Introduction

Turkey on the Edge of the Nazi Period

During the Second World War, Turkey was neither occupied by German troops nor did it actively participate in the war. Turkey also did not apply an openly anti-Semitic policy. So, one may ask, what has Turkey to do with the Holocaust? Turkey's policy during this period was crucial for many Jews: for the roughly 75,000 Jews still living in Turkey at that time, for Jews from Eastern and Southeastern Europe as a possible refuge or stepping-stone leading to Palestine, and for the numerous Jews of Turkish origin living in Central and Western Europe. Turkish politics played a vital role in the (potential) rescue of Jews in Southeastern Europe and particularly in the lives of Turkish Jews all over Europe.

Twenty to thirty thousand Turkish Jews, or Jews of Turkish origin, were living all over Europe in the period between the two world wars. Although this is more than the Jewish population in Turkey today, and despite the fact that many of them were victims of the Shoah, they have received very little attention in international Holocaust research to date. The only book dedicated exclusively to the subject has been Stanford Shaw's study from 1993, *Turkey and the Holocaust. Turkey's Role in Rescuing Turkish and European Jewry from Nazi Persecution*. As can be seen from the book's subheading, Shaw's focal point is Turkey's role in rescuing Jews. According to Shaw, Turkish diplomats all over Europe did their utmost to save Turkish Jews from persecution, "often at the risk of their own lives." These arguments struck a chord in Turkey's politics, and their constant repetition and exaggeration in official rhetoric has turned them into an ossified, self-perpetuating myth which is frequently propagated in international publications.

In such accounts, the fate of the Turkish Jews during the Shoah is only briefly mentioned; they were, after all, mere "extras" in Turkey's efforts to rescue its diplomats. My aim, in contrast, has been to let the perspective of Turkish Jews guide my investigation. The reaction of many contemporary witnesses I interviewed, whose fates had been of little interest until then, encouraged my approach.

I begin the first part of the book by briefly explaining the special circumstances that contributed to the formation of the Turkish nation-state and to Kemalist policies, while I also discuss the consequences these had for the situation of the Jews. The mass emigration of Jews from Turkey during the 1920s, and the policies that Turkey subsequently adopted regarding these emigrants, can only be understood against this background.

This historical background is also necessary for the analysis of Turkey's policies during the Holocaust. Considering that the Shoah is *the* catastrophe of modern human history, many authors tend to look back on past events from the perspective of what we know today and to interpret them anachronistically in the context of the Holocaust. Contrary to this, my analysis emphasizes that Ankara's policies concerning "its own" Jews living inside and outside Turkey and its policies concerning Jewish refugees can only be adequately explained as a consequence of Turkey's own politics.

The Historical Background

In 1933, the first year of National Socialist rule in Germany, Turkey was preparing to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Republic. The chorus of the march in honor of the tenth year of the Republic – "We are Turks; our chest is the bronze protective shield of the Republic; to be at rest is not fitting for Turks" – clearly illustrates the predominant ideology of the time: modernism and nationalism. At breakneck speed, the leadership of the new Turkey attempted to turn the country inside out: factories, schools, roads, and railways were built. Everything reminiscent of the Ottoman past was "revolutionized": the language, the alphabet, the calendar, head coverings, even the country's history. In 1933, Turkish women were given the vote – almost forty years before Swiss women. "Turks to the front, Turks forward, to be at rest is not fitting for Turks."

In 1933, the Nazi regime had already begun to introduce measures that discriminated against Jews and prohibited them from practicing a large number of professions. The National Socialist racial doctrines, which

claimed the superiority of the "Germanic peoples" over Jews and other peoples categorized as "racially inferior," would soon become state doctrine. Over the following years, Jews were gradually excluded from all areas of society; they were forbidden from marrying or entering into relationships with non-Jews and robbed of their property and human dignity.

