

THE TRANSITION FROM YUGOSLAV TO POST-YUGOSLAV JEWRY

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1. INTRODUCTION

And to be sure, any conceivable collapse of Yugoslav federalism, fragmenting the country according to its various national components, would destroy the centralized organization of the Jewish community and seriously hamper its ability to function. Yugoslav Jewry is already in a struggle for survival; any radical change would most likely help to hasten its demise. (Freidenreich 1984: 57.)

Harriet Pass Freidenreich foresaw the possible disintegration of Yugoslavia relatively early on, in 1984. She concluded that the break-up of Yugoslavia would have serious consequences for the Jewish community. According to Freidenreich (1984: 58), the Yugoslav Jewish community was an example of a community being sustained by its organisation. Accordingly, she drew the conclusion that the disintegration of Yugoslavia would result in the disintegration of the community's centralized organization, thus seriously hampering its ability to function.

A decisive step towards the disintegration of Yugoslavia was the declaration of independence by two Federal Republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, i.e. Slovenia and Croatia, in June, 1991. As a result, war broke out, and the Yugoslav Jewish community was destined to face a radical, historic change.

The aim of this article is to study the consequences of the disintegration of Yugoslavia for its Jewish community.¹ Freidenreich's above quoted assessment serves as a hypothesis for this study. In other words, did the disintegration really hasten the demise of the Jewish community? I shall endeavour to answer this question by focusing on the functions and activities of the local Jewish communities in the newly independent states of the former Yugoslavia.

There are several recommended studies on the history of Yugoslav as concerns the period up until World War II. The main references are *Tol'dot yehudey Yugo-*

¹ The article is based on my Master's thesis (Kerkkänen 1997) presented at the University of Helsinki in May, 1997. Currently I am working on a PhD dissertation on the same subject. My sincere thanks go to Professor Tapani Harviainen (University of Helsinki) and to the Israeli historian Zvi Loker (Jerusalem) for reading and commenting on the manuscript of this article.

slawya, I by Yaqir Eventov (1971) and *Tol^edot yehudey Yugoslawya*, II (Zvi Loker (ed.) 1991) (both in Hebrew). The most comprehensive study in English is Harriet Pass Freidenreich's book *The Jews of Yugoslavia: A Quest for Community* (1979). The most useful introduction to the local Jewish communities in Yugoslavia is *Pinqas haq-q^ehillot Yugoslawya* (Zvi Loker (ed.) 1988, in Hebrew). The history of Yugoslav Jews after World War II requires more research, not to mention about research on post-Yugoslav Jewry. The first monograph dealing exclusively with the events of the post-war period is the highly recommended *Voices of Yugoslav Jewry* by Paul Gordiejew.

2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF YUGOSLAV JEWRY

There is evidence of Jewish presence as early as the first century CE near the city of Split on the Dalmatian coast, in Stobi near Bitolj in Macedonia, and later, in the ninth century, in Belgrade. However, the foundations of Yugoslav Jewry were laid by the major wave of Sephardic immigration that followed the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. (Elazar 1989: 374.) Communities were established in Macedonia, in Bosnia and on the Dalmatian Coast. Bosnia became part of a new, Eastern, Sephardic cultural area together with the other Balkan regions ruled by the Ottomans. The Sephardim brought their own language, Ladino (or Judeo-Spanish), with them to the Balkans (Freidenreich 1979: 5). There Jews were able to maintain their own ethnic-religious identity, owing to the pattern of communal organization (*dhimma*) prevalent in the lands of Islam (Benbassa & Rodrigue 1995: xvii). The *Dhimma* transformed Jews into second-class subjects in Muslim society but, on the other hand, they were tolerated and protected. The Jews responded to this tolerant attitude by identifying strongly with the central authorities² and placing their trade and administrative talents at the service of the Ottoman Empire (Benbassa & Rodrigue 1995: 2).

Jews were banned from residing in Slovenia and Croatia until the late 18th century but during the 19th and early 20th centuries Ashkenazic Jews began to arrive from different parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the south Slav regions, especially in Zagreb and Osijek in Croatia and Novi Sad and Subotica in Vojvodina (Freidenreich 1979: 6). The Ashkenazim spoke mainly German or Hungarian among themselves, no longer Yiddish (Freidenreich 1979: 7). After the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary in 1878, some Ashkenazic Jews moved to Bosnia, especially to Sarajevo (Elazar 1989: 374). Sarajevo and Belgrade became the dominant centres of the Sephardic Jews whereas the centre of

² The Jews not only identified with the central authorities but also 'regarded the appearance of new national options in the modern period with mistrust' (Benbassa & Rodrigue 1995: 2, 104). It seems to me that this attitude has formed a tradition in the Balkans. The phenomenon was also witnessed during the process of Yugoslavia's disintegration.

the Ashkenazic Jews was located in Zagreb. It is worth noting that the line of demarcation between the Ashkenazic Jews and the Sephardic Jews continued to follow the old border between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans (Elazar 1989: 374).

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established in the aftermath of World War I, and from 1929 until World War II it was known as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. It brought together in one political unit two distinct groups of Jews, the Sephardim of the former Ottoman territories and the Ashkenazim of the Habsburg lands (Freidenreich 1979: 5). According to the census of 1921, there were 64,746 Jews, half a percent of the total population, in the Kingdom (Freidenreich 1979: 56). The Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia was established in Osijek in 1919. It served both as an umbrella organization for the local Jewish communities and as a representative body of the Jewish community to the outside world. Together with the Chief Rabbinate and the Rabbinical Council it supervised religious and educational affairs and settled religious and other disputes in the Jewish community (Freidenreich 1984: 28-29). The Orthodox communities set up their own small Union of Orthodox Jewish Religious Communities in Subotica, Vojvodina in 1924 (Freidenreich 1979: 100). Thus the setting up of separate Orthodox and Neologue³ communities was accepted by the Yugoslav Jews. The distinction between different communities could be made on at least two levels, firstly as a distinction between the Sephardic and the Ashkenazic communities, and secondly as a distinction between Ashkenazic-Neologue and Ashkenazic-Orthodox communities (Elazar 1989: 374).

In a relatively short period of time the Jewish communities in Yugoslavia were able to create a strong and centralized umbrella organization uniting the local communities. The fact that the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia comprised both the Ashkenazic and the Sephardic communities bespeaks solemnly for the minor differences between the communities (Freidenreich 1979: 113). On the eve of World War II, there were altogether 121 Jewish communities in Yugoslavia, which were divided into 72 Ashkenazic-Neologue communities, 36 Sephardic communities and 13 Ashkenazic-Orthodox communities, the total number of Jews being about 72,000 (Marcus 1968: 319).

In general, the Jews adapted themselves successfully to the surrounding society. However, they managed to preserve their own socio-economic character such as heavy concentration in commerce and white-collar employment by comparison with their fellow citizens. This was largely due to the higher standard of education and urbanization among the Jews. Although many Jews already regarded Serbo-Croat as their mother tongue, many of them were, in fact, still bilingual.⁴

³ The majority of the Ashkenazic Jews in the Habsburg areas joined a Reform movement in the second half of the 19th century, and these became known as Neologues.

⁴ Freidenreich 1979: 68. The Sephardim spoke Serbo-Croat and Ladino, and the Ashkenazim Serbo-Croat and German or Hungarian, and to a lesser extent, Yiddish.

The entire period between the two World Wars marked the heyday of Yugoslav Jewry. Jewish communities and organizations functioned actively and the relationship between the state authorities and the Jewish minority was a cordial one. The Serbs regarded the Jews as patriotic citizens because they had taken part in the Balkan Wars and in World War I. There was no organized anti-Semitic movement before World War II, although the situation in this respect began to change in the 1930s. (Freidenreich 1979: 179, 184.)

Yugoslavia was occupied by Germany in April 1941. Following the occupation, Yugoslavia was divided into different zones: Serbia and part of Vojvodina were placed under German military control and shortly after the German authorities installed General Milan Nedić and his government of National Salvation in power in Serbia. Hungary occupied the remaining part of Vojvodina and Bulgaria occupied Macedonia; the Dalmatian Coast and Montenegro were ruled by Italy and the remaining areas of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina constituted the Independent State of Croatia, in fact, a puppet state of Nazi Germany. The destiny of the Yugoslav Jews followed the line of the Jews in other German-ruled areas of Europe. They were registered and imprisoned in the labour and concentration camps located in Serbia, Croatia, Poland and Germany. The best-known Croatian concentration camp was in Jasenovac, where about 20,000 Jews lost their lives (Marcus 1972: 877). Not only their persons but also almost all synagogues and other public Jewish buildings were targets of hate, and accordingly destroyed. On the eve of World War II, there were in Yugoslavia between 71,000-82,000 Jews, depending on the sources.⁵ Only 15,000 Yugoslav Jews survived the Holocaust, of whom about 2000-3000 fought as partisans.

The new Communist regime of Yugoslavia formed a multinational federation, consisting of six Republics: Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro. National rights were divided into three categories. Croats, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbs, Slovenes and Muslims comprised the 'Nations of Yugoslavia'. The second category consisted of 10 different groups forming the 'Nationalities of Yugoslavia' and the third group consisted of 'Other Nationalities and Ethnic Groups', including the Jews.⁶

As a result of the Holocaust, the situation of Yugoslav Jewry had dramatically changed. In 1946, there were only 12,414 Jews, of whom 2236 lived in Belgrade, 2126 in Zagreb and 1413 in Sarajevo. About half of the Jews were Ashkenazim and

⁵ Šelah 1990: 465-467. The higher figure, exactly 82,242, is based on Dr. Jaša Romano's research whereas the lower figure is given by Harriet Pass Freidenreich. Šelah tends to believe that the higher figure is more accurate, because Freidenreich does not include in her calculation those Jews who were not members of Jewish communities or those who arrived there as refugees from neighbouring countries.

