

## PART ONE

1944–1953

### – TRANSITION TO THE POST-WAR PERIOD

Following the liberation of Eastern Europe and the Balkan countries from the yoke of Nazi rule, which had taken the form of German occupation or puppet-Governments, the surviving Jews began their journey back to their home districts. The People's Democracies in Eastern Europe meant communist rule: Bulgaria from 1946, Rumania from 1947, Czechoslovakia from 1948 and Hungary from 1949 were part and parcel of the so-called Soviet satellite system, which dictated policy to these countries for years to come. The People's Republic of Yugoslavia from 1945 onwards pursued a more independent policy as it remained free of the presence of the Red Army, although it was under Soviet influence until the break in relations in 1948. Owing to its independent policy, Yugoslavia was compelled to seek economic assistance from the West, and thus in spite of totalitarian communist rule, geopolitically Yugoslavia did not belong to the Iron Curtain countries.

In Eastern Europe, as well as in the whole of continental Europe, the Jewish communities underwent periods of reconstruction in response to the Holocaust losses, changes in the formal status of religious communities in their host countries, emigration to Israel and the introduction of new regimes. Jewish communities disappeared as organised communities in the USSR, whereas a limited reconstitution took place in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania and Yugoslavia.<sup>1</sup>

Post-war Jewish communities have been divided by Daniel Elazar into seven categories based on their structural and cultural differences. Communities in Yugoslavia were classified together with those in Scandinavian countries under *State*

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<sup>1</sup> Elazar, Daniel J.: "The reconstitution of Jewish communities in the post-war period". *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XI, No. 2, December 1969, 192–193.

*Recognized Communal Structures*, whereas communities in Yugoslavia's neighbours behind the Iron Curtain, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Rumania, belonged to the category of *Subjugated Communities*, which in turn was subdivided into two subcategories: *Traditional Subjugated* (mainly Arab and Muslim countries) and *Modern Subjugated* (Eastern European countries). Daniel Elazar admits in his article that the degree of restriction varied from time to time in Eastern Europe, but a total dependence on the decision of the Communist leadership placed communities in countries like Bulgaria, Rumania and Hungary in the category of modern subjugated communities. He notes with regard to Yugoslavia, however, that in spite of the communities' belonging to the category of state recognized communal structures, they were partly subject to the conditions of the modern subjugated category.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Elazar 1969, 195–197.

## 2. FROM REPATRIATION TO REBUILDING – 1944–1948

The Holocaust survivors of the Yugoslav Jews were scattered in different places: some of them survived in the Italian occupation zone on the Adriatic Coast and in prisoner-of-war camps in Albania and Italy, some of them had joined the Partisan ranks and fought against the Nazis, while some of them were prisoners of war in Germany, and finally, a few survived the concentration camps in Poland, Austria and Hungary.<sup>3</sup> A total of about 1,200 Jews converted to Catholicism after the fall of Yugoslavia,<sup>4</sup> and about 1,000 succeeded in hiding in Belgrade or in the Yugoslav countryside.<sup>5</sup>

The destiny of Yugoslav Jews was catastrophic both in terms of human and material losses. Entire families were annihilated, many individuals lost all their relatives and the situation of many surviving orphaned children was especially miserable. Jews were deprived of all property: houses, enterprises, funds, shops, bank deposits, insurances, furniture, clothing and all other personal belongings.<sup>6</sup> All in all, the dispersed Yugoslav Jewry was in a state of total disorder and destruction at the time of Belgrade's liberation in October 1944. Of all the Yugoslav Jewish communities only the Zagreb Jewish community had been allowed to function to a certain extent during the war years. The first task of survivors was to return home, or perhaps more correctly, to former home districts. Jews, in the same way as other Yugoslavs<sup>7</sup>, were facing the beginning of a new period of transition of their own amid the transition and new order of the surrounding society.

About a year before the liberation of Belgrade a group of Jewish communists had already made an attempt to influence post-war Jewish affairs in Yugoslavia. A group of 150 Jewish communists among Jewish internees on the island of Rab

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<sup>3</sup> AJJDCA – Istanbul Box 3–4: Yugoslavia 1945, report on the position of Yugoslav Jews by D. Alkalay and F. Pops.

<sup>4</sup> CZA/S6/4655: Review on the Jews in the areas controlled by the Yugoslav Partisans as told by Leopold Hirt, a Jew and an economic representative of the general staff of Tito in Otošac, January 23, 1944.

<sup>5</sup> S. Goldstein 1989, 112.

<sup>6</sup> CZA/S25/5280: Report of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities concerning the problems of the Yugoslav Jews community. The Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia to Mr. Lourie and Mr. Marton, February 8, 1946.

<sup>7</sup> The total casualties in Yugoslavia during 1941–45 were according to reliable scholarship some 1,027,000 war casualties, in contrast to the official claim of 1,7 million dead (Ramet 1998b, 161).

(Arbe) decided to build up momentum, and on the day of liberation from Italian control (Italy capitulated on September 9, 1943) they went to meet representatives of Tito's Government with a request for authority over other Jews. It was granted provisionally, and it was announced that every Jew had to return to the interior of the country. However, this overzealous approach was rejected by one converted Jew, who was elected as an official representative of the Government in Jewish affairs.<sup>8</sup> After the liberation of the Italian concentration camps, many Jews, with the largest group coming from the island of Rab, joined the Croatian Partisans.<sup>9</sup>

Soon after the liberation of Belgrade all the c. 3,000 Jewish internees<sup>10</sup> in Italy received a return order on December 3, 1944. The order was reinforced with the proviso that refusal meant losing citizenship. Winter conditions did not encourage the return, and in fact many Jews only wanted to return in order to finish up their business and save their property (which in many cases did not exist any more). On the other hand, they were also afraid of losing their citizenship at the same time.<sup>11</sup> Finally most of the surviving Jews decided to return, and when repatriation as a whole was calculated to have ended at the beginning of 1946, altogether about 11,000 Jews were in Yugoslavia while about 1,500 were living abroad in the USA, Italy and Palestine.<sup>12</sup> The economic situation of the Jews was still a difficult one in 1946. Many repatriated Jews could not recover their former apartments, bank assets confiscated by the Germans had still not been returned, salaries were low and the number of unemployed was still significantly high among those who before the war had occupied non-productive positions.<sup>13</sup>

Dr. Fridrih Pops, the President of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities since 1933, had spent the war years hiding<sup>14</sup> in Belgrade. Two days after

<sup>8</sup> CZA/S6/4655: Review of the Jews in the areas controlled by the Yugoslav Partisans as told by Leopold Hirt, a Jew and an economic representative of the general staff of Tito in Otošac, January 23, 1944. According to this document Jewish communists even informed the authorities that the Jews had hidden a lot of property which must be taken from them, even using terror.

<sup>9</sup> Goldstein, Slavko: "Fighting the evil. The Jews of Croatia in the anti-Fascist resistance". *Voice*, Spring 1996, 39.

<sup>10</sup> Levinger 1987, 225.

<sup>11</sup> CZA/S6/4569: The situation of the Jews in Yugoslavia, among the Yugoslav Jews. A report by Zwi Leiman, December 20, 1944.

<sup>12</sup> CZA/S25/5280: Report of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities concerning the problems of the Yugoslav Jewish community. The Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia to Mr. Lourie and Mr. Marton, February 8, 1946.

<sup>13</sup> AJJDCA – Istanbul Box 5–11: the Autonomous Relief Committee of the Federation of Jewish Community of Yugoslavia to AJJDC, European Executive Council, November 18, 1946.

<sup>14</sup> About 1,000 Belgrade Jews managed to hide in the city and the provinces in their friends' homes or with their Serbian in-laws, or under a changed identity as 'Serbian refugees from Bosnia' (S. Goldstein 1989, 112).

the liberation of Belgrade, on October 22, 1944, he entered the old premises<sup>15</sup> of the Federation and hung at the entrance the sign: *Savez jevrejskih veroispovednih opština Jugoslavije* ('Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Yugoslavia') thus symbolically declaring the revival of Jewish existence and activity in post-war Yugoslavia.<sup>16</sup> The initial estimate of the number of surviving Jews was only about 1,200.<sup>17</sup>

The Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Yugoslavia was formally re-established early in 1945 and officially acknowledged as the legal representative of Yugoslav Jewry.<sup>18</sup> The authorities symbolically recognised the Jewish community by attending the opening ceremony of the only remaining Belgrade synagogue on December 4, 1944. The regime's delegation consisting of representatives of AVNOJ members and of the new Yugoslav Government was led by Moša Pijade.<sup>19</sup> The Federation was also the legal successor to the numerous defunct communities, and took over their property in order to use it as the basis of a reconstruction fund.<sup>20</sup> The first temporary Executive Committee of the Federation was organised on August 11, 1945 and its work was divided between three commissions: social-cultural, legal and financial-administrative. The first post-war conference of the Jewish communities was organised in November 1945.<sup>21</sup> Before this conference Albert Vajs, Vice-President of the Federation, David A. Alcalaj, president of the Belgrade Jewish community, and Vladislav Klajn, Major in the Yugoslav Army and a member of the Executive Committee, participated in the European Conference of the World Jewish Organisation in Paris<sup>22</sup> and during the journey Vajs and Alcalaj wrote a letter<sup>23</sup> in which they outlined the future lines of the organisational structure of post-war Yugoslav Jewry.

