

*Holocaust of the
Macedonian Jews*



By

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(Translated from Macedonian to English and
edited by Risto Stefov)

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Published by:

Risto Stefov Publications
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Toronto, Canada

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e-book edition

November 8, 2016

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INTRODUCTION

You who survived the horrors that befell the Macedonian Jews and the whole of Europe should live freely in free Macedonia, restore your (Jewish) communities and continue the traditions of your ancestors.

Dimitar Vlahov

These words were spoken by the seasoned Ilinden revolutionary Dimitar Vlahov directed to a number of Macedonian Jews in December 1944 and to those few who managed to return alive from the death camps across Europe, welcoming them and encouraging them to join the new community. On that occasion Vlahov also offered to organize a conference of Jewish survivors which, at the same time, was the founding assembly of the new Jewish community. At the same time Vlahov apologized to the Jews for not being able to personally attend the founding meeting because of his poor health. But with sincere excitement he emphasized that his memories of the distant 1910 were still fresh in his mind when the Jews of Solun shouldered the elections in the Turkish parliament and helped to elect a member of the Madzhlis in Constantinople.

The Assembly to rebuild the Jewish community was held in Asher Beatty's house in the former Jewish neighborhood Kale (Fortress) in the same place where today the Memorial Holocaust Museum is located. The Assembly began at 5 pm and ended late at night with the election of a President, two Vice-Presidents and a Secretary. The first elected president of the renewed Jewish community was Giorgi Blaier. His wife Lena was elected Secretary. Elected as Vice Presidents were Josip Grasse and Dr. Boro Varron.

After that, the small group of surviving Macedonian Jews continued to live in Macedonia even though members of their loved ones had been brutally terminated on March 11, 1943 by the long and careful actions prepared and committed by the fascist Bulgarian occupiers and their Nazi German sponsors. The lives of the Jews in Macedonia, which ran continuously for more than 2,000 years, were brutally interrupted when 98 percent of them were sent to the death camps. It was ironic that after a millennium of continued and

uninterrupted living in Macedonia and in Macedonia's neighbouring states, the fate of the Jews was mercilessly interrupted in one day, in the name of a sick "pure race" ideology propagated by the German Nazis and led by their leader, former Corporal Adolph Shikelgruber Hitler, who himself was not clear on the meaning and the concept of race, people and nation.

The Macedonian people and the ethnic groups living in Macedonia, such as the Albanians, Turks, Serbs, Roma, Bosniaks, Jews and others, greatly contributed to the resistance movement and to the victory over fascism. During the Second World War the ethnic groups acquired heavy casualties in the struggle against the German, Italian and Bulgarian occupiers and their domestic servants. They endured revenge killings, especially committed against the unarmed civilian population, by the occupiers who failed to stem the resistance on the battlefield.

The most beastly and gruesome crimes perpetrated against the Macedonian Jews were committed by the German and Bulgarian fascists.

Ironically, the fate of more than 98 percent of the total Jewish population, who had lived in Macedonia for more than two millenniums, was sealed in one day on March 11, 1943 all in the name of "race purity", something which boggles the human mind!

It was Thursday March 1, 1943 when several hundred Bulgarian agents, police and fascist soldiers, after long and systematic preparations, gathered almost all the Jews in Macedonia and jailed them in an improvised concentration camp in the Skopje Monopole specifically designed for that purpose. Ten days later they were deported to the Treblinka death camp in Poland.

Not one Jew from there came back alive!

SETTLEMENT OF THE JEWS IN MACEDONIA – MILLENNIA LONG LIVING TOGETHER

Chroniclers have recorded the first settlement of Jews in Macedonia to have taken place during ancient times. This was due to the

frequent wars that had taken place in the Holy Land. In ancient times the Jews inhabited many places around the world. They were a people without a fatherland and without a country. They were accepted as martyrs, but sometimes with resistance.

There are no accurate historic records that show when the Jews first began to migrate out of the Holy Land. Ancient writers have noted that the Jews lived in the Phoenician colonies around the Mediterranean Sea. Some historians believe that the mass migrations began after Darius, the Persian King, initiated his campaigns. Other historians argue that the Jews began to massively migrate after Alexander the Great of Macedonia began his easterly campaign. While others argue that the massive migration took place after the Romans conquered Jerusalem and after the Jewish state collapsed.

When Perseus, the last Macedonian king, fought the Romans in the third “Macedonian-Roman” War (186-170 BC) and lost, the cities Solun, Stobi, Heraclea, Lihnidus..., were still inhabited by Jews... among others.

REBELLION AGAINST THE ROMANS

The Holy Land was conquered by Roman Emperor Pompey in 63 BC after the Jews incited a rebellion against the Romans in 40 BC. During the last three years of bloody warfare the Romans crushed the Jews, enslaved them and deported them across the empire. Many were sent to Macedonia. Immediate confirmation of the Jews living in Macedonia during the Roman era can be obtained from a letter written by the Jewish King Herod (10 BC) addressed to Roman Emperor Caligula and by the writings of Alexandrian philosopher Philon.

The Jews repeatedly rebelled against their Roman conquerors during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. To calm the situation down Emperor Hadrian had them dispersed throughout the Roman Empire.

It is unknown exactly when the Jews settled in Macedonia but it is quite obvious that they came to Macedonia much earlier than they came to the rest of the Balkans. The Jews are one of the oldest ethnic groups living in Macedonia.

Under Roman rule the Jews lived in organized communities and enjoyed certain rights and benefits afforded to them by the Roman Empire. In Solun, Berea, Philippi, Stobi, Scupi, Heraklea, Lihnidos... for example, Jewish municipalities had autonomous administrations, and to some extent judicial administrations. They were allowed to perform religious rites in their synagogues in accordance with Judaic laws. Each community had its own synagogue and collected its own revenues. A congress of elder Jews managed the synagogues.

During an excavation at the ancient site Stobi, located in present day Veles, a “Multi-temple synagogue” was discovered which turned out to be one of the oldest monuments of its kind in the Balkans. This is believed to have been erected immediately after the Edict of Milan was enacted in 313 AD by Emperor Constantine, recognizing Christianity as well as Judaism as official religions of the Roman Empire. It is unknown exactly what the Jews did for a living at that time but presumably they were merchants and artisans.

JEWS IN THE EASTERN AND WESTERN ROMAN EMPIRES

In 395 AD the Roman Empire was divided into two, the Eastern and the Western Roman Empires with Constantinople (Istanbul) and Rome as their capitals respectively. The Jews at that time were treated very badly but during Emperor Justinian I’s time (483-565) they became part of the social order. According to William of Tyre’s chronicles, during the First Crusade (1096-1097), the Crusaders with their armies passed by a flourishing Jewish community near Bitola, plundered it and killed most of the Jewish residents.

Many famous Jewish artists, scientists, travelers, etc., have their origins in Macedonia. Tobias Ben Eliazar, a well-known Jewish poet and talmudist (Talmud = Jewish Scripture), lived in Kostur at the end of the 11th and beginning of the 12th century AD. His student Judah Lev Mung was appointed Archbishop in Ohrid after the Archbishop Theophylact of Ohrid died.

One of the most prominent Jews in Macedonia was Judah Ben Moshe. He lived in Ohrid and was a great traveler, philosopher, mathematician and linguist.

Aleksandar Matkovski, a famous Macedonian researcher and academician, introduced the idea that the great Macedonian and Slavic teachers Kiril and Metodi may have had Jewish ancestry (See: History of the Jews in Macedonia, A. Matkovski).

The number of Jews in Macedonia sharply increased during the 13th and 14th centuries with the influx of Jews from France, Spain and Italy, suggesting that their situation in those countries had significantly worsened. The Jews have been mentioned as farmers many times during Emperor Dushan's rule especially in the well-known "Treskavechka" royal decree, a document found in the Treskavets monastery in Prilep.

During the 14th century AD when all of Europe was suffering a great economic crisis, epidemics and wars, the blame for most of these problems was placed on the Jews. By a special papal decree Pope Clement IV authorized an Inquisition to persecute the Jews. To avoid the Inquisition an estimated 90,000 Jews fled Spain and Portugal and settled in the Balkans where they began to mingle with the local Jews and natives.

The Jews were treated the same as the other non-Muslim population in the Balkan part of the Ottoman Empire. The Jews participated mainly in trade and production of woolen products such as blankets and the like. During the middle of the 19th century the Jews started manufacturing and industrial enterprises and by the second half of that century they had a major role in trade and being part of the fledgling Macedonian bourgeoisie.

THE JEWS AND THE MACEDONIANS SHARED A SIMILAR FATE

According to the publication "Political freedom" no. 7, an organ of the Macedonian Socialists, published on November 29, 1898, 2,275,000 people lived inside Macedonia's ethnic borders. Of that number 1,200,000, the majority, were Macedonians and 90,000 were

Jews. A large number of those Jews felt like they were the sons of the Macedonian people. They shared the Macedonian people's destiny and helped them during the Macedonian struggle for national and social liberation. The Jews in Macedonia accepted socialist ideals early on and began to gather together in groups as per socialist Vasil Glavinov's example. During the 1920 parliamentary elections most Jews voted for socialist candidates.

