

PART TWO

THE TRANSITION FROM YUGOSLAV TO POST-YUGOSLAV JEWRY

The anti-religious attitude of the Yugoslav regime characteristic of the immediate post-war years gradually eased, and as a result of the 1953 Basic Law, religious communities began to receive more liberal treatment. The Jewish community had skilfully managed to secure its position in the new Yugoslavia by presenting itself primarily as a national minority community, but with its own specific religious sections organised within the Federation. During the transition period of 1944–53 the Jewish community had sought and found its own direction in Yugoslav society, according to which community leaders pursued a course which would be fully approved by the state authorities. Clearly this policy and its objectives were seen to have been accomplished by the end of 1953. The Jewish community had secured its own legitimate place in Yugoslavia.

However, additional obstacles began to overshadow the tiny Yugoslav Jewish minority, and these were the anti-Zionist policy of Yugoslavia, which began with the reaction to the Sinai-Suez War in 1956, and the start of the non-aligned movement, in which Yugoslavia was one of the prime movers. This led to an alliance with Egypt, a relationship which spelt hidden danger for Jews in Yugoslavia. During the years following these events, Yugoslavia became an outspoken critic of Israel and oriented its foreign policy towards the Arab states. This official policy dictated caution from the Jews with regard to their relations with Israel. As Harriet Freidenreich has noted, the Jewish community for its own purposes exercised caution with regard to their relationship with Israel, in spite of the fact that the Yugoslav authorities never directly interfered with the community's support for Israel.¹ Finally, Yugoslavia broke diplomatic relations with Israel as a result of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war; nevertheless, relations between Yugoslavia and Israel were

¹ Freidenreich, Harriet Pass: "Yugoslav Jewry after Tito". *Jewish Frontier*, Vol. XLVII, No. 5 (505) 1980, 7–9.

not totally severed. Trade relations continued as before, and tourists were able to travel unhindered between Yugoslavia and Israel. The 1967 war, however, stigmatised Yugoslav Jews more than before, and the older generation, in particular, preferred to avoid open association with anything related to Jewishness.² This had unexpected repercussions in Yugoslavia, because many Jews there, as everywhere else in the world, took pride in Israel's victory, and young people started to ask for information about Israel, Judaism, Jewish holidays and Jewish culture and expressed a wish to learn Hebrew.³ Though Jews were to some extent discomfited because of this war in the Middle East, Yugoslavia skilfully distinguished between her policy towards the state of Israel on the one hand, and her policy towards the Jews in general and Yugoslav Jews in particular on the other hand.⁴ In this regard it is worth noting that Tito maintained friendly relations with the World Jewish Congress and its President even during Yugoslavia's official anti-Zionist period. The World Jewish Congress appreciated the fact that Yugoslavia had allowed relatively free emigration of her Jews after 1948 and had also served as an escape channel for Jews from other Eastern European countries. This policy secured Tito the support of American Jewry.⁵ However, the anti-Zionist policy of Yugoslavia caused uncertainty among her Jewish community from 1956 until the death of Tito in 1980, and consequently Jews were only able to express their national feelings towards Israel in a limited way.⁶ In general, from the early 1960s until 1971 strategic liberalisation was adopted in Yugoslavia with regard to religion, and later during the nineteen-seventies religious policy was increasingly entrusted to the jurisdiction of the Federal units, which had their own committees for social questions of religion.⁷

During this period the real threat to Jewish existence in Yugoslavia, however, was internal. As early as 1954 the leadership became concerned about the lack of young people in the Jewish community, and their indifference to any Jewish activity.⁸ The community as a whole was characterised by an ageing membership and intermarriage; assimilation, as alienation from the Jewish community was generally known, gained ground at an alarming pace, which worried both Yugoslav Jews

² Katan-Ben Tsiyyon, Dina: "David Albahari – legalot et 'atmenu we-lehitwada'" *Iton* 77, No. 68, 1985, 25.

³ Serotta, Edward: *Survival in Sarajevo. How a Jewish Community Came to the Aid of its City*. Wien: Edition Christian Brandstätter – Central Europe Center for Research & Documentation 1994, 31.

⁴ Rotem 1976, 150.

⁵ Čerešnješ 23.5.1999.

⁶ S. Goldstein 16.3.2000.

⁷ Ramet 1998a, 42.

⁸ CZA/S32/882: Arnon to the Jewish Agency, Youth and Hechalutz Department, October 22, 1954.

themselves and outside observers.⁹ In general, the perception was that Yugoslav Jewry was one of the communities fated to disappear.

To combat disaffection among Jewish youth in the communities, the Federation initiated a system of summer camps starting in 1955,¹⁰ and in 1962 the Commission for Work with Youth was established.¹¹ These summer camps became perhaps the single most effective factor contributing to the preservation of Jewish identity and general identification with Jewish life, and at the same time a new generation of leaders for Yugoslavia was also trained. Every summer about 400 Jewish youths came to the holiday camp of Pirovac on the Adriatic coast, and in fact for many participants the summer camp represented their first contact with a Jewish environment.¹² Miriam Steiner, Director of Youth Services of the Federation in the nineteen-sixties, estimated on the basis of Federation statistics that at the beginning of the period about 400 active Jewish youths aged between the ages of 7 and 25 participated.¹³ All the year round Jewish youth activities took place in the youth clubs of the communities, which held meetings once or twice a week and were well organised.¹⁴ A limited number of children also received the beginnings of a Jewish education in the kindergartens of the Zagreb and Belgrade communities. The significance of this investment in the training of young cadres cannot be underestimated. While the Jewish organisational structure ensured the survival of Yugoslav Jewry during the post-war years,¹⁵ future officials and leaders were trained to manage the organisation and individual communities largely in the summer camps.¹⁶

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee was the main source of finance for the activities of Yugoslav Jewry. Other financing institutions were the Central British Fund for World Jewish Relief and the Memorial Foundation of Tel Aviv. These institutions provided a steady stream of funds, packaged youth programs, and scholarships.¹⁷

The longest-serving President of the Federation, Lavoslav Kadelburg, took over the presidency in 1964 and kept it until 1992. He was, as Paul Gordiejew

⁹ Freidenreich 1980, 7–9.

¹⁰ ISA/FM 2510/7: the Delegate to the Department of Eastern Europe, July 17, 1955.

¹¹ Steiner, Miriam: "The life and work of Jewish youth in Yugoslavia". *Exchange*, No. 23, May 1966, 22.

¹² Steiner, Miriam: "Yugoslav Jewry". *Dispersion and Unity*, No. 13–14, Jerusalem 1971, 233.

¹³ Steiner 1966, 22.

¹⁴ Steiner 1966, 24.

¹⁵ Freidenreich 1984, 58.

¹⁶ Steiner-Aviezer, Miriam 3.5.1999. In general, the role of these summer camps in keeping post-war Yugoslav Jewry alive deserves further research.

¹⁷ Serotta 1994, 9.

pertinently remarks, in many ways a microcosm of the Yugoslav Jewish community as it was organised in the post-war period.¹⁸ As the head of the Federation he was also the representative of the entire Jewish community both within Yugoslavia and abroad, and was described as Yugoslav Jewry's ambassador to the outside world and as by far the most influential figure in the community.¹⁹ Kadelburg, a lawyer by profession and a member of the League of Communists, was exceptionally appropriate for the post, bearing in mind the realities surrounding the community. According to Gordiejew, Kadelburg had, in fact, two aims: to maintain the organisation of Jewish life, which in fact meant maintaining the post-war Jewish community, and maintaining the unity of the Yugoslav Jewish community.²⁰ As post-war Yugoslavia was characterised by Tito, in the same way the post-war Yugoslav Jewish community was characterised by Kadelburg. He was, so to speak, the 'strong man' of Yugoslav Jewry. When Kadelburg left office in 1992, Yugoslavia had already disintegrated as a country in every respect and his function as the guardian of Jewish unity collapsed together with the state.

The final culmination of the life of post-war Yugoslav Jewry can be seen in the exhibition *Židovi na tlu Jugoslavije* ('Jews in the lands of Yugoslavia') which opened on April 14, 1988 and was shown in several cities during 1988–89. More than 50,000 Yugoslavs and visitors from abroad filed through the exhibition.²¹ This exhibition also marked the beginning of a new public visibility for Jews²² and thus the end of the carefully maintained low profile policy of most of the post-war period. The era of the new Yugoslavia was coming to an end, and Jews were once again facing a new period of transition. The first post-war transition had been characterised by rebuilding and adaptation followed by almost of four decades of stability, even stagnation, in which the major achievement lay in keeping reorganised Jewry alive. This aim was ultimately achieved, and in spite of many matters of concern within Yugoslavia, the Jewish minority felt their position was secure and stable. Jakob Finci, the current president of the Jewish community in Bosnia-Herzegovina, recalls simply that 'we found ourselves comfortable in Yugoslavia'.²³ This state of affairs began to change as a result of the crumbling of the whole Yugoslav system with its communism, which led to this new period of transition for the tiny Jewish community.

¹⁸ Gordiejew 1999, 214.

¹⁹ Gordiejew 1999, 216; Freidenreich 1984, 47,51.

²⁰ Gordiejew 1999, 219.

²¹ Lungen, Paul: "Yugoslavian Jewish culture undergoes a rebirth". *The Canadian Jewish News*, February 8, 1990, 12.

²² Gordiejew 1999, 370.

²³ Finci 13.3.2000.

In this second part of the study an attempt is made to evaluate some consequences of the disintegration of Yugoslavia for her Jewish community and minority. Firstly, the disintegration of the Federation of Jewish Communities is dealt with, and in order to record history in the making, an introduction is given to the current situation of the existing Jewish communities of the former Yugoslavia. Secondly, emigration due to the war, the nature of post-Yugoslav Jewry and their position as a minority in their new host countries are examined. There is also an attempt to define the question of Jewish identification and identity since the disintegration of Yugoslavia, which launched the process of moulding former Yugoslav Jewry in line with the realities of new and unexpected circumstances. Of course the process of Yugoslavia's collapse with all its consequences has not yet come to an end. It might, therefore, seem premature to draw conclusions about processes which are still going on. Although no certain final conclusions on the consequences of the disintegration of Yugoslavia for the Jewish community and minority can yet be drawn, this study seeks to analyse some developments and aspects of this period, and to draw some preliminary conclusions.

5. THE PROCESS OF DISINTEGRATION

Totalitarian communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and above all that of the Soviet Union, began to crumble towards the end of the 1980s. The demolition of the Berlin wall in 1990 came to symbolise the collapse of the one-party totalitarian system, and a new era of openness and pluralism began to take shape in Eastern Europe. In many countries a multi-party system was introduced with free and democratic elections. Although in general this transition has not been easy, often bringing even more poverty and unemployment than before, it has meant a new freedom and new prospects for individuals, and also for previously oppressed groups and movements. Everywhere in Eastern Europe, as the grip of communism loosened, religion and churches underwent a process of rehabilitation in order to fill the vacuum created by the demise of totalitarian ideology. Religious revivals were observed in the process of disintegration in Yugoslavia as well as in other Eastern European states. A heightened sense of national identity increased attendance at religious events and made possible a more public role for religion.²⁴ Judaism also began to attract people of Jewish origin in the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, and the young, in particular, began to rediscover their Jewishness. Lost generations of Jews gradually re-emerged all over the former communist countries after the lifting of the Iron Curtain.²⁵ Some Jews of Eastern Europe were perplexed after the collapse of the totalitarian order, wondering whether they had done enough to defend their Jewish identity while living under communist rule.²⁶

A miniature version of the larger political revolutions followed within the Jewish communities. Most of the old communal leaders, who were known as party-line supporters and sometimes also as secret police informants, were ousted. The Hungarian Jewish community leader, for example, was removed from the leadership of the community in November 1989. In the USSR an umbrella organisation for all Jewish bodies, the Va'ad ('the Committee') was formed as the first nationwide legal Jewish organisation since the dissolution of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in 1948. The most visible result of the liberation was a mass emigration

²⁴ Lytle 1998, 323.

²⁵ *Time* 6.2.1995.

²⁶ Eschenazi, Gabriele & Gabriele Nissim: *Ebrei Invisibili*. Tel Aviv: Dvir Publication House 1998, 15 (in Hebrew).

from the USSR starting in 1988.²⁷ Illuminating with regard to the Jewish revival is the mission of the American photographer Edward Serotta, who set off to Eastern Europe in 1988 in order to produce the most comprehensive photographic study ever of the last Jews of the region. 13,000 negatives later he came to the conclusion that 'there was no Eastern Europe and no last Jews. With the collapse of communism, Central Europe emerged and Jewish communities that had appeared to be dying were blossoming.'²⁸

One of the last countries in the region to abandon the communist monopoly of power was Yugoslavia. The League of Communists of Yugoslavia disintegrated at the beginning of 1990, and at the same time the authorities legalised all political parties.²⁹ On the brink of the collapse of Yugoslavia, Jews began to emerge on the public stage, not only as individuals but also as an entire community. Several Jewish individuals became public figures in the course of these changes. In Croatia, Slavko Goldstein, a renowned publisher and prominent defender of Croat culture, editor-in-chief of *Erasmus*, an intellectual journal published in Zagreb expressing consistent and forceful opposition to Tudjman's Croatia,³⁰ and the President of the Zagreb Jewish community from 1986 to 1990, was the President of the first non-communist party in Croatia, the Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSLP), founded in May 1989.³¹ In the November 1990 elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina, one Jewish politician was running for a place on the State Presidency, though not in fact elected, and another member of the Jewish community in Tuzla was elected to the Bosnian Parliament.³²

Many agree that the most significant Jewish cultural event in recent Yugoslav history was the above-mentioned major exhibition on the 'Jews in Yugoslavia' that toured the country, starting from Zagreb, in 1988. The exhibition itself was also associated with growing philosemitism among the Yugoslav public in general,³³ and a cause of renewed interest in Jewish culture among Jews themselves.³⁴

In this respect year 1988 marks the end of the stagnation which had prevailed among Yugoslav Jewry since the years of adaptation to the new Yugoslavia after

²⁷ Wasserstein 1996, 253–254.

²⁸ *Update*. Newsletter of CBF World Jewish Relief, No. 15, January 1993.

²⁹ Goldstein, Ivo: *Croatia, a History*. London: Hurst & Company 1999, 209, 207.

³⁰ Balas, Sven: "Voices of opposition in Croatia". In Jasminka Udovički & James Ridgeway (eds.): *Yugoslavia's Ethnic Nightmare. The Inside Story of Europe's Unfolding Ordeal*. New York: Lawrence Hill Books, New York 1995, 214–215.

³¹ I. Goldstein 1999, 204.

³² Čerešnješ Papers: Report about activities from 1991–1995, Jewish community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, 25.12.1995.

³³ Gordiejew 1999, 370.

³⁴ Hostein, Lisa: "Yugoslavia: A Jewish community refuses to die". *Jewish Exponent*, Vol. 187, No. 5, February 2, 1990, 37.

World War II. Yugoslav Jewry had adapted to the society of socialist Yugoslavia as a non-religious, secular and Yugoslav-oriented national minority community, which distinguished itself as a Jewish entity by emphasising its cultural heritage and historic consciousness. This was in spite of the fact that on the basis of the 1953 Basic Law the authorities also regarded the Jews as *de facto* a religious community.³⁵ Jews who had opted to stay in Yugoslavia and to keep a low profile had found a relatively secure place in the Yugoslav system.

The year 1988 marks the turning-point in the contemporary history of Jews in Yugoslavia. Traditionally guardians of a low-profile policy in Yugoslavia, with the exhibition of 1988 they received a considerable amount of media publicity and considerable sympathy, which in turn created assertiveness among the Jews themselves. This was exemplified in the request for permission to build a synagogue at No. 7 Praška Street, a prime real estate site in Zagreb, where a synagogue had stood until it was destroyed in 1942 by order of the Ustaša mayor of Zagreb.³⁶ In Split and Dubrovnik Jewish communities were hoping to expand their community facilities by adding *kosher* restaurants and bookstores to accommodate the large number of Jewish tourists.³⁷ In 1989 650 Jews from all over Yugoslavia attended the Makkabia sports weekend on the island of Hvar in Croatia³⁸ and this clearly represents a relatively high proportion, almost 10 per cent, of the Jewish population as a whole.

Signs of Jewish revival were also witnessed in other parts of Yugoslavia. The Belgrade Jewish community at the end of 1980s developed a plan to construct a memorial for the community devastated by the Nazis and to build a community centre consisting of a synagogue, museum, kindergarten, bookshop, tourist agency, hostel and *kosher* restaurant.³⁹

When the authorities in Bosnia-Herzegovina allowed the establishment of national associations after the November 1990 elections, the Jews of Sarajevo decided to re-establish the Jewish cultural, humanitarian and educational society, *La Benevolencija*, closed in 1941. The society was officially re-established once more in February 1991. The intention was to channel all Jewish activities not strictly religious in nature through *La Benevolencija*, and this in fact created a second Jewish

³⁵ Laws and constitutions were revised relatively often in Yugoslavia. Thus the special law on the position of religious communities was revised both in 1965 (Alexander 1979, 225) and in 1974, and Jewish communities were then recognised on the basis of this law (Finci 13.3. 2000).

³⁶ Hostein 1990, 37; Knežević, Snješka: "The Zagreb Synagogue". *Voice*, Autumn 1998, 32.

³⁷ Lungen, Paul: "Yugoslav Jews cast an ambitious eye to future". *The Canadian Jewish News*, January 18, 1990, 12.

³⁸ Serotta 1994, 32.

³⁹ Lungen 1990b, 12.

entity, alongside the main Jewish community, fostering cultural activities in Sarajevo.⁴⁰

Thus the revival in Jewish life in Yugoslavia was akin to similar developments in other ex-communist countries of Eastern Europe. But another dimension to this revival was felt in Yugoslavia, because the renewal of interest in Jewish life can be partially attributed to the nationalist unrest gripping the republics at the turn of the decade. 'The Jews could not decide whether they were Yugoslavs, Croats or Serbs, and therefore some of them began to return to Jewish roots,' as Srđan Matić of the Zagreb Jewish community later recounted.⁴¹

While the unity of Yugoslavia disappeared amid the growing nationalist feeling and the tug-of-war between the Republics, the unity of Yugoslav Jews, well-preserved since the end of World War II, also began to show signs of disappearing. Like its host country, the Federation of Jewish Communities was doomed to fragmentation.

5.1. DISINTEGRATION OF THE JEWISH FEDERATION

Belgrade had been the undisputed centre of the Yugoslav Jewry simply because the Federation's offices were located there, and the Federation's monthly bulletin, *Jevrejski Pregled*, was edited and published there. This leading role for Belgrade had been accepted by the local Jewish communities, though Slavko Goldstein admitted that people in the provinces always think that the centre is favoured too much.⁴² Ivan Čerešnješ, Vice-President of the Federation since 1988 and the President of the Sarajevo Jewish community during the Bosnian war, recounted that the leading position of Belgrade was questioned in the 1980s, and a proposal was even made to rotate the Federation between Belgrade, Zagreb and Sarajevo. This proposal was never accepted by Belgrade.⁴³ Belgrade's central position in Yugoslav Jewry was understandable bearing in mind the fact that the post-war rebuilding had been initiated and directed from there, and Belgrade was the capital of Yugoslavia.

