

THE UNIFIER KING AND THE RESCUE OF THE JEWS FROM UNIFIED BULGARIA

(ON THE ROLE OF KING BORIS III OF THE BULGARIANS DURING THE YEARS OF THE HOLOCAUST)



БЪЛГАРСКИ
BULGARIAN

STARTING
POINT FOR
THOSE WITH
NO PREVIOUS
KNOWLEDGE
ON THE
SUBJECT



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Two statements contradicting a third one (Foreign Minister and Prime Minister vs. President)

"The King must have obviously shown great ingenuity in negotiating with the Nazi leaders to substitute the internal administrative and police measures for the deportation. A policy act of the magnitude of the revocation of the deportation, which had already begun, couldn't be done without the support of the head of state." [...] "At the same time my compatriots deployed lots of efforts, alas, unsuccessful, to save 11000 Jews – who were not Bulgarian citizens – from Aegean Thrace and Macedonia, where, notwithstanding the

Bulgarian military presence, the highest authority were the Nazis."

Excerpts from the statement of Foreign minister Solomon Passy at the OSCE conference on anti-Semitism in Vienna, 19 June 2003

"We mourn, of course, the fate of those who could not be saved. It is known that at the time Aegean Thrace and Macedonia were not under Bulgarian jurisdiction. The more important thing here is to heed the lessons of history and remember the events, so that they do not occur ever again."

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Excerpt from an interview of Prime Minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha for the Macedonian daily the Dnevnik, 17 April 2003

"On such a day we should not avoid to mention the responsibility of the then government for the fate of the 11343 Bulgarian Jews from Thrace and Macedonia, who were deprived of Bulgarian citizenship and were deported to the death camps. We are obliged, on a day like this one, to clearly say, and, what is more important, to clearly prove, that nothing is forgotten and no one is forgotten."

Speech delivered by President Parvanov of Bulgaria at the Special Session of the National Assembly of Bulgaria on the occasion of the Day of the Holocaust and the 60th Anniversary of the Rescue of Bulgaria's Jews, 11 March 2003

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The issue and the
response of official

Along with the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews, the difficult issue of the fate of the Jews from Vardar Macedonia and Aegean Thrace began to arise with increasing frequency beyond Bulgaria's borders. The issue has been discussed before, but the way it is raised outside of Bulgaria lately becomes sharper and harsher as a reaction to the categorical designation, by most of Bulgaria's official representatives, of King Boris III as one of the key rescuers of the Bulgarian Jewry.

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The official Israeli representatives and nongovernmental Jewish organizations usually approach this issue, in the presence of Bulgarian officials, with a delicate reminder of the very fact of the Thracian-Macedonian Holocaust, whereas the reaction of the Bulgarian officials and diplomats abroad varies from vexation and taking offence ("why should they remind us of this tragedy right now, when we are commemorating the deliverance of Bulgaria's Jews; are they doing this on purpose, just to belittle a bright page of our history") through partial and particular assertions ("all this happened under Hitler's pressure, we have had no real control there, they – the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia – weren't Bulgarian citizens") to a categorical denial of any involvement ("the Germans and Hitler did this, they ruled there, not us; nothing could have been done"), and sometimes the reaction is a quantitative comparison ('why should we be reminded of 12000 victims, when we have rescued 50000, and 6 000 000 have perished throughout Europe').

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This beating about the bush must stop, because it is about to finally put the blame in the wrong place.

The blame for the deportation of the Jews from Vardar Macedonia and from Aegean Thrace must be identified, recognized and acknowledged.

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It cannot be that there is no one responsible and no one to blame.

**Why is it to the best
 Bulgarian public
 interest to name the
 culprits?**

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The longer the concealment of the real situation around this issue, the darker the shadow that might unfairly fall on the unique and worthy behavior of the Bulgarian civil society of 1941-1943 in rescuing the Jews from the pre-war boundaries of the Kingdom. The Bulgarian society does not deserve this shadow. The Bulgarian society has proven its unique humanity, decency and courage in rescuing the Jews of Bulgaria-proper (pre-war Bulgaria).

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That is why it is to the interest of the Bulgarian society, more than to anyone else's interest, to name the accomplices in the doom of the Jews from the territories acquired during the war. The Bulgarian society cannot take the blame for these deaths. It was simply not there. Another cast of characters was there, who can in no way be the Bulgarian civil society.

