France

National Affairs

On May 6, French voters elected Nicolas Sarkozy, the center-right candidate, president of France for a five-year term. He defeated the Socialist candidate Ségolène Royal by 53.06 percent to 46.94 percent in the second-round run-off. Turnout was high, 83.97 percent of registered voters, which was not surprising given the intense public interest the campaign aroused.

The run-off was necessary because no candidate won an absolute majority in the first round of voting on April 21. Sarkozy was first in that contest with 31.18 percent, followed by Royal at 25.87 percent and centrist François Bayrou at 18.57 percent. Finishing fourth with 10.44 percent was ultra-rightist Jean-Marie Le Pen, whose National Front party suffered a major setback. In the previous presidential election in 2002 Le Pen came in second, albeit because the far stronger left-wing vote was divided among a multitude of first-round candidates. Le Pen that year received 16.86 percent in the first round and 17.79 in the run-off, when he was beaten by Jacques Chirac.

In 2007, eight candidates other than the top four shared the remainder of the first-round vote, with ultra-leftist Olivier Besancenot the only one to garner more than a million votes (4.08 percent). The others included hard-rightist Philippe de Villiers, Communist Marie-George Buffet, and Dominique Voynet of the Greens. As Buffet attracted less than 2 percent, the election confirmed the near-demise of the Communist Party, which, less than half a century earlier, when there was still a blue-collar, ethnic, French working class, regularly got more than a quarter of the vote. The French Greens, who hoped for electoral successes similar to those of their ideological soul mates in neighboring Germany, also saw their hopes dashed.

A non-practicing Roman Catholic who was largely raised by a Jewish-born grandfather after his parents divorced, the 52-year-old Sarkozy enjoyed the support of the vast majority of France’s 600,000-strong Jewish community because of a long record of support for Israel and Jewish causes. Although Jews represented only 1 percent of the French population, they were credited by friends and foes alike with an influence be-
yond their numbers due to their relatively strong presence in the media and other key sectors.

Sarkozy had been preparing his candidacy for years, but officially began it on January 14 with a mass rally in Paris of his Union for a Popular Movement (UMP). Organizers said that 78,000 party members attended. Sarkozy spoke immediately after the results were announced of an internal party vote in UMP branches across France in which, according to UMP officials, just over 69 percent of the almost 340,000 members took part and 98.1 percent of them designated Sarkozy as their preferred candidate.

“Sarko” told those present that with his designation as candidate he had ceased to represent the party only, and aspired to be “the person who unites all the French people.” “My France is that of all the French,” he said in a lyrical speech that referred to a long string of national heroes stretching from the Middle Ages until the present, who, he said, had inspired his career. Along with such obvious names as Charles de Gaulle and philosophers Pascal and Voltaire he threw in lesser-known figures, including Georges Mandel, the French Jewish politician murdered by Nazi collaborators during World War II and about whom Sarkozy wrote a biography in 1994.

“All of them,” he said, referring to these listed role models, “have taught the little Frenchman of mixed blood who I am, the love of France and the pride in being a Frenchman.” Three of Sarkozy’s grandparents were foreign-born: his father, who arrived in France as a political refugee after the war, was a Catholic minor Hungarian aristocrat, and his maternal grandfather was born in the Jewish community of Salonica, now in Greece but then in the Ottoman Empire. Sarkozy also mentioned events and places he had visited that, he said, forged his personality, including the hall at Jerusalem’s Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial that was specially dedicated to the one million children killed.

Among those present at the rally, but who discreetly and nonetheless demonstratively left after less than an hour, was Dominique de Villepin, the serving prime minister, who was Sarkozy’s main rival for the position of center-right presidential candidate. Despite smiles, the two men had been at daggers drawn for months. And shortly after Sarkozy was elected, an instructing magistrate placed de Villepin under judicial investigation—one small step short of being criminally charged—for participation in a complicated pre-election plot to disseminate false rumors alleging that Sarkozy had secret bank accounts abroad containing large sums of shady origin. President Jacques Chirac, who had at one point
harbored ambitions of running for a third term, was conspicuously absent from the rally.

Ségolène Royal, the first woman to represent a major party in a French presidential election, had eliminated her Socialist rivals from contention in late 2006. She outlined her campaign platform, contained in a 100-point “Presidential Pact,” at a major rally in the Paris suburbs on February 11. In an effort to break with the past practice of having a small group draw up the platform, Royal had promised that the public would help formulate hers, and some 6,000 town-hall-style meetings were held across the country in the months preceding the rally. Royal said she also had received 135,000 suggestions by Internet. “I have tried to listen to all of you. I wanted the citizens of this country to speak so that I could carry their voice, because you are fed up with programs written in the shadows and ignored as soon as they are written. Promises must be kept and must be credible,” she said.

The program she presented was only moderately left wing, far closer to the center of politics than previous Socialist platforms. On the international scene, she called for strengthening the European Union by tightening the links between its members. She also proposed that the EU take the initiative for an “International Conference for Peace and Security in the Middle East.”

Royal’s campaign, at first buoyed by the novelty of a woman’s candidacy backed by her own Mona Lisa-type good looks, started to wear thin once the campaign was underway. It did not help that she was sniped at by many within her own party, particularly former prime minister Laurent Fabius and former finance minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn, both of whom she had beaten out for the Socialist nomination.

The big surprise of the campaign was centrist candidate François Bayrou, whose political identity as someone who was neither part of the left or the right appealed to many French people who were fed up with that endless split that had characterized French politics since the French Revolution of 1789. Bayrou rose steadily in the polls and by early March tied Royal at 23 percent. At that point Sarkozy was at 28 percent and his camp worried about the prospect of a Sarkozy-Bayrou run-off, in which case many Royal sympathizers, whose main aim was to stop Sarkozy, would back Bayrou. In the Sarkozy-Royal tussle that did materialize, first-round Bayrou voters split between Sarkozy and Royal in the run-off.

Although both Sarkozy and Royal had visited Israel in 2006 and Sarkozy had assiduously courted French Jewry for years, the Arab-Israeli conflict and Jewish issues in general were absent from the election cam-
campaign. It was considered a foregone conclusion that the bulk of Jewish voters would back Sarkozy, but since it was illegal to ask about religion in opinion polls there was no way to verify the breakdown of the Jewish vote. One indication, however, came from the 45,000 French citizens residing in Israel, nearly all of whom were Jewish. Over 82 percent voted for Sarkozy when they cast their ballots in French consulates in Jerusalem, Haifa, and Tel Aviv.

Sarkozy's popularity with Jews was demonstrated on January 23 at the annual gala dinner of CRIF (Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France), the umbrella body of French Jewish groups. The CRIF dinner, instituted in 1985, was attended by the “who's who” of the French political world as well as by French Jewish leaders, and was traditionally addressed by the serving French prime minister and by CRIF's president. The guest speaker at the 2007 event was Prime Minister de Villepin, but all eyes were turned to Interior Minister Sarkozy, whose arrival caused a rugby-type scrum around him by the media and well-wishers. He stayed through the pre-dinner cocktails, surrounded by Jewish personalities seeking to have their photos taken with him. But he left before the dinner, possibly in order not to seem to be taking second place to the prime minister when the latter spoke. Royal, who, a week before, had told CRIF officials that she would not attend, showed up for the cocktails, as did Bayrou. During his welcoming speech, outgoing CRIF president Roger Cukierman pledged that the body would be neutral in the forthcoming presidential poll.

