



# Daily News Bulletin

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82<sup>nd</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Final-status talks begin

Israel and the Palestinian Authority launched talks Monday aimed at reaching a final peace agreement. The formal start of the final-status talks came on the sixth anniversary of the historic Rabin-Arafat White House handshake that launched the Oslo peace process.

The chief negotiators at the talks are Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's second in command, Abu Mazen. [Page 3]

### Israel criticized by State Dept.

Israel was among the countries cited for discrimination in the U.S. State Department's first annual assessment of religious persecution around the world.

The report, which was released Sept. 9 and covers 194 countries, said that throughout the world, "Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims and other believers continue to suffer for their faith." While Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Serbia and Burma were subject to some of the report's harshest criticism, Israel was cited for denying its Arab population the same quality of social services that the nation's Jews receive.

### Court rejects class-action suit

A class-action lawsuit filed on behalf of Nazi-era slave laborers against two German firms was thrown out of a Newark court Monday. The judge cited a 1921 treaty stating that claims such as those brought against electronics giant Siemens and chemicals manufacturer Degussa were a matter for governments, not courts, to decide.

The executive director of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, Gideon Taylor, said after the ruling that the "process of finding just resolution for slave laborers will continue regardless of any legal issues. This question is one of morality."

### Lileikis trial adjourned

A Lithuanian court decided last Friday to adjourn indefinitely the war crimes trial of Aleksandras Lileikis. The move cast a shadow on Lithuania's willingness to prosecute suspected Nazi war criminals. Lileikis, 92, is accused of having handed at least 75 Jews over to Nazi death squads during World War II while he served as head of the Lithuanian security police.

## TEN YEARS AFTER THE WALL [First in an ongoing series]

### Whether remnant or renaissance, European Jewry is redefining itself

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — A decade ago, the Jewish communities in communist-dominated Eastern and Central Europe were generally written off as dying remnants of the pre-Holocaust past.

Forty years of communist restrictions — and decades more than that in what was then the Soviet Union — had compounded the devastation of the Shoah.

Most who openly identified themselves as Jews were elderly. Many, if not most, other Jews chose to conceal or deny their Jewish identity. Many others, particularly in the former Soviet Union, faced active persecution. To many observers, the Jewish chapter in this part of Europe was virtually closed.

The collapse of communism 10 years ago changed everything. The institution of religious freedom and the disintegration of communist-era taboos triggered social, cultural and religious Jewish revival.

Exact figures have not been compiled, but throughout Eastern and Central Europe, thousands of Jews, particularly younger people, have discovered, recovered or reclaimed long-buried Jewish roots and openly declared a Jewish identity. This may be via a superficial public self-identification as a Jew, participation in study groups and secular Jewish activities, or immersion in traditional, religious Jewish life.

This has happened in Poland, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, in Hungary, in Bulgaria — even in the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

Hundreds of thousands, meanwhile, have immigrated to Israel and elsewhere from the former Soviet Union. This includes at least 70,000 Jews who have immigrated to Germany, radically changing the face of the Jewish community there.

Hundreds of thousands have also stayed in Russia, Ukraine and other countries, and have reopened synagogues and schools and rebuilt communal structures. "Jewish communities in the region are throwing off the mantle of 'remnant' like a garment that no longer fits," says Edward Serotta, an American photographer and writer who has documented Jewish communities in Eastern and Central Europe since the mid-1980s.

"We've been calling them last Jews, but they're not acting like last Jews — with kindergartens, summer camps, schools, youth programs and even Web sites on the Internet."

The impact of these changes has extended beyond the former communist states.

The emergence of newly active Jewish communities in the East, combined with the development of a new vision of a pluralistic Europe freed of artificial East-West frontiers, has created new opportunities, conditions and challenges for European Jewry in general. The new freedoms have opened up a world of choices. And the outcome of these choices is still far from clear.

