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## The Foundational Groundwork of the CDEC

### A Jewish Youth Documentation Initiative in a National and Transnational Context

#### ABSTRACT

This article explores the early development of foundational groundwork that led to the establishment of the Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center (CDEC) from 1952, when the project first emerged, to its first Statute in 1957, via its official foundation on 25 April 1955. It examines its symbolic and structural foundations, its guiding models, and the strategic choices that enabled a youth-led initiative to overcome significant challenges within the postwar and early Cold War context. The analysis situates the CDEC within the milieu of its founders, a group of young members of the Italian Jewish Youth Federation, providing insight into the challenges and debates at the heart of postwar Jewish reconciliation in Italy. It also explores the generational tensions experienced by those who had grown up under Fascism and sought a renewed civic and political identity through postwar engagement. Furthermore, it draws a close connection between the Centers foundations and the efforts to document and interpret the memory of the persecution affecting groups targeted by Fascism and Nazism, particularly that of the Istituto per la storia del movimento di liberazione in Italia (Institute for the History of the Liberation Movement in Italy). Finally, the CDEC's documentary mission is contextualized within a transnational framework of Jewish historical commissions and documentation centers across Europe, the United States, and Israel, setting the standards to preserve, analyze, and disseminate the memory and history of the Shoah.

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## Postwar—The Work of Researching and Collecting Documentation on the Shoah

With the end of the Second World War, the countries overwhelmed by the conflict soon found themselves forced to confront a profoundly new element: the elaboration of the diverse memories that had emerged from the fractures introduced by totalitarian regimes. While the processing of mass mourning had already been experienced after the First World War, the situation was now different: individual countries were unable to ritualize the past under a single, unified national symbol.<sup>1</sup> In the return to freedom, therefore, a series of new identities emerged, shaped by recent political and racial persecutions.

On a transnational level, some common needs became apparent: the recovery of archives seized by the Nazis, the collection of evidence of what had happened, and the effort to give meaning to the past and to the injustices suffered by activating processes of memory work. Within this context arose the phenomenon of the proliferation of institutes for history and historical documentation, which, following different methods and timelines, emerged across the world, starting from the places where the affected communities were reconstituting themselves.

As the German historian Lutz Raphael has pointed out, in the postwar period two major tendencies shaped the historiographical elaboration of these events: in some countries, such as France or the Federal Republic of Germany, it was the state that assumed responsibility for researching and elaborating the recent past; in others, such as Italy, this task was left to the initiative of individual groups.<sup>2</sup> Thus, taking as an example the institutes for the preservation and promotion of the history of the Resistance, in France we find the Comité d'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale (CH2GM),<sup>3</sup> a central, Paris-based government-sponsored institute, while in Italy, a series of independent institutes was established throughout the national territory.<sup>4</sup>

Raphael's insight outlines a framework within which we can place the case of the Jewish documentation centers and historical commissions that arose in various countries, at very different times and in very different ways. Like the other institutes created in this dynamic, they were born with the aim of seeking, collecting, and preserving documents and testimonies concerning the experiences of local Jewish communities during the 1930s and 1940s. Some were created during the war itself, as acts of resistance against the tragic prospect of the extermination of European Jewry; others emerged immediately after liberation, once national Jewish institutions had resumed functioning and the extent of the tragedy had been understood; still others were founded some years later, inspired by related experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> On this matter, see at least Peter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Lutz Raphael, "Militancy and Pluralism: Party and Church Institutes of Contemporary History in Western Europe since 1945," in *Setting the Standards: Institutions, Networks and Communities of National Historiography*, eds. Joe Tollebeek and Ilaria Porciani (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 240–265.

<sup>3</sup> Henri Michel, "Le Comité d'Histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale," *Revue historique* 233, no. 1 (1965): 127–138.

<sup>4</sup> Gaetano Grassi, ed., *Resistenza e storia d'Italia. Quarant'anni di vita dell'Istituto nazionale e degli Istituti associati. Annuario 1949–1989* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1993).

Within these small differences lies the profound divide between the two dimensions of the Shoah highlighted by Omer Bartov: the eastern one, where Jewish extermination unfolded in ghettos and city streets, and the western one, where deportation created a distance, an unknown factor that made the process of understanding the scope of the genocide much slower.<sup>5</sup> It was in the discovery of the Shoah's transnational dimension that these centers and commissions came into contact with one another. The common questions and the shared methodologies and objectives make it possible to hypothesize that there is a specifically Jewish phenomenon that can be situated and studied within the framework outlined by Raphael. Annette Wieviorka and Laura Jockusch, in their respective studies, inaugurated research into the reciprocal contamination that developed among these documentation initiatives, highlighting the crucial role played by the "Polish paradigm."<sup>6</sup> Poland was the origin of the first scholars of Jewish history, some of whom had initiated documentation and archival projects during the German occupation.<sup>7</sup> Their expertise and experiences spread along the migratory routes of Polish Jews fleeing persecution, and later, postwar antisemitic violence. Following this exodus, and similar initiatives undertaken in several Western European countries, a significant number of institutions assumed the task of collecting and preserving testimonies of the recent Jewish experience.

The phenomenon becomes even more interesting when considering that some of the main initiatives in this field were brought together at the Première Conférence Européenne des Commissions Historiques et Centres de Documentation Juifs, held in Paris between 30 November and 10 December 1947, with the dual aim of comparing methodologies and results, as well as establishing a European coordinating body for research and documentation on the Shoah.<sup>8</sup> This latter goal, however, proved too ambitious given the conditions in which Europe found itself at the end of the 1940s. Nonetheless, together with the conference, it revealed a specifically Jewish dynamic, which is worth examining both within the broader framework of the proliferation of historical institutes in the postwar period and within the more specific context of Shoah historiography.

The participants of the conference themselves showed a keen awareness of this dual framework within which their research initiatives were taking shape. Reflecting on the complexities of the context in which research on the genocide of the Jews was being established, Isaac Schneersohn, founder of the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine (CDJC) and president of the conference, declared:

Can we be reproached for confining our research to marginal areas, for in some way justifying the racial doctrine by writing a racial history, for erecting a

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<sup>5</sup> Omer Bartov, "L'Europa orientale come luogo del genocidio," in *Storia della Shoah*, vol. 2, eds. Marina Cattaruzza, Marcello Flores, Simon Levis Sullam, and Enzo Traverso (Turin: UTET, 2005), 419-459.

