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Abstract

This thesis historicises Sephardi politics in the Balkans and examines why and how the idea of Sephardi diaspora became a political vehicle in the twentieth century. The Sephardim stem from the Jewish refugees expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in the late fifteenth century, who settled across the Mediterranean and remained connected through a common set of religious practices, mercantile networks, and language(s). For most of this diasporic history, the Sephardim shared culture but did not have the capacity to make political claims. My research focuses on the Balkans, where the ruptures of modern history mobilised the Sephardi diaspora as a political body for the first time between the 1900s and the late 1930s. Within this context, I analyse how this Sephardi-centred politics presented significant challenges not only to empires and nation-states but also to the Jewish national movement and, finally, how the movement itself shaped these larger actors.

The thesis explains how Sephardim gained political significance in local contexts during the 1910s and 1920s when Jewish and European politics were intertwined and mutually dependent. The politicisation of the Sephardi diaspora influenced greater political outcomes in two crucial moments for the Balkans just before and after the First World War. Moreover, the spokesmen of Sephardi politics had ardent and distinct responses to the most movements of modern Jewish history: emancipation, Zionism and, socialism. I explore how the Sephardi-centred politics challenged the substance and direction of Jewish intellectual debates. I emphasise how Sephardi politics opened space for minority politics within the Jewish national politics, but also within multinational, multi-ethnic societies, and specifically within the Austro-Hungarian empire and interwar Yugoslavia. In all of these ways, my work sheds light on minority movements as agents of social change and their unintended influences.

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Introduction

'Are we, Sephardi Jews, indeed an *extra-wurst*?', pondered Jacques Confino, a Sephardi Jew from Leskovac (in today's Serbia), in a text published in 1928.[1] With this one sentence Confino managed to subtly convey the conflicting position of Sephardi politics in the early twentieth century. Although writing in Serbo-Croatian[2], he was paraphrasing a German idiom expressing disapproval of someone who always wants to be special ('*extra'*). The wider context of Confino's article is the peak of the Sephardi political campaign in the Balkans that promoted Sephardi political autonomy. Moreover, in this text Confino was reflecting on his youth in Esperanza, the first modern Sephardi organisation formed at the University of Vienna in 1897, which brought up an entire generation of Sephardim and set the course of Sephardi political orientation. Esperanza's alumni, with Confino among them, were fierce advocates of Sephardi cultural and political autonomy throughout the first half of the twentieth century. This was an uneasy path to take, and we can sense some discomfort in Confino's reference to *extra-wurst*, a type of Austrian cold cut made from mixed meat, including pork. It reads as if Confino was posing the question of whether the Sephardi insistence on their uniqueness and political autonomy was essentially un-kosher, and thus even non-Jewish. Taken as a metaphor, Confino's sentence depicts the deep unease of Sephardi political positioning throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The nonconformism of Sephardi politics is at the core of this thesis.

This dissertation unearths the persisting and extensive impact of Sephardi politics over the course of four decades. This specifically Sephardi politics encompassed political stands, cultural policies, a specific outlook on the Jewish national movement and Sephardi positioning in the surrounding non-Jewish society. It beings with Esperanza, a Sephardi student group formed at the University of Vienna in 1897, the first modern Sephardi organisation that advocated for Sephardi revival. Out of this student group in the period between 1900 and 1930 emerged two generations of Sephardi intellectuals ready and eager to represent their brethren. They worked dedicatedly towards articulating a unique Sephardi positioning both on the

[1] Jacques Confino, 'Uspomene i refleksije', *Jevrejski Glas*, 3, 29 Elul 5688/14 September 1928, 6.

[2] I opted to use the term Serbo-Croatian as a technical, linguistic term for the languages spoken on the territory of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (1918–1929) and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1941), today known as Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian. The term Serbo-Croatian originates in the Vienna Literary Agreement signed between linguists and writers of South Slav origin in Vienna in 1925 and has been used since by all major linguists, for instance: Kenneth Naylor: 'The Sociolinguistic Situation in Yugoslavia with Special Emphasis on Serbo Croatian', in *Language Planning in Yugoslavia*, eds. Ranko Bugarski and Celia Hawkesworth (Columbus: Slavica, 1992), 82. It is important to note that the official name of the state language in the Yugoslav Kingdom was Serbo-Croat-Slovene. Moreover, I follow the primary and secondary sources' terms for the language in question and quote them accordingly.

expanding Jewish political scene and in the Balkan political sphere. Tracing the political engagement of the Sephardim, the dissertation follows the unlikely path of the movement from an imperial-based politics to its repositioning in the new international order after 1918. At the same time, this thesis is in conversation with larger topics concerning the history of modern Jewish identity. What emerges from this is not only a defining period for modern Sephardi politics but an intense process of Sephardi self-questioning that lasted for over four decades and connected actors not only across the Balkans, but also Europe and the Mediterranean.

In early days, in Vienna in 1900, Sephardim from the Balkans aimed to initiate a Sephardi renaissance mirroring the Spanish Jewish cultural and scientific achievements and validating their historic and ancestral tongue, Judeo-Spanish, through modern Spanish. By the early 1900s, the movement's political framework was already working and grappling with Zionism, the growing and tendentiously all-encompassing Jewish national movement. In the 1920s, a decade following the collapse of three empires in which politics took new forms, Sephardi politics reached its peak on the global level, with the formation of the World Sephardi Organisation in Jerusalem in 1925. Furthermore, the Sephardim triumphed in local Jewish politics in the Yugoslav Kingdom[3] in 1928. During these latter years of the 1920s, the Sephardi youth referred to this Sephardi-centred political and cultural stand as the *Sephardi movement* (Sefardski pokret).[4] Following this cross-communal success and the growing pressures from the increasingly authoritarian Yugoslav state, but also from fascism and Nazism abroad, Sephardi politics outgrew the Jewish framework in the 1930s and participated on an equal footing in left, worker-oriented, and anti-fascist politics, in Sarajevo especially. In these four decades of challenging the boundaries of both national and gentile politics, Sephardi politics aimed to represent, mobilise, and cultivate Sephardi Jews in the Balkans in their own right. Therefore, this dissertation historicises the political mobilisation of the Sephardim as Sephardim in the space between Vienna in the north and Bitola in the south of the Balkan Peninsula and examines how and why the idea of Sepharad became a political vehicle in the twentieth century. It traces Sephardi intellectuals' shifting notions and employment of a Sephardi diaspora within the dynamic of Jewish national politics between 1900 and 1940.

[3] The country's official name was Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes throughout the period 1918–1929 and Kingdom of Yugoslavia 1929–1941. However, I also use Yugoslav Kingdom for the entire interwar period as it is customary in literature.

[4] Samuel Kamhi, 'Sefardi i sefardski pokret', in *Biblioteka Esperanza* (Zagreb: Štamparija "Lino Tip", 1927), 3–18.

Finally, the thesis offers a history of Sephardi political thought and action, focused equally on local, regional, and all-Sepharad level.

Largely led by European-educated Sephardim and almost exclusively men, Sephardi politics in the Balkans was a politics of representation but also, inherently, a politics of self-questioning and self-affiliation. It aimed to establish Sepharad as an entity and a factor in Jewish politics. This thesis is concerned with the nature and context of Sephardi political expression and poses the following questions: why and when did Sephardi Jews organise politically and become a factor in Jewish politics? What did the Sephardi-centred politics bring to the Jewish political scene in the first half of the twentieth century? Was Sephardi politics exclusive and to what extent? How and when did Sephardi intellectuals' ideas converge with or diverge from the Jewish national movement? Finally, I pose the questions whether, how and when did Sephardi politics evolve from standing (up) for Sephardi autonomy to redefining dynamics between Jewish groups in the Jewish national movement? These questions call for complex and intertwined answers. Moreover, often there are no simple answers but, rather, a plurality of perspectives which embed Sephardi-specific positioning in the changing political contexts. Within this framework, I analyse how Sephardi politics presented significant challenges to Jewish national politics, empires and nation-states, and, finally, how these movement itself helped to shape these larger actors.

Alongside the Sephardi-centric political sphere, the ever-expanding, polycentric Jewish political stage at the turn of the century had a myriad political actors proposing a myriad political options for Jews worldwide. Among the most important were diaspora nationalists in Eastern Europe (Austrian Galicia and Russia) who advocated for Jewish political and cultural national autonomy in the diaspora; Bundists, who built on the idea of national autonomy but primarily gathered around the idea of Jewish workers' political and social rights and, following this premise, political and cultural (especially linguistic) independence; the Zionist movement led by Theodor Herzl, which from 1897 and the First Zionist Congress in Basel opted for a Jewish national state; and finally, cultural Zionists, a strain of Zionism that campaigned for the Jewish national home as a focal point of national renaissance but not necessarily the only form of Jewish political existence. While the differences between these political ideologies were significant and relationships between them were often turbulent, to say the least, these movements shared one common trait: they professed to offer a solution for all Jews, regardless of their background. Sephardi politics, however, was solely focused on Sephardi Jews.

However, Sephardi politics was neither closed nor clannish, even if European Jews, among them Zionists in particular, criticised it as unnecessarily exclusive. It was variously

labelled as separatist, disloyal, and ignorant. However, as the dissertation explains, Sephardi positioning was rarely in opposition to Jewish national goals and never antagonistic towards other Jewish groups, first and foremost, Ashkenazim. Rather, Sephardi intellectuals offered the Jewish 'nation', perceived in a global sense, a different approach. They advocated an anti-elitist and inclusive reading of the Jewish past and from this understanding grew an approach that respected the individual traits of all Jewish groups. In short, the thesis traces a pluralist history of Jewish nationalism (or nationalistic) politics that advocated for both an all-Jewish political programme and for specific Sephardi political and cultural identities.

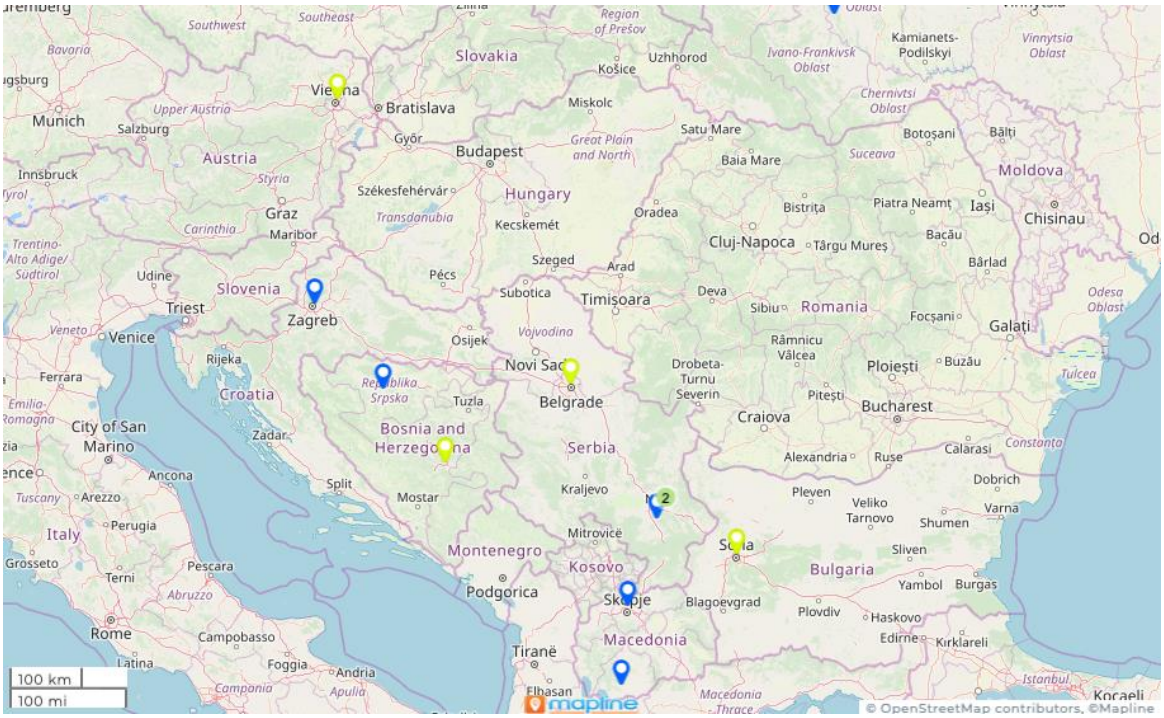
The Balkans, often referred to as Southeastern Europe, provided not only a framework to Sephardi politics but also content. Traditionally, the Balkan boundaries are not precisely defined and they span from the Danube to the Aegean sea and from the Black sea to the Adriatic. The region is often considered as a cultural residue of the Ottoman centuries-long presence in Europe, an imaginary space defined by the external, predominantly Western gaze, similar to Said's 'Orient'.[5] However, the Balkans had a foothold in Central Europe as well. Anecdotally, as Chancellor of the Austrian Empire, Klemens von Metternich (1773–1859) remarked that the Balkans begin right off Vienna's Ringstrasse (central boulevard); in the case of Sephardi politics, this reference played out in the twentieth century. Conspicuously, the birth of Sephardi politics started in the Habsburg capital, Vienna, as did almost all Balkan national movements.[6] Just as Balkan national movements were at first inclusive and addressed all Slavs (Christians) from the Danube to Greece, Sephardi politics initially spoke to all Jews living between Vienna and the Habsburg empire on the one side, and the Ottoman empire on the other. Moreover, at its peaks, Sephardi politics even sought to enhance its relationship with the Sephardim dispersed in the Middle East and across the Mediterranean.

In practice, Sephardi politics was directed towards, but not limited to, a handful of kehilot; first and foremost, Sarajevo, followed by Vienna, Belgrade, Skopje and Bitola (Monastir). The question that arises is: why there? More precisely, why was Sarajevo so crucial for Balkan Sephardi politics? Moreover, how did the allure of Sephardi politics spread to cities

[5] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). Marija Todorova followed Said's input in her book on the Western gaze on the Balkans: Marija Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Other works that discuss the region in the wider European political and historical setting: Misha Glenny, *The Balkans, 1804–1999. Nationalism, War and Great Powers* (London: Granta Books, 1999). Mark Mazower, *The Balkans. A Short History* (New York: Modern Library, 1999). On psychosocial and particularly Freudian perspective of the Balkans, relevant in particular for the Central European gaze into the region: Dušan I. Bijelić, *Normalizing the Balkans. Geopolitics of the Psychoanalysis and Psychiatry* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013).

[6] Ana Foteva, *Do the Balkans Begin in Vienna? The Geopolitical and Imaginary Borders Between the Balkans and Europe* (Vienna: Peter Lang, 2014).

and towns with almost minute Jewish and Sephardi populations across the region, such as Zagreb, Banja Luka (in Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Skopje and Bitola (in Macedonia)? In this sense it is important to explain how and why did an ideology minted in Habsburg Vienna gain a following and become the dominant force of the Sephardi intellectual and political positioning in the previously Ottoman-dominated Sarajevo, Belgrade and Bitola? Rather than being solely a localised albeit cohesive tie between kehilot, Sephardi politics also crossed imperial and nation-state boundaries in the early twentieth century.



Map 1: Important centres of the Sephardi politics in the Balkans (marked green are cities which had representatives in the first phase 1900–1910s, marked blue are cities and towns which became prominent in the 1920s)

The unique role and significance of Sephardi political engagement is a shared blind spot of both modern Jewish and the Balkan historiographies, and this dissertation attempts to illuminate both literatures. Sephardi politics fell out of the purview of modern Jewish history for two convergent reasons. First, scholars of modern Jewish history have primarily focused on Western, Central, and Eastern European Jews, predominantly Ashkenazim, and their experiences of the long-term social and political processes of emancipation, assimilation, and persecution. This *thematic* emphasis is to a large extent justified; these processes shaped the Jewish experience of the modern world to a great extent, including the history of the Sephardim. However, the Sephardi and other non-European Jews experience of social and political changes did not correspond with emancipation and assimilation conceived on the

German or French models.[7] Life in predominantly Muslim societies, primarily the Ottoman empire and then its successor Christian states in the Balkans, shaped Sephardi modern experience in specific ways, often comparable, but not necessarily parallel to their European brethren.[8]

Second, the historicisation of Jewish politics has generally focused on Eastern and Central Europe. As Jonathan Frankel stated, it was the quantity and density of Jews in the Pale of Settlement that enabled the birth of mass Jewish politics in Central and Eastern Europe.[9] This phenomenon became the model of European Jewish politics and the Sephardi political scene did not correspond to this idea of Jewish political organising. The fact that the Sephardi communities were dispersed through different regions, states, and systems, often without communication pathways consistently running between them, made it difficult for historians to notice a continuous connection and political conversation. Thus, scholarship on Sephardi communities often atomises Sephardi politics and is blind to the wider connections and tendencies. As a result, historians have overlooked the continuity and diversity of political responses in Sephardi modern history. Finally, the two factors overlapped and produced scholarship that was unable to see long-lasting trends in Sephardi political attitudes and action.

The first and seminal work on Sephardi political history was Aron Rodrigue's essay on the changes in social and political life of the Ottoman Jews, which significantly broadened previous knowledge about modern Sephardi history, and more importantly, opened the debate on political options for Jews in the last decades of the Ottoman empire.[10] Recent scholarship has addressed the question of Ottoman Jewish political choices through the prism of Jews' complex affiliation and interaction with the Ottoman empire in the last decades of its existence, significant waves of immigration to the West, and cooperation with non-Jewish groups in the Yishuv.[11] Despite the growing tendency to bring forward the diverse and disparate political

[7] Michael Brenner, Vicki Caron and Uri R. Kaufmann (eds), *Jewish Emancipation Reconsidered: The French and German Models* (London/Tübingen: Leo Baeck Institute/Mohr Siebeck, 2003).
[8] David Vital's seminal work on the Jews in Europe does not refer to Sephardim at all: David Vital, *A People Apart: The Jews in Europe, 1789–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). David Sorkin's synthetic study of Jewish emancipation does not refer to Sephardi Jews but touches upon their experience through the polities of the Ottoman empire and Danubian provinces: David Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation. A History across Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).
[9] Johnathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics. Socialism, Nationalism, and Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 50–1.
[10] Aron Rodrigue, 'From *Millet* to Minority: Turkish Jewry', in *Paths of Emancipation. Jews, States and Citizenship*, ed. Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 238–261.
[11] Julia Phillips Cohen, 'A Model *Millet*? Ottoman Jewish Citizenship at the End of Empire', in *Jews, Liberalism, Antisemitism. A Global History*, ed. Abigail Green and Simon Levis Sullam (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 209–32; Devi Mays, *Forging Ties, Forging Passports. Migration and the Modern Sephardi Diaspora* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2020); Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

choices of Eastern European Jewry and their role on the wide Jewish political stage, this tendency did not become a trend for other Jewish groups, including Sephardim.[12]

This dissertation, however, aims to cross the boundaries of polities and present Sephardi political options and choices not only within Jewish national politics but also within the Balkan and European context more widely. Historians of the Balkans have to a large extent understood the past along nation-state lines. In these traditional histories, even when they are mentioned, the political agency of minority groups, either national, ethnic, or religious, is still virtually taboo. The works dedicated to the exploration of histories of minorities almost exclusively exclude these groups from the wider political contexts. In predominantly Christian states (Serbia and Croatia), this especially concerns their Muslim and Roma populations, but also Jews. In these cases, the Jews, both Sephardi and Ashkenazi groups, are treated as a testament to all-consuming patriotism or as only one group among other numerous minorities in the region and from the standpoint of the majority population.[13]

More recent works have shown interest in the history of minorities. For example, there have been notable studies of the social and political relations between the ethno-religious groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina, namely the Bosnian Muslims, the Orthodox population identified as Serbs, and the Catholic population identified as Croatians. However, Jews have not figured in this complex equation.[14] Edin Hajdarpašić's research explores with subtlety Bosnian Muslims', Serbian and Croatian imaginations of Bosnia and Herzegovina over the turbulent late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but excludes (Bosnian) Jews from this overview.[15] An exception to the dominant reading is Emily Greble's book on Sarajevo during the Second World War, which includes a chapter on the pre-war political situation in the city

[12] Jonathan Frankel's work on Eastern European Jews is by and large still key volume for understanding their political choices: Johnathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*. Recent works on the Eastern European Jews' political engagement broaden our knowledge on topic: Joshua Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Joshua Karlip, *The Tragedy of a Generation. The rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism in Eastern Europe* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2013); Jan Rybak, *Everyday Zionism in East-Central Europe. Nation-Building in War and Revolution, 1914–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

[13] Zoran Janjetović deals with minorities in the Yugoslav kingdom in the interwar period but omits the political significance of Jews on the expense of ethnic Germans: Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastročad kraljeva. Nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji 1918–1941* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2005). Ivo Banac, for instance, refers to Jews in the context of Yugoslav questions referring solely to the perceived Jewish patriotism: Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (London: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[14] Robin Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism. The Habsburg 'Civilizing Mission' in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1878–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Robert Donia, *Sarajevo: A Biography* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2005).

[15] Edin Hajdarpašić, *Whose Bosnia? Nationalism and Political Imagination in the Balkans, 1840–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

where Sarajevan Jews, and predominantly Sephardim, play a role, even if a very minor one.[16] To a certain extent, valuable works on anti-Semitism in the interwar Yugoslav Kingdom are depart from this trope as they include a Jewish perspective on state politics;[17] however, they are not concerned with Jews' political agency.

In contrast to these works, the historiography produced in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia included all minorities in its spheres of particular interest – labour history, the history of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the National Liberation Movement (1941–1945). This stands in line with official policies which rejected national and religious differences among Yugoslav peoples, and included Jewish political engagement through a broad paradigm of class and class struggle.[18] Among the numerous individuals who supported either the workers' or anti-fascist movement, or most commonly both, Jews in the region were featured prominently and without hesitancy. Among them were prominent names in the Communist Party such as Moše Pijade or distinguished fighters of the National Liberation War (1941–1945) such as Nisim Albahari, Salamon Moni Finci and many others. However, while these works shed light on aspects of Jewish and Sephardi political activism, they do not examine the actors' Jewish background or political choices. This is especially visible in the example of Matatja, a Sarajevo Jewish Sephardi-led workers organisation formed in 1925. In the course of the turbulent decade-long history that saw the rise of authoritarian rule in the Yugoslav Kingdom, as well as ever-growing pressures of fascism and Nazism, Matatja was a crucial organisation for the entire city; albeit without losing its specifically Sephardi focus and core.

Finally, the role of portraying the richness of the Balkan Jewish, or more precisely Yugoslav Jewish past, has fallen to scholars dealing with Jews alone. They have been dedicated to portraying aspects of the rich and manifold communal histories, treating their Jewish languages, literature, art with special attention. The works of Harriet Friedenreich, Paul B. Gordiejew, Emil Kerenji, Ženi Lebl, Eliezer Papo, Avram Pinto and Mirjam Rajner broaden

[16] Emily Greble, *Sarajevo 1941–1945: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Hitler's Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011). The chapter in question is on pages 29–53.
[17] Milan Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2008). Milan Koljanin, 'The Jewish Community and Antisemitism in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia 1918-1941, *Colloquia Humanistica* 9 (2020), 139–52. Important contribution to this topic is Lovro Kralj's doctoral thesis in preparation at the Central European University: Lovro Kralj, Paving the Road to Holocaust: Antisemitism and the Ustasa Movement.
[18] The perfect example of this approach is the edited volume *Sarajevo u revoluciji* [Sarajevo in revolution] that not only had contributions of former Sephardi Jews partisan fighters Moni Levi and Salamon Roman, but the first editor of the volume was Nisim Albahari: *Sarajevo u revoluciji I*, ed. by Nissim Albahari et al. (Sarajevo: Istorijski arhiv Sarajevo, 1986). More on the communist historiography on Sephardim and in particular Sephardi workers' association Matatja in chapter 5.

our understanding of the Jewish communities and explain the complex specificities that shaped their experience.[19] Moreover, this research brings forward the history of the Balkans alongside the paradigm of national histories and it offers a wider idea of the peninsula's abundant history of different linguistic, ethnic, religious, and political groups. While illuminating the diversity of Jewish life in the region, these works do not trace Sephardi-specific political tendencies and mobilisations, nor do they refer to European and Balkan history more broadly.

This research bridges the gap between Balkan and Jewish studies in two ways. First, it addresses Sephardim as a political group in the Balkans, on par with other ethnic, national or religious politically organised groups in the region in the first half of the twentieth century. In this way, the research elevates Jewish history in the Balkans from the status of minority history to the domain of Balkan political history.

Second, the thesis engages with the ways the Sephardim studied here understood the Balkans, its history and their own Balkan-specific belonging. The period studied here, the first half of the twentieth century, was s period of evolving national ideologies in the Balkans; the transition from empires to nation-centred societies had a significant influence on the region's Jewish population. However, rather then studying the ways in which these Sephardi Jews understood the nation-state settings of their kehilot and wider societies, the thesis engages with the explicit and implicit ways the Sephardi Jews understood their own setting, which, more often, disregarded the nation-state aspects and focused on local and regional experiences, and, finally, the Balkans.

The making of political Sepharad and the Balkan Sephardim

[19] Harriet Pass Friedenreich, 'Sephardim and Ashkenazim in Inter-War Yugoslavia: Attitudes toward Jewish Nationalism', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* vol. 44 (1977): 53–80; Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia: A Quest for a Community* (Skokie: Varda Books, 1979). Paul Benjamin Gordiejew, *Voices of Yugoslav Jewry* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). Ženi Lebl, *Plima i slom. Iz istorije Jevreja Vardarske Makedonije* (Belgrade: Dečje novine, 1990); Ženi Lebl, *Do 'konačnog rešenja': Jevreji u Srbiji* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2002). Ženi Lebl, *Jevreji u Pirotu* (Belgrade: Privredni pregled/Pirot: Sloboda, 1990). Ženi Lebl, *Jevrejske knjige štampane u Beogradu* (Gornji Milanovac: Dečje novine, 1990). Ženi Lebl, *Do 'konačnog rešenja': Jevreji u Beogradu, 1521–1942* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2001). Emil Kerenji, 'Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia: Politics of Jewish Identity in a Socialist State, 1944-1974' (unpublished PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008). Eliezer Papo, 'Entre la modernidad y la tradución, el feminism y la patriarquie: Vida y obra de Laura Papo "Bohoerta", primera dramaturga en lengua judeo-española', *Neue Romania*, 40 (2010), 97–117. Eliezer Papo, 'German Influences on Bosnian Spoken Judeo-Spanish During the First Half of the 20th Century, the Way These Are Reflected in the Literature Produced by the Sarajevo-Based Sephardic Circle', in *Sefarad an der Donau, Lengua y literatura de los Sefardíes en tierras del Habsburgo, Colección Fuente clara, Estudios de cultura sefardí* Michael Studemunt-Halévy, Christian Liebl, Ivana Vučina Simović eds, (Barcelona: Tirocinio, 2013), 295–312. Mirjam Rajner, 'Between Local and Universal: Daniel Kabiljo, a Sephardic Artist in Sarajevo on the Eve of the Holocaust', *El Prezente*, no. 4 (December 2010), 233–54. Mirjam Rajner, *Fragile Images: Jews and Art in Yugoslavia, 1918–1945* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

The lack of comprehension of Sephardi political thought and action in the Balkans in the first half of the twentieth century stems from the ways in which historians have conceived the earliest history of Spanish Jewish refugees, how they mapped their post-expulsion settlement and, consequently, how they categorised the Sephardi diaspora from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. In modern historiography, Sephardi Jews have been studied as (direct) descendants of the Jewish refugees who fled from the Iberian Peninsula in the late fifteenth century. They are most commonly referred to as Western and Eastern Sephardi Diaspora, Ottoman Jews, Judeo-Spanish communities, Oriental Jews, and Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewish communities, and *Turkinos* (Jewish émigrés from the Ottoman lands to the North and South Americas).[20] All these definitions and distinctions were useful and served a valid purpose. They connected and helped to define multiple communities, separated by imperial or nation-state borders, religious understanding, social and economic conditions, or spoken and written languages. On the other hand, these definitions led to particularisation of Sephardi history and to a tendency to investigate divisions within the Sephardi diaspora. This has prevented historians from examining the political factors uniting the Sephardim once they emerged as a political collective. After 1900. In other words, the name 'Sephardi' (in its varieties) was a constant in both history and historiography. The latter, however, has often overlooked the fact that the substance behind the Sephardi diaspora changed over the centuries and especially during the politically turbulent twentieth century. In this sense, this category of 'Sepharad' followed the trajectories of Jewish and non-Jewish politics, but it was also actively shaped by the 'Sephardim' themselves. In order to understand and explain the political efforts of the Balkan Sephardim, it is necessary to address six reasons why historiography has ignored Sephardi politics.

First, the focus on exile in Sephardi history emphasised the cultural longevity of the diaspora at the expense of understanding political history of Sepharad. The initial and general definition of Sephardim stems from the historians of the early modern period who traced the history of Jewish refugees and *conversos* (Jews who converted to Catholicism under the pressures of the Inquisition) expelled from the Iberian Peninsula, the Kingdoms of Castille and

[20] This terminology is taken from seminal works, such as *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewry*, ed. Harvey Goldberg (Jewish Theological Seminar: New York, 2006); Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th–20th Centuries* (University of California Press: Berkley, 2000); Zion Zohar, *Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry: From the Golden Age of Spain to Modern Times* (New York University Press: New York, 2005); Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottoman*: *Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Devin Naar, '"Turkinos" beyond the Empire: Ottoman Jews in America, 1893 to 1924', *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 15 (2); *Coming to America: The Reception of Sepharad and Ashkenaz in America* (Spring 2015), 174–205; Devi Mays, *Forging Ties, Forging Passports.*

Aragon in 1492 and Portugal in 1495. [21] These fugitives who settled across the Mediterranean remained connected through a common set of religious practices, mercantile networks, and language(s). Early modernists paid special attention to the process of formation of the 'Sephardi' diaspora with respect to complex periods of emigration, and cultural and religious reconfiguration after the expulsions of the late fifteenth century.[22] Tracing both continuities and discontinuities into the new diaspora, scholars introduced exile as a process rather than a fact and Sephardim as the crucial case study (in Jane Gerber's poetic words: '[N]o medieval Jew sang as poignantly of exile as did the Sephardic Jew'[23]). The subtlety with which such historians approached this crucial period in the making of Sephardi diaspora is instructive; they questioned the cohesion of the Sephardi diaspora after dispersal and argued for the existence of a 'series of culturally defined and temporally limited micro-diasporas rather than a monolithic whole'.[24] Essentially, they built the foundations for understanding and explaining Sepharad through a plurality of voices. However, this multi-dimensional Sepharad did not gain a political dimension.

A second reason for the atomisation of Sephardi politics derives from the division between Eastern and Western Sephardi diasporas in which Spanish Jewish refugees settled post-expulsion. Considering the period of settlement in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, historians have noted the two poles of Sephardi dispersion.[25] They insisted on clear-cut divisions within the Sephardi diaspora and early on scholars distinguished between the two poles of Spanish Jewish refugees' settlements – East and West. This differentiation has been present since the first modern Jewish historians who built the idea of the East and West Sepharad theologically, from their own nineteenth-century perspective.[26] This division, however, complicated the idea of Sephardi diaspora and our understanding of Sephardi agency. In this wide diaspora two groups, settled in the north-west and south-east of the European continent and in the Middle East, having experienced different social and political conditions,

[21] Jonathan Ray, *The Sephardic Frontier. The Reconquista and the Jewish Community in Medieval Iberia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).
[22] Jonathan Ray, *After Expulsion. 1942 and the Making of Sephardic Jewry* (New York/London: New York University Press, 2013).
[23] Jane Gerber, *Jews of Spain: A History of Sephardic Experience* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), xiv.
[24] Jonathan Ray, 'New Approaches to the Jewish Diaspora: The Sephardim as a Sub–Ethnic Group', *Jewish Social Studies* 15/1 (2008), 10–31 (12).
[25] Yedida K. Stillman and Norman Stillman eds, *From Iberia to Diaspora. Studies in Sephardic History and Culture* (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 1999). Brian Smollett and Federica Francesconi, eds. *From Catalonia to the Caribbean. The Sephardic Orbit from Medieval to Modern Times* (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2018).
[26] Daniel J. Schroeter, 'From Sephardi To Oriental: The "Decline" Theory of Jewish Civilisation in The Middle East and North Africa: Reassessing an Idea', in: *The Jewish Contribution to Civilisation: Reassessing an Idea*, ed. Richard Cohen, Jeremy Cohen (Liverpool: Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, 2007), 125–148.

seemed to have created a logical geographical border between them: the western and eastern Sephardi diasporas. While the western Sephardi sphere was largely determined by the development of the free city states and metropoles in Western Europe or city states in Italy,[27] the eastern Sephardi diaspora maintained an almost monolithic status, by the sixteenth century united by the seemingly ever-expanding Ottoman state in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans.[28]

Third, when addressing the traditionally conceived Eastern Sephardi Diaspora, polities in the Middle East, and especially the Ottoman empire, complicated historians' understanding of Sephardi political engagement even further. Since the majority of Jews settled in the Eastern Mediterranean did reside in what was (or was soon to become a part of) the Ottoman empire, historians have interrogated the role of the empire in Sephardi political history. They have asked whether all Sephardi Jews in the Eastern diaspora, thus also Jews settled in the Balkans were essentially Ottoman Jews–that is, Jews whose political identity but also political activity was defined by the options/status/position in the Muslim empire that ruled the Mediterranean basin? It is difficult to say, bearing in mind that the Ottoman state was never a unified entity but an empire with strong regional rulers and cultural differences, which recent historiography has rightfully underlined.[29] What did, nevertheless, keep the Jewish subjects of the Ottoman sultan a more or less cohesive group was the policy of *dhimmi*, the corporate status all non-Muslim monotheistic groups shared.[30] Thus, while they were certainly spread across the vast territory of the empire, Ottoman Jews still shared a similar historical experience and social position, at least throughout the period when the house of Osman dictated the political order in the Mediterranean (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries). The common traits in Jewish communities of the empire in this period legitimate the attempts to read, understand and narrate

[27] Yosef Kaplan, *An Alternative Path to Modernity: The Sephardi Diaspora in Western Europe* (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2000). Italian Sephardi diaspora by this definition falls into western Sephardi diaspora: Francesca Trivelatto, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livrono, and Cross-cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019); Francesca Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment: Livornese Jews, Tuscan Culture and Eighteenth Century* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2014).

[28] Jane Gerber, *Cities of Splendour in the Shaping of Sephardic History* (Liverpool: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2020). Especially the chapter on Istanbul and Salonica 1492–1600: 171–213.

[29] Frederick Anscombe, *State, Faith, Nation in Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Lands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[30] Benhamin Braude, 'Foundation Myths of the Millet System', in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 1, ed. Benjamn Braude and Bernard Lewis (Teaneck, NJ: Holmes & Meier, 1982), 69–88; Aron Rodrigue, 'From *Millet* to Minority: Turkish Jewry', in *Paths of Emancipation. Jews, States and Citizenship*, ed. Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 238–261.

the history of Sephardi diaspora through the lens of their experience in the Ottoman lands.[31] Nevertheless, the slow collapse of the Ottoman state revealed the often unbridgeable gaps in forging an imperial political affiliation.

Moreover, the Ottoman empire did not only mark Sephardi Jews as a religious group – in the nineteenth century the empire's Jews started figuring as a political group. Historians have recognised how the Ottoman empire influenced Jewish and Sephardi political positioning towards the wider, non-Jewish society. In view of the growing interest in the failure of the imperial and colonial order at the beginning of the twentieth century, historians have been intrigued by the (perceived) Jewish resolve to side with the Ottoman imperial project through all reforms, bureaucratic challenges, loss of territories, and political turbulence. They asked whether this loyalty meant that the Ottoman Jews were the perfect imperial minority, the perfect *millet* – the category of Ottoman reformers assigned to religious groups in the mid-nineteenth century, which essentially served as a measure against the increasing threat of nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century.[32] Recent scholarship has argued that many Jews affiliated themselves with the Ottoman empire, albeit they usually expressed it at specific time, place, and context. Julia Phillips Cohen introduced imperial citizenship as a category beyond legal affiliation, as a 'process of continual individual and collective self-invention'.[33] The Ottoman Jewish leaders thus developed a broad project that aimed at the inclusion of Jews as a *millet*, or an entire religious group, rather than as individuals; in doing so, they believed the Jewish community would come out on the other side of the turbulent first decades of the twentieth century unharmed, together with the empire.[34] Nonetheless, this civic devotion to the empire was not specific to the empire's Jews, as Michelle Campos has argued. In Ottoman Palestine, Muslims, Christians, and Sephardi Jews all shared a commitment to 'civic Ottomanism'.[35] As in most of modern societies, Jews and Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman empire expressed their political aims and loyalty by aligning themselves with the official state politics. However, this political positioning was not an official policy which all Jews of the empire followed nor was it a form of political positioning specific to Jews within the empire.

Furthermore, recent scholarship has also shown that this rather idealised Ottomanism was, nevertheless, attractive only to a narrow class of Jews in the empire. The imperial project

[31] Avigodor Levy, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Darwin Press, 1994); Minna Rozen, *The Last Ottoman Century and Beyond: The Jews in Turkey and the Balkans, 1808–1945 I–II* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2002–2005).
[32] Rodrigue, 'From *Millet* to Minority'.
[33] J. P. Cohen, Becoming Ottoman, 4.
[34] J. P. Cohen, Becoming Ottoman, 10.
[35] Michelle Campos, Ottoman Brothers.

failed on account of several traps in this broadly understood patriotism: the Jews did not manage to establish stable relationships with other non-Muslims and it was almost impossible to engage the entire Jewish population in this project, not only because the Jews demonstrated little interest, but also because the state favoured only individual Jewish participation.[36] This only confirms that the Ottoman empire had no capacity to serve as the framework for collective Sephardi political engagement – neither within its political system based on religious groups, nor as a framework of closely engaged individuals/groups/associations of Jews/Sephardim. That the empire served as just one, in a set of many, political frameworks, became clear in the twentieth century.

Another factor which undermined Ottomanism as a political expression of Sephardim came through the fact that socially mobile Sephardim were pragmatic and in many cases identified with any empire and not only the House of Osman's empire. In the time of the empire's slow dissolution, another side of the Sephardi imperial experience came to the fore. Comparable to other ethnic, religious or ethno-religious minorities of the Ottoman empire, Sephardim were then, at the turn of the century, at a significant crossroads. At a time when all empires seemed unstable, one imperial institution was more important than ever – that of the protected subject. In this light, a number of Ottoman Jews, under the protection of European states, became 'extraterritorial subjects', as Sarah Abrevaya Stein has argued.[37] Furthermore, this turbulent end of the Ottoman Empire stimulated immigration to other European countries and the Americas,[38] where the Sephardi Jews, recognised as 'Turkinos' – acknowledging their Ottoman-Turkish background – gave impetus to social and political changes and new understandings of race and citizenship.[39]

The fifth reason for the atomisation of Sephardi political action comes from the activity of Jewish international organisations from the mid-nineteenth century, which has further obscured for historians Sephardi political engagement in the Ottoman world. The crucial role in this regard was played by the French organisation Alliance Israèlite Universelle. The institution was formed in 1860 with a mission to 'regenerate' those perceived as 'Oriental Jews', in the light of Jewish emancipation in France and through a set of educational initiatives

[36] Phillips Cohen, 'A Model *Millet*?'.
[37] Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews and the Ottoman Twentieth Century* (Chicago/London: Chicago University Press, 2016); Sarah A. Stein, 'Citizens of a Fictional Nation: Ottoman-born Jews in France during the First World War', *Past & Present*, 226/1 (2015), 227–54.
[38] Adriana M. Brodsky, *Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine: Creating Community and National Identity, 1880–1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).
[39] Mays, Forging Ties; ibid, 'Becoming Illegal: Sephardi Jews in the Opiates Trade', *Jewish Social Studies*, 25/3 (2020), 1–34.

intended to reform Ottoman Jewry, making them active economically and socially and so able to contribute to imperial society.[40] Their wide network of schools (by 1914 each *kehila* in the Ottoman Empire had an Alliance school) educated thousands of Sephardi Jews in French tradition, opening their paths to further education in French schools.[41] Even though it is undeniable that the Alliance left a significant trace on Jewish society in the Mediterranean, its influence was limited to the specific class that could afford sending children to their private schools. Moreover, the schools discouraged the traditional Sephardi way of life and the use of Judeo-Spanish, aiming to make its pupils Ottoman Jews rather than Ottoman Sephardim. As Esther Benbassa pointed out, the Alliance 'cultivated Jewish particularism in spite of itself'.[42] The Alliance's case was not unique. The two organisations of German-speaking Jewry (Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden and Israelitische Allianz zu Wien) active in the Ottoman empire also promoted education as a way of reforming Ottoman Jewry, in their case in a Zionist direction, albeit with even less success. [43] Therefore, instead of fostering a uniting front of Jewish political positioning, these Jewish organisations imposed another layer of divisions among local Jewish communities.

Sixth and finally, recent historiographical attempts to distinguish local communities, taken broadly, as models in their own right, have aimed to transcend the inevitable generalisations that arise from broad divisions such as East versus West. This is reflected in the rise of Sephardi *kehila* studies, which have produced deeper insights into the functioning, continuities, and discontinuities in the largest and arguably central communities, such as those of Salonica, Smyrna (Izmir) and Monastir (Bitola). After the success of Mark Mazower's book on Salonica,[44] which drew largely on the unlikely shared history of Christians (Greeks and South Slavs), Muslims (Turks), and Sephardi Jews in the Aegean port throughout the centuries, the city recaptured its symbolic status of the 'Jerusalem of the Balkans' in historiography. Devin Naar's study introduced the complex world of adjustments the *kehila* in Salonica was going through and how it reflected not only political and social life, but Sephardi culture and communal life too.[45] Dina Danon's study of 'modern Jews' tackled the modernisation of the Sephardi communities through the relationship of the Sephardi poor with public space in

[40] Aron Rodrigue, French Jews, Turkish Jews.
[41] Rodrigue, 'From *Millet* to Minority', 248.
[42] Esther Benbassa, 'The Process of Modernization of Eastern Sephardi Communities', in *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewry*, ed. Harvey E. Goldberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 96.
[43] Zosa Szjakowski, 'Conflicts in the Alliance Israelite Universelle and the founding of the Anglo-Jewish Association, the Viennese Aliaz, and the Hilfsverein', *Jewish Social Studies*, 19 (1957), 29–50.
[44] Mark Mazower, *Salonica. City of Ghosts. Christians, Muslims, and Jews 1450–1950* (London/New York: Harper Perennial, 2004).
[45] Devin Naar, *Salonica: A Jewish History* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2016)

Smyrna (Izmir).[46] In his study of Monastir Sephardim, Marc Cohen explored the changes of the 'last century' of this *kehila* in and beyond Monastir (Bitola), due to Jewish emigration from Macedonia during and after the collapse of Ottoman rule.[47] These studies of *kehilot* provide a window into Sephardi history; they show the subtle shifts and nuances that informed lives of many. *Kehila,* an embodiment of the urban life so crucial to the Sephardi experience, is doubtless a valid approach to Sephardi history. However, to what extent can we comprehend the wider Sephardi setting through an understanding of Sephardi communal life, especially in relation to unique examples such as Salonica, which was deemed 'a closed world, even to other Jews'?[48] Although this thesis does follow politics of the community (especially that of Sarajevo, in the Balkan context) it does so not to look inwards but outwards and illuminate the connections between dispersed kehilot.

To move from the dominant historiographical trends one can pose the question how and when were all these divisions and categorisations crossed? What were the uniting factors of the Sephardi diaspora? As this thesis observes, Sephardi intellectuals formed the backbone of the politicisation of the Balkan Sephardim. Moreover, it discloses in which ways and how often intellectuals infringed the boundaries of *kehila*. Historians have picked up on this fact and, in their general overview of modern Sephardi scholars for instance, Sarah A. Stein and Julia P. Cohen have shown that thematic, rather than geographical- or polity-based categorisations were significantly more relevant to Sephardim who pursued intellectual paths.[49] This is also reflected in a volume of sources they edited which clearly indicates that social, political, and cultural trends easily overcame boundaries of *kehilot*, regions, and even borders of hostile states.[50] Moreover, ideas, such as the Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment), spread across the German-speaking and -reading worlds, also received attention among Sephardim as well, as Esther Benbassa was the first to point out.[51] Tamir Karkason's research on Sephardi communal Haskalah gave a coherent framework to this process.[52] In this way, Sephardi

[46] Dina Danon, *The Jews of Izmir: A Modern History* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2020).
[47] Marc Cohen, *Last Century of a Sephardic Community: The Jews of Monastir, 1839–1943* (New York: Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, 2003).
[48] Katherine E. Fleming, *Greece: A Jewish History* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 47. Fleming quotes Nikos Stavros.
[49] Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, 'Sephardic Scholarly Worlds: Toward a Novel Geography of Modern Jewish History', *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 100/3 (2010), 349–84.
[50] Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, eds. *Sephardi Lives: A Documentary History, 1700–1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).
[51] Benbassa, 'The Process of Modernization of Eastern Sephardi Communities', 89–98.
[52] Tamir Karkasson, 'The Ottoman-Jewish *Haskalah*, 1839–1908: A Transformation in Western Anatolia, the Southern Balkans and Jerusalem Jewish Communities' (PhD dissertation, Hebrew University, 2019) [in Hebrew]; idem, 'The "Entangled Histories" of the Jewish Enlightenment in Ottoman Southeastern Europe', in *Jewish*

intellectuals became a part of the greater European intellectual movement – and thus a part of European Jewish history.

Prehistory of Sephardi politics

This thesis aims to explain Sephardi political thought and action outside or often even against the definitions and categorisations that are still dominant in historiography. It focuses on the Balkans, the territory between Western and Eastern Jewish scholarly centres, where I situate the roots of Sephardi politics. Its prehistory begins with the meetings of Jewish cultures: intellectual encounters fostered by the spread of printed (secular) texts[53] and the allure of Haskalah[54]; economic exchange via Mediterranean ports and merchant cities,[55] and political activity, through growing European Jewish interventionism after the Damascus affair in 1840[56] – the Jewish worlds of the West and East were growing closer and more familiar with each other. This elaborate encounter or the two-sided discovery of the dominant European Jewish

Literatures and Cultures in Southeastern Europe. Experiencesm Positions, Memories, ed. by Renate Hansen-Kokoruš and Olaf Terpitz (Vienna/Kölln: Böhlau Verlag, 2021), 21–32.

[53] On modern secular Sephardi print: Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Making Jews Modern. The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Olga Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture. Press, Belles Lettres and Theatre in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); David M. Bunis, 'Shem Tov Semo, Josef Kalmo, and Judezmo Fiction in Nineteenth-Century Vienna', in *Sefarad an der Donau, Lengua y literatura de los Sefardíes en tierras del Habsburgo, Colección Fuente clara, Estudios de cultura sefardí* Michael Studemunt-Halévy, Christian Liebl, Ivana Vučina Simović eds, (Barcelona: Tirocinio, 2013), 39–146.

[54] Michael H. Studemund, '"Ivri, daber ivrit!"Baruch Mitrani, un maskil turco-sefardi' in *Sefarad an der Donau, Lengua y literatura de los Sefardíes en tierras del Habsburgo, Colección Fuente clara, Estudios de cultura sefardí* Michael Studemunt-Halévy, Christian Liebl, Ivana Vučina Simović eds, (Barcelona: Tirocinio, 2013), 175–202. Tamir Karkasson, 'The Ottoman-Jewish *Haskalah'*.

[55] On Jewish merchants in the Mediterranean: Mattias Lehmann, 'A Livornese "Port Jew" and the Sephardim of the Ottoman Empire,' *Jewish Social Studies* 11/2 (2005), 51–76; Bregoli, Mediterranean Enlightenment. On the Balkan merchant connections in modern times: Aida A. Hozic, 'The Balkan Merchants: Changing Borders and Informal Transnationalization', *Ethnopolitics* 3, Vol. 5 (2006), 245–58; Eugenia Davidova, *Balkan Transitions to Modernity and Nation-States. Through the Eyes of Three Generations of Merchants, 1780s–1890s* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012). On Jews in the Mediterranean and overlaps of Jewish and Mediterranean studies: Jessica M. Magrlin and Mattias B. Lehmann, '"A Mediterranean Society? Jews in Mediterranean History, the Mediterranean in Jewish History,' *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 30/1 (2021), 63–83.

[56] Seminal text on the Damascus affair is Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: 'Ritual Murder', Politics and Jews in 1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). On the reactions on the affair among Jewish communities and the birth of Jewish internationalism: Lisa Moses Leff, *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity: The Rise of Jewish Internationalism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2006); Abigail Green, "Sir Moses Montefiore and the Making of the 'Jewish International'", *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 7, No. 3 (2008): 287–307; ibid, 'Old Networks, New Connections: The Emergence of the Jewish International', in *Religious Internationals in the Modern World: Globalization and Faith Communities since 1750*, ed. by Abigail Green (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 53–81; Yaron Tsur, 'Who Introduced Liberalism into the Damascus Affair (1840)? Center, Periphery and Networks in the Jewish Response to the Blood Libel', in *Jews, Liberalism, Antisemitism: A Global History*, ed. by Abigail Green and Simon Levis Sullam (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 263–282. More on how the Damascus affair directly influenced the position of the Balkan Jewry in Chapter 1.

culture(s) and the Ottoman, Sephardi, and Mediterranean Jewish worlds that happened gradually over the nineteenth century set the stage for Sephardi political thought. This broader, cultural trend was underpinned by political changes, namely the collapse of the Ottoman empire in the northern Balkans and the progression of the Habsburgs into the Balkan peninsula.[57] Both empires, alongside surrounding nations and nation-states, gave an impetus to this specific stream of Jewish politics. This blurring of the lines between (the ideas of) East and West planted the seed of the vibrant and persistent Sephardi politics. In this sense, the Sephardi-centred politics was equally a Central European and (post-)Ottoman phenomenon.

One particular factor illustrates these overlapping influences: the desire for learning. The ever-growing appeal of and ever-present access to secular education in the realm of Sephardi Jewry stimulated expression and practice of modern political ideas. From the Ottoman and Mediterranean sides, a specific trend of accessible rabbinical writing aiming to give straight-forward guidance which addressed secular themes started in the early eighteenth century as a direct response to a perceived educational crisis, a residue of the messianic movement around Shabbetai Zevi.[58] Among these works arguably most important is Jacob Huli's (1689–1732) *Me'am Loez* [From a Foreign People], a piece so important that Mattias Lehmann named it the beginning of Sephardi vernacular literature. Huli's and other similar works had the intention of bringing those Sephardim who knew little or no Hebrew closer to Jewish tradition. As these works were meant to be read in groups, these rabbinical writings also gave an impetus to a specific Sephardi public sphere.[59]

These local efforts were met with the Western European Jewish attempts to educate and thus essentially 'mould' their Eastern coreligionists in their own image – through education. The main input came through the fast-spreading network of Alliance Israélite Universelle schools. These institutions offered access to French language, esteemed European education and even opportunities to obtain a teaching position in another Alliance school. These were all appealing prospects from the perspective of the ever-unstable economic situation in the (former) Ottoman empire, and finally, they were a path out of the 'Orient.'[60]

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[57] Okey, Taming Balkan Nationalism.

[58] Mattias Lehmann, "The Intended Reader of Ladino Rabbinic Literature and Judeo-Spanish Reading Culture," *Jewish History* 16 (2002), 283–307.
Borovaya, 8–9. On Sabbatai Zevi's movement and its broader influence: Ada Rappaport-Albert, *Women and the Messianic Heresy of Sabbatai Zevi, –1816* (Liverpool: Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, 2015).

[59] Mattias Lehmann, *Ladino Rabbinic Literature and Ottoman Sephardic Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 31, 35.

[60] Rodrigue, French Jews, Turkish Jews. For a personal account of this appeal: *A Sephardi Life in Southeastern Europe. The Autobiography and Journal of Gabriel Arié, 1863–1939*, ed. by Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998).

Interestingly, while Belgrade only hosted an AIU teacher for a couple of years and Sarajevo was conspicuously outside of its network, both communities highly appreciated the few individuals who managed to acquire this prestigious education (as discussed in detail in chapter 1). AIU, as a French institution, obviously thrived in lands where the French empire had colonial and thus cultural interests. The Sephardi communities between Vienna, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Belgrade and, after 1913, Bitola, were largely under Central European, Habsburg or, in general, German(-Jewish) influence. In the friction between these two German-Jewish and French-Jewish political and cultural models, Sephardi politics negotiated and forged a niche to present its claims and fight for its place on the Jewish political scene.

Two Sephardi-specific factors also prompted the politicisation of Sephardi Jews. First, the call for action by the proto-Zionist rabbi Jehuda Alkalai, Chief Rabbi of the Sephardi community in Zemun (Semlin), a town on Danube and set on the Habsburg-Ottoman frontier. Rabbi Alkalai, inspired by both the Damascus Affair in 1840 and the Christian uprisings against the Ottoman rule at the beginning of the nineteenth century, called for the return of Jews to the Land of Israel. He advocated for the help of Great Powers in this endeavour and toured Europe 1851–52. The fact that one contemporary who lived in the vicinity was Theodor Herzl's grandfather, Simon Loeb Herzl, still inspires some historians to think about possible indirect influences on the father of political Zionism.[61] When it comes to Alkalai's legacy in the Sephardi world, his preaching and writings (some published in Ladino, but the majority in Hebrew) did inspire individuals to engage in solving the Jewish national problem and the fact that a Sephardi Jew predated the Central European Zionist movement became a significant argument for Sephardim who were defending their autonomy within the Zionist movement in the 1910s and 1920s (see chapters 3 and 4).

The second impetus to Sephardi political thinking came from the lost homeland, namely modern Spain, or more precisely, philosemitic individuals who saw 'Spanish-speaking Jews' as a natural extended hand of the Spanish empire. The best-known name in this regard is Angel Pulido who wrote about 'Spanish Jews', agitated in the Spanish parliament, and engaged with Sephardi individuals at the turn of the century[62] (see more in chapter 2). This backing from the Iberian Peninsula spoke to the Sephardi youth who formed Esperanza in 1897 in Vienna; not only did it reinforce the bond with the mythical land of Al-Andaluz where Jews played an immense role, but the founders of Esperanza also took on the idea of reforming the spoken and

[61] Georges Yitzhak Weisz, *Theodor Herzl. A New Reading* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 2013), 47–51.
[62] Overview of the Spanish relationship with Sephardi Jews: Daniela Flesler and Adrián Pérez Melgosa, *The Memory Work of Jewish Spain* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020).

written Judeo-Spanish language in the image of modern Spanish. Still, Pulido's, or modern Spain's for that matter, impact should not be overstated. After initial exchange over the last years of the nineteenth century, Esperanza moved closer to the Zionist movement, the Spanish heritage of Sepharad fell into the background, and new forms of Sephardi self-awareness came to the fore.

This dissertation investigates the voices of Sephardi intellectuals who crossed the boundaries of communities to argue for Sephardi-specific political action from the late nineteenth century until the Second World War. It is precisely this five decades-long evolution of Sephardi politics that contributed a new understanding of the dynamics of modern Sephardi history. These Sephardi groups and individuals transcend the boundaries of empires and nation-states from the late nineteenth century. They focused on and negotiated shared Sephardi cultural traits and historical and political experiences at large, often dedicating their entire lives to presenting the Sephardi case within the arena of Jewish politics.

The Sephardi politics followed in this dissertation argued for a united Sephardi front, albeit from the perspective of the Balkans. What made this specific group of intellectuals a *Balkan Sephardim* was the outreach of their political plans and, consequently, their self-definition in the 1920s as (in line with the majority of Esperanza's students) being from territories of the Balkans, including today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Northern Macedonia, Kosovo, and Bulgaria. While in Vienna, Esperanza's members counted on the Sephardi network that extended over the Eastern Mediterranean, in practice their ideas only held ground through the work of their alumni. Sephardi intellectuals' idea of 'the Balkans' rested on the changing borders between empires and nation-states, often following destructive wars, starting with 1877 and followed by the Balkan Wars (1912–14), and the First World War (1914–18), but also the self-imposed limits of their activity. Thus, the Balkan peninsula, or more precise its north-western part, comprised a Sephardi political sphere.

This space became ever more important for Sephardi politics in the mid-1920s. It was the period when the Sephardi-centred politics gained its greatest momentum, through the action of Esperanza alumni in Sarajevo and across the Yugoslav Kingdom. In this period, the representatives of this stream of politics predominantly referred to themselves as Balkan Jews or Balkan Sephardim, focusing on the shared cultural and historical aspects of the Sephardim and defying classifications in line with nation-state borders. This self-affiliation was a direct product of the necessity to navigate an international politics that limited the Sephardi-oriented politics to the Balkans. In the midst of changing imperial and nation-states borders, Sephardi

politicians positioned their faction in a wider framework that emphasised shared aspects of Sephardi culture and society.

While this (self-)classification was crucial for the Sephardi-centred politics, it did not offer any fixed content for the Sepharad. The dissertation follows these changing ideas of what it actually meant to be a Sephardi Jew in this turbulent social and political context. I ask what did the student society Esperanza mean by the cultural 'renaissance' of Sepharad at the beginning of the twentieth century? How and when did this cultural idea grow into a political agenda? And finally, what were the connections between the cultural and political Sepharad? In other words, what was the content of the modern Sephardi political positioning?

Beyond Judeo-Spanish: the content of modern Sepharad

As the overview of Sepharad classifications in the first section of this introduction has shown, there was no coherent or unique entity, no political thread that kept the dispersed Sephardi world in place. However, historiography emphasises two cultural factors that kept the Sephardi world almost a monolith: religious traditions and language. The scholars of Sephardi religious history, Matthias Lehmann and Norman Stillman, have traced and explained continuities and breaks in ritual and scholarly traditions.[63] This, religious aspect of modern Sephardi life remains outside of this study. The second aspect, the Sephardi vernacular Judeo-Spanish, also known as Ladino, Judezmo or Espanyol, is at core of this dissertation. In what follows, I trace the ruptures of Sephardi politics and the process of negotiating *the Sephardi language* – Judeo-Spanish – in the changing context of the first half of the twentieth century.

In their pioneering and highly influential synthetical study of Sephardi Jews living in the Eastern Mediterranean, Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue approached their subject through the Sephardi historical language. In the authors' own words, they studied the 'Judeo-Spanish culture area in the East', 'a distinct Judeo-Hispanic unit', 'the new Judeo-Spanish heartland in the Ottoman Balkans and Asia Minor', 'Judeo-Spanish collectivity as a distinct Jewish entity'. The premise of the work is that the Jewish refugees from Spain 'reconstructed a transplanted *Sepharad*' in the process of which they 'overwhelmed local Greek-speaking Romaniot (…) and 'the few Ashkenazim that migrated over', while only in North Africa Sephardim 'assimilated into this "Sephardized" Judeo-Arabic culture'. In short, Sephardi culture was the key force of this diaspora and its main content was the Judeo-Spanish language,

[63] Lehmann, Ladino Rabbinic Literature; idem, 'Jewish Nationalism in Ladino: Jacob Moshe Hay Altarats' Zikhron yerushalayim', *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 17/2 (2010), 146–59; Norman Stillman, *Sephardi Religious Responses to Modernity* (Reading: Hardwood Academic Publishers, 2005).

a Judaised form of fifteenth-century Castilian Spanish. This, allegedly linguistically coherent, Sephardi world was at first destabilised by the economic decline of the Sephardi world in the eighteenth century, while the 'age of reform' and 'Westernization', followed by the dissolution of the Ottoman Levant, fragmented the Sephardi unit. Between their 'ill-adaption' to Balkan nation-states and the trauma of the Holocaust, in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century Sephardi Jews tried to answer issues of identity, community and loyalty. In the existing literature the breakdown of Ottoman cohesion was also the breakdown of a 'specific Judeo-Spanish civilization'.[64]

Nevertheless, in view of the growing literature on Jewish multilingualism and Jewish languages,[65] it is necessary to call into question whether Judeo-Spanish was the only or even the most compelling cultural bond of the modern Sephardi world. In the Ashkenazi, especially Eastern European case, the choice between Hebrew and Yiddish traced the subtle differences between Jewish nationalisms.[66] Moreover, the German language, as the dominant language of culture and science, and Jewish nationalism – as Marc Volovici explained – marked and even directed Jewish national politics for almost two centuries.[67] Coming closer to the Sephardi world, French, the language of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, from the late nineteenth century became the language of perceived forward-thinking among educated elites.[68] Furthermore, a plurality of nation-state languages – Bulgarian, Greek, Serbo-Croatian – crucially, and arguably more than any national policies, challenged the remaining imperial social order.[69] These examples are hard to contain within the thesis of 'Judeo-Spanish Kulturbereich', what can we make out of the fact that the Sephardi groups and individuals studies here addressed the Sephardi question, led Sephardi-oriented politics, and negotiated Sephardi position in Jewish sphere in Serbo-Croatian?

This dissertation historicises the complex linguistic positioning of the Balkan Sephardim and directs attention to post-Ottoman polyglossia that went beyond Judeo-Spanish

[64] Benbassa and Rodrigue, 'Introduction', in *Sephardi Jewry*, xiviii–xxiv.
[65] Guy Miron, 'A People between Languages: Toward a Jewish History of Concepts', *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 7/2 (Winter 2012), 1–27.
[66] Naomi Seideman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997); Yael Chaver, *What Must Be Forgotten: The Survival of Yiddish in Zionist Palestine* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004).
[67] Marc Volovici, *German as the Jewish Question. Language Politics of Jewish Nationalism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2020).
[68] Rodrigue, French Jews, Turkish Jews. On the example of Gabriel Arie, Alliance-educated Sephardi Jew from Bulgaria: Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, 'Introduction', in *A Sephardi Life in Southeastern Europe: The Biography and Journal of Gabriel Arie, 1863–1939*, ed. by Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue (Seattle/London: Washington University Press, 1998), 3–58.
[69] On Bulgarian: Guy H. Haskell, *From Sofia to Jaffa: The Jews of Bulgaria and Israel* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018), 91–92. On Greek: Fleming, Greece: A Jewish History, 46–48.

and French Sephardi bilingualism. It traces the changes in the debate on the Sephardi language, Judeo-Spanish, throughout the first half of the twentieth century within the context of the great variety of languages that the Sephardim studied here used. The crucial symbolic and practical place of Judeo-Spanish in Sephardi politics was a defining challenge in twentieth-century Sephardi history. What informed this half-century long, persisting and turbulent debate on the language of Sephardim were, as noted, political changes that uprooted Sephardim from the shared Ottoman context. New political entities in the Balkans followed different cultural and linguistic rules – and expected their Jewish citizens to do the same. However, I argue that the new context only shifted the function of Judeo-Spanish – it did not lead to its abandonment.

This is identifiable from the beginning of the Sephardi-oriented stream of Jewish politics when Esperanza's members gathered around Judeo-Spanish as the means of both connecting and rejuvenating the Sephardi space. However, this focus on language persisted for only seven years (1897–1904), when the Sephardi student society accepted not only the changing political landscape in regions where their brethren lived but also a diverse spectrum of languages in use in the Sephardi diaspora. Yet these two facts did not lead to the abandonment of Judeo-Spanish, especially not as a dominant vernacular (as research in historical linguistics shows, described in detail in Chapter 1); rather the language became the symbolic centre of almost all political debates and, therefore, Sephardi positioning throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Moreover, this thesis explores Sephardim in a broader context and argues that one cannot fully comprehend Sephardi politics outside non-Jewish and Ashkenazi context. This approach applies to Sephardi polyglossia, a significant part of Sephardi experience of the twentieth century. However, even within this multilingual context, historians emphasised certain languages and downplayed others. For example, historians have accepted French, as an imperial and multinational language, as a language of Sephardi culture. Rodrigue argued that French has not 'weakened Judeo-Spanish ethnicity, simply marked it even more. French became domesticated, Judaized, Hispanicized. Speaking French on a daily basis became yet another ethnic marker in the local context'.[70] More than this, French was also a class marker and not only for Jews of the Ottoman empire but for all its subjects who could afford going to private European schools or opted for missionary schools that existed throughout the empire. Moreover, it remains unclear whether and how Sephardi Jews would be less Sephardi (or less ethnically marked as such) if they used Greek, Arabic, Turkish or Serbo-Croatian.

[70] Rodrigue, 'From *Millet* to Minority', 253.

While French held a dominant position among the Sephardi elite in the Levant, it did not grow roots among the Sephardim in the Balkans beyond Salonica. Rather, German was the dominant Western European language of education, literature, and culture. This was a direct result of the Austro-Hungarian imperialistic positioning in the Balkans which peaked during the occupation (1878) and annexation (1908) of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this period, there was an appreciable tendency for all well-off Sephardi families to send their children (and sons in particular) to Vienna to finish higher education. The Sarajevo kehila backed these efforts starting in 1892 (as discussed in detail in chapter 1). This shift towards Vienna and Central Europe distinguished the Sephardim who studied there from their brethren around the Mediterranean. Moreover, it brought them into closer contact with the centre of European Jewish politics in the twentieth century. Finally, while both French, explored in detail in the existing literature, and German were the languages of the Sephardi elite(s), this thesis introduces Serbo-Croatian and the bottom-up perspective.

The case of Sephardi adoption/appropriation of Serbo-Croatian, explored in detail throughout the thesis, touches on two crucial points that I deem crucial for understanding the history of Sepharad in twentieth century. First, it shows the readiness of Sephardim to negotiate a political and cultural common ground with non-Sephardi Jews.

