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## Transnational Jewish Politics in the Interwar Period: Berlin Rabbi Joachim Prinz and the Yugoslav Zionists

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### Abstract

This article explores the journey of Berlin Rabbi Joachim Prinz (1902–1988) to Yugoslavia at the invitation of Zagreb Zionist leader Lavoslav Schick (1881–1941) in late 1935. It examines the transnational cooperation between German and Yugoslav Zionists in the interwar period and their efforts to cope with the plight of German and southeastern European Jewry alike. Although Jewish representatives of different countries cooperated intensively during the interwar period, we know little about it. Thus, this article intervenes in current research on European Jewish history and contributes to a growing interest in the transnational entanglements of European Jewry and Jewish politics in the 1930s and early 1940s by focusing on two important protagonists of Jewish interwar politics in Germany and Yugoslavia.

**Keywords:** Jewish history; National Socialism; Yugoslavia; Zionism

### Introduction

In September and October 1935, the German Zionist rabbi Joachim Prinz (1902–1988) was on a lecture tour that took him to numerous cities all over Germany. While on this trip, he received a letter from a stranger in a country almost unknown to him: Lavoslav Schick (1881–1941) from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. This stranger, by contrast, seemed to know Prinz and his work very well and made him a tempting offer: Prinz should come to Yugoslavia and discuss the future of Judaism in a global perspective with Schick and his friends as well as with the Yugoslav Jewish public.<sup>1</sup> Prinz was flattered and responded promptly. Although he conceded frankly that he did not know anything about this country, he was happy to accept the invitation and to travel to Yugoslavia as suggested by Schick.<sup>2</sup>

This brief conversation is telling in several ways. Although many European (as well as non-European) Jewish representatives such as Schick had been observing the German-Jewish situation closely and anxiously since the early 1930s, German Jews, on the other hand, knew much less about their Jewish neighbors and their concerns. After Prinz recognized this gap, he was eager to bridge it. Although Schick's offer caught Prinz off guard and made him suddenly realize his own ignorance about Yugoslavia, it came at just the right time. Within a few years, Prinz had become an influential Zionist figure in Nazi Berlin, admired by some, resented by others. His reputation, however, derived primarily from his public involvement with the Jewish situation in Nazi Germany. As a Zionist, he theoretically had an international perspective on the Jewish situation in the world, but his

<sup>1</sup> Nacionalna i sveučilišna knjižnica u Zagrebu (hereafter NSK), R 7883a, Letter to Joachim Prinz, October 1, 1935.

<sup>2</sup> NSK, R 7883b, Letter from Joachim Prinz, October 16, 1935.

actual focus was on Germany. But in 1935, this perspective started to change. When his political and religious views led to an irreconcilable conflict with the Jewish community of Berlin, new horizons opened up for him and he began to shift his interests and activities to the international stage. At that very moment, this letter from Yugoslavia arrived. Thus, he gladly accepted the invitation and traveled not only to Yugoslavia but also to the Bukovina and Czechoslovakia in late 1935 and early 1936. In all the cities he visited, he talked to the local Jewish population about global problems of Jewish existence in the modern world and ideas and prospects for a Jewish future in dire times.

And indeed, in the course of the 1930s, the Jewish situation had become increasingly precarious not only in Germany but in many countries across Europe, especially in the East. While for a long time it seemed that the history of Jewish emancipation would progress steadily, eventually culminating in full equality in all spheres of society, this vision was now becoming increasingly unlikely. Even the reversal of what had been achieved now seemed possible.<sup>3</sup>

Against this background, the Jewish public throughout Europe passionately discussed ideas and proposals regarding how to deal with the crisis. Certainly, Zionists had a comprehensive goal in mind: the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. But what exactly that might mean for European Jews was not clear. For western Zionists, Palestine was not conceived as a substitute for emancipation but a supplement, intended primarily for desperate Jews from eastern Europe, and in any case to be realized only in the distant future. An immediate solution it was not.<sup>4</sup> After 1933, the Yugoslav Zionists, in turn, propagated Palestine as the only solution for German Jews. They argued that German Jews, who were experiencing disfranchisement and humiliation, needed to end this state of constant danger and insecurity. And instead of finding places of refuge and temporary shelter, they must emigrate to Palestine and build their new and permanent home there.<sup>5</sup>

During those years, debates were held throughout Europe about the Jewish future and the appropriate response to antisemitism and persecution. Jewish representatives corresponded with one another, met one another, and certainly collaborated with one another. And yet, we still do not know many details. When Prinz in his response letter to Schick frankly admitted that he knew nothing about Yugoslavia, that he probably could not even draw its borders on a map, this observation could also be applied to today's German-Jewish historiography, especially that concerning the 1930s. The transnational connections, entanglements, and collaborations of 1930s German and European Jewries are still basically uncharted territory. We know little about these transnational connections that could help us better understand the problems confronting not only German but many European Jews in the crisis years of the 1930s and early 1940s.<sup>6</sup> Thus, this article seeks to shed light on an aspect of German- and Yugoslav-Jewish history that has not been covered yet: the collaboration of Jewish

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Wasserstein, *On the Eve: The Jews of Europe before the Second World War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012). Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington, IN: Bloomington University Press, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Berkowitz, *Western Jewry and the Zionist Project, 1914–1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> A programmatic speech delivered by the leader of the Yugoslav Zionist: Aleksandar Licht, "Pomoć njemačkim Židovima" ("The Help for the German Jews"), *Židov*, May 5, 1933, 1; Marija Vulesica, "What Will Become of the German Jews?" National Socialism, Flight and Resistance in the Intellectual Debates of Yugoslav Zionists in the 1930s," in *Catastrophe and Utopia*, ed. Ferenc Laczó and Joachim von Puttkamer (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 45–70.

<sup>6</sup> A general discussion of German-Jewish transnational history appears in Guy Miron, "Toward a Transnational Jewish Historiography. Reflections on a Possible Future Path for the German-Jewish Past," in *The Future of the German-Jewish Past*, ed. Gideon Reuveni and Diana Franklin (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2020), 229–37. Jay Howard Geller and Leslie Morris, ed., *Three-Way Street. Jews, Germans, and the Transnational* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016). Moshe Rosman, "Jewish History across Borders," in *Rethinking European Jewish History*, ed. Jeremy Cohen and Murray Jay Rosman (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2009), 15–29. Shulamit Volkov, "Jewish History: The Nationalism of Transnationalism," in *Transnationale Geschichte: Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien*, ed. Gunilla Budde (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 190–201.

representatives of those two countries and their discussions about the Jewish future during times of extraordinary crisis, for German and other European Jewries alike. This article is about the personal encounter between Yugoslav Jews and Joachim Prinz in 1935. It is about Prinz's journey to a country and Judaism unknown to him and the (symbolic) meaning of his visit to six Yugoslav cities. It is also about expectations and hopes that Yugoslav Jews had; it is about their visions for a Jewish future and about Prinz as a projection and embodiment of a supposedly adequate Jewish attitude at a time when Jewish existence was already severely imperiled.

This article argues that the encounter of Prinz and Schick, of German and Yugoslav Zionism, was indicative of both a rising transnational perspective and an increasing transnational entanglement of European Jewries, especially of the Zionists. By looking at two major representatives of German and Yugoslav Zionism of the interwar period, we try to better understand Jewish problems and Zionist perspectives as well as the changing landscape of transnational Jewish politics in the interwar period more broadly. While an exploration of Prinz's trip to Yugoslavia in late 1935 is at the heart of this article, it is necessary first to set the background by looking at the development of Prinz's career in Nazi Berlin and, in turn, the Yugoslav Zionists', and particularly Lavoslav Schick's, perception of him.

By interpreting the trip as a prime example of the transnationalization of European Jewish politics in the interwar period, this article intervenes into current research of European Jewish history and contributes to a burgeoning interest in the transnational entanglements of European Jewries and Jewish politics in the 1930s and early 1940s.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it highlights the importance of the individuals' action and commitment in terms of crossing (intellectual) borders and bringing together different worlds.

