David Kohen

David Bucco Kohen
Sofia

Bulgaria

Interviewer: Dimitar Bozhilov

Date of interview: October 2004

Professor David Kohen is among the most respected Jews in Bulgaria. His long years of work in the State Central Archive are internationally recognized. He inspires with respect with his clear and objective point of views on the events his life made him a witness to during the whole 20th century. He thinks of himself as a happy man, because of his relatives, friends, as well as the opportunity to have a profession and vocation that gives sense to his life even at present.

My ancestors came from the Sephardic 1 branch of Jews who were expelled from Spain 2 in 1492 by King Fernando and Queen Isabela because they didn't want to be baptized. Jews crossed the Mediterranean by boats to reach Northern Africa; many of them, however, by land through Southern France and Italy, went to the Balkan Peninsula, where the Ottoman dynasty ruled. [Editor's note: The Sephardim mainly settled in Ottoman maritime cities, first of all Salonika, today Greece. They probably went there by sea and less typically by land.]. The Jews were warmly received there. The Ottoman rulers then needed their knowledge in the field of medicine and handicrafts. [A typical occupation of the Balkan Sephardim was textile production and trade.] According to some reports, there were even advisors to the sultan who were Jews. The Jewish people were granted the right of freedom of religion, which was very important to them. [According to the Sharia (Islam religious code), the Muslim state was to tolerate all people of monotheistic faiths. As a result Muslims, Jews and Christians coexisted relatively peacefully within the Ottoman Empire for hundreds of years.]. So they remained within the borders of the Ottoman Empire.

Jews who came to live in the Bulgarian territory 3 came chiefly from Salonika, Adrianople and Istanbul [both today Turkey]. There a compact mass of Jewish people lived, and as far as I know my paternal and maternal grandparents came from Adrianople. In Bulgaria they found a place granting them full religious freedom, which they needed very much, as well as the right to practice their professions. [The territory of Bulgaria was an integral part of the Ottoman Empire up until 1878.] Here, as it was in Spain, they were detached from land and didn't occupy themselves with agriculture. Their professions were connected with the city life; they were into handicrafts and small trade. Since they had relations with many of their coreligionists throughout Europe, part of them managed to establish profitable connections with large Jewish centers such as Rome, Vienna, and Paris.

My paternal grandmother and grandfather, Luna Kohen and Yuda Kohen, were grocers in Plovdiv. My maternal grandfather, Aron Mori, was engaged in production of confectionery in Nova Zagora. I have heard my father, Bucco Kohen, bantering with my mother, Klara Kohen, that her family promised to give him a wagon of sugar in dowry, but he never caught a glimpse of that wagon. Of

course, there was no such wagon at all. It was just that my father had a very good sense of humor.

My father told me that in the mornings, before he went to school, he used to put a tray full of snacks on his head, which had been prepared by my grandfather. He would go to the market to sell them, and it wasn't before it that he would go to school. Thus he helped his family, which wasn't small at all. They were four brothers and one sister. My father was born in 1888, most probably in Samokov. He died in 1982. He was the eldest son in the family. One of my father's brothers, David Yuda Kohen, died during World War I [4] in French captivity. According to my father, he was killed by Bulgarian soldiers who envied him for allegedly being in a privileged position before the Frenchmen since he spoke French very well. We can't be sure if that was exactly the case. I don't know where my father got this information from. Another brother of his, Israel Kohen, immigrated to France at the beginning of the century and was captured with his wife during the fascist years. His daughter and my cousin Jacqueline happened not to be at home by chance; she was with a friend. Her parents were taken to Auschwitz where they were gassed.

My father's last brother, Samuil Kohen, ran a grocery store in Haskovo, next to Boff railway station. I don't now when exactly Uncle Israel immigrated to France, but it was at the beginning of the 20th century. He left in search of a better job. He was a white-collar worker. My cousin Jacqueline, his daughter, showed me the recommendation letters he had when he changed jobs with different companies. He had been recommended as a clerk who worked consciously. I have seen a picture of him on a beach in Marseilles where they first lived. He changed his name in France from Israel Kohen to Jacques Kohen. His wife's name was Victoria Kohen. They both died on 16th September 1942. He was only 39 years old. His daughter, Jacqueline, managed to move to Algeria during the war to stay with a maternal uncle, who was an industrialist there. She worked as a blue-collar laborer there for a while and returned to France after the war ended. There she married a Frenchman: Henry Chevalier. They have a very nice family with three children: two boys and a girl.

My father grew up in Plovdiv, where he studied at the Alliance Israelite Universelle [5] up to the seventh grade. He studied accountancy on his own and started working as a white-collar worker with various companies. His work required him to move to Nova Zagora, where he met my mother and married her. I was born in Nova Zagora, while my two brothers, Aron Kohen and Leon Kohen were born in Haskovo.

My father married my mother, Klara Kohen, nee Aron Mori, in Nova Zagora in 1915. My mother was born in 1889 and died in 1958. At one of the annual meetings of Balkan Sephardi Jews [The 'Esperanza' festival of culture and creative work of Balkan Sephardi Jews was set up in Sofia in 1998. It's held every two years under the auspices of Joint. Up to now, it has taken place thrice in Sofia and once in Belgrade with participants from Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Croatia and Turkey.], I mentioned this family name and one of the participants exclaimed that there was a family carrying the same name in Adrianople. I can't say where my mother was born for sure. Maybe she was born in Nova Zagora, where she lived with her parents and where she met my father, but it's also possible that she was born in Adrianople, where her parents had moved from.

I hardly remember my maternal grandfather, Aron Mori, but I can recall my grandmother, Mazaltov Mori, very well. She was a very religious woman. There was an interesting incident that took place in Haskovo shortly before Pesach. The whole house was to be cleaned up perfectly, of course.

There shouldn’t have remained even a single crumb of bread or speck of dust. She carried out a special inspection of the house lest a crumb of bread had remained. A special check up of the whole house was conducted. All the dishes were washed and polished to brilliance with boiling water, soap and sand, and then they were put into a special cupboard so that nobody could touch or pollute them. Once it happened that the dishes were put into the cupboard, but there was a pot of jam in it. I liked jam and I took a spoon and had a bite. My mother saw this and she told my grandmother who had all the dishes brushed anew, washed and dried, because of my touching the cupboard where the dishes for Pesach were put.

My grandmother used to visit us often for long hours and on Saturdays as well. My mother was also very religious and she didn’t work on Saturdays, she also wouldn’t touch money nor would she kindle a fire on Saturdays. When she was with us on Saturdays, she hired a Turkish girl of our neighbors to switch on the light at night. I used to ask her if it was a great sin to switch on an electric light. She would confess it was, and I would then ask her why she always made this girl commit a sin. She couldn’t answer. This and some other events made me start alienating from her, in contrast to my other grandmother whom I loved very much.