Second, the use of Serbo-Croatian accounts for changes in the content of Sephardi culture and arguably in the meaning of Sepharad in the twentieth century. Widespread multilingualism among Sephardim gained momentum in times of changes of borders and spheres of influence, and there was no necessary opposition between the use of Judeo-Spanish and other, non-Jewish languages. For instance, the debates in Sephardi intellectual circles in the Balkans, regardless of how often they expressed anxiety for Judeo-Spanish, rarely if ever focused on Serbo-Croatian as the reason for the decay of Judeo-Spanish. In view of all these complex, overlapping and inter-contextual debates, this thesis positions the Balkan Sephardim as historical agents conscious of their choices and, arguably more importantly, actively involved in the ongoing negotiation of their position in both Jewish and non-Jewish politics and culture. Therefore, this thesis analyses Sephardi politics in the Balkans in this complex cultural and linguistic setting of the first half of the twentieth century.[71]

[71] For a sociolinguistic study of Sarajevo Sephardi Jews' identity and linguistic choices in the second half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century see: Jonna Rock, *Intergenerational Memory and Language of the Sarajevo Sephardim* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

Why do we need a history of Sephardi politics?

For most of its diasporic history, the Sephardim shared a culture but did not have the capacity to make political claims. This makes the emergence of the Sephardi-centred politics t at the turn of the century a unique example of modern Sephardi political engagement that contributed to the wider history of Jewish politics in the first half of the twentieth century. The significance of a history of Sephardi politics lies with the way it leads us to discover unheard voices and approaches to the Jewish political scene. Furthermore, this dissertation delineates the long-lasting and diverse nature of Sephardi politics had that often crossed communal, national, political and ideological boundaries.

This focus on Balkan Sephardi political positioning also brings new perspectives to our understanding of modern Jewish politics. Sephardi intellectuals from the Balkans, mostly educated in Europe, were not solely interested in the Sephardi question but were active contributors to general political debates of the time. In Vienna, where the Sephardi-led and -centred politics emerged, they were in touch with the first political Zionists and some of them were also ardent Zionists; they communicated with Yiddishists; and they learned about the Bundist movement from its representatives. The Sephardim also navigated the growing body of German-Jewish literature, which gave them an informed and firm basis for debate. Vienna was a centre, but not the only centre of Sephardi political activity. In the Balkans, Sarajevo, Belgrade, and Zagreb, and even smaller towns, were dynamic hubs of Ashkenazi-Sephardi relations, sites which also shaped Sephardi political responses. In short, the Balkan Sephardim were well-informed agents invested in Jewish politics.

Studying and contextualising Sephardi claims therefore, allows us to decentre Jewish political thought from the traditional focus on Central European or German-speaking Jews. Well versed in both Central European and Balkan politics, the Balkan Sephardim were in a unique position to claim the right to be heard, compared to the rest of their diaspora. Their calls for cultural and political autonomy were not outside the context of general trends in Jewish politics, even though Sephardim had little to no representation in influential circles. In this way, this dissertation extends our map of Jewish political ideologies to include Sephardi political thought. Moreover, Sephardi insights into politics offer more than Sephardi representation; the Sephardi intellectuals conceptualised the Jewish diaspora in new ways, advocated for a politics that interacted with non-Jewish society, and, crucially, called for the decentralisation of Jewish politics and the legitimisation of all Jewish groups. Their defiant

position sheds light on a political sphere that is multicentric, dynamic, and inclusive rather than its once presumed character of being one-sided and linear.

In historiography, Sephardi politics still comes across as merely reactive to European or Middle Eastern centres, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. The lack of comprehension of the wider context of the Sephardi political engagement hinders our ability to understand unlikely Sephardi positioning. A comparable case to Sephardim were the Jews in Austrian Galicia. Joshua Shanes followed Galician Jews' political options in his study and showed that the choices Jewish leaders took were rarely either/or; rather, they often combined ideologies and approaches and, thus, worked against expected lines of political action. [72] Thus, it was possible for a resolute political Zionist not only to understand but also to support positions of diaspora nationalists, their traditional and vehement enemies. This scholarship, represented by Shanes, attempts to situate Jewish political actions in the wider setting, Moreover, it traces the influences of the non-Jewish surrounding, understanding the necessity of the Jewish minority to be attentive to broader political trends. In light of this, this dissertation follows Sephardi positioning with and against empires, nation-states, and Jewish national politics.

Finally, understanding Sephardi political positioning contributes to the ongoing and complex history of internal Jewish divisions. In this regard, Sephardi Jewish political positioning should be seen as one side in the inherent triangle of European Jewish history – between German Jews, Eastern European Jews, and Sephardi Jews. Steven Aschheim's seminal study on the German-Jewish gaze on the so-called *Ostjude*, Jews from Eastern Europe opened the wider debate on the meaning and significance of the perspectives and prejudices between Jewish groups.[73] Ismar Schorsch noted that it is no coincidence that fascination with the Sepharad arose at the same time as antipathy towards *Ostjude*; rather, it was the other side of the same coin in German-Jewish self-fashioning.[74] However, the relationship between Jewish groups should not be seen only through the eyes of German Jews. Moreover, the

[72] Shanes, Diaspora Nationalism.

[73] Steven Ashheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1880–1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

[74] Ismar Schorsch, 'The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy', *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 34/1(January 1989), 47–66. Other works on the impact of Sepharad on German and European Jewry: John M. Efron, *German Jewry and the Allure of the Sephardic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). Carsten Schapkow, *Role model and Countermodel. The Golden Age of Iberian Jewry and German Jewish Culture during the Era of Emancipation* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016). Carsten Schapkow, 'Die deutsch-jüdische Presse der Haskalah und das iberisch-sephardische Vorbild der Maskilim', in *Deutsch-jüdische Presse und jüdische Geschichte. Dokumente, Darstellungen, Wechselbeziehungen/The German-Jewish Press and Jewish Identity. Documents, Representations, Interrelations*, vol. 1, ed. by Susanne Marten-Finnis and Michael Nagel (Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer Science and Business Media, 2005), 111–127.

German-Jewish perspective was not the last word in this regard. This study reflects on the links within Jewish politics when the *Ostjude* and Sepharad interacted and relied on each other. The triangle of the three most influential Jewish groups, thus, was a multifaced and multidirectional debate where all groups contended prejudice and asked for a reassessment of their position. The study offers an insight into the Sephardi side of this debate and political practice.

The Sources

The sources used for this dissertation reflect the focus and scope of the topic. The most significant arguments of the thesis rely on Jewish newspapers published in the Balkans, starting with the Sarajevo-based *La Alborada* (The Dawn) and the Zagreb- and Osijek-based *Židovska Smotra* (Jewish review) in the first decade of the twentieth century. In order to trace and historicise the thought behind the Sephardi politics, the thesis also draws from the Sarajevo-based *Židovska Svijest* (Jewish consciousness), *Narodna Židovska Svijest* (National Jewish Consciousness), and *Jevrejski glas* (Jewish voice), but especially the Sephardi-centric *Jevrejski Život* (Jewish life), edited and published by the Sarajevo Sephardi circle. For the Central European perspective, especially important for the Sephardi politics in the period before the First World War, I have used the Vienna-based *Die Welt.* These publishing outlets were supplemented with Jewish communal correspondence with the state authorities in Serbia and Yugoslavia (especially regarding the state education sector). Finally, school and university records, and the wider context of Jewish publishing, belles-lettres and texts by Sephardi intellectuals in non-Jewish publications were used to address changes in Sephardi linguistic choices.

Discussion of the wider contextualisation of the Sephardi-oriented politics within the Jewish national movements in the first half of the twentieth century has been based on extensive research, despite the circumstances of the pandemic, in the Central Zionist Archive and Central Archive for the History of Jewish Peoples in Jerusalem. I have supplemented this material with correspondence and published sources, such as Chaim Weitzman's correspondence and *Sephardi lives* collection of sources.

Finally, the thesis uses autobiographical material and audio-visual testimony of Holocaust survivors. This type of source was primarily relevant for the last chapter and for accounts of the Jewish workers' organisation Matatja, whose work was recounted in Jewish press.

Dissertation outline

This dissertation traces the development of Sephardi politics in the first half of the twentieth century in both chronological and thematical order. It pays special attention to moments of ideological convergence with Zionism, diaspora nationalism, and socialism. Chapter 1 traces the historical background of the Sephardi political engagement. It emphasises three particular factors in that background: the collapse of the Ottoman empire and the new social and political order in the Balkans; the question of Sephardi linguistic acculturation and Sephardi multilingualism; and Balkan Sephardi self-fashioning as a result of stronger contact with European, and especially, German-Jewish intellectual trends.

Chapter 2 introduces Sephardi affiliation expressed through the student association Esperanza, formed at the University of Vienna in 1897. Students gathering around Esperanza focused on reviving Judeo-Spanish as means of Sephardi renaissance. However, in only a couple of years they recognised that this was a futile project and turned to engagement with wider Jewish politics and means of finding a Sephardi place in it. Historicising the first period of the Sephardi-oriented politics gives a broad perspective to all the political and cultural influences, primarily with Herzl-led Zionists and Eastern European Jewish thinkers that Sephardi students encountered in the Habsburg capital. Moreover, the chapter explains how these intellectual contacts initiated in an imperial capital then expanded into the Balkan provinces, first and foremost in the Condominium Bosnia-Herzegovina under Austro-Hungarian occupation.

Chapter 3 traces the unlikely Zionist and Sephardi-specific political convergences over the course of the crucial and defining decade for Balkan Jewry (1902–1918). After renouncing the Judeo-Spanish revival plan, Sephardim in Vienna, but increasingly also in the Balkans, found themselves in the midst of a growing Zionist network. The chapter traces the initial Zionist views of Sephardim and first advances in the Balkan peninsula. In line with this, the Sephardi students in Vienna, but also Esperanza's alumni in Sarajevo, acknowledged the dominance but also cohesiveness of the Zionist movement. Nevertheless, they never abandoned their belief that Sephardi Jewry required a locus as a linguistic, cultural, and historical entity. In what follows, this chapter historicises the negotiation of the Sephardi place in the Zionist movement. Moreover, it also traces the position of Jews in the Balkans in the post-imperial world and especially the relationship of Sephardi and Zionist camps to the Yugoslav project.

Chapter 4 describes the development of the Sephardi-centred politics in the interwar period. It details how two international development, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and the creation of the multinational Yugoslav state in 1918, framed the new position of the Sephardim. Following the so-called Sephardi-Ashkenazi split in Yugoslav Jewish politics, Sephardi intellectuals and Esperanza alumni developed a broad ideological, cultural, and, finally political programme. Arguing for both all-Jewish and Sephardi-specific positions, the Sephardim advocated for a unique approach: the political dedication of the Sephardim in the Balkans to both life in diaspora and Palestine. This programme, which was both political and cultural, went beyond the scope of *kehila* and aimed at uniting Sephardim throughout the peninsula.

Finally, Chapter 5 follows the simultaneous peak and the change of course of the Sephardi politics; it traces the collapse of the intellectual elite-led movement and historicises the active involvement of Sephardi workers, shop keepers, and artisans who slowly took over the Sephardi and increasingly also all-Jewish political scene in the late 1920s. These marginalised voices operated through Matatja, an association of Jewish workers. Gathering workers, artisans, and unemployed youth, in an economically unstable and increasingly politically dangerous setting, Matatja managed to answer the cultural needs of the Sephardim through their theatre group, orchestra, and lectures programme. Combining both Jewish and non-Jewish political positioning, the organisation saw and responded to threats of the late interwar period – fascism and Nazism – without surrendering the crucial aspects of Sephardi political culture – Judeo-Spanish and political engagement.

Chapter 1

Setting the Scene: the Balkan Jews in the Nineteenth Century

This thesis explores the idea of a Sephardi diaspora among Jews who lived on the territories of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Austria (in order of importance for this dissertation). In the course of the time span covered (1900–1940), the Jews studied here lived with special status in the following states or provinces: the Ottoman Empire, the Serbian principality (1830–1881), the Serbian Kingdom (1881–1918), the Austro-Hungarian-occupied Condominium of Bosnia–Herzegovina (1878–1907), the so-called Southern Serbia 1912–1914 (comprising parts of the territories of today's south of Serbia, North Macedonia, and Kosovo), the Austro-Hungarian empire (1867–1918), and especially the Kingdom of Croatia–Slavonia (1868–1918), the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Kingdom SCS) (1918–1929), and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1941). This brief overview sketches out the complexities of the political map of the Balkans. Such political entanglements have significantly affected Jews as at first a religious and then ethno-religious and national minority. Customarily, Jews have been categorised through their affiliation with the Ottoman and Habsburg empires and citizenship in all the nation-states that grew out of the collapsed empires. However, more than once, historians have recognised the traps of grouping. Harriet Friedenreich, writing on 'Yugoslav Jewry', even touched upon the bias of this classification in the title of her book *The Quest for a Community*,[75] a title that indicates the difficulty of confining Jewish life, culture, politics, and exchange within the changing state borders in the Balkans. This chapter aims to show why and how Sephardi cultural, intellectual, and political ideas crossed these borders more often than respecting them.

In what follows, these questions are addressed through three aspects. First, the changes in Jewish–non-Jewish relations in the Balkans are examined. These emerged with the gradual collapse of the Ottoman imperial social and political order and the establishment of new nation-states in the Balkans. Even though the transition to nation-states predominantly meant that the Jews had to develop relations with the new authorities, this communication was not bilateral but also included international factors. Contrary to traditional historiography, which positioned Jews vis-à-vis nation-states in their struggle to achieve civic rights, this chapter aims to present a history that sets Balkan Jews in a wider, global setting, actors on a stage that includes nation-states, empires, the interests of European Great Powers, and the expanding network of Jewish

[75] Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia: A Quest for a Community* (Skokie: Varda Books, 1979).

international organisations. Essentially, the internationalisation of the Jewish question was among the crucial aspects of the Balkan Jewish position as Ottoman rule collapsed and new states were formed. All these players attempted to configure social relations in the Balkans in the name of their particular interests and ideologies. The first part of the chapter gives an overview of the effects of this on the Balkan Jews and their own actions and responses to these political factors.

Secondly, the chapter tackles the cultural divergencies that moulded the distinctive natures of these communities, namely the languages of the Balkan Sephardim. Traditionally, Balkan Sephardi Jews are considered to be part of the 'Eastern Sephardi Kulturbereich' or the 'Judeo-Spanish communities'.[76] However, these terms presuppose a long-standing, unchangeable, cohesive Judeo-Spanish, the traditional Jewish and native language of these communities. Negotiating the position of Judeo-Spanish with the state language, Serbo-Croatian, differentiated the Balkan Sephardim from other Sephardi groups in the Ottoman space and the Mediterranean in general over the centuries. As this chapter shows, the role of Judeo-Spanish, even though it is still crucial and paradigmatic for modern Sephardi history, changed over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The overwhelming acceptance of a variety of different languages, including state languages, contributed to the complex and often conflicting self-positioning of the Balkan Sephardim.

Thirdly, the chapter brings forward the changes that occurred in Ashkenazi–Sephardi relations from the second half of the nineteenth century and their by-product – the ideological change in Sephardi self-fashioning in the late nineteenth century. Focusing on the history of these interactions explains the co-dependent histories of these groups in Europe. Moreover, it allows an informed historical contextualisation of intellectual and political exchange between Sephardim and Ashkenazim that shaped modern Jewish life in general, and especially in the Balkans. Historians have so far dedicated significant efforts to explaining the role that the idea of Sepharad and Sephardi Jews had for European, more precisely German, Jews in the modern era.[77] However, cultural and political life of Balkan Jewry was defined by their position

[76] Both classifications come from the E. Benbassa and A. Rodrigue's co-written book and are used interchangeably: Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th–20th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Zion Zohar, *Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry: From the Golden Age of Spain to Modern Times* (New York: University of New York Press, 2005); *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewry*, ed. by Harvey Goldberg (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1996).

[77] Ismar Schorsch, 'The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy', *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 34/1 (January 1989), 47–66; John M. Efron, German Jewry and the Allure of the Sephardic (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Carsten Schapkow, Role Model and Countermodel: The Golden Age of Iberian Jewry and German Jewish Culture during the Era of Emancipation (Washington, DC: Lexington Books, 2016).

between two empires and two poles of Jewish culture: the Habsburg empire with the dominant German-Jewish culture and Ottoman empire which still essentially sustained Eastern Sephardi diaspora. The chapter gives us an insight into the negotiation of the Sephardi place in the changing landscape of European-Jewish politics – from the perspective of the Sephardi Jews. Tracing the Sephardi attraction to the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment), Jewish secular education and scholarship, this chapter explains how and why the Balkan Sephardi Jews turned to Central Europe and Vienna as centres, at first culturally, but from the twentieth century also in terms of political life.

1.1 Changes in the Jewish position in the Balkans

We can locate points in the nineteenth century when the cultural and political life of Sephardi Jews in the Balkans started to change rapidly. The decline and final withdrawal of the Ottoman government from the Balkan peninsula after centuries of rule and the establishment of new nation-states inherently amended centuries-long social rules. This was the case in all the former European territories of the Ottoman empire, namely Serbia, Bulgaria, the Danubian Principalities, and Greece. Moreover, alongside the new geopolitical situation in South-Eastern Europe, the boundaries of the Sephardi world underwent a transformational change. First and foremost, the Balkan Jews' position no longer relied on a relationship with Muslim rulers but now rested with the (Orthodox) Christian majority. The alteration in the social status of Jews in these former Ottoman territories was not solely based on this binary relationship. Rather, Christian–Jewish relations were simultaneously shaped by the changing international order, led by the European Great Powers after 1814, and also the burgeoning modern Jewish diaspora.

The turn of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of changes in the Balkans in which a transformation of the social order was arguably the most significant. Prior to the long nineteenth century of revolutions, social practice in South-Eastern Europe was established according to the Islamic law as practised in the Ottoman empire. These territories had become part of the growing Muslim empire in the mid-fifteenth century (Bulgaria 1430, Serbia 1459, Bosnia 1463, Herzegovina 1483), with Ottoman rule establishing a coherent set of rules for relations between Muslims, as the ruling group, and other monotheistic religious groups, namely all Christian denominations and Jews. The so-called People of the Book had the status of protected minority – *dhimma* in Arabic or *zimmet* in Turkish. The Ottoman system recognised religious groups as having a certain level of legal autonomy in exchange for a

special tax (*djizya* in Arabic or *cizye* in Turkish).[78] For Jewish communities across the empire, this meant that the state recognised the community rabbi's legal authority, the right to organise social life and conduct education, and freedom of religion. Ottoman rule was not uniform as it always recognised regional specificities and practices. However, with all these exclusions, the general corporate status of religious communities was respected throughout the empire.[79]

The first sign of political change, however, came after the Habsburg–Ottoman wars of the eighteenth century (1716–1718, 1739, 1788–1791). In this period, the Danube border figured as the most fragile point. As important commercial meeting points, the towns along the river, primarily Belgrade on the Ottoman side and Semlin (today Zemun, a part of Belgrade) on the Habsburg side, attracted Jewish merchants. It was during this period that Theodor Herzl's grandfather, Simon Loeb, moved to Semlin and worked as a supplier to the military.[80] During the wars, the river became an important access route for Jewish refugees.[81] It soon became obvious that every interrogation of Christian–Muslim relations led to questioning of the Jewish position – as both sides tended to blame the war and their own economic failures on the Jews, and this always ended in the Jews being expelled. These periods of war instigated recurring instability for all religious minorities, particularly Jews.

A long period during which the northern border of the Ottoman empire was defended was followed by waves of internal revolts. A Christian uprising against brutal local Ottoman representatives in the Belgrade area (the Belgrade *pashalik*), again along the Danube border, erupted first in 1804–1812 and then again in 1815.[82] These years were particularly difficult for the Jewish inhabitants of Belgrade. For instance, when Christian insurgents captured Belgrade's fortress, they confined all Muslim and Jewish families to mosques. This only furthered Jewish immigration to the Habsburg empire or deeper into the territories of the Ottoman empire. For example, the Christian revolt resulted in an expulsion of Jews from Belgrade in 1807, with those who were not banished facing the possibility of beatings or even

[78] Benhamin Braude, 'Foundation Myths of the Millet System', in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, vol. 1, ed. by Benjamn Braude and Bernard Lewis (Teaneck, NJ: Holmes & Meier, 1982), 69–88. On the historical development of the status of non-Muslims in the Ottoman state: Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 16–40.
[79] Bruce Masters showed how this system worked on a number of examples of non-Muslim courts throughout the empire: Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World*, 55–56.
[80] Derek Penslar, *Theodor Herzl: The Charismatic Leader* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2020), 13.
[81] Danilo Vogel, *Jevrejska zajednica u Zemunu. Hronika (1739–1945)* (Zemun, Serbia: Jevrejska opština Zemun, 2007), 9.
[82] Frederick F. Anscombe, 'The Balkan Revolutionary Age', *Journal of Modern History*, 84/3 (2012), 572–606.

death.[83] Semlin became a sanctuary for some of these refugees.[84] Violent outbursts such as this not only diminished local Jewish life but also actively fragmented the Jewish network that spread across the Balkans and the Ottoman empire.

The Christian revolt led to a semi-autonomous Serbian principality, in which the position of Jews often changed, becoming increasingly uncertain and restricted. Essentially, their legal status depended on their relationship with the government in power. Throughout the nineteenth century, autocratic rulers alternated with liberal oligarchs, the so-called Ustavobranitelji (Defenders of the Constitution). Thus, the autocratic prince Miloš Obrenović favoured Jewish merchants over local merchants, who were his growing political opposition.[85] The Defenders of the Constitution were considered by their contemporaries and have been accepted in historiography as liberals. However, their politics was only liberal in as much as they sought to check autocratic power. It was they who in 1844 introduced a residency restriction on all Jews in the province, confining them to the Belgrade city trenches. Moreover, their political power was based on an alliance with merchants who aimed at monopolising a state market and found Jews to be in their way. Building their government on this coalition, the liberals declared their allegiance to the rule of law (as opposed to autocracy), the institution of parliament, and national education.[86] This association of liberals with intolerant and, essentially, anti-Semitic measures was not unique: Lisa M. Leff noted similar tendencies in Romania and French Algeria: '[A]ntisemitism emerged as part of the transition to liberal democracy, and its proponents saw themselves as furthering rather than reacting against that transition.'[87] This complex political position made it difficult for foreign authorities to intervene.

Turbulence in the northern part of the Balkan peninsula had a direct impact on the position of Jews in the rest of the Ottoman empire. The Christian revolt was a precedent that opened a series of questions about the future of the state and the position of the empire when

[83] Bogumil Hrabak, *Jevreji u Beogradu do sticanja ravnopravnosti (1878)* (Belgrade: Srpski Geneaološki Centar, 2009), 125.
[84] Vogel, Jevrejska zajednica u Zemunu, 14.
[85] Hrabak, Jevreji u Beogradu do sticanja ravnopravnosti, 262–73. Constantin Iordachi,'Unerwünschte Bürger. Die "Judenfrage" in Rumänien und Serbien zwischen 1831 und 1919', *Transit* 43 (2012/2013), 107–127. On Hajim S. Davičo, an example of a 'Court Jew' in Serbia: Bojan Mitrović 'Court Jew' Origins to Civil-Servant Nationalism: Hajim S. Davičo (1854–1916)', *Quest, Issues in Contemporary Jewish History* 7 (2014), http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=362 (accessed 28 January 2019).
[86] Marie-Janine Calic, The Great Cauldron: A History of Southeastern Europe (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2019), 265. John R. Lampe, Balkan Economic History, 1550-1950: From Imperial Borderlands to Developing Nations (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 119–22.
[87] Lisa M. Leff, 'Liberalism and Antisemitism: A Reassessment from the Peripheries', in *Jews, Liberalism, Antisemitism: A Global History*, ed. by Abigail Green and Simon Levis Sullam (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 23–45 (27).

the number of nation-states was increasing. Ottoman positioning was determined by the growing interest of the British, Russian, and French empires in obtaining de facto tutelage of the Ottoman territories that spread across geopolitically and economically important territories in South-Eastern Europe and, for the European empires even more importantly, the Middle East. These European empires started to impose their presence through their support for the rights of Ottoman Christians. Based on this pressure from the outside, and also growing internal unrest, the Ottoman empire began to remodel its internal policies through a series of social and legal reforms (*Tanzimat*). In the edicts of 1839 and 1856, the empire formally introduced the principle of civil equality for all Ottoman subjects, Muslims and non-Muslims alike.[88] But the government nevertheless remained concerned about the integration of Balkan provinces.

Tanzimat reforms also allowed the Ottoman leaders to consolidate their power in Constantinople. As Yonca Köksal explained, it was a process by which local and state power could be negotiated.[89] The aim of centralisation was certainly a novelty, since for centuries Ottoman rule had relied on localised policies and provincial rulers. This was apparent in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which in the 1830s was still an integral part of the Ottoman empire. However, the province was surrounded by the Habsburg empire in the west and north, with Serbia alongside the river Drina in the east and Montenegro to the south. This geopolitical position allowed the Bosnian Muslim elite to resist the pressure of centralisation from Constantinople. Opposition to the new rules was embodied in Husein Gradaščević's movement in 1831 and Omer Pasha Latas's resistance in 1850–1851. These local leaders were not standing up to the Ottoman empire; rather, they were defending the status quo and the existing privileges of the local (Muslim) elite.[90] Even though these revolts were mostly expressions of an internal struggle for power, they caused a wave of Jewish immigration. It appears there was no single preferred direction; a number of Jewish families found refuge or stopped for a while in Belgrade.[91] It is almost impossible to record how many refugees were involved, or even how many migrations of religious minorities took place across the region, whether caused by political instabilities or persecutions, in this period. However, the numbers were significant enough to spark the international interest in protecting religious minorities.

[88] David Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation: A History across Five Centuries* (Princeton, NJ/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019), 266.
[89] Masters, Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World, 135–41. Yonca Köksal, *The Ottoman Empire in the Tanzimat Era: Provincial Perspectives from Ankara to Edirne* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2019).
[90] Husnija Kamberović, *Husein-kapetan Gradaščević (1802–1834): Biografija. Uz dvjestotu godišnjicu rođenja* (Gradačac, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Bošnjačka Zajednica Kulture 'Preporod' Gradačac, 2002).
[91] Belgrade, Archive of Serbia, Ministarstvo unutrašnjih dela – političko odeljenje (MUD-PO), 1856, F IX, R 20 (6.6.1856).

The rights of minorities was one of the crucial paradigms of the Ottoman reforms. In particular, the question of Jewish rights was gaining ever more attention internationally in this period. The terms and conditions for (civic) emancipation of the Jews in the Balkans were discussed alongside the issue of their brethren in the Middle East after the so-called Damascus affair of 1840, when the governor general of Syria, a province under the control of Egypt, found the leading Jews of Damascus guilty of murdering a Christian monk and his servant and using their blood for ritual purposes. This allegation led to revival of the blood libel, a false claim that Jews murdered Christians in order to use their blood in religious rituals that had origins in the Middle Ages. The arrest and torture of Jews had international ramifications, with the result that this fabricated accusation was felt throughout the European Jewish communities.[92] While the reactions and responses were often violent towards Jews, they also mobilised international Jewish action for the first time in modern European history. These networks of solidarity, previously resting on traditional transnational charity such as *chalukah* (donations sent to the Land of Israel), instigated a debate on the conditions of Jewish life in the Middle East. The event also mobilised the Western Sephardi diaspora through its most notable representatives, Moses Montefiore (1784–1885) and Adolph Cremieux (1796–1880).[93] Moreover, the first Jewish newspapers started to directly address the entire Jewish public.[94] Essentially, the events in Damascus began a new era in Jewish international politics.

European Jewry established new institutions that were dedicated to promoting Jewish emancipation as something that was required for a modern society. The leading role in this regard was taken by the Alliance Israèlite Universelle (AIU), formed in 1860 in Paris. Led by the principles of the French Enlightenment, the Alliance successfully spread the idea of Jewish 'regeneration' in line with (imagined) liberal and anti-clerical modern societies.[95] Jewish organisations from other parts of Europe, mostly German-speaking, took up similar aims, albeit with different ideological justification. All of them, though, had the same goal – to spread

[92] Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: 'Ritual Murder', Politics and Jews in 1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[93] Yaron Tsur, 'Who Introduced Liberalism into the Damascus Affair (1840)? Center, Periphery and Networks in the Jewish Response to the Blood Libel', in *Jews, Liberalism, Antisemitism: A Global History*, 263–282. Lisa Moses Leff, *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity: The Rise of Jewish Internationalism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2006), 120–27. On Montefiore and his role in protecting Jewish rights: Abigail Green, *Moses Montefiore: Jewish Liberator, Imperial Hero* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); Abigail Green, 'Sir Moses Montefiore and the Making of the "Jewish International"'. *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 7, no. 3 (2008): 287–307.
[94] Abigail Green, 'Old Networks, New Connections: The Emergence of the Jewish International', in *Religious Internationals in the Modern World: Globalization and Faith Communities since 1750*, ed. by Abigail Green (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 58–61.
[95] Aron Rodrigue, French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860–1925 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 6. Leff, Sacred Bonds, 160–62.

European civilisation, progress, and modernity in the name of the modernised Jewish communities they represented.

To a certain extent, the ambitions and work of Jewish international organisations had to comply with the general course of international politics. European states, primarily the British, French, Russian, and Austrian empires, used the so-called Eastern Question to impose their solutions to problems in the Ottoman empire in accordance with their own conflicting interests. The Crimean War exposed the rivalry between the Great Powers and their aim to take a dominant role in the Ottoman empire through their protection of Christian subjects of the empire and Christian holy sites in Palestine. This conflict resulted in the reconfiguration of relations between non-Muslim minorities in the Muslim-dominated empire. It also opened the question of ethno-religious minorities in the former territories of the Ottoman empire. This became evident in the Paris Treaty of June 1856, which put an emphasis on stability in the Balkans, reflected in the religious and political rights of the Sultan's subjects. Paragraph XXVIII mentioned the Serbian principality, which, in exchange for preservation of its independence and national administration, had to (among other things) allow liberty of worship.[96] The Ottoman empire reacted with Hatt-I Humayun, an Ottoman reform edict in 1856, which confirmed and enhanced rights that had already been proclaimed in the 1839 Edict of Gülhane, and concerned the equality of all subjects, regardless of their religious affiliations.

Thus, in 1856, European policies and politics on minorities, international and internal policies more generally, converged and created tension in the Balkans. This was the moment when the already dominant discourse about Jewish emancipation – in a variety of forms and ideologies – was defining the ways in which Jews were to participate in European societies. From 1856, Balkan Jews entered this conversation. It would be wrong to assume that its terms were merely imposed. In 1856, Jews in Serbia sent a petition to the Prince of Serbia, the Ottoman Sublime Porte, Russian, French, and other state representatives present at the Paris Treaty Conference with a request for legal equality.[97] Thus, the Paris Treaty opened a space for the Balkan Jewish agenda. This resulted in a change in Serbia's internal policies towards Jews, in that the 1844 decree restricting Jewish freedom of settlement was abolished in 1859 and Jews were again allowed to reside within the city walls. This positive change was not final, as the Jews in Serbia and the rest of the Balkans still lacked civic rights. The final step towards that had to wait for another peace congress.

[96] M. J. Kohler, 'Jewish Rights at International Congresses', *The American Jewish Year Book*, 19 (1917–18), 137.
[97] Hrabak, Jevreji u Beogradu do sticanja ravnopravnosti, 340–41.

The last international crisis in the Balkans in the nineteenth century began with the peasants' revolt in Herzegovina in 1875. This local unrest gained international significance after brutal suppression of the uprising in Bulgaria in spring 1876 which caused wide debates and public outcries across Europe and especially the United Kingdom.[98] The direct international involvement followed only Russia's and Serbia's declaration of war on the Ottoman empire in 1877. Furthermore, Russia intervened on behalf of Bulgaria, drastically altering the state's boundaries and the geopolitical situation in the Balkans in its favour. The Great Powers met in Berlin in the summer of 1878 to set the new boundaries in the Balkans.[99] When the Berlin Congress had concluded, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Montenegro were granted independence, but only on condition that they provided full civic emancipation to all religious minorities on their territories.[100] The Congress also introduced Austro-Hungarian occupation of the Ottoman province Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sandžak under the pretext of a 'civilising mission'.[101] This direct intervention of the Great Powers into internal affairs in the Balkans was met with resistance in all these countries. The problem, from the perspective of newly recognised nation-states, was not the emancipation of Jews, who were a minute minority in the societies, but the emancipation of Muslims, still significantly present in the entire region.[102] However, in Bulgaria, all religious minorities became full citizens, as granted by the constitution of 1879. After the 1878 occupation, Bosnia and Herzegovina was integrated into the legal system of the Dual Monarchy, and thus all individuals received legal, social, and political rights, regardless of background. Yet even after this significant international advocacy, Jewish emancipation took over a decade to be implemented. For example, in Serbia the new constitution introduced civic equality for all citizens in 1889 (or 1888 according to the old Gregorian calendar, then still in use in the country).

[98] Miloš Ković, *Disraeli and the Eastern Question* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 117–159.
[99] On the role of German Jews at the Berlin Congress: Nathan M. Gelber, 'The Intervention of German Jews at the Berlin Congress, 1878." *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 5 (1960): 221–48; Fritz R. Stern, *Gold and Iron: Bismarck, Bleichröder, and the Building of the German Empire* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
[100] Nathan M. Gelber, ‚La question juive en Bulgarie et en Serbie devant le Congrès de Berlin de 1878', *Revue des études juives* 3, 1–2 (1964): 85–124.
[101] Robin Okey, Taming Balkan Nationalism: The Habsburg 'Civilising Mission' in Bosnia 1878–1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 26–34.
[102] Marko Dogo, 'Balkanske nacionalne države i pitanje Muslimana', *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju* 11/5 (1996), 352–63.

1.2 The Sephardi languages

The question of language was at the core of the Jewish experience in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, and was most certainly a central conceptual problem for Jews in non-Jewish societies. David Sorkin has pointed out that Jewish emancipation and Jewish assimilation are 'reciprocally dependent processes'. While emancipation meant that states were to grant their Jewish citizens equal rights, assimilation was 'what the Jews were to give in return'. In addition to occupational restructuring and a version of religious reform, necessary prerequisites for the achievement of social and political equality, in theory, included re-education and adopting the state language.[103] Embracing the language of the state or of the dominant cultural-linguistic group became a political issue for all Judeo-Spanish-speaking communities in the Balkans in the second half of the nineteenth century. In Salonica, and also across other Ottoman territories during the last decades of Ottoman rule, learning the Turkish language became the ultimate proof of patriotism.[104] However, as some sources testify, only a quarter of Salonica's Jewish population actually knew any Turkish by the end of the Ottoman period.[105] Furthermore, other European languages, primarily French, but also German, Italian, and English, figured significantly as cultural, class, and (to a certain extent) political markers throughout the Eastern Mediterranean Sephardi world.[106] Yet, while these languages gave nuance to the Jewish–state-language disparity, they did not play a dominant role in this part of the Balkans.

Almost a decade after official emancipation in the Serbian principality (1889), and two decades in the case of the Condominium of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1878), the Jewish communities of both regions were still caught between community autonomy, as traditionally enjoyed, and full civic and political rights in the modern sense. These Jews held on to long-standing practices, with *meldar*, the traditional religious school, being central among them. In correspondence with the Ministry of Education in 1896, the Jewish community in Belgrade

[103] David Sorkin, 'Emancipation and Assimilation: Two Concepts and their Application to German Jewish History', *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 35/1 (January 1990), 18.
[104] Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 26–34.
[105] Devin Naar, *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2016), 145–46.
[106] On the case of knowledge and use of French, Italian, and English among the Sephardim in Belgrade: Ivana Vučina Simović, 'In Search of the Historical Linguistic Landscape of the Balkans: The Case of Judeo-Spanish in Belgrade', *Menorah*, 7 (December 2013), 185. Moreover, Sephardim did not insist on the boundaries between Romance/Latin languages: Naar, Jewish Salonica, 105.

stressed that the Jewish school had existed *od vajkada* (since time immemorial).[107] Indeed, this school lay at the heart of every Jewish community. Boys attended *meldar* from the age of five, and they were taught to read the Hebrew Bible and Talmud, and to sing the liturgy. Jakov Maestro, who attended Sarajevo's *meldar* at the end of the nineteenth century, described his school as a large room next to the synagogue, where up to fifty children sat around a *melamed* (teacher), who was usually also the rabbi.[108] The language of instruction was Judeo-Spanish, but the purpose of the school was to introduce boys to the study of Judaism and ensure that they had a sufficient grasp of Hebrew in order to say their prayers fluently. This tendency to marginalise Judeo-Spanish as the language of reading was, arguably, specific to Sephardim living in the Serbo-Croatian realm. Sarah A. Stein underlined that other Sephardi communities enhanced their mother tongue through reading Judeo-Spanish translations of the Bible and the *Me'am loez* (an encyclopaedic Bible commentary that was composed by a variety of scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), and this was later furthered by reading the Judeo-Spanish press.[109] While the objectives of education changed over time, and communities later tried to offer a broader curriculum, furthering literacy in Judeo-Spanish never became a part of the community's agenda for education or culture. This attitude encouraged Sephardi literary expression in other languages.

Across Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, Jewish boys were offered lessons in other languages. In other predominantly Sephardi settings, the AIU, the French Jewish organisation committed to establishing a network of schools for Jewish children in the Ottoman Empire, offered a broader secular curriculum.[110] The philosophy of the Alliance was deeply embedded in the French approach to Jewish emancipation: the question was not whether the Jews deserved civil rights; rather it was a question of regenerating their moral strength so they were able to become an integral part of (French) society.[111] Regeneration presupposed degeneration, which, in the eyes of the Alliance, was seen in traditional Judaism and traditional Jewish society. Therefore, three goals stood out in their educational reform agenda. They aimed to

[107] Belgrade, Archive of Serbia, Ministry of Education, Sector for Education (AS, MPs-P) 1899, F 4, R 56 (4 October 1896).
[108] Jakov Maestro, 'Naš stari meldar', in *Spomenica o proslavi tridesetogodišnjice sarajevskoga kulturno-potpornog društva La Benevolencija*, ed. by Stanislav Vinaver (Sarajevo: La Benevolencija, 1924), 103. Maestro also noted that the conditions of *meldar* in Sarajevo were similar everywhere in Bosnia.
[109] Sarah A. Stein, *Modern Jews: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 60.
[110] Aron Rodrigue, 'From Millet to Minority: Turkish Jewry', in *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States and Citizenship*, ed. by Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 253.
[111] Ronald Schlechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representation of Jews in France, 1715–1815* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2003), 9.

socialise Jewry through instruction in the languages of the surrounding society, to make Jews more 'useful' through vocational instruction, and finally to cut connections with the roots of traditional society by transforming rabbinical training.[112] In Bulgaria, the Alliance opened its first school in 1870, and had three by 1878. By the end of the century, fifteen schools hosted around 3,890 Jewish pupils and employed ninety-eight teachers.[113] By the end of the nineteenth century, both Greece and Bulgaria had ten AIU schools.[114]

Despite the efforts of Benjamin Russo, a well-connected member of the Belgrade community, only one Alliance teacher was appointed to the Jewish school in Belgrade, and he left his post after only two years because the community could not fund his salary.[115] The Alliance made no plans to establish a school in Sarajevo, the centre of one of the most significant Sephardi communities. In this way, Judeo-Spanish speakers in the Condominium of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbian principality were further isolated from the norm of cultural, and thus linguistic, practice in the rest of the Ottoman and post-Ottoman Jewish communities.

This of course, does not mean that French did not figure as a foreign language at all. On the contrary, it was highly regarded as a cultural or even class symbol.[116] A number of renowned community leaders were praised for their knowledge of French. Some of them were themselves alumni of AIU schools. Benjamin L. Pinto, in Sarajevo, was one of city's first secular Sephardi intellectuals at the turn of the century.[117] Laura Papo Bohoreta attended an AIU school while her family was settled in Constantinople between 1900 and 1908, and she later tutored French in Sarajevo.[118] But even these notable individuals did not have a career in the AIU system, unlike Arie Gabriel, a Samokov-born teacher who went on to pursue a teaching career in AIU schools.[119] As a result of the lack of AIU investment in the cultural space, French

[112] Rodrigue, *French Jews*, 7.
[113] Guy H. Haskell, *From Sofia to Jaffa: The Jews of Bulgaria and Israel* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018), 92.
[114] 'Alliance Israelite Universelle', Jewish Virtual Library, 2018, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/alliance-israelite-universelle> [accessed 12 July 2021].
[115] Noëmie Duhaut, 'Redrawing Boundaries in the Jewish World: The "Alliance Israelite Universelle" and Serbian Jews, 1860–1880' (MA dissertation, University College London, 2011), 18–19.
[116] Ivana Vučina Simović, 'Elección de lenguas entre los sefardíes de Belgrado en la época moderna', *Balkania* (2015), 75. Vučina Simović here quotes Spanish scholar Angel Pulido who believed that French played a role solely among Sephardi 'aristocracy'.
[117] Benjamin Pinto, Spomenica o proslavi 30-godišnjice jevrejskog pjevačkog društva 'Lira' u Sarajevu 1901–1931 (Odbor 'Lire': Sarajevo, 1931), 7.
[118] Jagoda Večerina Tomaić, 'Bohoreta torn between Zionism and Local Patriotism', *El Prezente*, 11 (December 2017), 51.
[119] Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, 'Introduction', in *A Sephardi Life in Southeastern Europe: The Autobiography and Journal of Gabriel Arie, 1863–1939*, ed. by Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 10.

was not a widely accepted norm. As a consequence, the cultural sphere of the Jews in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina could equally be defined by their embrace of Serbo-Croatian as the language of politics and culture as by their exclusion from the predominantly French-speaking circles of Sephardi culture. The boundaries of the AIU's influence began at the Bulgarian and Ottoman borders and spread into the Middle East.

German, on the other hand, had a prominent position as one of the key languages for European Jewish communities.[120] It did not owe its favourable position to a campaign by German-Jewish cultural organisations, namely the Israelitische Alianz zu Wien, set up in 1873, nor to the Hilfsverein der Deutscher Juden, dating from 1901.[121] Both organisations, inspired by the success of the AIU, aimed to create a network of German-Jewish organisations and educational institutions, led by the German-Jewish ideology of *Bildung*. This generally modest network focused primarily on Eastern Europe and remained out of reach of Jews in this part of the Balkans who generally took up German through state schooling. In Serbia, this language was offered as the second language in schools. In Belgrade, as early as the 1860s, Jewish boys learnt 'some Serbian and German'.[122] In Bosnia–Herzegovina under Austro-Hungarian rule, German was the state language, and was introduced in the Condominium as the language of administration and the press (notably the *Bosnische Post*,[123] and the *Sarajevor Tagblatt*). German also figured as the first 'learned language' (with 5,648 speakers) based on the census of 1910, followed by Turkish (2,289), Italian (591), and Arabic (448).[124]

Furthermore, German was a language spoken by the Ashkenazi population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. German-speaking colonists were the second largest group that settled there from other provinces of the Dual Monarchy. The authorities tracked this immigration from 1880 to 1910. In this period, 114,591 individuals settled in the province, making up a total of 6.04 per cent of the civil population. More than half of the immigrants were Serbo-Croatian speakers (58,173 or 50.76 per cent). German speakers made up 20.04 per cent (22,968),

[120] On the convergent role of German in history of Jewish nationalism in Europe: Marc Volovici, *German as a Jewish Problem: Language and Politics of Jewish Nationalism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2020).
[121] Zosa Szjakowski, 'Conflicts in the Alliance Israelite Universelle and the founding of the Anglo-Jewish Association, the Viennese Aliaz, and the Hilfsverein', *Jewish Social Studies*, 19 (1957), 29–50.
[122] AS, MP 1861, F VII, No i155 (n.d.). Eli Bar-Chen, *Weder Asiaten noch Orientalen: internationale jüdische Organisationen und die Europäisierung "rückständiger" Juden* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2005).
[123] Carl Bethke, 'The *Bosnische Post*: A Newspaper in Sarajevo, 1884–1903', in *Language Diversity in the Late Habsburg Empire*, ed. by M. Prokopovych, C. Bethke, and T. Scheer (London/Leiden: Brill, 2019), 87–114.
[124] Bethke, 88. Bethke quotes *Die Ergebnisse der Volkzählung in Bosnien und der Hercegovina vom 10. Oktober 1910*, Zusammengestellt. vom Statist.Departament d. Landesregierung (Sarajevo: Landesregierung für Bosnien u. d. Hercegovina, 1912), 54–55.

followed by Polish speakers with 9.42 per cent.[125] It is impossible to quantify how many Jewish immigrants spoke German upon settling in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The census of Jewish communities in Sarajevo in 1910 only distinguished between Judeo-Spanish speakers and 'other languages'. However, according to the 1931 census, German was the third language among the Sarajevo Jewish community with 3.48 per cent or 269 speakers.[126] As this census came after increased pressure on all non-South Slavic population to leave Bosnia and Herzegovina in the early 1920s (more on this in Chapter 4) and expectations to learn Serbo-Croatian as the new language of the Yugoslav state, it is reasonable to presume that the greatest number of Jewish immigrants to the Condominium and especially Sarajevo were predominantly German speakers.

The defining language for Sephardi Jews in the region was Serbo-Croatian.[127] This language, introduced and labelled as Serbian, Croatian, or Bosnian, depending on the context, was primarily instituted through the growing system of state education, starting in the mid-nineteenth century and reaching its peak in the first decade of the twentieth century. While there were no Jewish educational options beyond the traditional structure of *meldar*, the nation-states aimed to formulate a uniform education with the standardised vernacular at its heart. Behind this plan was the idea of *Kulturnation*, which was introduced in the first half of the nineteenth century and was popular until the 1870s in German lands. According to this concept, the nation was based on linguistic and cultural ties, rather than on shared historical tradition or state boundaries, which were still changing in the nineteenth century. Even before this common vernacular was created or, more precisely, systematised through the teaching of orthography and grammar, the idea of a shared language for all South Slav peoples had persisted since the Renaissance through the concept of the 'Illyrian language'. In the 1830s, a number of intellectuals from Croatia–Slavonia propagated the union of all South Slavs under the banner of 'Illyrianism'. However, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, a self-taught Serb, developed a standard language that was based on popular dialect with the help of a Slovenian, Jernej Kopitar, in Vienna in the 1820s. This language, Serbo-Croatian, was the basis of the so-called Vienna Agreement of Slavists from Serbia and Croatian lands in 1850.[128] From that point onwards, this single language, under different names and with certain differences within its dialects, was

[125] Ilija Hadžibegović, 'Migracija stanovništva u Bosni i Hercegovini 1878–1914', *Prilozi*, 11–12 (1975), 331–32.
[126] Freidenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 215.
[127] I use Serbo-Croatian as a linguistic term which originates in the Literary Agreement in Vienna in 1850, an agreement that unites all languages and dialects understood today as Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin.
[128] Calic, The Great Cauldron, 252–64. Andrew Wachtel Baruch, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998), 20–66.

the basis of state education in Serbia, Croatia–Slavonia, and eventually Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Compared with Serbia and Croatia–Slavonia, where the cultural elites initiated and developed the systematisation and advancement of the common vernacular, in Bosnia and Herzegovina the state took on this role. The Habsburg empire also consciously capitalised on the use of the language to unify the ethnically and religiously diverse population of its only colony.[129] From this aspiration came the broad social and cultural project of the Austro-Hungarian minister of finance and administrator of Bosnia–Herzegovina, Benjamin Kalláy (1839–1903). Kalláy's ambitious undertaking had, among other things, introduced Bosnian (a variant of Serbo-Croatian) as one of the languages of the empire and the national language in Bosnia–Herzegovina (as noted in new textbooks from 1884).[130] Having in mind how crucial, both ideologically and practically, the state language was for the identity of the new Serbian state, but also for the cultural principles of Austro-Hungarian rule in Bosnia–Herzegovina, it is not surprising that the states insisted on acquisition of the language in state schools.

The sources give a detailed insight into state language politics in relation to the Jews in Belgrade. In 1861, almost three decades before Serbian civic emancipation in 1888, two affluent members of Belgrade's Jewish community asked the Ministry of Education to set up classes for Jewish pupils within the state school system; and exclusively Jewish classes were established in two state schools in Belgrade, with classes were given in Serbian. One school was in the Jewish neighbourhood of Jalija, while the other was in the city centre, although still within walking distance of the Jewish area.[131] The community continued to organise *meldar* for boys in the afternoons on working days, on Sundays, and on Christian holidays, within their own communal spaces.[132] Thus, Belgrade's Jewish boys were receiving both secular, state, and religious education in two different settings. This coexistence of state and Jewish community schools was exceptional. In Sarajevo, for instance, following the ideology of the civil reforms, the Ottoman authorities opened a *ružđija* (*rüşdiye* in Turkish, state school). Based on the celebrated example of Moshe Attias (1845–1916), also known as Zekki Effendi, a multilingual intellectual who worked for both Ottoman and later Austro-Hungarian authorities, this school

[129] Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 654.
[130] Okey, Taming Balkan Nationalism, 68.
[131] AS, MP 1861, F VII, No. I155 (24 February 1864).
[132] AS, MPs-P 1899, F 4, R 56 (12 November 1895).

opened the doors to a career in the Ottoman administration.[133] Yet this did not encourage many Jewish parents to send their children to the school.[134]

After civic emancipation in Serbia, the state aimed to gain more control over the education of Jewish children. The Ministry of Education decided to raise the standards for entry to state schools. After a complaint that Jewish pupils were not capable of following their Serbian teacher, the state introduced a language proficiency test in 1894 for all Jewish children whose comprehension of Serbian was not satisfactory. Previously, Jewish students had been given the opportunity to learn Serbian when they entered the state school system, but now they were excluded unless their language skills were adequate. However, not all Jewish children lacked knowledge of the Slavic vernacular. Sultana Levi appealed to the ministry to accept her daughter into the school because, at the age of six, Rashela '[did] not speak any Jewish, but only Serbian'. Three teachers, one of whom, Jelena De Majo, was Jewish, examined Rashela, and confirmed that her knowledge of Serbian was satisfactory for enrolment in the first grade of primary school.[135] Jewish community officials 'proudly' claimed 'that our children speak Serbian as well as their own [language], [and] as proficiently as Serbian children'.[136] However, this still did not convince the Ministry of Education. The stakes of state involvement in the education of the Jewish minority were raised.

In 1898, the Ministry of Education cancelled classes held exclusively for Jewish pupils in the state schools and replaced them with mixed classes of Jewish and non-Jewish pupils. These classes also took place in the afternoon, during the time when Jewish boys had previously attended *meldar*. Thus, the *meldar*'s timetable was amended: the time Jewish pupils would have spent at the Jewish school between Monday and Friday was limited to religious classes held only when Christian pupils were attending scripture lessons, liturgical singing, and Church Slavonic. They attended *meldar* on Jewish community premises only on Sundays and on Christian holidays. Furthermore, the Jewish community had to bear the financial costs of any of their staff who were employed in state schools.[137]

This merging of classes effectively squeezed out Judeo-Spanish from the everyday curriculum, and Hebrew soon followed. The official excuse was that learning in two languages overburdened children's brains and limited schools' academic success. The school

[133] Sarah A. Stein and Julia P. Cohen, 'Sephardic Scholarly Worlds: Toward a Novel Geography of Modern Jewish History', *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 100/3 (2010), 374. Muhamed Nezirović,.'Historija bosanskih Jevreja Moše (Rafaela) Atijasa: Zeki Efendije', *Prilozi*, 29 (2000), 245–60.
[134] Freidenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 14.
[135] AS, MPs-P 1896, F27, R190 (n.d.).
[136] AS, MPs-P 1899, F 4, R 56 (12 November 1895), underlined in the original.
[137] AS, MPs-P 1899, F 4, R 56 (22 August 1896).

administration even asserted that '[Jewish] Religion can be taught in Serbian. It is only the matter of old Jewish books in old Jewish language; however, the religion is not taught in Serbian but in broken Spanish.'[138] A community representative tried to insist on the importance of learning 'the Jewish language', that is, Hebrew, as the only way 'to celebrate the greatness of God'.[139] Although this appeal was in vain, the language battle was not lost, as *meldar* survived emancipation. While school days from Monday to Friday were off limits, the melamed (teacher) gathered pupils together on Sabbaths and Sundays. Arguably, this was the case in all Sephardi milieux, as *meldar* was inseparable from the core of the *kehila*'s (community's) missions. The state authorities opened a Jewish school in Sarajevo in 1904[140], but that still does not mean the tradition of Sephardi education ceased or the end of Judeo-Spanish as the language of instruction, as Harriet Friedenreich has suggested.[141] Education was and remained among the crucial duties of the Jewish community. Even in a small town such as Goražde, Isak Samokovlija, who became the first acclaimed Sephardi writer, was able to attend both a state school and Jewish school.[142] In southern Serbia, in the town of Leskovac, where only a dozen Jewish families lived, until the Second World War boys gathered for *meldar* in a small room next to the synagogue.[143]

Meldar was certainly affected by state-imposed time constraints. Yet the curriculum and language used in school were matters of community autonomy and individual practice. Linguistic assimilation was not necessarily linked to the process of emancipation. Historical linguistics provides an interesting insight here. Vučina Simović has shown that Serbo-Croatian and Judeo-Spanish bilingualism was already common in the Sephardi community in Belgrade during the period prior to civic emancipation, with a high number of both men and women born between 1840 and 1879 speaking both Serbo-Croatian and Judeo-Spanish: 73 per cent of women and 85 per cent of men. In the same generation, only 17 per cent of women and 27 per cent of men used only Judeo-Spanish, while 4 per cent of women and 1 per cent of men were Serbo-Croatian monoglots. Bilingualism peaked in the generation born between 1880 and 1917; that is, in the period following civic emancipation. During this golden age of bilingualism, 79 per cent of Jewish women and 84 per cent of Jewish men could use both languages. However, in this generation no men or women spoke only Judeo-Spanish, while the

[138] AS, MPs-P 1899, F 4, R 56 (15 December 1897).
[139] AS, MPs-P 1899, F4, R 56 (12 November 1895).
[140] Historijski Arhiv Sarajevo (HIS), Izraelićko-sefardska škola.
[141] Freidenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 21.
[142] Sarajevo, Museum of Literature and Performing Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Isak Samokovlija Collection, J 915–1733; 145; 1221.
[143] Ženi Lebl, *Do 'Konačnog rešenja'. Jevreji u Srbiji* (Belgrade: Čigoja Štampa, 2002), 54–55.

trend towards monolingual Serbo-Croatian rose to 21 per cent of women and 16 per cent of men.[144] This research reveals how state involvement in Jewish education did not directly lead to linguistic assimilation and the abandonment of Judeo-Spanish for the sake of Serbo-Croatian, but rather that it enhanced bilingualism.

Judeo-Spanish, the language of centuries of Jewish educational tradition and Sephardi culture, endured, despite changing patterns of Jewish education. Space was left for the coexistence of *meldar* and state school and resulted in parallel education in both Serbo-Croatian and Judeo-Spanish. Often omitted in linguistic studies on Sephardi bilingualism is the gap between spoken and written language. Hence, knowledge of Judeo-Spanish and Serbo-Croatian did not necessarily mean that a person could read and write in one or both languages. The greatest contribution of state-imposed learning of Serbo-Croatian was not reflected in an abandonment of Judeo-Spanish, but rather in reading and then *writing* in Serbo-Croatian.

Focusing on the final product of both types of education sheds light on the phenomenon of multilingualism. Although Judeo-Spanish was the language of instruction in the *meldar*, traditional education was not directed towards learning to read and write Judeo-Spanish but used the language simply as a spoken tool to facilitate a grasp of Hebrew that was sufficient to understand the Torah. Thus, the curriculum first introduced the Hebrew alphabet: learning the letters and the formation of words. The next stage focused on reading Hebrew prayers and parts of the *Parashah* (the weekly Torah portion). The aim was to achieve fluency in the liturgy and comprehension of the whole *Parashah*. The final step in this pedagogic system was to teach pupils to translate the Torah into 'Spanish' by means of rote learning. The teacher read out the translation and the students repeated it after him.[145] Thus, while the state school stressed the use of Serbo-Croatian equally for speaking, reading, and writing, the purpose of the *meldar* was to prepare the next generation of men to participate in religious services. Even when the timetable left space for secular subjects (as in the aforementioned case of Belgrade in the 1860s), the emphasis was on understanding the Hebrew Bible and other religious texts. Active proficiency in reading and writing Judeo-Spanish was never the intention. The restricted role of Judeo-Spanish means that the emergence of a Sephardi collective identity was not a simple transition from a language-based identity to a political identity.

This lack of interest in acquiring Judeo-Spanish may also explain the unsuccessful attempt to establish a secular press in Judeo-Spanish in Belgrade and Sarajevo. The language

[144] Simović, 'Elección de lenguas', 86–88.
[145] Maestro, 103. Maestro also noted that the conditions of *meldar* in Sarajevo were similar everywhere in Bosnia.

used was Ladino, printed in Rashi Hebrew script. In Belgrade, *El amigo del pueblo* (The Friend of the People) was published for the Jewish community between 1888 and 1892.[146] Sarajevo's newspaper was *La Alborada* (The Dawn), which also lasted only briefly, from 1900 to 1901.[147] Although very short lived, these newspapers anticipated the rise of a secular Jewish press in the Serbo-Croatian language in the first decades of the twentieth century.

The Serbo-Croatian language was deployed to assert emancipation in the Serbian principality and in Bosnia and Herzegovina under Austro-Hungarian rule. The interests of the state and of the Jewish communities overlapped on two interconnected issues: language and education. However, Jews were not mere passive recipients, but critically assessed the terms of civic equality. Serbo-Croatian was instrumental both in affirming and negotiating emancipation. Beyond this emancipation process, Serbo-Croatian played a role in the internal cultural development of the Sephardi community in this part of the Balkans.

1.3 Modern Jewish encounters and Sephardi refashioning

The specific conditions and paths of the internal Ashkenazi–Sephardi exchange create the third aspect of the Sephardi setting in this part of the Balkans. Balkan Jewry, with the gradual disintegration of the Ottoman empire in the nineteenth century, slowly distanced themselves from the Eastern Sephardi diaspora and its centres in the Ottoman empire. This fact was enhanced by the proximity of the Habsburg empire and its growing interest in the Balkans. As the capital that hosted centres of both German-Jewish and Eastern European Jewish thought and culture, Vienna's adjacency to Belgrade and Sarajevo implied regular contact between Sephardi and Ashkenazi cultures. The mere fact that the Sephardim in these communities were unavoidably in closer contact with their Ashkenazi brethren distinguished them from the rest of the Eastern Sephardi Diaspora. The immigration of Jews from the Habsburg lands after the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 only intensified this process. Moreover, the Jews in Croatia–Slavonia, with their centres in Zagreb and Osijek, became ever more active in Jewish political spheres in this part of the Balkans in the early twentieth century. For all these reasons, the interchange, in the broadest possible sense, was not only geographically and socially conditioned, but also practically inevitable.

[146] Biljana Albahari, 'Pregled jevrejske periodike u Srbiji (1888–1941)', *Čitalište*, 28 (May 2016), 88.
[147] Freidenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 133. Krinka Vidaković-Petrov, 'La presse séfarade de Belgrade et Sarajevo de 1888 à 1941', in *Recensement, analyse et traitement numérique des sources écrites pour les études séfarades*, ed. by Soufiane Roussi and Ana Stulic-Etchevers (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2013), 69–96. Eli Tauber, *Jevrejska štampa u BiH 1900–2011* (Sarajevo: Mediacentar, 2011), 15–16.

The interaction between Sephardim with their Ashkenazi brethren was common in al larger towns in Europe and the Mediterranean. There often both an Ashkenazi and a Sephardi community lived side by side. For instance, Vienna's first established Jewish community within the city walls comprised Ottoman Jews, thus of Sephardi origin, and had already been formed by 1788. This community, the so-called Türkische-Jüdische Gemeinde, existed independently until 1890 when it was included in the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde, the officially recognised Jewish community.[148] Jerusalem also had two Jewish communities, namely the Spanish or 'local, Ottoman' community and the Ashkenazi community, or 'Europeans'.[149] Belgrade, as a border city and commercial centre, and subsequently a nation-state capital, was the home of two Jewish communities.[150] The differences between these communities were not extreme and only became visible when there were local disputes about tax or land for cemeteries. Taking precedence over the question of different spoken languages, rituals, and so on was the difference in position, or more precisely in legal privileges. In Belgrade in 1858, a dispute between the 'Austrian' and 'Spanish' communities arose owing to the privileges the city ruler extended solely to 'Spanish Jews'.[151] Interestingly, in these predominantly Sephardi Jewish settings, the state attempts to merge the two communities failed, and in Sarajevo and Belgrade both communities remained in existence until 1941.[152]

In this regard, even though there was no formal Ashkenazi community in Sarajevo until the Austro-Hungarian occupation, by the end of the nineteenth century the situation there resembled the Belgrade case. Following the Austro-Hungarian occupation in 1878, the province increasingly came into contact with the empire's Jewish population, at first directly, through immigration of Jews from other parts of the empire. By 1879, Sarajevo had an Ashkenazi Jewish community. Harriet Friedenreich noted that '[t]he "natives" resented these newcomers and refused to accept them as members of their community'.[153] This rift was similar to other local conflicts that arose among Sephardi–Ashkenazi *kehilot* in other contexts. These initial contacts tended to be hostile, reflecting local competitiveness and the fact that the Sephardim were already an integral part of Sarajevo's close-knit social life, while the Ashkenazim were seen as an 'alien element'. The class difference, with Ashkenazim

[148] Michael Gelber, 'The Sephardic Community in Vienna', *Jewish Social Studies*, 10/4 (October 1948), 359–96.
[149] Mattias Lehmann 'Rethinking Sephardi Identity: Jews and Other Jews in Ottoman Palestine', *Jewish Social Studies*, 15/1 (2008), 81–109.
[150] Ignjat Šlang, rabbi of the Belgrade Ashkenazi community, has written a history of Ashkenazim from that time: *Jevreji u Beogradu* (Belgrade: Štamparija M. Karića, 1926).
[151] AS, MP 1878, F VII, R i55
[152] Ignjat Šlang described the convergences and divergences of the two communities in his study of Jews in Belgrade.
[153] Freidenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 15.

dominantly belonging to the educated middle class and Sephardim to the artisanal working class, maintained this social division in the first decades of their coexistence.[154] The tension between the two Sarajevo communities, however, persisted well into the 1920s. This divergence between communities reflected the political affiliation of their leaders on the Jewish political scene, rather than any form of cultural or religious clash.

In both Sarajevo and Belgrade, and elsewhere in the Balkans, the *kehilot* maintained parallel social systems, namely the societies that provided support for specific needs, primarily in the educational sphere.[155] When Jewish political affiliation became an increasingly relevant topic in Sarajevo in the 1910s, divergence on Sephardi–Ashkenazi community lines remained palpable. However, conducting Jewish politics was not based on exclusion of either side but rather on their complex convergence. Moreover, levels of cooperation and exchange went beyond the borders of *kehilot*.

A trend in the last decades of the nineteenth century brought to the fore the initially inconspicuous results of this Sephardi–Ashkenazi cultural conversation. In this period, it became increasingly fashionable to have a Western-educated rabbi as the leader of Sephardi communities. This tendency was apparent in two Balkan Sephardi centres, Sofia and Belgrade, in the late nineteenth century. The two cities, also capital cities for the growing nation-states, had symbolically prominent Jewish communities, even if they were small in numbers. In 1890, Belgrade had 2,599 Jews, who comprised 4.65 per cent of the city's population, and in five years the percentage grew to 3,097 individuals or 5.24 per cent.[156] Yet the chief rabbi was not only a religious leader but was also meant to be a spokesman and head of the community in the eyes of the state authorities. How social and political change conditioned the need for a particular type of chief rabbi is epitomised by the case of Salonika. The Sephardi community of 'the Jerusalem of the Balkans' followed this trend conspicuously in the first decades of the twentieth century, after the city became a part of the Greek state. Thus, in the new system and in the nation-state, where Jewish autonomy existed solely through religious autonomy, the rabbi was a political representative. Moreover, he was seen as the key defender and saviour of Sephardi Judaism.[157]

After the turbulent years that followed the banning of Jewish residents from Belgrade in 1844, religious community life was not stable. The city did not have a chief rabbi for almost

[154] Freidenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 25.
[155] *Godišnjak izdaju Jevrejsko kulturno-prosvetno društvo 'La Benevolensia' u Sarajevu i Dobrotvorno društvo 'Potpora' u Beogradu* (Sarajevo: Štamparija Menahem Papo, 1933).
[156] Freidenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 215.
[157] Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 89–92.

a quarter of the century between the 1840s and the 1860s, and the community was in the secular hands of the *haham* (wise man). This title was given to a religious leader at the level of a rabbi who could judge certain religious issues. However, for complex theological problems the community council had to turn to established rabbinical authorities in the region. The official title of Belgrade's haham was *Bimkom Rav uMore Zedek* (Substitute Rabbi and Religious Teacher).[158] In the period between 1850s and 1885, this role was taken by several individuals, among whom Moshe ben David Alkalay stands out. Son of David Alkalay, a printer of Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish books in Belgrade, Moshe Alkalay was actively involved in intellectual circles in the region until his move to Vienna in 1882. Abraham ben Israel Bejarano (or Bidjerano), a native of Zagora in Bulgaria, later took the post, and established himself as the centre of traditionalist resistance to state schooling and encouraged Judeo-Spanish survival. After he had been employed for only six months, the community leaders hired a rabbi who had graduated from a theological seminary in Europe. Simon Bernfeld was chosen.