Sarkozy's election chances received an unexpected boost on March 28 when a major riot broke out at the Gare du Nord train station in Paris over the arrest of an illegal immigrant from Congo-Brazzaville who had leapt over a turnstile without paying his fare. The man, who had a long police record for minor criminal offences, tried to resist arrest because he was under a court order that he be expelled from France if apprehended. The train station with its many underground shops was a meeting place for African immigrants and young French blacks, who congregated there by the hundreds each day. When they saw police chasing the suspect, pouncing on him and holding him on the ground, they erupted in anger. Shops were looted and station equipment destroyed, and the air was thick with tear gas as the rioters, soon joined by ethnic French anarchists tipped off by radio news bulletins, fought it out with police inside the labyrinth-like station's maze of corridors. The proceedings were filmed by fast-arriving television-camera crews. A large segment of the French public, still feeling the shock of the October 2005 riots that raged for
nearly three weeks across immigrant ghetto suburbs, expressed renewed anger at street violence by Third World immigrants, a favorite Sarkozy campaign theme.

Sarkozy had resigned as Interior Minister earlier that month to devote himself to full-time campaigning, and so he had no direct responsibility for dealing with the riot. Left-wingers nevertheless blamed it on Sarkozy, saying that his constant harping on law-and-order combined with calls for tougher immigration regulations had helped create a climate in which immigrants felt hounded by authorities. Fears of more violence to come proved unfounded, and it was a good-natured crowd of tens of thousands of Sarkozy supporters who gathered in the Place de la Concorde in central Paris when the final results were announced on May 6. There were only a few scattered protests, including the burning of cars in Paris suburbs, over the next 48 hours, mostly by small groups of ethnic French anarchists.

One subject that came immediately to the fore on election day itself was the new president’s stormy relationship with his wife Cécilia, a matter that soon affected Sarkozy’s political fortunes and saw him drop sharply in opinion polls. The couple, who married in 1996 after long and messy divorces from their former spouses, separated in 2005 when Cécilia went off to live in New York with French Jewish advertising executive Richard Attias. The French press reported at the time that Sarkozy was himself romantically involved with a woman journalist. But Cécilia, who had long played a key role in her husband’s political career, came back to her husband in 2006, apparently on Sarkozy’s insistent bidding. He proceeded to publicly flaunt their renewed relationship. Later newspaper reports said Cécilia returned because she did not wish to be blamed in case Sarkozy lost the election.

On election day Cécilia failed to accompany Sarkozy to vote (the two grown daughters from her first marriage did), and it turned out that she failed to vote altogether. Cécilia showed up late that evening. It was subsequently learned that the couple had already effectively separated again, and only reunited for his inauguration ceremony. It was carried on live television, and Sarkozy made several affectionate gestures towards his wife as the press photographers clicked away, but Cécilia looked embarrassed and distant. The proceedings were front-page news, and celebrity and gossip magazines had a field day, vastly increasing their circulations for months.

In August, the couple and their 11-year-old son Louis went on vacation with friends to Wolfeboro, New Hampshire. During their stay they
were invited for a family lunch at the Bush residence in nearby Kennebunkport. Cécilia canceled her participation at the last minute, citing ill health. French journalists tailing the Sarkozys separately said they saw her shopping in Wolfeboro the same day. Before the visit, however, Cécilia had apparently played a role in the dramatic diplomatic mission to free five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor who had been in Libyan jails for years on trumped-up charges of inoculating children with the HIV virus (see below, p. 382). Cécilia then dropped from public sight, and on October 18 it was announced that the couple had divorced. Cécilia apparently went straight back to Attias, telling reporters that attempts to repair her marriage with Sarkozy had failed. (Cécilia and Attias would wed in New York in March 2008.)

Within weeks Sarkozy was involved in a whirlwind romance with a Paris-based Italian singer-fashion model, Carla-Bruni Tedeschi (who like Sarkozy, had one Jewish grandfather), again amid a flurry of media attention clearly encouraged by the president. This proved a miscalculation as his popularity rates began to plummet. Many French people complained that the president had lost all dignity and was turning his office into the setting for a “Dallas”-like TV series. By the end of the year Sarkozy’s approval rating had fallen from around 70 percent to half that figure, spelling major political trouble ahead.

Oddly enough, marital woes might also have affected Royal had she been elected. Her longtime companion and father of their four children was Socialist Party secretary general François Hollande, and during the campaign the press speculated about Hollande’s potential role as male companion of the first woman president. But the couple almost never appeared together in public, and the one time they did, for a major election rally when they were both on stage, Hollande pressed a clumsy kiss on the candidate’s cheek and Royal turned her head away, sparking much speculation. Shortly after her defeat, Royal issued a press communiqué saying that the couple had in fact separated some months before, apparently because Hollande was having an affair with another woman. “I wish him all the best in his new life,” she said.

Aside from family issues, Sarkozy’s presidency started out on a good footing as he received credit for clever high-level appointments, including some top figures lured from the opposition Socialists. Chief among these was humanitarian crusader Bernard Kouchner, a longtime health minister under President François Mitterrand, whom Sarkozy named foreign minister. Kouchner, whose father was Jewish, had long harbored his own presidential ambitions bolstered by strong personal popularity
among the French public for his decades of media-attracting action as head of Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), an international disaster-relief group. Precisely because he was far more popular than any other left-wing politician, Kouchner was always a figure of suspicion in his own party, and his Socialist rivals blocked him from running for president. This made it all the easier for him to accept Sarkozy's offer of the prestigious foreign-affairs portfolio.

Another leading Socialist who allowed himself to be lured by Sarkozy was Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the Jewish former finance minister who had been one of the three finalists for his party's presidential nomination. Sarkozy told Strauss-Kahn that France would support him if he stood for the office of managing director of the Washington-based International Monetary Fund (IMF). Strauss-Kahn accepted the offer and the IMF indeed appointed him its head on September 28. Also lured from Socialist ranks were Jacques Lang, former culture minister, and Jacques Attali, long a close Mitterrand adviser. Both men (who were Jewish) accepted positions as members of top state advisory committees. Like Kouchner and Strauss-Kahn, they were assured of government-supplied offices and honors and were removed from the ranks of the active opposition.

An appointment of particular interest to Jews was that of Jean-David Levitte, France's ambassador to the U.S., as personal foreign-policy adviser to the president. Although his mother was not Jewish, Levitte's father was a major figure in the Jewish community during the late 1940s and 1950s, whose own parents were both murdered in the Holocaust. The younger Levitte belonged to the French Jewish Scout movement before entering university. During his years in the French diplomatic service he was not considered particularly friendly to Jewish concerns, especially when he was diplomatic adviser to President Chirac and later ambassador to the UN. But he seemed to warm to Jewish issues when serving as ambassador in Washington.

Sarkozy also scored coups by appointing Rachida Dati, 41, a little-known female magistrate born into a poor family of North African Muslim immigrants, as justice minister, and Senegalese-born Rama Yade, 30, as deputy foreign minister in charge of human rights. The moves were clearly overtures to the immigrant Arab and black African communities that distrusted Sarkozy because of his stance on immigration. Yade was married to a Jew, Joseph Zimet, son of a famous French Yiddish-language singer.

Sarkozy, who long had the reputation of being the most pro-American
politician on the French scene but avoided foreign policy issues during the campaign, made a high-profile visit to the U.S. on November 6–7 that included an address before Congress that was interrupted about 20 times by applause. Presidential spokesman David Martinon told journalists as the visit began that its aim was to renew good relations that had soured after President Chirac actively campaigned to prevent the U.S. from launching the second Gulf War in 2003. While in the U.S. Sarkozy received the American Jewish Committee's "Light Unto the Nations" Award.

