
INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS OF THE ZAGREB JEWISH COMMUNITY

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The Federation of Jewish Religious Communities was established in 1919 in Zagreb, but Belgrade was chosen for its headquarters. "The original idea was to establish the Federation as a manifestation of our unity in an enlarged common country and a permanent common interpreter of all the aspirations and needs of our community." In time, the "Federation turned into an intermediary between the state authorities and our community, gradually its cultural and national programs gained shape" and it later "became capable of autonomously performing a host of tasks related to the Jewish community, thus turning into an official authority in its own right".¹ Of course, the Belgrade headquarters was also in charge of all the international contacts.

The situation changed in 1933, when Hitler's accession to power set off the first mass migrations of the German Jews. In the early days, they crossed the territories of France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Czechoslovakia, while these countries were still allowing them transit, in order to reach European ports and sail off to Great Britain and the United States. Here again, Yugoslavia played an important role.²

As most refugees traveled by train, Zagreb, which is conveniently situated at the point of conjunction of the continent's main railway corridors, became the country's major refugee center. From there, roads led further to the East, towards Palestine or the Adriatic ports of Rijeka and Split, points of departure for many.

¹ Minutes of the 5th session of the Federation's Main Board, January 23-25, 1938, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 3

² See: Ristović, *Jevreji* (The Jews), various places.

What is more, there was a 12,000-strong Jewish community in Zagreb in the period between the two world wars. The Belgrade and Sarajevo Jewish communities were similar to it in size, but the one in Zagreb excelled in economic strength and social influence, especially in comparison with its Bosnian counterpart. Other reasons for its supremacy are to be found in the fact that Zagreb was a Central European city with a sizeable German-speaking population.

As early as April 1933, the Federation of Jewish Communities set up its Central Board, charged with providing assistance to the German Jews. The Yugoslav Zionist Union, with a veteran Zionist activist Dr Alexander Licht, at its head, immediately joined in, suggesting that the aid should be "concentrated in one place".³ The Zionist Union had already decided that "refugee care" was one of the priorities.⁴

A "great meeting of the Zagreb Jews" was held in Zagreb in May to discuss the ongoing expulsions of Jewish in Germany". The chief rabbi and senator Isak Alkalaj, Licht himself and a non-Zionist Rudolf Rodanić together addressed the meeting, obviously to underline the sense of unity within the congregation. The meeting established the Local Board for the Assistance to the Jews Coming from Germany⁵, and was renamed into the Jewish Refugees' Relief Board, in 1939.⁶ Dr. Makso Pscherhof, the then president of the Community, chaired it, while the secretary of the Jewish Community, Aleksandar Klajn, was in charge of the operations.⁷ In July 1933 the Board asked the Zagreb Jews "not to undertake individual actions aimed at providing any type of assistance to the Jews from Germany. All that work and the entire action are concentrated in one place,

³ Židov (The Jew) 18, 19/1933.

⁴ DAZ, Fund of Lawyer and Notary A. Licht, 126; submitted minutes of the session of the Federal Board of the Zionist Union of May 28, 1934

⁵ Židov 20, 21/1933; 36/1936; 13/1937; Völkl, Religious Community, Lipa, *Pomoć (Assistance)*, 7-17; Ristović, *Jevreji*, 27; Boeckh, Židovska vjerska općina (*Jewish Religious Community*), 52; Dojč, *Utočište (Refuge)*.

⁶ DAZ, Fund of Lawyer and Notary A. Licht, Zionist activities

⁷ Lipa, *Pomoć (Assistance)*, 7-17, Ristović, *Jevreji*, 27

the Local Board.”⁸ In a fund-raising drive, the Zagreb community collected 572,000 dinars in just two weeks of May 1933, and 1.18 million until the end of the year.

Since its foundation, the Board enjoyed generous financial backing of various Jewish institutions from abroad: Zagreb also became the home of the central Yugoslav subsidiary of HICEM, the world emigration and relief organization (Hias – Jca – Emigration – Federation, i.e. Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), with headquarters in Paris. HICEM provided financial assistance to Jewish immigrants to Palestine and other overseas countries. The head office in Paris required a centralized nation-wide organization for the entire emigration operation and the Federation officially transferred the responsibility of the National Board for the Assistance to Refugees to the Zagreb board, in September 1936.⁹ The secretary of the Jewish community in Zagreb, Aleksandar Klajn, was also a HICEM agent.¹⁰ “The accommodation effort for emigrants is largely concentrated in Zagreb, which was also the center of correspondence with HICEM,” says a report to the Executive Board of the Federation,¹¹ and when HICEM organized a conference in Paris, it was held that it would be “most useful to send someone from Zagreb”, so Klajn went.¹² In January 1937, Klajn and Oton Heinrich attended a similar conference in Vienna.¹³

That this autonomy was quite unusual in other activities was evident from the fact that the Rules of the Jewish Community in Zagreb provided that the Community needed a

⁸ *Židov*, 30/1933

⁹ *Židov* 13, 45/1937

¹⁰ Minutes of the 3rd session of the Executive Board of the Federation, held on July 4, 1939, Jewish Historical Museum, 67

¹¹ Minutes of the 12th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, held on February 11, 1937, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 10

¹² Minutes of the 3rd session of the Executive Board of the Federation, held on June 4, 1936, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade 8; minutes of the 4th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, held on June 15, 1936, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 1

¹³ Minutes of the 12th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, held on February 11, 1937, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 1

formal approval of the Executive Board of the Federation when electing its rabbi.¹⁴

HICEM was covering only the travel costs for Jewish emigrants going to other countries, but their stay in Yugoslavia was the responsibility of the local Jewish communities that provided temporary residence. In Paris, Klajn was “promised a certain amount of money for the emigrants, but its effects were yet to be seen”. However, certain communities sometimes sent the emigrants to Zagreb, and they were warned that the “Zagreb community will have to send them back to their previous place of residence.”¹⁵

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JOINT) also committed considerable amounts of money.¹⁶ In early 1936, the JOINT turned down applications because both the Belgrade Federation and the Zagreb Board applied, while in late 1936 only Zagreb applied asking for “extraordinary material aid” for the refugees. Belgrade was agreed with to “have the received aid split into even shares” between the Federation and the Zagreb Board.¹⁷ True, the Zagreb Board enjoyed substantial autonomy, since the Federation, for instance, asked it to “send us copies of its letters in order to keep our archives updated” and it later committed itself to “letting the Zagreb Board have 50% of the funds received from abroad”.¹⁸

All these accomplishments – finding refuge for a large number of Jews from the Reich and the way in which that was done – was remembered among the Jews for its spirit of generosity and an impeccable organization. The Hevra Kadisha from Zagreb also helped, in money, but also by providing accommodation, education and specialized training for refugees.

