

PUBLIC POLICY.bg

(ISSN 1314-2313)

Journal of Public Policy and Good Governance

Volume 12/ Number4/ December 2021



Holocaust remembrance policies

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FOREWORD BY THE EDITORS

INTRODUCTION: ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF THIS VOLUME

Albena Taneva, Sofia University

The purpose of this volume of *PUBLIC POLICY.bg* is to draw attention to a topic that is usually considered primarily a matter of history. Thus, Holocaust remembrance is usually debated by historians. The study of this past is often in narrowly specialized academic units of Jewish studies or in Holocaust Studies Centers. Such academic structures exist in many universities around the world. They have long developed an extremely high level of expertise on this historical heritage. Conferences are held, exclusive publications appear in many languages. This autonomous scientific space is being reproduced and developed further. The problem, however, is that it remains relatively encapsulated and isolated within the narrow boundaries of experts on the subject. It can be said that the *first problem* that caused us to dedicate this issue of the Holocaust Remembrance Policy journal was *the need to draw attention to the interdisciplinary nature of these studies and highlight the importance of horizontal links between different scientific fields in them.*

The rise of anti-Semitism virtually everywhere in the world is an indicator not only of many other problems existing in the social environment, but also of certain deficits in Holocaust remembrance policies. The Holocaust is more than a valid research topic for all social sciences, and for the sciences in the field of governance in particular. We hope that this specialized issue of our journal will be met with the necessary attention and understanding of the insatiable valences in the study and teaching of Holocaust knowledge in a wide range of academic programs.

The level of education that is typical for the systematic teaching about the Holocaust *is the second problem.* Assuming that the rationale for teaching about this historical past in school curricula has long been clear, at least two questions arise in light of the current shortages of knowledge and sensitivity to Holocaust issues. The first is whether the lessons provided consist in a way that makes the knowledge taught comprehensible and leaves students involved in the subject matter (i.e. how it is taught). Next question is about the capacity of teachers in various fields to cope equally well in teaching of this complex subject. The word is about *the limited extent to which teachers themselves are prepared to teach this complex subject in a comprehensive way.* This latter question leads to the academic programs in an alternative way. Is it enough for history students alone to study the historical heritage of the Holocaust? For example, do teachers of civics, psychology, philosophy, and teaching in general have to focus on content about the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, human rights, and many other related topics? If so, what was it in their education that prepared

them, and if it did not, why important issues like that would not be discussed with students? Where do we learn about the Holocaust in a systematic way and the ways in which we interpret the meanings of this heritage? The latter leads to the importance of the interdisciplinary nature of the Holocaust. If academic programs ignore the subject of the Holocaust in their broader academic profile, then it is not clear how the capacity for systematic teaching in schools is created and reproduced, as well as how basic literacy of specialists from different professional fields on these issues is formed.

A key subject in the current issue of the journal *PUBLIC POLICY.bg* is that of *the policies of memory* themselves. If academic programs do not offer broad-based university courses related to the Holocaust, then where do lawyers or future judges learn about Holocaust deniers, hate speech, and various minority issues? How would future journalists, politicians, government officials, police officers and many others understand not only current regulations on issues such as hate speech, fake news and distortions of the past, but even more so how and how we actually understand history so that we do not experience it again? In short, how do we actually know about the Holocaust – from curricula, or rather from fiction and cinema? All this finds its focus in a general issue of memory policies.

This issue of our journal is dedicated entirely to the memory of the past. In memory of the Holocaust, the way we remember the persecution and the way we remember defending and opposing that persecution. We cannot change history, but we can look at it in its entirety. This is necessary not only because of our integrity to the past, but also because of the quality of the present and the future we are building.

Apparently this issue of the journal itself has a specific focus. It is dedicated to the institutional efforts of modernity to build a capacity for a responsible attitude towards history. The issue presents publications by nine authors on three important aspects of the research, educational and institutional status of Holocaust studies:

1. *Presentation of research* results or theoretical analyses of the legacy of the Holocaust and problems of anti-Semitism.
2. The Holocaust and anti-Semitism as an object of education or academic research. It is about the experience and opinion of *teaching the Holocaust knowledge in diverse academic programs*.
3. Memory protection policies. Articles in this section are focused on the results of the institutions on the sensitivity to the Holocaust, the state of human rights and problems of raising of anti-Semitism. It is about the role of civil servants and institutions of public governance.

We express our deep gratitude to each of the authors for contributing with their article to the achievement of the goals of this issue, namely to focus on the issue of *remembrance policies* for a *wider range of specialists*.

Albena Taneva, Responsible editor

THE IMPERATIVE OF HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

Daniel S. Mariaschin¹, B'nai B'rith International CEO

When I began my career almost 50 years ago, I emphasized in my speeches that one day there would be no Holocaust survivors to say, “I was there,” or to show their concentration camp tattoos, or to recount their first-hand testimony of being the victims of the worst brutality known to humankind. Sadly, we are almost at that point.

Twenty-two years into the 21st century, the biological clocks of these witnesses are winding down, and each year, many are taken from us. Fortunately, some are still able to speak in schools, at commemorations and in interviews, to tell their stories. And the many programs and projects devoted to recording thousands of testimonies over the past few decades have created a permanent record of the suffering they endured, much of which is accessible over the internet.

And yet, the passage of time and the increasingly short concentration spans of younger generations make us anxious about the future. Grandparent survivors, who helped to create a chain of continuity about Holocaust remembrance, are now in their late 80s and 90s.

But what of those families who either never had, or no longer have, that connection? In the United States, only 16 states have mandatory Holocaust education programs. A good number of universities have Holocaust studies programs, but unless you are a student seeking to obtain a degree in the subject, or if you are just interested in taking a course or two, the likelihood is that you'll never encounter a discussion about Hitler's campaign to eradicate the Jewish people.

Over the past 30 years or so, the callous and careless use of the word “genocide” and the trivialization of such terms as “concentration camp” and comparison of mundane, everyday matters to the Holocaust is tearing away and weakening the uniqueness of what the Jewish people experienced between 1933 and 1945. Viewers of the popular television situation comedy “Seinfeld” will recall a character nicknamed “the Soup Nazi,” a surly restaurateur who featured take-away soups. This kind of casual, off-handed minimization of the perpetrators of the worst possible crimes is not a laughing matter. Worse, if one has no context of exactly who the Nazis were, and what they did, you could wind up repeating these trivializations, all the while further exacerbating the problem.

In 2020, the Claims Conference (the Conference on Material Claims Against Germany), the organization which has, for the past 70 years, provided Holocaust survivors with financial and other

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material assistance, and which funds numerous Holocaust education and remembrance programs, issued a groundbreaking study about Holocaust awareness. It was a global survey, focusing on Millennials and Generation Z-ers and their knowledge of basic facts about the Holocaust. The results were disturbing: 63% of the respondents did not know that six million Jews were murdered; 36% thought it was two million or fewer. Almost half of those surveyed could not name a single concentration camp. Most shocking: 11% thought that Jews themselves were responsible for the Holocaust.

If these real-time results are surfacing when there are Holocaust victims and concentration camp liberators still among us, one can only speculate about the future. But an equally serious threat to remembrance is upon us, and it is growing in intensity: Holocaust denial.

When I entered the field of Jewish communal affairs in the 1970s, there was no internet, but there were Holocaust deniers. In the United States, people like Arthur Butz, an engineering professor who wrote “The Hoax of the Twentieth Century” and Willis Carto, founder of the Far-Right Liberty Lobby, and the Institute for Historical Review (on whose board Butz sat) promoted a cocktail of anti-Semitic, conspiracist theories that blamed Jews for concocting the Holocaust to advance their own interests. The messages of these deniers was conveyed mostly by mail, or when they might convene to feed upon their twisted, maleficent view of history.

Today, the Holocaust deniers have the internet through which to spew their hatred, aided and abetted by social media freelancers from the Far Left, the Far Right and from Islamic extremists. These purveyors of revisionism are anywhere and everywhere. Indeed, today a good deal of denial emanates from Iran, not content with just calling for Israel’s elimination on a daily basis.

The regime in Tehran famously sponsored an international cartoon contest, whose objective was to lampoon the Holocaust. One year the prize winner depicted an old-fashioned cash register, on which the number 6,000,000 appeared as the number that had been rung up. Written on the cash drawer were the words “Shoah Business.” And on the key to open the cash register was a tag, festooned with a Star of David, on which was written, “B’nai B’rith.”

Last year, the British newspaper The Guardian, reported on gatherings of former Labor Party members, and some Far Right figures who traffic in anti-Semitism demagoguery. One participant, a convenor of the meeting, spoke of “storybook gas chambers.” Another attendee stated that there were no deaths in Auschwitz.

Then there was one of the leaders of Germany’s Far Right AfD party, who described the period of Nazi rule as nothing more than “a speck of bird poop.”

The major social media platforms have been slow to move against the deniers, though they profess to be interested in doing so. Former Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey originally agreed to delete expressions of Holocaust denial, but then retreated. Said Dorsey to a Congressional Committee, in a twisted bit of having it both ways, “It’s (Holocaust denial) misleading information. But we don’t have a policy against that type of misleading information.”

Allowing the re-writing, or the erasure of history, in this unique case where tens of thousands of witness-victims are still with us, is unconscionable. In the United States, with its First Amendment constitutional protections, that major social media platforms wrestle with this issue is confounding. Holocaust denial is anti-Semitism. It is not only the ultimate rebuke to the victims, but to those who entered the camps and liberated them. It simply must not be countenanced.

A perfect storm of the passage of time, ignorance, hatred and denial has presented us with an imperative. The need for Holocaust education, remembrance and research has never been more apparent. Looking to the not-too-distant future, there will come a time when the last survivor and the last liberator will pass, and on that day, or the next, satellite news, TV, newspapers, news websites, and other media outlets will report the story.

And then what? Will the troubling numbers of the Claims Conference survey come back to haunt us? Will, ironically, “memory” be forgotten, or worse, will an illegitimate narrative of the Holocaust be advanced with few to push back?

We have the opportunity—now—to devote the resources and dedicated energy to setting in place several levels of Holocaust education, not only in schools, but for diplomats, law enforcement, the judiciary, elected officials and many more. Equal emphasis needs to be placed on related subjects: finally finishing, in a number of European countries, the many outstanding Holocaust era-assets issues, like property restitution and looted art, the establishment of museums using the latest technology, and to additional funding for documentaries in a way that brings previously untold stories and information to light.

This is a global challenge. The clock is ticking, and 77 years have passed since the end of the Holocaust. Are we up to the task?

REMEMBRANCE POLICY AS EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE

EVALUATING HOLOCAUST EDUCATION: HITTING THE TARGET?

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Abstract

According to recent studies of the Claims Conference, millennials in various countries believe that the Holocaust is an important subject that should be taught in schools. This topic is often included in national or state curricula, but educators do not necessarily receive accredited professional development opportunities about how to approach teaching this subject matter in their respective classrooms. Moreover, many Holocaust-related institutions around the world offer workshops and seminars geared for teachers, however, their programming is not always externally evaluated.

This article will explore the results of a number of external studies of Yad Vashem's teacher-training efforts on an international scale, reflecting on aims and outcomes. Based on this data, there appears to be an added value to professional development training. However, additional research should be undertaken as these findings could support decisions made by policy makers.

Key words: Holocaust, Yad Vashem, Evaluations, Education.

INTRODUCTION

According to recent studies from the Claims Conference (Schoen Consulting, 2018), millennials in various countries believe that the Holocaust is an important subject that should be taught in schools. This topic is often included in national or state curricula, but educators do not necessarily receive accredited professional development opportunities concerning how to approach teaching these topics in their respective classrooms. Moreover, many Holocaust-related institutions around the world offer workshops and seminars geared towards teachers, however, their programming is not always externally evaluated.

The root of the noun "evaluation" is value, discerning worth. An evaluation may be considered an examination to determine the worth of someone and or something. Evaluations, whether internal or external may be conducted as an open call for proposals or by a specific academic research team. Some evaluations can be a collection of anecdotal evidence, responses recorded and reviewed but not necessarily tabulated or compared. Responses in comparison can be published in a peer-reviewed professional journal as part of an emerging or established research field.

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² I would like to thank my editor, Noah Diller-Schatz, for his revision of, and contributions to, the materials herein.

Institutions may also seek to measure whether there has been an effective return on investments. A positive evaluation may therefore be considered a success - projected and reported not only internally to those responsible for undertaking the project but also - and perhaps more importantly - externally to supporters, policy makers and other stake holders. A less favorable evaluation may indicate that changes in the workplan are needed.

An evaluation ideally measures impact when goals have been clearly defined. Yet, in some cases it may be rather difficult to determine whether aims and progress markers were realistically attainable and “hit the target.”

Yad Vashem is the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem. In 1993, forty years after the Yad Vashem law was passed in the Israeli parliament, Yad Vashem's International School for Holocaust Studies was founded. The School established a faculty of experts in history and pedagogy, developing a didactic approach and age-appropriate resources which would serve as the basis for its global outreach activities as well as its domestic programming. Over the last three decades, the International School's administration has collected feedback about its programming as well as conducted several external evaluations. Various Holocaust-related institutions, such as Facing History and Ourselves (2019)³, have also undertaken similar evaluations.

A growing corpus of anecdotal evidence has been culled about the teachers' satisfaction vis-à-vis Yad Vashem's educational approach. The University of Duisburg-Essen (Friederike Lorenz et al, 2021) and other research institutes have also surveyed educators who have participated in Yad Vashem's professional development seminars and published their findings. However, a long-term study concerning the impact of Yad Vashem's trainings on pupils of its seminar alumni has yet been to be undertaken. Clearly, more research about the impact of Yad Vashem's training programs is needed in particular as well as in the field of Holocaust education in general.

Yad Vashem's goal is to ensure that the Holocaust is taught in schools, preferably by educators who have attended a training program on how to teach this complex subject matter in their classrooms. This training, which may range from a few hours to a few weeks, may be done in-person or online – whether synchronous or asynchronous.

Bolstering Holocaust education in recent years has become more crucial in light of surveys about the level of knowledge on this topic. For example, surveys in the US and other countries have measured the general population's level of knowledge about the Holocaust and attitudes toward teaching and studying about it. These surveys have received media attention worldwide, often highlighting people's lack of basic knowledge. As a result of Holocaust denial and distortion, the need to learn about the facts of the Holocaust has never been more relevant. Therefore, ignorance is not bliss but rather a serious problem that policy makers around the world need to address.

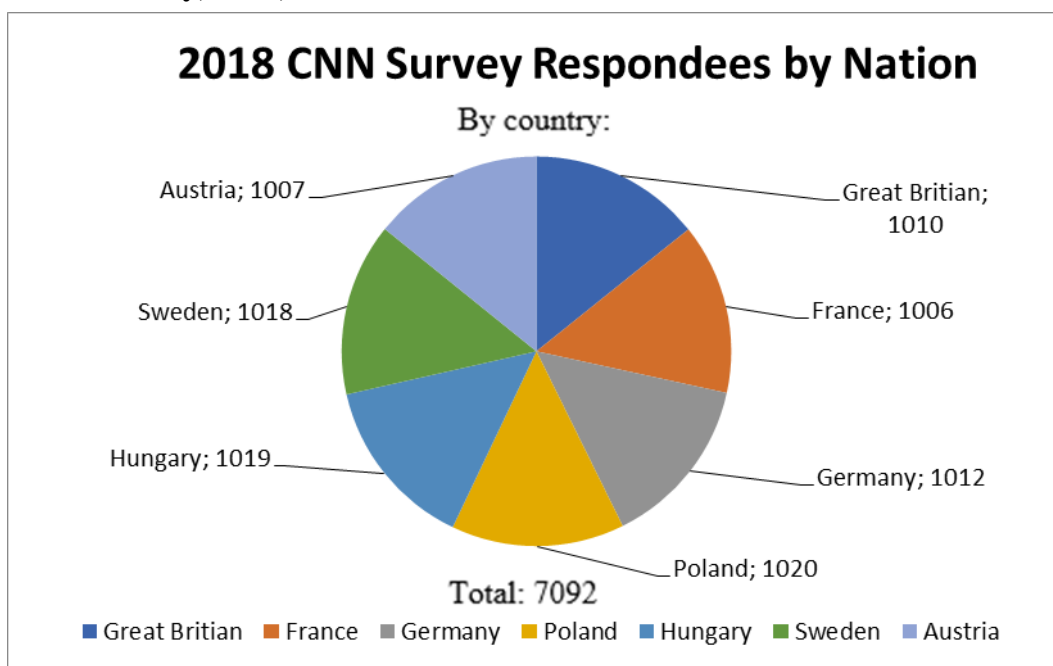
³ Facing History and Ourselves have conducted numerous self-assessments, ranging in topics, through the years from 2008 until the present. <https://www.facinghistory.org/our-impact/evaluation-studies-and-research>

This article will highlight the results of many of the above-mentioned evaluations, noting the significance of data due to the aforementioned dearth of Holocaust knowledge, and shed light on the state of the field as well as raise additional research questions.

SURVEYING GENERAL KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

This article primarily focuses on the evaluations of teacher-training programs delivered by Yad Vashem staff, both in Israel and abroad. Teachers impart knowledge to their students, whether in classrooms or in the framework of informal educational settings. Their efforts and best intentions are not always mirrored in the survey results, however. For instance, in November 2018 CNN⁴ released that they commissioned [ComRes](#) to interview adults from a variety of European countries (see: Figure 1). Data was weighted to be representative of each country based on age, gender and region. According to this poll, approximately one-in-twenty Europeans from the seven countries surveyed by CNN had never heard of the Holocaust. In France, one out of five people surveyed between the ages of 18 and 34 in September 2018 stated that they had never heard of the Holocaust (ComRes, 2018).

Figure 1. CNN Survey, 2018, Total: 7092



Source: ComRes, 2018

Over the past few years, Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness Studies have been commissioned by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany⁵ (Claims Conference) in several countries. Data was collected and analyzed by Schoen Consulting with representative samples of adults via landline, cell-phone, and online interviews. Yad Vashem staff were involved in the

⁴ <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2018/11/europe/antisemitism-poll-2018-intl/>

⁵ <https://www.claimscon.org/>

design of these surveys. Respondents were selected at random and constituted a demographically representative sample of the adult population in various countries, such as the United States of America, Austria, Canada, and France. Overall, these surveys aimed to determine people's level of knowledge about the Holocaust as part of a random sample of millennials. Although there are some differences between the various surveys (Schoen Consulting, 2018; 2019), overall certain patterns appear to emerge, namely:

- Modern cohorts do not support those who deny the Holocaust, however, they lack basic knowledge about Holocaust
- Moreover, a significant number of people have not visited Holocaust museums or Holocaust-related sites
- A significant number of people believe that something like the Holocaust could happen again

Overall, there are clear indications that teaching this subject is important in the eyes of most people surveyed. For instance, in the US, more than nine out of ten respondents (93 percent) believe that all students should learn about the Holocaust in school (Schoen Consulting, 2018). These surveys denote that despite their gaps in basic knowledge about the Holocaust, most people unequivocally state that this topic should be included in school curricula.

It is rather unlikely that a universal baseline of core knowledge about the Holocaust will be adopted across regions, let alone countries. Nevertheless, the results of these aforementioned national surveys indicate that pedagogical recommendations on teaching and learning about the Holocaust are needed across borders.

EVALUATING YAD VASHEM'S EFFORTS IN TRAINING ISRAELI EDUCATORS

In 2014, former Israeli education minister, Rabbi Shai Piron, implemented a systemic structure on learning about the Holocaust from kindergarten until 12th grade. The Israeli Education Ministry and Yad Vashem worked in partnership to create an educational and didactic curriculum that includes Holocaust education for all sectors and different age groups, emphasizing gradual and age-appropriate learning in a sensitive manner.

This spiral approach, considering the cognitive and emotional development of the pupils in each grade, provides Israeli teachers pedagogical guidelines and resources that seek to create a connection and a sense of belonging to this history while referring to national, Jewish and humanistic values.

In 2019, five years after the decision to revise the teaching of the Holocaust in the Israeli school system was taken by Piron, the Israeli Ministry of Education conducted a study (Tal Raz et al., 2019), including polls of educators and principals, and interviews with principals, educators and school officials.

The principle findings of this research (Tal Raz et al., 2019) highlighted the following results:

- There is a broad consensus among Israeli educators about the need to study this important topic
- Most Israeli educators teach about the uniqueness of the Holocaust, whereas a growing number also focus on the placing the Holocaust in historical context and its contemporary meanings. A number of teachers expressed their interest to find a balance between presenting the topic as a distinct and incomparable event and searching for connections to contemporary events, striving for relevance in the present
- Most teachers tend to prepare their classes about this subject around Holocaust Remembrance Day in Israel
- There appears to be a consensus that the topic needs to be introduced to students in a careful manner. Teachers overall agree to avoid traumatizing their students and to tailor their lessons in an age-appropriate manner, keeping in mind their students' developmental, cognitive and emotional levels. Israeli teachers also agreed about the importance in giving their pupils the possibility to ask questions and express themselves as a way to digest the information
- The majority of Israeli educators who were trained on how use this national curriculum on the Holocaust noted their high level of satisfaction with the material (over 75%), widespread approval with its pedagogical approach (about 85%), and a positive assessment regarding their students' response to the material. The level of satisfaction is particularly high in intermediate grades of primary schools—third and fourth grade
- Teachers who participated in training courses or seminars experience significantly increases in both familiarity with the material and classroom implementation. Although more than half of those who did not attend professional development programs used the online material, their level of satisfaction with the curriculum was considerably lower than that of those who did (89% of teachers who participated in the training, compared with 62% of those who did not)
- Nearly half of the Israeli teachers surveyed attested to changing their viewpoints about how they teach following the trainings. They underscored the importance of the age-appropriate guidelines as well as exposure to more interactive methodologies that encourage dialogue and significant learning
- Despite professional development training, only a minority of teachers reported making changes in the annual school Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony (approximately 35%)

In light of the findings, it was recommended to Yad Vashem and the Israeli Ministry of Education to:

- Expand the variety of online material—the study material is a main lever of influence within classrooms and elsewhere

- Institute a policy for training refreshers—turnover and growing distance over time that require thinking about a model for refreshers that presumes a consensus on the basis of the “age-appropriate” principle and move forward to clarify other topics that are more complicated to implement
- Clarify potential “red lines”—along with the forming of a consensus about the principles of teaching gradually and in an age-appropriate way, as it is necessary to provide guidelines on these matters
- Develop more tools for process-based learning—the emphasis on annual commemoration ceremonies and their timing does not properly address process-based learning and create meaningful connections to the topic
- Examine the needs of different pupils, such as special education students, those of various socio-economic and ethnic or religious backgrounds and others, along with maintaining a uniform and apolitical message

EVALUATING YAD VASHEM'S EFFORTS IN TRAINING GERMAN EDUCATORS

In 2021 the University of Duisburg-Essen (Friederike Lorenz et al.) published their findings concerning responses from German educators who had attended seminars at Yad Vashem’s campus in order to gauge the effects of the training. While its chief findings are listed below, the researchers were careful to note how German educators varied across different strata, further indicating that a monolithic approach to Holocaust education is unlikely to emerge, as even within subsets of educators there emerge variances related to socio-cultural and historical events, such as the bifurcation of Germany historically, post-World War II (Friederike Lorenz et al., 2021, pp.35-36).

The principle findings of this research (Friederike Lorenz et al., 2021) highlighted the following results:

- German educators contend that claims of “Holocaust fatigue”, an aversion to studying the Holocaust due to the passage of time or due to being overwhelmed, among contemporary German students is a “myth” (Friederike Lorenz et al., 2021, p.29)
- Over the course of the seminars, teachers expressed frustration regarding the lack of time allotted to the Holocaust in their curricula, the inadequate supply of teaching materials, and the generational gap between students and teachers within the German education system
- Many teachers noted that they were specifically motivated to attend Yad Vashem seminars due to expectations that they would return to Germany better equipped to respond to local antisemitism
- Teachers expressed the challenges of reaching students, particularly those of different religious and social backgrounds, including those students with special needs and vocational students

REFLECTIONS OF US COLLEGE STUDENTS

In 2005, the ADL, USC Shoah Foundation and Yad Vashem launched Echoes and Reflections⁶, a ten-unit interdisciplinary Holocaust curriculum designed for pupils in the United States. This educational material incorporates clips of witness testimony from the USC Shoah Foundation's archives.

In September 2020, Echoes and Reflections released the results of a study of 1,500 post-secondary students enrolled in four-year colleges and universities across the United States. Lucid Collaborative designed the survey and worked with the national polling company YouGov to recruit a nationally representative sample of US college students aged 18-24. This survey examined the differences between two distinct groups – those who received Holocaust education in high school and those who did not (*Echoes and Reflections*, 2020).

The survey measured student attributes related to: Holocaust knowledge and understanding; critical thinking skills; tolerance, empathy and respect for different viewpoints and experiences; and willingness and motivation to be an upstander. It was found that most college students (80%) have received at least some Holocaust education during high school, with the majority reporting they received one month or less of Holocaust education. The overwhelming majority (90%) of these students reported learning about the Holocaust in social studies or history classes, followed by English or language arts classes. The most common activities associated with Holocaust education were reading textbooks, watching documentaries, and reading novels and short stories. Over 55% reported watching videos of survivor testimonies. Students who had heard survivor testimony scored significantly higher than those who had not (*Echoes and Reflections*, 2020), suggesting that Holocaust education with survivor testimony could be more beneficial for critical thinking.

EVALUATING THE TRAINING HUB FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATORS

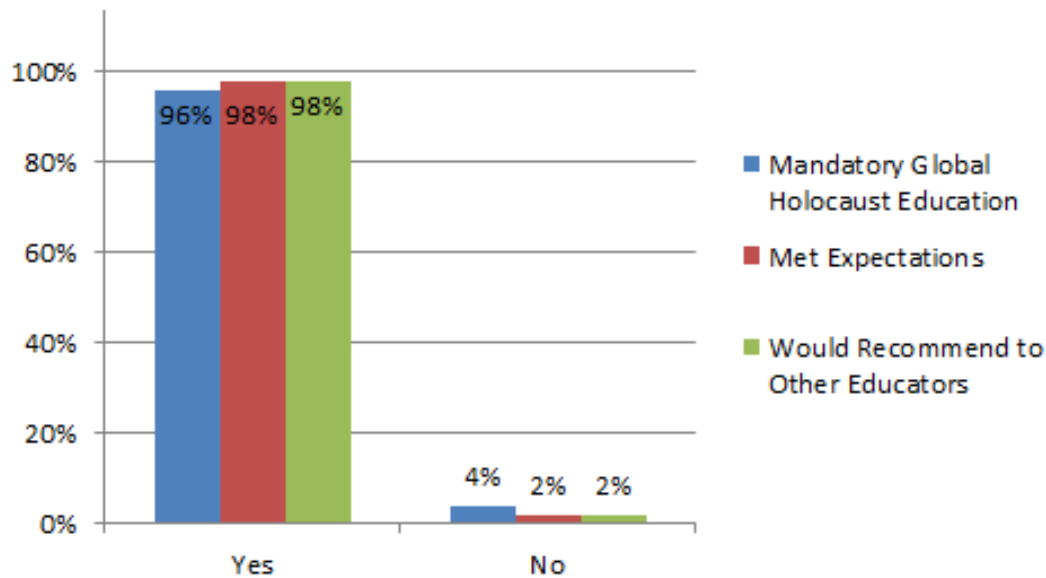
Yad Vashem's Overseas Education Department has trained some 20,000 educators on site, not including those who have been trained abroad and or via online study opportunities. In 2019, the Szold Institute conducted a study to assess seminar participants' educational process or the impact of their professional development experience at Yad Vashem, one to four years after completing their respective courses. Quantitative data were gathered via online questionnaires that were sent to the seminar graduates. The questionnaires included, inter alia, personal and professional data, general positions about the Holocaust, and aspects of satisfaction with the seminar. The graduates were asked about their interest in the Holocaust and how the seminar influenced their teaching of this subject matter. A total of 915 foreign educators answered the questionnaires. Additional qualitative data were gathered via partially structured phone interviews with 12 seminar graduates.

The main findings of this study (Szold Institute, 2019) revealed that:

- Over 70% of the educators surveyed continue to teach about the Holocaust. Most of them do so in a formal school framework

⁶ <https://echoesandreflections.org/>

- When teaching the Holocaust, most of them teach about discrimination, racism and antisemitism, and the resources that they use are mostly movies and primary historical sources
- Those surveyed seemingly have adopted Yad Vashem's pedagogical approach to teaching about the Holocaust, sharing this methodology with additional educators. Moreover, about half reported that they get support from local centers for Holocaust studies and local Jewish communities
- The short amount of time dedicated to teaching about the Holocaust in schools poses a challenge. Most educators would like more time to teach a Holocaust curriculum in schools
- A high percentage of the participants said that they believed that the Holocaust must be taught everywhere in the world (See Figure 2)
- Over 80% agreed that the Holocaust is a unique phenomenon that cannot be compared to other events in history, as well as that it is important to understand the Holocaust as a chapter in the course of Jewish history and not as an isolated event
- A high percentage of participants reported that their expectations were met during the seminar. Additionally, a large majority said that they would recommend the seminar to their colleagues (See Figure 2)
- The graduates thought that the seminars' strong points were the richness and diversity of the content, the caliber of the lecturers, the experiential learning, meeting Holocaust survivors, and the group experience.
- The participants and the graduates mostly suggested improving the methods and means of guidance during the seminars, and allocating sufficient time to process the information. Furthermore, they mentioned the need to tailor the content as much as possible to the various populations, and they wanted to become more familiar with Israeli society
- In general, there was great satisfaction with the seminars, particularly the quality of the guidance by the coordinators and lecturers. Along with that, the participants also reported a relatively low level of satisfaction with the free time and the time available to process the information and their experiences

Figure 2. Study, 2019

Source: Szold Institute, 2019

According to this 2019 Szold study, the training seminars appear to have met the key objectives Yad Vashem set for itself: teaching educators from overseas about its educational approach and didactic principles for Holocaust education. The seminars noticeably contributed to the participants both academically and pedagogically, and many of them have been making frequent and varied use of the knowledge that they gained, including Yad Vashem's print and online educational resources. Satisfaction with the seminars was high in most respects. A high percentage of the participants and the graduates said that the seminars met their expectations and that they would recommend that their colleagues apply to participate in them. Finally, the graduates seem to feel that the seminars have had a resounding impact over the years, and were increasingly interested in this subject. However, the findings shed light on various areas for improvement as well. For instance, the importance of buttressing experiential learning; allocating more time to process the information and the experience, tailoring the content to the different populations and more.

EVALUATION AND POLICY PLANNING IN HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

The abovementioned data, from various studies, have shed light on several aspects of Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust (TLH) in general, and for Yad Vashem in particular. On the one hand, many of the findings of these studies are positive indicators; for example: the majority of Israeli educators who were trained to use the spiral national curriculum on the Holocaust noted their high level of satisfaction with the pedagogical rationale as well as lesson plans.