Nationalistic tendencies began to grow rapidly in Yugoslavia, first focusing on Belgrade in the mid-1980s (for example the infamous 'Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts' in September 1986)⁴⁴ and then spreading to other parts of Yugoslavia. The identities of the peoples of Yugoslavia soon came to be

⁴⁰ Finci 13.3.2000.

⁴¹ Cited in Hostein 1990, 35.

⁴² S. Goldstein 16.3.2000.

⁴³ Čerešnješ 23.5.1999.

⁴⁴ Čuruvija, Slavko & Ivan Torov: "The march to war (1980–1990)". In Jasminka Udovički & James Ridgeway (eds.): *Yugoslavia's Ethnic Nightmare*. New York: Lawrence Hill Books 1995, 84.

based on ethnicity, mainly Croats, Serbs and Muslims, and religion, i.e. Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam. This development did not leave untouched Yugoslavia's tiny Jewish minority, and as a consequence of nationalistic rivalry, some leading members of the Jewish communities in Zagreb and Belgrade found themselves drawn into disputes about the extent to which Serbs and Croats had collaborated during World War II in the genocide which took place on Yugoslavia's soil.⁴⁵

Some discontent towards the Belgrade-based Jewish Federation had already been felt among Zagreb Jewry in the 1980s. *Jevrejski Pregled* was seen as a publication dominated by Belgrade, in which the voices of the other communities were not heard in an impartial way. As a result the Zagreb Jewish community asked to have some of its own people on the editorial staff of *Jevrejski Pregled*, and after this request had at least in part been rejected by Belgrade, the Jews of Zagreb decided to establish their own *Bilten* ('The Bulletin') in 1987.⁴⁶ Branko Polić, chief editor of *Novi Omanut*, recalls that contributions sent from Zagreb for *Jevrejski Pregled* were not sufficiently published.⁴⁷ On the other hand, Slavko Goldstein admits, the distribution of money among the communities was even-handed, and this was not a cause of discontent.⁴⁸ Paul Gordiejew concludes that the Zagreb Jewish community began to pursue greater autonomy within the Belgrade-based Federation in parallel with the policy of the Republic of Croatia which sought more autonomy within Yugoslavia.⁴⁹ In 1990, when commenting on disputes between Belgrade and Zagreb Jews, the Secretary General of the Zagreb Jewish community Sredan Matić stated that 'there were different opinions within the Jewish community concerning nationalistic and Yugoslav issues, but that they were unified on Jewish issues'.⁵⁰

All in all, in the background behind this developing dispute must be seen the whipping up of the nationalistic propaganda war between the republics of Serbia and Croatia in the late 1980s. The media war went into overdrive and Serbian television, in particular, exploited World War II events for purely propagandist purposes. The argument was that the full extent of Croatian atrocities had been covered up, and that the number of Serbian victims in the Croatian death camps during the war was much greater than had been estimated.⁵¹ The general picture inevitably became

45 Wasserstein 1996, 266.

46 S. Goldstein 16.3.2000.

47 Polić 8.3.2000.

48 S. Goldstein 16.3.2000.

49 Gordiejew 1999, 376.

50 Cited in Hostein 1990, 35.

51 Milošević, Milan: "The media wars". In Jasminka Udovički & James Ridgeway (eds.): *Yugoslavia's Ethnic Nightmare. The Inside Story of Europe's Unfolding Ordeal*. New York: Lawrence Hill Books 1995, 109.

distorted when viewed through the lenses of the nationalistic media. Belgrade Jews also kept a wary eye on the new assertiveness displayed by Zagreb Jews, who were the initiators of the successful 1988 exhibition,⁵² and had founded their own bulletin. Gordiejew has called this move the search for more autonomy within the Federation, and this was certainly the interpretation of the Belgrade Jews. As a result this development was linked with the autonomous aspirations expressed by the republic of Croatia. One ominous change undertaken by the Zagreb Jews in 1990, which was understandably criticised, not only by Belgrade Jews and the Belgrade daily *Politika*, but also by some Zagreb Jews, was the changing of the name of the Zagreb Jewish choir from *Moša Pijade* to *Lira*.⁵³ This ostensibly minor matter illustrates the manoeuvring behind the scenes, as Mirko Mirković from Zagreb reveals in *Jevrejski Pregled*: the leader of the choir, Mihail Montiljo, who was also the Vice-President of the Zagreb Jewish community, initiated the change, although he himself had only shortly before expressed pleasure in the fact that their choir bore such a distinctive name as *Moša Pijade*.⁵⁴ The name change reveals that Montiljo wanted to be seen as a good newborn Croat nationalist, and he was soon rewarded by the Tudjman regime with the post of Deputy Foreign Minister of Croatia.⁵⁵ This shows that the seeds of discontent between the Belgrade and Zagreb Jewish communities were already being sown in the second half of the 1980s. Ivo Goldstein recalls that the Belgrade Jews revealed their reserved attitude towards the Zagreb Jews at the Maccabi games in 1989. The Zagreb Jews were viewed as being somehow 'different'.⁵⁶ In the following paragraphs two topics will be introduced which perhaps more than anything else contributed to worsen relations between the Yugoslav Jewry. It demonstrates how Yugoslav Jewry was by no means immune from the virus of nationalism which at that time ravaged the country.

World War II: Numbers of Victims in Yugoslavia

The central issue which emerged again and again amid the nationalistic rivalries in crumbling Yugoslavia was the number of World War II victims in Yugoslavia. This dispute about the number of victims had already been an issue in Yugoslavia for the last 30 years. The dispute became focused around two books published on the number of victims: Vladimir Žerjavić's *Gubici stanovništva Jugoslavije u drugom svjetskom ratu* ('Population Losses in Yugoslavia in the Second World War') pub-

⁵² *Voice* 1998, 36.

⁵³ *Jevrejski Pregled* 7–12/1990.

⁵⁴ *Jevrejski Pregled* 7–12/1990, 73.

⁵⁵ Teitelbaum, Sheli: "A war within a war". *Jerusalem Report*, January 1992, 32–34.

⁵⁶ I. Goldstein 11.3.2000.

lished in Zagreb in 1989, and Milan Bulajić's *Genocide of the Serbs, Jews and Gypsies in the Ustashi Independent State of Croatia*, published in Belgrade in 1991. The latter gave much higher figures for the number of victims than were found in the Žerjavić account. At first Jews remained aloof from the dispute, but later, at the end of 1980s, they became involved in the issue.⁵⁷ The main lines of this dispute were as follows: Yugoslavia presented the figure of 1.7 million wartime losses to the Allied Reparations Commission in Paris in 1948. This number was, however, demographically calculated, and included not only the actual number of persons killed, but also those not born during the war years.⁵⁸ Nevertheless this number was officially established as the number of victims. In 1963–64 the Statistic Bureau of Yugoslavia, in order to establish the correct number of victims for the purpose of receiving compensation from the Germans, calculated a figure of about 600,000 victims. As a result, when it became obvious that the official figure of 1.7 million was far too high, the order was given to cancel the research, which was then declared secret. These results were leaked, however, and based on the Statistic Bureau research, some Croat nationalists began to minimise the number of victims.⁵⁹ The most famous of these 'minimisers' was the former partisan fighter and Yugoslav Army General, and later historian and President of the Republic of Croatia and, after 1991, the state of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman. In 1989, a year before his election as President, Tuđman published a book entitled *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnosti* ('Wilderness of Historical Reality') in which he asserted that the official death toll given for the World War II Croatian camp of Jasenovac had been exaggerated.⁶⁰

This dispute began to strain relations between Serbia and Croatia, since the Serbs wanted to keep the figures as high as possible as a proof of the genocidal nature of the Croats,⁶¹ and naturally, the Croats in turn endeavoured to minimise the figures in order to nullify the arguments repeated by the Serbs. Understandably, this dispute became an extremely inflammable issue in the rapidly deteriorating relations between these two Republics of Yugoslavia. It was difficult for Yugoslav Jews to remain indifferent to this dispute, since about 80 per cent of them had perished in the Second World War, and the biggest concentration camp on Yugoslav territory,

⁵⁷ S. Goldstein 16.3.2000.

⁵⁸ Cohen, Philip J.: *Serbia's Secret War. Propaganda and the Deceit of History*. Collage Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press 1996, 108.

⁵⁹ S. Goldstein 16.3.2000. On the number of victims see also Tanner, Marcus: *Croatia. A Nation Forged in War*. New Haven – London: Yale University Press 1997, 152–153.

⁶⁰ Cited in Šitković, Ejub: "Croatia: The First War". In Jasminka Udovički & James Ridgeway (eds.): *Yugoslavia's Ethnic Nightmare. The Inside Story of Europe's Unfolding Ordeal*. New York: Lawrence Hill Books 1995, 149.

⁶¹ Some Serbian authors considered in the eighties that the great number of Serbs killed by the Ustašas in 1941–45 made the Croats collectively guilty, and that their nation was genocidal in character, see I. Goldstein 1999, 200.

Jasenovac, had been located in Croatia. Jasenovac came to figure in this dispute because Belgrade declared that in Jasenovac alone the number of victims was as high as 700,000.⁶²

Slavko Goldstein, as the President of the Zagreb Jewish community at that time, wanted the Jewish community to establish the truth about the number of victims, and on his initiative, and with the financial support of the Zagreb Jewish community, a Croat, Vladimir Žerjavić, whose book was mentioned above, was employed to carry out research. After a meticulous study of the archives he published his findings, which indicated slightly more than one million victims. At the same time, according to Slavko Goldstein, independently of this research one Serb researcher, Bogoljub Kočović, reached almost the same figure,⁶³ of whom about 60,000 Jews. According to Žerjavić, there were about 83,000 victims in Jasenovac,⁶⁴ which naturally involved a huge discrepancy compared to the usual Serbian claims of 750,000 victims. However, Slavko Goldstein soon found himself accused of minimising the number of victims, when he publicly supported Žerjavić's findings.⁶⁵ Goldstein, who had initiated Žerjavić's research and written an introduction to his book, publicly defended the lower numbers against Bulajić's book in a debate arranged by the Zagreb Jewish community. For some Jews in Belgrade, this was seen as the first sign of a split between the two Jewish communities.⁶⁶ It seemed of small concern to some Belgrade Jews that Goldstein was defending the probable truth. They simply regarded the President of the Zagreb Jewish community as siding with the Croat nationalist policy. As a matter of fact, it appears that Belgrade's Jews were more concerned about Goldstein's revisionist stance, which was in their interpretation, directed against Serbia, than about establishing the most accurate estimate possible of the number of victims.

The Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society

In addition to the dispute about the number of World War II victims, the founding of the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society in Belgrade on May 28, 1988,⁶⁷ caused

⁶² S. Goldstein 16.3.2000.

⁶³ See Cohen 1996, 109–112. Cohen quotes the following figures from Kočović's and Žerjavić's books: Bogoljub Kočović estimates the total at 1,014,000 casualties in the whole of Yugoslavia, and Žerjavić at 1,027,000 casualties.

⁶⁴ I. Goldstein 1999, 201. In addition, there are other studies indicating smaller numbers of victims at Jasenovac. In 1946 it was claimed that 46,000 people had been killed there, and an exhaustive investigation in the 1960s did not bring to light more than 59,000 names; see I. Goldstein 1999, 200–201.

⁶⁵ S. Goldstein 16.3.2000.

⁶⁶ *NIN*, 15.10.1989.

⁶⁷ *Politika* 14.1.1990.

misunderstanding and even suspicion among Croatian and Bosnian Jewish communities.⁶⁸ Ivan Čerešnješ, the President of the Sarajevo Jewish community, said that the Jews of Bosnia-Herzegovina deliberately stayed out of the friendship society. For them, the existence of a friendship society between all the countries of the former Yugoslavia and the Jews would have been acceptable, but not this restricted one.⁶⁹ Dissident views were voiced in Belgrade, too. The well-known Belgrade Jewish writer Filip David, in referring to the activities of the Friendship Society, noted that there were 'various manipulations, particularly nationalistic manipulations'.⁷⁰

According to the secretary of the society, Klara Mandić, the society was founded to work against nationalistic, religious and political exclusiveness and hate.⁷¹ However, in direct contradiction with its founding ideology, this society became an instrument of Belgrade's propaganda warfare, the essence of which is expressed in an apposite way by Paul Mojzes:

presently history is being mythologized in ever more bizarre and divergent directions, the distinct purpose of which is not to determine what happened in the past and interpret it for the present but to provide ammunition for one's claims in the present situation and recall grievances against other groups in the past so that one may avenge them in the present.⁷²

This was precisely what the society sought to do. The founding of the society was based, as Klara Mandić said, on the historic and cultural ties between the Serbian and Jewish nations, and on the traditional friendship which was cemented by the parallel destiny of these two nations in the genocide faced by both during the Second World War.⁷³

This concept of 'everlasting friendship' between Serbs and Jews, taking into consideration the time, in 1988, when the idea was being promoted, served as an effective propaganda asset against the Croats, who were collectively perceived as committers of genocide against Serbs and Jews. The essence of the Serbian propaganda campaign, appropriately termed 'The World War II Argument' by Igor Primoratz, was in a nutshell as follows: (i) the current war in ex-Yugoslavia must be understood as the direct continuation of what happened in Yugoslavia in World War II; and (ii) in those years, the Croats and Muslims were on the side of the

⁶⁸ *Danas* 3.4.1990; *NIN* 15.10.1989; *Valter-Express* 14.5.1990.

⁶⁹ Cited in *Oslobodenje* 2.9.1992.

⁷⁰ Cited in Lungen, Paul: "Society links Jews and Serbs in friendship". *The Canadian Jewish News*, January 25, 1990, 12.

⁷¹ Cited in *Politika* 14.1.1990.

⁷² Mojzes, Paul: "The role of the religious communities in the war in the former Yugoslavia". *Religion in Eastern Europe*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, 1993, 13.

⁷³ Cited in *Politika* 14.1.1990.

Nazis, and helped them exterminate the Jews. The Serbs, on the other hand, fought against the Nazis, and helped and protected the Jews.⁷⁴ Slavko Goldstein pointed out from Zagreb that the parallels being drawn between Jewish and Serbian sufferings and promoted by the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society were absurd, since pogroms against Jews had also taken place in the region dominated by the Serbs, such as in Vojvodina in 1849, and further, that the fate of the Jews was similar under the Pavelić regime in the NDH and under the Nedić regime in Serbia during the Second World War.⁷⁵

This infamous society was not officially supported by the Federation of Jewish communities in Belgrade,⁷⁶ although of course a number of the Society's members belonged to the Belgrade Jewish community. Most of its about 3,500 members⁷⁷ were Serbs, with the well-known Serbian academician Ljubomir Tadić acting as its President. Among other founders of the Society were Milan Bulajić, the author of the book about war victims, Dobrica Ćosić, later President of rump-Yugoslavia, and the well-known Jewish academician Enriko Josif, for example.⁷⁸ The names of the founders alone are revealing and show the effort to use the Society as a propaganda instrument of Serbian nationalist policy. Relatively soon it was observed that the Society was contributing to bringing turmoil and nationalistic disputes among the Jews of Yugoslavia.⁷⁹ Ljubomir Tadić, in an article he wrote together with another member of the executive of the society, Andrija Gams, a Jew, tells the 'truth' about the relations of Serbs and Croats towards Jews, and accuses some officials in the Zagreb Jewish community of participating in anti-Serbian propaganda and consequently misinforming Jewish and non-Jewish organisations in the world.⁸⁰ When the crisis in Yugoslavia deepened, the Society turned its verbal attack from the Kosovo situation to Croatia with 'the World War II arguments' which can only be classified as a fabrication of history. The Society, founded to fight against exclusiveness and nationalistic hate, was itself effectively working for these particular ends.

Although the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society cannot be regarded as a Jewish endeavour, the Jews were associated with it in the mind of the public, simply because of the title of the Society, and thus could not avoid being drawn into the nationalistic dispute between the republics of Croatia and Serbia in Yugoslavia.

⁷⁴ Primoratz, Igor: "Israel and genocide in Croatia". In Stjepan G. Meštrović (ed.): *Genocide After Emotion. The Postemotional Balkan War*. London – New York: Routledge 1996, 197.

⁷⁵ Cited in *Danas* 3.4.1990. Generally on the subject see Cohen 1996.

⁷⁶ Lungen 1990c, 12.

⁷⁷ Lungen 1990c, 12.

⁷⁸ *Svet (Politika)*, No. 188, 28.6.–11.7.1989.

⁷⁹ *Davar* 23.10.1989.

⁸⁰ *Politika* 6.3.1992.

When the President of the Zagreb Jewish community, Slavko Goldstein, who was also a Vice-President of the Federation of Jewish Communities, publicly defended lower figures for World War II victims, it was perceived in Belgrade as Croatian nationalism and deviance from Yugoslavia. In the heavy atmosphere of nationalistic propaganda it was already difficult, and for many ordinary people, and Jews among them, impossible to differentiate between fact and fiction, and the dispute between certain Jews in Belgrade and Zagreb became a real split. It was of no importance that Slavko Goldstein had more facts behind his arguments, and that the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society rested more on fictions and fabrications. The propagandist 'World War II argument' pushed Jews in these republics towards their host-regimes, and apart from each other.

It must be kept in mind, however, that the dispute among Jews was actually a matter of a handful of individuals both in Belgrade and Zagreb, and did not involve the wider Jewish audience. The dispute nevertheless became public since many Jewish individuals involved in it held visible positions either in the Jewish community, or in society, or in both. The Jews, who had conveniently through the process of adaptation become Yugoslavs in Yugoslavia, at the turn of the decade found themselves in a position where they could no longer identify themselves as Yugoslavs, but instead faced demands to express nationalist loyalty.⁸¹ So some Jews were caught up in events and themselves became nationalistic in the cause of their host-republics. This caused tension between Jews.

Slobodan Milošević in his role as the defender of Yugoslavia clearly attracted some Belgrade Jews to support his politics, although in fact Milošević's policy was nothing but the advocacy of a Greater Serbia behind the 'fig leaf' of the federal structure of Yugoslavia. Some Serbian Jews became increasingly vocal in their public anti-Croatian utterances and seized on any opportunity to condemn Croatia as an antisemitic police state. Exceptionally vocal was the secretary of the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society, Klara Mandić, who publicly expressed her belief that Croatia had targeted Jews for unpleasant treatment.⁸² Naturally her comments caused dismay among Croatian Jews. Her anti-Croatian activity was so irritating that one Jewish leader from Croatia stated that 'I will kill that stupid bitch with my own hands,' and continued 'I'm not worried about Tudjman, but who will protect us from Klara Mandić?'⁸³

⁸¹ *Davar* 23.10.1989.

⁸² One of Mandić's infamous acts was passing on to the American Jewish press the chilling but deceitful story of an elderly Jewish woman, Ankica Konjuh, murdered by Croats at an early stage of the war in 1991 in Croatia. This was in spite of the fact that Mandić knew that Konjuh was neither a Jew nor murdered by Croats. The Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia demanded in writing that Mandić no longer misrepresent Ankica Konjuh as the first victim of the war (Cohen 1996, 126).

