THE ANTI-JEWISH POLICY OF THE USSR IN THE LAST DECADE OF STALIN’S RULE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE EAST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO POLAND

In the context of our conference the anti-Jewish policy of the USSR is only a pretext for reflection on aspects of the subordination of the East European states to the USSR after the Second World War. This policy of the USSR well illustrates the dependence of Eastern Europe on the Soviet Union after 1945, one of the most interesting issues in the postwar history of the region. We see here the interaction between one particular Soviet policy and countries with different historical experiences, economic structures, attitudes towards Russia and attitudes towards the Jewish community.

In this issue we can see the origins of certain political activities, their consequences and their transfer to other countries. Moreover, it is interesting to observe the behavior of “local communists” in a situation not of their choosing: from attitudes of total subordination to attempts to preserve some margin of their own independence. It is also important to observe what was the reaction of different societies to this policy. In this regard, it should be noted that this policy did not concern society as whole but only a small part of it. We have to remember that the East European societies had a variety of attitudes towards Jews, including anti-Semitic attitudes.

After the Second World War the Jewish issue appeared in the Stalin’s policies in a new context. Internally, it was a significant part of the preparation for a new purge. Internationally, the Jewish question became an aspect of the question of Soviet influence in the Middle East. One should stress the circumstances that made the Jewish issue dominant in Soviet policies in some periods. On the one hand, we can see reasons that originated in the postwar political situation: the growth of tension between Western countries, the US and the USSR or the conflict over influence in the Middle East, where the creation of a Jewish state was increasingly becoming a reality. On the other hand, anti-Jewish activities had their basis in the essence of the communist state: looking for enemies to solve political and other problems. One should emphasize that Jews were better suited to the role of scapegoats than other nationalities because of their connections with Jewish organizations in Western countries, the US and the Middle East. We also have to recall that some Soviet policy makers were anti-Semites or were conscious of the anti-Semitic mood in some groups of Soviet society.

A separate problem of anti-Semitism in Russia after the Second World War is connected with Stalin. The manifestation of anti-Semitism in his activities had
several sources. It is rather difficult to separate what originated with Stalin's anti-Semitism and what was simple political calculation. With the collapse of war-time alliances, Stalin's policies took into account the possibility of the outbreak a third world war. In this situation all "disloyal and doubtful elements" had to be removed from political life. Society also had to be convinced that the threat posed by capitalism was real and that it was only matter of time before the search for new enemies would commence.

The anti-Jewish policy included various elements: the liquidation of Jewish institutions and organizations, persecution of the Jewish intellectual elite, purges of some state institutions, reprisals against some Jewish activists. These elements created a consistently anti-Jewish approach by the Soviet authorities. In every case these activities were accompanied by virulent anti-Zionist propaganda, which in its essence was simply anti-Semitic.

There were several fundamental political actions after the Second World War in the USSR in which the Jewish issue played a significant role. And the policy connected with them was played out on several levels: from direct persecution of Jews and the Jewish community as whole to treating the Jewish issue as a pretext for the achievement of certain political aims.

One of the first activities connected with Soviet Jews undertaken after the war was the case of Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. Creation of this institution in 1942 was part of the Soviet effort to gain American military assistance. From the beginning there were questions about the Committee's independence. The war prevented actions directed against the Committee, but after 1945 they were quickly initiated. They were also intensified by postwar political situation. Step by step signals of changes became more apparent. At the end of 1946 the suggestion appeared that the connections between the Committee and Zionism and world Jewry were a threat to the USSR. Many accusations were leveled at the Committee's activists, some of them as serious as charges of espionage or anti-state activity. The Committee was defined as "a center of anti-Soviet propaganda." The accusations also included the absurd. A good example was the accusation that leaders of the Committee were attempting to separate the Crimea from the USSR to create an independent Jewish state.

The liquidation of Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was preceded by the arrest of some of its members and the murder of its head, Solomon Michoels in January 1948. The Committee was dissolved in November 1948, and four years later the main trial of its members took place. There were thirteen death sentences announced at trial but the number of victims of this political action was higher (according to some estimates there were over twenty death sentences and almost a hundred were sent to labor camps). It has been confirmed that Stalin personally supervised the all activities directed against JAC. Also the investigation and the trial were carried out under his direction.

Various other institutions connected with Jews were liquidated along with the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. At the end of 1948, the press organ of the Committee, the Yiddish language newspaper Eynikeyt, was closed down.

The next attack was directed against Jewish intellectuals. A significant part of the campaign called "the struggle against cosmopolitans" was to destroy the Jew-