We lived in Nova Zagora only for a couple of years after I was born; I have only one memory of this time. We used to live in a rented apartment in the building of a vet doctor, Vitanov. This name was often repeated in my family. Our kitchen was exactly above theirs, and there was a hole in the floor so my family could directly speak with the Vitanovs. They didn’t have children and often had rows. But in my presence they would always cool down. They wanted to have children very much, that was all. My mother told me she had often sent me to them and this settled down the disagreements between them every time.

There was no Jewish neighborhood in Nova Zagora. In Haskovo the Jewish neighborhood had between 600 and 800 inhabitants. There was a self-contained Jewish community and no Jews lived outside the neighborhood.

My father was the deputy mayor of Nova Zagora in 1919, because the legally elected mayor had been arrested in the barracks. The party of the narrow socialists supported him and he was elected mayor of Nova Zagora. Bulgaria’s socialist party 6 had split into narrow and broad socialists. The narrow ones were with Dimitar Blagoev 7, while the broad ones were with Yanko Sakazov [Sakazov, Yanko (1860-1934): socialist leader, elected Member of Parliament eleven times from 1894 to 1934, participant in the Socialist International. In 1918 he became Minister of Trade, Industry and Labor and introduced the eight-hour working day. Sakazov started the construction of the first state workers’ home for miners in Pernik, and initiated projects for developing measures for the protection of children and women workers]. After he became the mayor, a woman assistant told him that representatives of the municipal administration didn’t work. My father was surprised and asked about the reason. She told him that up to that day it was routine for every new mayor from any party to fire all the employees of the administration and to appoint new people from his own party for their positions. Then he gathered the salaried staff and told them he would assess them only by their work, nothing else mattered, so that they could calmly continue doing their work. The people calmed down and took on their tasks.

My family moved to Haskovo in the early 1920s and I lived there until 1945. I have unforgettable memories from my childhood years and I’ll keep them for the rest of my life. Those two events: the

one with the repeated dish cleaning for Pesach, and that with the Turkish girl, who was hired to switch on the light, as well as another one, which took place when I was in the first or second grade, determined me as a life-long atheist. The third one was as follows: A wooden box for pens, pencils and rubbers was stolen in my classroom. The box belonged to a girl whose father was the wealthiest Jew in Haskovo. He was a patron of the Jewish community and the synagogue. Our teacher panicked that the girl's father may learn about the theft. He started persuading us to give back the box, with no success. And as a last resort he told us he would bring us to the synagogue, which was in the Jewish school's schoolyard, he would make us stand in front of the bimah, and every one of us would have to swear that he or she hadn't stolen the box. God would punish the liar by sending him an immediate thunderbolt. We were curious to see how the thunder was to fall from the skies. Then, in front of the synagogue, we had to form a queue and our teacher asked for the last time who had stolen the box. Nobody answered and he changed his mind and scattered us to go home. He didn't have the guts to make us stand in front of the bimah. Thus into my childish mind crept the question why he didn't have us enter the synagogue and ask in front of the bimah who had stolen the box. My childish conclusion was then that there was no God at all.

My father was an atheist, but tolerant to religious people. He never mocked at the religiosity of my mother or my grandmother. He was a broad-minded person. He was the chairman of the Jewish community in Haskovo. He would always put on a praying shawl for the high Jewish holidays. He also had a prayer book. We used to wear hats in those days, regardless whether there were caps or bowler hats; the important thing was that the head was to be covered. We didn't have kippot then. It wasn't a part of the Bulgarian Jews' everyday life then. Kippot were introduced here after 9th September 1944 [8] as an instance of influence from Israel. I recently saw a Bulgarian movie called 'Journey to Jerusalem,' directed by Ivan Nichev, it was about the rescue of a Jewish girl during the war [WWII], and the Jews were wearing kippot there, which was simply not in line with the lifestyle in those years.

My parents didn't know Ivrit and we didn't speak Ivrit at home. We usually communicated in Bulgarian, but when my parents wanted to hide something from us they spoke with each other in Ladino. I didn't like that because my mother could start a sentence in Ladino and finish it in Bulgarian; we used to think those days it was Spanish. I wasn't pleased to hear her putting Bulgarian, Turkish and Ladino words in one sentence.

I have always spoken Bulgarian in my family. I didn't want to speak the language of my mother intentionally [the mixture of Bulgarian and Ladino], because in my views it was broken Bulgarian. It was just the language of Sephardi Jews that passed through many countries and every one of them imprinted on it part of its own linguistic culture. People passed through Italy and borrowed some Italian words, from Africa they took certain Arabic expressions, others were borrowed from Turkish, and that is how the present-day Ladino was formed. This was the way Ladino became a steady communicational tool between Jews in Bulgarian territories, but not only here. I remember that my father could write in Ladino using a strange alphabet called Solitreo. I begged him to teach me the alphabet, since I thought it might turn useful one day, but he said there were different versions of letters [sic] for designating separate sounds and he couldn't teach me Solitreo, because he found it too difficult.

In Haskovo we lived in rented apartments. We moved to different places every year or so. My mother was a great housekeeper and cleanliness loving person. When we were to move to a new

place she would always stay to the end to brush the wooden floors with hard brush, sand and soap until they literally started shining [Some special stuff called ‘Ikonomia’ with solid quartz granules was used for polishing solid surfaces], so that the people who were to come and live in the place after us might say that a civilized family had lived there before them. I remembered this as one of the burdens of our endless moving from place to place. After that we lived in a house owned by an Austrian company for production of tobacco, ‘Nikotea,’ for which my father worked as chief accountant. It was in the town’s suburbs near the tobacco warehouse. My father was well paid at this company and he also received bonuses. When the Austrian officials came to carry out an inspection, the whole enterprise was alarmed. My father always made a good impression because he kept the books very precisely. The plant’s director was a Jew and his name was Pinkas. His son was my classmate in the Jewish school.

While working as a chief accountant, my father figured out that we needed a house of our own. He decided to become a self-dependant tradesman. Of course, he couldn’t compete with the large companies and their capitals. One day he told my mother about his idea of owning a house. But he didn’t have enough money to carry out his plans. Then my mother went to the sleeping room, turned something over in a chest, found some money and put it on the table in front of him. All this happened in the presence of my second brother, Aron Kohen. My father’s eyes opened wide and he asked her where she had gotten this money from. She said she had saved it from the sums he had given her in order to keep the household. That’s how my father bought a house in Haskovo.