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The blame, therefore, exists, and the Bulgarian society should not undeservedly

share it. Because not only was not the Bulgarian society a passive onlooker, accomplice or the main perpetrator, as was the case in other countries (“we didn’t know, then we knew, but it was late, nothing could be done” etc. etc.), to the contrary – the Bulgarian society did something more – it saved its Jews, and if it had been present in the newly acquired Bulgarian lands, it would surely have tried to save the Jews from Thrace and Macedonia, too...

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Not for a single minute, not for a single second should the descendants of the brave Bulgarian men and women of that dramatic time share the guilt of the real accomplices. But in order not to share the guilt, they have to identify them.

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**Is there a place for
 Boris among the
 saviors?**

The culprit for the deportation of the Jews from Aegean Thrace and Vardar Macedonia is the Bulgarian government, acting in agreement with the Third Reich, behind the back of the Bulgarian society, and on territories that had not established yet a strong connection with the Church, the intellectuals, the Resistance, the opposition, in one word – with the civil society of Bulgaria-proper (prewar Bulgaria).

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The death of the Jews from Vardar Macedonia and Aegean Thrace is precisely the reason why King Boris III ought not be mentioned in the ranks of the rescuers of the Bulgarian Jewry.

You cannot be both rescuer in one part of Bulgaria, and an active accomplice to the murderers in another. The Jews of Bulgaria-proper were saved in spite of Boris, not because of Boris. What kind of a rescuer you have to be to have allowed the completion of all the preparations, with the trains waiting at the railway stations and the barges lined up at the river ports?

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**The credit that
 goes to Boris**

The only credit, not a small one, that goes to Boris is that, faced with the unpleasant leakage of information about the fully secret deportation plans, as well as with the fierce resistance of his own people, including a significant minority in Parliament, the whole of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the overwhelming majority of the intellectual elite and the professional unions, the underground Resistance and the associations of ordinary Bulgarians from stores, factories and workshops, he had the common sense to correctly evaluate the pending catastrophe for his authoritarian regime and was forced to stop and postpone, literally in the 12th hour, the deportation from Old Bulgaria, which HAD ALREADY BEGUN, thus finding himself *volens-nolens* in the position of someone who has reversed his policy by 180 degrees and has resisted Hitler’s demands.

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This is not a small feat for someone so hesitant such as Boris, whatever the situation of his German ally on the Russian war front. This credit of Boris is not being denied here. What is being denied is the assumption that Boris is entitled to being mentioned in the ranks and on a par with the real rescuers. It is unbecoming to thank in one and the same manner those who did their utmost

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and put their lives on the line to save the Jews, and the one (King Boris) who had made every preparation for the deportation and even started it, but did not succeed to finalize it and was forced to give up. This would be similar to thanking the bully for breaking his club while thrashing you: "thank you for not being successful at beating me to death"...

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The rejection of the responsibility of the Bulgarian State as an accomplice in the death of the Jews from the New Lands is incredibly detrimental to contemporary Bulgaria. For the simple reason that when the guilt is not identified, it might be improperly attributed to each and everyone in Bulgaria.

[The Government's responsibility](#)

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There are some European nations, which are still the object of a discussion on whether they are guilty as a nation (this is not to affirm that there are whole guilty nations – this is just to note that there are authors who find grounds for such a mental exercise). But the Bulgarians, of all nations, the Bulgarians who showed to other, presumably more sophisticated (at least in their own judgment) nations, how should Evil be faced, do not deserve such a discussion.

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What was the fate of the Jews from Bulgaria-proper? It is well known. They were saved. And what could their fate be, were it not for the decisive actions of the civil society? That is also made quite clear by what happened where there were no such actions – in Thrace and Macedonia.

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What was the missing Bulgarian component in Thrace and Macedonia? The Bulgarian civil society was missing. Local Bulgarians weren't missing, but the spectrum of the Bulgarian civil society was still dismally incomplete, same as its connections with the opponents of the government policy from the prewar boundaries of the Kingdom. This was the sealing circumstance of the tragic fate of the unfortunate Jews from Thrace and Macedonia.

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What was the Bulgarian component, which was present in Thrace and Macedonia? His Majesty's Government was present.

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In what way would the Bulgarian Government dispose of the Jews from Bulgaria-proper, were it not for the Bulgarian civil society? It's logical – in the way it disposed of the Jews where there was no one in the way (Thrace and Macedonia); in the way the explicit Bulgarian-German agreements stipulated, and in the way it had, in fact, begun to dispose of them in scores of Bulgarian towns and cities during the fateful first hours after midnight on March 10th, 1943.

