

4. ADAPTING TO THE NEW YUGOSLAVIA

The policy of *adaptation* became visible in the domains of religion and minority position, the subjects dealt with in this chapter, and the Jewish community in the new Yugoslavia positioned itself accordingly. The image and nature of the Jewish community in the new Yugoslavia was to a great extent created by this policy of *adaptation* which shaped the period of transition and resulted in a transformed Jewish community.

The use of the term *adaptation* need not be understood in a negative sense. Circumstances dictated that the Jewish leadership steer post-war Jewry towards the transformation which would guarantee their legitimate position in society. As a matter of fact, the ultimate aim of *adaptation* was to ensure the continuity of Yugoslav Jewry. While voluntarily yielding in certain matters, mainly concerning the religious sphere of Judaism, they simultaneously succeeded in preserving certain other dimensions of Jewish life. There is no clear-cut evidence that the authorities directly intervened in the internal affairs of post-war Jewry, but the Jewish leadership itself was well aware of the limits the new ruling power had set – and by keeping in constant touch with the authorities of the People's Republic, as the Minutes of Executive Committee meetings bear witness, were consequently able to direct Jewish policy along the lines approved by the regime.

Pedro Ramet has presented five factors which determine communist religious policy in general, and in this study the position of the Yugoslav Jewish minority is evaluated in respect of these factors. The five factors are as follows: (1) the size of the religious organization in question; (2) the organisation's disposition to subordinate itself to political authority and its amenability to infiltration and control by the secret police; (3) the degree of allegiance to a foreign authority; (4) the loyalty or disloyalty of the organization during World War II; and (5) the ethnic configuration of the country.²²³

The foundation for the position of religion and the churches in Yugoslavia was laid down during the war: firstly, by the Supreme Staff of the People's Liberation Army in Foča in February 1942 in a directive on the Organization and Tasks of the People's Liberation Committee; secondly, at the first session of AVNOJ (Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia) at Bihać in 1942; and

²²³ Ramet 1984, 7.

thirdly at the second session of AVNOJ at Jajce on November 27, 1945.²²⁴ The Foča documents declared that all citizens were equal irrespective of political, national or religious differences, and established the principle of the separation of the churches from the state. Moreover, commissions for religious questions formed by the federal units of the anti-fascist councils had already been entrusted in 1944 with the tasks of ensuring free expression of religious beliefs and of improving relations both between religious communities and the state, and between the religious communities themselves.²²⁵

The first constitution of the new Yugoslavia was promulgated in January 1946 and contained the following provisions relating to religion: citizens were guaranteed freedom of conscience and religious beliefs; the separation of the churches from the state was decreed; religious communities whose teaching was not against the constitution were guaranteed full freedom in performing their religious functions and rites and permission to establish religious schools to train their clergy, under the general supervision of the state; it was forbidden to use the church and religion for political ends, or to establish political organisations on a religious basis; and finally, the state may give financial aid to religious communities.²²⁶

Early in 1953 the Basic Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities was introduced: a draft was published in February, and individual religious communities were asked to make their comments and suggestions. The Jewish community was one of those which gave its response to the Federal Executive Council in May 12, 1953.²²⁷ With minor amendments the law came into force on June 4, 1953, and allowed for the formation of new religious communities.²²⁸ Such constitutional principles were a sound basis for liberty, but there was no recourse to legal protection when the government itself violated the constitution, as Paul Mojzes has noted.²²⁹

The absolute concentration of control in the hands of the Communist Party took place in Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1953. The religious communities were an

²²⁴ Alexander, Stella: *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945*. London – New York – Melbourne: Cambridge University Press 1979, 210.

²²⁵ Bročić, Manojlo: "The position and activities of the religious communities in Yugoslavia". In Bohdan R. Bociurkiw & John W. Strong (eds.): *Religion and Atheism in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe*. London – Basingstoke: Carleton University 1975, 355.

²²⁶ Alexander 1979, 211; Bročić 1975, 355. These constitutional principles offered a basis for the emergence of certain forms of state pressure over the leaders of some religious communities, and in fact the state was forced to use fairly strict measures, as many attempts were made by the leaders of certain religious communities, particularly the Catholic Church, to act as organised political forces against the existing social system (Bročić 1975, 356).

²²⁷ JHM/K-867, no. 973/53: Federation of Jewish Communities to the Federal Executive Council in Belgrade, May 12, 1953.

²²⁸ Alexander 1979, 221–222.

²²⁹ Mojzes 1997, 217.

exception to the general communist ambition to subsume everything under their control, for they were allowed to maintain religious organisations and world-views not consistent with the Marxist interpretation of reality.²³⁰ In spite of this ostensibly liberal religious policy, radical restriction of religious freedom was introduced. Mojzes has observed several stages marking the period from 1945, i.e. from the communist takeover, to 1992, of which the first, from 1945 to 1953, marks the radical restriction of religious liberty. Church buildings were expropriated, some were destroyed and, contrary to expectations, after Yugoslavia broke off with the Soviet Union and Cominform in 1948 and until Stalin's death in 1953, the conflict between the churches and the state and the oppression of religious communities by the Yugoslav Communists actually intensified. Some of the best-organised persecutions of religion took place between 1950 and the first part of 1953,²³¹ the period, interestingly enough, immediately prior to the enactment of the Basic Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities. All this coincided with the consolidation of Tito's power. The Roman Catholic Church, in particular, after World War II was seen as a dangerous rival by the Communist authorities, and a full scale attack was mounted in 1946, while by contrast the Orthodox Church, which has traditionally tended to be a state church, was less of a threat.²³² Islam also suffered during this period: the courts of Islamic sacred law were suppressed in 1946, a law forbidding women to wear the traditional veil was issued in 1950, in the same years elementary schools providing a basic knowledge of the Qur'an were closed down, and the teaching of children in mosques was made a criminal offence.²³³ Summing up, religious freedom existed on paper, but in practice the authorities kept religious communities under strict control and surveillance. The reality that existed is clearly pronounced by Mirko Mirković, the former editor of *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, when he recalls that 'religion, badly looked upon by the regime, was almost a taboo in post-war Yugoslavia'.²³⁴

After 1953 the persecutions slowly abated and a period of significant liberalisation followed from 1965 to 1971. However, at the same time concern was expressed by the government over the politicisation of the few larger religious communities, particularly the Roman Catholic but also the Islamic and Serbian Orthodox. The increasing tolerance towards religious communities was due, according to Mojzes, to the Yugoslav government's need for the approval of western and Third World countries with which Yugoslavia had developed increasingly good relations. Religious communities were therefore the beneficiaries of political considerations

²³⁰ Bročić 1975, 356.

²³¹ Mojzes 1997, 212–217.

²³² Poulton 1993, 7.

²³³ Malcolm 1994, 195.