Jews in former communist states may be throwing off the mantle of remnant, but it is still too early to predict whether the momentum of what many call a Jewish renaissance will carry through into the 21st century. Indeed, much of the support and infrastructure for Jewish revival in former communist states has been, and still is, funded by foreign institutions such as the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and Chabad Lubavitch.

Not only that. "Jews in Europe today are, first and foremost, voluntary Jews. Their continued presence in European societies demonstrates a conscious personal commitment," says Paris-based historian Diana Pinto. "They could just as easily disappear into

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Albright to push Israelis, Syrians

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright hopes to breathe life into long-stalled Israeli-Syrian negotiations when she meets with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa at the opening session of the U.N. General Assembly in New York later this month.

U.S. officials are expected to take an active role in attempting to bridge the gaps that separate the two sides.

### Knesset to discuss car bombings

Israel's Knesset is slated to convene Tuesday for a special session regarding the involvement of Israeli Arabs in last week's car bombings in Haifa and Tiberias. During the past week, Israeli police have arrested 10 Israeli Arabs in connection with the attacks.

### Gas field found off Gaza

A large undersea natural gas field was discovered off the coast of the Gaza Strip by a marine geologist who was trying to locate an ancient shipwreck. The discovery was announced Sept. 9 by the National Geographic Society.

### Report: Hezbollah may shift base

Hezbollah may be seeking to shift its operational base from Lebanon to Europe, according to senior Israeli sources recently quoted in the London Sunday Times.

One indication of this new departure is the militant organization's decision to recruit young Europeans to carry the fight to Israel. The head of the Lebanon desk at Israeli military intelligence told the Times that the group had realized the usefulness of non-Arabs to its cause.

"It rightly believes that a European can move around in Israel more easily than an Arab," he said. "Police and security forces try to identify potential suspects by scrutinizing their appearance."

anonymity, stop being Jews. And they are of course free to do so; it is one of their rights in a pluralistic democracy."

Pinto, in fact, espouses an optimistic vision of a Jewish future in Europe, one that links Jewish development with the development of post-Cold War civil society across the continent. In this construct, the new European framework is seen as the basis for the potential emergence of a strengthened and self-confident European Jewry that can take its place both as a positive, creative force in Europe and as a "third pillar" alongside the Jews of America and Israel in global Jewish affairs. This vision was celebrated at the end of May, when nearly 600 Jews from 39 countries converged on Nice, France, for the first General Assembly of the European Council of Jewish Communities.

"We are here to celebrate the pride and optimism of being Jews in Europe and being European Jews," Council Chairwoman Ruth Zilkha told the meeting.

Looming in the background, however, were dire predictions from pessimists like British Jewish scholar Bernard Wasserstein, who articulated his negative vision of the European Jewish future in a controversial book, "Vanishing Diaspora," published three years ago.

Citing drastically negative demographic statistics, thanks to a combination of assimilation, falling birth rates and mass emigration from the former Soviet Union, Wasserstein pooh-poohs the idea of a European Jewish renaissance. He disputes the European Council's claim that 3 million Jews live in Europe. He puts the total at 2 million — and falling. Within a generation or two, Wasserstein glumly predicts, "here and there pockets of ultra-Orthodox Jews, clinging to the tenets of the faith, will no doubt survive — a picturesque remnant like the Amish in the United States."

Jews in Europe, both East and West, have a bitter and frustrated awareness of the unresolved challenges that may hamper Jewish development both within individual communities and in the world at large. How to deal with the divisions among Orthodox, non-Orthodox and secular Jews? How to approach the high intermarriage rate and the resulting question of who is or can be considered a Jew? Is it possible to adopt a Jewish identity in mid-life? These are, in fact, many of the same questions that face Jews in already democratic, pluralistic, borderless America. But European Jews face them against a different historical and physical backdrop.

Two-thirds of Europe's Jews were killed in the Holocaust, destroying centuries-old communities and traumatizing those Jews who chose to remain — and their children.