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It is not true that only the Germans were to blame for the doom of those 11343 souls from the New Bulgarian lands. The Bulgarian government and the Bulgarian state, headed by Boris, are an active accomplice. It is not true that the Bulgarian authorities were nothing but passive onlookers. Nor is it true that they have been only implementing someone else's scheme. They were initiators, administrators and enforcers.

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Bulgarian police drove the ill-fated out of their homes and loaded them on Bulgarian trains (the notorious “hit them, don’t spare them the clubs” is well documented, as well as the 80 pounds of luggage allowed per adult and 40 pounds per child, the looting of abandoned households, the collecting of money and valuables, the searches for jewelry in the bodily orifices, the beatings, the summons for military service for the Jewish men and the decoy of an alleged visiting-day used to subsequently lure the wives and children into the trap “without street scenes”); Bulgarians handed the victims to the SS at border stations and ports, Bulgarians prepared the lists of names, Bulgarians signed the agreements with Germany, Bulgarian authorities put the railway personnel and the personnel of the Commissariat on Jewish Affairs (KEV) on a war footing, the Bulgarian government authorized the free-of-charge transportation via the Bulgarian State Railway Co., the Bulgarian government bargained whether to pay to the German government BGL 200 or BGL 150 per Jewish capita (*nota bene* – the Bulgarians were to pay the Germans, *ergo*, it is the German government doing a favor to the Bulgarian government by taking its Jews, rather than the Bulgarians doing a favor to the Germans by surrendering them...).

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Everything surrounding the deportation, to the last detail, to the hour and minute of every single “Aktzia”, even the subsequent “spontaneous” stream of “thank you” telegrams that the local Legionnaires, Branniks, Ratniks, other assorted fascists, and the local administration flooded Sofia with, was thought out and executed by the then Bulgarian administrative apparatus with precision and effectiveness which, barring, underline, barring the specific tragic circumstances, the contemporary Bulgarian government can only envy. And all of this was planned behind the back of the Bulgarian civil society, whatever and as much of it had survived under the regime of Boris III.

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The rejection of the responsibility of the pro-fascist regime of Boris III for the surrender of those 11343 victims is as detrimental to Bulgaria, as is the promoting of Boris as a full-fledged, *bona fide*, foremost etc. etc. rescuer of the Jews from Bulgaria-proper. For the world cannot honor someone who used to rescue with the one hand, and used to assist the killers with the other.

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[The arguments in favor of Boris](#)

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Lots of arguments have been put forward against the responsibility of Boris and his government for the fate of the Jews of the newly-acquired lands, some of them very general, and some of them very specific, the most specific being “they were not Bulgarian citizens”, and the most general being “this is all Hitler’s fault”. Somewhere in-between falls the argument that “yes, we did participate, but we had to surrender these Jews under Hitler’s pressure, because we had no real control there, the Germans had, these lands were not our jurisdiction”.

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Only the last of these assertions deserves attention, as the other two are obviously groundless, whereas the third one tries to palm off 95% of lies along with 5 % of truth.

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**The "they were not
Bulgarian citizens"
argument**

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It is not by some surprising, for the Bulgarian authorities, concurrence of circumstances, that the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia were not Bulgarian citizens. The fact is that the Bulgarian government, by virtue of its own executive order No. 31 of June 5th, 1942, unconstitutionally deprived them *en masse* of Bulgarian citizenship, precisely with the aim of facilitating their surrender to a foreign power.

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**The "it was all
Hitler's fault"
argument**

The argument "this was all Hitler's activity" should not be even approached – the whole process of the deportation, in all its stages – starting with the legislature, going through the dozen of unconstitutional government executive orders and finishing with the minutest disgusting detail of the practical execution – was carried out by the Bulgarian authorities – the police, the civil organs of the KEV, the army, the local administration. While it is clear that the government was doing this as a result of its own choice of policy of alliance with Hitler's Germany, it is nevertheless ridiculous to assert that "all was Hitler's deed" – along the whole tragic route from the Jewish homes through the transfer camps till their handing to the German SS at the border points of Lom and Lapovo, a German uniform could be seen on very few occasions, among them a pre-arranged tour of a transfer camp, guided in person by Commissar Alexander Belev for a few of the German allied officers.

