

# David Wainshelboim

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Kishinev

Moldova

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

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*David Wainshelboim requested that we meet and conduct this interview on the day of my arrival at Kishinev. He was sort of in a hurry to tell me the story of his family to pay tribute to his loved ones who perished during the Holocaust. David lives in a small one-bedroom apartment in a five-storied Khrushchovka [1](#) apartment building. There are books, notes and pads scattered all around his apartment. He was not happy with questions regarding his personal life and he didn't even tell me his wife's name due to his failing memory. However, we parted as friends. David called me at my hotel every day asking about my progress.*

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## My family background

My paternal great-grandfather, Avrum Wainshelboim, moved to Bessarabia [2](#) from some place in Russia in the early 19th century, escaping from recruitment to the tsarist army: young people were regimented for the 25-year army service at the time. Knowing about the liberal attitude towards Jews in Bessarabia, my great-grandfather Avrum moved to Kishinev [Chisinau in Moldovan]. He became a melamed, teaching Jewish children. I can't remember the date of his death. His grave is still there in the old Jewish cemetery. All I know is that my great-grandfather was married twice: he had a son, Iosif, from his first marriage. He died in the early 1950s. In the 1870s my grandfather, Mehl Wainshelboim, was born from my great-grandfather's second wife.

My grandfather may have finished a commercial school. He was an educated man. He worked as an accountant in a private company during the tsarist regime before 1918 and during the Romanian regimes [3](#) after World War I. Grandmother Bobtsia - I don't know her maiden name - came from a rabbi's family. She was a housewife, which was common among Jewish women. My grandmother and grandfather rented a small apartment of two rooms and a kitchen. The apartment was always clean and festive, however modestly furnished. On Friday, when their children and their families joined them for celebrations [of Sabbath], there was always a crispy

tablecloth on the table, fancy crockery, wine glasses, red kosher wine, mouth watering challah that my grandmother baked in the big stove in the kitchen, and silver candle stands. My grandmother Bobtsia lit candles before Sabbath.

Grandfather Mehl was a religious Jew; he had his own seat in the synagogue. I don't know which synagogue this was. There were over 60 synagogues in Kishinev and they belonged to [were maintained by] the craftsmen guilds. There was also a choral synagogue headed by Rabbi Zirelson, a well-respected man in Kishinev. He was a senator of the Romanian parliament. [Zirelson, Yehuda Leib (1860-1941): rabbi, member of the municipal council of Kishinev and its delegate to meetings with government authorities. He yearned for a Jewish state based on Torah principles. He was killed in a bomb attack on Kishinev.] Grandfather Mehl died in 1934, and Zirelson recited a prayer at his funeral. Grandmother Bobtsia lived through the war, evacuation, returned to Kishinev and died in the 1950s.

My grandfather was an educated man and wanted to give his children a good education. My father was the oldest, and the next one was Gershko [affectionate for Gersh], born around 1900. After finishing a gymnasium he went to Italy where he finished the Medical Faculty, unfortunately, I don't know in which town he studied or which college he graduated from. When he returned to Bessarabia, he became a doctor and worked in a small town. Gershko was married. His wife Riva was my mother's sister. Ruya, Riva and Gershko's daughter, moved to Israel in the 1980s. I correspond with her. Gershko died in evacuation in Kyrgyzstan, and Riva died in Kishinev shortly after the Great Patriotic War [4](#).

The life of the two sisters, Fania and Basia, born after Gershko in the early 1900s, was tragic. Fania married Weinstein, a Zionist activist [5](#). In 1940, shortly after the establishment of the Soviet power [6](#), Weinstein was arrested in the street and exiled like many other Zionist activists. Shortly afterward he died from tuberculosis in a camp of the Gulag [7](#) in Irkutsk region [today Russia]. Fania's older son, Yakov Weinstein, served in the army during the Great Patriotic War. After the war he became a veterinary. He lived with his family in Lugansk in Ukraine. He died a few years ago. Fania and her younger daughter Lilia were killed by the Fascists in the Northern Caucasus where they had evacuated from Kishinev during the Great Patriotic War in 1941.

Basia was married to Matus Bobis, a Jewish man. He was also involved in Zionist activities. During the Soviet period he worked as a proofreader in a newspaper. He missed a mistake in his newspaper and, being scared of many arrests [8](#) happening all around, threw himself under a train. Basia and Minna, their little daughter, evacuated to the Northern Caucasus together with Fania, where they perished when the Fascists came there.

My father's brother Genia worked with my father in the Jewish medical organization. He did some technical job. Genia married Sarrah, a Jewish girl, shortly before the Great Patriotic War. I was at his wedding. Genia and Sarrah stood under the chuppah since their parents insisted on it. He wasn't a really religious man. During the war Genia, his wife and Grandmother Bobtsia were in evacuation somewhere in Central Asia. After the war they returned to Kishinev. He had no children. In the middle of the 1970s he and his wife moved to Israel where he died in the 1990s.

Hona, born in 1910, was the youngest in the family. Influenced by the Zionist idea of the establishment of a Jewish state, Hona quit Iasi University [Iasi University named after A. Kuza, Romania, was founded in 1860. Iasi University was an important educational center. Its scientific

and educational achievements were highly valued and acknowledged in Romania], where she studied at the Medical Faculty, and moved to Palestine in 1929. I remember her farewell party at my grandfather's home, when the whole family got together to say 'good bye' to Hona. In Palestine she married Rabinovich, a Jewish man. They were involved in the construction of the first kibbutzim. Hona knew Golda Meir [9](#). They were friends. Hona visited Kishinev in the 1950s. She told us about Israel and tried to convince us to move there. This was the last time I saw her. I know that she died a long time ago. Her children and grandchildren live in Israel.