Elections for the National Assembly were held in June. Sarkozy supporters won 341 seats, a comfortable majority in the 577-seat lower house of France's parliament, but fewer than the 397 seats they won in the last such election in 2002.

Israel and the Middle East

ISRAEL

"I have the reputation of being a friend of Israel. It's true. I will never compromise with Israel's security." French Jews were used to hearing such statements from the country's politicians before an election, but this time it was made by President Sarkozy after his election, and addressed to France's ambassadors abroad, summoned to a conference in Paris on August 27. In the same speech Sarkozy said that the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran was the worst crisis facing the world and that Iran's possession of nuclear weapons was unacceptable to France. The major powers, he went on, should ratchet up sanctions against Tehran while at the same time showing openness to talks should Iran suspend its nuclear activities. The choice was clear, he declared, "the Iranian bomb or the bombing of Iran."

French Jewish leaders expressed hope that policy towards Israel would change notably for the better under the new government. Roger Cukierman, outgoing president of CRIF, told reporters soon after the election: "I hope to now see an improvement of relations between France and the Middle East, and especially, a true re-equilibrium of French policy towards the region. Until now Israel's friends were often former ministers and future ministers, but rarely serving ministers." Joël Mergui, president of the Paris Consistory, the board that administered synagogues and Jewish affairs in the capital, recalled that he had accompanied Sarkozy when the politician made his first visit to Israel, which was when it came
under missile fire from Iraq during the first Gulf War in 1991: "Nicolas Sarkozy then came to demonstrate his solidarity with Israel. That act today still symbolizes his closeness to the State of Israel."

French Jews were especially heartened that Sarkozy chose Kouchner as foreign minister. Although coming from Socialist ranks, Kouchner was one of the rare French politicians to strongly back U.S. intervention in Iraq in 2003, and was a longtime proponent of a hard line against Iran and its nuclear ambitions, proposing sanctions and economic boycotts. During Israel’s 2006 war in Lebanon, Kouchner said in an interview that France should “actively defend the citizens of Israel who have been attacked” and that UN forces should be given a mandate to disarm Hezbollah, although he did add that the movement could probably not be destroyed by force. Kouchner’s positions led the Franco-Palestinian Solidarity Association to state that his nomination “was bad news for the Arabs.” Kouchner, who received an honorary doctorate from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 2005, was Jewish on his father’s side but did not have community ties. Two of his grandparents were killed in Auschwitz.

The improvement in ties between France and Israel following Sarkozy’s election was highlighted during a three-day official visit to France, October 21–23, by Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert, who held meetings with Sarkozy and other French leaders. His stay in France followed a preparatory visit by Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni in July. Olmert told journalists after meeting Sarkozy that France and Israel had identical views on the Iranian threat. “I couldn’t have heard on the Iranian issue things that could more fall in line with my expectations,” said Olmert. He noted that they did not discuss possible military action against Iran’s nuclear program but focused rather on tougher sanctions. Just a month before, Kouchner had created a stir when he said in a radio interview that the world might have to get ready for war over Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Dr. Richard Prasquier, the new head of CRIF, said that Sarkozy told Olmert “he did not understand how the Palestinians could still think of ‘returning’ to Israel, a country whose reason for being was to be a Jewish state. He said that with great conviction and understanding of Israeli realities. I can only hope that his position will remain the same.”

Olmert also held emotional meetings with the French Jewish community, which he hailed as the “the warmest and closest to Israel in the world.” It was later announced that Israeli president Shimon Peres would visit France in March 2008 and that Sarkozy would go to Israel several months later.
During the year, Foreign Minister Kouchner visited Israel twice, pledging friendship and support but also making clear that French backing was not unconditional. In his typically direct style, he told journalists on arrival: “I will tell the Israelis that settlement activity [across the Green Line] is not only illegal, it is also politically the main obstacle to peace. Increased settlement activity reinforces the [Palestinian] feeling of injustice and therefore increases lack of security.”

On October 19, Paris mayor Bertrand Delanoë officially marked the erection, in the Yitzhak Rabin public garden in southern Paris, of a large scaffolding containing portraits of Gilad Shalit, Eldad Regev, and Ehud Goldwasser, the three Israeli soldiers held captive in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon since the summer of 2006. The ceremony was initiated by Siona, a Jewish group that campaigned to make the plight of the three known to the general public. In the weeks that followed the portraits were defaced several times by anti-Israel activists.

The Middle East and Radical Islam

Soon after his election Sarkozy sent Foreign Minister Kouchner on the first of a series of visits to Lebanon to try to reconcile the factions there and bolster the pro-Western administration of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. Kouchner met with little success. On his first visit, May 24, he made clear that France wanted to keep Syria at arms length. He said he had come “to meet the personalities and political groups who are in favor of Lebanese unity, autonomy and territorial integrity. That means very clearly that we don’t have to speak to Syria’s leaders.” He recalled that France strongly supported an international probe and international tribunal for the killers of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri, and claimed that the Lebanese national army was fully justified in trying to disarm Islamist militants who had taken over the Palestinian refugee camp at Nahr el-Bahred in northern Lebanon.

Kouchner organized talks at Le Celle St. Cloud, outside Paris, for July 14–15, inviting 28 representatives from 14 Lebanese factions including Hezbullah, plus five representatives of “civil society.” The sessions were inconclusive. Several French Jewish groups protested Hezballah’s participation. Kouchner wrote a letter to them on July 25 saying that “there were several arguments that made it politically necessary to invite this group.” One of these arguments was presumably the opportunity to learn the fate of the two Israeli soldiers kidnapped by the group in 2006, but no new information was forthcoming. There were at least eight visits to
the region by Kouchner or his aides, plus telephone calls by Sarkozy to Syrian president Bashar Assad, before Sarkozy called it quits and said he was freezing diplomatic ties with Damascus.

Paris was also the scene, on December 16–17, of a conference of international donors for the Palestinians, at which a record seven billion dollars in aid was pledged by 68 countries and organizations. Top donors included the EU ($650 million in 2008); the U.S. ($555 million in 2008); Great Britain ($490 million over three years); Germany ($290 million over three years); and Japan ($150 million). U.S. secretary of state Condoleezza Rice said at the meeting that “this conference is literally the [Palestinian] government’s last hope to avoid bankruptcy.” Attended by Israeli foreign minister Livni, this meeting followed the U.S.-organized Middle East conference at Annapolis, Maryland, in November, which launched negotiations aimed at creating a Palestinian state within a year.

President Sarkozy paid a visit to Algeria on December 3–5 despite a major, last-minute roadblock. Algeria’s minister of veterans’ affairs, Mohammed Cherif Abbes, himself a veteran of Algeria’s war of independence against France, said in a newspaper interview several days before the French leader’s arrival that “Sarkozy is not welcome in Algeria. We know his origins and we know who brought him to power ... the Jewish lobby, which dominates those who decide things in France and who hold a monopoly over its industries.”

The statement came amid a campaign by Algerian authorities to dissuade Sarkozy from including the Algeria-born French Jewish singer Enrico Macias (born Gaston Grenassia) in his official party. Prime Minister Abdelaziz Belkhadem said he would refuse to shake Macias’s hand if he came. Macias, who was enormously popular since emerging on the French scene shortly after fleeing independent Algeria together with more than 100,000 other Jews, was a longtime and highly committed backer of Israel. His popularity extended to the Algerian public as well, and Macias had often expressed the wish to revisit his homeland.

