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Why did the Jewish combatants need Union of Jews Participants of Combat for Polish Independence in the Second Polish Republic?

Abstract

This article attempts to provide an answer as to why the Jewish combatants founded the Union of Jews Participants of Combat for Polish Independence (Związek Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski), which operated in the period of 1929–1939. It was the only combatant organization in the Second Polish Republic that represented a national minority. The focus of this article is on the origin of the Union, its aims, goals and activities, as well as its developed organizational structure. Taken into consideration were also the Union's fundamental activities such as supporting self-help organizations, participating in annual events concerned with Polish history, spreading the knowledge of Jewish combatants' involvement in the fight for Poland's independence as well as the Union's protest against anti-Semitism in the 1930s and the Union's activities abroad. The Union was needed, because it allowed the Jewish combatants to take an active role in building up the Polish state, which had been erased from the maps for 123 years, influence its activities and at the same time supporting it and helping protect the interests of the whole Jewish community, in Poland and abroad. Members of the Union, the Jewish combatants who fought for Poland's independence, felt themselves entitled to, as well as morally obliged, protect their interests as well as those of the community they represented. They vied for respect and tolerance for their community and for the equal treatment of all Polish citizens, including Jews.

Key words: combatants, Jews, Poland, Germany, anti-Semitism, self-help associations, anniversaries

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Introduction

The 100th anniversary of the restoration of Polish independence in 1918, after 123 years of captivity, which was celebrated recently, encourages historians to look into the organizations and people that took part in the fight for Polish independence and who played an active role in founding and helping build the foundations of the Second Polish Republic.

Independent Poland, which was largely successful in the interwar period, was a result of the effort the citizens made for their own independent country. The effort of national minorities into the founding and growth of the Polish state cannot be disregarded. Despite a great volume of sources detailing the involvement of minorities, this matter is not common knowledge. This of course includes the Jewish minority, which, compared to other national minorities, was characterized by huge economic and intellectual potential. According to the 1931 census, there were over 3.1 million Jews living in Poland, who constituted about 10% of the total population (Tomaszewski 1993: 159, 161).

The multifaceted involvement of Jews into the founding of the independent Polish nation and its development was obvious, despite a range of controversial opinions on the subject. Some of those slanderous opinions state that Polish Jews were supporting the invaders, that they backed anti-state organizations in the new, independent Poland, and that they supported the totalitarian communism.

The main proof of the involvement of Jews in the fight for independence, right alongside Poles, is the Jewish combatants. To actively support the founding of the Polish state, to be able to influence its activities and at the same time protect their and their community's interests, they founded the Union of Jews Participants of Combat for Polish Independence (Związek Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski). It was the only national minority combatant organization in Poland (Żebrowski 2003, vol. 2: 843), which proves the major, when compared to other national minorities, role of Jewish people in the struggle for Poland's independence, as well as their eagerness to play an active role in public life.

In the Second Polish Republic, the Jewish combatants who fought for Poland's independence were entitled to respect, to be able to represent and protect the rights of themselves and their community and to protest against the intolerance shown against them.

The origin of the Union, its goals, aims and organizational structure

When referring to the origin of the Union, Jewish combatants point to the period of World War I and the organization of Jewish independent youth which, as early as 1916, issued a declaration denying the invader's government's right to decide what their community's fate on Polish soil will be. The declaration stated that the issue of Jewish people in Poland is a state matter and only the Polish state can resolve it ("Na Przełomie" 1936, no 1:1).

To be efficient in achieving their goals, the Jewish combatants decided to create their own organization. The concept of the organization was presented to Józef Piłsudski by the Jewish delegation, combatants who fought for Poland's independence. The delegation came to Sulejówek with this exact initiative in March, 1926. Marshal Piłsudski approved of the initiative and encouraged the delegation to continue its activities (*Delegacja...* 1939: 320–321).