My father, Moisey Wainshelboim, was born in 1895. He finished a cheder, a Jewish gymnasium [lyceum] and then grandfather Mehl sent him to Saint Petersburg where my father entered the Psycho-neurological College named after Behterev [Institute of positive psychotherapy, trans-cultural therapy and psychosomatic medicine named after Behterev, Vladimir Mihailovich (1857-1927), Russian neurologist and psychiatrist]. After three years of study he returned to Kishinev in 1916 due to the aggravated political situation. My father didn't study for a few years during the Civil War [10](#). Upon the annexation of Bessarabia to Romania he resumed his studies at the Medical Faculty of Iasi University. He graduated from it in 1924. Around this time he met my mother and they got married.

My maternal grandfather, Avrum Selewski, born in Kishinev in the 1860s, was involved in trade when he was young. When he married my grandmother Sarrah, he became a supervisor at the mill. The mill belonged to a wealthy Jewish man. Avrum's family lived in a small house by the mill. My grandfather was short, wore a kippah or a yarmulka, had a beard and mustache, but despite his plain appearance, my grandfather was known for his intelligence and prudence. My grandfather was very religious. He went to the synagogue on Friday, Saturday and on holidays. On weekdays he prayed at home with his tallit and tefillin on. Grandfather Avrum died in 1930. My grandmother Sarrah, a quiet and kind woman always wearing a dark dress, a snow-white apron and a matching kerchief, moved in with us. She lived with us till the Great Patriotic War.

The oldest in the family was my mother's sister Tania, born in 1888. All I remember about her is that she was married and worked in trade. Aunt Tania and her son Mikhail failed to evacuate in 1941. They perished in the ghetto in Kishinev [11](#), and her husband perished at the front.

The next of the children was my mother's brother Rafail, born in the 1890s. In 1918, after Bessarabia was annexed to Romania he happened to live in the Soviet Union. He finished the Dnepropetrovsk Mining College, worked at a mine and later lectured in Moscow Mining College and was a dean. During the Great Patriotic War Rafail served in the Territorial Army [People's volunteer corps during World War II; its soldiers patrolled towns, dug trenches and kept an eye on buildings during night bombing raids], escaped from captivity near Dnepropetrovsk [Ukraine, 420 km from Kiev] and returned to Moscow. He died in the mid-1950s. His wife Polia followed him soon. Their daughters Vera and Victoria live in Moscow.

My mother's sister Riva, born in the early 1900s, married my father's brother Gersh. She worked as a medical nurse. I dimly remember Tsyliya, my other aunt. She lived in Galas in Romania before the Soviet power was established. In 1940 she moved to Kishinev with her family. They died during the Fascist occupation. My mother's youngest brother, Lev Selewski, born in 1910, died in a car accident, when he was young.

My mother, Nena Selewskaya, was born in 1900. After finishing a gymnasium she went to Kharkov [today Ukraine] where she entered the Medical College. In 1918 she had to quit the college since Kharkov and Kishinev happened to belong to different states. Mama stayed in Kishinev. She met my father in 1920. Actually, my grandfathers Avrum and Mehl, who went to the synagogue together, arranged for their children to get married. My parents got married in 1922. They had a traditional Jewish wedding, but all I know is that they stood under the chuppah in the central synagogue in Kishinev. Zirelson, the rabbi of Kishinev, conducted their wedding ceremony. I still have this certificate of my parents' wedding.

## **Growing up**

After the wedding my father rented an apartment on Harlampiyevskaya Street [during the Soviet period (1940-1990) Lieutenant Schmidt Street, renamed to previous name of Harlampiyevskaya Street]. Our family lived in it for several years. In 1923 my older sister Rahil was born, and in 1928 I, David Wainshelboim, came into this world. Some time later our family moved to a bigger apartment on Alexandrovskaya Street [Lenina Street during the Soviet period, present Shtephan cel Mare Street], where I started walking, talking and studying the surrounding world.

There were four rooms in the apartment: a living room, my parents' bedroom, the children's rooms and my grandmother Sarrah's room. The rooms were nicely furnished with dark polished furniture; there were velvet drapes on the windows, and a fringed tablecloth on the table. I liked playing hide-and-seek behind it. I had a wonderful childhood. My mother, father and grandmother loved me dearly. My family mostly spoke Yiddish at home. My grandmother observed Jewish traditions and taught my sister to know them. I remember Sabbath: my grandmother lit candles in a high silver candle-stand saying her blessings. There was challah, wine, chicken, tsimes [fruit-and-vegetable stew typically prepared for Sabbath], cookies on the table, covered with a starched tablecloth. On Saturday no work was done at home. There was a holiday dinner: gefilte fish [filled fish balls in sauce], chicken broth, potato pancakes, and stew with prunes. It was kept in the stove since Friday. My father and mother went to the synagogue on Saturday, though they belonged to a more democratic generation of Jewish intelligentsia. The synagogue was most likely the place where they could feel themselves Jewish, socialize with their friends and discuss the latest news with them.

On Yom Kippur my parents and grandmother fasted and I enjoyed stealing food from the cupboard, though nobody forbade me to eat [Editor's note: children under the age of nine don't fast, then they start fasting little by little. Boys start to fast as long as adults do by the age of thirteen, girls from twelve], and I couldn't wait till the delicious dinner after the fasting. I remember a number of fall holidays followed by Simchat Torah. I went to the synagogue with my parents and saw old Jews carrying a scroll of the Torah in the street. On holidays we usually visited Grandfather Mehl. This was a traditional family gathering.

I remember Pesach, when my grandfather reclined on fancy cushions conducting seder [as the first Kiddush at seder has to be recited by reclining on something soft, some use cushions for making this position more comfortable]. I asked him about the history of the holiday. At home we also prepared for Pesach: cleaned the house thoroughly and removed the remaining bread crumbs [mitzvah of biur chametz]. I remember the koshering of crockery, when the stones burning hot were placed in a tub and then the crockery was placed there. Children got new clothes for the holiday and Mama got a new dress. The feeling of the holiday arrived, when a huge basket with

matzah covered with fresh napkins was delivered from the synagogue. The smell of matzah spread all over the house. After the first seder at my grandfather's Mama also made holiday dinners on the following days.