As the affair escalated with more anti-Semitic vitriol against both Sarkozy and Macias, there were calls in France for the president to cancel his own visit. Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika finally telephoned Sarkozy to say that Abbes had spoken in his own name only and that his views did not reflect those of the Algerian government. But Sarkozy finally asked Macias to withdraw from the visit, telling him to “have patience.”

The visit began in an extremely tense atmosphere when Sarkozy made clear, on Algerian soil, that he would not issue the public apology Al-
gerian leaders expected for French colonial rule of the country that lasted from 1830 through 1962. However Sarkozy was accompanied by 150 French business leaders who arrived with promises of huge investments, and returned with $7 billion in contracts, including for civilian nuclear power stations. While he was in the country Sarkozy took a swipe at Algerian anti-Semitism in a speech, but also explained to journalists that it was necessary to maintain good ties with Algeria if only to combat a continuing, mostly low-key, but often bloody Islamic fundamentalist insurrection that Algerian authorities were trying to crush.

Yet another controversy erupted when Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi arrived in France on December 10 for a five-day visit. This had been one of the conditions Qaddafi set in July when he released into French hands a group of Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor who had been held for years in Libyan jails on trumped-up charges that they had inoculated Libyan children with the HIV virus. The visit was roundly criticized by the French press not only because the motorcades snarled Paris traffic for days, but also because the Libyan leader made outlandish comments denying that his was a dictatorial state. Several Jewish groups issued statements recalling the role of Qaddafi’s Libya in international terrorism, but they remained relatively low key and avoided blaming Sarkozy personally for the visit. The president’s office said it was better to bring Libya back in “out of the cold” than to reject it and possibly induce it to resume with its old ways. The meetings also yielded close to $10 billion in contracts for France.

On January 3, French authorities expelled an extremist Muslim imam back to his native Morocco after several unheeded warnings about his lecturing in a prayer hall near Paris against Jews, woman, and non-Muslims. Ahmed al-Fatmi, 62, had resided in France for ten years and preached in Grigny, an area where clashes between police and local Arab youths were common. This expulsion followed another two weeks earlier (in late 2006) to Tunisia of Bilal Chouhir, a preacher in the central France city of Lyons. Chouhir was reported to have made death threats against French government ministers and journalists, and to have “publicly incited for holy war against Western society by all possible means.”

During the course of the year police announced the arrests of 89 Islamic fundamentalists. Eleven of them were picked up on February 14 in southwest France and in the greater Paris area as part of a crackdown on an Islamist network that sent young French Arabs to fight against the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq. These arrests followed the return to France the
previous day of two French Arabs arrested in Syria and sent back to France by that country, who then gave information about the others. Among those arrested was a Zairean Muslim, the first time a sub-Saharan African was arrested in France in connection with the Iraq conflict.

A French court, on October 10, rejected a request for parole submitted by Lebanese national Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, who had been jailed for life since 1984 on charges of murdering a U.S. defense attaché, Colonel Charles Ray, and Israeli diplomat Yaacov Bar Simantov in 1982. A note from DST, the French counterespionage agency, was read before the court saying Abdallah was still a threat to France and that his release would be celebrated as a victory by extremist groups. Now aged 57, Abdallah was acting on behalf of a faction within the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine when arrested. The court said one reason for its decision to deny parole was that Abdallah had never expressed regret for his acts.

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) office in France and the Franco-Palestinian Solidarity Association appealed before a French court on October 29 for the nullification of a contract under which the French firms Alstom and Veolia would build a light railway in Jerusalem. Since the route would include areas of the city taken over during the June 1967 war and reach the new Jewish neighborhoods of Pisgat Ze'ev and French Hill, the Arab groups declared this a violation of the Geneva Convention banning the settlement of populations in occupied areas. Lawyers for the firms countered that French courts had no jurisdiction over the case since the contract was being executed abroad. A decision was expected in 2008.

Racism and Anti-Semitism

In one of his last major speeches before leaving office, outgoing president Chirac delivered a televised exhortation to the French on March 11: “Never compromise with extremism, racism, anti-Semitism or the rejection of ‘the other.’ In our history, extremism nearly led us into the precipice. It is a poison which divides, which perverts, and which destroys. The soul of France says no to extremism.” Chirac said that “in the face of religious extremism, France must defend tolerance, dialogue and respect between men and cultures. Failure to do this will endanger peace and the security of mankind.” He concluded with a personal testament: “All my life, I have fought for justice, for progress, for peace, and for the
grandeur of France.” French Jews, who generally felt that Chirac had been consistently aloof, even cold, toward the State of Israel, gave him credit for being highly attuned to domestic Jewish sensitivities.

The annual report on racist violence published by the state-run National Consultative Commission on Human Rights counted 386 anti-Semitic acts in France in 2007, a drop of 32.5 percent from the 571 such acts reported in 2006. Jews were not the main victims of racism, the report showed, as 68 percent of those subjected to racist violence in France and 60 percent of those receiving racist threats were of North African Arab origin. To be sure, that community, constituting between five and six million people, was ten times larger than French Jewry.

Another audit of anti-Semitic acts during 2007 was prepared by the Service de Protection de la Communauté Juive (Jewish Community Protection Service, or SPCJ), the Jewish organizations’ own security service that worked in close coordination with the police. It counted 256 incidents, down 31 percent from the 371 in 2006 (the 2005 figure was exactly 300). Included in the 2007 figure were 143 acts of violence against people and property, as compared to 213 in 2006, a 33-percent decline. The number of physical attacks on people was 71; there were 112 in 2006. The figure for threats, either direct or by mail or telephone, dropped 28.5 percent, from 158 in 2006 to 113.

The SPCJ report cautioned that the picture it gave might understimate the problem, since the data only included cases where the anti-Semitic motive was proved beyond the shadow of a doubt. Excluded were “opportunistic” crimes, for example young French Arabs beating up a young Jew they happen upon by chance in the subway, where the anti-Semitic factor may be an aggravating factor in general delinquency. Since 2004, the report noted, the monthly trend of anti-Semitic acts no longer followed the levels of tension in the Middle East, as had been the case from 2000 through 2004. In fact for 2007 “references to the conflict between Israel and Palestine are almost completely absent . . . from statements and gestures that accompany or motivate anti-Semitic acts.” Despite the lower numbers, warned the report, “We still have a feeling of uncertainty with regard to the phenomenon; it is unstable, unpredictable and likely to change in unexpected ways; it requires extreme vigilance, both by the government and by the CRIF and the SPCJ.”

A specially prepared brochure was published highlighting examples of anti-Semitic incidents in 2007. Among them were the following:

April 7: An Algerian man drove his car directly at two yarmulke-wearing youths in the city of Lyons, hitting one of them. The victim was
thrown over the hood of the car and suffered injuries to the face and to one knee. The perpetrator was arrested.

April 22: The mezuzah was violently torn off the main entrance hall of the Jewish community center at Neuilly-sur-Seine, an affluent Paris suburb.

May 6: Two petrol bombs were thrown into a yeshiva in the town of Saint Louis in eastern France. There were no injuries and no damage.

June 23: A 13-year-old Jewish boy was attacked in the rough east Paris suburb of Villemomble by a group of men who punched him and threw him against a parked car, shouting such taunts as “We’re going to get this Jew.” The youth suffered a concussion but his family refused to press charges for fear of reprisals.

August 24: Arson caused serious damage to a Jewish prayer hall, once again in Saint Louis. No injuries were reported.