My mother was a really thrifty person. She kept the household alone, and she used to patch our trousers. When we tore our socks, she didn’t buy us new ones immediately. She taught us how to mend them and she checked if we did it the right way. My second brother was the best at mending. We used to wear mended clothes: a ragged spot was mended by a thick patch of threads. We used to sew our collars alone. She had taught us to be well groomed. Once a week each of us had the obligation to clean and polish the shoes of the whole family. There was a special place under the staircase where I gathered all the boots, shoe-creamed them and then polished them. My two brothers also did it. We had to keep the house very clean and every day we brushed the floor covers, because we lived next to the street and there was a lot of dust. My mother didn’t let us throw out any food. There was a sentence she always repeated in such cases: instead of throwing food into the washbasin, throw it into your mouth.

It was I who started accompanying my mother when shopping and after me, my brothers did as well. There was a ‘village’ market on Saturdays when villagers from the nearby settlements came to sell their goods. My mother would always walk around the whole market to see where the best product was sold at the lowest price. One day a village woman cheated her nicely. My mother had bought a bar of butter, which looked very nice, but when she put it in the water, this was the way we used to keep butter then, she found a small head of cabbage in it. I should confess that I gloated over it a bit, because her pretensions at selecting the right product for a long time tormented me.

We also used to go shopping in the trade street of manufacturers where pupils’ clothes were sold. Sometimes my mother would select something from the top shelf and the shopkeeper had to mount a chair to reach it. My mother looked at the clothes for a long time and we often went out of the shop without having bought anything if she didn’t like the clothes. That she did again and again in several shops, so that I started worrying about the sellers who had a hard time with her.

However, they would always see her politely to the front door and invite her to come again.

In Haskovo we were surrounded by Bulgarians, Turks, Armenians, Gypsies, but I never heard a bad word about them at home. We shared the same yard with an Armenian family in Haskovo, and they were good neighbors, I should say. Turkish was widely spoken in Haskovo, because many Turkish people lived there then. My father spoke Turkish very well, I knew a little bit, too. As a whole, Haskovo was an international [multi-ethnic] town and there was no separation between the people.

In Haskovo there was a Jewish school that consisted of four classes and a prep-class. There were as many as 20 pupils in a class. The school building had one storey only: a high ground floor. Once, I remember, I was punished not to go home for lunch for misbehaving. We, the kids then had the so-called gangs: a small group of friends with whom we played and walked around with. The boys from my gang then came and the ‘captain’ of the group put his back under the window so that I stepped on it and managed to escape. I ran home, had lunch and they helped me enter the classroom through the window again. The teachers didn’t realize that I had escaped. Usually we had only half-day classes and I don’t remember why on this day we had classes after lunch, too.

We had two teachers in Ivrit. The first one, Saul Levi, was a good teacher, but a bad pedagogue. He used to punish us for the least misbehavior. He beat my palms with a steel ruler. We didn’t like him and had our revenges in our own ways. We had slings and our pockets were always full of pebbles. There was a garden near the Jewish school where a local inhabitant, Aunt Vanya, grew vegetables. The garden was at a lower level than the street and was irrigated by this old-fashioned mechanism driven by a donkey. Saul Levi was used to walking along the garden on the street, reading a newspaper. We used to wait for him to pass by, his attention wholly occupied by the newspaper. Then we ordered ‘Fire!’ and shot five or six pebbles onto his back after which we hid. We had some other teachers who used to punish us, but they had milder ways of doing so.

The Jewish school was a four-year one. After that I attended a Bulgarian three-year junior high school and a Bulgarian five-year high school. In high school the Jews were free not to attend religion lessons. Our rabbi in Haskovo launched a course called ‘Shar Hatorah’ – Gate of the Torah [in Hebrew], where we studied texts from the Bible, and I still remember almost the entire text of the first book in the Bible, which I had then learnt by heart. However, I was curious and used to attend the lectures in Christian religion. I learned by heart all their prayers only from hearing them. Once just before Easter, the teacher wanted to examine one of my classmates in prayers and he, alas, didn’t know them. I whispered it to him, but the teacher heard me. She made me stand up and say not only this prayer, but some others, too. Then she scolded him for not knowing the prayers, as he was a Christian, and I, who was a Jew, knew them perfectly. Christian pupils were on special duties to attend the religious services in the churches on Sundays, and I didn’t have to go. But I always went with the others. I didn’t want to differ from them.

Zionist ideas were spreading in Haskovo then. I was a member of one of the Zionist organizations, Maccabi 9 until I became a university student. Other organizations were Betar 10, our opponents, and Hashomer Hatzair 11 with which we were on friendly terms. There were organizations of the General Zionists 12 in the town, as well as of the Revisionists, and Betar was the youth revisionist organization. They had one common goal: to set up Israel. General Zionists tolerated Maccabi, which wasn’t very connected with political parties. On high Jewish holidays [on Passover only] we greeted each other with the phrase ‘Next year in Jerusalem.’ We wanted to incorporate our

language in the Jewish organizations: we used to sing songs in Ivrit, danced Jewish dances, spoke Ivrit as much as we could.

My religious coming of age [bar mitzvah] was when I became 13. I had to learn my speech that I had to make at the tevah, in the synagogue. There the Torah scrolls are kept [read]. I had a text in Ladino, of which I remember only the salutation now, and I studied it for long hours. On my birthday, or on Saturdays, I had to read something from the Torah using a sliver pointer, since one must not touch the scrolls with fingers, after which I made my speech. That happened in the synagogue in the presence of my parents. So I came of age and could form and be part of a minyan: the quorum required for reading prayers [the Torah]. The synagogue in Haskovo was in the schoolyard of the Jewish school. The offices of the Jewish municipality were next to the school, but they looked down the street. Nothing remains now from these buildings, since they were destroyed, most probably because new city plans were developed.

Except for my brothers, I had a sister, too, Mazaltov, who died at the age of two from diphtheria. The doctor didn't pay attention to her festering coatings in the throat that suffocated her. My mother had a great desire to have a daughter. The most pampered of us was my brother Leon Kohen. There is an expression in Ladino for that: 'the child of the old age.' In Ladino it sounds like this: 'el ijiko de la chikes'.

My second brother Aron became a doctor. He became a chief inspector in Haskovo's regional healthcare department, after which he was appointed head of the healthcare department in Kardzhali. My third brother Leon was an examining magistrate on criminal cases and he was promoted to the rank of major at the Ministry of the Interior. We all had the opportunity to study at university, which wasn't easy in those days. I remember that one day, it was after 9th September 1944, my mother expressed her wish to change the curtains in our house. I asked, 'Why don't we buy new ones.' This happened in the presence of my father and his answer made me feel sorry for having asked at all. He answered that if they had bought everything they wanted to, the three of us wouldn't have finished our university education. We used to lead a modest life and we never denied ourselves food.