⁶ Poulton 1991: 5. Other nationalities belonging to the third group were: Austrians, Germans, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Vlachs and those who identified themselves only as Yugoslavs.

half Sephardim. The Federation of Jewish Religious Communities began to function again in October 1944, a few days after the liberation of Belgrade. Altogether 56 Jewish communities re-commenced their activities in Yugoslavia. (Freidenreich 1984: 14.)

Yugoslavia permitted its Jews freely to emigrate to Israel after the State of Israel was established in 1948. Altogether 7578 Jews decided to emigrate to Israel in five different waves during the period 1948-52. Roughly speaking, half of the surviving Yugoslav Jews emigrated in a short period of time following World War II. A Jewish community of only 6000-7000 Jews and 36 organized communities remained in Yugoslavia. In post-war Yugoslavia, the three largest Jewish communities were located in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Sarajevo and some communal activity was also found in eight other cities: Subotica, Novi Sad, Zemun in Serbia; Osijek, Rijeka and Split in Croatia; Ljubljana in Slovenia and Skopje in Macedonia. (Freidenreich 1979: 193, 197.) The remaining twenty-five Jewish communities existed mostly on paper. The post-war situation of the Jewish communities as well as the size of the Jewish population was to remain without major changes until the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991.

The former distinctions between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, Neologue and Orthodox disappeared and every local community included all the Jews in its vicinity (Freidenreich 1984: 14). This represents a remarkable difference in comparison to the pre-war period. The Federation of Jewish Communities as an organization became the strongest and most important factor in the lives of Yugoslav Jews. Membership of the community became voluntary whereas in the pre-war era it had been obligatory.

The governing bodies of the Federation were the Conference of the Communities, a Central Board and an Executive Committee. Later, in 1970, the Central Board merged into the Executive Committee. The highest-ranking body within the Federation was the Conference of the Communities, which held meetings annually, and the highest authority in the Federation was the President. (Freidenreich 1984: 30.)

The most important activities took place in the communities. Women's clubs, teenager's clubs and choirs were the places of lively activity in the communities. Summer camps were very popular among teenagers, and actually the Yugoslav Jewish summer camps at Pirovac on the Adriatic Coast were unique in the whole of Europe (Steiner 1971: 233). On the whole, the level of participation in Jewish organizations was relatively low (Freidenreich 1984: 33). There were even a number of Jews who were Jews by descent but who did not consider themselves Jews by religion or by nationality and thus no longer maintained ties with the community (Freidenreich 1984: 26).

The focus of Jewish community life shifted from religious to cultural activities after World War II. This shift was emphasized in 1952 by removing the word 'Religious' from the official title of the Federation (Freidenreich 1979: 198). There

was no longer a chief rabbinate and the community became totally lay-controlled (Freidenreich 1984: 23). However, services were still held on major Jewish holidays, such as Roš haš-Šana and Yom Kippur. One of the reasons for the secular outlook of the community was the lack of qualified religious leaders, as well as in the strongly secular attitude of the Jewish leadership (Freidenreich 1979: 198).

The Jewish community in post-war Yugoslavia was officially recognized as both a national and a religious community which was allowed to conduct its affairs freely (Freidenreich 1979: 198). Relations between the Jewish community and Yugoslav society were cordial. The Jewish community and its leadership gave full support to Tito and Yugoslav Communism (Freidenreich 1979: 207). There is no doubt that the Yugoslav Jewish community was the freest in Eastern Europe (Freidenreich 1984: 57). Accordingly, it assumed a special role as a bridge between the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe and the Western World (Singer 6.6. 1996).

The period from the end of World War II until the disintegration of Yugoslavia requires a comprehensive study but some preliminary conclusions may be drawn. To begin with, a return to the heyday of Yugoslav Jewry enjoyed between the World Wars was not feasible because of the Holocaust. There was almost no religious life in the communities. The Jewish community integrated well into the society of Communist Yugoslavia. As a matter of fact, the Communist regime made a considerable effort to fade out differences between nationalities, and it ideally suited the Jews of Yugoslavia. They willingly identified themselves as Yugoslavs, and some of them did so in such a committed manner that their Jewishness was almost completely forgotten. A high percentage of mixed marriages, a high assimilation rate, and the advanced age of the members were the greatest sources of anxiety in the Jewish communities. The community was the place of Jewish life in Yugoslavia, as there was no Jewish life at home. Due to its organized and centralized community structure Jewish life in a communal framework was kept alive in Yugoslavia after World War II.

The structure of the Jewish population on the eve of the disintegration of Yugoslavia justifies a brief introduction. As mentioned above, 7739 Jews left Yugoslavia during the years 1948-53 (Perić 1977: 270). The remaining 6000-7000 Jews formed the Jewish population of Yugoslavia during the next 40 years. Usually, a slightly smaller figure for the Jewish population of Yugoslavia is given in censuses. According to the Demographic Study of the Jewish Community in Yugoslavia, in 1971-72 the Jewish population was only 4199, and in the general census of 1971, the Jewish population was 4811.⁷ The general census only enquired about nationality, not about religion. The Jewish population of 4199 given

⁷ Perić 1977: 269, 271. It is worth noting that personal identity cards contained no mention of a person's nationality or religion. Thus the practice in Yugoslavia was different from in the USSR, for example.

in the aforementioned study includes only those who were Jews in the halachic sense. The total number of persons in Jewish households was 6457. Non-Jewish members of Jewish households were accepted as members of the Jewish community and thus the criterion of being a member of the Jewish community was not a halachic one in Yugoslavia (Perić 1977: 274). Later on, Jewish and non-Jewish members of the Jewish communities were no longer distinguished, and a general number of 6000 became established as representing the size of the Yugoslav Jewish population. As a matter of fact, the exact number of Jews since World War II has been unknown due to the fact that membership of the community became voluntary and many Jews opted not to be listed as members.⁸

3. EMIGRATION

The Jewish Agency for Israel started preparations for the emigration of Yugoslav Jews to Israel out of fear that war might break out. Tuvia Raviv, a representative of the Jewish Agency, arrived in Yugoslavia for his first visit on 5th May, 1991 in order to gain an overall view of the situation of the Jews in Yugoslavia and to find out what they wanted to do in the event of war. The Jewish Agency was convinced about the imminent outbreak of war, and therefore it was necessary to find a way to evacuate the Jews from Yugoslavia in case of an emergency. First of all, the Jewish Agency opened an office in Budapest, for it was perfectly located and conveniently reached from Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. Next, Raviv advised the Jewish communities in Yugoslavia to provide Jews with the documents indicating that their bearers were members of the Jewish community. (Raviv 23.6.1996.)

Raviv's first visit to Yugoslavia did not evoke an enthusiastic response from the Jews. He found it difficult to convince them that war was about to break out. There was not even one positive response to his exhortation to emigrate to Israel during the first three months after his first visit. According to Raviv (23.6.1996), such an unenthusiastic response was due to the following factors: assimilation, identification as Yugoslavs, a lack of religious Jews and a relatively high standard of living among the Jews in Yugoslavia. Mixed marriages, too, made the decision to emigrate more difficult. The decision to stay was, of course, not easy either. There was the fear that someone might request them to identify with one or other of the warring factions whilst the Jews' conscious effort was to avoid taking sides in the conflict, in order to protect the Jews in all parts of the former Yugoslavia (Ro'i 1991).

Eventually, some Jews of the younger generation, afraid of the possibility of being called up, turned to Raviv for help in the summer of 1991, when war actually

⁸ Singer 6.6. 1996. The Germans made use of the Jewish community records when hunting Jews during the Holocaust.

broke out in Slovenia and Croatia. The war in Croatia, however, did not lead to any mass emigration, and during the first eight months of the war only 210 Jews arrived in Israel.⁹ At this stage it had become evident that the Jews of Yugoslavia were not in danger because of their Jewishness, but only because of the fighting.¹⁰

In April 1992 the war had spread to Bosnia. The Jewish Agency, through its representative, kept in constant touch with the leaders of the Sarajevo and Zagreb Jewish communities in order to carry out the evacuation of Jews in case of emergency (Galili 1992). Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, was in danger of surrendering to the Serbs, and the Jews living there realized that they were under threat. Thereupon the Jewish Agency organized three evacuation flights, which were flown by Yugoslav Air Force cargo planes on the 10th and 17th of April and the 1st of May 1992 respectively, from Sarajevo to Belgrade (JOINT-AR 1992). About 400 Jews, mainly elderly people and children, were evacuated on these flights. Some of them continued to Israel while the rest stayed in Belgrade. Some Jews individually managed even later to reach Belgrade by car or bus, as evacuation by air became impossible (Raviv 23.6.1996). The Federation of Jewish Communities in Belgrade took care of the émigrés who arrived there (Grinvald 6.6.1996).

Henceforth evacuation had to be re-directed to Split in Croatia, by land routes. Bus convoys were organized by the Sarajevo Jewish community and the Jewish communities in Croatia, together with the JOINT (the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee). The Central British Fund also took part in financing these operations (JOINT-AR 1993). The first convoy left Sarajevo in August, 1992 and the last in summer 1993. There were altogether 12 convoys and in each of them non-Jewish refugees were included (Sikkum šenat pe'ilot 1995). The aim of the Sarajevo Jewish community was to evacuate children especially and all those who would be unable to survive the winter, hunger and disease in the besieged city of Sarajevo (Jerusalem Post 18.9.1992). Sarajevo also served as a mustering point for Jewish refugees from different parts of Bosnia, e.g. Mostar, Teslić, Kakanj, Jajce and Travnik (Bilten/Belgrade 1/1995).

Organizing convoys required enormous efforts on the part of the Sarajevo Jewish community. One of the most difficult problems to solve was how to obtain permission for evacuation from the different warring factions and from UNPROFOR (the United Nations Protection Force). This permission was needed because the convoy route ran through territory supervised by all three warring factions (Papo 14.6.1996). This is well illustrated in an interview given by Ivan

⁹ Galili 1991. In the same article the President of the Jewish Agency, Simḥa Diniš, revealed that during the first months of the war, some 80 children were evacuated to Israel from the areas affected by the fighting. Later, at the request of their parents, the children returned to Croatia.

