East-Central Europe and the Balkans

MARKING A MAJOR MILESTONE in the development of post-communist Europe, Romania and Bulgaria joined the European Union on New Year's Day. In December, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic entered the EU's Schengen zone, meaning that citizens could travel freely across these countries' borders.

Jewish communities continued to consolidate their presence and some expanded their operations. Israel had strong political and even stronger economic relations in the region, and thousands of Israelis took up at least temporary residence in East-Central Europe. Reflecting new conditions, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), long a key resource for Jewish communities, reorganized some of its operation along regional rather than national lines.

Not only the JDC, but also other international Jewish aid organizations such as the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation and the Jewish Agency relied primarily on American philanthropy, and so were vulnerable to the falling dollar, which dropped more than 12 percent in value over the year. The ensuing budget shortfalls forced belt-tightening changes in programming and staff. "Ultimately we provide less service if the dollar doesn't go as far," the JDC's chief financial officer, Eugene Phillips, told the JTA in November. "People are getting hurt."

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Bosnia continued its slow recovery from the three-year war ended by the Dayton Accord of 1995. While in February the number of EU peacekeepers, the so-called EUFOR, was cut from 6,500 to about 2,500, the international community decided to maintain the office of high representative in Bosnia an extra year, until at least June 2008.

In conformity with the constitution implemented under the Dayton Accord, Bosnia was divided ethnically into two separate entities, the Bosnian Serbian Republic and the Bosniak-Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its federal presidency rotated every eight months among a Bosniak (Muslim), a Croat (generally Catholic), and a Serb (generally Orthodox), in effect barring Jews and other minorities from the office. Early in the year Jakob Finci, president of the Bosnian Jewish community, pe-
tioned the European Court of Human Rights to act against this discriminatory system.

A Jew, Sven Alkalaj, was appointed Bosnian foreign minister in February. He had previously served for ten years as ambassador to the U.S. and also as ambassador to NATO. His first official visit to Israel took place in October. Prime Minister Nikola Spiric, a Bosnian Serb, resigned to protest attempts by the EU’s special representative to introduce EU-backed reforms, but returned as prime minister in December.

Racist and neo-Nazi behavior among soccer fans, a problem in many countries, plagued Bosnia as well. In August, fans of the Siroki Brijeg team gave Nazi salutes and chanted “Sieg Heil” during a match with visiting Hapoel Tel Aviv, angering Israeli fans. The game was halted temporarily after firecrackers were thrown from the Israeli stands, setting off a blaze. Referees ejected Israeli fans from the stadium and arrested two of them. At least one was injured in the fracas. (Hapoel won the match 3-0.)

In December, the Jewish community launched an appeal to locate Bosnians who aided Jews during World War II. The purpose was to record their stories as part of a project, undertaken in cooperation with the Bosnian Institute for the Research of Crimes against Humanity, to document Jewish and Muslim life in the country, focusing in part on how the two communities coexisted over the centuries.

Bulgaria

One negative consequence of Bulgarian EU membership was sharply increased inflation, which hit pensioners and others on fixed incomes especially hard. Corruption remained a major problem despite EU monitoring. Israel had widespread investments in Bulgaria, particularly in real estate, construction, and high-tech industry. About 100,000 Israeli tourists visited Bulgaria during the year.

One of Bulgaria’s first members of the European Parliament was Dmitar Stoyanov, 23, from the far-right, xenophobic Attack party. Within days of Bulgaria’s entry into the EU Stoyanov drew criticism—even from other rightists—for claiming that Jews had too much power. Stoyanov was quoted by a British newspaper as saying, “There are a lot of powerful Jews, with a lot of money, who are paying the media to form the social awareness of the people. They are also playing with economic crises in countries like Bulgaria and getting rich. These are the concrete realities.” In response, Emil Kalo, who chaired the Bulgarian Jewish or-
ganization Shalom, said he would fully finance Attack if Stoyanov could prove his allegations.

In March, government officials, Jewish leaders, and others marked the 64th anniversary of the rescue of Bulgarian Jews from Nazi deportation. In July, under a deal brokered by French negotiators, Libya freed six medical workers—five Bulgarians and a Palestinian—who had been held for eight years and convicted of involvement in a plot to infect Libyan children with the AIDS virus.

Bulgaria had an active Jewish community of about 5,000 people, some 3,000 of them in the capital city of Sofia. Jewish communities around the country were linked under the umbrella Shalom organization. In July, its board elected Maxim Benvenisti to replace longtime chair Emil Kalo, who left the post ten months before the end of his term.

There were many Jewish groups, organizations, and institutions. A resident rabbi was based in Sofia. Chabad had an increasingly visible presence, which some community members attributed to squabbles within Shalom. An active B’nai Brith lodge played a particular role in combating local anti-Semitism, including initiating action to close down several anti-Semitic Websites. Representatives from Bulgaria took part in international Jewish meetings, such as B’nai Brith Europe’s first Young Adults Forum held in Frankfurt at the end of November.

Croatia

In the November general elections, Prime Minister Ivo Sanader’s rightist Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) won the most parliamentary seats but failed to obtain a clear majority. Sanader was given a new mandate to form a coalition.

Concern was expressed during the year over continuing nostalgia in ultra-nationalist circles for Croatia’s World War II homegrown fascist Ustaše regime, which ruled the country as a Nazi client state. Nationalist rock singer Marko Perkovic, known as Thompson, came under particular scrutiny. In June, the Simon Wiesenthal Center directed attention to a Thompson stadium concert in Zagreb attended by 60,000 people, including government officials, where many concertgoers wore Ustaše dress or bore Ustaše symbols, and thousands gave the Ustaše salute. Efraim Zuroff, the Wiesenthal Center’s Israel director, called on the government to ban such concerts, calling them part of “an ugly wave of revived fascism” and an “extremely dangerous new trend.”

The next month Zuroff condemned the live broadcast of a Thompson
concert on state television. An official at Croatian TV, Jadranka Kolerevic, was reported to have dismissed the criticism, saying, “Many people die daily in Palestine and he wants to comment on the situation in Croatia.” Israeli ambassador Shmuel Meirom termed the remarks anti-Semitic and called for her dismissal, but her supervisors at Croatian TV rebuffed the criticism and dismissed Meirom’s protest as inappropriate interference in internal Croatian affairs. Despite protests by the ADL, B’nai Brith, and others, Thompson played concerts in several European, American, Canadian, and Australian cities on a tour to promote a CD released at the end of 2006. No controversial incidents or nationalist symbolism were reported on the tour.

In January, Croatian educators participated in a three-day seminar on teaching the Holocaust. President Stipe Mesic attended a commemoration in April at the former Jasenovac concentration camp south of Zagreb where tens of thousands of Jews, Serbs, Roma, and antifascist Croatian political prisoners were killed. It was now a memorial site. Ivo Rojnica, a wartime Ustashe commander, died in Argentina in December, aged 93.

Relations between Croatia and Israel were generally good, and tens of thousands of Israeli tourists visited Croatia annually. Shimon Peres paid a visit to Zagreb in April. Three months later, congratulating Peres on his election as Israeli president, Mesic said Croatia wanted to develop friendly relations with the Jewish state and pledged to oppose “any manifestation” of anti-Semitism or intolerance.

In February, a 24-year-old Croatian man was jailed for 15 months for having seriously damaged a Jewish school in Vienna in November 2006; the attack was found to have been motivated by anti-Semitism.