I enrolled in Varna's Finance University in fall 1938. My father accompanied me to the town to help me find lodgings. I had a meeting with the rector of the university and I went there in my high school uniform. My father asked him if I could become a student in my school uniform. He said I could, but it would be good if he bought me a red hat for my personal self-confidence. This was my first non-school clothing and it was much later that I had a suit made. So I became a university student in my school uniform.

In Varna I was a very good student. I found my place in the circle of people attending the Poor Student Canteen. This was an organization of anti-fascist students, while legionaries [13], who attended a different canteen, were supporters of fascism. On 24th May [14], when we were out on manifestation and we were formed in different lines, I realized that we outnumbered them four to five-fold. Representatives of the police came to persuade us to unite the two manifestations. We refused and the police scattered us, but we went in front of Varna's cathedral on our own.

The university offered four-year courses, but meanwhile Sofia Open University was formed and ours was closed, so many of us found it convenient to complete our education in Sofia. In the third year of our studies we were already in Sofia. Many of the subjects were comparable and we had

most of our exams acknowledged there.

I took all my exams in 1942. I had an ambitious Jewish girl for a colleague. She was from Pleven and her name was Regina Pinkas. We used to revise for our exams together. She had to pass all the exams that semester, because Jews were then no longer allowed to study at universities. It was also possible for us not to be allowed to sit for the exams at all. I also sat for all the remaining exams and passed them all, ten of them. They were really difficult. I stayed with one of my aunts on Dunav Street and in order to go to the university I had to go uphill and I staggered with exhaustion.

In Sofia I found myself in the circle of the Union of Young Workers 15 at [now called] Emil Shekerdjijski chitalishte 16, which was also known as the Jewish chitalishte. I was there for two years and I did relatively well at university. It was only once that I postponed a June exam for the fall one. I graduated in 1942 and I had just come back to Haskovo when I received the message that I had been mobilized into a [forced] labor 17 group for correction of the river flow of the Haskovska River.

I have written an article on the Jewish forced labor groups. I explained there that the legal basis for the formation of such groups was embodied chiefly in the Law for the Protection of the Nation 18 where there was a strict passage clarifying the status of the Jews as people who couldn't be summoned to service in the army, but had to serve their time as soldiers in the labor corps. They were set up in January 1942. However, this happened after insistence from the part of the German Labor Front [The National Socialist Party created the German Labor Front (Deutsche Arbeitsfront-DAF) in 1933. The purpose of the German Labor Front was to ensure the political stability of the German labor unions by converting them into a centrally controlled organization lead by National Socialists.], which declared it would cancel all its contacts with Bulgarian labor troops [Construction corps, formed in 1920 by the statesman Alexander Stamboliiski, in order to ensure the rebuilding of infrastructure after the devastation of World War I. Labor troops became an alternative form of the military service, being part of Bulgaria's armed forces and were created as a subdivision of the Ministry of Public Buildings, Roads and Regional Development. Construction corps existed until 2003, after which they were transformed into a state-owned enterprise.], if Jews were accepted as servants there, Jews weren't sent to serve in the labor corps, but to separate labor groups set up by a verdict of the Council of Ministers and attached to the Ministry of Public Buildings, Roads and Public Works.

These groups were given separate projects for fulfillment such as corrections of river flows and drying of swamps. The Jewish labor groups were formed only of Jews. Until 1941 Jews weren't separated in special labor units and took part in the construction corps with everybody else. After their separation in special labor corps they expended hard physical work without any payment in severe field conditions. The main difference between the Bulgarian labor troops and the Jewish ones was that we used to go there in our own clothes and shoes and our work wasn't considered a military service. These groups were operating throughout the country and each of them was between 200 and 400-men strong. I was first mobilized to make correction on the river flow of the Haskovska River, and after that to Svilengrad to carry out correction on the Kanaliyska River. I also worked for the factory of Georgi Chonev near Haskovo, we dug the bomb shelter under Yamasha [a hill near Haskovo] and we worked there only in the evenings. In 1942 I was with my brothers after which I was sent to Smyadovo while they were in Haskovo.

The work was hard and most of the guys hadn't done hard manual labor before. We used picks, spades and wheelbarrows for our work. We had a target of four cubic meters of soil but it was hard to fulfill it every day. As a result of the hard work my hand got infected and I was likely to lose it. The infection was caused by the excessive exercising of pressure on my hand in the area of the wrist. In the evenings I had to visit a surgeon, but he didn't have the instruments to help me. He froze my hand and he made a section with ordinary scissors. After that I had to go to the hospital to disinfect it for two weeks. Haskovo's hospital was near the railway station and about one or two kilometers away from the city center. In order to go there I had to ask for permission from the police commander. My father also had to ask permission from this institution so that he could take me there. I was bandaged for a month, but when I got well I had to return to the digging again.

In 1944 I got mobilized in Smyadovo for the construction of the Smyadovo-Veselinovo road. I was in the fourth group of workers out of nine that were building the section. We were accommodated in bungalows and the food was very bad. Our supervisor was an extremely wicked man and he didn't allow anybody to get detached from work. There were people with malaria among us. A friend of mine suffered from malaria tertiana. The supervisor knew very well when my friend was expected to lose consciousness. Once he asked me to see him to the toilet because he was about to faint. And in fact, we hadn't taken fifteen steps when he lost consciousness. Even these sick people didn't get released from work. The situation was similar in all other work groups. There were a lot of Jewish forced labor groups working on the bank of the Danube. Malaria was raging there. Three thirds of the people there were ill. Only few of them, however, were released. For example, around five ill men were released out of 100; the others had to continue working despite the cruel conditions. In my group there was an engineer named Gesharov, who was a tormentor. He used to drag a gun and threaten to shoot us because we couldn't fulfill the daily target. He worked us until late in the evening and left us without food, so that we could possibly fulfill those four cubic meters of soil.

On 8th September 1944 we heard that the Russian army was nearing. Meanwhile I was sent to work at the office of the water management construction department in Smyadovo. I got an order to prepare a poster for the welcoming of the Russian troops. [On 8th September 1944 there were changes in the Bulgarian government.] I had no political training and I wrote the first thing I thought of. So it read: 'Welcome, dear guests!' A man argued that they weren't guests, but liberators. However, what I wrote was hung as a slogan above the street. First came a reconnaissance automobile with machine-guns fixed to it to see if there were any troops nearby. A crowd of villagers flocked to the car. One of them mounted to one of its footboards and made a speech. There was also a group of women in black head-cloths, who were standing near a well crying. A Soviet officer asked why they cried and he was answered that in the well the bodies of dead anti-fascists had been thrown. We were quite excited on this day.

