

Avram Natan

Avram Merkado Natan

Sofia

Bulgaria

Interviewer: Stephan Djambazov

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Avram Merkado is an energetic and active man. A former mountaineer, even now he still continues to go on excursions and mountain treks. In the mountains he also met his former late wife Nina and his present wife Simha, who is 15 years younger than him. They both live in Borovo (one of the nice residential districts in Sofia) in a two-room panel flat owned by his wife. He gets very upset when he speaks about the time he spent in the camp in Somovit on the Danube in 1943, from where the deportation of the Bulgarian Jews should have started. He says that he suffers from nervous breakdowns since then and starts crying while talking about that. He likes more the times before 1989 when democracy came to Bulgaria, although he did not agree with all activities of the ruling Bulgarian Communist Party, of which he was a member. Now he does not complain of poverty thanks to the aid of the Jewish organizations 'The Claims Conference' and 'American Joint' [1] and he regularly takes part in the life of the Jewish community in Sofia, which adds meaning to his life, although he is not religious.



My ancestors came to the Balkan Peninsula from Spain in 1492 during the time of the Ottoman Empire. [2] Then the Turkish authorities welcomed them because there were a lot of intelligent people among them – physicians, merchants... They settled throughout the Balkan Peninsula. My paternal grandfather's family is from Karlovo and my grandmother is from Tsarigrad [Istanbul]. I do not know how they met. My paternal grandmother did not know Bulgarian very well – she spoke Spanish [Ladino] and Turkish. I do not know my grandfather Mois Natan – he died early. He was a confectioner and as far as I know he had a workshop for confectionery, which he sold to various coffee shops. He lived in Varna and died there. I don't think my grandmother Sultana (Duda) worked – she gave birth to 13 children, but a lot of them died. When she gave birth to my father, he was taken out of the house and into the yard according to some old Jewish tradition. A cousin of theirs passed along, tossed a coin and bought him in this way. That's why my father's name is Merkado (bought) and his name written in the municipality records is Eliezer. That is a tradition typical for the Sephardi Jews. [3] I will try to explain it. Before Merkado there were other children who had died. At that moment he was the only child and the only son. There is a ritual in the Jewish tradition that the relatives should 'buy' the child so that they would all take care of him and he would live. This is some kind of guardianship, which increases his chances of survival even if his parents are very poor. According to the ritual the child lives with his parents but they do not buy him anything until he himself would ask them to do it. That is done to keep the children. After my

father four more sons were born.

I do not know where exactly my grandfather Mois and my grandmother Sultana lived. They did not have their own house. They paid rent in various places. They spoke mostly Spanish, which we now call Ladino – an old Spanish dialect. [4] They also knew Turkish. My grandmother understood a little Bulgarian. They did not have any maids. I do not know if my grandfather was religious, but my grandmother was not very religious. My grandfather had three brothers: Nissim, Haham, Haim and one sister Ernestina. I know only her, as she is the youngest. She lived in Plovdiv. Once I went on a business trip there and my father asked me to find her and greet her. My grandmother had one sister who lived in Varna. She had two daughters and one son and during the Law for Protection of the Nation [5] in 1941 they were forced to leave Bulgaria because they were Turkish citizens, as was my grandmother. They were from Istanbul. I was in Varna visiting my grandmother when they left for Turkey. [6] Her name was Roza and her children – Beka, Lili and Alfred. I do not know how my grandfather dressed by my grandmother wore plain clothes.

My maternal grandfather's name was Avram Geron and my grandmother – Simha. He had a business with leather – he went from village to village, collected leather, processed it and sold it. I remember him. I was six or seven years old when he died and my grandmother died later when I was a university student. They also knew only Spanish [Ladino] and Turkish. They lived in Razgrad, but they did not have their own flat. They had three daughters – Rebeka, Ester and Rashel, and one son Yosif Geron. He was the eldest. During the [First] Balkan War [7] and World War I [8] my uncle and my grandfather enlisted as soldiers. Then the family moved to Ruse and my mother, who was the eldest of the sisters, worked as a seamstress to support her mother and sisters. They did not live in their own flat there either. They dressed in plain clothes. My maternal grandparents were religious, went to the synagogue and we celebrated with them the high holidays like Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. My uncle was also religious but his sisters were not. My grandparents did not go on vacations and they did not have maids.

The Jewish community lived in the Jewish neighborhood which was outside the center of the town. It consisted mostly of one-floor houses and not only Jews lived there. The place where I lived from 4-5 years of age until 13 years of age had four houses in one yard. Jews lived in two of the houses and Bulgarians in the other two. Throughout the years we kept in touch with the children of our Bulgarian neighbors. The mother in one of the families died young and my mother also looked after the children. Turkish people also lived next to us. [9] All the children from the nearby houses gathered together and played games. Our house had three rooms and a kitchen. The four of us – my parents, my brother and I lived there. My grandmother and my uncle paid rent in another house. We had a toilet, a bath and electricity.

There were two synagogues in Ruse –one of them was owned by the Sephardi Jews. It was big and beautiful. The other one was owned by the Ashkenazi Jews. There were two or three religious officials in the Sephardi synagogue and one chazzan in the Ashkenazi one. The rabbi is something like the bishop. He is more of a teacher than a preacher. There was also a shochet and a slaughter house at the synagogue. We brought there hens and chickens. Around 50 000 people lived in Ruse at that time. The Jewish community was around 3 000 people. There was a Jewish primary school. I graduated that school and so did most of the Jewish children. The school was a one-floor house in the Jewish neighborhood. Besides the big synagogue in Ruse there was a smaller one – midrash.

The Ashkenazi synagogue is nowadays a club of the Shalom organization [10]. After 9th September 1944 [11] and the emigration of the Jews [12] it was turned into a gym. The walls of the old synagogue are more or less one meter thick. There was one enormous chandelier brought probably from Austria. I do not know if the synagogue is working now, because it is in a decrepit state. The smaller synagogue was demolished when the street to the river was constructed before 1944. The club of the lobby 'Bnai Brith' was next to that synagogue. Weddings, balls and parties were organized there because there was a big hall. It was a very elegant house and opposite it there was another big house, whose first floor was taken by the organization 'Malbish Arumim' (meaning 'dressing the poor') [Jewish women's charity organisation. It was registered in 1912 in Ruse and in 1920 in Sofia.] On Sundays the merchants went there to play cards and mingle. The chazzan was also a shochet. There was a small brick building in the yard of the old Jewish school. There were hooks on its wall from which the birds slaughtered by the shochet for the Yom Kippur holiday were hung. That school was demolished in 1940-41 after the earthquake in Vranca, Romania [Vranca is an area in the Carpathian Mountains in Romania, famous as an area of strong seismic activity. Here earthquakes take place in 8-14 years, with an epicenter 100 km deep, which determines the great length of the seismic wave. The greatest earthquake in Vranca was recorded in 1940 and has a magnitude of 9.5 on the Richter scale. The next big earthquake is in 1977 and has a magnitude of 7.2, in 1986 – 7.00 and in 1990 – 7.2] and we were not allowed to access the buildings of the Hashomer Hatzair organization [13]. There was also a canteen for poor children in the yard. The Jewish school was with 20-25 children in each class and a junior high school – four years of primary school and three years of junior high school. Most of the Jewish children first studied in the Jewish school and then in a Bulgarian high school or technical school. We also studied religious subjects. We studied Jewish literature, Jewish history and Jewish religion – Tannakh. On Friday evenings we were taken to the synagogue and the older students read the prayer. My brother Mois was one of the chazzans there when he was in the third grade. He is still religious and goes to the synagogue. He read the prayers and tried to follow the prescriptions.

At that time there was a variety of Jewish professions. There were rich merchants, street vendors, craftsmen, porters, factory owner such as Avram Ventura. He owned the 'Zhiti' factory, which manufactured bolts, rivets and nails. There were also Jewish workers, but there was also that very nice organization of the Jewish community 'Malbish Arumim', which raised money from the rich and gave breakfast and lunch to the poor children in the Jewish school. It was founded by the Jewish municipality. In the autumn they also bought clothes and shoes for the poor Jewish children. At that time we did not feel anti-Semitism towards us. We were very tolerant to each other. We always took part in the parades and national holidays.

