Former Soviet Union

National Affairs

RUSSIA

In 2007, the Russian Federation maintained a precarious balance between two identities: one, as a semi-authoritarian state with designs on reacquiring regional hegemony and great-power status, the other as a cooperative element within the democratic world community and a reliable trading partner.

What enabled Russia to maintain this duality was the record-breaking rise in energy prices, the backbone of the Russian economy. As the world's largest oil and gas exporter, Russia, under President Vladimir Putin, who was in the eighth and last year of his presidency, confidently advanced its foreign- and domestic-policy agenda. Since 2000, when Putin was first elected president, Russia's economy had expanded about 7 percent annually, with average wages rising six-fold during that period. In 2007 alone, Russia's GDP went up 8.1 percent to reach approximately $1.35 trillion, according to the Russian Federal State Statistics Service. (Time magazine named Putin its "man of the year" for 2007.)

Russia's ability to influence world energy prices and virtually dominate European energy markets enabled Moscow to support some of the world's most outspoken anti-Western regimes—such as Venezuela, North Korea, and Iran—without provoking retaliation from the West. And meanwhile, unmoved by criticism of its backsliding on democracy and press freedom, the Kremlin continued to develop its own model of "managed democracy," which was reminiscent of the Soviet epoch although void of superpower status and communist ideology.

The year was marked by a number of diplomatic rows that became trademark signs of Putin's foreign policy. Russia started a heated dispute with Estonia in April, accusing its leadership of rewriting history and even of pro-Nazi sympathies. What provoked this Russian response was the relocation of a Soviet World War II monument in the capital city of Tallinn, an act that precipitated popular unrest there that observers speculated might have been orchestrated by Moscow (see below, p. 536). In May, Russia test-fired a long-range missile and President Putin spoke of a new arms race after the U.S. announced an upcoming expansion of its
missile-defense system into Eastern Europe. In July, president Putin personally presided over a diplomatic row between London and Moscow over Britain’s bid for the extradition of an ex-KGB agent accused of the murder in London of Alexander Litvinenko, a former KGB agent turned political exile and critic of the Kremlin. And in line with his anti-NATO rhetoric that became especially fierce in 2007, Putin, in November, signed a law suspending Russia’s participation in the 1990 Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty that limited the deployment of heavy military equipment across Europe.

Domestically, the crackdown on political dissent was unparalleled even for Putin’s Russia. There was wide-scale harassment of opposition figures and even of ordinary participants in pro-democracy rallies, as anti-Putin forces attempted to pull together a mass protest movement ahead of the parliamentary elections of December 2, 2007, and the presidential contest scheduled for the spring of 2008. In March, for example, dozens were detained after riot police broke up a St. Petersburg protest accusing Putin of stifling democracy. In April, police in central Moscow prevented opposition activists from holding a banned rally against the president.

In the December election, the pro-Kremlin United Russia party took 64 percent of the vote. None of the pro-democracy parties received a single seat in the Russian parliament, the second time in a row this had happened during Putin’s presidency. Many observers described the election as neither free nor democratic, not only because of the stifling of opposition activity but also because tight government control over the airwaves, preventing the broadcasting of opposition views.

Former president Boris Yeltsin died in April, mourned by few. Most Russians blamed Yeltsin, Russia’s first postcommunist leader, for policies that led to the economic woes of the 1990s, including the soaring cost of living, that many believed were reversed by his hand-picked successor, Putin.

Ukraine

In Ukraine, the second largest republic of the FSU, 2007 was marked by a protracted political crisis revolving around a power struggle between pro-Western President Viktor Yushchenko and the opposition-controlled parliament.

In the spring, culminating an eight-month standoff, the opposition parties boycotted the parliament’s plenary sessions, precipitating a par-
alyzing government deadlock. Yushchenko responded by dissolving parliament and announcing new elections. They were held on September 30, and yielded mixed results. Yushchenko’s party received only 14 percent of the vote, lagging far behind the pro-Russian Party of Regions and the pro-reform Yulia Timoshenko Bloc. Timoshenko had played a key role in rallying support for the Orange Revolution that swept Yushchenko to power in 2004, but the alliance between Yushchenko and Timoshenko broke down soon afterward. Yet the two pro-Western parties together narrowly beat out the Party of Regions led by former prime minister Viktor Yanukovich, and its allies. After ten weeks of political wrangling, parliament appointed Timoshenko prime minister by a tiny margin.