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**The "it wasn't our
jurisdiction"
argument**

The status of Thrace and Macedonia can only partially explain the motivation of King Boris III's government, but it can in no way excuse its actions. While it is true that the post-war status of these territories was not formally finalized among the allies (they must have postponed this for the day after the illusive *Zieg*), their wartime status was perfectly clear - these territories were *unter bulgarischer Verwaltung* - under Bulgarian administration. Bulgarian civil, police and military authorities ruled there, and Bulgarian laws were enforced.

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The motivation behind the Bulgarian government's decision to surrender the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia is not different from its motivation for the surrender of the Jews from Bulgaria-proper, which was planned, started, but could not be finalized. The legal basis was one and the same. The simple truth is that in the first case they succeeded, and in the second they failed. The decision to sacrifice the Jews at the altar of Bulgaria's unification was not exclusively targeted at the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia, which is why the status of the New Lands cannot be put forward as an excuse for the deportation; this decision targeted the Jews of the old boundaries of the Kingdom, too, *ergo*, it is not the peculiar status of Thrace and Macedonia that brought about the tragedy, but the overall pro-Hitler policy of the Government.

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Indeed, it is doubtful that Boris would have tried to reject Germany's demands for deportation, once he had accepted the new lands as a gift, and not as a liberator. The immoral (immoral by the Bulgarian people's standards, not the

government's) price that had to be paid for the ephemeral unification should have hardly been a surprise for Boris – after all, the anti-Jewish legislation was passed BEFORE Bulgaria's accession to the Axis, not AFTER. That is to say, they knew what Hitler would expect in return, made their educated choice and prepared accordingly. No one had the intention to resist and reject. To put it in the contemporary *EurEnglish* of Bruxelles, they completed the necessary legal approximation, harmonization and adaptation to the *Acquis Axiales* and closed the *Justice and Home Affairs* chapter...

Isn't it a sad way of defending Boris to argue that he had to thank Hitler for the unification of Bulgaria – let's think about it: Boris's father squandered these lands during the Second Balkan War and WW I, and Boris, hoping to restore what his father had wasted, paid with 11 343 innocent souls. The argument that the pro-Hitler choice of policy was justified by the unification of Bulgaria is even sadder. If this was the correct policy, where are these lands now?

The impediments to a solution

The impediments for the attribution of this responsibility in contemporary Bulgaria are purely political. For the son of one of the main culprits for the deportation of the Jews from the New Lands is currently the Prime Minister of Bulgaria. He would hardly be to blame for the silence of the officials surrounding him – though incompetent, he seems to be a decent person, until otherwise proven. But the officials themselves are surely to blame. What a concurrence of expedient interests – the ruling party, NDSV, keep silent lest they should offend their own Prime Minister, and the main conservative opposition party, the SDS, keep silent because their McCarthy-style primitive anti-communism wouldn't allow them to concede that the Communists of the time were anti-fascists and staunch defenders of the Jews, whereas quite a few of the then "democrats" were active collaborators of Hitler and Nazi Germany...

What could the Prime Minister do today?

If Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha were really a decent person, it would be most appropriate that precisely he should be the one to find the strength of pinpointing the responsibility for the fate of the Thracian and Macedonian Jews. Such a step will make the heroic rescue of the Jews from the Old Bulgarian boundaries even more visible, as it will clearly demonstrate what a grave danger they were in, as well as the fact that the rescuers had to fight AGAINST the government, rather than TOGETHER with the government...

It would also be a handsome gesture if he should pay the \$20 mln in indemnities and restoration of property, that the survivors insist on, out of his own pocket – after all that will be just one tenth of what the Bulgarian state gave him back. Once Simeon has accepted the property as a heir to his father, let him accept

also the moral liabilities and encumbrances of the estate.

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Bulgarian Civil Society as a savior

If contemporary Bulgaria proves successful in naming the culprits, it will also prove that it has finally turned into a real civil society, and that the Bulgarians of today are worthy of the Bulgarians of 1940 – 1943 who saved their Jews.

