

PHILIP J. COHEN, *SERBIA'S SECRET WAR: PROPAGANDA AND THE DECEIT OF HISTORY*. TEXAS A & M UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1996, pp. 264.

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The wars in the former Yugoslavia (1991–99) have inspired a considerable body of scholarly and popular history writings in the West, which, sadly, also includes a number of pseudo-scholarly publications, not infrequently swaying on the verge of ugliest war and racist propaganda, while setting themselves an ambitious and pretentious goal: to provide a “scholarly” explanation and unravel the real causes of the bloody disintegration of the common state of the South Slavs. As if following a well-trodden path, all these “scholarly” interpretations of the causes of the gory Yugoslav drama may be reduced to three propagandistic stereotypes: (1) cultural inferiority of the Serbian nation to the civilized nations, particularly manifest in its tendency to nurture various historical myths; (2) its centuries-long aspiration to dominate the neighbouring nations, notably Croat, Bosniak, Albanian and Montenegrin; and (3) its almost natural predisposition to all forms of totalitarian systems and political ideologies, notably Fascism and anti-Semitism.

One of such publications, *Serbia's Secret War: Propaganda and the Deceit of History*, was written by a medical doctor, Philip J. Cohen, and published in 1996 with the academic backing of the series editor, a Croat-American scholar Stjepan G. Meštrović, and the author of the Foreword, a Harvard professor, David Riesman, now deceased. Liking the book's author to Erich Fromm, Meštrović announced it as a refreshing contribution to contemporary world historiography, and for its scholarly refutation of the clichéd views of, and “Serbian propaganda myths” about, Serbia and the Serbian nation's antifascist role in the Second World War.

Even a cursory reading of Cohen's book, which heavily draws on the Croatian pamphlet of Tomislav Vuković (alias Ljubica Štefan) and Edo Bojović *Pregled srpskog antisemitizma* (An overview of Serbian anti-Semitism, Zagreb 1992) reveals quite clearly that it is just another obscure piece of ideological denigration (such as, for example, Croat-American sociologist Branimir Anzulović's *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide*, 1999, or Noel Malcolm's *Kosovo: A Short History*, 1998) inspired by just as clear political objectives. In fact, the Cohen's book teems with forgeries, half-truths, incompetent use of historical sources, overstrained theses and ill-intended inferences. It is so inconsistent that it does not even take a careful reader to notice its many contradictions and as many distortions of historical fact in virtually all chapters. If we add that Cohen, advertently or inadvertently, fails to mention and analyze some major historical phenomena, i.e. completely overlooks the broader European context, its real purpose does not seem too difficult to figure out. And its real purpose is to criminalize the modern history of Serbia, on the one hand, and to relativize the horrible crimes of the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* or NDH) against the Serbs, Jews and Roma, which took lives of hundreds of thousands of victims, on the other.¹ In other words,

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¹ There is an extensive and scholarly reliable literature on the genocide perpetrated by the Croatian Ustasas against Serbs, Jews and Roma. Among serious Croatian historians, the most important contributions were written by V. Novak, *Magnum Crimen*.

Cohen's book has been published with the intention to present the modern history of Serbia as the history of crime, to equate the Serbian national idea with Hitler's racist theory of Arian superiority (in this case, of the Serbian nation to other nations), to marginalize and even obliterate the Serbian contribution to antifascism, and to present Serbia, with her purported pro-Nazi and pro-Fascist predilections, as the source of all evil in the Balkans. Moreover, the book offers a symmetrical portrayal of the clerico-fascist Independent State of Croatia and occupied "Nedić's Serbia", ascribing to the collaborationist Serbian government, compared to other Balkan and even European countries, a little short of the leading role in carrying out the Holocaust.² Cohen goes even further and presents the annihilation of Jews

and their tragic fate in occupied Serbia in the light of what he sees as the historical continuity of aggressive Serbian nationalism and anti-Semitism threatening not only its neighbours but also world peace.

Cohen's book creates the impression that during the Second World War the Serbs were Hitler's allies and Jewish foes, whereas the Croats (and Bosnian Muslims) sided with the Allies and protected Jews against pogrom. Cohen argues that the Serbs have been successful in concealing the facts about their real role in the Second World War, presenting themselves as its main victim, as the only participant in the anti-Hitler struggle and the only friend of Jews in the Balkans. Through skilful manipulation and propaganda, Cohen claims, the Serbs have succeeded in imposing their own perception of the Second World War to others, and contemporary historiography has sadly succumbed to it en masse. Only recently, with the discovery of "new" sources, and with new readings of the available literature (mostly well-known products of Yugoslav Communist historiography, books from Croatian and US historiographies, and the memoirs of some of Ljotić's associates) has the picture emerged of Serbia's ideological and technical collaboration with the Nazi occupation forces, radically changing the earlier historical conclusions as regards the Serbs. This is what Cohen seeks to emphasize and this is why he chooses to title his book *Serbia's Secret War: Propaganda and the Deceit of History*.

