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Milestones in Israel's Relations with East-Central Europe and the Soviet Union: A Timeline

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Introduction

Israel's relations with the former communist states of Central and Eastern Europe were characterized by dramatic vicissitudes. Most significantly, these states (other than Yugoslavia) supported the establishment of Israel on the international level and some supplied arms and ammunition to Israel during its War of Independence. Shortly thereafter, however, the policy of those countries (except for Romania's) took an extremely antisemitic and anti-Israel turn under the leadership of the Soviet Union. This gradually led to the severance of diplomatic relations with Israel (again, except for Romania) following the Six-Day War in June 1967. Relations were slowly renewed after Mikhail Gorbachev rose to power in the Soviet Union and after the collapse of the communist regimes under its domination. The following timeline presents the significant milestones in the evolution of Israel's relations with these states and the differences that existed in their policies during the period when mutual relations were severed.

The Soviet Union

When the question of Palestine was raised at the UN General Assembly in May 1947, the Soviet Union, in a surprising move, deviated from the rigid anti-Zionist stance it had maintained since the early 1920s and which was shared by Communist parties around the world. In his appearance before the plenum of the UN General Assembly on May 14, 1947, the head of the Soviet delegation to the UN proposed

the establishment of an independent, democratic Jewish–Arab state in Palestine. If that could not be achieved because of the troubled relations between Arabs and Jews, he proposed dividing the Land of Israel into two independent states: one Jewish and one Arab. This, he said, would have profound historical significance, since it would satisfy the legal demands of the Jewish people, hundreds of thousands of whom had been left without a land or home after World War II.

May 17, 1948: The USSR grants *de jure* recognition to Israel, and thus is the first country to grant it full recognition.

June 27, 1948: Tel Aviv and Moscow formally announce the exchange of official representatives. The Soviet legation in Tel Aviv is opened on August 10, 1948, headed by Pavel Yershov, and the Israeli legation in Moscow is opened on September 6, 1948, headed by Golda Meir.

September 21, 1948: An article signed by the Jewish author Ilya Ehrenburg, a member of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in Moscow and one of the most important voices in the Soviet press during World War II, is published in *Pravda* (the organ of the Communist Party of the USSR), speaking out against the Nazi invaders. The publication of that article marked the beginning of the Soviet Union's shift in its attitude toward Israel. It contained a warning to Israel not to be tempted by American capital, lest it lose its independence, and not to encourage Soviet Jews to immigrate to Israel, lest this create a conflict between it and the Soviet Union and among Soviet Jews themselves.

November 24, 1948: The USSR submits a draft resolution to the Third (political) Committee of the UN General Assembly, which demands that it recommend the immediate withdrawal of the Arab armies that invaded Palestine. The Soviet representative to the committee declares that Israel was born as a result of an armed struggle for its freedom and independence.

December 16, 1948: The Soviet weekly *Novoye Vremya* complains about the lack of gratitude on the part of Israel, the policy of which it claims is anti-Soviet, "despite the consistent help of the USSR to the Jewish State."

December 19, 1948: The Soviet Union votes in favor of accepting Israel into the UN. The proposal is rejected due to the lack of a sufficient majority.

May 5, 1949: The Soviet Union's representative to the UN demands that Israel be accepted immediately as a member of the UN and condemns the procrastination taking place on this issue.

May 11, 1949: Israel is accepted as a full member of the United Nations with the vigorous support of the Soviet Union.

85 **October 10, 1949:** The Soviet assessment of Israel's policy is published for the first time in *Economic Issues*. The article was authored by Y.L. Lutzky, a Soviet expert on Middle Eastern affairs, who said that Israel's leaders had opened their country to American economic influence; that they were ready to join an aggressive Mediterranean bloc with Britain and the United States in its confrontation with the Soviet Union; and that the leaders of Mapai stand with the West and were agents of American imperialism.

90 **May 23, 1950:** During a Mapai conference at Kibbutz Afikim, David Ben-Gurion announces: "We demand that the USSR gives the Jews living within its borders the right to join us and participate in the building of our sovereign state. We send our blessings to the Jews of Russia and say to them: 'Our hope—your hope—is not lost. We will call on the Soviet Union to allow every Jew in its territory who wishes to join our creative enterprise to do so.'"

95 **October 4, 1950:** At the outbreak of the Korean War, Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett opposes the Soviet proposal in the UN calling for the withdrawal of American forces deployed in Korea.

100 **October 30, 1950:** The Israeli representative to the UN joins those opposing the Soviet draft resolution on a peace treaty and the imposition of a prohibition on the use of nuclear weapons.

105 **November 21, 1951:** In a letter sent to all Middle Eastern countries, including Israel, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko denounces the proposed American regional command plan, and warns that joining the command would worsen their relations with the Soviet Union.

110 **December 8, 1951:** Israel's responds to the Soviet statement saying that it had not been invited to join the command. This was due to the fact that there were no foreign bases in its territory and its posture was generally peaceful. On this occasion, Israel calls on the Soviet government to permit the immigration of Jews from its territory to Israel.

115 **December 8, 1952:** *Pravda* denounces the "campaign of incitement by the Zionist leaders" in connection with the Slánský Trial in Prague, in which the secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was accused, *inter alia*, of conspiring with Israel and Jewish and Zionist organizations to topple the Communist regime there and in neighboring countries. Slánský, a Jew by birth, was sentenced to death. 120 Eventually Czechoslovakia dropped the charges of treason against him, and he and the others accused were exonerated.