¹⁴ Minutes of the 11th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, held on November 23-24, 1936, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 2

¹⁵ Minutes of the 5th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, held on July 13, 1936, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 12

¹⁶ Boecks, *The Jewish Religious Center*, 52; Dojč, *Utočište*

¹⁷ Minutes of the 9th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, held on November 23-24, 1936, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 8

¹⁸ Minutes of the 9th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, held on November 23-24, 1936, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 8

In Zagreb in the thirties the Palestinian Office for Yugoslavia was very active. It arranged for the immigration documents, i.e. performed consular duties. The office of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, based in Berlin, with a mandate to protect the interests of Jewish immigrants and Jews in general was also on the list of contacts. The Jewish Agency was recognized by the British Government and its offices in Palestine. The Zagreb Board collaborated with the Berlin-based Zentralstelle für jüdische Wirtschaftshilfe, founded in 1933 with the aim to help the German Jews to leave the country and start a new life in third countries.

In the period between 1933 and 1941, the Zagreb Board welcomed, provided advice and referred to other countries some 55,000 persons. The table below shows their numbers by year.

1933.	4,400
1934.	4,200
1935.	2,400
1936.	2,200
1937.	2,800
1938.	11,700
1939.	15,400
1949.	9,300
1941.	3,100

Source: Völkl, Religious Community

In July 1933, according to the Local Board for the Assistance to the Jews from Germany “scores of Jews from Germany are pouring in daily, some of them staying here, and others continuing their journey, hoping to find better living conditions for themselves and their families elsewhere”.¹⁹ A prominent Jewish activist, Belgrader David Albala, also claimed in those days that the people in Zagreb were “overloaded” with the work they were doing for the refugees from Germany.²⁰

¹⁹ DAZ, Fund of Lawyer and Notary A. Licht, 439

²⁰ DAZ, Fund of Lawyer and Notary A. Licht, 72

The Yugoslav consular authorities even recommended emigration into Yugoslavia, not only out of altruism, but also expecting that this would ensure the influx of hardworking, constructive and enterprising people, who would also bring capital into the country. "Indeed, the first wave did introduce into Yugoslavia a couple of hundred of immigrants, who tried to position themselves on the market using the capital they brought with them".²¹ Thus, for instance, "a German lawyer with 80,000 dinars worth of capital is looking for a job or any suitable area of work".²² This group included several major investors in Zagreb's industry, but those investments were never brought about because, among other things, of the German laws obstructing international money transfers.²³ Several rich families settled permanently on the Croatian coast, while "a large number of intellectual proletariat and civil servants continued for Palestine."²⁴

By the end of 1937, refugee numbers began to subside; namely, to that date, only 400 German refugees made a stop in Yugoslavia. Of those 400, 60 stayed in Zagreb, seven of them invested considerable capital in different sectors of industry (chemical in particular), three became stockholders, five had traveling documents as representatives of foreign companies, four were granted work permits as special personnel, a dozen families lived off the interest on the capital that they either brought with them or had it in other countries, ten received training in different trades under the auspices of the Zagreb Relief Board, in order to later leave for Palestine. Many came and went, but the number of those who between 1933 and 1936 permanently settled in Zagreb essentially remained the same.²⁵

²¹ The report of Aleksandar Klajn, secretary of the Board for the Assistance to Jewish Refugees in Zagreb, *Židov*, 36/1936

²² *The Jew* 30/1933

²³ Völk, *Religious Community*

²⁴ Aleksandar Klajn's report – *Židov* 36/1936

²⁵ Aleksandar Klajn's report, *Židov* 36/1936

The newcomers in Zagreb included families with children of school age, from elementary school to college. Already in 1933, the Zagreb Jewish school formed a special class for the children of German immigrants, whose numbers fluctuated as they came and went, but in the school year 1933-34, the class had between 15 and 20 students, of which nine were assigned to the regular school.²⁶

Under such circumstances, there were 60 Jewish German refugee families registered in Zagreb in 1937 who paid for their own accommodation, while another 78 persons were supported by the Refugee Relief Board. Also, all refugees attended language lessons and vocational training, and the Board also tried to find them jobs. Many refugees from the Reich arrived without any money or valuables, and the Board also provided them food, accommodation, took care of their traveling costs, and even paid them a small allowance. In 1939, the Supreme Rabbinate in Zagreb invited "families who are willing to host refugees for the Seder dinner" to apply.²⁷ Thus, the Korda family had one immigrant coming to lunch and another one to dinner – "We entertain young men and women of the same age as my brother and I, we get together... forget about fear and the threats from the Nazis, we dance, laugh, tell jokes."²⁸

The Refugee Relief Board did its best to attract German Jews, above all those with considerable capital, to settle in Yugoslavia and thus make the Jewish community here stronger. It maintained contacts with the Berlin-based *Hilfsverein der Juden in Deutschland*, an association that informed the German Jews about the living and working conditions in Yugoslavia. However, it turned out that permanent residence was very difficult to obtain, and only those who had no place to go or did not leave on time were still there when the Germans occupied Croatia, in April 1941.

²⁶ *Židov* 12/1939

²⁷ *Židov* 12/1939

²⁸ Korda, *Nikad dosta suza (Never Enough Tears)*, 35

The number of refugees soared dramatically since the Anschluss (annexation), in March 1938. By the end of March, the Executive and Main Boards of the Federation of Jewish Religious Centers sat in Belgrade to “explore the possibility of providing assistance for the Austrian brethren, much needed after the latest developments in that country.”²⁹ The boards established the Central Support Fund as a permanent institution to which Jewish communities countrywide would make regular contributions by either levying an extra tax upon their members or by introducing it as a separate budget entry.³⁰ This marked the beginning of a series of emergency situations requiring extraordinary assistance – in money or other – almost on a daily basis.³¹ “Difficulties are getting ever bigger, since the growing needs exceed the inflow of funds,” an October 1938 report said.³²

In late 1939, the Federation of Jewish Communities estimated that it needed a total of 1 million dinars per year for refugee assistance, a sum that soon proved insufficient as the number of refugees increased.³³ The Social Board of the Federation of Jewish Communities calculated in May 1939 that the Zagreb Center needed to spend more than 2 million dinars per

