaijaniis fled the Armenian republic to their own. In addition to the pain caused to the nationalities involved, events in the Caucasus cast a long shadow on the myth of "friendship of the peoples" and embarrassed the Gorbachev leadership. Conservative critics suggested that the disorders were a direct result of perestroika and the forces it had unleashed. The devastating earthquake in Armenia on December 7, in which about 25,000 were killed and many more were wounded or made homeless, overshadowed the nationality frictions, at least temporarily.

Events in the Baltic republics posed a more direct political challenge. In Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, popular, officially recognized movements emerged demanding greater political, economic, and cultural autonomy from Moscow. Some suggested that the Baltic republics were the most likely venues of successful economic reform and that Gorbachev was willing to permit this spontaneous political and cultural activity in return for demonstrations of how successful economic perestroika could be.

Foreign Affairs

In order to revive the economy and breathe life into a political system that had lost its dynamism during the "years of stagnation"—the current euphemism for the Brezhnev era—Gorbachev tried to reduce Soviet commitments abroad as well as to divert resources going to the military toward the domestic economy. In May the pullout of Soviet troops from Afghanistan began, cutting a commitment first made in 1979. By the end of 1988 there were said to be 50,000 troops left there, down from 115,000 when the withdrawal began. For the first time the Soviets admitted the magnitude of their casualties: 13,310 killed and 35,478
wounded. An internal party circular acknowledged that fundamental errors had been made in the Afghan adventure.

Political prisoners were released and prominent refuseniks were permitted to emigrate, partly in order to remove the "human-rights obstacle" from relations with the West. In fact, Western Europe responded favorably to Soviet invitations to help the economy. The Federal Republic of Germany granted $1.6 billion in credits to help the consumer sector, and Western businesses eagerly sought opportunities in the huge Soviet economy.

An ideological rationale for these policies was given by Vadim Medvedev, promoted to the Politburo in October as its new ideological specialist. He said in a speech reprinted in Pravda that Soviet communism was in crisis and that it should borrow ideas from capitalist countries as well as socialist ones. He argued that universal values, such as avoiding wars and ecological catastrophes, had come to outweigh the class struggle in importance, and that peaceful coexistence would be a long-term proposition. This contrasted with statements by his predecessor, Yegor Ligachev, who warned that class struggle must not be abandoned even in periods of reform.

In May the U.S. Senate approved a treaty eliminating American and Soviet intermediate-range missiles. The following month another summit meeting took place between President Ronald Reagan and Gorbachev. Reagan met with dissidents in Moscow and addressed students at Moscow State University; however, little progress was made on arms control. Meetings between Reagan, Gorbachev, and President-elect George Bush at the United Nations were cut short when Gorbachev had to rush home to deal with the earthquake in Armenia; however, in his address to the UN, Gorbachev announced a unilateral deep cut in Soviet armed forces in Western Europe.

Relations with Israel

Relations with Israel improved as well. Consular delegations were exchanged, placing relations on a lower level than those of Israel with Poland and Hungary, but restoring a formal, albeit largely symbolic, relationship nonetheless. Six Israeli diplomats took up residence in Moscow in July. On several occasions Soviet representatives reiterated the view that a full restoration of relations could occur only "in the framework of a comprehensive Middle East settlement." Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, meeting in New York, in June, with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir of Israel, said about the restoration of relations that "when an effective international conference goes to work, the Soviet Union will be ready to resolve the issue."

During the course of the year, some 8,000–10,000 Soviet Jews visited Israel as tourists, hosted by family and friends. A large number also visited the United States. In July Rabbi Simcha Kook of Rehovot became the first Israeli rabbi since 1967 to pay an official visit to the USSR. In the same month, 70 people from eight cities
set up a "Soviet-Israeli Friendship Society." By contrast, Evgeny Evseev, a well-known anti-Zionist writer often accused of anti-Semitism, established the "Committee of the Soviet Public Against the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations with Israel."

