

**National and political activity of the Jewish prisoners
from the Russian Army at the Freistadt Camp,
Austria-Hungary in 1916 - early 1918**

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Abstract

The article deals with the national and political activities of the prisoners Jews from the Russian army in Freistadt prisoner-of-war camp (Austria-Hungary) in 1916 - early 1918, the deployment of which was made possible by the assistance of the Ukrainian organisation of this camp. Mostly soldiers from today's Ukraine with Orthodox and Jewish beliefs, who were members of all classes, lived in the camp. There were also Jews in the camp who had been members of the Jewish revolutionary

parties before the war and, accordingly, had distinctly anti-tsarist political convictions. It was with this category that the Ukrainian activists of the camp hoped to cooperate in their organisational and educational work in the future, and these hopes soon came true.

The efforts of the members of the Jewish Educational Circle, founded in Freistadt, were to conduct a series of theatrical performances, concerts and various promotions of national educational content. From the outset, a Jewish organisation in Freistadt made efforts to extend its influence to other prisoner-of-war camps as well as to Ukrainian lands. To this end, a Jewish circle was established in the camp of captive Ukrainian soldiers from the Imperial Army of Rastatt (Germany), and a "Provincial Central Bureau of the Union of Jews in the Occupied Territories of Ukraine" was established in Freistadt. The authors stress that the captive Jews and Ukrainians were united by the common idea of a joint struggle against Russian great power and tsarist despotism. It was very important that the leaders of Jewish and Ukrainian organisations were aware of the urgency for political awakening of the peoples enslaved by the Russian tsarism (in particular, Jewish and Ukrainian), as well as the importance of Ukrainian-Jewish understanding. In the article, certain attention is paid to the activities of Aron Vaks, the Head of Jewish "initiative group", who was a consistent adherent of the Jewish-Ukrainian rapprochement in Freistadt. Jewish-Ukrainian national and political as well as cultural and educational interactions at the Freistadt camp became a successful example of cross-ethnic understanding in the difficult conditions of camp everyday life between captive Jews and Ukrainians.

Unfortunately, in spite of mutual recognition of national and political aspirations of both Jewish and Ukrainian, the course of state and political transformations in Ukraine caused the Jewish organisation to distance itself first and then declare its rejection of the idea of Ukrainian independence.

Keywords: Jewish and Ukrainian prisoners, circle, educational work, Jewish national movement, Freistadt Camp, Austria-Hungary.

1. Introduction. Historiography and methods of research

While writing this article, problem-chronological, concrete-historical and comparative-retrospective research methods were used, the combination of these enabled to throw light on circumstances and reasons for stirring the Jewish prisoners to greater socio-political activities in the Freistadt prisoner-of-war camp, which was demonstrated by creation of a national Jewish organisation and political representation of Jewish prisoners expressing their interests in all camps of captured soldiers of the tsarist army in Austria-Hungary and Germany. At the same time, to comprehensively study this problem, research methods of "micro-history" were used, together with methodology of social determinism, which enabled to clarify the impact of so-

cial experience of prisoners (their socialisation) on their general psychological state in conditions of isolation.

Prior to introducing wide readership to the specifics of Jewish national organisations in the camps of Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) from the Russian Imperial Army at Freistadt camp during the First World War, it is worth mentioning the names of well-known scholars who contributed to the Jewish POWs research issue. In particular, Petra Rappersberger (1988) made a comprehensive reconstruction of the history of the camp as a part of her thesis, based on the use of a wide range of sources, including archival ones. In turn, historian Fritz Fellner (1989) prepared an extensive article on various aspects of the camp life and its inhabitants.

In the mid-1990s, the study of particular features of Russian tsarist army staying in Austro-Hungarian captivity was supplemented by Russian researchers whose papers, however, referred to general aspects of military captivity in Austria-Hungary, so they did not focus on history of the Freistadt prisoner-of-war camp (Sergeev 1995, 1996; Vinogradov 1995).

At the same time, Ukrainian historians decided to study the peculiarities of the “national” camps in Austria-Hungary and Germany, and their efforts resulted in the publication of a number of articles and monographs on captivity issues. Ihor Sribnyak’s (1999) monograph was important for understanding the circumstances of Ukrainian soldiers staying in Freistadt, which was prepared on the basis of elaboration of a wide range of sources discovered by its author in the Ukrainian archives. For the first time, this book provides brief information about the cooperation of the Ukrainian and Jewish national communities in the Freistadt camp (members of both communities endorsed the anti-monarchical notion, opposing the Russian Empire and its ruler).

In two years, the specifics of the functioning of Jewish organisations at the prisoner-of-war camps for Ukrainian soldiers in Austria-Hungary and Germany were detailed by a separate report at the 8th Annual International Interdisciplinary Conference on Jewish Studies in 2001 in Moscow (Sribnyak 2001). But the brief textual format of the articles asked by the organisers of the mentioned Conference enabled us to touch on some aspects of the topic in brief outline. Another paper, considering

its type of a review essay, also contained only general information concerning the everyday life of Ukrainian prisoners of war in Freistadt (Sribnyak 2002).