About 2,500 Jews lived in Croatia. Most were in the capital, Zagreb, but there were also nine other organized Jewish communities. In the aftermath of a bitter split in 2005-06 (see AJYB 2007, p. 485), two separate Jewish communities functioned in Zagreb, both officially recognized by the government: the longstanding Jewish Community of Zagreb, or ZOZ, which claimed about 1,500 members, and Bet Israel Zagreb, formed by supporters of Rabbi Kotel Dadon, who broke away after the ZOZ refused to renew his contract in 2005. Both communities sponsored cultural, educational, and social programs. The ZOZ also ran a Holocaust research and documentation center and an old age home. The Lauder Foundation had a school affiliated with Bet Israel. In December, the ZOZ appointed Luciano Moshe Prelevic as its rabbi. The community had sent Prelevic to study at a yeshiva in Israel in 2002.
Chabad also had a presence in Zagreb. This year, at Hanukkah, Chabad and city authorities sponsored Zagreb's first public menorah lighting. Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, chief rabbi of Tel Aviv and a former Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel, attended, as did Zagreb's mayor. The event drew about 1,000 people, and organizers reported that representatives of both feuding congregations were there.

At the end of August the annual “Beyahad” Jewish culture festival and social gathering, which drew Jews from all parts of the former Yugoslavia, took place in Opatija, on the Adriatic.

**Czech Republic**

Seven months after inconclusive elections (see AJYB 2007, p. 486), a new government headed by Prime Minister Mirek Topolanek took office in January 2007. The ruling coalition, which included Topolanek's center-right Civic Democrats, the centrist Christian Democrats, and the Greens, held only 100 seats in the 200-seat Parliament.

The Czech Republic was a key ally of Israel and the two countries enjoyed strong bilateral relations. At a meeting that took place in Munich in February with Czech foreign minister Karel Schwarzenberg, Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni thanked Prague for its support. Livni, Schwarzenberg told reporters, “knows that we are reliable friends.”

Israel had many investments in the Czech Republic, including a prominent brewery that began producing kosher beer for the Israeli market during 2007. In the summer, 80-year-old Chanan Rozen, who helped found the Israel-Czechoslovak Friendship League in Israel in 1948, received an award from the Czech Foreign Ministry. Born in Ostrava, Rozen immigrated illegally to Palestine in 1939.

International Jewish leaders praised the Czech Republic on several occasions. In January, Pierre Besnainou, president of the European Jewish Congress (EJC), said he was pleased with the status of Jews in the country and with the attitude of mainstream society and political figures toward them. After leading an EJC delegation that met with President Vaclav Klaus and other senior officials, he reportedly said he would be satisfied if the situation everywhere else would be as good as it was in the Czech Republic. A delegation from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations visited Prague in February and also met with senior government officials. Among other agenda items, they thanked Czech leaders for their support of Israel.

In January, the educational and cultural center of the Jewish Museum
in Prague sponsored a monthlong Holocaust awareness campaign. It featured a display of posters around the city bearing slogans that arbitrarily discriminated against various groups.

High-profile neo-Nazi activity prompted concern during the year even though there were only an estimated 1,000 hardcore neo-Nazis in the country. Anti-Semitic chanting at soccer matches was a problem. In August, Czech Jewish leaders protested to the AC Sparta team after its fans chanted “Jude” at the British team Arsenal during a match in Prague. An AC Sparta spokesman promised the matter would be investigated. “The club’s position on the problem has been absolutely clear for a long time. We do not want racists and anti-Semites at stadiums,” he said. But the chants continued. At a televised match with rival Slavia in October, Sparta fans chanted “Jude” and unfurled a banner referring to Slavia as “Jude.” Czech television cut the audio of the broadcast and said it would not air any more Sparta matches if such behavior continued. In a related incident, a Sparta team member was fined in September for apparently giving the Nazi salute to fans. He claimed afterward that the gesture had only been an attempt to calm them.

In Brno, vandals scrawled swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans around the city to mark Hitler’s birthday in April, and the next month police there broke up a neo-Nazi rally by about 600 people. In November, police used tear gas to break up a concert by neo-Nazi bands held at a hotel in Nove Hamry. There were scuffles with some of the 120 extremists in attendance.

Right-wing extremists tried to stage a march through Prague’s Jewish Quarter on the anniversary of the 1938 Nazi Kristallnacht pogrom in November. Czech authorities had banned the march by the extremist Young National Democrats group, and some 1,400 police, some in riot gear, prevented marchers from entering the Jewish neighborhood. In some cases, antifascist anarchists clashed violently with small groups of neo-Nazis. Police detained nearly 400 people.

In a remarkable show of solidarity with the Jewish community, thousands of Czechs rallied to protest the march. Many wore yellow Stars of David and some waved Israeli flags. A prayer service took place in front of the historic Old-New Synagogue and there were also other events, including musical performances. Chief Rabbi Karol Sidon, the mayor of Prague, Archbishop Miroslav Vlk, and other prominent personalities addressed the crowds.

There were several episodes of vandalism against Jewish sites. In January, for example, thieves stole bronze parts used on a tomb at the National Memorial Cemetery in the former Terezin concentration camp, and
during the summer vandals damaged tombstones in Jewish cemeteries in Bohumin and Pisek.

About 3,000 Jews were affiliated with Jewish organizations, communities or institutions in the Czech Republic, though Jewish leaders believed that thousands more Jews might be living in the country. Prague had the largest community, about 1,500 affiliated members. There was also a sizable population of Israeli expatriates, many of whom did not affiliate. Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative congregations held services, but only a small minority of Prague Jews attended any. In November, the Federation of Jewish Communities for the first time recognized Reform as one of its streams. Prague was one of the stops on a ten-day trip to Eastern Europe by more than 20 American Reform rabbis, the first such European tour for U.S. rabbis sponsored by the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

Chabad, which had a strong presence in the country, marked its tenth year of putting up a public menorah on Hanukkah. The first deputy mayor of Prague lit the first candle.

The Lauder School in Prague, the only Jewish school in the Czech Republic, also marked its tenth anniversary. It now had 120 students, three-quarters of whom had Jewish roots of some sort. Community leaders said the school had recovered from the scandal that beset it in 2003–04, when pornography found on its Internet server led to a community dispute and brought about the resignation of 17 teachers and the withdrawal of about a third of the student body (see AJYB 2005, p. 465).

Many performances, exhibitions, and other Jewish-themed cultural events took place around the country during the year. April saw the launch of a privately sponsored International Music Center in Terezin. In collaboration with the state-run Terezin Memorial, it was to host concerts of music composed by Jewish musicians killed in the Holocaust and would also support various tolerance-education projects.

There were several developments regarding Holocaust-era property restitution, compensation, and looted art. The most newsworthy was the city of Brno's decision not to return the famous Tugendhat Villa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to the heirs of its Jewish former owners. The villa, administered by the Brno City Museum, was designed by famed German architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and built in 1930 for Fritz and Grete Tugendhat. The couple fled the Nazis in 1938. Their surviving children filed to reclaim the villa at the end of 2006. Even though the statute of limitations on reclaiming real estate had already expired, they claimed the villa as a work of art, not real estate.
In November, the Czech Supreme Court upheld the claim of descendants of Oskar Federer, a Czech Jewish businessman who fled the Nazis in 1939, to 21 paintings once owned by Federer and currently held by art galleries in Ostrava and Pardubice. A new book, *Navraty pameti* (Bringing Back Memory), described the hundreds of objects that had belonged to Jews before World War II and were now in the collections of the Prague Museum of Applied Arts.

