

“Incomprehension of the Nature of the Race Question”: Saving the Bulgarian Jews from the Holocaust

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Човешеството стана свидетел на великите възможности и способностите на расите при втората световна война на XX век, но едно от най-важните действия беше извършено на европейската еврейство, Хитлеристкият или Шоа. В съответствие със своите изключителни способности и расова и расова борба, изключително изключително на територията, в изключително на територията за “изключително решение на еврейския въпрос”, в Германия, в окупирания Европа, в съответните държави. Еврейите бяха подложени на изключително и дискриминация, изключително от собственост, най-сетне деторнирани в лагерите на смъртта, където бяха изключително с тях, изключително от тях, бяха изключително.

Имаме обаче два изключително в изключително решение на изключително на европейската еврейство. Народите на Дания и България помислиха за себе си и да спасят своите еврейски съгражданици. Данията успява да спаси своите еврейски граждани в неутралния Штарп, българските еврейци остават в страната и след войната изключително брой бяха дадени по-големи (поне в старите предели на България). Българите обаче, не изключително решение проваля изключително закони, сътрудничеше с нацистките власти в изключително плановете за “изключително решение” и деторнира 11,000 еврейци от Българската Тракия и Македония (под временна българска управление), макар да бяха деторнирани еврейците от “старите предели” през пролетта на 1943 г., българските еврейци се изключително и осуждени изключително плановете.

Макар, че България имаха свои фашисти, както навсякъде в Европа, изключително от българските еврейци еврейци редом с евреи, циганци, гърци, турци и други народности, бяха изключително на расови предразсъдъци и омраза. Българското общество, предизвикано за изключително на деторнирането, като се помисли за заместител-председател на Народното събрание Димитар Попов (“човекът, който спечи Хитлер”, както го нарича Габриел Елиас), да Съюза на писателите, Съветски Съюз на Провославната Църква, изключително обичаещи граждани, изключително проваля и постави да бъдат еврейци “изключително на смъртта”. Съветите еврейци организираха изключително демократични (следва да се изключително, че еврейците бяха изключително част от борбата на Съпротивата). Провославната изключително на Йовдан Филев и Калеманджиев по еврейските еврейци изключително набор, освен да спасяват деторнирането. Сред многобройните еврейци цар Борис III бяха изключително към тях. Еврейците изключително бяха изключително в изключително и лагер изключително да бяха изключително да работят в специални изключително групи, българските еврейци изключително войната без изключително на чуждите еврейци, за да изключително масово в Държавна Изреша, следва след еврейци. Там на еврейци действа изключително и еврейците изключително, без да забравят или да изключително изключително еврейци със страната, и както бяха родени.



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The genocide of the peoples and ethnic groups labeled as *Untermenschen* by the fanatic Nazi leaders was one of the most horrible events of the 20th century. But the most horrible, if any gradation of inhumanity is possible, was the Holocaust or Shoa of the Jewish people – about 6 million Jews perished – gassed, executed, starved to death in the Nazi death camps and in the Nazi satellite-countries of Europe. There was, however, an anomaly, as the American historian Frederick Chary calls it, in the application of Hitler's *Endloesung* ("Final Solution")¹.

It was the case of Bulgaria, the only Nazi satellite country where at the end of World War II there were more Jews living than before it started. "In the general tragedy of the war years it would seem improbable that the Jewish community of a small nation could escape annihilation – especially in a country which was part of the Axis alliance"².

The co-existence of Jews and Bulgarians in the Balkan Peninsula has a centuries-long history. Part of Jewish diaspora after the subjugation of Judaea by the Romans directed its path to the Balkans, and the presence of Jews in today's Bulgarian lands was recorded from at least from the 2nd century A.D. (this is shown by the tombstone of the archsynagogue that Josephus found at Oescus, now the village of Gigen, on the river Iskar, near the Danube). During the Middle Ages there were Jewish colonies in the major Bulgarian cities: there were Jewish quarters in Veliko Turnovo (capital of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, 12th-14th centuries), Serdica (now Sofia, present capital of the country), Silistra, Nikopol, Philippopolis (now Plovdiv). Their treatment was not, however, invariably tolerant. In 1360, for instance, the Bulgarian Tzar Ivan Aleksandur himself presided a church council which condemned the Jews and banned them from the kingdom³.

In any case, the banishment does not seem to have been rigorously applied, for a few years after the council a large group of Jews expelled from Nuremberg settled in Serdica (Sofia), and founded their synagogue which existed until the 20th century there. Ironically enough, Tzar Ivan Alexandur fell in love with a beautiful Jewess, Sarah (or Theodora as she was named as a convert to Christianity). He married her, divorcing his wife, daughter of the

prince of Wallachia. Thus his son Ivan Shisman (1371-1393), under whom Bulgaria lost its independence for the next five centuries, was half Jewish (and consequently his nephew, son of his sister Kera Tamara, the Ottoman Sultan Bayazet I, a quarter Jewish) ⁴.

After the banishment of the Jews from Spain and Portugal at the end of the 15th century a great number of them found refuge in the Ottoman Empire, including in the Bulgarian lands. There was climate of religious toleration in that Empire, incomparable to the conditions in most of Western Europe. The Jews enjoyed the status of a separate *millet* (religious community with certain degree of autonomy in communal and religious matters) under the Chief Rabbi of Constantinople. Jews were active in the Ottoman trade with Western Europe, especially with Venice. Some of them became very rich and were forbidden by Sultan Murad III to display their wealth (wearing silks and gold jewels), and were obliged to wear green caps to be distinguished from the Ottoman masters. Bulgarian Jewry was a mosaic of various groups which came from different European countries – Greek (Romagnotes), Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, Hungarian, Italian Jews, as well as Judeo-Khazars, but the great majority of them were Sephardic Jews (from the biblical name of Spain – Sepharad) or “Francos” from the Iberian countries, speaking a language based on the Spanish-Castilian dialect “Ladino”, or “Espagnol language”. The first census in the Principality of Bulgaria in 1881 showed that the Spanish Jews were the country’s fourth largest minority, numbering 14,020 ⁵. Rich Jews were few, most Jews living in the poorest quarters of Bulgarian towns were small shopkeepers, artisans, pedlars, and manual workers.

In 1878 Bulgaria was at last liberated from Ottoman domination; a free Principality was formed north of the Balkan Mountains and South Bulgaria, named Eastern Roumelia, got administrative autonomy under the Sultan (the two Bulgarias were united after a revolution at Plovdiv in 1885). At that time the largest Jewish community lived in Sofia (about 1/4 of its 20,000 inhabitants). The Constitution of the Principality of Bulgaria (adopted at Veliko Turnovo in 1879, and known as the Turnovo Constitution) introduced a liberal political regime, guaranteeing political equality of ethnic and religious minorities. The Jewish community played an important part not only in the economic but also in the political and cultural life of the new Bulgaria. Gabriel Almozino of Sofia was appointed deputy the Constituent Assembly and in 1880 he was appointed officially Chief Rabbi, receiving a government subsidy under a law confirming the autonomy of minorities in matters of religion and education. Pavel Gabe, an Askenazi Jew who had emigrated from Poland, became the first Jew elected member of the Bulgarian Narodno Subranie (Parliament), but his election was turned down, as was the case with Lionel de Rotschild in Britain several decades earlier. His daughter Dora Gabe (1886-1983) became one of the most prominent Bulgarian poetesses. In 1896 the sculptor Boris Schatz (a Russian Jew) was appointed director of the Academy of Art in Sofia. Chief Rabbi Dr. Marcus Ehrenpreis was sent on important diplomatic missions in Europe and consequently decorated with the order of civil merit ⁶. The Bulgarian composer of Jewish origin Pancho Vladigerov worked successfully in Germany, and became one of founders of the Conservatory in Sofia.