²³⁴ Mirković 9.3.2000.

without making any reciprocal impact upon politics.²³⁵ In spite of the period of religious oppression until 1953, the attitude of the new Yugoslavia was tolerant with regard to religion as long as it stayed within the limits set by the regime.

4.1. 'VERSKA ZAJEDNICA ATEISTA' – PHASING RELIGION OUT

The position of Jewish religion in the new Yugoslavia is aptly described in a phrase of Max Nordau 'verska zajednica ateista', (an atheist religious community) cited by Albert Vajs in 1954.²³⁶

The umbrella organisation of the Jewish communities was re-established after the war on the basis of the law from the period of the Kingdom. According to this law the communities were regarded as religious communities. The Federation was thus established under exactly the same title as it had had during the inter-war period i.e. 'the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities'.²³⁷ The position of post-war Jewish communities was based on the constitution of 1946 and its provisions relating to religion.²³⁸ There was no particular law determining the legal status of the Jewish community.²³⁹ The legal position of the Jewish community was placed on the agenda for the Conference of the Federation. The discussion centred mainly on the issue of whether the Jewish community would be regarded as a national or a religious group.²⁴⁰ At that time Fridrih Pops, the president of the Federation, still regarded the Jewish communities as religious communities²⁴¹ as they had been during the inter-war period.

Although the post-war Jewish communities were re-established as religious communities, the Jewish leadership began to emphasise nationality instead of religion in order to smooth the process of adaptation. The most important element for post-war Jewry in Yugoslavia was to work together in the 'general Yugoslav reality which is a result of NOB (National Liberation Struggle)' and provided the foundation for being equal, both as citizens and as Jews. This policy was elaborated in the Conference of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in March

²³⁵ Mojzes 1997, 218–219.

²³⁶ Vajs 1954, 11.

²³⁷ ISA/FM 2510/2II, report no. 77: the Delegate to the Department of Eastern Europe, March 22, 1953.

²³⁸ JHM/K-822: Questionnaire, Federated People's Republic of Yugoslavia, sent by Pops and Gedalja, October 20, 1946.

²³⁹ JHM/K-813: Autonomous Relief Committee to F. White, October 8, 1946.

²⁴⁰ JHM/K-813: Autonomous Relief Committee to F. White, October 8, 1946.

²⁴¹ JHM/K-822: Questionnaire, Federated People's Republic of Yugoslavia, sent by Pops and Gedalja, October 20, 1946.

1947.²⁴² The question of the status of the Jewish community was raised repeatedly on the agenda of the Conferences and meetings of the Executive Committee, especially after a considerable section of the Jewish population had begun to emigrate to Israel in 1948.

The Minutes of the Conference of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in July 1949 noted that although the Jewish community had been recognised as a religious one since the liberation of Yugoslavia, it mainly carried out its activities in the social-humanitarian field and in organising immigration. Consequently it would be unnecessary to treat the community as a religious one, and the most appropriate definition would be a National-Cultural Jewish Community. By the same token it was expressed, however, that the religious sector should not be neglected. As different models of Jewish organization were discussed in the Conference, the Executive Committee gave its support to the model of a unified Jewish national-cultural organization with the religious sector included within it. To indicate this, Albert Vajs, the president of the Federation, suggested that the most appropriate title of the Federation would be *Savez jevrejskih udreženja FNRJ* ('Federation of Jewish Associations in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia') thus omitting the word religious.²⁴³ This change was finally made three years later. Immediately before the Conference, Bencion Levi, a member of the Executive Committee and himself an official in the Interior Ministry, had had talks with the Interior Ministry of FNRJ regarding possible changes in the structure of the Federation on the basis that the foundation of the Federation was no longer religious but national, or national-cultural.²⁴⁴ The Minutes of the Conference and the Executive Committee meetings in 1949 reveal no particular difficulties the Jewish leaders would have encountered with the authorities. Keeping the surrounding realities in mind, and the surveillance the regime exercised in general, it is plausible that a certain degree of self-censorship was practised in these meetings. All in all, the general climate at that time was oppressive towards religious communities, and this was also felt by the Jewish leaders. The Delegate of Israel reported about a month after the above-mentioned gatherings that the Jewish leaders were steeped in fear.²⁴⁵ Certainly this fear and uncertainty prompted the leadership to steer the Jewish community towards those standards which were wholly accepted by the regime. Therefore, as part of *adaptation* the shift from religious to national-cultural was

²⁴² JHM/K-784: Conference of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Belgrade, March 29–30, 1947.

²⁴³ JHM/K-781: Minutes of the Conference of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of FNRJ, July 28, 1949.

²⁴⁴ JHM/K-781: Minutes of the LI Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Federation, July 22, 1949.

²⁴⁵ ISA/FM 2494/4, report no. 10: the Delegate to the Department of Eastern Europe, August 1, 1949.

undertaken in the appearance and nature of the Jewish community. This was also made clear to the Jewish population of Yugoslavia when it was written in their *Bilten* paper in 1950 that religion had become a matter of the believers' own personal initiative.²⁴⁶ Here the Jewish community faithfully adapted the Leninist principle of the legal separation of church and state, declaring that religion is the private affair of every citizen. This relegated religion out of the public sphere into the private spiritual domain of individuals.²⁴⁷ Religion was a matter for individuals in the post-war Yugoslav Jewish community, while the Jewish leadership focused increasingly on portraying their community in national-cultural terms. The community which had previously been presented as a religious group now came to be presented as a national minority.

Thus the way of *adaptation* was undertaken and applied to accommodate the Jewish minority to the context of a communist regime. In practice this had several implications. As the regime was strongly anti-religious, the most important of these steps taken by the leadership was to minimise the religious character of the community. In fact, this was brought about to a great extent by the emigration of the most religious elements of the Jewish population i.e. the Orthodox Jews as seen earlier. Another crucial issue in redirecting the policy of the community was to emphasise various cultural activities and events within the communities as the central focus of activities, as this was known to be approved by the regime. This proved not too difficult to carry out since interest in religion was on the decline among Yugoslav Jews in general.²⁴⁸ This shift or repositioning from the religious to the cultural sphere has been attributed to the general orientation of the Federation,²⁴⁹ but as a trend was certainly strongly encouraged and directed by the leadership.

This process of adaptation and repositioning of the post-war Jewish community had almost been completed by the sixth post-war Conference of Jewish Communities in September 1952. Albert Vajs noted in his closing speech to the Conference that the Jewry of 1952 in Yugoslavia was not, and could not be, identical with the Jewry of Yugoslavia in 1920. The fact is, Vajs continued, that the religiousness of the Jewish community was at a very low level, which was the result of a process of secularisation which had not begun recently but many decades before. Vajs added that Yugoslav Jewry had to abide by the principle of one united and single organization, and the existence of a separate religious Federation or religious communities could not be tolerated. One single organisation was seen as the best guarantee of success in the new Yugoslavia. To this end, it was decided at this

²⁴⁶ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 6/1950, 7.