The bottom line of Cohen's book is that Serbia was not an ally of the anti-Hitler coalition during the Second World War, but a satellite of the Axis powers, and the one with the highest level of ideological and technical collaborative involvement in carrying out the genocidal policy towards the Jews and all other non-Serb nations that did not fit into the long-devised plan for creating "Greater Serbia". In support of his thesis, Cohen

Pola vijeka klerikalizma u Hrvatskoj (Zagreb 1948); F. Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i NDH* (Zagreb: Liber-Školska knjiga, 1977); B. Krizman, *Pavelić i Ustaše* (Zagreb: Globus, 1978). For a broader context with a chapter on Croatia, see J. Steinberg, *All or Nothing. The Axis and the Holocaust 1941-1945* (London and New York: Ruthledge, 1990); V. Dedijer, *The Yugoslav Auschwitz and the Vatican. The Croatian Massacre of the Serbs during World War II* (Buffalo & New York: Prometheus Books, and Freiburg, Germany: Ahriman Verlag, 1992). For a detailed analysis, see Edmond Paris, *Genocide in Satellite Croatia 1941-1945. A Record of Racial and Religious Persecutions and Massacres*, transl. from the French by Louis Perkins (Chicago: The Institute for Balkan Affairs, 1962). Cf. an overview in D. T. Bataković, "Le génocide dans l'État indépendant croate (1941-1945)", *Hérodote* 67 (Paris 1992), 70-80; Marco Aurelio Rivelli, *Un genocidio occulto. Etàt Indipendant de Croatie 1941-1945* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1999).

² Cf. M. Koljanin, "Holocaust Research in Yugoslavia", in *Israeli-Serbian Academic Exchange in Holocaust Research: Collection of papers from the academic conference, Jerusalem-Yad Vashem 2006* (Belgrade 2008), 283.

dwells on occupied Serbia's collaborationist government of General Milan Nedić, describing him as openly sympathetic to Nazi Germany even as the pre-war army and navy minister. General Nedić, Cohen argues, was Hitler's most loyal ally in the Balkans, especially in consistently carrying out the Holocaust and anti-Masonic policy. In order to achieve its criminal goal, the Nedić government set up an entire system of "genocidal institutions" and military units on the model of Nazi Germany, all under a single chain of command: Serbian State Guard, Serbian Gendarmerie (taken over from the collapsed Kingdom of Yugoslavia), Belgrade City Special Police and Dimitrije Ljotić's Serbian Volunteer Corps. Furthermore, the pro-Western royalist Chetniks of Colonel Dragoljub Mihailović, the first anti-Nazi guerrilla movement in occupied Europe, are described by Cohen as an ally of the Axis powers. This, added to his entire misrepresentation of Serbian modern as well as contemporary history, is meant to substantiate his thesis that the participation of Serbs on the side of the Allies is just another myth, so typical of the Serbian frame of mind. Unlike the Serbs, Cohen goes on to say, the Croats pursued an altogether different policy. They allegedly were the only pro-Western nation in Yugoslavia, politically oriented towards West-European democracies. This orientation of theirs was confirmed by their purportedly massive participation in Josip Broz Tito's communist Partisan forces which bravely fought both against the Germans and Mihailović's Chetniks.³

³ After Stalin's Red Army entered Serbia and Yugoslavia in 1944, Mihailović, abandoned by the Allies, was caught by Tito's communists and tried in a sham-trial in 1946. Mihailović, however, was considered a genuine anti-Nazi hero and praised as such in Washington, London and Paris: "Tout cela ne peut tout de même effacer les

There is no doubt even at this point that we are dealing with a pile of deliberate falsifications and that they should not at all be seen as a harmless adventure of an amateur historian. Cohen, obviously aware himself that his fabrications do not tally with historical fact, opens his book with a "theoretical explanation" for the Serbian collaboration during the Second World War. He tries to prove that Serbia's entire (ideological, political and technical) collaboration with the Axis powers had deep roots and that "Serbian fascism" and "anti-Semitism" rely on a long tradition of Serbian expansionism and intolerance of the Jews and all other nations opposing Greater Serbian hegemony.

According to Cohen's distorted Croatian-nationalist inspired interpretation, it was in fact Serbs who invented fascism, long before Hitler. Its origin can be traced as far back as the First Serbian Insurrection of 1804 and, forty years later, in Ilija Garašanin's *Načertanije* (1844), we can see it take its clearly recognizable shape. This fascism was fertile soil

magnifiques pages d'heroïsme qu'ont écrites les tchetniks au prix de leur sang. Les Alliés eux-mêmes ont reconnu que leur action en retardant l'arrivée des renforts allemands a joué un rôle importante dans les succès de la campagne d'Afrique. Les messages adressés par les généraux Auchinleck, Eisenhower, etc., en témoignent. Le général Mihalovitch fut même, le 2 février 1943, décoré de la Croix de Guerre avec palme par le général de Gaulle. Par la suite les tchetniks sauvèrent des centaines d'aviateurs alliés. Ils peuvent enfin être considérés comme les libérateurs d'une grande partie de la Serbie." (*Le Monde*, Paris, 12 June 1946) Quoted from D. T. Bataković, "Le nettoyage ethnique sous la loupe de l'historien. Une lecture du livre de M. Grmek, M. Gjidara, N. Simac, 'Le nettoyage ethnique. Documents historiques sur une idéologie serbe' (Paris: Fayard, 1993, 340 p.)", *Raison garder* 10-11 (Lausanne 1996), 11-25.

