

JEWISH REVIEW

The Federation of Jewish Communities in Serbia

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OUR GUEST Nachliel Dison (by Sasha Ristic)



The Law is One thing, Implementation – Something Else.

Serbia is an example of a country that has taken positive steps to support our Jewish community and Holocaust survivors.

In February of 2016, the Parliament of the Republic of Serbia passed a law which dealt with the restitution of heirless Jewish property from the Holocaust era. This law was seen as an important step towards justice and towards recognizing a painful history. Restitution advocates have praised Serbia for this major accomplishment. They suggest that other European and Central European countries learn from Serbia's progress in the discussion of Holocaust restitution.

While Serbia's commitment to restitution should be applauded there is still more work to be done. The World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) played an important role in the passage of Serbia's restitution law. Nachliel Dison, the Acting Director General of the WJRO, was recently in Belgrade and visited the Federation of Jewish Communities of Serbia. We sat down with Mr. Dison to discuss his experiences as a member of the WJRO and as a restitution advocate.

To begin, what is the purpose of your visit to Serbia?

I wanted to see how the process of restitution is progressing in Serbia. I am a member of the supervisory board which monitors the restitution funds that are received from the Serbian government. The supervisory board is responsible for overseeing and reviewing the distribution and use of the restitution funds. The

supervisory board is very important because passing a law is one thing but its implementation is an ongoing project.

What are your impressions from your visit here?

I was able to witness the implementation of the restitution law. Restitution funds have been transferred by the Serbian government to the Federation, who then distribute funds to the different Jewish communities. I was satisfied to see that the programs created by this law to service Holocaust survivors are already operational. A number of Serbian Holocaust survivors have already applied for these programs and it is clear that these programs are becoming a reality. I hope that over the course of the next few months the new legislation will allow us to distribute additional funds to the Jewish communities. These programs have the potential to benefit many Holocaust survivors.

You and the WJRO spent a lot of time and energy advocating for the restitution law before it was passed by the Serbian parliament. Can you describe what it was like to find out that the law had been passed?

The World Jewish Restitution Organization was very involved in this process. Before the law was passed, we held negotiations with the local Jewish community, with the Serbian government, and with the Serbian opposition. All parties were in support of passing this law. I happened to be in the Serbian parliament when this law was debated and then subsequently passed. For me, this was a very touching and emotional moment. We had spent many months advocating for this law along with the Jewish community and the Israeli and American ambassadors to Serbia. It was an important moment for me to see this law become a reality. We were very happy that the Serbian government and parliament took such a significant step towards justice.

What is the function of the WJRO and what is your position in the organization?

The World Jewish Restitution Organization is an organization that was established in 1993. We advocate for Holocaust victims whose property was seized during the Holocaust. Our goal is to bring the issue of restitution to the world stage and to encourage restitution legislation across Europe. Restitution is just one of the ways to address the enormous injustice that European Jewry suffered during and in the aftermath of the Holocaust. I serve as the Acting Director General of the WJRO.

As far as we understand, your organization is only active in Eastern and Central European countries. What about heirless Jewish property in other European countries?

Yes, that is correct. The WJRO was established in 1993, shortly after the fall of the Iron Curtain. During this time, the process of restitution was both slow and challenging, specifically within Eastern and Central European countries whose governments were in flux due to the changing political landscape. We are mostly active in countries that formally stood behind the Iron Curtain, with different levels of success. These countries include Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. Some of these countries have passed restitution legislation, others have not. Restitution legislation and funds have allowed the WJRO to establish organizations that assist Holocaust survivors and Eastern European Jewish communities. Countries such as Romania, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, and Serbia have begun the process of restitution.

The WJRO does not work with Western European countries like Germany, Austria, France, and Greece, because many of these countries have already completed the restitution process. Serbia is an example of an Eastern European country that has made significant restitution efforts.

Is the work of your organization in Serbia completed or do you think there is more to be done?

The restitution legislation that was passed by the Serbian government is a very big and important step towards obtaining justice for Serbian Holocaust victims. However, there is still a long way to go. We must ensure that the restitution funds that are to be distributed to the Jewish community will be delivered and used appropriately. Serbia has handled the question of heirless property restitution very well and should be seen as an example by other European countries who are dealing with this issue. Serbia's heirless restitution law is the first of its kind in Eastern Europe.

Restitution cannot compensate Holocaust victims for what they have lost, but it is an important step in recognizing the pain and suffering of Serbian Holocaust victims. In the beginning, it was difficult to raise the issue of Holocaust restitution with Eastern European governments, but we are very happy that this issue has been resolved in Serbia. The process may have been slow and challenging, but better late than never.

Can expect to see you in Serbia in the coming years?

Definitely. I consider myself half-Serbian because of my close connection to the Serbian Jewish community. I feel very welcomed by your community and our organization has a wonderful relationship both with the Serbian Jewish community and with the Serbian government.

