


ЗА БУКВНИТЕ

КИРИЛО МЕТОДИЕВСКИ ВЕСТНИК

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80 YEARS SINCE THE RESCUE OF BULGAR



Historical facts versus demagoguery

Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria

Attempts to impute guilt are a manifestation of disrespect to the rescued Jews and to the moral feat of tiny Bulgaria during World War II, the head of State says during the opening of an exhibition dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the rescue of Bulgarian Jews

In days of hardship, the Bulgarian state and people passed an incredible test of great historical value by not allowing a single Bulgarian Jew to perish in the death camps or be killed in Bulgaria. The rescue of Bulgarian Jews keeps on being an example of the strength of public and political energy dedicated to a just cause. This is what President Rumen Radev said during the opening of a documentary exhibition dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the rescue of Bulgarian Jews at the "SS Cyril and Methodius" National Library.

The exposition features exhibits from the National Library's collection, as well as the awards posthumously given to King Boris III by international Jewish organisations, including the World Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League.

Among the attendees were Vice President Iliana Iotova, Prime Minister Galab Donev, ministers, diplomats, representatives of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the academia, of the Jewish community in Bulgaria and of the organisations of Bulgarian Jews in the State of Israel. Famous historian and public figure from Israel, Prof. Michael Bar-Zohar, author of the book *Salvation*, dedicated to the events in the spring of 1943, which led to the rescue of nearly 50 thousand Bulgarian Jews, was a guest of honour.

In his speech, head of State Rumen Radev recalled how,

in one of the darkest periods of human history, Bulgaria, which had already experienced two national catastrophes, was doing everything possible

attitude towards their Jewish friends, neighbours, school-mates, and colleagues. The Commissariat for Jewish Affairs did not impose itself on the Bulgarian Parliament and Government, and Hitler did not break the decision of King Boris III not to allow the deportation of a single Bulgarian subject outside the borders of Bulgaria, the President added.

The lesson of statesmanship of the 43 deputies of

main in our history, the President stressed. Rumen Radev also highlighted the important role and active public position of a number of scientific and professional associations, and the intellectual elite that remained faithful to the traditions of its Bulgarian people and state, as well as the contribution of Bulgarian Jews in the anti-fascist resistance.

The head of State pointed out that eight decades since the

memory, on which the foundations of the nation are based, is strong only when it rests on the truth, the President said.

Attempts to impute guilt are, at the very least, a sign of disrespect for our rescued Jewish fellow citizens and for the moral feat of tiny Bulgaria, while others in Europe were collaborating with the Nazi authorities, the President said, adding that the millions of innocent victims of the Holocaust will never be forgotten. He stressed that Bulgaria's Jewish community at the end of the Second World War was more numerous than before it began and this huge moral capital of Bulgaria must be protected from any attempt to replace it.

Prof. Michael Bar-Zohar spoke about the decisive actions of King Boris III, the Bulgarian state and the Bulgarian people that led to the rescue of all Bulgarian Jews during World War II. My friends and I have a sacred duty to Bulgaria – to spread throughout the world this story of the rescue of the Jews – it is something very deep and we must keep it in the Bulgarian soul and in our memories, said Prof. Michael Bar-Zohar.



to avoid being dragged into another war on the Old Continent. Despite the pressure of Nazi Germany and its lost neutrality, however, Bulgarian institutions rejected anti-Semitism, while the Bulgarian people did not change their good

the government majority in the National Assembly who signed the letter of the Deputy Speaker Dimitar Peshev, and of the worthy spiritual leaders of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, which was then part of the state, will forever re-

rescue of the Bulgarian Jews our society remains in debt to the memory of the rescuers because of the ideological layers that have obscured the work of the worthy. We are obliged to keep the memory of the past clean, because the historical



IAN JEWS DURING WORLD WAR II

We share one goal – to know and remember the lessons from history

Iliana Iotova, Vice President of the Republic of Bulgaria



Little is known about the great example of Bulgaria, which saved its Jews. This unprecedented act belongs not only to the Bulgarian, but also to the world memory. Thanks to the joint efforts of the Bul-

garian Orthodox Church, leading politicians and intellectuals, and the courage of ordinary Bulgarians 80 years ago, my country saved over 48,000 Jews. It is sad that we failed to protect 11,343 Jews from

territories administered at that time by the Bulgarian authorities.” With these words, Vice President Iliana Iotova opened the international conference “The Role of Lawyers in the Rescue of Bulgarian Jews.”

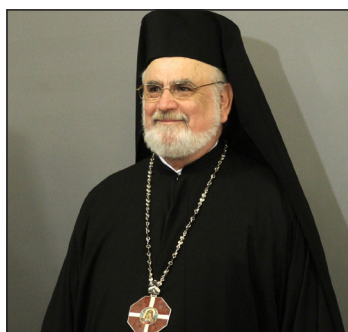
The organizers were: Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, the Embassy of the State of Israel, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Association of Prosecutors, the Chamber of Investigators in Bulgaria, the Federation of Zionists in Bulgaria.

“We share a common goal – to know and remember the lessons of history. Our task is even more important today, when in Europe, in the world, in Bulgaria, speech of hate flows, anti-Semitic sentiments are rising, one crisis after another fuels the virus of denial, and human rights that have constituted our lives for decades have been shamelessly overthrown today”, the vice-president also pointed out. She described as dangerous the attempts to replace history by denying the existence of the Holocaust. “The rescue of the Bulgar-

ian Jews from the camps of death is a matter of national pride! It is a matter of pride when you read in large letters at the World Holocaust Remembrance Center “Yad Vashem” in Jerusalem, “Bulgaria – the country where the Jewish population was saved,” said the vice president. She emphasized that in various European countries, individuals rose up against the Holocaust, but only in Bulgaria did the Holocaust meet the resistance of the people and institutions, and the deportation was stopped by a parliamentary act.

This material has been borrowed from the official website of the presidency of the Republic of Bulgaria: <https://m.president.bg/bg/index>

The Deliverance – Duty or Feat?



What are we celebrating in fact? Did we save the Bulgarian Jews, or did our ancestors, their Members of Parliament, The Holy Synod, the King? What is our personal merit? I am baffled by the fact that we are celebrating ourselves albeit as successors of honorable Bulgarians. Should

we brag as much and remind the successors of the Bulgarian Jews each year that we saved their grandparents?

Saving the Bulgarian Jews is a fulfilled Christian and human duty. And where there is a duty fulfilled, there is no merit. Or does one expect to be pulled over on the highway and praised by the police for complying with speed limits and other road rules?

If we want to bow to the memory of the saviors, it must be because they protected Bulgaria and the Bulgarians from the great disgrace with which all the European nations were covered, trampled by Nazi Germany, by handing over their compatriots and fellow citizens to humiliation and death. Some even shamelessly robbed them and viciously reviled them. These worthy ancestors of ours saved us from this shame and disgrace.

If we now want to set our grandparents as an example to ourselves and our future generations to emulate, we must once again remember that their work is only a duty as human beings, as Christians, as Bulgarians, as fathers and mothers. It was a matter of duty not to embarrass our people, ourselves and our children! And the awareness of our duty and the will to bring their work to the end today makes us also worthy individuals.