January 13, 1953: The "Doctors' Plot" in the Soviet Union is made public. A large group of Jewish doctors were charged in connection with an attempted poisoning

of Stalin after having allegedly received instructions from Jewish and Zionist organizations. Though the group was likely to be sentenced to death, its members were cleared of all charges after Stalin's death on March 5, 1953.

125 **January 19, 1953:** Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett addresses the Knesset regarding the "Doctors' Plot" and the fact that most of those implicated were Jews:

130 The State of Israel cannot remain silent regarding any attempt by a political entity to besmirch the name of the Jewish people, especially in view of the danger posed to the masses of Jews living there [in the Soviet Union]. The Israeli government always regarded friendly relations with the Soviet Union as a major source of support internationally and as a precious asset of the Jewish people. Israel looks with deep sorrow and extreme concern upon the malicious line of slander that has been officially adopted in the Soviet Union against Jews, and that will only encourage the most abject resentment and vigorous condemnation by the State of Israel and the masses of Jewish people around the world ... The government of Israel will denounce at the United Nations and on every available stage the incitement that is being waged against the Jewish people in the countries of the Communist regime, will condemn the aspersions being cast upon its representative organizations, and will warn of the danger posed to the safety of millions of Jews in these countries. The Israeli government will continue to demand ... the right of all Jews whose souls yearn for Zion to be able to immigrate to the State of Israel.

145 **February 9, 1953:** Explosive material is thrown at the Soviet legation in Tel Aviv. Three members of the Soviet staff are injured. The Israeli president and prime minister express deep sorrow at the act and promise to apprehend the criminals and bring them to justice.

150 **February 13, 1953:** The government of the USSR notifies the government of Israel of its decision to sever mutual relations.

155 **February 19, 1953:** In the Knesset, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion expresses great surprise and concern over the Soviet Union's decision to sever relations with Israel.

February 19–27, 1953: The staff of Israel's legation in Moscow leaves the Soviet Union. The Soviet legation staff in Tel Aviv leaves Israel.

160 **June 1, 1953:** Diplomatic relations between the two countries are renewed after negotiations between their representatives in Sofia. This happened some three months after the death of Stalin, the end of the libelous "Doctors' Plot" affair, and Israel's commitment not to join an anti-Soviet military alliance. From then

until June 10, 1967, those relations waxed and waned until their sudden severance in the wake of the Six-Day War.

165 1953–1956: Relations are stabilized along with diplomatic developments in trade, communication, and culture.

170 November 5, 1956: A significant worsening in mutual relations occurs with the onset of "Operation Kadesh" [the Sinai Campaign], and the Soviet–Egyptian arms deal that preceded it. Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Bulganin sent a letter to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, in which he wrote: "By following instructions from overseas, the Israeli government is playing with the peace and the fate of her people. Israel is sowing hatred among the nations of the Middle East, in such a way that it will inevitably influence the future of Israel, casing into question its very existence as a state."

175 1957–1966: Mutual relations are rehabilitated.

180 1966–1967: A severe crisis arises as a result of the of the Soviet Middle East policy and its political and military assistance to Arab countries. This developed against the backdrop of the Ba'ath Party's ascent to power in Syria and the escalation of tensions along Israel's borders with Syria and Egypt.

185 June 10, 1967: The Soviet government decides to sever diplomatic relations with Israel as a result of the Six-Day War, but also due to residual antisemitism and the global struggle initiated by Israel on behalf of Soviet Jewry.

190 1967–1987: Throughout the years of severed diplomatic relations and until the second half of the 1980s, the Soviet Union engaged in harsh anti-Israel propaganda domestically and supported Arab states and the PLO in their struggle against Israel in the international arena, in addition to the massive military aid it provided the Arab states. This period came to a close toward the end of the 1980s during the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. The softening resulted in Jews receiving exit permits, allowing them to immigrate to Israel, as well as in the renewal of mutual relations, in three phases:

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- 1987–1988: Consular delegations are exchanged under the auspices of embassies representing the two nations (Holland for Israel, and Finland for the USSR).
 - 1990: Official relations are established at the consular level.
 - 200 • October 1991: Diplomatic relations are fully renewed during the visit of Soviet Foreign Minister Boris Pankin to Israel. This was on the eve of the Madrid Conference, which sought to bring about a settlement to the Arab–Israeli conflict under the auspices of the United States and the Soviet Union. From the 1980s until that point, the Soviet Union had called for international

conferences aiming to resolve the conflict under the auspices of the permanent members of the Security Council in cooperation with Israel and the PLO as "the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." Israel had rejected this proposal, arguing that it did not have diplomatic relations with two of the permanent members, the Soviet Union and China, and because the PLO called for the annihilation of Israel in its National Charter.

October 30, 1991: Gorbachev outlines the Soviet principles for the resolution of the Arab–Israeli conflict during the Madrid Conference as follows:

- Security Council Resolution 242 of the UN is valid concerning all borders.
- The Palestinians (no mention of the PLO) have the right to self-determination, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.
- The resolution of the Israel–Arab conflict will progress in stages. The issue of Jerusalem, sensitive and complicated as it is, will be decided at the end of the peace process, not at the beginning.
- The establishment of new Jewish settlements in the territories administered by Israel should be ceased. This would be considered a gesture by Israel toward the Arabs, who would regard it as a positive step.

