

## 6. EMIGRATION

The Jewish Agency for Israel started preparations for the emigration of Yugoslav Jews to Israel as fears grew that war might break out. Tuvya Raviv, a representative of the Jewish Agency, arrived in Yugoslavia for his first visit between 11–14 May, 1991,<sup>408</sup> in order to gain an overall picture of the situation of the Jews in Yugoslavia and to find out what they wished to do in the event of war. The Jewish Agency was convinced that the outbreak of war was imminent, and so it was necessary to find a way to evacuate the Jews from Yugoslavia in case of emergency. As a first step the Jewish Agency opened an office in Budapest, which was perfectly situated and conveniently within reach of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. The next step was for Raviv, during his visit to different Jewish communities in June, to advise Lavoslav Kadelburg, the President of the Federation of Jewish Communities, to provide Jews with documents indicating that the bearers were members of the Jewish community.<sup>409</sup>

Raviv's first visit to Yugoslavia failed to evoke an enthusiastic response among the Jews. He found it difficult to convince them that war was about to break out. During the first three months after his first visit, there was not even one positive response to his exhortation to emigrate to Israel. According to Raviv, such an unenthusiastic response was due to the following factors: assimilation, identification as Yugoslavs, a lack of religious Jews and a relatively high standard of living among the Jews in Yugoslavia. More than 90 per cent of Jews lived in mixed marriages,<sup>410</sup> which accordingly made the decision to emigrate more difficult.<sup>411</sup> Lavoslav Kadelburg himself did not believe that war would come<sup>412</sup> and when Raviv asked him for community records, Kadelburg turned the request down.<sup>413</sup> More-

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<sup>408</sup> Raviv 1997, 15. Raviv's book about his activities in the former Yugoslavia between 1991–95 is an interesting personal account of events related to the Jewish emigration from the former Yugoslavia. In particular Raviv's reports on his visits to the Jewish communities, included in the book, explore the state of Yugoslav Jewry in the collapsing Yugoslavia, the prevailing mood and attitudes among Jews, and further, the problems the representative of the Zionist organisation encountered with a basically non-Zionist Jewish population.

<sup>409</sup> Raviv 23.6.1996; Raviv 1997, 36.

<sup>410</sup> Raviv 1997, 20.

<sup>411</sup> Raviv 23.6.1996.

<sup>412</sup> Raviv 1997, 37.

<sup>413</sup> Raviv 1997, 36.

over, Kadelburg was strongly against the distribution of documents indicating membership in the Jewish community, as in his view this was Zionist activity and therefore forbidden. Raviv's advice mentioned above to distribute the documents was finally accepted by the Emergency Committee of the Federation on August 8, 1991.<sup>414</sup> The difficulties Raviv faced during the spring and summer of 1991 in the Jewish communities reflect the nature of Yugoslav Jewry. First of all, they were not interested in immigration to Israel, and secondly, as Kadelburg expressed it, they, the Jews, were Yugoslavs, and for them it would be disloyal to escape in a time of crisis. It even seemed to Raviv that every new emigrant to Israel was perceived by the Jewish leaders as their personal failure.<sup>415</sup>

Obviously the Jews, in general, had hoped until the last moment that the crisis in Yugoslavia would not lead to war. As a result they were shocked after the fighting broke out in Slovenia and Croatia, failing to understand what was going on.<sup>416</sup> Consequently some Jews of the younger generation, afraid of the possibility of being drafted, turned to Raviv for help in the summer of 1991.<sup>417</sup> The war in Croatia, however, did not lead to any mass emigration, and during the first eight months of the war only 210 Jews arrived in Israel. During these first months of the war some 80 children were also evacuated to Israel from the areas affected by the fighting. Later, at the request of their parents, the children returned to Croatia.<sup>418</sup> At this stage it had become evident that the Jews of Yugoslavia were in no particular danger because of their being Jewish, but only because of the fighting.<sup>419</sup>