<sup>6</sup> Annette Wieviorka, *Déportation et génocide. Entre la mémoire et l'oubli* (Paris: Plon, 2013); Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> On the historiographical impulse given by Polish Jewish historians: Samuel D. Kassow, *Chi scriverà la nostra storia? L'archivio ritrovato del ghetto di Varsavia* (Milan: Mondadori, 2009), 25-31 and 61-105.

<sup>8</sup> The conference presentations are collected in the volume *Les Juifs en Europe (1943-1945). Rapports présentés à la première conférence européenne des commissions historiques et des centres de documentation juifs* (Paris: Éditions du Centre, 1949).

monument to a single martyrdom—that of Jews? No. [...]

There have been other horrors, other acts of bestiality, other iniquities; they certainly deserve the same indignation, the same revolt of conscience. Yet while the leveling of humankind takes place through suffering and death—since all are alike in the unity of flesh and in the fragility of life—one may say that Jews have earned, more dearly than anyone else, before humanity, the right to respect and equality. That is what the work of our conference will demonstrate, affirm, and impose upon the reflection of honest people throughout the world.<sup>9</sup>

In these words lies the entire effort to underline the specificity of the Jewish experience while safeguarding the equality and belonging of Jews to the broader society: a complex stance, which raises the question of Jewish identity in post-Shoah Europe and of the reconstruction of relations with national institutions and civil society.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Jewish initiatives most often originated from grassroots efforts rather than institutional intervention, reflecting the difficulty of seeking justice for the wrongs suffered while also avoiding undermining the process of reconciliation.

Such dynamics can also be found in the Italian context, where the work of documentation began in the very first months after the liberation of Rome in June 1944, though the first publication on the recent national Jewish experience emerged only in 1960, with the *Storia degli ebrei sotto il fascismo* by Renzo De Felice (Einaudi, 1960).<sup>11</sup> This was a long and complex project involving the key figures engaged in research and documentation in postwar Italy. First and foremost was Massimo Adolfo Vitale,<sup>12</sup> the leading figure behind the earliest and most systematic documentation initiative. Serving the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCII) through a special body tasked with searching for and repatriating missing and deported Jews—the Comitato Ricerche Deportati Ebrei (CRDE)—Vitale and his collaborators assembled the first and most valuable documentary collection on the Italian Jewish experience during the Shoah.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, the former colonel soon became the foremost expert on Jewish deportation from Italy, beginning the study of the sources he had gathered while also collecting the first testimonies of survivors from extermination camps.

When the trials against Nazi officials whose crimes concerned Italy began, Vitale managed to attend some of the proceedings. In 1947, he attended the trial of Rudolf Höss,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 17-18. The translation from the original French text was made by the author.

<sup>10</sup> Rebecca Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust: The Dilemmas of Remembrance in France and Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> For an accurate reconstruction of the events: Michele Sarfatti, “La Storia della persecuzione antiebraica di Renzo De Felice: Contesto, dimensione cronologica e fonti,” *Qualestoria* 32, no. 2 (2004): 11-27.

<sup>12</sup> Massimo Adolfo Vitale (1885-1968), a career officer in the Italian army and later an official at the Ministry of the Colonies, was expelled in 1939 due to anti-Jewish laws. He then engaged with antifascist networks in England, France, and Morocco, providing intelligence to the Allies, and returned to Italy after the Liberation of Rome in 1944. Resuming service at the Ministry of Italian Africa, Vitale, though not closely connected to institutional Judaism, collaborated with the Union of Italian Jewish Communities to support the search for and repatriation of deported or missing Jews. It is likely that Vitale was seen as the most suitable figure to head the CRDE because the Ministry was one of the Italian governmental bodies involved in repatriating displaced Italians.

<sup>13</sup> For further information on Vitale: Costantino Di Sante, *Auschwitz prima di “Auschwitz.” Massimo Adolfo Vitale e le prime ricerche sugli ebrei deportati dall'Italia* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2014).

commandant of Auschwitz, whom he was authorized to interview.<sup>14</sup> From this experience came his report *Missione in Polonia*, one of the first and most accurate Italian reconstructions of the functioning of the camps and the history of Auschwitz.<sup>15</sup>

Vitale then dedicated himself to dissemination and research, also engaging in the organization of the aforementioned first international conference for Jewish documentation centers and historical commissions. Precisely because of this leading role in documentation work, the UCII put him in touch with the youth of the Federazione Giovanile Ebraica d'Italia (FGEI), who in 1952, following a regular motion passed at their congress, committed themselves to developing a project aimed at highlighting the "contribution given by Jews to anti-fascism and to the Resistance in Italy"<sup>16</sup>: the embryo that a few years later would mature into the Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Italiana (CDEC).

## 1952—The FGEI, the Resistance, and the Liberovici Period

Compared to the rest of the population, for Jews living in liberated Italy, the postwar years marked a period of reconstruction, both symbolic and identity-related. The discrimination introduced in 1938 had already produced a sudden upheaval in the very conception of Italian Jewry and its future.<sup>17</sup> For the younger generation in particular, the general disorientation was intensified by the inability to find reassurance from their parents, who themselves were distressed and incapable of providing certainty. The different experiences, and consequently the differing interpretations of the Fascist period, opened a deep rift between parents and children, who no longer shared a common language or frame of reference for interpreting the past and imagining the future of Jewish life in Italy.<sup>18</sup> To an older generation of Jews who had experienced integration during the Risorgimento and the First World War, there stood opposed a mass of young people, born and raised during the height of Fascism, plunged into a state of profound confusion, with problems and questions left unrecognized.<sup>19</sup> From this deep generational fracture and the search for new points of reference, a renewed push toward youth associations emerged—taking on new dimensions and characteristics, both within and beyond the Jewish world.<sup>20</sup>

Thanks to the organizational process that began in the summer of 1946, led by figures such

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<sup>14</sup> The interview, accompanied by comments from the author, is included in M. A. Vitale, *Pellegrinaggio fra l'orrore*, 7-8, Massimo Adolfo Vitale, b. 6, CDEC Foundation Archive (henceforth ACDEC), Milan.

<sup>15</sup> M. A. Vitale, *Relazione. Missione in Polonia*, March-April 1947, Massimo Adolfo Vitale, b. 1, ACDEC.

<sup>16</sup> "Le mozioni più importanti approvate dal Congresso dei CGE," *Israel* 18 (8 January 1953): 3.

<sup>17</sup> Guri Schwarz, *Ritrovare se stessi. Gli ebrei nell'Italia post-fascista* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2004), 77.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-85.

