
TOURISTS UNDER SUSPICION – ON THE POLICY OF THE KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA TOWARD THE JEWISH REFUGEES 1938-1941

By Milan Ristović

The often controversial discussions about the problem of the Jewish refugees from Central European countries since 1938 – held at the level of the Government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, but also at different “lower administrative levels” (provinces, districts and local municipalities), with the participation of various directly or indirectly interested parties, whose numbers grew considerably on the eve of the war in 1941 – included the issue of status of several categories of persons with foreign citizenship (or with no citizenship at all). Apart from the “real refugees” and immigrants, these discussions also dwelled on the issue of the status of “Jewish tourists” from Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, the neighboring Yugoslav states as well as Palestine. The attempts to find the most favorable solution for the state of Yugoslavia reflected all the dilemmas of the Yugoslav authorities about how to “neutralize the problem” of the Jewish refugees from Germany, who after the National Socialists’ rise to power, in 1933, began arriving to the Yugoslav borders, too.

The tightened security measures at the Yugoslav border since spring 1938 and a new regime of entrance and transit visas for foreign citizens of Jewish origin came as a result of a radically changed position of Jews in the aftermath of the German annexation of first Austria and then the Sudetenland, and the consequent occupation of the Czech Republic and Moravia and their becoming German protectorates. Moreover, a sudden anti-Jewish orientation in the official policy of some Yugoslav

neighbors – Romania, Hungary, and Italy – also had an effect on the regime of visas for the Jewish citizens of those countries.

On the one hand, this may have been a result of the Yugoslav leadership's wish to prevent a massive inflow of tens of thousands of refugees from Central and South European countries, fearing that, in case they were forced to extend their stay in the country, it would inevitably result in a number of internal political problems (upsurge of anti-Semitism, as well as problems related to accommodation, food and health-care, etc.) Also, this political decision was clearly a consequence of another, none less important consideration that had primarily to do with the relations between Yugoslavia and the Third Reich. After consuming Austria, in 1938, the Reich became an unpleasant neighbor whose anti-Semitic policy had to be followed by any state wishing or forced to maintain good relations with it.

Such a reaction of the Yugoslav authorities was not unusual: Jewish refugees, whose unclear status and tragic position were bound to produce many problems, were not welcome anywhere. In an attempt to expose and condemn the behavior of countries that were expected to set a model for others in providing assistance and refuge for Jewish refugees, the London "Daily Mirror" of June 6, 1936 ran a cartoon showing the Statue of Liberty holding a tablet inscribed with the words "Keep Out" and turning its head away from a ship full of Jewish refugees, while the inscription at the monument's feet clearly read, "*Give your tired, your poor... send those, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me*" – a rather ironic punchline under the circumstances.¹

The prohibition to settle in the British colonies, including Palestine², and numerous restrictions (annual immigration quota, financial guarantees for entering the United States and

¹ "Daily Mirror", June 6, 1936.

² On the British policy towards Jews in the Second World War see: B. Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews in Europe 1939-1945*, London—Oxford, 1979.

other overseas countries, letters of invitation, etc.) made it difficult for Jewish refugees to reach safe haven.

Located on the road to exile of the refugee convoys that were set into motion in Germany in 1933, and encircled by countries which one by one introduced anti-Jewish measures, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia found itself in an awkward position; sealing off the borders was out of question and not feasible; rather, the borders were to be made "controllably porous" with the introduction of new control measures. Public assistance to refugees by the state organs was not to be expected, given the foreign policy of Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović and later the Cvetković-Maček government. There is no evidence that the government had ever discussed this issue, either.

The bulk of the aid for more than 55,000 refugees who between 1933 and 1941 were in transit through the Yugoslav territory, making brief or longer stops, was provided by the Yugoslav Jewish community, as well as international Jewish organizations, such as the "Joint" or HICEM.³

Refugees and displaced persons reached Yugoslavia's borders using different ways of transport and by different roads. Some were in possession of valid documents and immigration visas, but some had no papers at all. In certain cases, the Gestapo would simply order the larger groups of Austrian Jews with no papers across the border line and into the no-man's-land, where they spent days waiting to be granted entry into Yugoslavia.⁴

One of the ways to flee the countries that applied anti-Jewish measures and try to reach Palestine or other destinations were tourist trips. The forced displacement of Jews from

³ Herriet Pass Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia. A Quest for Community*, Philadelphia, 1979, ps. 180 and onward; G. Anderl/W. Manoschek, *Gescheiterte Flucht. Der jüdische "Kladovo Transport" auf dem Weg nach Palastina 1939-1942*, Wien, 1993, ps. 54-56.

