

Mois Natan

Mois Merkado Natan

Sofia

Bulgaria

Interviewer: Stephan Djambazov

Date of interview: January 2005

Mois Merkado Natan becomes 80 this year. He is a lively and schooled man. He expressed his interest in a book that he couldn't find and we helped him:: 'Jews, the World and Money', 'An Economic History of the Jewish People' by Jacques Attali. This shows Mr. Natan's profound interest in the Jewish history and fate. His flat, as he described it, is large compared to the usual Bulgarian home – four rooms and a kitchen. He lives there with his wife alone, but I failed to persuade him to pay him a visit, because of his wife's illness (she is almost paralyzed) and also there is an overhaul being carried out in their block of flats. We met in a cozy café-gallery near his flat.

My ancestors came from Spain and in Bulgaria they first lived in Karlovo. [Expulsion of the Jews from Spain] [1] My paternal grandfather's brothers settled in Plovdiv while my grandfather Mois headed to Varna and Dobrich. There he ran a shop and a trading company where he worked together with my father and his other sons. My paternal grandmother, Sultana Natan, had two sisters and a brother. My maternal grandfather Avram Geron and my grandmother Simha Geron lived in Razgrad and were in the trade with animals – sheep and cows – they used to buy them from the nearby villages and sell them to other villagers or sell them for processing. He had three or four brothers, too, but I don't know of any sisters. Then they moved to Ruse from Razgrad.

My paternal relatives were traders. I don't remember my paternal grandfather because when I was born he had already died. I remember my paternal grandmother Sultana. She was living in Varna with one of my uncles and she was letting nice flats during the summer. My grandmother used to rent two rooms and because her house was near the Seaside Garden, she always had tenants. They were predominantly Bulgarians who were on holiday, but there were also Poles. It was there, when I first went to the theater - there was a summer theater in Varna and my uncle, David Natan, was a theater critic. I used to go to the comedies of St. L. Kostov, mainly – one of the classic Bulgarian playwrights who mocked the love of power and the self-seeking of the politicians of the time.

My maternal grandfather Avram Geron was also a tradesman of animals and very religious, too. As the eldest grandson I had to attend services at the synagogue on Friday evenings. That was in Ruse because my mother's family had moved to live there in the 1910s because their business dwindled. All the Jews from that generation were very religious, but not orthodox. On Rosh Hashanah and the high holidays they used to close their shops and go to synagogue. My grandfather Avram used to go to synagogue every day. They used to buy only kosher meat. They observed that. At home, all holidays were observed when the whole family gathered. They lived well. I know that my grandfather Avram Geron was a very good man. He used to carry 10-lev bank notes in his pockets so that he could give them if he happened to meet a poor man. [This sum was

equal to the money one needs for food for a day, it is also comparable to two and a half tickets for cinema.] He had a purse full with white bonbons for the children. My grandfather used to wear bowler hat and all others were dressed in the way normal citizens did – in Western style. They spoke broken Bulgarian, Turkish and Spaniol, which is Ladino [2], while my grandfather in Dobrich spoke also Romanian. [Dobrich is located in the region of Southern Dobrudzha that belonged to Romania from the Second Balkan War (1913) until World War II.] They had nice houses both in Ruse and Varna – they had running water, electricity and toilet inside the houses. My granny in Varna had a housemaid, and my grandpa and granny in Ruse hired a housemaid for the winters.

My grandmother Sultana had two sisters – the first of them, Roza, was married to the tradesman Pinkas who had a trading company jointly owned by my grandmother's brother, Yosif; after that they went to Istanbul. I don't know exactly when but the reason was he had relatives in Istanbul. Roza had two daughters, Becca and Lily, and a son Fredi – they moved to live in Turkey, and Lily went to Israel after that. The second sister was called Luna who had two sons. The sisters died long ago. My grandmother had five sons and a daughter. Three of them, Aron, Albert and David went to Israel where they died; my father stayed in Bulgaria, while the fifth son, Marko, moved to Ecuador together with his family. The name of the daughter was Belina and she also went to Israel, where she died. I remember one of my grandfather Avram Geron's sisters, but I have forgotten her name. Her husband's name was Prezenetti, while their children (four sons and a daughter) were owners of the 'Fazan' [Pheasant] textile company in Ruse. I know a story about my grandpa Avram. Once he went on business to Varna, but he missed the train back and when he was told that there was a train at the same time only the next day, he set off on foot for Razgrad (where he lived then) and came home one hour before the arrival of the train in question (the distance between the two cities is 137 kilometers).

My mother Rebeka Natan was a housewife. She was born in Razgrad in 1896 or in 1897. She had primary education and she was a dressmaker. During World War I she was the one to earn the living of the family because my uncle was mobilized. [Bulgaria in World War I] [3] She used to make clothes and earn money for the family. She went to live in Ruse before the war. They moved to Ruse because the family business declined. Mum had two sisters, Ester and Rashel, and a brother – Yosif. Rashel had a high school education and Ester – primary. Both of them were housewives and lived in Ruse. Ester has a son, Rashel – two sons and a daughter, as well as two step-children because she married a widower.

My father Merkado Mois Natan was born in 1893 in Varna and had four brothers and a sister. Merkado means 'bought' [in Ladino] - this is an old Jewish custom of selling the eldest son to relatives when he remains alone; they take care of him until he himself asks for clothes from his mother and father. [According to the Sephardi tradition if all brothers and sisters of a child die he is 'sold' to some relative, so they take care of him and this way he may survive. According to the custom, the child continues living with his parents but they do not buy anything for him.] So they called him Merkado, because he was bought by relatives in Varna. His elder brothers and sisters had died and he remained alone. Our relatives took care of him, they loved him. According to the tradition, he lived with his parents but they didn't buy him anything until he asked for something from them. I don't know exactly the name of this Jewish tradition – but it was most probably developed for the survival of the oldest son, the continuer of the family. I don't know how many elder siblings he had, but after him came Aron, Albert, Marko and David. My grandfather could

afford to take care of him and pay for his expenses, but that was the custom. My father used to speak Bulgarian very well because he studied in a Bulgarian middle school.

My father's youngest brother David was 12 years older than me. His brothers (Aron, Albert and David) all died in Israel between 1983 and 1988. I don't know where the other brother Marko died. Aron had a daughter who also died of natural death. Albert had a daughter who is alive and we keep in touch on the phone from time to time. Marko had two daughters. David was not married and didn't have children. Belina was not married, too and she didn't have children. Albert and Marko studied in a college in Romania. David had a high school education – he was a theater critic – this was his passion, while the others were tradesmen.

During the World War I my father hired a cab and illegally moved to Bulgaria where he served in the army. That was in the period when Dobrich was in Romanian hands. He was wounded in his hand – not seriously – but he served as a nurse. [The matter in focus is about the military service of the father as a young man – yet before he married.] After that, already during the World War II, he was too old to be taken to the forced labor camps [4]. So he didn't serve in the army.

Together with my mother they had an arranged meeting where they liked each other. They had a marriage (religious and civic one) in 1923 in Varna. They dressed very fashionably - my father was a dandy. He had 12 suits in the wardrobe.

My father worked as a procurator in a Turkish tobacco company – he was in charge of the finances. The owners respected him and his salary was 12,000 Bulgarian leva – very good for that time. However, the Turkish company went bankrupt and he returned in Ruse where he became the accountant of my uncle's company.

When my family moved back to Ruse, they were not so well-off, but we still had a normal standard of living. My father was the accountant at my uncle's company – they used to buy tobacco and process it. They were partners in Ruse. We lived in a rented house and my mother ran the household work.

I don't remember where we lived in Varna, but the house in Ruse was a decent small one and we lived on the ground floor. After that we moved from there to a bigger house with two rooms and a kitchen; this house shared the same yard with the old one. Then we moved to live in the center of the Jewish neighborhood where we had two rooms, a living room and a kitchen. We had a toilet inside the house and a bathroom, too – it was heated on firewood from outside as a Turkish bath. We had electricity, but we used firewood and coal for heating. We were four of us – my mother, my father, my brother and I. After that we lived in other similar houses. The reason for moving so much was that we were seeking for better living conditions for the growing family. Besides, one of the houses was in the Bulgarian neighborhood, while later we managed to find a better one in the Jewish quarter, where we moved to. We used to change houses every five years or so.

