Lovro Kralj

The Holocaust in Sarajevo

Genocidal Policies, Regional Variations, and Political Rivalries

Abstract

This article examines the implementation of the Holocaust in Sarajevo within the broader context of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), highlighting how regional variation and local political rivalries shaped the trajectory of genocide. While antisemitic policies were enacted across the NDH, Sarajevo initially stood out as a case of genocidal underperformance. The city's multiethnic composition and fractured elite – divided primarily between Catholic and Muslim factions – generated delays in the deportation and extermination of Jews. Local elites weaponised antisemitism to pursue competing nation-building agendas, further complicating the implementation of centrally coordinated genocidal policies. By analysing the political dynamics between local authorities and the Ustaša regime in Zagreb, this study underscores the crucial role of mid-level actors and bureaucratic manoeuvring in facilitating or obstructing mass violence. Drawing on archival sources and recent scholarship, the article argues that the Holocaust in Sarajevo cannot be understood solely through top-down directives. Instead, it must be viewed as the product of local power struggles, strategic negotiation, and the agency of mid-level perpetrators. The case of Sarajevo illustrates how regional variations and internal political rivalries influenced the timing, intensity, and form of genocidal violence within the NDH.

Internationally, Sarajevo is often remembered for its association with political violence, marked by the 1914 assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the 1990s siege during Yugoslavia's collapse – events symbolising the start and end of Europe's "Short Twentieth Century".[1] While the 1990s siege claimed around 5,000 civilian lives,[2] the city endured even greater losses during the Second World War, when nearly twice as many civilians died under fascist occupation. Of the 9,071 civilians killed during the Second World War, an overwhelming 77 per cent were Jews – meaning that Sarajevo's Jewish population, once a vital part of its interwar diversity, nearly vanished by war's end.[3]

Jews had been an integral part of Sarajevo's communal life since the early modern period, witnessing the city's transformation under both Ottoman rule (1463–1878) and Austro-Hungarian control (1878–1918).[4] During the interwar period, the city was a part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (renamed Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929). In this period, Sarajevo's Jewish community reached its peak, numbering nearly 12,000 and comprising 77.5 per cent of Bosnia and Herzegovina's

1 Robert J. Donia, *Sarajevo: biografija grada* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2006), 23.

2 Ewa Tabeau, Jakub Bijak, and Neda Lončarić, "Broj žrtava u opsadi Sarajeva od aprila 1992. do decembra 1995. Studija o stopi smrtnosti na osnovu osam velikih izvora podataka" (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, 2003), 2, https://www.icty.org/x/cases/slobodan_milosevic/prosexp/bcs/mil-rep-tabeau030818b.pdf; Donia, *Sarajevo*, 365.

3 Božo Madžar, "Ljudske i materijalne žrtve Sarajeva u toku Drugog svjetskog rata", in *Sarajevo u revoluciji: u borbi do punog oslobođenja (novembar 1943 – april 1945)*, vol. 4 (Sarajevo: Istorijski arhiv Sarajevo, 1981), 653.

4 Emily Greble, "A City Apart: Sarajevo in the Second World War" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2007), 7.

https://doi.org/10.23777/sn.0225 | www.vwi.ac.at

RUBRIK

Jewish population – making the city the centre of Bosnian Jewry.[5] Yet, after more than four centuries of continuous presence, the community was devastated within just eight months of Ustaša rule in the fascist Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, NDH). This article investigates how and why such destruction became possible, posing interconnected questions about fascist mobilisation, antisemitism, and political dynamics in a multiethnic setting. It explores the relationship between the fascist central authorities and local actors; how state-sponsored antisemitism shaped interethnic relations; whether antisemitism was resisted, accepted, or adapted by various non-Jewish communities; how Jews were positioned relative to other persecuted groups like Serbs and Roma; and how Sarajevo's longstanding image as a tolerant, multiethnic city influenced the course of persecution and deportation.

Given that Sarajevo's Jewish community made up nearly a third of all Jews in the NDH, this article contends that the impact of the Holocaust in the city was both profound and far-reaching, extending well beyond the confines of local history. The deportation of Sarajevo's Jews served as a testing ground for key figures who would later play prominent roles in orchestrating the Holocaust at the state level. Consequently, the methods and practices developed in Sarajevo were not isolated but became a critical blueprint for implementing genocide across other regions of the NDH.

Scholars have frequently criticised the historiography of the NDH for its predominant focus on macro-level narratives, highlighting significant gaps in regional and micro-historical analyses of the Holocaust, other genocides, and mass political violence. Historian Max Bergholz recently noted that references to the local history of mass violence in the NDH are too often decontextualised and lumped together "without accounting for their temporal and geographical variation".[6] Similarly, the historian Alexander Korb has concluded that "even though the history of wartime Yugoslavia has been extensively researched, the number of useful case studies of Ustaša mass violence is very limited". He argued that the history of mass political violence on the local level has not been a subject of separate analysis, but that it has mostly been interpreted through the "historiographical canon, which has been produced for the whole of Yugoslavia".[7] As a result, overarching theories about the causes of the Holocaust in the NDH are often applied uncritically to local contexts, overlooking the distinct circumstances, dynamics, and actors that shaped genocidal processes on the ground.

While authors working in the fields of Holocaust, genocide, and political violence often focus on the leaders and their ideology, the meso- and micro-levels are often overlooked.[8] Exclusive focus on the macro-level can often have a blinding effect as it neglects the importance of autonomy and agency on the middle level of decision-making. With a few notable exceptions, it is the meso-level which has been

5 Avram Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva i Bosne i Hercegovine* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1987), 11–12; Francine Friedman, "Contemporary Responses to the Holocaust in Bosnia and Herzegovina", in *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe* (Lincold and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 83–84.

6 Max Bergholz, *Telling Histories of Violence Without Borders*, Occasional Paper Series (Notre Dame: Nanovic Institute for European Studies, University of Notre Dame, 2020), 7.

7 Alexander Korb, "Integrated Warfare? The Germans and the Ustaša Massacres: Syrmia 1942", in *War in a Twilight World: Partisans and Anti-Partisans Warfare in Eastern Europe, 1939–45*, eds. Ben Shepherd and Juliette Pattinson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 211.

8 Rui J.P. de Figueirido and Barry R. Weingast, "The Rationality of Fear: Political Opportunism and Ethnic Conflict", in *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention*, eds. Barbara F. Walter and Jack Snyder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 261; Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 3.

"largely neglected" so far in both the Holocaust and genocide studies.[9] The distinction between various analytical levels is particularly important with regards to the process of decision-making in the Holocaust. Seeking to determine how the ideological aims, determined at the macro-level, were translated into actions on the ground, we can divide the perpetrators into three analytical levels: architects who operate on the macro-level and occupy the highest offices within the state and political movements; the organisers of genocide, such as regional governors, mayors, and chiefs of police, who operate on the meso-level; and, finally, the killers who operate on the bottom level.[10] While in certain cases there might be an overlap between these categories, since an organiser can be a killer as well, these categories are used to identify the perpetrator's position within the hierarchy as well as the power and agency they held within the decision-making apparatus. Thus, the meso-layer is taken as a central level of analysis in this article as it is the interaction between the architects and the organisers, the rulers and the elites, which is one of the most important parts of the puzzle in explaining the translation of ideological aims into concrete destruction on the ground.

While existing local studies of the Holocaust in the NDH provide us with valuable empirical information, more often than not they fail to critically analyse the relationship between the macro- and meso-levels, thus completely abandoning attempts to reconstruct the decision-making behind various acts of mass violence. As a result, the actions of perpetrators on the local or regional levels are too often taken as a straightforward implementation of the orders from the top without any consideration of local motivations and context. Scholars of genocide studies have pointed out that genocides happen differently in different areas.[11] The process of launching genocides in different regions and localities can itself be so different that we must analyse each case separately. Explanations which focus on the Ustaša elites in Zagreb cannot account for the regional variation in the implementation of genocides. For example, Carl Bethke, a historian who dealt with the Holocaust in the region of Slavonia, noted that the question of why the Jewish communities in Bosnia were deported in the autumn of 1941, while those from Slavonia were not deported en masse until 1942, remains "unknown".[12] Similarly, Marija Vulesica has concluded that there are existing gaps particularly when it comes to Bosnia, where we see a notable absence of studies on the Holocaust.[13] This article contributes to closing this gap by focusing on the genocidal decision-making during the Holocaust in Sarajevo.

The Onset of Ustaša Rule and Anti-Jewish Violence in Sarajevo

Following the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia, German forces entered Sarajevo on 15 April 1941. At the time, the city had a population of approximately 85,000, including around 12,000 Jewish residents. Of these, an estimated 85.5 per cent were

9 Uğur Ümit Üngör, "Perpetration as a Process: A Historical-Sociological Model", in *Perpetrators of International Crimes*, ed. Alette Smeulers, Maartje Weerdesteijn and Barbora Holá (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 124.

10 Üngör, "Perpetration as a Process", 117.

11 Straus, *The Order of Genocide,* 5.

12 Carl Bethke, *(K)eine gemeinsame Sprache? Aspekte deutsch-jüdischer Beziehungsgeschichte in Slawonien, 1900–1945* (Berlin: Lit, 2013), 316–317.

13 Marija Vulesica. "Holocaust Research in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. An Inventory", *Südosteuropa* 65, no. 2 (2017): 274.

Sephardic Jews, while the remaining 14.5 per cent were Ashkenazi.[14] On 16 April 1941, a pogrom was initiated by the local German military authorities, with participation from segments of the non-Jewish population of Sarajevo. Although no Jewish casualties were reported, the violence was directed primarily at Jewish religious and cultural institutions.[15]

The Ustaša regime was initially slow to consolidate its authority in Sarajevo. During the interwar period, the movement had garnered minimal support among the city's Croat population. Nevertheless, in pursuit of their objective to establish a Greater Croatia, the Ustaša leadership secured Axis approval to incorporate Bosnia and Herzegovina into the recently proclaimed NDH. This annexation was formalized on 24 April 1941. That same day, a large Ustaša delegation – comprising approximately 800 individuals, primarily politicians and members of the Ustaša paramilitary – was dispatched to Sarajevo.[16] Many of these individuals would later assume key administrative roles within the city. The new Ustaša elite were assigned two immediate objectives: to consolidate the regime's control over Sarajevo and to purge Jews and Serbs from the state administration, with the ultimate goal of removing them from all aspects of public life.[17]

In order to consolidate their authority not only in Sarajevo but throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ustaša regime sought to secure the support of the region's Muslim population for the NDH. As part of a broader strategy to present Muslims as an integral component of the Croatian national body, Ante Pavelić, the leader of the NDH, appointed several Muslims to prominent positions within the newly formed government on 16 April 1941.[18] According to Nada Kisić Kolanović, Muslims comprised more than a third of the government cabinet, and were thus disproportionately overrepresented in the government. However, they remained markedly underrepresented in the upper echelons of power, particularly among military generals and directors of state and party institutions.[19]

Bosnian Muslims were not unified in their attitudes toward the Ustaša movement and the newly established Croatian state.[20] At the outbreak of war in Yugoslavia, some Muslims held out hope that Bosnia and Herzegovina might gain autonomy under German occupation, thereby preserving a degree of political agency. In the immediate aftermath of the German military's entry into Bosnia and Herzegovina, the region existed in an information vacuum, with the future political status of the territory remaining uncertain. Various ethnic groups attempted to capitalise on this ambiguity to assert local authority. In Bijeljina, for instance, segments of the local Volksdeutsche community, along with some Muslims, removed Croatian flags in the belief that they would administer the town independently and prevent its incorpora-

14 Josip Albahari Čučo, "KPJ i pogrom nad Jevrejima", in *Sarajevo u revoluciji: Komunistička partija Jugoslavije u pripremama i organizaciji ustanka*, vol. 2 (Sarajevo: Istorijski arhiv Sarajevo, 1977), 677.

