

# The Rescue of Bulgaria's Jews in World War II

January 13, 2010

ON FEBRUARY 13, 1998, Bulgarian President Petar Stoyanov accepted on behalf of his ex-Communist nation the Courage to Care Award, which the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) had bestowed upon Bulgaria in recognition of the heroism of its people in saving Bulgarian Jews during World War II. Speaking at a meeting of the League's National Executive Committee in Palm Beach, Florida, the ADL National Director Abraham Foxman presented this prestigious award to President Stoyanov with words of deep gratitude: "Today I am here to say thank you — thank you to a people and a nation that unanimously said 'no' to the Nazi killing machine, 'no' to the deportation trains and concentration camps, and 'yes' to its 48,000 Jews." [1] He praised the Bulgarian people who heroically saved the local Jews by preventing their deportation to Hitler's death camps, even though the Bulgarian government was allied with Nazi Germany during World War II. According to Mr. Foxman, this miraculous salvation of Bulgaria's Jewish community was made possible by the courageous leadership of Bulgarian King Boris III, "whose personal defiance of Hitler and refusal to supply troops to the Russian front or to cooperate with deportation requests set an example for his country." [2] Thanking his host for this high honor, President Stoyanov replied with some modesty, "What happened then should not be seen as a miracle. My nation did what any decent nation, human being, man or woman, would have done in those circumstances.... The events of World War II have made the Bulgarian Jews forever the closest friends of my people." [3] On March 11, 2003, Bulgaria's international image got an even bigger boost, when the U.S. Congress passed unanimously a resolution which praised Bulgarians and King Boris III for the wartime rescue of 50,000 local Jews.

This article will deal with a rather obscure historical event — the survival of Bulgaria's Jewish minority during World War II — that is little known even to those Americans who are more knowledgeable about the grim history of the Holocaust. [4] Here, in a nutshell, are the basic facts of this extraordinary story: despite strong pressure from Berlin, none of prewar Bulgaria's 48,000 Jews were sent to die in the Nazi death camps (where, by contrast, at least 270,000 Jews from neighboring Rumania alone perished). While there can be no doubt that the compassion, decency, altruism, sense of justice, and bravery of the Bulgarian people were responsible for this remarkable feat, many other details are still in dispute, especially the controversial role played by Bulgaria's former monarch, Tsar (Bulgarian for king) Boris III (despite Mr. Foxman's rather effusive but perhaps unmerited praise for him). Even President Stoyanov's personal acceptance of the Anti-Defamation League's award is not without some historical irony as his father was a leading member of the Union of Bulgarian National Legions (better known as the Union of Legionnaires) in Bulgaria's second largest city of Plovdiv (the birthplace of the future president). The Union of Legionnaires was a notorious fascist organization, founded in 1933 after Hitler's rise in Germany, which strongly supported the pro-Nazi Bulgarian government's plans to deport all local Jews to concentration camps in the Third Reich's new "Eastern Territories" (in this case, Nazi-occupied Poland). Hence, this article will attempt to render historical justice by giving credit only to those honorable and noble individuals who were genuinely responsible for this charitable act and to whom praise is indeed due.

## The Historical Background

IN 1940, THE KINGDOM OF BULGARIA had a total population of around 6.2 million, which consisted of 85 percent Slavic Bulgarians, 10 percent Muslim Turks, 1.5 percent Muslim Bulgarians known as Pomaks (Slavic Bulgarians who had been converted by force to Islam during the Ottoman Turkish rule of the country from 1396 to 1878), a very large but unknown number of Gypsies, and other

minority groups. The majority of the population were Eastern Orthodox Christians (87.5 percent), while the rest consisted mostly of Muslims, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. Most Bulgarian Jews (numbering about 48,400 and making up 0.8 percent of Bulgaria's population, according to the 1934 national census) were Sephardic Jews who had arrived in the Balkan peninsula after being forcibly evicted from Catholic Spain in 1492. Ninety-seven percent of Bulgarian Jews lived in the cities, almost half of them in the capital Sofia. Their main occupation was in retail trade (Jews accounted for half of all retail merchants in Sofia) and in the liberal professions (lawyers, medical doctors, dentists, pharmacists, engineers, teachers, etc.), but the majority were poor street vendors, manual workers, artisans, and public-sector employees.