Simon Bernfeld (1860–1940), born in Stanislau, Galicia, became the chief rabbi of the Belgrade Sephardi community in 1886. Prior to taking the post, Bernfeld had acquired a broad education. Initially, he studied with his father, who was a rabbinical scholar, and mastered Hebrew so well that at the age of thirteen he translated a novel from German into Hebrew. He contributed to Hebrew newspapers from the late 1870s. After Bernfeld had left Galicia for Prussia, he became editor of the Hebrew weekly *HaKol.* From Prussian Königsberg he moved to Breslau and became assistant to David Gordon on his well-respected journal *HaMagid*, also contributing his own articles. In 1883, Bernfeld started to study at the University of Berlin and attending the Hochschule für Wissenschaft des Judentums, highly esteemed secular Jewish educational institution. Only a year after he obtained a doctoral degree, in 1885, Bernfeld took the position of chief rabbi in Belgrade.[159] During his time in the post (1886–1894), he participated in the heated debates that were shaking the Jewish world of Central Europe, primarily those concerning the contentious rift between the *Ostjuden* and German Jews. Moreover, his mastery of Hebrew was lauded by Ahad Ha-Am (the founder of cultural Zionism), even if it was not held in high esteem by his fellow Hebraists because of his lack of innovative approaches.[160] Bernfeld also proved to be an active contributor to the community. In the course of his time in Belgrade, he wrote *Istoria de los Djideos* (History of the Jews),

[158] Lebl, Do 'Konačnog rešenja', 151.
[159] Lebl, Do 'Konačnog rešenja', 155–56.
[160] Volovici, German as a Jewish Problem, 105.

which was published in Belgrade in 1891 in Judeo-Spanish,[161] most likely a translation but it remained the only comprehensive work on the subject published in the language in this part of Europe. Even though he remained at his post for less than a decade, Bernfeld left a significant mark on the community – and its standards and expectations for community leadership.

Bernfeld was not unique in the region, however. Sofia's Sephardi community hired a well-respected Ashkenazi rabbi. Mordechai (Marcus, Marko) Ehrenpreis (1869–1951), Lvov-born graduate of the Hochschule für Wissenschaft des Judentums, was a recognised scholar of Jewish mysticism, who also studied at several German universities and was considered to be well versed in German culture. In 1884, he became a contributor to *HaMagid* and was among the most prolific writers in Hebrew of the time. In the political arena, Ehrenpreis distinguished himself on the First Zionist Congress in 1897. By the time he assumed the post of chief rabbi in Sofia in 1900, he was already an avid Zionist, a contributor to crucial Hebrew newspapers and a recognised thinker. Ehrenpreis remained the chief rabbi of Sofia's Sephardi community until 1914. Prior to this, he had been a rabbi in the Croatian town of Đakovo from 1896 to 1900, where he acquired his knowledge of Serbo-Croatian, and he contributed to the Serbo-Croatian-speaking Zionist network through the newspaper *Židovska smotra* (1906–1914). This collaboration continued throughout his time in Sofia, essentially connecting all Sephardi Jews in the South Slav lands.[162]

The cases of Bernfeld and Ehrenpreis testify to the need for a rabbinical and community cadre throughout the region that was educated and informed by European Jewish standards. Moreover, they stand as examples of the accepted value of Western education and modern(ised) Jewish scholarship, which to a large extent stemmed from the German-speaking world. This attitude, which favoured German cultural products and education, was not directly influenced by the fact that both Serbian and Bulgarian monarchies were connected with German nobility or were even direct heirs of German noble families (as in the case of the latter), but was certainly not harmed by it.[163] Additionally, after the occupation of Bosnia and

[161] Simon Bernfeld, *Istoria de los đideos* (Belgrade: Estamparia de Shemuel Horovitz, 1891/5651).
[162] 'Ehrenpreis, Mordehaj (Marko, Marcus)', in *Židovski biografski leksikon*, <https://zbl.lzmk.hr/?p=3186> [accessed 12 July 2021].
[163] Following the treaty of Berlin (1878), Serbian leaders opted for Austro-Hungarian protection, as Russia defended Bulgaria on the Congress. In 1881 Serbia signed a convention with the Austro-Hungary, also known as the 'Secret Convention'. This bilateral agreement was labelled as 'secret' as the conditions were unknown to the general public. The convention *de jure* turned Serbia into a vassal to Austro-Hungary. For more details see Ian D. Armour, *Apple of Discord: The 'Hungarian Factor' in Austro-Serbian Relations, 1867–1881* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2014), 311–12. From 1869 to 1943 Bulgaria had two German dynasties: first house Battenberg (1869–86) and then houses Saxe-Coburg and Gotha(-Koháry).

Herzegovina, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy became the most significant foreign influence in the Balkans.

Taken together, these examples testify to an ideological phenomenon that remains little studied among Sephardi Jewry: Sephardi attraction to the Haskalah. At a time when the German-speaking world reached its peak in celebrating Sepharad, or rather the constructed idea of the 'Golden Age' in medieval Spain, when Jews made a significant contribution to science, philosophy, and culture, the Sephardi Jews in the Balkans aspired to be a part of the Haskalah. Notably, there were particular circles of Sephardi intellectuals that held a continuous and prolific conversation with the Haskalah leaders;[164] but this was not the case for the majority of Sephardi communities, which saw a chance to participate in the wider Jewish intellectual discussion through the hiring of German-educated rabbis. Arguably, when the Belgrade Sephardi community leaders offered a position to Simon Bernfeld, they were not inviting a Galician-born, essentially an Eastern European Jew, but a German-educated and German-speaking intellectual who would be able to 'enlighten' the community. Moreover, they hired a well-versed young scholar who was actively building his reputation in scholarship. The Sephardi Jews born in the last decades of the nineteenth century were particularly critical about the passive attitude of their fathers, who had waited for German Jews to introduce them to Jewish scholarship and to write Sephardi history.[165] Thus, accepting German-Jewish standards indicated a radical change in culture and social relations in Sephardi intellectual circles from the 1900s onwards.

Importing rabbinical staff did not become a norm in this part of the Sephardi world; Sarajevo, for instance, did not participate. Yet Western education gained traction in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Better-off families started to hire private tutors from among German-speaking Jews for their sons, an example being the Kajon family (see Chapter 2). The appeal of Western, or more precisely German, standards of Jewish education paved the way to one of the most important intuitions of Sarajevo's Sephardim – *La Benevolencia* (lit. The Benevolence).

In early January 1892, Sarajevo's affluent Jewish merchants agreed to form a charitable society during a home visit (*sijelo*) to the best regarded of them all, Moshe Izrael. Based on later recollections, Izachar Danon, who hailed from a well-off merchant family that was the first to import agricultural machinery into Bosnia, asked the pressing question about Jewish

[164] Tamir Karkasson, 'The Ottoman-Jewish *Haskalah*, 1839–1908: A Transformation in Western Anatolia, the Southern Balkans and Jerusalem Jewish Communities' (PhD dissertation, Hebrew University, 2019) [in Hebrew].
[165] J. Confino, 'Zadatak i rad sefardske akademske mladeži', *Židovska Smotra*, 4 (20 February 1914), 56.

beggars on Sarajevo's streets. From this came the plan to form a society that would offer economic, and later cultural, guidance to Jews in the city. Those present, Izahar Z. Danon, Isak A. Salom, Ješua D. Salom, Bernardo Pinto, and Jozef Izrael, were to be remembered as the founders of La Benevolencia in September 1892.[166] The society worked to build a new image of Sarajevo Sephardim from the outset. On the anniversary of its first thirty years, celebrated in 1924, it was remembered as an attempt to end 'this ill-favoured, oriental way of supporting the poor that terribly humiliated an individual but did not ease his suffering for the long run'.[167] *La Benevolencia*'s leaders soon worked out how to make their support sustainable in the longer term.

Initially, the society aimed to offer material support and healthcare free of charge to the Sephardi poor and to forbid begging on Fridays.[168] The intention was to remove Jewish beggars from the streets and, in so doing, reshape the unflattering view of the Sephardi community, which was arguably held by the majority of Sarajevo's inhabitants. This marked negative attitude towards Sephardi impoverishment was a larger cultural and political phenomenon in the Sephardi world. In her study of the Jews of Izmir, Dina Danon explained how essential socio-economic factors were: that Izmir Jews understood modernity not as redefining their Jewishness, but rather as dealing with their poverty and social stratification.[169] Refashioning how the community was presented both to Jewish and non-Jewish observers became one of the main preoccupations of the Sephardi leadership in Sarajevo in the 1900s.

Soon, however, La Benevolencia's leaders chose to focus on education as a form of long-term social planning. Through offering stipends for apprentices and students at institutions of higher education, including secondary schools, colleges, and universities from 1899, La Benevolencia opened the doors of modern education to a wider range of Sarajevo's Sephardim. Sephardi society was an example to all three other religious groups in Sarajevo, namely Muslim, Orthodox, and Catholic Bosnians, who all followed in its footsteps and formed their own educational organisations: Gajret (Support), Prosvjeta (Education), and Napredak (Progress). These societies played a role similar for Sarajevan Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and Catholics respectively, to that of La Benevolencia.[170]

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[166] 'Dva glavna osnivača "La Benevolencie" i njihovo kolo', *Jevrejski Život*, 10 (26 Iyar 5684/30 May 1924), 2–3.
[167] Svetislav Vinaver, 'Introduction', in *Spomenica*, ed. by Vinaver, 4.
[168] Vinaver, 'Introduction', 5.
[169] Dina Danon, *The Jews of Ottoman Izmir: A Modern History* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2020), 26–27.
[170] Pieter Troch, 'Education and Yugoslav Nationhood in Interwar Yugoslavia: Possibilities, Limitations and Interactions with other National Ideas' (PhD dissertation, University of Ghent, 2012), 114–16. On the role of

From 1884, prior to La Benevolencia's support scheme, Jews in Sarajevo were eligible for stipends that were offered by the provincial and city governments. However, these stipends were distributed proportionally, according to community numbers, so in 1896, for instance, out of fifty-six scholarships given by the provincial government, Sigmund Pordes was the sole Jewish recipient, alongside twenty-eight Catholics, seventeen Orthodox Christians, ten Muslims, and one Nazarene. However, when the city gave four stipends in 1900, two went to Orthodox Christians, one to a Muslim, and one to a Sephardi Jew.[171] Since the Sephardi leadership apparently could not rely on state support in the domain of education, in 1905 *La Benevolencia* started to focus primarily on supporting Sephardi pupils and students. In 1908, the society went beyond the city limits and began to help youth across the province – but still only those of Sephardi background, a fact that was at the heart of a recurring debate.[172] Between 1899 and 1922, the society funded 148 pupils and students and 390 apprentices. With the help of a La Benevolencia scholarship, sixty-two students ended their secondary school education, nine graduated from the school for teachers (*preparandija*), and thirty-two progressed to higher education.[173] Among the latter were some highly influential names in the first half of the twentieth century: Moritz Levi (1878–1941), future chief rabbi of Sarajevo, Vita Kajon (1888–1941), Kalmi Baruh (1896–1945), and Isak Braco Poljokan (1897–1944), to name just a few.

The society grew as more benefactors saw its potential, and it invested in city property.[174] When La Benevolencia opened its remarkable three-storey premises in 1914, which was dedicated to the growing number of Jewish societies in the city, it unofficially became the nucleus of secular Sephardi life, in parallel to the religious-based kehila. It owed this status not solely to its role in forming the first Sephardi elite in the city but to its external achievements: La Benevolencia supported Jewish cultural societies, such as the musical society La Lira, and offered administrative positions to its gifted scholars.

La Benevolencia had its counterpart in Belgrade in the society Potpora (Support), which was founded in 1897. The formula was the same, and its influential members were important members of the Sephardi community, Bencion Buli, Solomon Azriel, David Alkalaj, Benko Davičo, and Jakob Čelebonović. The idea, however, came from a young man 'keen to dedicate

Gajret: Ibrahim Kemura, 'O ulozi 'Gajreta' u društvenom životu Muslimana Bosne i Hercegovine (1903-1914)', *Prilozi*, 20 (1984), 63-84.

[171] Srećko M. Džaja, Bosna i Hercegovina u Austrougarskom razdoblju (1878–1918). Inteligencija između tradicije i ideologije (Mostar/Zagreb: Ziral, 2002), 160, 169.

[172] Vinaver, 'Introduction', 8.

[173] Vinaver, 'Introduction', 7.

[174] In 1898 La Benevolencia acquired the first property in Miss Irbina Street. In 1905 the society expanded their estates after purchase of two houses in Mrkvina Street. Between 1912 and 1914, the society erected a three-storeybuilding in Miss Irbina Street for social activities of all Sephardi associations.

himself to philosophy and theology' who asked the community for support.[175] His name was Isak Alcalay[176] (1882–1978), and he became the chief rabbi of Serbia in 1912 and the chief rabbi of Yugoslavia in 1921. The society also sponsored well-known intellectuals in the town: Leon Kojen, Bukić Pijade, David Albala, and Jacques Confino. Potpora also aimed to fund apprenticeships. Its presidents were well-regarded and successful members of the community who exercised significant power and directed the funds at their disposal to different groups that were in need, such as war orphans.

Potpora did not gain the political significance of its Sarajevan sister society, however. Despite this, the two organisations nurtured amicable relations long before Sephardim in Sarajevo and Belgrade lived in the same country. The societies retained significant influence in social life well into the twentieth century, finally marking their perseverance and success in a volume that they published together. Among their greatest legacies were their scholarship holders, who interacted during their studies abroad and created a significant network, a backbone of Sephardi political action in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

[175] 'Istorija dobrotvornog društva Potpora', in *Godišnjak*, 33.

[176] Isak Alkalay used different spellings of his name and last name, which was later reflected in the literature. I have encountered these combinations: Isaac Alcalay, Isak Alkalaj, Isak Alkalay, Isak Alcalay. I am using the latter as Alkalay used this version in the Nationalen, official document at the University of Vienna (Arhiv der Universität Wien (AUW), Rigorosen Isak Alcalay 1906).

Chapter 2

From Vienna to Sarajevo: *Esperanza* (1897–1914)

The Sephardi political agenda, which argued for an exclusively Sephardi point of view, approach, and solution for Jewish politics in the twentieth century, fell in the shadow of the better represented and more comprehensive Jewish diaspora nationalisms and Zionism. Due to its small number of (identified) advocates, its perceived lack of structural influence on global Jewish politics, and its dispersed source base in various languages, historians have deemed the Sephardi-oriented politics an attempt that was nipped in the bud and barred from any legacy. Using the example of the Sephardi student association *Esperanza*, this chapter argues that, in the beginning, Sephardi politics was an integral part of the (Central) European Jewish nationalism movement and a driving force in Jewish politics at the local level. From 1904 onwards, Esperanza and other Sephardi politicians operated in a complicated alliance with Zionism – and the divergence between the two strains of Jewish nationalism set the tone for Sephardi political action over the next decades.

Esperanza, Sociedad academica de los israelitos espanoles en Viena, or simply Esperanza (Hope), was an academic society that was officially founded by Spanish Jews at the University of Vienna in July 1897. Formed with the intention of nurturing the Spanish language and facilitating the academic and literary training of Sephardi students at the University of Vienna, it was the first modern international Sephardi organisation. While the society grew up around the Viennese Sephardi community, most of Esperanza's members came from the Sephardi Jewish communities that had centuries-long histories and traditions in the Balkans. Developing from a cultural club at the end of the nineteenth century, Esperanza grew into the first modern political organisation to represent Sephardim.

With its seat in Vienna, capital of both the Austro-Hungarian empire and Jewish culture, this Sephardi association was tightly connected with the political and social scene in the city and the empire. Scholars have emphasised the fact that the first modern Sephardi organisation started here, in a city where the Sephardim were an almost insignificant Jewish minority. Writing about this paradox, Harriet Friendenreich deemed that '[t]o develop strong Sephardic consciousness, it would seem that one had to leave the Sephardic milieu'.[177] However, there are no reasons to claim that Sephardi consciousness was not 'strong' prior to Esperanza. Balkan Sephardim maintained a parallel community structure wherever they were

[177] Harriet Pass Friedenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia: A Quest for a Community* (Skokie: Varda Books, 1979), 151.

living alongside their Ashkenazi brethren. Furthermore, the sources show insistence on their own education, customs, and religious practice even in the smallest communities, such as Semlin, practically without exception. Thus, the Viennese experience was not a discontinuity; Esperanza brought together Sephardim from the dispersed Balkan communities and acquainted them with currents in the modern Jewish world. The change Esperanza brought was inherent in Sephardi consciousness and its politicisation within modern European Jewish politics.

This chapter explores how Esperanza marked the beginning of the Sephardi-oriented politics and the way it gave young Sephardi men the tools with which to express their Sephardi identity in line with contemporary, fin-de-siècle manners, aspirations, and ideas. Furthermore, the chapter connects the ideology behind the Sephardi-centred politics with other frameworks of Jewish politics, especially Zionism, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Negotiating the position of Sephardi Jews in European Jewry between 1897 and 1914 was far beyond the society's reach, and Esperanza rather took up the position of representing the Sephardi world of the Balkans. While the society did not survive the collapse of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, the core idea of a Sephardi entity unified through Judeo-Spanish and a unique Jewish historical path developed into the twentieth century. In view of the significance of this society, this chapter aims to unravel the formational period of Sephardi politics.

First, it is necessary to contextualise the first years of the Sephardi-oriented faction that forged a space for Sephardi identity within European Jewish nationalisms, notwithstanding the specific position that the Sephardi community had in Vienna, being both on the margins of gentile society, as protégés of the Ottoman government, and as a Jewish minority surrounded by multifaceted Viennese Ashkenazi Jewry. The roots of Esperanza and Sephardi politics are here traced in three specific settings: the centuries-long Sephardi networks that connected Vienna with the Sephardi communities in the Ottoman empire (and beyond), the upheaval of Jewish nationalism that was expressed through Jewish student associations, and finally the Balkan Sephardi communities. The wider Sephardi-oriented network of individuals and organisations largely stemmed from and focused on these networks, answering the political claims and cultural aspirations of the core of its membership, even while the historical context of Sephardi-led politics in Vienna depended on both Ottoman and Habsburg imperial settings.

In line with this, examining Esperanza's work indicates that the society was not just formulating and expressing Sephardi-focused political and cultural stands. Judeo-Spanish was the core of the affiliation that Esperanza was building upon, so this chapter historicises the complex relationship the society had with the Sephardi vernacular, and how it shaped the Sephardi political agenda in the twentieth century. As a case study, the history of the Sarajevan

Sephardi musical society La Lira, which maintained a regular exchange with Esperanza, is examined. Furthermore, through Esperanza's interaction with Bar Giora, the Zionist student society that gathered Jews from South Slav lands who were attending the University of Vienna, this chapter traces how the upheaval in Zionism moulded the Sephardi society. Through the friction between and also the collaboration of the two societies, their agendas and goals eventually became part of a wider Sephardi agenda. Finally, the chapter notes how the political stands of both societies clashed, coincided, then coexisted on the Sarajevo Jewish political scene.

2.1 Sephardi Vienna

Long before the foundation of Esperanza, the Sephardim had a Viennese history.[178] The circulation of Sephardi Jews in the city rested upon the trans-imperial exchange of rabbinical staff, knowledge, and mercantile connections. Even though the Sephardi presence was never widespread, Vienna was a steady centre for Sephardi culture. The city became a haven for Sephardim who were leaving the Balkan Ottoman territories owing to Christian uprisings in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Soon afterwards, and especially from the second half of the nineteenth century when ever more (Ashkenazi) Jews started to settle in the city, Vienna became one of the most important crossroads of modern secular Jewish thought, Jewish nationalism, and finally Zionism. Amid these upheavals, the Sephardim found their voice. Esperanza's modern expression of Sephardi identity built on both the acclaimed Sephardi centuries-long tradition and the Jewish fin-de-siècle political movements. A crucial role in bridging these two aspects was played by the Balkan Sephardim.

The Sephardi-oriented politics conspicuously originated in the Habsburg capital, as did many other national movements. Sephardim had maintained a form of community life in Vienna since the eighteenth century, specifically since the Ottoman–Habsburg treaty of 1718. At first, in common with all Ottoman subjects, the Sephardi Jews enjoyed the right to live and work across the entire Habsburg territory – a privilege their brethren who were not Ottoman subjects did not have. After the Ottoman–Habsburg treaty was signed in Belgrade in 1739, the number of Sephardim in Vienna swelled, but a 'Turkish Jews' community (*kehila*) was formed

[178] Martin Stechauner, 'The Sephardic Jews of Vienna: A Jewish Minority Crossing Borders' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Vienna/Hebrew University, 2019).

only in around 1788.[179] This means that Sephardi community life in Vienna predated the Ashkenazi by almost a century.

The continued presence of the Sephardim was a result of the special status they enjoyed as Ottoman subjects. While their legal position was bound to the destiny of the Ottoman state, they were also obliged to follow the rules of the states in which they resided. To unravel the complexity of this position in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Sarah A. Stein introduced the term 'extraterritorial subjects' for those Jewish individuals whose life and social norms defied the uniform nature of nation-states.[180] Their status granted them freedom of movement from 1718, but not the right of unrestricted stay in Vienna. As long as the Habsburg and Ottoman empire shared a border, Sephardim were mainly a seasonal population in the city: most would remain there only as long as necessary to handle business, in particular their trading connections between East and West. However, the Christian uprisings and the dissolution of the Ottoman empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century mostly affected the northern Ottoman borderlands surrounding the Habsburg empire, so Sephardim started to settle in Vienna, without any official change in their legal position in the Habsburg empire. Owing to the specific restrictions that Jews had to accept in order to join the Viennese 'Turkish Jewish' *kehila* (community), the community remained small in numbers. The community's life was constantly dependent on the fast-paced political changes that took place throughout the nineteenth century, during which the position and status of Jews in the Balkans changed often and unpredictably.

Despite this decades-long ambivalent status, or arguably thanks to it, Sephardi culture in Vienna flourished. This was due to two simultaneous developments in the second half of the nineteenth century: the growth in importance of Vienna for the Sephardi cultural and intellectual network, and the residual loss of a cohesive Balkan Sephardi network. One of the signs of this investment in Sephardi culture was the fact that Vienna became a centre of Judeo-Spanish printing production in the early nineteenth century. In 1813, a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Judeo-Spanish was published in the city.[181] Between 1870 and 1900, out of fifty-two books published in Judeo-Spanish, thirty-two were published in Vienna. Moreover, around fifteen Sephardi publications were published in the Habsburg empire, in Vienna and

[179] Michael Gelber, 'The Sephardic Community in Vienna', *Jewish Social Studies*, 10 (1948), 362.
[180] Sarah A. Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 7.
[181] Edwin Seroussi, 'Die Sephardische Gemeinde in Wien: Geschichte einer Orientalisch-jüdisch Enklave in Mitteleuropa', in *Sephardi – Spaniolen. Die Juden in Spanien. Die Sephardische Diaspora*, ed. by F. Heimann-Jelinke and K. Schubert, Studia Judaica Austriaca 13 (Eisenstadt: Osterreichisches Judisches Museum, 1992), 145–54.

Semlin.[182] In parallel with the traditional Sephardi centres in the Ottoman empire, Salonica, Smyrna, and Constantinople, Vienna was also becoming a seat of Sephardi culture.[183]

From the early nineteenth century, Vienna was the centre of an ever-growing number of Balkan Sephardim. The increasingly unstable situation in the Balkans, especially the restrictions on movement and work for Jews in the Serbian principality and internal struggles for leadership in Bosnia among the Muslim went hand in hand with this. the Balkan Jews were the revitalising force of the Viennese 'Turkish Jewish' community life. They had prominent role in Sephardi culture in the city. For instance, the translator of the 1813 Judeo-Spanish Tora was Rabbi Israel Bekhor Hazzim, born in Belgrade. The iconic figure of the Sephardi press culture in Vienna, and also beyond the city, was Shem Tov Semo (*c*. 1810–1881) the editor-in-chief of the official community newspaper, the Türkische-Israelitische *Gemeinde El Koreo de Vyena* (The Vienna Courier), and its literary imprint. He was born in Vienna, but raised and educated in Sarajevo, and considered Bosnia to be his true homeland.[184] Abraham Aaron Cappon, the founder of Sarajevo's only (and short-lived) Judeo-Spanish newspaper *La Alborada* (1900–1901) found his way from his native Ruse (Bulgaria) to the Bosnian capital through Vienna.[185] Finally, in this period, the important role of rabbi of the Viennese Türkische-Israelitische Gemeinde (Turkish Israelite Community) was taken by Michael Papo, who was the first Vienna-born Sephardi Jew from a well-known Sarajevan rabbinical family . Both his father, Menachem Papo, who had held the position previously, and his mother, Rachel Attias, came from Sarajevo. Rabbi Papo became one of the key persons in Sephardi associational life in Vienna.[186]

The Sephardi position in the city was complicated by the recognition of Jews as a religious community in the Habsburg monarchy, which came after decades of reassessing the Jewish position. After the momentous changes during and immediately following the liberal revolution of 1848 (the so-called Springtime of Peoples) that, among other things, proclaimed

[182] Ruth Burstyn, 'Die Geschichte der Türkisch-Spaniolischen Juden in Habsburgerreich', in *Ist jetzt hier die 'wahre Heimat'? Ostjüdische einwanderung nach Wien*, ed. by Petter Bettelheim and Michael Ley (Vienna: Picus Verlag, 1993), 53. Olga Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Lettres, and Theatre in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012), 24.
[183] On modern Sephardi print culture in the Ottoman Empire see Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture*, 23–74. On Judeo-Spanish newspaper printing culture, see Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 53–84.
[184] David Bunis, 'Shem Tov Semo, Yosef Kalwo, and Judezmo Fiction in 19th Century Vienna', in *Sefarad an der Donau*, ed. by Christian Liebl, Michael Atudemund-Halévy, and Ivana Vučina Simović (Barcelona: Tirocinio, 2013), 45, 47.
[185] Eli Tauber, *Jevrejska stampa u BiH 1900–2011* (Sarajevo: Mediacentar, 2011), 19.
[186] *Die Türken in Wien. Geschichte einer jüdischen Gemeinde, Ausstellungskatalog* (Vienna: Jüdisches Museum Wien, 2010), 164. Manfred Papo, 'The Sephardi Community in Vienna', in *The Jews of Austria, ed. by Josef Fraenkel* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell & Co., 1967), 327–46.

civic equality, Austria-Hungary's response was a return to absolutism. The neo-absolutist government built its rule around the (Catholic) confessional state,[187] yet the new regime also reassessed the right of Jews to settle, buy land, and take up particular professions. In 1852, Vienna's authorities permitted Jews, Habsburg subjects, to organise a *kehila*, and this became especially important after freedom of residence was introduced in the 1860s.

The monarchy finally introduced full civil equality for all its subjects in 1867, with changes in the *Staatsgrundgesetz* (Basic Law) to abolish all remaining restrictions for Jews.[188] Even though the Jews could have a community in Vienna and were equal before the law, the Sephardi Jews were recognised as a separate community, under the protection of the Ottoman state. When the Jewish community across the entire state was recognised as a religious community in 1890 and, thus, elevated to the recognised status of a religious group, namely Die Israelitische Kultusgemeinde (The Israelite Religious Community), the Sephardim lost their position as a privileged Jewish minority. As the Kultusgemeinde was recognised as the only official representative of all Jews in the empire and imperial capital, Sephardi Jews entered an almost two decades-long debate in order to maintain their autonomy within the Viennese Jewish community. The Sephardim lost this campaign in 1909 when an official decree ordered the merger of the Sephardi *kehila* with the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde.[189] This effectively meant that Sephardi Jews became a part of the official Jewish body, in which they represented a small minority, with ritual autonomy but now dependent on their co-religionists.

The gradual loss of autonomy for the Sephardi community in Vienna took place simultaneously with the growth and proliferation of the wider Viennese Jewish community in the second half of the nineteenth century. Not coincidentally, the Habsburg empire peaked economically in this period. The city attracted significant Jewish immigration from Galicia, and also from Bohemia and Moravia to some extent, experiencing a constant rise in the number of Jewish citizens until the 1890s. Between 1857 and 1890, the number of Jews as a percentage of the Viennese population rose from 1–3 per cent to 12 per cent.[190] Relocation to Vienna led to ascent up the economic and, to a certain extent, social ladders, which also led to significant

[187] On the revolutions 1848–49: Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge: The Balknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 155–217. On neo-absolutism in the Habsburg empire: John Deak, *Forging a Multinational State: State Making in Imperial Austria from the Enlightenment to the First World War* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2008), 99–136.
[188] David Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation: A History across Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 183–84.
[189] Gelber, 'The Sephardic Community in Vienna', 359–96; Burstyn; Corry Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews and the Holocaust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 171–75.
[190] Ivar Oxaal and Walter R. Weitzmann, 'The Jews of Pre-1914 Vienna: An Exploration of Basic Sociological Dimensions', *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 30 (1985), 399.

Jewish cultural contributions. Despite the disruptive effects of ever-present anti-Semitism in Viennese political circles around the turn of the century, Jews were prominent in the city's cultural activities, and had a deep impact on the city and its (self-)fashioning.[191]

The impulse of emigration from Galicia only enhanced the prominent place Jewish scholarship and culture had in the city. By that time, Vienna was already a seat of the *Haskalah*. The meeting of this, Ashkenazi-bound, and Sephardi culture in the Habsburg capital had fascinating ramifications.[192] Namely, the proponents of the Jewish Enlightenment in German-speaking lands had developed a deep fascination with the history of Jews in medieval Spain, and this peaked with a glorification of Spanish Jewish achievements in science, philosophy, and poetry.[193] This 'allure', to borrow John Efron's term, encouraged a celebration of all things Sephardic across the German-Jewish world.[194]

This acclaim was most obvious in the neo-Moorish synagogue architecture, inspired by the architecture of Alhambra. In the mid-nineteenth century, all Europe went through a phase when 'Oriental' styles in architecture were acclaimed. It is interesting to note that the first architects of synagogues in this Orientalised style were non-Jews, owing to educational constraints of the time. Saskia Coenen Snyder has observed that the style was essentially a result of 'a communicative gap between Jews and gentiles. For the latter, Moorish synagogues represented the inherent foreignness of the Jews, while for many Jews they reflected the non-Western origins of their faith, but of their faith alone.' Even if it marked the Jews' difference, the style marked the roles Jews played, which were regarded as positive. Well-known examples

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[191] On fin-de-siècle Jewish Vienna: Steven Beller, *The Jews of Vienna 1867–1914: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900). On political anti-Semitism: Pieter M. Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries: Liberal Politics, Social Experience, and National Identity in the Austrian Empire, 1848–1914* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1996), 223–65. Vienna was also a home to a significant number of Jews belonging to a lower strata, as Suzanne Korbel recently observed: Susanne Korbel, 'Spaces of Gendered Jewish and Non-Jewish Encounters: Bed Lodgers, Domestic Workers, and Sex Workers in Vienna, 1900–1930', *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 65 (2020), 88–104.

[192] On Baruch Mitrani, an example of Sephardi *maskil* (scholar educated in the spirit of *Haskalah*) see: Michael Studemund Halévy, 'Ivri, daber ivrit! Baruch Mitrani un maskil turco-sefardi en Viena', in *Sefarad an der Donau*, ed. by Christian Liebl, Michael Studemund-Halévy, and Ivana Vučina Simović (Barcelona: Tirocinio, 2013), 175–202.

[193] Ross Brann and Adam Sutcliffe, 'Introduction', in *Remembering the Past, Reconfiguring Jewish Culture: From al-Andalus to the Haskalah*, ed. by Ross Brann and Adam Sutcliffe (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1–18. On the role of Sephardi Jews in German Jewish culture: Carsten Schapkow, 'Iberian-Sephardic Jews as Cultural Mediators and the Case of German Jewry', in *Transcultural German Studies/Deutsch als Fremdsprache. Building Bridges/Brücken bauen*, ed. by Steven D. Martinson and Renate A. Schulz (Bern/Berlin: Peter Lang, 2008), 327–47.
On the reading of Sephardi Jew as an *Urjude* in 'racial science': John Efron, 'Scientific Racism and the Mystique of Sephardic Eacial Superiority', *Leo Baeck Year Book*, 38 (1993), 75–96. The role of certain Jewish intellectuals from the period of Muslim rule was rediscovered and brought to attention. On rediscovery of Maimonides: George Y. Kohler, *Reading Maimonides' Philosophy in 19th Century Germany: The Guide to Religious Reform* (Dordrecht/Heidelberg/New York/London: Springer, 2012).

[194] John M. Efron, *German Jewry and the Allure of the Sephardic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

of this style are Dohány Street Synagogue in Budapest (1859) and Oranienburg Synagogue in Berlin (1866). Writing about the latter, Coenen Snyder noted that the Moorish style was a testament to the growing confidence and optimism of Jews in Berlin, their positively framed self-awareness, and marked their addition to architecture – 'Jewish *Kultbau*'.[195] Yet the style represented a Central European, Ashkenazi ideology that had not penetrated Sephardi thought and aesthetic in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The Habsburg capital was the place where Sephardim encountered new interpretations and celebrations of their past. Thus, it is not surprising that the first Moorish-style Sephardi temple in Europe was built in Zirkusgasse in Vienna. In erecting the synagogue in the style that was fashionable in the West, one can read Sephardi ambition to imprint their trace on the city's landscape in an architectural language that their co-religionists would understand and even admire. Der Türkische Tempel (The Turkish Temple) or Das Zirkusgasse Synagoge was built in Vienna's Leopoldstadt between 1885 and 1887. It was grandiose in size, with the space to host over 660 people, and the ornamented front stood out prominently from Vienna's typical classical architecture.[196] The Turkish Temple thus became a distinctive feature of Leopoldstadt, already known as 'the Jewish quarter' of Vienna,[197] albeit with a Sephardi touch. It was a sign that the Sephardim participated in Jewish modernity and, moreover, that they cooperated on an equal standing. While it cannot be claimed that this building moulded the Sephardim in the image of their brethren, it was most certainly a sign that they understood the language of modernity, which they would continue applying elsewhere in Central Europe and beyond on their own terms.

Similarly, on a par with their Ashkenazi brethren, Sephardim started to participate in the Jewish political scene in the city. While the Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities had maintained parallel organisational structures, the end of the century brought ever more Sephardi outlets into the important arena of Jewish cultural and political life. Universities featured prominently as the places where early nationalist groups met and were organised. Jewish students comprised around 24 per cent of students at the University of Vienna at the

[195] Saskia Coenen Snyder, *Building a Public Judaism: Synagogues and Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 2013), 41, 43.
[196] Bob Martens and Herbert Peter, *The Destroyed Synagogues of Vienna: Virtual City Walks* (Vienna/Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2012), 41. Pierre Genee, 'Die Turkische Synagoge in der Zirkusgasse', *David Jüdisches Kulturzeitschrift*, 11 (1999), 5–6.
[197] Marsha Rozenbilt, *Jews in Vienna. Assimilation and Identity, 1867–1914* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 78–79.

turn of the century and this concentrated presence at universities led to an institutionalisation of Jewish nationalism.[198]

The first Sephardi student organisation was influenced by Kadimah, the first Jewish national student organisation in West Europe, and was part of a greater trend of Jewish student organisations (Verbinudingen) in German-speaking countries. The first Jewish student association was formed in 1882, pioneering an involvement with Jewish politics. Historians have interpreted Kadimah as a direct response to growing anti-Semitism in the city, but especially in the university.[199] However, this contextualisation of Kadimah as a mere response to anti-Semitism strips the society of any internal Jewish national agenda, which was clearly present in the society from its early days. Its founders, Nathan Birnbaum, Reuben Birner, and Moritz Schnier, first and foremost aimed to challenge the identity of their co-religionists. Birnbaum, the zealot of the group, was especially dismayed by the situation among his generation. For him, Kadimah represented a new and efficient form of candid critique of the 'aping' of German culture and mannerism among Jewish youth in Vienna. Thus, the core of the programme was resistance to assimilation, followed by attempts to achieve recognition of the Jewish nation and the colonisation of Palestine as means of reconstructing a Jewish community. Owing to the influence of Peter Smolensky, a Russian-Jewish intellectual who lived through the pogroms of the 1870s and 1880s, Birnbaum, Birner, and Schneir found inspiration in the Eastern European Jewish nationalism that was blossoming in the same period. This influence was reflected in the double meaning of Kadimah in Hebrew, both 'forward' and 'eastward.' Forward was the direction for the Jewish nation that the society advocated, while eastward referred to the group's critique of Orthodoxy and approval of Jewish national work that was emerging in Eastern Europe.[200]

Kadimah's insistence on a Jewish identity built on a Jewish language, culture, territory, and national being, [201] resonated with contemporaneous Sephardi cultural issues, namely the question of survival of Judeo-Spanish culture and, connected with the language, the coherence

[198] Beller, The Jews of Vienna, 34. In the period 1896–1901, Jews made up 24.80 per cent at the University of Vienna, but between 1901 and 1904 their numbers dropped to 23.70 per cent. The end of the century marked a decrease in Jewish presence at the university, since in 1881–86, Jews made up 33 per cent of students.
[199] Rozenbilt, 159–60. Klaus Hödl, *Entangled Entertainers: Jewish and Popular Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 153. With regard to pre-First World War memoirs by Jewish students in German universities, Lisa Zwicker has shown that anti-Semitism did not play a central role in their experience: Lisa F. Zwicker, *Dueling Students: Conflict, Masculinity, and Politics in German Universities 1890–1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 112–17.
[200] Robert Wistrich, *Jews in Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 150.
[201] Jess Olson, *Nathan Birnbaum and Jewish Modernity: Architect of Zionism, Yiddishism, and Orthodoxy* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013), 72–78.

and persistence of Sephardi culture more widely. The society's founding members were aware of the presence of Sephardim and other Jewish groups in Vienna and also their significance in Jewish national revival. Birnbaum wrote in the society's newspaper *Selbstemanzipazion* in 1892 that Vienna was the place where 'German and Russo-Polish, Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews can best be united in common work'.[202] The recognition of the Sephardi role, on an equal footing, could also be read as a call for action and collaboration addressed to Sephardim in the city. It was at least a confirmation of Sephardi presence and visibility, even significance, in Vienna.

Even though it enjoyed broad support, especially from students from Galicia, Russia, and Romania, Kadimah was far from a popular Jewish movement.[203] Its radical programme did not resonate with the majority of the Jewish community. As it attacked established Jewish society, which relied on narrowly religious and not ethnic or national Jewish affiliation, Kadimah received critical responses from the religious leadership of the Kultusgemeinde, which was inclined towards Orthodoxy.[204] Armed with patience and enormous will, mostly expressed through its satirical press, Kadimah was a voice for Jewish nationalism in Vienna a decade and a half before the upheaval of political Zionism. Furthermore, Kadimah had an immense influence on the Jewish student body. In the decades following Kadimah's formation, tens of Jewish student associations were formed at the University of Vienna, but also across all of the monarchy's university cities. While having different, all student associations offered an umbrella to voice Jewish affiliation. This led to the popularisation of Jewish nationalism among student bodies, thereby establishing Jewish students as the main vessel of the Jewish movement. In this regard Kadimah in particular provided a model for the first Sephardi organisation.

2.2 Esperanza: the beginnings of Sephardi politics

The beginning of Sephardi politics started with the recognition of Esperanza as a student organisation by the Rectorate of the University of Vienna on 24 July 1897. In its existence over a quarter of a century (1897–1924), the Sephardi student association brought up a generation of Sephardi men who became spokesmen of their communities at local level in the Balkans and representatives of the Sephardim in Jewish politics in general. However, at first the society

[202] Quoted in Wistrich, The Jews of Vienna, 402.
[203] Robert S. Wistrich, 'Zionism and its Religious Critics in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna', *Jewish History*, 10 (1996), 93–111.
[204] Wistrich, 'Zionism', 93–111.

did not set out to organise Sephardim politically; it was centred on the aim to revive (Judeo-)Spanish as a vehicle for Jewish national renaissance. Over the course of a decade, the society's cultural claims grew into claims for political regeneration. This development was in line with other groups in the occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina, who found their own voices initially outside their native environment and in the larger university cities of Austria-Hungary.[205]

The association's full name was Esperanza, Sociedad academica de los Israelitos espanoles en Viena, or Hope, Academic Society of the Spanish Israelites in Vienna. The Spanish name clearly referred to its cause, namely 'the cultivation of the Spanish language'.[206] Behind the phrase 'Spanish Israelite' is a specific political moment: 'Israelite' was a term used in line with emancipation ideology and language, which underlined civic affiliation with the state and relegated Jewish identity to merely religious affiliation. This political neutrality went hand in hand with Esperanza's arguable lack of a clear political agenda at the time of its foundation, while still resonating the society's Sephardi Jewish affiliation. The society dropped the use of Israelite and referred to the society as Jewish, namely 'Jüdisch', in the third statute of the society from 1906, which was a sign that Esperanza's agenda had changed.[207]

Sephardi affiliation was denoted by the term 'Spanish', which the first statute of Esperanza used to define the group it targeted. This term evoked the members' historical common denominator, referring to the pre-expulsion life on the Iberian Peninsula of their ancestors. Secondly, 'Spanish' or Spanyolit, Espanol, Judezmo, and Djudezmo were still popular names for the spoken language which today is labelled Judeo-Spanish. The society's aims exceeded the boundaries of Vienna and referred to all Sephardim as an entity defined through their shared mother tongue. Language was a common denominator for all Sephardim gathered in Vienna, but from the perspective of Esperanza's leaders, it was a common trait for the Sephardim as a whole. Members originated in the (former) Ottoman lands, primarily Sarajevo and Bosnia–Herzegovina, then a province of the Habsburg empire, and also territories in today's Serbia, North Macedonia, and Bulgaria. However, the society addressed and aimed to reach and represent all Sephardim living in the Ottoman space – the so-called Eastern Sephardi Diaspora.

This focus on language and the diaspora as central pillars of Esperanza's affiliation suggests potential association with, or at least inspiration from, a wider Jewish national and

[205] For a study of the Muslim student organisation Zvijezda (Star) at the University of Vienna see Ibrahim Kemura, 'Proglas muslimanske akademske omladine u Beču od 1907. godine', *Prilozi*, 13 (1977), 335–45.
[206] Arhiv der Universität Wien (AUW), Rekt. 3474 ex 1896/97.
[207] AUW, Rekt. 3474 ex 1896/97, June 1906.

political movement active in Eastern Europe – diaspora nationalism. Originating in Galicia in the period 1883–1897, diaspora nationalism primarily gathered intellectuals who were interested in solving the Jewish question in Europe rather than in Palestine. Focusing on a secular and revitalised Jewish culture within the existing political framework of the Habsburg empire, Jewish nationalists in Galicia aimed to achieve Jewish national autonomy.[208] Under the umbrella of Jewish national autonomy, they developed the idea of social and economic reform within the Austrian territories.[209] The political atmosphere in Austria-Hungary at the time seemed to be favourable for the further development of this plan. The empire's authorities were steadfastly avoiding recognition of minorities as nations, but from the 1880s, they allowed a certain level of cultural autonomy and corporate representation, based on languages as markers of group identity.[210] It was language, the exclusively Jewish vernacular and the growing printing culture in Yiddish, that shaped this political movement. What Eastern European Jews and the Balkan Sephardim had in common, besides of course the political context of multinational and multi-religious empires, was a shared exclusively Jewish vernacular: Yiddish and (Judeo-)Spanish. Moreover, the existence and persistence of a specific Jewish tradition and culture in a modern framework, encased in Yiddish, influenced the Sephardim. The movement was small in size, but great in influence: it originated in the Jewish political scene in Galicia and gave a solid base for all other types of national politics and ideologies.

The Sephardim had a connection with their Eastern brethren through the Habsburg capital. Vienna was not unknown territory for the Sephardim, but its importance grew at the end of the nineteenth century. This gravitation of the western part of the Balkan peninsula towards Vienna was a matter of international politics, taking place in the light of Ottoman decay and the Habsburg occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878. Certainly, connections with the Habsburg capital had existed previously; but soon after the occupation, the Sephardim from the Condominium of Bosnia–Herzegovina brought a new vitality to the Sephardi community in Vienna.[211] This influx of Sephardim from the Condominium was crucial for establishing Esperanza. The founder of the society was apparently named Salom, a Sarajevo-

[208] Joshua Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 46–109.
[209] David Rechter, 'Nationalism of Small Things: Jewish Autonomy in Late Habsburg Austria', *Leo Baeck Year Book* 52 (2007), 108–09.
[210] Pieter Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1–18.
[211] Seroussi, 'Die Sephardische Gemeinde in Wien', 145.

born student of medicine,[212] and it is most probable that this was Josef Salom, who already had experience in organising Sephardi youth in his hometown under the umbrella of the society El Progreso.[213] Manfred Papo, the rabbi of the community, supported the society and provided it with space for events and a library within the communal building. [214] In the twenty years of its existence, the association forged a generation of spokesmen for the Sephardi cause.

The need for educated men who would both uphold and nurture the prevailing Sephardi cultural traits and also take up the new cultural trends was obvious in the Balkans. La Benevolencia (The Benevolence) and Potpora (Support) played the biggest role in answering this need, two humanitarian societies that grew out of the aspirations of Sarajevo's and Belgrade's Sephardi communities to build an educated cadre. Their agenda, on the one hand, reflected the necessities of community life in Belgrade and Sarajevo, facing accelerated social and political change in the Balkans in the last decades of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, it was also a sign that community leaders intended to take things into their own hands to produce the intellectual and social elite considered necessary for active and productive participation in wider society. These societies seemed to have purposefully decided to create a new Sephardi cadre that, in their opinion, their community lacked. Esperanza was the stepping-stone to this process, as it gathered young Sephardi men from across the peninsula and introduced them to contemporary Jewish studies.

This was especially clear in the first generations when Belgrade and Sarajevo educated two young men so they could take up a rabbinical position. In Belgrade that person was Isak Alkalay. In Sarajevo, Moritz Levy took a similar path.[215] Both Alkalay and Levy graduated in 1906. Alkalay became the Chief Rabbi of Serbia in 1910 and Levy the Chief Rabbi of Bosnia in 1912. Their career paths as religious leaders brought them into close connection with Sephardim and also gave them political power as heads of religious groups that had been allocated positions in the state assemblies. Moritz Levy also published what remains the only book dedicated to the history of the Sephardi Jews in Bosnia. Entitled *Die Sephardim in Bosnien: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Juden auf der Balkanhalbinsel* (The Sephardim in Bosnia: A Contribution to the History of the Jews of the Balkan Peninsula), it was published

[212] Mordechei Schlome Schleichter, 'Geschichte der Spanionischen Juden (Sephardim) in Wien' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Vienna, 1932), 219.
[213] Benjamin Pinto, *Spomenica o proslavi 30-godišnjice jevrejskog pjevačkog društva 'Lira' u Sarajevu 1901–1931* (Sarajevo: Odbor 'Lire', 1931), 10.
[214] *Die Turken in Wien*, 164.
[215] AUW, Rigorosen Moritz Levy 1906. AUW, Nationalen Moritz Levy, WS 1906/1907.

in Sarajevo in 1911.[216] Both Alkalay and Levy were active members of Esperanza and their connection to the society did not end after graduation. Alkalay attended the celebration of the society's twenty-fifth semester in April 1909 as an honoured alumnus.[217] As this indicated the standard expected of its members in promoting Esperanza's ideas in their native communities, maintaining this close relationship helped the society to attract new members.

After only a decade of activity, all important positions in the Sephardi community, and also beyond, were filled by Esperanza alumni. Among the most notable was Dr Vita Alkalaj, the first modern era Jewish politician in Sarajevo who served briefly as the Jewish representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina's Parliament in 1911. Another, Vita Kajon, was born in 1888 in Sarajevo, into a well-known family. His brother Daniel opened the first bookshop in Sarajevo. This became a meeting point for the city's cultural and literary elite, spanning nations and religions, and it was Daniel who published Moritz Levy's history of the Sephardim in Bosnia.[218] Vita's second brother, Albert, opened a modern printing works in Sarajevo.[219] Vita himself graduated in law, it is thought in 1910, and during his university days was active in Esperanza: in 1910 he was the society's librarian.[220] Upon his return to Sarajevo, he assumed an important role in Jewish political life, becoming an organiser for the Congress of Zionist Youth in Sarajevo in 1910 and a writer of critical reviews of the course of Sephardi politics. He was, furthermore, active in the city's magistracy and in its saving bank. He worked closely with other Esperanza alumni in the city as well as the entire Sephardi sphere, from Sarajevo to Belgrade and from today's Serbia to North Macedonia.

From the last pre-First World War generation of Viennese Esperanza, Isak Samokovlija and Jacques Confino stand out. Both students of medicine and members of the society at the same time (they were respectively secretary and librarian during the winter semester of 1911),[221] They both came from smaller towns and both worked as doctors, but they also assumed notable positions during the interwar and post-war period as writers from Sephardi milieu.[222] Esperanza's alumni were influential far beyond the Sephardi setting of Sarajevo. For example, Dr Djerasl, a native of Monastir, today Bitola in North Macedonia, returned to his

[216] Moritz Levy, *Die Sephardim in Bosnien. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Juden auf der Balkanhalbinsel* (Sarajevo: Druck und Verlag von Daniel A. Kajon, 1911).
[217] 'Društvo Espernaza u Beču', *Židovska Smotra*, 7–8, 30 April 1909.
[218]AUW, Rekt. 3474 ex 1896/97, June 1906.
[219] Avram Pinto, 'Vita Kajon', *Jevrejski Almanah* (1959–60), 168–75.
[220] 'Beč, Esperanza', *Zidovska Smotra*, 6 (1910), 7.
[221] 'Esperanza,' *Židovska Smotra*, 13 (1911), 217.
[222] Predrag Palavestra, *Jevrejski pisci u srpskoj književnosti* (Belgrade: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 1998). 101–106, 121–22.

hometown and resumed his position in the local Zionist organisation.[223] With an especially strong foothold in Sarajevo, Esperanza's alumni encouraged Sephardi cultural and political life across the region. They shaped the modern Sephardi cultural space and forged Sephardi politics.

2 .3 'Our Spanish': Sephardi politics and Judeo-Spanish language

Apart from the social role the society had in gathering Sephardim in the Habsburg capital and shaping entire generations of Sephardi intellectuals in the Balkans, Esperanza was also instructive for developing a Sephardi-centric ideology. At the core of this agenda, at least in first decades, was *espanyol* (Spanish), their native and Sephardi historical language. In the context of growing Jewish nationalism both in Vienna and in the Balkans, Judeo-Spanish grew to be one of the core political issues for Balkan Jewry. It was deemed the common denominator of Sephardim and an extended trace of their historical significance from Middle Ages in Spain until the early twentieth century. In its first years, the society claimed (Judeo-)Spanish as the route by which modern culture could be brought to the Sephardi communities.

Moreover, the Sephardi language was already a contentious topic by the beginning of the twentieth century. Ashkenazim, living in dominantly Sephardi areas in the Balkans, deemed 'Spanish', the mother tongue of their co-religionists, as impractical, and something that only further burdened already strained intercommunity relations.[224] The rising Balkan Zionist movement advocated against Judeo-Spanish and its leaders regarded it as being at the core of unnecessary and fruitless Sephardi exclusivism. Moreover, the fact that the Sephardim were also divided on the matter did not help Esperanza's programme. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of Sephardim from the Balkans and beyond leaned towards using non-Jewish languages, either solely for social matters or even as the language spoken at home among families. Moreover, Sephardi intellectuals were split on the question whether Judeo-Spanish could serve as a solid base for a Sephardi cultural reconstruction as well as a means of Sephardi politicisation. Judeo-Spanish was at the intersection of all these different perspectives, and the debates about language that took place are crucial for understanding the Sephardi-oriented politics when it began in the 1900s and also during its historical development.

[223] Cijoni-Sefardi, 'Rad članova P.O.S.O. u Južnoj Srbiji', *Jevrejski Život*, 138 (1927), 2.
[224] A. Licht, 'Naše jezično pitanje', *Židovska Smotra*, 2, 22 January 1914, 7–9.

For Esperanza's members, the question of language far surpassed practical matters. For these Sephardi students, Judeo-Spanish was not only a historical Jewish language, their mother tongue, the language of prayer and services, but also a direct residue from the glorious past of their ancestors in Spain. It was a remembrance of the perceived greatest Jewish accomplishment to that date, the history of '[g]lory, rigour, sciences and renaissance'.[225] Emphasis on this almost forgotten past encouraged young Sephardim, as Jacques Confino noted: 'When they, in Esperanza, awoke our consciousness of our Sephardi traditions, of grandeur and gallantry of Spanish nobles and their chivalrous traits […] Oh, yes, grandeur! True Spanish! And more Western than all of the West!'[226] The society fervently 'invented tradition'[227] in this regard. This comes from Confino's experience where membership in Esperanza altered his perspective on his Sephardi background, connecting the imminent, arguably humble in achievements, present with the glorious Spanish past of his ancestors. After their expulsion from the Kingdom of Castile and Aragon in 1492 and Portugal in 1496, Jewish refugees took the Judeo-Spanish language with them, and this became a shared thread for all Esperanza members. The language therefore had two components of identity, historical and contemporary. Judeo-Spanish connected Sephardim, dispersed throughout different countries and continents, and created the arguably solid and coherent entity that Aron Rodrigue and Esther Benbassa named 'Judeo-Spanish communities'.[228] The society recognised Judeo-Spanish as being at the heart of affiliation to Sephardim.

This focus on language as the key feature of a community was not unique to Sephardim. It was in line with at least two national movements with whom Sephardi Jews were in close contact. First, the Jewish nationalists, with whom Esperanza's members had direct contact in Vienna, engaged in a complex debate concerning three languages: German, Yiddish, and of course Hebrew.[229] Secondly, the Sephardim were aware of their immediate social context in the Balkans, and that the Balkan nations had built their national narratives around a national language, whether Serbo-Croatian, Bulgarian, or Greek. As in other nation-states, Balkan countries also enforced the learning of state languages, predominantly Serbo-Croatian and Bulgarian. This was reflected in policies that enforced the state languages as the teaching

[225] Moritz Levy to Pulido: Angel Pulido, *Intereses españoles: Españoles sin patria y la raza sefardí* (Madrid: Establecimiento Tipográfico de E. Teodoro, 1905), 139.
[226] Jacques Confino, 'Uspomene i refleksije', *Jevrejski Glas*, 35 (September), 6.
[227] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Inventing Tradition', in: *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. By Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–14.
[228] Aron Rodrigue and Esther Benbassa, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th–20th Centuries* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1993), xxiii.
[229] Marc Volovici, *German as a Jewish Problem: Language and Politics of Jewish Nationalism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2020).

languages in all schools, including Jewish schools, as early as the 1840s in the case of Serbia and Bulgaria, and in 1896 in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see Chapter 1). At the time of the foundation of Esperanza, Judeo-Spanish was already coexisting with other languages in the Balkan states, and the society naturally responded to this linguistic acculturation Esperanza's effort to preserve and build upon the cultural traits of the Sephardim community is more than understandable: it was a resistance to acculturation in the age of nationalisms. Esperanza's aim was to reform Judeo-Spanish in the image of modern languages, so it could be claimed as a part of their contemporary identity. Moreover, the revived language would also facilitate the production of up-to-date scholarship.

Esperanza's members fine-tuned their attitude towards the language over the course of the twentieth century's first decade. The association's initial plan was to purify Judeo-Spanish in the light of modern Spanish. This was related to the society's idea of a future for the Sephardim in direct relationship with the Spanish state. Moreover, many circles in Spain shared an interest in (re-)connecting with Sephardi Jews.[230] A major role in this was played by Dr Angel Pulido, the Spanish intellectual who 'discovered' the Sephardi Jews and their language, based on fifteenth-century Castilian, in the first years of the twentieth century. Pulido's interest began when he accidentally overheard Judeo-Spanish on a Danube steamboat in 1883, and was further cultivated after his encounter with Enrique Bejarano, director of an Alliance Israèlite Universelle school in Bucharest. It was Bejarano who disclosed to Pulido that there were around 2 million Sephardi Jews across the Mediterranean and Americas. The fact that all these 'Spaniards' spoke Spanish four centuries after the expulsion was attributed by Pulido to the period of Spain's greatest national success, which peaked around the union of Castille and Aragon in 1469.[231]

From this linguistic connection, Pulido developed an entire political programme. He deemed the Sephardim to be a 'Spanish race', essentially Spaniards of the Jewish faith. Based on this presumption, Pulido built an argument that Sephardi attachment to early twentieth-

[230] Overview of the Spanish relationship with Sephardi Jews: Daniela Flesler and Adrián Pérez Melgosa, *The Memory Work of Jewish Spain* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020). Michal Friedman wrote about the initiatives to restore Jewish past in modern Spain: Michal Friedman, 'Recovering Jewish Spain: Politics, Historiography and Institutionalization of the Jewish Past in Spain (1845–1935)' (unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University, 2012). On the orientalist discourse in Spain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Pablo Bornstein, *Reclaiming al-Andalus: Orientalist Scholarship and Spanish Nationalism, 1875–1919* (Brighton/Chicago/Torono: Sussex Academic Press, 2021). On philosephardim and antisemitism: Isabelle Rohr, 'Philosemitism and Antisemitism at The-Turn-Of-Century Spain', *Historical Reflections/Réflexiones Historiques* 31/3 (2005), 373–392.

[231] Joshua Hoode, *Impurity of Blood: Defining Race in Spain, 1870–1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2009), 193.

century Spain came from language similarities as well as shared physical characteristics. It was obvious to him that culturally and economically both Jewish Spaniards and Christian Spaniards had suffered from their racial separation at the end of the fifteenth century.[232] Therefore, following these assumptions, Pulido conducted extensive ethnographic research into the state of Judeo-Spanish speakers in different communities, and also inquired about their attitude towards Spain. Doing so, he developed a broad, imperialistic plan to incorporate the Sephardim as outposts of the Spanish empire. In 1903, Pulido even presented his ideas to the Spanish Senate, aiming to raise awareness of about half a million Jewish Spaniards and to advocate taking them under protection, building them schools, appointing teachers, and sending books. Even though his ideas received only polite replies at first, Pulido dedicated years to the idea of repatriating Sephardi Jews to Spain. His commitment resulted in two books, *Intereses nacionales: Los Isrealitos españoles y el idioma castellano* (The Spanish Israelites and the Castilian Language),[233] published in 1904, and *Intereses españoles: Españoles sin patria y la raza sefardí* (Spanish Interests: Spaniards without Homeland and the Sephardi Race), published in 1905. Pulido's attempts to change the political attitude towards Sephardi Jews eventually left their mark: in 1913, when the Greeks captured Salonica during the Balkan Wars and during the First World War, the safe treatment of the city's Jews was accredited to the agitation of Spanish intellectuals.[234]

While researching for his books, Pulido engaged in correspondence with his Sephardi acquaintances across the Mediterranean space. These included members of Esperanza. Based on his contacts among Judeo-Spanish speakers, Pulido divided Sephardi attitudes towards Spain between 'anticastilians and hispanophobes', 'autonomists' (who admired Judeo-Spanish as an autonomous language), 'opportunists or eclectics', and 'castilans or hispanophiles'. While hispanophobes mostly referred to Judeo-Spanish as a jargon without a modern grammar, dictionary, and rules, and thus incapable of being the national language of Sephardim, the group of hispanophiles could essentially be traced back to one person, Jacques Danon from Smyrna, who advocated for the regeneration of 'Spanish' and worked tirelessly on producing material that was related to this cause. Based on Pulido's classifications, Esperanza's members belonged to the group of eclectics, those who cultivated 'Spanish' without hard feelings for the old homeland that had expelled them but were still not ready to submit to Spain's imperialistic

[232] Hoode, *Impurity of Blood*, 194–95.
[233] Angel Pulido, *Intereses nacionales : Los israelitos españoles y la idioma castellano* (Madrid: Est. TIp. 'Sucesores de Rivadeneyra', 1904).
[234] Hoode, *Impurity of Blood*, 197.

ideas.[235] For this reason, the society was relevant to Pulido, and he found the interest was mutual. He engaged in correspondence with members on the question of the future of Judeo-Spanish, essentially debating the future of Sephardi politics from Esperanza's perspective. This discussion outlined the society's prospects and its intended political engagement over the coming decade.

Moritz Levy was Pulido's correspondent for Esperanza and took on the responsibility to present a vantage point that varied between fanatical rejection and glorification of Judeo-Spanish. He did not shy away from the specific circumstances he and his fellows found themselves in. Esperanza was attempting to balance the increasingly complex Jewish political agenda in the Balkans. At first, dedicated solely to the cause of their language, the society worked on the premise that regeneration of the Jewish nation did not contradict regeneration of the Spanish language; rather, it was recognised that the language as the medium of national regeneration. However, already by 1904, Levy acknowledged the difficulties of such an endeavour, owing to pressures in the societies in which Sephardi Jews lived. He divided these countries according to whether they had or lacked a homogeneous culture. Labelled as having an 'indigenous', meaning homogeneous, culture were Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Greece, and Austria, and here, in the society's opinion, Spanish could still persist in Jewish schools. However, the scope of Judeo-Spanish could not and should not go beyond the Jewish school, as these countries already lagged behind in terms of their culture, and Sephardi Jews did not want to cause further cultural backwardness. This situation could not be improved through a network of Spanish schools, as Pulido suggested. Levy was aware of the pressures of nation-states, knowing that Bulgaria had even pressured an Alliance school in Sofia to teach in Bulgarian. Thus, the future of Judeo-Spanish was directly dependent on the countries in the African and Asian parts of Ottoman empire: Egypt, Algeria, Tunis, and Morocco. There, Levy deemed that the lack of one dominant culture and language could provide an opportunity for Judeo-Spanish. Here, according to Esperanza, it would be able to keep 'Spanish' and to purify it, mirroring contemporary Spanish.[236]

The first concrete venture of Esperanza was in this direction. It was the opportune time as the language and one of the ways to solidify Judeo-Spanish and encourage its use the language was through newspapers. Printing culture in Judeo-Spanish was not a novelty; since the 1870s there had been printing presses across Asia Minor (in Smyrna and Constantinople)

[235] Pulido, *Intereses españoles*, 107, 120, 131–34. Michael Alpert, 'Dr Angel Pulido and Philo: Sephardism in Spain', *Jewish Historical Studies*, 40 (2005), 105–19.
[236] Moritz Levy to Dr Angel Pulido, in Pulido, *Intereses españoles*, 121–30.

and in Salonica there was a variety of newspapers in Judeo-Spanish, mostly printed in Rashi script. The business was not prolific, though, and could hardly sustain itself; however, individuals and communities invested continuous efforts to keep newspapers and the printed word going.[237] Prior to the twentieth century, limited ventures led in this direction in the Balkans. The first was the short-lived *El Amigo Del Pueblo* (The Friend of the People), which came out in Belgrade between 1888 and 1892. This monthly, printed in Rashi script, was supported by the Sephardi community and edited by Jakov Alkalaj. After this attempt, the community in Belgrade were given another chance, in 1903, to support the printed word in Judeo-Spanish. This paper, *Hashalom* (Peace) was published until 1906. Only incomplete print runs of both papers are now available.[238]

However, Esperanza's, indirect contribution in this regard was arguably through the Sarajevan weekly *La Alborada, Periodico Instructivo del žudaizo de Bosnia y Erzegovina* (Dawn, Educational and Literary Periodical of Jews of Bosnia and Herzegovina). This, the first Jewish periodical in the city, was first published in December 1899, then continued from December 1900 until August 1901. It was printed in Rashi script in hispanised Judeo-Spanish, the same 'reform' of the vernacular that Esperanza had proposed. The editor-in-chief of the paper was Abraham Cappon, a Sephardi Jew born in Ploiesti, Romania. Cappon's road to Sarajevo was unusual, to say the least. After a lack of success with his first printing endeavour in his hometown (this was also entitled *La Alborada*) in 1898–1899, Cappon decided to try the United States. On his way there, however, in Vienna a chance encounter with a Sephardi from Sarajevo persuaded him to give Sarajevo a try himself. Cappon remained in the city until his death in 1930; and even if his newspaper project was deemed unsuccessful, he continued to support Judeo-Spanish through theatrical works and translations. Until the end of his life, Cappon was highly regarded in the community.[239]

Cappon's periodical underlined its educational purpose (as its title made plain), but also used the language of enlightenment.[240] Its pages also included a variety of reading material, from short literary texts and poetry to the first history of Jews in Bosnia, written by Moshe Rafael Attias (1845–1916).[241] While the readership was invited to participate in the newspaper, the community was arguably antagonistic towards *La Alborada*. Over the course of thirty-one

[237] Borovaya. 52–60.
[238] Biljana Albahari, 'Pregled jevrejske periodike u Srbiji (1888–1941)**',** *Čitalište*, 28 (May 2016), 89.
[239] Eli Tauber, *Jevrejska stampa u BiH 1900–2011*, 19–20, 83. 'Djela Abrahama Cappona', *Židovska Svijest*, 202, 22 December 1922, 4.
[240] 'El Necessito por un periodiko y sus sustinensio', *La Alborada*, 1, 28 December 1899, 1–2.
[241] Muhamed Nezirović, ''Historija Bosanskih Jevreja' Moše (Rafaela) Atijasa: Zeki Efendije', *Prilozi*, 29 (2000), 245–60.

issues, the editor complained about this hostility and a poor rate of subscriptions. Even though almost all Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish newspapers encountered similar attitudes and conditions,[242] *La Alborada* finally gave in to these pressures, without prior announcement, in August 1901.