²⁹ Minutes of the extraordinary session of the Executive Board of the Federation, held on March 28, 1938. Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 48; minutes of the extraordinary session of the Main Board of the Federation, held on March 31, 1938, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 45

³⁰ Report of the Executive Board of the Federation about its work since the last meeting of the Main Board to the last one, held on November 28, 1938, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 109. Minutes of the extraordinary session of the Main Board of the Federation, held on March 31, 1938, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 45-47

³¹ The Zagreb Jewish Communities informed the Federation of Jewish Communities on April 9 and again on May 2, 1939, that it gave 27,181 dinars to the “emigrants” – minutes of the second session of the Main Board of the Federation, held on May 22, 1939, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 64; Minutes of the 7th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, held on November 30, 1939, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 102

³² Minutes of the 32nd session of the Executive Board of the Federation, held on October 27, 1938, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 79

³³ Minutes of the eight session of the Executive Board of the Federation, held on December 3, 1939, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 107

year on the “registered refugees” alone. Other estimates put this amount to “200,000 per month”, that is almost 2.5 million per year. Obviously, Zagreb needed help and it was suggested that the centers nationwide should raise their contributions to the Social Fund from 10% to 15% and “observe in full their obligations to the Social Fund” of the Federation of Jewish Communities.³⁴ Towards the end of that year, the situation became increasingly dramatic. “The Community will not be able to carry the load that the circumstances had forced upon it. The number of its protégés is rising sharply,” Zagreb reported to Belgrade. In fall, the number of protégés “came to around 400”, and in December to “over 600, and indications are that it will soon reach 1,000”. “The Zagreb Community does not expect to be crowned with laurel for its work, since it has only done its duty, but it does expect all the parts of our community to be equally dutiful.”³⁵ Money came to Zagreb from various funds. In early 1939, for instance, the Zagreb Community was refunded by the Central Support Fund 30,297 dinars worth of “money spent on aid for various refugees”.³⁶ The Federation did not pay Zagreb the required sum until the end of the year, stating that “we were so taken aback by the circumstances that it was virtually impossible to effectuate the payment earlier”.³⁷

The secretary of the Zagreb community and HICEM agent, Aleksandar Klajn, traveled to Paris to raise the needed funds. It is not clear whether this trip was a success.³⁸

³⁴ Minutes of the fourth session of the Executive Board of the Federation, held on September 12, 1939, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 78-79; minutes of the sixth session of the Executive Board of the Federation, held on July 25, 1939, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 92

³⁵ Minutes of the 8th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, December 3, 1939, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 109

³⁶ Minutes of the 36th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, March 9, 1939, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 15

³⁷ Minutes of the 8th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, December 3, 1939, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 113-114

³⁸ Minutes of the 29th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, July 14, 1938, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 60

Help came in different forms: in June 1939, the Zagreb community had to purchase new boat tickets for 32 refugees “because the Italian Steamboat Association refused to accept the tickets paid in German marks”.³⁹ Refugees who lived outside Zagreb also needed assistance. Addressing a meeting of the Main Board of the Federation, the Community’s president Dr. Horn “described the difficult situation in which a group of 43 refugees from the Austrian province of Burgenland found itself in Podravska Slatina, and asked the Federation to do whatever it could to help these people as efficiently as possible”.⁴⁰ When two months later “they were given the opportunity to leave”, “the Zagreb Community provided 35,000 dinars for traveling expenses, since at this point the Federation had no money.”⁴¹

The assistance provided by the Zagreb Jewish community to the refugees from the Reich was uninterrupted. In a document describing the refugee situation in April 1940, the Jewish community asked its members to “perform the duty that, as Jews, they have to their victimized brethren by donating generous amounts, and commit acts of personal sacrifice, since only by making personal sacrifice can we contribute to the effort of our community to help these poor people.”⁴² Judging from Alexander Licht’s correspondence, Belgrade fell short of expectations in this respect.⁴³

Since early 1938, after the Italian policy toward Jews became more rigid the previous year, Jews from Italy frequently

³⁹ Minutes of the 6th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, October 30, 1939, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 96

⁴⁰ Minutes of the 37th session of the Main Board of the Federation, March 12, 1939, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 21

⁴¹ Minutes of the 31st session of the Executive Board of the Federation, September 8, 1938, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 78; minutes of the Second session of the Main Board of the Federation, May 22, 1939, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 64-65

⁴² DAZ, Fund of Lawyer and Notary A. Licht, Zionist activity

⁴³ DAZ, Fund of Lawyer and Notary A. Licht, 129-130

tried to reach Yugoslavia.⁴⁴ Italian government started implementing anti-Jewish measures. The next year, the Italian authorities “asked Jewish foreign citizens to leave Italy within a set deadline”, and a royal decree on the “defense of the Italian race”, passed in November, banned, among other things, the institution of mixed marriage.⁴⁵ Those illegal transfers from Italy to Yugoslavia at Susak were subject to special police investigation by the police, after tips suggesting that they were organized by “a certain Goldstein from Varšavska Street, Zagreb,” and that the “transfers are getting through by boat” and then “by cars, all the way to Zagreb”. The investigation resulted in a wrongful arrest of a Zagreb Jew Hinko Živko Goldstein, “known as a reliable and honest merchant and citizen”. It was eventually concluded that some Italian Jew provided the boats, but that people had to fend for themselves once they reached Sušak. Besides, “the transfers never assumed massive proportions”.⁴⁶

This is when the HICEM agent for Yugoslavia tried to “convince HICEM to also provide assistance for individuals who entered Yugoslavia before 1933 and are now requested to leave the country.”⁴⁷

Yugoslavia and the Zagreb community became particularly highly valued among the refugees after the war broke out in Europe, in 1939, since Yugoslavia managed to stay out of it until April 1941. As France, Poland and Czechoslovakia were no longer penetrable, Yugoslavia was one of the few countries that still offered some chance of escape. Furthermore, some Polish Jews, escaping the Nazi army, attempted to enter Yugoslavia through Romania and Hungary.⁴⁸ Some refugee transports tra-

⁴⁴ HDA, Fund 145, SBDZ, box No. 25, 345/1938

⁴⁵ *Jevrejska tribuna* (The Jewish Tribune) 41/1938; Ristović, *Jevreji*, 34-35; Kovačić, *Kampor*, 245; Hilberg, *Destruction*; Goldstein, *Holocaust*, Feral

⁴⁶ HDA, Fund 155 (BVPN), 3688/1941, box No 75

⁴⁷ Minutes of the 3rd session of the Executive Board of the Federation, July 4, 1939, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 67