<sup>15</sup> The building later served as the Embassy of Israel in Yugoslavia.

<sup>16</sup> Kadelburg 1969, 115.

<sup>17</sup> Perera, David: "Neki statistički podaci o Jevrejima u Jugoslaviji u periodu od 1938 do 1965 godine". *Jevrejski Almanah 1968–1970*. Belgrad: Savez Jevrejskih Opština Jugoslavije, 136.

<sup>18</sup> CAHJP-EA/B-120: Report of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of the Federated People's Republic of Yugoslavia concerning the problems of Yugoslav Jews, from Alcalay and Gedalja, July 19, 1947.

<sup>19</sup> S. Goldstein 1989, 127; Gordiejew 1999, 104.

<sup>20</sup> CZA/Z6/324: World Jewish Congress – Minutes & Reports 1950, Part III, Short Minutes of the Meeting of the London members of the European Executive of the WJC, November 28, 1950.

<sup>21</sup> Kadelburg 1969, 119–120. There is, however, contradictory information about the timing of the first post-war Congress since Pops wrote to the Head of Organisation Department of the WJC in June 1947 that the first Congress of the Federation had not yet been convened (JHM/K-822: Pops to Schwarzbart, June 27, 1947).

<sup>22</sup> CAHJP-EA/G-583: the Delegation to the Presidency of Minister Council, October 28, 1945.

<sup>23</sup> CAHJP-EA/B-120: Letter from David A. Alcalaj and Dr. Albert Vajs, September 10, 1945 in Paris, see Chapter 2.1. "Organisational Reconstitution: Centralization".

The following 42 Jewish communities were re-established and recognised by the Federation by August 1945:<sup>24</sup> Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Novi Sad, Subotica, Sombor, Skopje, Split, Priština, Petrovgrad (later Zrenjanin), Ada, Senta, Mostar, Bitolj, Bačka-Palanka, Pančevo, Osijek, Bačka-Topola, Zemun, Čakovec, Đakovo, Stari Bečej, Stara Kanjiča, Vršac, Velika-Kikinda, Bačko-Petrovo Selo, Kosovska-Mitrovica, Niš, Leskovac, Mol, Ilok, Rijeka, Novi-Vrbas, Debelječa, Čonoplja, Zenica, Bugojno, Bihać, Bačko-Gradište, Murska-Sobota, Dubrovnik and Nova-Gradiška.

In the nature of things, amidst the repatriation and the beginning of reconstruction, the number of Jewish communities fluctuated, as some initially re-established communities quickly disappeared and others re-emerged in the course of time. By 1947 the number of re-established communities had risen to 56<sup>25</sup> and the number of Jews registered in them to 12,399.<sup>26</sup> For unknown reasons, a later source lists only 38 communities in 1947 with slightly under 12,000 Jews.<sup>27</sup> Gradually a few synagogues also became operational, and the Novi Sad and Subotica synagogues, for example, were opened in August 1945.<sup>28</sup>

One of the main tasks of the Yugoslav regime in the first post-war years was the elimination of all forms of political opposition while continuing to steer society towards general reconstruction. As part of the process of gaining control, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia attempted to control and penetrate religious organisations during 1945, and succeeded to some degree. Especially with regard to the major religious dominations, the Government forcefully promoted the creation of unions and associations of clergy in order to gain tighter control of the clergy.<sup>29</sup> Under these circumstances and in this atmosphere, Jews faced the task of reconstituting their organised life and activity. The prevailing tension and uncertainty about the future can be sensed in a report from the Zionist Organisation in Bari, Italy, which advises those writing to the Federation in Belgrade that 'the situation is very delicate and letters should be written for the time being with greatest caution'.<sup>30</sup> Approximately at the same time, the Organisation Department of the

<sup>24</sup> CAHJP-EA/B-120: Pops, Alkalaj and Gedalja to 'Genfer Büro des Jüdischen Weltkongresses' (Geneva Office of the World Jewish Congress), August 9, 1945.

<sup>25</sup> CAHJP-EA/B-120: Report of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of the Federated People's Republic of Yugoslavia concerning the problems of Yugoslav Jews, from Alcalay and Gedalja, July 19, 1947. See also Map 2 on page xi.

<sup>26</sup> Perera 1971, 137.

<sup>27</sup> *Spomenica 1919–1969*, 207.

<sup>28</sup> CAHJP-EA/B-120: Letter from David A. Alkalaj and Dr. Albert Vajs, September 10, 1945 in Paris.

<sup>29</sup> Mojzes 1997, 212, 217.

<sup>30</sup> CZA/S5/11423: Julije Wiener, Zionist Organisation in Bari to the Jewish Agency for Palestine, June 7, 1945.

Jewish Agency for Palestine had received the first messages from the remnants of Yugoslav Jewry. Jewish leaders from Yugoslavia wrote in a very cautious manner about the situation and requested that no contacts should be made with them from Palestine, for that would endanger their delicate position.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.1. ORGANISATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION: CENTRALISATION

The post-war organisation of the Yugoslav Jewish community is outlined in a letter written by the Vice-President of the Federation Albert Vajs and a member of the Executive Committee David Alkalaj in September 1945. It highlights the need to work together laying aside all ideological or personal disputes, and stresses that all must take part in co-operation as Jews, whatever their Zionist, Communist or neutral orientation, in the community administration.<sup>32</sup> This aim was consequently realised and in practice it meant the policy of centralisation in the Jewish Federation.

Yugoslav Jews had been accustomed to a rich variety of Jewish organisations and associations during the inter-war years. All had had the opportunity to express their religious or nationalistic orientation and identification in the appropriate organisation, and indeed, the remnants of Yugoslav Jewry wanted to renew the structures of the pre-war days. There existed a desire to revive both the Federation of Zionists of Yugoslavia<sup>33</sup> and the Union of Orthodox Jewish Religious Communities after the war.<sup>34</sup>

There were still a considerable number of Jews who maintained their Zionist orientation, and who already had relatives living in Palestine.<sup>35</sup>

### *Rejection of Zionists*

However, the effort to reconstitute the Zionist organisation ran into difficulties almost from the outset. The question aroused differences of opinion between the Jews of Zionist orientation, mainly those who had had pre-war experience and a Zionist training and still maintained strong Zionist aspirations, and the non-Zionists,

<sup>31</sup> CZA/S5/11423/210/328: from the Organisation Department, May 16, 1946.

<sup>32</sup> CAHJP-EA/B-120: Letter from David A. Alkalaj and Dr. Albert Vajs, September 10, 1945 in Paris.

<sup>33</sup> CZA/S5/11423: Pops to the Executive of the Zionist Organisation, July 28, 1947.

<sup>34</sup> CAHJP-EA/B-120: Letter from David A. Alkalaj and Dr. Albert Vajs, September 10, 1945 in Paris.

<sup>35</sup> CZA/S5/11423: Loker to the Organisation Department: report of David Perera, August 28, 1947; CZA/S25/5280: Summary of the report of David Perera on his visit to Yugoslavia, August 27, 1947.

many of whom were communists.<sup>36</sup> An anti-Zionist tradition had existed among Yugoslav communists from the days of the inter-war period, when communists in general, and Jewish communists in particular, had carried on a continuous debate with the Yugoslav Zionists.<sup>37</sup> For example, Moša Pijade had said that although he supported the *Yishuv* (Jewish settlement in Palestine) in Palestine because of anti-British considerations, from the ideological point of view he was against Zionism, and during the inter-war period he himself had been a severe critic of the Yugoslav Zionists, and had been making an effort to attract Zionist youths into the ranks of the Communist youth movement.<sup>38</sup> There is no indication that the communist regime of the new Yugoslavia would have needed to pay special attention to the small faction of post-war Zionists, as their efforts were successfully torpedoed by the ardent communist members of the Jewish leadership, who themselves were at the beginning of their political career in the new Yugoslavia and strongly against every nationalist phenomenon.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Yugoslav Jews were not allowed to maintain contacts with the World Zionist Congress.<sup>40</sup> In the neighbouring Eastern European countries, which fell under total communist control later than Yugoslavia, Zionist organisations were re-established after the Second World War and allowed to function until the Communist takeover, when they were usually 'voluntarily' dissolved.

#### *Short-lived Post-war Orthodox Jewry*

Initially the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities raised no objection to the reconstituting of the separate Orthodox communities outside the orbit of the Federation.<sup>41</sup> In fact, there was no reason why they should have objected, since war time decisions by the AVNOJ had already decreed the equality of all citizens irrespective of religious differences, and the first constitution of the new Yugoslavia guaranteed freedom of conscience and religious belief. This is also clearly seen in the report on the position of Yugoslav Jews by Fridrih Pops and David Alkalaj in 1945, in which they wrote that 'the Jews have full freedom for organisation in the religious

<sup>36</sup> CZA/S5/11423: Pops to the Executive of the Zionist Organisation, July 28, 1947; CZA/S25/5280: Report on the Yugoslav Jewry by Zvi Loker, December 3, 1947; CZA/S25/5280: Summary of the report of David Perera on his visit to Yugoslavia, August 27, 1947.