The Yugoslav Jewish leaders and Jews were also angry with Uri Gordon, the head of the Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency, who stated in the Israeli daily *Yediot Aharonot* on July 4th, 1991 that the Yugoslav Jews had been afraid since the beginning of the fighting and wanted to emigrate immediately. This news was also translated and published in the Yugoslav media, which put the Jewish leaders in Yugoslavia in an unpleasant position, obliging them to explain themselves and convince the Yugoslav public that they were not intending to leave.<sup>420</sup> The situation was especially delicate in Bosnia, where it was considered a matter of particular importance for the Moslem-led government that the Jews should stay put. The Jewish community understood this and tried in every way possible to conceal from the public that they were considering the possibility of leaving.<sup>421</sup> Before the

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<sup>414</sup> Raviv 1997, 58.

<sup>415</sup> Raviv 1997, 52.

<sup>416</sup> Raviv 1997, 34.

<sup>417</sup> Raviv 23.6.1996; Raviv 1997, 52.

<sup>418</sup> *Haaretz* 12.4.1991.

<sup>419</sup> *Haaretz* 13.4.1992.

<sup>420</sup> Raviv 1997, 42, 73.

<sup>421</sup> Raviv 1997, 104.

evacuations from Sarajevo in April 1992, President Alija Izetbegović declared that 'if the Jews leave or disappear, Sarajevo is finished. It's a symbol of something.' The Jewish leaders' answer to this was that they were not going to shut down completely, but women and children would be evacuated in order not to endanger their lives.<sup>422</sup> As a matter of fact, there was another group, for obvious reasons not publicly mentioned, which there were plans to take out. These were the Jewish community's young male members of draft age, and accordingly all the young potential conscripts were evacuated by August 1992, before the Bosnian government controlled all the exits from Sarajevo.<sup>423</sup>

As war was raging in Bosnia, the Jewish Agency, through its representative, kept in constant touch with the leaders of the Sarajevo and Zagreb Jewish communities in order to carry out the evacuation of Jews in case of emergency.<sup>424</sup> Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, was in danger of surrendering to the Serbs, and the Jews living there realised that they, too, were under threat. Hence three evacuation flights were organised with the help of the Belgrade Jewish community, which made an agreement with a government in Belgrade. These flights from Sarajevo to Belgrade took place using Yugoslav Air Force cargo planes on the 10th and 17th of April and the 1st of May 1992,<sup>425</sup> and evacuated about 420 Jews, mainly elderly people and children. Some of the evacuees continued on to Israel while the rest stayed in Belgrade. Some Jews managed even later to reach Belgrade individually by car or bus, when evacuation by air became impossible.<sup>426</sup> The Federation of Jewish Communities in Belgrade took care of the evacuees who arrived there.<sup>427</sup> Altogether 1,077 Bosnian Jews moved from Bosnia to Belgrade.<sup>428</sup>

The evacuation flights were the result of cooperation between the Jewish Agency, the JDC, the Sarajevo Jewish community, La Benevolencija and the Belgrade Jewish community. Besides Raviv, others actively involved in this operation were Yechiel Bar-Chaim, the JDC's Country Director for Yugoslavia, Eli Eliezri, the JDC's Special Representative, Jakov Bienenfeld, a Zagreb businessman and Jewish community member with ties to the JNA<sup>429</sup> (his father was a former JNA Colonel, and later a general in the Croatian Army as well as an advisor of Tudjman)<sup>430</sup> together with Ivan Čerešnješ and Jakob Finci from Sarajevo. The JDC

<sup>422</sup> Cited in *Guardian Weekend* 10.12.1994.

<sup>423</sup> *Guardian Weekend* 10.12.1994; Serotta 1994, 45.

<sup>424</sup> *Haaretz* 12.4.1992.

<sup>425</sup> *Annual Report 1992*. New York: American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Inc., 1993.

<sup>426</sup> Raviv 23.6.1996; Raviv 1997, 106, 112.