There are a couple of reasons for this lack of success in the Judeo-Spanish printed word among Balkan Sephardim which had significant impact on the development of the Sephardi-centred politics in general. First, the new nation-state setting had a direct influence on the position of Judeo-Spanish. As discussed in detail in Chapter 1, social linguists noted these states' bilingualism, and Judeo-Spanish began to lose out to the official state language. However, these studies fail to point out the divergence between spoken and written language, namely the fact that Judeo-Spanish was not the language of literature and culture even in Jewish schools, as this role was taken by Hebrew. Proficient literacy in Judeo-Spanish was therefore limited to a narrow Sephardi rabbinical and secular elite, and even then, the language they would use in writing was a highly polished version of Judeo-Spanish and Hebrew that some scholars recognise as parallel to the Judeo-Spanish vernacular and refer to as Ladino.[243] Yet these vain attempts to establish the printed word in the region and thus enable Judeo-Spanish speakers to communicate in their native tongue beyond an everyday level did influence further development of the Sephardi-oriented politics.

In view of this unsuccessful endeavour and hostile attitude of the nation-states towards the Judeo-Spanish, Levy's letter reads to a certain extent as indicating the society's pessimistic attitude towards its goal of cultivating Judeo-Spanish. In acknowledging the fate of Judeo-Spanish in the Balkan nation-states, from which the majority of Esperanza members came, the society shifted its focus from language: the society only held that resuscitating the language artificially, namely through the support of Spain, was unsustainable. The belief that Judeo-Spanish could enable Sephardi involvement in modern Jewish culture and, in this way, play an important role in the regeneration of the entire Jewish nation, was aborted. This revision of goals did not mean that Esperanza had given up on Judeo-Spanish as the language of modern Sephardi culture. Sephardi intellectuals were not ready to write off their Jewish language. However, they needed to bridge the Sephardi-specific necessities in the light of the emergence and ever-growing influence of Zionism. From 1904, the society was identifying itself as Zionists. In his letter to Pulido, Moritz Levy's openly expressed Esperanza's loyalty to the

[242] Borovaya, Modern Ladino Culture, 52–60; Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity*, 146–147.
[243] Haim Vidal Sephiha and Bruce Mitchell, 'The Instruction of Judeo-Spanish in Europe', *Shofar*, 19 (2001), 62.

Zionist cause.[244] This meant not only accepting the new national goals and focus on another Jewish language – Hebrew – but also the entrance of Esperanza, and with it the entire new class of Sephardi intellectuals, on the scene of Jewish politics. Thus, during the last decade of Esperanza's activity in Vienna, the society entered the Jewish political arena and became ever more connected with the Jewish political situation in the Balkans.

2. 4 Esperanza and its outreach

Esperanza members actively interacted with their hometowns and worked to build wider Sephardi networks. At first, the society could not rely on a lively youth-centred associational life, even in cities such as Sarajevo and Belgrade. Beyond the traditional organisations within the *kehila*, such as Hevra Kadishah, which took care of the ritual burial of the poor, and the Bikur Cholim, focused on providing care for the sick, the number of associations was limited. In Belgrade, both Sephardi and Ashkenazi women developed humanitarian organisations, namely the Jeverejsko žensko društvo (Jewish Female Society) in 1874 and Benefactor in around 1896. Among the most active societies working in the Sephardi community was the Srpsko-jevrejsko pevačko društvo (Serbian-Jewish Choral Society), founded in 1879. Arguably the oldest Jewish modern choir in Europe, it started as an exclusively male choir, and only accepted women in 1890.[245] However, the society was hardly a spot for starting a social revolution, as it was deeply imbedded in the community's integrationist politics.

Sarajevo youth had been initiating social activities since 1888, when the club El Progreso (The Progress) was founded. Behind the club was Esperanza's founder Josef Salom, then a student at Sarajevo's secondary school. El Progreso was a theatre group that focused on presenting plays in Judeo-Spanish translation. These plays included those of the seventeenth-century French dramatist Jean Racine, namely his tragedies *Hannah*, *Esther*, and *Athalia*. At first the translations were imported from Bulgaria, from the Zionist Yosef Avram Papo, who was especially active in this domain. The group also translated a humorous Serbian piece by Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, *Šaran* (Carp), translated as *Al truto.*[246] After less than a decade of existence, El Progreso ended its activities in 1895, only to be briefly replaced by Nueva flor, which was led by Leon Finci. However, in this brief time the role of theatre in shaping the local Sephardi culture reached its peak. El Progreso nurtured a generation of cultural workers who

[244] Pulido, *Intereses nacionales*, 123.
[245] Friedenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 128. MdeM, 'Jevrejske ustanove u Beogradu', in *Godišnjak*, 49–50. Ivan Hoffman, *Srpsko-jevrejsko društvo (Hor 'Braća Baruh'): 124 godina trajanja* (Hor Braća Baruh: Beograd, 2004).
[246] Borovaya, Modern Ladino Culture, 210.

proved themselves as in-house translators and directors, among whom Bernardo Pinto and Josef Salom stood out.

Esperanza built on the experience of these two societies and helped to found *La Lira, Sociedad de cantar de los judios españoles en Sarajevo* (The Lyre, a choral society formed by Spanish Jews in Sarajevo) in 1900. The society's leaders maintained correspondence with Esperanza. Formally dedicated solely to music, La Lira became an umbrella under which young Sephardi generations gathered socially for receptions, parties, and tea parties. This form of gathering and entertainment was novel to the society, and its leaders took pleasure in presenting themselves as modernisers and progressives. La Lira followed the theatrical tradition of El Progreso and continued the production of plays in Judeo-Spanish with the same people in charge. Esperanza's influence was reflected in the insistence on Judeo-Spanish, as well as a widening of the programme. Most of the translations were still coming from Bulgaria, but the repertoire was expanded when Moritz Levy, then a student, delivered Judeo-Spanish translations of Molière's *L'Avare* (El Escarso) and *La Malade imaginaire* (El malda imahinado). This experience prepared the young Levy to take part in the Viennese Sephardi circle. Furthermore, La Lira also opened the first community library, with community leaders providing books as personal gifts. The books mainly came from Salonica and Constantinople and were written in Judeo-Spanish, but among them were also works in German and Serbo-Croatian.[247] La Lira proved to be a stable backbone of Sephardi culture in Sarajevo and would outlast Esperanza's Viennese influence. Obviously interested in having a deeper connection with the Sephardi world outside Vienna, Esperanza sought alliances with local representatives. La Lira was only one example. Nevertheless, the society's network proved to be insufficient for Esperanza's political ambitions that significantly grew after the society's siding with Zionism in 1904. It now aimed at recruiting Sephardi youth for the Zionist cause.

Before long, though, Esperanza found it had strong competition when it came to winning over the Sephardi local youth to Zionism. The competition had begun in Vienna, with the foundation of Bar Giora, Društvo Židova akademičara iz jugoslavenskih zemalja (Society of Jewish Academics from Yugoslav Countries), in 1902. Its founders were Johanan Thau (1880–1918) and David Fuhrmann (1881–1941). At first, Bar Giora seemed to attract mostly Jewish youth from Croatia and Slavonia, whose fathers had caught the last train of upward social mobility in the western Slavic provinces of the Habsburg monarchy immediately after the Jewish emancipation in 1867. Thau was a law student in Vienna when Zionism caused

[247] B. Pinto, *Spomenica o proslavi*, 7–18.

upheaval in student circles. This arguably encouraged him to join Bar Kokhba, one of the blossoming Zionist student organisations at the university, which drew together students from Galicia. Thau was also among Theodor Herzl's acquaintances. Fuhrmann, from Vinkovci in Slavonia, was also an aspiring lawyer.[248] Fuhrmann and Thau's embrace of political Zionism, in which they closely followed Herzl and later Max Nordau, set the path for Yugoslav Zionism until well into the second half of the twentieth century. A prominent position among the first Zionist generation was held by Aleksandar Licht (1884–1948). Born in Koprivnica, a town in northern Croatia, Licht spent most of his life in Zagreb, where he also studied law. In the year he spent at the University of Vienna studying law, he managed to become vice-president and then president of Bar Giora.

Eager to establish a Zionist organisation that would represent the entire Jewish population in the 'South Slav lands', Bar Giora worked on engaging with Sephardim from its foundation in 1902. These efforts bore fruit, as the society soon attracted a few Sephardim. Among them the name of David Albala (1893–1941) stands out. As the adoptive son of a prosperous merchant in Belgrade, Albala was among the first generation of Jews in Serbia to feel the effects of civic emancipation, through access to the best state-offered education. Possibly as a reaction against his adoptive father, who was leaning towards an integrationist Jewish stance in Serbia, Albala found his political voice in Bar Giora and remained one of the fiercest advocates for the Zionist cause throughout his life.[249] Another Sephardi in Bar Giora, one who exuberantly advocated the Sephardi cause in Esperanza and in his native Sarajevo, was Moritz Levy, who would become the Oberrabbiner of the Sephardi community in Sarajevo.[250]

Levy's Zionist inclinations were not far from Esperanza's. In the letter that he sent to Dr Angel Pulido in summer 1904, in the name of the society, he underlined that Esperanza had recently joined the Jewish societies at the University of Vienna that supported the Zionist cause.[251] Two years later, Esperanza dropped the use of 'Israelite' and formally changed its name to Sociedad academica per los Judios españoles en Viena (The Society of Spanish Jews in Vienna).[252] This was not necessarily a significant shift from the standpoint of Jewish nationalism: as Levy also explained to Pulido, Esperanza still maintained that the regeneration of the entire Jewish nation did not contradict regeneration of their 'Spanish' language.

[248] 'Thau, Jochanan (Johann)', in *Židovski bigrafski leksikon*, https://zbl.lzmk.hr/?p=2585 (accessed 11 May 2020).
[249] Paulina Lebl Albala, *Vidov zivot. Biorgrafija Dr Davida Albale* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2008), 1–6.
[250] Friedenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 154. Noel, 'Izbor nadrabina za Bosnu i Hercegovinu', *Židovska Smotra*, 12 (1909), 199–201.
[251] Moritz Levy to Dr Angel Pulido, in Pulido, *Intereses españoles*, 123.
[252] AUW, 3474 ex 1896/7 (1906).

Furthermore, the society saw the strengthening of this language as the main means by which national regeneration could take place. Thus, Sephardim held that becoming Zionist did not necessarily mean changing Esperanza's agenda. Rather the society's members believed they were expanding their cause in order to contribute to the greater Jewish cause.

However, the reality challenged this belief. The situation on the ground looked quite different for the two societies. While initially there was no ideological friction between Esperanza and Bar Giora, realities in the Balkans confused the view from Vienna. This was clear when Bar Giora set out an ambitious plan to disseminate Zionist ideas and organise Zionist societies in the entire 'South Slav' region. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, this space was divided into four states: the Austro-Hungarian empire, namely the territory of the Kingdom of Croatia–Slavonia, and then Serbia, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman empire. This vast space did not have any particularly Jewish network to connect it. Arguably, the only cohesive bond was the language of the nation-states, Serbo-Croatian (excluding Bulgarian). However, as Serbo-Croatian was dominant and prevailed beyond Christian societies, the language became the connective tissue upon which Bar Giora based its Zionism. (Serbo-)Croatian was chosen as the language of all-Jewish and Sephardi political scenes for logistical and practical reasons. Moreover, the language was a sign of ideological shift and a generational rebellion. Zionists openly challenged and defied the choices of the generation of their fathers who had accepted a political compromise with the monarchy in exchange for emancipation and, in line with this, spoke German. Thus, starting with the First Congress of Jewish Graduates, which was organised in August 1904 in Osijek, the language of the Zionist movement in South-Eastern Europe was Serbo-Croatian.[253] This choice of language directly went against Esperanza's work, and the aspiration to tie together Sephardim from the Balkans through their mother tongue, Judeo-Spanish.

The clash between Esperanza and Bar Giora was deepened by the positions they took up regarding Ashkenazi–Sephardi relations. Again, attentive to the specificities of the region, Bar Giora advocated closer ties between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim in the name of Zionism. The Ashkenazim only made up an insignificant percentage of the Jewish population in the Balkans, so Zionism could not take root without appeasing Sephardim. Bar Giora was aware of this fact and it entered its statute and was further discussed at their First Congress in

[253] Ljiljana Dobrovšak, 'Prvi cionistički kongres u Osijeku 1904. godine', *Časopis za Suvremenu Povjest*, 37 (2005), 489. Emil Kerenji, 'Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia: Politics of Jewish Identity in a Socialist State, 1944–1974', (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008), 59.

1904. With these attitudes, the Zionist society, even if not openly, practically negated the reasons for Esperanza's existence, and for Sephardi exclusivity in general.

Esperanza's mission was particularly endangered outside Vienna. Building on their experience of spreading Zionist ideas in Croatia and Slavonia, where they also met the resistance of established Jewish structures, Bar Giora developed a wide network of Zionist youth organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and finally in Serbia, in just a couple of years. In Zagreb their base was Der Israelitisch-kroatisch literarischen Verein (The Israelite-Croatian Literary Association), yet another student organisation organised at the University of Zagreb in 1899 that proved to be a bastion for Zionism. Bar Giora helped to found the Theodor Herzl society in Osijek in 1904, and the same year Bene Cion (the Serbo-Croatian transcription of Bene Zion) (Son of Zion) societies were formed in Semlin, a town on the Croatian (Habsburg)–Serbian border. In Sarajevo, even though the city and the entire province were predominantly Sephardi, the affluent Ashkenazi community that mostly came alongside with the Austro-Hungarian authorities keenly supported the Zionist cause. Belgrade gained an official Zionist society in the next year, 1905, under the name Gideon. Thus, in only three years, Bar Giora had solid foundations even in the communities that were traditionally considered as leaning towards assimilation, such as Belgrade. The success of the Zionist society was undeniable.

Esperanza's alignment with Zionism as early as 1904 was most certainly a response to Bar Giora's undeniable successes. However, the two societies started to cooperate officially only in 1908, when on 13 April they organised their first joint event. Giving the opening remarks, the president of Esperanza, student of medicine Pinto, underlined the importance of concord among Jews, which was possible only if Jews overcome internal differences, just as their enemy had overcome them in labelling them all as Jews.[254] The new positioning did not mean that Esperanza or its alumni gave up on the Judeo-Spanish, or on further cultural engagement with Sephardi circles. They relied not only on the societies, such as La Lira, under their influence, but also on the community structure in the region, which divided the Sephardi and Ashkenazi *kehilot*. Building on associational life, and the growing number of its alumni active in their home communities, the Sephardi-centred politics grew from a cultural to a political fraction. The effects of this change were to be seen most clearly in Sarajevo, the centre for Sephardi Jews in the Balkans.

[254] 'Iz sveopćeg cijonistickog pokreta, Zblizavanje Esperanze i Bar Giore', *Židovska Smotra*, 3–4 (1908), 57–58.

2.5 Sarajevo

The Sarajevan Jewish community was uniquely important in the Yugoslav lands. The Bosnian and Herzegovinian capital was the home of their largest Jewish community, which made up a significant proportion of the total population. In 1910, the total of 6,397 Jews living in Sarajevo were 10 per cent of the inhabitants: 4,985 were members of the Sephardi *kehila*, while 1,412 were members of the Ashkenazi community.[255] Unofficially, the Sephardi community of the city was the representative of entire Jewish population of Bosnia and Herzegovina in eyes of the Habsburg authorities. The role of the Sephardi *kehila* became increasingly important from 1910 when Sarajevo became the seat of Bosnia-Herzegovina's parliament. With the declaration of the first Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1910, the Jews of the province had the right to two Jewish representatives in the provincial parliament – one allocated representative, intended for the Oberrabbiner of the Sephardi community, and one elected representative, regardless of affiliation. Thus, without having a strong hold in Sarajevo's Sephardi community, not one political party could triumph in the region. On three occasions, the community politics of Sarajevo reflected the position of Esperanza: during the first modern elections in the Sephardi community in 1909, during the election of the Jewish representative for the Bosnian and Herzegovinan parliament in 1910, and finally with respect to the campaign for the alliance of the Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities in the province in 1912 and 1913.

The first modern community elections in the Sephardi *kehila* in 1909 highlighted the political split between the old leadership and the youth, the generation of fresh university graduates. For the first time, voting was based on the list of candidates, with the two lists being 'conservatives' (*konzervativci*) and 'progressives' (*naprednjaci*). The divide was generational, and the youth made up the 'progressive' party that gathered around Ješua D. Salom (1870–1941). The 'conservatives' were those who were opposing the idea of modernisation, which they felt would endanger religious and cultural traditions.[256] The conflict seemed to be mostly between the old establishment and ambitious new leaders, who were educated in the West, and were eager to end the status quo politics of previous decades.

Ješua Salom won by a landslide. He owed at least part of his success to his privileged background of well-off merchants. Salom and his brother would only grow the family business further. This position gave Salom something that not many young Sephardim in Sarajevo could afford – a private Jewish tutor, Nathan Schwarz (1834–1931). Born in Paks in southern

[255] Friedenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 17, 214.
[256] 'Općinski izbori u Sarajevu', *Židovska Smotra*, 21 (1909), 374–76.

Hungary in 1834, Schwarz was known as having had a broad education; he was fluent in a number of foreign languages and a contributor to the Jewish Zionist magazines *Židovska smotra* and *Židov*.[257] This investment in Salom's education must have brought him into contact with progressive Jewish thought, and he attempted to give similar opportunities to other members of his generation. While still a secondary school student, Salom founded a Sephardi youth club, El Progreso (The Progress). He was also one of the founders of La Benevolencia in 1892. Both as the president of La Benevolencia, and also one of Sarajevo's most successful businessmen, Salom exercised power in the community, the city, and the province. Salom's opponents often mentioned his wealth when discussing his political ambitions, but his devotion to the humanitarian society La Benevolencia proved his genuine desire to strengthen the community. Even though he was not a member of Esperanza himself, Salom surrounded himself with its alumni, among them Vita Alkalaj and Vita Kajon. In this way, the society gained influence on the political scene in Sarajevo among the youth.

The Zionist press, which backed Bar Giora in Croatia and Slavonia, was involved in the elections and supported Salom's candidacy, describing him as 'the national candidate'. It seemed that this was the end of Sephardi-centric Jewish politics in Sarajevo, as Salom immediately took an amicable stance towards Ashkenazi co-religionists. Previously, relations between the two Jewish communities had been far from good throughout the province. In Zenica, for instance, in 1908, the provincial authorities had intervened in a clash between two *kehilot* over religious practices, and since no agreement could be reached, they closed down the only synagogue in town. Thus, the mere expression of good will on the Sephardi side had great importance. Salom's first official visit was to the Ashkenazi community president, Dr Moritz Rothkopf, and Oberrabbiner Weszel, and he used this opportunity to express the necessity of Ashkenazi–Sephardi cooperation in culture and politics.[258] However, while there was no question that Esperanzistas aimed to maintain a courteous relationship with Ashkenazi co-religionists in the city and the province, their defence of Sephardi uniqueness and cultural autonomy did not change. Only in 1910 did this divide become political.

Esperanza and Bar Giora started to cooperate in 1908, mostly through co-organised lectures and events at the University of Vienna. To affirm their partnership in the Balkans, the two societies joined forces with Judea from the University of Zagreb and organised the Fourth Congress of Jewish Graduates in Sarajevo in 1910: Bar Giora had previously organised two in

[257] 'Nešto iz životopisa Jošue D. Saloma', *Židovska Smotra*, 11 (1910), 2–3. 'Schwarz, Nathan', in *Židovski bigrafski leksikon*, https://zbl.lzmk.hr/?p=2104 (accessed 11 May 2020).
[258] 'Iz židvoskog svijeta, 'Sarajevo' (Zbližavanje Sefarda i Aškenaza)', *Židovska Smotra*, 12 (1909), 425.

Osijek, the centre of Zionist agitation in Croatia and Slavonia, and one in Semlin, the town on the Austro-Hungarian (Croatian) and Serbian border. Beyond being the best place to strengthen the alliance between Zionists and Sephardists, that year Sarajevo also became the most significant place for Jewish political agitation in the region. At the beginning of the same year, Bosnia and Herzegovina gained a constitution, while a Jewish candidate was to be elected in the coming spring. Furthermore, the constitution acknowledged 'Spanish' to be one of the official languages of the province. Bosnia and Herzegovina became the only country in the region where Jews were represented in the assembly and the only country in the region that recognised a Jewish language. Different political groupings aimed to exploit this political space, but it was nonetheless obvious that the Sephardim would hold the key to a candidate's victory, as they had 1,200 voters, the number of men who met voting requirements, compared with the 200 voters of their co-religionists.

Most probably in view of this disparity, it seemed at first as if the Sephardi candidate would be the only one. Again, Ješua Salom was chosen as candidate by all Sephardi associations and started campaigning across the province. Elections were set for June, and prominent men, among them Vita Kajon, visited all the provincial towns, aiming to encourage all Jews, Sephardim and Ashkenazim alike, to vote for Salom. However, the Ashkenazim were not happy that there was only one Jewish candidate, as they had not been consulted in time on the matter. In protest, they presented Moritz Rothkopf, head of their Sarajevo *kehila*, as their candidate at the last moment. Rothkopf's campaigners argued that an Ashkenazi should be chosen as the Jewish representative, as Ashkenazim deemed themselves to be the first who had stood up for Jewish rights after the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1909. They also underlined that it would be only right for the Ashkenazim to have the elected candidate, as the Sephardim already had the allocated one, namely their Oberrabbiner.[259] The Ashkenazim must have been aware of the fact that their candidate had only a slim chance of winning, as the Sephardim had superior numbers. Nevertheless, Rothkopf had support until the end, as a demonstration against what they perceived as Sephardi disrespect.

Even after Salom's easy victory, the clash of the two communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina would only grow, even after the elections. What came out of this friction was a clearer vision of Bar Giora's Zionist stand. While Esperanza and Bar Giora came to a formal ideological agreement, Zionist agitation and preferences mattered more than ever. Through their publication *Židovska smotra* (Jewish review), Zionists criticised the Ashkenazim in

[259] 'Rezultati izbora u židovskoj kuriji', *Židovska Smotra*, 11 25 May 1910/16 Iyar 5670, 1.

Bosnia and Herzegovina for disregarding national consciousness. Rothkopf was called out on the basis of his assimilationist attitudes and even his lack of devotion to Judaism. Moreover, after the elections, Gustav Seidemann, a Bosnia-bound Zionist, wrote a piece that ridiculed the celebratory post-election Zionist attitude. In his opinion, Jewish nationalists did not have a candidate in the election, and he tied Salom's victory to his wealth and influence.[260] The opinion of this well-informed and uncompromising Zionist indicates that the majority of Zionists were willing to work with Sephardi leaders regardless of their attitude towards Zionism, and that concessions could possibly have accepted the Sephardi exclusivity but only if it did not go against Zionist goals.

The decision to cooperate was in line with the mission of the Congress of Jewish Graduates that was set for that August, a couple of months after the elections for the Senate, and another chance to agitate for the Zionist cause. The atmosphere around the Congress built on the triumph of the 'progressives' in community elections. The Zionist newspaper, which had reported for months on the organisation of the event, the identity of the confirmed speakers, and its importance, underlined the role of youth: 'We need youth, the strong impulse to startle from lethargy, we need to show what is strength and [what is] will.' The Congress showed that the Jews were 'one muscular body, one soul, […] one ideal'.[261] However, by the time of the Congress, the Zionist ideal seems to have been reworked to accommodate Sephardi intentions.

The Congress lasted for three days, 21–23 August 1910. By this time, Esperanza already had a couple of generations of graduates who had returned to the city, most prominent among them Moritz Levy, still the Sephardi community's secretary, and Vita Kajon, both of whom oversaw the organisation of the event. Among the guests were youth from all Yugoslav lands, including Literarische Verein from Zagreb and the Viennese student associations Kadimah and Unitas. The programme was trilingual, encompassing Spanish, German, and Serbo-Croatian. Even though the Congress itself was a traditional Bar Giora event, Bar Giorans did not hide their attempt to please their Sarajevan hosts, who were predominantly Sephardim. First, David Albala, a Sephardi, one of the rare Sephardi who sided only with the Zionist Bar Giora, was named the president of the Congress.

Secondly, the featured talks appealed to Sephardi tradition and history. Marko (Marcus) Ehrenpreis, previously a rabbi in a small Croatian town, and at the time of Congress the Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria, gave a talk in 'Spanish' addressing Sephardim as the Jews who had not only

[260] Gustav Seidemann, 'Moj epilog bosanskim saborskim izborima', *Židovska Smotra*, 12, 8 June 1910/1 Sivan 5670, 2–3.
[261] Ben Mozes (pseud.), 'Pred kongres', *Židovska Smotra*, 17, 17 August 1910/12 Ab 5670, 1.

started the initial Jewish renaissance in Spain, but were also the first to stand with Zionism (referring to Dr David Alkalay and two other Sephardi men from Salonica who attended the First Zionist Congress). Ehrenpreis also explained Zionism as meaning not necessarily a return to Palestine, but a return to Judaism. In this light, he underlined that Zionism required the restoration of Hebrew as the only Jewish language.[262] Moritz Levy, already a well-established intellectual, followed up on this point. However, while he pushed for acceptance of the view that '[r]enewal of Spanish is an illusion', Levy advocated for learning the language of the country as a means of social climbing. Only if they were financially independent could 'Spanish Jews' in Bosnia partake in the Sephardi-oriented political circles in Constantinople, Salonica, or any other town in the Orient from where they could contribute to general Jewish science and culture.[263]

The event was deemed a great success, and the foundation of future amicable Sephardi-Ashkenazi relations. However, Esperanza received severe criticism during the course of the Congress. It was suggested that the Sephardi society should become a 'genuinely Zionist society', and eventually merge with Bar Giora. It also needed to 'abandon its stand that Sephardim were Jews par excellence', accept equality between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, and focus its work on the same territory (the South Slav lands), renouncing the programme that aimed to incorporate the Jews of 'the Orient'.[264] In return, Esperanza's insistence on Judeo-Spanish was supposed to be satisfied by a supplement in 'Spanish' to the Zionist newspaper *Židovska smotra*.

The Sephardi-Ashkenazi relations were formally cordial, amidst the politically turbulent years leading up to World War I in both the Habsburg monarchy and the Balkans. This period of political instability had its parallel on the local level. Ješua Salom resigned from the post of Jewish representative in the Senate over community issues. His successor, Vita Alkalaj, left the position only a couple of months later. There were talks about the merging of the Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities on the basis of their national, political and economic goals, but not religion (ritual).[265] While these ideas had the support of Zionist Ashkenazim, it is apparent that the Sephardi side experienced exasperation in this period: it was increasingly clear that the Zionists had little or no intention of fulfilling the promises towards their brethren represented by Esperanza. Not even the Judeo-Spanish supplement in *Židovska smotra* came

[262] 'Marko Ehrenpreis', *Židovska Smotra*, 18, 31 August 1910/26 Ab 5670, 3–4.
[263] Moritz Levy, 'O općem stanju Židova u Bosni, Po govoru', *Židovska Smotra*, 19, 14 September 1910/10 Elul 5670, 2.
[264] 'Nakon kongresa', *Židovska Smotra*, 18, 31 August 1910/26 Ab 5670, 1.
[265] Gustav Seidemann, 'Za organizaciju bosanskih Zidova', *Židovska Smotra*, 3, 18 March 1911, 50–51.

to fruition. Moreover, the idea of fusion of the *kehilot* brought visible dissent. Sephardi leaders held that the first step towards this goal would be a uniform Sephardi body for the whole province.[266]

Circumstances thwarted further work on closer ties between the two sides. The Balkan wars (1911–1913) disrupted the circulation of young Sephardim to Vienna, and in any case many of them were engaged upon military duties. The Fifth Congress of Jewish Graduates, planned for Belgrade in summer 1912, was cancelled. The goal to gather Sephardim under one umbrella persisted, and arguably grew stronger. The near future brought a clearer and more decisive Sephardi political assertion – and an ever-complex relationship with the Zionist movement in return, as explored in the next chapter.

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This chapter has set out to demonstrate how a student society for Sephardim connected Central European Jewish fin-de-siècle nationalism with local Jewish politics in the Balkans. Esperanza was in a position to connect these two, previously distant, spheres, while relying on established Sephardi cultural circles, Jewish nationalist associations in Vienna and Sephardi students from the Balkans. But the difference between the two spheres of the Habsburg capital and the Balkan peninsula, remained. In Vienna, the work of the Sephardi student society was theoretical. Esperanza sparked the modern Sephardi cultural identity on the basis of the glorious past of their ancestors in Spain, and thus introduced the Sephardim to contemporary Jewish conversations on identity. Furthermore, the society's work on nurturing Judeo-Spanish joined all native speakers into a single entity.

In the Balkans, in their native communities, Esperanza's alumni aimed to further Sephardi culture but also presented the Sephardim as a political body. The traditional division between Sephardim and Ashkenazim rested on separate *kehilot.* However, in this period, the divide became ideological as well. Sarajevo, significant because of the position Jews enjoyed there, became the stage for Jewish politics in the Balkans. On the one hand, Zionist supporters were gaining ever more prominence; on the other, the overwhelming superiority in numbers of Sephardim was only enhanced once Esperanza's alumni became community leaders. They started at a local level, in Sarajevo, but over the following decades, their ambitions grew. During the interwar period, these men worked on forming a global Sephardi organisation that would become the central representative of Sephardim in the world.

[266] 'Narodni zastupnik dr. Alkalaj o cijonizmu', *Židovska Smotra*, 5, 18 May 1911, 75–76.

Chapter 3

Zionism of Smaller Things: the Balkan Sephardim and/in the Zionist movement (1904–1918)

Sephardi politics began with the founding of Esperanza, the first modern Sephardi organisation, in Vienna in 1897, in the year when the Zionist movement, led by Theodor Herzl, organised the First Zionist Congress in Basel. While Sephardi politics initially resonated solely in Sephardi circles in Vienna, and subsequently in Sarajevo and other Balkan *kehilot*, Herzl's publication *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State) marked the beginning of wide-scale organised mobilisation for an all-Jewish cause. From the beginning, Zionists were developing an all-encompassing social and political solution for European Jews – an independent Jewish political entity alongside a cultural revival of Jewish culture. This wide-ranging programme, which, at least to start with, completely disregarded any potential differences among Jewish groups worldwide, naturally became an ideological rival to the specific, Sephardi-oriented politics embodied in Esperanza.

After only a few years of peaceful coexistence between the two movements, already in the first years of the twentieth century it was becoming clear that Sephardi politics could not exist outside the growing Zionist networks in Central Europe. Moreover, the cohesive nature of the Zionist movement became an opportunity for all Jews to unite, albeit within a different framework. For dispersed Balkan Jewish communities, and even more so for the Sephardi communities throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, Zionism opened the doors of European Jewish politics. This new context of Jewish politics in the Balkans forced Sephardi leaders to re-negotiate their position. This chapter historicises the ways in which Zionism informed Sephardi politics between 1902 and 1918.

This complex process evolved in three phases. Accordingly, the chapter first historicises Zionist interest in Sephardi Jews. More precisely, the chapter traces how political Zionists imagined Sephardi Jews in racial and cultural terms and explains what shaped Zionist policies concerning their Sephardi brethren. In doing so, it follows the history of Bar Giora, the Viennese student Zionist association that aimed at gathering Jews from 'South Slav' lands to establish a network of Zionists that focused on branching out from Sephardi–Ashkenazi differences and build a solid network in the Balkans.

Secondly, the chapter discusses Sephardi responses to Zionism that went beyond the political sphere and ventured into a wider intellectual debate about the borders and boundaries of Sepharad. Within the all-Jewish movement, the Sephardim had to articulate contain their

plans and define their outreach. In this way, Sephardi intellectuals were essentially formulating the grounds of so-called Sephardi uniqueness that became the basis of their politics in the 1920s and 1930s.

Thirdly, the chapter discloses the moment of political convergence of Zionism and Sephardi-oriented politics on the question of international politics in the Balkans – that is, the Yugoslav movement and, from 1918 onwards, the formation of the Yugoslav state. This multi-ethnic and multi-religious nationalism and state influenced and shaped both Balkan Zionism and Balkan Sephardi politics. The most palpable influence comes through the role played by Serbo-Croatian in both movements.

Finally, this chapter discloses the Sephardi reception of and interpretation of Zionism through biographies of two Sephardi Zionists active in the Balkans, David Albala and Sabatey Djaen. Their political choices and understanding of their Jewish context, and their emphasis on the amalgam of political and religious readings of Zionism offer an insight into the complex nature of Sephardi involvement in Zionist politics. Contrary to dominant interpretations, the Sephardim were not inert objects in Zionist plans but have actively shaped, appropriated, and influenced the course of Jewish politics.

2.1 From the 'myth of Sephardi superiority' to the 'myth of instinctive Jews': Sephardim in Zionist thought

Zionism was deeply embedded in German-Jewish cultural and intellectual traditions and thus it is no wonder that it appropriated a form of the 'myth of Sephardi superiority' present in German-Jewish thought from the mid-nineteenth century.[267] The 'father of political Zionism', Theodor Herzl, is a good example of how this myth figured in the early Zionist culture. Historians have described Herzl's fascination with Sephardi cultural heritage as Orientalism; something which encompassed his approach to Jews he met living in the Middle East, and his appearance, namely his famous beard and proud posture.[268] However, Herzl also nurtured a personal mythology that connected his Moravian family background with a fascinating Sephardi past. For instance, he mentioned to his co-worker Jacob de Haas that he was descended from a rabbi Loeb in Spain, where his ancestors were forcibly baptised, only to return to Judaism decades later, once they were expelled from the Catholic Kingdoms. Herzl

[267] John Efron, *German Jewry Allure for the Sephardic* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015). Ismar Schorsch, 'The Myth of Sephardic Superiority', *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, vol. 34, issue 1 (January 1989), 47–66. Carsten Schapkow, *Role Model and Counter Model: The Golden Age of Iberian Jewry and German-Jewish Culture during the Era of Emancipation* (Washington, DC: Lexington Books, 2016).
[268] Arthur Kamczycki, 'Orientalism: Herzl and his Beard', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 12 (2013), 90–116.

spoke again of his Spanish Jewish lineage to Leon Keller; according to this story, Herzl was a descendant of two brothers who were forced to hide in a monastery to survive the Inquisition.[269] To his first official biographer, Reuven Brainin, Herzl related the most detailed account of this Sephardi retelling of his personal history: forced into Christianity, his ancestor rose high in the Catholic Church and when sent to Innsbruck on church business escaped and returned to Judaism.[270] The persistent reshaping of family history testifies to the aim to fit into a recognised myth. Herzl's most recent biographer, Derek Penslar, has noted how this story is indicative of Herzl's capacity for self-fashioning and of his milieu of 'upwardly mobile Ashkenazic Jews in the second half of the nineteenth century'.[271] This episode and the firm position it had in Herzl's narrative confirms the crucial and legitimising role of the myth of Sephardi superiority in affluent, secular, German-speaking Jewish circles beyond the intellectual narratives of the Berlin Haskalah established more than a century before Herzl's era. Herzl not only accepted this myth, but he persistently used this highly esteemed idea of Sepharad to present himself as a worthy leader of European Jewry.

The mere fact that Herzl perpetuated the myth of Sephardi supremacy left a significant trace on Zionism. After his death, Herzl's followers directly referred to his Sephardi background.[272] This alone gave Bruce Saposnik enough material to convincingly argue that Zionism followed the widely accepted myth of Sephardi supremacy.[273] Thus, as Herzl exemplified, the Zionist movement was from the start aware of Sephardi cultural prestige. However, the Zionists upgraded this inherited myth of Sephardi superiority with their own: *the myth of the instinctive Jew.*

The first signs of this altered view of the Sephardim within the Zionist movement came during the Seventh Zionist Congress in Basel in late July and early August 1905. The Congress is famous for the verdict on the so-called Uganda offer from the British government. The conclusions of the Congress ruled out Uganda as an option for a Jewish home, declared loyalty to Yishuv (the body of Jewish residents in the Land of Israel prior to the establishment of the

[269] Leon Keller, *Theodor Herzls Lehrjahre (1860–1895)* (Berlin: R. Löwit, 1920), 7; Jacques Kornberg, *Theodor Herzl*: *From Assimilation to Zionism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 76–77; Jacob de Haas, *Theodor Herzl: A Biographical Study* Vol. 1 (Chicago/New York: Leonard, 1927), 30; Israel Cohen, *Theodor Herzl: Founder of Political Zionism* (New York/London: T. Yoseloff, 1959), 21.
[270] Kornberg, *Theodor Herzl*, 77.
[271] Derek Penslar, *Theodor Herzl: The Charismatic Leader* (London/New York: Yale University Press, 2020), 13.
[272] Paul Diamant, 'Herzls Abstammung', *Die Welt* 14, 20 May 1910, 461–462.
[273] Arieh B. Saposnik, Becoming Hebrew: The Creation of a Jewish National Culture in Ottoman Palestine (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

State of Israel in 1948), and committed to building a Jewish national home in Palestine.[274] It is not a surprise that the Sephardi question came into view since the Sephardim were a dominant presence among the Jews in Palestine. Thus, it was not coincidental that the Congress raised concerns about the Sephardim within the Zionist movement.

The Seventh Zionist Congress reached significant conclusions that concerned Sephardim. Firstly, it labelled Sephardi exclusivity as negative. When Moses Gaster, Haham of the Sephardi and Portuguese Community in Great Britain and a vehement Sephardi Jew, was given word to speak, the chair of the Congress could not silence cries of 'The Spanish king! He should go to the Inquisition!'[275] Secondly, Zionist circles were ever more invested in situating Sephardim in the movement's ideology, and in particular in the flourishing field of Jewish anthropology. This, of course, had much to do with the growing Europe-wide interest in racial research, predominantly employed to justify the political and economic domination of Western European empires and the superiority of certain nations.[276] In view of the increasingly anti-Semitic politics of the time, enquiries into race served to perpetuate already established stereotypes of Jews as an inferior race.[277] Anthropologists of non-Jewish and Jewish backgrounds alike tried to identify Jewish characteristics but they also looked into the differences between Jewish groups within Europe.

Interestingly, anthropologists from non-Jewish backgrounds also accepted and developed the myth of Sephardi supremacy. They went as far as presenting Jews of Spanish origin as physically perfect. John Efron explained this tendency as a matter of 'comfortable distance in space and time'; namely, the Sephardi Jews were not as conspicuously present in Western European societies after the expulsions from Iberian Peninsula in the late fifteenth century and, therefore, did not pose a threat to modern European societies. The situation was quite the contrary when it came to the Jews of Eastern Europe, the so-called 'Ost Jude'.[278]

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[274] Walter Laquer, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Shocken Books, 2003), 317–319. On the Territorialist movement that gained momentum after the rejection of the Uganda plan in 1905: Gur Alroey, 'Zionism without Zion? Territorialist Ideology and the Zionist Movement', *Jewish Social Studies*, 18 (2011), 1–32.

[275] *Stenographisches Protokoll der Verhandlungen des 7. Zionisten-Congresses Basel und des außerordentlichen Kongresses in Basel 27., 28., 29., 30., 31. Juli, 1. und 2. August 1905 (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1905)*, 306.

[276] Gustav Jahoda, *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Europe* (London: Routledge, 1998). Jahoda argues that racism was intrinsically connected with alienation of the 'Other' throughout modern European history.

[277] George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1985), especially: 113–127.

[278] John M. Efron, 'Scientific Racism and the Mystique of Sephardi Racial Superiority', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 38 (1993), 75–96.

Thus, attitudes towards Sephardi Jews were used as proof that European society was not anti-Jewish per se. Rather, these studies implied that Jews living in Europe were the problem.
For Zionists, the Sephardim also began to look like a way out of an impasse. The Zionists were aware of the need to find a solution for Jewish assimilation into Western society.[279] Among the possible pointers was learning from the example of Sephardi Jews, whom Zionists saw as untarnished by assimilation. Among the noted visitors to the Fifth Zionist Congress was one of the first Jewish physical anthropologists, the Russian-born Samuel Weissenberg (Samuil Vaisenberg) (1867–1928) whose works on Sephardim proved to be the crucial link for the integration of the Sephardi myth into official Zionist positions. Trained as a physician and having lived and worked in the Pale of Settlement in Elisavetgrad, Weissenberg was well aware of and concerned with the widely accepted negative image of Russian and East European Jewry. Such ideologically tainted images came from (Western) European anthropologists whose prejudices projected a view of Russian Jews as backward and uncivilised. Weissenberg wanted to overturn these arguments. However, he did not argue against using 'Jewish physiognomy' but, rather, he opposed using this primitive racial research solely against Eastern European Jews.[280]

In contrast to his defence of Eastern European Jewry from a standpoint of racial science, Weissenberg contributed to the ongoing discourse by positing an anthropological split between the Sephardim and Ashkenazim. He based this claim on 175 cephalometries of Sephardim from Constantinople and Jerusalem he had taken in the first years of the twentieth century. Even though he was not a convinced Zionist, he shared the movement's concern with Jewish national authenticity, originality, and antiquity. This is why his claim that 'the Spaniolen preserved themselves more purely to the Semitic type than the East European Jews' started to play a significant role in Zionist ideology.[281] Indeed, Weissenberg managed to fit Sephardi Jews into the existing and dominant narrative on the search for 'the authentic Jew' in the period when, Saposnik argued, 'the translation of these scientific paradigms' became a crucial part of Zionist policies.[282] Without a doubt, this science-backed, Zionist racial myth of Sephardi supremacy helped to shape how the movement was perceived and, finally, with what the movement approached Sephardi Jews starting with the early twentieth century.

[279] Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 15–16.
[280] Marina Mogilner, *Homo Imperii: A History of Physical Anthropology in Russia* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 241–42.
[281] Efron, 'Scientific Racism'; on Weissenberg, see 88–89.
[282] Saposnik, *Becoming Hebrew*, 170.

This ongoing dialectical debate on Race, Jews and the Sepharad also had its practical implications. With the expansion of Zionism in Central, Eastern, and Western Europe, the movement was looking into ways to engage with Jews who were perceived as non-European. The first on this list were the Sephardim. However, the Sephardi Jews were not only an idea for Central European Zionists – they were also their reality, given the small but persistently active communities of Sephardi Jews in all Central European cities, Vienna included. Furthermore, with the expansion of Austria-Hungary into the Balkans with the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878, Sephardi Jews became ever present in Central Europe. Between 1900 and the 1910s, Zionist activities rapidly expanded into Sarajevo and other towns in Bosnia. These territories were still relatively unknown by the majority of Europeans, including European Jews. The Zionist movement, however, found a strong foothold among young Jews from Croatia–Slavonia. These still predominantly German-speaking Ashkenazim got introduced to Zionism in the Habsburg capital and from there, they developed their own organisation.

2.2 The Zionists from 'South Slavic lands'

It is no surprise that the history of Zionism in the Balkans developed from Vienna, at the Technical College in 1902 with the formation of Bar Giora, Društvo Židova visokoškolaca iz jugoslavenskih zemalja or Bar Giora, Vereinigung jüdischer Hochschüler aus den südslavischen Länder.[283] Bar Giora had an undeniably crucial position in politicising Balkan Jewry. The student organisation built the Zionist network in the region from scratch. However, Bar Giora's founders, young enthusiasts, were building on a solid Central European base and well-informed individuals from the southern Austrian lands of Croatia and Slavonia who have sided with Zionism since 1897 (as explained in Chapter 2). Founders of Bar Giora, Johanan Thau and David Fuhrmann were previously members of Bar Kochba, Vereinigung jüdischer Hochschüler aus Galizen, the society at the University of Vienna whose members were primarily Jewish students from Galicia.[284] Whether this reflected the founders' family backgrounds is unclear, as we know that Thau was born in Dubrovnik, then a part of the Austrian Crown lands of Dalmatia. Both men had successful careers in their respective environments, Dubrovnik and Djakovo (in Slavonia), Thau as a lawyer and Fuhrmann as an

[283] Austria, Archiv der Technisches Universität Wien (AT TUWA), Studentische Vereine, Jüdischeßnationale Verbindungen – Bar Giora.
[284] AT TUWA, Studentische Vereine, Jüdischeßnationale Verbindungen – Bar Kochba.

entrepreneur.[285] Furthermore, Bar Giora received support from Marcus (Marko/Mordechai) Ehrenpreis (1869–1951), a Lemberg-born and Berlin-educated, prolific contributor to Hebrew press, associate of Nathan Birnbaum and one of the founders of Kadimah (the first Jewish-national student society in Vienna). Ehrenpreis also served as Rabbi of Djakovo in Slavonia from 1896 to 1900 where he also learned (Serbo-)Croatian.[286]

From its foundation, Bar Giora reported steady growth among the Jewish students from Croatia–Slavonia. In the society's first generation were Ervin Krauss (1884–1918), Adolf Benau, Hugo Zaloscer, and Aleksandar Licht. The latter grew to become the leader of the Zionist movement in Yugoslavia. Hugo Spitzer (1859–1936), a well-established member of the Osijek's Jewish community, even though a generation older than these pioneers of Zionism, had an ear for their plans and ideas. Due to his wholehearted support Osijek became the first centre of the Zionist organisation in Croatia–Slavonia. Conspicuously, the province was also a major centre of Yugoslav agitation already from the second half of the nineteenth century.[287] Zagreb, the province's capital, was not on the Zionist map just yet, as the majority of its Jewish community still declared loyalty to the liberals' promises of emancipation and structural changes in the Habsburg monarchy. Yet the Zionists found an audience among the Jewish youth in Zagreb who from 1898 gathered around a secondary school students' society, the Israelitisch-Kroatisch Literarischen Verein (Israelite-Croatian Literary Club), to nurture Jewish national feeling.[288]

As its name suggested, Bar Giora had a straightforward mission that was directed at the Jews in the Yugoslav lands, both Ashkenazim and Sephardim. Thus, the society had a focus on improving the Ashkenazi-Sephardi relationship. A letter from Jochanan Thau in Vienna's Zionist newspaper *Die Welt* (The World) that addressed 'Jewish student organisations from the south Slavic Lands' made clear. Thau proclaimed Bar Giora to be the centre for Jewish students from the 'South Slav lands' in Vienna, Moreover, he disclosed the society's larger mission to awaken Jewish life in the students' homelands. Finally, Thau labelled the society a 'practical

[285] 'Fuhrmann, David (Furman)', in *Židovski bigrafski leksikon*, https://zbl.lzmk.hr/?p=3536 (accessed 1 July 2021); 'Thau, Johanan (Johann)', in *Židovski bigrafski leksikon*, https://zbl.lzmk.hr/?p=2585 (accessed 1 July 2021).

[286] Ehrenpreis, Marcus (Mordechai, Marko)' in *Židovski bigrafski leksikon*, https://zbl.lzmk.hr/?s=ehrenpreis (13 July 2021).

[287] Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815–1905), catholic bishop of Djakovo in Croatia-Slavonia, was one of the first bigger names of Yugoslav ideology. He founded the Yugoslav Academy of Arts and Sciences in Zagreb in 1866 (today Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences). More in: Günther Schödl, *Kroatische Nationalpolitik und 'Jugoslavenstvo': Studien zu nationaler Integration und regionaler Politik in Kroatien – Dalmatien am Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2005), 13–56.

[288] Emil Kerenji, 'Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia: Politics of Jewish Identity in a Socialist State, 1944–1974' (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008), 51.

attempt' to bridge differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews.[289] The same goals were repeated in Bar Giora's first-year report: to 'awaken and strengthen Jewish national feeling among Jewish graduates from the Slavic South, to nurture Hebrew, Jewish history, and to unify and connect Jews, Sephardim and Ashkenazim'.[290] Bearing in mind the activity of Bar Giora's founders in Vienna before 1902, the society's membership, circles of influence, and politics, the society reads like a conscious attempt of Zionists in Vienna to engage with the Balkan Jewish population, and especially Sephardim.

The society and the growing number of Zionists in Croatia–Slavonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina also provided information about the state of Sephardim and their culture in the Balkans. Gustav Seidemann, who had migrated to Prijedor in Central Bosnia most probably from Galicia, reported for *Die Welt* in 1903 on the uninhibited nature of Bosnian Jews. He ascribed this virtue of Jewish culture to the centuries they had spent under Ottoman rule, which had not exerted any pressure on them, so 'the Jews could evolve under healthy, natural circumstances'. The Bosnian 'Spaniolen', as Seidemann referred to Sephardi Jews, had not developed as 'assimilationists, or liberal, or – better to say – an irreligious milieu' prior to the Austro-Hungarian occupation. Yet Seidemann was convinced there was no need to worry that something similar would happen during the occupation, as the Austro-Hungarian authorities did not deal in politics and ruled absolutely, without a parliament, a representative autonomous body, or political parties. In Seidemann's opinion, this meant there would be no obstacle to Zionism gaining widespread Sephardi support. He declared that the Jews who settled in Bosnia from other parts of the Austro-Hungarian empire were the greater challenge to Zionist success. In Thau's opinion, the Eastern European settlers in Bosnia were more likely to override 'Jewish-national' interests and support the interests of a specific national group, 'Turks, Croatians, or Serbs'. Furthermore, he pointed out that these Jewish émigrés to Bosnia were inclined to get baptised.[291] Noting Seidemann's perspective, the *Die Welt* readership could easily have gained the impression that securing all Sephardim on the Zionist side was only a matter of time.

Bar Giora's pivotal role in growing Zionist network in the Balkans is indisputable. However, this is not to say that Zionism was only imposed by the incoming Austro-Hungarian Jews of the time. There were Sephardi Jews even among the first Zionist activists, even before

[289] Jochanan Thau, 'An die jüdische Studentenschaft aus den südslavischen Lander!', *Die Welt*, 21, 23 May 1902, 8–9.
[290] Kerenji, 'Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia', 51.
[291] Gustav Seidemann, 'Die Juden in Bosnien und der Zionismus', *Die Welt* 25, 19 May 1903, 3.

Esperanza sided with Zionism in 1904. For instance, in 1902, Rafael Israel from Sarajevo reported on the beginnings of an organisational network in the city, the enthusiasm of youth in the La Lira music society, the banker Mosco Salom's subscription for Colonial Bank-Action, and progress with organising a National Fund.[292] A couple of Jews from Bosnia, with their recognisable head coverings, were also present at the Bar Giora's Jewish graduates' congress in Osijek in 1904.[293] However, the insistence of Bar Giora and other attested Zionists in the first decades of the twentieth century that Ashkenazi-Sephardi relations should be harmonised testifies that previous Zionist endeavours in this region were either not well developed or were unsatisfactory.

Bar Giora's attempts to gain attention and support among Sephardim took time. Already in first years of the twentieth century, the eager Vienna-educated Zionists slowly became aware of the richness of Sephardi culture that openly resisted Zionist imagery. With the expansion of the Zionist network in the region, the Zionist idea of Sephardi Jewry became ever more ambiguous. The leading figures of the movement were faced with the complex reality of Jewish life in the inner Balkans and tried to balance this image with the predominant ideas in German-Jewish culture. Jochanan Thau wrote an elaborate text on 'Spanish Jews' for the first issue of *Židovska smotra* in autumn 1906 that summed up the tensions the loyal political Zionists had with Sephardim. He argued that these repeating frictions mostly came from the lack of Ashkenazi understanding of Sephardi history and language, religiosity, and race. Thau focused on the 'Spaniolen' living in the Balkans, where 'they could live undisturbed as they did not pose a threat to the Ottoman rule'. There was another side to life in the Ottoman empire – cultural decline, or as Thau put it, 'Carried away by their environment, the Jews neglected science and progress. Though they all know how to read and write, but only Spanish or Jewish [Hebrew]. Only recently they started learning the language of the land – and in the Eastern Balkans many know French.' Thau called the mother language of the Spanish Jews 'Old Castilian' and held the language to be the key to their 'specific colour' (*osebujni kolorit*).[294]

This report expanded on the Sephardi differences – Thau's writing illustrates how influential and widely accepted racial science was already in the first decade of the twentieth century. He used the racial language to describe the complexity of 'Spaniolen'. What

[292] Rafael Israel, 'Der Zionismus in Bosnien', *Die Welt* 24, 13 June 1902, 10.
[293] Ljiljana Dobrovšak, 'Prvi cionistički kongres u Osijeku 1904. godine', *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 37 (2005), 489.
[294] Jochanan Thau, 'Španjolski Židovi', *Židovska Smotra*, 1 (1 November 1906), 10. Sarajevo-based Zionist newspaper *Narodna Židovska svijest* reprinted this article in 1922.

distinguished Sephardim were their physical features: the majority of Sephardim were of average height, but there were also 'bigger chaps' among them. Perceiving no need to provide a broader picture or introduce his audience to the topic, Thau ascribed Sephardi characteristics to their skull measurements. He precisely identified that 21.8 per cent of Sephardim were dolichocephalic (long skulled), 45.2 per cent mesocephalic (medium skulled), and 32.2 per cent brachycephalic (broad and short skulled) – which led him to conclude that they had been mixing with the 'native' population. He also picked up on Orientalist tropes when he noted that women aged earlier than men and were of average beauty, contrary to what many writers had previously claimed.[295] These perceptions and vague ideas of the Sephardi culture and life guided the Zionist approach to Sephardim in the Balkans.

Inspired by Thau's conclusions and making similar assumptions, Bar Giora went forward with its mission. Only two years after their first congress in Osijek (Slavonia) the society organised a congress of Jewish graduates in Semlin. Even though from 1904 Bar Giorans had included Sephardim as members, cooperated with Esperanza, and a couple of Sephardim from Bosnia had come to their first congress in Osijek[296], Semlin tested closer relations between the Sephardi and the Ashkenazi. The Viennese student society included members from Semlin, who in 1905/6 formed the *Ferialklub* Bar Giora, a so-called vacation club that continued the work of the society over the summer holidays.[297] With the help of this branch, the original society organised a Congress of Jewish Graduates in the town.

Semlin was deemed to be a good spot for this as the town prided itself on its equally important Sephardi and Zionist traditions. In this period, the Sephardi community even had its own newspaper: *El Luzzero* was first published in 1905.[298] The town was also home to some of the first Zionists who had been at the First Congress in Basel, including a Sephardi Jew David Alkalaj and his wife Rachel, who was a granddaughter of Rabbi Jehuda Alkalai.[299] Active Zionist youth had formed the society Bene Cion, while Semlin also attracted young Jews from Belgrade; this resulted in the first Zionist club in Belgrade, Gideon, whose founders were the Jewish teacher Sabatey Djaen, Salamon Neuwirth, and David Alkalaj.[300] From 1905 onwards, Bar Giora gained ever more prominent Sephardi members, which led to open and

[295] Thau, 'Španjolski Židovi'.
[296] Dobrovšak, 'Prvi cionistički kongres', 489.
[297] 'Zemun', *Židvoska Smotra*, 2 (1906), 63–64. On the importance and growing network of the university 'vacation clubs': Dieter J. Hecht, 'Jewish (Vacation) Fraternities in the Habsburg Monarchy. Kadimah and Geullah: Forward to Redemption', trans. by Victoria Martin, *Austrian Studies*, 24 (2016), 31–48.
[298] Biljana Albahari, 'Pregled jevrejske periodike u Srbiji (1888–1941)', *Čitalište* 28 (May 2016), 88–89.
[299] Harriet Pass Friedenreich, 'Sephardim and Ashkenazim in Inter-War Yugoslavia: Attitudes toward Jewish Nationalism', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol. 44 (1977), 75.
[300] 'Zemun', 63–64.

more frequent conflict with the Sephardi-centred politics. Even though it often seemed that the Sephardim did not have a political agenda before Zionism, Zionism in the Balkans could not progress without the participation of the Sephardim.

2.3 Zionism in Sephardi key 1904–1914

The changing idea of Sephardim in Zionist thought informed the movement's approach towards Sephardim, and to an extent conditioned the Sephardi response. In the first years of the twentieth century, when Zionism was spreading its network in the Balkans, the Sephardi Jews already had an intellectual and cultural scene that purported to be political. The turbulent relationship between the various movements and their leaders shaped Jewish life in the Balkans. At the core of the debate were distinct interpretations of the place of Sephardim in the Zionist movement. This difference of opinion, however, came from the incompatible ideas about the Jewish nation between Sephardi intellectuals and primarily political Zionists. This dialectical battle persisted throughout the first half of the twentieth century and, even though it was never resolved, it was not a constant threat to Sephardi–Zionist, or Sephardi–Ashkenazi cooperation before the 1920s in general for two reasons. This Jewish ideological struggle took place in Vienna at the turn of the century, among young intellectuals who still came from different countries. Moreover, the tensions in the politics in the Balkans, especially after Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908, were almost palpable. In view of the declaration of Bosnia-Herzegovina's Constitution in 1910, the formation of the province's parliament and the right to be politically represented, Ashkenazi and Sephardi leaderships at times were at odds (as discussed in Chapter 2). These important factors did not stop an ongoing debate between the two Balkan Jewish political camps in 1904–1918: on the one hand, there were Zionist intellectuals, the majority of whom were Ashkenazi Jews, and on the other hand were Sephardi-oriented intellectuals. This exchange of views became ever more convoluted in the 1920s and set the tone of Sephardi politics for the rest of the interwar period.

The wider context of these ideological clashes was Central Europe or, more precisely, Vienna. The setting of the imperial capital that garnered a variety of Jewish groups was a precondition of the Sephardi-oriented politics. It started in Esperanza, the student society at the University of Vienna that promoted the renewal of the Sephardi culture in view of the perceived Spanish-Jewish glorious tradition. From its foundation, Esperanza was an exclusively Sephardi society that focused on reviving Sephardi culture, aiming to encompass Sephardi Jews from across the entire Eastern Mediterranean. However, in 1904 the society expressed its dedication

to Zionism and building of Jewish national home in Palestine (as discussed in Chapter 2). At first, this was only related to Esperanza's Central European position, as here the Sephardim were a small group and could not become a political leader outside the largest Jewish national movement. The Sephardi intellectuals were evidently conscious of this fact as early as 1904. From that moment on, and especially from 1906, Esperanza collaborated closely with Bar Giora. In Vienna, at least at the turn of the century, it seemed possible to balance Sephardi ways with political Zionist ideology. Yet only in the Austro-Hungarian capital could this overlap take place without excessive tensions; in the Balkan lands, from which Esperanza drew its members and alumni, the situation was more complex.

The Balkan perspective came into focus in 1910, when Esperanza and Bar Giora together with Judea from Zagreb organised the Fourth Congress of Jewish Graduates in Sarajevo. In line with Bar Giora's initial programme, the organisers proclaimed that the Congress' mission was the rapprochement of Sephardim and Ashkenazim. However, this occasion gave space for all unresolved issues to come out into the open. Even though it was an event co-organised with the Sephardi Jews and in a city where the Sephardim had the majority and wielded political power, the Congress leaders allowed all criticism of Esperanza, especially the perceived Sephardi exclusiveness, to be voiced. Speakers openly criticised the Sephardi student society for focusing its programme on lands of Sephardi Jews (or lands where 'Jews whose mother tongue is Spanish' lived) or for closing their membership to Ashkenazim. Esperanza's unwillingness to negotiate these terms was deemed unacceptable. Furthermore, the Congress used Esperanza's rules of conduct as an excuse to question whether Sephardim understood Zionism at all. Finally, following all these debates, the speakers addressed a point of special importance to Zionism: the place of the Sephardim in the movement.[301]

The most ardent to prove the worth of Zionism for Sephardim was Marko (Mordecai/Marcus) Ehrenpreis, Chief Rabbi of Sofia. He spoke about Sephardim as 'the role model of Jewish renaissance' (*preporod*), based on the historical examples of Spanish Jews, namely Judah Halevy, a Jewish physician, philosopher, and poet from eleventh-century Spain, and Joseph of Naxos, the sixteenth-century diplomat of Jewish Portuguese origin. Ehrenpreis also expressed admiration for David Alkalaj (1862–1933), who was present at the Congress in Sarajevo, as a contemporary example of a devoted Jew and a good Zionist. Alkalaj and his wife Rachel (granddaughter of the Rabbi Jehuda Alkalaj, father of the religious Zionism at the end of the nineteenth century) were also the only Spanish Jews at the First Zionist Congress in

[301] 'Četvrti kongres u Sarajevu', *Židovska Smotra*, 18, 10 August 1910, 1–2.

Basel in 1897.[302] It is unclear whether this inconsistent but more than often condemnatory rhetoric provoked reactions among Sephardim at the Congress in Sarajevo. Outside the Congress, it was difficult for Sephardim to express their responses and thoughts, as Esperanza had no publications in which it could convey its ideological standpoints.

However, the Sephardi response to this harsh criticism expressed at the Congress in Sarajevo, together with a larger programme for Sephardi action, was expressed in August 1913 at the First Sephardi Conference in Vienna. This Conference established the main goals of Sephardi politics as a Jewish national movement. It was organised in the summer of 1913 after the Balkan Wars which marked the official end of Ottoman rule in the largest part of the Balkans. The withdrawal of Ottoman rule inevitably led to further fragmentation of the Sephardi world in the Mediterranean which significantly influenced the political position of the Ottoman Sephardi communities. With another failure of the Ottoman state, its imminent collapse, and resurgence of nationalism, the majority of the empire's Jews had to reconsider their initial rejection of Zionist project.[303] Without the political framework that the Ottoman empire provided until 1913 or a worldwide organisation to connect the dispersed Sephardi communities, Esperanza had to rethink its position in Europe. Thus, as newspapers reported, the Conference in Vienna was dedicated to the consequence of the 'Balkan catastrophe'.[304]

Sephardi representatives gathered in the Turkish temple in Viennese Leopoldstadt to address the burning issue of the Sephardi future in the new context of international politics. There were eighty Sephardim from all Balkan states present at the conference. Moreover, important leaders of the Zionist movement were in attendance as well, including Nahum Sokolow (1859–1936), a highly regarded journalist, thinker and pollical Zionist, Nathan Birnbaum, Victor Jacobsohn, Zionist movement's official representative in Istanbul. Moreover, Rabbis Sephardi communities from Eastern and Western Sephardi Diasporas were at the conference too, among them Dr Moses Gaster (1856–1939), Hakham of the Sephardic Congregation and known Zionist, Jakob Itzhak Niemirower (1872–1939), Rabbi of the Sephardi community in Bucharest. Finally, among invitees was a (self-fashioned) Sephardi Jewish scholar, originally from Palestine, at the time professor in Berlin and later the first Chair of Jewish Studies in the Western Hemisphere at the University of Madrid, Abraham Shalom

[302] 'Dr. Marko Ehrenpreis', *Židovska Smotra* 18, 10 August 1910, 3–4.
[303] Michelle Campos, 'Between "Beloved Ottomania" and "The Land of Israel": The Struggle over Ottomanism and Zionism among Palestine's Sephardi Jews, 1908-13', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 37/4 (Nov. 2005), 461–83.
[304] 'Szefard zsidók világkongresszusa', *Egyenlöség*, 34 (1913), 10.

Yahuda (1877–1951).[305] All gathered, guests and hosts, considered three issues: 'language, centralisation, and general cultural issues' among Sephardim.[306]

The proceedings of the conference have not survived. However, Jacques Confino (1892–1975), the vice-president of Esperanza, summarised the Sephardi position in a text that was published in Zagreb-based *Židovska smotra* in spring 1914. In this text, entitled 'Duties and Work of Sephardi Academic Youth', Confino historicised Esperanza's relationship with the Zionist movement from its beginning until 1914. As he explained it, Esperanza was formed with the goal of cultivating the Spanish language and became a Zionist society only secondly. This was the path of many Jewish societies formed before publication of Theodore Herzl's manifesto *Der Judenstaat*, which envisaged the founding of a future independent Jewish state. Yet Confino defended Esperanza's beginnings end he claimed that even if the society was initially oriented towards Spain and not Palestine 'it cannot be denied even for that [initial] Esperanza cultivation of the Spanish language was an unconscious, emotional [*osećajni*], almost by default understood, but still not clearly expressed national character'.[307] Here, Confino was arguably relying on the aforementioned Zionist myth of the Sephardi Jew as 'the instinctive national Jew'; but he twisted this argument in favour of Sephardi self-sufficiency.

At the beginning, Confino addressed the most common and obvious Zionist criticism, namely Esperanza's initial Spain-oriented programme, referring to this as 'an unfortunate phase'. The society believed that rebuilding Sephardi culture was only possible through connection with contemporary Spain and renewal of their mother (Judeo-)Spanish language in relation to modern Spanish. This came from the members' confident belief that their mother tongue was the unique link for the entire Sepharad and the preferred means for a Sephardi renaissance. However, Esperanza chose to leave 'the glorious times in Spain' to memory and instead to join with the arguments of *Der Judenstaat*. Confino believed that the society proved itself as nationally oriented when it realised its mistake and chose 'Palestine, and not Spain, as the land of future and new Jewish life'. He expressed admiration for the path that had led the Sephardim to Zionism and stated that he had more faith in Zionism since it came as a solution 'after a crisis, a certain internal struggle'.[308] What was important for him, and arguably for the

[305] On Abraham Shalom Yehuda, a fascinating Sephardi individual: Michal Friedman, 'Orientalism between Empires: Abraham Shalom Yahuda at the Intersection of Sepharad, Zionism, and Imperialism', *Jewish Quarterly Review* 109/3 (Summer 2019), 435–51.
[306] Jacques Confino, 'Konferenca Sefarada u Beču', *Židovska Smotra*, 17–18, 1913, 285–86.
[307] J. Confino, 'Zadatak i rad sefardske akademske mladeži', *Židovska Smotra*, 4, 1914, 53–55.
[308] Confino, 'Zadatak i rad', 55.

society's members and alumni, was that Esperanza found its own way to Zionism, rather than approaching this strain of Jewish nationalism by simply following their Ashkenazi brethren.