**Greece**

In elections held in September, the ruling New Democrat party retained a narrow majority. But a far-right party, Popular Orthodox Alarm (LAOS), won 3.8 percent of the vote and ten seats in Parliament, thus becoming the first extreme-right party to enter Parliament since the military dictatorship ended in 1974. A 2005 report by the U.S. State Department said the party, headed by Giorgos Karatzaferis, supported “virulent nationalism, anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia.” LAOS’s strong showing worried some Greek Jews, but many observers considered the election result nothing more than a backlash against the government’s ineffectual response to huge forest fires that swept the country during the summer, killing dozens of people.

In the mainstream media, criticism of Israel and Israeli policy sometimes crossed the line into anti-Semitism, but the problem was much more serious in the extremist press. The Central Board of Jewish Communities and the Greek Helsinki Monitor sued the tiny, extreme-right newspaper *Eleftheros Kosmos* and former LAOS party candidate Kostas Plevris for racism and anti-Semitism. *Eleftheros Kosmos* was acquitted, but not Plevris. In his book *Jews: The Whole Truth*, issued May 2006, Plevris praised Hitler and called for the extermination of the Jews. He declared himself “a Nazi, a fascist, a racist, an antidemocrat, an anti-Semite.” In December, Plevris was convicted of inciting racial hatred and racial violence, and given a 14-month suspended sentence. It was the first conviction in Greece under the laws against incitement.

A few instances of vandalism against Jewish sites took place: for example, swastikas were scrawled on a former synagogue in Veria in February and in a cemetery in Ioannina in March. In October, an Israeli on vacation in Greece was hospitalized after a group of young Albanians beat him up while shouting anti-Semitic and anti-Israel slogans.

Greece and Israel were expanding relations. Economic ties were particularly strong. In January, when the Israeli ambassador presented
awards to 20 Greek businessmen for promoting bilateral trade, figures were released showing that trade between the two countries had jumped 28 percent in 2006. In March, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution praising Greece for maintaining “excellent relations with Muslim nations and Israel.” The next month, at a meeting in Washington launching B’nai Brith International programs on Greek Jewry, the Greek ambassador to the U.S. said relations between Greece and Israel were better than ever. In August, Israel sent dozens of firefighters to join other international teams battling the devastating forest fires.

Holocaust Memorial Day, January 27, was marked with ceremonies in Athens and Thessalonika. In Athens, a plaque was unveiled honoring Archbishop Damaskinos, who helped save hundreds of Jews by giving them false documents during World War II. In June, the bust of Col. Mordechai Frizis, a Greek Jewish World War II military hero killed in December 1940, was unveiled in Thessaloniki. Frizis was one of nearly 13,000 Greek Jews who served in his country’s armed forces during the war and the first high-ranking Greek officer killed in action on the Albanian front.

The American Jewish Committee signed an association agreement with Greece’s Jewish community in May. About 5,000 Jews live in the country. The major communities were those in Athens and Thessaloniki, but smaller communities existed in several other towns. Jewish communities were linked under the umbrella of the Central Board of Jewish Communities. There were a Chabad house and other Chabad facilities in Athens. Both Athens and Thessaloniki had Jewish museums. WIZO and B’nai Brith had functioning organizations in the country.

Hungary

The Hungarian political scene was tumultuous throughout the year as divisions between left and right became increasingly bitter. Young right-wing extremists who took to the streets to protest the leftist government frequently carried the red-and-white striped Arpad flag, an ancient Hungarian banner that was adapted and used by the World War II Hungarian Arrow Cross fascists.

At the official celebration of National Day, March 15, Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany was booed by rightist protesters. There were three rallies that day: one by leftist supporters of the government; a peaceful antigovernment mass rally that drew tens of thousands of supporters of FIDESZ, the main opposition party; and a far-right rally at which one
of the speakers was Holocaust denier David Irving, who had served 13 months of a three-year jail sentence in Austria and was now in Hungary to promote a new book. That evening Gyorgy Budahazy, a nationalist leader wanted for his involvement in violent street fights in September 2006, was arrested, setting off clashes between police and far-right protesters. Police used tear gas and water cannon to disperse the demonstrators, some of whom built barricades and set them on fire.

In May, dozens of right-wing extremists, some of them waving the Arpad flag, threw eggs and heckled Gyrucsany with antigovernment and anti-Semitic slogans when he spoke at a Holocaust commemoration and antiracism rally attended by about 10,000 people. It was held at a Holocaust memorial on the bank of the Danube dedicated to the memory of the thousands of Jews shot and thrown into the river by Arrow Cross fascists in 1944.

In August, in the face of condemnation by the government and protests from Jewish and Roma groups, 56 right-wing extremists formed a paramilitary “Hungarian Guard” under the sponsorship of the far-right Jobbik party. The uniform adopted included the red and white Arpad stripes of the Arrow Cross. At a rally of about 1,000 supporters outside Buda castle, Jobbik’s leader, Gabor Vana, said the guard had been organized “to carry out the real change of regime and to rescue Hungarians.”

Not only Jews and other Hungarians expressed alarm, but protests poured in from abroad. Leaders of the World Jewish Congress and the European Jewish Congress wrote to Gyurcsany, calling the guard an “extremely alarming development” and a danger to democracy. Gyurcsany said he had asked Hungary’s chief prosecutor to monitor the group’s activities for any violation of the constitution. In October, 600 new members were sworn in.

In this highly charged political atmosphere Jews maintained vigilance against anti-Semitism. The extremists used anti-Semitic rhetoric and at times shouted anti-Semitic slogans during their protests, but physical attacks directed at Jews were rare. In June, a radio broadcaster in Debrecen was beaten up and told to “go back to Israel,” and in December three rightists were detained after disrupting the annual Chabad menorah lighting. There were also several instances of vandalism of Jewish sites, including anti-Semitic slogans scrawled on a traveling Holocaust memorial exhibit in the town of Godollo near Budapest.

In an interview in March with the London Times, Gyurcsany warned that anti-Semitism in Hungary was on the rise and accused FIDESZ, the main opposition party, of allying itself with it. In the interview he noted
that his wife, a law professor, was "of Jewish descent" and had recently been handed a "very clear and unambiguous" anti-Semitic pamphlet outside her university.

Given this background, an attempt at Purim humor by the head of the central Jewish organization only added to the tension. Purim this year fell just before the March 15 national holiday. Jewish Federation president Peter Feldmajer created a sensation when, in a Jewish newspaper, he advised Jews to leave Budapest or stay indoors and lie low over the holiday for fear of anti-Semitic attacks. This "joke" was taken seriously and picked up by the international media, raising a ruckus among Hungarian politicians and diplomats.

An ADL survey released in July presented a worrying picture. Out of six countries surveyed, respondents in Hungary held the highest degree of anti-Semitic views. Half of the Hungarian respondents believed at least three out of four anti-Semitic stereotypes. Furthermore, the percentages were notably higher than those recorded in a previous survey in 2005: 50 percent, up from 38 percent, responded "probably true" to the statement that "Jews are more loyal to Israel than their own country"; about 60 percent, up from 55 percent, responded "probably true" to the statement, "Jews have too much power in the business world"; some 61 percent, up from 55 percent, responded "probably true" to the statement, "Jews have too much power in international financial markets"; and 58 percent, up from 46 percent, responded "probably true" to the statement, "Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust."

In an article in the Budapest Times, however, the Budapest-based British author Adam Le Bor denied that the situation was a dire as either Gyurcsany or the ADL survey claimed. He said there was "hysteria" about anti-Semitism that did not square with facts on the ground. "Hungary is home to mainland Europe's second largest Jewish community . . . and Jewish life is thriving," he wrote. "There are Jewish schools, a dozen or so working synagogues in Budapest and an ever-growing number of community centers. The far-right parties have no seats in parliament and, unlike in Poland, for example, open anti-Semitism is not part of mainstream political discourse. The synagogues are not burning. The cemeteries are not being desecrated. In Manchester, England, Orthodox rabbis need a police escort to synagogue to protect them from being attacked. Rabbis in Budapest do not."

