

## THE ATTITUDE OF THE UNION OF JEWS PARTICIPANTS OF COMBAT FOR POLISH INDEPENDENCE<sup>1</sup> TOWARDS THE MANIFESTATIONS OF ANTISEMITISM IN SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC

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**Abstract:** In the Second Polish Republic, from the mid-1930s, manifestations of antisemitism became more and more pronounced, and were met with protest from Jewish people. The Union of Jews Participants of Combat for Polish Independence, functioning in 1929–1939, was one of the organizations that fiercely opposed antisemitism. It was the only combatant organization in Poland that represented a national minority. While intensely fighting against the manifestations of antisemitism that encompassed various aspects of life, they condemned antisemitic riots in cities, towns and in universities, while also declaring and manifesting their loyalty and commitment to Poland itself.

### Introductory remarks

Antisemitism was a phenomenon which permanently, although with varying intensity, accompanied the daily life of European Jews when, after the emancipation (gaining equal rights) they were “introduced” to the non-Jewish society.<sup>2</sup> In Central-Eastern European countries in the 1930s, manifestations of antisemitism became distinctly worse, encapsulating various aspects of life, especially trade and craftsmanship. The growing wave of antisemitism also reached the Second Polish Republic. As Ezra Mandelsohn correctly noted:

In the 30s, and especially during the last four years of existence of independent Poland, anti-semitism returned in a gaudy form. It was accompanied by the doubled efforts to destroy the economic interests of Jews, and to eliminate as many of them as possible from Polish economy and intellectual life.[...] The great crisis, which hit Poland with full force in 1929, increased the influence of economic antisemitism [...] the economic crisis which caused the rise of

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<sup>1</sup> Pol. Związek Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski.

<sup>2</sup> See Cała 2000: 9; Wistrich 2007: 56–57.

social tensions and in an unavoidable manner worsened the relations between Poles and Jews. The other important factor was the growing Nazism in Germany.<sup>3</sup>

What position did the Jews take in regard to the antisemitism and how large was the protest against it from the Polish side – from the political parties and intelligentsia? The issue of antisemitic manifestations in the Second Polish Republic has been to a large extent covered by both Polish historians as well as those from abroad. A lot of attention has also been paid to the problem of Jewish circles protesting against antisemitism, but only a small amount of that attention focused on the issue discussed in these considerations. The issue of Polish circles protesting against the antisemitism still requires a lot of in-depth study.<sup>4</sup>

Among Polish political parties, antisemitism was unilaterally opposed by the Polish Socialist Party. In Jewish circles, the most visible protest against the wave of antisemitism came from the Polish Bund and Zionistic parties.<sup>5</sup> The Union of Jews Participants of Combat for Polish Independence belonged to the organizations that clearly and strongly opposed antisemitism. So far, there have been fairly few studies referring to the union's activities. The issue of the organization's opposition to antisemitism has been barely mentioned in those studies.<sup>6</sup>

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The combatant movement in the Second Polish Republic was characterized by intense dynamism and wide social outreach. As it was consolidating, Jewish combatants also created their own separate organization.<sup>7</sup> The Union of Jews Participants of Combat for Polish Independence was founded in Warsaw in 1929 and its admission to the Federation of Polish Unions of the Defenders of the Fatherland (*Federacja Polskich Związków Obrońców Ojczyzny*) took place in 1933.<sup>8</sup> The higher-ups of this dynamically growing organization strived to recruit Jews who fought for Poland's independence. Thanks to their huge determination, in 1938 the union had as many as 6,750 members spread across seven districts: Capital district, Warsaw-Białystok, Poznan-Pomeranian, Lodz, Cracow-Silesian, Lublin, and Eastern Lesser Poland.<sup>9</sup>

The day to day activities were managed by the Management Board in Warsaw, whose members were the presidents of the district departments. Under the district departments

<sup>3</sup> Mendelsohn 1992: 104–105.

<sup>4</sup> The scale of this problem and its importance for the Polish-Jewish relations was observed by Adam Michnik who published a three volume anthology of texts pertaining to negative reactions to antisemitism from some of the Polish circles. Taking into account his character and the role Michnik played in the history of modern Poland, it is important to mention his intentions: "The reason for my interest in this anthology is personal – I wanted to prove that Polish people did not suck antisemitism out of their mothers' milk. I have heard such an opinion many times and it always irritated me. After all, I knew that Polish culture spotted the poison of antisemitism and fought against it." Michnik 2010: V.

<sup>5</sup> Mendelsohn 1992: 114–116, 119–120.

<sup>6</sup> In the conducted studies one can include: *Związek Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski. Jego cele i działalność* 1939: 301–319; Jabłonowski 1989; Jabłonowski 1998; Jabłonowski 1996: 113–124; Wierzbieniec 1998: 281–305; Mierzwa 2001: 323–331.