Motorized infantries came with trucks after that, I managed to mount onto a truck and I went thus to my fourth forced labor group. The guys from these groups were hitch-hiking the trucks; they were jumping into them and singing with joy. It was this way that the forced labor groups were disbanded. I got onto a truck and reached the ninth forced labor group where the guys from Sofia were. The Jews there were playing instruments and dancing ring dances around the Soviet soldiers, who begged to make space for them to move ahead. All of us were enchanted with joy. When I got back to my forced labor group I saw one of the workmen with a knife, who was ready to tear the

canvas off our tent. I took his hand and stopped him. He wanted to have his revenge, but I told him it was our property now and didn't belong to the previous government any more. The people were ready to work off their bad temper on the belongings.

From there I took a cargo train and reached Targovishte, where the family of my girlfriend had been interned. I had met her while studying in Varna. She was from Varna. I stayed there for one day and returned to Haskovo by a cargo train again. At the railway station in Haskovo there were armed guards, who checked us because it was rumored that Colonel Marinov [commander of the Second Rhodopean division of the Bulgarian Army supporting the pro-Nazi government in Bulgaria.], the head of the Second Rhodopean Army was approaching the town. They recognized me and let me in. So, 9th September 1944 found me on my way to my town.

I have always regarded Bulgaria as my fatherland, even when the day came to decide whether to stay or to immigrate to Israel. My wife was then in Varna with our older daughter. I had received a letter from her where she said we should go to build our fatherland. I can still remember what I told her. I said she was free to go whenever she wanted, but I would remain here. She didn't go, so we made our choice. Years after that it happened that my older daughter, Klara, went to live in Israel. My granddaughter [Viktoria] has a family there and I now have a great-grandson.

After 9th September 1944, my parents lived in Haskovo. My second brother lived in Kardzhali and Dimitrovgrad. He was an anatomy pathologist. My younger brother was a criminal examining magistrate in Haskovo. He was a good expert.

I had had a long correspondence with my girlfriend from Varna and after 9th September 1944 we decided to make a family. We went to Varna, but her father was ill then. In Haskovo my parents weren't ready for celebrating a wedding, either. So we decided to go to Sliven, where both of us had relatives. We had our wedding there. Meanwhile I joined the Guards Regiment [a military subdivision acting as police] in Haskovo and I was wearing a uniform, but without epaulettes. We couldn't afford suits and my wife borrowed a bride's veil, while I wore the uniform. We didn't have civil marriages then and we called the chazzan to come home, because I had got the flu and had a fever. This was the first Jewish wedding after 9th September 1944 that was carried out in line with all the rituals. We married at a relatives' house on 20th January 1945. I can't tell any details because at a certain point I lost consciousness due to the high temperature.

The Guards' Regiment scattered the military brigade in Haskovo and started operating at its place [In those days the brigade was a part of the army.] It included the ex-partisan squad 'Asen Zlatarov' [Zlatarov, Asen (1885 – 1936), well-known Bulgarian scientist and public figure. Studied in Geneva, Grenoble and Munich, taught in Plovdiv and later in Sofia. He was an editor of several scientific magazines and the author of studies on literary criticism.] Its commander was Ivan Arakliev. The Guards' Regiment was a subdivision of both the Defense Ministry and the political administration. Its goal was to strengthen people's power, as we used to say then. Police headquarters in many parts of the country were captured and there were volunteers among the members of the Union of Young Workers, communists, socialists, representatives of the Agrarian Union 19, that is all representatives of the Fatherland Front 20.

In February they proposed that I get sent to Varna Military Academy, so that I might receive military education. I declined because I didn't see my future in the army. My superior said to me that I had to leave.

I came to Sofia and started looking for a job. My wife and I stayed with relatives. An acquaintance recommended me as an administrative director in a plant in the ‘Hadzhi Dimitar’ neighborhood, where they produced combs and buttons. I worked there for two months but I realized that the owners wanted to use me against the workers. The workers insisted on pay raises and improvement of the work conditions and I took their side. Then I got appointed as the director of supplies, but they didn’t give me any previous supplies information. We had hard post-war years and supplies with raw materials were a really difficult thing. I couldn’t handle it and we reached an agreement with the owners to let me leave.

I wanted to study medicine very much. Once during our Biology lessons at the junior high school we had to dissect black beetles, as big as the biggest plums. The beetles had been intoxicated with chloroform before and had been pinned to small boards. We had manicure scissors. Our task was to take out the digestive tract of the beetle without tearing it to pieces. My dissection was the best in the class. It was then that I decided to become a doctor, and mind you, not an ordinary doctor, but a surgeon. Dreaming of this I applied for medicine in 1942 but one tenth of the average grade in my high school academic record left me out of the list of successful candidates. We competed then for places at the universities only by our records from the high school certificate. [At that time universities didn’t organize exams for admission of students, they selected candidates only according to their grade point average from the high school.]

In 1945, when I had already completed my financial education, I decided to apply for medicine. I have a stubborn character and I don’t just let things go. I asked my wife who was studying at the faculty of Roman philology in Sofia and was working as an assistant pharmacist. In fact she studied Roman philology for one year, and then she quit and graduated from the pharmacy department at the Medical Academy in Sofia. She encouraged me and promised to work during my years in university. I just sent my documents and, as a university graduate, I was automatically accepted and I just had to pass a medical check-up. Well, there I went and got a notebook with a test for color-blindness. And they detected my color-blindness. This news came very unexpectedly. I was mentally prepared to study medicine. The associate professor, who was testing me, then even invited students to see what color-blindness was. One of the students then asked why one should believe that what I saw wasn’t right and what they saw was right. That was how my dream fell through.

When I got unemployed again, I prepared identical applications and I sent them here and there. One morning at six o’clock there was a ring on the doorbell. My wife and I went to open the door, she in her nightgown and I in my pajamas. A warrant officer asked me if I was David Kohen and invited me to accompany him to the commandant-ship. My wife started shivering with fear, but I remembered that it could be possibly in connection with an application, which I lodged there, too. Lieutenant-colonel Milenkov received me and he was the chairperson of the civil staff at the Interior Ministry. We had a short conversation and he offered me a job as a chief accountant. I accepted and when I was leaving he stopped me at the door and said we hadn’t talked about the salary. I told him we would talk when he saw how I worked. Later I learnt that I had found favor with him because of this attitude.