There were Holocaust commemorations and similar convocations throughout the year. A week of such events took place around April 16, Hungary's Holocaust Memorial Day. Ceremonies began with a torch-lit
“March for Life” from Budapest’s Holocaust Memorial Museum to the main Dohany Street Synagogue, where a large crowd attended a ceremony with Prime Minister Gyurcsány and other dignitaries taking part. In a speech the next day to a special session of the National Assembly, the nation’s parliament, Gyurcsány called for “zero tolerance” for hate speech, anti-Semitism, and Holocaust denial. That body refused, however, to allow a Jewish member to recite the Kaddish prayer for the dead at the end of the session, citing rules that barred prayers during parliamentary proceedings.

A month of memorial services commemorating the 1944 deportation of Jews from the Hungarian provinces began in June. That month a bust of Italian businessman Giorgio Perlasca, who saved Jews in Budapest during the Holocaust by posing as a Spanish diplomat, was unveiled. It was commissioned by the Italian embassy and the Italian Institute in Budapest. In October, a plaque was dedicated at the site of a former boarding school where nuns saved dozens of Jewish children and their parents. The sculptural gravestone of wartime heroine Hannah Szenes was moved from Budapest to Israel in May, and a new memorial took its place. A member of the Haganah, Szenes, 23, was parachuted into Nazi-occupied Yugoslavia in 1944 on a mission to help European Jews. Caught trying to cross the border into her native Hungary, she was taken to Budapest and executed by firing squad. Her remains had been moved to Israel in 1950 and reburied on Mt. Herzl in Jerusalem, where the original monument brought from Budapest would be placed.

In the spring, military historian Krisztian Ungvary published a book, The Hungarian Army in the Second World War, that detailed atrocities committed by the Hungarian army against Jews and other civilians in territories they occupied. In March, Hungary reopened a war-crimes investigation of 93-year-old Sandor Kepiro, accused of killing more than 1,200 people in Novi Sad, Serbia, during World War II.

Relations between Hungary and Israel were close. In January, ahead of a visit to Israel by Hungarian foreign minister Kinga Goncz, the Israeli foreign minister called those relations “excellent,” characterized by regular high-level visits. Israel was one of Hungary’s leading economic partners. At the beginning of the year Israeli investments in Hungary topped $4.5 billion and bilateral trade exceeded $500 million.

Pride in Israel’s economic performance led President Peres to make an unwise statement in October that touched off a furor in Hungary. In a speech at an economic forum in Israel, he noted that Israeli businessmen had “unparalleled success” around the world to the point where they
were "buying up" Hungary—as well as Manhattan, Poland, and Romania. The Hungarian media reacted with dismay, and far-right extremists protested in front of the Israeli embassy in Budapest.

A delegation of 174 Israeli soldiers visited Holocaust memorials during a three-day trip to Hungary in March. In August, the Israeli media reported that police had launched a bribery investigation against the ambassador to Hungary, David Admon, whose term was to end in September. He was suspected, among other things, of using his position to launch private business ventures in Hungary and to receive kickbacks from Israeli businessmen. He was allegedly also being investigated for attempting to arrange commission payments to his son in connection with the privatization of the former Jewish hospital. Both Admon and his son denied the allegations.

At least 100,000 Jews lived in Hungary, the overwhelming majority in Budapest. The main Jewish stream was Neolog, which was similar to what is called Conservative Judaism in the U.S. Reform and Modern Orthodox congregations also functioned, as did Chabad centers. Most Hungarian Jews, however, were secular or unaffiliated.

MAZSIHISZ, the Alliance of Jewish Communities, was the officially recognized representative of mainstream Jewry in Hungary. Nevertheless, there were alternative Jewish groups gaining increased visibility that often criticized MAZSIHISZ for taking a "monopolistic" attitude. Particularly attractive to young people, these nonestablishment entities included the on-line community judapest.org and the downtown café Siraly, co-managed by Marom, a Masorti (Conservative) Jewish youth group, which ran programs throughout the year.

In December, leaders of MAZSIHISZ boycotted the annual year-end luncheon for religious leaders with Hungarian president Laszlo Solyom to protest Solyom's veto of a law that would have allowed members of minority groups to sue people who made statements deemed to be hate speech. Solyom, saying this would stifle free speech and discriminate against members of the majority population, sent the bill to the Constitutional Court for further review. Following the announcement of the MAZSIHISZ boycott, judapest.org sent a platter of traditional Jewish pastry, Flodni, to Solyom, who served it as dessert at the boycotted luncheon. Judapest said it had made the gesture to protest the MAZSIHISZ "monopoly," and asserted that while "Jews in Hungary form a versatile and complex community, their official, political representation doesn't stand on the base of pluralism."

This year, the Reform congregation Sim Shalom—which was not rec-
ognized by the established Jewish community—signed a contract for a state-owned building and began fund-raising to convert it into a permanent synagogue and community center. Sim Shalom was founded in 1992 and legally registered as a religious congregation in 2006, making it eligible to receive the 1 percent of income tax that Hungarians may direct to religious organizations. It was served by a female rabbi, Katalin Kelemen, who was ordained at the Leo Baeck College in London and took up her post in 1999.

During the year a new Reform congregation, Bet Orim, was established, and for the time being held services at the Balint Haz Jewish Community Center. The new congregation’s rabbi was Ferenc Raj, the younger brother of a prominent Budapest rabbi, Tamás Raj.

There were many cultural and educational events throughout the year. Among them was a training seminar in January on addressing the needs of Jewish children. Israel’s Habima Theater performed in Budapest in April as part of an Israeli Spring Festival that saw concerts, films, and exhibitions by Israeli artists over the course of more than two months. In May, Israel was the guest of honor at the sixth Contemporary Drama Festival in Budapest. Central European University again staged a series of regular lectures in Jewish studies. The Kraków-based Austeria publishing house and bookstore opened a branch in Budapest in November.

The sculptor and ceramicist Levente Thury, whose work centered on representations of the Golem, died in May. In November, filmmaker Peter Forgacs was awarded the 150,000-euro Erasmus Prize in Holland. His films often dealt with Holocaust themes or prewar Hungarian Jewish life. The award was presented each year to individuals who made an “exceptional contribution” to European culture, society or social science.

Macedonia and Slovenia

Macedonia and Slovenia had Jewish populations numbering several hundred at most, but each had a small synagogue and an active organized Jewish community. Their members took part in regional and international Jewish conferences and other get-togethers. Both countries staged events for the September 2 European Day of Jewish Culture. Slovenia’s Jewish community was served by Chief Rabbi Ariel Haddad, a Chabad rabbi who was also the director of the Jewish museum in nearby Trieste, Italy.

In March, Macedonian Jews held their annual commemoration of the World War II deportation of almost the entire prewar Jewish community. In May, the town of Struga, Macedonia, was the scene of a four-day
"Gesher" meeting of Jewish students from the JDC's Danube and Black Sea region. Some 300 young people from Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Ukraine, Turkey, Israel, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Croatia took part.

Poland

In November, following a hard-fought election campaign, voters ousted the rightist government of Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski. Kaczynski (whose twin brother Lech remained Polish president) had headed a government composed of his Law and Justice party in coalition with two ultra-nationalist groups, the League of Polish Families and Peasants' Self Defense. In this election neither of the latter two won enough votes to enter the new parliament.

