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POLAND? BUT WHICH? JEWISH POLITICAL ATTITUDES TOWARD THE POLISH STATE IN FORMATION DURING WORLD WAR I

What kind of a country are we talking about when we speak of Poland from the perspective of the organized Jewish political trends among Jews in Poland? What should the scope of the new Polish state be in their view? What kind of relations should Poland have with neighbouring states as well as within, among its various populations and societies?

This paper examines the various answers Jews proposed in a period of liminality – the interval between two stages and two distinct situations: the imperial order (Austrian and Russian) and the Polish national state. It describes Galicia and the Congress Poland from 1914 to 1918 when the territory was shared by different empires and nations and its fate was far from clear. It considers the changing attitudes of different political groups among the Congress Poland and Galician Jewry during the World War I regarding the future of the Polish lands. It takes into consideration the effects of inter-ethnic (mainly Polish-Jewish) relations as well as the influence of the government and the impact of these factors on the political orientation of the main Jewish political groups toward Polish statehood during the war years, and also the forms this orientation assumed at the end of the war *vis-à-vis* the increasingly violent anti-Jewish atmosphere.

WITH THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR

The Jews of Galicia, like most of the Polish parties there, took a position in favour of the Austro-Polish solution. Leaders of the Jewish communities in Galicia, on behalf of the Jewish inhabitants, expressed their full support for the efforts of the NKN (Naczelny Komitet Narodowy – The Supreme National Committee) and Polish claims concerning the unification of the Kingdom of Poland with Galicia in the reformed Empire. This was in total concord with a well-kept loyal attitude towards Austria.¹

¹ Konrad Zieliński, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na ziemiach Królestwa Polskiego w czasie pierwszej wojny światowej* (Lublin, 2005), 108.

In many Jewish communities, prayers were held for Polish independence and Jews participated solemnly in patriotic demonstrations. While in western Galicia these events were organized by communities, in eastern Galicia, where Ukrainian feelings had to be taken into account, they were arranged by individuals. Jewish youth and political activists participated in the Polish armed effort. Among Jewish volunteers, those coming from Jewish families with a tradition of being engaged in Polish national life, most of them merchants, professionals and craftsmen stood out. They often joined the Riflemen's Association (Związek Strzelecki) and the Strzelec Society.² Because of their socio-economic background, many of them worked in the Legions' workshops, warehouses, administration and health care units. Jews cooperated with local representatives of the NKN, especially in the financial and commercial fields. They helped to acquire textiles and food for the Polish Legions at special, low prices in different cities across Galicia. West Galician Jewish craftsmen volunteered to work in the Legion workshop in Cracow, Oświęcim and, later on, in Piotrków. Like their Catholic peers, Jews donated goods and money to support Polish armed action. For instance, merchants from Rzeszów donated textiles and wool; Jewish artisans from Sanok or Tarnobrzeg sewed voluntarily uniforms, pouches and shoes.³

The rise of Polish nationalism and anti-Semitism during the years preceding World War I, and especially during the war, caused the outflow of Jewish youth from the Polish national movement. The leading sector among the Jewish society in Galicia and Congress Poland, the integrationist camp (often called the assimilationists), which maintained that Jewish cohesion stemmed from adherence to Judaism, thinned, its members turning toward a rising Jewish nationalism, especially Zionism. For them, the Jews were a modern nation, and deserved national rights in the lands of their dispersion.⁴ Those who remained in the integrationist camp generally identified with the Polish nation, often considering themselves Poles of the Mosaic faith. As part of the Polish nation, however, they insisted that Polish Jews deserve complete equality and should be fully integrated into Polish life, both socially and linguistically. The leaders of this camp were determined to combat the rising appeal of Jewish nationalism in Galicia and were deeply engaged in a struggle against Jewish national demands. Without giving up the fight for complete civil equality, they opposed claims for national minority rights for the Jewish population in a future, reshaped and united Galicia and the Congress Poland.

² Władysław Konic, "Żydzi w Legionach (1914–1917)," in: *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej. Działalność społeczna, gospodarcza, oświatowa i kulturalna 2*, eds. Ignacy Schiper, Aryeh Tartakower, Aleksander Haffka (Warsaw, 1936), 542–549; Zygmunt Zygmuntowicz, "Żydzi w Legionach Józefa Piłsudskiego," in: *Żydzi w służbie Rzeczypospolitej 1, 1918–1939. Żydzi bojownicy o niepodległość Polski*, ed. Andrzej Krzysztof Kunert (Warsaw, 2002), 163.

³ Alojzy Zielecki, "Żydzi w polskim ruchu niepodległościowym w Galicji przed pierwszą wojną światową i w czasie jej trwania," in: *Żydzi w Małopolsce. Studia z dziejów osadnictwa i życia społecznego*, ed. Feliks Kiryka (Przemyśl, 1991), 289–296; Zieliński, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na ziemiach Królestwa Polskiego w czasie pierwszej wojny światowej*, 302–309.

⁴ Ezra Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1916–1926* (New Haven, 1981), 24–36, 43–45, 50–54, 73.

Galician Jewish leaders from the integrationist camp (Jewish delegates in the Austrian Reichsrat and the Galician Landtag and the presidents of the major Jewish *Kultusgemeinde* in Galicia – Lviv, Cracow and Przemyśl), signed a statement printed on July 9, 1915, in *Polen*, the NKN's German-language journal.⁵ It expressed a commitment to the Polish national plan, the Austro-Polish solution, and called for “genuine” equal rights for the Jews so that they could be part of the economy and society “in all areas of Polish national culture”. The statement was finished with an unequivocal declaration that “we see in Poland’s liberation [...] the only way to rightly and favourable solve the Jewish question in Poland”.⁶ The drafters’ intention was twofold: to stress that only resolution of the Polish question in a Polish political entity would solve the Jewish question and to insist that the Jewish question was subordinate to the Polish question.⁷ Despite the fact that all the signers had come from the same camp (the statement was not signed by the leaders of the huge Orthodox population in Galicia, or by the Jewish nationalists), they did claim to speak on behalf of all of Austro-Polish Jews.⁸

Those who had been excluded from the statement expressed their disagreement with the integrationist discourse behind it. The Jewish nationalists, the Zionist and the Zionist Socialists (*Poale Tsiyon*⁹), stated that those signers represented only a small sector of the Galician Jewry. Polish statehood, as imagined by the proponents of the Austro-Polish solution, was not questioned. The question was not: “Poland, yes or no?”, but: “which kind of Poland?”. The Jews, it was maintained, need more than empty words about equal rights. They need a mechanism to ensure them and they demand recognition for the Jewish culture and language. The *Poale Tsiyon* movement stated as their answer that “Poland will be free only if it is free from within, if it is built on a democratic basis and freedom for all the nations inhabiting it”.¹⁰

THE OCCUPATION OF THE POLISH KINGDOM BY THE ARMIES OF THE CENTRAL POWERS

The attitude of Jewish political circles toward the future Polish statehood was becoming more and more relevant after the occupation of the Congress Poland by the central powers during the summer of 1915. In February 1916, with the active assistance of a moderate integrationist Samuel Goldflamm, a senior

⁵ “Erklärung”, *Polen* (July 9, 1915), 20–22.

⁶ “Erklärung”, *Polen* (July 9, 1915), 21–22. On the petition and drafting of it, see: Henryk Piasecki, *Żydowska Organizacja PPS, 1893–1907* (Wrocław, 1978), 311–313.

⁷ Ibid. and Władysław Leopold Jaworski, *Diariusz 1914–1918*, ed. Michał Czajka (Warsaw, 1997), 38.

⁸ See: “Erklärung”, *Neue Freie Presse*, July 15, 1915.

⁹ Zionist Socialists, who sought to create Jewish national home in Palestine, but also advocated national-minority rights for diaspora Jews.

