

## Former Soviet Union

### *National Affairs*

**I**N 2006, high energy prices enabled the Russian Federation, with its growing, energy-based economy, to pay off most of its outstanding debt and retain much of its political and economic influence regionally and internationally, further spurring Russia's ambition to dominate the area that had been the Soviet Union.

Russia's position as the leading energy supplier for many of the former Soviet republics and for some European countries, coupled with Moscow's ambition to reestablish itself as the only power center in the area, resulted in a series of conflicts throughout the year with its neighbors and trading partners, from the Russian-Ukrainian gas war in January, to Russia's standoff with Georgia in the fall, to the reevaluations undertaken of the major oil- and gas-production sharing agreements with Western companies. These episodes raised questions about Russia's role in the region and its reliability as a trading partner. The G8 summit in July, hosted by Russia for the first time, focused on energy security, and the topic returned to the forefront of discussion at the Russia-EU summit in November.

Domestically, President Vladimir Putin's "managed democracy" was believed to enjoy the support of most Russians. Indeed, many hoped Putin would stay in power past the end of his second term in 2008, although the president himself repeatedly denied any such ambition. Under Putin, only a decorative role was left for traditional democratic institutions such as political parties, parliament, or elections. Nearly unlimited resources—both political and economic—were concentrated in the hands of a few small and powerful groups within the Kremlin administration. The regime's clear intention was to sideline political dissent, increase the influence of the few large parties—all of which were clearly pro-Kremlin—and negate the protest vote in the parliamentary elections due in December 2007 and the presidential vote scheduled for spring 2008.

Among the most troubling developments of 2006 were the systematic efforts to weaken or eliminate pro-democracy forces by putting pressure on groups that monitored human rights and on media outlets that advocated for the expansion of democratic freedoms. The Kremlin tightened

its oversight on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) by insisting that all NGOs reregister with the authorities in accordance with legislation drafted in 2005 (see AJYB 2006, p. 514).

The tendencies of the current regime appeared even more ominous against the backdrop of pervasive corruption and lack of government transparency, increased activity by extremist fringe groups, and a series of murders that seemed politically motivated. The most shocking of these was the killing of a prominent political investigative journalist, Anna Politkovskaya, whose work had been instrumental in exposing human-rights abuses committed by Russian forces during the conflict with the separatists in Chechnya.

The Russian system served as a model for other authoritarian-minded regimes in the former Soviet Union. Campaigns to stifle civil society and dry up potential sources of democratic activism remained central components of domestic policy in Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, three countries whose human-rights records were among the worst in the world, and which seemed determined to crush all political opposition and independent media. In Azerbaijan, the regime increased its already tight grip on the media, and Kyrgyzstan too saw a decline in civil and religious freedoms.

Outside the three Baltic states, which were now full-fledged members of the European Union, the only FSU countries that seemed to have progressed on the road toward democratization were Ukraine and Georgia, both of which had seen bloodless regime changes in 2004 (see AJYB 2005, pp. 500–01). But Ukrainian democracy was tarnished by continuing corruption and an economic downturn, creating widespread disillusionment with the results of the Orange Revolution that had propelled President Viktor Yushchenko to power. In the Ukrainian elections, held in March, a record 45 different political parties and blocs competed for parliamentary seats. No clear winner emerged, resulting in a political stalemate and difficulty in forming a governing coalition.

Belarus also conducted a national election in March. President Alexander Lukashenko, a former Soviet collective-farm manager, was reelected for a third term in what most observers described as an undemocratic and obviously rigged vote.

### *Israel and the Middle East*

The first of several points of tension in Russian-Israeli relations during the year occurred after the electoral victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections, held in January. Although Western nations refused to deal

with a Hamas-led government that did not recognize Israel's right to exist, Moscow hosted a top-level Hamas delegation in March for talks with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. They reportedly discussed prospects for Russian economic and political support for the Palestinian Authority. Not only Israel but also a number of Russian Jewish leaders publicly denounced the invitation to a group responsible for multiple attacks against Israeli civilians.

Israel's war against Hezbollah during the summer also threatened bilateral relations. The Russian government criticized Israeli military operations in Lebanon as well as in Gaza, and sent humanitarian aid to Lebanese civilians affected by Israeli attacks. Russian Jews believed that such aid should also have been sent to Israelis living near the northern border, especially since many of them had come from Russia. In July, there were two small pro-Israel rallies in Moscow, as well as larger rallies in Kiev and Dnepropetrovsk in Ukraine, both attended by 1,500–2,000 people.