At the same time, the research on the peculiarities of keeping Russian soldiers in prisoner-of-war camps in Austria-Hungary was carried out by Verena Moritz (1999) whose study of this topic resulted in elaboration and defence of her dissertation project (Moritz 2001). Later, the researcher (on her own and in joint authorship with Hannes Leidinger and Julia Vallecchek-Fritz) published a monograph and a number of informative articles on captivity (Moritz 2005, 2014, 2016; Leidinger, Moritz 2006; Moritz, Walleczek-Fritz 2013, 2014).

By publishing the given article, the authors introduce into academic circulation the still unexplored documents of the Central State Archives of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine in Kyiv (CDAVO of Ukraine), which relate primarily to the cultural and artistic component of Jewish prisoners' everyday life at Freistadt camp. Such an attribute of POWs' activism became possible thanks to the organisational and financial support on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austria-Hungary and the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (ULU) with Ukrainian and Jewish POWs' participation and efforts. These include posters of theatrical performances and programmes of musical evenings (in Hebrew and Ukrainian) of Jewish amateur groups that have developed activities in this camp. Information protocols, which were regularly completed and based on the results of the General Council of the Ukrainian Community "Independent Ukraine" meetings in Rastatt (Germany), are crucial for understanding the dynamics of Jewish national movement. In addition, other archival materials (statutory documents of the Jewish community, correspondence, etc.) were used, which clearly illustrate the variety of national and political actions carried out by members of the Jewish community, usually in cooperation with Ukrainian organisations.

In order to fully reconstruct the process of the origin and development of the Jewish national movement in Freistadt, the authors of this article also used materials from the "Union for the Liberation of Ukraine" collection of memoirs, which discussed the specifics of cooperation between Jewish and Ukrainian camp communities in this camp (Danylenko 1979; Okhrymovych 1979). In addition, it is worth mention-

ing that primarily the “initiative group” was founded at Freistadt camp that was aimed at preparing and establishing Jewish cultural and educational club which established a Jewish school, a theatrical troupe and an orchestra. Following these initiatives, another Jewish organisation, the “Primary (provisional) Central Bureau of Jews in occupied territories of Ukraine” was established and qualified to be the institution of Jewish national movement’s political representation. Further on, two organisations worked jointly side by side with the Bureau of senior management holding membership of the Jewish cultural and educational club.

2. Presentation of the research problem

The military confrontation between the countries of the Triple Alliance and the Entente, which Russia was the member of, created entirely new political opportunities for Ukraine to intensify the struggle for the establishment of Ukrainian statehood, attracting attention of a wide range of the European community and getting into close contacts with the international community. The final defeat of the Russian Empire gave a chance for Ukraine’s national self-determination and full self-realisation.

The result was the foundation of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine on 4 August 1914 in Lviv, which included a number of Ukrainian political emigrants (in August 1914, due to the Russian military advance and temporary occupation of Lviv the ULU relocated to Vienna). On 25 August 1914, the Union issued a “Europe’s Public Opinion” proclamation, which argued that the sole protection for Europe from Russia’s aggression could be an independent Ukrainian state, and that its creation was necessary to keep a political equilibrium for further peaceful development of Europe. The statement emphasised that the fight for the establishment of such a state was the main strategic task of the Union (CDAVO a: 1-1verso).

Stating clearly and unambiguously in its Programme the task of fighting for an independent Ukrainian state, the ULU applied for a monetary subsidy to the governments of Austria-Hungary and Germany. Plans of the latter to use the “national factor” in order to weaken the Russian Empire helped acquire the financial assistance for the Union, which directed them to conduct advocacy campaigns with a view to

acquaint citizens of European states with Ukrainian issues, using founded by the Union periodicals in English and French. At the same time, a considerable number of translated articles concerning Ukraine and its national-state aspirations were published (Pater 2000: 78).

Another area of activity of the ULU was the national-organisational rallying of captured Ukrainians from the tsarist army, the total number of whom in the camps of Austria-Hungary and Germany at the beginning of the First World War was more than 200,000 people (Narizhnyy 1942: 15). To this end, a separate camp (in Freistadt) was established in Austria-Hungary for the concentration of the captive soldiers of the tsarist army, Ukrainians by their origin (end of 1914). The following year, three more camps were Ukrainised in Germany: Rastatt, Wetzlar and Salzwedel. In the above-mentioned camps, educational departments were set up, whose members (civilians from the Galician intelligentsia) were instructed to carry out organisational and educational work among the prisoners (Sribnyak 1999: 72-129).

