News of the outbreak of the war reached most of the Mossad agents in Paris. There they gathered following the Zionist Congress in Geneva in late August. The Congress had left a profound impression. Katznelson's resounding plea on behalf of aliyah bet stirred them, and their encounters with aliyah activists from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia rekindled their sense of urgency. They began to discuss new efforts, both to initiate additional operations and to persuade potential funders, in order to launch the largest aliyah campaign possible. Even as they spoke, the *Tiger Hill* was en route to Palestine carrying several hundred refugees from Poland and Rumania. Groups had been organized in Germany, Austria, and Bratislava and awaited departure. The issue of using the Danube route to the Black Sea was discussed. The Mossad had avoided this route, since it greatly compromised secrecy; it was accepted now after extensive debate because of its logistical convenience, a crucial factor in a large-scale campaign.

Yet at this point as war broke out, the head of Mossad's Paris bureau" Yehuda Braginsky, ordered Mossad representatives in Holland and Germany to return to Palestine. It is unclear whether Braginsky reached this decision on his own or after consulting the leadership in Palestine. (On 25 August, the final night of the Congress, a special meeting of Histadrut delegates had reached decision that Yishuv emissaries should return to the communities in Europe.)[[1]](#footnote-1) However, because of Braginsky's order the Mossad activity broke off for a period of five to six weeks, perhaps the most crucial ones for organizing groups, given that the onset of winter and the freezing of the Danube would severely hamper operations shortly thereafter.

However, the decision seemed the wisest course at the time. Pino Ginsburg, at the time a Hehalutz emissary and Mossad agent in Germany, noted that the emissaries, as citizens of Palestine (part of the British empire), were now enemy aliens and were perceived as being in greater danger than the resident Jews. Also, communication beyond the boundaries of those countries became very difficult and risky - all in all, a very dangerous situation.[[2]](#footnote-2) Zvi Yehieli and Ze'ev Shind, both key Mossad activists, returned to Palestine for consultation. Braginsky, too, prepared for his own return. Nevertheless, continuing operations from countries not yet involved in the war - the Netherlands, France, the Balkan countries, and others - could still be possible. The fate of those groups awaiting transport was not addressed.

In Geneva, Moshe Agami, who had served as Hehalutz emissary and Mossad agent in Austria until he was expelled by Eichmann in May 1939, also made plans to depart. All the while, however, communications that Agami received from the heads of the Jewish communities in Germany, Austria, and Slovakia insisted that greater decision, daring, and activity were needed more urgently than ever before - not a halt to clandestine immigration. Agami therefore delayed his plans to return to Palestine.

In Palestine, the emissaries' exit from Europe was debated as well, and a group of Mossad operatives was reorganized. At Agami's request, a number of assignments were made: Zvi Yehieli, one of the most capable and seasoned aliyah bet activists, was sent to work with Agami. Shmarya Tsameret, who had a great deal of experience in hiring ships, was posted to Athens. Yosef Barpal returned to Rumania, and Gideon Rufer (Raphael) went to Italy to investigate its suitability as an alternate staging area. Ze'ev Shind, an aliyah bet veteran since the voyage of the *Velos* in 1934, was assigned as a roving agent responsible for acquiring ships. By the end of November, agents had returned to Greece, Geneva, and Italy, and operations had begun anew. The center of operations now shifted to Geneva. Switzerland's neutral status made it secure, and the offices of international Jewish organizations located there made them convenient and logical for lobbying purposes.

# The Mossad's Organization of Aliyah bet

From its beginnings in spring 1939, the Mossad functioned in a centralized fashion (as had the Hehalutz operations that preceded it). Principal policy decisions were made by Mossad leaders in Tel Aviv, who were under the direct authority of the Haganah. Eliyahu Golomb, the head of the Haganah, and Shaul Avigur, a Mossad member and a leading figure in the Haganah, maintained very close ties. Policy on aliyah bet was set in meetings of the Haganah and Mossad, and political leaders such as Ben-Gurion and Shertok, Histadrut members involved in Hehalutz, and Berl Katznelson took part in these. However, there were no formal ties between the Mossad and the Jewish Agency. The meetings were under no institutional framework, and authority in decision-making was never formalized. In numerous cases, decisions were reached in private meetings involving Golomb, Avigur, Katznelson, Ben-Gurion, and sometimes Shertok.

Mossad operations across Europe were directed from Paris (and, after November 1939, from Geneva). There, the needs of individual communities were assessed and emissaries' proposals evaluated. Mossad representatives from Palestine were assigned to the main Jewish communities in Europe. Some agents, such as Yosef Barpal in Rumania and Shmarya Tsameret in Greece, were dispatched expressly for the Mossad's purposes. Others played a dual role as emissaries of Hehalutz and as Mossad representatives (Pino Ginsburg, Moshe Agami, and others). In both cases, no work was carried out without prior consultation with Paris.

Mossad representatives managed all logistical activities: finding ships, arranging travel and departure dates, and obtaining funds (the amounts contributed by the would-be immigrants fell far short of actual costs). The local Palestine offices and Hehalutz groups selected the candidates for immigration and were responsible for organizing groups of potential immigrants - obtaining travel documents and informing them of travel dates, how much luggage they could bring, and how much each would pay. In general, the selection criteria used were much the same as those of the Zionist authorities in Palestine: ability to adjust to life in Palestine, vocational training, health, age, and so on. In countries under Nazi rule, an individual's degree of personal danger was a decisive criterion. The net result was that most of those chosen tended to be youthful members of Hehalutz who had undergone some training on *hachshara.*

Thus, locally, the Mossad played mainly an advisory role - in the selection process and in other respects. Yet their importance to the local Hehalutz members was great. Hehalutz members tended to be young (under twenty-five), without financial means, and lacking in influence and professional contacts that elder Zionists had. Without the aid of the Mossad, Hehalutz members had little chance of immigrating, whereas older, better-established Jews had a few other options - privately arranged voyages and so forth. Mossad agents were also young (Braginsky, who was about thirty-five, was considered old by his colleagues). Yet by virtue of their status as members of the Yishuv, they commanded a great deal of respect and were able to acquire funds, arrange logistics, and exercise influence where Hehalutz members were powerless. Local Hehalutz members completely depended on the Mossad.

The Mossad's funds came almost entirely from the Zionist Organization, who raised them inside and outside Europe. These were disbursed centrally, from the Zionist Organization to the Mossad on behalf of particular groups or Jewish communities. (For certain operations, the American Joint Distribution Committee [the JDC, the main American institution aiding European Jewish communities under Nazism in the 1930s] also provided funds.) Virtually all the costs of the Mossad's aliyah operations were subsidized; passengers' contributions covered but a small portion of a transport's expenses. At the end of 1939, it was decided to include more veteran Zionists among the groups of passengers; these could generally afford to contribute more toward expenses.

While the Mossad was being reorganized after the outbreak of the war, Moshe Agami urged that less centralized procedures be adopted in order to give those in the field greater flexibility in making decisions. It was not always possible to wait for decisions from Tel Aviv and Geneva - especially under wartime conditions. He asked the leadership in Palestine for far greater autonomy for agents than there had been in the past.[[3]](#footnote-3) No change in policy was considered at this time, however. Indeed, the authority of the Mossad central office 'was never deviated from during its long years of operation. A certain tension existed between center and periphery, since in a few cases decisions had been made by the main office despite the objections of agents in the field, but established procedures were held to and central authority respected nonetheless. No serious challenge to the central office arose until the events surrounding the *Darien,* at the end of 1940 and early 1941.

## The Mossad's Logistical Difficulties

The political realities of wartime complicated the work of the Mossad and of all illegal aliyah activists. Because of restrictions and legal use of ships, the Mossad usually commissioned ships through an agent rather than purchasing them outright. The agent, in turn, hired captain and crew and arranged ship's papers and other details. The demand for shipping was such that only those vessels retired from service because of age or poor condition were available. These required extensive repairs and refitting for use as passenger ships. Prices soared, and vessels judged to be no better than scrap by governments during wartime doubled and tripled in value.

Aliyah activists were very much at the mercy of shipping agents and owners, even should they prove dishonest. All involved knew that the transport of refugees often violated conventions or laws, and in the event of fraud or breach of faith the Mossad agents had little recourse, legal or otherwise. Regardless of the ship's condition or the shipping agent's integrity, all ships were insured at exorbitantly high rates to guarantee some return for the owner, increasing the Mossad's expenses yet again. Ships were sometimes deliberately damaged before journey's end or even while still in port so the owners could collect on their insurance. The organizers had to bear the huge costs of delays or failure.[[4]](#footnote-4) Also, shipping agents often demanded last-minute bank guarantees, which were very difficult to obtain at short notice, again threatening delays and raising costs.

Shipping agents, as well as captains and crews, became increasingly hard to hire and of deteriorating quality. The Balkan governments, Rumania-Bulgaria, Greece, and Yugoslavia - increasingly put pressure on shipping agents and captains to dissuade them from cooperating with activists as the result of repeated British requests to prohibit the passage of Jewish refugees to Palestine. Because of this, some arrangements fell through even after all details had been concluded and money had changed hands. Crews were also discouraged from cooperating by British policies: illegal ships began to be seized off Palestine and their crews arrested.[[5]](#footnote-5) Rumors also circulated among seamen about attempts at secret landings that endangered all on board. Given the risks entailed, the pool of those willing to sign on as crew members was reduced to those most in need of work-frequently men with criminal records or questionable backgrounds. Crews often demanded the entire journey's wages in advance, when in ordinary circumstances a small portion of these would have sufficed. Furthermore, the low caliber of crews at times gave rise to tensions aboard ship.

Bringing the refugees to their port of embarkation also became more difficult and much more costly. Legally obtaining transit visas through the countries along the way proved near to impossible, and forged visas or illegally acquired ones became rarer and ever more expensive. Some governments sought to avoid an influx of impoverished refugees and others succumbed to British pressure to restrict the flow of Jews. The impact of the numerous obstructions was to increase the hardships of the journey for the refugees. Delays on land and aboard ship caused anxiety and turmoil. The only thing to inspire confidence was the prospect of eventual arrival in Palestine.

In short, arranging illegal immigration entailed overcoming virtually insurmountable obstacles. In the face of these, Mossad agents, even at this early stage, raised the idea of buying ships outright and training Jewish crews. "All of these failures involving non-Jews," Agami wrote in January 1940, "show that we must find some other way so that we can be sure the tents [ships] will really be at our disposal and so that we will not be at the mercy of these cheats and scoundrels."[[6]](#footnote-6) Such a scheme was not seriously considered at the time, however.

A picture emerges of competition in a volatile and uncertain market. Many groups sought to arrange illegal transports: the Mossad, the Revisionists, private organizers such as Baruch Konfino, who organized aliyah privately from Bulgaria, and Berthold Storfer, a Jewish businessman from Vienna engaged by the Jewish community to organize Jewish emigration from the Reich. All bid for the same ships in ports in Rumania, Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Turkey. Some used the same shipping agent;[[7]](#footnote-7) and the names of the same ships appear again and again in the accounts of their dealings: *Maria Luda, Sirus, Popi, Asimi, Wetan,* and a Greek-Rumanian barge. In Turkey, controls on shipping were the strictest by far, and all the organizers approached the same Panamanian consuls seeking its flag of registry for their vessels. Thus, the various organizers were competing against each other even while trying to accomplish the same thing for the same people, roughly speaking. This situation certainly compounded their own problems and indirectly contributed to the refugees' sufferings.

