



БЪЛГАРСКИ
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How Are We to Understand the Role of Bulgaria

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Holocaust historians have developed well refined categories by which to classify the behavior of individuals and nations in the Holocaust: perpetrators and victims, collaborators and bystanders, rescuers and resisters. Yet, the classification of Bulgaria defies such simple unitary categorization.

Militarily Bulgaria was part ally and part satellite of Nazi Germany, independent and dependent, allied yet singularly cautious. Part murderer, part persecutor, part rescuer, In 1941, when a German victory in World War II seemed all but inevitable, Bulgarian turned over Serbian Jews who had sought refuge in its territories to the Germans; they were then shot to death. In March 1943, when a German defeat seemed the likely outcome of the War, Bulgaria agreed to deport 20,000 Jews to Death Camps in German-occupied Poland and presided over the deportation of 12,000 Jews from Thrace and Macedonia to Treblinka where they were gassed upon arrival. Due to domestic protests from significant segments of the Bulgarian population – Parliamentarians and religious leaders, lawyers and civic figures, Bulgaria did not fulfill its signed commitment to deport 8,000 Bulgarian citizens in “old Bulgaria” and did not agree to deport its remaining Jewish population Previously, it defined its own Jews, expropriated their property, persecuted and marked them, even deported them to slave labor camps, where their treatment was anything but mild, but hesitated to take the final and fatal step of deporting its own Jews to death camps.

How is the role of Bulgaria to be portrayed?

Heroic rescuer?

More Jews and a greater percentage of Jews were saved from murder in Bulgaria than in Denmark, universally admired – properly so -- for its humanity and decency in protecting its Jews and transporting them to freedom.

Brutal Murderers?

The Jews of Thrace and Macedonia faced each stage of the Holocaust: they were defined, their property was confiscated, they were isolated and marked, concentrated, albeit only for days in makeshift ghettos and then deported to the death. More than 99% of these Jews were killed; the survivors were less than one in a hundred – men, women and children.

Cruel Persecutors?

Lest we shroud Bulgaria's action in the mantle of rescue, we must note the fact that Bulgaria mirrored Nazi German behavior. It subjected its Jews to ongoing persecution, slave labor, economic confiscation and overt discrimination even over the opposition of some of the very same forces that were to protest their deportation.

But Bulgarian behavior must be seen in context.

In his important work *The Fragility of Goodness: Why Bulgarian Jews Survived the Holocaust*, Tzvetan Todorov described Bulgaria's territorial losses and territorial ambitions. "At the end of the Second Balkan War (1913) and again at the conclusion of the First World War (1914-1918) Bulgaria had to give up several provinces: Dobrudja was ceded to Romania; Thrace to Greece and Macedonia to Serbia."

Bulgaria was defeated twice within five years. Still, while defeat meant the loss of territory, it did not end territorial hopes. The dream of restoration was not easily abandoned, the stigma of defeat not readily overcome.

King Boris III assumed the throne after the abdication of his father in 1918. In the coup of May 19, 1934, the Zveno military organization came to power and established a dictatorship and abolished the political parties in Bulgaria. As a result King Boris was reduced to the status of a puppet. But not for long! The next year he staged a counter-coup and assumed control of the country by establishing a regime loyal to him. He virtually destroyed the political parties and the Parliament, which gave him strong, quasi dictatorial executive powers, powers which he exercised cautiously and often ambiguously. Opposition parties remained and the Bulgarian Parliament was a place of debate and not quite a rubber stamp, Todorov

describes the regime as “authoritarian, though not fascist.” The authoritarian nature of the regime was to prove fatal to the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia while the debates in Parliament were to prove essential to the Jews of old Bulgaria.

The King was under no illusions regarding Hitler. After one meeting he noted:

He speaks off the cuff, but forcefully. No objection can ever stop the downpour of his endless words.... He hardly gives one the chance to get a word in edgewise ... and he doesn't seem to hear anything but his own voice.”

He has all kinds of intentions, projects and ambitions, which he expresses with brutal frankness, and which he will strive to achieve with no holds barred, and without the slightest shadow of doubt. This man is a curious blend of realism and mysticism, verging on religious fanaticism. These attitudes may propel him very far. He is truly someone possessed by demonic powers.