It should be noted that the beginnings of this work were rather complicated because of the complex nature of the separation of captive Ukrainians on a national basis due to the lack of their national consciousness. Moreover, initially the governments of Austria-Hungary and Germany did not consider it reasonable to create one-national camps, putting prisoners into them regardless of their national and religious affiliation. Another negative factor was that Austrian and German authorities left the administrative leadership in the barracks and camps in the hands of the sergeant majors and sub-ensigns of the tsarist army (from among the captives). Their overwhelming majority adhered to "Black Hundred" ideology (a generalised term and endonym for the right-wing monarchical parties and organisations which emerged in the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 20th century as a result of self-organisation of Russian society's radical and conservative circles to oppose the revolutionary movements and preserve the absolutist monarchy and zealously defended Russian imperial postulates (autocracy, orthodoxy and national character), passing on without hesitation to massacres of those prisoners who at least for a minute doubted the "truth" of this triad.

This was exactly the situation in Freistadt in the early summer of 1915, when the ULU's Department of Education was established. At its insistence, the Austrian commandant began removal of the "Black Hundred" Russian element from the camp, but this proceeded very slowly. Unfortunately, part of the Jewish captives at that time was under the influence of the Black Hundreds, which caused the Head of the Department of Education Roman Dombchevsky on 15 September 1915 to address a letter (№ 94) to the ULU Presidium explaining another circumstance that made it more difficult to carry out organisational work in the camp (CDAVO b: 52).

In the said letter, he pointed out that "we still have a large number of Jewish prisoners who in every aspect have different privileges, make use of others, interfere in our work, mainly music, and speak in a hostile way against those of our comrades who are becoming conscious Ukrainians. Those Jews venture insulting remarks [statements] against Ukraine. They do all of this because they have their shoulders" (CDAVO b: 52). Speaking of "shoulders", R. Dombchevsky obviously meant that they were supported and patronised by certain officers of the camp in matters of appointment to different camp positions.

Despite such an admonition concerning some part of Jewish POWs' attitude to the Ukrainian national idea, Educational Department did not prevent them from creating the Jewish initiative and educational circles (late October 1915) - (CDAVO c: 1a), hoping to overcome their moods in the future. Moreover, there were also Jews in the camp who, prior to war times, had belonged to the Jewish revolutionary parties and accordingly, had distinct anti-tsarist political beliefs. It was with this category that the Ukrainian activists of the camp hoped to cooperate with in their organisational and educational work in the future, and these expectations were soon came true.

The decisive change in the attitude of the majority of Jewish prisoners of war to the organised Ukrainian movement in the camp came primarily thanks to the efforts of the Head of the Jewish "initiative group", POW Aron Vaks¹, who proved to

¹ Aron Vaks, a member of the Socialist Jewish Workers' Party "Sickle" (1904-1909), led a revolutionary activity in Katerynoslav, and later probably belonged to the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party. In 1914 he was mobilised into the Russian Imperial Army, captured and then imprisoned in the camp of Freistadt. He initiated the creation of a Jewish educational group in that camp and was

be a consistent adherent of the Jewish-Ukrainian rapprochement in Freistadt. His position concerning this issue is fully reflected by the content of his letter (dated 4 February 1916), in which he addressed the ULU Department of Education. In it, A. Vaks, in particular, noted that he has already worked in the camp not only with Jews but also with Ukrainians – using for this purpose his speeches at the general prisoners' meeting in the camp's "Tea room" (buffet). In his letter, A. Vaks further stated that "the Jewish socio-political and national movement should go hand in hand with the Ukrainian movement" and that "mutual support for the two oppressed nations – Ukrainian and Jewish – in the fight against the oppressing and ruling nationalities should be taken into account" (CDAVO b: 95-97).

Recognising the importance of cooperation with Jewish POWs to defeat the Black Hundreds and dismantle the remains of the imperial consciousness in the minds of the campers, R. Dombchevsky, the Chairman of the ULU Educational Department, decisively supported A. Vaks's suggestions. The original of his letter was immediately forwarded to Vienna to the ULU Presidium with the accompanying postscript of R. Dombchevsky: "captive Vaks is a highly intellectual person, famous speaker, regarded Ukrainian affairs very favourably and supported ULU Educational Department' in its educational work" (CDAVO b: 97).

It is obvious that the ULU's Presidium willingly supported the development of the Jewish national movement in the camp, which was indirectly proved by reorganisation of the Jewish initiative group into "Primary (Provisional) Central Bureau of Jews on the Occupied Territories of Ukraine" (hereinafter – Central Bureau, CB) on 2-5 March 1916, which was functioning on the basis of its own "Draft Charter". A. Vaks was elected the Head (President) of the organisation, I. Shapyro (Nayyer) became his Deputy and D. Brodskyi (Debé) was elected First Secretary (CDAVO c: 1a).