### Rabbi Prinz and the Rise of the Nazi Regime

Joachim Prinz was born in 1902 in Bierdzan, Upper Silesia, into an ordinary German-Jewish family. He received his rabbinical training at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau, and his university education in Berlin and Giessen. In 1927, at only twenty-four years old, he became rabbi in Berlin—the youngest rabbi of the city at this time. His early tenure became an event, as he was—rather atypically for a rabbi—an exceptional speaker as well as a charismatic, unconventional, and popular personality. Prinz spent ten years in the city before he finally emigrated to the United States in the summer of 1937.

After his arrival in the United States, his prestige grew even further. In the decades that followed, he would become rabbi of the congregation B'nai Abraham in Newark, New Jersey (where he served until his retirement in 1977) and a senior member of important Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Congress (AJC), the World Jewish Congress (WJC), and the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations. Prinz served as president of the AJC from 1958 to 1966 at a time when it worked closely with Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement. He rose to national prominence when he was the Jewish main speaker at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, where King delivered his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech.<sup>8</sup> To sum up, Rabbi Joachim Prinz was a celebrity first of

<sup>7</sup> A few recent works that deal with this topic include Anne Klotz, "The Warsaw Yiddish Press and Its Struggle against the Persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany, 1933–1935," *GAL-ED* 26–27 (2021). Anne-Christin Klotz, "Reiseberichte vom Rand des Abgrunds—Der polnisch-jüdische Schriftsteller Leib Malakh unterwegs im Berlin des Jahres 1936," in *Shoah: Ereignis und Erinnerung*, ed. Alina Bothe, Monika Schärtl, and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Berlin and Leipzig: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2019), 31–46. Robert Rockaway, "The B'nai B'rith Encounters Nazi Germany, 1933," *American Jewish History* 101, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 245–63. David Jünger, *Jahre der Ungewissheit. Emigrationspläne deutscher Juden 1933–1938* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 253–331. Bela Vago, "The Reaction to the Nazi Anti-Jewish Policy in East-Central Europe and in the Balkans," in *Unanswered Questions: Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews*. ed. François Furet (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 199–234.

<sup>8</sup> Michael A. Meyer, ed., "Editor's Introduction," in *Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi: An Autobiography—The German and Early American Years* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press), xi–xliii. This title is Joachim Prinz's

German and later of American Jewry and emerged as a leading figure of global Jewish politics, particularly in the postwar period.<sup>9</sup>

Back to his early German years. Only a few years after Prinz's arrival in Berlin, the Nazi movement gained momentum and finally took power on January 30, 1933. In retrospect, this event seems to be a decisive turning point: namely, the beginning of the persecution of the Jews that would finally culminate in the Holocaust. For contemporaries at the time, however, this subsequent development could not be predicted. For them, the events of early 1933 were rather a continuation of the previous years and decades, albeit under exacerbated conditions.<sup>10</sup>

Against this background, the early years of Nazi power were framed within the larger context of the rise and fall of Jewish emancipation. Not yet as restricted in their freedom of speech as would later be the case, the Jewish public vividly discussed the project of emancipation: should it be defended by all means, should it be revised, or should it be abandoned altogether? The answers varied widely but remained within the framework of what the respective political camp had already put forward in the decades before.<sup>11</sup> History books were published in abundance addressing the history of German, but also European or global Jewry. The past—in a much broader context—was to be used to provide guidance for the present and the future.<sup>12</sup>

One of the key figures of those early debates was Rabbi Joachim Prinz, who in 1934 published a book entitled *Wir Juden (We Jews)*, in which he analyzed the present situation and sketched out future prospects by reflecting on the Jewish past. It was one of the most important and controversial Jewish books published during the Nazi era.<sup>13</sup>

The arguments put forward were mainly within the framework of typical Zionist reflections on the deterioration of the situation of German and European Jewry and possible solutions. Prinz, however, presented them in a more radical fashion than most of his Zionist contemporaries. He criticized the path of Jewish emancipation since its beginnings in the eighteenth century. In the course of this history, Prinz argued, Jews had not only gained civil rights, but had also tried to assimilate to both the German people and the modern world, thereby losing their Jewish tradition and their sense of Jewish belonging and unity.<sup>14</sup> But however desperately they tried, Jews could not escape their Jewishness because they were Jews and remained Jews. And as Jewish assimilation grew stronger, so did the

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autobiography; this edition has been edited by Michael A. Meyer, and he has written the introduction. References to Meyer, *Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi* refer to this autobiography. Stephen J. Whitfield, "Joachim Prinz, the South, and the Analogy of Nazism," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute Supp.* (2015): 99–117.

<sup>9</sup> Meyer, "Editor's Introduction," xiii, xxi. Whitfield, "Joachim Prinz, the South, and the Analogy of Nazism," 99, 101.

<sup>10</sup> Moshe Zimmermann, "Wie viel Zufall darf Geschichte vertragen? Über politische Zeit- und Krisenwahrnehmung deutscher Juden im Januar 1933," in *Jüdische Geschichte als Allgemeine Geschichte. Festschrift für Dan Diner zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Yfaat Weiss and Raphael Gross (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 288–302. Michael André Bernstein, "Victims-in-Waiting. Backshadowing and the Representation of European Jewry," *New Literary History* 29 no. 4 (1998): 625–51. Michael R. Marrus, "European Jewry and the Politics of Assimilation: Assessment and Reassessment," *Journal of Modern History* 49, no. 1 (1977): 89–109. Dan Michman, "Handeln und Erfahrung. Bewältigungsstrategien im Kontext der jüdischen Geschichte," in *Der Holocaust. Ergebnisse und neue Fragen der Forschung*, ed. Frank Bajohr and Andrea Löw (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2015), 257–79.

<sup>11</sup> Guy Miron, "Emancipation and Assimilation in the German-Jewish Discourse of the 1930s," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 48 (2003): 165–89.

<sup>12</sup> Guy Miron, "A 'Usable Past' and the Crisis of European Jews: Popular Jewish Historiography in Germany, France, and Hungary in the 1930s," in *Against the Grain: Jewish Intellectuals in Hard Times*, ed. Ezra Mendelsohn, Stefani Hoffman, and Richard I. Cohen (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), 213–39. For a more general perspective, see Michael Brenner, *Prophets of the Past: Interpreters of Jewish History*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Joachim Prinz, *Wir Juden* (Berlin: Erich Reiss, 1934).

<sup>14</sup> Prinz, *Wir Juden*, 102–17.

resentment of non-Jews. And thus, for Prinz, the “essential cause of antisemitism” lay in the “paradox of our Jewish situation.”<sup>15</sup>

According to this interpretation, the only remedy for Jews was to proudly acknowledge and strengthen their Jewishness. Only then would they be able to meet and converse with the non-Jewish Germans on level terms.<sup>16</sup> In the early stages of the Nazi regime, it was quite common to explicitly seek a conversation with the authorities. Prinz, however, would occasionally use Nazi terminologies such as blood, soil, and race a little too lightly. Unambiguously, he denounced liberalism as a historical failure and an outdated ideology<sup>17</sup> and expressed optimism, even enthusiasm, about the Jewish future in Germany.<sup>18</sup>

Although some of those comments are disturbing in hindsight and were already controversial at the time, Prinz’s primary purpose was to convey two core messages. The first was that the Jewish people should not despair. Anti-Jewish hostility had always existed, and yet the Jews had found strength and confidence in their community, religion, and tradition, and thus successfully fended off all such hostility. The second message was that if Jews reclaimed their Jewishness, there would be a chance for peaceful coexistence between the Germans and a separate but free Jewish people. Thus, a Jewish future was still be possible.<sup>19</sup> Although Prinz looked at European Jewish history throughout centuries, spoke fondly of East European Jewry, and used general terms for his analysis, his point of reference was Germany. It was the German(-Jewish) development that formed the background and provided the material for his general considerations of “a constructive and comprehensive solution.”<sup>20</sup> Only in theory was it transnational.

