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HOW EUROPEAN JEWISH COMMUNITIES CAN CHOOSE AND PLAN THEIR OWN FUTURES

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As we are all so well aware, in 1995 the world is marking the fiftieth anniversary of the conclusion of World War II. For Jews especially, this marks the liberation of the camps and the salvation of those Jews remaining alive on the European continent. It also marks the beginning of the final push for the establishment of the State of Israel.

A Postmodern Europe

World War II marked the end of the modern epoch which had begun 300 years earlier with the Treaty of Westphalia, ending another great European war, the Thirty Years War, fought between the same peoples and powers in their earlier political frameworks. The state system inaugurated by the Treaty of Westphalia came to dominate the European scene until it was perverted by totalitarianism and then brought down in the *gotterdammerung* of World War II. By the late 1940s when a new postwar Europe began to emerge, it was clear that

there was much sentiment among Europeans for greatly modifying if not abandoning the Westphalian system of states and balances of power among them and achieving a substantial degree of European integration.

After an initially rocky road, the states of Western Europe from the border between West and East Germany to the farthest end of the British Isles became parts of the European Community and, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Communist empire, the European Union, which presently extends from the Finnish-Russian border on the north to the farther reaches of Europe in the Atlantic. At the same time, with the EU at its core, a network of other institutions of a confederal nature such as the Western European Union (WEU), the Council of Europe, the Conference (now Office) on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, now OSCE), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) were developed

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to bind the rest of Europe as well, to prepare some of the remaining European states for full membership in the EU, and to bring others into the EU's orbit of democracy and human rights.

The OSCE, for example, organized originally as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and now being institutionalized, includes all of Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals. It is now the auspices under which the peace talks between Russia and Chechnya are being held, even though, under the old state system, that would have been considered a domestic Russian problem and definitely off limits to any multinational body. While this has not prevented inter-European wars on Europe's peripheries, it has set the continent on a new course which promises to bring it greater peace and prosperity than it has ever known. Indeed, the invention of the European Union can be compared to the invention of the United States of America as a modern federation in 1787, a landmark in the history of world political developments that in time will have reverberations far beyond its borders.

The Revival of European Jewry

Jewish life in Europe also has had its revival, far more modest because of the way that Jewish ranks were decimated (in truth, even worse; decimated literally means one in ten — for European Jewry perhaps one in ten survived). Nevertheless, the Jewish communities of Europe did revive. France, the largest (530,000 Jews), revived first through an infusion of Eastern European refugees immediately after the war and then through a massive influx of North African, particularly Algerian, Jews in the 1960s. British Jewry, the second largest (300,000), revived as part of the processes of British reconstruction.

Germany has become the third largest Jewish community in Western Europe through the settlement of Eastern European displaced persons who remained after the war, Israelis who followed them in the 1950s and subsequently, and Jews from the former Soviet Union who have arrived more recently. It has approximately 50,000 Jews within its borders and is predicted to have 100,000 in a few years. The other European Jewish communities west of the Iron Curtain followed the same pattern of reconstruction and reconstitution in their own ways in a manner compatible with their respective sizes. Even communities that had little or no Jewish life throughout the modern epoch because of pre-modern expulsions, such as Spain, found themselves with smaller but very real Jewish communities that developed in the postwar years through immigration

of wartime refugees, Jews from Arab lands, and Israelis.

East of the Iron Curtain, the few remaining Jews outside the Soviet Union hung on by their toenails throughout the Communist years, only to reemerge in communities after 1989. Hungary, always among the largest, remains the largest and most active today with 56,000 Jews. But now there are reports that the less than 4,000 Jews listed in Poland at the end of the Communist regime have become as many as 80,000 as others have emerged out of hiding, as it were.

A similar situation exists in the former Soviet Union. Although close to 850,000 Jews are documented as having left since its gates opened this last time, estimates of the number of Jews remaining range from a million and a half to three million. The story of the revival of Jewish life in those successor states is in itself a chapter worthy of note in Jewish history, one that demonstrates the great capacity of Jews for self-organization at any opportunity.