I was born in Varna in 1925. We moved to Ruse when I was two. I don't remember Varna from this period, I remember it from the period when I started visiting my grandmother in Varna. Ruse had a very strong Jewish community - around 3,500 people. [Ruse had the third largest Jewish community in Bulgaria after Sofia and Plovdiv, numbering 3,134 people in 1926.] The town had its own Jewish school, which was true only for Sofia, Plovdiv and Pazardzhik these days. There was no Jewish

middle school in any other Bulgarian towns. Ruse had then between 50,000 and 60,000 inhabitants. The Jewish community was very united – there was a Jewish municipality, led both by the synagogue and the school boards of trustees. There were several Zionist organizations – General Zionists [5], Poalei Zion [6] and Jabotinsky's revisionists [7], as well as the youth's organizations Hashomer Hatzair [8] and Maccabi [9]. Maccabi was the sports organization – we had a very good gym hall where we gathered every day and two times a week we made exercises under the supervision of a gymnast. My father was in the administration of the General Zionists, who were centrists. The other organization, Poalei Zion, was a bit more leftist, social democratic, while the revisionist fraction that was created by Jabotinsky [10] were rightists and a bit more radical as far as the liberation of Palestine was concerned. Each organization had a youth's subdivision. The Revisionists' one was Betar [11] – they used to have manifestations in the Jewish street dressed in brown shirts and black pants. The other ones were Hashomer Hatzair – they studied Ivrit rigorously and in their organization 'Ken' [Hebrew for Nest] they used to speak only in Ivrit so they prepared themselves for the Alyah to Israel - to work there in the kibbutzim. Maccabi was also a Zionist organization – followers of the General Zionists, mainly devoted to sports.

In Ruse there were two synagogues: the Ashkenazi one and the Sephardi one. There was a chazzan, too. Haribi [rabbi] Naftali was the chazzan at the first one and haribi Tuvi was servicing the second one. There was a shochet, too – there was a chazzan and a mezamer. The chazzan was the chief one and mezamer was the one, who accompanied him, his assistant to the service. Bar mitzvah was made in both the synagogue and home. Mine was at home. A chazzan came with plenty of relatives and friends. He read and gave me the maturity certificate. This was the routine in Ruse, [which was possible because Bulgarian Jews were not extremely religious and certain rituals had been adapted to the situation in Bulgaria] and I can't say anything more. Marriages were performed in the synagogue only according to the traditional ritual – the prayer was read and the respective certificate was issued [Ketubbah].

There was one Jewish school – a secondary school where we studied all the subjects taught in Bulgarian schools in Bulgarian language; in the primary school – up to the fourth grade Ivrit was taught. In the middle school we also studied Ivrit, Toldot [Hebrew for history], and Tannakh. There were Jewish children who were not sent to study in the Jewish school, because it was more difficult there – we studied in the mornings and in the afternoon. But when we reached the high school level we were completely prepared for it. I have a brother, Avram Merkado Natan. My brother is four years younger than me. He studied in the same schools as I did, but couldn't graduate from high school, because the Law for Protection of the Nation was introduced and he was not allowed to go to school. He couldn't graduate until 1947, after which he studied at the Technical University in Sofia.

The Jewish neighborhood was around David Street and the Jewish school. Almost all Jews lived there. There were also some Bulgarian families. In Ruse there were many Jewish tradesmen, successful ones. The trade with books was almost the whole in Jewish hands: the companies 'Sam Patak', 'Moisey Melamed', 'Rozanis&Co' and others. There were also many traders of haberdashery, clothes, and glass products. Beniesh had a large bookstore in the city center. Many doctors, and good ones, too, were from Jewish origin: Dr Menachem, Dr Versano, Dr Ovadia. One of the most famous dentists in the town was Dr Isakov, there were pharmacists, and druggists, too. Many lawyers were also Jewish, as well as some musicians. However, most of them were not

professionals, they were amateurs. There was a 'David' chorus at the synagogue. In Ruse three musical comedies with a purely Jewish cast were performed – among them were 'Carmusinella' [no information available] and 'The Love of Schubert', based on musical compositions by Franz Schubert [12], as well as the 'The Bells of Cornville' [an opera-comique in 3 acts, 4 scenes; Music by Robert Planquette; adapted and arranged by Max Morris, first staged in 1877 in Théâtre des Folies-Dramatiques, Paris]. I can't remember anything about the authors and the contents, because they were light ephemeral operettas – perhaps brought from abroad, Vienna maybe, which may be known only to the experts in operettas. There were attempts for Jewish theater performances with young people from Hashomer Hatzair – they played 'It's Hard to be a Jew' ('Shver Tzu Zein A Yid') by Shalom Aleichem [13]. I can't remember anything about that, too, except for the topic was the Jewish life. It was probably also a foreign product, because I remember a Negro appearing, but I can't say anything more as far as the author and the content is concerned. They played in Bulgarian, too. There was a Jewish jazz band also, led by Albert Ventura who was a banker and a violinist. In summer they used to go and play in Varna – to have fun, because they were rich boys. A great musician was born in Ruse: Isak (Ziko) Gratsiani, who became the conductor of the Israeli military chorus later. I can't add any further information. I don't know any details about his life, because he left for Israel after 1944 and our paths separated. [There is no information available on him].

The Jews had a good standard of living. Almost everywhere they had running water and electricity. In several slums for the poor people they had everything outside their houses, but such houses were a very rare thing to see. A big Jewish organization, 'Malbish Arumim' [14] was in charge of providing food and clothes to the poor people. In autumns they used to buy them winter clothes and shoes, there was also a communal canteen. There was no anti-Semitism before the introduction of the Law for Protection of the Nation [15]. But there was no anti-Semitism after this law, too – I mean – declared and rude one. [Editor's note: He probably means although the anti-Semitic laws were introduced it was still little felt in the every day reality.] There was one pro-fascist organization 'Country Defense' [16], as well as 'Ratnik' [17], but nobody offended me because of my Jewish origin while I was a schoolboy in the high school, even after we had to wear those yellow stars [18]. None of my classmates has ever insulted me, because we were good students. They respected us. There wasn't any anti-Semitism among the people in Bulgaria. The anti-Semitism was on an institutional level – stemming from the laws and regulations. But even in the period when we had to wear those yellow stars – there wasn't any negative attitude to us.

My mother always had me accompany her while she was to go shopping, so that I might carry the baskets. Tuesdays and Fridays were the market days. Ruse was a big industrial town. Outside the city there were many gardens so we used to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. My mother used to buy only kosher meat. There was only one seller that she would buy meat from. In the Jewish neighborhood there was a confectioner – the Turk Tahir Nuri, where we, the young people, used to go; our parents visited this place in the evenings, too. Pastries and cakes were offered there and in winter they made halva [19]. If you sit in there they would bring you a plate with pastries and you'll have to choose. From this period I remember 19th May 1934 [The military coup d'état after which King Boris III established a totalitarian regime, the Parliament was dismissed and all the parties were banned.]. I was 9 years old then. I remember the martial law, the mounted police. I remember also the entry of the German allies in Ruse through Romania– it was in March 1941. [On 1st March

1941, the Government of Bogdan Filov signed the protocol under which Bulgaria joined the Axis. On 6th March the dislocation of German troops on the Balkan Peninsula began and it started from Romania to Bulgaria via Ruse.]