The optimism that followed the Orange Revolution had faded for many Ukrainians as the country’s economic growth slowed and prices rose. Nevertheless, Ukrainian democracy appeared strong, and President Yushchenko pledged to continue the quest for membership in NATO and European Union, even though that goal did not appear to be shared by most Ukrainians.

OTHER REPUBLICS

In the Republic of Georgia, President Mikhail Saakashvili surprised many of his supporters and Western allies by imposing a state of emergency and closing television stations critical of his rule, after Tbilisi, the capital city, saw a weeklong massive protest against him late in the year. The U.S.-educated Saakashvili had previously enjoyed a reputation as a pro-Western reformer. The president called early presidential elections, and immediately after they took place on January 5, 2008, he claimed victory. Despite the damage his actions of late 2007 did to his reputation as a democrat, Saakashvili reiterated his intention of bringing his small republic in the Caucasus into the European Union and NATO.

The European Union and the U.S. continued to engage with Kazakhstan, an oil-and gas-rich former Soviet state, despite its spotty record on democratic freedoms and human rights. In the spring, the Central Asian nation’s parliament approved a constitutional amendment effectively giving President Nursultan Nazarbayev, the country’s leader for 18 years, the right to remain in office for life. In parliamentary elections held August 18, Nazarbayev’s party, Nur Otan, won all contested seats in the parliament’s lower house, leaving the nation with a single-party system for the first time since the breakup of the Soviet Union. None of the opposition parties could clear the required 7-percent election threshold.
The sudden death in December 2006 of Saparmurat Niyazov, Turkmenistan’s president-for-life, marked an end to the authoritarian rule that made him notorious as the most oppressive leader in the region. He had allowed neither basic freedoms nor political and economic reform. Niyazov’s successor, Gurbaguly Berdymukhammedov, easily sailed thorough a government-staged election in February 2007. Upon taking control of the gas-rich Central Asian nation, Berdymukhammedov introduced some programs, including a pension system and compulsory secondary education, which had been abolished by Niyazov, but refused to open up a country that remained the worst example of tyranny among the former Soviet republics.

In neighboring Uzbekistan, President Islam Karimov, in power for almost two decades, had little trouble extending his tenure by another seven years through an election in December that international observers refused to recognize as free or fair. The regime continued to suppress civil liberties and human rights, while strengthening ties to Russia and China through long-term oil and gas contracts as part of an apparent attempt to build a bloc of anti-Western regimes that would counterbalance the U.S. military presence in the region.

Israel and the Middle East

As part of its long-term foreign-policy objectives, Russia sought to reestablish its former prominence in the Arab and Muslim world, if not as a power broker, than as an arms and technology supplier.

During 2007 Russia intensified its engagement with Syria and Iran. In the summer, Russia delivered to Syria its MiG-31E interceptors as part of an agreement reached earlier in the year. Moscow also announced plans to sell Damascus its MiG-29M/M2 dual-role fighters, and Syria approved a multimillion contract to purchase 50 Pantsyr-S1E advanced antiaircraft systems from Russia. Iran was suspected of having financed part of the deal, and in return Damascus would Tehran with at least ten of the systems. Since the UN Security Council had imposed sanctions on Iran, the only way Russia could sell it weapons was through such subterfuge.

Russia continued to provide technical assistance to Iran’s nuclear program, centered on the nuclear power facility in Bushehr that Russian companies had been developing since 1993, and responded to complaints by repeatedly quoting provisions of international law permitting such deals. Russia insisted that the reactors would comply with all safeguards re-
quired by International Atomic Energy Agency. In 2007, Russia announced its commitment to transport spent nuclear fuel from Iran to Russian territory for storage and recycling.