We should note three facts about these population figures. First, most are estimates, especially in the largest Jewish communities, and no official census figures are available. Even where official figures are available, they only show who is enrolled in the Jewish community and many Jews, while known as Jews, do not enroll in the community for various reasons, not the least of which to avoid paying the extra taxes or other charges levied upon members.

Second, the definition of who is a Jew is almost entirely subjective. No *halakhic* criteria are used and in most cases none are even suggested as relevant. For example, Michael Chlenov, while head of the Jewish community of the Soviet Union in that interim period between the collapse of Communist restrictions and the dissolution of the USSR, stated in a private meeting that there were three kinds of Jews in the Soviet Union: those whose passports listed them as Jews, those who were Jews by ancestry but had succeeded in having a different nationality listed on their passports, and "those who shared the fate of the Jewish people." This latter category, which from any perspective elsewhere in the world would be considered for non-Jews, is no doubt the source of most of the non-Jewish migration to Israel. Without saying so in so many words, the vast majority of European Jews are adamant on using this broad and inclusive definition of "who is a Jew" or one similar to it.

Third, the most scientific population figures seem to be underestimates. In every documented case that we have, whenever more detailed studies have been

ESTIMATED JEWISH POPULATION IN EUROPE, END 1992

<i>Country</i>	<i>Jewish Population</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Jewish Population</i>
Belgium	31,800	Belarus	46,600
Denmark	6,400	Estonia	3,400
France	530,000	Latvia	13,500
Germany	50,000	Lithuania	6,500
Greece	4,800	Moldova	19,400
Ireland	1,800	Russia	415,000
Italy	31,000	Ukraine	276,000
Luxembourg	600		
Netherlands	25,600	<i>Total former USSR</i>	
Portugal	300	<i>in Europe</i>	780,000
Spain	12,000		
United Kingdom	298,000	Bosnia-Herzegovina	300
		Bulgaria	1,900
<i>Total European Community</i>	992,300	Croatia	1,400
		Czech Republic	3,800
Austria	7,000	Hungary	56,000
Finland	1,300	Poland	3,600
Gibraltar	600	Romania	16,000
Norway	1,000	Slovakia	3,800
Sweden	15,000	Slovenia	100
Switzerland	19,000	Turkey	19,500
		Yugoslavia	1,700
<i>Total other West Europe</i>	44,000		
		<i>Total other East Europe and Balkans</i>	108,100
			=====
		<i>Total Jewish Population</i>	1,924,800

Source: U.O. Schmelz and Sergio DellaPergola, "World Jewish Population, 1992," *American Jewish Year Book 1994* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1994).

made or Jewish emigrants have left the country for Israel or elsewhere, more Jews have suddenly come out into the open, increasing the numbers to at least the earlier totals if not beyond.

What we can say is that in Europe west of the CIS it is reasonable to assume that there are 1,300,000 Jews, while minimum estimates in the CIS claim at least 1,500,000. Either concentration is substantial. Separately or together, the nearly three million Jews of Europe represent the third largest continental concentration of Jews in the world after North America and Israel.

Lagging Linkage Among European Jewries

But despite the Jewish revivals countrywide, the European Jewish communities have been laggard in their European linkages. Unlike the rest of Europe, they have not created a European Union or anything like it for themselves. At most they have some weak to moderately functioning pan-European leagues, most of which are sustained from the outside by the efforts of Jews of the United States and Israel through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the World Jewish Congress, B'nai B'rith, or the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Indeed, the communities of continental Europe, both West and East, not only benefited substantially in their reconstruction from the Joint Distribution Committee's funding and leadership, but remained dependent upon both long after their communities had revived themselves organizationally.