September 21: A group of 25 people wearing yarmulkes were the target of stones thrown by a group of nine individuals, who resisted arrest when police arrived. The incident took place in a rough Paris suburb.

November 14: A bottle containing firecrackers was thrown into the home of a Jewish family in Gagny, also a tough suburb of the French capital. The assailants could not be identified, but Gagny had a large Muslim minority and particularly active street gangs. The same family had been the object of earlier death threats and anti-Semitic insults.

The French press during the year reported many other stories relating to anti-Semitism. The first was on January 18, when a Paris court fined Bruno Gollnisch, the number-two figure in Jean-Marie Le Pen’s National Front, 55,000 euros for challenging the truth of crimes against humanity, an offense under French law. During a news conference in 2004, Gollnisch said he did not doubt that millions had died in concentration camps or that gas chambers had existed, but added, “On the subject, however, of how people died there, I believe a debate should be held. I am not a specialist on such issues and I believe that historians should discuss this issue freely.” The presiding judge said Gollnisch’s remarks strongly insinuated that millions had not been killed in gas chambers.

A juvenile court on March 19 sentenced two youths of North African Arab origin and another of Asian origin to suspended nine-month terms for throwing improvised explosive devices into the recreation yard of a Jewish school in Paris in 2005. The prosecutor told the youths that they were getting off lightly only because they had no prior criminal records.

Two anti-Semitic incidents occurred in March. A kippah-wearing 13-year-old Jewish boy was attacked and beaten up by fourth youths of
black African origin on his way home from school in a tough north Paris neighborhood on March 20. And on the last day of the month about 50 tombstones were overturned in the Jewish section of a municipal cemetery at Lille in northern France. There was no indication of who was responsible. Outgoing president Chirac sent a message of sympathy to the local Jewish community condemning the outrage.

Orthodox rabbi Élie Dahan was attacked on April 19 by a man of black African or West Indian origin in the Gare du Nord train station in Paris and suffered facial injuries. The rabbi, easily identifiable by his clothing and beard, was walking in the station when his assailant shouted at him: “Don’t look at me, dirty Jew. I’m going to hit you, dirty Jew!” The attacker fled immediately and was not apprehended.

A Paris court on May 21 dismissed a libel suit brought by former university professor Robert Faurisson, a Holocaust denier, against former French justice minister Robert Badinter. The ex-minister, a Jew whose father was killed at Auschwitz, had described Faurisson during a television appearance in November 2006 as “already sentenced before courts as a falsifier of history.” The court, agreeing with Badinter’s defense that Faurisson falsified history by saying there were no gas chambers, threw out the case and ordered Faurisson to pay 5,000 euros for court expenses.

Two days later a Paris appeals court dismissed as unfounded a libel suit brought by leftist Israeli filmmaker Eyal Dayan against French Jewish philosopher Alain Finkielkraut, who had accused Dayan of being “an anti-Semitic Jew.” Finkielkraut leveled the charge in 2003 on a radio program while commenting on a full-length documentary film made by Sivan, who lived in Paris, about the Israel-Palestinian conflict. The court found that Finkielkraut’s words did not constitute libel.

In June, in the eastern France city of Reims, a handicapped Jewish woman who was swimming in a local public pool asked some youths to let her pass. One of them, seeing the Star of David around her neck, responded with anti-Semitic insults and struck her in the back. The 15-year-old boy—who, as it turned out, already had a police record—was charged with assault and public expression of anti-Semitism.

An appeals court in Dijon in central France confirmed a sentence on June 28 against a teenage girl of North African Arab origin who offered anti-Semitic insults against Franco-Israeli singer Shirel during a concert in the region in 2004. The accused was sentenced to 140 hours of community service, as well as payment of a symbolic one euro in damages and 1,500 euros in legal fees. The accused had denied responsibility.
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when the case was tried in a lower court, but the appeals court confirmed the sentenced after seeing television news footage of the incident.

That same day a court in Chartres, south of Paris, sentenced black nationalist Stelio Capo Chichi, also known as Kemi Seba, to a six-month suspended prison term and a fine of 1,500 euros for making violently anti-Semitic public statements in February 2007, when addressing customers emerging from a local supermarket. Another member of the same group, Cyrille Kamdem, got a three-month suspended sentence and a 750-euro fine on the same charge, and also had to pay 1,000 euros in damages to an antiracist group.

On August 28, a Paris court sentenced Nizar Ouedrani to nine months in prison for seriously injuring Yosef Zekri with a lead pipe in July as the latter was on his way to his Paris synagogue. The accused, who was of North African Arab origin, said he did not act out of anti-Semitic motives, but rather lost his temper during a traffic argument. Witnesses, however, testified that Ouedrani shouted, “I’m going to finish you off dirty Jew,” as he attacked Zekri, who suffered a broken arm, needed stitches for a head wound, and had to wear a neck brace for several weeks.

Three French neo-Nazis were sentenced on September 12 to prison terms ranging up to 30 months for daubing Nazi graffiti on 117 graves in the centuries-old Jewish cemetery at Herrlisheim in Alsace on April 30, 2004, Hitler’s birthday. The principal accused, Emmanuel Rist, was also facing the prospect of a separate trial for the murder, in 2001, of a Moroccan shopkeeper, a crime to which he admitted but that he insisted had no racial motive. The two other accused, Laurent Boulanger and Laurent Petterschmidt, respectively received terms of 18 months and one year plus six months suspended for the cemetery affair.

A Paris court on October 16 sentenced Franco-Ivorian Youssouf Fofana, the main suspect in the Ilan Halimi murder case of 2006, to a year’s imprisonment on the charge of insulting magistrates. Fofana had been in prison since his extradition from the Ivory Coast, where he had fled after the tortured body of the Jewish telephone salesman was found abandoned near Paris on February 13, 2006. The death of Halimi, who had been kidnapped for ransom because he was a Jew, was one of the greatest shocks suffered by French Jewry since the end of World War II (see AJYB 2007, pp. 360–62). At a yet-to-be-determined date in 2008, 20 people were to stand trial for their roles in Halimi’s murder.

Fofana’s October 16 trial appearance followed a letter he wrote to in-
structing magistrate Corinne Goetzmann, saying “I s . . . on you.” Fofana initially refused to answer questions, and then donned a religious Muslim’s skullcap and declared: “I am a symbolic war trophy . . . . I am the ally of the Muslims and the Africans against the bearded kippah-wearers. In the name of Allah, I shall be freed by commandos backed by oil money.” Halimi’s body, which had been buried near Paris, was reburied on February 9 at the Givat Shaul cemetery in Jerusalem in an emotional ceremony addressed by French chief rabbi Joseph Sitruk and French ambassador to Israel Jean-Michel Casa.

A court in the Alsatian town of Saverne sentenced already convicted Holocaust denier Vincent Reynouard to a year in prison and a fine of 10,000 euros for writing, having published, and having distributed to various public institutions, such as museums and city halls, a 16-page brochure entitled The Holocaust — What Is Hidden from You. Raynouard had previously been sentenced to a suspended prison term and fine in 1996 on similar charges. He was then fired from his job as a public school teacher and moved to Belgium. Reynouard was arrested during a visit to France. He immediately appealed the sentence, and, allowed to remain free until the appeals trial, went back to Belgium. Should he lose the appeal Reynouard would have to be extradited to serve his sentence.

