

# Bitoush Behar

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Plovdiv

Bulgaria

Interviewer: Svetlana Avdala

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*I think that the most idiosyncratic feature of Bitoush Behar is the sound spirit of a craftsman he carries about himself. I have come across such people. They walk firmly on the ground and have the self-confidence of people who are able to provide for themselves. They are not rich; they haven't gathered a fortune but feel free enough because they don't depend on the winds and storms of the times they live in. Their words are always sincere, frank and clear. For them two plus two makes four in most of the cases. They are not prone to talking about things in a philosophical way and they don't look for 'a calf under the ox', as the Bulgarian proverb has it. Their spiritual health is obvious and they are not susceptible to the diseases of the soul. For them the most valuable things are simple – family, marriage, children, home, work and having order in their lives. That's what Bitoush is like. In appearance – a massively built man with dense presence.*

*I met him for the first time in the café of 'Shalom' in Plovdiv. He was playing cards. He told me he was taking a nap every afternoon and every evening he came to the club to play cards. He didn't agree right away to give an interview, but after a conversation in which we found a lot of things we had in common, he agreed. He was very punctual when coming to our meetings, with preliminary prepared photos and the necessary documents. In the end we separated as old friends.*

My name is Bitoush Yuda Behar. I was born in Plovdiv [1](#) on 2nd August 1930. I have a brother Samuil Behar and a sister Victoria Tadzher (nee Behar). My wife's name is Yovka Behar (nee Zlatanova) - a Bulgarian. We have two daughters – identical twins – Liza Zhelyazkova and Dora Spasova.

We are Sephardi Jews [2](#) both on mother's and on father's side. We came from the town of Behar [Bejar] in Spain more than 500 years ago [3](#). I have drawn this conclusion from the fact that there is a town called Behar in Spain and last year [He is talking about the meeting of all the people with the name Behar from the whole world, organized in 2004] there was a meeting of the Behar families from all over the world. I was invited as well. The organizing committee of the event in Sofia sent me a letter but the journey would have cost \$ 1800. I couldn't afford it and didn't go.

I don't have any recollections and don't know any stories about my great-grandparents on either side. I only remember my grandparents.

The name of my father's mother was Rahel Behar (nee Kovo). I don't know when she had been born and she didn't have any idea about that either. When I was a child, she would often say that

the Russian – Turkish war [4](#) was in progress when she was twenty years old. She remembered those times because she got engaged then. She told me how she had seen my grandfather – her future husband Samuil Behar (? – 1936) for the first time on his way to the synagogue. He was walking past the house and she saw him, she was in the garden, and her father told her: ‘This is your future fiancé.’ My grandfather wasn’t rich, just the opposite, he was very poor but he was said to have two pairs of hands and two of feet, and his feet could work as well. That meant that he was not only extremely laborious but also very skillful. His work was connected with household utilities – locks, doors, he was the best installer of stoves on wood and coal and he was skillful in making pipes which were passing through the whole room in order to heat more. He was the only one who could make such pipe serpentine.

He didn’t have any education but spoke Ladino [5](#) fluently and could also write in that language. He also knew Hebrew. I don’t know how he had learned those languages, somewhere on the roads probably. My grandfather died when I was six, in 1936. I have dim memories of him. For example, I recall that he used to have a white beard and mustaches. He washed his head and beard with water and soap every Friday. My granny was pouring the water and it was falling into a basin. Afterwards, he used to go to the synagogue and he was taking me with him. He was religious although his son – Yuda Samuil Behar (1896 – 1959) - and I are absolute atheists. I remember that my father and grandfather had their own places in the synagogue. They had to pay for those places in the Jewish municipality. The places to the fore were more expensive, the ones to the rear – cheaper. The women’s places were on the balcony.

The house that was occupied by my grandparents – my father’s parents, was in a big yard and there were living a lot of other Jewish families. It was like a ghetto. The house was a two-storey building and other Jewish families were living on the ground floor. My grandparents used to have a room and a kitchen. I visited that house when only the two of them had remained to live there as all their children, my father’s brothers and sisters (Bouka, Nisim, Sofi, Rebeka, Stela) had already got married and had gone to live elsewhere.

My granny Rahel Behar (? – 1956) had a lot of siblings, too. I don’t know their names. And because of that she was brought up in Asenovgrad [A town in Bulgaria, situated on the northern skirts of the Rhodopi Mountains, at the exit of the Chepelare River called Chaya. The name of the town was Stanimaka until 1934. Nowadays there are about 44, 800 inhabitants. In the town there is well-developed food industry, timber processing, well-developed vine-growing and agriculture. The town is an important transport center on the road network that connects Plovdiv, Smolyan and Kurdzhali]. Her parents gave her to an aunt of hers who lived there – I don’t know her name. At that time, only the Greek language was spoken in Asenovgrad and there was a saying: ‘If you don’t like Bulgaria, go to Stanimaka.’ The Jews there were speaking Ladino but you could mainly hear Greek in the streets. My granny knew Turkish, she knew Greek, she knew Ladino and least of all she knew Bulgarian. I’ll tell you a story. I recall that she took me to the shops once in Plovdiv when I was about ten, so it must have been around 1940. We went to do the shopping. The action took place on Chetvrtuk Pazarya (Thursday Market Place). We lived just next to it. And we were looking after some hens. Granny asked the seller: ‘How much money for hens?’ He said: ‘Two napoleons.’ And one napoleon was twenty leva. And she was looking at the chickens, touching them, touching them and asking in a way typical for the Ladino language turning all the words of feminine gender to masculine. So she changed the Bulgarian word for ‘hen’, which is feminine, to masculine. [The

woman was speaking Bulgarian by using endings and grammatical forms typical of Ladino.] But she was able to understand and, most importantly, she was understood. After 1936, 1937, after grandpa died, granny started living with us. Granny told me a lot of fairy-tales and stories about Ally Baba and the forty bandits [a classical story, told by Scheherazade]. There was also a story about a pot full of gold but I don't remember it very well. On Saturday she usually visited her older daughter Bouka at lunch. I recall that she would always bring us sweets hidden somewhere in her clothes. She used to take them from Bouka's son Isak, who owned a sugar and sweets workshop.

My mother Liza Presiado Behar was born in Sofia. Her maiden name was Benataf. In Israel the surname Benataf was transformed to Benatov (that means good, ben – very well). My maternal grandparents - granny Vintoura (? – 1940) and my grandpa Presiado (? – 1943) used to live in Sofia and every summer we spent our holidays with them. I knew only one of my granny's brothers but I can't remember his name. My granny was illiterate but grandpa had finished a French college [6](#). I can't say whether he had a secondary education but he spoke French and German. His name was Presiado, which is a synonym of Yuda. I wasn't named after my grandpa because my father's name was Yuda, too. That's why I was named after my mother's grandfather Sabitay. Sabitay and Bitoush are synonyms. I know that the names Presiado and Yuda, as well as Sabitay and Bitoush are synonyms and mean one and the same thing in Ladino, but I can't comment on anything else. I don't know when granny Vintoura was born but she died in 1940. My grandpa died in 1943 during the Holocaust. He was interned to Plovdiv and died here. In Sofia my parents were living on the corner of 'Opalchenska' and 'Bregalnitsa'. Their house doesn't exist anymore. In its place was built the overhead crossing between 'Stamboliiski' Boulevard and Ruski [Russian] Monument. I remember it was a two-storey house. My grandparents paid a rent. They weren't rich. Grandpa used to sell fruit and vegetables, he used to have a greengrocery at some time but he went broke. The shop was in Halite [a covered market popular to the present day – it is situated in the central part of Sofia, not far from Sofia Mineral Public Baths, the famous Baths bashi Dzhamyia and the Sofia Synagogue. The 'Halite' store was designed by Ts. Torbov. The architectural style of the building is considered to be Neo-Byzantine.] He had six children – my mother's siblings. They had an older sister, whom I don't recall, she died. Apart from her – uncle Haim, aunt Mati, uncle Yosif, aunt Nemka, uncle Lazar.

My father Yuda Samuil Behar was born in Plovdiv in 1896 and died in 1959 there. There were six children in the family which means that dad had five more siblings – Bouka, Nisim, Sofi, Rebeka, Stela. He finished the fourth grade at the Jewish school. And irrespectively of the fact that he had only primary education, he was quite a specialist on Bulgarian grammar. He knew it better than the majority of people because he worked as a typesetter for years and years on end. When he turned twelve he started working as an apprentice at a printer's. At that time the local, Plovdiv, newspapers were printed there as well as the Jewish newspaper at that time 'Shofar' [7](#). In his spare time he was reading books with a pencil in hand and we could often hear him say: 'Oh, bullshit! Here a dash must be put, here – a comma, and here – a semi-colon.' I remember a very interesting occasion. I had a little book with his corrections. After his death I decided to give it to the greatest specialist on the Bulgarian language at the time – the teacher Vera Gulubova. At that time I was a student at the Rabfak [Worker's Faculty] [8](#) and she was my teacher. 'Comrade Gulubova, I want you to tell me if this correction is accurate.' And about a month and a half later she brought the book back and told me: 'Behar, who has done that correction – because that is a person who is

perfectly familiar with the grammar of Bulgarian.’ I told her that it was done by my father – a person who had finished the fourth grade but who worked as a typesetter for 52 or 53 years. He didn’t know what the rules were for the usage of commas and dashes but had an intuitive feeling as to where to put them. My father had always been a well-informed man, he worked at the printer’s after all. Apart from being a typesetter, he was also a stamp-cutter – he was making stamps. On top of that he was very skillful and could engrave with slate pencils. Yes, he was skillful indeed – he was making his living with his two hands but the money he was earning was only sufficient for a meal every day and for bread.