Without serious linkages, most of the Jewish communities of Europe, possibly (but not likely) excepting France and Britain, are small and weak, without the demographic or economic wherewithal to provide for their needs as Jewish communities, jeopardizing Jewish continuity and even Jewish survival. For example, with those two possible exceptions above, they do not have the resources to train their own rabbis or teachers, Jewish communal professionals, or other needed personnel. They cannot sustain more than the simplest Jewish educational experiences for their children and even those depend upon importing teachers and *shlichim* from Israel. The smaller communities cannot even provide potential Jewish marriage partners for all of their young people, nor can they undertake the tasks of political representation of European Jewry on questions of European Jewish interest such as *shechita*, combatting racism and anti-Semitism, or mobilizing support for Israel. In very few if any fields can they bring to bear the true weight of the millions of Jews now living in Europe. Thus the first item on the European Jewish agenda must be to establish a European Jewry to do at least as well at achieving union as the existing European states have done for themselves.

The difficulties of habit, language, and culture make this a more than simple task, but in an environment of greater linkage and confederal linkage at that, the Jewish communities at the very least have a hospitable climate for doing what they need to do. These are no longer the days of the nineteenth century when the European powers discouraged "their" Jews from affiliating with the Alliance Israelite Universelle on the grounds that such ties made the Jews susceptible to foreign influences, and encouraged them instead to set up their own separate countrywide organizations even for international Jewish relief. Now the Jews are free to pursue their own interests in the matter.

Those interests must be to aggregate their strength so as to bring as much of it to bear on their needs as possible. Moreover, this linkage can now be based on federal principles rather than on unification. The old statist Europe had little or no room for federalism in any form since its states strove to become homogeneous, centralized, and self-sufficient. Now, however, led by the EU and supported by the other European

multi-national organizations, federalism in its confederal mode has not only become acceptable but even desirable. European Jewish communities as well as others now have the option of developing unity on the basis of confederal links that recognize the differences of habit, language, and culture in each country on the continent.

European Jewry in World Jewish Affairs

Nor is this need for linkage only for purposes of strengthening internal European Jewish life, important as that is. For fifty years or more the Jewish world has been a bipolar world with Israel and the United States its two pillars. All other Jewries have had to stand far behind the Jewish communities of those two countries in world Jewish affairs. This is not healthy for them, nor is it healthy for world Jewry. It is not even good for the two pillars.

The Jewish world needs a strong European Jewry that is backed by its millions to at least the same degree that American and Israeli Jewries are. Moreover, by assuming its proper world role, European Jewry will strengthen itself internally. It will gain a new sense of itself. It will develop a continent-wide leadership because it will have a field of sufficient scope to attract the people it needs. Moreover, those of its needs which can no longer be handled locally, community by community in Europe, will gain in attention and support on a European basis. The fact is that not even American Jewry or the Jewish dimensions of Israel can be served in isolation. The world has grown together at such a rapid pace and the needs have become so great that only concerted action on the part of world Jewry as a whole, with each of its segments pulling its weight, can make possible Jewish continuity or even survival.

The European Jewish Agenda:

Beyond that, what are the other items on the European Jewish community agenda? Those tasks include:

1. Community Building

While every one of the communities has its organizational structure, in many cases they are structures that hang on problematically, and in every case, even in the most successful communities, in order to have continuity new leadership must be developed to take their responsibilities when the time comes. Links have to be established between the disparate ideological and religious groupings of a community, and the organized community has to form better links with the public it is designed to serve.

2. Federated Fundraising

This may necessitate a restructuring of the fundraising system. Historically, European Jewish communities relied upon communal taxation for funding. This was true even in the modern period when the governments levied or collected the taxes involved. With the increased separation between religion and state in Europe, fundraising, like other matters of affiliation and participation, has become primarily voluntary. In the past, the voluntary aspect was primarily directed to raising money for support of Israel through Keren Hayesod. For some time now, support of communal institutions and Jewish education has also come to be based on voluntary fundraising. Perhaps it is time to follow the North American model and combine fundraising for domestic and external Jewish causes into one federated campaign in each community, united, countrywide, and perhaps beyond that, in order to raise the maximum amount available. This needs to be seriously explored.