There was a significant engagement of Jews during the pre-Ilinden and Ilinden period, helping the Macedonian people prepare and execute the Uprising. Jakob Domazet from Kostur provided the Macedonian insurgents with material and equipment to make clothing for the freedom fighters. Jacob Cohen, also from Kostur, helped to maintain the courier connections and services. Many Jews also took up arms and actively participated in the Ilinden Uprising as fighters.

There are also the Jews of Solun who financially and morally helped the IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization). It is well-known that Abraham Maznu, a hotel owner, David Kaichki, a factory owner, David Kachachki, a shipper and the three Hasit brothers helped to supply IMRO and its members with weapons and ammunition.

It is also well-known that Rafael Kamhi from Bitola attended the IMRO Founding Congress in Solun on October 23, 1896 and befriended the revolutionaries Gotse Delchev, Iane Sandanski, Dame Gruev, Giorche Petrov and others. For many years Kamhi collected donations for the Organization and served as a liaison between the IMRO Central Committee and outside contacts, traveling abroad and taking special missions for the IMRO.

When the famous Jewish journalist Aaron Assa, originally from Bulgaria, interviewed Rafael Kamhi in his old age in Israel, Kamhi admitted that he felt more like a Macedonian than a Jew. He said he loved Macedonia like it was his own country. He also said that he loved the Macedonian people like brothers and one of the things he wanted to see during his lifetime was a free Macedonia.

During the first Ottoman Empire's parliamentary elections in 1910, the IMRO left selected Dimitar Vlahov as its socialist candidate in the Turkish Parliament. Vlahov's election was sponsored and assisted by the Jewish socialist club "Federation Socialiste".

Between the two World Wars, the Macedonian Jews were organized in the Jewish communities within the Federation of Jewish communities in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia based in Belgrade.

According to the 1921 census, of the 12,017,323 inhabitants who lived in Yugoslavia 64,221 were Jews.

Because of poverty, capitalist exploitation and growth of anti-Semitism in Yugoslavia many Jews were forced to immigrate to America.

RISE OF ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA

Anti-Semitic sentiments in the Yugoslav Kingdom began to spread immediately after its establishment in 1918. The young Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian bourgeoisie wanted to grab the largest amount of capital possible, as soon as possible, and to this end they found the Jewish merchants, industrialists and artisans as major obstacles. These anti-Semitic ideas came from Germany and Austria through Croatia and spread throughout the Yugoslav Kingdom.

Back in 1920 Bielovar Milan, a reporter from Obradovich, wrote a pamphlet entitled "How to solve the Jewish question." His aims were to stigmatize the Jews as "dangerous" people and offered to remove this "danger" by restricting their movements, by exiling them into ghettos, by prohibiting them from calling themselves "Croats from the Moses Tribune", by limiting their education in all schools and by many other similar means!?

The Jewish situation in the Yugoslav Kingdom greatly deteriorated during the Milan Stoiadinovich and Dragisha Tsvetkovich-Machek's pro-fascist governments. These anti-people's governments adopted a number of anti-Jewish laws, regulations and orders in order to persecute the Jews, forcing many to migrate to Palestine. On July

27, 1939, for example, Tsvetkovich-Machek's government adopted regulations which, among other things, enforced the following:

1. Jews who arrived in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after January 1, 1935 had to leave within three months;
2. Jews who arrived in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia before January 1, 1935 and who had not lived in Yugoslavia for more than 10 years, had to leave within six months;
3. Jews who lived in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia more than 10 years, and were Yugoslav citizens, had to leave within one year.

This anti-Jewish legislation in pre-war Yugoslavia was supported by a legal seal. The first texts, with racist content, that appeared as an anti-Jewish campaign were published in the daily "Balkan" in 1938 which opened the door for creating anti-Jewish sentiment. Worried about the rise of anti-Semitism, a Delegation from the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Kingdom, led by Friedrich Pops, visited the Council of Ministers Chaired by Dragisha Tsvetkovich on February 22, 1939. Tsvetkovich explained his position as a political gesture and sent the Delegation on its way with the words: "It is not in the interest of the Jews to become involved in politics.... Nevertheless things are going in an undesirable direction."

By doing this the Royal Yugoslav government opened the doors wide for the Nazi racial theory to be implemented and thus prepared the groundwork for a great Jewish tragedy to take place in the Yugoslav Kingdom.

There were 4,610 Jews registered in Macedonia in 1930. In April 1941, there were 2,150 Jewish families with 7,762 members existing in Bitola, Skopje, Shtip and other smaller towns in Macedonia. During the German occupation they were joined by another 300 Jews from Serbia, mostly from Belgrade.

ANTI-SEMITIC THEORETICAL AND "SCIENTIFIC" DEFENCE

The key leaders of anti-Semitic sentiments in Europe, in the first half of the 20th century, were Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini. They embraced anti-Semitism as the basis of their ideology and theory of races which Adolph Hitler “theoretically” explained in his notorious book entitled “Mein Kampf” (My Struggle), which he wrote while in prison after a failed attempt to violently take power in Germany in 1923. Besides that, the first theoretical and “scientific” explanation and justification for anti-Semitism appeared in Germany in waves as a mass anti-Jewish sentiment in the first half of the 19th century, mainly in 1829, 1830 and 1848.

The “scientific” work of Bruno Bauer appeared in Germany in 1843 which dealt mainly with the “Jewish question”. Later, university professor Rolling contributed to the spread of anti-Semitism among the intellectuals in Germany.

Adolph Hitler, leader of the National Socialist Party of Germany, together with the German reactionaries and most of the bourgeoisie, inebriated with revanchist (the act of retaliation by a nation) ideas after World War I, saw the German Jews as the main culprits for all their troubles. Their actions for “solving the Jewish problem” were captivated by the idea of a clean “Aryan” race, an idea taken from the nineteenth century. For that aim, the National Socialists, or Nazis for short, with Hitler at the helm, created the “percussion groups” (SA) who wore dark shirts with swastikas and the “special squads” (SS), who wore black shirts with a skull on their sleeves.

After seizing power on January 30, 1933, Hitler completely dedicated himself to realizing the thousand year-old idea of a Reich!

Just two months after coming to power in Germany, Hitler’s government adopted anti-Jewish legislation, requiring German Jews to effectively, starting on April 1, 1933, wear the yellow, six-sided “Star of David” so that they could be differentiated from other German citizens. In Berlin Square, in May of the same year, piles of books were burned by the Nazis claiming they had been “infected by the Jews”. Included among the books burned were the works of the great German poet Heinrich Heine.

The so-called “racial constitution” of Germany was adopted on September 15, 1935 which, among other things, contained two anti-Jewish laws: “The Law on the right to citizenship” and “The Law on protecting the German race and honour.” These laws were yet another step towards the biggest Jewish tragedy in Europe.

Anti-Jewish moods in Germany spiked during the night between November 8 and 9, 1938, known as the “Crystalline night”, when many Jews were abducted and killed and many synagogues, workshops, stores and homes were burned down.

Depending on the internal political situation in Germany, the so-called “Jewish Question” kept evolving until it became a major Nazi ideological preoccupation. The Nazis advocated the theory that the German race is the only pure and perfect race destined to rule the other nations in Europe. And as Academic Dr. Aleksandar Matkovski wrote in his book “History of the Jews in Macedonia”, one of the leading ideologues of National Socialism was Alfred Rosenberg who, on February 8, 1939, said that a solution to the “Jewish Question” will be found if every Jew, to the last one, leaves the territory of Third Reich. Rosenberg, on March 28, 1941, also said: “The Jewish Question will be resolved only if all Jews leave Europe.” In 1943 Walter Gross, head of racial division of the National Socialist Party of Germany, said that the only possible way for the Jewish impact to be eliminated is by completely eliminating the Jews.

The Nazis entrusted their “Special Squads”, better known as the notorious and evil “SS”, to resolve the “Jewish Question”. The “SS” was headed by Hitler himself, who was also leader of the Reich and Supreme Commander of the armed forces, the Wehrmacht. Hitler’s closest associates were Hermann Goering and Heinrich Himmler, who was second in command of the SS, Minister of Internal Affairs and head of the police.

The highest body leading the special units was the “SS Supreme Council” comprised of 12 administrations responsible for implementing terror against the oppressed peoples and exacting their extinction. The fourth administration, the Gestapo, was responsible for making direct decisions on the life and death of millions of

people. The Gestapo was divided into departments and sections. The Section IV B 4, headed by Karl Adolph Eichmann, was in charge of the liquidation of Jews and the German-ization of parts of occupied Europe. In 1941, after the Germans decided to liquidate the Jews, one of Eichmann's assistants, named Globohnik, organized over 50 labour camps and four death camps near the city Lublin in Poland. The death camps were called Belzets, Maidanek, Solibor and Treblinka. Treblinka was the camp in which the Macedonian Jews were killed.