Soon after Theodor Herzl launched the idea of setting up a Jewish national homeland, Zionism became popular among the Bulgarian Jews. In 1895 Herzl visited Sofia and was received by Prince Ferdinand I of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha; the next year the first Zionist society was set up and two years later the first group of Bulgarian Jews headed for Palestine.

During the first three decades of the 20th century more than dozen Zionist organizations were established – women’s, youth, sport, philanthropic. In 1909 the Bulgarian royal family was present at the consecration of the impressive new synagogue in Sofia (the third largest in Europe and one of the most beautiful).

Jews took part in the wars of Bulgaria ever since the Serbo-Bulgarian one in 1885. Several Jews became officers in the army, the highest rank reached by three Jewish officers being that of colonel. 952 Jews fell in the wars for national liberation and unification, and in World War I. As a rule Jews stayed aloof from Bulgarian politics, with some exceptions (Prof. Josif Fadenhecht, one of the leaders of the Radical Party, was Minister of Justice in 1918).

Not that Bulgaria was a kind of a happy Arcadia in terms of ethno-religious relations or was a country “free of anti-Semitism”, as the German scholar Wolf Oschlies claims⁷. Jews, due to their religion and specific culture were traditionally perceived as very embodiment of “the other” in Bulgarian folklore. Manifestations of anti-Semitism or Judaeophobia, however, were much weaker than in any other Central or East-European countries; they were mostly induced from without and of imitative nature. As elsewhere in the area there were incidental cases of lawsuits based on the notorious “blood libel” in Bulgaria (in the towns of Pazardjik in 1884, in Vratza in 1890, in Lom in 1893, in Kyustendil in 1904; in Vratza, Dr Konstantin Stoilov, the prominent lawyer and future prime-minister was the defending attorney). Since the early 1890s Nikola Mitakov started the publication of a vociferous but short-lived anti-Semitic periodical “Bulgaria For Bulgarians Only” (1893-1894), that is “Bulgaria without Jews”⁸. Anti-Semitic agitation was continued with sheets of similar type accusing Jews being inimical to Bulgarian nation and state, citing most often the alleged role the British Prime-Minister, the “Jew” Benjamin Disraeli, played at the Berlin Congress.

The Paris Peace Conference brought not peace, but only a 20-years’ truce, as even the Allied commander-in-chief, the French Marshall Foch, admitted. Bulgaria, as the Central Powers were punished and humiliated, losing about 10% of its territory and overburdened by a huge war indemnity of 2,250,000 gold francs that could *not* be paid. Some 300,000 refugees came from Macedonia and Thrace adding to the economic and political problems of the country. As a consequence Bulgaria’s foreign policy was by necessity revisionist. The political situation during the inter-war period was marked by deep crisis, liberal democracy as all over Eastern and Central Europe was on the retreat, authoritarian regimes were imposed in almost all countries from the Baltic to the Adriatic Sea. Tzar Ferdinand abdicated and his son Boris III ascended. Unlike his father, Boris was of modest manners, used to mix with common people, drove automobiles and locomotives, and was quite popular with his people. But he narrowly escaped death in the civil war raging for two decades, and his main preoccupation in the storm centre of the Balkans was to save his life and the dynasty. He acquired the ability to manoeuvre among different political factions, to procrastinate and to avoid personal responsibility.

There was sharp political polarization in the country, from the Communists and Anarchists on the extreme left to chauvinist pro-Fascist and pro-Nazi movements and groups on the right. After 1919 the country was ruled by a strong government of the Bulgarian Agrarian



Fig. 1
Metropolitan Stefan of Sofia and Tzar Boris III.

National Union (80% of the Bulgarians were then living on the land). A coup organized by the secret Military League and group of traditional parties, known as National Accord, in 1923 brought down Prime Minister Alexandur Stamboliyski, who displayed dictatorial tendencies. This marked the beginning of a virtual civil war lasting for the next twenty years. In September the same year the Communists, instigated by the Comintern, attempted an armed uprising which ended in failure, but resulted in their party being banished. After a brief return to democracy in the early 1930s, another coup of the Military League and right-wing intellectuals of pro-Fascist leanings banned all political parties and tried to reorganize the political system on authoritarian lines. A couple of years later these were in turn outmaneuvered and ousted from power by Tzar Boris III, who by 1936 was in complete control of the country and after that exercised power solely in what was termed “controlled democracy”. The Turnovo Constitution was practically suspended but the Subranie continued its existence: it was composed mostly of supporters of the governments appointed by the Tzar, the MPs being regarded as individuals rather than as party politicians.

After the mid-1920s not only chauvinist and pro-Fascist but also anti-Semitic propaganda was intensified. Jews were represented at the same time as envied capitalists and as embodiment of Bolshevik evil, “since Marx, like Disraeli before him, symbolized Jewish treachery”⁹.

During the inter-war period the Jewish community was growing slowly – 43,000 (0.9% out of total population of 4,850,000) in 1920, to 48,000 (0.8% out of total population of 6,080,000) in 1934. Of these more than half (about 25,000) were living in the capital, Sofia, the Jewish Communities in other cities numbering between 1,000 and 7,000. Ninety per cent of them were born in Bulgaria, 92% being Bulgarian subjects. Bankers and big businessmen were few; out of 49,000 Jews some 40,000 were workers, artisans,

petty tradesmen, pedlars¹⁰. Their presence in business and trade was not significant; out of 80,000 of the country's tradesmen in the 1930s the Jews only 1999 or 5.17%. Jews along with Greeks and Armenians were historically the country's traders, but there only a few rich persons among them. Most were specialized in foreign and tobacco trade. Out of 2,794 physicians in the country in 1926, 145 were Jewish, and as for lawyers only 77 out of 3,600 were Jewish¹¹.

There was a tendency in Bulgarian society, especially in certain circles of the ruling elite and intellectuals, to seek for an authoritarian, "right-wing" solution to the political problems of the interwar period, but Bulgarian Fascism never became a mass movement (as in the neighboring countries)¹². There were some proto-Fascist, quasi-Fascist or Fascist and Nazi style groups (the *Kubrat*, an organization, named after Khan Kubrat – the ruler of the Proto-Bulgarians and founder of the 'Great Bulgaria' in the steppes between the Black Sea and Azov Sea in the 6th century A.D. – the *Ratnitsi za napreduka na bulgarshinata* [Fighters for the Advancement of the Bulgarian Spirit], the Union of the National Legions, the Union of Bulgarian Fascists, *Rodna Zashchita* [Bulgarian Homeland Defense], the Bulgarian National Socialist Party, etc.), which had connections with German organizations, but with exception of the National Social Movement of Professor Alexandur Tsankov they never had anything close to mass following. In most cases these groups and movements habitually employed "anti- plutocrat" or anti-Semitic rhetoric, and tried to foster animosity against the Jews. They usually claimed that banking, commerce and the free professions were dominated by the Jews, who being a cosmopolitan element acted against the nation's interests. Brochures also appeared, plagiarizing Nazi racist doctrines, but their effect on Bulgarian society, traditionally tolerant to ethnic minorities and foreign to any racist notions was minimal¹³. On September 20, 1939 there was an attempt to stage an imitation of the "Kristallnacht" in the street of Sofia, smashing the windows of Jewish shops.

