In 1991, after nearly 75 years of rule, the Communist party of the USSR began to lose power, and the Soviet state itself began to dissolve. These unexpected and dramatic developments were triggered by a failed coup d'état in August, when a group of conservative Communists, led by politician Gennadi Yanaev, Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov, and KGB head Vladimir Kryuchkov, attempted to head off the planned signing of a treaty which would have loosened the ties among the Soviet republics. Arguing that the economic and political deterioration in the country, and her waning power and prestige abroad, had to be halted, they attempted to seize power in Moscow on August 19. They arrested President Mikhail Gorbachev at a summer resort in the Crimea and called troops out into the streets of Moscow. However, they failed to arrest Gorbachev’s rival, Russian president Boris Yeltsin, or to align the military and other security forces solidly behind them. They also appear to have had little support in the republics. As a result, Yeltsin was able to rally opposition to the “putschists,” arrest them, and emerge as a political hero. Gorbachev was released, but it became clear that he would now take a secondary position to Yeltsin.

Within a few days of the coup attempt, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania reaffirmed their earlier declarations of independence and moved to implement them on the grounds that the coup had demonstrated the fragility of both the democratization processes stimulated by Gorbachev and any new relationship among the republics. In early September, the Soviet State Council recognized the independence of the Baltic states. The European Community and the United States followed suit. This set off the breakup of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. A new “union treaty,” which Gorbachev had fought to formulate over several months, was to have been signed on August 20, but it was now a dead letter, as were the results of a referendum in March—boycotted by the Baltic republics, Georgia, Armenia, and Moldavia—in which 77 percent of the rest of the population voted to preserve the union. Belorussia, renaming itself Belarus, several Central Asian
repUBLICS, and Moldavia, renamed Moldova, declared independence. On December 1, a referendum was held in Ukraine, where a majority voted for independence, thus creating a new state of over 50 million people.

On December 8, the leaders of the three Slavic republics, Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, declared that the Soviet Union had ceased to exist. They proclaimed a "Commonwealth of Independent States" (CIS) open to all the former Soviet republics. Later in the month, five Central Asia republics—Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kirghizia (renamed Kyrgyzstan), Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan—agreed to join. Altogether, eleven republics constituted the CIS: the eight mentioned plus Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Georgia and three Baltic republics declined to join. On December 25, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as president of the Soviet Union. The Soviet flag over the Kremlin was lowered, and the Russian flag was raised in its place. The USSR was no longer.

The coup attempt in August came against a background of economic, political, and social crisis. Rapid inflation, declining productivity, shortages of consumer goods and energy, mounting international debts, and agricultural shortfalls had made the USSR a supplicant and debtor state. Rivalries between Yeltsin and Gorbachev and leadership struggles in several republics, along with a wave of political demonstrations, and the formation and re-formation of political parties and movements, signaled political instability. Political and economic troubles fed social tensions that were exacerbated by continuing ethnic violence in Moldova, Central Asia, and the Caucasus and more benign conflict in the Baltics, Ukraine, and Russia itself.

In January, the federal government had sent troops to Lithuania and Latvia, where they seized buildings and killed 15 people in Vilnius in an attempt to keep these republics from leaving the USSR. Crowds in Moscow protested these actions, which Gorbachev was hard put to defend. Referenda in the Baltic republics showed majority support for independence.

Political disaffection was manifested in the decline in Communist party membership. In the year before the coup, about four million people, 20 percent of all party members, had resigned from the party. Each of the 15 republics had declared sovereignty, meaning that its laws took precedence over federal laws. The proposed union treaty would have given the republics more power vis-à-vis the center, but it aroused little enthusiasm, even among those leaders willing to sign it.

During the coup attempt, three people were killed in Moscow, including Ilya Krichevsky, a young Jew. Funerals for the three were scheduled as public events on a Saturday. The proposal to give Krichevsky a Jewish funeral ran into difficulty as Jewish law forbids burial on the Sabbath, but a leader of the new Reform Jewish community of Moscow agreed to conduct Jewish services, which were broadcast nationally.

Soviet Jews were generally pleased by the breakup of a system and state that had persecuted them, but they wondered about their futures in the newly independent states, especially those, such as Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and the Baltic states, where they might be caught in rivalries between residents of warring nationalities.
Some also expressed fears that the nascent Soviet Jewish community, just beginning to organize, would be split along republic lines and would thus be weakened. An era had ended and the future appeared highly uncertain.