Theodor Dannecker, a former German Consul General in Skopje, was one of those appointed as an aide to Adolph Eichmann. Dannecker was appointed special envoy for Jewish Affairs at the German Embassy in Sofia, and without great effort managed to convince his Bulgarian associates to surrender 20,000 Jews to the Nazis from the so-called "newly liberated territories" (The three occupied parts of Macedonia and Thrace).

Negotiations between Nazi Germany and King Boris's fascist Bulgaria for the surrender of the Macedonian Jews were initiated by Adolph Heinz Bekerle, German Ambassador to Sofia, by order of Section IV B 4, and by Petar Grabovski, Bulgarian Interior Minister. The negotiations were later passed on to Theodor Dannecker.

DETERIORATING CONDITION FOR THE MACEDONIAN JEWS

There were two functioning Anti-fascist Jewish Organizations in existence in Macedonia before World War II started. These were "Somar Asciar" (Custodians of the state) and "Tehelet lavani" (Blue-white).

On April 7, 1941, the very next day after the undeclared war and attack on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia by Nazi Germany, German troops from their fascist bases in Bulgaria stormed Skopje. The same day (April 7, 1941) German troops began an unprecedented plunder of Jewish properties and businesses that continued for the next two days. The stolen items, declared as "war booty", were sent to Germany. Immediately after that the infamous "Ainzats" (special units) entered the scene. These were formed by Haidrih, head of

administration in the Reich Security, and by Gestapo chief Haidrih Miller back in 1939 and tasked with the responsibility of liquidating the enemies of the Reich and, since 1941, had been placed at the disposal of Section IV B 4 under the command of Adolph Eichmann.

The “Ainzats” special units were active in Macedonia up until the Nazi Germans handed power over to their allies King Boris’s fascist Bulgarians. From that moment on the Germans insisted that the “Jewish Question” be solved in this region, which was represented by Eichmann’s people Dannecker and Bekerle who were sent there to eliminate the Jews. They were there to assist the Bulgarian Interior Ministry and the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs in the Ministry whose sole purpose was to liquidate the Jews in the newly liberated, i.e. occupied territories.

During a meeting held in Vienna on April 21 and 22, 1941, between Robertrop and Giano, the German and Italian foreign ministers, it was decided to divide occupied Macedonia into three zones with the largest part being given to Bulgaria and the smallest to Albania (later Italy). Part of Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia remained a German occupied zone.

After the occupying fascist Bulgarian army entered Macedonia, in accordance with the Vienna ministerial agreement, in gratitude to its allies, especially to Nazi Germany, the Bulgarian government extensively devoted itself to solving the “Jewish Question”.

After consolidating its power in Macedonia, the Bulgarian occupying authority introduced economic measures and specific anti-Semitic legislation to materially and physically destroy the Jews in the occupied parts of Macedonia. Towards the end of 1942 a Committee of the Communist Party of Macedonia published a proclamation which called on the Jews to fight side by side with the Macedonian people. Among other things the proclamation read: “The Bulgarian and German fascists are preparing a great tragedy for the Jews. The treacherous Bulgarian government is implementing Gestapo policies toward you the Jews. Your stores are being looted by German thieves, and plundered by Bulgarian occupying bandits...” The proclamation also said that major

extermination of the Jews had already begun in Poland and Romania and that the Macedonian Jews would be next. This is why the Jews were called upon to fight alongside the Macedonian people.

This call was answered by many Jews. In Bitola alone 37 Jews joined and fought in NOB (People's Liberation Struggle), of whom 13 gave their lives at the altar of freedom. Included among those killed was Estrea Ovadia Mara who later was declared a national hero. Many Jews served in high positions in the anti-fascist movement in Macedonia. Included among those who served were Zhamila Kolonomos, Isaac Zion, Albert and Benno Russo, Moritz Romano, Branko Frichand, Moris Shami, Giorgi Blaier and Benjamin Samokovlia. As a wanted man, in an attempt to elude the Fascist Bulgarian police, Kole Chasule, now a prominent Macedonian diplomat and playwright, hid in the Jewish houses in Skopje. A 15 year old Jewish boy named Branko Fridzhand participated in the assassination of the notorious Bulgarian executioner Mane Machkov. Isaac Sarfatti from Bitola was also a great activist. His home was open to the national hero Stevan Steve Naumov, to Vera Atseva and to other Macedonian revolutionaries deemed dangerous to the occupiers. Raphael Baptiste, a Jew from Bitola, died bravely in 1942 in the battle in Sandzhak. Before that he busied himself with Carl Marx's "Capital" while serving a prison sentence in Sremska Mitrovitsa.

Many Jewish activists joined the resistance movement against the Bulgarian fascists in 1942. Included among the most distinguished from Bitola were Abraham Anaf, David Romano, Victor Pardo, Eli Faradzhi, Moris Shami, Moritz Romano and Roza Kanhi. Another Jew named Benno Russo operated a printing press in Pepo Hassan the mechanic's house in Bitola where a great deal of propaganda material against the occupiers was printed on a weekly basis. In 1943 Albert Kasorla - Berto, Albert Russo – Kote, Adela Faradzhi, Stella Levy, Estreia Ovadia - Mara, Zhamila Kolonomos, Samuel Sadikario – Simo, Solomon Sadikario – Mo, and Moshe Bahar, joined the Partisans. Moshe Bahar died during the liberation of Kichevo.

For helping the National Liberation Struggle in Macedonia, the Bulgarian fascist government condemned Bitola's Jews and, in 1942, collectively fined them 4.5 million Lev (Bulgarian currency).

In parallel with their occupying plans of Europe, the Nazis in Germany made plans to liquidate the Jews. That responsibility was given to the notorious and evil "SS" units. The Reich Supreme Council had 12 offices, of which the fourth was the Gestapo which decided the fate of millions. The Gestapo had its own Departments and Sections. The Section IV B 4, as mentioned earlier, was headed by Karl Adolph Eichmann and was responsible for the destruction of Jews and the German-ization of the occupied territories. Many domestic traitors were also employed in that Section. Section IV B 4 was also responsible for organizing the extermination camps with gas chambers and crematoria in which the lives of millions were lost. Globochnik, an assistant of Adolph Eichmann, was responsible for the liquidation of Jews in Poland. He had organized about 50 labour camps in Lublin and four liquidation camps in Belzets Majdanek, Solibor and Treblinka where 7,132 Macedonian Jews were liquidated.

As mentioned earlier Theodor Dannecker, the then German Consul General in Skopje attached to Royal Yugoslavia, later became an aide to Adolph Eichmann. During the war and during the occupation Adolph Eichmann was highly regarded by the Gestapo and as a special representative of the "Jewish Question" in the German Embassy in Sofia, without much effort he managed to convince the Bulgarian authorities to surrender 20,000 Jews from Vardar (Serbian occupied) and Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia to the Germans.

BULGARIAN FASCISTS TIGHTENING ENCIRCLEMENT AROUND MACEDONIAN JEWS

Seeing an opportunity to realize the San Stefano dream of a "Greater Bulgaria", Bogdan Filov, president of the government in Sofia, on March 1, 1941 signed Bulgaria's entry into the Tripartite Pact. Because most of Macedonia came under Bulgarian occupation, so as not to hurt the feelings of its allies, Eichmann ordered Dannecker to

pass on all repressive measures - arrests, searches, executions and so on, to the Bulgarian occupation authorities, including taking repressive measures against the Macedonian Jews. As a result, the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs in the Bulgarian Ministry of the Interior and the Bulgarian police undertook unprecedented repressive measures against the Macedonian Jews. After that Theodor Dannecker took on the role of observer and general supervisor, everything else was delegated to the Bulgarians. While in charge of the German Foreign Ministry in Sofia, Adolf Heinz Bekerle was given orders to start early negotiations with Petar Grabovski, then Bulgarian Minister of the Interior, for the deportation of 20,000 Jews from Vardar and Aegean Macedonia. Bekerle later left this responsibility to Theodor Dannecker, former Consul General in Skopje, who later was promoted to captain in the SS.

The Bulgarian occupation authorities in Macedonia and the fascist government in Sofia were very clear as to what Nazi Germany was going to do with the Jews collected throughout occupied Europe. There was a conversation that took place on November 26, 1941 in Berlin, between Bulgarian Foreign Minister Popov and German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, during which Ribbentrop openly introduced Hitler's idea of "cleansing" all Jews from Europe. The same subject was also discussed during a second meeting of the two Ministers that took place on December 30, 1941, during which the preparation for the deportation of Jews from Bulgaria was specifically discussed.

Deportation of the Jews from Bulgaria became an important issue generally between contacts and in correspondences between the two evil sides. Adolph Bekerle, German Minister of Foreign Affairs, for example, on May 9, 1942, informed the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the talks that took place with the Bulgarian government. Then on June 19, 1942, Bekerle received notification from Berlin about the talks between Ministers Ribbentrop and Popov during which it was decided to deport all Jews from Bulgaria to the Eastern part of the German occupied regions, Poland in particular.