The "Draft Charter" of the Central Bureau defined basic provisions to regulate the activities of Jewish organisations. In particular, its § 2 provided that "in Jewish

elected its Head. He worked with the ULU's Education Department in Freistadt. Until August 1916, he was the Head of the Jewish political organisation "Providence of the Central Bureau of the Union of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of Ukraine" at the Freistadt camp. He was then secretly transferred to sub-Russian Ukraine for revolutionary work. Further fate is unknown.

national issue, the CB stands for the need of the Jews in Ukraine to autonomise all aspects of life, where the particular national interests of the Jewish people are shown". It also contained provisions concerning consolidation of the Bureau's efforts with those political parties and groups that could contribute to its successful operation or to "rapproach the core programme goals" of the CB.

The § 9 of the "Draft Charter" described the position of CB concerning aspirations of the Ukrainian people to Ukrainian statehood "in Ukrainian issue, up to the creation of its detailed platform [the Bureau] stands for recognition of the full right of Ukrainian people to have their independent national and political existence" (CDAVO c: 6). Declaring such a right for Ukrainians, the CB, however, unconsciously or deliberately "failed" - using the phrase - "up to the creation of its detailed platform", as if in this future platform some other factors might appear or such a right may be taken away from Ukrainians, but here it concerned other details.

The CB set itself "immediate" and "further" tasks. The first, in particular, consisted of "expanding opportunities to work among Jewish prisoners from Ukraine in the camps of Austria and Germany", "transferring their political work to the occupied territories of Ukraine" and "developing their platform in Jewish and Ukrainian issues". The CB also identified its further ("broader") post-war tasks as agitation in Russian-dependent Ukraine (by Jewish agitators trained in Freistadt), whose activities were to "spread a network of organisations [...] under the ideological CB leadership until a Jewish regional representation was established there" (CDAVO c: 4-5).

In Galicia, the activities of the Jewish "agitators led by some CB members" were to be of a completely different nature; in particular to follow "in the direction of a deeper and closer understanding between the Jewish and Ukrainian peoples" (the latter was determined by the basic purpose of the CB activities). In order to achieve this goal, the CB planned to set up a publishing house in Galicia that would "translate from one language to another and vice versa the Ukrainian and Jewish works of writing", as well as translate and publish "scientific and non-fiction works that could be better known by intellectual groups with national-political tasks and points of contact of these tasks basing on mutual interests of the Jewish and Ukrainian peoples" (CDAVO c: 3-4).

Finally, a Jewish national newspaper was to be published that would be “dedicated to Jewish-Ukrainian rapprochement”. In national and political terms, the PCB declared the need to “unite the public forces of Jews and Ukrainians in the fight against harmful to both of them Polish aspirations in Eastern Galicia and in general where circumstances demanded”. Thus, recognising the ultimate goal of the Ukrainians – the creation of the Ukrainian state – the CB hoped to get moral and material support by the ULU, which was of paramount importance for the development of Jewish organisations. To this end, the Bureau was ready to testify facing Austrian and German factors, the full compliance of Jewish organisations in Freistadt (as well as in other camps) with Ukrainian interests which could be used “in full amount [...] for Ukrainian issue” (CDAVO c: 4-4verso).

In turn, the CB requested the ULU for assistance in transferring nationally conscious Jews (who came from Ukraine) to Freistadt from other Austrian camps (Jewish POWs’ German centre became Rastatt) what had to be done beforehand by the members of the Bureau. Finally, the Central Bureau requested the ULU to include its members in those groups of prisoners who were assigned to work in the Ukrainian lands occupied by the Central Powers which, in A. Vaks’s view, would have “good and useful consequences” for the development of national movement of both peoples (CDAVO c: 5-6).

A. Vaks assured that the CB would carry out educational work in Freistadt “in the direction of national awareness on the socialist background and in the direction of acquaintance with the Ukrainian problem in particular and in the synthesis with the Jewish one”. At the same time, “the language of the organisation and the language of propaganda” was to become “modern Jewish language” (§12 of the “Draft Charter”), which fully corresponded the internal realities of Freistadt, where the Ukrainian language was “governmental” for all Ukrainian camp organisations. The Central Bureau built its relations with Ukrainian organisations on the basis of “mutual technical and moral assistance”. This, in particular, was shown in the cooperative efforts of members of Ukrainian and Jewish organisations in the camp cooperative union “The Own Assistance”, which made the latter protected “from the

prevalence of unorganised elements" (out of 417 members of "The Own Assistance" 112 persons belonged to Jewish organisation) (CDAVO c: 1a-2).

Moral support of the Jewish national movement accompanied material one – the Jewish group received money (membership tabs and charity contributions from commandant and ULU), so that between 1 November 1915 and 11 June 1916 it received 324.55 Austrian-Hungarian kronas (kr) – (CDAVO c: 2). Another source of money for Jewish organisations was the deduction from the profits of the camp cooperative – "The Own Assistance" union, which was made possible by the informal joint efforts of the Ukrainian and Jewish organisations in the camp.