A Paris appeals court confirmed, on November 15, a lower court ruling sentencing “comedian” Dieudonné M’bala M’bala to a 5,000-euro fine for incitement to racial hatred against Jews. Dieudonné, the son of a black father from Cameroon and a French white mother, had for some years indulged in anti-Semitic “humor.” After Jews demonstrated against him during one of his performances, he told a newspaper interviewer that the demonstrators were “reconverted former slave traders” who now “specialized in banking, entertainment and terrorism, and who support Arik Sharon,” and reiterated that “those who attack me made their fortunes in the slave trade.” After being sued by several Jewish and antiracist groups for these remarks, he attempted to enlist support among black nationalist groups in France. Dieudonné told the appeals court that his initial statements were aimed solely at “Israeli diamond dealers” who, he said, backed the former apartheid regime in South Africa. The court rejected his defense, ruling that the incriminating interview was clearly aimed at all Jews.

On November 22, a Paris appeals court heard a request for reopening legal proceedings in the case of Sébastien Selam, a Jewish disc jockey who was 23 years old when he was murdered in 2003 by Abdel Amastaibou, a Moroccan-born neighbor. Amastaibou, then 20, knifed Selam to death
in the basement garage of their apartment building, disfigured his body, and was arrested when he appeared on the street covered in blood and shouting. “I am going to heaven because I killed a Jew.” He had been declared insane at the time and was committed to a mental hospital. Now, however, he was allowed to leave for occasional family visits, and Selam’s family wanted a new psychological examination and a trial if he were found sane. Lawyer Axel Metzker recalled that, when the murder took place, Amastaibou had already been accused in court of making death threats and anti-Semitic insults against a neighborhood rabbi. (The court, on January 21, 2008, would accept the family’s request and order a new examination.)

Jews were sometimes the aggressors. On January 7, Jewish youths beat up and injured two black sanitation workers in the Rue de Roisiers, the heart of the Jewish neighborhood of the Marais district in central Paris. The victims were driving a garbage truck and picking up refuse when the youths hurled insults at them, provoking the driver to come down from the vehicle. He was then assaulted and beaten with wooden stools from a nearby open-air restaurant and with heavy motorcycle helmets, as was his partner who came to his rescue. Police arrested four of the assailants. There had been several previous incidents in the area involving Jewish toughs who harassed passersby they felt “should not be in the neighborhood.” Police sources said the same youths were often found in the sometimes violent demonstrations organized by the French branch of the Jewish Defense League.

The latest attack was condemned by CRIF and by the mayor of Paris, while black nationalist groups threatened retaliation. Members of “Tribu Ka,” a black extremist group that had been banned by the authorities, demonstrated outside the neighborhood police station to protest what they said was police inaction against the Jewish gang. The blacks also threatened to track down the perpetrators themselves, as they tried to do in May 2006 when several dozen of them threw their weight around the Rue des Rosiers for 30 minutes before the arrival of police (see AJYB 2007, p. 368).

**Holocaust-Related Matters**

President Chirac officiated at the January 18 national day of tribute for French nationals declared “Righteous among the Nations” by Jerusalem’s Yad Vashem for saving Jews during World War II. The main ceremony took place at the Panthéon, in the heart of the Latin Quarter
in Paris, where French national heroes were buried. Chirac's speech, widely considered among the best he had ever made, repeated some of the themes from the ground-breaking address he made in July 1995, shortly after taking office, when he officially acknowledged Vichy French responsibility in the Holocaust. "The Talmud says that to save a life is to save the universe... and the memory of the righteous shall be cherished for generations," he said.

The Panthéon was transformed for a week, made into an exhibit hall in honor of the approximately 2,700 French nationals recognized as "Righteous" by Yad Vashem (out of a total of 22,000 from all countries), credited with saving about 30,000 Jews. Some 76,000, about a quarter of those in France at the time, died during the Holocaust. Chirac spoke after Simone Veil, a former European Parliament president and French cabinet minister and herself an Auschwitz survivor, praising Chirac, saying: "To have recognized the responsibility of the French [Vichy] state in the anti-Jewish persecutions and to now indelibly mark the memory of the Righteous allows one reasons for hope." Parallel ceremonies took place around France.

France's Shoah Memorial opened an exhibit on June 20 whose subject was the killing of 1.5 million Jews in Ukraine by Nazi firing squads (Einsatzgruppen). The exhibit, originally scheduled to close November 30 but prolonged to January 6, 2008, due to huge public interest, was based on the work of French Catholic priest Patrick Desbois and his Yahad-In Unum foundation for Christian-Jewish understanding. Dubois, head of the Commission for Relations with Judaism of the French Bishops' Conference, had scoured Ukraine since 2004, returning several times each year for an average of 15 weeks annually, to locate "killing fields" that held the remains of Jews massacred by the Nazis.

In what was believed to be the first-ever ceremony where a president of France decorated both a mother and her son together, Nicolas Sarkozy honored Beate Klarsfeld and her son Arno at the Élysée presidential palace on November 23. Beate was promoted to the rank of officer in the national order of the Legion of Honor, while Arno was made a chevalier (knight) of the Order of Merit. Beate, a German-born Protestant, had devoted her life to hunting Nazis and honoring the Shoah dead, together with her husband, Serge, who was already an officer of the Legion of Honor. A lawyer like his father, Arno was honored for his role in human rights causes. He had taken a year off from his practice at the height of the Palestinian intifada to serve as a volunteer with the Israeli Border Police in the Jerusalem area.
The 2007 Shoah Memorial Prize went to painter Alain Kleinmann for his life's work, and to Shlomo Venezia for his autobiography *SonderKommando—In the Hell of the Gas Chambers*, written with Béatrice Prasquier.

**JEWISH COMMUNITY**

**Demography**

In November, Fonds Social Juif Unifié, the social welfare arm of France's Jewish community, presented the results of a study it had sponsored of French Jewry that was conducted by Israeli sociologist Erik Cohen, who had been born and educated in France. The study, based largely on telephone interviews with sample groups of French Jews, was entitled *Happy as Jews in France*, a play on the Yiddish expression, "Happy as God in France." The data showed that 91 percent of the Jewish heads of households questioned said they were "happy" or "very happy" with their everyday lives (68 percent "happy," 23 percent "very happy"), as compared to 7 percent who were unhappy and 2 percent who were very unhappy. Another interesting finding was that the number of Jewish children attending Jewish day schools had shot up from 400 in 1950, to nearly 8,000 in 1978, and to more than 30,000 in 2007, a third of all Jewish children of school age. A major reason for the most recent rise was parents' assumption that their children would be safer in Jewish schools.

The March 1 issue of the Catholic weekly *La Vie* published the results of a survey it conducted among a representative group of 1,000 people to measure religious influence in France. It showed that 64 percent of the French declared themselves "close" to Roman Catholicism, 3 percent said they were close to Islam, and only 0.6 percent professed closeness to Judaism. Some 27 percent said they were atheists. The same poll said that of those polled, the highest number of those close to Judaism were in the Paris area, where the figure was 3.7 percent. About half of France's estimated 600,000 Jews lived in the capital.

**Communal Developments**

Dr. Richard Prasquier, a 62-year-old cardiologist, was elected president of CRIF on May 13. The Polish-born Prasquier, who arrived in France
as a small child, succeeded Roger Cukierman, who served since 2001. Prasquier edged out three other candidates, Arieh Bensemhoun, president of CRIF in the southwest city of Toulouse; Henri Hajdenberg, a past CRIF president; and Jo Zrihen, the CRIF vice president. Bensemhoun and Zrihen were Sephardim from North Africa, and many had expected that one of them would win since Sephardim now outnumbered Ashkenazim in France by 70 percent to 30, and the overwhelming majority of young community activists were Sephardim. CRIF officials explained that Prasquier's victory demonstrated the absence in France of the kind of ethnic Jewish antagonisms sometimes found in Israel, and that Prasquier was elected on the basis of his considerable work on behalf of the community.