At the same time, leading Bulgarian intellectual figures as Dimitur Mihalchev, professor of philosophy at Sofia University, founder and editor of the influential "Philosophical Review" around which much of the intellectual elite was gathered, and Metodi Popov, professor of biology, countered the racist propaganda, showing in their articles and books that the pseudo-biologist doctrines of racial inequality had no scientific basis¹⁴.

The main thrust of Bulgaria's foreign policy during the war years was revisionism, that is overturning the clauses of the Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine which set military restrictions on Bulgaria, and regaining the lost territories. Until 1939, however, it was peaceful revisionism – through seeking collaboration with the League of Nations, rapprochement with Yugoslavia and other Balkan nations. At the same time Bulgaria's economy was progressively being tied to the German one (in 1934-1939 about 69% of Bulgarian exports went to Germany, and conversely 66% of the imports came from that country). The Munich Agreement had shown that the small European nations facing the dictators could not trust the Western Powers. When World War II broke out, Bulgaria declared neutrality but it was impossible for the small Balkan country to stay out of the conflict for long¹⁵.

At the same time the beginning of the war and the Nazi-Soviet pact gave Bulgaria, courted by both dictators, the opportunity to regain some of the territories lost after World War I, following the Vienna Arbitration. Bulgaria was given back South Dobrudja by Rumania in September 1940. Stalin's Russia regarded Bulgaria as belonging to her sphere of influ-

ence, and in November-December 1940 she offered Bulgaria a treaty of guarantees, a mutual defense treaty and Soviet military assistance. At the same time the pressure on the Bulgarian government to join the Three Partite Pact (Germany, Italy, Japan), signed in September 1940, increased. Bulgaria, willing to revise the punitive treaty of Neuilly and to get territorial concessions, considered her rightful possession, from her neighbours, pinned her hopes on Hitler's Germany. The country became a passive and unwilling ally of Germany, but assistance on Hitler's part had a price. One element of it was the attitude towards the Jewish population, and the introduction of anti-Semitic legislation.

Under these circumstances the pro-German Bogdan Filov government, in which the Minister of the Interior was Petur Gabrovski, one of the leaders of the most virulent anti-Semitic group, the *Ratnitsi*, began anti-Jewish actions and preparation of legislation resembling the infamous Nuremberg Laws. An official of that ministry, Alexandur Belev, was sent to Germany to study them¹⁶. After the late 1930s anti-Jewish laws were introduced in the Central and South-East European countries allied or dependent on Nazi Germany (Hungary, Slovakia, Rumania). The Defense of the Nation Bill published in mid-October 1940 regarded "secret and international organizations" (Masons, Rotarians, Boyscouts, the YMCA, etc.) and seditious activities, but its main thrust was to limit severely the civic and political rights of the Jews. It imitated the Nazi Nuremberg Laws but with certain local modifications: "Jews" were defined not by "blood" but by religious affiliation. In view of the country's history and traditions it would have been ridiculous to speak in Bulgaria of racial



Fig. 2
Jewish Work Unit, with an officer, 1942.

purity and Arian superiority¹⁷. According to the bill Jews were denied access to business, professions, state and public offices and education. Jews, that is, persons having at least one parent of the Israelite faith, could not take part in parliamentary and local government elections or be elected in any public bodies, even non-government and philanthropic ones, to take any positions in state, local government institutions, to be members of associations of journalists, writers, artists, musicians, etc. Jews were forbidden to marry or enter into extramarital relations with persons of Bulgarian origin. They had to bear only Jewish names, and not assume family names with typical Bulgarian endings. Jews could not be granted Bulgarian citizenship. They were not permitted to reside in the capital or to change their place of residence according to their choice. Jews were forbidden to own agricultural property, to head companies or to be members of their boards, to invest in theatres, cinemas, newspapers, publishing houses or to be at their head. They could not hire Bulgarian servants. Quotas were set on the numbers of Jewish students at university, the share of Jews in commerce and industry, or in professions was not to be more than 1 per cent, in accordance with their proportion in the country's total population. Only those Jews who were converted to Christianity, had fought as volunteers in the wars or those having military decorations, were exempt from some of these limitations¹⁸.

The bill was sent also to the Jewish Consistory, and its leaders after the initial shock started a vigorous campaign against it. The Chairman of the Jewish Consistory Josif Geron sent a letter to the President of the Subranie in which the bill was defined as "not only anti-constitutional, but anti-social and anti-human", a return to the Middle Ages, when there was no culture, nor enlightenment. The claim that the Jews were a "menace" was denounced as absurd and ridiculous: they constituted only 0.7% of Bulgarian population, the only Jewish owned bank was a cooperative one, and the great majority of the Jews were manual workers, petty traders and pedlars, living in poverty in the outlying quarters of the capital¹⁹.

The bill was supported by some ultra-nationalist organizations like that of the *Ratnitsi*, the Legion, the Union of the Bulgarian Reserve Officers, the Union of the Bulgarian Non-commissioned Reserve Officers, the National Students' Union, the Father Paisii All-Bulgarian Youth Movement. At the same time it provoked an outburst of protest from different sections of the Bulgarian society, the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Lawyers' Union, the Bulgarian Physicians' Union, the Union of Artists' Associations, twenty-one Bulgarian writers, well-known public figures, including three former party leaders and prime-ministers, as well as numerous groups and individual ordinary citizens.

In their appeal to the Parliament and the Council of Ministers twenty-one distinguished Bulgarian writers and poets denounced the Bill as "extremely detrimental to our nation", saying that it would "enslave a part of Bulgarian citizens and will remain a black page in our modern history". They pointed out that by imitating foreign models a "dangerous path" would be trodden leading to the Bulgarians' self-denial as a "free and cultured nation"²⁰. The Executive Committee of the Lawyers' Union demanded rejection of the Bill as "unneeded, harmful to the society and contrary to basic legal order and to justice... The Bulgarian Constitution expressly forbids dividing the citizens into inferior and superior categories. All Bulgarian citizens are equal before the law. All Bulgarian citizens enjoy politi-

cal rights and all residents – civic rights ... Passing of the Bill quite evidently would be a violation of the Constitution...”²¹.

The undisputed leader of the protest became the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Its supreme organ, the Holy Synod, took an uncompromising stand against the Defense of Nation Bill, and the discriminatory measures against the Jews. In response to the government's intention to introduce the Bill, and to a letter of the Central Jewish Consistory, the bishops devoted several meetings in November 1940 to their discussion. The Metropolitans Stefan of Sofia, Kiril of Plovdiv (future Patriarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church), Michail of Dorostolo-Cherven, Paisiy of Lovech, pointed out that Bulgarian Jews were good and loyal citizen, who had shown themselves patriots in the wars. Their persecution only because of their race and faith would “discredit the small and unjustly treated Bulgarian nation”, generally tolerant of other nationalities and cherishing the ideals of justice and humanity. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church had to confirm the greatness of its divine mission by defending innocent Jews against persecutions. Memorandums to that effect were sent and special delegations of the Holy Synod met Tzar Boris III and the Prime Minister Filov to demand exemption of the Christened Jews from discriminatory measures and to plea in favour of those of Mosaic faith, between November 1940 and April 1941²². Eventually the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church refused to obey the provisions of the Defense of Nation Act and annul marriages between Christians and Jews as being contrary to its rules, and it demanded that the Minister of the Interior alter the law.