Centrist Donald Tusk, whose Civic Platform party was pro-business and pro-European Union, became the new prime minister. Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, a non-Jewish Auschwitz survivor and "righteous gentile," was named secretary of state in charge of Poland's relations with Russia, Germany, and Israel. Bartoszewski, 85, had served twice as foreign minister in previous postcommunist governments and was considered a respected moral symbol of Poland.

Jews were generally pleased with the election results. The Israeli embassy expressed "satisfaction" that the League of Polish Families had not entered parliament. Jewish groups in Poland had protested a TV campaign ad for the party as anti-Semitic. Even earlier, in February, there was a storm of protest over what was described as a "blatantly anti-Semitic" and "hateful" pamphlet, Civilization at War in Europe, published by Maciej Giertych, a Polish member of the European Parliament representing the League of Polish Families and father of Roman Giertych, who at the time was minister of education. The pamphlet asserted that "Jewish Civilization" had no place in Europe. President Kaczynski and other Polish political figures condemned Giertych's views, and the president of the European Parliament officially reprimanded him.

Relations between Poland and Israel were close. There were numerous back-and-forth visits by political figures. Israeli businessmen invested billions of dollars in Poland. They were particularly involved in the construction industry, building everything from homes to shopping malls to hotels. President Kaczynski's wife took part in the dedication of a new Polish Culture Center in Tel Aviv in October. In July, Polish Radio began broadcasting a daily, half-hour show in Hebrew throughout Israel.
As had been the case for some years, about 30,000 young Israelis visited Poland, most of them on organized trips to Holocaust sites, including the annual March of the Living. Incidents of inappropriate behavior by some of the Israelis, however, prompted complaints. A Polish newspaper in May, for example, blasted Israeli teens for, among other acts of vandalism, trashing hotel rooms. On another occasion a group of 35 young, strictly Orthodox men ripped out the gates of the Majdanek camp near Lublin to gain access to the site after it had closed for the day. In July about 60 Israeli students demanded to be allowed into the Auschwitz camp at 11 p.m. To avoid confrontation, guards allowed them in, and they stayed all night. The Israeli embassy denounced the actions of all such visitors.

In May, the government complained about how Poles were depicted in a cartoon in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* newspaper that showed Polish passengers on a train drinking liquor and harassing a Jewish woman. A spokesman for the Polish embassy in Tel Aviv said it stereotyped Poles "as vicious drunks and in a negative way. They look very ugly and not nice. This is a very difficult issue."

Israeli director Uri Barbash worked in Poland during the year on *Spring 1941*, the first film co-produced by Israel and Poland. A joint project of the Israeli film company Traxis and Poland's Opus Film, it starred British actor Joseph Fiennes and was based on stories by Holocaust survivor Ida Fink.

There were many Holocaust commemorations and related events throughout the year. In August, the city of Kielce unveiled a menorah-shaped monument to honor the 20,000 local Jews killed in the Holocaust. In the summer, at Poland's request, UNESCO changed the official name of the Auschwitz camp memorial to "Auschwitz-Birkenau. German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940–1945)." This would make clear that the camp had been established and run by the occupying German Nazis, not by Poland.

A number of ceremonies during the year honored non-Jewish Poles who saved Jews during World War II. One, which took place at Auschwitz on January 27, the 62d anniversary of the liberation of the former death camp, specifically honored residents of the town of Oświęcim, outside of which the Auschwitz camp was built, who tried to help inmates. A representative of President Kaczynski gave medals to about 40 people and read aloud a letter from him praising their efforts.

In February, the Claims Conference, which was holding its first executive board meeting in Poland, organized a luncheon in Warsaw hon-
oring some 60 Poles recognized as Righteous among the Nations. The next month, at a special session, the Polish Senate passed a unanimous resolution honoring Irena Sendler, now 97, and the Polish underground Council for Assisting Jews. Sendler had helped save some 2,500 Jewish children during World War II. And at a high-profile ceremony in October, President Kaczyński honored 50 Catholic Poles, many of whom had already been recognized by Yad Vashem, who risked their lives to save Jews.

In November, a statue of Jan Karski was unveiled in front of the Polish consulate in New York. The Polish World War II resistance hero, who died in 2000, was the first to bring eyewitness reports of conditions in the Nazi ghettos to Allied leaders.

At an international book fair held in May in Warsaw, convicted British Holocaust denier David Irving sought to display his books, but was prevented from doing so and escorted off the premises.

Many initiatives were taken during the year to combat anti-Semitism and promote dialogue. In January, the Roman Catholic Church in Poland celebrated its tenth annual “Day of Judaism.” Stanislaw Krajewski, the American Jewish Committee representative in Warsaw, told Polish Radio, “This is a significant event by itself because it is perhaps the only national day which is supposed to be observed by all churches all over the country devoted to Judaism. I think it shows two things: The universal dimension of the importance of Jews and Jewish religion for the Church, for Christianity in general; and the specific Polish dimension, the importance of Jews in the history of Poland.”

The powerful Catholic broadcasting station Radio Maryja and its director, Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, were subjects of great controversy. In the summer, the magazine Wprost released a tape on which Rydzyk accused Jews of using restitution claims to extort millions from the state, and criticized President Kaczyński for supporting the construction of a Jewish museum in Warsaw. These comments drew sharp condemnation from political, intellectual, and cultural figures as well as from Jews. Some 700 Poles, including prominent personalities, signed an open letter condemning Rydzyk and calling for him to be disciplined. Rydzyk rejected the criticism, saying that his statements had been twisted out of context and that he had not meant to offend anyone.

Jewish groups expressed disappointment when Pope Benedict XVI received Rydzyk in an audience in August (see above, p. 442). Around the same time Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz of Kraków told Polish bishops that Rydzyk had to be stopped. There was a “threat that the Church in Poland
is being identified solely with the position of Radio Maryja," he warned. "More and more, Radio Maryja is not contributing to unity in the Church but is becoming an element of . . . political and social jockeying." The EU denied an application for a grant of 15 million euros for Radio Maryja to establish a school of media studies.

Anti-Semitic graffiti were widespread and other isolated instances of anti-Semitism were also reported. In Łódź, which had a particularly severe graffiti problem, annual clean-up week occurred in March. After the 60 teenage volunteers staged a demonstration against anti-Semitism in their city, they spent the rest of the week painting over the offending scrawls.

About 200 right-wing extremists staged an anti-Semitic, anti-Israel demonstration in Kraków in April, during the annual March of the Living, but they were reportedly outnumbered by antiracism counter-protestors. In September, a Warsaw court sentenced a 29-year-old man to a year and a half in prison for directing anti-Semitic threats at his neighbors, saying such things as, "We'll finish what Hitler didn't," and "Jewess, you will die like your ancestors."

Several Jewish cemeteries were desecrated during the year, including the one recently restored in Częstochowa, where 100 graves were scrawled with graffiti. President Kaczyński denounced the desecration. Among other episodes of vandalism, the windows of the partially renovated synagogue in Rymanow were broken into in April, and in June the Lublin grave of the nineteenth-century Hasidic rabbi known as the Seer of Lublin was desecrated.

Monika Krawczyk, CEO of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, said that cemetery desecrations and the appearance of anti-Jewish graffiti were increasing in those areas that were also experiencing a growing far-right presence. But she also noted the large number of human rights groups and other NGOs opposing such manifestations, as well as programs, in part sponsored by the foundation, that saw thousands of Polish high school students taking part in efforts to clean up and preserve Jewish cemeteries. These programs existed in more than 130 high schools. In the summer, the foundation opened a new Website, www.polin.org.pl.

