

The Jews in Bulgaria -1941-1944*

Chronological development of events

By Nir Baruch

There were three major factors at the base of King Boris III's political concept during his 25 years in power (October 1918 - August 1943): preserving the status of the monarchy; refraining from getting caught up in active armed conflicts in the Balkans and the ambition to return the territories of South Dobrudja, Vardar Macedonia and Aegean Thrace to Bulgaria - which had been taken from Bulgaria in accordance with the San Stefano and Berlin Treaties (1878) following WWI. Bulgaria's obsessive attempts to return these territories, caused it to take part in three hard, bloody wars in which over 200,000 Bulgarians (out of a nation totaling 5 million citizens), lost their lives.

Starting in 1934, during the first visit to Bulgaria by German Foreign Minister, Von Neurath, the Germans constantly promised with various degrees of gravity and significance, their willingness to act in order to assist Bulgaria to realize its national aspirations, i.e. return the abovementioned territories to Bulgarian rule. Mussolini and the Italian Foreign Minister, Galeazzo Ciano, also expressed to King Boris and his government, their consensus to the return of the desired territories to Bulgaria. Many annual demonstrations, which were attended by masses of adults and youths, maintained the yearning in the heart of the public,

❖ Presented to the Beisky Committee (Dr. Moshe Beisky,retired Supreme Court Judge, Mr Arie - Lyova Eliav and Prof. Dalya Ofer).

The committee was established due to the public pressure in Israel and Bulgaria demanding the removal of the Commemorative monument of Boris from its original spot in Israel, because of his activity in the years 1941-1944, which led to the delivery of the Macedonian, Thracian, and Piroatian Jews to Nazi Germany. All of them -11343 babies, children and adults – annihilated in the gas chambers of Treblinka.

to right the wrong that had been perpetrated - as same was presented in all educational frameworks from pre-school, upwards. The press, literature, and other media continued to incite the citizens' imagination. Jews, an integral part of Bulgarian society, also took part in this national drive. The economic devastation caused to Germany, Austria and even Bulgaria by the Versailles, Trianon and Neuilly Treaties, following WWI, planted long-term political landmines. Bulgaria believed that its destiny was bound with that of Germany and Austria, alongside whom it had fought since the turn of the century.

After 1934, when King Boris III disbanded parliament and political parties, he and his governments were willing to pay any price for the return of Dobrudja, Macedonia and Thrace. The dream of reestablishing the Greater Bulgaria which had existed in the days of King Boris I and his son Simeon never disappeared. It was not co-incidental that Boris III had named his son Simeon - this was the name of the Bulgarian ruler who had extended the country's borders to the Adriatic Sea in the west, the Black Sea in the east, the Danube in the north and the Aegean Sea in the south.

The Soviet Union's attempts to create a revolutionary atmosphere in other countries, the Cominterns expressed insurgent activities as well as events in the USSR in the twenties and thirties, caused Europe in general - and Bulgaria in particular - to fear communism. France and Britain became interested in the economies of Turkey, Greece, Romania and Yugoslavia and the Bulgarian military's complete reliance on German logistics (from 1936), characterized Bulgaria's adherence to Nazi Germany.

As aforementioned, after 1934, King Boris disbanded parties and democratic parliament. He was not satisfied with the position of Head of State and became a single ruler, assisted by a small permanent cabinet consisting of four ministers and one personal advisor. The King thus instructed the ministers, monitored their actions and received feedback from his special advisor, Yordan Sevov, who seldom appeared in public but

saw to the implementation of all the King's personal instructions. The parliament became a voting machine with 141 permanent supporters and 19 opposition members, having limited influence. The method of preparing bills and voting in parliament turned King Boris - with active assistance of the speaker - into the decisive factor. For nine years, parliament hardly ever objected to the governments bills. One example of parliamentary discipline is **The Law for the Protection of the Nation (LPN)** aimed against Bulgarian Jews, turning them into second class citizens, damaging their property, their honor and lives. According to this law, Jews were expelled from their homes and their lives were at the mercy of street hoodlums. **Although The Law for the Protection of the Nation utterly contradicted Bulgaria's written constitution promising equality to all citizens, only nine members of parliament (out of 160) unequivocally opposed this law in determined speeches.**