On March 1, 1941, Bulgaria joined the Tripartite or Axis Pact (Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, Imperial Japan, Franco's Spain, and several other, mostly East European, countries) in the hope of reclaiming the territories which it had lost to its neighbors Rumania, Greece, and Serbia (later Yugoslavia) as a result of its military defeats in the Second Balkan War (1913) and again in World War I. The decision to throw in Bulgaria's lot with the Tripartite Pact was made by the Germanophile and German-descended Boris III (1894-1943), who was married to Queen Giovanna (the daughter of King Victor Emmanuel of Italy), and who ruled Bulgaria as nearly an absolute monarch after a royalist coup in 1935. Boris ascended the Bulgarian throne in 1918 when his Austrian-born father, Ferdinand I of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1861-1948), abdicated and fled abroad following defeat in World War I, in which Bulgaria fought on the side of the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire).

The very day that Boris III joined the Axis Pact, Rumania, another of Hitler's Axis allies, finally returned to Bulgaria southern Dobrudzha (a region which his father, Tsar Ferdinand I, had lost in the Second Balkan War) under the terms of a German-arbitrated treaty between the two countries signed on September 7, 1940 in the Rumanian city of Craiova. Two days later German troops entered Bulgaria and in April 1941 invaded and occupied Greece and Yugoslavia with active assistance from the Bulgarian military. By the end of that year, Bulgaria had declared war on both the British Empire and the United States. But Boris III refused to declare war also on the Soviet Union given the strongly Russophile sentiments of ordinary Bulgarians and the leftist sympathies of most of the Bulgarian intelligentsia. Thus, Bulgaria remained the only Axis country throughout the war that never sent troops to the Eastern front.

As early as July 1940 the pro-German and anti-Semitic Prime Minister Bogdan Filov, appointed and controlled by Boris III, announced that his government would take steps to regulate and restrain the activities of the local Jewry. On October 8, 1940, the disgraceful Law for the Protection of the Nation (ZZN) was introduced in the National Assembly (Narodno Subranie), Bulgaria's supreme legislative body which at that time was dominated by the monarch's supporters. Although ostensibly designed to curb Communist subversion and other anti-government activities, some of the bill's provisions specifically targeted the Jews. Deliberately modeled on Germany's infamous Nuremberg laws of 1935, the new legislation restricted the rights of the Jews to vote, hold public office, serve in the military, marry ethnic Bulgarians, use Slavic Bulgarian names, choose their place of residence, own businesses or commercial property (including landholdings), and practice certain professions (especially in the civil service and in the cultural sector). It also levied extraordinary new taxes targeting only the Jews and established quotas that limited the number of Jews that could be admitted to Bulgarian universities. This legislation was hardly unique at the time, since not only Nazi Germany, but also fascist Italy, Hungary, Rumania, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and other European countries (including even France) had adopted similar racial measures since the mid-1930s.

A number of professional organizations such as the Association of Bulgarian Lawyers, the Physicians' Union, the Union of Artists' Societies, and the Association of Craftsmen, sent letters and

petitions to the Prime Minister, protesting the proposed law as unconstitutional and morally degrading to the Jewish minority. Several deputies from the parliamentary opposition (Communists and non-Communists alike) and even former cabinet ministers like Dimo Kazasov, Yanko Sakazov, and Stoyan Kosturkov spoke out against turning the Jews into oppressed second-class citizens. The Holy Synod, the highest body of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, was also quite critical, with high clergy such as Archbishop Stefan of Sofia (the Church's nominal head) and bishops Neofit of Vidin, Kyril of Plovdiv, and Sofronii of Vratza publicly speaking out or writing against the draft bill's anti-Semitic provisions. On the other hand, the new law was supported by militant fascist groups like the Union of Legionnaires, Ratnik (Warrior), Brannik (Defender), a Bulgarian version of Nazi Germany's Hitlerjugend or Hitler Youth, and other right-wing conservative organizations such as the Federation of Reserve Officers, the Federation of Reserve Sergeants and Soldiers, the Merchants' Association, the Students' Union, the Bulgarian Youth League, and the Pharmacists' Association.