¹⁰ Lavon Archives (Tel Aviv), 11-III-JAK, “Zu den polnisch-jüdischen Beziehungen”, September 1915, 1–5; “Yehudei ha-Mizrakh”, *Hatsfira*, January 6, 1916; Sch. Rudel, “Poale Zion in Oesterreich während des Krieges”, *Der jüdischer Arbeiter*, December 1923, 31. In German and Hebrew.

leadership of various Jewish ideological camps was convened in Warsaw. The aim was to unite the Polish Jewish leadership behind a common program expressing the Jewish leadership's attitude toward a future Polish state as well as the status of Jews in it. The meeting, which took place in Warsaw, attracted representatives of all the main four Jewish socio-political camps: the integrationists, the nationalists, the socialist workers, and the Orthodox.¹¹ The integrationists, though well-organized before 1914, had slowly and continuously declined during the course of the war. The thriving nationalist camp led by the Zionists was highly organized, strong in its demands of national autonomy or minority rights, but lacking constituents' respect due to the weak leadership.¹² The Jewish workers' camp, especially the Bund, the largest Jewish workers' party in the Congress Poland, although relatively small, had increased greatly its strength during the war.¹³ The fourth camp, the Orthodox, saw the Jews as religion-based people, not a modern nation. Though the largest of the four camps, the Orthodox party was politically in its infancy. Its political consolidation occurred during the war thanks to the intervention and the patronage of the German Orthodox establishment, which inspired the organization of a full-fledged political party that later became *Agudas Isroel*.¹⁴ The meeting focused on drafting a minimalist platform, common to all the represented sectors.

The well-known integrationist Stanisław Kempner, a very active and influential political figure, the editor of *Nowa Gazeta*, proposed a declaration reflecting a vision of the Jews' status in the future Polish state:

We disagree with any use of political pressure to force assimilation on the Jewish masses. Nonetheless, we recognize that the masses are entitled to benefit from educational methods compatible with their needs. Therefore, we agree in principle with the idea of guaranteeing in the constitution [of the future Polish state] the legal status of the Supreme [Jewish] National Council [to deal with] matters of culture – in other words, a body to organize the education of Jewish youngsters and the development of the Jewish culture based on the right of linguistic self-determination following the relevant statistics in the Jewish population census. This idea will be accepted only if realized within the framework of an independent constitution for Poland. Under no circumstances should it contradict or hinder voluntary assimilation and the inculcation of civic duties toward the Polish homeland and the Polish political ideal among the Jewish masses. Needless to say, the Jews of Poland, regardless of their self-definition with respect to language, will enjoy unexceptionally full and constitutionally guaranteed civil equality.¹⁵

¹¹ For a comparative study of the camps, see: Ezra Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics* (New York, 1993), 4–35; Aleksander Haffka, “Żydowskie stronnictwa polityczne w Polsce Odrodzonej,” in: *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej. Działalność społeczna, gospodarcza oświatowa i kulturalna 2*, eds. Ignacy Schipper, Aryeh Tartakower, Aleksandr Haffka (Warsaw, 1937), 249–285; Aleksander Guterman, *Kehilat Varsha bein Shtei Milhemot ha-Olam, Otonomiya Leumit b-kvalei ha-Hok ve-ha-Metziut, 1917–1939* (Tel Aviv, 1997), 98–132.

¹² Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1916–1926*, 24–36, 43–45, 50–54, 73.

¹³ Bina Garncarska-Kadary, *Bechipusei dereh: Poalei Tzion smol befolin ad milhemet haolam ashnia* (Tel Aviv, 1995), 21–44; Gertrud Pickhan, *Gegen den Strom, der allgemeine jüdische Arbeiterbund 'bund' in Polen 1918–1939* (Stuttgart-München, 2001), 13–69.

¹⁴ Mordechai Breuer, “Rabanim Doktorim be-Folin bi-Zeman ha-Kibush ha-Germani (1914–1918),” *Bar-Ilan* 24–25 (1989), 117–153; Gershon C. Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition: Agudat Yisrael in Poland, 1916–1939* (Jerusalem, 1996), 34–46.

¹⁵ “Sitzung im Hause des Dr. Goldflam am 3. Februar 16 um 8 1/2 Uhr”; Polish version of the declaration states: “Jesteśmy jednak dalecy od zalecania przymusowej asymilacji politycznej

To the opposite of what might have been expected, Kempner's statement recognized the Jews as a national minority and demanded Jewish cultural autonomy while also insisting on constitutional guarantees to ensure continuity. It emphasized that his circle did not consider the Jews a nation, nor did it foresee the development of Yiddish. According to this view, assimilation based on cultural progress was the answer to the Jewish question; this process needed no artificial outside intervention.¹⁶ However, Kempner was ready to support some mild demands for cultural autonomy, but only in the future Polish state, on condition that it would not hinder civic equality and the integration or assimilation of those Jews who desired it. All of this presupposed naturally that the Polish question would be resolved within the framework of an autonomous Polish entity, probably envisaged as a result of the Austro-Polish solution.

The declaration was accepted by the representatives of the other political camps and along with brief statements that a free and democratic Poland would not impose any particular language in compulsory education and that Jews recorded in the census as Yiddish speakers would be able to attend Yiddish schools.¹⁷

So, in addition to the Folkists, the Zionists, and the Bundists that demanded minority rights before the war had broken out, people who had not supported autonomy now also began calling for mechanisms to protect the Jewish minority against the arbitrary will of the majority. Some figures, as the above-mentioned Samuel Goldflam or Leon Berenson, central figures in Jewish Warsaw of the so-called "neo-assimilationist camp", joined the call for granting of some special rights, issuing declarations in support of collective rights to protect the Jews from dispossession.

The declaration appeared in *Nowa Gazeta*, the organ of the liberal integrationist Jewish Varsovian camp, often the mouthpiece of the Congress Poland's integrationists. *Nowa Gazeta* published also articles endorsing the autonomists' complaints against discrimination. In private discussions, other figures in this camp also addressed the need for a legal mechanism of minority

względem mas żydowskich. Uznajemy przytem, że masy korzystać muszą z metod wychowawczych, zastosowanych do ich wewnętrznej potrzeby.

Z tych względów jesteśmy zdania, że w zasadzie przyjęć można pomysł konstytucyjnie i prawnie zawarowanej zwierzchniczej rady narodowo-kulturalnej, jako organu, który oprze nauczanie i wychowanie kulturalne młodzieży żydowskiej na podstawach językowego samookreślenia i na stosownej rejestracji ludności żydowskiej.

Przyjęcie tego projektu zależne jest jednak od warunku, że koncepcya taka może zostać urzeczywistniona dopiero w ramach samodzielnej konstytucyi polskiej i że nie będzie ona hamowała ani rozwoju dobrowolnej asymilacji, ani zaszczerpienia masom żydowskim zarówno obowiązków obywatelskich wobec ojczyzny polskiej jako też politycznej idei polskiej.

Samo się przez się rozumie, że żydzi w Polsce bez względu na ich językowe samookreślenie, korzystać będą z zupełnego równouprawnienia obywatelskiego, które znajdzie bezwzględnie gwarancję w przepisach konstytucyjnych". APwK, NKN 147, "Narady w sprawie żydowskiej w Polsce" February 5, 1916.

¹⁶ "Sitzung im Hause des Dr. Goldflamm am 3. Februar 16 um 8 1/2 Uhr".

¹⁷ The paper added that "representatives of the Polish club in Vienna, representatives of the CKN, and other [Polish] democratic groups" agreed with the principles of the declaration. Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amt (Berlin), WK, No 20c, Bd. 5, "Vorschläge zur Regelung der Stellung der Minderheiten im Zukunftigen polnischen Gemeinwesen" (1916 August).

rights to establish true equality. Demanding measures that would eliminate discriminatory policy ones and guarantee access to state resources, they acted at home and abroad to enforce the collective defense of their rights.

Nevertheless, the analysis of the 1916 summit suggests that the capacity for internal Jewish agreement was influenced decisively by external interests – those of the German occupiers, the Polish conservatives of Galicia, and the Austrian Foreign Office. When joint leadership or comprehensive Jewish demands served these elitist circles, the above mentioned German, Polish, or Austrian elements supported Jewish consolidation. When Jewish unity undermined their agenda, they thwarted even minimal agreements. Thus, to understand the division or unity among the Jews of Poland, it is insufficient to look at the politics, ideologies, or organization of the various Jewish camps. However important these factors might have been, one must also examine how the ruling administration related to the cohesion or division within Jewish society.

The crystallization of this minimal program underlines the consent and approval among broad Jewish political circles in the Congress Poland that the desired Polish state would guarantee full civic equality and offer conditions for the preservation of Jewish heritage and language, counselling neither assimilation nor nationalisation.