My father had taken part in World War I [9](#). He was a signaler. He was wounded in the leg by a metal fragment but I don’t know more details. In 1924 he married my mother who was born in Sofia. At that time he was 26 or 27 years old. Before that, they had met in the capital city while my father was working there for a year and a half. I can’t say what exactly he was doing and why he had decided to live in the capital for a while. I don’t know any details about the first meeting of my parents. It was probably someone from the family who talked to my father about her or they were introduced to each other on purpose. I can’t say what the circumstances were but they liked each other – this is something I can state without any doubt. They were engaged for a year and they were having a great time while engaged. They used often go on outings, to Vitosha Mountain – there were two more couples and they were having a really good time. They got married in the synagogue in Plovdiv according to all the traditions. They were living in agreement afterwards.

In our neighborhood my father was known as Zhoudi. He was very sociable. Everybody in Plovdiv knew him. He was friends not only with Jews but with Bulgarians as well. I recall that he was the heart and soul of the group of friends he communicated with. He used to often go to the chitalishte [10](#) after 9th September [1944] [11](#). At that time there was a dance school and my father was teaching quadrille and polka. He was performing at the dancing-parties, he was going out on stage and was telling jokes and funny stories. He never joined a Jewish Zionist organization because he was a socialist. He became a member of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) [12](#) in 1936.

He used to be a right-wing socialist and then he became a left-wing, revolutionary socialist. [origin of Bulgarian Communist Party] [13](#) He was in jail because of the Jewish conspiracy. There was a Jewish conspiracy in Plovdiv (its members were communists and BCP was banned at the time [14](#)).

They were accomplishing educational activities and defended the interests of the poor, mainly of the workers. At the beginning the conspiracy didn’t have a name but later it took the name of its leader Pardo. I can neither say the names of the people who took part nor where their headquarters and sphere of activities were. It started operating in 1935 – 1936 when I was only five or six years old.

After a failure my father was sent to jail. The charges were that he had faked a stamp in order to forge the ID card of someone from Silistra region [a town in Northeastern Bulgaria]. And I saw what real friendship means. In his group from the conspiracy there were only three married men, all the others were bachelors. At that time my father was already married. And the leaders took a decision which ordered the bachelors to take on the blame and to back up the married ones so that the married men would get a suspended sentence and go out to look after their families. And one of the accused said at the trial: ‘Mr. Judge, sir, if there is a man with a gun standing in front of you, you would do what he tells you to do. That’s why Yuda faked the stamp. I was with a gun pointed at

him.' And my dad was released because he had made the stamp under threat of being shot. And that wasn't true. Yes, that's esprit de corps, a sacrifice in the name of your comrade. There were people from the conspiracy sentenced to fifteen years in jail and they were released on 9th September 1944.

My father had already had two children when he was in jail – my older brother Samuil Zhoudi Behar who was born in 1925 and was eleven. I was six. My mother was pregnant with my sister Victoria who was born in 1937.

My brother Samuil Zhoudi Behar (1925 – 1974) was the oldest and most responsible of us all. We had always felt his presence as a support. That was especially true for my sister who was taken under his guardianship. He was happy to look after her and later when in 1942 he was dealing with some illegal activities he was taking her as a cover-up. He was very skillful, too, but not as much as my father or me. And he was studious. And he had finished, like my sister and me, a Bulgarian school which was cheaper and which we could afford. After finishing the junior secondary school in 1938 he told my father: 'Papa, I want to study.' 'Impossible, my boy, we don't have money – there are six mouths to feed. You have to start work.' And he started work at 'Napreduk' [Advancement] Printing House where my dad was working. He was a machine operator and a typesetter and so on. He had become a member of BCP before 9th September. Because of his illegal activities he was sent to jail in 1942-1943. After 9th September he finished the Party School. Then he was a militiaman for some time and by decree he started studying at something like Rabfak and he obtained a secondary education. For a certain period of time he worked as a secretary of the second region of the municipality council in Plovdiv. Much later he studied Chemistry at Plovdiv University. He studied there together with his daughter Lily. He graduated and became the director of the 'Drouzhba' glass works in Plovdiv.

He is married to Amada – a Jew, whom he met in the period of his illegal activities. They have two children – Lily and Zhoudi. Lily has a daughter Maria. Zhoudi is married to the Bulgarian Maria and has a son Samuil.

My sister Victoria Tadzher (1937) also finished the Bulgarian school and afterwards she studied at a vocational school of design. She is rather skillful, too – it obviously runs in the family. It seems to me she could have become an excellent designer. She is skillful but she doesn't like this profession. She is capable of making a piece of clothing for you that would fit you perfectly. She worked as a designer but didn't like it. She was a worker for some time and then she worked in the personnel department. She was head of a production shop for some time but now she has been a secretary of the Jewish organization 'Shalom' in Sofia [15](#) for twenty years. [Until she retired. Nowadays she is working as an organizer of club 'Health' where over fifty men and women practice some sport, celebrate their birthdays and make cultural programs. She is also working at the Day Rehabilitation Center of 'Shalom' Organization. An eminent public activist] We are extremely fond of each other. We talk on the phone every single day – I call from Plovdiv, she – from Sofia no matter that when we were children my brother had turned himself into her guardian. There is some gap between our interests because I am seven years older. When I started showing interest in girls, she was still keen on her toys. My brother had a big share in her bringing up. He replaced my father to a great extent because he died relatively early – when she was 22. She married in Sofia to the Jew Solomon Tadzher. She has a daughter – Ely and two grandchildren – Bozhidar and Monica.

My mother was born on 23rd January 1900. She had six siblings – uncle Haim, aunt Mati, uncle Yosif, aunt Nemka and uncle Lazar. They had an older sister Bela but she died while giving birth. According to the Jewish tradition the second oldest girl should take the place of the late bride and marry the widower. But my mother refused, she married my father instead. How their parents accepted that I don't know. She spoke Ladino and Bulgarian. She had only finished the fourth grade at the Jewish school but she was a very curious, energetic and quite intelligent Jew. She loved us very much although she never kissed us but her love was visible in her eyes. All the people in the neighborhood were very fond of her, they were absolutely delighted when talking about her. When the moment came for some pregnant woman to give birth mum would tell her: 'I'll take you to the hospital on foot.' And she took maybe about ten women giving birth for the first time to the Public Hospital and she was talking on the way: 'The more we walk, the easier your labors will be.' She was giving advice to the young mothers, she was knitting baby clothes, she was cutting out diapers.

She was an exquisite cook. I loved almodrati most of all – baked aubergine, chopped, mixed with eggs and cheese and baked in the oven. Superb... you can't imagine how delicious it was. She also prepared apio with celery, andjinara – pickled marrows, agristada – something like fricassee but with eggs and a little sugar. [Some chicken is also added to this dish.]

I like Plovdiv very much and am greatly committed to this city. I call myself a great-Plovdiv chauvinist. Several times I changed Plovdiv for other towns and lived there for some years but I have always returned. At that time – the 1930s – the years of my early childhood, I recall that there was electricity in Plovdiv. We used to have electric bulbs but there were houses in which one could see the gas lamps shedding light until late in the evening. Those made about fifty per cent of the houses. Not only did our house have electricity but it had sewerage as well. 80% of the houses didn't have sewerage. There was this profound smell which could be felt everywhere because the cesspits were in the yards and everything was done there, people even bathed there in the summer. When the cesspits were full, gypsies were hired to clean them with buckets. The payment was per bucket. Much later, in the 1940s, the sewerage was regulated. At that time the tunnel was built which helped the traffic in Plovdiv. Before that there were awful traffic jams because the traffic was taking place on one main street and there were horse phaetons, horse carts and cars moving on it. There was the noise from the horse clatter and the horns. The phaetons were waiting for clients at the station.