¹⁰ Šoḥat 1992. Šoḥat openly criticized the Jewish Agency's policy in Yugoslavia: 'The Jewish Agency exploits the war in Yugoslavia and hunts for Jews there in order to promote Zionism.'

Čerešnješ, the President of the Sarajevo Jewish community, in December 1992 when he explained that he had so far managed to negotiate exit for 1000 Jews through 38 checkpoints from Sarajevo to Split (Montague 1992). According to him, there was no problem of staying in Sarajevo as a Jew for the different warring parties (Croats, Moslems and Serbs) wished to demonstrate their democracy by their good behaviour towards the Jews (Jerusalem Post 18.9.1992).

It has not been an easy task to find out the correct number of Jewish émigrés from former Yugoslavia. Due to inconsistency in the different sources and the fluidity of the situation, the following is the best estimate based on the available sources. According to Jacob Finci (10.4.1997), the President of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Jewish Community, a total of 1002 Jews left Bosnia during the war years. Fishkoff's article (1994) supports this statement, pointing out that there were altogether 2300 refugees in convoys arranged by the Jews, of whom 1000 were Jews. Divergent information was given by the Zagreb and Belgrade Jewish communities as well as by Tuvya Raviv. According to Raviv (23.6.1996), 1300 Jews left Bosnia. According to the Secretary of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, Miroslav Grinvald (6.6.1996), 1073 Jewish refugees arrived in Belgrade from Bosnia, of whom 200 decided to stay in Serbia. Dunja Šprajc, the General Secretary of the Zagreb Jewish Community, stated (13.6.1996) that about 800 Jewish refugees arrived in Croatia from Bosnia, of whom about 100 stayed there. It follows that when the information given by the Belgrade and Zagreb Jewish Community is combined, the sum total is about 1900 Jewish refugees who had left Bosnia by the end of 1995. The number of émigrés given by the JOINT-AR 1993, 1600, also supports the higher estimate. To sum up, depending on the sources, the number of Jewish émigrés from Bosnia was between 1000 and 1900.

According to the Jewish Agency there were 731 Bosnian Jewish refugees who emigrated to Israel (Sade 12.6.1996). As was stated above, about 300 of the Bosnian Jewish refugees chose to stay either in Serbia or in Croatia. Grinvald was able to provide the exact number of those who neither emigrated to Israel nor stayed in Serbia but continued somewhere else abroad. Their number was about 600.¹¹ Consequently, the number of Bosnian Jewish refugees approaches 1700 when all this information is summed up. On the basis of this study it is reasonable to assume that there were at least 1500, but probably almost 2000, Jewish refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina.

We can rely at least on the information given by the Jewish Agency about those Jews who emigrated to Israel, and this figure is about 1500.¹² If 600 Jewish

¹¹ Grinvald 6.6. 1996. Of these 130 moved to Canada, 104 to Spain, 51 to Switzerland, 43 to England and the destination of the rest, 250, was unknown.

¹² Sade 12.6. 1996. Emigrés came from Yugoslavia as follows: Bosnia-Herzegovina 731, Croatia 103, Serbia 554, Slovenia 7 and Macedonia 6. In addition, there were about 100 Jews who were visiting Israel and decided to stay there. The total number of emigrés to Israel is therefore 1501.

refugees to other countries than Israel are added to the number of Jews who emigrated to Israel, the total number of émigrés is about 2100. Unfortunately, the information on those Croatian and Serbian Jews who left for countries other than Israel is not available. Certainly there were some, and thus the total number of Jewish refugees from former Yugoslavia must be almost 2500. In addition to those Bosnian Jewish refugees who stayed in Croatia or Serbia, there were about 30-50 Bosnian Jews who decided to stay in Slovenia, where they were immediately granted Slovenian citizenship, in contrast to Bosnian refugees in Croatia and Serbia who only had refugee status (Sade 12.6.1996). According to official Israeli statistics there were 1646 immigrants from former Yugoslavia to Israel between 1991-96 (Immigration to Israel 1996: 43).

It is rewarding to have a look at the number of émigrés in comparison to the final statistics regarding the Jewish population of former Yugoslavia. According to the Jewish Agency (Sikkum šenat pe'ilot 1995), there were altogether 6119 Jews left in the area of former Yugoslavia in 1995. According to the same source, the number of Jews before the breakup of Yugoslavia was 5758. Consequently, it means that after four years of war there were about 500 Jews more in the same area! And when the number of about 2500 émigrés is added to the current number of Jews, the sum total is nearly 9000 Jews. In the light of this study the best estimate of the Yugoslav Jewish population before the disintegration of Yugoslavia therefore lies between 8000 and 9000. This estimation refers to an 'enlarged' Jewish population.¹³

A few conclusions can be drawn on the basis of this chapter. About a quarter of Yugoslav's 8000-9000 Jews emigrated during the war to Israel or to other countries. This was the first major emigration from the territory of former Yugoslavia after the wave of emigration in 1948-52. Jews who wanted to stay outside of the war found themselves in the middle of the fighting between nationalistically influenced and motivated factions and decided, therefore, to move out. In this case neither ideology (Zionism), religious motives nor a fear of anti-Semitism were factors contributing to their decision to emigrate.

The decision to emigrate, however, was not an easy one. Especially Bosnian Jews were afraid of being understood as 'escaping Jews'. They made an effort not to give the impression that they were escaping at a moment when the homeland was in trouble. They even expressed the view that the publicity Israel made about their evacuation actually caused them harm (Galili & Lahav 1992). As a result, the image of 'escaping Jews' was perhaps etched in the minds of Bosnians. A hint of this can be detected in the speech of the Bosnian President delivered on the eve of Roš haš-

¹³ An 'enlarged' Jewish population consists beside a 'core' Jewish population – those who consider themselves Jewish – of a people who previously considered themselves Jewish, other persons of recent Jewish descent, and non-Jewish household members associated with any of these categories (Dellapergola 1994: 57).

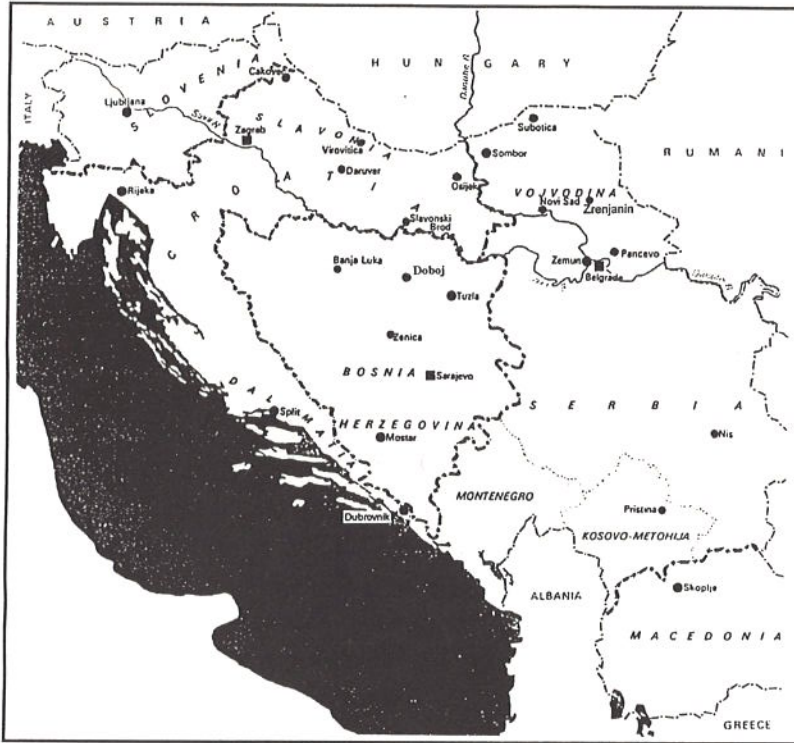
Šana in Sarajevo: 'If I may ask for something the Jewish Community of Sarajevo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, on the occasion of this holiday – is that those who have left the country, escaping from the war and sufferings, come back for the next Rosh Hashana' (Bilten/Sarajevo 7-8/1994).

In spite of emigration the Jewish population has increased in every former republic of Yugoslavia except for Bosnia-Herzegovina. The most remarkable increase was noted in Serbia, where the Jewish population is almost a thousand persons larger in 1995 than before the war. Only one third of the Bosnian Jews are left in Bosnia. The war had by far the greatest impact on Bosnia-Herzegovina and therefore the higher number of émigrés from there is understandable. Also of significance is the number of more than 500 émigrés from Serbia, even though the war did not touch its soil physically. Serbia was, however, subject to UN economic sanctions, which caused poverty among the Jewish population, too, thus resulting in emigration. The mass emigration of Yugoslav's Jewry in this decade as a result of the disintegration of the country is over, and there is no reason to assume that it might resume.

4. THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AFTER THE DISINTEGRATION OF YUGOSLAVIA

For the Jews, who were well integrated into the society of Socialist Yugoslavia, the disintegration of Yugoslavia was hard to comprehend. The Jews regarded Yugoslavia as one state and many of them had relatives living in different parts of Yugoslavia. This had strengthened their ties between the different republics of Yugoslavia. (Singer 6.6.1996.)

With the collapse of Yugoslavia its former republics were separated into new independent nation-states and, as a consequence, many local Jewish communities were separated from their umbrella organization, the Federation of Jewish Communities, located in Belgrade. Communication between communities was interrupted (JOINT-AR 1991). Local Jewish communities suddenly found themselves alone without their former cohesive organizational structure. The Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia had no choice but to face the actual situation in a meeting arranged in Budapest at the beginning of 1992. The Executive Board concluded that Yugoslavia was collapsing, and this would have an effect on the Jewish community as well. It was agreed that the communities in different parts of former Yugoslavia should endeavour to maintain relations. In addition, they would refrain from issuing statements which would cause prejudice to any of the Jewish communities. (Singer 6.6.1996; Albahari 7.6.1996.) A concern for the well-being of the Jewish communities is reflected in an interview given by Darko Fišer, President of the Osijek Jewish community, when he expressed his hope that the State of Israel



Jewish communities after the disintegration of Yugoslavia

would not recognize the independence of Slovenia and Croatia yet (in July 1991) for it would endanger the position of the Jews in Serbia (Avidan 1991).