There is also the infamous statement made by Grabovski, Bulgarian Minister of the Interior, on June 25, 1942, when he said: “Measures so far taken regarding the ‘Jewish Question’ were effective but insufficient. Therefore, this issue should be resolved conclusively... New measures against the Jews must be taken... It is necessary to act promptly and rapidly...”

In order to achieve the objective of acting “promptly” and “rapidly” the Bulgarian Parliament, on April 28, 1942, adopted a Law by which a government Council of Ministers was tasked with “taking measures to settle the Jewish Question” as well as to settle all other issues related to this problem. This law was confirmed by a royal decree signed by King Boris and published in the King’s “Official Gazette” no. 148 published on June 9, 1942. By this decree the Council of Ministers was obliged to strengthen measures against the Jews, adopt regulations to act against the Jews and make all necessary decisions to act against the Jews.

On June 26, 1942, the government Ministerial Council adopted a decision to form a Commissariat for Jewish Affairs within the Interior Ministry and, on September 3, 1942, appointed Aleksandar Belev Commissar (Note: After the war Belev was sentenced to death as a war criminal and executed). The Commissariat was headquartered in Sofia and had dispatched its delegates and bodies everywhere where Jews existed in the Bulgarian Kingdom.

The Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, which closely cooperated and worked with the German Embassy in Sofia and with the Gestapo, was paying itself with Jewish money confiscated from the “Jewish communities Fund” created by blocking Jewish accounts in Bulgarian banks. About 5 to 12 percent was confiscated from the Jewish accounts. In this way the Bulgarian fascists legally plundered the Jewish properties in the occupied territories.

On September 22, 1942, Ivan Zahariev was named delegate in Skopje by order of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs. With these delegates as heads of the Jewish communities, the various municipalities practically become centres for the destruction of the Jews.

The tragedy of the Macedonian Jews began on April 7, 1941, the very first day the German units entered Skopje. The Germans wasted no time when, the same day, they began an unprecedented campaign of looting Jewish shops calling the plunder “war booty”. The looting continued for days.

At that time the so-called “Ainzats” units (Special units) entered the scene in the German occupied part of Macedonia. As mentioned earlier, these specialized units were formed in 1939 by Haidrih, head of Reich Security and by Haidrih Miller, Chief of the Gestapo. These groups were tasked with liquidating the Reich’s enemies and, as of 1941, were added to Section IV B 4 under the command of Adolph Eichmann.

In the meantime Theodor Dannecker did his best to promote anti-Jewish propaganda in Macedonia. The “Ainzats” groups continued to do their evil deeds in Macedonia until the Germans put the Bulgarians in charge of that part of Macedonia. From that moment on all German efforts to resolve the “Jewish Question” were directly passed on to the Bulgarians. And as I said before, the Germans insisted that the Jewish problem be dealt with. To this end, Theodor Dannecker and Bekerle, through the Bulgarian Ministry of the Interior and through the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, established an exclusive group tasked with liquidating the Jews. After the Bulgarian fascists consolidated their hold in Macedonia, the Bulgarian government, in gratitude to the Germans, vigorously committed itself to resolving the “Jewish Question”.

BULGARIAN FASCISTS SYSTEMATICALLY DESTROY THE JEWS IN MACEDONIA

The tragedy of the Macedonian Jews has been diligently studied and documented by the famous Macedonian historian and academician Aleksandar Matkovski in his book “History of the Jews in Macedonia”, which has been published in several languages including Macedonian, Hebrew, English and Spanish. The view of Bulgarian born Israeli journalist Aaron Assa on this topic is also remarkably authentic, and so are the works of Dzhamilia Kolomonos and others. The film “The third halftime”, which caused much excitement in Bulgaria a year or so ago, is also a credible episode of

the behavior of the Bulgarian fascist occupation regime in Macedonia during World War II. Another good example of Bulgarian and German behaviour towards the Macedonian Jews is exemplified by the film “The Liberation of Skopje”, a Macedonian candidate for an Oscar award.

Anti-Jewish laws and other acts, enacted by the Bulgarian fascists, clearly show the evolution of the Bulgarian mood towards the destruction of the Jews in the Bulgarian Kingdom, carried out through economic and political means with the ultimate goal of physically destroying them.

On January 21, 1941, King Boris’s Bulgarian “National Assembly” passed the infamous law on “Protection of the state” with aims at “protecting” the Bulgarian nation from the Jews who were declared enemies of the state and, according to the same law, could only deal with industry, commerce and crafts. Under the same law the Jews were prohibited from working in the civil service, in education and in culture “so they could not spread Jewish influence and propaganda”.

To economically destroy the Jews in the Bulgarian occupied territories, including in Bulgaria itself, Boris’s fascist regime enacted the law on “one-time tax”. This law was published in the “State Gazette” no. 151 on July 14, 1941, according to which all Jews had to surrender one-fifth of their assets to the state. According to Bulgarian government estimates, in Skopje alone, for example, the Jews were estimated to own 320 million Lev in assets. From those assets the Bulgarian occupation authorities were planning to collect 59 million Lev, but later documented that only 2,548,434 Lev were collected. In other words, every single Jew in Skopje had to pay an average of 17,082 Lev. In total the Bulgarian occupiers managed to collect 42,643,728 Lev from the Jews in Skopje, or an average of 12,872 Lev from each Jew in Skopje.

Bulgarian anti-Jewish hysteria, in the occupied parts of Macedonia, received only the intensity necessary to achieve the ultimate objective; lay down the Jewish physical destruction in advance. On

October 4, 1941, the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry branches in Skopje and Bitola issued orders to prohibit all Jews from engaging in industry and trade, and all existing Jewish commercial and industrial firms to liquidate their assets within one year. This measure virtually marked the end of the Jewish merchant and industrialist presence in the economic scene in Macedonia.

But that was not all. King Boris's fascist government continued to pass new legislation for the full economic destruction of the Macedonian Jews. With order no. 5, enacted on April 8, 1942, for example, the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs placed the entire Macedonian Jewish property under state control. With order no. 77, enacted on February 12, 1943, the same Commissariat rapidly liquidated all the craft shops belonging to the Macedonian Jews.

The Bulgarian fascist government, which blindly followed Third Reich policies, was determined to evict all Jews from Macedonia and to send them to the Eastern German occupied territories (Poland). On March 2, 1943, a law was passed that allowed the complete confiscation of all Jewish properties belonging to the Macedonia Jews.

PARALLEL ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL LIMITATIONS FOR THE JEWS IN MACEDONIA

The first political restrictions against the Macedonian Jews were implemented in accordance with the law for the "Protection of the State". Under this law, starting on July 14, 1941, all Jews were required to register their "identity" with the police.

The Macedonian Jews were unable to get Bulgarian citizenship and as a result were treated as citizens of the Yugoslav Kingdom. But because they resided in the so-called "Bulgarian (occupied) Territory", they had to carry special identification cards and pay a monthly tax of 30 Lev. They were also forbidden from voting and from being elected. They were not allowed to serve in state institutions or in private organizations. They were not allowed to wear uniforms or serve in the Bulgarian army. And because they could not serve in the military they were forced to pay a non-service levy. But that was not the end of their political persecution. The

Macedonian Jews were not allowed to have family surnames ending in “ov”, “ev” “ich” or “ski” and all newborns were given names exclusively from a list compiled by the Bulgarian occupation authority, tied to the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs. The (occupier) police also had the right to prohibit Jews from entering public establishments. The Jews were not allowed to live together, in the same apartment, with people of Bulgarian origin. Jewish living space was limited and dependent on the number of family members.

On June 28, 1941, the Bulgarian fascist government, through the Bulgarian Ministry of Railways and Post Office, ordered all persons of Jewish origin in Macedonia to surrender their radios by July 5 of the same year so that they could be put in “storage”!?

The Jews were forbidden from marrying or living outside marriage with a person who was not Jewish. They were also forbidden from moving to another neighbourhood or city.

Based on the law for “Protection of the State”, Aleksandar Belev , State Commissar for Jewish Affairs, on September 15, 1942, ordered all doors on Jewish houses to be boarded with either wood or metal plates and to have written on them the words “Jewish residence” and to the left next to the writing to have a six-sided “Star of David” painted, measuring 5 x 5 centimetres. Jewish stores were also marked with the inscriptions “Jewish enterprise” or “Yiddish shop”.

The Jewish disaster took on a legal form on April 20, 1942, when the Seventh Meeting of the Bulgarian Parliament passed a law charging the Council of Ministers to take measures “to settle the Jewish Question”. This law was confirmed by a Royal Decree and signed by King Boris. Its contents were published in the state newspaper official gazette no. 148, on June 9, 1942. Under this Act the Ministerial Council was authorized to strengthen all measures against the Jews, including the right to prepare laws, regulations and other anti-Semitic acts and to amend laws and Assembly conclusions, as it found necessary. This was one of the top laws in the anti-Jewish legislation in existence in the Kingdom of Bulgaria,

after the law for “Protection of the State”. This was the law that sealed the fate of the Macedonian Jews.