<sup>19</sup> In his contribution to the volume published for the FGEI's eightieth anniversary, Paolo Foa recalls that "for the FGEI at that time, Italian Judaism was represented by 'dinosaurs' [...] the word 'dinosaurs' became synonymous with obtuseness, rejection of the new, closure to dialogue, and attachment to positions of power." Foa, "La FGEI e le Istituzioni (1957-1963)," in FGEI, *Quarant'anni, 1948-1988* (Florence: Giuntina, 1988), 63.

<sup>20</sup> Marco De Nicolò, ed., *Dalla trincea alla piazza. L'irruzione dei giovani nel Novecento* (Rome: Viella, 2011).

as Leo Levi,<sup>21</sup> some young people found a space in which they could question and confront their Jewishness. This need was confirmed by their enthusiastic response, which within months gave strong momentum to these spaces, structuring various youth movements and creating the Federazione Giovanile Ebraica d'Italia, which would later play a central role in the founding of the CDEC.

The Documentation Center experiment was born precisely from the search for symbols and reference points through which to give new meaning to Jewish identity. The majority of the FGEL's young members came from families who were deeply integrated into Italian society, where Jewish tradition was practiced privately, often only minimally maintained. While some Jewish youth were drawn to the Zionist paradigm relaunched by the arrival of the Jewish Brigade, the FGEL's young people were more strongly attracted to the rise of mass parties, to the values of antifascism, and to the memory of the Resistance.<sup>22</sup> This dynamic further sharpened the generational divide, leading to a latent conflict with the highest Jewish institution in Italy, the UCIJ, which held pro-government and conservative positions aimed at shielding Jews from national political storms.

The Youth Federation thus developed a model of Judaism grounded in public participation as a commitment to building a better world, within the framework of an "indissoluble Judaism-antifascism binomial" emerging from recent history.<sup>23</sup> Hence the intent to preserve and valorize the past in order to act in the present—an element that became a cornerstone of the FGEL's activity. Enthralled by the heroic narrative of the Resistance, on which the renewed sense of national unity was founded, the FGEL's youth saw the recovery of Jewish participation in the Resistance as a chance to connect to this new foundational myth and thus to contribute to the Jewish reintegration into Italian society.

Among the various FGEL initiatives shaped by this Jewish antifascism was the official decision to commit to creating a permanent archive regarding the Jewish contribution to the Resistance. The proposal first appeared in the pages of *Hatikwà*, the Federation's magazine, in an article published by the twenty-two-year-old Sergio Liberovici (1931-1991)<sup>24</sup> in May 1952.<sup>25</sup> In the two-column piece, he reflected on the difficulties faced by the magazine, which, launched in 1949 as an insert to the Jewish weekly *Israel*, was struggling to publish regularly and was proving unpopular among young readers. Beyond the material and structural challenges for the newspaper and its editorial team, Liberovici

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<sup>21</sup> Leo Levi, *Contro i dinosauri. Scritti civili 1931-1972*, ed. Arturo Marzano (Naples-Rome: L'Anch'ora del Mediterraneo, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Schwarz, *Ritrovare se stessi*, 89-100.

<sup>23</sup> Enzo Levy, "La nostra strada," *Hatikwà* 21 (11 March 1954): 3.

<sup>24</sup> From the limited biographical information available today, we know that Sergio Liberovici was born in Turin in 1930 and died there in 1991. At the age of just fourteen, he joined the partisan struggle and later became a member of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). He pursued a distinguished career as a musician and ethnomusicologist, dedicating himself to the study of rural, working-class, and partisan oral traditions. In this context, toward the end of the 1950s, he participated in the creation of the *Cantacronache* project, a precursor to the Italian singer-songwriter movement. His success in music coincided with the period during which he was leading the documentary collection, as emerges from his correspondence, in which he himself notes that the time and energy he could devote to the FGEL project gradually declined due to the increasing demands of his other commitments and the emotional stress they entailed.

<sup>25</sup> Sergio Liberovici, "Appunti d'organizzazione. Critiche e proposte riguardanti 'Tikwà' e l'attività dei CGE in generale," *Hatikwà* 9 (5 May 1952): 5. The complete collection of the journal is available online via the CDEC Digital Library: <http://digital-library.cdec.it/cdec-web/biblioteca/hatikwa.html> (accessed November 24, 2025).

also noted the lack of compelling content and therefore proposed identifying “a central theme of great interest and relevance. Example: the publication of a ‘History of the Contribution of Young Italian Jews to the War of Liberation’,”<sup>26</sup> thus inserting the project into a wider postwar trend within Italian Jewry.<sup>27</sup>

In Liberovici’s proposed framework, *Hatikwà* would have the task of publicizing the initiative among young people, while the Jewish Youth Centers (CGE) established in Italian cities could begin preliminary local work in preparation for the publication. This would involve engaging local youth in organizing lecture series held by those already working on the topic, as well as starting the collection of documentation: letters, names, testimonies—which, the author emphasized, were widely available.<sup>28</sup> Such work would have the dual advantage of involving young people, thanks to the relevance of the subject, while also fulfilling an action of high symbolic value for what the author described as an “almost debt of honor toward the many, many coreligionists who fell on the front of Liberty and Human Rights.”<sup>29</sup>

This passage allows us to highlight another key aspect of the FGEL youth’s relationship with their past. Deeply engaged with the ongoing memorialization process and the debate on legislative measures in this field—culminating in the approval of the so-called Terracini Law, which equated all the victims of deportation<sup>30</sup>—the FGEL promoted a reading of the whole Jewish experience under the sign of the Resistance. Persecuted, deported, and resisting Jews were indiscriminately described as having “fallen on the front of Liberty and Human Rights.” For this reason too, the main themes of the future CDEC would oscillate between the Jewish contribution to the liberation struggle and the Shoah—already outlining a characteristic dynamic of the Center’s future work.

Another significant element in Liberovici’s article is his acute awareness of the broader memorial context in which his initiative would fit. The work would have particular relevance in view of the upcoming tenth anniversaries of the Liberation and of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising—foundational moments in this process of re-signifying the past and Jewish identity-building initiated by the FGEL—as well as in relation to work then being carried out in Israel to highlight the Jewish contribution to European Resistance movements during the Nazi occupation.<sup>31</sup>

Liberovici also mentioned a second possible research project concerning “racism in Italy from 1939 to 1949,” to be carried out via the newspapers of the time—material which, he stressed, should not be left to deteriorate further. This once again confirmed the inseparable intersection between persecution and Resistance, demonstrating the existence of individuals and circles driven by a need that contrasted with the widespread tendency

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Schwarz, *Ritrovare se stessi*, 111-172.