<sup>427</sup> Grinvald 6.6.1996.

<sup>428</sup> Grinvald 28.6.2000.

<sup>429</sup> Serotta 1994, 40.

<sup>430</sup> S. Goldstein 16.3.2000; Raviv 1997, 78.

rented<sup>431</sup> the cargo planes from the JNA for these evacuation flights.<sup>432</sup> JNA officers took the chance offered by these flights, and the first plane was partly filled with family members of officers instead of Sarajevo Jews, and only after a temporary period of chaos were two additional planes flown in, which took the evacuees to Belgrade.<sup>433</sup>

The Sarajevo Jews had actually been prepared for the possibility of evacuation since July 1991, when about 400 Jews, at the suggestion of the community leaders, applied for visas for Israel. This operation was carried out by the Sarajevo Jewish community through the Belgian Embassy in Belgrade, which at that time represented Israeli interests in Yugoslavia.<sup>434</sup>

After this the evacuation had to be redirected to Split in Croatia by land routes. Bus convoys were organised by the Sarajevo Jewish community and the Jewish communities in Croatia, together with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. The Central British Fund also took part in financing these operations.<sup>435</sup> The first land convoy left Sarajevo in August, 1992 and the last in the summer of 1993. There were altogether 12 convoys, and in each of them non-Jewish refugees were

<sup>431</sup> These flights were funded by the American Joint Distribution Committee and CBF World Jewish Relief (*CBF – World Jewish Relief. 59th Annual Report 1992*). According to some sources the JNA evacuation flights were facilitated by Israeli arms deals with Serbia. The *European* newspaper reported that Israel might have broken the arms embargo imposed on the former Yugoslavia by selling arms to Serbia in return for permission to evacuate Jews from Sarajevo (*European*, June 4–10, 1993). At least one book written in Yugoslavia describes a major arms deal between Serbia and Israel in October 1991, a month after the UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo on all parts of the former Yugoslavia. (Kofman, Daniel: "Israel and the war in Bosnia". In Cushman, Thomas and Stjepan G. Meštrović (eds.) *This Time We Knew. Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia*. New York – London: New York University Press 1996, 113–114). Naturally the connection between arms deals and the evacuation of Jews cannot yet be proved but it certainly smoothed the way. In any case, Belgrade enjoyed several dubious but high-level Israeli visits during its international isolation. Uri Orr, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Security Council of the Knesset (whose responsibilities include the arms trade with foreign states) visited Belgrade in the summer of 1994 and emphasised during his visit Israeli support of Serbia because of history and World War II. Israeli-manufactured arms, used by the Serbian forces in Bosnia, (Kofman 1996, 114–115) made some headlines in the media during the war in Bosnia. Other sources claimed that ensuring safe passage for evacuation convoys required stuffing of thousands of dollars into the pockets of senior Serbian army officers in Belgrade (*Guardian Weekend* 10.12.1994). There were also reports of Israeli arms sales to other countries in the former Yugoslavia. The French television network announced at the beginning of 1991 that Israeli arms dealers were involved in selling weapons to the Croatian Army, and in 1995 Israel decided to ship arms to Bosnia, including antitank and personal weapons (Abadi 1996, 303–304).

<sup>432</sup> Serotta 1994, 40.

<sup>433</sup> Serotta 1994, 41.

<sup>434</sup> Čerešnjev 23.5.1999.

<sup>435</sup> *Annual Report 1993*. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Inc. 1994.

included.<sup>436</sup> The aim of the Sarajevo Jewish community was to evacuate children, in particular, and all those who would be unable to survive the cold, hunger, and disease in the besieged city of Sarajevo.<sup>437</sup> Sarajevo also served as a mustering point for Jewish refugees from different parts of Bosnia, e.g. Mostar, Teslić, Kakanj, Jajce and Travnik.<sup>438</sup>