Esperanza did not give up on preserving and reviving the Sephardi diaspora as an entity. On the contrary, from 1904 Zionism provided a new framework to approach the Sephardi diaspora. Noam Pianko has recognised that certain Jewish thinkers saw Zionism as providing a place where the categories of nationality could be discussed in the Jewish political realm. Namely, for Jewish intellectuals outside the Zionist mainstream, Zionism 'outlined the blueprint for a conception of national identity equally relevant for homeland and diaspora populations, compatible with particular and human allegiances, and distinct from patriotism or political citizenship'.[309]

Zionism crucially informed the Sephardi intellectuals' positioning on the eve of the First World War. What was, however, unique for the Sephardi understanding of Zionism is that, for them, Zionism grew to have a meaning interchangeable with the Jewish political scene. Accordingly, the position of the Sephardi-focused politics began to depend and rely on such all-Jewish politics in Europe. Through Zionism, Esperanza entered the wider Jewish political scene with the aim of accommodating Sepharad within the Jewish national goal. The Jewish national body and the Sephardim were not in contradiction – quite the contrary. They were coming from the same position. However, according to Confino, Sephardi difference was the core of their Jewishness – without this specific Jewish content, their entire Jewish identity would be threatened.

What Confino took from insight was the necessity to balance 'Sephardism' with Zionism. Esperanza wanted 'to preach Zionism in a Sephardi way'. He wrote in the name of his entire brethren: 'We did not want to enter Zionism as an imitation of Western Jews, without our own colour; we wanted to enter it [Zionism] as Sephardim, conscious of our own healthy, spiritual Jewish content, our natural Jewish consciousness, our unmediated Jewish instinct'. The proclaimed Sephardi way to Zionism was, therefore, acceptance and even celebration of the integrity of Sephardi Jewish culture and heritage, in the broadest sense, within the wider Jewish national movement. Therefore, Esperanza's membership recognised the importance of Sephardim serving as Zionist preachers and leaders; only individuals who were familiar with the Sephardi environment and character could reach the Sephardi as a whole. Opposed to this

[309] Noam Pianko, *Zionism and the Roads Not Taken: Rawidowicz, Kaplan, Kohn* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 3.

was the fear of an overwhelmingly foreign, in Confino's phrase, 'Ashkenazi movement'. The Sephardim felt under pressure to give up their culture so they could be part of Zionist politics.

Esperanza's voice was not alone in explicitly raising the question of Sephardi understanding of Zionism and its role. Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews raised this issue in Palestine in the early 1910s. There, as Abigail Jackobson argued, the so-called 'Arab question', discussion on the place of the Muslim population in the Yishuv, divided Zionists in Palestine, with the Sephardim and Mizrahim on the one side, and the Ashkenazim, on the other side.[310] Yet what is unique to Esperanza is the insistence on Sephardi cultural content under the umbrella of the Zionist movement. This was not the matter of situational positioning but rather a beginning of an ideological position that the Sephardim in Sarajevo developed further in the 1920s.

Obviously, not all Sephardim in the Balkans agreed with Esperanza's reading of Zionism. Esperanzistas were especially troubled by the 'blind approach to Zionism' that some Sephardi Jews took. In Confino's eyes, they had only

> assimilated into Western Ashkenazim […] and assimilated poorly as they did it abruptly; from an ordinary Spanyol, overnight, [they] grew into the most Ashkenazi Ashkenaz [*aškenaski Aškenaz*], their most chauvinistic supporter, who uncritically accepted everything he could see on them [Ashkenazim], negating tradition and everything that could remind them of their heritage.[311]

These Sephardi Zionists especially detested Judeo-Spanish as an 'uncultured language of the Orient'. [312] On the other side of the Sephardi spectrum were members of Esperanza who 'entered Zionism' unhurriedly; and, first and foremost, they did it as Sephardi Jews.

Confino underlined that the Sephardim were not alone in this struggle to find a counterpoint to the overwhelmingly dominant position of political Zionism in the early twentieth century. In Vienna, the capital of the monarchy, there was space for voices from Jewish communities, languages, and traditions, and most importantly a range of political opinions. This was the crucial aspect of the metropole that had shaped the Sephardi political

[310] Abigail Jacobson, 'Sephardim, Ashkenazim and the "Arab Question" in the Pre–First World War Palestine: A Reading of three Zionist Newspapers', *Middle Eastern Studies* 39/1 (2003), 105–30. Moshe Behar reflected on the same period and the issue of Jewish newspapers in Arabic in Moshe Behar, '1911: The Birth of the Mizrachi–Ashkenazi Controversy', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 16/2 (2017), 312–31.
[311] Confino, 'Zadatak i rad', 55.
[312] Confino, 'Zadatak i rad', 55.

outlook, with Esperanza's members finding it easy to identify with the problems of Eastern Jews (Istočni Židovi), even if their native communities were separated by thousands of kilometres. The Sephardim became aware of their co-religionists' issues through 'German-Jewish literature' (*nemačko-židovska lektira*) available in Vienna.[313] Confino underlined that it was precisely this indirect contact with their brethren in Eastern Europe that gave the Sephardim the confidence to modify Zionism.

The activity of Jews in Austrian Galicia and parts of the Russian empire from the last two decades of the nineteenth century and especially in the first years of the twentieth century established Eastern Europe as one of the key centres of Jewish politics. They created political platforms that predated Herzl's expansive Vienna-based Zionism. The pillars of Eastern European Jewish political activity were Ahavat Zion, the first Zionist organisation, the General Jewish Labour Bund, formed in 1897, and its Zionist faction Poale Zion, formed in 1906, to name just a few examples. They were not only predecessors of the modern Jewish political arena, but also, after the advent of Herzlian Zionism, pillars of constructive criticism, or even opposition and intellectual debate.[314] Observing Eastern Jews' struggles on the modern political scene was illuminating and offered reassurance and guidance. As Confino wrote, the problems of Eastern European Jews additionally legitimated the Sephardi demand for their own 'understanding of Zionism'. Moreover, the Sephardi Jews learned from their brethren and followed their 'tested roads'.[315] This relationship was cemented through the support that Esperanza received from important Eastern European Jewish intellectuals, particularly those from the left Zionist camp.

Confino listed a number of prominent thinkers and activists who participated in the work of Esperanza by giving lectures and participating in other ways.[316] Some of the named expressed their understanding for the Sephardi goals at Zionist meetings in Vienna. To find Nathan Birnbaum's name on the list is no surprise: Birnbaum and Esperanza shared the idea of Jewish national revival through cultural restoration, while his enthusiasm for Herzl's Zionist project was apparent from the first moment.[317] Notable support came from Jewish intellectuals who had profiled themselves as Labour Zionists in the 1910s, such as Shlomo Kaplansky

[313] Confino, 'Zadatak i rad', 55.
[314] On the immediate (1896–1904) Ahavat Zion and Galician Jews' responses on Herzl's Zionism see Joshua Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 149–96.
[315] Confino, 'Zadatak i rad', 55.
[316] Confino, 'Zadatak i rad', 55.
[317] Jess Olson, *Nathan Birnbaum and Jewish Modernity: Architect of Zionism, Yiddishism, and Orthodoxy* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013), 172–90.

(1884–1950), one of the founders of Poale Zion (Workers of Zion). Among these left-leaning Zionists there were also notable Yiddishists, such as journalist Abraham Coralnik (1883–1937). He was close to the Zionist leadership, namely to Herzl, and was also a contributor to *Die Welt* and an editor of a number of German and Yiddish periodicals, including one in Zagreb. Moreover, Coralnik was active in Croatian Zionist circles and was a participant at the First Conference of The National Association of Zionist in South Slavic Lands of Austro-Hungary (Prva konferencija Zemaljskog udruženja cionista južnoslavenskih zemalja Austrougarske monarhije).[318]

While Coralnik is remembered as a Yiddish journalist, Ber Borochov (1881–1917) holds a special place in this regard. He was not only a Marxist Zionist, but he also developed a systematic programme that integrated Jewish nationalism with orthodox Marxist doctrine by positioning class struggle within a social-national group, something that had previously been inconceivable.[319] Furthermore, Borochov was also the pioneer of Yiddish linguistics and scholarship, with his role in the establishment of Yiddish studies having a twofold significance for the Sephardi cause. Not only did he argue for Yiddish studies as a self-contained language and field of study, but he also supported Yiddish as the Jewish national language in line with the conclusions of the Tchernovits Language Conference in 1906.[320] Even though Yiddish and (Judeo-)Spanish developed in different, but arguably convergent, ways, there is no doubt that Sephardi-oriented individuals were attentive to developments on the Eastern European Jewish cultural front.

Aware that these individuals could be labelled as 'heretics' among political Zionists, Confino also underlined that the support for the Sephardi views also came from Kurt Blumenfeld (1884–1963) and Israel Waldmann (1881–1940), both of whom were established political Zionists. In 1913, Blumenfeld was in his third year as secretary of the World Zionist Organisation, which should have been enough to give him credibility among political Zionists, who understood and approved of Sephardi attitudes. In addition, Confino pointed out the

[318] The 'National Association' in the title is a translation of German *Landesverein*. Ljiljana Dobrovšak,' 'Prva konferencija Zemaljskog udruženja cionista južnoslavenskih zemalja Austrougarske monarhije u Brodu na Savi 1909. godine. Prilog poznavanju početka cionističkog pokreta u Slavoniji', *Scrinia Slavonica*, 6 (2006), 234–66. On Coralnik's writing on Herzl see Clemens Peck, 'Theodor Herzl and the Utopia of the Salon in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna', *Austrian Studies: Jews, Jewish Difference and Austrian Culture. Literary and Historical Perspectives*, 24 (2016), 79–84.

[319] Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981), 139–50.

[320] Dovid Katz, 'Ber Borokhov: The Pioneer of Yiddish Linguistics', *Jewish Frontier*, 47 (1980), 10–14. Barry Trachtenberg, *Revolutionary Roots of Modern Yiddish, 1903–1917* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 108–34.

'sympathies' of Nahum Sokolow.[321] This positive feedback certainly encouraged the society to present their programme and attitudes directly to the Zionist leadership already early in 1914.[322]

The message sent by the Sephardim was to an extent ambiguous; Confino's text, published in *Židovska smotra*, the intended Zionist organ for Jews in the Balkans or at least for those who could read German and/or Serbo-Croatian, reads as both reconciliatory and defensive. It is clear that Sephardim had to operate in the difficult setting of international politics. Without the Ottoman empire as framework for Sephardi politics, it was necessary to renegotiate the Sephardi position in line with the dominant Jewish political movement in Europe but increasingly so in the Balkans as well. Even though their position did not gain an overly optimistic reception, the Sephardi students took a stand far from appeasement. Building on their own work both in Vienna and in the Balkans, the support they were gaining from the left and from Yiddishists among Zionists, the Sephardi Jews defended their role in Jewish politics and asked for its recognition. Confino was aware of this increased Sephardi confidence when writing his pamphlet. The memory of idealised glorious days in medieval Spain was now, in 1913–1914, exchanged for an awareness of the role and power the Sephardim could assume in Jewish politics.

Herzl taught the Jews to 'think in millions', as Osias Thon famously wrote in 1929.[323] However, it became increasingly obvious to both the Zionist leaders and the Sephardi intellectuals that the Sephardi Jews held the key to the success of the Zionist mission in the Eastern Mediterranean, namely the Balkans, then the Ottoman empire, and, finally and most importantly, Palestine, where they made up the majority of Jewish inhabitants. And still, Confino lamented, Zionism was so determinedly centred on German Jews: 'Zionism as a cultural movement is a mere phrase for us, if it indeed means this [neglect of Sephardim].'[324] These words resonated strongly in the Balkan Jewish community and could not pass without a response.

Answering Confino's strong claims fell to Samuel Maestro, a member of Bar Giora and a Sephardi Jew from Bosnia. His response reads as a mere negation of Sephardi claims with a clear attempt to return the dispute to the level of Ashkenazi-Sephardi dichotomy rather than ideological differences within Zionism. Maestro criticised the antagonism between Sephardim

[321] Confino, 'Zadatak i rad', 56.
[322] Central Zionist Archives (CZA), A119\199–148, 149, 150, 151.
[323] Quoted in Shanes, Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity, 151.
[324] Confino, 'Zadatak i rad', 56.

and Ashkenazim as 'the worst disease'. In his eyes, (Ashkenazi) Zionists only jumped in to save the Sephardim from the problems Ashkenazim faced once Western culture started to enter and change their lives. In line with this, Maestro noted that the Zionist path depended on circumstances and that the movement had no intention to go against the Sephardi traditions. However, this would be only possible if the Sephardim stopped insisting on divisions but gave in to the 'overwhelming feeling of unity' between Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Moreover, he suggested that the Sephardi should not worry they would lose their uniqueness – Zionism would only enrich their Jewish characteristics. Therefore, Maestro concluded, there was no need to revise the Zionist approach to Sephardim, neither in Bosnia-Herzegovina, nor elsewhere.[325] The Balkan Zionist leadership and membership had a certain advantage as it held positions in Vienna, centre stage for Jewish politics at the time. With the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire, the Balfour declaration, and a complete reconfiguration of the European political space after the First World War, Zionists, and especially Balkan Zionists, had lost their, to an extent, privileged position. In post-war Europe, they were forced to negotiate with the Sephardim, as they all now lived in one state – the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

2.4 Yugoslav Jews and South Slav Zionists

Sephardi-oriented intellectuals from Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Serbia and the Zionist leadership, predominantly from Croatia–Slavonia and Dalmatia, had come to an agreement on the one political issue of crucial importance for the political map of the Balkans–the Yugoslav question. Their supportive arguments came from different perspectives and even from different political attitudes. Nevertheless, as the unification of all Yugoslav nations was on the table, Jews living in these states negotiated their position within this political framework.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Yugoslav question was receiving ever more debate in predominantly intellectual and cultural circles in Croatia–Slavonia, Dalmatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, but not in political circles. Similar to most nationalist movements, the Yugoslav movement started with intellectual debates on shared culture, predominantly the languages and literatures of South Slavs in the mid nineteenth century. [326] Moreover, sociolinguist Kenneth Naylor rightfully pointed out that language in the Balkans

[325] S. Maestro, ''Cijonisticki rad kod Sefarada: napose u Bosni'', *Židovska Smotra*, 8, 28 April 1914, 118–20.
[326] Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 19–66; Marie-Janine Calic, *The Great Cauldron. A History of Southeastern Europe* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2019), 385–86.

served as a 'flag'; it was a method of asserting independence and sovereignty.[327] This, however, did not mean that all these different ethnic and religious groups came to a consensus what their common, Yugoslav nation would be. As Dejan Djokic has summed it up, there was no fixed idea about what it meant to be Yugoslav as it was 'a fluid concept, understood differently at different times'.[328] Nevertheless, even this vague idea, at first limited to intellectual circles both in Serbia and among South Slavs living in Austro-Hungary, radical youth, and slowly grew into a political movement across the region. It had its first concrete manifestation in the southern regions of the Habsburg monarchy, where Serbo-Croatian speakers represented a significant proportion of the population, around 10 per cent based on 1910 census.[329] In 1905, mutual defiance of the denationalising politics of the Habsburgs resulted in Croat–Serb Coalition in the Croatian parliament.[330] The Yugoslav political idea was a rebellious movement that offered cultural and growing political resistance to the assimilating and increasingly patronising politics of the Habsburg empire.

The Balkan Zionists shared this outlook on the empire and expressed it in a variety of ways. Resistance to Habsburg politics was apparent from the moment that Bar Giora criticised Austro-Hungarian involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the lack of investment in democratising the political framework of the province.[331] Bar Giora's attitude was contained even in the society's full name in (Serbo-)Croatian: The Society of Jewish Students from Yugoslav Lands (Društvo iz jugoslovenskih zemalja). This name differed in German as 'Yugoslav Lands' was translated as 'South Slavic' (südslavisch); they were aware of the negative, anti-Habsburg label 'Yugoslav' and the irredentist nature of the Yugoslav idea that had been a thorn in the side of Habsburg political circles. Yet the society was proud that it covered all Yugoslav lands – parts of Austria-Hungary where South Slavs had significant presence, Serbia, and even Bulgaria.[332]

In this sense, Bar Giora brough a unique perspective to the Balkans and Yugoslav lands, since previously Jewish nationalists in Europe had been either not particularly sympathetic to

[327] Kenneth Naylor, 'The Sociolinguistic Situation in Yugoslavia with Special Emphasis on Serbo Croatian', in *Language Planning in Yugoslavia*, eds. Ranko Bugarski and Celia Hawkesworth (Columbus: Slavica, 1992), 82.
[328] Dejan Djokic, ''Introduction'', in *Yugoslavism: History of a Failed Idea*, ed. by Dejan Djokic (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 4.
[329] Wilhelm Winkler, 'The Population of the Austrian Republic', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 98 (1921), 1.
[330] Nicholas J. Miller, *Between Nation and State: Serbian Politics in Croatia before the First World War* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 27. Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 21–115.
[331] Seidemann, 'Die Juden in Bosnien und der Zionismus', '3.
[332] 'Četvrti kongres u Sarajevu', *Židovska Smotra*, 18, 31 August 1910, 1–2.

the nations and nation-states in the Balkans, considering them 'non-historical nations',[333] or mere political precedents that should also allow that Jews deserved a state.[334] However, the Yugoslav idea bore specific value for Zionists from 1900 onwards: it was not only a political mode for political and national emancipation but also a multicultural framework. In this context it would be, they hoped, possible to renegotiate the Jews' national standing. Moreover, the Zionist society Bar Giora not only approved the modernist and inclusive Yugoslav idea, but also based its own political aims on Yugoslav unification.

This attitude was apparent when the Zionists sided politically with the Croatian-Serbian coalition in the Croatian parliament in 1906. This new political grouping received the full support of their Zionist compatriots. When the Zionist-leaning Jewish journalist from Zagreb Otto Kraus wrote in 1906 about the state of Jews in Croatia, he emphasised the closeness of the Yugoslav and Jewish national movements: 'We, Jews, who have never seen a disgrace in the confession of our ethnical idiosyncrasy and have always proudly and sincerely emphasized non-national Jewry, we believe that a better era is dawning here and now, that a significant epoch has begun for Jews in Croatia: the epoch of sincere relations with the surrounding Croatian-Serbian nation.'[335] However, besides the Croatian parliament, there was no other formal framework for Croatian-Serbian cooperation in Yugoslav politics. The Dual Monarchy stood only for two political nations: Austria and Hungary. Zionists opted to support the Croatian nation as the third, increasingly relevant, Slavic component of the Habsburg monarchy.

Bar Giora disclosed their political stance towards local political issues in their native Croatia–Slavonia region at the First Congress of Jewish graduates in Osijek (Croatia) in August 1904. This event gathered many Jews with different views. Those most prominently hostile to Zionist politics were the Jews who identified as 'Croats of the Mosaic faith' and opposed any political action on the behalf of Jews as a nation. A week before the Congress, a group of Jewish students in Osijek even signed a petition renouncing Jewish nationalism and identifying exclusively and completely with the Croatian political nation and its interests. Thus, the first

[333] Shanes, Diaspora Nationalism, 128. Shanes brings an example of a particularly unsympathetic 1891 piece from *Israelitisches Volksblat*.
[334] Olson, *Nathan Birnbaum and Jewish Modernity*, 97. Olsen brings a perspective of Smolensky from 1891. Volovici quotes Pinsker's view on Romania and Serbia's 'self-determination' as encouraging for Jewish national leaders. Marc Volovici, *German as a Jewish Problem: Language and Politics of Jewish Nationalism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2020), 50.
[335] Otto Kraus, 'Die Lage der Juden in Kroatien', *Židovska Smotra* 2, 2 December 1906, 53. The summary of this Kraus text in Serbo-Croatian was published on 60–61; emphasis in original.

task of Zionist youth was to convince their audience that Zionism did not clash with belonging to the only 'political nation' in Croatia–Slavonia – that of the Croats.

Siding with this political project also influenced a matter of high importance for Zionism and Jewish nationalism: the question of language. There was no doubt that Bar Giora and Zionists in Croatia–Slavonia followed the official Zionist programme, and its strongly expressed aim to restore Hebrew as the Jewish national language; but at a local level, while Bar Giorans still needed to convince and persuade their compatriots of the reasons and aims of Zionism, they needed to opt for one of the vernaculars. Among them were Hungarian and German, the official languages of the Habsburg empire, languages of high culture and state education. Essentially these were the languages of Jewish emancipation in Austro-Hungarian society. They were also the languages of the majority of Jewish immigrants to the southern lands of the empire (Croatia-Slavonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina). On the other hand, there was (Serbo-)Croatian, a relatively new and promisingly inclusive linguistic project, propagated equally among Ashkenazim and Sephardim in the Balkans. Young Zionists, stemming from predominantly German-speaking families and educated in Vienna, had three concrete reasons to opt for the South Slavic language as the only suitable choice for their mission. All of these were expressed at the First Congress of Jewish Graduates in Osijek in 1904, or not long afterwards in the work of Bar Giora.

First, answering the attacks coming from the 'Croatians of Mosaic faith' and aiming to pacify Jews who also identified as Croats, the Congress declared that Jewish graduates were loyal members of the Croatian political nation and, as such, proclaimed the Croatian language for the language of the Congress and the only legitimate language for Croatian Jews.[336] To avoid any clashes, this proclamation opened the event, and speakers were invited to present in this language. This attempt by the organisers to have the entire congress in Croatian was a significant challenge for the majority of speakers and also for the audience. On a couple of occasions the speakers asked to present in German (as Rabbi Kaufmann from Virovitica did), or the audience demanded that the lecturers should speak in German (as in the case of journalist Otto Kraus).[337] However, this uneasy transition from German, which had previously dominated the political arena, to Croatian was not only a Jewish problem; rather, it was a dominant issue for the cultural and political elite of Osijek and Slavonia in this period.[338]

[336] Dobrovšak, 'Prvi cionistički kongres', 488–89.
[337] Dobrovšak, 'Prvi cionistički kongres', 490–91.
[338] Anamarija Lukić, ''Language Transition in the Town of Osijek at the End of Austro-Hungarian Rule', in *Language Diversity in the Late Habsburg Empire: Regional Perspectives in Global Context*, ed. by M. Prokopovych, C. Bethke, and T. Scheer (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019), 72–86.

Second, Bar Giorans used (Serbo-)Croatian as a symbol of detachment from previous generations and their politics. Emil Kerenji explained this adherence to (Serbo-)Croatian by the New Jewish Youth (Mladožidovi), as these first Zionists from Croatia referred to themselves. For them, opting for the language of the South Slavs was a statement against their fathers, the generation that had firmly believed in the liberal construction of the Habsburg monarchy and its emancipation project. German was, in Croatia–Slavonia as elsewhere in German-speaking Central European lands, the language of betrayed faith in Jewish emancipation.[339] At the beginning of the twentieth century, almost four decades after the civic emancipation of Jews in the empire and without any structural changes in the empire's policies towards national minorities, it was obvious that promises made had been betrayed, and siding first with the Croatian national project and soon afterwards with the Yugoslav movement seemed beneficial for the Jewish national plans.[340]

Third, Serbo-Croatian was the shared ground for Sephardim and Ashkenazim in this part of the Balkans. German was the language that separated Bar Giorans from their targeted audience, namely, the Sephardim. Although the Zionist society had made the pledge to (Serbo-)Croatian in 1904, in practice and outside the Yugoslav lands, they did not practice what they preached. This came across through the communication of Bar Giora's members with their colleagues from Esperanza. While reminiscing about his student days in Esperanza (1910–1914), Jacques Confino named the factors that separated the Sephardim in Esperanza from Bar Giora's members. Strictly speaking, the differences were obvious, as Bar Giora's members were exclusively Zionist and intolerant to the Sephardi. Moreover, the two student groups came from 'two worlds', the two hostile countries of Austria-Hungary and Serbia. But most of all, it was the language issue that alienated these students:

> On the one hand, we were with Spanish, or Serbian; on the other, they were with German, or Croatian. They preferred to speak German, perhaps with the best intention so that we [Sephardim] could learn it, because why were we, in the end, in Vienna? […] They seemed to us as somehow stilted, too refined! It seemed to us that they look at us with a pitiful smile […] And they were lions. In a word, they were there [in Vienna] as if at home, and we were pariahs and newcomers.[341]

[339] Volovici, German as a Jewish Problem.
[340] Kerenji, 'Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia', 58.
[341] J. Confino, ''Uspomene i refleksije',' *Jevrejski Glas*, 14 September 1928, 6.

From Confino's memory, Bar Giora's members insisted on German, even if they, or at least a part of their members, could speak (Serbo-)Croatian with their Sephardi peers. This divide deeply affected not only how the two groups presented themselves but also their interaction well into the twentieth century.[342]

While the vernacular of Zionism was interchangeable between German and Serbo-Croatian depending on the context, Bar Giora was officially dedicated to the linguistic unification of the Balkan Jews – and this is clear from their publications. The society printed annual reports in Serbo-Croatian in Vienna, but, in 1906, brought out *Židovska smotra* (Jewish Review), which began in Zagreb first as a monthly and soon afterwards as a weekly journal. Its editor-in-chief was Herman Licht and the editor was Aleksandar Licht. This paper was dedicated to politics as well as to literature, social issues, and communal news. The title, the subsections, and advertisements were all printed in Serbo-Croatian from the very beginning. However, in the first years, almost all the polemical texts were printed in German (or were reprints from newspapers and magazines that had originally been published in German). Arguably, *Židovska smotra* was intended to fulfil two purposes: to inform Serbo-Croatian-readers about events on the European Jewish political and cultural scene, and to keep German readers up to date on events in the Yugoslav lands.[343] The newspaper came out until 1914, having gradually become a solely Serbo-Croatian publication. *Židovska smotra* was the longest living pre-war Jewish paper in the region, compared with Judeo-Spanish publications *La Alborada* and *El Amigo del Pueblo* that lasted for only a few years. Arguably, this makes *Židovska smotra* the most eminent Jewish newspaper there in the pre-war period and confirms Zionists' dedication if not even success. Its direct successor was *Židov* (Jew), which started coming out during the war, in 1917, under the same editorial board and with a very similar structure and content.

It is difficult to estimate the extent of *Židovska smotra*'s readership outside Croatia–Slavonia, but it may be noted that in 1910 David Alkalaj from Belgrade and the Jewish Reading Room (Jevrejska čitaonica) in Semlin contributed to the newspaper's coffers.[344] Moreover, it definitely reached Sarajevo, as the city's Jewish Community Library holds a copy of the entire 1909 run, signed by Vita (Chajim) Kajon (1888–1941), also an Esperanza member. It seems that the printed word was the way into Sephardi circles in Sarajevo, where certain Sephardi

[342] Marija Vulesica, 'An Ambivalent Relationship: The Yugoslav Zionists and Their Perception of "Germanness", Germany, and the German Jews at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century', in *Jews and Germans in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Tobias Grill (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 176–98.
[343] Kerenji, 'Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia', 65–80.
[344] 'Prinosi za novinski fond "Židovske smotre"', *Židovska smotra*, 8, 13 April 1910/ Nisan 5670, 8.

pupil enthusiasts, such as Isak Samokovlija were already interested in first Sephardi ventures into Serbo-Croatian poetry and prose in Sarajevo.[345]

The Zionists in the Balkans balanced the Yugoslav movement with support for the Croatian national project. Thus, Emil Kerenji's argument that Bar Giora had '[the] goal of introducing the Serbo-Croatian Jewish population to Zionism' essentially means that the sole purpose of Bar Giora was to spread Zionism among Sephardim.[346] The 'Serbo-Croatian Jewish population' that Kerenji mentions did not exist, at least not prior to the development of the Zionist network in the Balkans. Examples from the Zionist Congress in 1904 confirm that German was still the dominant language in Croatia–Slavonia and that Zionists' acceptance of Serbo-Croatian was gradual. Therefore, the Zionists from Croatia–Slavonia judged the political moment well, siding with the Croatian political public at a local level, but indirectly supporting the Yugoslav movement at a regional level. Furthermore, only in accordance with the goals of the Zionist organisation's plans for Jewish people in South-Eastern Europe did Bar Giora introduce Serbo-Croatian as the language of Zionism in this region.

2.5 Sephardi Zionists

As this chapter has suggested, Zionism played a crucial role in Sephardi political positioning from 1910s. The reception and understanding of Zionism among the Balkan Sephardim, however, was specific and tuned to their political experience of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Political Zionism, the strain centred on forming a Jewish state in Palestine, had particularly devoted followers among Balkan Sephardim. Their understanding of the movement differed from that of the Yugoslav Zionist leadership, which came mainly from Croatia and Slavonia, such as Aleksandar Licht, Hugo Spitzer, whose circles were deeply embedded in the Austro-Hungarian political and cultural scene. Furthermore, their social insights and their experiences of both Jewish politics and anti-Semitism were context-bound. Biographies of two devoted Zionists of Sephardi origin, David Albala (1886–1942) and

[345] Ivo Andrić wrote about Samokovlija's early poetry: Ivo Andrić, 'Letnji dan: Kratko sećanje na mladost Isaka Samokovlije', *Savremenik*, 1–2 (1955), 254–55. On Samokovlija's elementary education: Museum of Literature and Performing Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina (MKPU BiH), Kolekcija Isaka Samokovlije, J-915-1733; 157; 1234. On Samokovlija's engagement with literary circles among Sarajevo's youth of all faiths: Marko Marković, 'Isak Samokovlija', in Isak Samokovlija, *Nosač Samuel: Pripovetke* (Sarajevo: Svijetlost, 1946), ii; Predrag Palavestra, *Književnost Mlade Bosne* (Belgrade: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 1994), 221–22.
[346] Kerenji, 'Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia', 55.

Sabetey Djaen (1883–1948),[347] bring to light certain hitherto overlooked aspects of the Sephardi reception of Zionist ideology. Moreover, they show that even those Sephardim who did not side with Sephardi-specific politics did not passively accept Zionism's general ideological lines and had their own insights into the movement.

There are two factors to note in particular: the role of the nation-state framework in the Balkans, in Albala's case, and the role of the religious interpretation of Zionism, primarily in Djaen's case, but also in some aspects of Albala's work. It is important to underline the different backgrounds that also shaped these two men from different classes. While Albala was a Serbian state military and civil servant for the longest periods of his life, Djaen was arguably one of the last 'extraterritorial subjects', to use Sarah A. Stein's expression, Sephardi Jews whose career led them to frequently cross state and national borders. These men embody two parallel histories of the Sephardim in this region. On the one hand, Albala stood for the secularised and politically accultured and, on the other, Djaen represented traditional structures of the Sephardi *kehilot*. Albala's involvement in nation-state politics contrasted with Djaen's insistence on an exclusive Jewish political sphere. Finally, their language choices show the deep disparity between Sephardim within one state or even one *kehila*: Albala's use of Serbo-Croatian and Djaen's use of Judeo-Spanish and contribution to its literature tackle the issue of one Sephardi language. Taken together, Albala and Djaen showcase convergent paths of Sephardi Zionists.

Historians have previously dwelt on the influences of nation-state settings and religious positioning among Sephardim, though they have not dealt with both. In her study on Zionists in Czechoslovakia, Tatjana Lichtenstein showed how Jews from Czechoslovakia used Zionism to express their loyalty to the state and strengthen their relations with it.[348] On the other hand, writing about an overlooked Sephardi modernity, Norman Stillman argued how it is impossible to understand Zionism in the Sephardi context outside the religious aspect that the Sephardim read into this, secularised, version of Jewish nationalism.[349] Underlined here is precisely the crossing of these two cultural and political frameworks, which helps to explain the Sephardi adherence to Zionism. It helps to illumine the complex relationship between Sephardim in the Balkans and Zionism, a form of Central European Jewish nationalism.

[347] Other scholars and sources I have encountered various spelling of Djaen's last name: Džaen, Djain, etc. I am using the spelling Djaen himself used in his personal correspondence. Jewish Historical Museum Belgrade, Reel 784/1454.

[348] Tatjana Lichtenstein, *Zionists in Interwar Czechoslovakia: Minority Nationalism and the Politics of Belonging* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

[349] Norman A. Stillman, *Sephardi Religious Responses to Modernity*, Sherman Lecture Series 1 (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995).

David Albala and Sabatey Djaen belonged to the same generation but to two different social and cultural milieux. Albala was born in 1886 in Belgrade into a poor family, the seventh child of a tinsmith named David Kovu. After the death of his mother, Lea Melamed, his mother's sister Sofia and her husband adopted David, and he took the last name of his adoptive father, Isak Albala.[350] After his adoption, the boy lived in a well-off merchant family, which enabled him to receive the most prestigious education a Jew could have in Serbia: elementary education in the school in the centre of Belgrade, which was attended by only the Jews of better standing, alongside the children of well-off Christians. Albala graduated from the First Royal High School (Prva kraljevska gimnazija) and was encouraged to pursue medicine at the University of Vienna.[351] This educational trajectory, prestigious for Jews and Christians alike, testifies to the fact that he belonged to the stream of Sephardi Jewry that was seen as almost fully acculturated into Serbian society.[352]

Djaen, on the other hand, was born into a religious Sephardi family in Plevna, Bulgaria, in 1883. His father was devoutly attached to the return to Eretz Yisrael and, most likely inspired by religious reasons similar to the ideas Rabbi Jehuda Alkalai was advocating in the 1860s, he moved to Palestine.[353] Following his father's departure, Sabatey went to Constantinople to study under Rabbi Abraham Danon. In 1902 he briefly settled in Niš, in Southern Serbia, in a small Sephardi community, where he already showed devotion to the Zionist project and formed the first Zionist organisation in the town. He even named his daughter Theodora, after Theodor Herzl, not long after Herzl's death in 1905. [354] Following his spell in Serbia, for two years Djaen occupied a teaching position in Travnik, in the northern part of the Condominium Bosnia-Herzegovina. There he was remembered as a dedicated, progressive teacher who went out of his way to establish a curriculum for education even when the community was opposed to it. In Travnik, he insisted on religious school on Saturdays and Sundays, and dedicated significant efforts to introduce his pupils to reading the Hebrew Bible and prayers, learning Hebrew, both written and in conversation, and Jewish history.[355] From Bosnia, Djaen went on

[350] All of his siblings were adopted into different families or sent across the world; in 1916/17 he found one of his brothers, Joe Kaufmann, in Pittsburgh.
[351] Paulina Lebl Albala, *Vidov život. Biografija Dr Davida Albale* (Belgrade : Čigoja štampa, 2008), 8–9. AUW, David Albala WS 1905/1906.
[352] Krinka Vidaković-Petrov, 'David Albala: The Forging of a Double Loyalty', *Journal of the North American Society for Serbian Studies* 28, 1–2 (2017): 57–73.
[353] These religious-based Zionist ideas were common in Bulgaria at the time. More in Aron Rodrigue and Esther Benbassa, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th–20th Centuries* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1993), 118–21.
[354] Ženi Lebl, *Plima i slom*, 184.
[355] Josef Konforti, *Travnički Jevreji* (Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavija, 1976), 22.

to occupy a position of teacher in the Sephardi community in Belgrade, and Moše Mevorah remembered him as a great public speaker in 'Spanish', who did not know much of the language of the state (Serbian).[356]

The paths of these two young men intersected in Belgrade for a while around 1907, when the city started developing a Jewish political scene. To become politically active in Jewish politics in Serbia, one apparently had to spend some time in neighbouring Austria-Hungary. David Albala was still a student of medicine in Vienna at this time, and also a member of Bar Giora, possibly one of the first Sephardi members of the Zionist society. Prior to his departure for the Habsburg capital, he was a member of a Jewish nationalist youth club in Belgrade; but nevertheless he ascribed his Zionism to his years in Vienna 'where he rubbed elbows with many of the greatest leaders of the Zionist movements'.[357] His wife and biographer, Paulina Albala, linked his lifelong friendships with leading Zionists in Yugoslavia such as Aleksandar Licht, Beno Stein, Dr Altman, and even the Sephardi leader Vita Kajon to the years he spent in Bar Giora.[358] Albala was among the active participants of the society, and he rose to the position of president in 1909.[359] In this capacity he was involved with the Third Congress of Jewish Graduates in Yugoslav Lands that was held over the 1909 summer holidays in Semlin, a town just across Danube from Belgrade, but still in (Austria-)Hungary. This was the first Zionist event that also directly addressed Ashkenazi-Sephardi relations in the region and also sparked an ardent Zionist organisation in Belgrade, Gideon, under the leadership of David Alkalaj and Sabatey Djaen.[360] The streams of Zionist politics of these two protagonists met in those pre-war years in Belgrade. However, they did not overlap much, as Albala and Djaen belonged to two different spheres.

Albala remained involved in Jewish youth politics in the Yugoslav lands, within Bar Giora's Zionist programme that also assumed closer connections between Sephardim and Ashkenazim in the Balkans at the cost of Esperanza's all-Sephardi programme. The peak of Bar Giora's work was the Fourth Congress of Jewish Graduates in Sarajevo in the summer of 1910, (as described in more detail in Chapter 2). Albala had a significant role in this event, being named the Congress's president as the only renowned member of Bar Giora who was

[356] Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), Eventov collection, Moše Mevorah to Jakir Eventov, 22 May 1974, B-33.
[357] 'A Serbian Jewish Captain: An Interview with Captain David Albala, by Our Washington Correspondent', *American Jewish Chronicle*, 3, 19 October 1917, 701.
[358] Lebl Albala, Vidov život, 10.
[359] 'Društvo Esperanza u Beču', *Židovska smotra*, 7–8, 30 April 1909.
[360] 'Zemun', 63–64.

also a Sephardi Jew.[361] This, however, proved not to be enough of a concession to pave the path to Sephardi–Ashkenazi cooperation. During the Congress all disagreements came to light – the sharp discords regarding the exclusive Sephardi programmes and the question of the patronising leadership position that the Ashkenazim took over their Sephardi brethren. Moreover, Jewish youth was refusing both Zionist- and Sephardi-centred politics in the name of socialism.[362] No matter how resolutely the Zionist press attempted to cover up these controversies, it was obvious that Zionism did not encompass the entire Jewish political spectrum, especially not for the Sephardi Jews. Nevertheless, Albala never showed any signs of aligning with exclusive Sephardi politics.

Interestingly, even though openly stating his own support for the goals of political Zionism, Djaen seems not to have participated in these official Zionist actions, or perhaps did not take part in politics at this time at all. This could be because of his lack of knowledge of Serbo-Croatian which already had become the language of the Zionist movement in the Balkans. Instead, Djaen ruled the field of Judeo-Spanish culture, which was becoming more restricted, and gained recognition as a playwright. There was not much competition: the Judeo-Spanish theatre had some popularity in Serbia and Bosnia but was not nearly as prominent and influential as the Yiddish theatre in Eastern Europe.[363] Yet Djaen turned to this medium and even published a translation into Serbo-Croatian of his one-act *U sirotinjskoj kući* (In a poor household) in Belgrade in 1908.[364] This was only the beginning of his theatrical endeavours.

Clearly the biggest difference between the two men was their stand towards the 'state'. Djaen, born in Bulgaria, but working for years in Bosnia-Herzegovina under Austro-Hungarian rule and Serbia, understandably did not show much attachment to either of those states. On the other side, Albala was a genuine supporter of Serbian politics and the unification of all Serbs living in the surrounding states. The dedication of this young medical doctor began to come to the forefront in the turbulent 1910s. His father was seriously ill and impoverished, and after his graduation Albala had to take on jobs even though he was clearly yearning to dedicate himself to Jewish politics. A couple of years after graduation in 1909, he spent time as a medical doctor working on transatlantic ships on the route from Trieste to South America.[365] However, as soon

[361] Nakon kongresa', *Židovska smotra*, 18, 31 August 1910/26 Ab 5670, 1.
[362] Rezultati izbora u židovskoj kuriji, Ješua D. Salom izabran židovskim narodnim zastupnikom Bosne i Hercegovine, *Židovska Smotra* 11, 25 May 1910/16 Iyar 5670, 1.
[363] María Del Carmen Valentín, 'Judeo-Spanish Theatre', European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe, 43 (2010), 91–101. Olga Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Lettres, and Theatre in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012).
[364] 'Savitaj J. Džain: U sirotinjskoj kući'', *Židovska Smotra*, 4–5, 1908, 126.
[365] Lebl Albala, Vidov život, 10–11.

as the news of the beginning of the Balkan wars reached him, he returned to Serbia to join the Serbian army. He spent the next two years on battlefields in Macedonia and Kosovo, and even after the war he served the newly expanded Serbia, taking up a position as a doctor in Bitolj in 1914. As such, he was a part of the state's political decision to send a group of well-established and trustworthy Jews from Serbia (among them Jovan Mandil, teacher and founder of *Bitoljski list*) to convince the significant number of Jews still in the so-called 'Southern Serbia' to accept the Serbian state.[366]

Albala combined his service to the state with his devotion to the Jewish cause during the First World War. After serving on the fierce Drina front in 1915, he fell ill with typhus and was sent to Greece to recover. He returned to the front in Serbia only just before the withdrawal of the Serbian army across Albania in 1915–1916, and alongside the Serbian government he retreated to Corfu. According to his wife Paulina, Albala, then only a captain, approached the Serbian prime minister, Nikola Pašić, with a plan to go to America and agitate in Zionist circles for the Serbian and Yugoslav cause.[367] He spent the last war years (1917–1918) in the United States, mostly on the east coast. During this time, Albala made a couple of notable diplomatic achievements. First, he managed to convince the Serbian government to be the first to support the Balfour Declaration. Owing to his encouragement, the Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Milenko Vesnić, expressed the sympathy of the Serbian state for the Jewish state in a letter that was sent directly to Albala and then published in newspapers:

> You know, dear captain Albala, that there is no other state in the world that could sympathise more with this cause [the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine] more than Serbia. Are we not crying Babylonian waters for our own country, lost only recently? How could we not join your loud requests and sufferings, which lasted for centuries and generations, especially when our compatriots of your background and faith fought for their Serbian homeland as our best soldiers?[368]

This letter was read as a direct support for the Zionist goal of establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine. Moreover, during the war years, Albala acquired connections within the established Jewish and especially Zionist circles, among whom his most noted contacts were Louis Brandeis and Chaim Weitzman. Albala's position and his political operations were

[366] Ženi Lebl, 208–09.
[367] Lebl Albala, Vidov život, 83–84.
[368] Lebl Albala, Vidov život, 88. Original kept in the CAHJP after David Albala's gift in 1935.

context-specific, and the fact he was on the side of the Entente, the victors in the First World War, allowed him to have a solid career in state service. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that most of the Sephardim in this region were actually citizens of Austria-Hungary.

Djaen, for instance, spent the war years in Vienna, and in 1918 gave a speech in Belgrade, in Judeo-Spanish, calling for Jewish support for Austro-Hungarian occupation and Kaiser Franz Joseph.[369] This did not bring him the backing of the Jewish community in Serbia, and in the immediate post-war period, Djaen found a place for himself in Vienna, where he published his plays in Judeo-Spanish.[370] However, in 1922, he was offered a position in Bitolj, thanks to the recommendation of the president of Bitolj's Jewish community, who believed in his capabilities. His proficiency in Judeo-Spanish and possibly even his lack of proficiency in the state language made Djaen attractive for this community, where Judeo-Spanish was still the dominant language and where Zionism was a direct political solution for the economic challenges Macedonia faced after the Balkan Wars and the First World War. However, Chief Rabbi of Yugoslavia Isak Alcalay did not accept Djaen as a rabbi of Bitolj; Alcalaj explained that Djaen lacked qualifications for the title, so he was named a mere 'priest' and given a salary in accordance with this title. This was the reason for unending debates about Djaen's status and complaints about his salary.[371] Djaen was, therefore, a unique, surviving specimen of the imperial system, albeit in the context of nation-states that expected unfailing expressions of patriotism from their Jewish citizens.

He still managed to find a haven in Bitola (Monastir), in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, where he spent four, very fruitful, years. He welcomed the first official visit from the Sarajevo Sephardim in the winter of 1926 and impressed his guests with the level of Jewish life. Not only did he establish humanitarian organisations supporting orphans or children with only one parent and insist on communal dedication to the study of Judaism, but Djaen also participated in Zionist actions, such as shekel collection. As Benjamin Pinto wrote: 'On one word of Leon Kamhi, Bitolj buys 800 shekels, on one word of Mr Djaen rooms fill with […] young men and women to study the language of Tora and the book of the Old Testament.'[372] Alongside his dedication to Judeo-Spanish, Djaen was a proponent of Hebrew as the Jewish language, and he encouraged his students from the beginning of his career to take up that language. The community even brought a teacher for the *gan* (Jewish kindergarten) from

[369] Lebl, Plima i slom, 186.
[370] María Del Carmen Valentín, 'Judeo-Spanish Theatre', *European Judaism* 43, 2 (2010), 91–101.
[371] Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), Ministarstvo vera, Sabataj Džean 69–54-87.
[372] Benjamin Pinto, 'Među Sefardima u Južnoj Srbiji II, 1–2', *Jevrejski Život*, 139 (1927), 1.

Palestine, so that children would be exposed to Hebrew from an early age.[373] Djaen was remembered as one of the best Hebraists in Belgrade.[374] David Albala had the same faith in the Jewish language as an overarching foundation of Zionism and learned to speak and write Hebrew as an adult, having been taught to read it as a child. He deemed it important to show by his own example that it was possible to learn Hebrew.[375]

The two Zionist workers' views were also intertwined in another way. They both assigned a significant role to the place of religion alongside the generally secular Zionist politics. In Djaen's case, this came naturally, as he was trained in the traditional, religious manner, and he served as rabbinical staff. For Albala, on the other hand, it was a direct consequence of his native Sephardi setting, and a personal choice. In an interview for the *American Jewish Chronicle* in 1917, he explained how in Vienna he had turned to a secular Jewish nationalism in the form of Zionism and had lost the habit of going to synagogue. Upon his return to Belgrade, he had a confrontation with his father.

> My own father was a typical Serbian Jew. He was a successful and busy merchant but all his life-time observant and pious. When I came back from the carefree student life at Vienna, I did not visit synagogue as often as in the boyhood days before I departed for the gay Austrian capital. One day my father took me aside and rebuked this strange indifference in words of hurt surprise. I defended myself. 'But I am a devoted Zionist,' I protested. 'Ah, my son,' he told me with one of his rare smiles, 'one must be a Jew as well as a Zionist.'[376]

Albala took this personal identification experience as a general guiding principle and elaborated his position in one of two plays he wrote. The one that survived is *Erev Jom Kipur* (Erev Yom Kippur), a play written for a Jewish youth theatrical group in Belgrade.

In the play, set in Belgrade, Albala portrays a lower-class family, with a father who is a small merchant, a grandfather who is a teacher, and their law student son and grandson. The main tension in the play comes from the lack of religious beliefs and practice. Set on the night before the biggest Jewish holiday, Yom Kippur (as the title suggests), the play centres on the young Jac (most likely from Jacques, not a very common name for Sephardim in Serbia), who

[373] Marc Cohen, *Last Century of a Sephardic Community: The Jews of Monastir, 1839–1943* (New York: Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, 2003), 124.
[374] Ženi Lebl, Plima i slom. Iz istorije Jevreja Vardarske Makedonija (Belgrade: Dečje novine, 1990), 186.
[375] Lebl Albala, Vidov život, 131.
[376] 'A Serbian Jewish Captain', 702.

does not show up for the traditional dinner that comes after a day of fasting. This is a source of frustration for the male members of the family, and Jac's father tells the rest of his family (wife, three other children, and grandfather) that his son is worse than a goy because at least a goy participates in some kind of ritual, even if it is Christian. This monologue is followed by the grandfather's speech, in which he explains the importance of belief and rituals. Upon his arrival, Jac confronts his father, who is in despair over his son's ways. His father asks him how he expresses love for his people, and Jac initially defends himself by saying that he never intended to denounce Judaism, that he almost never hides that he is a Jew, he has many Jewish friends, and intends to marry a Jewish woman. In his words, he loves Jewish people 'in a modern way, and not through religious rituals'.[377] His father interprets his answer as indicating a lack of knowledge of Jewish history, literature, and language. Jac then confronts his grandfather, who again questions his ways and compares him with Christian youth who also go to church and practise rituals, know their history, think of their brethren across borders, and participate in national movements. He reminds his grandson that he is asked to make a personal sacrifice as the Maccabees did, as Spanish Jews did during the Inquisition, and as Eastern Jews did; but that his

> people ask only to respect its past, to know its present and to take care of its future. And above all, to respect and keep its religion, because religion, and only religion, kept our people from the destruction of the Temple until today. The people who renounced their religion […] have to fall through; without religion, there is no people and there is no life.[378]

In the end, Jac understands, accepts his mistake, and promises to take on the religious aspects of his identity into practice. The play ends with Jac singing Kol Nidre (a prayer sung at the beginning of the Yom Kippur service) from memory.[379] Through this work, Albala sent a strong message to the Belgrade Jewish community: Zionism and Judaism were not exclusive. Moreover, to be a good Zionist, in Albala's eyes, it was necessary to be a practising Jew.

Djaen explicitly embodied this approach as a rabbi and Zionist activist. At the same time, between 1922 and 1928, Djaen held his position in Bitola, but was gone for long periods. For instance, in 1925 he was in the United States, where he collected help in New York for his

[377] David Albala, 'Erev Jom Kipur', *Spomenica*, 119.
[378] Albala, 'Erev Jom Kipur', 120.
[379] Albala, 'Erev Jom Kipur', 121.

community in Bitola. The following year, he departed on a trip to North and South America on the behalf of the Sephardi Federation.

In 1927, Djaen gave a talk to a full hall at Gloria, a Sarajevo society, on his views about the current condition of Sephardi Jews and his hopes for the future. He relied on history and drew his conclusions from sources. The main thesis of his work was that Sephardim always had a distinct wish to return to Zion, and he supported this thesis with the case of Sabbatai Zevi (the seventeenth-century rabbi who claimed to be the Messiah) and the first colonies in Palestine that were organised by Sephardi efforts. Until the nineteenth century, the Sephardim were not 'grand', but they kept the 'purity of race' and 'truthfulness of character'; the 'melody of Hebrew'. With all these characteristics, the Sephardim were bound to contribute to the making of the 'desired type of reborn Jew' as 'yeast in Israel's bread'. In conclusion, Djaen recognised the awakening of Sephardim in Yugoslavia as a result of Esperanza's alumni.[380] He also visited the Sephardi community in Zagreb: this was the first occasion when all the city's Sephardim were gathered together, and Djaen spoke to them about the place of Sephardim in Jewish national life.[381] Apparently, Djaen's views on the exlcusive role of Sepharad did not face criticism among the Zionist circles. According to the surviving records, Djaen did not oppose the official Zionist movement or its representatives. Moreover, the fact that he did not insist on the Sephardi-unique approach but rather focused his activism on Sephardi communities made him a useful asset rather than a defiant individual.

Subsequently, between 1928 and 1931, Djaen held the position of the rabbi of the so-called 'Ottoman' Jewish community in Buenos Aires. There, he was recognised as a modern Jew, with the ability to serve the community in a scholarly capacity but also represent it politically. His career was noteworthy in the history of Argentinian Jewry and, as Adriana Brodsky noted, Djaen 'came to represent what the European Jewish elite has been fighting for: an Ottoman Jew "renewed" by education'.[382] However, he went beyond *consistoria*, the Jewish communal body, and sought to introduce his authority not only in religious contexts but also in cultural and educational institutions. In the religious domain, Djaen, as Chief Rabbi, could not only perform religious rituals but also control shohetim, regulate payers, and oversee morals. His autocratic attitude was met with resistance by the community, parts of which

[380] 'Predavanje nadrabina g. Sabetaja Djaena u Gloriji', *Jevrejski Život*, 143 (1927), 3.
[381] 'Jedna manifestacija "Esperanze"', *Jevrejski Život*, 144 (1927), 2.
[382] Adriana M. Brodsky, *Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine: Creating Community and National Identity 1880–1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 99. On the example of the Chief Rabbi of the time: *Haim Nahum: A Sephardic Chief Rabbi in Politics, 1892–1923*, ed. by Esther Benbassa (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995).

complained at his high religious standards, his frequent travel, and his misunderstanding of the differences within Argentinian Jewry.[383] He stayed in Argentina for only two years and then went to take up a position in Bucharest as the Chief Rabbi of the Sephardi community of Romania. He stayed there until the end of the war, having survived the Holocaust thanks to the Turkish ambassador of Romania. He died in 1947 in Argentina, during a journey he was taking for the Sephardi Federation.

In the 1930s and 1940s, David Albala took on positions in the Sephardi community, first as vice-president under Jakov Čelebonović and later as president. In 1935, he travelled to Palestine[384] and deposited the telegram from Milenko Vesnić with expressed support for the Balfour Declaration in the Central Archive of the History of Jewish Peoples and the Hebrew University. In 1939, he left for the United States on a special mission on the behalf of the Yugoslav state. He was still there when the Second World War began in Yugoslavia in April 1941.[385] He died the following year, leaving behind his wife Paulina and daughter Jelica, in Washington, DC.

The fact that both Djaen and Albala acted within the Zionist movement primarily as Sephardi individuals explains why their views were not mirrored by the wider communities. They embodied the diversity of Sephardi communal, cultural, and political life, but never aimed at engaging with Sephardi Jews as a separate entity. This distinguished their work from the Sephardi movement which was gaining steady support from the mid-1920s, as discussed in the next chapter.

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This chapter has historicised the Zionist and Sephardi movements in first two decades of the twentieth century, the crucial period for their establishment in the Balkans. The Zionist and Sephardi movement started off at the same time, during the last years of the nineteenth century, and in the same Viennese setting. Their conflicting relationship in this period aside, the two Jewish national movements influenced each other and, in doing so, shaped the Jewish political scene in the Balkans.

The chapter explains how the Zionist approach to Sephardim changed in the course of the first two decades of the twentieth century. From the idea of Sepharad based on the dominant German-Jewish cultural and racial imagination to the more direct contact with Sephardim in Bosnia and Herzegovina under Austro-Hungarian occupation, Zionists not only altered their

[383] Brodsky, Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine, 100–02.
[384] CAHJP, Eventov Collection, David Albala to Žak Fried, 22 April 1935, A–50_R.
[385] CAHJP, Eventov Collection, Paulina Albala to Žak Fried, 11 January 1949, A–50.

mental pictures of their brethren but also their policies. This readiness to modify their approach to Balkan Jewish life gave the early Zionist movement significant impetus.

In the first years of the twentieth century the Zionist movement became the dominant force in Jewish political life in the peninsula. This was more than obvious to Esperanza, the Sephardi student society, which declared its loyalty to Zionist goals as early as 1904. However, Sephardi intellectuals were not ready to give up their unique Sephardi political objectives even if they were not easy to accomplish. The Sephardi movement suffered in this period (1902–1918) due to its exclusivity, lack of means to connect with and engage the wider Sephardi communities, and ambivalent attitude towards non-Jewish politics. For these reasons, the Sephardi movement had to rely on the Zionist network for political initiative. Yet the two political movements became dependent on each other, drew their own self-definitions in the process, and acted together in a rapidly changing political context that increasingly embraced non-Jewish politics. This tight and often conflicting connection between the two poles of Jewish politics was to be at the forefront of cultural and political debates up to the 1930s.

Chapter 4

From Local to Global: Sephardi Politics (1918–1940)

Europe after the First World War represented a break with the old system. The collapse of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires and the eruption of the Bolshevik revolution shook the ground of Jewish politics in Central and Eastern Europe. Diaspora nationalists still held ground, to some extent backed by the Yiddishist movement, a powerful cultural and political instrument of Jewish life in Eastern Europe in the 1920s. On the other side of the Jewish political spectrum, in parallel with the growth and importance of the Yishuv and certain diplomatic victories, Zionism became an important force in European politics. After the defeat of the German and Habsburg empires in the war, Zionism could not justify remaining centred in Germany and Austria. Already during the war, the Central Zionist Office moved to London and remained there, upheld by the Balfour Declaration and attitudes of the British empire towards Yishuv. The decentralisation was not merely geographical. In this period, Zionism also garnered two ideological streams, one cultural and one political, which diverged increasingly and gained growing attention and support across the continent. Finally, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire opened up spaces for political activity among the Jews of the Eastern Mediterranean. Jews in colonised North Africa interacted with the British, French, and Italian states.[386] To sum up, after the war it became increasingly obvious that there was not *one* Jewish politics, but a multitude of streams, plans, and programmes that rarely shared the same raison d'être, approach, or even goals.

In the context of these multiple projects, the Sephardi-led politics reached its peak in this period – this was the height of the ideological positioning of the Sephardi intellectuals and their engagement with the wider Sephardi population in the Balkans. The Balkan Sephardi centre in Sarajevo had a new position in the recently formed state of South Slavs (Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, from 1929 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia). These changed circumstances

[386] On Jewish politics and culture in Weimar Germany, see Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). On Yiddishism, see David E. Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005); Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish Culture: The Story of the Yiddish Language Movement* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997); David Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture*, 1918–1930 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). On Zionism in the German context, see Hagit Lavasky, *Before Catastrophe: The Distinctive Path of German Zionists* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Leo Beack Institute, 1996). On Zionism and politics of the left in Eastern Europe, see Zvi Gitelman ed., *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburg University Press, 2003); Shlomo Na'aman, *Marxismus und Zionismus* (Gerlingen: Belicher, 1997). On Buber, the key ideologue of cultural Zionism in the 1920s: Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Martin Buber: A Life of Faith and Dissent* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press 2019.

were very often discouraging and limiting for Sephardim. Yet educated Sephardim who continued to flow into Sarajevo and Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were dissatisfied with the position of Sephardim in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Jewish World were eager for change. They were encouraged by the bourgeoning of political options on the Jewish political scene in Europe and the convergence of worldwide interest in Sephardi Jews. This chapter argues that, in redefining and asserting their position at the local, Sarajevan, and state levels, the Sephardim were encouraged to address the issues they perceived in Jewish politics at a global level. The chapter further aims to shed light on the local and global aspects of Sephardi politics.

First, the chapter looks into how the new, post-imperial Yugoslav state setting of the Balkan Sephardi induced an independent Sephardi politics. The revised borders following the First World War caused structural changes for many Jewish communities in Europe, including the Sephardi Jews in the Balkans. With the majority of them living in the Yugoslav state, established in 1918, the Balkan Sephardim faced another novel situation: for the first time in modern history, the Sephardim were a minority outnumbered by their coreligionist Ashkenazim. This compounded their complex relationship with Ashkenazim, especially (Ashkenazi) Zionist leaders. The balancing that was necessary between internal Jewish and external state politics pushed the Sarajevo-based Sephardi leaders to define their stand, political goals, and the extent of their outreach activities with Balkan Jewry.

Second, the chapter offers an insight into the ideological positioning of Sephardi intellectuals, the leaders of the movement. It describes how they legitimised the need for Sephardi-centric politics in the local Sarajevo and Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes setting. Sephardi intellectuals offered not only a basis for navigating Ashkenazi-Sephardi relations, but also a new approach to the Jews as a nation, arguing for a pluralist Jewish culture and politics.

Third, Sephardi-oriented politics started figuring at local and worldwide levels after the formation of the World Sephardi Organisation (WSO) in 1925. The two strains of Sephardi politics converged in the project of connecting to form Sephardi *kehilot*. Starting in 1926, Sephardi youth organised trips to the country's borders and abroad with the aim of creating a Sephardi network that would be a parallel to a Zionist organisation. The chance to participate in a wider Jewish political scene created a paradox in Sephardi politics. On the one hand, the formal federation legitimised and expanded the realm of the Sephardi-led politics from Central and Southeastern Europe to the Mediterranean. On the map of the organisation, Sarajevo became a reference point for Sephardi politics, next to Jerusalem. It was a confidence boost for

Sephardi intellectuals, who expanded programmes and set out to find solutions to problems that Sephardim worldwide faced. On the other hand, the first Sephardi body existed within a political organisation that was not interested in Sephardim per se. The WSO was founded under the umbrella of the Zionist organisation and, thus, also focused on building a new state in Palestine, where Sephardim would be only a part of a new Jewish society. While it represented Sephardi needs, to a certain extent the WSO responded to European (Ashkenazi) ideas of Sephardi Jews. The Sarajevo Sephardi circle was, then, in opposition to the leaders of political Zionism in Yugoslavia, but also participating in a campaign of political Zionism at the global level. Economic stagnation, issues of social integration and production in new settings, and questions of literacy and cultural production –Sephardi intellectuals deemed that all these issues had to be responded to through the Sephardi political agenda. The questions were many but the answer, they held, must be one. Thus, in the interwar period, the Sephardi intellectuals offered versions of diaspora nationalism, Zionism, and socialism as Jewish political responses, but in a Sephardi key.

4.1 From Vienna to the Balkans: the new Balkan Jewish setting (1918–1924)

The formation of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in December 1918 brought together two Jewish groups, the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim, in one polity. Difficulties in organising the Jewish community of the new state were indeed reflecting the difficulties in setting up the new society with the dominant South Slav population, The new setting meant a significant change for all Jews, but especially for the Sephardi leadership. From the first day, the Sephardim had to accept their new position – they were no longer the dominant Jewish community, since the Ashkenazim held a solid majority over the Sephardim. Based on the 1931 nationwide census, 68,405 Jews lived in the Yugoslav Kingdom, of which 39,227 were Ashkenazi, 26,168 Sephardi, while 3,227 declared themselves Orthodox Jews.[387] Sephardim had been living in close contact with Ashkenazim for centuries, especially in smaller Jewish communities in merchant-oriented and border towns where the situation often required a united front towards gentile society. Yet Sephardi-Ashkenazi relations had depended on the circumstances and varied from amicable to hostile almost everywhere, from Vienna to Jerusalem.[388] In parts of the Balkans where Sephardim were the majority – territories of today's

[387] *Statistički pregled Kraljevine Jugoslavije po banovinama* (Belgrade: Državna štamparija, 1930), 4.
[388] On the conflicts between Sephardi and Ashkenazi kehilot in Vienna, see N. M. Gelber, 'The Sephardic Community in Vienna', *Jewish Social Studies*, 10 (1948), 359–96. On the case of Jerusalem under Ottoman rule, see Matthias B. Lehmann, 'Rethinking Sephardi Identity: Jews and Other Jews in Ottoman Palestine', *Jewish*

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Greece, and Albania – Ashkenazi Jews mostly formed merchant colonies and, aware of their position, had rarely tried to overpower the Sephardim. A rare example of Ashkenazi attempts to push their agenda more alongside than over the Sephardi was in Bosnia-Herzegovina under Austro-Hungarian rule, where Ashkenazim grew in numbers and significance after 1878. However, this was more of an exception than a rule.

Even if dominant in numbers, the Ashkenazim in Yugoslavia could in no way be seen as a monolith. The majority of Ashkenazim lived dispersed across the northern parts of the Yugoslav Kingdom: in the territories of Croatia and Slavonia, former southern Hungary (in 1918 attached to Serbia as Vojvodina province), and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The majority of them belonged to the Neologue (Reform, dominant among Hungarian-speaking Jewry) camp of Judaism, with the exception of a couple of Orthodox communities in Vojvodina (Subotica and Kanjiža). The Ashkenazi Jews differed among themselves mostly in their language choices: Yiddish was not a common linguistic choice, instead they spoke a variety of languages, including German, Hungarian, (Serbo-)Croatian, and Italian.[389] Cultural differences aside, Ashkenazim were still territorially and politically united through their historical experience of the Austro-Hungarian empire. The Jewish communities in Croatia–Slavonia, former Austrian territories, and Vojvodina, previously a part of Hungary, had a long-standing presence, dating back to the eighteenth century. Although Ashkenazim in Bosnia-Herzegovina formed communities only after Austro-Hungarian occupation in 1878, together with other non-Jewish colonists.

Like the Ashkenazim, the Sephardim were also dispersed across territories. The majority of Sephardim were living in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (based on the 1931 census, around 14,500). The second-largest group was living in the region called 'Southern Serbia', consisting of parts of today's South Serbia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. Exactly 7,382 Sephardim lived there in 1931, primarily in the merchant towns of Skopje (Uskub) and Bitola (Monastir).[390] Furthermore, Sephardim had a long presence in merchant towns in

Social Studies, 15 (2008), 81–109. On the case of Yishuv, see Arieh Bruce Saposnik, *Becoming Hebrew: The Creation of a Jewish National Culture in Ottoman Palestine* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 169–73.

[389] Harriet Pass Friedenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia: A Quest for Community* (Skokie: Varda Books, 1979), 16; Harriet Pass Friedenreich, 'Sephardim and Ashkenazim in Inter-War Yugoslavia: Attitudes Toward Jewish Nationalism', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 44 (1977), 55–80.

[390] *Statistički pregled*, 4.

Dalmatia, such as Split and Dubrovnik on the Adriatic coast.[391] From 1918 onwards, there was also a Sephardi colony in Zagreb.[392] Not only were they geographically dispersed, but these Sephardi Jews did not share the same historical experiences of the previous century, and their social, economic and political position varied from one community to other. Yet the largest concentration of Sephardim was in impoverished Macedonia, from where Jewish emigration to the United States and Palestine grew every year after the war.[393]

The historical language of these Sephardi communities, Judeo-Spanish, which had been the uniting thread for the Sephardim across the Balkans for centuries, started to lose its status in the post-imperial world. However, alongside the effort to consolidate their position in the new country and the disparity in the positions of the Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, Sephardi leaders were pushed to find a new framework for the exchange of ideas and knowledge. The traditional system of *kehilot* could not keep up with these changes. Due to these concerns, organising Ashkenazim and Sephardim and their *kehilot* was a strenuous task. It was practically impossible to satisfy the political and social needs and inclinations of all interested groups. Since the Ashkenazim were the majority, based on democratic principles, they led the formation of national-level organisations. It was precisely in these institutions that the Yugoslav Jewish community faced the first conflicts and addressed imbalances between the Jewish groups.