Israel sent two teams of over 40 persons each to assist the victims of the Armenian earthquake in December. They arrived in Israeli aircraft clearly marked as such. At the same time, five Soviet hijackers who had released their child hostages in return for a cargo plane and $3 million and who flew to Israel were arrested by the Israelis and returned to the USSR. Israel's action drew favorable comment in Soviet media.

In June the Israeli cabinet resolved that Soviet Jews wishing to emigrate could obtain their Israeli visas only in Bucharest and from there they would have to fly directly to Israel. This drew negative commentary from American and Soviet Jews and a mixed reception in the U.S. Department of State.

**Anti-Semitism**

Jews gained from glasnost' and perestroika, though there were some costs as well. On the one hand, improved relations with the West and Israel raised emigration levels significantly. Moreover, greater tolerance for religious and ethnic cultural expressions benefited Jews along with others. On the other hand, glasnost' permitted anti-Semitism to be expressed more widely. Pamiat', a Russian nationalist organization, expressed explicitly anti-Jewish sentiments in public meetings and publications, blaming Jews and Freemasons for most of the USSR's historic and contemporary problems. The rhetoric of Pamiat' was so strong that it drew public protests. Pravda (February 1) criticized Pamiat' for its anti-Semitism and for having become an "extremist, chauvinist organization." Izvestiia (February 27) also criticized the organization and mocked its claims of a Zionist-Masonic conspiracy that was trying to establish worldwide dominance.

The well-known "anti-Zionist" writers Yevseev, Begun, and Romanenko were criticized by the Yiddish monthly Sovetish haimland (No. 12) for publishing works which "abound in a large number of various propositions and inaccuracies that make it possible to assess their works as unscientific and essentially disorienting to readers. . . ." Experts from the Soviet Institute of the USA and Canada who had been asked to study the works of these propagandists concluded that they contained distortions, exaggerations, and "juggling of facts." In their article for Sovetskaia Kultura, quoted in Izvestiia (February 27), they accused Begun of employing a "simple device: he replaces the word 'Jew' with the word 'Zionist' and then he follows the original [of Mein Kampf] verbatim, occasionally interspersing the text with pseudo-Marxist phraseology." This was one of the strongest criticisms seen in a Soviet publication of works which had long been viewed as anti-Semitic in the West but which the Soviets had insisted were merely anti-Zionist.

Reformist magazines also condemned anti-Semitism. Two authors writing in Ogonyok noted, "Unfortunately, in the recent past the criticism of Zionism was not
always conducted from a class position in the works of certain Soviet authors. Scientific analysis was replaced by ambiguous hints, and the concepts 'Jew' and 'Zionist' were often confused. Anti-Semitism and its social roots were passed over in silence . . . or received an incorrect evaluation" and the influence of Zionism in capitalist countries was exaggerated. (Vladimir Nosenko and Sergei Rogov, "Beware: Provocation! Who Needs 'Black Hundreds' Myths!" Ogonyok, No. 23, June 4–11, 1988.)

In January Sovetish haimland (No. 1) translated a long critique by Andrei Tshervizov of Pamiat' and three well-known "anti-Zionist" writers who were accused of being anti-Semites. The May issue of the same journal (No. 5) published several letters from Jews concerned about open anti-Semitic expressions. In August Izvestiia published a letter by 59 staff members of the Leningrad division of the Academy of Sciences' Institute of Oriental Studies, protesting Pamiat's anti-Semitism and castigating it for blaming Jews and other non-Russians for Stalinist repressions and the destruction of Russian cultural monuments. A. Z. Romanenko's book The Class Essence of Zionism was criticized in at least three Soviet journals for inaccuracies and for conveying the mistaken impression that world Zionism was the chief enemy of revolutionary causes and the main proponent of war. The book was said to be "harmful to the internationalist upbringing of Soviet people," meaning that it aroused anti-Semitic feelings.