<sup>7</sup> Jabłonowski 1989: 93–141.

<sup>8</sup> *Biuletyn Federacji Polskich Związków Obrońców Ojczyzny* 1933, no. 13–14: 10–11.

<sup>9</sup> Jabłonowski 1996: 114–115.

were branches, and under these were local branches at the lowest level of the organization's hierarchy. According to the statute, the decision-making power belonged to the General Meeting of Delegates, which happened every two years, and in the time between those meetings, to the Management Board.<sup>10</sup>

The union, whose influence on likeminded people devoted to Polish history and culture was especially large, strived to create a sense of belonging among its members and among the whole Jewish community. The union's primary objective was to support and further the development of the Polish Republic. The fundamental activities of the union, which were to be realized, included supporting every decision of the country, helping those in need, taking care of the graves of Jews who fell in battle for Poland's independence, doing cultural and educational work, spreading the knowledge of Jews' involvement in the fight for independence among young people, propagating closer Jewish-Polish relations, striving for the equal rights of Jews and – especially visible from the mid-1930s – fending off antisemitism.<sup>11</sup>

As Janusz Mierzwa rightly stated, the most important event in the union's activities against antisemitism was the death of Józef Piłsudski in 1935, after which the wave of antisemitism in Poland grew substantially. At the same time, the union's fight against antisemitism as a bigger and bigger social problem became sorely needed. Before 1935, the matter of combatting antisemitism did not have as much exposure, as only some of its manifestations were taken into account, such as the antisemitic riots caused by the nationalistic national youth movement (*młodzież narodowa*).<sup>12</sup> From time to time, the union published information in newspapers about discrimination against Jewish people in public life, about not allowing Jews to hold civil servant posts and restricting their roles in the Polish economy. Deeper ruminations about a topic that haunted the Jewish community in Poland – the attitude of the Polish state towards Jews and their role in public life was featured in the union magazine *Na Przełomie* of January 1935. In the first issue of the magazine, Leon Bregman in the article "Państwo – społeczeństwo – obywatel" (State–community–citizen) stated:

Still structurally based on the elements of a ghetto, raised by whole centuries of being separated and a conviction that this isolation is something to be protected, and all the interests kept within it, continually forced into the ghetto by enemy forces, in one form or another, the Jewish community in Poland could not so far find a proper attitude towards the shared state organism.

This fact cannot be taken as an accusation towards Jewish community. It has been after all, left on its own from the first days of Polish state's existence, no one, no Polish group or political party made efforts to take care of the Jewish issue from the ground up, to include the three million Jews into the orbit of great tasks standing before modern Poland, the issue of giving the Jewish community a place they were entitled to, a place in consolidating and strengthening the Polish state, to tie this mass closer to Polish Republic, not artificially, but with their hearts, minds and economic interests.

The fifteen years since the restoration of Poland's sovereignty were thus wasted when it comes to this issue.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Wierzbieniec 1998: 284.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*: 283; Jabłonowski 1996: 114.

<sup>12</sup> Mierzwa 2001: 325; See also Piekła 2015: 141.

<sup>13</sup> *Na Przełomie* 1935, no. 1: 7.

In the next article in the same issue of *Na Przełomie*, titled “O równe prawo pracy” (For equal job opportunities), Mikołaj Wadyas made a thorough characterization of limiting Jews’ opportunities of finding work when compared to Poles.

In the competitive race, no harm is done to requirements of justice only when objective criteria for qualification are taken into account. A man better prepared, more knowledgeable, more experienced, more devoted to the public cause should be able to overtake his weaker adversary. And that is why he becomes a very sour roadblock for the adversary who is trying to make a good living. If we take into account the fact, that in the organized socio-political system the number of institutions providing work should be precisely calculated, then it becomes clear why masses of people looking for work with lower qualifications try their hardest to get rid of better candidates, who, objectively speaking, would take priority in the recruitment process. That is why, when fighting over a job, using a weapon from a judophobia arsenal is a very convenient although unsavory method [...] Sentencing the unemployed Jewish mass to look for job opportunities based only on their own qualifications, barring civil servant job access with a thick wall of aversion, cannot contribute to the cause of moral uplifting of the people sentenced to vegetation or even worse, extinction.<sup>14</sup>

Marek Jabłonowski pointed out another important issue concerning the union’s attitude towards antisemitism even before 1935. When the Nazis came to power in Germany, as early as in 1933 there was a strong reaction towards manifestations of racism in that country. A resolution was passed, calling on the Polish and Jewish communities to economically boycott Nazi Germany as much as they possibly could. The union manifested its negative attitude towards the situation in the Third Reich until the end of the interwar period.<sup>15</sup>

Only a few months after the death of Józef Piłsudski in December of 1935 the union’s bulletin (“Biuletyn Okręgu Stołecznego Związku Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski”), published in Warsaw, was dominated by the problem of a rising wave of antisemitism in Poland and Europe. In the introductory article titled “Zadania” (Tasks) an anonymous author stated:

Antisemitism, which among culturally advanced people was tantamount to barbarism and which only found moral purchase in the backward Russia’s officials, had somehow overtaken the people with an inexplicable psychosis, a nation which produced many of the world’s greatest creators and thinkers, often of the Jewish descent.