⁴ The Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade (hereinafter: JIM), Minutes of meetings of the Executive Board of the Federation of the Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia (SJVO), 1938, p. 56.

the Central European countries played in the hands of, among others, tourist agencies, the likes of the Italian national agency CIT, or ČEDOK, from the Czech Republic. Also, ship and air transport companies, state railways, and hotel industry charged their services to the many refugees.

Suspicious that the Jews from Central Europe and neighboring countries were using tourism as a pretext to leave the country, and the Yugoslav tourist visas as a hoax, grew in 1938 after a new, bigger wave of refugees took place, following the Anschulss, the Munich Agreement, the Night of Broken Glass and the introduction of anti-Jewish laws by many European countries. However, the groups of genuine vacationers continued to arrive in the summer resorts on the Adriatic coast and spas from the neighboring countries, including Palestine. The new circumstances called for a redefinition of their status as it became difficult to tell them apart from the Jews from Central Europe, who, the authorities believed, used tourist trips to flee to Yugoslavia. It is on the basis of the approach to those "tourists" that one can study this particular segment of the Yugoslav policy, but also the position of other interested players on the problem of refugees in a broader sense.⁵

The first indications of the existence of a debate about the tourists of Jewish origin are found in a reply of the Dravska province administration office to the Interior Ministry on July 26, 1938, regarding the protection from the unwanted entrance of "foreign Jews" from states that had already introduced anti-Jewish measures.⁶ In order for the problem of visas for foreign tourists to be solved as efficiently as possible, it was suggested to use urgent procedure only in the case of foreign citizens "coming from the states from which it is unlikely that unwanted

⁵ On the attitudes of the Yugoslav government towards Jewish refugees see my paper "Yugoslavia and Jewish Refugees (1938-1941)", *Istorija 20. veka (History of the 20th Century)*, 1, 1996.

⁶ Yugoslav State Archives (hereinafter AJ) 14-33-101/417-1024, Tourist and other visas, 1922-1941, June 26, 1938.

persons or persons whose return may be made impossible may enter our country".⁷

The Yugoslav Foreign Ministry, "given the likelihood that, due to the change of the political situation, Jews – Czech citizens, as well as former Austrian and German citizens of Jewish origin, residents of the Sudeten region – will attempt to enter our country", asked the Interior Ministry to take the necessary measures in order to prevent their transit through and stay in the Kingdom without a previous special authorization of the Foreign Ministry.⁸ The Ministry also warned that "lately... a large number of Hungarian and Czech Jews" entered Yugoslavia. Those arriving from Hungary, on regular tourist visas allowing them to stay on the Adriatic coast, "as a rule never go there, but rather scatter all over the state".⁹

The Interior Ministry (headed by Anton Korošec, a declared anti-Semite) required the introduction of a more rigid visa regime and warned the embassies that the Yugoslav entry and transit visas should be granted to Jewish persons in exceptional cases and for a precise location only, with mandatory registration with the local police office.¹⁰

As the situation regarding the "Jewish question" in Germany deteriorated after the assassination of Von Rath, a German diplomat in Paris – which was used as a pretext for the pogrom in the night between 9 and 10 November 1938 and led to a new, massive flight of Jews from Germany – the Yugoslav Interior Ministry tried to place under its full control not only the movement of Jews within the country, but also the visa policy. On November 14, 1938, it asked the Foreign Ministry to "in future stop issuing to Jews any type of entry or transit visa with-

⁷ Idem.

⁸ Idem. K.P No 11288-319, circular letter No 111, re: The Issue of Sudetenland Jews, October 1, 1938.

⁹ AJ PKJ Teheran, Consular and Economy Department, K.P No 1152-319, circular No 110, re: Hungarian Jews, arrival in our country, October 1, 1938.

¹⁰ Idem.

out previous authorization of the Interior Ministry.”¹¹ This was indeed put into practice, and the Interior Ministry had the last word in granting entrance into Yugoslavia to foreign citizens, Jews in particular.

