

IN THE NEWS

Coordination nixed after terror attack

Israel suspended security coordination efforts with the Palestinian Authority.

Monday's decision followed the killing of three West Bank settlers in drive-by shootings, but Israeli officials said diplomatic contacts with the Palestinian Authority would continue.

In a further bid to prevent terrorists from reaching roads used by Israelis, the army imposed a closure on Hebron and Bethlehem.

Congresswoman has Jewish roots

The influential chairwoman of a congressional subcommittee on the Middle East has Jewish roots.

The mother of Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) was born Jewish and converted to Catholicism when she married, the Forward reported.

Ros-Lehtinen's grandfather, Jacobo Adato Levy, was a leader in Cuba's Jewish community.

Ros-Lehtinen fled Cuba with her parents in 1960, after the Communist takeover, when she was 8.

She is close to Miami's Jewish community and is chairwoman of the Middle East subcommittee of the House of Representatives' International Relations Committee.

Jewish bus driver gets a settlement

A Jewish bus driver was awarded \$20,000 from a Los Angeles transit agency that had refused him time off for Shabbat and Jewish holidays.

The award results from a religious discrimination suit brought by the U.S. Justice Department last year on behalf of Henry Asher, 56, against the L.A. County Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

REMINDER: The JTA World Report will not be published on Wednesday, Oct. 19, and Thursday, Oct. 20.

WORLD REPORT

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After good years under Schroeder, German Jews see same with Merkel

By TOBY AXELROD

BERLIN (JTA) — As Germany stands on the brink of a new political era — about to have its first woman and first former East German as chancellor — Jews are reacting with cautious optimism.

Seven years of Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder turned out to be rather good for the Jews. But Angela Merkel isn't exactly an unknown quantity either.

When it comes to relations with Israel and with Germany's Jewish community, a Merkel administration isn't likely to bring much change, observers say. And transatlantic relations, another issue of import to the Jewish community, are likely to improve.

Merkel's Christian Democrat Union and Schroeder's party, the Social Democratic Union, are now crafting their coalition.

Paul Spiegel, head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, reserved comment until the new Cabinet ministers are named, but others were less shy.

"There's no 'getting to know you,' no breaking-in period needed," Rabbi Israel Singer, chairman of the World Jewish Congress and president of the Claims Conference, said of Merkel in a telephone interview with JTA. "We know her commitments."

Merkel "frequently finished a sentence that I began when we talked about Jewish issues. It's rare that you sit with somebody whom you don't need to win over and who is not only on the same page as you are, but on the same line as you are," Singer said.

Merkel has "demonstrated considerable interest in a positive and dynamic relationship with the Jewish world," Deidre Berger, head

of the American Jewish Committee office in Berlin, who also has met frequently with the CDU leader, said in an e-mail interview.

Merkel's track record on Jewish issues is "excellent," said Michael Wolffsohn, a history professor at the University of the Bundeswehr in Munich.

"She has always been in touch with the Central Council and the Israeli Embassy," Wolffsohn said in an e-mail comment. "Jewish-Israeli matters are close to her heart," as they are for the leadership of her party in general.

Merkel "is a direct, serious, knowledgeable, hands-on person who listens," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, "and she has very clear views on issues of our concern."

"I for one feel comfortable that her leadership will continue the dual tradition of taking responsibility for the past and being guided by it," Foxman said.

Merkel was born in 1954 to a Lutheran pastor and a teacher. She studied physics and worked as a chemist before becoming involved in politics after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989.

She became a political protege of former Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and has headed the CDU since 2000.

A proponent of economic and social reform, Merkel wants to make Germany more competitive by allowing longer work-weeks and removing barriers to firing employees.

She is a strong advocate of trans-Atlantic relations, and even supported the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq at a time when the view was most unpopular in Germany — a "high po-

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AROUND
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WORLD

■ *The German Jewish community feels comfortable with the country's new chancellor*

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litical risk" that Jewish leaders respected, Wolffsohn said.

In keeping with majority German opinion, however, Merkel rejects Turkish membership in the European Union.

For German Jews, the top items on the domestic agenda are integration of Jews from the Former Soviet Union, funding for cash-strapped Jewish communities, support for Jewish education and training of rabbis, security and efforts to combat anti-Semitism. Internationally, the issues are close ties with Israel and the United States.

Under Schroeder, Jewish communal life took a great leap forward with the signing of a historic contract in 2003 between the Central Council and the German government that placed the Jewish community on a legal par with the Protestant and Catholic churches.

Schroeder's foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, proved to be a great supporter of Israel, most observers agree.

The Schroeder administration also took a strong stand against anti-Semitism, particularly at the 2001 U.N. Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, where Fischer defended Israel, and at the conference on anti-Semitism in Europe convened by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and hosted in Berlin. Merkel was one of the speakers at the OSCE event.

