Turkey and Turkish Jews in France: 1940-1944
Arnold Reisman

ABSTRACT

Turkish diplomats saved Turkish Jews living in France from certain death during World War II. The Anglophone part of the world was ignorant of this fact until Stanford Shaw first revealed the historical data in 1995. Up until that time, this important piece of history had been ignored by historians. However Shaw suggested that the actions of Turkey’s legations were part of a well articulated policy formulated by the Turkish Foreign Ministry with the blessing of the government in Ankara. Not long thereafter, those acts of heroism and decency mentioned by Shaw were revealed in detail with the underlying presumption that at very minimum the Turkish diplomats were given guidance to act from Ankara. The totality of recent findings of contemporaneous documents from various US government archives attest to the fact that the intervention in behalf of French Jews with Turkish origins was not the policy of the Government of Turkey at all but the determined undertaking of members of the Turkish diplomatic corps in France who acted on their own against the extant policy of their own government and that of the US and the UK. In fact, from the outset of these actions the Turkish government had to be prodded and pushed to acquiesce from outside of Turkey not from within. With their deeds the diplomats risked the wrath and ire of their own government as well as the governments of Germany and Vichy France. At all times they risked their careers and often their lives finding no solace among diplomatic peers representing western countries. After Turkish Ambassador Behiç Erkin’s forced departure from Vichy, the removal of Turkish Jews from France to safety in Turkey greatly diminished.

Introduction

1 Arnold Reisman is the author of: Turkey’s Modernization: Refugees from Nazism and Atatürk’s Vision; Post-Ottoman Turkey: Classical Music and Opera; Arts in Turkey: How ancient became contemporary; Refugees and reform: Turkey’s republican journey; The transformation of Istanbul: Art galleries reviving decaying spaces; SHOAH: Turkey, the US, and the UK; and PERFIDY: Britannia and her all-Jewish army units.

2 Shaw Turkey and the Holocaust pp 135-254

3 The author is grateful to Virginia Lewick, Archivist, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, for finding and supplying many of the wartime documents upon which this paper is built; and the same goes to Jessica Kaplan, a freelance specialist in archival searching of Washington DC. Especial thanks to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which opened its archives allowing for some of the assertions in this paper to be made.
Do a good deed and throw it into the sea. If the fish do not recognize it, God will.\(^4\)

During World War II, Turkish diplomats saved Turkish Jews living in France\(^5\) from certain death, a fact of which the Anglophone world was ignorant until Stanford Shaw first revealed the historical data in 1995.\(^6\) Up until that time, this important piece of history had been ignored by historians. Mistakenly however, Shaw attributed the actions of Turkey’s legations in both occupied and Vichy France to a well articulated policy created by the Turkish government in Ankara\(^7,8\), when in fact these brave acts of heroism were devised by the diplomats themselves as a matter of conscience. In fact, from the outset of these actions the Turkish government had to be prodded and pushed, with various ramifications including implied aid programs from a number of sources, to acquiesce from outside of Turkey not from within. The diplomats involved were: Behiç Erkin, Turkish ambassador to Paris and later to Vichy; Necdet Kent, Consul General in Marseilles; Paris Consul-Generals Cevdet Dülger, Fikret Sefik Özdöğancı, and Paris Vice Consuls Namık Kermal Yolga, Fatih Rüştü

\(^4\) An old Turkish saying.

\(^5\) Many were French citizens others were holding Turkish passports

\(^6\) Shaw *Turkey and the Holocaust* pp 135-254

\(^7\) According to Shaw: “While no official orders from Ankara requiring Turkish diplomats to specifically protect Jewish Turks being harassed or persecuted in Nazi-occupied Europe have been found to date, allusions to such orders in the correspondence, along with instructions issued to provide protection to all Turkish citizens regardless of religion, indicate that they were given “by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on several occasions during the war, and that in any case such actions were most certainly included in the established functions of all diplomats, that is to protect their own citizens regardless of religion.” In support of the above statement, in a footnote, Shaw cites a number of memoranda. However all of these are between members of the Turkish legations in France. Shaw *Turkey and the Holocaust*; p 65. Moreover “In 1944, when the Vichy government was thinking of deporting all 10,000 Turkish Jews living in its territory to the East for extermination, Turkish Foreign Minister Numan Menemencioglu intervened with the French government, on the direct orders of President Ismet Inönü, stating that such an act would be considered unfriendly by Turkey and would cause a major diplomatic incident, including perhaps a complete break in diplomatic relations. This convinced Vichy to abandon the plan and saved these Jews from almost certain death. The original correspondence on this matter has not yet been uncovered. Turkey’s key role in this matter is, however, well documented in other sources.” Stanford J. Shaw, “TURKEY AND THE JEWS OF EUROPE DURING WORLD WAR II” (2001)

\(^8\) After the above allusion by Shaw this presumption has been held by all writers on the subject and yes, until now, by this author. See Reisman, A. *Turkey’s Modernization*: p. Front matter, Back matter, 304; Reisman A. *SHOAH: Turkey, the US, and the UK*, p 4; Reisman, A. “German Jewish Intellectuals’ Diaspora in Turkey: (1933-1955)”; Reisman, A. “Jewish Refugees from Nazism, Albert Einstein, and the Modernization of Higher Education in Turkey (1933-1945)”; Reisman, A. and Capar I. “The German Jewish Diaspora in Turkey: Exiles from Nazism as Architects of Modern Turkish Education (1933-1945)” and most recently Reisman, A. “Walter Gottschalk: A pioneer of Modern Library Science and his interactions with Albert Einstein during the Nazi era.” *Covenant, The Global Jewish Magazine*; among others.
Zorlu and Melih Esenbel; Marseilles Consul Generals Bedi'i Arbel, and Mehmed Fuad Carim.

Recent findings of contemporaneous documents from the Archives of NARA (National Archives and Records Administration), the Library of Congress, and the FDR Presidential library attest to the fact that the intervention in behalf of French Jews with Turkish origins was not the policy of the Government of Turkey at all. Rather, it was the determined undertaking of members of the Turkish diplomatic corps who acted on their own against the extant policy of their own government and that of the US and the UK. These men of conscience risked their careers and often their lives finding no support among their diplomatic peers representing western countries including those in the US legation. With their deeds these diplomats risked the wrath and ire of their own government as well as Germany and Vichy France.

While Germany and Vichy France were anti-Semitic to their cores, Turkey was in the unenviable position of attempting to maintain neutrality while in dire fear of being invaded by Germany. For that reason and after great pressure from Germany, Ambassador Behiç Erkin was recalled to Ankara and the rate at which Jews were repatriated to Turkey was greatly diminished. Many Jews were saved by the acts of the Turkish legation in France. From March 15, 1943 through May 23, 1944, the Turkish Embassy in Vichy and Consulates-General in Paris arranged for no fewer than eight groups of former Turkish Jews averaging roughly fifty-three persons each to be returned to Turkey and to freedom by rail in sealed wagons. This is but a part of claims that all 20,000 Turkish Jews residing in France were saved. Looked at in reverse the known number of Turkish Jews deported from France to the death camps is 1659.

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9 Melih Esenbel served as Turkish Ambassador to the US 1967-1979
10 http://www.sefarad.org/publication/lm/043/6.html
11 See the award-winning documentary “Desperate Hours” produced by Victoria Barrett and Michael Berenbaum. The film tells the extraordinary story of how the government of Turkey and Monsignor Angelo Roncalli (the Apostolic Delegate to Turkey who subsequently became Pope John XXIII), Turkish diplomats and international Jewish organizations, worked together to save lives during the Holocaust.