The Maritsa was not only part of the landscape – it was the place around which we spent our childhood. There was more water in the river at the time than there is now. Now there are a lot of dams. And it was clean and clear, transparent... we were in the water all the time. The current wasn't very strong because there were islands which separated the river into branches – one of them was shallow, the other one – deep and the island in between. We always bathed in the Maritsa River and our mothers would ask us: 'Were you in the Maritsa?' We wouldn't admit anything. Then she would strictly say: 'Let me see your leg.' And she drew a line with her finger along the leg and, as the skin was dried, there appeared a white line on the leg. Then followed a lecture about the dangers of getting drowned. Another site of Plovdiv was the market places. The Chetvurtuk Pazarya [Thursday market] was only on Thursday and not every day as it is nowadays, Subota Pazarya [Saturday market] was only on Saturday. Ponedelnik Pazarya [Monday market] was only on Monday. They had their own locations. There didn't exist permanent market places like the

ones that we have today. After that there was a grape market where only grapes were sold, a grain market. The grain market was east of Chetvurtuk Pazarya. There was a potato market, too. The shopping at home was done exclusively by my mum, dad and granny – I only helped them with the bags.

Our house was near Chetvurtuk Pazarya in ‘Angel Kunchev’ Street and was in the Jewish quarter. Most of the Jews were shoemakers, saddlers, tinsmiths, plumbers, carpenters. There were families that dealt with knitting and sewing. Some families were manufacturing knitwear. Only few people were doing with mechanical work – only two families – one of those were millers and the others who were dealing with knitting and sewing. There were some excellent seamstresses. Some families were making knitwear. More than 60 per cent of the Jews in Plovdiv were poor. And out of the other 40 per cent, not less than 20 per cent were craftsmen who could make a living. There were doctors; those of them who were wealthy used to have houses with surgeries in them in ‘Ivan Vazov’ Street – like Dr. Syarov, Dr. Moskona. There were some other people in the medical profession – doctors, dentists, midwives.

We were living in rented lodgings – five or six of us were living in two rooms and a kitchen. After 1936 – 1937, after grandpa died, granny came to live with us. During the Holocaust there were ten of us because my aunt Sofia and her family came to live in our house. We lived in a big two-storey house surrounded by a yard where six Jewish families were living – Assa, Lafchievi, Barouh, Bouka Pasi, Albert Shini, Varon. We were often completing different household chores together in the yard. For example, whenever one of the families started preparing ‘liutenitsa’ [a typical Bulgarian dish of stewed onions, peppers and tomatoes] everybody would take the ‘kalmour’ – do you know what ‘kalmour’ is – a sieve made of copper and they were all helping the family with the straining of the vegetables, if coal was needed for the fire, we were eager to help by carrying a bucket of coal for the family who were boiling the dish. Every family had their own cellar and the products for the winter were stored there but the point is that we were preparing those products together. The Bulgarian families took part too because in the Jewish quarter, where we were living, there were mainly Jewish families but there were some Bulgarian families as well. We were friends not only with Jews but also with Bulgarians. They knew some words and even whole phrases in Ladino. During the Holocaust not a single one of them turned against the Jews. We were on very friendly terms with them. Our families were visiting one another. What were those visits like – a cup of coffee, a spoonful of jam, a glass of water and you get the album with the family photos on your knees right away. The same album each and every time.

When the Bulgarian people celebrated Easter they were giving us Easter cakes, painted eggs while we were eating ‘boyos’ for Pesach and were treating the Bulgarians to ‘burmolikos’ [16](#). We were preparing the ‘boyos’ ourselves from dough made of flour, water, but without salt, which we baked afterwards. The result was a pretty hard round loaf. The ‘burmolikos’ we made from matzah which we bought from the synagogue for Pesach. It has nothing to do with the matzah we are buying these days because it was thick and hard. In order to prepare the burmolikos we put the matzah in water in advance so that it would become softer. After that we kneaded it, added eggs and fried it. There were two types of ‘burmolikos’ – salty ‘burmolikos’ with salt and black pepper and sweet ones dipped in cold sugar syrup after having been fried. At Purim we treated our Bulgarian friends and neighbors to different sweet things.

Our house was furnished poorly. We used to have two iron beds where my parents were sleeping. My sister was sleeping together with me. There was a wooden bed for granny. My brother and I were sleeping on a hard sofa in the kitchen. We had one single wardrobe. Well, after all, we weren't so needy because we used to have decent furniture although sometimes food turned out to be difficult to obtain. We always had something to eat but we couldn't afford to do whatever we wanted to do. A certain dish was cooked in the morning and we would eat from it at lunch and would have the same for dinner. One day I wanted to peep into the pot to see what we were going to have for lunch, and to steal a bite if possible. Dad saw me and 'slap' – a smack across the face. 'You are going to eat what you find served in front of you!' The whole family usually gathered for lunch and dinner. We waited for dad to sit at the table and then we would sit at the table, too. Mum would always put the first plate in front of him and after that she served us. We didn't have servants. While my granny was alive the meal for Saturday was always prepared on Friday. We were not allowed to cook on Saturday. But the table was laid in a rather formal manner with a white tablecloth. Before that, on Thursday or Friday, a chicken, a hen or a duck had been slaughtered. In the yard of the synagogue, behind a fence there was a slaughterhouse for hens and lambs. We used to buy the hens alive from Chetvurtuk Pazarya [Thursday market] and we transported them in baskets. The price of the slaughtering varied according to the type of the animal. Some of our dishes were kosher. Never has pork been cooked. All the cutlery and crockery was being cleaned with boiling water for Pesach. Milk and meat were never mixed but we didn't have separate plates for the different types of food. My parents haven't done bar mitzvah for me, I don't know if my brother had had it done. The women had a bath on Friday but we, the men, only washed. I recall that dad had a bath every fifteen days or once a month and there were Jews who took a bath rarely still – twice a year, for Pesach and Rosh Hashanah.

My grandparents were very religious – grandpa attended the synagogue every Friday where he had a booked place after having paid a fee, he was keeping 'taanit' whereas my father and I are absolute atheists.

When grandpa died we started convening at Seder Pesach with my father's brother – uncle Nisim and his family – his wife Bouka and their children – Ester, Rashka, Zelma. Uncle Nisim started reading the prayer and leafing through the Haggadah and granny continued after him. She knew some parts of it by rote. After her my father would go on reading but his turn was over very quickly because while turning the pages, he was turning three pages at a time. And we, the children, were staying still and listening. Well, we lost concentration at times. They gave us bags with a piece of 'boyos' inside. And we waited for the prayer to finish with the words 'this year here, next year – in Jerusalem' and here we were in.

At Purim we used to have much more fun. We organized groups – all of us were children of friends from the Jewish street and relatives. We used to sing a lot of songs. I know only one song but there were lots of them. We used to mask ourselves. Every year we prepared the masks ourselves but, of course, there were masks sold in the bookstores, in the groceries. They were polished, shining but were quite expensive. The wealthier could afford them. My usual disguise was as a black man with my face painted in black. Once I was a wolf, on other occasions – a buffoon or a clown. We used to have those special bags that we filled with sweets. We were visiting in our disguise all our relatives or the wealthiest Jews from whom we could expect more treats. They used to give us all sorts of sweets and some change. And we spent the money on swings or on the lotteries organized by the

Jewish merchants in the street. There was always hustle and bustle here – the merchants were taking out all kind of goods and started shouting, making people get involved – ‘Here is the profit’ – they urged us to buy tickets and get an object or a wish. After having eaten the sweets given to us by our relatives, we took the money they had given us and went to the commercial street to gobble more food. We used to get on the merry-go-rounds, on the ferris wheel, we used to shoot at the shooting-galleries. Everything looked like a big fair.

Every holiday evening spent with my family ended with singing. I used to know a lot of songs, dad, too. We were known among the neighbors as the singing family because our singing could be heard far. In the summer I used to go to my grandparents in Sofia. There I used to meet with the famous director and writer Angel Vagenshtain [17](#) who is a cousin of mine. He was older than me and used to keep in touch mainly with my brother as they shared common interests, but we used to be very fond of each other. Angel (Dzheki), in his turn, visited us in the summer in Plovdiv. His arrival turned our day into a holiday. My father loved him very much. I recall that when he was sentenced to death for his antifascist activities later dad got so drunk out of grief, that, under the influence of the alcohol, he was shouting: ‘They will exterminate the golden youth of Bulgaria.’ Together with the neighbors from the yard we hardly managed to stop him from taking the matters in his hands.

The children were playing in the yard and in the streets – they played chilik, machka [children’s games], we used to set matchboxes full of acetylene on fire – you make a hole in the ground, put a little carbide and place a box on top. We used to seal it hermetically and one of us used to place his finger on the box whereas another one stood and shouted; ‘Take care!’, the finger was removed and the box exploded because of the pressure. It was such a pleasure, ‘kef’ [18](#) as we say in Bulgarian because we managed to make this imitation of a little bomb. We were also playing ‘magare’ [donkey] - one of us would lean against a wall and three or four of the others would stand in a line behind him, one after the other, holding each other by the small of the backs and start jumping. When one of us fell, we changed our places. After that – ‘bouki’ – a tin was placed on the ground in the middle of a circle restricted by a line. We used little tokens and the boy who managed to hit the ‘bouki’ was the winner. It was placed in a circle and the furthest you managed to push it, the more points you got. We were also playing ‘hilka’ – two teams with a ball. The game was played on a pitch. The ball had to be hit with a board. It is very similar to baseball. The girls didn’t lag behind in those games and played together with us.