Yet a third bone of diplomatic contention was Russia's assistance to Iran. Moscow, which had significant economic interests in that country, not only continued to supply Tehran with sophisticated conventional weapons, but also provided expertise and technology to help the Iranians develop a nuclear capacity. Russia played a key role in the construction of Iran's first industrial-scale nuclear reactor, in Bushehr.

As Iranian president Ahmadinejad had repeatedly threatened to wipe Israel off the map, the prospect of a nuclear Iran raised serious concern there. This was, indeed, the major item on the agenda when Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert arrived in Moscow in October for talks with Russian leaders, his first trip abroad after the war in Lebanon. The ostensible occasion for the visit was the 15th anniversary of the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and Israel following the breakup of the Soviet Union. Putin said that in recent years ties between Israel and Russia had been "completely transformed" and were now based on a greater degree of mutual trust. He sought to assuage Olmert's anxieties about Iran by insisting that its nuclear program did not threaten peace and security in the Middle East.

Indeed, late in the year Russia showed a greater readiness to cooperate with the international community on steps to place Iran's nuclear program under UN supervision. But Russia stopped short of large-scale economic sanctions for fear of hurting Russian companies working in Iran. Most observers agreed, however, that the key factor in Russian policy toward Iran was a desire to counterbalance what it saw as a pro-Israel tilt in U.S. policy in the region.

Ukrainian president Yushchenko canceled a planned visit to Israel in June for reasons that were left unexplained. He had similarly scheduled and then canceled a trip there in 2005. Some speculated that Ukraine feared jeopardizing its relations with Iran and other Muslim countries, which were some of its best trading partners. Israeli president Moshe Katzav visited Kiev in September to participate in commemorative events marking the 65th anniversary of the Babi Yar massacre.

In February, when a delegation of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations visited Azerbaijan, officials told the Americans that the country would soon upgrade its diplomatic relations with Israel and open a trade mission there. Azerbaijan, a Muslim state in the Caucasus, had begun diplomatic relations with Israel more than ten years before, but had yet to open an embassy in the country; Israel, in contrast, had an embassy in Baku. As 2006 ended, the status quo remained in place. Azerbaijan had long cited its complicated geopolitical situation, particularly its proximity to Iran, as well as its membership in Islamic international organizations as factors making it difficult to upgrade relations with Israel.

### *Anti-Semitism and Extremism*

Since the collapse of the USSR there had been no instances of official governmental anti-Semitism to speak of in any of the former Soviet republics, with the exception of Turkmenistan. Nevertheless, officials in most of the countries occasionally exhibited anti-Jewish attitudes, and anti-Semitic acts by hooligans and extremist groups remained frequent across the FSU.

In 2006, anti-Semitism and xenophobia were still ongoing concerns for Jewish and human-right groups in most countries of the former FSU. The largest number of anti-Semitic incidents occurred in Russia, which witnessed a 20-percent increase over 2005, and Ukraine, where there was a slight decline from the previous year. These two countries also produced many thousands of pieces of anti-Semitic literature, and such ideas were spread even further through multiple Internet sites and blogs.

#### RUSSIA

According to the Moscow Bureau on Human Rights (MBHR), there were 170 violent attacks on individuals in Russia during 2006 that were motivated by racial, ethnic or religious hatred, in which 51 individuals

were killed and 310 injured. Russia's two largest cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, accounted for more than half these attacks. Most of the victims were people from the Caucasus, Africans, and Asians. Nine Jews were injured. Russian courts found 109 individuals guilty of hate crimes in 2006. According to MBHR, there were some 50,000 neo-Nazi skin-heads in Russia, 80 percent of them under the age of 30.

The year's first anti-Semitic incident, and the only one that resulted in injuries, occurred on January 11, when a knife-wielding man stabbed and injured nine men at a Moscow synagogue. The culprit, Alexander Koptsev, 21, said at his trial that he had been inspired by books and Web sites. Koptsev was found guilty in September of attempted murder on racial grounds and of inciting religious hatred. He was given a sentence of 16 years in prison and ordered to undergo psychiatric treatment. Russia's Supreme Court upheld the verdict in December.

Two days later, another young man attempted an attack on synagogue worshipers in the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don. In June, the perpetrator, identified as Vadim Domnitsky, 19, was found mentally unfit to stand trial, the court ruling that he must undergo coercive medical treatment in a special hospital.