<sup>37</sup> Levinger 1987, 227–228.

<sup>38</sup> Shelah 1994, 136.

<sup>39</sup> CZA/S5/11423: Report on Yugoslav Jews, December 8, 1947; CZA/S5/11423: Report on the situation of Jews in Yugoslavia by Levavy, 1947 (not dated); CZA/S5/11423: Loker to the Organisation Department: report of David Perera, August 28, 1947.

<sup>40</sup> JHM/K-784: Conference of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Belgrade, March 29–30, 1947.

<sup>41</sup> CAHJP-EA/B-120: Letter from David A. Alkalaj and Dr. Albert Vajs, September 10, 1945 in Paris.



communities with full liberty for expressing religion and religious teaching'.<sup>42</sup> In fact, in formal terms the post-war Orthodox Jewish communities functioned separately from the Federation within the framework of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Religious Communities (Udruženje Ortodoksna Jevrejskih veroispovednih opština) located in Subotica as they had been before the war.<sup>43</sup> Dr. Binder from Subotica served as the Chief Rabbi of Orthodox Jews.<sup>44</sup> Both the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities and the Union of Jewish Orthodox Religious Communities had been legal representatives during the inter-war period according to the Law on the Religious Community of Jews in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Although no law concerning the status of Jewish communities was in force any longer after the war, both institutions performed their function on the basis of this law, as Pops wrote to the Head of the Organisation Department of the World Jewish Congress. He continued by indicating that although these institutions were formally separated, there was close cooperation between the Federation and the Union.<sup>45</sup> Immediately after the war the Orthodox community of Subotica requested financial aid from the Autonomous Relief Committee in order to repair the synagogue and ritual bath, for example, and announced their decision to set up a *kosher* dining hall.<sup>46</sup>

Subotica in Vojvodina had been traditionally a cradle of Orthodox Jewry in Yugoslavia, and the Union of Orthodox Jewish Religious Communities was founded there in 1924. In general, after the war the Vojvodina region was home to almost one-third of the surviving Jews, with the highest number recorded in November 1946, a total of 3,729 Jews.<sup>47</sup> Post-war Orthodox communities were reconstituted in Subotica with 115 members and Senta with 179 members in 1946.<sup>48</sup> Neologue communities were also reconstituted in these towns. There were also small Orthodox Jewish communities in Ada with 70 members, Bačko Petrovo Selo with

<sup>42</sup> AJJDC – Istanbul Box 3–4: Yugoslavia 1945, report on the position of Yugoslav Jews by D. Alkalaj and F. Pops.

<sup>43</sup> JHM/K-822: Federated People's Republic of Yugoslavia, Questionnaire October 20, 1946. In a list of monthly distribution to different communities, the Union of Orthodox Religious Jews located in Subotica is mentioned separately from the Orthodox community of Subotica (JHM/K-854: distribution for the month of August 1948).

<sup>44</sup> AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.012: Orthodox Community, Yugoslavia, F. White to AJJDC-Paris, September 4, 1947.

<sup>45</sup> JHM/K-822: Pops to Schwarzbart, June 27, 1947.

<sup>46</sup> JHM/K-813, no. 6/1945: Letter from the Orthodox Jewish Religious Community of Subotica to the Autonomous Relief Committee.

<sup>47</sup> Perera 1971, 137.

<sup>48</sup> Perera 1971, 139. Figures on the post-war membership of these communities fluctuate. According to one source, there were 137 members in Subotica Orthodox community in 1945 (JHM/K-769, no. 15/45: Orthodox Jewish Community of Subotica to the Autonomous Relief Committee of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities, October 15, 1945) and 128 members in 1946 (JHM/K-769, no. 94/946: Jewish Religious Community of Subotica to the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in FNRJ, April 5, 1946).

70 members, Mol with 20 members<sup>49</sup> and in Ilok<sup>50</sup> in addition to Subotica and Senta. This amounts to more than 500 surviving Orthodox Jews. The few surviving rabbis made plans in order to secure at least some religious life in the future. In March 1947, at the meeting of Jewish representatives of larger cities initiated by five rabbis, they urgently requested immediate action to enable a few students to attend rabbinical colleges in Poland, Rumania, Hungary or Bulgaria, so that in a few years the larger cities would have one rabbi each.<sup>51</sup>

Though formally separated from the Federation, the Union of Orthodox Jews was, like the Federation itself, dependent on financial aid from the JDC channelled through the Autonomous Relief Committee. As the Executive of the ARC was manned by almost the same persons as the Executive of the Federation, this meant that in reality the Union of Orthodox Jewish communities was totally dependent on the Federation. The attitude of the Federation of Jewish Communities towards the remnants of Orthodox Jewry, however, aroused criticism among the Orthodox Jews. This is exemplified in a letter from the businessman and Orthodox Jew, Josif Hauer from Senta, to Rabbi Lazar Schoenfeld in New York about the situation of the Orthodox Jews in Yugoslavia in 1947. Hauer complains about the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia not taking care of the religious needs of the Orthodox Jewish population. According to Hauer, there were 300 Jews<sup>52</sup> in the Jewish community without any religious institutions. His letter also indicates that many Jews were leaving because of the lack of Orthodox *shochet*, *mochel* and Hebrew teachers. Hauer concludes his letter by requesting the Joint Distribution Committee, either directly or indirectly, to instruct the Federation to take care of the religious needs of the country.<sup>53</sup>

Apparently Hauer's letter prompted the Joint representative Frederick White to study the situation of the Orthodox communities in Yugoslavia, and indeed, four months after Hauer's letter White sent a clarifying letter about the position of the Orthodox Jewish community in Yugoslavia, starting with the point that the above-mentioned Hauer was no longer a member of the Board of Yugoslav Orthodox Jewry. This implies that he had previously been a member of the Board. The tone of

<sup>49</sup> JHM/K-769, no. 17/1946: Orthodox Jewish Religious Community of Subotica to the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities, February 20, 1946.

<sup>50</sup> JHM/K-822: Federated People's Republic of Yugoslavia, Questionnaire, October 20, 1946.

<sup>51</sup> AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.016: Report on Yugoslavia from F. White to Dr. Schwartz (not dated, but probably in 1947 because he refers to his last visit which took place in December 1946).

<sup>52</sup> Probably Hauer with his figure of 300 members was referring to the Senta and Subotica Orthodox communities combined, which at the time made up approximately the above-mentioned total.

<sup>53</sup> AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.013: Letter from Rabbi L. Schoenfeld to the Central Relief Committee, May 5, 1947, in which Hauer's letter is quoted.

White's letter indicates that perhaps Hauer was not a tolerated person in somebody's eyes, most probably in the eyes of the Federation leadership in Belgrade. White's report is based on the meeting with the representatives of the Orthodox Jewry in Belgrade on September 4, 1947. Present were Chief Rabbi Binder and the President of the Board, Zeiger, and as board members Gelbstein and Flesch from Senta. The meeting stated that the main causes of concern among the Orthodox Jews were the lack of *shochets* and *mochels*, the same points made earlier by Hauer. In addition, the wish was expressed to have one more Orthodox rabbi in addition to the Chief Rabbi. Religious items such as *mezuzoth*, *tallitim* and prayer books were sufficiently available.<sup>54</sup> Representatives of the Orthodox Jews, the Autonomous Relief Committee and the Federation of Yugoslav Jewish Religious Communities decided to set up a committee in order to establish the exact number of the Orthodox population, their financial status and, most important, impress upon them the need to display more loyalty and more honesty in supporting their institutions.<sup>55</sup>

The report makes some interesting observations about Orthodox Jews in Yugoslavia. A large percentage of the remaining Orthodox population was still rather wealthy, but contributed very little to the maintenance of their institutions, preferring instead to rely on the JDC.<sup>56</sup>

White's letter gives the impression that Hauer's individual act in approaching American Orthodox Jewry was not viewed with favour by the Federation of Jewish Communities, as it portrayed the Federation negatively in the eyes of American Orthodox Jewish circles. Keeping in mind the fact of its financial dependence on the international Jewish organisations, mainly on the JDC, the Federation had to foster its reputation in order not to put at risk the financial aid. The JDC from its financial assistance also covered the salaries of rabbis and chazzans, in addition to the maintenance of the few remaining synagogues, and also the salaries of teachers who conducted evening and Sunday lectures on the Hebrew language and Jewish history.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> A large number of religious and other books as well as religious items were bought by the JDC for Yugoslav Jews in 1946. Items included for example 200 Yiddish text books, 2,000 Hebrew text books, 300 Yiddish Natural Science books, 500 Jewish History books in Yiddish, 1,500 sets of Hebrew Picture books for colouring, 800 paper skull caps etc. (JHM/K-764: the AJJDC to Federation of Jewish communities in Yugoslavia, August 20, 1946).