Despite a nation-wide wave of protests and outspoken opposition, including an open letter to the Prime Minister by the Bulgarian Writers' Union, signed by twenty-one of Bulgaria's best known non-Communist authors led by Elin Pelin (a close friend and favorite of Boris III), the Law for the Protection of the Nation was approved on November 20, 1940 and went into effect on January 21, 1941. In vain did Yosif Geron, chairman of the Central Jewish Consistory<sup>[5]</sup> in Sofia, and other members of its executive board, seek an audience with King Boris to plead with him not to sign the controversial legislation. But even though the law passed, Boris must have realized just how difficult solving the "Jewish question" was going to be. After Hitler's Wermacht occupied Greece and Yugoslavia in April 1941, Bulgaria assumed full administrative control of Macedonia, Aegean Thrace, and Pirot (a town in eastern Serbia), decreeing on June 5, 1942 that all Yugoslav and Greek residents of these "liberated" territories would be made Bulgarian citizens, except for the local Jewry. Many Bulgarians, who now hailed Boris III as the "Unifier Tsar," failed to anticipate the fatal consequences of this exclusion for the Jews in these areas.

### **"Unified" Bulgaria's Jews**

BETWEEN 1941 AND 1943, the living conditions of Bulgarian Jews, whose freedom of movement was constrained by a strictly enforced curfew, continued to deteriorate as a result of the introduction of new, even more draconian restrictions. By 1943, there were a total of 63,403 Jews in the so-called "Unified" or "Greater" Bulgaria (which comprised pre-1941 Bulgaria and the conquered territories of Macedonia, Aegean Thrace, and Pirot), constituting nearly 1 percent of the combined population. All Jews were required to wear in public the yellow Star of David on their lapels (thus marking them for insults and physical abuse by local fascist thugs) and post it on their houses and businesses as well. Some of them lost their jobs, others were evicted from their homes, many saw their businesses, cars, bicycles, radios, and jewelry confiscated. Jews were also not allowed to frequent cinemas and cafes, nor use the main streets and roads. Prime Minister Filov and Minister of Internal Affairs Petar Gabrovsky had promised Berlin that all Bulgarian Jews would soon be turned over to Nazi Germany. In August 1942 the cabinet issued a decree, imposing new legal restrictions on the political, civil, and property rights of the Jews, including heavy new taxes on their professional and economic activities and on their private property. The decree also established a Commissariat for Jewish Questions which, as the central executive body in charge of implementing the Law for the Protection of the Nation, was attached to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and headed by Aleksandar Belev, an anti-Semitic, Nazi-trained lawyer and fascist.

A high-ranking SS official, Theodore Dannecker, arrived in Sofia in January 1943 as Adolf Eichmann's special envoy to coordinate with his Bulgarian counterpart, Commissar for Jewish Questions Belev, the first phase of the deportation of the Bulgarian Jewry. Belev and Dannecker together decided that 8,000 Macedonian Jews, 6,000 Thracian Jews, and 6,000 Jews from the "old," prewar Bulgaria — about 20,000 in number altogether — would be shipped to Germany in the first

wave of deportations. In February 1943, both the king and the cabinet (the Council of Ministers) approved Belev's secret plan. A propaganda campaign was launched in the government-controlled media, calling for tightening the repressive measures against the Jews. Members of the fascist Brannik youth group had already organized at least one "pogrom" in Sofia's Jewish neighborhoods at the beginning of February, resulting in many wounded and several deaths. Starting in early March 1943, at least 11,343 Jews were rounded up by the Bulgarian Army and police in Bulgarian-occupied Macedonia, Aegean Thrace, and Pirot, and delivered to various detention centers in Bulgaria proper. By the end of March all of them were transferred, mostly by train, to the dreaded extermination camps of Auschwitz and Treblinka, where nearly all subsequently perished (only twelve of the deportees survived the Holocaust).