In February, vandals spray-painted the words "Death to Yids" on the walls of the Hasdei Yerushalayim Jewish charitable center and on the local offices of the Jewish Agency for Israel in Saratov, in central Russia. Ten days later, a swastika was spray-painted on the entrance doors of the same charitable center.

In April, a group of young men, suspected of belonging to a local neo-Nazi skinhead gang, attempted to break into a synagogue in Orenburg, southeast of Moscow. They shattered several windows, shouted anti-Semitic slogans, and painted swastikas on the building, but no one was hurt. Police detained one of the attackers, aged 15.

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah in September, two Russian synagogues were vandalized in separate incidents. Unidentified attackers shattered windows at the synagogue in Astrakhan, southern Russian, and set a door ablaze at the one in Khabarovks, in the far east of the country. No one was hurt in either incident.

In Tver, central Russia, 173 Jewish and Muslim gravestones were desecrated in October. Many were toppled and others spray-painted with swastikas, and leaflets with Nazi symbols were scattered over the graves. This was believed to be the most extensive act of cemetery vandalism in Russia in recent years. A week after the incident, police detained several members of a banned radical nationalist group suspected of the attack.

Also in October, swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans were painted on the walls of the synagogue in Vladivostok.

Two Molotov cocktails were thrown through the windows of a Jewish cultural center in Surgut, Siberia, in November. No one was hurt. Following this incident, the fourth attack on a Jewish facility in Russia in less than two months, the Chabad-led Federation of Jewish Communities, Russia's largest Jewish group, called on the authorities to beef up security at Jewish sites across the country. But not long after, on November 26, unidentified people stormed into Ohr Avner, a Jewish day school in Volgograd, in southern Russia, severely injuring security guards, one of whom lost an eye.

Hanukkah services, in December, were disrupted at a synagogue in Pskov, in northwest Russia, when someone threw a gas canister into the Jewish community center. Worshipers were sickened by the gas and had to leave the service. That same month, a Jewish community center in Ulyanovsk, in the Volga region, was vandalized. Attackers shattered a window and painted a swastika on the wall. A leaflet with threats against the Jewish community was later discovered posted on the building's door. Also in December, a court in the far east of Russia sentenced two teenagers to prison, one for ten years and the other for nine-and-a-half, for the racially-motivated murder of three men of non-Slavic origin, including one Jew.

Human-rights activists and leaders of minority groups had long criticized Russian police and prosecutors for playing down the incidence of hate crimes, and Russian courts for their reluctance to treat crimes motivated by racism and religious hatred in that category. A report by Amnesty International called on the Russian government to establish a plan of action to curtail a rising trend of xenophobic attacks.

There seemed some willingness to take steps in that direction. In February, 12 Russian political parties signed an Anti-Fascist Pact against nationalism, extremism, and xenophobia. It was spearheaded by the pro-Kremlin party United Russia, but among its supporters were also moderate nationalist parties and the leading liberal opposition bloc. The signatories declared nationalism and xenophobia threats to the integrity of the state, and declared: "The activity of all responsible political parties should be aimed at the consolidation of the society and strengthening of the country's unity."

Later in the year there were more signs of progress. In September, the Prosecutor General's Office announced it was setting up a special de-

partment to deal with hate crimes. President Putin said, in October, that the "justice system and law enforcement agencies should adequately and promptly respond to manifestations of xenophobia and extremism." And authorities in both Moscow and St. Petersburg banned the so-called Russian March, a street demonstration planned by several ultranationalist groups for November 4, Unity Day, a national holiday in Russia. In 2005, Moscow came under fierce criticism for allowing the march in which thousands of nationalists participated, many sporting Nazi insignia and shouting, "Heil Hitler."

#### UKRAINE

The major source of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in Ukraine remained the Interregional Academy for Personnel Management (MAUP), a private university in Kiev that for years had been publishing periodicals and running academic conferences that defamed Jews and Israel. The Jewish community was particularly alarmed when MAUP, in February, held a commemoration for the Christian boy whose death, 95 years earlier, had led to the infamous Beilis case, in which a Jew was accused of ritual murder. In May, MAUP held a "Dialogue of Civilizations" conference in Kiev, where several speakers delivered anti-Semitic invective; in October, MAUP hosted a book-signing event for David Duke, the American white supremacist who held an honorary doctorate from the university; and at another MAUP conference, in November, "Jewish Bolsheviks" were blamed for organizing the Soviet-era famine in Ukraine.