⁴⁸ This is suggested in the documents of the Ministry of Interior in Belgrade and by the district authorities in Zagreb. For more details, see: HAD, BH, ODZ, Povijesni spisi (Historical Documents), 45870/1939, box No 328

veled down the Danube River, and were taken care of by the Jewish community of Vukovar.⁴⁹ The Jewish community in Čakovec looked after a “large number of refugees” stationed there.⁵⁰ In those months, the number of refugees went up dramatically and it only began to drop in 1940, when the borders of the Reich became virtually tight-closed for Jews. To be precise, since the beginning of the war in September 1939, the Gestapo started expelling Jews from Austria without any documents; the Yugoslav authorities, usually after prolonged waits in the no-man’s-land, were left with no choice but to let them into the country, leaving them in the hands of the Jewish organizations, based mainly in Zagreb and the surrounding municipalities.⁵¹

The wave of refugees got bigger and bigger: in October 1939, at the “German-Yugoslav border near the village of Ciringa, in the larger Maribor area, the border guards arrested “three suspects who smuggled Jews into our country...” One of them, a certain Aleksandar Kanik, was caught while waiting for “three Jews at the border” and before this he smuggled Jews into Zagreb, where there is already “an endless number of such run-aways”. He claimed that an entire organization existed in Zagreb... with a countrywide network of agents.”⁵²

Early 1940 in Croatia saw the establishment of “collective dwellings” for the Jewish refugees who resided in a certain area “while in no possession of a valid residence permit (i.e. illegally)”.⁵³ The first dwellings were in the towns of Sombor (in the

⁴⁹ Minutes of the 4th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, July 25, 1939, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 74

⁵⁰ Minutes of the 25th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, February 17, 1938, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 33

⁵¹ Bauer, *American Jewry*, 62; Ristović, *Jevreji*, 24.

⁵² HDA, team of the Institute for Contemporary History – group 24, 1938, reg. No. 173, *Politika*, Belgrade, October 22, 1938

⁵³ Minutes of the extraordinary session of the Main Board of the Federation, February 14, 1940, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 10

Tonšetić Villa)⁵⁴, Lipik, Daruvar, Jastrebarsko, Fužine and Po-dravska Slatina.⁵⁵

The heaviest load, both financial and organizational, again fell to the Jewish Community in Zagreb. In February 1940, the local members of the Main Board of the Federation of Jewish Community met in Zagreb to form a “body that, in line with the conclusions of the Executive Board and regarding the issue of collective dwellings, will represent the Federation in the Jewish Community in Zagreb and provide it with instructions”.⁵⁶ Although the language of the minutes was rather diplomatic, the Zagreb group began acting on its own, i.e. some in Belgrade held that “a new body has been formed in Zagreb consisting of the members of the Main Board, which might pass decisions independently from the Executive Board”. This marked the beginning of a debate about the relations between the headquarters in Belgrade and Zagreb. It unfolded very carefully, in gloves, with acceptance on both sides (“we acknowledge the great effort our friends in Zagreb have invested in the refugee issue”, and “the Zagreb Center, its president and secretary, Mr. Klajn, as well as many members of the Main Board who with love and understanding supported the Federation all deserve praise”)⁵⁷. However, the discussion that started during the session of the Executive Board “was marked with a sense of mistrust toward the Zagreb members of the Main Board”. The vice-president of the Zagreb Community Lavoslav Steiner was given a free hand to inform that

⁵⁴ HDA, Fund 155 (BVBN), 56977/1940, box No 52

⁵⁵ Minutes of the Seventh session of the Main Board of the Federation, February 1, 1940, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 4

⁵⁶ Minutes of the 10th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, March 3, 1940, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 12; minutes of the session of the members of the Zagreb members of the Main Board of the Federation, held on February 15, 1940 in the assembly room of the Jewish Community in Zagreb, following the session of the Executive Board held on February 14, 1940, in Belgrade, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 21

⁵⁷ Minutes of the 12th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, March 18, 1940, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 19; minutes of the 3rd session of the Main Board of the Federation, May 23, 1940, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 48

“the Zagreb members of the Main Board were, are and will be the best and the most loyal keepers of unity within our community”.⁵⁸ Clearly, the financial problems were in the background of the conflict. In early March, a telegram was dispatched from Zagreb to Belgrade in which “the Zagreb members of the Main Board” reported that the Zagreb Community was soon expected to make a payment of 313,000 dinars, that it was “penniless and determined to avoid being in debts in the future”.⁵⁹ Both parties then analyzed their costs once again; “new circumstantial details have surfaced on both sides”, and Zagreb was “asked to, for the sake of common good, accept all the friendly remarks”. However, at the session of the Executive Board of the Federation, its secretary general Šime Spitzer “pointed out the frustration of our friends and colleagues from Zagreb, who feel abandoned in this difficult situation and who have truly been pushed into a hopeless financial position”.⁶⁰ It was calculated that, until the end of April, Zagreb covered “almost one half of the total costs” of the Yugoslav Jewish community, amounting to as much as 7 million dinars.⁶¹ At that time, the Zagreb Jewish Community claimed more than 230,000 dinars from the Federation.⁶² On the other hand, both the Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities “appear among the Federation’s major debtors”.⁶³

In September 1940, “the members of the Main Board from Zagreb, the members of the Working Board of the Zionist Federation of Yugoslavia and some prominent Jewish public figures”

⁵⁸ Minutes of the 19th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, June 10, 1940, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 50

⁵⁹ Minutes of the 11th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, March 12, 1940, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 16

⁶⁰ Minutes of the 12th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, March 18, 1940, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 20

⁶¹ Minutes of the 3rd session of the Main Board of the Federation, May 23, 1940, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 48

⁶² Minutes of the 17th session of the Executive Board of the Federation, May 16, 1940, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 39

⁶³ Minutes of the 3rd session of the Main Board of the Federation, March 23, 1940, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 49

met in Zagreb. The situation was getting increasingly dramatic, since the Federation and the Zagreb Community to that date had supported some 3,000 persons in collective dwellings, and getting clearance for their departure for Palestine and other countries involved a complicated procedure with an increasingly uncertain outcome.⁶⁴

With the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), in April 1941, the Zagreb Jewish Community operated under changed circumstances. It remained active throughout the war, which made it unique in NDH.