⁸³ Teitelbaum 1992, 32–34.

Thus in parallel with the growing tension between the republics of Serbia and Croatia the Jews of Belgrade and Zagreb were also alienating each other due to factors which were all basically related to mounting and widespread nationalism, which subsequently led to both the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and also the disintegration of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia.

Broken Unity of Jews

For the Jews, who were themselves successfully integrated in the society of Socialist Yugoslavia, the disintegration of their host country was hard to comprehend. The Jews regarded Yugoslavia as one state. They were distributed all over the country, and many had relatives living in different parts of Yugoslavia. This had naturally strengthened ties between the different republics.⁸⁴

Croatia and Slovenia declared their independence in June 1991. This meant in practice the final collapse of Yugoslavia. Its former republics were separated into new independent nation states, and as a result, many local Jewish communities were separated from their umbrella organisation, the Federation of Jewish Communities, located in Belgrade. Communication between the communities became interrupted.⁸⁵

Immediately prior to the declaration of independence of Slovenia and Croatia, the annual meeting of the Federation of Jewish Communities had taken place in June 1991. This meeting was characterised by mutual accusations and intolerance, and the mood was 'dark and depressing', as Jakob Finci of Sarajevo recalls.⁸⁶ Since direct communication between Zagreb and Belgrade was no longer possible, the Sarajevo Jewish community took on the responsibility of serving as a channel of communication and passing on messages between Zagreb and Belgrade.⁸⁷

Local Jewish communities found themselves alone without their former cohesive organisational structure. Links between communities were severed and Kadelburg's aim of preserving the unity of the Federation had failed. The Federation of Jewish Communities had to face the current situation in a meeting arranged in Budapest at the beginning of 1992. The Executive Board concluded that Yugoslavia was collapsing, and that this would have an effect on the Jewish community as well. It was agreed that the communities in the different parts of former Yugoslavia should endeavour to maintain mutual relations. In addition, they would refrain from

⁸⁴ Singer 6.6.1996.

⁸⁵ *Annual Report 1991*. New York: American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Inc. 1992.

⁸⁶ Cited in Serotta 1994, 35.

⁸⁷ Finci 13.3.2000.

issuing statements which would prejudice the position of any other Jewish communities.⁸⁸

In summer 1991 Croatia came under attack by JNA forces, and the Zagreb Jewish community leadership publicly expressed its solidarity with the nation of Croatia, accusing Yugoslavia of being the aggressor. An appeal, dated October 7, 1991, was addressed to the World Jewish Congress and other international Jewish organisations protesting against the attack by the Yugoslav National Army on the Republic of Croatia. The appeal also refers to the 'antisemitic terrorist attack' against the Jewish community centre in Zagreb on August 19, 1991,⁸⁹ and goes on to state further that although the Government of Croatia was deliberately being depicted as antisemitic or neo-fascist, the Jewish community in Croatia enjoyed all the rights of a religious or national minority without hindrance or discrimination and that the Government of Croatia publicly denounced and condemned all neo-fascist and extremist ideologies and organisations that threatened the democratic system in Croatia. In the same appeal Croatian Jews noted with sorrow that all practical communications with Jews in other Republics of Yugoslavia had broken down.⁹⁰ Dunja Šprajc, then Secretary General of the Zagreb Jewish community, later recalled that in this situation, the leadership of the Zagreb Jewish community did not strongly oppose the disintegration of the Jewish Federation.⁹¹ During the previous year some changes had taken place in the leadership, as the moderate Slavko Goldstein had resigned and the new President, Nenad Porges, was more nationalistically inclined than Goldstein,⁹² and later served as a minister in the Tadjman government. Croatian Jewish leaders also complained that their Serbian counterparts failed to offer any tangible assistance when the community centre in Zagreb was attacked.⁹³

The above-mentioned appeal of the Croatian Jewish communities to international Jewish organisations on October 7, 1991, triggered immediate action in Belgrade, where an extraordinary assembly of the Jewish Community of Belgrade took place on October 20, 1991. The assembly voted by a very large majority for the statement published on October 28, 1991. This statement complained, among other points, that the Appeal of the Croatian Jews was made without prior consultation with the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, which represented all Jewish communities in the country, and that it was one-sided and

⁸⁸ Singer 6.6.1996; Albahari 7.6.1996.

⁸⁹ For further details of this attack see Chapter 8.

⁹⁰ Čerešnješ Papers: Appeal to our Jewish brothers and sisters, Zagreb, October 7, 1991.

⁹¹ Šprajc 13.6.1996.

⁹² S. Goldstein 16.3.2000; Knežević, Anto: *An Analysis of Serbian Propaganda*. Zagreb: Domovina TT Zagreb 1992, 49.

⁹³ Teitelbaum 1992, 32–34.

failed to reflect the complexities of the situation in Croatia and Yugoslavia.⁹⁴ The arguments of the assembly of the Belgrade Jewish community could be viewed as questionable, to say the least, as the ongoing war had effectively cut off communications between the two countries, and to some extent, between the two Jewish communities. In addition, only two months before this statement the Belgrade Jews had failed to extend their support to the Zagreb Jews after the bomb attack which destroyed the community centre.

Jewish war veterans of Belgrade hastened to issue their statement to the General Assembly of the World Veterans Federation on October 20, 1991, signed by Aleksander Demajo, the President of the Veterans, Concentration Camp Inmates and POWs of the Jewish community in Belgrade, which condemned German expansionism and restoration of the past in some parts of Yugoslavia, especially in Croatia. The message ends with the following words:

we Jewish war veterans cannot forget that we fought together in Croatia with the Serbs in the ranks of the partisans and units of the People's Liberation Army.⁹⁵

This statement contains a partial distortion of history since it fails to mention that a considerable number of the partisans were Croats, who together with Serbs and Jews fought against the Nazis and their collaborators. On one occasion Demajo remarked that he cannot 'understand how Jews could have bought into the government's (meaning the Tudjman government's) propaganda unless they were hypnotised'.⁹⁶

In general, Jews accused each other of being too involved in the politics of the new national states.⁹⁷ As Slavko Goldstein recalls it, the Jews of Belgrade feared that the Croatian Jews would associate with Croatian nationalistic regime, and in turn the Croatian Jews feared that the Jews of Belgrade would side with the Belgrade regime.⁹⁸ The ageing President of the Federation, Lavoslav Kadelburg, was relatively rational and understood the situation better than many in Belgrade. His primary aim was to keep the Federation united and so he was eager to reconcile the warring Jewish communities. Kadelburg's rational approach can perhaps be partly explained by the fact that he himself was born and brought up in Croatia. However, his attempts to bring about compromise failed to bear fruit. Those who were discontented with the policy of the Belgrade regime only rarely dared to speak out, instead preferring silence.⁹⁹ In fact, it was not the Federation in Belgrade, but

⁹⁴ Čerešnješ Papers: Statement of the Jewish Community in Belgrade, October 28, 1991.

⁹⁵ Čerešnješ Papers: Message from Jewish war veterans in Belgrade, October 20, 1991.

⁹⁶ Cited in Teitelbaum 1992, 32–34.

⁹⁷ Singer 6.6.1996.

⁹⁸ S. Goldstein 16.3.2000.

⁹⁹ S. Goldstein 16.3.2000.

the Belgrade Jewish community under the leadership of Jaša Almulji which was the leading party in the conflict with the Zagreb Jews.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia and of the Federation of Jewish Communities caused the Jews to slide into disputes and quarrels among themselves, especially in Croatia and Serbia, which set up barriers separating them from each other along the former borders of the republics, which now became the borders of newly independent states.

A dispute also arose about the material property of the Federation. The Federation's property included an Old People's Home in Zagreb and the Pirovac summer camp, both of which were located in Croatia. On the other hand, the Jewish Historical Museum was located in Belgrade. It naturally contained material and documents on the history of the Croatian Jews. This dispute itself created so many problems that eventually the Jewish Distribution Committee intervened, seeking to mediate between the quarrelling Jewish communities.¹⁰⁰

The activities of the original Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, which had continued since 1919, except for a short period during World War II, ceased in 1991. The title of the Federation has since then been reserved for the Serbian Jewish communities, and the federation acts as their umbrella organisation in the same way as it previously acted as an umbrella organisation for the whole of Yugoslav Jewry. The old Federation was formally ended in March 1996 when the final decision to dissolve it was signed in Zürich, Switzerland, and when the dispute over the Federation's property was solved by the existing property of the Federation becoming the property of the Jewish community on whose soil it was situated. Thus the Old Age Home and Pirovac summer reserve came into the ownership of the Croatian Jewish communities, and the former embassy building of Israel in Belgrade remained in the ownership of the Federation.¹⁰¹

Ethnicity became the dominating factor in former Yugoslavia. The Jews of Serbia and Croatia embraced, to different degrees, their dominant ethnic nations i.e. Serbs and Croats. The Jews of Bosnia-Herzegovina found themselves in a more complicated situation since their country was dominated by three major groups, Muslims, Serbs and Croats. It was impossible for them to join one of those groups because it would have automatically placed them in opposition to one or two of the other groups, depending on the situation at the time. The Bosnian Jews chose the only available option, impartiality, which allowed them to deal with all ethnic groups.¹⁰² This also meant that the Jews of Sarajevo remained outside the dispute between Belgrade and Zagreb Jews.

¹⁰⁰ *Annual Report 1993*. New York: American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Inc. 1994.

¹⁰¹ Finci 10.4.1997 and 13.3.2000.

¹⁰² Finci 13.3.2000.

As we have observed in this chapter, the major part of the blame for the disintegration of the Jewish Federation in Yugoslavia rests with nationalism, which took its toll among Jews as well. The violent fragmentation of Yugoslavia left the Jewish entity no chance of remaining intact. Perhaps the degree of integration of the Jews in the society of former Yugoslavia partially explains how easily nationalism affected them. Jews were part and parcel of the former Yugoslavia. On the other hand, it is clear that the extremes of nationalism among the Jews only affected a small minority, the rest being mainly indifferent, or at least silent, about the developments around them. Many Jews continued to practise a low-profile policy in order to secure their place and future wherever they happened to live in the former Yugoslavia.

It must be also noted that the splitting up of a religious minority was by no means a uniquely Jewish phenomenon in the former Yugoslavia. The Protestant churches, for example, which in the former Yugoslavia were close to the number of Jews in size, were similarly divided along the border between Croatia and Serbia. Severed communications between them resulted in rumours which incited Protestants to make accusations against each other. The Serbian Protestants did not support the sanctions against Yugoslavia, and the Croat Protestants, on the other hand, expressed no remorse over the break-up of Yugoslavia.¹⁰³

In the past the free church Protestants (e.g. Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh-Day Adventists, Methodists), who tended to attract membership from a variety of national groups, had striven to nurture exemplary harmonious relationships between the members of various nationalities, and there was hope that these good relationships could survive the war. These formerly united churches that worked together wherever they had members on the territory of Yugoslavia now found themselves in separate countries, and were forced to break up along the lines of the new nation-state borders into separate church organisations. Many of the Protestant leaders in Croatia became so morally outraged at what they perceived, along with the rest of the Croatian people, as Serbian aggression that they condemned this aggression and urged foreign military intervention against Serbians, often criticising foreigners, especially American, for inaction. This incensed their fellow-religionists in other states and formerly close colleagues regarded them as warmongers. On the whole the Protestant communities tended to accept the official propaganda of their respective new states and often interpret events as the propaganda directed them.¹⁰⁴

The point here is simply to show similarities in the development of different religious communities during the break-up of Yugoslavia. For many of them the process of disintegration was marked by mutual distrust and accusation. The fog of

¹⁰³ Steele, David: "Configuration of the small religious communities in the former Yugoslavia". *Religion in Eastern Europe*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 1995, 39-40.

¹⁰⁴ Mojzes 1993, 27.

propaganda was so thick that it prevented visibility, and perhaps helped those involved to forget that one day the war would end, ushering in a new situation. Obviously these days of mistrust and dispute are reluctantly remembered and in fact, as far as the Jews are concerned, those days belong to the past. Since the war ended, the communities which belonged to the Federation have come closer to each other, and the Jewish communities of the former Yugoslavia arrange annual meetings in order to maintain contacts. In November 1998 the eighth meeting of the representatives of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Yugoslavia took place with 110 participants from the once single Federation. In the meeting joint projects were discussed such as the exchange of information about cultural activities and the restitution of Jewish property, and also plans for an operational regional co-ordinating body were aired.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps some guilt is felt by those who so eagerly, especially in Serbia, allowed themselves to be used as an instrument of Milošević's nationalistic aspirations and in that way contributed to worsen relations between Jewish communities as well.

5.2. POST-YUGOSLAV JEWISH COMMUNITIES¹⁰⁶

As a result of the disintegration of Yugoslavia the former Yugoslav Jewry emerged as five separate entities. The Federation of Jewish Communities continued to act as an umbrella organisation for the Jewish communities of Serbia. In Croatia, a Co-ordination Committee was founded to represent the Jewish communities of Croatia, and in Bosnia the Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina was created to act as an umbrella organisation for the Bosnian Jews. Macedonia and Slovenia are both represented by one single, independent community, the Jewish community of Skopje in Macedonia and the Jewish community of Ljubljana in Slovenia. This chapter gives an introduction to the state of these post-Yugoslav Jewish communities.

5.2.1. Croatia

The secession of Croatia from Yugoslavia in 1991 turned a new page in the history of Croatian Jews. They found themselves existing as an independent unit of their own, outside the organisational framework so far provided by the Federation, responsible for both their spiritual and material well-being.¹⁰⁷ Following the sudden collapse of Yugoslavia, the Croatian Jews soon found their 'Croatian' identification as a community and immediately began to strengthen it by expressing loyalty to the

¹⁰⁵ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 12/1998.

¹⁰⁶ See Map 4 on page xiii.

¹⁰⁷ *Šprajc* 13.6.1996.

newly independent state. Ongjen Kraus, the current President of the Zagreb Jewish community, specifically emphasises the community's Croatian history, while the post-war Yugoslav period has been almost erased from his short introduction to the history of the Jews in Croatia.¹⁰⁸ This illustrates the effort on the part of the Jews to find their own independent history and identity as a Croatian Jewish Community in the post-Yugoslav era. A new publishing series *Studia Iudaico-Croatica*, in which three volumes on the history and identity of Croatian Jews have so far been published, underlines this trend. It is, therefore, correct to assume that a certain *Croatianisation* has taken place among Croatian Jewry. Independence and a new beginning also meant direct links with the international Jewish organisations, which so far had been a privilege of the Federation in Belgrade. The change is further reflected in the name of the Zagreb Jewish community, which in 1991 was changed from *Jevrejska općina Zagreb*, as it had been known since 1945, to meet the norms of the literary Croatian language i.e. *Židovska općina Zagreb*.¹⁰⁹

The Coordination Committee

The disintegration of Yugoslavia meant in practice that the nine Jewish communities existing on Croatian soil remained outside the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia. Since then one new community has been founded, in the town of Koprivnica, on June 17, 1999.¹¹⁰ A new umbrella organisation of Croatian Jewish Communities was officially established in 1995¹¹¹ when the Coordination Committee of Jewish Communities in Croatia, as it was entitled, came into being, although it had existed *de facto* since 1992.¹¹² Communities affiliated to the Coordination Committee are: Zagreb, Osijek, Rijeka, Split, Slavonski Brod, Virovitica, Čakovec, Daruvar, Koprivnica and Dubrovnik. The Committee consists of all ten presidents of the Croatian Jewish communities,¹¹³ and as it is strongly linked to the Zagreb Jewish community, which is by far the leading community in Croatia, the President of the Zagreb Jewish community acts as the President of the Coordination Committee as well.¹¹⁴ The task of the Coordination Committee is to unite Croatian Jews and represent them as a national and religious community on an official level vis-à-

¹⁰⁸ Kraus, Ongjen: "The Jewish Community in Croatia". *Voice*, Spring 1996, 4–10.

¹⁰⁹ Goldstein, Slavko: "Židovska općina Zagreb od 1941. do 1997. godine". *Dva stoljeća povijesti i kulture Židova u Zagrebu i Hrvatskoj*, Zagreb: Židovska općina Zagreb 1998, 25.

¹¹⁰ Branko 19.5.2000.

¹¹¹ Kraus 1996a, 4.

¹¹² *Croatia. In Memory to Holocaust*. Zagreb: Ministry of Education and Sports of Republic of Croatia 2000, 3.

¹¹³ Fischer 15.6.1996.

¹¹⁴ Šprajc 13.6.1996.

vis the state of Croatia.¹¹⁵ The Coordination Committee is also responsible for organising activities in local Jewish communities. It is not a decision-making body, but rather has the role of an advisory body to Croatian Jewry.¹¹⁶

The organisational structure of the local Jewish communities in Croatia has not changed since the collapse of Yugoslavia. The structure of all but the Zagreb Jewish community is straightforward. The decision-making body of the Zagreb Jewish community is a Community Council of at least 25 members, who are elected every four years in a General Assembly. The General Assembly meets annually and all the members of the Jewish community over the age of 18 are entitled to vote. The task of the General Assembly is mainly to make recommendations to the Community Council. The decisions of the Community Council are implemented by an Executive Board.¹¹⁷ The new constitution of the Zagreb Jewish community came into force on October 3, 1996.¹¹⁸ The structure of smaller communities such as Osijek, Rijeka and Split consists of an Executive Committee and a President, both elected every four years by a General Assembly.¹¹⁹ Membership regulations in the Croatian Jewish communities follow the same tolerant line as before: halachic order is not followed. Everyone with even one Jewish grandparent, regardless of gender, is accepted into the Jewish community.¹²⁰

Other Jewish Organisations

Other Jewish organisations and institutions in Croatia affiliated with the Coordination Committee are the Synagogue, located on the second floor of the Zagreb Jewish community centre in Palmotićeva street; the Jewish kindergarten 'Mirjam Weiller'; the Cultural Society 'Miroslav Šalom Freiburger'; the Ivo and Milan Steiner Art Gallery; the B'nai B'rith Unit 'Gavro Schwarz'¹²¹; the Home of the Lavoslav Schwartz Foundation (old people's home); the Jewish Cemetery Mirogoj; and the Croatian Israeli Society.¹²² It appears that the Croatian Israeli Society is only loosely connected with the Coordination Committee, along with the *Lira* choir, which was formerly the choir of the Jewish community under the name *Moša Pijade*, but currently belongs to Croatian Israeli Society activities.

¹¹⁵ Kraus 1996a, 4.

¹¹⁶ Šprajc 13.6.1996.

¹¹⁷ Šprajc 13.6.1996; Statut Židovski općina Zagreb (October 3, 1996).

¹¹⁸ Statut Židovski općina Zagreb (October 3, 1996).

¹¹⁹ Fischer 15.6.1996.

¹²⁰ Šprajc 13.6.1996.

¹²¹ Founded on June 26, 1998 as the first B'nai B'rith unit in Croatia after 1940 (*Voice*, Autumn 1998, 28).

¹²² *Voice*, Autumn 1998, 78.