While President Yushchenko and other government officials condemned MAUP on several occasions and the Ministry of Education revoked the accreditation of several MAUP branches in the provinces on technical grounds, Jewish leaders believed the authorities were not doing enough to combat anti-Semitism, particularly in the MAUP publications.

The Conservative Party of Ukraine, affiliated with MAUP leaders, sought to run candidates in the parliamentary elections, scheduled for March. Despite multiple protests from Jewish and human-rights leaders, the government allowed the ultranationalist party to compete. Headed by MAUP president Georgy Schokin, the party received less than 1 percent of the vote. Nevertheless, an opinion poll conducted in October by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology gave cause for worry. Surveying the attitudes of 2,000 people in 24 regions of the country, it found that 36 percent of Ukrainians did not believe Jews should be citizens, up

from 26 percent in 1994. Such sentiments were especially widespread among younger respondents.

In addition to several attacks on individual Jews—most of them directed against people wearing distinctive Orthodox Jewish garb—threats and harassment were common occurrences. In February, Friday evening services at Kiev's Central Brodsky Synagogue were disturbed by an intruder shouting anti-Semitic threats, and in Kerch, in southern Ukraine, a man burst into the Geshet Reform Synagogue and threatened to kill Jews. Also that month, a Holocaust monument in the town of Feodosia was daubed with paint and anti-Semitic graffiti. Another Holocaust memorial, in Sevastopol, was smeared with black paint, swastikas, and graffiti in February, and was vandalized once again in June. Stones were hurled at the Choral Synagogue in downtown Kirovograd in April, a scenario that would recur four more times during the year at the same synagogue, according to local Jewish leaders. And in May, the Ner Tamid Synagogue in Simferopol was the target of stone-throwing.

A yeshiva student, Azariy Menaker, was assaulted in a Kiev subway station in March, but was able to shoot at the three attackers with his pneumatic gun, causing them to flee. They were later detained by the police. Another attack occurred in April, when Vladimir Katzman, the Jewish editor of the popular Kiev weekly *Stolichnye Novosti*, was severely beaten at the entrance to his apartment house in what one Ukrainian Jewish leader said could have been retaliation for the paper's articles against anti-Semitism. That same month, Haim Gorbov, an Orthodox Jew, was stabbed on a street in Dnepropertovsk.

The situation was now so dangerous that the 40 Chabad rabbis working in Ukraine held a conference about the problem on May 15. They issued a call to the authorities to take steps to ensure the safety of Jews in the country and to adopt legislation against anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and intolerance.

But the pattern of disturbing incidents continued. In September, an Orthodox Jewish man wearing traditional garb, Haim Weitzman, was beaten in Odessa, sustaining minor injuries, and unknown vandals threw stones at the synagogue in Chernovtsy, in southwestern Ukraine. In October, 18 tombstones were destroyed in a Jewish cemetery in Gluhov, in the Sumy region of central Ukraine. And in December, three Orthodox Jews were attacked not far from Kiev's main synagogue—an Israeli teacher named Elhanan Shershevsky, another Israeli, and a Ukrainian—all of them wearing traditional Orthodox garb. Shershevsky suffered injuries and a concussion, but the other two were able to escape and call police.

## BELARUS

In Belarus, Jewish leaders not only criticized the government for turning a blind eye to anti-Semitism, but also chafed under the country's restrictive law imposing limitations on religious activities by minority faiths, including Judaism.

In January, a line of kosher bread introduced by a local bakery generated a string of anti-Semitic newspaper articles. An editorial in the *Mogilev Register*, a local daily, warned those of the Russian Orthodox faith not to buy kosher bread on the grounds that blood of sacrificed animals was used in baking it. Another daily, the *Evening Mogilev*, cited Orthodox Christian sources to the effect that part of the cost of all kosher products was a tax that benefited local synagogues, and that kosher food, produced in a "sacrilegious and anti-Christian" manner, should not be bought by Christians.

In June, a request from the local education department and a warning from the public prosecutor compelled a Jewish school in Mogilev to remove Jewish symbols, such as menorahs and Stars of David, from classrooms. They were deemed to violate the country's regulations prohibiting the use of public space for religious instruction.