A separatist mentality was, however, evident in the leadership of the Zagreb Jewish Community. The leadership did not strongly oppose the disintegration of the Jewish Federation (Šprajc 13.6.1996). On the contrary, it publicly expressed its solidarity with the nation of Croatia, and accused Yugoslavia of being the aggressor. A split between the Croatian and Yugoslav Jewish communities occurred as a result (Šprajc 13.6.1996). The strong nationalistic course which accompanied the disintegration of Yugoslavia took its toll among some of the Jews as well. This created a dramatic tension between Jews while they identified themselves more and more with the new national states in which they lived (Teitelbaum 1992). They accused each other of being too involved in the politics of the new national states (Singer 6.6.1996).

There also arose a dispute about the material property of the Federation. The Federation's property included an Old People's Home in Zagreb and the Pirovac summer camp which are both located in Croatia. On the other hand, the Jewish

Historical Museum was located in Belgrade. It contains, of course, material and documents on the history of the Croatian Jews. This dispute itself created so many problems that eventually the JOINT intervened, trying to act as a mediator between the quarrelling Jewish communities (JOINT-AR 1993). The disintegration of both Yugoslavia and the Federation of Jewish Communities within it, caused the Jews to slide into disputes and quarrels among themselves, especially in Croatia and Serbia, setting up walls separating them from each other along the former borders of the republics, which now became the borders of newly independent states.

The activities of the original Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, which had continued since 1919 except for a short period during World War II, ceased in 1991. The title of the Federation has now been reserved for the Serbian Jewish communities, and it acts as their umbrella organization in the same manner, as it acted before as an umbrella organization for the whole of Yugoslav Jewry. Formally, the old Federation was ended in March 1996 when the final decision to dissolve it was signed in Zurich, Switzerland (Finci 10.4.1997).

4.1. Croatia – the beginning of a new era

The secession of Croatia from Yugoslavia turned a new page in the history of the Croatian Jews. They found themselves an independent unit of their own, outside the Federation which had so far given organizational backing, responsible for both its spiritual and material well-being (Šprajc 13.6.1996). Following the sudden collapse of Yugoslavia, the Croatian Jews soon found their own 'Croatian' identity as a community and immediately began to strengthen it by expressing loyalty to the new regime. Dr. Ongjen Kraus, the President of the community, specifically underlines the community's Croatian history while the period of Yugoslavia is almost faded out in his short introduction to the history of the Jews in Croatia (Kraus 1996: 4-10). This fact illustrates the effort on the part of the Jews to find their own independent history and identity as the Croatian Jewish Community in the post-Yugoslav era. The article collection *Studia Judaica Croatica* 1-2 also underlines this trend.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia meant in practice that nine Croatian Jewish communities remained outside the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia. A new umbrella organization of Croatian Jewish Communities was formally established in 1995 when the Co-ordination Committee of Jewish Communities in Croatia, as it was entitled, came into being (Kraus 1996: 4). The Co-ordination Committee is strongly linked to the Zagreb Jewish Community, which is by far the leading community in Croatia. The president of the Zagreb Jewish Community acts as the president of the Co-ordination Committee as well (Šprajc 13.6.1996). The task of the Co-ordination Committee is to unify Croatian Jews and to represent them as a national and religious community on an official level vis-à-vis the state of

Croatia (Kraus 1996: 4). The Co-ordination Committee is also responsible for organizing activities in local Jewish communities. It is not a decision-making body of Croatian Jewry but rather an advisory body (Šprajc 13.6.1996). The Co-ordination Committee consists of all nine presidents of the Croatian Jewish communities and it meets twice a year (Fišer 15.6.1996). The constitution of the Federation of the Jewish Communities lost its validity with the disintegration of the Federation, and consequently a new constitution for the Croatian Jewish communities is being drawn up. Meanwhile, instead of the constitution a by-law has guided community activities (Šprajc 13.6.1996).

The organizational structure of the local Jewish communities in Croatia has not changed since the collapse of Yugoslavia. The structure is simplified in all except for the Zagreb Jewish Community. The decision-making body of the Zagreb Jewish Community is a Community Council of at least 25 members. They are elected every fourth year in a General Assembly. The General Assembly gathers annually and there all the members of the Jewish community over the age of 18 are entitled to vote. The task of the General Assembly is mainly to give recommendations to the Community Council. The decisions of the Community Council are implemented by an Executive Board. (Šprajc 13.6.1996.) The structure of smaller communities such as Osijek, Rijeka and Split consists of only an Executive Committee and the President which are both elected every fourth year in a General Assembly (Fišer 15.6.1996). Membership regulations in Croatian Jewish communities follow the former tolerant line; a halachic order is not followed. Everyone with even one Jewish grandparent, regardless of gender, is accepted into the Jewish community (Šprajc 13.6.1996).

The Croatian Jewish community finances several publications. The Zagreb Jewish Community began to publish its own paper *Bilten* ('Bulletin') in the latter part of the '80s and today this is the most important of its publications representing the opinion of the Croatian Jewish communities. It appears bimonthly with an issue of about 1000 copies (Kovać 1996). A new magazine in English, *Voice – Qol*, which began to appear in the spring 1996, is being published by the Co-ordination Committee of Jewish Communities in Croatia. The Cultural Society Miroslav Šalom Freiburger publishes a magazine called *Novi Omanut* and youngsters have their own paper, *Motek*, which appears at irregular intervals (Šprajc 13.6.1996).

The disintegration of Yugoslavia has strengthened the Jewish identity of the Croatian Jews. The times of uncertainty have resulted in a need to seek security in the community of one's ancestors. This strengthening has not meant a revival of religious or Zionist experience (Šehem-Golan 1991) but rather a consciousness of one's own distinct background and of being part of a Jewish nation which has contributed so much to civilization (Fišer 15.6.1996). Croatian Jewish identity is being crystallized through participation in Jewish communal life. Not only the community, but also individual Jews needed to search for their new identity because of the

dramatic historical changes. The social group to belong, needed to be found. Formerly a general Yugoslav identity was a convenient solution for the Jews living under a Socialist regime where 'socialism exceeded the boundaries of nationalities and religion' (Papo 14.6.1996). Identification as a Yugoslav was naturally not possible any longer after the collapse of the state, and many Jews found it difficult to identify with nationalistically inclined Croats. There was only one solution left, i.e. to return to one's roots – to Judaism. The descendants of mixed marriages are returning to the Jewish community and they are strengthening their Jewish identity. The material, psychological and social aid provided by the Jewish community during the difficult times of uncertainty after the collapse of Yugoslavia has resulted in increased motivation for the strengthening of Jewish identity (Šprajc 1996: 11). This newly found Jewish identity was strengthened and expressed through the Jewish community.

The Zagreb Jewish Community was founded in 1806 (Freidenreich 1979: 42) and as the largest it is by far the most important of the Croatian Jewish communities. There were 1400 members of the Zagreb Jewish Community in 1995 (Sikkum šenat pe'ilot 1995). Almost all of its activities are conducted in a community centre located in Palmotičeva Street in Zagreb. Different activities are channelled through seven boards which are the Financial Board, the Board of Religious Affairs, the Social Board, the Educational Board, the Cultural Board, the Board of Information and the Board for the Protection of the Jewish Heritage. There are also clubs such as the Youth Club, the Children's Club, the Women's Club and the Union of Jewish Students. (Šprajc 13.6.1996.) The Lavoslav Schwartz Old People's Home in Zagreb houses about 70-80 old people.

The Qabbalat Šabbat service takes place every Friday night in the synagogue, which is located on the second floor of the community centre and a Tora-reading is arranged on Saturday mornings (Šprajc 13.6.1996). The Mirjam Weiller Kindergarten, with some 30 children attending, is on the ground floor of the same centre. The centre also contains a library, the Miroslav Šalom Freiburger Cultural Society and the Ivo and Milan Steiner Gallery. The sports club Makkabi has its own activities as well. (Kovač 1993: 5.) The community has a rabbi and a Hebrew teacher from Israel who teaches evening courses. A choir called Lira also exists. Establishment of Hevra Kaddiša is now being planned (Šprajc 13.6.1996).

Other Croatian Jewish communities are found in Osijek with 99 Jews in 1995, Slavonski Brod with 15, Virovitica with only 8, Čakovec with 14, Daruvar with 10, Rijeka with 82, Split with 165 and Dubrovnik with 47 Jews respectively (Sikkum šenat pe'ilot 1995). The Jewish population of Osijek has slightly decreased in comparison with pre-war numbers due to emigration during the war. The Jewish population is decreasing in Dubrovnik, too, but the number of Jews in Split increased from 91 to 165 during the war. The reason for this is obvious for Split served as a

transit point for Jewish refugees from Bosnia and some of them decided to stay there.¹⁴

Darko Fišer, the President of the Osijek Jewish community, maintains (15.6.1996) that the task of the smaller Jewish communities in Croatia is to keep the Jewish tradition alive and to leave a trace of the Jewish community in people's minds, and last but not least, to take care of existing Jewish cemeteries.

4.2. The Jewish Community in Serbia – continuity of Yugoslav Jewry

Serbia and Montenegro today form so-called rump-Yugoslavia. There is not even one Jewish community in Montenegro and therefore this study deals exclusively with Serbian Jewry. According to the Jewish Agency, there were 3221 Jews in Serbia in 1995.¹⁵ Some 500 Jews emigrated from Serbia during the war. The Serbian Jewish population is concentrated mostly in the Vojvodina region.