15 Friedman, "Contemporary Responses to the Holocaust in Bosnia and Herzegovina", 85–86.

16 Emily Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941–1945: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Hitler's Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 63.

17 Vladimir Dedijer and Antun Miletić, ed., *Genocid nad Muslimanima 1941–1945: zbornik dokumenata i svjedočenja* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1990), 52–53.

18 Marko Attila Hoare. *The Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War: A History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15.

19 Nada Kisić-Kolanović, "Muslimanska inteligencija i islam u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj", *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 36, no. 3 (2004): 906.

20 Yeshayahu Jelinek, "Bosnia-Herzegovina at War: Relations Between Moslems and Non-Moslems", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5, no. 3 (1990): 282; Xavier Bougarel, "The Muslim Resolutions of 1941: Between Moral Courage and Political Impotence", in *The Muslim Resolutions: Bosniak Responses to World War Two Atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Sarajevo and Winchester, VA: Institute for Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks and Center for Islam in the Contemporary World at Shenandoah University, 2021), 135–136.

tion into the NDH. Following the formal proclamation of the NDH, a group of politicians – comprising Muslims, Serbs, and Croats – submitted a memorandum to the German military authorities, petitioning for Bosnia and Herzegovina to be placed under direct German military administration rather than being integrated into the Croatian state.[21]

Among Muslim elites, the pro-Croatian faction associated with the Muslim Organisation (*Muslimanska organizacija*, MO) initially emerged as the most vocal supporters of the NDH. In contrast, representatives of the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation (*Jugoslavenska muslimanska organizacija*, JMO) – which had previously cooperated with various Serbian-led governing parties during the interwar period – were initially hesitant to endorse the Ustaša regime. Nevertheless, over time, segments of the JMO leadership also began to collaborate with the Ustaša authorities. Historian Xavier Bougarel attributes this political shift to a longstanding pattern in Muslim political behaviour: a pragmatic alignment with dominant centres of power in exchange for security assurances and the preservation of religious autonomy.[22] In this context, Ustaša officials sought to win over Muslim support by pledging improvements to the community's social, political, and religious standing under the new regime.[23]

As for the Muslim religious elites, they too initially welcomed the establishment of the NDH. Fehim Spaho, the reis-ul-ulema (head of the Islamic community), held a speech at the great mosque in Sarajevo on 11 May 1941, in which he complimented the Ustaša regime for organising the state without much bloodshed. In his speech he pointed out that

> [t]he Independent State of Croatia has been born and has begun to live. We Muslims have greeted it with all our hearts, bearing in mind that we are entering it as citizens with equal rights and strongly believing that no injustice will be committed against any Muslim.[24]

Various Ustaša policies, however, quickly started to cause discontent among the Muslim elites. Several Muslim dignitaries repeatedly expressed their concern that Muslims were discriminated against in comparison to Catholics. Already in early May 1941, Reis-ul-ulema Fehim Spaho complained to the Ustaša authorities, decrying that Muslim state officials were being fired from, instead of rewarded with, existing administrative positions, a development that marked a radical departure from the upward social mobility the regime had promised the Muslim community.[25]

Further tensions between the authorities of the NDH and the Islamic Religious Community revolved around the demands for religious autonomy, which went against the grain of the totalitarian and secular nature of the Ustaša regime. The Ustaša commissioner for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hakija Hadžić, himself a Muslim, complained to the elites in Zagreb that some Muslim newspapers failed to show sufficient political support for the NDH. Hadžić implied that the Muslim leadership,

21 According to historian Marko Attila Hoare, the initiative for this proposal came from JMO Muslim leaders Hadžihasanović, Husein Kadić, and Asim Šeremet. The Serbian signatories were Milan Božić, Vojislav Besarović, Dušan Jeftanović, and Milan Jojkić. Croatian signatories included Luka Čabrajić and, possibly, Vjekoslav Jelavić. The Serbian signatories, such as Božić, Besarović, and Jeftanović, were quickly arrested afterwards and all of them were later executed. Enver Redžić, *Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Second World War* (London and New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 178.

22 Bougarel, *Islam and Nationhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 55–56.

23 Maurer, "On Reading the Muslim Resolutions", 36.

24 Bougarel, *Islam and Nationhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 56.

25 Reis-ul-ulema in Sarajevo to Hakija Hadžić, on 8 May 1941, HM BiH, fond NDH, box 1, file 1131, document number 738/1941.

headed by Spaho, was tainted by its past cooperation with the Yugoslav regime.[26] The conflict between Hadžić and Spaho further escalated in the coming days when the former ignored the autonomy of the Islamic Religious Community and interfered with its work.[27] These were only the initial conflicts that derived from the Muslim agenda of increased religious and political autonomy, on the one hand, and an aggressively nationalising, secular, totalitarian, and fascist regime, on the other hand.

Perhaps the greatest concern of the Muslim community not only in Sarajevo, but in the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was the fear that the Ustašas would eventually turn against them, once the Serbs and Jews had been dealt with. Despite the proclaimed tolerance and inclusion of Muslims, there was a growing fear that ethnic homogenisation would be followed by a religious, Catholic, homogenisation.[28]

Muslims in Sarajevo – and more broadly across Bosnia and Herzegovina – were particularly alarmed by the rapid onset of political persecution, which began as early as late April 1941. Among the first individuals arrested were Bishop Petar Zimonjić, head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Sarajevo; Šefkija Behmen, a former delegate of the JMO who identified as a Serb; and Šime Jurišić, a pro-Yugoslav Croatian lawyer.[29] These early arrests targeted prominent ideological opponents of the Ustaša regime, encompassing members of all three major ethnic groups in the city. The detentions sparked widespread outrage, particularly in response to Zimonjić's arrest, as he was a highly respected figure across communal lines. According to contemporary accounts, a delegation – primarily comprising Catholic Croats – approached Archbishop Ivan Šarić of the Catholic Church in Sarajevo to request his intervention on Zimonjić's behalf. However, Šarić declined, claiming that he too risked arrest if he became involved.[30]

In June 1941, Zimonjić was murdered by Ustaša forces.[31] According to an Ustaša official in Sarajevo, the arrest and execution of Zimonjić were carried out on direct orders from Minister of the Interior Andrija Artuković, one of the principal architects of the NDH's genocidal policies. The official noted that the directive had to originate from the central government, as "no one in Sarajevo would dare to arrest" Zimonjić due to the potential for significant political backlash.[32] This incident reflects a broader pattern throughout 1941, in which state security institutions at the national level routinely intervened in local affairs, revealing underlying tensions and a lack of trust between central authorities and regional elites.

The early wave of individual arrests and assassinations in Sarajevo quickly escalated into a systematic campaign of discrimination and persecution targeting Jews and Serbs. Bosnia and Herzegovina was designated as one of the key regions for the aggressive implementation of the Ustaša regime's genocidal policies. In June 1941,

26 NDH Commissioners in Sarajevo to Doglavnik Mile Budak, document issued on 25 July 1941, document number 2343/41 Historijski Muzej BiH, fond NDH, box 4, file 1711.

27 Reis-Ul-Ulema to Poglavnik's Commissioners on 29 July 1941, HM BiH, fond NDH, box 4, document number 96/41.

28 Jelinek, "Bosnia-Herzegovina at War: Relations Between Moslems and Non-Moslems", 282.

29 Testimony of Salihbegović Avdo given to County Court in Sarajevo on 8 January 1953, HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128, 1.

30 Testimony of Pavičić Ivan given to County Court in Sarajevo on 15 January 1953, HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

31 There are conflicting reports as to what happened with Zimonjić: according to Milan Radeka, he was taken to Kerestinec, where he was murdered. Testimony of Milan Radeka given to District Court in Karlovac, 28 August 1951, HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

32 Testimony of Mesic Zlatko given to County Court in Zenica on 14 August 1951, 3, HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 129.

Artuković NDH, reportedly declared that "Bosnia is Croatian, it always was, and it always will be Croatian. You should know that streams of blood will flow through Bosnia".[33] When some Muslim officials expressed concern that the indiscriminate violence against Serbs could provoke a rebellion, thereby endangering both Muslim and Catholic communities, Artuković dismissed their warnings. He argued that the most effective way to prevent an uprising was to eliminate the Serb population entirely, urging local Muslims and Catholics to participate actively in the mass killings. His genocidal intent was made explicit when he reportedly concluded: "[n]othing will remain of this evil kin, born or unborn – it will all be eliminated".[34]

In Bosnia and Herzegovina broadly, and in Sarajevo specifically, these policies aimed to radically transform the region's historically multiethnic character. The Ustaša regime viewed ethnic homogenisation as an urgent political imperative, necessary to resolve what it considered to be the contested and unstable status of the region. By carrying out their genocidal campaign, the regime sought to establish unchallenged Croatian national and political dominance and to recast Bosnia and Herzegovina as the ideological and territorial heartland of the NDH.