I’ve never attended a Jewish kindergarten or a Jewish school because the tuition fee was too high for me. It was affordable only for those of the poor children whose parents had seasonal jobs like the tobacco pickers, for example, not the ones with permanent jobs like my father. In their case the education was free of charge. I finished ‘King Boris III’ Primary School [19](#) and the Fifth Junior High School ‘Lyuben Karavelov’[20](#). Both educational institutions were within the limits of the Jewish quarter and in the classes of thirty students there were four or five Jewish children. In our class there were four Jews. I, Barouh, Marko and a girl, whose name I can’t remember. I attended the Sunday school at the Jewish center where we had religion classes devoted to our religion. There were religion classes in the Bulgarian school as well but the Jews didn’t have to attend them. We could remain in class if we wanted to and sometimes I stayed. My favorite subject was Manual Labor. I am a skillful man, just like my father and brother. I can make anything – no matter where you put me – I manage to complete any task – I can paint, I can make installations, doors, window

frames, ironmongery and so on. I have been a member of both Maccabi [21](#) and Hashomer Hatzair [22](#). My brother was a member of Maccabi at the beginning and then he joined Hashomer Hatzair. There was also an organization called Betar [23](#) – the most right-oriented, the most armed wing of the Zionist movement. They believed that Palestine had to be liberated through revolution, through weapons. The Maccabeans on the other hand were sports people. They used to have a large gym which was their own property. Hashomer Hatzair's members were with leftist orientation. They were for social equality. The majority of its members left for Israel in 1947 [Mass Aliyah] [24](#). During the Holocaust most of its members started co-operating with the UYW [25](#). The main occupation of the members of Hashomer Hatzair was tilling the land. There was a big farm, 'chiflik', which was owned by the Bulgarian Baltov and, for that reason, known as the Baltov Chiflik. They were giving 'ahshara' – a public service which they weren't paid for, and at the same time were training in agriculture. So there they were working and training in agriculture professionally at one and the same time. Their aim was to be able to till the land after leaving for Israel. There was some competition between the different organizations. Each one of them wanted to attract as many members as possible. At first I was a Maccabean, then I became a Hashomerist but I felt best at Maccabi. In the gym we used to have different exercise facilities – bars, a vaulting horse, a horizontal bar – we were practicing sports and apart from being Zionist, the focus was on the healthy way of living.

I hadn't felt any anti-Semitist attitudes until 1939 – 1940, until the moment when the Fascist organizations Brannik [26](#), 'Han Krum' Legion were established in 1941. In the Jewish quarter their members – all of them young men – would come to break windows, to eventually beat somebody and they went away. I had such a case. We used to have a neighbor. His name was Kasurov and he used to live on the corner of 'Tsar Samuil' and 'Yuri Venelin'. One day he saw how the members of Brannik were coming into the quarter ready to vandalize and ran towards them because they started bullying some of my friends. 'Bastards, what wrong have these people done, leave them alone.' We realized the Jewry was in jeopardy at the very moment of the begetting of fascism, with the appearance of the book 'Mein Kampf' by Adolf Hitler. A lot of the Jews were aware of the real dimensions of the situation, of the fact that a peril was approaching because we received information that the Jews from the region of the Aegean Sea were sent to the camps of death and we knew that was our destiny as well [Deportation of Jews from Aegean Thrace and Macedonia] [27](#). But nonetheless, we were used to being in good relations with the Bulgarians, to being tolerated by them and that gave us reasons to believe that those terrible things were not going to happen in Bulgaria. It was not by chance that a lot of the Jews joined the armed fight as a reaction against the jeopardy.

I get furious when some people say: 'They were communists'. The truth was that the Jews found a way to fight for their own cause by joining UYW and BCP. Some of the members of the youth Jewish organizations joined their ranks. I was too young but my brother was a Maccabean and then he joined Hashomer Hatzair – they were different you know, and then he joined UYW and then became a member of BCP. Later, in 1943, he was a political prisoner.

What I remember first about the period of the Holocaust is how my father was completing the documents. We enlisted in a declaration all our property and real estate – an incessant succession of documents [Law for Protection of the Nation] [28](#). They didn't take anything from us because there was nothing to take. We were living in rented lodgings but we had to pay very high taxes for

everything we owned. After that appeared the badges [yellow stars] [29](#) that all the people of Jewish origin over the age of ten were obliged to put on. We were obliged to wear them. The badge had to be sewn, but we put them on with safety pins so that we could put them on different clothes. My father was buying them from somewhere, I don't know where from. Dad had bought a badge for every member of our family. There were differences in the badges of the Jews who were decorated with a military star and the cripples from the wars. Theirs had a big black button and not a David's star. My father had taken part in the wars but hadn't been injured and he was wearing an ordinary badge. The ones who had a button on their badges were privileged but I don't know in what way. We, the Jews, were not allowed to work at certain institutions like the police, the municipality council, but the craftsmen went on working. After 1943, when the Jews interned from Sofia came, the doctors were forbidden to work in the towns they lived in [Internment of Jews in Bulgaria] [30](#). They were sent to other places, where there were no doctors. That's how the doctors of Jewish origin from Plovdiv were sent to the most difficult job positions. During the war incredible home production developed – necklace making, bag-knitting, knitting of different hand-made objects. People were trying to earn a morsel. There was a great demand on the market and people were in need of all possible goods, you could sell and buy anything – war.

During the Holocaust I was working as an apprentice shoemaker and was repairing the shoes of the entire family and I'm still doing it. I have a kit of instruments at home. I worked like that for about two years but then one day I said to my father: 'I don't like this job. I have learned everything and now I want to work on the trains.' But he replied: 'No, you'll go on working.' But I said: 'But I'm already familiar with this craft. I'll make you a pair of shoes – if they're not comfortable, I'll go on working until I learn how to make comfortable shoes. If you like them, you'll find me a job on the trains.' And I made him a pair of shoes – for his extremely crooked feet. He put them on, took a walk and told me: 'To my satisfaction and dissatisfaction at the same time, these shoes are extremely comfortable.' He admitted – in that respect he was an extremely decent man.

The men between the age of 19 and 40 were mobilized in the labor camps [31](#). My father was getting on and I was too young for the labor camps. In 1942 my father was sent to the village of Gorno Voroshilovo because of his party membership. The village used to have the same name before 9th September but then it was quite a forlorn place. Now the highway is going through it.

There were also some men of the same age from present-day Greek territories, from towns like Drama, Salonika, Xanti whose relatives had been deported. They were mobilized in the labor camps of Kingdom Bulgaria which at that time used to have an outlet to the Aegean Sea. [50 000 Jews from Salonika were deported to Poland in 1943 but that has nothing to do with Bulgaria. The mobilization was of Jews-relatives who were from the old territories of Bulgaria – otherwise there are no facts about Jews from the newly-annexed lands who were mobilized to work.] When they were demobilized in winter they used to sleep in one of the rooms from the synagogue in Plovdiv. There were five such rooms in the yard. There were about 40 or 50 of those Greeks. There is an interesting story with them. The Branniks started bullying us again. They were attacking us ruthlessly. Somebody saw them coming and shouted: 'Call the Greek boys' (the Greek boys because they could only speak Greek). They quickly came out and there was such a fight. In the end there was a pile of the members of Brannik, like dogs, and they were severely beaten. But suddenly there was a shout 'Police!' and we disappeared into thin air. That was possible because the streets 'Angel Kunchev', 'Vodoprovodna', 'Tsar Samuil' and 'Yuri Venelin' formed a square. The

houses and yards of those houses were connected by little doors and we could move from yard to yard. We entered a house in 'Angel Kunchev' and went out from a house in 'Yuri Venelin'.

Afterwards the interned Jews from Sofia arrived. They were first sent to Chepelare. [A small town in the Rhodopi Mountains, nowadays a winter ski resort. There was probably a Jewish forced labor group which was working in the region of Devin and Chepelare. Otherwise there is no information about internment of Jews to Chepelare] and later they came to Plovdiv. A part of them were staying with friends and relatives. My aunt Sofi and my uncle came to our house. Well, what can I tell you? We the children were sleeping on the table – my brother on top of the table, I – on the lower board. On the table! It was possible to accommodate 12-13 people in those rooms. It was difficult to handle with the food but that was the reality not only for the Jews but for the Bulgarians as well. We used to have vouchers at the time and we ate 250 grams bread a day. We had to take care of ourselves, like everybody else. There was also a black market where the prices were extremely high. So flour, butter, oil could all be bought on the black market but that kind of providing supplies was the same for both Jews and Bulgarians. It was the same. For some of the Jews and for the Jews living in the synagogue there was a soup kitchen.