²⁴⁷ Mojzes 1997, 215.

²⁴⁸ CZA/Z6/324: Short Minutes of the Meeting of the London members of the European Executive of the World Jewish Congress, November 28, 1950.

²⁴⁹ Freidenreich 1984, 29–30.

Conference to change the title of the Federation by omitting the word 'religious'. The former title 'the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Yugoslavia' was no longer regarded as reflecting the real character of the Federation, which was now much more heavily engaged in national, social and cultural than religious activities. Vajs even said that if the Federation were a religious organization he could not be its President, for he was not a religious person.²⁵⁰ As the following makes clear, there were also other crucial reasons which contributed to the necessity of changing the Federation title.

The Jewish Dilemma over the New Law on the Status of Religious Communities

As the Jewish leadership, after years of discussions, had succeeded in finalising the reorientation of the community in September 1952, and so now regarded themselves as well-adapted to the realities of the new Yugoslavia with a non-religious form of Jewish organization, new surprises were lurking just around the corner. Only about six months after the decisions of the September Conference in 1952, the Yugoslav dailies *Borba* and *Politika*, in their issues of 12 February, 1953, published the draft for the Basic Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities.²⁵¹ At the moment when the Jewish Federation had officially settled on a secular path, new prospects for more religious liberty suddenly seemed to be opening up. This Basic Law seemed to guarantee full religious liberty for religious communities, and only political activities by religious communities were forbidden.

The surprising proposal of a new law organising religious communities in Yugoslavia, considering the oppression religion had suffered in recent years in general, led to lively discussions among the leadership, which, as different opinions emerged, reflected uncertainty about the most appropriate policy for the Jewish communities.²⁵² In fact, the new proposal hid two traps for the Jewish community, one for the community policy in general and a second for the leadership in particular. The general problem was that if the Jewish Federation were reorganised according to the new law, how could it then act on behalf of the state of Israel, which would be considered political activity and thus forbidden by the new forthcoming law? The second problem concerning the leadership itself was the incom-

²⁵⁰ JHM/K-784: the Sixth Post-war Conference of Jewish Communities in FNRJ, September 7-8, 1952.

²⁵¹ JHM/K-806, no. 242/53: Federation of Jewish Communities of FNRJ to all Jewish communities, February 13, 1953.

²⁵² ISA/FM 2510/2II, report no. 77: the Delegate to the Department of Eastern Europe, March 22, 1953.

patibility of Party membership with membership of an organisation recognised as a religious one, because many of the Jewish leaders were also Party members.²⁵³

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia had changed its name to the League of Communists in Yugoslavia at the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party in November 1952. Its new Statute was adopted,²⁵⁴ and consequently a new Federal Constitutional Law was enacted in January, 1953.²⁵⁵ This law again emphasised that atheism was an obligatory principle. In any case, belonging to a religious community was forbidden for members of the League, and to this end, as many Jewish activists were also Communists, the title of the Federation was changed in September 1952, thus technically, at least, overcoming the obstacle to being simultaneously a member of the League and of a religious organization. Now the proposal of the Basic Law in February 1953 brought this issue back onto the agenda, as the new Basic Law threatened to change the status of the Jewish community to that of a religious community, and would thus revive the problem of the 'double membership' of the Jewish Communists. For this reason the proposals stirred up fear among the Jewish Communists.²⁵⁶ Now, if the Federation were organised as a religious community according to the Basic Law on the Legal Status of Religious Communities, a section of the Jewish leadership would face a difficult dilemma, and in the strict sense of the Statute of the League of the Communists, should renounce either membership in the League or membership of the Jewish community. This was certainly a step they would have been most unwilling to take, since although they were not religious, they were devoted to the Jewish cause in Yugoslavia. Thus the introduction of the new law on religious liberty brought the Jewish leadership face to face again with the problem which had so conveniently and skilfully been solved in September 1952 by dropping the word 'religious' from the title of the Federation. There was nothing wrong with being a member of a national-cultural society and simultaneously a member of the League of the Communists, but now the draft of the Basic Law was, against the will of the Jewish leadership, about to recognise the Jewish community as basically a religious community.

²⁵³ ISA/FM 2510/2II, report no. 77: the Delegate to the Department of Eastern Europe, March 22, 1953.

²⁵⁴ Morača 1966, 57.

²⁵⁵ *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, Zagreb, Izdanje i naklada jugoslavenskog leksikografskog zavoda 1968, Vol. 7, 156; Singleton 1976, 134.

²⁵⁶ ISA/FM 2510/2II, report no. 77: the Delegate to the Department of Eastern Europe, March 22, 1953. I had difficulties in finding explicit denial of membership in religious organisations to members of the League in other sources, but at least the programme of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in 1958 states that 'belonging to the League of Communists of Yugoslavia does not allow any religious belief'. (Cited in *Matstva' berit ha-qomunistim šel Yugoslavija 1958*. Mifleget ha-po'alim ha-meuchedet 1959, 191).

As different opinions and uncertainty seemed to abound, it was finally decided to ask the opinion of Moša Pijade. A consultation with him was arranged and his advice was that a special law should be introduced for the Jewish communities which would take into account their special character. As a matter of fact the members of the Federation were not satisfied with this advice because it would have placed them in a special position,²⁵⁷ a situation they wanted to avoid at all costs.

After discussions with and responses from different Jewish communities concerning the draft for the Basic Law, the Federation sent its comments to the Federal Executive Council of Yugoslavia on 12 May 1953. The response of the Federation highlighted the fact that the Jewish community in Yugoslavia was not a religious community in the strict sense of the word, but a national-cultural minority with certain religious ingredients. The response describes at length the position of Jewry in post-war Yugoslavia and concludes that as a result of these developments the Jewish community was primarily to be regarded as a national minority. The most appropriate solution proposed in this response concerning the Jewish community was that it should continue to be a unified, single organization in which separate religious sections would be created. These sections would then be directed according to the proposed law on religion.²⁵⁸

Finally, to comply with the Basic Law while simultaneously keeping the Federation as a basically non-religious organization, a separate religious section of the Federation was founded in 1953.²⁵⁹ Thus the problem caused by this law was, so to speak, skilfully evaded, and the Federation was able to continue on its former chosen track of maintaining contacts with Israel and allowing League members to keep their membership of the Jewish community.

Non-attendance at the Community Celebrations

A gradual deterioration of the situation with regard to religion was also reflected in the behaviour of the Jewish leadership. In this respect it is rewarding to compare two community celebrations. The biggest post-war ceremony in the Belgrade Jewish community took place at the end of 1951. The *Hanukkah* celebration gathered some 300 participants and the ceremony was opened by the President of the community, Bencion Levi, who spoke in a national Jewish tone about the freedom of Jews in Yugoslavia as a miracle, and about their freedom to live as Jews. He also

²⁵⁷ ISA/FM 2510/2II, report no. 77: the Delegate to the Department of Eastern Europe, March 22, 1953.