"I look to Mrs. Merkel for at least as much understanding" as the past administration showed, Singer said. She "has always been sympathetic to us when she

was in the opposition, and helped us on every issue in the last seven years," including the fight for homecare payments to Holocaust survivors.

Growing up in East Germany taught Merkel "the importance of what it is like to live under the yoke of a system that is not amenable to human rights," Singer said.

Foxman said Merkel had made "her own pilgrimage" to come to terms with the Nazi past.

"She said to us that her parents ... tried to enlighten her contrary to what she was taught" in East Germany, which held that the Nazi perpetrators had all come from western Germany and which tended to deny the unique nature of the Jewish genocide.

Merkel "is aware of the poison that was fed to millions of Germans on the eastern side for years," Foxman said. The government "has the responsibility not only to be aware of it but to deal with it." ■

Spanish party want Israel ties nixed

By JEROME SOCOLOVSKY

MADRID (JTA) — A Spanish political party's recent appeal for Europe to downgrade its ties with Jerusalem has angered Israel, which anticipated improved diplomatic treatment after the recent Gaza Strip withdrawal.

The party is small and the non-binding appeal was watered down in the Spanish Parliament, but Israeli diplomats appear eager to send a message to European politicians that the Jewish state deserves a breather after the withdrawal.

"We are concerned about the moral issue," said Jackie Eldan, spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Madrid. "This is exactly not the right moment for strange and unconstructive initiatives."

The proposal was put forth by Esquerra Republicana, or Republican Left, a small, Barcelona-based faction notorious in Spain for its controversial stand in favor of sovereignty for the northeastern region of Catalonia. The party holds eight of the 350 seats in Spain's Parliament.

Esquerra Republicana's proposal called for the European Union to suspend its commercial agreements and scientific and military cooperation with Israel because it "continues annexing territories in the West Bank and continues building its wall."

The wording ultimately was toned down in the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee.

The new statement notes that the commission "is pleased" by the withdrawal from Gaza, but still demands a halt to the "illegal construction" of Israel's security fence, and calls on the European Union to implement all of the clauses in its agreements with Israel — an implicit reference to human-rights stipulations.

Eldan says the final statement fell short

of what Israel believes Europe's message should be now: that Hamas and Islamic Jihad have to hand in their weapons and cease to be terrorist organizations.

And he remains outraged by the original proposal.

"You have pro-Palestinians in Europe who are blinded to reality, while Palestinians in Israel are talking peace," Eldan said.

The change in wording came after the Israeli Embassy aired its objections to the original draft in the Spanish press.

Rosa Maria Bonas, an Esquerra Republicana lawmaker and one of the authors of the original draft, accused Israel of waging a campaign of "defamation and calumny" against the party.

"We just wanted to send the message that after the withdrawal, peace is still endangered by settlement building," she said. "In Europe, there is a sense that everything is OK after the Gaza withdrawal."

Bonas called herself "pro-Israeli" and noted that she and her son both are married to Israelis. She said her party's initiative was a response to her contacts in Israel "who think the Israeli government has to be pressured" more after the Gaza pullout.

Ironically, the leader of Esquerra Republicana, Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira, is one of the most pro-Israeli figures on the Spanish political scene.

The proposal was drafted while Carod-Rovira was on a visit to Israel, and he wasn't informed about it. Some political observers have interpreted the proposal as a mutiny against the party leader, but Bonas denied that the timing was deliberate.

Bonas said she didn't know Carod-Rovira would be in Israel at the time — even though his visit made the front pages of Spanish newspapers nearly every day he was there. ■

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Non-Jew in Ukraine 'addicted' to Jewish life

By YULIANNNA VILKOS

ODESSA, Ukraine (JTA) — Vladimir Chaplin's enthusiasm is contagious as he leads a visitor through the Museum of Jewish History in this southern Ukrainian port city.

"The history of Jews in Odessa is our past, present and future, and our museum is proof of that," says the 26-year-old Chaplin, the museum's full-time researcher and guide. Founded four years ago with funding from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the museum displays artifacts from Odessa's 200-year-old Jewish history, from 18th-century gravestones to contemporary anti-Semitic leaflets.

Pausing before a display of 19th-century Odessan Jewish life, Chaplin says, "Did you know that in 1820, Odessan Jews founded the first institution of higher education in the Russian Empire, where Jewish students could learn secular subjects such as European languages, accounting and economics?"

Chaplin has studied the topic long enough to regale visitors with every facet of the city's colorful Jewish history. Which might not be surprising, except that Chaplin is not Jewish. His mother is Ukrainian and his father is Russian, and he can't explain what drew him to Jewish life and history more than 10 years ago.