My parents used to read also newspapers, mainly Jewish ones, and from Bulgarian newspapers they preferred 'Utro' [Morning] [20] and 'Zora' [Dawn] [21] [popular newspapers without any particular political focus]. Dad could speak Hebrew, because he read the prayers in Hebrew. In Ruse there were two clubs where the libraries were located, but I haven't borrowed books from there because I used to buy them. I read 'Captain Dreyfus', the five volumes of Victor von Falk ['Auf ewig getrennt? Oder Kapitän Dreyfus und seiner Gattin ergreifende Erlebnisse, Schicksale und fürchterliche Verbannung. Sensationsroman von Victor von Falk' (On eternally separately? Or Captain Dreyfus and his wife moving experiences, fates and dreadful banishing. Thriller by Victor von Falk) (Berlin: A. Weichert 1898) - a novel in five volumes by Victor von Falk, considered to be a pseudonym of several authors] - my mother read them, too, as well as the novels by Victor Hugo: 'The Miserables', 'The Hunchback of Notre-Dame', all of them. Dad used to give me 20 leva a week and I saved it. In Ruse there was a famous bookshop 'Simeon Simeonov', where I could find the book I liked.

My father was in the administration of General Zionists. He was a member of the board of directors of the Jewish bank 'Avoda' Bank. [There is no further information on it]. There were several accountants in it, several tradesmen and several industrialists. My parents had Zionist political views - they were not in the politics because the Jews were out of the political institutions then. We had not only Jews for neighbors - there were Bulgarians, too. We got on well with them, and with their kids. However, my parents made friends more easily with Jews. My father attended the Jewish Bet Am [22]. After World War II he used to work with Bulgarians only.

My parents respected the Jewish traditions - they observed kosher, but not Sabbath - because we had to work. However, they did close the shops on Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot. We would go to synagogue on every holiday. We had a pupils' synagogue on Sabbath - on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. [Organised attendance of Jewish pupils to services at the synagogue on Saturdays at Sabbath] There was a small and a big hall in the synagogue. The synagogue services for pupils were held simultaneously in the small hall - the prayers were read by the pupils themselves so that they might learn them. We had a famous teacher - we used to call him uncle Bucco - Bucco Delarubisa. He was a teacher in the middle school, his two sisters were teachers, too, as well as his wife. He once was the teacher of my mother, too. We learned many things from him. He was our Math teacher, but we learned a lot more from him - many sayings, for example, which famous people were Jews, he also taught us about the Jewish life and traditions. It was he who took us to synagogue on Friday evenings and we made our 'pupils' synagogue' in the small hall of the synagogue. After I had my bar mitzvah I started taking part in the prayers - I used to read them. We observed the high Jewish holidays at home, too. We would lay the table for the respective holiday, kindle the candles and read a prayer. Just simple observing of the traditions, without putting much passion into it. We would always buy matzah for Pesach. Purim was marked in its own way - we were given money and sweets. At Chanukkah we used to kindle the chanukkiyah at home.

My parents seldom went on holiday. I remember that one year we came to Sofia's Ovcha Kupel with my mother (there is a mineral water spa there) because of her illness. My mother and I used to visit my grandmother in Varna. My parents used to gather with their brothers and sisters as well as with my mother's cousins in Ruse. In 1933 and 1934 all my father's brothers gathered in Varna to visit my grandmother: Aron and Albert came from Dobrich [Romania at the time], Marko – from Milan (Italy).

We didn't have a garden, but we had a big yard in one of the houses, shared between four other buildings and we played there. My mother was ill because she had two hard births (mine and my brother's). She had problems with her physical condition and so we used to hire a housemaid from the neighboring villages Dimitrovden and Gergyovden for the winters. [The villages are named after Bulgarian Orthodox holidays. Dimitrovden is St Dimitar's Day, while Gergyovden stands for St. George's Day.] The housemaid had a bed in the kitchen.

We had both religious and mundane books, but I don't remember their titles. My parents did read, and especially my father, because my mother didn't have the time for it. Dad used to read contemporary novels. I remember that when I was 12, he brought home the 'Brown Book' [Editor's note: Probably a reference to 'Brown Plague' in the sense of Nazism.] against Hitler and I understood from it that Hitlerism persecuted Jews and communists. It was an international issue, it read also about the Leipzig trial [Georgi Dimitrov] [23], for the Kristallnacht ['The Night of Broken Glass': the pogrom against German Jews. On the nights of 9th and 10th November 1938, gangs of Nazi youth roamed through Jewish neighborhoods breaking windows of Jewish businesses and homes, burning synagogues and looting. In all 101 synagogues were destroyed and almost 7,500 Jewish businesses were destroyed. 26,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps, Jews were physically attacked and beaten and 91 died (Snyder, Louis L. Encyclopedia of the Third Reich. New York: Paragon House, 1989:201)].

I haven't had a nanny, but for one year I attended the 'Gan Yeladim' kindergarten at the Jewish school. It was one year before I started school. 'Gan' means garden in Ivrit, while 'yeladim' stands for 'children'. After that I studied in the Jewish primary and secondary school. I was very good at mathematics. When uncle Bucco made us do sums, he would always ask me first what the answer was. This teacher whom we learned a lot of things from was a mathematician. From him we learned many sayings, many things, for example that the great violinist Bronislaw Huberman was a Jew. [Huberman, Bronislaw (1882-1947): a great violinist of the 20th century, born in Poland. He was highly acclaimed for his strongly individual interpretations.] We learned which famous people were of Jewish origin, he used to tell us about the Jewish lifestyle and traditions. He was a great man, a great pedagogue; for us he was not only our teacher in mathematics. His classes were exceptional. Later, every time I was in Ruse after the war I visited him until he passed away.

I haven't had private lessons in music, nor in foreign languages; I studied French at the high school. My friends at school were Jews and Bulgarians, especially after I entered the Union of Young Workers (UYW) [24]. That happened after the war on the USSR was declared on 22th June 1941. I was in the sixth grade in the high school two years before graduation. However, the next year I was expelled from school. We were locked up within the Jewish neighborhood and we didn't have any out-of-school contacts. We used to gather in Tahir's confectionery before the curfew hour. At weekends we gathered in someone's house – we used to organize jours [i.e. youth parties] then as

we used to call them. We gathered boys and girls, danced a little, but most of the time we discussed things and had arguments – we were already members of the UYW. We didn't drink alcohol, we listened to music only if there was a gramophone or a radio at the place where we gathered. We used our free time to study and read.

I did sports at 'Maccabi' – there were various competitions there. We used to play volleyball, table tennis, and two times a week we did gymnastics. I had a friend who used to come home and stayed with us for the night. From 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. we prepared our lessons. At 9 a.m. we were at 'Maccabi' where we played until 11:30. After that we used to have lunch before we go to school. The Jews in Ruse were not communists regarding their social status – we were rather intellectually attracted by the idea. As I already told you I read the 'Brown Book' and I knew the Hitlerism persecuted Jews and communists. In Ruse there were between 70 and 80 people, living in the Jewish street, who were organized in the UYW. I remember that we asked for special permission from the State Security Service to perform chamber concerts in the Jewish school. And when the day of the first one came we shuddered with fear because the head of the State Security Service and three or five agents came to listen to our music – but it was because in Ruse there was no other place to listen to music then. That was one of the most significant cultural events in the town during the war. Apart from gathering to someone's house for a party the other thing to do was to go together with our parents to eat kebapcheta [traditional grilled meatballs] in the evenings – in our street there was a kebapche eatery, that was owned by Jews. The eatery was not kosher.