Tikhon, Bishop of Tiveriopol, patriarchal vicar

The Special Bulgarian People

Prof. Michael Bar-Zohar

There is something special about the Bulgarian people. And this thing must be like a light, like a ray that illuminates the whole world. For people to see how in the darkest, in the most difficult moments, an entire people, from all walks of life, stood up and saved their Jews.

I see this, and my friends, as a sacred duty we have towards Bulgaria – to spread this story of the rescue of the Jews throughout the world. Because this is not a one-day or two-day event. This is something very deep and we must keep it in the Bulgarian soul and in our memories.

And I am very happy to be able to say these words today, in my hometown of Sofia, to such an important audience. So please help me so we can spread this story. This is for the honor of the Bulgarians, for the honor of my homeland.

We left for Israel with a freight train that passed through Yugoslavia. A steamer was supposed to come there to take us to Israel. There were more than 1,000 Jews

from Sofia on the train. The train stopped at the border for administrative matters. When we crossed the border we all jumped out to have a stretch. We turned to the border and looked at Bulgaria – for the last time, a beautiful green valley. And one person began to sing, then - a second, a third... Imagine a choir of 1000 people, men and women, singing “Dear Motherland” (The Bulgarian National Anthem). They sang and cried. I was 10 years old then and I asked my mom and dad why they were crying. My father told me: “Because we love this country. Bulgaria has been good to us; we love Bulgaria”. So we left for Israel, torn apart.

I wonder what you Bulgarians have in your blood. Is it the water or the air? What made these Bulgarians, who had a history, like many nations in Europe, be the only ones in the world. The only ones who were against the National Defence Act. What made this whole majority in the parliament, which was for Germany, get together



and say “Don’t touch our Bulgarians, our Jews”. What happened so that the church of Bulgaria was the only one in the world that fought so bravely to save the Jews.

Excerpts from a speech delivered during the opening of the documental exhibition at the National Library St. St. Cyril and Methodius as part of the program for celebrating 80 years since the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews, 10th March 2023.

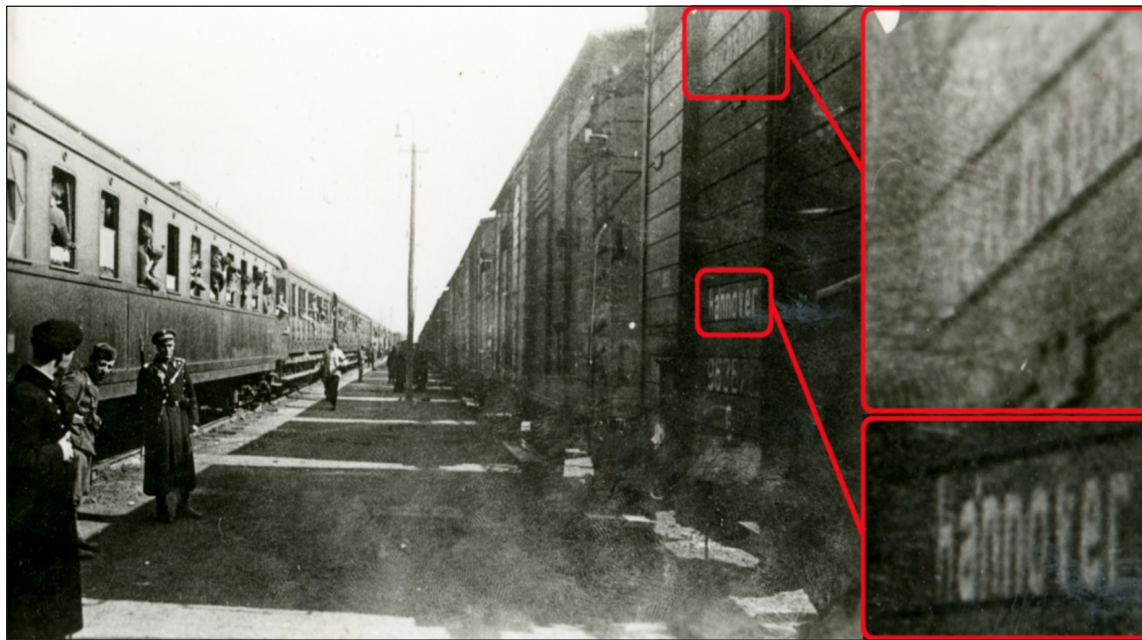
The Jews Bulgaria Could Not Save

One of the most dramatic events in the Central Balkans was the deportation of 11,343 Jews from The White Sea Area, Vardar Macedonia and Pirot, who were exterminated in the Treblinka concentration camp in the spring of 1943. The memory of the victims demands that this tragedy be known in detail to avoid any speculation.

The catastrophe was reached after the Italian dictator Mussolini started an unsuccessful war against Greece at the end of 1940. Hitler decided to come to his aid, but for this purpose the Nazi army had to pass through neutral Bulgaria. They began to put pressure on the government in Sofia to join the Tripartite Pact, otherwise an occupation would follow. The lack of guarantees for Bulgarian independence predetermined the choice made. Bulgaria joined the Pact, but it was agreed that the Bulgarian army would not participate in the military actions. In the same way, Yugoslavia became an ally of Nazi Germany, in return for which Hitler promised to expand it south to Thessaloniki.

On 27th March, 1941, a military coup was perpetrated in Belgrade, which was perceived in Berlin as an anti-German act. On 6th April, 1941, the German army attacked Greece and Yugoslavia simultaneously. The two countries were defeated in a matter of days, and the same month they signed their military capitulations, and Germany became the supreme wartime sovereign of the conquered territories. However, the bulk of the Nazi army was to be moved east for the upcoming war against the USSR. This is the only reason why Berlin agreed to allow a Bulgarian administration in Vardar Macedonia and the White Sea. German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop explicitly wrote on 15th April, 1941 that "the fate of the various areas belonging to Yugoslavia will not be finally determined until the end, until peace is concluded... no statements can be made about political goals and future borders regarding Macedonia".

There is no bilateral treaty by which Germany would officially grant these territories to Bulgaria. On 24th April, the fifth-rank German official



A sealed deportation train. Skopje, March 1943. Yad Vashem Archive #1817, Album #FA213/48. When scanning the original in high resolution and enlarging the inscription on the wagon, the name of the German state railways "Reichsbahn" and the inscription "Hannover" can be read. On the left is a passenger composition with German soldiers.

Karl Clodius brought written notes to Sofia, from which it is clear that Berlin reserved for itself the basic rights arising from the capitulation of Yugoslavia signed on 17th April, 1941. In these notes, it is explicitly stated that it is a question of "areas which, in a final settlement, will be given to Bulgaria". Confiscations carried out by German troops remained solely for the benefit of Germany, and economically important Yugoslav and Greek state property was subject to German compulsory management. The authorities in Berlin, as the supreme wartime sovereign, reserved for themselves the right to exploit in the future and to freely export without any restrictions mined raw materials from the White Sea, Vardar Macedonia and Eastern Pomerania. Hitler guaranteed his interests through the presence of German troops in them, and the costs of their maintenance were borne by Bulgaria. In these territories, in parallel with the Bulgarian administration, there were also German commandant offices, to which the Bulgarian troops were subordinated.

