From Tolerance to Emigration

The history of Turkey's Jewish Community

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Content

Introduction *3*

Chapter 1 : History of the Jewish Community in Turkey *6*

The Jews of the Ottoman Empire 6

The Jewish community at the start of the twentieth century 12

Political activity of Ottoman Jews and Zionists 17

Chapter 2 : The Jewish community in the early Republican period *22*

Policies concerning Jews and other minorities 22

Antisemitism in Turkish society, press and politics before World War II 32

Jewish migration in the 1920s and 1930s 43

Chapter 3 : The Jewish community during World War II *49*

Antisemitism in Turkey during World War II 50

Turkey and Jewish migration during and after World War II 55

Conclusion *62*

Bibliography *64*

Introduction

In 1992, Turkish Jews celebrated five hundred years of welcome. The celebrations were held to commemorate the welcome that was received by the Jews who came to the Ottoman Empire in 1492, after many thousands were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula. According to the official statement of the Quincentennial Foundation, the celebrations were not just held for the welcome that was received, but also for the '*remarkable spirit of tolerance and acceptance which has characterized the whole Jewish experience in Turkey*'.[1] The festivities included many cultural activities, such as exhibitions and concerts, of which some were visited by politicians as well. At the same time, investments were made to restore ancient Synagogues. It even inspired academics such as Stanford Shaw (himself Jewish), who had studied the history of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish republic for thirty years, to dedicate his study to '*Muslim and Jewish Turks of the Republic of Turkey, in celebration of five hundred years of brotherhood and friendship*'.[2] A century earlier, in 1892, similar celebrations were held. During these celebrations, a declaration of Jewish homage was presented to the Sultan, in thanks of the recognition of the Jews.[3]

And yet, in spite of these celebrations, much had changed for the Jewish community in Turkey in the century between 1892 and 1992. The twentieth century witnessed the end of the old Ottoman Empire and the birth of a Turkish Republic, which transformed the relationship between Turks and other ethnic groups, influenced by the rise of nationalism. Of course, radical nationalism and antisemitism in Europe lay at the foundation of the darkest years of the Jews during the Second World War and subsequently, the founding of the state of Israel. All these developments radically changed the Jewish community in Turkey. The celebrations of 1992 seem to obscure the fact that thousands of Jews chose to leave Turkey in the late 1940s, in spite of 'the remarkable spirit of tolerance and acceptance which has characterized the whole Jewish experience in Turkey'. It will be the purpose of this thesis to look for the causes of the migration of Turkish Jews in the years after the Second World War, and thereby to question the idea of a spirit of tolerance and acceptance.

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[1] Marcy Brink-Danan, *Jewish Life in Twenty-First-Century Turkey: The Other Side of Tolerance* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012), x.
[2] Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 1991).
[3] Walter F. Weiker, *Ottomans, Turks and the Jewish Polity. A History of the Jews of Turkey* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1992), 132.

In order to be able to structurally study the causes of Jewish emigration in the late 1940s, I have divided this thesis into three parts, which can be separated chronologically. The aim of the first chapter is to give a description of the Jewish community in Turkey at the start of the Turkish republic in 1923. In this chapter, I will present a brief overview of the history of the Jewish community, with special attention for the political and cultural developments of the late 19th and early 20th century. These developments include in particular the rise of Zionism on the one hand and of Ottoman and Turkish nationalism on the other. The second chapter will deal with the Turkish republic until the start of the Second World War. In this chapter, I will particularly question the spirit of tolerance and acceptance with regard to the Jews in Turkey. It means that I will analyse antisemitic and anti-Zionist elements in both political circles and society, which can explain the emigration of Jews after the war. The third and final chapter of the essay then deals with the years of the war itself, between 1939. In this chapter I will address the Turkish policies towards Jewish refugees, (Turkish) Jews abroad and at home. These policies have had major impact on the Jewish community in Turkey, which helps to explain the emigration after the war.

I deeply feel that this study contributes to our understanding of Turkish-Jewish relations, which are so often perceived as being unproblematically positive. Of course, much work has already been done in this respect. In 2008, Corry Guttstadt published her study on the Turkish Jews and the Holocaust. Guttstadt's aim was to include the perspective of Turkish Jews in academic studies, in order to contrast their view to the dominant idea of Turkish tolerance and acceptance, which is defended by, among others, Stanford Shaw.[4] Some Turkish academics, most notably Rifat Bali, also advocate a more nuanced view of Turkish-Jewish relations. More recently, Berna Pekesen has published a number of studies dealing with nationalism, national socialism and antisemitic policies in the Turkish republic before and during the Second World War.[5] The most recent publication on Jewish-Turkish relations is by Efrat Aviv, whose study deals with antisemitism and anti-Zionism in Turkey during the entire twentieth century. His main focus

[4] Corry Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2-3.
[5] Berna Pekesen, *Nationalismus, Türkisierung und das Ende der jüdischen Gemeinden in Thrakien* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2012); Berna Pekesen, *Zwischen Sympathie und Eigennutz. NS-Propaganda und die türkische Presse im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014).

however, is on the period after the second World War.[6] Although all these publications greatly contribute to a more nuanced picture of this particular part of history, none of these works specifically deal with the question of Jewish emigration. With this study, I hope to bridge this gap.

[6] Efrat Aviv, *Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism in Turkey. From Ottoman Rule to AKP* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

Chapter 1 : History of the Jewish Community in Turkey

In this chapter, I will explain the main features of the Jewish community at the start of the Turkish Republic. In the first part of the chapter, I will start with elaborating on the background of Turkey's Jews, because it is important to clarify the historical position of the Jewish population. Furthermore, it is important to sketch their lives in earlier times in the Ottoman Empire: where they were situated and what their socio-economic position was within Ottoman society. In the second part of this chapter, I will address the internal features of the Jewish community at the start of the twentieth century. This part will focus on a number of factors that are relevant for the Jewish community, such as religion, education and the (lack of) unity within that community. Furthermore, I will answer the question whether the Turkish Jews generally lived segregated or integrated well into Turkey's predominantly Muslim society. The third and last part of this chapter will deal with the political inclusion of Jews and will mainly focus on the causes and effects of the rise of Zionism from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. The rise of Zionism is crucial for this study, since I try to explain the emigration of Turkish Jews. Zionism plays a fundamental role in this development.

The Jews of the Ottoman Empire

Traditionally, the year 1492 is marked as the beginning of the Jewish community in the Ottoman Empire. However, when the Sephardi Jews were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula and sought refuge in the Islamic world, there were already several century-old Jewish communities present. These had inhabited the lands of Anatolia since the fifth century and had adopted the Greek language of their Byzantine rulers. These Jews had already prospered after the Ottoman conquests of Anatolia, since the Islamic rule that followed was much more tolerant than the Byzantine rule had ever been. In the early fifteenth century, the Jewish numbers increased as a result of immigration by Ashkenazi Jews from central Europe. Many were attracted by the policy of tolerance in the Ottoman Empire, which was actively promoted by Mehmed II and his direct successors in order to develop more trade relations in the Mediterranean.[7] Nevertheless the largest migration of Jews began with their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula. This migration was the most significant change in the Jewish diaspora in

[7] Halil Inalcık, "Foundations of Ottoman-Jewish Cooperation," in *Jews, Turks Ottomans. A Shared History, Fifteenth through the Twentieth Century*, ed. Avigdor Levy (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 3-14: 12.

centuries, with more than a 100.000 Jews that moved to the Ottoman Empire.[8] Avigdor Levy concludes, although he acknowledges that no exact data can support it, that '*during the sixteenth century, more Jews lived in the Ottoman Empire than in any other state*'. It is not surprising then, that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Ottoman Jewish communities ranked among the most important Jewish centers in the world.[9]

Although the Jews migrated to all parts of the Ottoman Empire, they most frequently settled in the urban areas, such as Salonica, Smyrna (from the seventeenth century onwards), Edirne in Thrace, Safed in modern day Israel and of course Istanbul. In Anatolia, there were relatively little Jewish communities, with the exception of Bursa, in which around 1.800 Jews lived halfway through the sixteenth century (compared to 5.000 in Safed, 3.900 in Edirne, 23.000 in Salonica and 56.000 in Istanbul). Their total amounted to an estimated 150.000 in the entire Ottoman Empire at its height in the sixteenth century.[10] The Jewish communities profited from a substantial amount of autonomy, which was based on the *millet* system. Although on a religious level, the Jews were regarded as second-class citizens, their social position was still regulated on the basis of law. They were allowed their own leaders with the authority to administer its own religious matters and several important socio-economic matters as well, including the settlement of internal disputes and the allocation of taxation (both to the Ottoman administration and to the Jewish internal organization). The downside was that the *Millet* system also implied that non-Muslims had to pay special taxes such as the *cizye* (yearly taxation that was based on the household as a unit and went through the male heads of households) and were subjected to all kinds of prohibitions. Furthermore, their autonomy was limited with regard to commercial, civil and penal laws.[11]

The sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century are usually described as the Golden Age of Ottoman-Jewish relations. The commercial enterprises of the Jewish community thrived and their importance to both the Ottoman economy and administration increased as they contributed to banking, industry, taxation and held important positions as customs officials. The seventeenth century marked the beginning of a change in this relationship, however. Changes in international trade routes made it harder for the Jews to compete with Christian merchants

[8] Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, 31-33.
[9] Avigdor Levy, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1994), 12.
[10] Shaw, *Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, 37-39.
[11] Weiker, *Ottomans, Turks and the Jewish Polity*, 49-51.