In Germany, where in 1848 a victorious battle for freedom and free spirit was taking place, currently a wild and unworthy of humankind theory of racism became a national, common and mandatory theory [...].

The disease goes in circles. Under the influence of western barbarism, this theory of racism and antisemitism grew in scope until it encompassed other nations, finding followers either among people with weak characters or among people who wished to excel, counting on the weakness of character of their community.

If the Polish nation, endangered for so many years was able to suppress the disease of communism by depending on the soldier-like traits of national character, it will be able to suppress the equally dangerous hydra of racism.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*: 8–9.

<sup>15</sup> Jabłonowski 1996: 118.

<sup>16</sup> *Biuletyn Okręgu Stołecznego Związku Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski* 1935, no. 1: 2.

This bulletin included a resolution of the Management Board from 15 December 1935 titled “Wszyscy na front walki z antysemityzmem” (Everyone to the front of battle against antisemitism). The article pointed out that, for several weeks, Jewish youths at universities had been under attack by Polish students associated with the nationalistic movement. The young Jews were insulted, thrown out of lecture rooms and beaten with sticks. The resolution also condemned the actions taken by the Faculty Council of Engineering and Mechanics of Lviv Polytechnic, which issued a declaration to relieve existing tensions, stating that Jewish students were to sit at separate, dedicated seats in the lecture rooms. It was pointed out that for the first time in the history of independent Poland, an official public institution took a stand towards Jews, a stand that was based on racist principles. The union thought that Polish society, and especially state officials, should firmly and decidedly oppose the wave of hate directed at Jewish university students. The union appealed to Polish society, and especially to Polish combatant circles who they stayed in close contact with, to condemn the methods of nationalistic infighting, which put the good name of Poland at risk, and to find the viewpoint of the Lviv professors disgraceful. It was underlined that the manifestations of antisemitism in the form of law violations and restricting Jewish rights, were to be treated as social tensions, which undermined the inner cohesiveness of the state and its constitutional order. Thus, these antisemitic manifestations should be vigorously opposed just as any other antisocial and anti-state manifestations would be.<sup>17</sup> In order to disseminate the resolution as widely as possible, the union sent it to the district departments and union branches. The branches were tasked with conveying this declaration post-haste to their respective district governors (Pol. *starosta*) and voivodes (Pol. *wojewoda*). The other task of the union branches was to make sure that the resolution appeared in local newspapers, both Jewish and Polish.<sup>18</sup>

The issue of fighting against the growing wave of antisemitism was addressed in the resolution of the Second General Meeting of the Union’s Delegates, which took place in Warsaw at the beginning of January 1936. The resolution stated that antisemitism, which had become an instrument for a political agenda, was contradictory to the Polish tradition of tolerance, that it weakened the coherency of the Polish state and attempted to push away the Jewish population. While declaring the union’s readiness to repel any acts on Jewish rights, possessions and lives, the union also addressed the Polish society with an ardent plea to fight together against antisemitism.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, at the beginning of 1936, the Management Board of the union sent special instructions pertaining to antisemitism to all of its branches. Each branch was tasked with choosing one of their members (or more) to prepare papers describing the danger of antisemitism and to deliver them at open meetings.<sup>20</sup>

The actions taken by the union were a result of antisemitic riots in cities and universities, pickets near Jewish shops which barred Polish clients from entering, as well as

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*: 5–6.

<sup>18</sup> CDIA, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 19: 4; CDIA, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 84: 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Na Przełomie* (March) 1936, 11; *Biuletyn Okręgu Krakowsko-Śląskiego Związku Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski* 1936, no 5: 6–7; See also: Jabłonowski 1996: 117–118; Mierzwa 2001: 326.

<sup>20</sup> DALO, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 20: 10.

slogans inciting boycotting the Jews, which more and more often appeared in newspapers affiliated with the far right, fascist political parties.<sup>21</sup>

Trying to counteract the growing wave of antisemitism, the union's Management Board in Warsaw passed a resolution on antisemitism on 16 June 1936. The declaration listed out the sources and consequences of the phenomenon, which was becoming more and more present in public life. The effects were negative towards the Jewish population, yet, as the resolution underlined, also disadvantageous for the Polish statehood. The lack of proper reaction from the Polish government pertaining to economic boycott of the Jews and the spreading antisemitic slogans by far-right fascist political parties was also noted. At the same time, the lack of reaction from the Polish government was seen as the source of all the antisemitic incidents.

