

Josif Kamhi

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Sofia

Bulgaria

Interviewer: Dimitar Bojilov

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Josif Kamhi welcomes us in his newly-renovated home in the center of Sofia, inherited from his father and located very close to the Jewish Community Center. He has dedicated his life to technical sciences and has made significant contributions to the technical development of a number of industrial companies. His designs are widely sought and are considered the best even nowadays. He is retired now and spends his days doing housework and visiting the home of the Jewish Community in Sofia.

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My family background

My family comes from Spain. My ancestors settled on the Balkans a number of centuries ago [cf. Expulsion of the Jews from Spain] [1](#). My paternal great-grandfather, Albert Kamhi, was born in Turkey. He lived there for some time and at the end of the 19th century came to Sofia. I suppose that happened before the liberation of Bulgaria [2](#), in 1878. My paternal grandfather, Perets Albert Kamhi, was born in Sofia.

My father's house was on Pozitano Street in the center of Sofia. When I was a child, my grandparents, some of my father's sisters and my father's family lived there. I remember vaguely that my great-grandmother – my grandfather's mother – also lived with us. One of my father's sisters, Adela, was very kind to us and loved us very much. Unfortunately she was deaf-mute.

The house, where I was born had two floors, and each floor had two rooms and a small kitchen. There was also a big yard with some trees which we climbed all the time. My paternal grandparents lived on the upper floor and we on the ground floor. My mother took care of the housework and cooked on a stove using wood. We had a toilet inside the house. We had electricity and water. I lived there until I was eight years old. Then my father bought by installments the apartment in

which I live now.

My paternal grandparents also moved to live in another place, in the Batlova Vodenitsa district. This district is very close to the Jewish neighborhood Iuchbunar [3](#). That place was not far from the center of the town and from our new apartment.

I remember that my grandfather loved gathering the grandchildren and offering us pieces of water-melon. There was a big yard and a well, where he placed the water-melons to cool. He also liked to drink 100 gram of rakia [4](#). My grandmother, Dora Kamhi, also indulged us and made us delicious cakes.

They dressed in fashionable city clothes – my grandmother wore long dresses and my grandfather put on coats. They were not religious and I never saw them going to the synagogue. One of the houses next to them was owned by Bulgarians and the other by Jews. They got on very well with all neighbors. There was a mezuzah placed high on the door of my grandfather's house. There is a mezuzah now in our home, too.

My grandfather Perets Kamhi had a butcher's, which he probably passed on to my father. It was on Klementina Blvd, present-day Stamboliiski Blvd and on Paisii Street. I do not remember if they sold kosher meat. My father was forced to move from that store, because he had only rented it. Another butcher took the store, probably by offering higher rent. He continued selling meat and working with the customers that my father had attracted.

My father opened another butcher's but it was further away from the center and he did not have so many clients. So he went bankrupt. That happened around 1940. He started work in a factory processing leather. Before he went bankrupt, my father earned good money. When he moved the shop, our financial situation worsened. At that time we also had to pay a big sum every month as installment for our new apartment. We managed to pay all the installments by 9th September 1944 [5](#).

My grandfather rarely came to visit us in our new apartment, but when he came they always sent me to buy 100 gram of rakia from the tavern in the neighborhood. Once my grandfather asked me to buy something else besides the rakia. But I forgot and came back only with the drink. Then he joked that someone should have bumped into me so that I would remember.

Mostly my brother and I did the shopping in our family. We preferred Zhenskia pazar ['Women's Market,' the central market in Sofia] and the grocery store near our house.

My father had two brothers and three sisters. The eldest one was Matilda, who married in Sofia and no longer lived in our house when I was born. The others were Jacques Perets Kamhi, who died in the 1920s, Samuel Kamhi, who had a shop for shoemaker's materials, and Sara and Adela, who I think were married to Jewish merchants.

We lived separately and did not visit each other very often. Mostly my father's sisters visited us. All except for Jacques left for Israel during the Mass Aliyah [6](#) between 1948 and 1950. My family kept in touch mostly with Adela, who was deaf-mute, Sara, and my mother's sister Luisa.

My family often told us a story involving the husband of my father's sister Sara. Once he hired a cart and porters and went to a textile store during the weekend. He broke open the shop, loaded

the cart with textiles and drove away. He was caught and sentenced, but it seems that he spent little time in prison.

During the Holocaust they were interned to Ruse [7](#). After 9th September 1944 he committed some crime again, this time while at work in the police, and he was sacked. During the totalitarian regime they left for Israel and as far as I know they got divorced there.

My mother Berta Kamhi also worked but from home. She had a sewing machine and made handkerchiefs and singlets. We, the children, helped her. My brother Perets Albert Kamhi and I went to the central market and sold the so-called 'ikonomia' – very fine sand, which was used in dish washing. We offered it packed. We also sold toothpicks, paint and shoelaces. We sold them by going from house to house, and we got the goods from the merchants who owned shops.