"It was interesting because it was something new, it was different from the family I grew up in," he muses of his attraction to things Jewish. "A stranger among my own people, and a friend among strangers — that's me."

Chaplin's story illustrates the fascination many non-Jews, particularly in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, have for Judaism and Jewish history and culture, a fascination that has spawned everything from klezmer fests in Poland to non-Jews filling Jewish studies classes in Kiev and Potsdam.

But his story also tests the limits of Jewish openness to non-Jews who want to join the community.

In high school, Chaplin trained as a guide to Jewish Odessa. A history major in college, he wrote his thesis on early Zionist leader Vladimir Jabotinsky, an Odessa native.

In 1997, Chaplin was one of the founding members of Hillel in Odessa. His friends say he quickly became one of the

most popular youth movement leaders in the former Soviet Union, and took part in regional and national training seminars.

"Every community has its stars, and in the community of Hillel in the former Soviet Union, Chaplin was definitely a star," says Kiev Hillel member Arseniy Finberg, who used to be active in Odessa's Hillel. "Everybody knew him."

He wasn't the only non-Jew in Hillel, not

by a long shot. Hillel around the world maintains an open-door policy toward any young person interested in its activities, and the former Soviet Union's high intermarriage rate dictates an even more relaxed approach, Hillel staff says. And in the absence of other comparable youth groups in the former Soviet Union today, Hillel is, members say, an attractive social option for young people with even the barest connection to the Jewish community.

"The level of flexibility in the former Soviet Union is greater than it might be in Israel or South America," says Jay Rubin, executive vice president of Hillel's International Division. Referring to Jewish law, he says, "We define 'Jewish' in the broadest possible strokes. We don't take a halachic approach."

But Chaplin was the spiritual leader of his Hillel, leading weekly prayer services. And Hillel's openness to non-Jews has its limits — it is, after all, an organization whose primary purpose is to serve Jewish youth.

Four years ago, Rabbi Yossie Goldman, founder and former director of Hillel activities in the former Soviet Union, met with Chaplin.

Goldman, who is today director of Hillel's Israel activities, describes Chaplin as "affable and highly intelligent," but says Chaplin "considers himself a Christian" and was not interested in converting.

As a result, Goldman recalls that he told Chaplin he was welcome at Hillel activities, but should not assume a leadership position, and the two men parted friends.

But scandal erupted. On the eve of the 2001 Hillel Student Congress in Moscow, an editorial in the Jewish newspaper in Kishinev, Moldova, criticized the presence of non-Jews in Hillel. The article mentioned Chaplin by name, saying he was "taking the place of a Jewish boy or girl."

By the time the Moscow conference took place, the Chaplin affair was well known, and Goldman

felt he had to address it publicly. At a Shabbat speech before more than 300 Hillel students and staff, Goldman outlined Hillel's position on non-Jewish participation: Hillel is open to everyone, but it is a Jewish organization for Jewish students, and while non-Jews are welcome as "honored guests," only persons "with Jewish roots" should hold leadership positions or take part in leadership training seminars.

Finberg and other members of Odessa Hillel say virtually all the students at the Moscow Congress signed a petition calling for Chaplin's reinstatement. Goldman does not remember such a petition.

For Chaplin, the experience was a hard lesson, although he bears no grudge. "Now I know that non-Jews are welcome in a Jewish organization, and they will always be treated nicely as guests," he says. "But they will always remain guests, and that's something I should have known earlier."

Chaplin is still very involved in Jewish activities. He likes working at the Jewish museum, he says, because it's a place "where I can be more than a guest."

For his part, Chaplin is tired of looking for answers to his identity. Although most of his friends are Jewish, and all the girls he's dated are Jewish, he says that listening to Jews discuss their problems has strengthened his own identity as a Ukrainian.

"Don't ask me why I do not research Ukrainian topics, or why I am interested in the Holocaust or in Odessa Jews, because I don't know," he says. "Even if I leave my work at the museum, I will still be concerned about the Jewish people. Everything that concerns them will touch me. I can't get away from it."

'Even if I leave my work at the museum, I will still be concerned about the Jewish people.'

Vladimir Chaplin
Museum of Jewish History

**AROUND
THE JEWISH
WORLD**

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Phone book relists Jews for Jesus synagogues

A phone book in New Jersey removed "messianic Jewish" synagogues from a listing of Jewish congregations.

The move by the Verizon 2006 Camden County Superpages came after a complaint from a local Jewish man, the Philadelphia Jewish Exponent reported.

The phone book will list the "messianic" synagogues — often linked to Jews for Jesus — under a separate heading.

Rioting breaks out before supremacist march

Counterdemonstrators against a planned white supremacist march in Ohio turned violent against the police.

Police said that gang members, who were among those demonstrating against a planned march by the National Socialist Movement, hurled rocks at police.