In Turkey, on the other hand, Jews were urged by Turkish politicians to integrate more successfully by learning Turkish in order to be able to merge with the majority society. In 1933, Jews in almost all of Turkey's larger cities founded associations for the promotion of Turkish culture and made solemn vows to speak only Turkish. In other words, while the Nazis in Germany were organizing the systematic exclusion of Jews from German society, the Kemalists[1] demanded their complete assimilation. It must be asked, however, how sincere this offer of integration actually was. In practice, non-Muslims and "real Turks" were treated quite differently. Furthermore, many Jews perceived the massive pressure of *Turkification* as threatening.

Also in 1933, Sarah Kavayero celebrated her tenth birthday in Paris. She had been born in Izmir on December 23, 1923, eight weeks after the founding of the Turkish Republic. A few years later, she moved with her parents to France, where her sisters Suzanne and Diamante were born in 1926 and 1932, respectively. The Kavayero family was among the twenty to thirty thousand Jews living in France and other European countries during the inter-war period. Numerous families did not leave Turkey until the 1930s. In May 1940, France was occupied by German troops. A mere few weeks later, anti-Semitic regulations were introduced in France, and from 1942 onward, Jews were deported to extermination camps. Sarah Kavayero, too, was sent to Auschwitz with her mother Perla and her two sisters on February 11, 1943, where she was murdered.[2]

During World War II, Turkey was neither occupied nor was it a warring party. Despite leaning toward anti-minority policies, it issued no openly anti-Semitic laws. Nevertheless, Ankara's policies in the years 1933–1945 had far-reaching ramifications for Jews – not only for those living in Turkey, but also for the Jews who came from Turkey and were living in Europe and for those European Jews for whom Turkey, because of its geographic location, was potentially an important country of refuge or transit.

[1] This was the Turkish nationalist movement and its party (first HF, later CHF, from 1924, CHP), which ruled in a single-party government until 1946 and was named after the leader Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk].

[2] See Figure 13.1 on page 310.

In 1933, Germany became Turkey's most important export market. Over the course of the following twelve years, Nazi Germany was at several points Turkey's most important trade partner. However, interpretations that attribute Turkey's policies and especially its anti-Jewish measures primarily to German influence are too narrow. They ignore the course of historical events and are not supported by sources. Furthermore, it was one of the principles of Kemalist policy to reject any meddling and patronizing treatment by European powers. An in-depth examination and assessment of Turkey's policies during the Holocaust is only possible against the backdrop of Turkey's own history and has to take into account the distinct characteristics of the Turkish nationalism that shaped the country's anti-Jewish policies.

Jews in the Republic of Turkey: Between Hope, Assimilation, and Exclusion

The founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 was the final stage in the long dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, which had lost most of its territory in a series of wars against Christian European powers. The crucial factor in the fate of the minorities living in the new republic was the Kemalist project of creating a homogeneous nation-state on the ruins of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire. Kemalism attempted to achieve this goal by means of a strict Turkification policy. In this respect, Turkey's policies in the inter-war period did not markedly differ from the militant nationalism of other newly founded countries in Eastern and Southeastern Europe.

In contrast to these other countries, which had come into existence as a result of independence struggles or the breakup of an empire, the Republic of Turkey was itself the successor state to the Ottoman Empire, which, over the course of numerous wars in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, had attempted unsuccessfully to prevent the independence movements from breaking away. Because the European powers had supported the separation efforts of the Balkan peoples and had used the situation of the minorities in the Ottoman Empire as a pretext for weakening and intervening in the Empire, the Christian minorities in particular were viewed as an instrument of the European powers, as the "enemy within" that was supposedly working on behalf of the "enemy without." Equating the two had given the Young Turks an excuse for the expulsion of the Greeks beginning already in the spring of 1914 and the genocide on the Armenians in the shadow of World War I.