Among Ashkenazim, Zionists were the first to exercise agency, beginning on the eve of the Yugoslav unification. Their political agility was a testament to the pliability and strong organisation they had developed in the decade before the war. Soon after the proclamation of Yugoslav unification in December 1918, Zagreb's Local Zionist Organisation (Mjesna cionistička organizacija) held a meeting of considerable size in the town.[394] Following this meeting, they formed the first Jewish organisation – the Zionist Federation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Savez cionista Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca). The president of the federation was a lawyer named Hugo Spitzer (Špicer) (1858–1936), son of Osijek's chief rabbi Samuel Spitzer and son-in-law of Zagreb's chief rabbi Hozeja Jakobi, a known Zionist, and one of the first supporters of Bar Giora's work. Spitzer held this position between 1918 and 1922. His successor David Alkalaj (1863–1933), a Belgrade-born Sephardi Jew, held the

[391] On Sephardim in Split, see Duško Kečkemet, *Židovi u povijesti Splita* (Split: Novinsko-izdavačko preduzeće 'Slobodna Dalmacija', 1973). Jorjo Tadić, *Jevreji u Dubrovniku do polovine XVII stoljeća*. (Sarajevo: La Benevolencia, 1937). La Benevolencia instigated and supported Tadić's research in the mid-1930s.
[392] 'O sefardskoj koloniji u Zagrebu', *Jevrejski Život*, 152, 27 Nisan 5687/29 April 1927, 1.
[393] Mark Cohen, *The Last Century of a Sephardic Community: The Jews of Monastir* (New York: Foundation for the Advancement of the Sephardic Studies and Culture, 2003).
[394] Jakir Eventov, 'Omladina iz 1918', *Jevrejski Almanah*, 1955–56, 97–109 (101).

position until his death. From then until the Second World War, the leader of the federation was Aleksandar Licht (1884–1948), a lawyer from Zagreb who was one of the founders of Bar Giora and arguably the most vocal and active Zionist thinker in the entire country.[395] Even though this nationwide Zionist Federation garnered support from all Zionist associations, with the exception of Revisionists, it could not encompass the entirety of Jewish life in the new country. The next level of organisation had to be based on religious communities, the institutions at the centre of Jewish life.

Unlike the Zionist local organisations that were a part of a solid network, *kehilot* did not have any structural framework. Communities in Croatia–Slavonia formed a federation in 1909, but never actually went into operation due to obstructionism on the behalf of the Zagreb community. No similar organ existed in pre-war Serbia. Therefore, the formation of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovens (Savez Jevrejskih Opština Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca) took a few years to set up. It was Friedrich Pops, the president of Belgrade's Ashkenazi community, who started agitating from for this organisation, even before the end of the war, while he was a refugee in Switzerland. His efforts were joined by Spitzer, who also served as the first president of the federation from 1921 until 1933. Notably, Spitzer's mandate in the Federation of Religious Communities overlapped for a year with his presidency of the Zionist Federation. After him, Pops became president until his death in 1948. Pops also served as a vice president of the Zionist Federation for the majority of the interwar period.[396] With the exception of Alkalaj, who headed the Zionist Federation, and David Albala, who served as the vice president of the Federation of Religious Communities, there were not many Sephardim in leadership positions in these bodies. Moreover, the leadership did not include Sarajevo's Sephardim. From these examples, it became obvious that Ashkenazi Jews were not only a majority in terms of numbers, but also better organised. Ashkenazi Jews, especially those from Croatia–Slavonia, adhered to political Zionism in line with Theodor Herzl and Max Nordau's plans and relied on a substantial network of Zionist organisations.[397] Even though it could not diminish the Sephardi dominance in the province, especially in Sarajevo, the Zionist organisation had gained a number of supporters in Bosnia even before the war.

From this brief overview of the important names in the only two nationwide Jewish organisations, it becomes apparent that the borders of the Zionist and communal federations

[395] Friedenreich, 'Sephardim and Ashkenazim', 68.
[396] Friedenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 98–99.
[397] Friedenreich, 'Sephardim and Ashkenazim', 66.

were blurred or even, at times, non-existent. Even before the war, Zionists were slowly growing the well-connected network of local organisations based on Herzl's formula of 'conquest of the communities' which finally made Zionists the dominant voice in Jewish political life in Croatia.[398] Furthermore, their influence extended to Bosnia-Herzegovina through Ashkenazim who settled in this province during the Austro-Hungarian occupation. This came to the fore in the policies that the two bodies pursued and that aimed to redraw the boundaries of the autonomy of the *kehila*, the institution that had been the bastion of social and cultural life. For instance, the Federation of Religious Communities proposed and advertised a merger of 'Jewish national' (*jevrejsko-nacijonalne*) organisations into the Zionist Federation. Under 'Jewish national' organisation, the proponents of this idea aimed to include *all* Jewish cultural, social, and political associations in the Zionist Federation.

Under this pretext, the leadership of the Jewish federation made a number of attempts to influence Sephardi cultural associations to call a halt to their exclusive Sephardi politics and membership. Moreover, associations such as La Benevolencia, a humanitarian and cultural society of Sephardim of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and La Gloria, Sarajevo's Sephardi *kehila*'s music society, were called on to stop 'favouring Sephardim' or to 'renounce their Spanish character'.[399] Both societies reported that these suggestions were discussed in their assemblies and that the membership decided against them.[400] Soon after, a number of Ashkenazim from Bosnia came out with the idea of the 'fusion' of *kehilot*. Essentially, they agitated for uniting Ashkenazi and Sephardi *kehilot* into one body in every town in which these communities had a presence. Before the First World War and the formation of the Yugoslav state, this radical suggestion was an object of wider debate, even if it had relevance only in Bosnia, where a significant Ashkenazi minority lived alongside the Bosnian Sephardim. It seemed on occasions that this idea had some legitimacy, since it happened that whole towns would remain without synagogues because of internal disagreements between Ashkenazim and Sephardim. Debate about this possible merger of communities was part of the agenda of the Zionist circles before the war and the establishment of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, but now they were intensified.[401] Oscar Graf, a Bosnian Zionist, called out the Sephardi community for a lack of interest and cooperation.[402]

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[398] Shmuel Almog, *Zionism and History: The Rise of New Jewish Consciousness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987), 188–93.
[399] 'XIII glavna skupstina drustva La Benevolencija', *Židovska Svijest*, 11–12, 16 Shevat 5679/17 January 1919, 4–5. 'Glavna skupština La Lire', *Židovska Svijest*, 11–12, 16 Shevat 5679/17 January 1919, 6.
[400] 'XIII glavna skupstina drustva La Benevolencija', 4–5. 'Glavna skupština La Lire', 6.
[401] Inž. Grof, 'U oči kongresa općina u Osijeku', *Židovska Svijest*, 32, 29 Sivan 5679/27 June 1919, 1–3.
[402] 'Izveštaj o zemaljskoj konferenciji', *Židov*, 4–5, 30 Shevat 5679/31 January 1919, 2–7.

These were bold propositions from the Ashkenazi side, as cultural associations had been at the core of Sephardi cultural as well as political life since the 1890s; they connected *kehila* leadership and, arguably more importantly, Sephardi intellectuals with their wider audience. Finally, these associations essentially defined Sephardi society, augmented the social and humanitarian aspects of the traditional *kehilot*, and finally contributed to Sephardi political autonomy in both Jewish and non-Jewish contexts. It is hard to imagine that the Sephardim of Sarajevo would be willing to give up on the institutions they had worked so hard to build and sustain, especially in the previous decades.

The Sephardi Jews seem to have been very well aware of their position. As a minority within the country and in the representative body (Federation of Religious Communities), in the first years of the Sephardi-Ashkenazi federation, Sephardim consistently defended their autonomy on the local level of the *kehilot* and associations. Furthermore, the Sephardi leadership from Sarajevo argued that the leadership of the Federation of Religious Communities and the Zionist Federation were unable to see and accept the reality of Jewish life beyond their local Croatian experience. Vita Alkalay presented this line of argument at the conference of the Zionist Federation, following up on the Zionist leader Alexander Licht's report on the 'needs and requests' of the Jewish people. Alkalay observed how pointing to non-Zionists had no real purpose. Moreover, he underlined that 'nationally oriented Jews do not have to be Zionists'.[403] He was supported by Isak Braco Poljokan (1897–1944), who pointed out that the differences between Sephardim and Ashkenazim should not be overlooked. Vita Kajon argued for the preservation of that which is unique to the Sephardi Jews – their traditions and 'Spanish' language. While he argued that 'fusion' could be the final goal, it should not happen before the 'Jewish language', meaning Hebrew, gained dominance in the entire diaspora. This, in Poljokan's opinion, did not make Sephardim separatists, but rather guardians of the Jewish tradition.[404] Both sides showed no intentions to agree on a shared agenda, and very early on in the new country, it became clear that the two camps could only formally exist under one roof. Moreover, the Yugoslav state, as the formal framework for Ashkenazi-Sephardi cooperation, intervened and arguably aggravated relations between the two groups.

As early as 1919, Sephardi-Ashkenazi relations were challenged when the status of a number of Jews, predominantly Ashkenazim, came into question in the eyes of the state authorities. The Paris Peace Conference opened the issue of minorities in the new states that

[403] 'Izveštaj o zemaljskoj konferenciji', 6.
[404] 'Izveštaj o zemaljskoj konferenciji', 7–8.

had been established from the former multi-ethnic and multi-national empires.[405] An article of the Saint Germain Peace Treaty of the Entente with the defeated Austria was of great interest to Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The disputed Article 51 stated that Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was obliged to accept external interference to protect minorities if the League of Nations considered necessary. This was a significant concession for Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as a new multi-national state and the Yugoslav delegation in Paris was not inclined to accept this tutelage. Delegates, and Nikola Pašić (1845–1926), former Serbian prime minister and the leader of the Yugoslav delegates, feared that non-Slavic, and primarily Albanian population in Macedonia, might gain significant protection through this treaty.[406] In 1921, it had 12 million citizens out of which 2 million did not belong to the constitutional Serbian, Croatian, or Slovene nations. The kingdom also had a significant number of ethnic minority groups, the largest of which were ethnic Germans, who made up more than 4 per cent or around 500,000 citizens. Among minorities with significant presence were also ethnic Hungarians, ethnic Romanians, ethnic Russians, ethnic Czechs, ethnic Albanians, and others.[407]

However, the same peace treaty accepted the so-called Native Law, giving citizenship rights only to the (previously) foreign subjects who had settled in the given territory before 1910. In the case of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, this law meant that those settled in its territory between 1910 and 1918 did not automatically gain citizenship and nor were they eligible for any other citizenship (Austrian, Czechoslovakian, Polish) without a detailed application that would have an uncertain result.[408] This legislation targeted all immigrants, but mainly those who settled after the Austro-Hungarian annexation of the province in 1908. Among these were many Ashkenazi Jews.

The European diplomats foresaw the imminent issues that new nation-states would create for countless minority groups on the continent. Thus, the treaties that came out of Paris Peace Conference included the so-called Minority Treaties, granting minorities rights to life,

[405] Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878–1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See especially the chapter 'Paris', 133–69. On general overview of geopolitical problems of Yugoslav unification: Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919. Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2002), 109–124.
[406] Dejan Djokić, *Nikola Pašić and Ante Trumbić. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes* (London: Haus Publishing, 2010), 132–3.
[407] Mirna Zakić, *Ethnic Germans and National Socialism in Yugoslavia in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 25–56.
[408] Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastročad kraljeva. Nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji 1918–1941* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2005), 139. More on the problems Jews faced in post-Habsburg states in: Mira L. Siegelberg, *Statelessness. A Modern History* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2020), 65–67.

the practice of faith, equality, and regulation of the question of citizenship. While the countries who had obliged to respect the rights of minorities, the Minority Treaties were taken as a humiliation as they did not oblige all European states. Rather Great Powers took a patronising position towards the smaller and newer nation-states.[409] In the end, in practice, almost all vulnerable minority groups had already faced a number of discriminatory decrees despite the minority rights and peace treaties.[410] In summer 1919, before the Paris Peace Treaty was signed, Ashkenazi Jews in Bijeljina, a town in the eastern part of Bosnia-Herzegovina, raised their voices about the harsh treatment of fifteen Jewish families who had been lived there for over fifteen years. A couple of individuals were even imprisoned without any clear reason and then fined. Things took a turn for the worse with the outbreak of anti-Semitic articles in the press. In the autumn of 1919, a local newspaper in Derventa, a town in northern Bosnia-Herzegovina, claimed Jews were responsible for the lack of housing. The newspaper explicitly legitimated the expulsion of a number of Jewish families.[411]

The peak of these events was the official order to expel 'aliens' in November 1919. The order specifically targeted 'foreigners' without consistent employment, usurers, and peddlers. Over the following months, it became obvious and openly discussed in Jewish newspapers that the application of this law targeted not only those who had settled in the territories of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes before the war, but also well-off merchants and industrialists who had lived in Bosnia-Herzegovina for decades prior to the war. The authorities at first focused on expelling 'foreigners' from provincial towns, so these policies only reached Sarajevo in 1920. The city was the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina and home to the majority of Austro-Hungarian colonists. Its newspapers reported on v the measures, and the pressure being applied to Jews to sell their property and move in a short span of time.[412] Jewish representatives gave a united response to these expulsions and even visited Minister of Internal Affairs Svetozar Pribićević in person to raise the issue of the criteria for expulsions and to intervene to defend their brethren. The expulsions ended soon after, in the winter of 1919, but it was already too late for hundreds of Jewish families.

Sephardi Jews were also victims of these policies, but indirectly. The paper *Židovska Svijest* (Jewish Consciousness) reported on the case of a widow who was 'Sephardi-born and

[409] Mark Mazower, 'Minorities and the League of Nations', *Deadalus* Vol. 1926, No. 2. (1997), 52–3.
[410] Srđan Mićić, 'Minority Petitions Against Yugoslav Authorities Before the League of Nations', *Tokovi istorije*, 3 (2020), 27–52.
[411] 'Dopis iz Dervente', *Židovska Svijest*, 47, 21 Cheshvan 5680/14 November 1919, 2.
[412] 'K izgonu stranaca', *Židovska Svijest*, 48, 28 Cheshvan 5680/21 November 1919, 2; 'Derventski galicijski Židovi', *Židovska Svijest*, 48, 28 Cheshvan 5680/21 November 1919, 2; 'Ponovni izgoni', *Židovska Svijest*, 50, 13 Kislev 5680/5 December 1919, 1.

of Sephardi heritage' whom the state authorities forcibly relocated to Poland, from where her deceased husband had come to Sarajevo.[413] This case was an example of how the law left Jews vulnerable to expulsion – the authorities who persecuted Jews claimed to be acting within the law. Under this citizenship law, the so-called native right, Sephardi Jews were, in a sense, privileged as they were accepted as 'natives' of the territories included in Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. This position set them apart from their coreligionists in that the vast majority of Sephardim became citizens of the new country without question.

Sephardi behaviour towards the Ashkenazim in the country inflamed the conflict. The Sephardim were discredited when a group of individuals signed a memorandum sent to the Austrian authorities in 1919, seeking the closure of the Ashkenazi *kehila*, which was under Austrian minority protection.[414] Among the petitioners was, infamously, Samuel Pinto, the secretary of Sarajevo's Sephardi community. When the word about this letter got out, all Sephardim were criticised for this disgraceful act and whenever the two groups confronted each other, Ashkenazim were eager to use the memorandum as absolute proof of Sephardi disloyalty to the Jewish cause, both in the new country and in general.

From the perspective of the Ashkenazim, it appeared obvious that the state gave preference to Sephardim. Indeed, it seems that, in the eyes of the Yugoslav state, Serbian Sephardim, and all Sephardim by extension, were loyal elements of society. They had shown their dedication by serving in the victorious Serbian army in the Balkan and First World War. This sacrifice was the ultimate proof of the relationship between Serbian Jews and the Yugoslav state, reinvigorated through the commemoration of victims throughout the interwar period. The Jewish community also played its part by erecting monuments. Moreover, a special volume naming 150 soldiers who died in the wars between 1912 and 1918 contributed to the personal connection between the (Serbian) Jews and the Serbian state, now the centre of the new Yugoslav state.[415] The dedication of 'Serbian Jews' to patriotism was a recurring theme in Jewish circles as well, in both a positive and a negative sense.[416] This underlined the fact that the Ashkenazim, who, were primarily from Croatia–Slavonia and mostly served in the hostile Austro-Hungarian army.

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[413] 'Ponovni izgoni', 1.

[414] Cvi Loker, 'Sarajevski spor i sefardski pokret u Jugoslaviji', *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijski muzej*, 7 (1997), 72–73.

[415] *Spomenica poginulih i umrlih srpskih Jevreja u Balkanskom i svetskom ratu –1918* (Belgrade: Odbor za podizanje spomenika palim jevrejskim ratnicima, 1927). The reprint of the volume in 2014, on the occasion of the widely commemorated (if not celebrated) 100th anniversary of the beginning of the First World War, testifies to the importance of this message to this day.

[416] Vita Kajon, 'O Jevrejima na Balkanu, naročito u Bosni', *Kalendar Prosvjeta* (Sarajevo: Kulturno-prosvjetno društvo Prosvjeta, 1924), 145.

While the sacrifice of individual soldiers on the front had been part of a collective trauma, two individuals had unique roles in Serbia's diplomatic service and had built a direct relationship with the state authorities. David Albala was the Serbian consul to the United States during the war. A part of Albala's work was to present the case for the Yugoslav state in American diplomatic circles. He also employed soft diplomacy by growing his Jewish connections in the United States. Among his acquaintances was, for instance, Louise Brandeis, an associate justice on the Supreme Court of the United States from 1916 to 1939. In an interview Albala gave to the *American Jewish Chronicle* in 1917, he pained the image of Serbia as completely free of anti-Semitism ('Jews were the happiest people in the world in Serbia'[417]) and as a place where Jewish life was declaredly Zionist. By his estimate, Serbia had the highest percentage of Jews who contributed to the Shekel, a fund supporting the establishment of Jewish colonies in Palestine. Moreover, Zionism was 'such an intimate part of Jewish life'.[418] As a dedicated Zionist, Albala delivered a victory for the Balkan Zionists when Serbia came out as the first country to support the Balfour Declaration in the autumn of 1917. Apparently, the decision to support the Jewish state was the result of Alabala's diplomacy.[419] Albala continued his service after 1918 as a Yugoslav delegate to the Paris Peace Conference as an observer and expert on Jewish matters.[420]

Albala was not the only Sephardi Jew in the Serbian diplomatic corps. Isak Alkalay, chief rabbi of Serbia, went on a significant diplomatic mission to the United States and the United Kingdom in 1917 with two goals. Officially, he travelled to the two countries in order to collect aid for Jewish refugees in the Balkans. However, Rabbi Alkalay also took the role of a Yugoslav diplomat. The Serbian Exterior Ministry gave him a mission to advocate in the United States for the new South Slav state that was to be born from the territories of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires.[421] Rabbi Alkalay's work for the Yugoslav cause also led to the favourable position Sephardim enjoyed in the new country, in the eyes of the Ashkenazim. In 1923, the state appointed Rabbi Alkalay the chief rabbi of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. This was an important position as the Chief Rabbinate was the sole institution to represent all Jewish groups, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, Neologue and Orthodox. The fact that

[417] 'A Serbian Jewish Captain: An Interview with Captain David Albala, by Our Washington Correspondent', *The American Jewish Chronicle*, 3 (19 October 1917), 701.
[418] 'A Serbian Jewish Captain', 702.
[419] Milan Koljanin, 'Druga misija Davida Albale u Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama 1939–1942,' *Zbornik Saveza jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije*, 2003, 7–76
[420] Krinka Vidaković-Petrov, 'David Albala: The Forging of a Double Loyalty', *Serbian Studies: Journal of the North American Society for Serbian Studies*, 28 (2017), 57–73 (67).
[421] The Serbian Archive, MID, Ps Vašington, 1918, F I, r 205.

the authorities appointed Alkalay without prior consultations with the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities sparked a lot of criticism, especially in Zionist circles.[422] It was read as yet another obvious sign that Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes openly preferred its Sephardi Jewish citizens.

The almost six-year period of disagreement and tensions on various fronts ended in the spring of 1924. The final event that moulded the relationship of the Sephardi circle with the Zionist organisation in the interwar Yugoslav Kingdom occurred in Sarajevo. At the core of this conflict was a disagreement between Sarajevo Sephardi representatives and the Zionist Federation in Zagreb about the leadership of the Sarajevo branch of the Zionist organisation. The Sephardi side underlined the necessity to include more Sephardim in the local Zionist headquarters. After a weeks-long debate, in April 1924 Sephardi leaders physically took over the local Zionist headquarters in Sarajevo (Židovsko narodno vijeće or Jewish National Council). Each side painted a different picture of the event. The Zionist side, led by Oskar Graf, argued that the overthrow was illegitimate as the state police had intervened on the behalf of the Sephardi leaders, insinuating that the state was backing the Sephardim. The Sephardi side asserted the lack of public support for the previous Zagreb-oriented Zionist leadership in Sarajevo. They ascribed the reaction of the local Zionists to the fact they denied membership to anyone who was not like-minded. Sarajevan Sephardim called out not only their opponents in Sarajevo but also 'their commanders in Zagreb', implying that the attack came from the Yugoslav Zionist Federation in Zagreb rather than the Zionist circles in Sarajevo.[423] Eli Tauber and Cvi Loker, who chronicled the series of events, dubbed it 'the Sarajevan dispute', most likely consciously adopting the words of the Zionist newspaper *Židov* (Jew).[424] However, from the Sephardi perspective, this conflict went beyond Sarajevo and the question of local Zionist leadership. It was the first step on the road to re-establishing Sephardi politics both in Yugoslavia and on a wider scale.

In the first years after the war, Sephardi politics relied on the right to communal, regional, and ultimately Sephardi autonomy within the Yugoslav Jewish communities. The pressure of the central Yugoslav Jewish leadership, aimed at discouraging what they called 'Sephardi separatism', but had the unattended consequence of forging a space for Sephardi-centric politics. As we shall see, the Sephardim felt confident to act because of two factors:

[422] Friedenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 107.
[423] 'Spor medju Sarajevskim Jevrejima u svijetlu istine', *Jevrejski Život*, 1, 22 Veadar 5683/28 March 1924, 2–3.
[424] Eli Tauber, *Jevrejska štampa u BiH 1900–2011* (Sarajevo: Mediacentar, 2011), 33– 39; Loker, 72–79.

rejuvenation of the Sephardi leadership with the new generation that had returned from universities and finding a new ideological base.

4.2 The new orientation: the Sephardi circle in Sarajevo and 'the Sephardi movement'

From its beginnings, the Sephardi political agenda drew its ideological base, leadership, and membership from the educated youth. In its first two decades (1897–1914), the centre of this political thought was Esperanza, the student society at the University of Vienna. While the members were politically active in the Habsburg capital, its alumni spread the political agenda to their hometowns upon returning after their studies. Due to its concentration of Sephardim and also Sephardi associations, Sarajevo was the most fertile soil for Sephardi ideas. The steady relationship between Vienna and Sarajevo made the Sephardi-oriented politics a vibrant political idea that was alluring to youth. It took a couple of years after the war to establish a base of Esperanza alumni in Sarajevo. The fresh graduates did receive special treatment in the society, as illustrated by this article from 1924:

> Equipped with theoretical knowledge, our intelligentsia comes back home to roll up their sleeves and get to work. Two to three months after their return from studies abroad, here they are, our young intellectuals, in the lush setting of the bazaar, with a fast walking pace, following the calling they chose, as if they had never left […]. This is where our strength lies, [in] our national faith in our intelligentsia, eager to use its energy to serve the people for the advancement and flourishing of the Jewish community.[425]

The general impression was that the new names, involvement of men from professions (especially medical doctors and lawyers), and approaches to Jewish politics meant that a new Sephardi politics had emerged in the mid-1920s.

At that time, Esperanza's alumni already held important positions in Sarajevo. First and foremost, it is impossible to omit the fact that the chief rabbi of Sarajevo was Moritz Levy, an active participant in Esperanza's first attempt to secure a spot for the Sephardim in Jewish politics. As the religious head of the Sephardim, Levy enjoyed wide recognition among Zionists as well, which he earned as an active member of Bar Giora at the beginning of the

[425] 'Naše poklonstvo', *Jevrejski Život*, 9, 19 Iyar 5684/23 May 1924, 1–2.

century.[426] Alongside Levy, Sarajevo's Sephardim considered engineer Isidor Sumbul the first Sephardi intellectual. He was among the youth active in all communal cultural initiatives; most notably he was an in-house translator from French and Serbo-Croatian into Judeo-Spanish for the youth-organised theatre group. Sumbul is also said to have translated a Jewish history originally published in French, but his translation was never published. After graduation, he was especially active in La Benevolencia.[427] Sumbul's heir as the leader of the most important Sephardi association was another Esperanza alumnus – Jakov Kajon, a lawyer and the vice president and president of La Benevolencia from the end of the war until 1924. He also served as the president of the Sephardi community between 1922 and 1941.[428]

A crucial role in the new Sephardi society was played by medical doctors. La Benevolencia had taken efforts to offer young Sephardim the option to take up the profession. Many medical professionals considered work in the community to be important, including Josef Salom, the famous founder of Esperanza. Among the younger generation, educated in the 1910s, Isak Samokovlija and Jacques Confino stood out as cultural workers. Notably, Confino was not a Sephardi Jew from Sarajevo, or even from Bosnia and Herzegovina; he hailed from Leskovac, a small town in the south of Serbia. Esperanza alumni kept close connections and Confino wrote laudatory articles about his Sarajevan brethren.[429] He actively followed the situation in Sarajevo and came to engage with the Sephardim. Both Samokovlija and Confino were inspiring writers, which was most likely the reason they rejoined the Sephardi circle as contributors to Sarajevan Jewish newspapers and publications.

One Esperanza alumnus who was crucial in holding the entire Sephardi cultural and political enterprise together was Vita Kajon (1888–1941). Brought up as sons of Sarajevo's first modern bookshop keeper and printer, Daniel Kajon, Vita and his brother Albert enjoyed the company of the town's literary and intellectual elite from a young age. Vita went to Vienna to pursue studies in law and was active in Esperanza as well as wider Jewish circles. Upon his return to Sarajevo, he was eager to exhibit and apply everything he had learned in the Habsburg capital. He was employed as a banker but did not shy away from active involvement in the *kehila* as well as almost all Sephardi associations (La Benevolencija, La Glorija, La Lira) and, ultimately, Sephardi-led newspapers, *Jevrejski Život* (Jewish Life) (1924–28) and *Jevrejski*

[426] Friedenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 154; Noel, 'Izbor nadrabina za Bosnu i Hercegovinu', *Židovska Smotra*, 12, 30 June 1909, 199–201.
[427] 'Inž. I Sumbul, glavni organizator La Benevolencie', *Jevrejski Život*, 9, 23 May 1924/19 Iyar 5684, 5. Stanislav Vinaver (ed.), *Spomenica o proslavi tridesetogodišnjice sarajevskoga kulturno-potpornoga društva La Benevolencia* (Sarajevo: Štamparija i cinkografija 'Vreme'), 7.
[428] Friedenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 118.
[429] J. Confino, 'Sarajlijama', *Jevrejski Zivot*, 13, 25 Sivan 5684/ 27 June 1924, 1.

Glas (Jewish Voice) (1928–41). Early in the post-war period he took over the position of La Benevolencia's secretary. This was arguably La Benevolencia's most productive period, when the organisation grew ambitiously and established an office outside Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Zagreb, the new centre of Sephardi students starting in 1923.[430] Moreover, Vita Kajon was also elected a representative of the community in the Yugoslav Federation of Jewish Religious Communities.[431] He also contributed to non-Jewish periodicals such as *Prosvjetin Kalendar* (Prosvjeta's Calendar) in Sarajevo and *Nova Evropa* (New Europe) in Belgrade.[432] Avram Pinto, a chronicler of pre-Second World War Jewish Sarajevo, even ascribed to Vita Kajon the role of ideologue and social force for the entire Sephardi-oriented political thought.[433]

Among his visionary moves was the cultivation of a new generation of Sephardi intellectuals. La Benevolencia's pre-war focus was on educating a generation of lawyers and medical doctors (with the notable exception of Rabbi Levy who studied Semitic languages and attended Theological Seminary in Vienna). Out of the 32 students that La Benevolencia had supported from 1899 to 1922 at higher education institutions,[434] a large number became officials in the Sephardi *kehila*. Kajon and his co-workers had an eye for cultural and academic contributors. In 1924, another fresh Viennese student, Kalmi Baruch, came to Sarajevo with a degree in languages, this time in Romance languages, having defended a thesis on the phonetic developments in Judeo-Spanish. He became active in the community following his graduation in 1924.[435]

Finally, the chief rabbi of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Isak Alkalay was an alumnus of Esperanza. Esperanzistas made up the core of the Sephardi cultural and political life, joined by a few like-minded Sephardim from outside the circle, most prominently Isak Braco Poljokan, originally from Banja Luka, who also studied in Vienna and Graz before receiving his doctoral degree from the Sorbonne.[436] For this group of men in their prime, the year 1924 was less likely to be remembered as the year of 'the Sarajevan dispute'. For them, it was the year in which they became leaders of the community, as the previous generation retired

[430] Vita Kajon, 'La Benevolencija u zadnjih deset godina', in *Godisnjak Izdaju Jevrejsko kulturno-prosvetno drustvo La Benevolensia u Sarajevu i Dobrotvorno drustvo 'Potpora' u Beogradu* (Sarajevo: Štamparija Menahem Papo, 1933/5694), 7.
[431] Avram Pinto, 'Dr Vita Kajon', *Jevrejski Almanah*, 1959–1960, 168–75.
[432] Vita D. Kajon, 'Jevrejski građani Jugoslavije i njihov odnos prema državi', *Nova Evropa*, 9–10, 21 July 1922, 264–70.
[433] Avram Pinto, 'Dr Vita Kajon', 173–75.
[434] Samuel Pinto, 'La Benevolencia', *Jevrejski Život*, 9, 1 Iyar 5684/23 May 1924, 4.
[435] Kalmi Baruh, 'Der Lautstand des Judenspanischen in Bosnien' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Vienna, 1923).
[436] Avram Pinto, 'Isak Braco Poljokan', *Jevrejski Almanah*, 1965–67, 145–47. Poljokan's doctoral dissertation was on the topic of war crimes (*Le Crime de Guerre*).

from key positions in both the *kehila* and associations. The generational turnover led to a completely new leadership cohort made up of Esperanza alumni. They were not only the enthusiasm behind Sephardi cultural and political life in Sarajevo, but they became the leaders of communal politics and increasingly became interested in reviving the idea of a worldwide Sephardi-led political network.

The new generation's agenda was guided by an unapologetic defence of Sephardi autonomy, culture, and political position. The 'Sephardi-Ashkenazi conflict' in early 1924 in Sarajevo gave impetus to independent Sephardi politics, but the Sephardi intellectuals underlined they were building upon ideas that were already known. The ideas expressed in the mid-1920s were an elaborate continuation of the first steps Esperanza had made in the 1900s and 1910s in Vienna and Sarajevo. There was, however, one significant difference: the gathering of the Sephardi Jews was a part of the Eleventh Zionist Congress in August 1913 the Habsburg capital and therefore it worked within the political Zionist frame of reference that was dominant in Vienna those days. Reporting on the conference, Jacques Confino explained that Esperanza's programme of accenting Sephardi cultural traits was the only way for the Sephardim to practice Zionism. Moreover, in contrast to Zionist societies who worked for the future in Palestine, Esperanza insisted on working for 'now and here'.[437] Here Confino quoted a common motto of diaspora nationalists, who emphasised the need to solve Jewish problems in the diaspora, before or – at least – in parallel with the formation of a Jewish state in Palestine. The so-called *Gegenwartarbeit* (work for the present) approach focused primarily on the demands for the recognition of Jews as a nationality, representation of Jews in government bodies, and a plan for economic and social reform.[438] Sephardi leaders never renounced their loyalty to the main goal of political Zionism, the building of the Jewish national home in Palestine. However, the Sephardi politicians went a step further in the 1920s, strategically pursuing their own political expression and ideologically distancing themselves from political Zionism. The ideological core of Sephardi politics in this period was a peculiar ideological symbiosis between diaspora nationalism and cultural Zionism.

The first step in this programme was the legitimisation of the Sephardi position or addressing the burning issue of 'Sephardi particularism'. This issue was taboo and considered almost un-kosher by Ashkenazim in the Balkans. Confino recalled how Bar Giora questioned

[437] J. Confino, 'Zadatak i rad sefardske akademske mladeži', *Židovska Smotra,* 4, 20 February 1914, 53–55.
[438] David Rechter, 'A Nationalism of Small Things: Jewish Autonomy in Late Habsburg Austria', *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 52 (January 2007), 87–109.

the right of Sephardi Jews to self-organise: 'Are we Sephardi Jews indeed an Extra-Wurst?'[439] If this was an open question during Confino's days in Vienna in the 1910s, the Sephardim in Sarajevo in the 1920s worked on closing it. A myriad of articles, mostly unsigned, openly stated the Sephardi opposition to the Zionist domination in the Yugoslav Jewish leadership: 'We are separatists. We are all that differs from their understanding of nationalism and Zionism. This separatism means to us emancipation from all dogmas.'[440] Yet this distinctiveness and the celebration of it did not mean that the Sephardim were attempting to dissociate from their brethren. On the contrary, the Sephardim perceived themselves as part of the Jewish nation, and the Sephardi leaders saw their distinctiveness going hand-in-hand with Jewish nationalism, albeit in a broader framework: 'We see Jewishness [*Jevrejstvo*] as too complex a racial and national organism to allow uninvited persons to confine and narrow it to a framework foreign to us […] Our uniqueness is a conscious affirmation of life and the development of this life within the Sephardi community […] but all within the greater framework of worldwide Jewishness.'[441] This positioning enabled the Sarajevo Sephardi circle to both refute the claims of anti-nationalism and anti-Zionism, and to present a new definition of Jewish nationalism that offered space for internal differences.

Kalmi Baruh addressed the burning issue of the Sephardi-Ashkenazi relationship and claimed that 'a Sephardi and an Ashkenazi were two divergent representatives of a diasporic Jew. Even though they are of the same race and nation, and they share a destiny, both have crucially different characters, conditioned by the unequal histories.'[442] However, as another author underlined, the Sephardi is not merely the 'opposite of Ashkenazi', nor 'a senseless attempt to Hispanicise Jewish culture'.[443] The core of Sephardi uniqueness was a specific historical experience. It included both the centuries of *Galut* (diaspora) on the Iberian Peninsula – as Esperanza in Vienna claimed – and in the Balkans. The end product was a specific diasporic culture.

In Baruh's eyes, the Sephardi Jew was embellished by mysticism and a 'specific religiosity' known only to the group itself, reflected in 'absoluteness' and 'eternity', 'yearning for Zion', and 'mystique of Lashon Hakodesh' (Hebrew). However, the diaspora is much more

[439] Jacques Confino, 'Uspomene i refleksije', *Jevrejski Glas*, 3, 29 Elul 5688/14 September 1928, 6. Writing in Serbo-Croatian, Confino actually paraphrased a German idiom expressing disapproval of someone who always wants to be special, *extra*.
[440] 'Naš separatizam', *Jevrejski Život*, 8, 1, 2 Iyar 5684/16 May 1924, 1.
[441] 'Naš separatizam', 1–2.
[442] Kalmi Baruh, 'Nova orijentacija. Razmatranja o sporu među sarajevskim Jevrejima', *Jevrejski Život*, 1, 22 Veadar 5683/28 March 1924, 5.
[443] 'Naše jevrejstvo', 2–3.

than religious tradition and the specific atmosphere of Sephardi life, or in Baruh's words, the 'Sephardi ambience'. Baruh deemed the latter a relic of interest only to historians and folklorists. He did not shy away from calling the Sephardi environment 'anachronistic', but also saw potential in this: 'One needs to get closer to this world and get down in it to notice its rich and harmonious Jewish life.'[444] The Sephardi-centred ideology should develop from Sephardi life, presented as a pool of authentic culture, through methods put forward by the Sephardi public workers.

The premise of this Sephardi politics thus relied on Sephardi tradition and the specific Sephardi historical experience as the core of their approach to Jewish nationalism. That had precedents among other Jewish nationalists. The Sarajevo Sephardi circle openly acknowledged that they took their inspiration from Eastern European Jewry. Early on, from the first Sephardi conference in 1913, Esperanzistas took pride in well-known Jewish politicians and thinkers comparing them with 'Eastern Jews' (*Istočni Židovi*, most likely a direct translation from the German *Ost Jude*).[445] They embraced this analogy as indirect support and valued it as a token of confidence in their movement.

The Sephardim and Eastern European Jews were too remote to interact and develop a political programme based on the shared experience of political marginality within the Jewish national movement. Moreover, it was only for a brief time that the two movements coexisted in the same Jewish sphere. From 1918 and the collapse of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, the two groups went through significant changes. The Sephardim were uprooted from Central Europe and Eastern European Jews lost on political coherence and coexisted within different, often opposing, political options. The connection, albeit indirect, between the Eastern European Jews and the Balkan Sephardim seemed to have been strongest in the mid-1920s. This was not a coincidence. The references to their Eastern brethren in this period were direct, with Sephardi intellectuals making parallels between the specific conditions that shaped the culture of Eastern European Jews and their own Sephardi culture.[446] The influence of Eastern European intellectuals, Martin Buber in particular, grew from a mere comparison into a comprehensive ideological standpoint that fed the Sephardi political agenda.

Interestingly, references to Eastern European Jews were no longer restricted to a shared emphasis on specific Jewish languages that the two Jewish groups cultivated. Even though both sides had developed bases of intellectuals and cultural workers in the previous decades, their

[444] Baruh, 'Nova orijentacija', 5.
[445] J. Confino, 'Zadatak i rad sefardske mladezi', 53–55.
[446] 'Galut i njegova prava', *Jevrejski Život*, 3, 7 Nissan 5684/11 April 1924, 1–2.

paths took them in different directions with regard to their native, historical, Jewish languages. It is significant that the Sephardim's independent politics emerged in the Balkans on the eve of the formation of the Yiddish Scientific Institute (YIVO, Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut), one of the crucial institutions of European Jews.[447] The Eastern European Jews pursued the knowledge, use, and cultivation of Yiddish mainly as a political vehicle, starting in the 1880s and 1890s,[448] while the Sephardi circle in Sarajevo opted to conduct their politics in Serbo-Croatian. This fact, however, did not reduce the influence of the Eastern European Jews on the Sephardim, although it took a different form.

Next to their promotion of Sephardi culture and tradition, from 1924 onwards, the Sephardi circle focused on aligning the diaspora and Zionism as the major framework of Jewish politics in the Balkans. To situate their political orientation within the global Jewish national movement, the Sephardi intellectuals turned to Ahad Ha-Am (Asher Zvi Ginsberg, 1856–1927), the founder of cultural Zionism, and Martin Buber (1878–1965), philosopher and advocate of cultural Zionism. In opposition to Herzl's stream of Zionism that favoured a secular state in Palestine, European in essence and Jewish in form, cultural Zionists advocated for a Jewish state as a cultural base for the regeneration of Judaism, rather than a solely political form of Jewish existence in the modern world.[449] This spoke to the Balkan Sephardim in as much as it gave them an ideological umbrella for establishing a good base for Sephardi Jews in the diaspora. This is where the Sarajevo circle directly referred in their writings to Ahad Ha-Am's opinion that Palestine would only accept the surplus Jewish population, while millions of Jews would still live in Galut.[450] The only question was whether the Jews were capable of building a healthy, steady, and creative national life for themselves. If they were, the diaspora could also be the space where the Jews would have their own *Weltanschaung*.[451] The Sephardim turned to Jewish politics in an 'Eastern key' to legitimise their stand towards the diaspora.

As the crucial figure of cultural Zionism in the 1920s, Martin Buber received significant space in the Sephardi political thought. The front page of the first issue of the Sephardi-led *Jevrejski Život*, dedicated to programmatic questions of the Sephardim in Sarajevo, quoted Martin Buber (most probably a paraphrase): 'And in this way we are going to raise a nation,

[447] Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture*, 126–38.
[448] Marc Volovici, *German as a Jewish Problem: Language and Politics of Jewish Nationalism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2020), 175.
[449] Walter Laquer, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Shocken Books, 2003), 367–85.
[450] 'Galut i njegova prava', 1–2.
[451] 'Galut i njegove dužnost', *Jevrejski Život*, 5, 20 Nisan 5864/24 April 1924, 1.

which for us means Jews. Everyone should create from soul, build on its distinctiveness, everyone in their own tradition, everyone in their own way and, again, everyone as a community. Only then will spirits and work unite in one whole – and Zion, our Zion will resurrect!'[452] By this point, Buber was a well-regarded and highly respected Jewish thinker whose approach to Jewish politics had won acclaim from a variety of circles. Ultimately, his thought did begin to stand for a unique approach to the Jewish project in Palestine, namely cultural Zionism.

Buber's popularity reached its peak at the time when cultural and political Zionisms were connected only by name, and their representatives did not share many beliefs. Buber's work and personality outgrew this conflict, especially in the Balkan circles where he was known from the first Balkan Zionist newspaper *Židovska Smotra* (1906–1914). At that time, Buber had captured the political imagination of the Zionist youth in Central Europe.[453] Now, in the mid-1920s when the Sephardim sought approval for their dissociation from mainstream Jewish politics in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, they must have found Buber's endorsement of Hassidism and, by extension Eastern European Jewish traditions and culture,[454] legitimising and reassuring. The mere existence and persistence of Eastern European Jewish culture was a confirmation of the main postulate of the Sephardi political agenda. For Sephardi intellectuals, the Sepharad was a historical fact, a Jewish experience moulded by the local cultural context – but so were all other Jewish groups, without exception. In short, the Sephardi circle argued that there is no universal Jewish experience, therefore there should be no pervasive Jewish model of culture, politics, or social norms. The Sephardim advocated for a plurality of Jewish voices in the context of Jewish–gentile relations as well. In so doing, they actively shaped the general dynamics within Jewish politics, especially in the second half of the 1920s.

The second part of the new Sephardi orientation was directed towards the immediate diasporic experience of Sarajevo's Sephardim in the Balkans. The general argument of the Sephardi circle cultivated respect for all Jewish groups and their cultures, including their own group – the Balkan Jewry. This attitude towards the diaspora came through the argument that 'the Sepharad is a historical fact': it exemplified a specific Jewish group whose culture was intertwined with the cultures of the surrounding peoples. What the Sephardi circle deemed

[452] *Jevrejski Život*, 1, 22 Veadar 5683/28. March 1924, 1. Quote from the front page.
[453] David Rechter, '"Bubermania": The Jewish Youth Movement in Vienna, 1917–1919', *Modern Judaism*, 16 (1996), 25–45. Jakir Eventov wrote about the fascination with Buber among Zionists from Zagreb in the last years of the First World War: Eventov, 'Omladina iz 1918', 106–07.
[454] Mendes-Flohr, *Martin Buber*, 64–67.

necessary was to stop 'negating the recent past'. This motto urged their fellow Sephardim not to wallow in sorrow for the lost medieval glory of the Sepharad, but to embrace the modern Sephardi historical experience in the Balkans as the trademark of Sephardi Jewishness: 'We live in a racially foreign environment, but we cannot, and we will not resist the influences of its culture.'[455] This final point of the new Sephardi politics did not support a mere coexistence in the diaspora, with an orientation towards the Jewish state. It was a decision to concentrate and cultivate Sephardi cultural and political life in the Balkans. In this context, the Balkans was a framework of Sephardi politics, but it also offered content.

First, it is important to underline that the Sephardi intellectuals' cultural idea of Balkan Jewry did not go against the current political order on the peninsula. The national-level situation did not figure in the question of Sephardi Jewry. It was more an issue of a wider, cultural identity of Jews in the Balkans, as explained in Vita Kajon's article for the Bosnian Serb's annual volume *Prosvjeta* in 1924:

> And Jews of the Balkan Peninsula, as much as they have built on their preserved cultural and social structure, […] are always a faithful reflection of their surroundings and background. They have formed their unique physiognomy due to [their] position and life conditions on their peninsula.[456]

The historical background of Sephardi Jews as 'the carriers of the strongest worldwide Jewish culture' was only a part of their identity in the 1920s. It was the amalgamation with the Balkan surrounding that rounded up their affiliation. This, according to Kajon, led to the fact that the 'Balkan Peninsula had its own Jewry more than any other region in Europe. It [the Balkan Jewry] is homogenous in its nature, healthy and resistant in its "self-sustainability" [*samoodržanje*]'.[457]

Until the '*Balkan Risorigimento*', the creation of nation-states on the peninsula, Kajon held that Balkan Jewry made one 'entity, one spiritual community' with the Jews of Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Bosnia, and Dalmatia. These communities still share the same 'cultural and historical background': 'the specific Spanish ceremony, family tradition, customs, and Judeo-Spanish'. However, what distinguished all these groups were 'political and social

[455] 'Naše jevrejstvo', *Jevrejski Život* 3, 7 Nissan 5684/11 April 1924, 2–3.
[456] Kajon, 'O Jevrejima na Balkanu', 143.
[457] Kajon, 'O Jevrejima na Balkanu', 144.

life and education',[458] and precisely these factors formed Balkan Jewry, the group Kajon was writing about in 1924. In this constellation of Balkan Jewries, he considered Bosnian Jewry 'the purest and the most original'.[459] They owed this status to the autonomy they enjoyed throughout their history on the peninsula. This autonomy was 'complete autarchy of culture and religion, and, to some extent, even socio-economic factors'. Moreover, Bosnian Jewry accepted 'the ambience of the Bosnian surroundings with the mixture of Turkish and Slavic elements, which only enriches this Jewish community'. Yet Kajon admitted that the Sephardim were still negotiating the boundaries of cultures, most notably on the matter of language. He described how Jews 'are losing their native language, which they replace, in our state, with Serbian'. In the same paragraph, Kajon referred all interested to *Jevrejski Život*, the newspaper of the 'Bosnian Jewish intelligentsia'.[460]As the organ of the Sephardi circle, *Jevrejski Život* offered insights into the practical results of the new politics, at least in cultural terms.

The mid-1920s were crucial for the Sarajevo Sephardi circle. In the years of the Ashkenazi-Sephardi split in Sarajevo, Sephardi intellectuals advocated for Sephardi cultural and political self-sufficiency. They believed that this distinctiveness was a direct result of their experience of diaspora in the Balkans that brought them into close contact with surrounding cultures. To them it seemed futile to ignore or reject Sephardi historical development. Rather, the Sephardi circle built on this background and coined an expanded idea of Sephardi affiliation – the broader concept of 'Balkan Jewry'.

4.3 The languages of Sephardi politics

The first issue of *Jevrejski Život* came out on 28 March 1924 (22 Adar 5684), just before 'the Sarajevo dispute' broke out. The newspaper could also be a sign that the Sephardi side had been planning a drastic shift for some time. Having a Sephardi newspaper was a revolutionary move in itself. Since the closing of the Judeo-Spanish weekly *La Alborada* (1901–1902) the first Jewish pre-war newspaper in Sarajevo (and only second Sephardi newspaper in the region, after *El Amigo del Pueblo* in Belgrade), the Jewish newspaper that served the entire region with news from European Jewish politics and, to a lesser extent, culture, was the Zionist bulletin *Židovska Smotra* (Jewish Review) (1908–14), published in Serbo-Croatian. In the new

[458] Kajon, 'O Jevrejima na Balkanu', 144.
[459] Kajon, 'O Jevrejima na Balkanu', 145.
[460] Kajon, 'O Jevrejima na Balkanu', 150.

Yugoslav state, *Židovska Smotra*'s direct heir was the Zagreb-based *Židov* (1918–41).[461] From 1918, Bosnian Jews also had their own Zionist-oriented newspaper, *Židovska Svijest*, published in Serbo-Croatian (1918–24). After the Sephardi-Ashkenazi dispute of 1924, the newspaper changed its name to *Narodna Židovska Svijest* (National Jewish Consciousness). This lasted until 1928, when the dispute waned and Jewish journalists from both sides joined forces to create *Jevrejski Glas* in 1928. There were other short-lived attempts at Jewish publications, such as *Jevrejska Tribuna* (Jewish Tribune) that came out 1921–22 in Sarajevo, known as a 'moderately Zionist' paper, and *Hadegel* (The Flag) in 1921, dedicated to the Yishuv. Amid these monolingual weeklies, *Trazera* (The Rear), an attempt at a bilingual Serbo-Croatian and Judeo-Spanish (in Latin script) satirical paper, came out in Banja Luka. Its editor-in-chief was Max Rosenbrauch. *Trazera* had only two (known) issues in 1923.[462] Thus, the publishing of *Jevrejski Život* in Serbo-Croatian was in line with the established wider Jewish tradition of publishing in Serbo-Croatian in the region, even if was an innovation for the organ of Sephardi politics. In the first two decades of the movement (1890s–1910s), Judeo-Spanish, even though often attacked by the hardline Zionists, persisted as either the ideological core (1897–1904) or a crucial pillar of Sephardi cultural uniqueness (from 1904 onward). In the 1920s, Judeo-Spanish became limited to margins of the printed media, led by Sephardi intellectual circles. It was also the language of one of the most important publications of Sarajevo's Sephardim – *Spomenica*, a memorial volume dedicated to La Benevolencia's 30th anniversary, published in 1924.[463]

Opting for Serbo-Croatian as the language of the Sephardi political rebellion in Sarajevo was indeed a sign of the final change of the course of Sephardi politics. This decision was built on the sustained Serbo-Croatian's success in the Balkans. First, the literacy rates in Judeo-Spanish remained overall low and acquiring literacy in any other language opened a lot of doors to the Sephardim (as previously discussed in Chapter 1). Second, the Sephardi intellectuals had previously already accepted Serbo-Croatian as the language of Jewish nationalism and the official language of Zionism (as explained in Chapter 3). Since the Sephardi-Ashkenazi dispute in Sarajevo was at the level of Zionist politics, it is logical that the debate took place in Serbo-Croatian. Third, crucial for the Sephardi 'New Orientation' was embracing the diaspora and turning to the Balkan setting and its cultural influences that, as

[461] Emil Kerenji, 'Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia: Politics of Jewish Identity in a Socialist State, 1944–1974' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 2008), 84–94.
[462] Tauber, *Jevrejska štampa u BiH 1900–2011*, 43–62.
[463] Vinaver, *Spomenica o proslavi tridesetogodišnjice sarajevskoga kulturno-potpornoga društva La Benevolencia*.

Kajon argued, only contributed to Bosnian Jewish uniqueness and life. Serbo-Croatian, in the mid-1920s, was finally turned into the language of a specifically Sephardi cultural, political, and, above all, intellectual milieu, and its influence was confirmed both through Jewish publications and the growing acceptance of Sephardi writers in Yugoslav literary circles.

The choice of certain Sephardi writers to use Serbo-Croatian did not mean forsaking Judeo-Spanish literature. Even Vita Kajon, who celebrated the amalgamation of Balkan Jewish culture, underlined that '*žudeo-espanjol*' (Judeo-Spanish) was the mirror of the Sephardi soul that reflected 'all peripeties of intellectual and emotional life' since the Sephardi arrival in the Balkans.[464] *Jevrejski Život*, even if predominantly published in the language of the Yugoslav state and Latin script (with rare articles printed in Cyrillic, mostly from Serbian correspondents), consistently dedicated space to literary works in its *Književni dodatak* (Literary Supplement) which also published texts in Judeo-Spanish, albeit in Latin script. Short stories, novellas published in serial form, and poems graced the pages dedicated to Jewish culture. The most noted writers of these works were Laura Papo, known under her penname Bohoreta, and Buki Finci, but Sabataj Djaen was also a noted contributor.[465] Nevertheless, their work failed to gain critical approval, even in Sephardi circles. In 1925, Kalmi Baruh, a connoisseur of Judeo-Spanish, asserted in print that 'Sephardi Jews do not have artistic literature'. Balkan Sephardim, in particular, had historically been 'separated from the rest of the world', and were deeply embedded in 'primitive patriarchal life', in an atmosphere 'which killed all individuality'. By contrast, Baruh still praised the literary achievements of his contemporaries in Judeo-Spanish as the 'higher expression of the environment from which they stemmed'.[466] He was inspired by Buki Finci's drama *Esperansa* (Hope) and also drew attention to works by Abraham Cappon, Sabetaj Djaen, and Laura 'Bohoreta' Papo.

At the same time, from the late 1920s, Isak Samokovlija, writer of Sephardi background, was receiving ever-more attention and appraisal in Yugoslav print. The language of the state was slowly also becoming a language of Sephardi literature. However, Samokovlija was not the first Sephardi Jew to write prose in Serbo-Croatian. The history of Serbo-Croatian as a language of Sephardi literature started with Hajim Davičo (1854–1916), writer, diplomat and theatre critic. Born in Belgrade in 1854, he belonged to a generation that experienced life before and after the civic emancipation of Jews in the Serbian principality. Although the cultural élite initially became acquainted with his writing through his theatre reviews, Davičo's

[464] Kajon, 'O Jevrejima na Balkanu', 145.
[465] Among their works were: Buki, 'Noče de alhad', *Jevrejski Život*, 50, 10 Adar 5686/6 March 1925, 3.
[466] Kalmi Baruh, *Izabrana djela*, ed. by Vojislav Maksimović (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1972), 323.

first literary work, *Slike iz jevrejskog života na Jaliji beogradskoj* (Images of Jewish life in Belgrade's Jalija) appeared in 1881 in the Belgrade-based newspaper *Otadžbina* (Homeland). Davičo wrote mostly about Jalija, the *mahala* or neighborhood where the majority of Belgrade Jews lived. He was the first writer in Serbo-Croatian who depicted Belgrade in literature. He was an exceptional figure in several respects and, in this sense, he made more of a precedent than a rule.[467] Samokovlija and Jacques Confino, on the other hand, established a solid path for Jewish literature within Yugoslav literature.

Samokovlija even openly defended his choice to write in Serbo-Croatian in a manner that invited criticism from his community: 'It is not so much religion as the fault of the Spanish jargon that we are lagging behind, and find ourselves in a time where hidden forces are more destructive than creative […] And what is happening to us? We are almost hermetically sealed in our language ghetto.'[468] Yet when Samokovlija published his story 'Rafina avlija' (Rafi's Yard) in the well-esteemed *Srpski književni glasnik* (Serbian Literary Herald) in 1927, the achievement was celebrated as almost a communal success.[469] Erih Koš (1913–2010), Samokovlija's contemporary and a Sarajevan Ashkenazi Jew who was a connoisseur of the cultural scene in Sarajevo, noted that Jewish society started taking Samokovlija's literary ambitions seriously only after this success beyond it.[470] By the end of the 1920s, Serbo-Croatian became a language of Sephardi literature; nevertheless, the South Slav vernacular was not the only language of Sephardim.

Sarajevo Sephardim did not give up on Judeo-Spanish but neither did they 'envision the development of Ladino culture as an achievement towards which Sephardim in general, and Sephardi youth in particular should strive'. This negative attitude towards Judeo-Spanish was not attributable to 'the virtual lack of Sephardi Diaspora Nationalism or a large-scale Sephardi working class movement',[471] as has been argued by recent scholars such as Sarah

[467] Ivana Vučina Simović, "Život i delo Hajima S. Daviča (1854–1918). Između slave i zaborava," *Nasleđe* 31 (2015): 111. On Davičo's cultural impact: Krinka Vidaković Petrov, "Identity and Memory in the Works of Haim S. Davicho," in *Los sefardíes ante los retos del mundo contemporáneo: identidad y mentalidades*, eds. Paloma Díaz Más and María Sánchez Pérez (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2010), 307–316; Krinka Vidaković Petrov, "Književnost Jevreja u Bosni i Hercegovini: označavanje identiteta," in *Sto dvadeset pet godina visokog obrazovanja u Bosni i Hercegovini*. *Filološke nauke* (Istočno Sarajevo: Filozofski fakultet Pale, 2008), 288–299. On Davičo's career as a state official: Bojan Mitrović, "From 'Court Jew' Origins to Civil-Servant Nationalism: Hajim S. Davičo (1854–1916)', *Quest, Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, 7 (2014), http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=362 (accessed 28 January 2019).
[468] Isak Samokovlija, 'Jevrejski život i njegovo značenje', *Jevrejski Život*, 53 (1925), 4.
[469] Isak Samokovlija, 'Rafina avlija', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 21–2 (1927), 323–32.
[470] Erih Koš, *Odlomci, sećanja, pisci* (Belgrade, Budva, and Novi Sad: Matica Srpska, Prosveta, Mediteran, 1990), 37–41.
[471] Sarah Abrevaya Stein, 'Asymetric Fates: Secular Yiddish and Ladino Culture in Comparison', *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 96 (Fall 2006), 498–509 (503, 506).

Abrevaya Stein. Rather, the motivation was pragmatic: the need to unite with their Ashkenazi brethren, given the fact that the Jews were such a small minority in Yugoslavia. Neither Samokovlija nor Confino really aimed to undermine or marginalise Judeo-Spanish but realised that Serbo-Croatian would reach a far wider audience, including a wider audience of Sephardim and Jews in general.

Beyond the continuing role Judeo-Spanish enjoyed as the Sephardi vernacular, the language also assumed two different roles in the Sephardi politics in the 1920s and early 1930s. First, the language became the object of academic studies. Baruh, the linguist of the Sephardi circle, developed a career as a scholar of Judeo-Spanish. Following his thesis on the phonetic development of Judeo-Spanish, he continued writing on the Sephardi language for educational purposes for the Sarajevo and Yugoslav Sephardim, for instance in *Spomenica*.[472] His research was well received in public and further supported by rabbi Moritz Levi. Moreover, he pursued his studies in Spain, where he spent a year on a scholarship from the Spanish government in 1929.[473] Upon his return, Baruh was recognised and celebrated not just as an intellectual in the Sephardi community, but as a Hispanic studies scholar across the Yugoslav Kingdom as a whole. He was a contributor to the Institute of Balkan Studies, formed in 1934 in Belgrade. The reason for creating the institute was the geopolitical context and it called for mutual understanding and rapprochement among all Balkan peoples, Jews included

Baruh's research had a place in this Balkan scheme, as it was centered on the Judeo-Spanish language from both the linguistic and the cultural-historical perspectives. Thus, Baruh's research on Judeo-Spanish fitted within both Sephardi Jewish and wider Yugoslav intellectual circles, while enjoying institutional support from both sides. Finally, he proved to be a role model for the next generation of scholars of Judeo-Spanish. Following his footsteps, Kalmi Altarás pursued studies at the University in Vienna and defended his doctoral thesis on linguistic peculiarities of the Judeo-Spanish translation of the Bible that had been published in Vienna in 1813.[474] Through the growing interest in the language of the Balkan Sephardim, Judeo-Spanish became an important object of study and, thus, enhanced its status and value for the Sephardi intellectuals.

Second, the Sephardi language still had an ideological position among the Sephardi youth. Just as the first generations of Esperanza had commenced work in the first years of the

[472] Kalmi Baruh, 'Jezik sefardskih Jevreja', in *Spomenica o proslavi tridesetogodišnjici La Benevolencie*, 71–77.
[473] 'Studij g. dra Kalmia Baruha u Španiji', *Jevrejski Glas*, 39, 28 Tishri 5689/12 October 1928, 3.
[474] Kalmi Altrás, 'Die Spracheigentümlichkeiten der judenspanischen Bibelübersetzung (Wien 1813)', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Vienna, 1934).

twentieth century, they had now, as the leaders of the community, entrusted the outreach of the Sephardi-led politics to a new generation of Sephardi students in the mid-1920s. This new momentum at the Sephardi political scene in the Balkans was now a part of a worldwide Sephardi political engagement that reached its peak in the late 1920s, following the formation of the WSO.

The centre was again Esperanza, albeit now gathering Sephardi students in another Central European city – Zagreb. The society was named 'the bright spot' among organisations that had Jewish national programmes and had already produced tangible results.[475] These results were many: in the summer of 1927 Esperanza organised a Sephardi youth conference in Sarajevo where inspiring Sephardi intellectuals were given the space and audience to present their visions of the Sephardi future. The event was deemed a success. The young enthusiasts proved to be more than just good organisers. Among their concrete inputs were a 'Ladino course' and a publication, envisioned as the first in series of volumes dedicated solely to the Sephardi politics, its problems and solutions.

Both these initiatives led to the final intellectual debate on the Sephardi language in interwar Sarajevo. Sarajevo Jewish Youth organised the first course on Judeo-Spanish in late 1926.[476] The programme and teacher remain unknown. However, the course had a short history. Soon after the start of the course, the organisers appealed to the participants via the *Jevrejski Život* to attend classes regularly.[477] This was not the only attempt to instil systematic learning of Judeo-Spanish. Esperanza in Zagreb declared Judeo-Spanish the official language of the association in 1927 and insisted on holding all meetings in the language.[478] The first course of 'Ladino', organised in Zagreb, aimed to enable all members of the Sephardi student society to use the historical language of the community.

However, Serbo-Croatian was still the prevailing language of the Sephardi political scene, and not just in Sarajevo, where the old Esperanza alumni still held all the key institutional positions. In 1927, Esperanza published a volume dedicated to 'the Sephardi movement' and Sephardi issues – in Serbo-Croatian. The Sephardi students envisioned the publication of the series as a journal entitled *Biblioteka Esperanza* (Library Esperanza). It aimed to attract 'wider layers of Sephardim'. The first and last edition of the journal was dedicated to explaining the main ideas behind what they called 'the Sephardi movement'. It

[475] 'Jedna svetla točka', *Jevrejski Život,* 148, 21 Adar 6587/25 March 1927, 1.
[476] 'Iz Sarajevske jevrejske omladine', *Jevrejski Život*, 129, 8 Kislev 5678/19 November 1926, 3.
[477] 'Iz Sarajevske jevrejske omladine', *Jevrejski Život*, 133, 12 Tevet 5687/17 December 1926, 3.
[478] 'Glavna skupstina Esperanze u Zagrebu', *Jevrejski Život*, 143, 16 Adar 5687/18 February 1927, 2.

even announced that the following volumes would deal with the Sephardi past in Spain and, after their expulsion from the Iberian peninsula, Sephardi social life in the Balkans, customs, language etc. The editors wanted to keep the price of the publication low in order to boost circulation.[479] This might also as be the reason why they kept the publication in Serbo-Croatian.

Interestingly, it seems that the young Sephardi ideologues did not perceive a direct competition between Judeo-Spanish and Serbo-Croatian; rather the only true rival to the language of the Sephardim was Hebrew. Eliezer Levi spoke about this discord among Jewish languages at the Conference of Sephardi Youth in Sarajevo and published his talk in sequels in *Jevrejski Život*. In his opinion, Hebrew should only replace Spanish (*španjolski*) if it were to become the language of the entire Galut. This would mean that an entire generation, and not only individuals, would have to transition from Judeo-Spanish to Hebrew. Levi found this turn of events implausible, so he defended Judeo-Spanish as the crucial factor of Sephardi differentiation. It was still the language of Sephardi literature, even if it had experienced a decline due to the heterogenous cultural environment the Sephardim had been exposed to in the past centuries. Moreover, it was a unique language, – Levi underlined the fact that Judeo-Spanish was originally written in a 'specific Hebrew cursive script', called Rashi. He underlined the fact that the youth not knowing the script was a break in a centuries-long tradition. The only way to revive the language was to return to and learn the Rashi script, revisit the old literature, and revive the forgotten lexicon.[480] Moreover, Judeo-Spanish was a shield from assimilation.[481] Thus, it seems that Eliezer Levi did not perceive any imminent danger from Serbo-Croatian, even though he wrote and published articles arguing for Judeo-Spanish to be the language of Sephardim – not in Judeo-Spanish, but in Serbo-Croatian! Arguably, the Sephardi youth leadership had not feared that the language of the state, state education, and even Sephardi publishing could seize the position of the Sephardi mother tongue, the language of their cultural, religious, and political identity. One experience that must have encouraged this confidence came during the visit of the Sephardi youth to their brethren in the southern parts of the Yugoslav state in the winter of 1926, when they found that the use of the Sephardi vernacular helped them to convey their point more powerfully.

[479] 'Predgovor', in *Sefardi i sefardski pokret* (Zagreb: Biblioteka Esperanza, 1927), 2.
[480] Eliezer Levi, 'Pitanje jevrejsko-španskog jezika na konferenciji', *Jevrejski Život*, 165, 29 Tamus 5687/29 July 1927, 2. Eliezer Levi, 'Jevrej.-španjolski jezik na konferenciji', *Jevrejski Život*, 166, 166, 21 Av 5687/19 August 1927, 2.
[481] Eliezer Levi, 'Jervejsko-španjolski jezik na konferenciji', *Jevrejski Život*, 167, 14. Av 5687/12 August 1927, 2.