The disciplined parliament enabled King Boris and his government to establish three clearly anti-Semitic movements: the National Legion Alliance, Ratnick (Bulgarian students' organization) and Branick (high-school students) - totaling some 60,000 youths and students who were raised in the spirit of the German Hitler Jugend and Italian Balila movements. Thus anti-Semitism became organized and received government support. In the central squares of Sofia the capital, the Prime Minister and senior ministers attended parades of these movements. The King also complimented the movements in his appearances at the National Culture Day events, held every year on May 24th.

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Bulgaria's adherence to Nazi anti-Semitic policy was well thought out, stage by stage, culminating in the planning and deportation of thousands of Jews to the Treblinka death camp. The following anti-Jewish legislature

paints an exact picture of the actions of **King Boris' regime**, whose **signature endorsed all anti-Semitic laws** and edicts:

1. On February 1940 Prof. Bogdan Filov, a determinate Germanophile, was appointed as the Prime-Minister of Bulgaria.

On December 24th 1940 Parliament approved the proposed anti-semitic legislation.

On January 21st 1941, King Boris personally endorsed the "*The Law for the Protection of the Nation -LPN*".

The LPN has four main chapters:

The first chapter discusses international and undercover organizations; the second chapter discusses the civil and economic status of the Jews and the means which were used against them; the third chapter -"anti-national" organizations (against the Bulgarian nation.) and suspicious elements; the fourth chapter describes special instructions on how to implement the law.

Following are some details regarding the second chapter:

Clause No.21 describes the limitations and restrains forced upon the Jews and states they can not receive Bulgarian citizenship (excluding those who already hold a citizenship); they can not be elected to any official position and their voting right was taken away. They were not allowed to serve in the Military, but only in labor groups; they could not have been members in organizations which had any connection to the activities of the Ministry of Defense.

Clause No.22 stated that only a limited number of Jews were allowed to study in institutions of higher education where the number of pupils was restricted, and they could only apply if no Bulgarian candidates have applied for the same institution.

Clause No.24 stated that Jews are not allowed to own properties or rent out their properties to local citizens.

Furthermore, they could not own agricultural land or live in rural areas.

This law laid the foundations for expropriation of property belonging to Bulgarian Jews and issuing of decrees preventing Jews from full-time or part-time work in their professions, students were expelled from schools and universities and Jews had to wear a distinctive yellow badge so they could be discerned from the rest of the population.

Sofia Jews were crammed into small apartments in the quarter allotted to them, according to the rule of four persons to a room. (Official documents in the Bulgarian National Central Archive, chapter 173, pp. 241-244.) The LPN was very well orchestrated politically. On September 7th, 1940, Bulgaria received South Dobrudja back from Romania. This achievement was due to active German intervention. The Bulgarian government had a great interest in proving to Hitler that they were willing to follow the pro German-Nazi path..

2. On March 1st, 1941, Bulgaria joined the Axis Germany - Italy - Japan.

(After a personal meeting with King Boris in January 1941, the efforts made by President Roosevelt's envoys attempts to prevent Bulgaria from joining the Axis and to take the edge off it's anti-Semitic legislature did not succeed.)

Immediately after signing the agreement to join the Axis (in Vienna), a meeting took place between the Bulgarian Prime Minister Filov, von Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Minister and Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister. Both deposited secret letters which declared that

Germany and Italy promise Bulgaria that Thrace would be appended to Bulgarian territory. On April 12, 1941, Draganov, Bulgarian ambassador to Berlin, reported personally to king Boris that Hitler had informed him that “it would now be possible to solve the problem of Macedonia in keeping with the spirit of Bulgaria’s request”. On April 17, King Boris received a German message that Bulgarian forces could also enter the Pomoravia region. Bulgaria’s satisfaction was complete.