²⁵⁸ JHM/K-867, no. 973/53: the Federation to the Federal Executive Council, Belgrade, May 12, 1953.

²⁵⁹ ISA/FM 2510/2II, report no. 79: the Delegate to the Department of Eastern Europe, April 13, 1953.

reported increased interest among Jews in Jewish life and gatherings.²⁶⁰ The *Seder Pesah* celebration in 1952 was also a normal one with Jewish communists participating. The president of the Belgrade Jewish Community, Bencion Levi, a communist and an official of the Ministry of the Interior,²⁶¹ led the *Seder* celebration.

This situation changed dramatically within a year, as in the spring of 1953 *Seder Pesah* was boycotted by the communist members of the leadership of the Federation. Bencion Levi and all the other important members of the community council, who were present the year before, were simply absent. The ceremony was now conducted by a religious member of the community council. The President of the Federation, Albert Vajs, did not make a speech on that occasion, in contrast with the previous year when Vajs had spoken in a Zionist tone. Vajs was now even seated apart, as if to indicate the changed situation. The Delegate of Israel was invited to speak in 1952, but no longer in 1953.²⁶²

This change in conducting Jewish religious festivals, from the *Hanukkah* celebration of 1951 to *Pesah* in the spring of 1953, was a dramatic one, revealing, perhaps better than any other fact, the fear and feeling of oppression felt among the Jewish leadership. All these precautions had to be taken in order not to endanger either their own, personal position or the position of the Jewish community as a whole.

Apparently this remarkable change in conducting the *Seder* within a mere year needed explanation, because Vajs visited the Israeli Delegate only a couple of days afterwards. Vajs was angry about the 'boycott' imposed by the communist members of the council on the *Seder* (he himself was not a party member) and on Jewish holidays in general. The reason given for the boycott was opposition to a religious service because of the anti-religious clause introduced in the constitution of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. According to Vajs an exaggerated fear among the Jewish communists, and their excessive concern for party purity were the only logic behind their behaviour.²⁶³

In general, Albert Vajs was in quite pessimistic about the fate of Yugoslav Jewry and compared their situation to that of Jews in the Soviet Block, with only one reservation: relations with Israel were better in Yugoslavia than in the countries

²⁶⁰ ISA/FM 2494/6, report no. 33: the Delegate to the Department of Eastern Europe, January 3, 1952.

²⁶¹ According to some sources, as mentioned above, Bencion Levi was in his work connected to the secret service of Yugoslavia, known as UDBA (ISA/FM 2494/6: Report no. 33, the Delegate to the Department of Eastern Europe, 3.1.1952).

²⁶² ISA/FM 2510/2II, report no. 79: the Delegate to the Department of Eastern Europe, April 13, 1953; ISA/FM 2498/3, report no. 97: the Delegate to the Department of Eastern Europe, November 19, 1953.

²⁶³ ISA/FM 2510/2II, report no. 79: the Delegate to the Department of Eastern Europe, April 13, 1953.

behind the Iron Curtain. He complained that there was a complete lack of Hebrew education and now the Jewish holidays were also being boycotted. In Vajs' assessment the maintenance of traditional ceremonies with a Jewish-national meaning, outside the sphere of religion, would be the way to secure the existence of Yugoslav Jewry. Simultaneously Vajs hoped that the attitude towards Jewish holidays would change in the future.²⁶⁴

The boycott of synagogues and all religious activity in the form of Jewish holidays was based on the constitution of the League of Communists, which forbade its members to take part in any religious worship, and so the direct result was that the communist members of the Jewish leadership had no choice but to boycott Jewish holidays of a religious character out of fear of the consequences. These restrictions mainly affected the top echelons of the Yugoslav Jewish leadership. Regular members of the Jewish community were allowed to conduct their religious worship on an individual basis, and the community took care to provide the necessary means for those who wanted to maintain religious traditions by providing *matsot*, *kosher* wine, *arba minim* for the *Succoth* holiday, *Haggadot*, *Sidurim* and *Tora* books for the few individuals interested in religion.²⁶⁵

These events also support the periodisation introduced by Paul Mojzes, who argued that the period of radical restrictions lasted until 1953 and then slowly abated. To be precise, the period of introducing the new constitution of the League of Communists, and of promulgating the Basic Law about the Status of Religious Communities, was the most crucial in relation to religion among the Yugoslav Jewry. The boycott exercised by the Jewish communists with regard to Jewish celebrations of religious significance clearly showed the path they had taken. If religion was banned in general, it was banned as well by the Jews. It was to some extent the price of *adaptation* which had to be paid. Foreign Jewish institutions, and the Jewish Agency, for example, were requested to supply educational material and reminded that it should not be of a religious character because of the nature of the Jewish communities in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav authorities.²⁶⁶ The profound pessimism expressed by Vajs, and the significant change in comparison with his earlier reports on the situation of Jews in Yugoslavia in his meetings with the Israeli Delegate, reveal the actual atmosphere felt among the Jews.

Interestingly the situation of post-war Yugoslav Jewry accords almost perfectly with the factors introduced by Pedro Ramet according to which the communist religious policy was conducted. The size of the community favoured Jews in that having such a small population they could not pose any considerable threat to

²⁶⁴ ISA/FM 2510/2II, report no. 79: the Delegate to the Department of Eastern Europe, April 13, 1953.

²⁶⁵ Kadelburg 1969, 166–167.

²⁶⁶ CZA/S32/882: Arnon to the Jewish Agency, Youth and Hechalutz Dept., October 22, 1954.

the regime. Ramet's second factor, willingness of subordination, describes very well the adaptation of the Yugoslav Jewry, who fulfilled perfectly the regime's expectation of a disposition to subordination. This went so far that Yugoslav Jewry could have been used as an example for other religious organisations. Whether the Jewish community was amenable to infiltration and control by the secret police, however, is a more difficult question to answer owing to the lack of accessible sources. However, the general process of adaptation and subordination supports the presumption that the secret police had control through the leadership, of course in an invisible way. Infiltration was unnecessary since a section of the leadership itself had direct links through their professions to the Ministry of the Interior and the authorities (Bencion Levi, for example). The Jewish leadership supervised their own community on behalf of the regime, which was, of course, very convenient for both the regime and the Jewish leadership.