for anti-Semitism and, thus, the Serbs, throughout their modern history, systematically discriminated against Jews, through legislation, through ideological and religious propaganda and through political actions. This racist and religious intolerance culminated, Cohen argues, during the Second World War, in the consistent implementation by the collaborationist Nedić government of measures conducive to the Holocaust. To corroborate his assertions, Cohen cites the Nazi concentration camp at Sajmište, near Belgrade (set up in the territory of the pro-Nazi Independent State of Croatia and run by the Nazi forces), and the anti-Masonic exhibition held in Belgrade, emphasizing Serbia's alleged responsibility for these destructive anti-civilisation measures.

An unbiased reader, however, can see instantly that Cohen's interpretation is based on clumsily and malevolently assembled falsifications, half-truths and metaphysical assumptions. According to him, the Serbs were the originators of Fascism, more than a century before Hitler or Mussolini, and on top of it, during their insurrection against foreign rule in 1804. Does that mean that the great German historian Leopold von Ranke got it all wrong while writing his famous, and smoothly readable, history of the First Serbian Insurrection? Having identified all processes, events and constants he thought of as being universally human, Ranke shaped an account of Karageorge's short-lived state and called it a history of the Serbian revolution, whereby he sought to emphasize its importance not only for Serbian, but also for Balkan and European history. It began as a local revolt and gradually grew into the struggle for national liberation and for the restoration of independence, thus setting an example for other conquered Christians, notably the Greeks, whose insurrection, famously and un-

controversially known as the Greek War of Independence, began in 1821.⁴

Cohen's fabrications about the *Načertanije* are even more malignant. From what this physician writes about the first Serbian national programme, it seems justified to ask if he has ever read it all. He claims that Garašanin devised this Serbian fascist project, which amounts to annexing to Serbia all the lands populated by "Bulgarians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Bosniaks, Hungarians and Croats", using the goriest of methods — ruthless liquidation and expulsion. Two things need to be borne in mind here: (1) Fascism as a totalitarian social movement with distinctive ideological tenets is not the product of the nineteenth but of the twentieth century; its emergence was related to the severe economic crisis, the collapse of democratic constitutionalism and the efforts to break up the system of collective security established by the 1919 Versailles Treaty, in the aftermath of the First World War, which is why it arose in the revisionist countries frustrated with the outcome of the war; consequently, the *Načertanije* could not even theoretically be the source of Fascism, let alone genocide; (2) the *Načertanije*, an unpublicized foreign policy draft, drawn up jointly with Polish agents in the Balkans, actually an abridged version of Polish policy proposals, approved by Paris and London officials, was aimed to bring Serbia closer to France and Great Britain as a future Piedmont of the Balkan Slavs. Drafted in the age of national awakening fermenting across pre-revolutionary Europe, the *Načertanije* was similar to other national programmes all over the Balkans, which

⁴ L. Ranke, *Die Serbische Revolution* (1829) = *The History of Servia and the Servian Revolution, with a Sketch of the Insurrection in Bosnia*, transl. from the German by Mrs Alexandra Kerr (London, 1853).

makes its interpretation as a manifesto of “Serbian fascism” and “Greater-Serbian hegemonism” not only inaccurate but also malignant; the contents of the *Načertanije* was heavily influenced by a Czech, František Zách, an agent of the Polish émigré circles in Paris headed by Count Adam Czartoryski.⁵ The *Načertanije* contains nothing of what Cohen insinuates, especially not the wide array of cruellest methods for its accomplishment, including executions and deportations of non-Serbs. The only accurate thing is that Garašanin marked out all Ottoman-held regions he thought of as being Serbian and that therefore they should gradually join an enlarged Principality of Serbia: Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo [northern Albania], and, if possible in a distant future, the regions of Srem, Banat and Bačka (in present-day Serbia’s province of Vojvodina); the *Načertanije* did not discuss the Serbo-Croat relations, because Garašanin did not expect as rapid disintegration of the Habsburg Empire as Count Czartoryski tended to believe.⁶

It should be noted that the neighbouring peoples drew up similar programmes, as Dimitrije Djordjević observed more than twenty years ago in a text on the role of historicism in the proc-

ess of nation- and state-building in the nineteenth-century Balkans.⁷ A similar political programme originated among the Greeks (*Megali Idea*), and in Bulgaria, where the programmes of several political parties advocated a territorially expanded (“San-Stefano”) Bulgaria, and among the Albanians under the leadership of the Frasheri brothers, at the time of the Albanian League (1878), conceived of as the renewal of the pan-Albanian tribal alliance of feudal times. All subsequent Albanian movements drew on the tenets of the Albanian League in their aspiration to unite into a single Albanian state all areas which once had been within the boundaries of four Ottoman *vilayets*, (Scutari, Kosovo, Monastir and Ioannina) with roughly 44 percent of Albanian population.⁸