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There is no doubt that there was a civil society in Bulgaria in 1943. The regime, pro-fascist, authoritarian and dictatorial as it was, was not fascist in the classical German sense – there were tortures and persecutions, there was the unconstitutional anti-Jewish and anti-democratic legislation, there was a ban on all political parties and consequently a semi-rubber-stamp Parliament, there was a mockery of an electoral law, but, on the other hand, there was opposition, there was an independent and extremely decent Church, there were opposing members of parliament, elected in their private capacity and on their own ballot, there were, questionable as they undoubtedly are, parliamentary elections in 1938 and in 1939, there were, after all, the civic and professional associations who fiercely and relentlessly opposed the anti-Jewish policy of the government.

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This is the reason why it is safe to say that in Bulgaria of 1940 – 43, despite Boris, there were remnants of civic society that totally disappeared later, by 1947-48, after the complete consolidation of the Communist totalitarian regime. And they disappeared for such a long time, that even now many Bulgarians seem to be at a loss when finally grasping the simple truth – it was not the *Caesar ex Machina* who saved the Jews, but their own civic society. And those who guiltily defend the *Caesar ex Machina*, who is responsible for the deaths of 11343 Jews from Greater Bulgaria, they belittle the heroic deed of their own people. (The number 11343 is not final – we still have to count the Jewish subjects of Boris, stranded in Nazi-occupied Western and Central European countries – Germany wanted to know whether the Bulgarian government would like to claim them, and the latter magnanimously gave them away for keeps...)

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A magic formula: "Nothing could be done in Bulgaria without the King's involvement"

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It is only natural that, after a period of 55 years (1934-1989) of uninterrupted failure of the democratic form of government in Bulgaria, some Bulgarians of today might find it hard to comprehend that their civil society could get the better of Boris in rescuing the Jews. Notions like “civil society”, “civic virtues”, “independent middle class” and “social contract between the government and the citizens” had been long forgotten. This inevitable decline of the civic consciousness is evidenced today in the ubiquitous magic formula of Boris III’s defenders: “Nothing could be done in Bulgaria without the King’s involvement”. This formula is not particularly helpful to the King’s cause, not only because it

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can be equally applied to both the deportation from the new lands and the started/suspended deportation from Bulgaria-proper, but also for the simple reason that it is not equivalent to “nothing could be done against the will of the King”, or “the King could do as he pleased, without deferring to anyone”. The very fact that Boris and the government had to keep their plans in total secrecy speaks volumes about the formidable force of the anti-government public opinion in Bulgaria on the Jewish “question”. The absolute secrecy was vital for the success of the malefaction. The government was reduced to unabashed lying – they had to lie even to their own parliamentary majority; Interior minister Gabrovski looks Deputy Speaker Peshev straight in the eye, in the presence of all the Kyustendil delegation, and lies through his teeth, without batting an eyelid, first, that there were no deportation plans, and later – that he himself was not aware of any such plans, and continues lying even after the (town of) Kyustendil authorities confirmed, by phone, that they had received secret orders to round up all the Jews that very night and lock them up in the tobacco ware houses, and the trains are already lined up at the station...

The role of Bulgaria's diplomacy today

When some Bulgarian diplomats in neighboring and overseas capitals today deny the responsibility of the then Bulgarian authorities for the tragedy of the Jews from the new lands with arguments such as “they weren’t Bulgarian subjects, they had no Bulgarian passports” and the like, they do themselves a good short term personal favor, but a great disservice to Bulgaria. Because most of them are in fact striving to pusillanimously please the son of King Boris III, and current Prime Minister of Bulgaria (barring, of course, the few among them who earnestly believe they defend Bulgaria). In fact, it is not Bulgaria they defend, but the pro-Nazi Bulgarian government of 1941-43 that doomed the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia. They also defend, of course, the benevolent attitude of the Prime minister to their own *personae*. This policy is harmful for Bulgaria, and the crop of its bitter fruit is yet to be gathered in abroad.

The best the Bulgarian diplomats could do for Boris’s memory was to just keep silent about his role during that specific period of Bulgaria’s history – *aut bene*, *aut nihil*, and in this case – *nihil*. Had they kept silent, it could be that the Jewish organizations and associations (even the friendliest to Bulgaria among them) wouldn’t have been forced to react (orally, so far), and the bitter truth would have continued to be, as hitherto, the object of academic research and scholarly discussions in museum halls and on the pages of documentary collections, rather than in the broad and glaring field of the dailies.