My mother's parents lived in the center of Sofia in a two-story house. It was owned by my mother's brother, Nissim Koen, who was relatively rich, because he had a factory for leather processing. Their living standard was higher than ours. My mother's brother lived on the first floor and his mother on the second floor. My mother and I often visited them.

My mother had three brothers and three sisters. The eldest was Bohor Koen, who was a merchant and had six children. Next were Nissim Koen, whom I already mentioned, Miriam, Liza, who had an ironware store with her husband David, Matilda and David, who left for Palestine in 1926. They all had families and children but I have met only David's son Yoske, whom I met during my visit to Israel in 1985.

During the Jewish holidays we did not gather with other families. Everyone celebrated in their own house. When we lived with my father's parents, we gathered on Pesach. In 1934 we moved into our present apartment, and my mother made the preparations for the Jewish holidays.

We observed the Jewish traditions to some degree. During Pesach it was obligatory to eat only matzah, but that meant that we should buy it. The matzah I bought was finished on the second day, and we had to buy more. But they asked me to buy bread and gave me a dark bag so that the neighbors would not see me buying bread.

We did not observe Sabbath because we were short of money and we had to work on Sabbath. They gave us a big packet of handkerchiefs which had to be ready in a number of days and we worked on them the whole day. My mother did the sewing and when she took a break, we worked instead of her. We took pieces of cloth which we folded at the ends and the handkerchief was ready. Before my mother married, she had bought a Singer sewing machine for 20 golden levs. She sewed for herself and for her family.

We did not make special meals for the holidays. But for Pesach we always had matzah and burmolikos, which was made from matzah and eggs and was then fried. It can also be covered with jam. Maybe because my father worked in a butcher's, I did not like meat much. There were meatballs, cheese pastries and cakes. My paternal grandmother made a very nice sponge-cake. When my father had the shop, we always had good meat on the table, but when he went bankrupt, we did not eat meat much.

Before the holidays my brother and I often went to sell small goods on the streets and earned enough money to buy some stuff to eat. Once we bought smoked fish and surprised our parents in

a pleasant way by arranging the table.

We could not afford to go on vacation. But my father often took us on excursions to Vitosha [mountain near Sofia]. Once, when we did not have any money, we went on foot from Sofia to Boyana Lawns [a region in Vitosha]. The distance is around 10 kilometers. We carried food, spent the whole day there and returned by tram. We really must have been in a bad financial state if we could not afford to go there and come back by tram.

Growing up

When I was a child, I was sent to a nursery in the central Jewish school. We learned songs and games there. In Sofia there were two Jewish schools. One of them was in the center and the other in the Jewish neighborhood in Luchbunar. I was not very good at foreign languages there. I was not able to learn Ivrit well, neither French, nor any other languages.

Ivrit was taught after the fourth grade in the Jewish school. We started with general subjects in Bulgarian – natural studies, history. Honestly speaking, we did not learn spoken Ivrit there; we only read texts from the Talmud. We did not have any foreign teachers. Our Ivrit teacher's name was Margolis. I did not know any Ivrit before I started going to school.

There were two classes in the school. The rich children studied in one of the classes. I studied in the other one together with the poorer children and those from the Jewish orphanage. But there were many excellent students in our class. I was best at maths. We studied for seven grades in the school.

I was a member of the rightist organization Betar [8](#). In fact, I understood nothing about politics. It so happened that the brother of a classmate of mine was chairman of Betar and he gathered a group of us and made us members of Betar. He told us about Herzl [9](#) and the founding of the Jewish state.

We studied in the Jewish school for half a day and then we could stay in the yard to play sports. We played various games, mostly tag and marbles. All of my friends were from the Jewish school.

When I graduated from the fourth grade, every following summer I worked as an upholsterer. I mastered that craft soon and applied it at home. We had a small sofa with sagging springs and I repaired it. One of its sides was askew, but it was very comfortable.

Life was calm when we lived on Pozitano Street. I remember only one occasion when there were many policemen on horses on our street. That must have been in the 1930s. Maybe it was 1934, the year when there was a military coup in Bulgaria [10](#).

During the War

The outrages against Jews started in 1939 with fascism coming to Bulgaria. In 1940 I was already in high school. There were Branniks [11](#) walking along the streets, beating us with sticks and breaking the windows of the Jewish shops. After the Law for the Protection of the Nation [12](#) was adopted, all Jews had to wear a yellow star [13](#).

In 1942 I became a member of the UYW [14](#), because the Branniks had started harassing us a lot and the UYW members protected us. They invited me to some meetings and I took part in the

spreading of leaflets against fascism. All the time the Branniks tried to beat us.

My brother's name is Perets Kamhi. He also went to the Jewish school. When he graduated from the 7th Men's High School, he started working in a foundry producing door handles. Then he was mobilized to a labor camp in 1942 [15](#). I do not know the exact place where he worked, but I know that he built roads. He had to break down large stones into gravel, with which the roads were covered. The work was very hard.