## Mossad Activities after the Renewal of Operations

The Mossad's task after resuming operations in October and November 1939 was to arrange the transportation of four groups of illegals that had been organized before the outbreak of hostilities. In one group, there were 725 members of Young Maccabi and other Zionists. These were waiting aboard the *Hilda* in Rumania, but the Mossad feared that the ship was unseaworthy and hoped to obtain another for the group. A second group of about 1,100 people, composed of the remainder of Hehalutz in Vienna, youth groups and *hachshara* trainees from Germany, and refugees from Danzig were on riverboats at the port of Kladovo in Yugoslavia waiting for orders to depart for the Black Sea. A third contingent of 300 farm trainees from Prague and Berlin and 150 refugees from Danzig waited in Bratislava. Another group, 600 Jews from Germany, Danzig, and Austria was also ready to depart from Bratislava. Meanwhile, they were at the mercies of the local police.[[8]](#footnote-8) In addition, there were now many people who descended upon the Hehfilutz offices and the Palestine Offices in Berlin and in Prague, as well as on shipping agencies in Vienna, seeking a way out of Europe. Zvi Yehieli arrived in Greece at the end of November and contacted shipping agents he had worked with in the past. He was informed that costs had now doubled. Nevertheless, Yehieli instructed them to arrange the charter of the *Maria Luda* to transport 500 people at a cost per head of £17 (as compared with the £9-10 paid in August for the *Tiger Hill).* The *Dara* was to be assigned to the group aboard the *Hilda.[[9]](#footnote-9)* The ship had already been under contract to the Mossad, and its owners claimed it was en route to Rumania from Marseilles, as agreed. It had actually been sent to North Africa and its owners seeking other business. Only in December was it clear that the *Dara* was lost.[[10]](#footnote-10)

It was imperative, however, that the *Hilda* group leave Rumania. Its presence in Rumania complicated additional efforts. The government had barred the entry of new groups of refugees until those already in the country left, and now it added two other stipulations: that a ship be standing by in port to await each group entering Rumania, and that 15 to 20 percent of the passengers of each ship consist of refugees already in Rumania or of Rumanian Jews. Furthermore, as winter approached conditions on the *Hildadeterio* deteriorated. The group threatened to publicize its plight, and the Mossad feared a furor in the press.[[11]](#footnote-11) Revisionist-organized groups had provoked such a storm in the local press and in European newspapers after having been left waiting for weeks on frail river craft in Rumania.[[12]](#footnote-12) The Mossad proposed the hire of a boat with Panamanian registry, the *Asimi,* despite the still higher cost demanded by its owners, now amounting to £20 per person.

It thus seemed that two ships, the *Maria Luda* and the *Asimi,* were available, allowing the evacuation of the *Hilda* group and the groups that were in Bratislava and Kladovo. However, on December 3rd the Greek government, under British pressure, announced a prohibition on the use of Greek ships to transport refugees, and the shipping agent assigned to hire the *Asimi* was threatened with arrest. The owner was warned not to get involved in transporting Jewish refugees, and the ship was placed under Greek registry. Hopes of acquiring the *Maria Luda* vanished as well. Attempts to transfer it to Panamanian registry failed on account of a government order forbidding changes of registry for passenger vessels. By mid-December, all the Mossad's efforts thus far had been in vain. Agami wrote to Golomb:

Things have gotten worse than they were before. The truth is that we have suffered a major setback, and that in the entire time since the war began we have not been able to save even one "tent" [shipload], despite the fact that we do have funds. There have, of course, been reasons. The [British] are interfering with us wherever there is a market in ships. Still, others have succeeded in obtaining one [the *Sakariya,* acquired by the Revisionists], while we are stuck in the bargaining stage. I am not qualified to give you a firm judgment on this, but those are the sad facts.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Given this situation, Yosef Barpal and Ruth Klueger Aliav, the Mossad's agent assigned to Rumania, made the decision to sail the *Hilda* itself to Palestine, despite fears of its unseaworthiness. An agreement was reached with the ship's owner in January 1940, and an exorbitant sum was paid. Yet, as Agami wrote to a comrade in the U.S. Zionist Organization, further problems remained:

Things here are very trying. The first contingent has not yet left and is under Kadmon's [Barpal's] care. This is costing us dearly, both in lives and in expenses. After much effort, we had found "drivers" (the main reason why they hadn't left yet). The officers were brought from Greece, and the men from Turkey as well as some locals. A few hours before sailing, a fight broke out between the Turks and the local men, and we had to get rid of all of them. Only the officers remained. Maybe things will move in a few days if we can get other crewmen.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The *Hilda* sailed on 8 January and arrived offshore in fairly short order, on 18 January. The ship was impounded and the crew brought to trial. Its passengers were seized, brought to Haifa, and interned. After a few months, however, they were released and their numbers subtracted from the next three-month schedule of legal immigrants (March to May 1940).

During winter 1939-40, the Mossad was kept from further operations by the frozen Danube, preventing transport of the groups in Bratislava and Kladovo. The Mossad spent the period strengthening its network, consolidating their main base in Geneva, and establishing others in Bucharest and Athens. In Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and Paris, Ze'ev Shind pursued the owners of vessels who had reneged on agreements and tried to recoup lost funds. He also approached the JDC in an effort to gain financial support. Mossad agents communicated daily, in meetings or by telephone and letters. They also kept in touch with leaders of the Berlin and Prague communities, and with Sima Spitzer, secretary of the Union of Jewish communities in Yugoslavia, who bore responsibility for the maintenance of the group at Kladovo as well as for thousands of other Jewish refugees.

The Mossad worked in many directions simultaneously. It primarily focused on acquiring ships and reestablishing a network of contacts among the shipping agents. They even went so far as to renew liaisons with Germans who had aided illegal aliyah before the war, especially through contacts in the German government. Among these was Alexander von Hoepfner (known as "the aristocrat"). Von Hoepfner had maintained a link to Pino Ginsburg in Germany, at some risk to himself. In December, Yehieli, Agami, and Shind met von Hoepfner in Italy, where he was seeking means to help German Jews gain passage to Palestine.[[15]](#footnote-15)

The Mossad attempted, to reestablish contact with the movement in Poland and to send money via von Hoepfner, but to no avail. A plan was also discussed of offering some sort of agreement to the Germans in order to organize an evacuation from Poland. Yehieli also proposed cooperating with Revisionist groups in order to maintain the flow of immigrants.[[16]](#footnote-16) He had also suggested that the Mossad cooperate with private aliyah organizers and on several occasions had met with Baruch Konfino in Italy, Belgrade, and Bucharest.

The Mossad agents saw their work as dictated by circumstances. Their constant contacts with the European Jewish communities convinced and compelled them. It was clear to them that the Jews of Europe would flee whether they were given organizational assistance or not. The Mossad saw itself as a facilitator. In one sense, it hoped that it could deter the Nazis in their extreme measures - such as expulsion to Lublin - by organizing large numbers of refugees and, as it were, offering the regime a simpler alternative.[[17]](#footnote-17) In addition, it acted as a vehicle to mobilize the funds of various Jewish communities and agencies, centralizing funds and putting them to use. Yet the scarcity of funds and the lack of decisive support on the part of the Zionist leadership plagued them. They were far removed from the policymakers' concerns over political implications and absorption difficulties. For the Mossad, Jewish and Zionist values coincided. In its practical operations, the Mossad agents were mindful of anxieties in Palestine - of possible German infiltration of the immigrant groups and of the difficulties and risks involved in aliyah bet. In their organizing efforts they strictly guarded against possible infiltration. Insofar as risks were concerned, the Mossad gave great care to refugees' safety. Yet they also recognized the necessity of taking chances, as in the sailing of the *Hilda.* In such cases, however, decisions were made only as a last resort.

For the Mossad, the important question was not *whether,* but rather *how,* to pursue aliyah bet. Their conclusions were that the operations of the many disparate aliyah bet organizers should be concentrated under the Mossad's direction to ameliorate logistical difficulties and avoid counterproductive competition. (Leaders of the Jewish communities, Paul Epstein in Germany and Jacob Edelstein in Prague, stressed this in their communications with the Mossad and expressed their preference to cooperate with the Mossad over any other organization.)[[18]](#footnote-18) The activists also strongly believed that the Nazi regime would permit an organized effort to go on if that effort produced significant results - evacuating large numbers of Jews. In sum, their approach became one of looking beyond the solution of immediate problems, such as that of the Kladovo contingent or of the other groups awaiting transport, to a broader and more comprehensive effort. Their outlook was one of openness to all proposals, of taking chances on many plans at once and of accepting a higher level of risk than before.

# The Kladovo *Darien* Incident

All of the several attempts made to bring the group of refugees in Kladovo, Yugoslavia, to Palestine failed. Finally, most of the people in the group were killed by the Nazis.[[19]](#footnote-19) The group's story is one of the saddest episodes in the history of clandestine aliyah. The incident became a painful issue between the Diaspora Jewish communities and the leaders of the Yishuv and was raised time and again as an example of Mossad and Jewish Agency irresponsibility.

The chances to rescue the Kladovo group and the issue of how the ship *Darien* was to be used - whether for war or for rescue work - are directly related to the fundamental question for Zionist policy: How was the leadership to choose? In favor of an immediate rescue operation with some probability of success, or instead in favor of small steps in a political strategy calculated to enable a much larger rescue effort at a later time? An accurate assessment of this episode requires a thorough examination of events beginning in summer 1939, when the group was first organized for an illegal journey to Palestine.

Ehud Ueberall (Avriel) was responsible for organizing the initial group, composed of 1,000 Hehalutz members (who mostly came from Austria), as well as approximately 200 others from Germany and Danzig. The plan was that the group would travel by train to Bratislava, proceed to the Black Sea via the German Danube Line (DDSG), then sail to Palestine on a vessel arranged by the Mossad.

Originally, in summer of 1939, the group was intended to sail either on the *Dara* or the *Holm,* but the outbreak of the war interrupted the plans of the Mossad.[[20]](#footnote-20) It became imperative to get the group out of German-controlled territory as soon as possible - it was unclear whether Jews would continue to be allowed to leave the Reich or whether the Lublin expulsion plan would be attempted on a large scale. In late November, Ueberall learned of the horrible conditions facing the deported Jews from Vienna community leaders who had visited the Lublin camps. Ueberall resolved that the group must exit Austria at once. Between 24 and 26 November, the group left Vienna for Bratislava. Ueberall had obtained temporary visas for Slovakia with the aid of Storfer and through bribes paid to the Slovak consul in Vienna (with whom the Mossad had had prewar ties).[[21]](#footnote-21) The group stayed at a hotel waiting for word of the arrival of their ship in Sulina before setting out on the next leg of their journey. Ueberall urged his comrades in Geneva and Rumania to find them a ship quickly. The DDSG refused to transport the group to Rumania until a ship was stationed in Sulina. After repeated requests, Ueberall realized that in fact the Mossad had no ships at its disposal.

The Slovak police began to threaten to send the refugees back to the Reich. Ueberall engaged in stalling tactics to put them off. The Mossad, however, believed it was better for the group to wait in Bratislava rather than Rumania, which was flooded with refugees. Furthermore, the Mossad felt it could do no more to ensure the group's safety in Rumania than could Ueberall in Bratislava. Ueberall demanded that the group move on, no matter what; funds were exhausted on provisions and bribes, and the situation was growing ever more critical.[[22]](#footnote-22) Yehieli remained opposed, knowing that there was no ship to transport them. He believed that as long as the group stayed in Bratislava, he had a better chance of obtaining financial assistance from the JDC. Agami, however, fully appreciated the seriousness of Ueberall's arguments and took upon himself the responsibility for issuing the go-ahead. Agami turned for help to Sima Spitzer, secretary of the Union of Jewish communities in Yugoslavia. With Spitzer's aid and after paying large sums of money, they hired three Yugoslavian riverboats to take the group from the Yugoslavian border to Sulina, Rumania.[[23]](#footnote-23) By mid-December, the boats had arrived near the Rumanian border, a few days' sail from Sulina.