By these political achievements, King Boris, his government and the Bulgarian members of parliament considered that national desires of the Bulgarian people had been achieved.

Within a few weeks, the Bulgarian administration, Police Force and Army spread out over territories in Macedonia and Thrace (18-20 April 1941) and all Bulgarian laws including the LPN, also became valid in those territories - integral part of UNITED BULGARIA., with a population of about 60.000 Jews. Macedonia (with about 7200 Jews), Thrace (about 4100 Jews) and Pirot (about 200 Jews), became regular Bulgarian districts.

(District directors subsequently: I. Kojuharov, T.Pavlov, D. Miladinov and Raev).

De facto the political developments started on February 17th, 1941 - before Bulgaria had officially joined the Axis(March 1, 1941) - all the details for moving German forces into Bulgaria had been agreed upon in principle between King Boris and the German army's Chief of Intelligence, Admiral Friedrich Canaris. Bulgarian-German office of coordination was set up and included: Colonel Kostov, Bulgaria's Chief of Military Intelligence, Dr. Delius (who's real name was Otto Wagner) - the senior representative of German Military Intelligence in Sofia and the king's personal advisor Yordan Sevov, who used to meet also the German intelligence officers (in the German Embassy in Sofia):

Noibacher, Sterker, Dr. Lossi,, and Ulman.

On February 20th, 1941, SS officers from the elite Brandenburg unit (227 in all) arrived in Bulgaria to take over the responsibility for supervising the security of 24 strategic installations around Bulgaria. (I.Paunovski, Vazmezdiето (Retribution), Sofia 1988 pp 257-287)

3. On June 13, 1941, based on the National Defense Law, the Bulgarian Finance Minister issued an edict requiring all Jews, **including these from Macedonia, Thrace and Pirot**, owning property worth over 200,000 leva (approximately 2,430 US dollars) to deposit 20% of these assets, in cash, on behalf of the Ministry of Finance. Jews whose assets totaled over 3,000,000 leva (about 35,000 US dollars) had to deposit 25% of their property in cash. The definition of assets included not only apartments, houses and workshops, but clothes, cooking utensils, bed linen and personal belongings. This order was executed within one month and caused severe financial damage to all Jewish population. The total required sum was 1,726,871,278 leva -

= 21,586,140 US \$, but the collected amount was 1,439, 949,392, leva
= approx. 18 million US \$. (1942)

On July 1,.1941 King Boris personally expressed, to Prime Minister Filov, his agreement to impose the tax on all Jewish assets. (Filov Diary, p.328, blg, 1986)

4. On June 25th, 1941, the Minister of the Interior issued a decree forbidding Jews from discussing political-public- economic issues among themselves and being on the streets or in public places between 21:00-06:00 hours. Anyone breaking this law was subject to imprisonment and/or revocation of their Bulgarian citizenship and/or deportation from Bulgaria. (Bulgarian National Central Archive document, dossier 247, pg. 6.)

5. On June 5, 1942, the UNITED Bulgaria Council of Ministers published Decree number 31 that laid the foundations for deporting the Jews from Macedonia, Thrace and the city of Pirot. According to the decree published a year and a half *before* deportation, all Jews living in these territories were prevented from receiving Bulgarian citizenship although all other citizens of these areas, including Armenians and Gypsies, received citizenship automatically unless they filed an expressed written application waiving such right. (Document - publication in Bulgarian official newspaper, issue No. 124, dated 10.6.1942 and issue No. 59, dated 17.3.1943.)

6. On June 1942 the Minister of Interior Peter Gabrovski received from Parliament a blank authorization empowering the government with absolute prerogatives on all questions pertaining to the Jews. Gabrovski received details of the Nuremberg anti-Semitic legislature. It is to be noted that Gabrovsky, the Interior Minister, was a member of the King's inner cabinet with the Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, Foreign Minister and Sevov, the King's personal advisor. King Boris kept constant contacts with representatives of the Gestapo, German police and German military intelligence in Bulgaria through his advisor. Admiral Canaris was one of the many military personnel with whom King Boris had personal relations.

