Tinka Kohen

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Sofia
Bulgaria
Interviewer: Stephan Djambazov
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Now Tinka Kohen is 84 years old, but she is very energetic and vigorous. She lives very close to the Jewish cultural center, but she does not visit it, because she does not share the sentiment of the major part of the Jewish community in Bulgaria, who feel nostalgia for the socialist past. Tinka's daughter Leah was one of the distinguished Bulgarian diplomats since 1989. She was ambassador to Brussels and Switzerland. She married in Switzerland and remained there to live. Tinka lives alone in a cozy, small apartment, but her son often visits her as well as Leah when she comes to Bulgaria. Tinka goes out with friends and loves walking to the Borisova park in Sofia, which is a good distance from her home. This keeps her in shape. She is slim and very agile. And now she took up the noble task to find money for the cleaning of the Jewish cemeteries in Sofia. She does not complain of any illnesses and does not remain indifferent to the events taking place around her.

My family background

My paternal grandparents come from Svishtov [a small Bulgarian town on the Danube] and later they moved to Pleven. My grandfather, Iakov Haimov Moyseev, was a corn dealer. He had grapevines and also produced wine. He fought in the Russian-Turkish war [1877-1878], which liberated the Bulgarian people and he took part in the defense of Pleven in 1877, and his name is even inscribed on a memorial plate in Pleven. I didn't know Iakov very well. He lived in Pleven, and I lived in Sofia. I remember only two occasions when I visited his home. He lived in a nice house. Iakov wasn't religious, but he probably observed the traditional religious holidays. He lived to 101 years of age, but unfortunately we didn't get in touch very often. I have no memories of my grandmother.

Iakov's eldest son was named Haim. His next child was a daughter, Bohora; my father, Mois, was the third child. The fourth one was Rica and the youngest was Mordo. From all the children, only Haim helped his father with the business. Almost all of them left town, only Haim, who had two children, remained in Pleven. We didn't keep in touch with them.

Bohora had a son, Mayer Djine, and a daughter. The son joined the socialist movement very early and in 1925 after the bombing of the Sveta Nedelia Church in Sofia 1, Mayer Djine escaped to Turkey, afraid of repression. From there he went to France, where he married an Armenian. After Stalin's address in the middle of the 1930s, in which he appealed to all Armenians to come back and help build socialism [the appeal was also addressed to all Soviet citizens living abroad], Mayer Djine and his wife went to Soviet Armenia.

I heard this story after 9th September 1944 2 when Mayer Djine came to Bulgaria. It impressed me quite a lot. He told us that he went to the USSR with his wife and another family, in which the husband was a dentist. But at the border, the dentist disappeared and he was never seen again. Probably, he was sent to a camp. Mayer Djine remained in Armenia during World War II, where he was drafted to the army. His wife died during the war of typhus, and when the war was over he came back to Bulgaria with his two children.

Even as early as 1945 we were shocked by the things he told us about the Soviet repressions, the dictatorship and Stalinism. At that time my husband, Pepo, and I, believed strongly in the new order. So we regarded Mayer Djine as a Trotskyite and we avoided contact with him. When Djine decided to move to Israel in 1949, he suggested that my husband should go to see him off at the railway station to hear some more facts. But the real reason was that he was afraid of someone stopping him from leaving. However, my husband didn't go to the station, because he didn't trust Djine. Later, when we went to Israel for the first time in the middle of the 1960s, we met with Djine and Pepo apologized to him for not meeting him.

My maternal grandfather Avramov died very young. I don't remember him at all, I don't even know his first name. I only remember others speaking about him as someone who had recently died. Even my elder sisters remember him only vaguely as an old man sitting quietly. My mother used to tell us that he read the Kabbala all the time; he seems to have been very religious. And from all this reading and mystery solving, he went insane and died – that's how they explained his death. I suppose he died of some kind of mental illness or sclerosis. My grandmother, Amada Avramova, became a widow very young. She lived with her son Marko, who supported the family. Amada was a housewife and she never worked outside the home. Later I visited her more or less often. She was very friendly, she smoked cigarettes and we played cards. She wasn't very religious: she observed the high holidays – Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, but she didn't observe Sabbath.

