

**VATICAN APPEARS TO BE RETHINKING  
DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL****By Debra Nussbaum Cohen**

NEW YORK, Dec. 30 (JTA) -- The Vatican appears to be reconsidering its absence of diplomatic relations with Israel because it is concerned that it may not have a voice in the Middle East peace process, according to several observers of Catholic-Jewish relations.

But they say that since diplomatic positions evolve gradually at the Vatican, it would be premature to talk about a date when the Holy See might be ready to establish formal relations with the Jewish state.

Nevertheless, evidence of incremental change in the Vatican's position on Israel can be seen in two developments, observers say.

One is the planned visit to Israel next week of New York's Cardinal John O'Connor, who is scheduled to meet with President Chaim Herzog, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek.

The other is a discussion of the Vatican's role in the Middle East that took place at a conference of Catholic scholars in Bari, Italy, on Dec. 13-14.

O'Connor, who will also visit Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and possibly Syria, has long been one of the most outspoken supporters in the Catholic hierarchy of the Vatican establishing diplomatic relations with Israel.

It is considered significant that the New York archbishop is bookending his trip with visits to Rome beforehand and afterward.

**This Time No Vatican Restraints**

Before leaving New York, O'Connor said he would be available to meet with any Israeli leaders, religious or civic, who wanted to do so.

The cardinal accepted an invitation from President Herzog before he left New York and has since made arrangements to meet with the prime minister and Mayor Kollek in their offices during his visit.

If he does so, that will be a change from his last visit to Israel in 1987, when he was forced at the last minute to cancel meetings with the same officials, which he had scheduled without prior Vatican approval. O'Connor had to make his embarrassed apologies at a meeting in Herzog's official residence.

At the time, "someone in the Vatican informed the apostolic delegate in Jerusalem to call off all the meetings O'Connor had planned without telling him," according to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, who was then chairman of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations.

It was "an indication of how determined some in the Vatican were to undermine any success on that trip," he said.

This time, O'Connor is going to Israel without any apparent restraints from the Vatican.

"There are a number of significant signs that the Vatican is searching for appropriate ways to improve diplomatic relations with Israel that, in time, can lead to the establishment of full diplomatic relations," said Tanenbaum.

"O'Connor's trip makes clear the change in atmosphere," he said.

Another indication is the meeting of Catholic scholars in Bari, Italy, which issued a communique stating that the Vatican must be included in any Middle East negotiations involving the status of Jerusalem.

If the issue is left to negotiations only between Israel and the Arab states, Jews and Moslems will be represented while Christians will not, said the scholars, who are experts on international law, canon law and political science.

The Vatican, they said, "has the right to participate in any 'regional' issue compatible with its proper role."

**'There's A New Wind Blowing'**

The communique also defended the Vatican's position that Jerusalem needs an internationally guaranteed statute to protect it as a city open to Christians, Jews and Moslems.

There is "frustration and concern" among Catholics that if the Middle East peace talks proceed, "an equitable settlement may be made on the question of Jerusalem excluding them, minimizing the role of the Vatican," according to Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee.

"There's a new wind blowing from the Tiber," he said. "We are seeing the beginning of something going on here. It's always subtle with the Vatican, but there's a different sense than there was even four or five months ago."

"Israel has made clear that the Vatican cannot participate fully in the Middle East peace process unless they have full diplomatic relations," said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress and a spokesperson for Edgar Bronfman, the current chairman of IJCIC, which officially represents world Jewry in dealings with the Vatican.

Vatican officials "are now going through a very serious re-examination, with the view to salvage something constructive so they can be players in the Middle East," said Tanenbaum.

"They are not a player now and need to find a way to get to the negotiating table, or the fate of Jerusalem will be decided without them," he said. "The Vatican now realizes it needs diplomatic relations with Israel far more than Israel needs diplomatic relations with the Vatican."