The Ustaša regime's genocidal intent was not directed solely outward – against the designated "Others", such as Serbs, Jews, and Roma – but also functioned as a tool for forging internal cohesion among disparate segments of the population. Beyond its destructive aims, the genocide was envisioned by some within the regime as a unifying, nation-building project. In this view, the shared participation in mass violence would transcend prior political, religious, and ethnic divisions, facilitating the creation of a homogenised national identity – a so-called "New Man" aligned with Ustaša ideology. One pro-Ustaša official from Sarajevo articulated this logic in a letter to Pavelić, recommending that animosity toward Serbs and Jews be "carefully and methodically directed" as a means of uniting Muslims and Catholic Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina under the Ustaša banner, adding that

> [t]he extermination [*iztrieblјenje*] of Jews and Serbs in Bosnia would build brotherhood and trust among Muslims and Catholics […]. Bosnia, which had been stuck in backwardness because of its [historical] torment, would move towards the path of nationalisation, Europeanisation, and prosperity [after the extermination of Jews and Serbs has been completed].[35]

Accordingly, antisemitism was supposed to serve the purpose of nation-building by expediating the process of the Croatisation of Bosnian Muslims. However, both the Catholic and Islamic leadership seemed to initially reject the notion of racial antisemitism. Their antisemitism relied on previously nurtured anti-Jewish tropes such as economic, religious, and socio-cultural arguments. For example, the Catholic Weekly (*Katolički tjednik*), a mouthpiece of the Catholic Church under the control of Ivan Šarić, wrote in May 1941 that

> [t]he Jews, who have led Europe and the whole world toward disaster – religious, moral, cultural and economic disaster – they have appetite for nothing less than the whole world … Satan himself aided them in the invention of Socialism and Communism … We Catholics are not put in charge of the persecution of the Jews. This does not suit us. We do not wish any kind of inhumanity. We do not suggest draconian measures […]. [But] there is a

33 Testimony of Šefkija Behmen given to County Court in Jajce on 7 July 1952, HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

34 Testimony of Muftić Omer given to County Court in Zenica on 29 June 1951, 1, HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 129.

35 Petar Pavić, "Problem Bosne", Zagreb, September 1941, ABiH, ZKUZ, box 7, file 181.

> limit to love. The movement for liberation of the world from Jews is a movement for the renewal of human dignity. Omniscient and omnipotent God stands behind this defense, behind this movement.[36]

Despite these antisemitic attitudes, and in defiance of the race laws issued by the Ustaša regime in Zagreb, the local clergy members in Sarajevo started to immediately convert Jews to Catholicism. For example, Božidar Bralo, a Catholic priest and one of the highest Ustaša functionaries in Bosnia and Herzegovina, personally oversaw the conversion of more than a thousand Sarajevo Jews to Catholicism.[37]

The Croatian Catholic clergy likely hoped to negotiate more favourable treatment for Jews who had converted to Catholicism, and accordingly petitioned the central authorities in Zagreb to ease the implementation of antisemitic measures against such individuals.[38] Following the establishment of the NDH, more than 500 Sarajevo Jews reportedly converted to Islam, while estimates suggest that between 1,400 and 3,800 converted to Catholicism.[39] The lower number of conversions to Islam was likely influenced by the perception that the Catholic Church – and its affiliated institutions – held greater political influence and could therefore offer more effective protection. This surge in conversions to Catholicism generated concern among Muslim leaders, who viewed it as both a demographic threat and a reflection of unequal treatment. In September 1941, the highest Muslim religious authority in the NDH, the Reis-ul-ulema, addressed a formal complaint to the NDH government, asserting that Serb and Jewish converts to Catholicism were granted preferential treatment – often spared arrest and deportation – while those who embraced Islam were not afforded the same protection. These concerns were exacerbated by widespread rumours that, once the "Serbian" and "Jewish questions" were resolved, the regime would move toward the Catholicisation of Muslims within the NDH.[40]

The efforts to convert Jews to either Catholicism or Islam provoked a firm response from the Ustaša regime, which reiterated its view that Jewish identity was defined racially rather than religiously, and therefore could not be altered through conversion. In October 1941, the regime formally prohibited all such conversions. Paradoxically, the Ustaša campaign of antisemitism generated unintended consequences: instead of fostering unity, it deepened rivalries between Sarajevo's Muslim and Catholic religious communities. While some conversions may have been motivated by ethical or humanitarian concerns, they were widely perceived as having been instrumentalised for political purposes. At the heart of the matter was a broader anxiety over the future distribution of political power in Sarajevo. If, as envisioned by Ustaša ideologues, Serbs and Jews were to be entirely eliminated from the NDH, the city's demographic and political landscape would be left to Muslims and Catholics alone. Many Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina viewed this scenario with unease, fearing that it would leave them as an isolated religious minority within an overwhelmingly Catholic state.[41] Consequently, the wave of Jewish conversions to Catholicism in Sarajevo was interpreted by some Muslim leaders as a strategic effort to bolster the Catholic community's numbers and thereby strengthen its future political dominance in the city.

36 As quoted in Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 455.
37 Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941–1945*, 94–95.
38 Sarajevo chief of police to Ministry of Interior of NDH, document dated 21 June 1941, HR-HDA-223, MUP NDH, box 101.
39 Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941–1945*, 93.
40 Dedijer and Miletić, 38–39.
41 Maurer, "On Reading the Muslim Resolutions", 34.

Beyond conversions, a similar process of competition between the two communities was taking place regarding "Aryanisation" – the confiscation and redistribution of Jewish property in Sarajevo. When the NDH was established, Jews in Sarajevo owned around 400 stores, 300 workshops, and three large industrial complexes which employed more than 100 workers. In May 1941, all of these were seized by the Ustašas, who placed 303 commissioners in Jewish-owned business in order to manage them.[42] On 1 July 1941, the NDH regime formed the State Directorate for Economic Renewal (*Državno ravnateljstvo za ponovu*), whose function was to manage and redistribute the confiscated property of Serbs and Jews. The local office for Economic Renewal immediately became a battleground for the discussions on which property should be given to Catholics and which to Muslims. As with the conversions, the Muslim elite feared that Catholics would dominate the redistributive process. This would in effect create a competitive edge for the Catholic community, enabling it to cultivate a future city elite faster than the Muslim community could.[43]

Tensions between Muslims and Catholics in Bosnia and Herzegovina were further exacerbated by the sharp deterioration of the security situation beginning in mid-1941. In addition to the deportation of the Serbian political and economic elites from urban centres, the Ustaša regime launched a brutal campaign of mass violence in rural areas. According to the historian Korb, by the end of the summer of 1941, over 100,000 Serbs had been killed throughout the NDH.[44] This widespread persecution sparked a large-scale armed uprising, which began in eastern Herzegovina in late June 1941 and rapidly spread to other regions of the NDH. The resistance movement was divided between the Serbian nationalist Chetniks and the communist-led Partisans.[45] In eastern Bosnia, the Chetniks emerged as a dominant force and carried out numerous atrocities against Muslim civilians, often as acts of retribution for prior Ustaša violence or as part of a broader ideological agenda to create ethnically homogeneous Serb territories.[46]

The escalation of Chetnik violence, coupled with the NDH's inability or unwillingness to protect Muslim populations in the region, led to a massive displacement crisis. Waves of Muslim refugees fled toward Sarajevo and other relatively safer areas. Over the course of the war, the NDH hosted more than 210,000 Muslim refugees.[47] Providing shelter, food, and basic services to this displaced population posed a serious challenge, particularly for local authorities, who were already operating under strained and limited resources.

Rather than fulfilling promises of increased political representation, upward social mobility, and economic and political stability, the Ustaša regime precipitated a series of profound crises in Sarajevo. These failures led to growing disillusionment and alienation among segments of the Muslim elite as well as the broader population, who came to view the Ustašas as fundamentally incapable of ensuring even the most basic conditions of governance, including public security and economic order.

42 Donia, *Sarajevo*, 201.

43 Testimony of Salihbegović Avdo given to County Court in Sarajevo on 8 January 1953, 4, HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

44 Korb, "Understanding Ustaša Violence", 5.

45 For more details about this topic in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, see, for example, Marko Attila Hoare, *Genocide and Resistance in Hitler's Bosnia: The Partisans and the Chetniks, 1941–1943* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

46 For more information, see Jozo Tomasevich. *The Chetniks* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975). See also Zdravko Dizdar, *Četnički zločini u Bosni i Hercegovini: 1941.–1945.* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2002).

47 Hoare, *The Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War*, 118.

Much of this crisis was self-inflicted: the regime's campaign of ethnic homogenisation – which entailed the systematic exclusion and persecution of Serbs and Jews – resulted in the dismissal of a significant portion of Sarajevo's skilled professional class. The consequent degradation of administrative capacity undermined local governance and contributed to mounting dysfunction. Compounding these issues was the increasing interference from central authorities in Zagreb, who pressured local officials to escalate the campaign of ethnic cleansing. These directives not only deepened local instability but also intensified internal divisions and rivalries within the Sarajevo-based Ustaša leadership.

Orders From Above and Actions from Below: Genocidal Decision-Making in Sarajevo

Like all other security forces in the NDH, the police apparatus in Sarajevo received an order from Zagreb on 23 July 1941 which called for the urgent imprisonment of all Jews and Serbs "who are known as communists" and their deportation to concentration camps.[48] Police officials in Sarajevo interpreted this order literally, arresting those who were suspected of being communists without targeting the Jewish or Serbian community in toto.[49] The initial order of 23 July confused some police officials in the NDH. It was unclear what kind of evidence was required to justify deportations of communist suspects. Should the officials follow existing legal proceedings, or did this order override them? Moreover, for many police officials, it was unclear if Jews who had converted to Catholicism, Islam, or other religions should be deported or not. Facing many questions related to the ambiguity of the order, the main security office, RAVSIGUR (*Ravnateljstvo za javni red i sigurnost*, Directorate for Public Order and Security), sent a clarification of this order on 30 July 1941. It stressed that Jews and Serbs who are "suspicious of communism" were to be deported to the concentration camps regardless of whether they had converted to any other religion. More importantly, it was explicitly permitted to continue with these deportations "even if there is no evidence" to justify the arrests.[50]

These developments effectively dismantled any remaining legal constraints that might have impeded the mass deportations. Following the clarifying directives issued by RAVSIGUR, police officers and Ustaša security personnel were granted a degree of autonomy in carrying out deportations as they saw fit. As a result, the scope and intensity of arrests and deportations became highly dependent on the initiative, ideological zeal, and autonomy of local actors. Although the Ustaša leadership at the national level clearly signalled its broader objective of ethnically cleansing the NDH – particularly through the systematic removal of Serbs and Jews to Ustaša-run concentration camps – initially there was no unified, centrally coordinated plan to implement this policy across all regions. Instead, deportation practices unfolded in a decentralised manner, with state officials, local gendarmes, and Ustaša functionaries expected to "work toward the leader" by interpreting and executing genocidal aims

48 Directorate of the Ustaša police of NDH to all Regional Prefectures [velike župe] and to Ustaša Commissioner for Bosnia and Herzegovina [Jure] Francetić, issued on 23 July 1941, Vukčević, *Zločini na jugoslovenskim prostorima u prvom i drugom svetskom ratu – zbornik dokumenata*, 366.