We couldn't go on summer holidays after 1941 any more. Before that I hadn't gone on holiday with my friends, because my father didn't allow me to go on trips – he was very strict and meticulous in this respect, he always wanted to know where we were. Anti-Jewish laws were introduced in 1941 – the yellow star and the curfew hour. Now there are some disputes as to whether we lived in a ghetto or not – well we were in Ruse and 9 o'clock was the curfew. We could go out of there only for two hours a day – from the beginning it was not so strictly observed, but later the situation grew tenser. During the day we were allowed to go to the market, in a café and in a confectionery's in the Jewish neighborhood, but we were not allowed to go to the other parts of the town. In 1942 a policeman liked the apartment where we were living and he drove us out from there. We used to live in the house of the Spanish ambassador Aftalion, who left and asked us to keep his home. He was a Jew, however, so the state confiscated the house and kicked us out. [No information for such person is available. In the same year, chief of the Spanish mission to Sofia was Julio Palencia i Alvares (11.12.1940-27.10.1943). He is known for his active efforts for freeing dozens of Jews, as Spanish citizens, from compulsory work and civil mobilization in Bulgaria during the years when the anti-Jewish legislation was in force. He actively assisted the process of issuing Spanish passports and handled the emigration issues of Bulgarian Jews, who went to America through Spain. In order to save a Jewish family in Plovdiv, Palencia even adopted their child. As of 27th October 1943, Ramon Maria de Pujadas was the plenipotentiary minister of Spain to Bulgaria. Aftalion was most probably a Spanish consul, but the name of the town he went to was not mentioned – most probably this was Kavala, where the Spanish consul was Jew against whom Germans undertook repressive measures.]

A friend of my father's accommodated us at his place – he gave us a room and a store-room where we all lived. My father was jobless – we started selling all our furniture and possessions, because we didn't have any savings by then. When they started renaming us – they didn't change my

name, but they did change the name of my father, because Merkado was not in the list of the Jewish names. [25] So he took his birth name – Eliezer. My mother remained Rebeka. My father’s name, changed to Eliezer, was written in all documents. That was the period when I studied at the high school, but in 1943 I was expelled from it because there were too many Jews there and some of them had to be expelled. I was expelled on the suspicion that I was a member of the UYW, and I was a Jew, too.

In March 1943 when a probable deportation of the Jews was discussed for the first time openly, seven friends on mine (two girls and five boys) decided to go illegal so that nobody could send us to concentration camps. We all were Jews, and one of us turned out to be the secretary of the town committee of UYW, so he got in touch with the underground revolutionaries. It was the period when Ana Ventura [26] was also illegal – the famous Ana Ventura – Jewish, daughter of one of the largest and richest industrialists in the town; she died later. On 19th March 1943 we decided to go illegal. Not only communists concealed us – there were also people who were anti-fascists and democrats. A humble villager offered us a shelter for a month, after which we moved to hide in a cave near Cherven village. We were not ready for such kind of life. We had almost no weapons, only a Turkish gun and two pistols. So we were just staying there and waiting. I went once or twice to the neighboring villages in order to make connection with the partisans – we expected to be relocated in the Balkan Mountains together with them. But the man who controlled the illegal activity in Ruse had us stay near the town for two months. His name was Nikola Popov, a former participant in the Spanish Civil War [1936-1939] and immigrant to the Soviet Union.

An accidental revelation happened when we were hiding in the caves: a child shepherd saw the youngest of us while he was at his post. This happened on 10th May and we scattered. The leader took with him a girl from our group, the other one managed to escape and I had to take the others out of that place because I knew the area. I led them to Svalenik village first – to one supporter of the partisans. We passed right through the center of the village – the police officers were in the tavern as we walked past them. And we did find the supporter of the partisans. He took us to a neighboring village – Katselovo. Meanwhile, our group leader left Tinka Dzhain [Born as Ester Sabitai Dzhain. She was an anti-fascist fighter of Jewish origin, a political commissioner of the Cerven’s guerilla detachment. She was killed after the detachment was discovered in 1943.] to the care of one of the supporters in Bozhichen village, but he gave her away to the police and they killed her there. We remained three or four days in Katselovo, but the man who was concealing us got scared and he said he would take us to another place, so he started guiding us, but disappeared in the middle of nothing. This happened at night. We hadn’t realized that the whole region was blocked and as we were moving forward we just came across the blockade. Guns went off several times and we hid ourselves in the nearest forest. During the night some of us wanted us to surrender, but a guy and I didn’t accept it, because we didn’t know whom we might come across and what they would do to us – they could kill us. We waited until the morning, came out of the forest and stepped in the hunting posse. So they caught us and arrested us. One of us – Salvador Papo, was stouter than the others and cocky, too – so he got the first thrashing because they thought he was the leader of the group. I was a skinny schoolboy – I weighed only 45. So we were taken to the police where we were detained for 45 days. We had a perfect ‘brainwash’ there – beating, beating as much as a human being could bear. Some of us couldn’t endure it any more and they confessed they were members of the Union of Young Workers, but I never confessed it.

We said we decided to run away because we didn't want to get deported.

In July we were brought to court and I was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment. I was accused of taking part in a Jewish communist group. I was taken to the Ruse's prison, but during the bombardments we were moved to the jail in Pleven. I stood there until 8th September 1944. During that period my father, mother and brother were interned to the town of Somovit [Internment of Jews in Bulgaria] [27]. The Jews from Ruse, Vidin and Pleven were not interned to other Bulgarian towns but they were prepared for deportation. So, my family lived in Somovit and they were awaiting their deportation. In the dress making unit of the camp there was a friend of my father's who approached him one day and told him: 'Bad news, they're going to move us from here', because a German officer had told him so. But on the other day, uncle Sinto (that was the name of the dressmaker) went to work and was told that everything bad had blown over. When he came back to the camp and broke the news, the people in the camp started celebrating that they were not going anywhere. This happened in September or in October 1943. There were many Jews in Somovit – some of them from Plovdiv, some – from Sofia and especially those who got arrested during the demonstration on 24th May [28]. My parents and brother lived in Somovit for three months. After that they came back to Ruse and lived in the same room and store-room in the house of that friend of my father's. My father then used to make frames for mirrors together with one of my uncles, so that they could earn their living.

I got out of the prison in Pleven on 8th September 1944. We broke the jail, the police started fire on us, but we, the prisoners, slashed the cordon. There was a victim or two. After that we ran to the vineyard where we spent the night. In the morning everything was calm and we went back to Ruse. After that I worked for a year in the police I was an intelligence officer at the State Security Service for a year. But after that I followed my father's advice – to complete my high-school education and to go to university. So I graduated from the high school and enrolled in the Ruse's Technical University. Later I applied for studying in the USSR. But then they played a trick on me – they hid my documentation. A member of the youth communist organization hid them, although he was in charge of submitting them. The reason was a simple envy – after which he confessed the fact to senior executives, but all the same - the deadline had passed. After that they sent me to Czechoslovakia as compensation, where I studied mechanical engineering. I learnt Czech language. My brother, after they closed the Ruse's Technical University, moved to Sofia, where he graduated from the Mechanical Electro-Technical Institute. My father worked in Ruse as a chairman of 'Clothes and Shoes' until he retired.

I studied in Prague from 1949 to 1952. There I lived in the Jewish hostel in 25 Belgicka Street. There were two Jewish hostels in Prague, indeed – one for boys and one for girls. They were maintained by Joint [29] and were built especially for families that suffered from the Holocaust. Even the staff in these hostels was of Jewish origin. There was a great concern for the students in these hostels – they fed and dressed us for almost nothing. I studied in the Czech Higher Technical School and I was impressed by the level of culture of the Czech people at that time. I was pleased with the education.

I came back and I was given a job in the Metal Cutting Machines Plant in Sofia. I wanted to work in Ruse, but I was told that there were too many engineers there and I got a refusal. They offered me to go to Haskovo, or to Vidin, but I told them that if I was to move to another town, that should be

Sofia. So I got a job in Sofia. I was vice-technologist at the Metal Cutting Machines Plant in Sofia. I was not given an apartment, I was accommodated in a rented flat. Later we had a dispute with the director of the plant and in 1955 I resigned and found a job with the Institute for Rationalizations [30]. I was an engineer in chief there and in 1956 I became a lector in Resistance of the Materials - Mechanics at the Military Academy. I was a civilian - that was my wish. My parents and brother moved to Sofia in 1956. We changed our rented flat in Ruse for one of a military man in Sofia who was to move to Ruse.