The third factor put forward by Ramet, the degree of allegiance to a foreign authority, is interesting in relation to the Jews of Yugoslavia. In contrary to the general policy of the communist countries, Yugoslavia permitted her Jews to maintain contacts with all international Jewish institutions except the World Zionist Organization. During the years of reconstitution co-operation with the Jewish Distribution Committee was very close, as it almost exclusively funded the reconstitution and humanitarian aid. Perhaps this was partly due to the fact that despite the financial support Jews received from foreign sources, they succeeded in retaining all the decision-making authority in the hands of their own capable leadership.²⁶⁷ As pointed out earlier in this study, there existed disagreement on certain matters between the Jewish leadership and the JDC, as the JDC wanted to differentiate between Jewish communities which took care of purely religious functions on the one hand, and the Autonomous Relief Committee with other institutions which took care of Jewish activities of a non-religious character on the other hand. The leadership wanted to keep the Jewish community as an all-embracing centre of all activities, and in this they succeeded. There was also pressure from the World Jewish Congress to establish local committees for WJC affairs in every Jewish community.²⁶⁸ This suggestion, even demand, was politely turned down by Pops who wrote that 'it is our wish to develop, within the frames of possibilities, our cooperation with the WJC, taking into account the actual circumstances and needs of the Jewish community in Yugoslavia'.²⁶⁹ Summing up, the Yugoslav Jewish community made its own decisions independently of foreign Jewish organisations,

²⁶⁷ As Vajs and Gedalja wrote 'You, The World Jewish Congress, are (sic!) in all matters always respected our independence regarding decisions relative to our community' (CAHJP-EA/B-120, no. 3517/49: Vajs and Gedalja to the WJC, October 26, 1949.

²⁶⁸ JHM/K-822: Schwarzbart to Pops, October 23, 1947.

²⁶⁹ JHM/K-822: Pops to Schwarzbart, December 2, 1947.

and this was certainly appreciated by the authorities. In consequence there was no need for the government to fear foreign contacts by the Jews; on the contrary, the government attempted to use these contacts as an instrument to influence foreign, especially American, public opinion.

The loyalty or disloyalty of the organisation during World War II, Ramet's fourth factor, was, of course, perhaps more beneficial than any other factor for the adaptation to the new regime in Yugoslavia. The Jews had stood firmly on the right side, and they completely fulfilled the requirements of the so-called Partisan paradigm, so important in post-war Yugoslavia.

Ramet's final factor, the ethnic configuration of the country, was also a great benefit for the Jews living in the multi-national Federation of Yugoslavia. In a multi-national society the Jews had a legitimate position among other nationalities, as a separate nationality in a federation of nations, as Daniel Elazar has pointed out.²⁷⁰ Yugoslav Jewry was, therefore, perfectly adapted to post-war Yugoslav society when evaluated by the standards of communist religious policy.

Albert Vajs wrote explicitly in 1954 that the Jews were recognised as a nationality in Yugoslavia. Then he added that Jews also had freedom of religion, which could be practised according to everyone's own individual will within the limits of the existing laws.²⁷¹ The Jewish community focused its communal attention on national, cultural and social activities while religion was restricted to the sphere of individual interest.²⁷²

4.2. THE JEWS' POSITION AS A NATIONAL MINORITY

The policy of the Tito regime towards the Jews had, in fact, already been made known at the beginning of 1944, and the message was that the Tito government understood positively the aims of the Zionist movement. Relations with those Jews not moving to Israel would be the same as with other Yugoslavs on condition that they obeyed the Tito government.²⁷³ All anti-Jewish measures and laws were cancelled immediately after the liberation. In addition to this, a Law punishing racial and religious hatred was passed. The Law on the restitution of property, however, was of no assistance to the Jews owing to the simple reason that there was nothing left to be restored. Despite these measures there were still traces of antisemitism in 1946 which were attributed to the propaganda sowed by the occupying power and

²⁷⁰ Elazar 1989, 378.

²⁷¹ Vajs 1954, 42.

²⁷² JHM/K-913: Minutes of the Joint Meeting /CX and CXI/ of the Executive Committee of the Federation and the Autonomous Relief Committee, February 22, 1953.

²⁷³ CZA/S6/4569: Leiman's discussion with Nusbaum, February 1, 1944.

its local collaborators. In general, the Jews' juridical and actual equality with all other Yugoslav citizens was expressed.²⁷⁴

It was specifically stressed by Fridrih Pops and David Alkalaj in their report to the Joint Jewish Distribution Committee in 1945 that the position of Jews in Democratic Federal Yugoslavia was absolutely equal to the position of any other, non-Jewish citizen of the country. According to the report, the Jews like all other citizens in the New Yugoslavia had complete freedom to organise themselves in religious communities with full liberty to express their religion and religious teachings.²⁷⁵ This letter expresses the great confidence of the Jewish leadership in religious liberty under the new regime, which was probably also reflected in their hopes.

To give an example, this confident tone can easily be found in the report written by the Yugoslav Jewish leaders to the World Jewish Congress in 1949:

All these tasks [i.e. rebuilding] could successfully be carried out thanks primarily to the freedom-loving and progressive spirit of New Yugoslavia, which extended also to her Jewish citizens full equality, embracing them in the community of brotherhood and unity of all the peoples in our country, and which enabled the Jewish population to lead a free life and to develop as human beings, as citizens and as Jews. Just as the authorities of New Yugoslavia allowed, on the one hand, the voluntary emigration of Jews from Yugoslavia, standing by the correct conception of the Jewish national question, so on the other hand, they do not desire to place any obstructions in the way of the Jews remaining here in Yugoslavia, from cultivating their specific characteristics and from enjoying the fullest equality and possibilities for development not only as citizens but also as members of the Jewish community. Such an attitude is the logical consequence of New Yugoslavia's basic conception and her great principle of brotherhood and unity among all her peoples, which is one of the fundamental achievements of the glorious National Liberation Struggles and people's revolution. In consequence of all this, the Jews of Yugoslavia who will remain in our country, will always be loyal citizens and active participants in the freedom-loving aspirations, in the grandiose feat of the building up of socialism, in her struggle for just and equal relations among States and peoples and for a lasting democratic world peace.²⁷⁶

The report was written in the spirit of the time of the greatest will to adapt to the communist regime of Yugoslavia, and could also be viewed as a manifestation of adaptation. Of course the writers of the report knew that it would not only be read by the addressee, and as a result this awareness dictated the style of the report. However, it is plausible that the Yugoslav-orientated Jewish leaders were sincere in their effort to secure a legitimate place for the remaining Jewry in Yugoslavia, and

²⁷⁴ CZA/S25/5280: Report of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities Concerning the Problems of the Yugoslav Jewish Community, February 8, 1946.

²⁷⁵ AJJDC - Istanbul Box 3-4, Yugoslavia 1945: Report on the position of Yugoslav Jews.

²⁷⁶ CZA/C2/1722: Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia to World Jewish Congress, October 26, 1949.

the tone of the report merely reflected their faith in Yugoslavia, and the status of the Jews among her nationalities.