Yet it remains unclear why anyone involved assumed the Rumanian authorities would clear the boats for entry when no ships were available to transport the group from Rumania. It seems that the Mossad members themselves had little idea of how this problem would be solved; the necessity of moving on had overridden all other considerations. They had probably hoped to improvise tactics - they had succeeded in this way before and were at that very moment doing just this with the *Hilda* group.[[24]](#footnote-24)

However, even prior to receiving word about proceeding to Sulina, the boats were instructed to halt. The Danube had frozen early that year. They entered a small port in Yugoslavia - Kladovo. There they were meant to remain until the spring thaw. However, the Yugoslavian authorities barred the passengers from going ashore, forcing them to remain on the boats under dire conditions. There was no heat, since the boats were not designed for winter operation, and they lacked facilities for extended residence on board. Through great efforts Sima Spitzer obtained a river barge (without power) on which two kitchens, an eating area, a sick bay, and berths were set up, somewhat relieving the overcrowding. The Union of Jewish communities of Yugoslavia took it upon itself to supply the group (at a time when 10,000 other Jewish refugees were already in the country).

Supplying Kladovo was difficult. It was located some eighty miles from the nearest town, and in winter it could be reached only by sled. Under these conditions, a supply line and communications had to be maintained. But life on the river was harder by far. Cold, monotony, and despondency plagued the stranded refugees. In an effort to overcome these, the group's leaders established a regimen of order and discipline and organized cultural activities. Throughout the period, the members of the group demonstrated impressive stamina and spirit.[[25]](#footnote-25)

## *The* Wetan

The Mossad's search for a vessel began in Genoa, Italy, where Shind, Yehieli, and Gideon Rufer tried to locate a ship through various agents. Meanwhile, in Athens, Shmarya Tsameret bargained for a small boat, and Barpal and Klueger Aliav negotiated for a Turkish ship, the *Wetan,* which could carry 3,000 passengers. Baruch Konfino, the private aliyah organizer, was approached to try to acquire a boat in Bratislava.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The Mossad's goal was to hire or purchase enough vessels to transport 3,000 people in the months to come. In addition to the 1,100 waiting in Kladovo, there were other groups waiting in ever more precarious situations in Bratislava and Rumania totaling more than a thousand people, as well as concentrations of Jewish refugees in Venice and Genoa who had requested the Mossad's help. There was growing pressure on the remaining Jews in Danzig, and the Mossad sought to aid them as well. In addition, the Mossad promised to help some 2,000 Czech Jews leave Prague. The commitment to this last group had come about after meetings in Geneva with the Berlin and Prague leaders - Jacob Edelstein, Fritz Ullmann, and Paul Epstein - in January and February. The Czech Jewish community was able to obtain foreign currency for emigration, and they offered funds equivalent to £25 per person to purchase a ship and to cover the costs of travel.

Negotiations for several vessels were conducted simultaneously to increase the chances of success. The practice was risky - it was costly and invited the possibility of provoking some agents in the end. However, the state of the market demanded such dubious methods, and the Mossad had to guard against the possibility of fraud. By early March, the *Wetan* seemed the most attractive solution.[[27]](#footnote-27) Its large capacity would allow the transport of the groups in Kladovo and Bratislava, a major step toward fulfilling the overall plan. A successful precedent encouraged them: the Revisionists had used a Turkish vessel, the *Sakariya,* to convey refugees out of Sulina. The Mossad was confident that it, too, could circumvent Turkish restrictions.

After several setbacks, a contract was ready, and three Mossad representatives - Klueger Aliav, Barpal, and Yehieli - traveled to Istanbul, arriving 1 March 1940. They were greeted with news in the press of a new law prohibiting the transfer of Turkish vessels to foreign ownership and instituting tighter controls on shipping. Upon further inquiry, however, it appeared that the law applied only during a state of emergency and therefore was not applicable for the present.[[28]](#footnote-28) The group met with the owner of the *Wetan,* who had received an advance of $12,000. He announced that he was raising his asking price from $30,000 to $60,000. The Mossad representatives were unwilling to let the ship slip through their fingers and agreed to the price. The additional costs, they reasoned, could be offset by including more passengers, and Yehieli asked Edelstein in Prague to send more money.

At this point there began a series of delays in the transfer of the needed funds, delays whose true nature was unclear to the Mossad at the time. (It was later revealed that the delays were the work of Storfer, who was engaging in a struggle with the Zionist leaders over the control of aliyah. The Mossad, whose information came mostly from the Zionist leadership, was not fully aware of Storfer's influence and power.)[[29]](#footnote-29) When the Czech funds had failed to arrive, the Mossad began to search feverishly for others. In the meantime, $35,000 that had been raised by American Zionist organizations for relief to the Kladovo group arrived in Geneva. The Mossad was thrown into a moral quandary. The amount would cover the cost of purchasing a smaller ship, large enough to carry the Kladovo group, but it was not enough to buy or even to pay for refitting the *Wetan,* whose procurement was part of the Mossad's plan for a large-scale aliyah. In addition to the question of the propriety of using funds sent for one purpose for another - which was not merely a technicality -there were further considerations. Under Turkish currency restrictions, dollars deposited in Turkey could not be taken out again. In the event that the Czech funds did not arrive or if for some reason the *Wetan* transaction fell through, the money might be unavailable for the purchase of a smaller ship.

There was no simple answer to the Mossad's dilemma - to risk the *Wetan* by waiting for money from Prague or to risk the Kladovo money by putting it toward purchase of the *Wetan.* But a fine line separated a reasonable gamble from a disastrous speculation. The Mossad decided to try to win some time. Yehieli returned to Geneva and tried to offer the owners short-term bank guarantees in lieu of actual payment. These were refused, however. Klueger Aliav and Barpal, who had remained in Istanbul, pressed Yehieli to make a decision. They feared that the *Wetan's* owners would cancel the deal if there were too many more delays. There was still no clear word out of Prague. Meanwhile, from the information gathered by Yehieli it became evident that Storfer's intervention was a factor in the delay, and Yehieli realized that some way to win his cooperation had to be found. Yehieli contacted Storfer, who demanded to inspect the ship, but the Mossad rejected this, arguing that it would require too long a wait. They finally compromised on an inspection in Rumania prior to boarding. The Mossad was to release the money it had ($42,000), enough for the ship's purchase but not enough for refitting. The Mossad decided to proceed with the deal even though the final arrangements were still in doubt. As Yehieli summed up the matter:

Even though we were agreed on the importance of not allowing the vessel to be lost, it was difficult to go through with the transfer of funds. We contacted Kadmon [Barpal] and Dani [Shind] again in Istanbul. They assured us that the deal was dangling by a thread, and unless we signed at once it would be lost. On that understanding, we sent all the money we had, including $6,000 we had from the JDC for Danzig.... I want to stress that we all took responsibility for the decision, some of us with more misgivings than others. We knew that under the circumstances we had no choice. The transfer was made toward the end of March.[[30]](#footnote-30)

In a letter to the United States of March 25, Agami spoke of the acquisition of the *Wetan* as a very real possibility.[[31]](#footnote-31) But soon after, a new obstacle materialized - as they had feared all along - barring the transfer of the *Wetan* to their Greek agent, Pandelis.[[32]](#footnote-32) Whether or not this obstacle was the new Turkish law forbidding the sale of Turkish shipping to foreign nationals remains unclear from the documents; nor is it clear why, if this was indeed the case, the law could not have been circumvented through a fictitious sale or a lease arrangement. What was quite clear was that the Mossad was now left with no money and no ship.

The fiasco brought a chain of repercussions in its wake. In the United States, Zionist supporters were angered at the Mossad's seeming irresponsibility. The reaction hampered additional fund-raising efforts. The JDC, which had supported the Mossad in the Kladovo case with considerable reservations, became even more uncertain. In Yugoslavia, the refugees sunk into a profound depression, and the rift between the Mossad and the Yugoslav communal leadership widened. Meanwhile, the Yugoslav government pressed for the refugees’ departure. In addition, the Danube was beginning to thaw and the boat company demanded the return of its riverboats. The Mossad was left without the means to reenter negotiations for ships, and April passed without any progress. Pressure on Jews to leave the Reich continued to escalate, but the Mossad had nothing to suggest to further its plans for the other groups either.

Agami went to Kladovo in April, burdened with a sense of responsibility for the group's situation. He found it difficult to present the situation to the refugees in stark objective terms. Life on the riverboats, which they believed had been at its conclusion, had grown grimmer than ever. Agami promised to do everything possible to find them a ship and money to maintain them in the meantime.[[33]](#footnote-33)

## *The* Darien

The next stage of the Kladovo story begins in May 1940 in Athens. There Tsameret and Agami came across a ship, registered in Panama and owned by a retired sea captain who wished to sell it and buy a home for his wife and himself. The price for the ship (soon to become the *Darien)* was set at $60,000. Although the Mossad was receiving small installments from Istanbul, the $42,000 paid for the *Wetan* could not be recovered all at once, and the Mossad opened negotiations to buy the *Darien* through its Greek agent, Pandelis.

Tsameret and Yehieli began a campaign for funds with the sole intention of transporting the Kladovo group, though this would require more than one voyage. In mid-May and early June the Mossad sent cables to New York, Geneva, and Jerusalem expressing grave concerns that lack of funds might ruin the prospective deal and spell the end of efforts to rescue the Kladovo group.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Raising the money was difficult nevertheless. The Mossad's capabilities had fallen into disrepute. The JDC hoped that another party could be found to take responsibility and rescue the refugees. It was also pressing Storfer to aid the group and had made further aid to the Yugoslavian communities contingent on their purchase of a ship, in an effort to prompt them to act.[[35]](#footnote-35) To the Mossad, it seemed as if the situation conspired to set a cruel trap--a ship was within its grasp, but by the time its purchase was arranged there might be no chance of sailing it. The likelihood of a successful transport was clouded by Italy's preparations to enter the war; it was uncertain whether the Mediterranean would remain open. Yehieli, enraged by the JDC's maneuverings, demanded to meet with their representatives in Geneva. A meeting was held on 28 May. Yehieli bitterly criticized the JDC's refusal to expend the $45,000 necessary to secure the *Darien* and threatened to renounce all responsibility for the affair (as did Golomb in a cable to the Zionist organizations in New York).[[36]](#footnote-36)

The JDC agreed to cooperate on the condition that the Jewish Agency and the Zionist Organization in America give half of the money required. The next day, Agami contacted Yehieli from Athens with word that negotiations for the *Darien* had been concluded and that $30,000 was required. On 1 June, Yehieli sent the funds he had received from the Jewish Agency and the JDC to Tsameret in Athens, after a quick consultation with Jerusalem about political difficulties. Italy's preparations to join the war and open a new front in the Mediterranean were alarming. Nevertheless, the ship was acquired and registered in Tsameret's name. (Tsameret, an American citizen, could own the ship personally, since the United States was not at war at this time.) Thus, by the beginning of June 1940, the purchase of the Darien was complete and it was ready to be refitted for a voyage.[[37]](#footnote-37)

## The Suspension of Aliyah bet and the Transfer of the Darien

On 10 June 1940, Italy entered the war, generating alarm and confusion among the ranks of the Mossad. Yehieli, in Geneva, tried to contact Agami in Athens, but without success. He was able to communicate with Spitzer the next day, but Spitzer was unable to assess the implications of the news. Yehieli and Spitzer decided to wait a few days while developments took shape and to receive word from Jerusalem.

Agami and Tsameret believed that there would be enough time to bring the Kladovo refugees out before the sea-lanes became impassable. Yehieli was not quite sure. News came from Hungary and Bulgaria of continuing aliyah activity. Storfer, too, continued to make plans for Jewish emigration. Klueger Aliav reported from Rumania in mid-June that the Mediterranean remained open.