As we can see, the *Načertanije* was in no way a phenomenon that could be seen as exclusive to Serbian history; it was just one of many political programmes emerging at the time of nascent European nations and Romantic fascination with the idea of restoring the glory of idealized medieval states. It did involve Serbia’s territorial expansion (as all similar programmes did), but its underlying principles were quite legitimate at the time. The interpretation of Garašanin’s programme as a “fascist manifesto” is utterly inaccurate and tendentious.⁹

⁵ D. Stranjaković, “Kako je postalo Garašaninovo Načertanije”, *Spomenik XCI* (Belgrade: Srpska Kraljevska Akademija, 1939), 63–113; V. Začek, “Češko i poljsko učešće u postanku Garašaninova ‘Načertanija’ (1844)”, *Historijski zbornik XVI* (Zagreb 1963), 35–56.

⁶ D. T. Bataković, “Ilija Garašanin’s Načertanije: A Reassessment”, *Balcanica XXV-1* (Belgrade 1994), 157–183, with an English translation of Serbia’s foreign policy *Draft (Načertanije)*. Cf. also a relevant scholarly biography of Garašanin: David Mackenzie, *Ilija Garašanin: Balkan Bismarck* (Boulder & New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), with a chapter on the *Načertanije* on pp. 42–61.

⁷ D. Djordjević, “Uloga istoricizma u formiranju balkanskih nacionalnih država u devetnaestom veku”, *Ogledi iz balkanske istorije* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1989), 87–103.

⁸ D. T. Bataković, “The Serbo-Albanian Conflict: an Historical Perspective”, in G. Dujizings, D. Janjić, Sh. Maliqi, eds., *Kosovo/a. Confrontation or Coexistence* (Nijmegen 1998), 1–14.

⁹ The Polish representatives to Garašanin pointed out the following: “Les Serbes ont encore cet avantage que c’est un peuple pu-

Cohen's next grand deception is his thesis that anti-Semitism is deeply rooted in Serbia. As we have seen, Cohen claims that Jews have been systematically discriminated throughout Serbia's modern history. At closer examination, however, historical facts once again suggest a malevolent and unfounded thesis. In corroboration of his thesis, Cohen cites two laws from the period of the Constitutionals or Defenders of the Constitution (1842–58), re-enacted under Prince Michael (Mihailo); the ideological-religious sermons of bishop Nikolaj Velimirović; and, finally, the political ideology of Dimitrije Ljotić and his organization, *Zbor*.

It is a fact that there were laws imposing restrictions on the Jews in Serbia in some spheres of life. However, there also are some very important facts in connection with these laws which the author completely overlooks, either deliberately or out of ignorance. It is true that a law of 1844 imposed occupational restrictions and restrictions on the ownership of real property outside Belgrade, and it is also true that a law of 1856 banned the newly-arrived Jewish immigrants from permanent residency in Serbia. These restrictive laws were abolished by Prince Miloš in 1859, and re-enacted during the second reign of Prince Michael in 1861. After some time, mostly under pressure from great powers and the Pan-Jewish Alliance, the government permitted the

Jewish immigrants to stay permanently or those who had been banished to return.¹⁰ What is important about these laws is the general and local historical context in which they arose. Namely, they arose under the regime of the Constitutionals in the middle of the nineteenth century, when anti-Semitism raged all over Europe and even America. In some wealthier and much better organized parts of the world (e.g. the German states, the Habsburg Monarchy or the Russian empire), the Jews were subject to much harsher restrictions and discrimination than they were in the Principality of Serbia. The most restrictive measures are observable in the German lands, and as early as the eighteenth century. The Austrian Empress Maria Theresa expelled almost all Jews from Prague in 1744. Thirty years later, in 1774, she sponsored another wave of expulsion, this time of the Jews from Moravia and Bohemia.¹¹ In 1816 almost the entire Jewish population of Lübeck was expelled. In the second half of the nineteenth century, after the unification of Germany, some markedly discriminatory laws were enacted restricting Jewish educational and occupational freedom. They were greatly influenced by the Jews-are-our-misfortune policy of Heinrich von Treitschke. Anti-Semitism flourished in other European countries as well: in 1716 they were expelled from Brussels, in 1775 from Warsaw. Leonard Dinerstein credibly elucidates the phenomenon of anti-Semitism in America from the earliest settler colonies to modern times. It gained momentum after the Civil War and, in the early twentieth century, as-

rement démocratique; pas de noblesse et de clergé riches et corrompus, l'intelligence qu'accompagne ordinairement l'aisance donne droit et moyen d'arriver à tout. Dans toutes les combinaisons la nationalité serbe doit être aidée, encouragée, car elle sera un membre excessivement utile et important pour la civilisation." Quoted from S. Champonnois, "L. Bystrzonowaski, L'Hôtel Lambert et la diplomatie française dans les Balkans 1840–1849", in *Actes du Colloque Franco-Yougoslave* (Ljubljana: Centre culturel Charles Nodier, 1987), 56.