Organising convoys required enormous efforts on the part of the Sarajevo Jewish community. One of the most difficult problems to solve was how to obtain permission for evacuation from the different warring factions and from UNPROFOR (the United Nations Protection Force). This permission was needed because the convoy route ran through territory supervised by all three warring factions.<sup>439</sup> This is well illustrated in an interview given in December 1992 by Ivan Čerešnješ, then President of the Sarajevo Jewish community, who explained that 'he had so far managed to negotiate exit for 1,000 Jews through 38 checkpoints from Sarajevo to Split'.<sup>440</sup> According to Čerešnješ, it was no problem for a Jew to stay in Sarajevo as the different warring parties (Croats, Muslims and Serbs) wished to demonstrate their democracy by their good behaviour towards the Jews.<sup>441</sup> The organisation of emigration convoys was no simple matter. By November 1992 the Bosnian government controlled all the exits from Sarajevo and every person on the list had to be approved by the Ministry of Interior.<sup>442</sup> The first task, after compiling the list of those who were willing to leave, was to convince the Bosnian government why these particular people had to be taken out of Sarajevo, and secondly, the permission of the UN had to be sought, which was not always a simple matter because taking people out was seen by the UN as facilitating ethnic cleansing. Usually not all the names on the list were approved, and sometimes permission was conditional on acceptance on the list of a number of non-Jews of the nationality from whom permission was being sought.<sup>443</sup> In any case, mixed convoys of Jews and non-Jews were deliberately planned in order to make it easier to negotiate passage for the convoys with the various parties. This also promoted the non-sectarian policy chosen by the Jewish community.<sup>444</sup> Most of the convoys were arranged before the end of 1992. The next convoy took place in August 1993, and the last big convoy in February 1994 with 116 Jews, and altogether 294

<sup>436</sup> Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

<sup>437</sup> *Jerusalem Post* 18.9.1992.

<sup>438</sup> *Bilten* (Belgrade) 1/1995.

<sup>439</sup> *Papo* 14.6.1996.

<sup>440</sup> Cited in *Jewish Chronicle* 11.12.1992.

<sup>441</sup> Cited in *Jerusalem Post* 18.9.1992.

<sup>442</sup> Serotta 1994, 45.

<sup>443</sup> Čerešnješ 26.5.1999.

<sup>444</sup> *Guardian Weekend* 10.12.1994.

Sarajevans on board.<sup>445</sup> There is no exact figure for the Bosnian Jews who left via Split and Croatia, but the estimate of about 800 Jews given by Dunja Šprajc, then the Secretary General of the Zagreb Jewish community, can be taken to be fairly accurate.<sup>446</sup>

In the later stage of the conflict, some Jews were denied permission to leave because they were needed in Sarajevo on account of their professions, such as doctors and nurses, for example.<sup>447</sup> The Draft Law affecting males between 18–65 years created obstacles for some Jews to leave. According to some news media, Jews were exempted from military service, but according to Ivan Čerešnješ this was not the case.<sup>448</sup> In fact, in 1993 Čerešnješ together with his vice-presidents developed a plan to evacuate out of Sarajevo those Jews, who were denied permission to leave. This plan involved providing them with Israeli passports while they were still inside Sarajevo, thus allowing them to leave as foreigners. The plan was accepted in Israel, and by the end of 1993 altogether 49 new 'Israelis' could be found in Sarajevo with proper new passports. Ultimately only 20 of them needed those passports in order to leave the besieged city.<sup>449</sup>

When the information from Belgrade and Zagreb is put together, the total number of Jewish refugees from Bosnia is about 1,900. Jakob Finci, the president of the Jewish community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, gives the figure of 1,003 Jews who were evacuated from Sarajevo.<sup>450</sup> This would only indicate that there were a considerable number of Jews who left Bosnia independently, and not through the Jewish community of Sarajevo. Further, as we have seen, there were quite a considerable number of people of Jewish origin who had not affiliated with the Jewish communities in Yugoslavia, and it is possible that some Jews in this category revealed that they were Jewish only after leaving Bosnia. Altogether 731 Bosnian Jews had emigrated to Israel by 1996,<sup>451</sup> while the rest remained in Belgrade or Zagreb or continued on to another foreign destination.