During a meeting held on August 26, 1942, the Bulgarian fascist government Council of Ministers, as mentioned earlier, adopted a resolution to form a “Commissariat for Jewish Affairs” within the Ministry of the Interior. Then, on September 3, 1942, the Council of Ministers appointed Aleksandar Belev Commissar. (And, as mentioned earlier, after the war Belev was sentenced to death as a war criminal and executed.) The Commissariat was headquartered in Sofia with branches all over the Bulgarian Kingdom in all the occupied territories where Jews existed. The branches were tasked with controlling the Jews and were given incentives to implement new anti-Semitic measures. The Commissariat had close ties to the German Embassy in Sofia and used exhorted Jewish funds to pay for its work. These funds were exhorted from Jewish communities by blocking the accounts of Jews in Bulgarian banks. If the Commissariat was in need of one hundred thousand to one million Lev, the Fund had to cover five to ten percent of the costs. All assets of the Jewish communities, including those of humanitarian and cultural associations, institutions and organizations, were included in the Fund in support of the Commissariat. In other words, the Bulgarian fascists legally plundered Jewish properties in the occupied territories and used the money for anti-Jewish activities.

By order no. 14, ordered by the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs on September 22, 1942, Ivan Zahariev was appointed delegate in Skopje. In this new situation, all former Jewish community cultural and humanitarian organizations were staffed with delegates from the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs and became centres for the destruction of the Jews.

HOLOCAUST OF THE MACEDONIAN JEWS

In the name of both evil allies, on February 22, 1943, Theodor Dannecker, the German Ambassador in Sofia, and Aleksandar Belev, the Bulgarian Commissar for Jewish Affairs, reached an agreement to “evict more than 20,000 Jews from the Eastern occupied territories”. With this agreement the fate of the Jews in Vardar and Aegean Macedonia was sealed. The details as to how the

Macedonian Jews were collected and deported from Macedonia had been clarified.

But thanks to the efforts of author Nathan Greenberg, who in 1945 wrote a book entitled “Documents”, published by the Centre for Jewish History in Sofia, much of the classified material was made public. There was also a range of other documents released to the public, which preserved details of Bulgarian legislation being passed during the fascist period from 1941 to March 1943. When put together, these documents created a complete picture revealing the systematic and zealous work carried out by King Boris’s fascist Bulgaria towards the destruction of the Macedonian Jews.

Also many thanks to Giorgi Dimitrov, an internationalist and spirited revolutionary who, in his short time as leader of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, allowed a multitude of archived documents to be released to the public. These documents were published and exposed many of the crimes committed by King Boris’s fascist Bulgaria against the Jews in the occupied territories during World War II. Giorgi Dimitrov’s government was the only Bulgarian government worthy of recognizing the crimes committed by Boris’s fascist, anti-people government against the Jews. If it was not for Giorgi Dimitrov, the documents published by Nathan Greenberg’s book would have never seen the light of day and would have been declared non-existent, which is common practice in today’s official Bulgarian historiography and politics.

March 11, 1943, a tragic day when the fate of the Macedonian Jews was definitively decided, was preceded by a series of measures taken by the Bulgarian fascist government which culminated in the deportation of over seven thousand people from Macedonia and their destruction in the Treblinka extermination camp in Poland.

On September 23, 1942, Aleksandar Belev, Commissar for Jewish Affairs, signed an order that called for all Jews in “All of Bulgaria” (meaning all parts of Vardar Macedonia, Aegean Macedonia, Thrace, Pirin Macedonia, as well as Bulgaria) to be compelled to wear the six-pointed “Star of David”. This was to commence on

September 29, 1942. Only Jews who were foreign nationals and who were passing through Bulgaria were exempt. Also exempt were children under the age of 10 and Bulgarian Jews who, as of September 1, 1940, were married according to Christian customs to persons who were Bulgarian citizens and who were baptized before January 23, 1941.

Two types of yellow badges were created by the Bulgarian fascist government in order to tag the Bulgarian Jews, a round yellow badge was worn by Jews who were in the service of the state and a yellow Star of David badge was worn by all others. Failure to wear the badge was punishable by imprisonment and by a fine of 100,000 Lev.

By the end of 1942, the Bulgarian Ministry of the Interior had prepared 70,000 badges intended for the Jews of “All of Bulgaria”. On December 28, 1942, the Jews living in Skopje were issued such badges and were never again permitted to take them off!

Working tirelessly for the final solution of the “Jewish Question”, Ivan Zahariev, delegate of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs in the Skopje community, on January 25, 1943, issued an order prohibiting all Jews in Skopje from entering restaurants, pastry shops, coffee shops, dairy shops and all other stores that served drinks and delicacies on the streets “King Boris” and “King Ferdinand” and in the Skopje square. The Skopje Jews were not allowed to view movies on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays in all theaters in Skopje. Jews were prohibited from attending dances or visiting the city parks in Skopje seven days a week after 16.00 hours in the summer and after 18.00 hours in the winter.

Jews were even forbidden from visiting the military cemetery or the public beaches along the Vardar River. Their movements along the main streets in Skopje were restricted and they were forbidden from attending performances at the National Theatre on Sundays...

The same day, January 25, 1943, Ivan Zahariev issued a second order by which all persons carrying a Jewish badge were not allowed to stay in any hotel in Skopje with the exception of hotel

“Sofia”, “Krushevo” and “Lovets”, but they could only stay there one time every six months. The Skopje Jews were forbidden from hiding in public shelters during air raids. In this way the Jews were steadily being prepared for the “final solution” of the “Jewish Question”, i.e. for the “Holocaust of the Macedonian Jews” (Holocaust is an old Yiddish word which means great plunder and destruction).

The fate of the Macedonian Jews in Aegean (Greek occupied) and Pirin (Bulgarian occupied) Macedonia was no better during the fascist Bulgarian occupation. Before World War II started there were 56,000 Jews living in Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia. Of those only one out of every ten managed to survive the Nazi-fascist pogroms. According to the 1920 census there were 45,000 Jews living in the Bulgarian Kingdom. There is no data available on how many Jews lived in Pirin (Bulgarian occupied) Macedonia.

THE THIRD REICH WANTS THE JEWS FROM ITS ALLY BULGARIA

On February 2, 1943, Aleksandar Belev, Commissar for Jewish Affairs for Bulgaria, informed his Ministry of Internal Affairs that Theodor Dannecker, German Ambassador to Sofia, had informed him that the Reich was prepared to accept the Jews from the occupied parts of Macedonia including those from Aegean Macedonia, as well as all “unwanted” Jews from “the old boundaries” (i.e. from Bulgaria itself).

Soon after King Boris’s fascist Bulgarian government committed itself to meeting its ally’s request, it began preparing lists with names of Jews living in the Bulgarian occupied territories. Ivan Zahariev, head of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs in Skopje, took immediate action and by February 20, 1943 had all his lists prepared, which contained the entire Jewish population in Macedonia and Thrace. Just two days later, on February 22, 1943, German Ambassador Theodor Dannecker, on behalf of the Reich, and Aleksandar Belev, on behalf of the Bulgarian fascist government, signed an agreement to surrender all Jews to Germany in phases. The first phase called for surrendering 20,000 Macedonian Jews from Vardar and Aegean Macedonia. In other

words nothing was left to chance when it came to the two trusted allies solving the “Jewish Question”...

The first execution of Jews in Macedonia took place in 1941 during which time the Bulgarian occupation authorities in Macedonia surrendered 48 Jews to the Germans. The 48 Jews were part of a group of 300 Jews who had fled Belgrade and came to Macedonia when the Germans were preparing to occupy Serbia. All 48 were shot on December 3, 1941, in a makeshift camp in Iaintsi near Belgrade.

According to Theodor Dannecker and Aleksandar Belev's February 22, 1943 Agreement, deporting the Jews from Macedonia was to begin early March of the same year. Their surrender from Bulgarian to German hands was to take place at certain points in temporary camps near railway stations where the Jews were to be immediately picked up and carried away. From the point of surrender the Jews would be exclusively under German jurisdiction (Nathan Greenberg "Documents", p. 8-11). In a proposal to Gabrovski, Bulgarian Minister of Internal Affairs, Belev recommended that this operation be carried out by a joint military and police force. The Jews were to be informed that they were being transported to other parts of Bulgaria. No one was allowed to tell them that they had been surrendered to the Germans! After their eviction, of course, their property was confiscated and handed over to the Bulgarian state.

Immediately after the Dannecker-Belev Agreement was signed, preparations to build facilities and camps for the collection of Jews were accelerated. A number of delegates from the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs in Macedonia were appointed to carry out the collection of the Macedonian Jews in Macedonia. These were Zachary Velkov, Ivan Zahariev and Peio Draganov Peev, for Skopje Region. Peio Draganov Peev was also commander of the Skopje concentration camp. Appointed for Shtip Region was Stoian Hristov Bashchevanzhiev and for Bitola Region were Kiril Stoimenov and Giorgi Dzhambasov. Three collection camps were prepared in

Macedonia; in Skopje, Shtip and Bitola, but only one was a building. This building was located in the Skopje Monopole and to this day exists as a silent witness to a great tragedy. The concentration camp was located in one of the four buildings. Each building had 30 rooms. An average of 241 Jews stayed in those rooms for ten days before they were deported to the Treblinka death camps!

