

IN THE NEWS

EJC, E.U. differ on anti-Semitism

The European Jewish Congress slammed European Union claims that most anti-Semitic acts are committed by white males.

The congress said a report by the E.U. Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia, published Wednesday, clearly showed that the majority of attacks were committed by "young Muslims of North African origin."

The European Union issued a news release Wednesday claiming that "white far-right youths or traditional anti-Semites perpetrate most incidents of anti-Semitism in Europe," but the congress said the claim was "in direct contradiction with the EUMC report."

Likud is likely to back Sharon plan

Ariel Sharon's Likud Party would narrowly approve his plan for Israel to disengage from the Palestinians, a survey found.

According to Wednesday's opinion poll in the Yediot Achronot newspaper, 51 percent of surveyed party members back the plan to remove most Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip and several in the West Bank; 36 percent oppose the plan.

On Tuesday, the Likud's Central Committee approved a proposal by Israel's prime minister to put the plan to a referendum for party members after Sharon's April 14 trip to Washington.

Survivors get token compensation

Some 16,000 Holocaust survivors in 60 countries received \$16 million in compensation for unpaid insurance policies.

The International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims mailed the one-time token payments to survivors or their heirs who never received benefits from insurance policies they held during the Holocaust.

These survivors were unable to produce documentation about their stolen policies.

WORLD REPORT

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For U.S. Russian Jews, identity is a complex mix: part Russian, part Jew

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — On the weeks his Baba Sofa could afford it, Bentsion Boverman rode the streetcar from college into Odessa's busiest market to buy his grandmother a live chicken for Shabbat.

Pickings were slim by the time he reached the Privoz market those Friday afternoons at the dawn of the 1970s. He'd shell out about 25 rubles — roughly 20 percent of the average monthly Soviet salary at the time — and stuff the bird into his leather satchel.

Because live chickens in streetcars were frowned upon, he carried the fowl by foot to the kosher slaughterer a mile away, then watched his grandmother turn it into chicken soup in the family kitchen.

"It was a schlep!" Boverman says with a laugh in a telephone interview from Boston, where he is chief financial officer of an engineering software company.

It was also the osmosis through which Boverman, now 54, and thousands of other Russian-speaking American Jews attained their Jewish identity under Soviet rule.

Now, more than a quarter of a century after the first wave of Soviet Jews arrived in America and some 13 years after the mass exodus that followed the collapse of communism, the Jewish identity of Jews from the former Soviet Union is far more complex.

Like Boverman, who landed in West Hartford, Conn., in 1977, most Soviet Jews picked up pieces of Judaism from their grandparents. The elder generation offered them a smattering of Hebrew or Yiddishkeit, but most of their Judaism was squelched by the Communist state.

The rest of their Jewish education came by way of anti-Semitism and state policy: the peers who bullied them, the teachers who failed them and the stamps of "Jewish" on their passports.

Mostly because of that oppression, the Soviet Jews who immigrated to America are deeply identified as Jewish.

But their Judaism takes a different form from mainstream American Judaism, where the synagogue is the center of observance and communal life, and people are mostly open about their Judaism, whether or not they practice Jewish rituals.

Ask a Russian American Jew to describe his Jewish identity and he typically will talk in secular terms — describing a culture borne of persecution or an abiding love for Israel, where perhaps half the family now

lives.

But after years of immigration and growth, Jews from the former Soviet Union — now estimated at between 600,000 to 800,000 — are becoming increasingly interested in religion and organized Jewish life.

That sometimes happens together, but more often apart, from the rest of organized Jewish life.

Of course, the community's Jewish identity is diverse, with a small percentage of observant Jews and a sizable minority exploring the religion long denied them. In recent years, for example, several synagogues serving primarily Russian-speaking Jews have sprouted up around the country.

According to Sam Kliger, coordinator of the American Jewish Committee's department of Russian Jewish community affairs,

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**RUSSIAN
JEWS IN
AMERICA**

■ *Identity is a complex mix of part Russian, part Jewish*

Continued from page 1

Russian American Jews who have lived here for more than nine years are more likely to attend synagogue on Shabbat and holidays, donate to Jewish causes, especially a synagogue, and show interest in Judaism and Jewish life than those who have been here less time.

Since two-thirds of the Russian-speaking Jewish population in America came here in the 1990s, the community is now reaching a critical turning point, Kliger says.

But they face steep challenges, according to Russian-speaking Jews and those who work with the community.

Among them are a dearth of affordable Jewish education, institutions and Russian-born religious leadership, as well as a residual Soviet mentality that keeps religion at bay.

Also, the American Jewish groups that received them focused primarily on social, not religious absorption.