The Jewish Communities in Serbia were in a better position than their fellow communities in Croatia and Bosnia at the time of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. There were no military activities on Serbian soil and thus no one's life was in immediate danger. The Federation of Jewish Communities was able to continue functioning as before through the existing organizations, except for the fact that most of the local communities were cut off from the Federation. The biggest losses, besides a radical decrease in the number of communities, were the loss of the Old People's Home in Zagreb and the Pirovac summer camp on the Adriatic Coast. The dispute between the Federation and the Croatian Jewish communities was partly caused by the still unsettled question of the division of property.

The international sanctions imposed on Yugoslavia caused economic distress, which obviously encouraged emigration from Serbia. Many Jews of the younger generation left in order to avoid being called up. Regardless of emigration, the number of Serbian Jews has increased to 3400, which is almost 1000 more than before the war. This is partly explained by Bosnian Jewish emigrants who decided to stay in Belgrade, but mainly the increase is a result of the returning to the Jewish communities of those Jews who had no previous contacts with the community. This development is parallel to the development in Croatia.

Belgrade was the centre of Yugoslav Jewry prior to the collapse of Yugoslavia, and the headquarters of the Federation was located there. After the collapse,

¹⁴ The second oldest synagogue in Europe, built in 1408, is located in Dubrovnik. Unfortunately, it suffered some damage by artillery shelling in December 1991. The most attractive monument of the Split Jewish community is a synagogue built as early as the 16th century. It was under renovation, financially supported by Croatia, in 1995.

¹⁵ Sikkum šenat pe'ilut 1995. However, on the basis of research carried out for my Master's thesis, the correct number would be about 3400 (Kerkkänen 1997: 74-81).

the Federation continued functioning under the same title as before, this time minus all the Jewish communities in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Now it formed an umbrella organization of Serbian Jewish communities. Officially the Federation of the Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia is recognized both as an ethnic and as a religious community (Singer 6.6.1996). A new constitution is being drafted as in Croatia (Salom 8.6.1996). The General Assembly of the Jewish communities meets annually and as the supreme authoritative body it elects the Executive Committee and the President, which are both elected for a term of three years (Singer 6.6.1996). The governing body of the local Jewish community is the General Assembly, which meets annually. All the members of the community over 18 years of age have the right to vote. The president and the Executive Committee of the community are elected by the General Assembly for a period of four years. (Salom 8.6.1996.)

The activities of the Federation are supervised by various commissions. These are the Financial Commission, the Social Commission, the Commission of the Jewish Historical Museum, the Commission for Anti-Semitic Phenomena, the Commission for Religious Affairs, the Cultural Commission and the Youth Commission. The Federation also provides legal services. (Grinvald 6.6.1996.) The Braća Baruch choir and the Magen David, a Society for Humanitarian Aid, are also part of the Federation's activities. The Magen David was originally established as early as 1874, but its activities were renewed during the war following the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The Magen David distributed a considerable amount of medicine to hospitals in Serbia. In the Federation building there functions a pharmacy serving members of the Jewish Community. (Grinvald 6.6.1996.) The sports club Makkabi was set up in 1994 and a new Home for Old People was opened in May 1996, located in a wing of the Pančevo Gerontology Centre (Bilten/Belgrade 5/1996; Grinvald 6.6.1996). Thus the housing problem of old people was partly solved, for the previous Old People's Home of the Federation is located in Zagreb, out of reach of the Serbian Jews.

During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina the Federation took care of the Jewish communities which were located in the area of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. These were the Jewish communities of Doboj, Banja Luka and Grbavica (a suburb of Sarajevo). Later Grbavica was joined to the Sarajevo Jewish Community as a result of the unification of Sarajevo in spring 1996. (Grinvald 6.6.1996.) Officially the Doboj and Banja Luka Jewish communities do not belong to the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia for they are located on Bosnian soil.

The Federation has two rabbis, Chief Rabbi Cadik Danon and a younger rabbi, Isak Asiel. Asiel teaches Hebrew and Judaism in different Jewish communities, and he is responsible for burials and ritual slaughtering of animals as well (Asiel 6.6.1996). The pre-war Ashkenazic synagogue, which was not destroyed in World War II, serves the mainly Sephardic community. Jewish holidays and services

follow the Sephardic tradition although Ashkenazic songs are sung in the service as well. (Asiel 6.6.1996.)

Before the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Federation's main paper was *Jevrejski Pregled*, the last issue of which came out in December 1990. The Federation did not publish any paper for the next two years. The first issue of the new *Bilten* of the Belgrade Jewish community appeared in April 1993. Altogether seven issues of *Bilten* appeared before it was changed to be the paper of the whole Federation under the new title *Bilten-Jevrejski Pregled* (Gaon 7.6.1996). It appears monthly and serves as the Federation's most important channel of communication with its members (*Bilten/Belgrade* 4/1996). *The Jewish Historical Museum Bulletin* is also published twice a year by the Federation (Grinvald 18.5.1995). The Jewish Historical Museum itself publishes *Zbornik* once every three or four years, so far a total of six periodicals have been published. *Pinkas*, a small paper containing articles on Judaism and Jews, has been published as part of the Federation's project for revitalization of small communities. A *Jewish Calendar* is published annually by the Federation (Grinvald 6.6.1996). A youth paper, entitled *Hai* appeared in 1989-92 three or four times; it has been replaced by *Yofi*, which has appeared at irregular intervals since 1994.¹⁶

The Belgrade Jewish Community has substantially grown in size since the collapse of Yugoslavia. Prior to the 1991-95 war its membership numbered about 1600 but in June 1996 it was already 2200 (*Jevrejski Kalendar* 5742; Grinvald 6.6.1996). The community has grown partly due to the émigrés from Bosnia who decided to stay in Belgrade, but the majority of new members have come from Belgrade itself. Other Jewish communities in Serbia are located in Novi Sad with 500 Jews¹⁷, Subotica with 213, Sombor with 80, Zrenjanin with 50 (Grinvald 6.6.1996), Pančevo with 130, Zemun with 170 and Niš with 45 (Grinvald 6.6.1996) Jews respectively.

The greatest increase in the size of a community besides Belgrade has taken place in Novi Sad, where almost 300 new members have joined the community and according to George Heisler (8.6.1996), a member of the community, the reason for this growth is obvious: 'in time of distress everybody wants to find one's own nation; also humanitarian aid, especially medicines, distributed by the community attracts old people'. Heisler goes on to say, 'The community is in every sense more active now than before the war, the spirit has been kindled and Jews want to show that they are alive, they want to show their identity in every possible manner.' The Novi Sad Jewish community also has its own choir, Hashira, and a youth magazine entitled *Hadashot* appears four times per year (Heisler 8.6.1996).

¹⁶ The Writer's discussion with some young people of the community on June 6th, 1996.

¹⁷ All the statistics in this paragraph are from *Sikkum šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslawya* unless otherwise stated.

Both the Zrenjanin and Prishtina Jewish communities ceased to exist as independent communities after World War II and were restarted in 1994 (Bilten/Belgrade 12/94). The former Kikinda Jewish community has combined with the newly started Zrenjanin community.

It appears that small communities in Serbia have a better chance of survival than similar small communities in Croatia, due to organized efforts by the Federation of Jewish Communities in Belgrade. Serbia's Jewish communities have the best chances for the future amongst the former Yugoslav Jewish communities. Their activity is based on a centralized organization which holds to the tradition of Yugoslav Jewry. Also, the strong will to revive Jewish life in Serbia speaks for a promising future. The greatest problem is financial, as in every republic of former Yugoslavia, for community activities are financed mainly by American Jews via the JOINT.

The same phenomenon of a revival of identity as was observed in Croatia took place in Serbia, too. Many Jews are returning to their roots. Rabbi Isak Asiel (6.6.1996) comments that the situation is in a way better than before the disintegration of Yugoslavia and that 'the war caused Jews to wake up'. This is a paradox of otherwise regrettable disintegration, he says. The reawakening of Jewish identity does not mean religious revival in Serbia any more than in Croatia. The Jewish Community was already a secular community before World War II and the same secular tradition continues (Singer 6.6.1996). The President of the Federation, Aca Singer, says that his Jewishness is based on feelings, origin and national identity rather than on religion. The most important matter of identity is the feeling of being a Jew, supported by a Jewish education at home and by the Jewish tradition. Personally, he cannot call himself a Serb. (Singer 6.6.1996.) The Federation of Yugoslav Jewish Communities has launched a campaign to increase the awareness of Jewish identity among the Jews. Part of this effort is a project called 'Revitalization of Small Communities'. Activities are carefully planned and organized and the fact that the Federation has two rabbis gives the opportunity of providing religious instruction and arranging religious services in an otherwise very secular community. Increased activity since the disintegration of Yugoslavia is well demonstrated by renewal of the Jewish community in Zrenjanin and in Priština (Kosovo).

4.3. The Jewish Communities of Bosnia-Herzegovina – diminished but alive

The war between the three largest ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Muslims, Serbs and Croats broke out on the April 6th, 1992 and continued for three and a half years, before the Dayton Peace Accord was signed in November 1995. The unity of Bosnia-Herzegovina was agreed upon in the Accord, but in practice Bosnia was and still is divided into the Federation of Bosnian Muslims and Croats and the

Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Bosnian Jews were affected by the war much more than their counterparts in Croatia and Serbia. The majority of them emigrated to Israel, Croatia or Serbia. At least two Jews were killed in Sarajevo due to bombings and 10-12 lost their lives due to lack of proper medical care (Montague 1992). A Jewish couple was murdered in an armed robbery in Banja Luka (Grinvald 6.6.1996).

Before the disintegration of Yugoslavia there were six Jewish communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Banja Luka, Doboj, Mostar, Sarajevo, Tuzla and Zenica (*Jevrejski Kalendar 5752*). The war severed contacts with the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, except for the Jewish communities of Banja Luka and Doboj, which were located on territory controlled by the Serbs. Bosnia's own, independent umbrella organization of Jewish communities, *Jevrejska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine*, was founded by the end of 1992 (Finci 10.4.1997). This community consists of the Jewish communities of Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla and Zenica. The Banja Luka and Doboj Jewish communities were in contact with the Federation in Belgrade even though they did not officially belong to the Federation.