In Palestine, a hurried meeting of those involved in aliyah bet planning was called in response to an urgent cable from Mossad emissaries.[[38]](#footnote-38) A decision on whether to continue the preparation for the *Darien* voyage had to be made. It was decided to discontinue plans for the Kladovo group's voyage in light of the new dangers posed to shipping and to halt all other aliyah bet activity. Although Agami and Tsameret cabled strenuous objections from Athens, Golomb proceeded to suspend operations and instructed the Zionist office in New York to send no additional funds to Athens until further notice.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Agami, determined to resist the new orders, returned in mid-June to Palestine to lobby for the continuation of operations. Tsameret remained in Athens, and Yehieli informed Spitzer of the decision. Spitzer was incensed. He called into question the Mossad's sincerity of purpose in trying to rescue the Kladovo group and pointed out that other groups were still continuing with illegal aliyah plans. He demanded that the refugees be transferred to Rumania, but the Mossad members refused, arguing that the refugees were likely to be safer in Yugoslavia than in anti-Semitic Rumania.[[40]](#footnote-40)

At some point in July, the *Darien,* the ship that had been assigned to take the Kladovo refugees to Palestine, passed from Mossad control to Yehuda Arazi, one of the Haganah’s liaison group for planning cooperation with the British war effort.[[41]](#footnote-41) The timing of the two events raises the question of whether the *Darien's* transfer to Arazi was included in the June decision to discontinue plans for the Kladovo group, and whether these in fact formed two parts of a single strategic decision. Clarifying this issue may illuminate the stances of the Mossad, Haganah, and Yishuv leaders toward aliyah bet in the face of the ongoing difficulties encountered and the challenge posed to support for aliyah bet by the political option of cooperation with Great Britain.

Why was the *Darien* transferred to Arazi? One answer was given by Agami and Klueger Aliav. They have contended that it was never the Mossad’s intention to give up the *Darien* entirely.[[42]](#footnote-42) Although the ship was indeed transferred and the Mossad received payment for it, they claim that it was a sort of ruse whereby the British would pay the Mossad, while the Mossad would still be able to put the ship to its own purposes. Another answer was proposed by Arazi and David Hacohen (a leading member of the liaison group), both proponents of a cooperative strategy with the British.[[43]](#footnote-43) Intheir view, the Mossad had no idea whether it could continue its operations. It transferred the *Darien* because of important plans for cooperation with the British - plans that would serve to strengthen the Zionist political position. Inaddition, the sale enabled the Mossad to erase a deficit it had been carrying throughout 1940.

Ze'ev Shind provides yet a third version, stating that the sale was the beginning of a new strategy combining aliyah bet work and cooperation with the British.[[44]](#footnote-44) As members of the Haganah, the Mossad's people could function in both areas and work toward the success of both. However, in weighing the two goals, "saving Jews came first," should there be any conflict. Berl Katznelson had put forth this formulation in a meeting attended by Golomb and Dov Hoz (one of the most influential Haganah leaders), Mossad representatives Braginsky and Shind, and representatives of the Jewish Agency's political committee, Shertok and Reuven Shiloach. Braginsky voiced objections, but was outvoted. After the meeting, Shind, Shertok, and Shiloach left for Egypt to set concrete plans in motion.

The transfer of the *Darien* to the liaison section was a source of bitter controversy. The topic arouses explosive emotional responses to this day. Proponents and opponents each saw the dire necessity of their stances. On the one hand, the Mossad's agents were reluctant to relinquish, for the sake of long-term plans, even a slim chance of rescuing the Kladovo refugees, to whom they felt personally obligated. For them the *Darien* was not just another ship; they held a personal stake in it. The ship embodied the frustrations of the Mossad's past disastrous failures and represented the salvation of a group that had borne far too much hardship and suffering-by now many of them had been encamped on riverboats for seven months. On the other hand, the proponents of a cooperative strategy with the British saw the acquisition of the *Darien* as a long-term investment, one that might later be applied to rescue work.

The development of the war since spring of 1940 coalesced to make this a strategic time to offer assistance to the British: France had been invaded and vanquished, Italy had entered the war and expanded the fronts of hostilities into the Mediterranean, and there were fears of an invasion of England itself. The Zionist leadership expected to implement a range of cooperative activities in summer 1940: intelligence work, sabotage aimed at enemy transportation arteries and in the Balkans, parachute drops to aid partisan warfare, and more. Apparently, few results came of these plans.[[45]](#footnote-45)

For exactly what purpose Arazi and Hacohen needed the ship remains unclear. Again there are several different accounts. Arazi's first account was that the ship was to be fitted with torpedoes and disguised as a cargo ship; it would sink oil tankers going from Bakau, Rumania, to Varna. In another account, however, Arazi described a plan to use the *Darien* to transport commandos from Palestine to lay the groundwork for a British invasion force.[[46]](#footnote-46) The *Darien's* background in illegal aliyah was to come into play here. Arazi was to organize an illegal immigrant voyage on board the *Darien.* The refugees were to be transferred at sea to another ship on which the commandos would be waiting to board the *Darien,* and on which the immigrants would continue on in secret to Palestine. The commandos were to land in Istanbul, ostensibly as illegal immigrants who had tried to reach Palestine on the *Darien* but were forced to turn back, either because of mechanical trouble or British patrols. The idea was to camouflage sabotage work with illegal immigration. Arazi contended that this plan received the approval of the British command in Egypt and was ready to be carried out. There is no documentary proof of this.[[47]](#footnote-47)

David Hacohen did not indicate in his own version what specific plans were considered when the *Darien* was purchased. He mentioned only that the liaison group and the British were discussing a number of sabotage actions in Rumania and on the Danube that called for the use of a boat. One idea, apparently, was to block the Danube to German shipping by sinking a boat in the river's "Iron Gate" (the narrow passage of the river as it crosses from Rumania to Bulgaria). Other ideas involved blowing up boats along the Danube or attacking the oil refineries in Rumania that were supplying the Germans. Ze'ev Shind knew of a plan to place a mine in the Danube, set to explode after the mine-laying ship had made good its escape.[[48]](#footnote-48)

To implement so many plans required a number of boats, and Hacohen's group had begun a search for vessels in May 1940 through the Nahshon (later to become the Ayalon) Company. The liaison group faced all of the same difficulties in procuring boats as had the Mossad. At about the same time, in spring of 1940, Arazi had asked Shmarya Tsameret in Athens to find a vessel, and Arazi traveled to Greece to investigate the matter himself soon thereafter. In April and May, Tsameret provided Arazi with several contacts among Greek seamen and shipping agents that might lead to a vessel, but all these were rejected by the liaison group.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Thus, in June 1940, as the Mossad's sources of funds were drying up, Italy had entered the war - lowering the prospects for aliyah bet and raising the hopes for cooperation - and as the liaison group was having difficulties finding suitable vessels, the sale of the *Darien* seemed to offer a better way for Shertok, Katznelson, and the Haganah heads to make political headway than did aliyah bet. This was the background for the decision to interrupt immigration work, given the new security situation, and to offer the use of the *Darien* to the British. According to Agami, the decision was reached at the home of Moshe Shertok. "We were all there," he reports without naming the participants, "and we received the money.”[[50]](#footnote-50)

The reasons for placing hard-won resources at the disposal of the British war effort would appear to have been extraordinarily important to those involved. All knew how difficult it was to obtain a ship. We must keep in mind Tsameret's contention that despite Italy's entry into the war, it was still possible to go on with illegal sailings, and other groups had continued to operate in Europe. The JDC was prepared to go on, and the Zionist organizations in New York demanded that the Kladovo group be taken out or the money returned.

Eliyahu Golomb, as head of the Haganah, was responsible both for aliyah bet and for cooperation with the British war effort. Thus, two different and opposing strategies were carried out under the same institutional framework, and the sale of the *Darien* exposed the areas in which the two strategies were most in conflict with each other. Was it indeed possible to carry out both sets of goals, which served such opposing interests? Can we conclude that Yehuda Arazi and Zvi Yehieli were working against each other in pressing for their respective priorities? It would seem that the use of the ships for military purposes endangered the refugees, endangered the ships themselves - so difficult to acquire -and could result in German termination of Jewish emigration.

According to the testimony of former Mossad members, they were aware of these dilemmas; nevertheless, they chose the path of a dual strategy. The principle that guided them in approaching any conflict between the two policies was the one Katznelson had formulated: to give priority to rescue of Jews.[[51]](#footnote-51) But did this principle in fact guide the decision to sell the *Darien* to the British in July 1940? Or should we ask the question already about the decision to halt the emigration of the Kladovo group? The events may lead to a conclusion that the awareness of the dual strategy was clearly formulated at a later stage, when Mossad members had to explain to themselves why they were ready to give up the *Darien.*

The ship changed hands sometime in July. On July 15, Shind wrote to Tsameret: “The arrangements to transfer the ship here [to Alexandria] are complete. We have been given the funds. Await further details and the name of the ship's agent. Continue [further] contacts with 'Ovdim' - Yehuda Arazi.”[[52]](#footnote-52) This cable was the final authorization that completed the transfer of the *Darien* to the liaison group - to Yehuda Arazi. Tsameret wanted to pay off the debts remaining from the previous arrangements for the *Darien,* which consisted of money owed to their agent Victor Meyer and to the Jewish community members in Athens who had supported the aliyah bet activity from the start. He was informed by Shind that a representative of the Atid Company would arrive to take charge of the *Darien* and that he would be empowered to clear up the debts to Meyer. Thereafter, the Atid Company would be responsible for operating the ship.[[53]](#footnote-53)

The *Darien's* transfer in effect marked the end of another stage in the Kladovo affair. In June, Spitzer obtained the permission of the Yugoslavian government to land the refugees who were still on board the riverboats in a tent camp in Kladovo. This permission was granted based on the commitment by the Jewish Agency to bring the refugees to Palestine as legal immigrants. Until such time, the JDC was prepared to pay for their upkeep.

# The Jewish Agency, the Yugoslavian Communities, and the JOC Search for a Solution

The Jewish Agency pursued two different paths to aid the Kladovo group. It attempted to obtain immigrant certificates for the refugees to give them legal status, and it approached the Zionist organizations to provide funds for the refugees’ maintenance. The Agency encountered an inflexible attitude among the British authorities on the subject of authorization for the immigrants. The pretext for the British refusal to admit the group was that it contained fifth columnists. The agency's immigration people and Moshe Shertok had unsuccessfully applied to the Mandatory administration for permits for a part of the group during the winter of 1940 when it became clear that they would have to spend the winter on the river. Appeals to London brought no result. In May and June, Eliezer Kaplan, who had always opposed aliyah bet, backed the plan to buy the *Darien* and proposed to help pay for it out of Jewish Agency funds to match those given by the JDC.

In June, Shertok reported that there was still no agreement in London to permit the refugees to enter the country. The Agency sent an official letter to Spitzer guaranteeing eventual entry to the Kladovo group, but there was no British confirmation of this.[[54]](#footnote-54) Shertok and Golomb pressed their people in London to make a most urgent plea on behalf of the refugees.[[55]](#footnote-55)

During the summer of 1940 a few certificates were issued, primarily due to efforts of relatives of Individuals in the Kladovo group in Palestine. In March 1941, four groups of 111 children and 96 adults were allowed to enter the country under the Youth Aliyah framework and with other certificates. They traveled via Bulgaria, Turkey, and Syria. These were the sole survivors of the Kladovo group. The Jewish Agency was unable to bring the rest of them to Palestine legally. It failed to keep up a relentless campaign on their behalf, and appealed to the British authorities only intermittently, whenever the Mossad encountered setbacks in its own attempts to bring the group out. In effect, the Agency relied upon illegal immigration to solve the Kladovo problem.

The Yugoslavian communities and the JDC, by providing funding, made it possible for the group to remain in Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was one of the major way stations for Jewish refugees en route to Palestine, and the Yugoslavian Jewish communities bore the brunt of the effort to assist them. In this, they demonstrated commendable solidarity with their fellow Jews. The government, in response to British pressure, continued to demand that the refugees leave the country; but at the same time, the authorities were sensitive to the fate of the refugees and to the position of Yugoslavian Jewry.[[56]](#footnote-56) Spitzer himself was tireless in his efforts to obtain assistance for the refugees.