The East-West postwar divide effectively and artificially cut off Eastern European Jews from the rest of the Jewish world. Indeed, Jews from these countries often have had to learn more than prayers, holidays, customs and Hebrew. They must also frequently learn even the sense of collective memory and connection that even secular Jews in the West tend to grow up with.

Many Jews in former communist Europe still maintain what Polish sociologist Pawel Spiwak describes as an "idle" Jewish identity: They are aware of their Jewish identity but, for whatever reason, are not interested in deepening or admitting it.

This is strikingly evident in Hungary, whose Jewish population is estimated at anywhere between 54,000 and 130,000. Like other countries in the region, Hungary has experienced a visible Jewish revival. Still, only about 6,000 Jews, most of them elderly, formally belong to the Jewish religious community. And only about 20,000 Jews are estimated to have even a tenuous contact with any sort of Jewish activity or institution.

Jews active in community work warn that the momentum of the current Jewish revival may be endangered unless new, younger leaders are prepared to take up the reins and efforts are made to encourage continuing Jewish involvement.

Increasingly, international Jewish organizations are establishing training programs for teachers, lay leaders and fund raisers. The European Council of Jewish Communities promotes cross-border contacts, keeps track of new Jewish community Web sites, and helps arrange seminars and other activities — including international singles weekends. But will this be enough? Experts say the critical mass for Jewish continuity in former communist Europe may not be achieved until the children of today's emerging Jewish generations come of age.

"It is the young who will decide on the character of the Jewish community," says sociologist Spiwak. "The third generation, the children of those who chose to be Jewish" as adults "are the ones who will determine the picture." □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### France creates Shoah-era panel

France announced the creation of a government panel to oversee payments to victims of anti-Semitic measures passed by the nation's Vichy regime.

French Jewish leaders applauded last Friday's announcement. "This marks the first time a state, other than Germany, recognized the principle of individual reparation," said Henri Hajdenberg, president of CRIF, the umbrella group of secular French Jewish organizations. "It's something we've been waiting for for years."

### AJCongress pushes gun petition

More than a dozen U.S. House and Senate lawmakers are expected to call for stricter gun control legislation at a Capitol Hill news conference Tuesday. The news conference, organized by the American Jewish Congress, is slated to coincide with similar news conferences around the country and the organization's launch of a petition drive demanding that Congress enact tough gun control laws.

Also on Tuesday, the U.S. House Banking Committee is slated to examine the handling of Holocaust victims' assets by French, British and Austrian banks at a hearing Tuesday. Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat and former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger are scheduled to testify on issues related to Nazi-era slave laborers and the settlement of insurance claims of Holocaust victims and their heirs.

### Greece honors Israeli rescuers

Greek officials on Monday honored the Israeli team and the units from other countries who helped with the rescue efforts in the wake of the earthquake that shook Athens last week.

During the ceremony, Greek President Kostas Stefanopoulos addressed the Israeli rescuers, saying, "In spite of your own troubles, you came to our help. We will not forget this. We are your friends." Referring to the peace process, he added, "I hope your difficulties will be settled and you will achieve a lasting peace." Some Greek Jewish observers said the Israeli team did more to improve often strained Greek-Israeli relations than any government officials could ever have done.

### Ratner's blintzes recalled

Ratner's, the famed New York dairy food purveyor, recalled frozen cheese blintzes that may be contaminated with salmonella bacteria, the Food and Drug Administration announced last Friday.

The New York Department of Health was quoted as saying that anyone who purchased Ratner's cheese blintzes within the last six months could be at risk of infection. The blintzes were sold in stores in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York and Wisconsin.

## Israel, Palestinians have no illusions going into the difficult final-status talks

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Six years after signing the first Oslo accord at the White House, Israel and the Palestinians have launched final-status negotiations aimed at ending their decades-long conflict.

But alongside hopeful declarations by Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and Palestinian Authority official Abu Mazen at a festive ceremony at the Erez Crossing to the Gaza Strip on Monday, both sides made clear they are aware of the difficulties that lie ahead.