49 Directorate of the Police in Sarajevo to Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] Vrhbosna, 25 July 1941, HM, fond NDH, box 4, document number 1030/41.

50 Main Security Office of the NDH (RAVSIGUR) to all Regional Prefectures [velike župe], 30 July 1941, Vukčević, 414.

through their own judgment and actions.[51] This is evidenced by significant variation in the actions taken by perpetrators at the meso- and micro-levels, including differences in the scope of deportations, the categories of individuals targeted, and the timing and pace with which these measures were carried out across the NDH.

After receiving the July orders issued by the main security office, in the Bosnian town of Bijeljina, the Ustašas displayed a particular radical comportment. On 1 August 1941, they arrested all Jewish men. Arrests of women and children followed the next day. In the first two days of August 1941 alone, approximately 350 people were deported to the concentration camps. In a report from 9 August 1941, the local Ustaša authorities in Bijeljina boasted that they have "thoroughly cleansed all the kikes [Ćifuti]. There are only two [Jews] remaining in our district, both are aged between 70–80, and they are blind."[52]

Nevertheless, the radical approach which targeted all Jews for deportation, such as the case in Bijeljina, was not repeated everywhere in the NDH. In certain cases, the deportations were highly gendered, and only men were arrested while women and children were left in place for the time being, as was the case in the city of Križevci in the north of Croatia.[53] In other cases, perpetrators targeted the Jewish youth which they found as vitally important, as was the case in Osijek during the summer of 1941, while the rest of the Jewish community was largely left in place until the second wave of deportations in the summer of 1942.[54]

Unlike many other places across the NDH, no mass deportations in Sarajevo took place following the receipt of the July orders. The regional prefect (*veliki župan*) immediately passed down the orders through the chain of command. However, when the 30 July clarification order was issued to all the gendarme stations in Sarajevo and its surroundings, it simply stated "arrest all communists regardless of their religion".[55] This significantly altered the original intent of the order. Instead of carrying out arrests and deportations in an indiscriminate manner – that is the wholesale targeting of Jews and Serbs – the local police in Sarajevo continued to arrest and deport Jews and Serbs on an individual basis.[56]

Nevertheless, officials in Sarajevo were not per se averse to radical measures. This was shown in the aftermath of a Partisan sabotage action. On 29 July 1941, a bomb was planted in the Sarajevo railway works by the resistance. It was supposed to signal the beginning of an uprising in Sarajevo and potentially trigger the uprising against the Ustaša regime in Sarajevo. As an immediate response to this action, the local Ustašas ordered the mass shooting of approximately fifty hostages who were already kept in prison, mostly Serbs. However, the gendarmes who were given the order to implement the mass shooting on 31 July simply refused to execute the prisoners. The

51 For the concept of "working towards the leader", see Ian Kershaw, "'Working Towards the Führer.' Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship", *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 2 (1993): 103–118.

52 Ustaša Logor in Bijeljina to Main Ustaša Headquarters in Zagreb, 9 August 1941, document number 342/41. HM BiH, UNS, box 1, file 25, 2; testimony of Holocaust survivor Rahela Altaras, available in Aleksandar Gaon, *Mi smo preživeli … Jevreji o Holokaustu* (Belgrade: Jevrejski istorijski muzej, Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 2001), 19.

53 Report of the District Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators in Bjelovar, 23 September 1945, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2943, frame number 282.

54 Lovro Kralj, "A Microcosmos of Fascism in the Age of Genocide: German Nazis, Croatian Ustašas, and the Hungarian Arrow Cross in the City of Osijek", *S:I.M.O.N.: Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation.* 9, no 2 (2022): 67–89.

55 Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] Vrhbosna to District Authority in Sarajevo, 31 July 1941, HM BiH, fond NDH, box 4, file 2656, document number V.T. 47/41.

56 Vukčević, *Zločini na Jugoslovenskim prostorima u prvom i drugom svetskom ratu – zbornik dokumenata*, 431–432.

commander of the gendarmes sought clarification from his superiors, asking whether the gendarmes were obliged to follow orders issued by the Ustašas and take part in mass executions.[57] This case is significant because it demonstrates that the security forces in the NDH were not a monolithic entity and that some members still operated under the belief that punishment should correspond to individual guilt.

Even though Sarajevo's own police investigation showed that the sabotage was conducted by four non-Jewish resistance members,[58] the local Ustaša security officials held a meeting about the railway sabotage and concluded that several Jews had to be included in a retaliatory shooting. Since the minister of interior, Artuković, was supposed to visit Sarajevo in the coming days, the inclusion of Jews in mass shootings would demonstrate to the elite in Zagreb that Sarajevo was indeed working on the solution to the "Jewish question". The execution of Jews also had the task of demonstrating to the local population that Jews were entangled with communism, thereby legitimising the antisemitic agenda of the Ustaša ideology and the regime's anti-Jewish policies. On 1 August 1941, ten prominent Jewish citizens of Sarajevo were arrested and shot together with ten Serbs at the outskirts of Sarajevo.[59] This was the first case of a mass shooting of Jews in Sarajevo since the establishment of the NDH. News about it reached the population the following day when the Ustaša newspapers publicised the massacre and issued a warning that further executions would follow if the security situation deteriorated further in the city. This sent shockwaves throughout the Sarajevo Jewish community. Many Jews started to plan their escape from the city in an effort to reach the Italian occupation zone, which they considered to be a safe haven in comparison to remaining in Sarajevo. The mass shootings are important because they constituted an autonomous attempt by the local Ustašas to solve two different issues. The first was to demonstrate their own contribution to anti-Jewish policies. The second was how to deter further Partisan activities.

According to some reports, even though they were antisemitic, the leaders of the city's police were not prone to launch large scale deportations of Jews on their own in at this stage.[60] Up until this point, at the end of the summer of 1941, they had primarily conducted antisemitic actions in response to specific events, such as Artuković's visit and the Partisan railroad sabotage. The local Ustaša officials did not only react to the orders they received from the top, but they also discussed and designed their own plans for the possible solution to the "Jewish question" locally. The numerous attempts by Jews to leave the city gave rise to new ideas and proposals. Srećko Bujas, the Ustaša-installed commissioner who supervised the work of the Jewish Sephardic Religious Community, suggested to the chief of police, Branko Điković, that perhaps a mass migration of Jews would be useful for the city. He employed the political language of antisemitism, which was familiar to the Ustašas, and recommended selling legally issued travel papers to Jews who wanted to emigrate. Bujas argued that Jews were emigrating anyway by bribing Ustaša officials and that such a step would enable a more effective seizure of money from Sarajevo Jews. Bujas also suggested that if

57 Telegram from 4th Gendarme Regiment to Gendarme Central Command sent on 31 July 1941, Vukčević, *Zločini na Jugoslovenskim prostorima u prvom i drugom svetskom ratu – zbornik dokumenata*, 418.

58 Report of Directorate of the Sarajevo Police to Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] Vrhbosna – Sarajevo, 24 September 1941, HM BiH, Fond NDH, box 6, file 2175.

59 Report of Srećko Bujas, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ GUZ. Br. 2235/2/1-45, microfilm roll 2942, frame number 202, 258; Milan Bulajić, *Ustaški zločin genocida i suđenje Andriji Artukoviću 1986. godine*, vol. 1 (Belgrade: Izadavačka radna organizacija "Rad", 1988), 752.

60 Report of Srećko Bujas, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ GUZ. Br. 2235/2/1-45, microfilm roll 2942, frame number 250; 255.

Jews emigrated collectively, they would have to leave all their property behind. In such a way, the city would benefit financially and could use their property for other purposes. The chief of Sarajevo police was intrigued by this suggestion but ultimately refused it with the excuse that this question was out of his jurisdiction.[61]

The implementation of the Holocaust in Sarajevo was profoundly tied to the interaction between local Croatian and Muslim actors on the ground. On 5 August 1941, the minister of interior, Artuković, arrived in Sarajevo to address several important issues which troubled the Ustaša elite in Zagreb. Artuković primarily intended to solve severe tensions between different powerholders in Sarajevo. Most importantly, his main desideratum was to alleviate the conflict between Muslims and Catholic Croats since the government in Zagreb "believed that the alliance with Croats of Islamic religion was endangered".[62] In order to win Muslims over, Artuković held several meetings with Muslim officials and representatives. During one of these meetings, Artuković stressed that "Jews had to be eliminated because they hold the main economic levers in their hands". He tried to explain to the Sarajevan Muslim elite why the solution of the "Jewish question" was one of the main aims of the government and demanded that antisemitic persecution should be radically implemented in Sarajevo as soon as possible.[63] The leading Ustašas in Sarajevo, such as the Ustaša commissioner Jure Francetić and his deputy Drago Jilek, agreed with Artuković. They told him that all the difficulties in Sarajevo could be resolved if Jews were to be removed from the city.[64]

In their meetings with Artuković, the Muslim leadership in Bosnia and Herzegovina tried to intervene on behalf of the Roma who had converted to Islam. On the one hand, the efforts to exclude the Muslim Roma from the persecution was an attempt to protect their religious community. On the other hand, the Muslim elite feared that the arbitrary persecution of various groups could potentially result in Muslims becoming a target of the Ustaša regime in the future.[65] In order to appease the Muslim elite, Artuković was ready to make a compromise. To resolve this issue and secure the loyalty of the Bosnian Muslim elite, he ordered the establishment of a committee tasked with creating a pseudoscientific explanation for the exclusion of Bosnian Roma Muslims from the race laws. Since all members of this newly formed committee were Sarajevo Muslims, the outcome of their deliberations was predictable. The committee concluded that Roma Muslims belonged to the "Indo-European race" since they originated from northwestern India. The committee members also concluded that Roma spoke the Croatian language and that they were integrated into the society. Following the conclusions of the committee, and after having returned to Zagreb from his visit to Sarajevo, Artuković issued a decree on 30 August 1941 stipulating that Muslim Roma were to be exempt from any form of persecution.[66] The case of the Muslim elite's intervention on behalf of the Roma demonstrates that, despite the rigidity of race laws in NDH, the racial categories could still be negotiated when the political benefits of such actions outweighed the costs.

61 Ibid., frame number 258.

62 Testimony of Kurbegović Hamid given to County Court in Sarajevo 7 July 1952, HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128. See also Bulajić, *Ustaški zločin genocida i suđenje Andriji Artukoviću 1986. godine*, 1:757.

63 Testimony of Hasan Hadžiosmanović, Ustaša Logornik in Sarajevo, given to County Court in Zenica on 28 June 1952, HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

64 Report of Srećko Bujas, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ GUZ. Br. 2235/2/1-45, microfilm roll 2942, frame number 259.