Concern for the Kladovo group was especially great because of the living conditions they had to endure. Inadequate hygienic conditions led to disease both in the cold winter months and during the hot summer. The situation improved somewhat after July 1940, when the refugees were permitted to set up camp on shore. In September, they were transferred to the town of Sabac on the Sava river, 250 kilometers northwest of Kladovo, and farther away from the Black Sea ports. There the refugees lived in solid buildings and were able to organize a more orderly social and cultural life. Funds were scarce, and in reports to the JDC Spitzer noted that the Jewish community had spent 12.5 million dinars ($625,000) from January to December 1940 to maintain the refugee group. Aid for all the refugees in Yugoslavia totaled 30 million dinars, half of which had been raised locally. Spitzer wrote to the JDC:

We will need $55,000 per month. We leave it to you to determine how much a small community can raise on its own for these purposes. In Yugoslavia there are 70,000 Jews. If we assume that we can raise half of the amount locally, that means that each family must contribute five dollars a month. This is a very large sum.[[57]](#footnote-57)

The JDC, the prime source of funds for maintenance of the group, demonstrated a certain ambivalence.[[58]](#footnote-58) Formally, the JDC was opposed to illegal immigration, but in some sense it was forced to take such a position. It was an official organization recognized by the United States government, and it wished to cooperate with the British in refugee aid committees. During the course of 1939, the attitude of the JDC to aliyah bet developed and led to direct support of it as a way to save thousands of Jews from the Reich. At first, the JDC assisted the refugees only through the agency of the Jewish communities where they found shelter. When the war started, the JDC received an ever-growing number of appeals for assistance from groups unable to continue their journey. The host communities wanted the refugees to leave as soon as possible, for they were a drain on local resources and their prolonged stay was likely to have adverse effects on the attitude of the governments concerned.

In this situation, the JDC was called upon to relieve the budgetary and other pressures on the communities by granting assistance both to the refugee groups on their way to Palestine and to the aliyah bet organizers. It helped in the acquisition of ships, and gave aid to the Mossad, the Revisionists, as well as to Storfer. The JDC determined the level of aid to be given to each of these groups according to its judgment of the soundness of each one. That was the instruction it gave to its European representatives, Morris Tropper and Joseph Schwartz, in early 1940. They were asked to follow up and determine whether the JDC's funds were indeed being used for their stated purpose and whether departures of refugee groups were in fact taking place. In 1940, the JDC was having a difficult time raising funds, and it had to tighten its already inadequate budget. It was forced to borrow on the strength of future income in order to maintain essential aid programs. As the costs involved in maintaining the Kladovo group continued to rise, the JDC was asked to increase its share. Sima Spitzer asked the JDC to commit itself to supplying a certain sum per person for as long as the group stayed in Yugoslavia. This the JDC refused to do, believing that this would weaken the motivation to get the group out of the country.[[59]](#footnote-59)

The JDC took part in the purchasing efforts aimed at transporting the refugees and thus became one of the bodies pressuring the Mossad to bring the job to a swift conclusion. Without the help of Mr. Sally Mayer (the JDC's representative in Switzerland) and Tropper, it would have been impossible to maintain the group and to purchase the *Darien.* The Mossad agents appreciated the efforts of the JDC, even while keeping some distance from it as an organization that was anti-Zionist in orientation. Despite arguments that took place over various aspects of the work, the Mossad and the JDC managed to cooperate with each other. The JDC in fact preferred working with the Mossad to working with the Revisionists, Storfer, or with unaffiliated individuals, but was wary of what it saw as the Mossad's particularistic outlook. It therefore continued to work with the others as well.[[60]](#footnote-60)

# The *Darien -* AnImmigrant Ship Again

In September 1940, two months after passing over into Yehuda Arazi's recognizance for work in the war effort, the *Darien* was again placed at the disposal of the Mossad. Plans to bring out the Kladovo refugees went into high gear. The explanation for this about-face is not a simple one.

Throughout the period from July to September, it had remained unclear just what the *Darien* was to be used for. At the end of August, the ship had sailed from Piraeus to Alexandria, and a month later, from Alexandria to Istanbul. While the ship had remained in Piraeus to be inspected by the agent of the Atid Company as arranged, very little was actually accomplished. The agent seemed lazy and negligent, and did nothing either to reach a compensation settlement with the Greek agents or to send the ship on its way, despite its readiness.[[61]](#footnote-61) The agent's behavior prompted Tsameret to wonder whether the decision to transfer the *Darien* to war work had been final. The immigrant ship *Libertad,* sent in July by Konfino from Bulgaria, had arrived safely in Palestine, and Storfer was going ahead with his plans. These continuing operations gave him further cause to speculate that perhaps his colleagues in Palestine were changing their minds. He cabled to Shind on August 7: "Ship has not yet sailed. Atid Company doing nothing. Wire whether ship is leased to Atid or to Spitzer Company. Must know next step." But Tsameret's hopes were groundless. Shind sent him an unequivocal reply: “The deal with Atid stands. We are attempting to renew contacts with Spitzer.”[[62]](#footnote-62) Tsameret, who was intimately acquainted with the shipping market, knew that without the *Darien* there was virtually no possibility of bringing out the Kladovo group. On August 11, he repeated his arguments, this time to Arazi.[[63]](#footnote-63) On August 16, he was directed by Shind to dispatch the *Darien* to Alexandria as quickly as possible. Tsameret complied, and the *Darien* left for Alexandria after about ten days.[[64]](#footnote-64)

But at precisely the same time as the *Darien* was making its way to Alexandria, a decision was made to resume the Kladovo work. Eliyahu Golomb summoned Yehuda Braginsky, who had headed the Mossad in Paris until the outbreak of the war, and asked him to lead the Mossad team in Istanbul and solve the Kladovo quandary. Golomb informed Braginsky that the *Darien* had again been designated to convey the Kladovo group and that funds to prepare the ship for its voyage were forthcoming from the Zionist movements in the United States.[[65]](#footnote-65)

The sources suggest that the reasons for this decision had to do with the blow to the prestige of the Zionist leadership in Palestine arising from the mishandling of the Kladovo case thus far-already it was considered a major failure of the Mossad and of the Zionist movement. An overriding sense of obligation to take action to resolve the matter had resulted. No less important, it would seem, was the fact that there were others who continued to engage in secret aliyah work.[[66]](#footnote-66)

One thing that emerges quite clearly from the course of events in the summer of 1940 is that the *Darien* was not assigned to any specific task in connection with the war effort, although various ideas had been put forward. Sending the *Darien* from Alexandria to Istanbul had to be coordinated with the liaison group,[[67]](#footnote-67) but to judge from the way the plans involving its use were rejected, the British apparently were not interested in the ship. When the ship reached Mossad hands once more, it was in the same physical condition as it had been at the end of June: its hull had been reinforced by a steel frame, but it had not yet been outfitted for carrying passengers. These alterations were to be performed in Constantsa. It now appeared as if the rest of the mission would be fairly simple and that the Kladovo refugees would finally be rescued. In fact, however, when the *Darien* reached Sulina in December, the refugees were unable to get there. Why were the events unfolding this way?

Braginsky's task upon arriving in Istanbul on September 26 was to assure the completion of the job (including transfer of the refugees to the Black Sea) within two months. By December, the Danube might be frozen and impassable. Braginsky first had to purchase fuel for the boat, which proved problematic. Coal had to be paid for in foreign currency. Braginsky and Klueger Aliav (now in Istanbul and working alongside Braginsky) lacked the necessary $4,000. Golomb, in informing the American offices of the Zionist Organization that the Kladovo plan was once more operational, had requested the funds to pay for it.[[68]](#footnote-68) But the Zionist organizations demanded to know where the funds sent previously had gone and contended that sufficient money had already been sent for the supply and refitting of the boat. Further funds were unavailable.[[69]](#footnote-69)

Securing additional funding at this point required the active cooperation of Spitzer. But he, too, was disinclined to place much trust in the Mossad. The Mossad had, after all, made several promises that had gone unfulfilled. The fact that Spitzer was hesitant to cooperate with the Mossad was known in Jerusalem, and Braginsky was directed to meet with him right away to work out a satisfactory plan of action.[[70]](#footnote-70) Braginsky was unable to succeed in this task. Spitzer was unable to obtain a visa to enter Turkey, and Braginsky could not get one for either Yugoslavia or Bulgaria.[[71]](#footnote-71) Another meeting planned for mid-October between Barpal and Spitzer also never took place. After some time, Spitzer did appeal to the Zionist Organization and to the JDC to send funds to Braginsky, which Spitzer was willing to have deducted from the Kladovo aid budget.[[72]](#footnote-72) The money finally arrived at the end of October, and the *Darien* sailed to Constantsa on 2 November.

Meanwhile, the war drew closer. Fighting in Greece grew heavy, and with the Italian army experiencing difficulties it was likely that the Germans would step in to assist. In Greece and Bulgaria, there was a very palpable fear of a German invasion. Thus, once again, the question arose of what to do with the *Darien.* Braginsky and his colleagues felt uneasy about leaving it for extensive refitting in Constantsa. They decided to take on board 160 legal immigrants (who paid full fare) for passage to Istanbul, where they transferred to the Palestinian boat *Hannah* for the voyage to Palestine.[[73]](#footnote-73) This delayed work on the *Darien* by a week. It sailed back to Constantsa only on 9 November. Two more weeks of work were needed to prepare the *Darien* to receive the Kladovo group: two critical weeks, considering the danger of an early frost as had occurred the previous year.[[74]](#footnote-74) It is therefore even more critical to consider why the group did not sail to Sulina during the month of November.

Spitzer had been ready and able to send the refugees on to Sulina during November, but would do so only on the condition that the ship was in dock, ready and waiting to receive them. We know that the refugees were ready to leave between 9 and 11 November. They had said good-bye to people in Sabac and had packed their bags. Groups had been formed and group captains assigned to make their departure more orderly. They were to travel down the Danube on Yugoslavian boats - the same riverboats on which they had lived in Kladovo - and were to reach Sulina within six days.

The trip was postponed by ten days and set for 20 November, and then put off for yet another two or three days. No one unpacked; all were ready. On 29 November they had still not left, however, and no departure date had been set. They knew that the ship waiting for them was “illegal”, and that they would be joined by other illegal immigrants in Rumania. But, other than rumor, they had no information as to why they had not left yet.[[75]](#footnote-75)

The only possible explanation permitted by the sources we have is that every time Spitzer received word that the *Darien* would not be ready by the set deadline, he delayed the refugees' departure from Sabac. Undoubtedly, he felt that past experience warranted such a course. Spitzer had no idea how advanced the work on the *Darien* was at that point, and he suspected that in reality more time was being "wasted" on transporting legal immigrants. How could he justify sending the refugees to Sulina under those circumstances?[[76]](#footnote-76) It is possible that had Spitzer been able to meet with Braginsky or Barpal he might have been assured of their intentions and plans and have felt that he could trust the Mossad.

At the end of November, the *Darien* sailed for Sulina ready for its voyage and carrying 160 immigrants who had forced their way on board (including refugees from Poland, people from Rumania, and twenty Hehalutz members).[[77]](#footnote-77) Upon arrival, it appeared that the Kladovo group was not there yet.

The Kladovo group had set December 2 as the embarkation day when the Yugoslavian shipping company began a series of postponements that ended with the cancellation of the contract. Two other plans for a combined journey, via train to Bulgaria and by a Rumanian barge to Sulina, could not meet the scheduled dates and were delayed until 16 December. Spitzer's confidence was further undermined by the news of the *Patria* tragedy in Palestine and of the sinking of the *Salvador* (an emigrant boat organized by Konfino from Bulgaria that had sunk in a storm). He concluded that the refugees were safer in Yugoslavia than on board the *Darien,* whose safe entry into Palestine was not assured.[[78]](#footnote-78) The *Darien* waited for the Kladovo emigrants until 29 December, but when still they failed to arrive it departed Sulina amid a new storm of controversy, as we shall see.