12 In a letter dated September 13th 1941, Fleet Admiral William Daniel Leahy, US Ambassador in Vichy France reported to Sumner Welles, Under Secretary of State - “There are persistent rumors to the effect that Axis troops in large numbers are being concentrated on the Turkish-Bulgarian border in preparation for a push toward Egypt. My Turkish colleague, [Behiç Erkin] who is frequently well informed, has nothing definite to substantiate this rumor, and he says that Turkey is prepared and intends to resist invasion from any direction.” William D. Leahy papers, Library of Congress All diary entries for 1941: Reel 2, William D. Leahy Diaries, 1897-1956, (Washington DC: Library of Congress), microfilm. All diary entries for 1942 and letters to Welles: Reel 3, William D. Leahy Diaries, 1897-1956, Washington DC: Library of Congress), microfilm. Entries for: Jan. 1 - p.2; Jan. 8 - p. 4; March 5 - p.29; April 14 - p. 46; April 25th - p. 52; For July 18, 1941 letter to Welles - p. 2; Sept. 13, 1941 letter to Welles - p. 3 also see Arnold Reisman Turkey’s Modernization: p 273, 298, 408, and 418.

13 Shaw Turkey and the Holocaust pp 135-254 and Reisman, A., SHOA: Turkey, the US, and the UK; p. 29
14 See: Shaw Turkey and the Holocaust pp Emir Kkvircik The ambassador: p. 8, 20, 21 and Zeyno Baran and Onur Sazak “The Ambassador” Zeyno Baran is a Senior Fellow and Director of Hudson’s Center for Eurasian Policy. Onur Sazak is a Research Associate for the Center for Eurasian Policy at Hudson Institute. Documentary “Desperate Hours” produced by Victoria Barrett and Michael Berenbaum. Michael Berenbaum is a Holocaust
Background

Many Jews had left Turkey, this was especially true during and after the War of Liberation. By 1939, those Jews who had come to France years earlier had married French Jews and had children, and in some instances grandchildren, who were French citizens. Many of these Turkish born Jews had become French citizens themselves while others maintained their Turkish passports and still others had let their passports lapse. In the autumn of 1940 when Germany occupied Paris and parts of northern France, the Germans ordered that a census be taken in Paris, the purpose of which was to determine the number of Jews living there who had French citizenship. Special identity cards were issued to each person and copies “centralized at National Police headquarters. … [so] every French and foreign Jew [was thus] known to police…. In a single move, the French administration has enumerated both Jewish persons and Jewish property.”

The figures for the census listed 113,467 French Jews over the age of 15 living within the metropolitan area of Paris. Of these, 3,381 were of Turkish descent. By adding those who were under 15 to the 3,381 Jewish Turks, the figure rose to more than 5,000 Jews of Turkish heritage with French citizenship living in the capital. Extrapolating this figure to the entire country it is fair to assume that the total number doubled to around 10,000 Turkish-descent Jews who were citizens of France. In addition the census showed that 3,381 “foreign Jews” living in Paris were from Turkey. Thus it was estimated that another 10,000 Jewish Turks living in France were not French citizens. Consequently since the Shaw revelation most authors use 20,000 for the number of Jews with Turkish origin as living in France when the war broke out.

As the war continued the Nazis began persecuting French Jews. Many “Turkish Jews” who had relinquished their Turkish citizenship...
“suddenly found it was far better to be a Turkish Jew than a French Jew, and they applied in large numbers to have their Turkish citizenship restored.”

According to a Raoul Wallenberg Foundation website:

Turkish diplomats serving in France at that time dedicated many of their working hours to Jews. They provided official documents such as citizenship cards and passports to thousands of Jews and in this way they saved their lives.

Below is a story of these diplomats.21

Behiç Erkin was the Turkish ambassador to Paris when France was under Nazi occupation. In order to prevent the Nazis from rounding up Jews, he gave them documents saying their property, houses and businesses, belonged to Turks. He saved many lives in this way.22

In a letter dated September 2, 2008, to Abdullah Gul, President of the Republic of Turkey, the Raoul Wallenberg Foundation’s Founder, Baruch Tenenbaum, stated “we are conducting an extensive research into the actions of the Turkish diplomats who were stationed in France during WWII, including Ambassador Behic Erkin, Consul Bedi’i Arbel and Vice Consul Necdet Kent, just to name a few.” At the time this paper was written, that “research” was still ongoing.

Discussion

Behiç Erkin arrived at the Turkish Embassy in Paris as Ambassador in 1939, only three weeks before the start of the Second World War. Although the embassy staff were few in numbers, they represented Turkey's administrative and cultural elite, all of whom were graduates of Galatasaray Lisesi23 and as their track records have shown, all men of high moral principles and valor. They continued their careers as leaders of Turkey in the postwar decades. According to Emir Kivircik

Head Clerk Fatin Rüştü Zorlu approached Ambassador Behiç and informed him of the situation, asking for his advice. Without hesitation, Behiç said, ‘Whoever presents an I.D., document or title deed belonging to either the Ottoman Empire or the Republic of Turkey, have them fill out a citizenship application form, then give them a citizenship affidavit.’ Fatin Bey countered with ‘My Dear Ambassador, there are countless French citizens amongst them who don’t have any documents, don’t even speak Turkish, but claim their parents or grandparents lived in Turkey many years ago!’ Behiç countered with, ‘Then just have them memorize these six

22 Ibid
23 Starting as Galatasaray Lyceum in 1481 to this day it is a very fine French high school in Istanbul. Galatasaray alumnae continue to occupy high ranking political, industrial and business positions within and outside of Turkey. Seven have served as Ambassadors to the US, five to Canada and two to the United Nations.
words in Turkish: ‘I’m Turkish, my relatives live on Turkish soil.’ Have them memorize this and issue them the affidavit. As it is, Germans don’t understand Turkish,’ he said and added, ‘Let’s tell the Consulates to do the same thing.”

Behiç Erkin often used strong language when communicating his position to the Vichy French. On December 15th 1942 he wrote; “The Jewish Turks are under the organized protection of the Consulate-General … Due to the urgency of this matter, our Embassy demands the intervention of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ highest level authorities to ensure that our Turkish citizens be rendered exempt from … arbitrary action they feel threatened by at this time.”

Among the French Jews saved by Behiç Erkin, was the son of former French Prime Minister Léon Blum and his friends. On 21 September 1942, Leon Blum’s daughter-in-law visited Ambassador Erkin: “The reason for me coming here, Mr. Ambassador, is that my husband and some of his friends were detained in Represaille Camp. My father-in-law wanted me to come here, explain the situation and request your help.” After some tense moments when Erkin had to explain that her husband’s plight was not within the Ambassador purview Erkin suggested that she ask Leon Blum to write a letter explaining the situation and have him address it to the Esteemed President of Turkey, İsmet İnönü. He then told her to bring that letter to him, and that he will add a cover page and make sure it reaches the President. “Let’s try to solve this there, not here.” On 22 September 1942, she returned with a letter written by her father-in-law. Addressed to President İsmet İnönü, it requested assistance to free his son and friends. Behiç Erkin conveyed the matter to Ankara just as he promised. A letter from the President arrived a very short time later. In it, İsmet İnönü stated that he met with German Ambassador Von Papen whereupon Leon Blum’s son and friends were released shortly thereafter.