**Relations with Israel**

Soviet relations with Israel continued to improve. In January, an Israeli consulate opened in Moscow, replacing the "interests section" established in 1988 after diplomatic relations had been severed by the USSR in 1967. By October, the consulate had been elevated to the status of an embassy. Arye Levin, who held the rank of ambassador, became Israel's ambassador to the USSR. The restoration of full diplomatic relations was apparently linked to Israel's agreement to attend a Middle East peace conference in Madrid, which the USSR cosponsored with the United States.

Direct charter flights began between Israel and the USSR, but at the latter's insistence they were to be used only by tourists and business travelers, not by Soviet immigrants to Israel. However, the Jewish Agency signed an agreement with Aeroflot, the Soviet national airline, allowing that company and El Al to fly immigrants to Israel on El Al's subsidiary, Transair.

The Hebrew University and National Library in Jerusalem signed an agreement with the Lenin Library in Moscow whereby the former could microfilm many of the latter's rich Judaica holdings, including Hebrew manuscripts and incunabula held in the Baron Ginzberg and other collections. The University and National Library was working with Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz's Aleph Society in this endeavor.

**Anti-Semitism**

Some of the newly unfettered media carried many and virulent anti-Semitic messages. Dmitri Vasiliev, a leader of the extreme Russian nationalist and anti-Semitic organization Pamyat, inaugurated a radio program in September that could be heard all over the country. Titled "Fatherland, Pamyat and We," it broadcast the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The latter was reprinted and distributed in several major cities. Magazines such as *Molodaya Gvardiia* and *Nash Sovremennik*, both monthlies, and the newspapers *Sovietskaya Rossia* and *Literaturnaya Rossiya* consistently carried anti-Semitic articles. There were calls to curb Jewish emigration and Zionist activity in the USSR and to eliminate Jews from "control" of the government and media. Some authors presented a range of conspiracy theories suggesting that the Jews aimed at controlling the country. Konstantin Smirnov-Ostashvili, a Pamyat leader sentenced in October 1990 to two years in prison for fomenting ethnic hatred, died suddenly on April 26. Vasiliev, leader of a rival Pamyat fraction, blamed Zionists for Smirnov's death. "The Zionists threaten no one personally: they sit somewhere in the Bahamas and pass the order by radiotelephone. Today the order was to eliminate [Smirnov] Ostashvili" (quoted in *Sovetish haimland*, no. 8, p. 37). The leading journal of military history, which had
published excerpts from Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, was scheduled to publish the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

A conference on anti-Semitism was held in Moscow in September, at which the results of a poll taken in ten cities in October 1990 were released. Among 4,200 people interviewed, over half expressed a desire to see all Jews leave the country. A Jewish newspaper, *Evreiskaya Gazeta*, published a list of 38 newspapers and 7 magazines it claimed consistently published anti-Semitic materials. Almost all were published in Russia.

The president and executive director of the American National Conference on Soviet Jewry met with President Gorbachev on October 2 and asked him to issue a statement condemning anti-Semitism. He declined on tactical grounds. However, three days later, a historic statement by Gorbachev was read by his adviser, Alexander N. Yakovlev, at ceremonies commemorating the Nazi slaughter of Jews in Kiev's Babi Yar in 1941. Gorbachev admitted that Stalin had used anti-Semitism as a policy tool, and that it survived in the present on the grass-roots level. He expressed regret at the ongoing Jewish emigration. He concluded: “This ceremony . . . is a mournful event, but it inspires hope that we are renovating our society, are capable of learning lessons from the tragedies and errors of the past” (*New York Times*, October 7, 1991).

**JEWISH COMMUNITY**

**Demography**

The census taken in January 1989 showed 1,445,000 people declaring themselves Jews. Since about 345,000 Jews emigrated after the census was taken, the number of Jews in the Soviet Union might have been about 1,100,000 by the end of 1991. However, as emigration proceeded, more and more people claimed or reclaimed Jewish nationality in order to leave the country. Thus, the number of self-described Jews may have stayed closer to the census figure than might be expected.

