

# SOME WORDS ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST IN SERBIA

for better understanding of the historical experience in Serbia in the context of the European Holocaust



A photograph of the Baruh family taken in Belgrade before World War II: mother Mazal (née Ruso) and children Isak (1927), Streja (1928), Roza (1930) and Sofika (1931), father Rahamim Baruh not being on this photograph probably because it was he who took it. They were living in the Dubrovačka street No. 6 in Belgrade.

Mazal and the children Isak, Streja, Roza and Sofika were all killed in the Jewish camp at Sajmište.

Rahamim survived the war. Besides his wife and children he also lost his brothers Moša and Ašrer. Rahamim moved to Israel in 1953.

Yad Vashem Photo Archive, Jerusalem. 4731/4

## Words, just like forgotten names: mean more than they can say.

David Albahari

### 1 Jews

After having been expelled from Spain and Portugal Jews started arriving into the interior of the Balkan Peninsula, which gradually led to establishment of the first large Jewish communities in Sarajevo, Belgrade, Skopje and other cities during the 16th century. Since then Jews have been living, working, contributing to society and sharing the same destiny as other nations in the region.

It was after the Second Serbian Uprising in 1815 that the Jewish community started to progress in Serbia. The fact that Jews actively participated in wars of national liberation contributed to their social integration and they were recognized as "Serbs of Moses' faith".

In Serbia there were both Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jewish communities, Sephardic being a larger one.

When Serbia gained independence from Turkey in 1878, the Jews gained full equality of rights. Jews and Serbs shared the same feeling of patriotism, which was witnessed in the Balkan wars and World War I when the Jews shared the same fate as the Serbian people, while many Jews in Serbian army distinguished themselves in battles, and Jewish nurses and doctors played an important part, as well.

During the period between two World Wars Jews lived as equal citizens, taking part in and contributing to the political, cultural and economic life of Yugoslavia. Many of them were in trade, often keeping small family shops. Some of them were doctors, military offi-

cers, professors, lawyers, engineers, craftsmen and clerks. Most of the Yugoslav Jews belonged to the middle class. In addition there were some who were wealthy, and some were very poor.

There were 82,000 Jews in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, out of which 35,000 were living in Serbia. Jews represented a small community making 0.5% of total population of Yugoslavia before World War II.



The Synagogue in Pančevo, built in 1909.