**Israelis Don't Want Complications**

Israel, which has not directly pursued relations with the Vatican recently, would not necessarily find this the best time for the Vatican to make its move, Tanenbaum said.

"Now that the Israelis are involved with serious negotiations with the Palestinians," he said, "they do not want more complications, which could become serious obstacles" to peace.

The Vatican remains the only state in Europe not to have formal diplomatic relations with Israel, noted Moshe Gilboa, the Israeli Foreign Ministry's adviser on relations with non-Jews.

"Israel is definitely interested and willing to have diplomatic relations with all sovereign countries in the world, and the Vatican is one of them," he said in an interview from Jerusalem.

And "we hope anyone wants to join the Middle East peace talks wants to it for positive reasons," he added.

## ISRAEL NOW HOPES TO STAGGER 3 SETS OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 30 (JTA) -- Conceding little chance it will be accepted, Israel has nevertheless proposed again to the United States that the dates be staggered when bilateral peace talks resume in Washington next week.

This time, however, the Jerusalem government is split. The request, reportedly made through the Prime Minister's Office, was not endorsed by Foreign Minister David Levy or his aides.

The suggestion was rejected by Americans and Arabs alike when Israel first raised it in early December.

The Israelis themselves backed down, and the Washington round of talks with Syria, Lebanon and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation started simultaneously on Dec. 10.

Israel's purpose has been to accentuate the distinctions among the three sets of talks in order to avoid as much as possible the image of an international conference.

The talks recessed on Dec. 18 and were to reconvene on Jan. 7.

Israel has now proposed that only the talks with the Jordanian-Palestinian group resume on Jan. 7. The talks with the Lebanese would begin the next day, but those with the Syrians not until six days later.

Israel's policy-making Inner Cabinet was scheduled to meet Wednesday to discuss the instructions to be given the Israeli team with respect to offering the Palestinians autonomy.

During the December round in Washington, Israelis and Palestinians were unable to agree on the most fundamental procedural matters. As a result, they met in the State Department corridors instead of the conference room assigned them.

But optimism was expressed here that in the next round, procedural differences will be resolved by some adroit maneuver and substantive talks on autonomy will begin.

## SETTLERS, MOSLEM FUNDAMENTALISTS DISRUPT 2 PALESTINIAN GATHERINGS

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 30 (JTA) -- Moslem fundamentalists and militant Jewish settlers showed themselves Monday to be of one mind when it comes to the peace process: They oppose it.

Supporters of the fundamentalist Hamas movement succeeded Monday in breaking up a meeting of about 1,000 Palestinian nationalists in the West Bank town of Tulkarm. They used iron bars, chairs, fists and cries of "traitor" to break up the gathering.

At least 15 people were injured in the scuffle.

Palestinian activist Faisal Husseini, whose life has been threatened in leaflets issued by Hamas, left on the advice of his bodyguards before he could deliver his speech. His departing car was pelted with stones.

At almost the same time, a handful of Jewish settlers invaded the popular Hakawati theater in East Jerusalem with the intention of disrupting a political symposium among Palestinians over whether to support or oppose the current peace talks.

The settlers were clearly outnumbered. But

the timely arrival of a border police patrol protected them from a physical confrontation with the angered Palestinians.

The rally in Tulkarm was in support of the peace talks in which Husseini is involved.

He is in fact considered the behind-the-scenes leader of the Palestinian component of the joint delegation with Jordan that has engaged in bilateral talks with an Israeli delegation in Madrid and Washington.

He is prevented from being a member because Israel refuses to negotiate with Arab residents of East Jerusalem.

The talks, presently adjourned, are to resume in Washington on Jan. 7.

## RUMORED TURKISH NUCLEAR ARMS QUEST RAISES CONCERN IN GREECE AND ISRAEL

By Jean Cohen

ATHENS, Dec. 30 (JTA) -- While Greece is worried by reports that Turkey is seeking nuclear weapons and know-how from the Moslem republics of the former Soviet Union, Israeli circles are pondering the possible effects of having a Moslem nuclear power as a nearby neighbor, even a non-hostile one.

