

## *Israel Sees a Surge in Immigration by French Jews, but Why?*

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### **Body**

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More **French Jews** have been **immigrating** to **Israel** or buying properties here as potential havens, and the Israelis and the **French** are debating whether the trend is a result of a **surge** in anti-Semitic attacks in France or just a cyclical oddity.

The Jewish Agency, the quasi-governmental body responsible for settling immigrants, reported a doubling in the number of **French Jews** who arrived last year and in 2002, to more than 2,000 each year, compared with about 1,000 a year in the previous three years. By contrast, worldwide **immigration** to **Israel** has sharply declined during the Arab-Israeli violence.

Michael Jankelowitz, a spokesman for the Jewish Agency, said that as a result of attacks against **Jews** in France in the past three years, many **Jews**, particularly those whose religion is evident from their clothes, were feeling increasingly uneasy. Much of the tension has centered in working-class suburbs of Paris where **Jews** and Muslims mingle.

"If they're made to feel uncomfortable, this is the place they've always dreamed of coming to," he said.

Some Jewish leaders in France contend that the Jewish Agency has sent squads of "emissaries" to recruit **Jews** for aliyah, or the return to **Israel**. The agency denied the charge, saying that it has the same staff of eight recruiters and that they merely try to persuade **Jews** thinking of emigrating to the United States or Canada to consider **Israel** instead.

France has 500,000 to 600,000 **Jews**, the largest population in Europe.

Gerard Araud, the **French** ambassador to **Israel**, played down the influx, suggesting in an interview that emigration is cyclical. He noted that during the "golden years" of quiet after the Oslo accords between **Israel** and the Palestinians, there were years when the number of **French Jews** who **immigrated** to **Israel** was quite high, once hitting 1,800. "It's a flow, not a flight," he said.

He also contended that there had been as many anti-Semitic incidents per capita in Italy and Belgium, but that France got the most attention because of its larger Jewish population. He also noted that most recent attacks had been by North African Muslims angered over Israeli treatment of Palestinians and therefore could not be linked to historical incidents of **French** anti-Semitism like the Dreyfus affair or the Vichy government's collaboration with the Nazis.

The rash of attacks was the basis of a major finding in a report last month on the state of world Jewry by the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, a group led by Dennis Ross, the longtime American mediator in the Middle

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East. In an interview here, Mr. Ross said Israel needed to anticipate how its Palestinian policies might reverberate in the diaspora and better coordinate with the governments affected.

Alex Losky, a 44-year-old real estate agent in Jerusalem, said French Jews had bought 1,000 apartments a year in Israel in the last couple of years, compared with 100 or so three and four years ago. He said, though, that most of his customers seemed to be buying apartments as vacation retreats and as potential refuges in case there was a sharp explosion in violence in France. Such purchases are sweetened by the fact that the value of the euro has risen against the shekel, making Israeli real estate a bargain.

But he said, "If there weren't a wave of anti-Semitism in France, they wouldn't be buying."

Chaim Spiller, a 42-year-old Orthodox Jew from Paris, immigrated with his wife and two children in March 2003 and bought a \$400,000 apartment here, even as he held on to his men's clothing business in Paris. He said he had long felt a "latent anti-Semitism" from some neighbors and said the waves of attacks by Muslims confirmed his decision.

"You feel you are not welcome," he said. Referring to his skullcap, he added, "You can't put on a kipa in Paris because it's too dangerous."

Mr. Spiller, the son of a survivor of the Buchenwald concentration camp, said that several years ago, a neighbor in his apartment house complained about the Spillers' mezuzah -- a doorpost marker containing Torah passages -- and asked him to move it inside.

"I cannot raise my children in an atmosphere when I feel the latent anti-Semitism, which is worse than the Arabs who shout, 'Dirty Jew,'" he said. "With the Arabs, we know they are our enemies and we know what we can expect."

A more secular Jew, Philippe Bensoussan, a 48-year-old filmmaker who arrived in December, gave a complex tangle of reasons. He said he found that French political life no longer roused his ideological fervor in the way that Israel's did. "Here every moment is essential," he said.

But a less tangible motivation, he said, was his distress at what he saw as the slanted coverage of Israel in the French news media. He came to Israel because he wanted to create a Web-based television news outlet about Israel in French.

Mr. Araud also said the French government had reduced assaults against Jews with tougher laws against racist violence, protection for religious sites and programs in schools to encourage tolerance.

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