The Diary of Bogdan Filov

[This is the second year of extracts from the diary of Bogdan Filov published in Southeastern Europe. Previous issues contained extracts from 1941. Filov was Prime Minister of Bulgaria from 1940 to 1943 and a member of the regency council from September, 1943, to September 9, 1944. These extracts by the editor are taken from two Bulgarian newspapers, Naroden Sud and Otechestven Front, which published them in 1945.]

For the year 1942 Naroden Sud has the more complete set of extracts, and those from Otechestven Front do not add to the former. There are some typographical and editing errors of a minor nature which differ in the two copies, but apparently both newspapers received the extracts from the same source, presumably the Ministry of Justice. The 1942 portion is extremely scanty on a number of intriguing questions, particularly the administration of Macedonia and Thrace and the ensuing problems with Italy in the former region. There is also nothing of the Zaimov case or the Vidin flood (of February) in the available extracts and only one brief, uninformative remark about the perilous situation of the Jews (entry for October 26). The two major issues covered are the cabinet change of April and the difficulties involving the Soviet embassy in the fall.

In 1942, with the Third Reich still on the offensive for most of the year, the Kingdom of Bulgaria found itself more and more under the influence of Germany. Indeed, the pressure of the alliance with Germany was clearly evident in several ways. During 1942 the kingdom enacted major legislation against the Jews in the country, threatening them with deportation to the extermination centers in Poland. Restrictive legislation similar to the Nurnberg laws had been enacted in January, 1941. In 1942, after the Nazis had worked out the grisly details of the Final Solution, Berlin enjoined Sofia to pass a much more rigorous law against the Jews, which included the establishment of a Commissariat for Jewish Questions, whose main task was the preparation for the deportation of the Jews in Bulgaria, Thrace, and Macedonia to the death camps in Poland. In the fall of the year a representative of Adolf Eichmann, Chief of the SS section for Jews, came to Sofia to help work out the details.

Another effect of the Axis alliance was the change in Bulgaria's cabinet in April. While Boris' dissatisfaction with governmental stagnation played a role, Filov leaves no doubt that Berlin also was influential in bringing the government crisis about (January 29). Although six of the ten ministers were changed, the initiative of the revision, which Filov mentions as early as January, appears to have been directed at Popov (foreign affairs) and Daskalov (war), both of whom had expressed anti-German sentiments in 1941. Before the old cabinet stepped down, however, a crisis in the Subranie (national assembly) revealed other shortcomings (March 5 and 10).

Bulgaria's twenty-fifth Subranie was decidedly controlled by the government, and the
members of the opposition could do little more than use its tribune to air their grievances. One of the few times that a government minister had difficulty with the assembly was on March 4, 1942. Minister of Agriculture Dimitur Kushev introduced a bill attempting to limit Bulgaria’s goat population to protect mountain resources, the representatives bombarded the bill with such a storm of protest that the minister withdrew it. The king himself through his most important advisor, Iordan Sevov, suggested Kushev’s removal. Filov also makes allusions to his distrust of Kushev and the latter’s relations with the Bulgarian Agrarian and Cooperative Bank, which was part of his ministry (March 5). Filov’s distrust stemmed from the influence of the Bulgarian National Agrarian Union in the agricultural ministry and in the executive circles of the bank.

About the same time Vasili Mitakov, the minister of justice, was criticized in the chamber because of procedural irregularities in a different matter. Later on in the month Filov had more difficulties with the Sùbranie when he forced the resignation of two members apparently involved in some sort of corruption (March 26).

Furthermore, just before the cabinet change a Communist conspiracy was uncovered in the Sofia garrison and some other units in the country. Filov and the king blamed Daskalov for this (April 5 and 8). The conspiracy was compounded by the revelation at about the same time of an espionage ring operating on behalf of the Soviet Union involving a number of military men including retired General Vladimir S. Zaimov.

The cabinet change provided a convenient way for Boris and Filov to settle their domestic turbulences as well as to fulfill obligations demanded by Berlin. In June, 1942, Boris and Filov finally replaced Pùrvan Draganov, ambassador to Berlin, a move they had wanted to make since the previous year. The departing minister of trade, Slavcho Zagorov, replaced him.

Despite the kingdom’s obeisance to Germany on the matters concerning the Jews and the government changes, King Boris and Filov still feared that Berlin might decide to install a right-wing extremist cabinet in Sofia. In his diary the prime minister notes several times mistrust of groups on the right (January 18, February 25, March 21, September 1, etc.). Within the cabinet suspicion was directed toward Petur Gabrovski (internal affairs), whom most observers regarded as the most pro-Nazi of the ministers and who had had connections with right-wing extremists in the past. King Boris seemed to think that these continued (March 21). In point of fact, the Bulgarian right regarded Gabrovski as a renegade, and his influence among them was not so great as the king feared. The main danger in 1942, according to indications in the diary, came from the Legionaires, a pro-Nazi military organization with such respected retired officers as General Khristo Lukov, former minister of war, and General Nikola Zhkov, commander-in-chief during World War I, in its leadership. Both the king and the prime minister feared a German attempt to place the Legionaires in power if the present government stepped out of line.

Barely alluded to in the diary is Bulgaria’s conflict in 1942 with her Axis allies regarding administration in the portions of Greece and Yugoslavia she received for her participation in the war in the Balkans (April 3, April 25, and August 15). One aspect of this confrontation was Sofia’s attempt to expel Greeks from Thrace and Macedonia into German-held Greece, which is not mentioned at all. The other more serious confrontation was the conflict between Italy and Bulgaria over the Albanian-Macedonian border. Both of these issues are revealed in the German foreign office records, the latter being the major issue of correspondence between the German embassy in Sofia and the Wilhelm-