The issue of visas for Jews who on the eve of the war arrived in Yugoslav spas and summer resorts as tourists soon went beyond the limits of a “purely administrative” matter. Throughout 1939, the representatives of different government ministries held several meetings dedicated to this issue.

At the meeting of the senior officials of the Interior Ministry, the Foreign Ministry and the Department of Tourism of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, held on February 21, 1939 on the premises of the Consular and Economy Department of the Foreign Ministry, the loudest opponent of a less rigid and less elaborate visa procedure for Jewish foreign citizens was the head of the Interior Ministry, Keršovan.¹² His position was that “the most dangerous tourists” were those who came to visit relatives and used the opportunity to stay in Yugoslavia at any cost. The Interior Ministry granted visas to the Jewish traders from Eastern and Central European states for the duration of two or three weeks and up to one month. Keršovan claimed, “if we allow Jewish immigrants into the country, anti-Semitism will rear its head, as it has in other countries”. According to his account, which included several “classical anti-Jewish statements”, the Interior Ministry received “every day and from all parts of the country letters from traders complaining against disloyal Jewish competition and against Jews who take jobs away from our men”. He pointed out that “we don’t touch our Jews, but what are we to do with the Jews who are now without citizenship? This refers in particular to the Jews from Poland, Czech Republic and Germany”.

¹¹ *Idem.* Highlighted in the original.

¹² AJ MUP, 14-33-101/910, dossier: Tourist and other visas (mainly for Jews from different countries), 1922-1941, Inter-ministerial conference at the Consular and Economy Department of the Foreign Ministry, February 1939.

He conceded that the tourist season, which was expected to attract, among others, a large number of Jewish visitors mainly from the Czech Republic, Hungary and Palestine, would be of great benefit to the country, but “are we to give up Germans and Czechs for this? The Jews will come this year, but what about next year?” – he asked, adding that “we cannot afford to be so generous”, because “almost all Jews are smugglers of hard currency”.¹³

This rigid, intolerant stance with clear anti-Semitic undertones was contested by R. Mitrović, the representative of the Foreign Ministry. Stating pragmatic reasons of a different sort, he said that Yugoslavia should follow the example of Italy, which, despite its anti-Jewish laws, allowed Jewish foreign tourists unrestricted entrance. The representative of the Department of Tourism requested that the tourists from Palestine be allowed into the country “in largest possible numbers”, and said that “not all Jews should be regarded as the enemies of this country”, the statement strongly opposed by Keršovan. The representative of the Foreign Ministry also argued that ČEDOK’s proposal to let the Jews who were in transit through Yugoslavia pay the Yugoslav police “to, in the interest of public safety, escort them from the border to the port” should not be accepted “for ethical reasons”. The unrelenting position of the representatives of the Interior Ministry resulted in the rejection of a more liberal regime of tourist and transit visas for which Jewish tourists had to apply to this ministry.¹⁴

Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković displayed the same inflexibility when rejecting a request from Pečuj for letting Hungarian Jews access summer resorts in Yugoslavia without having to face administrative obstacles.¹⁵ Asked to give his opinion, the secretary general of the Interior Ministry said that “by

¹³ Idem

¹⁴ Idem

¹⁵ Idem, 14-101-33-937, Letter from Balasz Gyozo to PM Cvetković, November 8, 1939.

no means should this wish of foreign citizens be gratified under the current circumstances, because without special visas for Jews the road would be wide open for them to cruise up and down our country, something that would obviously be against our interests in terms of state and public safety.”¹⁶

This narrow-minded, police-like way of reasoning must also be placed in the context of the new war, which had already spread over a large portion of the European continent. It is problematic thought because of its underlying mistrust of the group that had already become the biggest victim of the burgeoning brutal clashes that preceded the outburst of war in Europe.