<sup>55</sup> AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.012: Orthodox Community, Yugoslavia, F. White to AJJDC-Paris, September 4, 1947.

<sup>56</sup> For example: the Orthodox Jewish community of Ada had sold property and received about Din. 200,000, without informing the ARC and without raising their ridiculously small monthly contribution of Din. 500 to the Central Orthodox representation. Accordingly, and in agreement with that body, the ARC decided to stop its monthly allocation of Din. 8,900 to Ada (AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.012: Orthodox Community, Yugoslavia, F. White to AJJDC-Paris, September 4, 1947).

given no chance to exist in the post-war conditions of new Yugoslavia, against the will of a part of the Jewish population.

In summary, the Jewish communists succeeded in preventing the reconstitution of the Zionist organisation, the Jewish leadership prevented the Jewish communists' attempt to create non-sectarian organisations alongside the communities, and the mass emigration to Israel smoothed the path to adaptation of the remnants of Yugoslav Jewry by removing the most religious Jewish elements from the scene.

The Yugoslav Jewish leadership successfully established one umbrella organisation for all Jewish communities and dissident attempts were successfully outmanoeuvred. The centralisation of Jewish communities was a general policy of the People's Republics. In Hungary it was carried out in 1950<sup>66</sup> and Czech and Slovak Jewries also merged into a single framework under communist pressure,<sup>67</sup> and only later were allowed to split again.<sup>68</sup> The centralisation was already complete in Yugoslavia by 1948, earlier than in other Eastern European communist countries and without significant pressure on the part of the authorities. The emigration which followed shook the newly reconstituted community and the question of organisation was put on the agenda again during the succeeding years. This is discussed more in detail in Chapter 4, Adapting to the New Yugoslavia. The outcome, in any case, after a lot of discussion and debate, was to preserve one, single centralised pattern of Jewish organisation in post-war Yugoslavia.

The formal structure of post-war Jewish communities was rather simple. The highest decision-making body was the Conference of Communities, and other governing bodies were the Central Committee (merged with the Executive Committee in 1970) and the Executive Committee of the Federation, which included a Working Committee and the Presidency, along with a Supervisory Committee and the sub-committees.<sup>69</sup> All these activities were channelled through different sections within the framework of the Federation and, for example, women's groups were created relatively early, who concerned themselves with social work, mainly child care and care for the sick.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Fisher, Julius: "Hungary". In Nehemiah Robinson (ed.): *European Jewry Ten Years After The War*. New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs of the World Jewish Congress 1956, 70.

<sup>67</sup> Jelinek, Yeshayahu: "The Jews in Slovakia, 1945–1949". *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1978, 48.

<sup>68</sup> Rothenberg, Joshua: "The fate of Judaism in the Communist World". In Bohdan R. Bociurkiw & Strong John W. (eds.): *Religion and Atheism in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe*. London – Fakenham – Reading: Carleton University 1975, 225.

<sup>69</sup> Freidenreich 1984, 30; Kadelburg 1969, 185.

<sup>70</sup> AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.016: Report on Yugoslavia from F. C. White to Dr. Schwartz (not dated, but probably in 1947 because he refers to his last visit which took place in December 1946).

Almost immediately after the war Yugoslav Jewry established, and was allowed to maintain, external contacts, especially with the Joint Distribution Committee and the World Jewish Congress.<sup>71</sup> International Jewish organisations for their part appreciated contacts with the Yugoslav Jewry because their leadership was seen as the most reasonable and helpful of all the East European Jewish communities.<sup>72</sup> This is easy to understand because contacts with the Iron Curtain countries were usually broken totally after the Communists had seized full power. Czechoslovakia's affiliation with the WJC came to an end in 1949 and the Joint Distribution Committee was ordered to discontinue its work and leave the country in January 1950.<sup>73</sup> In Bulgaria, the Central Jewish Consistory announced in June 1949 its secession from the WJC.<sup>74</sup> The Joint Distribution Committee was often accused by Communist Governments of links with the CIA and with 'international Zionism'.<sup>75</sup> With regard to external relations, Yugoslavia differed considerably from the other Communist regimes; only affiliation with the World Zionist Organisation was disallowed for Yugoslav Jews.<sup>76</sup> The external relations of post-war Yugoslav Jewry are best explained in terms of Yugoslavia's *realpolitik* i.e. rapprochement with the West, especially after the break with the Soviet Union.

## 2.2. THE AUTONOMOUS RELIEF COMMITTEE

War-torn Yugoslavia was in desperate need of humanitarian aid, and Yugoslavs and Jews alike were dependent on this aid. In fact, Yugoslavia survived the winter of 1945–46 largely through the contribution of United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, whose aid to Yugoslavia exceeded over 400 million USD during that period.<sup>77</sup> For distributing humanitarian aid, the regime divided the population into different categories according to political considerations, and this had a negative effect on Jews in many cases because of their bourgeois background.<sup>78</sup> Consequently the burden of humanitarian aid for Jews rested almost

<sup>71</sup> Robinson, Nehemiah: "Yugoslavia". In Nehemiah Robinson (ed.): *European Jewry Ten Years After the War*. New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs of the World Jewish Congress 1956, 189.

<sup>72</sup> CZA/C2/210: Easterman to Schwarzbart, May 25, 1948.

<sup>73</sup> Sokal 1956, 102.

<sup>74</sup> Karbach, Oskar: "Bulgaria". In Nehemiah Robinson (ed.): *European Jewry Ten Years After the War*. New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs of the World Jewish Congress 1956, 115.

<sup>75</sup> Wasserstein, Bernard: *Vanishing Diaspora. The Jews in Europe since 1945*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1996, 222.

<sup>76</sup> Sekelj 1993, 74.

<sup>77</sup> Singleton, Fred: *Twentieth-Century Yugoslavia*. London – Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd. 1976, 106.

<sup>78</sup> Levinger 1987, 229.

exclusively on the Jewish communities. Social welfare became the most important task of the reconstituted Federation of Jewish Religious Communities during the first post-war years.<sup>79</sup> Initially the Yugoslav Ministry for Social Welfare had allotted a sum of half a million Dinars for social welfare on the application of Jewish community, but the Government did not have the resources to supply further aid. Fridrih Pops as the President of the Federation and David Alkalaj, the initiator of the appeal,<sup>80</sup> as the head of the Belgrade Jewish community, prepared an appeal to foreign donors for aid for Yugoslav Jews.<sup>81</sup>

In this respect the first contacts were created with Bulgarian Jewry as early as the end of 1944 and during the spring of 1945.<sup>82</sup> Bucharest, however, served as the link with the international Jewish organisations, as the Rumanian delegation of the Joint Distribution Committee was located there and expressed understanding for the needs of Yugoslav Jewry.<sup>83</sup> The JDC itself was unable to bring assistance directly to Yugoslavia before the summer of 1945. Even then, the Yugoslav Jewish community was unable to contact the European headquarters of the JDC located in Paris, but they were able to send a delegation to Bucharest, where the first meeting with the people in charge of the JDC program in Rumania and its director B. Jakobson took place during July 1945.<sup>84</sup> The JDC was unable to send its first representative, Frederick White, to Yugoslavia until 1946. He came to Belgrade in order to cooperate with the President of the Autonomous Relief Committee, David Alkalaj.<sup>85</sup>

The Rumanian delegation of the JDC gave immediate assistance to Yugoslav Jews, although at the beginning without formal authorisation for such assistance. After some negotiations with the JDC delegation in Bucharest, the JDC delegation in Yugoslavia was organised under the name *Savez Jevrejskih veroispovednih opština u Jugoslaviji – Automni odbor za pomoć, Beograd* ('Autonomous Relief

<sup>79</sup> CZA/Z6/324: World Jewish Congress – Minutes & Reports 1950, Part III, Short Minutes of the Meeting of the London members of the European Executive of the WJC, November 28, 1950.

<sup>80</sup> AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.004: F. White to J. Schwartz, November 28, 1946.

<sup>81</sup> AJJDC – Istanbul Box 3–4: Yugoslavia 1945, report on the position of Yugoslav Jews by D. Alkalaj and F. Pops.

<sup>82</sup> Kadelburg 1969, 132.

<sup>83</sup> AJJDC – Istanbul Box 5–11: the Autonomous Relief Committee of the Federation of Jewish Community of Yugoslavia to AJJDC, European Executive Council, November 18, 1946.

<sup>84</sup> AJJDC – Istanbul Box 5–11: the Autonomous Relief Committee of the Federation of Jewish Community of Yugoslavia to AJJDC, European Executive Council, November 18, 1946; Kadelburg 1969, 132.

<sup>85</sup> J.D.C. News Bulletin, Vol. 1, No. 12, November 10, 1946 (a copy of the article is in AJJDC – Istanbul Box 1–2: Report on JDC Activities in Europe and Middle East 1944–1946).