On the other hand, some results raise concerns; for instance: only a minority of Israeli teachers who participated in this training redesigned the way in which they conducted their annual school Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony. Since most Israeli teachers prepare classes about this subject around Holocaust Remembrance Day, is the educational approach of their lessons consistent with the content of their remembrance ceremonies? Are the elements of the ceremony age-

appropriate and in line with the educational approach of the spiral curriculum? If not, then what possible conflicting educational messages could their students be receiving? More research appears to be needed in order to address additional questions and issues that arise from the original study.

Students in the US appear to positively recall survivor testimony. Meeting a Holocaust survivor, apparently, has made an impression. The voice of someone who was there, who is part of the human chronicle of the Holocaust, resonated with the students. This finding also indicates that the efforts to collect, preserve and make testimonies accessible appears not to have been in vain. As survivors pass on their memories to the next generation, educational institutions will continue to grapple with how to impart survivors' messages when survivors will no longer be able to bear witness in-person. Crucially, further empirical studies will need to be conducted regarding the educational impact of recorded testimonies on students after witnesses will no longer be alive.

In 2017, IHRA published *Research in Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust: A Dialogue Beyond Borders*. In the concluding section of this book the authors note that processes of TLH in schools "have a great potential interest not only for specialists, but also for educational reformers and researchers." (IHRA, 2017, p. 299) In 2019, in follow up to this volume, IHRA released comprehensive recommendations on learning and teaching about the Holocaust in English (IHRA, 2019). These recommendations have been translated into some twenty languages to date. Clearly, no ideal methodology may be deemed appropriate for all educators and learners for any subject. Contexts of when, why, what and how educators teach are not fixed but dependent on a multitude of factors. Measuring impact cannot be done in a vacuum and therefore the ever-changing context of educational environments must be considered, such as policy makers' directives, teacher burn-out, the influence of social media and more.

In the case of teaching about the Holocaust in particular, there are additional factors that should be considered, such as, but not limited to: contemporary antisemitism; Holocaust denial and or distortion. Although educational contexts differ, can an expected consensus on what constitutes a universal baseline of core knowledge about the Holocaust emerge? In this context, it should be underscored that the Holocaust cannot be considered a "point of view." Moreover, it is difficult to fathom how the Holocaust that "challenged the foundations of civilization" (IHRA, 2000, p.26) can be considered as "an issue from diverse and contending perspectives without giving deference to any one perspective" (Prose 2021). This discourse, which has been widely reported in the media, infers the importance of institutionalizing professional development programming on Holocaust education and researching its impact – not only on the teachers but also on their students in the long-term. Training teachers and educational policy makers has never been more relevant, especially if the Holocaust could be perceived as an opinion or an "individual's truth" rather than an undisputable fact that should be taught.

In addition, research questions often yield unexpected results as well as denote the need to conduct further inquiry and or revise hypotheses. For instance, the "Zoom era" that emerged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted all educational frameworks, both formal and informal. It appears that online programming can successfully provide support for teachers and

therefore professional development programming does not necessarily need to be localized, but rather can also be done on the international plane in partnership with other institutions. These technological innovations in teacher training are certainly relevant to both policy makers and researchers.

Evaluation is connected to public policy. Since training is often a three-way investment of teachers, educational authorities and the training institution itself, all three levels should ensure that evaluation is conducted on a regular basis and that the results are disseminated and publicized. Policy makers should provide the support for teachers to improve their skill sets, including Holocaust education. Teachers' professional development programming should be continuously evaluated and policy makers should be updated about the results of these assessments. Holocaust institutions should continuously evaluate their work, both on the national and international level, preferably with external experts such as university researchers. Research findings will always remain key in determining policy – not only in the field of science in general but also in the field of education in particular.

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PERCEPTIONS OF THE RESCUE OF THE JEWS AND THE HOLOCAUST IN BULGARIA TODAY¹

*Lea Cohen*²

"The Holocaust is not in the past, it is also the present. Many of the survivors are still alive, as well as their children and grandchildren, for whom the Holocaust continues to be a personal and family history."

Yehuda Bauer, Professor of History at Yad Vashem in an interview with Le Monde, 3 April 2012.

Abstract

Over the last 20 years the perception of the Holocaust in Bulgarian society, including by various historians, is perhaps one of the most complex subjects in the national public space, and even beyond. The lack of consensus regarding the assessment and perception, as well as in the presentation and interpretation of historical facts, i.e. of the stories about what happened and what did NOT happen, prevents a structured history of the events from 1940 to 1944 in the Kingdom of Bulgaria. In various versions, that are often diametrically opposed, the persecution of Jews is presented using a hybrid mixture of facts from Bulgarian history of the same period (political, military, economic relations with Germany and Italy, the partisan resistance movement and relations with Soviet Russia, the specifics of political parties and political life in Bulgaria, actions of the Royal Palace and the Parliament), which either have nothing to do with the so-called 'Jewish question' or are only indirectly related to it. False theories of the 'salvation of the Jews' continue to be fabricated from this hybrid mixture of facts into an amalgam, which has many followers who believe these historical legends and myths over the past two decades.

In this article I will look at some of these recent theories and discuss the reasons for their spread and, possible motives for the persistent desire within certain circles to impose on society these "alternate" interpretations of the salvation of the Jews.

Key words: *Holocaust, Jews, deportation, rescue, memory, interpretation, labour camp, Law for the Protection of the Nation*

WAS THERE A HOLOCAUST IN BULGARIA?

The very term *Holocaust* provokes resistance and disagreement among many, when it comes to the fate of the Jews in Kingdom of Bulgaria during the period 1940-1944. After 1944, this term *Holocaust* was carefully avoided in the Bulgarian historiography. Immediately after the events of

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September 1944, when the Red Army entered Bulgaria, a politically pragmatic and socially acceptable version of the historical events was concocted reflecting Bulgaria's efforts to eradicate the stain of its four-year alliance with Nazi Germany. The survival of 48,000 Jews within the old borders of the Kingdom of Bulgaria was an argument by which the Bulgarian delegation tried to influence the negotiations at the 1947 Paris Conference, which was determining the status of the individual states that cooperated with Nazi Germany. The term '*Holocaust*' came into socio-historical use in Bulgaria only after 1989, when, along with attempts rewrite contemporary Bulgarian history, the facts and circumstances surrounding the fate and persecution of Jews were reconsidered.

It must be acknowledged that the concept of the *Holocaust* is somewhat confusing when it comes to the treatment of Jews in the Kingdom of Bulgaria because, as Michael Berenbaum points out, "at the same time within the Kingdom of Bulgaria some Jews were saved, others - persecuted, and others - deported and destroyed."³ If the literal meaning of the word '*Holocaust*' is applied (from ancient Greek - destruction by complete incineration), then this tragic event has happened only to Jews in the territories that were occupied by Bulgaria - Macedonia and part of northern Greece. However, the broader understanding of the *Holocaust* saw it as a process whereby Jewish civil rights were first destroyed, then Jewish property was confiscated, Jewish cultural and architectural heritage liquidated, and finally the annihilation of the Jews themselves. While the liquidation physically destroyed 12,000 of the 60,000 Jews within the Kingdom of Bulgaria after 1941, that is 20% of their total number, the previous phases of the Holocaust were experienced by the entire Jewish population. However, the public and political attitude in Bulgarian society to this day tacitly disagrees with the use of the term and perceives it as an attack against the Bulgarian state. The establishment of the Holocaust Museum in Skopje in 2012, in memory of the 7,000 Macedonian Jews exterminated in Treblinka, became an occasion for heated debates about the role of the Bulgarian state in this tragic episode and even aggravated political relations between Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia.

In the same context, '*deportation*' is another controversial term. According to the international rules of law, it means the forcible transfer of certain groups of the population from their place of residence to another country, usually to places of forced isolation. Undoubtedly, this is exactly what happened within the Kingdom of Bulgaria, when 7,000 Jews from Macedonia and 4,000 from northern Greece were deported to Treblinka and Auschwitz.

THE STRATEGY OF FABRICATING A "RESCUE TERMINOLOGY"

During the last twenty years a new terminology has been created in order to defend the lack of complicity of the Bulgarian state in those actions perpetrated by the Bulgarian administrative bodies, army and police in 1943. The term '*administered territories*' was invented to replace the term '*occupied territories*' applied in 1941 to the parts of of the former Yugoslavia (present-day

³ Michael Berenbaum, "The Jews in Macedonia during WWII"

Northern Macedonia and a small part of Serbia) and parts of northern Greece that were now subsumed into the Kingdom of Bulgaria. The doctrine positing the innocence of the Bulgarian state in the deportations of Jews has been scientifically refuted in many publications including the study of Dr. Zdravka Krasteva "Legal Aspects of the State Anti-Jewish Policy in the Kingdom of Bulgaria (1940-1944)",⁴ as well as arguments in books and publications of Dr. Albena Taneva⁵, Rumen Avramov⁶, etc. They prove not only that the Bulgarian state seized these territories, but also that it was the Bulgarian army and police that deported the 11,343 Jews to their extermination. In the case of the Macedonian Jews, they were deported from 'occupied territories' by the Kingdom of Bulgaria according to some interpretations, and 'administered territories' according to others. On the other hand the 4,000 Jews from northern Greece which was also subsumed into the Kingdom of Bulgaria, were deported first to intermediate camps in Gorna Jumaya or Lom which were located within the old borders of the Kingdom of Bulgaria, and from where they were then transported through Austria to concentration camps in occupied Poland.

Over the last twenty years, the policy of denial has degenerated into unacceptable interpretations of these tragic facts, some of which have gained official recognition and deserve to be mentioned.

- One such interpretation is the thesis of Dyanko Markov, former representative of the Union of Bulgarian National Legions, which was a fascist organization before the war, and after 1989 one of the flag wavers of anti-communism. Markov was convicted in 1947 by the communist authorities for pro-fascist activities and spent some time in an internment camp. In 2000, he delivered a speech before the National Assembly as an elected Member of Parliament (MP) of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) stating that "the deportation of a hostile (Jewish) population from Macedonia and northern Greece by Bulgarian authorities was legal and not a crime". His statement provoked strong protests from all of the Jewish organizations in Bulgaria as well as from abroad. The UDF disavowed his declarations, but the statement continued to be defended by segments of the Bulgarian right. Thus, in 2014 Member of European Parliament (MEP) Andrey Kovachev from the Citizen for European Development of Bulgaria Party (GERB) organized a special session in the European Parliament in honour of Markov, during which he was presented as a 'fighter against communism'. Open sympathy for Dyanko Markov was also shown by other political parties including members of the country's coalition government. In 2018 the former Union of Bulgarian National Legionnaire and creator of the doctrine of "legal deportation of the hostile Jewish population" was awarded a medal from the Ministry of Defense by Minister Krassimir Karakachanov, a representative of the far-right Bulgarian Macedonian Revolutionary Organizationparty (VRMO), a coalition partner of GERB in the government of former Prime Minister Boyko Borisov for four years⁷.

⁴ Dr. Zdravka Krasteva "Legal Aspects of the State Anti-Jewish Policy in the Kingdom of Bulgaria (1940-1944)" ed. Ecstasy, Berlin 2018

⁵ Dr. Albena Taneva, "Гласове в защита на гражданското общество", изд. „ГАЛ-ИКО“, 2002

⁶ Rumen Avramov, "Спасение и падение", изд. „Св.Климент Охридски“, 2012

⁷ GERB lost as a party the last parliamentary elections in October 2021, and VMRO only achieved of 3.64% of the votes, denying it entry into the parliament.

- After 2008, the GERB government continued the efforts of the party of the former crown prince and heir to the Bulgarian throne, Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to deny the historical responsibility and any guilt of Kingdom of Bulgaria in the deportation of the almost 12,000 Jews from northern Greece and Macedonia. This was expressed not only in personal statements by former Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, Foreign Affairs Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva, and Defence Minister Krasimir Karakachanov among others, but also by ordering governmental sponsored books, articles, exhibitions, TV shows, translations of propaganda texts in English and Spanish, and organized tours abroad, etc. Gradually and by efforts not only of governmental bodies, but also with the complicity of some academic institutions such as the Bulgarian Academy of Science (BAS), some professors from Sofia University, the New Bulgarian University (NBU) and the University of the City of Veliko Tarnovo (VTU), the government imposed the thesis of the complete and unconditional rescue of the 48,000 Jews in Bulgaria. This rescue was accomplished with the participation of all segments of the social pyramid, starting with the Bulgarian King Boris III, along with the ministers of his last government, the MPs and finally - the Bulgarian people.

Apart from the fact that this social pyramid was, and remains upside down, it also includes completely irrelevant elements from a historical point of view. This upside down pyramid has been refuted not only by Jewish organizations, the Yad Vashem Holocaust Research Centres in Israel, the Holocaust Museum in Washington, but also by a number of researchers in Bulgaria, Israel, France, etc. in their publications and books⁸. In their works and publications, these researcher unanimously acknowledge several particularly circumstances.

IMPORTANT FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE RESCUE OF THE MAJORITY OF THE JEWISH POPULATION IN BULGARIA FROM THE ‘FINAL SOLUTION’

This Bulgarian ‘final solution’ was decided by Prime Minister Bogdan Filov and German Minister of Foreign Affairs von Ribbentrop.⁹ They agreed on the deportation of the Jewish population from the Bulgarian territories, and this was supported and consented to by King Boris III for up to 25,000 ‘undesirable’ Jews.

The contributing factors to the rescue of the Jews were the following:

- The relatively low level of anti-Semitism among the Bulgarian population, offered the Jews the opportunity for help from their Bulgarian fellow citizens.
- There was a general lack of interest of a large part of society in the ‘final solution’. According to Holocaust researcher Arno Lustiger, the chances of Jews being saved throughout Europe were inversely proportional to the level of anti-Semitism. It is for this reason that Croatian Jews

⁸ Nikolay Poppetrov, Albena Taneva, Zdravka Krasteva, Angel Chorapchiev, Rumens Avramov, Nadia Danova, Nadège Ragaru, prof. Dalia Offer and many others.

⁹ This was outlined in the correspondence and documents during the period August-September 1942 preserved in the Bulgarian National archives.

were not spared, given the sharp anti-Semitic attitude of the Croatian population, while the Bulgarian Jews had much better chances.

- The strong integration of the Bulgarian Jewish population in the national social and professional life, which led to personal ties that offered the protection by professional organizations with Bulgarians and Jewish members (artisans and merchants, lawyers, writers). They were among the first to react sharply against the Protection of the Nation Act, which deprived their Jewish colleagues of their professional rights.
- A remarkable level of religious tolerance in Bulgaria, which had led to peaceful coexistence and even friendly relations between different religious groups. The role of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the most consistent defender of the Jews throughout 1940-1944, is widely known. Its leaders did not hesitate to defend the Jews but also to oppose the instruments of the state and the King himself, with the resulting positive consequences.
- The role of individual politicians and prominent public figures such as the majority MP Dimitar Peshev, the industrialist Atanas Burov, Ekaterina Karavelova the wife of former Prime Minister Petko Karavelov, and others who unhesitatingly used their personal connections and authority to prevent the deportation of the Jews.
- And finally, the active role of the Jews themselves, who, thanks to their integration in Bulgarian society, had the capacity and resources to influence events, albeit to a limited extent.

RESCUE OR SURVIVAL?

This question is a small part of the terminology war when discussing the fate of the Bulgarian Jews during the period 1940-1944. However, the disputes are extreme and the positions of the disagreement are irreconcilable. On the one hand, a national myth is being put forth about a universal effort to save the Jews, however, this myth has one significant drawback. Namely – it does not answer the question: From whom was it necessary to save the Jews? Additional contradictions arise, namely:

- The Law on the Protection of the Nation was passed in 1940, when Bulgaria had not yet joined the Axis, and practically no political pressure was being put on the government. On the contrary, in September 1940, through an official act by Nazi Germany, Bulgaria received as a generous gift, Southern Dobruja, which comprises the northwest portion of contemporary Bulgaria. In March-April 1941, shortly after the Kingdom of Bulgaria joined the Fascist-Nazi coalition Bulgaria received Macedonia, a small part of Serbia, and northern Greece.
- Contrary to the belief that the Germans insisted on "purging Bulgaria of Jews", the demands were rather the reverse: Bogdan Filov's government initiated correspondence with von Ribbentrop for a 'purging' plan (*Jüdenrein*). The plan called for the Bulgarian government to pay Germany 100 Reichmarks per deported Jew. Transportation was to be provided by Bulgarian Railways (BDZ), with logistics services by the Ministry of Interior, Commissariat for

Jewish Affairs, and the Royal Touristic Company "Balkan". The necessary funds were obtained from the sale of Jewish owned, who in fact paid for their OWN destruction.

- Despite being a Nazi ally, there were practically no German troops in Bulgaria except for those who transited in the direction of Greece. They received a warm, friendly welcome from the Bulgarian population and authorities. After this troop transit to Greece, the German representation was reduced to a small number of observers and diplomats, as well as advisers with special functions to the Bulgarian authorities, such as the Gestapo representative Hoffmann or the deportation consultant von Daneken, sent from Berlin as supervisor.

The Bulgarian official policy towards the Jews was by no means coercion, but a voluntary synchronicity with the official policy of Nazi Germany, and in some cases even predated it, as was the case with the Law for the Protection of the Nation of 1940.

From the opposite side, when considering these same historical events, we see controversial arguments emerging in Bulgaria. Bulgarian society, which for many years identified with the thesis *'We are all saviours of the Jews'*, when faced with the real facts prefers to reject them and interprets them instead as a virulent attack against the sacred myth of the unique salvation of the Bulgarian Jews.

The result is the fabrication of a sub-mythology, which leads to the creation of misinterpretations and facts about the story of rescue/survival. Here are a few examples.

THE ROLE OF DIMITAR PESHEV

It is paradoxical that the icon of salvation, its acclaimed champion and hero, recognized as 'The Righteous Among the Nations' by the State of Israel in 1973, the dissident MP from the ruling majority of King Boris III and Bogdan Filov, Dimitar Peshev is in a sense the first victim in the distorted narrative of the fate of the Jews.

Historiography obsessively repeats the story of his famous letter of March 17, 1943 in defence of the Jews, in which Peshev added in his own handwriting the names of 42 deputies and sent it to the Prime Minister and the Chairman of the National Assembly. The significance of his intervention in the turbulent events of early March 1943 is highly questionable, given the facts. Namely, that on March 4th the Jews from Northern Greece were 'gathered' to be transported to the concentration camps via Bulgaria, on March 9th the Macedonian Jews were taken to the Monopole warehouses in Skopje to be deported by the end of March on three BDZ transports to Treblinka. After protests by Bulgarian citizens in Kyustendil and Plovdiv, the planned deportation of 8,000 Bulgarian Jews on March 10th, was postponed indefinitely. Why was it necessary for Dimitar Peshev to write an urgent, alarming letter on March 17th if, as the myth of salvation recounts, the postponed deportation of the Bulgarian Jews already occurred on March 10th. Peshev's letter only advocated for postponement of deportation of the Jews in the old borders of Bulgaria.

The answer is not complicated in the context of Peshev's overall commitment to the Bulgarian Jewish community. This commitment is far from limited to his letter, which in fact proves that he

was not in the least mistaken of the intentions of the Bulgarian state and did not think at all that salvation of the Jews had already taken place. As with other liberal jurists, Dimitar Peshev consistently defended positions rejecting anti-semitism. For example, the Prosecutor General, Assen Golyubov, in 1933 demanded sentences for members of the fascist organization "Rodna Zashchita", later renamed the Union of Bulgarian National Legions, including in the indictment "the act of anti-Semitism". Peshev, in his position as Minister of Justice (1935-1936) and later as a private attorney often defended Jews against antisemitic acts. For example, in this capacity he acted as defense attorney in the 1936 defamation case by Jacques Aseov, an influential Jewish tobacco magnate and financier and owner of the largest Bulgarian tobacco company *Balkantabak*, against Yanaki Pochekanov, the owner of the Dupnitsa newspaper *Polet*. Encouraged by a group of radical right-wing anti-Semites, Pochekanov was fighting a defamatory war against Aseov, not sparing anti-Semitic arguments. At the broadly publicized trial held in the regional tobacco producing center of Kyustendil, Peshev explicitly emphasized the anti-Semitic nature of the campaign against Aseov. Aseov ultimately won the case and Pochekanov was convicted. This trial outlines two antagonistic camps in Bulgarian society of that time: an opportunistic union of the far-right and some left-wing elements (Pochekanov was a communist), united by anti-Semitic rhetoric, against a liberal community of industrialists and public figures led by Dimitar Peshev.

Another striking episode was Peshev's personal opposition in October 1942 to the draft law against speculation by 'foreign elements' personally submitted by King Boris III to the National Assembly. Since the draft law was submitted by the King, the MPs were required to prepare a response in which they must either approve or reject the proposed law. Dimitar Peshev expressed his wish to participate in compiling the response. The State Archives Agency preserved the original text in support of the King's proposal prepared by the majority, on which Peshev has handwritten his remarks and corrections in many places. He was adamant that such a law was repressive, as the current legislation provided protection from speculators, and did not hide his fear that the law proposed by the King would be directly aimed against the Jews. Despite his intervention, the law was quickly approved by the King's Parliamentary majority, and as early as November 1942 the first arrests of prominent Jewish industrialists were made, and only months later some were convicted of serious sentences, including the death penalty.

Due to the existing selectivity in historiography in the public discourse, the full picture of Dimitar Peshev's resistance and his consistent behaviour supporting the Jews during the decade 1933-1943 with the rise of fascism in Bulgaria, remains hidden from the Bulgarian society. The most probable reason for this is the intention to obscure the role of the King in the persecution of the Jews, who is arbitrarily and unjustifiably placed by his supporters at the top of the pyramid of salvation.

THE FACTS AND 'ALTERNATIVE FACTS'

Until November 10, 1989 there was a fairly acceptable consensus in Bulgaria about the rescue of the Jews, attributing it to the Bulgarian people. Sporadic attempts by the Communist Party and some of its leaders, such as Todor Zhivkov, to take historical credit, were not taken seriously even

among communists, much less abroad. Significantly, the honorary list of the ‘The Righteous Among Nations’ in Yad Vashem does not include a single Bulgarian communist functionary. This reading has changed significantly since 1989, especially after the rehabilitation of various politicians and public figures, some of whom were on trial for persecuting Jews. Efforts by pro-monarchist circles to rewrite this history became a goal after the political return to Bulgaria of King Boris III's son Simeon, and the establishment of his National Movement Simeon Second (NMSS) party. The NMSS won the 2001 Parliamentary elections and Simeon became prime minister. During his term we began to see a concerted public relations campaign in Bulgaria and abroad to enhance the image of King Boris III as the saviour of the Jews. This thesis was sceptically received by the international community and completely rejected by the state of Israel, as well as by the international Holocaust research centres. However, both the government of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and his GERB political successors, continued to fabricate evidence in the monarchy's defence. I will present some of this ‘evidence’ below.

THE REVOKED RESCUE VISAS

Around 2017, a fictional version of ‘salvation through visas’ was created, which stated that about 15,000 European Jews (20,000 according to a statement by Prime Minister Boyko Borisov) were rescued by the Bulgarian government of Bogdan Filov after having been issued transit visas to leave Bulgaria via Turkey, and from there to Palestine. This ‘fact’ was mentioned not only in publications produced by pro-monarchist circles, but was also officially quoted by the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Zaharieva and by Prime Minister Boyko Borisov himself.

A detailed inspection of historical documents established the following:

The visas in question were indeed requested through the Swiss Red Cross by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Minister Shishmanov, according to lists provided by the Geneva-based Jewish Agency. However, no trace of Jewish emigrants with such visas have been found anywhere, nor transport documents that they passed from Bulgaria. I personally participated in a thorough inspection of the Red Cross archives of this period that are housed in the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with a professor of history at the University of Lausanne and an expert from the Swiss Archives Directorate. The results of this inspection completely disproved this myth of ‘salvation through visas’. Indeed, in the period from March to the end of 1942 the Jewish Agency tried, with the cooperation of the Red Cross, to transit through Bulgaria a number of Jews, mostly minors, from Hungary, Croatia and Romania in an attempt to avoid having them shipped to concentration camps. In some cases, the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry granted transit permits, which it then systematically CANCELLED without explanation, most likely after consultations with Berlin.. Dozens of such annulments issued by the embassy in Bern or directly by the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Denominations were found in the Swiss archives. Furthermore, our team found that the visa lists contained the same names, repeated many times, i.e. a new attempts were made after each cancellation. Checking these lists proved relatively simple because they were only 75 names, with indication of the nationality and ages of the Jews. The number 75 was chosen not randomly, but

reflected the number of seats in one BDZ passenger wagon with which the Jews were to be transported. Only one confirmation of such transport of 75 Jewish minors who transited Bulgaria to the Turkish border was found in the archives.. The record of their crossing states that two of them were detained by the German border patrol between Bulgaria and Turkey because they were over 16 years of age. They were immediately sent to Auschwitz, for which a report was attached to the border crossing documentation found in archives.

These documents have not yet been published in Bulgaria, thus the legend of ‘salvation through visas’ continues to be used, although it is obviously contrary to the facts.

DEPORTATION AND LABOUR CAMPS AS ‘SALVATION’

After the failure of Alexander Belev's, Director of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, initial plan to deport 20,000 Jews to Poland and the King's agreement to deport of 25,000 ‘undesirable Jews’ with economic and social influence, Bogdan Filov's government assigned a new strategy to the Commissariat. This strategy was centered around internment of the Jewish population already forced into the ghettos in the big cities, scattering them to small settlements, mainly in northern Bulgaria close to deportation centres such as the ports of the Danube. By doing this it was anticipated that the Jews would not benefit from the social support from their hometowns (Sofia, Plovdiv, Kyustendil, Dupnitsa, etc.), where the Jewish population was highly integrated and could rely on the support of their fellow Bulgarians. The plan was carried out in stages and in complete secrecy. The Jews of Sofia were gathered at the train station at 11 o'clock in the evening, away from curious witnesses, and were deported to northern Bulgaria on the night of May 27, 1943.¹⁰

At the deportation sites the Jews were placed in terrible conditions, accommodated in houses and barracks in the Roma and Turkish neighbourhoods, without the right to move and without any means of subsistence or household goods. They lived in these conditions until the Red Army entered Bulgaria in September, 1944. After this they began their chaotic return home, which they found occupied and their belongings robbed. They did not have any cash, as their bank accounts were blocked as early as 1941 and subsequently confiscated in favour of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, and all money and valuables were also seized. The restoration of their rights and property proved to be long and complicated process, significantly hampered by the new rules introduced by the communist government, which did not pay much attention to their experiences and introduced new restrictive rules on private property valid for the entire Bulgarian population. It is for this reason that the vast majority of Bulgarian Jews took advantage of the opportunity provided by the Jewish Agency to leave their Bulgaria homeland in the late 1940s and emigrate to the historical Jewish homeland of Palestine, even before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

In the last three years, publications have appeared coming from the aforementioned right wing circles rewriting the history of salvation, and claiming that the expulsion of Jews from their home

¹⁰ My family archive includes the original order in Bulgarian from the Commissariat for my parents and I to report on this date.

cities and their deportation to ghettos were conscious salvation measures taken by the Bulgarian authorities for the explicit purpose of hiding the Jews. However, these publications do not explain who the Jews were supposed to be hiding from, since the instrument of their displacement and economic devastation was the same Commissariat for Jewish Affairs that in March 1943 deported 11,343 Jews to Treblinka and Auschwitz.

Similar attributions about the forced labour camps for Jewish men, that operated from May 1942 to September 1944, have also appeared in recent years. There have been publications, books and exhibitions suggesting that these camps, through which more than 15,000 Jewish men between the ages of 20 and 45 passed, were places to hide the Jews, and were a rescue strategy devised by the Bulgarian authorities and by the army. This thesis was set out even in a publication of the Bulgarian edition of Deutsche Welle, dated January 7, 2012, in the Bulgarian newspaper "Trud", as well as in a specially organized exhibition in 2018 in Plovdiv, opened by former Deputy Prime Minister in the GERB government Valeri Simeonov in the presence of former Prime Minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. This false narrative also finds a place in a book published in 2021 by the ex-military officer Dimitar Nedyalkov, which, according to an official statement of the Ministry of Defence, was not only sponsored and supported by the Ministry, but also translated into English as propaganda material for abroad.

In all these efforts, elementary facts have been neglected and selectively omitted, as well as long-standing research, including by Yad Vashem's Angel Chorapchiev's research on Bulgarian labour camps.

Ever since the 1920s when Prime Minister Alexander Stamboliiski introduced the Labour Service into the Bulgarian army, Jewish men by law were mobilized for military service only in compulsory labour groups and for 2 years were obliged to participate in construction works such as road construction, etc. Despite this discriminatory treatment by the Bulgarian military of Jewish men since they could not have weapons and could not be promoted to ranks, they were considered to be part of the Bulgarian army and provided with the appropriate uniforms and the resulting rights and obligations. The supporters of the "Salvation of the Jews from the Army" narrative often use material from this period that lasted until October 1941, including photos taken during inspections by the Red Cross and other human rights organizations from Geneva, to prove the good treatment of the Jews. However, after the Law for the Protection of the Nation, came into force on August 12, 1941, Ministerial Decree No. 53 was issued and signed by all the governmental ministers, requiring removing Jewish labourers from the army, stripping them of military uniforms and the right to be commanders of work groups (to be replaced by Bulgarian officers) and placing them under special restrictions. All the Jewish labourers were obliged to wear a yellow star of David patch, were housed in tent camps near the sites and in complete isolation from the outside world. The labourer groups were formed by "recruiting" Jewish men interned in the Jewish ghettos. They worked on the most difficult construction sites, mainly road construction, to realize King Boris III's ambition to create a large strategic road network in Bulgaria to turn it into a major military centre in the Balkans. The conditions in these camps were severe, as documented in many archival materials,

including photographs and they continued to operate until September 1944. It is not surprising that this type of forced labour was recognized by post war Germany on an equal footing with the concentration camps. At the insistence of the Claims Conference and negotiations between the state of Israel and Germany, in the late 1990's the survivors of these labour camps were paid compensation.

Final thoughts

The bias, not only in Bulgaria but also in other European countries, to the creation of myths and legends about the salvation of the Jews in Europe during the Holocaust is understandable. To a large extent, it reflects a desire to establish moral values that will serve as an example for future generations. Such examples exist in many places in Europe; they are venerated in Bulgaria as well. The righteous images and deeds of personalities such as Dimitar Peshev, of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church bishops Kiril and Stefan, and of hundreds of ordinary Bulgarians are sufficient grounds for pride of the Bulgarian people and the Bulgarian state. However, the fabrication of fictional narratives, characters, facts and "events", which in the last two decades, especially after the political return of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Bulgaria, creates a parallel false historical reality and hides the affirmation of the cases of real heroism during one of the darkest pages in modern Bulgarian history. It is this affirmation that should be held up as the shining example for future generations.