Marko was the leader in the family. He was a very enterprising man and took us all to live in Sofia, including my mother. But, while he was still young he got tuberculosis and spent one year in Switzerland - at that time people with tuberculosis were sent there for treatment. Marko was well off financially and probably he himself paid for his treatment, which at that time wasn't as expensive as it is now. When he returned, he started a textile factory. At first we all lived in the same house, later, after Marko's death the families separated. I haven't kept in touch with Marko's other brothers and sisters. Gavriel left for Israel a long time ago [1935] and I seldom heard from him or from Rebecca, who left later.

My mother, Matilda Mois Iakova, nee Avramova, was born in 1880 in Samokov [a town south of Sofia]. I never spent any time in Samokov, because my mother came to Sofia when she was very young. She was very intelligent for her time – she studied in the French College 3 and knew French very well.

My paternal grandmother was from Solun [today Thessaloniki, Greece] and she didn't know Bulgarian. My paternal grandparents were modern people, with no prejudices and they didn't wear typical Jewish clothes. I spent some time in Pleven as a child, but I only remember that they lived in a beautiful house with beds, servants and everything was in the style of the times. Everybody apart from my grandmother spoke Bulgarian perfectly, which shows that they came to Bulgaria a long time ago. They exchanged a word in Ladino only when they didn't want the children to understand what they were speaking about and so we never learned the language.

My father, Mois Iakov Moyseev, was born in Pleven in 1877. He graduated from high school there and around 1900 he came to Sofia, where he was a soldier and met my mother - I don't know where and how they met. They had a religious wedding around 1900. My father worked as a clerk in the municipality in the beginning. When my uncle Marco Avramo built a factory in Troyan and then a textile factory in Sliven, he hired my father as an accountant. Before that Marco Avramov bought a house in Sofia and gathered the whole family there. Unfortunately, he died in 1932 and his wife sold the house. In 1940 she emigrated with her children to the USA and the factory was expropriated twice – the first time under the anti-Jewish laws, the second time during the communist rule in 1944 when it was nationalized.

We were never deprived of anything, although we never had our own house. We lived in a rented house after my uncle died and his wife sold the house. We had four rooms, but when the factory was expropriated in 1940, my father was fired and our troubles began. The general impression that all Jews were rich then is not true. I come from the middle class and I lived in the center, but there were also poor Jews, who lived in Iuchbunar 4.

My parents dressed fashionably. At that time hats and long dresses were very fashionable. We had servants, we went to resorts. My mother liked Bankya most [a town close to Sofia, famous for its mineral water]. We also went to Vurshets and Kostenets [also famous balneological centers]. My first holiday on the seaside was in Varna in 1934-35.

We had a lot of books – Bulgarian and French, because my sisters read a lot and they, especially my sister Milka, had writer friends, such as Nikolay Liliev, Nikolay Hrelkov, D.B. Mitov and others. But eventually Milka married a lower-class Jew in Sliven, whose name was Shmil. My mother also read and loved to sing. She went deaf very early and spent her days reading and looking after her daughters. I was brought up mostly by my sisters, who helped my mother a lot. My mother also looked after us, but our age difference was very big. I was the youngest and my sisters loved me so much that they were all very keen to look after me. They regarded me as their little doll.

Our maids were usually young girls from the villages near Sofia, who lived with us. They used to spend about a year or two with us. I don't remember any particular maid very well. Their tasks were mainly to clean the house and do the washing. My mother was the one who did the shopping and the cooking, but they also helped her by carrying the products that were bought, washing them, bringing in coal and wood, cleaning and firing the stoves. Mother and the maid went shopping on Thursday to prepare meals on Friday for the weekend. We went to the Tsentralni Hali

[the central covered market in Sofia], which was near the Central Synagogue. I don't remember my mother buying live hens to take them to the synagogue to be killed in accordance with the religious law. But I have some vague memories of hens being killed there. We bought meat many times, even pork steaks – my father lied to my mother saying that they were veal. Monday we ate beans and did the washing.