7. On July 9, 1942, King Boris signed a confirmation (ukaz) of the Authorization Law, providing the United Bulgarian cabinet with authority to take any measures to "solve the Jewish problem", without requiring prior consent from parliament. This law provided the legal ground for preparation and deportation of Jews from Macedonia, Thrace and the city of Pirot, as well as all preparations to deport 8,000 Bulgarian Jews residing within its old boundaries, as a "preliminary stage" before deportation. (Document - Bulgarian official newspaper, issue No. 148, dated 9.7.1942).

8. On August 12th, 1942, based on article 21 of the National Defense Law, Decree 13 was published requiring every Jew aged eighteen to forty (former military conscripts) to serve in the **Labor Brigades** for an indefinite period, without pay, in their own personal clothes, bearing a yellow ribbon on their right arm. These brigades were deployed in all regions throughout UNITED Bulgaria, **including Macedonia, Thrace and Pirot** and they had to construct roads, bridges and public installations in consideration of very little food. Due to the harsh conditions, many contracted various diseases, mainly malaria. (Bulgarian National Central Archive document, dossier 284, pp. 28-29).

At the end of August the government promulgated the establishment of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs.

9. On August 29, 1942, the Bulgarian cabinet issued an edict in terms of which the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs (CJA) was established. On Sept. 3, 1942, the lawyer Alexander Belev, a German - trained vulgar anti-Semite, became the head of the Commissariat. The CJA was authorized to handle all issues relating to Jews without necessary approval or assistance from parties in the finance and interior ministries and the police department. This provided an opening for covert planning of deportation, arrest, exile and other drastic measures aimed at removing Jews from the entire area of Greater Bulgaria, i.e. Bulgaria's old territories as well as Macedonia and Thrace. (It is to be emphasized that at that time, South Dobrudja was already an integral part of Bulgaria since Hitler had fulfilled his promise to persuade the Romanian government to hand this region to Bulgaria.)

Furthermore, from that date Jews were forbidden to bear Bulgarian-sounding names and were required to signpost all apartments inhabited by Jews and all Jewish-owned businesses that remained open, with special signs. Certain public places were required to place 'No Jews Allowed' signs.

10. On September 19, 1942, Martin Luther, the vice- general director of the German Foreign Office, reported to his superiors that a report had arrived from the German Legation to Sofia, to the effect that the Bulgarian government had notified Germany on July 6, 1942 of its approval that Germany could treat Bulgarian Jews residing in Germany and territories under its rule, in the same manner as it treated German Jews (German document, Akten, series E, report 3, pp. 513-514). According to this agreement Bulgarian Jews who had resided in Germany for many years, were arrested and sent to detention camps. There is a detailed report of the arrest, deportation to camp and consequent death of at least one such Jew, Solomon Baruchson who had resided in Berlin as well as 171 Jews from France, who were sent to Auschwitz.

11. On November 12, 1942, the German legation in Sofia received a formal communication (NoteVerbal) from the Bulgarian foreign ministry agreeing to the deportation of Bulgarian Jews from the country. The communication also noted that some Bulgarian Jews would remain in Bulgaria in order to assist in the various public works being performed by the government. The Bulgarian government also agreed to pay Germany for each Jew handed over, but determined that the sum required per capita - 250 Marks - was too high (Yad VaShem document K207548-9, dossier 111, pp. 1-2).

12. On the same day, November 12, 1942, Bogdan Filov, the Bulgarian Prime Minister, gave the German Plenipotentiary Minister to Sofia his consent to deport Jews "to the East", but requested that a special German advisor be sent to Bulgaria to help with the transfer. Accordingly, SS officer Obergruppenfueher Theodore Dannecker was dispatched to Bulgaria after having assisted in deporting French Jews. On January 21, 1943, Dannecker

started this job, working in cooperation with the Commissar for Jewish Affairs Alexander Belev. (Yad VaShem documents, K207564, K207566.)