THE WARSAW MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

On May 3, 1916, many Jews in the Congress Poland and Galicia shared the celebration of Constitution Day with many others, demonstrating their support for the renaissance of a Polish state. With great pomp, a festive prayer was held at the bulwark of the Warsaw integrationists, the Synagogue on Tłomackie St. The Zionist rabbi Shmuel Poznański delivered a sermon dedicated to the significance of 1791. It was rich in Polish patriotism, stressing the good intentions of the constituents towards the Jews. Poznański emphasized the meaning of the past in shaping the future Polish state. When liberated and independent, he claimed, Poland should follow that masterful example and not forget the days of oppression and suffering. It should follow in the footsteps of the noble past, rejecting injustice and discrimination, incorporating the Jews as citizens with equal rights.¹⁸

In spite of demonstrations in favour of the re-establishment of a Polish state, like the above mentioned ceremony, the deep and intensive ethnification of the population prevented any possibility of establishing an integrative and multi-ethnic electoral list for the elections to the Warsaw municipality scheduled for early summer 1916.¹⁹ Although the elections (based on a *curiae* system) did not

¹⁸ *Mowa wygłoszona w Synagodze na Tłomackim w Warszawie ku upamiętnieniu Rocznicy 3-go Maja Przez Dr. Samuela Poznańskiego* (Warsaw, 1916).

¹⁹ Paul Roth, *Die politische Entwicklung in Kongreßpolen während der deutschen Okkupation* (Leipzig, 1919), 35; Czesław Kozłowski, *Działalność polityczna kół międzypartyjnego w latach 1915–1918* (Warsaw, 1967), 97–99; Piotr Wróbel, “The First World War. The Twilight of Jewish Warsaw,” in: *The Jews in Warsaw: A History*, eds. Władysław Bartoszewski, Antony Polonsky

comprise national but socio-economic groups, Warsaw's population (especially the non-proletarian part) was rather divided along ethno-national lines, i.e. Polish or Jewish.

The Polish population organized itself into two electoral committees while most political groups in the Jewish public sphere (mainly the Orthodox, Zionist, neo-assimilationist) formed the United Jewish Electoral Committee (*Fareynikte yidishe vahl komitet*).²⁰ Despite their authority being limited mainly to decisions concerning the municipal budget and city management, the council was widely viewed as the embryonic parliament of a future Polish state which main goal was to raise the question of Poland's independence. Polish political circles argued that the municipal elections should be bypassed. Instead, all circles desiring representation on the council should distribute the places among themselves, without consulting the electorate. The United Electoral Committee of All-Polish Parties was established and it proposed that the United Jewish Electoral Committee presents a single electoral list, making elections in all but the sixth curia unnecessary. The purpose of this ploy was to show the German occupier that the population was united in its main demand: Poland's liberty from the yoke of occupation.²¹

The Polish political leadership in Warsaw informed the Jewish representatives there that since the city council represented all "Polish" interests, the number of Jewish representatives could not reflect the true proportion of Jews in the city. In exchange for their inclusion as political partners, they have to forfeit half of their representation in this local political institution. Most members of the Jewish committee accepted the compromise as an expression of solidarity between the Polish and Jewish public, a fact that would improve relations between the two major ethnic groups in the city.²²

But, not all leaders of the Jewish community accepted this rationale. Different groups, especially those organized around Noah Pryłucki and his Folkists (Jewish nationalists demanding personal autonomy for Jews in the Diaspora), saw it as an excessively far-reaching compromise and an overly large concession²³

(Oxford, 1991), 284; Piotr Wróbel, "Przed odzyskaniem niepodległości," in: *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce, w zarysie (do 1950 roku)*, ed. Jerzy Tomaszewski (Warsaw, 1993), 13–142; "Wahl einer autonomen Stadtverwaltung in Warschau," in: *Neuen Freie Presse*, April 3, 1916; Konrad Zieliński, "Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w Królestwie Polskim w czasie I wojny światowej na przykładzie działalności rad miejskich," in: *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 206 (2003), 169–171; idem, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na ziemiach Królestwa Polskiego w czasie pierwszej wojny światowej*, 265.

²⁰ Chaya Meller, "Miflegot ha-Folkistim (Folks Partey) be-Polin 1915–1939" (an unpublished PhD thesis, Bar-Ilan University, 2004), 76–78; Kalman Weiser, *Jewish People, Yiddish Nation, Noah Prylucky and the Folkistis in Poland* (Toronto, 2011), 141; Zieliński, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na ziemiach Królestwa Polskiego w czasie pierwszej wojny światowej*, 267.

²¹ Janusz Pajewski, *Odbudowa państwa polskiego 1914–1918* (Warsaw, 1985), 107.

²² "Ba-itonut ha-Polanim, hitachdut ha-bocharim," in: *Hatsfira*, July 3, 1916; "El Yehudey Varsha!," in: *Hatsfira*, July 4, 1916; "Ha-mafridim," in: *ibid.*; "Di poylishe prese vegn der vahl kampanie," in: *Haynt*, July 2, 1916.

²³ On criticism in the Jewish press about the compromise, see: Meller, *Miflegot ha-Folkisitim*, 78f; Weiser, *Jewish People, Yiddish Nation*, 142. Critics were to be found among the Zionists, too. See: "Bay di Tsionistn," in: *Varshaver Togblatt*, July 5, 1916; "Khaveirim Tsionistn!," *ibid.*, July 12, 1916. The Bund was also very critical of the compromise: "The slave cannot cast off

Nevertheless, despite their disagreement with the compromise, they did not present a list in the *curiae*, where the compromise had been reached, which would practically endangered the agreement. They presented their candidates only in the sixth *curia*, where elections were scheduled, and achieved an outstanding result, expressing the Jewish electorate's approval of Pryłucki's militant claims.²⁴

At the inauguration of the Warsaw City Council on July 25, 1916, representatives of all the Jewish parties present expressed full solidarity with the declaration made by the majority of Polish parties in favour of independent Poland that would grant civic equality to all of its citizens. The Zionist sought to continue the policy of emphasizing a wall to wall coalition. Not wishing to antagonize their Polish allies, the Zionists issued a written statement as an addition to the declaration of the majority of the council members. It stated their vision of Polish state: free Poland guaranteeing civil and national rights to Jews – “The Zionist Organization in Warsaw declares its support for the demand of the independent Poland, as expressed in the statement of the counselors of the capital city of Warsaw, a demand which is also our firm demand and expresses the strong confidence that the free Polish people would guarantee equal civil and national rights to the Jews”.²⁵

Speaking on behalf of the Polish and Jewish proletariats, a PPS-Left delegate allied with the Bund demanded an end to anti-Jewish discrimination in the administration in addition to national cultural autonomy for minorities which should include schools with Yiddish as their language of instruction and the right to address official institutions in Yiddish.²⁶

The Folkists' statement was aimed against discrimination in the municipal institutions (equal access for unemployed Jews and non-Jews to municipal jobs or exemption of Jews from the mandatory Sunday rest) and called for the acknowledgement of Jewish cultural difference (the recognition of Yiddish in schools). In line with the views of the other main Jewish political camps, it recognized the Polish character of the land. It concluded with the following words:

The Jewish people supports the political ambitions of the Polish nation. It recognizes the Polish character of the land and at the same time demanding from the Polish nation that it grants and guarantees full civic equality and cultural-national rights for Jews as a national minority. It is our undying hope that Poland, which, in the period of its most beautiful flowering, respected the Jews' cultural and national qualities, will also recognize them in the present historical moment.

his shackles,” wrote the Bund's weekly *Lebensfragen*. “Der Vehler darf blaybn in der heym,” in: *Lebensfragen*, July 7, 1916.

²⁴ It was concluded that the agreement between the Jews and the Polish political organizations would be valid only as long as the Jews run with one list only, the one included in the agreement. Should another Jewish list be submitted and elections became necessary, the signed agreement with the Jews would be considered as void. See: “El Yehudei Varsha!,” in: *Hatsfira*, July 4, 1916. Since the sixth *curia* was not included in the agreement, the Jews were able to present additional lists there.

²⁵ *Organizacja Sjonistyczna w Królestwie Polskim w sprawie politycznego i narodowego uprawnienia Żydów* (Warsaw, 1918), 9–10, according to Szymon Rudnicki's “Stosunek Żydów do odbudowy Państwa Polskiego,” in: *Midrasz* 12 (2008), 10–11. See, also: “Di fayerlikhe erefenung fun shtot rat”, *Haynt*, July 25, 1916, 2.

²⁶ *Dziennik Zarządu Miasta Stołecznego Warszawy*, 44, November 28, 1916, 1–4.