In the large cities, the number of those claiming Yiddish as a mother tongue continued to decline. *Sovetish haimland* (no. 4, p. 113) noted that, in the 1989 census, only 9,525 Jews in Moscow (5.5 percent of the city's Jewish population) gave Yiddish as their mother tongue. Of the 628 Mountain Jews living in Moscow, 82 percent listed a Jewish language (presumably Tat) as their mother tongue. In Kiev, 4,685 Jews (4.7 percent of all Jews) gave Yiddish as their mother tongue, and in Minsk, 2,130 (5.5 percent). However, in territories annexed to the USSR in 1939–40, the proportion of those giving Yiddish as their mother tongue was much higher. It was 37.3 percent in Vilnius, 22.7 percent in Riga, and 22.2 percent in Kishinev.

Data gathered in 1989 showed that mixed marriages were frequent among Jews, whose rate of intermarriage was exceeded only by that of Germans. In 1989, 57.5 percent of Jewish males entering marriage and 46.6 percent of Jewish females
married people of a different nationality (Mark Tolts in *Megapolis-Continet*, August 7-13, 1991). This was a very slight decline from the proportions of mixed marriages in 1988.

**Emigration**

In 1991, 179,720 Jews left the Soviet Union permanently. Of those, 145,005 went to Israel (a drop from 1990's record 181,759), and 34,715 (an increase from 5,056 in 1990) went to the United States. Of the latter, 36 percent were from Ukraine, 21 percent from Russia, and 10 percent each from Belarus and Moldova. Of those who went to Israel, 30 percent were from Russia, 27 percent from Ukraine, 13 percent from Central Asia, and 11 percent each from Belarus and Moldova.

The decline in emigration was attributed to resettlement difficulties in Israel, especially in employment, and a lessening of the panic that had driven so many out of the USSR when they feared it was lapsing into anarchy. The increase in the number of immigrants to the United States was explained by the clearing away of American and Soviet bureaucratic obstacles to processing immigration applications. In the fiscal year 1991, 40,000 slots had been allotted to Soviet Jewish refugees, but only 26,680 Jews immigrated to the United States, largely because of "processing problems" in both countries. Since the quota was not used up, it was decided to increase the fiscal 1992 quota for Soviet refugees from 50,000 overall to 61,000, of whom presumably about 50,000 would be Jews. A substantial number of Soviet Jews, perhaps as many as 1,500, settled in the Federal Republic of Germany where, it was estimated, 5,000 had already arrived before 1991. In January the German government and its 16 federal states agreed not to limit the number of Soviet Jews allowed to resettle in Germany. Some international Jewish organizations criticized Germany's Jews for pressing for this agreement, while others maintained that a safe haven for endangered Jews was the main consideration. The Union of Councils for Soviet Jews in the United States called for emergency admission of up to a quarter of a million Soviet Jews to the United States on the grounds that they were in imminent danger. The Va'ad in the USSR, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (USA), and Israeli circles rejected this idea, asserting that Soviet Jews were not in immediate danger, and that such a policy would cause many of them not to immigrate to Israel but to wait in the USSR in anticipation of admission to the United States.

Advocates for Soviet Jewry estimated that there were still several hundred "poor relative" refuseniks and about 40 "secrecy" refuseniks left in the USSR. Gorbachev agreed in his October meeting with the NCSJ leaders to review 355 refusenik cases.

Seven hundred Jews of Tskhinvali, Ossetia, fled to Tbilisi and Gori in Georgia as a result of the Georgian-Ossetian war. They left behind 38 men to guard communal property, including the most recently built (1969) synagogue in the USSR.

In May the Supreme Soviet failed for a third time to pass a new Law on Entry and Exit from the USSR that had been first proposed in 1989, but after two weeks
of debate the law was finally passed. It was scheduled to go into effect on January 1, 1993. American president George Bush extended the waiver of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment in recognition of the planned liberalization of emigration. As of July 1, Soviet authorities permitted émigrés to retain Soviet citizenship. They could now leave on Soviet passports and retain them, rather than renouncing citizenship and going abroad stateless. However, the Soviet authorities announced that those who took Israeli government jobs or served in the Israel Defense Forces would lose their Soviet citizenship.

Cultural and Organizational Life

The second congress of the Va'ad, the umbrella organization for local Jewish cultural associations, took place in January. Several hundred delegates, representing up to 400 organizations from 86 cities, registered. Debate focused on the Va'ad itself, one group advocating that it be a strong, centralized organization with one president, rather than the three leaders it had, and another advocating a loose federation, the central body dealing with only a few issues. The latter camp prevailed, reflecting the general tendency toward greater power devolving on republics and regions. Three people were elected to the Va'ad's presidium: Mikhail Chlenov of Moscow, Yosef Zissels of Chernovtsy (Ukraine), and Samuil Zilberg of Riga.