The Kladovo refugees were crushed, and some appealed for help to Storfer and to the leadership of the Jewish communities, but to no avail. Storfer could offer no help; the Mossad discontinued its activity. Unable to leave Yugoslavia, the refugees waited for spring to come, and with it, they hoped, some solution to their predicament.[[79]](#footnote-79)

The Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia began in the spring of 1941, on 6 April. In June, the refugees were put in a camp. In October, the men were murdered by the Germans, who claimed it to have been an act of reprisal for a partisan operation that had taken place in an area south of Belgrade. The women and children were gassed in May 1942. The Kladovo men were the first group of Jews to be killed by the Nazis in Yugoslavia. They came to symbolize for the rest of the Jewish community the failure of the Mossad to carry out its stated goals.[[80]](#footnote-80)

## Whose Ship Was the Darien?

In the darkest days of December 1940, as the *Darien* waited in Sulina for the riverboats that never arrived, the argument over who controlled the ship erupted afresh. Yehuda Arazi and David Hacohen demanded that the *Darien* be returned to them. It was not the property of the Mossad, they claimed, and was now required for war work. The Mossad emissaries in Istanbul challenged the right of Arazi's group to hand over to the British a ship that was needed to transport immigrants regardless of formalities. The conflict, seemingly a struggle between two distinct groups, actually involved people who were active in both refugee work and war work. Ze'ev Shind, Yosef Barpal, and Ruth Klueger Aliav, for example, were all active in both efforts at this point. For them, the conflict became one that each had to wage in his or her own conscience.

In order to understand the debate and its result, it is important to understand exactly why and for what purpose the *Darien* was needed at just this time, in December 1940 and January 1941. During July to September 1940, when the *Darien* was at the disposal of the liaison group for work in the war effort, it was not used for this purpose. Yehuda Arazi then agreed to transfer the ship to the Mossad in order to rescue the Kladovo refugees. We find no hint of any objection throughout October and November to the *Darien's* being used for ferrying legal immigrants or for its preparations to pick up the Kladovo group.[[81]](#footnote-81)Arazi and Hacohen consented to this because it was in their interest that the ship be used in this manner and because they had no other mission for it in that period. However, they considered it a loan, to be called in on demand, and rejected the contention that for the period in which Braginsky had refitted and used the *Darien* for the Mossad's purposes the status of the ship had changed.

However, Arazi and Hacohen were at this point ready with a sabotage plan in the Danube River for which they needed the *Darien.* Although both pushed for the plan's implementation, the British intelligence service was not yet ready to begin, though it demanded that all preparations be made.[[82]](#footnote-82) British intelligence had followed the course of the *Darien* and expressed dissatisfaction about it to Arazi. The link between foreign policy and the intelligence services proved a factor here. British diplomatic personnel often worked for the intelligence services; Major Whitehall, for example, was both a consular official in Istanbul and an intelligence agent. Thus, in the very same months as Britain's unyielding policy on Jewish immigration and the reverberations of the *Patria* and *Salvador* incidents were provoking waves of criticism, arrangements were underway to bring the illegal Kladovo refugees to Palestine aboard a British boat!

The consequences of such an absurdity would have been clear to those in the intelligence services with Foreign Office connections, and it is a reasonable assumption that they quickly made them clear to the liaison group. The liaison group, alarmed at the prospect of seeing all plans for cooperative war work collapse, would have raised a hue and cry within the Zionist leadership. Despite the many disappointments in the late fall of 1940, the leadership still set great store in a policy of cooperation with England.[[83]](#footnote-83) Yehuda Arazi and David Hacohen were personally involved in the *Darien* matter, and they would be directly implicated by any action it became involved in. Thus, the *Darien* became the focus of a political conflict between the Mossad agents and the war liaison group. Theoretically, Katznelson's formula giving priority to aliyah bet missions was designed to resolve such conflicts, but in practice it proved difficult to apply.

Arazi arrived in Istanbul in mid-December, and told Braginsky that his refusal to hand over the *Darien* would cause irreparable damage to the Zionist cause. Hacohen recruited Golomb's aid, and Golomb wired the following to Braginsky on 27 December: *“Darien* sold absolutely every delay in transmitting to buyers is not only unfair but endangering good name and position. See the cable David [Hacohen] Yehuda [Arazi] and act accordingly.”[[84]](#footnote-84) On 29 December Braginsky replied: “Due difficulties liberation obligations do not see possible fulfillment of your request in accordance your cable. Discuss matter again with Kadmon [Barpal].”[[85]](#footnote-85) Now there began a struggle between Braginsky on the one hand and Arazi, Hacohen, and the Mossad leaders in Palestine on the other. Ze'ev Shind, Ruth Klueger Aliav, and Shmarya Tsameret were caught in between, grappling with an agonizing choice.

Although at first the Mossad agents believed that the Kladovo refugees might still arrive, by 27 December it was clear they would not and that the ship's passengers would be other refugees from Rumania.

A more difficult phase began when Barpal, followed by Hacohen, rushed to Istanbul to convince their colleagues to give up. This raised for the Mossad agents the question of authority and discipline alongside the question of relative priority between aliyah bet and war work. Where did the chain of command lead? To Braginsky in Istanbul, or to the Haganah (and Mossad) chiefs in Palestine, led by Golomb? We know from Braginsky's testimony and that of Klueger Aliav that the question of discipline was taken very seriously and that they knew a principle was at stake that could not be lightly dismissed. Shmarya Tsameret put it bluntly when he asked, “Who are we to make decisions against those of the leadership?”

What, however, was the alternative? Against the authority of the leadership were pitted the lives of 160 Jews on board the *Darien.* Forcing them to leave the ship meant, in all likelihood, sentencing them to die. And hundreds more were waiting in Varna hoping for a boat - the *Darien - to* take them on.[[86]](#footnote-86)

On 29 December, the *Darien* left Sulina for Constantsa, and Alexander Shapiro, from the Palestine office in Bucharest, took the responsibility of preparing a list of passengers. Nothing seemed to go well for the Mossad agents over the next weeks. The *Darien* ran aground on 30 December, and only heroic efforts saved it from sinking. Nevertheless, it was badly damaged and required repairs.

During this time, pressure on the Mossad agents intensified. They were called to a dramatic confrontation with David Hacohen. He read them cables from Moshe Shertok referring to a letter from Chaim Weizmann that made it clear that all hope for future cooperation with the British rested on putting an end to the *Darien* problem. He demanded that the 160 passengers be put ashore and the ship be handed over to him at once. All but Braginsky gave in. The *Darien* was damaged, and there was no longer any hope of saving the Kladovo refugees. On 5 January, Arazi wired to Palestine:[[87]](#footnote-87)

1. The owners have agreed to hand over the ship.

2. Hope to take possession by end of January.

3. Delay was caused by need to cancel prior commitments and make alternate arrangements for cargo.

4. Owners request my assistance in this and I will remain here until *Darien's* departure arranged.

Even so, the Darien incident did not end. None of the Mossad agents dared tell the refugees on board that they had to disembark. The situation for Jews in Rumania had worsened in January 1941. More than a hundred Jews were killed in pogroms in Bucharest, including Zionist leaders. As Braginsky later wrote: “After three days Ruth [Klueger Aliav] called me and asked me to meet her. She said, ‘What is going to happen?’ I asked her if she was willing to commit herself to go on working with me and not look back. Ruth said yes, and the voyage continued.”[[88]](#footnote-88) The *Darien* was repaired in Constantsa, and plans were made to take on 500 more refugees. On 31 January, Braginsky wired: “The management has decided to continue working without interruption. We also ask that you help make an agreement with Yehuda [Arazi]. If there are problems and further opposition, Kadmon will come to you immediately. It is essential to go on.”[[89]](#footnote-89)

Feverish preparations took up the next two weeks. The *Darien* was scheduled to leave Constantsa on 19 February. Shind went to Sofia to organize an additional group of passengers and to make financial and fuel arrangements for the trip. In addition to a group of 300 immigrants to go aboard the *Darien* itself, Shind wanted to hitch on a barge, called the *Struma,* which could hold another 350 passengers. His negotiations were almost concluded when the German invasion of Bulgaria intervened, forcing the *Darien* to leave without the *Struma.[[90]](#footnote-90)* The ship sailed on 27 February 1941, arriving in Istanbul on 2 March, where it remained for a week. Forty survivors of the *Salvador* and a number of refugees from Poland and Czechoslovakia were taken on board; the captain, who quit, was replaced, and coal was loaded for the journey.

All the while, Hacohen had been trying to make other arrangements for the *Darien* refugees, so that he might take control of the ship himself. Several ideas were mentioned, including putting them ashore in Egypt, in Benghazi, in the Greek isles, Athens, and various other places. He hoped to obtain the help of British political authorities in Turkey.[[91]](#footnote-91) Yet, once again, policy decisions were preempted by objective circumstances, and on 10 March the *Darien* departed for Palestine. On 19 March, the ship was intercepted and impounded by the British (who, of course, were actually the owners of the ship). The passengers were interned at Atlit for a year and a half. Thus, the odyssey of the *Darien,* replete with many failures, ended with one success: the rescue of 786 Jewish refugees from Rumania, Poland, and Bulgaria.

The *Darien's* arrival in Palestine represented the final episode in the dramatic events of 1940. The Mossad, which had been caught unprepared for the war, had managed to recover somewhat and to place its people in various spots to help Jews leave Europe. Aliyah bet had increasingly become a rescue mission, and as such there was less and less selection of immigrants according to the requirements of the Yishuv. However, selectivity was not completely abandoned, partly because of the British fears of a German fifth column planted within refugee groups. The Mossad felt obligated to check each refugee, since the Jewish Agency had committed itself to exert vigilance in this matter.

As 1940 progressed, the Mossad activists developed an attitude toward the situation in Europe that was quite different from those prevailing in Palestine or America. They were in direct contact with the Jewish communities and their leaders, and were able to receive via Switzerland shocking reports of the fate of Jews in the occupied zones. This firsthand knowledge gave them a feeling of mounting urgency in their mission-a sense that seemed to get lost when the same reports were read by those farther removed, in the relative calm of everyday life in Palestine and America. The gap in attitude was evident by the spring of 1940. The fear of losing precious time was not of paramount consideration among the political leadership, as it was among the Mossad activists in the field. Yehieli and Agami began to establish contact with people in Poland and to send funds with agents. Despite failures and setbacks, the Mossad expanded its activity in the first six months of 1940. There was a general feeling that their mistakes could still offer valuable lessons for coming operations.

In June 1940, however, Italy's entry into the war caused a sort of paralysis in the Mossad, returning it to the situation of the first months of the war. The *Darien* was sold and the Kladovo group was all but abandoned; Yehieli left Geneva for Palestine with little reservation about neglecting aliyah work.[[92]](#footnote-92) Agami also departed, leaving Tsameret as the only Mossad member in Athens. The Mossad's activity in Istanbul later that year proved to be brief and ineffective, and the Kladovo *Darien* incident was a critical event in this regard.

Why didn't these men resist more forcefully the decision to halt illegal immigration work? One can understand their helplessness, perhaps, in the face of the war's expansion into the Mediterranean. But, apart from the security problem, it seems that Zionist policy played a role in bringing aliyah bet to a halt at this juncture. From the historical perspective, one can say that the Mossad erred very seriously. For a short period of time the Mossad resumed work in Istanbul, but the Kladovo *Darien* affair caused a new crisis.