According to the Greek daily Kathimerini, the Athens government is deeply disturbed by the news. Diplomatic sources said Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis has asked the Greek secret service for an assessment of the situation.

Animosity between Greece and Turkey goes back a long time and runs deep, despite their common membership in NATO. During the Cold War, Turkey was generally favored in terms of aid because of its contiguous borders with the Soviet Union.

Now, as a Moslem state, it may be in a favorable position to obtain nuclear technology from Kazakhstan, the only one of the former Soviet Moslem republics known to have nuclear weapons inside its borders.

Kazakhstan is a member of the recently formed Commonwealth of Independent States, once part of the Soviet Union. A common policy with respect to the disposal of the republics' nuclear arsenals has yet to be worked out.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and upheaval in the Balkans, especially Yugoslavia, where many ethnic Turks live, Turkey is trying to increase its influence in those parts of Europe and Asia where the absence of a superpower has left a vacuum.

The Turkish government is also said to be seeking a bigger role in the Middle East peace process.

Israel is aware that Turkey has been cooperating for years with other Moslem countries, including its arch-enemies Libya and Pakistan, to develop nuclear technology.

On the other hand, the Turks are trying to improve their ties with Israel. The Turkish Embassy in Washington has announced that Ankara has upgraded its diplomatic relations with Israel to the ambassadorial level.

Turkey recognized the Jewish state when it was founded in 1948 and has since then always maintained some level of diplomatic relations with Israel.

Turkey, moreover, is a secular state. According to one school of thought, if it gains in power and influence, it will be better able to resist the tide of Islamic fundamentalism sweeping the region.

## NEITHER HOLIDAY NOR PRESIDENT STOPS NEO-NAZIS FROM RIOTING

By David Kantor

BONN, Dec. 30 (JTA) -- Neither the holiday spirit nor a strong appeal by German President Richard von Weizsacker were able to deter neo-Nazi violence against foreigners during Christmas week, and the ugly phenomenon is likely to spill over into the new year.

The assaults occurred throughout united Germany, although most of them were in former East German territory, near the Polish border and around Berlin.

In Jutterburg, in the federal state of Brandenburg, a dozen neo-Nazis on Christmas Day hurled firebombs and stones into a hostel sheltering asylum-seekers. Police managed to extinguish the fires but made no arrests.

On Christmas Eve, about 30 Skinheads, many of them drunk, attacked a young Turk in downtown Oberhausen, near Dusseldorf. The severely beaten man required hospitalization.

The Skinheads celebrated the holiday earlier by breaking into the lobby of a refugee hostel and smashing windows. A pregnant woman who witnessed the attack was treated for shock.

Police said one 17-year-old neo-Nazi was arrested.

On Christmas Day, neo-Nazis also raided a refugee hostel in Sommerda, a small town in the state of Thuringia, in eastern Germany.

Police in nearby Jena said the material damage was heavy but no one was hurt. Nevertheless, several foreigners living at the hostel spent the night at police headquarters for fear of more attacks.

In a televised address to the nation on Christmas, von Weizsacker warned Germans they were harming themselves by violent behavior toward refugees seeking asylum in the country.

The nation's self-respect is at stake, he declared, urging fellow Germans to demonstrate solidarity with foreigners on their soil.

### Tension Near The Polish Border

A group calling itself Pro-Asylum has criticized the government for failing to prepare the population to receive more refugees and for promising to close its borders.

Meanwhile, hundreds of riot police gathered in Gorlitz, near the Polish border, where a neo-Nazi youth group planned a major demonstration on New Year's Eve.

The police are allowing that demonstration but, fearing clashes between right- and left-wingers, they have banned a neo-Nazi rally at Landeskronen, a hill on the German-Polish border.

But an extremist group called Deutsches Jugendbildungswerk (Organization for the Promotion of German Youth Activities) has threatened to go to court if its activities are banned.