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24 Emir Kıvırcık The ambassador: p. 193

26 (Born in Paris, on April 9, 1872 and died March 30, 1950) Léon Blum served as French Prime Minister between 1936 – 7, and again between December 1946 and January 1947.

A letter of thanks to Erkin from former French Prime Minister Léon Blum⁴⁹

Another letter of thanks, this one in behalf of the entire Turkish Jewish community in France is shown next.

⁴⁹ The original letter of thanks that Blum sent to Erkin is archived in the Republican History Museum, Turkish Revolution Institute, Ankara University, file 12 of the “Personal Red Files of Behiç Erkin”
Letter written on behalf of our Jewish citizens in France. October 10, 1942

Translation:

For your eyes only 30.10.1942

To His Excellency Behiç Erkin, Our Vichy Ambassador;

We are grateful to you for allowing us to send the petition we wrote to President İsmet İnönü to explain the situation of the Turkish-Jewish population who are of Turkish descent but have not maintained their registration on a regular basis in compliance with the deportation law which is now enforced in France. We have learned with great satisfaction of the role undertaken by your Embassy and the great efforts you have exerted to assist the Jews. All the senior citizens, women, children, the disabled and poor citizens in our patronage, have lined up to offer you with all our hearts a prayer of good fortune on behalf of all our fellow non-registered Jews.

The original copy of this letter is preserved in the İnkişaf Tarih Müzesi (Revolution History Museum), located at the Turkish Revolution Institution, Ankara University. It is registered in Catalogue Title-A6, Row No.113, Box No.190 with the entry, “Letter written on behalf of our Jewish citizens in France.”
M. Behic, with his exalted heart and soul, has lessened the burden of households, has lessened the pain of miserable and wretched survivors like us and has reached out to our appeal for assistance during this unmitigated disaster which we find ourselves in today. He is a man rarely found in the pages of history. One who conducts beneficent work, of course, garners accolades and deserves such accolades.

May God Bless Our Ambassador along with all the members of his family and keep them in good health and spirits, Amen...

Our Exalted Ambassador, please accept our highest respects.
On behalf of the thousands of poor, irregular Jewish Turks living in France.

B2142
Yakar

On the reverse side of this letter is a typed annotation presumably dictated by Erkin to his secretary.

A typed annotation on the back of the letter

Translation

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31 Emir Kıvırcık The ambassador: p 234, 235. There is no information available as to Yakar’s identity other than that shown in the letter.
32 The original copy of this letter with the annotation shown is preserved in the İnşilâp Tarih Müzesi (Revolution History Museum), located at the Turkish Revolution Institution, Ankara University. It is registered in Catalogue Title-A6, Row No.113, Box No.190 with the entry, “Letter written on behalf of our Jewish citizens in France.”
I felt very sorry for these people, but for some reason our Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not show any mercy towards them.

Following are some oral histories from Turkish Jews who were living in France and were saved by the Turkish Consuls.

Lazar Russo’s memories are quite vivid. “I was at the metro. They arrested me when they saw Jew written on my identity card and so they sent me to a camp. When my father realized I was missing, he went to the Turkish Consulate. The Consulate made an investigation and protested. I was liberated from the camp. The Germans told the Turkish authorities that they would take no further responsibilities for Jews who were caught. The Turkish Consulate called my father and said there were a few trains going back to Turkey. I’m remembering these….. We arrived in Turkey on the train. One woman started crying: ‘We are in Turkey! We are in Turkey!’ Finally we understood. All the Jews….Our family….Everyone was dead. I was alive only because I have a Turkish passport.” Find one way to spell this guy’s name please.

Mr. Lazzare Rousso also told about the events he had been through during those times. Robert Lazare Rousso was picked up in a random identity check in Paris on December 13, 1941 and dispatched to a camp, a military barracks comprised of several dormitories outside of Paris and surrounded by barbed wire. Identified by the number 3233, he was held with thousands of others for two months before gaining release on February 6th, 1942 due to pressure that Erkin’s consulate brought with the Germans. At the time this paper was written, Monsieur Rousso was still living in Paris at age 86. Following is an extract from his testimony:

……the German commander asked,

“Are you Robert Lazare Rousso?”

“Yes,”

“Are you Turkish?”

“Yes,”

“You should thank God you’re a Turk, you are free to go!” said the German commander.

And so Lazare Rousso was released from custody and spared certain death.

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33 Courtesy of Victoria Barrett and Michael Berenbaum, Desperate Hours
34 Emir Kivircik The ambassador: p 88
Stella Ventura remembered the humiliation and degradation she felt at the way they were treated. “We had this awful thing…JEW…on our identity cards.” She, too, was rescued by the Turkish consulate.

Refka Kapsuto and her daughter, Saphira Kapsuto Haas, were also saved by the Turkish diplomatic corps and are living in Israel. “When my father went to the consulate he got a passport. It was the only paper we had that showed we are Turkish citizens. My father had a friend in Paris who told him that ‘the Turkish government takes the Jews to Turkey. So if we want to go, we can go to Paris and leave with the train.’”

Albert Saul explained that “My mother went to the Turkish Embassy to ask for specific papers certifying the Turkish nationality of her children. I owe my life to Turkey because I was liberated from a camp because of my Turkish nationality.”

Now living in Israel, Rosa Levy Kosrovitsky said “I saw an ad in the newspaper that anyone of Turkish origin who wanted to go home should come to the Turkish Consulate and begin the process. My uncle was taken from the house to Drancy (detention area near Paris) and later to Auschwitz where he was killed. If I had stayed in France it would be 100% sure I would have died.”

According to the Vice President of the Israeli Association of Turkish Jews, Rafael Sadi, the Papico and Darico family left Istanbul for Hamburg in 1930. At the time Charlotte and Avraam had one son, Yosef Papico, born in Istanbul in 1927. Their son David Darico was born in Hamburg in 1930 just one year prior their relocation to France. They were among those who were fortunate to return to Turkey in 1943, during Behic Erkin’s term as Ambassador. In that same year, they left for Palestine where both of their sons fought in Israel’s War of Independence in 1948 and sadly both lost their lives.

Graves of two brothers (Papico) and (Darico), who were killed in Israel’s War of Independence

35 Right side - Yosef (Papico), born in Turkey, died in battle in N'veh Ya'akov
17 Adar-b, 1948, 20 years old when killed, the left side - David (Darico), born in Germany, died in battle
In February 1942, Ambassador Erkin ordered his staff to produce a list of non-Jewish Turkish citizens living in France, focusing on individuals with clean records and employment histories. On a cold winter night he summoned a group of individuals from that list to a meeting and asked them to volunteer to assume custody of the businesses and properties that their fellow Turkish citizens were being forced to surrender and to pledge to return everything when the war finally came to an end. He dubbed them the “Turkish Custodians of the Properties of our Jewish Citizens” and presented the list of volunteers to the leadership of the Paris Turkish Jewish community for its approval. Erkin then went to the Vichy authorities with the list but could not get them to agree to transfer the custody of the Jewish properties to non-Christians. Refusing to give up, he went to the German controlled Jewish Affairs Commission, a Vichy controller agency, and received permission. This victory was a testament to Erkin's tenacity.

As French leaders simply fell in line behind the wishes of their German masters, Erkin continued to forge ahead. He initiated and implemented the system by which many Jews with any connection to Turkey whatsoever, (not just Turkish citizens) and living in France were issued certificates tantamount to citizenship documents by simply reciting 10 words in Turkish. Erkin arranged for train convoys to transport them from a war zone to a neutral country, Turkey; from death to life. He also managed to push back the final deadline for the evacuation of Jewish Turks from France from January 31, 1943 to March 31.