However, anti-Semitic motifs did not disappear from the press. Writing in Pravda (July 22) about Michael Dukakis, for example, V. Linnik said, "The Jewish bourgeoisie's money carries colossal weight in the Democratic party, and Dukakis's distinctly pro-Israeli stand is no accident." In an article that became a political cause célèbre (Sovetskaia Rossiya, March 13), Nina Andreevna, a chemistry teacher in Leningrad, attacked perestroika by linking it to Jews, lack of patriotism, and political liberalism. "Another special feature," she wrote, "of the views of the 'left-liberals' is an obvious or camouflaged cosmopolitan tendency, a sort of de-nationalized 'internationalism,' " citing Trotsky as the epitome of this tendency. Trotsky, she asserted, slighted Russian culture and the Russian proletariat. In case the Jewish connection was not clear enough, she suggested that "militant cosmopolitanism is now linked with the practice of 'refusenikism,' of refusing socialism." Refuseniks commit "outrages" by demonstrating publicly, she asserted. "Moreover, we are somehow gradually being trained to see this phenomenon as an almost inoffensive change of 'place of residence,' not as class and nationality betrayal by persons most of whom have been graduated from higher schools and graduate schools at public expense." She mocked "refusenikism" as "some kind of manifestation of 'democracy' and 'human rights.' "

So the connection was made between Trotsky—the cosmopolitan Jewish intellectual who had no regard for Russians—refuseniks, and democracy. Little wonder that rumors of anti-Semitic pogroms connected to the Church millennium spread among Jewish activist circles, especially after leaflets appeared in Leningrad calling for "Death to the Jews." The rumors proved unfounded.
Past episodes of anti-Semitism were also reconsidered. In April the magazine *Druzhba Narodov* ("Friendship of the Peoples") published 90-year-old Yakov Rapaport’s memoir of the "Doctors' Plot" of 1953, when Kremlin doctors, most of them Jews, were accused of poisoning top Soviet leaders. This led to a pogrom atmosphere in the entire country, in which Jewish doctors such as Rapaport bore the brunt of popular rage. His daughter’s memoir of the time was published simultaneously in *Yunost*, a youth magazine. In July *Sovetskaia Kultura* published a long article on the death of Solomon Mikhoels, Yiddish actor and director, in 1948, admitting that he was murdered, that the murder was "sanctioned," and that the official version of his death was a fabrication.

**Emigration**

When a new emigration law went into effect in 1987, providing, among other things, that only first-degree relatives could invite Soviet citizens to join them abroad, many assumed that this would severely constrict Jewish emigration. In fact, since the law was only sporadically applied, Jewish emigration soared dramatically. Whereas in 1986 only 914 Jews left the USSR, in 1987 some 8,000 did so, and in 1988, 18,965 were permitted to leave. Among them were several hundred long-term refuseniks, including Yosif Begun and Pavel Abramovich, leading Hebrew teachers in Moscow; Naum Meiman, Alexander Yoffe, Feliks Kochubievsky, Alexander Lerner, Alexander Paritsky, Grigory Rozenshtain, and former prisoners Leonid Volovovsky, Alexei Magarik, and Alexander Khomiansky. Among those still waiting for exit visas was Yuli Kosharovsky, in refusal for years. At the end of the year, however, Kosharovsky and three other refuseniks were notified that they were no longer considered to possess state secrets and thus were free to leave the country.

There were signs that the Soviets might in fact be changing their traditional hostility toward émigrés. A number of articles appeared in the press suggesting that people who emigrated were not necessarily hostile to the USSR and that they helped disseminate and promote Russian culture. A letter to the editor of a Lithuanian newspaper protested the exclusion of two Heroes of the Soviet Union from museum exhibits on World War II just because they had emigrated to Israel for family reasons. A Moscow theater staged a play titled *Benjamin the Third's Trip to the Holy Land*, despite its depiction of earlier generations of Jews wishing to leave for Israel.