Despite that, the Union was only founded three years later, in 1929 (Wierzbieniec 1998: 282). However, the Union's large expansion of its organizational structure happened after the first General Meeting of Delegates in 1933 (Jabłonowski 1996: 115; Mierzwa 2001: 324). As a result, in 1936, the Union functioned in eight districts: Capital district, including the capital city of Warsaw, Warsaw-Białystok, Poznań-Pomerian, Cracow-Silesian, Eastern Lesser Poland, Łódź, Lublin and Vilnius-Nowogród. Moreover, two branches of the Union functioned abroad, in Antwerp and Brussels (F. 346, op. 1, spr. 20: 4). Under the district departments were lesser branches, subordinate to which were local branches completing the hierarchy. The power to decide about the Union's day to day activity lay in the hands of the Management Board, its headquarters located in Warsaw (Wierzbieniec 1998: 284). After expanding, in 1938 the Union had 6750 members (Jabłonowski 1996: 115).

From 1933 until the end of the interwar period, the Union of Jews Participants of Combat for Polish Independence was associated with the Federation of Polish Unions of Defenders of the Country (Federacja Polskich Związków Obrońców Ojczyzny) (*Biuletyn Federacji...* 1933, no. 13–14: 10–11). The Union was also an active participant in the activities undertaken by the Federation. This matter is thoroughly covered by Marek Jabłonowski (Jabłonowski 1989: 322; 1996: 113–119; 1998: 210–213).

To become a member of the Union one had to be a Jewish combatant, regardless of military rank, who was not an active member of the

military (*Związek...* 1939: 301). The Union tried to gather all the Jewish combatants who fought for Polish independence. As a result, the Union's influence was directed towards people devoted to Polish history and culture. The fundamental activities of the Union included making its members and the Jewish community feel as if they belonged to the country, supporting every decision of the country, helping those in need, taking care of the graves of the Jews who fell in battle for Poland's independence, spreading the knowledge of Jews' involvement in the fight for independence among the young people, as well as supporting the closer Jewish-Polish relations (Statut... 1934: 4). In its declarations, the Union supported Marshall Józef Piłsudski and his vision of the prosperous country (Mierzwa 2001: 325).

The activities of the Union were different based on the district department the branch belonged to. One such branch was founded in Rzeszów on July 22, 1934. A year after its creation it had 90 members. The Rzeszów branch owned a building, which opened in March, 1935. The branch used the building to organize lectures, debates, gatherings and dances. The Union branch's members participated – most often in military uniforms – in Rzeszów's state ceremonies (Wierzbieniec 2004: 806). The branch in Przemyśl, founded in 1933, with which the Rzeszów branch worked closely, worked in the same manner (Wierzbieniec 1996: 246).

The foreign branches of the Union, which gathered the Jewish combatants who emigrated from Poland, were also thriving. On September 14, 1936, a new branch was opened in Brussels. The event was hosted by the president of the branch, Karol Bravman. As for how much this branch was worth to the Union, it should be indicated by the presence of the president and secretary of Federation of Polish Unions 'Protectors of the Country' branch. ("Na Przełomie" 1936, no. 1: 14).

Self-help associations, participating in state anniversaries and spreading knowledge about Jews who fought for Polish independence

The Union made sure to take care of its members. That is why, self-help section Brotherly Help (Bratnia Pomoc) was introduced to all of the Union branches. Aside from helping members of the Union and their families, the Brotherly Help section also took care of looking for employment, seeking legal and medical help. One of the busy self-help sections was located in Warsaw. Trying to help unemployed Union

members, it placed advertisements in newspapers and appealed for job offers to be sent to the secretariat of Brotherly Help located at Leszno Street 48, whether in craft, industry, trade or liberal professions (“Na Przełomie” 1936, no. 1: 14).

