

# Parking on the Sidewalk... Walking in the Street

Saturday, February 1, 2020

## Holocaust Remembrance and Bulgaria

Last Tuesday we were invited to a Holocaust Remembrance Event here in Sofia, in honor of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. It was an opportunity to be reminded of the horrors of genocide against not only the Jews, but also Roma (gypsies), handicapped and others - including Christians who stood up for or protected Jews.



In March, 1941 Bulgaria gave in to Axis demands to form an alliance with them. While initially agreeing to deport all Bulgarian Jews to German control, Bulgaria did not carry through. There were a number of restrictions placed on Jews in Bulgaria and most of the non-Bulgarian Jews in areas under Bulgarian control (but not Bulgaria proper) were deported. There were public demonstrations and Parliamentary disagreement against following along with the Nazis.

But Bulgaria was in a tough place considering its geographic location. The laws on deporting Jews were protested, not only by the Bulgarian Jewish community and intellectuals, but by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and its leader, Metropolitan Stefan I. Deportations were entirely cancelled in May 1943. The Bulgarian government tried to arrange transport for Bulgarian Jews to Palestine on British vessels in the Black Sea. However, these efforts were rebuffed by Britain. Around 20,000 Jews were expelled from Sofia to the provinces where they were used in forced labor, while the Bulgarian government used labor shortage as the reason to refuse deportation.

Hitler was angry with Bulgaria and their king, Tsar Boris III, due to their unwillingness to declare war on the Soviet Union and not deporting the Jews to death camps in Poland and Germany. Several days after his return from meeting with Hitler in August, 1943, Tsar Boris III died of apparent heart failure at age 49. His German doctors believed he had been poisoned with a slow acting poison.

Bulgaria was officially thanked by the government of Israel but this was kept quiet until Bulgarian independence in 1989 because the credit belonged to the royal Bulgarian government, the King of Bulgaria and the Church (all considered enemies of Communism) in response to calls from the Bulgarian people to defend their Jewish neighbors.

***Of the 48,000 Jews in Bulgaria, none was deported or murdered by the Nazis.***

Peace, Kathy