(mostly Armenians and Greeks), who were favoured by merchants and officials from European countries. The French in particular had signed Capitulations agreements which granted special privileges to their merchants, who profited from legal privileges and tax exemptions that were not applied to Jews.[12] As a consequence, their powerful economic position became marginalized.[13] Political struggles and military defeats also contributed to a change in the relationship between the Jews and the Ottoman state. Policies of active Islamization were used to strengthen the authority of the Sultan. These policies often targeted non-Muslim minorities, of which the policies by Valide Sultan Hatice Turhan (1651-1683) are a perfect example. She expelled the Jews of the Eminönü neighborhood in Istanbul in order to make room for a new mosque and removed Jews from prominent positions in court.[14]

The decline of the Jewish position in Ottoman society continued in the eighteenth century, which had profound impact on the internal structure of the Jewish communities as well. These communities came under the rule of theocratic rabbis, who tried to maintain 'discipline and order to remedy all the difficulties of the time'.[15] Following orthodox Jewish rules became compulsory and this was regularly monitored by the so-called *memunim*, who were appointed by the leaders of community organizations. Luxury was heavily suppressed and violations of Jewish morality would lead to punishment, especially since it was believed that any disaster happening to the Jewish community, such as fires, were the consequence of impiety. Likewise, the Jewish schools became preoccupied with religious contemplation and morality instead of preparation for any kind of trade. The majority of Jewish children did not have access to any kind of education, meaning they could not read or write. In the sixteenth century, the Jewish community had the financial possibilities to support some kind of public education, but this system eventually disappeared entirely during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.[16] There are more examples that show the consequences of the economic decline. Jewish males were more often pressured into military service, especially if they were unable to pay their taxes. Furthermore, the living conditions at the end of the eighteenth century were described by

[12] Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire,* 116-118.
[13] Daniel Goffman, "Jews in Early Modern Ottoman Commerce," in *Jews, Turks Ottomans. A Shared History, Fifteenth through the Twentieth Century*, ed. Avigdor Levy (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 33-34.
[14] Marc David Baer, "The Great Fire of 1660 and the Islamization of Christian and Jewish Space in Istanbul," *Journal of Middle East Studies* 36 (2004), 167-173.
[15] Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire,* 137.
[16] Ibidem, 139.

visitors of the Jewish quarters in Istanbul (mainly Balat and Hasköy) as being unclean and unhealthy, with frequent plagues and epidemics as a consequence.[17]

In the nineteenth century however, the Jewish community slowly recovered. Although their economic position in international trade had suffered and the number of Jews in influential positions decreased, the majority of Jews still occupied jobs in commerce or as artisans and craftsman.[18] Jews had come to occupy a similar economic position as the Greeks and Armenians, which is shown by the Istanbul census of 1830. For the *cizye* taxation, minorities were placed in three different categories of financial status. Almost a quarter of the Jews were placed in the highest category and more than 57 percent was placed in the average group. Only 20 percent was placed in the poorest category. Although these percentages do not give us an exact view of the welfare of Turkish Jews, it does show that their financial position was hardly different than that of Greeks or Armenians. For these minorities, the percentages in the different categories are almost the same.[19] After the Crimean war, the Jewish economic position steadily improved, mainly due to major investments by European Jews who helped to revive the Ottoman economy after the war. Just as the Greeks and Armenians had profited from Christian merchants in earlier centuries, the Jews now profited from European investors (mainly bankers) of their own religion. Although this Jewish revival was opposed by the Christian Ottomans, the Jews now had plenty of economic opportunities to invest in new industries, such as the cigarette-industry and spinning mills.[20]

The main changes in the position of Jews within the Ottoman community during the nineteenth century were caused by the reform movement called Tanzimat. In this period, reaching from 1839 to 1871, sultans Mahmud II, Abdulmecid and Abdulaziz subsequently tried to modernize and restructure the Empire in order to save it from falling apart. Besides this internal motive, an important external motive for reforming the Empire was pressure from European powers. They especially advocated for equal rights for the Ottoman Christian communities.[21] The reforms however, had profound effects on other communities, such as the Jews, as well. One of the main goals of the Tanzimat reforms was to *'create an Ottoman society consisting of equal*

[17] Joseph Hacker, "Istanbul Jewry 1750-1870," in *A Tale of Two Cities, Jewish Life in Frankfurt and Istanbul 1750-1850*, ed. Vivian B. Mann (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1982), 45.
[18] Weiker, *Ottomans, Turks and the Jewish Polity,* 174.
[19] Ibidem, 175.
[20] Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire,* 176-177.
[21] Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey. A modern history* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 50.

individuals connected directly to the state, lacking the segregation of the millet'.[22] This idea of Ottomanism was meant to undo the old ethnic and cultural segregation and to stimulate non-Muslims to integrate fully into Ottoman society, without seeking separation. Paradoxically, the search for centralization did not lead to the end of the *millet*-system, but in fact strengthened it to some degree. The authority of *millet*-leaders was increased and formalized, in order to ensure government control over the *millets.* In the Jews' case, this meant a considerable increase in power for the restored position of Grand Rabbi, who became the chief governmental representative for all Jews in the Ottoman Empire, as well as the administrative leader and the religious leader, in charge of all rabbis and community heads.[23] Nevertheless, to ensure that the religious control over the lives of *millet*-members was broken, the *millets* were to a certain extent secularized. Secular schools and law courts were created, which were meant to decrease the power of the old religious schools and courts. In 1869 for instance, the *Nizamiye* courts were created to enforce new secular legal codes, which were based on European models. These courts were available for Ottoman citizens of all religions and could – at least theoretically – provide equal treatment.

The new laws were all translated into Judeo-Spanish, making them available for those members of the Jewish community who could read.[24] In 1865 the organization of the Jewish *millet* was formalized in an 'Organic Statute', which was also referred to as a constitution for the Jewish community. It meant that the power over the community was exercised through a general council, which was composed of sixty laymen and twenty rabbis. The general council elected the seven rabbis of the religious council, which only had power over religious questions which were submitted by either the Grand Rabbi or the general council. The general council also elected the nine members of the secular council, which, among others, exercised government laws and collected taxes.[25] These taxes did no longer include the *cizye,* which was abolished in 1856 as a consequence of the *Hatt-i Hümayun* (Reform Decree). This decree ensured equality before the law, thereby formally ending the status of *dhimmi* for non-Muslim minorities, which also implied equality in taxation. Instead of the *cizye*, admission into military service became open to men of all religions. Military service however, could be avoided only by payment of

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[22] Aviv, *Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism in Turkey*, 23.
[23] Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire,* 149-150.
[24] Ibidem*,* 157.
[25] Ibidem, 167-168.

the military exemption tax, the bedel-i askeri. In practice, nearly all non-Muslims chose that alternative, which limited the effect of the abolition of the *cizye*.[26]

The reforms of the Tanzimat were not warmly welcomed by everybody. Many Muslims regarded the Tanzimat as an assault on the superior position of Islam in Ottoman society, which had been achieved and defended in previous centuries. During the nineteenth century, European ideas like liberalism and nationalism had also spread to the Ottoman Empire. Some Ottoman nationalists and liberals criticized either the authoritarian character of the Tanzimat, or the fact that the reforms were instigated by foreign powers.[27] More surprising however, is that the reactions within the Jewish community were mixed as well. Many Jews wanted to keep their own identity and traditions, which were in danger if the Jews were expected to participate equally in Ottoman society. The religious leaders in particular were afraid to lose control over those institutions that had been under their control, such as education and justice. They discouraged people to use the new secular courts and schools, which few Jews therefore dared to use.[28] This only started to change in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the increasing popularity of modernist Jews who were open to the transformation of Jewish life and who were supported by European Jews. Outside of Istanbul however, local communities often continued to resist the reforms and the process of centralization in particular. The Jewish identity therefore remained largely centered around the local community.[29] Nevertheless, the Tanzimat still improved the social position of Jews in Ottoman society, making the Empire an ideal refuge for persecuted Jews from Eastern Europe. As a consequence of the attacks on Jews in Russia and the Balkans in the late nineteenth century (which were lost by the Ottoman Empire), many of them migrated to the Izmir and Edirne regions, as well as Istanbul. The Jewish population in these areas grew with more than one third between 1881 and 1906: from 17.195 to 24.633 in Izmir province and from 8.918 to 15.534 in Edirne province.[30] The late nineteenth century also witnessed the beginnings of Zionism, which would cause migration to the area of Palestine. This development will be more extensively treated in the last part of this chapter.