Religion

The biggest change in the field of religion was, without doubt, the arrival from Jerusalem of a new Chief Rabbi of Croatia, Kotel Dadon, in September 1998. He became only the second rabbi of Zagreb since World War II, as his predecessor, Hinko Urbach, who served as a rabbi of Zagreb between 1946–48, left for Israel in 1948.¹²³ Dadon describes Croatian Jewry as even more secular than Bosnian or Serbian Jewry, since several famous rabbis had a greater influence on the life of the Jewish communities of both Sarajevo and Belgrade than that of Zagreb. Zagreb was geographically further away and without a single rabbi for the whole post-war period. In addition, intermarriage was already very common in Croatian Jewish communities before World War II.

Dadon started his work with very basic steps. One of the first achievements was the introduction of *kashrut* in the Jewish community centre and in the Jewish kindergarten. The second important step was to launch a programme of Jewish education, which he began to carry out in the kindergarten, with Sunday schools for different age-groups and public lectures teaching Judaism, Bible, Jewish festivals, prayers, Mishna and philosophy. From this very modest beginning in 1998 Dadon already sees signs for optimism: some lectures have as many as fifty or more participants, which in turn reflects general interest in Judaism. The former dispute between the Belgrade and Zagreb Jewish communities has no effect on the cooperation between the rabbis of these communities. Together with a Belgrade rabbi, Isak Asiel, Dadon undertakes joint educational projects, and in addition, Isak Asiel performs the ritual slaughtering for the needs of the Croatian Jewish communities.¹²⁴ Obviously, with the coming of a rabbi, the Croatian Jewish communities in general, and the Zagreb Jewish community in particular, gained a spiritual strengthening responding to the needs of those individual Jews who wanted to strengthen their Jewish religious and spiritual identity. Although the rabbi's arrival obviously aroused enthusiasm among some Jews, other, dissenting opinions were also heard during this author's visit to Croatia in March 2000. Secularism has almost become a tradition with even anti-religious attitudes found among Croatian Jews and Jews in other parts of the former Yugoslavia, and a young, dynamic rabbi is now challenging this tradition in a way that clashes with the traditional secular way of life.

¹²³ I. Goldstein 9.1.2001.

¹²⁴ Dadon 9.3.2000; *Voice*, Autumn 1998, 3.

Publications

Considering the small size of Croatian Jewry, its publishing activity is amazingly wide-ranging. Of the major works, three volumes in the series *Studia Iudaico-Croatica*, published between 1995–98, have already been mentioned. As mentioned earlier, the Zagreb Jewish community began to publish its own paper *Bilten* ('the Bulletin') in December 1987,¹²⁵ which changed its name to *ha-Kol* at the beginning of 1997,¹²⁶ and nowadays this is the most important of its publications representing the opinion of the Croatian Jewish communities. It appears bimonthly with an issue of about 1,000 copies.¹²⁷ A new magazine in English, *Voice*, which began to appear in spring 1996, is published by the Coordination Committee of Jewish Communities in Croatia for a larger, English-speaking audience. The second number of *Voice* appeared in autumn 1998. The Cultural Society Miroslav Šalom Freiburger has been publishing a paper called *Novi Omanut* since September 1993¹²⁸ which concentrates on the topics of Jewish history and culture, and youngsters have their own paper, *Šma*, appearing at irregular intervals.¹²⁹ The first Jewish calendar published in Croatia by the Coordination Committee was *Židovski kalendar 5758 (1997–1998)*.¹³⁰ More than ten books and booklets have been published by the Cultural Society Miroslav Šalom Freiburger since 1995,¹³¹ which illustrates well the publishing activity and productivity of the Jews of Zagreb and Croatia.

The Jewish Community of Zagreb

The Zagreb Jewish Community was founded in 1806¹³² and as the largest it is by far the most significant of the Croatian Jewish communities. The community had 1,318 members in March 2000.¹³³ There has been no major change in the number

¹²⁵ Kovač, Vlasta: "Obnova Židovskog tiska u Hrvatskoj". *Dva stoljeća povijesti i kulture Židova u Zagrebu i Hrvatskoj*, Zagreb: Židovska općina Zagreb 1998, 92.

¹²⁶ The last number under the title *Bilten*, No. 46–47, appeared in November–December 1996 and the first number under the title *ha-Kol*, No. 48, in February–March 1997.

¹²⁷ *Voice*, Spring 1996, 1.

¹²⁸ Kovač 1998a, 98; *Voice*, Spring 1996, 60. Its predecessor, *Omanut*, appeared from 1936 to 1941 as a monthly journal for Jewish culture, published by a cultural society called *Omanut* which existed from 1932 to 1941.

¹²⁹ Kovač 1998a, 99–100. *Šma* appeared originally from 1987 under the names of *Bilten Omladinskog kluba*, *Glasilom Jevrejske omladine Zagreba* and *Motek*.

¹³⁰ Koš 17.3.2000.

¹³¹ *Croatia. In Memory to Holocaust 2000*, 9.

¹³² Goldstein, Ivo: "Zagrebačka Židovska općina od osnutka do 1941". *Dva stoljeća povijesti i kulture Židova u Zagrebu i Hrvatskoj*, Zagreb: Židovska općina Zagreb 1998, 13.

¹³³ Data from 21.3.2000 of the Jewish population in Croatia.

of members since the fifties, as in 1958 the community numbered 1,341 members,¹³⁴ after which numbers fell to 1,028 at the beginning of the 1980s¹³⁵ and rose again to some 1,300 in the 1990s.

Almost all the community's activities are conducted in the community centre located in Palmotićeve Street in Zagreb. The different activities are channelled through seven boards: the Financial and Administrative Board, the Board for Religious Affairs, the Board for Social Care, the Educational Board, the Cultural Board, the Board of Information and the Board for the Protection of the Jewish Heritage.¹³⁶ There are also clubs such as the Youth Club, the Children's Club, the Women's Club and the Union of Jewish Students.¹³⁷ The Hevra Kadiša was re-established on December 6, 1999.¹³⁸

There have been several changes of policy in the leadership of the Zagreb Jewish community during the process of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Slavko Goldstein's four-year tenure of office as the President of the Zagreb Jewish community ended in 1990, and he was followed by Nenad Porges.¹³⁹ Slavko Goldstein, as mentioned earlier, was a public figure and a leading member of the anti-Communist and democratic movement in Croatia, and after the victory of Tudjman's HDZ-party in 1990, he gradually became a vocal opponent of the Tudjman regime. Nenad Porges was in a way the opposite of Goldstein, in that he became known for his obsequious attitude towards the Tudjman government, and was subsequently criticised by the Zagreb Jewish community council for being too close to Tudjman. This led to his resignation in 1993 before the end of his mandate.¹⁴⁰ Porges was first appointed by the Tudjman government to the diplomatic corps of Croatia as the First Secretary of the Washington Embassy¹⁴¹ and later served as Minister for Economy and Trade in the government, replacing Davor Stern, another Jew, in the post.¹⁴² Porges was the president of the community during the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the beginning of the war in Croatia, and under his leadership the community made statements supporting the Croatian government, although some Jews would have preferred to see the community supporting the

¹³⁴ Freidenreich 1979, 197.

¹³⁵ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*.

¹³⁶ Statut Židovski općina Zagreb (October 3, 1996).

¹³⁷ Šprajc 13.6.1996.

¹³⁸ *ha-Kol*, No. 63–64, 1999–2000, 3.

¹³⁹ *Jevrejski Pregled* 3–6, 1990.

¹⁴⁰ Mirković 9.3.2000 and 22.9.2000; S. Goldstein 16.3.2000.

¹⁴¹ I. Goldstein 14.6.1996.

¹⁴² *American Jewish Year Book 1998*, Vol. 98. New York: The American Jewish Committee, 360.

nation rather than the government.¹⁴³ In general, only a tiny minority of Jews in Croatia supported the Tudjman regime.¹⁴⁴ In contrast to both Slavko Goldstein and Nenad Porges, the President of the Zagreb Jewish community since 1993, Ongjen Kraus, is described as being strongly Jewish in orientation,¹⁴⁵ and clearly not so politically-inclined as his two predecessors. Nevertheless, the general opinions and attitudes prevailing among the Jews of Zagreb are crystallised in the leaders of the Zagreb Jewish community. It is interesting to observe that the community leaders reflect the general orientation of Jews in Zagreb in the different phases of the transition. Slavko Goldstein, as an opposition politician and a strong supporter of democracy, clearly reflected the general orientation of the majority of Zagreb's Jews. The rising nationalism had its effect on Jews, however, and the nationalist Nenad Porges acted as a president of the community during the period when nationalism was at its peak. The neutral, and less outspoken, Ongjen Kraus came into office when sentiments had begun to calm down, thus steering the Jewish community back into its traditional path of not involving itself overmuch in political matters, but instead concentrating more on internal developments.

The Middle-sized Jewish Communities: Osijek, Rijeka and Split

The town of Osijek in Croatian Slavonia was in the war zone during the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Fighting was especially heavy in autumn 1991, when Osijek was constantly shelled by the Serbian artillery, and nearby Vukovar fell into Serbian hands. Some Slavonian Jews left Slavonia in search of shelter, especially in Hungary, because of the heavy fighting.¹⁴⁶

From the beginning of the 1980s the number of members had declined from 168 to 99 in 1995,¹⁴⁷ but some increase, however, has taken place since then because the data for March 2000 showed 111 members.¹⁴⁸

The Osijek Jewish community represents a middle-sized community in Croatia, whose only regular activities are weekly meetings every Wednesday night in the community premises in B. Radićeva street in Osijek. Beside this, the major Jewish holidays are celebrated. Otherwise there is no religious activity. The most important aims, according to the community president Darko Fischer, are to keep Jewish tradition alive, to remember the Holocaust victims, to take care of two

¹⁴³ I. Goldstein 14.6.1996.

¹⁴⁴ Mirković 22.9.2000.

¹⁴⁵ S. Goldstein 16.3.2000.

¹⁴⁶ *Haaretz* 19.9.1991.

¹⁴⁷ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*; Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

¹⁴⁸ Data about the Jewish population in Croatia, 21.3.2000.

Jewish cemeteries in Osijek and one in the nearby town of Đakovo, and perhaps above all, to maintain a trace of the Jewish community in people's minds in Osijek.¹⁴⁹ The town was formerly home to a prospering Jewish community with two synagogues and a Jewish share of the population of 8.3 per cent in 1900.¹⁵⁰ One concrete step towards preserving a trace of Jewish life in the area was the publication by the Osijek Jewish community, together with the Novi Liber publishing house, of the book *Kao Mraz*, introduced in the first chapter of this study, about the life of one Jewish family in Osijek during and after the Second World War.

The building where the community office, hall and synagogue are located is the former Jewish school building of Osijek and is still owned by the community, although only a small part of it is used by the community. The major part of the building serves as the Faculty of Law of the University of Osijek.

In Rijeka, an coastal city on the Adriatic, the first Jewish community was founded in 1781 numbering 25 souls.¹⁵¹ The Jews of Rijeka used the former Orthodox synagogue in Ivana Filipovića street, built in 1929.¹⁵² Before the collapse of Yugoslavia the community numbered 93 members, while after the war in 1995 there were 82 Jews,¹⁵³ and at the beginning of 2000 the number of members of the Jewish community was 85.¹⁵⁴

Soon after the arrival of Jews from Spain, the still surviving synagogue in Split was created in a building in the Jewish quarter, the centre of the mediaeval city. The building with the synagogue was located in the north-west part of the former palace of Diocletian.¹⁵⁵ The Split synagogue acquired its present appearance in 1728 and was refurbished in 1996; the opening ceremony of the reconstructed synagogue was held on September 11, 1996.¹⁵⁶ The number of Jews in the community before the collapse of Yugoslavia was 91, increasing subsequently as a result of the war to 165 in 1995.¹⁵⁷ This increase is explained by the fact that Split served as a transit point for Jewish refugees from Bosnia, and some of them decided to stay there. Since the war finished, the number has decreased again reflecting the real situation, having been 113 at the beginning of 2000.¹⁵⁸ Obviously

¹⁴⁹ Fischer 15.6.1996.

¹⁵⁰ Agmon, Michael: "Osijek". In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 28 (Hebrew).

¹⁵¹ Korda, Irena: "Iz povijesti Židova Rijeke i okolice". *Dva stoljeća povijesti i kulture Židove u Zagrebu i Hrvatskoj*. Zagreb: Židovska općina 1998, 332.

¹⁵² Korda 1998, 334.

¹⁵³ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

¹⁵⁴ Data of the Jewish community population in Croatia, 21.3.2000.

¹⁵⁵ Kečkemet, Duško: *The Place of Jews in the History of the City of Split*. Split 1984, 9.

¹⁵⁶ *Voice*, Autumn 1998, 35.

¹⁵⁷ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

¹⁵⁸ Data of Jewish community population in Croatia, 21.3.2000.

some of the Jewish refugees have returned to Bosnia and some moved on somewhere else.

During the war of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Jews of Split were actively engaged in humanitarian work, mainly helping refugees from Bosnia; otherwise the community functions like the other middle-sized Jewish communities of Osijek and Rijeka in Croatia, with the emphasis being placed on keeping up traditions and celebrating Jewish holidays.¹⁵⁹

The Small Jewish Communities:

Slavonski Brod, Virovitica, Čakovec, Daruvar, Koprivnica and Dubrovnik

Slavonski Brod is located on the northern banks of the River Sava which divides Croatia from Bosnia-Herzegovina. The synagogue in Slavonski Brod was built in 1896.¹⁶⁰ The community has been one of the smallest in Croatia during the post-war period, from 14 members at the beginning of the 1980s to 15 in 1995 and only 5 at the beginning of 2000.¹⁶¹ Although the town was sporadically shelled during the last war, this caused no significant movement away by Jews. However, as the current numbers indicate, the small community is withering away.

Like Slavonski Brod, the Jewish community of Virovitica is small, numbering only 10 members at the beginning of 2000.¹⁶² It is not known when the Jewish community was founded in Virovitica, but the building of the first synagogue was completed in 1863 in this town located near the Hungarian border.¹⁶³ The number of members of the Jewish community seems to be declining since before the disintegration of Yugoslavia there were still 16 members.¹⁶⁴

The Jewish community in Čakovec, near the Slovenian and Hungarian border, was founded, in 1740.¹⁶⁵ The number of Jews in the community in Čakovec has also been decreasing: before the collapse of Yugoslavia there were still 24 members, but at the beginning of 2000 only 13 members.¹⁶⁶ The war did not affect the life of this small town in the Medjumurje region of Croatia.

¹⁵⁹ Bronner-Mišića 18.6.1996.

¹⁶⁰ Loker, Zvi: "Slavonski Brod". In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 239 (Hebrew).

¹⁶¹ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*; Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia; Data about the population of Jewish communities in Croatia 21.3.2000.

¹⁶² Data about the Jewish population in Croatia 21.3.2000.

¹⁶³ Weiss, Marko: "Iz povijesti Židovske općine u Virovitici". *Dva stoljeća povijesti i kulture Židova u Zagrebu i Hrvatskoj*. Zagreb: Židovska općina 1998, 385.

¹⁶⁴ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

¹⁶⁵ Etz-Hayyim, Moshe: "Čakovec". In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 284.

Daruvar is also in Croatian Slavonia, not far away from Virovitica. The synagogue in Daruvar was built in 1860 and at its height in 1921 the Jewish population comprised 10 per cent of town's inhabitants.¹⁶⁷ The number of Jews in Daruvar before the collapse of Yugoslavia was 20, decreasing gradually as a result of the war to 10 in 1995.¹⁶⁸ There was a small Serbian-held pocket near Daruvar until 1995, and so this region suffered more from the war, which is subsequently reflected in the fall in the number of Jews. Furthermore, at the beginning of 2000 there were already 27 Jews in Daruvar.¹⁶⁹ So clearly a number of Jews left Daruvar because of the war and returned after it.

The Koprivnica Jewish Community is the only one which has been re-established in Croatia since the disintegration of Yugoslavia. This community was probably originally founded in 1850¹⁷⁰ and then decimated in 1941 when all the Jews of Koprivnica were deported to the concentration camps.¹⁷¹ Though community life ended in the Holocaust, several Jews survived who continued to live in Koprivnica. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, interest in Jewish life among them grew, and the Jewish community was re-established on May 25, 2000. Although the community is small, only 23 members in a total of six families at the beginning of 2000,¹⁷² its founding shows that something is happening under the surface. The example of Koprivnica need not be unique, for there are Jews still living in more than 60 localities in Croatia,¹⁷³ many of whom are officially unaffiliated with the Jewish communities. Similar developments could take place in a number of other localities besides Koprivnica, and small, once decimated communities, could be reborn. Koprivnica, and in particular Heinrich Branko, the Vice-President of the community, provide an illustrative example of the state of affairs of post-war Jewry living in a relatively small locality. Though both Branko's parents were Jews, he himself grew up without any teaching of Jewish tradition. They were totally isolated from the Jewish community of Zagreb, and as a matter of fact, Branko's contact with the Zagreb Jewish community in the mid-nineteen-eighties was the first Jewish contact made from Koprivnica with the Zagreb community since the Holocaust! This was in spite of the close geographic proximity, as

¹⁶⁶ Data of the Jewish community population in Croatia, 21.3.2000.

¹⁶⁷ Loker, Zvi: "Daruvar". In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 87.

¹⁶⁸ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

¹⁶⁹ Data of the Jewish population in Croatia, 21.3.2000.

¹⁷⁰ Švarc, Krešimir: "Kratka povijest koprivničke Židovske zajednice". *Dva stoljeća povijesti i kulture Židova u Zagrebu i Hrvatskoj*. Zagreb: Židovska općina 1998, 378.

¹⁷¹ Švarc 1998, 382.

¹⁷² Branko 19.5.2000.

¹⁷³ *Croatia. In Memory to Holocaust* 2000, 5.

Koprivnica lies only about 80 km from Zagreb. Now the community of six families, which are all families with intermarriage, endeavours to preserve Jewish traditions and take care of the devastated cemetery in Koprivnica.¹⁷⁴

Dubrovnik, a beautiful town on the Adriatic coast south of Split, hosts the second oldest synagogue among preserved synagogues in Europe, and the oldest preserved Sephardic synagogue in Europe which still functions. Jews were allowed to settle permanently in Dubrovnik from 1538 onwards, and soon after they constituted a community with one of the buildings allocated to them converted into a synagogue. The synagogue exists in the same building today on Žudioska Street. It was damaged by earthquakes in 1979 and 1996 and also hit by two grenades during the siege of Dubrovnik by Serb forces between the end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992. The synagogue was restored and reconstructed, and the opening ceremony was held on the occasion of the Jewish New Year in 1997.¹⁷⁵

The number of Jews in the community in Dubrovnik has increased since the collapse of Yugoslavia. Before the collapse there were 29 members, in 1995 already 47¹⁷⁶ and at the beginning of 2000 there were 44 members in the Jewish community.¹⁷⁷

To sum up, Croatian Jewish communities can be divided into three categories by their size. The Zagreb Jewish community is by far the biggest and therefore the leading community. Most Jewish activities take place in Zagreb. The middle-sized communities of Split, Osijek, Rijeka have around 100 members each and some weekly activities, while the rest are very small communities which actually exist only on paper, although the example of Koprivnica illustrates that developments can appear which produce some activity even in the smallest communities. However, Zagreb is the only real centre of Jewish life in Croatia, with the others being merely guardians of Jewish history and tradition in their respective towns.