Nevertheless, with the Iranian president threatening Israel with annihilation and Israeli intelligence suggesting a possible military conflict with Syria, these Russian policies were perceived in Israel as extremely dangerous. Already in January 2007 Israeli officials voiced extreme concern over Russia’s sale of the advanced antiaircraft missiles to Syria, with some destined for Iran. Russia’s plans to restore a permanent naval presence in Syrian ports were also cause for concern. The Israelis suspected that the Russians would turn the Syrian ports into electronic-surveillance and air-defense centers and thereby threaten Israeli security. However some experts felt that any such plan was unlikely to materialize due to lack of funds and technical capacity.

Russian-Israeli relations retained a considerable level of ambiguity. On the one hand, the Kremlin’s friendliness to Syria and Iran suggested hostility toward Israel and the U.S. Russian engagement in the Middle East peace process which was mostly nominal. Following the conclusion of the U.S.-sponsored Annapolis conference held in November 2007, Moscow said it would host a follow-up summit with the goal of attaining a “comprehensive” Middle East peace.

But at the same time Israel and Russia accomplished a diplomatic breakthrough, agreeing to abolish, as of June 2008, the visa requirement for traveling between the two countries. This was probably the most important positive development in relations between Moscow and Jerusalem since the reestablishment of diplomatic ties in 1991. The new visa-free regime was expected to draw hundreds of thousands of Russians to Israel for business and tourism; Israel predicted it would create 10,000 new jobs in the country. The agreement was despite concern on both sides about potential negative effects: Israelis feared an influx of illegal workers and prostitutes from Russia, while Russians worried about Israeli attempts to obtain sensitive and classified information in Russia.

Ukrainian president Yushchenko paid his first state visit to Israel on November 14–15. At least three times over the previous three years planned visits by Yushchenko had been postponed due to “scheduling conflicts.” Some Jewish leaders had said the delays were actually due to Ukrainian concern about upsetting Arab allies, notably Iran and Syria. Discussions were begun between Israel and Ukraine about possibly ending the visa requirement for travel between the two countries, as had already been done in the case of Russia.
Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad paid a surprise visit to the Belarusian capital of Minsk in May for talks with his Belarusian counterpart, Alexander Lukashenko. Lukashenko had already been in Iran twice. Jewish leaders in Minsk expressed outrage over the visit to their country by the notoriously anti-Israel Iranian leader. Belarus was known to be involved in selling Russian arms to Tehran and other buyers, on a commission basis, and the Belarus military industry was believed to be aiding in the development of the Iranian Shahab 3 and Shahab 4 ballistic missiles.

Anti-Semitism and Extremism

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union none of its successor republics had instituted official anti-Semitic policies, with the exception of Turkmenistan, where only Islam and Orthodox Christianity were recognized as "legitimate" faiths. Nevertheless, in some of the countries government officials occasionally exhibited anti-Jewish attitudes; books and pamphlets expressing hostility to Jews were published and distributed, sometimes in bookstores run by Russian Orthodox dioceses; anti-Semitic views were found on Internet sites; and physical attacks on Jews and Jewish property were not infrequent.

Russia

Human-rights and Jewish activists expressed apprehension about the level of xenophobia and anti-Semitism in Russia, noting that such attitudes in the general population were exacerbated by the absence of an effective and independent judicial system and the prevalence of widespread corruption that hampered prosecution of racist crimes.

According to a report issued by the Moscow Bureau on Human Rights (MBHR) late in the year, there were some 200 attacks on individuals during 2007 motivated by race, creed or ethnicity, in which 60 people were killed and at least 280 injured. These figures were very similar to those published for 2006. Most of the victims, as in previous years, were people from the Caucasus, Africans, and Asians.

According to the Sova Information and Analytical Center, Russian courts, during 2007, convicted 23 people of hate crimes and another 27 of violating hate-speech laws. Both these figures were believed to be the highest annual numbers recorded to date. Indeed, human-rights monitors insisted the number of convictions was nowhere near the number of
crimes committed, since the country's courts had a long way to go before they could cope satisfactorily either with hate crimes or with hate literature being published and openly distributed.

Physical attacks on Jews were rare in the Russian Federation. On February 18, three yeshiva students were assaulted near Moscow, and one of them was lightly injured. On June 11, in the city of Ivanovo in central Russia, a group of youths, apparently members of a neo-Nazi gang, attacked a local rabbi and two other Jewish community leaders. There were no serious injuries.