2 Occupation

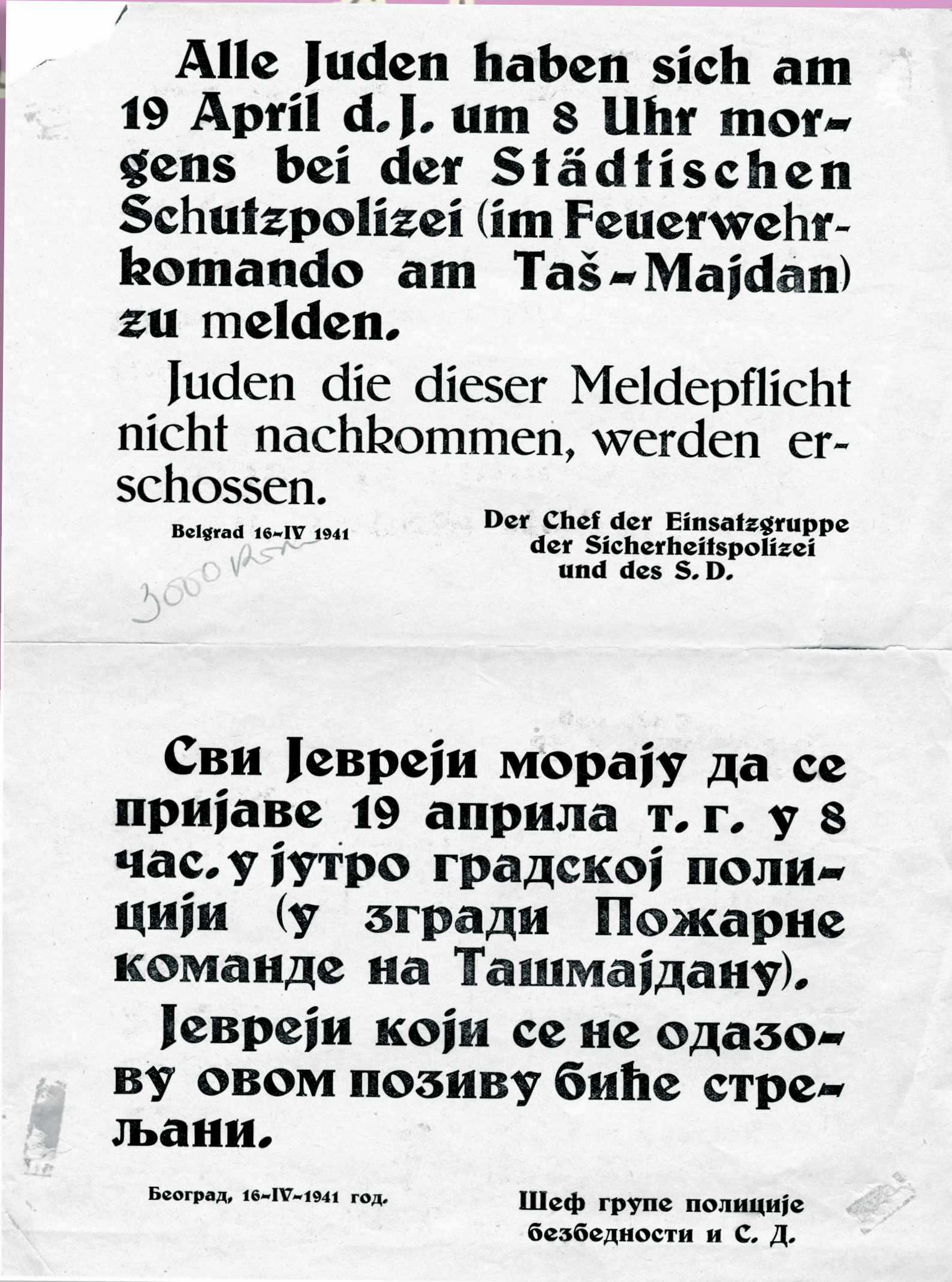


Having succumbed to the pressure of Germany, Yugoslav government signed the accession to the Tripartite Pact. But only two days later, on the 27th of March 1941, demonstrations broke out in Belgrade and other cities, and after a coup d'état was conducted a new government was established which rejected alliance with Germany. Consequently, Hitler made a decision to defeat and destroy Yugoslavia both militarily and as a state. German Air Fleet started bombing Belgrade in the dawn of 6th of April 1941. Italy, Bulgaria and Hungary joined Germany in aggression against Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

After a short war, historically referred to as the April War, which resulted in the defeat of Yugoslavia, it was occupied and some parts of it were annexed by the aggressors, while the Ustasas Independent State of Croatia was formed from the central part of Yugoslavia. As for Serbia, it was occupied and divided between occupying forces.

The largest part of Serbia came under German occupation, including the north part of Kosovo, as well as the territory of Banat governed by Volksdeutsche. Other parts of Serbia were annexed by Hungary, Italy, Bulgaria and the Independent State of Croatia.

***It was the Germans who instigated, organized and for the most part committed the Holocaust in Serbia***



Compulsory order for Jews to register with police

Although other occupiers and their collaborators did commit crimes, loot and kill Jews as well, it was Germans who instigated, organized and for the most part committed the Holocaust in Serbia, including the territories controlled by Hungary, Bulgaria and Italy, only exception being the Ustasas Independent State of Croatia: Jews from the territory of Srem were mostly killed at Jasenovac .



## Dehumanization



Registration of Jews in Belgrade 1941.

Immediately after their troops had entered Serbia, Germans started to enforce anti-jewish measures. It was already on 16th of April 1941, right after the capitulation of Yugoslav army, that Wilhelm Fuchs, the chief of the Einsatzgruppe of German Police, ordered registration of Belgrade Jews. All Jews had to register with German Police. Other measures followed, which came into force by order of Military commander in Serbia issued on 31st of May 1941. Jews were registered, marked with yellow armbands, compelled to go to forced labour, expelled from public services, and their possessions were being confiscated.

It was only the beginning of the suffering of Jews which would consequently lead to their systematic destruction.

- Jews are allowed to buy goods at markets or in shops only after 10.30 a.m;
- Jews are allowed to supply themselves with water at public fountains only when all other citizens satisfy their needs for it;
- All retailers are forbidden to sell goods on the black market to Jews under a threat of fines, imprisonment or being sent to a concentration camp;
- Jews are not allowed to possess cameras;
- Jews are not allowed to possess refrigerators;
- Jews are not allowed to use telephones;
- Jews are forbidden to use trams;
- Jews are forbidden to receive medical treatment in public hospitals;
- Jews are forbidden to work in public institutions;
- Jews are forbidden to go to cinemas;
- Jews are forbidden to use sport courts;



A tram with the sign "Forbidden for Jews" in occupied Belgrade.



Jews on forced labour in the town of Senta 1941.

## 4 Collaboration



Milan Nedić, the prime minister of the "Government of National Salvation", central organ of the puppet quisling authority in Serbia under German military administration.

Anti-Jewish measures in Serbia under German occupation were enforced by German Police aided by Serbian quisling administration headed by **Milan Aćimović**, and later by Milan Nedić.

**Milan Nedić**, the prime minister of the quisling Government from 1941 to 1944, was a key figure of collaboration regime ultimately loyal to German occupying authority, who firmly believed in victory of a new european order led by Germany.

During the occupation **Dimitrije Ljotić** was a leader of Serbian Volunteer Corps whose members, also known as "Ljotičevci", assisted Germans in detaining Jews and arresting supporters of National Liberation Fight, actively taking part in gathering of civilians and German reprisal executions of them.