We believe that the new Poland will be a loving mother to all her children regardless of their religion and nationality.²⁷

It expressed confidence that Poland, which had recognized Jewish national and cultural particularity in the best times – an allusion to the pre-partition Jewish “autonomy” during the legendary days of the Council of Four Lands – would recognize again the Jews’ due rights.

The Zionists, Folkists and Bundists held the conception that equality in the future Polish state could not be identified adequately with the common good of any particular ethnic group. They demanded Jews’ equal inclusion among those entitled to equally shape and enjoy the “common good”, and the Polish state as equally committed to their needs and interests. Moreover, besides recognizing the right of the Polish nation to the Polish state, they asserted that addressing Jews’ cultural and economic needs ought to be regarded as a part of the Polish state’s duties, no less than attending to the needs of ethnic Poles.

Still, the hope for joint trans-ethnic work toward equality conscious of differences in the city council vanished, as a number of anti-Jewish measures and regulations were enacted by the municipal authorities. Since the number of Jewish councillors was minimized, their capacity to change the situation by parliamentary action was marginal. This led to a further polarization in the Jewish camp between integrationists and Jewish nationalists. The latter, the Zionists and Folkists, voiced their demands forcefully and vociferously, often in a manner that antagonized their opponents. The discrimination and the limited possibilities of altering it according to the rules of the game dictated by the Polish majority fortified their political demands for Poland based on real, not just formal, equality.²⁸

These demands, however, such as the vehement denouncement of discriminatory policies, were regularly condemned as “separatist”, seeking to harm the Polish cause abroad by incessantly decrying alleged injustices. Such condemnations turned Jews into members of a group with “illegitimate” interests, foreign to the ethno-national “Polish” vision of statehood. The discriminatory measures, as well as the de-legitimization of the opposition, eroded the confidence of the Zionists, Folkists and many others that the anti-Jewish attitude of the Polish national camp was not merely a legacy of divisive Russian policy, but part of an ethno-cultural hierarchical vision of future Poland.

²⁷ Ibidem, 5.

²⁸ Gabriela Zalewska, “Społeczeństwo żydowskie Warszawy wobec kwestii niepodległości Polski i wojny bolszewickiej,” in: *Warszawa w pierwszych latach niepodległości*, eds. Marian Drozdowski and Hanna Szwankowska (Warsaw, 1998), 94–95; Marcos Silber, “Ambivalent Citizenship – The Construction of Jewish Belonging in Emergent Poland (1915–1918),” *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook*, X (2011), 161–184.

FROM THE ACT OF 5 NOVEMBER 1916 TO THE EVE OF POLISH INDEPENDENCE

On November 5, 1916, the German and Austrian emperors issued a declaration that provided for the Polish Kingdom under German and Austrian auspices. The announcement was a clear political manoeuvre. Polish political reactions were mixed, ranging from highly sceptical to enthusiastic. Similarly, among Jews, the responses ranged from wholehearted to reticent. In the public sphere, one could come across decorated and illuminated Jewish houses. Passionate congratulations were issued by Jewish organizations, mainly in Polish, confirming full Jewish engagement in cooperation towards building the new Polish state, as well as hopes for the harmonious co-existence of citizens of different religions and denominations.²⁹ However, behind closed doors, worries and concern were also expressed. The main concern was that before coming to an arrangement the Jewish question had already been surrendered to the jurisdiction of Polish officials, awakening the fear that with this step Jewish hopes of civic equality and minority rights were dashed. Such signs of worrying stated in the Jewish press were interpreted by many Polish press organs as a rejection of the very idea of Polish statehood. The issue, however, for Jewish political circles was not the Polish state, but how the new Poland would resolve the Jewish question.³⁰

Immediately after the Temporary Council of State began functioning in January 1917, a number of organizations congratulated on it. Not surprisingly, all of them claimed their full support for the new Polish state in the making, yet each condensed in the greetings its particular vision of the desired state model and of the place of the Jewish minority in it. The integrationists showed universal citizenship, disregarding ascriptive differences, like religion, nationality and race. Such a vision was expressed in the letter of the Warsaw Jewish community, commending the Council for its “appeal... which emanates from the glorious tradition of the past... asking all citizens without distinction of rank and origin, for the sake of equal rights and duties, to serve the fatherland”.³¹ A model that emphasized the need for civic equality while championing the right to maintain religious differences and traditions was expressed in the letter addressed by *Agudas ha-ortodoksim*, the new orthodox party (later: *Agudas Isroel*).³² The Jewish

²⁹ Zieliński, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na ziemiach Królestwa Polskiego w czasie pierwszej wojny światowej*, 314–317.

³⁰ Marcos Silber, *Leumiut shona, ezrahut shava! Hama'amatz lehasagat otonomia leyhudei Polin bemilhemet aolam arishona* (Tel Aviv, 2014), 236–238.

³¹ “Di 6-te sitsung fun melukhe rat”, *Haynt*, February 9, 1917; Isaac Levin, *A History of Polish Jewry during the Revival of Poland* (New York, 1990), 14; Wilhelm Stein, “Die politische Entwicklung im polnischen Judentum während der Zeit der Deutschen Okkupation,” in: Paul Roth, *Die Politische Entwicklung in Kongreßpolen während der deutschen Okkupation* (Leipzig, 1919), 172; Szmuel Hirschhorn, “Żydzi Królestwa Polskiego podczas wojny światowej,” in: *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej. Działalność społeczna, gospodarcza, oświatowa i kulturalna*, eds. Ignacy Schipper, Aryeh Tartakower, Aleksander Haffika (Warsaw, 1936), 499; Gabriela Zalewska, “Społeczeństwo żydowskie Warszawy”, 95; “Tymczasowa Rada Stanu”, *Głos Stolicy*, February 9, 1917, 2.

³² “A adres tsum melujhe rat fun ‘Agudas haortodoksim’,” *Haynt*, February 28, 1917; Alexander Carlebach, “A German Rabbi Goes East,” *LBIYB* 6 (1961), 65–66.

Community of Siedlce, dominated by the Zionists, sent its greetings to the Council, stressing the need to “protect all the citizens of the country regardless of religion or nationality”, whereby it made a subtle demand for minority rights.³³

In October 1917, the Zionist movement convened its conference which dealt mainly with the current political situation and articulated its standpoint regarding the Polish state. The main member of the discussion was Apolinary Hartglas. Hartglas prepared the party’s platform that supported unequivocally the constitution of Poland as a sovereign Polish national entity and even considered the establishment of a nation-state a “natural” and desirable development:

[The state] building work is done by one nation only, gifted with organizational talent than that of other nations, or that by chance it is in more favorable terms than others. [...] [In the state] one nation is the ruling nation or the leading nation. That nation in the Polish state is the Polish people.³⁴

He welcomed the imminent independence of Poland and emphasized the right of the constituent nation, the Polish people, to build its nation state. (“This country, this land... belongs to the Polish nation and **only** to the Polish nation”).³⁵

Harglas adopted the principle of an ethnic hierarchy in the ownership of the state:

We can and we should address our demands to the Polish state, as faithful and devoted citizens. Belonging to a different national group, we do not have any collective rights, as co-owners, to the Polish land and we recognize the exclusive ownership right only to one national community, the Polish.³⁶

But, at the same time, it is not an unlimited right:

All of this does not, however, preclude the right of the national minorities ... to free cultural development ... to their own national self-government, with its own official language.³⁷

Hartglas, who accepted the principle of a constitutive nation, disapproved, simultaneously, a nationalizing policy towards the minorities and demanded a mechanism of minority rights to limit the power of the majority. Among the Zionists in Poland, this discourse was strengthened and became hegemonic in the process of establishing the Polish state.

He demanded national autonomy for Polish Jewry and argued that the only way to ensure the independence, prosperity and well-being of the Polish state was to provide all minorities with full rights, making them in this way loyal allies of the country.

Among Polish Zionists, support increased to the establishment of a state with Polish ethno-national characteristics. But, the support for the establishment

³³ “An adres fun der shedltser gmine tsum melujhe rat,” *Haynt*, February 23, 1917.

³⁴ “Yesodot ha-programa ha-politit shelanu,” *Hatzfirah*, November 11, 1917.