[26] Weiker, *Ottomans, Turks and the Jewish Polity,* 125.
[27] Zürcher, *Turkey. A modern history,* 61-62.
[28] Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire,* 158-159.
[29] Daniel J. Schroeter, "Changing Relationship between Jews and the Ottoman State in the Nineteenth Century," in *Jews, Turks Ottomans. A Shared History, Fifteenth through the Twentieth Century*, ed. Avigdor Levy (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 97.
[30] Weiker, *Ottomans, Turks and the Jewish Polity,* 135-139.

All in all, it is not surprising that the Jewish community in the Ottoman Empire saw reason to celebrate the commemoration of 400 years Jewish presence in Ottoman territories in 1892. In the period 1492-1892, Jews have generally been able to lead a prosperous life in a community which had been able to maintain its own identity. Especially when one compares the development of the Jewish community in the Ottoman Empire with that of the Jews in Europe, it is obvious that the relative tolerance of Ottoman rulers helped the Jews in many ways. This explains the declaration of Jewish homage that was presented to the Sultan in 1892, in thanks of the recognition of the Jews.[31] Nevertheless, the nineteenth century was the starting point for modern times, in which the relation between the Jews and other ethnic groups, such as the Turks and the Arabs, would be redefined. In the next part of this chapter, I shall therefore discuss the changing internal features of the Jewish community in the early twentieth century, during which the political structure of the Ottoman Empire was revolutionized as well. Consequently, I will address the developments that redefined the political position of the Jews, such as the rise of Zionism.

The Jewish community at the start of the twentieth century

The migration of Eastern European Jews to the Ottoman Empire at the end of the nineteenth century had profound impact on the internal structures and ideologies of the Jewish community. For centuries, the Sephardi Jews who had their historical roots on the Iberian Peninsula had outnumbered the Ashkenazim from central European areas. All around the Mediterranean, Jews had spoken Judeo-Spanish, also called Ladino, which had bound different regional groups of Jews together. From the 16th to 20th century, it underwent minor changes due to the influx of Jews from other regions, but eventually the language had assimilated all external influences.[32] During the Tanzimat era, it seemed that the Ashkenazim had formally assimilated to Sephardic culture, as they recognized the authority of the Sephardic Grand Rabbi as it was formalized by the Organic Statute in 1865. Only a few small Jewish communities, such as the Karaites, refused to recognize the Grand Rabbi. The immigration at the end of the nineteenth century however, greatly increased the number of Ashkenazi Jews.

[31] Weiker, *Ottomans, Turks and the Jewish Polity,* 132.
[32] Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire,* 56.

The differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews were not just the lands they originated from. In general, they occupied different professions. Ottoman Ashkenazi Jews focused on trade, commerce and finance which made them relatively wealthier than the Sephardi Jews, who prospered in the less paid sectors of artisan and craft, although some Sephardi Jews were very successful in banking. In short, Sephardi Jews tended to operate in the middle class whereas Ashkenazi Jews where part of the higher-class citizens. The Ashkenazi's more profitable economy and slight autonomy allowed them to build their own synagogues as well.[33] The differences also became visible on an ideological level: while the Balkan's Ashkenazi communities combined Jewish (even ultra-Orthodox) religion and culture with a process of emancipation and acculturation like the example set by the communities in Western and Central Europe, the Sephardi communities seemed to take another path. The Sephardi Jews, though depending on place, time and class, were conflicted between modernization, integration and acculturation on the one hand and tradition on the other hand. In 1898, a number of Sephardi students from the Balkans who had studied in Vienna, established the *Sosyedad Akademika de Djudios Espanyoles: Esperanza.* They aimed to protect and strengthen the Judeo-Spanish identity, on the level of both language and tradition. Their movement flourished as a number of Sephardi intellectuals joined the society. It contributed to a renewed sense of common identity for Sephardi Jews in an era during which nationalist sentiments in states such as the Ottoman Empire demanded participation as a national citizen. The multi-ethnic character of the Ottoman state however, provided the possibility for Jews to hold onto the Jewish as well as the national citizen's identity. Their integration in society therefore turned out to be limited, which can also be demonstrated by the system of education.[34]

Education in the Ottoman Empire had been an affair completely regulated by the different *millets*. For centuries, Jewish children attended schools established by their own *millet*. Like their Islamic and Christian equivalents, the Jewish schools focused on teaching religion. During the Tanzimat reforms, this all changed. The state modernization process also affected the old education system. Education was seen as an excellent measurement to keep a community

[33] Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire,*170-171.
[34] Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry. A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th-20th Centuries* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 90-91, 105.

together. So, when modern, foreign-inspired, somewhat secular schools emerged and started to teach 'worldly' affairs, some Jewish students started going to those schools. In an attempt to keep these students inside the Jewish community, the Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU) founded several schools in the Ottoman Empire. The AIU was a Jewish organization, based in Paris, that aimed at the protection of the rights of Jews throughout the world, mainly by means of modernization and education. The AIU was particularly influential in the Middle-East and North-Africa, where their schools and programs to increase welfare were very effective. The educational model of the AIU was very different than the traditional education in most Jewish communities. Many AIU teachers were secular – and often European – Jews. The Alliance as well as the schools caused controversy between the traditionalists and modernists. The traditionalists wanted to retain Jewish identity in education, but the modernists saw the lack of modern education as one of the main reasons that the Jews had fallen behind on the Greek and Armenian minorities on many social levels within the Ottoman Empire. Many of those modernists sent their children to the cost-free Christian schools, of which many were founded from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.[35] For higher education, Jews increasingly went to European universities, as we had already seen with the Sephardi students in Vienna who established the *Sosyedad Akademika de Djudios Espanyoles: Esperanza*. Some of these students later returned to the Ottoman Empire, and several even managed to get appointments at the Darülfünun, which later became Istanbul University.[36] Zionist political leaders like David Ben-Gurion and Itzhak Ben-Zvi also studied law there in the early twentieth century.

However, aforementioned schools were almost exclusively available for Jewish boys. The perspectives for the female part of the Jewish community were very different, if not limited. Before the Tanzimat reforms, Jewish girls did not go to any school to get formal education, though a small percentage of them got some tuition at home. Since traditional Jewish schooling was meant to prepare for service in synagogues and women were not allowed to serve there, there was no need to educate them. With the Public Education Regulations of 1869, this all started to change. The Regulations required all girls between the age of six and ten to attend

[35] Weiker, *Ottomans, Turks and the Jewish Polity,* 193-194.
[36] Hayyim J. Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East 1860-1902* (New York: Wiley and Israel Universities Press, 1973), 131.

school, and as a result, many girls' schools were opened. The first modern secondary school for girls opened forty years later, in Istanbul in 1911, which shows the slow progress in female education.[37] As mentioned before, Christian schools were relatively popular among Jews. Many of those schools were missionary schools, especially focusing on the non-Muslim population. Another goal was to involve women in education, since there were opportunities to greatly improve girls' education. Thus, Jewish women were a main target for these missionary schools. For Jewish fathers of daughters, the dilemma with regard to education was even bigger than that involving sons: most often, the only way to prevent girls from being illiterate was sending them to missionary schools. Most prominent among the missionary organizations were the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews (or LJS: London Jews Society) and the Female Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, which was established in Boston.[38] The competition of the missionary schools caused Jewish organizations such as the AIU to establish their own modern schools for girls, to limit the influence of the Christian missionaries on their communities. Most of the AIU schools for girls (there were more than 45 altogether in the Ottoman Empire) were founded in what is now Turkey. They all operated with the same curriculum and with the same guidelines. At the start of the twentieth century however, some of the teachers started to spread Zionist ideas at these schools, even though the AIU was not a Zionist organization. This was most prominent in the Palestinian and Syrian territories of the Ottoman Empire, where even a number of Zionist schools were established, such as the one in Damascus, where during the first World War, some 1200 students (male and female) were educated.[39]

The education of Jews by Christian missionaries should not be seen as exemplary for the relations between the two religious groups in the Ottoman Empire. From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, the intercommunal relations between Christians and Jews

[37] This is the situation in the areas of the Ottoman Empire which we nowadays call Turkey. The opening of girls' schools followed a somewhat different path in the Egyptian areas, including Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. There, the Egyptian government opened modern schools from 1831 onwards.
[38] Rachel Simon, "Jewish Female Education in the Ottoman Empire," in *Jews, Turks, Ottomans. A Shared History, Fifteenth through the Twentieth Century,* ed. Avigdor Levy, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 127-131.
[39] Ibidem, 135.