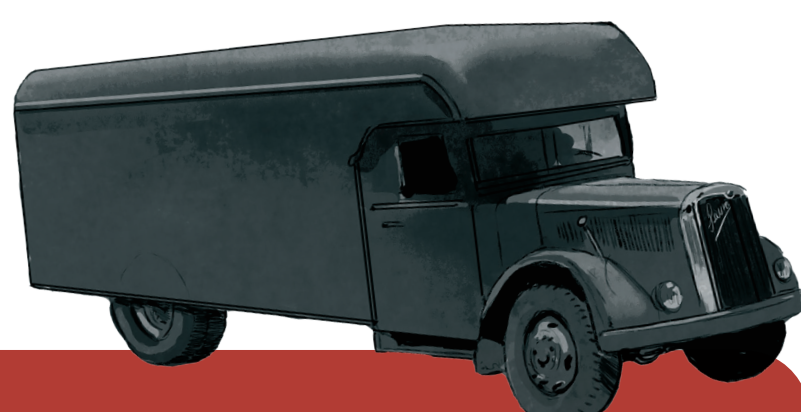
**Dragomir Dragi Jovanonović** was the chief of Belgrade Police and the head of Belgrade City Administration who actively persecuted patriots and occupation opponents during the German occupation.



JULY - NOVEMBER 1941

## SYSTEMATIC DESTRUCTION OF JEWS IN OCCUPIED SERBIA

During the first stage, men were killed under the mass reprisal measures implemented by the Wehrmacht forces.



DECEMBER 1941 - MAY 1942

During the second stage, women, children and elderly were interned and killed in a Jewish camp at Sajmište.