But numerous incidents of vandalism against synagogues and other Jewish institutions were reported. Most commonly this took the form of anti-Semitic graffiti, which were found on Jewish centers in Murmansk and Volzhsky (January) and in Izhevsk (November), and synagogues in Vladivostok and Voronezh (March), Tomsk (April), and Ulyanovsk (November). In the spring, crude anti-Semitic posters were glued to the walls of the offices of the Jewish community in Ivanovo, blaming Jews for the region's economic problems. On May 6, in Saratov in the Volga region, a homemade explosive device went off near the local synagogue, inflicting minor damage. Vandal's threw stones and a Molotov cocktail at the synagogue in the southern city Astrakhan on September 22, causing a fire that was quickly put out. On December 24, windows were shattered in the synagogue in Makhachkala, the capital city of Dagestan, an autonomous republic in the Caucasus, and a window was broken in the house of a local rabbi two days later.

Of these incidents, only the Voronezh synagogue desecration resulted in the arrest of the suspected perpetrator, a 20-year-old man who was apprehended shortly after the crime.

Ukraine

The incidence of hate crimes targeting Jews was higher in Ukraine than in Russia even though the latter's population, both Jewish and non-Jewish, was far larger. One theory seeking to explain this was the relatively higher number and hence greater visibility of dark-skinned immigrants in Russia: the comparative absence of this element, the most frequent target of racism, in Ukraine, left Jews as the most recognizable ethnic minority. But Jewish officials placed the blame on Ukrainian officials for not doing enough to discourage anti-Semitism, complaining that police routinely classified what appeared to be anti-Semitic attacks as cases of hooliganism, a lesser offense.
Most anti-Semitic acts committed in Ukraine during 2007 were against Orthodox Jews, who were easily recognizable by their clothing, and against Jewish cemeteries and Holocaust-memorial sites.

The largest numbers of violent attacks took place in the city of Zhitomir, about 90 miles west of Kiev: on March 10, an Israeli yeshiva student wearing Orthodox garb was attacked by assailants who appeared to be members of neo-Nazi skinhead gang; on July 9, a group of youths chanting anti-Semitic slogans attempted an attack on Zhitomir's chief rabbi, Shlomo Wilhelm, inside the synagogue yard, but were held off by guards and community members; the same day, another young gang tried to break into the girls' dormitory at a local Chabad-run Jewish school, hurling verbal insults at the students; on August 6, a Jewish couple was attacked for no apparent reason, both suffering minor injuries; and on September 27, Mendel Lichstein, an Orthodox Jew visiting from Israel, was attacked near the synagogue. Elsewhere in the country, a rabbi was beaten on September 28 in Odessa, suffering a concussion and minor injuries, and the next day a Chabad emissary and two yeshiva students visiting from Israel to celebrate Sukkot were attacked in the city of Cherkassy, in northern Ukraine. In none of these cases were the culprits apprehended.

Vandalism of Jewish sites was a problem throughout Ukraine. On January 2, a swastika was painted on the façade of the Jewish charitable center Beit Dan in Kharkov, the country's second largest city, and a week later vandals damaged a memorial plaque commemorating victims of the Holocaust in the same city, and painted swastikas next to it. Mariupol, in southern Ukraine, was the site of the next incident, where, on January 14, swastikas and the words "Die Yid" and "Death to Yids" were discovered on the façade and fence of a former synagogue. On February 17 a memorial to victims of the Holocaust in Babi Yar, near Kiev, was damaged, as were 41 headstones at a nearby military cemetery that the vandals mistook for a Jewish cemetery. Police apprehended two suspects. The next day swastikas were daubed on the Holocaust memorial in Odessa, about 500 headstones were marred with swastikas or toppled down in a Jewish cemetery there, and "Happy Holocaust" and a swastika were spray-painted on the memorial plaque commemorating Leon Pinsker, a pioneer of the Zionist movement.