### **Resistance to the Holocaust**

THE NEWS OF THE TRANSPORTATION of the Macedonian and Thracian Jews to Germany provoked widespread dismay and disapproval in Bulgaria. Archbishop Stefan of Sofia, who had by chance come upon a sealed boxcar train carrying Thracian Jews in most horrific conditions, sent several urgent telegrams and personal appeals to the monarch, expressing his shock and in vain pleading with him to stop the deportations. Letters, petitions, appeals, and entreaties from other top Orthodox clergymen were similarly ignored. Even the protest voices of several parliamentary deputies from both the government majority (like Dimitar Ikonov) and the opposition parties (like Professor Petko Stainov) fell on deaf ears. But when the police started rounding up thousands of Jews within Bulgaria's prewar borders, the resulting public outcry and backlash stopped the Filov government in its tracks. When Archbishop Stefan learned that at least 800 Jews from Sofia were about to be "evacuated," he rushed to the royal palace and refused to leave until the king finally agreed to hear him out. Bishop Kyril of Plovdiv (a future head of the Orthodox Church) sent several telegrams to the monarch and, in a defiant act of civil disobedience, allowed local Jews to take refuge in his church and in his own home. He prevented the deportation of between 1,500 and 1,600 Jews from his diocese, who had been ordered to assemble at Plovdiv's train station during the night of March 9, by vowing to lie across the rails in the path of the first train transport taking them out of the country.

When about a thousand Jews from Kyustendil (a town about 65 miles southwest of Sofia) were ordered on March 7 to leave their homes with only a few belongings, the alarmed local citizenry formed a delegation of forty-four people to travel to Sofia and ask the authorities to rescind the evacuation order. In the end, a smaller delegation of only four prominent men, all of them ethnic Bulgarians, arrived in Sofia the next day and met with their parliamentary representative, Dimitar Peshev, who happened to be the vice-chairman of the National Assembly. Upon hearing their urgent pleas, Peshev and nine other Assembly deputies tried in vain to speak to Prime Minister Filov but could only meet on March 9 with Minister of Internal Affairs Gabrovsky, who at first denied any knowledge of the ongoing "evacuations." When pressured by his agitated visitors, who refused to leave his office until he agreed to intervene, a visibly shaken Gabrovsky finally ordered by telephone the release of all Jews who had been detained. Incredibly, the new orders were not countermanded, so thousands of Jewish men, women and children, who had been waiting in school buildings and warehouses to board trains bound for the death camps in Poland, were allowed to return home.

Dimitar Peshev, a former minister of justice, decided to keep up the pressure on the cabinet and thus became a pivotal figure in the campaign to save the Bulgarian Jewry.[6] Even though he had voted for the Law for the Protection of the Nation, Peshev reacted with consternation, outrage, and deep sympathy when his parliamentary colleague Dimitar Ikonov told him about the forced removal of the Macedonian and Thracian Jews, which Ikonov had personally witnessed. Faced now with the attempted mass "evacuation" of the Jews from his own electoral district, Peshev composed a letter of protest addressed to Prime Minister Filov, attacking the cabinet's anti-Semitic

steps as "cruel measures" leading to "mass murder" and demanding that they be immediately revoked. He persuaded forty-one other parliamentary deputies (out of the Assembly's total of 160) — all of them from the government majority — to sign it. To avoid accusations of siding with the anti-government parties on this issue, he decided not to have any deputies from the parliamentary opposition sign the statement. Before several other deputies from the ruling majority could add their signatures, Peshev had to hastily deposit his protest letter with the chairman of the National Assembly, after Filov asked him through an intermediary not to make it public.

Enraged by this open challenge to his prestige and authority, the Prime Minister demanded that all forty-two deputies who had signed the now published letter — no less than a third of the government majority's members — withdraw their signatures, thus openly humiliating them and also isolating Peshev. Despite Filov's threat to eject from the majority's ranks any deputies who did not withdraw their signatures, at least thirty of the co-signers refused to do so. Filov also demanded that Peshev, the main signatory, resign from his post as vice-chairman of the Assembly, but the latter refused, declaring that he had done absolutely nothing wrong. With support from the king, the Prime Minister then organized a vote of censure, removing Peshev from the vice-chairmanship of the Assembly for insubordination. The motion passed on March 30, but this rebuke from within its own parliamentary ranks — coming on top of other public protests and widespread opposition to Hitler's genocidal policies — forced the cabinet to put on hold its plans to hand over the rest of Bulgaria's Jews. Peshev was not allowed to take the floor and defend himself in the Assembly, nor was any parliamentary debate ever held concerning his protest petition, but the planned expulsions to Poland were suspended, at least temporarily, and would never resume.[7]