This idea of the enemy within initially shaped Kemalist policies as well. The founding of the Turkish Republic was a result of the "War of Liberation," also known as "War of Independence" (*İstiklal savaşı* in the language of the early years of the Republic, in modern Turkish *Kurtuluş savaşı*, War of Liberation) in 1919–1922, which was conducted for the most part against Greeks and Armenians.[3] The Turkification policy was designed to ensure Turkish-Muslim predominance in all areas of society, and in a way, it constituted a continuation of the "War of Liberation" by other means: "This country belongs to you, the Turks. This fatherland has been Turkish throughout history, it is Turkish, and it will always remain Turkish. It has now finally returned to the hands of its rightful owners," Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk][4] declared in Adana in 1923.[5]

At the same time, the Turkification policy was aimed at the homogenization of the ethnically and religiously very heterogeneous population. A large proportion of the Muslim population did not even speak Turkish, among them the Kurds and especially hundreds of thousands of *muhacir*, Muslims who had immigrated to Anatolia from the territories lost to the Ottoman Empire in the last decades of Ottoman rule and after the Empire's dissolution.

[3] Calling it a national "War of Liberation" suggests that it was a war conducted by a country against the imperialist or colonial powers occupying it. In reality, however, the three years of military combat on different fronts were conducted against a variety of opponents. On none of these fronts were the Turkish troops engaged in a mentionable military combat with British, Italian, or French troops, who had left the country for the most part by 1920. To the west, the country was at war with Greece, which had been entrusted with several areas in western Anatolia (whose inhabitants were primarily Greek) by the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920. After five years, the fate of these areas was to be decided by referendum. However, before this could happen, Greek troops crossed the borders of these areas advancing to Central Anatolia. As the Turkish-Muslim troops defeated the Greek forces, they did not differentiate between the Greek invasion troops and the Greek civilians in the region and utilized the war to expel the Greeks living in these areas. In southeastern Anatolia, which was under French mandate, the Turkish-Muslim troops also permanently expelled the Armenians, who had survived flight and genocide, after the French troops withdrew. The same happened in the provinces of eastern Anatolia, whose administration should have been entrusted to the Armenians by the Treaty of Sèvres. During this time, the Turkish troops also crushed an uprising of Kurdish Alevis in Koçgiri and expelled the Pontic Greeks settled on the Black Sea. For this reason, the Turkish term "War of Liberation" is cited here in quotation marks.

[4] Family names were not adopted until 1934; they have been in use since the beginning of 1935. To make it easier for non-Turkish readers to understand, for the time prior to 1935 I have indicated the names in brackets.

[5] Quoted in Orhangazi Ertekin, "Cumhuriyet Döneminde Türkçülüğün Çatallanan Yolları," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasî Düşünce*, Vol. 4, *Milliyetçilik*, ed. Tanıl Bora (Istanbul: İletişim, 2002), 355.

The Ambivalent Situation of the Jews

The situation of the Jews was ambivalent. Like the other non-Muslim minorities, they were subject to a number of restrictions and repressive measures. To some extent, however, these laws were not applied to Jews with the same severity as they were to Greeks and Armenians.[6] Kemalist politicians repeatedly used the Jews as a token "model minority." At the peace negotiations in Lausanne in 1922–1923 after the "War of Liberation," for example, Ismet Paşa [Inönü] pointed out the exemplary behavior of the Jews, who, according to him, were loyal to Turkey. The Greeks and the Armenians, on the other hand, he portrayed as potential traitors in order to discredit their demands to have minority rights enshrined in the treaty.[7] At the first economic conference in Izmir in February 1923, M. Kemal said in response to a question by the Jewish attorney Rafael Amato regarding Kemal's attitude toward the Jews: "There are several loyal population groups that have tied their fate to that of the ruling group, the Turks; the Jews are first among them."[8]

Representatives of the Jews in Turkey, for their part, made every effort to establish a good relationship with the Turkish authorities, as had been the tradition since the Ottoman era.[9] In light of the atrocities committed by the retreating Greek troops at the end of the Greek-Turkish War, many of the Jews in western Anatolia had regarded the Turks as liberators. Many of the Jewish intellectuals who acted as spokespeople for their respective communities in the early times of the Republic shared the Kemalists' enthusiasm for progress and secularization. Consequently, most Jews initially considered themselves allies of the Kemalist movement and had mostly positive expectations for the new republic. Atatürk

[6] The regulation that denied repatriation to non-Muslims who had fled or been driven out during World War I or the "War of Liberation", for example, was partly rescinded for Jews.