Holocaust monuments were desecrated in two separate incidents in the towns of Berdichev and Aleksandria on March 7. On March 16, windows were shattered in a synagogue in Chernovtsy. On March 20, a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust was desecrated and damaged in a Jewish
cemetery in the town of Kalush, western Ukraine. Another Holocaust memorial, in Lutsk, on the site of a Nazi wartime massacre of 2,500 local Jews, was desecrated on March 27; vandals destroyed fencing around the memorial and dug out some human remains from the mass grave. On April 12, some 70 headstones were toppled in an old Jewish cemetery in Chernovtsy. A Holocaust memorial was reported damaged on August 27 in Khmelnytsky, in western Ukraine, and three days later Jewish graves were desecrated in a cemetery in Mariupol, southern Ukraine. On May 3, an unidentified person set fire to an exhibit in Kharkov organized by the Jewish Agency for Israel; that same day the Golden Rose Synagogue in Dnepropetrovsk was smeared with black paint.

On May 22, unidentified persons threw eggs at a synagogue in Kolomya, western Ukraine. The next day 19 nineteen headstones were damaged in a Jewish cemetery in Chernigov, north of Kiev. An unidentified individual threw a stone in the window of a synagogue in Zhitomir on August 16. On September 10, anti-Semitic graffiti were discovered on the walls of a Jewish day school in Zaporozhye, eastern Ukraine, and two days later a Holocaust memorial in Aleksandria was desecrated for the second time in four months. On October 5, unknown vandals broke into the Chabad center in the western Ukrainian city of Uzhgorod and set fire to the home of the local rabbi, who was celebrating the holiday of Simchat Torah in a nearby town. The intruders stole money, passports and some official documents.

On October 9, a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust was desecrated in a Jewish cemetery in Ivano-Frankovsk, western Ukraine. A teenager set fire to the front door of a Jewish day school in Kiev on November 1. Around the same time a leading Jewish newspaper in Kiev received e-mail threats, and the Website of the office of the chief rabbi of Ukraine was disabled by hackers. The same thing happened to the Website of a Jewish newspaper in Odessa in mid-December. On November 7 anti-Semitic graffiti were painted on the entrance to the apartment block in Zhitomir where a Hasidic rabbi and his family lived. A Hanukkah menorah displayed in a public square was desecrated in the city of Cherkassy on December 8, just days after a local Cossack leader publicly spoke out against any public celebration of that Jewish holiday.

The spate of anti-Semitic outrages in Ukraine triggered Jewish outrage. The targeting of Orthodox Jews precipitated a meeting of the countries rabbis, who issued a statement calling on the authorities to provide adequate protection and to prosecute the guilty parties. To protest the government’s silence in the wake of several attacks, the president of the
European Jewish Congress canceled a planned trip to Ukraine. President Yushchenko finally met with the country's Jewish leaders on October 22 and sought to assuage their concerns. He criticized the law-enforcement agencies for their lackluster response to recent attacks, not only against Jews but also against blacks, Asians, and Arabs. As a result of the meeting the Ukrainian Security Service set up a special task force on hate crime, although considerable skepticism remained about whether it would alter Ukraine's troubling record.

Belarus

Belarus president Alexander Lukashenko generated headlines and drew international condemnation when, during an October 12 news conference broadcast live, he lashed out at Jews for their alleged inimical influence on the town of Bobruisk. Lukashenko described Bobruisk as "a Jewish city" and claimed that "Jews do not care for the place they live in; look at Israel, I have been there."

Rebukes came from the U.S., Israel, and the Council of Europe. Some commentators attributed the remarks, especially the Israel reference, to Lukashenko's desire to please Iran, Belarus's new strategic ally. Lukashenko, clearly concerned by the impact of his remarks, had his ambassador to Israel, Igor Leshchenya, publish a piece in the Jerusalem Post explaining that Belarus was not an anti-Semitic country and that Jews fared so well there that many who had left for Israel were now opting to return to Belarus.

Five days after Lukashenko's controversial remarks, 15 gravestones were vandalized in a Jewish cemetery in Bobruisk. A local Jewish leader cautioned that this might not have been an anti-Semitic act, as a Christian cemetery had also been recently vandalized in the vicinity. But anti-Jewish graffiti were found on the gates of the Jewish cemetery as well as a swastika, casting some doubt on his benign assessment.