My mother died in 1958. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Sofia, but she didn't have a Jewish funeral because her husband arranged the funeral for a Saturday, when no Jewish funerals are carried out. He didn't want to wait because of the heat. So we remained my father, my brother and I. I met my wife Yanka, a Bulgarian, in 1957 at the Institute for Rationalizations. She was a librarian after which she became a telephone operator there. We got married in 1959.

It happened to me to have problems because of my Jewish origin. In Czechoslovakia I studied aviation engineering - well, I graduated and when I came back a friend of mine introduced me to the Personnel Department at the Air Force, where I wanted to work. However, I was received there very coldly. Later, when I was working for the Metal Cutting Machines Plant, I learnt that all our Jews had been expelled from the Interior Ministry. At the Military Academy, I had a very intelligent man for director - colonel Kalanov - whose opinion was not influenced by my origin, because he had been a partisan together with Jews. So, he welcomed me very warmly at the Military Academy - and when I told him I wanted the position but as a civilian - he said: 'O.K, we'll have a civilian at the position.' This was after Israel was constituted. And the attitude to us was connected with the security problems under the influence of the USSR. This is not a question of anti-Semitism - it was an institutional problem. After the Suez Crisis in 1956 they became more fastidious to Jews. Then the Hungarian events of 1956 [31] came in focus, it was said that the Jews had organized them, and institutions became more suspicious towards us. I was a member of the Bulgarian Communist Party, but there have always existed suspicions against me.

When I came back from Czechoslovakia and started work in the Metal Cutting Machines Plant, the doctors' plot [32] in the Soviet Union started. While I was still in Czechoslovakia, in Bulgaria started the trial against Traicho Kostov [33]. I was in the Pleven's jail together with him, our cells were on the same floor. We used to walk together and we would often go to him to listen to his lectures. I knew Traicho Kostov in person and that turned into just one more suspicion against me. After I came back from Czechoslovakia, the trial against Rudolf Slansky [34] began - he was the general secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Soon after it, in Romania was initiated the trial against Ana Pauker - one more strike against the Jewry. [see Ana Pauker-Vasile Luca-Teohari Georgescu group] [35] So - there was a certain negative reaction against the Jews on an international level. Almost all my friends moved to Israel after it was set up. I felt awkward about leaving, because I was sent to Czechoslovakia as a scholarship holder of the Bulgarian Government, so I decided to stay here. I also wanted to gain experience here.

My wife Yanka comes from Stara Zagora and her parents are from the town of Radnevo. She has uncompleted university education in a faculty of law. During the period the Jews were persecuted, her parents Dinka and Prodan Ovcharovi moved to Plovdiv to save the shop of a Jewish family. Prodan Ovcharov was a tradesman in Radnevo - a bit strange, Tolstoyist, vegetarian.

After I got married, we lived in a small rented flat that was destroyed later, and we were given an apartment, which we shared with other people. Then we moved to another place and finally I managed to buy a flat of 150 sq.m. (four rooms and a kitchen) from a friend in Maria Luisa Street in 1972. We still live there. My friend was fed up with this apartment, because there were tenants in it. We managed to move in 1975, but we continued with the law suits against the last tenant for three or four more years, because he didn't want to move from there. Now only two of us live here – my wife and I – because my children have their own places now. One of my sons lives in Bulgaria, but has a separate flat, while the other is in Canada. My older son is Merkado – named after my father – he was born in 1960; the younger is Alfred and he was born in 1963 – both of them in Sofia. My son Merkado Mois Natan (this is the full name of my father, in the same way I carry the full name of my grandfather) is a lawyer and lives in Sofia. He has a family and a son, whose name is Mois Merkado Natan (that is also my name) and has just turned 17. His wife is a Bulgarian, and is also a lawyer. My younger son Alfred lives in Canada. He studied for two years at the Mechanical Electro-Technical Institute in Sofia and decided to move to Israel, and he set off for there without completing his university education in 1990. I didn't agree that he should leave without finishing his education, but he did it. He was married to a Bulgarian in Sofia and he has a daughter from her, but he divorced and left for there. Four months later he came back, married his girlfriend and moved to live in Israel with her. After that they emigrated to Canada in 1993. He has two sons from his second marriage, the first one is 10 years old, the second one is 7. He attended a course for dental mechanics and now works as a dental mechanic. Both his children from the second marriage were born in Canada.

Until my father was alive he used to tell everything about the Jewish tradition to my sons. He used to tell them things, take them to the Bet Am or the synagogue. He told them about the Jewish history and the religious holidays as a way to observe traditions.

Then I had two jobs – and I had classes at the Mechanical Electro-Technical Institute, so I didn't have much time. They are brought up as Jews and that's how they feel themselves. They had Jews for friends even when it was not allowed for Jews to gather in Bet Am before the changes of [10th November] 1989 [36]. They used to gather at home – because we had a big flat and they had their own rooms. I used to go to synagogue only on high holidays before the changes. I am from those few people who know Hebrew and can read prayers. Now we mark all the holidays. I go to synagogue on Friday evenings, I am there on Saturday mornings, too. Besides, I worked for four years at the synagogue – I was vice-chairman of the Religious Council. My friends are Jews and Bulgarians. There are now no relatives left with whom we may keep in touch – neither in Sofia, nor in Israel.

As far as the wars from 1967 [Six Day War] [37] and 1973 [Yom Kippur War] [38] are concerned and the cancellation of the diplomatic relationships with Israel – I had expected these events, because we were deep into our relations with the Arabic world, which was dictated by the Soviet Union. I am a supporter of Israel and my attitude to the Arabic problems is negative. Firstly – because the Palestine question is not a Jewish question. The Palestine question is a problem of the Arabs. In 1948 when the War for Liberation was being led, Israel was attacked by all Arabic countries. The West Bank that was to become a Palestinian state, under the decision of the United Nations was occupied by Jordanians. Golan was occupied by Syria, while Sinai Peninsula was controlled by Egypt. That is to say that this is a purely Arabic question. It was not earlier than 1967

that Israel occupied the West Bank, expelling Jordan and winning the war. That is why the problem with those camps is artificially created - and it is quite clear for every Jew. Every time I explain these matters to somebody I say that the Palestinian question has nothing to do with Israel. It is an Arabic one because they didn't allow another Arab country to be set up from the very beginning. However, after the wars started and the diplomatic relations with Israel were cancelled, I didn't feel any change in the attitude of my friends and co-workers in Bulgaria. All the more - when I was teaching at the Military Academy we used to discuss these matters rather theoretically.

I have been to Israel once - in 1982. I gathered with my old friends there as if we hadn't been separated at all. I visited all my classmates and friends whom I used to live in Bulgaria with many years ago. Then I had relatives there - they were alive; my aunts and uncles, too. I haven't been there after that first visit, because as a poor relative of theirs I felt awkward about visiting them again. Now my aunts and uncles are dead. My wife wanted to go there very much, but it simply didn't happen. My uncle David used to come to Sofia every two years or so. We communicated through letters, telephone calls. Now I have only one cousin there, other two of my cousins are living in Ecuador, but I don't keep in touch with them. Unfortunately, I don't know any further details about them.

The democratization of the country after 1989 had a negative effect on me. The way we live here now is the worst that ever happened to Bulgaria. We live in an insecure society. People are scared when they come back home from somewhere - people are afraid even when they are in their own homes. Because of that criminal deed, that Bulgaria has never experienced before. I'm speaking not only about the socialist period, but also of the times before it when we were wearing yellow stars and were in conspiracy activities. Even then we felt safer than we feel now. There was order in the country. Now - this democracy that we are now living in is no democracy at all, it is rather DAEMONcracy. And if I have to explain this situation to myself - it is perhaps because there hasn't been such a phenomenon in the human history before. We know how capitalism stems out of the feudalism, how capitalism became socialism - but this phenomenon - from socialism to go back into capitalism we experience for the first time here. [Editor's note: A reference to the perception of History along the lines of Marxist ideology. According to dialectical and historical materialism, official and exclusive in Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe before 1989, the structure of society is in continuous development in the scene or World History, starting from the primitive prehistory, reaching the most developed and socially advanced Communism through the stages of Antique Slavery, Feudalism and Capitalism.] I call it DAEMONcracy because of the daemons - because people live in fear. Its is a stressful situation.