The Bill was debated during six sittings between November 1940 and January 1941, and fully supported by the members of the pro-government majority in the Assembly. Their arguments ranged from historical ones, the evils done to the Bulgarian nation by Jews, from the legend of opening the gates of the medieval capital Turnovo before the Turks by a treacherous Jew to the policies of the British prime-minister Benjamin Disraeli, allegedly responsible for destroying ‘Great Bulgaria’ at the Berlin Congress (as did Kroum Mitakov)²³, to extolling the Nazi racist doctrines, and Adolf Hitler, the ‘liberator of the world’ from the bondage of Judaeo-Masonry and capitalism (Deni Kostov, Dr. Petur Shishkov)²⁴.

During the debates on the Bill it was sharply criticized by a few but distinguished members of parliament. The former leader of the former Democratic Party and ex-prime-minister Nikola Mushanov pointed out that the Bill was the most flagrant violation of the liberal Turnovo constitution, as well as of the provisions of the Penal Code which envisaged punishment for inciting enmity and hatred of religious, ethnic and other groups of the population. He also stressed that the principles of racism were foreign to Bulgarians’ mindset and morality. Races were God’s creation and the Bulgarians were by no means a “pure” or “superior” race. The immoral and unhuman treatment of the Jews meant not defending the nation but destroying its most valuable qualities, “humaneness and humane treatment of the minorities”²⁵.

Prof. Petko Stainov, university lecturer and theoretician of jurisprudence, pointed out that the Bill was not only unconstitutional, suspending its provisions of equality of all Bulgarian subjects, but that racism and anti-Semitism were contrary to the nation’s dignity and tolerant spirit. He also ridiculed the concept of “pure race” as mystification and nonsense, and refuted the argument that the Jews, who played an insignificant role in the country’s poli-



Fig. 3
Jews handing over their radio sets,
1942.

tics, economic and cultural life, posed any threat to the nation²⁶. Communist deputies, Dr. Lyuben Dyukmedjiev and Todor Polyakov, also criticized the Bill as 'anti-social, immoral and anti-human', and spoke in defense of the Jews. Polyakov called it the 'Defamation of the Nation Bill'²⁷.

Even the Minister of the Interior, in whose name the Bill was introduced, Petur Gabrovski, in his concluding speech, explained the measure not with arguments of racism, racial purity or superiority, but with the necessity of strengthening 'national consciousness' and safeguarding it against Jewish 'internationalism and cosmopolitanism', liberalism and 'money cult'²⁸.

The Defense of the Nation Act was signed by the Boris III and went into force on January 23, 1941. With the act and the accompanying measures taken later (the Act on Taxing Property of the Persons of Jewish Origin, the Act Empowering the Council of Ministers to Take Measures towards Solving the Jewish Question, the Rules Regarding Enforcement the Defense of the Nation Act, etc.), Jews were deprived of their political, civic, economic and cultural rights. They were effectively ousted from the national economy and their property was expropriated and put at the disposal of the newly established Commissariat of Jewish Affairs. Their names were to be changed according to a list made by the Commissariat and they were ordered to wear the yellow Star of David on their lapels. All able-bodied males at the age between 20 and 46 were mobilized and sent to the country to build and mend roads and railways, drain marshlands, work in quarries, brickyards, etc., without any payment²⁹.

After the defeat of the Italians in Greece in December 1940, Hitler felt obliged to assist Mussolini, which required the passage of German armies through Bulgaria ("Operation Marita"). Facing the dilemma of siding with Germans or occupation, Boris III and his Prime Minister Prof. Bogdan Filov opted for the former. On January 20, 1941 the Council of Ministers approved the German passage unanimously, and on March 1, the Prime Minister signed in Vienna a treaty of adherence to the Axis Powers. The German and

Italian foreign ministers Joachim von Ribbentrop and Galeazzo Ciano handed Filov secret letters promising that with the delimitation of the borders in the Balkans after the war Bulgaria would be given an outlet to the Aegean between the mouths of the Maritsa and Struma rivers. After the lightning campaigns of the Wehrmacht in Greece and Yugoslavia the Germans demanded that Bulgarian troops occupy Thrace and Macedonia. Though the occupation was not recognized in any official document, the 'new lands' were considered part of the Bulgarian kingdom, and Boris III was hailed as "Tsar-Unifier". By its decree of July 31, 1941, arranging the matters of nationality, however, the Council of Ministers denied the Jews of the 'new lands' rights of citizenship³⁰. At the same time an act empowering the Council of Ministers to take any measures deemed necessary towards the solution the Jewish problem deprived the National Assembly of legislative power in that respect.

The deal with Hitler was at first quite favourable for Boris III: Bulgarian troops were used as an occupying force in Macedonia and Aegean Thrace, promised to Bulgaria after the war. Even after joining the Axis Powers in March 1941 Bulgaria did not declare war on Britain and the USA until the end of the year, never broke off diplomatic relations with Soviet Union and Boris III, who knew well the pro-Russian feelings of his people, did not allow even a token corps of "volunteers" on the Eastern front. On December 12, 1941 under the pressure of Hitler, the Bulgarian government declared war on the United States and Great Britain, believing it would be a symbolic one. But with the Allied bombings of Bulgarian cities from November 1943 to the spring of 1944, the "symbolic" war turned into quite a real one.

In accordance with the decision of the 'Wansee Conference' (taken at the headquarters of the Reichsicherheitshauptamt at am Grossen Wansee Street in Berlin under Reinhard Heidrich) on January 20, 1942, for the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe", that is, the genocide of 11 million Jews, the German legation in Sofia was instructed on



Fig. 4
Vulka Goranova.

August 19 to start negotiation for deportation of the Bulgarian Jews. Ten days later the Council of Ministers established Commissariat of Jewish Affairs at the Ministry of the Interior, headed by Alexander Belev, who had been in Germany to get acquainted with the methods of dealing with the 'Jewish question'. The Commissariat, with a staff of 130 officers, which used funds expropriated from Jews, took complete control over the life of their victims. Within three months the diplomatic arrangements for the deportation were completed. The unsettled status of the 'new lands' made possible the immediate implementation of the 'Final Solution' there, despite of the fact that the Jews in the new territories were under Bulgarian jurisdiction and administration.

On January 23, 1943, the German ambassador in Sofia Adolf Heinz Beckerle, former chief of police in Frankfurt and a fanatic Nazi, met the Minister of the Interior Gabrovski. They agreed to start the process of deportation in the 'new lands', while Gabrovski insisted that the Jews within the 'old borders' should be deported at a later date because of the need of work force in Bulgaria. Michael Bar-Zohar believes that both the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior deflected deportation at the instructions of the Tzar himself, who was not anti-Semitic³¹. At the same time Gabrovski refused to help organizing an anti-Jewish exhibition in Sofia. Beckerle was shocked with the absence of anti-Semitism in Bulgaria. "The Bulgarian public does not understand the true meaning of the Jewish problem ... The ordinary Bulgarian who is growing up side by side with Greeks, Armenians, Turks and Gypsies, does not understand the purpose of the struggle against the Jewry, moreover the very nature of race question is incomprehensible to him", he wrote in a report to his superiors in Berlin³².