65 Alexander Korb, "Ustaša Mass Violence Against Gypsies in Croatia, 1941–1942", in *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma: Reassessment and Commemoration* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), 81.

66 Bulajić, *Ustaški zločin genocida i suđenje Andriji Artukoviću 1986. godine*, 1:758–59.

During his stay in Sarajevo, Artuković had also reprimanded the local Ustaša leadership for their lack of proactivity in cleansing the city of Serbian influence.[67] The first chief of police in Sarajevo, Josip Zubić, was forced to resign because he did not implement the genocidal policies against the Serbs energetically enough.[68] Reflecting on the previous situation in Sarajevo during 1942, Artuković was enraged that Sarajevo still had not been "cleansed" of Serbs. He explicitly brought up Francetić, asking: "[w]hy is Jure Francetić not executing the orders I gave him? I do not want any Serbs in eastern Bosnia, nor in Croatia in general. I gave orders to eliminate their bishop [Petar Zimonjić]. Thus, I don't want any Serbs to remain."[69]

As Artuković desired, the massacres against Serbs had begun in certain regions of the NDH already in April 1941.[70] However, Sarajevo was another aberration in this regard. While Serbs in Sarajevo were subjected to harsh discrimination and violence, the local Ustaša authorities authorised several exemptions from the persecution of the local Serbs. Authorities in Sarajevo gave more urgency to pragmatism, foreseeing that a too swift persecution of Serbs would result in the collapse of the local administration, economy, and the supply chain due to the embeddedness of Serbs in the administrative and economic fabric of the city. Despite several orders from the central authorities in Zagreb to dismiss Serbs and Jews from all state positions, almost 25 per cent of all employees in the municipality of Sarajevo remained Orthodox Serbs until November 1941.[71]

Some Ustaša members from Sarajevo, such as Dragutin Kamber, wrote to Pavelić, arguing that the mass murder of Serbs in the countryside could prove to be disastrous. Kamber held anti-Serb attitudes himself. He argued that "Serbs are collectively and individually guilty, and they are an irreconcilable enemy of our state and its existence". However, Kamber pointed out that the "unreasonable and unlawful murder of Serbs has to be stopped" because it would cause a powerful uprising which the Ustašas would be unable to contain. Instead, Kamber supported the idea that Serbs should be resettled elsewhere. More specifically, he hoped for their mass deportations to Germany as a labour force. However, he concluded that

> I am not a supporter of the idea that Serbs should have equal rights while they are among us. Nor am I supporting the idea that they should stay among us for long. However, while they are still here, they should be second-class citizens, but still, there must be some laws that have to be respected and which cannot be broken as one saw fit. They cannot stand outside of the law.[72]

Despite such divergent opinions regarding the way the "Serbian question" was supposed to be solved, after Artuković's visit to Sarajevo in August 1941, the police started to take more active measures against the Serbs. On 11 August 1941, the police arrested all the Serbian Orthodox priests in Sarajevo, deporting them to a transit camp, from where they were supposed to be expelled to Serbia.[73] The arrests of Ser-

67 For example, he was angry with Jure Francetić because he did not order the destruction of a Serbian Orthodox Church in the city of Sarajevo. Bulajić, 1:757.

68 Testimony of Ćurčić Kosta given to District Court in Sarajevo on 6 August 1951, 1–2, HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 128.

69 Testimony of Mesic Zlatko given to County Court in Zenica on 14 August 1951, 3, HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo, box 129.

70 Korb, "Understanding Ustaša Violence", 5.

71 Emily Greble, "When Croatia Needed Serbs: Nationalism and Genocide in Sarajevo, 1941–1942", *Slavic Review* 68, no. 1 (2009): 127.

72 Dragutin Kamber to Ante Pavelić, 29 September 1942, Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine (ABiH), ZKURZ, Referati, box 7, file 173, 4.

73 Directorate of Police in Sarajevo to State Directorate for Economic Renewal, 12 August 1941, HM BiH, fond NDH, box 5, file 1849, document number 104.

bian priests, teachers, intellectuals, and anyone else who could be seen as potentially belonging to the "national elite", was a widespread policy in the first months of the NDH's existence. According to an agreement between the NDH and the Third Reich, Serbs with a "developed national consciousness" were to be deported to Serbia proper.[74]

The pressure to start with the deportations of Jews was building up not only from the Ustaša elite in Zagreb but from other institutions as well. On 7 August 1941, the local military command sent a report to the central authorities in Zagreb, stating that actions against Jews in Sarajevo were not implemented harshly enough. The heads of the security apparatus in Zagreb demanded an explanation from the regional authorities of the regional prefecture (*velika župa),*[75] asking why more active measures had not been taken. The office of the regional prefecture responded that some measures had been taken but tried to excuse itself by putting responsibility for the persecution of Serbs onto the police and other security agencies.[76]

The growing pressure for a radicalisation of the persecution occurred around the same time that the city of Sarajevo started to face a major housing crisis, which was initially caused by a massive inflow of Ustaša officials and security forces. Originally, the police in Sarajevo had 200 officers. However, in June 1941, the decision was made to hire an additional 800 men in order to strengthen the security apparatus,[77] but Sarajevo's chief of police, Branko Điković, was unable to ensure their accommodation. He first asked the regional prefecture if he could use the building of the Women's State Gymnasium, but his request was refused because it would have endangered the education of 1,600 students. After hearing about the issues with accommodating the newly hired policemen, the head of the RAVSIGUR, Eugen Dido Kvaternik, was surprised that the chief of the Sarajevo police had not simply requisitioned the buildings from Sarajevan Jews and Serbs for this purpose. Kvaternik quickly ordered that several buildings owned by Jews should be emptied and assigned to the police.[78]

Housing was also needed for the Ustaša Corps (*Ustaška vojnica*) units which were being formed in Sarajevo.[79] Francetić, the commander of this newly formed unit, ordered the first mass arrest of Jews on 1 September 1941. Virtually all Jews in the immediate centre of the city were arrested.[80] On 3 September 1941, the first transport with 324 Jews was taken to the Kruščica concentration camp and, on 9 September 1941, another transport of 331 Jews was taken to the same place.[81] According to the testimony of the Holocaust survivor, Jozef Alkalaj, he went to the police after these mass arrests in order to inquire about the fate of his brother who lived in the centre

74 Lovro Kralj, "The Evolution of Ustasha Mass Violence: Nation-Statism, Paramilitarism, Structure, and Agency in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941", in *Fascist Warfare, 1922–1945: Aggression, Occupation, Annihilation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 241–268.

75 Regional prefectures (*velike župe*), were the main regional-administrative units constituting the Independent State of Croatia.

76 Directorate of Ustaša Police of NDH to Directorate of Police in Sarajevo, 28 September 1941, HM BiH, fond NDH, box 6, file number 2187.

77 Directorate of Police in Sarajevo to Regional Prefect [veliki župan] of Vrhbosna, HM BiH, fond NDH, box 6, file number 2226, document number 25113/41.

78 Main Security Office of NDH to Directorate of Police in Sarajevo, HM BiH, box 6, file number 2226, document number 31.926/41.

79 Ministry of Interior of NDH's Order about the Accommodation of the Active Ustaša Battalion, 7 September 1941, HM BiH, box 6, file 2122, document number 670.

80 HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2942, frame number 261. See also Albahari Čučo, "KPJ i pogrom nad Jevrejima", 687. The report of Srećko Bujas, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ GUZ. Br. 2235/2/1-45, microfilm roll 2942, frame number 260.

81 Madžar, "Ljudske i materijalne žrtve Sarajeva u toku Drugog svjetskog rata", 652–653; Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941–1945. Žrtve genocida i učesnici Narodnooslobodilačkog rata*, 130; Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941–1945*, 111.

of the city, which was targeted by these deportations. Alkalaj managed to talk directly with the chief of Sarajevo police Branko Điković, who told him that the mass arrests were not conducted on his initiative and that he was simply following orders. Alkalaj got the impression that Điković tried to whitewash his responsibility and place all the blame on Jure Francetić.[82] The Ustaša commissioner who oversaw the activities of the Sephardic Jewish Religious Community similarly argued that Francetić personally told him that the first wave of deportations from Sarajevo, beginning in September, were conducted because Francetić needed additional housing for the members of his Black Legion Ustaša units.[83]

Entire families, including women and children, were imprisoned for a few days in Sarajevo, after which they were deported to the Kruščica concentration camp in the nearby town of Travnik. The Kruščica concentration camp was originally a detention site that was formed during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia at the end of 1940 to intern different political extremists, mainly the Croatian Ustašas and Serbian Ljotić supporters. The existing infrastructure was used by the Ustašas to form a concentration camp in July 1941. By the middle of September 1941, the camp already hosted 1,539 prisoners – most of them Jewish. This number included 780 Jewish deportees from Sarajevo, as well as 759 Jews who were deported from Zenica. The local Ustašas from nearby Travnik complained to the central authorities that they wanted to use Kruščica as a concentration camp for Jews and Serbs from Travnik and that current prisoners should be deported elsewhere because the camp had reached its maximum capacity. The leader of the Ustašas from Travnik wrote to the main security office of RAVSIGUR that

> a certain territory must be found where Jews from the entire country could be deported to and where they would be isolated from our people. On this territory, Jews should be guarded and supervised. In this way, we would cleanse our cities from the Jewish element.[84]

The Ustašas from Travnik were therefore demanding a more organised, systematic, and coordinated effort to solve the "Jewish question". Instead of local solutions, they demanded state-wide planning that would increase the concentration camp capacities. The main security office in Zagreb promised help in this matter, and the Ustašas in Travnik received instructions to close the Kruščica concentration camp and deport all the prisoners to the newly formed Jasenovac concentration camp, which would soon become the main death camp of the NDH. Jewish men from Kruščica were deported to the Jasenovac concentration camp on 5 October 1941, and women were deported on the next day to the newly formed Lobor concentration camp, which was created specifically as a camp for women and children.[85]

The first mass deportations of Jews from Sarajevo in September, therefore, included approximately six per cent of the entire Jewish population of Sarajevo, most of whom lived in a narrow area of the city centre. The police did not continue with the mass deportations from the rest of the city during this month. However, some Jews were reported to the police on made-up charges of being suspected of communism. Instead of immediate deportations in such cases, the police still conducted investiga-

82 Testimony of Holocaust survivor Jozef Alkalaj given to Sarajevo Commission for War Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators on 28 November 1945, ABiH – Sarajevo, fond ZKURZ, box Jevreji po mjestima, file Sarajevo – no. 16.

83 Report of Srećko Bujas, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ GUZ. Br. 2235/2/1-45, microfilm roll 2942, frame number 261.

84 Regional Prefect Nikola Tusun to Main Security Office of NDH (RAVSIGUR), 19 September 1941, as quoted in Čamil Kazazović, *Travnik u Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu* (Travnik: Naša riječ, 1969), 83–84.