After 1989 my life didn't change much with regard to the Jewry. I get on well with my wife on these questions - she has lived with Jews. But I feel that now the anti-Semitism is stronger than before. I can see the books on Slaveykov Square [the largest open book market in Sofia]: Hitler's 'Mein Kampf', the books by Volen Siderov [Bulgarian journalist, radical nationalist, and Holocaust denier. Among his publications are 'The truth about the six million Jews' and 'The Boomerang of Evil'.] and others. However, these are separate books - people do not share these views and feelings. I have always said that there wasn't any anti-Semitism among people in Bulgaria. There were certain instances - sometimes they were provoked, sometimes they were paid, but as a whole they were marginal cases. However, the instances of anti-Semitism are instances of anti-Semitism. The publisher of 'Mein Kampf' in the Czech Republic was sentenced to four years of imprisonment. I

think that every country deserves its Jews. After the changes from 1989 in Bulgaria a certain impetus to the Jewry was given, but the initial excitement of not being choked has passed and now the life takes its normal routine. The club 'Golden Age' was set up, and we meet with friends, acquaintances. [The Golden Age club was formed in 1999. In the Bet Am there are separate programmes for people of different age – this is the club of the elderly people] There is also a club where one can study Ivrit, Ladino – these are nice things. I receive aids - from 'Joint' I receive a small sum on heating – it is around 20 levs. [20 levs are equal to some 10 euros]. The Swiss organization helps us, as well as this 'Claims Conference'.

However, there is another thing - as if something in the mentality of the local Jews went wrong together with these changes. All of us here lived intensive lives, we had certain positions in the society, we were respected. Now we came to a situation to wait for somebody to help, because we live in need. This has its influence on our psychics. We are asking each other – did you receive this, did you get that? Earlier we could manage it with our own strength somehow. For example, when I bought the flat I started working more intensively, I developed projects, I had private students. Deeply in our hearts we cannot accept that we are living out of aids. On the other hand – the repressed by the socialism got between 20 and 50 levs in additional monthly pension, whereas before that the active fighter against the capitalism and fascism received such bonuses. And what should one say – have we, the Jews, not been repressed? We are the most repressed people: from 1941 to 1944 we had to wear yellow stars, there was a curfew hour, many houses were destroyed during the process of internment.

Translated by Alexander Manuiloff

Glossary

[1] Expulsion of the Jews from Spain: The Sephardi population of the Balkans originates from the Jews who were expelled from the Iberian peninsula, as a result of the 'Reconquista' in the late 15th century (Spain 1492, and Portugal 1495). The majority of the Sephardim subsequently settled in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, mainly in maritime cities (Salonika, Istanbul, Smyrna, etc.) and also in the ones situated on significant overland trading routes to Central Europe (Bitola, Skopje, and Sarajevo) and to the Danube (Adrianople, Philipopolis, Sofia, and Vidin).

[2] Ladino: otherwise known as Judeo-Spanish, is the spoken and written Hispanic language of Jews of Spanish origin. Ladino did not become a specifically Jewish language until after the expulsion from Spain in 1492 - it was merely the language of their province. It is also known as Judezmo, Dzhudezmo, or Spaniolit. When the Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal they were cut off from the further development of the language, but they continued to speak it in the communities and countries to which they emigrated. Ladino therefore reflects the grammar and vocabulary of 14th and 15th century Spanish. In Amsterdam, England and Italy, those Jews who continued to speak 'Ladino' were in constant contact with Spain and therefore they basically continued to speak the Castilian Spanish of the time. Ladino was nowhere near as diverse as the various forms of Yiddish, but there were still two different dialects, which corresponded to the different origins of the speakers: 'Oriental' Ladino was spoken in Turkey and Rhodes and reflected Castilian Spanish, whereas 'Western' Ladino was spoken in Greece, Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia and Romania, and preserved the characteristics of northern Spanish and Portuguese. The vocabulary of Ladino includes hundreds of archaic Spanish words, and also includes many words from different

languages: mainly from Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, French, and to a lesser extent from Portuguese and Italian. In the Ladino spoken in Israel, several words have been borrowed from Yiddish. For most of its lifetime, Ladino was written in the Hebrew alphabet, in Rashi script, or in Solitro. It was only in the late 19th century that Ladino was ever written using the Latin alphabet. At various times Ladino has been spoken in North Africa, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, France, Israel, and, to a lesser extent, in the United States and Latin America.

[3] Bulgaria in World War I: Bulgaria entered the war in October 1915 on the side of the Central Powers. Its main aim was the revision of the Treaty of Bucharest: the acquisition of Macedonia. Bulgaria quickly overran most of Serbian Macedonia as well as parts of Serbia; in 1916 with German backing it entered Greece (Western Thrace and the hinterlands of Salonika). After Romania surrendered to the Central Powers Bulgaria also recovered Southern Dobrudzha, which had been lost to Romania after the First Balkan War. The Bulgarian advance to Greece was halted after British, French and Serbian troops landed in Salonika, while in the north Romania joined the Allies in 1916. Conditions at the front deteriorated rapidly and political support for the war eroded. The agrarians and socialist workers intensified their antiwar campaigns, and soldier committees were formed in the army. A battle at Dobro Pole brought total retreat, and in ten days the Allies entered Bulgaria. On 29th September 1918 Bulgaria signed an armistice and withdrew from the war. The Treaty of Neuilly (November 1919) imposed by the Allies on Bulgaria, deprived the country of its World War I gains as well as its outlet to the Aegean Sea (Eastern Thrace).

[4] Forced labor camps in Bulgaria: Established under the Council of Ministers' Act in 1941. All Jewish men between the ages of 18-50, eligible for military service, were called up. In these labor groups Jewish men were forced to work 7-8 months a year on different road constructions under very hard living and working conditions.

[5] General Zionism: General Zionism was initially the term used for all members of the Zionist Organization who had not joined a specific faction or party. Over the years, the General Zionists, too, created ideological institutions and their own organization was established in 1922. The precepts of the General Zionists included Basle-style Zionism free of ideological embellishments and the primacy of Zionism over any class, party, or personal interest. This party, in its many metamorphoses, championed causes such as the encouragement of private initiative and protection of middle-class rights. In 1931, the General Zionists split into Factions A and B as a result of disagreements over issues of concern in Palestine: social affairs, economic matters, the attitude toward the General Federation of Jewish Labor, etc. In 1945, the factions reunited. Most of Israel's liberal movements and parties were formed under the inspiration of the General Zionists and reflect mergers in and secessions from this movement.

[6] Poalei Zion: Leftist Zionist movement, founded in the late 19th century in Russia that combined Zionism with Socialism. The early Poalei Zion found its expression in the organization of trade unions, mutual aid societies, and Zionist groups of workers, clerks and salesmen. These groups emphasized the need for democracy within the Jewish community. The Austro-Hungarian branch of Poalei Zion differed markedly from the Russian one. Its ideologists maintained that the Zionist movement was an expression of the entire Jewish people and transcended class interests. It maintained that the position of the Jewish worker and commercial employee was different from that of the non-Jew, since the Jew had to face both exploitation and discrimination at the same

time. It warned the Jewish workers against following the teachings of the Social Democrats in Austria-Hungary who denied this fact. It negated the socialist solution unless it were combined with a Jewish autonomous territory. Instead it stressed the need for the conscious direction of the migration of the Jewish masses to Palestine. The Poalei Zion groups in other countries followed in their ideology either the Russian or the Austrian models. Poalei Zion in Romania and Bulgaria adhered to the Austrian school. In 1907 a World Union of Poalei Zion was founded. In 1920 the movement split over the attitude toward the Socialist and Communist Internationals, the Zionist Organization, and the place to be accorded to the movement's activities in Erez Israel. Left Poalei Zion sought unconditional affiliation with the Third International (Comintern); by 1924 it had abandoned this attempt and reorganized itself on an independent basis. The other faction, the Right Poalei Zion, merged in 1925 with the Zionist Socialists.