My father fought in World War I and they told us that the soldiers wanted to go home to their families so much that they drank from the same water that the buffaloes drank from in order to catch dysentery and be sent home on leave. My father was Bohemian in nature – he loved life, and he loved gambling, so my mother was very happy when gambling was banned after 9th September 1944. He never lost much money, he did it because of the thrill the game gave him. We were not part of the Jewish community, although we kept in touch with some of our relatives. My mother had some socialist leanings, but my father didn't. They mixed with intelligent people – Jews and Bulgarians. They visited each other, but not very often. Usually my father went around the cafés to gamble while my mother stayed at home. I remember more clearly the friends of my sisters, with whom they went to the theatre, the cinema and to restaurants.

My sisters and I were born in Sofia. I am the youngest and I have four sisters. Sophie was born in 1902, Milka in 1904, Liza two years later and Stela in 1908. My uncle Marco, who was a very enterprising man, took care of all of us. He sent one of my sisters, Lisa, to Paris to study French at the Sorbonne. He sent my other sister Stela, who graduated from a sewing school, to study design in France for one year. She was 'progressive' [i.e. of left-wing convictions] and instead of studying, she took part in protests – the trial against Georgi Dimitrov 5 was taking place in Berlin then [in the 1930s] and there were protests of left-wing parties throughout Europe. Before that [in the 1920s], my uncle sent my third sister, Milka, to Germany for one year to study dentistry. But then came the time of Rosa Luxemburg 6, the country fell into a deep economic crisis and Milka couldn't finish her studies. My sisters Sophie and Milka were accountants, Lisa became a teacher and Stela a designer and artist.

Growing up

I was born in 1918. From my childhood I remember most clearly the bombing of the Sveta Nedelia Church in Sofia. I was seven years old then, the whole city was blocked off and nobody was allowed be on the streets. Only the children were allowed to go and buy bread, nothing else. I was also sent for bread and I saw carriages with wounded people speeding along the streets. I also saw a young man going out of his house when a mounted policeman came down on him and started beating him with a club for violating the ban. Dead silence reigned throughout the whole city. I was so afraid that I stumbled and fell and I remember having both my knees bandaged like the wounded. This is all I remember.

I studied in a state high school. My favorite subjects were French, Latin and physics. My favorite teachers were Mrs. Taseva, who taught physics and Mrs. Arabadjieva, who taught literature. I also liked the teacher in Latin. I took private lessons in French and I learned enough to be able to communicate with my son-in-law, the husband of Leah, who is Swiss. Of the official holidays I remember 1st May – May Day, which for me was the Day of the Flowers. I most loved 24th May7, the day of St. Cyril and Methodius 8, the creators of the Slavic alphabet.

During my childhood all of my friends were Bulgarians, I didn't have any Jewish friends. We lived very happily. When I was six years old, I became friends with a Bulgarian girl and we were inseparable until just two years ago when she died. We went to parties with my friends, in the summer I went to the seaside in Varna, sometimes with my sister, sometimes in organized school camps. My classmates and I went on excursions to the Vitosha Mountain. I seldom went out with my parents, because I was the youngest child and we didn't have much in common. Ever since I was 12 years old, at the end of each school year, they used to put me on the train and send me to spend the summer with my sister Sophie in Sliven. I loved her as if she were my mother and so did she. We went to Karandila [a region in the Balkan Mountains of Sliven] or to Varna. If I didn't go to Sliven, I went with my mother to Bankya. But when I grew older, I preferred to spend the whole summer with my sister in Sliven.

As a child, I never experienced any anti-Semitic attitudes directed towards me. But I remember an incident that made a great impression on me. As a student during religion class, since I was the only Jew there I had nothing to do, as class wasn't mandatory for me. So instead of wandering around, I asked if I could stay in class and listen. The teacher, Mrs. Kovacheva, refused squarely, "You cannot stay. You are a Jew and you cannot stay." I was so shocked, I went home and told my father about that. He was a militant man and we went straight to the headmaster's office. The headmaster said that I could visit those classes if I wanted to and that the teacher was in the wrong. After many years we became neighbors of that teacher, but I've never reminded her of that although it hurt me a lot.