Considering that Jews were a part of the cooperative, the parties reached an agreement that up to 7 % of the net income would be paid to the needs of the Jewish educational group (from those that were sent by the general cooperative meetings to cultural and educational funds) in strict accordance with the number of Jews – members of the cooperative. The parties also agreed to mutually support each other's wishes – by jointly voting during the distribution of amounts according to Ukrainian and Jewish goals. According to these agreements, during the existence of the Jewish Educational Fund group, the Camp cooperative transferred to it 1158.69 kr (Okhrymovych 1979: 44-45).

The content of the programme documents of Jewish organisation and their political orientation met the interests of Ukrainian organised movement, so it is logical that the Bureau Presidium informally favoured the development of "Jewish affairs" in camps and provided all possible assistance which is proved by the expression of sincere gratitude by A. Vaks to the leaders of the Union, and the request of the "brotherly hand of help" recognising that it "will further strengthen our readiness together with the Ukrainian people to work for our common better future" (CDAVO c: 7).

Meanwhile, A. Vaks was trying to draw more attention of the Austria-Hungary's government to the Jewish national movement in the prisoner-of-war camps, and on behalf of PCB wrote a letter of 9 July 1916 (in German) to a top official of the Austrian Foreign Ministry consul Emanuel Urbas who at this time made an acquaintance trip to Freistadt. In the letter, the CB President mentioned, in partic-

ular, that unlike the situation in the Russian Empire, where the Jewish people are in a state of oppression, here in Freistadt – in the camp of Ukrainians POWs – Jews have every opportunity for their free expression of national will. Taking the opportunity, A. Vaks and his accomplices declared in a letter their “protest against the political and national oppression” of the Jewish nation in Russia (CDAVO c: 11-12).

In the mentioned letter, E. Urbas also drew attention to the fact that “the Jewish people and Ukraine to which we [the authors of the letter belong to], fight for national independence and have much in common in our aspirations”. While developing this statement, the authors of the letter noted that the Jewish organisation in the camp and in Ukraine is preparing a joint action of the two peoples in their struggle for national freedom, and also expressed their belief that the efforts of the Jews to protect the oppressed peoples “will receive further development” and “new opportunities” (CDAVO c: 12).

In his reply letter, consul E. Urbas mentioned that he was aware of the terrible plight of the Jewish people in the Russian Empire, as well as their oppression by the tsarist government. He also noted that there was no discrimination on national grounds in Austria-Hungary, and that his government was resorting to various measures to improve the situation of the Jewish people. The organisational work carried out in the camp by members of the Bureau, as viewed by E. Urbas, was very useful for the Jewish people, approaching a time when they could be released from the oppression of the Russian Empire (CDAVO c: 10).

The dynamics of the Jewish national movement in Freistadt was really more than positive – founded by the CB activities “Sholem Aleichem Jewish Educational Circle” headed by the committee of six people led by Ye. Brodskyi (Holdvart) had every opportunity to develop all possible spheres of Jewish national life in Freistadt. It consisted of several sections (commission for the collection of historical materials, section of art, library and educational section). The latter (consisting of 17 people) provided educational work in the prisoner-of-war camp for Jewish prisoners, and in particular from 2 April 1916, a school was founded where they taught “Hebrew and Ukrainian languages, geography, history, mathematics, and German”. It was attended by 51 students, and classes were held twice a week. The commission collected

“stories, impressions and facts” of the captives that characterised the attitude of the soldiers of the tsarist army and its command to the Jews at the front line and “the position of the Jew-reaper in the army during the war”. The Jewish Circle Library exhibited 200 books (mainly in Yiddish), about 100 Jewish campers used its services (CDAVO c: 2). The latter circumstance is particularly noteworthy because the process of collection of such considerable number of books, finding financial resources for their purchase and sending them to camps was rather problematic. Nonetheless, thanks to some unknown philanthropists along with the assistance of the camp administration and the ULU Educational Department it became possible to establish a small library with a collection of Jewish books that appeared to be a great comfort for Jewish POWs.

Another important area of activities of the Jewish cultural and educational circle was the cultural and artistic sphere, and in summer 1916 a number of national literary evenings were held in the camp (30 June, 14 July, etc.), which included reports, chants, recitals, readings. Excerpts from Jewish literary works, solo songs and instrumental music were performed by camp musicians (CDAVO c: 12-14). These POWs’ meetings were held in Hebrew but, taking into account that Ukrainians were also invited, Jewish cultural and educational circle leaders always arranged the improvised translations from Hebrew and Yiddish into Ukrainian.