5.2.2. Yugoslavia (Serbia)

Serbia and Montenegro today make up the so-called rump-Yugoslavia. This part of the study deals exclusively with Serbian Jewry as there are only 25 Jews living in Montenegro, all of whom are registered with the Belgrade Jewish community.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Branko 19.5.2000.

¹⁷⁵ *Voice*, Autumn 1998, 37.

¹⁷⁶ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

¹⁷⁷ Data of the Jewish community population in Croatia, 21.3.2000.

¹⁷⁸ Grinvald 28.6.2000. It seems that most of Jews in Montenegro are living in Boka Kotorska region since *Bilten* (Belgrade) 11/1997 reported that there are 25 Ashkenazi Jews living in Boka Kotorska. Almost all of them are older than 70 years old.

According to the Jewish Agency, there were 3,221 Jews in Serbia in 1995¹⁷⁹ and 3,211 in 2000.¹⁸⁰ Some 500 Jews emigrated from Serbia during the war.¹⁸¹ The Serbian Jewish population is concentrated mostly in Belgrade and in the Vojvodina region.

The Jewish Communities in Serbia were in a better position than their fellow communities in Croatia and Bosnia at the time of the disintegration of Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1990s. During that period there were no military activities on Serbian soil and so no-one's life was in immediate danger. Nevertheless, the Jewish Federation was actively engaged with helping fellow-Jews who left Sarajevo during the first years of the war in Bosnia. Altogether 1,077 Jews came to Belgrade, of whom some 150 have remained there while the others have left, mainly for Israel or another destination.¹⁸²

The deteriorating economic situation and social conditions of the community members caused increasing concern in the Jewish leadership in Yugoslavia towards the end of the 1990s.¹⁸³ The need for social help was already growing before the NATO campaign in the spring of 1999, and subsequently became even more acute. The Federation's Executive Board has discussed these matters at length in their meetings and new guidelines for providing assistance have been debated. One proposal was, because of the large number of new members coming into the communities, to exclude new members from receiving welfare distributed by the Federation for the first year of their membership of the Jewish community. This proposal has not yet been accepted, however, but instead local communities have been given the freedom to decide how the welfare would be distributed.¹⁸⁴

The international sanctions imposed on Yugoslavia caused economic distress, which obviously encouraged emigration from Serbia. Many Jews of the younger generation left in order to avoid being called up. In spite of emigration, the number of Serbian Jews has increased to some 3,200, which is almost 1,000 more than before the war. This is partly explained by Bosnian Jewish emigrants who decided to stay in Belgrade, but the increase is mainly the result of those Jews who had no previous contacts with the community returning to the Jewish communities. This development is in parallel with the development in Croatia.

179 Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia. Obviously numbers were even higher (Kerkkänen 1997, 74–81) but were reduced to some 3,200 as a result of the Kosovo war in 1999.

180 Grinvald 28.6.2000.

181 Grinvald 6.6.1996.

182 Grinvald 28.6.2000.

183 *Bilten* (Belgrade) 1/1999.

184 *Bilten* (Belgrade) 12/1999.

The Kosovo War – Pesach '99

The war only became a reality in Serbia in a visible way in the spring of 1999 as a result of NATO bombing due to the Kosovo war. The war lasted from March 24 to June 24, 1999. Already before the war, in October 1998, the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia established a Crisis Management Group (CMG), which during the Kosovo war acted on behalf of the Executive Board of the Federation. The wartime activity of the CMG was code-named *Pesach '99*. The Executive Board could not meet during the war due to transport and security problems. From July 3 onwards the Federation resumed its normal activities. The main task of the Crisis Management Group was to find safe places for Jews during NATO bombardments.¹⁸⁵ Consequently about 600 Jews, i.e. about 17 per cent of the whole Jewish population in Yugoslavia, sought shelter in Budapest, staying there as guests of the Jewish community of Hungary.¹⁸⁶ Those who did not move to Israel or some other destination from Budapest returned to Yugoslavia by the end of June 1999, and the operations of the Crisis Management Group in Hungary came to an end.¹⁸⁷

The Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia

Belgrade was the centre of Yugoslav Jewry prior to the collapse of Yugoslavia, and the headquarters of the Federation were located there. After the collapse, the Federation continued functioning under the same title as before and with its former organisational structure, only this time without all the Jewish communities in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Now it came to form an umbrella organisation of Serbian Jewish communities. The biggest losses, besides the decrease in the number of communities, were the loss of the Old People's Home in Zagreb and the Pirovac summer camp on the Adriatic coast.

Officially the Federation of the Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia is recognised as both an ethnic and a religious community.¹⁸⁸ According to its constitution, passed at the General Assembly of the Federation on July 3, 1993, and subsequently amended three times, most recently on December 12, 1999, the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia as a non-political ethnic and religious

¹⁸⁵ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 8/1999.

¹⁸⁶ Information on the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, Savez Jevrejskih Opština Jugoslavije (provided by Aća Singer on June 19, 2000) and *Bilten* (Belgrade) 8/1999.

¹⁸⁷ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 8/1999.

¹⁸⁸ Singer 6.6.1996.

organisation represents the Jewish Community of Yugoslavia both in Yugoslavia and abroad, and is the joint organ of local Jewish communities.¹⁸⁹ Local communities affiliated with the Federation are: Belgrade, Novi Sad, Subotica, Sombor, Zrenjanin, Pančevo, Zemun and Niš. Priština was a part of the Federation until its demise as a result of the Kosovo War, and Prizren, also located in Kosovo, is not affiliated with the Federation.

The organs of the Federation are the Assembly, the Executive Board, the Supervisory Board and the President. Members of these organs and the staff of the Federation are not allowed to hold office in political parties.¹⁹⁰ The General Assembly of the Jewish communities meets annually, and as the supreme authoritative body it elects the Executive Committee and the President, both of which are elected for a term of three years.¹⁹¹ The Executive Board consists of the President of the Federation, presidents of the local communities and 11 other members elected by the Assembly of the Federation. The Executive Board implements the decisions of the Assembly. The Supervisory Board controls the financial and material business of the Federation.¹⁹² The governing body of the local Jewish community is the General Assembly, which meets annually. All members of the community over 18 years of age have the right to vote and the President and the Executive Committee of the community are elected by the General Assembly.¹⁹³

The long-time President of the Federation, Lavoslav Kadelburg, retired in 1991. The well-known Yugoslav writer David Albahari was the President during 1991–94, and was followed by Aća Singer.¹⁹⁴ The federation's premises together with the Belgrade Jewish community and the Jewish Historical Museum are located on Kralja Petra Street in Belgrade.

During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina the Federation took care of the Jewish communities which were located in the area of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. These were the Jewish communities of Dobož, Banja Luka and Grbavica (a suburb of Sarajevo). Later Grbavica joined the Sarajevo Jewish community as a result of the unification of Sarajevo in spring 1996.¹⁹⁵ Officially, of course, these communities were not affiliated with the Federation for they were located on Bosnian soil.

189 Constitution of the Federation of Jewish communities in Yugoslavia, revised text 1999.

190 Constitution of the Federation of Jewish communities in Yugoslavia, revised text 1999.

191 Singer 6.6.1996.

192 Constitution of the Federation of Jewish communities in Yugoslavia, revised text 1999.

193 Salom 8.6.1996.

194 Grinvald 6.6.1996.

195 Grinvald 6.6.1996.

Activities and Institutions

The activities of the Federation are supervised by various commissions. These are the Financial Commission, the Social Commission, the Commission of the Jewish Historical Museum, the Commission for Antisemitic Phenomena, the Commission for Religious Affairs, the Cultural Commission and the Youth Commission. The Rabbinate is responsible for organising religious activities. The Federation also provides legal services, and *Magen David*, the Humanitarian Pharmaceutical Dispensary, is also a part of the Federation's activities. The *Magen David* was originally established as early as 1874 as a Humanitarian Aid Society, and its activities were revived in 1992 following the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The *Magen David* distributed a considerable amount of medicine to hospitals in Serbia during the war years. Nowadays the Pharmacy, operating in the building of the Federation, primarily dispenses medicaments to the members of Jewish communities and their extended families. The need for the Pharmacy has even increased since the Kosovo War and NATO bombardments further impoverished the country, also affecting the Jewish population.¹⁹⁶ The sports club *Makkabi* was set up in 1994 and a new Home for Old People was opened in May, 1996, located in a wing of the Pančevo Gerontology Centre.¹⁹⁷ Thus the housing problem of old people was partly solved, for the previous Old People's Home of the Federation had been located in Zagreb, out of reach of the Serbian Jews.

One of the most distinguished institutions of the Federation is the Jewish Historical Museum, established in 1949. The Museum houses a permanent exhibition and also possesses a valuable collection of Judaica, containing paintings, sculptures and old Jewish books. The archives of the Museum comprise documents from various Jewish communities from the whole territory of the former Yugoslavia.¹⁹⁸ Besides the permanent exhibition, about 50 temporary exhibitions on Jewish life have been put on so far since the establishment of the Museum. The Museum has published several books, and its best-known publication series, *Zbornik*, contains scientific articles about the history of Jews in Yugoslavia. To this date, seven volumes of *Zbornik* have already been published. In addition to this, the Museum publishes its own bulletin called *Jevrejski Istorijski Muzej* with four issues so far. The latest exhibition catalogue *Životni ciklus – Običaji kod Jevreja* ('Jewish Customs – the Life Cycle') by Vojislava Radovanović and Milica Mihailović was also published as a CD-ROM in 1998.

¹⁹⁶ Grinvald 6.6.1996; Information on the Humanitarian Pharmaceutical Dispensary "Magen David" of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia (dated on May 6, 1999).

¹⁹⁷ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 5/1996; Grinvald 6.6.1996.

¹⁹⁸ Information on the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade, Savez Jevrejskih Opština Jugoslavije (provided by Aća Singer on June 19, 2000).

Publications

Before the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Federation's main journal was *Jevrejski Pregled* ('the Jewish Review'), the last issue of which came out in December 1990. The Federation publish no journal for the next two years. The first issue of the new *Bilten* ('the Bulletin') of the Belgrade Jewish community appeared in April 1993. Altogether seven issues of *Bilten* appeared before it was changed to be the journal of whole Federation under the new title *Bilten-Jevrejski Pregled*.¹⁹⁹ It appears monthly and serves as the Federation's most important channel of communication with its members.²⁰⁰ *Pinkas*, a small paper containing articles on Judaism and Jews, has been published as a part of the Federation's project for the revitalisation of small communities. The Rabbinate prepares a *Jewish Calendar* which is published annually by the Federation.²⁰¹ A youth paper called *Hai* appeared three or four times in 1989–92; it has since been replaced by *Yofi*, which has appeared at irregular intervals since 1994.²⁰²

Religion

The Federation has one rabbi, Isak Asiel, who has received his rabbinical education in Israel. In addition to being the Rabbi of Yugoslavia, Asiel serves as Rabbi of Macedonia.²⁰³ The former Chief Rabbi, Cadik Danon, retired at the beginning of February 1998. Besides Rabbi Asiel, the Rabbinate also has an assistant.²⁰⁴ The pre-war Ashkenazi synagogue, which was not destroyed in World War II, serves the mainly Sephardic community. Jewish holidays and services follow the Sephardic tradition although Ashkenazi songs are also sung in the services.²⁰⁵ Asiel has been credited with sparking a renewal of religious interest among Yugoslav's Jews, and is also in charge of the revitalisation programs for smaller Jewish communities.²⁰⁶ As Rabbi Asiel recalls: 'the war in a way awakened Jews' and the situation is in this respect better than before the disintegration of Yugoslavia, when there had been

¹⁹⁹ Gaon 7.6.1996.

²⁰⁰ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 4/1996.

²⁰¹ Grinvald 6.6.1996.

²⁰² The Author's discussion with some young people of the community on June 6, 1996, in Belgrade.

²⁰³ Asiel 14.6.2000.

²⁰⁴ The Activities of the Rabbinate from 1.4.1995 – 24.3.1999 (dated August 17, 1999 in Belgrade).

²⁰⁵ Asiel 6.6.1996.

²⁰⁶ *American Jewish Year Book 1998*, Vol. 98, 363.

almost no Jewish education and no study groups. These activities began after the disintegration of Yugoslavia.²⁰⁷

The Rabbinate organises occasional religious activities such as Bar Mitzvah rituals, regular Erev Shabbath services every Friday and celebrations of Jewish Holidays. This activity marks a new beginning of the celebration of traditional Jewish Holidays, since in the past only *Seder Pesah* was celebrated traditionally. Now Bar Mitzvah rituals are being held, and *Hanukah* candles have been lit in the synagogue for the first time since World War II. *Purim* and *Shavuot* have also been celebrated in a traditional way for the first time since the Second World War.²⁰⁸ Besides organising celebrations, the Rabbinate performs ritual slaughtering (occasionally also for the Jewish communities of Slovakia and Croatia), weddings, funerals and commemorations. Various courses in Mishna, Halacha and Hazanut have been provided in previous years, but this activity has significantly declined since the Kosovo war, which reduced the number of young people in the communities as many moved to Israel. The Rabbinate has concentrated now more on basic Jewish education by publishing in its *Ner Micva (Ner Mitzvah)* series several books of basic Judaism translated into Serbian. Rabbi Danon's book *Zbirka Pojmova iz Judaizma* ('Basic Terms of Judaism'), originally published in 1966, was republished in an enlarged edition in 1996.²⁰⁹

Other educational activities include the Jewish school *Ham Ribei Jehuda Alkalai* which began its work in April, 1995, mainly giving lessons in Hebrew language and Judaism. Lessons are provided for pupils in three different age-groups from 7 to 18 years.²¹⁰

The Belgrade Jewish Community

Like the Zagreb Jewish community in Croatia, the Belgrade Jewish community in Yugoslavia is the main centre of Jewish activities, and the leading community in the country. There have been Jews in Belgrade since the time of the Second Temple, and its Jewish population peaked in proportional terms between 1838–45, when Jews constituted almost 12 per cent of the city's inhabitants.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Asiel 6.6.1996.

²⁰⁸ The Activities of the Rabbinate from 1.4.1995 – 24.3.1999 (dated August 17, 1999 in Belgrade).

²⁰⁹ The Activities of the Rabbinate from 1.4.1995 – 24.3.1999 (dated August 17, 1999); Asiel 14.6.2000.

²¹⁰ The Activities of the Rabbinate from 1.4.1995 – 24.3.1999 (dated August 17, 1999).

²¹¹ Lebl, Ženi: "Beograd". In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 55–56.

The Belgrade Jewish community has grown substantially in size since the collapse of Yugoslavia. Prior to the 1991–95 war, its membership numbered about 1,600²¹² but in June 1996 it was already 2,200.²¹³ The number has fallen to 1919 in June 2000²¹⁴ owing mainly to emigration during the NATO campaign against Yugoslavia. The community has grown, on the other hand, partly because of refugees from Bosnia who decided to stay in Belgrade; however, the majority of the new members have come from Belgrade itself.

As a result of the general deterioration in the economic situation of Serbia in the 1990s, the emphasis of community activities has shifted to the social sphere. A soup kitchen was established in November 1999 serving meals for community members on weekdays, and a doctor holds a surgery twice a week on the community premises.²¹⁵

The decisions of the community are made by the Community Council of 28 members which is elected every third year. The Executive Board of seven members implements decisions made by the Council. The Belgrade Jewish community activities are channelled through various commissions which include a Cemetery Commission, a Commission for Social Affairs, a Commission for Legal Matters, a Commission for Culture and a Commission for Religion.²¹⁶ The Braća Baruch choir of the Belgrade Jewish community is widely known for its performances.

The Middle-sized Communities: Novi Sad and Subotica

The Jewish community of Novi Sad, located in Vojvodina, is the second biggest Jewish community in Yugoslavia. The first synagogue in Novi Sad was built in 1749.²¹⁷ On the threshold of World War II, Novi Sad hosted about 4,300 Jews.²¹⁸ Since the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the greatest increase in size of any community apart from Belgrade has taken place in Novi Sad, where almost 400 new members have joined the community. At the beginning of the 1980s there were 288 members in the Jewish community²¹⁹ and in 1995 there were about 504.²²⁰ In June

²¹² *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*.

²¹³ Grinvald 6.6.1996.

²¹⁴ Grinvald 28.6.2000.

²¹⁵ Ajzinberg 14.6.2000.

²¹⁶ Ajzinberg 14.6.2000.

²¹⁷ Loker, Zvi: "Novi Sad". In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 179.

²¹⁸ Loker 1988, 178.

²¹⁹ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*.

²²⁰ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

2000 the number of Jews in the community was already 605.²²¹ After the collapse of Yugoslavia about 80–90 Jews emigrated to Israel²²², so the number of newcomers must amount to some 400. According to George Heisler, a member of the community, the reason for this growth is obvious: ‘in times of distress everybody wants to find their own nation; also humanitarian aid, especially medicines, distributed by the community attracts old people’. He goes on to state: ‘The community is in every sense more active now than before the war, the spirit has been kindled, and Jews want to show that they are alive, they want to show their identity in every possible manner.’²²³ The Novi Sad community also has its own choir, *Hashira*, and a youth magazine entitled *Hadashot* appears four times a year. As in other communities, the major Jewish holidays are celebrated in Novi Sad, although generally speaking the community continues its secular tradition.²²⁴ The first Sabbath service for several decades was conducted in spring 1994.²²⁵ The community has a building in use as a community centre; the synagogue itself was rented to the town in 1990 for 25 years to be used as a concert hall.²²⁶

Among the post-Yugoslav Jewish communities, the Novi Sad community is third in size after the Belgrade and Zagreb Jewish communities. Its size reflects the continuation of a rich Jewish history in Vojvodina, where the biggest concentration of Jews was located during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

The Subotica Jewish community, located almost on the border between Yugoslavia and Hungary, is another example of the continuity of Vojvodina Jewry. The first synagogue in Subotica was opened in 1802²²⁷ and the peak of its Jewish population was in 1931 when there were 6,500 Jews in Subotica.²²⁸ Immediately prior to the disintegration of Yugoslavia the Subotica Jewish community had 192 members and a certain increase has since taken place: in 1995 there were 213 members²²⁹ and in June 2000 there were 218 members.²³⁰ The *Hevra Kaddiša* was organised again after a long interval in 1994.²³¹ During the war of disintegration, the Jews of Subotica gave humanitarian aid to the Serbs who escaped from

²²¹ Grinvald 28.6.2000.

²²² Heisler 8.6.1996.

²²³ Heisler 8.6.1996.

²²⁴ Heisler 8.6.1996.

²²⁵ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 5/1994.

²²⁶ *Jevrejski Pregled* 7–12, 1990.

²²⁷ Levinger, Yosef: “Subotica”. In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 220.

²²⁸ Levinger 1988, 218.

²²⁹ *Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut* 1995, Yugoslavia.

²³⁰ Grinvald 28.6.2000.

²³¹ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 1/1995.