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REMEMBRANCE AS PUBLIC POLICY

THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR THE HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE: THE BULGARIAN CASE

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Abstract

The article examines the concept of memory policies in different perspectives. A central category of analysis is Holocaust remembrance policies and the role of the institutional approach for achieving sustainable results and developing values in the social environment. The reasons for the deficits in the memory of the Holocaust, the periodization in the stories about the Holocaust in Bulgaria and the importance of the factors of the political environment for the dynamics in the interpretations of the past are analyzed. The importance of reflection on the historical past, and in particular that of the Holocaust is considered in regard to the social and generational transfer of memory and attitudes.

Key words: Holocaust remembrance; memory policy; Bulgarian Jews; IHRA.

Let us start with an explanation of the concept of *remembrance policies*. According to the dictionary definition, remembrance is “the act of remembering and showing respect for someone who has died, or a past event”². However, *Holocaust remembrance* cannot fit into this definition. The memory of the Holocaust has some peculiarities. At first glance, the scale of the tragedy clearly determines the way it can be remembered. As is well known, the reality is different. Anti-Semitic ideology produces false interpretations that are actively communicated in the form of articles, books, films and publications in the media. The existence of these publications lines them among the literature on the subject. The development of technology (all social media, Internet itself, etc.) has exacerbated this situation by ranking fake news on a par with valid knowledge. Thus, erosion of knowledge and the relativization of the standards knowledge for orientation in the truth-false and good-evil coordinate system became part of the social environment. It became more difficult to orient in the coordinate system of the categories good-evil and true-false. The tendentious replacement of truth with untruth brings confusion, deception and, as a result, deterioration of the

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² <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/remembrance>

very ability to understand and think. The relativization of the categories of good and evil also erodes the social environment. Lack of sympathy for victims, rationalization of hatred, disguise of responsibility for political decisions that lead to repression and destruction have severe and dangerous consequences for the value system of society, gradually leading it to a state in which the political system itself can find new tyrants and be brought to a totalitarian regime.

This, of course, applies to every topic in public discourse.

Fake news has intervened as a fact in the social environment and as a constant theme in public discourse for many years. The concept of post-truth has become the subject of definitions in dictionaries of social science concepts. If the delusion of believers in the flat shape of the Earth is a kind of indicator of ignorance and challenges the question of knowledge and the ability to think critically, the Holocaust denial and deliberate delusion of the truth about it is much more important in view of the challenges of reproducing political freedom and morality of a society.

Holocaust denial and belittling the truth about the Holocaust have revolved around the memory of this catastrophe of civilization for many years. The subjects of the repressive policy of anti-Semitism hardly ceased to exist and be active with the end of the Second World War. The very fact that it was possible in the civilized twentieth century in developed European countries to have a tragedy on the scale of the Holocaust is a phenomenon that by definition involves the study and preservation of memory. The study is fundamentally important for understanding the processes and interactions in a society and its political system, which were possible to degrade to a state that made possible the persecution and systematic destruction of an entire group of this society. Preserving the memory of the Holocaust tragedy is fundamental to society's value system. The ability to feel sympathy for the victims and their heirs for this past, to preserve the understanding of these processes helps to orient in the coordinate system of good and evil. The latter is directly related to the reproduction of the moral values of society.

The thesis of this article is about the importance of Holocaust remembrance policies not only as a moral act that has validity in itself, but also about their special significance and role in the sustainability of the moral value base of society and preservation of political freedom as a prerequisite for development of this society. That is why at the beginning of this text the focus is on an organization such as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which is committed to consolidating the efforts of countries with democratic political systems to preserve not only information about this past, but its meaning and emotional empathy.

According to the definition of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance³, it can refer to the very definition of what IHRA is. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance unites governments and experts to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education, research and remembrance and to uphold the commitments to the 2000 Stockholm Declaration⁴. It can be argued

³ <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/world-remembers-holocaust>

⁴ <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us>

that the specific policies for the Holocaust remembrance are most clearly formulated in the IHRA program document, namely the Stockholm Declaration⁵.

The concept of remembrance policies can be reduced to several specific elements. On the one hand, this is the organization of collective memory by political agents. On the other hand, it also connotes the political means by which events are remembered and recorded, or discarded. I find it significant that the concept of politics of memory is a subject of a separate article in the online dictionary Wikipedia, which cites different definitions and outlines that there is no common definition: Politics of memory is the organization of collective memory by political agents; the political means by which events are remembered and recorded, or discarded. Eventually, the politics of memory may determine the way history is written and passed on, hence the terms history politics or politics of history. The politics of history is the effects of political influence on the representation or study of historical topics, commonly associated with the totalitarian state which use propaganda and other means to impose a specific version of history with the goal of eliminating competing perspectives about the past. Nevertheless, the term is contested and there is no common agreement on its meaning which is often a matter of contextual use⁶.

In fact, the collision within remembrance policies is influenced by many factors. I would reduce them to four: the selection of content (“what”); the purpose that makes one look at a given episode of the past (“why”); the way it is done (“how”), and the agent of that interest (“who”).

(1) Let us first turn to the question of the subject of interest (*who*) – whether, for example, these are politicians or experts who turn their interest to a given past episode, or journalists, or scientists, contemporaries or next generations. In principle, it is not the job of politicians to retell the past, but rather to make decisions for the current public agenda and for the future. According to Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson, who is the initiator of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (which currently has 35 member states and 9 more are accepted as observer countries), “the future we are shaping now, is the past that we will share tomorrow⁷.” In this statement, Persson as politician does not give an interpretation of the process and all its complexities. He speaks and acts precisely as a politician whose responsibility is to make decisions, create opportunities and rules that lead to responsible behavior on an issue and improve the condition of a problem diagnosed.

It is worth looking at this short statement again. It alerts about of an existing problem. This is the problem of forgetting and deteriorating values of modern societies. The lack of empathy, the distance from moral responsibility to the past, disinterest and forgetfulness actually challenge the maxim that *history is life's teacher*. It is well known that those who do not know history are doomed to relive it. In this sense, it is the responsibility of politicians to make decisions and act to help solve the problem identified. The problem in this case is forgetting or manipulating the memory of the Holocaust. Göran Persson as politician did not enter into a discussion on the essence

⁵ <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us/stockholm-declaration>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_memory

⁷ Former Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson: <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us>

of the various causes and variants of the problem given. He has spearheaded an initiative for the support of national and supranational memory preservation policies.

As we know, the parties concerned and authors of a given policy are numerous. They always involve various experts in the discourse and create opportunity for discussion as well as clear mechanisms for outlining alternatives and ways of making decisions. Founded in 2000, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance based on the Stockholm Declaration initiated a supranational partnership to uphold the responsibility of governments in their mission to create conditions for the maintenance of high moral values in their societies. It should be self-evident, but for the sake of detailed reasoning in terms of basic social principles, let us clarify why Holocaust remembrance is such an important issue today and why it affects everyone. In other words, the central questions in this analysis are:

- to highlight *why the memory of the Holocaust* as a politics of National Socialist Germany for the extermination of Jews affects not only Jews but everyone;
- to highlight *why the Holocaust is a common problem* for all societies, regardless of the specific way in which events unfolded in one country or another during the Second World War.

It would be strange to expect that the responsibility for preserving the memory lies with the heirs of the persecuted and the victims. Left alone and unsupported when the repressive machine of National Socialism pursued its policy of genocide against Jews in the years of World War II, they should never be alone in their efforts to preserve this memory for future generations. Understanding these issues should not be needed explained. It had to be understood by itself in nowadays. However, the rise of anti-Semitic attitudes in our time and the ideology of Holocaust deniers presuppose consistent institutional efforts in remembrance policies. It can be said that this is measured as the moral side, understood as solidarity with the suffering of the victims.

This repression is a result of violation of constitutional and moral norms. Any action in violation of the basic principles and norms should trigger institutional and all other possible mechanisms to protect the basic social principles. When that happens, the entire society becomes a victim, not just the persecuted. As Jews were left to be helpless victims of party and state-organized repression back in the WWII by the Nazis and their allies, is this same principle applicable today by considering them the only group in modern societies that should be interested in its suffering and survival? History is as it is and cannot be changed.

The persecution of the Jews was initiated and carried out on the extreme level of the so-called politics of the final solution with almost no sign of protection in societies that could prevent this genocide. Since the Jews remained helpless and defenseless at that time of trial, does this mean that, from the distance of time, the memory of this catastrophe is their concern? Because they have already suffered. As if the preservation of memory is the duty only of those who have suffered.

(2) Remembrance policies presuppose the creation of relevant infrastructure and the provision of appropriate regulations and resources to ensure the transfer of this memory to each succeeding generation (*refers to the question how*). The meaning of such public policy is not an end in itself, but a deeply conscious *process* of respect for history, which affirms the values of society on the

basis of sincere attitude to the past. This result is achieved precisely based on *institutionalized memory policies, which ensure that this memory is not the sole responsibility of the victims' heirs.*

(3) The *time* factor in relation to the memory of the past must also stand out as an essential element. For history, there is no hierarchy in the importance of periods according to the degree of their remoteness. The fact that the events that are here subject of discussion happened in the more distant past - almost eighty years since then - does not mean that their significance for society is diminishing. (This refers to the factor of *what* is remembered). In a sense, history is handing the torch from generation to the next. It is the duty of each succeeding generation to preserve the memory of the past, to preserve it and to pass it on to the next generations, preserved in its authenticity and valid meanings. The abandonment of certain historical episodes is a kind of interpretation of memory. Clearly, history does not start with us. It is exactly as long as our memory is. If we think that it starts with us, we will probably reproduce the specific errors in all specific circumstances. This may sound trivial, however practice suggests that there are events and facts in the present that raise difficult questions.

(4) Numerous studies and analyzes have been published on the complexity of historical memory issues. A specific perspective on them is in the article by Jean-Pierre Rioux, entitled "About the duty of remembrance"⁸, which problematizes the attitude to memory as a duty that instills guilt in future generations, reducing memory to a formal naming of things, and fails to form a true attitude towards them. The author does not call his conclusions exactly this way, but presents them in the final sentence: "But after all, the nobler witnesses themselves have agreed that any useful and genuine transmission would first and foremost require intelligence and knowledge, then recognition." Primo Levi said on numerous occasions⁹, "I believe that for a layman like me, the main thing is to understand and to be understood." However, the real message of quoted article fails to emphasize what is missing, namely empathy for the victims and understanding of the meaning of what is being studied. What the author has chosen is, to emphasize the formalism of memory as a problem, presenting his thesis in the title as "duty of remembrance". In fact, memory policies are very different from the official obligation. (This refers to the factor of *why*). Knowledge of the past is not a tool for blaming the dark pages, nor for decorating with a medal when it comes to its bright pages. It is after all for understanding and becoming a better people.

The formal attitude towards the heritage of any historical period, and especially of one such as the Holocaust, can easily be profaned and manipulated. However, the reason for studying history and especially that of the Holocaust is dictated by two main benchmarks: to find the reason and to sympathize. Not just information, not just emotion, but meaningful messages that have the function of affirming values and principles for the good development of society. Thus, we can derive one of the indicators that set the framework of memory policies as meaningful knowledge. This means that looking at the past is not an end in itself and should not be seen as a duty. They are a kind of

⁸ Jean-Pierre Rioux, "About the 'duty of remembrance'", In: *Inflexions* 2010/1 (N° 13), p. 125 à 135, in: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-inflexions-2010-1-page-125.htm#no3>

⁹ *Ibidem*

institutionalized responsibility to the past, which supports the quality of the present and the future. Understood in this way, it can be said that they contribute to the preservation of integrity and solidarity in relations as a public good.

REMEMBRANCE POLICIES AS ARGUMENTATION AND INITIATION

The way in which memory policies are formulated involves the organization and commitment of relevant institutions and stakeholders clearly identified. At first glance, memory is a spontaneous way of dealing with the past. Of course, while there are many true witnesses to certain events, they, as contemporaries, are natural bearers of memory. Arbitrary interpretations are more difficult for them, but even then, they are possible and happen. Let us look at the incredible phenomenon of Holocaust deniers. The arrogance of such a thesis in the face of countless evidence, memories and especially the fact that millions of people have never returned to their homes speaks for itself how many challenges to memory. Moreover, the outright lie, cleverly disguised as doubts about the manner of persecution, the scale of the victims, the technology of the killings, practically launched the ideology of Holocaust deniers. This falsification has been raised in the face of millions of contemporaries of these events around the world. And, yet such manipulations of memory find ways to replicate and mislead the ideas of people of future generations. If for a phenomenon of the scale of the Holocaust it is possible to encounter a variety of ways of belittling, denial and all sorts of manipulations, then what is left for all other topics on which “alternative memory” is created. In other words, memory policies are an issue of growing importance.

According to a statement by Derrida, there is no political power without the control of the archive, if not of memory¹⁰. This short phrase highlights the main problem in the use of memory for political purposes, i.e. this leads to the “who speaks” factor in remembrance policies. This says that history has a way of serving current or conjunctural political goals. In other words, this phrase of Derrida addresses the problem of how the authorities could build imaginary and fake realities about the past that would serve some political goals of the authorities. This problem is related to the big topic of the misuse and replacement of history with some conjunctural political goals. However, remembrance policies mean something very different, even the opposite of the problem outlined here. Their purpose is to protect against memory abuse, deliberate deformation and forgetfulness. In other words, the question is about the difference in the concept of memory politics and policies for remembrance.

Let us repeat that the issues related to memory policies can be reduced to several things - to *what* is remembered (what the narrative itself contains); *how* memory is formed; *why* actions are taken regarding memory (goals); and *who* speaks. One of the systematic ways to preserve memory is education. Curriculum design is always based on the coordinated efforts of different categories of experts and parties concerned. The likelihood of spreading fake knowledge in a democratic world is

¹⁰ See Introduction to the special issue – disputed Holocaust memory in Poland, Larry Ray and Sławomir Kaprański in: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17504902.2019.1567657>, A Journal of Culture and History, Volume 25, 2019 - Issue 3: Special Issue: Disputed Holocaust Memory in Poland

small, and the opportunities for content enrichment and interaction are many and varied. Educational institutions are one of the most powerful socializing agents and therefore quality content and a well-chosen approach to teaching are key to a responsible and honest attitude towards memory.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MEMORY POLICIES

The topic of memory and remembrance policies is increasingly relevant. In his analysis, the expert from the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and head of the research “Science, Data and Policy” says that “ultimately the objective of European remembrance policies is to create an informed and resilient historical memory which is also self-critical, turning away from a rigidly defined “remembrance culture” towards a common “culture of remembering.”¹¹

The special status of Holocaust remembrance policies is a topic that is constantly discussed. Starting with the sporadic opinion that the topic is overexposed, but on the other hand there are so many deficiencies in knowledge and understanding of the topic and ending with the debate over whether the Holocaust is a unique or characteristic type of genocide. Perhaps the most synthesized and conceptual view on this issue is in Prof. Yehuda Bauer's speech to the UN Assembly in 2006. He says:

„Of course there are parallels between the Holocaust and other genocides. The main one is that the suffering of the victims is the same... There are no gradations, and no genocide is better or worse than another one, no one is more victim than anyone else. The other parallel is that every genocide is perpetrated with the best technical and bureaucratic means at the disposal of the perpetrators...”¹² And still, he continues, “Why is the Holocaust the most extreme case? I think the reason is that while all the elements of each genocide are repeated in some other genocides, there are elements in the Holocaust that were without precedent; they cannot be found in genocides that preceded it. There are five such elements, in addition to the fact that it happened at the center of human civilization.”¹³

Yehuda Bauer summarizes these five elements to meanings that are directly related to the foundations of Holocaust remembrance policies. Here it is enough to single out even just two of them to draw attention to the unprecedented nature of this genocide. This is the linking of Jewish origins back several generations as a motive for persecution and destruction. Secondly, this is the internationalization of persecution. Jews became the object of repression and massacre not only on the territory of National Socialist Germany, but all over the world. In the words of professor Bauer, “this was to be done, ultimately, everywhere in the world, so that for the first time in history there was an attempt to universalize a genocide.” In this sense, “the Holocaust was unprecedented, and we had hoped that it would become a warning, not a precedent.”

¹¹ Markus J. Prutsch, Fellow of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the University of Heidelberg, leader of the international research project Science, Numbers and Politics in: European Remembrance Policies, <https://europeanmemories.net/magazine/european-remembrance-policies/>

¹² Yehuda Bauer, In: <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/pdf-drupal/en/remembrance/remembrance-and-beyond.pdf>

¹³ Ibidem

This historical legacy challenges not just to be remembered, but to be made meaningful. However, as Markus Prutsch says, „One of the most powerful tools in welding political identity is to create a collective historical memory, whereby we generally understand this to mean a form of collectively remembering or commemorating the past, whatever concrete form that might have.”¹⁴

DISCUSSION

Remembrance policies in a democratic world are multifaceted. Governmental institutions have a key role in shaping their content (mainly as a standard in educational programs) and public communication in this content. However, these are network policies. They reflect the views and ideas of many other stakeholders. The result is a function of this interaction. The responsibility of the key actors is towards the values, cognitive and affective attitudes of the citizens, which are formed based on social capital and the sense of national identity. This is not the place to delve into the depth of the scientific debate on identity and memory policies, but it should be noted that this is again a very topical issue in the social sciences¹⁵. As far as the political (*mis*)use of memory for propaganda and ideological purposes is a trademark of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, it can be hypothesized that the attempt of politicians to intervene in the expert debate on remembrance through ideological substitution is an indicator of the level of democracy of the political regime.

Knowledge of the past rests on objective truth proven by scientific methods. It is a subject of education, which must be provided by the institutions that set the standards for educational programs. The role of government institutions is to ensure that this scientific truth is available to the education of each new generation. Responsibility for Holocaust remembrance lies precisely in this area of remembrance policies. The educational content is produced by experts and is legitimized by its acceptance by legitimate scientific and educational commissions. The role of state institutions is in creating standards for objectivity and prevention against indiscriminate and manipulative reading of the past.

Holocaust remembrance policies are particularly sensitive to narrative, because the historical legacy itself is fraught with the ever-valid question of responsibility for this catastrophe. This question allows us to add another touch to the current analysis. It refers to *the originators of these remembrance policies*. The individual national narratives by definition represent segments of the whole picture of the Holocaust in Europe. The waves of interest in this past and the ways of telling

¹⁴ Markus J. Prutsch, Fellow of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the University of Heidelberg, leader of the international research project Science, Numbers and Politics in: European Remembrance Policies, <https://europeanmemories.net/magazine/european-remembrance-policies/>

¹⁵ See on these issues Patryk Wawrzyński in Polish Political Science Yearbook vol. 46 (1) (2017), pp. 294–312, <https://marszalek.com.pl/yearbook/docs/46-1/ppsy2017119.pdf> He, for example, says in the abstract of his article that “Remembrance is a powerful instrument of social mobilization, identity construction and political competition. Its impact on individual and shared beliefs or attitudes makes it an object of government’s interest, because remembrance can be used to legitimize ideologies or policies ”and that according to its concept “The government’s remembrance policy is myth-motoric, non-scientific, emotional, based on commitment and that it is a type of social influence” p. 294 This interesting concept raises issues that are debatable. It seems to me that the author has constructed his concept in the context of the current situation in his country with regard to memory issues, but that this concept does not have a universal explanation for the role of governments in memory policies. However, it does offer an interesting basis for further scientific debate.

it have specific periods in each country. In this periodization, there are many similarities, as well as different national features. What is most important, however, is the fact that a supranational agreement has been reached on the shared responsibility for the *memory* of this common horrific past in Europe. These consolidated efforts of many countries and organizations are increasingly visible in the results of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). As Marcus Pruch's analysis already cited reads, "Only by tackling the past in a self-assured manner, equally able to acknowledge historical accomplishments *and* admit mistakes of the past without bias and by accepting accountability, will European societies be able to move into the future more confidently." This is how the status of European remembrance policies was achieved: from "remembrance culture" to a "culture of remembering."

As already said, the periodization of interest in the legacy of the Holocaust in Europe has both similarities and differences. In the words of Anne Wæhrens, "During the Cold War the memory of the Holocaust did not occupy a central role in Europe. Instead of remembering, Europe wanted to forget the victims of the war and move on. Moreover, the political climate and the ideological contrast between Communism and Liberal democracies dominated."¹⁶ In the period after the end of the Cold War, there is a common policy embodied in the decisions of the European Parliament in addition to the actions of various countries. For example, the same analysis states that "in the period from 1989 to 2009 the European Parliament has adopted eight resolutions and two declarations concerning the memory of the Holocaust. The resolutions and declarations can be classified in three groups according to their theme: remembrance days, concrete physical places of memory and restitution."¹⁷ What does this actually tell us?

Based on the approach in this analysis, namely, considering Holocaust remembrance policies from the perspective of the initiator (actor) and his manner of conducting them, the quoted passage draws attention to the subject of these policies. The extent to which memory policies are usually thought of is within national borders. However, this is a supranational policy, and more specifically a pan-European policy as an EU community. The even higher level to which the whole process has reached is what this text started with, namely the role of a supranational, international organization involving countries from all over the world, called the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. The second part of this text focuses on the contribution to the memory policies of this institution and in particular on the role it has in relation to the legacy of the Holocaust in Bulgaria.

PERIODS IN HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE POLICIES. SPECIFICITIES IN THE BULGARIAN CASE

The specific chronicle of the events of the Holocaust is well known even to people who are not particularly interested in history: the rise to power of the National Socialists, the practical suspension of the rule of law in Germany, the political and social marginalization of Jews in

¹⁶ Anne Wæhrens, *Shared Memories? Politics of Memory and Holocaust Remembrance in the European Parliament 1989-2009* DIIS Working Paper 2011:06, Copenhagen 2011, p. 6, in: <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/122232/1/664119069.pdf>

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 13

Germany, economic plunder, humiliation, ill-treatment and murder. This is the model that has been exported and that National Socialist Germany has imposed as an occupying power since the start of WW2 or expected to be followed by countries allied to the Axis. But, as we know from history, although elements of the repressive regime are seen in many places in one way or another, the degree and cooperation are at a different pace, with different diligence or obstruction.

The purpose of this text is not to enter into the discussion on the essence of the events in the fate of the Jews of Bulgaria. This is a topic on which I have had the opportunity to express my concept and arguments in other publications. The focus of the analysis here is many decades later, after November 10, 1989, when former communist leader Todor Zhivkov fell from power and the process of transition to a democratic political system began. In fact, only then was the beginning of a consistent study, reflection and debate on the events in the fate of the Jews in Bulgaria during the Second World War.

The dynamics of attention to this issue has not been balanced in the last 30 years. One can clearly periodize the way in which social processes have taken place and influenced the attention of society, experts, historians, especially the attention of institutions to the heritage of the Holocaust. In particular, in the years after 1989, the whole focus of public attention was focused on changing the political system for obvious and understandable reasons. The main topic in the public discourse was communism - anti-communism, the legacy of the communist past and the desire of society to change the political system from totalitarian to democratic. Every single topic in these first years was refracted in the context of this common problem without exception. It was also an emotional period that did not always rationally interpret the past. In these years, at the beginning of the transition, the question of the fate of Bulgarian Jews in the years of World War II for the first time finds its place in public discussions about the past.

Throughout the period of Socialism - from September 9, 1944 to November 10, 1989 the topic of the fate of Jews in Bulgaria and the Holocaust in general have never been part of the educational content of school education. As far as the fate of Jews was concerned, this was in the general context of “fascist Germany” – using the phraseology of Socialism to characterize the German regime during the war. At best, the topic was mentioned in the teaching content as part of the common tragic legacy of Nazi Germany's policy toward the “progressive forces”. However, this has never been singled out as a separate subject of study. Of course, people were more or less aware of the events and the legacy of the Holocaust. Sources such as cinema, fiction, journalism and all other were used but information stemmed never from school education. It has not been the subject of serious scientific attention either. Publications of individual historians appeared in specialized literature¹⁸, but since the ideology of that era suggested, they were all obliged to mask their analyzes by promoting the leadership of the Communist Party for good and condemning the role of absolutely every other factor in public life. Thus, even in scientific publications, although the

¹⁸ Publications on this topic until 1999 are duly described in the extremely useful work of Jacques Eshkenazi and Alfred Crispin and an introduction by Emy Baruch, “Jews in the Bulgarian Lands. Annotated Bibliography”, Judaica Studios, Sofia 1999. also foreword by Emy Baruch in https://newspaper.kultura.bg/media/my_html/2164/evrei.htm

participation of the relevant institutions in the persecution and defense was described, the story was told via the topic of saving Bulgarian Jews because of the leadership of the Bulgarian Communist Party. The role of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was mentioned, but the ideology that this happened at the lead of the Bulgarian Communist Party was also applied to it. The nature of these publications and the fact that they were the subject of attention only in the narrowly specialized scientific press, they never become subject of wide public attention. To the extent that media policy of that period would reflect only the one-sided ideological reading of anything, this explains the total oblivion and the desire to replace the historical picture - as it was with as it is told for future generations.

It is interesting to note that there is a public rumor that in the 80's there was an attempt to draw attention to this issue, using it to further embellish the image of Todor Zhivkov as a "savior" of Bulgarian Jews, claiming that it was he who organized the demonstration of the left forces against the then planned expulsion of Jews from the capital to provincial towns, scheduled for May 1943. According to rumors, this particular act of resistance was intended to be presented as an event organized by Todor Zhivkov as argument for his international recognition for efforts to the protection of Jews. However, let us note that the falsification of Todor Zhivkov's role as a participant in the protest action of the left forces on May 24, 1943 against the organized expulsion by the government of Bogdan Filov of the Jews from Sofia to the province, we documented in an interview with him. In this interview he points out his participation as an organizer, in fact the organizers are Valka Goranova and Betty Danone, while Todor Zhivkov at that time was not even in Sofia.¹⁹

In summary, *the first period* is from the end of the Second World War to the end of the socialist regime, when the memory of the Holocaust was not part of the public discourse in Bulgaria. The reasons for this are probably complex. They are the subject of a separate analysis. I will point out very briefly that, on the one hand, this is the momentum of pushing out the memory of war, suffering and destruction. Witnesses of certain events do not always realize how important it is to share their experience with next generations. However, in the conditions of the Communist regime is the creation of an idea that corresponds to the ideology of this regime. The peculiarities of the events in Bulgaria make them inconvenient for the regime. Let us briefly sketch these events by *key features* that shape them as such:

- According to Communist ideology, every religion is “opium for the peoples” and is therefore reactionary. Only the ideology of Marxism-Leninism is correct. The positive account of the moral role of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church goes beyond ideology. For this reason, it is easier not to mention it, or if it is mentioned, to be with the official thesis that it was under the leadership of the Bulgarian Communist Party.
- A serious problem during the regime is even mentioning about *civil society*. This is also a negative perception by Communist ideology. It conflicts the basic claim that the latter ideology is

¹⁹ See more in Bar-Zohar, M., 1998

the most moral and the only correct one. For this reason, no alternative of it is allowed on any issue. The very idea of an alternative is a kind of political heresy from the point of view of the Communist regime. In fact, the opposition of the civil society to the repressive policy of the Bulgarian government towards the Jews is a manifestation of the search for an alternative to this official political course. Various institutions and individuals are in opposition to it. They disagree with the government's policy and insist on abandoning repressive legislation and require not persecuting anyone on a group basis. I believe that the most important meaning of knowledge about the Bulgarian case is precisely this - in the persistence of various structures to oppose the official repressive policy and in the insistence to change and stop it. The protest letters and petitions on behalf of various organizations and individuals, including the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, express mainly two arguments as the basis for their demands for an end to the persecution of Jews. These are generally the arguments that the Law on the Protection of the Nation violates constitutional norms and that such a policy violates the basic moral principles of society. Thus, all these actions of opposition to the policy of persecution managed to protect Bulgarian Jews and prevent the final act of deportation of Jews from the so-called Old Borders and the repeal of repressive legislation in August 1944. However, the narrative of events in this way would contradict the ideology of the socialist regime as according to it there couldn't be no positive social action with a participant other than the Communist Party.

- Another fact that made inconvenient for the regime to allow public debates on the fate of Bulgaria's Jewish population during WWII was that the party system at the time did not consist only of the BCP but also of the rest of so-called bourgeois parties. The factual picture shows that against government policy are individuals, political and civic institutions that are extremely different in their political and ideological views. It would also mean presenting a positive image of liberal opposition politicians in the 25th National Assembly during the debates on the draft Law on the Protection of the Nation in the autumn of 1940. This means recognizing the positive role of bourgeois politicians in general. Moreover, the actual participants in these events were politically persecuted and repressed during socialism. This applies to some of the brightest figures such as Dimitar Peshev, Petar Mihalev, Nikola Mushanov and many others.

- Next comes the fact that the majority of Bulgarian Jews have a strong Zionist attitude. Therefore, and due to the new circumstances of the repressive nature of the socialist regime (nationalization of property of the entire population in Bulgaria, as well as the suspension of all civil and political rights) leads to mass alia of Bulgarian Jews. About 45,000 of the 49,000 Jews in Bulgaria are leaving for the newly created state of Israel. However, Israel is considered by Soviet Union to be an enemy country, and therefore, under Soviet pressure this was the policy of almost the entire socialist bloc. This of course is still another argument for forgetting the fate of the Jews in the years of World War II.

Regardless of the validity of the arguments presented in this way, the reality in the years before 1989 in Bulgaria is that knowledge of the Holocaust was not part of the content of school curricula.

This is a period of 45 years in which several generations, most of whom were born after these events, have virtually no (or no systematic) knowledge of the subject. However, these are the generations that reconstruct the story of the Holocaust.

Thus, the *second period* in the memory of the fate of the Jews in Bulgaria coincides with the fall of Todor Zhivkov from power and thus the end of the Communist regime. This is actually the beginning of real interest in the topic at last. In the early 1990s, however, the question was not “what exactly happened to the Jews in Bulgaria” but “who is the savior - the Communists or the King” (Boris III who passed away in 1943) as a reaction to refute the overexposed thesis of the Communist Party's total presence in all positive social processes. At that time, the rescue of the Jews in Bulgaria was taken for granted that they remained alive on the territory of the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the whole question came down to clarifying who had the credit for this rescue.

To the extent that the demagoguery of socialism and the totalitarian dictatorship of the communist regime has long claimed to be the only possible player in the political field on the part of the right cause, the passion for overcoming this problem is leading in all processes and topics. *It can be said that although the public interest in the fate of the Jews has found a place in the eyes of society, it is rather an element in the Communism – anti-Communism discourse. It did not immediately become the subject of analysis per se, but rather an instrument in the wider debate on the direction of political change and social transition.*

One of the first manifestations of a large public discussion on this issue was the special meeting held in 1995 in the Auditorium of Sofia University, moderated by Mikhail Tachev²⁰ and with the participation of two Israeli guest speakers²¹. They articulated the thesis of the role of Tsar Boris III, which was in contradiction with the ideologized history of the Communist Party-rescuer of the Bulgarian Jews. The discussion on this occasion is reflected in a publication containing the full text of the event. Still, the first two significant documentary collections on the subject also appeared during this period. Special recognition should be given to the emblematic collection of the Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria "Shalom", "Survival"²², published in 1995. This is a documentary collection of major documents from this period, which has become a very important source for the interested in this issue. A similar role for the expert circles is played by the earlier collection of documents compiled by Vitka Toshkova, called "Bulgaria - the disobedient ally of the Third Reich".²³ Gradually, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, more systematic research on the subject began to emerge. Here we offer a brief overview of this subsequent development.