13. On November 27, 1942, the Bulgarian official newspaper published confirmation (ukaz) of all regulations and decrees issued by the Council of Ministers between July 9 and October 26, 1942, including those relating to the Jews. Therefore, in a short period of 4 months all legal and diplomatic preparations were executed in order to take measures against the Jews of old Bulgaria, Macedonia and Thrace. King Boris approved all orders and decrees.

14. On February 22, 1943, the formal written agreement between Bulgaria and Germany was completed - in the "first stage" deporting 20,000 Bulgarian Jews into German Territories in the East. The agreement noted that it had been signed after the Bulgarian Council of Ministers had approved the action. The agreement discussed technical details, e.g. the number of Bulgarian trains required for deportation, implementation of arrests and how Jews would be handed to the Germans. (Bulgarian National Central Archive, dossier 190, chapter 8518, pp. 1-3).

The Bulgarian fascist government, with complete King Boris' and Filov consent, handed over the Jews from the two new districts - Vardar Macedonia (including Pirot) and Western Thrace, to SS officers when the transports leave United Bulgaria territory. 11343 Jews were deported by the Bulgarian Authorities.

15. On February 22, 1943, an order was sent to the representatives of the Commissariat of Jewish Affairs in 21 towns in Bulgaria, requiring them to prepare lists of all Jews in their regions who were described as being rich, influential or with public status. They were also required to note the number of persons per family.

This document leaves no doubt that the order was the second stage in the deportation of Jews from Bulgaria itself (“Documents N.Greenberg”)

16. On March 2, 1943, the **Bulgarian cabinet** ratified 7 decrees (113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 126, 127). These decrees specified all logistic issues regarding arrest, transport and medical care for deported Jews. Furthermore, all those deported to the East were to lose their Bulgarian citizenship. (It is therefore clear that the decrees related to Jews from old Bulgaria since Jews from Macedonia and Thrace and Pirot never received Bulgarian citizenship!)

Order No. 127 confirms that deportation was carried out according to the above-mentioned Authorization Law, and was ratified by the signature of King Boris.

17. On March 5, 1943, an executive meeting was held by the **Commiserate of Jewish Affairs**. They discussed the plan to transport and concentrate 8,000 - 8,500 Jews who lived in 23 cities in the old part of Bulgaria.

Upon orders received from Commissar Belev, the plan was designed by **Zahari Velkov Ivanov**. According to the plan, widespread arrests took place in some of the cities. The Jews were placed in schools with scant belongings. Instructions of the campaign's deferral arrived at these cities on March 10 towards noon - then the exhausted unfortunate Jews, who had undergone a nightmarish night, were released. (Dr. Ezra Benjamin who now resides in Beer Sheba, was taken with his parents to the Gorna Djumaya transit camp where he had witnessed this episode.)

18. On April 4, 1943, Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Minister, sent a telegram to the German emissary in Sofia. Ribbentrop reported the following in the telegram:

Paragraph 4 -“ regarding the Jewish problem in Bulgaria, the King has declared that up to now he has only given his consent for deportation of Jews from Macedonia and Thrace to areas in Eastern Europe. He only wants to deport a limited number of Bolsheviks-communists from Bulgaria itself. The other 25,000 Jews will be concentrated in camps within the country seeing that he wants to use them to build roads. In my response to the King's statement, I stated with emphasis that according to our concept of Jews, the only proper solution is the radical one. Ribbentrop”

Therefore, considering that Bulgarian Jews numbered approximately 48,000 (after the deportation of 11,343 Jews from Macedonia and Thrace to Treblinka, with Boris' consent), the King agreed to deport a further 23,000 Jews from old Bulgaria to the death camps. German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop's report is based on his conversation with the King on April 1, 1943. (Yad VaShem document, Uro 94-95.)