¹⁰ M. Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918–1941* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2008), 164.

¹¹ W. A. Iggers, *The Jews from Bohemia and Moravia. A historical reader* (Wayne State University Press, 1993), 27–43.

sumed a form of real racism.¹² Finally, the Great Depression of 1929 gave rise to an anti-Jewish hysteria, targeted especially at Wall Street bankers, who were accused of having caused the economic and financial crisis. According to *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, American anti-Semitism has been the most serious of all in the Western world, occasionally assuming terrifying forms.¹³ As for the Principality of Serbia in the Balkan context, its attitude towards the Jews was similar to that of Bulgaria (after 1878) and, to an extent, Greece. The position of Jews was much worse in the Principality of Wallachia, where they were subjected to mass persecution and expulsion. The absence of aggressive outbursts of anti-Semitism in Serbia suggests that the laws, rather than being a manifestation of a racist attitude, were meant as protection of Serbian merchants and craftsmen from competition. The Jews in Serbia were actually in a better position than in many European countries of the period. Using Serbia's few restrictive laws at a time when the Jews were overtly and harshly discriminated and persecuted across Europe to accuse her of deeply-rooted racially motivated anti-Semitism is plainly malicious. As for Serbian bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, confined by the Nazis in 1941 and sent to Dachau concentration camp, along with the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, patriarch Gavriilo Dožić, Cohen's interpretation of the bishop's case is also exaggerated. Bishop Velimirović is certainly among the most prominent twentieth-century Orthodox theologians, whose work also included philosophical and literary essays and poetry. Some of his writings, published after his death without his written permission,

do contain certain anti-Semitic excesses.¹⁴ Even so, bishop Velimirović obviously was not blinded by racist hatred. His attitude towards the Jewish people should be interpreted in the context of the fact that the interpretative framework of his perception of history was biblical tradition. His work shows an evolution from dogmatic criticism of Judaism to mild anti-Judaism, though in the general context of criticizing Europe's dwindling liberalism and materialism.¹⁵ He believed that such a markedly non-Christian spiritual climate would lead Europe into a new disaster and wars, which eventually turned out to be true. However, that the bishop did not harbour racist hatred, he proved it by his actions. During the Second World War, risking his own life, bishop Nikolaj Velimirović saved a Jewish girl, Ela Nejhaus from Trstenik, and her mother, from certain death.¹⁶ Had the bishop been anti-Semitic would not he fared better with the Nazi German authorities? Would he have been sent to Dachau? The bishop's humanity has been testified to by an Israeli citizen, Samuel Aviatar. At a conference devoted to bishop Velimirović in 2003, in his essay "Sons of Serbia and sons of Israel", Aviatar said: "Nazi Satan knew all too well why

¹⁴ E.g. bishop Velimirović's philosophical contemplation on biblical themes (*Kroz tamnički prozor*), written in the Nazi concentration camp, was published four decades later although the manuscript bore his hand-written remark: "Not to be published."

¹⁵ M. Koljanin, "Odnos Srpske crkve prema Jevrejima i 'jevrejskom pitanju' (1918–1941)", *Srpska teologija u dvadesetom veku. Istraživački problemi i rezultati* (2010), 103–104.

¹⁶ As testified by Ela Trifunović (nee Najhaus) herself in her letter kept at the Archives of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade.

¹² L. Dinerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 58.

¹³ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, "Anti-Semitism in USA 1776–1970", vol. 3 (2008).

he imprisoned him. He imprisoned him for being a man of God. For refusing to renounce God." Finally, there are, in the history of the Christian faith and Church, theologians, much greater and more influential than bishop Velimirović, who left behind more strongly anti-Semitic writings. One of them is none other than the originator of the Reformation, Martin Luther. His writings were so permeated with anti-Semitism that the Nazis did not fail to exploit the fact and quote the excerpts. And yet, it has never occurred to anyone to denounce Martin Luther as anti-Semitic and to call for the abolition of his church in the Protestant countries across Europe. What follows is that any evaluation of bishop Velimirović's spiritual legacy should use the same, or at least similar, criteria.

Finally, Ljotić's Zbor was created in the mid-1930s, which is to say at the time it was a European-wide "trend". After the rise of Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany, similar political movements, which obligatorily professed anti-Semitism, began to burgeon all over Europe, and their totalitarian tenets further eroded democratic constitutionalism on the continent. They found an echo in the Balkans as well, usually as caricatured local plagiarisms: the Arrow Cross in Hungary, the Iron Guard in Romania, the VMRO in Bulgaria, or the Ustasha movement in Croatia, are only the most prominent representatives of the Balkan version of Fascism and Nazism. Ljotić's Zbor belongs into this group, but it was not as extreme as the Croatian Ustasha, the Hungarian Arrow Cross or the Bulgarian VMRO. Unlike the Ustasha movement, for example, which was exclusively Croat and based on the ideology of the so-called Croatian "State Right" combining clericalism and extreme nationalism, Zbor was a Yugoslav movement with a corporatist ideology, replicating the patterns of the *Action française*. Even though it had

never been able to attract mass membership, Cohen writes about it at length, as if it had played a central political role in Yugoslavia. Cohen's book creates the impression that Ljotić was the most influential political figure in Serbia at the time. Ljotić ran for parliament twice, in 1935 and 1938, and suffered a heavy defeat both times. In the 1935 elections he won less than one percent (0.84), and in 1938, about one percent of the electorate. These figures strongly suggest that Cohen's attention paid to a marginal political group has ulterior motives.