³⁵ Apolinary Hartglas, *Zasady naszego programu politycznego w Polsce* (Warsaw, 1918), 21.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 23.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 24 and “Yesodot ha-programa ha-politit shelanu,” *Hatzfirah*, November 11, 1917.

of the Polish nation-state was accompanied by a growing fear that the Polish majority shall exert a discriminatory policy on an ethno-national base. Then, increasingly and loudly demanded limiting its sovereignty by warranting minority rights to its ethno-national minorities and, above all, to the Jews. Like the PPS-Left, the Bund looked with disfavour upon the declaration of 5 November, the model of the statehood it represented and the dynamics it created. Some change in the Bund's attitude toward the nascent Polish state began in Russia after the March Revolution. In June 1917, during a plenum of the St. Petersburg Soviet, one of the most important Bundist leaders, Henryk Erlich, proposed a resolution calling for Polish independence.

In Poland, in December 1917, the first Territorial Conference of Bundist Organizations in Poland convened in Lublin, addressing the question of the Polish statehood. Unlike its Russian counterpart, the Lublin gathering passed an ambiguous resolution with regard to the recently declared Polish state, stating that the representatives of the entire population were the only ones entitled to decide the "structure of **our country**" (the emphasis in original). In any case, it was added, any arrangement regarding such a statehood should include national and cultural autonomy "as the maximum guarantees for the collective rights of national minorities", including the Jews. "At this moment", says the Bund's resolution, "when the Polish question is on the agenda, the class-conscious Jewish proletariat demands, among other things, *national-cultural autonomy* for the Jewish people in Poland, as a recognized national minority in the country".³⁸

At a time when social tensions ran high, Polish public opinion was shocked by the news of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Signed on February 9, 1918, by the Central Powers and the Ukrainian National Republic, the treaty stipulated the cession of Chełm province to Ukraine in exchange for grain supplies. A vehement indignation was also directed against the Jews, who were accused of complicity with the central powers.³⁹ The fact that the Zionists, *Poale Tsyion*, Bundists, Orthodox and integrationists joined voices against the treaty did not alleviate the situation.⁴⁰ Although Polish society was deeply divided along social, economic, and political lines, many Polish commoners and politicians from different extractions came to believe that the Polish nation had been betrayed by the Central Powers and by disloyal aliens, above all Jews.⁴¹ The

³⁸ Roni Gechtman, *Yidisher sotsializm: The Origins and Contexts of the Jewish Labour Bund's National Program* (NYU, 2005), 232. See also: *Tzvei konferentsn* (Warsaw, 1918), 12–13. The resolution criticized the central powers' imperialistic aims, the nationalism of the bourgeoisie (both Jewish and Polish) which celebrated independence in conditions contradicting the interests of "the broad masses" living in Poland. Piotr Wróbel, "From Conflict to Cooperation: the Bund and the Polish Socialist Party, 1897–1939," in: *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. Jack Jacobs (Palgrave, 2001), 159–160.

³⁹ Frank Golczewski, *Die polnisch-jüdische Beziehungen 1881–1922. Eine Studie zur Geschichte des Antisemitismus in Osteuropa* (Wiesbaden, 1981), 170–171.

⁴⁰ *Po Traktacie z Ukrainą. Żydzi (17.2.1918)*, Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie, NKN, 147; Mieczysław Hertz, *Łódź w czasie wielkiej Wojny* (Łódź, 1933), 151–153; Konrad Zieliński, "Reperkusje traktatu Brzeskiego z 1918 roku dla stosunków Polsko-Żydowskich," *Studia Judaica* 5–6 (2002–2003), 103–105.

⁴¹ Zieliński, "Reperkusje traktatu Brzeskiego," 106–115; Alexander Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland: War, Ethnicity and Anti-Jewish Violence in East Galicia, 1914–1920* (Tuscaloosa AL, 2005), 72.

Treaty became a junction at which the ideological anti-Semitism of politicians and the popular anti-Semitism of the Polish masses coalesced into a single powerful drive. Anti-Jewish violence spread.⁴² Such growing and violent anti-Semitism was a new motivation added to the existing trend of ethnification and ethno-national building.

Indeed, the leading Polish circles spawned different concepts of Polish nationhood. While the Endecja promoted the need for the Polish nation state in which ethnic minorities (except for the Jews) would gradually be made Polish, the followers of Piłsudski advocated a confederation of Poles, Ukrainians and Belarusians as a power capable of withstanding the Russian and German aggression. However, the two Polish groups shared a broad consensus that ethnic Poles would be a dominant group in the new Poland, whether the nation state or a confederation. On the Jewish side, integrationist civic equality, the Bundist cultural autonomy, the Zionist or the Folkist national autonomy, the Orthodox civic equality with institutional warranties to keep the tradition – all of these groups, despite their differences, rejected the view suggesting that Jews would be “equal, but not complete”, in Szymon Rudnicki’s words.⁴³ The question of the future nature of the Polish state still remained open, but rising anti-Semitic propaganda led growing circles among Jews to demand institutionalized protection to anchor equality. The disappointment was growing even in integrationist circles. Ludwиг Rechtszaft, the editor of the Lublin’s *Mysł Żydowska*, wrote after the elections to the municipal council of Lublin as a reaction to exclusionary practices that “it is time to realize that we are not the stepchildren of this country, but its sons and legitimate citizens”.⁴⁴

POLISH AND MINORITIES LANGUAGES

The new Polish authorities in the making emphasized the Polish language’s status and the need of keeping the most prestigious and influential functions in “Polish” (i.e. ethnically Polish) hands, regardless of their political stance. The Polish character of the state-in-formation was presented as a “zero-sum game”, i.e. a situation in which the simple recognition of another official language besides Polish or keeping central official functions in “non-Polish” hands were presented as a menace of the city’s “Polishness”. For the sake of national building and state consolidation, minorities were asked to renounce their claims

⁴² Golczewski, *Die polnisch-jüdische Beziehungen*, 170–171; Jan Małecki, “Zamieszki w Krakowie w kwietniu 1918 r. Pogrom czy rozruchy głodowe?,” in: *The Jews in Poland 1*, ed. Andrzej Paluch (Cracow, 1992), 245–256.

⁴³ Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland*, 71; Szymon Rudnicki, *Równi, ale niezupełnie* (Warsaw, 2008).

⁴⁴ Konrad Zieliński, “Żydzi pod okupacją Austro-Węgierską w wyborach do samorządu miejskiego 1916 roku,” *Kwartalnik Historyczny* CIX, 1 (2002), 69; Konrad Zieliński, *W cieniu synagogi. Obraz życia kulturalnego społeczności żydowskiej Lublina w latach okupacji austro-węgierskiej* (Lublin, 1998), 46–48.

to “minority rights” (already formulated before the outbreak of the war), which were perceived as competing with Polish ones.⁴⁵

An occasion to discuss the status of the different languages appeared when the responsibility for Polish educational system was transmitted in September 1917 to the Interim Council of State by the German occupational forces who retransmitted a part of the responsibilities to the local councils.⁴⁶ The question of the status of the minorities’ languages aroused again in the public sphere. The effort of the Polish Circle to de-legitimize the minority languages’ presence in the public sphere continued, and ethno-cultural issues were increasingly paramounting. Claims for recognition of German and Yiddish culture were labelled as nationalist, anti-Polish, anti-state, and separatist.⁴⁷ The Polish authorities sought to favour the Polish language and culture, empowering the Polish ethno-cultural group and denigrating minority cultures, eliminating them from the public sphere. They insisted that independence and the construction of a Polish state required the assimilation of “backward minorities” into the constituted Polish majority.

In this regard, the Bund of Łódź Israel Lichtenstein considered that “the use of the mother tongue belongs to the rights usually called holy, [...] together with other most basic human rights. In this case it is about the equality of the languages. About the right of everyone to use his own language”.⁴⁸ He stressed the connection between equal citizenship and minority languages’ recognition in the different public spheres, i.e. the municipal council, the school system or the press.⁴⁹ Israel Lichtenstein demanded the complete recognition of Yiddish spheres (whether press or schools) as a condition to achieve complete equality for the different citizens. That is because, he stressed, the limitation of such a recognition means limiting their equal rights: “Above all it is about being a citizen”. In order to enjoy its basic rights “no characteristic, no other demand should be required from any citizen”.⁵⁰ He objected the creation of a civic hierarchy based on linguistic or national adscription. He asserted “Poland will be fortunate only when all inhabitants of this land will be such. General prosperity can be built on complete equality for all citizens, regardless of nationality and language”.⁵¹ The attempts to minimize minority cultures and languages received

⁴⁵ Hertz, *Łódź w czasie wielkiej wojny*, 168; “Debatn in lodzer shtodt-rat vegn di yiddishe nazionale recht,” *Haynt*, November 16, 1917. The bibliography regarding the formulation of the minority rights is immense. The monograph by Oscar Janowsky, *The Jews and the Minority Rights (1898–1919)*, New York, 1966, is still the basic introduction to the topic.