According to the newly established Jewish Information Agency in Moscow, some 42,000 people were participating in activities of local Jewish associations, only 2,000 of them in Moscow. In 47 cities there were well-organized Hebrew study groups, involving over 800 teachers. All told, there were said to be about 22,000 people studying Hebrew, the great majority in preparation for immigration to Israel. In the larger cities there were often several Jewish organizations. Thus, in Kiev there were ten organizations and three Jewish newspapers: Einikeit (Unity), Vozrozhdenie (Rebirth), and Evreiske Vesti (Jewish News), the latter published by the Ukrainian Republic Society of Jewish Culture headed by Ilya Levitas. The cochairman of the Sholem Aleichem Jewish Cultural and Educational Society, Oleksander Burakovskyi, was also vice-chairman of Rukh, the Ukrainian national organization, and chairman of its Council of Nationalities.

Foreign Jewish organizations were active in assisting the reconstruction of Jewish communities. B'nai B'rith claimed 13 lodges in the USSR, and the Agudas Yisroel and Lubavitch Orthodox movements were sending many emissaries to serve as religious functionaries. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee had several representatives in residence in larger cities. It was training cantors, supplying kosher food packages for holidays, and beginning to establish social services, such as assistance to the elderly. On Passover, JDC sponsored 52 seders in 28 cities, serving approximately 15,000 people. By March the Jewish Agency had 31 emissaries working in 22 cities. It had permanent offices in Vilnius, Tbilisi, Odessa, Kishinev, Baku, Leningrad, Kiev, and Chernovtsy. The YIVO Institute and the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York opened a four-year course in Judaica at the
Russian State University of the Humanities (formerly the Moscow Historical-Archival Institute), which trains historians, librarians, and archivists. The World Union for Progressive Judaism assisted the Hineni Congregation in Moscow, a Reform group, and was active in other cities. The Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture held its Nahum Goldmann Fellowship Program, involving 40 Soviet participants and an equal number from Western and Eastern Europe, outside of Moscow. The two-week seminar continued uninterrupted during the attempted coup in August.

Departments of Hebrew were approved by the Ukrainian Ministry of Education for the universities of Kiev and Odessa. In Ukraine efforts were made to reexamine Ukrainian-Jewish relations and bring out into the open sensitive issues that had been covered over in the Soviet period. In June, Kiev was the site of a three-day conference, with many participants from abroad, on Ukrainian-Jewish relations. The conference was sponsored by the Ukrainian Republic Organization of Ukrainian Specialists, headed by former dissident Ivan Dzyuba, and several local Jewish organizations. Over 70 papers were presented.

A more highly visible series of events took place in Kiev in September. To mark the 50th anniversary of the Babi Yar massacre, on September 29-30, 1941, when the Nazis murdered about 35,000 Kievan Jews, local authorities organized photographic exhibitions, a scholarly conference, ceremonies at Babi Yar, musical performances, and other events. Main streets of Kiev were strung with banners recalling the tragedy, and the photos of some of the victims were displayed on the streets. A commemorative volume was published. Leonid Kravchuk, chairman of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, Minister of Education Zvulun Hammer of Israel, the chairman of the German Bundestag, and other dignitaries addressed a large audience at Babi Yar, where a new monument, in the form of a menorah, was dedicated. Yevgenii Yevtushenko read his famous poem “Babi Yar,” which had been condemned by Nikita Khrushchev and conservative Soviet writers.

By contrast, the Lithuanian government pardoned 35,000 Lithuanians who had been convicted by Soviet courts of collaboration and other war crimes, on the grounds that Soviet justice was politically directed and that this charge had been used to dispose of opponents of the Soviet regime or nationally minded Lithuanians. The Lithuanian courts refused pardons to 400 people who clearly were active collaborators in murdering Jews and others. Israeli and Jewish officials protested the blanket pardons, in which cases were not examined individually. Rehabilitation of those convicted was stopped, and a parliamentary commission, to be advised by foreign experts, was set up to examine the pardons. The U.S. Department of Justice announced that it had identified 2,000 people who should not be rehabilitated, according to Izvestiia (September 11, 1991). Lithuanian president Vytautas Landsbergis said that the KGB had planted the evidence which the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles made public.