I remember Purim. I liked the whipping top and on Chanukkah I liked the gifts and money that children were given. In my boyhood I took part in the carnival procession on Purim.

Grandfather Mehl died in 1934. I was too young to go to his funeral. Jewish children whose parents are living don't commonly attend their relatives' funerals. I know that my grandfather was buried in accordance with Jewish traditions. Rabbi Zirelson recited a prayer at his funeral.

Kishinev was a rather big town, when I was a child. It had a Moldovan, Russian, Jewish, Greek, Armenian, Bulgarian, Polish population. We lived in the Jewish area in the central part of the town. Jews were involved in crafts and trades. There were also Jewish doctors and lawyers. According to some data Jews constituted about 80,000 before the Great Patriotic War [Editor's note: In 1930 the 41,405 Jews living in Kishinev constituted over 36 percent of the total population numbering 114,896. Under Soviet rule, from July 1940 to July 1941, the number of Jews in the city increased to an estimated 60,000.]. There were up to 65 synagogues and prayer houses in the town. Besides religious establishments there were Jewish schools for boys and girls, children's homes for orphan children and children from poor families, elderly people's homes, a Jewish hospital and a developed charity network. Young Jewish people were fond of Zionist ideas.

Though we observed traditions and celebrated holidays, my father gave the priority to science and education. My father belonged to the progressive Jewish intelligentsia. He worked in the Jewish Health Organization, this organization was financed by the Joint [12](#). My father worked as a children's doctor [pediatrician] there. I remember staying in his office at times. His visitors were children and their mothers. His work was much needed and so was the organization supporting poor Jewish families and mothers in Bessarabia. Mothers were provided with consultations, baby food and medications for free.

In summer children went to special camps and recreation houses in rural areas. My sister or I didn't go there. My father would have never taken advantage of his position to arrange for his children's recreation. Mama and we rented a room in a village for the summer. My father visited us once a week. He spent all his time at work. Besides his medical practices, he collected statistical data related to death rate among Jewish children in Bessarabia. In 1937 my father was delegated to the Jewish Health Organization congress in Paris where he made a report. I adored my father and could watch him working for hours. When I grew older I often went to his workplace and the Jewish Health Association. It was probably then that I decided to become a doctor.

In the mid-1930s we moved into another apartment provided to my father by the association. It had five or six rooms. Mama and grandmother did the housework. We never had housemaids. It was against Jewish ethical principles to use hired work. Mama spent most of her time with me. We walked in the park on Pushkinskaya Street almost every day. This park is still there. We also visited my mother's brothers and sisters, and on holidays we visited my grandfather. My cousin brothers and sisters were my first friends. I took the surrounding world very seriously since my early childhood. I took no interest in children's games, but I could look through my father's medical books for hours, asking him rather adult questions at times.



I went to a Romanian elementary school at the age of seven. My father knew that to be able to enter a college and deal with science – and this was the only future he could imagine for me – I had to study the state language. I don't remember the elementary school. After finishing it, I passed entrance exams to the Romanian state-owned gymnasium. I received the highest grade in the exam, and the teachers were good to me. There were many Jewish boys at school, and I can't remember a single incidence of prejudiced attitude or anti-Semitism towards any of us. What mattered was the attitude of the boys to their studies, and it was even more important than the grades they received. I had the highest marks and my teachers and fellow students respected me all right.

There were Zionist organizations in the town. There was Maccabi [12](#) for young people, and many students were fond of these ideas. All I cared about was science and I took no interest in politics. I remember posters, announcing the arrival and meeting with Jabotinskiy [13](#). My father, who was fond of Zionist ideas, went to this meeting and then discussed it with Mama, but I took no interest in their discussion. In 1938 Fascism began to spread in the Romanian society: the Cuzist parties [14](#) and legionaries [15](#) were established. On the other hand, young Jewish people united in the underground Komsomol [16](#) and Communist organizations, propagating the Soviet way of life and unification of Bessarabia with the Soviet Union.

I was too young to take any interest in politics. I liked Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry. I wanted to become a doctor like my father, who was ideal in my opinion. Since I turned eleven I often visited my father at work and even helped him, taking samples to the private bacteriological laboratory of Yakir, who was an uncle of the Soviet commander Yakir [17](#). I remember how my father spoke with horror about the arrest and death of Yakir in 1937. This was probably the only act of terror in the Soviet Union that we heard about. We knew little about the horror happening there. We believed the Soviet society was the real fair Communist society.

On 28th June 1940 the Red Army [18](#) came to Kishinev. This was a peaceful change of regimes: Romanians left the town peacefully. A Soviet tank stopped near our house. The tank men were talking to the locals quietly. A [Soviet] Communist held a speech in the center of the town. He said that the Soviet power had been established in Bessarabia and there would be no exploitation and injustice in this area. Many people rejoiced, particularly, the Jewish residents, who had always been attracted by the Communist ideas of equality and fraternity. During the first days it was allowed to move from Bessarabia to Romania or vice versa. People were aware of Fascist atrocities in Germany and their attitude towards Jews. Fascism was growing stronger in Romania and many Jews, even the wealthy families, left their businesses and houses to move to Kishinev that belonged to the Soviet Union. My aunt Tsylia and her family also moved here.

Our life was gradually changing. There were positive and negative changes. About three days after the establishment of the Soviet power, food products and other goods disappeared from the stores. There was no sausage, ham, caviar or chocolate left, and even white bread became a deficit. However, this wasn't the worst thing. Enterprises, stores and shops were subject to nationalization and their owners were arrested and deported. Besides, the NKVD officers [19](#) didn't take into consideration whether an owner used hired labor or made his living on his own. The Jew Zolotaryov, our neighbor, who owned a small store, in which he and members of his family worked, was arrested, for example. He and his family were deported and I never heard from them again.