Finally, the Council of Ministers decided on February 12, 1943, to start the deportation 12,000 Jews from Thrace and Macedonia, as well 'undesireable Jews' from within 'old' Bulgarian lands, so as to reach the total number of 20,000³³. By the beginning of March technical problems were arranged by special decrees of the Bulgarian government. The officers from the Commissariat of Jewish Affairs, police officers and soldiers, as well a certain number of Gestapo guards crammed hapless Jews in warehouses and then into horse-boxes, and on March 4th the Jews from Aegean Thrace were on their way to the death-camps in Poland, to be followed at the end of the month by those from Macedonia. Altogether 11,343 Jews from the 'new lands' were deported (4,221 from Aegean Thrace and 7,122 from Macedonia). It proved comparatively easy to deport the Jews from the 'new lands' who were not considered Bulgarian subjects (they were treated respectively as Greek and Yugoslav subjects, unlike those from Dobrudja, annexed by Bulgaria according to an international treaty); they were isolated and had few contacts even with their co-religionists in Bulgaria³⁴.

The Metropolitan of Sofia, Stefan, accidentally witnessed the deportation, and telegraphed the Tzar requesting that the Jews be treated as humans and not as cattle, and begged him to alleviate their suffering and not to send them to Poland. The Tzar responded that he would do everything that was possible and lawful, but nothing happened. From March 31 to April 2 Boris III was in Germany to meet Hitler. Von Ribbentrop informed Beckerle that the Tzar had agreed only to the deportation of the Jews from Macedonia and Thrace, as well of certain number of "Bolshevik-Communist elements" from Bulgaria proper, while he insisted on retaining the rest, 25,000 Jews, in concentration camps so as to use them in building roads³⁵.



Fig. 5
Dimitur Peshev, Vice-President of the Bulgarian National Assembly, the 'man who stopped Hitler'.

At the beginning of March 1943 rumours were spread in the town of Kyustendil (some 90 kilometres south-west of Sofia), that after the deportation of the Jews from Macedonia and Thrace it would be the turn of the local ones. On March 9, a delegation of alarmed Bulgarians contacted the Vice-President of the National Assembly, Dimitur Peshev, himself member for Kyustendil. After the Prime Minister refused to meet the Kyustendil delegation and Peshev, the latter phoned the Minister of the Interior, who at first denied the intended deportation, but after being confronted by a group of MPs led by Peshev, Gabrovski ordered the district governor to suspend action temporarily. The same instructions were sent to authorities throughout the country to the utmost regret of the German ambassador³⁶. Dimitur Peshev understood that deportation was only temporarily suspended and in order to avert its resumption decided to mobilize a sufficient number of deputies. He initiated a collective letter of protest sent to Prime Minister Filov on March 17th, eventually signed by 43 members of the pro-government majority in the Assembly. The intention of expelling the Jews, warned Peshev, would "stain the nation's reputation politically and morally, and would invalidate all the arguments to which the country might resort in its international relations in future". Any further steps might provoke accusations of mass murder for which the signatories disclaimed any responsibility. In conclusion they demanded maintaining "at least the elementary rule of law, as necessary for the government as is air for life"³⁷. The letter was signed by about 1/3 of the pro-government members of parliament, as well as by some extreme right and pro-German members such as the ex-Prime Minister and leader of the National Social Movement Aleksandur Tsankov – a symptom of a serious rift within the ruling majority. The MPs who had signed the letter

were put under great pressure by the Prime Minister, and 13 of them withdrew their signatures. Dimitur Peshev, the “man who stopped Hitler”, as Gabriele Nissim called him, was subjected to the humiliating procedure of a vote of confidence and divested of his post of Vice-President of the Assembly.

In the meantime wider groups of the public opinion also intervened in favour of the Jews threatened with deportation. The leader of the former Radical Democratic Party, Stoyan Kosturkov, appealed to the Tzar to stop the cruel measures of the government, which were acts of “barbarity and negation of elementary humanity”. Warned the elder statesman: “History will not forgive us, but will stigmatize us as merciless barbarians. It is still not too late to avoid that”³⁸.

The Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church intervened again, the protest against deportation expressed in no uncertain terms by all the bishops at an extraordinary session convened on April 2, 1943. Even before that some of the hierarchs acted on their own initiative: for example, Metropolitan Kiril of Plovdiv, who upon being informed on the night of March 9 of the intended deportation of the Jews to Poland, telegraphed the Tzar, and sheltered at his residence a number of Jewish converts to Christianity, and informed the local police authorities that he would “retain freedom to act as his consciousness of prelate dictates”³⁹. Metropolitan Stefan of Sofia with the help of the local citizens and Mrs. Ekaterina Karavelova, widow of Petko Karavelov, one of the fathers of the Turnovo Constitution and formerly Prime Minister, herself a leader of the feminist movement, managed to suspend the deportation in Dupnitsa (one of the towns with a significant Jewish population). The prelates, even some of those who had previously partly accepted the Defense of the Nation Act, decided to send a memorandum to the Prime Minister and the Tzar in defense of the Jews. The Holy Synod gathered six times between April and June 1943 to discuss Jewish problems. On April 15th they met the Tzar Boris III and the Prime Minister in a conference at the Vrana Palace. Notwithstanding the Tzar’s tirades that the Jews with their spirit of profiteering and destructiveness were a menace to mankind at large, and were to be blamed for their own plight, the bishops’ delegation insisted that the Jews had to be treated according to the principles of justice and humanity, inherent to the nation’s soul⁴⁰.

The Jews found support also in the leader of the peculiar mystic and theosophic movement of the White Brotherhood, Petur Dunov, one of whose disciples, Lyubomir Lulchev, was a confidante of the superstitious and distrustful monarch⁴¹.

The suspension of the deportation in March 1943 was only temporary, and in May the government’s activities in that direction were renewed. On May 23 the Jews in Sofia (about 25,000) were informed they were to be transferred to the country (a preliminary step by the Commissariat of Jewish affairs prior to handing them over to the Germans)⁴².

The opposition in Parliament, in the face of Mushanov and Stainov, sent a letter to the Tzar protesting against internment of Sofia’s Jews. The District Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party decided to use traditional demonstrations on May 24, Sts. Cyril and Methodius Day – celebrated as holiday of Bulgarian literature and culture – to organize a protest of both Bulgarians and Jews. The district secretary Metodi Shatorov entrusted the organization to Vulka Goranova, herself twice condemned to death in absen-

tia for conspiratorial anti-government activities, and to the Jewess Berta Kalaora, also a member of the District Committee. On that day, after a speech by rabbi Daniel Zion, several thousands Jews and Bulgarians made their way to the royal palace. They were confronted by foot and mounted police, and about 400 demonstrators were arrested. Some 120 Jews, of them 30 members of the Central Consistory and other Jewish bodies, were sent as hostages to a concentration camp in Somovit (on the bank of the Danube). The Sofia demonstration of May 24 was one of the most important acts of Jewish resistance in Nazi occupied or satellite countries, second only to the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. Metropolitan Stefan of Sofia with the Chief Rabbi Daniel Hananel and Rabbi Zion tried to intervene before the Tzar, the same being done by the United Evangelical Churches of Bulgaria ⁴³.