MARCH 11, 1943

On March 11, 1943, at two in the morning, several hundred Bulgarian agents, police officers, soldiers and representatives of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs received their final instructions to carefully and in strict secrecy start preparations for the collection of the Macedonian Jews, following carefully prepared lists which were compiled in advance. Gathered in front of the police stations in Skopje, Bitola and Shtip were a dozen horse-drawn wagons ready to transport the sick as well as the hand luggage that the frantic Jews were carrying.

During the cold Thursday, March 11, 1943 morning, the Bulgarian army and police blocked all the streets and neighbourhoods in Skopje, Bitola and Shtip, where the Jews lived. There were soldiers stationed ten metres apart all around the neighbourhoods. No one was allowed to pass! The Bulgarian fascists dispersed and entered the Jewish houses in groups of three, each group carrying a list of names and addresses, which recorded where the Jews lived. The police were ordered to inform the Jews to bring all their money and valuables with them “in case they needed them”. As the Jews were taken away their house keys were confiscated by the police.

A reliable picture of what happened that morning, on March 11, 1943, was painted from the testimony given by the few Jews who survived the pogrom. Among other things, here is what Heskia Piade told the Macedonian Federal Commission investigating war crimes: “... Around five o'clock in the morning we realized that the entire city was blockaded... Three police agents, accompanied by two armed policemen, rudely pushed our door wide open and began to pressure us to take with us our gold, jewelry, watches, money and anything that we had that was expensive. The ‘road is long’, they

kept saying... Waiting in the street for us, and for several other families in front of us, was a freight wagon. It was cold and we were trembling that morning. We were also a little afraid. Each one of us looked at our mothers, sisters, brothers... like we were never to see them again. A few tables were lined up in the courtyard of the Monopole. There were also agents and policemen moving about watching us. Resting on top of the tables were gold items, jewelry and all sorts of watches. The pockets of the agents looked full. We put everything we brought with us on the tables. One agent put something in his pocket and wrote something in his notebook. Another agent kept yelling 'money, money, gold, remove it all and put it here. If I find something on you I will shoot you like a dog!' I looked into the next room and there I saw an agent removing the jewelry from my wife. He was exploring every part of her body... what humiliation."

The atmosphere on March 11, 1943 was no better in Bitola. A total of 973 Jewish families were collected, among them 3,351 members. Managing the Bitola gathering were Kiril Stoimenov, Giorgi Dzhambasov, Vasil Giorgiev Vasilev and General Marinov. During the same day, March 11, 1943, 14 so-called coaches were used to transport 131 Jewish families, with 551 members, from Bitola to Skopje. Stoian Hristov Bahchevandzhiev and Ignat Atanasov were responsible for receiving the Jews in Skopje.

THE SKOPJE MONOPOLE

Preparation of the facilities for collecting the Jews in Skopje Monopole, before their deportation took place, was done in the greatest of secrecy. A total of 1,264,609 Lev was spent to prepare them. Guards with machine guns were placed at every corner of the camp and policemen with machine guns mounted on horses moved around in the yard. There were also constant military patrols circulating around the camp.

Outside contact with those in the camp was strictly forbidden. There were only 15 toilets in the camp, which were accessed in groups and under officer supervision. There were shelves made of planks in each of the 30 rooms and communication between rooms was forbidden. The Macedonian Jews in the Skopje camp, after their

arrival, were not allowed to go to the toilet or to get drinking water for three days. The people in each room had half an hour of washroom time and many, because of the large crowds, never made it to the toilet. Five days after they were arrested the detainees were given 250 grams of bread and a little bit of bean and rice soup prepared in a makeshift kitchen.

There was also the women being stripped naked and other horrors committed in the Bulgarian collection camp in Skopje Monopole. Because of their views, many Jewish women were raped and beaten. Included among them were Elena Leon Ishah, a doctor from Bitola, Mikko Noah from Skopje and Bertha Noah Haim also from Skopje. Plundering of the Jewish prisoners in the camp continued for days making sure nothing was concealed. The prisoners had no medicine and not much food but the Bulgarian guards were more than willing to secretly sell them some. One kilo of bread, which cost 16 Lev in the market, was sold to them for 500 Lev in the camp.

A total of 7,215 Jews were collected on March 11, 1943, in the Skopje Monopole collection camp. Included among them were 3,313 Jews from Skopje Region, 3,351 from Bitola Region and 551 from Shtip Region. Two days later, on March 13, 1943, another 25 Jews were detained from the Macedonian interior and brought to the camp. After March 22, 1943, another 75 Jews were brought to the Skopje camp, bringing the total number of Jewish prisoners to 7,315.

During their ten-day captivity in the Skopje camp, only those Jews who were doctors and pharmacists by profession (and their families) were freed. Only 165 Jews in total were freed, of whom many were from Spain, Italy and Albania.

Representatives from the Skopje Red Cross were not allowed to visit the Jewish prisoners in the Skopje camp. This was by order of Arthur Witte, German consul in Skopje, by Aleksandar Belev, Bulgarian Commissar for Jewish Affairs and by other fascist officials.

ON THE ROAD OF NO RETURN

Most Macedonian Jews were liquidated in Poland in the Treblinka death camp. Some were liquidated in the Auschwitz, Dachau, Bergen-Belsen and Mauthausen death camps. After World War II ended only 15 Jews returned to Macedonia from the death camps, 116 Jews from Albania and Italy and 65 Jews from various other camps.

The first transport of Jews from the Skopje camp, accompanied by Bulgarian police officers, left for the road of no return on March 22, 1943. On March 21, 1943, 1,600 Jews traveling from Skopje were issued food for the trip. On March 22, 1943 another 800 Jews were ordered to travel but most were not given any food. The second transport of Jews, loaded in a livestock railcar, left Macedonia on March 25, 1943. This one was headed for the Treblinka death camp. Loaded in the second transport were some Skopje Jews, all the Jews from Shtip and some of the Jews from Bitola. According to Dr. Ishah Levy, this transport was taken over by the Gestapo while it was still in Skopje.

The third and last transport of the remaining Macedonian Jews, imprisoned in the Bulgarian camp in Skopje, did not leave until March 29, 1943.

During the first transport a total of 2,338 Macedonian Jews were deported, of who 5 died on the way. During the second transport a total of 2,402 persons were deported, of who 3 died on the way. During the third transport a total of 2,404 persons were deported, of who 5 five died on the way.

Information regarding the fate of Macedonian Jews during their transfer from Skopje to Treblinka was obtained from documents seized from the German police detachment in Nishka Bania, which supplied soldiers to escort the transport, as ordered by telephone by Theodor Dannecker, German ambassador in Sofia.

THE TREBLINKA DEATH CAMP

In 1941 and 1942, the Treblinka I and Treblinka II death camps were built by the tenacious commander and war criminal Franz Paul

Shtantsl. They were located near the Malkinia train station, about 100 kilometres northeast of Warsaw, the capital of Poland.

Immediately after the arrival of the trains with the compositions of livestock railcars loaded with Jews from all over Europe, those sentenced to death were separated into groups of men, women and sick, right on the train platform. The sick were then taken out in the fields and shot in the head, instantly cutting short their plight. The healthy men were sent to the Treblinka I labour camp. Those remaining received a haircut, were undressed and afterwards led by the Nazis to the so-called baths to be “bathed” in sealed chambers. Before entering the chambers the Nazis gave the people soap made from the ashes and body fat of earlier cremated Jews. Once the chambers were loaded with the unfortunate Jews, the doors were locked and sealed. The Nazis then poured poison gas “Zyklon B” (carbon monoxide) through special openings in the ceiling from which people died a torturous death, suffering 15 to 20 minutes! In the Treblinka II death chambers the Nazis killed about 1,000 people per hour.

The Treblinka II death camp operated at its greatest capacity from August to December 1942 and from January to May 1943. The Macedonian Jews were killed at this time. Physicist Dr. Julian Krazitski organized a rebellion on March 2, 1943 in both Treblinka I and Treblinka II camps.

I (Martin Trenevski) have personally visited several Nazi concentration camps across Europe including Dachau, located near Munich, which is practically the first concentration camp built after Hitler’s arrival to power in Germany in 1933. This was where most opponents of Nazism and communists were liquidated. After Germany’s capitulation and after the camp was liberated by Allied troops, the US commanders forced every Dachau citizen to go to the camp and see what the Nazis had done, the atrocities their compatriots, the Nazis, had committed. I visited Auschwitz several times and saw the place where unimaginable crimes were committed against fellow human beings. The Mauthausen camp, situated about 20 kilometres from Linz city, all encircled by stone, is a special story. Looking from the distance the camp looks like some kind of splendid medieval castle but, according to some estimates, there

were nearly 700,000 people liquidated there, mainly intellectuals, mostly from countries like the Soviet Union and Poland, but also from the Balkans and other parts of Europe.