Prinz’s message of being proud, confident, and undaunted resonated well with some parts of the German-Jewish community, especially the Zionists and the youth. Although some Zionists such as the editor of the influential newspaper *Jüdische Rundschau* Robert Weltsch held similar views, other Zionists rather disagreed with Prinz, not to mention the liberal Jews who continued to be the clear majority of German Jewry.<sup>21</sup> In particular, Prinz and his book *Wir Juden* were heavily attacked in the Jewish public, most prominently by the German-national Jewish theologian Hans-Joachim Schoeps and by the representative of the leading liberal organization, Central-Verein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith), Bruno Weil. Both published books aimed explicitly at Prinz, harshly attacking his historical analyses as well as his political claims.<sup>22</sup>

Despite this criticism, or perhaps because of it, Prinz became a star among the Jewish public, especially in Berlin. Prinz’s sermons had been turned into mass events, sometimes attended by thousands of people, who were seeking comfort, guidance, and even some

<sup>15</sup> Prinz, *Wir Juden*, 145.

<sup>16</sup> Prinz, *Wir Juden*, 155f.

<sup>17</sup> Prinz, *Wir Juden*, 32–70. Guy Miron argues that Prinz’s ideas on emancipation, assimilation, and the enlightenment “were quite rare among German Jews”; Miron, “Emancipation and Assimilation in the German-Jewish Discourse of the 1930s,” 189.

<sup>18</sup> Prinz, *Wir Juden*, 154.

<sup>19</sup> Prinz, *Wir Juden*, 154–61. In this sense, Prinz and others reformulated the idea of a Jewish renaissance, which had developed as a strong intellectual force in German Jewry in the early twentieth century and especially during the Weimar years. Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996). Michael Brenner, “Jewish Culture in a Modern Ghetto,” in *Jewish Life in Nazi Germany. Dilemmas and Responses*. ed. Francis R. Nicosia and David Scrase (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 170–84.

<sup>20</sup> Prinz, *Wir Juden*, 130.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Weltsch, “Tragt ihn mit Stolz, den gelben Fleck!,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, April 4, 1933. See also Christian Wiese, “Resisting the Demonic Forces of Nationalism. Robert Weltsch’s Response to Nazism and Kristallnacht,” *Jewish Quarterly* 212, no. 4 (2008): 50–53. Arnold Paucker, “Robert Weltsch: The Enigmatic Zionist: His Personality and His Position in Jewish Politics,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 54 (2009): 323–32.

<sup>22</sup> Bruno Weil, *Der Weg der deutschen Juden* (Berlin: Centralverein, 1934). Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Wir deutschen Juden* (Berlin: Vortrupp-Verlag, 1934). See also Michael A. Meyer, “Jüdischer Geistiger Widerstand während der NS-Zeit. Die Rabbiner Leo Baeck und Joachim Prinz,” *LBI-Information* 12 (2007): 6–16; Miron, “Emancipation and Assimilation in the German-Jewish Discourse of the 1930s.”

audacity, which Prinz offered them. Young people in particular frequented his sermons.<sup>23</sup> He became the most popular Jewish speaker in Nazi Berlin. “Without question,” writes historian Michael A. Meyer, “he was their favorite rabbi.”<sup>24</sup> He was one of those young rabbis who became vital pillars of the mental and spiritual resistance of the German Jews in the early phase of the Nazi regime.<sup>25</sup>

## The Sacking

Yet his popularity came at a price. For as much as Prinz was a star of the youth, he was an embarrassment to the Jewish establishment, namely the leadership of the Berliner Jüdische Gemeinde (Jewish Community of Berlin). Their dispute eventually led to Prinz’s sacking as a community rabbi in the course of 1935—a remarkable move amid increasing pressure from the Nazi regime. The background of this conflict was manifold. Prinz’s Zionism, his lifestyle, and his open criticism of both the leadership of the Jewish Community of Berlin and the organization of pastoral care led to a mutual estrangement, and even hostility. The process and the immediate circumstances that led to his dismissal were complex and shall not be detailed here. In May 1935, however, the community board of the Jewish Community of Berlin decided to dismiss Prinz, which led to fierce controversy among the Jewish public.<sup>26</sup> After weeks of dispute, the Allgemeiner Rabbinerverband (General Rabbinical Association) stepped in as mediator and brokered a compromise that allowed Prinz to resume his preaching activities, but without being reinstated as a community rabbi.<sup>27</sup> Five weeks after being banned from preaching, Prinz returned to the pulpit. Thousands of people flocked to the New Synagogue for that occasion, turning the event into an impressive show of solidarity for the man who was now arguably Berlin’s most prominent rabbi.<sup>28</sup>

For the Zionist *Jüdische Rundschau*, the arrangement worked out between the Rabbinerverband and the community board could only be the starting point for a complete rehabilitation of Prinz, which would have to lead to his reinstatement as community rabbi.<sup>29</sup> Prinz himself, however, did not seem to be very interested in this. While the conflict with the Jewish community board was gaining steam in early 1935, he had already secured a new position, that of the European representative of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.<sup>30</sup> Although his reinstatement as community rabbi might have been possible, he decided to try something new and to expand his tasks to a global or at least European scope—much to the chagrin of the *Jüdische Rundschau*, which insisted that Prinz’s reinstatement had become a public matter that went beyond Prinz’s personal aspirations.<sup>31</sup> Prinz was unimpressed and, as he later remembered, was “very pleased indeed to have been afforded the opportunity to do something completely different.”<sup>32</sup>

However, his international turn was only partly triggered by the dispute with the Jewish community board. More importantly, he had begun to look at the Jewish situation in a much

<sup>23</sup> Kurt Singer, “Jüdische oder deutsch-jüdische Kultur?,” *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, March 22, 1934.

<sup>24</sup> Meyer, “Editor’s Introduction,” xix.

<sup>25</sup> Meyer, “Jüdischer Geistiger Widerstand während der NS-Zeit.”

<sup>26</sup> “Ein unverständlicher Schritt,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, May 28, 1935. “Der Fall Prinz,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, June 4, 1935. “Der Fall Prinz,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, June 14, 1935. “Nochmals. Der Fall Prinz. Eine bezeichnende Erklärung des Gemeindevorstandes,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, June 6, 1935. “Weg und Führung der deutschen Juden. Eine Rede von Kurt Blumenfeld,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, June 14, 1935. “Um die Freiheit der Kanzel. Kundgebung der BZV zum Fall Prinz,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, June 18, 1935. “Wie steht es um Prinz?” *Jüdische Rundschau*, August 16, 1935. “Ein jüdischer Kanzelparagraph?,” *Central-Verein-Zeitung*, May 30, 1935.

<sup>27</sup> “Beilegung des Falles Prinz,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, June 21, 1935.

<sup>28</sup> “Rabbiner Dr. Prinz predigt wieder,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, July 2, 1935.

<sup>29</sup> “Beilegung des Falles Prinz,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, June 21, 1935.

<sup>30</sup> “Dr. Joachim Prinz,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, March 5, 1935.

<sup>31</sup> “Wie steht es um Prinz?,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, August 16, 1935. „Dr. Prinz hält Rückschau. Abschiedspredigt im Friedenstempel,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, September 17, 1935.