The German ambassador Beckerle explained in one of his reports to Berlin that the reason for the failure of the deportation plans until that time lay in the “mentality of the Bulgarian nation, which lacks ideological clarity, such as we have. Grown up amidst Armenians, Greeks and Gypsies, a Bulgarian cannot find any faults with the Jews justifying special measures against them” ⁴⁴.

The situation in Europe began to change dramatically in the summer of 1943 with the Allied landing in Sicily and the German defeat in the battle of Kursk in Russia. The Axis began to crumble, and Tsar Boris III returned to Sofia on August 15 from his last meeting with Hitler at which he declined the demand to send new divisions in Greece, in a depressed mood. Two weeks later he suddenly died; the mysterious death of the 49-year-old monarch provoked suspicions that Hitler might have been responsible. His sudden death marked the beginning of a deep political crisis. A regency was established, including Filov himself. Despite increased pressure from Berlin, the Minister of the Interior in the new cabinet of Dobri Bozhilov (September 1943 to June 1944), Docho Hristov, who had personally introduced in parliament the Defense of the Nation Bill three years before, had to admit the failure to intern the Jews and advise that the matter be dropped. The head of the Commissariat of Jewish Affairs, Belev, resigned in October, and his successor announced a certain alleviation of status of the Jews (removal of the obligation to wear yellow stars, curfew, discrimination regarding visiting places of entertainment, etc.) ⁴⁵.

The next cabinet of Ivan Bagrianov (June 1 to September 2, 1944) issued a decree on August 31 amending certain provisions of the Defense of the Nation Act and the Law of August 29, 1942, but not those regarding the economic status of the Jews. The amendments were in force from September 5 on, during the next government of Konstantin Muraviev, which lasted only a week. That very day the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria, and four days later, following a coup staged primarily by the Military League, a government of the Fatherland Front headed by Kimon Georgiev, with the participation of the Zveno political circle, the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union and the Communist Party, assumed power. All anti-Jewish legislation was repealed, the politicians and functionaries responsible for the persecution of Jews (62 persons), were brought to trial by one of the sections of the so called People’s Tribunal. Two of them (including the former Commisar Belev) were condemned to death, 31 received prison sentences, and the rest were acquitted.

Bulgarian Jews survived World War II in almost the same number as in 1939, their political, civic and economic rights were restored, some Jewish Communists fully supported the new regime, but the great majority of the Jews chose to emigrate to newly created State of Israel (some 30,000 in 1948 and 1949, over 10,000 in the next five years). One of the survivors, in a letter to the historian Martin Gilbert, called the saving of the Bulgarian Jews the 'miracle of the Jewish people' ⁴⁶.

As Gabriele Nissim has pointed out, the situation in Bulgaria regarding the Jews had three significant peculiarities: the lack of anti-Semitic tradition in the country and the slight influence of the radical anti-Semitic groups; the opportunistic, non-ideological anti-Semitism of the ruling class striving to gain German support to recover Thrace and Macedonia, the Jews thus becoming a "bargaining chip" in dealing with the Nazis; the Jews not being separated from the rest of the population, so that the process of dehumanizing the victims did not take place in Bulgaria (unlike what happened in some other East European countries) ⁴⁷.

Great political controversy has emerged as to the responsibility of personalities and groups who saved the Bulgarian Jews. The debate concerns the role of Tzar Boris III, the alleged contribution of the Communists, particularly of the General Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Todor Zhivkov, who at that particular moment was a functionary responsible for some quarters of Sofia. Some historians claim that the Tzar was chiefly responsible for saving the Jews, and that he even followed a preconceived plan for misleading Hitler (Benjamin Arditi, Pashanko Dimitrov). Others believe that Hitler ordered his mysterious death since he was unwilling to send his Jews to Nazi death camps. There are historians who believe the Jews were rescued despite the Tzar, and that only pressure from within and without the country forced him to cancel the plans of deportation at the last moment. This is the opinion of N. Grinberg, M. Yulzari, N. Baruch. Others are of the opinion that the Tzar was not an avowed anti-Semite and was not willing to send Bulgarian Jews to the death camps, but that his role in their rescue was rather a passive one. For Wolf Oshlies "the entire country presented a united front to the Nazis: from the King to the Communists, Bulgarians did everything possible to protect their Jews".

The Jews of Bulgaria paid a high price in terms of physical and moral deprivation and suffering, but they never thought that the Bulgarian nation would abandon them. As the prominent Bulgarian historian Andrei Pantev pointed out, at a conference on saving the Jews, held at Sofia University in 1995, we should not ask "who" saved the Jews within Bulgaria's pre-war borders, but rather "what" saved them. Although analogies and historical parallels are slippery ground, we can try to place these facts of the relatively recent past in the context of the broad factors that characterize the historical and cultural life of the Bulgarians. Bulgaria is characterized by ethnic, cultural and even political tolerance, not motivated by petty calculation, but having moral dimensions. That tolerance begins with the neighborhood, the school and the town market-place, and had penetrated into the public and state institutions. It began with the birth of new Bulgaria at the Constituent Assembly of 1879 and survived the ordeals of nationalistic and racist hysteria, so easily instigated and manipulated during the interwar years.

Without idealizing or exaggerating this tradition, which on certain occasions was denied or breached – but never discontinued – we may say that it helped the Bulgarians to keep their human aspect even in times when their state was temporarily and involuntarily allied with one of the ominous military-political coalitions during World War II. There were traditions of human intimacy in the national state, where multicultural, multi-religious and multi-linguistic manifestations were met not with hatred or ridicule but with respect and understanding. This is part of the distinctiveness of the small but variegated Balkan world.