**Notes Chapter** 3 1. See Braginsky 1965, p. 246; Agami's statement, HA 3033. For the meeting of 25 August in Geneva, see Labour Archive (henceforth LA), 39m. See also the comments of Eri Jabotinsky about the break in activities in CZA F17/4 (letter to YaacoJ2.~ 4/10/39): - 2. ODC, Ginsburg statment. 3. HA 14/41951 (Shamir papers; series of letters from Moshe Agami (Averbuech) dating from October and November 1939, especially his letter of 11/21/39). 4. According to its passengers, the *Hilda's* engines were damaged through the intentional negligence of the crew (December 1939). The *Darien* ran aground near Constantsa as the result of a deliberate act of the captain, again according to passengers. Similar charges were made regarding other ships as well. 5. See below, on the *Dora* affair. In September 1939, the British intercepted the *Tiger Hill,* the *Parita,* and the *Naomi Julia,* impounded the ships, and arrested their crews. See Chapter 7 on Britain's policy. 6. HA 14/4195 (1/6/40). 7. A Greek shipowner and shipping agent, Pandelis (referred to as "the fat man" in letters and communications), had worked with the Mossad since the time of the *Tiger Hill* and also worked with the Revisionists. Pandelis seemed to use his considerable business sense in overcoming the conflicting interests of both groups of aliyah activists as well as of the various governments involved. Pandelis worked with the Mossad throughout the war years and became indispensable to illegal aliyah activity in this period. Opinions of him varied, but on the whole he was considered to be a man strangely able to combine adventurism and greed with a desire to help the aliyah effort. 8. The list derives from Yehieli's report, HA 14/153; from Agami's account of that period (HA 14/4195); and from papers of the Vienna Archive, including letters from Storfer. Storfer indicates the existence of a 700-person group from Germany Austria, Danzig, and Czechoslovakia. I have not found any further documentation regarding such a group. It is possible, of course, that the group broke up, with some of the people later arriving in Yugoslavia and elsewhere in the Balkans. Perhaps, too, there was no separate group, but that there is a confusion in the sources, and that the *Hilda* group is meant. It is worth noting that, of the groups mentioned above, the Mossad managed to accomplish the transport only of the *Hilda* group. Many among the other groups left on Storfer's boats, and others stayed behind. 9. HA 14/153 (Yehieli's report); HA 14/4591I (letter from "Moshe," 1/6/40). Two shipping agents the Mossad worked with were "Tenor" (Victor Meyer, a Jew of German origin) and "Tsaba." Victor Meyer was a prosperous businessman who had lived in Greece for many years. He served as the Greek representative of the Palestine agricultural marketing cooperative, Tnuva, was strongly sympathetic to the Zionist cause, and was ready to lend a hand in order to help Jews. The Haganah had contacted him as early as the *Velos* episode, and he also aided Moshe Galili. "Tsaba" was the collective code name for a Greek family by the name of Vernikos who helped the Mossad arrange for the *Atrato* and the *Colorado* in 1939. This family ran a small "boating company" that, among other things, had dealt in smuggling arms to Spain during the civil war. *10. Dora* was the vessel that transported members of the German branches of Hehalutz who had been on training farms in Holland, as well as a group from France in August 1939. It had been acquired after much effort, with the help of the Vernikos family. 11. HA 14/153 (Yehieli's report); Jabotinsky Archive (henceforth JA) Kenner collection. Ruth Klueger Aliav and Peggy Mann, *The Last Escape,* New York, 1973 (henceforth Aliav 1973), pp. 220-221. 12. The passengers that eventually boarded the *Sakariya* in January 1940. 13. HA 14/4195 ("Moshe to Eliyahu," 12/14/39). *14. Ibid. (116/40).* In cables and other communications among the Mossad, activists and their contacts were given code names, and various terms were used to conceal the nature of their work: for Yosef Barpal, "Kadmon"; Ze'ev Shind, "Dani"; Yehuda Braginsky, "Yolek"; Shaul Meirov-Avigur, "Ben-Yehuda"; Victor Meyer, "Tenor." 15. On the contact with von Hoepfner, see Ruth Zariz. *Hatzalat Yelwdim meGermaniyah beemtzaut ha-girah november* 1938-1945 (Hebrew), *(The Rescue of German Jews Through Emigration, November* 1938-1945), Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University Jerusalem, 1986 (henceforth Zariz 1987), pp. 256-257. 16. HA 14/153 (Yehieli's report, p. 23). 17. The plan to expel Jews to Lublin was part of a broad plan to concentrate and isolate the Jewish population in a reservation in the Nisko-Lublin area of Poland. The Nazi logic of the plan was that, if isolated, the Jews, as parasites, would lack a healthy body on which to thrive, resulting in their eventual "natural" liquidation. Two groups of deportees were sent from Vienna in 1939, one on 20 October (912 people) and a second on 26 October (672 people). A transport of deportees left Czechoslovakia on October 18 (1,000 people). In Lublin, they found a complete absence of basic living facilities. Leaders of the Prague and Vienna communities who visited Lublin were utterly shocked, and on returning did their utmost to prevent further deportations. The deportations ceased at the end of October, the result of organizational problems on the German side rather than intervention by the Jewish communities. 18. HA 14/153 (letter from Epstcin to Zilberschien, 12/9/39), and Zariz 1987, pp. 251-252. 19. The K1adovo group's story is revealed through several main sources: History of the Jewish People (henceforth CAHJP), the Vienna Archive (henceforth AW), and the Storfer material (AW/2515); CZA, Geneva files L22; YVA; and JDC Archives; b) reports sent by the heads of the Jewish community in Yugoslavia, especially to the JDC and to the Jewish Agency, now found in the JDC Archives L6-43 and the CZA, L22 and LIS; c) Storfer's correspondence with the JDC, in AW at CAHJP; d) Ehud Avricl, *Open the Gales, New York,* 1975; oral testimony in ODC; an . interview conducted with him by the author in fall 1979; a letter Ueberall (Avriel) wrote to Storfer regarding financial difficulties arising from the expenses of the group (dated 28 December 1939), now in AW at CAHJP; e) Agami's account in HA 14/3033; f) Yehieli report, HA 14/153. The primary sources do not constitute a narrative account. Only Ehud Avriel, in his book and his oral testimony, attempts to reconstruct the events, but he deals only with the first phase of the episode-from the group's departure from Vienna until its arrival in Kladovo. In describing the fate of the group here, sources are not cited for every detail. except in those cases where the sources conflict. The author assumes all responsibility for the reconstructed account, as well as for any errors that may have emerged regarding some of the details. 20. The *Holm,* a Dutch vessel, was offered to Yehieli by the Vernikos family after it proved difficult to obtain the return of the *Dora.* 21. For a detailed description of the preparations for departure, the fiscal problems, etc., see Hanah Weiner, "Latzet Behol Mehir" (Hebrew), ("To Leave at Any- . Cost"), in Hanah Weiner and Dalia Ofer, *Parashal Kladovo Sabac* (Hebrew), *(The Kladovo Sabac Slory),* Tel Aviv, in progress (henceforth Weiner Latzet). 22. The similarity between Ueberall's and Paltin's difficulties during this period is striking. (See Chapter 4.) 23. HA 3033 (Agami's report); interview with Agami in the summer of 1977; cf. HA 14/153 (Yehieli's report). On the price paid by Spitzer and Ueberall, see CAHJP, *A':N* 2515 (Spitzer to Mentzer in Vienna, 1/23/40; letter to Hehalutz in Prague, 3/18/ 40, unsigned). The letter to Hehalutz contains a report on the fare collected by the Danube companies. 24. An example of such improvisation was the attempt to acquire a Rumanian river barge that would accommodate the refugees until a ship became available. Negotiations were conducted even before the ship completed its run to Marseilles, a trip that was meant to end in January, whereupon it would return to the Black Sea and tow the barge. While steps were being taken to implement the plan, there was a legal dispute over ownership of the barge between a Greek company and a Rumanian one. Thus, this plan, too, failed. 25. The figure of 10,000 refugees and information on the activity of the Yugoslavian communities on the Kladovo group's behalf are contained in two reports sent to the JDC: JDC Archive 7-15, April 1941. See especially Alexander Klein's report, *Zehn Jahre juedischen Fluechllingshilfswerks in Jugoslawien, die Donaulransporle* (henceforth Klein report), of which section F deals with the Kladovo group, and CAHJP Protocols of the Executive of the Union of the Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, years 1939, 1940, and 1941 (henceforth Yugoslavia Protocols). On the life of the people during the long stay in Yugoslavia, see Dalia Ofer, *"Mimas'a Aliyah El Hamavel"* ("From Immigration Journey Unto Death") (henceforth Ofer Aliyah) in Hanah Weiner and Dalia Ofer, *Parashat Kladovo Sabac* (Hebrew), *(The Kladovo Sabac Story),* Tel Aviv, in progress (henceforth Ofer Weiner). 26 HA 14/153 (Yehieli's report, pp. 19,20,24). Or. Baruch Konfino, an eye doctor who was active in Zionist affairs in Bulgaria, organized refugee aliya from Bulgaria on a private basis. See Chapter 5. 27. The most comprehensive source regarding the *Wetan* is.Yehieli's report (HA 14/153). It was written about six months after the events and is generally an accurate account. A group of letters written by Agami (HA, Shlomo Shamir file 41951) to the U.S. Labor Zionist organization that were asked for assistance. The letters date from October to April and present additional though sporadic data on the *Wetan* negotiations. On the matter, also see the references in Storfer's material (CAHJP, AW 2515), especially his self-vindication and his attacks on the Mossad. These occur particularly in his correspondence with the JOc. Comparison of the various sources indicates their relative trustworthiness and provides a fuller understanding of the episode. See also Aliav 1973, pp 350-367. This, however, is a later and somewhat altered account. The account here is based on the three primary sources. 28. CAHJP, AW 2515. Storfer, in a letter of 31 March 1940, reports that Turkish government had stepped in at the last minute to block the sale because of the seizure of the *Sakariya* in Palestine. See PRO C0733/429 (4/4/40). The British consul in Istanbul, Mr. Morgan, quotes in his report the Turkish government regulations issued in March regarding control of Turkish vessels during the war emergency. For further deliberation, see Chapter 7, on British policy. 29. See Chapter 6, on Storfer, for his relations with the Mossad. Storfer himself vehemently denied that his activities had anything to do with the cancellation of the *Wetan* deal. He viewed the charge as gross slander levied by a vindictive Mossad that intended to convince the Joint to cease its support of his aliya activities. Yet the delays in the transfer of funds certainly played a role in the failure of the deal. 30. HA 14/153 (Yehieli's report). 31. HA 14/4195. 32. HA 14/4195. The failure was quite unexpected. We learn this from a note in Starfer's report of 7 April 1940 (CAHJP, AW 2514), according to which the Kladovo people were about to leave for the Black Sea. From this it is clear how certain the Mossad emissaries had been that the *Wetan* deal was about to be concluded, to the point that they had set a date for the group to leave for the Black Sea to meet the ship. This tends to support Yehieli's statement that the cancellation took them completely by surprise. On Storfer's contention that his delay in forwarding payment had nothing to do with the cancellation, see AW 2514, Mitteilung 56, 4/27/40. Also, see Chapter 7. 33. HA 14/3033 and CAHJP AW 2515, Mitteilung 50, 4/15/40, and letters from people in Kladovo quoted by Storfer, 19 and 29 May 1940. 34. HA 41951, Shlomo Shamir file (Yehieli and Lichtheim to New York, 6/9/40; cables from "Moshe" [Agami] to Meriminsky, 5/22/40 and 5/30/40). 35. Transfer of funds from the JOC to the Mossad was required at the same time that Storfer demanded the transfer of large sums for purchase of his three ships, the *Atlantic, Pacific,* and *Milos.* The JOC hoped that transport for the Kladovo group might be provided with Storfer's help, and pressed him on this. Storfer himself may have been willing to do this, but he was unable to counter the opposition of the Center for Jewish Emigration (controlled by the S.S.), which was interested only in the transport of Jews from the Reich, not from surrounding countries. This was a further factor in the JDC's reluctance to transfer funds. (For more information, see Chapter 7.) 36. HA 14/153; *ibid.,* Shlomo Shamir 41951. 