In reality the situation was much more delicate than the impression given in the report. Religion in general was under attack during this period with radical restriction of religious liberty as earlier observed. This was without doubt experienced, not only by the major religious dominations, but also by all the minorities or groups recognised like the Jewish community as religious, regardless of their size. As early as 1945 Jewish leaders admitted their delicate position as they warned against establishing contacts in order to avoid endangering them.²⁷⁷ The representative of the JDC, Frederick White, observed that the Jewish communities were the target of internal and external propaganda directed at them for the purpose of assimilating them into the new system.²⁷⁸ This oppressive attitude by the regime also had practical consequences, as the fear of reprisals caused the Jewish leadership not to organise a congress planned for November 1946, in which it was planned to forward an application to the Government for recognition of the Jews as a religious or even national group.²⁷⁹

Israeli diplomats who served in Yugoslavia after the establishment of the Israeli Legation in Belgrade in July 1949 also gave a rather pessimistic picture of the situation.²⁸⁰ In one report the Israeli Delegate in Belgrade reports to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Jerusalem that pressure had been exercised on some individuals to stay in Yugoslavia instead of emigrating, and that in general local Jews were steeped in fear.²⁸¹ The Legation of Israel also passed on printed material for the communities. On one occasion it was discovered that the material forwarded to the Federation for redistribution was not, however, regularly passed on and the explanation was given that they had been deterred from doing so. Henceforth the Legation sent the material straight to the communities themselves.²⁸² This indicates that the Federation as the umbrella organisation exercised a very cautious policy in order not to arouse the suspicions of the regime.

Formally relations were good, and as if to demonstrate the fact, Marshall Tito occasionally met both the leadership of Yugoslav Jewry and the representatives of foreign Jewish organisations. On February 27, 1950 Tito received Albert Vajs and

²⁷⁷ CZA/S5/11423/210/328: Situation of Zionism in Yugoslavia, May 16, 1946.

²⁷⁸ AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A/1, C-89.004: F. White to J. Schwartz, November 28, 1946.

²⁷⁹ AJJDCA – Geneva I, 2A/1, C-89.004: F. White to J. Schwartz, November 28, 1946.

²⁸⁰ CAHJP-EA/B-120, no. 3517/49: Vajs and Gedalja to the World Jewish Congress, London, October 26, 1949.

²⁸¹ ISA/FM 2494/4, report no. 10: the Delegate to the Foreign Ministry, August 1, 1949.

²⁸² ISA/FM 2498/3: Cultural Activity among Yugoslav Jews, the Legation to the Department of Eastern Europe, March 29, 1951.

the JDC representative in Yugoslavia, Frederick White, for interview immediately before White left Yugoslavia. It was reported that the meeting was held in a warm atmosphere. Tito reminded Vajs and White that the participants in the Liberation War had done their utmost in order to save the Jews of Yugoslavia from the hands of the Fascists and stressed his deep sorrow that it had not been in his power to save more Jews. He also stressed that the regime's policy was to guarantee equality to all *national* (author's italics) groups inside Yugoslavia and that he was against all forms of discrimination against Jews. Tito added that according to the Yugoslav position the Jews had the right to their own state and for this reason emigration from Yugoslavia had also been allowed, even in the form of illegal immigration before the founding of the state of Israel.²⁸³ At the beginning of 1953, while on a visit to Great Britain, Tito met a political director of the World Jewish Congress in London, A. L. Easterman, who expressed his satisfaction to Marshal Tito with the attitude of the Yugoslav Government towards the Jews. Tito replied that it was pleasure for the Yugoslav Government to learn of the sympathies of World Jewry towards his country.²⁸⁴ This was not merely lip-service since the position of the Jews as citizens of Yugoslavia was relatively good and they were not oppressed as individuals nor subjected to any specific form of antisemitism. However, all this in no respect alters the fact that this positive attitude towards Yugoslav Jewry was possible only so far as the limits imposed by the regime were respected. On the international scene the Yugoslavs endeavoured to highlight their good relations with their own Jews as well as with international Jewish organisations and Israel. According to the assessment of the Israeli Delegate in Yugoslavia in 1955, the Yugoslav authorities viewed contacts between Yugoslav Jews and Israel as well as with the World Jewish Congress and other Jewish international organisations in a favourable light because they created a positive image of Yugoslavia in the American Jewish population,²⁸⁵ and consequently the American public as a whole.

The Jewish leadership was unable to act independently under the Yugoslav communist regime and was, at least to a certain extent, under supervision. Although generally speaking the supervision was undertaken by the leadership itself, in some matters the opinion of the authorities was sought. Jewish officials asked the opinion of high-ranking Yugoslav officials whether the sending of a delegation to the *Zimria* song festival in Israel would fit in with the political aims of the authorities, for example. In the above-mentioned case the response was a positive one, and even the provision of financial aid by the Yugoslavs, and as a result 47 singers were sent

²⁸³ ISA/FM 2498/3: Hitahdut Olej Yugoslavia to the Foreign Ministry, April 17, 1950.

²⁸⁴ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 3/1953.

²⁸⁵ ISA/FM 2510/7: Our Relations with Yugoslavia Now, the Delegation to the Department of Eastern Europe, July 17, 1955.

to Israel.²⁸⁶ However, it is implausible that such delegations would have travelled without supervision. Obviously a few members of the delegations were given by the authorities the task of supervising others.²⁸⁷

Yugoslavs were very cautious in their relations with the foreigners in general and this caution can also be seen in the policy of the Jewish community in its relations with the Legation of Israel in Belgrade. Cordial relations were maintained but care was obviously taken to avoid giving the impression that relations were either too deep or too visible. In one instance, the Delegate of the Israeli Legation participated without invitation in the Subotica Jewish community celebration. The president of the community blessed his arrival but also clearly pointed out that he had not himself invited him; this was said as if somebody was supposed to hear it. The Delegate had asked Albert Vajs prior to his travel to inform the Subotica community about his participation, but this Vajs failed to do, and moreover, Vajs himself while otherwise participating in the celebration did not even attend the prayers in the synagogue, as the Delegate conveyed in his report.²⁸⁸

Faithfulness to Yugoslavia was demonstrated by the Federation in public appearances, as Gordiejew excellently described it.²⁸⁹ In addition to the unveiling of memorial monuments, one such public appearance which attracted a lot of publicity, was a protest meeting held in Belgrade on February 27, 1953 against the antisemitic campaign in the Soviet Union and the Soviet block countries. The protest meeting was organised by the Town Committee of the Socialist Union of Working People of Yugoslavia and the former People's Front. Present were representatives of altogether 117 organisations and associations as well as numerous both Jewish and non-Jewish citizens. Albert Vajs was one of the speakers representing the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia.²⁹⁰ The gathering praised the liberal traditions and aims of socialist Yugoslavia in contrast with the aggressive and imperialist foreign policy of the Soviet hegemonists, according to the Yugoslav press report on the meeting.²⁹¹ It was clearly directed against the Soviet Union and while pointing out the existence of antisemitism in the Soviet

²⁸⁶ ISA/FM 2510/7: *Our Relations with Yugoslavia Now*, the Delegate to the Department of Eastern Europe, July 17, 1955.