[7] Seha L. Meray, *Tutanaklar belgeler: Lozan Barış Konferansı*, set 1, vol. 1, book 2 (Ankara: Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1970), 211. Representatives of the Turkish-Jewish community usually played along with the role assigned to them. The former chief rabbi Haim Nahum, for example, served as an advisor to the Turkish delegation during the Lausanne negotiations.

[8] Quoted after Avram Galanté, *Türkler ve Yahudiler: Tarihi, Siyasî Tetkik* (Istanbul: Tan, 1947), 86.

[9] Jews were frequently subject to attacks by the Christian minorities, especially toward the end of the nineteenth century, and therefore relied on the protection of the state. For the Ottoman rulers, the relatively small Jewish minority, which was spread out all over the Empire and did not pursue any separatist goals, was an ideal ally. References to the loyalty of the Jewish community were intended to counter European protests regarding the suppression of non-Muslim minorities in the Empire. This mutual interest led to the emergence of the special "Turkish-Jewish" alliance in the late nineteenth century.

in particular was deeply revered and loved by many Jews and was the subject of many poems and songs.[10]

Prominent representatives of the Jewish community repeatedly voiced the hope that the Jews of Turkey would merge into Turkish society on the basis of equal rights and obligations and become Turks of Jewish faith. But they would soon realize that they, too, would become victims of the Turkification policy.

Anti-Jewish Campaigns

Jews had already become victims of the violence of Turkish troops in various locations during the Greek-Turkish war.[11] In the period between the end of the war and the founding of the Republic of Turkey, parts of the press launched an anti-Jewish campaign. The prelude was an editorial in the *İleri* (Forward) newspaper in December 1922, headlined *Kanımızı Emenler* (blood-suckers), in which Jews were accused of double-dealing, and their declarations of loyalty were declared a lie. The article ended with the words: "Oh, now that the Greeks and the Armenians have departed, if only the Jews would leave the country as well."[12] Several other newspapers, such as the *Türk Sesi* in Izmir, *Paşaeli* in Edirne, and the *Tevhid-i Efkâr* published in Istanbul,[13] as well as several caricature magazines, also took part in the anti-Jewish campaign. Jews were portrayed as exploiters and war profiteers. While the majority of Jews were completely impoverished, some had been able to take over the positions of the expelled Christians and had become prosperous. The Jews were also accused wholesale of having dodged military service and thus also participation in the "War of Liberation."[14]

Anti-Jewish demonstrations, boycotts against Jewish merchants, and threats against Jews occurred in various locations, particularly

[10] See Henri Nahum, *Juifs de Smyrne XIXe–XXe siècle* (Paris: Aubier, 1997), 184ff.

[11] Nahum, *Juifs de Smyrne*, 170; Avner Levi, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Yahudiler* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1998), 15. In some places, the perpetrators were members of irregular Turkish units; see also Melek Çolak, *Milas Yahudileri* (Muğla: Milas Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, 2005), 28ff.

[12] Quoted in A. Levi, *Yahudiler*, 26. The editor of *İleri* was Celal Nuri [İleri], a Member of Parliament who would later become head of the commission charged with drafting the constitution.

[13] *Tevhid-i Efkâr* was published by Abdurrahman Velit Ebüzziya, the son of Mehmet Tevfik Ebüzziya. The latter had made a name for himself with anti-Semitic publications since the end of the nineteenth century, and he translated major ideological statements of modern European anti-Semites into Turkish.