The Yugoslav envoy in Prague, informing in early March 1939 that new trains were ready to take tourists to the Adriatic coast, suggested that the answer to ČEDOK's proposal to have a unique identity paper for all tourists should be: “for Aryans, Czech subjects.... a collective visa is acceptable.”¹⁷ He believed that difference should be made “between Jewish emigrants and the Jews who are Czech subjects. The former should not be granted visa at all, and the latter, when visiting our sea resorts, could be stamped individual visa in their passports, providing they are in possession of a valid return visa issued by Czech authorities”. The ban on the issuance of entrance visas for Czech Jews had to be lifted for the sake of tourism. According to the envoy, they accounted for more than one half of all Czech tourists in Yugoslavia in the previous years, and any ban or complications regarding visas could easily make them go to Italy instead.¹⁸

The expected massive arrival of Jewish tourists from Palestine topped the agenda of the second inter-ministerial conference on Jewish tourists, held on March 21, 1939.¹⁹ Again, the

¹⁶ *Idem.* Opinion of the Interior Ministry, December 10, 1939.

¹⁷ AJ MUP14-33-101, 825-915, No 562, Envoy in Prague to the Foreign Ministry, Consular and Economy Department, March 8, 1939.

¹⁸ *Idem.*

¹⁹ AJ MUP 14-33-101, 837, the paper from the inter-ministerial conference at the Foreign Affairs Ministry, March 21, 1939.

rigid position of the representative of the Interior Ministry (headed by Mehmed Spaho since February that year), quite different from that of his counterparts from the other two ministries, prevailed.

He insisted that there was risk of an uncontrolled inflow of Jews, either in transit or as tourists. This would “have only short-range benefits for the country, while in the coming years, the revenue from tourism would drop considerably, because we would most certainly lose guests from Germany, who already last year protested against the strong presence of Jews in our sea resorts” (underlined by M.R.).²⁰

The third conference, held at the Interior Ministry on June 10, 1939, concluded that “the question of the arrival of Jews from the clearing-regime countries (Germany with former Austria, Czech Republic and Slovakia, and Italy) is not on the agenda, since it is of no relevance for profits from tourism, and the visa regime for Jewish foreign citizens from these countries will remain as before, i.e. the applications will still be considered by the Interior Ministry, in accordance with the current procedure”.²¹

It was decided that the Jews from Hungary, Poland, Switzerland, the Nordic countries and Palestine would be issued visas at the Yugoslav diplomatic outposts, providing that they were in possession of valid return visa in their passports, proof of financial solvency or letters of credit. A tourist visa issued for a particular destination – Adriatic sea resorts, medical treatment or vacationing in the spas – could, the conference conceded, be extended in the country only in the case of severe medical condition endorsed by a doctor’s opinion, while the change of residential address could be approved only by the police. To enter

²⁰ Idem.

²¹ AJ MUP 13-33-101, 33-825-915. Conclusions of the conference held at the Ministry of Interior about the issuance of tourist visas to Jewish foreigners, June 10, 1939.

Yugoslavia, the Jewish tourists from Palestine needed to have valid British passports duly stamped with return visa.

As for the emigrants from the countries "from which they fled to other countries, they will be granted tourist visas under the same conditions as above, providing the country of their current residence is willing to accept them back". The Jewish citizens of the countries that had not yet introduced anti-Semitic measures "will be granted tourists visas same as all other Aryan foreigners (French, English, Belgian, Turkish, etc)".

The new conclusions were somewhat less rigid and came as a result of the fact that, this time, the representatives of other two ministries took the upper hand in defining the "state security policy". The representative of the Interior Ministry again said that there was a possibility that "a small percentage of Jews (those from Poland and Romania, in particular) may try and find a way to stay" in the country. This could only be avoided by rendering the control tighter and residence-permit regime more restrictive in the case of Jewish foreign citizens, along with the obligation of the countries whose nationals they were to accept them back. However, "the potential damage of a small percentage of Jews who might still stay is surely much smaller than the benefit our tourist industry will have from the arrival of these people".²² Nevertheless, the Yugoslav Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković refused all the proposals of the inter-ministerial group.

Apart from the representatives of the provinces, the discussion drew the local authorities in, but also tourist workers, hoteliers, and spa owners. In 1939 in particular, the operators of summer resorts and spas complained to the government about a poor turnout of vacationers due to its stern measures regarding entry and the length of stay, particularly in what regarded the Jews from neighboring countries.