Croatia.²³² In November 1995 a library was opened in the community centre of the Subotica Jewish community,²³³ and Hebrew courses have also been arranged.²³⁴

The formerly independent Jewish community of Senta, with only 10 members at the beginning of the 1980s,²³⁵ joined the Subotica Jewish community, a factor in the increase in the number of members.

The Small Communities: Sombor, Zrenjanin, Pančevo, Zemun and Niš

Also located in Vojvodina, the Sombor Jewish community had its first synagogue built in 1825, and the community was at its peak in 1940 with 1620 members.²³⁶ At the beginning of the 1980s the community had 37 members²³⁷, and a quite remarkable increase has been recorded, since in 1995 there were already 80 members.²³⁸ This increase was also noted in the Federation bulletin²³⁹ but since then a dramatic decrease has taken place and the number of Jews in the community was only 35 in June 2000.²⁴⁰ Clearly the NATO campaign in spring 1999 caused many Jews from Sombor to move abroad. The renovation of the community centre, in which the synagogue is also located, was completed in autumn 1995.²⁴¹

The first synagogue in Zrenjanin, also situated in Vojvodina, was built in 1847.²⁴² In 1900 there were altogether 1,335 Jews.²⁴³ Activities diminished as a result of the Holocaust so that the community gradually lost its position as an independent community, and Jewish Calendars of the years 1981–82 and 1991–92, for example, omit Zrenjanin from the list of Jewish communities. It was re-established on October 8, 1994.²⁴⁴ The former Jewish community of Kikinda, which only had four members at the beginning of the 1980s²⁴⁵ actually joined the newborn Zrenjanin community. There were still two Jewish families living in

²³² *Bilten* (Belgrade) 10/1995.

²³³ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 12/1995.

²³⁴ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 1/1996.

²³⁵ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*.

²³⁶ Loker, Zvi: "Sombor". In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 232–233.

²³⁷ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*.

²³⁸ *Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995*, Yugoslavia.

²³⁹ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 6/1994.

²⁴⁰ Grinvald 28.6.2000.

²⁴¹ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 9/1995.

²⁴² Loker, Zvi: "Zrenjanin". In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 158.

²⁴³ Loker 1988, 158.

²⁴⁴ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 12/1994.

²⁴⁵ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*.

Kikinda in 1995.²⁴⁶ In Zrenjanin the Jewish community had altogether 50 members in 1996²⁴⁷ and 78 Jews in June 2000.²⁴⁸ The re-establishing of the Zrenjanin Jewish community bears witness to the revival of Jewish life after the disintegration of Yugoslavia in this town, which has formerly been known as Veliki Bečkerek and Petrovgrad.

There were only 28 Jews in the Jewish community of Pančevo, also situated in Vojvodina, at the beginning of the 1980s.²⁴⁹ In 1995 it already had 130 members²⁵⁰ and in June 2000 it had 154,²⁵¹ which is, of course, a remarkable increase. The organisation of Hebrew courses also shows increased interest in Jewish life and culture in this small community.²⁵² The Old People's Home of the Jewish Federation was located from May 1996 in a wing of the Pančevo Gerontology Centre, thus partly solving the problem of housing elderly Jews who could no longer use the facilities of the Old Age Home in Zagreb.²⁵³

The first synagogue in Zemun was built in 1863, and when it was at its height in 1900 the community reached a total of 955 members.²⁵⁴ This community, located near Belgrade, has like many other Jewish communities in Yugoslavia witnessed an increase in membership during recent years. At the beginning of the 1980s it had 103 members²⁵⁵ and in 1995 as many as 170 members.²⁵⁶ Zemun is known for its early Zionists. Theodor Herzl's grandparents lived in Zemun, and an Orthodox rabbi of the Sephardic community of Zemun, Yehuda Alkalay, wrote a Ladino-Hebrew textbook as early as in 1839, in the introduction of which he pointed to the need to establish Jewish colonies in Palestine. Later he continued to publish extensively his Zionist ideas, and finally himself settled in Palestine.²⁵⁷

The first Jews arrived at Niš, a city located close to the Bulgarian border in South-East Serbia, in the 17th century, and the synagogue was built in 1695.²⁵⁸

²⁴⁶ Grinvald 6.6.1996.

²⁴⁷ Grinvald 6.6.1996.

²⁴⁸ Grinvald 28.6.2000.

²⁴⁹ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*.

²⁵⁰ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

²⁵¹ Grinvald 28.6.2000.

²⁵² *Bilten* (Belgrade) 2/1996.

²⁵³ Grinvald 6.6.1996; *Bilten* (Belgrade) 5/1996.

²⁵⁴ Loker Zvi: "Zemun". In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 153–54.

²⁵⁵ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*.

²⁵⁶ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

²⁵⁷ Loker 1988, 154; Sachar, M. Howard: *A History of Israel from the Rise of Zionism to Our Time*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1996, 6.

²⁵⁸ Lebl, Ženi: "Niš". In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 197.

Membership of the Jewish community has recently increased slightly, since at the beginning of the 1980s it had 18 members²⁵⁹ and in 1995, as well as in June 2000, as many as 41 members.²⁶⁰ During Yugoslavia's war of disintegration, members of the Niš Jewish community assisted the two remaining Jewish families in the Bosnian town of Višegrad by sending them parcels.²⁶¹

Apparently because of the existing structure and organisation inherited from the period of Yugoslavia, the Federation was able to take care of its smaller communities in a more systematic way than was possible in Croatia, especially in the first half of the 1990s. Due to the organised efforts of the Federation of Jewish Communities in a programme called 'Revitalisation of Small Communities', some obvious results were visible after the collapse of Yugoslavia; membership was on the increase in many small communities, and various activities, such as Hebrew courses and the Jewish education given by Rabbi Isak Asiel, were also taking place. This encouraging development, however, encountered severe setbacks from the war in Kosovo, its consequences and the increasing deterioration of the financial situation.

Jewish Communities in Kosovo: Priština and Prizren

The first specific mention of a Jew in Kosovo is found in a reference from 1442 to two merchants in Priština described as holders of the tax-farm for silver production: one of these merchants was a Jew.²⁶² By 1498–99 there were six Jewish households in Novo Brdo, a town to the south-east of Priština. In addition, a Jewish merchant in Prizren in the 1580s is known to have traded with an extensive network of other Balkan Jews. By the mid-19th century there were Jewish merchants in Prizren, 600 Jews in Gjakova, to the south-west of Priština, and a Jewish community in Priština. By 1910 there may have been about 3,000 Jews in Kosovo.²⁶³ A synagogue was built in Priština in 1897, and the community was at its height in 1913 with 452 Jews. The community was actually wiped out as a result of the Holocaust, and in 1968 there were only 11 Jews.²⁶⁴

Officially the Priština Jewish community was re-established after the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1994 as a part of the project for the Revitalisation of

²⁵⁹ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*.

²⁶⁰ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia and Grinvald 28.6.2000.

²⁶¹ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 6/1994 and 10/1994.

²⁶² Malcolm, Noel: *Kosovo. A Short History*. London – Basingstoke: Papermac 1998, 211.

²⁶³ Malcolm 1998, 212–213.

²⁶⁴ Lebl, Ženi: "Priština". In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 281–282.

Small Communities²⁶⁵, and in 1995 it numbered 35 members²⁶⁶; a year later there were already 45 members.²⁶⁷ Most Kosovo Jews lived in Jewish-Serbian, Jewish-Albanian or Jewish-Turkish mixed marriages.²⁶⁸ The Kosovo war, however, brought this development to an end, when practically the whole community, except for those Jews living in Prizren, was obliged to seek shelter in Serbia or Macedonia following the withdrawal of the Yugoslav military and police forces from Kosovo.²⁶⁹ Altogether 47 Jews arrived in Belgrade as refugees from Kosovo.²⁷⁰ The fact that the Jews of Priština left Kosovo during the Kosovo war clearly shows their Yugoslav or Serbian orientation, and they were probably also perceived in this way by the Albanian Kosovars. This fact was witnessed also by Stephen Schwartz, a Sarajevo-based American journalist who has travelled widely in the Balkans in general and in Kosovo in particular.²⁷¹

The case of Prizren is an interesting one. There has never been a Jewish community in Prizren during the Yugoslav period, either in the Kingdom or in the new Yugoslavia. Nor it was known that there were any Jews in this town, situated to the south of Priština. After the Kosovo War, however, it was discovered that at least two large families of Jewish-Albanian mixed marriages were living in Prizren, in both cases families with Jewish mothers, numbering altogether 38 people and considering themselves to be Jewish families.²⁷² Apparently they saw themselves as a community of their own established without prior negotiation with the Federation of Jewish Communities in Belgrade, a fact which caused obvious embarrassment and discontent in the Federation.²⁷³ All of this came to light only after *Bilten* had reported an interview with Čeda Prlinčević, the President of the exiled Priština community, as the last authentic statement of Jews living in Kosovo.²⁷⁴ The Executive Board of the Federation decided in its meeting on November 11, 1999, that the Federation should not initiate contacts with the Prizren community, since the basis for the establishment of the community was unknown. A second decision was made to find out how this community, whose members are descendants of Jewish-Albanian mixed marriages, was found so suddenly.²⁷⁵

265 *Bilten* (Belgrade) 12/1994; Grinvald 28.6.2000.

266 Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

267 Grinvald 6.6.1996.

268 *Bilten* (Belgrade) 8/1999.

269 *Bilten* (Belgrade) 8/1999.

270 Grinvald 28.6.2000.

271 Schwartz 14.3.2000.

272 Schwartz 14.3.2000 and 29.8.2000.

273 *Bilten* (Belgrade) 12/1999.

274 *Bilten* (Belgrade) 8/1999.

275 *Bilten* (Belgrade) 12/1999.

There were thus two Jewish communities in Kosovo, one in Priština recognised as a community by the Federation in Belgrade, and the other in Prizren. These were of totally different orientations. The Priština community can be regarded as Serbian-Jewish in orientation, while the families in Prizren are Albanian-Jewish. This naturally puts these entities in opposite camps politically, and the Kosovo War in 1999 led to the disappearance of the Serbian-Jewish entity. Though Kosovo is still *de jure* a part of Yugoslavia, it is *de facto* a separate entity, where the Belgrade-based Jewish Federation has no legal standing at all. Now that Kosovo's Serb-orientated Jews have left, a process has begun of building a new framework for Kosovo's existing Jews. A Kosovo-Jewish Committee has been founded in Priština to improve relations between the Kosovars and world Jewry. As a practical step it has taken on the task of cleaning up the old Sephardic cemetery in Priština. In addition, an Institute for Albanian Jewish Studies is in the process of being established.²⁷⁶ In spite of the Federation's reluctant attitude towards the Jewish group in Prizren, it has received a certain recognition by international Jewry in the form of financial support from the JDC.²⁷⁷

It is unrealistic to consider that Kosovo will return to Yugoslav control in the near future, if ever. Consequently a very minuscule Albanian-Jewish group in Kosovo must be regarded as a new independent offshoot of the former Yugoslav Jewry and a result of its disintegration, one chapter of which was the Kosovo War. Ironically enough, it may be that without these unfortunate wars and their consequences, this small community would have remained unknown.

5.2.3. Bosnia-Herzegovina

The war between the three largest ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Muslims, Serbs and Croats, broke out on April 6, 1992, and continued for three and a half years until the Dayton Peace Accord was signed in November 1995. The unity of Bosnia-Herzegovina was agreed in the Accord, but in practice Bosnia was, and still is, divided into the Federation of Bosnian Muslims and Croats on the one hand, and the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina on the other hand. Bosnian Jews were much more seriously affected by the war than their counterparts in Croatia and Serbia. The majority of the community members emigrated to Israel, Croatia or Serbia. Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, was besieged during the war for more than three years. Seven Jews of Sarajevo lost their lives during that period because of the war.²⁷⁸ The war affected the way of life of Jews in Bosnia. The

²⁷⁶ Schwartz 29.8.2000.

²⁷⁷ Schwartz 29.8.2000.

²⁷⁸ Čerešneš 26.5.1999.

Jewish Passover celebration in Sarajevo in April 1992, for example, managed to gather only seven Jews because of the bombardment and sniper fire.²⁷⁹

The Jewish Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Before the disintegration of Yugoslavia there were six Jewish communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Doboj, Mostar, Tuzla and Zenica.²⁸⁰ Although the Sarajevo Jewish community was regarded during the post-World War II era as the most active and lively of the Jewish communities in Yugoslavia,²⁸¹ Bosnian Jews, along with the Croatian Jewish communities, felt sidelined during the Yugoslav era, as all contacts with international Jewish organisations were channelled through the Federation in Belgrade. The President of the Jewish Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jakob Finci, recalls that before the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the last contacts Bosnian Jews had with international Jewry were in 1966, when they celebrated the 400th anniversary of Jewry in Bosnia.²⁸²

The war severed contacts with the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, except for the Jewish communities of Banja Luka and Doboj, which were located in territory controlled by the Serbs. Bosnia's own, independent umbrella organisation of Jewish communities, *Jevrejska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine* ('the Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina') was founded by the end of 1992²⁸³; at the same time the Jews of Bosnia began, for the first time, to be involved in international relations with major international Jewish organisations. The first contacts with these groups were created at the reopening ceremony of the Zagreb Jewish community centre in September 1992.²⁸⁴ By the end of 1992 the Jewish Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina was affiliated with the European Jewish Congress and European Council of Jewish communities, and later also with the World Jewish Congress.²⁸⁵ Thus Bosnian Jews received recognition as an independent Jewish organisation, separate from the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia. This community consisted, in fact, of only four communities during the war i.e. Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla and Zenica; only after the Dayton Accord did the communities of Banja Luka and Doboj come to be a part of the Sarajevo-led community in practice.

²⁷⁹ *Bilten* (Sarajevo) 4/1993.

²⁸⁰ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5752 (1991–1992)*.

²⁸¹ Freidenreich 1984, 33.

²⁸² Finci 13.3.2000.

²⁸³ *Bilten* (Sarajevo) 4/1996; Finci 10.4.1997.

²⁸⁴ Finci 13.3.2000.

²⁸⁵ Finci 13.3.2000.

The Jewish Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina is led by its Board, on which each community is represented by its president, and the President of the Board is the President of Jewish Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, currently Jakob Finci.²⁸⁶ Jewish communities are themselves internally organised by their own by-laws but in general the structure is the traditional one from the former Yugoslavia: the General Assembly is the decision-making body which elects the Executive Board and the President.²⁸⁷ However, during the war years 1992–95 a ‘war constitution’ was introduced in order to carry out activities under wartime conditions, and only after the war was a new constitution for the Jewish Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina promulgated.²⁸⁸ Jewish communities are *de facto* regarded as religious communities in Bosnia, although the legislation in this respect is still being created. The Inter-religious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina, with Jakob Finci, a lawyer by profession, acting as its President, is preparing a draft for the new law on the role of religious communities in Bosnia.²⁸⁹

The number of Jews in Bosnia-Herzegovina decreased from about 1,300 to 800 during the war. About 1,00 Jews emigrated from Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war, as will be discussed later in the chapter dealing with emigration. As a result, no more than about 300 Jews should be left, when comparing the number of emigrants with the number of Jews before the outbreak of war, 1,281 according to the Jewish Agency statistics.²⁹⁰ As this figure shows, there are now about 500 new members in the communities, from which it can be concluded that a number of formerly strongly acculturated Jews is returning to the Jewish communities. While the same phenomenon was witnessed in Serbia and Croatia, the total number was by far the highest in Bosnia-Herzegovina. With the rise of national parties in Bosnia, and the eventual dissolution of Yugoslavia, people who used to declare themselves to be Yugoslavs started to join the Jewish community, proving with authentic papers that they were of Jewish origin, although until then they had been declaring otherwise.²⁹¹

Publications and Religion

The Jewish Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina has been publishing its own *Bilten* (Bilten – Glasnik Jevrejske Zajednice Bosne i Hercegovine i.e. ‘Herald of the Jew-

²⁸⁶ Finci 13.3.2000.

²⁸⁷ Finci 13.3.2000; Albahari 7.6.1996.

²⁸⁸ Finci 13.3.2000.

²⁸⁹ Finci 13.3.2000.

²⁹⁰ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

²⁹¹ Čerešnješ Papers: Report of activities from 1991–1995, Jewish community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo 25.12.1995.

ish Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina') since 1991.²⁹² *Bilten* was published throughout the war period, the first 'war' issue having been published in May 1993.²⁹³ The name of the paper was subsequently changed to *Jevrejski Glas* with the old subtitle 'Glasnik Jevrejske Zajednice Bosne i Hercegovine.'

The Jews of Bosnia-Herzegovina are highly acculturated to their environment, and intermarriage is as frequent as among Jews in the other former republics of Yugoslavia. Religion plays only a small part in community life, and religious holidays are social gatherings rather than religious observances.²⁹⁴ At the beginning of the war in 1992, Torah scrolls and religious books had to be removed from the synagogue, which did not function as a synagogue in the religious sense until the end of the war.²⁹⁵ Only Saturday morning services and the most important Jewish holidays were observed under wartime conditions.²⁹⁶ In response to criticism of the non-religious nature of Bosnian Jews, Jakob Finci responded that

some things are Jewish, some not, this has been however the only way of being a Jew in Sarajevo. Our biggest achievement is survival and for this purpose even things which are not in line with the religious regulations, have to be done²⁹⁷

illustrating, perhaps, the practical nature of Jewry in general in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Financially Bosnian Jews are as dependent on international donors as other Jewish communities in the former Yugoslavia. The Jewish Distribution Committee and the Central British Fund for World Jewish Relief are the main donors.

Sarajevo Jewish Community

The old Sephardic synagogue of Sarajevo, Stari Hram, built in 1581, serves today as the Jewish Museum of Sarajevo.²⁹⁸ A new Sephardic synagogue built next to the old one serves today as an art gallery belonging to La Benevolencija.²⁹⁹ The only synagogue still being used in Sarajevo is an Ashkenazi synagogue built in 1902.³⁰⁰

The Sarajevo Jewish community, the largest in Bosnia, comprised 1,090 members at the beginning of the 1980s.³⁰¹ As a result of the war many Jews emigrated,

²⁹² *Bilten* (Sarajevo) 14–15/1998.

²⁹³ *Bilten* (Sarajevo) 4/1993.

²⁹⁴ *Los Angeles Times* 30.4.1996.

²⁹⁵ *Jerusalem Post* 4.9.1992.

²⁹⁶ *Bilten* (Sarajevo) 4/1993.

²⁹⁷ Cited in the *Los Angeles Times* 30.4.1996.

²⁹⁸ *Jevrejska Opština – Jewish Community, Sarajevo*. Sarajevo 1984, 30.

²⁹⁹ Finci 13.3.2000.

³⁰⁰ *Jevrejska Opština – Jewish Community, Sarajevo*. Sarajevo 1984, 27.