Active Zionist activists were also arrested and persecuted. To start with, all Zionist organizations were eliminated. The Jewish newspaper 'Neue Tsayt' ['New Time' in Yiddish] was closed. The Jewish Health Organization was also eliminated. Its leaders, who failed to move abroad, were arrested. The rabbi of the Jewish Health Organization was arrested. People said he was the treasurer of this organization and state authorities demanded that he gave all money to the state. Alexandrowski refused and paid for this with his life: he was executed by the NKVD authorities. Many Zionist leaders, writers and journalists, including my uncle Weinstein, were arrested and deported.

My father was also very nervous about the situation, especially, when it came to his organization. He and Mama often whispered among themselves, stopping in our presence. However, my father got a job offer from the Ministry of Health. He became chief of the department of children health care. This was the first official position my father held and he was grateful to the Soviet power for this.

The Romanian gymnasium was closed. My sister Rahil and I went to the Russian general education school: she went to the tenth grade [age 16-17] and I went to the seventh grade [age 13-14]. It was hard for our other schoolmates to adapt to Russian as the language of instruction. It was all right for my sister and me. Our father had studied in Saint Petersburg for three years. He loved Russia, often spoke Russian, read Russian poems and we could understand Russian well. I became a pioneer [20](#) and my sister joined the Komsomol at school.

I remember a meeting in the middle of the academic year, when the director of the school introduced us to some refugees from Romania, mostly Jews, who had escaped from the Antonescu [21](#) regime. These guys spoke at this meeting, telling us about Fascist atrocities against the Jews and other civilians. We were scared hearing this. We sympathized with those children, who had lost friends and relatives and only miraculously managed to survive. When I told my father about it, he noted that we were lucky to be in the Soviet Union. The situation was rather tense. We knew that the war was inevitable.

## **During the war**

We heard from Molotov's [22](#) speech on the radio on 22nd June 1941 that the Great Patriotic War began. We had a radio in our apartment and a few neighbors joined us to listen to the speech. Several days later Kishinev was bombed. My father was waiting for the official evacuation to be arranged by the Ministry of Health, but our departure was delayed. My father hired a wagon, we loaded our luggage on it, whatever we could pack: food, water, warm clothes. My mother, father, grandmother, my sister and I departed. I remember a long line of wagons and people, consisting of civilians and the retreating Soviet forces. We were bombed on the way, and then people scattered around in the fields of sunflower and corn. Only Grandmother Sarrah stayed in the wagon, refusing to leave it. So we walked for about a week till we reached Krivoy Rog [today Ukraine, 370 km from Kiev, 300 km from Kishinev]. My father paid the cabdriver. We stayed a few days at the railway station, waiting for a train to the east till we managed to board an open train loaded with iron ore. This iron ore was to be delivered to a metallurgical plant in Lugansk region. We arrived in the town of Alchevsk [today Ukraine, about 780 km from Kishinev, 680 km from Kiev].

This was July 1941. Alchevsk was in the rear and it seemed that the Fascists were never to reach it. Our family decided to stay there. My father went to the town department of health and was

appointed chief doctor of a hospital. We received a room at the hospital and settled there. There was little space to live, but we didn't fret, having a roof over our heads and also, my father had a job. My sister, who had finished school, went to work as a receptionist at the hospital. I went to the eighth grade of a local school. Soon I became the best student in my class. However poor my Russian was, I studied better than many local classmates, helped them with their studies and made friends with them. Of course, we didn't have sufficient food and this was a common situation, but we managed somehow. My father managed to get food products, received a food ration and once he brought home a bag of cereal. We even celebrated Jewish holidays. We fasted on Yom Kippur and celebrated Rosh Hashanah. We didn't have any matzah for Pesach, but Grandmother baked something like it on the stove. We lived like this for a year.

The front line was approaching and German troops were already in the vicinity of Debaltsevo [Donetsk, today Ukraine]. I still can't understand why my father failed to arrange for us to depart farther to the east. He was probably too busy at work. There were flows of the wounded delivered to the hospital from the front. Anyway, on 12th July 1942 the Fascist tanks and motor units entered Alchevsk. We were at home. A German trooper broke into the room: 'Juden, Uhr!' ['Jews, watches' in German] I gave him a watch and he left.

A few days later an order was issued: all Jews were to gather near the town hall under the threat of execution. We didn't sleep the night before, packing our belongings and talking about the past life. Nobody mentioned what we were up to: in our family we were used to caring about the feelings of each other. The Jews were gathering near the town hall. We were lined in columns and convoyed to the barracks located in the northern part of the town, near the metallurgical plant. There was a camp arranged there, I never heard any name of this camp. We slept on planks on the floor of the barracks. Some time later my father managed to make cloth partials to separate us from others.

Every day we were taken to work, cleaning toilets in the town, dragging logs and cleaning the territory of the plant. We weren't given any food or water. Many inmates starved to death. Ukrainians came to the camp bringing potatoes, vegetables, bread or pork fat to exchange them for clothes. Many inmates were getting ill. My father supported people, but the only help he could offer was a kind word. There were no medications available. So we existed for about half a year.

We had no information about the situation at the front. We could only guess what was going on by the conduct of our German wardens. The occupiers became brutal after their defeat at Stalingrad in December 1942 [23](#). In January 1943 my father was ordered to make his appearance at the camp commander's office and he never returned from there. We got to know that he had been taken to jail. I never saw him again.

There were rumors in the camp that Fascists were preparing for the massacre of inmates. Mama insisted that my sister and I escaped. In early February we got a chance to do so: a policeman agreed to take us out of the camp for a bribe. Mama hugged me and I ran out of the barrack. This was how we said 'good bye.' We were taken out of the camp at night. My sister and I went to the hospital where our father had worked. We came to see the logistics manager of the hospital, a Ukrainian, Kuleshov, with whom our father had worked. He gave us shelter and we stayed in his house for several days.