The total number of emigrants from the former Yugoslavia to Israel due to the war reached 1,501 by 1996. According to figures for emigration by the end of 1995, emigrants were distributed by place of departure as follows: Bosnia-Herzegovina 731, Croatia 103, Serbia 554, Slovenia 7 and Macedonia 6.<sup>452</sup> Miroslav Grinvald

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<sup>445</sup> Serotta 1994, 91–93.

<sup>446</sup> Šprajc 13.6.1996.

<sup>447</sup> Čerešnješ 26.5.1999; *The Jewish Week* (New York) 10.3.1995.

<sup>448</sup> Čerešnješ 26.5.1999.

<sup>449</sup> Raviv 1997, 212–217.

<sup>450</sup> Finci 13.3.2000.

<sup>451</sup> Sade 12.6.1996.

<sup>452</sup> Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia; Sade 12.6.1996.

from the Federation of Jewish communities in Belgrade also possessed reliable figures concerning 600 Jews who left Belgrade for some other destination than Israel. Of them 130 moved to Canada, 104 to Spain, 51 to Switzerland, 43 to England and the destination of the rest, 250, was unknown.<sup>453</sup> In Serbia, the Jewish community of Novi Sad is an interesting case. Prior to the disintegration of Yugoslavia the community numbered 271 Jews, of whom 105 emigrated quite soon after the outbreak of war. This is remarkable, as Novi Sad in Vojvodina was not physically affected by the war. However, after Sarajevo, proportionally the second highest number of emigrating Jews came from Novi Sad.<sup>454</sup> Nevertheless, the Jewish population there rose sharply as in 2000 the community already had 605 members.<sup>455</sup>

Unfortunately, information on those Croatian and Serbian Jews who left for countries other than Israel is not available. Certainly there were some, and thus the overall total of Jewish refugees from the former Yugoslavia must be about 2,500.<sup>456</sup> In addition to those Bosnian Jewish refugees who stayed in Croatia or Serbia, there were about 30–50 Bosnian Jews who decided to stay in Slovenia, where they were immediately granted Slovenian citizenship, in contrast to Bosnian Jewish refugees in Croatia and Serbia who were only granted refugee status.<sup>457</sup>

A new wave of Jews moving out of former Yugoslavia came about as a result of the Kosovo War and its consequences in the form of NATO air raids against Serbia. During the first month and a half after the beginning of the bombing, about 470 Jews, mainly children, mothers and the elderly, had already been evacuated to Budapest, where they were taken care of by the Jewish Agency and the JDC,<sup>458</sup> and about 600 Jews moved temporarily to Belgrade.<sup>459</sup> Most of them waited there to return to their families and homes in Serbia<sup>460</sup> while 175 of them were brought to Israel for a two-week pilot programme to explore the immigration option.<sup>461</sup> Obviously the Kosovo War resulted in several individuals emigrating, but generally speaking the Jews who left Serbia took only temporary shelter in neighbouring Hungary. The Jewish community leaders emphasised that this move was no exo-

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453 Grinvald 6.6.1996.

454 Raviv 1997, 38.

455 Grinvald 28.6.2000.

456 This estimate is also given in *Jevrejski Glas*, August 1999, 7.

457 Sade 12.6.1996.

458 *Jerusalem Post* 7.5.1999.

459 Information on the Federation of Jewish Communities, Savez Jevrejskih Opština Jugoslavije (given by Aca Singer on June 19, 2000).

460 *Jerusalem Report* 10.5.1999.