Such a variety of cultural and national activities favoured a significant influx of new members into the Jewish organisation: for instance, if by 11 June 1916, the group numbered 112 members of Freistadt prisoners (CDAVO c: 7), then in a short time (by the end of June) its membership increased to 153 members (out of 216 Jews who were in the camp). Thanks to the moral and material support of the Ukrainians, the authority of the Jewish organisation steadily grew, which gave A. Vaks grounds to “soon have all the Jew prisoners of the camp as members of the organisation” (CDAVO c: 1).

All these meetings and presentation events required understanding and closer cooperative efforts of activists from among the Jews and Ukrainians, which became possible through holding joint meetings and reciprocal invitations to the meetings of Ukrainian and Jewish educational groups and members of both organisations. Multi-

cultural communication was simplified by the fact that practically all Jewish POWs understood or even fluently spoke Ukrainian. In contrast to it, Ukrainian POWs understood neither Hebrew, nor Yiddish that caused the members of Jewish circles to pass on to Ukrainian or Russian when Ukrainians were present. Very often, the Jewish interests were represented to the Ukrainians by A. Vaks, and every time the Ukrainian side met his requests concerning the use of camp premises for national performances and concerts given by the Jewish cultural and educational circle. The camp Commandant's office was also attentive to satisfy Jewish POWs' religious needs that resulted in having a separate place for joint meetings (Danylenko 1979: 28).

The cooperative efforts of Jewish and Ukrainian communities in Freistadt in summer 1916 were so successful that enabled to rally Jewish POWs in the prisoner-of-war camp for captive Ukrainian soldiers of the tsarist army in Rastatt (Germany). On initiative of the Freistadt CB representative (CDAVO c: 3) and with the consent of the ULU Department of Education and the General Council of the Ukrainian Community "Independent Ukraine" (Sribnjak 2020) in Rastatt, there, on 21 April 1916, the constituent assembly of the Jewish Educational Circle of the Rastatt camp was held. Representatives of all Ukrainian camp organisations and guests from the Freistadt camp were invited to the meeting. A representative of the Jewish group delivered a speech "aimed at uniting with Ukrainian organisations and common understanding of Jewish and Ukrainian problems" (Jewish Educational Circle 1916).

The purpose of the newly created Jewish organisation was to make its members "aware of the common interests of the Jewish and Ukrainian people" and their national awareness (of Ukrainians and Jews). The Jewish Circle in Rastatt got the status of the PCB regional branch and had to coordinate its activities with it, which was fixed in its Draft Charter and "Regulations", which had yet to be considered and approved by the General Council of the Ukrainian Community "Independent Ukraine". According to PCB President A. Vaks (message to the ULU of 11 June 1916), at the initial stage of its activities, the Rastatt Jewish Circle "was developing well", uniting 45 members (of 49 Jews who were in the camp) - (CDAVO c: 15).

It is confirmed by information from Protocol № 13 of "Independent Ukraine" GC meeting of 13 July 1916, mentioning the library and a reading room in the newly created Jewish organisation. With unanimous approval of the statute of the Jewish Circle, the General Council expressed its hope that the Jewish organisation would go "in common with our [Ukrainian] organisations in the camp" and at the same time defend the "national Jewish cause" (CDAVO d: 80-81). Obviously, having no information about this decision, PCB President A. Vaks on 20 July 1916 addressed the Presidium of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine with a request to send to Rastatt two or three people "for organizational work". In his view, members of Jewish cultural and educational circle, Joseph Schapiro, Jankel Koiles and Ruvin Lifshitz were the best to accomplish such a mission. The Head of the Jewish organisation of Freistadt insisted that "the existence and prosperity of our organization in Rastatt" will depend on it (CDAVO a: 98).

But even earlier (14 August 1916), A. Vaks put an application to the ULU Educational Department in Freistadt, stating that, given his poor health, which had been "the result of continuous, intensive work for ten months", he is compelled to "cease his activities and resign from the co-operation in all institutions", including the Jewish organisation as well. From that point on, he withdrew his "moral responsibility for the course of events in the camp organisations", where he had been very prominent before. One can only assume that a great number of A. Vaks's speeches and presentations at the meetings led to his nervous overstress, which forced him to make a decision concerning his self-removal from all kinds of activities (CDAVO a: 149). It might be, that one of the reasons for A. Vaks' resignation was short-term tensions between Ukrainians and Jews but it looks more plausible that an idea expressed by Austrian military commandment at the Freistadt camp to the leader of the Jewish circle to secretly cross the border front line in order to revolutionise the rear of the Russian Army caused a temporary problem.

At this time, first divergencies of opinions occurred between the leaders of the Jewish and Ukrainian communities that were connected with numerical superiority of Jewish representation in the elected bodies of the camp cooperative union "The Own Assistance" which raised funds to initiate its commercial object - the "Tea

Room” buffet. Traditionally, the composition of the Board had included two members of a Jewish circle, but when in August 1916 the cooperative added one more (the third) delegate of the Jewish circle, it caused claims by Ukrainians, bringing the case to the conflict. In this situation, the meeting of the Jewish educational group (dated 12 August 1916) was forced to admit that this election was contrary to previous arrangements. At the same time, considering the numerical increase of the Jewish representation in the cooperative, the meeting decided to increase the “quota” of Jews in it, remaining two members of the Jewish organisation and delegating one to the executive body of the union (board) – (CDAVO c: 10).