⁴⁶ Kazimierz Konarski, *Dzieje szkolnictwa w b. Królestwie Kongresowym 1915–1918* (Cracow, 1923), 15–56; Jerzy Ogonowski, *Uprawnienia językowe mniejszości narodowych w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 1918–1939* (Warsaw, 2000), 22–23.

⁴⁷ YIVO, RG 1400, Bund, MG2, Box 15, folder 145, Protokół posiedzenia 37-go Rady Miejskiej z dnia 29 Października 1917 r. [Protocol of the thirty-seventh session of the municipal council on October 29, 1917].

⁴⁸ YIVO, RG 1400, Bund, MG2, Box 15, folder 145, Protokół posiedzenia 62-go Rady Miejskiej z dnia 23 Stycznia 1918 r. [Protocol of the sixty-second session of the municipal council on January 23, 1918].

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

the support of the Zionists and the Folkists. The Zionist Jerzy Rozenblat demanded autonomy in issues concerning education and demanded the creation of autonomous municipal educational committees for Germans and Jews. Each population, he argued, was entitled to a school that spoke its language.⁵² He defined the situation this way:

The population of Poland is not homogeneous. Alongside the Polish, there are other nationalities, which constitute 30% of all inhabitants. [...] The Jewish nation wants to live in harmony with the Poles. "Politically, we are Polish. In our internal life, we are Jews [...]". We demand national, cultural autonomy, that is to say, the right to self-determination in all internal matters [...] we seek not separatism but mutual understanding, working for the common good and prosperity.⁵³

The only way to build the Polish state, argued Lichtenstein, Rozenblat and many other leaders of the Bundism, the Zionism and the Folkism, was with the voluntary participation of all citizens, including those identified as minorities. Deferring minority rights in the name of national consolidation would likely be counterproductive. Instead, the Bundists, the Zionists, the Folkists and their followers proposed recognition of the cultural particularity of the groups constituted as minorities. These three demanded recognition of their separate public spheres. They sought reinforcement of the separate public spheres and public measures. These aimed at protecting or even promoting ethno-cultural identities, (by means of just budgeting their cultural necessities, or constructing recognized school councils for every minority⁵⁴) in order "to give everyone the possibility of a free development".⁵⁵

However, this kind of politics of identity were seen by the Polish authorities as "separatist" and, therefore, illegitimate, undermining society's "united" advancement toward independence. Any group's campaign for recognition of its particularity and separate public sphere implied lack of commitment to – and even alienation from – the common public sphere. This interpretation reflected fear of the fragmentation that was, *prima facie*, endemic to the politics of identity, with "the other" endangering civil solidarity and the building of a nation.

RADICALISATION

As anti-Semitism made deeper inroads into Polish political organizations, the collapse of the integrationist vision was growing increasingly tangible. As

⁵² Ibidem, 168.

⁵³ "Mowa d-ra Rozenblata, prezesa frakcji żydowskiej w Łódzkiej Radzie miejskiej" [Speech of Dr. Rozenblat, chairman of the Jewish fraction in Łódź municipal council], in: *Głos Żydowski*, November 1, 1917. The emphasis is in the original.

⁵⁴ YIVO Archive [henceforth YIVO], RG 1400, Bund, MG2, Box 15, folder 145, Protokół posiedzenia 37-go Rady Miejskiej z dn. 29 Października 1917 r. [Protocol of the thirty-seventh session of the municipal council, October 29, 1917]; "Fun lodzer shtot rat," *Lebensfragen*, December 15, 1917.

⁵⁵ "Debatn in Lodzer shtot rat vegn di yiddisher natzionale recht," *Haynt*, November 16, 1917.

anti-Semitism was becoming more and more an integral element of a public discourse and Polish nationalism was becoming more and more exclusionary and xenophobic, Jewish demands for a state offering warranties for minority rights increased. As anti-Semitic views spread beyond right-wing Polish groups, Jewish demands for minority rights was more widespread. When the Folkist Pryłucki was asked why German Jews do not demand minority rights, he answered: “We are not worse than them. If you want that kind of Jews, treat them as they are treated in those countries”.⁵⁶

In the Council of State, inaugurated solemnly on June 22, 1918, tones of concern resounded in the speeches by Jewish representatives. Pryłucki, voicing his priorities, demanded “full human and civic emancipation, as well as personal national autonomy, which is the only guarantee of equal human and civil rights”.⁵⁷ The Orthodox Moses Pfefer articulated his view, stating that “we deeply trust that the resurrected Polish state will give equal protection to all parts of the nation, and, hence, also to the Jewish population”.⁵⁸ Even in the statement made by Bolesław Eiger, a fervent representative of the integrationist camp, we can discern an alarm and even an echo of the above mentioned Rozenblat statement: “Only in satisfying all groups of the population can the Polish state find security for its strength and its prosperous development”.⁵⁹ He was fully aware that his concern was well-founded.⁶⁰

The absence of a civil identity as well as the general ethnification of politics and social relations turned the Jews into “alien” citizens, members of a group with a distinct ethnic, racial, religious and national identity and “foreign” interests. The dominant notion of Polish statehood which emerged among Polish political groups from World War I onwards did not associate the public good either with complete civic equality for ethno-national minorities or with ethno-national autonomy. Instead, it combined it with an ethno-national hierarchy. The state should first and foremost serve what was understood as the (ethno-national) Polish interest. The Zionists, Folkists, Bundists, Orthodox Jews and integrationists rejected a situation in which influence over state policy by individuals or communities who were subject to state authority but did not belong to the constituent nation might legitimately be restricted on the basis of their ascribed identity alone.

⁵⁶ Meller, *Mifleget ha-Folkistim*, 105.

⁵⁷ Levin, *A History of Polish Jewry during the Revival of Poland*, 24.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 26; “Drugie posiedzenie Rady Stanu,” *Głos Poranny*, June 27, 1918, 152, 2.

⁵⁹ Levin, *A History of Polish Jewry during the Revival of Poland*, 25. *Rozwaga*, lipiec-sierpień 1918, 104.

⁶⁰ A few months earlier in a formal meeting in his house with leading figures of the Polish government (Bukowiecki, Mikułowski-Pomorski and others), he and his fellows from the integrationist camp emphasized the need to cancel the discriminatory laws. In their answer, the officials addressed the need of Jewish migration from Poland. They even asked the integrationists to support Jewish migration to Palestine. “A poilishe yidishe beratung vegn der yidn frage,” *Haynt*, December 31, 1917; “tsu di poilishe yuidishe beratung vegn der yudn frage”, *Der Moment*, December 31, 1917.

THE BREAKDOWN OF THE CENTRAL POWERS

The Jewish public faced Polish independence with fear and determination. In light of repeated violence, Jewish individuals were cautious in public “Polish” spaces in cities and in the countryside. The imminent conflict in liminal east Galicia dictated caution, too. While the west Galician Jewry took an open stance supporting the Polish state, the east Galician Jewry approached the collapse of Austria with prudence in light of the confrontation between Poles and Ukrainians. Most of the Jewish political circles there advocated a neutral attitude toward the Polish-Ukrainian conflict.⁶¹

With fear, because the National Democrats had gained mass support for an anti-Jewish boycott and aggression. A series of mass anti-Jewish riots began in the fall, spreading to over a hundred localities in the Congress Poland and Galicia, where peasants and soldiers made up the backbone of the mob. Attacks on Jews sent an unmistakable message to the Jewish leadership that the collapse of the old order would bring more calamity and anti-Jewish violence. On 11 November, a pogrom took place in Kielce. Jews celebrating independence were attacked as dangerous strangers. The country saw a wave of anti-Jewish riots and pogroms. They were not merely the work of the mob. Often, military forces and police took part. Sometimes they showed a passive attitude. The authorities’ justifications or concealment manoeuvres *vis-à-vis* the riots, combined with the lack of an appropriate response, caused growing concern.⁶²

With determination, because the Jewish leadership was determined to demand real, not just formal equality in the reborn Poland, to which they declared their loyalty. World War I saw the collapse of Jewish political leadership embracing integration and universal citizenship – a major, almost hegemonic political segment in the pre-war period. It was replaced by another leadership, advocating minority rights, whose rise during the Great War was staggering. This leadership comprised parties with complex autonomist programs, such as the Bundism, Zionism, and Folkism. The new leaders became convinced that in light of the discriminatory policies and growing anti-Jewish violence only a mechanism of minority rights could guarantee Jewish existence in Poland. The Polish authorities’ rejection of these demands strengthened Jewish leaders in the belief that only a strong external pressure on the Poles would guarantee Jewish rights. Therefore, it became imperative to seek the support of the allies, whose voice would be decisive in the post-war European political settlement. This merely underscored the need to anchor Polish Jews’ equality and collective rights in an international agreement backed by international guarantees.