<sup>32</sup> Meyer, *Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi*, 137.

more global perspective. As dire as the situation in Germany was, for many Jewish contemporaries the plight of eastern European Jews in 1935 seemed even more desperate. In particular, Poland had become a major concern for the Jewish world.<sup>33</sup> In his incriminated sermon of May 1935, Prinz warned: “Should the misery of Polish Jewry be exacerbated by a new political situation or by the rise of antisemitic tendencies, the misery of the German Jews will become insignificant compared to the misery of 3 million Polish Jews.”<sup>34</sup>

As a devoted Zionist, he placed developments such as those in Germany in the broader context of Jewish emancipation history. Already in *Wir Juden* he had emphasized that although the German situation seemed to be particularly devastating, it “must be situated within a larger *Judenschicksal* (Jewish destiny).”<sup>35</sup> For this reason, “a constructive and comprehensive solution” was needed.<sup>36</sup> “Thus, the solution of this Jewish question (*Judenfrage*) becomes a global issue (*Weltfrage*)... We do not need to hide it from anyone. It lies open before the entire world.”<sup>37</sup>

When, from the beginning of 1935, his situation in Germany became increasingly precarious, he made it his mission to address the global problem of the Jews on a global stage. In late 1935, he attended the Nineteenth Zionist Congress in Lucerne, where he met Stephen S. Wise. Wise was one of the most prominent American Jewish leaders and would become Prinz’s political mentor a few years later. Prinz was flattered when Wise introduced him to other delegates by saying, “This is Joachim Prinz, the Stephen Wise of Berlin.”<sup>38</sup>

It became clear that international politics appealed to him and suited him, so he increasingly devoted himself to it. From 1935 on, he toured Germany and Europe to discuss problems of Jewish existence in a global context. About a speech Prinz gave in Breslau, the *Jüdische Rundschau* reported: “Very impressively he showed ... the extent to which the Jewish question is a world question, that in all countries such as Yugoslavia, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, England and America the situation of the Jews is precarious. The Jews who live in these countries have not yet realized that it is not only a Jewish question in their own country, but that there are broader implications which have their historical reasons.”<sup>39</sup>

### Future Visions: Lavoslav Schick, the Yugoslav Zionists, and Transnational Jewish Politics

Prinz’s increasingly pronounced international agenda corresponded well with his growing international reputation, as was evident in his encounter with Stephen S. Wise in Lucerne. Already his book *We Jews* was received by Zionist groups throughout Europe, including Yugoslavia. On December 20, 1933, at 8:30 p.m., members of the Zagreb B’nai B’rith Lodge<sup>40</sup> came together for a regular meeting. A few days earlier, they had received the invitation and the agenda, advertising Lavoslav Schick and his planned presentation, entitled “How did Dr. Joachim Prinz’s new book ‘Wir Juden’ come about?”<sup>41</sup> The B’nai B’rith brothers—prominent figures, leading actors of the Jewish Community in Zagreb, and mostly

<sup>33</sup> David Jünger, “Beyond Flight and Rescue: The Migration Setting of German Jewry before 1938,” *Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 16 (2017) [2019]: 173–97.

<sup>34</sup> Joachim Prinz, “Jüdische Nachbarpflicht. Eine Ansprache am Freitagabend,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, May 28, 1935.

<sup>35</sup> Prinz, *Wir Juden*, 130.

<sup>36</sup> Prinz, *Wir Juden*, 130.

<sup>37</sup> Prinz, *Wir Juden*, 160.

<sup>38</sup> Meyer, *Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi*, 124.

<sup>39</sup> “‘Zionismus als Verantwortung.’ Dr. Joachim Prinz in Breslau,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, March 3, 1936.

<sup>40</sup> The “Zagreb” Lodge was established in 1927. At the beginning of the 1930s, the lodge had some fifty members. In 1935, there were six lodges in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In 1940, all of them were dissolved. There has not been any research on the lodges in the past decades. For an (at some point antiquated) overview, see Andrija Radenić, “Bene Berit u Srbiji I Jugoslaviji 1911–1940,” *Jevrejski Istorijski Muzej/ Zbornik* 7 (1997): 3–71.

<sup>41</sup> USHMM, RG 11.001M, Fond 1225, Reel 199.

Zionists—were the first to listen to Schick's lecture on Prinz's latest book. Although it was quite common to give scientific or popular scientific lectures at B'nai B'rith meetings, Prinz's book, its observations and claims, must have caused unprecedented impressions and reactions. It was certainly not because Prinz had presented something completely new and unknown. On the contrary, his book assembled prevailing views and opinions the Yugoslav Zionists have had about German Jews, their constitution, and—as they claimed—their craven reaction to the rise of Nazism. Hence, Prinz's book must have been a pleasant surprise rather than a shocking revelation to them because they found their beliefs and attitudes confirmed by his remarks and judgments.

Lavoslav Schick's interest and commitment in this case did not stop after the evening lecture. Like so many other Yugoslav Zionists, he followed and monitored the events and developments in Germany very closely. And when Prinz was dismissed as rabbi of the Jewish Community of Berlin, Schick became active again, mobilizing Jewish communities and actors throughout the country to take a stand and to show their solidarity with Prinz. In response to Prinz's work and political claims, and particularly in response to his dismissal as community rabbi, Lavoslav Schick invited him to Yugoslavia.

Lavoslav—called Leo by friends and family—Schick (1881–1941) was one of the key figures of Yugoslav Jewry. Born in Vienna, he became a well-known and well-to-do lawyer in Zagreb. Moreover, he was a journalist, a Judaist, temporarily vice president of the Jewish Community Zagreb, and an ardent Zionist.<sup>42</sup> Schick passionately collected and read books and journals on Jewish topics. His private library, installed in his house in the city center of Zagreb, was well known and open to everybody who wanted to read about Jewish history. From his youth on, he was a committed Zionist who believed in the creation of a homeland in Palestine, and who supported and pushed some of his siblings and acquainted youngsters to leave for Palestine in the 1930s. While being supportive of those who wanted to leave, he was very critical of those who preferred to bear disfranchisement and humiliation and stay where they were. This related, above all, to German Jews in 1933 and 1934. Being well informed about the situation in Germany and being in direct contact to acquaintances and colleagues in Germany or to first Jewish immigrants and refugees from Germany, he urged them to oppose humiliation, to overcome political passivity, and to find their new home in Palestine. Finding out about Joachim Prinz's book *Wir Juden* must have been a revelation to him. He shared Prinz's criticism of the alleged alienation of many Jews from Judaism, of their attempts to hide and assimilate.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Prinz's demand that Jews avow themselves to Jewishness, to a Jewish nation, and that they discover their pride and finally overcome "hiding and crawling"<sup>44</sup> was in total accordance with Schick's and with other leading Zionists' beliefs in Yugoslavia.<sup>45</sup> It was surely due to these findings and intellectual parallels that made him want to present Prinz's book before the B'nai B'rith audience in December 1933. Only eight days after meeting his lodge brothers, Schick wrote a letter to Joachim Prinz, in which he stated:

Dear Doctor. I have read your recent book "WE JEWS" with the greatest interest and thank you for the enjoyable hours that its reading has given me. I have delivered a detailed lecture on this book in the local B. B. Lodge "ZAGREB." It is also published in the local Jewish weekly "ZIDOV," which is published in Croatian Serbian. I am enclosing a German translation of this paper. Dear Doctor, please accept the expression of my highest esteem, with which I sign as your very devoted.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> On Schick's biography, see Marija Vulesica, "Being a Jew in Zagreb in 1941: Life and Death of Lavoslav Schick," in *Local Dimensions of the Second World War in Southeastern Europe*, ed. Xavier Bougarel, Hannes Grandits, and Marija Vulesica (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 214–33.

<sup>43</sup> Prinz, *Wir Juden*, 41–45.

<sup>44</sup> Prinz, *Wir Juden*, 135f.

<sup>45</sup> On the Inner-Zionist Intellectual Debates, compare Vulesica, "'What Will Become of the German Jews?'"

<sup>46</sup> NSK, R 7883a, Letter to Joachim Prinz, December 28, 1933.



Whether Prinz responded to this letter and to Schick's lecture is unfortunately not documented. It is likely, however, that Prinz did not pay much attention to a letter from an unknown man from an—to him—unimportant country. There are no hints that German-Jewish representatives in general have reacted to claims, warnings, and analyses expressed and urged by non-German Jews in the 1930s, and definitely not to those from Yugoslavia, because neither the country nor its Jewry played a role within their world and state of consciousness.