In September, remains of a Jewish cemetery dating back to 1811 were discovered during a construction project for a new tram line in Łódź. In November, workers discovered about 200 Jewish tombstones at the bottom of a reservoir in Kepno. Experts believed the Nazis had uprooted them from the Jewish cemetery and used them to line the reservoir.
JEWISH COMMUNITY

It was difficult to gauge the number of Jews in Poland. About 5,000 people were formally affiliated with Jewish institutions or organizations, but estimates of Jews living in the country ran as high as 20,000, and the number of those with Jewish roots of some sort was far higher. The umbrella Union of Jewish Religious Communities encompassed eight Orthodox communities around the country; Warsaw, with 500 members, was the largest. Foreign individuals, foundations, and organizations helped support Jewish life in Poland. Especially notable in this regard were three Holocaust survivors from Poland, Tad Taube, Severyn Ashkenazy, and Sigmund Rolat. Jewish religious, cultural, and educational activities continued to expand. In fact the healthy development of Jewish life in postcommunist Poland and the government’s strong ties with Israel led a number of Jewish commentators, both in Poland and abroad, to suggest—in the formulation of the Los Angeles Jewish Journal—that it was “time to stop hating Poland.”

There were Orthodox rabbis in Warsaw, Wrocław (where a new kosher dining hall opened), and Kraków, and rabbis from other countries were frequent visitors. The secular Cultural and Social Association of Jews had a number of branches around the country.

Both Chabad and Reform Judaism were becoming increasingly visible. Chabad had synagogues in Warsaw and Kraków, where it had taken over the historic Izaak Synagogue in the heart of Kazimierz, the old Jewish quarter. Chabad organized a Hanukkah menorah lighting outside the Polish parliament building in December. Beit Warszawa, the Reform congregation in Warsaw, had about 200 members and a full-time rabbi. It ran classes, religious services, a Sunday school, and, among other activities, a conversion course. In December Beit Warszawa took on a second rabbi, Tanya Segal, a Russian-born Israeli woman. In June, the American singer and actor Theodore Bikel, a supporter of the group, conducted Shabbat services at Beit Warszawa. In the summer, a discussion group was formed to investigate the possibility of establishing a Conservative congregation in Warsaw.

At the beginning of the year, an English language on-line newsletter, Warsaw Jewish Grapevine, began operation, publishing news about all streams of Polish Jewry. It listed classes, courses, commemorations, social and cultural events, and lifecycle milestones, such as weddings, circumcisions, and b’nai and b’not mitzvah.

In February, a three-day celebration marked the dedication of the syn-
agogue in the building that had housed the Chachmei Lublin Yeshiva, once a renowned center of Jewish life and learning. Only a few dozen Jews now lived in Lublin, and after the war the building had become part of a medical school before its return to Jewish communal ownership in 2004. The ceremony also marked the completion of the structure's partial renovation, although it was not yet decided how to use the building.

The list of Jewish organizations operating in Poland expanded in September when B'nai Brith International established its first lodge in Poland since 1938, when the group's operations in the country were shut down. Numerous Jewish-themed conferences, concerts, performances, and other cultural events took place during the year. The tenth Jewish book fair was held in Warsaw in May. In June, a Jewish cultural center opened in Częstochowa with a gala ceremony. That same month the cornerstone was laid for the planned Museum of Polish Jewish History in Warsaw, in the presence of a U.S. delegation headed by Tevi Troy, President Bush's deputy assistant for domestic policy. Germany announced in November a donation of five million euros to the project. On the site of the planned new museum organizers set up a permanent tent installation called "Ohel" ("tent" in Hebrew), which showcased information about the museum. Various cultural events were programmed in and around the area, including a festival of contemporary Jewish music in September.

Also in June, Yad Vashem released the text of a diary kept in the ghetto of Będzin in 1943 by 14-year-old Rutka Laskier. The 60-page diary, which chronicled the horrors of the ghetto in the months before Laskier was deported to Auschwitz and killed, was compared to the Holocaust diary kept by Anne Frank.

The annual Jewish Culture Festival in Kraków in late June and early July drew its usual big crowds. Other Jewish festivals included the fourth annual Singer's Warsaw Festival of Jewish Culture in September and, around the same time, the sixth annual Festival of Dialogue of Four Cultures in Łódź, which spotlighted the Jewish, Polish, Russian, and German cultural streams that historically characterized the city. There was also a summer Jewish culture festival in Wroclaw. In October, about 100 people attended a three-day seminar in Kraków on "Rediscovering Judaism in Poland," and a three-day Israeli dance marathon took place near Warsaw.

Polish author and critic Leszek Kolakowski received the prestigious Jerusalem Prize, a literary award presented at the annual Jerusalem International Book Fair. In April, the American Jewish Committee honored Zuzanna Radzik for her work in combating anti-Semitism and promot-
In 2006 she had been instrumental in obtaining the closure of a bookstore located in a church that sold anti-Semitic literature. As in years past, non-Jewish Poles were honored for their work in preserving Jewish heritage at a ceremony in July, during the Kraków Festival of Jewish Culture; this year, the Israeli ambassador presented awards to 11 people.

In October, the Polish Council of Christians and Jews awarded Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg its "Man of Reconciliation 2007" award. Greenberg gave several lectures while in Poland. Also in October, at a ceremony at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, YIVO Institute in New York presented the Jan Karski and Pola Nirenska Prize for 2007 to university lecturer Joanna Tokarska-Bakir for her achievements in popularizing Jewish contributions to Polish culture. In December, Janusz Makuch, director of the annual Kraków Festival of Jewish Culture, was awarded the 2007 ODYS Award, presented by civic and tourist bodies in the Kraków region, and the Kraków Judaica Foundation presented its annual "Felek" award to Władysław Bartoszewski.

British photographer Chris Schwarz, founding director of the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków, died in that city in August, aged 59. Schwarz's photographs documenting Jewish heritage sites in southern Poland formed the permanent exhibit of the museum, which opened in 2004.

Romania

Romania entered the European Union as the year began. Parliament suspended President Traian Basescu from office in April for what it termed "grave infringements of the constitution." But in a referendum held the next month, voters rejected Parliament's attempt to impeach him.

The annual Holocaust Memorial Day, instituted in 2004, was observed in October. To mark the occasion a survey was presented showing that some 65 percent of the sample had heard of the Holocaust and only 6 percent declared themselves "interested" or "very interested" in the topic. The data showed ambivalent attitudes toward Jews. More than 50 percent of respondents said that Jews had a good relationship with the mainstream population. Four percent perceived Jews as a "threat" to Romania; 5 percent said they were a "problem"; and 33 percent felt that Jews were "neither a threat nor an advantage."

At a Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony, President Basescu honored a dozen Jewish Holocaust survivors, awarding them national decorations. (Later in the month he similarly decorated three Roma survivors
and took the unprecedented step of apologizing for the World War II deportation of thousands of Roma.) In addition, a library was inaugurated for the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania. In June, the U.S. embassy and the Institute held a one-day conference in Bucharest on “Holocaust in Romania: Unsolved Problems.” Speakers focused on anti-Semitism in public discourse, the need for better education about the Shoah, and the anti-Jewish attitudes of some political figures.

In August, Yad Vashem posthumously named Theodor Criveanu as Righteous among the Nations for having saved Jews while serving as a Romanian reserve officer in Cernauti, then part of Romania. Criveanu, who died in 1988, married the daughter of one of the Jews he saved. The umbrella Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania (FEDROM) and the Association of Romanian Jewish Victims of the Holocaust filed a criminal complaint in January against Ion Coja, a university professor, for denying the Shoah.