3. Jewish Education

In Europe, as elsewhere, there is great weakness in Jewish education in contemporary Jewish communities. To use economic terminology, it is a combination of weaknesses — in service delivery, among service providers, and with regard to consumer desires. Any of these weaknesses by themselves could defeat the enterprise. Together they represent a combination that no Jewish community in the world has yet been able to fully overcome. Here is where European Jewry needs to be involved with the rest of the world both to stimulate consumer interest and to secure better service providers, but the effort must be made in all arenas simultaneously.

It may be more possible to improve Jewish education as the school choice movement that arose in the United States and that is already influencing Israel as well comes to Europe. European statism in the past strongly opposed choice systems in education because the education system was seen as the way to induce loyalty to the state. Only where the dominant religion, Catholic or Protestant, was so strong that its educational needs had to be recognized did the state compromise. In some cases Jews benefited from that compromise, but in many cases what they could win in the political arena they lost as the social forces pressed for high homogeneity, making Jewish exceptionalism in education less acceptable or, of necessity, uncompromising, so that those who went to Jewish schools could not easily secure integration into the larger society to the extent that they wished to. That may begin to change now that statism itself has been seriously weakened.

4. Defining Who is a Jew

This is becoming an increasingly serious problem in Europe, compounded by the fact that European Jews, enjoying the new openness of European society and their acceptance within it, are very reluctant to even seem as if they are being exclusive. Nevertheless, every group that aspires to continuity must have rules of affiliation. One does not become a citizen of one's state of residence simply by crossing the border. One must either be born within it or naturalized, and in some cases (the *gastarbeiter*, for example), being born within the state is not sufficient to endow a person with citizenship. Every organization has its rules of membership.

No matter how much Jews desire to be open, they, too, must have some rules. They can be welcoming rather than restrictive rules, but some sort of solution must be found to the excessive fluidity of today which survives only because there is enough residual tribalism among European Jews that non-Jews who marry into the community can — in some cases — still be carried along by the tribal identification of their partners. Moreover, the rules that are arrived at must be acceptable to the great majority of Jews in Israel, North America, and the rest of the Jewish world as well if the Jews are to remain one people.

One way to do this might be to begin by making a distinction between full and associate membership, the latter entitling people in Chlenov's third category to all of the services of the Jewish community except those proscribed to non-Jews religiously. In this way a basis for bringing non-Jewish partners or those non-Jews interested in Judaism closer to the community would find expression while at the same time allowing for reasonable membership and traditional membership criteria.

An arrangement such as this is more possible today as the world Jewish polity has returned to a situation in which the civil authorities are dominant in a way that they had not been for nearly two thousand years. The Jewish people and their polity was always based on the division of human authority within it into three domains — the traditional Hebrew term used is *ketarim* (crowns) — each of which, according to the Bible, receives its authority directly from God. The three are the *keter malkhut* (the crown of civil rule), the *keter torah*, and the *keter kehunah* (the crown of priesthood).

The first deals with the day-to-day problems of governance of the Jewish people and has been at different times in Jewish history in the hands of kings, patriarchs, judges, designated community elites, and elected representatives of the community. The second

deals with the transmission of the Divine message and its requirements to the people. It has been variously in the hands of prophets, sages, scholarly heads of yeshivot and other religious academies, and, most recently, leading scholars of Jewish studies. The third connects the people with the transcendent by enabling them to give public expression to their religious needs. It has variously been in the hands of priests, congregational rabbis, and other synagogue officiants.