Local tourist agencies feared that, due to the fact that the tourist visa requirements were rendered increasingly rigid, the

²² Idem.

number of vacationers would drop sharply, especially in the Western parts of the Kingdom. They demanded that those measures be slackened and the administrative procedure simplified and rendered more efficient in the case of tourists from Central Europe. Thus, for instance, in a March 1939 letter, forwarded to the Interior Ministry's National Security Office, doctor Anton Vovk, president of the medical commission in the town of Bled, Slovenia, suggested that obstacles for the entry of Jewish tourists in Yugoslavia should be reduced.²³

The Bled Tourist Association wrote in December 1939 to the Administrative Office of the Dravska Province, in Ljubljana, about the unsatisfactory results of this policy, citing examples of absurd exaggerations, as in the case of a Hungarian vacationer of, as the letter stated, "pre-Aryan origin" (!) "Before this world was made unsafe with the proliferation of Aryan paragraphs, he married a non-Aryan, who in the meantime even converted to Christianity – too late, unfortunately, to meet the requirements for entry into Yugoslavia. Now the husband can travel, but his wife cannot, because of her non-Aryan descent".²⁴

During the 1938 tourist season, Bled had 1,600 visitors from Hungary, most of them Jews, who previously vacationed in Austria. A document of the Administrative Office of the Dravska Province describes them as "good guests with sound money" similar to the guests who in recent years arrived from the Levant States in larger numbers (Syria, Egypt, Palestine, Turkey) and who were "almost exclusively Jewish".²⁵ It also states that "among other nations – excluding Germans – there is always a smaller or larger percentage of tourists of Jewish faith."

²³ AJ MUP, 14-33-101/840, Kraljevska banska uprava Dravske banovine (The Royal Administrative Office of the Dravska Province), Ljubljana, pov. II/2, No. 2402/1, *Izdavanje viz inozemnim Židom in interesi našega turizma* (Issuing visas to foreign Jews in the interest of our tourism), March 23, 1939.

²⁴ AJ MUP, 14-33-101, 822, *Bled Tourist Association* to the Interior Ministry's National Security Office, May 8, 1939.

²⁵ See above, No. 24, *Idem*

Looking at the consequences of anti-Jewish measures implemented in the immediate neighborhood, it became clear that the thousands of Jewish émigrés from the Reich were now the potential users of tourist facilities in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: “Very welcome guests in our hotels could be the hundreds and thousands of Jewish emigrants from Germany, who managed to save some of their belongings, have the permission to go to Palestine and various American states, and have been waiting for months for their turn. There is no doubt that they would rather wait in Yugoslavia than, say, in Switzerland, Italy, and so on.”²⁶

Pursuing the same pragmatic line, the author of the note (deputy province administrator of the Dravska Province) believed that – even if other states, Switzerland for instance, were equally careful to protect themselves from Jewish immigrants – “this does not mean that these measures are in collision with profitable tourism. Germany herself has no prejudice against Jewish money and foreign Jews are allowed to stay there and receive medical treatment in almost all sanatoria and health resorts.” “It must be said,” that the Jewish tourists “are welcome, because there are no better”. While they should be encouraged to come, the state should use all the measures to “prevent Jewish foreigners from settling permanently or stay illegally in our country”. One of the proposed measures was keeping their passports for the duration of their stay.²⁷

For the first time on May 8, 1939, the Foreign Ministry warned the National Security Office of the Ministry of Interior about the risk of losing hard currency brought into the country by the Jewish tourists from Palestine because of the stern restrictions regarding entry visas. It recommended that the bearers of Palestinian passports should have the same treatment as all other British citizens.²⁸

²⁶ Idem.

²⁷ Idem.

²⁸ AJ MUP 14-33-101, 852, K.P. No. 3649-323, Foreign Ministry to the National Security Office of the Ministry of Interior, May 8, 1939.