## DEHUMANIZATION

IDENTIFICATION

LOSS OF CIVIL RIGHTS

REGISTRATION

EXCLUSION

MARKING

EXPROPRIATION

## CONCENTRATION

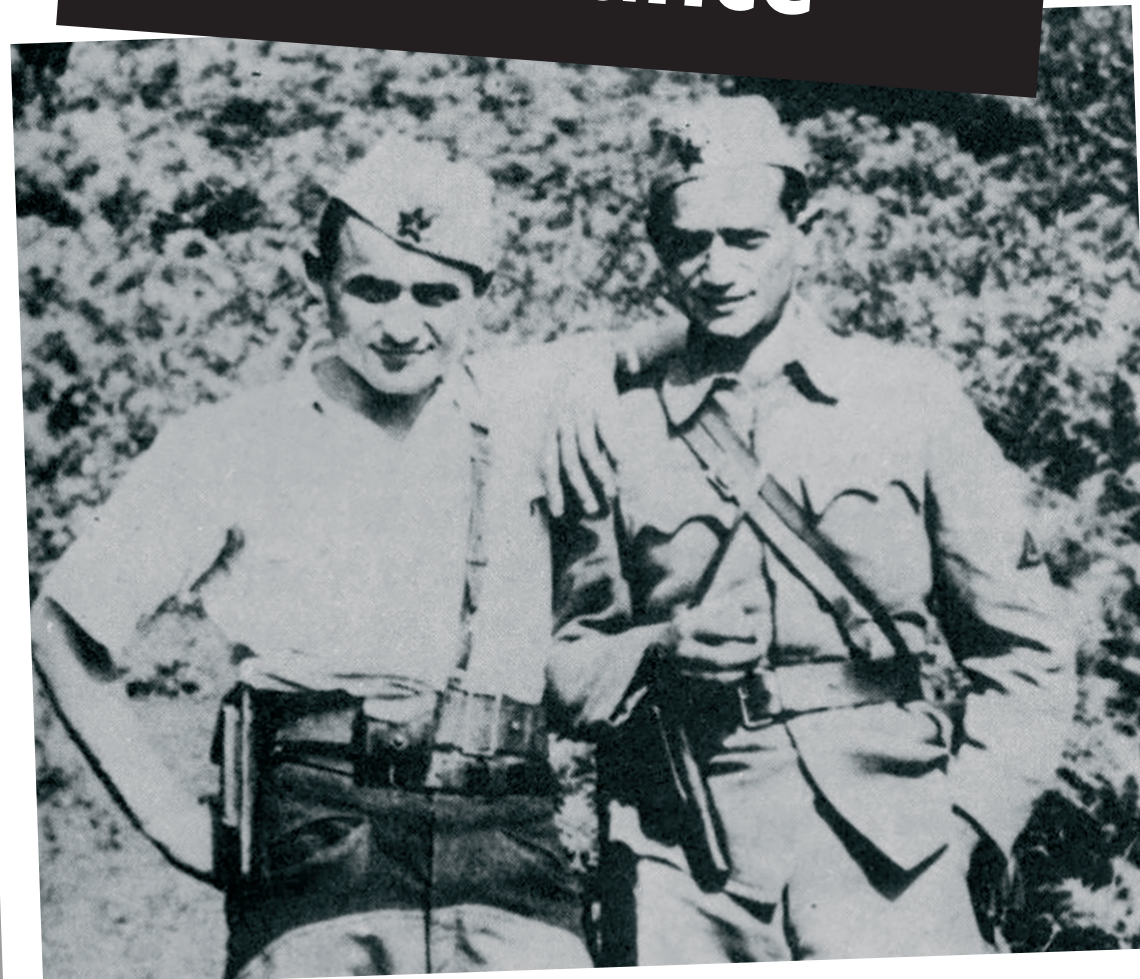
## ANNIHILATION



### More than 80% of Yugoslav Jews were killed in the Holocaust

When the war broke out, there were 82,000 Jews living in Yugoslavia and about 4,000 Jewish refugees who came there mostly from Central Europe. Thus out of total of 86,000 Jews, 71,000 (82.56%) of them lost their lives in the Holocaust. On the whole territory of Serbia, including the one under German occupation and the parts annexed by Hungary, the Independent State of Croatia, Bulgaria and Italy, 28,224 Jews were killed, out of 34,777 (1200 Jewish refugees included), i. e. 81.16% of Jewish population.

## 6 Resistance



Vojo Todorović - Lerer (on the right) took part in People's Liberation War, reached the rank of lieutenant-general of Yugoslav National Army and was proclaimed a Yugoslav national hero.

During the summer in 1941 a resistance movement against the occupation spread throughout Serbia. A mass anti-fascist uprising, which swept through the most part of occupied Serbia in September and October, was being suppressed by Germans in blood with extreme repressive measures against civilians. Four years a very hard and cruel liberation war against occupiers and their collaborators was fought in Yugoslavia, as well as a civil war.

Altogether 4,556 Jews took part in People's Liberation War in Yugoslavia. Some of them were among organizers of the uprising and in important positions of partisan movement. Jewish women also took a significant part in the fight, including Roza Papo, the first woman field medic general. 14 Jews reached the rank of a general of the Yugoslav Army and 10 Jews were proclaimed national heroes for exceptional courage and merits in the fight.

Taking into consideration the percentage of Jewish population in Yugoslavia, the number of Jews who took part in Yugoslav anti-fascist fight is among the highest in Europe.

## 8 Refugees



A photograph of Regina Schlesinger with her son Heinz, the refugees in Sabac from the so-called "Kladovo transport".

## 7 Help



A photograph of Sonja Lunginović and Marija Andeselić taken in Belgrade in 1944. Marija together with her daughters Vera and Natalija looked after Sonja and saved her.

The Jews who managed to get out of the cities were hiding mostly in Serbian villages often assuming the identity of Serbian refugees from the Independent State of Croatia. Other Jews were trying to reach the territories under the Italian or Hungarian occupation, where they were safe at first.

Many helped Jews in various ways. Sometimes it required providing false identification papers, sometimes just offering some food or a shelter for a night would be enough, and sometimes helpers risked their own lives hiding the Jews in their houses, barns, stables and other hiding places.

As of January 2018, for unselfishly helping Jews save themselves from a certain death, **139 honorary titles "Righteous among the Nations" have been awarded by the state of Israel to the Serbian citizens.**

During the 1930s, oppressed by antisemitism and anti-Jewish laws, many Jews were forced to flee from Germany. After the Anschluss, i.e. Germany's annexation of Austria and occupation of Czechoslovakia the number of Jewish refugees from Central Europe kept rising. A large number of them was trying to reach Palestine territory which was a British protectorate at that time, but also some other ones, overseas countries, in particular. One of the refugee routes led across the territory of Kingdom of Yugoslavia, along which about 50,000 Jewish refugees passed until April 1941. Many countries refused to accept Jewish refugees, partly for anti-Semitic reasons.

About 4,000 Jewish refugees happened to be on the territory of Yugoslavia at the beginning of the war. Some 1,200 refugees came by so-called "Kladovo transport" from Vienna and Bratislava to the river-port of Kladovo by the Danube, where they were forced to stop and were later towed to the river-port of Sabac, where German occupation found them and were eventually killed in the Holocaust.

Jewish refugees shared the same fate as the Jewish population in Serbia.



## Camps



On the territory of Serbia occupied by Germans the occupying forces started to arrest communists, opponents of the occupation and quisling regime, as well as Jews, primarily Jewish men population. They were detained mostly in the Banjica concentration camp in Belgrade, the camp in Šabac and the Red Cross camp in the town of Niš. The camp "Topovske Šupe" at urban neighbourhood of Belgrade called Autokomanda, where Jewish and Roma men were detained from the end of September 1941, served as a source of hostages for shooting. Jewish camp at Sajmište, Belgrade Fairgrounds, was a death camp for Jewish women and children until 10th of May 1942. After that camp at Sajmište was used as a detention camp where most of inmates were Serbs.