"We are now entering the final phase to reach a final arrangement between Israel and the Palestinian which will hopefully end years of suffering and conflict," Levy said. "But no one is under any illusion."

"It is no secret each side is coming to the table with its own principles and positions," Levy said, "in which differences will at times seem insurmountable."

Abu Mazen, who is Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat's deputy, declared that Israel and the Palestinians have reached the moment of truth and that the Palestinians look with "hope and optimism" toward a "historic reconciliation between the two sides."

He stressed that the process must be based on the principle of land for peace and the establishment "of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital." Abu Mazen said the Palestinians would uphold their commitment to fight terrorism.

"We have wasted much time in the peace process," he said. "For that reason we have decided to launch final-status talks in an intensive fashion. If the Sharm el-Sheik agreement is implemented, it will restore Palestinian faith in the peace process."

In the agreement signed at the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheik earlier this month, Israel and the Palestinians set an ambitious one-year deadline to conclude a final-status accord by September 13, 2000 — and to resolve the thorniest issues that the sides have until now put off dealing with in interim agreements.

These include borders, refugees, Jerusalem, Jewish settlements, water, security arrangements and the Palestinian entity.

Ahead of Monday's ceremony, each side talked tough about their red lines. Addressing a meeting of Arab League foreign ministers Sunday in Cairo, Arafat called on all refugees to return, declaring that "Palestine is the homeland of all Palestinians."

The remarks were met with displeasure in Jerusalem, where Prime Minister Ehud Barak's office issued a statement that all disputed issues "will be resolved only in negotiations and not through provocative unilateral steps or declarations."

The statement also reiterated that Israel's position going into the final-status negotiations is clear: no return to the pre-1967 borders, Jerusalem will remain the united capital of Israel, large blocs of Jewish settlements will be preserved, and there will be no foreign army west of the Jordan River.

Earlier Monday, Israel formally transferred to Palestinian civilian control 7 percent of West Bank land, as stipulated in the Sharm el-Sheik agreement. This was the first of three further withdrawals called for in the accord.

The ceremony at Erez in fact marked a relaunch of the final-status talks, first declared in a one-time ceremony on the eve of the May 1996 election in Israel in which Benjamin Netanyahu was elected prime minister.

Even before Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams get to work, observers suggested that the sides have set an impossible timetable to resolve the contentious issues facing them.

U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross, who attended the Erez ceremony, told reporters the five-month timetable for reaching a framework for the permanent-status talks was "realistic," but he stressed that all sides were aware difficult issues lay ahead.

Regional Development Minister Shimon Peres, an architect of the original Oslo accords, described the coming months as a "test of the creative and innovative skills" of the two sides to overcome the inevitable obstacles. Speaking on Israel Television's Channel 1, Peres added, "For me, this is indeed a festive moment." □

**HIGH HOLIDAY FEATURE****History may record 5759 as year Israel made historic turn to peace***By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Will 5759 be remembered as a year of radical change in the course and direction of Israel's history, or merely as a year when the government changed hands after an election and life went on much as it did before?

The answer, as 5760 begins, is that the jury is still out.

But if history and Israel's recent election are any guide, the radical change scenario is more likely.

While there have been many different governments in Israel's 50-year history, only three times has there been a change in the party that controls the country.

While this is a regular enough event in most parliamentary democracies, in Israel's case each of these changes ushered in a veritable cataclysm in the domestic and diplomatic directions in which the country was headed.

In 1977, after nearly three decades of uninterrupted rule by the Labor Party or its predecessors, Menachem Begin won an election, at last, as the head of the Likud bloc.

Begin's victory signaled not only a sharp turn to the ideological right, but also the emergence of new power blocs.

Israel's Sephardi communities, in particular the large Moroccan community, were solidly identified with Likud.

For them, Begin's success meant they had finally "arrived" after years of alienation and discrimination.

Begin, moreover, created what was to be a stable and lasting alliance between his Likud and the Orthodox parties: the National Religious Party, Agudat Yisrael and, later, the Sephardi, and fervently Orthodox, Shas Party.