My brother and I took part in the sports organisation 'Maccabi' [14]. On all holidays we went out in uniforms, carrying a drum and a flag. We were part of the parade as were all people in Ruse. We sang various songs – 'Maritsa Rushes' [15], 'Quiet White Danube' [16] – the songs all sang. Of the Jewish songs we knew about Trumpeldor [17]. In fact, we were educated in Zionism. That was done by a Jewish nationalistic organization. There were a number of Zionist organizations – 'General Zionists' [18], 'Poalei Zion' [19], 'Revisionists of Jabotinsky' [20] and youth organizations such as 'Hashomer Hatzair' and 'Maccabi'. 'Maccabi' was a sports organization. We had a very nice gym where we gathered daily and twice a week we did exercises with a gym instructor. My father was in the leadership of 'General Zionists', which was a centrist organization. The other one, 'Poalei Zion'

was a leftist, social democratic organization, and the Revisionists founded by Jabotinsky (a Polish Jew) had a right orientation and were more radical about the liberation of Palestine. Each organization had its youth formations. The Revisionists had 'Betar' [21] – they organized manifestations in the Jewish neighborhood dressed in brown shirts and black trousers. The others were 'Hashomer Hatzair' – they studied hard Ivrit and in the organization 'Ken' (nest) they spoke only in Ivrit and were getting ready for an aliyah (leaving) for Israel – to work in the kibbutzim there. And 'Maccabi' was also a Zionist sports organization – follower of the 'General Zionists'.

Apart from education, every family received the so-called steel money-boxes used to collect donations. They were called 'Keren Kayemet le'Israel' – these were money to buy land in Palestine. These money-boxes were regularly taken to the municipality, all the money was collected and sent to the Consistory. Thus, the first Jewish settlements in Israel were created – the Israeli lands were bought from the Arabs and the kibbutzim and villages were built.

Friday was a market day – my mother did the shopping – mostly fish from the Danube, vegetables, agristada [Traditional Jewish holiday dish prepared from fish with sour egg sauce, oil, salt and lemon, which is served on Rosh Hashanah.], vegetable marrows, andjinara [Traditional Jewish dish made by pickled vegetable marrows, oil, salt and wild plums, which is served on Rosh Hashanah.]. My father worked and my brother and I went to help carry the bags. Usually villagers came to the market selling their produce. I was sent to buy only yogurt from a Jewish dairy shop. My father bought butter, cottage cheese, cheese and yellow cheese from a Whiteguard – Nikolay. In 1938 some cousins of ours emigrated to Israel and left us their house, but later they sold it to another family. I do not know their names, they are from the Geron family on my grandmother's side and the house was sold through some middlemen to Nikolay and Olga Spasovi. They did not have any children. They were communists, at that time my brother also joined the Union of Young Workers (UYW) [22] – the youth organization of the Bulgarian Communist Party. We did not have a radio because we did not have the money to buy one. But they did and we all listened to the news and knew what was going on. We discussed the developments and talking with Nikolay and Olga, my father who was a Zionist and a religious man, became a communist and a supporter of the partisans. We hid in the house some of their illegal friends.

My father Merkado Mois Natan was born in 1893 in Varna. Then he lived in Dobrich. He took part in World War I at the front in Dobrudzha and he was wounded there. After the end of the war he escaped from Dobrich in a carriage because the Romanians wanted to arrest him for fighting against their army. Then he settled in Varna with his parents. His two brothers Aron and Albert stayed in Dobrich even when the town was annexed by Romania [23]. My father has four brothers. They are younger than him and their names are Aron, Albert, Marko and David. He also has a sister – Belina. My father studied until the third grade, which is equal to present-day seventh grade, and since the family was large and my grandfather could not support it, my father started work in a tobacco factory. The chief accountant of the factory was a socialist, who liked my father and taught him to do accounting. And until the end of his life my father worked as an accountant. The factory was owned by Turkish nationals who lived in Vienna. Later they closed the factory. My father was already married and my mother and he came from Varna to Ruse.

My mother Rebeka Avram Natan (nee Geron) was born in Razgrad in 1897 or 1898 – we could not find out the exact date. And we always joked with her that we could not celebrate her birthday

because we did not know her date of birth. She had a primary education. At home my parents spoke mostly Spanish [Ladino], but when our neighbors came, they spoke Bulgarian. My mother knew Bulgarian because she had worked as a seamstress in a Bulgarian company and she could read in Bulgarian. My parents met in Ruse – my father was on a business trip there and a cousin of my mother's and a friend of his introduced them to each other. They engaged, then they had a religious wedding and went to live in Varna. They dressed in clothes typical for the times. My mother says that my father was a dandy and had a Bohemian lifestyle. When they lived in Varna and my father had a job, they were well-off. He had a big salary, but when my brother was born, my mother got sick and at one moment all the money was gone, even their savings. Then they had to move to Ruse, where my uncle offered my father a job. In Ruse we were never well-off, because only my father worked and my mother was often sick. We lived quite frugally.

We lived in rented premises. We moved a lot – we changed about five or six houses. We had water, electricity and an inside toilet in every house. We usually had two rooms and a living room. We had a bathroom only in the house of Nikolay Spasov, the water-heater used wood and coals. Then we lived at the house of a Spanish consul in Ruse – a well-off Jew. After the Law for the Protection of the Nation was passed, he realized what the situation was and decided to leave for Spain. He asked my father to move into his house – it was big – four or five rooms and a big living room. That happened in the autumn of 1941. His name was Aftalion. I do not remember anything else about him because I was a child then. He locked the furniture in one of the rooms and let us use all the others. It had a big yard, it was a rich house. We did not pay rent. He only wanted us to keep his house. We spent a year there and in the winter of 1942 the police evicted us. The state confiscated the house and threw us out. My mother had burnt her leg and was lying in bed – they shoved her in a wash-tub and threw her out. We were sheltered by some very close friends of my parents'. They let us use a room with a small corridor and we lived there until October 1944.

Everyone in Ruse had small gardens. My mother planted flowers, parsley, dill. There were no animals in the yards. We had servants only for a year. My mother was seriously ill then and we took a very nice girl from the villages. Her name was Kina. We had books at home. My parents loved reading. When we got older, we also read the books. They were in Bulgarian. We had 'The Dreyfus Trial', books in aesthetics and ethics. My brother and I read the novels by Karl May, Mayne Reid, Jack London, Maxim Gorky [24]. We also had prayer books, which my father used. I also knew Ivrit from the Jewish school. My brother still remembers it, but I have forgotten it. I did not buy newspapers, even now I do not like reading newspapers and I do not remember if my parents read them. My father was a religious man. He went to the synagogue, knew all the prayers. He knew Ivrit. He studied until the third grade, but he was very clever, he spoke French, Turkish, Ivrit, Bulgarian and could write in French. We visited my uncle on holidays and usually my father read the prayers. My uncle also read them although he did not know Ivrit so well. My other uncles (my father's brothers) were not religious. On the high holidays we gathered at the house of grandmother Simha.

My parents were part of the Jewish community. My father was in the leadership of the Zionist organization 'General Zionists'. My mother was not interested in politics. They were Zionists, but later under the influence of Nikolay and Olga they started sympathizing with the communists. After 9th September 1944 my father became a member of the Bulgarian Communist Party and my mother remained 'non-party communist'. My parents got on very well with their neighbors. When

the mother of Tosho and Boianka died, the two children were twins, my mother looked after them. They lived in the house next to ours with their father Bai [uncle] Ivan, who was a tailor. They had an elder brother Lyubo who was the age of my brother, while the twins were one year older than me. We played together. Most of my parents' friends were Jews. There was a family, with whom they were very close and when they gathered together, they laughed all the time.

They were very merry people. They were the ones who sheltered us when we were thrown out of the big house. They had three children. One of them died recently in Israel – he was a famous conductor and composer there – Izhak (Ziko) Gratsiani [there is no further information about him]. I cannot remember a lot about him, because I was five years younger than him and did not go out with him and his friends. But Ziko was the leader of the high school orchestra, he even established a Jewish jazz band in Ruse – he was very talented from an early age. I knew his sister Mati, who was only one year older than me. Their family was very easygoing and when they gathered together with my parents, they never spoke about their problems, but they always tried to cheer the atmosphere, especially after the anti-Jewish laws were adopted.

My father worked all his life without a day off. He took money as a compensation for his entitled holidays so that we would make ends meet. When we were children, we were sent to our grandparents in Varna for the summer. Like my father, my mother also did not go on holiday. When my father retired and came to Sofia, we took him to a vacation home in Bankya. [Bankya is a small town near Sofia, famous for its nice air and healing properties and with its healing mineral water. There are a lot of vacation homes in Bankya. During totalitarian times the state leader at that time Todor Zhivkov had a residency there]. My mother was at a sanatorium at that time. And my father said, 'It turns out it is very nice to have a break'. My mother's sisters kept in touch all the time. Our cousins and we grew up together. My uncle did not have children and looked after all of us. There was even a tradition – on Sundays, our uncle would hire a carriage, pass by all the sisters and take their children for a walk. My father had a sister who was not married and four brothers. Two of them lived in Dobrich and I have visited them. Their names were Aron and Albert and after 9th September 1944 they moved to Israel.