Committee of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Yugoslavia', or ARC). This office was constitutionally a sub-office of the Rumanian office<sup>86</sup> of the JDC and organisationally a part of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities.

The tasks of the ARC were multiple. Firstly, it was in charge of organising and conducting the relief work for the Jews of Yugoslavia and of finding new sources of funding from abroad, and secondly, its task included representing the Jews of Yugoslavia vis-à-vis the authorities of the People's Republic and Jewish organisations abroad.<sup>87</sup> This organisation formed the nucleus of Jewish activity in Yugoslavia in the immediate post-war years and through it almost all their activities were channelled. The first Executive<sup>88</sup> of the Autonomous Relief Committee consisted of 11 members with David Alkalaj, the President of the Belgrade Jewish community, as its president until his emigration to Israel in 1950,<sup>89</sup> and in fact the ARC was the only active organisation under the supervision of the Federation.<sup>90</sup> The Executive was joined by the best-known and most powerful of post-war Yugoslav Jewish leaders, Lavoslav Kadelburg<sup>91</sup>, who had spent the war as a prisoner of war in Germany and was a member of the Communist party,<sup>92</sup> and who eventually became Alkalaj's successor as the President of the ARC in 1950.<sup>93</sup> Naftali Gedalja served as the secretary of the ARC.<sup>94</sup> The ARC became a strongly Belgrade-oriented body as all the first executive members were from Belgrade. In 1945 it was decided that

<sup>86</sup> CAHJP-EA/B-120: Letter from David A. Alkalaj and Dr. Albert Vajs, September 10, 1945 in Paris.

<sup>87</sup> AJJDC – Istanbul Box 5–11: the Autonomous Relief Committee of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia to AJJDC, European Executive Council, November 18, 1946.

<sup>88</sup> The executive consisted of Dr. Pops, Dr. Vajs, Aleksander Štajner, Dr. Lavoslav Kadelburg, Martin Komloš (vice-chairman), Oskar Našić, Milan Medina, Moša Farkić, Dr. Žak Konfino, Adanja. This was the first Executive Committee (CAHJP-EA/B-120: Letter from David Alkalaj and Albert Vajs, September 10, 1945). In addition to the above-mentioned persons, the following served later as members of the Executive: Andrija Kon from Belgrade, Slavko Radej, Dr. Arbad Han and Rafael Montiljo from Zagreb, Pavle Lampel from Novi Sad, Dr. Stevan Braun from Subotica, Đorđe Blajer from Skopje and Dr. Hajim Kamhi and Mirko Levinger from Sarajevo (Kadelburg 1969, 133; JHM/K-822: Pops to Schwarzbart June 27, 1947).

<sup>89</sup> Išay, Moše: *Tsir musmakh* ('Accredited Minister'). Tel Aviv: Masada Publishing House, n.d., 61.

<sup>90</sup> CAHJP-EA/B-120: Letter from David A. Alkalaj and Dr. Albert Vajs, September 10, 1945 in Paris.

<sup>91</sup> Dr. Kadelburg, a lawyer by profession, was born in 1910 in Vinkovci in Croatia. See the excellent account of his life as a Jewish leader in Gordiejew 1999, 214–220.

<sup>92</sup> Freidenreich 1979, 206.

<sup>93</sup> Kadelburg 1969, 133.

<sup>94</sup> Kadelburg 1969, 133.

an additional six persons from different large communities in Yugoslavia would be elected as advisory members with an advisory vote in order to supervise the interests of the communities<sup>95</sup> they represented. However, the members of the ARC in Belgrade continued to form the Working Committee of the ARC.<sup>96</sup> The ARC also established an office in Zagreb and had two storehouses, one in Belgrade and one in Zagreb.<sup>97</sup>

The main motives behind JDC assistance for needy Yugoslav Jews were not merely to secure their physical survival; rather, it was a mission to save Jewish life in all of its aspects. The JDC concluded that the only chance of preserving Jewish tradition, religion, cultural activities and spiritual hope in Yugoslavia lay in supporting the 'backbone' of Jewish life in Yugoslavia, by which they meant the Jewish communities and their leaders and paid staff. Therefore channelling the activity of the JDC through the ARC would not only allow the distribution of material aid, but would also guarantee the continuation and functioning of Jewish communities with their own special Jewish aspects.<sup>98</sup> The support for the communities was planned to be temporary because the JDC wanted, at least according to its representative Frederick White, to differentiate between the aid given for social welfare and that given for the maintenance of Jewish communities, which should not be the responsibility of the JDC. Temporarily the JDC had been forced to take care of the communities, but in the future the communities would have to look after themselves, as White gave them to understand. As a means of financing communities, White proposed selling all unnecessary communal estates.<sup>99</sup> The JDC purpose was that their funding through the ARC would take almost the whole relief burden away from the communities, which would allow them to concentrate on the task of rebuilding Jewish life in general.<sup>100</sup> It seems that in White's mind there was a more traditional model of Jewish organisations, according to which the community was exclusively in charge of religious life, while other Jewish activities took place in separate associations and organisations. For the Yugoslav Jewish leadership, however, the community was the centre of all the activities, and religious life should be one part of the community life among other activities. Apparently they

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<sup>95</sup> Advisory members of the Committee came from Zagreb (2), Novi Sad, Sarajevo, Subotica and Skoplje (one each).

<sup>96</sup> AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A, C-89-011: Minutes of Meetings of the Autonomous Relief Committee, November 9, 1946.

<sup>97</sup> Kadelburg 1969, 133.

<sup>98</sup> AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A/I, C-89.004: F. White to J. Schwartz, November 28, 1946.

<sup>99</sup> AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.011: Minutes of Meetings of the Autonomous Relief Committee, December 14, 1946.

<sup>100</sup> AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.016: Report on Yugoslavia from F. C. White to Dr. Schwartz (not dated, probably in 1947 because he refers to his last visit which took place in Dec. 1946).



had a more realistic view of the possible scale of religious life in post-war Jewish communities than White had, and of course they were in a better position to estimate what would be a workable structure for Jewish life on the basis of pre-war experience and an understanding of the post-war realities of an evolving communist society. This led to the occurrence of differences on certain matters between White and the leadership. White also complained in 1946 that it was still difficult to obtain a clear picture of the situation in the Jewish communities, because of the lack of qualified personnel, and the political tension which made it a difficult and delicate job to insist on exact figures and statistics from communities.<sup>101</sup>

To the authorities of the Yugoslav People's Republic, the establishment of a Jewish aid organisation was a welcome contribution as it took care of one section of the population in a ruined country, and therefore reduced the Government's burden in the sphere of social welfare. In practice this attitude was demonstrated by the Department of Foreign Trade, which exempted all incoming relief supplies from the payment of duties and required only a moderate fee of 0.5 per cent of the value of the supplies. Relief supplies were also exempted from consumer taxes. The ARC, for its part, had to submit a statement to the Government indicating how the relief supplies were distributed.<sup>102</sup> Funds<sup>103</sup> received through banks were distributed by the ARC to the local Jewish communities, which in turn allocated them to needy Jews in their own locality and neighbouring villages.

One of the first activities of the ACR and the communities was to establish public dining halls; this was enabled by the first credit of 50,000 USD given by the JDC.<sup>104</sup> Public dining halls existed in the following cities (the figure after the name indicates the number of people fed in them): Belgrade 400, Petrovgrad 50, Sarajevo 90, Senta (Orthodox) 25, Senta 60, Zagreb 370, Čakovec 56, Subotica 130, Novi Sad 250, a total of 1431 people.<sup>105</sup> The figures show that about 10 per cent of the

<sup>101</sup> AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.016: Report on Yugoslavia from F. C. White to Dr. Schwartz (not dated, probably in 1947 because he refers to his last visit which took place in Dec. 1946).

<sup>102</sup> AJJDCA – Istanbul Box 5–11: the Autonomous Relief Committee of the Federation of Jewish Community of Yugoslavia to AJJDC, European Executive Council, November 18, 1946.

<sup>103</sup> Apart from the JDC, other organisations which sent relief to Yugoslavia were the Canadian Jewish Congress, the World Jewish Congress, the Jewish Agency, OSE, the Society for Yugoslav Jewry in London, the Association of Yugoslav Jews in USA and the Jewish War Appeal, South-Africa (AJJDCA – Istanbul Box 5–11: the Autonomous Relief Committee of the Federation of Jewish Community of Yugoslavia to AJJDC, European Executive Council, November 18, 1946; CAHJP-EA/B-120: Report of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of the Federated People's Republic of Yugoslavia concerning the problems of Yugoslav Jews, from Alkalaj and Gedalja, July 19, 1947).

<sup>104</sup> AJJDCA – Istanbul Box 1–2: Report on JDC Activities in Europe and Middle East 1944–1946: J.D.C. Sends Relief to Jewish Survivors in Yugoslav Areas.

surviving Jewish population received daily food in the dining halls organised by the ARC in 1946.