<sup>28</sup> Liberovici, *Appunti d’organizzazione*.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Law 10 March 1955, n. 96, “Provisions in favor of anti-fascist or racially persecuted individuals and their surviving family members,” *Gazzetta Ufficiale Serie Generale* 70 (26 March 1955), 988-989.

<sup>31</sup> The reference is to Kibbutz Lohamei Haghetatot (“the fighters of the ghettos”), founded in Israel by former Jewish fighters from the ghettos of Europe, which played a fundamental role in collecting and preserving the relevant documentation.

to “draw a curtain” over the horrors that had been experienced.<sup>32</sup> The proposal, and later the CDEC project, thus played an important role in showing how Jewish narratives and the memory of the Shoah continued to remain alive and circulate, albeit within specific memorial communities.<sup>33</sup>

Liberovici’s article was followed by responses from FGEL members supporting the initiative, highlighting its educational and political function in the face of the rehabilitation of fascist ideas and groups in both student and political settings,<sup>34</sup> as well as amid the complex process of reintegrating the Jewish minority.<sup>35</sup> At that very time, the specter of Fascism seemed to be returning through the rightward drift of segments of the Christian Democrats and the electoral successes of the Italian Social Movement (MSI). For this reason too, the UCII’s cautious attitude appeared particularly unacceptable to the most active of the FGEL youth, as emerged in a series of articles.<sup>36</sup>

This new trend, however, also created tensions within the FGEL, which by statute committed itself to guaranteeing “absolutely apolitical spaces and full freedom of conscience to its members.”<sup>37</sup> On the one hand, the Federation gave voice to a strong Jewish youth presence pushing for political participation; on the other, this voice did not represent the majority of its members, who had mostly joined in search of spaces for socialization shielded from political divisions.<sup>38</sup>

Liberovici, in an article published in *Hatikvâ* on 17 July of the same year, returned to the project on the occasion of the enactment of the so-called Scelba Law, which introduced legal sanctions against anyone attempting to reconstitute the Fascist Party or overthrow the democratic order.<sup>39</sup> He wrote that “it is not enough, it will not be enough on its own,” underlining the need for educational projects and the creation of a united national front, by selecting “the healthy circles of our homegrown antifascism.”<sup>40</sup> In this passage, one can already perceive the fractures within the Italian left, some of whose factions were aligning with the USSR, which by then had shifted its stance toward the State of Israel and Zionism more generally. Liberovici also stressed the relevance of the project in view of the “absolute lack in Italy of clear, official, chronologically ordered documentation on the period of history

<sup>32</sup> Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust*, 80.

<sup>33</sup> On this topic, which is the subject of intense historiographical debate, please refer at least to Hasia Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, eds., *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (London: Routledge, 2012); Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust*, 31-43 and 79-91; François Azouvi, *Le mythe du grand silence. Auschwitz, les Français, la mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015). On the Italian case: Robert S. C. Gordon, *Scolpitelo nei cuori. L'Olocausto nella cultura italiana (1944–2010)* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Angelo Della Seta, “Un passato che non deve tornare,” *Hatikvâ* 10 (12 June 1952): 3.

<sup>35</sup> The reintegration of the Jewish minority in Italy was a slow and painful process for Jews who had survived the Holocaust. On this subject, see at least Mario Toscano, ed., *L'abrogazione delle leggi razziali in Italia (1943–1988). Reintegrazione dei diritti dei cittadini e ritorno ai valori del Risorgimento* (Rome: Senato della Repubblica, 1988); Alberto Cavaglion, “Sopra alcuni contestati giudizi intorno alla storia degli ebrei in Italia,” in *Il ritorno alla vita: Vicende e diritti degli ebrei nell'Italia dopo la seconda guerra mondiale*, ed. Michele Sarfatti (Florence: Giuntina-Fondazione CDEC, 1998), 151-65; Schwarz, *Ritrovare se stessi*, 11-12.

<sup>36</sup> Roberto Di Castro, “Hai dimenticato...,” *Hatikvâ* 10 (12 June 1952): 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Progetto di Statuto per la Federazione Giovanile Ebraica d'Italia*, 1949, FGEL, ACDEC.

<sup>38</sup> Foa, “1953-1964,” 16.

<sup>39</sup> Liberovici, “Ricordare i nostri Eroi,” *Hatikvâ* 11 (17 July 1952): 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

running from 1939 to 1945.”<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, during the autumn and in anticipation of the Federation’s annual congress in late December, an operational note published in *Hatikwà* introduced several topics for discussion, among which was the development of the documentation project. In this short piece, written by Angelo Della Seta, an FGEI Council member, the goal was more clearly articulated: to organize an archive with the purpose of publishing the collected information and documents, together with the creation of a traveling exhibition.<sup>42</sup> An invitation was therefore delivered to the CGEs to begin discussions and form small committees to examine available materials, so that at the congress, the delegates’ ideas could be heard and efficient selection and collection work could be initiated.

In preparation for the congress, Liberovici, writing to FGEI’s general secretary Elio D’Angeli, outlined the objectives that were taking shape in his vision for the project:

- 1) To counter the dismissive attitude maintained by certain official Jewish circles in Italy toward our recent history;
- 2) To prevent the loss of many extremely important documents and testimonies concerning that particular period of our history;
- 3) To strengthen, on the basis of the collected documents, our antifascist educational work for the younger generation;
- 4) To direct the FGEI (this chaotic organization of ours, this amalgam of differing opinions, this body with countless varied activities, etc.) toward a project and initiative that could, thanks to unanimous approval, become the very backbone of the FGEI—or rather, direct the FGEI into a line of work capable of overcoming its congenital lack of a clear, unequivocal orientation.<sup>43</sup>

The first objective, then, stemmed from the need to engage in the process of constructing the history of Italian Jewry, a process that Jewish institutions were having great difficulty carrying forward. Indeed, in the summer of 1952, the first of Antonio Spinosa’s essays was published in the journal *Il Ponte*, under the direction of Piero Calamandrei—an initiative that involved the Union from the outside, as the latter’s own project had stalled.<sup>44</sup>

In December 1952, at the FGEI congress in Genoa, a dedicated Resistance Commission was established, presenting a motion to launch the project proposed by Liberovici, which was approved by the voters.<sup>45</sup> The foundations of the project therefore seemed to have been laid, all the more so as the congress was attended by Raffaele Cantoni, president of the UCII, who pledged the Union’s support. At the beginning of 1953, the mandate to start the work was therefore given, and coordination of the initiative was entrusted to its main promoter.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Della Seta, “Cari amici,” *Hatikwà* 13 (20 November 1952): 3.