After that my brother was interned with us to Kyustendil. In Kyustendil he was also obliged to do hard labor for free. He did the same job – digging gravel for road construction. My brother was a UYW member in Sofia and he contacted his friends from the capital. Some months later he decided to escape and he became a partisan in the squad of Slavcho Transki.

My sister Donka worked as a clerk in the post office. After 1944 she did some administrative work for the Bulgarian Army. Now she lives in Sofia. She married a Bulgarian and now they live in a village. They have two children – Beatrice and Ivan.

I was a member of the UYW in high school. We gathered and talked about fascism in Bulgaria. We spread leaflets against fascism. That was dangerous and we hid from the police. We also made a demonstration. That happened on 24th May 1943 [16](#). The UYW organization decided to organize a protest against the internment of Jews and the Law for the Protection of the Nation. At the time of the demonstration it had already been decided to intern us.

A lot of people gathered in front of the Jewish school. There were also speakers. Then we headed for Klementina Blvd [present-day Stamboliiski Blvd.]. We marched towards the center, but when we reached Opalchenska Street policemen on horses surrounded us and dispersed us. A young man and I managed to escape by telling a policeman that we lived in the area. And my friend really lived on Stamboliiski Blvd. We went to his place. Many people were arrested at the demonstration.

At the same time my father worked in a leather processing factory and was on his way back home from work. The police detained him for a while in the afternoon, but when they realized that he was not directly involved in the protest, they released him. They had also arrested some colleagues of his. Their work involved working with chemicals and the smell about them proved that they had been at work. Previously my father had worked for a short time in the leather processing factory owned by my mother's brother. But at the time of the protest he was working in another one.

On 27th May we received the notice that we were to be interned to the town of Kyustendil. I think that someone came to tell us that in person. At that time we wore yellow stars which showed that we were Jews. I had been wearing such a star since 1940. If we had not worn them, we could have been sent to a concentration camp. We were allowed to keep our houses but most of the Jews sold away their possessions.

We arrived in Kyustendil by train and we were accommodated in the Jewish school. We slept on the floor on blankets which we brought from home. We ate from a big cauldron where they prepared some food for us. Shortly after, I started work. At first I was a waiter in a cafeteria for the meager sum of 20 leva a day – the price of one loaf of bread.

Each evening the interned Jews gathered in the Jewish school and once I was told that I could go and take part in the digging of a river path, which was much better-paid. So, I started working

there. The first day I was so tired, I could hardly walk. Then I got used to it and even dug much more than the others.

My father also came to work with me. We could afford better housing and rented an apartment. My brother was in a labor camp and came back at the beginning of 1944. He escaped at the beginning of May and became a partisan.

Soon people found out that my brother was not returning home. One of our landlady's sons worked in the police. My father was arrested to be questioned about his son. He did not say anything and spent 20 days in the police station, where he was beaten. At that time I was the only one who worked – we had to bring him food to the police station and pay our rent. We managed to keep ends meet because my employer paid me regularly and was a very honest man.

Something interesting happened one day. I had to dig an area one meter deep, seven meters long and four meters wide. But the supervisor deliberately measured the width of my excavation right to its very limits where it was 20 centimeters more shallow. His son also worked there and he probably wanted to write down that his son had completed my work. But the technician saw that, corrected the measurements and paid me the full sum. I was very happy with the organization of labor there.

At the beginning of June 1944 our whole family was interned to Pleven, the Kailuka area, where a concentration camp had been built [17](#). We were shut in a wooden shed. They put it on fire during the night and my mother was burned alive. My mother had a long dress which got stuck between the boards of the house and she could not get out. I tried to pull her out, but I could not.

We were released on 21st August 1944. We went to Pazardzhik first, to Liza's place. Liza was my mother's sister. My father was sent to a labor camp in Enikioy [18](#). My sister and I waited for our father and our brother to return. My father came back at the end of August 1944 and we celebrated 9th September 1944 there.

Long after 9th September we waited for my brother to appear. There was information that his squad had gone to Yugoslavia with the partisans there. Some men of his team had really gone there after one battle. We hoped that he was there, too. My sister went to Yugoslavia but learned nothing. It seems he had died as a partisan.

After the War

We came back to Sofia and found our apartment completely plundered. We had left the furniture there before we moved. Besides, some man had used the apartment as a storehouse for wood material. He quickly collected his things and left.

In 1946, I graduated from high school and started studying in the Polytechnic [it was named State Polytechnics then and now it is Technical University]. My sister Donka started work as a typist. My father once again started work as a butcher. He retired in this job.

I met my wife, Venezia Kamhi [nee Konorti], in Kyustendil. She was also interned with her family. We went out in the same company. We gathered in the Jewish school in town and had a great time. We married in 1950. I was still a student then. In 1951 I wrote my diploma and a year later I graduated. My diploma was on secondary connotation of a post station. That means distant

management and protection of the high voltage of thermo-electric power plants.