Leaving a certain degree of freedom and autonomy to the Jewish community, the new Croatian Ustashe authorities somewhat followed the Nazi model. In big Jewish ghettos in the occupied Poland between 1939 and 1941, the German authorities ordered the formation of the Jewish Councils (Judenräte), which as a rule consisted of the more prominent members of the given community. Those councils acted as intermediaries: they conveyed the orders and demands of the occupational authorities and represented the Jewish community in its dealings with the occupational authorities. The council members enjoyed a certain (short-lived) safety and other privileges, but as soon as mass deportations to the death camps started in 1942, they were deported and killed together with everybody else.⁶⁵ In Germany's ally countries, such as Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and to a degree Romania, the Jewish centers never stopped working. When in spring of 1944 the Germans occupied Hungary, Eichmann's communication with the Hungarian Jews went mainly through the Jewish Community in Budapest and its representatives. The Jewish councils in the ghettos attempted, and sometimes briefly succeeded, to alleviate a bit the hardship that the members of their communities endured. There were examples of the members of the councils who, in order

⁶⁴ Minutes of the 23rd session of the Executive Board of the Federation, September 17, 1940, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 79-82

⁶⁵ Ben-Sasson, *History*, 1026-1027

to save their lives, collaborated with the Nazi authorities to the detriment of their fellow Jews, something that Hannah Arendt called “undoubtedly the most sinister chapter of the entire tragic story”.⁶⁶ There is no record of any such activities of the members of the Zagreb Council and other officials of the Zagreb Jewish Community. Quite the opposite, in the circumstances which deserved to be called impossible, there is no doubt that the Jewish Community of Zagreb did its utmost, and sometimes succeeded, to provide assistance to at least some of its members in distress, and save some of them. The Ustashe authorities in NDH obviously estimated – perhaps even followed recommendations by German representatives – that letting the Jewish Community remain active would make it easier for them to control what was left of the Jewish community in Zagreb and elsewhere in NDH and, above all, the channels of financial aid from abroad. What is more, some in the regime may have believed that the existence of the Community could be used for propaganda purposes. The regime could thus boast about its liberal Jewish policy before important visitors from abroad (the Vatican, for instance).

The establishment of NDH resulted in the breakup of Zagreb’s contacts with the major international Jewish organizations, both direct ones and the ones maintained through the Federation in Belgrade. Amid a changed political reality, even the neighboring Slovenia became a distant foreign country, as did Split, a coastal town in Croatia, and many other parts of the country that were under the control of Italy or Hungary.

As those international organizations (the American JOINT most of all) were ready to offer considerable material assistance to their victimized brothers, the Zagreb Center maintained indirect contacts with them – via Italy, with neutral Switzerland, and via Budapest with the representatives of Palestinian Jews in neutral Turkey (Istanbul). The Zagreb Jews who managed to flee to Switzerland played a particularly important role

⁶⁶ Arendt, *Eichmann*, 117

here, with Zionist leader Alexander Licht taking a prominent place. On the basis of the existing documentation it is not possible to establish the exact scale of financial aid that came in through those channels, but it is clear that the packages sent to concentration camps through Zagreb, as well as the maintenance of "Lavoslav Schwartz" home for the aged were largely financed from those sources. The benefactors preferred to see their money go to institutions that they could reasonably trust rather than to individuals. The Ustashe authorities put up with this, because it enabled them to have full control over the inflow of funds, apart from some other substantial indirect benefits, such as conversion of the much-needed hard currency, misappropriation of packages, etc. All this contributed to the authorities' decision to leave alone the Zagreb Jewish Community, and let it survive, its activities reduced to a minimum, throughout the war. The Jewish communities in Hungary and Slovakia, which in the final phase of the war received considerable assistance from the International Red Cross as well, operated under similar circumstances.⁶⁷

Unfortunately, very few documents have been saved to provide evidence about these events, and very few people were in a position to testify about them. To be sure, some contacts were never revealed, despite the regime's eagerness to have a full insight into the dealings of the Community.

The trip of Alksandar Klajn to Ljubljana, in March 1942, well illustrates the zeal with which the Ustashe authorities scrutinized the international aid intended for the Jewish Center. The purpose of the trip was to "make arrangements regarding assistance to refugees". "He was accompanied by Geza Farbak, deputy head of the Jewish Department of the Ustashe Administrative Office", clearly to be kept under 24-hour control.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Laquer, *Secret*, 58-60

⁶⁸ HDA, collection of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Croatia III-24, 1179

While the activities of most Jewish Communities in Croatia were practically brought to a standstill by fall of 1941, Zagreb remained active in a number of ways. It gradually assumed the role of the umbrella organization for not just local Jews, but all Jewish sufferers in Croatia, as well as Bosnia-Herzegovina. This situation is well described in a circular sent by the Zagreb Community to all the Jewish Communities in Croatia on May 21, 1941: "We hereby inform you that by permission of the relevant authority our center will continue with its regular activities. Since it has been charged with taking care of the refugees in the territory of Croatia (that is, NDH – I.G.) we kindly ask you to do your utmost to support our efforts."⁶⁹

The Ustashe authorities proclaimed that Jewish inmates in the camps were to get all the supplies only from the Jewish religious centers, notably from Zagreb. At the same time, the centers had to help their members and their families who were left with no income or living means. Their duties also included providing supplies for the transports that passed through Zagreb, on their way to the concentration camps. All this entailed tremendous effort, in terms of both manpower and finance, and the Community's council and staff endured it with fascinating perseverance.

There were three major sources of financing. First, the members' contributions, which proved insufficient already during the summer and fall of 1941, because the majority of the members had been robbed, many sent to camps, or fled Zagreb. Second, responding to the Community's repeated requests, in 1942 the Ustashe authorities began releasing tiny and inadequate sums from the Community's accounts that they had previously frozen. Third, the initially limited donations from the Jewish organizations and individuals from neutral countries (Switzerland, Portugal, Turkey), as well as Hungary and Italy, which began coming in in late 1941, became since summer 1942 the Community's

⁶⁹ Jewish Historical Museum, Fund of the Zagreb Jewish Center, registration No 4859, sign. K-65-1-1/1-172

main source of funds that kept alive the line of supplies for the camps, as well as other humanitarian activities.⁷⁰