The largest death camps in the Ustasha's Independent State of Croatia were Gospić-Jadovno and Jasenovac.

Jews from the other parts of Yugoslavia were mostly killed in death camps Auschwitz-Birkenau and Treblinka. Due to need for workforce in mines at Bor, upon the request of Germans, Hungarian occupation authorities were sending Jews from Bačka and Baranja regions to Bor for forced labour. Camps in Bačka Topola, Szeged and Subotica were used by Hungarians for deportation of Jews to Auschwitz in April and May 1944. At that time there was a Jewish ghetto in Subotica.

# CONCENTRATION CAMP AT SAJMIŠTE TIMELINE

# Executions



During the summer and autumn in 1941, Germans were trying to suppress the uprising in Serbia with extreme repressive measures, primarily with mass arrest of civilians, who were detained as hostages and shot dead for a reprisal. They were targeting mostly Jews, Roma, communists and occupation opponents, but any else as well. For every German soldier killed 100, and for every wounded 50 hostages were to be shot dead.

Thus, by conducting the mass reprisal shootings, the Germans were simultaneously aiming both to suppress the uprising in Serbia and to kill Jews, as a part of a wider plan to destroy European Jews.

After a few months, in autumn 1941 almost complete Jewish men population on the territory of Serbia under German occupation was killed at killing sites, such as: Ledine and Jajinci near Belgrade, Jabuka near the town of Pančevo, Bubanj near the town of Niš, Zasavica near the town of Šabac and at other places.

# Ustasha



Germany and Italy enabled creation of the Independent State of Croatia headed by **Ante Pavelić**, which also comprised today Bosnia and Hercegovina, and the region of Srem, as far as the town of Zemun and bank of the Sava river, which was the boundary of Belgrade at that time. Ustasas' Regime in the Independent State of Croatia was very similar to the Nazi one. While persecuting Serbs, Ustasas simultaneously started to persecute Jews and Roma. Jews were registered, marked, exposed to extortion, violence and looting which was supported by a powerful antisemitic campaign.

The Ustasha's regime implemented and mostly accomplished the Holocaust in their death camps Gospić-Jadovno and Jasenovac, where Serbs, Jews, Roma and anti-fascists were killed.

At the end of July in 1942, Ustaschas' authorities ordered arrest of all Jews in Srem, after which they were deported to death camps. Most of the arrested Jews were detained at the football stadium in the town of Vinkovci in the open. After a month a part of detainees were deported to Jasenovac, and the other part to Auschwitz, where the majority was killed immediately.,

# Bačka



The region of Bačka came under administration of pro-fascist Hungarian occupying authorities headed by **Miklos Horthy**, which oppressed people by looting, arresting, killing and persecuting. In January 1942 Hungarian soldiers and gendarmes committed a mass crime known as "Raid" in Šajkaška, southern Bačka and Novi Sad, by executing more than 4,000 Serbs and Jews: men, women, children and elderly.

In April 1944 Hungarians arrested Jews from Bačka and handed them over to Germans who deported them to the death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau.