Other Republics

A rare case of anti-Semitism took place in Armenia, home of a tiny Jewish community, in December. Vandals defaced a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in the capital city of Erevan, scrawling a swastika and splattering it with black paint.

In Moldova, five youths were detained in March in connection with the vandalism of a Jewish cemetery in Kishinev. This cemetery, which had
around 24,000 graves, was one of largest in the former Soviet Union, and had been vandalized numerous times in the past. The Jewish community had not found an effective way to protect it.

In the Baltic States, Lithuania saw a surge in the number of hate-speech investigations in 2007, according to local media. Thirteen cases were initiated by prosecutors in the first half of the year alone. Twenty such cases had been opened in 2006, as compared to just one in 2005, five in 2004, and one in 2003. More then half the 2007 cases involved incitement of hatred against Jews.

In Latvia, a court in Riga reached a decision in the two-year-old case of Aivars Garda, publisher of the newspaper *DDD*, and two of his employees charged with fomenting ethnic hatred for articles that appeared in the paper calling Jews “kikes” and making derogatory references to Russians. The judges acquitted the defendants. *DDD* had a long record of publishing such material with impunity.

**Holocaust-Related Developments**

Issues related to the Holocaust remained quite sensitive in the Baltic nations, particularly Estonia and Latvia, which had fought alongside the Nazis in World War II. Estonia was a focus of attention in 2007. In the spring, Russia accused Estonian authorities of “rewriting” the results of World War II by moving a memorial to Red Army soldiers who liberated Estonian capital from the Nazis in 1944 away from its original location in central Tallinn. While this dispute seemed likely to strain relations between the two countries, Estonia downplayed the issue and said it was an internal matter. Then, during the summer, Jewish groups outside Estonia expressed dismay that the defense minister and a member of parliament attended a celebration marking the anniversary of the fighting between pro-Nazi Estonian forces and the Soviet Army during World War II.

In May, workers preparing to lay gas pipelines in Gvozdavka, a village in south Ukraine about 100 miles from Odessa, came upon a mass grave. It was believed to contain the remains of thousands of Ukrainian Jews killed by the Nazis. Some Jewish leaders expressed outrage that local citizens, many of whom must have known about these massacres, had kept quiet about them and that it took an unrelated dig to reveal what had happened. They urged that the grisly discovery be used to educate Ukrainians about the extermination of approximately 1.5 million Jews on their soil and teach young people the importance of tolerance.
Soon afterward another mass grave was revealed by workers digging on the site of a planned office complex near Netishin, a town in the Khmelnytsky region of western Ukraine. It contained the remains of at least 60 Jews killed by the Nazis as well as what appeared to be fragments of Torah scrolls.

The Ukrainian government created other Holocaust-related controversies. Early in 2007, President Yushchenko signed a decree recognizing the Ukrainian soldiers who fought alongside the Nazis in World War II as wartime veterans, thus raising their status to that enjoyed in Ukraine by Red Army veterans, which came with substantial social security and healthcare benefits.

And in October, the government awarded the prestigious Hero of Ukraine medal, posthumously, to Gen. Roman Shukhevich, a wartime Ukrainian nationalist who fought alongside the Nazis. Presenting the award, President Yushchenko cited Shukhevich’s role in fighting for his country’s independence and noted that 2007 was the 100th anniversary of his birth. But Holocaust researchers and Jewish groups claimed that not only were the Ukrainian nationalists of that time allies of the Nazis, but that a force under the general’s command was responsible for killing some 4,000 Jews in pogroms in 1941. Ukrainian government officials, however, insisted that the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), which Shukhevich led until he was killed in combat, did not collaborate with the Nazis and that such stories were misinformation spread by communist and pro-Soviet propaganda. President Yushchenko did acknowledge that some of the recent celebrations honoring Shukhevich had anti-Semitic overtones.

**JEWISH COMMUNITY**

**Demography**

The number of Jews in Russia and the other FSU countries continued to decline due to unfavorable demographic processes: an aging Jewish population, high rates of intermarriage, and continuing — although dramatically decelerated — emigration. The largest Jewish communities remained those in the Russian Federation (conservatively estimated at about 250,000), Ukraine (about 80,000) and Belarus (about 20,000).