December 13, 1991: The ambassador of the Soviet Union submits his credentials to the president of the State of Israel in Jerusalem. This is the last time the Soviet anthem is played in such a ceremony, together with Hatikvah, and the last time an ambassador of the Soviet Union submits credentials to the president of a foreign nation. The new ambassador of Israel submits his credentials in the Soviet Union at the same time.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Israel establishes diplomatic relations with all its former republics. Russia, as the successor to the Soviet Union, maintains friendly relations with Israel in the political, tourist, aviation, maritime, commercial, economic, agricultural, and scientific fields. Regarding the Arab–Israeli conflict, Russia takes a much more balanced approach than did the Soviet Union; it is a part of the Quartet seeking to resolve the conflict. The immigration of Russian Jews to Israel and their emigration to Western countries is free. Jewish communities throughout Russia—as in all the other former Soviet republics—are developing national, religious, and cultural lives, as well as their ties with Israel and other Diaspora communities around the world.

Albania

April 16, 1949: Albania accords Israel *de jure* recognition. Despite the fact that the cable, signed by the Albanian prime minister and foreign minister, stated that "the

government of the People's Republic of Albania and the Albanian people are following intently the efforts that the Jewish people have invested in renewing their freedom, independence, and sovereignty, and are pleased to see that these efforts were successfully crowned with the declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel," it avoided establishing diplomatic relations with Israel—despite Israel's attempts—during all the years of Communist rule in that country. Relations were established for the first time on August 19, 1991, with the collapse of the Communist regime and the desire of the new Albanian regime to establish relations with Israel. Since that time, Israel was represented in Tirana first by its ambassador in Rome, and later by a non-resident ambassador based in Jerusalem. Albania, on the other hand, has been represented in Israel since 1999 by its ambassador in Tel Aviv. The two nations have signed agreements of cooperation in the fields of agriculture, tourism, culture, commerce, and the economy.

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Bulgaria

The Bulgarian people's longstanding sympathy for the Jewish minority in their country was maintained even after Bulgaria became a popular democracy (1946) and an integral part of the bloc of Communist countries in Eastern Europe. This was evident primarily in the granting of permits to Bulgarian Jews that allowed them to immigrate to Israel, which they did in droves between 1948 and 1949. Then-Prime Minister Georgi Dimitrov is remembered well for viewing the *aliyah* of Bulgarian Jews as a return to their historic homeland, and for incorporating those Jews who chose to remain into the social, economic, cultural, scientific, and political life of Bulgaria. Furthermore, Bulgaria accorded *de jure* recognition to Israel in February of 1949 and trade, economic, and tourism ties between the two nations begin to develop. The Israeli legation operated in Sofia and the Bulgarian legation was based in Tel Aviv. This state of affairs lasted until Bulgaria, along with all other Soviet Bloc countries except Romania, severed relations with Israel on June 11, 1967. Throughout the years of the Communist regime, Bulgaria behaved like all other Soviet Bloc countries in the political sphere. However, during the years of severed ties between 1967 and 1990, Bulgaria continued to maintain its trade and tourism relations with Israel, and its domestic propaganda was less hostile to Israel than that of the Soviet Union. Diplomatic relations were renewed in May 1990 at the level of embassies. Israel and Bulgaria signed cooperation agreements in the economic, commercial, tourism, aviation, cultural, and scientific arenas. The Israeli embassy operated in Sofia and the Bulgarian in Tel Aviv.

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Hungary

Hungary joined the countries of the Communist Bloc in Eastern Europe (except Romania) when on June 12, 1967 it notified Israel—under pressure from the

Soviet Union — of its decision to sever diplomatic ties following the Six-Day War. Bilateral relations up until that point had been rather cool. However, Hungary was the first among the former Soviet Bloc nations to renew ties, on September 18, 1989. In contrast to the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, Hungary had never cut its trade ties with Israel throughout the years of severed relations, and its anti-Israel propaganda was conducted on a low profile. Despite this, at the United Nations, Hungary would vote with the countries of the Communist Bloc on all of the anti-Israeli resolutions proposed by the Soviet Union and the Arab states. From 1983 until the renewal of diplomatic relations, the following milestones should be noted:

July 1, 1983: An agreement, the first of its kind, is signed between the Bank of Israel and the National Bank of Hungary for the expansion of bilateral trade by opening lines of credit and setting up arrangements for mutual economic ties.

1983: A comprehensive book entitled *Jerusalem*, by the Hungarian author Daniel Rapcsany and with illustrations by the Jerusalem artist Yossi Stern, is published in Hungary with an initial release of 70,000 copies. The author had visited Israel as a guest of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the book excels in its objective description of the city of the three faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) against the backdrop of its historical and religious importance.

Also in 1983, the first association for the promotion of Israeli-Hungarian relations is established in Israel at the initiative of Moshe Zanbar, the Hungarian-born Governor of the Bank of Israel, and with the encouragement of the MFA in Jerusalem.

1984: Three Israeli writers — Ben-Zion Tomer, Asher Reich, and Itamar Yazo-Kest — travel to Budapest for talks with the director of the Hungarian publishing house "Europe" following an agreement to publish an anthology of new Hebrew poetry in Hungarian, as well as an anthology of Hungarian poetry in Hebrew, with the encouragement of the MFA in Jerusalem and the World Zionist Organization.

