

EUROPEAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

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A new concept of European solidarity is transforming Jewish life in Europe. The long-dormant European Council of Jewish Communities is now initiating new alliances and joint projects on a continent-wide basis, and a Jewish Partnership has been established in Brussels with links to the European Union. Twenty-first century European Judaism will be free from national boundaries, and three million European Jews will become equal partners with North American and Israeli Jews.

Over the last 50 years, Jews in Europe looked toward Israel and North America for the spirit and the funding to rebuild a destroyed Jewry. Yet they seldom looked beyond their national borders at other Jews in Europe. Despite the gradual implementation of the unification of Europe, nation-states continued to be the main reference in people's lives and in the Jewish communities. If people from different countries met, it was usually in Israel and seldom with the intention of coordinating or cooperating in Europe.

However, in recent years there has been a shift in attitude based on several factors—the fall of Communism, the opening of Europe to the East, the anticipation of the Euro (the common currency, set to debut in 1999), and a continent-wide economic crisis that has forced people to look beyond their own national boundaries for markets and jobs. All this has given rise to the new concept of European solidarity in the minds of the Jewish leadership.

The long-dormant European Council of Jewish Communities sprang to renewed life a few years ago. With a new board, a new mission, and support from the Joint Distribution Committee, it set out to focus on networking among professional and lay leaders throughout the continent. It is now addressing issues on a continent-wide basis, initiating new alliances and joint projects.

The new Jewish activists belong to the

generations born after World War II. They are witness to and actors in the uniting of Europe and its extension to the East and of a society transformed by the Internet and by thriving nongovernmental associations that have become a major component of our democracy.

In July 1997 Jewish leaders and intellectuals from all over Europe met in Strasbourg. The theme of the conference was "Strengthening Jewish Life in Europe." A number of projects are now taking shape. Training programs for young leaders and for the development of new groups have been set up to deal with the needs of Jewish immigrants, the elderly, and Holocaust survivors. New networks are being created, and there is a sense of common purpose.

A Jewish Partnership for Europe has been established in Brussels. It has links to the institutions of the European Union, Europe's developing federal government and a major public funding source for social welfare and nongovernmental organizations. Three-year venture capital was provided to the Jewish Partnership mainly by Europeans (including Russian donor Evgeny Satanovski) and the Ronald Lauder Foundation.

The increasingly active Jews from Central and Eastern Europe and from the Former Soviet Union provide an incentive for Western European Jews to become more involved at the European level. They are organizing themselves anew and beginning to raise money for their own needs. With offices in more than 50 cities, the Russian Jewish Congress is becoming a powerful grassroots organiza-

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tion, raising millions of dollars annually from businesses and individual members. A Ukrainian Jewish Congress has recently been established. In the future, wealthy Eastern European communities will become major protagonists and funders of continent-wide activities.

Twenty-first century European Judaism will be characterized by numerous local, re-

gional, and continent-wide initiatives, free from national boundaries. Today just a few hundred leaders are involved, yet their number is increasing. Eventually, a critical mass of European-minded leaders will become a major influence in Jewish life. Then three million European Jews will become equal partners with North American and Israeli Jews.