[7] Revisionist Zionism: The movement founded in 1925 and led by Vladimir Jabotinsky advocated the revision of the principles of Political Zionism developed by Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism. The main goals of the Revisionists was to put pressure on Great Britain for a Jewish statehood on both banks of the Jordan River, a Jewish majority in Palestine, the reestablishment of the Jewish regiments, and military training for the youth. The Revisionist Zionists formed the core of what became the Herut (Freedom) Party after the Israeli independence. This party subsequently became the central component of the Likud Party, the largest right-wing Israeli party since the 1970s.

[8] Hashomer Hatzair in Bulgaria: 'The Young Watchman'; A Zionist-socialist pioneering movement established in Bulgaria in 1932, Hashomer Hatzair trained youth for kibbutz life and set up kibbutzim in Palestine. During World War II, members were sent to Nazi-occupied areas and became leaders in Jewish resistance groups. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.

[9] Maccabi World Union: International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

[10] Jabotinsky, Vladimir (1880-1940): Founder and leader of the Revisionist Zionist movement; soldier, orator and a prolific author writing in Hebrew, Russian, and English. During World War I he established and served as an officer in the Jewish Legion, which fought in the British army for the liberation of the Land of Israel from Turkish rule. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the Keren Hayesod, the financial arm of the World Zionist Organization, founded in London in 1920, and was later elected to the Zionist Executive. He resigned in 1923 in protest over Chaim Weizmann's pro-British policy and founded the Revisionist Zionist movement and the Betar youth movement two years later. Jabotinsky also founded the ETZEL (National Military Organization) during the 1936-39 Arab rebellion in Palestine.

[11] Betar: (abbreviation of Berit Trumpeldor) A right-wing Zionist youth movement founded in 1923 in Riga, Latvia. Betar played an important role in Zionist education, in teaching the Hebrew language and culture, and methods of self-defense. It also inculcated the ideals of aliyah to Erez Israel by any means, legal and illegal, and the creation of a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan. Its members supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. In Bulgaria the organization started publishing its newspaper in 1934.

[12] Schubert, Franz (1797-1828): a famous Austrian composer known as master of song whose works bear the spirit of Romanticism. He composed over 950 works (approximately 600 of them are songs).

[13] Aleichem, Shalom (1859-1916): born in Russia as Solomon Rabinovitz, he is a Yiddish literature's classical writer. He is best known for his unique humorous style, 'laughter through tears'. His works include five novels, many plays, and some 300 short stories. Among them are: 'Adventures of Mottel, The Cantor's Son', 'The Adventures of Menahem-Mendl', 'Tevye the Dairyman', etc.

Source: <http://www.bialik.netaxis.qc.ca/yiddish/aleichem.htm>, <http://www.sholom-aleichem.org>, <http://www.encyclopedia.com>

[14] Malbish Arumim: Jewish women's charity organisation. It was registered in 1912 in Ruse and in 1920 in Sofia. Organisations 'Malbish Arumim' are women's charity ones, aimed at offering material support to poor Jewish girls and enhancing the popularization of Jewish culture in Bulgaria. Its activity was canceled with the introduction of the anti-Jewish Law for Protection of the Nation (1941) which liquidated all social, enlightenment, cultural and trade enterprises and organisations]

[15] Law for the Protection of the Nation: A comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation in Bulgaria was introduced after the outbreak of World War II. The 'Law for the Protection of the Nation' was officially promulgated in January 1941. According to this law, Jews did not have the right to own shops and factories. Jews had to wear the distinctive yellow star; Jewish houses had to display a special sign identifying it as being Jewish; Jews were dismissed from all posts in schools and universities. The internment of Jews in certain designated towns was legalized and all Jews were expelled from Sofia in 1943. Jews were only allowed to go out into the streets for one or two hours a day. They were prohibited from using the main streets, from entering certain business establishments, and from attending places of entertainment. Their radios, automobiles, bicycles and other valuables were confiscated. From 1941 on Jewish males were sent to forced labor battalions and ordered to do extremely hard work in mountains, forests and road construction. In the Bulgarian-occupied Yugoslav (Macedonia) and Greek (Aegean Thrace) territories the Bulgarian army and administration introduced extreme measures. The Jews from these areas were deported to concentration camps, while the plans for the deportation of Jews from Bulgaria proper were halted by a protest movement launched by the vice-chairman of the Bulgarian Parliament.

[16] Country Defence (Rodna zashtita): Proto-Fascist militant organization, founded in 1923 by retired army generals and led by Ivan Shkoynov. It declared fight against the political 'left' in general and the freemasons in particular. Members wore paramilitary uniforms and introduced the fascist salute. In 1930 the ultra right part split and gave birth to the Bulgarian Legions. In 1931, Country Defence merged with another extreme-right organization Kubrat (named after a proto-Bulgarian khan) and gave support to the party formation Democratic Union. After the 1934 coup

d'état the organization officially ceased to exist.

[17] Ratniks: The Ratniks, like the Branniks, were also members of a nationalist organization. They advocated a return to national values. The word 'rat' comes from the Old Bulgarian root meaning 'battle', i.e. 'Ratniks' fighters, soldiers.

[18] Yellow star in Bulgaria: According to a governmental decree all Bulgarian Jews were forced to wear distinctive yellow stars after 24th September 1942. Contrary to the German-occupied countries the stars in Bulgaria were made of yellow plastic or textile and were also smaller. Volunteers in previous wars, the war-disabled, orphans and widows of victims of wars, and those awarded the military cross were given the privilege to wear the star in the form of a button. Jews who converted to Christianity and their families were totally exempt. The discriminatory measures and persecutions ended with the cancellation of the Law for the Protection of the Nation on 17th August 1944.

[19] Halva: A sweet confection of Turkish and Middle Eastern origin and largely enjoyed throughout the Balkans. It is made chiefly of ground sesame seeds and honey.

[20] Utro: Meaning Morning, it was a Bulgarian bourgeois daily, issued between 1911 and 1914. It was founded by St. Damyanov and the first editor-in-chief was St. Tanev. Utro published sensational both local and international news, supporting the policy of the Government, especially during the World War II, as well as Bulgaria's pro-German orientation. Its circulation amounted to 160,000 copies.

[21] Zora: Meaning Dawn, it was a Bulgarian daily published between 1919 and 1944. It was owned by 'Balgarski Pечат' (Bulgarian Printing) publishing house and its editor-in-chief was Danail Krapchev. Zora was primarily affiliated to the rightist Bulgarian Democratic Party, but later it took a more neutral position and fought for national union. It defended the interests of the occupied Bulgarians from Thrace, Macedonia, Dobrudzha and the Western Outlying Districts. It published political, economic, and cultural information. After 9th September 1944, it stopped being published. Its editor-in-chief was convicted and executed.

[22] Bet Am: The Jewish center in Sofia today, housing all Jewish organizations.

[23] Dimitrov, Georgi (1882-1949): A Bulgarian revolutionary, who was the head of the Comintern from 1936 through its dissolution in 1943, secretary general of the Bulgarian Communist Party from 1945 to 1949, and prime minister of Bulgaria from 1946 to 1949. He rose to international fame as the principal defendant in the Leipzig Fire Trial in 1933. Dimitrov put up such a consummate defense that the judicial authorities had to release him.

[24] UYW: The Union of Young Workers (also called Revolutionary Youth Union). A communist youth organization, which was legally established in 1928 as a sub-organization of the Bulgarian Communist Youth Union (BCYU). After the coup d'état in 1934, when parties in Bulgaria were banned, it went underground and became the strongest wing of the BCYU. Some 70% of the partisans in Bulgaria were members of it. In 1947 it was renamed Dimitrov's Communist Youth Union, after Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party at the time.