My parents didn't know Hebrew and they weren't religious. We celebrated Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, but we didn't observe Sabbath. My sisters joined the socialist movement from an early age and we were atheists. The holidays bored us. Our father took the book [the Haggadah on seder]; it was written in Bulgarian, or maybe in Ladino, I don't remember. He read out of it for a while, as my mother prepared the dinner. Since I was the youngest child, they gave me a bag with small loaves of bread to carry, like those made during the escape from Egypt, but different from the matzah. They were very hard and we could hardly eat them. During the evening my sisters read books and nobody paid attention to what our father was reading. My sisters and I didn't go to the synagogue, later I started going there, but only to meet with boys in the courtyard. We didn't eat kosher food. My mother didn't go the synagogue either, probably because she was deaf.

I graduated from high school in 1937, when, unluckily, Simeon [Saxe-Coburg-Gotha] 9 was born and then I don't know why, all graduation balls were banned and they raised all students' marks. That was the generous gesture of King Boris III 10 so that no student would have to repeat a grade the year that his son was born. To fill up the university with even more incompetent students! And since we didn't have a graduation ball, the following year we gathered in the BIAD Restaurant in Sofia. I had a Bulgarian boyfriend, with whom I was platonically, but beautifully in love. But he graduated in law and went to Plovdiv, and so I was free. I don't know if I was very pretty that evening in BIAD, but I was constantly invited to dance. We danced the waltz and tango. I received notes, flowers, and when I went back home – a serenade. My future husband was at that dinner with a cousin of mine. Josif Menahem Kohen – his nickname was Pepo – was born in Skopje [today Macedonia] on 11th June 1911. While they were talking with each other, Pepo asked my cousin to introduce him to me. I married him in 1939, but not because he was Jewish. If my former friend, the Bulgarian, hadn't been so prejudiced, maybe I would have married him.

During the War

Then in 1939 Branniks 11 and Ratniks 12 appeared, but what bothered me the most was that a cousin of mine kept his Jewish origin secret. He was an international crook, and remained such until the end of his life. At that time he mixed only with Bulgarians, he concealed the fact that he was a Jew and claimed that he was an engineer, although he had graduated from an ordinary technical school. One night he took me to Bulgaria Restaurant which was frequented only by officers. And when he was about to go inside, one of his friends, an officer, said, 'Forget it; it is full of chifuti here [derogatory nickname for Jews in Bulgarian].' I was shocked and I asked my cousin, 'Don't they know that you are a Jew?' and he mumbled something in response. So, I went away.

I started studying law at Sofia University. My husband and I lived in a rented onebedroom apartment. But then from 1939-1941 anti-Jewish laws and the Law for the Protection of the Nation 13 were passed in Bulgaria, which led to many Jews being laid off of work and the men were sent to labor camps. I studied only two years, because I had to start work in 1941 as a spinner in a factory. My husband was sent to a labor camp, and my father was laid off. I got pregnant, but it was a stillbirth after the first bombing by the English of Sofia in 1941. There was a song at that time: 'We will fly against England' portraying the war as something abstract and far away. But the bombings were real enough and during one of them, after we went down to the basement, my mother went up to go to the toilet and forgot to switch the lamp off. The following day my father was arrested for ostensibly making signs to the English for where to bomb. He was later released, but because of the anxiety and the bombings, I had a stillbirth.

I gave birth to Leah in June 1942. Pepo was in a labor camp again [see forced labor camps in Bulgaria] 14. I don't remember how much time he spent at home – it was only a few months. In May 1943 we were interned to Vratsa and in April 1944 we moved to Sliven to live with my sister. My name was changed to Ruth, but it didn't figure in any documents later on. [In order to distinguish the Jews from the Bulgarians, the names of the Jews were changed only to Biblical ones – so that there would be no doubt that they were Jews. But this change of names was done a bit clumsily. So, it happened that in some documents the Jews received their new names and in others they still kept their old ones. And not all names were changed, only those that were also used by Bulgarians and were ambiguous.]