Several acts of anti-Jewish vandalism took place in November. On November 12, a swastika was daubed on the Holocaust memorial in Minsk, known as the Yama (Pit). Found at the site were anti-Semitic leaflets signed by the White Rus Front for Aryan Resistance, a previously unknown group. A nearby sculpture depicting Jews marching to an execution site was smeared with white paint. The same day, swastikas and the words "Beat the Yids!" were discovered on the façade of a building in central Minsk that housed the Israeli Cultural and Information Center, which was affiliated with the Israeli embassy.

Later in the month an explosive device went off at the Holocaust memorial in Brest, in the western part of Belarus, causing minor damage. Local Jews said this was at least the sixth act of vandalism there since the monument was unveiled 14 years earlier. The police, however, described the crime as an act of petty hooliganism and refused to open a criminal investigation. The Jewish community protested the decision.

## OTHER REPUBLICS

In Lithuania, 19 Jewish tombstones in a cemetery near the capital of Vilnius were toppled in June. Local Jewish leaders speculated that the des-

ecration might have been linked to the 65th anniversary of the June 23, 1941, uprising of Lithuanian nationalists against the Soviet Union. President Valdas Adamkus condemned this and other acts of anti-Semitic vandalism.

In the predominantly Muslim Central Asian nations, anti-Semitic incidents were relatively rare, and the governments of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan—the region's two largest countries that also had Central Asia's biggest Jewish communities—continued to demonstrate friendly attitudes toward Jews.

Jews in Uzbekistan were alarmed after three members of the community in the capital city, Tashkent, were killed in February and in June. But community leaders said they had no reason to believe that Avraham Yagudaev, who died on February 25 of injuries he received two days earlier, and Svetlana Loifer and her daughter, Karina, strangled to death in their home on June 8, were victims of anti-Semitism. A week after the Loifers were killed police arrested a suspect. He later confessed to killing the women in the course of a robbery attempt, and received a lengthy prison sentence.

In October, anti-Semitic graffiti were spray-painted on several buildings in central Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. Evda Abramov, the only Jewish member of the Azerbaijani parliament, was quoted by the media as saying that the act could have been inspired by agents of the Iranian special services. Iran, Azerbaijan's southern neighbor and most important trading partner, was believed to be irritated by Baku's diplomatic relations with Israel.

### *Holocaust-Related Developments*

Holocaust denial, a widespread phenomenon in Russia, was especially evident on the Internet. At least four Russian Web sites were devoted mostly or exclusively to denial, according to a report released early in the year commissioned jointly by the Moscow-based Holocaust Foundation and the Moscow Bureau on Human Rights. The report noted that one of the sites, Holocaust Revisionism ([www.revisio.msk.ru](http://www.revisio.msk.ru)), contained about 400 written items and video clips. Holocaust-denying books were also widely available at Russian bookstores.

In early 2006, Jewish and human-rights activists in Russia called on federal authorities to follow the lead of many other countries in designating January 27 as Holocaust Memorial Day. No official response was forthcoming.

Holocaust-era issues remained extremely sensitive in the Baltic

countries. In Latvia, attention focused on the annual parade in Riga commemorating the Latvian SS Legion, scheduled for March. For ultranationalists, wartime collaboration with the Germans signified resistance to Russian domination, and was therefore deemed heroic.

President Vaira Vike-Freiberga publicly opposed the event, saying that it brought unnecessary negative attention to Latvia by portraying it as a country of fascists and Nazis. Visiting Israel in February, Vike-Freiberga apologized for Latvia's role in the Holocaust. A special commission of the Estonian parliament announced cancellation of the march just two days before it was to take place. It cited security concerns, as antinationalist and pro-Russian groups had vowed to show up en masse in protest. But the nationalist organizations went ahead with the march anyway, resulting in clashes with police.

In a trial held in March in Vilnius, Lithuania, 85-year-old Algimantas Mykolas Dailide was found guilty of crimes against Jews in Nazi-occupied Lithuania during World War II. From 1941 through 1944 Dailide worked for the Vilnius office of the Nazi-supervised Lithuanian Security Police, and, according to the indictment, participated in the November 1941 arrests of Jews, specifically arresting two Jews who escaped from the ghetto. There was also evidence suggesting that he arrested members of a Polish anti-Nazi underground cell in 1942. Prosecutors requested a five-year jail sentence, the minimum provided under the law, but, in light of the defendant's advanced age and poor health, the court imposed no sentence. This result revived criticism of Lithuania's poor record of prosecuting Nazi wartime criminals: only a few of them had stood trial since Lithuania established its independence from the USSR, and not one had received a prison term.