I was born on 10th July 1929 in Ruse. There were no kindergartens then and my mother looked after us. We started the Jewish school at six years of age. The first year was something like a preparatory class and then we continued in the school. We played in the yard, on the street and mostly in 'Maccabi'. We joined the organization at six years of age and were divided into groups according to our age. We played gymnastics, children's games, I grew up there. In the Jewish school I was good at maths, geography. Our teacher was a very kind and delicate woman – Mrs Kamilarova. Her son is a famous Bulgarian violin player, Emil Kamilarov. I also loved literature because the literature teacher was also a very interesting woman. The subject I most disliked was Tannakh. Our teacher was the headmaster Ben Avram and when he entered the room he put me and my friend Aron Kapon (he died in Israel years later) in the opposite ends of the classroom so that we would not make noise. I thought that all the legends about Avraam, Izhak, Yakov did not sound real enough and I could not understand them. That is why, we made noise during the classes.

There was no anti-Semitism during those times. I did not go to private classes. My school friends were Jews and in the neighborhood we played with Tosho and Nikola Korabov (a famous Bulgarian

cinema director) [25], because he lived nearby. We kicked the rag ball, played hide-and-seek, walked in the vineyards around the town. When we were older, we went to the river. Games were our hobby – we played 'ashitsi', marbles. There was a gym in 'Maccabi' in the Jewish neighborhood. There were around 200 children there. Various people were instructors in it – Aron Alfandari, Jacques Kapon – brother of my friend Aron and others. There was also a nice volleyball playground, a little football field and in the gym there were gym apparatuses. 'Maccabi' also organized tourist excursions – we went outside the town in the 'Sveta [St] Petka' cave. It was 5-6 kilometers from the town in some limestone slopes near the Lom River. We went there on foot, had lunch, and went back. We also went to a monastery for a walk.

Our parents did not have the money to take us anywhere and we did not go anywhere with our friends. Yet my father tried not to deprive us of anything. On Sunday evenings we sometimes went to the neighborhood pub. It was visited by Jewish, Bulgarian and Armenian families. During the week only the men went there to drink rakia [brandy]. Our father ordered kebapcheta [gilled oblong rissoles] for us in wooden plates and lemonade. They gathered with other families and it was something like a ritual for us. We did not go there every Sunday, only when we had money.

When our parents got together with their friends, they did not play cards. They usually gathered after dinner to talk (there was no TV then), usually they told each other jokes and had fun. My father did not play cards. He knew how to play but did not do it in order to protect us from becoming gamblers. My brother Mois and I grew up and studied together. Then he left for Czechoslovakia and I remained in Bulgaria. We had mutual friends. My father went to the synagogue, but not regularly. When the time for my bar mitzvah came, the Law for Protection of the Nation was already adopted and we all lived in one room. My brother had his bar mitzvah. At that time we lived in the nice house of Aftalion. My father threw up a great party then – invited all relatives and friends. Of all religious holidays I was impressed most by Yom Kippur, when you fast and ask for forgiveness. Purim was a merry holiday. We, the children, were dressed in fancy clothes, and acted out some performances. On Yom Kippur we did not eat all day and waited for the evening to come in order to eat. In fact, the men were in the synagogue the whole day and the prayers were told there. In the evening we laid the table with the typical Jewish dishes. For Purim we prepared some masks at school, but I do not remember what they were.

The first time I felt serious anti-Semitic attitude towards me was after the Law for Protection of the Nation was passed in the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942. My father was left without work. Before that my uncle Yosif had opened a bookstore selling to wholesalers and had taken my father to be his associate. My father was an accountant, a traveling salesman, everything, because my uncle did not understand how to do business. He was involved only with his capital. They even imported goods from Germany – pens, rubbers etc. But under the Law for Protection of the Nation the bookstore was closed. My uncle took all the goods in it. My father remained without salary and any money. So, my parents started selling our possessions to make ends meet. We were also evicted from the big house.

We had an uncle married to the sister of my mother, Ester. He was a glazier – very enterprising and with a technical inclination. His only problem was that he was lazy. He earned a little money and then he closed his workshop and rested. His name was Simo Tsimerman. He offered my father to make table mirrors. They were made with tin frames, carton paddings and then the glass was cut.

He and my father cut the glass, because my father had learned that after the big hailstorm in Ruse, which broke a lot of windows. Then my father went to help uncle Simo, because there was a lot of work and he could not cope alone. Now when uncle Simo saw that we were desperate, he offered us to make those mirrors. I also took part. We worked illegally and sold them to Bulgarian companies. My father bought a small manual press and I worked in the small room which our uncle Fiko Grasiani gave to us. I graduated junior high school in the Jewish school but under the Law for Protection of the Nation we were not allowed to study in a high school. It was 1942, I did not go to school and helped my father. We did not have working hours, but we worked all the time and there were a lot of orders.

We put on the yellow stars [26] and we were not allowed to walk in the center of the town. We walked only in our neighborhood. There was a curfew from 9 pm to 7 am, when we were not allowed to go out at all. We could not study, could not work and most of the Jews dug trenches, because the American and the English planes passed above the town on way to Romania. The Jews were also hired for laying on cables, in other words, for heavy labor. My brother Mois went underground. He was a UYW member. I was not a member yet, only a sympathizer. Some classmates of mine and I gathered and discussed these issues, but we were not allowed to become members, because we were still young. My brother and his friends went underground and hid around the Ruse region until they were caught. We knew nothing about them and my mother got sick from worry, not knowing if he was dead or alive.

When they were caught, we knew at least that he was alive. But my mother, washing his clothes soaked with blood, when we got home from the police station, cried a lot. Because it was evident that they had been beaten a lot. And after two or three months we were taken to Somovit. There was a Jewish concentration camp there, created firstly for Jews from Sofia. On 24th May 1943 [27] the Sofia Jews organized a demonstration together with the rabbi harbi Daniel [28], the police dispersed them and arrested whoever they could – only male Jews. They took around 300 people to the school in Somovit [29]. This is a small village near the Danube with a port – very beautiful. Then we were also brought from Ruse – families of communists, whose members were in jail or arrested for communist activities. We were the three of us – my mother, my father and I. At first they told us to prepare only hand luggage, but later they confiscated it and never gave it back. We were left with only our clothes on our backs, all our money was taken too. We were 38 people and we traveled by ship all night; in the morning we were in Somovit. 325 Sofia Jews were already there, only men. They also had nothing else except their clothes on.

After us a small group from Plovdiv, very rich families, was also brought to the village. It turned out that the Plovdiv municipal chief gathered them and told them to give him 50 000 levs each. Whoever did not give him money would be sent to Somovit. The people who paid in Plovdiv remained there. Those who refused were brought to Somovit. When they saw the situation, they wired someone right away, maybe they made a deal with the provost marshal. They spent only one night with us and were released the next day. Only one family remained with us – with two young children. The man said, 'I will not give money to fascists.' But his wife was crying all the time, the children were only 4-5 years old. It was horrible there. Everyone was telling him, 'Pay the money, because we would not get out of here alive, save at least your children and your wife!' And he would say, 'I will not give any money to them!' But in a week, he was not so sure any more. He offered his wife to pay for her and the kids. But she said, 'I am going nowhere without you!' So, in

the end he agreed, paid the money and they were all released.

There were families with young children from Kyustendil and Dupnitsa in the camp. At one time two Jewish girls arrived – prostitutes from Salonika, Greece. One of them lived with a Bulgarian officer and the other one with a Greek. But when the deportation of the Greek Jews began, they hid them. But after a while they came out, the authorities arrested them and brought them to Somovit. Later a Jew from Skopje arrived, then another one from Kavala or some other town on the Aegean Sea. [30] They all told us about how the Jews had been deported. So we all realized that the same fate was awaiting us too. We arrived in the camp on 16th July 1943. The chief was a beast and on arriving he found a coin of 5 leva in my pocket. I had forgotten it there. He slapped me twice and brought me to the ground. Every night before the roll-call he beat someone. At first he began with insults and dirty words. Then he brought a man in front of all and beat him up. Depending on his mood he would beat one or three people on one evening. Their only fault was that they had found some bread or fruit thrown by the villagers passing by. 'Who eats bread?' would ask the chief. The man would step forward and he would beat him up. That happened in the yard of the school where we lived. We slept in common rooms on the floor and we were allowed to go out only in the evening. We stayed in the yard the whole day. And the villagers passed and pitied us. And they would throw us something. We were not allowed to go out and stood in the dirt there. Only one man went out – bai Sinto Eshkenazi, who was a very good tailor. When the marshal provost found that out, he would send for him to make clothes for him. Sinto went there with a policeman. Three or four policemen guarded us. There was a high fence on one side and a hill on the other. If someone stood on the hill, he would see everything. There was nowhere to escape.