Meanwhile, an agency that monitors extremist groups estimates there are 500 neo-Nazi Skinheads in Berlin between the ages of 17 and 25.

But neo-Nazi proclivities are not restricted to the young.

The 70-year-old former mayor of Linz, Theo Luck, has been fined 3,000 marks, the equivalent of \$1,860, for giving the Nazi salute.

A court in Linz had cleared him on grounds that the incident in 1989 was a one-time gaffe. But a higher court in Koblenz reversed the decision and imposed the fine.

## GERMAN-BORN MYSTERY MAN FINGERED IN ATTACK ON EMIGRES IN BUDAPEST

By David Kantor

BONN, Dec. 30 (JTA) -- A German-born mystery man may have played a key role in the car-bomb attack on a busload of Israel-bound immigrants from the former Soviet Union in Budapest on the morning of Dec. 23.

Although the German federal police, BKA, have released little information, they do acknowledge getting a request from Interpol, the international criminal information exchange agency, to trace a man identified as Winfried Robert Georg Hamdaker, supposedly born in Bonn.

Someone with documents bearing his name rented a Fiat Tipo car, which, it is now believed, was filled with explosives and blown up by remote control when the bus passed it en route to the airport from the Budapest railway station.

Two Hungarian police officers were seriously injured by the blast. The immigrants, who have since arrived in Israel, were unhurt.

## NEW AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER IS AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY FOR JEWS

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia, Dec. 30 (JTA) -- Australian Jews are uncertain whether their concerns will receive the same sympathetic attention from the new prime minister, Paul Keating, as they did from his predecessor, Bob Hawke, who was replaced recently by the ruling Labor Party.

Hawke, for example, was an unequivocal friend of Israel and had close contacts within its trade union movement before he became prime minister.

As head of government, his was a powerful voice in support of the Jewish state. His grasp of the Arab-Israeli conflict was respected by Australian Jewry even when their views differed.

Hawke was also in the forefront of legislation introduced by his government to allow Australian courts to prosecute suspected Nazi war criminals living in Australia.

Keating, whose chief interest is in economics, is an unknown quantity with respect to such issues. But his supporters include some of Israel's best friends in Parliament.

One of them, Senator Graham Richardson, told Australian Jews that Keating's membership in the party faction known as the New South Wales Right means he will support Israel in crucial votes.

Nevertheless, there are aspects of Keating's record that are disturbing to Jews.

In 1990, he argued in Parliament in favor of granting a Moslem preacher permanent resident status even though he had violated the conditions of his visa by publicly inciting anti-Jewish feelings.

Australia's Moslem community is concentrated in and around Keating's district. But Moslem moderates and Christian Arabs, as well as Jews, had been lobbying for the preacher's deportation.

During the Persian Gulf War, Keating was part of Hawke's inner circle, which made Australia the first country to join the U.S.-led coalition against Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

But he has told the news media his position with respect to the Gulf war was always "cautious and considered" rather than all-out enthusiastic.

## DISAFFECTED CANTORS FORMING NEW GROUP FOR TRADITIONALISTS

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Dec. 30 (JTA) -- Cantors unhappy with the liberal trend in the Conservative movement and a shift to the right in the Orthodox community have decided to establish a professional organization they hope will meet their needs better than the existing Orthodox and Conservative associations.

A group of the disaffected cantors met in Toronto during the last week of October and voted 99-3 to create the International Federation of Traditional Cantors.

It is intended to meet the needs of right-wing Conservative, left-wing Orthodox and non-aligned cantors who are committed to halacha, or traditional Jewish law, but are feeling squeezed out of the various movements.

One of the group's founders, Cantor A. Eliezer Kirshblum of Toronto, is a former executive committee member of the Cantors Assembly who was upset with the Conservative group's decision earlier this year to admit women who receive cantorial degrees from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

But while that decision for Kirshblum was the final move beyond an acceptable level of halachic flexibility, he believes a problematic leftward trend began in the Conservative movement long beforehand.