worsened, particularly in the Syrian and Palestinian provinces but in other areas as well.[40] Three major causes for this development can be seen during this period: the economic decline of the Empire, the rise of nationalist sentiments such as Zionism and Arab nationalism and increasing antisemitism that started in Europe. Christian and Jewish merchants and craftsmen had a long history of economic competition, which caused animosity when the Empire was losing its economic power to the European nations. Christians accused the Jews of infiltration in commercial sectors that were traditionally dominated by Armenians and Greeks, for instance money changing and cloth making.[41] The growing strife led to a number of violent anti-Jewish riots in cities like Salonica. The rise of nationalism, in contrast to the economic competition, mainly affected the relations in the Arab regions, where Christians and Muslims sided together against the growing threat of Jewish migration to Palestine. Although resistance to Jewish migration already existed in the Arab regions before the rise of anti-Ottoman nationalism, the Arab nationalists (both Christian and Muslim) did not welcome the growing number of Zionists. This is hardly surprising, given the fact that Zionist leaders like Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi advocated in favour of Ottomanism among local Jews in Arab regions, which the Arabs resisted.[42] In the Turkish part of the Empire however, the anti-Jewish feelings among the Muslim population differed from the antisemitism of many Christians. The Turks had little appreciation for the political indifference of the vast Jewish majority, despite the fact that a number of Jewish individuals supported the Turkish nationalist aspirations in the first two decades of the twentieth centuries.[43] Further consequences of growing nationalism - among both the Muslim Turks and the Jews - and the political transformations in the Empire at the start of the twentieth century, will be discussed in the third and final part of this chapter.

[40] Moshe Ma'oz, "Changing Relations between Jews, Muslims and Christians," in *Jews, Turks, Ottomans. A Shared History, Fifteenth through the Twentieth Century,* ed. Avigdor Levy, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 116-118.
[41] Jacob M. Landau, "Relations Between Jews and Non-Jews in the Late Ottoman Empire: Some Characteristics," in *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Avigdor Levy, (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1994), 540-541.
[42] Ibidem, 544.
[43] Ibidem, 544-545.

Political activity of Ottoman Jews and Zionists

At the time of the Young Turk revolution in 1908, the Jewish political doctrine of Zionism had been established in Jewish intellectual circles in European countries. Zionism gained momentum after the publication of Theodor Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* in 1896, in which the main goals were formulated: the creation of a sense of national unity among Jews in the diaspora and the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. It was almost immediately met with opposition in Jewish communities throughout Europe, who felt that the Zionist program conflicted with their interests and obligations as national citizens of the countries in which they lived.[44] Although scholars used to believe that there was little support for the Zionist aspirations among Ottoman Jews, this conclusion no longer seems to be correct.[45] Publications by Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue have pointed out that the influence of Zionism on Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire was in fact quite extensive. Herzl himself had negotiated with the sultan in order to convince him to lift restrictions on Jewish migration to Palestine, which had been installed after the large migrations of Ashkenazi Jews at the end of the nineteenth century. Herzl's attempts had failed, but after the revolution of 1908, the Ottoman Zionists moved into the open in order to continue their political efforts to lift the restrictions. Before the revolution, their activities had been limited to discrete propagation of Hebrew culture by organizations like *Kadimah,* an underground Zionist group which was established in 1899 with the purpose of encouraging spoken Hebrew.[46] With the Young Turks in power however, they felt secure enough to establish a Zionist office in Istanbul (*Kadimah* also became active in Zionist politics and was renamed *Jewish Library*). This was not altogether surprising, given the fact that the Young Turks' Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), had a number of Jewish members already before the revolution. More significantly even is that after the revolution, the CUP no longer had any members of other ethnicities than Turks and Jews. This led to several conspiracy theories, both in European countries and in the Empire, that the entire movement was part of a Jewish plot.[47]

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[44] Isaiah Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism 1897-1918* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 17-18.

[45] Feroz Ahmad, "The Special Relationship. The Committee of Union and Progress and the Ottoman Jewish Political Elite, 1908-1918," in *Jews, Turks, Ottomans. A Shared History, Fifteenth through the Twentieth Century,* ed. Avigdor Levy, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 212.

[46] Weiker, *Ottomans, Turks and the Jewish Polity*, 226.

[47] M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, "Jews in the Young Turk Movement to the 1908 Revolution," in *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Avigdor Levy, (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1994), 519.

On a political level however, the Zionists' renewed attempts to lift the restrictions on immigration to Palestine were as little successful as Herzl's had been. The Ottoman political elite remained hostile to the Zionist cause and the Jewish governing elite was more inclined to the course set by AIU: westernization and modernization of the Jewish community in order to strengthen their social position.[48] The Jewish members in parliament during the Second Constitutional Period (1908-1918) had little to offer the Zionists. They were all members of the CUP and therefore they supported its nationalist policies. This attitude was in fact shared by many Jews, since they regarded a strong and secular Ottoman state as the best method of protecting Jewish interests from (Christian and/or European) antisemitic influences.[49] The attitude of the Jewish members of parliament can be best illustrated by the debate on Zionism in parliament in 1911. Opposition to the CUP tried to discredit a number of Ottoman Jews with the charge of having Zionist ambitions, claiming that the Jews were aiming to establish a state in Palestine and Mesopotamia by means of systematic immigration. The Jewish members of parliament Emanuel Carasso and Nissim Masliyah – both had studied law in Salonica – immediately refuted the claims of the opposition. Carasso even openly opposed the immigration of foreign Jews, which both he and Masliyah tried to disassociate from Ottoman Jews, whose reputation of loyal subjects they wanted to protect. Ironically, the one member of parliament defending the Zionist cause was the Bulgarian socialist Dimitri Vlahof, who was not a Jew. He thought the immigration of foreign Jews would help the Empire's economy, since the newcomers would pay taxes and increase agricultural productivity. His plea was not successful because of protests by the Arab deputies, making it all the more clear that the Ottoman parliament was the wrong place for nationalist demands by minorities.[50]

The lack of political success caused the Zionists to try a different strategy: convince the masses. Here they were particularly effective: they became active in synagogues, where they spread a message of nationalism and democratization. As mentioned before, Zionists became active in education as well, even at the non-Zionist schools of the Alliance Israelite Universelle. In order to undermine the power of the AIU, they sought the aid of the *Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden*, which had been anti-AIU because of its association with France. More help came from the traditionalists, who distrusted the AIU's modern educational system and regarded it a threat to

[48] Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry,* 121-122.
[49] Hasan Kayalı, "Jewish Representation in the Ottoman Parliaments," in *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Avigdor Levy, (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1994), 511.
[50] Ibidem, 513-515.

traditional religious education. The conflicts between the Zionists and the Alliancists caused a division in local Jewish communities throughout the Empire. Towards the end of the first World War however, the Zionists seemed to be gaining the upper hand. The general dissatisfaction of the Jewish population about its governing elite drove many away from the Alliance, including journalists and intellectuals. This dissatisfaction, combined with the advantage of combining modernism with tradition, made Zionism an attractive alternative.[51] Zionism did however remain a movement that was supported and led by mainly Ashkenazi Jews. The Sephardim developed a strong sense of nationalism as well, but this was first and foremost a Sephardic-oriented nationalism, aimed at the protection of the Judeo-Spanish identity and language. Most Zionists were Ashkenazi immigrants from Central-Europe and the Balkans, who were still treated as foreign Jews. Moreover, many Sephardi were opposed to the Zionist ambitions in Palestine. They defended a Diaspora-type of nationalism, uniting Jewish communities on the grounds of a shared identity rather than on a shared claim on the Holy Land. The differing ambitions of the Sephardim and Ashkenazim made the division between the AIU and the Zionists into an interethnic division as well, with the Ashkenazim as a Germanic union of all the AIU's opponents.[52]

The first World War greatly helped the Zionist cause. In part because of their association with the German Jews, the Zionists succeeded in securing the aid of influential figures within the German government (for instance secretary of state Zimmermann). For the German government, this was both an attempt to gain the support of Jewish communities throughout Europe – for which the European powers competed – as an insurance for future influence in the Middle East. The British promise of a national home for the Jews by means of the Balfour Declaration, as well as the American entry into the war in 1917 were major setbacks for the Germans in their attempt to win Jewish support. Nevertheless, Germany was the first European power to protect Zionist interests in Palestine by intervening in the internal affairs of its Ottoman ally. This proved to be vital, in particular in light of the deportations of Jews from Jaffa and Tel Aviv in 1917 on the order of Cemal Pasha – which was harshly criticized by the German government.[53] Also crucial in this respect, was the role played by the Chief Rabbi, Haim Nahum. Nahum had received his rabbinical training in Paris, where he became associated with the AIU. He became Chief Rabbi in 1909, shortly after the Young Turk revolution. From

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[51] Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry,* 123-127.
[52] Ibidem, 125, 147-148.
[53] Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism*, 416-419.

this position, he tried to defend the interests of the Jewish community in the Ottoman Empire. In his function as Chief Rabbi, he opposed Zionism and supported Ottomanism, believing Jewish integration into Ottoman society to be the best guarantee of Jewish security. His openness to modernity and Ottomanism made him a popular figure among the Turkish political elite as well, which helped his aim of speaking on behalf of the Jewish community. He himself claimed that he "*rendered greater services to Zionism in my obscurity than the most fervent of them; and that, thanks to the policy I followed, I prevented the Jews of Turkey and Palestine from sharing the fate of the Armenians and Greeks"*.[54] After his dismissal as Chief Rabbi in 1920, he was still an influential figure. In 1923, he was one of the members of the Turkish delegation to sign the Treaty of Lausanne, which will be discussed in the second chapter. Although he initially opposed Zionism, in his later career after the fall of the Empire, he became more open to Jewish migration to Palestine.