85 Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941–1945*, 130–131.

tions to gather evidence. For example, the Holocaust survivor Jozef Alkalaj was arrested in September 1941 after an anonymous denunciation that claimed he was a communist. The police searched his apartment but did not find any compromising material. He was then taken to a police station and questioned. Alkalaj recounted that the questioning was not harsh and that "everything was done according to the law". Due to the lack of evidence, he was released from prison.[86]

Such investigations clearly ran contrary to the July 1941 orders, according to which any Jew or Serb suspicious of communism should be deported to a concentration camp immediately. The slowing pace of the deportations of Jews from Sarajevo was seen with suspicion by the main security office in Zagreb, and the Sarajevo chief of police was falling out of favour. Moreover, Điković was further suspicious because his brother was a suspected communist who allegedly supplied many Jews with forged travel documents which helped them escape to the Italian occupation zone.[87]

Radicalisation of the Persecution of Sarajevo Jews

Dissatisfied with the situation in Sarajevo, Kvaternik, the head of RAVSIGUR, demanded in September 1941 that more skilled police officials be sent to the police in Sarajevo to further coordinate security forces in the city. One of the suitable security officials was found in Ivan Tolj, a close associate of Andrija Artuković and one of the most radical mid-level organisers of deportations. Tolj was a Croat refugee from Subotica, which he had fled from after the Hungarian occupation of the city in April 1941. As a highly educated official, he quickly received a position in the developing NDH apparatus as the head of the district in Vinkovci, where he distinguished himself in coordinating the deportations of Serbs from Croatia to Serbia. After entering a conflict with the local ethnic Germans, he was forced to leave his position in Vinkovci and continued his career in Bijeljina, where he continued to coordinate the deportations of tens of thousands of Serbs, as well as Jews. Throughout this process, he developed a particularly close relationship with Artuković, the NDH's minister of interior, and acted as his protégé.[88]

Artuković himself expressed disappointment that the deportations of Jews did not continue throughout September and October 1941, complaining to Tolj that Điković, the then police chief in Sarajevo, had not made sufficient progress in his mandated mission to "Croatise" the city through the "destruction of all non-Croatian elements".[89] As Tolj's mission to remove "foreign elements" from Bijeljina foundered in September 1941 due to the refusal of the German military authorities to accept deportees in Serbia, Artuković decided that Tolj's initiative and expertise in deportations could be more effectively applied in Sarajevo.

86 Testimony of Holocaust survivor Jozef Alkalaj given to Sarajevo Commission for War Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators on 28 November 1945.

87 Džiković›s brother was Veljko Džiković. For his activities, see the testimony of Holocaust survivor Gonda Pinto Izrael in Aleksandar Gaon, *Mi smo preživeli … 3: Jevreji o Holokaustu*, vol. 3 (Belgrade: Jevrejski istorijski muzej, Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 2005), 67–68.

88 Lovro Kralj, "Becoming the Ustaša 'Deportation Expert'. Ivan Tolj and the Perpetration of Ethnic Cleansing in the Independent State of Croatia", in *Deported. Comparative Perspectives on Paths to Annihilation for Jewish Populations under Nazi German Control*, ed. Michaela Raggam-Blesch, Peter Black, and Marianne Windsperger (Vienna and Hamburg: New Academic Press, 2024), 161–186.

89 Testimony of Zlatko Mesić, personal secretary of Ante Vokić, given to County Court in Zenica, 14 August 1951, HR-HDA-421, box 129, 3.

Tolj received orders to go to Sarajevo at the beginning of October 1941 in order to assess the situation in the city. Soon after his arrival, Tolj reported that the existing security apparatus in Sarajevo in fact lacked both initiative and leadership.[90] Tolj's critique of the Sarajevo police confirmed Zagreb's suspicions regarding Điković, and he was forced to resign his position in Sarajevo and was ordered to move to Zagreb, where he was assigned to serve in the main security office of RAVSIGUR.[91] Tolj formally replaced him as chief of police in Sarajevo in November 1941 and quickly consolidated his authority in the city.[92] He introduced himself to local Ustaša officials, one of whom reported that everyone "immediately understood that he nurtures a demonic hatred towards Jews".[93]

On the evening of 20 October 1941, police rounded up Jewish men above the age of sixteen in various parts of the city, removing them from their apartments, loading them onto trucks, and bringing them to a local army barracks guarded by German military personnel.[94] This detention site was chosen because it was one of the few facilities in the city with sufficient capacity for the enormous number of deportees. Two days after the mass arrest, Tolj came in person to inspect the prisoners. Srećko Bujas, the Ustaša-installed commissioner for the Jewish Sephardic Religious Community in Sarajevo, tried to intervene on behalf of some of the arrested Sarajevan Jews, arguing that one could not really consider the sick and the elderly to be a threat to Sarajevo's security. Tolj responded, however, that sick and elderly Jews were "all actors who are only pretending they were ill". Only Jews married to "Aryans" were released due to laws protecting persons in "mixed marriages".[95] After six days of incarceration in Sarajevo, the Croat authorities deported 695 Jewish men in two transports to the Jasenovac concentration camp.[96]

Through his active and sustained engagement during the deportation operations, Tolj functioned as a critical intermediary not only between the macro- and meso-level structures of bureaucratic coordination, but the micro-level dynamics of violence as well. By embodying both the role of the desk-bound administrator and the operative actor in the field, he effectively collapsed the conventional distinction between planning and execution. This fusion of responsibilities not only facilitated the implementation of genocidal policies but also directly influenced the behaviour of direct perpetrators locally. In doing so, Tolj played a pivotal role in shaping the modalities of violence on the ground, thereby exerting a formative influence on how deportations were enacted on the ground.

Further arrests and deportations followed almost daily throughout the first half of November 1941.[97] It seems that Tolj's eagerness to deport all Jews from Sarajevo as swiftly as possible created significant logistical difficulties in Jasenovac, to where most of the deportees were sent. The camp administration intervened with the au-

90 Ivan Tolj to Ministry of Interior of NDH, 14 October 1941, Vukčević, *Zločini*, 813.
91 ABiH, fond Velika župa Vrhbosna, box 18, document number 6143-I-B-1941.
92 HR-HDA-223, MUP NDH, file 463 (Ivan Tolj).
93 Report of Srećko Bujas, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ GUZ. Br. 2235/2/1-45, microfilm roll 2942, frame number 268.
94 Report of Srećko Bujas, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ GUZ. Br. 2235/2/1-45, microfilm roll 2942, frame number 262.
95 Jews who married non-Jews were in principle exempted from deportation, but many of them were, nevertheless, killed. Moreover, legal "protection" depended on various factors, such as the actions of local Ustaša officials as well as the gender or ethnicity of their spouses. Jewish women in "mixed marriages" were considered to be more secure than Jewish men. Moreover, Jews married to Serbs were particularly vulnerable to persecution even though they too were in "mixed marriages". Goldstein and Goldstein, *The Holocaust in Croatia*, 2016, 325–329.
96 Albahari Čučo, "KPJ i pogrom nad Jevrejima", 688–689.
97 Avram Pinto and David Pinto, ed., *Dokumenti o stradanju Jevreja u logorima NDH* (Sarajevo: Jevrejska opština, 1972).

thorities in Zagreb and demanded deportations from Sarajevo be slowed down.[98] Tolj received direct orders from Zagreb to immediately stop all deportations to Jasenovac on 13 November 1941. Disregarding these orders, Tolj undertook the most ambitious roundup of Jews in Sarajevo up to that point. On Sunday morning, 16 November 1941, at 8 a.m., Croat police blocked off the main streets in Sarajevo and rounded up nearly 3,000 Jews – regardless of gender or age – in a single day, including even Jews who held locally issued documents (*žute legitimacije*) that supposedly exempted them from arrest.[99] The sheer scope of the roundup overwhelmed the space in the military barracks in Sarajevo and the German commander refused to provide guards for the prisoners due to a fear of epidemics.[100] Tolj solved this issue by turning two existing synagogues and another building owned by a Jewish social institution, La Benevolencija, into detention sites.[101] Imprisoned Jews were held in horrible conditions without any hygienic infrastructure. Upon inquiries by Commissioner Srećko Bujas about additional food for prisoners, Tolj simply responded: "let them all die like dogs".[102]

Contrary to orders he received four days earlier to decelerate the deportations, Tolj and his henchmen deported 400 Jewish men from the latest roundup to Jasenovac on 17 November 1941. According to the testimony of a Jasenovac survivor, the arrival of a large number of Jews from Sarajevo in the autumn of 1941 created the need to expand the camp's capacity.[103] During the autumn of 1941, at the height of the Sarajevo deportations, the Jasenovac camp complex expanded its functions from those of a forced labour camp into a death camp. As the mass inflow of deportees from Sarajevo and other locations across the NDH overwhelmed the capacity of the camp, its commanders decided that the number of inmates should not rise above 3,000. Any prisoners above this threshold were considered a "surplus" to be physically eliminated.[104] The acceleration of deportations from Sarajevo under Tolj was, therefore, a factor driving other Ustaša security agencies to expand the genocidal apparatus of the regime.

While women were included in the deportations from the outset of the Ustaša "cleansing" campaign, until the autumn of 1941, anti-Jewish deportations across the NDH disproportionately targeted Jewish men. This was in part the outcome of a patriarchal political vision which considered men to be the source of political, economic, and military agency. These entanglements between antisemitism, gender, and politics were, however, reconsidered with an emphasis on race that erased differences within the targeted group. Racial politics shifted the psychological threshold from a focus on deporting and killing men to killing entire communities including women, children, and the elderly. Tolj was one of the Ustaša perpetrators who pioneered this approach in the NDH. Already in Bijeljina, Tolj was one of the first Ustaša perpetrators to deport Jews regardless of gender or age. In Sarajevo, he followed the same pattern, insisting that "both male and female Sarajevan Jews are the worst enemies of the Independent State of Croatia".[105]

98 Directorate of the Ustaša Police to Velika župa Vrhbosna, 13 November 1941, Miletić, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac 1941–1945. Dokumenti*, 1:93.
99 Madžar, "Ljudske i materijalne žrtve Sarajeva u toku Drugog svjetskog rata", 652–653.
100 Report of Srećko Bujas, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ GUZ. Br. 2235/2/1-45, microfilm roll 2942, frame number 270.
101 Albahari Čučo, "KPJ i pogrom nad Jevrejima", 691.
102 Report of Srećko Bujas, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ GUZ. Br. 2235/2/1-45, microfilm roll 2942, frame number 270.
103 Testimony of Holocaust survivor Otto L., interview 4297403, Tel Aviv, Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, 1991.
104 Goldstein, *Jasenovac*, 493.
105 Office of Poglavnik to Regional Prefecture [Velika župa] of Sarajevo, 24 December 1941, Antun Miletić, ed., *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac - dokumenti*, vol. 3 (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1987), 74–75.

