



Център за
Еврейско-българско
Сътрудничество

Activity report 2015

Jewish-Bulgarian cooperation center “Alef”

About “Alef”

Jewish – Bulgarian cooperation center “Alef” is founded in Burgas. The association carries the name of the first letter of the Jewish alphabet.

Center “Alef” is legal fact since March 2014. Among its founders are Jews and Bulgarians with proven public activity and sympathy towards preservation and development of the Jewish-Bulgarian relations.

The center is non-governmental organization, which aims at creating initiatives that provide good examples of integration between Bulgarians and Jews. It is nonpartisan, voluntary, democratic and autonomous public organization that operates according to adopted Statutes and under the active legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Its headquarters and registered office is situated in Burgas, 4 Baba Ganka sq.

Mission:

1. Creating initiatives that provide good examples of integration between Bulgarians and Jews;
2. Researching and promoting the deep cultural and historical ties between Bulgarians and Jews throughout history;
3. Developing cultural, social and economic ties with Jewish and Israeli institutions, companies and individuals;
4. Promoting the unique act of rescuing 50,000 Bulgarian Jews during World War II and giving due respect and gratitude to those Bulgarians who contributed to it;
5. Proving that Jews are people with ancient traditions and morality, having deep roots in Bulgarian society without losing their identity;
6. Actively working to promote trust and to enhance cooperation between Jewish and Bulgarian people, their countries and their diaspora;

7. Countering any form of fascism, xenophobia, totalitarianism anti-democracy, terrorism, racism, anti-Semitism and all other inhuman and condemned by human civilization ideologies and practices that constitute crimes against humanity;
8. Strengthening relations with other ethnic communities in the spirit of generally accepted human values – respect, understanding and tolerance;
9. Informing about and promoting individual and socially-significant contributions of Jews to science and to the economic, educational and cultural life of the Bulgarian society;
10. Preserving, promoting and developing Jewish and Bulgarian ethnic, linguistic and cultural values and traditions;
11. Creating connections and communication between Jewish and Bulgarian organizations and communities to carry out joint projects in all sectors of social, economic and cultural life;
12. Promoting better communication between official institutions and political and administrative entities of the States of Israel and Bulgaria;

Management:

Alberta Alkalay, Chairperson





Activities:

[Literary contest](#)

In the beginning of December 2015 [Center "Alef" announced the start of the third literary school contest](#) "Whoever saves one life, saves the entire universe". The topic was: "The art is a stage, which blurs all differences or the contribution of the Bulgarian Jews in the country's culture".

The aim of "Alef" was to draw the attention of the young people towards the artists, who through their art unite people, do not separate them. To this cause a lot of Bulgarian artists of Jewish origin have dedicated their talent since in the darkest times the art saves and uplifts. The Center wanted to show the inextricable link between Jewish artists and Bulgarian art and the fact that their unique worldview enriched the Bulgarian culture and presented it to the world stage.

90 high-school students from the whole country sent their essays. Young people got acquainted with artists of Jewish origin, left their mark in the Bulgarian culture. Through the unique virtual library the students had the chance to get in touch with their messages and to receive inspiration. In their literary works we meet artists, writers, musicians, filmmakers and actors of cinema and theater, who occupied a worthy place in the annals of the Bulgarian and world culture.

[Prominent cultural figures awarded the winners at a ceremony on May 12, 2016.](#)

First prize was awarded to Detelina Staneva from National school of arts "Panaiot Pipkov", Pleven. Second awards took Teodora Doncheva from Commerce High School, Burgas and Gergana Ivanova from High School for foreign language "Hristo Botev", Razgrad. The two third places took Maria Magdalena Stoyanova High school for Roman languages "G. S. Rakovski", Burgas and Victoria Dimova, Tervel. For their excellent performance another 17 young artists received special incentive awards.



Virtual library

To facilitate the participants in the preparation of their essays, the Centre enriched the bibliographic fund of the virtual library on the site <http://alef-bg.org> with details of significant artists of Jewish origin, left an indelible mark in the the Bulgarian national culture and history.

Young people got acquainted with the most famous Bulgarian artists of Jewish origin in literature, music, art, theater and cinema: Valeri Petrov, Elias Canetti, Dora Gabe, Angel Vagenstein, Maurice Yomtov, Pancho Vladigerov, Peter Stupel, Jules Pascin, Greddy Assa, David Peretz, Leon Daniel, Grisha Ostrovki, Itzhak Finzi and others.

The unique virtual library collected fragments, reproductions, video and audio materials, curricula vitae, publication of parts of famous poems, stories, pictures, sound and video files of emblematic works of the artists.



It is not only available to participants in the competition, but also to anyone who would have interest in the topic.