# Pirot



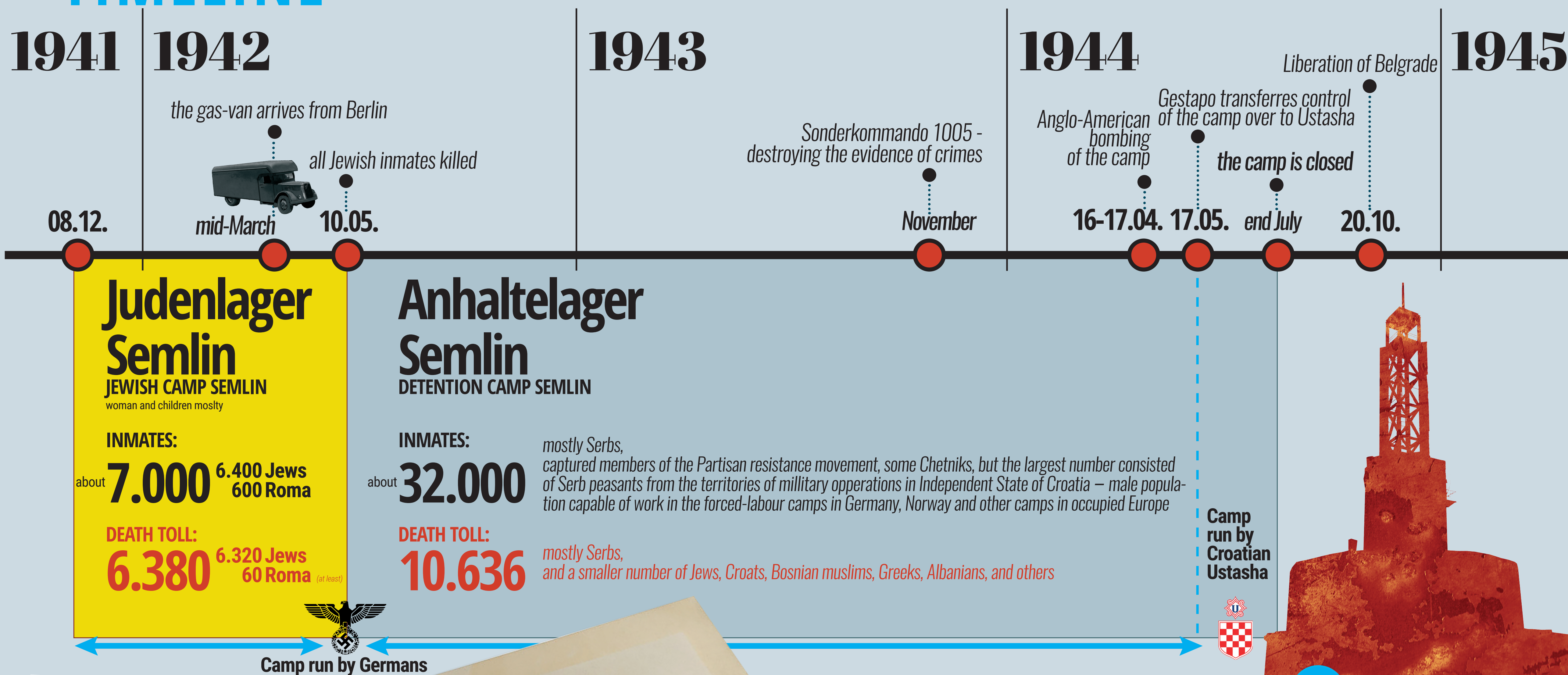
Bulgarian occupying zone also comprised southeast Serbia including the town of Pirot with its small Jewish community. The Bulgarian antisemitic legislation was enforced against them pursuant to which Jews were registered, marked, exposed to looting and humiliation. Starting from 11th March 1943 all Jews from Bulgarian occupying zones in Yugoslavia and Greece were being deported to the death camp Treblinka from where nobody returned.

# Banat



The region of Banat belonged to the zone of German Military Government of Occupation, but it was governed by Volksdeutsche, ethnic Germans living in Banat. Kreis-Kommandantur represented German Occupying Authorities in Banat with its headquarters in the town of Petrovgrad (today Zrenjanin).

After several months of looting, mistreating, beating, arresting and killing Jews, in the middle of August 1941 German authorities in Banat expelled all Jews to Belgrade, where they shared the fate of Belgrade Jews.



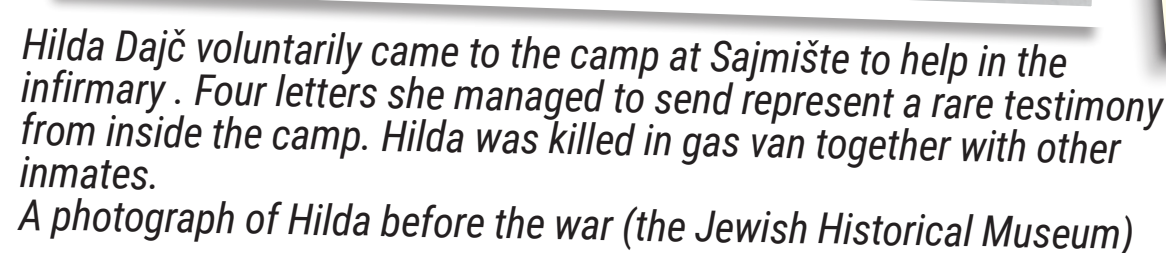
# Sajmište

*The camp at Sajmište is a symbol of the Holocaust and suffering of the Jews in the occupied Serbia.*

The Jewish camp at Sajmište was formally on the territory of the Independent State of Croatia, but it was run by Gestapo and under the command of SS officers, and founded for Serbian Jews, mostly from Belgrade, but also from the region of Banat as well as from other towns of Serbia under German occupation.

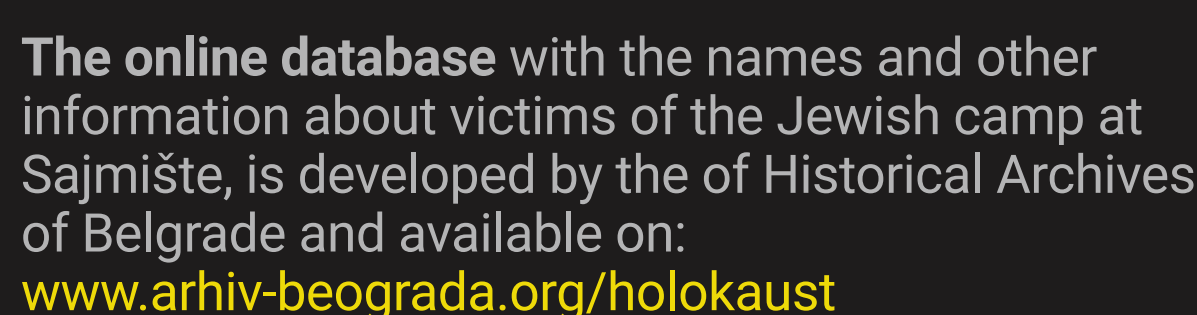
On 8th of December all Jews registered in Belgrade were sent to the camp. In just a few weeks from the middle of March to 10th of May 1942, the camp inmates, mostly women and children, were systematically killed in the gas van, also known as "dušegupka", a van specially redesigned and readjusted to be used as a mobile gas chamber, and delivered from Berlin specially for that purpose.