²⁰ Mihail Tachev is President of the International Foundation "St. Cyril and Methodius"

²¹ These are the historians Avram Ben-Jacob and Michael Bar-Zohar. The discussion was published in a brochure based on a recording.

²² Оцеляването, съставител Давид Коен, ИК „Шалом“, 1995 [Survival, compiled by David Cohen, Shalom Publishing House, 1995]

²³ България – своенравният съюзник на Третия райх“, съставител Витка Тошкова и др., ИК „св. Георги Победоносец, С. 1992 г. [Bulgaria - the wayward ally of the Third Reich, compiled by Vitka Toshkova and others, Publishing House "st.Georgi Pobedonosetc", S. 1992]

CHRONICLE OF THE NARRATIVE ON THE QUESTION OF THE FATE OF THE JEWS IN BULGARIA IN THE FIRST TWO DECADES AFTER 2000

The specificity of the interest in that topic is of an increasingly in-depth study and understanding of the historical heritage. The attention is focused more and more on the overall picture - to the events in the old borders of Bulgaria as well as to those in the so-called New territory. Research on specific problems is emerging. A debate on the responsibility for the persecution and the nature of the rescue started. The challenge of the labels is becoming more and more clear - whether the respective episode and the participant are named with the appropriate label.

The book *Beyond Hitler's Grasp* was published in the United States in 1998.²⁴ This book is the first comprehensive study published in English since the iconic work of Frederick Chary in 1972 on the same topic.²⁵ In 2003, Tsvetan Todorov's famous work, *The Fragility of Goodness*, was published.²⁶ During this period, documentaries on the subject started appearing. For example, M. Bar-Zohar made a documentary of the same name by the Israeli company Per Capita Production, directed by Nisan Aviram, based on the book.²⁷ At the same time, a documentary was being prepared by American law professor Ed Gaffney, *Empty Boxcars*, which was completed about ten years later. Another documentary was being prepared at the same time, *The Optimists*.²⁸ The film has been repeatedly shown in Bulgaria, the United States and many other places. The growing interest in the legacy of the 1940s continued to be the subject of documentaries for the past 20 years. They are dedicated to the interpretation of events as a whole or to individual aspects of them. Memory digitization projects also date from this same period. The partnership between Edward Serota and the Bulgarian Photographic Association led to the digitization of numerous family albums and interviews with contemporaries at these events.²⁹

During this period, more and more academic and journalistic titles on the legacy of the Holocaust appeared. What is specific of them is the deepening of the documentary heritage and the analysis of specific aspects of the overall picture. Such are the documentary collection *Voices in defense of civil society. Minutes of the Holy Synod on the Jewish Question* (2002), translated into English in 2005³⁰ with the support of B'nai B'rith International; the collection of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences *Doomed and saved*³¹; the documentary collection *You Believe* by Lea Cohen and a number of

²⁴ Bar-Zohar, M. "Beyond Hitler's Grasp". Adams Media, 1998. Bar-Zohar, M. "Beyond Hitler's Grasp". Adams Media, 1998. The book has been translated into Bulgarian and published as a joint publication of the publishing houses of OJB "Shalom", Sofia University and AUBG..

²⁵ Chary, Frederick B. *The Bulgarian Jews and the final solution, 1940-1944*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972

²⁶ Todorov, Tsvetan, *The Fragility of Goodness: Why Bulgaria's Jews Survived the Holocaust*, Princeton University Press, 2003, first published in French 1999

²⁷ The film premiered at the United Nations, New York in 2000. It was in Bulgaria and Israel in early 2001. After that it was repeatedly presented in many places in Bulgaria and around the world.

²⁸ This film was created by Jackie Comforty: <https://www.newday.com/film/optimists>

²⁹ The results of this consistent research and creative activity can be seen at www.centropa.org

³⁰ *The Power of Civil Society in a time of Genocide*:

http://jews.archives.bg/jews/uploaded_files/The_Power_Of_Civil_Society_In_A_Time_Of_Genocide.pdf

³¹ *Doomed and saved: Bulgaria in the anti-Semitic program of the Third Reich: research and documents*, compiled by Vitka Toshkova, Sineva Publishing House, Sofia 2007/*Doomed and saved : Bulgaria in the anti-Semitic program of the Third Reich : articles and documents*

others.³² An independent new focus in academic research is presented in the works of Rumen Avramov and Nadia Danova, whose subject of analysis is economic robbery and repressive measures and actions against Jews in Bulgaria.³³ A contribution to this development is the collection of analyzes of this legacy from a legal point of view³⁴, as well as the study of Nikolai Poppetrov and Varban Todorov on political sanctions against anti-Semitic policies.³⁵

Part of the development of interest in this heritage and, as a result, of maintaining the memory of the Holocaust, is the holding of numerous academic forums at the initiative of various organizations. During this period, although not very active, there is still interaction between academic and other experts and various government institutions. The State Archives Agency is among those constantly present in this context. Prominent expert Ivanka Gezenko and her colleagues have prepared numerous exhibitions on the subject, as well as various documentary publications such as the catalog of Jewish working groups in conscription.³⁶ It is worth noting that throughout the period after the fall of the socialist regime, the files in the State Archives are with completely free access for researchers and all readers interested. The development throughout the period is in the direction of providing wider access to the documentary heritage. There is currently a public web platform with a number of digitized key documents available in free access for all.³⁷

The growing interest in the subject is also present in the fact of increase of titles of translated literature on topics dedicated to the Holocaust, as well as the appearance of photo type editions of emblematic titles. Such are the first documentary collection by Nathan Greenberg in 1947, as well as that of Buko Piti in 1937, which is based on interviews with prominent public figures of that period about their critical views and non-acceptance of anti-Semitism and racism.³⁸

These examples represent the positive result that all these activities have towards a better understanding of the legacy of the Holocaust. They contribute to the preservation of memory as an element of interinstitutional cooperation in this field. A very good example of such interaction is the creation of the conceptual exhibition *The Power of Civil Society* as a collaboration between the Center for Jewish Studies at Sofia University and the State Cultural Institute at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The organization of this exhibition on the spot in over 80 countries so far around

³² Cohen, Lea, *You Believe*, Enthusiast Publishers, Sofia. 2012

³³ See *The Deportation of the Jews from Vardar Macedonia, Thrace by the White Sea, and Pirot, March 1943*. Nadia Danova and Rumen Avramov, compiler and general editor, BHC, 2013, https://www.marginalia.bg/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/T.1_palen.pdf and "Salvation" and the Fall - Rumen Avramov

³⁴ See *Legal Aspects of the State Anti-Jewish Policy in the Kingdom of Bulgaria (1940-1944)* - Zdravka Krasteva, ed. Ecstasy, Berlin 2018

³⁵ Poppetrov N. and V. Todorov, VII Chamber of the People's Court. *A Forgotten Documentary Evidence of Anti-Semitism in Bulgaria in 1941-1944*, East-West Publishing House, 2013

³⁶ See for example, *Jewish working groups in conscription*. Thematic catalog, published by the State Archives Agency, 2008

³⁷ See <http://jews.archives.bg/> and <http://isda.archives.government.bg:84/FundSearch.aspx>

³⁸ <http://jews.archives.bg/17->

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the world is usually done by the Bulgarian diplomatic missions in partnership with the diplomatic missions of the State of Israel and various Jewish organizations in the host countries.³⁹

However, the most significant in terms of achievement are the type of interactions that have contributed to the institutional nature of memory policies, their increasingly systematic nature and capacity building to maintain and develop quality and systematic knowledge in the educational programs themselves. In this regard, the formalization of a national date of remembrance⁴⁰ can be highlighted (March 10 was first officially commemorated in Bulgaria in 2003), as well as actions of the Bulgarian authorities to join International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (the application happened in 2012).⁴¹

One important feature in the analysis of these actions that should be emphasized is the fact of the *supra-party nature* and continuity between different political forces in Bulgaria. Presidents and governments of even opposing ideologies in the political spectrum have been in power. However, this did not prevent progressive efforts to better shape educational programs, provide resources for many different initiatives and support thematic inter-institutional working groups. The renewal of the curriculum that contributes to the systematic study of this heritage is a visible result. The result of the curricula, of course, depends on the specialized training of the teachers themselves. The cooperation of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science with a leading institution on these issues, such as Yad Vashem, has provided annual training for school teachers of history and civic education. The shared experience of interesting pedagogical practices and the adaptation of the subject to the age specificity of the students as well as the peculiarities of modernity are elements that contribute to the improvement of the general picture in the policies of memory. The

³⁹[https://www.culture-](https://www.culture-mfa.bg/content/%D0%A1%D0%98%D0%9B%D0%90%D0%A2%D0%90%20%D0%9D%D0%90%20%D0%93%D0%A0%D0%90%D0%96%D0%94%D0%90%D0%9D%D0%A1%D0%9A%D0%9E%D0%A2%D0%9E%20%D0%9E%D0%91%D0%A9%D0%95%D0%A1%D0%A2%D0%92%D0%9E%20%D0%A1%D0%AA%D0%94%D0%91%D0%90%D0%A2%D0%90%20%D0%9D%D0%90%20%D0%95%D0%92%D0%A0%D0%95%D0%98%D0%A2%D0%95%20%D0%92%20%D0%91%D0%AA%D0%9B%D0%93%D0%90%D0%A0%D0%98%D0%AF_1825.html)

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⁴⁰ By Government Decision 105 of 19 February 2003, the date of 10 March was chosen because of the so-called "Kyustendil Action" of 1943. At that date, the government was asked to stop the planned deportation of Bulgarian Jews to the Nazi concentration camps with the help of politicians and public figures from Kyustendil and Bulgarian metropolitans.

⁴¹ The process of Bulgaria's accession to IHRA formally begun with a decision under item 6 of Protocol № 37 of the meeting of the Council of Ministers on March 10, 2012. During the plenary session of the IHRA in Liege on December 10-13, 2012, Bulgaria was unanimously granted observer status. The first participation with an official delegation was ordered by the Minister of Education at the session in Manchester in December 2014 during the second presidency of the United Kingdom. Bulgaria became a Liaison country under the Swiss Presidency of IHRA in 2017. Bulgaria's full membership was voted in 2018 in Ferrara under the Italian Presidency after presenting a detailed report on its coherence in its policies on Holocaust remembrance and demonstrating institutional capacity and sequence of educational programs in the study of this historical heritage and preservation of memory.

The very process of developing such a capacity is supported by all member states of this international organization and its permanent office in Berlin. The partnership in this process with the mentor country, in the Bulgarian case it was Israel, is important for the quality preparation of programs and partnership meetings in the implementation of the standards and the capacity for effective participation of the country as a full member of the Alliance. The complex issues of this historical heritage have been fully discussed in the positive environment of this organization with the delegations of Greece and the Republic of Northern Macedonia, as well as many other initiatives such as joint seminars initiated by the Memorial de la Shoa in Paris.

establishment of an annual national competition on Holocaust heritage by the Ministry of Education and Science is another example of socializing new generations through knowledge and creative reflection on the past. These examples are among the indicators of the joint efforts of many institutions, which, despite all the other complexities of society's social and political agenda, are trying to meet the current challenges of memory abuse and attitude manipulation. The process of Bulgaria's accession to the IHRA became possible thanks to long-term cooperation between various stakeholders – politicians, academics, other experts, experts in the field of education and, of course, representatives of the Organization of Jews in Bulgaria “Shalom”. None of these institutions could independently achieve quality and sustainability of the results in overcoming oblivion, layers of misunderstanding of the peculiarities of the Bulgarian case and highlighting the deep foundations for systematic study and respect of symbolic dates of remembrance.

The presented direction of development does not mean that the debate on issues of the past has become unambiguous and calm. One of the challenges to the remembrance policies in the Bulgarian case is the complex nature of the content of this historical heritage. The experts are aware of the true picture of the Bulgarian case in which there are events and actions that represent persecution and repression, as well as other events and actions defending people from persecution. The difficulty of finding a concept that characterizes the whole process is part of the problem. The natural reflex of identifying with the good seems to push out or ignore the fact of persecution and can be bypassed or alienated from the general picture of memory. On the other hand, the sensitivity to this topic and the honesty to the historical truth provokes a sharpened attention to the repressive actions and sometimes to the meaning of the whole process in the categories of persecution. One can say that there is some chronicity of these collisions in memory management. Something more. The intensification of the attitude towards this past brings not only experts to the debate. The potential of social networks for the circulation of not only valid knowledge is a problem for every sphere of public life. Against these questions, the most effective answer is in the systemic nature of knowledge in educational programs and an approach that addresses learners not as an object of information, but as a partner in this discussion and an interested participant.

Obviously, it is not the responsibility of state institutions to intervene in the scholarly dispute. However, the improved capacity of remembrance policies stems from creating the conditions to teach credible, holistic and valid knowledge that is respectable to the past and contributing to building values in the present. The key issue for public environment policies that is always relevant is to be able to create a sustainable environment in which all stakeholders can partner on each issue and contribute to the quality of the conversation and hence to the integrity of the social environment.

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HOLOCAUST MEMORY IN MODERN RUSSIA

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Abstract

The main tendencies and features of the Holocaust memory policy in modern Russia are analysed in this article. Positive and negative factors in preserving the memory of the Holocaust are extracted that lie in the context of the memory of the Nazi occupation on USSR territory.

Key words: *policy of memory; denial and understatement of the Holocaust, National Holocaust Remembrance Day; the “Return dignity” project.*

In the West, the subject of the Holocaust is shaped by a collective memory of World War II and an aversion to violence and intolerance. In Russia, by contrast, it is the memory of heroism and victimization in the war that shapes views of the Holocaust. One cannot deny that the Russian population is very well aware of the war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, which in Russia is called the “Great Patriotic War”. Indeed, the victory over Nazi Germany is much propagandized in Russia.²

However, this memory culture of World War II is rather superficial because it leaves out one essential aspect that is intrinsically linked with the war: the Holocaust. As a result, the collective memory of Jewish victims is presented in Russia in a rather fragmented manner. There are both objective and subjective reasons for this. The Nazis and their collaborators in the occupied Soviet territories killed more than seven million civilians. This number appeared in 1998 in volume 4 of the multi-volume history “The Great Patriotic War” prepared by several institutes of the Russian Academy of Science. Another 20 million died in battles as well as at the home front, during the occupation and in the siege of Leningrad.³ The majority of them were non-Jews. For this and some other reasons, the subject-matter of the Holocaust is still painful in Russia, as in some other post-Soviet states (Belarus and Ukraine).

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² See Ilya Altman. Opfer des Hasses. Der Holocaust in UdSSR, 1941-1945. — Gleichen, 2008

³ Usually these figures are mentioned in general calculations of Soviet human losses during the war, including textbooks. Some politicians ranged them in mass-media at from 13,5 to 20 million “peaceful Soviet citizens”.

Only in recent years has Russian society begun to be interested and started to understand the Holocaust. The term “Holocaust” was included in 2003 at State Pedagogical Standart.⁴ Documents about the Holocaust started being published in Russia since early 90-th. The first complete edition of the *Black Book* was published in 1993. In the same 1993, the State Archive of the Russian Federation in conjunction with Yad Vashem issued a collection of documents entitled *The Unknown Black Book*. It included materials, which the editors of the *Black Book* refused to publish fearing censorship. In 2005 it was translated and published in Hungary.⁵ Also, this volume was published in English by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.⁶ In 2015 the Moscow publishing house Corpus issued a revised text of these publications with our detailed comments.⁷

Unlike previous editions, this book appeared in bookstores in all major Russian cities. This publication caused a public response: reviews, radio programs, interviews. Several presentations took place both in Russia and in other countries.

In recent years, new historical facts were made available about the Jewish refugees and the émigrés, connected with the Soviet Union, and, in particular, about the proposal Germany made to the USSR back in 1940 to admit “all Reich Jews”, which the Soviet government rejected.

The information about the transport of several thousand refugees from Lithuania via the USSR to Japan in late 1940 and early 1941 became of great interest. As it is known, the Japanese Consul in Kaunas, Chiune Sugihara, gave visas to refugees. But it was only recently when we learned from declassified documents from the Archives of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation about the role played by the Soviet authorities in this episode and the problems the refugees faced while entering Japan.⁸

The last decade has seen several new trends in Holocaust studies in Russia.⁹ First, there are more scholarly works and more memoirs published. Some of them have been published in the Russian provinces, including in cities that were not occupied by the Germans.

In recent years, Jewish communities in Orel and Rostov-on-Don, and local researchers in Taganrog, Pyatigorsk, Nevel and Pskov have become involved in preparing books and articles on the Holocaust. These works are largely descriptive rather than analytical. Also works by Professor Boris Kovalev from the University of Novgorod dealing with collaboration appeared noteworthy as well as research on anti-Jewish propaganda in the German-controlled press, theatre and radio in the

⁴ Ilya Altman. Holocaust Education in Russia Today: Its Challenges and Achievements. In *The Holocaust and the United Nation Outreach Programme. Discussion Papers Journal*. V.II –New York, 2020. P.117-130

⁵ Az Ismeretlen FEKETE KÖNYV. Budapest, Pannonica Kiadó, 2005.; Ilya Altman. The Holocaust in the Territory of Russian Federation. In: *Facing the Nazi Genocide: Non-Jews and Jews in Europe.*/ Eds. Beate Kosmala and Feliks Tych. Berlin, Metropol, 2004. - P.169-203

⁶ Ilya Altman, Joshua Rubinstein(eds.). *The Unknown Black Book*. Chicago: Indiana University Press, 2008.

⁷ *Черная книга*. Под редакцией Василия Гроссмана и Ильи Эренбурга. – М.: АСТ: CORPUS, 2015; «Неизвестная Черная книга». Материалы к «Черной книге» под редакцией Василия Гроссмана и Ильи Эренбурга. / Сост. И.А. Альтман – М.: АСТ: CORPUS, 2015.

⁸ Ilya Altman. The issuance of visas to War Refugees by Chiane Sugichara as Reflected in the documents stored in Russian archives. In “Casablanca of The North: Refugees and Rescuers in Kaunas 1939–1940”. – Kaunas: Versus Aureus, 2017. P. 133-139.

⁹ See more Ilya Altman. The Holocaust on the Territory of Russian Federation. In: *Facing the Nazi Genocide: Non-Jews and Jews in Europe*. Beate Kosmala and Feliks Tych, Eds. Berlin, Metropol, 2004. - P.169-203

occupied areas. We can also mention in this regard recent works by Dmitry Zhukov and Ivan Kovtun.¹⁰

Second, these are works by foreign researchers not translated into Russian. In contrast to Ukraine, Latvia and Lithuania, few readers in Russia are aware of works by some of the most prominent Holocaust researchers writing in English and not translated into Russian (for example, Raul Hilberg, Michael Berenbaum etc). In 2005, one of the most prestigious Russian publishers ROSSPEN issued the book *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust* edited by Walter Laqueur (originally published by Yale University Press in 2001), but this has proven to be the exception rather than the rule.

In 2009 ROSSPEN published the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust on the Territory of the Soviet Union*. This was the biggest project of the Russian Holocaust Centre. It brought together almost 100 scholars from fifteen Russian universities to write more than 2,000 articles on specific localities. There are also more than 300 thematic articles dealing with literature, poetry, theatre, cinema, etc. All of them have to do with the Holocaust of Soviet Jews or the fate of the citizens of other countries (victims and perpetrators) on Soviet territory. Many of these articles are entirely original contributions, because at the time when they appeared, nothing else had been written on these topics.

The *Encyclopaedia* summarizes Holocaust research of Russian scholars and their colleagues in the post-Soviet states. It was particularly important for general Holocaust statistics to establish the number of Holocaust victims on Soviet territory. Thanks to the studies of Russian scholars (Mark Kupovetsky and myself) and Israeli scholar (Yitzhak Arad), it was ascertained that the minimum of 2,600,000 Jews were killed on the territory of the former Soviet Union or deported to death camps between 1941 and 1945. Another 300,000 Jews were deported from Germany, German allies and German-occupied Europe to this region and then murdered. These numbers make up nearly 50 per cent of the total number of killed Jews during the Second World War.

Another important point. About 1,000 ghettos and camps were set up on occupied Soviet territory, a higher number than in any other country occupied by the Nazis and their allies.

These numbers were determined through the comprehensive analysis of German and official Soviet data about the number of victims. These statistics are also important in order to assess the number of Holocaust victims in Poland, Romania and Lithuania. Many works by Israeli and Western historians overlook the fact that by June 1941, Jews who had previously lived in eastern Poland, Bukovina and Bessarabia already had Soviet citizenship.

¹⁰ И́жа Алтман. А холокаустт историографияја ес емлекенек мегорзесе Оросзорхзагбан /Альтман И.А. Историография Холокоста и сохранение памяти о нем в России. В кн.: Az antiszemitizmus történeti formái a cári birodalomban és a Szovjetunió területein (Szerk.: Barta Tamás és Krausz Tamás).// Istoricheskie formi antisemitizma v carskoj imperii i na territorii SSSR. Kafedra Rusistiki Universiteta Etvesa Loranda, Russica Pannonica. Budapest, 2014. P. 298-315; И́жа Алтман. Der Stellenwert des Holocaust im historischen Gedächtnis Russlands (Место Холокоста в российской исторической памяти) . //Andreas Wirshing, Urgan Zarusky, Alevander Tchubarjan, Viktor Isctshenko (Hrsg.) "Erinnerung an Diktatur und Krieg. Brennpunkte des kulturellen Gedächtnisses zwischen Russland und Deutschland seit 1945" — Олденбург: Де Гройтер, 2015. S. 213-225

The (partial) opening of Soviet archives, and the work done by Russian and foreign researchers made it possible to prove that the total annihilation of Jews (including children, women and old men, the eradication of entire communities) began on the territory of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941.

Thus, the USSR was consistent and persistent in granting a possibility to several thousand Jews to leave the territory of the Soviet Union, while, at the same time, refusing to admit Jewish emigration from Nazi Germany. So, this help to the Jewish refugees was local and this partial, by allowing them to exist on Soviet territory, but not to enter it. The Soviet government (along with the Western democracies) bears full responsibility for its indifference after the beginning of WW II regarding the fate of the Jews of Germany and countries occupied by the Nazis.¹¹

Memorialization of the Holocaust on Russian territory was impacted by the total annihilation of Jewish communities, on the one hand, and a relatively high number of Jews conscripted into the army who returned home and were often the first to launch memorialization, on the other. The support of local authorities made it possible for Jewish religious organizations to obtain recognition in memorializing the Holocaust.

Holocaust remembrance is rarely a feature of the Russian public discourse. Hushing up the Jewish tragedy for almost fifty years had an impact on Russian society, its educational structures, historical institutions and intellectual environment. This reactionary and revisionist impact is stronger than elsewhere in the post-Soviet European space. It is a wonder that Russia still has no Holocaust Remembrance Day, although it was the Red Army that liberated Auschwitz.

Indeed, far from memorializing the Jewish tragedy, government officials in Rostov decided to take down a memorial plaque that was erected in 2004 identifying most of the 27,000 Zmievskaia Balka victims as Jews. The replacement plaque does not mention Jews, but rather “peaceful citizens of Rostov-on-Don and Soviet prisoners of war.” One of the major, although not the most important, motives behind this decision was the reluctance to mention the term “Holocaust” on the plaque, while Jews here were not “gassed” but “shot”.¹²

Since 2015 the Government of Moscow, the Russian Jewish Congress and the Russian Holocaust Centre have annually organized the Week of Remembrance. This is a series of memorial and educational events marked the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The highlight of this series of cultural and educational events is the evening requiem held in the prestigious halls of Moscow. Guests of these events included representatives from the political, social and religious sphere, ambassadors and diplomats from more than 25 countries as well as WWII-veterans and former ghetto prisoners, teachers and students. The official part included welcoming speeches by Russian Federation government representatives. The Week of Remembrance is widely covered by the media.

¹¹ Il'ya Al'tman. The Holocaust in the Occupied USSR and its Memorialization in Contemporary Russia. In Alex Kay and David Stahel (Eds.). *Mass Violence in Nazi-Occupied Europe*, Indiana University Press, 2018. –P. 219-234

¹² Ilya Altman. Is Minimizing the Scale of the Holocaust a Form of Anti-Semitism in Russia and the World? In “Protecting the Future. Proceedings of the First International Conference on Combating Anti-Semitism. Moscow, November 1-2, 2016”. – New York, 2018 – P. 155-163

Some aspects of the Holocaust have become relevant in the political discourse. The Holocaust took its place in the struggle of the Russian state against the “rehabilitation of Nazism”. The topic of the Holocaust appeared in the official state educational programs, for example, for the first time the International Holocaust Remembrance Day was integrated into the calendar for educational institutions’ measures. By 2020, the number of regions and cities that officially commemorated the International Holocaust Remembrance Day throughout Russia had risen to 656 and included 81 out of 85 Russian regions.

Moreover, a program for perpetuating the Holocaust victims began in the framework of the project “Return Dignity”. After 10 years of preparatory work, it resulted in the installation of about 100 monuments at spots of mass murder of Jews in about 20 Russian regions.

In 2015, the International Forum “Holocaust: 70 Years Later” was held. Different problems of the Holocaust, genocides and terror were discussed in the context of historical memory. This gave a basis for the creation in 2016 of the first International Educational and Research Center of the Holocaust and Genocides at the Russian State University for the Humanities. In 2020, the first master program on Holocaust and Genocide research in Russia was founded at this University.

The Liberators project plays an important role in preserving the memory of the Holocaust in Russia. The Holocaust Center started this project in 2015. Its ultimate goal is to establish the names and biographies of approximately twenty-five thousand soldiers, officers, doctors, journalists. Those who liberated the Auschwitz death camp on January 27, 1945, treated prisoners, or recorded the release or crimes of the Nazis in the media in real time. It was January 27 the date that the UN General Assembly chose as the International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Holocaust. But the history of the rescue of prisoners by the Red Army, not only in Auschwitz, but also during the liberation of ghettos and concentration camps in many countries, has not been specially studied.

There were about 7,000 inmates in Auschwitz itself and its branches at the time of liberation, in which number approximately 300 were Jews. No museum in the world has made a list of either the liberators or the liberated victims of the Holocaust.

Five divisions of the 1st Ukrainian Front took part in the liberation. In recent years, during the information wars between Russia, Poland and Ukraine, the question has repeatedly arisen whether the liberators were predominantly Ukrainian or Russian. Our intention is to find out the biographies of all liberators as well as the specific names of the prisoners they saved. Wherein the task is to trace the personal fates of the liberators and those liberated before and after January 27, 1945: where they came from, where they were located, what was their job after the war, and of what nationality they were. The most important part of the project is to find the documents and photographs from their family archives. This will allow us not only to preserve the personal destinies of the liberators and the liberated, but it will also help young people, schoolchildren and students, who became the main performers of the project, to get acquainted with the original documents that were preserved in the families of the liberators - letters, diaries, memoirs, interviews in newspapers.

Under the leadership of the Holocaust Center, the search is being conducted in more than 25 regions of Russia. The results found are presented at events in educational institutions for the International Holocaust Day. Project participants study existing publications, specialized Internet sites, and also they work in local museums, make inquiries to archives. Schoolchildren meet with former prisoners – I record their testimonies of the facts of release.

The project began with the training of its leaders. We have held about 20 seminars for teachers in the regions, several conferences for schoolchildren. With the support of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, we have prepared guidelines for the participants and project leaders. The documents, photographs, and memoirs found during the search were sent to the archives of the Holocaust Center. Based on the results of the search, research papers are being prepared for the International Competition “Memory of the Holocaust - the Path to Tolerance”.

From the very beginning, we decided that the traveling historical and documentary exhibition “The Holocaust: Annihilation, Liberation, Rescue”, dedicated to the role of the Red Army in saving the peoples of Europe from Nazism and the Jewish people from complete annihilation, would become a kind of “business card of the project”.¹³

A number of unique exhibits are presented at the exhibition among more than 80 documents and photos from archives and museums of several countries. Among them - a letter from the famous Italian writer Primo Levi about his release from Auschwitz, documents about the rescue of the leaders of the Jewish community in Germany.

As is well known, the world famous diary of Anne Frank was published in 1947 by her father. It is difficult to overestimate the contribution of Otto Frank to the fate of this unique document. But few people knew that Soviet doctors treated him for six months. Our exhibition contains an invaluable document: his first letter after he was able to hold a pen in his hands. It is written on a German Auschwitz letterhead, addressed to his mother in Basel, dated 23 February 1945. The first phrase of the letter: “I was saved and cured by Russians”. The question that follows is the following: did he know about the meaning of February 23rd for the Soviet Union? In the diary of Otto Frank, which he kept immediately after his release, you can find an entry: February 23 - the day of the Red Army. The exhibition in Russian was shown in the State Duma of the Russian Federation (2016) and the Federation Council of the Russian Federation (2018). It was also exhibited at the Moscow City Hall (2019) and in 20 regions of the Russian Federation (in city halls, museums, universities, regional (regional) libraries). No other exhibition about the Holocaust, including those prepared by our foreign colleagues - the Anne Frank Museum (the Netherlands), Yad Vashem, the Swedish project Living History and others – has been exhibited in Russia at the same mass scale.

We consider the display of our exhibition abroad as a case of “people's diplomacy”. Versions in 9 foreign languages (English, German, Spanish, French, Hebrew, Czech, Slovak, Polish, Hungarian) have been created. We managed to show it in 4 headquarters of international organizations (UN,

¹³ Ilya Altman. Introduction. The Holocaust: Annihilation, Liberation, Rescue. Booklet of the documentary exhibition. – Moscow, 2017, P.1-2

UNESCO, Council of Europe) and parliaments of 6 countries (Czech Republic, Israel, Argentina, Uruguay, Austria, Slovakia), as well as in the Berlin Senate. At the UN, the exhibition was opened by the Russian Foreign Minister, and the UN Secretary General visited it. All presentations were attended by heads of parliaments and ambassadors of our country. These events drew a great response in the media: several hundred publications, some published by the world's leading agencies (Associated Press) and publications in more than 30 countries.

The partnership with museums and Holocaust research centers in different countries plays a significant role in our project, for example the preparation and display of the exhibition in Budapest in cooperation with the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial. Our partners not only translated the text of the exhibition, but also supplemented it with 4 stands and several showcases with exhibits about the Holocaust in Hungary.

We have recently created a specialized website – The Liberators. It contains the guidelines for organizing the project and, most importantly, more than 500 names and destinies, personal stories, photographs of the main characters of the liberation and rescue of prisoners are also included. Biographies of several thousand liberators and prisoners have already been found, they are now being processed by the staff of the center and our partners.

We see the prospects of the project in assigning their names to the streets in the cities where the divisions liberated from Auschwitz were formed (note that there is such a street in Arkhangelsk) and memorial plaques on the houses where their commanders lived.