19. On May 21, 1943, according to the decision of Peter Gabrovsky, the Minister of Interior and the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs prepared the transfer of all Jews from the capital, Sofia, to smaller towns. The transferred families were given one week to prepare. They were permitted to take 50kg of belongings. In a spontaneous demonstration (24 5.1943) that arose immediately after families began to receive the deportation letters, some 1,000-1,500 persons - mainly women and children - took part in a spontaneous demonstration. At that time, most men were already in

the Force Labor Brigades. The demonstration resulted in further delay of two weeks to enable families to try and sell their meager possessions before the transfer. The streets of Sofia, particularly Jewish neighborhoods, were turned into markets. Hundreds of farmers came by horse-drawn carts to purchase Jewish property for pennies. The miserable picture is etched deep in the memory of Sofia Jews. The hurt, insult and pain cannot be erased. Within 12 days 19,153 Jews were transferred from Sofia to 22 towns in the provinces.

(Carl Savich Archive-Serbianna).

20. On May 24, 1943, in the aftermath of a Jewish demonstration in Sofia, the Minister of Interior and the Commissar for Jewish Affairs decided to arrest Jewish leaders in the capital. Some 500 Jews were taken in and held for several days at a school in the center of Sofia and later sent to the concentration camp in northern Bulgaria near the town of **Somovit**. Several months later, the camp was relocated to the vicinity of **Pleven**, another town in northern Bulgaria. For 15 months, 120-500 persons were detained in the camp under harsh conditions for various periods of time. **Ten Jews were burnt alive at the camp in a fire which had broken out in a locked hut that was not unlocked after the fire spread. Another detainee died of his wounds in hospital, several days after the disaster.** The detention camp was designed for Jews only and they were held without any indictment whatsoever and without a time limit on their detention.

21. On June 22, 1943, the High Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church convened, attended by King Boris and Prime Minister Filov. The King's speech to the Synod is quoted in the Synod's protocol No. 6:

... In his speech the King emphasized" the great damages caused to humanity throughout the generations by the Jewish spirit of profiteering. This spirit caused hatred among nations, despair, moral decay and betrayal between nations everywhere. This spirit of harmful

profiteering caused and is causing dissatisfaction, frays, disputes, wars and disasters among nations. The present global cataclysm [e.g. WWII.] can also be related to this spirit of profiteering.”

“It is true that some great nations make good use of the money accumulated by this Jewish spirit of profiteering, but other nations realized that Jewish profiteering poses a fatal obstacle for their cultural-spiritual and national-economic development. These nations have acknowledged that the sooner they are released from the Jewish influence and exploitation, the sooner they will regain their national feelings and patriotism. This may be achieved when their [Jewish.] influence on economic, financial, commercial and industrial institutions is terminated. All over Europe, the appropriate legal conditions have been created. Here too [in Bulgaria.] the legal conditions have been fashioned through the National Defense Law. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church, known for its patriotism, cannot have any other concept”.

The signatures of 11 bishops present at the meeting appear at the bottom of the protocol.

22. This review cannot be concluded without noting that 78 Jewish youths, boys and girls, who joined the Partisans or Underground Resistance Groups, died in the anti-Fascist struggle. Their names and deeds are known. What caused these youths to take to arms and sacrifice their lives?

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Notwithstanding BorisIII and NOT thanks to him, Jews in old Bulgaria survived. His consent to defer deportation of 8,000 Jews, some already placed in detention camps prior to deportation, was made due to the

pressure created by a group of Bulgarian members of parliament. The King and his closest assistants, advisor Jordan Sevov and Prime Minister Bogdan Filov, decided that delaying Jewish deportation would put the matter to rest. They hoped that the deputy speaker, Dimitar Peshev, would cease handling the issue. They were surprised on **March 19th** when Peshev handed the Prime minister a petition signed by 43 members of parliament - all members of the pro-government majority party - expressing their adamant opposition to deportation of Bulgarian Jews (from the old territories).