[25] Forced name change of Jews in Bulgaria: As a part of the anti-Semitic legislation 'Law for Protection of the Nation', introduced in December 1940 and followed by a further governmental

decree in August 1942, Jews were not allowed to possess the Bulgarian ending of family names (-ov, -ev, -ich, etc.) and the Ashkenazim were forced to change their first names too. In the fall of 1940, interior minister, Petar Gabrovski, submitted to Parliament a draft bill called Law for Protection of the Nation. The bill contained four chapters: 1. On the secret and international organizations; 2. On the persons of Jewish origin; 3. On anti-national and suspicious actions; 4. Special provisions; and the whole legislative text was divided into 50 articles. The second chapter focused on people from Jewish origin with article 15 defining the legal term 'Jew' while the following 14 articles imposed severe limitation on Bulgarian Jews' civil and political rights. According to the requirements of this act, the Jews were forced to declare their origin with the due documents at the municipal authorities and police offices, removing the traditional Bulgarian endings -ov, -ev, -ich from their surnames. They were not authorized to be Bulgarian subjects, to vote, be elected to public bodies, enterprises or organizations, they were forbidden to occupy state, municipal or other positions in the public governing system or in private organizations. They were not allowed to be members of the organizations ruled by the interior ministry, to marry Bulgarians or own any open-land estate. Apart from that, their enrollment to education institutions as well as their right to practise freelance jobs, trade, industry and crafts were limited. All Jews were required to register their place of residence, which they were not allowed to change without prior permission, they were also asked to declare their properties. The restrictive measures of this chapter were connected with the personality, properties and professional activities of the Jews. On 24th December 1940, this bill was voted and passed by the 15th National Assembly. On 1st March 1941, the Government led by Bogdan Filov signed the protocol under which Bulgaria joined the Tripartite Pact and German troops entered the country.

[26] Ventura, Ana Avram (1925-1942): Bulgarian anti-fascist fighter of Jewish origin, born in the Danubian town of Ruse, a daughter of one of the richest industrialists there. She was a member of the communist youth organization of The Union of Young Workers and one of its leaders in Ruse and in 1942 also of the Bulgarian Workers' Party. She was killed in an underground flat on 22nd February 1944.

[27] Internment of Jews in Bulgaria: Although Jews living in Bulgaria were not deported to concentration camps abroad or to death camps, many were interned to different locations within Bulgaria. In accordance with the Law for the Protection of the Nation, the comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation initiated after the outbreak of WWII, males were sent to forced labor battalions in different locations of the country, and had to engage in hard work. There were plans to deport Bulgarian Jews to Nazi Death Camps, but these plans were not realized. Preparations had been made at certain points along the Danube, such as at Somovit and Lom. In fact, in 1943 the port at Lom was used to deport Jews from Aegean Thrace and from Macedonia, but in the end, the Jews from Bulgaria proper were spared.

[28] 24th May 1943: Protest by a group of members of parliament led by the deputy chairman of the National Assembly, Dimitar Peshev, as well as a large section of Bulgarian society. They protested against the deportation of the Jews, which culminated in a great demonstration on 24th May 1943. Thousands of people led by members of parliament, the Eastern Orthodox Church and political parties stood up against the deportation of Bulgarian Jews. Although there was no official law preventing deportation, Bulgarian Jews were saved, unlike those from Bulgarian occupied Aegean Thrace and Macedonia.

[29] Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee): The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish aid committees, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported the establishment of cultural meeting places, including libraries, theaters and gardens. It also provided religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from European and Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

[30] Institute for Rationalizations: It was set up by a law passed by the 15th National Assembly in 1941 upon proposal of the Bogdan Filov's cabinet under the name of Institute for Economic Rationalizations at the Council of Ministers. This institute merged the existing by then Bulgarian National Scientific Organization and Bulgaria's Standardization Institute. It was a state authority and a legal entity according to the legislation of the period. The aim of the Institute for Economic Rationalizations during these years was to co-operate for the economic strengthening of the state through applying the principles of rationalization. Its relations with the Bulgarian-German Chamber of Commerce and the Germany's Institute for Standardization and Economic Rationalization are apparent. After the end of the WWII it was closed down in 1948 when it was transformed into Institute for Rationalizations. It had two main departments: Inventions and Proposals for Rationalizations and Standards.

[31] 1956: It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest started in which Stalin's gigantic statue was destroyed. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationing in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's announcement that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the rising on 4th November and mass repression and arrests started. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy, and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989, the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

[32] Doctors' Plot: The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

[33] Kostov, Traicho (1897-1949): born in Sofia. After he graduated from the high school he enrolled in the National Service Academy. Later he started studying law at Sofia University. He took part in WWI. He made friends with officers who were narrow socialists under whose influence he adopted socialist ideas. In 1920 he became a member of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP). After the anti-fascist September uprising of 1923 he joined BCP's apparatus. In 1924 he was caught and convicted to 8 years imprisonment. He was granted amnesty in 1929 and immediately after that illegally left for the USSR. He worked at BCP's foreign office and was a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist International. He returned to Bulgaria in 1931 to direct the ideological activity of BCP and the Workers' Party parliamentary group. For the period from 1932 and 1936 he emigrated to the USSR three times. He went underground in the summer of 1940. As a secretary of the BCP's Central Committee he was one of the initiator's and leaders of the armed resistance led by BCP during WWII. In 1942 he was arrested and convicted to imprisonment for life. He was released on 7th September 1944 from the Pleven's jail. In 1945 he was elected general secretary of the BCP's Central Committee. In 1949, following Stalin's example for seeking enemies among the party members, he was accused of anti-party and anti-state activities and sentenced to death after a public process. He was posthumously rehabilitated.

[34] Slansky Trial: Communist show trial named after its most prominent victim, Rudolf Slansky. It was the most spectacular among show trials against communists with a wartime connection with the West, veterans of the Spanish Civil War, Jews, and Slovak 'bourgeois nationalists'. In November 1952 Slansky and 13 other prominent communist personalities, 11 of whom were Jewish, including Slansky, were brought to trial. The trial was given great publicity; they were accused of being Trotskyist, Titoist, Zionist, bourgeois, nationalist traitors, and in the service of American imperialism. Slansky was executed, and many others were sentenced to death or to forced labor in prison camps.

[35] Ana Pauker-Vasile Luca-Teohari Georgescu group: After 1945 there were two major groupings in the Romanian communist leadership: the Muscovites led by Ana Pauker, and the former illegal communists led by Gheorghe Dej. Ana Pauker arrived in Romania the day after the entry of the Soviet army as the leader of the group of communists returning from Moscow; the Muscovites were the major political rivals of Gheorghe Dej. As a result of their rivalry, three out of the four members of the Political Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party were convicted on trumped-up charges in show trials in 1952. The anti-Semitic campaign launched by Stalin in 1952, which also spread over to Romania, created a good opportunity to launch such a trial – both Luca and Pauker were of Jewish origin. Georgescu was executed. Luca was also sentenced to death but the sentence was changed to lifetime forced labor. He died in prison in 1960. Pauker was released after Stalin's death and lived in internal exile until her death.

[36] 10th November 1989: After 35 years of rule, Communist Party leader Todor Zhivkov was replaced by the hitherto Prime Minister Peter Mladenov who changed the Bulgarian Communist Party's name to Socialist Party. On 17th November 1989 Mladenov became head of state, as successor of Zhivkov. Massive opposition demonstrations in Sofia with hundreds of thousands of participants calling for democratic reforms followed from 18th November to December 1989. On 7th December the 'Union of Democratic Forces' (SDS) was formed consisting of different political organizations and groups.

[37] Six-Day-War: The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

[38] Yom Kippur War: The Arab-Israeli War of 1973, also known as the Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War, was a war between Israel on one side and Egypt and Syria on the other side. It was the fourth major military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states. The war lasted for three weeks: it started on 6th October 1973 and ended on 22nd October on the Syrian front and on 26th October on the Egyptian front.