Bulgaria in the middle of 1942, on its own initiative, automatically granted Bulgarian citizenship to persons of Bulgarian origin. The local Jews, however, were treated by the Germans as subjects of defeated countries, and as early as December 4, 1941, they were declared to fall "under the ... 11th provision of the Imperial Civil Law." The authorities in Sofia were forced

to comply with this position of Germany as the supreme wartime sovereign of these territories. Berlin reacted sharply even against the change in the subjection of the population of Bulgarian origin. On 11th August, 1942, the German South-East Command with headquarters in Thessaloniki protested against the Bulgarian subjection given to the Bulgarians in Vardar Macedonia and the White Sea, stating that "it is questionable whether Bulgaria has the right to settle the subjection in the newly liberated lands before there is a treaty on peace affecting the fate of these lands... The German military command South-East demands the abolition of the decree of servitude in the newly liberated lands."

At the beginning of 1943, Germany wanted to hand over the 12 thousand Jews living in the Yugoslav and Greek territories administered by Sofia. Bulgaria did not give up any of its Jews, it gave away about 15 thousand. Bulgarian transit visas to European Jews fleeing Nazi oppression, but could not oppose German

plans to deport Jews of Yugoslav and Greek citizenship.

The German authorities officially took in 7,140 Jews from Vardar Macedonia in Skopje, and from there on 22nd, 25th and 29th March, 1943, they were taken on three Deutsche Reichsbahn trains to the Treblinka concentration camp, where they were all murdered. The fate of 4,058 White Sea Jews was similar. The German authorities took them to the Danube port of Lom, where on 20th and 21st March, 1943, they were put on three Serbian and one Austrian steamers and sent to the Treblinka concentration camp.

At that time, the authorities in Sofia could not openly oppose Nazi Germany, whose Southeast Command maintained 600,000 men in the Balkans. an army that can quickly transfer to any trouble spot in the region. In order to prevent possible Bulgarian sabotage, on 7th March, 1943, the Wehrmacht sent additional troops to Skopje, who in April 1941 participated in the capture of the city and knew all the strategic objects. However, by order of the Bulgarian

government, 282 Jews were released from the transit deportation camp in Skopje. Bulgarian government officials, who learned about the impending deportation, warned some of the local Jews to hide.

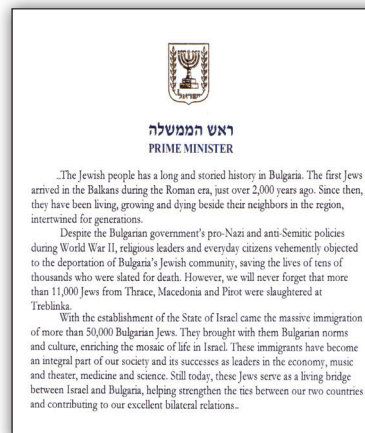
An opportunity for change did not arise until late July 1943, when Mussolini was deposed and Italy took action to leave the Pact. In August 1943, Tsar Boris III planned to form a new transitional government within a month. In order to counter German countermeasures, on 22nd August, 1943, the tsar discussed with the Minister of War the conduct of maneuvers of the First Bulgarian Army in the Sofia area, which were convened on 24th August. However, on 28th August, 1943, the Bulgarian king died under suspicious circumstances and everything was stopped.

The fate of the king shows how fragile and uncertain the situation was. Speaking about the German threat, former Bulgarian Minister of Public Education Boris Yotsov shared in 1945 that "the Germans were watching our every step. The plenipotentiary minister of the Germans, Beckerle, stood in the foreign ministry every day... Even then it was suggested that even the smallest careless step could lead to the complete occupation of Bulgaria by Germany". This is even more true for Vardar Macedonia and the White Sea, where there was a permanent German military presence. The archives of the Wehrmacht reveal that as early as 1943 the creation of an "independent" Macedonia and the occupation of Bulgaria were planned.

Spas Tashev



Prime Minister
Benjamin Netanyahu



Prof. Dr. Alexander Oscar,
President of the Organization of
the Bulgarian Jews "Shalom"

The Rescue of the Bulgarian Jews During the Second World War

By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rumyana Christidi, Head of Jewish Studies Program, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

The fate of the Bulgarian Jews during the Holocaust is an exceptional case in Europe which resulted in the rescue of the whole 48 000 members of the Jewish community. How did that become possible in a country - allied to Nazi Germany; which had imposed a full and heavy Anti-Jewish legislation; which had a written agreement for the deportation of the Jews? And how the Bulgarian Jews lived for three and a half years under these conditions and no one died as a Jew? It was a process with many parties involved, not just individual actions.

In September 1939, Bulgaria officially announced a policy of neutrality trying to avoid direct involvement in the war conflict. After the outbreak of the Italo-Greek had to come to the rescue of the Italian troops in Greece and presented Bulgaria with an ultimatum to determine on which side it stood. This would condition the way the Wehrmacht would cross the country - as an enemy or an allied force. On 1 March 1941 the Prime Minister Filov signed the accession to the Tripartite Pact. Even before that the government in Sofia decided to demonstrate "good will" to Nazi Germany and the National Assembly passed the Law on Protection of the Nation in late December 1940, which entered into force in January 1941. The Law imposed economic, social, professional, administrative and other humiliating restrictions on Bulgarian Jews. Broad social groups - professional unions, intellectuals, politicians from the whole spectrum from far right to far left, MP's and the whole Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church opposed the adoption of the law, which contradicted the Constitution of Bulgaria and the traditions of its society.

In April 1941 a German offensive resulted in then-Yugoslavia and Greece capitulations and Germany becoming the de facto wartime sovereign of their territories. Later, parts of then-Yugoslavia and northern Greece were handed over to Bulgaria for temporary administration and without recognition of any Bulgarian sovereignty over these territories by the Germans.

Bulgarian administration, courts, police and the army moved in the "new territories".

In August 1942 a Commissariat of Jewish Affairs was established having as its task the organization of the deportation of the Jews and the liquidation of their properties. Orders

Bulgaria. The German officials demanded from Bulgaria assistance, not permission, in the rounding up of the Jews in the transit centers, from where the Germans took over and deported them to Treblinka. With the participation of the Bulgarian authorities, be-

highlight of the campaign to rescue the Bulgarian Jews was the petition of 43 MPs, initiated by Peshev. This highly visible public campaign involved many official state representatives, politicians and administrators alike. In the collision between the executive and

If-Heinz Beckerle, provide the best support to the above argument: "Bulgarian society does not understand the real meaning of the Jewish question. Next to the few rich Jews there are many poor workers and craftsmen. Having grown up together with Greeks, Turks and Gypsies, an ordinary Bulgarian does not understand the meaning of the struggle against Judaism, even more, that the racial question from its nature is incomprehensible to him". It was exactly this lack of comprehension and understanding that saved the Jews in the old borders of Bulgaria from extermination.