Having deported most of the Jewish men from Sarajevo to Jasenovac, Tolj confronted an obstacle to removing the women and children. He sent approximately 1,200 Jewish women and children to the Lobor concentration camp located in the northwest of the NDH. Commandant Karlo Heger, however, noting that the camp was already overcrowded, redirected the transport back to Sarajevo.[106] Tolj now had to contend with a demand from German forces stationed in Sarajevo that he halt the deportations for the time being. The Sarajevo Ustašas appealed to Artuković in Zagreb, insisting that, in view of the significant benefits they brought to the city, the deportations should continue.[107] Once again, Tolj's insistence on the complete deportation of the Sarajevo Jews forced the Ustaša security agencies in Zagreb to seek solutions to the logistical problem of the internment of Jewish women and children from Sarajevo. To enable further deportations from Sarajevo, the Ustaša authorities in Zagreb determined that the establishment of a new concentration camp specifically intended for women and children was urgently needed. A location was found near the town of Đakovo. The first prisoners, arriving in December 1941, were 1,200 Jewish women and 300 children from Sarajevo.[108]

At the beginning of the war, Sarajevo was home to approximately 12,000 Jews, making it the second-largest Jewish community in the NDH. By the end of 1941, only a few hundred Jews remained in the city. Many of them were "protected" as workers essential to the municipal administration. Some Jews were exempt from deportation as partners in intermarriages with non-Jews; others remained in hiding. In little over two months as Sarajevo's police chief, Ivan Tolj had removed virtually the entire Jewish population of the city. Tolj's "cleansing" of Sarajevo was therefore not only of local or regional relevance but was one of the most significant chapters in the history of the Holocaust in the NDH.

The rapid pace and extensive scope of Tolj's deportation operations, along with the broader campaign of terror inflicted upon the civilian population, provoked tensions with elements of the local Ustaša apparatus. Friction emerged particularly when Croatian police units, under Tolj's direction, disregarded exemption certificates held by individual Jews –actions that were perceived as violations of the legal framework established by the NDH. Local officials demanded the immediate release of these individuals and, when met with resistance from the Sarajevo police, escalated their appeals to the authorities in Zagreb. The deportation of Ignac Fischer, a Jew officially classified as "protected", became a flashpoint. In that case, even the office of the *Poglavnik* (leader), referring directly to Ante Pavelić, formally rebuked Tolj for contravening explicit directives. Tolj justified his actions with the following words:

> I arrested Jews according to my conscience, after seeing evidence that they were helping the Četnik-Communist actions, which were directed at the destruction of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its secession from the Independent State of Croatia. The greatest enemies of the independence of the Croatian state are Jews from Sarajevo, both men and women […]. All Jews are equal, regardless of whether they are honorary Aryans or whether they converted to Roman Catholicism, Islam, or the Evangelical religion or not. They all feel the same and they all want to harm the Independent State of Croatia and its allies […]. As a Croat and loyal follower of the Poglavnik, I

106 Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941–1945.*, 131–132.

107 Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941–1945*, 116.

108 Report of Jewish Religious Community of Osijek on "The Female Prisoner Camp in Djakovo", 4 December 1941, Državni Arhiv u Osijeku (State Archives in Osijek, DAOS) – 1177, fond Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file 2.4.4. Unutarnja i vanjska politika.

need to tell the truth, the rebellion was caused mainly by Jews, and therefore they should be quickly and thoroughly exterminated from the face of Bosnia.[109]

There was, of course, no evidence that Jews had disproportionately supported the resistance, but Tolj's deeply held antisemitism justified the accusation. Moreover, it was in his interest to depict the Jewish community in Sarajevo as a major threat to security in order to validate his overzealous approach to deportations and dismiss complaints from other Ustaša agencies. Tolj's statement clearly reveals the perpetrator's awareness and endorsement of genocidal intent by explicitly referring to his aim to "exterminate" the Jews under his jurisdiction. By explicitly referring to Jews as the "greatest enemies" and calling for their "quick and thorough extermination from the face of Bosnia", Tolj demonstrated both ideological alignment with genocidal aims and an understanding that his actions – specifically the arrests and deportations – were part of a broader campaign of systematic destruction. His framing of all Jews as inherently disloyal and uniformly dangerous, regardless of religious conversion or social status, underscores the racial logic of genocide and confirms that his role in organising and carrying out deportations was an integral part of the extermination policy.

However, after the deportations of Jews, Tolj entered a more serious conflict with the local Ustaša officials when he attempted to deport 200 leading Muslim intellectuals and public officials in early 1942. Fearing that such actions would completely alienate the Muslims of NDH and endanger the Ustaša hold on Sarajevo and Bosnia itself, the local Ustaša officials arrested Tolj and transferred him to Zagreb.[110]

Perceiving Tolj's detention as an attack on his personal authority, Interior Minister Artuković was enraged, and threatened that Sarajevo Ustašas involved in Tolj's arrest would face severe consequences. In fact, one of the people alleged to have been involved in Tolj's arrest was sent to a concentration camp but was soon after released.[111] Artuković released Tolj from prison and decided to put him back in the field. His experience as the deportation expert was used again in 1942, when he was put in charge of the mass deportations of remaining Jews in the northeast of the NDH.

After Tolj's departure from Sarajevo, very few Jews remained in the city. The last large deportation was implemented in August 1942 when 300 Jews were deported. Afterward, only around 120 Jews remained in the whole of Sarajevo. About half of them were unable to work because they were ill or too elderly. The rest were experts who were essential for the functioning of the city.[112] Approximately 7,000 Sarajevan Jews were killed in concentration camps, and 316 Sarajevo Jews died as Partisans during the Second World War. Around 1,277 Jews came back to Sarajevo after the war, 120 emigrated to Palestine, around 100 stayed in Italy, and 40 emigrated to the United States of America.[113]

109 Office of Poglavnik to Regional Prefecture of Vrhbosna, 24 December 1941, Miletić, *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac - dokumenti*, 3:74–75.

110 Testimony of Hasan Hadžiosmanović, former Ustaša functionary (*Logornik*) in Sarajevo, given to County Court in Zenica, 14 August 1951, 1, HR-HDA-421, box 128; testimony of Arif Balta, former deputy police chief in Sarajevo, given to district court in Sarajevo, 6 August 1951, 3–4, HR-HDA-421, box 128; HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2942, frame number 273.

111 Testimony of Zlatko Mesić, personal secretary of Ante Vokić, given to County Court in Zenica, 14 August 1951, 3, HR-HDA-421, box 129.

112 Madžar, "Ljudske i materijalne žrtve Sarajeva u toku Drugog svjetskog rata", 652–653.

113 Postwar Study of the Occupiers and their Collaborators – Concentration camps, Inventory, ABiH, ZKUZ, box 5, number 50, file 147, 356.

According to the demographic research conducted by the scholar Božo Madžar, 7,092 Jew from Sarajevo were killed as civilians by fascists during the Second World War. Both in absolute and relative terms, Jews were by far the most numerous group among the victims of Ustaša persecution in Sarajevo. In the same period, 1,427 Serbs were killed as civilians, followed by Muslims with 412 victims, and 106 Croats. Thus, Jews constituted 78 per cent of all Sarajevan victims of fascist terror killed during the Second World War.[114]

Conclusion

Scholars of the Holocaust and other genocides have emphasised the uneven geographic and temporal distribution of mass violence. Often, violence is initiated with particular intensity in one region, prompting other regions to either follow suit autonomously or in response to directives from higher authorities. This pattern allows for a conceptual distinction between *genocidal overperformers* – regional actors who take initiative and accelerate persecution ahead of national trends – and *genocidal underperformers*, who delay or resist implementing systematic violence.[115]

In the early months following the establishment of the NDH, Sarajevo emerged as a significant example of genocidal underperformance. Although Serbs and Jews were subjected to discrimination and violence, Sarajevo's local Ustaša authorities were repeatedly criticised by security agencies in Zagreb for their inadequate efforts in carrying out deportations and other forms of persecution. The Minister of the Interior, Andrija Artuković, explicitly rebuked Sarajevo's Ustašas for their "inactivity in the cleansing of Bosnia and Herzegovina".[116]

Several interrelated factors contributed to this initial underperformance. Sarajevo's multiethnic composition hindered the consolidation of a unified local power structure. Catholic and Muslim elites, in particular, remained divided and pursued competing agendas, often attempting to mould state policy to serve their own group interests. This fragmentation led to delays in implementing genocidal policies and hesitancy toward actions that might provoke unrest or alienate segments of the population. Antisemitism became instrumentalised within this rivalry, as both Catholic and Muslim elites appropriated antisemitic rhetoric to bolster their position against one another. In this way, antisemitism in Sarajevo evolved into a tool of competitive nation-building rather than a unified ideological commitment.

The Sarajevo case underscores the critical role of local actors in shaping the trajectory and dynamics of genocidal violence. Chiefs of police, such as Zubić and Điković, navigated a complex landscape, attempting to satisfy central expectations while remaining attentive to local constraints. Local elites continued to believe they could negotiate with the central government on key issues, particularly regarding the persecution of Serbs, Jews, and Roma. This belief was, in part, validated: Muslim elites successfully lobbied for the exemption of Muslim Roma from deportation, demonstrating that NDH racial policies could be moderated under political pressure. How-

114 According to the research conducted by Božo Madžar, there were in total 9071 Sarajevan civilians who were killed as a consequence of fascist terror during the Second World War. According to nationality, the victims included 7,092 Jews, 1,427 Serbs, 412 Muslims, 106 Croats, 16 Montenegrins, 5 Slovenes, 1 Macedonian and 12 classified as others. Madžar, "Ljudske i materijalne žrtve Sarajeva u toku Drugog svjetskog rata", 662.

115 Üngör, "Perpetration as a Process", 126.

116 Testimony of Telarević Osman given to County Court in Bosanska Gradiška, 11 June 1952, HR-HDA-421, box 128.

ever, no comparable efforts were made on behalf of Sarajevo's Jewish community, which remained politically isolated.

In October 1941, the central government in Zagreb intervened decisively by removing local officials deemed too moderate and appointing Ivan Tolj – an archetype of the genocidal overperformer – as Sarajevo's new chief of police. Tolj's appointment served both as a warning to lagging local actors and as a test case for the accelerated implementation of genocidal measures. Despite limited resources, including insufficient manpower and inadequate detention infrastructure, Tolj orchestrated the near-total destruction of one of the Balkans' oldest and most prominent Jewish communities in a matter of weeks.