The loyalty of the Jewish population towards Poland was emphasized by the fact that Jews also took part in Poland's fight for independence, for which some of them were given the highest military honors, including the Order *Virtuti Militari*.<sup>22</sup> The resolution pointed out the economic effects of the growing expulsion of Jews from certain aspects of the economy, and the simultaneous decrease in income to the state budget. By emphasizing the loyalty of the Jews to Poland, the resolution mentioned that the economic boycott of Jews served the enemies of harmonic development of the Polish statehood. It also stated that the growing unemployment and progressing process of pauperization among a large part of Jewish population were factors contributing to the radicalization of social masses, which communists would exploit to grow their influence.

One point of the resolution concerned the situation of Jewish youths, who had limited access to schools and public universities and were persecuted by their Polish colleagues. The young people also had limited opportunities to work as civil servants, even though access to such jobs was guaranteed for all Polish citizens by the constitution. As means to change the existing Jewish work structure, which focused largely on commerce, the resolution proposed creating and funding vocational schools, on a large scale, for Jewish youths.

At the end of the declaration was an appeal to the Polish government and Polish society at large to protest against antisemitism. The union demanded proper legislation be passed, one that would ban propagating antisemitism, ensure equal rights in public life, and provide the Jewish population with a sense of security. At the same time, the union declared the readiness of Jewish people to change their professional structure. The union also declared that they would be persuading young Jews to cooperate with Polish youths when it comes to *Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego* boy scouts organization.<sup>23</sup>

The Management Board of the union, in a circular sent to all its branches on 24 June 1936, instructed them to spread the declaration against antisemitism far and wide. The declaration was to be delivered to local authorities, state officials, prominent politicians and economists and local social, professional and combatant organizations. Moreover, the union appealed to have the contents of the declaration disseminated among local

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<sup>21</sup> DALO, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 28: 2.

<sup>22</sup> From the members of the union, the Order *Virtuti Militari* was awarded to, among others: Leopold Spira, Dr Karol Zipper, Juliusz Zirler. See: *Zirler Juliusz* 1937: 111–112; *Spira Leopold* 1937: 791; *Zipper Karol* 1937: 801–802.

<sup>23</sup> CDIA, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 82: 1; See also: Appendix.

Jewish communities. On 14 July 1936, the Management Board of the union addressed all its branches and departments to collect, in the shortest amount of time possible, all material referencing antisemitic manifestations in Poland such as flyers, brochures, declarations, stickers and photos of antisemitic slogans. Those materials were to be sent as soon as possible to Warsaw, to the Management Board, so that they could prepare a presentation for the government officials, a presentation depicting the scale of antisemitism, its range and form in different regions of the country.<sup>24</sup>

Protesting against the wave of antisemitism, the Management Board of the union constantly lobbied the relevant authorities of the Polish state, with whom they stayed in contact. In December 1936, the union fiercely reacted to a widely discussed and published antisemitic statement of Member of Parliament Waclaw Budzyński, former participant of combat in Piłsudski's Legions, politically affiliated with the ruling party in Poland. During a debate in the Sejm, he was said to state that during Poland's fight for independence every Jew had deserted the battlefield, which was clearly slanderous. Immediately after this statement, on 22 December the Management Board of the union called for an assembly, during which the Board made a resolution to send their complaint by telegram to the Marshal of the Sejm. Nikodem Polak, Leon Bergman, Leopold Spira, Leon Holzer and Henryk Kanarek, all members of the Management Board, were authorized to challenge Budzyński to a duel. Budzyński, however, refused, calling on parliamentary immunity. As a result, the issue ended amicably, as a deal was made with Budzyński's proxies, editing a protocol under which Budzyński signed. The protocol stated, that the information given to the press did not reflect the true intentions of Budzyński's statement, and as such they were false, adding that he did not have any intention of insulting Jewish combatants, and felt regretful for the incident it caused.<sup>25</sup>

After antisemitic riots in Brześć-on-Bug on 13 May 1937, and riots against the Jewish population in other towns and cities,<sup>26</sup> the vice-presidents of the Management Board of the union, Leopold Spira and Dymitr Lachowski, intervened on 11 October 1937 in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, expressing their protest against the radical increase in antisemitic activities in some Polish cities. The Head of the Political Department from Ministry of Internal Affairs, Waclaw Żyborski, with whom the representatives of the union met, ensured them at that time that the state officials would use all means at their disposal to stop the antisemitic violations of law. He also stated that these acts had reached their climax and that in the near future everything should go back to normal, instructing the representatives to have patience, and to calm the other members of the union. The Head of the Nationality Department of Ministry of Internal Affairs reacted in a similar manner, and the union representatives met with him on 13 October 1937. Moreover, the Management Board of the union addressed all its departments and branches to financially help the members and their families who suffered in the riots. The gathered sum of 4,617 Polish zlotys was then sent to the branch office in Brześć-on-Bug.<sup>27</sup>

Other cases in which the union intervened concerned the military service of Jewish people. In July 1937, the vice-president of the Management Board of the union, Dymitr

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<sup>24</sup> CDIA, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 20: 15, 21.

