JEWS OF YUGOSLAVIA 1941 - 1945
VICTIMS OF GENOCIDE AND FREEDOM FIGHTERS

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It was as far back as 2,000 years ago that the first Jewish settlers appeared on what is today the territory of Yugoslavia. The remnants of a Jewish synagogue excavated in Stobi (Macedonia) date back to that period and the conclusion that a developed Jewish Community existed in that locality those days is based on these findings. Sometime later a Jewish Community existed in Solin (Dalmacia) and there were Jews in Maribor (Slovenia) as well, even before the first Slovenes settled on the Balkans. Wars and various anti-Jewish measures led to the disintegration of, these early Jewish communities. In the city of Sarajevo the first Jewish settlers appeared at the beginning of the 16th century, after their expulsion from Spain (1492), while Jews from Central and Eastern Europe started to settle in various areas of the present-day Yugoslavia at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. In localities in which a greater number of Jews lived Jewish communities were established. As those localities were in various countries (Turkish empire, Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Serbia) the Jewish communities had no way to be in close touch and to cooperate.

At the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th century the first trade union organizations and social-democratic parties started to function in all those areas (Osijek, Beograd, Sarajevo, Sombor, etc.) and a certain number of Jews were among their very first members. Also, a great number of Jews participated in the “Ilinden” uprising of the Macedonian people (1903) and it was Rafael M. Kamhi (Skender-beg) who led one of the rebel groups.

The formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia) was of particular importance for the further development of Jewish communities in the areas under the sovereignty of the new Kingdom in which a united Jewish organization came into being in 1919, the Federation of Jewish Religions Communities. Between the two world wars the Federation played a very important role and invested great efforts in endeavours aiming at securing to its members all the rights the other citizens of the country enjoyed.

According to the census of 1921 there were 64,753 Jews in Yugoslavia that year, while according to the poll taken by the Association of Rabbis in Yugoslavia in 1924 the number of Jews was 73,266.

The period between the two world wars made it possible for the Yugoslav Jewish Community to enjoy a relatively peaceful development. The increase of membership is characteristic of that development. But even more characteristic of that period is the participation of Jews in all fields of activity on the wider Yugoslav scene – social, economic, cultural, educational, scientific and all the rest. In all walks of life the contribution of Jews was quite considerable.

Soon after the end of WWI various Jewish organizations and societies were formed wherever a greater number of Jews lived in one locality. Under the Influence of the Zionist movement a considerable number of these organizations and societies chose to follow the Jewish nationalist line.

During the first few years of the post WWI period only a relatively small number of Jews joined the revolutionary working class movement. However, among those who did join some were outstanding revolutionaries and in that respect Mosa Pijade should be particularly singled out. More than 20 Yugoslav Jews participated in the Hungarian Revolution (1919) and quite a few joined the October Revolution. Among the members of the Yugoslav Socialist Student Club, formed 1919 in Vienna, a considerable number were Jewish students from Yugoslavia who subsequently after their return to the country joined the Yugoslav Communist Party and continued, now as party members, their revolutionary activity.

Among the students of the two then existing Universities in Belgrade and Zagreb many of the outstanding revolutionaries were Jews (ZIata Miler, Isak Alfandari, David Naftali, Lujo Vajs, Maks Svarc, Miroslav Dajc, Milivoj Hirsl, Bela Handler, Pavle Brajer, and others).

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia was banned in 1920. This fact notwithstanding the number of Jewish party members continued: to grow in the period from 1920 until 1929, i. e. until a monarchist fascist dictatorship was established in the country. During that period many Jewish members or sympathizers of the Communist Party were arrested. Twenty of them were sentenced to long term hard labor, ten were jailed, while two were killed during the interrogation process. By 1932 the Party succeeded to consolidate its ranks and to revitalize the revolutionary movement of the working class and the progressive youth. It was in this period that a greater number of Jewish workers and' university and high school students joined the movement. The following facts influenced this trend: first, at that time the economic crises ruined the existence of a great number of small retail traders and craftsmen; second, the Nazi ideology started to penetrate into the country and numerous fascist organization were formed; and third, the program proclaimed by the Communist Party was very near to or in full harmony with the aspirations of a great number of Jews (fight against the penetration of fascist ideology, against anti-Semitism, against unemployment and price increases on the one hand and for a just solution of the national question on the other).

The activity of many Jewish organizations and societies was also influenced by the revolutionary movement which gained momentum in that particular period. Hashomer Hatzair, Tehelet Lavan, and some other youth organizations are indicative cases in the point. In Sarajevo the Matatya society of Jewish workers played an important role in making the revolutionary movement attractive to the Jewish youth. The following data stand in witness of a growing Jewish participation in the revolutionary movement during this period: a great number of Jewish members of the Communist Party and of the League of Communist Party and of the League of Communist Youth were arrested; the Court for the Protection of State sentenced 41 Jews to long term hard labor, while 56 were sentenced to prison or had been in preventive detention for a long time allegedly for interrogation; 39 Yugoslav Jews joined the Spanish republican army; a great number of Yugoslav Jews were given high and/or responsible functions In the Yugoslav Communist Party (Mosa Pijade, David S. Demajo, Vojka Demajo, Olga Alkalaj, Avram Anaf, Valerija Kario-Pap, Oskar Davido, Beska

Bembasa-Cvetic, Edi Davico, Stevan Varga, Rena Abravanel, Dora Frajdenfeld, Rashela Baruh-Simic. Joza Baruh - all from Belgrade; Pavle Pap, Stjepan Policer, Milan Spicer-Milanovic, Mosa Albahari, Viktor Rozencvajg, Leo Mates, Mila Hercog, Alfred Bergman, Sigmund Kraus, Magda Boskovic - all from Zagreb; Erih Kos, Jozef Altarac-Todor, Eliezer-Lezo Perera, Pavle Goranin, Hana Ozmo, Nisim Albahari, Tinka Romano, Rafael Gaon - all from Sarajevo; Tibor Gotesman, Stevan Gal, Edmund Kornstajn, Nikola Svalb, Franjo Balog, Magda Bosan-Simin - all from Subotica; Miroslav Bauer, Zdenko Has, Zdravko Singer - all from Osijek; Franjo Kardos, Rudolf Girn, Lola Vol, Bem Livija - all from Novi Sad;. dr Istvan Gere and Karolj Levi - from Senta; Ruza Sulman from Petrovgrad; Julius Eker - from Bjelovar; Reginald Vajs - from Djakovo; Nikola Kardos - from Karlovac; and some others.