NOTES

- ¹ F.B. Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution, 1940-1944*, Pittsburgh - London 1972, p. XIII.
- ² *Ibid.*
- ³ Some Jewish scholars, however, deny the very existence of a council against the Jews but against the heresy of the Hebrewsants, that is, believers of the 'Jewish Gospel', who did not believe in heavenly parentage of Christ, nor in His resurrection, see: R. Levi, *Persecuted Throughout the World, Sheltered in Bulgaria*, in N. Andreeva, et al., *Bulgari i evrei*. Pt. 1 [Bulgarian and Jews], Sofia 2000, p. 162.
- ⁴ S. Mezan, *Les Juifs espagnols de Bulgarie*. Vol. I. Histoire. Ethnographie. Statistique, Sofia 1925, pp. 7, 12.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- ⁶ C. Boyadjiev, *Spasyavaneto na bulgarkite evrei prez Vtorata svetovna vojna* [The Saving of the Bulgarian Jews during World War II], Sofia: Universitetsko Izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Ohridski", 1991, p. 17.
- ⁷ W. Oschlies, *Bulgarien – Land ohne Antisemitismus*, Erlangen 1976.
- ⁸ V. Tamir, *Bulgaria and Her Jews: The History of a Dubious Symbiosis*, New York 1979, p. 118.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- ¹¹ B. Vasileva, *Evreite v Bulgaria, 1944-1952* [Jews in Bulgaria, 1944-1952], Sofia: Universitetsko Izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Ohridski", 1992; D. Cohen, *Demografsko i sotsialno-ikonomichestko polozhenie na bulgarskite evrei (1926-1946)* [Demographic and Socio-Economic Status of Bulgarian Jews (1926-1946)], in *Prouchvaniya za istoiyata na evreiskoto naselenie v bulgarskite zemi XVI-XIX vek* [Studies in the History of the Jewish Population in the Bulgarian Lands, 16th to the 19th Century], 1980, pp. 157-186. C. Boyadjiev, *Spasyavaneto na bulgarskite evrei prez Vtorata svetovna vojna* [The Saving of the Bulgarian Jews during World War II], Sofia, 1991, p. 21].
- ¹² S.G. Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition*, Madison 1980, p. 120.
- ¹³ M. Bar-Zohar, *Izvun hvatkata na Hitler: Geroichnoto spasyavane na bulgarskite evrei* [Beyond Hitler's Grasp: the Heroic Rescue of the Bulgarian Jews], Transl. from the English, Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Ohridski", 1999, p. 23.
- ¹⁴ D. Mihalchev, *Izbrani suchineniya* [Works], Sofia 1981; M. Popov, *Nasledstenost, rasa i narod* [Heredity, Race, and Nation], Sofia 1938.
- ¹⁵ S. Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, cit. 1991, p. 297; F.B. Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution*, p. 18.
- ¹⁶ Chary, *Frederick B. The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution* cit., p. 36.
- ¹⁷ In fact, the leading Bulgarian biologist Prof. Metodi Popov claimed that mixing of races, shared the view that mixing of races leads to strengthening of their functions, or luxuriation, and is, consequently, the fundamental factor in the history of any nation. See: M. Popov, *Nasledstvenost, rasa i narod* [Heredity, Race, and Nation], Sofia 1938, p. 27.
- ¹⁸ Narodno Subranie, *Stenografski dnevnitsi na XXV Obiknoveno Subranie. Vtora redovna sesiya, 1940-41* [National Assembly, Stenographic Report of the Proceedings of the XXV Ordinary National Assembly. 2nd Regular Session, 1940-41], Sofia 1941, pp. 204-207.
- ¹⁹ Bar-Zohar, *Izvun hvatkata na Hitler* cit., pp. 41-42.

- ²⁰ H. Oliver, *We Were Saved: How the Jews of Bulgaria Were Kept from the Death Camps*. Transl. from the Bulgarian, Sofia 1988, pp. 58-59.
- ²¹ Central State Historical Archive, Group 173, archival unit, 1087, folios 55-58.
- ²² A. Taneva, V. Gezenko (eds.), *Glasove v zashtita na grazhdanskoto obshtestvo. Protokoli na Svetiya Sinod na Bulgarskata pravoslavna tsurkva po evreiskiya vupros (1940-1949)* [Voices in Defence of the Civil Society: Protocols of Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church on the Jewish Question, 1940-1944], Sofia 2002, pp. 5, 11, 28, 31.
- ²³ Narodno Subranie. *Stenografski dnevnitsi na XXV Obiknoveno Subranie. Vtora redovna sesiya, 1940-41, 12 zas., 19.11.1940* [National Assembly. Stenographic Report of the Proceedings of the XXV Ordinary National Assembly. 2nd Regular Session, 1940-41, 12th sitting, 19.11.1940], Sofia 1941, pp. 237-242.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 217, 252 ff.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 237-242.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 232-233.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 689-691, 697-698, 708-709, 711, 727-728.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 256, 259.
- ²⁹ D. Cohen, *Ekspropriatsiyata na evreiskite imushtestva prez perioda na hitleriskata okupatsiya* [The Expropriation of Jewish Property during the Period of Hitlerite Occupation], *Godishnik na kulturno-prosvetnata organizatsiya na evreite* [Annuary of the Cultural and Educational Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria], Vol. 2, Sofia 1967, pp. 65-110.
- ³⁰ "Durzhaven vestnik" [Official Gazette], No. 124, April 10, 1942.
- ³¹ Bar-Zohar, *Izvun hvatkata na Hitler* cit., p. 69.
- ³² D. Cohen, *Politicheskata golgota: natsiya ne se deli* [Political Golgotha: A Nation cannot be Divided], in N. Andreeva, et al. (Comps. and eds.) *Bulgari I evrei*. Pt. 2 [Bulgarian and Jews], Sofia 2000, p. 58.
- ³³ V. Toshkova (ed.), *Iz dnevnika na Bekerle – pulnomoshthen ministur na Tretiya raih v Bulgaria* [From the Diary of Adolf Heinz Beckerle, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Third Reich in Bulgaria] Sofia 1992, p. 72.
- ³⁴ Bar-Zohar, *Izvun hvatkata na Hitler* cit., p. 87.
- ³⁵ Cohen, *Politicheskata golgota* cit. pp. 62-63, 67.
- ³⁶ N. Baruch, *Otkuput: Tzar Boris I sudbata na bulgarskite evrei* [The Ransom: Tzar Boris and the Fate of the Bulgarian Jews], Sofia: Universitetsko Izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Ohridski", 1991, p. 167-169; Toshkova, *Iz dnevnika na Bekerle* cit., p. 90.
- ³⁷ D. Cohen (Comp.), *Otselyavaneto: Sbornik ot dokumenti, 1940-1944* [The Survival: A Compilation of Documents, 1940-1944], ed. by Krastiyu Gerginov et al., Sofia 1995, pp. 312-313.
- ³⁸ D. Cohen, *Politicheskata golgota: natsiya ne se deli* [Political Golgotha: A Nation cannot Be Divided], in Andreeva, et al., *Bulgari I evrei* cit., p. 67.
- ³⁹ Cohen, *Politicheskata golgota* cit., pp. 68-69; Taneva, Gezenko, *Glasove v zashtita na gazhdanskoto obshtestvo* cit., pp. 79-88.
- ⁴⁰ Taneva, Gezenko, *Glasove v zashtita na gazhdanskoto obshtestvo* cit., pp. 101-105.
- ⁴¹ B. Filov, *Dnevnik* [Diary], Sofia 1990, p. 562; L.B. Lulchev, *Tainite na dvortsoviya zhitov. Dnevnik (1938-1944)* [The Secret of Court Life: A Diary (1938-1944)], Sofia 1992, pp. 23-25.
- ⁴² Cohen, *Ekspropriatsiyata* cit., p. 79.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-82.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- ⁴⁶ M. Gilbert, *Holokostut* [Bulgaria translation of The Holocaust, London, 1985], Sofia 2003, p. 786.
- ⁴⁷ G. Nissim, *The Man Who Made a Whole Nation Ashamed*, in A. Kovacs, A. Eszter (eds.), *Jewish Studies at the Central European University, II*, 1999-2001, Budapest 2002, pp. 137-138.



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SOURCE

Excerpts from protocols of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church on the situation of the Jews, 1940-1943.

1. From the Protocol No. 11/November 12, 1940 of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church on discussion of the letter of the Central Jewish Consistory on the situation of the Jews, and the forthcoming introduction of the Defense of Nation Bill:

...Софийски Стефан: Строго погледнато в България не съществува еврейски въпрос. За цялото време у нас, с малки изключения са добри, лоялни, коректни граждани и с гордост и радост носят и отстояват българско патриотство. Пред чуждия свят те са доказателство за българската толерантност, в не фронта на държавата се явяват като истински патриоти. Те някога не са били фанатици и мнозина са приемали драговолно покръстването, за да са единни с народа ни и по вера. Заключението е едно: всички и всички конфесии и религии да приемат коректни промени ...