In liberating refuseniks — Jews denied the right to emigrate under the Soviet system — the motto was “Let my people go,” not “Let my people know,” says Rabbi Aryeh Katzin, dean of Sinai Academy, a Russian Jewish yeshiva in Brooklyn and editor of the newspaper “Evreisky Mir,” Russian for “the Jewish world.”

In addition, Russian Jews retained a culture that looked down upon religion.

“There is a big-time paranoia” against religion, says Rabbi Pinchus Bobrosky, a Russian-born rabbi in the densely populated Russian-speaking Jewish community in

the Brighton Beach section of New York.

Russian Jews were weaned, he says, on Lenin’s mantra: “Religion is the opium for the masses.”

Still, as Kliger says, the longer Jews from the former Soviet Union are here, the more Americanized they become and the more likely they are to adopt religious practice and an overt Jewish identity.

When Julian Abrams immigrated to New York in 1989, he was struck by the sight of Jews observing a holiday. Driving along a Brooklyn street, he saw a Jewish promenade — his first time seeing Jews “so openly enjoying their Jewishness,” he says. “I cried inside,” says Abrams, who is not religious.

Among the Russian Jews here who have adopted religion, many have found a home in the Chabad-Lubavitch movement. Its appeal, they say, stems from its welcoming attitude — coupled with free activities.

Rabbi Shmuel Notik, who heads Chabad’s outreach to Russian Jews in Illinois, estimates that as many as 150,000 Russian Jews across the country are affiliated with the movement.

“They like to hear that despite the fact that they don’t have any background, nonetheless Chabad accepts them” and “gives them a chance to grow in their Jewishness,” Notik says.

While many Russian Jews attend High Holiday services, they generally practice a brand of Judaism from an era prohibiting it: They piece together fragments of secular Jewish knowledge to constitute practice and identity.

Russian Jewish holidays essentially are social events, festooned with Russian fare like caviar and smoked fish, says Stanley Trepetin, 35, an MIT graduate student, who grew up in Brooklyn. “Rarely do you ever have prayers,” he says.

In fact, he says, most Russian Jews congregate at Russian events, not Jewish ones, where traditional Russian trivia games and talk of vodka take center stage.

Retaining their Russian identity is a priority for many who immigrated in the 1990s, says Pnina Levermore, executive director for the Bay Area Council for Jewish Rescue and Renewal, in San Francisco.

It’s not so much a security blanket but something “which defined them back there, which kind of makes them feel planted here,” she says.

That steeps the community in its own brand of Jewish culture — often detached from religion.

“They’ll raise their kids never setting foot in a temple, but God forbid you want to marry someone not Jewish,” says Victoria Weesies, 38, who emigrated to Orange County, Calif., in 1975.

The youth of the community, more Americanized and with more opportunities than their parents had to pursue Judaism, represent a more religious segment of Russian Jewish society, most say.

Ironically, however, some think that these young people, lacking their parents’ fear of being Jewish, will lose their Jewish identity altogether.

Because Russian Jews see Jewish identity as ethnic, they bequeath their children a Judaism with “nothing really attached to it,” says Andre Krug, director of services for New Americans at the Jewish Community Centers of Greater Philadelphia.

For those working to cultivate Jewish identity among Russian American Jews, they craft strategies to appeal to their specific concerns. For example, Krug has drawn many to Jewish events by focusing on culture and rejecting fees for services.

Rabbi Marc Schneier of The Hampton Synagogue, perched in the tony weekend area of Long Island, N.Y., which has seen the trickling in of Russian Jewish congregants, aims to respond to the immigrants’ desire to fit in with American culture.

“Our challenge is to show the greater Russian Jewish community that you can be a successful and very fulfilled American, and at the same time you can be a practicing Jew,” he says.

While Russian American Jews seem “almost devoid of religious observance,” Katzin says, they are slowly returning to their Jewish roots.

A rabbi from an assimilated family, Katzin says the “flame of a Jew” persists, despite the “cultural genocide” of Jewish life in Russia. “One explanation,” he says, is “Am Yisrael chai.”

Russian Jews see Jewish identity as something ethnic, rather than religious.

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Anti-Semitism report vague on who is responsible

By JONATHAN FISK

STRASBOURG, France (JTA) — A long-awaited report on European anti-Semitism confirms that it is a growing problem across the continent — but dances around the politically sensitive question of who is responsible.

The 344-page report by the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia, or EUMC, details a rise in anti-Semitic incidents in Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and England.

Physical assaults are absent or rare in Greece, Austria, Italy and Spain, the report found, but anti-Semitic discourse is virulent there as well.

Those findings are unlikely to surprise observers who have watched a rash of anti-Semitic outbursts spread across Europe since the Palestinian intifada began in September 2000.