In the various regions of the country Jewish participation, in the revolutionary movement was of various degrees of intensity. This can be explained by the differences in the social structure of the Jewish population in various areas, but of no less importance was the Party's activity or the lack of it in approaching the prospective Jewish members in a given area. The number of Jews participating in the Liberation War resulted, obviously, from these two factors. This point shall be elaborated below in more details.

As far as the Jews of Yugoslavia were concerned dark clouds started to make their appearance felt already during the years preceding WWII. The Yugoslav governments of those days found themselves ever closer to the policy of the Third .Reich allowing fascist ideology to be spread in the country, fascist organizations to be brought into being and anti-Jewish Folksdeutschers' activity to be carried out unabated. In 1940, the Cvetkovic - Macek Government enacted two anti-Jewish decrees, one prohibiting Jews to be engaged in production of and wholesale trade in food, and another introducing “numerus clauses” for Jews at the University and High School levels. On March 25, 1941 the Cvetkovic - Macek Government signed a Protocol by which Yugoslavia joined the Axis Powers' Pact which the broad masses of Yugoslavia did not propose to accept and by a coup d'etat changed the Government on March 27, 1941.

Only a few days later, on April, 6, 1941, the Third Reich's armed forces attacked and invaded Yugoslavia without any declaration of war. Italian, Hungarian and Bulgarian forces were also engaged in this operation. Under the pressure of superior forces, both in number and equipment, the Yugoslav army was defeated in what became known as the Short April War and very soon, on April 17, 1941, the capitulation was signed. This also meant that the Yugoslav Jewish community, with its membership of 82,500 people, had to face the darkest period in its existence.

Areawise, the Jewish population of Yugoslavia was distributed as follows: Serbia about 12,500, Croatia, Slavonia and Srem about 25,000, Bosnia and Herzegovina about 14,500, Banat about 4,200, Backa and Baranja about 16,000, Slovenia, Medumurje and Prekomurje about 1,000, Kosovo about 500, Sandzak, Dalmacia, Montenegro about 730 and Macedonia (according to documents preserved) 7,762. Following the capitulation of Yugoslavia Hitler tore the country apart allotting certain territories to his allies who participated in the invasion. Serbia, Banat, Sandzak and a part of Kosovo remained under German administration. Hungary was given Backa, Baranja, Medjumurje and Prekomurje, while Bulgaria received Macedonia, a part of Eastern Serbia and a part of Kosovo. The territory of Dalmacia and

Croatia Litoral was divided into “Zone I” which became an integral part of Italy and -Zone II- in which Italy exercised the military while the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) the civil administration, or to use the proper term, the Ustashe authority. In addition, Italy was given Montenegro and a part of Kosovo as well. On the territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slavonia and Srem a Quisling state called the Independent State of Croatia was created to be administered by the Ustashe.

In all these areas genocide was committed against the Jews, but not simultaneously as the new rulers did not demonstrate the same degree of hurry. The fact, however, remains that it was the Third Reich who initiated and organized the genocide in all provinces and in some areas she was the executor as well. To prepare the ground for the genocide anti-Jewish measures were introduced in all provinces with a view to bringing about the breakdown of the Jews in both an economic and psychological sense. In areas administered by the Germans special organizations were set up for the solution of the Jewish question. To ruin the Jews financially the following measures were introduced: Jews were prohibited to cash their saving accounts in banks; they were deprived of their enterprises, shops and real estate; Jewish objects of historical and cultural value were exposed to sheer plunder; Jews of some wealth were arrested and set free only after payment of high ransom; Jews were made to pay large sums of money to *“compensate for the damage suffered by the Third Reich in the April war provoked by the Jews”* and to contribute to 'the Fund against Jewish-communist action,” etc.

The plunder was completed and made total after the deportation of Jews to death camps. We shall list here only some of the measures the Nazis introduced against the Jews with a view to bringing about their complete psychological breakdown. The Jews were put to forced, often humiliating, hard, physical labor. They were deprived of each and every of their civil rights, were prohibited, to have their place of domicile, forced to dance naked in front of Nazis who called this type of torture - *“recreative physical exercises.”*

They all had lost their job in administration or in other public offices and were excluded from public health services. In addition, they were forced to wear yellow mark, observe special police hours valid only for Jews, and to face, individually or in groups, special firing squads and to perish after having been falsely accused of sabotage. Several other measures were also introduced with the same purpose.

Genocide against the Jews was started by the Germans in the middle of September 1941. First on their list were the Jews transported to Belgrade from Banat. The Belgrade Jews were the next victims, to be followed by Jews transported to Belgrade from various other Serbian towns and townships. By the end of October all Jewish men from Banat were killed near the village of Jabuka (Pancevo), while the killing of Jewish men from Belgrade and other Serbian places was completed by the end of December 1941. These last executions were carried out in the localities of Jajinci, Bezanija, Marinkova bara and in some other localities.