Still King Boris drew Bulgaria into Germany's orbit. Internalizing the lessons of defeat, at the outset of the war, Boris was anxious to avoid being drawn into the conflagration. Bulgaria harbored territorial grievances against its neighbors yet the hopes for restoration were to overcome his great hesitancy. Bulgaria remained neutral as the war began in September 1939, but still was regarded as leaning toward its traditional ally of Germany. Bulgaria was the beneficiary of the Soviet-German Pact, the startling alliance between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed in late August 1939 on the eve of the German invasion of Poland, which secretly divided Poland into German held territories in the West and Soviet held territories in the East, which proved so essential to German plans for domination. As part of the pact part of Northern Romania was ceded to the Soviet Union. The Germans were aware of Bulgaria's ambitions and were quite skilled in using them to their own advantage to cement the alliance. Thus, on September 7, 1940 Southern Dobrudja was ceded to Bulgaria. The King's stature among his people grew measurably.

In March 1941 admitted German troops into Bulgaria in preparation for the attack on the Balkans and Greece that followed in April. With the German victory, Bulgaria, which had welcomed German troops but not sent its own into battle received Thrace from Greece and Macedonia from Yugoslavia. Its troops were

to occupy these lands. The King again showed his people what could be gained by the strategic and judicious use of power. With considerable skill, the Germans were strengthening the alliance just on the eve of their invasion of the Soviet Union, luring Bulgaria away from its balance and its historic ties with Russia.

Bulgarian Jews were less than 1% of the population mainly artisans and workers. Unlike most Bulgarians, they were an urban population; with half concentrated in Sofia the nation's capital. While Bulgaria had antisemitic parties, the traditions of antisemitism were not deep and the Orthodox Church was a force for moderation. It remained so throughout the war.

Yet with its strategic course charted, and with his desire to draw closer to Germany, in February 1940 King Boris appointed Bogdan Filov, a Germanophile, as his Prime Minister and Filov in turn appointed Peter Gabrovski, of the antisemitic Ratnitsi party as Minister of Interior, in charge of Bulgaria's security. Gabrovski sent his chief lawyer, Alexander Belev, another Ratnitsi partisan, to Berlin to consult with Adolf Eichmann. Eichmann who staffed the Jewish question clearly was primarily interested in the question of all Jews under Bulgarian control. Belev returned with a Bulgarian translation of the Nuremberg Laws. Might one say, he had his marching orders?

Within months, the Law for the Protection of the Nation was enacted. Written by Bulgarians, not Germans, the law was clearly modeled on the German Nuremberg Laws of September 1935; some provisions were more stringent while others were milder. For example, unlike the Nuremberg Laws, a person with three Jewish grandparents was not defined as a Jew if he had married Christian before September 1940 or converted before the law was passed. Similarly, a person was not classified as a Jew if he had two Jewish grandparents and married to a Jew if he converted before September 1, 1940. The Bulgarian law insisted on conversion, a religious category, rather than the racial – biological -- categorization that was central in Germany. The law also had a category of "Privileged Jews," consisting of war volunteers, war heroes with certain types of decoration, war orphans, war invalids and their descendants.

Still, a young Bulgarian Jew, Norbert Yasharoff well remembered its impact: “The Law for the Protection of the Nation” included measures such as depriving Jews of every kind of property, forcing them to pay a one time global tax on everything they owned, prohibiting them from exercising their professions, eventually forcing them to move into ghetto areas of the major cities of Bulgaria.”

The introduction of the law met with some significant opposition from segments of the Bulgarian population, writers and lawyers, church leaders and physicians, but the law was passed overwhelming by Parliament and signed into law in January 1941 by the King. The government learned some significant lessons from this opposition as more than a year later, when plans are developed for the more intensive persecution of the Jews, the Subranie (Bulgarian parliament) introduced the "Law to charge the Council of Ministers to take all measures for solving the Jewish question and matters connected with it," bypassing Parliamentary oversight and responsibility for the anti-Jewish policy. It gave the Cabinet the authority to pass decrees on Jewish matters and the power to alter existing Jewish legislation unchecked by the Parliament and policy could be developed and implemented without public debate – or so it seemed.

The tone of the opposition was a prelude to what would happen later, much later.

One Parliamentarian said:“ The Jews of Bulgaria have not threatened our economy, our culture, or the `purity’ of the Bulgarian nation....The Bulgarian Constitution expressly forbids the separation of Bulgarian citizens into inferior and superior categories.... Approval of the bill would be a violation of our Constitution.”

Dimo Kazasov, another Parliamentarian said: “The war against the Jews in Bulgaria will inevitably put us morally at odds with public opinion around the world. What a monstrous nationalism, to condemn our own people to complete isolation. Do we really want to do this ... because of the social hysteria of a few mentally imbalanced Bulgarians?”