²⁸⁷ There is an interesting example of this as late as in 1976. A Yugoslav Jewish delegation participated in a seminar arranged for Yugoslav Jewish community activists by the World Zionist Congress. Participants were not very open even in private discussions because they feared that 2–3 Jewish participants in a group were there on behalf of the Yugoslav authorities (CAHJP-EA/B-120: *Summary of the Yugoslav Jewish Communities Activists Seminar* 19.10.–2.11.1976, December 10, 1976).

²⁸⁸ ISA/FM 2493/6, report no. 124: *Community celebration in Subotica*, November 2, 1950.

²⁸⁹ Gordiejew 1999, chap. 3.

²⁹⁰ CZA/C2/240: *Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia to World Jewish Congress*, March 5, 1953.

²⁹¹ ISA/FM 2510/2II: *the Legation to the Department of Eastern Europe*, March 10, 1953.

Union simultaneously demonstrated to the Western media that Yugoslavia was free of this plague.

Perhaps the most important post-war public event organised by the Federation took place between August 28 – September 11 1952, when in five cities of Yugoslavia, Zagreb, Djakovo, Novi Sad, Belgrade and Sarajevo, unveiling of monuments to the Jewish victims of fascism took place. Besides the Jews, high-ranking representatives of the Yugoslav civil authorities and the Yugoslav Army and also the Israeli Legation in Belgrade attended the ceremonies. These ceremonies were a public manifestation of the life and efforts of the small Jewish community in Yugoslavia.²⁹² Several monuments in Jewish cemeteries had already been unveiled earlier in various parts of Yugoslavia.²⁹³ These public appearances reinforced the relationship between the Jewish minority and the Yugoslav authorities: both had fought for the common cause and against the common enemy. If the National Liberation Struggle was the founding myth of the new Yugoslavia, it was as much the legitimising foundation of Jewish existence within this state. The fact that Jewry contributed comparatively more fighters for liberation than other groups of the population enhanced the Jews' prestige and explains why a fair number of them occupied responsible positions.²⁹⁴ The paradigm of partisanship, to use the apt term introduced by Paul Mojzes, was also a solid foundation for the mutual relations between the Jewish minority of Yugoslavia and the regime.

In the field of occupations doors were open to those Jews who had adapted well to the regime. They could serve without hindrance in different state institutions and services such as the army or diplomatic corps. Mirko Bruner served as a First Secretary of the Yugoslav Embassy in Washington²⁹⁵ and Cadik Danon, the chief rabbi of Yugoslavia after his retirement, served as Ambassador to Sweden. Immediately after the war, besides the first vice-chairman of the Parliament, Moša Pijade, there was another Jew in Parliament as well, Colonel Dr. Herbert Kraus.²⁹⁶

Naturally the Yugoslav Jewish minority had to express their attitude towards the Palestine question and the state of Israel. Not surprisingly, they raised their voice to support official Yugoslav policy with regard to Palestine. A political message was attached to one of their letters which highlighted the Yugoslav Jews' position in relation to the Palestine question, expressing confidence that an under-

²⁹² CZA/S41/4491: Vajs to WJC, Israeli Executive, Eng. Reiss, August 8, 1952.

²⁹³ CZA/KKL5/19185: Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia to Keren Kajemet le'Israel, June 26, 1952.

²⁹⁴ 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.

²⁹⁵ ISA/FM 2738/2: the Washington Embassy of Israel to the Foreign Ministry, April 3, 1951.

²⁹⁶ CAHJP-EA/G-583: General report by Dr. Albert Vajs, September 23, 1945.

standing would be achieved between Jews and Arabs on the same soil in Palestine, which would become a common homeland for both Jews and Arabs.²⁹⁷ This is fully in line with the policy of the Yugoslav regime on Palestine. In the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine Yugoslavia supported the formation of a Jewish-Arab Federation, as the Yugoslavs' view was that the economic and political interests of Jews and Arabs would have been best served in a federation similar to the Yugoslav Federation.²⁹⁸

4.3. THE PIJADE FACTOR

The Belgrade born painter and journalist, Moša Pijade (1890–1957), was a prominent Yugoslav Communist of Serbian Jewish origin, who together with Milovan Djilas led the partisan uprising in Montenegro in 1941. In 1925 he was convicted of the illegal publication of the journal *Komunist* ('Communist') and sentenced to 12 years in prison, and consequently became, largely for his courageous conduct in court and in prison, one of the most popular and distinguished figures of the Yugoslav Communist movement, held in esteem both at home and abroad.²⁹⁹ Pijade served in high-ranking political posts during and after the war, was a member of the Central Committee and the Politburo and was also proclaimed a National Hero.³⁰⁰ Throughout the war Pijade served among the partisans in close proximity to Tito, while his family perished during the Nazi occupation of Yugoslavia.

Pijade came, in fact, to play the role of intermediary between the Jewish leadership and the Yugoslav authorities. He was the mainstay of Jewish leadership, who knew that as long as he remained in a sufficiently high-ranking position his more or less tacit support was assured. Pijade's Jewishness was, of course, well known among the Communist leadership. For example, when the Central Committee was appointing a representative to the thanksgiving service of the Orthodox church in Belgrade after its liberation, Pijade was chosen but then 'it was remembered, with laughter, that Pijade was Jewish, but that didn't matter, since he wasn't representing a religion but rather the state'.³⁰¹ Pijade himself said that he had no Jewish sentiments, but sympathised with the Zionist revolutionary activity as a Serb.³⁰²

²⁹⁷ 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.

²⁹⁸ OHD (166)2: Interview of Vladimir Velebit by Moše Mešulam on the Yugoslav-Yishuv Relations in 1943–48, on May 2, 1972.

²⁹⁹ S. Goldstein 1989, 105.

³⁰⁰ Djilas, Milovan: *Wartime*. New York – London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1977, 455.

³⁰¹ Djilas 1977, 428.

³⁰² Shelah 1994, 150.

Pijade admits in a meeting with the Delegate of Israel that the emigration from Yugoslavia (including permission to emigrate) was the result of his efforts, and that because of his influence it was not cancelled even though there existed an urgent need for (educated) people. He was even involved in arranging some individual cases, although these cases were difficult from the country's point of view.³⁰³ This opinion of Pijade's influence was also shared by the international Jewish organisations: Pijade was one of those at the top in the regime who greatly assisted the emigration from Yugoslavia and because of this assistance the emigration was carried out in much better circumstances than the emigration from other Eastern European countries.³⁰⁴ Pijade was of the opinion that Zionism was not the answer to the so-called Jewish problem but as a communist he supported the anti-British campaign of Jewish settlement in Palestine.³⁰⁵ Certainly these political ends important for the Yugoslav regime in general made it easier for Pijade to render assistance to the Jewish cause.