Bulgarian people were not especially philosemitic, but they were not antisemitic. In times of peace they viewed the Jews with indifference, as part of them. But in times of trouble, when the life of these people was in danger, the good patriarchal moral of this non-modern Bulgarian rural society and its the strong barometer for "good" and "bad" and for "right and wrong", played a crucial role. The Bulgarian Jews were loyal citizens of the Bulgarian state and fully integrated in the society. They were not especially religious and the same is valid for the rest of the Bulgarian people. Religion was never a reason for any negative feelings from both sides. The Bulgarian Jews were also not especially rich or involved in politics, so there was no ground for jealousy or any associations with the bad images of the Jew portrayed by the Nazi propaganda. The Bulgarian Jews looked like the others, lived like the others, they took part in all the wars that Bulgaria conducted for its national unification, they fought and died side by side with their Bulgarian friends, neighbours, comrades. This strong bond, the lack of precondition for real Antisemitism and the historically tolerant profile of the then Bulgarian society were of vital importance during the Second World War. They shaped the behavior that saved the lives of the Jews during the most difficult three and a half years of the war.



Mass of the Holy Synod in the Bulgarian National Assembly in defence of the Jews, 1943.

and rules issued by it were not subject to any kind of public scrutiny. In January 1943, a Counsellor for Jewish Affairs, Theodor Dannecker, arrived in the German Embassy in Sofia to arrange the deportation of the Jews from the parts of then-Yugoslavia and northern Greece, which were under temporary Bulgarian administration. The international status of these areas was of parts of Yugoslavia and Greece occupied by Germany. The administrative status and powers of the Bulgarian authorities were outlined by several documents, the most significant being the Clodius-Popov Agreement. It stipulated that the natural resources belonged to Germany, as did the state property and all confiscations. Bulgaria could not oppose sending people from the area to work in Germany. Berlin considered these territories to be under the full and direct power of Germany and the Jews living there, who were citizens of the defeated Yugoslavia and Greece, to be under German jurisdiction. The Jews of these areas were listed statistically within the total numbers for Yugoslavia (Serbia) and Greece, completely separate from those in

tween 18 and 29 March 1943, around 11,343 Jews from Thrace and Macedonia were deported to Poland, where they were exterminated at the Germans' Treblinka camp.

The Germans viewed the deportation of the Jews from Thrace and Macedonia as the beginning of the expulsion of all Jews from the territory of Bulgaria, the fate of whom was now on the agenda. However, Bulgaria did not hand over to Germany its "own Jews". As the preparations for the deportation became known, protest and rescue actions started across the country. On 9 March 1943, a delegation of MPs headed by the Deputy Speaker of Parliament Dimitar Peshev held a meeting with Interior Minister Petar Gabrovski. After a long telephone conversation, presumably with King Boris III, the Interior Minister cancelled the deportation of Bulgarian Jews. In parallel, Metropolitan Cyril strongly opposed the rounding up of the Jews and cabled his protest to King Boris III. The Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and various cultural, scientific, professional and civil organizations declared their opposition as well. The

legislative branches of power, the role of the monarch, King Boris III, was of utmost importance - he was the main political factor in the country.

During his next meeting with Hitler and Ribbentrop at Berchtesgaden, on 1 April 1943, Tsar Boris III emphasized that he needed the Jews in labor camps within the country as they were needed in the construction of roads. By this pretext the Tsar sought to avoid the deportation of the Jews. A secret report of the German diplomatic mission in Sofia to Berlin on 5th April 1943 noted, "In order to properly understand the attitude of the Bulgarian government, one should have in mind that in Bulgaria no Jewish question exists in the way that it exists in the Reich. Indeed, there are also Jews here that have reached leading positions in the Bulgarian economy. However, these are particular cases. In this country (Bulgaria) the ideological and racial preconditions are lacking to present the (final) solution of the Jewish question to the Bulgarian people as an urgent necessity, as is the case in the Reich."

The words of the German Ambassador in Sofia, Ado-

Within the framework of the developed National Program adopted by the Council of Ministers, the National Library “St. St. Cyril and Methodius” prepared the exhibition “Jews on the Bulgarian Lands. Documentary Evidence of the Life of the Jewish Community from the Collections of the National Library “St. St. Cyril and Methodius”. The history of Jews in Bulgaria in its most diverse aspects, as well as the selection of documents to point out the most important highlights, was a challenge for the library team. The selection made, presented in chronological order, allows one to form a comprehensive picture of the history of the Jewish community in our country. The archival documents, books and periodicals stored in the collection of the National Library are divided into two thematic circles.

In the first one, attention is directed to manuscripts, old print and rare books, photographs and documents in Bulgarian, Hebrew and Ottoman Turkish from the collections of the “Manuscripts and Old Print Books”, “Bulgarian Historical Archive” and “Oriental Collections” departments, which reflect the richness of the source material. Extremely valuable examples of the written tradition of Hebrew are three scrolls of Esther from the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, purchased for the National Library in the 1980s and 1990s. They were handwritten in Hebrew on parchment and used during the Purim holiday. At the end of the text of the 16th century manuscript is written the name of the probable owner Moshe Halevi (Moisei Alevi).

Among the old printed books, two Bibles in Hebrew stand out – dated 1705 and 1720. TORAH NEVI’IM U-KHETUVIM] = BIBLIA HEBRAICA by Everardo Van der Hoot is the first printed Hebrew Bible. It was printed in Amsterdam and Utrecht in 1705. It is the “Editio longe accuratissima [the most accurate edition]” on which most subsequent Hebrew Bibles are based. It features an engraved title page, an engraved vignette on the two-tone title page, a nineteen-leaf preface by Van der Hoot, followed by five testimonial leaves, Hebrew text, Latin marginal notes, and headings in both languages.

The Jewish Bible by Johann Michaelis dated 1720, printed in Halle, represents the first attempt at a critical edition of the Hebrew Bible by the Ger-

Documental Evidence from “St. St. Cyril and Me

Hon. Prof. Dr. Krasimira Ale

man Hebraist and theologian Johann H. Michaelis; Shulchan Aruch (Tidy Table), dated 1864, is of particular interest to researchers. It was written by the prominent Talmudist and Judaism preacher Joseph Karo. The work contains instructions and rules for Jewish behavior in a religious aspect. For a certain period, the author also lived in Nikopol, Bulgaria.

Among the Ottoman Turkish documents, the so-called exhibition of the Jewish community in Rousse dated 7.9 Rebiyulev-

cover it with tiles (since it was covered with reeds). There is also a copy of a court decision (hüccet) dated 22 Cemaziyela-hir 1164 /18th May 1751 for the purchase of a house and a shop in the inner bazaar of the city of Mercado son of Sabatai, who bought them from Yakov son of Ilia from the Sofia neighborhood “Pop Milosh” for the value of 500 kuruş.

The attitude of the Bulgarian government towards the Jews in our country is evidenced in a letter dated 27th May, 1909



el 1276/ 6th October 1859 is interesting, in which the genealogical tree of the members of the family of Solomon, son of Joseph is presented. In the archive unit, there are 4 documents that testify to the special status of the descendants who settled in Ruse, to the privileges given to them by the official Ottoman authority and their exemption from taxes, due to the merits of their ancestor at the siege of Buda in 1526. In one of these documents it is recorded that Solomon, son of Yasef, handed over the keys of the fortress to Sultan Suleiman I.