Even some Church leaders joined in: Bishop Neofit of Vidin said: “This bill contains many grave provisions ... that could ... jeopardize our nation.... It contains clauses that target only Jews. These measures cannot be considered just or useful for the defense of the nation.... They are a pretext for injustice and violence.”

Yet the bill passed and the moves against the Jew pushed forward.

As in Germany, definition was but the first stage of the process of depriving Jews of their rights, it was swiftly followed by a series of measures designed to impoverish the Jews and to confiscate their wealth.

Within months a special tax was placed on all Jewish property in Bulgaria and Jews abroad were also liable to the tax. Unlike other people in Bulgarian-occupied Macedonia, Jews in Bulgarian zone in Macedonia declared Yugoslav citizens – "foreigners" and were obliged to pay the special "alien tax". Fines, imprisonment, and confiscation could be placed in case of non-payment or fraud, and migration could be halted until tax was paid. Alien males ages 20-45 drafted for hard labor. Jews in Macedonia and Thrace had to wear the yellow star. Special signs reading "Jewish Residence" or "Jewish Shop" had to be posted.

In August Bulgarian Jewish males who were deferred or rejected by the military were sent to forced labor. And by early 1942 the Ministry of Finance sponsored a general bill against real estate speculation. The law forbade Jews explicitly to own real estate except for a home or a business. Jews were to be reimbursed by the government over a long period for property liquidated under the law.

The Bulgarian Occupation of Macedonia

On April 6, 1941 the Germans bombarded Macedonia 1941. Four days later the German army entered Macedonia as part of its move against the Balkans and Greece. With German entry, the Nazi followed a familiar script. Actions against the Jews followed immediately; synagogues were burned, shops were looted, windows were broken, but Macedonia was but a way station in German plans for domination. Their target were the Balkans and Greece; ultimately the Soviet Union. So at a meeting later that in April between Germany, Italy and Bulgaria, is given control over Thrace and Macedonia, a move that was welcomed by Macedonia Jews who expected Bulgarian occupation to be far more benign than Nazi Germany. Of the three powers, only Italy did not participate in the murder of Jews.

Avram Sadikario was born in 1919 in Bitola, Macedonia. As one of ten children, he grew up in a religious Ladino speaking Sephardic family. During the war, he hid in a gynecological clinic in Sofia and later he graduated from the Faculty of Medicine there. After the war, he was director of the Pediatric Clinic and professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Skopje. He recalled the arrival of the Bulgarians:

In April 1941, when the Bulgarians came they came as so-called liberators, they proclaimed themselves as liberators. They would tell the Macedonians: "We are liberators, you are Bulgarians"...In 1941, the Macedonians were not yet aware that the Bulgarians were occupiers, and they only realized this in 1942 and 1943. Afterwards, the people realized that they were fascists and as far as Jews were concerned, Jews were harassed by Bulgarians from the beginning.

Bulgarian citizenship was given to non-Jewish Greeks and Yugoslavians in newly annexed areas of Thrace and Macedonia; Jews were explicitly excluded from Bulgarian citizenship. In July 1941, a special tax was placed on all Jewish property in Bulgaria and Jews abroad were also liable to the tax. Unlike other people in Bulgarian-occupied Macedonia, Jews in Bulgarian zone in Macedonia were declared Yugoslav citizens – "foreigners" and were obliged to pay the special "alien tax". Fines, imprisonment, and confiscation could be placed in case of non-payment or fraud, and migration could be halted until tax was paid. Macedonian Jewish men now defined as aliens, ages 20-45 were drafted for hard labor. Jews in Macedonia and Thrace had to wear the yellow star. Special signs reading "Jewish Residence" or "Jewish Shop" had to be posted. Thus, swiftly they faced both economic discrimination and personal peril.

Zamila Kolonomos, a Macedonia Jew recalled:

When the Bulgarians came to Macedonia, most of the people thought they would be better off with the Bulgarians than the Germans. But from day one, the Bulgarians showed us the face of an occupier. First, they established the Law for the Protection of the Nation. The most important thing about this law is that it was against the Jews. Second, they treated all Jews as foreign nationals. In other words, they denied us Bulgarian citizenship. Everybody else in the city became Bulgarian citizens. But the Jews remained subjects of Yugoslavia. That way the Bulgarians could do to us anything they wanted.

