

# Jews in Moldova, Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Georgia

Tanya Basok

The rise of nationalism in Moldova, Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Georgia has had significant repercussions for Jews residing in these regions. Even in those communities where Jews have peacefully coexisted with other ethnic groups for centuries, ethnic resentments and hostilities are beginning to make them extremely anxious about the present and future. There have been individual incidents of break-ins and attacks reported by word-of-mouth to journalists and representatives of organizations concerned with human rights. No research on the subject has been done in these regions. And even systematic reports on anti-Semitism there are very rare. Unlike their Russian counterparts, anti-Semites in these regions did not form impressive Pamyat-like organizations and do not seem to publish newspapers. This makes it difficult to monitor their activities.

One can judge how alarming the situation is by examining the growing numbers of Jews who have expressed interest in or who have moved to Israel. Presently the number of Jews from these regions who have come to Canada as refugee claimants is relatively small. However, if the exodus of Jews from these regions increases and Israel continues facing tremendous hardships related to settlement of the former Soviet *olim* (immigrants), many of them will attempt to come to Canada.

There are more than 1.2 million Jews in the former Soviet Union who have invitations to repatriate to Israel. Not all of them are ready to leave their home country. Their decision depends on the political and economic conditions in their country of origin, as well as policies and conditions of absorption in Israel. In the first eight months of 1992, over 40,000 of them decided to come to Israel. In the first six months of this year the total number of Soviet *olim* was 27,330, aver-

aging 4,555 people per month. In the next two months the number of Jews arriving in Israel from the former Soviet Union went up to 6,575 in July and 6,461 in August. This increase can be accounted for by a growing outflow of Jews from regions experiencing civil wars and ethnic confrontations—that is Central Asia, Caucasus and Moldova. According to Simha Dinitz, the chairman of the Jewish Agency, the average monthly arrival of Jews from these regions would be 10,000 people at the end of 1992, reaching a total of 150,000 *olim* from these regions in 1993.<sup>1</sup>

## ISLAMIC REPUBLICS (CENTRAL ASIA)

There are a total of 200,000 Jews, both Bukharan and Ashkenazi, in the Islamic republics of the former Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> Many of them are beginning to leave the region because of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. When Tadjikistan started on a road of Islamization, local nationalists were tolerant of the Bukharan Jews who had been living there since the eighth and ninth centuries. Ashkenazi Jews, on the other hand, being Russian speakers and having immigrated to Central Asia recently from the European parts of Russia, were identified with the Russian culture and population. Together with other Russian-speaking people, they began fleeing the region. Lately, however, even Bukharan Jews have started fleeing. As one of them said, "The attitude towards Jews has changed suddenly. Tadjik friends don't want to see you anymore. Their philosophy is that Muslims should live in their state and Christians and Jews should get out. There is virtual anarchy in the city; no one is responsible for anything, human life is worth nothing. There is an impression that a tragedy can erupt any moment. We decided not to tempt fate."<sup>3</sup> Anti-Semitic incidents are becoming widespread, while local law enforce-

ment agents refuse to take action. In one reported incident, three Uzbeks broke into an apartment of a Jewish family on February 20, 1991. They beat the father unconscious, tried to rape the older sister and forced the mother and other children on their knees to beg for forgiveness. "Why have you not left for Israel?" they yelled.<sup>4</sup>

In August 1992, 750 Jews repatriated from the Muslim republics to Israel. In the summer months their exodus surpassed that from Russia and Ukraine. In the last two and a half years 6,500 Jews left Tadjikistan. The remaining 12,000 are anxious to escape the armed confrontations between the supporters of the deposed president, Nabiev, and his opponents.<sup>5</sup> After Israel organized an airlift of 146 Jews from the Tajikistani capital of Dushanbe, some 10,000 Jews of Tadjikistan have expressed interest in repatriating to Israel.<sup>6</sup>

## CAUCASUS

There are 22,000 Jews in Georgia of whom 7,000 are Ashkenazi. Of the 1,300 Jews in Abkhazia, 300 are Ashkenazi. It is the latter who are in most danger because they are equated with the Russian-speaking population. But even the Georgian Jews who have lived in this region for centuries are beginning to pack their bags. In Abkhazia, Jews are caught in a cross-fire between Abkhazian separatists and Georgian nationalists. Anti-Semitism is on the rise in the rest of Georgia.<sup>7</sup>

The ethnic confrontation between Armenians and Azeris in Azerbaijan has affected its Jewish population as well. During the 1990 Armenian pogroms in Baku, many Russian-speaking Jews also fled, fearing that their turn would come next. Attacks on mountain Jews by Muslims in some small, predominantly Jewish communities, such as Kuba or Oguz, are forcing entire communities to flee.<sup>8</sup>