According to the report of the self-help section in the Cracow branch, from March 29, 1936, until April 11, 1937, out of 512 members, the branch helped 22 members with legal matters and 67 of them with medical issues; 30 members were placed in hospitals. The members were also given benefits in the total amount of 374.84zł. In 28 cases legal action was taken to the administration office. The branch assessed 36 requests to various institutions, both state and local. The poorest members received 35 pairs of shoes. During winter, the Union paid for 200 lunches in restaurants. They also bought and handed out 5,000 tons of coal. To organize Pesach, the Union helped 39 members. They bought and handed out: 266kg of maca bread, 1,635 kg of potatoes, 101 kg of meat, 39 kg of sugar, 0.5 kg of tea, 5.5 kg of coffee, 1,155 eggs, 18 kg of various fats, 9 kg of soap, 20 liters of wine, 6kg of plums and 39 Hagada books. (“Biuletyn Okręgu Krakowsko-Śląskiego...” 1937, no 8: 12–13).

In Lviv, the Brotherly Help organized a yearly fundraiser for Pesach among the Jewish community for the poorest members of the Union (*Związek...* 1938, no. 9: 4). Just like in other cities, the Brotherly Help in Rzeszow paid out benefits to the poorest members, tried getting them jobs and also offered legal and medical help. They have also made successful interventions in the city council (Wierzbieniec 2004: 806).

The Union members were especially noticeable during the anniversary state ceremonies. During such events, the Union members usually went along with the Federation (Jabłonowski 1996: 115). Members of the Union wore pins with their Union emblem and carried their banner on each and every anniversary of National Independence Day or anniversary of 3rd May Constitution Day.

The first time the Union members took part in the National Independence Day state ceremony was on November 11th, 1933 (*Związek...* 1939: 306). In 1934, the Management Board of the Union ordered all of the branches to take part in the state ceremonies of 3rd May Constitution Day (F. 346, op. 1, spr. 19: 1). In each city where the Union branches existed the most important moment was the passing of the banner, in which local and state government officials took part. In November of 1934 such a ceremony took place in Przemyśl. The honorary committee was led by Prince Leon Sapieha, president of the Federation’s district department. The ceremonies began with a service in the Tempel synagogue, then proceeded to the market square where a large audience gath-

ered. Military rabbi Prof. Schapira blessed the banner under the watchful eye of Colonel Mieczysław Boruta Spiechowicz, commander of the 22nd Mountain Infantry Division in Przemyśl. Then the Przemyśl Powiat Governor (pol. starosta) Adam Remiszewski passed the banner to the president of the Union's Management Board, Leon Bregman, who then passed it to the Union president of the Przemyśl branch, dr. Ferdynand Brandstaetter. After the ceremonies on the market square ended, the gathered people moved to the the new Jewish cemetery, where the participants placed flower wreathes on the Jewish graves ("Na Przełomie"... 1935, no 1: 28).

The Union took pride in the patriotic behavior of the Union members, who fought alongside Polish people for Polish independence. The character the Union liked to refer to the most was Berek Joselewicz, who created a Jewish light cavalry regiment and as its commander, ranked colonel, fought in the Kościuszko Uprising and then enlisted in the army of the Duchy of Warsaw. At the beginning of 1934, the Union's Management Board ordered all its branches to organize a ceremony on April 21, 1934 to celebrate the 125th anniversary of colonel Joselewicz's death (F. 346, op. 1, spr. 19: 1).

In order to gather documents about Jewish people's involvement in the fight for Polish independence and to document the activities of Jewish combatants in the Second Polish Republic, the Union's Management Board created an archive in Warsaw. The archive gathered memoirs and diaries as well as documents detailing the medals received by the Union's combatants. Each branch was also ordered to send newspaper articles and photographs related to the Union's activities to the Warsaw archive (F. 346, op. 1, spr. 19: 1–2).