Получих малко използван от културни дружества у нас, които правдиво и неопровержимо се застъпват за запазване на правата на еврейското малцинство у нас. Сръдност и в този случай има възможност да запазим многобройните си рогов и да подобрим силата и величавото на светите Божествени мисли, както се при защитилите на военните без едни вери ...

... *Metropolitan Stefan of Sofia:* Strictly speaking, a Jewish problem does not exist in Bulgaria. Happily, Jews in this country with few exceptions are good, loyal, honest citizens, who bear

with pride and uphold Bulgarian citizenship. Abroad they are a proof of Bulgarian tolerance, and on the home front they are true patriots. They have never been fanatics and a number of them have freely taken baptism, to be at one with our people even in the matters of faith. The Defense of Nation Bill is a legal and moral confusion and should be fundamentally revised ...

I have got several memorandums from cultural societies in this country, which justly and imperatively intercede in defense of the rights of the Jewish minority. The Church has in this case the opportunity to play her pacific role and to enhance the strength and greatness of its Divine mission, presenting itself a defender of the rights of the Jews persecuted without any guilt.

2. From the Protocol No. 12/November 14, 1940 of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church on discussion of the Defense of Nation Bill and setting up of a commission to draw up a memorandum to the National Assembly:

...Пловдивски Кирил: Въпросът за отношението към верите в лоял. Ние сме християни и като граждани не са. Българска църква не може да стои на почвата на се. Единство и Христовото учение за равенството на всички човеци пред Господа, без оглед на раса, пол и култура. Следователно, трябва да се въздържа да верите, първо за християните, а също и за нехристияните

Антиюдаизмът в старо явление. Среща се и преди Христа В сред християнските народи противояудейските настроения са стари. Дали ги няма сред нашия народ? Има ги в някои форми – верите са разявения Господ, гонения са се. Апостолите, проповядвали са църквата. Ние не народът ни е толерантен и верите не бива могли да са опанат, че са били или третирани у нас ...

... Софийски Стефан: У нашия народ най-християното в историята е новобата толерантност, неговото възприемство и търпимост към всички, които са били у нас, между нас, живели и дошли в нашата среда. Това ни свидетелство – покоряемостта – българският народ прояви най-добре към нещастния арабски народ, който след пленителите в Цариград намери място и човешколюбиво убавиле в България, като който и днес има своите високи способности в очите на живяния свят. В международните конференции са ни въздържали похвалени за покоряемостта му към всички малцинства, и в това отношение ние, особено като ни сравняваме с другите, имаме предимството на търпимостта. И това българският народ в своето дълго болюмоство ние могли отношения към верите ...

... Metropolitan Kiril of Plovdiv: The question of the attitude towards the Jews is self-evident. We are Christians and as prelates of the Holy Bulgarian Church we cannot but stand on the ground of the Holy Gospel and Christ's teaching of the equal worth of all human beings in the eyes of God, irrespective of their origin, race and culture. Therefore, we must intercede in defense of the Jews, firstly the Christian ones, but also of the non-Christian ones ...

Anti-Judaism is an old phenomenon. It was present even before Christ ... Anti-Jewish sentiments among the Christian nations are old. Aren't they present in our nation? They are present in a naïve form – the Jews crucified God, they persecuted the Holy Apostles, victimized the Church. Otherwise, our nation is tolerant and the Jews cannot complain about unfair treatment in this country ...

... Metropolitan Stefan of Sofia: The most noble quality in the history of our nation is its tolerance, its hospitality and latitude towards all who were with us, amongst us, residents and guests amid us. That quality, the tolerance, the Bulgarian nation has displayed in the highest

degree towards the Armenian people, which after the massacres at Constantinople, has found a quiet and humane haven in Bulgaria, an act having high value in the eyes of the philanthropic world. They have praised at international conferences our toleration towards all minorities, and in that respect, especially in comparison with the Romanians, we have the advantage of priority ...

3. From the Protocol No. 4/April 2, 1943 of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church on discussion of the attempts on part of the government to deport the Jews from the towns in the country

... Софийски Стефан: Законът за защита на нацията бе създаден по чуждо влияние, с преднамерения цел да алипоотали една част от българското гражданство – еврейското малцинство. В този отношение законът отиде до това, че извърши посегателство върху правата на българската църква, с постановлението да се забрани кръщаване на евреи, а после и венчаване с българи ... Когато питахме държавата с какво се провалява еврейта в страната ни, те не могат да ни кажат. Всичко им вземат, но когато поискали да им вземат и живота, душите и съвестта, тогава еврейте потърсва защитата на Църквата. Нико не можем да им я отнемем ...

....Врачешки Пайсий: Ние обсъждаме още на времето, когато се създаваше закон за защита на нацията, върхове за попознанието, а когато той подготвя еврейското малцинство и се изказва срещу расисткия принцип, като подчертаваме, че да се създаде закон на такъв ибейни основе, това не ще означава, а ще навреди на нацията ... Впоследствие се види, а впоследствие отново още по-ясно, че в края на крайщата законът за защита на нацията проваля в много материални аспекти, закон за военна, политическа и икономическа несправедливост — Българската църква не може да сподели расисткия принцип. Тя не може да приеме мисълта, че някой раса може да бъде лишена от човешкото право на живот, защото това е проваляне на основните начала на християнската вера.

Българската Църква казва, че не може да отплати помощ и защита на военните и несправедливите. Ако би отплатила таква помощ, пак би се отплатила от самите деца си ... Да не се лишават еврейте християнски и еврейте в страната от възможности преди на човещи и граждански и да не бъдат лишени от право да живеят в страната и от възможности за работа и за човешки живот. Оценителните постановления по отношение на еврейте – да бъдат обвинени и да не бъдат притеснени с преследвания и суровости...

... *Metropolitan Stefan of Sofia:* The Defense of Nation Law was made under foreign influence, with the deliberate aim to discredit one part of the Bulgarian citizens, the Jewish minority. In that respect, the law went as far as to encroach on the rights of the Bulgarian Church, with its provision to forbid christening of Jews, and then marriages between them and Bulgarians ... When we have asked the government, what is the guilt of the Jews in this country, they were unable to answer us. They have deprived them of everything, but when they have reached taking their lives, their souls and their conscience, then the Jews appealed to the Church for help. We cannot decline to give them that help ...

... *Metropolitan Paisiy of Vratsa:* We have discussed before, at the time when the Defense of Nation Law was made, the situation in which it placed the Jewish minority, and we have declared ourselves against the racist principle, emphasizing that to make a law based on that principle would not defend but harm the nation ... It became evident afterwards that in the end the Defense of Nation Law turned out to be an anti-Semitic law, a law for persecution, victimization and destruction of the Jews ... The Bulgarian Church cannot share the racist prin-

ciple. It cannot accept the principle that any race can be deprived of every human's right to life, for it goes against the basic principles of the Christian faith ...

The Bulgarian Church considers that it cannot refuse to help and defend the persecuted and victimized people. Declining to give such a help would equate to its self-denial ... [We appeal] not to deprive the Jews-Christians and the other Jews in country of their elementary rights of men and citizens, of the right to live in this country, of the opportunity to work and enjoy human existence. The discriminatory provisions regarding the Jews should be modified and not implemented in an overzealous and harsh way ...

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