Two other Ottoman Turkish documents are related to the life of the Jews of Sofia and Nikopol. The first one dated 8.4 Rebiyulevel 1291 /21st April 1874 of the Dupnitsa Judge is about a court decision (hüccet) for certifying the heirs of the late Rubin Mosulam Solomon from the neighborhood “Gül Camii” in Sofia, and the other one dated 29 Şeval 1226/16th November 1811, which is a letter regarding the request of the Jews in the city of Nikopol to repair the roof of the synagogue and

from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Confessions to the Ministry of Education, signed by Stefan Paprikov. It insists that the Law on Public Education be adapted to the school boards of Jewish schools as well. Among the topics of the correspondence between the Chief Rabbinate of Bulgaria, the Jewish school board and the Ministry of Public Education are the election of Jewish school boards, the approval of changes in Jewish schools, etc.

A significant part of the presentation of the topic is de-



voted to the place and role of Jews in Bulgarian cultural life. Here are presented editions from the “Probuda Library” series, published under the editorship of the journalist and cultural activist Buko Piti in the late 1930s. He began this undertaking in the years of rising anti-Semitism in Europe

and with the thought that the only means by which slanders against Jews could be refuted was the press. Among the titles are Iliya Arnaudov’s “Jews in Music”, Boyan Danovski. “Theater and Spectators”, Leo Cohen’s “The Jews in Bulgarian Literature”, “The Truth about the Situation of Jews in

From the National Library "Methodius" Collections

Aleksandrova, Iulia Karadachka

our country - Boris Shatz, David Perets, Sultana Surujon, Moritz Benzionov, Eliezer Alsheh, etc. The contribution of

The second thematic circle reveals through the prism of documentary sources and memories of contemporaries,

ence, literature and art. To the main questions asked by Pitti: "What do you think about racism as theory and prac-

of a nation lies in the tolerance and equality of all Bulgarian citizens. Anti-Semitism is an act that is categorically denied. I appeal to the Bulgarian conscience - to love our fellow Jews and to live in peace and understanding for the honor of Bulgaria and its glory".

The exhibition shows letters from the "Tsar Boris" Joint Stock Company for Cotton Yarns to the State Receivables Directorate at the Ministry of Finance; Yambol, June 12, 1944. One insists that the factory employee Jacques Shimon Niño be kept at work, and the other - from Jacques Shimon Niño to the lawyer Nikola Zlatarski - is a thank you for his help in not being evicted from Sofia and kept at work.

The topic of Jewish working groups is considered as a form, rather not repressive, but aimed at deflecting the restrictive consequences imposed by Germany under alliance commitments, brought into the Law for the Defense of the Nation and its accompanying legal norms. We find support for this statement in the Memoirs by Bogdan Filov: "13.IV. Tuesday. At 5 pm me and Gabrovski went to the King. ... Then we discussed the Jew issue; the King thinks we should divide those capable of working in working groups and thus avoid sending Jews from the vicinity to Poland...".

Emphasis is also placed on the reaction of people's representatives from 25 National Assembly, witnessed in a letter by Nikola Mushanov and Petko Stainov and in the letter of Dimitar Peshev, signed by 43 MPs. A number of Bulgarian public and artistic unions and organizations also raise their voices against the motion. "Our legislation should not coin a law that will enslave a part of Bulgarian subjects and leave a black page in our recent history," wrote a group of Bulgarian writers in their protest letter to the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the National Assembly against the consideration of a motion for the protection of the nation in October 1940. The chairman of the Society of New Artists S. Sotirov testifies to his position in defense of Jewish artists in a letter dated 12th November, 1940. The exhibition also includes the protest statements from the Union of the lawyers and the Doctors' Union in Bulgaria, who also declare their response against the motion.



Bulgaria: Figures and Data". In memory of the late poet Johan Bashmutzki, his poems are collected in a separate book. A number of albums, as well as illustrations, reproductions, reviews of exhibitions from the newspapers "Probuda", "Jewish Speech" present talented Jewish artists who worked in

Bulgarian Jews to the musical life of Bulgaria is presented through publications in the periodical press about names such as Leon Surujon, Jacques Tsadikov, Pancho Vladigerov. The "Jewish Poem" by Pancho Vladigerov, published in volume three of Violin Pieces in 1975, in memory of his grandfather Leon Pasternak, also finds a place in the exhibition.

the events in Bulgaria in the period 1940-1943, directly related to the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews. The exhibition includes a series of documents and publications illuminating the reaction of Bulgarian society against the anti-Jewish policy. The Bulgarian society firmly stands against racism and anti-Semitism and it is no coincidence that in 1937 the first survey of its kind was published, conducted by Buko Pitti with 60 prominent representatives of the Bulgarian public, sci-

ence?", "How do you explain anti-Semitism?", "Your opinion about Jews in Bulgaria?", each of the respondents with a clear civic and human feeling and from the positions of their morals and convictions stands in defense of the Jews and points out that anti-Semitism has no place in our country.

The exhibition also quotes the opinions expressed by other prominent public figures, published in various publications. Here we will cite two of them - by Todor Tonchev: "Bulgarian Jews are not foreigners, they were born in Bulgaria, breathe the same air, sing the same songs, enjoy the common cultural and economic achievements, suffer from the common crises, create together with the Bulgarians, the well-being of the country". (Todor Tonchev. Is anti-Semitism justified in our country? Sofia, 1938) and gen. retired Velizar Lazarov from his preface to the same book: "No conscience should allow anti-Semitism in Bulgaria. The nobility

Dimitar Peshev and the Failure of the Imposed Deportation

One of the most shameful pages in human history is that of the Holocaust. The whole of Europe took part in writing it - that Christian Europe, which accepted love for man as its creed. A Europe of humanism, of enlightenment, of democracy and progress... Today, the Bulgarian people can be proud to make an exception from this list.

The deliverance of the Bulgarian Jews is one of the rare moments in Bulgarian history, in which the efforts of the monarch, the National Assembly, the Church and society are united. Among all the efforts, one stands out especially strongly for its timeliness and determination.

It is 1943, two years after Bulgaria joined the Tripartite Pact, the final decision on the Jewish issue had been made, and a Law for the Protection of the Nation had been adopted in our country, despite widespread public dissatisfaction. On 24th September, 1942, Berlin officially asked Sofia to implement the procedure of forcibly sending the Bulgarian Jews to the death camps on the territory of Poland. On 22nd January, 1943, Minister Plenipotentiary Adolf-Heinz Beckerle raised the issue with the Bulgarian Minister of the Interior, Petar Gabrovski. The pressure was enormous and on 22nd February a secret agreement was signed to deport 20,000 Jews. The majority of them were Jews from the "new lands", but another 8,000 Jews were Bulgarian subjects.