The spread of knowledge about Jewish combatants' involvement in the fight for Polish independence as well as the Union's goals and purpose was undertaken by the Management Board, Union districts and its local branches. The earliest and the longest running publications, from 1934 to 1938, appeared in 'Biuletyn Okręgu Krakowsko-Śląskiego Związku Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski' (Union's Cracow-Silesian District Bulletin) (Mierzwa 2001: 330). In the years 1935–1936 the Management Board published in the magazine 'Na Przełomie', whose editor was Stanisław Feigenblatt (Jabłonowski 1991: 81). At the end of 1935, the Union's Warsaw district started to publish 'Biuletyn Okręgu Stołecznego Związku Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski' ('Biuletyn Okręgu Stołecznego...' 1935, no. 1: 1). Then, starting from July, 1937 until the end of the interwar period, the Union's Lviv branch published its own magazine titled 'Związek

Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski Oddział Lwowski im. Nikodema Polaka Biuletyn' (*Związek...* 1937, no. 2: 1).

The Union published an album dedicated to Berek Joselewicz with the text written by famous Jewish historian, professor Majer Bałaban. For the 75th anniversary of the January Uprising, the Union published the work of a journalist from Łódź and an officer in reserve, Janusz Konrad Urbach, titled *Udział Żydów w walce o niepodległość Polski (The participation of Jews in the fight for Polish independence)* (Urbach 1938: 3). Just before the outbreak of World War II, the Union financed and published an illustrated monograph in Lviv titled *Żydzi bojownicy o niepodległość Polski (Jews, combatants for Polish independence)*. The monograph contained memoirs of Union's members as well as short biographical articles of people who fought in World War I and for the creation of borders of the Second Polish Republic (*Żydzi...* 1939: 196, 203, 327).

Because of financial limitations, the magazines were published infrequently and in few numbers, and as such did not manage to stay afloat on the market for long. They contained information about the Union's day to day activities, Union resolutions made on General Meetings, the Union's standing in regard to various political events in Poland and abroad, etc. The role of Jews in the fight for Polish independence since the end of the 18th century could also be found in the magazine's articles. A lot of space was dedicated to the Polish-Jewish relations. The Union also published articles that firmly protested against the belief that Jewish combatants showed anti-Polish behavior. The magazines also outlined that the honor and dignity of a Polish Jew became a subject of numerous attacks and slanders (Jabłonowski 1996: 118, 122). The magazines and books published by the Union were used as an instrument of communication with other Union members. They also helped generate the image of the Jewish combatants.

Against the anti-Semitic outbreaks in Poland

Under the influence of a growing wave of anti-Semitism in the 1930s in Poland, the Union started actively opposing such outbreaks and aggression towards the Jews. The Union opposed the anti-Semitic agitation used by various organizations connected to the nationalistic movement. The Union also condemned the anti-Semitic riots happening in various cities and in universities.

An in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of anti-Semitism was made in the declaration of the Union's Management Board from June 16th,

1936, in which the Union appealed to the government and to the Polish citizens to oppose the hostility and anti-Semitic wave directed against the Jewish community.

‘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 anti-Semitic agitations, which in times of hunger and unemployment, where there was no hope for tomorrow, struck a chord among the masses of workers, farmers, craftsmen and even intelligentsia, without so much as any action from the government, and the silent treatment of the rest of the society, press and the members of the so called ‘May Coup’ (F. 346, op. 1, spr. 82: 1–2).

The issue of anti-Semitism dominated the Third General Meeting of Delegates of the Union, which took place in Cracow in December, 1937. During the event, Professor Zdzisław Zmigryder-Konopka gave a lecture, in which he pointed out that the recent pronouncements and actions of the government which encourage Jews to emigrate, did not help the Jews and were, in fact, harmful. He emphasized, that Jews and Jewish combatants, were prevented from entering the pro-government political party Camp of National Unity (Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego). With regret, the professor mentioned the attempt to disturb the funeral ceremony of Nikodem Polak, a vice-president of the Union’s Management Board, in Lviv. At the end of his speech, the professor protested against discrimination against Jewish students, against separating them into the ‘seating ghetto’, that is forcing them into taking separate, isolated seats meant just for them during lectures. At the same time, he proudly mentioned those Jewish students who stood during lectures just so they would not have to take a seat. He found their attitude commendable and righteous, as it was opposing the creation of the new ghetto (ANKr, Starostwo Grodzkie Krakowskie, sygn. 248: *passim*).