In May, Aurel Vlaicu University and the Jewish community in Arad reached an agreement whereby the city’s former Orthodox synagogue would be taken over by the university and become the premises of the Shalom Institute for Ecumenical Studies. The university took out a 20-year lease on the building and agreed to renovate it. About 400 Jews lived in Arad.

Romania’s Jewish communities included some 10,000–12,000 people, about half of them living in Bucharest. In addition, about 10,000 Israelis were believed to live in the country, most of them in Bucharest. They included students and Israelis who moved to Romania for economic reasons, as well as Romanian-born Israelis returning to their homeland (the nation’s new membership in the EU was a strong magnet). One of the more controversial Israelis in Romania was Nati Meir, a native of Afula whose parents were from Romania, who returned to that country in the 1990s and became a citizen. Meir, convicted of fraud in Israel, was elected to the Romanian Parliament in 2004 as part of extreme nationalist Corneliu Vadim Tudor’s Greater Romania Party.

Gala ceremonies on September 30 marked two major communal events in Bucharest. Romanian-born Shlomo (Sorin) Rosen, 28, who received his rabbinical ordination from New York’s Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, was installed as Romania’s new chief rabbi. At the same time, Bucharest’s modern new Jewish community center was officially opened.

Chabad in Romania was expanding, catering largely to the expatriate Israeli population. Chabad emissary Rabbi Naftali Deutsch, who moved to Bucharest eight years earlier with his wife and children, ran a kinder-
garten for 40 pupils. In February a recently renovated synagogue, Yeshua Tova, was inaugurated for use as a Chabad center, with classrooms, a kitchen, a library, and function rooms. As part of the dedication ceremony, the final letters of two Torahs destined for use in the synagogue were completed. Among the guests were Rabbi Shlomo Amar, Israel’s Sephardi chief rabbi, and the American ambassador. Amar also paid a visit to the main synagogue.

One of the most active Jewish communities outside Bucharest was in Oradea, on the border with Hungary. In January, a rabbinical student from New York arrived for a six-month stay. The community launched a modern, full-service Jewish community center in September.

In January, FEDROM hosted a gala party to mark the birthday of its president, Aurel Vainer. Vainer spelled out some of the chief policy concerns of the FEDROM leadership a few months later. They included the restoration and care of Jewish heritage sites; the promotion of Jewish cultural and educational activities; closer collaboration with public authorities and NGOs; the development and expansion of FEDROM’s relations with international Jewish organizations and Jewish communities in other countries; fighting anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial; promotion of interfaith relations; and bettering the living standards of Romanian Jews through social assistance.

Figures released by FEDROM in December said there were 94 synagogues in Romania, 41 of them still in use. There were also 809 Jewish cemeteries scattered around the country in 724 locations, and only 148 of those places still had Jews living in the vicinity. It estimated that the “rehabilitation and preservation” of this patrimony would require 50 million euros. In 2007, it said, FEDROM had allotted funding for urgent repairs to six synagogues and eight cemeteries.

FEDROM also issued a public denial of charges by a man living in New York, recently repeated in the Israeli newspaper Ma’ariv, that FEDROM was engaged in a “profitable racket” of selling off cemetery land. “There is no case of land selling from cemeteries with human remains,” it said. The outgoing chief rabbi, Menachem Hacohen, told Ha’aretz that land from some cemeteries, where no remains were buried, had been sold, but that “all the works in cemeteries were carried out under strict supervision by teams of ultra-Orthodox rabbis from Israel.”

Anti-Semitic trends and incidents during the year sparked concern. There were continuing attempts at rehabilitating wartime fascist leader Ion Antonescu, a Nazi ally. In February, a Bucharest appeals court issued a ruling that exonerated Antonescu from responsibility for attack-
ing the Soviet Union in 1941 in alliance with Germany. It ruled that the attack had been in "self-defense," as the Soviets had occupied parts of Romania in 1940. FEDROM and the Association of Romanian Jewish Victims of the Holocaust expressed "deep astonishment and bitterness" at the court's decision since it "justifies military actions with undisputable aggressive character." They expressed the fear that this ruling could strengthen right-wing extremism in the country.

Work began during the year on the reorganization and modernization of the Rosen Jewish nursing home in Bucharest. Also, several FEDROM-owned properties in small towns were being renovated to serve as holiday accommodations and rest houses.

There were many Jewish-themed cultural events and publications during the year. A large Jewish cultural festival, "Eurojudaica" took place in Sibiu (the 2007 European cultural capital) at the end of June. Celebrations held June 29–July 1 marked the 200th anniversary of the Jewish community in Brasov. In October, during ceremonies marking the 350th anniversary of the Jewish community in Dorohoi (now consisting of fewer than 30 members), a Museum of the History of Northern Moldavian Jews opened. During the year the Great Synagogue in Bucharest and the synagogues in Botosani and Ploesti were reconsecrated after their renovation.

In April, the academic and Jewish communities in Romania mourned the death of 76-year-old Liviu Librescu, the Romanian-born Holocaust survivor who was shot trying to protect his students from a gunman who managed to kill more than 30 people at Virginia Tech University. Tania Grinberg, secretary of the Jewish community in Radauti, died suddenly in October, on the very day she had organized a big Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration in the town. Also in October, Prof. Moshe Carmilly Weinberger traveled from his home in New York to Cluj, in Transylvania, to celebrate his 100th birthday. Carmilly, who had been chief rabbi in Cluj before the Holocaust, helped establish a Jewish research institute at the Babes Bolyai University in Cluj in 1990, which was named in his honor.

**Serbia**

Nationalism was on the rise in Serbia throughout the year as concern over the fate of Kosovo province dominated the news. Israel had its own concerns about the potential impact of independence for Kosovo, an area that was mostly ethnic Albanian and Muslim, and could conceiv-
ably provide a foothold for radical Islam. After the expiration of a December 10 UN deadline for an agreement with Serbia on its status, the province prepared to declare unilateral independence. Kosovo leader Hashim Thaci told the JTA, “I love Israel. What a great country. Kosovo is a friend of Israel.”

Various Holocaust commemorations took place during the year. On the January 27 Holocaust Memorial Day, a commemorative ceremony took place in Belgrade organized jointly by the Federation of Jewish Communities and the Serbian government.

Anti-Semitism was a continuing concern. In October, neo-Nazi skinheads attempted to stage a rally in Novi Sad to mark the birthday of SS commander Heinrich Himmler, despite a police ban. Local citizens, Jews included, staged a large counterdemonstration and clashed briefly with the neo-Nazis, who attacked them with bottles and stones. Several dozen members of the pro-fascist National Front were arrested and a Serbian court sentenced three of them to up to 25 days in jail.

Also in October, the Jewish Federation protested the sale of anti-Semitic books such as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion at the annual Belgrade Book Fair. Its director had promised to remove them, but the Federation said that the pledge was not kept. The book fair this year was dedicated to the memory of Italian Holocaust survivor and author Primo Levi.

Again in October, organizers canceled a rock concert by a British band that was to have been held at the site of a former Nazi concentration camp in Belgrade, Sajmiste, where 48,000 Jews, Serbs, and Roma were murdered. The Jewish Federation had long called for the neglected camp to be preserved as a memorial site.

At an event at the Belgrade synagogue in October, five Serbs (only one of them still living) were honored as Righteous among the Nations. Serbian president Boris Tadic addressed the ceremony. An International Day against Fascism and Anti-Semitism was marked in November. There were ceremonies, lectures, exhibitions, and a roundtable discussion on Holocaust denial.