The Jews in the camp were around 520 people. We ate beans soup and a piece of bread – morning, noon and evening. There was a streamlet behind the toilet where we could wash. We did not have any soap. We were full of lice. One of the Jews was a doctor, but we did not have any medical examinations. We had no drugs, no hygiene. We slept on the floor, one next to the other. If you wanted to turn around, you had to get up, turn and lie down again. The tailor in the village was a very nice man, a communist. Through him bai Sinto got in touch with relatives of ours in Ruse. The post clerk in the village was also very good man. And not only they – all the villages felt sorry for us... I am overwhelmed with emotions...

One evening when bai Sinto returned, he told us that two barges were getting ready at the port for us. And the next day a German officer with soldiers came. We knew what had happened to the Aegean Jews and realized that we would be deported. We could not sleep the whole night. The next day, however, we were not told anything. A policeman came, took bai Sinto to the tailor's workshop. We were waiting. In the evening bai Sinto came back and said, 'We are staying here, the barges left.' We started singing and dancing with joy. At one time we even danced a horo. The policemen who guarded us, started clapping. The villagers also gathered to look at us. We felt as if we were living a second life!

By the way, I do not know how in one night the villagers sent a message to Sofia about our deportation and it was blocked from there. Probably through the post office clerk and the local party organization. If we were deported from Somovit as first group, probably many Jews from Bulgaria would have been deported after us. But since our deportation was blocked, all the Jews remained in Bulgaria. We were the first group, which they intended to deport silently from Somovit

- a small village, so that there would not be mass protests. After these events, with the help of the deputy speaker of the Bulgarian Parliament Peshev [31] in March 1943 when the deportation was canceled, the authorities tried to organize another deportation in April. It failed again. After the demonstration on 24th May in Sofia the authorities had decided to make Somovit the base, from which Jews to be deported. I do not know what happened but it is a fact that the two barges were at the port, the Germans came to take us, but we stayed. I think that the villagers called Sofia and the people there took action so that we would stay. When I am asked who saved us, I answer - the Bulgarians saved us. I do not know any names.

That happened in the end of August 1943 and things started changing. At one time that beast, the chief, was replaced. A kinder chief was assigned in his place. I do not remember his name. Almost every week we were taken under guard to the Danube to wash ourselves. We would sit under the willows and take out the lice, we felt human beings again. Firstly the men were taken to the river, and the next day the women. The chief did not beat us or insult us. In September, the children had to start school and we were taken above the village, where we started building sheds, a faucet and toilets. Around 15th September we moved to live there. There was no fence, but there were guards - the policemen. And we could escape nowhere.

Around 10th October the provost marshal ordered us to fall in and read us a release order. There was a lot of joy. First, the Sofia Jews were released, because then they were taken to labor camps [32]. In two-three days a group of people was released. On 16th October all Jewish families were released. Earlier Avram Ventura and 2-3 richer families were released. Probably they paid someone in Ruse. Avram Ventura's daughter Ana was killed by the police. [33] She had gone underground and was a secretary of the town committee of the UYW in Ruse. After that Avram Ventura was sent to Somovit. Then we were all released. We traveled by train to Pleven and there the Jewish community took care of us. We received food and shelter and the next day we left for Ruse.

My brother Mois was already in prison. Even in Somovit we knew that he was sentenced because we received letters from his through the tailor. We returned to Ruse and started making mirrors again. We continued to live in the house of our parents' friends. Mois was in the Ruse prison - in 1944 when the bombing started they were transferred to the Pleven prison. Even though we earned very little, we brought him food. We could see him once a week - we brought him clothes and food. We also brought food for the other 4-5 boys with whom he was imprisoned - some of the boys were from the town and the others were from the villages.

On 8th September 1944 the Soviet forces entered Ruse and we welcomed them. It was great joy. Firstly, we saw one car and communications troops installing a cable. Then we went to watch how they made a pontoon bridge over the Danube. And the first car - an open jeep with an officer inside - suddenly flew in the air - the people lifted it and carried it. The officer got embarrassed. 'Tovarishti, pozhaluista!' [From Russian: Comrades, please!] Then we went on a demonstration singing and the policemen hid away. The Germans had withdrawn their troops. After ten days Mois and his friends also returned from the prison in Pleven - they had stayed in the town in order to overthrow the fascist authorities. At that time the power in Ruse was also taken by the people - some of the policemen from State Security were arrested, others killed. I was already a member of an illegal UYW group - four boys and I had formed it in 1944. We collected money for the prisoners, for the people underground - we stole, we did everything we could to help. We were still boys - 14-

15 years old.

We founded our own UYW club. We shouted on the streets – songs, agitation. We started courses in Marxism – Leninism. I enrolled in the high school in Ruse. I had one grade officially recognized as a person affected by the Law for Protection of the Nation – I enrolled in the fifth grade but I had to catch up with the material. We helped the Soviet troops in Ruse. The high school turned into a Soviet military hospital. We studied in the cinemas – as well as one could study there. We were only taught and not examined. Those were revolutionary times. We were asked to guard and to look for fascists. Once they gave me a gun. We were gluing posters all night and since one girl had been shot by fascist recently, they gave us one gun when we were working. When we finished the job, we returned it. We did agitation, propaganda, we did not feel like studying. It was not a time for studies. We were full of enthusiasm and we mixed with the Bulgarian youths. That lasted 5-6 months. Then we realized that we had to study and I graduated from the high school in 1947. I was a secretary of the UYW in the high school and deputy chairman of the United Youth School Union. We tried to attract more of our classmates. In my class all students were UYW members, except two boys who were sons of rich villagers. They did not mingle with us. We were friends with all the rest even after we graduated.

When we finished high school we went on a brigade [34] to build the Hainboaz pass – this is one of the national construction sites, in which the socialist youth contributed to the construction of the road – digging, etc. In the evenings we gathered around the camping fire and sang songs. We slept in tents. In 1947 I started studying in the Higher Technical School in Ruse. At first I did not want to go to university, because my brother was already studying and my father had a small salary – he was an accountant in the commissariat. Then he became chief accountant in the company 'Clothes and Shoes'. I wanted to become a worker, because I shared those ideas and wanted to help the family. But one day my father and brother persuaded me that the country needed not only workers, but also engineers. So, they convinced me to continue my education. I spent two years in Ruse. Then the Higher Technical School was closed and I was transferred to Sofia where I graduated the Higher Machine Electrical and Technical Institute in 1952.

I started working as an engineer at the construction site of the present-day Danube Bridge, which was then called the Bridge of Friendship [35]. I was the technical leader of the assembly brigades. My mother was seriously sick and my father was deep into debt in order to support our studies. I had to work one year to pay the debts. My father was also working, but it was impossible to support two students and our very sick mother with only one salary. So, he had taken loans from friends, he had not paid the rent, and because they knew him, they did not evict him. I started work and gradually I started paying the debts back. Then I transferred to Sofia in a military design organization – we designed hiding places, I designed the ventilation and other installations. I also did my military service there – that was in the summer of 1954 when we finished the bridge and I was conscripted to Boychinovtsi station [Montana district] where I spent two months. Then I went to the design organization. It was housed in the Jewish Home [36] in Sofia. I worked there a year and a half. I did not stay any longer because I did not like all the secrecy. Then I worked a year and a half in 'Mashproekt' and then in 'Himmetalurgproekt' [design institutions in machine construction, chemistry and metallurgy, designing plants in these sectors]

Meanwhile, many Jews started emigrating to Israel. All my uncles and aunts left. Only we remained together with a cousin – Avram Pinkas. My father's brothers also left and so did their mother Sultana. My other grandmother Rebeka died in Bulgaria. Her son Yosif Geron died here too. Our ideas and education were different. We felt good here, we had jobs. We said nothing to those who left – there were even members of the Bulgarian Communist Party who emigrated. There were political prisoners and a former partisan from Ruse who left. When their families decided to leave, they left with them. That was not a question of ideology or understanding. After the tortures and the sacrifices, which the Jews experienced during World War II, the people thought, 'Let's go to our own country.' That was the main reason why they left. At one time I also thought about leaving. It was when I experienced a serious disappointment at my work place. I was given a very big project – a furnace for carbide for the plant in Devnya [37]. That is a very explosive substance, because the carbide melts at a temperature of 2 000 degrees C by means of an electric arc with the capacity of 24 000 kilowatts. The whole furnace weighed 700 tons and contained three electrodes, each electrode weighed 45 tons. Everything was cooled by water. The project was very difficult and I invested a lot of effort and nerves in it. And then I was accused of importing foreign bricks and spending a lot of dollars, while I could have done it with Bulgarian bricks. I was under a lot of stress until I convinced them that those bricks were of a better quality.