When the Empire fell apart at the end of the war, all objections to Zionism seemed to melt away as the fear of the Ottoman authorities vanished. The Jewish National Council, which had thus far only operated as a provisional coalition of the competing Jewish factions, presented itself as the representational body of Ottoman Jewry in both national and international affairs – such as the peace conferences. Confident because of the British official support to the Zionist cause by means of the Balfour Declaration, the council proposed to ally itself with the other ethnic minorities in the Empire – the Greeks and the Armenians – in order to throw off the status of subordinates. Moreover, the violent revolution in Russia caused more migration of Jews, many of whom were Zionists who wanted to go to Palestine. The Zionists gained the decisive upper hand in the conflict with the old community leaders after the dismissal of Haim Nahum as the Chief Rabbi and the victory in community elections in 1919 and 1920. This ensured that leadership of community organizations remained in Zionist hands, which would still be the case at the start of the Turkish Republic.[55]

In this chapter, I have made an attempt to portray the Jewish community at the beginning of the twentieth century. Apparently, the communities' origins, its socio-economic and political positions, in a period that was the starting point for many ground-breaking events, are essential elements in order to answer the main question of this research: why, towards the middle of the

[54] E. Benbassa, *Haim Nahum: A Sephardic Chief Rabbi in Politics, 1892-1923* (trans. by M. Kochan), (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 182.
[55] Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry,* 127-129.

twentieth century, so many Turkish Jews would emigrate to Israel. In conclusion, the Ottoman Jews evolved from a somewhat inaccessible, fragmented, barely integrated *millet* into a more unified community and a significant factor in both domestic and international politics. The Empire's tolerance towards non-Muslims initially resulted in a (predominantly Sephardi) Jewish community that tried to maintain the Judeo-Spanish identity and operated almost exclusively in the own sphere: in private life, but also in education and commerce. Their economic position was therefore weaker than that of the Muslim population but similar to that of other non-Muslim groups. The Tanzimat era changed this status quo. Modernization caused collision between traditionalist and modernist Jews. At the same time, the Jewish community extensively grew due to Ashkenazi immigrants, who did not manage to mingle well with the Sephardi. Rising Zionism caused all the more disunity in the Jewish community, as not all Jews were content with foreign Jews entering the Empire. The first World War neutralized the dispute among the Jewish communities: the end of the Empire resulted in a victory for Zionism. In the next chapters, I shall discuss the changing position of Jews in the Turkish Republic, due to new policies and dramatic (inter)national developments in the 1930s.

Chapter 2 : The Jewish community in the early Republican period

In this chapter, the focus will be on Turkey's Jewish community in the early republican period. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the government's policy. I will elaborate on the CHP's general, domestic policies and the government's relation to non-Muslim groups such as the Jews. In the second part of the chapter I will discuss antisemitic sentiments in Turkish politics, society and press during the 1920s and 1930s. In this part, a number of specific events with an anti-Jewish character, such as the Thrace pogroms, will be addressed. The third and last part of the chapter deals entirely with the consequences of and responses to Turkification and antisemitism for the Jewish community. I will specifically deal with Jewish migration. Emphasis will be on the German migration towards Turkey and the migration of Turkish Jews. In discussing these topics, I hope to find some indications for the Jewish motives to leave Turkey after World War II.

Policies concerning Jews and other minorities

The Ottoman Empire's decline, which had started earlier, got into its final stages during World War 1. After the war was over, the armistice was signed and the Empire had capitulated, most former Ottoman lands were, by treaty, controlled by the Allied powers. In the chaotic period that followed, a national resistance movement took its chance. This resulted in another war (of independence), with primarily Britain and Greece as the Turkish opponents. Despite all parties being tired of war and endless negotiations, it would take some years before the peace treaty of Lausanne was signed.[56] The treaty of Lausanne marked the beginning of new relations between the Turkish state and the minorities that lived within its borders. The negotiation process, however, was another struggle. The Turkish delegation had been given orders to hold strongly onto the principles of the 'National Pact' (Misak-ı Millî), formulated in early 1920 as a result of cooperation between the Ottoman parliament in Istanbul and the Turkish nationalists in Ankara. In this pact, six important decisions on territorial matters as well as on political autonomy and people's rights are formulated. With regard to minorities, the decision was made that the rights of minorities would be respected as long as the rights of the Muslim minorities in neighbouring countries were respected as well. The concept of minority that was used here,

[56] Zürcher, *Turkey. A modern history,* 120-161.

referred only to the historical religious minorities (Jews and Christians) since, according to the Turks, there were no ethnic or linguistic minorities in the country.[57]

During the negotiations in Lausanne, the Turkish delegation managed to achieve almost all of its (rather nationalist) goals, mainly because of its rigidity and the Allies' fear that a rejection of the treaty would have another war as a consequence, an outcome not at all favoured. In the treaty, eventually signed at 24 July 1923, Turkey received complete sovereignty over the area that is roughly similar to the land between the current borders, and in addition, promised to protect all citizens, no matter their religion. To be more specific, "*members of recognized religious minorities enjoyed full legal equality as well as the right to free exercise of religion, freedom of movement, and the use of their own language – including in public, in the press, and in court – the right to maintain their own schools and social institutions, and the right to communal self-administration*".[58] However, there would be no international control on the internal affairs that were agreed on in Lausanne.[59] Besides, according to Corry Guttstadt, there are strong indications that the Turkish leaders never had the intention to follow up on this part of the treaty. The politicians seemingly saw the parts concerning minorities as a way to continue the old *millet* system. Implementation of the minorities rights would mean a clash with the plans for assimilation and Turkification. This contradiction between the agreements and the political intentions became visible in the Turkish policies that followed. For example, the secularization policy aimed at Jewish and Christian as well as Islamic religious institutions: their authority was limited and institutions were closed on all sides.[60] When it thus comes to the policy of secularization, no distinction was made between Muslims and non-Muslims. With regard to the right of self-administration, the situation was different. The press was used to manipulate and even blackmail the Jewish community. Under immense political pressure, the Jews were forced to 'voluntarily' dissolve their institutions. For example, after the chief rabbi died in 1931, the Jews could not assign a successor due to the government's refusal to allow the foundation of a new congregational constitution.[61]

A similar process occurred in the Jewish education system. Although Article 41 of the Lausanne Treaty guaranteed the right to uphold their own educational system, it soon became clear that

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[57] Aviv, *Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism*, 25.
[58] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 11.
[59] Zürcher, *Turkey. A modern history,* 151-163.
[60] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 11-12.
[61] Ibidem, 13.

the Kemalist regime would not allow the Jews to maintain their own schools, since they feared these schools propagated loyalty to the Jewish community rather than the Turkish state. Over 35 percent of the Jewish children went to schools that were run by the Alliance Israélite Universelle which, ironically enough, had encouraged Jews to modernize and integrate into the majority society. These schools had to dissolve all relations with the European organizations they were a part of (the AIU and the Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden), which effectively ended the funding of these schools. In addition, from 1926 onwards the schools were obligated to search for Muslim teachers in Turkish and history and were prohibited to teach Jewish history and religion. The obvious effect was that most of these schools were closed.[62]

Essentially, the Jews quickly lost the rights they had been promised in the Treaty of Lausanne, as well as the privileges concerning communal autonomy they had under Ottoman rule. The new Kemalist policies robbed them from their special privileges, which was justified by the principle of equality for all citizens. Citizenship is one of the important factors that the Kemalist regime used as a basis for building a nation of 'real Turks'. Being a 'real' Turk went hand in hand with certain specifics, such as language and religion. As such, speaking Turkish was an essential condition for being a part of the nation.[63] Therefore, this became part of the larger project of the Kemalists.