The Zagreb Jewish Community dispatched the first truckload of clothes for Jasenovac in November 1941. This shipment was allegedly authorized by the future camp commander Vjekoslav Maks Luburić himself, then the head of Office III, responsible for setting up, running and securing concentration camps in Croatia. The Community's clerk, Robert Stein, accompanied the shipment. The Community had a list of 400 inmates who were to receive the packages and Stein was sent there to monitor the delivery.⁷¹ As of November 1941 considerable quantities of drugs – more than 150 different kinds – and sanitary material arrived in Jasenovac.⁷² The members of the Zagreb Jewish Community “mailed hundreds of packages to relatives and friends”, but “the Ustashe let the prisoners have just the leftovers”.⁷³ According to Egon Berger, a Jasenovac inmate for 44 months, in November and December 1941 “suddenly thousands of packages started pouring in. We could see them, but could not know who they were for, because the Ustashe had removed all the addresses. Of course, many of the recipients were already dead. Those who sent those packages... will probably remember the enthusiasm and joy they put into making the food, and it was all eaten up by the Ustashe”.⁷⁴ Ante Ciliga, a politician, writer and Jasenovac inmate whose account of the time spent in the camp stirred controversy, described the relief shipments in the following way: “Certain manifestations of Jewish solidarity which I came across in Jasenovac stroke me as extraordinary, fantastic. The only aid shipments that arrived in the camp from the outside in a system-

⁷⁰ HDA, Fund ZKRZ GUZ, No 306, box 10, 93

⁷¹ HDA, Fund 252, Section 28371; Jewish Historical Museum, Fund of the Zagreb Jewish Center, Reg. No 4866, sign. K-66-1-1/1-67

⁷² Jewish Historical Museum, Fund of the ZJC, Reg. No 4866, Sign. K-66-1-1/1-50

⁷³ HDA, Fund ZKRZ GUZ, No 306, box 10, 87-8

⁷⁴ Berger, *44 Months*, 31

atic, steady and organized manner were Jewish, and all that through the Jewish Religious Community in Zagreb! Every week, this Community collected packages from individuals and made its own packages for the Jews who had no one to help them. They packed them together into two or three crates and, accompanied by a Catholic Croat hired especially for the occasion, sent them by rail to Jasenovac. The shipments were made each Thursday, so that the packages could be handed out in time for Sabbath, during the day on Friday”.⁷⁵

Despite all the generous efforts of the Community’s leadership, some were not satisfied with its work. In a letter sent to some relief organizations abroad in late 1941, a certain Leopold Pick, a refugee from the Reich, “gravely insulted and smeared the Community and its secretary general, Klajn.”⁷⁶

Already in the summer of 1941, and again on two occasions in 1942, Klajn traveled to the JOINT’s Budapest office in order to get assistance. Indeed, the JOINT had promised to give money.⁷⁷ What is more, it seems that a representative of the JOINT had arrived in Zagreb in July 1941, because the position of the Jewish Department was that “the money orders that might come in this way are both needed and welcome”.⁷⁸ It seems that neither Klajn nor the Jewish Community got much money that time, only the equivalent of about USD 2,000 paid in the Hungarian currency. Several smaller payments that followed were not enough to cover even one third of its most urgent needs. In March 1942 Klajn also traveled to Slovenia’s capital Ljubljana “for the purpose of making arrangements for the assistance to refugees”.⁷⁹ Dragutin Rozenberg traveled to “Hungary, Italy and Switzerland” with the same mandate,⁸⁰ as did Dezider Abra-

⁷⁵ Ciliga, *Sam kroz Evropu (Across Europe, Alone)*, 305

⁷⁶ Minutes of a session of the Council of the ZJC 1941, JCZ Archives

⁷⁷ HDA, Fund 252, RUR, Ž. Section 27352, 27793; *Minutes of the Council of ZJC 1941*, ZJC Archives; Ristović, *Jevreji*, 184

⁷⁸ HDA, Fund 252, RUR, Jewish Dept. 27554

⁷⁹ HDA, Collection of the Ministry of Internal Affairs RH III-24, 1179

⁸⁰ HDA, Fund 252, RUR, Jewish Dept., 28575, 29153, 29154

ham.⁸¹ As these effort proved completely unsatisfactory, in early 1942 Zagreb turned to Jewish and other organizations in Switzerland, above all to Dr Alfred Silberschein, the chair of RELICO, in Geneva.⁸² In this way, one contingent of 1,200 boxes with provisions – sardines, sugar, macaroni, and canned food – was sent to concentration camps through the International Red Cross.⁸³ Registered as a Swiss company, RELICO could afford to let its activities sometimes overlap with the JOINT's. A Swiss businessman, working as middleman, transferred financial aid to the Zagreb Jewish Community. At the same time, the JOINT sent three shipments – directly through the International Red Cross – of “large and wonderful packages” containing various drugs, mainly those that were in short supply in Zagreb. Most of them were forwarded to the camps.⁸⁴ One of the shipments (“11 crates with medical products”) were sent to the Croatian Red Cross in July 1943 and distributed to the camps through the Zagreb Jewish Community.⁸⁵ In a brief overview of the war years, the Federation paid special tribute to Mr Kelert, the wartime Swiss consul in Zagreb, who was secretly bringing money for the Jewish community from Jewish international institutions' agents in Turkey.⁸⁶ Some support arrived from Delasem, the organization of Italian Jews, which provided assistance primarily to Jewish refugees in Italy and the territories under Italian occupation. Ante Ciliga claims that, in 1942, his Jewish fellow-inmates in Jasenovac told him that the money for the distribution of packages to the camp arrived in Zagreb through Budapest, “mostly from Jews in America and England”.⁸⁷

⁸¹ HDA, Fund 252, RUR, Jewish Dept., 29153.

⁸² HDA, Fund 252, RUR, Jewish Dept., 29153; Ristović, *Jevreji*, 184

⁸³ HDA, Fund ZKRZ GUZ, No 306, box 10, 93; box 16, 4687-4770

⁸⁴ HDA, Fund ZKRZ GUZ, No. 306, box 10, 93

⁸⁵ Jewish Historical Museum, Fund of the ZJC, Reg. No 5386, Sign. K-65-6-1/1-315

⁸⁶ *Spomenica SJOJ 1919-1969*, 89

⁸⁷ Ciliga, *Sam kroz Europu*, 305

According to some accounts, in this way the Jewish Community sent to Jasenovac, Stara Gradiska, Lepoglava and some other camps remarkable quantities of clothes, medicines and hygiene products, and somewhere between 50,000 and 51,000 packages containing food (and tobacco).⁸⁸ If this number is correct, it means that during the four years of war, including Sundays and holidays, the Jewish Community sent an average of 25 to 30 packages to the camps every week.⁸⁹ The packages were “stuffed with supplies and parceled in a professional way... and precise records were kept of when they were dispatched”. Although they had to be standardized, thanks to the accounts of “various people and non-Jews who had been released from camps... we sometimes learned that food for cooking was taken away from the inmates in Stara Gradiska and that they were allowed to keep ready-to-eat dry food only. Later on, we were informed that women prisoners were only allowed to keep cookies... We then adjusted the contents of the packages taking these information into account.” For instance, as regarded a shipment of clothes and men’s underwear to Jasenovac, the Community learned that “the Ustashe took more than 90% of it for themselves”.⁹⁰

Relief shipments from abroad – mainly Switzerland — contained medicines as well, but not regularly. In a letter sent to RELICO on January 30, 1943, the president of the Jewish Community, Hugo Kon, and rabbi Miroslav Shalom Freiburger complained about not having received a shipment of medicines for more than two and a half months.⁹¹ In a telegram to HICEM of February 13, 1943, Freiburger and Kon requested a shipment of medicines for that month. In those weeks, they approached other organizations in Geneva with the same request. It appe-

⁸⁸ HDA, Fund of KRZ GUZ, No 306, box 10, 94

⁸⁹ HDA, Fund of ZKRZ GUZ, No 306, box 15, 3877, box 16, 4479.