When the furnace was started for the first time, it was sheer luck that we survived. The furnace had to be drilled with an electrical arc electrode. We started the furnace, but the workers could not make the hole for one whole day. At the same time the lava was filling the tub of the furnace. According to the design plans there is a steel crane where the worker with the electrode is, which is cooled by water because the temperature is very high. That water passes through some hoses. On the third day when the worker made the hole, the flow of lava turned out to be very strong because of the high pressure which had built up inside. It poured on the floor and the hoses melted from the high temperature and the water inside them poured out too. Water and carbide make acetone, which explodes. But the mist was so dense that there was not enough oxygen for an explosion. We all survived by mere coincidence.

We stopped the water, the mist cleared, but the carbide was being cooled in a revolving drum 102 meters long, over which water is poured. A colleague of mine had designed it, but he had calculated the volume of necessary water on the basis of the data for the output, which I had given to him. Yet, that output turned out to be 6-7 times higher. The drum started getting red. If it were torn, everything would explode in a second. Dmitriy, the consultant on the project from the Russian side and I sat there and waited until the flow subsided and it was certain that the drum would hold. If the drum exploded, the staff and we would be dead in an instant. No mistake about that. Maybe when the workers built the furnace, they made it more difficult to be drilled. Dmitriy was a very nice boy at my age. He was from Karaganda [an industrial city in central-eastern Kazakhstan – at that time part of the USSR]. There were a number of such furnaces in Karaganda. He said to me, 'I have done that a lot of times and never has such a thing happened to me.' Our first white hairs are from this experience. But once the furnace was started, there were no more problems with it. It worked without failure for nine years. That furnace is in the plant producing polyvinylchloride in Devnya.

We returned to Sofia and instead of being thanked for everything, some incompetent and gossipy person was promoted to chief engineer. I was group leader of the machine construction

department in 'Himmetalurgproekt'. That was in 1964. The chief of the department was a very good friend with that man Petko Hristov and brought him from Dimitrovgrad to Sofia. Probably Petko had been a very good engineer in Dimitrovgrad, but he was not a good constructor. So, he started making intrigues. All of the group leaders including me resigned. Only Marin Ivanov Marinov remained working for him and Petko started gossiping against him too. At that time, in 1965 I wanted to emigrate to Israel. I have a nerve condition ever since Somovit.

My nervous system is shattered and I had a nervous breakdown again. My physician advised me to change the atmosphere. I quit the job and became a teacher in an evening technical school in Sofia. I applied for emigration, my wife also agreed. I was already married and had children. But the authorities refused to let me go. Later I found a way to discover the reason – it was because I had designed installations for the military plants in Sopot, Kazanlak and Karlovo [38] - furnaces, in which ingots, which are later used to produce shells. My group made designs for the military plants and that was why I was not allowed to emigrate.

I met my wife in the Vitosha Mountain. I am a tourist and I still go to the mountain. Once my chief in 'Himmetalurgproekt', Marin, his wife Atanaska and I decided to go to Vitosha. It was February 1958 and we went skiing. There we caught up with a group of young people and together with them went to the 'Fonfon' mountain hostel. I got acquainted with my future wife, the next day we went skiing together and then we started on our way back together with Milka, a friend of my wife. I taught them how to ski and helped them, but I fell down and sprained my ankle. When I got home, my leg was swollen. And Nina Perets, my future wife, told Milka, 'Let's go and see him.' Nina is a Jew and Milka - a Bulgarian. But Milka was too shy, so Nina came alone to see me. Then we were living in a rented flat in the Banishora residential district in Sofia. In 1956 my parents and I changed the rented flat in Ruse to one in Sofia. That is how our friendship started. Nina and I married on the same day with my brother - 12th December 1959. At that time my wife's aunt and uncle from Moscow were visiting her. They were political emigrants. [39] Their names were Solomon and Rebeka Goldstein. Rebeka is a sister of Julieta, Nina's mother. The Goldstein family has lived in Moscow since 1918. They also spent some time in Switzerland where they met Lenin, who invited them to the USSR. Julieta and Josef Perets lived in Sofia. They were interned to Montana. That is why, at first we lived for one month at my father's place (my mother had already passed away) – my father was in one of the rooms, my brother and his wife, Yanka, in the other and Nina and I – in the kitchen. When Nina's relatives returned to Moscow we went to live at Nina's parents – we lived in one of the rooms and her parents – in the other.

Next year our daughter Beka was born – on 14th August 1960. My brother's son Merkado was born the same year. Three years later our second children were born – on 28th June 1963 Joze [Josef] was born, and my brother's son Alfred was born the same year. We raised them – my wife was working as a technician in a laboratory measuring electrical appliances, and I worked as a designer. My wife died in 1976. In 1973 she was operated from breast cancer, she lived three more years, but she had metastases and she died. She was born in 1934. Before she got sick, we went trekking every year (a group of tourists start walking from mountain hostel to another, sleeping in different places and following a fixed route usually in Rila, Pirin or Stara Planina [The Balkan] Mountains). We also brought our children with us. I married again in 2004. I've been together with Simha Aladjem (her father's name) for ten years. We also met in the mountain. I have known my second wife ever since she was a child – she was born in 1944 in Ruse and her parents, especially her father, were

great tourists. So, we met in the mountains. Her father Solomon Aladjem (upholsterer in a company) and her mother Rayna Aladjem (hairstylist) had been interned to Ruse and they met there.

My job as a teacher was very light, but low-paid. And I loved designing, so I quit the technical school and started work in 'Vodproekt' in 1969. I was chief engineer of the Machine department – we prepared designs for dams, pumping stations, pressure pipelines. My employers offered me to go and work in Cuba. So, in January 1979 I left for Cuba with my son. My daughter stayed in Bulgaria to study, she was already 18 year old and lived by herself. My brother and his wife helped her. I worked in Cuba for three years and a half. I was in a plant producing hydraulic installations for dams and pumping stations. I was happy there. I got along very well with the Cubans. I can say a lot about Cuba. At one time the Mexican Foreign Minister arranged a meeting between the USA State Secretary and Fidel Castro's adviser. The Americans said that they would lift the economic blockade, turn over Guantanamo and restore diplomatic relations with Cuba if the country withdrew its forces from other countries and stopped interfering in their internal affairs. Cuba had military missions in Angola, Mozambique and other places. But the Cubans declined and there was a lot of coverage on that.

Fidel Castro organized a demonstration. He spoke three or four hours and said that he did not make deals with the revolution and his ideas. So, the American Congress adopted a decision for serious measures against Cuba and was inclined to attack. Cuba raised into combat readiness all its arms on the coasts and mobilized half the men. One morning I went to the plant and the director told me that we were going to the site. We produced hydrotechnical installations for dams and pumping stations and we hired assembly brigades to install them. We got into the Volga [a car manufactured in the USSR] and left. After a while we reached a military base. The director told them our names and they let us in. I am a foreigner, but they did not want to see my documents, nor did they ask me anything. A lieutenant colonel welcomed us and showed us their lines or armaments – tanks, cannons. He told us that we should cover them so that the Americans would not see them. I said, 'Okay, what materials do you have?' We had never done anything like that before. 'We do not have any materials,' the army official said, 'Take materials from your plant.' There were such materials in our plant. So, the director, who was a turner, said, 'Well, Avram, you will be using tubes.' 'But the tubes are for water. We need planks for the supporting structure,' I said. 'Well, we do not have any planks, so you will make it with tubes,' they said. The next day we had to start working.