In 1943 my brother Samuil Behar was sent to jail after the failure of a Jewish youth UYW organization. He was sentenced to 10 years but was freed on 9th September. He was in the prison in Plovdiv. His wife, my sister-in-law, Amada, also spent some time in jail. They met while conducting different activities for UYW and got married immediately after 9th September in 1945. Later my sister told me that when she was younger our brother Samuil had always taken her to his secret meetings with Amada and his comrades from the group. She served as a cover. They had even told her that Amada's name was actually Hana so that she wouldn't betray her unintentionally. I believe that my parents had drawn their conclusions about the illegal activities of my brother but there were no comments and questions because they didn't want to embarrass him and to be embarrassed in their turn. After all it was an illegal activity and too much talk was inadvisable. My sister-in-law had been not only in the prison in Plovdiv, but also in the prisons in Pazardzhik and Sliven. We used to visit my brother on Wednesday and Sunday and brought food and coal. My arms started hurting from carrying the buckets – one or two buckets of coal and wood on top. And in the end we found out that the wardens used the coal for heating and our relatives were freezing.

In January 1943 my father was freed from the village of Gorno Voroshilovo and was mobilized as a typesetter because they started publishing the newspapers 'Utro' [32](#), 'Zarya' [Fireworks - a daily informational newspaper. Printed in Sofia from 1914 till 1944] – and we were extremely happy that he got permission to move about freely whenever he wanted although there was a curfew for the entire population of Bulgaria. He even got permission to be outside after 10 p.m. He was going to work, they were printing the newspaper, they loaded it on the trucks and so on.

There was a decision to deport us on 10th March 1943. [Plan for deportation of Jews in Bulgaria] [33](#) They woke us at 3.15 in the morning and told us to take up to 10 kg luggage. And together with my six-year-old sister and ninety-year-old grandmother we went to the Jewish school. We were pushed into the Maccabi gym. There were about 200 of us and we could hardly breathe. There is an interesting story with my father. Dr. Araf was crying and talking through tears; 'Do you know where we're going?' And dad replied: 'I know very well but you have to pull yourself together – we have to set the example for the young people'. But he went on crying and my father slapped him across

the face to make him stop. 'We have been to war, we have looked death into the face. We have to be brave because of the women and the children.' And at these words the man became behaving normally again.

We stayed there for about ten hours. I didn't actually realize what was going to happen but my brother was fully aware because he was trying to get in touch with the partisans. At a certain moment they started separating men from women. They were reading our names from a list. They were letting us enter the schoolyard. And some time around noon, I can't say at what time exactly, protest demonstrations started down 'Tsar Osvooboditel' Blvd, which at that time was called 'Adolf Hitler', and down 'Aleko Konstantinov', with slogans 'Liberate the people who have fought for the sacred lands of Bulgaria.' Tobacco workers and craftsmen from Plovdiv took part in the demonstrations. The people had sent tens of telegrams to the government saying 'Stop the violence over the Jews!', 'We have lived together and will live together again!' The patriarch also came out with the stole and the scepter and said: 'The trains cannot pass! Only over my dead body!' I think that the greatest influence was exerted by the Jews from Kyustendil and the Bulgarian intelligentsia – the unions of the lawyers, of the journalists, of the writers..., but there was some influence from abroad as well. Boris was a cousin of the British queen so she got in touch with him and told him: 'Do not forget that there is Doomsday.' [There is no data about such a conversation but this is a popular proverb in Bulgaria meaning that there is justice in the end.] Of course, the events on the Eastern Front played an extremely important role. The fall of Stalingrad, the Kursk Duga [Kursk Arc] and so on. They let us go. We realized that they wouldn't deport us and then Zhan Levi [an eminent Jewish lawyer in Plovdiv] delivered a speech of gratitude for His Majesty but I think that he wasn't the only one to contribute for this decision.

A couple of days before 9th September 1944 my father came home and said 'They're liberating the political prisoners.' And we all ran to the prison. Somebody there said: 'Don't go home, all of us will manifest together.' We separated into two columns – one of the columns went over the bridge of Gherdzhika, the other one – over the old Karlovsky Bridge and the two columns met here in front of Dzhumayata and the speeches started. Then we went to the Police Inspectorate, which was functioning as a town-hall at the same time, and they started pushing the policemen and making them go outside. They didn't surrender that easily; they even tried to shoot several times and injured one of our Jewish boys in the leg. And after that we went to the monument in 'Hristo Botev' Street. There was a symbol in front of it – the Latin letter V – for victory. Then somebody said: 'This shameful sign cannot be left before the chief and the teacher of the communist movement in Bulgaria! Smash it!' And we tore the flowers to pieces in seconds. On 9th September we first met and greeted the partisans from Sredna Gora Mountain and later the partisans from the Rhodopi Mountains – the first at one exit of the town, the others – at another. At that time the song 'A Partisan is Preparing for Battle' was extremely popular.

My brother was released from prison and the family was whole again. In 1947 for Israel left my dad's relatives aunt Sofi and aunt Bouka. Another aunt of mine, Stella, emigrated to Paris in 1928. Aunt Rebeka and uncle Nisim remained in Bulgaria as well. All my mother's relatives left the country in 1947; the only ones who remained were her sister Mati and she. I've never thought about leaving Bulgaria. I am married to a Bulgarian and my life is here in Plovdiv.

I was regularly writing letters to my relatives until they were alive. My mother was very active in this correspondence – she was regularly writing letters to our relatives in Israel irrespectively of the

official policy of Bulgaria towards Israel.

After my mother's death, my aunts died as well, but we talk on the phone with my cousins every now and then.

After 9th September life returned to normal again. Even before 9th September, in 1943-1944, I was working as a shoemaker. Afterwards, at the end of 1945, I started work at 'Mikromer' Locksmith's. There we were making keys, locks, oxygen welding. My master, whose name was uncle Georgi, and my father had been together in prison in 1936. I spent two years there and then from the town committee of UYW sent me to ORT [34](#) in Sofia. At that time UYW hadn't been transformed into Dimitrov Communist Youth Union [Bulgarian Komsomol] [35](#) yet. That took place later, in 1948. In ORT I attended six-month courses to train for jig locksmith. After completing them I worked for 4 or 5 months at 'Osvobozhdenie' Cooperation – a Jewish cooperative company in which the machines were from 'Joint' [36](#) I worked there for 6 months and came back to Plovdiv and worked at 'Ustrem' Metal-Working Cooperation, a subsidiary of 'Joint' too from 1946 till 1950. 'Ustrem' Cooperation was the first manufacturer of machine-tools. I worked there for a year and a half and then I was sent to Rabfak, where I studied for a year and a half. I was very good at Physics and Chemistry there. Our teachers were wonderful, all of them were so good – the best, the elite of the teachers in Plovdiv and they were eager to work there. For example, the eminent teacher of Bulgarian and Literature, Vera Gulubova, who I have mentioned at the beginning. I remember that I used to smoke at the time, she came to me and told me: 'Behar, you smell like a tobacco warehouse, if nature had wanted the man to smoke, it would have put chimneys on our heads.'

After that I was advised to enroll in the Institute of Mining and Geology, into a field where specialists were needed. I enrolled and spent nine terms studying from 1952 till 1957. At that time I was living with the family of one of my father's sisters. After graduating I got a job at Gorubso. I worked there for ten years until 1967 and then I decided to quit because I wanted to return to Plovdiv. I came back and started work at the Electrical Equipment Plant where I started as a dies technologist and reached the position of a head of the Instruments Department. And I grew a little further in the hierarchy by becoming a head of department in the town of Peroushtitsa [a small town 26 km from Plovdiv].

I have never had any problems with my Jewish origin – neither at school and at university, nor at my work places.

In 1955 at a birthday party I met my future wife. As a matter of fact, my brother was invited there and I went with him. We quickly made our acquaintances, we kept in touch and at the end of the year she came to celebrate together with me the New Year's Eve in Sofia where I was a student. She was born in the village of Borets, Plovdiv region, but she went to live in Plovdiv in 1947. Her father was a militiaman here. She is a weaver by profession.

At the time of our first meeting I was preparing my diploma paper at the Institute of Mining and Technology. I graduated in 1956. We got officially engaged. My parents had nothing against the fact that she wasn't Jewish. As far as her parents were concerned there was a certain opposition on the part of her mother because she was worried about what the people would say but her father was firm – he said it was her choice and it had to be respected. We got married before the officially chosen date. It happened absolutely by accident. At that time I was already working at Gorubso. We were invited to the wedding reception of a colleague of mine, which was organized in the

village of Brestovitsa, Plovdiv region. His name was Lyubo. His best man was the Director of Gorubso and brother-in-law at the same time – the director's wife was Lyubcho's wife-to-be sister. The Director of Gorubso started joking with us in the end and told us: 'Come on, why don't you get married as well? Come on, it will be fun, I'll give you the jeep and you'll make a honeymoon to Plovdiv.' So we went in the registry office with one bride, separated the bouquet and went out with two brides. That is how we made our civic marriage in Brestovitsa. Afterwards we went to buy some chocolates and the first thing we did when we returned to Plovdiv was to go to her parents and she said: 'Mum, Dad, we got married.' 'How come, the date of the marriage is in autumn? She started collecting her things and her mother asked: 'Where are you going?' 'Well, I'm going with him.' That's how we started living together in our house with my parents. We got married in 1956. Our children were born in 1957 – twin sisters. Their names are Liza and Dora.