"There's a disenchantment, to put it mildly, within the Conservative movement about the direction of the seminary within the last decade. They're getting closer and closer aligned to Reform," he said.

"Many of us are becoming isolated within the movement because we don't have a place anymore," he said.

Kirshblum said that at the same time, there is "a move to the right within the Orthodox world. And in the Orthodox camp, very few synagogues are accepting full-time cantors, so many Orthodox cantors have to go into Conservative synagogues."

The turnout of 102 cantors at the Toronto meeting proves that there are a lot of cantors whose needs are not being met by the Conservative and Orthodox professional associations, he said.

### Convention Was A 'Huge Success'

The vote to form the federation followed a two-hour discussion in which leaders from all of the cantorial organizations present participated, said Kirshblum. He said the three dissenting votes came from officers of the Cantors Assembly.

Kirshblum expects that at least 200 cantors will want to join the new organization once it gets off the ground. That would make it substantially larger than the 128-member Orthodox Cantorial Council of America, which is affiliated with Yeshiva University, and half the size of the Conservative movement's Cantors Assembly.

In addition to strong support from American and Canadian cantors, there is "tremendous response" from England and from Israel, he said. "This convention was a huge success in every respect."

The relationship of the new federation to other cantorial organizations and to the Union for Traditional Judaism has yet to be determined.

The union is a rabbinic and educational organization based in Mt. Vernon, N.Y., that split

off from the Conservative movement in 1984, following the Jewish Theological Seminary's decision to ordain women rabbis. It established its own seminary in 1990 and now has 8,000 member families.

While there is not yet an official link between the union and the new cantorial federation, "by nature we have an association, and an informal relationship already exists," said Rabbi Ronald Price, the union's executive vice president.

Kirshblum co-chairs the union's Cantorial Services Committee.

### 'Not Right Enough For Us'

One of the reasons that no formal relationship has been created is because "among the Orthodox, there is still suspicion" of the union, "because its roots are in the Jewish Theological Seminary" of the Conservative movement, Kirshblum said.

And according to Cantor Bernard Beer, executive director of the Orthodox cantorial association, exactly what form the new federation will take remains to be seen.

It might become an umbrella organization, he said, and encompass Cantorial Council of America members, "defectors" from the Cantors Assembly and cantors from Toronto and Montreal who have their own local associations.

In that case, Beer said, members of the federation would already have to belong to one of the constituent associations.

Beer said serious religious problems may lie ahead if the new federation wants to include cantors who serve a wide range of congregations.

Cantors "may be too right for the Cantors Assembly, but not right enough for us," he said. "We have certain standards, and while a cantor could be very Orthodox himself, if he serves a left-wing, egalitarian Conservative congregation, we may not accept it."

Three or four Conservative cantors have resigned from the Cantors Assembly, according to Cantor Samuel Rosenbaum, the body's executive vice president. But Conservative cantors will be free to maintain membership in both organizations, he said.

No further decisions on the form, constitution and associations of the International Federation of Traditional Cantors are expected to be made before next spring.

## ISRAEL EXPECTS SLOWER GROWTH IN '92

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 30 (JTA) -- Israel's economic outlook in 1992 is for slower economic growth, a drop in the inflation rate and rising unemployment, according to a forecast by Chamber of Commerce economists published Monday in the business weekly Mabat.

Inflation is expected to fall from a current annual rate of about 18 percent to 15 percent in the new year because of an anticipated decrease in the price of housing and a government cap on consumer prices in an election year.

The economists foresee the growth rate declining from a 5.2 percent increase in the gross national product during 1991 to a 4.3 percent rise in 1992.

They base that on an expected arrival of 100,000 to 130,000 immigrants next year. That is a conservative figure, assuming there is no mass unemployment in the republics that formerly constituted the Soviet Union.