The main goal of president Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his government was creating a strong, modern state that would be able to compete with the great powers of the time. In their opinion, only a homogeneous nation-state would achieve this goal. Therefore, Turkification takes up a considerable part of the reforms. In general, the Kemalist reforms can be considered successors of the Tanzimat and Young Turk reforms in the sense that they were aimed at secularizing and modernising the state, although the Kemalist regime saw itself as a revolutionary government, without any direct link with the Ottoman or Unionist past. The nationalist aims of the government were centred around the personality of Atatürk, who became the modern leader of the Turkish nation. The people of the nation however, were seen to be in need of reforms in order to create the Turkish identity, since most of the Turkish population still identified themselves first as a part of a (religious) community and only secondly as citizen of the Turkish

[62] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 13-14.
[63] Yeşim Bayar, *Formation of the Turkish Nation-State, 1920-1938* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 39.

state. The reforms were therefore meant to lead the people away from religious superstitions and ancient community ties.[64]

Although the main problem for the Kemalist regime was the strong grasp of Islamic institutions on the daily lives of Turkish citizens, the reforms obviously also had profound effects on the Jewish community. As mentioned before, the turkification of society was a leading idea and therefore incorporated in many of the Kemalist reforms. The exact meaning of turkification is, according to Rıfat Bali: *the Turkish Republic's project to create a state of citizens with equal rights, who will define themselves first and foremost as Turks, their religion being a private matter.*[65] This policy affected the Jewish community in political, social and economic ways. The economic aim of turkification was to strengthen the economic position of Muslim Turks. The methods that were used to achieve this were not very subtle. They included boycotts of non-Muslim traders and manufacturers and more notably, the firing of non-Muslims. This was a consequence of the quota that were imposed to limit the number of foreign employees who worked for foreign companies that were established in Turkey. During the war of independence, almost all employees of these companies had been either foreigners or non-Muslim Turks. After the war however, many of the Muslim Turks were in need of employment. The quota on foreigners that was enforced by the *Dersaadet Ticaret Odası* - the Chamber of Commerce - had the effect that many non-Muslims were fired, including those of Turkish nationality. The Jews were among those who suffered immediately from this policy.[66] This once more shows that, at least for those Turks who implemented this policy, the identity of a true Turk included being Muslim. Similar measures were taken against non-Muslim state employees. The Law on Civil Servants of March 1926 announced that only 'Turks' could work as a civil servant. Employer's administration now had to contain information on the employee's religion, names and nationality, with the meaning of the last one actually being ethnicity, all in order to secure their real Turkishness. Civil service then consisted of a broader range than nowadays, for example including the occupation of streetcar driver.[67] For these officials it not only became obligatory to speak Turkish, but also to *become a Turk* - "*Türk Olmak*". It referred not just to having the

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[64] Hamit Bozarslan, "Kemalism, westernization and anti-liberalism," in *Turkey beyond Nationalism,* ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 31.
[65] Rıfat N. Bali, *The Silent Minority in Turkey: Turkish Jews* (Istanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık, 2013), 95.
[66] Rıfat N. Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri. Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni, 1923-1945.* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2017), 214-225.
[67] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 10.

Turkish nationality, but also to Turkish ethnicity and to religious identity. The definition of being a Turk therefore in practice entailed being Muslim, even though the law made no mention of religious distinctions.[68]

The real purpose of the turkification was of course not religious in nature, but political. Although the Turkish identity might have been more difficult to achieve for non-Muslims, it was by no means impossible. What the Republican government really intended, was for non-Muslims and non-Turkish Muslims (like many Kurds) to release their old religious or ethnic community identities in favour of a Turkish national identity. Direct motivation for the campaign was the Kurdish rebellion of 1925, led by Sheih Said. In general, the Kemalist government formulated three conditions for non-Muslims in order for them to be accepted as a Turkish citizen: their mother tongue must be Turkish, they must adopt the Turkish culture and they must act on the ideal of Turkism. On several occasions throughout the years, primary politicians including Mustafa Kemal himself referred to these conditions. For example, Mustafa Kemal said during a visit to Adana in 1931: "*One of the most obvious, precious qualities of a nation is the language. A person who says he belongs to the Turkish nation should first and under all circumstances speak Turkish. It is not possible to believe a person's claims that he belongs to the Turkish nation, to the Turkish culture, if he does not speak Turkish*".[69]

The campaign for becoming a Turk targeted the Jewish community more than other minority groups, because the republican elite regarded the Jews as the people who resisted Turkification the most, even though this claim was rather questionable. However, the Jews were ridiculed (in both text and caricatures) in popular press at the time, whereas Greeks or Armenians were hardly hit by this practice. Nevertheless, there are examples Jewish support for the practice of Turkification, of which Tekin Alp is probably the most notable. Born as Moise Cohen in 1883 and starting his career as a Jewish businessman, he later changed his name into Tekin Alp. In his youth, he went to an AIU-school and he soon became an example of the progressive Jewish Turks, who strived for modernity. After studying and teaching law and economics in Istanbul, he dedicated himself to Turkish nationalism and Turkification. His 1928 book *Türkleştirme* (Turkification) argued for the Turkification of all Turkish minorities. In his opinion, minorities had to deserve their status as equal citizen, despite the constitution of 1924. In an attempt to

[68] Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri,* 226-228.
[69] Bali, *Silent Minority in Turkey,* 96-97.

convince the Jewish community and to validate his claims, he formulated (in accordance with the government's policies) ten codes of conduct, in the same way as the Ten Commandments of Moses. By following these rules, the Jews would be able to become Turks. Examples of these codes of conduct, are changing the Jewish names to Turkish ones, speaking Turkish, sending children to (Turkish) state schools and the elimination of the Jewish community spirit.[70]

As evidenced in the previous paragraphs, the policies of Turkification or becoming Turkish had certain main features, in which language is one of the most important. The fact that the different ethnic or religious groups had not been obliged to speak Ottoman Turkish for centuries and thus usually communicated in their own communal language, had the result that not many of them knew (enough) Turkish. Therefore, a transition period was appreciated. Exactly this was requested by the Deputy Chief Rabbi called Becerano in the first republican years. The linguistic situation of the Jewish community was a special one. They usually spoke Ladino (a sort of Spanish, mixed with Turkish, Greek and French) and/or French, not Hebrew. However, Hebrew was seen as the Jewish primary language by the republican elites. If this had been the practice for Turkey's Jews, they could have claimed that according to the Treaty of Lausanne, they had, as a minority, the right to speak their language freely. Because Hebrew was not the primary spoken language of most Turkish Jews, this option was off the table. Furthermore, the republican elites did not want a transition period in which Jews could become accustomed to speaking Turkish. Instead, they were (again) the main target in the "Citizen, Speak Turkish!"-campaign.[71] As Mustafa Kemal pointed out: "The Turkish language is the heart and spirit of the Turkish nation. A person who does not speak Turkish is not to be trusted, even if he claims to have a bond with Turkish culture."[72]

Essentially, according to Guttstadt, Jews were accused of being not loyal to the state. Therefore, the main aim of the "*Vatandaş Türkçe konuş*"-campaign as it is called in Turkish was not to help integrate the minorities into Turkish society but rather to discriminate them. In public, posters displaying the slogan were not meant as an invitation but as a warning or even a threat. In some places, nationalist Turks encouraged by the campaign even attacked people who were heard speaking a non-Turkish language on the streets. The government even attempted to regulate the matter by law. In this case, using any other language than Turkish would be legally

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[70] Tekin Alp, *Türkleştirme* (Istanbul: Resimli Ay Matbaası, 1928), 63-65.
[71] Bali, *Silent Minority in Turkey*, 98-99.
[72] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 16.

forbidden. The law was put into practice, but locally and on a small scale, cities issued fines on their population who violated their local rules on this matter. The government thus, in many ways and on different scales, portrayed the Jewish community as resistant and unloyal. This remains rather surprising, considering the fact that the Jewish community had a rather long history of promoting the Turkish language among their own people. Even in the Ottoman times, Jews went to the Turkish Cultural Association (*Türk Kültür Cemiyeti*) for lessons in Turkish language. There were at least two newspapers, *Üstad* and *Ceride-i Tercüman* which were published in Turkish language with Hebrew script. This was supposed to advance the learning of Turkish. In republican times, similar measures were taken in order to promote speaking Turkish. The highly educated Jews of Turkey encouraged their community fellows to learn Turkish, as they saw it as crucial for integration into Turkish society.[73]

The attitude of the Turkish state towards the Jewish community seems to be a topic of debate in modern literature. Corry Guttstadt in particular emphasizes that Jews were seen as a troublesome minority, which can be illustrated by the aforementioned ridiculizations and threats. The paradox that Jews, despite efforts to integrate, were regarded by Turks as a reluctant minority group can perhaps, at first glance, be explained by the success of Zionism in Turkey after the end of the first world war. After all, the strengthening of an international Jewish identity was one of the main aims of Zionists, whereas Turkification aimed at the exact opposite: release the Jewish identity in favour of the Turkish identity. In addition, the Jews had become more visible as a potential target for Turkish nationalists after the expulsions of Greeks and Armenians in the decade between 1914 and 1923. Consequently, Jews became the target of violent attacks. Already in the Greek-Turkish war between 1919 and 1922, Jewish communities were attacked by Turkish troops. In 1922, the Turkish newspaper *İleri*, of which the editor was Celal Nuri - a Member of Parliament - published an article which ended with the wish: *"Oh, now that the Greeks and Armenians have departed, if only the Jews would leave the country as well"*.[74] The responses of local governments varied, but were usually not friendly towards the Jews. In Aydın for instance, the return of Jews who had fled during the Greek-Turkish war was prohibited by the local government, as their houses had been confiscated and 'Turkified' - effectively making an end to a community which had numbered 3000 Jews before the war. Examples like these, Guttstadt argues, show that the hope of many Jewish