To find ways to resolve this conflict a joint “conference” of representatives of Ukrainian and Jewish organisations was held at the camp on 24 September 1916, having decided that “the recent conflict between the two organisations concerning the Tea Room events should be considered as an incident that have passed”. The problem of increasing the Jewish representation in the leadership of the cooperative was decided to submit to the general meeting of all the shareholders, and eventually it was settled on compromise grounds (CDAVO c: 11). Finally, the participation of Jewish representatives in the work of the elective bodies of the cooperative union “The Own Assistance” and the distribution of its profits despite the aforementioned conflict was also an effective form of interaction between the two national organisations, facilitating mutual understanding of Jews and Ukrainians on the economic basis.

The joint “conference” also came to an agreement that in further educational activities, both communities would remain on the same foundations when “the whole Jewish organisation stands for the distinctiveness of the Jewish people – and recognizes the full right of national self-determination for the Ukrainian people”. Also, the common desire of participants of the „conference” was “to make educational work possible to improve relations between the two peoples after the war as well”. Concerning “the establishment of political relations between the two peoples after the war”, the parties decide to leave “a free hand” at that moment (CDAVO c: 11).

Despite A. Vaks’s withdrawal from participation in the social, political and national-organisational life of the camp, Jewish organisations created by his efforts suc-

cessfully continued their activities, emphasising the intensification of their cultural and artistic component. During the second half of 1916-1917, the Jewish National Theatre named after Jacow Gordin² was functioning in the camp, whose performances were prepared amateur actors. In particular, on the theater stage they performed (in Yiddish) a variety of performances, including "Birth" drama of four acts by Prylucka, "Our Faith" play of three acts by Sholem Aleichem, the first act of "The Idiot" play by J. Gordin's and the "God, Satan, Man" play. To facilitate the perception of the content of these performances by Ukrainians, the Jewish theatre took care of printing information for some performances with the libretto in Ukrainian (CDAVO c: 17-18).

Jewish actors and musicians willingly prepared theatrical and musical evenings, one of which took place in December 1917 with the following programme: the first act of J. Gordin's "The Idiot" play, "The Jewish Working Anthem", the "Memories of Shraer" Waltz, "Branka" (a monologue by Sholem-Aleichem), "Mourning chanting in memory of Shevchenko" by Prisowski, *Lezginka* and *Hopak*, declamations and marches performed by the mandolinists orchestra of J. Gordin (CDAVO c: 15-16verso) [the mandoline became widespread in the Russian Empire due to its accessibility, so that the art of playing this instrument became hereditary]. In early 1918, the "Jewish King Lear" drama (of four acts) by J. Gordin was staged - according to existing tradition, it was performed in Yiddish, and the libretto with a programme was produced in Ukrainian.

As it had been before, all these cultural and artistic and educational initiatives of the Jewish educational circle were fully supported by the Ukrainian camp institutions. For example, from time to time joint "conferences" of the I. Kotlyarevsky Drama Society and the Jewish theatre members (who communicated in Ukrainian and Russian) were held, which discussed the use of props, costumes and scenery during Jewish performances. This assistance was all the more important to improve

² Jakow Gordin, 1853-1909 (pseudonym Jakiw Mykhajlowych, Ian, Ivan Koluczij) - famous Jewish playwright. Reformer of the Jewish theatre, he established vernacular Yiddish language on stage that led to his success among Jewish public circles, particularly intelligentsia, and their interest in national theatre. He was subjected to persecution by the tsarist authorities that caused his departure to the USA.

the artistic level of performances, and, moreover, it favoured the influx of spectators from among Ukrainian POWs. These conferences and joint activities of the camp actors enabled to largely overcome false stereotypes in the perception of Jews by Ukrainians and vice versa, consolidating in their minds a positive vision in the attitude of the nations to each other (CDAVO e: 24).

Such close cooperation between the two camp organisations – Jewish and Ukrainian – were going on until the Act of full state independence of Ukrainian People's Republic was adopted by the superior body of the legislative power of Ukraine – the Central Council of Ukraine – (the IV Universal, 22 January 1918). However, after its promulgation in the camp, almost all members of the Jewish organisation in Freistadt – in violation of previous agreements – declared their rejection of this state-political act, in fact going along with the opponents of Ukrainian national statehood. In regard to this position of the Jewish organisation the Chief Ukrainian Council (the governing body of the Ukrainian camp organisation in Freistadt) decided to suspend (without the possibility to renew) the transfer of specified sums for cultural and educational needs of Jewish camp community at Freistadt camp.