For the first time, an official delegation from Hungary visits Israel for the opening of an exhibition about the Jews of Hungary at the Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv.

1985: Several academic, tourism, and cultural exchanges, each the first of its kind, take place between Israel and Hungary this year:

- An agreement is reached between the Hungarian State Archives Authority and Yad Vashem for the exchange of archival material relating to the period of the Holocaust and the history of the Jews in Hungary.
- A delegation from the Hungarian Jewish community visits Israel for a global conference on Hungarian Jewry, held in Jerusalem.

- Hungarian authorities grant Israelis who wish to enter Hungary considerable leniency—whether to visit relatives or for business purposes—allowing Israeli citizens to obtain visas on the spot in any of Hungary’s embassies in Europe or when entering the country.
- 325 • A delegation of the World Jewish Congress visits Hungary and is invited to speak with official representatives. The delegation is accompanied by the Director of Diaspora Affairs at the MFA in Jerusalem. The talks focus on the subject of cooperation between Israel and Hungary, and between Hungary and world Jewry.
- 330 • Hungary participates in the International Book Fair held in Jerusalem. As part of the fair, the Hannah Szenes Prize was awarded by the Jerusalem Municipality to the Hungarian author Daniel Rapcsany, author of *Jerusalem*.

335 These and other milestones laid the foundation for the system of economic, trade, cultural, and tourism ties between the two countries. They also helped develop relations with the Jewish communities in Hungary, even in the era of severed diplomatic relations, but especially after their renewal.

340 The foreign ministers of Israel and Hungary met for political talks in the context of the UN General Assembly in 1985 and 1986. Following these meetings, delegations from the two sides met August 9–12, 1987 in Vienna and agreed to open interest sections in Budapest and Tel Aviv. These offices operated as embassies for all intents and purposes. About two years passed from the time of their establishment until the renewal of diplomatic relations. The signing ceremony for the protocol of the renewal of relations took place in Budapest, where Israel was represented by Foreign Minister Moshe Arens. Shortly after, agreements on cooperation between the two countries were signed and further agreements were added in the 1990s. These agreements expanded and deepened mutual ties in many areas. There were exchanges of visits by presidents, prime ministers, and foreign ministers, among others. At the United Nations, Hungary began to take balanced positions on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and to promote a solution that would be acceptable to both sides.

355 Yugoslavia

From the start, Yugoslavia was involved in the affairs of the Land of Israel as a communist republic, when it was a member of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), which was established at the initiative of the UN. Most of the members of the committee recommended that the Land of Israel be divided into two states: one Jewish and one Arab. Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia were among the minority who objected to that recommendation in favor of a binational state in the Land of Israel. Yugoslavia’s reasoning was that a federated national framework like its own would also suit other nations. When the Partition

Plan was put to a vote in the UN General Assembly on November 29, 1947, Yugoslavia was the only one of the ten East-Central European countries to abstain. Despite this, Yugoslavia accorded Israel *de jure* recognition in its first month of independence and in short time, diplomatic representatives were exchanged between the two countries.

In their shared historical memory, several important points stand out in the early relations between Yugoslavia, the Jewish people, and pre-State Israel. First, there were many Jews among the people of Yugoslavia who fought alongside the partisans under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980) during the Nazi occupation. Second, Yugoslavia served as a transit station for "illegal" Jewish immigrants who arrived from 1946–47 intending to sail from its shores to Mandatory Palestine. Third, the transfer of arms through Yugoslav territory to Israel during its War of Independence in 1948 was a crucial component of Israel's military capacity.

Under the rule of Tito, Yugoslavia was one of the first states in the Communist Bloc to initiate a severance of ties with Israel at the end of the Six-Day War in June 1967. It was also the last to renew them, in October 1991. However, unlike the Communist nations—Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia—that automatically sided with the Soviet Union in their decisions to sever ties with Israel, Yugoslavia did so out of independent considerations.

The period from 1948 to the severance of ties in 1967 was characterized by the development of close bilateral ties between the two states, especially in the fields of economics, trade, sport, culture, and tourism—except during the Sinai Campaign (1956). During that time, political relations deteriorated, though without coming to the brink of complete rupture, as happened after the Six-Day War. During the years of severed ties (1967–91), Yugoslavia adopted a harshly anti-Israeli policy at the United Nations and in its constituent bodies, in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, in the Forum of the Non-Aligned States (of which it was part of the leadership), and in its domestic propaganda. Yugoslavia extended military and diplomatic aid to the PLO, and the PLO delegation in Belgrade had the status of embassy. Tito hosted the head of the PLO, Yasir Arafat, during his visits to Yugoslavia with all the ceremonial trappings typically afforded prime ministers. During the years of severed ties, the following demands regarding the Arab–Israeli conflict were made by Yugoslavia at the United Nations and in other political forums, including those of the Non-Aligned Movement:

- Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories conquered in the Six-Day War, including Jerusalem.
- The cessation of settlement construction in Judea, Samaria, Gaza, and the Golan, and the removal of existing "illegal" settlements.
- Recognition of the legal rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to self-determination; the establishment of an independent state in the territories

of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza; and recognition of the PLO as the legal representative of the Palestinian people.