³⁰¹ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*.

and the number of members fell to 540 in 1995.³⁰² Perhaps the most remarkable development was the influx of new members, altogether some 300, into the Sarajevo Jewish community.³⁰³ Another estimate has put the number of new members as high as 400.³⁰⁴ These people, for one reason or another, had kept their distance from the community during the Yugoslav period. Now during the war they came back and discovered their Jewishness, many of them showing authentic documents witnessing to their Jewish origin.³⁰⁵ After the war some Jews returned to Sarajevo, and in March 2000 the Jewish community there already had 700 members³⁰⁶, thus showing a decrease of about 400 members in comparison to the pre-war period. The community meets in the Ashkenazi synagogue and in the attached community centre by the River Miljacka in Hamdije Kreševljakovića Street (formerly known as Dobrovoljačka Street; in 1994 altogether 93 street names were changed at the same time in Sarajevo).³⁰⁷ The building was damaged in July 1995 by mortar shelling from the Serbs, but there were no casualties.³⁰⁸ The community's organisational structure is similar to that of other Jewish communities in the former Yugoslavia.

The majority of Sarajevo Jews are Sephardi although the distinction between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews ceased to exist after World War II. However the community endeavours to maintain Sephardic traditions. In spite of the war, in September 1992 the Sarajevo Jewish community celebrated the 500th anniversary of the expulsion from Spain in the form of SEFARAD 92, which became a remarkable cultural event in war-torn Sarajevo. Alija Izetbegović the president of Bosnia, gave the opening speech in SEFARAD 92.³⁰⁹ This major event came to serve as a manifestation of Bosnian Jews in favour of their home country, as is clearly expressed in the introductory speech delivered by the President of the Community, Ivan Čerešnješ: 'the same blood is in our veins, and we are, first of all, loyal only to one – to our Bosnia and Herzegovina.'³¹⁰ An extensive collection of articles on the Jews in general, and Sephardic Jews in particular in Bosnia-Herzegovina, called *Sefarad 92, Sarajevo, 11.09.–14.09, Zbornik Radova*, was

³⁰² Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

³⁰³ Finci 13.3.2000.

³⁰⁴ Čerešnješ 23.5.1999.

³⁰⁵ Finci 13.3.2000.

³⁰⁶ Statistical data given by Jewish Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo 14.3.2000.

³⁰⁷ *Oslobodenje* 2.2.1994.

³⁰⁸ *Maariv* 11.7.1995.

³⁰⁹ Finci 13.3.2000; *Jewish Chronicle* 19.9.1992.

³¹⁰ *Sefarad 92, Zbornik radova*, 9. Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju i Jevrejske zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine 1995.

published to commemorate this anniversary. Muhamed Nezirović's book *Jewish-Spanish Literature in Bosnia and Herzegovina* was published as part of the SEFARAD 92 celebration.³¹¹

One aspect of keeping the Sephardic tradition alive is the effort to ensure the survival of the Judeo-Spanish language,³¹² and one issue of *Bilten* was devoted to Judeo-Spanish and contained a dictionary of Judeo-Spanish by David Pardo.³¹³ An exceptionally rich survey of the history of Sephardic Jews in Sarajevo is conveyed by Isak Samokovlija's short stories, a collection of which was also translated into English and published in 1997.³¹⁴ In fact, before the end of communist rule in Yugoslavia, the Bosnian authorities had publicly recognised the Sephardic tradition in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in 1987 a major Sarajevo publishing house published a two-volume anthology of lyrics, ballads, charms and other texts.³¹⁵ The famous *Sarajevo Haggadah*,³¹⁶ a medieval Jewish manuscript from Spain, first survived the Second World War by being hidden from the Nazis in a mountain village near Sarajevo, and now this war by being deposited in the vaults of the Bank of Sarajevo.³¹⁷

Bosnian Jews decided from the very beginning of the war to adopt a policy of impartiality and took a strictly neutral stand towards the different national groups.³¹⁸ This attitude was made clear to outsiders and helped in many ways to overcome various obstacles during the war. Inside the community, however, there was less impartiality since part of the community sympathised with the Serbs on the one hand, and another part with the Muslims on the other hand, with only very few sympathising with the Croats.³¹⁹ Another division was created between the old and new members of the community. As the majority of the old members of the Sarajevo Jewish community emigrated during the war, and some 300–400 new members joined the community, the balance of the old community was disturbed.

³¹¹ *Bilten* (Sarajevo) 4/1993.

³¹² La Benevolencija published in 1994 a book entitled *Cuentos Sobre Los Sefardies De Sarajevo – A Collection of Sephardim Stories From Sarajevo*.

³¹³ *Bilten* (Sarajevo) 9/1995. The name of Pardo's dictionary published in this *Bilten* is *In Memoriam of the Everyday Spoken Bosnian Judeo-Spanish*. Much of the vocabulary in this dictionary is typical of Sarajevo Judeo-Spanish and not found in other dictionaries of the Judeo-Spanish language.

³¹⁴ Samokovlija, Isak (Lešić, Zdenko ed.): *Tales of Old Sarajevo*. London – Portland, Oregon: Vallentine Mitchell 1997.

³¹⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* 13.6.1995.

³¹⁶ The newest, and the first complete edition of the *Sarajevo Haggadah* was reproduced in 1999 together with an introductory study by Eugen Werber. This edition was printed in Ljubljana and published by SVJETLOST d.d, Sarajevo.

³¹⁷ *Time* 24.4.1995.

³¹⁸ *Finci* 13.3.2000.

³¹⁹ *Čerešnješ* 23.5.1999.

The newcomers already constituted a majority of the membership in 1995, and at the beginning of 2000 still constituted about half of the community. Consequently some old members accused the newcomers of returning to the community only because of the humanitarian aid received there.³²⁰ If that were not enough, there is a further split in the community: a tug-of-war between supporters of a 'political' and a 'religious' community. The religious community inside the community consists of only about 30 members, with David Kamhi, the Cantor of the Jewish community, acting as the spiritual leader of this group.³²¹

During the war in Bosnia the community was led by the architect Ivan Čerešnješ, who was the first Ashkenazi Jew to lead a Sephardic community,³²² and acted as the President of the Sarajevo Jewish community from 1988 until his immigration to Israel in 1995. During the same period he served as the Vice-President of the Federation of Jewish communities of Yugoslavia until the disintegration of Yugoslavia.³²³ By the end of the 1980s the new guard had taken over the community from the old Partisan fighters, and besides Čerešnješ, Jakob Finci and Danilo Nikolić were also elected to the community board.³²⁴ All these figures played crucial roles in the leadership of the community during the war period. Subsequently after Čerešnješ had left for Israel, Danilo Nikolić was elected as President.³²⁵

It was this Jewish community of all the communities in the former Yugoslavia which suffered most as a result of the war. The Sarajevo Jewish community called an extraordinary assembly on November 1, 1992 in order to adapt the activities of the community to suit wartime conditions. A Rule of Operation for conditions of war was accepted by the Jewish community of Sarajevo. It was decided, among other things, that the Presidency, acting as the collective organ of the community, should represent the community in all dealings with both organisations in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina and foreign organisations. During the war the Presidency carried out its duties in the following sectors: General and Judicial Matters, Financial-Economic Matters and Social-Cultural and Religious Matters. The Presidency was controlled by three members of the Management Committee.³²⁶

Now, several years after the war, slowly but surely life is returning to its normal course in the Sarajevo Jewish community. One concrete example of this

³²⁰ Finci 13.3.2000.

³²¹ Schwartz 14.3.2000.

³²² Serotta 1994, 9.

³²³ Čerešnješ 23.5.1999.

³²⁴ Serotta 1994, 9.

³²⁵ *Jevrejski Glas*, January 2000.

³²⁶ Čerešnješ Papers: Pravilnik o radu Jevrejske Opštine u Sarajevu u ratnim uslovima, November 1, 1992.

was the rebirth of the community library in the spring of 2000, when sacred books in Hebrew, Aramaic, Ladino and Yiddish, preserved for about seven years in steel coffers in the synagogue basement, were put back onto the shelves of the library.³²⁷ Every Friday there is *minyán* in the synagogue and every Saturday evening a communal dinner is organised in the community centre.³²⁸

Old Jewish (Sephardic) Graveyard

The famous Old Jewish Graveyard, located in the southwest of Sarajevo on the northern hillsides in the area of Kovačići, with a wonderful view over the town, was founded according to community records in 1630. The graveyard of more than 3,850 tombstones has some unique forms of tombstone with no equivalent in the Balkans or in Europe. The war which began in 1992 caused physical damage in various ways to 626 tombstones.³²⁹ The graveyard, on the front line during the war, was heavily mined, and also served as a sniper position for the Serbs besieging Sarajevo. Fortunately enough, the oldest and most valuable stones remained undamaged. The Norwegian People's Aid carried out the mine clearance of the graveyard in 1998.³³⁰ Currently the graveyard chapel is under renovation.³³¹

Other Communities in Bosnia: Mostar, Tuzla, Zenica, Banja Luka and Doboj

Mostar, the capital of Herzegovina, had 34 Jews at the beginning of the 1980s³³² and 28 Jews in 1995.³³³ The number of Jews in Mostar rose temporarily to about 100 in 1993³³⁴ when Jews from other parts of Bosnia stayed there before continuing on elsewhere. At the beginning of 2000 there were 33 members in the community³³⁵ thus indicating no remarkable change since the Yugoslav period. The role of Zoran Mandelbaum, the President of the Mostar Jewish Community, as a trusted intermediary between the warring parties, was crucial in securing the release

³²⁷ Schwartz, Stephen: "Letter from Sarajevo: Cherished books". *Forward*, March 3, 2000, 1, 18.

³²⁸ Finci 13.3.2000.

³²⁹ Mutapčić, Snježana: "Old Jewish graveyard". *Bilten-Glasnik Jevrejske Zajednice Bosne i Hercegovine*, No. 7-8, 1994, 34.

³³⁰ Finci 13.3.2000.

³³¹ Author's visit to the graveyard on 14.3.2000.

³³² *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981-1982)*.

³³³ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

³³⁴ *Bilten* (Sarajevo) 4/1993.

³³⁵ Statistical data about Bosnian Jewish communities, Sarajevo, 14.3.2000.

of prisoners during the war³³⁶ and therefore deserves to be mentioned in this context.

Tuzla in the northern part of Bosnia has hosted a Jewish community since 1880.³³⁷ At the beginning of the 1980s the Jewish community had 40 members.³³⁸ During the war in Bosnia the Muslims succeeded in holding Tuzla although it was surrounded by the Serb forces almost all the time. There were Jews from the Serb-held territory who escaped to Tuzla, which increased the number of Jews there. In 1995 the community already had 97 members³³⁹ and in 2000 110 members.³⁴⁰ Thus it has grown into the second largest Bosnian Jewish community, both as a result of Jews coming from other parts of the northern Bosnia and because of newcomers joining who had formerly not belonged to the Jewish community.

The first Jews had arrived in Zenica, located in central Bosnia on the River Bosna, in the 17th century, although the Zenica Jewish community was not founded until 1880. The synagogue, built in 1903, was converted into the City museum after World War II.³⁴¹ At the beginning of the 1980s there were 27 Jews³⁴² but during the war in Bosnia the number gradually increased to 37 in 1995,³⁴³ and to 45 at the beginning of 2000.³⁴⁴ Therefore it can be concluded that the war, in terms of the number of Jews in the community, benefited the Jewish community in Zenica.

Banja Luka in the northern part of Bosnia was in Serb-held territory during the entire wartime period, and is now also part of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. During the war the Federation of Jewish communities of Yugoslavia took care of Banja Luka's Jews, since communications with Sarajevo were cut due to the war. It was agreed through the Jewish Distribution Committee that the Federation would take care of the communities located in Serb-held Bosnian territory.³⁴⁵ This community was very small at the beginning of the 1980s with only 12 members³⁴⁶ but during the war numbers began to increase, reaching 53 in 1995.³⁴⁷ The Banja Luka Jewish community recently acquired an international reputation

³³⁶ I. Goldstein 9.1.2001.

³³⁷ Loker, Zvi: "Tuzla". In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 160.

³³⁸ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*.

³³⁹ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

³⁴⁰ Statistical data about Bosnian Jewish communities, Sarajevo, 14.3.2000.

³⁴¹ Loker, Zvi: "Zenica". In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 157.

³⁴² *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*.

³⁴³ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

³⁴⁴ Statistical data about Bosnian Jewish communities, Sarajevo, 14.3.2000.

³⁴⁵ Čerešnješ 26.5.1999.

³⁴⁶ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*.

³⁴⁷ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

since the President of the community was nominated as Bosnia's ambassador to Israel.³⁴⁸

The Doboj Jewish community is the second community in Bosnia located in the Serb Republic, of a similar size to the Banja Luka community, with only 18 members at the beginning of the 1980s.³⁴⁹ During the war the number of Jews in the community increased, first to 68 in 1995³⁵⁰ and then to 71 at the beginning of 2000.³⁵¹ The Doboj community managed to hold both Seder and Hanukkah celebrations during the war.³⁵² The President of the Doboj Jewish community, Mordehai Attias, came to be known as a pro-Serbian patriot during the war, calling himself 'the only Jewish Chetnik³⁵³ on the planet'.³⁵⁴ There seems to be a strong pro-Serbian attitude in this community since in 1997 they were refurbishing the premises which they received free of charge for the use of both the community and the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society.³⁵⁵

In addition to these two Jewish communities in the Serb Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, there were also Jews living in at least the following localities: Pale, Trebinje, Bijeljina, Visegrad, Teslić and Brčko.³⁵⁶ According to the Belgrade data, there were altogether about 200 Jews living in the territory of the Serb Republic.³⁵⁷ The reasons for the increase in membership in this area of Bosnia are as obvious as elsewhere: the search for humanitarian aid, the renewal of Jewish identification, and the roots and security felt among fellow-Jews have been reasons for the growth of these communities. Though both the Banja Luka and Doboj communities are now part and parcel of the Jewish community of Bosnia and Herzegovina centred in Sarajevo, some disputes dating from the war years are still alive. For example, there was a person calling himself the Chief Rabbi of the Serb Republic of Bosnia during the war in the Banja Luka Jewish community. This was accepted during the war

³⁴⁸ Finci 13.3.2000; *Haaretz* 7.1.2000.

³⁴⁹ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*.

³⁵⁰ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

³⁵¹ Statistical data about Bosnian Jewish communities, Sarajevo, 14.3.2000.

³⁵² *Bilten* (Belgrade) 5/1994 and 1/1995.

³⁵³ Chetnik means literally a member of a *četa*, or armed band, and came to be used to mean especially a band of guerrillas who fought against the Turks during the Ottoman occupation. In the Second World War there were various groups fighting under the Chetnik name, though to the outside world the name Chetnik was mostly associated with Colonel Draža Mihailović whose aim was to restore monarchy in Yugoslavia after the Axis powers lost the war. (Singleton 1985, 187–189). In the war of the disintegration of Yugoslavia the Serbian irregular and ultra-nationalist paramilitary, who were largely responsible for the so-called ethnic cleansings in northern Bosnia, were called Chetniks.

³⁵⁴ *Jerusalem Report* 5.5.1994.

³⁵⁵ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 6/1997.

³⁵⁶ Albahari 7.6.1996; *Bilten* (Belgrade) 11/1995.

³⁵⁷ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 9/1994.

because he did it for humanitarian reasons but now, several years after the end of the war, he still continues to use this title against the wishes of the Sarajevo Jewish community.³⁵⁸

5.2.4. Slovenia

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

After World War II there was only one Jewish community in Slovenia, located in the capital Ljubljana. There were 110 Jews in Ljubljana in 1954 and ten years later only 84 in Ljubljana.³⁵⁹ At the beginning of the 1980s there were 116 Jews altogether in Slovenia, the majority of them in Ljubljana and a few in the towns of Lendava, Maribor and Murska Sobota.³⁶⁰ Slovenian independence did not significantly alter the situation of the Jews in Slovenia, in comparison with the former times. The community had already existed for some time mainly on paper without any organised activities.³⁶¹ In 1995 there were only 72 Jews left in Slovenia.³⁶² However, it is worth noting that between 30 and 50 Bosnian refugees moved to Slovenia and received citizenship immediately on their arrival.³⁶³ As a result there are over 100 Jews in Slovenia today. In addition, there are an estimated 200–300 Jews living in Slovenia not affiliated with the Jewish community.³⁶⁴

According to the Slovenian Jewish politician Lev Kreft, there is some antisemitism in Slovenia, but this is not directed towards Slovenia's own Jews, for the Slovenes in general are totally unaware of their Jewish minority.³⁶⁵ The returning to roots evident in the other republics of former Yugoslavia is not found among Slovenian Jews. Those factors which forced Jews to seek identity and social security in the Jewish communities in the midst of a disintegrating Yugoslavia were not present in Slovenia. Neither was external pressure exerted. The Slovenian Jew-

³⁵⁸ Schwartz 14.3.2000.

³⁵⁹ Etz-Hayyim, Moshe: "Ljubljana". In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 165.

³⁶⁰ *Jevrejski Kalendar 5742 (1981–1982)*.

³⁶¹ This was apparent to this author as many attempts to obtain information from representatives of Slovenian Jewry were unsuccessful for unknown reasons.

³⁶² Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

³⁶³ Sade 12.6.1996.

³⁶⁴ CAHJP-EA, G-975: Notes on the lecture given by Dr. Lev Kreft in Jerusalem, Jan 10, 1996.

³⁶⁵ CAHJP-EA, G-975: Notes on the lecture given by Dr. Lev Kreft in Jerusalem, Jan 10, 1996.

ish Community is by far the weakest, in terms of activity, of the Jewish communities of the former Yugoslavia. According to the JDC Annual Report of 1997, an Israeli folk dance group has been started in Ljubljana and a JDC-trained Slovenian-American teacher has set up a Jewish education programme. This development has been seen as related to the change in community leadership.³⁶⁶ Only time will tell whether these changes can bring new life to this community, which seems to be destined to die of natural causes. The transition of Slovenia from a republic of the former Yugoslavia to independence was sufficiently painless, and the economic situation was the best among the countries of ex-Yugoslavia, so that no need arose among Slovenia's Jews to seek security and shelter in the Jewish community.

5.2.5. Macedonia

The Macedonian secession from former Yugoslavia took place peacefully. As is the case with Slovenia, Macedonia also has its own language, Macedonian, which differs from Serbo-Croat.

The transition from the Republic of Yugoslavia to the independent state of Macedonia (or FYROM – Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as it is officially called) had few significant effects on the Jewish minority of Macedonia. After World War II there remained one Jewish community in Macedonia, that of Skopje, preserving a rich and long tradition of Macedonian Jewry. Most Macedonian Jews perished in the Holocaust, and only 328 Jews survived to continue Jewish life in Skopje after the war. The number of Jews decreased and in 1969 only 54 Jews were left.³⁶⁷ After that the number of Jews slowly increased, reaching a total of 112 just before the disintegration of Yugoslavia,³⁶⁸ and this growth continued as a result of the disintegration of Yugoslavia so that in 1996 there were 165³⁶⁹, in 1998 as many as 182 Jews in the community³⁷⁰, and about 200 in summer 2000.³⁷¹ According to Jewish Agency information, only six Jews emigrated to Israel during the war.³⁷² Almost all the Macedonian Jews live in Skopje; for practical purposes only one family, consisting of seven persons, lives outside Skopje, in Bitola.³⁷³

³⁶⁶ *Annual Report 1997*. New York: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Inc. 1998, 42.

³⁶⁷ Lebl, Ženi: "Skopje". In Zvi Loker (ed.): *Pinkas Hakehillot – Yugoslavia*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 1988, 256.