[14] Rıfat N. Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni (1923–1945)*, (Istanbul: İletişim, 1999), 44, 50–51; A. Levi, *Yahudiler*, 41ff.

in Thrace and western Anatolia.[15] The reactions of government agencies varied widely. While they prevented the expulsion of Jews in some locations, in others, Jews were forced by local security forces to leave their homes and cities. The members of the Jewish community of Aydın, which had once numbered 3,000 and was one of the most significant communities in the Aegean region, had fled the city during the terrors of the Greek-Turkish War; now they were not permitted to return. Their houses and their property were confiscated as "abandoned property" and Turkified.[16]

Another reason Jews were now becoming a target of nationalist attacks was that they had become more "visible" as a minority after the murder and expulsion of the Armenians and Greeks between 1914 and 1923. Furthermore, on the basis of the "population exchange" agreed in the Lausanne Treaty, Greeks were not allowed to settle in areas outside of Istanbul, and in many places hardly any Armenians had survived. Before the war, the proportion of non-Muslims in the territory of today's Turkey had been more than 20 percent, the proportion of Jews only slightly more than 1 percent. After the war, non-Muslims represented only 2.5 percent of the population.[17] In the previously mixed regions of western Anatolia and Thrace, the small Jewish communities constituted the largest, or even the only, non-Muslim minority after 1923. Their members were distinguishable from the majority population by their names, language, and religious rites. In Izmir and Edirne, the proportion of Jews in the population during the first years of the Republic was more than 10 percent.[18] The chauvinistic and xenophobic sentiments that during the war were directed primarily against Christian groups now turned against the Jews. Moreover, the bulk of the Muslim refugees and *mucahir*, many of whom had settled in Thrace, were particularly receptive to chauvinistic slogans, as the Jewish population of Thrace would later find out. Foreign diplomats observed that the predominant fear among Jews was

[15] Anti-Jewish activities are documented, for example, for Edirne, Tekirdağ, Uzunköprü, Çorlu, and Urla near Izmir. A. Levi, *Yahudiler*, 34–37; Nahum, *Juifs de Smyrne*, 203; Bali, *Türkleştirme Serüveni*, 40–45.

[16] Nahum, *Juifs de Smyrne*, 201; A. Levi, *Yahudiler*, 57.

[17] Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Die Geschichte der sephardischen Juden: Von Toledo bis Saloniki* (Bochum: Winkler, 2005), 165.

[18] According to Çagaptay, who bases his information on the *İstatistik Yıllığı* (Statistics Yearbook), vol. 11, the proportion of the Jewish population was 15 percent in Edirne and Çanakkale and 10.5 percent in Izmir. Soner Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who Is a Turk?* (London: Routledge, 2006), 176.

that "their turn will come after the Turks have finished with the Greeks and Armenians."[19]

Economic Turkification: Dismissals and Occupational Bans

One aspect that the theoreticians of the Young Turk movement had considered a crucial weakness of the Turkish national movement had been that no Turkish-Muslim middle class had emerged that could have fueled national development, as it did in Western European nations.[20] In the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, capitalist development had just begun. Capital, banks, insurances, and the few industrial operations that were not owned by foreign companies were owned predominantly by members of religious minorities. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Christians and Jews were by no means capitalists; rather, most of them were workers, artisans, and small tradesmen, and the majority of the Christian Greeks were farmers. This employment situation was the result of the Islamic disposition of the Ottoman Empire, in which the Muslim-Turkish upper class traditionally had occupied leading positions in the army and administration, leaving non-Muslims overrepresented in trade and commerce. The Young Turks criticized the strong presence of minorities in the economy as a "false distribution of labor," since, according to them, the Muslim-Turkish population and the "non-Turkish" element of the population did not belong to the same people.[21] The Turkification of the economy – that is, the deliberate ousting and dispossession of non-Muslims – therefore became one of the Young Turks' most important goals. The expulsion and deportation of Greeks and Armenians during World War I had provided the crucial opportunity for the Turkification of their property.[22]

[19] Admiral Mark L. Bristol, U.S. High Commissioner to Turkey, in a report of December 1, 1923, National Archives at College Park, MD (hereafter NARA, MD), M353 (Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1910–1929), reel 48, document No. 867.4016/967.