Cohen also goes at great length: (1) to present occupied Serbia (1941-44) as the most hideous of all satellites of Hitler's Germany, the one who sought to rely on the Nazi occupation forces to accomplish its ideal of "Greater Serbia" and to exterminate its Jews; and (2) to present the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland as a fascist and collaborationist movement. In this case too, Cohen's arguments are unconvincing and easily refutable.

The first fact that requires emphasis is that Serbia in 1941-44 was a military-administrative area under German occupation. This means that it was not a state in the strict sense of the word; it was a remnant of the dismembered Kingdom of Yugoslavia, with insufficiently clear borders, constitutional status and capacity for establishing international relations. In those unfortunate times, the unlawful acts of Nazi Germany reduced Serbia to its pre-1912 frontiers, with the Banat nominally within its borders but beyond the reach of its institutions (effective power was exercised by the local Germans, *Volk-deutsche*, who formed the SS Prinz Eugen Division). What is also to be noted is the fact that the Germans wielded ultimate political power in Serbia. Of course, to exercise it effectively, they needed cooperation of the local political and military factors. The powers of the Nedić government were restricted to administrative

and technical matters; which means that it was not authorized to make political decisions of prime importance. It was subordinate to the Administrative Headquarters of the German Military Command. Thus it had to provide all assistance to the occupation authorities in carrying out anti-Semitic, anti-Masonic and anti-Resistance measures (against the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland and the Communists) to maintain “peace and order”. Research carried out by Walter Manoschek, Christopher Browning and Menachem Shelach has shown that the policy of extermination of the Jews and Freemasons, conceived and articulated in the capital of the Third Reich, was the exclusive responsibility of the representatives of Nazi Germany in occupied Serbia. This means, then, that the domestic collaborationist administration had no say in the matter; its responsibility was to provide “technical assistance” in its implementation.¹⁷ In that sense, the Sajmište concentration camp and the 1941 anti-Masonic exhibition were elements of a global Nazi policy which was carried out in all countries under German occupation, Serbia included.

Responsible for the horrendous crimes committed against the Jewish and other populations (Serb and Roma) in Serbia were: Felix Benzler, Plenipotentiary of the German Foreign Ministry in Serbia; Harald Turner, head of the Military Administration in Serbia; Wilhelm Fuchs, SS Oberführer, head of the Einsatzgruppe in Serbia; Paul Bader, Plenipotentiary Com-

manding General in Serbia; and Franz Neuhausen, General Plenipotentiary for economic affairs in Serbia (there was a special commissariat managing the immovable property of Serbia's Jews) — the “five kings of Serbia”, as Browning calls them. These high-ranking officials of the Third Reich in Belgrade, Browning stresses, hardly ever agreed among themselves. But they did on the issue of setting up a camp for Serbia's Jews.¹⁸ It should be noted that the Sajmište camp was located on the left bank of the Sava, i.e. on the soil of the clerico-fascist Independent State of Croatia (NDH). Therefore, Benzler had turned to the Reich's embassy in Zagreb and the NDH authorities asking permission to use Sajmište as a transit camp for the deported Jewish women and children. The Croatian authorities granted his request with the proviso that: (1) the camp should be guarded by Germans and not by Serbs, and that (2) the camp should be supplied from Serbia and not the NDH.¹⁹

At Sajmište, which operated as an SS-managed camp from October 1941 until July 1944, several thousand Jews, Serbs and Roma were brutally murdered. It should be noted that an airtight vehicle for mass carbon-monoxide poisoning was in use between mid-March and May 1942.²⁰ The vehicle was then transferred to Riga to continue fulfilling its horrendous purpose. This method of mass murder was also in use in the Chelmno concentration

¹⁷ W. Manoschek, “‘Gehst mit Juden erschossen?’. Die Vernichtung der Juden in Serbien”, in H. Heer and K. Naumann, eds., *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944* (Hamburg 1995), 39; Ch. Browning, “The Final Solution in Serbia. The Semlin Judenlager: A Case Study”, *Yad Vashem Studies XV* (Jerusalem 1983), 55–90; M. Shelach, “Sajmište – An Extermination Camp in Serbia”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies 2: 2* (1987), 243–260.

¹⁸ Ch. Browning, *Fateful Months: Essays on the Emergence of the Final Solution* (London: Holmes and Meier, 1985), 70.

¹⁹ Browning, “The Final Solution in Serbia”, 58.