And because Jews in the annexed territories were non-Bulgarian citizens, “foreigner and aliens,” their fate was of less concern to the Bulgarians; they did not have even the most basic protections of the Bulgarian Constitution and the support of civil society.

The Final Solution to the Jewish Problem

In June 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union and followed by Einsatzgruppen, mobile killing units whose task was to round up Jews and Gypsies and Soviet Commissars and to murder them one by one, in cities town and hamlets, bullet by bullet, men, women and children. In areas under Bulgarian occupation as well as within Bulgaria itself, anti-Jewish propaganda was swiftly mixed with anti-Communism agitation.

The killing of Jews in Bulgaria began in December 1941. In November Serbian Jews who had fled direct German occupation to Bulgarian-occupied Macedonia forced to register. They are arrested by Bulgarian authorities and handed over to Germans on November 27; within a week, they were shot.

The fate of Macedonia Jews along with the fate of Jews throughout Europe was sealed when the Germans adopted “The Final Solution to the Jewish Problem,” a euphemism for the annihilation of the Jewish people men, women and children as state policy.

The Wannsee Conference of January 20, 1942 was the announcement of a policy decision -- The Final Solution to the Jewish Problem -- which was already in effect. The decision had already been made by Hitler and was being implemented in part in the areas captured from the Soviet Union, but the operation needed centralization and coordination and a new method of implementation.

The Wannsee Conference marked a turning point in German anti-Jewish policy. As these fifteen men gathered on January 20, 1942 80% of the Jews who were to die in the Holocaust were still alive. Within 15 months 4 of 5 were already dead.

The Wannsee Conference initiated a shift in the methods of killing. At first Jews were shot in their town and villages by mobile killing units but this process proved inefficient, psychologically difficult for the killers and too public, as the local population was all too aware of what was happened. So a reverse took place. Instead of sending mobile killers to stationary victims, the victims were made mobile – placed on railroad trains – and sent to stationary killer centers where factories of death created an assembly line killing process. The victims were unloaded, their valuables were confiscated, their hair shaven and they were sent to gas chambers, and once killed gold was removed from their teeth and their bodies were burned.

Within months of this meeting, three new killing centers -- Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka -- were in operation. At first the killing was centered in Poland where Jews were heavily concentrated. Poland's three million Jews were one in ten of the Polish population. Belzec was opened in March 1942 within weeks of the Wannsee Conference; its mission, the murder of the Jews of Galicia was completed that December 500,000 Jews were gassed in the ten months of the camp's operation; for two of those months the gas chambers were not functioning and deportations were halted as they were expanded to accommodate the heavy load of arriving Jews. Treblinka was opened on July 22, 1942. The deportation of the Jews of Warsaw began the very next morning and over the next 60 days more than 265,000 Jews were deported and murdered at Treblinka from Warsaw alone.

The Jews of Thrace and Macedonia

As killing operations were reaching high gear in Poland, the fate of the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia was being sealed. In June 25, 1942 the Germans complained to their allies that the measures taken against the Jews have been fruitful but insufficient. While there is little evidence to link the two events, three days later the Bulgarian Parliament passed a law allowing a Ministerial Council to undertake a solution to the Jewish problem without consulting Parliament. A Commissariat for the Jewish problem was formed in the Bulgarian Ministry of Interior headed by Aleksander Belev. SS Captain Theodor Danneker was dispatched to Bulgaria as a special German representative for the Jewish question. Having had considerable experience in the deportation of Jews from France as the emissary of Eichmann office and having been in trouble for corruption, he was anxious to succeed in his new assignment. Events proceeded swiftly in the early winter of 1943.

On February 22, 1943: Belev-Dannecker sign an agreement for deportation of 20,000 Jews from Greek Thrace, Yugoslavian Macedonia, and Bulgaria concluded. 12,000 were to be selected from Thrace and Macedonia, and 8,000 from Old Bulgaria. Among other provisions of the agreement was that Bulgaria would not inquire as to the fate of those Jews who were deported. The Bulgarian government would not demand their return.

On March 2, 1943 the Bulgarian cabinet ordered minister of railroads to transport without charge Jews of Thrace, Macedonia, and Bulgaria to places specified by KEV and gave the latter right to confiscate private and public buildings and premises for temporary camps for the Jews. It also decided to confiscate on behalf of the Bulgarian State all property that had belonged to the Jews who would be deported. Cabinet also approved to remove citizenship from all Jews deported across the borders in accordance with article 15 of the Law for Bulgarian Citizenship, which provided that Bulgarian citizens who were not of Bulgarian nationality lost their citizenship if they emigrated, even as a result of International Treaty.