Mid-level perpetrators like Tolj played an essential role in operationalising genocide on the ground. He eliminated institutional obstacles, streamlined inter-agency coordination, expanded detention facilities, and ensured that deportation logistics could scale to meet Zagreb's objectives. His efforts contributed directly to the expansion of concentration camp capacity on a national level. The deportation of Sarajevo's Jews was not merely a local event; it was a central episode in the broader history of the Holocaust in the NDH. Given that Sarajevo's Jewish community comprised more than a quarter of the entire Jewish population in the country, its destruction marked a turning point. When Ante Pavelić met Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano in December 1941 and boasted that one-third of the NDH's Jews had already been eliminated, he was, in fact, knowingly or not, referring primarily to the deportations orchestrated by Ivan Tolj in Sarajevo.[117]

117 Friedman, *Like Salt for Bread*, 400.

References

Croatian State Archives in Zagreb (HDA)

HR-HDA-223, Ministarstvo unutarnjih poslova Nezavisne Države Hrvatske [The Ministry of Interior of the Independent State of Croatia].

HR-HDA-306, Zemaljska komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača Hrvatske [The National Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators].

HR-HDA-421, Javno tužilaštvo Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske [The Public Persecutor's Office of the Republic of Croatia].

Croatian State Archives in Osijek (DAOS)

HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan (Esteban) Hefer, odvjetnik, političar, veliki župan župe Baranjske [Stjepan (Esteban) Hefer, lawyer, politician, and the Prefect of Baranja]

Archive of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ABiH)

ABiH, Zemaljska komisija za Bosnu i Hercegovinu za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača [State Commission for Bosnia and Herzegovina for the Investigation of the Occupiers and their Collaborators]

History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HM BiH)

Fond Nezavisna Država Hrvatska [The Independent State of Croatia Collection]

Fond Ustaška Nadzorna Služba [Ustaša Surveilance Service Collection]

Bibliography

Albahari Čučo, Josip. "KPJ i pogrom nad Jevrejima". In *Sarajevo u revoluciji: Komunistička Partija Jugoslavije u pripremama i organizaciji ustanka*, edited by Nisim Albahari et. al. 2:677–693. Sarajevo, 1977.

Dedijer, Vladimir, and Antun Miletić, ed. *Genocid nad Muslimanima, 1941–1945: zbornik dokumenata i svjedočenja*. Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1990.

Dizdar, Zdravko. *Četnički zločini u Bosni i Hercegovini: 1941. –1945.* Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2002.

Bergholz, Max. *Telling Histories of Violence without Borders*. University of Notre Dame: Nanovic Institute for European Studies, 2020.

Bethke, Carl. *(K)eine gemeinsame Sprache? Aspekte deutsch-jüdischer Beziehungsgeschichte in Slawonien, 1900–1945.* Berlin: Lit, 2013.

Bougarel, Xavier. *Islam and Nationhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Surviving Empires*. London, Oxford, and New York: Bloomsbury, 2018.

Bougarel, Xavier. "The Muslim Resolutions of 1941: Between Moral Courage and Political Impotence". In *The Muslim Resolutions: Bosniak Responses to World War Two Atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, edited by Hikmet Karčić, Ferid Dautović, and Ermin Sinanović, 133–138. Sarajevo and Winchester, VA: Institute for Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks and Center for Islam in the Contemporary World at Shenandoah University, 2021.

Bulajić, Milan. *Ustaški zločin genocida i suđenje Andriji Artukoviću 1986. godine*. Volume 1. Belgrade: Izadavačka radna organizacija "Rad", 1988.

Čaušević, Halid. "Sociološki presjek pojave antisemitizma u BiH". In *Sefarad 92 – Zbornik radova*, 119–132. Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju – Sarajevo, Jevrejska zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine – Sarajevo, 1995.

Donia, Robert J. *Sarajevo: biografija grada*. Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2006.

Figueirido, Rui J.P. de, and Barry R. Weingast. "The Rationality of Fear: Political Opportunism and Ethnic Conflict". In *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention*, edited by Barbara F. Walter and Jack Snyder, 261–302. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Friedman, Francine. "Contemporary Responses to the Holocaust in Bosnia and Herzegovina". In *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, edited by John-Paul Himka and Joanna Beata Michlic, 83–107. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013.

Gaon, Aleksandar, ed. *Mi smo preživeli … 3: Jevreji o Holokaustu*. Volume 3. Belgrade: Jevrejski istorijski muzej, Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 2005.

Goldstein, Ivo, and Slavko Goldstein. *The Holocaust in Croatia*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016.

Goldstein, Ivo. *Jasenovac*. Zagreb: Fraktura, 2018.

Greble, Emily. "A City Apart: Sarajevo in the Second World War". PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 2007.

Greble, Emily. *Sarajevo, 1941–1945: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Hitler's Europe*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011.

Greble, Emily. "When Croatia Needed Serbs: Nationalism and Genocide in Sarajevo, 1941–1942". *Slavic Review* 68, no. 1 (2009): 116–138.

Hoare, Marko Attila. *The Bosnian Muslims in the Second World War: A History.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Hoare, Marko Attila. *Genocide and Resistance in Hitler's Bosnia: The Partisans and the Chetniks, 1941–1943*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Jelinek, Yeshayahu. "Bosnia-Herzegovina at War: Relations Between Moslems and Non-Moslems". *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5, no. 3 (1990): 275–292.

Kazazović, Ćamil. *Travnik u narodnooslobodilačkom ratu*. Travnik: Naša riječ, 1969.

Kershaw, Ian. "'Working Towards the Führer.' Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship". *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 2 (1993): 103–118.

Kisić-Kolanović, Nada. "Muslimanska inteligencija i islam u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj". *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 36, no. 3 (2004): 901–938.

Korb, Alexander. "Integrated Warfare? The Germans and the Ustaša Massacres: Syrmia 1942". In *War in a Twilight World: Partisans and Anti-Partisans Warfare in Eastern Europe 1939–45,* edited by Ben Shepard and Juliette Pattinson, 210–232. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Korb, Alexander. "Understanding Ustaša Violence". *Journal of Genocide Research* 12, no. 1–2 (June 2010): 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2010.508273.

Korb, Alexander. "Ustaša Mass Violence Against Gypsies in Croatia, 1941–1942". In *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma: Reassessment and Commemoration*, edited by Anton Weiss-Wendt, 72–95. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013.

Kralj, Lovro. "Becoming the Ustaša 'Deportation Expert'. Ivan Tolj and the Perpetration of Ethnic Cleansing in the Independent State of Croatia". In *Deported. Comparative Perspectives on Paths to Annihilation for Jewish Populations under Nazi German Control*, edited by Michaela Raggam-Blesch, Peter Black, and Marianne Windsperger, 161–186. Vienna and Hamburg: New Academic Press, 2024.

Kralj, Lovro. "A Microcosmos of Fascism in the Age of Genocide: German Nazis, Croatian Ustašas, and the Hungarian Arrow Cross in the City of Osijek". *S:I.M.O.N.: Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation*. 9, no 2 (2022): 67–89.

Madžar, Božo. "Ljudske i materijalne žrtve Sarajeva u toku Drugog svjetskog rata". In *Sarajevo u revoluciji: U borbi do punog oslobođenja (novembar 1943 – april 1945)*, edited by Nisim Albahari, 4:649–70. Sarajevo: Istorijski arhiv Sarajevo, 1981.

Maurer, Desmond. "On Reading the Muslim Resolutions". In *The Muslim Resolutions: Bosniak Responses to World War Two Atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 31–63. Sarajevo and Winchester, VA: Institute for Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks and Center for Islam in the Contemporary World at Shenandoah University, 2021.

Miletić, Antun, editor. *Koncentracioni logor Jasenovac – dokumenti*. Volume 3. Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1987.

Miletić, Antun, editor. *Koncentracioni Logor Jasenovac 1941–1945. – dokumenti.* Volume 1. Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1986.

Pinto, Avram. *Jevreji Sarajeva i Bosne i Hercegovine*. Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1987.

Pinto, Avram and Pinto, David, editors. *Dokumenti o stradanju Jevreja u logorima NDH*, Sarajevo: Jevrejska opština, 1972.

Redžić, Enver. *Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Second World War.* London and New York: Frank Cass, 2005.

Romano, Jaša. *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941–1945. Žrtve genocida i učesnici narodnooslobodilačkog rata*. Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1980.

Straus, Scott. *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006.

Tabeau, Ewa, et al. "Broj žrtava u opsadi Sarajeva od aprila 1992. do decembra 1995. Studija o stopi smrtnosti na osnovu osam velikih izvora podataka". International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, 2003.

Tomasevich, Jozo. *The Chetniks*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975.

Ümit Üngör, Uğur. "Perpetration as a Process: A Historical-Sociological Model". In *Perpetrators of International Crimes: Theories, Methods, and Evidence*, edited by Alette Smeulers, Maartje Weerdesteijn, and Borbora Hola, 117–131. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Vukčević, Slavko, editor. *Zločini na jugoslovenskim prostorima u prvom i drugim svetskom ratu: zbornik dokumenata.* Volume 1. Belgrade: Vojnoistorijski institut, 1993.

Vulesica, Marija. "Holocaust Research in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. An Inventory". *Südosteuropa* 65, no. 2 (27 January 2017): 260–283.

Lovro Kralj is a historian specialising in fascism, antisemitism, genocide, and the Holocaust, with a regional focus on Central and Southeast Europe. He received his PhD from Central European University (CEU) in 2023, completing a dissertation which focused on history of antisemitism and Holocaust in Croatia. His research has been supported by numerous competitive fellowships and grants, including the Claims Conference Saul Kagan Fellowship, a Senior Fellowship at the Institute for Contemporary Research in Munich, a Junior Fellowship at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust-Studies, and the Sharon Abramson Research Grant of the Holocaust Educational Foundation at Northwestern University. From 2022, Kralj was affiliated with the Department of History at the University of Rijeka, where he coordinated several international projects on Holocaust history and served, until recently, as the founding Director of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Research in Southeast Europe. From October 2025, he works as a Research and Content Officer at EHRI-ERIC.
Email: l.kralj@niod.knaw.nl

Quotation: Lovro Kralj, The Holocaust in Sarajevo. Genocidal Policies, Regional Variations, and Political Rivalries, in S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation. 12 (2025) 4, 50–76.
https://doi.org/10.23777/sn.0425/art_lkra011

S:I.M.O.N.– Shoah: Intervention. Methods. DocumentatiON. is the semi-annual open access e-journal of the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) in English and German.

ISSN 2408-9192 | 12 (2025) 4| https://doi.org/10.23777/sn.0425