I became a member of BCP in 1957. I'll tell you a very interesting case. A decision was taken to make a TKZS – a Co-operative Farm [labor co-operative agriculture farms – the law for their establishment dates back to 1945. At first those were voluntary organizations but by 1956 they have turned into obligatory organizations. They were based on the principle of co-operative property and tilling of the land.] in the Balkan. Its chairperson started talking and was trying to win us for the idea. I had just graduated and was well-versed in Marxism. There was a meeting at which the Co-operative Farm issue was being discussed. I couldn't contain myself and said: 'Look, comrades, there must be some mistake here. According to Lenin's theses about the rural economy this should take place on the basis of profound mechanization, automation and application of chemicals. Here we are using mules [a hybrid between donkey and horse] for work, mules for tilling the land. What kind of Co-operative Farm are we going to make?' Break was announced and the chairperson came to me: 'Hey, you, if you want to become a member of the party, you wouldn't say such things!' I replied: 'That's my opinion.' – 'What opinion of yours is that? This is according to Lenin's theses.' And I recall that I was looking for those theses afterwards. The Co-operative Farm existed for a year, then it was turned into forestry and once I bumped into the chairperson and asked him: 'What happened, my man?' – 'Those were the general instructions.' Even though I had made such a comment I was accepted for a member of the party.

My granny Rahel, dad's mother, died in 1952. We buried her observing all the Jewish rituals in the Jewish cemetery. We kept on observing the Jewish rituals even after her death but not with the same solemnity as when she was alive. The large tablecloths at Pesach were missing. Now we buy matzah, make burmolikos, we put a tablecloth on the table again but there is no reading of prayers and so on. This tradition continued no matter I married a Bulgarian. My wife started making 'alkashul' for Purim. She learned how to cook a lot of typical Jewish dishes – agristada and apio, andjinara and burmolikos. At Chanukkah we are still visiting uncle Nisim to light a Chanukkiyah – only once, and the children come then.

And our twins – our children grew up in this atmosphere but, of course, there is an important detail – my wife paints 40 or 50 eggs every Easter and she prepares Easter cookies. At Christmas we celebrate with her kin.

My two daughters were raised as Jews. For a short period of time they attended the Jewish kindergarten. They are twins. When they were children we dressed them identically. In 1979 my daughters got married on one and the same day. They feel very strong connection even nowadays despite living in different countries. Liza has a college education and is a sanitary inspector – to

control the quality of the food – but she doesn't work in this field. Now she lives in Israel and works at a hotel in Elad. She married twice and has two children from her two husbands. From her marriage with Svetozar Zhelyazkov is her son Branimir, and from her second marriage to Tsenko Kunchev is her daughter Vanya, who is a student.

Dora is married to George Spasov, a master of sports – mechanized water sports. She has a secondary education of technology. She lives in Plovdiv and works as a beautician here.

Liza, who lives in Israel at the moment, is more committed to the Jewish organization whereas Dora, who lives here, is not committed to that extent. She is a member of Shalom but comes rarely, and her children, too, but on the other hand Liza is very devoted. Her daughter Vanya, who lives in Plovdiv, is an activist and a madriha. Dora has two children, Nikolay and Iva. Iva is a third-year student. My two daughters are married to Bulgarian men. The Jewish origin of my daughters has never been an obstacle for the choice of their Bulgarian husbands, otherwise they wouldn't have married them, right? Dora works as a beautician in Plovdiv. Irrespectively of the fact that they have different professions and destinies, they feel very strongly connected. I'll tell you a very interesting fact. When Dora was pregnant, Liza could feel her labor pains from a distance.

We keep in touch with the Jewish community. Its activities after 9th September expanded very much, the 'Sholom Aleichem' Chitalishte was created, which didn't exist before that. The Jewish singing union was restored and while I am in Plovdiv I keep in touch with the Jewish community all the time. After 1957 – 1958 it became a state property but the name remained unchanged. The Jewish holidays were still celebrated but they became somewhat more European. For example, from Purim we have kept mainly the carnival, Chanukkah was turned into a celebration of bravery. And people aren't that much focused on religion any more but it seems to me that at the time when I was working at Gorubso, there weren't so many people going to the Jewish Chitalishte, the flow of people going there diminished greatly. That was in the period between 1957 and 1962.

We lived in my parents' house until a cousin of mine bought her own place and I went to live in her old apartment which was actually a Jewish real estate left by people who had emigrated to Israel. I didn't buy it, but rented it. The Jews who had left for Israel had left a representative and I was paying the rent to him. Once a year we met because I was paying the taxes. I bought that place in 1989 and went on living there while my daughter who lives in Bulgaria – Dora – had bought the apartment in which I live now. The two grandchildren were born – her children Nikolay and Iva – and once she told me: 'Papa – they call me Papa – Papa, there are four of us now. Mum and you are only two. Let's swap our apartments.' And we swapped.

I hail the establishment of the state of Israel. I believe that every Jew should have a place to call home. I think that the Israeli state system should be something like federation. It is not the only state in the world where people from various nationalities live together. There were years when the official policy of Bulgaria towards Israel wasn't very friendly. I personally accepted critically some aggressive extremities on the part of the Israelis as well as the Arab attacks.

I accept myself as a citizen of Bulgaria and give examples with football. If Bulgaria plays Israel I'll be for Bulgaria but if Israel plays any other country, I'll be for Israel.

I was in Israel in 1999. I was impressed because it is an excellently constituted country, very different from Bulgaria at the moment. In general, democracy is a good thing but we shouldn't

have destroyed what we had already achieved.

In Bulgaria the democratic changes started in 1989 [10th November 1989] [37](#). I'll give an example with the Electrical Equipment Plant in Plovdiv, which was a leader in the industry before 10th November. It had certified products in the international laboratory in Hague and we actually had received European machines. There were 400 employees working at several branches. At the moment there are 150 employees.

Or another example – in the rural economy. People have tried for years, for hundreds of years to consolidate the land plots. We had achieved this consolidation and afterwards it was returned to the owners in real boundaries. And now when you walk through the fields you can see two decares of wheat, a decare of sunflower, two decares of alfalfa and so on. The main mistake of the socialist movement is the complete lack of changes of people in authority. If there was an opportunity for such changes and T. Zhivkov [38](#) hadn't been the leader for 34 years, if somebody else had come – there were a lot of students who were studying in Europe and in the world. Lyudmila Zhivkova [39](#) opened Bulgaria for the outside world. If a lot of people were rotating in the administration of the party only for two mandates and then were replaced by other people by younger and more competent people, now the situation would have been different.

I became much poorer after 10th November. I retired in 1980 and was getting the highest possible pension – 230 levs. Afterwards I was immediately hired again as a locksmith at the same plant that I had worked before. So I started completing my job as a worker again, I was standing at the vice again. I worked for ten more years. I was responsible for the maintenance of the instrumental equipment of the mass consumer goods shop. We were making door hinges, case hinges, shop shelves, we were making the Rubik's cube, pegs, hairdryers. I was responsible for the entire instrumental maintenance. And that was the most creative period of my, how shall I put it, of my conscious manufacturing life. The boss whose subordinate I was would come and say: 'Behar, do something because the people who are making this part are putting in too much effort and it's too difficult.' And I would go and observe the process, would look the people in the hands to see what they were doing. I would go there, take a seat, make drawings, would move to the machines – I am a technologist, I am a constructor – and start applying the new method and I would assemble the part, bring it to the workers and say: 'OK, now, my girl, look now, see if this time you will assemble it more easily. Give it a try.' In half an hour: 'Wow, uncle Behar, that's a good thing you have done, a very good thing indeed!'

I have another very interesting story to tell. There was an exhibition of all the shops in Bulgaria producing consumer goods and I went behind the sales stall. The guy standing behind the stall told me: 'Behar, stay here for a while, I am a little fed up.' And while he was away there came this guy and I said: 'How can I help you?' He was looking at me and said: 'All you have shown here is very interesting but what I need is hinges. How many can you produce?' 'Tell me the quantities you need?' 'A really large quantity.' And while this conversation was taking place I was estimating the time for which I could make new dies and asked him to be more specific about the amounts he would need. 'Well, a million from each type. From each type.' I was still thinking at that moment and told him: 'No problem!' But I had estimated that I could make one die for a week and that one die could cut 300 parts per minute, depending on the size. And that guy threw a business card on the counter – a director of 'Raznoiznos' Directorate. I immediately called the head engineer who said: 'Have you gone mad?' I replied: 'Listen, we will make a mint from that.' And we started right

away – that guy would order 10,000 of that hinge, 40,000 – from another. I would take one of the boys working there and we would make three new dies. That dies provided for 12 people from that shop for eight years. Every year huge amounts of hinges were planned for manufacture.