According to Kivrıcik a sentence written in a communiqué Erkin sent to Ankara best reflects the voice of his conscience. “The treatment of children, women, men, mothers and fathers as though they were mere herds of animals, separating members of the same family from each other and shipping them to indeterminate destinations...”

On May 15th 1942 Erkin, frustrated by the uncompromising attitude of the Vichy French towards his proposals to save Turkish Jews, suggested to the government in Ankara that the Turkish Foreign Ministry find a means to retaliate against the Vichy Government. The response was unequivocal. “Your proposal of retaliation against the French …goes against the grain of our general principles regarding the Jewish question.” Signed, Deputy Vice-Foreign Minister

in Jerusalem, 5 Sivan, 1948, 17 years old when killed. Center - sons of Charlotte and Avraham. sign - Yosef and David your mother mourns her only sons, inconsolably, in your death the people are redeemed. Photo courtesy Yad Vashem

36 The list can be obtained from Naim A. Güleryüz at Istanbul’s Jewish Museum.
37 Emir Kivrıcik The ambassador: pp 97-99
38 Ibid p. 206
39 Communiqué No. 597/383/6127 dated May 15, 1942, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
40 Communiqué dated June 6, 1942, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. U. No. 28420; Lef 72. No name was indicated.
Regardless of the attitude of his government, Erkin was determined to protect the “Turkish” Jews. One example of Erkin’s resolve can be seen in Emir Kivircik’s book, *The Ambassador* where the entire contents of the Isak and Sarah Bitran file\(^{41}\) are reproduced. Isak was arrested near his home on October 1\(^{st}\) 1942 and sent to the Drancy Concentration Camp. A great deal of official correspondence between Ambassador Erkin and various Vichy and Nazi officials ensued. The bottom line was that Isak was released from Drancy on March 12\(^{th}\) 1943 and with wife and family sent to Turkey, his homeland, via a train convoy on March 15\(^{th}\) 1943.

According to *Time Magazine*\(^{42}\)

> Turkey last week recalled her Ambassador to Vichy, Behic Erkin, registering a bitter protest against Gestapo violations of his diplomatic immunity and indicating a possible break with Vichy.

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\(^{41}\) Emir Kivircik *The ambassador*: p. 212-220

\(^{42}\) Anonymous, “World Battlefronts: Next Step?”
BERNE, Switzerland, June 17 (AP)—Turkey has recalled Behic Erkin, her Ambassador to France, in protest against strong German restrictions on his embassy in Vichy, a Turkish diplomatic source said today.

Mr. Erkin’s recall to Ankara was not yet considered a rupture in relations between Turkey and German-occupied Vichy, this source said, but it could be a step in that direction. A Turkish Embassy counselor, M. Scovdat, also was told to return home.
Besides registering a protest against German Gestapo surveillance of the Turkish Embassy in Vichy, another reason advanced for Mr. Erkin's recall was pressure on the part of the Allies, who hope Vichy will retaliate by recalling Gaston Bergery, its Ankara Ambassador.

Allied quarters hold that M. Bergery "is too friendly with the Axis; sees too much of [German Ambassador to Turkey Franz] von Papen," said this source, who cannot be identified by name.

Mr. Erkin was believed to be already en route to Turkey, after the Germans had refused to issue a visa which would have enabled him to return through Switzerland; instead the Germans granted him passage through Germany.

The New York Times June 18, 1943

Turks Angered by Nazis

Relations between Vichy and Ankara were reported very strained, with the Turks especially angered at the Pétain-Leval regime over German interference.
Was it a coincidence that Behiç Erkin “resigned” from his posting to France on the 23rd of August 1943 and three days later from the Foreign Service altogether? There is no question but that Erkin was removed from the Ambassadorial post because of Ankara’s inability to withstand Germany’s pressure and the implied threat of invasion. For Turkey, angering Berlin meant more than risking the loss of lucrative exports at a time when its economy was still in shambles. There was also a real and present danger that Germany could opt to use Turkey as a route to the Caspian area oil riches in order to hit the Soviets on another front — its soft underbelly. This was indeed a real possibility, not just conjecture. Turkey’s army stood prepared. 43

43 See “Notes from the Leahy diary,” footnotes 12 and 52.
Some clues to a man’s character are his public stands

When Erkin received instructions from Ankara saying “do not send here Jews, convoy by convoy” he replied “I accept this as an order, but, it is impossible to prevent Turkish citizens to go back to their country.” He kept sending them.

Some clues to a man’s character are the public stands taken by people under his direct supervision.

The work of other Turkish diplomatic corps members under Erkin’s direction

Following Italy’s withdrawal from the war in late 1943, the Turkish Consul General in Marseilles moved to Grenoble when Germany occupied much of southern France. The Turkish diplomats in Paris who were most involved in the rescue efforts and who went to great lengths and often at great personal risk to protect Turkish Jews, were: Consuls General Cevdet Dülger, 1939 until 1942; Fikret Sefik Özdoganci, 1942 until 1945; and Vice Consul Namik Kemal Yolga who remained in Paris throughout the war. Yolga and two other staff members, Fatin Rüştü Zorlu and Melih Esenbel, later became foreign ministers of Turkey. In Marseilles were Consuls General Bedi’i Arbel, 1940 until 1943, Mehmed Fuad Carim, 1943 until 1945, and Necdet Kent, 1941 until 1944.45

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45 http://www.sefarad.org/publication/lm/043/6.html
In 1943, the Turkish Vice Consul in Marseilles, Necdet Kent, was informed by a Jewish worker at the consulate that 80 Turkish Jews had been loaded into cattle cars for immediate transport to one of the death camps. Immediately, Kent rushed to the Saint Charles train station and approached the Gestapo commander there demanding that the people being loaded onto the cars had to be released because they were “his” Turkish citizens. The official refused to comply stating that the people were nothing but Jews. Undeterred, Kent turned to the Jewish worker from the consulate who first alerted him, and said, “Come on, we’re getting on this train, too.” Pushing aside the soldier who attempted to block his way, Kent jumped into the wagon. The German official on duty ordered him to get off but Kent refused stating that these were his Turkish citizens and he would stay with them. Angered and frustrated by this attitude, the Gestapo officer slammed the door and locked him in the cattle car with the others. By the time the train reached the next station, nervous and solicitous German officers were waiting for Kent, hoping to diffuse a possible international incident. Embarrassed and apologetic, they wanted to escort Kent back to Marseilles and had a car waiting. Kent retorted that the mistake was not that he was on the train - but that 80 Turkish citizens were - and he had no intention of leaving them. The officer in charge yielded and let all the people in the wagon leave with Kent not even bothering to check their papers to see if they were all Turks. For this act of humanity Kent was nominated for Yad Vashem’s “Righteous Gentile Award.” In need of “objective evidence,” the decision is still pending.47


47 Hopefully this Brief/paper contains the necessary and sufficient “objective evidence” to supplement oral testimonies for a favorable decision.
In Paris Namik Kemal Yolga would drive to Drancy in his own car and one by one pluck the Turkish Jews from the camp and hide them in safe places until placed on trains to Turkey. Known as the Turkish Schindler, Yolga was honored by the "500. Yıl Vakfı" (Quincentennial Foundation) in 1998.⁴⁹