- The Right of Return for Arab refugees who wish to return to their homeland, and reparations for those who do not wish to do so.
- Immediate development in talks on resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict under the auspices of the UN with the participation of all involved parties to the conflict, including the PLO as the only representative of the Palestinian people, with equal status to that of the other participants.
- A comprehensive solution, including the setting of recognized borders between the State of Israel and its neighbors, and alongside UN security guarantees to ensure peace and security for all the nations of the region including Israel.
- The imposition of sanctions on Israel "if it persists in its policy of expansion," as declared by Tito at the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Colombo, August 18, 1976. A year prior, this same demand was made by the Yugoslav foreign minister at the UN General Assembly.

These sharp calls were repeated again and again until the mid-1980s. From that point and until the renewal of relations, they began to soften, especially when domestic criticism of Yugoslavia's policy toward Israel intensified. This occurred due to the increasing awareness of the political contacts between Israel and the Soviet Union and the rest of the Communist Bloc countries in anticipation of the renewal of diplomatic relations between them.

September 30, 1987: A conversation is held between Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Yugoslav Foreign Minister Raif Dizdrević while they are attending the opening of the UN General Assembly. This was the first meeting between the two after twenty years of severed relations between their countries, and it took place at the initiative of the Yugoslav side. The main topic of conversation was the path to a solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict.

July 1, 1988: The Foreign Affairs Committee of the Yugoslav Parliament adopts a decision regarding the expansion of relations with Israel. This constitutes a kind of compromise between those demanding renewed diplomatic relations with Israel and those who oppose them.

September 27, 1988: A conversation is held between Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and the Foreign Minister of Yugoslavia, Budimir Lončar, when the two of them attend the opening ceremony of the UN General Assembly. This is the second conversation between the two countries' foreign ministers during the period in which they have no formal diplomatic ties. The main points addressed are paths to a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the potential for the establishment of mutual relations between the two countries. This conversation, just as

the one that preceded it a year earlier, did not yield any fruit regarding the renewal of diplomatic relations. Rather it reflected the desire of Yugoslavia as a member of the leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement to demonstrate its interest in finding a solution to the conflict, according to its declared positions.

October 27, 1988: Member of Knesset (MK) Abba Eban visits Yugoslavia, in the first visit of its kind. While there he holds three meetings: with Foreign Minister Lončar; with a member of the Socialist Alliance; and with the chairman of the parliamentary defense committee of the Federation of Yugoslavia. In all three, Eban clarifies Israel's positions regarding mutual relations between Yugoslavia and Israel, and paths to a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

January 1990: A member of the Yugoslav parliament presents his government's proposal to establish relations with Israel at the commercial, economic, and consular level during a visit to Israel. His proposal is rejected. In May 1990, the proposal is raised again by a representative of the Yugoslav government who is visiting Israel, emphasizing its importance in that it would lead to the renewal of diplomatic relations. This proposal, like the previous one, is rejected.

May 1991: Deputy Director General of the East Europe Department at the MFA, Yosef Govrin, visits Belgrade at the invitation of the MFA of Yugoslavia. This is the first time an Israeli MFA official is invited to Belgrade. In addition to dialogue about the Middle East, the visit was primarily intended to prepare the ground for the renewal of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

October 8, 1991: Letters are exchanged between the two foreign ministers on the renewal of diplomatic relations between their two nations. With the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federal Republic, between 1992 and 1996 Israel recognizes the independence of all the republics that had formed Federated Yugoslavia and develops friendly relations with each of them in the political sphere as well as in the fields of trade, economy, aviation, tourism, culture, and science.

Poland

Poland, along with the rest of the countries in the Soviet Bloc, was one of the first nations to recognize the State of Israel *de jure* on May 18, 1948. During the period of political struggle at the UN prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, and during the months of the War of Independence that followed, the government of Poland demonstrated its support for Israel. The foreign minister of Poland pushed forward a resolution in the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Soviet Bloc congratulating Israel on its independence and denouncing the Arab nations' attack. Once the War of Independence had erupted, the government of Poland permitted members of the Haganah to establish camps on its territory for 1,500 young people who would

undergo intensive training before their immigration to Israel. They went on to join the ranks during the War of Independence. In August 1948, Israel's legation in Warsaw opened—one of the first in the world to be established—and the emissary of Israel, Israel Barzilai, presented his credentials to the president of Poland in September 1948. The status of diplomatic representation was raised to the level of embassy, like that of relations between the Soviet Union and Israel.

With the cooling off of relations between the Soviet Union and Israel from 1950–1955, ties with Poland also deteriorated. In 1953, the Israeli representative in Warsaw (and in Prague), Dr. Arie Kubovy, was declared *persona non-grata*. Bilateral relations only began to improve in the fall of 1956. After a three-year hiatus, Israel had a representative, Katriel Katz, appointed in Poland. The improvement in bilateral relations was also manifested in the fact that the government permitted large-scale immigration of Polish Jews to Israel. Until then, most Jews were denied that option. In addition, the two countries saw an expansion in economic, commercial, cultural, and scientific ties.

A significant event took place in May 1966 when a conference of Israeli ambassadors to East-Central European states was held in Warsaw for the first time, headed by Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban and with the blessing of the Polish government. During the conference, Eban conducted a friendly talk with his Polish counterpart, Adam Rapacki, on developing bilateral ties and other international issues. This was the first visit of an Israeli foreign minister to Poland.