Aliyah continued to decline. According to the Jewish Agency for Israel, in calendar year 2007, 6,502 Jewish immigrants from the FSU came to
Israel, a 13-percent decrease from the 2006 figure of 7,470. Even though the FSU remained the largest source of aliyah, providing roughly a third of the 19,700 immigrants who came to Israel in 2007, FSU aliyah was declining at a faster pace than aliyah in general, which dropped 6 percent compared to 2006.

The number of immigrants to Israel who returned to their native FSU countries, primarily Russia and Ukraine, remained at a high level in 2007. Although official statistics on returnees were not available, in some republics the statistics for return were probably close to those for aliyah. This was quite likely the case in Ukraine, where 1,450 Jews emigrated to Israel in 2007 and, according to the Va'ad, a Jewish community organization, about the same number returned to Ukraine from Israel.

**Communal Affairs**

Jewish communal life in Russia was dominated by the Chabad-led Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FJC), which far outpaced rival groups in terms of financial resources, political clout, number of affiliated congregations, and scope and variety of programs. An indication of the FJC's prestige in government circle was the highly visible role it had at the ceremony in December marking Putin's "person of the year" award from *Time* magazine, which took place in the Kremlin Palace of Congresses and was nationally televised the following month. Complementing the political backing it received from President Putin and other federal and regional officials was the extensive funding the FJC continued to get from abroad, particularly from its primary donor, Israeli diamond merchant Lev Leviev.

By 2007, the FJC had expanded its network to some 200 communities across Russia. The group's chief rabbi was the Italian-born Rabbi Berel Lazar, who has been a Russian resident for 15 years. Most of the rabbis currently working in the FSU belonged to the FJC network, which paid salaries to over 300 rabbinical emissaries, about half of them working in the Russian Federation and the other half elsewhere in the FSU. While most of the emissaries in the larger communities were foreign nationals, a growing number of FSU-born young men were holding positions as well.

A second national organization of Russian Jews was the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations and Communities of Russia (KEROOR), which lagged far behind the FJC. It served as an umbrella body for non-Hasidic Orthodox congregations, and its spiritual leader was the Russian-
born Rabbi Adolf Shayevich, who also claimed the title of chief rabbi of Russia. KEROOR’s president and major financial backer was the Russian-Israeli entrepreneur Arkady Gaydamak.

The Union of Religious Congregations of Modern Judaism in Russia (OROSIR), the central body of the Reform movement, operated a number of congregations in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Its scope of operation was limited by financial constraints and its plans for expansion remained largely unfulfilled. While Reform Judaism appeared to be a popular option among young Jewish professionals in the large cities, it did not have a local financial base and drew its budget almost exclusively from foreign sources. In 2007, OROSIR dedicated a new synagogue in St. Petersburg on a site purchased with the help of a London Reform congregation. This St. Petersburg synagogue was the first new Reform congregation to open in Russia since the fall of communism.

The Russian Jewish Congress (RJC), founded in 1996, was mainly a charitable foundation, and continued to support a few selected community projects. Vyacheslav “Moshe” Kantor, RJC president since 2005, was an industrialist who enjoyed good relations with some key Kremlin officials. He was elected president of the European Jewish Congress in the summer of 2007.

In Ukraine, a number of Kiev-based Jewish umbrella organizations represented community interests. The oldest group, the Ukrainian Va’ad, dealt with communal, charitable, and political issues, relying largely on the authority of its leader, longtime Jewish activist Josef Zissels. Also dealing with such matters was the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress—United Jewish Community of Ukraine, created and led by businessman Vadim Rabinovich, which claimed to unite some 120 organizations under its aegis. Other organizations in Ukraine included the Jewish Council of Ukraine and the Jewish Foundation of Ukraine.