The situation with the books at the commandant-ship was awful. There wasn’t an accounting staff. I was the first in this department. They had started working without thinking of organizing the documents in a certain order. I managed to finish the first annual financial report in April or in May,

while the requirement was to present it in a month and a half after the year-end. We worked extremely hard in order to compensate the previous delay. After that they took me in the financial department of the Interior Ministry. I worked there for several years. After a year there were job cuts and I was moved to the State Archive.

I started working in the State Archive with great unwillingness. I felt disoriented because I had been fired from my previous job after having proven that I work well. My new director was once my teacher, who was a good pedagogue, and understood my situation very well. He didn't give me any concrete tasks, but only an archivist's guide written by some Russian author. My director told me there were no economists employed in the State Archive; there were only historians and pedagogues. So I was the only economist and he offered to take me up to where the documents of the joint-stock company 'Granituit' were, which was the largest public company in Bulgaria.

State archivists then had to collect documents whose ten-year validity period had expired, to put aside more valuable papers, that were worthy from a historical point of view, as well as to prepare a protocol, based on which experts had to issue their stance. Day by day I found this documentation very interesting. I started thinking how schematically we were taking the things from our social and political life. When someone was called 'rich,' we were thinking of him as a bloodsucker and extortionist. My job helped me see an absolutely different image of a capitalist. I saw an image of a man who defended the national interests of Bulgaria, a person who set himself against German representatives in the enterprise, defending not his interests, but the country's interests. I was captivated by this documentation, which determined my remaining in the position at the State Archive. All papers to do with the country's economy came to my sector. I was the head of the economy department in the State Archive, which was let me say the largest one.

After a while we started publishing a magazine of the State Archive and I started researching a topic, which was very warmly received by the scientific circles. The magazine's editorial staff then included an Associate Professor in Economy, Hadjinikolov, who later became a professor and academician in economy history. I was attached to him as a PhD candidate. My thesis was called: 'The Financing of German Troops in Bulgaria from 1941 to 1944.' I have found very expressive documents that hadn't been studied in our economy literature. Each month Bulgaria's Council of Ministers had voted a sum for financing the German troops in the country. The thesis got published and this was my dearest child as far as my research was concerned. This publication was followed by another one focused on the German ransacking of the tobacco sector in Bulgaria during World War II.

Hadjinikolov then invited me and proposed to write a dissertation on the ransacking of Bulgarian economy during World War II. I became very enthusiastic and ambitious about it and for two years every day after work I would take my bicycle and ride to the Archive of History Department, where I would read until the library closed. I wrote some 120 pages and gave them to him to review. One day I went to hear his opinion. He started with remarks about many oversights. I went out very unsatisfied with my manuscript. When I calmed down I continued working for another year, after which I managed to defend my dissertation on Bulgaria's economy during World War II.

The chairman of the State Archive, Michail Alexiev, insisted that we all speak one major European language, so he invited paid teachers for us. I took up French. A teacher from the Bulgarian News Agency, Miss Alkalay, came to teach us. She was a very good pedagogue. With her help I learnt

French very well. At my examination, I immediately began a conversation in French and I received the maximum possible grade. I tried to do the same on my exam in Russian, but it was more difficult. The main test was, however, the most difficult. My examiners were Professor Hadjinikolov and his assistant, Lyuben Berov, who became Prime Minister in 1990 [Editor's note: actually from 1992 until 1994]. Hadjinikolov understood my uneasiness and with Lyuben Berov he went to the opposite part of the hall, so that they could leave me alone in peace and quiet. After an hour and a half, I found myself and managed to elaborate on the question. After that, they examined me on the whole material and assigned me a five out of a maximum of six. Many years later I met my scientific supervisor and we talked about the exam. He was a man, who managed to hearten young people. His students became professors and PhDs.

During the period I worked as an archivist, I visited Auschwitz and particularly the museum of belongings that remained from the deported Jews who had been killed. I had an ambition to find out more about my uncle and his wife who were burnt there. The museum shows a horrifying picture of the life in the camp. There are belongings of old people, women, men, children, even babies. They have a sickening collection of baby's shoes and socks. There I had the chance to take hold of a bar of soap, where the letters RIF were engraved: Rein jüdisches Fett, which means [in German] 'pure Jewish fat'. [Editor's note: In the Polish ghettos the German occupants distributed bars of soap with the inscription 'Rif.' The Jews in the ghetto interpreted it as 'Rein jüdisches Fett', that is, 'pure Jewish fat,' and that is why the belief that the Germans made soap out of Jewish bodies spread. In reality RIF stands for 'Reichstelle für Industrielle Fettversorgung'.] I kept this bar of soap in a small case next to the yellow star 21 that the then-government had decorated me with. With the years this bar just fell into pieces and turned into dust. In that museum I saw a lampshade made of human skin. I had another experience: while I was examining the museum, a very noisy group of Bulgarians passed by. And this is a holy place for both the Jewish and Polish people. They step into that place in reverence as if they enter a synagogue or a church. These people, however, were rather noisy and I reproved them. They understood immediately and got out of the museum.

One of my co-workers remained there to search for information and I have received a book from her, published by the museum of Auschwitz. There she states the date when the Trancy's echelon near Paris, where the Jews from France were deported from, reached the concentration camp in Poland. This was an important date, because based on it they found the lists of people who were there, so I learnt that my uncle and aunt were sent to the gas chambers, where they were suffocated and [later] burnt. My father would often sigh that Bulgaria seemed too narrow to my uncle and he went to try his luck far away abroad.

After 9th September 1944, in my family we celebrated the high Jewish holidays, such as Pesach, Sukkot, Purim, and Chanukkah. We celebrated mainly those holidays that were somehow related to our history. Up to the time my mother was alive, we celebrated them at home, but after that we used to go to the synagogue. My father had leftist socialist views and was not religious. I asked him how he managed to match his political orientation with attending the synagogue, and he answered me very wisely that he was where the people were.

I have two daughters. The elder one's name is Klara David Yosifov. She married a Jew in Bulgaria and went to live in Israel several years ago. She works as a [computer] programmer. The other one is called Shelly Palikarieva. She married a Bulgarian and lives in Sofia. She also studied informatics

and is a [computer] programmer, too. I have also three grandsons and a great-grandson.

I wasn't brought up to specifically marry a woman of Jewish origin. My youngest brother, for example, married a Bulgarian. My second daughter married a Bulgarian. We didn't differentiate between Jews and Bulgarians in our family.