Information about the planned deportation leaked out and reached the Jewish community in Bulgaria. On 26th February, 1943, the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs began preparations for deportation in Kyustendil. Greatly frightened, the Jews in the city decided to send a delegation to Sofia to plead in their defense. The Macedonian leader Vladimir Kurtev, the lawyer Ivan Momchilov, the merchant Asen Swichmezov and the national representative Petar Mihalev responded to the call of the Jews. On the evening of 8th March, the four left to Sofia by train, hoping to receive help from the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly,



Dimitar Peshev in his office

Dimitar Peshev. He is their fellow citizen, former Minister of Justice in the Kyoseivanov government, a judge from So-

late afternoon of 9th March, 1943, Gabrovsky surrendered to the pressure of Peshev and the delegates telephoned Kyustendil with instructions to stop the preparations for the deportation of the Jews. An order followed to cease the operation everywhere.

The 9th March action blocked the Nazi plan, but in order to prevent similar actions against the Jews in the future, Dimitar Peshev prepared a letter to Prime Minister Bogdan Filov to be signed by members of the majority in the Parliament. Hristo Kalfov embarrassedly ran to Prime Minister Filov, who read the letter and was unpleasantly surprised. The two tried to convince Peshev to delay sending the letter. Peshev suspected that Filov would try to put pressure on the majority not to sign the letter and acted without further delay. On 19th March, a letter was left on the Prime Minister's desk with the signatures of 43 people's representatives from the

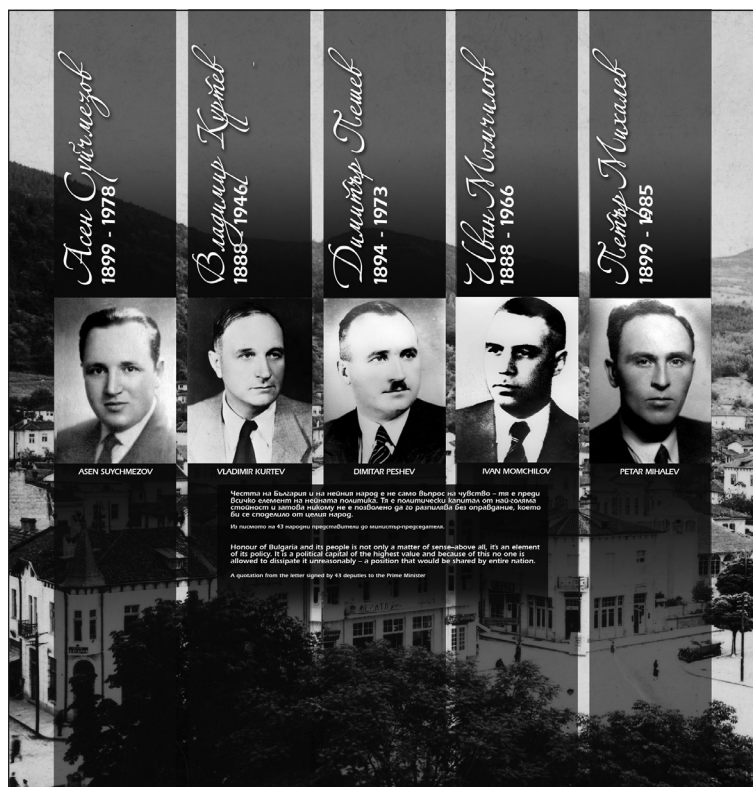
majority, who declared against the intention to forcibly send Bulgarian citizens outside the borders of Bulgaria.

Bogdan Filov saw in Peshev's action a rebellion and a blow to the discipline of the majority. His removal from the post of Deputy Speaker of the Parliament was subject to a vote. The majority was "in favor", but all the signatories of Peshev's letter supported him and voted "against". He refused to resign and wanted a public hearing on the deportation issue. On 26th March, a motion was read from the rostrum of the National Assembly to dismiss Dimitar Peshev from his post, without giving him the floor to defend himself. Peshev was also deeply affected by the accusations that he received millions from the Jews for their protection.

Many years later, a report from the German legation in Sofia to Berlin became available to science, in which it was written that on 9th March, 1943, Interior Minister Gabrovsky received instructions from the highest place - from Tsar Boris III - to stop the planned 10th March deportation of Jews. According to historian Michael Bar-Zoar, this happened after the visit of Dimitar Peshev to the Minister of the Interior on 9th March 1943.

For saving 8,000 Bulgarian Jews, Peshev was protected by Jewish leaders after 9th September, 1944. He maintained friendly relations with Jews until his death in 1973.

Boyan Asparuhov PhD



The Kyustendil deputies who participated in the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews

fia and Plovdiv. On the morning of 9th March, at 10 o'clock, the delegates from Kyustendil told Peshev about the danger that threatened the Jews... The night before, he learned from his colleague Dimitar Ikonov about a similar situation in Dupnitsa. Peshev responded immediately. Even before noon, he entered the office of Interior Minister Petar Gabrovski, who denied that there was any planned deportation from Kyustendil. At three o'clock in the afternoon on the same day, the Kyustendil delegation arrived at the Parliament. A group of ten people quickly formed demanding a meeting with the Prime Minister, but Bogdan Filov refused

happen in Kyustendil until the delegates revealed that they knew about the plan. In the

late afternoon of 9th March, 1943, Gabrovsky surrendered to the pressure of Peshev and the delegates telephoned Kyustendil with instructions to stop the preparations for the deportation of the Jews. An order followed to cease the operation everywhere.



House-Museum Dimitar Peshev

Thoughts on the Good We Have to Fight for

When Theodor Herzl wrote his famous book *The Jewish State* in 1895, provoked by the brutal attacks against the Jews throughout Europe, Bulgaria had just celebrated the seventeenth anniversary of its Liberation. In those years, the Jewish population in the youngest European country did not exceed 20,000 people. The majority of them, descendants of the Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain, found a good and peaceful haven in the Ottoman Empire. Anti-Semitism was not a problem for Bulgarian Jews and they enjoyed a tolerant attitude from the original Bulgarian population. After the adoption of the Tarnovo Constitution of 1879, they had equal rights in terms of the law, just like all other citizens of the country. Their participation in the Bulgarian national liberation movement and the support that not a few of them gave to the fighters against the Ottoman rule were among the main factors for the good attitude of the local people towards the Jewish community in the country. And so, while in most of the old European countries and in the Russian Empire Jews were forced to live in ghettos and endure the intolerant attitude of their fellow citizens, in Bulgaria the Jewish community felt like a full-fledged building block in the construction of the new state.

Several wars followed, in which Bulgarians and Jews were again side by side, soldiers and officers defended their fatherland and stood out

with heroism and self-denial. The entire history of the Bulgarian Jews until the adoption of the Law for the Protection of the Nation in January 1941 is in complete harmony with the aspirations of the Bulgar-

Bulgaria tried to pass with the least damage between „Scilla“ and „Charybdis“ of the great powers and seemed ready to sacrifice its Jewish population for the sake of the kingdom's survival. Maybe things real-

to destruction, they did not turn them into a hecatomb for the sake of their own survival.

Unfortunately, that was not the case for 11,343 Jews from White Sea Thrace, Northern Macedonia and Pirot, lands administered by Bulgaria at the time. The story of their senseless death will always remind us that in addition to believing in good, you have to want it and fight for it. The Bulgarians did not recognize these people as their fellow citizens and did not prevent the echelons from crossing Bulgaria on their way to doom. The bitter fact will always make us, on the day of our salvation, bow our heads in memory of those who were not saved... Therefore, for their Jews, the Bulgarians were ready to lie down on the railway tracks.