In September, a bar in Kaunas, Lithuania's second-largest city, hoisted a Nazi flag and greeted customers with an employee dressed as Hitler. This sparked outrage in the Jewish community. The Simon Wiesenthal Center's Israel office blamed this, too, on Lithuania's poor record of prosecuting Nazi-era war criminals, arguing that such laxity on the part of the authorities encouraged an atmosphere tolerant of Nazism in the country.

In Ukraine, state officials and delegations from some 30 countries attended commemorative events marking the 65th anniversary of the Babi Yar massacre near Kiev. The event was jointly organized by the Ukrainian government and Vyacheslav "Moshe" Kantor, a Russian Jewish industrialist who was president of the Russian Jewish Congress and chairman of the board of the European Jewish Congress.

Several Holocaust memorials were dedicated in Ukraine during the

year. In May, a monument was unveiled in Aleksandria, in central Ukraine's Kirovograd region, at the place where 2,500 Jews were killed during the Nazi occupation from 1941 to 1944. In July, a memorial was dedicated in the town of Zolochiv in western Ukraine, on the site of the former Jewish cemetery where Nazis and their local collaborators killed 14,000 Jews during those years.

In October, President Yushchenko raised alarm among Jews by signing a decree calling for a law that would extend official recognition to veterans of World War II Ukrainian nationalist brigades, many of whom fought alongside the Nazis. It was estimated that some 10,000 such men were still living in the country. Ever since Ukraine achieved independence in 1991 they had demanded official veteran status similar to that accorded men who had fought in the Red Army. The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Rebel Army (OUN-URA), the two best known of these organizations, were responsible, according to reputable historians, for killings Jews in western Ukraine during and after World War II while fighting against Soviet rule. In response to complaints, Yushchenko said that disagreements among Ukrainians about the role of these fighters were due to "perverted knowledge of history," which should be resolved as soon as possible. He therefore called for more research to get at the truth.

## JEWISH COMMUNITY

### *Demography*

The number of Jews in Russia and other FSU countries continued to decline due to unfavorable demographic processes—an aging Jewish population, high rates of intermarriage, and continuing, although slowed-down, emigration. The largest Jewish communities were in Russia (about 250,000), Ukraine (about 80,000), and Belarus (probably close to 20,000).

Aliyah continued to decline. In calendar year 2006, 7,300 Jewish immigrants from the FSU came to Israel, a 23-percent decrease from the 2005 figure of 9,528. Still, the FSU remained the largest source of aliyah, accounting for roughly 35 percent of new immigrants to Israel in 2006.

At the same time, the number of Russian immigrants to Israel who returned to their native land was reportedly rising at a fast rate. According to Israeli media reports, the number of naturalized Israelis from Russia who went back had increased more than sixfold over the previous three

years, drawn by the improved Russian economy. Some maintained homes in both countries. The Israeli Foreign Ministry claimed that these reports were highly exaggerated and suggested that the rate of return was below 5 percent.

### *Communal Affairs*

Jewish communal life in the Russian Federation continued to be dominated by a few umbrella organizations that openly competed with each other. Since 2000 the Kremlin had clearly favored the Federation of Jewish Communities (FJC), led by Rabbi Berel Lazar, the Chabad chief rabbi of Russia. Complementing the political backing it enjoyed from the government was the extensive funding the FJC received from abroad, especially from its primary donor, Israeli diamond merchant Lev Leviev. The Chabad-oriented FJC had expanded its network to some 190 communities across Russia by 2006.

While its budget for the year was not made public, sources within the FJC indicated that there had been a 15-percent increase over the 2005 figure, which had been estimated at \$60 million—nearly \$36 million of it raised in North America by the group's U.S. arm. Most of the rabbis currently working in the former Soviet Union belonged to the FJC network, 152 rabbinical emissaries (and their families) in Russia and 146 in the rest of the FSU. The group said that about half its rabbis were Russian-born and the rest mostly Israelis and Americans.

A second major national organization was the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations and Communities (KEROOR), which encompassed non-Hasidic Orthodox congregations and had its own chief rabbi, Adolf Shayevich. KEROOR had about two dozen rabbis in Russia, half of them serving the Moscow community. Its president and major financial supporter was the controversial Russian-Israeli businessman Arkadi Gaydamak. In 2006 Gaydamak donated large sums for the renovation of KEROOR's most prized property, the Moscow Choral Synagogue, which was celebrating its centennial.