Short documentaries:

Center “Alef” created three short video films, which present prominent artists - Bulgarian Jews. Each film pays tribute to artists, actors, directors, writers, musicians of Jewish origin, who made Bulgaria visible in the world culture. The films were screened during the awards ceremony of the literary contest in 2016 and are available on the website of “Alef”

[Artists Jews in the Bulgarian art](#)

[Jews in the Bulgarian literature](#)

[Jews in the Bulgarian music](#)

Reconstruction of the Medieval Jewish necropolis near

In the beginning of 2015 Center “Alef” was addressed by [The ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative](#), financed by the German foreign ministry with a request for cooperation for reconstruction of the Medieval Jewish necropolis near Karnobat.

The organization made a commitment to provide funding for delineation of its borders, building a fence with access opportunities, development and the signposting and subsequent security guards of the cultural heritage. It has already restored and maintains over 30 Jewish cemeteries in Ukraine, Poland, Czech Republic and other European countries. The necropolis near Karnobat is the first project in Bulgaria, which provoked its attention.

The future construction works were discussed on a meeting between the mayor of Municipality of Karnobat – Georgi Dimitrov, Philip Carmel - Chief Executive Officer of ESJF and representatives of “Alef” in April 2015.



Placing a memorial plaque for the saviors of the Jews from Burgas

In 2015 Center “Alef” initiated a campaign to place a memorial plaque for the saviors of the Jews from Burgas. The idea received a broad public support.

The idea emerged during the initiatives for the 70th anniversary of the rescue of the Jews in Bulgaria. This historical fact at national level is well known, less known are the names of the people from Burgas, who with their brave behavior opposed the deportation of their fellow citizens – Jews.

Center “Alef” considers it its duty to save their names from oblivion. The plaque will be placed in the city center as a sign of gratitude to all decent citizens of Burgas, it must remain for the generations as a symbol of tolerance and humanism.

In 2016 the procedure for placing the plaque was finalized and until the end of the year it will be placed.



Screening “Let`s remember”

In March 2015 the documentary “Let`s remember” [was broadcasted on the national TV SKAT](#) on the occasion of 72 years from the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews from the death camps. Spectators from around the country had the chance to become partakers in the events that lead to the rescue of the Jews from Burgas.

In 2016 the film was broadcasted on the regional Burgas TV Channel 0.

“Let`s remember” moved the Rotarians from club “Primorie” Burgas

Rotarians from Bourgas club "Primorie" watched in great interest the exciting documentary "Let`s remember". The story about the fate of Bulgarian Jews during the World War II was screened at the invitation of Sabetay Varsanov - one of the founders and honorary member of the club and chairman of the Regional organization of the Jews “Shalom” in Burgas. This was the second screening of

the film for local Rotarians. In late November last year the author of the film Alberta Alkalay presented it to the Rotary Club "Pyrgos".

The film raised a lot of questions, which proved interest in the topic. Rotarians wanted to learn more about the birth of the Jewish community in the city. Sabetay Versanov talked about the construction of the synagogue in 1909 and the unique fact that Bulgaria is the only country in the world where before the start of World War II there were fewer Jews than after its end.

Occasions

On the day of the salvation of the Bulgarian Jews from the death camps – March 10th – in [13 high schools in Burgas was screened the film “Let`s remember”](#).

The documentary provoked a great interest among the students in the Commercial High School and understandably arouse in them questions about the shown events and people. Answers they received from the author of the film – Alberta Alkalay, who attended the screening. She told not only about the creation of the film, but also why the rescue of Bulgarian Jews is a unique occasion and act of collective pride.

She pointed out that representatives of some prominent Jewish families in Burgas studied precisely in the Commercial High School and the relations between the students there in the harsh years of the Holocaust have been a benchmark for humanity.



For Bulgaria March 10th is a memorable date because in 1943 on this day was cancelled the decision for the deportation of the Jews to the death camps. On this day every year with commemorative ceremonies the country honors the memory of the victims of the Holocaust and expresses its gratitude to the brave Bulgarians only in Europe who dared to resist Hitler's war machine. But for the first time this appreciation goes out of the official ceremonies and goes to the very young to show them that just causes can unite and defeat and the worst evil.

Tribute to the memory of the victims in the attack near Burgas

On July 20th on a memorial ceremony for the victims of the attack in 2012 was held in the Burgas airport. Three years from the terrorist act were turned on Saturday but the anniversary coincided with the holy Jewish Sabbath, so the ceremony was held three days later.

In the attack on July 18, 2012 were killed five Israelis and one Bulgarian and 35 people were injured.

On behalf of "Shalom" Bulgaria tribute to the memory of those who died expressed Alberta Alkalay, chairperson of the Jewish -Bulgarian cooperation center "Alef".