Kuleshov must have had contacts with partisans. His comrade from the other side of the front line visited him. He said that we could cross the front line over the frozen Severny Donets River.



Kuleshov gave us cotton wool coats that local residents wore and my sister had a kerchief on her head. He accompanied us to the river and when the German patrol went farther on, my sister and I crossed the river. My sister was scared. She sobbed, saying that we would be killed. I was trying to calm her down, though I was five years younger than her.

The night was dark and we managed all right. On the opposite bank Soviet soldiers met us. We were lucky, meeting good people on the Soviet side. The first person we met was a Jewish captain. We told him our story and he believed us. We were given food from the field kitchen. We had a common soldiers' meal: soup and boiled cereal, but it tasted very delicious after the six-month starvation in the camp. We went on till we reached Lugansk [today Ukraine].

This was a big town where nobody knew us. We went to the regional department of health, where our father was known. My sister and I were given a job as medical registration clerks. We rented a room from an attendant. We received salaries and bread cards [24](#). My sister learned to cook from whatever was at hand: soup and boiled cereals, and in spring we gathered greeneries. Our childhood was over and we entered our adulthood before time.

My sister wrote a letter to our uncle Rafail Selewski in Moscow. He was happy to hear from us and invited us to Moscow, but we were afraid of going there since there were Germans all around. In September 1943 I wrote to my former Tatar classmate Chiitov in Alchevsk, asking him to tell me what had happened to my family. My friend told me that they were dead. My father was executed in the yard of his jail in early February 1942 – later I obtained a certificate of his death from the archive – and that Mama and Grandma were executed at about this same time in a quarry of the plant and so were other Jewish inmates of the camp.

## **After the war**

After the war I visited Alchevsk. My friend and I went to the scene of execution. I was told that in spring 1943 the graves were opened since all the dogs gathered to the terrible smell of the graves. They ate the human remains, probably including those of my parents. After the liberation of the town, a small monument was installed at this place. My friends photographed me beside this obelisk, and this horrible memory about this place where my parents and grandmother Sarrah perished has stayed with me for the rest of my life.

My sister and I didn't stay in Lugansk for long, feeling like leaving this area as soon as possible to probably start a new life and to stop thinking all the time about the death of our family. Besides, we were scared that the front line was approaching. In November 1943 we went to Moscow, having saved a sufficient amount of money to buy tickets. Uncle Rafail, his wife Polia and their two daughters lived in a nice apartment in the center of Moscow. He was already a professor of the Moscow Mining College, received food packages with basic food products and delicacies: ham, smoked sausage, tinned meat and black caviar. I was responsible for getting food products by his cards at the grocery store in Smolenskaya Square near the house. We were given a warm welcome and felt at home. My sister and I were given a room in the apartment. I passed exams for the tenth grade externally and entered the preparatory department of the Moscow Mining College.

After a year of studying at this department I realized I had no talent in the mining engineering industry and I was still attracted to medicine. I went to work as a lab assistant at a department of

the Medical College. I had friends and met my first girlfriend there. I fell in love with her with all the passion of my youth, she responded to my love and we got married soon. We were young and inexperienced and a few months later we separated. I try to forget my first unsuccessful experience. I even forgot my first wife's name. Her surname was Altman. I never met with her again and this is all I know about her. After the divorce I moved to Kishinev in 1946. My sister Rahil stayed in Moscow and entered the Moscow Dentist College.

I already knew that my paternal aunts Fania and Basia and my mother's sister Tsylia perished during the Great Patriotic War. In Kishinev my uncle Genia, his wife Sarrah and Grandmother Bobtsia lived in a small apartment, where the kitchen and the toilet were in the yard. However, they gave me a warm welcome. My uncle helped me to prepare for entrance exams to the Medical College of Kishinev. I passed the exams successfully and was admitted. However, I had to pay for education while I had no money. The rector of the college, whom I came to talk to, was very kind to me. He advised me to write a letter, stating that I was an orphan and my parents had perished. I was exempt from all educational fees and given a stipend. The rector also talked to the housing department about providing me with a place to live since I was born in Kishinev. On 28th June I was given a small room in the center of Kishinev. There were no comforts [sanitation] or even a kitchen in this dwelling.

One year later I managed to obtain a permit to build an annex, where I cooked on a kerosene stove. Life was hard: the stipend was too low for adequate living. I worked night shifts at a hospital. This was the period of the outburst of state level anti-Semitism: the murder of Mikhoels [25](#), disbanding of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee [26](#) and struggle against rootless cosmopolitans [27](#). This affected the heart of each Jewish person and I was very upset about it, but I can't say it affected my own life in any way. I studied well. When I was in my third year, I chose my specialization: ophthalmology and surgery. Our lecturers respected me. I joined the Komsomol in the college, but public activities didn't attract me. Though I was the best student of the course, I wasn't offered to enter the postgraduate course. This was the period of support of national Moldovan staff that I didn't belong to.

I finished my college in 1951 and got a job assignment [28](#) to the hospital in a small district town in Irkutsk region in Siberia. My sister Rahil moved into my little room. After finishing her college she also moved to Kishinev and started work as a dentist. The war and the hardships that we lived through must have affected her health. My sister fell ill with tuberculosis. I felt responsible for her and supported her as much as I could. I sent her money for medical treatment each month. Rahil recovered and married Yefim Taksir, a Jewish man. He worked for the Academy of Sciences.

I worked as a surgeon/ophthalmologist. The hospital where I was sent was a complete mess and I took over my job with great enthusiasm. I operated on patients with various problems: I helped at baby delivery, went to the taiga, when workers were injured, and provided treatment to all kinds of patients. I made friends in Siberia. One of my friends worked at the power plant and Sasha Kligma, another friend, was procurer at the shipyard. They were both Jews. We were friends and supported each other: my friends refurbished my room. We also celebrated Jewish holidays. I started fasting on Yom Kippur in 1943, when I got to know that my parents perished, and I still observe this fast.