Shortly after his talk in front of his Lodge brothers, however, the most important and widely known Zionist paper *Židov* (*The Jew*) published Schick's review of Prinz's *Wir Juden*. Schick supported all of his views, in particular those where he claimed that assimilation has failed and the "transformation" of Jews into a nation will lead to the return of the Jews to their "old home."<sup>47</sup> Schick was enthusiastic about Prinz's frank and unambiguous words, claiming that this is no longer the "unmanly lamentation" they had heard before.<sup>48</sup>

Since 1928, the Zionists were intensively engaged in discussions about the Nazi movement and their aims. After their coming to power in January 1933, this debate became an essential focus for the Yugoslav Zionists.<sup>49</sup> They discussed what an appropriate response, literally a "manly" Jewish response, to antisemitism should be. Thus, the concept of an "unmanly" or rather "manly" attitude and behavior was of significant importance for the—essentially—male actors of the Zionist movement. It represented and summarized the core of their belief: being a self-consciously Jewish individual, not afraid to fight back. Further concepts such as "defense," "struggle," "honor," and "dignity" dominated in their calls appealing to all Jews in Yugoslavia and Europe.<sup>50</sup> In their eyes, the German Jews served as a focal point for identification, negative projection, and critique. They were the target of accusations, demands, and calls for action. In keeping with their Zionist self-understanding, they called on German Jews to abandon their assimilationist attitudes and move toward a proud and self-confident Zionist orientation.<sup>51</sup> They argued that only a self-assertive avowal of allegiance to the Jewish nation and identity could serve as a means of defense in their struggle against Nazism and antisemitism.

The Zionists were men and women who believed that it was appropriate to resolutely and openly stress allegiance to their Jewish nationality. Political maneuvering between Serbs and Croats or even the attempt to view oneself as "anational" in a state that was highly charged in national terms appeared problematic. The leading Yugoslav Zionists were men, born in the 1880s and 1890s, who had been inspired and supported by the older generation of rabbis. This generation had a strong orientation toward the emerging Zionist movement active in Basel and Vienna. In 1902, the *Jüdische Akademiker aus den südslawischen Ländern Bar Giora* (Jewish University Students from the South Slavic Lands Bar Giora) association was established in Vienna; many students from Croatia-Slavonia, among them Lavoslav

<sup>47</sup> Lavoslav Schick, "Djelo dra. Joachima Prinza 'Wir Juden'" ("The Oeuvre of Dr. Joachim Prinz 'We Jews'"), *Židov*, January 5, 1934, 2–3.

<sup>48</sup> *Židov*, January 5, 1934, 2.

<sup>49</sup> On the reaction of Yugoslav Zionists to the National-Socialist politics and actions, compare Marija Vulesica, "Formen des Widerstandes jugoslawischer Zionistinnen und Zionisten gegen die NS-Judenpolitik und den Antisemitismus 1933–1941," in *Jüdischer Widerstand in Europa (1933–1945): Formen und Facetten*, ed. J. H. Schoeps, Dieter Bingen, and Gideon Botsch (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2016), 89–105.

<sup>50</sup> Vulesica, "Formen des Widerstandes jugoslawischer Zionistinnen und Zionisten gegen die NS-Judenpolitik und den Antisemitismus 1933–1941." For a broader engagement with masculinity, "manliness," and "manhood" in Jewish modernity and the Zionist discourse in particular, see Mark H. Gelber, ed., *Melancholy Pride. Nation, Race, and Gender in the German Literature of Cultural Zionism*, (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2000). Benjamin Maria Baader, Sharon Gillerman, and Paul Lerner, ed., *Jewish Masculinities: German Jews, Gender, and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012). Todd Presner, *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007). Paula E. Hyman, "Gender and the Shaping of Modern Jewish Identities," *Jewish Social Studies* 8 no. 2–3 (2001–2002): 139–52. Ofer Nordheimer Nur, *Eros and Tragedy: Jewish Male Fantasies and the Masculine Revolution of Zionism* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014).

<sup>51</sup> "Primirje u Njemačkoj. Pismo iz Berlina" ("Cease-fire in Germany. Letter from Berlin"), *Židov*, June 24, 1932, 2.

Schick (1881–1941) and Aleksandar Licht (1884–1948), as well as students from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Dalmatia, and Serbia joined the association.<sup>52</sup> After their studies in Vienna, they returned to their home countries and began to distribute Zionist pamphlets and brochures, to establish associations and organize meetings.

After World War I and the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918 (renamed in Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929), the Jews were not recognized as a nationality, much to the great disappointment of the Zionists. The constitutions of 1921 and 1931 granted the Jews political and civil rights. In 1921, approximately 65,000 Jews lived in the newly created Yugoslav state, and their number increased to approximately 75,000 in 1941.<sup>53</sup> They were considered a religious minority enjoying the protection and financial support of the state. Over the course of the following years, the Zionists built up a dense network of local Zionist societies and associations, which published numerous periodicals and brochures. Cultural events and Zionist meetings across the country gave manifest expression to a self-assertive Jewish nationalism.<sup>54</sup> The Association of Zionists was founded in 1918, the Association of Jewish Religious Communities in 1919, and the Association of Rabbis in 1923. By the end of the 1920s, the Zionists had gained a leadership position in the political and cultural communal life of the Yugoslav Jews and their umbrella associations.<sup>55</sup> They dominated the public opinion and claimed to speak on behalf of all Yugoslav Jews. No doubt, there were internal conflicts and disagreements. Not all Jews in Yugoslavia were Zionists, but Zionism offered them an intellectual arena and political home, presenting a vision of a prosperous Jewish future. And it offered them answers and options for fighting marginalization and indignity.

### Invitation to Yugoslavia

For Lavoslav Schick, Prinz's dismissal was an attack on all Jews. In response, he published an "Open Letter" in the Sarajevo-based Zionist newspaper *Jevrejski glas* (*Jewish Voice*) in September 1935. Schick's words reflected disappointment over and disapproval of the decision of the Jewish Community of Berlin. At the same time, the letter expressed solidarity and support for Prinz and, in order to underline the local endorsement, also issued an invitation to Yugoslavia.<sup>56</sup> Because he did not want to interfere in the internal disputes of a foreign community, as he explained, Schick wrote to him as a "friend," referring to the dedication "to friends" in Prinz's book *Wir Juden*.<sup>57</sup> While admitting that he had never heard him speak, Schick referred to others who have and who were full of admiration. He himself found "consolation and relief" in *Wir Juden* because it proved that "persecution and humiliation, negligence and poverty will not melt all German Jews down." Schick continued, "We have seen a lot of them (German Jews) wearing the yellow badge with pride and now, in these difficult times, Berlin Jews are making their way back to Jewishness after they have been running

<sup>52</sup> On the beginnings of the Zionist movement in the South Slavic countries of the Habsburg monarchy, see Cvi Loker, "Začeci i razvoj cionizma u južnoslavenskim krajevima" ("The Beginnings and the Development of Zionism in the South Slavic Regions"), in *Dva stoljeća povijesti i kulture Židova u Zagrebu i Hrvatskoj* (*Two Centuries of Jewish History and Culture in Zagreb and Croatia*), ed. Ognjen Kraus (Zagreb: Židovska općina Zagreb, 1998), 166–78; Ljiljana Dobrovšak, "Prva konferencija zemaljskog udruženja cionista južnoslavenskih krajeva austrougarske monarhije u Brodu na Savi 1909. Godine" ("The First Conference of the Association of Zionists in the South Slavic Regions of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Brod on the Sava in 1909"), *Scrnja slavonica* 6 (2006): 234–66.

<sup>53</sup> Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia: A Quest for Community* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 56. Holm Sundhaussen, "Jugoslawien," in *Dimension des Völkermords. Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Munich: De Gruyter, 1991), 311–30, esp. 311–12.

<sup>54</sup> Ivo Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu 1918–1941* (*Jews in Zagreb 1918–1941*) (Zagreb: Novi Liber; 2004), 108–124, 230–58.

<sup>55</sup> Loker, "Začeci i razvoj cionizma u južnoslavenskim krajevima," 174.