When I graduated I started work in the designers' company 'Promproekt.' In October 1952 I had to do my military service and was stationed in Dimitrovgrad. But after 15 days the commanding officer received an order from Sofia that five people had to return to Sofia for a course in radio location. It turned out that I was the only electrical engineer at the base. I went to Sofia and spent three months in the course on radio location, which was taught by a Soviet specialist.

Two more courses on radio location were organized after that and I taught them. One of them was for officers and the other for soldiers. The course was in Chepelare. I taught them for three months.

Then I was assigned to head a repairs workshop. There was a Soviet colonel there, who insisted that I stay on a termed service in the military, and not on a permanent one. He advised me to write that all my relatives were in Israel. I did what he told me and they kept me only one month at that job.

The job in the military was not a promising one. The technical equipment in my base was not good. We were given some appliances to repair, but we could not do it because we did not have any modern equipment.

Once a colonel came with a device to be repaired and got angry with us that it was not ready. I told him that we didn't have the equipment to identify the malfunctioning part. He said that we did nothing the whole day and we did not need equipment for that. It was not easy to explain to him that we could not do anything without the necessary equipment.

After the service in the army I started work in the designers' company, which split into two, and in 1957 I continued to work in one of the two new companies – Minproekt, where I designed the electrical installations of the Maritsa mine complex and the Kremikovtsi metallurgic plant. I was happy with my job and working conditions.

We could afford to go on holidays, though we did not have a car. We also went to the mountains and to the seaside. We went to the best resorts such as Borovets and Nessebar [a town in the Black Sea region with a multitude of splendidly preserved Byzantine architecture]. We were given pre-paid vouchers from my work, with which we spent two weeks at the resort.

Once I designed a project for a resting home of the miners in Nessebar on the Black Sea coast. That was the second resting home there. When it was finished, the miners gave our organization the bungalows in front of the station. We used to go there together with five more families from our organization.

At my work I did not have any problems for being a Jew. When I designed the project for the Maritsa mine complex I made model designs so my employers decided to place me in such a department. A model department is a mixed department in which architects and technicians work together on the designs.

We made model mobile electrical connecting posts, electrical boards, designs for companies. The electrical installations in the plant for metal-cutting machines in Sofia were also designed by me. The design was very practical and afterwards many companies from the country wanted to use it.

In the 1970s I continued work in the model department of Niproruda. This is also a designers' company working mostly in the area of ore output. We had to design the underground electrical installation of a mining complex near Kyustendil. I retired in 1982. Then I started receiving commissions at home to design the electrical installations of various companies, mills and silos. I was much respected as a designer. I also educated young specialists who are working in this area now.

My wife Venezia is also of Jewish origin. My generation of Jews was brought up to sympathize with our fellow men in Israel. She was born in Sofia, but her parents are from Kyustendil. Her family was more religious than ours. Her paternal grandfather was very religious and read books in classical Hebrew. Her parents knew many songs in Ladino [19](#). My wife also knows some very nice songs in Ladino.

Her brother Mordohai Konorti lives in Israel where he went with their mother during the Mass Aliyah between 1948 and 1950 when the government of Georgi Dimitrov [20](#) allowed Bulgarian Jews to move freely to their new state.

My wife worked as a seamstress after 9th September 1944 and later started making designs for clothes companies such as Osvobozhdenie, Zoya, and Lada.

My daughter Beti was born on 13th July 1952. She studied in a Bulgarian school. After 9th September 1944 the Jewish schools in Sofia were closed. My daughter was raised Jewish and feels Jewish. She did not learn Ivrit, but understands Ladino.

I also tried to raise my daughter in the 'Jewish spirit' and encouraged her to have Jewish friends. She also liked to mingle with other Jews. I have always lived in a Jewish environment. I still have Jewish friends from my childhood. My daughter and granddaughter have a wider circle of friends than me.

At that time, in the 1970s, Jews were scattered throughout Bulgaria and my daughter married a Bulgarian. She graduated from the Higher Polytechnical Institute in the specialty thermotechnics, but now she works as a computer specialist.

When my daughter was a child and my wife had to go to work, my wife's aunt Matilda Miuhas helped us in looking after her. She was very religious. She observed all Jewish rituals and her husband went to the synagogue regularly. Thanks to them my daughter learned Ladino and I did not have to explain to her what it means to be Jewish. Matilda even went to the meetings of the parents' council at my daughter's school instead of us.

I have been a member of the [Bulgarian] Communist Party [21](#) since the 1950s. I approved the intervention of the Soviet Union during the crises in Hungary [in 1956] [22](#) and Czechoslovakia [cf. Prague Spring] [23](#). If someone had tried to intervene against the socialist progress in Bulgaria, I would not have approved it.

No period before or after 9th September can match the rate of construction we had then. There were people who suffered from the regime, but no one in my workplace was persecuted. The Niproruda organization consisted of more than a thousand people.