²⁰ For more detail see M. Koljanin, *Nemački logor na Beogradskom sajmištu 1941–1944* (Belgrade, ISI 1992); Browning, *Fateful Months*; Browning, “The Final Solution in Serbia”; Shelach, “Sajmište.”

camp in Poland and in the occupied parts of the USSR.

As part of the Nazi anti-Masonic policy, the anti-Masonic exhibition mounted in Belgrade in 1941 was targeted at the Jews, Freemasons and Communists. It was organized under the patronage of the occupation authorities, and the collaborationist Nedić government was under an obligation to stage it and to publicize it, including the issuance of postage stamps for the occasion.²¹ Far from being a Serbian invention, such anti-Masonic campaigns were being launched in other European countries where Nazi Germany installed puppet regimes. For example, in August 1940 the Vichy regime of General Petain enacted a law authorizing the police to persecute and arrest Freemasons as enemies of France, and an anti-Masonic exhibition mounted later that year toured the entire country. And once again, it has never occurred to anyone to accuse France and the French en bloc of anti-Semitism and anti-Freemasonry.

Based on all the historically founded counterarguments quoted above, one can only re-emphasize that there had never been organized and state-sponsored, racially and religiously based anti-Semitism in Serbia, and that Serbia and the Serbs, as a prominent ally of the anti-Axis coalition, made a significant contribution to the struggle against Nazism and Fascism during the Second World War. Serbs demonstrated it by their mass participation in the antifascist struggle, either within General Mihailović's Yugoslav Army in the Homeland or within Josip Broz Tito's pro-Communist Partisan forces. It is also a fact that Serbs in occupied Serbia risked their own lives trying to save the lives of their Jewish fellow citizens. Until now, there have been 125 such cases in Ser-

bia recorded in the database of the Yad Vashem memorial centre, even though, according to Jaša Almuli, such noble efforts were much more numerous.²² Many rescuers (or their descendants) have been awarded Yad Vashem's honour of the Righteous among the Nations. What is important to emphasize is, that of all new countries that emerged from the former Yugoslavia, Serbia has the largest number of the "Righteous". And why is it important? Because Cohen claims that the Jews, in contrast to Serbia where they have always been persecuted and felt unsafe, have found home and safety in Croatia, with the exception of the NDH period. Historical fact, however, shows the presence in Croatia, as an integral part of the Habsburg Monarchy, of organized anti-Semitism, which occasionally assumed extreme forms of racist and religious hatred. By act of the Croatian Diet of 1609, the Roman Catholic Church was the only recognized church in Croatia and Slavonia, which had far-reaching implications for the position of other religious communities, especially the Orthodox Christian and Judaic. The act remained in force for decades. Domestic merchants frequently organized strong anti-Jewish protests, probably in a bid to protect themselves against competition, but more often than not these protests involved physical assaults on Jews. For example, the anti-Semitic demonstrations organized by the association of Zagreb (Agram) merchants in 1838/9, were accompanied by the demolition of Jewish shops and the beating of Jews, and followed by the demand that they all be expelled from Zagreb.²³ Similar

²¹ M. Koljanin, "Antisemitski stereotipi i propaganda u Srbiji 1941-1942", *Istorija 20. veka* 1 (2003), 83-119.

²² J. Almuli, *Stradanje i spasavanje srpskih Jevreja* (Belgrade 2010), 109; M. Fogel, M. Ristović and M. Koljanin, *Righteous among the Nations - Serbia* (Belgrade: Jewish Community in Zemun, 2010), 6-7.

²³ Koljanin, *Antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, 117-118.

demands could be heard in other Croatian towns, most prominently in Karlovac and Varaždin,²⁴ and they resurfaced during the revolutionary events of 1848/9; for example, in early 1848, the town council of Slavenska Požega passed an ordinance on the expulsion of all Jews except for a single “deserving” family, but the ordinance was not endorsed by the district authorities and the Ban, Josip Jelačić.²⁵ Animosity towards the Jews was fuelled by the profoundly anti-Semitic ideology of the Croatian state right ideology shaped by Ante Starčević and Eugen Kvaternik in the 1860s, but it was not until Josip Frank replaced Starčević in the 1890s that anti-Semitism practically became a legitimate political ideology, which found its promoters among intellectual circles and Roman Catholic clergymen.²⁶ It was manifested in written form, such as newspaper articles, brochures and vilifying tracts, which were so abundant that Ivo Goldstein finds it justified to describe them as an organized anti-Semitic campaign.²⁷ In the early twentieth century, public life in Croatia was permeated with anti-Semitism, and its most vocal promoters were the Radić brothers and their Croatian Peasant Party. Stjepan Radić’s anti-Jewish rants in the Croatian Diet in 1916 are a well-known fact, and so is his advice to the electorate: “For God’s sake, do not destroy [Jewish property]! Why would you destroy what is yours? To rob the Jews is not enough, they

should be skinned off!”²⁸ Those were the words of an indisputable political leader in a country Cohen describes as the safest place for Jews, for their lives and their property. Croatian anti-Semitism continued into interwar Yugoslavia, but it took monstrous proportions in the Independent State of Croatia during the Second World War, where Jews, Serbs, Roma and other “non-Arian” races were outlawed.²⁹ A number of racist laws were enacted, providing “legal” definitions of “Jews” and “Gypsies” (Racial Affiliation Act).³⁰ The implementation of these laws was clarified by the *Poglavnik* of the NDH, Ante Pavelić, in his interview for the *Berliner Bersen Zeitung* of 5 May 1941: “...the Jewish question will be radically resolved and, in accordance with the racial and economic views, the country will also be cleansed of Freemasons.”³¹ It follows from all this that Cohen is either poorly acquainted with Croatian history and the history of anti-Semitism in the Balkans or very biased.