During the period of the Second Commonwealth all three domains functioned and indeed competed with one another. With the destruction of the Second Temple, the *keter kehunah* was reduced to providing local services in Jewish congregations and the authority of the *keter malkhut* became drastically limited because the Jewish people was no longer politically independent. So the *keter torah* became the dominant domain. It held that position until the modern epoch when another reversal took place. As the authority of the traditional Torah broke down, the vacuum generated within the Jewish people came to be filled by those who advanced the civil and political causes in Jewish life — emancipation and citizenship, Zionism, the fight against anti-Semitism, and the other political issues which have preoccupied modern Jews at least since the French Revolution.

Today, the differences of opinion within the *keter torah* and *keter kehunah* are so sharp that in many cases representatives of those *ketarim* will not sit with one another on the common agendas of their respective domains. Until now, however, all have managed to continue to sit together in matters pertaining to the *keter malkhut*. Moreover, the development of more comprehensive secular expressions of Jewish life have additionally strengthened that *keter* so that it may begin to take the kinds of steps needed in this arena.

5. Jewish Religious Life

Still, the *keter malkhut* alone cannot hold together the Jewish people or its communities. It has long been proven that unless at least two out of the three *ketarim* are functioning well, the Jewish people is so truncated as to be in danger. This means that however strong and beneficial the *keter malkhut* may be in today's Europe, European Jewry ignores the other two *ketarim* at its peril.

Unlike the Jews of the United States or even Israel, the Jews of Europe as a whole lack the religious commitment that once was the norm. As always in recent times, Jews are among those who as a group display the least religious commitment, viewing their

Jewishness as a matter of ethnicity or in some cases disability. Only a minority see it as a matter of Judaism and conduct their lives according to Jewish tradition. Indeed, European Jewish activists, with the exception of a small Orthodox minority, are presently riding the crest of a wave of secularism. Many of their intellectuals are working to develop a new secular Jewish identity, apparently unaware of the failure of such efforts in the rest of the Jewish world including Israel over the past two centuries whenever and wherever they have been tried. Moreover, they bristle when this latter point is raised by Jews from other communities.

While we are all thankful for the freedom to choose, it has now become increasingly clear that Jewishness cannot survive without Judaism, that no secular solution to the Jewish question, not even Zionism or Israel, has the power to sustain humans born Jews in their Jewishness. Yet the search for normality, which in today's world is a search to be part of the international popular culture that pervades the world, is stronger than any but the most deeply grounded calls for exceptionalism.

Jews should not kid themselves; being Jewish is hard. It demands sacrifices, including a rejection of "normalization" — of being "like all the nations," on behalf of Jewish affirmation. On the other hand, it is rather like an exclusive club, not because it keeps people out to maintain exclusivity, but because it demands the best in people. Under these limitations, it should be open to everyone.

All serious Jews always are trying to be better Jews. This means that, without excluding anyone in our priorities, Jewish communities are first and foremost for those who are striving to be better Jews. They are not designed to make it easier for those who simply seek normalization to be included. All those who care must share that aspiration, each in an appropriate way. That is the real divide for contemporary Jews — not between Israel and the diaspora or between particular diaspora communities, but between those who want to be better Jews and those who seek normalization above all.

It is difficult to suggest exactly how this religious revival can be given form. That is the province of others who may or may not be able to suggest and implement the right steps. But the communities can play a facilitative role by making the budgets available for the requisite Jewish education and relevant programming.

This is necessary even if, in the face of the overextension of the welfare state and the retreat of social

democracy, there may be burdens imposed on the communities to maintain certain minimum standards for their members that the state will no longer maintain. If so, these will be expensive and a serious drain on already strained communal budgets and will have to be approached with a great deal of judicious consideration.

6. Jewish Culture and Civilization

This may prove to be a field more susceptible to community activity, possible to foster on limited budgets, available to all who seek it without having to make determinations as to who is a Jew that are mired in controversy and that will be accepted as the Jewish contribution to the local cultural scene. Indeed, in a so strongly secular Jewish community, Jewish culture and civilization may provide the best vehicles in the short run for maintaining Jewish unity, although it is hard to see how young European Jews who have grown up without either in their personal experiences will easily be able to attach themselves to Jewish culture and civilization. It can be done, but it requires serious effort, more of an effort than most young European Jews seem to be interested in exerting. These then should be high priorities on the communal agenda.