Why did Bulgaria save its Jews 80 years ago, while many other European countries failed? My short answer is – because Bulgarian Jews have always been an inseparable, fully integrated part of Bulgarian society. Apart from faith, they are no different from all other Bulgarians. They were artists, workers, teachers, doctors, lawyers, served in the army and reached high army ranks thanks to their personal qualities. They were good neighbors and did not flaunt their differences. Therefore, the anti-Jewish legislation introduced in the years of the Second World

War was not accepted by the Bulgarian society. They never understood why they had to part with their neighbors, colleagues and friends forced to wear a yellow star.

And if the state machine tried to humiliate and crush its fellow citizens through the artificially coined Law for the Protection of the Nation, through dozens of regulations with prohibitions and restrictions blocking the normal life of Bulgarian Jews, then Bulgarian society, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the intelligentsia, the aristocracy and even politicians from the governing coalition overruled with applause the anti-Jewish legislation and thus the miracle called Salvation happened! They did it because they believed that deportation was madness, harmful to the state and because they fought. Not a single Jewish-Bulgarian subject lost his or her life in the execution of the inhuman Nazi plan for the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question”.

Viktor Melamed,
Director of the Office
of the American Jewish
Committee for Bulgaria

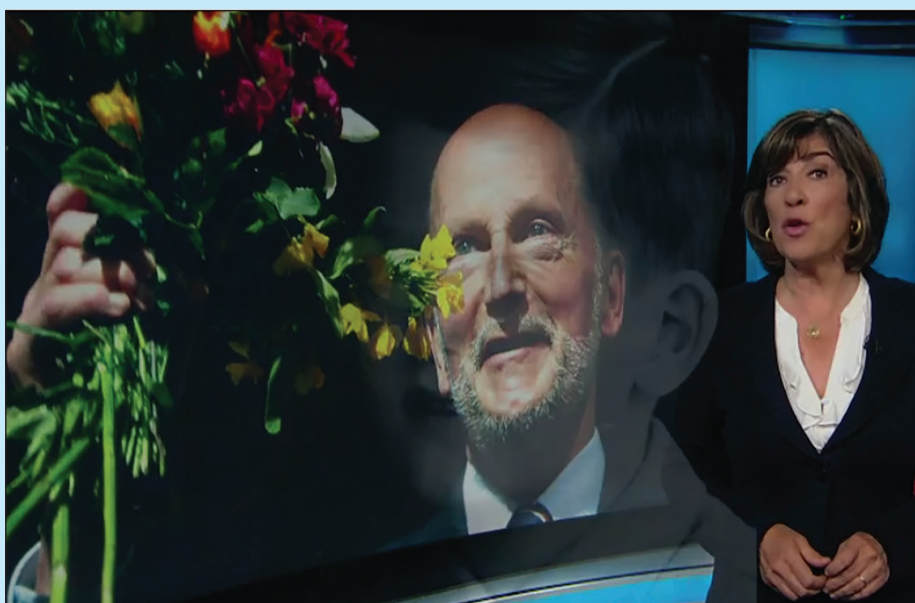


Itzhak Fintzi portrait by Andrey Daniel, both descendants of the saved Bulgarian Jews.

ian society to build a modern and prosperous state. But in the period 1941–1944, at the height of the Second World War, the life of the Jews and in our country changed dramatically. During this period,

ly would have happened as in many other European countries, if it were not for the unexpected reaction of the Bulgarians, completely ignored by the fascist ideology. They did not turn their fellow citizens over

Amazing story of how Bulgaria's Jews were saved in WWII



<https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2015/07/24/intv-amanpour-bulgaria-king-a.cnn>

There's no People to Boast such a Phenomenon

Bulgaria's confidence must be boosted

Nikolay Galabov, President of the Zionist Federation in Bulgaria

My name is Nikolay Galabov, a Bulgarian of Jewish origin. I grew up in Bulgaria. I lived for some time in Israel. Today I am developing my own business with Israeli technologies in Bulgaria.

This great anniversary should be talked about, because it is an act of salvation, historically speaking, there is no other nation, apart from Bulgaria, that can boast such a phenomenon. I grew up with my grandmother, who was a nurse and was in the Bulgarian Red Cross. She had seen the echelons that travelled to the death camps and told me a lot about what was going on. In every country there was a person who did something to help people, but in general, in many places in Europe, actions were taken to kill the Jews. However, the Bulgarian church and government stood up to the Hitler machine, even though the country was an ally of Hitler's Germany, and Bulgaria was expected to initiate the deportation of its Jews..

When I talk to my friends and business partners in Israel, they say they love Bulgaria; and they are not of Bulgarian origin. They say: "You have a very nice country, Bulgarians are extremely good people, but you have a problem with self-confidence - you don't know how to position yourself, you have inferiority complex and you rely on someone to help you, give you, speak about you. And you have to fight and defend your basic ideals."



Kibutz Gan-Shmuel, 1953

I am convinced that modern Bulgarians would also save the Jews, even though we say that there is degradation, demoralization. We can boldly set an example of how our country treats minorities or refugees passing through our territory.

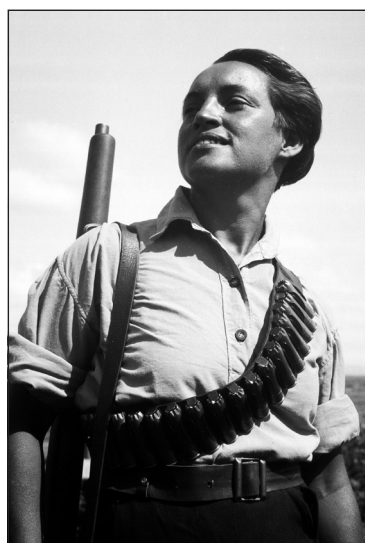
There are no attacks on minorities and refugee camps here, while in many countries there are. This is a clear argument that today's Bulgarian people criticized in all aspects by Europe, give a clear example that they know how to behave when it comes to humanity.

I lived in Israel during my formative years, but I received my secondary education in Bulgaria, where I was a member of a Zionist organization. I went to Israel and lived there in a kibbutz - these are the iconic communes. They are located in critical points and border areas and were used from the beginning to populate these areas, to create the new state, as well as for agriculture and animal breeding. Our rescued Jews went to these kibbutzim. In 1943, they did not go to the death camps, but were among the founders of the state of Israel. As soon as it was proclaimed on 14th May, 1948, the liberation war immediately began and these Bulgarian Jews took a strong part in regaining freedom and in starting the country in the desert from scratch.

When I arrived, the first thing the locals asked me was: "Are you from Bulgaria?". I have traveled a lot and I know that there is no place in the world where a Bulgarian feels as proud as in Israel. Why did I feel this way? Regardless of what kind of education or what level one is in the social hierarchy in Israel, everyone is familiar with the feat of the Bulgarian people to save the Bulgarian

preciate, know. This should also be preserved in the relations between Bulgaria and Israel, because no one is sure what dark times will come again.