During the General Meeting of Union’s Delegates, the government’s policy towards Jews was criticized and this statement was propagated in Jewish communities far and wide (“Biuletyn Okręgu Krakowsko-Śląskiego...” 1938, no. 9: 2, 4–8, 10). In result, the Union’s popularity grew, especially among Jewish combatants who did not belong to the Union (Wierzbieniec 1998: 287). However, despite the Union’s best efforts to fight off anti-Semitism until the end of the interwar period, be it in their magazines, during public speeches and debates, as well as appealing to the government and the Polish citizens at large, despite various actions and huge determination, the Union did not manage to accomplish its goals.

On the international stage

The Union's activities abroad, such as its participations in international ventures, are very interesting. Other activities included participation in World Congress of Jewish Combatants (Kongres Światowych Kombatantów Żydów) as well as in the World Union of Jewish Combatants (Światowy Związek Kombatantów Żydów) and organizing solidarity actions for Jewish combatants abroad (F. 346, op. 1, spr. 23: 18–19).

The first World Congress of Jewish Combatants was in Paris, as a result of the French Jewish combatants' initiative, it began on June 15th and ended on June 20th, 1935. Delegations of Jewish combatants from seven countries participated, coming from England, Austria, France, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and the USA. Two delegations from Poland were present: Union of Jews Participants of Combat for Polish Independence led by Leon Bregman and the Consolidated Unions of Jewish War Veterans Widows and War Orphans of the Polish Republic (Zjednoczenie Związków Żydowskich Inwalidów Wdów i Sierot Wojennych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej), led by Stefan Lubliner. The importance of the Congress was highlighted by it taking place in the renowned Paris University, The Sorbonne. As soon as on the first day of the Congress Poland was mentioned, as the leader of French delegation and at the same time the chairman of the Congress, Maurice Vanikoff, touched in his speech upon the then recently departed Marshal Józef Piłsudski and asked to commemorate his death with the observation of a Minute's Silence (*Światowa...* 1939: 322).

The aim of the Congress was to show that Jewish combatants were ready to use all means at their disposal to protect their citizen's rights, as well as those of Jews in other countries and to make sure that they were treated equally. During the deliberations, the issue of anti-Semitism and racism took the majority of the Congress' time, the result of which was a resolution.

'The World Conference of Former Jewish Combatants (Światowa Konferencja Byłych Kombatantów Żydów) sees itself forced to make this statement, as anti-Semitism uses the current world crisis to start political and economic attacks on Jews.

These attacks have taken the largest toll on German Jews, who were deprived of their rights, one of which was the right to military service, even though 12,000 of said Jews died on the battlefield for their country – Germany.

The World Conference of Former Jewish Combatants finds, that Nazi racist methods of fighting against race and beliefs undermine culture

and civilization and can lead to a catastrophe for the civilized world.’ (*Światowa...* 1939: 322)

The Polish Embassy in France was very interested in the deliberations of the Congress and the Polish Unions’ participation in it. Upon arrival in Paris, Leon Bregman and Stefan Lubliner, the leaders of the two organizations, were invited to the Embassy by the Ambassador of the Polish Republic, Alfred Chłapowski. As they talked, the Ambassador declared the embassy’s readiness to cooperate and to help the Unions in making contact with Polish emigrants in France resident in Paris. As a result, and using those contacts, the delegation of the Union, after the Congress ended, remained for a few days in Paris to try to establish another branch of their organization abroad (*Światowa...* 1939: 325).

The integration of Jewish combatants and cooperation on various ventures was even more pronounced after the Second World Congress of Jewish Combatants in Vienna, which lasted from June 27th to July 2nd, 1936. The Congress was attended by representatives of fourteen countries – France, England, the USA, Union of South Africa, Australia, Canada, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Egypt, Palestine and Poland (“*Na Przełomie*” 1936, no. 1: 3–4). The Polish delegation was led by the president of the Union’s Management Board Leon Bregman.