As a matter of fact, the Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina is almost the same as the Jewish community of Sarajevo; Mostar, Tuzla and Zenica are much smaller units. The number of Jews in Bosnia-Herzegovina decreased from about 1300 to 800 during the war. As was discussed earlier, up to 1500 Jews emigrated from Bosnia during the war. As a result there should be none left when comparing the number of émigrés to the number of Jews before the outbreak of war, which was 1281 according to the Jewish Agency (*Sikkum šenat pe'ilut 1995*). This clearly indicates, that the number of formerly assimilated Jews returning to the communities was by far the largest in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina publishes its own magazine *Bilten* (*Bilten – Glasnik Jevrejske Zajednice Bosne i Hercegovine*). Its first, so-called 'war' number, was issued in May 1993 in Serbo-Croat and English.

The Jews of Bosnia-Herzegovina are assimilated, and mixed marriages are as frequent as among Jews in the other former republics of Yugoslavia. Religion plays but a small part in community life and religious holidays are social gatherings rather than keeping up religious tradition (Wilkinson 1996). At the beginning of the war in 1992, Tora scrolls and religious books had to be removed from the synagogue and thus it could no longer function as synagogue in a religious sense (Pomfret 1992). Under war conditions only Saturday morning services and the highest Jewish holidays were observed (Čerešnješ 1993). Answering criticism regarding the non-religious nature of the Bosnian Jews, Jacob Finci, the President of the Jewish Philanthropic Society *La Benevolencija* responded by saying 'some things are Jewish, some not, this has been however the only way of being a Jew in Sarajevo. Our biggest achievement is survival and for this purpose even things which are not in line with the religious regulations, have to be done' (Wilkinson 1996).

The Sarajevo Jewish Community, the largest in Bosnia, comprised 1090 members at the beginning of the '80s (Jevrejski Kalendar 5742). According to the Jewish Agency, there were 540 Jews in 1995 (Sikkum šenat pe'ilot 1995). The community gathers in the Ashkenazic synagogue in Hamdije Kreševljakovića Street (formerly known as Dobrovoljačka Street). The Community's organizational structure is similar to any other Jewish community in former Yugoslavia: the community has an Executive Board and a President (Albahari 7.6.1996). Before the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Sarajevo Jewish Community was known as the most active and lively of the Jewish communities (Freidenreich 1984: 33).

The majority of Sarajevo Jews are Sephardic although the distinction between Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews ceased to exist after World War II. The Community, however, endeavours to keep Sephardic traditions. Regardless of the war, the Sarajevo Jewish Community celebrated 500th anniversary of the expulsion from Spain, in form of SEFARAT 92 in November 1992. Part of keeping the Sephardic tradition alive is an effort to ensure the survival of the Judeo-Spanish language.¹⁸

An interesting matter is that during the war years 1992-95 almost the whole membership of the Sarajevo Jewish community has changed. Almost all of the previous members of the community emigrated during the conflict. However, already in 1993 about 400 new members had joined, Jews who before the war were not in contact with the community (Ćerešnješ 1993).

Besides Sarajevo there are Jewish communities in Mostar with 39 members, in Tuzla with 109 and in Zenica with 42 members respectively (Finci 10.4.1997). Sarajevo is without question the centre of Jewish life in Bosnia, and the other communities in Bosnia are entirely dependent on Sarajevo. If the still continuing tension between the Federation of Bosnian Muslims and Croats and the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina calms down, it is obvious that the Banja Luka and Doboј Communities will join the Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This is reflected by the decision to hold a joint meeting of Bosnia-Herzegovina's Jewish Communities in Banja Luka in May 1997 (Finci 10.4.1997). The slow return of those Jews who emigrated from Bosnia during the war has already begun and it can strengthen these otherwise diminished Jewish communities.

The Banja Luka and Doboј Jewish communities are located in the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina and individual Jews also live in the towns of Pale, Trebinje, Bijeljina, Visegrad, Teslić and Brčko. The Federation of Jewish Communities in Belgrade keeps in contact with these Jews (Albahari 7.6.1996 & Bilten/Belgrade 11/1995), and a total number of about 200 Jews are living in the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Bilten/Belgrade 9/1994). The Banja Luka Jewish community has grown and now consists of 53 members in comparison with 16 before the war (Sikkum šenat pe'ilot 1995). A Search for humanitarian aid, Jewish

¹⁸ The community published in 1994 a book entitled *Cuentos Sobre Los Sefardies De Sarajevo - A Collection of Sephardim Stories From Sarajevo*.

identity and security among fellow-Jews have been reasons for the growth of the community. The Doboj Jewish Community has similarly grown and now has 68 members, in comparison with 28 before the war (Sikkum šenat pe'ilot 1995). The increase in the membership is due to the same reasons as mentioned in regard to Banja Luka.

4.4. The Slovenian Jewish Community – a community only on paper

The process of the disintegration of Slovenia took place quite easily, following a short period of fighting in the summer 1991. Slovenia as a neighbouring country of Austria and Italy is more distinct from other republics of former Yugoslavia not only because of its geographical location but also because of its language, Slovenian, which differs from Serbo-Croat.

After World War II there was only one Jewish community in Slovenia, located in its capital Ljubljana. There were 110 Jews in 1954 and ten years later only 84 in Ljubljana (Eş-Ḥayyim 1988: 165). At the beginning of the '80s there were 116 Jews altogether in Slovenia, the majority of them in Ljubljana and some in the towns of Lendava, Maribor and Murska Sobota (Jevrejski Kalendar 5742). Slovenian independence did not remarkably alter the situation of the Jews in Slovenia, in comparison to former times. The community had already existed for some time mainly on paper without organized activities (Slovenia – Jewish Communities of the World). According to the Jewish Agency, there were only 72 Jews left in Slovenia in 1995 (Sikkum šenat pe'ilot 1995). However, it is worth noting that between 30 and 50 Bosnian Jewish refugees moved to Slovenia and immediately upon their arrival received citizenship (Sade 12.6.1996). Therefore there are over 100 Jews today in Slovenia. In addition, there are an estimated 200-300 assimilated Jews living in Slovenia outside of Jewish communities (Kreft 10.1.1996).

As a matter of fact, the Slovenian Jewish community acts under the auspices of the Co-ordination Committee of Croatian Jewish Communities (Slovenia – Jewish Communities of the World). Thus it is the only one of the Jewish communities in former Yugoslavia that is formally a part of the Jewish community of another country, in this case Croatia. This is understandable bearing in mind the geographical proximity between Ljubljana and Zagreb, and the inability of the Slovenian Jewish community to support itself.

According to the Slovenian Jewish politician Lev Kreft (10.1.1996), there is some anti-Semitism in Slovenia but it is not directed towards Slovenia's own Jews for the Slovenes in general are totally unaware of their Jewish minority. A return to the roots, as in other republics of former Yugoslavia, is not found among Slovenian Jews. Those factors which have forced Jews to seek identity and social security in the Jewish communities in the midst of a collapsing Yugoslavia, were not present in

Slovenia. Neither was external pressure exerted. The Slovenian Jewish Community is by far the weakest of the Jewish communities of former Yugoslavia.

4.5. The Macedonian Jewish Community – struggles against assimilation

The Macedonian secession from former Yugoslavia took place peaceably. As is the case of Slovenia, Macedonia also has its own language, Macedonian, which differs from the Serbo-Croat spoken in other parts of former Yugoslavia.

The shift from the Republic of Yugoslavia to the independent state of Macedonia (or FYROM – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as it is officially called) did not greatly affect the Jewish minority of Macedonia. After World War II there remained one Jewish community in Macedonia, that of Skopje, preserving a rich and long tradition of Macedonian Jewry. Most Macedonian Jews perished in the Holocaust, only 328 Jews survived to continue Jewish life in Skopje after the war. The number of Jews decreased and in 1969 only 54 Jews were left (Lebl 1988: 256). Slowly the number of Jews increased, reaching a total of 112 just before the disintegration of Yugoslavia (Sikkum šenat pe'ilut 1995). The Macedonian Jewish Community began to grow as a result of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. It has received some 50 new members, numbering in 1996 a total of 165 Jews (Iliev 1.4. 1996). Only 6 Jews emigrated to Israel during the war, according to the Jewish Agency (Sikkum šenat pe'ilut 1995).

The independence of Macedonia also led its Jews to create a communal framework of its own and this was founded (probably in 1992) under the name *Evrejska Zaednica na Makedonija – Jewish Community of Macedonia*. Macedonian Jews have not faced anti-Semitism and it seems unlikely to happen in the future. The greatest danger for the Jewish community is assimilation. The community sees its task as that of being a reminder of a once rich Jewish history in Macedonia (Iliev 1.4.1996).

5. THE JEWISH MINORITY VIS-À-VIS THE AUTHORITIES – A QUESTION OF RELATIONSHIP

The independence of Croatia brought new state symbols, such as a flag with a red and white chequered shield in the middle and a new currency, the Kuna. Both the currency and the flag were used during the preceding Ustaša period. Some Jews felt uneasy at seeing symbols with links to the Ustaša past of Croatia (Šprajc 13.6. 1996). Already in 1990 a square in Zagreb 'Victims of Fascism' was renamed the 'Square of Croatian Rulers', for example. Among others, the Jews expressed their opposition to this move (Jevrejski Pregled 3-6/1990: summary). Streets named after

partisans, anti-Fascists or victims of Ustaša were renamed, and some 2000 memorials dedicated to the victims of Fascism or to partisans were destroyed or vandalized (Gruden 1996: 15). This development understandably aroused suspicion, and perhaps confusion among the Croatian Jews. All of a sudden the Jews realized that with the collapse of Yugoslavia they are facing a new regime. They felt that the sudden collapse had surprised them (Šprajc 13.6.1996). Nonetheless, they expressed loyalty to the country in which they were living. Those living in Zagreb felt close to Croatia, while those living in Belgrade felt themselves close to Serbia (Goldstein 14.6.1996).