Cohen’s book exhibits all features of a racist vilification with clear political goals: to discredit and criminalize Serbia’s modern history, to present the Serbian national idea as criminal, to accuse the Serbs of being naturally anti-Semitic and predis-

²⁴ I. Goldstein, “Antisemitizam u Hrvatskoj. Korijeni, pojava i razvoj antisemitizma u Hrvatskoj”, in *Antisemitizam, holokaust, antiifašizam* (Zagreb 1996), 14.

²⁵ Koljanin, *Antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, 118.

²⁶ M. Gross, *Povijest pravaške ideologije* (Zagreb: Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Institut za hrvatsku povijest, 1973), 197.

²⁷ Goldstein, “Antisemitizam u Hrvatskoj”, 17.

²⁸ Koljanin, *Antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, 135.

²⁹ Cf. a Jewish Holocaust survivor’s recently published testimony about the genocide against Jews and Serbs, slaughtered in hundreds of thousands in the largest Croatian Ustasha concentration camp, Jasenovac: Cadik I. Danon Braco, *The Smell of Human Flesh. A Witness of the Holocaust. Memories of Jasenovac* (Belgrade: Dosije, 2006).

³⁰ “Ustaša”. *Dokumenti o ustaškom pokretu* (Zagreb: Zagrebačka stvarnost, 1995), 160–161.

³¹ A. Pavelić, “Židovsko će se pitanje radikalno riješiti”, in “Ustaša”. *Dokumenti o ustaškom pokretu*, 171.

posed to fascist and any other totalitarian ideology, and to relativize the crimes of the Independent State of Croatia. That this book, published in the 1990s, was to serve propaganda and revisionist purposes may be seen from the fact that there soon followed its translated editions in Zagreb and Sarajevo, while the author was awarded a medal for merit by the President of the Republic of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, known not only as the architect of the ethnic cleansing of Croatia of its Serbian population, but also for markedly anti-Semitic views in his programmatic

book *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnosti*,³² and for publicly stating that he was happy that his wife was neither Jewish nor Serbian. Cohen's purportedly scholarly approach to Serbia's history proves to be just another of many failed attempts to falsify the past in order to accommodate some narrow nationalist or immediate political goals.

³² Franjo Tuđman, *Bespuća povijesne zbiljnosti. Rasprava o povijesti i filozofiji zločinja* (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, 1990).

JAJA ALMULI, *STRADANJE I SPASAVANJE SRPSKIH JEVIJEJA*
[SUFFERING AND RESCUE OF SERBIAN JEWS]. BELGRADE: ZAVOD ZA UDŽBENIKE I
NASTAVNA SREDSTVA, 2010, pp. 392.

Reviewed by Veljko Stanić*

The book of the renowned journalist and publicist Jaša Almulic re-examines the tragic fate of the Jewish community in Serbia during the Second World War. A result of the author's twenty years of research into the Holocaust in Yugoslavia, it belongs to the field of microhistory studies, but it also looks at the Jewish question in occupied Serbia in the overall context of the Holocaust.

Almulic, born in 1918, comes from a Belgrade Jewish family himself. Under Nazi invasion in April 1941, the young man managed to leave Belgrade, but was arrested in Montenegro and transferred to a prison in Italy. After the war, he pursued a career in journalism. He was a distinguished political commentator, news agency editor and foreign correspondent for Yugoslav newspapers, notably from South America and the United States.

The research Almulic, as a privileged interlocutor of Jewish Holocaust survivors, has been carrying out over the last two decades has considerably improved our knowledge and resulted in several important publications, such as *Jevrejke*

govore [Jewish women speaking], *Živi i mrtvi* [The living and the dead], and *Jevreji i Srbi u Jasenovcu* [Jews and Serbs in Jasenovac], the latter being a collection of sixteen testimonies of the former prisoners of Jasenovac, the largest extermination camp in what had been the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, managed by the Croatian Ustasha regime in the Independent State of Croatia 1941–1945.

The book presented here is organized into three main parts. The first offers an account of the persecution of Jews in Serbia by the Gestapo after the Kingdom of Yugoslavia collapsed and Serbia was occupied by German troops and put under a system of military administration. The second part reveals a less known aspect of the occupation period: the rescue of Jews under Nazi threat. Finally, the third part revisits some controversial issues of the Jewish question in Serbia. Apart from doing his own research, Almulic underlines the importance of widely recognized

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