The Congress took place in the renowned concert hall Musikverein. Around 2,000 people took part in the deliberations. Aside from the delegations of Unions of Jewish combatants from various countries, there were also invited guests, representatives of other combatant Unions from Austria, but also diplomatic representatives of Austria, including the Polish Embassy. The hosts of the Congress were an especially large group. They were members of the Austrian Jewish combatant Union who lived in Vienna. In Vienna alone, the combatant Union had over 10,000 members and over ten buildings to their name. They even kept a symphonic orchestra on their payroll, which prepared a special concert for the participants of the Congress.

During the first day of deliberations, before the official opening of the Congress, each Jewish combatant Union entered with their banners. Then, when each of the countries was welcomed, their flag was raised to the top of the mast, this included Polish white-red flag. The official opening of the Congress was conducted by the president of Jewish Soldiers of the Austrian Front (*Żydowscy Żołnierze Frontowi Austrii*), and at the same time the chairman of Congress, Capitan Sigmunt Edler von Friedmann. In his speech, the Captain emphasized that the main topic discussed would be counteracting anti-Semitism. He said that during

World War I, no one was asked whether they were Christian or Jewish. Everyone shed blood for their country all the same. He mentioned the lack of German Jewish combatants present, which only made their status among the German populace even more evident. He added that in Germany, the names of Jews who fell in battle were being erased from graves and commemorative plaques. At the end of his speech, the chairman said that this Congress has to become a large manifestation against anti-Semitism and against hate directed towards Jews. He also called for the participants to stay loyal to their country and to Judaism (F. 346, op. 1, spr. 111: 8–9).

Leon Bregman, the leader of the Polish delegation, was one of the next speakers. In his speech he stated that Jewish combatants from all over the world should stick together so that they could better serve their homelands and Judaism itself. It was their responsibility to now fight against the phenomena of evil and hate which were directed towards Jews, some of which could be seen in Poland. He then referred to the example of Jews fighting for Polish independence. His speech he ended thus: ‘We fought under our great Marshal Józef Piłsudski, who never judged his soldiers based on them being Jewish or Polish, the same man who left a new Polish Constitution in his last will, which in its main point states that the Polish Republic should be in the best interest of all of its citizens. Even though today the venom of hatred seeps through our borders, even though some political organizations bid against each other in a war of ‘who is going to make Jews look worse’ to gain political power, we know that Marshal Piłsudski’s last will is binding in Poland. I hope this Congress will satisfy the needs of millions of Jews in Europe, who are blamed for the economic crisis and harassed with various manifestations of anti-Semitism’ (F. 346, op. 1, spr. 111: 9–10).

During the next few days, the participants of the Congress reported on various activities their combatant Unions undertook in their respective countries, they shared their experiences and discussed various matters. A lot of the time the subject revolved around fighting against anti-Semitism, both in their respective countries and overall, on an international scale. The initiative to talk about this matter in depth was a result of the presentation of the Polish Union’s delegation, a presentation which characterized the scope and form of anti-Semitism in Poland. The participation of the Polish delegation met with a great deal of interest from the Polish Embassy in Vienna. The man in charge of the Embassy, Ambassador Jan Gawroński participated as one of the invited guests, interested in its proceedings. He organized a special banquet for the Polish Union in the Polish Embassy.

To coordinate the work of the Congress and publish its resolution, the Congress created the Bureau of World Congress of Jewish Combatants (Biuro Kongresu Światowego Kombatantów Żydów) composed of 30 members. After the Congress finished its deliberations, the Vienna Bureau still functioned, monitoring how much of the Congress' resolution was implemented by the delegates of respective countries. The activities of this Bureau led to a more cordial cooperation between Jewish combatant organizations of various countries, and in the end to the founding of World Union of Jewish Combatants (Światowy Związek Kombatantów Żydów) (F. 346, op. 1, spr. 23: 19, "Na Przełomie" 1936, no. 1: 3–4).