[73] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 17-18.
[74] Quoted in A. Levi, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Yahudiler* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1998), 26.

representatives that the Turkish Jews would peacefully integrate and be granted equal rights was in vain.[75]

A different opinion is voiced by Rifat Bali however. In his opinion, the Turkish-Jewish community was seen as a model community for the Turkification policy. In his words, the Jewish community actually was seen as *"a communal prototype, as a reference point for Turkification."*[76] According to Bali, this can be explained by the almost complete absence of nationalism among the Jewish community. He claims that although there was Zionism on a small scale, this was not seen as a great danger. However, the Greek and Armenian nationalism was considered a threat and therefore those communities were seen as much bigger problems than the Jewish community. The Jews, a minority *"which did not nurture separatist aspirations or ethno-nationalist sentiments"* were therefore used as an example *against* the Greeks and Armenians.[77] Bali has a couple of arguments to vouch for his statement. For the first argument, we need to go back to Switzerland in 1922, during the peace talks in Lausanne. İsmet Paşa, the head of the Turkish delegation, was invited for a banquet by the Turkish-Jewish community in Switzerland. *The Jewish Chronicle* recorded his speech, saying that İsmet Paşa told that "*the Jews in Turkey constituted an element of order, work, progress and harmony and that they could serve as an example to all minorities in their maintenance of the law and in patriotism.*"[78] It is said that İsmet Paşa repeated this opinion, mentioning the Jewish "model community" and speaking of the Jews being an example "*who enjoyed all of the rights of Turkish citizenship*."

Bali's second argument involves the 42th article of the peace treaty of Lausanne. This article provided in the minorities rights, literally stating: *"The Turkish government undertakes to take, as regards non-Moslem minorities, in so far as concerns their family law of personal status, measures permitting the settlement of these questions in accordance with the customs of those minorities."*[79] As mentioned earlier in this research, the Turkish government did not intend to follow up on this part of the peace agreement, not even in the beginning. The Civil Code of 1926 illustrated this, as this secular set of laws opposed the minority privileges of Article 42. As a preliminary step to the Civil Code, the minorities were asked to officially renounce their minority rights. The Jews, as the model community and example, were seen as the group who

[75] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 7-9.
[76] Bali, *Silent Minority in Turkey*, 109.
[77] Ibidem, 109.
[78] Ibidem, 110.
[79] Pekesen, *Nationalismus, Türkisierung*, 280.

must obey the request first. A meeting of members of lay and religious councils, presided over by the Grand Rabbi, complied with this command.

The official Turkish Jewish Community renunciation, which was written on September 15 1925, contained sentences of willingness and gratitude. The renunciation started with the statement that there was a new political situation, "*Following the acceptance and proclamation of the principle separating religion from the affairs of State, the same principle as in other civilised countries*" and, on that this ground, it was decided that it was "*our duty to submit to our Republican government*".[80] A few lines further, it is made clear that the authors agree with the government and, above that, they are clearly convinced of the utility of the new situation after renunciation of article 42: "*(..) when the treaty was signed, our national government, (..) agreed to fix and apply special dispositions for each of the minorities. But as a result of the complete separation of religion from things of this world, and in view of the fact that all laws, without exception, are being elaborated and applied outside of all religious ideas and considerations and conforming to the needs of the country and to the progress of contemporary law, there is no longer any need to elaborate dispositions relative to the family laws of Jews (..)."*[81] In other words, the Jewish community (or at least its primary leaders) understood and agreed with the government's wishes concerning secularity and modernity, even if it undermined their own minority rights.

This means they indeed showed signs of loyalty to the Turkish state. The renunciation strengthens this view by adding the following: "*(..) it has been proven by experience and by historic witness that Jews not only have never been indifferent to political and social revolutionary movements of the countries in which they live, but rather, to the contrary, they have taken part in them and have added their influence. From another point of view, since the political and general order of the Turkish republic is completely based on separation of religion from the things of the world, the Jews who have always considered themselves to be true children of this country cannot conceive of any incapability regarding the application, for them, of exceptions, which would be in contradiction with this principle and the obligations of*

[80] "Official Turkish Jewish Community renunciation of special privileges provided by the Treaty of Lausanne, Article 42, September 15, 1925" as published in Berna Pekesen, *Nationalismus, Türkisierung und das Ende der jüdischen Gemeinden in Thrakien. 1918-1942* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2012), 281-282.
[81] Ibidem.

patriotism."[82] This passage proved the previous statement of loyalty and even advocated for the renunciation of minority rights. The final argument would have released all doubts about what, in the Jews opinion, was their role in society: "*Given then that the personal statute which is now being elaborated is inspired by the principles accepted in all civilized countries and of our civil and social rights we have no doubt that it will satisfy all the civil and social needs of all Turks inhabiting Turkey as well as Jewish Turks."*[83]

Apparently, the Jewish leaders greatly trusted the Turkish government in treating all citizens equally. The whole renunciation document, however, relied on the rights concerning family and personal law who had not been practiced at the time, since the Civil Code would be implemented several months later. Now the following question arises: were the Jewish leaders aware of the specific content of the new legal system and what it would mean for their community? The last lines of their document indicate that the answer is positive: "*(..) we Turkish Jews accept the vow from which we profit as well as the other civil laws and secular dispositions that the Republican government publishes relative to personal statute and family rights, and we present the sentiments of our gratitude."*[84] Given the events in the following decades, this statement is rather strange in hindsight. It is plausible to assume that the Jewish leaders felt pressured by both government and Turkish press to renunciate their privileges provided by the Treaty of Lausanne. Given the fact that Yunus Nadi, chief editor of *Cumhuriyet*, wrote a widely read article stating that Jews *should* act as an example for other minorities, it is likely that the Jewish leaders chose to avoid conflict and went along with what was demanded by the new political order.[85]

All in all, there is little to support the view of Rıfat Bali that the Jews were truly wholeheartedly complimented for their patriotism and loyalty to the new Turkish Republic. In spite of the fine words by government officials like İsmet Paşa and the voluntary renunciation of the privileges of article 42, the identity of the Jewish community was at odds with the Turkification policy. In short: the Jews had to bend or break. In my view therefore, Guttstadt is right to assume that the founding of the Republic and the success of Turkish nationalism was not good news for the Jewish community - in particular because of the Zionist successes after the first world war.

[82] "Official Turkish Jewish Community renunciation of special privileges".
[83] Ibidem.
[84] Ibidem.
[85] Bali, *Silent Minority in Turkey*, 111-112.

Guttstadt's conclusion is also defended by Berna Pekesen, who refers to the words of the American consul Charles E. Allen, who said that the true objective of the Turkish government was *"to get rid of the Jews, but at the same time make it appear that they had left on their own"*.[86] In the next part of this chapter, I will compare this attitude of the Turkish government to that of the Turkish population and press, by discussing the existence of antisemitism in Turkish society during the interbellum.

Antisemitism in Turkish society, press and politics before World War II

In the second part of this chapter, antisemitism will be the main theme. At first, the term antisemitism needs to be specified and distinguished from, for instance, anti-Zionism. Secondly, it is useful to explain if antisemitism occurred in pre-World War II Turkish society and, in case it did, how it manifested among Turkish citizens. Thirdly, I shall discuss the presence and nature of antisemitism in Turkish press. Fourthly, another look will be taken at the Turkish government's policies with regard to antisemitism. In connection to this, I will discuss the events known as the Thrace pogroms of 1934, which are considered the biggest and most important anti-Jewish acts in Turkey during the 1930s.