The Foreign Ministry estimated that the provision requiring of tourists to state in advance their planned place of residence and prohibiting the change of destination was “rigid and none-too-attractive for Jews”. It was suggested to the Interior Ministry that the Palestinian Jews “who bring hard currency into this country”, as well as the Jewish citizens of the countries that had not introduced anti-Jewish measures, should be granted entry and transit visas without any restrictions.²⁹

The representative of the Official Tourist Bureau of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Budapest, Farkas, warned the Ministry of Trade and Industry’s Office for Tourism that the agencies of neutral countries were competing to get control of the transport of Jewish émigrés from the Central European countries. The Yugoslav share in this lucrative business was deemed as unsatisfactory, given that the Danube River was used for transports only as far as the Bulgarian port of Rusa. It was also believed that the Yugoslav government should open a new, better corridor: Budapest–Koprivica–Split by train, and then to Palestine on Yugoslav steamboats. Farkas expected the number of transit passengers to rise by an additional 30,000 to 50,000 people.³⁰

The next inter-ministerial conference was held in mid December 1939 – the first year of the war. The transit of Jewish refugees on their way to Palestine was on the agenda, as well as visas for Hungarian tourists of Jewish origin.³¹ Examining the meager and grim prospects for the coming year, the representative of the Foreign Ministry, R. Mitrović, said that with the Hungarian and Romanian Jew now remaining the only tourists, their entrance into the country should be made easier. As for those

²⁹ Idem.

³⁰ AJ 14-33-101/917, Official Tourist Bureau of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Farkas), Budapest, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Office for Tourism, November 28, 1939.

³¹ AJ MUP 14-33-101, minutes of the inter-ministerial conference held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Jewish tourists from Hungary and transit of Jewish refugees on their way to Palestine, December 14, 1939.

in transit, he maintained that, in order to avoid any political damage, "this job should be done with utmost caution and correctness". Stating "ethical reasons", he disagreed with the proposal to have the Jews transported in sealed (passenger – M.R.) wagons". He believed that Jews should be allowed entrance under the same conditions as "Aryans – tourists – or, if that is not possible, the Interior Ministry of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia should slacken the visa procedure". As for the Jewish refugees, he estimated their future numbers at between 30,000 and 50,000 persons, and if the émigrés had valid visas – they should be encouraged to get on Yugoslav vessels.

The representative of River Transport Company, Nešković, claimed that the last transport alone, taking Jewish émigrés from Vienna to Sulina, brought 1.6 million dinars to the state, 3,500 dollars to the National Bank. The Yugoslav Railways also benefited from it. The conference therefore recommended that new group transits over the Yugoslav territory should be allowed for Jews heading for Palestine and other overseas countries, providing that "all state obligations toward third countries are observed".³² In a decree passed on December 23, the Interior Minister ignored this recommendation, and even made it easier for Jewish businessmen and, in particular, Jewish tourists to enter the country.³³

On March 8, 1940, the Ministry of Interior informed the Croatian provincial administrator Dr. Ivan Šubašić about the proposal of the Foreign Ministry allowing the heads of Yugoslav diplomatic missions to independently and without previous consultation grant visas to the citizens of Palestine, Bulgaria,

³² Idem. This probably referred to the convoy consisting of the ships "Urania", "Saturnus", "Helios", "Car Dušan", "Kraljica Marija", "Bitolj", "Vojvoda Mišić", and "Minerva", carrying 3,500 refugees, which left Bratislava in late November. A part of this convoy with more than 1,000 refugees was later stopped at Kladovo, Yugoslavia. Jewish Historical Museum, Minutes, 1939, p. 102.

³³ AJ MUP 14-33-101/965, I No 37277, Dec. 23, 1939.

Hungary and Greece.³⁴ Croatian leadership in Zagreb thought that “the current practices of control of the foreign Jewish citizens should not be abandoned” because “apart from the large number of Jewish foreigners who entered the state, there is a considerable number of those who were in possession of regular entry or transit visas and stayed here under various pretexts”. Hence the need for a continued and permanent control of the entry and exit of foreign Jews and for “refusing entrance to any person without the unconditional guarantee that after the visa expiry he will unconditionally return to (his – M.R.) country of origin”.³⁵

The State Protection Section of the provincial administration in Zagreb recommended that Hungarian Jews should be kept under special control and visas granted “only to those who are considered rightful citizens under the law and if they are in possession of a Hungarian return visa”. Moreover, their status and property must guarantee that they would not stay in Yugoslavia. Because of anti-Jewish laws in their countries, the Jewish visa applicants from Italy and Romania were to be subjected to strict control and procedure.³⁶

Similarly, the position of the administration of the Dravska Province, in Ljubljana, was that “in future, only Jews from the states which have not introduced anti-Jewish laws will be granted tourist visas for entering our state, and only in exceptional cases when there is full guarantee that the Jewish person will, after the expiry of his tourist visa, leave the state.”³⁷ Such approach, it was suggested, will be particularly valid in the case of Jews from Germany and the protectorates of Bohemia and Mo-

³⁴ AJ MUP 14-33-101/956/40, draft, Interior Ministry to Dr. Ivan Subasic, provincial administrator of Croatia, March, 1940.