Prasquier was the longtime president of the French Committee for Yad Vashem and had also served as adviser to outgoing CRIF president Cukierman. His previous CRIF responsibilities were head of international affairs and point man for relations with the Catholic Church. His excellent contacts in French society were underlined soon after his election, when it became known that President Sarkozy would be guest of honor at the next annual CRIF dinner, scheduled for February 13, 2008. Sarkozy would thus be first French head of state to attend the event, which was the highlight of the French Jewish calendar.

Prasquier, a personal friend of Sarkozy, was formally received by him on July 24 to discuss French Jewish affairs. He told reporters afterward that the French leader assured him he would do everything possible to have Israel admitted to the Francophonie, the International Organization of French-speaking countries (including countries like Israel, where French, although not an official language, was spoken by many), a move long opposed by Lebanon, another member state. Sarkozy also told Prasquier that he had invited Israeli president Shimon Peres to visit France. Sarkozy invited Prasquier to accompany him as a member of the official delegation when the French president paid an official visit to the U.S. in November. Prasquier's presence in the group was criticized by pro-Palestinian groups in France.

The Reform movement in France, called judaïsme libéral, celebrated its centennial during the week of December 4-11, with much attention focused on the Union Libérale Israélite de France (ULIF), the first Reform organization in the country. While it was extremely active in France, Reform had the allegiance of only about 20 percent of French Jews, predominantly from the middle and upper classes. The majority of reli-
giously affiliated French Jews, who attended Orthodox synagogues where the liturgy was usually based on the North African tradition, were generally of lower-middle-class and blue-collar background.

**French Jews and Israel**

There were 2,717 immigrants from France to Israel in 2007, a slight drop from 2006, when there were 2,838, and 2005, when there were 3,005, the highest annual figure since 1968. The overall figure for immigration to Israel from all countries for 2007 was about 19,700, the lowest in 20 years.

In 2007 there were also 382 “returnees,” French Jews coming back home after having left to settle in Israel. The equivalent figure for 2006 was 429. Although no details were available, most of the returnees were believed to have gone back because of disappointment with Israel or because they found the going too tough—a frequent phenomenon with “immigrants of choice,” Jews from Western countries who had the alternative of changing their minds. Israeli officials in Paris privately said that 25–30 percent of immigrants from France left Israel to return home within five years. Another reason for return may have emerged in 2007, a sense that the election results might make France friendlier to Jews. David Roche, head of the Jewish Agency in France, told the weekly newspaper *Actualité Juive,* in an interview published December 13, “I suppose that the election of Nicolas Sarkozy had its effect on the French Jewish community [in bringing aliyah figures down] even though the decision to make aliyah is a personal and intimate one . . . .”

Israeli authorities and French Jewish groups had programs in Israel to aid the immigrants during the first difficult years, particularly in settling them in towns where there were already numerous French speakers, such as Netanya and Ashdod. Roche said that a new Website would be launched in February 2008 to make it easier for potential immigrants from France to find jobs in Israel.

The attachment of many French Jews to Israel was again demonstrated by tourism figures. In 2007 about 250,000 French tourists visited Israel, and approximately 85 percent of them were Jewish. France was the second largest contributor of tourists to Israel for the year, after the U.S. (542,000 visitors). The Israel government tourism office in Paris calculated that some 95 percent of the visitors from France had been in Israel at least once before.
Culture

The Museum of Jewish Art and History in Paris held an exhibition from March 28 through July 1 on “Rembrandt and the New Jerusalem: Jews and Christians in Amsterdam in the Golden Century.” Featuring a number of Rembrandt masterpieces, it drew some 56,000 visitors and received exceptional reviews from the media. The exhibit was accompanied by lectures about the history of the period and Jewish life in Amsterdam.

The Paris-based UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) decided on November 7 to add the name of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, the father of modern Hebrew, to the list of those personalities who most influenced world culture. Born Eliezer Perlman in Lithuania in 1855, Ben-Yehuda came to Paris for medical studies but then decided to devote his life to the renaissance of Hebrew, and settled in Ottoman-ruled Palestine in 1881. Founder of the Hebrew-language weekly Hatszvi, he published the first modern Hebrew dictionary in 1909.

Organizers of the annual Paris Book Fair (Le Salon du Livre), one of the largest events of its kind in Europe, announced in December that the 2008 event, to be held March 14–19, would honor Hebrew literature, and that Israel would be the fair’s guest of honor. The focus on Israel was in recognition of Israel’s impending 60th anniversary. Some 40 Israeli authors, including Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua, and David Grossman, were expected to attend and discuss their works.

A good number of original works of Jewish interest were published in France during the year.

Novels: Serge Koster’s Ces choses qui blessent le coeur (These Things that Wound the Heart); Yves-Victor Kamani’s Le onzième Templier (The Eleventh Templar); Myriam Anissimov’s Vie et de mort de Samuel Rozowski (The Life and Death of Samuel Rozowski); Alain Suied’s Laisser partir (To Let Go); Yaël König’s Cinq sous et un miracle (Five Pennies and a Miracle); Joëlle Perelberg’s Oncle Isak (Uncle Isak); Liliane Atlas’s Le Maître des eaux amères (The Master of the Bitter Waters); and Cyrille Fleischmann’s Riverains rêveurs du metro Bastille (Dreaming Neighbors of the Bastille Metro Station).

Judaism: Linda Toros’s La Lettre Sepharade (The Sephardi Letter); Betty Rojtman’s Moïse, prophète des nostalgies (Moses, Prophet of Nostalgias); Théo Klein’s Une manière d’être Juif (A Way of Being Jewish); Mireille Hadass-Lebel’s Philon d’Alexandrie (Philo of Alexandria); Shmuel Trigano’s Le Monde sépharade (The Sephardi World); Marie Vidal’s Les sept prophetesses (The Seven Women Prophets); Johann Sfar’s cartoon
book Le chat du Rabbin—Jérusalem d’Afrique (The Rabbi’s Cat—Jerusalem of Africa); Hélène Hadas-Lebel’s Rites et fêtes du Judaïsme (Rites and Holidays of Judaism); Michel de Saint-Chéron’s Sur le chemin de Jérusalem (On the Path towards Jerusalem); Rafael Draï’s Abraham ou la recreation du monde (Abraham or the Recreation of the World); Jacquot Gunwald’s Le bonheur de vivre à Jérusalem (The Joy of Living in Jerusalem); Claude Bochurberg’s Levinas ou la brisure de la coque (Levinas or the Shattering of the Shell); and Sébastien Tank-Storper’s Juifs d’élection: se convertir au Judaïsme (Jews by Choice: Conversion to Judaism).