Among the junior staff at the Vichy embassy who helped Erkin save Turkish Jews were Beşir Balcıoğlu and Fatin Rüştü Zorlu, both of whom lost their lives prematurely. Fatin Rüştü Zorlu, later minister of foreign affairs in the Democratic Party administration during the 1950s, was hanged for “treason” after the 1960 coup d'état.⁵⁰ In 1978, Balcıoğlu was assassinated by the

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⁴⁹ In 2001, Namik Kemal Yolga was honored with Turkey's Supreme Service Medal as well as a special medal from Israel for rescuing Jews during the Holocaust. "I admire and respect and thank you no end for what you did to save our Jewish brothers at the darkest moment in history," Uri Bar-Ner, then Israel's ambassador to Turkey, said at the ceremony. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, speaking in Washington on Turkish-U.S. relations in March, praised the diplomat, saying his story "has a place in humanitarian acts of courage beside the feats of a man like Raoul Wallenberg." The Associated Press, ISTANBUL, Turkey (AP) October 1, 2002. Naim A. Güleryüz, “The History of Turkish Jews,” http://www.muze500.com/content/view/251/222/1/3/lang,en/

⁵⁰ Anonymous, “Turkey: Message to a Son” Time Magazine, Sep. 29, 1961
Armenian terrorist organization ASALA in Madrid\textsuperscript{51} while he was visiting his brother-in-law who was the ambassador there at the time.

After Erkin’s retirement the government of Turkey had to be prodded and cajoled to assist more Jews who wanted to leave France and return to Turkey. That prodding came from outside – The World Jewish Congress, The War Refugee Board, US Ambassador to Turkey Laurence Steinhardt, as well as Münir Ertegün, the Turkish Ambassador to the US. Most surprisingly, pressure came from Cordell Hull the US Secretary of State under whose watch Jewish immigration to the US had been severely restricted.\textsuperscript{52}

A “Memorandum for the Files” of the War Refugee Board by Ira Hirshmann, US Special Attaché in Ankara summarizes the situation of Turkish Jews in France as of April 14, 1944.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{51} Anonymous, “ATAA REMEMBERS VICTIMS OF ARMENIAN TERRORISM”  
http://www.ataa.org/press/prl_060208.html

\textsuperscript{52} Reisman, A., \textit{SHOAH: Turkey, the US, and the UK}
Memorandum for the Files” of the War Refugee Board by Ira Hirshmann, April 14, 1944

Other clues to a man’s character are the public stands taken by his peers.

The role of the US diplomatic corps in Vichy

In a dreadful moment in history it was argued that one only carried out unjust laws in order to weaken their severity, that the power one agreed to exercise would have done even more damage if it had been placed in the hands which were less pure. What a dreadful rationalization, which opened the door to unlimited criminality! Everyone eased his conscience, and each level of injustice found a willing executor. In such circumstances, it seems to me, innocence was murdered, with the pretext that it be strangled more gently.

Benjamin Constant, 1815

During the war, few other foreign missions in France shared Erkin’s views. The American embassy in Paris denied that discrimination was even taking place and called on American Jews living in France to continue to “obey the voluntary laws administered by occupied France.” In a letter sent to Erkin by the first secretary of the U.S. embassy, Maynard Barnes, on October 17th 1940, the convoluted and prejudiced attitudes were revealed when Barnes stated:

The Embassy of the United States of America,

Paris, 17 October, 1940

To the Consul-General of the Republic of Turkey,

To my esteemed colleagues,

Please accept my apologies for my belated response to you regarding the registration of property owned by German Jews. Nowadays, I’m informing American citizens who apply at our Embassy that they are voluntarily obliged to abide by the laws as U.S. citizens living in France. However, we can take the initiative whenever there is any discrimination. As far as we can tell, no discrimination is being practiced whereas it is

53 Courtesy Laurence Steinhardt Papers, FDR Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY
54 Benjamin Constant, Tzvetan Todorov and Etienne Hofmann, Principes de politique : applicables à tous les gouvernements: (version de 1806-1810), (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 1997)
applied on all members of the Jewish faith residing within occupied territory. I would greatly appreciate hearing from those who have opinions that are to the contrary.55

Maynard B. Barnes, 1st Ambassadorial Secretary

Ambassador Erkin met with Barnes’ boss, US Ambassador to Vichy, Fleet Admiral William Daniel Leahy, on several social occasions. Evidently they exchanged views on many subjects because the Leahy Diaries in the Library of Congress mention Ambassador Erkin several times in connection with formal dinners and luncheons that Leahy attended and matters they discussed such as whether Turkey would enter the war and on which side.56 Since the diaries contain one entry about Jews and Communists being held hostage and killed in retaliation for the kidnapping of some German soldiers, it is unthinkable that the “Jewish question” was never discussed, especially given Erkin’s resolve. Yet, neither Leahy’s diaries nor his book I was there, based on his diaries 57 make mention of Jews being rounded up when he was the US Ambassador. What would be the reason for this void in Leahy’s memoirs. Not only was America’s ambassador to Vichy mum on the plight of Turkish Jews in France but so was America’s ambassador to Turkey, Laurence A. Steinhardt58 at least until 1944 when the State Department was cleansed of its anti-Semitic policies and policy makers. After that change in Washington and the subsequent formation of the War Refugee Board, there is quite a bit of correspondence on this issue in the Steinhardt archives.59

55 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Embassy Archives, "Paris Büyükelçisi". File No. 463-205-6127.


Jan. 22, 1941 - "made formal calls of ceremony on the Ambassador from Turkey, M. Behic Erkin and China...Erkin stated that a movement of German troops toward the Bosphorus would be resisted by the Turkish Army."

Feb. 6, 1941 - "dined with Ambassador from Turkey."

Feb. 9 - formal dinner at Flandin's - Ambassador from Turkey, Argentina, Spain were there.
March 13 - Spoke at length with Erkin on phone...Turkey will not enter war unless invaded. Will fight to the end if invaded.
March 15 - luncheon with Erkin and other ambassadors.
July 2 - lunch with Mr. Ours, Counselor of the Turkish Embassy.
July 5 - private tea with Behic Erkin and Mr. Ours.
Sept. 20 - execution of Communists and Jews after taking them hostage - in retaliation for assasination of German soldiers.

57 Leahy, W. D. I was there; 1950).
58 Steinhardt was Jewish.
59 See the Appendix of this paper for a smapling.
History has shown that the United States and Erkin had diametrically opposed positions regarding the need for saving Jews from deportation and death. What the world has learned is that the “great” powers lacked the moral rectitude that determines whether a country is indeed great or whether a man is righteous.

The British and US positions on saving Jews of Europe

The life saving immigration that never happened prior to the outbreak of WWII is one of the great shames and tragedies of the 20th century as shown by the Évian Conference of 1938 which was convened at the initiative of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in July 1938 to discuss the problem of Jewish refugees. For nine days, from July 6 to July 15, delegates from thirty-two countries and twenty-four volunteer organizations attending as observers, many of whom presented plans orally and in writing, met at Évian-les-Bains, France. The U.S. was unwilling to change its immigration policies and, along with France and Britain, stated they had already done enough to help the plight of refugees. Other nations then fell in line and in terms of saving Jewish lives, the conference was a total failure. The fact that the conference did not pass even one resolution condemning Germany’s treatment of its Jewish citizens was widely used as part of Nazi propaganda to further Hitler’s plans. The lack of action by the nations of the world emboldened Hitler to enlarge his assault to include all European Jewry.