In addition to the dining halls, the ARC took over the care of students, and about 120 were sheltered in students' homes in Belgrade and Zagreb, while others, who were not living in students' homes, were granted scholarships. Homes for old and disabled men and women were also established in Belgrade, Zagreb and Brezice. The ARC funded the summer camps for children in Crkvenica, Pazarić, Lovran and Frušk.<sup>106</sup> The health service established by the ARC consisted of the maintenance of dispensaries in larger communities, free medical examinations, the provision of medicines and cash assistance for those needing a special food. Assistance through the ARC was also given for the thousands of displaced Jews from Europe who used Yugoslavia as their transit point on the way to Palestine.<sup>107</sup> With regard to these transients, the ARC was in charge of housing and feeding of them (for example, there were some 5,000 transient Jews in the premises and barracks located in Zagreb)<sup>108</sup> whereas the costs of their transport and supplies for the ships were borne by the representatives of the Mossad Le-Aliyah Bet who were responsible for organising the immigration.<sup>109</sup> Dov Steiner, an executive member of the ARC complains of being inadequately informed about the representatives, referring to the Mossad activity, of the transients regarding their precise functions and duties.<sup>110</sup> Steiner's statement reveals a degree of suspicion towards the activity of the foreigners.

Funds were also requested from the JDC for publishing a community bulletin in order to inform people about the activities and services of the ARC and, more importantly, in order to connect Yugoslav Jews with Jewish life globally. In addition to the bulletin, those who were interested in preserving Jewish life wanted to furnish community centres with radio sets, table tennis tables, and libraries of Jewish books and magazines, and to organise lectures on Jewish subjects.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>105</sup> AJJDC – Istanbul Box 5–11: the Autonomous Relief Committee of the Federation of Jewish Community of Yugoslavia to AJJDC: European Executive Council, November 18, 1946.

<sup>106</sup> Kadelburg 1969, 162. The first summer camp was organised, however, in Rovinj in 1945.

<sup>107</sup> AJJDC – Istanbul Box 5–11: the Autonomous Relief Committee of the Federation of Jewish Community of Yugoslavia to AJJDC, European Executive Council, November 18, 1946.

<sup>108</sup> Hadari, *Ze'ev Venia: Second Exodus. The Full Story of Jewish Illegal Immigration to Palestine, 1945–1948*. London – Portland: Vallentine Mitchell 1991, 102.

<sup>109</sup> AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.011: Minutes of Meetings of the Autonomous Relief Committee, November 9, 1946. (There was also a temporary shelter for transients in Novi Sad: AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A/1, C-89.004: F. White to J. Schwartz, November 28, 1946).

<sup>110</sup> AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.011: Minutes of Meetings of the Autonomous Relief Committee, November 9, 1946.

<sup>111</sup> AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A/1, C-89.004: F. White to J. Schwartz, November 28, 1946.

The care of children, especially orphans, was one of the main duties of the ARC and the communities, and every effort was made to gather children who were scattered all over the country into places where they could be properly cared for. The Belgrade Jewish Orphanage in the Belgrade Jewish community building was the only institution of its kind, sheltering 60 children.<sup>112</sup>

Establishing the new Yugoslavia on socialist principles inevitably meant reducing the private sector. As has been pointed out, the new economic organisation was introduced by confiscating the property of war criminals and enemy collaborators, the majority of the bourgeoisie were expropriated after the war, and the means of production were proclaimed state property. The Nationalisation Act in 1946 finalised the liquidation of capitalist ownership.<sup>113</sup> This naturally had consequences for the Jews who traditionally were well represented among private enterprises and merchants, creating reorientation problems for those who were not qualified for state services. As this problem grew more acute, a plan was introduced to train those affected for other occupations. The Autonomous Relief Committee instructed the communities to do everything possible in order to render productive those Jews with non-productive occupations. The basket-makers' cooperative at Subotica was the first attempt in this respect. The promotion of cooperative and collective workshops was planned to facilitate the reorientation of unemployed Jews.<sup>114</sup> Obviously the JDC, through the Autonomous Relief Committee, attempted to encourage the establishment of commercial enterprises as a way to ease unemployment among Jews. This was rejected, however, by the executive of the ARC. Martin Komloš, vice-chairman of the executive, noted during the ARC session that the new Yugoslavia had adopted a planned economy which left little room for small business. Vajs supported Komloš by saying that only craftsmanship could be considered with regard to the vocational training, and not small business.<sup>115</sup>

The ARC planned to launch these vocational projects from the beginning of 1947. The plans included courses in mechanics, knitting, sewing and tailoring, which later would be developed into cooperatives offering more employment opportunities. According to the plan, 350–400 Jews would be trained and eventually made self-supporting within six to eight months. The projects were discussed with Yugoslav officials, especially with Moša Pijade, and they received the blessing of

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<sup>112</sup> AJJDC – Istanbul Box 5–11: the Autonomous Relief Committee of the Federation of Jewish Community of Yugoslavia to AJJDC, European Executive Council, November 18, 1946.

<sup>113</sup> Morača, Pero: *The League of Communists of Yugoslavia*. Beograd: Medunarodna Politika 1966, 46.

<sup>114</sup> AJJDC – Istanbul Box 5–11: the Autonomous Relief Committee of the Federation of Jewish Community of Yugoslavia to AJJDC, European Executive Council, November 18, 1946.

<sup>115</sup> JHM/K-783: Minutes of the XXXVIII Session of the ARC, April 6, 1947.

the authorities. The JDC's purpose in re-educating unemployed Jews was both to reduce the need for relief and to enhance the prestige of the JDC, not only within the Jewish community but also vis-à-vis the Government.<sup>116</sup> In spite of these vocational projects there remained Jews who were either too old to work, or 'undesirable' for political reasons, or simply unable to adapt themselves to the new economy, and who therefore would also need to be assisted in the future. Many job-holders also had to be assisted as their salaries could not cover any further requirements beyond the bare necessities of life.<sup>117</sup>

Frederick White, the JDC representative, also initiated a Medical Conference of Jewish Physicians which was accordingly organised in Zagreb on September 28–29, 1947. Child care, treatment of the sick, the procurement of large amounts of medicaments, efforts made on behalf of tuberculosis patients – all these activities were on the conference agenda. As David Alkalaj noted in his opening remarks, the conference

presents renewed and strong evidence of our determination to preserve our Jewish Community in Yugoslavia, to raise its cultural, social and health level, in order that we might, both as a collective and as individuals, serve as positive members in the reconstruction of our homeland, the New Yugoslavia.<sup>118</sup>

The purpose of the conference was to consider together the overall health problems of Yugoslav Jewry. The conference brought together 42 participants, of whom 37 were Jewish Physicians, from Zagreb, Belgrade, Sarajevo, Osijek, Zrenjanin, Skopje and Novi Sad. There was a plan to organise dental ambulances and X-rays of the population to solve the most acute problems of the dental service and the care of tuberculosis. A Health Advisory Council was formed within the ARC in order to direct the outcomes of the conference and the entire health service.<sup>119</sup>

Frederick White's report reveals several interesting matters from the conference besides the main agenda. The conference began in rather a cold atmosphere and the discussions and responses actually reflected the outspoken federalist tendency and rivalry between Jewish communities. This, in fact, according to White, created the main obstacles to the JDC program in Yugoslavia. White complained that the statements of communities and individuals were rarely objective enough to be considered reliable and sound conclusions could only be drawn after immediate

<sup>116</sup> AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A/1, C-89.004: F. White to J. Schwartz, November 28, 1946.

<sup>117</sup> AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.016: Report on Yugoslavia from F. C. White to Dr. Schwartz (not dated, but probably in 1947 because he refers to his last visit which took place in Dec. 1946).

<sup>118</sup> AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.010: Medical Yugoslavia, Minutes of a Jewish Physicians' Medical Conference in Zagreb, September 28, 1947.

<sup>119</sup> AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.010: Medical Yugoslavia, Minutes of a Jewish Physicians' Medical Conference in Zagreb, September 28, 1947.

checks. In addition, there existed conflicts due to political antagonism within the whole group. Finally, certain elements showed a general tendency to do little themselves and to criticise whatever was done by the ARC, their battle-cry being that the JDC was sending millions to European countries and so the ARC could give far more or force the JDC to do so.<sup>120</sup>

The JDC funding of Jewish social and welfare institutions through the ARC was almost the only source of financial aid for Yugoslav Jewry in the post-war years. To provide an alternative, Frederick White suggested to the ARC that certain communities should sell property which they no longer needed. This would enable those communities to fulfil their tasks and pay their debts. This suggestion was rejected, however, for it was seen as a last resort which should not be used.<sup>121</sup> Later, when the JDC aid ceased, the leadership was obligated to make use of this resource. During 1950 and 1951 the community carried on its work without JDC assistance and all large or convertible holdings were sold for income.<sup>122</sup> Social welfare continuously made up a major part of the community activities. The percentage of the elderly, i.e. those above 60, was quite high and some of them became the responsibility of the communities, as they were not included in the state social security system because of their former professions in the private sector.<sup>123</sup>

The JDC operated and distributed aid from 1945 until 1949, when after the third wave of emigration there was no more need for the aid. When the JDC's relief programme came to an end in 1949, its representative Frederick White was decorated with a high honour by Marshal Tito in recognition of the help given to 'the peoples of Yugoslavia'.<sup>124</sup> As an organisation within the Jewish Federation, the Autonomous Relief Committee was closed in 1952.<sup>125</sup> Later, however, the JDC had to renew its aid to Yugoslav Jewry, which was continuously dependent on financial aid from abroad. As for the situation in 1952, the healthy and favourable attitude of the Government towards the Jewish community, as one visitor expressed it, encouraged the JDC to support projects which would project a pattern of Jewish living in Yugoslavia into the future. The Jewish community of Yugoslavia was considered a small but worthwhile area for JDC support.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>120</sup> AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.010: Medical Yugoslavia, Minutes of a Jewish Physicians' Medical Conference in Zagreb, September 28, 1947.