Interestingly, the Jewish community was targeted during the very initial stage of the war in former Yugoslavia. August 19, 1991 is recorded as a sad day in the history of the Zagreb Jewish Community. In the early hours of that day an explosion destroyed the Zagreb Jewish Community centre on Palmotićeva Street. The building itself was badly damaged but fortunately there were no casualties. Another explosion occurred at the same time in the Jewish section of the Mirogoj cemetery in Zagreb. The whole community was shocked by these incidents. (Šprajc 13.6.1996.)

The general situation at the time of these explosions was tense. Fighting had been going on between Croats and Croatian Serbs for two months and the future was uncertain. War propaganda diverted people's minds to the horrible images of World War II. Memories from the battles between Ustašas, Četniks and Partisans were revived and brought up again. Serbia regarded the attack against the Jewish community centre as a sign of Fascism in Croatia. Less than an hour after the attack Belgrade's official news agency announced that the attack was made by Croatian nationalists. (Tsur 1993; Teitelbaum 1992.)

The truth about the attack seems, however, to be still unknown. The Croatian police has not solved the case yet, and the Croats regard it as unsolved (Goldstein 14.6.1996; Šprajc 13.6.1996). Paradoxically enough the alleged attackers have already been brought to trial in Serbia! The Belgrade based weekly, NIN, reported that the blowing up of the Jewish centre in Zagreb was part of a larger operation, code-named 'Opera Orientalis', which aimed at blame to the Croats worldwide, and to promote the unity of Yugoslavia by preventing Croatian and Slovenian secessions. A Serb born in Croatia, Slavko Malobabić and Radenko Radjčić (of Jewish origin) appeared in court in Belgrade on a charge of blowing up the Jewish centre on the orders of the Serbian intelligence service. With them, a group of high-ranking Serbian Army officers were also charged. The reason for these legal proceedings in Belgrade was an effort to get rid of the old, Communist-minded commanders in the army and to replace them with more nationalistically minded officers (Jovanović 1994). This is a plausible explanation and most probably the attack was engineered by the Serbs in order to blame Croats for it. It was certainly in the interest of the Belgrade regime to prevent the secession of Croatia from Yugoslavia and con-

currently the incident would have supported Serbian claims concerning the existence of Fascism in Croatia. The question, why Croats refuse to accept this explanation, remains open.

Immediately after the incident the state of Croatia granted an interest-free loan to the Zagreb Jewish Community for the renovation of the Centre. The renovations took place without delay, and the opening ceremony of the entirely renovated Centre took place on the eve of Roš haš-Šana in 1992 (Kovač 1993: 5). The loan given by the state of Croatia actually became a gift since the community has not been obligated to pay it back. This led some Jews outside of Croatia to claim that in this way Croatia had bought the Jews in order to support its policy. (Šprajc 13.6.1996.) Without doubt, this gesture represented a debt of gratitude to the Croatian Jewish community, and it has possibly led them to exercise some self-censorship in expressing their views.

Basically the sad incident was not an anti-Semitic attack deliberately targeted against Jews but instead it had much wider connections with the general political situation of the time. The Jewish community, as a sensitive subject, offered a perfect target for this kind of operation. Nevertheless, it shows the way the Jewish community was utilized as an object for the sake of political ends in collapsing Yugoslavia. The speculations, uncertainties and complicities connected with the explosion at the Jewish centre illustrate perfectly the complicity of war and politics in former Yugoslavia.

The Croatian-Israeli Friendship Society was established just before the break up of Yugoslavia in order to foster good relations between Croatia and the Jews. During the first years of its activities it was considerably involved in politics, and therefore its relationship with the Zagreb Jewish Community was a problematic one. Later on relations have improved (Fišer 15.6.1996). Obviously the establishment of such a society was clearly linked to the forthcoming collapse of Yugoslavia. It also served as a counter-weight to the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society established in Belgrade in 1990 (Poulton 1991: 97).

The main cause of anxiety in the relationship between the Jews and the Croatian state is the fact that the state does not make a clear distinction between itself and the so-called Independent State of Croatia that existed during World War II (Šprajc 13.6.1996). During the multi-party election campaign in 1990 some anti-Semitic statements were heard, of which the best known is an utterance by the Croatian president Franjo Tuđman: 'I'm happy that my wife is neither a Serb nor a Jew' (Ben-Haim 1993). Fascist elements are also found in two extreme right-wing political parties in Croatia. Certain members of these parties come out publicly with anti-Semitic statements.¹⁹ These were sporadic incidents and there is no real threat to the Jews in Croatia because of their Jewishness. The Jews, however, would

¹⁹ Antisemitism – World Report 1996. The parties are Nova Hrvatska Desnica (NHD – Croatian New Right) and Hrvatski Oslobodilacki Pokret (HOP – Croatian Freedom Movement).

prefer to see more prompt responses by the Government to anti-Semitic incidents (Goldstein 14.6.1996). For the first time since World War II the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' was published in Croatia, in autumn 1996 (Koš 6.9.1996).

By way of contrast, Croatia has shown a keen interest in its Jewish minority since the disintegration of Yugoslavia. As stated above, the Jewish Centre in Zagreb was renovated with the help of financial support from the government, the old synagogue of Split is being renovated as well and Croatia is also financing publications of the *Studia Judaico-Croatica* (Goldstein 14.6.1996). These have been remarkable gestures from the state which itself faces economic difficulties and huge war expenses.

The official line of Croatian policy in its relationship with the Jewish minority is an expected one. In the eyes of the world, Croatia has no choice but to dissociate itself from the burden of their Ustaša background in World War II, and to foster good relations with the Jews. This was essential in order to achieve the sympathy of the Western world during the war. The problem with this attitude, which, according to Goldstein (14.6.1996), has reached a level of philo-Semitism is that it does not emerge from a tolerant attitude but merely from utilization of this attitude for particular ends. Moreover, wavering between anti-Semitic statements and philo-Semitism reflects a certain immaturity on the part of Croatia with its relations to the Jewish minority.

Following the disintegration of Yugoslavia, i.e. since 1991, many Serbs identified with the Jews, asserting that both Serbs and Jews alike were persecuted during World War II by the Croatian Fascists. In fact, the tragic destiny of the Jews both in Serbia and in the Independent State of Croatia was similar. Some Serbian historians have blamed the Germans for the atrocities in Serbia but in fact the puppet government of Serbia collaborated with the Germans in order to create in Belgrade the first *Judenfrei* city in Europe (Cohen 1992).

After the collapse of Yugoslavia, Aca Singer, the President of the Federation of Jewish Communities, expressed the existence of a good working relationship with the regime of Serbia. The neutral stand of Jewish communities on political issues is certainly one of the reasons for this. The Jews emphasized that this was 'not our war'. There is no law in Serbia limiting the activities of its Jewish minority. (Singer 6.6.1996.) Jews have always been free to organize their own activities, and relations between Jews and non-Jews (i.e. Serbs) have in this century been friendly. As an expression of good mutual relations some well-known Serbian and Jewish intellectuals established the Society of Serbian-Jewish Friendship during the time of former Yugoslavia, in 1990, with some 3000 members (Singer 6.6.1996; Poulton 1991: 97). The Friendship Society posed some problems to the Federation. At the outset of the disintegration of Yugoslavia it strongly supported the nationalistic policy of Serbia. Some outsiders viewed statements of the Society as representing the official line of the Federation. The Society is, however, a totally independent

organization without links to the Federation of Jewish communities. A number of Jews left the Society when it became too involved in politics. (Singer 6.6.1996.)

The Serbian regime treated its Jewish minority very well during the war years. There are at least two reasons for this. The first is that the Jews were supposed to have influence in the USA, and the second is that by showing a tolerant attitude towards the Jews Serbia was presenting an image of being a democratic regime (Singer 6.6.1996). This intentional attitude was necessary while Serbia tried to evade the economic sanctions imposed by the UN through its contacts with American and Israeli Jews (Heisler 8.6.1996).

The 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' appeared in the bookshops of Belgrade during the spring of 1994. The Federation filed a suit against its publisher and protested against it via the media (*Bilten*/Belgrade 4/1994). Also, a few anti-Semitic articles were published in Serbia. According to *Bilten*, one reason for this is that there is a long anti-Semitic tradition in the countries neighbouring on Yugoslavia. The same source regards anti-Semitism as a by-product of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and associates it closely with nationalism and xenophobia. The Jews were selected as targets of nationalists because they were considered to be 'Lovers of the USA'. (*Bilten*/Belgrade 4/1996.) Serbian anti-Semitism is clearly a matter of isolated incidents and has not been instigated by the authorities (Singer 6.6.1996).

Obviously the regime of Slobodan Milošević tried to make use of Jewish contacts at the beginning of the conflict but these efforts did not bear fruit. The Federation made its effort to dissociate itself from politics whereas the Society of Serbian-Jewish Friendship played an active role in politics (and propaganda) on the Serbian side. The Federation opted for a low profile so as to protect the Jews and not to evoke anti-Semitic incidents.²⁰ This policy of the Federation guaranteed the freedom of activity of the Jewish communities throughout the upheavals caused by the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

The Bosnian Jews were as much assimilated as their fellow Jews in other parts of former Yugoslavia. They identified themselves as Yugoslavs to the degree that they did not consider themselves at all as a national minority like the Albanians or Hungarians in Yugoslavia (Galili & Lahav 1992). Especially the Jews in Sarajevo expressed the mutual tolerance between different nationalities which had lasted for many centuries. This tradition was so strong that as late as 1991 the outbreak of war in Bosnia was seen as an impossibility (Avineri 1994). The Bosnian Jews generally wanted to stay neutral in their relations to the different warring factions, and particularly to secure a safe exit for evacuation convoys from Sarajevo (Fishkoff 1994). According to Čerešnješ, all three warring factions looked for the support of the Jews for their cause. By showing a tolerant attitude towards the Jews they wanted

²⁰ The low profile of the Federation was under dispute for the elder generation of Jews would have liked to see more active support for the Belgrade regime during the conflict. They regarded this war as a continuation war against Nazism (Judah 1992.)

to demonstrate their democracy in the eyes of the international community. (Jerusalem Post 18.9.1992.) One example of this was the appointment of a Jew, Sven Alkalaj, as Ambassador of Bosnia-Herzegovina to the United States. Alkalaj himself agrees that he was appointed partly because of his Jewishness (Eldar 1995). The Bosnian government apparently thought that a Jewish ambassador would have a positive impact on the USA.