I was wondering what to do the whole night. We had rims and we soldered the rims to the tubes to make something like a supporting plank. The next day we loaded the tubes, took the brigade and started working. We worked for one month – without designs. They gave us food there, I got home dirty and dead-tired. Meanwhile my daughter married and had a baby. My son graduated the Bulgarian school in Cuba and returned to Bulgaria to do his military service. My daughter needed me – she was studying machine engineering with a baby on her hands. My son was a soldier and no one had the time to visit him. So, one day I told the director that I wanted to go back to Bulgaria. We went to the site and he said to the lieutenant-colonel, 'You know, the Bulgarian wants to go home.' And he said, 'No way, he knows too much. He will go nowhere until the end of the war.' It was the winter of 1982. I told them, 'I am alone here,' and the lieutenant-colonel said, 'We will find you a wife!' 'But I also want a lover,' I answered and the lieutenant-colonel burst out laughing, 'You

have become a real Cuban!' In Cuba everyone has a wife and a lover. The Cubans are warm people, with a sense of humor, but life is hard and they are isolated. But the war did not take place and I returned to Bulgaria.

I came back in April 1982 and started work in the Hydrotechnics and Melioration Institute. I headed a section for the design and assembly of installations for automation of the water distribution. The work was interesting and creative. My colleagues were nice people and we achieved some very good results – we produced a lot of inventions and patented some of them. I worked there until February 1990 when I retired. The director asked me to stay and work on a contract. I did not want that very much because my children wanted me to help them. So, worked six months more. Then democracy came [40] and the institute no longer had money for salaries and fees. So, I quit. I founded a private company for the design of sites for purification of waste waters. My inventions are mainly in the area of water industry. But I was not much successful as an expert in hydrotechnics and melioration. I had two more inventions, but there was no market for them. I closed the company, the institute had also closed down and so had most of the institutes in the country. That was the end of my creative work. I am the author of nine inventions in water industry. I was offered to patent the last two. I tried to sell them to companies, but neither the state, nor the private ones were interested. I saw no point in paying taxes without putting them into practice and I decided not to patent them.

My children have degrees in machine engineering. My daughter worked in the Institute at the Plant for Metal Cutting Machines and my son became a technologist in the same plant. When the institute was closed down, my daughter Beka was left unemployed. My son was also laid off. He was offered to be a turner, and he accepted but he could not support his two children with that job and his wife was on a maternal leave. He quit the plant and worked in a private construction company, doing all kinds of work. In the end, he decided to emigrate with his family to Israel. His wife Mariela is a Bulgarian, an accountant. They moved in 1996. They have two children – a boy and a girl. Avram and Maria – pupils. My daughter Beka has a son Albert. She tried to find another job, for a while she worked in some shops. Then she enrolled in university again. She graduated psychology and worked for two years as a psychologist in the kindergarten of the Jewish organization 'Habat'. Now she is no longer working there. She is writing a dissertation in psychology at the Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski' and she teaches classes there. Her husband is a Jew – Maxim Varonov. He is a programmer, a computer expert. Their son also has a degree in computer technology and already has a job.

I did not raise my children in the spirit of Jewish traditions because I did not have the time, especially after my wife died and I had to work, do the shopping, cook and look after them. And since one salary was not enough I started working on innovations. In the evenings when the children were asleep, I was writing and calculating in the kitchen. Then I started making inventions and I had no time educating them in that respect. The times were also different. We did not go to synagogues. Moreover, I am not a religious person. Even when I was a child and I was studying the Tannakh in the Jewish school, I was not interested in it. Now, we follow the traditions, not because we believe in them, but because they are traditions.

Most of my friends are Bulgarians, but my wife's relatives are Jews. We organized a Jewish tourist club in 'Maccabi'. Now it still exists, although 'Maccabi' is no longer active. Everyone who wants

comes to our club – Bulgarians, a Greek, two Armenians and a Russian woman came with us. We walk in the mountains. In the winter we go to Vitosha. In the spring we go to the Lozen Mountain, Plana Mountain and other places [all of them are mountains near Sofia]. We go out on Saturdays. Before I was a mountain guide – I knew the routes and organized groups to walk in Pirin, Stara Planina, Rila. Now, I go to the mountains with close friends, Bulgarians, whom I met 32 years ago on a trek in Rila Mountain. We still keep in touch and get together. Some time ago we went to the mountains a lot, but now not so often because one of our friends Georgi has the Parkinson's disease. Every Monday and Wednesday we play bridge in the Jewish cultural home. We are a group of four people, and one man who plays with us when someone is missing. We usually play backgammon the other days.

As for my relatives I keep in touch mostly with the cousins of my wife Simha. I meet my brother sometimes, but he is very busy, because he has to take care of his wife Yanka. I also call my cousin Avram Pinkas. But most of my relatives are in Israel. I went there before 1989. In 1965 I went to Israel with the Bulgarian national football team – we were in one group with Israel and I went there for two days and a half. It was then that I decided to emigrate. I am not such a great football fan, but I had helped the son of a friend of mine, who was a student. My friend had connections and arranged my trip as a way to thank me. So, I agreed to go there for a couple of days to see my aunts and uncles. I had never been to Israel before that. My cousin and his friend there offered me to emigrate and convinced me that I would have a nice job. But I could not do it, and I already explained the reason. I was alone on my trip and in the end of 1989 I went for a week to celebrate the New Year's Day – the first year after the changes. In 1997 Simha and I went together – her daughters also emigrated to Israel – they have families and two children each. Their names are Adela and Luiza. Adela is a nurse and Luiza works in a bank. I had to help my son and his wife, because she was studying. He works in a construction company and she is an accountant so I had to look after their children. Simha was at her daughters'. We stayed there for three months.

I did not accept everything before the changes unconditionally, but the things we did – building plants, creating jobs for the people, I think that was something positive. Yet, we also made many mistakes – we imported old technologies, implemented bad economic projects which turned out not to be profitable. We built everything in a hurry. That angered me the most. For example, in Pazardzhik we built a plant for accumulators using an old Czech technology. Also, the plants for heavy machine construction in Chervena Mogila and in Ruse. We live in a small country, which is not rich in resources or in electricity, and yet, we built such enormous plants. Those were mistakes, which we as engineers and technicians in line with the contemporary tendencies in the world noticed. But I did not feel limited in my work and my personal disappointment was of another nature.

Out of the political events in those times I remember Stalin's death [in 1953], which took place while I was working at the site of the bridge over the Danube. There was a Soviet expert monitoring every engineering activity. When they heard about Stalin's death, all the Russians started crying. I was wondering how such responsible and high-level people could cry so easily. But they believed in him! I also thought that Stalin was a great leader, but then I was disappointed by him. In 1958 I was on a business trip to Moscow – we designed a department producing ball-bearings. Nina's uncle, who had been in the USSR since 1918 and was twice sentenced to exile in Siberia, told me how many people were sacrificed – whole groups of emigrants – Germans, Polish, and the

Bulgarians were spared only thanks to Georgi Dimitrov, those were his words. I was positive about the April Plenum of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1956 when Bulgaria similarly to the USSR criticized the distortions of the cult to Stalin's personality and his Bulgarian follower, Valko Chervenkov [the then Bulgarian Communist Party and state leader]. But when Boyan Balgaranov came, who was one of the leading communist figures in Bulgaria, to introduce us to the decisions of the Plenum and when he hit the table with his fist in answer to the criticism of some of the people, I knew that nothing good will come of it.

Nobody harassed me because of my Jewish origin. But I was very angered by the attitude towards the wars in Israel in 1967 [41] and 1973 [42] and the breaking of the diplomatic ties with Israel. That was a policy of the Bulgarian Communist Party, which disappointed me a lot. Because I had been to Israel and I had seen how they worked and how people became real men there. There was no industry in Israel yet, people were building with primitive technologies. Their settlements were green gardens and between them – deserts. People had a lot of enthusiasm. So, I could not accept the idea that they were aggressors. A colleague of mine, Tihomir Stanev, met me at that time, one or two days after the war in 1967 ended. He hugged me, kissed me, and said, 'Avram, I heard that you were wise people, you are a handful of people and you scared so many Arabs.' That was the only man who greeted me warmly, but the propaganda was unpleasant. The other colleagues did not change their attitude towards me. They were very tactful about the war in 1967.

I did not have problems keeping in touch with my relatives in Israel. My uncle David, who was the youngest, came to visit me in Bulgaria. I only had some problems when I returned from Cuba. My former director, Marin, with whom I went on excursions, offered me a job. He worked in the Institute for casting using anti-pressure of Academician Angel Balevsky [43]. But the institute was secret at that time. And Marin's condition to employ me was that I should not keep in touch with any foreigners. I had to sign a declaration. I told him that I had so many relatives in Israel and I had to keep in touch with them. So, I went to another institute – the Hydrotechnics and Melioration Institute. And my relatives continued to visit me. After the changes in 1989 I was disappointed – the mistakes which were made before that were exaggerated. That fierceness between the parties was very unpleasant.