Discrimination and escalation of violence, thus, led directly to the radicalization of attitudes. The Zionist mode was different now from than it had been in early 1916 and late 1917. Now, they were much more militant in their

⁶¹ Nahum Michael Gelber, *The National Autonomy of Eastern Galician Jewry in the West Ukrainian Republic 1918–1919* (New York, 1990), 230–243.

⁶² Zieliński, “Reperkusje traktatu Brzeskiego”, 106–115; Konrad Zieliński, “Od bojkotu do pogromu. O zajściach antysemickich w Królestwie Polskim jesienią 1918 roku,” in: *Żydzi i judaizm we współczesnych badaniach polskich 4*, ed. Krzysztof Pilarczyk (Cracow, 2008), 211–226; Prusin, *Nationalizing a Borderland*, 72–74.

demands. While in 1916 they were ready to limit themselves to demands *vis-à-vis* the local authorities-in-formation, now they demanded an international intervention through the peace conference.

By February 1918, the Zionist leader Joshua Gottlieb was arguing in a closed party meeting in Warsaw that: “We demand national rights. But, if it appears that the Polish side is willing to compromise, we can forego some of our demands”.⁶³ Rather than foster compromise and negotiation, however, the increasing effort to exclude the Jews on the basis of liberal rhetoric did precisely the opposite. At the end of the year, even Joshua Gottlieb, hopeless, had joined the voices demanding uncompromising national-cultural autonomy.

In October, the Zionists leaders decided to convene a Jewish representative body. Following that, Zionists convened a meeting of representatives of the Jewish parties.⁶⁴ In an invitation sent to the central committees of the Jewish parties, it was stated that: “In connection with the recent political events and the new political situation that has been created in Poland, you are requested to send your representatives to a consultation aimed to establish a Jewish National Representation”.⁶⁵

Apparently, most of the Jewish parties responded to the invitation because they shared the feelings that the time was pressing and that there was an urgent need to establish immediately a Jewish representation. This at least was the view of Beinisch Michailewcz, one of the leaders of the Bund, published in the Bund’s “Lebensfragen”.⁶⁶ On 9, 13 and 19 October, representatives of the Zionists, the Mizrahi, the Orthodox Yeshurun Association, the Folkists, and representatives of the Bund, Poalei Zion, the territorialists and also the representatives of the neo-assimilationists held a meeting in Warsaw.⁶⁷

In these inter-party consultations, the representatives of the Zionists proposed the establishment of a temporary national representation with the participation of representatives of all the Jewish parties that regarded the Jewish people as a nation. The Jewish National Representation as a not permanent representative body shall be composed by equal members of representatives of each party. It shall make its decisions unanimously and shall coordinate its day-to-day political struggle. The Jewish Provisional National Representation shall serve in its capacity to convene a General Congress of Polish Jewry, which delegates will be elected democratically by the Jews of Poland and in their turn will elect the Jewish National Representation to the State institutions that will state the common demands of Polish Jewry regarding the new Polish State. The paradigm behind this initiative was the right to equal Jewish inclusion in the general

⁶³ Minutes of the Meeting of the Central Committee of the Zionist Organization in Poland, February 10, 1918, CZA, F33/1.

⁶⁴ Protocol of the Meeting of the Central Committee of the Zionist Organization in Poland, October 7, 1918, CZA, F33/1.

⁶⁵ *Dos Yidishe Folk*, 44, October 25, 1918.

⁶⁶ “Vegn yudishen tsumzanefer”, *Lebensfrage*, 46, November 15, 1918.

⁶⁷ Protocol of the Meeting of the Central committee of the Zionist Organization in Poland, October 7, 1918, CZA, F33/1; Protocol of the Meeting of the Central committee of the Zionist Organization in Poland, October 8, 1918, CZA, F33/1; “Duach katzar me-ha-Yeshiva ha-Rishona”, October 9, 1918, CZA, A127/312; “A din vechesven fun der tzveiter zitzung fun dem 13 October 1918”, CZA, A127/312; Report on the Second Meeting (Warsaw), October 13, 1918; “Drite zitzung fun der fertreter fun di parteyen dem 19 October 1918”, CZA, A127/312.

political body, as an autochthonous part of the broad society in Poland and, as such, entitled to complete equality and to legitimate their vision of the new state and its obligations to each and every one of its citizens.

Despite that most Jewish fractions responded favorably to the call, most of the parties' representatives left gradually. The conflict of views between bourgeois parties and the radicalized socialists, between the secularists and the Orthodox, and the fierce personal rivalry of leaders, like the Zionist Grünbaum and the Folkist Noiach Prilutski, doomed the efforts to failure. The conflict that arose in questions regarding the agenda: Shall the Jewish demands include demands regarding Palestine? Would a joint representation of bourgeois and proletarian parties blur the class struggle?

Following these controversies, representatives of Jewish proletarian parties abandoned the consultations. After that, the Folkists also cancelled their participation.⁶⁸ Yitzhak Grünbaum tried, then, to convince the Folkist representatives to establish an organizing committee that would have the authority to solve ongoing disagreements until the Jewish conference would convene.⁶⁹ Yitzhak Grünbaum did not want to establish a temporary Jewish representation only with the participation of the Zionists and the Mizarchi (a religious kind of Zionism), the parties that did not withdraw from the consultation. Grünbaum insisted that the representatives should be elected from all the Jewish parties, to obtain the broadest possible legitimacy.⁷⁰ However, Polish independence, increasing anti-Jewish violence and the legitimization of exclusionist practices in the economic field, was an important incentive to establish even a limited and narrow Jewish representation that would present Jewish demands.

Even though their effort to create an all-Jewish representative body had failed, the Zionist federation determined to convene a "pre-conference" (Yiddish: *for-Konferents*). They invited representatives of a wide range of Jewish professional, cultural, women's organizations, as well as members of municipal councils, elected during 1916–1918 to the local city administrations. However, they could not (and did not) include representatives of the Jewish parties that abandoned the above mentioned October political meetings.⁷¹ The goal of the pre-conference was to establish a temporary country-wide Jewish national representation and to determine the ways to convene a general, democratically elected, Jewish conference representing the Polish Jewry in its complexity.⁷²

The final declaration of the pre-conference highlights accelerated the process which Polish Jews have been undergoing. On the one hand, it was an inclusive process that included them in the state and municipal institution information. On the other hand, there were exclusionist practices that discriminated Jews in the economic sphere and the labour market, and even worse, they condoned

⁶⁸ "Drite zitzung fun der fertreter fun di parteyen dem 19 October 1918", CZA, A127/312.

⁶⁹ Ibidem.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ "Tsu ale yudische kehiles fervaltungen, tsu ale yudische ratmener, profesionale, kulturele un froyen fereynen", December 8, 1918, CZA, A127/312.