Did you have any knowledge about the Serbian Jewish Community before you started coming here?

Before I began visiting Serbia, I had very little knowledge about the Jewish community. However, after visiting Serbia a number of times, I have a much better understanding of the community. It's a complex community and a wonderful community. I have spent most of my time in Serbia in Belgrade, but I hope to visit other communities.

The man of the world

Tell us also something about yourself. I suppose that you are a lawyer?

No, I am not a lawyer. I was born in Israel and grew up in Israel, so I am very much a Sabra. My father moved to Israel from South Africa and his parents are from Lithuania. My mother is from the United States, but her parents are from Poland. I would say that I have international roots. I have four children and six grandchildren who live in the United States and Israel. I live in Jerusalem and I have been working in the non-profit sector for years. I started in the non-profit sector as a financial advisor but over time I became much more active in other aspects of organizations. I currently serve as the Acting Director General of the WJRO and am very grateful to spend my time doing such meaningful and important work.

NAŠ GOST NAHLIEL DISON

Piše: Saša Ristić

Zakon je jedno, implementacija – drugo

Srbija je postala primer zemlje koja je učinila nešto dobro time što je podržala Jevrejsku zajednicu i naše sunarodnike koji su preživeli Holokaust

U februaru prošle godine, sećamo se, Narodna skupština Republike Srbije usvojila je Zakon o otklanjanju posledica oduzimanja imovine žrtvama Holokausta koje nemaju živih zakonskih naslednika. Bio je to, ocenjeno je sa svih strana, korak ka pravdi i prepoznavanju istorije, a od drugih država Centralne i Istočne Evrope zatraženo je da se po ovom pitanju ugledaju na našu zemlju.

Naravno, proces usvajanja pomenutog zakona kao i sazrevanja svesti o tome da se oteto mora vratiti bio je dug i trnovit. Veliku ulogu u tome imala je i Svetska jevrejska organizacija za restituciju (WJRO) čiji je visoki funkcioner Nahliel Dison nedavno boravio u Beogradu i posetio Savez jevrejskih opština Srbije. Tu priliku iskoristili smo da sa njim obavimo kraći razgovor.

■ **Za početak, koji je cilj vaše posete?**

– Želeo sam da vidim kako napreduje proces restitucije, kako radi Nadzorni odbor koji to treba da nadgleda, jer, znate, doneti zakon je jedna stvar, a njegovo implementiranje sasvim druga.

■ **I, kakve utiske nosite?**

– Dobro je videti da to što je dogovoreno zaista funkcioniše. Novac, dakle, dolazi u Savez i distribuira se opštinama. Uverio sam se da je program pomaganja



osobama preživelim Holokaust iz tog fonda u punom jeku. Ima mnogo aplikacija širom sveta, kao i iz Srbije i vidim da taj projekat postaje realnost. Nadam se da će u narednih nekoliko meseci biti moguće distribuirati novac osobama preživelim Holokaust i to je odlična vest.

■ **Pre nego što je Srpski parlament izglasao Zakon o restituciji vodila se velika bitka da on bude donet. Možete li opisati našim čitaocima kako je ona izgledala?**

– Ja sam iz Svetske jevrejske organizacije za restituciju i mi smo bili deo celog tog procesa. Pre nego što je Zakon donet imali smo pregovore sa ovdašnjom jevrejskom zajednicom, sa Vladom, sa opozicijom i svi su podržali donošenje zakona. Kada sam pre nešto više od godine dana bio u Srpskom parlamentu dogodilo se da je upravo tada vođena debata o Zakonu i da je on je usvojen. Bilo je to za mene vrlo dirljiv trenutak. Nešto za šta smo se godinama zalagali, zajedno sa ovdašnjom jevrejskom zajednicom, izrael-

skim ambasadorom, američkim ambasadorom, odjednom pred našim očima postaje realnost. Svi smo bili vrlo srećni da su Vlada Republike Srbije i Parlament to usvojili.

■ **Možete li našim čitaocima da objasnite šta je u stvari WJRO čiji ste jedan od direktora?**

– Organizacija je osnovana 1993. godine, nakon pada „gvozdenih zavesi“. Polako su počeli da se stvaraju povoljni uslovi u istočnoevropskim zemljama za pokretanje procesa restitucije. Velike jevrejske organizacije poput Klems konferensa, Džointa, Svetskog jevrejskog kongresa, udružile su se u cilju formiranja jedne organizacije koja će se baviti mogućnostima restitucije jevrejske imovine u Centralnoj i Istočnoj Evropi. Naša organizacija je smeštena u Jerusalamu, kao izraelska neprofitna organizacija, ali imamo i mnogo aktivnosti u SAD. Radili smo u mnogim od zemalja iza nekadašnje „gvozdenih zavesi“ sa promenljivim uspehom. Neke od njih usvojile su zakone o povratku jevrejske imo-

vine, neke druge još nisu. Sada tako imamo fondove u Rumuniji, Litvaniji, Poljskoj, takođe i u Mađarskoj i sve te zemlje su ušle u proces restitucije. Zakon koji je Srbija usvojila, da se jevrejskoj zajednici vrati imovina ljudi koji nemaju naslednike, postao je primer drugim zemljama.