I felt well in Siberia. I knew that people needed me. However, I was eager to become a scientist and master my professional skills of surgeon/ophthalmologist. I wrote to the Odessa

Ophthalmologic Institute, headed by the great eye-doctor Filatov, and received an invitation to a course of training in this institute in early 1953. [Filatov, Vladimir Petrovich (1875 - 1956): academician, outstanding Russian ophthalmologist and surgeon. He developed methods of skin plastics, transplantation and therapy methods. He created the theory of biogenic stimulators.] This was the period of the outburst of the case of the 'Kremlin poisoning doctors' [29](#). Fortunately, Filatov and his followers weren't affected by this case. I got a warm welcome in Odessa; I received a room at the dormitory of the institute and started my training. I remember the announcement of the death of Stalin in 1953, and how we sighed with relief. We understood that this was to put an end to the persecution of our colleagues.

I worked and studied in Odessa for a year. Then I returned to Kishinev. I stayed with my sister before I received this one-bedroom apartment. At that time it was a luxurious dwelling with running water and a toilet. In Kishinev I went to work at the trachomatous clinic. I was a doctor and often went to Moldovan villages to visit patients with trachoma: it's an eye disease resulting from lack of vitamins. It's common in poor countries. Later I went to work at the Kishinev ophthalmologic hospital. I was a surgeon and worked there till I retired. I got along well with patients and colleagues. I performed the most difficult operations and my opinion was important. I earned well. At least I managed to support myself and my sister.

Grandmother Bobtsia died in Kishinev in the early 1950s. I was in Siberia and didn't come to her funeral. In 1955 Aunt Hona from Israel visited us. She told us a lot about her country. She told us affectionately how the people in Israel were building their own state. Hona said that all Jews should come to Israel. After perestroika [30](#) when departures were allowed, Uncle Genia and Sarrah moved there at once. My sister, her husband and their daughter Nelia moved to Israel later. My sister lives in Jerusalem now. Her husband died. Her daughter Nelia is a teacher of Physics at school.

I've always remained a Jew, though I am not religious. However, I celebrated holidays and fasted on Yom Kippur. On Pesach my friends - by the way, most of them are Jews - brought me matzah. I sometimes go to the synagogue on holidays, and I always go to the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah. I sort of see all of my loved ones there, I develop the feeling of quietude... I went on vacation every three-four years. I was fond of my work and always felt reluctant to leave it. I spent vacations at the seashore or in the mountains, or traveled around the country. I've never considered Soviet holidays as such, they were just days off for me. I visited my sister or friends to sit at the table together and socialize.

I've always been interested in everything going on in Israel. I listened to the forbidden radio stations 'Radio Europe', 'Free Europe' [31](#) to hear the words of truth about Israel. I never considered departure, probably because I've been alone, and it's hard to overcome difficulties if you have no family. Remembering my failed marriage, I never considered marriage again, and so I am single.

Every two-three years I visited the place where my parents and grandmother died. The obelisk installed there in 1943 is gone. There is a huge plant at the place where they died. Though local authorities state that they hauled the remains to the cemetery, the cemetery is abandoned and nobody takes care of it. I met a woman there. Her surname is Pinskaya. Her mother left her as a baby on the road side and a Ukrainian woman picked her. Only when she grew up, did the girl hear about where she came from. She was the only survivor of the massacre in Alchevsk. She and I try to convince the local authorities to restore the monument, but it seems nobody else cares about it

and things are still where they were before.

I've lived in harmony with life and myself for many years. I read a lot. I was hardly affected by the changes that happened in the USSR in 1991, and the establishment of independent Moldova [32](#). My work was important for any state. As for material hardships, I am alone and don't need much. My father taught me to take life philosophically and I believe that the current level of science doesn't tie us to the concept of a state; we have to be people of the whole planet. I stopped performing surgeries many years ago, but I'm involved in scientific work. I systematize my experience. Hesed [33](#) provides assistance to me. It has also paid for the refurbishment of my apartment. However, I'm not a passive member of the Jewish community, I consult patients at Hesed, help them to choose glasses. I often attend meetings of the Association of Jewish organizations of Moldova, read new publications related to the history of Jews of Kishinev. I try to keep pace with life. I even hope to consider repatriation and move to my sister in Israel. I would love to see Israel and touch upon its history.

## **Glossary:**

### **[1](#) Khrushchovka**

Five-storied apartment buildings with small one, two or three-bedroom apartments, named after Nikita Khrushchev, head of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. These apartment buildings were constructed in the framework of Khrushchev's program of cheap dwelling in the new neighborhood of most Soviet cities

### **[2](#) Bessarabia**

Historical area between the Prut and Dniestr rivers, in the southern part of Odessa region. Bessarabia was part of Russia until the Revolution of 1917. In 1918 it declared itself an independent republic, and later it united with Romania. The Treaty of Paris (1920) recognized the union but the Soviet Union never accepted this. In 1940 Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The two provinces had almost 4 million inhabitants, mostly Romanians. Although Romania reoccupied part of the territory during World War II the Romanian peace treaty of 1947 confirmed their belonging to the Soviet Union. Today it is part of Moldova.

### **[3](#) Annexation of Bessarabia to Romania**

During the chaotic days of the Soviet Revolution the national assembly of Moldavians convoked to Kishinev decided on 4th December 1917 the proclamation of an independent Moldavian state. In order to impede autonomous aspirations, Russia occupied the Moldavian capital in January 1918. Upon Moldavia's desperate request, the army of neighboring Romania entered Kishinev in the same month recapturing the city from the Bolsheviks. This was the decisive step toward the union with Romania: the Moldavians accepted the annexation without any preliminary condition.