The Jewish women and children from Banat and Belgrade were transported and confined to the Sajmiste camp in Zemun at the beginning of December 1941. Women and children from other localities as well were brought to this camp at a later date. Due to terrible health and

other conditions in this camp, and as a result of torture, hunger, cold and various infectious and contagious deseases, a great number of these women and children died in no time. In the second part of January 1942 the Germans started to liquidate those who survived. To expedite this liquidation a special truck arrived from Germany in which the inmates were killed by the poisonous gas. By the end of May not one of the inmates remained alive. The Germans were very eager to find every Jew who still might have been at large. They therefore engaged the Folksdeutschers, and members of Ljotic, Nedic and Chetnik formations who all were given awards in money for every Jew they could lay their hands on. In March 1942 about 800 sick Jewish persons were chased out from the Belgrade Jewish hospital to be killed in the truck mentioned above.

In the second part of 1941 the Jews from Sabac and about 1100 Jewish émigrés from European countries who were in confinement in Sabac until the outbreak of the war were made inmates of the Sabac camp. In October 1941 all the men of this group were executed by firing squads near the village of Zasavica, while the women and children were transported to Sajmiste camp in January 1942 to be killed there very soon after their arrival.

In October 1941 the Jewish men from Nis and the nearby localities, including a certain number of émigrés from other countries, found themselves interned in the “Red Cross” camp in Nis. In February 1942 all these inmates were killed at the village of Bubanj near the city of Nis, while their wives and children were taken to the Sajmiste camp to be killed there.

The Jews of Sandzak were transported to the Sajmiste camp in March 1942 and killed there immediately after their arrival.

According to available data out of the Jewish victims of genocide 3,800 were from Banat, 11000 from Serbia and about 260 from Sandzak. This makes a total of about 15.000 persons plus several hundreds of Jewish émigrés from other countries. The Germans themselves considered these killings a great “success.” This is evident from the following report dated August 29, 1942 and sent by Turner to Lohr, the commanding officer of the South East area: *"Serbia is the only country in which the question of Jews and Gypsies has been solved.”*

In January 1941 the Government of Bulgaria enacted an anti-Jewish law (“The Law on the Protection of the Nation”) which, when enacted, was valid in Bulgaria proper only. As of December 1941 the same law was applied in the occupied Macedonian territories too. In addition, several by-laws and decrees were passed, all aimed at bringing about a complete financial and psychological breakdown of the Macedonian Jews. A total plunder of Jewish property was organized, Jewish businessmen engaged in trade or craft were deprived of their shops, as were dispossessed of their property all the Jewish real estate owners. A special Jewish tax and several other Jewish levies were introduced. To cause a psychological collapse of the Macedonian Jews several additional other special measures were introduced. The Macedonian Jews, too, had to wear the yellow mark, they were banned from specific streets and from selected food stops They were prohibited to enter public shelters during air attacks. The explanation was that *“it was the Jews who brought about this war.”* Jews were not permitted, furthermore, to enter any park, public bath or similar places.

At the beginning of March 1943 the Government of Bulgaria and the representative of the Third Reich signed an agreement on the Macedonian Jews who were, as the agreement stipulated, to be handed over to the Germans. Prior to the implementation of this agreement far-reaching measures were introduced to prevent any possible escape. On March 11, all the Jews from Skopje, Bitola and Stip were transferred to what was said to be a collection point and were interned there. Actually, the storehouses of the tobacco plant were used for this purpose although their capacity was very far from what would be sufficient to house over 7,000 people. For all the same all these Jews were forced in and kept there two days without food and water. During the second part of March three railway compositions were packed with these people and they were all transported to the ill famed Treblinka camp where 7,144 Macedonian Jews perished.

When it came to committing crimes against the Jews the Ustashe in the so called Independent State of Croatia had, no doubt, surpassed their German masters. As far back as April 1941 Andrija Artukovic, the then Minister of Interior, chose to state: *"The Government of Croatia shall solve the Jewish question in the same way as the German Government did."*

As a first step Jewish property was plundered in the Ustashe state. To be true, not only the Ustashe but the Yugoslav Folksdeutchers and the Germans, too, had their share in this plunder. Jews were deprived of their property and real estate, heavy burdens were levied on them, Jewish physicians were dispossessed of their offices and equipment, Jewish libraries were plundered as were many objects of great historical and cultural value. After the transport of Jews to death camps the plunder was made complete and total.

To bring the Jews to the brink of psychological breakdown the Ustashe followed the example of German practice in Serbia applying the same measures. Anti-Jewish measures were decreed not only by the central Ustashe agencies but by the country and municipal authorities as well.

Genocide was started by the Ustashe as early as July 1941. The victims were first taken to what were called transit camps, wherefrom only after a few days, to death camps. Transit camps for the purpose of genocide were formed in Gospic, Bosanski Petrovac, near Koprivnica (Danica), Loborgrad, Djakovo, Tenja near Osijek, Vinkovci, Vukovar, Sremska Mitrovica and Zagreb. When already in death camps, the inmates were exposed to torture, hard labor was forced upon them, they had to face hunger and diseases and wanton killing was not a varity either. When all the prospective victims were concentrated in death camps the transit camps were of no avail anymore and their operation was discontinued.

The Ustashe organized several concentration camps as well, notably in Kerestinac, Jadovna, Metajna and Slana on the Island of Pag, as well as in Jasenovac - which had branch-camps in five localities. The level of cruelty exercised and the number of crimes committed in these camps put them very high on the list of the most ill-famed ones which existed during WWII.

Inmates of the Pag camp (men, women and children) were exposed to the most cruel tortures, were sent to hard labor in quarries and actually starved to death. The women were raped, the abdomen of pregnant women were cut open and their fetus pulled out. Mass

killings were carried out by hammering nails into tile inmates' head, by cutting their throat or by applying strokes of a mallet. Many of the inmates were simply hamstringed and thrown down into the abysses of the Velebit mountain.