In Belarus a weeklong Marc Chagall festival took place in the city of his birth, Vitebsk, in January. Films, television programs, and exhibits of his work were
shown under the rubric of the “Return of the Maestro.” His works were also shown in an exhibit entitled “Artists of GOSET, 1919–1949” (the State Yiddish Theater, closed in 1949) in Moscow. The exhibit featured artistic works by others, such as Alexander Tishler and Natan Altman, who had also painted scenery for the theater. Recordings and films of performances by Shlomo Mikhoels, actor and director of the theater who was murdered in an “accident” in 1948, were part of the exhibit. However, funds were insufficient to publish a catalogue.

The Yiddish journal Sovetish haimland lamented that mass emigration was depleting its readership. “When a Jew emigrates, we lose a reader. The size of our editions is falling catastrophically . . .” (no. 7).

Birobidzhan

Early in 1991 there was talk of declaring the Jewish Autonomous Region, whose center is Birobidzhan, an independent, but Soviet and socialist, republic. There was considerable opposition to the idea. Some pointed out that in 1989 the 8,800 Jewish residents comprised only 4 percent of the population and that there was hardly a need for a Jewish autonomous region (oblast’), let alone a republic. Others pointed out that the motivation for autonomy or independence was economic, not national. That is, an independent republic could extricate itself more easily from the Soviet economy.

There were two Jewish cultural societies in Birobidzhan, Mame Loshn, with a Yiddish orientation, and Einikeit, with a more Israeli orientation. The two groups were reported to have no contact with each other. In 1990, about 1,000 Jews emigrated to Israel from Birobidzhan, and it was expected that several hundred others would do so by the end of 1991. There were said to be 200 children in a Jewish Sunday school where they studied Yiddish, Hebrew, Jewish history, and Jewish music and dance. Efforts were being made to train Yiddish teachers in the local pedagogical institute, but they were reported to be more interested in studying English.

Velvel Belinker was appointed the new editor of Birobidzhaner shtern, the local Yiddish newspaper, which now added four pages in Russian. Belinker, a 37-year-old native of Birobidzhan, had learned to write and speak Yiddish only three years earlier. In an interview, Belinker asserted that there was a future for Jews in the area because “there are people who are afraid both of pogroms and of emigration. Birobidzhan is for them a compromise” (Sovetish haimland, no. 6, p. 119).

ZVI GITELMAN
Eastern European Countries

In their attempts to reconstruct their political and economic systems in 1991, the formerly Communist East European states encountered political instability and rapid change, economic difficulties, and social unrest. Because of the lack of political consensus, many parties vied for office, with the result that almost all governments in the region were coalitions. The transition from socialism to capitalism brought relatively high unemployment and steep inflation. Social tensions increased as people felt uncertain about the political and economic situations. There was an upsurge of nationalism, often accompanied by animosity toward other peoples. Anti-Semitism surfaced even in those countries where there were hardly any Jews. The situation roused unease among Jews living in the region, though they were now able to express themselves culturally and religiously to a greater extent than had been possible under the Communists.

Albania

The economic and political situation in Albania was so uncertain that thousands of Albanians fled to Italy, where most were initially refused admission. Others tried to make their way to Greece and other countries. The Communist party won the first multiparty elections since World War II, held in March, but by June the government had fallen.

The Jews of Albania, mostly of Sephardic and Greek origin and heavily intermarried, had no ties with world Jewry until the fall of Communism. There was no synagogue or rabbi in Albania after World War II. In 1991, 300 Jews emigrated to Israel. In August, Albania established diplomatic relations with Israel, the last former Communist state to do so. It is believed that there are practically no Jews left in Albania.

Bulgaria

The United Democratic Front in Bulgaria, the main opposition to the former Communists (reconstituted as the Bulgarian Socialist party), won the second national election since the fall of the Communist government.