Peshev was punished: he was removed from office as deputy speaker. This was done at the initiative of the King, the Prime Minister and the Speaker. On March 23, 1943, Filov wrote in his diary: "... *[The king] agreed to reprimand Peshev at the Parliament majority party in order to neutralize him once and forever.*"

At a vote which was taken by the majority party, all 114 out of 160 members supported government policy "on all matters, including policy towards Jews". However, 66 majority members voted "for" the government policy, while 33 voted "against" and another 11 abstained at the **concrete** proposal to remove Peshev from office as Deputy Speaker. 5 majority members were demonstratively absent from the voting. As far as one knows, the Bulgarian Parliament had never had such a case of division within the pro-government-monarchist majority party.

On **March 22nd** one day before the above-mentioned vote by the majority party, a query was submitted to the Bulgarian Parliament by Prof. Petko Stainov, a member of the Democrat opposition. It was addressed to both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister. The query requested the Prime Minister to explain to Parliament why Jews were being deported from Macedonia, Thrace and Pirot.

At the time of the query, Thracian Jews were still in the Bulgarian border - port of Lom, waiting to be herded over to SS officers who had

come for them. The Bulgarian government never responded to the query.

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The question of "who saved" the Jews living in the old territories of United Bulgaria has been too simplified. It would be better to ask how some eight thousand Jews, who according to the formal, **written agreement** between Bulgaria and Nazi Germany were to be handed to the Germans with the Jews from Thrace, Macedonia and Pirot, managed to survive. The answer to this question requires analysis of the complex of events that preceded the Bulgarian-German agreement, in particular - March 1943, the period before the deportation. Another question is why the deportation of Bulgarian Jews was not continued until the final solution was achieved?

Beyond all doubts, the Bulgarian fascist regime, Parliament and cabinet members, were aware of the dramatic turn of events on all fronts of the war. The German military sustained three painful defeats:

First, in North Africa, around the city of Tobruk.

Second, in the Russian front around Stalingrad and in the battle around Kursk.

Dismissal of very senior commanders who were at the head of Nazi German troops, expressed defeat and a lack of ability to overcome allied forces (in the course of 8 months from June 1942, General Franz. Halder, Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, Field Marshall Wilhelm. List, who was very well known to Bulgarian army general headquarters, and Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, commander of the navy, were dismissed). Information about the dramatic changes in the superior command of the German military establishment was received with astonishment by the upper echelon of Bulgarian military command, symbolizing the end of the victorious German campaign.

At the same time partisan units gained strength after receiving assistance from the Moscow Comintern. Simultaneously, there was a growth

of clandestine radio stations operated by the Bulgarian Communist Party and despite interference by the authorities; Radio London was received clearly in Bulgaria. The Jewish issue was a subject which appeared on these broadcasts on an almost daily basis. It can be said that the Partisans suffered physically and mentally even more than the persecuted Jews living in the old territories of Bulgaria.

The relations between a handful of Jewish leaders with the upper echelon of the Church and Parliament were of great importance. They managed to rip the heavy envelope covering the meticulously designed, utterly secret deportation plans. The Bulgarian government wanted to hide its intentions to deport 20,000 Bishop Stefan of Sofia leader of the Orthodox Church, went to King Boris and told him :”If the persecution against the Jews continues, I shall open the doors of all Bulgarian churches to them and then we shall see who can drive them out “. Bishop Kyril of Plovdiv send a telegram to the King - he threatened to lie down on the railroad tracks to block the deportations. The most notable activists against the deportation were: Benjamin Ardit who had constant communication with senior church officials; Adv. Fayonov - closely connected with parliament member Dimo Kazasov; Adv. Jaco Baruch, extremely close to deputy speaker of the parliament Dimiter Peshev and connected to the Swiss legation

officials; Dr. Israel Kalmi, connected to senior municipal officials and Adv. Buko Levi who had personal relations with some member of the Commisariat for Jewish Affairs,

Colonel(res.) Avraham Tajer, Leon Farhi, Yoseph Moshev and Vitali Haimov. Adv. Jaco Baruch used the very good services of Adv. Boris Apostolov and Dr. Kussitasev.