The pension I received after I retired in 1990 was more than enough. I even managed to help my children financially. But after the inflation in 1996-7 my pension decreased significantly. We did not live in misery because my wife Simha worked in the Institute of Communications at the Bulgarian Telecommunications Company and had a good salary. We have been living together for ten years and she has never said anything about the fact that she receives a high salary and I – only a small pension. So, we live as well as we could and we do not deprive ourselves of the basic things. Now we receive a pension from the 'Claims Conference' and we live comfortably. When our pensions were low we received aid from 'Joint'. Three years ago we received aid in dollars from Switzerland but we already spent it. Now we take an active part in the community of the Jewish Home in Sofia. The women gather on Mondays and Wednesday morning - they do gymnastics in the health club. They listen to lectures, dance, cheer up. They also learn songs and do Jewish and Spanish dances twice a week. We also have our male dance club and there are women in it too – they are even more than the men. Overall, we are never bored.

Translated by Ivelina Karcheva

Glossary:

[1] Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee): The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish aid committees, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported the establishment of cultural meeting places, including libraries, theaters and gardens. It also provided religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from European and Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

[2] Expulsion of the Jews from Spain: The Sephardi population of the Balkans originates from the Jews who were expelled from the Iberian peninsula, as a result of the 'Reconquista' in the late 15th century (Spain 1492, and Portugal 1495). The majority of the Sephardim subsequently settled in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, mainly in maritime cities (Salonika, Istanbul, Smyrna, etc.) and also in the ones situated on significant overland trading routes to Central Europe (Bitola, Skopje, and Sarajevo) and to the Danube (Adrianople, Philipopolis, Sofia, and Vidin).

[3] Sephardi Jewry: Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Their ancestors settled down in North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, South America, Italy and the Netherlands after they had been driven out from the Iberian peninsula at the end of the 15th century. About 250,000 Jews left Spain and Portugal on this occasion. A distant group among Sephardi refugees were the Crypto-Jews (Marranos), who converted to Christianity under the pressure of the Inquisition but at the first occasion reassumed their Jewish identity. Sephardi preserved their community identity; they speak Ladino language in their communities up until today. The Jewish nation is formed by two main groups: the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi group which differ in habits, liturgy their relation toward Kabala, pronunciation as well in their philosophy.

[4] 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 Solitro. 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.

[5] 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.

[6] Nansen Passport: It is named after the scholar, statesman, diplomat and winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace Fridtjof Nansen, a Norwegian (1861 – 1930). After the end of World War I until 1921 he worked as a chairman of the World League of Nations. All his efforts were directed to protect the interests of the minorities and the small nations. He contributed to the organization of the repatriation of 450 000 prisoners of war from 26 countries. He also worked to settle the legal status and economic independence of refugees. The first legal document on the legal protection of refugees was adopted in July 1922 and later endorsed by 52 countries worldwide. That is the so-called 'Nansen Passport' which established the status of the refugee. All his life the humanist Fridtjof Nansen worked for the establishment of a common international status of the refugees, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace. In 1954 the League of Nations established an award in his name.

[7] First Balkan War (1912-1913): Started by an alliance made up of Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro against the Ottoman Empire. It was a response to the Turkish nationalistic policy maintained by the Young Turks in Istanbul. The Balkan League aimed at the liberation of the rest of the Balkans still under Ottoman rule. In October, 1912 the allies declared war on the Ottoman Empire and were soon successful: the Ottomans retreated to defend Istanbul and Albania, Epirus, Macedonia and Thrace fell into the hands of the allies. The war ended on the 30th May 1913 with the Treaty of London, which gave most of European Turkey to the allies and also created the Albanian state.

[8] Bulgaria in World War I: Bulgaria entered the war in October 1915 on the side of the Central Powers. Its main aim was the revision of the Treaty of Bucharest: the acquisition of Macedonia. Bulgaria quickly overran most of Serbian Macedonia as well as parts of Serbia; in 1916 with German backing it entered Greece (Western Thrace and the hinterlands of Salonika). After Romania surrendered to the Central Powers Bulgaria also recovered Southern Dobrudzha, which had been lost to Romania after the First Balkan War. The Bulgarian advance to Greece was halted after British, French and Serbian troops landed in Salonika, while in the north Romania joined the Allies in 1916. Conditions at the front deteriorated rapidly and political support for the war eroded. The agrarians and socialist workers intensified their antiwar campaigns, and soldier committees were formed in the army. A battle at Dobro Pole brought total retreat, and in ten days the Allies entered Bulgaria. On 29th September 1918 Bulgaria signed an armistice and withdrew from the war. The Treaty of Neuilly (November 1919) imposed by the Allies on Bulgaria, deprived the country of its World War I gains as well as its outlet to the Aegean Sea (Eastern Thrace).

[9] Bulgarian Minorities: Some of the larger Bulgarian minorities are Turkish (800,000), Roma (300,000), Armenian (13,500), Tatar (4,500), Jewish (3,500). These are rough figures, based on a 1994 census. Further minority groups are the following: Gagauz (1,500), Orthodox Christians who speak a Turkish dialect, and have a home territory in Gagauzia, Moldova. Karakachan (5,000) are a Greek speaking ethnic group. There is also special minority going by the name of Pomak. These are Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, who are not properly identified in the national Census, but who are said to number between 150,000 and 200,000.

[10] Shalom Organization: Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria. It is an umbrella organization uniting 8,000 Jews in Bulgaria and has 19 regional branches. Shalom supports all forms of Jewish activities in the country and organizes various programs.

[11] 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.

[12] 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.

[13] Hashomer Hatzair in Bulgaria: 'The Young Watchman'; A Zionist-socialist pioneering movement established in Bulgaria in 1932, Hashomer Hatzair trained youth for kibbutz life and set up kibbutzim in Palestine. During World War II, members were sent to Nazi-occupied areas and became leaders in Jewish resistance groups. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.

[14] Maccabi World Union: International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism

felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

[15] 'Maritsa Rushes': a national anthem of the Kingdom of Bulgaria from 1886 to 1944. The author of the text is the Veles teacher Nikola Zhivkov. In 1912 the text was edited by Ivan Vazov. Firstly it originated as a song of the Bulgarian National Revival period sung by rebels of Philip Totyu's band. Later, during the Russian-Turkish Liberation War it was sung by the Bulgarian volunteers in the battles at Shipka and Sheinovo. During the Serbian- Bulgarian War in 1885 it was sung as a battle song by the Bulgarian soldiers. In 1886 it was adopted as a national anthem.

[16] 'Quiet White Danube': a poem by the poet Ivan Vazov praising the heroism of Hristo Botev's revolutionaries, which is still sung today as one of the most patriotic Bulgarian songs of the Bulgarian National Revival.

[17] Trumpeldor, Joseph (1880-1920): Soldier and early pioneer-settler in Erez Israel whose life efforts to organize the military defense of the Jewish settlements in Erez Israel and whose heroic death in a battle at Tel Hai in the north of the country became an inspirational symbol to pioneering youth from all parts of the Diaspora [see: Betar].

[Source: <http://www.jafi.org.il/education/100/people/BIOS/trump.html>]

[18] General Zionism: General Zionism was initially the term used for all members of the Zionist Organization who had not joined a specific faction or party. Over the years, the General Zionists, too, created ideological institutions and their own organization was established in 1922. The precepts of the General Zionists included Basle-style Zionism free of ideological embellishments and the primacy of Zionism over any class, party, or personal interest. This party, in its many metamorphoses, championed causes such as the encouragement of private initiative and protection of middle-class rights. In 1931, the General Zionists split into Factions A and B as a result of disagreements over issues of concern in Palestine: social affairs, economic matters, the attitude toward the General Federation of Jewish Labor, etc. In 1945, the factions reunited. Most of Israel's liberal movements and parties were formed under the inspiration of the General Zionists and reflect mergers in and secessions from this movement.