That alliance was the pivotal axis of Israeli political life through the late 1970s and the 1980s.

In foreign affairs, of course, Begin's advent, far from triggering tension and war as the left had feared, brought about the first breakthrough to peace: the Camp David conference and the peace treaty with Egypt.

But the Likud and its allies, determined to perpetuate Israel's rule over the West Bank, held on tenaciously to the Greater Land of Israel.

It took the return to power of the Labor Party under Yitzhak Rabin in 1992 for the second great cataclysm in Israel's diplomatic saga: the Oslo accords with the Palestinians.

On the domestic front, Rabin's victory seemed to signal the beginning of a turnabout in the party-political configuration, too.

Shas, by now the Jewish state's largest Orthodox party, entered the Rabin governing coalition alongside the secular Meretz Party.

But this marriage of convenience did not last, and in 1996 Benjamin Netanyahu, the head of Likud, regained power for his party and reconstituted the Likud-Orthodox alliance.

The Oslo process, which Netanyahu reluctantly embraced, barely flickered under his stewardship.

But it was not extinguished.

Does Ehud Barak's impressive electoral victory in May, and his creation of a broad government encompassing the left and all the Orthodox parties, indicate a further irrevocable surge toward

peace and reconciliation between Israel and the Arabs?

And does it mean a historic return to the traditional alliance between Israel's leftist and Orthodox parties, which Begin smashed and which Rabin failed to re-create in a lasting way?

Netanyahu calls Barak's 12 percent margin of victory in the direct election for prime minister a result of moral fatigue.

But leftist writers and thinkers are welcoming the less chauvinistic, less militaristic mood that has swept much of secular, Ashkenazi Israeli society and begun to make inroads among the traditional and the Sephardi sectors, too.

Barak's supporters make the point that, unlike Rabin, the present premier rules with a solid "Jewish" majority in the Knesset, and the hard-liners, still fighting against Palestinian statehood, are reduced to less than one-quarter of the Parliament.

The prime minister's apparent readiness to cede all of the Golan Heights for peace seems likely to win wide support in the referendum he has promised — if and when Syria accedes to his demands on security and normalization.

If, as Barak has publicly and repeatedly pledged, the next 15 months see historic breakthroughs toward peace both on the Syrian-Lebanese and the Palestinian tracks, then last year's change of government will turn out to have been a real watershed in Israel's century of conflict with its Arab neighbors.

Barak says his aim is to end this seemingly unresolvable conflict once and for all.

The method of partial, incremental steps forward seems to him too risky, too slow and too unstable.

His most oft-repeated statement in his early sallies in international diplomacy — in the Middle East, in Washington and Moscow, and in key European capitals: "I am not Netanyahu. I seriously intend to make peace."

If Barak can translate his intentions into concrete results, moreover, the authoritative and domineering way he put together his governing coalition will be forgiven, even by those within his own party most deeply hurt and offended by his brushing them aside.

If his peacemaking succeeds, his deliberate deferral of pressing domestic issues, especially religious pluralism, will be accepted, in the light of hindsight, as an act of wisdom and political perspicacity.

Indeed, the deferral — while ideological foes like Shas and Meretz cooperate with Barak to bring the peace treaties — may well turn out to be the most salutary approach to these intractable state-religion dilemmas.

And it may to a large extent determine the shape of society in the Jewish state into the next century.

The partnership between ideological opposites over peace will, with luck and leadership, blunt their animosity over the issues that divide them.

The Orthodox parties — Shas, United Torah Judaism and NRP — sitting in coalition with the left, may develop a new sense of respect, or at least of tolerance, for the "secularists." And vice-versa.

The perniciously rigid right-against-left, religious-against-secular parallelogram that furnished the parameters of Israeli politics for a whole generation will have been permanently erased, leaving a more mature and less dogmatic political community, better able to grapple with the state-and-religion disputes that lie ahead. □