Relations with Israel were good, particularly in the economic arena. Israeli investors were behind the $173-million Airport City business park, which opened in 2007 near Belgrade. Israeli ambassador Yaffa Ben-Ari left in August after four years and was replaced by Arthur Kohl. In February, former Jewish Agency for Israel official Arie Livine was honored in Belgrade by the Serbian government for strengthening ties between Serbia and Israel. Livine, the World Jewish Congress’s special adviser for the
former Yugoslav countries, emigrated from what was then Yugoslavia to Israel in 1956 and worked at the Jewish Agency for 40 years.

About 3,000 Jews lived in Serbia, at least 800 of them in Belgrade. The ten local communities were linked through their membership in the Jewish Federation of Serbia. Most Serbian Jews were secular, but Jewish religious and cultural life flourished. Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Asiel said about 100 people came each week for Friday night dinner in the newly refurbished hall of Belgrade's only synagogue.

Organizational and legal concerns, including the relationship between the federation and local communities, were the focus of debate and discussion during the year. Aleksander Necak was elected president of the federation in March, replacing the ailing and elderly Aca Singer, who was named honorary president. A new statute for the federation was approved at the end of June that, among other things, removed the old description of local Jewish communities as "associated" into the federation and declaring them instead to be its "founders," with community presidents automatically holding seats on the federation executive board.

Purim, the High Holy Days, and other holiday celebrations were held in all local communities. According to the federation monthly, "great numbers" attended at Rosh Hashanah. Two Chabad rabbis from the U.S. took part in Rosh Hashanah ceremonies in Novi Sad. For the first time in nearly 70 years, large public celebrations marked Hanukkah. A 2.5-meter-high menorah was set up in the courtyard of the synagogue, and candle-lighting and other festive events were held each night of the holiday. The new Israeli ambassador, Arthur Kohl, lit the candle on the first night.

There were many cultural and educational events. In March, tribute was paid to concert pianist Andrej Preger on his 95th birthday. Belgrade's Braca Baruch Choir gave many concerts and also performed at the Zimria choral festival in Jerusalem. Serbia took part in the annual European Day of Jewish Culture, held on September 2, with events in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Subotica, Nis, and Zemun.

In November, the first regional Limmud Keshet study gathering was held for the former Yugoslavia region, attracting more than 100 people from 13 Jewish communities in Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia, as well as from Austria, Sweden, Bulgaria, and Israel. The program included 30 lectures, exhibitions, workshops, film showings, concerts, dance performances, and other events. Sixty participants from 17 countries met in Belgrade from November 30 through December 5 for
a seminar on religion and sexuality organized by the European Union of Jewish Students. In December, the Cinema Museum in Belgrade organized a two-day festival of Israeli films. Gordana Kuic, the author of bestselling novels about Sephardi Jews in the Balkans, received the Zensko Pero Award for 2007.

Controversy erupted in the northern town of Subotica after the outside of the Art Nouveau synagogue was painted green during ongoing restoration work. In the fall, the temple's big chandelier was stolen. In November, the Jewish community in Subotica hosted a meeting of small Jewish communities from Serbia, Romania, Croatia, and Hungary.

Like other countries in the region, Serbia was affected by the JDC organizational changes noted above. These included the departure of Yechei Bar Chaim, who had been JDC director for the former Yugoslavia over nearly two decades. Bar Chaim was reassigned to head JDC non-sectarian activities from Paris, and he was replaced in the Balkans by Robert Djerassi, based in Sofia.

Slovakia

The World War II role of Slovakia’s Roman Catholic Church was a matter of controversy during the year. In January, the archbishop of Bratislava and Trnava, Jan Sokol, spoke fondly of the wartime period as “a time of well-being” when Slovaks had “everything we wanted.” The country had been a Nazi client state at the time headed by profascist priest Jozef Tiso, whose government deported more than 70,000 Slovakian Jews to their deaths. Tiso was executed as a war criminal in 1947.

Sokol’s statement naturally outraged Jews, Roma, and others. The Central Union of Jewish Communities in Slovakia described it as “unacceptable” and declared that Jews felt “offended by Sokol’s open admiration of that racist state.” Prime Minister Robert Fico also condemned Sokol’s statement, as did Roma leaders. In the wake of this controversy, the Slovak Bishops’ Conference organized a council to review the Church’s wartime and communist-era role, which, according to the head of the Conference, had been “intentionally misinterpreted here . . . under the influence of communist ideology.”

In October, the umbrella Central Union of Jewish Communities protested a bill before parliament that would honor another nationalist priest, Andrej Hlinka, who, until his death in 1938, led the nationalist, pro-fascist Slovak People’s Party. “The Jewish community in Slovakia
considers the name of Andrej Hlinka a symbol of Slovak fascism in the years of 1939–45," it said in a statement. Parliament passed the bill nonetheless.

There were a number of Holocaust commemorations. On March 22, the 65th anniversary of the beginning of the deportation of Slovak Jews, a train pulling two wartime freight cars left Poprad and started a six-month journey around the country. They contained two exhibitions: the first car told of the deportations, and the second reproduced the harsh conditions of the crowded car as they were at that time. The first train, which left on March 25, 1942, carried 1,000 Slovak Jewish women to Auschwitz, and only 20 survived. Prime Minister Fico took part in the ceremony inaugurating the exhibition train.

In June, nine Slovaks were honored as Righteous among the Nations at a ceremony in Bratislava. Slovakia marked its Day of the Victims of the Holocaust and Racial Violence on September 9, the date in 1941 that the government issued its "Jewish Code," a package of harsh anti-Jewish measures modeled on Nazi regulations. President Ivan Gasparovic, Prime Minister Fico, and other officials took part in commemorative ceremonies in Bratislava.

About 3,000 Jews were known to live in Slovakia, in a dozen Jewish communities. The two largest were in Bratislava, the capital, and Košice, in eastern Slovakia, each with several hundred members. Jewish communities around the country were linked under the umbrella Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities, based in Bratislava. All recognized congregations were Orthodox, although an informal liberal group met in Bratislava.

An American-born Chabad rabbi, Baruch Myers, served in Bratislava, and a Slovak-born Israeli, Yossi Steiner, in Košice. In October, Chabad rabbi Ze’ev Stiefel and his family moved from Bratislava to the spa town of Piestany to establish the Chabad Center of Central Slovakia. Stiefel estimated that as many as 5,000 Jews visited the Piestany spa each year (some of the hotels there were run by Israelis). Stiefel also worked with the small Jewish communities of Nitra, Nove Zamky, and others. He traveled regularly to Košice, where he was involved with the sizable group of Israeli expatriates, many of them students at the local veterinary school.

In January, three apparently inebriated men hurled insults at Rabbi Myers and one of his sons as they left the synagogue in Bratislava. Myers, who had been physically assaulted by skinheads twice in the 1990s, reported the incident to police, who arrested two of the men and charged
them with expressing sympathy for a movement that denied human rights. Myers told reporters that such incidents were very rare in Slovakia.

The Central Union, Jewish communities, and other institutions hosted a number of cultural and educational programs. Several Jewish periodicals were published in the country and some of the local communities had Websites. There was a B’nai Brith lodge in Bratislava. Despite having only about 70 members, the Jewish community in Komarno had numerous programs, a library, a Website, and a blog, and strove to maintain regional contacts with other small Jewish communities in Slovakia and Hungary. In February, the Jewish community in Banska Bystrica hosted the annual Slovak Maccabi Winter Games.

The scholar Maros Borsky ran the Slovak Jewish Heritage Center in Bratislava, which cared for and preserved Jewish heritage sites. He published a book in September on synagogue architecture in Slovakia that was officially launched as part of the European Day of Jewish Culture, which also included a photographic exhibition and the unveiling of commemorative plaques at Jewish sites.

RUTH ELLEN GRUBER