■ **Vaša organizacija je, koliko smo razumeli, aktivna samo u zemljama Centralne i Istočne Evrope, a šta je sa jevrejskom imovinom bez naslednika u ostalim evropskim zemljama?**

– Ne radimo sa Nemačkom ili Austrijom i zemljama kao što su Francuska, Grčka jer je u njima taj proces odavno gotov. Srbija je postala primer zemlje koja je učinila nešto dobro time što je podržala jevrejsku zajednicu i naše sunarodnike koji su preživeli Holokaust.

■ **Da li je posao vaše organizacije u Srbiji završen ili mislite da ima još ponešto da se uradi?**

– Pre svega reč je o procesu koji je, eto, dostigao to da Srbija donese pomenuti zakon. Ipak ima još posla i još nekoliko godina da se vidi da li se novac koji zajednica dobija upotrebljava na odgovarajući način. Zato i imamo nadzorni odbor jer želimo da vidimo i da se uverimo da novac odlazi u prave ruke. Vrlo sam srećan što mogu da

Svetski čovek

Recite mi i nešto o sebi, pretpostavljam da ste pravnik?

– Ne, nisam pravnik. Rođen sam u Izraelu, dakle ja sam Sabra. Moj otac je došao iz Južne Afrike, njegovi roditelji vode poreklo iz Litvanije, a moja majka iz Sjedinjenih Američkih Država s tim što vodi popreklo iz Poljske. Tako da sam, što bi se reklo, svetskog porekla i imam rođake širom planete. Imam četvoro dece i šestoro unučadi, neki od njih su u Izraelu, neki u SAD-u, a ja živim u Jerusalimu. Godinama radim u neprofitnoj organizaciji. U početku sam radio na finansijskim poslovima, da bih u godinama koje su dolazile postajao sve više uključen u druge aktivnosti i sada sam direktor organizacije WJRO. Smatram sebe srećnim što radim na tako važnim poslovima.

kažem da sam se uverio da **Robert Sabadoš, Ruben Dajč i Danijela Danon** taj posao odlično rade. Želimo i da se uverimo i vidimo da je i Vlada zadovoljna kako to funkcioniše i da to sve ide glatko.

■ **Znači možemo vas očekivati ovde i narednih godina?**

– Pa ja sebe već smatram polusrbinom, osećam se dobrodošlim i mogu da kažem da imamo vrlo dobre odnose sa Jevrejskom zajednicom Srbije i Vladom vaše zemlje.

■ **A da li ste išta znali o Jevrejskoj zajednici Srbije pre nego što ste počeli da dolazite ovde?**

– Iskreno, vrlo malo, ali sada svakako mnogo više. Rekao bih

da je to jedna vrlo kompleksna jevrejska zajednica. U Beogradu sam bio najviše, ali se nadam da ću početi više da upoznajem ostale delove Srbije. Ono što bih voleo jeste da ljudi razumeju značaj restitucije, kada to kažem ne mislim samo na novac nego na osećanje da je nešto za njih urađeno, da je neko njihove potrebe prepoznao i uvažio.

Znate, do skoro restitucija je bila nešto o čemu vlade nisu želele ni da razgovaraju, tema koju niste mogli ni da stavite na sto u razgovorima i pregovorima. Podvlačim da smo vrlo srećni što je to rešeno u Srbiji, pa makar i sa zakašnjenjem, jer, kako se kaže, bolje ikad nego nikad.

LICA I DOGAĐAJI

PISMO • Ploča

Poštovani,

Gospoda Čedomila Marinković, prijatelj JOB i turistički vodič, 25. maja 2017, oko 17.00 časova, prilikom vođenja grupe gostiju iz Izraela, ustanovila je da kod Topovskih šupa više nema memorijalne ploče (mesingane ploče u vidu razmotane Tore, veličine cca 1m sa 70cm, na kojoj je na tri jezika bilo rečjefnim slovima ispisano šta se na tom mestu dogodilo 1941. godine).

Moguće je da je ploču neko skinuo s namerom da je očisti, ili da je zameni drugim obeležjem, ali verujem da to nije slučaj i da se radi o krađi radi prodaje metala od kojeg je bila napravljena.

Ne želim ni da pomislim da iza uklanjanja ploče stoji antisemitizam, i namera da se poništi istorija i da se izbriše sećanje na jezive događaje iz vremena Holokausta.

Brane Popović