More surprising was the almost passing reference made to the perpetrators. Newer actors such as immigrant Muslim youth are mentioned in the report, but an EUMC press release accompanying the report sought to highlight the role of more traditional sources of anti-Semitism, such as far-right groups and skinheads.

That came as a shock to Jewish groups, who were furious when the EUMC quashed an earlier report last year identifying Muslims and pro-Palestinian left-wingers as the main sources of the “new anti-Semitism” in Europe.

The EUMC said that report was withheld because of methodological shortcom-

ings — it eventually was released under pressure from Jewish groups — but many suspected the findings simply had proven politically unpalatable given Europe's huge Muslim immigrant community.

“After the scandal of the previous report, the EUMC has compiled an impressive quantitative analysis that shows an unprecedented wave of anti-Semitism in Europe,” Elan Steinberg, executive vice president of the World Jewish Congress, told JTA on Wednesday. “But they studiously avoid going into the causes of the anti-Semitism; you're almost left with the impression that it occurred from outer space. It's an intellectual whitewash and an instance of moral cowardice.”

Serge Cwajgenbaum, secretary general of the European Jewish Congress, said “it's contradictory that the EUMC puts an emphasis on” white, right-wing perpetrators, “whereas the report reveals that the majority of attacks in most countries are committed by young Muslims of North African origin.”

“How can we effectively fight anti-Semitism when we refuse to identify the true perpetrators?” he asked.

“The E.U. still appears unwilling to acknowledge its own findings that Muslim immigrant youth are increasingly responsible for anti-Semitic violence motivated by the conflict in the Middle East,” the Anti-Defamation League noted in a statement.

Roger Cukierman, president of the CRIF umbrella organization of French Jewry, said the response to the spread of anti-Semitism needs to be “education, sanction and integration.”

Cobi Benatoff, president of the European Jewish Congress, said the report was important enough to be presented to the European Parliament.

“However, to be forthright, this is only a first step,” he said. “We must get the message of the fight

against anti-Semitism into the streets, into the schools, the universities, the churches and the mosques of Europe. In order to achieve this goal, we must have the support of our political leaders and of the media.”

The report marks the first time that data on anti-Semitism has been collected systematically across all 15 E.U. member states under common guidelines set down by the EUMC.

The WJC's Steinberg said the report would be discussed in Berlin at a late-April conference on anti-Semitism sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The report “confirms our worst fears: The level of anti-Semitism is such that we can describe it as the most serious since the end of the Second World War,” Steinberg said. “We will press forward, particularly at the Berlin conference, for a more realistic assessment of the problem.”

‘This is only a first step.’

Cobi Benatoff
European Jewish Congress

McKinney, seen as anti-Israel, to run for Congress again

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish fund-raisers are looking for ways to prevent former Rep. Cynthia McKinney from returning to Congress. Jews were caught off-guard Monday when Rep. Denise Majette (D-Ga.) announced she would seek the Democratic nomination for Georgia's open Senate seat, and would not run for re-election in the House.

Just two days earlier, McKinney, a lightning rod in the Jewish community who has been called stridently anti-Israel, announced her intentions to seek the seat she lost in 2002.

Majette received strong financial support from Jews when she beat the incumbent McKinney in the Democratic primary, and she was considered a favorite for re-election in the House this year. Her absence is expected to greatly aid McKinney's chances, unless another Democratic primary challenger is found.

Morris Amitay, a leading Jewish fund-raiser, said it's too early to determine how much effort the Jewish community would put into defeating McKinney this year. “It depends if there is a viable candidate,” said Amitay, founder of the pro-Israel Washington PAC. “There is some time, but I haven't heard anything.”

Cathy Woolard, president of Atlanta's city council, announced her entry into the Democratic race for Majette's seat Tuesday.

During her 10 years in Congress, McKinney angered many in the Jewish community with her anti-Israel comments and votes against resolutions supporting Israel's right to self-defense. She has enjoyed strong support from the Arab and Muslim communities, which view her as a strong proponent of a Palestinian state.

Several Jewish officials said they were surprised with Majette's decision, and predicted she would have an uphill battle to win the Senate seat in a state that is leaning Republican.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Qurei: Attacking civilians is bad

The Palestinian Authority prime minister condemned suicide attacks on Israeli civilians.

Ahmed Qurei said Wednesday that the attacks have damaged the Palestinian cause and given Israel cover to build its West Bank security barrier.

Qurei also welcomed Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, but said it should be followed by a withdrawal from the entire West Bank.

Poll: Palestinians back attacks

A majority of Palestinians support terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians, according to a new poll.

Fifty-three percent of Palestinians in the poll, taken just before the March 22 assassination of Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin, support the attacks, a rise of 5 percent from a December poll.