461 *Jerusalem Post* 7.5.1999.

dus,<sup>462</sup> but that those leaving were intending to return home later. 47 Jewish refugees moved from Kosovo to Serbia as a result of the Kosovo War.<sup>463</sup>

This was the first major emigration from the territory of former Yugoslavia after the wave of emigration in 1948–53. The Jews, who wanted to stay out of the war, found themselves in the middle of the fighting between nationalistically inclined and motivated factions, and therefore decided to move out. In this case neither ideology (Zionism), nor religious motives, nor a fear of antisemitism were factors contributing to their decision to emigrate. In fact, besides the conflict the only other factor contributing to the decision to leave, also related to the conflict, was economic distress, especially in Serbia.<sup>464</sup> The decision to emigrate, however, was not an easy one. Bosnian Jews, especially, were afraid of being perceived as ‘escaping Jews’. They strove to avoid giving the impression that they were escaping at the moment when their homeland was in trouble. The view as even expressed that the publicity Israel gave their evacuation actually caused them harm.<sup>465</sup> Nevertheless, the image of ‘escaping Jews’ was perhaps etched in the minds of Bosnians. A hint of this can be detected in the speech of the Bosnian President Alija Izetbegović delivered on the eve of the Jewish New Year in Sarajevo: ‘If I may ask the Jewish Community of Sarajevo and Bosnia-Herzegovina for something, on the occasion of this holiday – it is that those who have left the country, escaping from the war and suffering, come back for the next Rosh Hashana.’<sup>466</sup> At the Passover ceremony in 1995 President Izetbegović repeated his message: ‘I ask you not to leave Bosnia, I ask you to stay here. This is also your country.’<sup>467</sup>

The severest impact of the war by far was on Bosnia-Herzegovina, and therefore it is understandable that the highest number of Jewish refugees from the region of former Yugoslavia was from there. The number of more than 500 refugees from Serbia, even though the war did not physically touch its soil before 1999, is also significant. Serbia was subject to UN economic sanctions, however, which caused poverty among the Jewish population, too, and so resulted in emigration. The emigration of Yugoslav Jewry halted as the war died down only to be repeated on a smaller scale in 1999 because of the Kosovo war. However, as observed above, this war led to the emigration of no more than a handful of people.

Emigration from the former Yugoslavia between 1991–95 highlights, in fact, certain specific features of post-World War II Yugoslav Jewry. The community

<sup>462</sup> *Jerusalem Report* 26.4.1999.

<sup>463</sup> Grinvald 28.6.2000.

<sup>464</sup> As Raviv wrote that ‘if war or a fascist, anti-Semitic regime does not drive Jews to emigrate, then at least the economic situation forces them to leave’ (Raviv 1997, 51).

<sup>465</sup> *Haaretz* 13.4.1992.

<sup>466</sup> Cited in *Bilten* (Sarajevo) 7–8/1994, 7.

<sup>467</sup> Cited in *New York Times* 16.4.1995.

was well acculturated to Yugoslav society with a great deal of intermarriage and had close ties with all the nations of Yugoslavia. In consequence it was physically and emotionally strongly connected with the host country. Zionism as an ideology, especially at an organised community level, played no role in post-World War II Jewish life in Yugoslavia. This explains the difficulties the Jewish Agency faced when they rushed in to 'rescue' Jews who did not want to be 'rescued' from the former Yugoslavia. At the beginning of the war, the Jewish Agency had boldly announced that their intention was to evacuate *all* Jews from Yugoslavia to Israel.<sup>468</sup>