Although I didn't speak Ladino when I was a child, a lot of Ladino words and sayings remained from my childhood memories. I heard my mother saying them. Two years ago, when the Ladino Club at the Jewish community center was set up, I went to listen to this speech, and I was astonished to learn that I still understood everything. Before that I had an interesting experience at an international archivists' conference in Copenhagen. Next to me the chairman of the Spanish State Archive was speaking in Spanish with a Russian colleague, who was in the chair of the Spanish section at UNESCO, and I understood the whole conversation. Without any practice I asked if I could join their talk. The director of the Spanish State Archive was extremely amazed. He started patting me on the shoulder, congratulating me that I was allegedly speaking the language of Cervantes. [Although the Sephardim were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula hundred years earlier, Ladino probably reminded him of the Spanish Cervantes wrote in.] He was simply not able to understand how I could speak that way. He had read documents of this period, but he had never heard the sounds of this speech. This incident encouraged me and once when I was in America on a business trip I used Ladino again to help my poor English. I was in California and whenever I used Spanish, they answered me. Many Spanish people had immigrated there.

I remember the publishing of documentation of the Central Co-operative Union. Their old archive was situated in a basement on Slaveykov Square [a central square in Sofia]. My colleague and I went there as representatives of the State Archive. The air inside was soaked with steam from a cracked pipe from the central heating utility. Our feet were slapping in the mud on the floor. The committee that was to process these materials on the part of the Central Co-operative Union consisted of six or seven people. We worked with them. The moisture and steam had formed a mould layer of twelve centimeters on the files. We inhaled this poisonous air every day and began to run a temperature. This was one of the hardest situations in my work as an archivist. There were no such things at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. We were encouraged to make science and I had a lot more opportunities to work.

From the State Archive I moved to the archive of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences [BAS]. I had already received my scientific degree 'Candidate of Historical Sciences' and a career opportunity was open for me at BAS. I became a senior research fellow. I retired from BAS in 1982. The whole atmosphere there was academic. I felt morally encouraged, because I was making science, as opposed to the situation in the State Archive, where the work prevailed.

No members of my family immigrated to Israel during the Great Aliyah 22. I thought that it would be a good thing for my family to live in the country where I was born. However, I continued supporting the young Jewish State.

Once the director of the Institute of History told me, we, the Jews, were great. It was sometime during the [Israeli] wars with the Arabs 23. I told him it was a matter of nationality only. In Israel [meaning the wars between Israel and its neighboring countries] there was a clash between the high culture and the lack of civilization; yesterday's shepherds without education were opposed to people who came from the towns of the high-civilized Europe. Brains and culture were behind

every gun there. He said I was right.

I can say that 9th September 1944 was one of the greatest events in my life, because it put an end to that anxiety and awful situation in which we, the Jews, were forced to live. We started working for the new regime with all our strength. It was a new beginning for us, and a new life, too. In every field we worked selflessly with our compatriots. We believed in very high ideals. The idea for social equality was our goal. The fact that sometimes there were mercenary motives is another question. But as a whole our expectations were realized.

In 1948, when the state of Israel was founded, the Bulgarian Jews with communist orientation were hardliners and said that no support should be offered to a state, which doesn't accept the socialist ideas. Jacques Nathan was the leader of the Jewish commission at the Bulgarian Communist Party's Central Committee; he was also the chair of the Jewish Fatherland Front. We lodged a written proposal for Jews in Bulgaria not to be allowed to immigrate to Israel. Then Georgi Dimitrov [24] called him and said that the first time in their history Jews were fighting bravely for the restoration of their fatherland and Bulgarian Jews shouldn't obstruct them. Whoever wanted to had to be allowed to freely emigrate. It was this position of Georgi Dimitrov that opened the gates for Jewish people. No other socialist state in those years let its Jews freely emigrate. The Soviet delegate to the United Nation, Andrey Gromiko was the man who lodged the proposal in the United Nations for the establishment of a Jewish state, but the Jews from the USSR weren't allowed to emigrate.

Before [10th November] 1989 [25] I was well off, I could afford a car and a normal place to live. My wife graduated in pharmacy from the Chemical-Pharmaceutical Institute. She was in charge of the analytical laboratory there. We both had good salaries for that time. We brought up our children with the help of my wife's mother, because the two of us were working.

The events of 1989 in Bulgaria were regression. We now have a certain bringing to life of capitalism in its most cruel forms, which I hadn't seen before 9th September 1944. The people who were rich then, had achieved this gradually; they had collected their wealth for decades. We are now witnesses to how a monstrous opulence can be gathered for a short period. It's obvious that we have organized crime now, which wasn't a common thing then. I don't know Italian Mafia in details, but I think it has its match in the Bulgarian one. Since we know that Bulgarian people were workmen and white-collars for 45 years [i.e. the communist period in Bulgaria, 1944-1989], it becomes difficult to explain from where some people have all this wealth. I think that governments after 1989 opened a wide space for crime and corruption, as well as for misappropriation and thefts from the state treasury, so that a small group of people may live a rich life sponging on the whole nation.

Bulgaria has never had such a massive emigration of young people who now earn their living abroad. I think the figure of such emigrants has already reached some 800,000 or 900,000. Years ago foreigners came here to earn their living, chiefly workmen in construction, and gardeners. Now, our young people receive their education here, in order to sell their work abroad. What's the profit for Bulgaria then? Nothing good awaits Bulgaria if no sound people come into power, who should find a way out of this situation.

I have a scientific interest in several areas. First of all, it's the history of economy. I have also worked on the history of Bulgarian Jews, mainly during the period of World War II, because this is the most expressive period, filled with disagreements and clashes. I also have some articles

concerning local Jews during the period of Bulgaria's liberation from the Ottoman yoke 26. I have worked in the field of historical metrology, too – I'm speaking of the old Bulgarian measuring system.

I'm thankful for my fate as a workman in the field of archives, because this opened for me the gates of science. I still do some scientific research. I write and publish articles. Perhaps not so intensively, as in previous years, but you see, I have a book at the printer's now, which will be something like a supplement to Moskona's 'Lifestyle and Mentality of the Bulgarian Jews' [Moskona I. 1970. Lifestyle and Mentality of the Bulgarian Jews. In: Yearbook '70 - year V. Sofia: Organization of Jews in Bulgaria.].

I found by chance a book from the ex-Jewish Institute [Institute of Balkan Studies in Sofia, where both Hebrew and Ladino as well as the culture of Sephardi Jews were also studied.] written by Eli Eshkenazi [lawyer, founder of the Institute of Balkan Studies in Sofia] and the chief rabbi Hananel [Hananel, Asher (1895-1964): rabbi of Sofia, later Bulgaria's chief rabbi]. After the institute stopped its activities its archives were brought to the State Archive and there I found a very interesting collection of Jewish sentences and proverbs. I included in my new book what Moskona hadn't published. It's also hardly likely that the Jewish organization Shalom's yearbook will come out without my article in it. I was the editor-in-chief of the publication for many years.