The resolution of the Second World Congress of Jewish Combatants pointed out that only the countries that treat Jews with respect can be considered to have cultural values. To improve the coordination between each organization, the resolution proposed an exchange of youths connected to the combatant movements. The coordination of this exchange was to be handled by the Bureau. The resolution also mentioned the need to honor the memory of Jews who have fallen during World War I in various countries. This included around 12,000 dead German Jews whose memory was being erased due to the actions of Nazi Germany. The resolution appealed to Great Britain to provide Jews with means to defend themselves against Arabs in Palestine. The resolution also appealed to provide help to Jews who wanted to emigrate from their countries due to perceived danger or lack of means to sustain themselves (F. 346, op. 1, spr. 83: 1, 3).

The resolution of the Second Congress was similar to that of the First Congress from 1935, as it too covered the issue of widely spread racism in Germany and anti-Semitism in general. Condemning the phenomenon of anti-Semitism it stated: 'The moral crisis that the whole of humanity is going through is not only the result of the economic crisis, but also the result of the racial and religious war, which is waged by the Nazis that use the most nefarious of methods (...) This specific type of anti-Semitism is only a mask for the true goal of Nazism described in the book 'Mein Kampf', which wants to destroy the world peace and to deprive all nations of their freedom and all countries of their independence and civilization.

Taking all of this into account, the Second World Congress of Jewish Combatants makes the following demands:

- a) In the name of law we demand a resolution to be passed that would ban racial and anti-Semitic propaganda, both oral and in writing, and to consider such agitation as subversive, as it is already done in Switzerland, Netherlands, Norway, the USA, Canada, Union of South Africa and Brazil.

- b) We demand an immediate dissolution of anti-Semitic organizations which spread hate among people and strive to economically destroy the Jewish people by misleading the masses, which leads to social unrest, which in turn could lead to a nationwide upheaval. These types of actions should be considered illegal just like any other crime.
- c) To efficiently fight against anti-Semitism, we are calling on the Jewish communities all over the world to act as one united front in which we will be able to fight a winning defensive battle through our own propaganda, publishing magazines, books and textbooks, making use of movies and radio. We, former combatants, feel obliged to form this initiative in every country.
- d) We hope that in this fight for human rights, all organizations and cultural institutions as well as our non-Jewish men in arms will lend us their support.
- e) We find that it is the Jewish combatants' duty to use all the means at their disposal to protect their community from anti-Semitic attacks.
- f) To protect ourselves against anti-Semitism, all Jewish combatant organizations should make sure that aside from buying products from their own countries, the rest of the products should be bought from the countries that fully respect Jews' equal rights. The Congress encourages boycotting German products and services and bans participating in and visiting to see the Olympics that will soon happen in Berlin.' (F. 346, op. 1, spr. 83: 2).

The Union, until the outbreak of World War II, tried as it might to support the Jewish combatant organizations in other countries. One of such solidarity actions was directed towards Bulgarian combatants. The Management Board of the Union responded to a call for help from the Union of Bulgarian Jewish Combatants (Związek Kombatantów Żydów Bułgarii) from May 16th, 1939, and tried to persuade Polish wholesale enterprises to trade with Bulgaria and to consider setting up branches in Bulgaria. The crisis of Bulgarian Jews was due to the decision of German wholesales and factories not to hire Jewish people, as such Jewish people in Bulgaria suffered, some of whom were combatants. By issuing a call for help, the Bulgarian Union tried to eliminate Germany from their economy and replace it with Poland (F. 346, op. 1, spr. 23: 18).