<sup>43</sup> Liberovici to Elio D’Angeli, Turin, 17 December [1954], FGEI, ACDEC.

<sup>44</sup> Antonio Spinosa, “Le persecuzioni razziali in Italia,” *Il Ponte* 8, no. 7 (1952): 964-978; no. 8: 1078-1096; no. 11: 604-1622; *Il Ponte* 9, no. 7 (1953): 950-968. On the subject of the publication: Sarfatti, “La Storia della persecuzione antiebraica di Renzo De Felice”; Schwarz, *Ritrovare se stessi*, 161-164.

<sup>45</sup> “Le mozioni più importanti approvate dal Congresso dei CGE.”

Liberovici himself was highly motivated: he had been a very young partisan in the IX “Giustizia e Libertà” Division, was a member of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), had been active in the FGEL since its earliest days, and was a member of its Council between 1952 and 1953. Through *Hatikwà*, the documentation campaign was launched in a highly pragmatic fashion: each CGE was to report the name of the person in charge of collecting documents and material on the contribution of Jews to the Resistance in their city “as soon as possible” to the editorial staff of FGEL’s newspaper. The editorial staff would then provide a preliminary outline of the work to be undertaken.<sup>46</sup>

However, despite the commitment and the tools put in place, over the course of a year Liberovici was unable to secure the participation of the CGEs—with the sole exception of Venice, where Roberto Bassi, a key figure in the future CDEC, became active. In general, both the central and local structures of the FGEL showed little involvement, while the Union, by contrast, became increasingly overbearing. In exchange for its support, collaboration with the central Jewish institution took the form of work geared toward the Union’s own purposes. For the documentation project, therefore, Liberovici was put in contact with Colonel Vitale, and the young researchers were tasked with collecting and organizing documentary material to be added to what had already been written by Spinosa, who continued publishing his essays until 1954.<sup>47</sup> In this context, the first meeting between Liberovici and Vitale took place in the early months of 1953. Following that meeting, Vitale sent the documents gathered by the CRDE to Liberovici, who soon afterward proposed a first classification scheme to help define the themes to be addressed in the future publication.<sup>48</sup> Yet the Union’s influence weighed heavily on the collaboration: in May, the assignment of supervisory roles over Liberovici’s work passed on to Benvenuto Terracini and Raffaele Jona, and this shift led to a redefinition of the project and the request that he break away from both Vitale and even the FGEL itself.<sup>49</sup> To this was added the demand to include the theme of Jewish adherence to Fascism, a topic far removed from the sensibilities of the FGEL youth, who were instead intent on emphasizing the inseparable link between Judaism and antifascism. In March 1954, Liberovici also became entangled in what he and his collaborators referred to as the Kalk Affair: according to his account, the Union attempted to use the FGEL initiative to gain possession of valuable documents belonging to Israel Kalk, founder of the Mensa dei Bambini (Children’s Canteen). These documents might have shed light on some problematic decisions made during the war by leading figures of Italian Jewry and thus deepen young researchers’ distrust of the institution.<sup>50</sup>

On the eve of the December congress in Venice, aware of the dead end reached with the Union, Liberovici sought to relaunch the initiative by attempting to separate its spheres of competence from those of the FGEL. To this end, he wrote a long memorandum addressed

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<sup>46</sup> “Gli Ebrei e la Resistenza,” *Hatikwà* 15 (29 January 1953): 4.

<sup>47</sup> Liberovici to anonymous recipient, 16 December [1953], FGEL, b. 9, ACDEC.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Dante Lattes to Benvenuto Terracini, 6 July 1953, supplemented by Terracini and then forwarded to Sergio Liberovici, who received it about a month later. The letter is forwarded from Liberovici to an unknown recipient, 16 December [1953].

<sup>50</sup> Liberovici to D’Angeli, 13 March [1954], as well as D’Angeli’s reply to Liberovici, 29 March 1954, FGEL, b. 9, ACDEC.

to the FGEI's secretary, in which he stated: "The archive is today a reality [...] as is the specialized library."<sup>51</sup> After describing the positive aspects of the initiative and its initial results, he sought to demonstrate the Union's incompatibility with the project, proposing a new beginning. He then described the archive, which, despite being "piled up in a corner of [his] room" and not yet well organized, already contained around a thousand valuable documents, along with a specialized library consisting of about ten books from his personal collection. Much of the material had come from Colonel Vitale, who had preserved such precious documents that the young activists "solemnly committed themselves to making good use of them and continuing decisively along the path he had charted."<sup>52</sup> To move forward, Liberovici set out his firmest and most urgent point: breaking off collaboration with the Union, or alternatively involving it only externally, so as to preserve the Federation's independence. To sustain the research, the FGEI would need to allocate a fixed annual contribution to allow the research body to consolidate autonomously. On this last point, Liberovici returned in a letter dated 16 December 1953, in which he also described the project for a periodical publication titled *Documenti*, designed to give value to the "very interesting and unpublished" materials collected—including the diary of Emanuele Artom, which the young researchers had likely obtained during that period.<sup>53</sup> The structure of the periodical was envisioned to have several sections: *Testimonies* and *Essays*, with contributions from international experts and scholars; *Reviews*, among which Liberovici cited Léon Poliakov's *Le bréviaire de la haine. Le IIIe Reich et les Juifs*, from the CDJC in Paris; and *Echo of the Press*, which would include reports from journals of other similar institutes, such as the Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia, the CDJC, and other international Jewish institutions. Such examples demonstrated the attempt to place the initiative within a national and international network of valorizations of Italian Jewish history. It is clear that Liberovici's intent was not only to motivate and engage his Federation peers, but also to confront the "natural distrust of the so-called official organs of Italian Jewry" toward a youth-driven and alternative initiative.<sup>54</sup> Underlying all this was his conviction that the effort for autonomy would be repaid by the merit of creating "a periodical of extreme, general, and current interest" in Italy, "with incalculable educational value."<sup>55</sup> The Venice congress, held in the final days of 1953, reaffirmed the values and significance of the documentary research initiative, ratifying the commitment of all FGEI youth to its development. However, the hoped-for collaboration was slow to materialize. In a new proactive move, Liberovici once again addressed the FGEI's secretary, proposing four new actions.<sup>56</sup> The first point emphasized the need to create a "Historical Archive (with an attached specialized library) on official, serious, and permanent foundations." To give the project form and credibility, Liberovici suggested giving it a title. Here, for the first time

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<sup>51</sup> Liberovici, *Nota per il Segretario Generale della FGEI*, FGEI, b. 9, ACDEC.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Liberovici to unknown recipient, 16 December [1953].