The Treblinka camp is also a special story. Before the arrival of the Red Army in November 1943, the Nazis destroyed the gas chambers and blew up virtually all existing facilities to make sure no trace was left behind which would point to the crimes they had committed against hundreds of thousands of innocent Jews. After that the Nazis plowed the camp soil and planted wheat on it. But before they could cover up everything the Nazis fled, leaving traces of a concrete platform where the trains stopped and offloaded the Jews arriving from all over Europe, including from Macedonia. Naturally the platforms and the train rails were preserved and are a silent witness to the tragic end of so many innocent people.

It is estimated that at least 750,000 people were killed in the Treblinka concentration camp, among them 7,132 Macedonian Jews. Camp commander Franz Paul Shtantsl was captured by US troops but managed to escape. He worked in Brazil in a branch of the Volkswagen automotive company for a long time. But tireless Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal was able to track him down in a way that paid off when one of his Nazi co-fighters turned him in for 7,000 dollars. Shtantsl was extradited to West Germany by the (West) German government, where he was sentenced to 20 years in prison. He died in prison in 1971.

The hand of Justice also reached out to Karl Adolph Eichmann, head of Section IV B 4 of the Reich Security, who the Jews themselves sued on behalf of the six million compatriots who were killed in World War II.

It is interesting to also mention at this point that Daniel Dano Sason was involved in the capture and kidnapping of Adolph Eichmann from Brazil. Daniel Dano Sason piloted the aircraft which flew Eichmann, in great secrecy, and transferred him to Israel. After a

lengthy trial in Israel, this criminal was sentenced to death by hanging. After his execution he was cremated and his ashes were thrown into the Mediterranean Sea so that no trace of him was left!

There is a huge memorial complex, the “Yad Vashem” dedicated to the Jewish victims of World War II, built in Jerusalem, where an eternal flame burns. Inscribed on the monument are all parts of Europe from where the Jews were deported. However, a great injustice was made on the part of the Macedonian Jews on the “Yad Vashem” memorial by presenting them as the “Jews from Bulgaria”!? It was probably the people who conceptualized the “Yad Vashem” who made the error. They probably used data from the death camp filing cabinets where the origin of the deported Jews in occupied Europe was recorded. The Macedonian Jews who were deported to Treblinka were from all parts of Macedonia when it was under Bulgarian fascist occupation. This error however, is not justifiable because it permanently absolves the murderers who actually sent the Macedonian Jews to their death.

WHAT BECAME OF THE BULGARIAN JEWS DURING WORLD WAR II

One of the “main arguments” with which Bulgarian historiography glorifies Bulgaria’s alleged World War II “contribution” to the final collapse of fascism and of how little the Bulgarians say they served the Nazis in the three years, is that they did not sell out their Jews to the Germans!?! However, the same contemporary Bulgarian historiography and policy is oblivious of what happened to the Macedonian Jews under Bulgarian occupation. Contemporary Bulgarian historiography has forgotten the thousands of Macedonian Jews who were liquidated because of King Boris’s fascist Bulgarian stubborn efforts to contribute to the final solution of the “Jewish Question”. By doing so, the Bulgarians were hoping that maybe later Hitler would grant them their wish to realize their San Stefano dream of creating a “Greater Bulgaria” with Macedonia included in it.

It is a well-known phenomenon that Bulgarian historians not only boast about their alleged great Bulgarian contribution to World War II but have also played down contributions of other nations. Preserved evidence and actual documentation specifically pertaining to the alleged rescue of the Bulgarian Jews, however, shows something completely different from what Bulgarians are attempting to impose through their historiography (note: Fascist Bulgaria's capitulation to the Red Army took place at such a rapid pace that the Bulgarian occupiers simply did not have the time to act in the Nazi example and destroy everything they could so as to leave no evidence of their misdeeds. Fascist Bulgaria capitulated on September 9 and it left behind all its original documentation including laws, acts and the measures it undertook in occupied Macedonia. This documentation fell into Macedonian hands and has been preserved in the Macedonian government archives in Skopje. A copy of the documentation has been donated to the "Yad Vashem" Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem).

Outside of the Bulgarian historians there was also a Bulgarian Jew who contributed to the Bulgarian boast about "saving the Jews". Israel Meyer, in an article entitled "Salvation of the Bulgarian Jews from destruction", published in Sofia in 1967, wrote that on March 15, 1943, D. Peshev, President of the Bulgarian National Assembly, sent a protest letter to Prime Minister Filov "against the deportation of the undesirable Jews". That protest letter was signed by 43 Members of the Bulgarian Parliament.

Yes, what Israel Mayer and Bulgarian historiography wrote was true but unfortunately the protest Mayer is talking about was not "an act of Bulgarian public opinion". So, at this point we would like to remind Israel Mayer, the Bulgarian historians and all other individuals who have similar ideas that the protest letter was written after the Macedonian Jews had met their fate. In fact the letter was written after all the Macedonian Jews from all the Bulgarian occupied territories had been surrendered to the Nazis and their fate had already been sealed. Does it not seem odd that the then Members of Parliament waited this long before they protested? Could the MPs not protest earlier, before the Jews were collected? Why did they wait until the fate of the Macedonian Jews was sealed before they protested? Were they not the same MPs who voted for

so many anti-Jewish acts and passed destructive laws? Why did they not protest then? Those same MPs and members of the fascist National Assembly voted for the laws that allowed the economic destruction and the loss of all civil and political rights of all the Jews in occupied Macedonia!? On the other hand, the question is: “Was it even possible for Filov and his 43 MPs to support such an act and to consider such a ‘public opinion’ appeal in general when it is quite clear that these MPs were fascist and members of King Boris’s fascist Bulgaria?”!

It is worthwhile mentioning at this point that on March 15, 1943, when the alleged protest letter reached the Bulgarian National Assembly, the battle of Stalingrad, in which elite German units had suffered great defeat on the Eastern Front, had been fought. At this point the Bulgarians as well as all of Europe and beyond were well aware that this battle was practically the turning point in World War II. At this point the so-called “national” Bulgarian ambassadors were certainly not thinking of the Jews in their country but of how to save their own skin! There are many facts that support this conclusion. On August 18, 1943, for example, Adolph Bekerle informed the Reich Foreign Ministry that the Bulgarian government did not want to give up the Bulgarian Jews fearing reprisals from the Anglo-Americans, in particular by aerial bombardments of Sofia, Varna and other major cities in Bulgaria, as well as the deterioration of the international political situation that would not be in favour of Bulgaria.

Given the development of events on the battlefield after the end of the Stalingrad Battle, and given US and allied threats to bomb Bulgaria, which at the time was a staunch ally of the Third Reich, it is quite logical to conclude that some of the Bulgarian MPs in the fascist Bulgarian Assembly, would have done everything possible to “save themselves” including creating a perception or “public opinion” that they wanted to save the Bulgarian Jews! Had developments in the battlefield been different and in favour of the Nazis, the Bulgarian Jews would have certainly been deported to the death camps. But by delaying the handover of the Bulgarian Jews to the Reich, Bulgaria, as a loyal ally of the Reich and its satellites, at least somewhat, tried to rehabilitate the crimes it committed against the Macedonian Jews in World War II.

FATE OF THE JEWS IN THE ITALIAN OCCUPATIONAL ZONE IN WESTERN MACEDONIA

Unlike the number of Jews in the part of Macedonia that fell under Bulgarian fascist occupation, the Macedonian Jews in western Macedonia, who came under fascist Italian occupation, were greater in number. Fascist Italy, however, took no measures against the Jews. And no measures were taken against the Jews in the Italian occupied zones until Italy's capitulation on September 8, 1943. In fact, due to the tolerant attitude of the Italian occupation authorities, after a large part of Macedonia (two thirds of its territory) was given to Bulgaria and a smaller part (one third of its territory) to the Italians, many Jews from the German and Bulgarian occupied zone fled to the Italian occupied zone. The Jews in the Italian occupied part of (Western) Macedonia were not obligated to wear the "Star of David" or to mark their houses and shops.

So far historical science has found no recognizable law, regulation or local act issued by the Italian occupying powers in Western Macedonia that has anti-Jewish content. Of course, occasionally there had been Jews arrested but they were arrested because they were members of the resistance movement or because they were communists.

LIQUIDATION OF PROPERTIES BELONGING TO DEPORTED JEWS

Like hungry wolves, the so-called Bulgarian "liberators" threw themselves at what remained of the Jewish properties belonging to the Jews deported from Macedonia. By Bulgarian government Ministerial Council decision, no. 126, made on March 2, 1943, all properties belonging to the deported Jews, which were not already confiscated, were to be liquidated. All remaining real estate properties were to become the property of the state. Any proceeds raised by selling Jewish assets, in auctions or otherwise, were to be handed over to the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs or deposited in the National Bank of Bulgaria.