A new kind of emigration problem arose midyear when the United States announced that the unexpectedly large emigration, mostly of Armenians, had exhausted the budgetary allocations for Soviet immigrants. In the next few months, the backlog of immigrants began to build, and many Jews found themselves stuck in Rome, awaiting transit to the United States, or having their refugee status challenged on the grounds that they could not prove that they were likely to be persecuted in the USSR. In December the U. S. attorney general agreed to exercise his "parole power" and admit more Soviet immigrants, but those admitted under such status would not enjoy the assistance offered to refugees. Ameri-
can Jewish organizations promised to press the matter with the new administration and Congress.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Demography

The 1979 census had enumerated 1,811,000 self-identified Jews. The next census was planned for 1989 and was expected to show some decline in the number of Jews as a result of emigration and the aging of the Jewish population, as well as of low fertility rates.

Culture

In 1988 there emerged several “grassroots” Jewish cultural groups which were not necessarily religious or oriented toward emigration. In July the Jewish Cultural Club was formed in Riga, with B. Gaft as its coordinator. The Jewish Cultural Society was established in Estonia in March. Literaturna Ukraina (November 24) reported that a Jewish cultural society had been formed in Kiev, where a Jewish folk-song ensemble, Nigunim, was already performing. The founding of the society was welcomed by representatives of the Ukrainian Cultural Fund and by Aleksandr Levenbuk, director of the Shalom Theater in Moscow and a leader of a similar group in Moscow, one which, he said, was open to all and included Russians and Ukrainians. He was quoted as saying, “Our aim is to develop Jewish culture, to strengthen internationalism on the basis of the exchange of spiritual values with representatives of other nationalities” (Tass, October 28). The new Union of Lovers of Jewish Culture in Minsk, chaired by artist M. Dantsig, planned to feature local actors and dance groups, offer courses in Yiddish, and publish a yearbook in Yiddish and Belorussian. The organizers also expressed a desire to link up with similar groups inside and outside the USSR (Tass, October 18).

The Kishinev (Moldavia) municipal government announced that tuition-free Yiddish courses would be offered for adults and children. In Chernovtsy and Lvov in Ukraine, Yiddish courses were also announced, in the latter city organized by the newly formed Sholem Aleichem Society. Sovetish haimland (No. 11, p. 160) reported that a “large number of families have demanded that their children learn Yiddish language and literature in the schools” of Lvov. Even in cities with only a few thousand Jews, such as Ufa, Cheliabinsk, Kuibyshev, and Kherson, Jewish cultural associations were formed. Their main activities seemed to be lectures, musical and dance programs, and instruction in Yiddish or Hebrew. In Berdichev and Baku, Yiddish courses were announced. In Central Asia, a Bukharan Jewish section was created in the Union of Writers of Uzbekistan.

In Lithuania Jewish cultural activity was officially encouraged. The May issue of
Kommunistas (Lithuania) reported an order to party committees, trade unions, and the republic's Ministry of Culture to "devote constant attention to the development of the national cultures of the Polish and Jewish populations" and to provide for art exhibits, literary evenings, the expansion of Yiddish library holdings, and commemoration of Nazi victims, and to arrange wider local coverage of Jewish history, culture, and traditions. Jews and other national minorities were to be "guaranteed fair representation in party, government, Komsomol, trade union and economic organs, and in the ranks of the CPSU." Such a directive was unknown anywhere else or, for that matter, at any time in recent Soviet history. Indeed, the Group to Promote Jewish Culture was formed under the aegis of the Lithuanian Cultural Fund, and its representatives participated in the 45th-anniversary commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