<sup>54</sup> Liberovici, *Nota*, 5.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Liberovici to D'Angeli, Turin, 6 January 1954, FGEI, b. 9, ACDEC.

among other possible names, appeared the one that would become the name of the future CDEC, meaning, “Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (Italian Section).” The plan included organizing “roundtable conferences, pamphlets, *Hatikwà* notebooks, specialized periodical publications,” and so forth. Attached to the document was a budget report showing the concreteness of the work and some early results, including the purchase of complete collections of the periodicals *La Difesa della razza* and *La Nostra Bandiera*—valuable sources for studying Fascism and its relations with Italian Jewry—demonstrating the sensitivity and maturity of the young researchers’ work. However, Liberovici’s hopes were once again frustrated by the secretary of the FGEI’s position, who responded by reaffirming the necessity of involving the UCII in the initiative.<sup>57</sup> The only concession was the allocation of a provisional FGEI fund, pending Union contributions. Over time, an irreparable rift opened between Liberovici—who struggled with the Union—and the rest of the Federation, which was increasingly expressing its desire to build a productive collaboration with the Jewish institution. This distance reached a point of no return at the FGEI gathering in Livorno in April 1954, where the overwhelming presence of institutional authorities definitively sanctioned the new course of relations between the FGEI and the Union. Disappointed and disheartened by the marginalization of his position, in July Liberovici left the Federation, sending a bitter letter in which he highlighted the lack of collaboration and the sense of failure.<sup>58</sup> However, before he left, he compiled a final document to clarify his work, which he sent to the FGEI’s secretary at the end of the summer.<sup>59</sup> This represented the final act of the first phase of the project. After demonstrating, through numerous excerpts copied and pasted from letters, the good faith that had guided his actions, Liberovici denounced the betrayals and speculations that had undermined the initiative, concluding decisively: “The initiative to collect documents, testimonies, publications, etc., for the creation of a permanent archive dedicated to the history of the Jewish contribution to the Resistance in Italy and to the history of Nazi-Fascist persecution of Jews in Italy, can today be considered a complete failure.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> D’Angeli to Liberovici, Genoa, 24 January 1954: 2, FGEI, b. 9, ACDEC.

<sup>58</sup> Liberovici to D’Angeli, Turin, 1 July 1954, FGEI, b. 9, ACDEC.

<sup>59</sup> Liberovici, “Relazione sulle ricerche storiche (da presentare integralmente),” spring-summer [1954], 3, CDEC, ACDEC.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

## 25 April 1955—Birth and Development of the Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center (Italian Section)

The Seventh Congress of the F.G.E.I., having taken note, with regret, of the poor results achieved thus far in the work on the history of antisemitic persecutions and the Jewish contribution to the Resistance, as well as in the publication of the material already collected, commits the FGEI Council to examining the work carried out thus far and to resuming the interrupted activity as soon as possible. It calls on all CGEs to give their fullest support to this essential task of the FGEI.<sup>61</sup>

With this motion, the December 1954 congress gave fresh impetus to the historical research promoted by the FGEI, in a new general context marked by the decision to abandon the political neutrality of the initial phase and by preparations for the celebrations of the first decade since Liberation. The figure identified to coordinate the relaunch of the initiative was Roberto Bassi, who had collaborated with Liberovici and who, during the congress, insisted on reading the report compiled by the project's first coordinator.

Bassi (1931-2025) was a young medical student in Venice, part of the first generation of the FGEI and representative of a more moderate faction within the organization.<sup>62</sup> He came from a family that was both deeply integrated into Italian society and strongly attached to Jewish tradition and Zionism—elements that led him to take on increasingly important roles, from president of the Jewish Community of Venice to vice-president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities.<sup>63</sup> Bassi, moreover, was a member of the Socialist Party (PSI), a sufficiently distant position from the PCI, in which his predecessor had been active. This did not mean that he rejected the motivations that had led Liberovici to abandon the project, but rather that his integration into the institutional life of Italian Jewry and his more moderated political ideas allowed for greater mediation.

In the early months of 1955, Elio D'Angeli mobilized to reactivate the group that had been working on the historical research. Among those he involved was Enzo Levy (1922-1958), a survivor of deportation and a leading figure in Jewish associational life. A young president of the Turin CGE, he became a member of the FGEI Council in 1953, and, in 1954, of the Turin Jewish Community Council. Levy was part of the FGEI's most militant current: he authored the article introducing the inseparable bond between Judaism and antifascism. A staunch supporter of the principle of equalization for all deportation victims, Levy openly clashed with the UCII, emphasizing the need for an independent FGEI.<sup>64</sup> From February 1955, he facilitated the handover between Liberovici and Bassi and later introduced the Center to networks of former deportees, such as the *Fédération Internationale des*

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<sup>61</sup> "Le mozioni approvate al termine del Congresso," *Hatikvâ* 30 (10 February 1955): 3.

<sup>62</sup> Bassi, "Due precisazioni," *Hatikvâ* 34 (16 June 1955): 4.

<sup>63</sup> Bassi, *Scaramucce sul lago Ladoga* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2004); interview with Roberto Bassi by Liliana Picciotto, Venice, 16 November 2010, Memorie della Salvezza, ACDEC.

<sup>64</sup> This distance was certainly increased by the reluctance with which the Union viewed pilgrimages to the extermination camps, in line with the position of the government and the Italian authorities. In 1952, Levy traveled to Auschwitz with other former internees, while in 1954, together with Primo Levi, he participated in the pilgrimage to the Buchenwald camp, to which both were invited as representatives of the Turin community. "Notizie dai CGE," *Hatikvâ* 10 (12 June 1952): 4; "Omaggio ai martiri," *Hatikvâ* 25 (15 April 1954): 3.