The most notorious camp of all was the one in Jasenovac. The cruelty in it was unsurpassed and the number of killed the greatest. The inmates were sent to hard labor and forced to work under such terrible conditions that more often than not one half of them never returned to the camp, as they either died at work or were killed on the way back. The methods of killing were similar to those in the Pag camp. The scene of the killing was mostly at the bank of the Sava river. When Jews were the victims the killing by cutting of throat was called "ritual throatcutting." Many inmates were kept in bunkers and were left without food and water to starve. The hunger in the camp was simply unbelievable. The hygienic conditions were on the lowest possible level making it a fertile ground for diseases which took a very high toll. The corpses of those killed or who died were burned in an improvised crematorium. The children were, as a rule, liquidated in a closed room by poisonous gas or simply strangled.

In April 1945 about 1200 inmates were still alive in the Jasenovac camp. The Ustashe were just about to liquidate them but the Partizans' advance proved to be speedier than expected. Although unarmed, the inmates decided to attempt a break-out. Most of them had to pay for this attempt with their lives, but a small number, 30 Jews among them, got through all the same.

According to data available about 800,000 people (Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and progressive minded Croats) with about 20,000 Jews among them, perished in the Jasenovac camp. In the genocide in the so-called Independent State of Croatia against the Jews the Germans had their share too, as they took out from the Loborgrad, Tenj, Vinkovci and Zagreb transit camps several thousand Jews and transported them to Auschwitz where nearly all of them perished. For each Jew taken out from Croatia the Ustashe government paid 30 Marks to the Germans for "transport expenses."

About 30,000 Jews were victims of genocide on the territory of the Independent State of Croatia. As soon as that country came into being a greater number of Jews from Bosnia and Herzegovina and from Croatia proper and Slavonia, too, having seen the writing on the wall, attempted to escape and to reach Dalmatia and the Croatia Littoral, i.e.: "Zone I" and "Zone II." Only 3,000 succeed to get to Zone I and about the same number reached somehow Zone II. These numbers would have been much higher had the Croatian fascists not prevented the escape of many of these people. A considerable number were caught and handed over to Ustashe to be killed.

In Zone I the refugees settled in the City of Split, but the Italians had confined a number of them to Korcula, an island of the Adriatic sea. In that Zone the following Anti-Jewish measures were decreed: no Jewish child could attend elementary or high school; Jewish property was registered; no Jew could enter any public restaurant, bar, bath or similar public premises. The fact remains, however, that genocide, as such, was not committed in this Zone. What the Jews had to face were some excesses and provocations. So, sometime in June 1942 a group of "Black Shirts" attacked the Jewish synagogue in Split, demolished it and beat up quite a number of Jews. Plunder of Jewish shops and apartments followed.

Subsequently, however, there were no further drastic excesses to which the Jews were exposed in that Zone.

After the capitulation of Italy the Germans and Ustashe entered the city of Split. The refugees from other Yugoslav areas who found shelter in the city of Split were the more fortunate ones. The Partizans succeeded to evacuate them in good time and to take them to the Island of Vis where from they were transported to Italy to reach El Shat, Egypt, eventually. Actually only those were transported who themselves did not feel fit to join the Peoples' Liberation Army (elderly people, women and children). However, the time was too short for the Partizans to save the Jewish citizens of Split too. The Split Jews who were not fit to join the Liberation Army had to remain in the city and to face the Germans and the Ustashe. As soon as they entered the city the Germans introduced the following anti-Jewish measures: Jews were deprived of their property and real estate; they had to wear yellow mark; the men were housed in camps and taken out daily to do hard labor. In October 1943 the men (and a few women) were taken to Sajmiste camp where some of them were killed on the spot, while those whose life was spared here were sent to the Auschwitz death camp to perish there. On March 11, 1944 the Ustashe took the women and children to Jasenovac to kill them there. And so, a total of 148 Jews from Split became victims of genocide.

The moment the Ustashe found themselves in power in Zone 2 they started with the plunder of Jewish property in Dubrovnik. The first victims of their killings were the refugees who found shelter in Kotor (their number is not known) and 17 Jews from Dubrovnik. Crimes committed by the Ustashe in the Pag camp were already listed above. Actually, the Italians were the ones who have introduced measures to protect the Jews in Zone 2 from the reoccurrence of such Ustashe crimes. The Ustashe were very persistent in demanding from Italians the handing over to them of all the Jews in that Zone. To avoid disputes with Ustashe the Italians decided, however, to confine the Zone 2 Jews to camps administered by Italian military authorities. Consequently, at the beginning of November 1942 the Jews were interned in four camps: one was near Dubrovnik, one in Kraljevica and one each on islands of Hvar and Brac. At the beginning of June 1943 the Jewish inmates of these four camps were concentrated in one camp, that on the island of Rab. In this camp about 3,500 Jews were interned. In addition to this Jewish camp there was on the island of Rab a Slovene camp, too, with a considerable number of Slovenes interned in it. The inmates of these two camps organized an attack on the camp guard and succeeded to liberate themselves. A great number of former Jewish inmates of the Rab camp, who regained their freedom, joined the Liberation Army while the others were taken by the Partisans to the liberated areas of Lika, Kordun and Banija region. More will be told about these people further below.

As to the Kosovo region, Jews lived only in two cities, in Kosovska Mitrovica (113) and in Pristina (about 400) in the prewar period. After the invasion Kosovska Mitrovica was under German military administration, while the civil administration was passed on to the Albanian Ballists. Just as in Serbia the Germans did not lose any time to introduce anti-Jewish measures. Jews had to wear the yellow mark, Jewish property was plundered by both the Germans and Ballists, and hard labor for Jews was on the order of the day. From August 1941 onward the men were confined to camps, while the women and children had to face the same fate a few months later, from February 1942. Sometime in March 1942 they were all

taken to the Belgrade Sajmiste camp to be transported to Bergen Belsen where all the former Kosovska Mitrovica Jews perished except only 25 who fled from Kosovska Mitrovica to Pristina in good time.

Pristina was administered by the Germans only for two months. When they left the Italians took over the administration of the city.