The 5,000 Jews of Bulgaria began to reorganize their communal life. A new organization, Zion, was formed in direct competition with the Shalom organization dominated by former Communist functionaries. Its aims were to revive Jewish culture, reestablish links with world Jewry, assist Jews in need, and forge business links with Jewish communities abroad in an effort to help in the revival of Bulgaria’s moribund economy.
Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia undertook to sell Syria a number of T-72 tanks, which aroused much criticism in Israel and elsewhere. Prime Minister Marian Calfa explained that, though Czechoslovakia did not want to spur Middle Eastern arms competition, her economic problems dictated that she earn hard currency, including from the sale of armaments. Two parliamentary deputies caused controversy when, on the floor of the parliament, they warned against the return of Jewish artifacts to the Jewish community, lest the latter sell them abroad, thus depriving the country of its artistic and religious heritage.

Israeli president Chaim Herzog became the first Israeli head of state to visit Czechoslovakia when he came to Prague in October. He was returning an official visit to Israel in 1990 by Czechoslovak president Vaclav Havel.

The Jewish population, estimated at 5,000, seemed to grow as some people who had hitherto not associated themselves with the Jewish communities identified themselves as Jews. This raised questions about the Jewish bona fides of many people who are the children of mixed marriages. The question was not only religious, but raised the issue of who would be officially considered a member of the community and hence eligible to participate in decisions about and access to formerly Jewish properties, which the government was being asked to return to the organized Jewish community. These very valuable properties include former synagogues, schools, and communal buildings, the component parts of the State Jewish Museum and its holdings, and even hotels and other commercial establishments formerly the property of the community. Partly because the issue of Jewish identity came to the fore, a group of younger Czech Jews, most of whom are of mixed parentage, began to explore possibilities of creating a non-Orthodox community and synagogue.

Hungary

In May, Hungarian prime minister Jozef Antall visited Israel, where he urged an expansion of economic ties between the two states. While on a visit to Hungary, Pope John Paul II met with representatives of the Jewish community and condemned anti-Semitism. However, he prayed at the crypt of Jozef Cardinal Mindszenty, who had refused to condemn Nazi killing of Jews and was widely perceived in the Jewish community as anti-Semitic.

In December, a bomb exploded near a bus carrying Soviet Jewish émigrés to the Budapest airport, where they were to embark for Israel. Two Hungarian policemen were seriously injured and four passengers were lightly wounded, but Hungary continued to be a way station for Soviet immigrants to Israel.

The largest Jewish population in Eastern Europe, estimated at between 35,000 and 100,000, continued to develop its educational and cultural institutions. Three Jewish day schools operated in Budapest for a second year, and newly founded or revived Jewish organizations continued their activities. These schools were the Anna
Frank Gymnasium, Yavneh, and Masoret Avot. The Anna Frank school existed throughout the Communist period but its enrollments rose dramatically after 1990 and it now enrolled about 200 high-school students. It had close links with the Jewish Theological Seminary in Budapest, the center of Neolog Judaism. The Yavneh school was secular in orientation and was supported by the Lauder Foundation based in the United States. It enrolled about 200 students. Masoret Avot was an Orthodox school with a Zionist orientation. Funded in part by the Reichmann family of Canada, its Judaic faculty was staffed partly by Hungarian-speaking Israelis, with an Israeli educator, Dr. Efraim Frisch, as principal. The school enrolled about 500 students.

There were 20 functioning synagogues in Budapest and 19 elsewhere in Hungary. Ten rabbis served in Budapest and seven outside the capital. The Jewish hospital and nursing home had 250 beds and a central communal kitchen fed 1,300 elderly Jews. There were three Jewish old-age homes, two in Budapest and one in Szeged.

Poland

In Poland, the polity was so fragmented that in the national election no party won more than 13 percent of the vote.

Though no more than 5,000 identified Jews lived in Poland, anti-Semitism became a much discussed issue. In several Polish cities, anti-Semitic graffiti were found, even in places of Jewish martyrdom during World War II. President Lech Walesa met with members of the World Jewish Congress in March, acknowledged the continued existence of anti-Semitism in Poland, and pledged Poland's support for the repeal of the United Nations resolution calling Zionism a form of racism. He said that Poland would protect Jewish cemeteries and former synagogues and would address the property claims of former Polish Jews. In May, addressing the Israeli Knesset, Walesa apologized for Polish anti-Semitism and called for improved Polish-Jewish relations. Earlier, Walesa had announced the formation of a presidential commission to combat anti-Semitism and xenophobia. Members of the commission included literary critic Jan Blonski; Jerzy Turowicz, editor of the leading Catholic newspaper, Tygodnik Powszechny; historians Władysław Bartoszewski and Krystyna Kersten; and Stanisław Krajewski, representative of the World Jewish Congress in Poland.