On March 4, 1943 the Jews of Thrace were arrested and taken to internment camps in Gorna Dzhumajia and Dupnitsa in Old Bulgaria, and from Lom sent by boat on Danube River to Vienna and then by train to Treblinka where they were immediately gassed.. The first boat, the Karageorge, left Lom on March 20, 1943 and never arrived in Vienna. The Jewish inmates on board from Kavalla and Komotini, Greece were shot to death on the banks of the Danube by the Bulgarian and German soldiers.

One week later on March 11, 1943 the Jews from Monastir (Bitola), Skopje, and Shtip, the three cities that were the home of the Macedonia Jews, were arrested. The arrest proceeded according to a list that had been prepared. Keys to Jewish apartments were confiscated; those who were leaving would not return and their property would be ceded to the state.

As in Germany, the Bulgarians expected to profit from the deportation of their Jews. A government decree read:

The lands belonging to the Jews who will be expelled beyond the borders of Bulgaria will be confiscated by the State. The Commissariat for Jewish Affairs will sell the assets of the deported Jews at a public auction. Since the Jewish organizations will end their duties with the emigration of the Jews, all the properties of the local Jewish communities and of their religious and cultural institutions will be handed over to the municipalities.”

The Jews were transported to a tobacco warehouse in Skopje known as Monopol which became a temporary ghetto for the last three weeks in March.

There were around 7300 Jews inhabitants in Macedonia, and all of them were brought to the camp in the tobacco factory.

Monopol was heavily guarded. Food was distributed twice daily to adults and three times to children.

Sanitation was horrific. There were 15 latrines for some 7,320 people. Food was scarce; it consisted of 250 grams of bread, watery beans.

The ghettos of German-occupied Poland lasted for between two and four years; thus, they developed a culture of their own and in which memoirs were written, diaries were composed, works of literature were drafted and an entire archive was created, the ghetto of Monopol lasted less than three weeks. Historians must rely on testimonies, almost entirely from people who escaped to understand what happened.

Some 7,320 Jews were taken to Monopol tobacco warehouses in Skopje. One-hundred sixty-five Jews were released for diverse reasons. Some were Spanish national, tracing their roots back to the Spanish Inquisition of 1492 and never losing their connection with Spain, which remained neutral during World War II and inquired as to the fate of its nations. Others were Italian nationals, citizens of a country that was an integral part of the Axis but whose alliance with Nazi Germany did not translate into active support for the implementation of the “Final Solution to the Jewish Problem. Bulgaria also permitted the release Jewish

physicians and pharmacists together with their families for fear that the health care in Macedonia could not withstand their departure.

The first transport consisting of 40 cattle wagons left on left on March 22nd, but 11 days after their arrival. It consisted of 2001 people 556 families and 134 children up to the age of 4, 194 more children between the ages of 4-10. The Bulgarians were police were responsible for the deportations until it reached Lapovo, after which German soldiers were responsible for the remainder of the journey to Treblinka.

The second transport left on March 25th at 2:00 pm,. It was composed Jews from Skopje and Bitola and all the Jews to Shtip. 2005 Jews were on the transport 103 children under the age of 4 and 197 aged 4-10.

The third transport considered of 25000 people; 2370 Jews from Bitola, 40 Jews from Skopje and 90 young people from Kava.

The Bulgarians kept meticulous figures

Deported	7,144
Died in Camp	4
Escapes	3
Born in Camp	4
Released from camp	165
Total	7,320

We can suspect that the number of escapees is understated as it would have been perceived as a failure on the part of the Bulgarian authorities.

Treblinka:

The Jews of Macedonia were sent to Treblinka. To understand their fate, we must grapple with the history of the camp and its place in the Nazi killing machine.

Treblinka was one of three Aktion Reinhard Death Camps established along major railway lines in German-occupied Poland for the sole purpose of killing Jews. Situated on the main railway lines between Warsaw and Bialystok, two of Poland's largest Jewish communities, it began operation on July 22, 1942 and continued in operation for fourteen months until August 14, 1943, shortly after the death camp uprising. Staffed by some 30 Germans and some 90 Ukrainians, former Soviet Prisoners of War all, during its 14 months of operation between 870,000 and 925,000 Jews were killed with fewer than 100 known survivors.

Treblinka was opened on July 22, 1942. On July 23, 1942 the deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto began and within the next eight weeks until September 21, 1942, 265,000 Jews were transported from Warsaw to Treblinka where they were killed upon arrival.