There were two major rabbinical authorities in Ukraine, each laying claim to the title of chief rabbi of the country: Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, an American who had been chief rabbi of Kiev since 1992, and Rabbi Azriel Haikin, who was elected chief rabbi in 2003 by Chabad rabbis, who were the majority of all rabbis working in Ukraine. Chabad operated in Ukraine through the Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine, which, unlike most other national Jewish groups, was headquartered not in Kiev but in central Ukrainian city of Dnepropetrovsk.

In December, Focus, a Russian-language weekly published in Kiev, named Aleksandr Feldman, a Jewish member of the Ukrainian parliament and head of the Jewish Foundation of Ukraine and the Interna-
tional Center for Tolerance, "national philanthropist of the year" and his Aleksandr Feldman Charitable Foundation "national foundation of the year." The paper's list of 200 most influential Ukrainians included at least ten Jews, Feldman among them.

A number of foreign Jewish organizations had extensive operations in the FSU. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) was the primary provider of welfare and charitable services for the Jewish community. The Jewish Agency for Israel dealt with issues of aliyah and Jewish and Zionist education. Hillel operated off-campus programs for Jewish student students in the larger communities.

On October 18, Russia instituted new and complex visa rules that were clearly designed to make it harder for Western-based groups to send personnel into the country. While this was not directed specifically at Jewish organizations, the FJC and other Russian Jewish groups, which relied on foreign manpower, feared that the new system would make it much harder for them to operate.

On November, 13 Chabad yeshiva students were deported from Russia following a visa incident that prompted a rare case of direct intervention by the U.S. State Department. The young men, who were studying in the provincial city of Rostov, about 1,000 miles south of Moscow, were detained for violating immigration regulations, allegedly having failed to register properly with the authorities upon their arrival. The students were imprisoned overnight and allowed to leave Russia the next day after the U.S. embassy in Moscow made its displeasure known.

There were more than 100 Jewish day schools across the FSU, 75 of them affiliated with the Chabad-run Or Avner network, 15 schools operated by World ORT, and another 15 that belonged to the Shma Israel network, a loose grouping funded by the Canada-based Reichmann Foundation. Or Avner and Shma Israel schools provided Orthodox education; ORT schools were pluralistic, focusing on technology and computer training.

In October, more than 700 Jews attended the Limmud weekend educational marathon held near Moscow. In a rare show of unity, both claimants to the title of chief rabbi of Russia, Berel Lazar of FJC and Adolf Shayevich of KEROOR, attended.

Ukrainian president Yushchenko signed an order in November to return to the Jewish community an estimated 1,000 Torah scrolls that the old communist regime had confiscated and were now held in state archives and museums. The decision was seen as a reversal of a widely criticized move by local authorities in the city of Zhitomir who, in February, or-
dered that a number of Torah scrolls on loan to the Jewish community be returned to the local archives. Yushchenko also ordered the return of the historic Chernovtsy synagogue to the Jewish community. It had been confiscated from Jews decades earlier by the communists.

On May 16, the first synagogue in Estonia since World War II was dedicated in the country’s capital, Tallinn.

In July, some 100 Jews held a prayer meeting and protest outside the European Commission in Brussels, protesting construction being conducted on what experts believed was a 600-year-old cemetery in Vilnius, Lithuania. The city had sold an area that included part of the former Snipiskes Cemetery to developers for construction of a residential and commercial complex. Although local officials said that their research indicated there were no graves there, experts from the London-based Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe (CPJCE) argued that bodies had been found under the ground in question. The group said that as many as 10,000 Jews might be buried in what had been one of the region’s largest Jewish cemeteries.

A synagogue in Dushanbe, Tajikistan’s capital—the only synagogue in the country—remained under threat of demolition. The work had begun in February 2006 to make way for a new presidential palace, and the mikveh (ritual bath), classroom, and kosher butchery at the century-old synagogue were destroyed before an outcry brought the project to a halt. The question of completing the demolition still remained unresolved at the end of 2007.

In Moldova, protests from local residents, environmentalists, and Jewish activists halted a construction project on the site of a former Jewish cemetery in Kishinev. In the fall of 2006, excavation work in the Alunelul amusement park, located on the grounds of a former Jewish cemetery, unearthed human remains. The outcry that ensued convinced the Kishinev mayor’s office to cancel the construction plans in early 2007.