³⁶⁸ Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

³⁶⁹ Iliev 1.4.1996.

³⁷⁰ *Bilten* (Belgrade) 12/1998.

³⁷¹ Sami 5.6.2000.

³⁷² Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

³⁷³ Sami 5.6.2000.

The independence of Macedonia also led Macedonia's Jews to create a communal framework of their own and an independent organisation was established in September 1991 under the name *Evrejska Zaednica na Makedonija* – Jewish Community of Macedonia. The community is recognised by the state as both an ethnic and a religious minority. The General Assembly of Macedonian Jewry elects community officials to different bodies of the community for a period of four years. Elected officials and bodies are the President of the community, the Executive Board (consisting of the President of the community and six additional members) and the Supervisory Board for supervising financial matters. A Religious Board is about to be established as well as a Statutory Committee for revising the Constitution of the Community. The community publishes its own bulletin 4–5 times per year, and in addition to this, has succeeded in publishing on average one book per year, the most recent being *The Jews of Štip* with a summary translation of the *Hagadah*.³⁷⁴

In March 2000 the community held a commemoration of the deportation of Macedonian Jews during World War II, and on the same occasion the new synagogue in the community premises was officially opened.³⁷⁵ The community has promising prospects of growth since, in the estimation of community official Zdravko Sami, there are still probably a few hundred Jews outside the community who are slowly but gradually showing interest in it. Like the other Jewish communities in former Yugoslavia, the community is working for the return of the community property. This matter awaits the enactment of a new law on the denationalisation of the property of religious communities. The Macedonian State has established a special Board for the construction of a Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the Jewish community participates in the Board and its efforts. The Museum will be located in the old Jewish quarter of Skopje.³⁷⁶

Tomislav Iliev, the secretary of the community, estimated in 1996 that the biggest cause of concern for the Jewish community was assimilation.³⁷⁷ It appears, however, that in this regard the greatest danger has passed, as the number of people in the community is steadily growing, activities take place regularly and the new synagogue, for its part, provides more facilities for renewing interest in the Jewish life in Skopje. Moreover, antisemitism poses no problem in Macedonia³⁷⁸ and therefore makes no contribution to emigration aspirations, which can be seen in the very small number of emigrants.

³⁷⁴ Sami 5.6.2000.

³⁷⁵ Sami 5.6.2000.

³⁷⁶ Sami 5.6.2000.

³⁷⁷ Iliev 1.4.1996.

³⁷⁸ Sami 5.6.2000.

The main focus of the community activity is on children and youth including Jewish education, summer camps, visits to Israel and learning Hebrew. During the Kosovo War the community formed a humanitarian organisation *La Benevolencija* (a separate organisation from the one established in Bosnia, which will be dealt with in the next section) supported by the international Jewish community and the JDC.³⁷⁹ All in all, even a cautious estimate leads to the view that the future prospects of Macedonian Jewry are promising.

5.3. LA BENEVOLENCIJA

Certainly one of the most meaningful and boldest Jewish activities amid the disintegration of Yugoslavia was carried out by *La Benevolencija*, the Jewish philanthropic society of Sarajevo, which was founded in 1991 to display the richness of Jewish culture in Sarajevo. The founding of *La Benevolencija* became possible after the first democratic elections in Bosnia in November 1990, when the new authorities allowed the establishment of national associations, and of course not only *La Benevolencija* but also many other national associations were established at the same time.³⁸⁰

In fact, the original *La Benevolencija* had been founded in 1892 by wealthy Sarajevo Sephardi Jews who decided to give aid to the needy Jews of the town. Consequently it became the most important Jewish philanthropic society in Sarajevo.³⁸¹ The society was closed down in 1941 when the Second World War began, and as was the case with other national organisations, the renewal of its activities after the war was not allowed.³⁸² The revival of *La Benevolencia* in Bosnia in spring 1991 was reported visibly in different newspapers, including *Oslobođenje* and *Muslimanski Glas*.³⁸³

In Sarajevo the plan was to channel all activities not strictly religious in nature, especially cultural, humanitarian and educational activities, through *La Benevolencija*. Organisationally it was established as an independent organisation alongside the Jewish Community of Sarajevo, with its own Board of thirteen members, seven of whom were the presidents of the Bosnian Jewish communities, with six other Jews or non-Jews. The community is registered with both the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs.³⁸⁴ The first President of *La Benevolencija* was

³⁷⁹ Sami 5.6.2000.

³⁸⁰ Finci 13.3.2000.

³⁸¹ Freidenreich 1979, 116.

³⁸² Čerešnješ 26.5.1999; Finci 13.3.2000.

³⁸³ See *Oslobođenje* April 29, 1991 and *Muslimanski Glas*, May 3, 1991, for example.

³⁸⁴ Finci 13.3.2000.

Jacob Gaon, a member of the Academy of Sciences of Bosnia. As an elderly person he was evacuated from Bosnia at the beginning of war, and the then Vice-President, Jakob Finci, took over as President of the society. Immediately before the war broke out in Bosnia, La Benevolencija prepared an extensive program for the Sarajevo Winter Festival in February – March 1992 called *Shalom Sarajevo* with concerts and an exhibition: ‘Jews to our beloved city’. This festival served as a manifestation of the newborn La Benevolencija for the Sarajevans, and its programme was a great success.³⁸⁵ As the wheels of history turned, the cultural work was replaced by extensive humanitarian work in which La Benevolencija was engaged for the entire period of the war in Sarajevo and Bosnia.

La Benevolencija in the War

The Jews of Sarajevo understood that war was coming, sooner or later, to Bosnia as well when fighting broke out in Slovenia and Croatia in summer 1991. At that time they drew up an initial plan to send schoolchildren to Israel for a period of one year from September 1991. This plan, however, was never implemented owing to financial problems.³⁸⁶

The turning point in the war preparations, however, was the siege of Dubrovnik in the autumn of 1991, which showed what eventually could happen in Sarajevo, and Jewish leaders in Sarajevo began to prepare a ‘Survival in Sarajevo’ plan. La Benevolencija was the framework organisation and all the preparations were made under its auspices. Doctors and pharmacists were called in to prepare a list of medicines and equipment needed for at least two months in case something happened; this was considered a very important precaution, bearing in mind that majority of the community members were elderly people. All the funds were put together, and as a result large quantities of medicines and food were bought locally to be stored for the winter 1991–92 in the Jewish community hall, which was converted to serve as a warehouse. Later this decision turned out to be crucial as the warehouses of many humanitarian organisations lay outside Sarajevo, and were therefore out of reach. At the same time the leaders of La Benevolencija decided to keep a deliberately high profile with as much publicity as possible as a security measure for Jews. It was decided to keep everything open and public. The tension in Bosnia gradually mounted during the spring of 1992 and war finally broke out in April 1992; the siege of Sarajevo began on May 2, 1992. By that time the Bosnian Jewish communities, and especially the Sarajevo Jewish community, thanks to La Benevolencija, were exceptionally well prepared for the coming war.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁵ Finci 13.3.2000.

³⁸⁶ Finci 13.3.2000.

La Benevolencija began immediately to distribute food and medicines from the Jewish community centre, not only to members of the community but to all needy Sarajevans. Soon the first pharmacy was opened, called by the locals the *Jewish Pharmacy* since La Benevolencija was too difficult to pronounce. Later two more pharmacies were opened in different parts of Sarajevo. Between 1992–94 the Jewish community distributed almost 40 per cent of all the medicines needed by the residents of Sarajevo through La Benevolencija pharmacies. This figure was approved by the Ministry of Health.³⁸⁸ Many Moslems of Sarajevo have said that this may have saved Sarajevans from the epidemics which are usually fatal under such conditions.³⁸⁹ A symbolic gesture of thanks was given by the city in 1994 when the street where the magnificent pre-Second World War La Benevolencija building was located, which is now used by the Bosnian Interior Ministry, was renamed La Benevolencija Street.³⁹⁰

A soup kitchen was opened and between 1992 and 1996 free meals were distributed in the community centre. In November 1992 a two-way radio link was established from the community centre to the Zagreb Jewish community, and from there to everywhere in the world. As this was almost the only link between the Sarajevans and the outside world, it was extremely important for morale and survival, and helped many temporarily separated families to keep in contact with each other.³⁹¹ In addition to this, La Benevolencija ran a first aid clinic with a multi-ethnic staff and a post office which in only two years channelled over 150,000 letters from the city's trapped citizens to their families abroad and vice versa.³⁹²

La Benevolencija signed a contract with the UNHCR and so became part of its activities in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It also co-operated with other local humanitarian organisations such as the *Merhemet* of the Muslims, *Caritas* of the Croats and *Dobrotvor* of the Serbs.³⁹³ There were approximately 60 staff members and volunteers working for La Benevolencija during the war, and only about 30 per cent of them were Jewish.³⁹⁴ Not only humanitarian work was done, but cultural activities were also carried out in order to keep up morale. For example, languages courses teaching Hebrew, Arabic, English, German and French were started.³⁹⁵

³⁸⁷ Finci 13.3.2000.

³⁸⁸ Finci 13.3.2000.

³⁸⁹ Schwartz 14.3.2000.

³⁹⁰ *Oslobodjenje* 2.2.1994.

³⁹¹ Finci 13.3.2000.

³⁹² Čerešnješ Papers: Report about activities from 1991–1995, Jewish community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, 25.12.1995.

³⁹³ Finci 13.3.2000.

³⁹⁴ Finci 13.3.2000.

³⁹⁵ Finci 13.3.2000.

Due to the clear non-partisan position chosen by La Benevolencija from the very beginning of the war, it was able to stretch out a helping hand to all victims of Sarajevo, Muslims, Serbs and Croats alike. In this role it was supported both financially and politically by the World Jewish Congress and logistically by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the World Jewish Relief from London, and by numbers of Jewish communities all over Europe and America. La Benevolencija also set up an informal network of 'Friends of La Benevolencija' in most European countries as well as with several American voluntary groups. These groups collected funds for La Benevolencija in Sarajevo in order to purchase humanitarian parcels and provide basic supplies. La Benevolencija was trusted by all the authorities in Sarajevo and Bosnia. Muslims considered it as a friend, as did the Bosnian Serbs and Croats, for all of them knew that La Benevolencija was helping their own people inside the besieged city. Basically for this reason, La Benevolencija was in a position to negotiate the arrival and the distribution of humanitarian aid in Sarajevo.³⁹⁶ The documentary photographer Edward Serotta correctly stated that for the first time during a modern European war, Jews have actively been involved in saving and rescuing Christians and Muslims.³⁹⁷

La Benevolencija in the Post-war Period

After the Dayton Agreement at the end of 1995, La Benevolencija had three scenarios for the future. The first was a war scenario, the second a peace scenario and the third, and subsequently the chosen one, something in between. Though the humanitarian work still continues, cultural activities are taking its place as the major interest of La Benevolencija. La Benevolencija publishes the monthly bulletin of the Bosnian Jewish communities and broadcasts a radio programme *Radio La Benevolencija* for an hour every week, and also takes part in the joint inter-religious radio programme called *Susret* along with other religious communities. Groups of teenagers are trained in Sunday School, and programmes are arranged for a group of children from the community's neighbourhood. La Benevolencija has an art gallery in Novi Hram (the former New Sephardic Synagogue) with some 15 exhibitions every year. The humanitarian work consists of taking care of the elderly, both Jews and non-Jews, and providing them with medicines. The Soup Kitchen was turned into a small restaurant which provides very cheap meals in the community centre.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁶ Čerešnješ Papers: Report about activities from 1991–1995, Jewish community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, 25.12.1995.

³⁹⁷ Serotta 1994, 10.

³⁹⁸ Finci 13.3.2000.

To aid the economic recovery of Sarajevo, La Benevolencija with the help of the World Bank developed micro-lending facilities providing small loans of up to 10,000 DEM to enable people to start their own businesses and to generate jobs. This project ran from 1996 to 1999.³⁹⁹

The report of the Jewish community activities in Bosnia-Herzegovina conveys the significance of the Sarajevo Jews' contribution during the siege of the city as follows:

Perhaps the most important of all in 'spiritual' terms, furnishing in the Sarajevo Jewish community complex an open space where everyone was welcome and where all could find words of comfort or concrete assistance. The Jewish community turned the Sarajevo synagogue into an open house for all, an oasis of civilization in a sea of barbarity, a place where citizens of Sarajevo from all ethnic and religious groups could still meet and find a spark of their city's tolerant openness.⁴⁰⁰

The *London Jewish Chronicle* named La Benevolencija as 'Newsmaker of the Year' in 1996.⁴⁰¹

Unquestionably Sarajevo's Jews through the contribution of La Benevolencija played an important role in the survival of Sarajevo during the siege and the war. Many thousands of Sarajevans received aid there. In fact, La Benevolencija was the only active Jewish organ during the war in Sarajevo, as almost all activities were channelled through it. The Jewish community centre provided premises for La Benevolencija, and the Sarajevo Jewish community as a community stayed alive through La Benevolencija, too. As the Report describes, the activities of the Jewish community in Sarajevo and La Benevolencija, cannot be separated, because they were working together, with some activities being carried on in the name of the community and some in the name of La Benevolencija.⁴⁰²

One repercussion worth mentioning is that the example of La Benevolencija in Sarajevo provided a model for a Jewish European body, the CARELINK, created by the initiative of the European Council of Jewish Communities to channel aid to any spot where such aid would be needed.⁴⁰³

Eventually the situation in Sarajevo came to resemble that of Belgrade after the Second World War. During the initial post-war years almost all activities were

³⁹⁹ Finci 13.3.2000.

⁴⁰⁰ Čerešnješ Papers: Report about activities from 1991–1995, Jewish community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, 25.12.1995.

⁴⁰¹ Cited in the *American Jewish Year Book*, 1998, 359.

⁴⁰² Čerešnješ Papers: Report about activities from 1991–1995, Jewish community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, 25.12.1995.

⁴⁰³ Barth, Theodor: "Ben Zug: Jewish identity and the books of Zagreb and Sarajevo". In Barth, Theodor & Magnus Enzell (eds.): *Collective Identity and Citizenship in Europe. Fields of Access and Exclusion*. (The Van Leer Institute Report No. 3.) Oslo: Arena & Jerusalem: The Van Leer Institute, 1999, 226.

channelled through the Autonomous Relief Committee under the leadership of the able David Alkalaj. There was almost no activity in the Belgrade Jewish community itself, while the Autonomous Relief Committee ran all activities, most of which in the nature of things were humanitarian. Now, during the war in Bosnia, La Benevolencija undertook a similar task as in fact the only active organ of the Sarajevo Jews. Jakob Finci as a head of La Benevolencija and Ivan Čerešnješ,⁴⁰⁴ the head of the community, provided in their time the same initiative and capable leadership as David Alkalaj had in his time. This war proved again that the Jews of former Yugoslavia were especially ready to organise humanitarian aid. The active Jewish philanthropic societies of pre-World War II period, the undertaking of the huge task of repatriation and rebuilding of Jewish communities in the first post-war years, and finally now, the exceptionally prominent work of the Sarajevo Jews can only be recorded. It must be remembered, however, that both the Belgrade and Zagreb Jewish communities were participants in this activity, by helping Jewish refugees coming from Bosnia. In Belgrade, for example, Jews established their own pharmacy in the premises of the Federation of Jewish communities. This tendency towards philanthropic activity can be said to be one specific feature of the former Yugoslav Jewry. It even seems, that while this secular Jewry has acted according to its own *Yugoslav halachah* in general, the readiness to help others is a real *mitsvah* for them. It is a rule which they have fully observed.

The Sarajevo Jews' organised efforts and procedures under the conditions of war have set an example to other Jewish populations and communities which find themselves living under oppressive conditions. The general pattern, taking into consideration the local situation, is adaptable. The rules are basically as follows: (i) wide publicity is needed with international (Jewish) links, (ii) openness towards local society must be combined with the distribution of non-sectarian humanitarian aid and (iii) there must be strict but public neutrality with regard to political factions. Following these rules can help the Jewish community in suppressed conditions to survive, and help others to survive, too.

* * *

The conclusion of this research into the treatment of post-Yugoslav Jewish communities suggests positioning them, according to their structure, among contemporary patterns of communal organisation. According to Daniel Elazar there are still today five types of communities with five patterns of Jewish communal organisations.⁴⁰⁵ Division among the post-Yugoslav Jewish communities is quite clear.

⁴⁰⁴ Ivan Čerešnješ for his crucial efforts in helping hundreds of Jews and non-Jews to leave Sarajevo and also organising humanitarian aid, received one of France's highest honours, the Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur. (*Jewish Chronicle* 21.10.1994).

The three largest with their own central and umbrella organisations i.e. Yugoslavia and the Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia with its most prominent community, the Jewish community of Belgrade; Croatia and the Coordination Committee of Jewish communities in Croatia with its most influential community, the Jewish community of Zagreb, and Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Federation of Jewish Communities of Bosnia-Herzegovina with its leading community, the Jewish community of Sarajevo, all belong to the category of Integrated Congregation pattern. In all of them several Jewish organisations/institutions exist, all bound together by some form of umbrella organisation. Elazar has placed Bosnia and Croatia under this pattern but for some reason, Yugoslavia under the Single Organisation pattern.⁴⁰⁶ This study disagrees with Elazar's categorisation since Yugoslavia fulfils in a similar way the requirements of the Integrated Congregation pattern, like Bosnia and Croatia. It is irrelevant to this division that the Federation of Jewish communities of Yugoslavia plays a more authoritative role than its counterparts in Croatia and Bosnia. However, Elazar places Slovenia correctly in the Single Organisation pattern⁴⁰⁷, while he forgets to mention Macedonia at all. Macedonian Jewry must naturally be placed in the same pattern as Slovenian Jewry.

In general, all the Jewish communities are still dependent on the financial aid given by international Jewish organisation, especially the JDC. In this respect, the situation has not changed since the disintegration of Yugoslavia. However, while Jewish communities were formerly more passive recipients of the aid, today they are, because of changed circumstances and the legitimate opportunity to reclaim lost property, active participants working hard to regain their property. Should they receive even a part of the property they are claiming, their dependence on the international Jewish organisation would decrease considerably. This would make them to a large extent self-supporting for the first time since the end of World War II. The freedom to develop Jewish activities and organisations in the post-Yugoslav setting has, in fact, repositioned the nature of Jewry as a whole to correspond that of the inter-war period in Yugoslavia, though naturally in a much smaller scope. Many changes in the political context surrounding Jews living in the region of Yugoslavia have transformed them by moulding them to suit the prevailing conditions.

⁴⁰⁵ These patterns are: (1) the Single Organisation/Congregation pattern which reflects the simplest type of patterns and exists only in the smallest communities which cannot maintain different organisations alongside the existing one; (2) the Integrated Congregation pattern in which several different organisations or congregations exist but are all tied together around a single community and operate within that integrated framework; (3) Government-Assisted Framing Institutions; (4) Government-Recognised Framing Organisations; and lastly, (5) Diffused organisations (for more on these patterns see Elazar, Daniel J.: "Jewish communal structures around the world". *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 74, No. 2-3, 1997-98, 121-123.

⁴⁰⁶ Elazar 1997-98, 122.

⁴⁰⁷ Elazar 1997-98, 126.