It should be mentioned that according to the data gathered by The Jewish Education Organization of Bulgaria 260 Jews, men and women participated in the Partisan movement and in the special fighting units against the pro-Fascist Bulgarian government. Another 400 were treated as

political prisoners. 6 out of the 230 Jews convicted of political crimes were sentenced to death, 17 to life imprisonment, 63 received a prison term of 15 years, 2 - of 12 years, 39 - of 10 years and the rest received relatively shorter sentences. (A. Assa, The Participation of Jews in the Revolutionary Struggles of the Bulgarian People. Ann. of PCJO, 1984, 112-113). This contribution cannot be ignored.

The fact that 43 members of the Bulgarian parliament majority group publicly objected to the deportation of Jews from old Bulgaria was the **result of the fact that the secretly planned deportation had been revealed**. 16 other members of parliament from the Democrat opposition group also continuously and constantly opposed fascist and anti-Semitic legislature. They expressed their will to sign the petition with the 43 members of the majority group but their proposal was rejected outright in order to prevent the petition from receiving an oppositionist character. Therefore, 59 members of parliament objected to deportation of Jews from old Bulgaria. These 59 members (out of 160) represented an electorate of over one million potential voters. **The removal of deputy speaker Peshev from his position was initiated by King Boris and Prime Minister Filov, who also planned punitive measures against the 43 parliament members who dared sign the petition that was published both within and outside Bulgaria.**

As for continued deportation until the final solution was achieved, the answer was given by the war fronts. Had Nazi Germany won the war, there is no doubt that no Bulgarian Jews would have survived.

In order to complete the big picture, it is important to mention a few historical facts.

From the end of 1879 until August 1943, persons from German descent ruled Bulgaria. Two of them, Prince Alexander Battenberg and Ferdinand I were born and raised in Germany and Austro-Hungary and was educated in German civil and military schools. The third, Boris III, was born in Bulgaria

and served in the Bulgarian army. He fought in some of Bulgaria's wars against its neighbors and was educated by scholars of Bulgarian and German descent.

Battenberg belonged to the German dynasty Fon Hesse, while Ferdinand belonged to the German/Austro-Hungarian Saxe-Coburg Kohary Gotha dynasty.

Boris III belonged to the *Saxe-Coburg Gotha Klemens Robert Maria Pius Ludwig Stanislaus Xaver* dynasty.

In the three wars in which Bulgaria participated in between the years 1912-1918, it always joined the coalition led by Germany.

Boris III was a welcomed visitor to Hitler's headquarters and between the years 1936-1943 met with him at least six times, three of which in times of the war, with Bulgaria joining the Axis (Germany, Italy and Japan).

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Text etched on a memorial plaque placed beside the Bulgarian parliament on February 24, 1993

On March 9, 1943, the protest of the Bulgarian democratic public, supported by a group of members of parliament, forced the government to postpone deportation of 8,500 Bulgarian Jews to fascist death camps.

This protest as well as developments in World War II saved the lives of 49,000 Bulgarian Jews.

Unfortunately, the 11,363 Jews from Aegean Thrace and Vardar Macedonia, regions that were administrated at that period by the Bulgarian government, were deported to the Nazi concentration camps and only 12 souls survived.

The Bulgarian nation bows its head in memory of these innocent victims.

The plaque laying ceremony was attended by the speaker of the Knesset, Prof. Shevach Weiss, Bulgarian parliament speaker Alexander Yordanov, Kenneth Sheiner, president of Bnai Brith, Leon Baruch and Marcel Bejerano, joint chairmen of the Bulgarian Immigrants' Union, Eddy Schwartz, chairman of the Bulgarian Jewish Communities, Nir Baruch of Israel (who phrased the text) and a large audience. It was also attended by representatives of the foreign diplomats to Sofia. The text on the plaque was approved by Bulgarian President Jelio Jeleu, Stefan Savov, speaker of the parliament, and Alexander Yordanov, the speaker at the time of the inauguration