A few days after the Macedonian Jews were gathered at the Skopje Monopole camp, the Bulgarian occupiers began to liquidate their movable assets. Special commissions were sent from house to house to catalog the items, food and everything else that remained. The finer items were collected in special warehouses and later distributed to various government institutions or sold.

Before each auction, all Jewish assets were studiously “sifted over” and it was not unusual for representatives of the official government to participate in the plundering and looting. In addition to grabbing cash money, they also took jewelry and other valuables that belonged to the deported Macedonian Jews who were destined for the Treblinka death camp.

There are a number of preserved documents which speak of Bulgarian criminal activities committed against the Jews. Document no. 2015, dated June 29, 1943, for example, states that items from a certain Jewish house were taken by members of the Bulgarian police. Document no. 2407, dated July 29, 1943, states that the seals of certain Jewish houses were broken by the police and that soldier Slavcho Stoilov was punished by the police administration by withholding a quarter of his salary. Stoilov was also obliged to return all the items he stole, which included an oven, a coil, two bedside tables, three sheets, three cushions and a wall mounted mirror.

The originals of both above cited documents can be found in the Macedonian State Archives.

From the liquidation of assets, belonging to the deported Macedonian Jews, the Bulgarians received 33,112,714 Lev, in total.

JEWES DEPORTED FROM EASTERN MACEDONIA, THRACE AND SOLUN REGION

According to the Agreement made by Theodor Dannecker, German Ambassador to Sofia, and Aleksandar Belev, Bulgarian Commissar for Jewish Affairs, the first phase of Jews being deported was to be done from Aegean Macedonia and Thrace. The Agreement, as mentioned earlier, called for the deportation of all Jews from the

entire so-called “Bulgaria”, i.e. all the territory occupied by Bulgaria including Aegean, Vardar and Pirin Macedonia, as well as Thrace. The Jews held in the reception camps in Kavala, Drama, Seres, Ksanthi and Dzhumurdzhina were to be sent to the concentration camp in Gorna Dzhumaia, today’s Blagoevgrad, Pirin Macedonia and to the camp in Dupnitsa. The Jews from Aegean Macedonia were sent mainly to Gorna Dzhumaia and those from Thrace were sent to Dupnitsa.

Two loads of Jews, a total of 2,617 people, were transported on March 18 and 19, 1943. They were sent to Gorna Dzhumaia over Sofia through the port of Lom on the Danube River. In total 4,219 people were then taken by boat from Lom on the boats “Voivoda Mishich”, “Saturnus”, “Tsar Dushan” and “Karagiorgie” and transported to Vienna, where they arrived on Mach 20 and 21, and where the Gestapo settled them in the death camps.

After the Jews were taken away from Seres, Drama and Kavala, the Bulgarian occupation authorities auctioned off their properties from which they collected 12,493,827 Lev.

Of the approximately 56,000 Jews who lived in Solun and other cities in Aegean Macedonia during World War II, 45,850 lost their lives in the death camps.

THE BULGARIANS WERE EVEN MORE EXTREME THAN THE GERMANS REGARDING THE “JEWISH QUESTION”

King Boris’s fascist Bulgarian government had a clear, extreme and uncompromising attitude towards resolving the “Jewish Question”. Its zeal to liquidate the Jews was even more extreme than that of the Germans themselves. To illustrate our point we will mention a few examples.

On February 4, 1943, Adolph Bekerle, assistant to Eichmann in Sofia, informed the Reich Foreign Ministry by telegram about his talks with Prime Minister Bogdan Filov, President of the Bulgarian government. Filov informed Bekerle that the United Kingdom had made a request, dispatched through the Embassy of Switzerland in Sofia, to send 5,000 Jewish children from Bulgaria to Palestine via

Turkey. Bogdan Filov was against this proposal and Bekerle was looking for an opinion from his own ministry in Berlin. On February 10, 1943, Bekerle received a telegram stating that the German side was against such a move “because such a move could be detrimental to German policy towards the Arabs!” On February 13, 1943, Bekerle again sent a telegram to his ministry informing it that Filov expressed no desire to send 5,000 Jewish children from Bulgaria... This clearly speaks about Bulgaria’s position on the Jewish issue.

On March 3, 1943, an attempt was made to save 3,000 Macedonian Jewish children and 100 adult Jews by sending them through Turkey to Palestine. This attempt was made by the international community but without success because Bogdan Filov’s fascist government categorically rejected it. It is interesting, however, that the Nazis themselves were not so strict and Eichmann himself personally, for political or other reasons, had saved some Jews from being executed. Fascist Bulgaria, on the other hand, remained uncompromising on the “Jewish Question” until its capitulation on September 9, 1943. Fascist Bulgaria did not even allow small groups of Jews to transit through its territory.

On March 14, 1943, Kilinger, Eichmann’s representative in Bucharest, informed his boss that the Bulgarian government did not allow a group of 77 Jewish children to pass through its territory on their way to Istanbul because they had to be transported through Macedonia and Thrace, where the jurisdiction of Railways was equally shared by Bulgaria and Germany. On March 16, 1943, German Ambassador Bekerle informed his Foreign Ministry in Berlin that the Bulgarian government would not allow 150 Jewish children coming from Romania and heading for Istanbul to pass through Bulgaria. On April 9, 1943, Kilinger (from Bucharest) informed Eichmann that the Bulgarian government would not allow a group of 74 Jewish children traveling from Romania to Istanbul to pass through Bulgaria.

It is interesting to mention at this point that El Hussein, the Grand Mufti of Bulgaria, sent Ribbentrop of Germany a request asking him to intervene in the Bulgarian government to allow the transit of 4,000 children and 500 adult Jews through its territory to Istanbul, which the Bulgarian government refused. The Bulgarian

government's tough stance against "saving" certain groups of Jews, and its attitude towards the "Jewish Question" in general, was confirmed by a telegram Adolph Bekerle sent to the Reich Ministry of Foreign Affairs on June 12, 1943, in which he reported that Popov, Bulgarian Minister of Internal Affairs, reiterated his government's position that "it was no longer interested in the fate of the deported Jews" (he was referring to the Jews in the Kingdom of the "newly liberated territories", i.e. Vardar and Aegean Macedonia and Thrace), as well as the Bulgarian Jews - Bulgarian nationals residing in the territory of the Reich and other territories occupied by the Germans and its allies.

THESE CRIMES CANNOT BE FORGOTTEN

Many of the Macedonian Jews who survived the horrors of the concentration camps across Europe, and who returned to Macedonia after Germany's capitulation, soon afterwards left Macedonia, this time forever. But that does not mean that they had forgotten... their memories of life with their closest and most beloved still remained fresh in their minds... Those who decided to stay, on the initiative of Dimitar Vlahov, renewed their Jewish communities and since then have grown to 85 in numbers.

According to Beniamina Samokovlia, long-time president of the Jewish Community in Macedonia, who was saved from the pogrom of the Macedonian Jews, in the first years after Skopje's liberation there were about 320 Jews in living in Skopje but most of them later immigrated to Israel.

After the Jewish pogrom, all Jewish real estate, houses, stores, and so on, practically remained without legal heirs. As part of the process of returning properties, according to the law on restitution of private properties that were taken away or went to the Government, VMRO-DPMNE decided to form a special fund from the properties of the Macedonian Jews, victims of Nazism and fascism, and with that fund built a wonderful Museum of the Holocaust in Skopje. This rare museum, whose content is strictly associated with the memory of Macedonian Jews, was built for the young generation of Macedonian Jews to cherish their ancient customs and traditions.

The Macedonian government's gesture left a strong impression on the Jewish community worldwide, particularly with Israel, with which the Republic of Macedonia is fostering excellent relations.

Skopje, October 23, 2016

PIRAMID OF THE NAZI GOVERNMENT: ORGANIZATIONS AND DEATH CAMPS

Adolph Hitler - (Reich leader and supreme commander of the armed forces, the Wehrmacht).

Heinrich Himmler - (Reichsfurer of the SS Supreme Council, Minister of Internal Affairs and Chief of the German Police).

SS "Supreme Council" with 12 directorates

Haidrih and Kalternbruner Chiefs of RSNA, Reich main security administration – directorate IV: Gestapo led by Hainrih Miler.

Section IV B 4, Carl Adolph Aihman.

Bulgarians collaborating with the Reich responsible for the liquidation of the Macedonian Jews:

Petar Grabovski, Minister of Internal Affairs and Chief of the Bulgarian Fascist police;

Aleksandar Belev, Chief of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs in King Boris's Fascist Bulgarian government;

Zachari Velkov, a delegate of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs in Macedonia;

Ivan Zachariev, a delegate of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs in Skopje Region;

Giorgi Dzhumbasov, a delegate of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs in Bitola Region;

Stoian Hristov Bashchevandzhev, a delegate of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs in Shtip Region,

Peio Draganov Peev, commander of the Bulgarian concentration camp in Skopje.