Alas, not only did they not keep silent – they actively promoted, both in their own and in others’ texts, Boris as a savior. This borders on the anti-Bulgarian. While Simeon was a private person, it was his private business whether he could successfully convince a few Jewish organizations and members of some foreign parliaments to proclaim his father as a Savior of the Jews. But Simeon is not a private person anymore, and the Bulgarian diplomats should very carefully weigh on the scales of their own conscience whom they owe loyalty to – to the

Bulgarian public interest, or to the personal interest of the Prime Minister. Regretfully, as far as the truth about the Vardar-Aegean tragedy is concerned, these interests are obviously divergent...

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Who was saving the Jews from whom?

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If it were true that everyone joined forces together in a common struggle against the perdition of the Jews, whom did the rescuers fight? Who was the fight against? Who did they have to save the Jews from? Can it be that the hundreds of protest letters, statements and minutes, the pledges to lie across the railway tracks, the personal interventions, the counter-orders given from within the Houses of the National Assembly, etc. etc. - can it be that they were all directed against Hitler? No. They were directed against the government and against the King; it was their plans and intentions that the Jews had to be saved from. To speak of "the beauty of this act" in which allegedly, everyone said "Hail Fellow Well Met" - the King, the Branniks, the Ratniks, the Legionnaires, Filov, Gabrovski, the opposition, the Church, the Communists, the RMS-members, the social-democrats - and embraced each-other in a common struggle to save the Jews, is blatantly indecent.

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The inclusion of Boris into the ranks of the real saviors is incorrect and detrimental to Bulgaria. At the insistence of a certain US Jewish organization a commemorative plaque in honor of Boris was put in Israel next to the plaque commemorating Dimitar Peshev, the Bishops and the other heroes. The subsequent wave of outrage in Israel and abroad (part of which was the similar protest in Bulgaria) brought about the dismantling of both commemorative signs – the baby was thrown out of the bathing tub together with the water...

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Why wonder – should there be people in Bulgaria who can see beyond the narrow national horizons of the unparalleled Bulgarian deed of valor, let them think about this: could there be a commemorative plate honoring Boris in Israel, even if someone may earnestly consider him to be the savior of the Jews from Bulgaria-proper, given that the whole world has very good reasons to consider him the accomplice of Hitler in the undoing of the Jews from Thrace and Macedonia? A reluctant rescuer in spite of himself in Bulgaria-proper, a hesitant but effective accomplice in Greater Bulgaria – that is what Boris is...

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The Bulgarian civil society, whose heroic act of saving all the Jews from Bulgaria-proper will shine with everlasting and intransient brightness, has to immediately distance itself from the accomplices of Hitler in the destruction of the Jews from Thrace and Macedonia, because the truth is slowly but inevitably emerging, because in Thrace and Macedonia they still remember the Bulgarian uniforms of the officials who crammed the Jews like cattle into the boxcars, and when defending, presumably, the honor of Bulgaria, quite a few high Bulgarian officials are in fact defending today nothing but a failed government with a failed policy (the government of 1940 - 43).

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What is of greater
importance - the label
or the policy?

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The recent legal rehabilitation of two of the key murderers – Prime Minister Filov and Interior Minister Gabrovski (inconspicuously attached to the justified *en masse* rehabilitation of hundreds of innocent victims of Communism), makes one wonder: is this not an attempt at rehabilitation of their policy? Are the relentless assertions of the SDS (right wing) leaders that there has never been fascism in Bulgaria also a part of this attempt at rehabilitation? And if this assertion is correct from the academic point of view, isn't it equally correct that the "non-fascist" personal regime of the King was pursuing a fascist policy?

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If that policy wasn't fascist, what is the definition of "fascist"? How should one define the adoption and enforcement of the fascist anti-Jewish legislation, the adoption of the fascist anti-Jewish government executive orders, the doom of the Thracian and Macedonian Jews, and what is more important – the precise politological label of the regime, or what the regime had done to please its Fascist ally, drawing the resistance and wrath of its own people?

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The real saviors

Those who are trying, because of political expedience or career aspirations, to sneak up Boris into the ranks of the saviors of the Jews, are in fact disparaging the accomplishment of the real rescuers and opponents of the genocide. The loyal subjects' and courtiers' myth of the Savior King Boris III was conveniently substituted for the totalitarian myth of the Communist leader and rescuer of the Jews Todor Zhivkov...

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The real saviors are the ordinary and extraordinary Bulgarians – the Princes of the Church and the street-vendors, the Members of Parliament and the shoemakers, the former Prime ministers and the underground resistance – these are the real heroes, and their role is well documented.