³⁵ *Idem.*, 957, No. 12570/I/Pov-DZ-1940, Croatian Provincial Authority, State Security Section of the Interior Ministry – to the Security Department, March 21, 1940.

³⁶ *Idem.*

³⁷ AJ MUP 14-33-101/961 VIII, Št. 1423/3,

rovia, which were exposed to strong pressure of the Nazi authorities and forced to use all means available to leave the regions under their control.

The official Ljubljana informed that in the previous year, 1939, a larger group of Jews from those territories precisely, and who stayed in Rogaska Slatina, remained in Yugoslavia after their visas expired and fled to the countryside, where their whereabouts were impossible to track. What's more, "in the last months of 1939, the pressure of German Jews on our borders was particularly strong. Many were lucky, secretly entered the country and reached Zagreb. The border authorities caught more than 200 such refugees and sent them back to Germany.³⁸ In the course of their repatriation, "many unfortunate... and unpleasant scenes occurred." It was established that the German side "itself encouraged the illegal arrival of Jews in our country, and welcomed every opportunity to get rid of them the legal way."³⁹

Based on the experiences thus far, it was concluded that the attempts "to send these people back to their country of origin are hardly ever successful"; because "it is certain that some German Jews, if not most of them, would try to misuse tourist visas and settle in our country, and for the sake of our tourist industry, we cannot afford to have large numbers of German Jews in our country."⁴⁰

In late January 1941, the provincial administrator's cabinet informed the State Security Department of the Interior Ministry that the position of the Tourism Office on the need to strengthen traffic with foreign countries was justified, but that it should be noted that "the arrival of foreign Jews, i.e. persons of Jewish descent, should not be permitted, because it is known that such foreigners misuse this in a number of ways in order to

³⁸ Idem.

³⁹ Formally, it was not before Himmler's (Heinrich Himmler) decision of October 23, 1940, officially prohibiting Jewish emigration from the Third Reich that any possibility to cross the German borders "legally" was suspended.

⁴⁰ Idem.

settle in our country, and in order for single girls to get married here and get citizenship, etc.”⁴¹

The Ministry of Industry and Trade and its Tourism Office received complaints and warnings about the serious consequences of similar government restrictions. Travel agency “Putnik” from Belgrade informed in late March 1940 that, due to the restrictions of entry for Hungarian Jews the current business agreements with Hungary were jeopardized and that the Hungarian business partner and tourist agency “IBUS” voiced their disapproval.⁴² Similar warnings came from Slovenia as well.⁴³

By the end of April that same year, in a letter to the Provincial Authority – Interior Affairs Department, to Juraj Krnjević, secretary-general of the Croatian Farmers’ Party, and Avgust Košutić, president of the party, the Municipal Tourist Board of the town of Crikvenica described the consequences of a possible nonappearance of Jewish tourists.⁴⁴ The Board pointed to the fact that Jews made the majority of the regular guests from Hungary in that part of the coast, and that due to the difficulties with visas they were now forced to go to Italy “which has indeed been prosecuting Jews (but) posed no obstacles for Hungarian Jews to visit Italian sea resorts” and that this made it even more obvious that “in our country we should make it possible for Jewish Hungarian tourists to come here, because today they are the ones with financial means”. In case that foreign guests did not come in expected numbers to the Adriatic coast, “which is an underdeveloped part of the Province of Croatia,

⁴¹ AJ MUP, 14-33-101/993, No. 5026-1941, Cabinet of the Head of the Provincial Administration of Croatia, to the Interior Ministry – State Security Department, January 28, 1941.

⁴² AJ MUP, 14-33-101/856, “Putnik A.D.” to the Ministry of Industry and Trade/Tourism Office, 6466/P/VP/MM, Belgrade, March 30, 1940.

⁴³ Idem. No. 857, “Putnik”, Maribor, No. 5409 Lo/8/No. 5404, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 12, 1940.