As the Jewish men were mostly killed in mass shooting executions during the previous months, by executing the remaining women and children from the camp at Sajmište, as the Nazis so cynically put it, “the Jewish question in Serbia was solved.”



Dear Mirjana, there are now 2,000 women and children here, and almost 100 babies for which one cannot even boil any milk because there is no fuel, and you can imagine what temperature is, considering the height of pavilions and the strength of Košava, the cold southeastern wind. I read Heine and it makes me feel good, although we have a latrine a half kilometer away from here and for fifteen persons to go at the same time, although by four o'clock we have only been given a little of cabbage twice, which has obviously been boiled in plain water, although they keep shouting at us: "Idiotische Saubande", although they keep on having roll calls and we are severely punished for every offence... Today I started to work at infirmary, actually at one table with a few bottles and some gauze, behind which there is only one doctor, one pharmacist and me. There is a lot of work, for people, i.e. women are fainting and so on. But in most cases they put up with it all more than heroically. There are rarely any tears.

Excerpts from the second letter from Hilda Dajč,  
9th December 1941.





Julija Fišer was born as Julija Sandel to mother Ester (née Tenenbaum), and to father Menahem in the town of Slavonski Brod on 27th of May in 1915. She lived in Belgrade working as a teacher at Medical School. Julia was married to Erik Fišer, a doctor and a lieutenant of Yugoslav army.

She was killed on 3rd of February in 1942. She was 27.

A photograph of Julija and Erik Fišer taken in Belgrade before the war. Yad Vashem Photo Archive, Jerusalem. 9162/2

## 17 Remembrance



Monument to the Victims of the Novi Sad Raid

In Serbia there are several official Memorial Days committed to the victims of the Holocaust, , as well as to the memory of the joint suffering of Jews, Serbs, Roma and other victims of crimes committed by the Nazis and their collaborators, such as:

**27th OF JANUARY: INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY**

**22nd OF APRIL: NATIONAL REMEMBRANCE DAY FOR THE VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE IN THE WORLD WAR II**

(the day when the remaining inmates rose up and made a breakthrough from the Ustasjas' concentration camp Jasenovac in 1945)

**10th OF MAY: MEMORIAL DAY OF THE HOLOCAUST VICTIMS IN BELGRADE;**

**9th OF NOVEMBER: INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST FASCISM AND ANTISEMITISM**

**The Holocaust represents the genocide against the Jews, aimed at complete destruction of Jewish people, systematically planned and carried out by the German Nazis and their collaborators throughout the occupied Europe during the World War II, when 6 million Jews was murdered.**

During the World War II other terrible crimes were committed, too, such as: the genocide against the Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia, the genocide against the Roma - Porajmos, a mass murder of the people with disabilities in Germany, mass atrocities against the Soviet civilian sand so on. We must remember all victims with dignity and respect, and research all the crimes so that we can understand their particularities. Considering its scale, the way it was prepared and carried out as a state project, the ideology behind it, fanaticism of the perpetrators, indifference and silence of bystanders all around Europe, and terrible consequences, the Holocaust is a unique crime in history.

Today when Europe faces problems of Holocaust denial, revision and distortion, equalization of crimes of Nazism and communism, attempts to rehabilitate even those who without any possible doubt directly took part or contributed to Nazi crimes, our duty to remember and research causes, timeline and consequences of these crimes is greater than ever.

in the same or very similar way. On the other hand, this material can point to some historical experiences characteristic of the persecution of the Jews in the occupied Serbia, thus contributing to distinguishing particularities of the Holocaust in the occupied Serbia in the wider context of European Holocaust.

Special thanks to:

- Yad Vashem's Traveling Exhibitions Department;
- International School for Holocaust Studies Yad Vashem;
- Yad Vashem Archives;
- Historical Archives of Belgrade;
- Historical Archives of the City of Novi Sad.

## 18 Education



Ester: teaching material and a collection of graphic novels: [www.ester.rs](http://www.ester.rs)

It is important to teach and learn about the Holocaust, not only because it is a civilizational, moral and human duty, but also because by learning about the life and history we share with Jews we also learn about ourselves and our own history, which helps us to understand it better.

Being aware of a strong antifascist tradition in Serbia, and especially of the fact that the Serbs themselves were victims of terror and genocide and a huge number of lives lost during their fight against the Nazism, too, to teach and learn about the Holocaust should come as a natural constituent of the memory and the historical narrative of Serbia.