Approximately 65 people were arrested during the rioting on Saturday, and the police then called off the march by the National Socialists, a neo-Nazi party.

After the violence at the rally, which led to some looting, Toledo Mayor Jack Ford declared a state of emergency and set an 8 p.m. curfew for the weekend.

Groups launch campus program

A pro-Israel campus initiative recently launched a fellowship program.

Caravan for Democracy will select two fellows from 15 campuses for a two-day retreat in New York City to help them establish an agenda for their campuses.

More information is available at www.caravanfordemocracy.org.

Caravan for Democracy is a joint project of the Jewish National Fund, Media Watch International and Hamagshimim.

Dancing with Native Americans

A Canadian Jewish congregation joined a Native American powwow.

Congregation Agudas Israel joined in the fourth annual powwow of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian nations on Sunday.

The effort is the latest attempt to build bridges between Jews and Canadian Native Americans since Native American leader David Ahenakew unleashed a diatribe in 2002 against the Jewish people, calling them a "disease" and asserting that Hitler was justified when he "fried 6 million of those guys."

MIDDLE EAST

Abbas talks to Chirac

Mahmoud Abbas is visiting Paris, Le Figaro reported.

He met President Chirac in order to rally French support for the Palestinian cause. It is his first meeting with the French president since his election last January.

Abbas also is expected to discuss the participation of several French companies in the construction of a tramway serving eastern Jerusalem.

Abbas is expected in Washington to meet President Bush on Thursday.

Israel braces for bird flu

Israel braced for the possible arrival of a bird flu that has reached Turkey and Romania.

The Health Ministry said Sunday it had ordered 200 hospital beds set aside for senior citizens who are expected to be the first victims of the virus should it reach Israel, and asked the government for \$22 million in emergency funding.

Israeli tourists who plan to visit Turkey and Romania were also warned to avoid farmland where they might be exposed to infected

fowl. But Health Minister Dan Naveh said it was too early to issue a nationwide warning over the flu in Israel, given the relatively slim chance that it could reach the country's shores.

Qatar backs Israeli stadium

Qatari officials contributed \$10 million toward a sports complex in an Israeli Arab town.

The money will go toward a complex in Sakhnin, home to Bnei Sakhnin, which won Israel's soccer championship last year.

The offer came during a visit to the Gulf nation by Ahmed Tibi, an Israeli Arab lawmaker.

Bnei Menashe converted

Israeli rabbis formally converted a community of Indians who say they are descended from Jews.

Some 200 members of the Bnei Menashe underwent conversion this week under six rabbinical judges dispatched to India by the Shavei Israel organization.

The conversions were performed with the approval of Israel's chief Sephardi rabbi, Shlomo Amar.

Last March, Amar recognized the Bnei Menashe, who claim descent from the lost Israelite tribe of Manasseh, as "descendants of Israel" and agreed to restore them to the Jewish people.

According to Shavei Israel, more than 800 Bnei Menashe have immigrated to the Jewish state.

WORLD

Krakow gets its own rabbi

The city of Krakow, Poland, got a full-time rabbi.

Avraham Flaks is believed to be the first full-time rabbi in Krakow since World War II, the Jerusalem Post reported.

The Israel-based Shavei Israel organization sent Flaks to Krakow following a request from Poland's chief rabbi, Michael Schudrich.

The city's community only has 200 members, but it is also home to many descendants of mixed marriages and those who covered up their Judaism during World War II and the subsequent Communist era.

Cossack leader blasts anti-Semitism

The leader of the Ukrainian Cossacks condemned anti-Semitism and agreed to hold a roundtable with Jewish leaders to address the issue.

During the Oct. 13 meeting in Kiev, Azriel Haikin, one of Ukraine's chief rabbis, and Anatoly Shevchenko discussed issues of tolerance and understanding between various ethnic groups in Ukraine.

According to the Federation of Jewish Communities, Shevchenko condemned acts of anti-Semitism in Ukraine and assured the rabbi that Ukrainian Cossacks would make every effort to promote ethnic and religious tolerance in Ukraine.

The two leaders also agreed to hold a Jewish-Cossack conference in November to discuss xenophobia and anti-Semitism in Ukraine.

The Cossacks, known for the military skills and special military services they rendered to the Russian Empire, have a long history of anti-Jewish violence dating back to the 17th century.

Palestinian-themed film won't get Oscar

Italy's entry for an Oscar, which deals with a Palestinian family that lives with Israeli soldiers, was rejected because of language issues.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences refused to consider "Private" because no Italian is spoken in the film.

The dialogue in the film is in Arabic and English, but the academy requires that a country's entry feature dialogue predominantly in the language of the country submitting the film.

Italy will be allowed to submit another entry.