The Union of Religious Congregations of Modern Judaism in Russia (OROSIR), the central body of the Reform movement, operated a number of congregations in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Its small size was reflected in its budget, which was only 1–2 percent that of the FJC. OROSIR owned very few synagogue buildings of its own in the FSU, renting facilities instead. In 2006, the group purchased space for a new synagogue in St. Petersburg, Russia's second largest city, which would,

when completed, become the first new Reform synagogue to be opened in Russia since the fall of communism.

The Russian Jewish Congress (RJC), founded in 1996, had lost much of its earlier influence with the government and in the community. Vyacheslav "Moshe" Kantor, an industrialist who had good personal relations with the Kremlin, assumed the presidency in 2005. He tried to increase the group's visibility in the international Jewish arena, focusing, in 2006, on Holocaust-related programs (see above, p. 517). The RJC continued to demonstrate little interest in the domestic social and political issues of concern to the Jewish community.

Other Jewish organizations that had some influence in the FSU were not indigenous, but operated from outside the region, with foreign funding. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) ran significant Jewish welfare programs through its network of Hesed centers. The Jewish Agency for Israel was involved in aliyah as well as Jewish and Zionist education. Hillel, a student group, operated dozens of off-campus student clubs that sought to attract unaffiliated Jewish college youth and young professionals. Some of these groups—particularly the JDC—came under criticism from Russian Jewish leaders for allegedly disregarding the interests and preferences of the local Jewish communities.

In Tajikistan, the country's only synagogue was demolished to make way for the construction of a new presidential complex in Dushanbe, the capital of this predominantly Muslim Central Asian country. The 100-year-old synagogue had served the small community of mainly elderly Jews that remained in the city in the wake of the civil war that followed the collapse of communism in 1991. City officials offered the community a plot of land for a new synagogue, but in the absence of adequate financial compensation there was no money to build it. The FJC entered into negotiations with national and local officials, but no resolution had been reached as the year ended.

Two historic synagogues were rededicated during 2006. President Freiberga of Latvia attended a ceremony at the reopening of the synagogue in Daugavpils, the country's second largest city, which was now home to 400 Jews. The synagogue in Mukachevo, western Ukraine, was dedicated after its restoration was completed. Prior to World War II the town was the seat of the Munkach Hasidic dynasty, now based in the Boro Park section of Brooklyn, New York.

A new Jewish community center, Beit Menachem Tabachnik, opened in Krasnoyarsk, Siberia, in December. It included a synagogue, a kosher

soup kitchen, a library, classrooms, and sports and music facilities. The center, believed to be the largest Jewish facility in Siberia, was built and run by the FJC.

### *Education*

There were about 100 Jewish day schools across the FSU, about 70 of them affiliated with the Chabad-run Or Avner network, which also ran some 60 Jewish kindergartens. In December, it opened Maor, a new Jewish educational center in St. Petersburg that included a day school, kindergarten, prayer hall, and kosher kitchen, along with facilities to host communal programs for various age groups.

World ORT sponsored 15 schools in the region that provided training in computers and technology to enable students to compete in the job market. In February, it opened a technology center at Beit Yehudit-Moriah, an Orthodox day school in Moscow.

In May, leaders of the World Jewish Congress, international Jewish scholars, and rabbis participated in a one-day Limmud FSU educational marathon held in Moscow for local Jews. The program was aimed at bringing together Jews from across the communal spectrum and providing a rare opportunity for exchange between proponents of different Jewish ideologies and interests.

The prospect that Russian Orthodox Christianity might be taught in Russian public schools alarmed Jewish leaders. Berel Lazar, the chief rabbi of the FJC, said that the introduction, in four Russian regions, of a new subject, Foundations of Russian Orthodox Culture, would “divide children into different classes” and lead to the ostracism of religious minorities. The new subject was to become an obligatory part of the curriculum in Orel, Belogorod, Kaluga, and Ryazan—all in central Russia. Depending on the region, the subject was to be taught in the primary, middle-school, or high-school years. The move was supported by the Russian Orthodox Church, Russia’s largest faith.

A similar development in Ukraine had already met with criticism on the part of some Jewish leaders in 2005 (see AJYB 2006, p. 531). As of September 1, 2006, parents of students in some Ukrainian public schools were required to choose among new elective courses that included Basics of Christian Ethics and Basics of Religious Ethics.