After the capitulation of pre-war Yugoslavia about 200 Belgrade Jews also found shelter in Pristina. Moreover 45 other Jews found themselves in this city. These were refugees from various European countries confined to Kursumlijska Banja until the war, and the Germans when they entered that spa, transfered these people to Pristina.

During the two months long German administration of Pristina Jewish property was plundered, Jews had to wear the yellow mark, were taken to hard labor and all the rest. When the Italians took over, the situation did not change much, at least as far as the Jews were concerned. The plunder went on and the Ballists particularly distinguished themselves in it. The Belgrade refugees were interned in a camp and 51 of them were later handed over to the Gestapo, who took them to the Belgrade Banjica camp to be killed there. Before very long the Italians took all of the men to Albania to confine them to camps there. The fate of those who remained in Pristina, actually the women and children only, was doomed when the Germans returned to the city in April 1944. They were taken to the Bergen Belsen camp where 117 Pristina Jews perished. Two others, when they tried to escape, were also killed by the Germans. In all 210 Kosovo Jews were victims of genocide.

As to the anti-Jewish measures and Jewish sufferings in the regions of Backa, Baranja, Medjumurje and Prekomurje, two periods can be clearly distinguished: the first started when pre-war Yugoslavia capitulated and lasted until March 1944, while the second started in March 1944 and lasted until May-June 1944 when the Jews were taken to the death camps. During the first period the administration of these regions, both military and civil, was in Hungarian hands. The following anti-Jewish measures were introduced during this period: Jews were taken to hard labor; had to pay heavy burdens; their real estate, houses, land or forest, were confiscated, wealthier Jews were interned and set free only after payment of high sums; special forced labor units were organized and sent to Hungary and Ukraine (about 4,000 Jews); forced labor in Bor mine, etc, Genocide in its true sense was, however, not committed during this period although the toll was by no means small. During the notorious “razzia” in South Backa several thousand people, mostly Serbs, were killed, with 870 Novi Sad Jews and 323 Jews from other towns of South Backa among them.

In March 1944 German units entered these regions and Gestapo men were with them. Without any delay the most cruel measures were introduced: the plunder of Jewish property was completed to be absolutely total; Jews had to wear the yellow mark; they were all confined to transit camps before very long to be taken, sometime in June 1944 first to Hungary and then to concentration camps in Austria and Germany. Most of them ended their journey in Auschwitz. Very few of them succeeded to survive and to return.

Genocide on these regions claimed a total of 14,000 Jewish victims.

Not all the victims of fascist terror and genocide were Jews. Other nations and nationalities of Yugoslavia had to pay high price too. Out of about 15,000.000 citizens of pre-war Yugoslavia 1,700.000 died during WWII, which is 11%. However, when one takes the number of people belonging to each nation or nationality, then percentagewise the Jews were those who paid the highest price. Out of about 82,000 members of the Jewish community in Yugoslavia only 15,000 survived WWII which means that 79,2% perished.

The thirst of the Nazi criminals and of their accomplices was not quenched by physical liquidation of Jews. They made it a point to break down their victims, both physically and mentally, before sending them to death. Hard and, as a rule, humiliating hard labor, hunger torture, rape, diseases planted in the camps were only some of the methods which clearly demonstrated the sadism of those criminals. When the time for physical liquidation arrived that same sadism came to expression in the following methods: cutting of throat, beating until death, hammering nails into the head, killing by strokes of a mallet, poisoning in gas chambers, burning at the stake, and the rest. For the inmates death was a real salvation.

One of the famous sentences the renowned writer Ivan Goran Kovacic, a victim of fascist terror himself, left us reads as follows: *"History has recorded many persecutions, old societies and surviving oppressive classes guilty of terrible crimes against masses often had to disappear in the course of past history, but intentionally to annihilate and exterminate whole nations is indeed a crime never witnessed so far, a most repulsive, hideous and shocking crime."*

Extermination of Jews was not the only aim of Nazi criminals and their accomplices. Plunder of Jewish property was their very important objective as well and they have indeed met it by employing most perfidious methods. Very rich Jewish libraries disappeared, numerous documents of historical value could not be traced after the fall of Nazi Germany, many valuable pieces of art and craft have simply gone to earth, etc.

But more than that, numerous monuments, edifices and landmarks were destroyed, synagogues, many of exceptional architectural value, were demolished and leveled to the ground.

The return of the few Jews who survived was a most awestricken experience. They found their homes plundered, but even more terrible was the fact that hardly any of them found at home a single member of their families.

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And yet, in this sad book on the tragedy of the Yugoslav Jewish community there are shining pages which will tell to all future generations that the Yugoslav Jews did not propose to remain passive and reconcile themselves with the crimes the occupiers and their accomplices have committed against them. A considerable number of them took up arms to fight, together with all the other nations and nationalities of Yugoslavia, in the Liberation War.

Thanks to the high reputation earned by its pre-war activity the Communist Party of Yugoslavia did succeed to inspire the freedom loving nations of Yugoslavia to stand up

against the invaders and their accomplices. When the capitulation became a fact of history, the Party without losing much time instructed its members to start to prepare the masses for struggle. As early as July 1941 the Central Committee of the Party announced its resolution to start the peoples' uprising. Only a few days later the first Partizan units already made their appearance felt. The units became brigades and very soon after, by November 1942, the brigades became divisions and corps. At the beginning of 1945 the enemy had to face already four army-corps. Simultaneously people's committees were formed on the liberated areas to take care of the civil administration, while the supreme authority was vested in the Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation.

The people has took up arms practically simultaneously in all regions but due to some specific conditions the uprising could not developed everywhere with the same degree of intensity. Jewish participation in the War of National Liberation in 1941 was much influenced by this fact.