I've never interrupted my connections with the Jewish community. I've been tightly related to it for 45 years, whenever I've been in Plovdiv. After 1989 the Jewish center expanded its activities and somehow changed in itself. Many holidays preserved their religious nature, as it was before 9th September. But I'm still a complete atheist. I attend the synagogue at memorial services or at the big holidays.

I haven't received anything from the Joint but there were some 400 Swiss dollars and some German from the Red Cross. Before the denominations they amounted to 20,000 levs which means 500 levs nowadays. Every evening I play belote at Shalom. Even now I am in a hurry because I have to tell them I won't play tonight so they have to find another partner.

Translated by Dimka Stoeva

## Glossary

### **1 Plovdiv**

a town in Bulgaria situated in the Upper-Thracian Lowlands, along the two banks of the Maritsa River and on six unique syenite hills or as everybody calls them – tepeta. On about three of those hills the Thracians founded the ancient Thracian settlement called Evmolpias, later renamed to Poulpoudeva. In 342 BC the town was conquered by Philip II of Macedonia and renamed to Philipopol. During the Roman rule it turned into a major economic, cultural and political center of Thrace. The three hills around which the town was founded were called Trimontsium. After the downfall of the Roman Empire in VI century the town was conquered by the Slavs. Two centuries later it was included within the boundaries of Bulgaria and was called. Puldin. In XIV century it was conquered by the Turks and its name was changed again – to Phelibe. At the time of the Russian – Turkish Liberation War Plovdiv was the biggest town in Bulgaria. Following the decisions of the Berlin Congress and the separation of Bulgarian Principality and Eastern Rumelia, the town became the administrative center of Eastern Rumelia. Here, in Plovdiv, on 6th September 1885 was announced the Union of the Bulgarian Principality and Eastern Roumelia. The town is famous for the peaceful life of a mixture of Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Bulgarians and Jews.

### **2 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.

### **3 Expulsion of the Jews from Spain**

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

### **4 Russian-Turkish War (1877-78)**

After the loss of the Crimean War (1856) the Russian Empire made a second attempt in 1877 to secure its outlet from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean by conquering the strategic straits (Bosporus and Dardanelles) and strengthening its position in the Balkans. The pretext of the war declaration was pan-Slavism: protecting the fellow Christian Orthodox and Slavic speaking population of the Ottoman controlled South Eastern Europe. From the Russian controlled Bessarabia the Russian army entered Romania and attacked the Ottomans south of the Danube. With enthusiastic Bulgarian support the Russians won the decisive battles at Plevna (Pleven) and the Shipka straight in the Balkan Mountains. They took Adrianople (Edirne) in 1878 and reached San Stefano (Yesilkoy), an Istanbul suburb, where they signed a treaty with the Porte. This provided for an autonomous Bulgarian state, under Russian protection, bordering the Black and the Aegean seas, including also most of historic Thrace and Macedonia. Britain (safeguarding status quo on the European continent) and Austria-Hungary (having strategic interests in the region) initiated a joint Great Power decision to limit Russian dominance in the Balkans. Their diplomatic efforts were successful and resulted in the Treaty of Berlin in 1878. According to this Bulgaria was made much smaller and large populations of Bulgarians remained outside the new frontiers. Eastern Rumelia as an autonomous Ottoman province was created. In Berlin the Romanian, the Serbian and the Montenegrin states were internationally recognized and Austria-Hungary was given the right to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina to restore order.

### **5 Ladino**

also known as Judeo-Spanish, it is the spoken and written Hispanic language of Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Ladino did not become a specifically Jewish language until after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 (and Portugal in 1495) - it was merely the language of their province. It is also known as Judezmo, Dzhudezmo, or Spaniolit. When the Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal they were cut off from the further development of the language, but they continued to speak it in the communities and countries to which they emigrated. Ladino therefore reflects the grammar and vocabulary of 15th century Spanish. In Amsterdam, England and Italy, those Jews who continued to speak 'Ladino' were in constant contact with Spain and therefore they basically continued to speak the Castilian Spanish of the time. Ladino was nowhere near as diverse as the various forms of Yiddish, but there were still two different dialects, which corresponded to the different origins of the speakers: 'Oriental' Ladino was spoken in Turkey and Rhodes and reflected Castilian Spanish, whereas 'Western' Ladino was spoken in Greece, Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia and Romania, and preserved the characteristics of northern Spanish and Portuguese. The vocabulary of Ladino includes hundreds of archaic Spanish words, and also includes many words from different

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

## **6 French Colleges in Bulgaria**

Bulgarian-French diplomatic relations date officially from 8th July 1879 when the French Consul Y. Shefer handed to King Battenberg his letters of accreditation. There were French colleges in Ruse, Varna and Plovdiv. The one in Ruse was founded before the establishment of diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and France because there was a French consul in the town from the time of the Ottoman Empire. French colleges are famous for their good education. There is no information on the number of Jews who studied in them. They were usually established at Catholic missions.

## **7 'Shofar' newspaper**

a Jewish newspaper, issued in Plovdiv and Sofia from 1919 till 1944. The total number of the newspapers and magazines issued in Bulgaria from 1844 till 1944 is 8,622. Out of them there were 90 Jewish newspapers that were in Bulgarian. There were several groups of Jewish newspapers and magazines according to their ideology and other features: Zionist – 51; BCP publications – 9; publications of the Bulgarian Workers Social Democratic Party (radical socialists) - 2; mason's – 1; charity – 3; religious – 5; advertising and informational; economic and so on – 7; tourist – 1; to spread ideas among the Jews – 1; with undefined ideology, cultural included – 9. at the same time the Jewish newspapers and magazines that were printed in Ladino and Hebrew were 56. Among them is the 'Shofar' newspaper which was issued in Ladino from 1901 till 1911 in Plovdiv.

## **8 Rafbak**

Rafbak is an abbreviation for 'Rabotnicheski Fakultet' meaning Workers' Faculty. They were much popular in the 1970s and 1980s. They were organized with the cooperation of the Bulgarian Communist Party and their main goal was to prepare specialists to enroll in universities. The people were mostly from industrial companies. The courses lasted a number of months and people did not go to work while they were studying. The people sent to such courses had a good professional background and were recommended by the party representatives. In socialist times Workers' Schools were organized throughout the entire Eastern Block. Modes of instruction included both evening and correspondence classes and all educational levels were served – from elementary school to higher education.

## **9 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).

## **10 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 organizations 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 chitalishte in Bulgaria today, although they have become less popular.

## **11 9th September 1944**

The day of the communist takeover in Bulgaria. In September 1944 the Soviet Union 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.

## **12 Bulgarian Communist Party [up to 1990]**

the ruling party of the People's Republic of Bulgaria from 1946 until 1990 when it ceased to be a Communist state. The Bulgarian Communist Party had dominated the Fatherland Front coalition that took power in 1944, late in World War II, after it led a coup against Bulgaria's fascist government in conjunction with the Red Army's crossing the border. The party's origins lay in the Social Democratic and Labour Party of Bulgaria, which was founded in 1903 after a split in the Social-Democratic Party. The party's founding leader was Dimitar Blagoev and its subsequent leaders included Georgi Dimitrov.

## **13 Origin of Bulgarian Communist Party**

In the Bulgarian Workers' Socialist Democratic Party there formed two wings – revolutionary, left-wing and right-wing socialists. The revolutionary socialists' leader was Dimitar Blagoev and, in practice, they were following the ideas of the Second Socialist International and were taking active part in the international socialist movement. The left-wing, revolutionary socialists were for national unity of the Bulgarian people but they didn't approve of the way in which it was being achieved and that was adopted by the monarch and the government of the coalition of the narodniaks [narod means people] which means they were against a next Balkan, Second Balkan and World War I. Their idea was the creation of a Balkan Federation and the peaceful solution of

the national issue. The right-wing socialists were led by Yanko Sakuzov, Evtim Dabev and K. Bozveliev. The right-wing socialists were also considered to be an integral part of the international socialist movement and the Second Socialist International but their social grounds were the hired laborers, the lowest and medium strata mainly of the urban population, the teachers and the clerks. In May 1919, after World War I had ended, there was held a congress at which the wings officially separated. The Bulgarian Communist Party – left-wing socialists – was the successor to the Bulgarian Workers' Socialist Democratic Party – Left-wing Socialists. The change of the name took place at the XXII congress in May 1919. The very reason for the change of the name was the adoption of Lenin's theory about imperialism as the last stage of capitalism, about the real chances of the proletarian revolution to win even in one separate country, about the role of the peasantry as an ally of the proletariat in the fulfillment of the socialist revolution.