[20] See Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de "Millî İktisat" 1908–1918* (Ankara: Yurt, 1982), 33; Klaus Kreiser and Christoph K. Neumann, *Kleine Geschichte der Türkei* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003), 362. Yusuf Akçura, one of the early theoreticians of Turkish nationalism, compared the situation to that of the Polish national movement; in Poland, the middle class was also predominantly German and/or Jewish.

[21] Gökalp, quoted in Zafer Toprak, "Millî İktisat," in *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 3 (Istanbul: İletişim, 1985), 744.

[22] The businesses, shops, and real estate of one million Armenians and one million Greeks were taken over by Muslims/Turks. Çağlar Keyder, "Kayıp Burjuvazi Aranıyor,"

Turkification of the economy remained the most important goal in the early phase of the Republic as well, as the minister of economics, Mahmut Esat [Bozkurt], declared at the first economic conference in Izmir in February 1923. He was not, however, referring to a potential nationalization of foreign-owned capitalist businesses but to the ousting of Jewish and Christian blue- and white-collar workers from the economy. First, foreign enterprises in Turkey were forced to dismiss non-Muslim employees, since the minimum proportion of Muslim employees was legally stipulated.[23] Since the Treaty of Lausanne proscribed discrimination against members of the non-Muslim minorities, and the Turkish Constitution established, at least formally, the equality of all citizens in 1924, it was frequent practice to issue directives below the level of laws that prescribed the hiring of "Turks" – meaning Muslim Turks, not Turkish citizens – in particular branches of the economy or at the regional level.

The Law on Civil Servants of March 1926 stipulated that only "Turks" could be employed in the civil service. The personnel files of public servants were required to contain information on religion, "nationality" (meaning ethnicity), and all names, including aliases, to ensure that these people were "real" Turks.[24] These directives applied to all employees in public service, including occupations such as streetcar conductor and longshoreman. Many of the Jews of Turkish origin living in France, Italy, and Belgium whom I interviewed while researching this book said that their parents had emigrated because they had been laid off from such low-end jobs.[25] The majority of the Jewish population was and remained poor. According to the results of the 1935 census, 45.9 percent of Jewish men were without occupation and relied on odd

Toplumsal Tarih no. 68 (1999): 7. See also Christian Gerlach, "Nationsbildung im Krieg: Wirtschaftliche Faktoren bei der Vernichtung der Armenier und beim Mord an den ungarischen Juden," in *The Armenian Genocide and the Shoah,* ed. H. L. Kieser and D. J. Schaller (Zurich: Chronos, 2002), 347–422.

[23] Esther Benbassa, "Les Juifs de Turquie durant l'entre-deux-guerres," in *Les cahiers de la Shoah*, ed. André Kaspi (Paris: Liana Levi, 1995): 125; Bali, *Türkleştirme Seriüveni*, 208.

[24] Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism*, 69. For the text of the law, see (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi or Turkish national parliament) TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, term II, vol. 23:179. Before the law on family names of 1934 was passed, it was usual for people to have additions to their names that indicated their ethnic-religious affiliation, for example, Giorgio the Greek, Avram the Jew.

[25] These dismissals were also described in detail in the reports of the AIU; Lize Tiano, "L'immigration et l'installation en France des juifs grecs et des juifs turcs avant la second guerre mondiale" (unpublished master's thesis, University Paris X, 1981), 32, note 12; also Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Geschichte,* 168.