After signing the Peace Agreement in Brest between the Ukrainian People's Republic and the Quadruple Alliance (on 9 February 1918) and the appeal of the Ukrainian delegation to Ukrainian prisoners of war in Austria-Hungary to join national Ukrainian formations, members of the Jewish organisation in Freistadt declared their “neutrality” in the Ukrainian-Bolshevik confrontation and respectively their refusal to join the Ukrainian army. Moreover, the leadership of the Jewish educational group decided that those of its members who would volunteer to join the future Ukrainian division (it is the division of *Sirozhupannyki*), will be excluded from the Jewish organisation as having violated its national unity (Dubrivnyy 1964: 55).

Therefore, while planning to return in the aftermath of the First World War to Ukraine, Jewish POWs did not sympathise with supporting or defending the Ukrainian state. It seems plausible that Jewish public mood was formed by the apprehension that, despite born on Ukrainian lands, they did not consider Ukraine to be their Motherland. They preferred to foresee who would win in the Ukrainian-Russian con-

flict. They did not know what to expect from the newly established Ukrainian independence and subconsciously they chose the "Russian prospects", in spite of its Bolshevik "image".

The decision of Jewish national group led to the dissolution of all its hitherto relations with the Ukrainian organisation, but the final of Ukrainian-Jewish relations in camp dimension took place in mid-February 1918. That was when the camp was informed about registration in the list of volunteers to Ukrainian division, the conclusion of which was to continue in Ukraine (Volodymyr-Volynsky). According to the activist of the Ukrainian camp community P. Dubrivny, this news led to an immediate change in the moods of the members of the Jewish organisation, when all of them without exception, suddenly expressed their will to join this division.

Such a sudden change of Jewish POWs' aspirations was caused by the sole reason - their desire to use the Ukrainian division formation as a chance for rapid homecoming. Moreover, Jewish prisoners' apriori did not intend to fight for independence of the Ukrainian People's Republic, neglecting this opportunity by stating that Ukraine can only lay claims to autonomy as a part of democratic, federal Russia.

In response, the "Combat Authority", which was engaged in the formation of division, made a decision on the inappropriateness of admission of Jewish POWs to the ranks of the division. In doing so, the Board made an exception for the two former members of the Jewish organisation, who from the very beginning sympathised with the aspirations of Ukrainians and were expelled from the Jewish Educational Circle because of their "pro-Ukrainian" moods (Dubrivnyy 1964: 55).

3. Conclusions

So, despite the fact that at the initial stage of Ukrainian national educational work with Jewish prisoners of war at the Freistadt prisoner-of-war camp it was accepted with partial clear reluctance, the Department of Education did not resort to removing it from the camp. The point is that due to the efforts of the members of Department of Education at the beginning of 1916, a significant change was observed in their (Jewish) moods - thanks to successful Ukrainian actions in Freistadt Jewish prisoners began to cooperate with Ukrainian organisations, having the opportunity

to organise their own national life in the camp. This was made possible by the fact that the captive Jews and Ukrainians were united by the idea to jointly fight the Russian “great-poweriness” and the tsarist despotism.

To a large extent, positive developments in the establishment of Jewish-Ukrainian dialogue were made possible by A. Vaks, a POW, whose activities formed the first Jewish cultural and educational centre. Through his efforts, the Jewish national movement in Freistadt acquired a distinct political sound that made it possible to establish a Jewish national political organisation in the camp. This became possible because of moral and financial assistance provided to the Jewish organisation by the Presidium of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine and by Ukrainian camp institutions. It was important that the leaders of the Jewish and Ukrainian organisations were aware of urgency for political consciousness of enslaved by Russian tsarism peoples (including Jewish and Ukrainian people), as well as the importance of Ukrainian-Jewish understanding.

In the spring and summer of 1916, the Jewish Educational Circle was able to develop its activities in the camp, organising national cultural and artistic events for the campers and conducting educational courses. The key to success in this work was the provision of regular financial assistance for the profits received by “the Tea Room” camp cooperative union. At the same time, Ukrainian organisation supported the Jewish circle through non-material promotion by giving a temporarily free camp space to prepare theater performances, concerts and various national actions along with educational content. It was largely because of this that the Jewish national movement went beyond Freistadt – when, in April 1916, a Jewish organisation was established in a prisoner-of-war camp for Ukrainian soldiers of the Tsarist Army in Rastatt (Germany).

Unfortunately, despite the declared mutual recognition of national and political aspirations of both peoples (Jewish and Ukrainian) at this time, the course and nature of state-political transformations in Ukraine caused the Jewish organisation to distance itself first and then to declare their rejection of the idea of Ukrainian independence. In its turn, such an unfriendly attitude of Jewish POWs to the independence aspirations of the Ukrainians led to the cessation, and then a complete breaking-

off between the two communities, which in turn called in question their experience in the joint struggle against Russian despotism.

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