The authorities were asked to reopen the State Jewish Museum of Culture in Vilnius, which had closed in 1949, but by year's end this had not happened. On the other hand, an exhibit of Lithuanian Jewish graphic art from the 17th through the 20th centuries opened in Kaunas in June and was then shown in Vilnius. Organizer of the exhibit was Emanuelis Zingeris, active in the promotion of Yiddish culture in Lithuania. In an article in Sovetish haimland (No. 7), Zingeris related that in 1942 the Nazis had gathered 100,000 Yiddish and Hebrew books in Lithuania, shipping about 20,000 to Germany and turning the rest into pulp. At the time of writing, the Lithuanian Book Palace held 20,705 works in Yiddish and Hebrew, mostly published in Lithuania in the last two centuries. There were also 21,420 Yiddish newspapers and journals in the collection.

The Yiddish Folk Theater of Vilnius gave 15 performances in Moldavia and several in Belorussia. A Jewish chamber ensemble from Vilnius performed in Georgia and Azerbaijan and also for five military units. Grigory Kanovitch, a novelist whose themes were Jewish life in Lithuania in the 19th and early 20th centuries, was awarded a republic prize for literature. Middle School No. 6 in Vilnius began offering Yiddish courses on three levels, and another school was scheduled to introduce similar instruction in the next academic year.

In Moscow, too, cultural activity picked up considerably, some claiming that 25 Jewish cultural groups were active there. World War II veteran Yuri Sokol opened a Jewish library in his apartment in Moscow and reported that 30 to 40 readers a week patronized it. He applied to the city soviet for official recognition of the library and for the establishment of a museum highlighting the role of Soviet Jews in World War II, but his application was denied. Mikhail Chlenov, an anthropologist, had founded a group for the historical and anthropological study of Jewry as far back as 1981. In March, along with two others, he began publishing a journal of general Jewish interest, Shalom. A second issue appeared in September. Altogether, about six journals of Jewish interest were being published (typed and inexpensively reproduced) in the USSR in 1988.

Aspects of Jewish culture that had been anathema in the past now seemed to gain legitimacy. Sovetish haimland (No. 1) devoted considerable space to the 115th
anniversary of the birth of the Hebrew, Zionist poet, Chaim Nachman Bialik. One of his best-known poems was published in Yiddish translation, along with an appreciation of the poet written by Maxim Gorki.

Ilya Shifman published the *World of the Bible* in 200,000 copies, a work that included talmudic commentary as well as modern Israeli scholarship. Sixty Hebrew teachers from eight cities formed the National Hebrew Teachers Association headed by Lev Gorodetsky.

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz of Israel announced in May that a Jewish religious training institute would open in Moscow in 1989, offering classical Jewish studies from an Orthodox viewpoint. The teachers would come initially from abroad. The institute was part of a broader agreement providing for Soviet-Western cooperation in surveying, preserving, and studying Judaica books and manuscripts in Soviet libraries and archives. The agreement was negotiated with Evgeny Velikhov, vice-president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, acting on behalf of the Academy of World Civilizations.

Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress, announced in the fall that the WJC and the Jewish Agency had agreed to work with the Soviet Ministry of Culture to establish and help finance a Jewish cultural center at the site of the Jewish Musical Theater in Moscow. To be named the Solomon Mikhoels Culture Center and scheduled to open in February 1989, it would include a Judaica library, a museum, art gallery, and teaching areas. Bronfman further announced that Soviet authorities had agreed to allow the distribution of Jewish cultural and religious material. The building adjacent to the main Moscow synagogue was also to be turned into a museum of Jewish culture.

**Holocaust-Related Matters**

There were signs this year that Soviet reluctance to recognize the Holocaust as a specifically Jewish tragedy might be changing slightly. The Main Archival Administration of the USSR and the United States Holocaust Memorial Council signed an agreement in the summer to permit American researchers to copy documents in Soviet archives that related to the Holocaust. The copies would be deposited in the Holocaust Museum scheduled to open in Washington, D.C., in 1991.