37. It is extremely difficult to reconstruct the exact chronology here. The sources are mainly cables, some of which bear no dates and some that are practically illegible. The following reconstruction is a result of cross-checking the various cables to Palestine and to the United States with Yehieli's report (HA *14/153),* although the report (written about two months later) may be off by a day or two in places. 38. We have no eyewitness account or minutes of the meeting, but Agami and Yehieli both mention it in their reports. 39. HA 14/41951 (Katznelson to 1. Sakharov in New York, *6/14/40).* 40. HA *14/153* (Yehieli's report); JDC Archives, Spitzer report. 41. HA *14/209* (cable from "Eliyahu" to Tsameret, *7/17/40).* 42. HA *1413033* (Agami's testimony); interview with Ruth Klueger Aliav at her home, spring 1976. 43. David Hacohen, *'Et Lesaper* (Hebrew), *(Time to Tell),* Tel Aviv, 1974 (henceforth Hacohen 1974). HA 14/2506 (Arazi testimonies, 1949, 1955). 44. HA *14/3031* (Ze'cv Shind's statement, undated and unsigned). The statement appears not to have been edited and is unorganized. He is also mixing dates of plans. The plan he is referring to was apparently December 1940 or J~nuary 1941 in its later stages, and was decisive in the debate over the ship at that point. See below. 45. For further information on sabotage plans and other military intelligence plans, see Yoav Gelber, 1983, pp. 133-142. 46. HA *14/209* (cables from Arazi to Tsameret). 47. HA 14/2506 (Arazi's testimonies, 1949, 1955). The agreement to transfenhe- . .ship over to'Arazi stipulated that it would be contingent upon Arazi's satisfaction that the vessel in fact suited his requirements. In other words, ther~ was an option built into the agreement, which Arazi could choose to exercise or not, and which seemed to imply the need for certain physical specifkations. During the period in which Arazi's decision was pending, the ship could not be used for immigration work. Arazi would bear the cost of the *Darien's* travel from Piraeus to Palestine. In the end, Arazi did copfirm his acceptance of the ship and paid £15,000 to the Mossad. 48. Hacohen 1974, and HA 14/3031 (Shind testimony). 49. HA *14/209* (Dani (Shind) to Shmarya, 4/12/40). *Ibid.* (Shmarya offers a ship, *6/17/40).* Again, Shmarya offers Arazi a ship named *Ageus Nicolaus,* and *ibid. (6/161 40, 7/21/40, 9/29/40,* the Palestine company Nahshon responds to Shmarya's offers). Use of the Nahshon name in the communications indicates a search for vessels for the war effort rather than for aliyah. 50. HA *14/3033* (Agami's testimony, p. 10). In an interview in the summer of 1977, he did not recall there being any other Mossad activists besides himself at the meeting. At the time, Braginsky and Shind were in the country, but, according to Agami, they were not present. 51. ODC, Yehieli's testimony; HA 3031 (Shind's testimony). 52. HA *14/209. 53. Ibid. (7123/40).* 54. CZA *L15/324* (Barlas to Spitzer). 55. CZA *S25110582* (Eliyahu to Avi Amos (Ben Gurion) *7/9/40).* 56. HA *14141951* (Dr. Moshe Schweig to Aryeh Tartakower, *118/40, 1/26/40).* CL JDC Archive, Yugoslavia 51, report on refugee activities, undated; Klein report; CZA L22-14 (Spitzer to Geneva, *12/31/39).* 57. JDC Archive, Sima Spitzer's report. 58. On the JDC activities, its approach and the development of its position, see Bauer 1974, and Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust,* Detroit, 1981 (henceforth Bauer 1981). 59. JDC Archive, 14-19 Yugoslavia, 1/14/40 to 2/22/40. 60. HA 14/153 (Yehieli's report, especially pp. 50-53 and the description of the meeting of 5/20/40). 61. HA 14/209 (Shind to Tsameret, 7/23/40); HA 14/41951 (Tsameret to Arazi, 8/ 3/40). *62. Ibid.,* and also 8/8/40. *63. Ibid.* "Clarify the nature of the link with' Atid'. I still have the boat. Cable clear instructions." It should be noted that the *Darien* was purchased in Tsameret's name. After its transfer to Arazi, the official ownership documents remained unchanged. This was because of considerations of administrative convenience, even though later interpretations by Mossad activists cited the fact as demonstrating the true intentions for the vessel. 64. The sources do not indicate a specific date for the ship's departure, but by comparing the letters we may say quite definitely that the *Darien* left between 24 and 28 August. It should be noted that David Hacohen contends that the *Darien* was never in Alexandria at all. 65. Braginsky 1974, p. 260. CL his letter to Sakharov, 10/16/40, HA 41951, Shlomo Shamir file. 66. See HA 41951, Shlomo Shamir file (Braginsky to Sakharov, 10/16/40). In this letter, Braginsky refers to a decision to renew aliya work: "Many reasons have driven us to renew the activity and they are certainly clear to you, but one of the reasons is the prestige of Zionism in America.... " This provides clear proof of a process of questioning, discussion and decision related to these matters. If we attempt to narrow down the time of the decision, we can say that it is tied to the announcement of Braginsky's departure to aid Tsameret-i.e., mid-August, as per Shind's letter. 67. It should be noted that David Hacohen, in both his written and o"r'al testi'mon.y, contests the ship's presence in Alexandria. He contends l'h·a<t t~e .sh'p "~v-er i~ft P'tr~ us before it arrived in Istanbul~:n 'S'epltemb'ef l~O, But th~ documentation we have shows definitely tb~t Hacohen is **the** victim of faulty memory here. The ship was indeed in Alexandria. This is proved by Shind's cables to Tsameret from Alexandria on 13 and 25 September 1940: HA 14/209, and *ibid.,* Braginsky's letter to Mr. Cohen regarding transfer of the ship to Istanbul from Alexandria, 16 October 1940; see also *ibid., 14/* 41091 (Braginsky to Sakharov). Arazi, too, in his testimony relates that the ship reached Alexandria: HA (Arazi's reports, pp. 49, 55). (Note that there are contradictions in his reports; they should be used with care.) 68. HA 14/41591 (Sh10mo Shamir file), (Dalin (Go10mb) to Sakharov, 9/23/40, two cables). *69. Ibid.* (Sakharov to Golomb, 9/25/40). *70. Ibid.* (Dalin (Golomb) to Ruth Klueger, 9/25/40). *71. Ibid.* (Braginsky to Sakharov, 10/16/40). 72. CZA U5/122 (Spitzer to Ruth Klueger, 12/7/40,12/12/40); HA 41951, Shlomo Shamir (Schwartz to the JDC executive in New York, 10/18/40). 73. This trip is not mentioned by the Mossad workers either in their testimony or in their subsequent books. In interviews conducted with them, they again could not recall it. But it undoubtedly did take place and provided an occasion for Spitzer to criticize the Mossad emissaries for contributing to the delay of the *Darien* voyage. The trip is mentioned in a summary of aliyah efforts from Rumania from December 1940 to 1944: CZA S25/2493; cL Spitzer's letter to Ruth Klueger, *ibid.,* 22/14 (12/7/ 40); and *ibid.,* 22/188 (Barlas to the Jewish Agency aliya section, 10/31/40). In this letter, Barlas explains that he was forced to lease the *Darien* because he had obtained Turkish transit visas for 380 refugees, but the rail link from Rumania to Turkey had been interrupted because of the war between Greece aI}d Italy. Similarly, there is a detailed report of the trip by the German consul in Istan\:>ul, who followed the movement of refugee traffic closely (YVA 3141, 11/7/40). This report ciearly shows that the trip did take place, but that this trip was one in a series. We are dealing with several trips of this kind that the boat was involved in: legal voyages with legal immigrants on board, bound for Palestine. Reference to Poles among the immigrants is interesting. Apparently, what this refers to is the British plan to provide safe haven in Palestine for Polish war refugees. It is very likely that this trip (or trips) was undertaken only to help pay the expenses incurred in the course of the special situation. But it is also likely that this plan reflects the implementation of those involved in war cooperation projects in order to camouflage the illegal voyage that was planned. The German document demonstrates that they in fact succeeded in this. If this conclusion is correct, then we can point to a far-reaching degree of cooperation between the Mossad and the war-effort team at that point in the events. If the *Darien* indeed made several trips before 4 November 1940, it must have arrived in Constantsa quite some time earlier, perhaps as early as mid-October or at the end of the month. It may also be that the ship was used for trips to Istanbul after 7 November, but that we have no documentation of them. 74. CZA L22/14, Ruth Klueger to Spitzer, 2/13/41. 75. The account here is based on a letter written from the Sabac camp to Vien;;a-on 29 November 1940: CAHJP AW2515. This is one offour letters .f.~om th~ camp, the first one dating from 1 October and t\vo 'Others froth b'e~emb6t. YVA '0/1 3091. letters 0:[ Wailer Kldn, and SG'meotl,:ier 500 prlvM~ l~tms ~@tj~~fard~' Äh~ ~wtn{).,Ä 76. CgA ~!l·a fs~tÄ~r ~ ~h.'~~.~tÄ l~f'rMo)Ä ", f)~u~se~es Nachrkhtsburo (henceforth DNB) in YVA, JM3141 83-24. A report in Bucharest's German press of 9 December 1940 regarding the *Darien* stated .there were 300 immigrants from Yugoslavia and 187 from Rumania. This report differs from other data we have, both regarding the number of passengers and their composition, and ought to be questioned. It is interesting, though, that the figure of 500 , appears also in a letter from Kladovo dated 29 November 1940. The time of departure appears close to the time indicated by a juxtaposition of other sources available. 78. CZA L22/14 (Spitzer report to Nahum Goldmann); also a summary and translation in English of that report, in the JDC Archive 15-32, 9/1/41. 79. CZA L22/14 (Spitzer to Ruth Klueger, 12/23/40); CAHJP AW 2515, 12/3/40, Z. Herman from Sabac: "My dears, we were already set to leave with all our luggage and things and again we have not left. What can happen now? No one knows. Tomorrow Spitzer is to explain to us what happened. Why didn't tfie voyage succeed this time? This was my last hope.... " It should be remembered that a similar incident occurred in the previous month: see *ibid.,* letter to Mr. Yunes, Danzig, 12/8/40, on behalf of the Danzig group. 80. Hanah Weiner, "The Fate of the Kladovo Group Under the Nazis," in Hanah Weiner and Dalia Ofer, see note 21. 81. See note 73. If my conclusion about the use of the *Darien* for legal immigration is correct, then David Hacohen's and Yehuda Arazi's contention appears to have greater force-namely, that the ship was not transferred to the Mossad, only that it was enabled to use it. This aspect of the episode suffers, I should stress once again. from insufficient and incomplete source material. There are too many contradictory accounts by various people, and internal contradictions within some of the accounts. As a result, there has been no choice here but to decide between sources based on their apparent accuracy,. even though there is no absolute guarantee of this. 82. HA 14/3031 (Shind's testimony); *ibid.* (Arazi testimony, 1949); Hacohen 1974, p. 162. Note that each testimony carries another version of the actual plans for the *Darien.* I tend to accept Shind's account. See also PRO WO193.956 KlL 03107, 9/27/ 40, and CZA S25/3124 (Hacohen to Zaslany (the operational head of all cooperation plans) undated, probably March 1941). 83. Weizmann to Shertok, 1/3/41, in *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann,* Series A, vol. 20, Jerusalem, 1979, M.J. Cohen (cd.) (henceforth Weizmann Letters 1979), pp. 86-91. 84. HA 14/209. *85. Ibid.* 86. See Shind's testimony, HA *14/3031,* also with regard to the German invasion that was expected in those countries. 87. HA *14/209.* 88. Braginsky 1965, p. 282. 89. HA *14/209.* The cable is incomplete and it is unclear exactly where it was sent. **It** was most likely sent to Palestine, though it may have been to New York. 90. HA 14/714 (Shind's report). 91. CZA *S25/3124,* to Reuven, signed D., undated. The letter expresses keen disappointment over the failures of the *Darien* episode, but finally accepts the reality of the situation. **It** proved impossible to remove the refugees from the boat. The British intelligence liaison (Major Taylor) was not in Istanbul to help Hacohen. Hacohen was sincerely concerned by the *Darien* affair and believed that it might prevent future cooperation with the British in the war effort. His personal disappointment found expression in the following sentence: "If my hands were not tied and I could speak of the ship as my own project, I might have succeeded in arousing more than a little interest in behalf of Britain's war for human freedom and liberation, but fate decided that I should come here for something quite different. ... " 92. HA 14/4195 (7/31/40). ***,***

1. See Braginsky 1965, p. 246; Agami's statement, HA 3033. For the meeting of 25 August in Geneva, see Labour Archive (henceforth LA), 39m. See also the comments of Eri Jabotinsky about the break in activities in CZA F17/4 (letter to YaacoJ2.~ 4/10/39) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
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