As for the Bulgarian people, only a few of them were fascists, mainly among the politicians and leaders. There was no anti-Semitism among the common people. It was artificially instilled. When we were interned to Vratsa [see Internment of Jews in Bulgaria] 15 and we arrived at the railway station, one of the railway officials told us, 'We hear that you are going to be deported. When you arrive during the night, go to this address of a colleague and a friend of mine. He will put you up for the night. The next day he will check what the situation is. If you are going to be deported, he will put you in touch with the partisan squad so that you can escape. If he sees that you are being accommodated in the town, then there won't be any deportation and you can go and settle in your house.' And he told us the truth. When we arrived at half past two in the morning, we went to the address he had given us and the people welcomed us very warmly. In the morning the man checked and saw that there were no signs of deportation, and we went to receive accommodation. But I really regret not looking for those people afterwards to thank them. We didn't receive any call-up orders for deportations, as other Jews from southern Bulgaria did. The reason was that they were afraid to deport Sofia citizens.

The people at whose place we lived were very hospitable. They helped us as much as they could with food and with their kind attitude. We had some saved money, but we didn't have to spend much of it, because we didn't have to pay any rent. That's why I regret now that due to being absorbed in our everyday worries, we didn't look for those people later on to thank them for their hospitality.

After the War

Later we moved to Sliven and we celebrated 9th September 1944 there. We remained in Sliven and my husband took part in the social activities in the town. He established a Jewish Fatherland Front 16. We signed up in the Bulgarian Communist Party. He was also offered the position of an examining magistrate, but he declined. The People's Court was established and he was appointed chairman for the Sliven and Kotel region. Many fascists were sentenced at that time. After 1946 we went back to Sofia and my husband started working as a lawyer. I started to work as a librarian in the Slavyanska Beseda community center. I earned my living by distributing books in the library of the community center. Later I went to work in the State Insurance Institute and gave up studying.

We didn't leave Bulgaria, because we put much hope in the USSR – we thought that this was the ideal legal system. But then we became disappointed, by the time the Doctor's Plot 17 in Moscow took place; we knew that it was all a lie. News started coming in about repressions in the USSR. Mayer Djine returned to Bulgaria. At first, we didn't believe him, but later we found out that he had told the truth. But once you become a party member, there is no turning back. We had to wait for 10th November 1989 18 in order to leave the party. Before that, we started to mix only with Jewish families, since we didn't trust others much.

Our second child, Valeri, was born in 1947. We lived in a rented apartment, we were not well off, but we managed to educate our children. Leah graduated from the Academy of Music and became a music critic, and Valeri earned a university degree in engineering. We were never very religious so there was no conflict between our membership in the Bulgarian Communist Party and the Jewish traditions. And we didn't observe all Jewish holidays – we only observed Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, but not Sabbath. And we did that not out of piety, but in order to keep the tradition alive. There isn't such a big gap between the Jewish traditions and socialist ideas, because both of them value justice most of all. Reality, however, turned out to be quite different from our ideals. So the year 1989 had to come for us to get rid of our delusions.

All of our relatives left for Israel when the Jewish state was established in 1948. We met with them when we went to visit. Before democracy came in 1989, we went to Israel three times and after that three more times. When we were leaving for the first time, we went to get our passports at the police station. There they delicately hinted to us that if we saw or heard anything special, we should call them when we got back. But we told them that we were going on a friendly visit to see our relatives and friends and weren't interested in anything else, so we wouldn't be of use to them.

The wars in Israel in 1967 [see Six-Day-War] 19 and 1973 [see Yom Kippur War] 20 brought us to marry our son Valeri to a Jewish girl. At that time our daughter Leah was married to a Bulgarian from a family who didn't have any feelings for the problems of the Jews. At this point I told my son that only a Jew who experienced and understood the problems of Israel, could understand the Jewish tragedy. And so if he would marry a Jew, I told him, she would have a different view on the events there. The breaking of diplomatic ties between Bulgaria and Israel also hurt me a lot – here

the Jews were called aggressors and so we mixed only with Jewish friends so that we could talk and share our opinions more freely.