Among other killed at Treblinka were the 12,000 Jews of Thrace and Macedonia. Bulgarian police administered the deportation of Jews from the areas it occupied.

Bulgaria and Its Jews

The Belev-Dannecker agreement specified that 20,000 Jews would be deported. The distinction between "old Bulgaria" and the occupied territories was significant to Bulgaria, but of no importance to the Germans who wanted to implement the "Final Solution" and to deport all the Jews of Bulgaria and part of their plan to kill all the Jews throughout Europe. The civic forces that were silent and ineffective during the deportation of Jews from Thrace and Macedonia raised their voices in protest as the deportations reached home.

The roundup of the Jews of Plovdiv begins in the early morning of March 10. Sixteen hundred Jews were gathered in a courtyard surrounded by police.

Col. Joseph Mayer Iles recalled:

Bishop Cyril came with two priests next to him.... And he headed straight for the Jewish community. Then a young policeman said, "You are not allowed to enter the schoolyard. He brushed him aside with his hand and said: "Child, you're pretty small to try to stop me." Then this policeman called an officer, who told him, "Bishop, I have an order not to let anybody enter here." Cyril replied, "This

order has no validity as far as I am concerned!" Then he walked into the middle of the Jews, who were all crying and expecting the worst, the most terrible, because we already knew about the extermination camps. And the bishop said to them, "My children, you must know that God will not allow this terrible thing to happen. I will be with you if these trains leave for the extermination camps."

In Parliament the Deputy Speaker Dimitur Peshev, who had previously been approached by a Jewish classmate and friend organized a Parliament letter of protest. 43 members of Parliament signed. He personally confronted the Minister of Interior, camping out in his office, demanding a meeting and not allowing himself to be pushed aside:

Peter Gabrovski denied that any deportation is taking place. "Good," said Peshev, "phone the police in Kyustendil to tell them that." Caught in his lie, Gabrovski consulted with the Prime Minister Filov, who postponed the deportation. A week later Peshev delivered to the Prime Minister a manifesto protesting the protesting deportation of any Bulgarian Jew. It is signed by 43 members of Parliament.

Measures taken against women, children and the aged, people who are guilty of no crime whatsoever ... are unacceptable.

These people – who are still Bulgarian citizens – cannot be expelled from their own country. This course of action would be disastrous, with grave consequences for our country. We are deeply convinced that the use of exceptional and cruel measures may expose the government and the entire nation to accusations of mass murder. The consequences of this policy would be particularly grave for the government, but they would weigh upon the Bulgarian people as well. These consequences can be easily foreseen, and for this reason the policy is inadmissible. We cannot share any responsibility for it whatsoever."

This course of action would be disastrous. Cruel and unusual punishment may expose the government and the entire nation to accusations of mass murder."

In response the Prime Minister Filov decided to marshal his force. He convened an Emergency Session of the Cabinet which could operate on Jewish issues without Parliamentary approval. He confronted Peshev in Parliament and pressured many of his erstwhile supporters who backed away and rescinded their

signature. He forced an unrepentant Pershev to be removed from power The King, who is the ultimate power supporters the decision to sack Peshev, but who also sustained postponement of any further deportations of Jews from Bulgaria.

German officials – both diplomats and the SS – kept pressing the King to complete the Final Solution in Bulgaria. Bulgarians from many walks of life – Church leaders, lawyers, and labor leaders –pressed the government to abandon its complicity in mass murder.

In the end the Bulgarian Jews were isolated, stigmatized, persecuted and economically ruined; they were deported to slave labor camps, but they were not deported. Their fate is not quite the stuff of heroism but still significant given all that was done by other nations to their Jewish population. The calls for civility, the demands for decency, religious and secular ultimately prevailed to prevent the worse for the Jews of Bulgaria, but far too late to protect Jews in Bulgarian-occupied territories of Thrace and Macedonia.

If as a guest in your country, a visitor, I were brazen enough to offer advice, permit me to say the following. Bulgaria must embrace all three roles that it played in history. It must cherish its role as rescuer, struggle with its role as persecutor and renounce the role that it played in the murder of the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia. Bulgaria has every reason to be proud of the role of civil society – rather than its then government – in protecting its own Jews from deportation. A democratic society can build on those traditions and strengthen democratic society, but only if it admits to what it has done. Germany is an example of a society that has used the failings of its shape a different future; so too, the Roman Catholic Church.

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