In 2020, more than 150,000 schoolchildren and teachers took part in the memorial and educational events dedicated to January 27. The project makes it possible to link the International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Holocaust with the regional history – a contribution to the rescue of residents of a certain settlement, region or republic. A personal approach to history is fundamental to the Holocaust Center. We are convinced that only through personal stories, the stories of a particular family, one can understand the whole tragedy of the war, the Nazi occupation regime, the Holocaust, the victories and defeats, heroism and betrayal, personal responsibility to future generations. The methodology for establishing the personality of the liberators may become the basis for such projects, dedicated to the liberation of other camps and ghettos. In my opinion, this is a model of educational projects both in Russia and in other countries, the armies of which liberated the Holocaust victims, and where the Allies liberated the inmates of ghettos and concentration camps – in Budapest, Terezin, Lodz, Buchenwald, Dachau, Mauthausen.

I would also like to raise one more issue: the topic of Jewish victims isn't always reflected and sometimes hushed up in the Russian media when covering memorial events at the International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Holocaust. On the one hand, the headlines contain the term "Holocaust", but the emphasis is often placed on all victims of Nazi crimes. The role of the allies is

rarely mentioned. Meanwhile, the liberation of the camps and ghettos is one of the most important events of the Second World War, our memory of the joint victory over Nazism.¹⁴

To sum up, Holocaust researchers in Russia face numerous problems. Many collections of documents from departmental archives (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, special services, the Presidential Archives) are only partially available to historians. As noted above, Russian academics often overlook the Holocaust, including works that concern Nazi ideology, policy and practice. Furthermore, in cases where the destruction of the Jews is mentioned, the number of victims is considerably diminished. This was the case, for example, of a book published in 2010 and edited by one of the most well-known Russian historians of the Second World War, Oleg Rzheshevski. He spoke of about 700,000 Jewish victims on the territory of the USSR.

The national Holocaust Remembrance Day still does not exist in Russia despite all the attempts of the Russian Holocaust Center and Jewish organizations to implement it based on the fact that Russia has ratified the United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/7 on 1 November 2005 about commemorating the tragedy of the Holocaust.

Unfortunately, Russia is not an IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) member. The Russian Holocaust Center's international cooperation network is an essential component of the connections forged by this organization with Russia. Further international cooperation in studying, teaching and memorializing the Holocaust is definitely needed.

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THE LEGACY OF THE HOLOCAUST IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

THE FATE OF THE BULGARIAN JEWS DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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Abstract

The basic aim of the present article is to provide a historical overview of the Bulgarian state policy towards Jews in the country during the Second World War. The paper analyzes the variety of factors that played role in this specific case - such as the positive historical legacy of Bulgarian-Jewish relations that contributed to the salvation of Bulgarian Jews but also the negative factors that led to the deportation of the Jews from the occupied and controlled by Bulgaria territories.

Key words: *Bulgarian Jews, salvation, deportation, World War II.*

INTRODUCTION: FROM BULGARIA'S LIBERATION TO THE OUTBREAK OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Russian-Turkish War of 1877-1878 brought about Bulgaria's liberation from Ottoman dominance. Around that time the biggest Jewish community in Bulgarian lands lived in Sofia - around 20,000 - constituting one fourth of the total population of the city that will become Bulgaria's capital. Bulgaria's first Constitution, the Turnovo Constitution of 1879 guaranteed the political equality of all ethnic and religious minorities living in the Bulgarian Principality. Bulgarian Jews will play an important role in the political, economic and cultural life of the country. Some of them will even become famous worldwide, like the painter Jules Paskin born in the city of Vidin, and the Nobel prize-winner in literature, Elias Canetti born in the city of Russe.² Bulgaria's Jewish community maintained excellent relations with the Bulgarian state. In 1880 Gabriel Almozino (Габриел Алмозино) was appointed Chief Rabbi, receiving a government allowance, according to the law that regulated religious and educational issues for the minorities. In 1909 the Bulgarian royal family participated in the inauguration of the new Synagogue in Sofia, the third largest and

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² Stefanov, P., "Bulgarians and Jews throughout History", in Religion in Eastern Europe, Vol. XXII, № 6, 2002, www.georgefox.edu/academics/undergrad/departments/soc-swk/ree/stefanov_baj.doc, accessed 29/10/2008.

one of the most impressive and beautiful in Europe. As loyal citizens of the Bulgarian state, the Jews participated in the wars that Bulgaria conducted for its national unification. Thus, during the Serbian-Bulgarian War of 1885 some of them reached the rank of colonel. We find names of Bulgarian Jews, soldiers and officers, in the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, as well as in the First World War; the total number of Bulgarian Jews that fell during these wars was 952³.

The Jewish community grew, albeit slowly, between the two world wars: from 43,000 or 0.9% of the total Bulgarian population, of around 4,850,000 in 1920, to 48,000 or 0.8% in a total population of 6,080,000 in 1934.⁴ Some authors even mention the number of 51,500.⁵ More than half, around 25,000 lived in Sofia, with most other Jewish communities numbering between 1,000 and 7,000. Around 90% of them were born in Bulgaria and 92% were Bulgarian citizens. The great majority of them, around 40,000, were workers, craftsmen and petty tradesmen. Only a small number were bankers and industrialists. Their involvement with commerce and business in general was not so important: around 5.17%. Their presence was more noticeable and important in the export trade and in the trade of tobacco, as well as in the medical profession and among layers.

In the middle of the 1920s, Bulgarian society as elsewhere in Europe went through a phase of radicalization: chauvinistic ideologies with strong fascist and anti-Semitic elements gained in popularity. Jews were being portrayed not only as “big capitalists” but also as the personification of the “Bolshevik evil”. Nevertheless, apart from a few sporadic, anti-Semitic incidents with religious undertones, we can hardly talk about anti-Semitism as a popular and accepted current in Bulgarian society. If in normal times Bulgarian society viewed with “indifference” its Jewish community, in times of crises it dealt with it with tolerance.

Hitler’s rise in power in Germany, in 1933, affected Bulgaria too. The growth of Germany’s political and economic influence in the Balkans contributed to the rise of anti-Semitism in Bulgaria’s political life. In the mid-1930s in Bulgaria appeared two main nationalistic, anti-Semitic political organizations: “The Union of Bulgarian National Legions” (Съюзът на българските национални легиони) and “The Fighters for the Progress of Bulgaria’s National Spirit” (Ратниците за напредък на българщината). Both organizations indulged in anti-Semitic propaganda and publicized anti-Semitic literature, copying Nazi, racist texts - however their influence on Bulgarian society remained limited. On the 20th September 1939 an attempt was made

³ Genov, R. Baeva, I. “Incomprehension of the Nature of the Race Question: Saving the Bulgarian Jews from the Holocaust”, www.stm.unipi.it/Clloh/tabs/libri/7/11-Genov-Baeva_153-176.pdf

⁴ *ibid*, p. 157

⁵ Chary, F. *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution*, Pittsburg, PA 1991, p. 58

for a repetition of the “Crystal Night” (*Kristallnacht*)⁶ in Sofia: windows of Jewish shops were broken. However, no one was physically attacked.⁷

THE SECOND WORLD WAR PERIOD

Bulgaria’s close relationship with the Third Reich, commercially and militarily, its territorial claims on neighboring states allied with Britain and France, as well as the menacing presence of the German Army on its northern borders, led the country to join the Axis Powers on the 1st March 1941.⁸ It was a decision that had almost fatal consequences for the Jewish population of Bulgaria.

Specific, anti-Semitic, official actions began to take place in Bulgaria in 1940 and were closely related with the country’s foreign policy: The introduced anti-Semitic legislation followed closely the anti-Semitic laws passed by the Nazi Party in Germany, whereas the history of the racist laws in Bulgaria reminds that of Italy. In both countries (Italy and Bulgaria, anti-Semitism was imposed from above in an effort to please Germany.⁹

The Law for the Protection of the Nation is of special importance for the anti-Jewish legislation introduced after 1939, as it essentially made anti-Semitism a state policy. The drafting of the law began in the summer of 1940, under the auspices of Tsar Boris III (цар Борис III) and Bogdan Filov’s (Богдан Филов) government. It was presented in the parliament on the 6th October of the same year. In the arguments, accompanying the law, it was asserted that “... during the times we live in, the nation needs such a defense, especially as far as the Jewish community is concerned, which as part of the international Judaism remains alien to the Bulgarian spirit, and (furthermore) threatens the national state with its cosmopolitan ties...”¹⁰

⁶ The *Kristallnacht*, 9th and 10th November 1938, was triggered by the assassination in Paris of German diplomat Ernst vom Rath by Herschel Grynszpan, a German-born Polish Jew. In a coordinated attack on Jewish people and their property 91 Jews were murdered and 25,000 to 30,000 were arrested and placed in concentration camps. 267 synagogues were destroyed, and thousands of homes and businesses were ransacked. While the assassination of Rath served as a pretext for the attacks, the *Kristallnacht* was part of a broader racial policy of Nazi Germany, including anti-Semitism and persecution of the Jews.

⁷ Поппетров, Н. Фашизмът в България. Развитие и прояви. София, 2008, р. 84-96 [Poppetrov, N. Fashizmat v Bulgaria. Razvitie i proyavi. Sofia, 2008, p. 84-96]

⁸ Калинова, Е., Баева, И. Българските преходи 1939-2005, С., 2006, р. 18-19 [Kalinova, E., Baeva, I. Balgarskite prehodi 1939-2005, S., 2006, p. 18-19]

⁹ All the researches that have worked on the issue agree that the Bulgarian society had a positive attitude towards the Jews. The anti-Semitic change of policy took place under German pressure and was the result of Bulgaria’s foreign policy orientation and the establishment of close ties with the Reich.

For more details see Барух, Н. Откупът. Цар Борис и съдбата на българските евреи. София, 1991; Бар-Зоар, М. Извън хватката на Хитлер. Героичното спасяване на българските евреи. София, 1999; Бояджиев, Хр. Спасяването на българските евреи през Втората световна война. София, 1991; Нисим, Г. Човекът, който спря Хитлер. Историята на Димитър Пешев, спасил евреите на една нация София, 1999; Калчева, Д. Холокостът в Третия райх и неговите съюзници. София, 2008; Ардити, С. Човекът, който изигра Хитлер. Цар Борис III – гонител или приятел на българските евреи. Русе, 2008 [Baruh, N. Otkupat. Tsar Boris i sadbata na balgarskite evrei. Sofia, 1991; Bar-Zoar, M. Izvan hvatkata na Hitler. Geroichnoto spasyavane na balgarskite evrei. Sofia, 1999; Boyadzhiev, Hr. Spasyavaneto na balgarskite evrei prez Vtorata svetovna vojna. Sofia, 1991; Nisim, G. Chovekat, koyto sprya Hitler. Istoriyata na Dimitar Peshev, spasil evreite na edna natsiyal Sofia, 1999; Kalcheva, D. Holokostat v Tretia rayh i negovite sayuznitsi. Sofia, 2008; Arditi, S. Chovekat, koyto izigra Hitler. Tsar Boris III – gonitel ili priyatel na balgarskite evrei. Ruse, 2008] Chary, F. The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution, Pittsburg, PA 1991

¹⁰ Йочев, Е. Законодателството в Царство България (1878-1944). Конституция, закони, мотиви, доклади, укази, наредби, наредби-закони. София, 1999, р. 598 [Yochev, E. Zakonodatelstvoto v Tsarstvo Bulgaria (1878-1944). Konstitutsia, zakoni, motivi, dokladi, ukazi, naredbi, naredbi-zakoni. Sofia, 1999]

Against the Law declared themselves various sections of the Bulgarian society, rejecting the Nazi's racist theories. The Bulgarian population had lived side by side for years with the Jews and perceived them as "part of itself", as loyal citizens of the state. In the absence of favorable to it ideological and racial conditions, the Law generated hostile reactions inside the parliament as well as outside of it. In parliament Petko Stainov (Петко Стайнов), Professor at the Faculty of Law at the University of Sofia, and an influential politician stated, "using as an excuse the defense of the nation, racism and even religious inequality is being introduced, for the first time, in our legislation... a kind of Bulgarian racism for the first time is being introduced..."¹¹ Against the discriminatory law also spoke the well-known politician and leader of the *Democratic Party* Nikola Musanov (Никола Мушанов), who declared, "Honorable representatives of the nation! I honestly tell you: Bulgarian thinking, the Bulgarian National Assembly, the common interests of this country, cannot be reconciled with the provisions of this law!"¹²

Against the Tsar, the Prime Minister and Members of Parliament (MPs) of the government came out former ministers, MPs of the opposition, academics, writers, influential citizens, the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the central Jewish religious council, intellectuals, representatives of professional associations, as well as the majority of Bulgaria's population. All of them described *Law for the Protection of the Nation* as unconstitutional, inhuman, and immoral and sided with the Jewish population.¹³

Despite the reactions against it, the government majority in the 25th National Assembly voted for the *Law for the Protection of the Nation*. On the 21st January 1941 the Law was ratified by a Royal Decree, and two days later came into force. It was an emergency law following the emergency, anti-Semitic laws that had been introduced by Nazi Germany.¹⁴ Based on the criterion of the religious identity of the citizens, the population of the country was divided into "persons of Bulgarian origin" and "persons of Jewish origin". According to the *Law for the Protection of the Nation*, anyone who "had at least one parent Jew was a Jew". Under the threat of criminal proceedings, and within a month after the Law had come into force, all Jews living in the territory of the Kingdom, irrespective of their nationality, were obliged to declare their "origin", and to register in municipal and police inventories. They were ordered to have distinctive Jewish names, as their own surnames

¹¹ *ibid*, p. 71

¹² *ibid*, p. 95

¹³ For a rich collection in documents dealing with the reactions from different social strata see: Борбата на българския народ за защита и спасяване на евреите в България през Втората световна война (Документи и материали). София, 1978, p. 17-102 [Borbata na balgarskia narod za zashchita i spasyavane na evreite v Bulgaria prez Vtorata svetovna voyna (Dokumenty i materialy). Sofia, 1978, p. 17-102]

¹⁴ Милкова, Ф. Българската държава и изключителното и законодателство в периода 1923-1944 г. София, 1991, p. 501 [Milkova, F. Balgarskata darzhava i izklyuchitelното i zakonodatelstvo v perioda 1923-1944 g. Sofia, 1991]. The structure of the law included 3 Parts. Part I "On Secret and International Organizations": Chapter A "Common Provisions", Chapter B "The Dissolution of Secret and International Organizations", Chapter C "The Liquidation of the Property of the Dissolved Secret and International Organizations". Part II "On Persons of Jewish Origin": Chapter A "On their Origin", Chapter B "Common Limitations", Chapter C "On the Residence of Persons of Jewish Origin", Chapter D "On the Property of Persons of Jewish Origin", Chapter E "On the Professional and Economic Activities of Persons of Jewish Origin". Part III "On Unpatriotic and Suspicious Activities": Chapter A "On Unpatriotic Activities", Chapter B "On Suspicious Activities". Part IV "Special Provisions". Закон за защита на нацията, Държавен вестник (ДВ), бр. 16, 1941, p. 1-5

and family names could not carry Bulgarian suffixes, -ov, -ev, -its and other, for example Davidov (ДАВИДОВ), Leviev (ЛЕВИЕВ).

The *Law for the Protection of the Nation* introduced widespread limitations in the political and civil rights of the Jewish population. According to its provisions persons of Jewish origin could not:

- acquire Bulgarian citizenship;
- elect and be elected in local elections, as well as in elections for non-profit associations and unions;
- occupy state, municipal or other public positions or to receive state assistance;
- buying out their military service.

To the Jews it was forbidden to participate in organizations under the control of the Ministry of War (Ministry of Defense); they did not have the right marrying non-Jew Bulgarian citizens, or to employ under whatever form in domestic employment persons of Bulgarian origin; their military service took place in special labour groups; in education only a limited number of Jewish children could be accepted, determined by the Minister of Education, under the precondition that no “Bulgarian children” were candidates; no Jew person had the right to change his/her address without prior police consent, and they were forbidden from settling into Sofia.

The economic sanctions introduced against the Jewish population were also quite hard. The Jews lost the right to possess, use, or rent land as well as buildings in farming communities. Although, according to the Constitution, property was an unalienable right, Jewish owners of real estate were forced “to offer” their property to the State Land Fund, sell it to Bulgarians or to associations owned by Bulgarians. The Law restricted the economic and professional activities of persons of Jewish origin. They were only allowed to be engaged in the so-called “free professions” or with industrial production and only in proportion to the total number of those who exercised the specific professional activities, as well as in proportion to the percentage of the Jewish population in the country. In trade, Jews could not own more than 505 commercial firms. All these measures were taken, under the pretext that the Bulgarian economy would be “allowed to recover”. The government had the right to limit, partially or totally, the personal or capital participation of Jews in specific trade or industrial fields or in any other economic activity and to supervise and ascertain the property status of persons of Jewish origin. Within a month after the adoption of the law, every Jewish person was obliged to inform the Bulgarian Central Bank about his/her property, thus creating the preconditions for a future confiscation of Jewish property¹⁵.

The forced “arianization” of Jewish businesses was introduced under the provisions of the *Law for the Protection of the Nation*. It was forbidden to persons of Jewish origin to be owners and shareholders under whatever form in educational institutions, theaters, cinemas, in firms producing printing material, in the production and trade of films, gramophone discs, arms and other businesses. It was forbidden to Jews to become directors, managers and to occupy other directory

¹⁵ Аврамов, Р. “Спасение “ или падение. Микроикономика на държавни антисемитизъм в България 1940-1944, С., 2012 [Аврамов, Р. “Spasenie“ ili padenie. Mikroikonomika na darzhavni antisemitizam v Bulgaria 1940-1944, S., 2012]

positions in specific businesses. Jews did not have the right to become chartered accountants, stockbrokers and members in directory boards, directors and deputy directors, commercial representatives in banks, pharmacy owners and owners of shops selling medical products. In such a way the Jewish population was deprived of its means for survival and was ostracized from the economic life of the country.

The majority of introduced limitations soon proved “inadequate” in specific fields in commerce, light and heavy industry. As a result, Prime Minister Bogdan Filov stated that the Law was too “liberal” and “weak” and introduced supplementary legislation¹⁶: under the *Law for the Settlement of Land Property for Persons of Jewish Origin* of 1941 it was foreseen that expropriated properties would be evaluated and paid in prices not higher than the 50% of their 1932 market price; under the *Law for the Taxing of Jewish Population* Jews were taxed with a lump sum corresponding from 1/5 to 1/4 of their property, in effect justifying their robbery under the pretext that they were a threat for the national economy; under a subsequent law all pharmacies of Jewish ownership were shut down; the government introduced a regulation, according to which Jews would serve their military service in special groups formed by the Ministry of Public Buildings, Roads and Works. While extra measures of administrative-police character were taken for persons of Jewish origin: they were obliged to wear yellow stars, to declare their property, bank accounts, valuable books, furniture and other; they were also forbidden from possessing cars, radios and telephones.¹⁷

In April 1941, the Bulgarian Army occupied Aegean Thrace (Беломорска Тракия) and Vardar Macedonia. The “newly added territories” were put under the control of Bulgarian administration and incorporated into the territorial-administrative organization of the Bulgarian Kingdom. Bulgarian administration, courts, police and the army moved in. Courts ruled in the name of the Tsar and the government issued a *Decree Concerning Citizenship in the Liberated Territories*, according to which Greek and Yugoslav citizens of Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian origin obtained automatically the Bulgarian citizenship. However, according to article 4, par. 2, the law did not concern persons of Jewish origin. Jews in Aegean Thrace and Macedonia were deprived of their rights of citizenship and at the same time were subjected to all the obligations, limitations, and prohibitions existing in the old borders of the Kingdom. Gradually, the anti-Jewish legislation was supplemented with a series of published and secret decrees, rules and regulations.¹⁸

In June 1942 the parliament adopted a new law, providing the government with the legislative power to adopt all those measures necessary for the “settlement” of the Jewish question. According to it, the government had the power to issue decrees and resolutions, in order “to strengthen” and make more effective the limitations already existing for persons of Jewish origin. The government

¹⁶ Неделева, П. Антиеврейското законодателство в България през Втората световна война, С., 2015; Сб. „Антиеврейското законодателство в Европа и България – правни изследвания“, Съставител: Албена Танева, автори: Б. Цеков, Здр. Кръстева, М. Манолова, П. Неделева, Е. Георгиев, А. Салуло, С., 2015 [Nedeleva, P. Antievreyskoto zakonodatelstvo v Bulgaria prez Vtorata svetovna voyna, S., 2015; Sb. „Antievreyskoto zakonodatelstvo v Evropa i Bulgaria – pravni izsledvania“, Sastavitel: Albena Taneva, avtori: B. Tsekov, Zdr. Krasteva, M. Manolova, P. Nedeleva, E. Georgiev, A. Salupo, S., 2015]

¹⁷ Токушев, Д. История на новобългарската държава и право 1878-1944. София, 2006, р. 369-370

¹⁸ ibid, p. 370-371 [Tokushev, D. Istoria na novata balgarskata darzhava i pravo 1878-1944. Sofia, 2006, p. 369-370]

was authorized to change and supplement laws already adopted by parliament, in practice substituting legislative power. Government decrees were confidential, were not published and no public scrutiny over them existed.¹⁹

Under a government decree, a *Commissariat for Jewish Affairs* (*Комисариатство по еврейските въпроси*) was established on the 29th August 1942 in the Ministry of the Interior and People's Health, having as its task the organization of the deportation of the Jews and the liquidation of their properties. Orders and rules issued by it were not subject to any kind of public scrutiny. Staff working for the committee increased gradually to 113 persons and at its head was appointed by the government, a 42 year-old legal expert, Alexander Belev (Александър Белев), who displayed a persistent and fanatic anti-Semitism.²⁰

At the beginning of 1942 during the Wannsee conference, the Nazis decided to pursue a policy of genocide against the Jews²¹; not only against those Jews living in the territory of the Reich and in the occupied countries, but also in the countries that were allied to the Germans. This decision also concerned the 48,000 Bulgarian Jews. On 24 September 1942 the head of the Department concerning the Jews in the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dispatched an internal memo to the General Secretary of the Ministry, communicating to him Ribbentrop's order to get in touch with the governments of Denmark, Hungary and Bulgaria for a definite solution of the question of the Jews' deportation. On the 14th October 1942 the German diplomatic mission in Sofia received an order to begin negotiations with the Bulgarian government; in a secret telegram to the deputy General Secretary of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Martin Luther, sent by the German Ambassador in Sofia, Adolf-Heinz Beckerle on the 15th October 1942, the financial aspect of the issue is being discussed: "for the sake of a proper settlement of the property issues, we propose, based on article 11, to take away the citizenship from all Jews that would be expelled. Having in mind the fact that Bulgaria would obtain the Jewish property, and in advance of the significant expenses that the Reich will have to shoulder, we propose the payment of a sum of money, which initially could number around 250 Reichsmark per person".²² Beckerle sought to meet Prime Minister Bogdan Filov. On the 2nd of November 1942 Beckerle dispatched a telegram to Berlin, informing his superiors about the outcome of his meeting: from the telegram it becomes clear that the Bulgarian government approached the whole issue, i.e. the deportation of the Jews, with cautiousness and procrastination. It's an assessment that is confirmed by a further German report of the 16th of November.²³

¹⁹ Оцеляването. Сборник от документи 1940-1944. София, 1995, р. 184-184 [Otselyavaneto. Sbornik ot dokumenti 1940-1944. Sofia, 1995, p. 184]

²⁰ Бар-Зоар, М. Извън хватката на Хитлер. Героичното спасяване на българските евреи. София, 1999, р. 65 [Bar-Zoar, M. Izvan hvatkata na Hitler. Geroichnoto spasyavane na balgarskite evrei. Sofia, 1999]

²¹ The so-called "final solution to the Jewish problem".

²² България – своенравният съюзник на Третия райх. Съставители: Тошкова, В., Котев, Н., Стоименов, Н., Николов, Р., Нойков, Ст. София, 1992, р. 89 [Bulgaria – svoenravniyat sayuznik na Tretia rayh. Sastaviteli: Toshkova, V., Kotev, N., Stoimenov, N., Nikolov, R., Noikov, St. Sofia, 1992]

²³ Бояджиев, Хр. Спасяването на българските евреи през Втората световна война. София, 1991, р. 43 [Boyadzhiev, Hr. Spasyavaneto na balgarskite evrei prez Vtorata svetovna voyna. Sofia, 1991]

At the beginning of 1943 Germany began to exercise strong pressure on the Bulgarian government concerning the deportation of the Jews. On the 22nd of February, SS Hauptsturmführer, Theodor Dannecker and the head of the *Committee on Jewish Issues*, Alexander Belev, concluded an “agreement for the deportation, at an initial stage, of 20,000 Jews (from the new Bulgarian territories of Thrace and Macedonia) to the German eastern territories”.²⁴ The agreement referred exclusively to the Jews from Thrace and Macedonia, Belev however forged the agreement, by writing off the words Thrace and Macedonia from the agreement. In such a way the agreement became valid for the whole territory of Bulgaria.

On the 2nd March 1943, with Decree № 127 the government approved the agreement, specifying at the same time that it was valid only for the Jews living in Thrace and in Macedonia. To avoid any public protests, the agreement was not published in the State Journal; thus the Bulgarian society “was kept in the dark” about the scheduled deportation.

In March 1943 the Bulgarian administrative and police forces deported 11 362 Jews - 7165 from Vardar Macedonia, 4039 from Aegean Thrace, 158 from Pirot. They were sent to the concentration camp in Treblinka where less than 300 of them survived.²⁵ In a secret report of the German Consul General in Skopje Vitte to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 18 March 1943, we read the following: “The deportation took place without troubles on the part of the Jews... While the majority of the Macedonian population, without exception, welcomed the deportation, declaring with joy that following the deportation they can find in the market all sorts of products, mainly milk, seed-oil, eggs and meat, and all these in prices lower than 50% than previously existed... It is a welcoming fact, that following the removal of the Jews the biggest part of the population has (finally) understood what kind of a burden the Jews were representing. First of all, (the Macedonian population) has observed that in the food market an end has been put to the robbery...²⁶. The authorities viewed the deportation of the Jews from Thrace and Macedonia as the beginning of the deportation of all Jews from the territory of Bulgaria, the fate of whom was now on the agenda.

However, it did not happen. The result of these two policies on the Jewish question - persecution as an official policy and protection (as a cause advocated by many different groups and individual citizens), led to different results - the Jews in the borders of the old Kingdom escaped from the scheduled deportation in March 1943 but the Jews from the “new-added” territories were sent to the death camps²⁷. The people who raised their voice in defense of the Jews belonged to the full spectrum of Bulgaria’s political life, from the left to the supporters of the nationalist far-right. Among the first ones who already in 1940 and in the years after, supported the Jews were the *Union*

²⁴ Оцеляването. Сборник от документи 1940-1944. София, 1995, p. 204-205 [Otselyavaneto. Sbornik ot dokumenti 1940-1944. Sofia, 1995, p. 184]

²⁵ Калчева, Д. Холокостът в Третия Райх и неговите съюзници. София, 2008, p. 117 [Kalcheva, D. Holokostat v Tretia Rayh i negovite sayuznitsi. Sofia, 2008]

²⁶ България – своенравният... p. 121-123 [Bulgaria – svoenravniyat sayuznik na Tretia rayh. Sastaviteli: Toshkova, V., Kotev, N., Stoimenov, N., Nikolov, R., Noikov, St. Sofia, 1992]

²⁷ Albena Taneva, The Rescue of the Jews in Bulgaria: An Old Theme in a New Political Science Interpretation. The Power of Civil Society in a Time of Genocide: Proceedings of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church on the Rescue of the Jews in Bulgaria 1940-1944, Sofia University Press St. Kliment Ohridski, 2005, in p. 23-25

of *Bulgarian Writers*, the *Union of Bulgarian Lawyers*, and the *Union of Bulgarian Doctors*. In defense of the Jews spoke a series of Bulgarian writers, among them Todor Vlaikov (Тодор Влайков), Elin Pelin (Елин Пелин), Stoian Tsiligirov (Стоян Чилингиров), Mladev Isaev (Младен Исаев), Anna Kamenova (Ана Каменова), Elisaveta Bagriana (Елисавета Багряна) and others. In a speech in favour of the Jews poet Emmanouil Popdimitrov (Емануил Попдимитров) declared: “Now the whole Jewish community of Germany is heart-broken from the threat, no... it is heart-broken from the hard measures of merciless persecution... To the Jews they have taken away the right to participate in culture... Their soul, their thinking and the highest deposits of Jewish communal culture have been hit hard. This however could become a beginning not only in Germany but elsewhere, and not only for the Jews, but for other nations as well; this is where this danger can lead us to”.²⁸

The writers protest was endorsed and supported by eminent artists, musicians, journalists, businessmen, Members of Parliament and politicians. Especially commendable was the position adopted by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, its leaders and above all by the Bishops Stefan of Sofia (Стефан Софийски) and Kiril of Plovdiv (Кирил Пловдивски). Through baptisms, statements and meetings with Tsar Boris III and other initiatives, the highest clergy exercised pressure on the government and acted for the salvation of the Bulgarian Jews.

Actions for opposing the plan for deportation of the Jews within old boundaries of Bulgaria began in the city of Kyustendil.²⁹ According to the Bulgarian-German agreement signed, the local Jews had been prepared for deportation and gathered in the local tobacco warehouse “Fernandez”. As news spread on their scheduled deportation, local Bulgarian friends took actions: delegation composed of four distinguished inhabitants of Kyustendil - Assen Sountsmezov (Асен Суичмезов), Petar Mihailev (Петър Михалев), Ivan Momtsilov (Иван Момчилов) and Vladimir Kurtev (Владимир Куртев) – left for Sofia seeking to cancel the scheduled deportation. The delegation met with the Vice-President of the National Assembly, Dimitar Peshev (Димитър Пешев), also born in Kyustendil.