[19] Poalei Zion: Leftist Zionist movement, founded in the late 19th century in Russia that combined Zionism with Socialism. The early Poalei Zion found its expression in the organization of trade unions, mutual aid societies, and Zionist groups of workers, clerks and salesmen. These groups emphasized the need for democracy within the Jewish community. The Austro-Hungarian branch of Poalei Zion differed markedly from the Russian one. Its ideologists maintained that the Zionist movement was an expression of the entire Jewish people and transcended class interests. It maintained that the position of the Jewish worker and commercial employee was different from that of the non-Jew, since the Jew had to face both exploitation and discrimination at the same time. It warned the Jewish workers against following the teachings of the Social Democrats in Austria-Hungary who denied this fact. It negated the socialist solution unless it were combined with

a Jewish autonomous territory. Instead it stressed the need for the conscious direction of the migration of the Jewish masses to Palestine. The Poalei Zion groups in other countries followed in their ideology either the Russian or the Austrian models. Poalei Zion in Romania and Bulgaria adhered to the Austrian school. In 1907 a Word Union of Poalei Zion was founded. In 1920 the movement split over the attitude toward the Socialist and Communist Internationals, the Zionist Organization, and the place to be accorded to the movement's activities in Erez Israel. Left Poalei Zion sought unconditional affiliation with the Third International (Comintern); by 1924 it had abandoned this attempt and reorganized itself on an independent basis. The other faction, the Right Poalei Zion, merged in 1925 with the Zionist Socialists.

[20] Jabotinsky, Vladimir (1880-1940): Founder and leader of the Revisionist Zionist movement; soldier, orator and a prolific author writing in Hebrew, Russian, and English. During World War I he established and served as an officer in the Jewish Legion, which fought in the British army for the liberation of the Land of Israel from Turkish rule. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the Keren Hayesod, the financial arm of the World Zionist Organization, founded in London in 1920, and was later elected to the Zionist Executive. He resigned in 1923 in protest over Chaim Weizmann's pro-British policy and founded the Revisionist Zionist movement and the Betar youth movement two years later. Jabotinsky also founded the ETZEL (National Military Organization) during the 1936-39 Arab rebellion in Palestine.

[21] Betar: (abbreviation of Berit Trumpeldor) A right-wing Zionist youth movement founded in 1923 in Riga, Latvia. Betar played an important role in Zionist education, in teaching the Hebrew language and culture, and methods of self-defense. It also inculcated the ideals of aliyah to Erez Israel by any means, legal and illegal, and the creation of a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan. Its members supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. In Bulgaria the organization started publishing its newspaper in 1934.

[22] 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'état 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.

[23] The annexation of Dobrich: the agreement in Krayova or the so-called Krayova Treaty signed in the Romanian town Krayova on 7th September 1940. According to that treaty Bulgaria officially receives back South Dobrudzha taken from the country under the Treaty of Neuilly in 1919. The Treaty of Krayova was officially recognized by the USSR, Germany and France as well as the consecutive treaties on the exchange of population and financial consequences. According to that treaty the Bulgarian troops entered Dobrudzha and Dobrich on 21st September 1940 and annexed the treaty.

[24] Gorky, Maxim (born Alexei Peshkov) (1868-1936): Russian writer, publicist and revolutionary.

[25] Korabov, Nikola (b.1928): a Bulgarian cinema director born on 7th December 1928 in Ruse. He had a degree in cinema directing in Moscow in 1956. After he returned to Bulgaria he started work in the Studio for Feature Films. His filmography includes 'Dimitrovgradtsy' [Dimitrovgrad people]

(1956), 'Malkata' [The young one] (1959), 'Tyutyun' [Tobacco] (1962), 'Vula' [Bull] (1965), 'Svoboda ili smart' [Freedom or Death] (1969), 'Ivan Kondarev' (1974), for which he received the special award of the festival in San Remo – Italy, 'Yuliya Vrevskaya' (1978), 'Orisiya' [Destiny] (1983), etc.

[26] 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.

[27] 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.

[28] Daniel Zion: Rabbi in the Sofia synagogue and President of the Israeli Spiritual Council, participant in procession on 24th May 1943.

[29] 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 Aegean Thrace and from Macedonia, but in the end, the Jews from Bulgaria proper were spared.

[30] 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.

[31] Peshev, Dimitar (1894-1973): Bulgarian politician, former Deputy-Chairman of the National Assembly. Peshev was the leader of the group who opposed to deportations of Bulgarian Jews. According to Gabrielle Nissim, author of the book 'The Man Who Stopped Hitler': 'He was the only politician of high rank in a country allied with Germany who broke the atmosphere of complete collective silence with regard to the Jewry's lot.'

[32] 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.

[33] Ventura, Ana Avram (1925-1942): Bulgarian anti-fascist fighter of Jewish origin, born in the Danubian town of Ruse, a daughter of one of the richest industrialists there. She was a member of the communist youth organization of The Union of Young Workers and one of its leaders in Ruse and in 1942 also of the Bulgarian Workers' Party. She was killed in an underground flat on 22nd February 1944.

[34] Brigades: A form of socially useful labor, typical of communist times. Brigades were usually teams of young people who were assembled by the authorities to build new towns, roads, industrial plants, bridges, dams, etc. as well as for fruit-gathering, harvesting, etc. This labor, which would normally be classified as very hard, was unpaid. It was voluntary and, especially in the beginning, had a romantic ring for many young people. The town of Dimitrovgrad, named after Georgi Dimitrov – the leader of the Communist Party – was built entirely in this way.

[35] Bridge of Friendship: also known as Danube Bridge. That is the main road from Bulgaria over the Danube in the area of Ruse – Giurgiu. It was opened on 20th June 1954. The author of the project is architect Andreev. The bridge was built in two years – from 1952 to 1954 with the help of USSR experts. Its length is 2.8 km and its height – 300 meters above the water. It was built in two levels – for trains and for cars. Its middle part can be lifted so that ships may pass along the Danube. In this area the river is 1 km wide and its depth reaches 10 meters.

[36] Bet Am: The Jewish center in Sofia today, housing all Jewish organizations.

[37] Plants construction with the help of the USSR: Devnya is a town in Northeast Bulgaria near Varna and Beloslav Lake. It has a population of 12 000 people. Due to its proximity to the Black Sea and the port of Varna-west and due to its natural resources, the town was turned into an industrial center. In 1954 it had the status of a national site. Soviet experts helped start the construction of a plant for the production of light and heavy soda, nitric acid and ammonia. The strategic location of the town led to the construction of other sites of national importance – a cement plant, a sugar plant and a polymer plant. During socialism the industrial sites in the town provided jobs for a lot of experts in the chemical industry.

[38] Military plants in Sopot, Kazanlak and Karlovo: They are also known as Vazov Machine Construction Plants, whose production is in the sphere of explosives. They are located in the small towns of the Bulgarian rose. Due to the participation of Bulgaria in the Warsaw Treaty those towns became sites for plants of the military industrial complex of the Bulgarian army. The headquarters of one of Bulgaria's divisions is also in Karlovo.

[39] Bulgarian political emigrants: Bulgarian Political Emigration in 1947: those are the processes, which started after the adoption of the Dimitrov constitution in 1946 when the Bulgarian opposition was persecuted. The Soviet model of governance is gradually adopted in Bulgaria and the Communist Party takes up the leadership of the nation. Trials start against the leaders of the opposition – Nikola Petkov (Bulgarian Agricultural People's Union) is declared to be an American agent and killed in the end of 1947, and so was Krastyo Pastuhov (Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party). Other opposition leaders were also persecuted. A major part of the opposition members were forced to leave the country illegally. Among them was also the agricultural leader G.M.Dimitrov. One of the last trials condemning the people, who thought differently, was against one of the leaders of the Communist Party itself – Traicho Kostov, which took place in 1949.

[40] 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.

[41] Six-Day-War: The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

[42] Yom Kippur War: The Arab-Israeli War of 1973, also known as the Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War, was a war between Israel on one side and Egypt and Syria on the other side. It was the fourth major military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states. The war lasted for three weeks: it started on 6th October 1973 and ended on 22nd October on the Syrian front and on 26th October on the Egyptian front.

[43] Academician Angel Balevsky (1910-1997): a distinguished and internationally known Bulgarian scientist and public figure. He was one of the creators of the Bulgarian higher technical education, establishing and developing together with his collaborators the metal science and technology of metals in Bulgaria. One of the greatest achievements in that field is the worked out by Academician Angel Balevsky and Corresponding member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS) Ivan Dimov 'Gas counter pressure casting method', which is a scientific and technological novelty worldwide in the production of light alloy castings of high accuracy and high mechanical and technological characteristics. Academician Angel Balevsky was co-founder (together with Correspondent member Ivan Dimov) of the Institute of Metal Science (1967), which is now bearing his name. He was also Rector of the Machine Electro-Technical Institute (now Technical University) in Sofia and long Chairman of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, as well as member of a number of international scientific and humanitarian organizations.