Britain allowed very few Jewish immigrants to enter its domain for many reasons, some with anti-Semitic overtones, and it tightly controlled entry to Palestine so as not to offend the Arab world for they controlled the oil. They [the Middle Eastern War Council] recommend a firm reservation by the Government of the policy of the White Paper of 1939, which, as you remember gives the Arabs the right to stop Jewish immigration after the end of March 1944, and thus stereotype the exiting Arab majority.

The Foreign Secretary wishes to ask the American Government to try to damp down Zionist propaganda in the United States so as not to hurt Arab susceptibilities.

F.A. Lindemann, Winston Churchill’s Scientific Adviser, June 25th 1943

We have come to the conclusion that a peaceful and secure Palestine is and must remain of the utmost importance to the British Empire and Commonwealth in achieving their strategic needs in the Middle East. For this reason, we consider that the continued occupation of Palestine by British forces

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60 The U.S. delegation was headed up by Myron Taylor, the former head of U.S. Steel.
61 Fischel, Jack R., The Holocaust
62 See Reisman, A. SHOAH: The US and the UK.
and the control of air bases and means of communication in that country after the war are essential.

M. B. Ronald Ministerial Committee on Palestine, August 25th 1943

[The] decision … in respect to immigration … I hold, should not be reached until we are sure whether or not mass immigration is more conducive to our imperial interests then a system of strict and close control under which each application for entry would be judged upon its intrinsic merits.

It is my own belief that the continuance of Jewish immigration to Palestine would be disastrous to our imperial interests.

H. A. MacMichael, High Commissioner for Palestine, July 1944

In control of Palestine Britain held the keys to the legal immigration of Jews into the country while at the same time its navy and border patrol spared no effort to block attempts at illegal entry. The following Table shows that between April 1939 and May 1945 only 62,000 individuals were given the gift of life by Great Britain. This figure represents one tenth of one percent (0.1%) of the six million who perished, many could have been saved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Number of Immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 1939</td>
<td>1,210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May–September 1939</td>
<td>7,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1939–March 1940</td>
<td>9,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April–September 1941</td>
<td>7,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1941–March 1942</td>
<td>1,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April–September 1942</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1942–March 1943</td>
<td>3,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1943</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February–March 1943</td>
<td>1,140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April–June 1943</td>
<td>12,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July–September 1943</td>
<td>1,340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October–December 1943</td>
<td>1,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January–March 1944</td>
<td>808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April–July 1944</td>
<td>608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1944</td>
<td>16,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1945</td>
<td>2,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>62,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distribution of Jewish immigration to Palestine permits during the war

Across the Atlantic, the immigration into the United States of the oppressed from Nazi Germany and Adolf Hitler's policies was limited to only a small fraction of those who wanted to leave

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66 Ofer, D. *Escaping the Holocaust* : p 320
Germany. Because of anti-Semitism, isolationism, the depression and xenophobia, the immigration policy and well documented State Department practices of the Roosevelt Administration made obtaining entry visas impossible for most refugees, especially with such “Catch 22-type” regulations in place like the “criminal record” prohibition which by definition considered those who had been released from concentration or labor camps criminals and therefore excluded them as candidates for visas. The “LPC” (likely to become a public charge) prohibition excluded many Jews since they were prohibited to take any wealth with them out of Nazi territory and would arrive destitute. Finally the “contract labor” prohibition eliminated those who did not have guaranteed job offers in America and therefore would likely become LPC. There were other rules to follow allowing for the obstruction of visas. “American consuls in Germany [were instructed] not to give visas to Germans [Jews] without passport or without permission to leave the country ... not to issue immigrant visas to anyone without evidence of a booking on a ship due to sail within four months ... have the ability to pay for passage and affidavits of support from American relatives.”

This left many Jews trapped in Germany and German controlled territories as Hitler continued his persecution.

These discriminatory practices were due to a long standing State Department policy ultimately articulated in detail by a June 26, 1940, Internal State Department Memorandum formulated and signed by Breckinridge Long, Assistant Secretary for immigration Affairs.

The State Department practices, the mentioned Memorandum, the fact that FDR repeatedly abetted the Holocaust by suppressing as much information about it as he could, his refusal to bomb railways leading to the camps or crematoria at the camps when it could have saved hundreds of thousands of lives, his delay in liberating prison camps in the Netherlands as long as possible allowing the Jews to die were the motivation for a “Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of this Government in the Murder of the Jews,” written by Josiah E. DuBois, Jr.

DuBois was a young Treasury Department official who played a pivotal role in exposing State Department obstruction of efforts to provide American visa to Jews trying to escape Nazi

67 See Reisman, A. Turkey’s Modernization: p 324
68 There are excellent secondary sources for the reader to consider. Among them are: Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, American Refugee Policy. Berenbaum, M. The world must know: and Laquer, W. and Baumel, J.T. The Holocaust encyclopedia. Morse, A.D. While six million died; Feingold, H.L. The politics of rescue; Gilbert, M. Never again; Friedman, S. S. No haven for the oppressed; Perl, W. The Holocaust conspiracy; Wasserstein, B. Britain and the Jews of Europe: Bokhover, R. British Jewry and the Holocaust. The list can go on and on.
69 However, in The Myth of Rescue, William D. Rubenstein provides much statistical data to support his premise that America and the UK did do all that could have been done to save Jewish lives, an unorthodox point of view indeed. Interestingly the word “Turkey” does not appear in his lengthy and detailed index.
70 Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, American Refugee Policy: p 75
71 For a full transcript see Reisman A. SHOAH: Turkey, the US, and the UK pp 13-15. Photocopies of the actual document are available on request from this author.
72 Josiah E. DuBois, Jr. Report to the Secretary:
73 Wyman - Abandonment of the Jews, p 295
74 Josiah E. DuBois, Jr. Report to the Secretary;
75 DuBois, a 1934 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, was Special assistant to Henry Morgenthau Jr., the Secretary of the Treasury
Europe. In no uncertain terms the report said that FDR was “guilty not only of gross procrastination and willful failure to act, but even of willful attempts to prevent action from being taken to rescue Jews from Hitler.” One of many facts in the report: “By the act of 1924, we are permitted to admit approximately 150,000 immigrants each year. During the last fiscal year only 23,725 came as immigrants. Of these only 4,705 were Jews fleeing Nazi persecution.”

According to historians Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut:

In the spring of 1941, the State Department especially an eager Brekinridge Long, hurried to bolt the door it had all but closed the previous year. Once again citing the dangers of subversives among the refugees, State instructed consuls to reject applicants if they had ‘children, parent, spouse, brothers, or sisters’ residing in the ever-widening territories under Nazi domination.

Since his boss Cordell Hull was an ineffectual aristocratic political appointee, “twenty-three of the forty-two divisions in the State Department were directly under the supervision of Assistant Secretary Brekinridge Long.”

“Ultimately, the effect of the immigration policies set by Long’s department was that, during American involvement in the war, 90 percent of the quota places available to immigrants from countries under German and Italian control are never filled. If they had been, an additional 190,000 people could have escaped the atrocities being committed by the Nazis.”

In 1944 Josiah DuBois Jr., a young Department of the Treasury fresh out of law school, learned about his government’s policy of not only deterring Jewish immigration to America but of blatantly ignoring the genocide to be taking place in Europe. Disgusted, angry and appalled, he prepared a historic memorandum in which he stated that unless these policies were abolished and the Roosevelt administration began to get into the fray and help the survivors and refugees, he would take all his information to the media and expose the State Department policy of acquiescence in the murder of European Jews. After listing the details of US complicity in the Holocaust, the memo stated, “...this Government will have to share FOR ALL TIME responsibility for this extermination.” A delegation took the memo to President Franklin Roosevelt on January 17, 1944.