The Yugoslav Jews had as many reasons as all the other patriotic citizens to take up arms in 1941 against the invaders but they were handicapped, as compared with others, by many obstacles. Some of these obstacles, but by no means all, can be listed here. Strong measures were introduced by the occupiers and their accomplices just for the purpose of preventing the Jews to leave their domicile and to join the Partizans. When the first partisan units were organized and the first areas liberated, most of the Jews were confined to camps if not killed already. Only a very limited number of underground channels were available for those who lived in cities to reach the liberated areas and even those channels which were available could offer a chance to individuals only and by no means to greater groups. A certain number of Jews who attempted to reach the Partizan lines were caught by quisling traitors and handed over to Germans who killed them without any hesitation. The moment the Germans and Ustashe took over they started with the confinement of Jewish members of the Communist Party and of the League of Young Communists as they somehow succeeded to lay their hands on the membership list of these organizations. In some regions, as for instance in Backa, there were simply no preconditions in 1941 for Partizan units to be formed as the time for armed struggle was not ripe those early days, for non-Jews and Jews alike.

There were, however, some other reasons as well, which were not so much beyond the control of the Jews themselves. Some of these can be listed too. As a rule Jews allowed themselves to be confused by the sudden capitulation. They proved to be rather hesitant and did not believe that that they would become victims of genocide. They entertained some illusions and overestimated the fact that the Germans did not, at that time yet, resort to genocide in the countries occupied before Yugoslavia. They were also afraid that if one of its members would join the Partizans, the rest of the family would then be killed by the Germans. They were afraid in the same way for the Jewish hostages too. There were, of course many more personal reasons, but history will hardly take note of them.

In some regions the first mentioned reasons were more present than the latter ones, while in others it was the other way round. The fact, however, remains that a greater number of Jews could most probably escape from cities to join the Partisans.

And yet, the measures introduced by the occupiers and their accomplices notwithstanding, the number of Jews who joined in 1941 the War of National Liberation was far from small. Depending upon the situation in various regions, the number of those who joined the Partisan units varied. Those who for whatever reasons did not, did join as a rule the underground Movement of National Liberation in the occupied areas. Particular emphasis should be given to the fact that a considerable number of Jewish youth, although under double pressure, as Jews and communists - as most of them were enrolled in the League of Communist Youth - were members of action groups responsible for various acts of sabotage and diversion in Belgrade, Sarajevo, Zagreb, Subotica, Novi Sad, Sombor, Senta and other cities.

Here are the names of Jews who were among the organizers of the uprising: Mosa Pijade (in Montenegro), Solomon Anaf (in Pozarevac), eng. Isidor Baruh (District of Uzice), Josip-Joza Baruh (District of Bajina Basta), Dragutin Zonenfeld (Belanovica). Political activists in the rear were: Olga Alkalaj, Rafael Batino, Beska Bembasa-Cvetic, etc. At the beginning of the uprising high Party functionaries were: Mosa Pijade, Olga Alkalaj, Rafael Batino, Dora Frajdenfeld and Mosa Levl.

In 1941 no less than 277 Jews joined the War of National Liberation. Out of this number 168 were warriors of the Army of National Liberation, while 109 were members of the Movement of National Liberation. Out of the members of the Army 129 fell in combat while out of the members of the Movement 79 perished as victims during the war.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina the list of Jews who were responsible for preparing and organizing the uprising in various localities was by no means small. The following names are on that list: Nisim Albahari (Semizovac and Vares area), Oskar Danon (Vogosce area), Slavko Engl (in Breza), Mento Eskenazi and Feliks Goranin (Trebevic area), Pavle Goranin (Romanija area), Samuel Lerer (in Western Bosnia), Albert Trinki (in Janja), Jakica Altarac (Vijenac area). Political activists in the rear were: Hana Ozmo, Salom Albahari, Izidor B. Abinun, Aser S. Danon. Sabetaj H. Levi, Jozef Altarac-Todor, Tinka Romano, Blanka Albahari-Ferusic, Eliezar-Lezo Perera, Isak J. Gaon (all from Sarajevo), Frida Laufer (from Tuzla) and Herta Baum (from Bjeljina). Here are the names of those who held high and responsible posts in the Party during the initial phase of the uprising: Hana Ozmo, Nisim Albahari, Blanka Albahari-Ferusic, Pavle Gorarnin, Isak J. Gaon and Tinka Romano (all from Sarajevo), Jakica Altarac (from Jajce) and Frida Laufer (from Tuzla).

From the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina 382 Jews joined the War of National Liberation in 1941. Out of these 264 were in the Army of National Liberation (185 fell) and 118 in the Movement of National Liberation (115 perished).

In Croatia and Slavonija the Ustashe succeeded in arresting a considerable number of Communist Party and Young Communist League members prior to the start of the uprising. All these people, with 25 Jews among them, were confined to the Kerestinici camp. Some of them were simply killed as early as July 1941, i. e. very soon after their arrival to the camp, while the rest perished in the same month when an attempt was made to break out of the camp. In May and June a greater number of Jewish members of the Young Communist

League, belonging to action groups were arrested. They were taken to the camp and killed indiscriminately.

One of the organizers of the Zagreb action groups was Pavle Pap. He was instructed by the Party in August to leave for Split in order to participate in the formation of Partisan units in that city. With a small detachment he set out in the direction of Dinara mountain but was denounced and caught by the Italian Carabineers on August 17, 1941, to be killed in Skradin. Under the same Party instruction Dr. Leo Gerskovic and Dr. Andrija Remenji did succeed to reach Split, while Josip-Papo Polak was ordered to go to Sibenik. Roman Domani and Adolf Stajnberger, both veterans of the Spanish Republican Army, were deputed to the Kordun region, Ilija Engl to Zumberak, while Mosa Albahari was sent to the Istra area. Zdenko Has, Jaksa Singer, Miroslav Bauer, Reginald Vajs were among the organizers of the uprising in Slavonija, Slavko Goldstajn in Karlovac, and Hugo Kon in Varazdin. Activists in charge of political work in the rear were: eng. Josip Engl, Djuro Engl, David Gaon, Magda Boskovic and Dr. Pavao Verthajm, while Pavle Pap, Dr. Leo Gerskovic, Leo Mates, Slavko Goldstajn and Hugo Kon were Party functionaries of high responsibility.