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Let us mention, in no particular order, and in a list which will be constantly updated, the names of at least some of them: Deputy Speaker of Parliament Dimitar Peshev and 29 of the 42 members of Parliament who signed his letter; Metropolitans (Bishops) Stefan of Sofia and Kiril of Plovdiv, all the other members of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church – Bishop Neofit of Vidin, Bishop Michail of Dorostsol and Cherven, Bishop Paisii of Vratza, Bishop Boris of Nevrokop, Bishop Sofronii of Tarnovo, Bishop Joseph of Varna and Preslav, Bishop Eulogii of Sliven, Bishop Kliment of Stara Zagora, and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as a whole, the (town of) Kyustendil Delegation, comprising MP Petar Mihalev, businessman Acen Suichmezov, teacher Vladimir Kurtev and lawyer Ivan Momchilov, the three Baruch brothers - Jacob (Yako), Samuel and Joseph; the Group of 63 (among them prominent figures such as Tzviatko Boboshevski, Damian Velchev, Dimo Kazasov, Krastiu Pastuhov, Mihail Madzharov, Nikola Petkov, Atanas Burov, Kimon Georgiev), Prof. Petko Stainov, Nikola Mushanov, MP Ivan Petrov, Dr. Nikola Sakarov, BRP-members

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and MPs Todor Poliakov and Lyuben Dyukmedzhiev, MPs Martin Tyutyundzhiev and Georgi Kenderov, Christo Punev, Yanko Sakazov, Stoyan Kosturkov, Lyudmil Stoyanov, Konstantin Neftyanov, Ivan Runevski, MP Tzvetan Petkov, MP B. Kovachevski, MP Nikolai Rainov, MP Dimitar Ikonov, MP P.Mitev, MP T.M. Novakov, MP Avram Gachev, MP Atanas Kadrev, MP R.Atanasov, the Union of Bulgarian Writers - Grigor Cheshmedjiev, Stilian Chilingirov, Todor Vlaikov, Elin Pelin, Konstantin Konstantinov, Nikola Filipov, Christo Tsankov-Deridjan, Lyudmil Stoyanov, Minko Genov, Trifon Kunev, Elisabeth Bagriana, Mladen Isaev, Peter Gorjanski, Nikolai Liliev, Miroslav Minev, Vladimir Rusaliev, Ilija Volen, D.B.Mitov, N.Djerov, N.P.Ikonov, Ana Kamenova; the citizens of III, IV and VI residential districts of Sofia, the people of the “Lozenets” and “Yuchbunar” residential areas of Sofia, The Supreme Lawyers’ Council, The Union of Bulgarian Lawyers, the Bar Association of the town of Vidin, The Bulgarian Medical Doctors’ Union, The Union of Crippled War Veterans, The Union of Bulgarian Artists, The Central Jewish Consistory, the Union of the *People’s* Banks, the *People’s* Banks of the cities of Sofia and Plovdiv and of the residential districts of Lozenets and Yuchbunar in Sofia, the *Fatherland Front* coalition of legal and underground opposition forces, the consular officers: minister plenipotentiary Nikola Petsev, legation counselors Nikola Vanchev, Henry Levenson and Dr. Lyuben Zlatarov, the Bulgarian Workers’ Party (BRP) as a whole, the Youth branch of the BRP, Valka Goranova and Bertha Kaloara, Rabbi Daniel Zion and Rabbi Dr. Asher Hananel, Solomon Leviev, Ekaterina Karavelova, The Association of Shop Assistants, Lyubomir Lulchev, Liliana Panitza; trade associations of shoe-makers, food-processing workers, tailors, carpenters, mechanics, textile factory workers, street vendors etc. etc.

For those of our readers who are not well versed in Bulgarian history, a clarification: many of the above names have such a prominent, semi-legendary, place in it, that there is no way Boris could have circumvented their unshakable, active and loud disapproval.

And, when all is said and done, the credit goes to the Bulgarian people. Other than their integrity of character, there is one more thing in common for the persons enumerated above, despite the various walks of life, ideological orientations and political affiliations they represent – had they not felt the mood of the people, had they not seen its humane behavior, its defiant daily gestures of solidarity with the Jews, the few of them who would rise to fight the Government and the King on moral grounds, exclusively because of the Jews, would have been doomed to failure or worse. If they succeeded, it was due to their civil valor, supported by the relentless solidarity of the overwhelming majority of Bulgarians with their Jewish compatriots.