Relations took a turn for the worse in mid-May 1967, as seen in the virulent anti-Zionist and anti-Israel campaigns publicized in Polish state media. The campaigns expressed Poland's support for Egypt in its conflict with Israel and were conducted in the domestic and international arenas. Following the Six-Day War, Poland followed the lead of the Communist Bloc. On June 12, 1967, its government, headed by Władysław Gomułka, informed the Israeli government of its decision to sever bilateral ties. In addition, its antisemitic policy was made clear when the administration removed Jews, including those who were members of the Communist Party, from all key positions in government ministries. In the decade between 1967 and 1977, relations between Poland and Israel on the political, trade, and tourism levels were completely frozen. Poland's antisemitic image around the world apparently influenced its new government, led by Edward Gierek (after Gomułka was ousted from power at the end of 1970), to engage in contacts with Israel in order to create an atmosphere open for political negotiations, as described below:

April 1, 1977: The editor of the Polish weekly *Kultura* visits Israel. This is the first visit of a Polish journalist to Israel during the era of severed diplomatic relations between the two countries. In a meeting with the MFA's director of the East Europe Department, Yosef Govrin, the topics of the Middle East and bilateral

ties are discussed. This visit lays the foundation for continued contacts between the two sides.

December 1977: Eli Zborowski, Deputy Chairman of the World Organization of Polish Jewry and Chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem, visits Poland. He speaks with government officials, including the minister of religious affairs and minorities, who expresses a desire to visit Israel.

May 3, 1978: The first secretary of the Communist Party of Poland, Edward Gierek, is interviewed by a reporter from the party daily *Trybuna Ludu*. Gierek remarks: "Just as we once had diplomatic relations with Israel and were among the initiators of the establishment of the State of Israel, so it is possible that in the future we will reestablish diplomatic relations. We have never had hostile intentions toward the Jewish people. We believed, and still believe, that the people of Israel, the Jews, like other peoples, have the right to an independent state ..."

January 1981: Polish Minister of Religious Affairs and Minorities Jerzy Kowarski visits Israel. In addition to his participation in the presidential session of the Korczak International Society, which he chaired, Kowarski held a scheduled meeting with Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir, in which he asked to hear Israel's thoughts on expanding bilateral ties. At his request, the director of the East Europe Department of the MFA in Jerusalem met with him for a comprehensive and detailed conversation. The department director suggested, among other things, the possibility of appointing an "interest officer" to act on behalf of Israel in Warsaw under the auspices of the Dutch embassy, which represented Israel's affairs in Poland, while the representative of the Polish PKO Bank in Tel Aviv would serve in a similar role, all in order to expand bilateral trade and tourism.

1981:

- Israeli historians visit Poland to identify historical documentation related to the history of Polish Jewry in the state archives.
- A delegation of Israeli authors visits Poland. Meetings are arranged for them with the general public, as well as many lecture opportunities and media appearances.
- The first political dialogue between Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Polish Foreign Minister Józef Czyrek takes place in the context of the opening session of the UN General Assembly. In their meeting, they discuss the Arab-Israeli conflict as well as opportunities for expanding bilateral ties.

September 26, 1984: A second political dialogue is held between Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Polish Foreign Minister Stefan Olszewski, in the context of the opening session of the UN General Assembly. As in the previous

meeting, they discussed the Arab-Israeli conflict and possibilities for expanding and formalizing bilateral ties.

565 September 5, 1985: At the initiative of the Polish government, a working meeting is arranged between representatives of the Polish and Israeli foreign ministries in New York. This is organized ahead of the meeting between the foreign ministers of Israel and Poland, which will take place in the framework of the discussions at the opening session of the UN General Assembly. At that preliminary meeting, it was decided to appoint an official in charge of Israel affairs under the auspices of the Dutch embassy in Warsaw and a Polish representative of parallel status under 570 the auspices of the PKO Bank in Tel Aviv.

September 1988: The respective offices open. Shortly thereafter, the Israeli office in Warsaw operates independently as an embassy in all respects. 575

September 27, 1990: The protocol for the renewal of full diplomatic relations between the two countries is signed during a visit to Poland by Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Arens. Shortly after the official renewal of relations, visits are exchanged at the governmental and presidential levels, and agreements are signed for economic, commercial, scientific, cultural, and tourism cooperation. 580

Czechoslovakia

585 In the historical consciousness of the establishment of the State of Israel, democratic Czechoslovakia holds a special place, especially between the two World Wars. Tomáš Masaryk, the president of Czechoslovakia during the interwar years, fought for the rights of the Jewish minority in his country, supported the Zionist movement, and even visited the Land of Israel in 1927. At that time, he was the 590 first president in Europe to publicly demonstrate his support. Even after World War II, Czechoslovakia was particularly friendly toward Israel during the presidency of Edvard Beneš and Jan Masaryk's term as foreign minister. This positive stance was evident in the assistance given to the *Bricha* [escape] movement, which transferred Jewish refugees from Poland through Czechoslovakia to Austria and DP camps in Germany, and from there to Italy and onward toward the Land of Israel (1946). When the question of the Land of Israel was raised at the UN in 1947, Czechoslovakia was a member of the UNSCOP Committee. It voted to recommend that the Land of Israel be divided into two independent states, one Jewish and one Arab. The speech given by Jan Masaryk at the UN General Assembly on 595 the right of the Jewish people to their own state was quite impressive. 600

In the first year of the communist regime (1948–49), Czechoslovakia was one of the first countries (after the Soviet Union) to recognize the State of Israel *de jure* on May 18, 1948. During the War of Independence, it provided Israel with

605 weapons necessary for its defense when other supply routes had been blocked, albeit in exchange for compensation. It also provided important services within its territory for the training of soldiers and pilots from Israel. These two factors helped to decide the war in Israel's favor. The first Israeli emissary to present his credentials in Czechoslovakia was Ehud Avriel (July 29, 1948). In July 1948, Israeli Minister of Transportation David Remez visited Prague, and in May 1949, Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett was warmly greeted there. Until the end of 1949, Czechoslovakia was the most supportive country in Eastern Europe of the young State of Israel. But from the beginning of 1950, with the establishment of the communist regime in the country and its adherence to Soviet policy under the rule of Stalin, its policy toward Israel changed radically: Friendship transformed into hostility, in line with the antisemitic, anti-Zionist, and anti-Israeli policies of the Soviet Union.