<sup>25</sup> CDIA, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 28: 4.

<sup>26</sup> Berenstein 1955: 24–25; Żyndul 1994: 44–48; Piekla 2015: 137; Aleksion 2019: *passim*.

<sup>27</sup> CDIA, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 28: 6; CDIA, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 105: 34.

Lachowski alongside the secretary general of the union, Stanisław Feigenblatt, went to the Ministry of Defense (Ministerstwo Spraw Wojskowych) and expressed their protest against a questionnaire published in the magazine *ABC* which spread antisemitic slogans. The questionnaire included negative and insulting comments about Jewish people serving in the military. This intervention ended up as a success, as the questionnaire ceased to be published. However, in the middle of November 1937, the vice-president of the Management Board Dymitr Lachowski, alongside one of the Board's members, Jerzy Flaum, met with the Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Defense, intervening in the case of antisemitic statements of some military officers. In response, they were assured that there would be an immediate investigation regarding the matter.

Another issue to meet with a resolute intervention from the union, was an ordinance passed on universities that ordered Jewish students to take separate seats in lecture rooms dedicated to them. The issue became important once again in 1937, when the Head of the Ministry of Religion and Public Enlightenment (Minister Wyznań Religijnych i Oświecenia Publicznego), due to nationalistic militants assaulting Jewish university students, gave rectors the decision-making power to issue such resolutions. The Management Board of the union reacted by sending an open letter to the ministry. The letter expressed their firm objections against the ordinances rectors made in Warsaw universities, which placed Jewish students in separate seats in the lecture rooms where classes took place. The letter stated that these ordinances infringed upon the Jewish students' rights to equal treatment, as guaranteed by the constitution. At the same time, the union appealed to the Head of the Ministry of Religion and Public Enlightenment to repeal these ordinances.<sup>28</sup>

The issue of antisemitism dominated the Third General Meeting of Delegates of the union, which happened in Cracow in December 1937. Once again, the government's position in regard to the Jewish question was criticized and this statement was propagated in Jewish communities far and wide.<sup>29</sup> As a result, the union's popularity grew, especially among Jewish combatants who did not belong to the union.<sup>30</sup>

At the general meeting, Professor Zdzisław Zmigryder-Konopka<sup>31</sup> gave an ideological lecture, in which he pointed out that the recent statements and actions of the government, encouraging Jews to emigrate, were harmful to them. He emphasized that Jews and Jewish combatants were restricted from entering the Camp of National Unity pro-government political party. With regret, the professor mentioned an attempt to disrupt the funeral ceremony of Nikodem Polak in Lviv. Polak was a vice president of the Management Board of the union who died on 12 April 1937.<sup>32</sup> During the funeral procession with the coffin of the deceased, a group of students connected with the nationalistic movement, caused an antisemitic disturbance on plac Akademicki (Academic Square).

<sup>28</sup> CDIA, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 28: 6–7.

<sup>29</sup> *Biuletyn Okręgu Krakowsko-Śląskiego Związku Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski* 1938, no. 9, 2,4–8: 10.

<sup>30</sup> *Wierzbieniec* 1998: 287.

<sup>31</sup> Professor Zdzisław Zmigryder-Konopka was the vice president of the Management Board of the union. In 1938, after the president's nomination, he became a senator of the Polish Republic. See: Żebrowski 2003: 832.

<sup>32</sup> ANKr, *Starostwo Grodzkie Krakowskie*, sygn. 248: *passim*; *Polak Nikodem*, 1939: 272–273; Jabłonowski 1996: 117.



Bottles and glasses were shattered in front of the funeral procession and the group used antisemitic slogans and kept chanting “Heil Hitler.”<sup>33</sup> Professor Zmigryder-Konopka also mentioned another incident. On 11 November 1937 Poles celebrated their National Independence Day. During this celebration in Cracow, the union banner with the Polish emblem was disrespected only because it was being carried by Jewish combatants.