I did not keep in touch with my relatives in Israel during the wars there [24](#) [25](#). It was not possible at that time. After the wars the Israeli citizens were allowed to travel and they could visit us in Bulgaria. I went to Israel for the first time in 1985. There I met my cousin Yoske, who is the son of my mother's brother. He is older than me and left Sofia for Palestine before I was born.

During the communist regime, thanks to my wife, we always observed the Jewish holidays – mostly Pesach and Chanukkah. We celebrated them at home and we always bought matzah from the synagogue for Pesach. My wife made almond cookies and burmolikos. The [Great] Synagogue [26](#) in Sofia was open, but we did not go there. My family was not very religious.

Now we gather at home for Pesach and Chanukkah with my daughter's family. We prepare a rich table. We have a chanukkiyah. My daughter's husband is a Bulgarian and during the major Christian holidays my wife and I used to visit them at their place.

After the political changes in Bulgaria from 1989 [27](#) life, in my opinion, became harder. That has not changed nowadays. The situation is very difficult for the retired people and the unemployed. In our designers' company even the most ordinary draftsman went on holiday at the seaside or in the mountains. We often went to the theater and to the cinema. But nowadays with our small pensions we cannot afford to visit a cultural event.

The change in Europe can be a positive one in the long term, but it is still not such. I cannot see the end of the conflict between the Arabs and Israel and in the Middle East. Young people are still brought up to be terrorists and suicide bombers there.

For fifteen years my wife and I spent every summer in the village of Zhedna, Radomir municipality. There we were involved in agriculture and breathed fresh air. We were even members of the agricultural cooperation and received 500 square meters of land which we cultivated. We planted potatoes, beans, pumpkins, maize, sunflowers, tomatoes and other vegetables. We also had some hens but one day they were stolen. Some years ago we stopped going there.

I mostly spoke in Ladino with my wife's aunt. When I was on a trip to Cuba in 1955-1956 I had no difficulties in understanding the language there. I designed some electrical part there and the automated system of a company producing raw material for porcelain. I was sent to supervise the process and I had to correct each one of their mistakes.

I have a dictionary in Ivrit at home, but I cannot use it very well. It is a gift from my wife's brother, who lives in Yafo. My wife has been to Israel five times and she can speak Ivrit a little.

At the moment I spend more time at home, doing shopping and the household chores. My wife is more sociable than me and visits every event organized by the Jewish People's Home. She also visits the 'Golden Age' club and the Ladino club several times a week. There they speak and practice our old Spanish language by singing songs and learning poems.

The Health club is visited by a physician and a gym instructor. I visit the Bet Am [28](#) only at noon from Monday to Friday when I meet friends from my generation.

1 Expulsion of the Jews from Spain

In the 13th century, after a period of stimulating spiritual and cultural life, the economic development and wide-range internal autonomy obtained by the Jewish communities in the previous centuries was curtailed by anti-Jewish repression emerging from under the aegis of the Dominican and the Franciscan orders. There were more and more false blood libels, and the polemics, which were opportunities for interchange of views between the Christian and the Jewish intellectuals before, gradually condemned the Jews more and more, and the middle class in the rising started to be hostile with the competitor. The Jews were gradually marginalized. Following the pogrom of Seville in 1391, thousands of Jews were massacred throughout Spain, women and children were sold as slaves, and synagogues were transformed into churches. Many Jews were forced to leave their faith. About 100,000 Jews were forcibly converted between 1391 and 1412. The Spanish Inquisition began to operate in 1481 with the aim of exterminating the supposed heresy of new Christians, who were accused of secretly practicing the Jewish faith. In 1492 a royal order was issued to expel resisting Jews in the hope that if old co-religionists would be removed new Christians would be strengthened in their faith. At the end of July 1492 even the last Jews left Spain, who openly professed their faith. The number of the displaced is estimated to lie between 100,000-150,000. (Source: Jean-Christophe Attias - Esther Benbassa: Dictionnaire de civilisation juive, Paris, 1997)

2 Liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman rule

Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire in early 1877 in order to secure the Mediterranean trade routes. The Russian troops, with enthusiastic and massive participation of the Bulgarians, soon occupied all of Bulgaria and reached Istanbul, and Russia dictated the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878. This provided for an autonomous Bulgarian state, under Russian protection, bordering the Black and Aegean seas. Britain and Austria-Hungary, fearing that the new state would extend Russian influence too far into the Balkans, exerted strong diplomatic pressure, which resulted in the Treaty of Berlin in the same year. According to this treaty, the newly established Bulgaria became much smaller than what was decreed by the Treaty of San Stefano, and large populations of Bulgarians remained outside the new frontiers (in Macedonia, Eastern Rumelia, and Thrace), which caused resentment that endured well into the 20th century.

3 Iuchbunar

The poorest residential district in Sofia; the word is of Turkish origin and means 'the three wells.'