### **[4](#) Great Patriotic War**

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg,

known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

## **5 Revisionist Zionism**

The movement founded in 1925 and led by Vladimir Jabotinsky advocated the revision of the principles of Political Zionism developed by Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism. The main goals of the Revisionists was to put pressure on Great Britain for a Jewish statehood on both banks of the Jordan River, a Jewish majority in Palestine, the reestablishment of the Jewish regiments, and military training for the youth. The Revisionist Zionists formed the core of what became the Herut (Freedom) Party after the Israeli independence. This party subsequently became the central component of the Likud Party, the largest right-wing Israeli party since the 1970s.

## **6 Annexation of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union**

At the end of June 1940 the Soviet Union demanded Romania to withdraw its troops from Bessarabia and to abandon the territory. Romania withdrew its troops and administration in the same month and between 28th June and 3rd July, the Soviets occupied the region. At the same time Romania was obliged to give up Northern Transylvania to Hungary and Southern-Dobrudja to Bulgaria. These territorial losses influenced Romanian politics during World War II to a great extent.

## **7 GULAG**

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

**8 Great Terror (1934-1938):** During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were Communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no



longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

### **9 Golda Meir (1898-1978)**

Born in Russia, she moved to Palestine and became a well-known and respected politician who fought for the rights of the Israeli people. In 1948, Meir was appointed Israel's Ambassador to the Soviet Union. From 1969 to 1974 she was Prime Minister of Israel. Despite the Labor Party's victory at the elections in 1974, she resigned in favor of Yitzhak Rabin. She was buried on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem in 1978.

### **10 Civil War (1918-1920)**

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups – Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14 percent and agriculture to 50 percent as compared to 1913.

### **11 Kishinev Ghetto**

The annihilation of the Jews of Kishinev was carried out in several stages. With the entry of the Romanian and German units, an unknown number of Jews were slaughtered in the streets and in their homes. About 2,000 Jews, mainly of liberal professions (doctors, lawyers, engineers), and local Jewish intellectuals, were systematically executed. After the wave of killings, the 11,000 remaining Jews were concentrated in the ghetto, created on 24th July 1941, on the order of the Romanian district ruler and the German Einsatzkommando leader, Paul Zapp. The Jews of central Romania attempted to assist their brethren in the ghetto, sending large amounts of money by illegal means. A committee was formed to bribe the Romanian authorities so that they would not hand the Jews over to the Germans. In August about 7,500 Jewish people were sent to work in the Ghidighici quarries. That fall, on the Day of Atonement (4th October), the military authorities began deporting the remaining Jews in the ghetto to Transnistria, by order of the Romanian ruler, Ion Antonescu. One of the heads of the ghetto, the attorney Shapira, managed to alert the leaders of the Jewish communities in Bucharest, but attempts to halt the deportations were unsuccessful. The community was not completely liquidated, however, since some Jews had found hiding places in Kishinev and its vicinity or elsewhere in Romania. In May 1942, the last 200 Jews in the locality were deported. Kishinev was liberated in August 1944. At that time no Jews were left in the locality.

### **12 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)**

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance,

which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

## **12 Maccabi World Union**

International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

## **13 Jabotinskiy, Vladimir (Zeev) (1880-1940), writer and Zionist movement activist**

Lived in Russia before 1914, and in France for the most part after 1920. He wrote in Russian, Hebrew and French. In his stories, articles and plays he expressed the idea of national self-consciousness and renaissance of the Russian Jews.

## **14 Cuzist**

Member of the Romanian fascist organization named after Alexandru C. Cuza, one of the most fervent fascist leaders in Romania, who was known for his ruthless chauvinism and anti-Semitism. In 1919 Cuza founded the LANC, which became the National Christian Party in 1935 with an anti-Semitic program.

## **15 Legion of the Archangel Michael (also known as the Legionary Movement)**

Movement founded in 1927 by C. Z. Codreanu. This extremist, nationalist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic movement aimed at excluding those whose views on political and racial matters were different from theirs. The Legion was organized in so-called nests, and it practiced mystical rituals, which were regarded as the way to a national spiritual regeneration by the members of the movement. These rituals were based on Romanian folklore and historical traditions. The Legionaries founded the Iron Guard as a terror organization, which carried out terrorist activities and political murders. The political twin of the Legionary Movement was the Totul pentru Tara (Everything for the Fatherland) that represented the movement in parliamentary elections. The

followers of the Legionary Movement were recruited from young intellectuals, students, Orthodox clericals, peasants. The movement was banned by King Carol II in 1938.

## **16 Komsomol**

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

## **17 Yakir**

One of the founders of the Communist Party in Ukraine. In 1938 he was arrested and executed.

## **18 Soviet Army**

The armed forces of the Soviet Union, originally called Red Army and renamed Soviet Army in February 1946. After the Bolsheviks came to power, in November 1917, they commenced to organize the squads of worker's army, called Red Guards, where workers and peasants were recruited on voluntary bases. The commanders were either selected from among the former tsarist officers and soldiers or appointed directly by the Military and Revolutionary Committee of the Communist Party. In early 1918 the Bolshevik government issued a decree on the establishment of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and mandatory drafting was introduced for men between 18 and 40. In 1918 the total number of draftees was 100 thousand officers and 1.2 million soldiers. Military schools and academies training the officers were restored. In 1925 the law on compulsory military service was adopted and annual drafting was established. The term of service was established as follows: for the Red Guards- 2 years, for junior officers of aviation and fleet- 3 years, for medium and senior officers- 25 years. People of exploiter classes (former noblemen, merchants, officers of the tsarist army, priest, factory owner, etc. and their children) as well as kulaks (rich peasants) and cossacks were not drafted in the army. The law as of 1939 cancelled restriction on drafting of men belonging to certain classes, students were not drafted but went through military training in their educational institutions. On the 22nd June 1941 Great Patriotic War was unleashed and the drafting in the army became exclusively compulsory. First, in June-July 1941 general and complete mobilization of men was carried out as well as partial mobilization of women. Then annual drafting of men, who turned 18, was commenced. When WWII was over, the Red Army amounted to over 11 million people and the demobilization process commenced. By the beginning of 1948 the Soviet Army had been downsized to 2 million 874 thousand people. The youth of drafting age were sent to the restoration works in mines, heavy industrial enterprises, and construction sites. In 1949 a new law on general military duty was adopted, according to which service term in ground troops and aviation was 3 years and in navy- 4 years. Young people with secondary education, both civilian and military, with the age range of 17-23 were admitted in military schools for officers. In 1968 the term of the army service was contracted to 2 years in ground troops and in the navy to 3 years. That system of army recruitment has remained without considerable changes until the breakup of the Soviet Army (1991-93).