Confronted with a groundswell of public opposition to his unpopular anti-Jewish measures, Boris III obviously felt that it would be politically too risky to deliver any more Jews to the Germans. But he could hardly be given credit for the failed extradition of the remaining Jews, let alone be hailed as a gallant hero who saved the local Jewish population from Hitler's gas chambers, as his hand was clearly forced by the storm of public protests and the private interventions of many members of Bulgaria's leading moral and religious authorities. At a special plenary session in April 1943, the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church officially rejected the government's anti-Semitic policy. In response, the monarch openly criticized the Church leadership during his April 15 speech to the Holy Synod, in which he also blamed "the profiteering spirit" of the Jews for inflicting enormous damage over the centuries to the Bulgarian nation and to all mankind as well, including the outbreak of World War II.

Following the government majority's open rebellion in the Assembly and amidst a rising tide of public concern and indignation, on May 20 the king ordered the evacuation of Sofia's 20,000 Jews and their internment in the countryside which was the first step in transporting them out of the country, according to the Dannecker-Belev plan. The monarch postponed for the time being any new deportations to Poland, but never cancelled them. All able-bodied Jewish men were conscripted and sent to forced labor camps throughout Bulgaria where they were organized in slave-like working gangs. Now Boris could simply tell the Germans that he needed his Jews to build and maintain Bulgaria's roads and railways (whether he believed him or not, there was not much that Hitler — beset with a succession of military calamities on the Russian front — could do).

### **No "Final Solution" in "Old" Bulgaria**

POPULAR OPPOSITION AND RESISTANCE CONTINUED, leaving little doubt that public opinion was decisively against the persecution of the Jews. On May 24, 1943, the traditional parade in the streets of Sofia to celebrate the National Holiday of Slavic Letters and Culture ("Cyril and Methodius' Day") turned into a demonstration against the government's evacuation and internment orders, which were forcing 20,000 Jews to abandon their homes in the capital. The police arrested over 400

demonstrators, mostly Jews, during this mass protest, organized and led by leaders of the Jewish community (mainly Rabbi Daniel Zion) as well as by Jewish members of the Workers' Party (a front organization for the outlawed Bulgarian Communist Party). When the government threatened to prosecute Archbishop Stefan for his appeals, letters, telegrams, telephone calls, and other public and private intercessions on behalf of the Jewish minority and the police raided his office, Stefan responded by giving Rabbi Zion and Bulgaria's Chief Rabbi, Dr. Asher Hananel of Sofia, refuge at his home and declaring the doors of every Orthodox church and monastery open to all Jews. A number of prominent independent politicians and parliamentary deputies such as Nikola Petkov, Dimo Kazasov, Nikola Mushanov, Krustyo Pastukhov, Damyan Velchev, Tzviatko Boboshevsky, and Petko Stainov co-signed a letter addressed to the king, denouncing on behalf of the non-Communist opposition the evacuation and internment of Sofia's Jews. The evacuation order was nevertheless carried out in May and June 1943 with many brutalities perpetrated by thousands of heavily-armed policemen and Branniks.

On August 28, 1943, shortly after returning from one of his visits with Hitler, Boris suddenly died of a heart attack. As Crown Prince Simeon was still a minor, three regents, including Bogdan Filov, were appointed to rule in his name. A new cabinet was formed under another German puppet, Dobri Bozhilov, but without Aleksandar Belev and Petar Gabrovsky. As it had already become obvious that Hitler was losing the war, the new Prime Minister had little stomach for any more Jewish expulsions to Germany. In fact, Sofia's Jews were allowed to return to their homes in October 1943. On August 31, 1944, just days before the Soviet Army overran and occupied the country, the cabinet finally revoked the Law for the Protection of the Nation.

After September 9, 1944, Filov, Bozhilov, and other leading members of the deposed fascist regime were arrested, tried, sentenced to death for collaboration with the Germans, and executed. Nearly all deputies of the wartime National Assembly's government majorities were also put on trial and many received the death penalty, including even Dimitar Ikonov and several other signatories of Peshev's letter. Peshev was himself prosecuted and sentenced to fifteen years of imprisonment for his role in passing the Law for the Protection of the Nation, but was released after only a year due to his critical contribution to defending the Jews. After 1948, the majority of Bulgaria's Jewish survivors (reportedly as many as 45,000) emigrated to Palestine and became citizens of the newly created state of Israel. The recently elected right wing government of ex-General Boyko Borisov has angered the few remaining Jews in Bulgaria by naming one of Sofia's central streets after their former nemesis and ex-Prime Minister the late Bogdan Filov.