4 Rakia

Strong liquor, typical in the Balkan region. It is made from different kinds of fruit (grape, plum, apricot etc.) by distillation.

5 9th September 1944: The day of the communist takeover in Bulgaria. In September 1944 the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria. On 9th September 1944 the Fatherland Front, a broad left-wing coalition, deposed the government. Although the communists were in the minority in the Fatherland Front, they were the driving force in forming the coalition, and their position was strengthened by the presence of the Red Army in Bulgaria.

6 Mass Aliyah: Between September 1944 and October 1948, 7,000 Bulgarian Jews left for Palestine. The exodus was due to deep-rooted Zionist sentiments, relative alienation from Bulgarian intellectual and political life, and depressed economic conditions. Bulgarian policies toward national minorities were also a factor that motivated emigration. In the late 1940s Bulgaria was anxious to rid itself of national minority groups, such as Armenians and Turks, and thus make its population more homogeneous. More people were allowed to depart in the winter of 1948 and the spring of 1949. The mass exodus continued between 1949 and 1951: 44,267 Jews immigrated to Israel until only a few thousand Jews remained in the country.

7 Internment of Jews in Bulgaria

Although Jews living in Bulgaria were not deported to concentration camps abroad or to death camps, many were interned to different locations within Bulgaria. In accordance with the Law for the Protection of the Nation, the comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation initiated after the outbreak of WWII, males were sent to forced labor battalions in different locations of the country, and had to engage in hard work. There were plans to deport Bulgarian Jews to Nazi Death Camps, but these plans were not realized. Preparations had been made at certain points along the Danube, such as at Somovit and Lom. In fact, in 1943 the port at Lom was used to deport Jews from the Aegean Thrace and from Macedonia, but in the end, the Jews from Bulgaria proper were spared.

8 Betar in Bulgaria

Brith Trumpler (Hebrew) meaning Trumpler Society; right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpler, one of the first fighters to be killed in Palestine, and the fortress Betar, which was heroically defended for many months during the Bar Kohba uprising. Its aim was to propagate the program of the revisionists and prepare young people to fight and live in Palestine. It organized emigration through both legal and illegal channels. It was a paramilitary organization; its members wore uniforms. They supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. From 1936-39 the popularity of Betar diminished. During WWII many of its members formed guerrilla groups. In Bulgaria the organization started publishing its newspaper in 1934.

9 Herzl, Theodor (1860-1904)

Hungarian-born Jewish playwright, journalist and founder of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). His thought of realizing the idea of political Zionism was inspired by among other things the so-called Dreyfus affair. In the polemical essay *The Jewish State* (*Der Judenstaat*, 1896) he declares that Jews aren't only a community of believers, but also a nation with the right to its own territory and state. He was of the opinion that in the anti-Jewish mood extant in Europe, it was not possible to solve the Jewish question via either civic emancipation or cultural assimilation. After a significant diplomatic effort he succeeded in the calling of the 1st International Jewish Congress in Basel on 29-31st August 1897. The congress accepted the "Basel Program" and elected Herzl as its first president. Herzl wasn't the first to long for the return of the Jews to Palestine. He was, however, able to not only support the idea, but also to promote it politically; without his efforts the creation of the new state of Israel in the Palestine on 14th May 1948 would not have been possible. Theodor Herzl died in 1904 at the age of 44 and was buried in a Jewish cemetery in Vienna. In 1949 his remains were transported to Jerusalem, where they were laid to rest on a mountain that today

carries his name (Mount Herzl).

10 19th May 1934 coup

A coup d'etat, carried out with the participation of the political circle 'Zveno', a military circle. After the coup of 19th May, a government was formed, led by Kimon Georgiev. The internal policy of that government was formed by the idea of above-all-parties authority and rule of the elite. The Turnovo Constitution was repealed for that purpose, and the National Assembly was dismissed. In its foreign affairs policy the government was striving to have warmer relationships with Yugoslavia and France, the relations with the USSR were restored. The government of Kimon Georgiev was in office until 22nd January 1935.

11 Brannik

Pro-fascist youth organization. It started operating after the Law for the Protection of the Nation was passed in 1941 and the Bulgarian government forged its pro-German policy. The Branniks regularly maltreated Jews.

12 Law for the Protection of the Nation

A comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation in Bulgaria was introduced after the outbreak of World War II. The 'Law for the Protection of the Nation' was officially promulgated in January 1941. According to this law, Jews did not have the right to own shops and factories. Jews had to wear the distinctive yellow star; Jewish houses had to display a special sign identifying it as being Jewish; Jews were dismissed from all posts in schools and universities. The internment of Jews in certain designated towns was legalized and all Jews were expelled from Sofia in 1943. Jews were only allowed to go out into the streets for one or two hours a day. They were prohibited from using the main streets, from entering certain business establishments, and from attending places of entertainment. Their radios, automobiles, bicycles and other valuables were confiscated. From 1941 on Jewish males were sent to forced labor battalions and ordered to do extremely hard work in mountains, forests and road construction. In the Bulgarian-occupied Yugoslav (Macedonia) and Greek (Aegean Thrace) territories the Bulgarian army and administration introduced extreme measures. The Jews from these areas were deported to concentration camps, while the plans for the deportation of Jews from Bulgaria proper were halted by a protest movement launched by the vice-chairman of the Bulgarian Parliament.