Next, the professor said that removing Jews from commerce and the “learned professions” (priests, lawyers, doctors) would lead to the impoverishment of the Jewish population, which would cause pauperization and in turn create solid ground for the radicalization of social tensions among them. At the end of his speech, the professor decried the discrimination against Jewish students, against brutally separating them into a “seating ghetto,” forcing them into taking separate, isolated seats dedicated to them during lectures. At the same time, he proudly mentioned those Jewish students who decided to stand during lectures because they did not want to take a seat. He found their attitude commendable and righteous, as it was opposing the new ghetto and hopefully, thanks to their efforts, Jews would never be sent to one again. He expressed the solidarity of the entire union in favour of their actions.<sup>34</sup>

In the years 1938–1939, as the Second Polish Republic was focusing on the nascent military threat from Germany, the national press did not stop its antisemitic propaganda. Antisemitic riots still happened, but on a much smaller scale than before.<sup>35</sup> As a result, the union paid much less attention to the antisemitism, concentrating its efforts on fighting off the German threat. The brunt of the fight against antisemitism was picked up by an organization closely related to the union called Youth Cadre (Kadra Młodych). The age of organization’s members ranged from 18 to 35 years, and they were recruited from the families of the union members and supporters of the union, including Jewish students, who were exposed to discrimination and to physical violence from Polish students affiliated with the nationalistic movement.<sup>36</sup>

Youth Cadre’s ideological agenda, which addressed the issue of antisemitism in Poland, was widely spread amongst Jewish university students in Cracow, Lviv and Warsaw in May 1938. It was stated that antisemitism negatively affects the stability of the country and that it makes Jewish people feel unsafe. The activities of Polish nationalistic political parties aimed against the Jews in hopes of increasing their influence on society were immoral and unethical, violated the law, and disrupted the public order. These activities became more and more popular among the Polish population due to the difficult economic situation and high unemployment. It was emphasized that people submitting to the antisemitic propaganda were not aware that the Jewish merchant, on par with non-Jewish, was facing the economic crisis all the same, and that the Jewish worker, in physical and sedentary occupations were also suffering from unemployment, often even more so than the non-Jewish worker. After analyzing the hard situation in which the Jewish youths found themselves in, the analysis found that they indeed had no access to official positions, state or local, and that they were indeed exposed to insults and violence due to

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<sup>33</sup> Biedrzycka 2012: 851.

<sup>34</sup> ANKr, *Starostwo Grodzkie Krakowskie*, sygn. 248: *passim*.

<sup>35</sup> Piekla 2015: 143.

<sup>36</sup> DALO, Fond 1, opis 53, sprawa 883: 5–7; CDIA, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 26: 2–3; CDIA, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 30: 1–2; Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 117: 2–4.

antisemitic riots breaking out in universities. It was also found out, that Jewish university students were excluded from scientific and self-help associations. The programme mentioned with regret the lack of proper opposition amongst the Polish intelligentsia to manifestations of antisemitism. However, most of the Polish public that did not submit to the antisemitic slogans did not take action to fight antisemitism. Despite that, the programme declared willingness to work for Poland. There was also a declaration of readiness to sacrifice themselves to defend Poland, if the need ever arose.<sup>37</sup>

## Final remarks

To sum up, it is worth mentioning that Jewish combatants who had taken part in fighting for Poland's independence had a special right to demand respect and tolerance from the Polish state for both themselves and the whole Jewish community, to protest against the intolerance and enmity which erupted into violence on more than one occasion.

Condemning antisemitism, as an unfavorable phenomenon for the Jewish population and the whole country, a phenomenon which grew in strength in the second half of the 1930s, was a main issue. The agitation of masses against the Jewish people organized by various organizations connected to the nationalistic movement, which was especially visible in newspapers, was met with protest. The discrimination against Jews in public life, the antisemitic riots that broke out in towns, cities, and universities, and the attacks on Jewish combatants were also condemned. It was pointed out that the emigration of Jews from Poland, which the Polish state strived towards, would not better the situation of the Polish population.

The issue of antisemitism was discussed during debates and public speeches. It was present in various magazines. It was the topic of many resolutions of the union, but also protests directed at the Polish government and the whole of Polish society. Every time the protests were formulated, they declared a devotion to Polish state, and the eagerness to take an active part in its development, based on the principle of every citizen being equal.

Despite various activities and the staunch determination of the union in its fight against antisemitism, the union did not manage to achieve its goals. The same goes for other Jewish organizations that opposed antisemitism. Nevertheless, this struggle was necessary, for it gave testimony to a desire present in many circles in the Second Polish Republic, a desire to make a country based on democratic principles, free of hate and xenophobia.

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<sup>37</sup> CDIA, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 85: 1–2.

## APPENDIX

Declaration of the Management Board of the Union of Jews Participants of Combat for Polish Independence concerning antisemitism, from June 16, 1936.<sup>38</sup>

Związek Żydów Uczestników  
Walk o Niepodległość Polski  
Warszawa, Elektoralna 18.