Résistants and the Associazione Nazionale Ex Deportati.<sup>65</sup>

In the spring of 1955, Guido Di Veroli, who would become one of the most important figures in the CDEC's history, joined its first core team. Besides wanting to deepen his knowledge of recent Jewish history, he immediately grasped the educational potential of the Center's work for the younger members of his CGE. Although heavily engaged in his studies, he offered the CDEC his time and energy alike, bringing new resources and unexpected results and contributing to the theoretical definition of the Center's scope. After the first months of collaboration, he became Bassi's point of contact for everything concerning relations with Vitale and with the Union.<sup>66</sup>

Working alongside him was Lello Anav (b. 1932), an engineering student from Rome and a member of the Rome CGE Council since 1953. A leading figure within FGEL, he represented the opposed current to Levy's: he believed the future of Judaism lay in Torah study and *aliyah* as the only antidotes to assimilation. Together with Di Veroli, he aimed to coordinate the collection work that had hitherto been carried out by the Rome CGE, handing the collected material over to Bassi.<sup>67</sup> Anav had in fact curated the gathering of testimonies from survivors of the raid on the Roman ghetto on 16 October 1943, which the Rome CGE organized in 1955. These testimonies were recorded on vinyl discs, now preserved in the CDEC archive, and probably constitute the earliest oral sources available on this event.<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile, Elio D'Angeli, having been admitted to the Union's Council, brought the institution's attention back to the FGEL's historical research during the March session.<sup>69</sup> He announced the appointment of the new coordinator, the decision to establish the Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center, and requested confirmation of funds previously approved but never disbursed. The FGEL's secretary also sat on the committee organizing the celebrations for the tenth anniversary of Liberation, established within the Union by special authorization from the government.<sup>70</sup> The committee began organizing commemorations of key figures in the Jewish Resistance and preparing a ceremony to award honors to Italians who had distinguished themselves in aiding persecuted Jewish citizens.<sup>71</sup>

Thanks to the renewed support from the Federation and its secretary, the re-establishment of a core team, and the strong desire to take part in the tenth anniversary celebrations, on 25 April 1955, the first official communication from the Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center – Italian Section was sent out and the Center was officially

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<sup>65</sup> Levy to Bassi, Turin, 2 February 1956, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

<sup>66</sup> It was thanks to the work begun by Guido Di Veroli in the summer of 1955 that the CDEC was able to obtain the CRDE papers once again, which Liberovici had in the meantime returned to Vitale. Bassi, "Relazione sul lavoro per la Resistenza (8° Congresso F.G.E.I. Roma 23/26 dicembre 1955)," 1, CDEC, b. 1, ACDEC.

<sup>67</sup> Guido Di Veroli to Bassi, Rome, 8 May 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

<sup>68</sup> Now digitized, the recordings are accessible online: <https://www.cdec.it/16-ottobre-1943-le-registrazioni-complete-delle-testimonianze-dei-sopravvissuti/>, accessed June 20, 2025.

<sup>69</sup> D'Angeli to UCII, Genoa, 1 May 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

<sup>70</sup> Paola Bertilotti, "L'Unione delle Comunità e la commemorazione della Resistenza (1944–1948)," *La Rassegna mensile d'Israel* 74, no. 1-2 (January-August 2008): 173-190.

<sup>71</sup> *Committee for the Celebrations of the Tenth Anniversary of Liberation*, UCII, 1-2, FGEL, b. 9, ACDEC.

established.<sup>72</sup> Through this communication, the new coordinator informed both Jewish and non-Jewish institutions, national and international alike, of its foundation. One preserved copy bears handwritten notes listing the recipients, which reveal the network within which the young organizers aimed to place the CDEC. Besides the FGDI, these included Keren Kayemet LeIsrael, the Zionist Federation, the Israeli Legation, Keren Hayesod, the UCII, the World Jewish Congress, Histadrut HaMorim, and the Association of Jewish Women of Italy, while on the media side, they included *Israel*, *Hechalutz*, *Bollettino della Comunità Ebraica di Milano*, *Ha Zofè*, *L'Incontro*, *Hamim*, and the journal of the *Istituto Nazionale per il Movimento di Liberazione in Italia*.<sup>73</sup>

Yet, as Bassi noted in his end-of-year report, the response consisted mainly of “many kind words of encouragement, few offers of collaboration.”<sup>74</sup> His frustration was evident, particularly in a letter he sent to Fabio Della Seta, editor of the journal *Israel*, regarding the failure to publish the CDEC announcement.<sup>75</sup> Even within the FGDI, initial support was limited. The first months were therefore devoted to promoting the Center and building a network of relationships essential to its success.

After the summer break, Bassi met for the first time with Massimo Adolfo Vitale to resume collaboration on the publication project envisioned by the UCII.<sup>76</sup> As Bassi himself recounted, the meeting revealed a profound generational gap, but also a courteous willingness to cooperate—thus beginning a slow process of building mutual trust.<sup>77</sup>

As mentioned, 1955 saw a proliferation of initiatives for the tenth anniversary of Liberation, including the publication of the Italian translation of Léon Poliakov’s work—one of the first historiographical reconstructions available in Italian.<sup>78</sup> Bassi reviewed it in *Hatikvâ*, signaling both the maturity of the Center’s work and its intention to monitor issues related to recent Jewish history.<sup>79</sup> The proliferation of initiatives on the Jewish Resistance, however, posed a challenge to the CDEC, which struggled to make itself known and recognized. Significant in this regard was an article published in *Israel* by Settimio Sorani, in which he lamented to the Union the absence of an Italian institution comparable to the French CDJC.<sup>80</sup> In his reply article, Bassi highlighted key aspects of the younger generation’s critique of their elders and the institutions. Certainly, he wrote, the Italian Center

cannot compete with those of other countries [...] due to the lack of material resources and the inexperience of us young people [...] but we have good will [...] a quality unfortunately lacking (with the exception of the excellent work carried

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<sup>72</sup> *Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea – Sezione Italiana*, 25 aprile 1955, CDEC, b. 1, ACDEC.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Bassi, “Relazione sul lavoro per la Resistenza,” 1.

<sup>75</sup> Bassi to Fabio [Della Seta], Venice, 24 May 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

<sup>76</sup> Bassi, “Ricordo di Massimo Adolfo Vitale. Dal Comitato ricerche deportati ebrei al Centro di documentazione ebraica contemporanea,” *La Rassegna mensile di Israel* 45, no. 1-3 (January-March 1979): 8-21. The meeting is also mentioned in Bassi, “Relazione sul lavoro per la Resistenza,” 1.

<sup>77</sup> Bassi, “Ricordo di Massimo Adolfo Vitale,” 17.

<sup>78</sup> Léon Poliakov, *Il nazismo e lo sterminio degli ebrei* (Turin: Einaudi, 1955).