⁹⁰ HDA, Fund of ZKRZ GUZ, No 306, box 15, 3877

⁹¹ Jewish Historical Museum, Fund of ZJC, Sign. K-65-4-1/1-94; for more details, see: Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu (The Holocaust in Zagreb)*, 456-457

ars that at one moment foreign suppliers were replaced by a local producer.

In February 1943, Freiburger went out of his way to find matzo for Passover. The Jewish centers in Genoa and Trieste replied that a government ministry there had prevented the export of even the smallest of quantities.⁹² He sent the same letter to Geneva, Rome, to several addresses in Budapest, Subotica. The outcome of this endeavor remained unknown.

More than ever, the international contacts of the Zagreb Jewish Community proved vital during the operation "Kindertransport".

In early 1942, the Jewish Agency initiated an extensive operation to save several thousand Jewish children from Hungary and neighboring countries and take them to Palestine. The Palestinian Office in Budapest allocated 50 children's passes to the Zagreb Community.⁹³ The representatives of the Catholic Church in Croatia, as well as the Swiss Consulate in Zagreb also took part in the action. A number of offices and individuals in Budapest and Istanbul who were to accompany the children during their journey maintained extensive correspondence with Zagreb. The Istanbul office of the Jewish Agency for Palestine coordinated the entire action.⁹⁴

Initially, the Zagreb Community submitted a list with the names of 87 children and nine escorts. However, their numbers dropped all the time, and in early fall of 1942 only 32 names remained on the list, then 25, 20... On January 15, 1943, the list contained 15 names, and only 12 by the end of that month.⁹⁵

⁹² Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, Reg. No 5382, Sign. K-65-5-1/1-54, 1-61, 1-74, 1-75, 1-80, 1-81, 1-93, 1-94, 1-101 to 1-106; for more details, see: Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu*, 458

⁹³ For more details, see: Ristović, *Jevreji*, 320-324

⁹⁴ Krišto, *Katolička crkva (The Catholic Church)*, II, 219; HDA, Fund of ZKRZ GUZ, No 306, box 16, 4526-4687, 4771-4818, 4825, 4877

⁹⁵ See records of applications for travel documents: HDA, Fund of ZKRZ GUZ, No 306, box 16, 4500-4520; Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, gn. K-67-1-1/1-101; Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, no reg. No/sign.

Many from the list got deported or had fled the country. The identity of the children was carefully hidden from the Ustashe authorities, and their addresses and other details never appeared on any list. The Jewish organizations in Budapest and Switzerland complained about the ever-changing numbers, but to no avail.⁹⁶ In a letter to Budapest dated January 14, Freiburger and Kon requested precise answers to the following questions: "When are the children due to leave?", "What must they have on them (minimum)?", "How much are they allowed to take with them (maximum)?", "Will the escorts go with them all the way to Turkey and if not, will someone be allowed to take them to Budapest?" Three days later, they thanked a certain Otto Komoly from Budapest for his efforts,⁹⁷ and started applying for passports two days after that.⁹⁸ On January 22, a telegram arrived from HICEM, confirming a list of 14 passengers.⁹⁹ However, getting Hungarian visa proved to be a problem and Freiburger and Kon, now rather disheartened, turned to the management in Geneva, urging them to reply to the letters they had sent almost two months earlier and begging them to speed up the bureaucratic procedure.¹⁰⁰ On January 28, HICEM informed them that the children's passports had been approved and that Hungarian visas were now a matter of urgency. Three days later, they had a confirmation that Hungarian visas had been granted.¹⁰¹ On February 3, news arrived from Budapest that the "pictures are sent" and that the departure "should now be speeded up".¹⁰²

⁹⁶ HDA, Fund of ZKRZ GUZ, No 306, box 16, 4459-4476; Lengel-Krizman, *Supplement* 8, 16-18

⁹⁷ Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, no Reg. No/sign.

⁹⁸ Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, no Reg. No/sign.

⁹⁹ Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, no Reg. No/sign. Established in Paris, in 1927, HICEM is an acronym for its three co-founders: HIAS (United Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society), ICA (Jewish Colonization Association), and EMIG (Emigration Direct).

¹⁰⁰ Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, no Reg. No/sign

¹⁰¹ Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, no Reg. No/sign

¹⁰² Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, no Reg. No/sign

Freiberger also turned to the Catholic Church for help, urging it to get involved in making the transport possible. Vatican diplomats and the Archbishop of Zagreb, Stepinac, spoke with the top officials of the Ustashe state, which is probably how the children eventually got their passports, given that until the very last moment the Ustashe authorities did everything to obstruct their departure.¹⁰³ Finally, on Sunday, February 7, 1943, 11 little boys and girls left for Palestine, Freiberger's eleven-year-old son Ruben among them.¹⁰⁴ Freiberger was offered to leave with the children, as their escort, and get out of harm's way, but he had refused.¹⁰⁵ During their stop in Budapest, the Jewish children from Hungary and Slovakia took the names of the Croatian children from the original list, the majority of whom were either deported or dead. It is very likely that the certificates were out for sale.¹⁰⁶ The children reached Bucharest on February 12, five days after leaving Zagreb. From there, the Jewish Center in Zagreb received a telegram saying that "they are doing well and have continued the journey".¹⁰⁷ Marija Bauer, who had lived in Istanbul for many years and was one of the key players in this rescue operation, hoped to see her grandson Fedor Fedja Franko in the transport, but discovered that a different child had arrived under his name.¹⁰⁸ In all likelihood, little Fedor perished in the Nazi camp in Zemun, near Belgrade.¹⁰⁹