### DECLARATION of the Management Board June 16, 1936

The ever-increasing wave of antisemitism, endangering the public safety, as well as the Polish good name and the national pride, forces every astute citizen to consider the reasons and consequences of this social phenomenon.

The Management Board of the Union of Jews Participants of Combat for Polish Independence, after careful deliberation, announces the following:

From the oldest times, the source of the animosity directed towards Jews were their economic relations.

The economic crisis which overwhelmed the Polish Republic in the recent years, the unemployment in the cities, industrial centers and among craftsmen, the overpopulation of the countryside and the abrupt drop in prices of all agricultural goods, and finally, the inability of the state to accommodate the substantial rise of population in Poland – all of this has made the masses susceptible to antisemitic propaganda. This agitation was orchestrated by people who call themselves the “National” party of Grand Poland, who hope to transform the Polish Republic into a camp of chaos and lawlessness, that propagate slogans unworthy of any Polish faction mindful of its true Polish tradition, slogans that come from the lowest of impulses, slogans that are foreign to every ethics and religion, slogans highly similar to those only used by the Nazis.

“Do you have no bread to eat? Take it from the Jew! You lack work? Exile the Jew – you will take his work.” This is the quintessence of the antisemitic agitation, which in the times of hunger and unemployment, where there was no hope for tomorrow, found recognition among the masses of workers, farmers, craftsmen and finds it more and more even among intelligentsia, without so much as any action from the government’s public security, and the pregnant silence from the majority of the public, the Polish press and the people in power after the May Coup.

With these slogans directed at the unemployed and hungry, the old saying “don’t buy from the Jew” came back to life among small shopkeepers, hucksters and all sorts of petite bourgeoisie of Polish nationality.

It has to be said that the antisemitic policy using these slogans is not conducive to economic, national and state development, in fact it is the opposite – it cannot cure the economic situation of Poland yet it contradicts the foundations of law, undermines the morality and public order and brings to the fore the seeds of anxiety and bloody riots.

It thus seems clear, that the ones wielding these slogans, in the ultimate goal of their machinations, are not really aiming at the Jews, but at the current government. They know that by sacrificing the small-town Jews and the chaos it causes, they can reach for power which they so desire.

Instead of fighting against the reason, and instead of applying reasonable preventative measures, the government often intervened only when the Jewish shops were destroyed, when the Jews were killed, after their houses had been burned and the property of these calm citizens stolen.

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<sup>38</sup> CDIA, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 82: 1 and *verte*.

However, with a difficult-to-explain indulgence that put the image of the Polish state at risk, the disgusting antisemitic slogans were and are tolerated, as is the publishing of the tabloids that call for boycotts that lead to riots and the punishment system that uses the sword – not the hand.

We have to regretfully state, in view of relevant factors, that the system failed altogether and, for the good of the Polish state, cannot be tolerated any longer. We have to underline, that the economic boycott and economic struggle against the Jews will inevitably lead to riots. Once the social tensions are truly ignited, the policeman's baton will be powerless to stop them.

Finally, for principle's sake, we have to take a stand in the issue of the so-called economic struggle against the Jews.

First of all, we have to objectively state that, not mentioning us being soldiers of Poland, members of Polish legions, members of Polish Military Organization, Knights of the *Virtuti Militari* Order, owners of the Cross of Independence and Cross of Valor, earned through a soldier's sweat and blood, that the Jewish people in Poland, if they are to be considered a minority, they are without a doubt a loyal and firmly devoted minority to the Polish state.

And if the Polish state could solve its internal problems just enough to positively and constructively take care of Polish Jews, if they were to show them a bit more love from their motherland, love for their somewhat neglected son, and if they could with the then aware of said love Jewish community, pull away the uneducated and economically poor Jewish masses out of their cultural and economic backwardness, and propel them into the higher level of cultural and economic emancipation, as the great countries of the Western Europe have already done, there is no doubt that today's most loyal Jews would grow to become the most useful in all economic areas and national activities ardent Polish patriots.

Is there a need to present the example of French, English, American or Italian Jews to finally acknowledge the old adage that every country's Jews are just like the country that raises them?

That is why, concerning ourselves only with Polish national interest, the economy and defensive strength of the country, it has to be stated that such economic struggle in aforementioned conditions where Polish Jews are supposed to subordinate themselves to Polish national demands is pointless, unnecessary and harmful, and what is most important – costly. We cannot forget that the financial burden of this struggle will be borne by the country's economy, alongside the State Treasury, which is already in a weak condition.

We do not hesitate to say, that only the greatest enemy of Poland, one who hates the image of big, rich, happy and joyful, due to its population's happiness, powerful Poland, could propagate such a boycott, especially now, when arm in arm we have to rise together to a higher economic and cultural life standard.

