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Bulgaria accepts blame for 11,000 Holocaust deaths

By [Yossi Melman](#)

Bulgaria accepts responsibility for the genocide of more than 11,000 Jews in its jurisdiction during World War II, President Georgi Parvanov said during a visit to Israel this week.

The 11,000 Jewish victims were residents of Thrace in Greece and Macedonia in Yugoslavia, areas annexed to Bulgaria in April 1941. Nazi Germany awarded these regions to the Balkan kingdom in gratitude for its cooperation.

Bulgarian police acting under Nazi orders arrested the Jews in the annexed territories and deported them to Treblinka in 1943. In parallel, Bulgarian church and political leaders saved the 48,000 Jews living in Bulgaria proper, whom the Nazis had also demanded be deported to death camps.

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King Boris III agreed to the Nazi demands but bowed to pressure from public figures and did not carry them out. The deaths of the Thrace and Macedonian Jews were played down over the years while the rescue of the Bulgarian Jewish population was emphasized.

After the fall of the Communist regime in the 1990s, Bulgarian leaders who visited Israel refused to take responsibility for the deeds. Parvanov, a member of the socialist (formerly communist) party, is the first to do so.

"When we express justifiable pride at what we have done to save Jews, we do not forget that at the same time there was an anti-Semitic regime in Bulgaria and we do not shirk our responsibility for the fate of more than 11,000 Jews who were deported from Thrace and Macedonia to death camps," he said at a ceremony at the President's Residence in Jerusalem on Tuesday.

Israeli President Shimon Peres also emphasized the historical dichotomy in Bulgaria during World War II. A monument to King Boris was removed from a Jerusalem Hills forest in 2000 after protests by a group of Macedonian descendants.

Dr. Nissim Yusha said yesterday that the Bulgarian president's comments are "a great achievement and step forward." But he added that the advocacy group

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