Yugoslav Jews wanted to experience Israel first before making the decision about actual *aliya*. Consequently Raviv was asked in June 1991 to arrange a pre-*aliya* trip to Israel.<sup>469</sup> The Jewish Agency published premature statements about saving Jews, as witnessed in the statements of Uri Gordon and others,<sup>470</sup> and their Zionist-orientated representative was in search of good and healthy Jewish human stock for Israel, as is reflected in his expression of satisfaction at seeing healthy, tall and beautiful Yugoslav Jews<sup>471</sup>. Obviously he found it difficult to grasp why somebody would not want to live in Israel. Gordon, perplexed about a low level of interest in *aliya* among the Yugoslav Jews, stubbornly declared that rescuing Jews for Israel meant *aliya*,<sup>472</sup> which can of course be regarded as a new and interesting definition of *aliya*, which perhaps in turn reflects a low level of interest in Zionism among Diaspora Jews. What then if those who are rescued do not wish to be new *olims*? Above all, this reflects the fact that the Jewish Agency was seeing the situation from only one perspective. For them, it seems, individual Jews are merely necessary instruments in the fulfilment of one of the basic conceptions of Zionism, *aliya*. In fact, the emigration of Jews from the former Yugoslavia was not because of their longing for Zion, but only due to the deteriorating situation in their home communities. The war and economic distress drove them to leave. An incident Avraham Sade faced in Zagreb in 1995 illustrates this. In May 1995 Zagreb was attacked by rockets. Sade rushed from Budapest to take Jewish children out of Zagreb, and the next day the Israeli media reported that the Jewish Agency was taking 200 children to Israel. Sade encountered an almost hostile reception in the Zagreb Jewish community, which refused to send their children away, declaring that their children were exactly the same as other Croat children.<sup>473</sup>

<sup>468</sup> *Jerusalem Report*, April 23, 1992.

<sup>469</sup> Raviv 1997, 35.

<sup>470</sup> For example, in October 1992 Jewish Agency leaders announced that by November 1992 the remaining Jews from Sarajevo would be evacuated. *Jewish Chronicle* 2.10.1992.

<sup>471</sup> Raviv 1997, 20.

<sup>472</sup> *Haaretz* 14.8.1992.

<sup>473</sup> Sade 12.6.1996.

Ultimately the Jewish Agency had no choice but to create programmes in which groups of Jews were brought to Israel for a trial period of residence. The lack of Zionist orientation among Yugoslav Jews made Israel an unattractive option for most of them, and so the Jewish Agency was compelled to picture Israel as a more attractive option than others. After the Kosovo war and NATO bombings had begun in Serbia, the Jewish Agency brought to Israel a group of 60 Belgrade Jewish teenagers and eight Macedonian Jewish teenagers for a three-month pilot programme in order to enable them to explore *aliya* options.<sup>474</sup> It appears that the Yugoslav experience taught the Jewish Agency some hard lessons and forced them to adopt a more flexible policy with regard to candidates for immigration.

The nature of Jewish emigration can also be seen in the fact that many Jews have already returned to Bosnia, the worst affected region of the former Yugoslavia. Of about 1,900 Jews evacuated from Bosnia, altogether 280 had returned by March 2000.<sup>475</sup> Nevertheless, the emigration of Jews was a major blow for the Jewry of the former Yugoslavia and the most direct and immediate consequence of the break-up of Yugoslavia for its Jewish population. The blow was especially serious as many of those who left were children and teenagers, which meant in practice that a part of the future of the former Yugoslav Jewry departed in order to build their lives somewhere else. In comparison with other citizens of the former Yugoslavia, the emigration meant that in the middle of a bloody conflict the Jews were a privileged minority, possessing an option, Israel, that others were denied. In addition, they were actually the only religious and ethnic group which was given an organised opportunity to leave the country. This option was not so much Zion in Israel as, more practically, a safe haven provided by Israel for Jews whose life was in danger, not because of their being Jewish but by reason of the tragic events and economic distress surrounding them. It would be more appropriate to call the Bosnian Jews who left Bosnia refugees and not emigrants, since they left against their will. There was no other reason for leaving apart from the war. Jews leaving Vojvodina and Serbia can be regarded more properly as emigrants, since the economic difficulties combined with the uncertainties related to the disintegration of Yugoslavia were the main factors behind their decision to leave Yugoslavia. The Jewish exodus from the former Yugoslavia took place only because of the war and the disintegration of Yugoslavia; otherwise Jews would have remained where they felt they belonged.

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<sup>474</sup> *Jerusalem Post* 18.6.1999.

<sup>475</sup> *Finci* 13.3.2000.