In Israel I received what made me whole. You can't stay in a kibbutz, you have to work to live. I learned Hebrew by attending classes from morning to noon. I chose to work in agriculture with a tractor. In the kibbutz there were mainly Jews from Argentina, France and local Israelis, and they said: "Let the Bulgarian do the night shift, you are hardworking, don't ask questions, once your people were the first to get up...". The Bulgarian Jew there is called "Bulgarian" and bears his/her identity. The Bulgarian there



Kibbutz Guard, 1936

is famous for 3 things: honest, hardworking and modest, who does not like to stand out, prefers deeds rather than words.

In Israel, nutrition is very important. Everyone there knows about the cheese pie, the sarmi, the cheese, the salad, even if they have no connection with the Bulgarian Jews. Regarding hard work - with Argentine Jews or Jews anywhere else, everything is for tomorrow, while with Bulgarians, what's necessary is done at the moment and they are truly among the builders of the state.

The role of the army is paramount, as the country is faced with survival, surrounded by enemies and the army is the fulcrum - it guarantees peace and defense. There is a high command of Bulgarian Jews such as Moshe Dayan. I also served in the Israeli army, in the middle of my service I was a platoon leader and we even had a call sign on the radio - „Bulgarians“ when something more complicated had to be performed. It was known that our platoon had to take it

All Bulgarian Jews say: We have two hearts, we have a heart for Israel and for Bulgaria - two homelands. When I returned to study at the Technical University here, I contacted Israelis who wanted to invest in Bul-



Moshe Dayan (middle) together with the future Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin (right). During the 1947 war. Rabin was a great friend of Bulgaria

garia. We wanted to implement their innovations and technologies in Bulgaria in various industries. This is exactly how I imagine the sustainable development of Bulgaria to this day - to use the experience of rapidly developing countries such as Israel. It is no coincidence that so many software companies in Bulgaria are owned by Israelis, this shows intelligence.

I have always loved to build and today I can boldly say that I have two productions - one is in animal breeding - a cow farm that works according to Israeli methods. We can compete with the leaders in Europe in dairy production and we are even better than them. This business is successfully developing in an area with a standard - below the European average, i.e. we support the everyday life of the people themselves. And salaries are serious even compared to Sofia. My other production is in glass processing. When I returned to Bulgaria, Israelis directed me there again. I don't know if you are aware, but the largest glass processing plants are owned by Israeli families. Today, I am developing the production of ceramic glass - only two plants in the world produce it. This is, for example, the black glass for kitchen counters, which is brought to a final product in very few places in the world.

Tourism from Israel to Bulgaria is an important resource that remains in Bulgaria. Israelis like to travel, live, spend money... The other area in which Bulgaria needs help and in which we must draw

from innovations and modern trends is medicine. Israel has well developed medical tourism. Many people from all over the world travel to the country for treatment. I have personally helped friends and

compatriots who sought contact in Israeli medical facilities for diseases that threatened to end in death and gained years of life for the patients.

I also want to point out the software companies. 25-30 years ago, Israel decided to invest in high technologies, and in practice, the fruits of these startups can already be seen in space technologies, in defense, in the military industry. In Bulgaria, we have had a technical culture for many years, the people are awake. Why should the state not open pilot projects, even for the purpose of subsidizing? As can be seen from the Israeli model - they come back in the form of insurance and taxes, so it is good to work in this area. Israel is ready - they are looking for training grounds. Why should they be in Ukraine and India, when they could be in Bulgaria... The next area is security and defense. Israel has a strong army, modern weapons, many countries draw experience from them, what could be better for Bulgaria to do the same?

Exchange in the field of culture is also very important - Israel has an ancient culture, as does Bulgaria. While many countries have only 200-300 years of history, we can only be proud of our long-standing ancestry. We have a basis for raising self-esteem and we must constantly work in this direction.

David Harris

On March 10, we recall that 80 years ago an amazing rescue took place

BULGARIA was on the wrong side of WW2, but defied Hitler by refusing to deport 50,000 Jews to the death camps.

50,000 lives were saved.

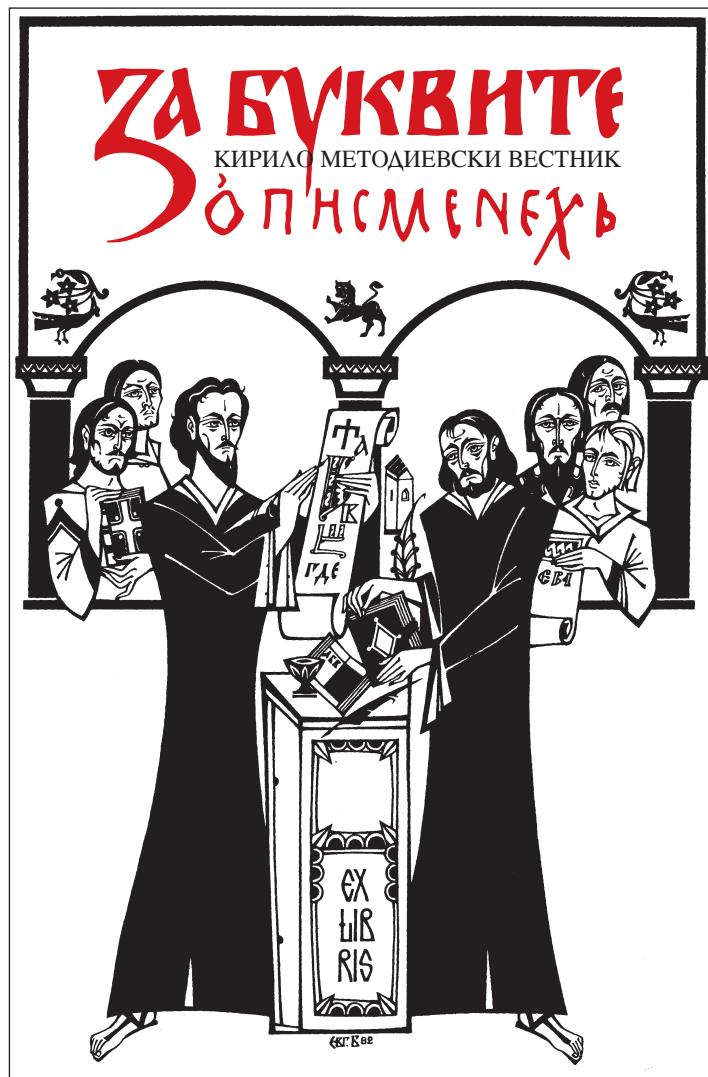
How many more Jews could've been saved had more nations acted similarly?



David Harris is an American political activist who served as the CEO of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), one of the oldest Jewish advocacy organizations in the United States.



Prayer for peace in the Central Sofia Synagogue
Photos: BTV News



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Saving the Bulgarian Jews is a fulfilled
Christian and human duty. And where
there is a duty fulfilled, there is no merit.

Tikhon, Bishop of Tiveriopol,
patriarchal vicar

120 Years of Diplomatic Relations between Bulgaria and the USA

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