The humanitarian aid distributed during the war in besieged Sarajevo by the Jewish Philanthropic Society *La Benevolencija* positively influenced the relationship between the Jews and the Bosnian authorities. The American photographer Edward Serotta, who visited Sarajevo several times during the war, has said that it was the first time in the history of European wars that Jews have extended their helping hand both to Muslims and to Christians (Fishkoff 1994). A leading principle of *La Benevolencija*'s activity was to help anyone to survive, regardless of nationality or religion (Kozar 1993). The humanitarian aid donated by foreign contributors was shipped to Split and transferred to Sarajevo, where about 60 volunteers of *La Benevolencija* were in charge of distributing it. Less than half of the volunteers were Jews (*La Benevolencija* – Annual Report 1993). The most important part of *La Benevolencija*'s activities was the health care department which opened its first pharmacy at the beginning of 1992, and in May 1992 it was renamed the Jewish Pharmacy. This pharmacy provided Sarajevo citizens with insulin – the only pharmacy in Sarajevo to do so during the siege. Medicines were given free of charge on prescription and the Pharmacy became very popular among Sarajevo citizens during the war. (Gaon 1993.) Later *La Benevolencija* opened two more pharmacies which daily distributed between 3000-4000 medicines (*La Benevolencija* – Annual Report 1993). Since November 1992 there arrived every week in Sarajevo 7000 kg of medicines under the supervision of *La Benevolencija* (Gaon 1993). Once Sarajevo's official postal system ceased to function due to the war, *La Benevolencija* took care of the mail, which arrived in Sarajevo with the organization's supply convoys. For example, in 1993 more than 100,000 letters arrived in Sarajevo or were sent off from Sarajevo this way (JOINT-AR 1993). Also, perhaps it is needless to say, but it appears that Jewish life itself in Sarajevo was kept alive through the Jews' participation in humanitarian aid work channelled through *La Benevolencija*.

Some dark clouds, however, have started to hover over the Sarajevo Jewish community since the end of the war. Increasing Muslim nationalism and disputes about property (the non-return of apartments) has led the Jewish community on a collision course with the Bosnian Government. The Bosnian Government has allocated about 300 empty apartments, owned by the emigrant Jews, to its own supporters. (Wilkinson 1996.) The formerly rather secularized Bosnian Muslim community became more nationalistic and religious as a result of the miserable war. Islamization might have a negative effect on their relationship with the Jews in the

long run. This could cause trouble not faced before by the Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be a return to the formerly tolerant and co-operative attitude between different nationalities and religions in Bosnia.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The disintegration of Yugoslavia was a major historical change in the history of the Yugoslav Jewish communities. One period of Yugoslav Jewry, from 1919 until 1991, had come to an end. A change of this scale, as a fragmentation of the state, would seriously hamper the Jewish communities' ability to function, concluded Freidenreich in her study.

On the basis of this study it can be ascertained that her assumption, as understandable as it was, was a wrong one. The centralized organization of the Jewish communities collapsed together with Yugoslavia, but it did not hamper the ability of the Jewish communities to function. On the contrary, there is a slight, but indisputable, increase in the activities and in the Jewish population precisely as a result of Yugoslavia's disintegration.

Jewish life in the former Yugoslavia was totally dependent on the existence of the organized Jewish communities and one's Jewishness was demonstrated only through being a member of the Jewish community. After World War II there was rarely any ideological or religious identity involved in being a Jew. The disintegration of Yugoslavia proved that the strength of its Jewish community was in its organized structure, which, regardless of the collapse of the centralized Jewish Federation, assured a certain continuity for the work of the local communities. The Jewish communities and their structure in Zagreb and Sarajevo were so strong that they were able to create their own, new centralized national Jewish organizations. The historic change moulded the former Jewish communities into new, national Jewish communities.

The Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia (in Serbia) can be seen as a continuation of 'traditional' Yugoslav Jewry. The Croatian Jews have endeavoured to redefine their own Croatian Jewish history and identity, distinct from that of the former Yugoslavia. The Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina suffered the most as a result of the war and the majority of the Jews left for abroad, but, on the other hand, it distinguished itself positively through its humanitarian aid in Sarajevo and other parts of Bosnia.

The question of identity is a cardinal problem of Diaspora Jewry. The disintegration of Yugoslavia caused its Jews to reconsider their identity in the new national states. As a result, a re-awakening of Jewish identity did occur. Growing nationalistic ambiguities both in Croatia and Serbia excluded Jews from the pos-

sibility of identifying themselves with the Croats and the Serbs in the same manner as was usual before, as Yugoslavs (Goldstein 14.6.1996). Jews were well assimilated into the surrounding society of the former Yugoslavia and they felt themselves to be 'Yugoslavs' first and only then 'Jews'. The disintegration into the new national states made the former identification impossible; especially in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina a 'Yugoslav' identity was out of the question. Identification with the Croats, Muslims or Serbs was also felt to be unnatural, and therefore there was only one way out – a return to their Jewish roots and identity. The assimilated Jews who had stayed for decades with no contact with the Jewish communities started to return. This is demonstrated by the fact that there are still about the same number of Jews (6000) in the area of the former Yugoslavia than before its disintegration regardless of the fact that about 2500 Jews have left the area. Freidenreich (1979: 202) had assumed that about 90% of Yugoslavia's Jews belong to the Jewish communities but her estimate must have been too high. Developments after the break up of Yugoslavia have shown that only about 70% of Jews have been members of the Jewish communities. Revival of Jewish identity has rarely or not at all been connected with a religious revival or with Zionist ideology, but instead a knowledge of Jewish history, traditions and culture has been a factor in moulding a new Jewish identity which has found its expression inside the Jewish community.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia did not evoke a remarkable anti-Semitic movement in any part of former Yugoslavia. Except for the time of World War II, there is no deep-seated anti-Semitic tradition. There also was no reason to make the Jews scapegoats in line with traditional anti-Semitism. Targets for hate and suspicion were sufficiently numerous even without blaming the Jews for the misfortunes of the former multi-ethnic state of Yugoslavia.

On the other hand, the Jews had their own role during the war, one they obviously viewed with aversion. All the major warring factions in the conflict, Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, tried to demonstrate their democracy by their good relations with the Jewish minority. There was even an attempt to escape international sanctions via Jewish connections, and by means of these connections there was an attempt to influence the policy of the USA and of the other Western nations. The Jewish communities of former Yugoslavia clearly had no desire to play such a role. Jewish communities endeavoured to keep as low profile as possible during the conflict, and succeeded in this, except for some sporadic outbursts of nationalist sentiments by individual Jews. The authorities, on the contrary, wanted their Jews to provide propaganda for their own nationalistic goals. The attempted utilization of the Jewish minority to achieve the aforementioned political ends reflects a seriously unnatural attitude towards the position of a particular minority.

The low and neutral profile was deliberately chosen by the Jewish communities in order to protect Jews everywhere in the former Yugoslavia. Understandably, Jews felt their position as a minority threatened by sudden changes, and clearly

would have preferred the preservation of the former Yugoslavia. The wheels of change, however, could not be stopped, and the Jewish communities had no choice but to adapt to the new situation and to adopt a public attitude in line with the politics of the new host countries. Actually, this was the case with the Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The multi-ethnic and multireligious context of the Ottoman Empire attracted the Jews, for it gave a protected position to the minority, and reciprocally it led the Jews to identify with the central authorities. In this sense Communist Yugoslavia was a similar case. The Jews felt that their position in multi-ethnic Yugoslavia was secured, and therefore their objection to the disintegration was understandable as an inherited tradition of their forefathers. Adopting a public attitude in line with the new central authorities in the new national states was a continuation of a centuries' old tradition aiming at the protection of one's own position. Thus a certain parallelism in the Jewish attitude toward the splitting up of a larger unit into smaller units in the Balkans can be drawn as was the case both with the Ottoman Empire and Yugoslavia. The attitude was possible only due to the relatively secure minority position enjoyed by the Jews under both regimes.

The Jewish communities survived the transition from Yugoslav to post-Yugoslav era. The Jewish population has increased, the activities of the communities were revived, especially in Croatia and Serbia, and there is no fear of the disappearance of Jewish communities and the Jewish life in that part of the Balkans. The future of the Bosnian Jews will be dictated by the development of Bosnia, and it is still too early to say anything definite about it. The basic problems of the Jewish communities have not changed as a result of political disintegration. These are the advanced age of the members²¹, assimilation and financial dependence on international Jewish organizations.

The Jewry of former Yugoslavia – many of them themselves survivals of the Holocaust – survived through its organized communities, and these communities as organizations were skilful enough in profiting from a historic change to stimulate a revival of Jewish life in former Yugoslavia. The Jewry of former Yugoslavia continues its life, coloured with a slight optimism in the new national states in the form of new, nationally organized Jewish communities. The tragedy of Yugoslavia gave a positive impulse to a strongly assimilated Jewish community obviously slowing down its assimilation and increasing various Jewish communal activities to a level not seen since World War II.

²¹ In Croatia more than half of the community members are over 60 years of age (Šprajc 1996: 10) and in Serbia about 35% of the members of Jewish communities are 65 years old or older (Bilten/Belgrade 12/1995).

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