7. Political and Representational Activity

Foreign affairs is a perennial need of any community which seeks to maintain itself within a framework of good relations with its hosts or neighbors. Jews have rarely appreciated the fact that many of our political and representational activities, which tend to be couched in the most moralistic of terms, are actually exercises in foreign relations. For example, it is natural for Jews to fight anti-Semitism as a human scourge, especially after our most recent experiences with its manifestations; indeed, it is wise to enter into coalitions with others to deal with common or similar problems.

We must keep up our political and representational activities, but would be wise to do so in a judicious and sober manner, recognizing that these are not all or nothing fights that, once won, are won forever, but rather elements in an ongoing task of living peacefully and securely in the world where we are a highly visible minority. This requires a strategy rendered doubly difficult by the emotional responses of most Jews to the critical issues on the Jewish political and representational agenda. Increasingly, the political and representational activities of European Jewry will need to be conducted in at least two arenas. One is the arena of individual states and the other, the European-wide arena.

The external affairs issues that seem to most concern Jews, which rest so heavily on questions of human rights, have been foremost among those that have been moved to multi-national European arenas. The EU has taken the lead in making human rights a matter of EU business, with a constitutional court that has been quite active on that issue. But so, too, are most of the other less powerful Europe-wide bodies. Yet the Jews have been rather laggard in developing appropriate political and representational institutions for the new Europe-wide arenas. European Jewry is notably underrepresented in Brussels even though, since the establishment of the European Community, Brussels has turned into a major center for lobbying by nongovernmental groups. Hopefully, European Jewry will decide to change this situation before long, especially since it could prove to be one of the most important vehicles for developing European Jewish unity in a feasible and non-interfering way. This should be a matter of real priority.

For the first time, European Jews must begin to learn to deal with the kind of open communities that early on became prevalent, even dominant, in the New World, where historic anti-Semitism and a corporatism fostered by the state served to keep most Jews in the community most of the time. European Jewry rightly celebrates this new openness, but it must develop ways to deal with it for Jewish survival and continuity. In part, this consists of giving people what they want, of providing for diversity, provided that such diversity is limited to those things which are authentically Jewish. To give people what they want in such a way that is anti-Jewish or at cross purposes with Jewish survival and continuity is not the task of the Jewish community, especially since the people who want that can find it elsewhere. European Jewish communities must stand for Jewishness first and foremost.

Arenas of Organization and Activity

In all of the foregoing, there must be communal activity in several arenas: local, European-wide, and worldwide. In part because of our historical tradition and in part because of our historical circumstances, the Jewish people has always had to function within those three arenas on a federal basis. There have been virtues and advantages in that, but inevitably the relationships among the arenas generate a certain amount of tension and require a certain amount of negotiated cooperation. However, where any of those arenas is lacking, communal function suffers.

In the modern epoch, the local and countryside

arenas were well developed while the world arena was undergoing a great transition and those in it were feeling their way. With the establishment of Israel at the very beginning of the postmodern epoch and the mobilization of North American Jewry in its support, a worldwide arena of substance was initiated for the first time since the collapse of the Muslim empire in the eleventh century. European Jewry at that time was in the throes of reconstruction or reconquest by the Soviet Union and was naturally unable to participate in the arena's birth the way it might have wished at an earlier time.

The first generation of the postmodern epoch witnessed the consolidation of Israel and the Jewries

of the New World and culminated in the reconstitution of the Jewish Agency which provided an active locus for a world Jewish politics which rapidly emerged. Because of its special situation, European Jewry has remained a laggard participant in this new world arena. The time has come to change that.

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