#### **14 Banning of Bulgarian Communist Party**

It happened after the September Rebellion which was organized under pressure from the Comintern in Moscow. During the rebellion and after its defeat a lot of members and followers of BCP died, others were thrown in jail. The organized life of the party was stopped whereas the party itself was practically declared to be outside the law. Inside the party a fractionist fight between the liquidators was taking place and it was led by Dr. Nikola Sakarov, Ivan Klincharov and S. Todorov. They announced that they had been against the September Rebellion line of the party, against the Communist International and the turning BCP (left-wing) into an illegal party. At the beginning of April 1924 in accordance with the Law for the Protection of the State BCP (Left-wing) was banned. Nonetheless, in May that same year BCP (left-wing) held an illegal conference at which a decision for new armed uprising was taken. Without assessing the new situation correctly, the military fraction of the party organized and conducted a terrorist act in 'Sveta Nedelia' Church. A Jew took part in that terrorist act – Marko Fridman who was arrested and hanged immediately after the explosion on 16th April 1925 in response to the terrorist activity the government of Alexander Tsankov started a terror during which hundreds of party members lost their lives.

#### **15 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.

#### **16 Burmoelos (or burmolikos, burlikus)**

A sweetmeat made from matzah, typical for Pesach. First, the matzah is put into water, then squashed and mixed with eggs. Balls are made from the mixture, they are fried and the result is something like donuts.

#### **17 Vagenshtain, Angel (1922)**

A classic of Bulgarian cinema. He graduated in cinema dramaturgy from the Russian State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow. Author of some 50 scripts for feature, documentary and animation films, as well as of novels published in Bulgaria, France, Germany, Russia, and the USA. Since 1950 he has worked in Bulgarian and East German cinematography. His 1959 film 'Stars',

dedicated to the fate of Jews in WWII, and directed by Konrad Wolf, won the Special Prize of the jury at the 59th Cannes International Film Festival. Among Vagenshtain's most famous films as a scriptwriter are: 'Amendment to the Law for the Defense of the Nation', 'Goya', 'Stars In Her Hair, Tears In Her Eyes', 'Boris I', etc.

## **18 Kef**

Comes from the Turkish word keyif meaning delight, great pleasure akin to Arab kayif – well-being. The word is very common in Bulgarian and it is used often.

## **19 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. Many Bulgarian Jews saved from the Holocaust (over 50,000 people) regard King Boris III as their savior.

## **20 Karavelov, Lyuben (1834 - 1879)**

a Bulgarian writer from the Renaissance period; an activist of the revolutionary movement for liberation from the Ottoman yoke. He was born in 1834 in Koprivshtitsa and died in 1879 in Ruse. He got his primary education in Plovdiv. Then he studied in Istanbul – 1856 and at the Department of History and Philology at Moscow University – 1859. He worked as a correspondent for the Moscow newspapers 'Golos' (Voice) and 'Moscvu' (Moscow) while he was living in Belgrade in 1867. In 1868 he was living and working in Novi Sad and from 1869 – in Bucharest where he started printing the Svoboda (Freedom) newspaper. In 1872 together with some other Bulgarian revolutionaries he founded the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee which was aiming at the liberation of Bulgaria. Among his most popular works are: 'A Description of the Bulgarian Way of Living', 'Is it the Destiny's Fault', 'Bulgarians from Past Times', 'Stories from the Bulgarian Reality'.

## **21 Maccabi World Union**

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

## **22 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.

### **23 Betar**

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

### **24 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.

### **25 UYW**

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

### **26 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.

### **27 Deportation of Jews from Aegean Thrace and Macedonia**

On 22nd February 1943 in Sofia, late in the evening, at the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs an agreement was signed between Alexander Belev – a commissar for Jewish affairs and Teodor Daneker – SS hauptsturmbanfuhrer, an assistant to the military attaché at the German Legation in Sofia concerning the deportation of Jews to Poland. According to the agreement 20,000 of the newly-annexed in 1941 Aegean Thrace and Macedonia had to be deported to Poland. As their

number amounted to 12,000 the others, who were supposed to make up for the needed numbers, were from the interior of the country – from the towns of Plovdiv, Kyustendil, Dupnitsa, Pazardzhik, Yambol, Varna – the more enlightened, the wealthier and more socially active, those who were known to be ‘the leaders of Jewry’ were preferred. The very act of deportation of the Jews from Aegean Thrace and Macedonia was accomplished from 1st to 8th March and those Jews were deported through Yugoslavia and Bulgaria to the concentration camp Treblinka in Poland. The deportation of Jews from the interior of the country didn’t take place. Although it was planned as a secret mission due to the active interference of the citizens and society, the operation failed and not a single Jew was deported from the old territories of Bulgaria.

## **28 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.

## **29 Yellow star in Bulgaria**

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

## **30 Internment of Jews in Bulgaria**

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

and from Macedonia, but in the end, the Jews from Bulgaria proper were spared.

### **31 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.

### **32 Utro**

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

### **33 Plan for deportation of Jews in Bulgaria**

In accordance with the agreement signed on 22nd February 1943 by the Commissar for Jewish Affairs Alexander Belev on the Bulgarian side and Teodor Daneker on the German side, it was decided to deport 20 000 Jews at first. Since the number of the Aegean and Macedonian Jews, or the Jews from the 'new lands', annexed to Bulgaria in WWII, was around 12 000, the other 8 000 Jews had to be selected from the so-called 'old borders', i.e. Bulgaria. A couple of days later, on 26th February Alexander Belev sent an order to the delegates of the Commissariat in all towns with a larger Jewish population to prepare lists of the so-called 'unwanted or anti-state elements'. The 'richer, more distinguished and socially prominent' Jews had to be listed among the first. The deportation started in March 1943 with the transportation of the Aegean and the Thrace Jews from the new lands. The overall number of the deported was 11 342. In order to reach the number 20 000, the Jews from the so-called old borders of Bulgaria had to be deported. But that did not happen thanks to the active intervention of the citizens of Kyustendil Petar Mihalev, Asen Suichmezov, Vladimir Kurtev, Ivan Momchilov and the deputy chairman of the 25th National Assembly Dimitar Peshev and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Before the deportation was canceled, the Jews in Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Kyustendil, Dupnitsa, Yambol and Sliven were shut in barracks, tobacco warehouses and schools in order to be ready to be transported to the eastern provinces of The Third Reich. The arrests were made on the eve of 9th March. Thanks to the intervention of the people, the deportation of the Jews from the old borders of Bulgaria did not happen. The Jews in Dupnitsa were also arrested to be ready for deportation.

### **34 Organisation for the Distribution of Artisanal and Agricultural Skills among the Jews in Russia ORT**

On 22nd March 1880, by order of the Minister of Interior Affairs of Russia, the Organisation for the Distribution of Artisanal and Agricultural Skills among the Jews in Russia - ORT - was established. A small group of prominent Russian Jews petitioned Tzar Alexander II for permission to start a fund to help lift Russia's five million Jews out of crushing poverty. ORT, Obschestvo Remeslenovo i zemledelcheskovo Trouda (the Society for Trades and Agricultural Labour) was founded. ORT today provides skills-training and self-help projects for some of the world's most impoverished

communities, using funds raised by its supporters, and added to by development agencies and national governments, to put people on the path to economic independence.

### **35 Bulgarian Komsomol**

The communist youth organization in Bulgaria in socialist times. The task of the Komsomol was to spread the ideas of communism among worker and peasant youth. The Komsomol also aimed at providing a communist upbringing by involving the youth worker in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education.

### **36 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.

### **37 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.

### **38 Zhivkov, Todor (1911-1998)**

First Secretary of the Central Committee of the ruling Bulgarian Communist Party (1954-1989) and the leader of Bulgaria (1971-1989). His 35 years as Bulgaria's ruler made him the longest-serving leader in any of the Soviet-block nations of Eastern Europe. When communist governments across Eastern Europe began to collapse in 1989, the aged Zhivkov resigned from all his posts. He was placed under arrest in January 1990. Zhivkov was convicted of embezzlement in 1992 and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. He was allowed to serve his sentence under house arrest.

### **39 Zhivkova, Lyudmila (1942-1981)**

daughter of the general secretary of the Bulgarian communist party, Todor Zhivkov, and a founder of the international children's assembly 'Flag of Peace'. In 1980 Todor Zhivkov appointed her a

chairwoman of the Commission on science, culture and art. In this powerful position, she became extremely popular by promoting Bulgaria's national cultural heritage. She spent large sums of money in a highly visible campaign to support scholars, collect Bulgarian art, and sponsor cultural institutions. Among her policies was closer cultural contact with the West; her most visible project was the spectacular celebration of Bulgaria's 1300 years of nationhood in 1981.