Ideas and current events: Johann Sfar’s Pascin; Pascal Ory’s Goscinny; Noam Ohana’s Journal de guerre (War Diary); Benoît Rayski’s Là où vont les cigognes (Where the Storks Go); Élie Barnavi’s Les religions meurtrières (The Murderous Religions); Ernest Gugenheim’s Lettres de Mir (Letters from Mir); Alain Finkielkraut’s Ce que peut la litterature (What Literature Can Do); Rovert Redecker’s Il faut tenter de vivre (One Must Try to Live); Christiane Lecerf’s L’entretien (The Interview); Marie-Christine Weiner’s Les sorbier de Transylvanie (The Sorb from Transylvania); Bruno Durocher’s Ni idoles, ni étoiles (Neither Idols Nor Stars); Frantz Vaillant’s Roland Topor ou le rire étranglé (Roland Topor or the Strangled Laugh); Georges Bensoussan’s Europe, Une passion génocidaire (Europe, a Genocidal Passion); Jeanne Favret-Saada’s Comment produire une crise mondiale avec douze petits dessins (How to Provoke a World Crisis with 12 Little Drawings); Line Meller-Said’s Blida et des poussières (Blida and a Few Specks); Henri Raczymow’s Dix jours “polonais” (Ten “Polish” Days); Jean Cayrol’s Œuvres lazaréennes (The Works of Lazarus); Jacques Semelin’s Purifier et détruire: Usages politiques des massacres et génocides (Purify and Destroy: The Political Use of Massacres and Genocides); Claude Mouchard’s Qui si je criais (Who If I Shouted); and Anny Dayan Rosenmann’s Les Alphabets de la Shoah (Alphabets of the Shoah).

History and biography: Claudine Drame’s Reflets de la Shoah au Cinéma 1945–1985 (The Shoah as Reflected in the Movies, 1945–1985); Simone Veil’s autobiography, Une Vie (A Life); Olivier Guez’s L’Impossible retour (The Impossible Return); Viviane Teitlebaum-Hirsch’s Enfants cachés, Les larmes sous le masque (Hidden Children — The Tears under the Mask); David Shapiro’s Jacob Kaplan—un rabin du XXe siècle (Jacob Kaplan — A Rabbi of the Twentieth Century); Shlomo Venezia and Béatrice Prasquier’s Sonderkommando — Dans l’enfer des chambers à gaz (Sonderkommando — In the Hell of the Gas Chambers); Alain
Among the outstanding films of Jewish interest were Marco Carmel’s *Comme ton père* (Like Your Father), about an Israeli family settling in France; Ariel Zeitoun’s *Le dernier gang* (The Last Gang), about a real gang of mostly Jewish bank robbers that operated in France in the early 1980s; Néomie Lvovsky’s *Faut que ça danse* (There Has To Be Dancing), a comedy about an aging Shoah survivor’s search for love; Claude Miller’s *Le secret* (The Secret), a film adaptation of author Philippe Grimbert’s book about his family’s wartime tribulations in occupied France; and Idit Cebula’s *Deux vies plus une* (Two Lives Plus One), a bittersweet Jewish family drama.

**Necrology**

The body of David Dahan, 54, head of the Israeli Defense Ministry’s purchasing mission in Europe, was found floating in the Seine River near the Normandy city of Rouen on February 21. Dahan disappeared from his home in Paris on January 21 leaving a note that suggested he was contemplating suicide and asked forgiveness from his family. Investigators initially kept all options open, including foul play, but they later said it appeared that Dahan had become depressed because his wife would not move with him to Paris, and subsequently, from their home in Israel, asked for a divorce. Israeli defense minister Amir Peretz paid a quick visit to Paris on January 31 that was believed connected to the disappearance. Peretz presumably met with French officials investigating the case.

Catholic priest Henri Grouès died on January 22, aged 94. Better known as “l’Abbé Pierre,” he saved Jewish children during World War II but provoked intense controversy by making anti-Semitic statements toward the end of his life. Grouès became one of France’s most popular personalities in the early 1950s, when he led campaigns to help the homeless at a time when France had yet to emerge from postwar poverty. Since then he supported many other social causes, each time bringing his prestige to bear on government ministers. Long an honorary board member of LICRA, a group that campaigned against anti-Semitism and racism,
Groués caused pained astonishment in 1996 when he defended Roger Ga-raudy, a former communist intellectual who converted to Islam and be-came a leading Holocaust denier. Stung by the criticism directed against him, Groués lashed out, saying that Jews in Israel had gone “from being victims to being executioners,” and that his opponents were “inspired by the international Zionist lobby.” At his death, however, Patrick Gaubert, the Jewish president of LICRA, which had expelled Groués from its board, said: “He was a giant of a man. We were angered against him at one time for extremely justifiable reasons. But nonetheless, overall, he was a giant of a man.”

Baron Guy de Rothschild, retired banker, Jewish communal activist, and former senior figure of the French branch of his celebrated family, died on June 12 at the age of 98. He was a former president of the Rothschild Bank and a leading figure both in French aristocratic circles and among horse-breeders. He left France for the U.S. after Germany occu-pied the country in 1940, but joined the Free French forces, and returned with them to Europe as an officer shortly after D-Day. His bank, taken from him by Vichy authorities during the war, was again nationalized in 1981, this time by Socialist president Francois Mitterrand. Guy de Rothschild left France the following year, saying: “I was a Jew under Petain and now I’m a pariah under Mitterrand. Enough is enough.” He returned nevertheless in 1984. Rothschild created the FSJU, the social welfare arm of French Jewry, in 1949, and served as its president until 1982. During the June 1967 Six-Day War he was president of the coordinating committee that mobilized French Jewry and its non-Jewish friends in favor of Israel. His son, David, a prominent business leader, was serving as president of the French Shoah Memorial Foundation.

Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger died on August 5, aged 80. He had been born a Jew, Aron Lustiger, in 1926, the grandson of a Polish rabbi and the son of recent immigrants to France. Hidden by his parents in a Catholic boarding school during World War II, he decided to convert to Catholicism at the age of 14. His mother was killed at Auschwitz, but his father and sister survived the war and remained Jewish. Lustiger was or-dained as a priest in 1954 and was long the very popular chaplain of Catholic students at Paris University. He was appointed bishop of Or-leans before becoming archbishop of Paris, and then cardinal in 1983.

Lustiger always insisted that he remained a Jew even after becoming a Catholic, which long caused unease among the French rabbinate, which feared he had a hidden agenda of converting Jews. In fact, Jewish leaders later acknowledged that Lustiger turned out to be the best friend
French Jewry ever had in the French Catholic hierarchy. He played a key role in obtaining the removal of a Carmelite convent from the grounds of the former Auschwitz camp; initiated the ceremony of public repentance by France’s bishops for the Church’s failure to speak more forcefully against anti-Jewish persecutions during World War II; and played a major role in organizing Pope John Paul II’s visit to Israel in 2000. In 2005, he was the pope’s personal representative at the 60th anniversary ceremonies of the freeing of the last inmates of Auschwitz.

His funeral service, in the presence of President Sarkozy, former Polish president Lech Walesa, and many top figures in the French government, was a stunning demonstration of Catholic-Jewish reconciliation. Before the coffin was brought into Notre Dame Cathedral for a Catholic service attended by leading churchmen, it was laid on trestles just outside the cathedral for a brief Jewish religious tribute that had been conceived by Lustiger himself and outlined in his will. A cousin recited the kaddish prayer over the coffin, onto which earth gathered in Jerusalem had been placed.

Celebrated mime Marcel Marceau died in Montauban, southwest France, on September 22 — Yom Kippur — aged 84. Born Marcel Mangel in Strasbourg, capital of the province of Alsace, he was the son of a kosher butcher who was deported and killed at Auschwitz. Marceau was a member of the French Resistance during the war, and afterwards studied theater. His best known character was a sad-faced clown with dark eyes and a reddish mouth. He was an internationally recognized star, and tributes poured in from all over the world at his death. At Marceau’s request, the only speaker at his funeral was René-Samuel Sirat, the former chief rabbi of France.

Bernard Edinger