Just before a trip to the United States, the primate of Poland, Józef Cardinal Glemp, apologized for remarks made in 1989 when he accused Jews who had demonstrated at the controversial convent in Auschwitz of wishing to attack the nuns. While in America, Glemp also condemned anti-Semitism, of which he himself had been accused after a homily in which he charged that Jews controlled the media worldwide. However, the cardinal refused to make the same condemnation in Poland itself.

Bolesław Tejkowski, a politician on the fringes of Poland's fractionated political life, gave an interview in Gazeta Wyborcza, the country's most widely circulated newspaper, on July 4. The editor clearly wished to draw him out in order to show...
the absurdity of Tejkowski's views, and the latter obliged him by asserting that Mikhail Gorbachev, Polish prime minister Krzysztof Bielecki, and the wife of presidential candidate Stanislaw Tyminski were Jews. Tejkowski criticized Walesa for apologizing in Israel for Polish anti-Semitism. He argued that anti-Semitism was justifiable because Jews had fatally injured Poland on several occasions: they had collaborated with Swedish invaders and then with the Soviets. Now they were dominating Poland through their "control" of Solidarity.

Public Jewish activity among the 5,000 or so Jews in Poland continued at a modest level. The one synagogue in Warsaw benefited from the services of Polish-born Israeli Rabbi Jozkowicz and daily services were held. A small group of younger Jews, including journalist Konstanty Gebert and mathematician Stanislaw Krajewski, maintained a Sunday school for young children. Festivals of Jewish culture, featuring music and art, were held in Krakow and a few other cities.

Romania

Prime Minister Petre Roman resigned in September after three days of rioting by dissatisfied miners who had come to the capital, Bucharest.

The Romanian Jewish population was dwindling rapidly as a result of emigration, a low birthrate, and a high mortality rate. It was estimated that the Jews numbered between 15,000 and 18,000 in a general population of over 23 million. Nevertheless, there were many anti-Semitic articles in the press, which blamed the Jews both for Communism and for seizing power after the downfall of Communism. The largest circulation weekly, Romania Mare, which had half a million readers, was edited by Eugen Barbu and Corneliu Vadim Tudor, both known for their anti-Jewish views. On May 31, the weekly wrote: "While there are 20,000 Jews left in Romania, 5,000 of them are in the country's leadership. . . . In parliament it rains Jews by the bucket. . . . It's not their fault—domination has been their style since the dawn of time—but can't they let us breathe a little, instead of trampling on us as they have been doing since 1947?"

In April, the 45th anniversary of his execution as a war criminal, parliament paid tribute with a moment of silence to Marshal Ion Antonescu, Romania's wartime dictator and collaborator with Hitler. But on June 4 the government issued a declaration dissociating itself from anti-Semitic articles in the press. President Ion Iliescu did the same at a press conference, but some publications continued their anti-Semitic line.

In July, the 50th anniversary of Romanian pogroms in Iasi and Bucharest was marked. Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen accused the government of cowardice and indifference toward anti-Semitism and warned that Romania's image in the world would suffer if anti-Semitism were permitted to go unchecked. He said that 400,000 Romanian Jews had been killed in the Holocaust, but few Romanians were aware of that or acknowledged it. Some intellectuals issued a statement condemning anti-Semitism, but the country's leading political force, the National Salvation Front, was ambivalent about it.
Yugoslavia

In February, the Yugoslav republics of Croatia and Slovenia asserted the priority of their laws over those of the federal government, and the government was forced to initiate discussions with the republics regarding a further loosening of the Yugoslav federation. But in June, Croatia and Slovenia declared independence. The Yugoslav army moved into both republics in order to prevent their secession. Macedonia then declared independence in September. Germany recognized the independence of its wartime ally Croatia, as well as that of Slovenia. The European Community, prodded by Germany, followed suit at the end of the year. Greek objections to Macedonian independence—the Greeks claimed that “Macedonia” is a Greek name and territory and no other state should use it—blocked recognition by Europe of that republic’s independence.

The breakup of Yugoslavia threatened the unity and organizational coordination of the 5,000 Jews in the country. Though small, this community was one of the best organized in the region, sponsoring summer camps, old-age homes, cultural and educational activities, and several publications.

Zvi Gitelman