<sup>121</sup> AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.011: Minutes of Meetings of the Autonomous Relief Committee, November 9, 1946.

<sup>122</sup> AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A/1, C-89-003: Report on a visit to Yugoslavia by Judah J. Shapiro, September 3–8, 1952.

<sup>123</sup> AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.003: Vajs and Kadelburg to AJJDC, December 5, 1951.

<sup>124</sup> CZA/Z6/324: World Jewish Congress – Minutes & Reports 1950, Part III, Short Minutes of the Meeting of the London members of the European Executive of the WJC, November 28, 1950; Vajs 1954, 32.

<sup>125</sup> Kadelburg 1969, 120.

Because of these funds and supplies, the ARC represented the most powerful Jewish institution in Yugoslavia during the immediate post-war years. It was the only institution maintaining a decent standard of relief available to all those who needed it, regardless of their political colour or the degree to which they could satisfy overzealous 'observers' and commissars, as Frederick White expressed it in his report to the AJJDC office in Paris. Indirectly and directly, the continuation of Jewish life and the welfare of the Jewish population in Yugoslavia depended on the functioning of the ARC, which in turn meant dependence on JDC funds and supplies.<sup>127</sup>

### 2.3. LEADERSHIP

Three basic forms of political control can be discerned in contemporary Jewish communities: autocratic, oligarchic and polyarchic. In the autocratic pattern every significant community decision is made by a single individual or an organisation functioning as a corporate person. Oligarchy is a form of political control in which a virtual monopoly of power lies with a group of individuals (or interests represented by individuals). In the polyarchic system no single person or group can exercise a monopoly of decision making.<sup>128</sup>

Fridrih Pops, a lawyer<sup>129</sup> and a member of the Belgrade municipal council in the pre-war period,<sup>130</sup> was born in 1874, and served as the first President of the post-war Federation of Jewish Communities, actually continuing in the same position he had held since 1933. Earlier he had been the President of the Belgrade Ashkenazi community. During the inter-war years Pops was an active Zionist and also served as a Vice-President of the Zionist Federation in Yugoslavia. From the beginning of 1945 Fridrih Pops served as the accredited representative of the Jewish Agency for Palestine in Yugoslavia.<sup>131</sup>

Besides Pops, the first post-war Executive Committee of the Federation consisted of Albert Vajs as the Vice-President, and members David Alkalaj, Lavo-

<sup>126</sup> AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A/1, C-89.003: Report on a visit to Yugoslavia by Judah J. Shapiro, September 3.-8, 1952.

<sup>127</sup> AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.016: Report on Yugoslavia, F. C. White to Dr. Schwartz (not dated, but probably in 1947 because he refers to his last visit which took place in Dec. 1946).

<sup>128</sup> Elazar 1969, 215–216.

<sup>129</sup> Lawyers were traditionally well represented among the leadership, in both the pre-war and post-war periods. The leaders of the inter-war period in the Zionist Federation of Yugoslavia were mainly lawyers, for example. (S. Goldstein 1989, 105.)

<sup>130</sup> Freidenreich 1979, 77, 98–99, 175.

<sup>131</sup> CZA/S6/1691: Behar to the Jewish Agency for Palestine, January 10, 1945 and Dobkin (the Jewish Agency) to Behar, February 4, 1945.

slav Kadelburg, Aleksander Štajner, Vladislav Klajn, Isak-Bata Amar, Avram Mevorah, Sima Alkalaj, Martin Komloš and Fred Binder. Naftali Gedalja served as the secretary of the Federation.<sup>132</sup> Another source also mentions Oscar Grof and Adanja (the first name is not given) as members of the first Executive Committee.<sup>133</sup> The Executive Committees of the ARC and the Federation were manned by almost the same leaders, David Alkalaj being the President of the former and Fridrih Pops of the latter. Pops was already advanced in age and giving way to the younger guard, while Alkalaj was described as the most respected and prominent personality in the leadership.<sup>134</sup> In consequence, as the President of the ARC, he was the person who in practice ran Yugoslav Jewry during the years of reconstruction. A Zionist and not a Party member,<sup>135</sup> perhaps seeing his task fulfilled, he emigrated to Israel in 1950.

Of the Executive Committee members at least Grof, from Sarajevo, Pops, Alkalaj and Vajs from Belgrade had been Zionists in the pre-war years.<sup>136</sup> Albert Vajs was a lawyer who had joined the Executive Committee as the third Vice-President before the war. Pops, Alkalaj and Grof represented continuity, as all of them had been among the first rank of the pre-war leadership. Albert Vajs, the President of the Federation from 1948 until 1964, served after the war as the Secretary of the Yugoslav War Crimes Commission and later as Professor of International Law at the University of Belgrade.<sup>137</sup>

A certain similarity appears in the backgrounds of the post-war Jewish leadership. Prominent positions were occupied mainly by those who had been among the Jewish officer prisoners of war in Germany<sup>138</sup> or participants in the National Liberation Struggle. From the first Executive Vajs, Kadelburg, Alkalaj and Amar were former prisoners of war.<sup>139</sup> Obviously participation in the National Liberation Struggle was an important criterion for good standing in post-war Yugoslav society

<sup>132</sup> Kadelburg 1969, 119.

<sup>133</sup> CAHJP-EA/B-120: Letter from David A. Alkalaj and Dr. Albert Vajs, September 10, 1945 in Paris.

<sup>134</sup> AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A/I, C-89.004: F. White to J. Schwartz, November 28, 1946.

<sup>135</sup> Shelah 1994, 140.

<sup>136</sup> Freidenreich 1979, 154, 156–157.

<sup>137</sup> CZA/S25/8980: Yugoslav Report. Yugoslav War Crimes Commission, Report to the International Military Tribunal, December 26, 1945; ISA/FM 2494/4: Report no. 10, the Delegate to the Foreign Ministry, August 1, 1949.

<sup>138</sup> CZA/Z6/324: World Jewish Congress – Minutes & Reports 1950, Part III, Short Minutes of the Meeting of the London members of the European Executive of the WJC, November 28, 1950.

<sup>139</sup> Gordiejew 1999, 94; Lebl, Ženi (ed.): *A Memorial of Yugoslavian Jewish Prisoners of War. Half a Century After Liberation 1945–1995*. Tel Aviv: The Committee of Yugoslavian Jewish War Veterans 1995, 32 (in Hebrew, English and Serbo-Croat).

in general and in the post-war Jewish community in particular.<sup>140</sup> Participation in the revolutionary underground and in the war brought great honour in the New Yugoslavia, and this was often accompanied by a high position in the army, administration or party organisation.<sup>141</sup> Partnership in these crucial events leading to the birth of the New Yugoslavia legitimised the position of Jews in post-war Yugoslav life and society.

The new Jewish leadership consisted both of pre-war traditional Zionists, of whom a number became communists, and young communists who were against Zionism.<sup>142</sup> It is no wonder, then, that the post-war Yugoslav Jewish leadership was not exempt from internal rivalries. As noted earlier, the communists were the most outspoken opponents of the revival of the Zionist organisation. The representative of the JDC, Frederick White, on several occasions criticised the internal disputes among the leadership. According to White some of the most influential members holding official positions in the Federation were trying, for example, to minimise and gradually abandon the specifically Jewish features of the JDC aid programme channelled through the Autonomous Relief Committee, and to adapt them to the new system in which neither difference of creed nor nationality existed.<sup>143</sup> The 'federalist tendency and rivalry between Jewish communities' was one of the main obstacles to White's efforts to carry out the JDC programme in Yugoslavia, as he himself reported.<sup>144</sup>

It can be concluded that a power struggle between communists and non-communists was ensuing within the Jewish leadership after the war.<sup>145</sup> The Jewish leadership in the People's Republics usually became communist. In Bulgaria the Central Jewish Consistory was recognised, after the period of the kingdom, as the supreme administrator of Jewish affairs. Reconstituted under its earlier name, the Consistory fell under the influence of the communist minority backing the Government as early as November 1944.<sup>146</sup> In Rumania, the Jewish Democratic Committee established in June 1945 led to the communisation of Jewish organisations, and

<sup>140</sup> Gordiejew 1999, 92–95.