Arbit Blatas, a Lithuanian-born sculptor living in the United States, was given permission to erect a monument to Holocaust victims in Vilnius, one that would have a specifically Jewish character and include the Hebrew word "zakhor" (remember). A commemoration of the 45th anniversary of the liquidation of the Lvov ghetto was held in that city on June 24. At the officially sanctioned meeting, which was conducted in Yiddish, Russian, and Ukrainian, speakers called for the preservation of Jewish cultural monuments, popularization of Yiddish language and literature, and the opening of Jewish schools and synagogues in Lvov. Luiza and Iosif Shternshtam, Lvov sculptors, presented a proposal for a monument to ghetto victims to the local soviet.
In a letter to the editor of a local newspaper, a Lithuanian wrote that before the war, “Lithuanian children played with Davids, Yoskes, Chashkes, Mirkes. But alien camps arrived who began to murder our good neighbors. That was not all. There were Lithuanian sons . . . who . . . joined the alien murderers.” The writer called for a memorial to be erected to the Jewish children who died in the Holocaust (Sovetish haimland, No. 1, p. 128). Party veteran Solomonas Atamukas, a Jew, admitted that Jewish suffering and the role of Jews generally in Lithuanian history had been suppressed in the USSR.

In general, there were more public commemorations of the Holocaust, unimpeded by the authorities, than in previous years. Public observances of Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Memorial Day) were held in Vilnius and Leningrad. In Moscow and Kiev the anniversary of the massacre at Babi Yar was observed by Jewish groups. Delegations from Minsk and Vilnius attended ceremonies in Warsaw marking the anniversary of the ghetto uprising. In Minsk itself, however, a gathering at a monument to victims of the Nazis was dispersed by police. And in Lithuania it was pointed out that though nearly a third of the soldiers of the 16th Lithuanian Division had been Jews, their role in fighting the Nazis was not mentioned in Soviet media and literature. Finally, Sovetish haimland (No. 11) included an article stating clearly that writer Ilya Ehrenburg’s attempts to publish testimonies about the Holocaust had been blocked by the authorities. The writer of the article called for publication of the “Black Book” in full, in line with the trend toward filling the “blank pages” in Soviet history. At least Vassily Grossman’s monumental novel about World War II, Life and Fate, wherein the Jewish element is prominent, was finally published this year in the magazine Oktiabr’, long after it had become an underground classic.

Personalia

Several prominent cultural figures died in 1988. Among them were composer Zinovy Kompaneets, some of whose works were on Jewish themes. The deaths of Yiddish writers Note Lurie (aged 81) and Yosef Rabin (aged 87) in late 1987 were reported at the beginning of the year. Other writers who died were Buzi Miller (aged 75) of Birobidzhan and Khaskl Tabachnikov of Kiev. Scholar and author Leib Vilsker, formerly the curator of Judaica at the Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library in Leningrad, died at age 69. Ilya Zilbershtain, a prominent literary figure who wrote in Russian, died at age 84.

Zvi Gitelman
Eastern European Countries

Czechoslovakia

In 1988 CZECHOSLOVAKIA showed only the faintest signs of political and economic reform, and its leadership remained unenthusiastic about changes taking place in the USSR. In October Prime Minister Lubomir Strougal, generally thought to be an advocate of economic reform, resigned, along with Deputy Prime Minister Petr Colotka. Both men also resigned from the Politburo, the leading organ of the Communist party. Ladislav Adamec succeeded Strougal as prime minister.

There were modest indications this year of some relaxation in Czechoslovakia's hostility to Israel. In September, at a meeting of the UN General Assembly in New York, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres of Israel met with his Czechoslovak counterpart, Bohuslav Chnoupek. Such a meeting had not taken place since 1967, when Czechoslovakia unilaterally broke relations with Israel, following the Soviet lead. It was agreed that Czechoslovakia would send two delegations to Israel, one economic and one to deal with consular matters.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

There were no significant changes in the position of the Jewish community, generally estimated to number about 5,000, though some maintained that there were another 10,000 people of Jewish origin who did not identify with the Jewish community. The community was served by a single rabbi, Daniel Meyer, in Prague. Some after-school classes for Jewish children were offered in that city.