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## MOLDOVA

The armed conflict between the Romanian and Slavic populations of the Trans-Dniestria region has alarmed many Russian-speaking Jews. In the last two and a half years 32,500 Jews came to Israel from Moldova. There are 40,000 Jews still living in the region, 70 percent of whom have Israeli letters of invitation. Among them 8,000 live in the Trans-Dniestria region, with 2,500 in Bendery and Tiraspol. One-third of the Jews who fled the armed confrontations in that region are already in Israel, while others are becoming very anxious to leave.<sup>9</sup>

Armed conflicts and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism are forcing Jews out of Central Asia, Georgia and Moldova. Simultaneously, the growing number and power of nationalist forces in Russia have repercussions in the other regions of the former Soviet Union. The open demands of these nationalist organizations for a reunification of the Russian empire makes many Jews residing in the newly formed independent states wary of the future. ■

## NOTES

1. Shimon Chertok, "Progozi—Vesch Netochnaya" ('Forecasts Are Not Exact'), *Novoe Russkoe Slovo* (September 25, 1992): 6.
2. Ben Rose, "Jewish Agency Plays Key Role in Rescuing Jews, Says Dinitz," *The Canadian Jewish News* (September 3, 1992): 2.
3. Shimon Chertok, "Progozi—Vesch Netochnaya."
4. Georgii Samoilovich, "Izgnanie Naroda" ["Expulsion of a Nation"] *Novoe Russkoe Slovo* (June 26, 1992): 6.
5. Shimon Cherton, "Progozi—Vesch Netochnaya."
6. Batsheva Tsur, "Airlift from Tajikistan Arrives," *The Jerusalem Post International Edition* (October 3, 1992).
7. Georgii Samoilovich, "Izgnanie Naroda."
8. Batsheva Tsur, "Akhazi Jews Set for Exodus," *The Jerusalem Post International Edition* (August 29, 1992): 4.
9. Shimon Cherton, "Progozi—Vesch Netochnaya"; Allison Kaplan, "Moldavian Jews Arrive," *The Jerusalem Post International Edition* (August 15, 1992).

## Psychosocial Changes in East German Refugees

Ralf Schwarzer and André Hahn

During the breakdown of the communist system in 1989, more than 300,000 East German citizens left their country and moved to West Germany. As part of this exodus, more than 50,000 refugees settled in West Berlin. Some came via the West German embassies in Warsaw, Prague or Budapest, while others fled under various dangerous conditions. However, many crossed the border after the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989.

A study was launched in October 1989 (before the fall of the Berlin Wall) to examine the emotional reactions, coping strategies, social adaptation and health of these refugees in their new environment. The project was planned as a longitudinal study, with three measurement points during the first two years after their flight. The East German refugees, who were contacted individually in their temporary living quarters, were asked to take part in a psychological investigation on their new life in the West. The first stage of the study took place in the fall and winter of 1989-90, the second-stage data were obtained in the summer of 1990, and the third set was collected in the summer of 1991. A total of 1,036 refugees agreed to participate and, thus, constituted the first-stage sample. The analysis was performed on the basis of 235 refugees who had participated in all three stages. These 126 males (mean age was 31 years) and 109 females (mean age was 32 years) filled in a questionnaire measuring (among other variables) employment status, social support, anxiety, depression and health complaints.

There was a stable relationship between one's employment status and self-reported ill health, but this relationship was further elucidated when sex differences were taken into account. More extreme symptoms were reported for men than for women. Apparently, joblessness is more detrimental for men, or else ini-

tial health problems inhibited job search and hiring. At all three stages, women reported more ill health than men.

A related research question was whether social support could buffer the effect of joblessness on ill health. Those refugees who were employed reported low physical symptoms, regardless of whether or not they received social support. For the refugees who were always jobless, however, social support made a considerable difference. Those who suffered from two stressors simultaneously, i.e., unemployment and lack of social support, continued to report the highest level of ill health at the three points of study. It was most interesting that those who remained jobless but received social support showed a remarkable decline in ill health over time.

This is an example of the often hypothesized buffer effect of social support within the stress and health relationship. Similar results were found for depression and anxiety (Schwarzer, Hahn and Jerusalem 1993). ■

## REFERENCE

- Schwarzer, R., A. Hahn and M. Jerusalem. 1993. "Negative Affect in East German Migrants: Longitudinal Effects of Unemployment and Social Support." *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping: An International Journal* 6 (in press).

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