In our most general take on today's issue of the so-called Jewish question, we want to be loyal and brave, just like the former soldiers we are, and that is why we do not close our eyes to the accusations that find faults in Jewish people, and to the danger that the spread of such socio-radical influence brings.

As for the social disadvantages of the Jewish people, we have to say that every nation and every society has their own specific characteristics which developed in said nation or community over a long period of time. Only nations without any history, which in the grand book of mankind's development have not done anything remarkable, do not possess weaknesses and at the same time strengths.

As for the Jews in particular, it has to be said that through long years of living as a scattered nation, centuries long ghetto and malfunctioning economic structure, the nation developed specific characteristics which are perceived as their weaknesses.

Without a doubt, in the Great Independent Poland, following the examples of such reformers as Czacki, Kołłątaj and Kościuszko, and thanks to Polish schools and shared school desks, such characteristics, with the passage of time, will lessen or even fully disappear.

The far-reaching radicalization of masses can be seen in the whole country. Parts of both Christian and Jewish communities, due to poverty, deprived of both food and work and not see-

ing any better prospects for tomorrow, fall right into the hands of communist agitators. The same preventive measures that are deployed for defenseless masses of farmers and workers have to be deployed for the impoverished and unemployed Jews.

The lowering of the unemployment rate will be the best and the most effective antidote for communism. This programme in its entirety can also be applied to the Jewish community. Their situation, especially the situation of youths attending schools and universities, is deplorable and tragic, for they are ill-treated by their school desk peers. The Jewish youths cannot even begin to fathom, that despite the rights guaranteed by Polish constitution, even the most brilliant of them, they are unable to receive any job offers in the public sector, state or local or even as manual labor for public contracts.

This breaking of laws guaranteed by the constitution – exclusion of Jews from jobs in state and local administration by the administrative factors – has to be condemned as hard as possible.

The Jewish youths, raised in the spirit of a beautiful country abiding by the constitution, that the state is a common good of all of its citizens meet with a sad truth on their first encounter with real life, and after years of vegetation and ineffective job hunting, they become overwhelmed by despair at their situation, and thus can become quite susceptible to the communist propaganda.

It does not have to be added that our homegrown racists, using their untoward antisemitic propaganda, poison the atmosphere and successfully push the maltreated and beaten Jewish youths to desperate acts.

Providing basic means of living such as food and work and a change of atmosphere in which the Jewish community is growing right now, expanding the boy scouts activities to include the Jewish youths, organizing joint work camps, addressing the issue of Jewish emigration on reasonable and factual premises, finally large subsidizing of vocational schools for Jews, allowing Jews to hold official positions, both locally and on the higher level – is the only right way to remove communist influence from among the Jewish population.

After conducting the aforementioned analysis of phenomena and current issues concerning the nowadays Jewish question, the Management Board of the Union of Jews Participants of Combat for Polish Independence decides:

- I. To appeal to the Sejm and Senate, and to all learned public opinion and all reasonable citizens, clergy of all faith and rites, to the mass of all Polish teachers and especially to the old comrades in arms and old colleagues from the federation, to fiercely and fully oppose the criminal, devious and harmful to the country antisemitic agitation.
- II. To demand in the name of the best understood Polish national interest, a ban on any and all antisemitic manifestations, both oral and in writing, and for such activities to be considered activities against the state itself.
- III. To demand from the local and state officials to pass a legislation that would ensure Jews' equal rights and to provide them with equal opportunities of finding work.
- IV. To demand a guaranteed survival and full protection of Jewish lives and wealth, by using all available means present in the administrative regulations, and especially abiding by basic and criminal law to guarantee the right to work and earning in peace.
- V. To call upon the Jewish society to support all the necessary works concerning the change in Jewish economic structure, especially to support building new vocational schools, and to appeal to the government that it fully supports and oversees this project.
- VI. To call upon the Jewish society to provide care and guidance to the young Jews, to demand from General Union of Polish Boy Scouts (Ogólny Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego) that it creates an apolitical Jewish branch, and to ask the government to support this action, which aims to raise a new generation in the spirit of solidarity and brotherhood of all citizens of the Polish Republic.

## Abbreviations

ANKr – Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie (National Archive in Krakow)

CDIA – Centralny Derżawnyj Istorycznyj Archiw Ukrainy u Lwowi (Central State Archives of Ukraine in Lviv)

DALO – Derżawnyj Archiw Lwiwskoj Oblasti (State Archives of Lviv Oblast)

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*Związek Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski*, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 20.

*Związek Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski*, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 26.

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*Związek Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski*, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 105.

*Związek Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski*, Fond 346, opis 1, sprawa 117.

DALO – Derżawnyj Archiw Lwiwskoj Oblasti (State Archives of Lviv Oblast)

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