615 Starting in 1951, Czechoslovakia began to purge veteran members from within the ranks of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, including many Jews who were accused of treason. One of the most notable events in this process deeply shook relations between Israel and Czechoslovakia: the prosecution of Rudolf Slánský during the Prague Trials. Slánský, general secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, was accused, as a Jew, of treason and collaboration with Zionist organizations against the interests of Czechoslovakia. He was sentenced to death and executed in November 1952.

625 Eleven of the fourteen defendants in the trial were Jews. Eight of them were executed. The rest were sentenced to life imprisonment. Two Israelis—Mordechai Oren, a Mapam leader, and Shimon Orenstein, who served several months as commercial attaché in the Israeli legation in Prague before moving to the private sector—were arrested, tortured, and sentenced to lengthy prison terms. The Israeli legation in Prague was designated a "spy center," and in December 1952, the Israeli envoy in Czechoslovakia was declared *persona non-grata*. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett reacted furiously from the Knesset podium. In their speeches on November 24 and 25, 1952, they vigorously rejected all accusations made against Israel during the Slánský trial and forcefully attacked the Czechoslovakian government for its antisemitic, anti-Zionist, and anti-Israeli policies. Though the purges gradually ended and the show trials stopped after Stalin's death in March 1953, relations between Israel and Czechoslovakia did not return to their friendly tone. Diplomatic relations between the two countries persisted until the end of the Six-Day War, but the ties were fraught with tremendous tension during that time. Relations deteriorated even more as a result of the Egyptian-Czech arms deal in 1955 and the Sinai Campaign in 1956.

640 Following the Six-Day War, Czechoslovakia joined the bloc of communist countries in Eastern Europe that severed their diplomatic relations with Israel on June 12, 1967. With the announcement of the severance of ties, it was

agreed that Austria would represent Czechoslovakia in Israel and Sweden would represent Israel's interests in Czechoslovakia.

645 From the cessation of diplomatic relations with Israel and until the late 1980s, Czechoslovakia, along with the Soviet Union, continued to carry out a harsh anti-Israel policy, manifested in extensive military and political assistance to Arab countries and the PLO, including training PLO militants in perpetrating acts of terror. In addition, it conducted virulent anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli propaganda at home and on the international stage, including voting at the UN in support for 650 Arab resolutions, for example to revoke Israel's membership in the United Nations and to equate Zionism with racism. Unlike Hungary, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia, it completely halted trade, cultural, sports, and tourism ties with Israel and refrained from both formal and informal contact between their representatives. Even at diplomatic receptions around the world, its representatives avoided any social or even 655 incidental contact with Israeli representatives.

The following is a description of the phases that led to the renewal of diplomatic relations between Israel and Czechoslovakia:

660 **September 27, 1988:** Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Shimon Peres meets with Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia Bohuslav Chnoupek. This important milestone, initiated by Israel during the UN General Assembly, is the first of its kind since the severing of diplomatic relations. The conversation focuses on the Arab-Israeli conflict and possibilities for renewing 665 bilateral relations.

October 23–25, 1988: MK Abba Eban pays a visit to Czechoslovakia on behalf of the Labor Party. He holds a lengthy meeting with the chairman of the Socialist Party of Czechoslovakia on the issues discussed by the two ministers the previous 670 month. This discussion continues to expand the basis for the continuation of diplomatic contacts.

December 11, 1989: Ambassador Mordechai Palzur, who headed Israel's interest office in Warsaw, visits Prague at his own initiative with the support of the 675 embassy of Czechoslovakia in Poland and the MFA in Jerusalem. He meets with senior officials of the Czechoslovak MFA, including the deputy foreign minister, and conducts friendly talks on a range of political issues, including mutual relations.

680 **December 14, 1989:** With the formation of the new government, democratically elected by the Czechoslovak parliament for the first time since the Communist Party came to power, the new foreign minister, Jiří Dienstbier, declares at his first press conference that relations between Czechoslovakia and Israel would be restored in the near future.

January 1, 1990: In his first speech as the last president of Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel declares, among other things, "that he would be happy ... to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican and with Israel."

685 **January 8–11, 1990:** Dr. Václav Jizdny from the MFA of Czechoslovakia visits Israel, accompanied by Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Trade of Czechoslovakia Ladislav Dobrovolny. This is the first visit of its kind, in which a delegation invited itself to Israel for preparatory conversations at the MFA and Ministry of Industry and Trade regarding the development of political and economic relations between the two countries. They hold talks with Minister of Foreign
690 Affairs Moshe Arens and meet with Deputy Directors-General of the MFA, Yosef Govrin and Yaakov Cohen, and with Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Industry and Trade Zohar Perry.