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75 For more on these FDR factoids see: Wyman, Abandonment of the Jews:
76 Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, American Refugee Policy p 135 citing “Circular Telegram to certain Diplomatic Missions and to all Consular Offices except Those in France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany and Italy” June 5, 1940. Breitman and Kraut devote an entire highly documented chapter, pages 126-145 to “Brekinridge Long and Jewish Refugees.”
77 Morgenthau H. III, Mostly Morgenthau: p 325.
78 “Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of the Jews,” an 13, 1944, p.1
79 “Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of the Jews,” an 13, 1944, p.1
1944 was an election year and public exposure of this document could have been politically damaging for the Democratic Party. Obviously moved by the memo's warning that he could be held historically accountable for acquiescence in the murder of European Jews, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9417 five days later. This order created an agency to rescue Jews and required the Departments of State, War, and Treasury to implement the agency's plans. "The mandate of the new agency was extraordinary for in some respects it gave the director more power than a Cabinet officer." "Three days later the State Department, having caught the new spirit, displayed fresh vigor in implementing the order." Turkey was recognized as a center of operations for the War Refugee Board because of the country's neutrality and geographic location. The War Refugee Board is credited with saving 200,000 European Jews in the final stages of the Holocaust.

According to historian Rafael Medoff, post facto DuBois felt his efforts had been a failure, If only he had "been able to get the board started a year, six months earlier, how many more could he have saved? By January 1944 there was only 15 months left in the war. Most of the six million were already gone."

The fate of “Turkish” Jews in occupied Greece

To fully appreciate the actions taken by Behiç Erkin and his staff, one need only look at the fate of Jews in Thesaloni, Greece. During WWII Greece was occupied by the Nazis but neutral Turkey maintained an Embassy in Athens and a Consulate in Thessalonika. Before the war Thessalonika boasted a Jewish population of 56,000, most with roots in the Ottoman Empire dating back to the Spanish Inquisition and the expulsion of Spanish Jewry in 1492. These Jews were no different than the “irregulars” in France, many of whom were saved by Behiç Erkin and his staff while the entire Thessalonika Jewish community was deported to the crematoria. Why did the Turkish legation in Greece not raise objections? They did not interfere since they had no instructions from Ankara to do so, and obviously lacked the same moral compass as their colleagues in France.

80 There is some evidence that Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau II finally agreed to press Roosevelt (with the memo) because one of its authors, Special assistant to the Secretary of the Treasury, (1944-45) Josiah E. DuBois, Jr. threatened that if he did not do so, he, DuBois, would resign from the Treasury, call a press conference in Washington, and rip the lid off the entire State Department refugee scandal. See David Wyman Abandonment of the Jews, p.203. "(Roosevelt realized) a nasty scandal was imminent...(and) decided to head off the impending crisis" See David Wyman World Reacts to the Holocaust, p.706. "Roosevelt was doubtless aware, after reading the Morgenthau file, that the State Department's usefulness in handling the potentially explosive rescue question was at an end." See Henry Feingold Politics of Rescue p. 241. "It had the desired effect for two reasons, its contents were political dynamite and 1944 was an election year," See Henry Feingold Bearing Witness, p.176.
81 Ibid p. 245.
82 Ibid p. 244.
83 Medoff, Blowing the Whistle:
84 Over more than four centuries Thesalonika was known to have the largest Jewish community in the Ottoman Empire.
85 A term used to describe the Jews in France with Turkish roots but not holding French passports.
Concluding Remarks

The Appendix of this paper provides legends, short summaries, and a few actual excerpts of a sampling of additional archival documents pertinent to this matter. The various specific life-saving actions of the Turkish diplomats in France have been amply described in several published articles and in two or three books. The totality of evidence presented here justifies the conclusion that without question whatsoever Behiç Erkin and those working under his supervision in France acted on their own and that by 1944 after his resignation as ambassador, Ankara’s position on the remaining Jews of Turkish origin in France has hardened considerably, Ankara and its legations have become much more intransigent.

The grand total of all evidence justifies concluding that starting with Behic Erkin, the Ambassador and the “leader of the band,” most if not all members of the Turkish legation in France ca 1939-1944 deserve to be honored with Yad Vashem’s “Righteous Gentile” Award.

These days when discussion in America turns to Turkey’s role in the Shoah, the most and often the only cited fact concerns the Struma affair.

A public notice announcing the Struma’s sailing out of Constanta, Rumania/Rumania on October 8, 1941.

On February 24, 1942, the Rumanian steamer Struma was torpedoed in the Black Sea, an incident that sent shock waves internationally. With the English adamant about not allowing the refugees on board to disembark and proceed to Palestine, the Turkish coast guard towed the

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86 Copies of the actual documents are available from this author on request.
87 Courtesy of the Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem, Israel.
88 The designated Jewish homeland was under British rule as part of a League of Nations mandate. Britain controlled all entry visas and refused to provide them to the Struma passengers. According to its law Turkey for its part would not allow transit unless the passengers had valid entry visas at some other destination. Moreover the United States would not intervene with the British.
Struma out of its territorial waters. Several hours later, the ship sank in the Black Sea. Contemporary records and recent studies have concluded that the ship was torpedoed by a Russian submarine. However, to this day it is still unclear who gave the order or why it was given. It may have been an on-the-spot decision by the sub’s commander Senior Lieutenant D.M. Denezhko and/or by Political Commissar A.G. Rodimazov. The SC-213 fired a single torpedo from a distance of 1,118 meters (1,218 yards) and sank the Struma, having no knowledge who or what was on board but recognizing the ship as belonging to Rumania, an enemy nation; a case of the wrong decision made for the right reasons.

No one will deny that it was a tragic and shameful episode. 768 refugees perished; only one survived. Most people have put the blame squarely on Turkey’s shoulders. That is neither fair nor is it historically justified. Yet it unquestionably shows that as of 1941 when Behiç Erkin and his staff were already working feverishly to save Jews in France their government did not have a policy dedicated to the same lofty goals.

One could argue that the Struma’s passengers were not Turkish citizens and that there are no indications that any of them had any Turkish roots. Granted! This however raises the question as to what was the prevailing climate regarding Turkish citizens who were Jewish and who were living in Turkey at the time. One indication is that after the death of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkey’s founding father and great visionary, on November 10, 1938, some of his policies on many issues pertaining to the refugees began eroding as his successors shifted gears. Economic conditions coupled with the stirring of nationalist passions gave rise to Law Number 4305, the Capital Tax Law (Varlık Vergisi Kanunu) passed by the Turkish Grand National Assembly on November 11, 1942. The explicit objective of this law was to heavily tax the wealthy in order to shore up Turkey’s economy. From the way it was administered, however, its implicit objective was to reduce minority populations such as Jews, Armenians, and Greeks. Under the umbrella of promoting this law the media ran many unabashedly anti-Semitic cartoons as well as stories. Because of its coercive and discriminatory practices the law was thankfully short lived, primarily due to external pressures. The New York Times unleashed a series of articles that were most critical of this law beginning with a C.L. Sulzberger column which appeared.