After 16 days, the children finally reached Palestine. Zagreb had news about them through Marija Bauer. Letters conti-

¹⁰³ HDA, Fund of ZKRZ GUZ, No 306, box 10, 92; Krišto, *Katolička crkva*, II, 242-243, 254, 280-281

¹⁰⁴ Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, Sign. K-65-4-1/1-106; HDA, Fund of ZKRZ GUZ, No 306, box. 16, 4487-4492

¹⁰⁵ HDA, Fund of ZKRZ GUZ, No 306, box. 16, 4487-4492

¹⁰⁶ Shomrony, *Kako su prodani certifikati (How the Certificates Were Sold)*

¹⁰⁷ Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, Sign. K-65-4-1/1-114

¹⁰⁸ Ristović, *Jevreji*, 320, 324

¹⁰⁹ *Card catalog of the Jewish Symbol; List of victims*

nued to arrive even after May 1943, when Kon, Freiberger and others had already been deported.¹¹⁰

One of the last actions that Hugo Kon and Miroslav Shalom Freiberger undertook shortly before their deportation in May 1943 was an attempt to organize a new childrens' transport. Already on January 28, the two men sent to Budapest a list of 28 names.¹¹¹ This new transport stirred more interest than the previous one: life in Zagreb was getting more difficult, hope of survival in the city was fading, and people started snatching at straws. Besides, it seems that in the days of the first transport, few believed that the children could actually reach Palestine. The success of the fist transport boosted hopes that escape was possible, and the Community's leadership suggested that a new transport should include "45 children". Writing on February 9 to Drago Rosenberg, a member of the Zagreb community who had fled to Vicenza, Kon and Freiberger said that they were "trying to obtain the authorization for the new list of children to leave the country".¹¹² However, the new transport never came into being, although Freiberger asked people in Budapest "to get the approval as soon as possible". They wrote again on February 11, asking to add some more names on the list; an exchange of telegrams followed.¹¹³ But it was all to no avail, the transport never left Zagreb and most children from the list were deported to Auschwitz in the beginning of March 1943.

In June 1943, an initiative was launched in the Italian-run camp of Kraljevica (located some 20 km south-east of Rijeka, on the Adriatic coast) to send the children from the camp to Palestine. In early May, a list with the names of approximately 70 children from Kraljevica – potential immigrants to Palestine –

¹¹⁰ Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, no Reg. No/sign

¹¹¹ Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, No Reg. number and sign. It says on the list that Lea Deutsch was born in 1933, while in fact she was six years older. This inaccuracy was probably intentional because only children under 16 years of age could be included in the transport.

¹¹² Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, Sign. K-65-4-1/1-114

¹¹³ Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, no Reg. No/sign

was dispatched to Zagreb and Budapest. The news about the possibility to organize another transport reached other camps on the east coast of the Adriatic Sea, then under the control of the Italian forces. In a camp near Dubrovnik, as well as in the confinement camp on the Isle of Lopud, "in the spring of 1943 rumors started that the children were leaving for Palestine. The lists with names were made, but the parents were too distrustful to let children have. Soon, this was no longer mentioned."¹¹⁴ The deportations from Zagreb in May 1943 put a stop to the action, since it was all to be organized through the Zagreb Community. Nothing could be done through other channels either, because the Kraljevica prisoners were taken to the Island of Rab in the northeast Adriatic. After the capitulation of Italy, in September 1943, rather than to Palestine, the children were taken to other safe destinations.¹¹⁵

Kon and Freiburger still maintained extensive and often unpleasant correspondence with those asking for information about the fate of their relatives or friends. Letters arrived from all parts, from Macedonia to the parts of Croatia under Italian occupation. To some they replied that their relatives were in Jasenovac, and to others that they did "not know anything about the Jews who were taken to the labor camps in Germany".¹¹⁶

After Freiburger and Kon were deported in May 1943, Ašer Kišický and Robert Glücksthal took the helm.

Although they were exposed to harassment and could never be sure whether they would live to see the next day, and once even detained for five days, Kišický and Glücksthal faced a lack of understanding from the part of the Jewish organizations abroad when they tried to explain the situation of the Jews who still remained in Zagreb. Glücksthal wrote that in Budapest there were "people who do not seem to recognize us as the members

¹¹⁴ Isaić, *Od Mostara do Raba (From Mostar to Rab)*, 12

¹¹⁵ Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, reg. No 5993, sign. K-62-6-1/1-146, 1-159, 1-166, 1-171; Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, no reg. number or sign.; Ristović, *Jevreji*, 325-328

¹¹⁶ For more details, see: Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu*, 461-463

of the same family”.¹¹⁷ The probable reason for this attitude was the entirely unfounded suspicion that the two men were Ustashe collaborators. The Federation paid them special tribute after the war. “Under the circumstances that prevailed in those days, the Community was as active as it was still possible. Certainly, the credit for this goes to Dr. Robert Glücksthal, engineer Djura Kastl and Ašer Kišicky, who, at the cost of exposing themselves to gravest dangers, kept the Zagreb Community operational throughout the war – thus making it unique among 115 Jewish centers that existed in the pre-war Yugoslavia.”¹¹⁸ All three men survived the war thanks to the fact that they were married to non-Jews and continued to lead the Zagreb Jewish Center until 1946.

One of Kišicky’s and Glücksthal’s very first undertakings involved making international contacts, They wrote to the Jewish prisoners in the camp in Osnabrück¹¹⁹ and to the Hungarian Jews Relief Committee (Magyar Izraeliták Pártfogó Irodája).¹²⁰ They dealt with similar matters as the leaders of the Center for the next two years.

When the war ended, the Zagreb Jewish Community sent letters to the Diaspora – from California to Israel – informing relatives and friends about the fate of their loved ones. Most of them were informed that the persons in question were “taken to the camp. Given that the above mentioned individual has not appeared until present day, there is a probability that he/she is no longer alive”.¹²¹ The dryness of the bureaucratic lingo only underlines the horror of the information. Similar letters were dispatched from Zagreb until 1952, as a reminder of past times. The Zagreb Center and the entire Jewish community faced different challenges in the post-war period.

A.D.

¹¹⁷ Ristovic, *Jevreji*, 80

¹¹⁸ *Spomenica 1919-1969*, 89

¹¹⁹ Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, reg. No 5386, sign. K-65-6-1/1-262, 1-263, 1-265 to 1-268, 1-275 do 1-279, 1-305

¹²⁰ Jewish Historical Museum, ZJC Fund, reg. No. 5386, sign. K-65-6-1/1-309; for more details, see: Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu*, 541-542

¹²¹ See: Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu*, 650