The representatives of the Jewish Agency for Palestine turned to Pijade because of his high position as Speaker of Parliament and his friendship with Marshal Tito. They claimed that Pijade was not contacted because of his Jewishness, but because of his contacts. Ephraim Shilo, a political representative of the Jewish Agency, had the feeling that Pijade arranged matters behind the scenes because many unsolved problems were solved after such meetings.³⁰⁶ The Yugoslav Jews themselves also bore witness to the significant help they received from Pijade.³⁰⁷ Contrary to Shilo's claim, the Jewish Agency certainly contacted Pijade precisely because of his Jewishness.

Pijade was often consulted by the Yugoslav Jewish leadership, especially by Albert Vajs, who wrote as early as 1945 that Moša Pijade expressed great understanding and goodwill and was often visited regarding Jewish activities.³⁰⁸ Consultations with Pijade were carried out concerning, for example, the unveiling of the memorials to Jewish victims in Yugoslavia, the repair of destroyed Jewish cemeteries, and sending a Yugoslav Jewish delegation to the World Jewish Congress and the USA. Generally Pijade gave the go-ahead to all suggestions and proposals and supported plans presented to him.³⁰⁹ The vocational training funded

³⁰³ ISA/FM 2494/4: Report no. 6, the Delegate to the Foreign Ministry, July 13, 1949.

³⁰⁴ ISA/FM 2498/3: Hitahdut Olej Yugoslavia to the Foreign Ministry, April 17, 1950.

³⁰⁵ Shelah 1994, 136.

³⁰⁶ OHD (166)1: Relationship between Yugoslav Authorities and the Yishuv in Eretz Israel in the years 1945–48, Interview of Ephraim Šilo by Moše Mešulam on June 7, 1971.

³⁰⁷ CZA/C2/1722: Note on conversation with Mr. Alexander Stajner, August 1965.

³⁰⁸ CAHJP-EA/B-120: Letter from David A. Alkalaj and Dr. Albert Vajs, September 10, 1945 in Paris.

³⁰⁹ ISA/FM 2494/6: Report no. 29, the Delegate to the director of of the Department of Eastern Europe, December 6, 1951.

by the AJJDC was also mostly coordinated with Moša Pijade.³¹⁰ The emigration of Yugoslav Jews as well as the Basic Law on the Status of Religious Communities were matters constantly discussed with him.³¹¹ Albert Vajs indicated that in the course of time Pijade's attitude gradually relaxed in these consultations, and at the beginning he had been more reserved and indifferent. Sometimes he had reservations and said that he had no authority to express opinion on certain matters.³¹²

The Israeli Delegate interpreted Pijade's attitude as follows: firstly, Yugoslavia wanted to demonstrate her liberalism by approval of relations between Yugoslav and World Jewry in opposition to the policy exercised by the Soviets, and secondly, Yugoslavia had no fear that allowing these contacts would have unwanted internal consequences because of the small number of Jews in Yugoslavia, which was the very reason actually given again and again for the lack of antisemitism in Yugoslavia. In addition to this, Jews would serve as a channel of influence, or effective propaganda instrument, towards American Jews, which would then have a positive impact on American public opinion at large. Albert Vajs agreed with the opinion of the Delegate.³¹³ This illustrates again, how much *realpolitik* thinking influenced the Yugoslav authorities' decision-making with regard to the affairs of the Jewish minority. It can be assumed that the liberalism expressed towards the Jewish community was not so much drawn from sincere liberalist or cosmopolitan thinking, or that they were so different as a religious denomination from others, but was determined by the need to achieve certain political ends, for which the Jewish minority was used as an instrument. Of course, here the interests of both parties, the Jewish community and the regime, ran in parallel, and both benefited from this policy of *instrumentalisation*.³¹⁴ Yugoslavia became, in fact, well-known for understanding the importance of her many nationalities as a policy tool in the domain of foreign policy. Yugoslavia's Muslim community, after the years of hardship and oppression, became an important instrument of Tito's 'non-aligned' foreign policy, which concentrated on many Third World Muslim countries, and soon a Muslim back-

³¹⁰ AJJDC-Geneva I, 2A/1, C-89.004: F. White to J. Schwartz, November 28, 1946.

³¹¹ JHM/K-769: Minutes of the XXXIII Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Federation, June 5, 1948; JHM/K-913: Minutes of the Joint Meeting /CX i CXI/ of the Executive Committee of the Federation and the Autonomous Relief Committee, February 22, 1953.

³¹² ISA/FM 2494/6, report no. 29: the Delegate to the Director of the Department of Eastern Europe, December 6, 1951.

³¹³ ISA/FM 2494/6, report no. 29: the Delegate to the Director of the Department of Eastern Europe, December 6, 1951.

³¹⁴ In fact, bargaining involving Jews had already been undertaken earlier, in 1945. Epstein from the Jewish Agency for Palestine had contacts with officials of the Yugoslav Embassy in Washington, and the idea arose of recruiting American Jewish opinion to support Tito's government. Epstein pointed out that if Yugoslavia supported the Zionists in the Palestine question, American Jewry would be sympathetic towards Tito (Shelah 1994, 138).

ground was a positive advantage for anyone hoping to get on in the Yugoslav diplomatic service.³¹⁵

Pijade, therefore, as a link between the Jewish leadership and the highest echelons of the regime, actually safeguarded the interests of both. Besides being eager to advance Yugoslavia's political interests, it can plausibly be argued as well that he was not indifferent to the fate of his fellow-Jews in his home country, who in a reciprocal way were more confident because one of theirs, though not officially affiliated with the community, occupied such a high position.

* * *

It can be argued that the position of the Jewish minority in post-war Yugoslavia became well-established, largely due to the policy of *adaptation*. It was one of the rare examples where being a minority was not manifested in religion. Jews were a non-religious minority, although they were also recognised as a religious group on the basis of the Basic Law of 1953. They were regarded mainly as Yugoslavs, whose legitimisation in post-war society was based on the paradigm of partisan-ship. Collectively and as citizens of Yugoslavia they had no particular problems, though having a Jewish origin as such was insufficient to protect individuals if they behaved in a way considered inappropriate, as the example of Ženi Lebl shows. Lebl, a young prominent Jewish journalist working for the newspaper *Politika*, was imprisoned in 1949 for two and a half years for telling a joke about Tito. Part of her imprisonment was spent in *Goli Otok*, an infamous labour camp located on an island in the Adriatic.³¹⁶

³¹⁵ Malcolm 1994, 196–197.

³¹⁶ *Haaretz* 27.3.1991. Lebl has written a book describing this period entitled *The White Violet*, Am Oved Publishers Ltd, Tel Aviv 1993 (in Hebrew).