Some 87 percent of respondents in the recent poll, taken by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Social Research, support attacks on Israeli soldiers, and 86 percent favor attacks on Israeli settlers.

Scuffles in Silwan

Arabs trying to block the arrival of Jewish residents in an eastern Jerusalem neighborhood scuffled with Israeli police.

Six rock-throwers were arrested in the Silwan neighborhood Wednesday as a dozen heavily guarded religious Jewish families arrived in their new homes.

Several Jewish groups have mounted campaigns to buy residences in eastern Jerusalem in recent years, but Arabs denounce the move as an effort to "Judaize" Israel's capital city.

Two terrorists killed in Gaza

Israeli soldiers killed two would-be infiltrators in the Gaza Strip.

The two Palestinians were shot while sneaking up on an army post at the Neve Dekalim settlement before dawn Wednesday. There was no immediate claim of responsibility from any Palestinian group.

Hamas assassination plot foiled

A 24-year-old Hamas member from Jenin was charged with plotting to assassinate a senior Israeli lawmaker.

Israeli security sources said the terrorist, arrested last month, told interrogators the target was lawmaker David Levy.

The Hamas man worked for a fishmonger in Levy's hometown of Beit She'an, and said he followed the lawmaker's movements closely while planning the attack.

West Bank outposts evacuated

Israeli police evacuated two West Bank outposts, sparking scuffles with settlers.

Wednesday's raid on Hazon David, a cargo container and tent set up in the "Pilgrim's Passage" linking Hebron's Cave of the Patriarchs with Kiryat Arba, was the second this week. Hundreds of settler youth descended on the site and had to be removed by police.

Intifada costs Israel millions

The Palestinian intifada has cost Israel more than \$7.5 million, the Bank of Israel reported.

That doesn't include defense costs, but does include border police, hospitalization costs and defending settlements.

The cost is between 6.2 percent and 8 percent of Israel's gross domestic product and is among the causes of Israel's economic recession, the bank said.

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. Jew pleads guilty to arms dealing

An American Jewish man pleaded guilty for his role in transferring money linked to terrorist arms dealings.

Yehuda Abraham, 76, was nabbed last summer along with two other men after one tried to sell a surface-to-air missile to FBI informants posing as terrorists who wanted to shoot down an airplane.

A New York jeweler, Abraham said he neither knew nor asked what the money — approximately \$30,000 — was to be used for, CNN.com reported.

Celebrity pre-seder slated

Celebrities from architect Daniel Libeskind to sex adviser Dr. Ruth will attend a pre-Passover seder in New York.

Other stars, including rock singer Perry Farrell, composer Steve Reich, author Douglas Rushkoff, comedians Jerry Stiller and Anne Meara and actor Theodore Bikel, are due to gather at the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust on Sunday to offer creative interpretations of the Passover story.

Kosher slaughter worker sentenced

A woman who worked at one of the country's largest kosher meat-packing plants was sentenced to prison for bank fraud.

Teresa Downing, 43, of Postville, Iowa, who worked for Agriprocessors, was jailed this week for five months after pleading guilty last May to hiding \$1.14 million in bad checks from the company's New York bank to its Postville accounts, which resulted in unauthorized loans to the company, The Associated Press reported.

She also admitted to embezzling more than \$78,000 from Agriprocessors, which is owned by a Chasidic family.

Chagall biographer on Cloud Nine

A biography of Marc Chagall won a prestigious Jewish literary award.

The Koret Jewish Book Award in biography was given Monday evening in New York to Benjamin Harshav's "Marc Chagall and His Times: A Documentary Narrative." The fiction prize went jointly to Barbara Honigmann's "A Love Made Out of Nothing and Zohara's Journey" and Aharon Megged's "Foigman." Shmuel Feiner's "The Jewish Enlightenment" won the history prize and Daniel Matt's "The Zohar" won in the philosophy and thought category.

WORLD

Arrests in Canadian vandalism

Canadian Jewish officials are cautiously optimistic as arrests were made following a spree of anti-Semitic vandalism.

Steven Vandermeij, 18, and two unidentified 15-year-olds were arrested this week on mischief charges that could land them in jail.

Bernie Farber, executive director of the Ontario region of the Canadian Jewish Congress, thanked police at a Wednesday news conference for their commitment to solving the rash of hate crimes.

Jews to U.N.: Teach your children well

B'nai B'rith International called on the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to prevent children from becoming terrorists.

"It is deplorable to see the manipulation of children through the use of textbooks, TV programs, cartoons, and comic strips," said the group's president, Joel Kaplan.

B'nai B'rith next week will ask the commission, which is in the midst of a six-week session in Geneva, to appoint a rapporteur to report on nations that teach children to hate and become terrorists.