<sup>141</sup> Loker, Zvi: "Radicalism, heroism, and martyrdom in the Balkans". In *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. LXVIII, 1977, 104.

<sup>142</sup> CZA/S5/11423: Report on the situation of Jews in Yugoslavia by Levavy, 1947 (not dated).

<sup>143</sup> AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A/I, C-89.004: F. White to J. Schwartz, November 28, 1946.

<sup>144</sup> AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A/I, C-89.004: Medical Yugoslavia, Minutes of a Jewish Physicians' Medical Conference in Zagreb, September 28, 1947.

<sup>145</sup> One interesting incident reflects the fact that relations between Jewish communists and non-communists were not so good in Yugoslavia. When several families were settled in the small settlement of Bet Neqofa near Jerusalem, formerly a Palestinian village, one particular emigrant from Yugoslavia had difficulties in gaining acceptance there from other Yugoslav Jews because he was known to be a communist (OHD (210)76: the Mass Emigration, interview of Fredi Martin, January 26, 1991).

<sup>146</sup> Karbach 1956, 114.



by the end of 1947 the Jewish Democratic Committee had taken over the Federation of Jewish Communities, the body coordinating all communal activities in Rumania.<sup>147</sup> In Czechoslovakia the same process happened immediately after the Communist *coup d'état* in February, 1948. The Central Council of Jewish Communities (Rada) was reorganised, the Zionists were deprived of their leading positions, and only persons recognised by the regime as reliable occupied leadership positions.<sup>148</sup>

In the case of Yugoslavia, no communisation of the leadership occurred. There were communists on the Executive Committee and in other official leadership positions, but non-communists succeeded in preventing the development which took place in the other People's Democracies. David Alkalaj seems to have been the strongest personality standing against communist influence. There is some evidence to support this conclusion.<sup>149</sup> He also initiated the request for humanitarian aid from the JDC.<sup>150</sup> The second influential non-communist in the leadership was the successor of Fridrih Pops as the first strong post-war president of the Federation, Albert Vajs, whereas his deputy and the later long-time president of the Federation, Lavoslav Kadelburg, was a member of the Communist Party. It is difficult to say whether the failure to communise the Jewish leadership in Yugoslavia would have been allowed without the friction between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. As a result of the break in relations, Yugoslavia was compelled to seek financial aid from Western countries, and above all from the USA. As a result, Yugoslavia had to take into account Western opinions to some extent in different matters, including the treatment of ethnic minorities including Jews, which were naturally a not insignificant group for American public opinion. Apparently the communisation of the Jewish leadership was seen as unnecessary as long as the leadership otherwise demonstrated loyalty to the Yugoslav regime and the ability to adapt. There is no doubt that the regime could have enforced communisation, if this had been considered necessary. Nevertheless, the Jewish community seemed to enjoy quite a large degree of autonomy in internal matters, as long as these did not collide with the interests of the regime. The case of the Zionists also witnesses to the policy of non-interference, as the strongest opponents of the Zionists were the Jewish communists, i.e. insiders, whereas the regime seemed to be indifferent to the whole matter.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Vago, Raphael: "The communization of Jewish political life in Rumania, 1944–1949". *Slavic and Soviet Series*, Vol. 2, no. 1, Spring 1977, 57–61.

<sup>148</sup> Sokal 1956, 101–102.

<sup>149</sup> AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.016: Report on Yugoslavia, F. C. White to Dr. Schwartz (not dated, but probably in 1947 because he refers to his last visit which took place in Dec. 1946); AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A, C-89.004: F. White to J. Schwartz, Nov. 28, 1946.

<sup>150</sup> AJJDC – Geneva I, 2A/1, C-89.004: F. White to J. Schwartz, November 28, 1946.

The question of whether the Jewish leadership was penetrated by the communist regime cannot, of course, be evaded. As noted earlier, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was already attempting to control and penetrate religious organisations during 1945, with at least a partial degree of success. It is plausible that smaller denominations such as the Protestant Churches and the Jewish Federation were also under supervision, although understandably the main focus was on the major religious denominations. One document<sup>152</sup> mentions by name a person in the leadership who was a communist and, according to the document, chosen by the Party to be responsible for... (the following word or clause is deleted from the document). This would indicate, however, that the leadership of the Federation also included a member chosen by the Party, or at least his executive membership was coordinated with the Party. Zvi Rotem, who was well acquainted with Yugoslav Jewry as he himself originated from Yugoslavia, concludes that perhaps some of the Jewish leaders 'volunteered' for executive positions on the instructions of the Party.<sup>153</sup>

On the other hand, the question arises of whether penetration was at all necessary since the Jewish leadership already partially consisted of communists and members of the Communist Party. Bencion Levi, for example, Vice-President and later President of the Belgrade Jewish Community, was a high-ranking official in the Federal Ministry of Interior and in the UDBA, the security service of Yugoslavia.<sup>154</sup> In any case, the supervision was apparently not as open as in Czechoslovakia, where in the post-war period a Government official was always present at the council meetings of Jewish communities.<sup>155</sup> All in all, there existed a link between the Party and the Federation, and direct interference in the affairs of the Jewish community was therefore unnecessary. The former President of the Sarajevo Jewish community admits that 'the role of guardians was reserved for the leaders of community'.<sup>156</sup>

An oligarchic pattern of leadership existed among Yugoslav Jewry in the immediate post-war period. The Yugoslav-orientated leadership as a corporate

<sup>151</sup> CZA/S25/5280: Report on the Yugoslav Jews by Zvi Loker, December 3, 1947; CZA/S25/5280: Summary of David Perera's visit to Yugoslavia, August 28, 1947.

<sup>152</sup> OHD (166)1: Relationship between Yugoslav Authorities and the Yishuv in Eretz Israel in the years 1945-48, interview of Ephraim Shilo by Moše Mešulam on June 7, 1971.

<sup>153</sup> Rotem 1976, 149-150.

<sup>154</sup> ISA/FM 2494/6: Report no. 33, January 3, 1952; ISA/FM 2498/3: Report no. 77, March 30, 1956; Freidenreich 1984, 48.

<sup>155</sup> Hahn, Fred: "Antisemitism and the treatment of the Holocaust in post-communist Czechoslovakia (the Czech Republic)". In Randolph L. Braham (ed.): *Antisemitism and the Treatment of the Holocaust in Post-communist Eastern Europe*. New York: Columbia University Press 1994, 61.

<sup>156</sup> Čerešnjež 23.5.1999.

group decisively advocated those steps which were seen as prerequisites in order to exist as a distinct Jewish entity under the conditions of the Yugoslav Communist regime. Adaptation to post-war Yugoslav society was carried out by encouraging those elements within Jewry which did not clash with the interests of the authorities and by excluding those elements (open advocacy of the Zionist cause and the religious Jewish identification in general) which were perceived as a threat to Jewish existence in Yugoslav society. Later, with Kadelburg's presidency from 1964, a shift from oligarchic towards autocratic leadership took place. All the communities were practically under the single rule of Kadelburg who was accepted by the regime.<sup>157</sup> One community member even noted that Kadelburg was able to take decisions against the entire Executive Committee of the Federation.<sup>158</sup> It is no exaggeration to state that by analogy Kadelburg represented for the Jewish community what Tito represented for the country as a whole.

Daniel Elazar defines subjugated communities as communities which must try to maintain their existence under conditions of subjugation ranging from open and intense to indirect and subtle. With regard to communist countries, these communities are subjugated at least in the sense that all potential rivals for citizens' interest are curbed in totalitarian societies. Although Czechoslovakian, Hungarian and Rumanian Jewish communities had legal status, and the functions of the state-recognised communal structures were similar up to a point to those of Yugoslavia, Elazar has placed them under the category of modern subjugated communities whereas Yugoslavia was exempted from this category.<sup>159</sup> The findings of this chapter, however, indicate that the Yugoslav Jewish community also belonged to the group of modern subjugated communities. Post-war Yugoslav Jewry lacked freedom of choice. Orthodox communities had no chance to exist regardless of the fact that initially a few of them were reconstituted, and similarly efforts to revive the Zionist organisation failed as alert Jewish communists in the Jewish leadership managed successfully to block all the efforts of the Zionists. Many Orthodox Jews had been, or immediately after the war still were, owners of private enterprises and so were treated, at least to some extent, as class enemies, exploiters and profiteers. Moreover, the centralisation of Jewish organisation, so typical of communist countries, was introduced in Yugoslavia: the multi-structural pattern of the inter-war period turned into the single, centralised organisation of the post-war period, with a power base located in Belgrade. Religious functions were also discouraged, and an image of the Jews as a national minority was emphasised in order to legitimise Jewish existence in the new Yugoslavia, as will be shown later in this study.

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<sup>157</sup> Raviv, Tuvia: *The Last "Yugoslavs"*. Budapest: Tuvia Raviv 1997, 43 (in Hebrew).

<sup>158</sup> Gordiejew 1999, 216.

<sup>159</sup> Elazar 1969, 207–208.