Worried from the indignation felt by the Bulgarian society, the insistence of their supporters, as well as by the threat of questions in the parliament, the government retreated and on 9 March 1943 issued an order, cancelling the deportation of the Jewish population from Kyustendil. On 17 March 43 MPs of the 25th National Assembly, among them Dimitar Peshev, sent a protest letter to Prime Minister Bogdan Filov, against the scheduled deportation of Bulgarian Jews to Poland.³⁰ In a closed-door session of the parliament, on 24 March, Peshev was removed from his place, while two

²⁸ Калчева, Д. Българската общественост срещу Закона за защита на нацията. Реч на Емануил Попдимитров в защита на еврейското малцинство. В: Университетски четения и изследвания по българска история. IV международен семинар, Смолян, 11-13 май 2006, р. 544 [Kalcheva, D. Balgarskata obshtestvenost sreshtu Zakona za zashtita na natsiyata. Rech na Emanuil Popdimitrov v zashtita na evreyskoto maltsinstvo. V: Universitetski chetenia i izsledvania po balgarska istoria. IV mezhdunaroden seminar, Smolyan, 2006]

²⁹ Бар-Зоар, М. Цит. Съч, р. 107 [Bar-Zoar, M. Izvan hvatkata na Hitler. Geroichnoto spasyavane na balgarskite evrei. Sofia, 1999]

³⁰ Борбата на българския народ..., № 103, р. 167-169 [Borbata na balgarskia narod za zashtita i spasyavane na evreite v Bulgaria prez Vtorata svetovna vojna (Dokumenti i materiali). Sofia, 1978]

days later a vote of censure against Peshev became “accepted without debate, in great noise and protests on the part of the opposition and Peshev’s friends”.³¹

Completely different were the reactions of the Tsar and his Prime Minister. As a committed anti-Semitic, Bogdan Filov was outraged and on 19 March wrote in his diary: “this is a big protest that will not remain without consequences. Now I can really see how big influence the Jews have and how much harmful they are”.³² On the other hand, Tsar Boris III made a radical turn in his policy. Peshev’s initiative in combination to the position of the Church and of the intellectual elite “shook” the Tsar: he realized clearly that the whole of the Bulgarian society, even some of his most loyal supporters could not accept such a behavior towards the Jews. From that moment on the Tsar could not procrastinate anymore, manoeuvring in an effort to gain time, as he had done until then. He had to choose; either to expel the Jews or to refuse coming into confrontation with the Germans.

Following Kyustendil, another effort developed to save the Jews in the city of Plovdiv. In the night of 9th to 10th March 1943 around 1,500 to 1,600 Jews were arrested in the city and imprisoned in a big school building, where they were waiting deportation to Poland. The Bishop of Plovdiv, Kiril, a declared enemy of the anti-Semitic policy of the government, sent a telegram to Tsar Boris III, pleading with him to show compassion to the Jews. He also came into touch with the police director’s assistant in Plovdiv, insisting that the police should contact the government and obtain an order for the release of the detained Jews. Bishop Kiril went to the school where the Jews were kept and declared that he was ready to share their fate, “where ever they would send them”.³³ The actions of one of the most eminent leaders of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church troubled deeply the government, as they illustrated the extent of the discontent and indignation the country felt from the followed anti-Semitic policy.

During his next meeting with Hitler and Ribbentrop at Berhstetang, on 1 April 1943, Boris III underlined that he had agreed on the deportation of the Jews but only from Macedonia and Thrace. Among the Jewish population of Bulgaria, he wanted to expel only a small number, “Bolshevik-Communist elements”, and the rest, around 25,000, was thinking of gathering in labour camps in the country, as they were needed in the construction of roads.³⁴ Using this pretext the Tsar sought to avoid the deportation of the Jews. His intentions did not remain secret from the Germans. In documents of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs we read the following: “The practical result by the use of Jews in the construction of roads and railway lines in Bulgaria until today is particularly insignificant. For example, in the area of Stara Zagora they mobilized around 2,000 Jews, who in the presence of untrained and poor supervisors work for only a few hours every day

³¹ Филов, Б. Дневник (под общата редакция на проф. Илчо Димитров). София, 1990, р. 529 [Filov, B. Dnevnik (pod obshtata redaktsia na prof. Ilcho Dimitrov). Sofia, 1990]

³² *ibid*, p. 526

³³ Калчева, Д. Холокостът на Балканите..., р. 120 [Kalcheva, D. Holokostat v Tretia Rayh i negovite sayuznitsi. Sofia, 2008]

³⁴ Оцеляването..., р. 234 [Otselyavaneto. Sbornik ot dokumenti 1940-1944. Sofia, 1995, p. 184]

and live in comfort... We must conclude that the Bulgarian government is obviously using the labour battalions basically as a pretext against our wish for a deportation".³⁵

On the 3rd April 1943 the Section "Deutschland" at the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, prepared a memo, concerning the progress of the Jewish question in Bulgaria. In the document we read: "As in these instances concerning deportation, like in others as well, one can see that the orders for the Jewish question in Bulgaria, which by themselves are quite strict, are being loosely implemented and sometimes even pushed aside, because practically there is no understanding of the importance of the Jewish threat and because the Jews nevertheless remain in a position to exercise influence even on high-ranking officials. For example, in certain cases, at the last minute were excluded from deportation some intellectuals and more specifically doctors. Typical is the example with the transit of Jewish children from Romania to Palestine.³⁶ Once the German diplomatic mission in Sofia learned about the planned transit it attempted to foil it. From the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs they were given assurances that such a transit would never be allowed to take place and no visa permits would be issued (to the Jewish children). Nevertheless, following instructions from Sofia, the Bulgarian diplomatic mission in Bucharest issued the necessary visa permits. We have information concerning deportation of Jews from Bulgaria to Palestine and about its preparation. There are rumors that George Earle³⁷ has been involved in a similar transfer of Jews".³⁸ Another secret report of the German diplomatic mission in Sofia to Berlin, on 5th April 1943, gives testimony to the non-implementation of the obligations, the Bulgarian government had undertaken in relation to the Jewish question: "In order to understand properly the attitude of the Bulgarian government, one should have in mind that in Bulgaria no Jewish question exists in the way that it exists in the Reich. Indeed, there are also Jews here that have reached leading positions in the Bulgarian economy. They however are particular cases. In this country (Bulgaria) the ideological and racial preconditions are missing, in order to present the (final) solution of the Jewish question to the Bulgarian people as an urgent necessity, as is the case in the Reich. With the deportation of the Jews, the Bulgarian government is seeking above anything else material benefits, as the intention to give property belonging to the Jews to friendly Bulgarians, satisfying the latter and at the same time to replace the troublesome Jews in the new Bulgarian territories with Bulgarians. There is no doubt that the Bulgarian government is ready to expel the Jews living in the territory of old Bulgaria. It is behaving however in a particular way in the Jewish question in order to avoid attacks by the international press. Only in this way we can explain the readiness of the

³⁵ България – своенравният съюзник..., p. 135 [Bulgaria – svoenravnnyat sayuznik na Tretia rayh. Sastaviteli: Toshkova, V., Kotev, N., Stoimenov, N., Nikolov, R., Noykov, St. Sofia, 1992]

³⁶ For the transfer of Bulgarian Jews to Palestine see Шалтиел, Шл. От Отечество към Родина. Емиграция и нелегална имиграция към Палестина от България и през България в годините 1939-1949, Тел Авив, 2004 [Shaltiel, Shl. Ot Otechestvo kam Rodina. Emigratsia i nelegalna imigratsia kam Palestina ot Bulgaria i prez Bulgaria v godinite 1939-1949, Tel Aviv, 2004]

³⁷ Former American Ambassador in Bulgaria

³⁸ България-своенравният съюзник... p. 127-128 [Bulgaria – svoenravnnyat sayuznik na Tretia rayh. Sastaviteli: Toshkova, V., Kotev, N., Stoimenov, N., Nikolov, R., Noykov, St. Sofia, 1992]

Bulgarian government, as expressed to the Swiss Ambassador, to allow thousand Jewish children to live for Palestine”.³⁹

The deportation of Jews from the big cities and their concentration into labour camps began on the 24th May 1943. Eminent politician Stoicho Moshanov (Стойчо Мошанов) and Professor Petko Stainov (Петко Стайнов) protested strongly, however Prime Minister Bogdan Filov refused to stop the deportation. Nevertheless, both of them wrote a letter to the Tsar asking again for a termination of the deportation.⁴⁰

Bulgarian Jews themselves resisted the scheduled deportation and undertook a series of actions. During the celebrations in the name-day of the Slav Illuminators, St Kiril and Metodi, on the 24th of May, a group of around thousand Jews organised a protest meeting in Sofia against the government plan for their deportation. Their brave action found the support of many Bulgarians, and above all of the Bishop of Sofia Stefan who during the liturgy, conducted in honor of the two saints, he anathematized power for the attempted deportation. On the same day Bulgaria's spiritual leader intervened with the Prime Minister on behalf of the Jews, while he also spoke with the head of the Tsar's Chancellery Pavel Gruev (Павел Грueв), seeking to communicate with the Tsar.⁴¹ Boris III was outside Sofia, however having received criticism from many sides on the Jewish question, he had already decided to exile the Jews only in the countryside. The forced eviction of the Sofia Jews began on the 26th of May and until the 7th of June 19,153 of them had been removed from the capital. In the countryside they were received in houses of local Jews or were settled in empty houses where their living conditions were difficult, however their physical survival was guaranteed. The decision for the deportation of the Bulgarian Jews to Poland remained, without however being implemented.

On the 28th August 1943, only two weeks following his meeting with Hitler in Germany, the Bulgarian Tsar, Boris III died. So ceased to exist the most important personality of Bulgaria's political scene, while his death to a certain extent contributed to the salvation of the Jews, as German pressure on the Bulgarian government on the issue weakened. Three days following the death of Boris, in the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs they were convinced that the Bulgarian government would reject any German action, even if it was accompanied by strong pressure. The German diplomatic mission in Sofia believed that “not only there are no chances of success, but would even be politically risky to undertake any initiatives on the Jewish question”.⁴² On the 2nd October 1943 Foreign Minister Dotso Hristov (Дочо Христов) summarized as following his government's position on the Jewish question: “We will not deport anymore Jews. They will remain

³⁹ *ibid*, p. 130-131.

⁴⁰ Димитров, И. Буржоазната опозиция в България 1939-1944 г. София, 1997, p. 76-77 [Dimitrov, I. Burzhoaznata opozitsia v Bulgaria 1939-1944 g. Sofia, 1997]

⁴¹ Борбата на българския народ..., № 105, p. 169-170 [Borbata na balgarskia narod za zashtita i spasyavane na evreite v Bulgaria prez Vtorata svetovna voyna (Dokumenti i materialii). Sofia, 1978]

⁴² *ibid*, № 147, p. 240-241

where ever they are. They will be assisted discreetly, in the sense of not burdening the state and the population”.⁴³

The consequences of the anti-Semitic legislation began to be annulled with the *31st of August 1944 Decree for the Change and Supplementation of Law for the Protection of the Nation* issued by the government of Ivan Vagrianov (Иван Багрянов). The new decree restored the rights and freedoms of the Jewish population. The next government of Konstantin Muraviev (Констатин Муравиев) issued an amnesty for all violations committed against 33H and the law for the imposition of a lump-sum tax to the Jewish population. The complete annulment of all the legal and executive measures taken against the Jews, took place with the *Decree-Law for the Settlement of Property Issues and the Annulment of the Anti-Jewish Laws* issued by the government of the fatherland Front of Kimon Georgiev (Кимон Георгиев) following the 9th of September 1944.⁴⁴

History's judgment for the policy Bulgaria followed towards the Jews varies. On the one hand, the deportation of Jews from Thrace and Macedonia did not stop and they perished in the concentration camp in Treblinka. On the other, Jews within the limits of the old Kingdom of Bulgaria were saved, despite the preparations for their deportation. Historians are not in unison on another issue as well: on who deserves praise for the salvation of Bulgarian Jews; the Palace, certain representatives of the Bulgarian elite or the whole nation? Examining the actions of the authorities and the main factors which led to the salvation of the Jews, we can conclude that until 9 March 1943, Tsar Boris III, willingly or unwillingly, was following a policy against the Jews, with main elements the adoption of the *Law for the Defense of the Nation*, the establishment of the *Committee on Jewish Issues* and the agreement Belev-Dannecker. After the 9th of March, the Tsar changed abruptly his policy and until his death he defended his position, rejecting the plans existing for deportation in May (1943). Boris III actions, during March and May, were greatly influenced by the steady position of the Vice-President of the National Assembly, Dimitar Peshev, the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the firm position of the Bishops Stefan and Kiril, a large part of the Bulgarian political and cultural elite, as well as the resistance meted out to the anti-Semitic policy by a significant part of the Bulgarian society. Although ambivalent, the role of the Tsar Boris III at certain moments was positive as he was the main political factor in the country. The major factor of the salvation however is the active involvement and reaction of the majority of the Bulgarian society, which felt anti-Semitism as something alien to it. The words of the German Ambassador in Sofia, Adolf-Heinz Beckerle, provide the best support to the above argument: “Bulgarian society does not understand the real meaning of the Jewish question. Next to the few rich Jews there are many poor, workers and craftsmen. Having grown up with Greeks, Turks and Roma, an ordinary Bulgarian does not understand the meaning of the struggle against Judaism, even more, that the racial question from its nature is incomprehensible to him”⁴⁵.

⁴³ *ibid*, № 148, p. 241

⁴⁴ Държавен вестник, бр. 227 of 16th October 1944. With article 2 of the Decree-Law all laws that had been issued in relation to the Jewish question were annulled, among them the Law for the Defense of the Nation, and the Law for the Imposition of a Lump-Sum Tax to Persons of Jewish Origin.

⁴⁵ България – своенравният съюзник..., p. 112

These values of tolerance and empathy most of the Bulgarian society showed during these difficult times are the fundament on which we should build today a shield against Antisemitism, xenophobia, hate speech and all kind of unhuman ideologies.

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LOOTED JUDAICA AND EUROPEAN CULTURAL HISTORICAL HERITAGE

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Abstract

During the Holocaust, the physical persecution of the Jews in Europe was conducted along with a series of policies aimed at the appropriation of Jewish religious art as well as objects related to the Jewish cultural heritage. These objects are known as Judaica and their systematic appropriation by the Nazi regime, in Germany and throughout Europe, is referred to as “the looting of Judaica”. The paper examines the relation between these objects and the European cultural historical heritage while discussing potential paths of interdisciplinary study of the looted Judaica.

Keywords: Judaica, religious art, looting, spoliation, anti-Semitism, cultural historical heritage.

During the Holocaust, the physical persecution of the Jews in Europe was conducted along with a series of policies aimed at the appropriation of Jewish religious art as well as objects related to the Jewish cultural heritage. These objects are known as Judaica (from Latin, *Judaica*, pl. subst., meaning “Jewish objects”) and their systematic appropriation by the Nazi regime, in Germany and throughout Europe, is referred to as “the looting of Judaica”. In the aftermath of World War II, looted Judaica became a subject of study *per se*, as organizations compiled inventories in the effort of identifying, describing and restoring the plundered objects. In addition to this direction of research, modern studies have also examined the problematics of looted Judaica in a broader context and, more precisely, in relation to the concept of Nazi looted art. Plundered Judaica were, in fact, a part of a larger group of artifacts, that did not necessarily belong to Jewish individuals or institutions but were nevertheless appropriated by the Nazi regime. Taking into consideration these areas of research, this paper aims to extend the reflection on the looting of Judaica in the context of the study of European cultural historical heritage. Modern research in the field of religion, art and history has shown that Judaica were an important part of the cultural heritage of Jews in Europe since Antiquity. Jewish religious art and writings are also closely related to European and Christian cultural heritage. Thus, it is legitimate to investigate the looting of Judaica in the context of European cultural historical heritage and to look into potential areas of study in the realm of the humanities and the social sciences.

In order to do so, we shall 1) define the concept of Judaica and the various objects that fall into this category, while also examining some of its relations with the European cultural historic heritage (Looted Judaica as an object of study) before discussing 2) potential paths of interdisciplinary study

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in the areas of the humanities and the social sciences (Studying the looting of Judaica: anti-Semitism, memory and symbolism).

LOOTED JUDAICA AS AN OBJECT OF STUDY

The term “Judaica” applies to Jewish books and ritual objects relating to the practice of Judaism (Claims Conference 2016: 8)². More broadly, Judaica are defined as “historical and literary materials relating to Judaism. Included are not only objects that carry a quality of holiness (*tashmishey kedusha*) or that are essential to the performance of a particular ritual or commandment (*tashmishey mitzvah*), but also those that have no intrinsic quality that can be defined as sacred or holy” (*Ibid.*). These include the Torah scroll, curtain and cases, as well as a number of other of objects, “not only other handwritten Biblical texts (such as the Scroll of Esther) but also printed Bibles, prayer books, volumes of the Talmud, law codes, and commentaries, and not only in Hebrew but in other languages as well” (*Ibid.*). Under the Nazi regime, plundering of Judaica affected synagogues as well as property of individuals or families; such actions were carried out within the Reich as well as in occupied territories or within allied countries.

An important part of the practice of Judaism, Judaica are related to Jewish culture and collective memory. As such, since the 1940s, the looted Judaica are the subject of efforts aimed at creating a comprehensive catalogue of plundered objects and their restoration. The Claims Conference, through its dedicated website, maintains information on National and International Organizations handling looted art and Judaica, as well as Research Databases and References on the subject³. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) diffuses relevant information on events related to the Nazi looted art via its website⁴. The Central Registry of Information on Looted Cultural Property 1933-1945 offers Information and Object Databases covering cultural property and Judaica⁵. In a similar manner, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has established a bibliography and a list of resources destined to outline essential topics in research on looted Judaica⁶. In addition to studies and catalogues specifically centered on Judaica, Jewish religious objects and texts plundered during World War II are examined as a part of the Nazi looting of art in Europe. The Oxford Bibliographies provide an essential introductory article on the subject (Petropoulos, Sage, 2021)⁷. In recent years, academic courses as well as interdisciplinary lectures have focused on the problematics of restitution of plundered art and Judaica with regard to their legal aspects, art and history⁸.

² <https://art.claimscon.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Descriptive-Catalogue-of-Looted-Judaica-3-February-2016.pdf>

³ <https://art.claimscon.org>

⁴ <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/>

⁵ <https://www.lootedart.com/home>

⁶ <https://www.ushmm.org/collections/bibliography/looted-art>

⁷ <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199920105/obo-9780199920105-0161.xml>

⁸ Among the recent courses on the subject are “Nazi-Looted Art: Law and Provenance Research”, Tel Aviv University (2021-2022); “Looted Art: An Introduction to Nazi Spoliation, Provenance Research and Restitution”, The Courtauld (2021); “Nazi Art Theft and the Question of Restitution”, University of Amsterdam; “Looted Art and Restitution: History, Theory and Policy”, Leiden University (2018-2019); “Mapping the Recovery of Nazi-Looted Artworks”, Pratt; “The Nazi Plunder of European Art: The History and Cultural Legacy”, The Smithsonian (2015).

As a subject of study, looted Judaica should also be considered in the light of the significance of the religious objects for the Jewish communities and for the European cultural historical heritage. For the purpose of the present paper, let us limit the scope of these considerations to the Torah scroll and religious writings. As an essential element of the practice of Judaism, the Torah scroll has a continuing presence in synagogues, probably since the origins of this type of religious site. The presence of Torah scrolls in ancient synagogues can be traced back with certitude to the sites containing an *aedicula* (niche or shrine), an architectural element serving as a place for the scroll. Such an architectural element was found, for instance, in the Delos synagogue, dated back to the period before the 1st century AD (Levine, 2005: 107-108). Moreover, during Antiquity, Torah scrolls could have enjoyed a special status not only among those practicing Judaism but also among the Romans who had sufficient knowledge on Jewish culture (*Ibid.*, 147).

Silver Torah case made by the Hadad Brothers, Israel



Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SilverTorahCase.jpg>

Religious art related to the decoration of the scroll, such as the crown, *atarah*, was used in Europe at least since the 13th century (Roth, 1961: 315). During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Jewish families in Europe also commissioned copies of the Torah for their homes, along with decorated arks used to hold and protect the scrolls (*Ibid.*, 348). These examples may serve to retrace the presence of Jewish communities in Europe since at least before the 1st century AD but they attest also the importance of religious art for the communities and the families. Since ancient times, Judaica were, therefore, adorned and belonged to the category of European tangible cultural heritage, along with similar objects used in other religions.

Furthermore, religious writings of the Jewish communities were sometimes decorated in a manner inspired by the Islamic or Christian traditions. In Europe, illumination (decoration) of the Torah scrolls and other religious writings could use techniques similar to those that could be seen in Christian manuscripts. Indeed, the rabbinic tradition seemed to have allowed decoration of religious writings, considering it as a way of celebrating God. Thus, as early as the Middle Ages, Jewish illuminated manuscripts in Europe adopted representations of a number of Biblical scenes following the artistic conventions of the specific regions where they were created (*Ibid.*, 381s.). As in the field of the architecture of the synagogues through the continent, this trend should be outlined since it highlights the interaction between Jewish and Christian communities. In addition, it also demonstrates the importance of this type of Judaica for the study of such interactions.

Looted Judaica belong to various geographical areas and historical periods while, for some objects, information on their origins and date of creation is difficult to establish. While the examples seen above could illustrate some general conclusions on their importance in the context of European cultural historical heritage, these conclusions could certainly be supplemented throughout case studies of individual objects or thematic collections of Judaica. Such studies could hence contribute to the better understanding of various aspects of the European culture while also providing a more detailed image of the Nazi looting and its consequences.

STUDYING THE LOOTING OF JUDAICA: ANTI-SEMITISM, MEMORY AND SYMBOLISM

Since Jewish religious art was such an essential aspect of the practice of Judaism, what was the relation between anti-Semitism and Judaica? And how does this relation affect European cultural heritage? The following section examines the subject of anti-Semitism and Judaica with regard to the protection of memory.

ANTI-SEMITISM, JUDAICA AND PROTECTION OF MEMORY

The looting of Judaica is deeply connected with the problematics of anti-Semitism. This connection is important for the better understanding of the process that led to the Nazi plundering as a part of the systematic persecution of the Jews in Europe.

During the period 1933-1944, Nazi politics of anti-Semitism was directly related with the process of appropriation of Jewish religious art known as the looting of Judaica. The Reich implemented anti-Jewish laws, thus facilitating the confiscation of property from Jewish individuals, families and synagogues. This legislation was directly or indirectly related to property; in both cases, it allowed the confiscation of Judaica by the regime. The following is a brief overview of some of the important legal acts from this period based on the Descriptive Catalogue of Looted Judaica of the Claims Conference (Claims Conference 2016: 9-11).

The 1938 Decree on the Registration of Jewish Property (*Verordnung über die Anmeldung des Vermögens von Juden*) imposed an obligation on all Jews to register their property if they were in possession of more than 5000 Reichsmarks worth of assets. Property registration was imposed also

on those wishing to emigrate and to those subject to deportation. During this period, similar acts were passed also in allied countries (*Ibid.*, n. 10, p. 10). The Law on the Confiscation of Products of Degenerate Art (*Gesetz über Einziehung von Erzeugnissen entarteter Kunst*), passed shortly after, allowed the confiscation of property qualified as “degenerate art” from museums or public collections without compensation from the government. During the same year, two separate decrees, the Decree for the Elimination of Jews from German Economic Life (*Verordnung zur Ausschaltung der Juden aus dem deutschen Wirtschaftsleben*) and the Decree on the Utilization of Jewish Property (*Verordnung über den Einsatz des jüdischen Vermögens*) aimed at excluding the Jews from the economic life of the Reich.

During the 1940s, several additional Decrees related to the treatment of property were passed starting with The Decree on The Treatment of Enemy Property (*Verordnung über die Behandlung feindlichen Vermögens*) in the beginning of 1940. This decree, along with three supplemental orders, established two categories of property: the first, was “enemy property”, the second “under decisive influence of enemies” of the Reich. As a consequence of this act, transfer of property was impossible except by an appointed Administrator. This was followed, in 1941, by another decree by the Führer and the Reichskanzler (*Erlaß des Führers und Reichskanzlers über die Verwertung des eingezogenen Vermögens von Reichsfeinden*) allowing the legal confiscation of property from the enemies of the Reich. Additionally, a Decree relative to the Reich Citizenship Law (*Elfte Verordnung zum Reichsbürgergesetz*) allowed the confiscation of property from German Jews who were deported. The same act deprived German Jews living abroad from their nationality. Finally, in 1943, The Thirteenth Decree to the Reich Citizenship Law (*Dreizehnte Verordnung zum Reichsbürgergesetz*), related to the Citizenship Law pronounced the Reich as the heir to all property of deceased Jews (*Ibid.* 10-11).

This plethora of laws had a clearly anti-Semitic character, as indicated by the measures directly aiming the Jewish population, within the Reich and beyond its borders. As a result of this legislation, the confiscation of Jewish property, including Judaica, was made legal. Looting of art and religious objects became easier, too, as the government was exempt from the obligation to offer compensations and could freely dispose of property regarded as “enemy” or of the belongings of Jews that had fled or were deceased. Application of these acts with regard to religious and other types of property went parallel with the destruction of Jewish buildings such as synagogues. Together, these measures lead to the destruction of tangible heritage, loss and displacement of religious objects, among others. As a result, a number of looted Judaica remain unidentified to this day.

The policy of confiscation of belongings from the enemies of the Reich that was carried out thanks to this legislation could be replaced in the context of the Nazi ideology of the origins of the German nation. The latter maintained, among others, that all culture and civilization come from the North (Chapoutot, 2012: chap. “L’Aryen, “Prométhée de l’humanité”) and, in consequence, opposed directly the idea of the existence of eastern civilizations and their cultural achievements. The looting of Judaica thus corroborated the Nazi approach to history and reinforced its readings of the

interactions between cultures in Europe. The problematics of looted Judaica appear, consequently, as being related to anti-Semitism as well as to the specific interpretation of history forged by the regime. An in-depth study of the problematics at hand is likely to establish a clearer definition of this relationship and to contribute to the preservation of memory.

LOOTING AND SPOLIATION AS A SYMBOLIC ACT

Modern studies typically designate the act of confiscation of Judaica by the term looting, i.e. “to plunder or sack in war, to rob especially on a large scale and usually by violence or corruption” (Meriam Webster, *s.v.* loot). The term is also applied to the appropriation of a number of objects of art not belonging to Jews and operated by the Nazi regime. A relatively rarely used synonym of looting is the term spoliation⁹. The latter is derived from Latin and is used especially in the context of enemy plunder during wartime. Throughout Jewish and European history, looting and spoliation have a very symbolic meaning. It is worthwhile looking at this symbolic meaning since it allows to further contextualize the looting of Judaica in the context of European cultural historical heritage. Beginning with Jewish history, the act of spoliation is probably best visually illustrated by the monument known as the Arch of Titus.

Fragment of the Arch of Titus, Rome



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Carrying_off_the_Menorah_from_the_Temple_in_Jerusalem_depicted_on_a_frieze_on_the_Arch_of_Titus_in_the_Forum_Romanum.JPG

⁹ For instance, Claims Conference 2016: 12.

Built after the defeat of Jerusalem (70 AD), the Arch of Titus illustrates the Roman victory over the Jews in a very specific way. The Roman army is depicted carrying objects from the Temple in Jerusalem among which is a menorah, *i.e.* one of the most recognizable Jewish symbols since Antiquity. This monument is, to this day, used as a powerful illustration of the practice of wartime plunder in modern studies (Fincham, 2017: 152-153), as it highlights the symbolic link between the concepts of victory and spoliation. Or, to paraphrase S. Fine, a monument is never just a monument (Fine, S. 2017)¹⁰.

This brings us to the second aspect of the spoliation, an aspect that was closely related to the Roman understanding of the term. The noun spoliation is, in fact, derived from the Latin verb *spolio* meaning “to strip, to deprive, rob, plunder” (Lewis & Short, *s.v. spolio*) and was one of the terms commonly used for plunder of enemies. If Latin had a number of words for plunder, it was because the act of looting was, in the Roman mind, related to the war and, more precisely, to victory over the enemy. Much like in the procession depicted on the Arch of Titus, great Roman military campaigns were followed by processions exhibiting plundered property. In this context, items such as the enemy's military equipment, named *spolia*, were used to visually demonstrate the victory and the victor's value (Rollo-Koster, J. 2008: 107-108). Plundered property or architectural elements were also used for the construction of new buildings, such as the ones built by the Romans in the province of Judea bearing the inscription “from the spoils of Judea” (Levine, L. E. 2005: 126).

This brief excursus outlines the symbolic value of spoliation and looting in Roman culture with regard to the representation of victory. In this context, plundered objects are a symbol of victory over one's enemy. European culture has inherited this concept from Antiquity and it would be no surprise if the Nazi regime, which appropriated various elements from ancient history, had also interpreted the looting of Jewish property in this direction. There lies yet another path of investigation that could supplement the study of the looted Judaica.

CONCLUSION

Since the end of World War II, looted Judaica have been the subject of research aiming at the creation of collections and descriptions of the plundered objects as well as at their restitution. This research is currently supplemented by courses and lectures focused on the legal aspects of this restitution, on art and history. These objects are an essential part of Jewish culture and, as such, a part of the European cultural historical heritage. Investigation on the relationship between the looted Judaica and the European cultural historical heritage is an interdisciplinary endeavor that could benefit a number of areas in the social sciences and humanities, along with preserving the memory of the Holocaust.

¹⁰ <https://www.jweekly.com/2017/08/29/rome-charlottesville-statue-never-just-statue>

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ANTISEMITISM AS AN INADMISSIBLE SOCIAL PHENOMENON

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Abstract

Antisemitism is a dangerous and destructive ideology based on incitement to hatred of the Jewish people and is associated with their persecution, discrimination, and in the variation of Nazi antisemitism - with their physical destruction and extermination. Despite the destructive and absurd ideas of this stereotype of national and racial hatred, it is very persistent and people still sometimes experience its consequences. Apart from rumors, conspiracy theories and outdated and denied notions of "world Jewry", these ideas, which are detrimental to humanism and freedom, are sometimes disseminated in the form of "science" or "journalism", "opinion", very often using the power of contemporary media. The word antisemitism always means hatred against Jews in the context of modernity. An important element of contemporary antisemitism is the identification of Jews with finance, urbanization, and especially capitalism. Different "scientific" explanations about "interioriness" of the Jews have had a strong influence on German society since the first decades of the 20th century, an influence that underlies the ideology that led to the brutal policy of the "final decision". The danger of spreading such misanthropic ideas in the form of some kind of "education" and under the guise of "scientifically-based" antisemitism has not passed today. That is why the emphasis on education of students, doctoral students, etc. is extremely important: they should learn not only about the tragic events of the Holocaust, but also to build a critical view of all those preconditions - historical, social, cultural, intellectual – that led to the emergence of racial theories, "explaining" social processes and leading to catastrophic and horrific cruelty events.