13 Yellow star in Bulgaria

According to a governmental decree all Bulgarian Jews were forced to wear distinctive yellow stars after 24th September 1942. Contrary to the German-occupied countries the stars in Bulgaria were made of yellow plastic or textile and were also smaller. Volunteers in previous wars, the war-disabled, orphans and widows of victims of wars, and those awarded the military cross were given the privilege to wear the star in the form of a button. Jews who converted to Christianity and their families were totally exempt. The discriminatory measures and persecutions ended with the cancellation of the Law for the Protection of the Nation on 17th August 1944.

14 UYW

The Union of Young Workers (also called Revolutionary Youth Union). A communist youth organization, which was legally established in 1928 as a sub-organization of the Bulgarian Communist Youth Union (BCYU). After the coup d'etat in 1934, when parties in Bulgaria were banned, it went underground and became the strongest wing of the BCYU. Some 70% of the partisans in Bulgaria were members of it. In 1947 it was renamed Dimitrov's Communist Youth Union, after Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party at the time.

15 Forced labor camps in Bulgaria

Established under the Council of Ministers' Act in 1941. All Jewish men between the ages of 18-50, eligible for military service, were called up. In these labor groups Jewish men were forced to work 7-8 months a year on different road constructions under very hard living and working conditions.

16 24th May 1943

Protest by a group of members of parliament led by the deputy chairman of the National Assembly, Dimitar Peshev, as well as a large section of Bulgarian society. They protested against the deportation of the Jews, which culminated in a great demonstration on 24th May 1943. Thousands of people led by members of parliament, the Eastern Orthodox Church and political parties stood up against the deportation of Bulgarian Jews. Although there was no official law preventing deportation, Bulgarian Jews were saved, unlike those from Bulgarian occupied Aegean Thrace and Macedonia.

17 Kailuka camp

Following protests against the deportation of Bulgarian Jews in Kiustendil (8th March 1943) and Sofia (24th May 1943), Jewish activists, who had taken part in the demonstrations, and their families, several hundred people, were sent to the Somovit camp. The camp had been established on the banks of the Danube, and they were deported there in preparation for their further deportation to the Nazi death camps. About 110 of them, mostly politically active people with predominantly Zionist and left-wing convictions and their relatives, were later redirected to the Kailuka camp. The camp burned down on 10th July 1944 and 10 people died in the fire. It never became clear whether it was an accident or a deliberate sabotage.

18 Annexation of Aegean Thrace to Bulgaria in WWII

The Treaty of Neuilly, imposed by the Entente on Bulgaria after WWI, deprived the country alongside with its WWI gains (Macedonia) also of its outlet to the Aegean Sea (Aegean Thrace) that had been a part of the country since the Balkan Wars (1912/13). King Boris III (1918-43) joined the Axis in 1941 with the hope to be able to regain the lost territories. Bulgarian troops marched into the neighboring Yugoslav Macedonia and Greek Thrace. Although the territorial gains were initially very popular in Bulgaria, complications soon arose in the occupied territories. The oppressive Bulgarian administration resulted in uprisings in both occupied lands. Jews were persecuted, their property was confiscated and they had to do forced labor. Although the Jews in Bulgaria proper

were saved they were exterminated in the newly gained territories. Over 11.000 Jews from the Bulgarian administered northern Greek lands (Thrace and Macedonia), mainly from Drama, Seres, Dedeagach (Alexandroupolis), Gyumyurdjina (Komotini), Kavala and Xanthi were deported and murdered in death camps in Poland. About 2.200 Jews survived.

19 Ladino

Also known as Judeo-Spanish, it is the spoken and written Hispanic language of Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Ladino did not become a specifically Jewish language until after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 (and Portugal in 1495) - it was merely the language of their province. It is also known as Judezmo, Dzhudezmo, or Spaniolit. When the Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal they were cut off from the further development of the language, but they continued to speak it in the communities and countries to which they emigrated. Ladino therefore reflects the grammar and vocabulary of 15th-century Spanish. In Amsterdam, England and Italy, those Jews who continued to speak 'Ladino' were in constant contact with Spain and therefore they basically continued to speak the Castilian Spanish of the time. Ladino was nowhere near as diverse as the various forms of Yiddish, but there were still two different dialects, which corresponded to the different origins of the speakers: 'Oriental' Ladino was spoken in Turkey and Rhodes and reflected Castilian Spanish, whereas 'Western' Ladino was spoken in Greece, Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia and Romania, and preserved the characteristics of northern Spanish and Portuguese. The vocabulary of Ladino includes hundreds of archaic Spanish words, and also includes many words from different languages: mainly from Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, French, and to a lesser extent from Italian. In the Ladino spoken in Israel, several words have been borrowed from Yiddish. For most of its lifetime, Ladino was written in the Hebrew alphabet, in Rashi script, or in Solitreo. It was only in the late 19th century that Ladino was ever written using the Latin alphabet. At various times Ladino has been spoken in North Africa, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, France, Israel, and, to a lesser extent, in the United States and Latin America.