The first two contributors to *Jevrejski život* were the leaders of Esperanza in Zagreb and also members of the Sephardi Youth Propaganda Board in Sarajevo, Samuel Kamhi (1904–75) with the article titled 'Sephardim and the Sephardi Movement', and Ješua Kajon with 'Sephardim Until Today'.[482] Both texts complemented the line of thinking already expressed by the Sephardi leaders and the trips to South Serbia: Sephardi Jews were a historical entity that grew apart from their Ashkenazi brethren due to the experiences in Galut. In order to contribute to the Zionist project, Sephardi Jewry had to rely on their own cultural and religious values. Kamhi underlined that if 'Sephardim lose their specific Sephardi self, they will lose their specific Jewish [self]'.[483] The Sephardi youth was dedicated to the Jewish national goals, albeit through working with the Sephardim.

4.4 Ermanos Sefardim: Sephardi politics beyond Sarajevo

The consolidation of Sephardi-oriented leaders across the world ran parallel to the solidification of Sephardi forces in Yugoslavia. The Zionist Congress in Carlsbad revisited the 'Sephardi question' in 1923 through a debate on the colonisation of 1,500 Sephardim in Palestine. Even though the official debates did not mention a Sephardi-led politics, this had obviously been a topic of conversation outside the congress to a sufficient extent to encourage Benjamin Arditti, a delegate from Bulgaria, to stand against 'a Sephardi movement' (*eine sephardische Bewegung*) and any 'separatist politics' (*eine Separationpolitik*).[484] In the course of the debates, this issue did not receive further attention: rather, the Sephardi issue was included in the issue of 'Oriental Jews', which featured prominently as the pressing issue in the Zionist debates. Zionist leaders proposed a variety of solutions to the problem of 'one million Oriental Jews' who lived dispersed around the Mediterranean. Chaim Weitzman was eager to help organise a conference of the Sephardim in Egypt with Jews from 'Morocco, Baghdad, India […] with the idea to unite and organise them and make arrangements for emigration from Persia, Morocco, and Yemen'.[485]

Other Zionist leaders also had their own visions of approaching the Sephardim. Ze'ev Jabotinsky gave a talk at the Sephardi club Union Espanola during his visit to Vienna in 1924.

[482] Ješua Kajon, 'Sefardi do danas', in *Sefardi i sefardski pokret*, 19–32.
[483] Samuel Kamhi, 'Sefardi i sefardski pokret', in *Sefardi i sefardski pokret*, 15.
[484] *Stenographisches Protokoll der Verhandlungen des XIII Zionisten-Kongresses vom 6. Bis 18. August 1923 in Karlsbad*, 288–89.
[485] Chaim Weitzman to Isaac Naiditch, 25 September 1923, *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weitzman*, gen. ed. Barnet Litvinoff, volume 12, ed. by Joshua Freundlich, series A (August 1923—March 1926) (Jerusalem: Transaction Books, Rutgers University Press, Israel Universities Press, 1977), 6.

His investment in the matter was underlined by the fact that he had learned and delivered the speech in Judeo-Spanish. Jabotinsky paid special attention to highlighting the Sephardi task in building Eretz Israel.[486] His views, interestingly, aligned with those of the leader of the cultural Zionists, Menachem Ussishkin, who supported the formation of the Sephardi organisation and argued that the Sephardim were the 'element […] predestined for Jewish regeneration'.[487] What Zionist ideologues from different sides of the movement saw in the Sephardim was not solely their dominant presence in the Mediterranean lands, and thus the most plausible prospect for systematic emigration to Eretz Israel, but also that the Sephardim were bound to serve as a cultural model of Jews unspoiled by modernity. In this light, the term 'Sephardi' expanded from the Judeo-Spanish speakers and/or descendants of Spanish Jewish refugees from the fifteenth century to include Maghreb Jews, all Middle Eastern communities, and, essentially, *all* non-European Jews.

This broadened and elaborated idea of Sephardim led to the formation of the WSO. In the summer of 1925, the *Palestine Bulletin* reported on the preparations among the Sephardim in the Balkans for the upcoming Sephardi conference that was to take place at the same time as the Zionist Congress.[488] The congress' official stand on 'the Sephardi movement' was far from encouraging, but it did acknowledge the Sephardim, if only as the elephant in the room. For instance, Marco Romano, a delegate from Bulgaria, asked the organisation to pay more attention to the propaganda in the Sephardi realm. He said he intended to raise awareness by guiding Sephardi settlements in Palestine, or else the Sephardi immigrant would 'adjust to the ways of the Arabic population'.[489] The agenda of the parallel Sephardi meeting must have concerned at least a handful of speakers, as Emil Schomarak from Galicia asked that the congress refute any difference between the Sephardim and Ashkenazim, while rabbi Bension Uziel, a Sephardi Jew from Palestine, saw the Sephardi differentiation as a cry for help from Jews living in underprivileged societies.[490]

Simultaneously, representatives of Sephardi communities from Western Europe (London, Manchester, Amsterdam, and Paris) met with their brethren from the Maghreb, Palestine, Turkey, and the Balkans. The meeting was organised in the *Zirkusgasse* Temple, the synagogue of the Viennese Sephardi community. The Sephardim gathered under the flag of

[486] 'Žabotisnki među Sefardima', *Jevrejski Glas*, 10, 26 Iyar 5684/30 May 1924, 7.
[487] 'G. Usiškin o sefardskom kongresu', *Jevrejski Život*, 43, 20 Teveth 5685/16 January 1925, 1–2.
[488] 'Sephardim Active in Balkans', *The Palestine Bulletin*, 31 July 1925, 1.
[489] *Protokoll der Verhandlungen des XIV. Zionisten-Kongress vom 18. bis 31. August 1925 in Wien* (London: Zentralbüro der Zionistischen Organisation, 1926), 274.
[490] *Protokoll der Verhandlungen des XIV*, 588.

Zionism and Zionist policies; thus, discussions were concerned primarily with the status of Sephardi settlers in Palestine and disregarded any vows of independent Sephardi politics. These claims were especially supported by the Bulgarian representative Saul Mezan (1893–1943), who expressed the opinion that a Sephardi Jew from Bulgaria 'has more in common with the Ashkenazi who resides in his village, as it is easier for him to unite with the Ashkenazi Jew than with the Moroccan Jew, the Jew from Manchester, or the Yemeni Jew'.[491] Therefore, labelling all Sephardim as 'Eastern' would be arbitrary and against the aims of Zionism.

The Yugoslav delegation had specific claims that their representatives, rabbis Isaac Alkalay and Moritz Levy primarily, attempted to articulate. Alkalay, as the chief rabbi of all Yugoslav Jews, stressed that Yugoslav Jews had special needs. The Sephardim there lived next to Ashkenazim, and while they worked on strengthening 'the Sephardi element so our sons would not be lost to the [Ashkenazi] majority', they could not subscribe to Sephardi separatist politics as 'from a local perspective it could be considered a divisive act'. If, however, the organisation would be dedicated to the 'revival of the spiritual state of Sephardi Jews from a religious and educational perspective', Alkalay assured those present that the Sephardim of Kingdom Serbs, Croats and Slovenes would offer their unconditional support. Rabbi Levy supported these claims.[492] This shows that the Sephardi circle restrained their political independence to the Sephardi *kehilot*, arguably to the Yugoslav state, and never intended to overshadow the aims of Jewish national politics.

This attitude was supported by Moshe David Gaon (1889–1958), a Travnik-born Sephardi Jew who immigrated to Palestine in 1909 after his studying in Vienna and spending some years as a teacher in Buenos Aires and Smyrna.[493] At the Conference in Vienna, Gaon was also a Yugoslav representative, but with experience on the ground in Yishuv. He denied that the Zionist Committee discriminated against Sephardim but admitted that they were being neglected. In this sense, the Sephardi federation was only meant to represent and guarantee the rights of Sephardi immigrants to Palestine.[494]

Ultimately, the conference set out to form an organisation consisting of fourteen representatives and a president. Mosheh Dayan de Picciotto, a Sephardi Jew from a

[491] 'Is There a Need for a World Sephardi Federation? A Debate by Jewish Delegates in Vienna (1925)', in *Sephardi Lives: A Documentary History, 1700–1950*, ed. by Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press 2014), 244–47 (246).
[492] 'Is There a Need for a World Sephardi Federation?', 246–47.
[493]Walker Robins, 'Gaon, Moses David', in *Encyclopaedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, ex. Ed. Norman A. Stillman (Brill, 2010), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-jews-in-the-islamic-world/gaon-moses-david-SIM_0008290 (accessed 3 July 2021).
[494] 'Is There a Need for a World Sephardi Federation?', 247–48.

Manchester-based merchant family, was elected the president. This choice presumably went against the Balkan Sephardim, who considered their brethren in 'Western colonies' such as London and Amsterdam products of 'a type of assimilation', and Jews 'only formally connected with Jewishness'.[495] Under the auspices of the Zionist organisation, a Sephardi from a well-established community must have been a safe choice. Furthermore, as the Zionist central bureau moved from Vienna to London, a Sephardi from Manchester had the potential to negotiate the position of the WSO through selected channels.

The reading of the WSO by the Sephardi circle in Sarajevo reveals the approach this strongest of Sephardi organisations took. Baruh reported on the Sephardi conference and underlined the 'emotional nature' of the Sephardi connection based on the shared 'language, cultural past and instinctive will for Jewish self-sustainability'.[496] These elements were shared even by Sephardim who had not had direct contact for centuries. Moreover, these communities had a shared experience of the 'era of emancipation under the influence of the European West'.[497] This political background did not come from the 'people, its soul, and its needs'. Thus, the congress agreed to 'rehabilitate the Sephardi Jewry'. The main idea was to concentrate on the strength of their own organisations, reinstate the network of Sephardi communities, and awaken and revitalise Sephardi consciousness. This would be the way to approach the communities previously beyond the reach of Jewish and Zionist politics, mainly the Jews in Persia, Mesopotamia, North Africa, and Yemen.[498]

The Balkan Sephardim were loyal to the WSO. Their newspaper reported on president de Picciotto's visits on its behalf and followed the situation with the Sephardi settlers in Palestine. However, there was nothing more the Sephardi diaspora could do on top of existing practices to support the Zionist movement – contributing to the Shekel and supporting the well-established local Zionist organisation. In less than a year, the WSO also realised that its true work should focus on the Sephardi diaspora – all Sephardi Jews living outside of the Yishuv.[499] Creating a meaningful connection between *kehilot*, associations, and individuals would not only strengthen the Sephardi position in inter-Jewish matters in the state but would also be a viable body of the Sephardi diaspora. The Balkan Sephardim enthusiastically took part in this stage. Sarajevo was the true 'Jerusalem of the Balkans' in this sense and took on the duty to enhance Sephardi culture while also sustaining its political position in the Kingdom of Serbs,

[495] Baruh, 'Nova orijentacija', 5.
[496] Kalmi Baruh, 'Sefardska konferencija u Beču', *Gideon*, 1924–25, 236.
[497] Kalmi Baruh, 'Sefardska konferencija u Beču', *Gideon*, 1924–25, 236
[498] Kalmi Baruh, 'Sefardska konferencija u Beču', 236–37.
[499] 'Daljni uspjesi Svetske Ogranizacije Sefard. Jevreja,' *Jevrejski Zivot*, 109, 29 Sivan 5686/11 June 1926, 6.

Croats and Slovenes. In the next decades, Sarajevo was a vital pillar, if not *the* pillar, of Sephardi world politics, not just in the Balkans.

Within the context of a global Sephardi-oriented fraction, the Sephardi political agenda in the Balkans gained a more defined focus. Its work fell into two areas: first, the Sephardi youth organisations, and, second, building connections between Sephardi *kehilot*. The policies directed towards youth were necessary; they were at the core of Sephardi politics in the twentieth century. Viennese Esperanza, alongside its side projects in Sarajevo youth organisations (El Progresso, La Lira), was the space where the Sephardim started their battle for recognition within Jewish politics. Furthermore, Esperanza's alumni, the two generations that studied in Vienna before the war and organised the first Sephardi conference, were now Sephardi leaders. The most active among them were approaching middle age and ran almost the entire *kehila* and La Benevolencia. Consciously and optimistically, they thought the future of Sephardi politics was in the next generation and considered it their duty to bring in new names for the cause.

Building on their own experience in Vienna, the Sephardi circle focused on a group of young academics. Vienna and the Sephardi student society in the city remained relevant even after the collapse of the imperial world, and these leaders attempted to maintain good relations with the Sephardi 'colony' in the city, where a number of affluent Sephardim also settled after the war.[500] However, Esperanza lost both its form and content. After the war, the society slowly merged with Bar Giora, which now gathered all 'Yugoslav Jewish students'.[501] Regardless of the dominance of the Yugoslav Zionist circles overrunning the Balkan Jewish space in Vienna, it would have been difficult to maintain the stream of Sephardi students to the post-war city. The new Yugoslav state also had three university cities: Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana. For financial and political reasons, students chose to obtain higher education within the country. The Sephardi students went along with this practical policy and started gathering in greater numbers in Zagreb. From this predominantly Ashkenazi centre of Yugoslav Zionism, the Sephardi youth political scene flourished – just as was the case with Esperanza in Vienna in the 1900s.

After the war, Zagreb had already begun to claim the place that Vienna had held for Sephardi students in previous decades. Its proximity to Sarajevo was enhanced by possibly the most important legacy of Austro-Hungarian rule in Bosnia – railways. Furthermore, Zagreb

[500] 'Naša kolonija u Beču za "Benevolenciju"', *Narodna židovska svijest*, 15, 7 Adar 5679/7 February 1919, 2–3.
[501] 'Bar Giora Beč', *Židovska Svijest*, 24, 14 Nisan 5679/14 April 1919, 6.

became an important centre for internal migration and already in the first couple of years after the war, the city gained a new Sephardi *kehila*. The new generations of Sephardi students, therefore, spontaneously leaned towards Zagreb. They had already formed the Sefardski Studentski Klub (Sephardi Student Club) in the pre-war period, under the direct influence of the Viennese Esperanza.[502] In 1927, the club changed its name to Esperanza.[503] Compared with the status Esperanza had enjoyed in pre-war Sarajevo as torchbearer of Jewish and Sephardi politics, the Zagreb-based Sephardi group was only one among many flourishing youth associations. Nevertheless, together with the nation's strong Sephardi politics, it grew in size and influence.

Political tensions between the Sephardi and Ashkenazi, or rather, the Sephardi and political Zionists spilt over into the youth organisations. During a 1926 Yugoslav Jewish youth rally, featuring sport and art performances popular in the interwar period, Zionist organisations criticised the Sephardi youth associations for their exclusivity and urged them to drop 'Sephardi' from their names.[504] In response, all Sephardi organisations left the Jewish Youth Yugoslav Organisation and formed the Sephardi Youth Organisation.

The Sephardi Student Club in Zagreb became a crucial part of the Sephardi network. In 1926 it joined the Sarajevo Jewish Youth organisation to form the Sephardi Youth Propaganda Board (Propagandni Odbor Sefardske Omladine).[505] It was a declaration of loyalty to the WSO and its goal of uniting all the Sephardim in the world for 'a better tomorrow'. The youth immediately began the task of uniting the Sephardim in Yugoslavia by planning a trip to the Sephardi *kehilot* in the south.[506] From this first trip, a decisive and more specific plan of action emerged for the wider Sephardi community.

In the 1920s the faces were new, the circumstances were different, but the means stayed the same. Among the means of unifying Sephardim were the student associations and their short trips to other cities and towns in the vicinity. Even though the first meetings of the Jewish youth in the Balkans were organised under the Zionist umbrella, there was a certain gravitas behind the visits from the times when the two most important Sephardi communities in the immediate region, Sarajevo and Belgrade, had been part of opposing countries, Serbia and

[502] Jakov Atijas, '"Esperansa", Jevrejski sefardski klub u Zagrebu', *Jevrejski Almanah*, 1955–56, 110.
[503] 'Glavna skupština Esperanze u Zagrebu', 2.
[504] Solomon Alkalaj, "'Sefardska omladina"', *Židov*, 30, 23 July 1926/12 Ab 5686, 2–3.
[505] 'Deklaracija Prop. Odbora Sef. Omladine, Esperanze sef. Stud. Kluba i Sar. Jevr. Omladine', *Jevrejski Život*, 130, 20 Kislev 5687/26 November 1926, 2.
[506] 'Iz Propagandnog odbora Sef. Omladine', *Jevrejski Život*, 132, 5 Tevet 5687/10 December 1926, 4.

Austro–Hungary. In May 1912 the Serbian–Jewish Singing Society (Jevrejsko-srpsko pevačko društvo) from Belgrade visited La Lira, its sister society in Sarajevo.[507]

At first, the Sephardi Club and Sarajevo Jewish Youth met in Zagreb and Sarajevo, with a couple of stops in Bosnia, most notably Banja Luka, the birthplace of Poljokan, now owner and editor-in-chief of *Jevrejski Život.* In Banja Luka, the youth declared the desired outcome of the entire Sephardi-oriented politics: '[r]ebirth of the Sepharad awakened into Jewish Sephardi awareness [*jevrejska sefardska svijest*] and only then we can be the true Sephardi and the true Jews'.[508] What made the Sephardi plan essentially different from the Zionists' was their insistence on a special programme addressing the state and circumstances of each and every Sephardi community, rather than pursuing uniform plans.[509] Taking trips to Niš, Skopje, Bitola, and Salonica in December 1926 was a way to develop their own programme. The delegation comprised of students from the Board for Propaganda, Samuel Kamhi, Isak Talvi, Avram Pinto, Josip Levi, and Jakica Atijas, accompanied by Benjamin Pinto, a well-regarded cultural worker.[510]

The reports of the group show their lack of awareness that the living conditions of the Jews of Niš, Skopje, and Bitola were significantly different from the Sephardi world they had grown up in. These territories had gone through a significantly different historical experience.[511] Almost the entire region they visited, excluding Niš, had been under military rule between 1913 and 1915 as it was deemed politically unstable.[512] Being on the frontline in 1917–18, this area also suffered significant damage during the First World War. War and economic instability go hand in hand, so it is not surprising that the region had the highest Jewish emigration rate in Yugoslavia. Jews from Bitola were among the pioneers of the Balkan Jewish immigration to the Americas, where they formed important communities in New York (*Ahavat Shalom*), Rochester, Indianapolis, and Chile in the first decade of the twentieth

[507] 'Pismo iz Sarajeva, Srpsko-jevrejsko pjevačko društvo iz Beograda u Sarajevu', *Židovska Smotra*, 9, 14 June 1912, 133–34.
[508] Samuel Altarac, 'Delegati Propagandnog Odbora Sef. Omladine u B. Luci', *Jevrejski Život*, 134, 9 Tevet 5687/24 December 1926, 3.
[509] 'Nekoliko rijeci o našem prosvjetnom problemu', *Jevrejski Život*, 135–36, 26 Tevet 5687/31 December 1926, 1–2.
[510] Jakica Atijas, 'Entre los Sefardin de la Srbija del Sud', *Jevrejski život*, 138, 11 Shevet 5687/14 January 1927, 3; Iz, 'Propagandnog odbora Sef. Omladine', *Jevrejski Život*, 132, 5 Tevet 5687/10 December 1926, 4.
[511] Keith Brown, *The Macedonian Question. Asked and Answered, 1878–1913*", in: *The Routledge Handbook of Balkan and Southeast European History*, eds. John R. Lampe and Ulf Brunnbauer, 122–34.
[512] Nada Boškovska, *Yugoslavia and Macedonia Before Tito: Before Repression and Integration* (London: IB Tauris, 2017), 4–6.

century; some also moved to Salonica, where they erected a synagogue in 1927.[513] According to the official Yugoslav statistics for 1931, 7,258 Jews still lived in this region (Vardarska Banovina),[514] making up a tenth of the total Jewish population in the nation and a third of the Sephardi population. Moreover, these communities did not speak the same language as the rest of the Yugoslav Sephardim. In 1931, 7,269 out of 7,579 Jews in Vardar Banovina still declared their native language to be (Judeo-)Spanish, while only 220 opted for Serbo-Croatian.[515] From 1918 onwards, the Federation of Jewish Communities and the Zionist circles were aware of the struggle that the Jews from South Serbia were going through and of how important their recruitment would be for the Zionist cause.

The Sephardim in this part of the peninsula had experienced the nineteenth century significantly differently than their brethren in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia had. While the northern part of the Balkan Sephardim in most aspects fell under the cultural sphere of the German Jews, the Sephardim in the southern Balkans were exposed mainly to the Western European missionary projects of the time, Jewish and Christian alike. Most notably, the French Jewish organisation Alliance Israèlite Universelle had been operating a school in Bitola (Monastir) since the 1880s. This was notably the only long-lasting institution that the French organisation had established on the territories of the Yugoslav Kingdom. Even though such institutions brought modern education in French, they offered opportunities only for the few students who could afford them and therefore they did not make a structural impact on Jewish education in the area. The situation was similar in Christian missionary schools in the region. A French nunnery in Skopje, for example, had a similar impact by teaching in French, although it did so for free.[516] Both missionary projects had only limited results, judging by the fact that the overwhelming number of Jews living there were resilient to linguistic acculturation and loyal to their native tongue of Judeo-Spanish more than any other Sephardi community in Yugoslavia. In 1931, the overwhelming majority of Jews in Vardar Banovina (7,269 out of 7,579) declared their native language to be Judeo-Spanish, while only 220 opted for Serbo-Croatian.[517] This, however, does not mean that that Jews in Vardar Banovina were in any sense strictly defiant to the language of their surrounding as these results might suggest; namely, even though Serbo-Croatian was the only official language of the province, the spoken

[513] Ipek K. Yosmanoglu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia 1878–1908* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2013), 131–68. Naar, *Salonica*, 54. Cohen, *The Last Century*, 130, 138.
[514] Friedenreich, Jews of Yugoslavia, 192.
[515] Friedenreich, Jews of Yugoslavia, 221.
[516] Cohen, The Last Century, 79–92.
[517] Friedenreich, Jews of Yugoslavia, 221.

language was Macedonian, at the time still unrecognised as a language in its own right.[518] Even though the exposure to European culture in Skopje and Bitola was far more than in Salonica, Smyrna, and other Sephardi communities that were part of the Ottoman society significantly longer than then the rest of the Balkan *kehilot*, the communities kept a strong traditional structure well into the twentieth century.

The distances from Zagreb, Sarajevo, and even Belgrade to South Serbia were considerable – there were no direct connections, either by road or railway. The students' trip lasted for around ten days and a significant portion of their time was spent travelling. The first took the train from Belgrade to Niš, where they spent only one day. Niš at that point was not in Vardar Banovina, nor was it considered a part of 'Southern Serbia', having been part of the Serbian state since 1878. However, the city was en route to Skopje, where the delegation from Sarajevo most probably spent two or three days. Finally, a five-hour car ride took them from Skopje to Bitola, where they stayed for four days, including a one-day excursion to Salonica. Benjamin Pinto complained about the state of the railways, lack of connections, and the deep social differences they saw on the way.[519] It was no wonder that they were completely unaware of the complexities and nuances of Sephardi life in this corner of their country.

Upon their arrival at Niš, Pinto wrote about his slight disappointment with Jewish life in the town. They knew that there were no more than 70 Jewish families in Niš, and they expected around 700 people, meaning every family would have at least seven or eight children. However, only 350–400 Jews welcomed them to the city:

> It was not [simply] due to the [increasing] death rate or emigration that the Jews are not patriarchal, simple, and strictly religious, unaware of modern legacies and [without] insights into the progressive world. [Rather] [the Jew here] opens shop on Saturday, smokes and frequents *kafana* (indeed, only younger people), reads the newspaper, follows progress, sends his sons to schools, and even sends graduates to other Serbian towns under the influence of civilisation and the modern spirit.[520]

Pinto and Kamhi gave talks to the youth in the crowded *beth midrash* (Jewish school) in Judeo-Spanish on the difference between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, the struggle the Sephardim endured in conflict with the representative body in Yugoslavia, Sephardi Zionism. The mere

[518] Boškovska, Yugoslavia and Macedonia, 263–4.
[519] Benjamin Pinto, 'Među Sefardima u Južnoj Srbiji II', *Jevrejski Život*, 139, 8 Shevat 5687/21 January 1927, 1.
[520] Pinto, 'Među Sefardima u Južnoj Srbiji I', 1–2.

fact they spoke in Judeo-Spanish made people listen carefully, as only youth were giving up on their native tongue, while the rest spoke (Judeo-)Spanish. Avram Pinto took over and spoke in Serbian on the role of youth in 'the Sephardi movement'. Afterwards, there was a rally in which the entire Jewish population of the town participated.[521]

Going further south, to Skopje, the visitors were surprised to see that it was 'not Oriental, but modern'. Around 3,500–4,000 Jews living in the town still spoke a variety of languages, like in imperial times, including Macedonian, Serbian, Turkish, Greek, Spanish and French, but they were 'prone to any new thing'. They did not live in the Jewish *mahala* (Pinto uses the word 'ghetto' as a parallel to *mahala*) but in the newly built central areas of the town. Pinto noticed with discomfort that Jews in Skopje interchanged 'patriarchy with modern triviality and colourlessness, with life in cafés and dancing rooms'. Essentially, they did the same as Sarajevo Jews, but with one difference. According to Pinto, Sarajevan Sephardim had had three to four decades to get used to the good and bad influences of 'European civilisation', and they still felt the spiritual and social crisis. Since Skopje had been under Ottoman rule until recently and had suffered immensely during the wars, the crisis of the town's Jewry must have been even greater. He interpreted the fact that there were no Jewish high school pupils, no Jewish students at universities, and no Jewish university graduates, professionals or intellectuals while 'matinees and dance courses are full of Jewish young men and women' as evidence of this social crisis. The situation was problematic, and the Jews were 'indifferent and nonchalant'.[522]

In Bitola, another town with approximately 3,500–4,000 Jews, the delegation was shocked by their economic state. They did not differ from Turks or Albanians in dress and many provided manual labour, which was unusual for Jews in Bosnia. However, modern entertainment had not reached them – Bitola had no cafés, dance halls, or cinemas. Religious to the point of fanaticism and dedicated equally to family life and the temple, the Jews here were deeply invested in Zionist goals. To a certain extent, this had to do with the ancient habit of well-off Jews to settle in Palestine before their deaths – from the 1830s we can trace '*Monastirlis*' (Jews from Monastir) in Palestine in Montefiore's census. The tradition must have remained strong through the period of social and economic instability from 1900 onwards, when the emigration rate reached 11,000 per year.[523] Many rabbis in the town were also inclined towards Zionism, with Sabatay Djaen (1883–1946) being the most vehement and

[521] Cijoni-Sefardi, 'Rad clanova P.O.S.O. u Juznoj Srbiji', *Jevrejski Život*, 138, 11 Shevat 5687/14 January 1927, 1–3.
[522] B. Pinto, 'Među Sefardima u Južnoj Srbiji I', 1–2.
[523] Cohen, *The Last Century*, 107–8, 152–53.

systematic in spreading the Zionist idea. He had only arrived in Bitola in 1924 and by 1927 had departed on a mission to North and South Americas ex officio for the Sephardi World Organisation. Pinto praised the dedication of the Jews of Bitola to building a Jewish state in Palestine. He formed this opinion by noting their readiness to collect 800 *shekalim* for the needs of Palestine. However, he also remarked that this money could cure the deep poverty of the community through courses for analphabets, schools, and associations to improve the economic and cultural condition of the local Jews.[524] Essentially, Pinto suggested dealing with the issues of modern times the Sarajevan way – working their way out of problems through a series of cultural and humanitarian programmes.

Their honest interest in the life of their brethren aside, the Sephardi delegation from Sarajevo came to find what they were looking for – a Sephardi society that captured the naiveté and pastoralist life of the imagined past. This search for Jewish authenticity resonated in Europe of the time. Michael Brenner argued that the search for authentic types of Jews was the 'ultimate fulfilment of this [German–Jewish] renaissance' in the Weimar republic.[525] The Sephardi leaders did not shy from this aim and addressed it directly in their speeches: Pinto called on the youth to work with the unique and 'strong Jewish life unlike to any other town in our Kingdom'.[526] He noted how 'Jews, exclusively Sephardim, live the true, unadulterated, intensive life, whose intensity was not everywhere the same: the more we were approaching the South, the stronger and cleaner the pulse of the Jewish life beat, without any impurities'.[527] What they expected was an image of the Sephardim that circulated Europe, Orientalised through the eye of the West, untouched by modernisation and therefore useful for reconstruction as the base of the Sephardi renaissance. In the words of Samuel Kamhi: 'What is left [in South Serbia] is a raw Jew, wholesome, intact, noble and good – and what is most important, healthy. Priceless treasure.'[528] Pinto and Kamhi pondered the roots of the issues the Jews in this region were facing. They saw their own community passing through a similar spiritual and social crisis, so the effects of accelerated modernisation in Niš, Skopje, and Bitola hit close to home.

Benjamin Pinto expanded on the 'problem of South Serbia':

[524] Pinto, 'Među Sefardima u Južnoj Srbiji II', 1–2; Benjamin Pinto, 'Među Sefardima u Južnoj Srbiji III', *Jevrejski Život*, 140, 25 Shevat 5687/18 January 1927, 1–2.
[525] Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture*, 130. On the meaning of 'authentic Jews', 129–84.
[526] Cijoni-Sefardi, 'Rad clanova P.O.S.O. u Juznoj Srbiji', 1–3.
[527] Cijoni-Sefardi, 'Rad clanova P.O.S.O. u Juznoj Srbiji', 1.
[528] Samuel Kamhi, 'Problem Južne Srbije', *Jevrejski Život*, 138, 11 Shevat 5687/14 January 1927, 1.

> We are familiar with Turkish rule in the Balkans and its consequences – decline and decadence of the Sephardi Jewry in the seventeenth, eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. It is up to us to rectify the retrograde historical path of the last three centuries and, at the same time, this is the reason for our Sephardi movement. […] Our desired progress and support in preserving a conservative [life] do not exclude each other; they are not exchangeable. [R]eaching a synthesis, a satisfying result, is the solution of the problems for South Serbia and for us, Sephardim, in general.[529]

The Jews from South Serbia were also to an extent the answer to their own questions.

Effectively, the excursion to Niš, Skopje, and Bitola expanded the horizon of the Sarajevo Sephardi youth and influenced their agenda. The momentum was powerful and the leaders Samuel Kamhi, Jakica Atijas, and Eliezer Levi, among others, made great efforts to structure and navigate the growing interest. It was an impetus of the Local Sephardi Organisation (Mesna Sefardske Organizacije), an initiative that occurred in almost all Sephardi *kehilot* across the Yugoslav Kingdom and seemed to be compelling and strong enough to build a new, modern, and lasting network of Sephardi organisations that would surpass the boundaries between provinces and even countries. Individuals or smaller groups of interested young Sephardim wrote to Sarajevo and asked for instructions.[530] Moreover, this connection between Sephardi youth and organisations aimed to be not only a parallel to the existing Zionist groups, but arguably also a significant and deeply involved tool of Sephardi politics.

The trip to South Serbia marked the beginning of the youth engagement, but also, arguably, its peak. The youth leaders remained active in enhancing Sephardi relations in the country and contributing to the Sephardi World Organisation. When in January 1928 the Sephardi-oriented *Jevrejski Život* and Zionist-leaning *Narodna Židovska Svijest* ended their four-year rivalry and joined forces to create *Jevrejski Glas*, the Sephardi youth scene lost its momentum. This merger did not mean the surrender of either side; the editorial of the first issue underlined that both sides found the dispute 'obsolete' and that there was no reason why one paper could not give space to both standpoints.[531] Even Esperanza in Zagreb announced that it was developing relations with Zionist youth in Judeja on friendly terms.[532] The youth eagerly

[529] Pinto, 'Među Sefardima u Južnoj Srbiji III', 2.
[530] Bata Gedalja, 'Ermanos Sefardim', *Jevrejski Život*, 153, 4 Iyar 5687/6 May 1927, 2.
[531] 'Sarajevo, 13. Januara 1927 [sic]', *Jevrejski Glas*, 1, 20 Tevet 5688/13 January 1928, 1.
[532] 'Glavna skupština "Esperanze"', *Jevrejski Glas*, 7, 3 Adar 5688/24 February 1928, 2.

worked on engaging their peers from all over the country, focusing on Bitola, but aiming to expand the network to Dalmatian towns.[533]

A trace of scepticism about the favourable outcome of these efforts was, however, noticeable in the words of the Sephardi Propaganda Board as early as their first conference in Sarajevo in the summer of 1927. It was not the amount of work that intimidated the young enthusiasts, but the lack of adequate financing and consistent support from their fellows. By the summer of 1928, frustrated voices wrote that a clash between idealism and reality led to a 'generational crash'.[534] There were two reasons for these anticlimactic attitudes. First, the Sephardi-centred ideas arguably lost momentum with the restoration of harmony between the two sides. This by no means indicates that 'the Sephardi movement' ended in 1928. In the coming years, the Sephardim organised a Sephardi representative body in Yugoslavia, albeit, conspicuously, with the centre in Belgrade.[535] The decision to move the heart of Sephardi politics out of Sarajevo could have been another sign of Sephardi dedication to resolving its differences with the Zionist leadership. In Sarajevo, the Sephardi circle dominated the cultural and political scenes. The Sephardi orientation was not an option within the Jewish national movement but the principal position. The city became the symbol of an evolving and determined Sephardi stand.

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The Sephardi-oriented politics in the Balkans grew from a local Jewish discord and a struggle to maintain political, social, and cultural independence. The Sephardi leaders and ideologues aimed to offer theoretical tools to support their difference alongside tangible methods to resolve the social, economic, and cultural issues of the Sephardi diaspora. They certainly did not represent the entirety of Sephardim, neither did they offer a political platform that could influence the social standards of their brethren in any structural way. Yet Sephardi intellectuals did succeed in one respect – they provided a framework for Sephardi cooperation beyond the kehilot.

Second, Sarajevo became a stage for another Sephardi-based political option that addressed a wider audience, the lower middle class and workers who had been previously politically marginalised both in the kehila and among Sephardi political representatives in the

[533] 'Turneja "Lire" po Južnoj Srbiji', *Jevrejski Glas*, 15, 7 Iyar 5688/27 April 1928, 5.
[534] J.A.K, 'Slom jedne generacije', *Jevrejski Glas*, 22, 27 Shivan 5688/15 June 1928, 5.
[535] Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th–20th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 149.

province and the nation. In the Sarajevo city elections of 1928, it became clear that the options Sephardi intellectuals represented in previous years had not satisfied the needs of the city's and Bosnia-Herzegovina's Sephardim. The last stage of the Sephardi political response came from the left, from a socialist group close to the Yugoslav Communist Party – Matatja, organizacija jevrejske radničke omladine, or Matatja, the Jewish youth workers.

Chapter 5

Sephardi Socialism: Progressive Politics and Culture (1920s–1940s)

Over the course of three decades (1897–1928), the Sephardi-centred politics was led by educated elite, intellectual, and predominantly secular circles. This privileged position granted the Sephardi circle access to the European Jewish political stage, representation in European and worldwide Jewish organisations, and a dominant position in local Sephardi cultural life. They presented their politics as Sephardi and insisted on reframing Jewish politics so that it could embrace difference and different voices. This chapter questions the limits of the inclusivity that the Sarajevo Sephardi circle exercised in their own setting. It historicises the marginalised voices of Sephardi artisans, manual and industry workers, and peddlers from the 1910s, through the late 1920s, when they found their expression in Matatja, Jewish workers' association, until the late 1930s, when Matatja achieved the dominant position on the Jewish and wider political stage in Sarajevo. Finally, the chapter explains how, from the late 1920s, two sides of Sephardi politics complemented each other's positions. This alliance only grew stronger in the 1930s, in response to the expansion of fascism in the Yugoslav Kingdom and abroad and the growing presence of Jewish refugees from Central Europe in Yugoslavia.

Matatja was equally important for both Jewish and the wider non-Jewish society. In the Jewish framework, the association gained relevance owing to the fact that it was the first to politicise and organise the predominant majority of the Sephardim, who belonged to the lower-middle or working class, an achievement that no contemporaries even tried to question or deny. Yet the history of marginalisation of the Sephardi poor is part of a wider phenomenon that Dina Danon explained as 'Sephardi Ottoman modernity'. Sarajevo was not unique when it came to the marginalisation of underprivileged Jewish groups. Taking the example of Ottoman Izmir, Danon explains how *kehila* leadership utilised modern Western concepts of public social spaces as the face of the Jewish community to disengage from the Sephardi poor. In short, Danon showed how modernity, as imported from the West, could sustain only the Sephardi bourgeoise, not the entirety of the socially and economically diverse Sephardi society. This resonates with the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sephardi history in the Balkans, especially considering the role humanitarian societies played. La Benevolencia in Sarajevo and Potpora in Belgrade concentrated on offering solutions for the street beggars and recognised the problem of giving access to modern education to a small minority of Sephardim. Those who did not get scholarships were out of the scope of the associations' programmes. Using the

example of Izmir, Danon shows how the poor and poverty (and other factors) were important instigators of social change, in spite of these challenges.[536] In the light of this example, this chapter invites us to consider the role and political aims of the underprivileged in Sephardi society in the period from 1928 to 1940 as the end of one type of modernity and the introduction of inclusive modern Sephardi politics in Sarajevo and throughout the Sephardi Balkans.

The association of Jewish workers had a significant place on Sarajevo's political stage in general. In the non-Jewish setting, Matatja received significant and well-deserved attention as a part of the global resistance to both Yugoslav and European fascist pressures. In the light of the Jewish role in the National Liberation Movement during the Second World War, more Jews than ever before in the Balkans were present in the official historical narrative of post-war Yugoslavia. They featured as participants, leaders, and ideologues of the social and political revolution that happened between 1941 and 1945. These remarkable individuals were built into the history of the class struggle and sacrifice, the resistance against Nazi and fascist occupiers, and, eventually, the righteous victory. Among them was Moše Pijade (1890–1957), one of the most prominent leaders and ideologues of the Communist Party, whose grave is still in a prominent position in the middle of central Belgrade (Kalemegdan fortress). Moreover, a number of Jewish fighters and celebrated party members held important positions, such as Eliezer (Leza) Perera, Salamon (Moni) Finci, and Nisim Albahari. They were celebrated as true comrades and committed communists, while their Jewish background, not to mention the Jewish roots of their political engagement, rarely played a role in the discussion and were either ignored or downplayed. This one-sided, over-generalised and particularised interpretation of Jews as socially aware individuals in the communist movement bred conclusions that Jews and their left and left-leaning political associations were already completely integrated into the pre-war Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY). Since their activities within the Jewish communities and in their local settings were only rarely celebrated, it seemed as if Yugoslav Jews never questioned the social order, issues, and politics at the local level or the level of the Jewish community.

The complexity of the organisation of Jewish workers introduces a number of issues for historians and historiography. This chapter addresses three levels of the politicisation of Jewish workers, especially Sephardim. First, it gives an overview of the marginalised voices of the poor and working class in Jewish national politics and on the local political stage in

[536] Dina Danon, *The Jews of Izmir: A Modern History* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2020).

Sarajevo between 1910 and 1925. This reveals an important but hitherto little-known and little researched period in the history of Sephardi society.

Second, the chapter investigates the changes in Sephardi communal politics in the late 1920s. In the context of the Sephardi communities, and especially the Sephardi community in Sarajevo, it discusses the tensions between the communal leadership and ever-louder voices of the Sephardi Jews who did not participate in the communal politics due to their class status and were therefore under-represented. In 1928, Jewish artisans and workers attempted for the first time to compete with the official communal representatives in the Sarajevo city council elections and for the leadership of the Jewish community. The deepening economic issues and spiking unemployment created a growing underprivileged, unrepresented stratum of the Jewish community – the Jewish poor – in the cultural, social, and political institutions of Sarajevo. Combined with a high natural increase in the population of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes at large (especially the territories of the province formerly known as Bosnia-Herzegovina and southern parts of the country), this resulted in unemployment rates as high as 60% by some estimates.[537] As such, both the attempt to win the leadership of the Jewish community and the city council elections were arguably successful and changed the course of Jewish politics in the province and the nation in the last decade before the Second World War.

Third, the chapter historicises Matatja's complex ideological positioning. It attempts to bring into communication the society's undeniably Sephardi-oriented cultural and educational programme and its political activism, which often completely overlapped with the CPY from the 1930s onwards, albeit on the local level. Matatja was formed with the intention of nurturing Jewish identity among Jewish workers in Sarajevo. However, historians have previously understood the organisation's programme and political agenda as stripped of Sephardi, and arguably Jewish in general, content. As Gordiejew put it, 'While the association was overwhelmingly Sephardi, it never identified with the Sephardi movement.'[538] Arguing that Matatja was a part of the Sephardi political scene, this chapter traces the society's dedication to Sephardi culture and language and its relationship with the Sephardi intellectuals. Finally, the chapter questions prevailing historians' view that the fact that the popularity of the progressive movement among Jews correlated with imminent global economic problems and the growing pressures of fascism in the country and abroad means that Matatja did not have a

[537] Jelena Rafailović, 'Economic Structure of the Population in the Kingdom of SCS', *Tokovi istorije*, 3 (2019), 79–104.
[538] Friedenreich, The Jews of Yugoslavia, 167; Paul Benjamin Gordiejew, *Voices of Yugoslav Jewry* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 64–65; Gordiejew also quotes Friedenreich.

unique political response in the form of its own complex ideology. In order to unpack the complex history of Sephardi workers, their political engagements, and the forms of Jewish political resistance to fascism, the chapter starts with an outline of the existing historiography and timeline of the Jewish involvement in leftist politics.

5.1 Pioneers: Jewish progressives in the Balkans (1910–24)

How Jewish involvement, place, and initiative in the socialist movement was perceived in the socialist Yugoslav state depended on both the political positioning (from the perspective of the state) of Jews in the official narrative, but also on the historiography. The arguably tendentious historical narrative of the CPY aside, a number of Jewish historians, communists, partisan resistance fighters, cultural workers, and Holocaust survivors have also left significant traces. Among them, the most notable history writers were Jaša Romano (1908–86), Salamon (Moni) Finci (1914–84), Marko Perić (Velimir Drechsler/Dreksler) (1914–2000). There were also individuals who were not prominent as cultural workers but have still written on the socialist movement among Jews in the interwar period, such as Salamon Romano, who was also interviewed for the Fortunoff video archive in 1995.

Jaša Romano, a veterinarian and university professor, wrote the most comprehensive opus on the Jewish role in left politics. He predominantly dealt with the history of the Jews in Yugoslavia during the Second World War, the Holocaust, and Jewish soldiers in the resistance movement (*Narodnooslobodilačka armija*). In his work *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941–1945: Žrtve genocida i učesnici Narodnooslobodilačkog rata* (The Jews of Yugoslavia 1941–1945: Genocide Victims and Participants of the National Liberation War) Romano also gives an overview of Jewish participation in leftist politics from the beginning of the twentieth century. His periodisation of the workers' movement in this regard is interesting and telling. He followed the dominant timeline of the history of the CPY and distinguished two periods relevant for Jewish participation in the workers' movement. During the first period (1919–32) only a small number of Jews were involved in left politics, mostly only individuals, intellectuals, and students. However, even though Romano consistently followed his timeline, he still named more examples of groups and individuals who cannot be categorised as anomalies or cases of isolated intellectuals and students, and who clearly participated in the workers' movement at large alongside the CPY in this period. It seems as if he struggled to contextualise all the known and active individuals and groups. Moreover, as Romano started

his work with 1919, he did not trace any (potential) specifically Jewish interest in progressive politics in the period before the unification of the Yugoslav Kingdom.[539]

The conclusion from Romano's work seems to be that if an active Jewish workers' organisation did not exist, the Jews had no interest in progressive politics. A reason for this oversight could be that, when compared to the grand Jewish workers' organisations worldwide, the engagement of Jews in this part of the Balkans indeed seemed minute. A crude comparison with other Jewish workers' movements could only affirm this judgement. The most significant Jewish political and social organisation has most certainly been The General Jewish Labour Bund in Lithuania, Poland and Russia (*algemeyner yidsher arbeter-bund in lite, poyln un rusland*), known as the Bund. 'Bundism' was not only a response to the crisis of Jewish emancipation politics in the late nineteenth century, it was also a coherent economic answer for the increasingly impoverished Jewish population in Eastern Europe, as well as an impetus for a secular counterculture. The influence of the Jewish Labour Bund cannot be overestimated, since it 'profoundly changed the structure of Jewish society, politics and culture in Eastern Europe, and, by extension, Americas, much of Western Europe, and Israel', as Zvi Gitelman argued.[540]

If, at first, historiography did not note significant Jewish participation in the workers' movement, it could be also due to the fact that workers' organisations in general took some time to develop in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and especially in Sarajevo. In 1894, Sarajevo already had a union of typography workers. In 1898, railways workers formed an organisation, and in 1904 construction workers followed suit. The peak of political action in these years was the general strike in 1906. All these organisations accessed a wider field of action with the formation of the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1909. The party fought not only for political rights and freedom, but also for the improvement of the economic status of workers and the abolishment of serfdom, which was still in practice under Austro-Hungarian rule.[541] Yet Jews seem not to have participated in this first wave of political organising of workers under Austro-Hungarian rule. On the occasion of the first modern communal elections

[539] Jaša Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941–1945: Žrtve genocida i učesnici Narodnooslobodilačkog rata* (Belgrade: Savez Jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1980), 20.
[540] Zvi Gitelman, 'A Century of Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Legacy of the Bund and the Zionist Movement', in *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Zvi Gitelman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 3–19 (3). Seminal text on Bund is a chapter in Jonathan Frankel's work on Russian Jewish politics: Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 171–257.
[541] Nikola Babić, 'Osnovna obilježja društveno-političkih odnosa i djelatnosti radničkog pokreta u Sarajevu do 1937. godine', in *Sarajevo u revoluciji I*, ed. by Nissim Albahari et al. (Sarajevo: Istorijski arhiv Sarajevo, 1986), 9–62.

in Sarajevo, in 1910, the Jewish community there registered some interest in the political option that stood in defence of the rights and protection of labour workers. This initially small but significant appeal of the socialist option was certainly the result of the growing local workers' organisation.

The lack of Jewish participation in these movements arguably was because of the complex economic divide within the Jewish population, not the non-existence of Jewish labour workers. The Ashkenazi Jews who started settling in the Condominium of Bosnia-Herzegovina from the late nineteenth century came from other Austro-Hungarian provinces, equipped with at least some knowledge of German and experience of the capitalist market. This opened the doors to middle-class occupations such as medium-scale commerce, administration, free professions, and skilled labour.[542]

In contrast, Sephardi Jews remained bound to the Ottoman economic system in which the Jewish elite worked in commerce – both large and small scale. For the larger trading businesses, Austro-Hungarian rule brought access to greater markets and different goods. However, smaller-scale merchants were doomed to fail in these economic circumstances. Thus, Todor Kruševac, a historian of Bosnia under Habsburg rule, noted that 'class differentiation sharpened social polarisation among Bosnian Jews, arguably more than among their fellow citizens of other faiths'.[543] Kruševac's explanation is a good parallel for the change in Sephardi *kehila* leadership. The key positions were in the hands of merchant families until the 1910s and then moved to university-educated free professionals. It seems apparent that, in this constellation of power, Jewish artisans and labour workers were politically unrepresented both in communal affairs and in the local and provincial political bodies. This does not by any means mean that the Jewish lower classes did not have or express any interest in politics. They attempted to break into the political sphere on two occasions in 1910.

When the first parliamentary elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina were called for spring 1910, the question of who would get to represent the Bosnian-Herzegovian Jews sparked a months-long conflict between the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim (Chapter 2). Only men of a certain social status – the highest earners – had the right the vote in the elections. Altogether, 1,400 Jews cast their votes, of which the majority voted for Ješua Salom. A rabbi of the Ashkenazi community named Rothkopf won only 142 votes. Yet a certain Kapor – a Serb,

[542] Harriet Pass Friedenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia: A Quest for Community* (Skokie: Varda Books, 1979), 19.
[543] Todor Kruševac, 'Društvene promjene kod bosanskih Jevreja za austrijskog vremena', in *Spomenica 400 godina od dolaska Jevreja u Bosnu i Hercegovinu, 1566–1966*, ed. by Avram Pinto (Sarajevo: Jevrejska zajednica, 1967), 71–96.

Židovska Smotra underlined – who was the socialist option, received fifteen votes.[544] Considering the high benchmark for voting rights, meaning that the socialists' main target audience could not even vote, this was certainly a sign of interest.

Another note of dissatisfaction with the course of Jewish politics in the city came that summer. In 1910, there was a spike of interest in politics among not only Bosnian–Herzegovinian Jews, but also among Jews throughout the Balkans. That August, Bar Giora and Esperanza organised a Congress of Jewish graduates in Sarajevo, with the intention to bring together Ashkenazim and Sephardim in their Zionist agendas. The congress had a programme, a representative body and speakers who aimed to represent the entire Jewish community in this region between Croatia–Slavonia, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the Zionist newspaper *Židovska Smotra*, the only Jewish newspaper in the region in the period 1906–14, an author who used the pseudonym Judacus bosniacus (Bosnian Jew), drew attention to the lack of representation of and interest in the poor Jews of Sarajevo in the congress. The neighbourhoods of Bjelave, Piruša and Alifakovac, pejoratively named the 'Asia' or 'India' of Sarajevo, the author claimed, were home to nine out of ten of the city's Jewry. The Graduate Congress was quick to meet these 'Jewish masses'. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of these marginalised city quarters came to the congress, even if they seemed invisible. 'At the congress you could not see it [Jewish masses] […], but you could notice them at the balcony, timid, ashamed, half-asleep and serious'. The article was not only a critique of the lack of understanding among this overwhelming number of people, but also of the Zionist rhetoric, which was often incomprehensible and inaccessible to these people, who mostly had limited secular educations. The author painted an image of a peddler at the end of his article: 'A worried Jew comes home from work. On his back, he has a bundle of old things, and in his hands, he is carrying *Židovska Smotra*. He directs his tired eyes and reads – he attempts and struggles – to understand.'[545] It was a sign that Jewish politics was actively excluding the majority of Sarajevo's Jewish population.

These still weak voices from the margins appeared in Sarajevo at the same time as a significant Sephardi Jewish workers' ideology had gained momentum in Salonica. In the coming years (1910–14), the increased activity of the Zionist organisation in the region, followed by the Sephardi aims to establish cultural and political autonomy within the European Jewish nationalisms, failed to engage with the lower classes in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia.

[544] 'Rezultati izbora u židovskoj kuriji', *Židovska Smotra*, 11, 16 Iyar 5670/11 May 1910, 1.
[545] Judacus bosniacus, 'Poslije kongresa', *Židovska Smotra*, 19, 10 Elul 5670/12 September 1910, 1–2.

The elite-oriented politics disabled any potential connection and political engagement with the Socialist Federation in Salonica, whose leaders were Jews and whose supporters shared a similar frustration with their brethren living further north in the Balkans.

The Socialist Federation started off in 1909 as the Labour League, and in the next decade, it grew into a coherent and structured party with sound support that could count on 7,000 to 8,000 people. Formed in the light of the Young Turk revolution in 1908, the Socialist Federation started off as a workers' club, initially gathering (Sephardi) Jewish printers, tobacco and clothing factory workers, and mercantile employers. The Jewish Labour League grew into an umbrella organisation that was conceived as a federation of separate sections standing for the city's ethnic groups: Jews, Bulgarians, Greeks and Turks.[546] Inasmuch as its leaders, among them most notably Abraham Benaroya (1887–1979), aimed to deliver a better life for Salonican workers, they also protested against the bourgeois 'Cercle des Intimes' (Inner Circle), as they derisively called the Jewish leadership in the city. The federation successfully organised a couple of strikes that completely paralysed economic activity in the city. Furthermore, they translated the essential Marxist works into Judeo-Spanish. Finally, they strove to engage with the city's Greek, Turkish, and Slavic population alike.[547] While the federation had a significant political role both in Salonica and within the Balkan context in general due to its dedication to overcoming ethnic divides, with the collapse of the Ottoman empire and seizure of Salonica by the Greek state, this multinational organisation lost its momentum.

In other parts of the Balkans, active left politics emerged after the Balkan Wars and the First World War, especially among the Jewish youth. Universities were the first centres where young Jewish leftists took on important roles. Like Esperanza and Bar Giora, which shaped the Jewish political scene at the turn of the century, the workers' movement also recruited enthusiasts from among the students at the University of Vienna. The Club of Socialists Students from Yugoslavia (Klub studenta socijalista iz Jugoslavia) was formed in 1919. Among its founders were Lavoslav Kraus (1897–1984) from Osijek, Alfred Bergman (1901–

[546] On the broader united front of the Balkan peoples on the left see the special issue of Revolutionary History Journal:. *Revolutionary* History 8/3 (2003), The Balkan Socialist Tradition and the Balkan Federation, 1871–1915, ed. by Andreja Živković and Dragan Plavšić.

[547] Joshua Starr, 'The Socialist Federation of Saloniki', *Jewish Social Studies*, 7 (October 1945), 324–25. Abraham Benaroya wrote his memories for the years 1908–1918 for the Greek newspapers *Takhydromos* in 8–25 March 1931; Abraham Benaroya, 'A Note on "The Socialist Federation of Saloniki"', *Jewish Social Studies*, 11 (January 1949), 69–72. Aron Rodrigue and Esther Benbassa, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th–20th Centuries* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1993), 154–56.

41) from Visoko, and Greta Diamant (1900–93/4) from Vukovar.[548] A number of Jewish students from Yugoslavia became members, including Stjepan Policer, Salamon Moni Levi, Marcel Šnajder, Šua Salom, Karlo Fodor, Lea Grin, and Julija Kraus. A communist group within the club started the newspaper *Srp i čekić* (Sickle and Hammer), whose editor-in-chief was Moni Levi. Soon after, the Communist Party declared this paper the official organ of the party, with Moni Levi remaining as its editor. This was a defining period for the workers' movement, when, only two years into the Yugoslav unification, the Communist Party was banned by a decree in December 1920. This, however, was not the end of progressive politics among Jews. The role of leaders in the fight for workers' rights gave the unions, where Jews were widely represented, significantly more influence than was proportional to their percentage of the population. Just some of the Jews who served as leaders of unions in Bosnia-Herzegovina were Moric Švarchard, a board member of the Union of Bosnian and Herzegovinian Railways, Juda Atijas, the secretary of the Union of tanners, and Natan Ovadija the treasurer of the Union of metal workers.[549]

Even if the Communist Party came out as one of the strongest parties on the general elections in 1920, for the longest part of the interwar period (1921–1941)[550], it acted underground in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, while its leadership predominantly worked from abroad. Many of its activists paid for their involvement with the party by spending long years in prison. A widely celebrated example that really stands out in the general narrative of the CPY was Moše Pijade (1890–1957). Born into a well-off Sephardi merchant family in Belgrade, Pijade spent his early days acquiring the best education Belgrade at the turn of the century had to offer. After pursuing his interest in painting in Belgrade, he went off to study art in Munich. After his father had a financial breakdown, Pijade returned to Belgrade in the 1910s and took on a series low paid jobs to support his family. Soon, he began working as a journalist. His contemporaries remembered his pieces for an unusual willingness to criticise the government of the time.[551]

Pijade became interested in the increasing number of social issues that were emerging after the Balkan Wars and the First World War and the formation of the Yugoslav state, so his

[548] 'Kraus, Lavoslav', in *Židovski bigrafski leksikon*, https://zbl.lzmk.hr/?p=883 (accessed 17 July 2021); 'Bergman, Alfred', in *Židovski bigrafski leksikon*, https://zbl.lzmk.hr/?p=1769 (accessed 17 July 2021); 'Diamant, Greta', in *Židovski bigrafski leksikon*, https://zbl.lzmk.hr/?p=3116 (accessed 17 July 2021).
[549] Romano, Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941–1945, 15–16.
[550] Dejan Djokic, *Elusive Compromise. A History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst&Co, 2007), 51–2.
[551] Slobodan Nešović, *Moše Pijade i njegovo vreme* (Belgrade: Prosveta/Mladinska knjiga, 1968), 33–46, 119–96; On the contextualisation of Pijade's work as a painter, see Mirjam Rajner, *Fragile Images: Jews and Art in Yugoslavia, 1918–1945* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 15–56.

involvement in the Communist Party was a logical step. He remained active in the underground circles of the party after it was banned in 1920 and ended up getting a twelve-year sentence for publishing the party's unofficial newspapers in 1924. Pijade earned legendary status in the 1920s by educating prison inmates about socialism and organising them into a cell of the Communist Party. He served his sentence in prison in Sremska Mitrovica alongside Josip Broz, who became the General Secretary of the CPY in 1937 and later the leader of the National Liberation War (1941–45). Pijade is now remembered mainly for his loyalty to the cause and the party, his participation in the anti-fascist movement, and his ideological contributions and policies after the Second World War.[552] He received a number of medals and titles for his contributions, and his grave was moved to Kalemegdan, to the Tomb of People's Heroes made for him and three other devoted communists and well-known fighters in the Second World War: Ivo Lola Ribar (1916–43), Ivan Milutinović (1901–41), and Đura Đaković (1896–1929).

While his efforts were not openly celebrated in the 1920s, the name Moše Pijade resonated with all politically active Sephardim through the column by his brother, David Pijade, in the Sarajevan *Jevrejski Život*. David wrote for the Sephardi-oriented newspaper more or less regularly through the entire 1920s. In 1924 and 1925, just as his younger brother went to serve his sentence, David Pijade wrote open letters to his brother that were emotional but still eager to convey a political message. He called for the reconsideration of his brother's sentence, calling the imprisonment the 'death of his youth'.[553] David Pijade's writing went hand-in-hand with growing interest in the socialist cause and the CPY among Sephardi, and more generally Jewish, youth in the mid-1920s. This was certainly important for establishing a stronghold among the wider non-Jewish population. However, alongside these individual endeavours, there was a significant shift in the ways the Jewish community, especially the Sephardi community in Sarajevo, saw their poor, working-class members.

5.2 The poor and Sephardi communal politics (1924–28)

Parallel to the individual and group endeavours within the Communist Party was a shift in the Jewish communal relationship with the Jewish poor and working class. La Benevolencia, a society for support and education, played a crucial role in shaping the image of this part of Jewish society among the Sephardi Jews in Sarajevo. Founded in 1882, the society grew to be the core of communal politics. This was mainly due to its wide, all-encompassing plans that

[552] Nešović, Moše Pijade i njegovo vreme, 766–840.
[553] David S. Pijade, 'U zatišju. Pisma mome bratu', *Jevrejski Život*, 120, 1 Tishri 5687/9 August 1926, 1–2.

aimed to make each individual Jew 'a useful member of society'. Behind this universal phrase was the idea that educating Jews, for artisanry or professions, enabling a solid financial existence and meant having a productive member of society. In this equation, poverty was not acceptable as a part of modern society.[554] In the decades that followed, La Benevolecia educated a number of artisans and, primarily, doctors and lawyers of Sephardi backgrounds in Sarajevo.

The accomplishments of the most important Sephardi humanitarian society were celebrated in the memorial volume dedicated to La Benevolencia published in 1924. Stanislav Vinaver (1891–1955) gave an overview of the society's work. In his words, the work of 'a small but devoted circle of progressive Jews' had produced triumphant results. When it began, the society had been dedicated to eliminating public displays of poverty, such as begging on Shabbat and Jewish holidays, common in the Sephardi communities in the Ottoman empire. Establishing a goal to 'economically strengthen and enlighten the community',[555] La Benevolencia began in 1899 to invest in educating youth in artisan and professional work. Though focused solely on Sarajevo at first, the society started to actively include Sephardi youth from across Bosnia-Herzegovina in their programme in 1904. Interested young men from underprivileged families received grants during their education in high school, higher education, and apprenticeships. Vinaver even estimated that half of 'our intelligentsia and masters [artisans] should thank La Benevolencia for their education and material support'.[556]

The society even offered post-education support. For instance, the apprentice would get help in finding a position at the end of his training. In case of university students, La Benevolencia did not explicitly state what their opportunities would be; however, since they were mostly educated to be medical doctors and lawyers, they had, at least at first, good opportunities in the city and in provinces that lacked men in these professions. The first generations or two of this professional class were also active in communal leadership. La Benevolencia held sway in the society through the two generations of Sephardi scholars who by then had been educated in the West, primarily in Vienna. These university-educated Sephardim included both Sephardi Zionist ideologues and Sephardi-oriented politics proponents. While the highly educated Sephardim still held the executive positions in the

[554] Danon, The Jews of Izmir.
[555] Stanislav Vinaver (ed.), *Spomenica o proslavi tridesetogodišnjice sarajevskoga kulturno-potpornoga društva La Benevolencia* (Sarajevo: Štamparija i cinkografija 'Vreme'), 3.
[556] Stanislav Vinaver, in Spomenica o proslavi tridesetogodišnjice, 3–5, 9.

community, the ever-growing number of poor people in the city and province in the first half of the 1920s had no say when it came to communal politics.

Yet these efforts did not bring about a deep restructuring of Sephardi society in the province. Sephardi Jews remained predominantly involved in commerce and, based on the estimates made by Haim Kamhi in the 1930s, they controlled approximately one-third of commercial activity in Sarajevo.[557] At the lower end of the economic spectrum were thousands of Jewish artisans and workers, and, according to the tax distribution, which was progressive in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, two-thirds of Jewish taxpayers (549 households) fell into the lowest income bracket, while the remaining households (183 in total) were almost equally distributed among the middle and upper tax brackets.[558] Thus, it is not surprising that socio-economic issues became ever-apparent, even while La Benevolencia celebrated success in eliminating poverty among Jews.

Comments in the press focused on the marginalised parts of society. In March 1923, *Židovska Svijest* (Jewish Consciousness) published David A. Levi's text 'Bjelave', about a quarter of Sarajevo where the poorest Jews lived. This report had a critical tone from the start. After first alluding to the selectiveness of Jewish politics and the focus newspapers chose in their reports, Levi went on to condemn the general ignorance of the social and economic state of the majority of Jews in the city. [559] Not only was this disregard harmful to the Jewish poor, but it also fed the prejudiced stereotype that Sarajevo was full of rich Jewry.

In Bjelave, on the other side of the city centre, lived 'hungry people' (*gladna raja*). Levi wrote of his visit to Bjelave on a Saturday afternoon and described three homes he entered. The first barely resembled a house; it was a traditional barn, without windows, where a war widow lived with four children. The second was home to an infirm middle-aged woman and her daughter who nursed her. The third home in this row discouraged him even from entering: 'it multiplied the gallery of dark images'.[560] Although it was noted, the topic of the article did not receive much attention, arguably because of the so-called Sephardi-Ashkenazi conflict, the formation of the World Sephardi Confederation, and the local issues that followed these events. However, as both the local conflict and the enthusiasm around Sephardi organisation waned, the pressing social issues among the Sarajevo Sephardim attracted more attention. This comment was channelled in two distinct ways: first, reflections on poverty and its meaning in

[557] Haim Kamhi, 'Jevreji u privredi Bosne i Hercegovine', in *Spomenica 400 godina*, 57–60.
[558] Friedenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, 19–20.
[559] David A. Levi, 'Bjelave', *Židovska Svijest*, 216, 13 Nisan 5683/30 March 1923, 7.
[560] Levi, 'Bjelave', 7.

the moral system of Judaism and Jewish life, popular culture, and especially the representations of Jewish life in literature; and second, the recurring issue of career and education paths for youth.

The return of the poor into social politics came on the occasion of Purim, the Jewish holiday that commemorates the salvation of the Jewish people from Haman, the Persian official who wanted to kill them. In 1927, the Sarajevan newspaper *Jevrejski Život* published 'Moral of Purim', an editorial underlining the ethical meaning of Purim in Judaism, namely giving to the poor and easing their misery. The author, probably the newspaper's editor-in-chief Braco Poljokan, celebrated this forgotten Jewish custom. He wrote: 'To [the Jewish people] the mutual assistance is holy and supporting the poor almost a religion'. However, it seemed to the author that 'the rich lost the sense of deeds "para el otro mundo" [for the other world],' and therein lay the crisis of the entire society. The crisis, the critique estimated, was obviously not financial, as all cafes and dancing halls were full – the crisis was moral and threatened to become cultural.[561] After more than three decades of persistent attempts to exclude the poor and poverty from the public sphere and discourse, the communal turn to the ethics of giving and the role of the poor in society was a response to a growing social issue.