⁴⁴ AJ MUP, 14-33-101/865, No. 330, Municipal Tourist Board, Crikvenica, April 27, 1940.

⁴⁵ Idem.

the poor people will not make any money. As a result of all this, the state will have to provide several hundred wagons of food to help these people make it through the winter".⁴⁵

Addressing the unrelenting Interior Ministry, the Office for Tourism, in Belgrade, tried in late December 1939 to soften its position on the Jewish tourists and the transit of refugee groups through Yugoslavia. The Office repeated that their presence was of great importance for the local transport companies as well as the state budget, given that they paid for the services mostly in US dollars and British pounds. Also, the Interior Ministry was informed about the visit and talks with Dr. Werner Blöch, "a representative of the official tourist agency from Jerusalem" about granting visas to tourists from Palestine.⁴⁶

However, all attempt to change this policy was fruitless. Following a proposal of the interior minister, the ministerial council passed a legally bounding decree on April 17, 1940, setting new conditions for the residence, registration and transit of aliens, including tourists. Even though it made no explicit mention of Jews, it was clear that it referred mainly to the refugees from Central European countries, the majority of which were of Jewish origin.⁴⁷ Among other things, the decree held that "while in the Kingdom, the foreign citizen shall only reside in the place indicated in his visa, i.e. in the place of residence indicated in the residence permit". Any change of address was to be authorized by the head of provincial authority himself or the administrator of the City of Belgrade. Every foreign citizen "within 12 hours after his arrival in the place of residence or 36 hours after crossing the border... must register in person with the home affairs authority and show identification papers."⁴⁸

As a sign of acquiescing to German pressure, but also of catching up to the trends that gradually absorbed Europe after

⁴⁶ AJ MUP 14-33-101/943, No. 50399/T, Ministry of Trade and Industry – Office for Tourism, December 1940.

⁴⁷ "Official Gazette", No 90, April 18, 1940.

⁴⁸ Idem.

the fall and occupation of France and, before that, the seizure of most of Northern, Western and Eastern Europe, the Yugoslav government passed two legally bounding decrees, on October 5, 1940, seriously jeopardizing the equality status of its Jewish citizens. Compared with similar decrees in other countries, these were rather soft and provided quite a lot of means of evading compliance (especially in the application of *Numerus Clausus*) but nevertheless were a sinister warning and a sign of a humiliating yielding to the outside pressure.

The final phase of the debate about the Jewish tourists – which became meaningless as the war progressed towards the Yugoslav borders – included the State Security Department and the Second Military Intelligence Department, whose head, Brigadier-General Joksimović, was of the opinion that there was less damage from small turnout and outstanding debt to neighboring countries than there was from the “trouble and embarrassment to which we could be exposed today in these murky and volatile times if we allowed the entrance into our country to strangers who, posing as tourists, may include unwanted and even dangerous individuals among them.”⁴⁹

Although this debate about the treatment of Jewish tourists in the early days of the Second World War, before it spread to the Balkans, may at first sight seem irrelevant and even bizarre in the context of the European historical reality of the day, it may help to form a clearer picture about the way the “Jewish Question” was addressed in the European and Yugoslav contexts. Also, the sometimes different and conflicting views of the representatives of various government ministries, provincial and local authorities, clearly reveal different trends and ambitions within the Yugoslav state regarding this delicate problem, whose “solution” according to a “unique” (National Socialist) model was imposed through strong outside pressure, giving ri-

⁴⁹ *Idem.*, 14-33-101/994, Đ. Ob. 2, No 180, Main Headquarters, Second Intelligence Department to the Interior Ministry – State Security Department, January 25, 1941.

se to the until then latent anti-Semitism. The gap between “higher interests of the state”, “national security” and the excuse for a restrictive policy toward foreigners (Jewish refugees, tourists or “tourists”), on the one hand, and specific, business interests of the tourist agencies, transport companies, state railways, hotels in the spas and sea resorts, which asked for a more flexible and tolerant approach, on the other, could also serve as an indicator of the sentiments and perceptions existing within a complex society such as Yugoslavia. Also, such a great discrepancy between the solutions offered by different ministries of the same government (most notably the Interior Ministry and the Foreign Ministry) perhaps reveals much deeper – political – differences that existed within the country’s political elite in the early days of the war.

A.D.