Hungary

Hungarian political life was lively in 1988. In May Janos Kadar was removed as general secretary of the Hungarian Workers (Communist) party and was replaced by Prime Minister Karoly Grosz. Kadar had led the party since late 1956, when he entered the country with Soviet forces which overthrew the reformist regime of Imre Nagy. In the 1960s Kadar guided Hungary through economic reform and political liberalization, but by the late 1980s he was thought to be unsympathetic to further reform and both physically and mentally incapable of continuing his leadership. Grosz, a conservative reformer, took pains to point out on television that, despite his family name, he was not Jewish. In November Miklos Nemeth replaced Grosz as prime minister, the latter retaining the post of party leader.
In March an Israeli interests section was opened in Budapest, making Hungary the only East European country aside from Poland to reestablish some form of diplomatic relations with Israel. Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres visited Budapest in May and met with party secretary Grosz. Peres's coalition partner, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, did the same in September. While on an official visit to Israel, Minister of Cults Imre Miklos agreed to permit Israeli educators to come to Hungary to teach Hebrew and Jewish subjects. Israeli scholars would also be given access to Judaica materials in Hungarian libraries and archives.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

The Jewish population of Hungary, the largest in Eastern Europe, was estimated at between 35,000 and 100,000, the great majority not formally affiliated with the community.

Late in the year, the Center for Jewish Studies was inaugurated within the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Initiated by the New York-based Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, which, together with the academy, provided it with financial assistance, the center was headed by Prof. Geza Komoroczy, a non-Jewish specialist in the ancient Near East who had been teaching biblical Hebrew for 26 years. The inauguration of the center was attended by U.S. ambassador Mark Palmer and the president of the Academy of Sciences, professor of history Ivan Berend. Several lectures on Judaic subjects were given by Hungarian and foreign scholars in connection with the inauguration. The center and the Hungarian Jewish community agreed to publish Judaica materials for adults, to supplement the work of the Aleph Library, which published similar materials for children. The first work to be published was *The Essential Talmud*, by Israeli scholar Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz.

The Memorial Foundation concluded an agreement with the Ministry of Cults enabling the Budapest Rabbinical Seminary, the only one of its kind in Eastern Europe, to train teachers of Judaica in addition to rabbis. It was also agreed that Hebrew would be taught in select secondary schools in Budapest.

The Federation to Maintain Jewish Culture in Hungary was founded this year. In contrast to the long-recognized religious community (Magyar Izraelitak Orszagos Kepviselete), this organization did not define itself in religious terms but stressed the ethnic dimension of Jewish identity. The organizers, who were from highly assimilated backgrounds, were led by Endre Rozsa, a well-known radio personality. Claiming over a thousand members, the federation lobbied for Jewish elementary schools and Hebrew instruction.

A privately sponsored journal of Jewish content made its appearance in 1988. Called *Mult es Jovo* (Past and Future), the journal featured works on Jewish themes by both contemporary and past writers.

The improved climate of Israeli-Hungarian relations enabled two Israeli *sofrim* (scribes) to visit Hungary and collect about 140 Torah scrolls from abandoned
synagogues and Jewish communities. Most could not be refurbished, however, and were taken to Israel for burial.

Poland

Poland's economic and political situation continued to deteriorate. In February the prices of about half of Poland's goods and services were raised an average of 27 percent, and the currency was officially devalued. By April strikes broke out and were curbed only at the cost of wage increases. In August coal miners and dockworkers went on strike. After meeting with Interior Minister General Czeslaw Kiszczak to discuss the possibility of the government negotiating with the Solidarity union, Solidarity leader Lech Walesa called for an end to what were now nationwide strikes. Prime Minister Zbigniew Messner, whose government had failed to improve the economy, resigned in September and was succeeded by Mieczyslaw Rakowski. When the new government announced plans to begin closing the Lenin shipyards in Gdansk, a Solidarity stronghold, it was strongly condemned by that movement.