Key words: anti-Semitism, academic education, media

Antisemitism is a dangerous and destructive ideology based on incitement to hatred of the Jewish people and is associated with their persecution, discrimination, and in the variation of Nazi antisemitism - with its physical destruction and extermination. This ideology is mostly associated with the construction of a negative image of Jews as a people, race, religious and national identity in the public consciousness, which often becomes a stable stereotype that dominates the ideas of entire nations in different historical epochs. There are almost no examples in the history of Europe of a state or society that has not fallen prey to this dangerous prejudice in a given period. It has reflected in the political, economic, cultural and educational life of the various states and political formations in the development of Europe and the world. In general, it can be said that "the word

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was new, but the concepts it articulated were not"². And also: "Conflicts between Jews and their neighbors have been recorded for more than 2,000 years"³. Despite the destructive and absurd ideas of this stereotype of national and racial hatred, it is very persistent and people still sometimes experience its consequences. Apart from rumors, conspiracy theories and outdated and denied notions of "world Jewry", these ideas, which are detrimental to humanism and freedom, are sometimes disseminated in the form of "science" or "journalism", "opinion", using the power of contemporary media in our modernity. After the victorious for the Russian Empire war against Ottoman Turkey in 1877/78, a congress was convened in Berlin to settle the political situation with the newly formed nation-states after the end of Ottoman rule over them. What is less known about the Berlin Congress is that together with the representatives of the so-called Great Powers - France, Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, etc. - it is also attended by representatives of Eastern European Jews (from then Romania) "as an opportunity to protect Jews in expanded Romania"⁴. Although the Great Powers which are presented at Berlin Congress agree that citizenship cannot be restricted by religion, culture or blood ancestry, in the Romanian parliament this idea was accepted extremely negative and the Romanian government refuses to sign the Berlin Treaty precisely because of this decision. After long debates and quarrels in Romanian society, a "compromise" was reached, with only a small proportion of the 250,000 Romanian Jews receiving citizenship, and the Great Powers agreed to this "compromise". However, the very "fact" that Jews have tried to defend their rights at a high European forum, to try to fight for their safety and security and to influence the decisions of the Berlin Congress, creates the myth of a "world Jewish government" that "coordinates" and implements" a secret policy of conspiracy against the citizens of European countries⁵. One of the strongest believers in this myth is the German journalist Wilhelm Marr (1819 -1904), who was also the creator of the term "antisemitism" (1878) in its modern form, including the spread of negative stereotypes of Jews as a dangerous "race", incitement to struggle with them, and invented ideas of some kind of "Jewish threat" to almost the whole world. Later, antisemitism took on a political form that unfortunately met with supporters, especially in Germany and Austria, again among journalists and publicists such as Karl Freicherr von Vogelsang (1818 -1890) in Austria⁶. These "modern" Western ideas reach the newly created Bulgarian state. In 1884, from Germany and Hungary they were imported to the Bulgarian lands, as well as various anti-Semitic pamphlets and publications were printed, but they did not have the impact they had created in Western Europe⁷. Various anti-Semitic editions began to appear, such as *Голгота* (Golgotha or Calvary, 1919 -1923), *Атака* (Attack, 1932 -1934), and others, but they did not last long in the media market at the time⁸. In general, the attitude of Bulgarians towards their Jewish compatriots remains tolerant and

² The Holocaust Encyclopedia, Yale University press, 2001, p. 16

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ph. Goldstein, A convenient hatred: The history of antisemitism, 2012, p. 200

⁵ Ibid., p. 201 -202

⁶ The Holocaust Encyclopedia, Yale University press, 2001, p. 21

⁷ Nir Baruch, The Redemption. Tsar Boris and the Fate of the Bulgarian Jews, Sofia University., 1991, p. 49 (in Bulgarian)

⁸ Ibid., p. 50

antisemitism fails to become part of the worldview of Bulgarians. "Mainly Sephardim, the Jews constituted less than 1 percent of the total population attitude the attitude of Bulgarians towards Jews was tolerant even friendly... the Jews of Bulgaria achieved economic, social and cultural integration in the life of the state over several decades"⁹.

Although not very often in Bulgaria some social actions, "campaigns", rumors or "theories" are spread, sometimes appear studies or frames of mind that may have inadvertently reflected the influence of antisemitism as well as its sad legacy. Although not so common, they represent an atavism, a reactionary, as stereotypical as it may sound, an idea that is associated with long-outdated public relations, social and especially moral norms. The ideas and teachings of a German "scientist" from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Werner Sombart, can serve as an illustration. Although somewhat forgotten as a "sociologist," many of Sombart's ideas, which he presents as scientific, are in fact anti-Semitic and even Nazi. Especially those according to which capitalism as a social system has an ethnic ("Jewish" after Sombart) origin. In my opinion, it is more important to show what are the roots of the phenomenon of antisemitism and if its new appearance in Bulgaria is possible.

The term antisemitism is a relatively new invention of European thought. Antisemitism is associated above all with hatred of Jews as a race. Here we need to make a few clarifications. This term was first used by the German journalist Wilhelm Marr in 1878, as I have already noted. However, hatred of Jews has much older roots. In his book *Convenient hatred*, Phyllis Goldstein tells of events that took place in the city of Alexandria at the time when Philo of Alexandria, a philosopher, scientist and writer of Jewish descent, lived there. He witnessed violence against Jews in the city in 38 CE - more than 400 years after the destruction of the Jewish temple on Elephantine (an island on the Nile in south of Egypt). Why were Jews attacked?¹⁰ At that time, the city of Alexandria, founded by Alexander the Great, was a center of Greek culture, although part of the Roman Empire. In the city was situated one of the greatest libraries in world history, as well as the first university in the Middle East that attracted scholars in mathematics, medicine, and literature from Asia, Africa, and Europe¹¹. But Jews are not full citizens under Roman governance. Once, when Agrippa I, a Roman appointed Jewish king of Judea stopped in Alexandria on his way to Rome, Aulus Avilius Flaccus, the Roman governor of Roman Egypt and of the city ordered that statues of Caligula, the Roman emperor be placed in every Jewish house of worship¹².

The Jews of Alexandria refused to do that, then Aulus Flaccus declared that they were aliens in Alexandria with no rights to government protection - a city they have lived for more than 300 years. "In the days that followed well-organized mobs attacked Jews with stones and clubs... Flaccus encouraged the rioting by publicly executing a number of Jewish leaders"¹³.

⁹ The Holocaust Encyclopedia, Yale University press, 2001, p. 98

¹⁰ Ph. Goldstein, *A convenient hatred: The history of antisemitism*, 2012, p. 13

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p. 16

¹³ Ibid, p. 17

There are, of course, many other examples, all tragic and gloomy, related to the negative attitude towards Jews as a separate national, social or religious group. It is well known in this sense about some "objections", that the term antisemitism is inaccurate and almost coined by the Jews themselves alone to present themselves as persecuted or victims. The reason for this "objection", according to some authors, is the "fact" that the Jews were not the only "Semites" and therefore this term is at best inaccurate or unclear. The other large Semitic group, the Arabs, was not taken into account in describing the various manifestations of antisemitism. Some authors claim that the Arabs are also Semites and have a long Semitic history and ancestral memory.

What I think that is important to say here is that the word antisemitism always means hatred against Jews. Apart from being a prejudice dating back to ancient times and given a modern impetus by the ideas of Wilhelm Marr, this gloomy idea can become a dangerous stereotype, even a risky social position, affecting much of society, regardless of its education, intellectual qualities and social position. "A man can be a good husband and a kind father, a law abiding citizen, a person of culture, a philanthropist, and at the same time and anti-Semite"¹⁴, writes Sartre. The French philosopher goes even further when he reflects on the permanence of this unfortunately well-established prejudice. "No eternal factor can instill antisemitism in the anti-Semite. Antisemitism is something adopted of one's own free will and involving the whole of one's outlook, a philosophy of life brought to bear not only on Jews, but on all men in general, on history and society; it is both an emotional state and a way looking at the world"¹⁵. This relatively long quote from Sartre, I think, explains to a very large extent the fact that people with recognition in various fields of science, art, politics, etc. have manifested themselves in their positions as staunch anti-Semites, especially during World War II in connection with the dreadful idea of a "Final Solution" to the "Jewish question." But even before and after the war, antisemitism, this old form of social and even personal hatred to the different people by their descent, culture or religion and often presented as a social "theory", continued to have its grim influence among the peoples of Europe.

Marr's sinister idea that in the German (and in every) nation-state since the late 19th century there has been a group of people of different cultures, religions and customs who are "hostile" to the dominant nationality and use various means to to destroy this state from within, comes to replace the old distrust of the countries with a predominant Christian population towards the Jews. This grim idea bore its most sinister fruit in the social conditions of Nazi Germany with the transformation of antisemitism into a state policy of the Third Reich, both in early 1933 with the coming to power of the Nazis and in its apogee of "empire" encompassing significant parts of Europe. As the Holocaust Encyclopedia very accurately notes: "It is unconceivable that the thousands of individuals - from SS officers to industry captains to average citizens who reported Jews in hiding - who willfully participated in the Shoah could have acted as they did they had not

¹⁴ J.P. Sartre, *Portrait of the anti-Semite*, L., 1948, p. 6

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 13

inherited prejudices that developed over two millennia, the effect of which was to dehumanize Jews and create a consensus that they were not entitled to equal civil rights”¹⁶.

The very idea of a particular "Semitic race" used by opponents of the term antisemitism and all racists in general is no more than a myth, as is the idea of a special "Aryan race" in this context. According to this myth, the "Semites" are descendants of Shem (Sem), who, along with Ham and Japheth, is the son of Noah¹⁷. Each of Noah's sons, according to the Old Testament, gives rise to a certain offspring that spreads throughout the earth. Thus the Jews and their closest neighbors — the Arabs, the Aramaeans, the Phoenicians, and even the Philistines — were the direct heirs of Shem through his descendant Abraham. This explanation from the point of view of science is no more than a myth, as there is so far no archaeological or other evidence than the book of Genesis that this ever happened. However, this myth is used by the linguists of the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, who came to the conclusion that the languages spoken by mankind correlate with each other, and thus some common origin can be found. It can be assumed that the term Semitic originates as a linguistic one to describe the similar languages spoken by the peoples of the Middle East - Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, etc. In this regard, Maurice Olender's book "The Languages of Paradise"¹⁸ discusses the ideas to various linguists, culturologists, who give an explanation not only of the origin of languages, but also of the origin of the term race itself. For example, Joseph Ernest Renan, one of the greatest names in linguistics of this period, defines race as "a hierarchical form and system that hides the secret of all events in human history". The big question Renan asks is whether the term race has a linguistic or anthropological dimension. Both Renan and subsequent linguistic researchers concluded that the two main races in the then modern world (the mid-nineteenth century) were the Semites and the Aryans. And these two races are not equal. Higher values such as freedom are inherent only in their peers, i.e. the Aryans. The Semites, although they created their own culture, remained a lower race by virtue of their "natural characteristics". Renan writes that "nature created a race of workers, that is, the Chinese, who have surprising dexterity and almost no sense of honor; a race of agricultural workers, i.e. Africans; and a race of lords and warriors, i.e. Europeans"¹⁹. According to Renan, the Semites gave the world neither science, nor philosophy, nor the arts, nor politics. There can be no agreement on these frankly offensive words in a democratic and enlightened society as ours is. The biological can not be leading when we try to determine a person's social identity. The focus of Nazi propaganda on the "racial" traits of Jews, portraying them in unacceptable forms, actually has a social goal - to demonize and compromise a certain social group in German society based on a perverse image of them and instilling intolerance of their culture. "The Nazis tried to be racists with Jews, but their biological markers worked with perhaps 10 to 15 per cent reliability. In practice they used mostly

¹⁶ The Holocaust Encyclopedia, Yale University press, 2001, p. 25

¹⁷ Genesis 5:32

¹⁸ M. Olender. The Languages of Paradise. (in Bulgarian, ed. 2002)

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 97

cultural markers: circumcision, synagogue attendance, the Star of David, denunciations, surnames, etc.”²⁰.

Yet, despite blatant antisemitism and racism in various actions and claims, mid-nineteenth-century linguists define races on linguistic grounds. "For this reason, philology speaks of “linguistic” rather than “anthropological” races”²¹. They describe as "Semitic" people who speak Semitic languages and who have a culture expressed in a Semitic way that may be limited in nature. The Semites are opposed by the families of the Aryan language group, who create a higher culture. The goal of anti-Semitic linguists is to "save" Christianity and its culture from its Semitic roots²².

The other question that is of interest in this context of the problem is whether Jews and Arabs really have a common Semitic origin, and thus, if so, the term antisemitism is compromised. As I have already pointed out, the common origin of the Jews and the Arabs is based on the myth of their common ancestor. Abraham is the common father of both Ishmael (the ancestor of the Arabs) and Isaac (the ancestor of the Jews). But according to some scholars, even the Bible contains facts that contradict the linguistic argument about race. The language spoken by the ancient Jews in the Bible is called "the language of Canaan", i.e. the language spoken by the tribes living in Canaan before the Jewish conquest. But both Canaan and the ancient Cush or Kush (the ancestor of the Ethiopians) are considered in the Bible to be inhabited by the descendants of Ham, Noah's other son, not Shem. Therefore, the language spoken by the ancient Jews should have been defined as "Hamitic" and not “Semitic”²³. The conclusion that can be drawn is that the term Semitic as uniting a group of peoples by their origin and language is artificially created and has nothing to do with the historical connection between them or their anthropological or racial origin²⁴.

The conclusion we can make from the above reasoning is that despite the long tradition of Judeophobia, a new, modern dimension of hatred of Jews was formed in the mid-nineteenth century associated with the emergence of the term antisemitism. "Research" conducted by various European scholars points out that Jews as a "race" have a number of shortcomings and limitations that they try to compensate for through covert actions, conspiracies and organizations. In this way, the natural hostility to the Jewish people, manifested for more than three thousand years, is understood in a "scientific way." This is how modern antisemitism was born, a direct consequence of prejudices and stereotypes imposed over millennia and seeking its basis in a secularized Europe. An important element of contemporary antisemitism is the identification of Jews with modernity, finance, urbanization, and especially capitalism. The German "scientist" in this regard, Werner Sombart, notes: "Jews should hardly lead a team; from the very beginning, they have been a predominantly

²⁰ P. van der Berghe, *Does Race matter?* in *Race and racism*, Oxford, 2001, p.109

²¹ M. Olander, *Op.cit.*, p. 92 (in Bulgarian)

²² According to Renan, "human freedom" is a privilege above all of equals, i.e. of the "higher races", p. 95

²³ This idea is mentioned in the study of the famous Arabist, historian and ethnographer Shelomo Dov Goitein. See his book "Jews and Arabs: Their Contact Through the Ages", 1955, (in Russian, 2001)

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 24

especially educated people of merchants”²⁵. The German author lays the foundations of an economic antisemitism, in fact a slander against the Jews, according to which they possessed a "spirit of bargaining" that underpinned capitalism, thus "harming" the "heroic peoples" (to whom they belong), primarily the Germanic tribes of the Normans, Lombards, Saxons and Franks²⁶). These "scientific" explanations have had a strong influence on German society since the first decades of the 20th century, an influence that underlies the ideology that led to the brutal policy of the "final decision". The general idea of this ideology is evident in the works of economists like Sombart: capitalism is acceptable as long as the "Jews" are not in it, and because they are "guilty" of its negative social consequences, an extremely unscientific conclusion. Antisemitism in its most radical form, such as hatred of Jews, including a plan for their physical extermination, manifests itself in this fanatical idea of "removing the Jews" as the "final" result of the "long struggle" against them. The "Final Solution" is presented as a product of the "spirit of science", a model of "social therapy", the different types of which were deliberately developed in the late 19th century and became even more radical in the 1920s as a result of the war and crisis, and finally came to an end in the form of the National Socialist regime²⁷.

The danger of spreading such misanthropic ideas in the form of some kind of "education" and under the guise of "scientifically-based" antisemitism has not passed today. That is why the emphasis on getting to know students, doctoral students, etc. is extremely important, not only with the tragic events of the Holocaust, but also building in them a critical view of all those preconditions - historical, social, cultural, intellectual - that led to the emergence of racial theories, "explaining" social processes and leading to catastrophic and horrific cruelty events. National Socialism and its antisemitic ideology are not accidental deviations in some forms of social development, and "interest" in their "traditions" always leads to severe and deadly conflicts. In the modern world, a huge role in this regard - to refrain from promoting obsessive ideas such as those of "blood", "race", "honor", "land / soil" - play the media and various communication technologies, including Internet platforms, which are a preferred source of information. Young people, and society as a whole, need to have a credible criterion for distinguishing reliable and true information as a protection from the many manipulations and conspiracy theories that stem from a certain ignorance in this regard. Pseudo-scientific theories such as Sombart's still find support as an "explanation" for the horrific crimes of the Third Reich's anti-Semitic policies. And in a democratic country like ours, which has its own experience in the events that shook the whole world in 1939-1945 and may still have an impact on our time.

In this regard, partnership of Bulgarian universities with other universities or research centers that study and teach similar topics is an effective way to protect young people and the whole society

²⁵ W. Sombart, *Bourgeois*, M., 1994, p. 165 (in Russian). Werner Sombart (1863-1941), German sociologist and economist, with controversial ideas and theories, whom some influential thinkers rank among the forerunners of National Socialism ideology (F.A. von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, Routledge, 2006, pp. 173 -174)

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 162-163

²⁷ S. Friedlaender, "The Final Solution" (its sources)" in *The Jews in 20- th century. A critical dictionary*, M., 2004 (in Russian) p. 144

from these events. They also can defend the whole society from sinister repetitions or even the emergence of similar moods in it. Especially if it about students studying different disciplines in the field of public communication and media, because, as I noted, the media in the broadest sense are those that shape the perceptions of society and have a huge impact on it. In the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski", of which I am a lecturer, for several years in a row I have been conducting a special university course dedicated to the study of the Holocaust as a tragic phenomenon in human history and its modern dimensions. It is held under the University project in Holocaust Studies supported by the Claims Conference and enjoys high attendance. My students have the opportunity to learn the facts and events about that period, to comment them and to express their views on the unacceptability of antisemitism, violence, intolerance and aggression. Future professional communicators, for which these young people are preparing, will be able to use the knowledge acquired during the course to build communication strategies against the influence of antisemitism and other radical ideologies, which are still present as a problem not only in Bulgaria but also in the community of democratic European nations. Particular attention is paid to the so-called *antisemitism online*, as the internet sometimes becomes a forum for spreading anti-Semitic clichés and calls for violence and aggressive action against Jews²⁸. Students are convinced of the need for this course: the feedback survey noted that the course "arouses interest in topics that have not been of interest to me so far", another student wrote in his assignment: "my personal point of view has changed radically ", and another one that "it is necessary to talk about the Holocaust; this topic should be introduced in all educational programs. This is how, remaining in people's memory and consciousness, because we are in constant discussion, we can be warned not to repeat such a tragedy". The themes of the course program give young people a clear idea of the tragic atmosphere of those years, the drama of the moral choices of people in a fateful situation, the destructive effects of violence and aggression that led to genocide. They also form in students an objective assessment of the events of the Holocaust, they acquaint them with important facts and events, introduce them to different sides of Jewish culture, which gave birth of the eternal ideas of equality and mutual respect. Young people learn about the long history of Judeophobia, which has grown into an organized anti-Semitic ideology, anti-Semitic provocations such as the falsification of the "Protocols of the Sages of Zion", sinister ideas in the infamous book "Mein Kampf", historical facts such as Anschluss and Nazi penetration in Poland and the crimes committed by the Einsatzgruppen, and the SS in labor camps, death camps, gas chambers etc. The events of those troubled years related to the fate of the Jewish people increased students' interest in learning their tragic lessons, the most important of which was insisting on democratic equality in the modern world, liberal values of respect for human dignity, tolerance and freedom.

²⁸ K. von Schnurbein, EU Strategien gegen Antisemitismus, Politische Studien, Juli – August 2021: 1700 Jahre Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland, p. 28

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ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION OF THE COMMISSARIAT FOR JEWISH AFFAIRS

The Institution, which had to Implement the Holocaust in Bulgaria

Ivanka Gezenko¹

Abstract

An old Jewish piece of wisdom runs: Not a single sheet of a book or document should remain unread and lost for the generations. This article presents the role of the institution of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs in Bulgaria in its role of executing the policy of persecution of Jews. It tries to take a look and reconsider the past. To this day, however, there are unknown (or less familiar) documents patiently waiting their time to throw light on the facts revealing what happened. Once again, we have to face the 'platitude of evil', which was set as a whole and separately long before. The analysis is done in the context of more general picture of anti-Semitic laws in the Balkans and more generally in the European countries².

Key words: Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, anti-Jewish Legislation, Bulgaria.

I. ANTI-JEWISH LEGISLATION IN EUROPE 1938-1940

After the mid 30-ies of XX century European international relations were entering a new phase, which led to the beginning of World War II. Persecution of Jews began in Germany and gradually drew near the Balkans with the conquering of Czechoslovakia and Poland. The 'Nuremberg Laws'³, which deprived German Jews of their civil rights became a legislative model for the satellites of Germany. In each of the European countries anti-Jewish restrictions acquired various forms in accordance with the number and status of the Jewish population therein, however, their common feature at that time was to 'exclude' Jews from economic life of the country, to abrogate their civil and political rights, non-admission of Jewish immigrants from other countries and legal definition of 'Jew'. Reports in the Bulgarian press about the situation of Jews in various European countries gave the following picture:

1938

In September 1938, **Spain** performed purge of the fleet and the army of Jews⁴.

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² Translation of the entire text from Bulgarian by Iren Boykikeva

³ Law on the Protection of German Blood and Honour of September 15, 1935; Reich Citizenship Law of September 15, 1935.

⁴ ASA, Ф.370к, inv.6, a.u.934, sheets33

On November 17, 1938 **Italy** adopted the Manifesto of Race aiming at exclusion of Jews from the labor market, abrogation of civil and political rights⁵.

In the same year in **Finland** was issued an order restricting the admission of Jewish immigrants from Germany and Austria without special permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Helsinki⁶.

By special decision of December 1938, the **Supreme Soviet of the USSR** created the Jewish Autonomous Oblast of Birobidzhan in Siberia. It settled Jews from the rest of the USSR with no particular state jobs and with the future prospect Jews to be allowed to live only in that Autonomous Oblast⁷.

On March 15, 1939 Bohemia and Moravia were declared a protectorate of Germany. On March 21, 1939 Konstantin von Neurath was appointed First Reichsprotektor. The staff of the departments similar to the ministries was manned by officials from Germany. Formally existed the position of president of protectorate which for the whole period of existence was held by Emil Hácha.

After the proclamation of the independent **Slovak Republic** and the treaty signed with Germany in 1939, in Slovakia began a large-scale persecution of Jews. Regulations against the Jews were published in November the same year. Jewish property was confiscated and handed to the Germans and Slovaks. 'Hlinka Guard' initiated boycott and pogrom against the Jewish population. 50 000 Jews left Bratislava. Two years later - on September 9, 1941 the 'Jewish Code' was approved on the analogy of the Nuremberg Laws⁸.

On May 13, 1939 the newspaper 'National Policy' in the **Czech Republic** published the Act against Jews. A Jew was considered any person professing Israelite religion before October 30, 1918, or a person whose parent or grandparent was Jewish before that date. Jews were excluded completely from public life. Their number was 357 000. On July 27, 1939, Adolf Eichmann established a branch of the Central Office for Jewish Emigration. The Jews were forced to pay a very high emigration tax and were practically divested of their property. The total value of the requisitioned Jewish property in Bohemia and Moravia was about CZK 12 billion⁹.

In **Hungary**: Act No. 15 of 1938 restricted the number of Jews to 20% in each commercial/financial enterprise with ten or more employees, in the press, among physicians, engineers and lawyers. This law did not apply to Jews honored with military prizes from the First World War, as well as to participants in the fight against the Hungarian communist government of 1919. Exception was made also for widows and children of fallen military heroes, and for Jews who had abandoned the Jewish religion until 1919. The law defined a 'Jew' on the basis of religious background, notwithstanding the sneaking idea of a racial element: under this Act all who had abandoned the Jewish religion after 1919 were considered Jews.

⁵ ASA, ф.176к, inv.7, а.у.950, sheets 1,2, - by law is prohibited Jewish foreign nationals to settle in Italy. Sept. 8. 1938; Jews, Italian nationals are not allowed to teach or to study in Italian educational institutions.

⁶ Ф.370к, inv.6, а.у.933 sheets 41

⁷ Ф.370к, inv.6, а.у.933 sheets 70

⁸ Ф.370к, inv.6, а.у.933 sheets 20

⁹ Ф.370к, inv.6, а.у.933 sheets 7 There is evidence for anti-Jewish pogroms and for declaration of assets before July 31, 1939.

Act No. 4 of 1939 defined Jews racially: a Jew was considered anyone regardless of their religious affiliation with at least one parent or at least two grandparents of Israelite denomination. The law provided for restriction to 6% participation of Jews in liberal professions and in business, financial and industrial enterprises with ten or more employees. Their employment in state administration, the judiciary and in state owned secondary schools was forbidden, as well as their involvement in theaters and media¹⁰.

On November 20, 1940 Hungary joined the Tripartite Pact. The governments of Pal Teleki and Laszlo Bardossy adopted the Labour Service Act and Foreign Jews Act.

After the attempt at 'limited anti-Semitism' (1937-1940), established by King Carol, the rights of Jews in **Romania** were restricted in June 1940. Romanian-Jewish intermarriage was forbidden and during the mutiny in Bucharest and other cities the legionaries carried out the first major anti-Jewish pogroms¹¹.

On October 5, 1940, the Council of Ministers to the Kingdom of **Yugoslavia** issued two ordinances: one on the terms and procedures of enrollment of persons of Jewish origin in the university, and in higher and secondary educational institutions, and the other - on the measures that apply to Jews in terms of companies engaged in trade with food supplies for the population of Belgrade¹²

After the occupation of **France** on September 27, 1940, the occupation authorities issued a decree for census of the Jewish population. 287 962 Jews were registered, 60% living in the occupied zone, and 40% - under the jurisdiction of the collaborationist regime of Marshal Pétain.

On October 2, 1940, Pétain's regime adopted the first 'Statute on Jews' (*Statut de Juifs*), which restricted their right to free movement, access to public places and employment.

In October 1940 the Jews in **Norway** were barred from liberal vocations. In July 1941 they were dismissed from public office, and lawyers were deprived of the right to practice their profession. A law banning mixed marriages was adopted. The Reichskommissar Josef Terboven imposed restrictions on Jewish property.

II. ANTI-JEWISH LEGISLATION IN BULGARIA FROM 1940 UNTIL THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMISSARIAT FOR JEWISH AFFAIRS IN 1942

Anti-Jewish legislation did not bypass Bulgaria. The signing of the Craiova Treaty between Bulgaria and Romania (September 7, 1940), under the terms of which southern Dobruja was returned back to Bulgaria, seemed to be the first sign of the further political orientation of the country. The Treaty restored the border of 1913 and regulated the relations between the two countries regarding the exchange of population as well as all issues of legal and financial nature. Germany was among the countries that approved this legal instrument. A month later, the Law on protection of the nation was billed in to the XXV Ordinary National Assembly. On November 17, 1940 in Berchtesgaden, Bulgarian Tsar Boris III met with Adolf Hitler and his Foreign Minister

¹⁰ Ф.176к, inv.7, а.у.748, sheets 154

¹¹ ASA, ф.176к, inv.7, а.у.748, sheets 6, 48, 49;

¹² ASA, ф.366-Б, inv.1, а.у.976, sheets1-5

Ivan Popov¹³ - with Joachim von Ribbentrop¹⁴. Subject of the meeting was the accession of the Kingdom of Bulgaria to the Tripartite Pact. The position of the Bulgarian side confirmed by letter of October 20 the same year was that *'it is dangerous for Bulgaria and even for Germany the accession in question to happen right now'¹⁵*. During the meeting was decided Bulgaria's accession to the pact to be postponed *'for the situation to settle and to make clearer the position of Turkey from where von Papen has already returned'¹⁶*. Meanwhile, at the 13th meeting of the second regular session of the XXV Ordinary National Assembly, the Law on Protection of the Nation was considered at first reading. On December 24 of that year the bill was passed and became a regulatory act of state power. Thus, the foundations of the 'Jewish question' were legally laid in Bulgaria. The following 1941 was marked by other legislative and regulatory restrictions on Jews in Bulgaria: in addition to LPN, depriving them of their civil and political rights on the grounds of their nationality, the National Assembly considered and adopted another two laws that imposed economic constraints – Law on single payment tax on property of persons of Jewish origin and Law on payment for uncovered property of persons of Jewish origin, offered to the state land fund for redemption in accordance with LPN. By a number of decrees from the same year, the Council of Ministers further regulated rules of economic restrictions on Jews in various areas - trade, economy, production. Concurrently on March 1, 1941 in Vienna, Prime Minister Bogdan Filov¹⁷ signed the Treaty of Accession of Bulgaria to the Tripartite Pact. German troops entered the country, and on April 19 and 20 Germany allowed the entry of Bulgarian troops in Vardar Macedonia and Aegean Thrace. According to the special telegram No. 244 that Ribbentrop transmitted to Sofia on April 18, 1941, the Bulgarian Army was authorized to seize:

- “1. Greek Thrace, bordered to the east by demarcation line Mustafa Pasha – Dedeagach (Alexandroupoli) and to the west - by the Struma River.
2. From Macedonia, but not further from the line Pirot-Vranje-Skopje and from there - along the course of Vardar River to the Greek border.

The German military services had already received instructions from the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces (Wehrmacht). Nevertheless, the Bulgarian government was informed that the said

¹³ Ivan Vladimirov Popov (1890-1944), politician and diplomat. Bulgarian Minister Plenipotentiary to Bucharest, Prague and Belgrade. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations in 1940-1942. From January to September 1944 was Minister Plenipotentiary to Bucharest, where he committed suicide.

¹⁴ Joachim von Ribbentrop (1893-1945), head of the Diplomatic Office of the Third Reich. Member of the National Socialist German Workers Party since 1930. After Hitler came to power, he headed special bureau to conduct foreign policy campaigns of the Nazi leadership. From 1936 to early 1938 he was ambassador to London, and in February the same year was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Third Reich. He was executed as a war criminal in Nuremberg.

¹⁵ ASA, ф. 176K, inv. 1 “III”, a.u.149, sheets 11-14.

¹⁶ Franz von Papen (1879-1969) - German politician, Prime Minister (1932). In 1933 introduced Hitler in the government as Vice Chancellor. ф. 176K, inv. 1 “III”, a.u.149

¹⁷ Bogdan Dimitrov Filov (1883-1945), scientist and politician. Studied classical philology, history and archeology in Germany. Specialized in Bonn, Paris and Rome. Minister of Education in the government of G. Kyoseivanov. From February 15, 1940 to September 9, 1943 was Prime Minister and then regent. He was sentenced to death and executed on February 1, 1945.

line of Macedonia was temporary. At some close by moment were envisaged negotiations with the Bulgarian government for the temporary regulation of the territories which will be a consequence of the dissolution of the Yugoslav state, and the date of these negotiations would be further decided¹⁸. The next agreement between the Bulgarian and the German government signed between Foreign Minister Ivan Popov and German representative Dr. Karl Klodius and approved by the Council of Ministers on April 24 and 27 1941 did not resolve the status of these territories. It was not legally regulated until the fall of 1944¹⁹ and Bulgaria governed them only administratively.

The beginning of 1942 placed the 'Jewish question' in a new light. On January 20, 1942 in Berlin, (56-58, "Am Grossen Wannsee" Str.) was called a conference to discuss a single issue - the Final solution of the Jewish question in Europe. Two key points in the development of the Jewish question until 1942 were analyzed: 1) driving out the Jews from various areas of life of the German people, and 2) expulsion of the Jews from the territory of the German people. Certain disadvantages were also considered - emigration had become a problem not only for the Germans but also for countries where Jews passed through or settled, and furthermore - in wartime, emigration had become a danger, which required a new way of resolving the problem of evacuation of the Jews to the East.