Conclusion

To sum up and to answer the raised question as to why the Jewish combatants founded the Union of Jews Participants of Combat for Polish Independence, it has to be stated that public life, creating and function-

ing of various organizations, political parties and institutions in the Second Polish Republic had a national and religious character. The economic and moral crises were conducive to this phenomenon. As a result of these crises some nationalistic groups 'isolated themselves' in their own country. The feeling of national and religious bond was often stronger than the feeling for one's country. Economic and social life became increasingly polarized, which also affected the sphere of political and cultural life (Wierzbieniec 2003: 352, 361). The emergence and functioning of a separate organization that brought together Jewish combatants was mostly the result of this polarization.

Realizing the tensions that divided the society and their source, the Jewish combatants in the Union strived to deeply associate the Jewish community with the Polish state and Polish people. The Union was a veritable 'instrument' to achieve that goal and at the same time it was supposed to protect the interests and rights of the Jewish population and to treat them equally with other Polish citizens.

Throughout its existence, the Union, which gathered Jewish combatants who fought for Polish independence, felt the weight of responsibility due to the Jewish community's trust in them. As a result, the Union constantly addressed the Polish state and the Polish citizens to stop the discrimination of Jews, so they wouldn't feel discriminated, and so that they wouldn't have to emigrate. The Union members thought that Jews were deeply connected to Poland since the creation of the Polish state, that they contributed essential values to Polish culture and as such that they could not be treated as a foreign element.

The Union was a veritable phenomenon among other combatant organizations in the Second Polish Republic, and indubitably even now deserves even more study and consideration. The briefly described activities of the Union in this study should be further characterized, especially when it comes to the activities of district and local branches, as well as the Union in the capital, Warsaw, and the foreign branches in Antwerp and Brussels. The relationships the Union forged with other Jewish combatant organizations and their attitude towards anti-Semitism also require further study.

At the end of the interwar period, when Germany's military might was growing, the Union focused on opposing the German threat. This issue also requires further study. Further study will without a doubt reveal the full scope of the activities of the Jewish combatant Union and find answers to the list of essential questions when it comes to the role of this community in regaining Polish independence, building up the Polish state and participating in its defense against the German invader. As

a result, further studies will fully show just how large was the sacrifice of Jewish combatants for the Polish country with which they were so deeply connected.

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W jakim celu w II Rzeczypospolitej żydowscy kombatanci skupiali się w Związku Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski?

Streszczenie

Artykuł stanowi próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie, z jakiego powodu żydowscy kombatanci skupiali się w Związku Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski, który prowadził działalność w latach 1929–1939. Była to jedyna w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej organizacja kombatancka reprezentująca mniejszość narodową. W rozważaniach zwrócono uwagę na genezę tego związku, jego cele i zadania oraz rozbudowaną strukturę

organizacyjną. Uwzględniono również jego zasadnicze pola aktywności, takie jak działalność samopomocowa, uczestnictwo w uroczystościach rocznicowych związanych z historią Polski, popularyzowanie wiedzy o udziale Żydów w walkach o niepodległość Polski. Zwrócono uwagę na występowanie Związku przeciw przejawom antysemityzmu w Polsce w drugiej połowie lat trzydziestych XX w. oraz na jego aktywność na arenie międzynarodowej. Związek był potrzebny żydowskim kombatanom, aby brać aktywny udział w budowie państwa polskiego, po 123 latach niewoli, wpływać na jego funkcjonowanie, a zarazem wspomagać się wzajemnie i bronić interesów całej społeczności żydowskiej zarówno w Polsce, jak i na arenie międzynarodowej. Skupieni w nim żydowscy kombatanzi, którzy uczestniczyli w walkach o niepodległość Polski, uważali, że mają szczególne prawo, a zarazem moralny obowiązek, aby występować w interesie swojego środowiska, jak również w interesie całej społeczności żydowskiej w Polsce, domagając się szacunku, traktowania na równi z innymi obywatelami państwa oraz tolerancji.

Słowa kluczowe: kombatanzi, Żydzi, Polska, Niemcy, antysemityzm, działalność samopomocowa, uroczystości rocznicowe