Polish-Israeli relations continued to expand. In June El Al Israel Airlines inaugurated direct flights from Tel Aviv to Warsaw. In October the Polish and Israeli foreign ministers, meeting in New York, agreed in principle to upgrade their diplomatic missions in Warsaw and Tel Aviv to make them independent, rather than have them operating under the diplomatic sponsorship of the Netherlands. Polish scholars were among the 300 people who attended a conference in February on the history and culture of Polish Jewry, held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the latest in a series of such conferences that had taken place in Poland and the United States. At the conference, Prof. Jozef Gierowski of the Jagellonian University in Krakow announced that the Polish government would soon issue a statement on the anti-Semitic campaign and purges of 1968. The same month, the weekly Polityka called the campaign "infamous" and "an embarrassment" to Poland. However, the official statement, issued on March 2, in Trybuna Ludu, organ of the Polish United Workers party, while acknowledging that there had been an anti-Semitic campaign, asserted that "the overwhelming majority of party and state activists had nothing to do with anti-Semitism." It admitted that the campaign "brought harm to many people," but went on to say, "It should be strongly stated that the party as a whole and its leadership—although not always effective or timely—nevertheless tried to discourage an atmosphere of anti-Semitism." Trybuna Ludu admitted 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.

The Warsaw Yiddish Theater toured Israel in February and the Mazowsze Folk Dance Troupe did the same in May. The renowned Polish director Andrzej Wajda directed a production of the classic Yiddish play The Dybbuk at Tel Aviv's Habima Theater. In June Dr. Yossi Beilin, political director of the Israel Foreign Ministry, met with Polish foreign minister Tadeusz Olechowski in Warsaw.
JEWISH COMMUNITY

Most estimates agreed on about 5,000 Jews in Poland, fewer than half of them affiliated with the religious communities or the secular social and cultural society of Jews in Poland.

On the 45th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt, commemorated in April, over 3,000 Jews from 35 countries came to Warsaw for the ceremonies. They included six members of the Israeli Knesset, Deputy Prime Minister Yitzhak Navon, and Justice Minister Avraham Sharir. In a ceremony at the Polish Parliament, 99 Poles who saved Jews during World War II were given “Righteous Gentile” awards by the Yad Vashem Institute. A newly erected memorial monument to those deported to death camps was dedicated by the authorities at Warsaw’s Umschlagplatz, the point of embarkation on the death trains. One voice of protest was that of Marek Edelman, the only one of the leaders of the ghetto revolt still living in Poland and a Solidarity activist. Objecting to the fact that the ceremonies were arranged by a repressive government, he organized an alternative ceremony at the monument to the ghetto resisters, in which some 5,000 people participated. The unofficial commemoration also dedicated its own monument, a marker in the Jewish cemetery in honor of Viktor Alter and Henryk Erlich, leaders of the Jewish Labor Bund in prewar Poland, who were murdered in the Soviet Union on Stalin’s orders after they had proposed the formation of a Jewish armed force to fight with the Soviet army against the German invaders.

Romania

U.S. deputy secretary of state John Whitehead met with President Nicolae Ceausescu in February to warn that Congress was displeased with Romania’s human-rights record and could revoke Romania’s status as a Most Favored Nation for trade purposes. Romania then announced that it was voluntarily relinquishing this status. It made no concessions on human rights.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

The Jewish community, declining steadily as a result of emigration and a preponderance of aged people, was estimated at about 20,000.

Chief Rabbi Moses David Rosen celebrated his jubilee as a rabbi and 40th year as the chief rabbi of Romania. The anniversary was marked in both Bucharest and Jerusalem.

Zvi Gitelman