From the territory of Croatia and Slavonija 188 Jews joined the War of National Liberation in 1941. Out of these 72 were in the Army of National Liberation (40 fell) and 116 in the Movement of National Liberation (96 perished).

In Srem one of the organizers of the uprising was Emil Skalicki, while Arnold Rajh and Edita Pisker were outstanding political activists in the rear.

From the territory of Srem 37 Jews joined the War of National Liberation in 1941. Out of these 21 were in the Army of National Liberation (12 fell) and 16 in the Movement of National Liberation (15 perished).

It was already mentioned that the then prevailing situation in 1941 did not allow the forming of Partizan units on the territory of Backa. However, the Movement of National Liberation gained wide support and was joined by a considerable number of Backa Jews. A similar situation existed in Medjumurje and Prekomurje. As to the Jews, their number was impressive, but even more impressive was their activity.

The following names are on the list of organizers of the Movement of National Liberation in Backa: Dr. Adolf Singer, Eden Kornstajn, Tibor Gotesman, Lola Vol, Konstantin Lakenbah, Stevan Gal, Dr. Koloman Majer, Nikola Majer, Nikola Svalb (all from Suboitca), Dr. Andrija Fiser, Leo Akerhalt, Olga Braun, Ladislav Kon, Eva Cuker, Ladislav Bokor (all from Sombor), Rudolf Grin, Djula Varga, Franjo Kardos, Milan Kom, Andrija Lederer, Oto Blam, Zoltan Timar, Livija Bem (all from Novi Sad), Dr. Istvan Gere, Karoij Levi, Denes Levi, Istvan Miler, Macas Spiro (all from Senta), Dr. Ruza Blau-Francetic and Lajos Sintes (from Backa Topola). They were engaged in collecting arms, medicines and other medical supply; they organized courses and trained prospective Partizans for combat and non-combat war duties; formed action groups for sabotage and diversions; collected data and information on enemy, etc. In the action group Jewish youth was percentagewise more than well represented.

In October 1941 the enemy succeeded to penetrate into the Movement. A mass arrest followed in all parts of Backa and very soon the apprehended ones were exposed to the most cruel torture in the prisons of Subotica, Novi Sad, Sombor and Senta.

In Subotica about 80 Jews were arrested. Twelve were condemned to death by a court-martial (ten were hanged as two were at large) while 53 were sentenced to hard labor. These latter ones were sent to the Ukraine and to Hungary as forced laborers which actually meant death for 30 of them.

In Subotica 70 Jews joined the Movement, of National Liberation in 1941. Forty of them perished.

In Sombor two Jews were condemned to death. Out of 17 who were sentenced to hard labor 8 perished in the Ukraine, where they were sent as forced laborers, or in camps in which they were interned.

In Sombor 22 Jews joined the Movement of National Liberation in 1941.

About 90 Jews were confined to the prisons of Novi Sad. Two of them were condemned to death, two were killed while in pretrial confinement, while 70 were sentenced to hard labor. Out of these latter ones 38 perished in the Ukraine while on forced labor. Two of those who were sent to the Ukraine succeeded in escaping. One of them joined the Red Army and fell in combat, while the other joined the Yugoslav tank brigade and fell, too, as a warrior. Moreover, three members of the Liberation Movement fell in a battle against the Hungarian gendarmerie, while 12 perished in the notorious Novi Sad “razzia” at the end of January. A total of 131 Novi Sad Jews joined the War of National Liberation in 1941, one of them joined the Army and fell as a warrior, and 130 joined the Movement of National Liberation (66 of them perished).

In Senta 5 Jewish members of the Movement of National Liberation were condemned to death by a court martial. All the others were sentenced to hard labor. From other cities of the Backa region 18 Jews were sentenced to hard labor. Out of these 11 perished in camps and on forced labor.

All in all, 271 Jews from Backa joined the War of National Liberation in 1941. Four of thern joined the Army and all the four fell in combat, while 267 joined the Movement of National Liberation (and 140 of these perished).

From Medjumurje and Prekomurje 34 Jews joined the War of National Liberation in 1941. Six of these were in the Army but only two survived. The remaining 28 joined the Movement of National Liberation. Out of these one was sentenced to death, while 6 perished as forced laborers in Ukraine or Hungary.

In Macedonia 90 Jews joined the War of National Liberation in 1941. Sixteen joined the Army (6 fell in combat) while 74 joined the Movement (69 perished). Several Jews were among the organizers of the uprising. In Skopje Djordje Blajer, in Stip Isak Cion, in Bitola Beno Ruso,

Viktor Mesulam, Zamila Kolonomos, Avram-Bata Anaf, Estreja Ovadija, Mordo Nahmijas and Avram Sadikario.

In Skopje several Jewish young men were members of action groups. One of them, Branko Frichand, a courageous and brave activist, particularly distinguished himself. In Bitola all the members of several action groups were recruited from the ranks of Jewish youth. The Bulgarians succeeded to get information on some of these groups and to arrest their members. David Romano and Isak Faradzi were the prime victims as they were condemned to death, while several others were sentenced to hard labor. A number of Macedonian Jews were accused by the Bulgarian fascists and taken to Bulgaria to be interned there as supporters of the Movement of National Liberation. Another 19 of them were confined to the Idrizovo prison near Skopje, but these managed, fortunately, to regain freedom together with other captives in August 1944.