## **Conclusion**

WHAT LED THIS SMALL AND RATHER HELPLESS NATION to defy Hitler for the sake of saving the lives of its fellow citizens of Jewish origin? Very different historical interpretations have been offered about who was responsible for the partial rescue of Bulgaria's Jewish minority. The Communists, for example, used this tragic episode to condemn the treachery, inhumanity, and anti-Semitism of King Boris and his fascist regime, blaming them for the extermination of the defenseless Jews from Bulgarian-controlled Macedonia, Aegean Thrace, and Pirot. In their self-serving explanation of these events, it was the valiant and heroic struggle waged by the Bulgarian Communist Party (today renamed the Socialist Party) and many ordinary Bulgarians from all walks of life but especially from the working class, that saved the lives of the Jews in Bulgaria proper. On the other hand, Bulgarians on the political Right (such as ex-President Petar Stoyanov) claim to this day that it was Boris III who saved Bulgaria's Jewish population from certain death in the gas chambers, hailing the king as the hero of heroes in this untold drama.[8] Under their influence, a monument was erected at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, to honor Boris and his wife, Queen Giovanna, for sparing the Bulgarian Jews during the war. But that controversial monument was removed in 2000, following vigorous protests by many Bulgarian-born Jews and after a semi-official Israeli inquiry

established that the king had personally approved the deportation of more than 11,000 doomed Jews from wartime Bulgaria's annexed territories. And, of course, all of Bulgaria's post-Communist governments have shamelessly exploited these grisly events either to score political points at home or to ingratiate themselves in the eyes of their Western mentors and patrons in a campaign to obtain foreign economic assistance and investments as well as membership in coveted Euro-Atlantic institutions such as NATO and the EU.[9]

## Footnotes

1. "ADL Honors Bulgaria for Saving Jews from Holocaust," an Anti-Defamation League (ADL) press release dated February 13, 1998.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. While a lot of Americans seem to know the story of how wartime Danes saved 8,000 Danish Jews from the Nazi occupation authorities by smuggling them to Sweden in fishing boats, relatively few appear to have heard of the comparable Bulgarian case.
5. The Central Jewish Consistory was a self-governing council of the Jewish community in Bulgaria, which enjoyed considerable administrative and financial autonomy from the Bulgarian government.
6. Dimitar Peshev (1894-1973) is one of a dozen or so Bulgarians officially honored by the State of Israel (in the so-called "Bulgaria Forest" at Yad Vashem's "Garden of the Righteous Among the Nations") for their role in saving the Bulgarian Jews.
7. For more details about this episode, see Frederick B. Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution, 1940-1944* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1974); Christo Boyadjiev, *Saving the Bulgarian Jews in World War II* (Ottawa: Free Bulgarian Center, 1989); Michael Bar-Zohar, *Beyond Hitler's Grasp: The Heroic Rescue of Bulgaria's Jews* (Holbrook, MA: Adams Media Corp, 1998); and Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fragility of Goodness: Why Bulgaria's Jews Survived the Holocaust*, tr. by Arthur Denner (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).
8. Those who defend King Boris and his role in this high drama tend to contradict themselves when they insist, on one hand, that he was powerless to prevent sending the Jews from Bulgarian-ruled Macedonia, Aegean Thrace, and Pirot to their deaths in the concentration camps but that, on the other hand, the deportation of the Jews from Bulgaria proper could not have been suspended without the monarch's blessing and crucial intervention.
9. Many Bulgarian-born Jews were outraged when Bulgarian Ambassador Elena Poptodorova falsely claimed in a May 1, 2003 speech delivered during the Holocaust Days of Remembrance at the Lincoln Theatre in Washington, D.C. that Bulgaria's Jewish population actually increased during World War II and that in those years many Slavic Bulgarians wore the yellow Star of David in a show of solidarity with their Jewish friends and neighbors.