<sup>56</sup> Lavoslav Schick, "Otvoreno pismo" ("Open Letter"), *Jevrejski glas*, September 27, 1935, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Prinz dedicated his book *Wir Juden* "to friends" ("Den Freunden").

away from it for centuries.”<sup>58</sup> In the course of the letter, Schick brought some Berlin rabbis to mind, including the former chief rabbi of Zagreb, Hosea Jacobi (1842–1925). Jacobi, hailed from Jakobshagen in Prussia, had grown up and was educated in Berlin. Schick stated, “All of our sense and love for Jewishness, our Jewish self-confidence, and our hopes were funded by him..., this rabbi from Berlin.”<sup>59</sup> Bringing Prinz in line with Jacobi, Schick intended to demonstrate the connection and attachment of Yugoslav Jews—particularly the Ashkenazi Jews in Croatia—to German and Berlin Jewry as a cultural point of reference.<sup>60</sup> He constructed intellectual and historical proximity among these different Jewries. And by pointing to the importance of Berlin and Berlin-based events even for the Jews in Yugoslavia, Schick praised Prinz’s “manly defense of all Jewish concerns.” Thereby he indicated that Prinz was fighting not only for the endangered German Jews but for Jews as a whole. Thus, he urged him openly, “Stand by your position.” Simultaneously, Schick extended his invitation to Prinz by arguing that he would be welcomed by all Jews. “If Dr. Prinz comes to us, he will be listened to by our Croatian and Serbian friends,” he continued, and drew a parallel between Prinz and the late Croatian bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815–1905), who—as Schick put it—fought against the emperor and his ministers only to defend “his Croatian people.” And in order to establish his significance for the Jewish people even more clearly, Schick equated Prinz with the Serbian-Orthodox priests who “sacrificed” their lives in 1914 fighting for their people.<sup>61</sup> He admired the young rabbi from Berlin, his courage and openness, and he wanted his fellow Jews—Zionists and non-Zionists alike—to understand and to share his convictions about Jewish resistance, self-awareness, and the significance of Palestine for the Jewish future. To achieve this, he did not hesitate to place Jewish and Croatian-Serbian history and historical national movements in parallel.

A few days after the “Open Letter” was published, Schick wrote to Prinz directly. He stated that his article in *Jevrejski glas* had been well received and that he—Prinz—was longingly expected in Zagreb. Isak Alkalay, the chief Rabbi of Yugoslavia, had declared in a private conversation with him—Schick—that he would be thrilled to welcome Prinz in Belgrade, leaving the Belgrade Synagogue open to him as a matter of course.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, Schick invited Prinz to be his guest while in Yugoslavia, and in particular while in Zagreb. Two weeks later, Prinz responded to Schick’s “Open Letter” and to his invitation: “I must tell you that I am very moved to learn through this letter that I have such kind and sincere friends in Yugoslavia, a country I have never seen and whose exact borders I would hardly be able to draw.”<sup>63</sup>

Prinz was at least honest when he admitted that he had no idea about Yugoslavia and the situation and nature of Yugoslav Jewry.<sup>64</sup> He only expressed the hope to be able to visit this country and to get to know Lavoslav Schick personally. No further words were exchanged about Yugoslav Jewry and his plans. It is likely that the correspondence between the two has not survived completely.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Schick, “Otvoreno pismo.” Schick here referred to Robert Weltsch’s famous essay “Tragt ihn mit Stolz den gelben Fleck” (“Wear the Yellow Badge with Pride”) mentioned previously. Weltsch’s call to the Jews was partially reprinted in the Zionist paper *Židov* (April, 7, 1933, 1), and it had caused large approval and admiration by the Yugoslav Zionist.

<sup>59</sup> Schick, “Otvoreno pismo.”

<sup>60</sup> For further analysis of the ties and contacts between Yugoslav Jews or rather Zionists to the German Jews, see Marija Vulesica, “The Yugoslav Zionists and Their Perception of ‘Germanness,’” in *Jews and Germans in Eastern Europe*, ed. Tobias Grill (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 177–98.

<sup>61</sup> Schick, “Otvoreno pismo.”

<sup>62</sup> NSK, R 7883a, Letter to Joachim Prinz, October 1, 1935.

<sup>63</sup> NSK, R 7883b, Letter from Joachim Prinz, October 16, 1935.

<sup>64</sup> There is indeed no indication that for German Jewry at the time Yugoslav Jewry played any significant role. At least, the *Jüdische Rundschau* covered some developments in a regular short column entitled “Letter from Yugoslavia.” The Open Letter by Schick was only mentioned in passing in one sentence: *Jüdische Rundschau*, October 10, 1935.

<sup>65</sup> Only very few documents and letters have survived from Prinz’s German years (1902–1937). The bulk of it is probably lost.

Although not mentioned by either man, the sponsor of the trip was the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, of which Prinz had become the European representative a few weeks earlier. Notwithstanding this arrangement, the situation of the German and all European Jews was probably the main reason for the invitation to Yugoslavia and Prinz's acceptance.<sup>66</sup> To Hugo Bergmann (1883-1975), rector of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem from 1935 to 1938, Schick's letters of November and December 1935 spoke only of university business that Prinz would pursue during his stay in Yugoslavia.<sup>67</sup>

Given Prinz's schedule, which included meetings with representatives of the Universities of Zagreb and Belgrade, the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, and other institutions, several individuals and organizations must have worked tirelessly in October and early November to carefully organize this trip. When the Zagreb-based *Židov* announced Prinz's coming to Zagreb in its issue of November 1—repeating the announcement a few days later—the Zagreb Zionists were full of pleasant anticipation.<sup>68</sup> Thus, shortly after the “Open Letter” was published, the journey to Yugoslavia must have been set.

### The Trip: Rabbi Prinz in Yugoslavia

On Monday, November 11, 1935, Joachim Prinz arrived at the Zagreb railway station. “A large Jewish Public” awaited and greeted him, welcoming his wife and his assistants with flowers. In the evening, Prinz delivered his first sermon on Yugoslav soil. The synagogue was overcrowded, and the Zagreb Jews—who had a good command of the German language—listened to Prinz speaking about Jewish fate, Jewish self-confidence and self-efficacy, about a return to Jewishness, and about Palestine as the answer to current Jewish concerns.<sup>69</sup> One can only imagine what these words, expressed by a German Jew in the city center of Zagreb, must have meant to the local Zionist actors such as Lavoslav Schick. To them, Prinz's views and ideas were grist to their mills and encouraged them to believe in their strength as Jews and to keep propagating their methods, answers, and ideas as *the only* solution to the Jewish question.

Prinz spent two and a half days in Zagreb. On the second day of his trip, he met the rector of the University of Zagreb, Stanko Hondl, and according to *Židov*, they agreed to exchange scientific publications and initiated officially a communication process between the University of Zagreb and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. When Prinz met non-Jewish officials, his task was to represent the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He did so on Wednesday when he visited the Yugoslav Academy of Science and Arts (JAZU), whose president at the time happened to be Stanko Hondl as well. Hondl was representing the university, its library, and JAZU in personal union. It is quite likely that Hondl was good friends with some Jewish representatives of the community, maybe also with Schick himself, and therefore willing and interested to meet Prinz a few times. In a mid-sized city like Zagreb and among a certain group of intellectuals, it would not have been unusual that leading figures knew one another on a personal level.

The highlight of his Zagreb trip was most likely his public lecture, held in front of 900 people—who were listening in- and outside—in the Maccabi Hall. Prinz spoke about Zionism as the “moral responsibility” that offers perspectives for the Jewish people; he

<sup>66</sup> The *Jüdische Rundschau* reported: “The main task of his stay was to set up a society of friends of the university with fixed annual contributions to be added to the university's budget. Besides that, the purpose of his trip was Zionist propaganda. Both goals could be happily combined.” “Dr. Prinz in Jugoslawien,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, December 6, 1935.

<sup>67</sup> NSK, R7883a, Letter to Hugo Bergmann, November 15, 1935, December 6, 1935; R7883b, Letter from Hugo Bergmann, November 26, 1935.

<sup>68</sup> *Židov*, November 1, 1935, 4. *Židov*, November 8, 1935, 1, 6.