695 **January 21–23, 1990:** Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Shimon Peres visits Prague for a discussion on economic cooperation between Israel and Czechoslovakia, at the invitation of the Czechoslovak Finance Minister, Václav Klaus. It is the first meeting involving such a high-level Israeli official in the history of relations between the two countries. During the meeting, the two ministers decide "to take special measures to encourage, as much as possible and at the
700 earliest opportunity, the economic ties between the two countries, and to allow trade between them to operate freely." During his visit, Peres is received by President Havel for a friendly conversation, and by Prime Minister Čalfa, both of whom reported that diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and Israel
705 would be renewed very soon.

February 8–10, 1990: Foreign Minister Moshe Arens visits Prague, and the Protocol on the Renewal of Diplomatic Relations between Czechoslovakia and Israel is signed. The ceremony is held with great fanfare on February 9, 1990 and is
710 attended by representatives of the Czechoslovak and foreign press, the Czechoslovak MFA, and the Israeli MFA, as well as the governor of the Bank of Israel who accompanied Minister Arens. Congratulations are exchanged, and memoranda of understanding are signed between the two foreign ministers regarding cooperation in the areas of education, culture, and science. These events, and the discussions
715 that preceded them, are widely publicized via local media channels. During the visit, the Czechoslovak hosts organize tours for the foreign minister and his entourage through the city itself, in addition to visits to the the memorial site of the Theresienstadt concentration camp, the Jewish community center, the Alt-neuschul [Old-New Synagogue], the Jewish Museum, and the adjacent Jewish
720 cemetery where they place flowers on Masaryk's grave. The talks with Foreign Minister Dienstbier, Prime Minister Čalfa, Chairman of Parliament Dubček, and President Václav Havel are held in a friendly and cordial in nature, as if the two countries had not been separated by 23 years of severed relations.

725 April 24–27, 1990: President Havel visits Israel, accompanied by Foreign Minister Dienstbier. This is the first presidential visit held in Israel after the resumption of diplomatic relations with the countries of Eastern Europe. On April 25, 1990, President Havel is awarded an honorary doctorate by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Shortly thereafter, the Israeli embassy is inaugurated in Prague and the Czechoslovak embassy opens in Tel Aviv. On October 13, 1990, President Chaim Herzog pays a reciprocal visit to Czechoslovakia. These visits are the first of their kind in the history of the relations between the two countries.

730 1992: Following the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, Israel recognizes the independence of the Czech Republic and of Slovakia and is among the countries who support their becoming member states of the United Nations. Soon after, the Slovakian Embassy in Tel Aviv is inaugurated, whereas Israel is represented in Slovakia by its embassy in Vienna, then at a later stage by an ambassador based in Israel, and finally, in 735 2006, the Israeli embassy is inaugurated in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia.

Romania

740 Romania, like the Soviet Union and the rest of the countries in the Communist Bloc in Eastern Europe, recognized Israel *de jure* on June 11, 1948, and a short while later established diplomatic ties at the level of legation. However, in contrast to the Soviet Union and the other countries of the Communist Bloc, Romania did not sever diplomatic ties with Israel following the 1967 Six-Day War. Moreover, 745 during the years after the Six-Day War, Romania actually elevated its level of diplomatic representation to embassy in August 1969 and signed agreements with Israel on direct air and maritime routes, a first in Eastern Europe. Agreements on trade, economics, and culture were signed between them, and visits were even exchanged between prime ministers, foreign ministers, and other figures, 750 during which fruitful policy discussions were held in the fields of bilateral relations and Middle East policy. After the resumption of relations between Israel and the rest of the East-Central European countries, bilateral relations between Israel and Romania continued to develop in all fields.

755 Conclusion

When events came full circle, and diplomatic relations between Israel and the countries of East-Central Europe were restored, in addition to the establishment of relations with Albania and the former 15 republics of the Soviet Union, the following characteristics of mutual relations began to emerge: 760

- Development of bilateral relations: Agreements were signed in the field of trade, and for the first time in the history of Israel's relations with East-Central European countries (excluding Romania) in the fields of agriculture,

banking, aviation, economics, medicine, culture, and science. In addition, the volume of tourism on both sides increased significantly.

- Exchanges of visits at the level of prime ministers, government ministers, members of parliament.
- Free contact between Jewish communities in East-Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union, with communities in Israel and Jewish organizations around the world.
- A large scale public relations campaign in these countries was conducted by Israel, intending to correct the deceptive and distorted information which had been disseminated about it during the decades of Communist rule.
- Intensive political dialogue was conducted at all levels in Jerusalem and in the capitals of East-Central Europe.

Israel returned to East-Central Europe and the former Soviet Union on a broad scale and at a rapid pace. That region, which during the years of diplomatic disconnection had been a bastion of hostility toward Israel, took on an increasingly friendly attitude toward it. Before the renewal of diplomatic relations with Israel, the Arab-Israeli conflict had been nourished to a large extent by the world powers, and at times took on the form of an inter-superpower struggle. Without the political and military support the Eastern Bloc had been extending to the PLO and the Arab states, however, this conflict became a regional one. In the new era after the restoration of diplomatic ties between Israel and the countries of East-Central Europe, these relations stand as a sign of ongoing friendship in all possible fields. They are nourished by the roots of a shared past, and also demonstrate a deep appreciation of Israel's achievements.

Translated from the Hebrew by Alex Feder