⁷² Materialn vegn der natsionaler representants un dem yudishen natsionalen tzusamenfor, aroysgegeben funm tsionistishen pres-biuo, Warsaw 1918.

violence against the Jews. In other words, the same state that discursively talked about equal citizenship, was accused that not only did not mobilize its power to suppress economic and acts of physical violence against Jews, but also justified this violence with an exclusionary ethno-national discourse. It was emphasized that the Jewish question would be solved only “when the Jew are recognized as a national minority with the warranted right to arrange their lives in Poland on an autonomous base”.⁷³

The tone, however, reflects the atmosphere of lack of a dialogue. The above mentioned Gottlieb, for instance, used a language of struggle during his speech on the need to defend equality and minority rights, using the combative expression: “war for Jewish rights”, and this aggressive tone characterized the proceedings of the pre-conference. The pre-conference decided that one of the most important tasks of the Temporary National Council was “to direct the war of the Jewish nationality in Poland”. A suggestion to replace the word “war” by “work” was voted down.⁷⁴

The declaration highlighted the disparity between the ethno-national principle, which perpetuated their second-class status and the principle of governmentality, and which gave them the right to participate as equals. Appealing to the latter, they sought to undermine the former, demanding equality and rights for each group on the basis of its ethno-national adscription or collective identity, in a way that reflects the adoption of the ethno-national paradigm. As a result, the pre-conference demanded, with unequivocal firm tone, equality in the individual as well as in the collective level, which would defend the individual Jew against the collective discrimination.⁷⁵

At the practical level, the pre-conference constituted a Jewish political body: The Temporary Jewish National Council, composed almost exclusively by leaders related to the Zionist camp, to represent the Polish Jewry until the democratically elected conference would replace it with a permanent body that would determine the representatives of the Polish Jewry. It would assume the political leadership of the Polish Jewry and place Jewish demands before the Polish authorities and elsewhere. Till then, the Temporary Jewish National Council will function as its substitute. The Warsaw pre-conference resolved to convene a Jewish congress but failed to do so and the Temporary Jewish National Council became permanent without becoming more representative.⁷⁶

There were three main tasks of the Temporary Jewish National Council. The first was situating itself as the main representative body of the Jewish people in Poland. The Temporary Jewish National Council undertook handling the Polish Jewry’s basic problems, monitoring attacks on and discrimination of the Jewish population. Even though their effort to create an all-Jewish representative body had failed, the fact of forming the Temporary Jewish National Council was a major step towards clear formulating of all-Jewish national claims.

⁷³ “Bericht No. 57”, January 1919, CZA, A18/31.

⁷⁴ Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1916–1926*, 95.

⁷⁵ “Bericht No. 57”, January 1919, CZA, A18/31.

⁷⁶ Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1916–1926*, 92; Shlomo Netzer, *Maavak yehudei polin ‘al Zekhuyoteihem haezrahiot vehaleumiut, 1918–1922* (Tel Aviv: 1980), 67–72.

The second was participating in the upcoming elections to the constituent Sejm (the Polish parliament in charge of formulating the Polish Constitution) taking place on January 26, 1919. They presented a list led by the Temporary Jewish National Council in Warsaw and Jewish National Council of west Galicia, officially a non-party but in fact dominated by the general Zionists and Mizrahi with a few independents. The results showed their electoral victory. It received 51.3 percent of the votes going to Jewish lists in Congress Poland and west Galicia (the Orthodox League – 21.4 percent, the Folkists – 13 percent, Poalei Zion – 6 percent, and the Bund – 3.7 percent).⁷⁷

The third was determining the Polish Jewry's representatives to the Peace Conference. The pre-conference stated that the Temporary Jewish National Council must send its representatives to the peace conference and their main demand must be "the recognition of the Jewish people as such and its inclusion as a member equal to other peoples".⁷⁸ The pre-conference showed that more than any other Jewish political faction in Poland, the Zionists were alert to the need to present the Jewish case before the world at the forthcoming peace conference.⁷⁹

On the one hand, the policy adopted by the emerging Polish leadership was based on the ethno-national principle that crystallized in the occupied Poland prior to Polish independence. This marginalized and excluded the Jews as "one of them". On the other, the logic of governmentality included the Jews "as one of us", granting them – at least formally – a degree of equality. This provided the Jewish leadership with a tool to demand their rights and press for an alternative model of citizenship while exposing the inequality of the system currently in process of building.

As Ezra Mendelsohn pointed it out, anti-Jewish violence did convince Jewish political parties of the urgent necessity of Jewish national autonomy. Even the germanized Zionists in Poznań, who established a national council (*Volksrat*) in 1918, came to the conclusion that "the present day outlook no longer allows one nation to be the sole ruler of a state, and to force its language, customs, and culture upon the other nationalities".⁸⁰ Moreover, the new regime authorities tendency to ignore, or even to justify, exclusionist practices and even anti-Jewish violence, combined with the simultaneous reluctance to keep an open dialogue with Jewish leaders about how to constitute an equal Jewish belonging to the new state, increasingly pushed the Jewish leadership to set their hopes on international agreements that would warrant equal rights despite socio-cultural differences.

⁷⁷ Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1916–1926*, 108; Shlomo Netzer, *Maavak yehudei polin 'al Zekhuyoteihem haezrahiot vehaleumiot, 1918–1922* (Tel Aviv: 1980), 81–85.

⁷⁸ "Bericht No. 57", January 1919, CZA, A18/31.

⁷⁹ Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1916–1926*, 106.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, 105.

SUMMARY

The Jewish vision of Poland presented by the Jewish leadership was grounded in two assumptions. The first was that the Jews, as an integral part of the society, were legitimately entitled to express their own vision of the future state.

The second assumption was that the Jews were entitled to equality on all levels of social life. The efforts the leaders of the Polish Jewry made to include the Jews as a minority group equal to others in the Polish state took place in the framework of the ethno-national *ethos* as the constitutive principle of state-building becoming “one of us” in a higher level of state belonging.

In a multi-ethnic state, minority rights were instrumental in the demand for a fair distribution of the state’s resources. It was an option that could be interpreted as an authorization to receive a share of the available resources in order to advance the social mobility of such a minority group. This ethno-egalitarian sharing of the state’s resources would admit Jews to the corridors of power. This leadership called for symbolic recognition of Jewish culture, which had been marginalized by the central government. It demanded a more equitable distribution of power, but also formal acceptance of the Jews as an ethnic group like the other ethnic groups in the state, and of their culture as equal to that of others. This leadership sought to abolish the ascendancy of the hegemonic culture and to obtain not only formal, but also symbolic, and, above all, real, concrete and tangible equality for the Jewish collective. It seems to me, however, that the new Jewish national leadership, which raised rapidly during World War I, became convinced that, in light of the discriminatory policies and growing anti-Jewish violence, only a mechanism of minority rights could guarantee Jewish existence in Poland.

The Polish authorities’ rejection of these demands strengthened Jewish leaders in the belief that only strong external pressure on the Poles would guarantee Jewish rights. Therefore, it became imperative to seek the support of the allies whose voice would be decisive in the post-war European political settlement. This merely underscored the need to anchor Polish Jews’ equality and collective rights in an international agreement backed by international guarantees.⁸¹

Ironically, the Jewish struggle to become recognized as “one of us” reinforced their status as “one of them”. The fight for inclusion, thus, tragically led to increased exclusion.

⁸¹ See, for instance: “Di liga fun di natsyes un das idische folk,” *Haynt*, October 28, 1918; “Di idn frage oyfn sholom konferents – ver zol unz fertretn baym grinem felker tish?,” *Haynt*, October 31, 1918; “Die Liga des Nationen und das jüdische Volk”, “Der Völkerbund und die Juden,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, October 18, 1918.

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POLAND? BUT WHICH? JEWISH POLITICAL ATTITUDES TOWARD THE POLISH STATE IN FORMATION DURING WORLD WAR I

Summary

What kind of country are we talking about when we speak of Poland from the perspective of the organized Jewish political leadership in Poland? What should the scope and characteristics of the new Polish state in their view be? What kind of relations should Poland have with neighbouring states, as well as within, among its various populations and societies?

The paper explores the changing answers given by different political Jewish leadership in a period of liminality – the interval between two stages and two distinct situations: the imperial order (Austrian and Russian) and the Polish national state. It examines Galicia and the Congress Poland from 1914 to 1918 when the territory was disputed among different empires and nations and its fate was far from clear.

The article claims that the different visions of Poland presented by the Jewish leadership were grounded in two assumptions. The first was that the Jews as an integral part of society were legitimately entitled to express their own vision of the future state, the second – that the Jews, as an integral part of society, were entitled to equality on all levels of social life. That is the reason, the article claims, behind the demands for a fair distribution of the state's resources regardless the mother tongue, religion, or ethno-national identification.

The efforts the leaders of the Polish Jewry made to include the Jews as a minority group equal to others in the Polish state took place in the framework of the ethno-national *ethos* as the constitutive principle of state-building. The changing political circumstances and the growing hegemonic discourse based on the nation and nationality brought, claims the article, to the raising of a new Jewish national leadership during World War I. This leadership became convinced that, in the light of the discriminatory policies and growing anti-Jewish violence, only a mechanism of minority rights could guarantee Jewish existence in Poland.

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