<sup>69</sup> *Židov*, November 15, 1935, 1. On the significance of the German language for the Zionist movement, see Marc Volovici, *German as a Jewish Problem: The Language Politics of Jewish Nationalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020).

spoke about the significance of cultural work and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, which “accompanies the national-Jewish renewal.”<sup>70</sup> The Jewish and non-Jewish audience alike was—according to *Židov*—thrilled and swept away. Prinz’s first stop in Yugoslavia was a huge success: for him, but first and foremost for the Zionists. They invited a prominent guest, a well-known Berlin Jew who came to offer ideas and visions, and who came to support—this is how the Zionists must have had seen it—local Zionist politics and demands.

The next two stops were Sarajevo and Belgrade. And according to the newspaper reports, they were also a great success.<sup>71</sup> Prinz arrived in the Bosnian capital on Thursday, November 14, late in the evening. The scheduled program of his Sarajevo—and Belgrade—trip was quite similar to that in Zagreb. He first preached in the Ashkenazi synagogue, which was again overcrowded with Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews alike. This was not common in those days and even for the local Jews a very special experience.<sup>72</sup> Prinz himself was deeply impressed, particularly from the Sephardic community.<sup>73</sup> And again he spoke about the Jewish future, about resuming Jewish soul, about standing up and demonstrating strength. At the end of his speech, there was “a deathlike silence,” but then the audience applauded enthusiastically.<sup>74</sup> On Saturday morning, Leon Perić, the president of the local Zionist organization, took Prinz to attend the Shabbat service in the Sephardi synagogue. According to *Židov*, this experience made a deep impression on him. In the course of the day, Prinz gave two public lectures, one about the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and its importance for the Jewish rebirth in the first place, and the second one about Zionism and its goals. Both events were overcrowded; a wide range of people came to see and hear the rabbi from Germany.

During his second lecture, Prinz responded for the first time to local, Yugoslavian, circumstances. He recalled the assassination of King Aleksandar in 1934 and asserted that the Western world and its Jews have been concerned about the fate of Yugoslavia ever since. He called Aleksandar “a fighter for the full emancipation of Jews,” and he expressed a good wish for Yugoslav Jews, namely a long-lasting peace “in this beautiful country.”<sup>75</sup> He even claimed in an article published in Germany that Yugoslavia was for the Jews an “island of the blessed and happy.”<sup>76</sup>

It is very likely that Prinz accommodated himself to the political situation in Yugoslavia and that he and his assistants had been asked by their Yugoslav hosts to make such a declaration. As indicated before, Prinz did not know much about Yugoslavia or its Jews before the start of the trip, but now, being there and probably being briefed that Yugoslav police spies liked to attend larger political gatherings, he had to express words of admiration and respect to the late king. Zionists—unlike other national parties and organizations—had been allowed to express or publish Jewish national aims as long as they did not criticize and oppose the state. And the leaders of Jewish communities, associations, and organizations were keen to prove their loyalty and not cause any suspicion.

In Belgrade, Prinz’s next stop, he was greeted by local Zionists such as Friedrich Pops, the president of the Association of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia (SJVOJ) and Bukić Pijade, the president of the Sephardi community. As previously in Zagreb and Sarajevo, the synagogues and halls were full of people who wanted to hear him speak. And here, too, he urged the Jews to create their own nation and their own state because neither assimilation nor mixed marriages nor leaving their communities was going to save the Jews from persecution and humiliation. Here too, as in Sarajevo, he made a political statement. Praising

<sup>70</sup> *Židov*, November 15, 1935, 1.

<sup>71</sup> For the following events, the newspaper reports of the Yugoslav Zionist press are the main source. For obvious reasons, they were not impartial and were anxious to portray the trip as an outstanding success. Thus, we must be careful not to follow these reports too lightly.

<sup>72</sup> *Židov*, November 22, 1935, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Joachim Prinz, “Europäische Reise. 1 Jugoslawien,” *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, November 28, 1935.

<sup>74</sup> *Židov*, November 22, 1935, 6.

<sup>75</sup> *Jevrejski glas*, November 22, 1935, 2.

<sup>76</sup> Joachim Prinz, “Europäische Reise. Jugoslawien (III.),” *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, December 19, 1935.

again King Aleksandar, he declared that Jews lived well in Yugoslavia, and he wished them a life in peace and peaceful cooperation with non-Jews for the centuries to come.<sup>77</sup> For the Yugoslav Zionists, this was not exactly what they themselves had preached in recent years. They had propagated Palestine as the sole Jewish future and had not considered Yugoslavia as their future home. However, given their everyday and pragmatic considerations, such views were probably less controversial. Though Lavoslav Schick himself was at that time already planning trips to and business with Palestine, even he did not seriously consider emigrating to Palestine for good.<sup>78</sup>

As he had done in Belgrade, in Zagreb, too, Prinz met the press. The most famous daily newspaper of the country, *Politika*, published a quite descriptive article about his visit and his efforts for the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.<sup>79</sup> In the same issue, the newspaper published an additional article this one covering the recently passed Nuremberg Laws. This code of laws excluded Jews from German citizenship and simultaneously intended to “define” who was a Jew. Although the German developments leading up to the laws had been covered by the Yugoslav Jewish and non-Jewish press over the previous weeks, it was probably not coincidental that both articles appeared on the same day.<sup>80</sup> The author of the report was Predrag Milojević, the Berlin correspondent of *Politika*. He described the laws in detail, calling them “racist” and “antisemitic,” leaving German Jews no choice but to accept the new legal and political system. Despite attempts to silence Milojević, his criticism was still audible. As a consequence, he was forced to leave Berlin in late 1936.<sup>81</sup>

Prinz never addressed the Nuremberg Laws directly or officially during his visit. Nevertheless, given what was going on in Germany, supporting him and his political demands was a political act on the part of the Yugoslav Zionists.<sup>82</sup> Despite having to make some political accommodations, Prinz’s presence and fierce words, as well as his visions of a Jewish future, consolidated the Yugoslav Zionists and their views and goals. The journey itself, its organization and arrangement, was also an important manifestation of inner-Yugoslav Zionist cooperation and understanding. Almost all larger communities and associations took part and did their best to welcome Prinz and to demonstrate their cohesion, their shared beliefs and aims. He visited six Yugoslav cities—after Belgrade, Novi Sad, Subotica, and Osijek followed.<sup>83</sup> This must have been a tremendous amount of work. Šime Spitzer, the secretary general of the SJVO, was praised for his great organizational efforts.<sup>84</sup> The SJVOJ ultimately published (likely in 1937) a report on its work and achievements in the period between 1933 and 1936.

The relentless efforts of a whole range of people to make this trip possible paid off in several ways. Prinz’s journey was valued as the starting point of a Yugoslav campaign supporting the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.<sup>85</sup> In 1937, the leadership of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem sent a letter to Schick thanking him and appreciating his efforts in facilitating Prinz’s trip. The university also expressed its gratitude for all the work that Yugoslav Jews had done for its cause ever since.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *Židov*, November 29, 1935.

<sup>78</sup> Vulesica, “Being a Jew in Zagreb in 1941,” 219.

<sup>79</sup> *Politika*, November 21, 1935, 11.

<sup>80</sup> Predrag Milojević, “Položaj Jevreja u nacional-socijalističkom Rajhu,” *Politika*, November 21, 1935, 7.

<sup>81</sup> Predrag Milojević, *Bio sam prisutan. Sećanja (I Was Present. Memoirs)* (Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 1980).

<sup>82</sup> Several articles were published in *Židov* in which the Yugoslav Zionists expressed their rage and protest against the Nuremberg Laws. *Židov*, September 20, 1935, 1. On Saturday, September 21, a regular meeting about the just completed XIX Zionist Congress turned into a spontaneous protest meeting against the Laws. Aleksandar Licht, President of the Yugoslav Zionist Organization, gave an impassioned speech against the discrimination of German Jews. See *Židov*, September 27, 1935, 5. The chief rabbi, Isak Alkalaj, and the Association of Jewish Religious Communities in Yugoslavia wrote a protest letter to the League of Nations; see *Židov*, September 27, 1935, 19.

<sup>83</sup> “Dr. Prinz in Jugoslawien,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, December 6, 1935.

<sup>84</sup> *Židov*, November 29, 1935, 2.