We kept a regular correspondence with our relatives. But I remember the following incident. My sister-in-law often went to the Israeli embassy before diplomatic ties were broken. And each holiday she received invitations for parties. One day there was a policeman waiting for her in front of her home and he took her to the station and asked her, 'You often go to the Israeli embassy, why do you go there, what do you talk about inside?' My father was also interrogated about his visits to the embassy. And they were made to sign a declaration stating that no political issues were discussed in the embassy.

Let me tell you a funny story: when I was in Israel around 1980, a friend of mine there called me and said, 'Tinka, a friend of mine will come to see you in Bulgaria. Please, do her the favor that she will ask of you.' But she told me nothing else on the phone. In a couple of days, a woman called, speaking in Russian and said, 'I'm the friend of your friend Shelly and I want to see you.' She came and told me that she had moved from Moscow to Israel seven years earlier. But she had relatives to whom she wrote letters and her sister went on an excursion to Bulgaria so that they could meet. She wanted me to help her find out in which hotel she was. When I checked all the big hotels, I remembered the Slavia Hotel. Indeed, it turned out that there was such a group of tourists there and I went to speak to the group leader. I made up the story that my daughter was a fellow student of that woman, that she heard that she was here and wanted to meet her. But he told me that there was no such person in his group.

We both went to the hotel and asked a Russian woman in the foyer. It turned out that not only was the woman I had been looking for there, but she was also in the same room as the woman we asked. So, both sisters started meeting in secret. The woman went out of the hotel, as if to go shopping and went to see her sister, who had rented a room in another hotel. After this she traveled throughout Bulgaria to all the same places the group went to, such as to Pleven and Varna, to be with her. She couldn't even give her a little gift, because she was afraid that the Russian customs officials might confiscate it. So, such things happened then. Two sisters weren't allowed to keep in touch properly!

After 1989

After 1989 democracy did a lot of good for me. You could breathe now, speak, tell jokes – but nowadays I don't hear jokes any more. 10th November 1989 brought greater freedom, but I was in a way ostracized by the Jewish community in Sofia. They called me a traitor, because my daughter, Leah, signed up with the opposition party called Union of Democratic Forces. Once I met an acquaintance who was with another Jew and he asked me why I didn't visit the Bet Am 21, just next door. I answered, 'Why should I come, you've turned it into a branch of Pozitano? [The headquarters of the Bulgarian Socialist Party is located on Pozitano street] Why do you invite Aleksander Lilov [one of the ideologists of the Bulgarian Communist Party during the time of Todor Zhivkov] on your holidays and anniversaries?' And the other man grabbed me and shouted, 'You, fascist, do you know that my brother was killed by the fascists before 9th September?' 'But that was 60 years ago, even Israel and Germany have shaken hands since then', I told him. 'And your brother was revenged immediately after 9th September – the People's Court and so on, so stop talking about this!' And now when he sees me in the Jewish Center he tells me, 'Every time I see

you, my mood is spoiled!' And I seldom go there. I find it boring. I prefer to take a walk in Borisova Gradina [the central park in Sofia] than listen to their silly conversations.

Now I have taken up the task to clean the Jewish cemeteries. Those from the Shalom organization 22 receive big sums from the Joint 23, and spend it on so many things, but they don't spare any for the cemeteries. Because the Joint told them that they give money for the living, not for the dead. So, together with two other women I decided to gather the necessary sum to clean the cemeteries. Because they are all overgrown with weeds, the monuments cannot be seen well, and the cemetery is full of ticks and perhaps even snakes.