Parallel to the problem they posed, the Jewish poor were also a part of a solution for the constantly looming cultural 'crisis'. For example, the Sephardi intelligentsia was fascinated with Bitola's Jewry, who lived in humble conditions but maintained perceived high cultural standards based on tradition (see Chapter 4). At the time, during the peak of enthusiasm for the World Sephardi Organisation (WSO) in 1925 and 1926, it seems that the representatives of the Sephardi community who visited 'Southern Serbia' did not at first notice similar potential in their own surroundings. Soon after, *Jevrejski Život* picked up on this oversight and wrote about the 3,000 Jews living in Bjelave. They were also a part of the Jewish population of the city but had a specific role: 'Their homes still carefully preserve tradition and our good customs still find space and foundation there'. However, their existence depended solely on the charitable societies Bet Tefila and Olat Aboker.[562]

In the coming years, this question was reopened on various occasions in the local press. Another editorial, published in January 1928 in *Jewish life*, reminded readers of the essential rules of 'Jewish sacrifice'. According to the author, Jewish atonement draws roots from beyond the Jewish laws. Moses' ordinances on giving, the religious institution of *tzedah* (charity) – all

[561] 'Moral purima', *Jevrejski Život*, 147, 14 Adar 5687/18 March 1927, 1.
[562] 'Fuzija i štednja', *Jevrejski Život*, 156, 25 Iyar 5687/27 March 1927, 1.

these codes were the result of the Jewish social position in wider society, as a reaction to an unjust world. As such, self-sacrifice is a part of the 'Jewish psyche'; it is a Jewish quality.[563] Thus, the Jewish poor had an essential purpose, not solely in the political but also in the cultural sphere. Historian of the Yugoslav Jewry, Harriet Friedenreich, ascribed this editorial to Isak Samokovlija,[564] a physician who was growing in stature as a writer precisely at that time in the late 1920s and was famous for his short stories depicting the life of Sephardim in Sarajevo. His growing popularity, hand in hand with the topics he repeatedly wrote about, revealed the experiences of the Sephardi majority to a wider audience. Due to his writings, the Sephardim who had been marginalised both in space (living on the outskirts of Sarajevo) and in discourse came to the fore (for Samokovlija's biography, see Chapter 4). His importance arose from the wider acknowledgement he received as a writer both within and beyond the Sephardi community in Sarajevo.[565] His contemporaries named him the first and only storyteller of Bosnia.[566] His work, most notably short stories and novellas, described the setting and conditions of the Sephardi poor: 'Rafina avlija' dealt with the life path of a young woman from a poor background, while 'Nosač Samuel' illustrated modest life choices and sacrifices of a worker.[567]

Finally, the pressures of economic and social reality and evidently ever diminishing prospects of navigating the (future) job market led to engagement with the working class. This debate went in two directions: first, contrary to previous cultural policies, mainly presented and led by La Benevolencia, the press actively discouraged youth from pursuing higher education. Second, the press and the notable representatives of the community kept trying to convince youth and their parents that the best option for a career path was artisanship. This development peaked in 1928 and the following years as a direct consequence of the economic crash and the impact it had on the job market in Yugoslavia. After decades of encouraging and supporting Sephardi students to attend universities, which had become the core of La Benevolencia's work and had been deemed crucial for building a Sephardi elite, the Sephardi leadership started encouraging youth and their parents to pursue training with local artisans. Moreover, parents were criticised for forcing their children into higher education, not for the sake of learning but with the aim of making a career as a physician or a clerk. This way of thinking, said the author, writing under the pseudonym 'More' in *Jevrejski Glas* in 1928,

[563] 'Požrtvovanost', *Jevrejski Glas*, 2, 27 Tevet 5688/20 January 1928, 1.
[564] Friedenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, 20n30.
[565] Be. p., 'Isak Samokovlija: Drina', *Jevrejski Glas*, 17, 12 Iyar 5688/17 May 1928, 2.
[566] J. Palavestra, 'Pripovedač Isak Samokovlija', *Jevrejski Glas*, 22, 27 Sivan 5688/15 June 1928, 2.
[567] Isak Samokovlija, 'Rafina avlija', *Srpski književni glasnik*, 21–22 (1927): 323–32.

harmed the entire community. The undermining of manual labour led to social changes and habits, and the community had to carry the burden of 'Luftegzistencija' or luft life.[568] This word was derived from a pejorative term that was popular across Europe: 'luftmensch', meaning a person solely concerned with airy intellectual pursuits and not practical matters. Anti-Semites across Europe had used this word since the 1900s as a deprecatory marker for cosmopolites and Jews (and Jewish cosmopolites), and it summed up the accusation of their having a perceived inconsistent lifestyle and culture, rootlessness, and economic futility.[569] Reconsideration of non-intellectual professions thus had an ideological subtext as well.

In the light of these social changes, La Benevolencia changed its strategy and stopped giving scholarships to university students. More than before, in choosing a career path, parents were advised not to force their children to pursue a craft as a punishment for failure in school, but instead as a sensible choice. Moreover, they were encouraged to send their children to learn professions that were not popular and were physically easier, such as hairdressing or garment-making. A productive society should meet the need for occupations such as wheelwrights or stonemasons as well.[570] Girls and young women were also encouraged to take up artisanship through the programmes of La Gloria, a society dedicated to helping poor women.[571] These responses to the economic crisis were meant to solve the issue of poverty in the city. However, they did not go hand in hand with the representation of artisans and workers in the community itself. This changed in the late 1920s.

When the group Young Jewish Shopkeepers and Workers (jevrejska čaršijska-radnička omladina), along with Poale Cion (Workers of Zion), gathered a list of names for the communal elections in Sarajevo in autumn 1928, it was greeted with hostility. The traditional Jewish (and mostly Sephardi) representatives in city and national politics were also *kehila* leaders, who presented themselves as the 'general Jewish list'. Their leader was the president of the Sephardi community, Avram Majer Altarac, alongside Albert Kajon, Vita Kajon's brother and a bookshop owner Žiga Bauer, a physician; and Samuel Pinto, a lawyer.[572] The representative of the shopkeepers and workers was Josip Pepi Baruh. Interestingly, Pepi Baruh also belonged to the Sephardi intellectual establishment – he was an alumnus of Esperanza in Zagreb and, therefore, a supporter of the Sephardi-centred politics.[573] Apparently, he did not see any

[568] More, 'Što ću sa svojim djetetom?', *Jevrejski Glas*, 2, 27 Tevet 5688/20 January 1928, 6.
[569] Nicolas Berg, *Luftmensch. Zur Geschichte einer Metaphor* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).
[570] Rad, 'La Benevolencie za naučnike', *Jevrejski Glas*, 61, 3 Adar 5689/15 March 1929, 4.
[571] A. 'Prosvjetno-kulturni rad La Glorije', *Jevrejski Glas*, 12–13, 14 Nisan 5688/4 April 1928, 6.
[572] 'Izbori za sarajevsku gradsku opštinu i Jevreji', *Jevrejski Glas*, 37, 14 Tishri 5689/28 September 1928, 3.
[573] Jakov Atijas, '"Esperansa", Jevrejski sefardski klub u Zagrebu', *Jevrejski almanah*, 1955–56, 110.

discontinuity in supporting Sephardi politics and representing politically marginalised Sephardi social groups. He explained this political movement came out of dissatisfaction with social differentiation in the Jewish society and the lack of representation of the lower Jewish strata: 'Us Jews do not share all interests; among Jews, there are working people and other poor, but also merchants, and their political interests cannot align. Thus, the Jews decided to step up for the interests of workers and smaller merchants and artisans.'[574]

Pepi Baruh's shared youth experience in Esperanza and close association with the Sephardi leadership did not prevent the merciless attacks in the Jewish newspapers in the weeks leading up to the elections. He and his supporters were called out for lack of solidarity and personal ambitions. Braco Poljokan, the editor-in-chief of *Jevrejski Glas*, the only Jewish newspaper in Sarajevo at the time, insinuated that the 'second list' had false pretences. In his opinion, there were no social classes among Jews, since the Jewish community's wealth consistently changed and fluctuated. Poljokan claimed that contesting the elections with a separate list was not proof of class-directed politics, since the communal political board always supported all members of the Jewish community, regardless of their wealth, status or affiliation. 'Among us', Poljokan wrote, 'the rich always alternate with poor. Yesterday's wealthy man is today a cripple, and today's cripple is a rich man tomorrow. The problem of the poor among is not class[-based] but personal.' Thus, he concluded that the discussion forced on the community was made up and senseless.[575] These rough words and accusations did not resonate well in the community. Not only did the elections see higher Jewish voter turnout than ever before (65% or 1,600), but just under half (around 700) voted for Pepi Baruh's list or the list of 'Jewish shopkeepers and workers'.[576]

Even though, seemingly, the conflict remained on the fringes of the Sephardi *kehila*, the Poljokan–Pepi Baruh tensions reflected a greater political divide among Jews in Sarajevo. Jews, in the end, did not have their own political option, their own party; they could be elected only on the lists of dominant political parties. Naimly, Poljokan, and other Sephardi intellectuals such as Vita Alkalaj, Albert Kajon, and Vita Kajon supported the People's Radical Party (Narodna Radikalna Stranka), which had been in power since the unification of Yugoslavia. The party garnered support among Sephardim nationwide and even organised rallies in Judeo-Spanish. Siding with the government became especially problematic in the

[574] 'Pred općinske izbore', *Jugoslavenski list*, 226, 23 September 1928, 4.
[575] 'Veliki zbor Jevreja. Uspjela skupština Političkog odbora', *Jevrejski Glas*, 40, 5 Cheshvan 5689/9 October 5689, 3.
[576] 'Poslije izbora', *Jevrejski Glas*, 43, 26 Cheshvan 5689/19 October 1928, 1.

summer of 1928, after the turmoil that revealed the complex discord between the main political opponents, the Radical Party and the Croatian Peasants' Party (Hrvatska seljačka stranka), which even resulted in the assassination of a Member of Parliament, Stjepan Radić, the leader of the latter party.[577] After this event, the government moved to further constrain political and public debate.

In the light of these circumstances, it is important to note that Samuel Pinto and Pepi Baruh sided with the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation (YMO, Jugoslovenska Muslimanska Organizacija), which primarily represented and defended the Bosnian Muslim population in the country but was in general highly critical of the leadership in Belgrade. YMO had support primary in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[578] The motivation of the group of 'small shopkeepers' to side with the Muslim organisation is obscure. In the mid-1920s YMO started spreading anti-Semitic rumours, framing Jews as supporters of the state regime and blaming them for the decline of Muslim merchants' success. The organisation even organised a boycott of Jewish stores in 1925, although it did not garner public support.[579] The group around Pepi Baruh must have believed that they could cultivate solidarity between Jews and Muslims in Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, given the growing pressure from the central government.

The elections ended as a victory for the Jewish citizens of Sarajevo: instead of the four seats on the city council expected of the list of Avram Altarac's allies prior to the entrance of Pepi Baruh's list, Jews won five seats – four for the People's Radical Party and one for the YMO. This was not a cause for celebration in the Jewish community, but an invitation to continue verbal assaults on the newcomers. Benjamin Pinto alienated the list of shopkeepers and workers with his article in the newspaper *Jevrejski Glas* calling their step 'unconscious politics'. Not only did Pepi Baruh's list lack intellectual support (since Avram Altarac's list supposedly gathered all Jewish intellectuals) but Pinto also questioned whether the impressive turnout really testified to the political maturity of the Jewish voters in general. Turnout can be a sign of success in a rural setting, but in the city, Pinto wrote, politics valued ideas and not mass, uncritical affiliation. In his eyes, Pepi Baruh was not the leader of a mass movement, rather it was the mass, ready for a rebellion, that pushed him to the fore.[580]

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[577] John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 158–62.

[578] Seka Brkljača, 'Prilog proučavanju političkog života Jevreja Sarajeva', *Prilozi*, 48 (2019), 112–13. Brkljača mentions that there were still Sephardi political representatives in the state's politics who showed support for other parties as well, such as Mihael Levi who was in the Democratic Party.

[579] Emily Greble, *Sarajevo 1941–1945: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Hitler's Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 35–36.

[580] Be. p., 'Iza opštinskih izbora', *Jevrejski Glas*, 43, 26 Cheshvan 5689/19 October 1928, 3.

The tension between the two camps remained the main topic in communal politics for months after the city council elections. In an article published weeks after the elections, Benjamin Pinto called out the supporters of the Pepi Baruh list for revolting not against the rich but against the intelligentsia.[581] While he aimed to delegitimise the efforts of the shopkeepers and workers, Pinto was correct in the sense that the Sephardi intelligentsia was now challenged both as communal leaders and Sephardi representatives. This was, in fact, the consequence of the failure to turn the Sephardi-centred politics into a coherent political choice in Yugoslavia. However, this lack of political reach among the Sephardi university-educated elite was due to their inability to break off their contracts with the dominant minority that controlled the social and cultural institutions, namely La Benevolencia. The fact that the decline of support and enthusiasm for the Sephardi political platform came at the same time as the rise of the lower-middle and working classes is not accidental. The latter was the target of both left and Sephardi-focused programmes. The Sephardi circle was either too confident in the support of the 'Sephardi masses living in Bjelave' or unwilling to respond to their pressing economic needs.

Finally, even though the communal Sephardi leadership started to notice and act on the disproportionate numbers of Jewish poor and the gaps in their own education policies and started raising awareness of the importance of the good standing of the working class, they were not willing to free up space for the working class to take political action. This was the case with the city council elections, which was the point at which this conflict burst into the open. The issue came up again only a couple of months later, in January 1929, on the occasion of the communal elections within the Sephardi community, when Avram Levi Sadić came out as a leader of small merchants and, now officially, the Poale Cion list. These elections did not attract a similar level of interest and engagement as the city council ones, getting a turnout of only around 50 per cent. This was enough for Avram Altarac to win another mandate.[582] However, what came out of these two instances was a larger faction that refused to be contained within the established walls of communal politics.

[581] Be. p., 'Jedna riječ o našoj inteligenciji', *Jevrejski Glas*, 44, 3 Kislev 5689/16 November 1928, 1.
[582] 'Izbori za Sefardsku opštinu u Sarajevu', *Jevrejski Glas*, 51, 22 Tevet 5689/4 January 1929, 3.

5.3 Matatja: Sephardi workers' response (1923–39)

Considering the Sephardi communal leadership's harsh responses and ongoing critique against the emerging political activity of the previously unrepresented Sephardim, it is not surprising that the Jewish workers in Sarajevo, again mainly Sephardim, worked to secure political representation. Communal Jewish politics had clearly been unresponsive towards the pressing social needs and growing aspirations for political representation. As seen in the example of the local elections in Sarajevo and then Jewish communal elections in 1928 and 1929 respectively, a group of shopkeepers and artisans, at first alone and later supported by Poale Cion, came out with the first platform that aimed to respond to the social issues of the previously unrepresented Jewish citizens of the city. This pioneering and successful attempt opened the doors of local, regional, and finally national politics for Jews, and a couple of Jewish organisations stepped forward to take the leading role in this breakthrough.

Arguably the pre-eminent example of at first solely social and then political organising was Matatja, organizacija jevrejske radničke omladine, or Matatja, the Jewish youth workers' organisation in Sarajevo. Matatja achieved concrete results that went over the heads of the Jewish political leadership in the city – in its eighteen years of existence, Matatja stood out as the only Jewish organisation to simultaneously remain autonomous from the *kehila* and become an independent political platform. As such, Matatja was unique and unprecedented, which is reflected in the memory culture around it. With its connections and work with the banned CPY in the interwar period, Matatja became a significant player in the story of the party's post-Second World War history in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Socialist Federal Republic (SFR) of Yugoslavia. Historians' interpretations of Matatja as a success story overlooked or misinterpreted the significance of the Jewish, especially Sephardi, content in the Jewish social campaign in Sarajevo in general.

The timeline of Matatja has been blurred by Yugoslav historiography's specific outlook on the Jewish workers' organisation. In view of the victory of the People's Liberation Army over fascism, all workers' and progressive organisations active in interwar Yugoslavia were declared part of a nationwide movement, organised and led by the CPY. Moreover, a number of Matatja's activists during the interwar period took part in combat during the Second World War and, after the war, were a part of the cultural and political establishment of the new SFR Yugoslavia. The reading of the Jewish workers' organisation was, thus, in line with the party's interpretation of the interwar period and embedded into a wider narrative of the resistance to the previous 'royalist regime' and the underground actions of the CPY. To a certain extent,

members of Matatja, fighters in the People's Liberation Army and Holocaust survivors after the Second World War contributed to this image of Matatja. Here I am mostly referring to Moni Finci and Salamon Romano (1898–2015). However, the two former activists did not embed Matatja's history into the history of CPY with last intentions; it was rather that historians took Finci's and Romano's experience as a reflection of Matatja's work throughout its existence between 1923 and 1939. Both Finci and Romano, however, were involved with the society only from the mid-1930s, or precisely in 1934 and 1936 respectively. By that moment, Matatja had existed for more than a decade, with its programme evolving over the course of time. Therefore, even though Matatja did work closely with the CPY – or more precisely with its youth branch Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije (SKOJ) – this still does not mean that the society had been a cell of the party throughout its history. Moreover, based on existing sources, Matatja's story between 1923 and 1939 reveals much about the history of Sephardi political engagement beyond the *kehila*. Thus, to understand the complex context of the society, one must historicise its cultural and political work.

Matatja was formed in 1923 but held its first official large gathering in 1926. Reflecting on the beginnings of the society in 1927, *Jevrejski Život* wrote: 'A small group of conscious workers felt a strong need, a couple of years back, for a community which would be their hub; a centre from which they can spread national consciousness among Jewish workers.'[583] The general public took interest in the society only following this meeting in winter 1926, and it was not entirely clear to the reporter of *Jevrejski Život* why Matatja split from the Sarajevan branch of Poale Cion. Yet the reporter noted that Matatja's work was admirable – they had amassed 250 members, had put together a *tamburica* band (a type of guitar popular in South-Eastern Europe), had organised lectures on Zionist topics, and had participated in the Maccabean games.[584] Thus, at least at first, Matatja fit in with the Jewish political mainstream of Zionist organisations following different ideological streams and targeting assorted audiences.

Similar organisations dominated Jewish social and political throughout Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe. Beyond the Yugoslav Zionist Organisation, with headquarters in Zagreb, a number of local agencies and youth organisations who were active at the local level organised Jewish political life. Among the most active was Poale Zion (Poale Cion in Yugoslavia), the organisation of Jewish workers. The Poale Zion movement was

[583] 'Otvorenje Doma jevrejske radničke omladinske zajednice "Matatja"', *Jevrejski Život*, 171, 19 Elul 5687/16 September 1927, 4.
[584] 'Matatja', *Jevrejski Život*, 133, 12 Tebet 5687/17 December 1926, 2.

initiated in the Russian empire, when in 1906 a group of Jewish workers disagreed with Bund's abandonment of the Zionist project. Agitating for workers' rights in the Jewish diaspora and supporting the development in Yishuv, Poale Zion's popularity reached its peak during and immediately after the First World War.[585] In Yugoslavia, the organisation had a similar timeline: the Zionist workers' organisation had a largely cultural Zionist programme and left political orientation. As many of its members engaged with the banned Communist Party, Poale Cion was greatly weakened by the anti-communist purges 1925.[586] Afterwards, it limited its activities to charitable burial work in the 1930s.[587]

Certainly, many Poale Cion supporters must have also been members of Hashomer Hatzair (or Hašomer Hacair in Serbo-Croatian transliteration). Also on the Zionist spectrum, Hashomer Hatzair was a left-leaning Zionist organisation focused on Jewish youth. This organisation also had its roots in 1916 Vienna – more precisely Galicia – where it was built on the model of the Polish Scouts organisation. Thus, Hashomer Hatzair primarily nurtured engagement in sport, hiking, and scouting activities that were meant to bring young Jews closer to nature, instil in them a sense of duty and discipline, and harden their physiques.[588] The organisation was dedicated to building *kibbutzim* in the Yishuv. The success of Hashomer Hatzair in Yugoslavia was evident and resulted in the creation of Shaar Hamakim, a Yugoslav–Romanian *kibbutz*.[589] While both Poale Cion and Hashomer Hatzair had a role in Jewish communal life in Sarajevo, they never came out with a political agenda that would in any way defend Jewish political interests in the wider society. In this regard, Matatja gradually changed its nature.

At first, Matatja fit into the mould of youth groups who organised nature outings. The spirit of national rejuvenation through physical exercise and time in nature had been a trope of national politics in Europe ever since romanticism. In this regard, the Jewish national movements lagged behind. For instance, the biggest part of the Zionist movement, in its earliest stages, was based on the endless debates in Central European cafes. With the launch of the first Blau-Weiss (Blue-White) youth group in Breslau in 1907, the Zionist movement worked

[585] On the example of Poale Zion in interwar Poland, see Samuel D. Kassow, 'The Left Poalei Tsiyon in Interwar Poland', in *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics*, 71–84.
[586] Jakir Eventov, 'Omladina iz 1918', *Jevrejski Almanah*, 1955–56, 103.
[587] Friedenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, 158–59.
[588] Elkana Margalit, 'Social and Intellectual Origins of the Hashomer Hatzair Youth movement, 1913–1920', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 4 (1969), 25–46.
[589] Andreja Preger,'Jevrejska omladinska društva u Jugoslaviji od 1926. do 1941', in *Jevrejska omladinska društva na tlu Jugoslavije, 1919–1941*, ed. by Milica Mihajlović (Belgrade: Jevrejski istorijski muzej, 1995), 17–25 (24).

concertedly on getting the Jewish youth together in nature.[590] This idea was picked up by the most significant Jewish youth groups, among which were Hashomer Hatzair, Bar Kohba, etc. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, hiking and alpinism were introduced as leisure activities during Austria-Hungary's rule.[591] Matatja's programme initially followed this trend and actively organised hiking trips in Sarajevo's surroundings: from the tobacco factory to Ilidža in the east of the city, to Careve vode, Vasin Han, and Betanija.[592]

Seemingly, it took some time for hiking and camping clubs to have an impact on Jewish youth in the Balkans. The road of both Zionism and the Sephardi faction was originally paved by the student clubs in Vienna (Bar Giora and Esperanza) and Zagreb (Judeja and Literarische Verein) whose political culture relied deeply on city-dwelling. The interest of the general public in sports and nature outings seems to have grown only in the late 1920s. In 1927, *Jevejski Život* dedicated a couple of front pages to declarations of support for 'hiking and spending time outside (out of the cafes and clubs)' for the Jewish youth, male and female alike. Spending time in nature was bound to nurture a new generation of Jews and develop a new Jewish body, physically and aesthetically.[593] Similar confirmations of the benefits and importance of spending time outside of the city were constantly repeated in the newspapers and reached a peak with Isak Samokovlija's article 'To hikers', published in summer 1927. This commentary aimed to explain the history of the Jewish 'lifestyle' through the relationship the Jews had with their environment, both social and natural. At first, Samokovlija outlined how the Jews' position in the society, manifested through a social 'border', has for centuries shaped the Jewish body and soul. Even after the 'external circumstances' changed, the 'type' of Jew who kept the residues of the former lifestyle remained. What Samokovlija saw as the cure for this 'condition' was closer contact with nature, which would lead to 'healing of our life. In the hill air, in the smell of woods, on the mountain sun, on the snowy peaks, our soul will cleanse and heal the "rheumatism" it caught in the ghetto.' He praised the youth's engagement in hiking and called

[590] Chaim Shatker, 'Confronting the Religious Question Within the Zionist Youth Movement', in *Zionism and Religion*, ed. by Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1998), 303–11.
[591] Jelena Ćirić Kovač and Helmu Friefrischmeier, 'Die Entwicklung des Alpinismus in Bosnien und der Herzegovina', in *Bosnien. Von der Save bis zur Drina — auf Altösterreisches Spuren in Bosnien und Herzegowina*, ed. by Helmut Friedrichsmeier (Berndorf: Kral, 2018), 204–8.
[592] 'Iz Matatje', *Jevrejski Život*, 151, 13 Nisan 5687/15 April 1927, 7; 'Iz Matatje', *Jevrejski Život*, 162, 8 Tammuz 5687/8 July 1927, 3.
[593] 'Podrška planinarenju', *Jevrejski Život*, 153, 4 Iyar 5687/6 May 1927, 1.

it the 'healthiest movement'.[594] By the mid-1920s, Sephardi and other Jewish youth picked up these activities in Sarajevo and across Yugoslavia.[595]

Spending time in nature was a typically Zionist thing to do at the time. Matatja shared this Zionist practice. Moreover, there was no reason for Matatja to renounce Zionism in favour of left-wing political options, namely the Communist Party. Zionism was, in the end, a typical political choice of Jewish communities in this period. The most obvious sign of Matatja's affiliation to Zionism was in the society's name, derived from Mattathias ben Johanan, one of the leaders of the Maccabean Revolt (167–160 BCE), who was a major inspiration for the Zionist movement. Moreover, the framework of Jewish political engagement in the Balkans since the 1900s implied crossing with Zionism. As a matter of fact, Zionism became a signifier for a variety of ideas, processes, and movements: it could mean the active movement of Jewish nationalism with the aim of returning to the Promised Land in Palestine, but over time it also came to mean the politics of Jewish nationalism or, even, (Jewish) politics in general. Or, in the end, all three could figure at the same time. Therefore, 'breaking' with Zionist orientation should not be the key to reading Matatja's political goals.

The Jewish workers' society did not stir up any controversy in the 1920s. On the contrary, when a young enthusiast called for a joint effort of Jewish local associations in Sarajevo, he put Matatja at the top of his list.[596] The rest of Matatja's advertised activities aligned with the typical programmes of Jewish associations in the late 1920s: lectures, music bands, a theatre and a literature group, a youth group, and organised dance parties. However, most Jewish associations focused only on one or two of these activities: the female-led and -oriented La Gloria had a theatre group, offered lectures from time to time, and gave tea parties; Poale Cion and Hashomer Hatzair focused on increasingly popular outdoor activities; Sarajevan Jewish Youth organised lectures; La Lira had a choir and a small tamburitza orchestra. Matatja seems to have been more ambitious and aimed to offer their members and supporters, young Jewish workers, a complete cultural and social programme.

At first, along with the hiking excursions, the society started developing a social programme around theatre and music performances. At its second annual party in April 1927, the members staged a sketch by rabbi Haim Papo and David Atias played a piece on the violin, accompanied by A. Pordes on piano. The evening was completed with a ballet act.[597] This was

[594] I.S. 'Izletnicima', *Jevrejski Život*, 158, 10 Sivan 5687/10 June 1927, 2.
[595] Preger, 'Jevrejska omladinska društva u Jugoslaviji od 1926. do 1941', 18–19.
[596] Eliša Levi, 'Sarajevskoj omladini', *Jevrejski Život*, 118, 10 Elul 5688/20 August 1926, 3.
[597] 'Zabava Matatje', *Jevrejski Život*, 150, 6 Nisan 5687/8 April 1927, 4.

merely the beginning of the society's plans – it opened its own premises that October, which promised a more developed calendar. After years of gathering in private apartments and cafes, the society opened a space in Jelića street in the city centre. Around 400 people gathered for the occasion, which shows the significant and growing appeal Matatja had already acquired.[598]

Through Matatja, we gain insights into the convergence of the cultural and political upheaval that the 1920s brought worldwide. For much of the late 1920s, the society was invested in creating '*pleh muzika*' or an orchestra of brass and wind instruments. This was a significant innovation for the society, which still relied on the traditional music of the Sephardi Jews, the so-called Spanish romance. This sound was nurtured by one of oldest societies, La Lira, formed in 1902, which had a decades-long history of public performances. However, La Lira's approach was more suited to official gatherings, meetings, and synagogue services, as its members performed mainly as choirs. By contrast, Matatja's music programme was centred on fun, mainly catering to the society's parties. Moreover, it had a wider message, as the society insisted on the 'Jewish' aspect of the brass orchestra – most likely inspired by the success Klezmer music was finding in Europe at the time – as well as the solid advancement of jazz.[599] Josef Levi even gave a lecture on the importance of Jewish music.[600] They took pride in forming their own band, and not relying on music from 'non-Jews' or *Nejevreja*.[601] Alongside 'Jewish music', the society also had groups dedicated to playing tamburitza and mandolins. While Matatja, with this interpretation of Jewish music and the popular programme associated with it, obviously responded to some of the needs of its members and even the wider society, it did not venture into becoming a solely social society; rather it combined cultural and political activities.

Matatja was founded to nurture Jewish consciousness among Jewish workers. Arguably, all societies in both the Sephardi and Ashkenazi realms intended to reinforce Jewish affiliation, but they had different target groups that often, if not always, excluded Jews from the lower economic stratum. Moreover, the approach Matatja took was specific in that it moved from the field of intellectual debate and focused on presenting concrete political choices for Jews in Sarajevo. Reflecting on his years spent in Matatja in the mid-1930s, Moni Finci noted

[598] 'Otvorenje Doma jevrejske radničke omladinske zajednice "Matatja"', *Jevrejski Život*, 171, 19 Elul 5687/16 September 1927, 4.
[599] On Klezmer music and its importance, see Walter Zev Feldman, *Klezmer: Music, History, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[600] 'Miting "Matatje" i Jevrejska glazba', *Jevrejski Glas*, 16, 14 Iyar 5688/4 May 1928, 3.
[601] 'Jevrejska glazba. Rad radničke omladinske organizacije "Matatja"', *Jevrejski Glas*, 7, 12 Iyar 5688/11 May 1928, 4.

that the society was known for its disdain for intellectuals.[602] However, at least in the late 1920s, the society did not shy away from engaging with people from Zagreb's Esperanza and workers from the Sephardi-centred politics, such as Ješua Kajon. Kajon, for instance, gave a lecture on 'the Sephardi movement' and encouraged the Sephardi youth in Sarajevo to work with Matatja to revive the Sephardi community.[603] Still, the engagement of Luna Laura Papo tied into the ideological aspects of Matatja well.

Laura Papo (1891–1942), known by her penname Bohoreta (meaning 'the eldest daughter'),[604] came to stand for marginalised intellectuals on two accounts: her gender and her affiliation with and dedication to the Sephardi poor in Sarajevo.[605] Educated in an Alliance Israèlite Universelle school in Constantinople, Laura Papo was unusual for her environment. She was an educated woman who not only made a living from teaching (alongside working in her sister's boutique),[606] but also contributed to contemporary social and political debates. Today remembered as primarily a playwriter in Judeo-Spanish and a collector of oral traditions, Laura Papo also had a distinguished path as a social chronicler. From 1910 on, she collected Sephardi romance songs, a job assigned to her by Carl Patsch, the curator of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Papo's brave entrance into the public sphere came after her seminal article 'Die Spaniolin in Bosnien Frau' (The Spanish woman in Bosnia) in Sarajevo's German-language newspaper *Die Bosnische Post*. This article was a response to Jelica Bernadzikowska Belovič's critical text 'Die südslaische Frau in der Politik' (The South Slavic woman in politics) which dedicated a paragraph to Sephardi women. The author saw Sephardi women as merely pillars of Sephardi patriarchal society. Papo's response fiercely defended Sephardi women as the pillars of Sephardi society as a whole rather than of patriarchy.[607]

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[602] Moni Finci, 'O radu u Matatji', in *Sarajevo u revoluciji I*, 565–576 (563).
[603] 'Glavna skupstina "Matatje"', *Jevrejski Život*, 144, 23 Adar 5687/25 February 1927, 3.
[604] 'Bohoreta' or 'Bukica' were usual nicknames for firstborn female children and 'Buki ili Buhor' was for boys. Meant for use in family circles, the nicknames still often spread to wider society, as was the case with Bohoreta, who used two nicknames – Laura and Bohoreta – as pennames, as her name was Luna. Eli Tauber and Milena Gašić, *Jevrejska prezimena u arhivskim dokumentima Bosne i Hercegovine* (Sarajevo: JU Historijski arhiv Sarajevo, 2013), 10.
[605] David Kamhi, 'Odnos Laure Papo Bohorete prema društveno-političkim kretanjima između dva svjetska rata', *Forum Bosnae*, 87–88/19 (August 2020), 94–100; Eliezer Papo, 'Entre la modernidad y la tradución, el feminism y la patriarquie: Vida y obra de Laura Papo "Bohoerta", primera dramaturga en lengua judeo-española', *Neue Romania*, 40 (2010), 97–117.
[606] 'Gospođa Laura Papo', *Židovska Svijest*, 289, 23 September 1923, 4. The advertisement in *Židovska Svijest* says that Laura Papo was offering tutoring in French 'with contemporary methods for a reasonable price'. Moreover, she offered her services for writing merchant contracts in French, English, and Italian.
[607] Nela Kovačević, 'El Mundo Sefardí en la obra de Laura Papo y el lugar de la mujer en él' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Granada, 2014), 120–21.

Papo's engagement did not end at bridging high and popular culture. During and immediately after the First World War, Papo's theatrical plays were also picked up. She was most certainly the only Sephardi woman who wrote for theatre at the time, and one of only a handful of play writers in Judeo-Spanish. La Gloria used Papo's pieces to develop an amateur theatre group. Moreover, *Jevrejski Život*, the newspaper read by the Sephardi-minded intellectuals in Sarajevo, published her writings in Judeo-Spanish – a language used solely for literary works. In this sense, Laura Papo was not only providing wider Sephardi society with content in 'the mother tongue' of the Sephardim, she was, simply put, a medium between the intellectuals and the general public.

Even more unusual for a woman in that time, Laura Papo aimed to be an active participant in political debates. Even though involved in the 'Sephardi question', she did not take part in the so-called Sephardi-Ashkenazi split in Sarajevo in 1924–28, or in the debates surrounding the WSO. This could be due to the fact that, as a woman, she did not have the privilege of speaking her mind on these topics. Moreover, it seems that her political choices had a very down-to-earth and local orientation. She proved her 'local patriotism', to borrow Jagoda Večerina Tomaić's phrase, towards Sarajevo and Bosnia-Herzegovina in a number of her literary works, in which spoke with love and understanding about her immediate surroundings. Her plays reveal that she was decidedly against leaving for Palestine and promulgated a distinct form of Sephardi diasporic nationalism that placed Sephardim firmly in the context of the land where they had already been living for centuries, in her particular case Bosnia.[608] In this way, she openly dealt with issues that were emerging in the present, rather than aiming to solve Sephardi problems elsewhere and in the unforeseeable future.

Papo presented her objectives in a direct manner, and it is not surprising that she found her most avid listeners in workers' movements. In autumn 1926, she gave a lecture at Poale Cion titled 'La mužer žudija i el socijalizmo' (The Jewish Woman and Socialism).[609] Once Matatja took over the leadership among leftist Jewish associations, Laura Papo affiliated with the association in a way that led David Kamhi to call her 'the mother of Matatja'.[610] Not only did she write plays for the society's theatre ensemble in Judeo-Spanish, but her writings reflected Matatja's social engagements. Her plays described social issues of the era and the pauperisation of the Sephardi lower classes – shopkeepers, artisans, and workers.[611] Laura Papo

[608] Jagoda Večerina Tomaić, 'Bohoreta, Torn Between Zionism and Local Patriotism', *El Prezete*, 11 (2017), 51–66.
[609] 'Iz Poale Ciona', *Jevrejski Život*, 131, 3 Novembar 1926/27 Kislev 5687/3 November 1926, 5.
[610] H. Kamhi, 'Jevreji u privredi Bosne i Hercegovine', 67.
[611] Friedenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, 132.

and Matatja presented and represented the majority of Sephardim in Sarajevo and, arguably, the Yugoslav Kingdom. Thus, not only is Matatja inseparable from the Sephardi political scene, but the organisation acted a true intermediary between the different groups of Sephardim and succeeded in gathering the biggest majority of Sephardim socially, culturally, and, finally, politically.

Matatja's initial political engagement came through its cultural programme – the previously mentioned theatre group, social gatherings, literary group (which started off in autumn in 1928)[612], but also closely following and taking care of the community's needs. Thus, the society, originally conceived as an organisation of (young) workers, opened itself up for gatherings of all youth, age 15 and above, to 'raise them in Jewish spirit'. Parents were asked to encourage their children to attend these gatherings.[613] While not openly addressed, this can be taken as a sign that the number of young Jewish people without school or work, was relatively high on the streets of Sarajevo. In 1930, the society had around 400 young members of unspecified age. Their politics started opening up Matatja, making it an all-encompassing organisation for all Jews in need, or, in the words of Josef Levi, a *Jevrejski Glas* reporter, 'the main artery and confluence of the entire youth of Sarajevo'.[614] The turn in Matatja's outspoken political engagement came through the classical Marxist notion that sometimes quantity does mean quality – the increasing number of Jews in need of (social) shelter made Matatja a political organisation that stood up to the unfair social and political order of the late 1920s.

Moreover, Matatja's work broadened to include education on top of its existing cultural work. In his post-Second World War writings, Moni Finci said the society was distinctive because they worked to 'first of all, educate and culturally uplift the working youth and explain its [working youth's] position in light of scientific socialism, or Marxism, followed by directing its attention and engagement on the social or burning life matters of their own surrounding, and, finally, to clash with the opposing attitudes, ideologies, and tendencies'.[615] Finci wrote about his own experience in Matatja from 1934, however, the idea of engaging youth through literature can be traced through the society's sizeable library, established around 1930. By 1933, the library already owned 700 books.[616] According to Finci, Matatja's leadership was invested in expanding the library and it is not surprising that it had a wide range of books and magazines dealing with topics from politics to culture. The library was open twice a week, and

[612] 'Iz Matatje', *Jevrejski Glas*, 42, 12 Cheshvan 5689/26 October 1928, 4.
[613] 'Iz Matatje', *Jevrejski Glas*, 17, 12 Iyar 5688/11 May 1928, 5.
[614] Josef Levi, 'O Matatji', *Jevrejski Glas*, 36–37, 1 Tishri 5691/23 September 1930, 10.
[615] Finci, 'O radu u Matatji', 565.
[616] Eliezer Levi, 'Matatja', *Jevrejski Glas*, 22 Tevet 5693/20 January 1933, 2.

it was usual to see members of Matatja with a book or a magazine under their arms.[617] Of course, a library cannot sustain political activism on its own, but the cultural engagement of Matatja, under the pressing circumstances, became political.

By underlining the role of Matatja's literary section, Moni Finci to a certain extent described what in the society was dear to him personally. As he testified, he got involved with Matatja after graduating from the University of Belgrade in 1934 with a degree in land surveying. Due to his physical condition, he was not suited for his chosen career, so he returned home to Sarajevo. In the following years, Finci dedicated his time to 'reading progressive literature, studying the basics of Marxism, the Jewish question and similar [topics].' He noted that his generation, 'especially those who went to vocational schools, spent most of their time on the streets, in public libraries, and engaging in public debates. Only a limited number of them managed to find preferable positions in government service, through personal connections. The young generation was looking for its place under the sun [while] searching for a way to survive and their own ideological path.' At the end of 1934, Levi was approached by Leo Lušić (1914–41), who was a machine technician, and B(i)janka Levi (?–1941), who was active in the Union of Privately Employed Workers (Sindikat privatnih nameštenika),[618] and they suggested that he join Matatja. Lušić and Levi were both active in the workers' movement in Sarajevo and affiliated with the banned Communist Party.

Still, this is not enough to support the idea that Matatja became just a 'cell of the Communist Party'.[619] Matatja's work, by its nature, gathered workers who were actively participating in political organisations at their workplaces, thus their political engagement was not directly through Matatja. That was the case with the printmaker Salamon Romano. Talking about his youth as a Holocaust survivor in 1995, Romano spoke of his experience in Hashomer Hatzair, where he actively participated in excursions and scouting. Dedicated to the Zionist cause, he even picked up Hebrew and learned it for two years. By Romano's judgement, *moshave*, Hashomer Hatzair's leadership, gathered the best of Jewish youth. However, the society only had students for members and when Romano finished his elementary education (eight years) and went to learn the printing trade, he joined Matatja (c. 1936). It did not take him long to prove himself as a significant contributor to the society, and he was rewarded by being made the youngest member of the society's board and its librarian. Still, he connected his political activity with his engagement with the youth section of the Union of Printers, which

[617] Finci, 'O radu u Matatja', 565.
[618] Romano, Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941–1945, 42.
[619] Friedenreich, The Jews of Yugoslavia, 168.

also organised a variety of social activities, including sports. Through the union, Romano became an activist in the Association of the Communist Youth of Yugoslavia (SKOJ) in c. 1936.[620] This was during the period when the CPY had heightened its activities after a long fallow period.

After it was officially banned in December 1920, the party went through a process of establishing effective ways of working underground. The government's ban included the work of class-oriented unions and any other organisations that was deemed to work under the influence of the Communist Party. This was, however, only the beginning of the pressure on the workers' organisations. Following the promulgation of the new constitution of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (June 1921), in August 1921, the Parliament passed the Law of State Protection that allowed the suppression of any (perceived) communist action, allowing punishments including even the death penalty. The law almost stopped all organisational activities in the 1920s. The ideological differences among the leadership active from afar did not help the situation.[621] Even though penalties for any action interpreted as communist were high, the number of activists grew.

Again, the number of Jews and, especially Sephardi Jews in the case of Sarajevo, involved in these small-scale actions went beyond the proportion of Jews in the total population. After the consolidation of the remaining CPY leadership in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there was noticeable work among typographers, metal workers, bakers, and builders in the first years after the ban. However, no matter how small-scale the actions of the unions, they attracted police interrogations. Under such conditions, every activist had to be conscious of his position and be ready to make a sacrifice. Among those who paid the highest price were Benjamin Finci, who kept in his flat a small printing press that was used to print and distribute pre-elections leaflets in the autumn of 1928. He was known as a fighter in the October revolution and a devotee of the socialist cause. After a night in the police station, Finci died.[622] This is one example of the brutality of the police and the state.

Matatja, however, was spared this first wave of police purges. The society remained seemingly untouched under the dictatorial regime of King Alexander I, which commenced in January 1929.[623] To a certain extent, it could have been a sign of the society's status as an

[620] Salamon R. (HVT-3587) Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.
'O društveno-političkoj i drugoj aktivnosti partijske ćelije grafičkih radnika', in *Sarajevo u revoluciji*, 270–76.
[621] Stefan Gužvica, *Before Tito: The Communist Party of Yugoslavia during the Great Purge, 1936–1940* (Talin: ACTA Universitatis Tallinnensis, 2020).
[622] Babić, 'Osnovna obilježja društveno-političkih odnosa i djelatnosti radničkog pokreta', 49.
[623] Lampe, Yugoslavia as History, 164–76.

organisation representing a recognised (ethno-)religious minority, even if explicitly leftist. Moreover, activism under the Communist Party's direction in unions and underground societies was not the only type of leftist activism at the time. Kalmi Baruh, known as the first university-educated recognised scholar of Judeo-Spanish and a commentator on the cultural aspects of the Sephardi politics, worked as a teacher in Sarajevo's oldest high school (Prva gimnazija). His position put him in touch with the youngest generations in the city, which he actively used to educate them about the social issues and economic realities of their immediate surroundings. The same was the case with Marcel Šnajder (1900–41).[624] They were not members of Matatja, but sympathisers and supporters of the society's progressive work. However, as the society's political ambitions grew, its political identification became more outspokenly leftist and it opposed the government even more. Thus, Matatja became an issue for Sarajevo's police.

When did Matatja express and pursue openly political goals? The society's activists and later chroniclers ascribed the change in Matatja's work to the general political climate, both inside the Yugoslav state and internationally. Moni Finci, for instance, distinguished between Matatja's work before and after 1933, as the beginning of the Europe-wide anti-fascist movement.[625] Salamon Romano directly connected the rise of fascism with Matatja's abandonment of the Zionist cause.[626] In that case, we need to question whether 1933 can in fact be taken as the year that the general threat of fascism began, considering that since 1935 the prime minister of the Yugoslav Kingdom was Milan Stojadinović, whose political party and policies had been deeply influenced, if not led, by the example of Benito Mussolini's Italy.[627]

Undeniably, the surge of Central European Jewish refugees in Yugoslavia contributed to the existing motivation to side with the anti-fascist CPY. Already in 1933, waves of Jewish refugees from Germany had started arriving in Yugoslavia, although it was regarded only as a stopping point for their further emigration to the Yishuv, the United States, or even Italy.[628] The majority of them first gathered in Zagreb, from where they were directed to Split. The Adriatic port city had a *kehila* numbering only 300 members in the 1930s, which still managed to organise their arrival and departure. Moreover, the Split community leaders founded the Jewish Refugee Board, an organisation that personified and led Jewish politics in the region

[624] Romano, Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941–1945, 43.
[625] Finci, 'O radu u Matatji', 562.
[626] R. Salamon (HVT-3587) Fortunoff Video.
[627] Finci, 'O radu u Matatji', 594; Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 176–86.
[628] Milan Ristović, *Jugoslovenski Jevreji u bekstvu od holokausta* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2016), 27.

from 1933 until 1943.[629] The physical presence of the Jewish refugees demonstrated the need for active and ongoing political engagement.

Furthermore, the beginning of the Spanish civil war in 1936 had a significant echo in Sarajevo's Sephardi community. Based on existing estimates, around 1,664 Yugoslavs participated on the Republican side of the Spanish civil war, fighting under the flag of the Yugoslav Brigadistas. The number is significant, as the number of volunteers in the so-called international brigades was around 40,000 (18.04 per cent of which were Jews).[630] The Yugoslav volunteers, based on Marko Perić's research, included 34 Jews,[631] six of whom were from Bosnia and Herzegovina.[632] The numbers might not seem impressive, but Sarajevo's underground leftist press, primarily *Pregled* (Review), had a rich coverage of the civil war. Among its crucial contributors was Kalmi Baruh who used this outlet to write about the Jewish past in the Iberian Peninsula and about Spanish classic and contemporary literature, and its role in the Spanish civil war. He described the destruction of cultural and historical monuments, and thus connected the destiny of the Spanish people with the destiny of the entire world.[633]

The worrying economic status of Jews in Sarajevo, and in Bosnia-Herzegovina overall was the pressing aspect of the leftist agitation. The initial economic crash immediately caused greater unemployment, but the situation in Sarajevo did not look any better by 1935. That year around 1,200 Jews received financial benefits. Contrary to the common belief that the majority of Jews were well-off, there was a growing Jewish proletariat. One of the most respected leftist thinkers and organisers of the time, Lepa Perović (1911–2000) wrote about her surprise at seeing the number and state of Jewish poor in Sarajevo.[634] This shows that Matatja had an opportunity to capture interest and involve the entire community with the aim of improving the social position of Jews from the lowest strata.

The first signs that Matatja faced the threat of police oppression came at the beginning of 1936. The society planned its yearly programme for the end of February. It was already a tradition: Matatja's shows were famous, highly praised, and went beyond the typical reach for Jewish, or for that matter, any national society. All sections of the society were involved, and every member had to contribute. Alongside the band, known as 'the Jewish music [band]', a

[629] Duško Kečkemet, *Židovi u povijesti Splita* (Split: Novinsko-izdavačko poduzeće 'Slobodna Dalmacija', 1971), 173–80.
[630] Colin Shindler, '*No Pasaran*: the Jews who fought in Spain', *Jewish Quarterly*, 33 (1986), 34–41.
[631] Marko Perić, 'Jevreji iz Jugoslavije – Španski borci', in *Zbornik 3: Studije i građa o učešću Jevreja u Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu* (Belgrade: Jevrejski istorijski muzej, 1975), 1–43.
[632] Vlajko Begović, 'Učešće u pomoći Španskoj republici', in *Sarajevo u revoluciji*, 197–99.
[633] Vlajko Ubavić, 'Sarajevski profesori – odred napredne inteligencije izmedju dva rata', in *Sarajevo u revoluciji I*, 221–36.
[634] Jaša Romano quotes Perović 'Od Beograda Preko Sarajevo, do Mostara. Ustanak naroda Jugoslavije', 5, 106.

drama group was preparing a new play by Laura Papo, and the cultural group was to present a recital and a short play. Moni Finci wrote a short play called *Living Wall* (Živi zid) which, in his words, aimed to show that history remembers many persecutors of Jews whose time eventually passed, but that the Jews survived everything. This directly referenced Hitler, who was also shown on stage. Finci was at the time already the head of the cultural section, which had significant political influence, a role he was given at the recommendation of Leza Perera, at the time one of the most ardent members of the party in Sarajevo.

The play may have been short, but the troupe consisted of 40 people, most notably Albert Danon, Albert Maestro, Nissim Albahari, and Jahiel Katan, all workers and active members of both Matatja and CPY. When the Sarajevan police arrested Leza Perera, Matatja's leadership showed signs of concern but decided to continue preparing the performance. However, after the next couple of arrests – including of Albert Danon, who played the main role in the play, and Nissim Albahari – it was not clear whether the police was targeting known party supporters or was just arresting anyone suspicious. By the end of the purges, almost half of the *Living Wall* troupe had either been arrested or had stopped going to the rehearsals out of fear. There was no way of finding out which was actually the case. Few of Matatja's members, including Moni Finci, slept at home at this time, knowing that arrests mostly took place early in the morning, between 5 am and 7 am. These dramatic events did not change the society's plans, however: the performance took place – with Moni Finci taking on the main role in the play that he had also written and directed – and it was deemed a success.[635] This suggests that Matatja itself was not targeted, but that those of its members directly associated with the Communist Party were. However, the society's leadership took it as a sign of grim days ahead for Matatja too.

In the autumn of 1936, Finci found out through his underground connections that he and 39 other Matatja's members were to be prosecuted. While Matatja was not labelled a party cell, the prosecution did mention twelve times that all the accused met in and worked out of the society's offices. The authorities did not pursue this indictment, but the society felt the pressure through the ever-growing presence of police agents at their events. As the Communist Party was left without access to most of the cultural outlets in Sarajevo, Matatja took over the role of the progressive hub in the city. Conscious of the sensitive nature of this work, the society

[635] Moni Finci, 'Jedna burna priredba Matatje', *Jevrejski almanah*, 1954, 97–102.

focused solely on literary and cultural soirees.[636] In this regard, Matatja was not a 'cell' of the Communist Party, but it did give space for the Communist Party to function under its roof.

One of the crucial moments in the society's political life was in the parliamentary elections in the winter of 1938. At this time Milan Stojadinović, leader of the Yugoslav Radical Union, was prime minister. He was known for his political connections with Mussolini's close associate, Count Cianno, and for running a quasi-dictatorship in Yugoslavia. The elections of 1938 were, therefore, important both in the context of internal Yugoslav politics and international positioning. Matatja urged the Sephardi communal leadership to support opposition candidates. This was a key intervention, given that the Sephardi leadership was often criticised – mainly by their Ashkenazi and Zionist brethren, but also from within the community – for uncritically siding with the government. In this case, Matatja gained support from crucial members of the community, among them Braco Poljokan, which was reflected in the results at the local level: out of 2,200 registered Jewish voters, around 1,000 abstained from voting, 300 supported Stojadinović, and 900 voted for the opposition. Even given the fact that almost half of the Jews did not vote, this was a drastic change in the political behaviour of Jewish voters and a sign of growing involvement with the political scene in Yugoslavia.[637] Stojadinović's government fell, but the political situation in the country did not change significantly.

As a result of this intervention, Matatja was banned in December 1938, a situation which lasted for almost a year. During this and the following period, when the ban was lifted, Matatja was active in the underground resistance to both nationwide and international pressure. It continued its collaboration with the CPY through the previously existing network until 1941, when Yugoslavia was occupied by the Axis powers.

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The history of the Jewish workers organisation shows both limits and evolution of the Sephardi political agenda. Through the greater part of its history, the Sephardi-centred politics relied on intellectuals and communal leaders while maintaining connection with the wider Sephardi population through humanitarian and cultural associations. The first token of change was the attempt by united shopkeepers and workers to achieve political representation in Sarajevo city council in 1928. The imminent success of this coalition led by Pepi Baruh encouraged further Jewish workers' political involvement. Their organisation, Matatja, grew to be the workers'

[636] Finci, 'O radu u Matatji', 566–67.
[637] Finci, 'O radu u Matatji', 568.

representative but also a cultural and ideological platform. Through genuine dedication to improvement of workers' status, education, and representation in both communal and city politics, Matatja came to the forefront of politics in Sarajevo.

Matatja's siding with the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was unsurprising, considering the organisation's progressive orientation. It was also a reasoned decision in the wider context of oppressive state regimes, imminent fascist danger both in the Yugoslav Kingdom and abroad, and the arrival of Jewish refugees in Yugoslavia from 1933. However, the fact that Matatja kept its Jewish, and primarily Sephardi, character is undeniable judging by its cultural programme and the connections with and approval of Sephardi intellectuals the society that were fostered throughout its existence. Finally, the commitment to both Sephardi communal work and social and political life beyond *kehila* was in line with the Sephardi circle's idea of combining diaspora work with the Sephardi-specific Balkan setting.

Towards the end of the interwar period, Matatja facilitated Jewish political participation and general political resistance to the impending dangers of fascism and Nazism. Moni Finci and Salamon Romano, Matatja's former members, resistance fighters during the war, and Holocaust survivors portrayed Matatja as a crucial aspect of Sephardi political, cultural, and social life but also as crucial for youth in general in Sarajevo. The society was the pinnacle and the most direct evidence of the Sephardi political significance in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Yugoslav Kingdom, and, finally, the Balkans.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to investigate what was behind Sephardi claims for a special, unique or as Jacques Confino put in the text quoted in the introduction–*extra* position within both the Jewish and European political scenes. It traced the social and political expressions of Sephardi politics through the engagements of Sephardi intellectuals and an ever-growing group of interested Sephardi individuals and organisations over the course of the first half of the twentieth century. What it offers, in the end, is a history of the political, social, and cultural dimensions of Sephardi thought and action in the Balkans.

Sephardi politics embodied a set of ideas, political decisions, and cultural practices that informed the lives of Sephardi Jews in the space between Sarajevo, Zagreb, Belgrade, and Bitola, between 1900 and 1940. Political mobilisation of the Sephardim started off within a narrow intellectual circle, virtually a clique of Sephardi youth formed the student association Esperanza at the University of Vienna. Nevertheless, in less than a decade this student society not only gained more individual supporters but also expanded its gaze to include the social and cultural associations, the core of social life of the kehilot in the Balkans. Initially academic-focused and directed towards educated individuals, Sephardi-centric politics in its later stages was accepted and appropriated by workers and even served as a platform for progressive politics in general, within the constricted political sphere in the Yugoslav Kingdom and under threats of fascism and Nazism. It gave a foundation for the claims to Sephardi political autonomy but also a new vitality to the modern Sephardi cultural scene. Based on Sephardi traditions, including Judeo-Spanish, Sephardi politics was inclusive, receptive to social changes and responsive to the needs of Sephardi society. Its development and rise reflect this ability to adapt to the challenges of the twentieth century. The history of Sephardi political positioning, therefore, is a history of Sephardi political action but also a history of an inclusive minority movement that became a factor in transnational politics.

The dissertation contributes equally to the fields of modern Jewish and Balkan historiographies. It presents Sephardi politics as an integral part of two histories that do not often overlap in historiography. However, even if this research focuses on a minority perspective, it is not only an addition to the already complex maps of Balkan political, ethnic, and national groups and Jewish national politics. Rather, the Sephardi example also invites historians to think about minority politics as complex, unlikely combinations of cultural and social attitudes, instigators of policies that were influential beyond their immediate

environment, as we saw in the creation and activity of the World Sephardi Organisation, the voice of all non-Ashkenazi Jews.

The thesis makes an intervention in the way contemporary historiography has seen Sephardi Jews in the twentieth century. First, the research showed that Sephardi politics was a lasting phenomenon, comparable to other modern Jewish political movements and ideologies. Sephardi politics prompted action in social, cultural and political spheres within the Balkans. In contrast to the existing works on Sephardi history that focus or emphasise short-term or merely reactive outbursts of Sephardi political responses, this dissertation historicises this continuous involvement of the Sephardi Jews in both Jewish and non-Jewish politics.

Second, the agents of Sephardi politics in the Balkans never lost sight of the broader Sephardi community, regardless of their cultural and political settings or even specific linguistic differences. The prominent spokespeople of Sephardi politics made sure their own ideas addressed the rest of their brethren around the Mediterranean. In this sense, the thesis also historicises the unfolding idea of Sephardi Jews in the first half of the twentieth century through the perspective of Sephardi politics and it reflects on the idea of Sephardi Jews as a political and cultural unit within modern Jewry. Therefore, the thesis questions the predominant definitions of the Sepharad that emphasise the fissiparous nature of the numerous isolated Sephardi communities in the Balkans, Asia Minor, around the Mediterranean. What the example of the Sephardim between Vienna, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Belgrade, and Bitola show is a dynamic, inclusive and uniting idea of the Sephardi Jews within and beyond communal lines.

Third, the research explains that the choices and ideological positions expressed in the Sephardi political agenda dominant among the Balkan Sephardim were not in line with the assumption that the Sephardim accepted the myth of Sephardi superiority. The idealisation of the Jewish past in medieval Spain was a German-Jewish construct that predominantly served the ideological purposes of its creators' own socio-political setting. Sephardim were not strangers to this idea; in the first years, Sephardi youth referred to the 'glorious' Sephardi contributions and significant Jewish creativity during the Golden Age in Spain. However, those recollections were mere references to the past and Sephardi intellectual, cultural, and racial superiority never became an official stand in Sephardi politics. Rather, Sephardi representatives were cautious in their interpretation of Sephardi contributions to Jewish culture. In this vein, the Sephardim took neither a protective nor an exclusive view of their 'heritage'– they did not differentiate between the different Jewish groups in the Middle East and the WSO reached out to all non-European Jews. This fact is crucial for any understanding of the Sephardi

movement's political and social intentions and goals, and also for modern Sephardi and non-Ashkenazi Jewish history more generally.

From the perspective of modern Jewish political history, the Sephardi-oriented political ideas should be treated as part of the history of Jewish nationalisms that started in the late nineteenth century. The complex and often conflicting relationship between the Sephardi and all-Jewish political spheres is at the core of this research. From the outside, and especially from the Zionist perspective, it seemed that the Sephardi political circles aimed at unreserved exclusivity. While Zionists opted for a Jewish national home in Palestine, for all Jews, regardless of their background, Sephardi politicians argued for the unification and renewal of a culturally and historically united Sephardi world. At the centre in imperial Vienna, Sephardi youth was in contact with a spectrum of non-mainstream Jewish political groups, nationally oriented student associations such as Kadima and Bar Kochba, left organisations such as Poale Zion, Yiddishists such as Bor Boruchov, among others. Until the First World War, the Sephardi-oriented politics gave rise to a wide range of political responses. These particular and universal perspectives on Jewish politics were, indeed, at first, mutually antagonistic. Sephardi Jews set great store by Sephardi-specific cultural values, their language (which at the time they called Spanish), the significance of maintaining traditions while, simultaneously, joining European Jewish academic and cultural trends. On the other hand, the first Zionists insisted on a single political and cultural solution for worldwide Jewry – one state and one language. Both movements were, however, in the development phase in the early twentieth century, responsive to changes in local and international politics and inclusive of different perspectives and influences. Yet neither the Sephardi nor the Zionist movement was ready to compromise their core principles. The dynamics between the two set the tone of Jewish politics in the Balkans in the 1910s and extended to the whole of Mediterranean Jewry from the mid-1920s.

This contentious relationship between the two movements, encouraged Sephardim to further legitimise their politics and defend their cultural, religious, and linguistic specificities in the post-imperial setting. During the war and in particular its immediate aftermath, the collapse of the imperial system, replaced by nation-states, the Sephardi movement had to reposition its politics, both on the Jewish political stage and in face of the new international realities.

In the new Yugoslav state, formed in 1918 on the territories of the two collapsed empires, Ottoman and Habsburg, Sephardi ideologues had an opportunity to offer a fresh Sephardi-led political option. Two factors in particular encouraged Sephardi politics. First was the immediate closeness and dominance of Ashkenazim in the state, the majority of whom were

ardent political Zionists with little to no understanding of any other Jewish group. This atmosphere invigorated the Sephardi movement, encouraging it to stand up and defend the basis of Sephardi society – starting with kehila and expanding to the associational life as a whole.

The second factor that encouraged the emergence of Sephardi politics was the collapse of the Ottoman empire, the Balfour Declaration, and the move of Zionist institutions to the United Kingdom, all of which for the first time gave the question of a Jewish national home in Palestine a real sense of gravitas in international politics. This, Mediterranean, Yishuv-centred, perspective compelled the Zionist leaders to acknowledge the presence of Sephardi Jews as potentially numerous immigrants to Palestine and significant potential for building the new state. The ongoing conflicts, of smaller and greater scale, induced the Zionist leaders to find a solution for the unavoidable *Sephardi question*.

These two factors, local pressures, especially in Sarajevo, and growing global awareness of the 'one million Sephardi Jews' in the Mediterranean, gave an impetus to the Sephardi World Organisation and vibrant Sephardi politics in the Balkans. The Sephardi movement's programme developed in the mid-1920s. It came after the complex evolution of Sephardi thought from a cultural revival based on the idea of Jewish renaissance in medieval Spain through a Sephardi interpretation of Zionism, to its conclusive positioning between diaspora nationalism focused on the Sephardi communities in the Balkans, and formal siding with the goals of political Zionism. This nuanced reading of the Sephardi position allowed Sephardi intellectuals to legitimise their position within Jewish politics in Yugoslavia and organise a network of Sephardi kehilot as a branch of the Sephardi World Organisation.

From the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, mass politics, based on political parties attracting ever more members, began to replace the hitherto carefully led and intellectuals-based Sephardi politics in the Balkans. The last pre-war impulse of Sephardi politics was marked by ever-greater engagement of Sephardi workers and progressive individuals with the left movement, namely the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. This shift and, in consequence, the expansion of Sephardi politics, was a direct result of international changes, the Bolshevik revolution and the growing threat of fascism and Nazism, economic depression, but it was also a result of the growing dissatisfaction with elite-based kehila politics. From this complex background, a Sephardi workers' movement gave new impetus to both Jewish and local politics.

It is important to underline that as much as this growing political group was left-wing or even communist, it was also Sephardi. It not only nurtured the Sephardi historical language,

albeit in spoken form, through lectures and theatre performances; but also Matatja, the Jewish workers' organisation, challenged the established norms of Sephardi kehila politics. The Sephardi workers' movement put into practice what the last generation of Sephardi intellectuals had preached – dedication to life in diaspora on their own terms, which effectively meant deliberate and focused work within the diaspora, especially their immediate environment– Sarajevo, Yugoslav Kingdom, the Balkans.

Sephardi politics emerged from the uniquely Balkan context. This heterogenous religious and ethnic setting fed Sephardi and Jewish politics in specific ways during the last decades of the Ottoman and Habsburg presence in the Balkans. Vienna-educated Sephardi intellectuals were intimately connected with the Central European Jewish political scene, which was arguably the centre of Jewish politics and culture at the turn of the centuries. However, their choices to return to their hometowns after their studies prompted the Sephardim to embrace their own setting and take it into account as they developed their political views. In this regard, Vienna was the classroom, but Sarajevo was the true habitat and reality of the Sephardi movement. From Sarajevo the network spread beyond Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Balkan peninsula, aiming to reach and engage with Sephardim culturally and politically. The pinnacle of the movement was arguably this (re-)connection between the Sephardim from the dispersed kehilot from Sarajevo to Bitola in the mid-1920s. Sephardi politicians had bold cultural and political plans which were built on the idea of diverse Sephardi culture, polyglossy and social positions and took into consideration their brethren around the Mediterranean.

The collapse of the imperial system in 1918 altered these political ideals. In the two empires, Sephardi Jews made a significant group. In contrast, one of the most important factors of the Sephardi politics in the interwar period was that the Jews were only one minority among tens of minorities in the Yugoslav state. The environment offered less space for exclusivity and, thus, fostered cooperation between Jewish groups on cultural and political plan.

This illuminates the fact that Jews, both Ashkenazim and Sephardim, accepted Serbo-Croatian as the language of their political and cultural debates. Adoption of this non-Jewish language testifies to the flexible and pluralist nature of Jewish politics in the region – Sephardim found common ground not only with(in) the gentile society but also among different Jewish groups. Moreover, Serbo-Croatian proved to be a cohesive tissue for the Jewish national movement and, following from that, for Sephardi politics as well. The South Slavic vernacular was certainly not the only example of this open attitude, and the wide-spread multilingualism in the Sephardi world could also be interpreted through re-connecting with other Jewish, non-Sephardi (political) groups. While the Serbo-Croatian language never overtook the cohesive

and uniquely important position of Judeo-Spanish, it did leave a mark on Sephardi culture outside of the political realm. The Sephardi Jews studied here accepted, appropriated, and used the South Slav vernacular in both the cultural and political sphere which differentiated them from their brethren in the wider Balkan region, namely Bulgaria, Albania, and Greece. This, of course, also circumscribed the impact of Sephardi politics and thought.

Sephardi politics had the most direct influence in a specific part of the Balkans, primarily the Yugoslav Kingdom, and finally, Sarajevo, and thus, its success was, to an extent, localised. This limited scale does not diminish the importance of the movement, however. Rather, it points out how minority engagement and politics can challenge and affect or even determine political outcomes at large. The Sephardi political sphere was balanced between the specifically Sephardi and the Jewish national interest. It brought up the question of the differences between Jewish groups and the importance of internal Jewish diversity for the Jewish national movement. Rather than focusing solely on the Sephardi perspective, Sephardi politicians stood up for all Jewish groups and their cultures, languages, customs, and the right to participate in the Jewish national movement on the equal footing.

To conclude, the history of the persevering and reactive Sephardi politics in the first half of the twentieth century illuminates new aspects of modern Sephardi history. Sephardi-oriented politics constituted a unique contribution to the ideas of Jewish peoplehood and Jewish nationalisms and generated new and significant Jewish political goals in the 1920s. They reached a formal peak in the formation of the World Sephardi Organisation in 1925. This institution arguably had a liminal role in respect of policies and execution of plans of the Zionist Organisation. However, at least among its Balkan Sephardi instigators, the intended role of the World Sephardi Organisation was never to challenge and confront the World Zionist Organisation and its leadership, but to broaden the range of represented voices in Jewish politics. The role of the Balkan Sephardim in this regard should be acknowledged.

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Studentische Verbindungen [Student Associations]

Archiv der Universitat Wien, Austria (AUW)
Nationalen [Student Registration]
Rektorat

Arhiv Srbije, Serbia (AS)
Ministarstvo unutrašnjih dela, Policijsko odeljenje [Ministry of Interior, Department of police]
Ministarstvo prosvete [Ministry of Education]
Ministarstvo spoljnih poslova [Ministry of Foreign Relations]

Central Archive for the History of the Jewish Peoples, Israel (CAHJP)
Eventov collection

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