## **19 NKVD**

People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

## **20 All-Union pioneer organization**

a communist organization for teenagers between ten and fifteen years old (cf: boy-/ girlscouts in the US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

**21** Antonescian period (September 1940– August 1944): The Romanian King Carol II appointed Ion Antonescu (chief of the general staff of the Romanian Army, Minister of War between 1937 and 1938) prime minister with full power under the pressure of the Germans after the Second Vienna Dictate. At first Antonescu formed a coalition with the Legionary leaders, but after their attempted coup (in January 1941) he introduced a military dictatorship. He joined the Triple Alliance, and helped Germany in its fight against the Soviet Union. In order to gain new territories (Transylvania, Bessarabia), he increased to the utmost the Romanian war-efforts and retook Bessarabia through a lot of sacrifices in 1941-1942. At the same time the notorious Romanian anti-Semitic pogroms are linked to his name and so are the deportations – this topic has been a taboo in Romanian historiography up to now. Antonescu was arrested on the orders of the king on 23rd August 1944 (when Romania capitulated) and sent to prison in the USSR where he remained until 1946. He was sentenced to death for his crimes as a war criminal and was shot in the same year.

## **22 Molotov, V**

P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On 22nd June 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.

## **23 Stalingrad Battle (17th July 1942- 2nd February 1943) The Stalingrad, South-Western and Donskoy Fronts stopped the advance of German armies in the vicinity of Stalingrad**

On 19-20th November 1942 the soviet troops undertook an offensive and encircled 22 German divisions (330 thousand people) in the vicinity of Stalingrad. The Soviet troops eliminated this German grouping. On 31 January 1943 the remains of the 6th German army headed by General Field Marshal Paulus surrendered (91 thousand people). The victory in the Stalingrad battle was of huge political, strategic and international significance.

## **24 Card system**

The food card system regulating the distribution of food and industrial products was introduced in the USSR in 1929 due to extreme deficit of consumer goods and food. The system was cancelled in 1931. In 1941, food cards were reintroduced to keep records, distribute and regulate food supplies

to the population. The card system covered main food products such as bread, meat, oil, sugar, salt, cereals, etc. The rations varied depending on which social group one belonged to, and what kind of work one did. Workers in the heavy industry and defense enterprises received a daily ration of 800 g (miners - 1 kg) of bread per person; workers in other industries 600 g. Non-manual workers received 400 or 500 g based on the significance of their enterprise, and children 400 g. However, the card system only covered industrial workers and residents of towns while villagers never had any provisions of this kind. The card system was cancelled in 1947.

## **25 Mikhoels, Solomon (1890-1948) (born Vovsi)**

Great Soviet actor, producer and pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was murdered by order of the State Security Ministry.

## **26 Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC)**

formed in Kuibyshev in April 1942, the organization was meant to serve the interests of Soviet foreign policy and the Soviet military through media propaganda, as well as through personal contacts with Jews abroad, especially in Britain and the United States. The chairman of the JAC was Solomon Mikhoels, a famous actor and director of the Moscow Yiddish State Theater. A year after its establishment, the JAC was moved to Moscow and became one of the most important centers of Jewish culture and Yiddish literature until the German occupation. The JAC broadcast pro-Soviet propaganda to foreign audiences several times a week, telling them of the absence of anti-Semitism and of the great anti-Nazi efforts being made by the Soviet military. In 1948, Mikhoels was assassinated by Stalin's secret agents, and, as part of a newly-launched official anti-Semitic campaign, the JAC was disbanded in November and most of its members arrested.

## **27 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'**

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

## **28 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR**

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory two-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.



### **29 Doctors' Plot**

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

### **30 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)**

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

### **31 Radio Free Europe**

Radio station launched in 1949 at the instigation of the US government with headquarters in West Germany. The radio broadcast uncensored news and features, produced by Central and Eastern European émigrés, from Munich to countries of the Soviet block. The radio station was jammed behind the Iron Curtain, team members were constantly harassed and several people were killed in terrorist attacks by the KGB. Radio Free Europe played a role in supporting dissident groups, inner resistance and will of freedom in the Eastern and Central European communist countries and thus it contributed to the downfall of the totalitarian regimes of the Soviet block. The headquarters of the radio have been in Prague since 1994.

### **32 Moldova**

Historic region between the Eastern Carpathians, the Dniester River and the Black Sea, also a contemporary state, bordering with Romania and Ukraine. Moldova was first mentioned after the end of the Mongol invasion in 14th century scripts as Eastern marquisate of the Hungarian Kingdom. For a long time, the Principality of Moldova was tributary of either Poland or Hungary until the Ottoman Empire took possession of it in 1512. The Sultans ruled Moldova indirectly by appointing the Prince of Moldova to govern the vassal principality. These were Moldovan boyars until the early 18th century and Greek (Phanariot) ones after. In 1812 Tsar Alexander I occupied the eastern part of Moldova (between the Prut and the Dniester river and the Black Sea) and attached it to its Empire under the name of Bessarabia. In 1859 the remaining part of Moldova merged with Wallachia. In 1862 the new country was called Romania, which was finally internationally recognized at the Treaty of Berlin in 1878. Bessarabia united with Romania after World War I, and was recaptured by the Soviet Union in 1940. The Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic gained independence after the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991 and is now called

Moldovan Republic (Republica Moldova).

### **33 Hesed**

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint Hesed helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the FSU countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.