90 To place the Struma Affair in some relevant context one should be reminded of the steam ship St. Louis which left Germany on May 13, 1939. Its passengers, most of them Jews from Germany, had documents for entry into Cuba. When the ship arrived, however, Havana - and the US - refused to admit them. The St. Louis sat in the harbor for days. After frantic international negotiations to allow the refugees to disembark only 29 passengers were permitted to land in Havana. Then the ship was ordered to leave – maneuvering slowly and tantalizingly near the coast of Florida before turning back to Europe. Soon enough the U.S. had another opportunity to help the plight of refugees when the St. Louis, a luxury liner, had been charted from Germany to Cuba and was refused landing permits at Cuba by Batista. The U.S., led by Secretary of State Hull and President Roosevelt, ordered the U.S. Coast Guard to keep the ship from port. On June 17, 1939, the St. Louis docked at Antwerp: 214 passengers remained in Belgium, 224 went to France and 181 to the Netherlands. Another 288 passengers went ashore in Britain on June 21. But, the end of that journey for most its passengers was the beginning of the Holocaust. Over two-thirds of the 907 passengers died, including many in Auschwitz. http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005139

90 See Reisman, A. SHOAH: Turkey, the US, and the UK, p 58
on September 10, 1943. Between November 11th 1942 the passage of Law Number 4302, and its cancellation, Turkish legation staffers in France were sending trainloads of Turkey connected Jews from France to safe-haven –Turkey.

Post scriptum

Two books will be cited here for the very reason that there is absolutely nothing to quote from them. Yet they are part of a genre of highly researched and well written history books on the fate of French Jewry during the Holocaust, a genre which makes no mention of a group of French Jews the members of which were liberated by the Turkish diplomatic corps in France.

One is the 432 page Vichy France and the Jews\textsuperscript{91} book by Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton. Both authors are highly established authorities, one on the Holocaust and the other on Vichy France. The book’s jacket reads: “This lucidly written and rigorously documented book definitively establishes French cooperation in the Final Solution – cooperation, the authors conclude, that was virtually unparalleled in all of Europe.”

The other is a 310 page small-print The Jews of Paris and the Final Solution: Communal Response and Internal Conflicts, 1940-1944 book by Jacques Adler\textsuperscript{92} is about the Turkish Jews of Paris. According to the New York Times: “Mr. Adler's wide-ranging investigation - in New York and Jerusalem as well as Paris - gives this book an authority lacking in so much French-written history of World War II…..”\textsuperscript{93}

Significantly Jacques Adler is not the only historian of that subject who has allowed this significant part of the Shoah history to remain unreported. There are other significant episodes of Turkey’s saving Jews during the Holocaust and some in fact as a matter of government policy,\textsuperscript{94} which have become an Anglophone historian’s blind-spot until very recently.\textsuperscript{95} Clearly one should not be too critical of Adler’s oversight back in 1987 as he had nothing to work with in literature published in English nor French when he was doing his research. However since he himself is a Holocaust survivor, a remnant of Parisian Jewry, the question might be raised as to whether he had no inkling, no clue whatsoever, that others in that community, as a significant grouping, were given tickets to freedom and to safety. Yet as was indicated Rosa Levy Kosrovitsky had testified: “I saw an ad in the newspaper that anyone of Turkish origin who

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{92}Jacques Adler \textit{The Jews of Paris and the Final Solution: Communal Response and Internal Conflicts, 1940-1944}. (Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 1987)
\item \textsuperscript{93}Herbert R. Lottman, “COMPLIANCE OR RESISTANCE?” \textit{New York Times} Sunday, September 20, 1987
\item \textsuperscript{94}As was the case of the 91 intellectuals and professionals who were invited by government to upgrade Turkey's higher education, medical care, etc, starting in 1933. See Reisman, A. Turkeys Modernization:
\end{itemize}
wanted to go home should come to the Turkish Consulate and begin the process. Obviously the Turkish diplomats were not hiding their actions. So how could other Jews of occupied Paris and historians who came after them not know anything. When Adler was researching, did he not go back into newspaper archives? His book is based on his doctoral research. Doctoral research requires that no pertinent information is overlooked. Why then with his knowledge of French did he not search out these facts while doing his research in Paris. He would have been the first to shed light on a significant epoch quite relevant to the topic of his dissertation. A missed opportunity, at least until 1995 when Stanford Shaw first brought it to light.96

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**APPENDIX**

A February 18, 1944 to the Secretary of State from Special Attache Ira Hirschmann in Ankara asking the Secretary to intervene with the Turkish Ambassador to Washington. Saying among other things “immediate
aid on the part of the Turkish government … to help in the [Jewish refugee] rescue effort will be highly
evaluated.”

A February 19, 1944 Telegram to the Secretary of State which shows that Laurence Steinhardt, American
Ambassador to Ankara discussed sending a joint communique to the Turkish Foreign Minister to intervene
in “the plight of Jews in France of Turkish origin … to save them from being deported to Poland” with his
British counterpart

A March 13th 1944 letter to the Secretary of State signed by Laurence E. Steinhardt transmitting a report by
Special Attache Ira Hirschmann an excerpt of which is shown next.

An excerpt from a report by Special Attache Ira Hirschmann regarding the plight of Turkish origin Jews in
France.

An April 22nd 1944 letter to the Secretary of State signed by Laurence E. Steinhardt showing no objections
about “raising with the Turkish Ambassador in Washington the danger of deportation to approximately 800
Jews in France who claim Turkish nationality.”

An April 25th 1944 letter to the Secretary of State from Joseph Schwartz in Lisbon requesting that pressure
be applied on the Turkish government by Ambassador Steinhardt and by Washington “to save
approximately 6,000 Turkish nationals … now in precarious situation.”
An April 27th 1944 letter to John Pehle, Executive Director of the War Refugee Board signed A. Leon Kubowitzki, Head Rescue Department, on the World Jewish Congress letterhead saying that “the attitude of the Turkish Government with regard to the 10,000 Jews of Turkish origin now in France has in fact not changed and that the danger which threatens them is more acute than ever.”

An April 12th 1944 letter from the Turkish Embassy in Washington to Dr. J.W. Wise, World Jewish Congress, signed M. M. Ertegun Turkish Ambassador.

A letter to the Department of State dated January 27th 1944, signed Stephen S. Wise, President World Jewish Congress, requesting that Ambassador Steinhardt “ask the Turkish Foreign Minister to instruct the Turkish representative in France to protect all those Jews claiming Turkish citizenship, regardless of whether they fall under the competence of the Turkish law of 1935…”

A May 3rd 1944 letter from John Pehle, Executive Director of the War Refugee Board to Turkish Ambassador Mehmet M. Ertegun saying “it is understood that the Turkish Government has recognized some of the claims but that in most of the cases no action has yet been taken with the result that some of the persons involved have already been transported to Poland and almost certain death.”
Turkish Ambassador’s May 6, 1944 response letter to Pehle

Cable 35, dated May 10th 1944, from the Secretary of State Cordell Hull to Ambassador Laurence Steinhardt stating “It is further requested that the Turkish government postpone making adverse determinations of [citizenship] claims until the termination of the war…. The Board will undertake to make funds available from American sources for their maintenance and support and will further undertake promptly to find havens outside Turkey for such evacuees whose claims to Turkish nationality are rejected by the Turkish government.

Telegram 876 from the American Embassy in Ankara signed Steinhardt and dated May 18th 1944 to the Secretary of State saying among other things “It was stated by the Minister that the [Turkish] Ambassador’s position in dealing with the authorities in Vichy was not ‘too advantageous’ in that over 90% of the Jews in France who claim Turk nationality ‘have not the remotest claim thereto, since in many instances their ancestors have left Turkey several generations ago’”