The plan for the final solution of the Jewish question envisaged extensive campaign in Europe which had to include about 11 million Jews distributed by countries. 48 000 people were Bulgarian Jews. Among the main issues discussed was the question of the beginning of the individual major campaigns for expulsion of the Jews and their implementation in the territories controlled by Germany. This required the Pact allies - Romania, Slovakia, Croatia and Bulgaria to introduce new measures against the Jews coordinated with Gestapo (in the occupied countries, the Germans were making these decisions themselves). In the first half of 1942, the Bulgarian government continued to expand the range of economic sanctions – regulations issued by the Council of Ministers, on one hand, increased the number of activities prohibited for the Jews and on the other - increased those in which Jewish free labor was included as compulsory. On July 9, 1942, the government obtained legislative powers contrary to Art. 9 of the Tarnovo Constitution²⁰. A law was passed, which devolved on the Council of Ministers to take all measures to settle the Jewish question. Thus, the Council of Ministers was authorized to issue general regulations or separate orders for more expedient and effective restrictions and measures both for the Jews and for their concealers. Until the approval of these ordinances by the National Assembly, they have the force of law. A month later, on August 29, 1942, by virtue of an ordinance issued on the grounds of this same law, at the Ministry of Interior and Public Health was established the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs (CJA/KEB). The implementation of all measures to resolve the Jewish question was concentrated in this Commissariat.

¹⁸ Cable № 244 from Ribbentrop transmitted to Sofia on April 17, 1941 by special train and submitted on April 18, 1941 with No. 547; V. Toshkova

¹⁹ ASA, ф.176K, inv.1 "III", a.u.149.

²⁰ Legislative power belongs to the King and the national representatives.

The Commissioner was nominated by the Minister of Interior and Public Health and appointed by the Council of Ministers. His orders were not subject to appeal. *Moreover – even before the Law devolving on the Council of Ministers the implementation of all measures to solve the Jewish question in Bulgaria, on June 26, 1942 was voted the Law on the rights, which the Minister of Interior and Public Health may entrust with officials from the same ministry*²¹. In the statement of reasons to the bill before voting, Peter Gabrovski pointed out that besides law on the budget, accountability and enterprises in rural and urban municipalities, state police, public health and other special laws, the Minister was given a number of rights that he should exercise personally which was detrimental to the swiftness of governance. In order to create greater efficiency in the work and to relieve the Minister, he had to be given a legitimate opportunity to entrust some of his rights under the various laws with other officials in the Office of the Ministry. At the end of August 1942, the lawyer Alexander Belev was appointed Commissioner for Jewish Affairs. Prior to this appointment, his name was known to the public as the leader of *Ratniks*²², who carried out the attempted pogrom against Jewish shops in downtown streets of Sofia in 1938.

His political beliefs were clearly stated on the pages of the newspaper "Prolom" - a biweekly dedicated to the progress of the Bulgarian national spirit, published in 12 issues from 1938 to 1939. Alexander Belev participated in the newspaper editing with Assen Kantardzhiev, Victor Ichkov, Kliment Dalkalachev and Ivan Gyoshev.

He is author of the following articles:

Issue 1 – “Statics and Dynamics of Political Forms”

“The task of the political form of today should be the organization of political, economic and spiritual forces of the nation to implement the basic aspirations of the nation for social justice and national power. The implementation of this task implies physical and spiritual raising of our race, involves clearing the spiritual and political weed by drawing a clear line between honor and dishonor, implies creating conditions for the existence of all Bulgarians in Bulgaria, knowing that Bulgaria is for the Bulgarians, implies at last intensification of economic and cultural activity and creativity in the style and pace of the age. Power creates a whole from the parts - it directs and aligns the scattered, it gets the nation ready for any sacrifice. Real power flows from the center to the periphery”.

Issue 3 – “Nationalism, Religion, Church”

“The main goal of the Bulgarian nation to social justice can be religiously meaningful only in Christianity”.

Issue 4 – “Law and Morality”

“The law is a deliberate and pre-established coherent freedom in human society. The law is a form. Its content in a legal rule, is derived from manners, technique, from economic social and cultural

²¹ Adopted on June 26, 1942 at the Fifth Meeting, IV Extraordinary Session, XXV ONA, approved by Decree № 43/01.07.1942 of King Boris III

²² Warriors for the Advancement of the Bulgarian National Spirit (Ratnitci za napreduka na bulgarshtinata) Bulgarian non-governmental organization founded in 1936.

life, from morality. What will be given as a content of the law shall be decided based on the necessities of life, relevance, power and ultimately – Morality”.

Issue 5- “Axes and Global Influence”

“In solving European issues should be borne in mind that the history of Europe is the history of the establishment of nations as states. In solving global issues should finally be noted that Europe is an organic whole”.

Issue 6 – “Under the Sign of Faith in the Nation”

“The nation should be organized. Only then the faith in the nation achieves the goal. The faith of the organized nation is power. What the leader and the rank-and-file will be capable of will no longer correspond to their power as individuals but to the power of the nation. Therefore, today the cause of Hitler and Mussolini seems so inhumanely great.”

Issue 7- “The Leaders”

“The history of a nation can be a history of a rise or a history of decline. If within the nation is developing a process of separation of the individual from the nation, if the person puts their interests above all, if they serve the individual rather than national progress, national consciousness will begin to darken and the nation will start to decline.”

Issue 8-“The Meaning of ‘Nation’”

“Correctly used, the word ‘racism’ equals to racial hygiene”

Issue 9- “Race, Science and Metodi Popov”

Issue 10- “The end of Czechoslovakia”. The articles are signed by Alexander Belev. Several articles are signed with the initials A. B.

Compared to the information about his views based on the publications, there is much less information about his career as a lawyer based on archival sources. To the occupation of the position of Commissioner, Alexander Belev was 42 years old, i.e. his age suggests a career that would be documented. Among the preserved documents of the Ministry of Justice are the registers of the State examinations of candidates for judicial office and lawyers, exams for bailiffs and scribes, personnel files of the employees in the Ministry of Justice and its subsidiaries in Bulgaria, and files related to years of legal service of employees of the Ministry of Interior and Public Health. A total of 21,847 files are preserved. Among them is the file of Alexander Belev for sitting the State examination as a candidate for judicial office. It was filed on the name of Alexander Belev from Lom. It lacks biographical details, but it is apparent that he graduated in law at Sofia University in 1926 and held a degree № NG 235/1926. From November 10, 1926 to November 20, 1928 inclusive, he worked as judicial candidate (trainee) at Sofia District Court. According to the case law for the acquisition of specialty, in 1929 Alexander Belev was entitled to sit the State examination for judicial office and lawyer. To the application is enclosed a certificate by the Sofia District Court, stating that *"during his internship in the court, Alexander Belev had good behavior and good relations with the judicial panel and in society and can be admitted to the state examination."*

The theoretical and practical State examination of candidates for judicial office and lawyers was held on November 19, 1929 at the Ministry of Justice. In the oral examination the candidate Alexander Belev from Lom got the following grades²³:

Civil Law – 4 (C)

Commercial Law – 3 (D)

Criminal Law - 2 (F)

Civil proceedings – 2 (F)

Criminal proceedings – 3 (D)

Administrative Law – 3 (D)

Private International Law – 3 (D)

By official decision of the same date, the Commission allowed Alexander Belev to reset the exam in criminal law and civil proceedings at latest in the second of the subsequent sessions. In the resit held on May 16, 1930, the candidate Alexander Belev got the following grades:

In Criminal Law – 3 (D)

In Civil Proceedings – 3 (D)

The members of the Commission noted in the report of the exam: "*Since the same candidate in the last session (in November) had received in all other subjects not less than average grade (in Report № 15 dated November 19, 1929), in accordance with Art. 31 of the Rules, he is recognized that he has passed the state examination*".

The examination topics developed in writing by Al. Belev at the resit were:

- Abstract legal transactions. Their nature and importance for legal certainty.
- Transfer of commercial enterprise. Form and effect between the parties and third parties.
- Causality in commission transactions and types of crimes.
- Experience concept and types criminality²⁴.

After this date no documents of his activities as a lawyer had been filed with the Ministry of Justice. Among the few personal papers of Alexander Belev are two official forms - Personal tax return²⁵ and service card²⁶, where he had completed autographically date of birth – July 8th 1900, place of birth - Lom, education - Law, religion - Eastern Orthodox, marital status -single, address in Sofia – 11, “Rositsa” Street. Both in the tax return and in the service card of Alexander Belev there is a column for data on positions held before joining the Commissariat. In his tax Belev had completed autographically that from January 1, 1942 to September 3, 1942 he had occupied the position legal

²³ The Bulgarian evaluation system is six-point, where their correspondence to the American one is the following: Excellent (6) is equal to A; Very Good (5) is B; Good (4) is C; Satisfactory (3) is D; and Unsatisfactory or Weak (2) is E (F) means that the exam is not taken.

²⁴ ASA, ф.242к, inv.9, a.u.18 223, sheets1-15

²⁵ ASA, 190к, inv.1, a.u.1, sheets8

²⁶ ASA, ф.190к, inv.1, a.u.346, sheets104

counsel at the Ministry of Interior and Public Health (total remuneration of 58 477 lev). In his service card, completed on February 9, 1943 as a previous position held Alexander Belev had stated - Ministry of Interior and Public Health - "Department of Administration, Administrative Division". In the service card there is space for portrait photograph of the person - Alexander Belev had not attached any. I think that every outline of the personality of Alexander Belev is of particular importance. He was directly involved in the establishment of an institution that had to work for 'the final solution' of the Jewish question in Bulgaria

III. ROLE AND PLACE OF THE COMMISSARIATS IN THE HISTORY OF BULGARIAN INSTITUTIONS

In the history of the Bulgarian state institutions from 1879 to 1942 were established the following Commissariats:

1. *Commissariat in South Bulgaria* - (1885-1886) - a temporary institution established by Decree № 1/09.09.1885, after the Unification of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia on 09.06.1885, with the task to arrange the institutional amalgamation, since both areas lead an autonomous life. To this point in the principality were operating National Assembly, Council of Ministers and Ministries, while in Eastern Rumelia - District Assembly and directorates of the various fields of economy and life. Georgi Stranski was appointed Commissioner with assistants P.R. Slaveykov and Yoakim Gruev. The Commissariat governed on behalf of the Bulgarian monarch. Gradually the institutional amalgamation began. Many of the regional governors from North Bulgaria were transferred in southern Bulgaria and vice versa. All of them were subordinated to the Ministry of Interior in Sofia. The Commissariat removed customs between the two areas. From 01.01.1886, in South Bulgaria were introduced the judicial laws established and active in the Principality of Bulgaria until 06.09.1885.

By signing the Act of Tophane of 1886, with which the Great Powers recognize the Unification and the convocation of the Ordinary National Assembly, the work of the Commissariat came to an end.

2. *Bulgarian Commissariat for Reparations*²⁷

Established under Art. VII of the Peace Treaty of Neuilly (1919) stipulating that the Kingdom of Bulgaria had the obligation to recover the damages caused to the Allies by reparations in the amount of 2 billion and 250 million francs. It was governed by Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner.

Prepared comprehensive reports on the economic and financial situation of Bulgaria, controlled observance of Bulgarian obligations under the provisions of the Treaty of Neuilly, justified requests for rebates, deferrals and remissions of loan interest on overdue reparations, etc. Operated until 1954.

²⁷ ASA, ф.378к

3. *Commissariat of the League of Nations in Sofia*²⁸

Established by Protocol of the League of Nations of Sept. 8. 1926 on the occasion of the financial loan granted to Bulgaria under the auspices of the LN for accommodation and settlement of refugees. Control over the spending of the loan was exercised by Commissioner- LN Delegate who appointed the employees in the commissariat. Closed in 1933.

4. *Chief Commissariat for Supplies*²⁹

Established as part of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour with the task of combating the black market and wartime profiteering, control and distribution of food and industrial products through distribution cards and household books and distribution of imported and local raw materials for industrial enterprises. Operated until 1944³⁰.

5. *Commissariat for Jewish Affairs*³¹

Established in 1942 at the Ministry of Interior and Public Health to implement the policy of removing Jews from the social and economic life and deportation from Bulgaria. Liquidated at the beginning of September 1944.

On August 29, 1942, in issue No. 192 of the State Gazette was promulgated a Regulation issued on the grounds of the Law on devolution on the Council of Ministers. The same was approved by Decree № 70 passed at the sitting of the Council of Ministers on August 26, 1942 (Protocol № 111). Art. 1 of Chapter I "For the administration of the Jewish affairs" reads: "*At the Ministry of Interior and Public Health shall be established Commissariat for Jewish Affairs.*

Implementation of any measures to address the Jewish question shall concentrate in this Commissariat, except those under the Law on single payment tax on property of persons of Jewish origin and the Law against profiteering from real estate.

The Commissioner for Jewish Affairs may request from the institutions to take all necessary measures to enforce the laws and regulations concerning the Jews. For all measures relating to the implementation of laws and regulations governing the Jews, the consent of the Commissioner shall be required. Before deciding on matters affecting other institutions, the Commissioner shall consider in advance the view of the respective institution."

The procedure for appointment of the staff of the Commissariat is regulated by Art. 5 of the Regulation: " Art. 5 of the Regulation: "*The Commissioner for Jewish Affairs shall be appointed by Council of Ministers upon the proposal of the Minister of Interior and Public Health. Other staff of the commissariat, unless the regulation provides otherwise, shall be appointed by the Commissioner [...].The currently existing offices in various institutions working on the solution of*

²⁸ ASA, ф.467к

²⁹ ASA, ф.231к, inv.12

³⁰ See also Agreement between BNB and the Head Office of Credit Funds of the Reich in Berlin - part Guidelines, signed on March 4, 1941., 176к, inv.11, a.u.401, sheets1-6, 2506, inv.1, a.u. 48, sheets 1-4, 10,11, ИДА, кн.3/1959

³¹ ASA, ф.190к

the Jewish question, shall be transferred to the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs with all their personnel and equipment.

All employees on the staff of the Commissariat shall be considered civil servants [...]. Amounts necessary for personal and material costs in the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs shall be allocated to the budget of the fund "Jewish Communities".

The overall activity of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, arising from Articles 1-7, Chapter I of the Regulation, is covered in the following structure:

I. Commissioner

1. Staff

II. Administrative Division

1. Inspectorate

2. Jewish communities

3. Camps

III. Economic Division

1. Office of Jewish Property

2. Liquidation Office

a/ sole proprietorships

b/ joint stock companies

c/ limited partnerships and limited liability companies

d/ general partnerships

e/ sale of movable property

f/ sale of movable property in the New Lands

g/ settlement of liabilities to banks, institutions

3. Intelligence group

IV. Accounting division for Jewish Communities Fund

1. Upkeep of kitchens and camps

The structure, operation and the place of an institution can be studied and analyzed by the surviving documents. The collection of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs contains 15,348 archive units. **In general, they have the following characteristics:**

Inventory 1, 9062 archive units, 1940-1945.

Bills addressing the Protection of the Nation, ordinances, regulations, circulars, orders of Commissariat and personal records of its employees, lists of persons of Jewish origin, their movable and immovable property; reports, statements, files, etc. on the activity, budget approvals for the Jewish communities, reports, records, reports, statements, correspondence, etc. on the expropriation and sale of property of Jewish families, the displacement and interning in camps, prohibition of visiting public places and other restrictions imposed; records on the movement and sale of their

properties , memoranda, reports, testimony, case files, records, etc. on the participation of authorities and officials in the Commissariat in the persecution and deportation of Jews.

Inventory 2, 5910 archive units, 1942-1944

Files for liquidation of sole proprietorships, joint stock and other companies with participation of Jewish capital and liquidation of liabilities of Jews to banks, companies, institutions and individuals; orders, correspondence, records, etc. on confiscation of assets of persons of Jewish origin and Jewish companies, and single tax on their property; budgets and budget estimates of Jewish communities, supporting documents, inventories, records, files on their revenues and expenditures; books of accounts of the Commissariat.

Inventory 3, 376 archive units, 1896-1945

Law on the protection of the nation (LPN), notes, memoranda, reports, etc. on its interpretation and implementation, as well as proposals for amendment and supplement. Regulations, structure and reports of the Commissariat, minute book of the Council under the Commissioner for Jewish Affairs, ordinances, regulations, circulars and orders regarding the LPN implementation, hiring and dismissing employees of the Commissariat and its delegates in Jewish communities, the structure and management of the Jewish communities, etc.

Orders, files, statements, reports, records, etc. on the liquidation of Jewish companies and enterprises, displacement of Jews, the organization of camps, seizure and sale of property, dismissal from work, prohibition of visiting public places, establishing a curfew, wearing badges and other restrictive measures; on opening, operation and closure of Jewish communities, accommodation and arranging housing for displaced Jewish families, opening Jewish schools and recruitment of teachers, arranging homes for senior citizens, free kitchens, allocating aid for poor Jews, issuing permits for trade and craft services, etc.

Lists and information about Jews; property declarations. Financial statements, budgets, revenue and expenditure accounts, payrolls and supporting documents, orders, files, records, etc. on approving budgets for Jewish communities, approval of the financial statements, transfer of funds, funds raising for the "Jewish community" Fund, performed audits, etc.

Investigation files on trials of persons involved in the persecution of Jews in the application of LPN.

IV. ROTATION, CONFIDENTIALITY, LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION IN THE COMMISSARIAT FOR JEWISH AFFAIRS

Among all these documents it seems that the clearest idea of the Commissariat is provided by the Order Registers. For the period 09.04.1942 until the end of 1944, a total number of 12,954 outgoing orders were registered. They can be grouped as follows:

(1) Orders for appointment of personnel. For the period September 5 to 28 1942, Alexander Belev signed orders appointing 45 employees at CJA. Among them is the core of the Commissariat

- Zahari Velkov Ivanov, Head of Department in CJA - 5.9.42, Ivan Dimitrov Popov, accountant - 10.9.42, Maria Borisova Pavlova, Deputy Head - 22.9.42, Jaroslav Kalitsin, Chief Inspector - 22.9.42; Iliya Dobrevski, Inspector - 22. 9.42, Kiril Stoymenov, Inspector - 22. 9.42, Atanas Ovcharov, Deputy Head -22.9.42. The next mass appointment is on October 22, 1942. By the beginning of 1943 the number of the employees appointed in the Commissariat reached 115 people.

(2) Orders for ranking the personnel. Usually issued three months after the appointment of the person.

(3) Orders for manufacturing insignia for Jews, Jewish businesses, Jewish homes and industries with Jewish participation.

(4) Appointment of day laborers. By the end of 1942 their cash remuneration was between 70 and 80 lev per day, and in 1943 reached 120 lev per day worked.

(5) Appointment of Delegates to Jewish communities. The appointment began in October 1942. Initially in almost more than 90% were appointed mayors, district governors or administrators who combined the office of Delegate. In early February 1943 they were dismissed and new delegates were appointed in their place.

(6) Appointment of Jews as members of the Consistory in Jewish communities - after February 17, 1943.

(7) Appointment of liquidators of Jewish businesses. In 1943 most of them were also replaced.

(8) Order for seizure in favor of the treasury for public support of amounts, inventory and cash balances.

(9) Administrative orders for displacement of Jews - throughout the whole 1943.

(10) Orders for missions predominantly to Jaroslav Kalitsin, Atanas Ovcharov, Iliya Dobrevski, Ivan Gyoshev, Ivan Popov, Borislav Tasev, Zahari Velkov Slavcho Jonchev, Alexander Belev. The orders are from the beginning of February 1943.

(11) Orders for reappointment of all full-time staff of the Commissariat. They were issued in the period 1 - 16 February 1943.

(12) Orders for payment of additional remuneration for overtime - February - July 1943. They concern mainly the members of the Council under the Commissioner and heads of departments in the Commissariat. From technical staff were rewarded typists, the driver of Al. Belev, his private secretary, messenger, telephone operators /2/ intelligence police officers, guard of the warehouse of the organization *Brannik*, members of the Commission under Article 37 of Decree - liquidation of Jewish property.

(13) Orders for sanctions and dismissal of employees in the interest of the service and delays - between February and May 1943. Dismissal of day laborers - the end of February 1943. Dismissal of Jewish members of the Consistories and appointment of new ones – after February 17, 1943.

(14) Orders establishing a committee for counting the Jews from Sofia - the beginning of May 1943.

(15) Orders imposing financial penalties on Bulgarians in debt to Jews - after June 1943.

From the orders concerning the staff of the Commissariat is apparent that the constant reappointments aimed to limit the information on the actual activity of the Commissariat. In the Commissariat was designated a 'core' of 5-10 people. The biography of each of them contained pronounced nationalist orientation.

In the period September 1942 to February 1943 the full-time staff passes probationary period until permanent reappointment performed from 9 to 18 February 1943. The Commissariat employed for its operations two main types of part-time staff -- non-qualified day laborers and skilled-liquidators of property of persons of Jewish origin. For the period October 1942 - February 1943 a triple replacement of delegates to Jewish communities took place. In February - March 1943 was carried out replacement of members of the Jewish Consistory in each city. The number of posted employees in February and March 1943 was reduced to the core staff in the Commissariat.

In March 1943, was issued an order prohibiting the staff to talk to each other in the hallways, and in May 1943 - to talk to outsiders and visitors to the Commissariat. Moreover, two reports have been prepared of visits of outsiders to the Commissariat. The first was for the period February 12 to 26, with specified number of visitors to the Commissioner and individually named employees of the Administrative Division (Kalitsin , Nikolov, Pavlova, Yonchev , Stoimenov, Roussev); Occupation Division (Velkov Ivanov, Ovcharov, Popov, Dochev and Tsonev); Business Division (Lukov, Gavrilov, Bahchevandzhiev, Paraliev, Ikonov, Raynov, Kolev); Jewish Communities Fund (Gyoshev, Draganov Paitashev). A total of 510 visitors, of which 259 with invitations, 169 with permission and 82 officials. The hours for visitors were from 7:45 to 14:00 hours. In this period Alexander Belev was visited by 12 persons, including 6 with permission and 6 officials. The second report was for the period February 27 to March 13 1943. The total number of visitors was 458, of which 218 with invitations, 200 with permission and 40 officials. Visits to the Commissioner were 30 (1 of them with invitation and 29 with permissions). Both reports were prepared and signed by Zachary Velkov and were addressed to the Minister of Interior and Public Health³².

Another interesting document that reflects the administration of the Commissariat is the regulations for the registry and archives. The main objective set out in the general provisions was to simplify and accelerate the registry. To achieve this goal, the regulations have the following main sections: 1. Office for distribution of documents; 2. Incoming documents out of the procedure; 3. Movement of files; 4. Signs; 5. Resolution of files; 6. Registry; 7. Letters and signature; 8. Information; 9. Office; 10. Expedition; 11. Working time; 12. Supervision. The regulations trace out the operational movement of each document. According to it, every head of department writes in a certain color – the Commissioner uses a green pencil, heads of departments and inspectors use blue pencils. There is an additional code – КД – enclose to file/to case, ПП. - enclose the file; Б - short note on the matter; Д – report on the matter; С - information on the matter; И – to write a letter, to communicate; КА – enclose outside the file; Да –request is upheld/positive resolution of the

³² ASA, ф.190к, inv.3, a.u.101

request; He - without consequence to the request/negative resolution of the request;; CC- quick inquiry on the matter; T - telephone inquiry; A- inspection, survey, Han.- reminder, Ч- wait: 3- to be reported to particular person.

According to Article 104 of the Regulations only the Commissioner, the Chief Inspector, the Head of the Administrative Division and the Head of Staff have general oversight of the procedures and operation of the Commissariat. The level of confidentiality of the document is designated by four types of symbols³³. If the resolution, report, letter, etc. are not signed by the rapporteur but by another person, that is indicated by the following characters:

For signature by the Commissioner: #

For signature by the heads of divisions: = (with one crossing line)

For signature by the Chief Inspector:-II-

For signature by the Head of Office +

The regulations and the classifier consist of 40 mimeograph sheets without signature. The filing has accurately described indices for each activity and includes 962 key items. They cover the activities of the Commissariat as follows: A-1 General Affairs and Administration, B 4 - Division of Personal Status and Occupational Activities; 5 Business Division - organization, liquidation pursuant to art. 37 of the Regulation, seizure, sale of movable property seized by the Jews, verification of Jewish liabilities, management of Jewish real estate; 9 Accounting department of the Jewish Communities Fund. In the first section apart from the Commissariat of the Jewish Affairs Head Office relations with the Ministry of Interior and Public Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Denominations, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture and State Property, Ministry of Labour Service, Ministry of Public Buildings, Roads and Public Works, Ministry of War, Council of Ministers, the National Assembly and the Palace Chancellery, there is a subsection covering the direct activity of the Commissioner and levels of communication with the other institutions. Besides letters, dispatches, general surveys, surveys on the Jewish issue, his activities include strictly confidential files and documents. His personal record keeping covers issues relating to visits and protocol, reports to the Minister of Interior, reports to the Council of Ministers, Kardex and tasks, regular information to the press and communications and relations with regard to press reports.

It is important to mention one more fact - all orders and regulations of the Commissariat subject to publication until August 1943, were promulgated in the State Gazette. A reference to list of periodicals in Bulgaria shows that for the period 1941 -1944 its circulation was to 13 000 copies.

Alexander Belev holds the office of Commissioner from September 3rd 1942 to the beginning of October 1943. In the middle of the same month the then deputy prosecutor at the Sofia Military Court, Hristo Stomanyakov, was appointed Commissioner for Jewish Affairs. On August 31, 1944 by Decree № 4 of the Council of Ministers (proceedings № 167), the Council of Ministers approved the liquidation of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs (SG, No.193 /September 5, 1944).

³³ ASA, ф.190к, inv.3, a.u. 61

In 1945, during the sessions of the VII panel "Anti-Semites" of the Peoples Court as an accused was called Liliana V. Panitsa. In her written reply she stated as follows: "... *I held the position of private secretary of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs and in this capacity I did not head any sphere therein; no files were reported to me nor did I report or resolve any such files ...*

The position of private secretary was not foreseen in the budget of the Commissariat and I did not receive a salary as the other officials; I was affiliated in Commissariat as a day laborer ..."³⁴

Again in her testimony before the Peoples Court, Liliana Panitsa tells in detail about the visit of Dannecker³⁵ and the signing of the agreement itself in February 1943. Here, however, we will consider the characterization she gave, which highlights the staff that worked in the Commissariat. According to L. Panitsa in CJA worked ten *Ratniks* members, almost all of them were close to Alexander Belev and had influence on him. Liliana Panitsa gave the following description:

"... Ivan Gyoshev, Jaroslav Kalitsin and Dr. Popov, all three were outright Ratniks and very close with the Commissioner and had a very great influence on the latter [...]. Most frequently the Commissioner was visited by his friends Ratniks - Luben Valkov (who was allowed visits without regard to the reception or working hours) Boris Naumov and Ivan Badev (the latter came less frequently than the other two). All three of them were Ratniks and liquidators of large enterprises.

I have not seen Assen Kantardzhiev to be coming to the Commissariat. But he often called under assumed names (I know that because once he called under the name of General Nikolov and another time - as General Petrov). [...]. When I asked why he gave another name, Belev said "probably he did not want you to know it was him." Victor Ichkov Boychev, lawyer also had free access to Belev - the latter explained that Ichkov came to him not only as a lawyer and friend but also as editor of the journal "Ideas and Deeds" where the Commissioner was member of the management board.

I've heard that besides Alexander Belev, on the LPN, the Rules and the Regulation of August 26, 1942 had worked also Docho Hristov³⁶ and Boncho Bonchev, Director in the Ministry of Interior.

There was a Council at the Commissariat with representatives of the Minister of Trade, Ministry of Finance, Civil Mobilization Directorate, Police Directorate, the Supreme Administrative Court, the Bulgarian National Bank, of the Ministry of Finance [...]. The Commissioner did not take part in this Council. The issues under consideration were reported by the heads of the divisions and in their absence – by the chief inspectors.

³⁴ ASA, ф. 1568K, inv. 1, a.u. 74, sheets 38, 39.

³⁵ Theodor Dannecker - hauptsturmbanführer of SS, adviser on Jewish affairs in France, and from January 21, 1943 - in Bulgaria. Entrusted with preparing the deportation of Bulgarian Jews in Poland. Their deportation was part of the "final solution of the Jewish question". Not only in Bulgaria but also in Romania, Hungary, Italy, Spain, German diplomatic and special representatives faced resistance, which hindered or even failed some of the planned operations. Supposedly, he committed suicide on December 11, 1945 in the official judicial prison Bad Tölz.

³⁶ Keynote rapporteur at consideration of the bill on protection of the nation at the National Assembly in 1940, and later - Minister of Interior and Public Health (September 14, 1943 - July 1, 1944).

At the beginning, with the establishment of the Commissariat, the Council convened almost weekly, and later on - very rarely. Besides the issues that were approved by the Council (reviewed in advance by the Commissioner), there were issues where only the Council's decision was authoritative and determinant: transfer of property to relatives, sale of property, recognition of origin, etc.

There were cases where the Council was unanimously dissatisfied, namely that certain matters were not referred to it (e.g. the deportation of Jews).

[...] The same committee convened always after office hours; the members and the Commissariat officials who participated were getting delegates' money.

There was a council that was called every Saturday (later, I think, that the day changed). It included all heads of divisions and chief inspectors – the convened in the office of the Commissioner [...]. There each head reported issues that were discussed by all members. Besides personal and current issues were reported also weekly results of the individual divisions and agencies and draft regulations, such as restriction of students of Jewish origin, compression and the results thereof (Jews of Sofia), Sofia Jewry census, collected Arah (Jewish religious tax), accounting issues, travel of Jews in the country, the work of the agents, etc.”³⁷.

The years of the Holocaust in Bulgaria would hardly be fully understood if contemporary researchers and the general reading audience were not thoroughly familiar with CJA, which actually focuses on both the German pressure to solve the Jewish question and the ‘evolution’ of the Bulgarian fascist organizations. Their action provoked opposition from the Bulgarian civil society and as a result led to the rescue of Bulgarian Jews. This was a protest in the society against the designed machine for annihilation, in the case of Bulgaria – the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs. In the conditions of World War II (and as an ally of the Third Reich) Bulgaria is saving its Jews, although through the government's actions in its foreign policy relations it has been complicit in the deportation of Jews from the "newly liberated lands", although they do not enter its borders. Throughout the existence of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, thousands of Bulgarians, led not only by a sense of tolerance but also by duty and morality, have provided assistance to their fellow Jews to survive. During the period 1940-1944, thousands of Jews crossed the borders of Bulgaria, whose transit visas are not only a way to the Promised Land - they were first and foremost an act of rescue.

³⁷ ASA, ф. 1568K, inv. 1, a.u. 74, sheets 42, ф. 190K, inv. 3, a.u. 42. For more details on the work and personality of Liliana Panitsa, please see Chary Frederick. *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution 1940-1944*, Pittsburgh University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972.

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