Glossary

1 Sephardi Jewry
Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Their ancestors settled down in North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, South America, Italy and the Netherlands after they had been driven out from the Iberian peninsula at the end of the 15th century. About 250,000 Jews left Spain and Portugal on this occasion. A distant group among Sephardi refugees were the Crypto-Jews (Marranos), who converted to Christianity under the pressure of the Inquisition but at the first occasion reassumed their Jewish identity. Sephardi preserved their community identity; they speak Ladino language in their communities up until today. The Jewish nation is formed by two main groups: the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi group which differ in habits, liturgy their relation toward Kabala, pronunciation as well in their philosophy.

2 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, Izmir, etc.) and also in the ones situated on significant overland trading routes to Central Europe (Bitola, Skopje, and Sarajevo) and to the Danube (Edirne, Plovdiv, Sofia, and Vidin).

3 Ottoman Rule in Bulgaria
The territory of today's Bulgaria and most of South Eastern Europe was an integral part of the Ottoman Empire for about five hundred years, from the 14th century until 1878. During the 1877-78 Russian-Turkish War the Russians occupied the Bulgarian lands and brought about the

independent Bulgarian state, which however left many Bulgarians outside its boundaries, mostly in areas still under Ottoman rule. The autonomous Ottoman province of Eastern Rumelia united with Bulgaria in 1885, and Bulgaria gained a small part of Macedonia (Pirin Macedonia) in the Balkan Wars (1912-13). However complete Bulgarian national unity was never achieved as many of the Bulgarians remained within the neighboring countries, such as in Greece (Aegean Thrace and Makedonia), Serbia (Macedonia and Eastern Serbia) and Romania (Dobrudzha).

4 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).

5 Alliance Israelite Universelle

founded in 1860 in Paris, this was the main organisation that provided Ottoman and Balkan Jewry with western style modern education. Between 1870 and 1900 it established numerous schools in Bulgaria, providing comprehensive education in French, especially to the elite. After 1891 the Jewish schools which had adopted the teaching of the Bulgarian language were recognized by the Bulgarian state.

6 Bulgarian Workers' Party

The Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) is heir to the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party founded on 2nd August 1891. In 1903 it split into the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party (broad socialists) and the Bulgarian Worker's Social Democratic Party (BWSDP) (narrow socialists). In 1919 the BWSDP was renamed Bulgarian Communist Party (narrow socialists). It was banned between 1923-1944 and went underground. Between 1938-1948 it was known as Bulgarian Worker's Party. Between 1944-1990 the BCP was the only ruling party in Bulgaria.

7 Blagoev, Dimitar (1856-1924)

Dimitar Blagoev was a communist revolutionary leader in Russia and Bulgaria. In 1883 in St. Petersburg he founded the first social-democratic organization in Russia, composed mainly of students. In 1919 Blagoev founded the Communist Party in Bulgaria. He was the first proponent of Marxism in Bulgaria and he traslated the writings of Karl Marx into Bulgarian. He also wrote philosophical and historical works, as well as articles about Bulgarian literature. Today the town

Blagoevgrad, in the South-west of the country, is named after him.

8 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.

9 Maccabi World Union

International Jewish sports organisation 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 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 organisation started publishing its newspaper in 1934.

11 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.

12 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.

13 Bulgarian Legions
Union of the Bulgarian National Legions. Bulgarian fascist movement, established in 1930. Following the Italian model it aimed at building a corporate totalitarian state on the basis of military centralism. It was dismissed in 1944 after the communist take-over.

14 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.

15 UYW
The Union of Young Workers (also called Revolutionary Youth Union). A communist youth organisation, which was legally established in 1928 as a sub-organisation of the Bulgarian Communist Youth Union (BCYU). After the coup d'etat 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.

16 Chitalishte
literally 'a place to read'; a community and an institution for public enlightenment carrying a supply of books, holding discussions and lectures, performances etc. The first such organisations were set up during the period of the Bulgarian National Revival (18th-19th centuries) and were gradually transformed into cultural centers in Bulgaria. Unlike in the 1930s, when the chitalishte network could maintain its activities for the most part through its own income, today, as during the communist regime, they are mainly supported by the state. There are over 3,000 chitalishtes in Bulgaria today, although they have become less popular.

17 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.

18 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.

19 Bulgarian Agrarian National Union

It was founded in 1899 as a professional organisation and became a peasants' party by 1901. Its popularity increased after World War I. Alexander Stamboliiski, its leader, has been celebrated as a reformer with broad views introducing extensive land reforms. As prime minister of Bulgaria, Stamboliiski was overthrown by a military coup d'etat in 1934. The party was banned from 1934 until 1944. After 1945 it was a political ally of the Bulgarian Communist Party in the framework of the Fatherland Front.

20 Fatherland Front

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

21 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 to previous wars, the war-disabled, orphans and widows of victims of wars and those who were awarded the military cross were given the privilege to wear the star in the form of a button and Jews converted to Christianity and their families were totally exempt. The discriminatory measures and persecutions ended with the cancellation of the Law for Protection of the Nation on 17th August 1944.

22 Mass Aliyah

Between September 1944 and October 1948, 7,000 Bulgarian Jews left for Palestine. The exodus was due to deep-rooted Zionist sentiments, relative alienation from Bulgarian intellectual and political life, and depressed economic conditions. Bulgarian policies toward national minorities were also a factor that motivated emigration. In the late 1940s Bulgaria was anxious to rid itself of national minority groups, such as Armenians and Turks, and thus make its population more homogeneous. More people were allowed to depart in the winter of 1948 and the spring of 1949. The mass exodus continued between 1949 and 1951: 44,267 Jews immigrated to Israel until only a few thousand Jews remained in the country.

23 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.

24 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.

25 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 organisations and groups.

26 Liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman rule

Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire in early 1877 in order to secure the Mediterranean trade routes. The Russian troops, with enthusiastic and massive participation of the Bulgarians, soon occupied all of Bulgaria and reached Istanbul, and Russia dictated the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878. This provided for an autonomous Bulgarian state, under Russian protection, bordering the Black and Aegean seas. Britain and Austria-Hungary, fearing that the new state would extend Russian influence too far into the Balkans, exerted strong diplomatic pressure, which resulted in the Treaty of Berlin in the same year. According to this treaty, the newly established Bulgaria became much smaller than what was decreed by the Treaty of San Stefano, and large populations of Bulgarians remained outside the new frontiers (in Macedonia, Eastern Rumelia, and Thrace), which caused resentment that endured well into the 20th century