<sup>85</sup> USHMM, RG 11001M96, Reel 797, Fond 1942, Report SJVOJ, Document No. 1–54, 23f.

<sup>86</sup> NSK, R 7883b, Letter from the Hebrew University, Department for Information, October 27, 1937.

For Zionist transnational conversations, it was an even greater success. Not only was the Zionist leadership delighted, but so was the public. Thousands of people flocked to the synagogues and public meetings that Prinz addressed. The *Jüdische Rundschau* reported: “The temples [synagogues] were overcrowded, the halls sold out days in advance, and in some cases the lectures needed to be transmitted to adjoining halls by loudspeakers. The trip thus turned into a major publicity drive for the Zionist movement.”<sup>87</sup> Prinz himself also fondly remembered the trip when he wrote his memoirs decades later: “It was a very fascinating trip,... seeing the beautiful country from one coast to the other and meeting not merely the leading Jews but also the governors of the various provinces of the country, both Croatian and Serbian. It was a new world.”<sup>88</sup>

After Yugoslavia, Prinz moved on to the Bukovina, where he was similarly received. The Romanian Zionists had also observed the German situation closely. They, too, considered Prinz’s dismissal outrageous, but could still see “a beneficial effect, because now Joachim Prinz is no longer rabbi of a rather small community, but has risen to the ranks of the leaders of national world Jewry [nationales Weltjudentum].”<sup>89</sup> In early January 1936, he held a total of six events in Czernowitz, which were attended by thousands of Jews and reported enthusiastically in the local press.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

For the Yugoslav Zionists, Joachim Prinz served as projection. German Jewry was perceived as too passive, too anxious in terms of resisting the discrimination and humiliation in the first years of the Nazi regime. Because German Jews had been the Yugoslav Zionists’ cultural reference point for decades, they wanted them to take a more combative approach and to openly and confidently identify themselves as nationally conscious Jews. Prinz’s appearance, his sermons, ideas, and demands were therefore considered a coup, an appropriate response to Jewish life in Germany and Europe in general. To have him in Yugoslavia and to experience the enormous interest and support for his ideas—which were in fact the same ideas that the Yugoslav Zionists had been propagating for years—provided satisfaction and strengthened their prestige and pride. They claimed to know the answers to the questions of their time, and so did Prinz, supposedly.

The question remains what the trip meant for Prinz and how much he cared about non-German Jews. In the first place, he traveled to Yugoslavia because he had a job to do, namely, to support the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Before Schick invited him, Yugoslavia and its Jews—as well as other east-southeastern European Jews—had not been part of his intellectual horizon. And yet, during his trip, he “discovered similarities between many of the problems with which the Jews of Palestine had to grapple and those of Yugoslavia.”<sup>91</sup>

For a very long time, the ties between these worlds—southeastern European and central European Jews—were unilateral. The enthusiasm and gratitude for his visit only seemed to

<sup>87</sup> “Dr. Prinz in Jugoslawien,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, December 6, 1935. “Jugoslawische Universitäten ehren Dr. Joachim Prinz.” *Ostjüdische Zeitung. Organ der jüdischen Nationalpartei in der Bukowina*, December 4, 1935. Meyer, *Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi*, 136.

<sup>88</sup> Meyer, *Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi*, 135.

<sup>89</sup> “Joachim Prinz zur Begrüßung,” *Ostjüdische Zeitung. Organ der jüdischen Nationalpartei in der Bukowina*, December 22, 1935. “National World Jewry” referred to the Zionist understanding of Jews and Judaism as a nation.

<sup>90</sup> “Joachim Prinz zur Begrüßung,” *Ostjüdische Zeitung. Organ der jüdischen Nationalpartei in der Bukowina*, December 22, 1935. O. B., “Dr. Joachim Prinz in Cernauti,” *Ostjüdische Zeitung. Organ der jüdischen Nationalpartei in der Bukowina*, January 8, 1936. “Dr. Prinz über die Lösung der Judenfrage. Die Aktion des Keren Hajessod in Cernauti,” *Czernowitzer Morgenblatt*, January 9, 1936. Theodor Weisselberger, “Joachim Prinz,” *Czernowitzer Allgemeine Zeitung. Unabhängiges Tageblatt*, January 11, 1936. Dr. Mayer Ebner, “Dr. Joachim Prinz-Tage,” *Ostjüdische Zeitung. Organ der jüdischen Nationalpartei in der Bukowina*, January 12, 1936.

<sup>91</sup> Meyer, *Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi*, 135.

have proved it. Lavoslav Schick must have been highly pleased with Prinz's tour, with the positive reactions countrywide and the overwhelming expressions of support. However, no further correspondence between the two men is documented. The trip was a one-time event, not to be repeated. But Schick, like so many other Yugoslav Jews, continued to observe and deal with the situation in Germany. Likewise, he continued to believe in Palestine and a Jewish future there. He was killed a few months after the German invasion of Yugoslavia in 1941—like so many others who had believed in the strength of the German—and European—Jewries.

Although this episode may seem rather marginal to the history of German and European Jewish responses to Nazi persecution, it allows for a broader perspective on the transnational entanglement of European Jewries during the crisis years of the 1930s. Many eastern and southeastern European Jews felt strongly connected to Germany and German Jewry. They spoke German, they adored German culture, and they admired German Jewry both for its success in emancipation and for its manifold cultural, economic, and political achievements. When the Nazis grew stronger and came to power in the early 1930s, they watched German developments with apprehension and linked them to their own situation.

Among German Jews, on the other hand, there was little knowledge of the Jewish conditions in neighboring countries, particularly of southeastern Europe. Although Zionist ideology claimed to transcend national boundaries and present comprehensive solutions to the "Jewish question" on a global scale, the actual work of German Zionists was very much tailored to Germany—and to some extent to Palestine.

However, during the 1930s, transnational cooperation and exchange increased. The worsening conditions for many eastern and southeastern European Jewries invited a more global perspective. For Zionists, in particular, it seemed necessary to detach this development from national specifics and to view it as a global problem. This general trend is reflected in Prinz's trip to Yugoslavia. Although he himself had not thought of visiting southeastern Europe, Schick's invitation to Yugoslavia was a welcome opportunity to catch up on something he had missed so far.

His trip to Yugoslavia, Romania, and Czechoslovakia was not the beginning of closer relations between him and his Zionist partners in those countries, but it may have left a mark that is difficult to determine in detail. In the first years of Nazi rule, Prinz's analyses and future visions were very much focused on Germany and vaguely on Palestine. In approximately 1935, this changed. His sacking from the Jewish Community of Berlin opened up new intellectual perspectives as well as political and job and opportunities. In the same year, his perspective on Jewish politics also began to transnationalize, coinciding with the increasing general perception that the situation of Jews was deteriorating dramatically on a European or even global scale. All these developments probably reinforced one another, so that the trip to Yugoslavia became the prelude to a political career that would eventually center on international Jewish politics, particularly after Prinz's immigration to the United States in 1937. Now he joined the AJC and the WJC and would become a leading figure of both organizations in the following decades. In this period, he advocated a distinctly international agenda and pushed the AJC in that direction. In that sense, this trip might have been part of Prinz's turn to transnational politics after his sacking as community rabbi in Berlin in 1935, which brought him to America and to transnational Jewish politics in the postwar world.

Back in Europe, the burgeoning transnational conversations of the 1930s never transformed into a broader transnational collaboration due to the accelerating speed of German military aggression and anti-Jewish persecution. Europe's Jewish representatives were not able to keep pace with this acceleration. Within a few years, questions of emancipation rapidly turned into questions of emigration and finally into questions of flight, escape, and rescue.

A closer look at those conversations, however, sheds light on the exacerbating problems of Jewish existence in Europe in the course of the 1930s. Without a doubt, Nazi Germany was a prime concern within this context. But Jewish existence was precarious throughout



Europe, particularly in the east-central and southeastern regions. A transnational perspective on both the problems of Jewish existence throughout Europe and the entanglements and collaborations of various European Jewries allows for a better understanding of Jewish history in the 1930s and beyond.

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