By learning about our past and understanding it through education about the Holocaust, we contribute to preserving the memory of not only Jewish but all other victims of the Nazi crimes, too, as well as to preserving and improving civilizational and democratic values of the society we live in. This way we learn how to do everything we can to prevent such crimes from happening ever again.

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## 16 Life



Danilo Kiš (1935 - 1989), a writer and a member of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, is one of the greatest Serbian authors. As a boy, he survived the horrors of the Holocaust, while his father perished in Auschwitz. In all his works, one way or another, Kiš always goes back to this experience, trauma, perpetual escape and chaos, anatomy of fear and evil, and search for meaningfulness.

**“An important fact of may fate is related to the origins I come from and the times I was born in, which probably is cause of my restless nature.”**

Danilo Kiš, a writer

After the war the surviving Jews faced a terrible loss. Jewish community was almost completely destroyed, and in many towns there were no more Jews.

In some places the survivors tried to revive cultural and religious life of the community. Some of them joined the thousands of European Jews who emigrated to Israel. Some decided to move to other countries far away from the traces of the war. Still, some continued their life in Yugoslavia.

Today the Jewish community in Serbia is brought together around Jewish communities in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Subotica, Pančevo, Zemun, Niš, Zrenjanin, Sombor and Kikinda, as well as around the Federation of Jewish Communities in Serbia. Jewish Historical Museum also operates within the Federation.

More information on: [www.savezjos.org](http://www.savezjos.org)

**“Remembrance is not enough, research is necessary, education is a must.”**

Aleksandar Saša Nečak, a Holocaust survivor

**“A commemoration without an educational dimension is void and meaningless, just as the education about the Holocaust cannot be without research. All three segments go hand in hand.”**

Chava Baruch, PhD Historian  
International School for Holocaust Studies Yad Vashem

Additional information:

- Portraits and Memories of the Jewish Community in Serbia before the Holocaust [www.jevrejpamte.org](http://www.jevrejpamte.org)
- Web Page Dedicated to the Past, Present and Future of Jews of the Former Yugoslavia [www.elmundosefarad.wikidot.com](http://www.elmundosefarad.wikidot.com)
- Yad Vashem - The World Holocaust Remembrance Center [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)
- Ester: teaching material & a collection of graphic novels: [www.ester.rs](http://www.ester.rs)
- Teaching material to combat antisemitism [www.antisemitizam.rs](http://www.antisemitizam.rs)

**TERRA FORMING**  
[www.terraforming.org](http://www.terraforming.org)

Yad Vashem's ready2print exhibition "Shoa - How Was It Humanly Possible?" deals with major historical aspects of the Holocaust. As I was working on the translation in the Serbian language, I realized that additional material dedicated to the Holocaust in the occupied Serbia need to be developed.

"Some words about the Holocaust in Serbia" is intended to be printed, exhibited and used as an addition to the Yad Vashem's exhibition "Shoa - How Was It Humanly Possible?", or it can be used as a separate exhibition, or a publication, or digitally (PDF). Obviously, this material is not meant to give a comprehensive and thorough overview of this complex period of history, but to contribute to learning and spreading of knowledge about it. It contributes to better understanding of the common elements and processes characteristic to the persecution of the Jews all around Europe compared to the model and processes implemented in the occupied Serbia and Yugoslavia

Serbian translation of the Yad Vashem's exhibition "Shoa - How Was It Humanly Possible?", as well as Terraforming's "Some Words about the Holocaust in Serbia" are available for free download on the website: [www.terraforming.org](http://www.terraforming.org)

Terraforming is a CSO network based in Novi Sad (RS), Stockholm (SE) and Amsterdam (NL). Terraforming develops educational methodologies and teaching materials combining best practices in contemporary pedagogy with new-media technologies.

Some of the graphs, maps and texts used in this material are taken from the teaching material Ester - a collection of graphic novels about young Jewish victims killed in Judenlager Semlin, also known as the camp Sajmište: [www.ester.rs](http://www.ester.rs)



# SOME WORDS ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST IN SERBIA

for better understanding of the historical experience in Serbia in the context of the European Holocaust



A photograph of the Baruh family taken in Belgrade before World War II: mother Mazal (née Ruso) and children Isak (1927), Streja (1928), Roza (1930) and Sofika (1931), father Rahamim Baruh not being on this photograph probably because it was he who took it. They were living in the Dubrovačka street No. 6 in Belgrade.

Mazal and the children Isak, Streja, Roza and Sofika were all killed in the Jewish camp at Sajmište.

Rahamim survived the war. Besides his wife and children he also lost his brothers Moša and Ašrer. Rahamim moved to Israel in 1953.

Yad Vashem Photo Archive, Jerusalem. 4731/4

Design © Terraforming 2018

## Words, just like forgotten names: mean more than they can say.

David Albahari

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3 Dehumanization

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