**INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC CONFERENCE**

EAST EUROPEAN AND SOVIET JEWS DURING

WORLD WAR II AND THE COLD WAR (1939-1989)

Sofia University, 2-4 November 2012

Co-organized by the Dialogue Europe Center of Excellence at Sofia University, the Strochlitz Institute for Holocaust Research at the University of Haifa, the Cold War Studies Program and Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University, the Shalom Organization (an association for Bulgarian Jews), and Emuni, Porto Roz (Slovenia).

In partnership with the Bulgarian Commission on Dossiers, the U.S. Embassy in Sofia, the Israeli Embassy in Sofia, and other organizations.

Next year, 2013, marks the 70th anniversary of a remarkable event with an European significance - the rescue of most of Bulgaria’s Jews from the Holocaust. In March 1943, in accordance with the pact signed with Nazi Germany, the Bulgarian authorities in the parts of Thrace and Macedonia occupied by Bulgarian troops at the start of the war deported some 12,000 Jews from those territories to Nazi death camps, where nearly all of them were annihilated. The same fate was about to befall the 50,000 Jews in Bulgaria itself. Starting in March 1941 the Bulgarian government (which had aligned itself with Nazi Germany and the Axis Powers) had subjected Jews to vicious discrimination, and in March 1943 the Bulgarian authorities began preparing for the mass deportation of Bulgarian Jews to Treblinka, where they would have faced certain death. But thanks to resistance put up by a significant number of Bulgarians, including intellectuals and a courageous group of Bulgarian parliamentarians led by Dimitar Peshev, as well as pleas from Bulgarian Orthodox clergy, the pro-Nazi Bulgarian government halted its plans to deport Bulgarian Jews to the death camps. The shifting tide of the war against Germany conclusively settled the matter.

This conference is designed to commemorate the rescue of Bulgaria’s Jews, but it also is intended to provide a broader assessment of the fate of the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union during World War II and the Cold War, including the role of Jews in political life.

The conference will include panels on six broad topics:

1. The Holocaust and East European and Soviet Jews

2. Jews in the East European Communist Parties and State Security Organs

3. The Stalinist Anti-Semitic Campaigns and the East European Show Trials

4. Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe and the USSR in the Post-Stalin Era

5. Emigration of East European and Soviet Jews to Israel and the USA

6. The Arab-Israeli Conflict, the Soviet Bloc, and East European and Soviet Jews.

Among the questions to be explored are: How did the Holocaust shape public and official attitudes toward the Jewish communities in the respective countries? What were the legal, economic, social, and psychological circumstances of the European Jews regarded as “displaced persons” – especially in the occupied zones in Germany, Austria, and some other Central European countries? How did the start of the Cold War affect Jews in areas under Soviet occupation? How did the newly emerging Communist regimes and state security organs in Eastern Europe regard the surviving communities of Jews under their control? How did the formation of the state of Israel in May 1948 affect the Cold War, and vice versa? Did Stalin’s shift to murderous anti-Semitism in the final years of his life hold out an ominous fate for Soviet Jews? What role did anti-Semitism play in the East European show trials of the late 1940s and early 1950s? How did the Arab-Israeli conflict affect the Soviet-bloc countries and the Jews living there?

Presentations at the conference will look at specific countries as well as the region overall. The organizers plan to prepare in advance a volume of declassified State Security and Communist Party documents pertaining to Bulgarian Jews in the Cold War years. Presentations at the conference will be based on preliminary drafts or notes, and then after the conference the participants will submit full papers, which will be considered for possible publication in a volume in Harvard’s Cold War Studies Book Series.

For additional information, please contact Kostadin Grozev of Sofia University by phone at 359 (country code) 887-438317 or by email at kgrozev@gmail.com.