20 Dimitrov, Georgi (1882-1949)

A Bulgarian revolutionary, who was the head of the Comintern from 1936 through its dissolution in 1943, secretary general of the Bulgarian Communist Party from 1945 to 1949, and prime minister of Bulgaria from 1946 to 1949. He rose to international fame as the principal defendant in the Leipzig Fire Trial in 1933. Dimitrov put up such a consummate defense that the judicial authorities had to release him.

21 Bulgarian Communist Party [up to 1990]: The ruling party of the People's Republic of Bulgaria from 1946 until 1990, when it ceased to be a Communist state. The Bulgarian Communist Party had dominated the Fatherland Front coalition that took power in 1944, late in World War II, after it led a coup against Bulgaria's fascist government in conjunction with the Red Army's crossing the border. The party's origins lay in the Social Democratic and Labor Party of Bulgaria, which was founded in 1903 after a split in the Social-Democratic Party. The party's founding leader was Dimitar Blagoev and its subsequent leaders included Georgi Dimitrov.

22 1956

It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest and

began with the destruction of Stalin's gigantic statue. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationed in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's declaration that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the uprising on 4th November, and mass repression and arrests began. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989 and the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

23 Prague Spring

A period of democratic reforms in Czechoslovakia, from January to August 1968. Reformatory politicians were secretly elected to leading functions of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC). Josef Smrkovsky became president of the National Assembly, and Oldrich Cernik became the Prime Minister. Connected with the reformist efforts was also an important figure on the Czechoslovak political scene, Alexander Dubcek, General Secretary of the KSC Central Committee (UV KSC). In April 1968 the UV KSC adopted the party's Action Program, which was meant to show the new path to socialism. It promised fundamental economic and political reforms. On 21st March 1968, at a meeting of representatives of the USSR, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, East Germany and Czechoslovakia in Dresden, Germany, the Czechoslovaks were notified that the course of events in their country was not to the liking of the remaining conference participants, and that they should implement appropriate measures. In July 1968 a meeting in Warsaw took place, where the reformist efforts in Czechoslovakia were designated as "counter-revolutionary." The invasion of the USSR and Warsaw Pact armed forces on the night of 20th August 1968, and the signing of the so-called Moscow Protocol ended the process of democratization, and the Normalization period began.

24 Six-Day-War

(Hebrew: Milhemet Sheshet Hayamim), also known as the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Six Days War, or June War, was fought between Israel and its Arab neighbors Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. It began when Israel launched a preemptive war on its Arab neighbors; by its end Israel controlled the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. The results of the war affect the geopolitics of the region to this day.

25 Yom Kippur War (1973 Arab-Israeli War)

(Hebrew: Milchemet Yom HaKipurim), also known as the October War, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and the Ramadan War, was fought from 6th October (the day of Yom Kippur) to 24th October 1973, between Israel and a coalition of Egypt and Syria. The war began when Egypt and Syria launched a surprise joint attack in the Sinai and Golan Heights, respectively, both of which had been captured by Israel during the Six-Day-War six years earlier. The war had far-reaching implications for many nations. The Arab world, which had been humiliated by the lopsided defeat of the Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian alliance during the Six-Day-War, felt psychologically vindicated by its string of victories early in the conflict. This vindication, in many ways, cleared the way for the peace process which followed the war. The Camp David Accords, which came soon after, led to normalized relations between Egypt and Israel - the first time any Arab country had recognized the Israeli state. Egypt, which had already been drifting away from the Soviet Union, then left the Soviet sphere of

influence almost entirely.

26 Sofia Great Synagogue

Located in the center of Sofia, it is the third largest synagogue in Europe after the ones in Budapest and Amsterdam; it can house more than 1,300 people. It was designed by Austrian architect Grunander in the Moor style. It was opened on 9th September 1909 in the presence of King Ferdinand and Queen Eleonora.

27 10th November 1989

After 35 years of rule, Communist Party leader Todor Zhivkov was replaced by the hitherto Prime Minister Peter Mladenov who changed the Bulgarian Communist Party's name to Socialist Party. On 17th November 1989 Mladenov became head of state, as successor of Zhivkov. Massive opposition demonstrations in Sofia with hundreds of thousands of participants calling for democratic reforms followed from 18th November to December 1989. On 7th December the 'Union of Democratic Forces' (SDS) was formed consisting of different political organizations and groups.

28 Bet Am

The Jewish center in Sofia today, housing all Jewish organizations.