Glossary

1 Bombing of Sveta Nedelia Church

In 1925 the military wing of the Bulgarian Communist Party launched a terrorist attack by blowing up the dome of the church. It was carried out during the funeral ceremony of one of the generals of King Boris III. There were dozens of dead and wounded, however, the King himself was late for the ceremony and was not hurt.
2 9th September 1944: The day of the communist takeover in Bulgaria. In September 1944 the Soviet Union unexpectedly declared war on Bulgaria. On 9th September 1944 the Fatherland Front, a broad left-wing coalition, deposed the government. Although the communists were in the minority in the Fatherland Front, they were the driving force in forming the coalition, and their position was strengthened by the presence of the Red Army in Bulgaria.
3 French College: An elite Catholic college teaching French language and culture and subsidized by the French Carmelites. It was closed in 1944.

4 Iuchbunar
The poorest residential district in Sofia; the word is of Turkish origin and means 'the three wells'.

5 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.

6 Luxemburg, Rosa (1871-1919)
German revolutionary and one of the founders of the Polish Socialist Party (1892). She moved to Germany in 1898 and was a leader in the German Social Democratic Party. She participated in the Revolution of 1905 in Russian Poland and was active in the Second International. She was one of the founders of the German Communist Party and she also edited its organ, Rote Fahne. Critical of Lenin in his triumph, she foresaw his dictatorship over the proletariat becoming permanent. She was murdered in prison in Berlin.

7 24th May

The day of Slavic script and culture, a national holiday on which Bulgarian culture and writing is celebrated, paying special tribute to Cyril and Methodius, the creators of the first Slavic alphabet, the forerunner of the Cyrillic script.

8 St

Cyril and Methodius: Greek monks from Thessaloniki, living in the 9th century. In order to convert the Slavs to Christianity the two brothers created the Slavic (Glagolitic) script, based on the Greek one, and translated many religious texts to Old Church Slavonic, which is the liturgical language of many of the Eastern Orthodox Churches up until today. After Bulgaria converted to Christianity under Boris in 865, his son and successor Simeon I supported the further development of Slavic liturgical works which led to a refinement of the Slavic literary language and a simplification of the alphabet - The Cyrillic script, named in honor of St. Cyril. The Cyrillic alphabet today is used in Orthodox Slavic countries such as Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus. It is also used by some non-Slavic countries previously part of the Soviet Union, such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgizstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, as well as most linguistic minorities within Russia and also the country of Mongolia.

9 Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Simeon (b

1937): son and heir of Boris III and grandson of Ferdinand, the first King of Bulgaria. The birth of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha in 1937 was celebrated as a national holiday. All students at school had their grades increased by one mark. After the Communist Party's rise to power on 9th September 1944 Bulgaria became a republic and the family of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha was forced to leave the country. They settled in Spain with their relatives. Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha returned from exile after the fall of communism and was elected prime minister of Bulgaria in 2001 as Simeon Sakskoburgotski.

10 King Boris III

The Third Bulgarian Kingdom was a constitutional monarchy with democratic constitution. Although pro-German, Bulgaria did not take part in World War II with its armed forces. King Boris III (who reigned from 1918-1943) joined the Axis to prevent an imminent German invasion in Bulgaria, but he refused to send Bulgarian troops to German aid on the Eastern front. He died suddenly after a meeting with Hitler and there have been speculations that he was actually poisoned by the Nazi dictator who wanted a more obedient Bulgaria. Most Bulgarian Jews saved from the Holocaust (over 50,000 people) regard King Boris III as their savior.

11 Brannik

Pro-fascist youth organization. It started functioning after the Law for the Protection of the Nation was passed in 1941 and the Bulgarian government forged its pro-German policy. The Branniks regularly maltreated Jews.

12 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.

13 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.

14 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.

15 Internment of Jews in Bulgaria

Although Jews living in Bulgaria where 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.

16 Fatherland Front

A broad left wing umbrella organization, created in 1942, with the purpose to lead the Communist Party to power.

17 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.

18 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.

19 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.

20 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.

21 Bet Am

The Jewish center in Sofia today, housing all Jewish organizations.

22 Shalom Organization

Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria. It is an umbrella organization uniting 8,000 Jews in Bulgaria and has 19 regional branches. Shalom supports all forms of Jewish activities in the country and organizes various programs.

23 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.