From the “Zone 1” 16 Jewish citizens of the City of Split joined the War of National Liberation in 1941. Four of these joined the Army of National Liberation (2 fell), and ten joined the Movement of National Liberation (2 perished, while the rest was confined in Italy where they regained their freedom after Italy's capitulation). From the City of Split seven more Jews, refugees who found shelter in the City, joined the Army of National Liberation (3 of them fell in combat).

From the “Zone 2” one Jew (from Dubrovnik) joined the Movement of National Liberation.

The number of Jews who joined the War of National Liberation in Montenegro or in Croatia Litoral is rather small and those who did were mostly Jewish refugees from the territory of the so-called Independent State of Croatia. All in all, in Yugoslavia 1,319 Jews joined the War of National Liberation in 1941. Out of these 562 joined the Army of National Liberation (388 fell) and 757 joined the Movement of National Liberation (534 perished). Of those who survived 149 are holders of the Partizan Star 1941 (65 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 28 from Serbia, 26 from Croatia and Slavonija, 10 from Macedonia, 7 from Srem, 7 from Backa, 2 from Dalmacia, 2 from Medjumurje and 1 from Kosovo). Ten Jews are on the distinguished Peoples' Heroes list: from Serbia - Mosa Pijade and eng. Isidor Baruh (fell); from Bosnia and Herzegovina - Pavle Goranin (fell), Nisim Albahari and Samuel Lerer (aka Voja Todorovic); from Croatia - Robert Domani, Ilija Engl, Pavle Pap and Adolf Stajnberger (all of them fell); from Macedonia - Estreja Ovadija (fell).

During the period from January 1942 until September 1943, i.e. until the capitulation of Italy, the number of Jews who joined the War of National Liberation was rather small. Some of the reasons may be listed here: by the end of 1941 or the beginning of 1942 a very great number of Jews were already confined to German and Ustashe camps, and quite a great number were already killed; in 1942 the Italians confined to concentration camps in Zone 2 about 3,500 Jews, while about 3,000 were confined in Zone I; in Backa, where the enemy succeeded to penetrate into the Movement, the activity had to be slowed down which inevitably had an adverse effect on the activity of the Jews as well; at the beginning of 1943 the Germans transported over 7,000 Jews to the Treblinka camp.

And yet, during that same period 616 Jews joined the War of National Liberation. They were not, however, listed in the place of their domicile but rather in the locality they reached as refugees after the capitulation of Yugoslavia. Of these 498 joined the Army of National Liberation (145 fell) while 118 joined the Movement of National Liberation (37 perished).

From September 1943 onward, Jews who were still alive joined the War of National Liberation practically en masse. Among these were first of all those who were confined to the camp on the Island of Rab, as well as those who were confined in Zone I and in Italy. A certain number succeeded to escape from the Ustashe camp in Jasenovac, from various prisons, from forced labor units in Hungary and Ukraine, and from the prisoners of war camps in Germany and to join the War of National Liberation.

When those confined to the Rab camp regained their freedom, a combat unit called the Jewish Rab Battalion was formed with a membership of 243 warriors. At a later date this unit was dissolved and its members were absorbed by the Partizan units operating on the territory of Croatia. After the liberation of the Rab camp an additional group of former inmates numbering 448 also joined the Army of National Liberation. These were sent to various partizan units on the territory of Croatia. In addition, 648 former inmates joined the Movement of National Liberation. Accordingly, from the Rab camp 1,339 former inmates joined the War of National Liberation (691 the Army and 648 the Movement).

During this period one more combat unit was formed with solely Jewish membership. These were the Jews who were interned or confined in Italy. The unit they formed was the Jewish platoon within the Montenegro Battalion of the First Prekomurje Brigade. In addition, 1,282 more Jews joined the War of National Liberation in that period. These were the ones who were confined in Zone 1 and in Italy or escaped from camps, prisons, forced labor units or prisoners of war camps.

Accordingly, from September 1943 until the end of the War 2,621 Jews joined the War of National Liberation. Of these 1,926 joined the Army of National Liberation (187 fell) and 695 joined the Movement of National Liberation (48 perished).

Two facts clearly stand out: first, the formation of combat units with sole Jewish membership, and second, the proportionate number of Jews in the War of National Liberation. These two facts demonstrate undoubtedly that the Yugoslav Jews were more than eager and sharp-set to fight the enemy and did so when they had a chance to prove themselves.

A great number of Yugoslav Jews joined the anti-fascist movement outside their country wherever they happened to be at the capitulation of Yugoslavia or escaped to during the subsequent period (Hungary, Italy, Switzerland, France). The role of Jewish officers in the anti-fascist movement organized within the prisoner of war camps in Germany should be particularly singled out.

An analysis of the circumstances which, in one way or other, made it possible for or stood in the way of Jews to join the War of National Liberation leads us to conclusion that the membership of participants was rather large, which is evident from the following facts:

- according to the available data (which are most probably incomplete) 4,556 Jews participated in the War of National Liberation, i.e. 2,897 in the Army of National Liberation (720 fell) and 1,569 in the Movement of National Liberation (599,perished). Out of those who were in the Army 29% fell, while the percentage of those who perished as members of the Movement is approximately 38%;

- out of the 720 who fell as members of the Army 438 were soldiers in combat units, while the others fell while commanding combat units or on duty as political or other combat related functionaries. A certain number of Jews were during the war on high commanding military or political functions (Pavle Goranin, Ilija Engl, Samuel Lerer and others) while Mosa Pijade was a member of the Supreme Staff of the Army of National Liberation. The contribution of those Jews who were members of the Movement of National Liberation and were given various duties behind the front line as political workers, contributing activists, workers in various Partizan workshops, educational and cultural institutions, was also considerable;

- out of those who joined the Army of National Liberation at the beginning of the uprising and survived, 150 are holders of the Partizan Star 1941, while 10 are on the distinguished list of Peoples' Heroes;

- in the Yugoslav Peoples' Army 14 Jews reached the rank of a general, two of them lieutenant generals, two major generals and 10 brigadier generals.