<sup>79</sup> Bassi, “Il breviario dell’odio,” *Hatikvâ* 33 (5 May 1955): 6.

<sup>80</sup> Settimio Sorani, “Leggendo il Poliakov,” *Israel* 41, no. 1 (22 September 1955): 3.

out by Col. Vitale and his Committee for Research on Deportees) among those who, with far greater authority and means, should have undertaken this work as early as 1945!<sup>81</sup>

Spurred on by these dynamics, the Center's activity intensified from September onward. In a letter to Vitale, Bassi reported:

I plan, at the beginning of next month, to begin a definitive effort to collect and catalogue all Jews who took part in the Resistance. We have printed specific forms [...] to make the work more methodical and thorough.<sup>82</sup>

He added, hoping to lend further credibility to the effort: "This is above all to provide Avv. Ottolenghi with the material needed for the commemorative publication he intends to release early next year."<sup>83</sup>

By late September, then, a project for a broad and systematic census of Jewish Resistance fighters was already underway. Around the same time, the Venetian coordinator reached out again to the CGEs across the country, and within a month, he had succeeded in creating the network needed to launch nationwide grassroots research. It was during this period that Guido Neppi Modona, a Jewish student from Turin who was still in high school and who would soon take on significant responsibilities within the CDEC, joined the team.<sup>84</sup> In almost every city with a CGE or Jewish community, Bassi established a point of contact. On 28 October 1955, he issued the first circular, launching the data-collection campaign and clearly defining the CDEC's structure: "The Center's most urgent task [was] to achieve a definitive census and a wide collection of data on the Jewish contribution to the fight against fascism."<sup>85</sup> The work was carefully organized: each correspondent received a mandate, separate questionnaires for fallen and surviving Resistance members, and a letter of introduction signed by the coordinator.

In October, one of the key events organized by the Commemorations Committee took place in Verona: the commemoration of Rita Rosani. In agreement with Elio D'Angeli, Bassi took part, establishing important relationships—especially with the UCII president Giorgio Zevi and the committee president Giuseppe Ottolenghi. On that occasion, he also attended a committee meeting and proposed the CDEC as an authoritative partner in research on Jewish partisans and the history of anti-Jewish persecution.

Autumn marked major progress for the Center, and Bassi began reflecting on its sustainability and authority. Among the options considered was the possibility of making the CDEC the "Italian Section" of Yad Vashem, showing an awareness of the international scope of Holocaust and Jewish Resistance research.<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile, negotiations with the Union led to a new agreement: on the condition of distancing itself from the FGEL, the

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<sup>81</sup> Bassi to Carlo Alberto Viterbo, 27 September 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

<sup>82</sup> Bassi to Massimo Adolfo Vitale, Venice, 22 September 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Bassi to D'Angeli, Venice, 21 October 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

<sup>85</sup> *Circolare n. 1*, Venice, 28 October 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

<sup>86</sup> Bassi to D'Angeli and Guido Di Veroli, Venice, 14 November 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

Union would provide financial support, guarantee the cooperation of the communities, and confirm the CDEC's location in Venice—at least until the completion of its initial work, after which the archive would be transferred to Rome.<sup>87</sup> Through the second circular, Bassi informed his collaborators that the FGEL would make the CDEC autonomous, entrusting it to a board of directors composed of Bassi, D'Angeli, Di Veroli, Levy, and Aldo Luzzatto.<sup>88</sup> The CDEC would thus come under the Union's authority, with Vitale as its official representative.

By the end of 1955, the volume of activity had grown considerably, and during the December FGEL congress, Bassi organized the first national meeting of collaborators and correspondents.<sup>89</sup> In the winter of 1955 to 1956, Di Veroli worked on cataloguing Vitale's collection, while the Center received several documentary collections and began important collaborations with authoritative bodies such as the Istituto per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione and the Italian public broadcaster RAI.<sup>90</sup> Thanks to this new, though delicate, stability, the CDEC was able to hire its first paid collaborator: Bruno Di Porto, a history student from Rome, tasked with systematically processing the material held by the Union. The CDEC's work took on an increasingly defined shape, culminating in April 1956 with the publication of the first booklet presenting the sixteen thematic sections of the archive under construction and mapping the national network of fourteen cities where collaborators were active.<sup>91</sup> The booklet also introduced the board of directors and set out the CDEC's objectives for the first time:

To collect the largest possible number of testimonies, documents, publications, etc., capable of shedding light on the vicissitudes of Italian Jewry from the advent of Fascism to Liberation [...]. The ultimate goal of the CDEC is to provide the scholar and historian of tomorrow with broad and exhaustive documentation on the preparation and unfolding of the Jewish tragedy in Italy, and to make known to a wider public—through means and formats yet to be determined (exhibitions, publications, etc.)—the events affecting Jews in Italy and their contribution to the cause of freedom.<sup>92</sup>

Over the course of 1956, Bassi also began work on the Statute, in order to strengthen the functioning of the board, which was struggling to guarantee continuity. The Statute was finally approved in September 1957, establishing that the CDEC was an autonomous body, created by the FGEL and operating under its aegis, with oversight from the UCIL.<sup>93</sup> The

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<sup>87</sup> Bassi to D'Angeli, Venice, 23 November 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

<sup>88</sup> *Circolare n. 2*, Venice, 30 November 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

<sup>89</sup> "Il Centro di Documentazione," *Hatikvâ* 39 (19 January 1956): 4.

<sup>90</sup> Bassi, *Relazione sull'attività del Centro di Documentazione nei mesi di novembre e dicembre 1955*, 1, CDEC, b. 1, ACDEC.

<sup>91</sup> *Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea - Sezione Italiana*, April 1956/Nissan 5716, 2, CDEC, b. 1, ACDEC.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>93</sup> *Statuto del CDEC approvato dal Consiglio della Federazione giovanile Ebraica d'Italia (Torino, settembre 1957)*, FGEL, b. 9, ACDEC.

governing body was the board of directors, composed of five members appointed by the FGEI, plus two representatives—one from the Federation and one from the Union—serving with full voting rights. Most of the Statute's articles concerned the board's operations, with mechanisms to ensure continuity and overcome management crises.

The CDEC's path toward consolidation would encounter many further challenges in the following years, but thanks to the FGEI's efforts, the foundational groundwork made would allow the Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center to develop its activities and establish itself as an indispensable point of reference for the preservation, study, and dissemination of the history and memory of Jewish life in Italy from unification to the present day.