There are different ways to categorize antisemitism. Efrat Aviv, who most recently published on antisemitism and anti-Zionism in Turkey, uses the same definition that is used by the European Union as well as the U.S. State Department: *'Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred towards Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.'*[87] This definition can be called a broad conception of antisemitism, since it includes all actions directed against Jews or the Jewish community that are expressions of hatred towards Jews. It is broader than what I call the narrow conception of antisemitism that is used by Marc David Baer, who addressed the origins of antisemitism among Ottoman and Turkish Muslims. Baer distinguishes between antisemitism and anti-Judaism. The former refers only to a hostile, racist conspiracy theory, originating in the nineteenth century, according to which Jews are morally inferior because of certain essential biological traits. In this narrow conception, only the genuine racist who

[86] Pekesen, *Nationalismus, Türkisierung,* 241-242.
[87] Aviv, *Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism*, 1.

believes that the *'inherently evil Jews are everywhere, and always plotting the destruction of one's society*', can be called truly antisemitic.[88]

After comparing the two different definitions of antisemitism by Baer and Aviv, I favour Aviv's definition over Baer's for the purpose of this paper. There are two reasons for this choice. The first is that anti-Jewish sentiments are often based on other grounds than racial discrimination, such as religious and nationalist tendencies.[89] Of course, Nazism is an obvious exception and Baer might well be correct in concluding that there were racist tendencies in Turkey's antisemitism as well. However, Aviv's definition is more inclusive and thus more useful for this research, since the main goal of this research is answering the question why Turkish Jews left the country after World War II. Aviv's definition covers not just racial antisemitism, but religious or nationalist anti-Judaism as well. Since both count as plausible explanations for a general feeling of discomfort among Jews - which can cause them to emigrate - it is better to use a broad conception of antisemitism.

Antisemitism does not, of course, include every act against Jews. For instance, government officials or newspaper articles might object to the Jewish nationalist goals of the Zionists, without targeting the Jewish community as a whole. Anti-Zionism, therefore, can be defined as the *political* attitude against international Jewish unity, nationalism and against the idea of a Jewish state. In fact, anti-Zionism can even be practiced by Jews themselves, for instance those who favoured the Turkification policies of the Turkish Republic. However, when anti-Zionism manifests itself in combination with negative stereotypes of Jews, such as greediness, communism, or being evil in general, these manifestations can become antisemitic.[90]

It is perhaps slightly problematic that the use of the term antisemitism with regard to Turkey is already controversial in some circles. Antisemitism is often regarded as a European phenomenon, even by some Turkish intellectuals, who simply state that the term does not apply to Turkey, because Turkey welcomed Jews during the Second World War, when the Jews fled from the *European creation* of antisemitism. The denial of antisemitism in the Muslim world also has roots in the old Arab conviction that by definition Arabs could not be antisemites

[88] M.D. Baer, "An Enemy Old and New: The Dönme, Anti-Semitism, and Conspiracy Theories in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 103, no. 4 (2013), 527.
[89] W. Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Anti-Semitism. From Ancient Times to the Present Day* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 107.
[90] Aviv, *Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism*, 2.

because they were Semites themselves. This argument completely ignores the fact that the term Semite is more a linguistic than an ethnic or political term and as such it does not rule out any enmity between Arabs and Jews - even if their languages have common roots.[91] Furthermore, Turks do not share a common linguistic or ethnic ancestry with either the Jews or the Arabs, so this kind of reasoning would never apply to them. It might well be true that many Turks are not aware of the presence of antisemitism in the European meaning of the word, because the term is simply not widely used in Turkish society. Other words are often used in its place, such as *'Yahudi Karşıtlığı'*, which also refers to hostility toward Jews, but this terminology does not carry the historically determined value of the term antisemitism. This also explains why Turkey does not have any law that bans antisemitism, in addition to the fact that such a law might lead to demands by other minorities.[92] Of course, we need not adept our use of terminology to that of Turkish society or politics. Any policy, newspaper article or social act that counts as a manifestation of hatred against Jews, can be called antisemitic - independent of the Turkish usage of the word.

Over the years, there have been some small-scale, anti-Jewish actions by civilians which are documented. The case of Elza Niyego is both rather well known and exemplary for early Republican Turkey and the way the public treated Jews. In 1927 Istanbul, Elza, a 22-year-old Jewish woman, caught the eye of the 42-year-old Osman Ratıp, an islamic married man with children and grandchildren. Osman immediately fell in love with Elza and asked her to marry him but did not get any response. Osman pursued her for months and even threatened to kill her in case she would not agree to marry him. After complaints of her family, he was imprisoned for a month. After his release, he continued to pursue her. At this point, the story took a dramatic turn. Osman learned that meanwhile, Elza got engaged to a young Jewish man. On August 17 1927, Osman waited for Elza to return home from work in the late afternoon and then stabbed her to death. Elza's sister got wounded in the attack as well. The police arrived just in time to prevent an attack on and probable lynching of Osman by a group of Jews, shortly after the murder. Elza's body remained on the streets for hours, because, as it is said, her mother did not want to cover her body with a blanket. This obviously fuelled the anger of many Jews who gathered at the scene and paved the way for further escalation.[93]

[91] Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Anti-Semitism,* 191.
[92] Aviv, *Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism*, 3-4.
[93] Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri,* 110.

The aftermath of Elza's murder was tumultuous. Istanbul's Jewish society was shocked by the murder and as a result, the Niyego family house was flooded by Jews promising them to organize a wonderful funeral ceremony for Elza. Rage was further encouraged by the expectation that Osman would escape punishment because of two factors, being his Turkishness and his prominent and important family. This expectation indeed came true. The sense of injustice drew, according to some journalists, hundreds of Jewish people to the Niyego's house, where the crowd verbally accused the journalists and police of barbarism.[94]

Elza's funeral was attended by many people, including prominent figures of Istanbul's Jewish community. Estimates of the number of Jews who were on the streets for the ceremony go up to 25.000. During the march, some of the Jews raised their voices against Turks, saying that they wanted justice and calling the Turks "cowards".[95] The following day, different newspapers reported the events of the funeral, but the attitude of the Turkish newspapers had changed considerably. Where they had been sympathetic towards the victim immediately after the murder (although it was not mentioned that she was a Jew, and the murderer a Muslim), the funeral radically turned the opinion of the press. Newspapers like *Vakit* and *Son Saat* accused the Jews of using the funeral as a political demonstration against the Turkish Republic and Turkish honor, which supposedly resulted in attacks on innocent Turks and policemen.[96] The anti-Jewish campaign that followed the murder of Elza Niyego lasted for quite some time, although not all Turkish newspapers participated. Yunus Nadi Abalıoğlu, editor in chief of *Cumhuriyet*, explicitly renounced the anti-Jewish campaign and made the decision to cease it in his newspaper.[97] The articles of the newspapers that did participate in the campaign however, were widely read by young educated urban Turks, who had already adopted some antisemitic attitudes. Until the early 1930s however, the hostility toward the Jewish community was mostly verbal and physical attacks that specifically targeted Jews were scarce.[98]

Antisemitism in the first decade of the Turkish Republic was still very much connected to a general sense of xenophobia and hostility towards minorities. It seems however, that a more independent form of antisemitism developed in Turkish society from 1933 onwards. This

[94] Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri,* 111.
[95] Ibidem, 112.
[96] Aviv, *Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism,* 35.
[97] S. Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is a Turk?* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 149.
[98] Aviv, *Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism,* 36.

development was, at least in part, related to rise of the Nazi regime in Germany, since it became more common to refer to Nazi policies when threatening Jews who resisted turkification. Amongst those who expressed attitudes of antisemitism were influential figures like Asaf Belge, a young intellectual and representative in the Turkish National Assembly, who often wrote articles for the left-wing journal *Kadro*. Others include the novelist and philosopher Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, who was openly racist and supported Nazism.[99] Perhaps the most influential antisemitic writer of the 1930s was Cevat Rifat Atilhan, who both published and wrote for the nationalist journal *Milli İnkılap*. He was fiercely opposed to Zionism, claiming it to be the biggest enemy of Turkishness, and resisted what he called the 'Jewization of Turkey'. *Milli İnkılap* published not only Turkish antisemitic articles, but caricatures and articles from Nazist journals in Germany as well. Cevat Rifat believed in conspiracy theories of a Jewish plot to dominate the world, which was made explicit by his novel *Yahudi Dünyayı Nasıl İstila ediyor* ('How the Jews conquer the world').[100] His inflammatory publications played a prominent role in the events leading to the Thrace pogroms of 1934, provoking the Turkish population to fight against the Jewish danger.

The violent attacks on Jews in Thrace during the summer of 1934 are in Turkish referred to as *Trakya Olayları* – the 'events' in Thrace – which hardly captures the extent of the damage that was done to the Jewish community. The Thracian events started on June 21 in Çanakkale, when boycotts of Jewish shops were organized. These boycotts were soon followed by physical attacks on individual Jews. Although local authorities granted the Jews police protection, this was only maintained for a couple of days, after which the attacks started again. Jews all over Thrace – both the European and the Anatolian part - were being threatened to leave the larger cities like Edirne immediately. Simultaneously, Turkish nationalists looted Jewish shops and homes and assaulted rabbis and women in the city of Kırklareli. Local security forces did prevent some escalations of violence, but also ordered the Jews to leave.[101]

The events caused thousands of Thracian Jews to leave the area and flee to Istanbul, as well as across the border, into Greece and Bulgaria. Estimations of the number of Jewish refugees vary from around 3.000 to around 10.000. The estimation of 3.000 was the result of an investigation

[99] Rıfat N. Bali, *Antisemitism and Conspiracy Theories in Turkey* (Istanbul: Libra Kitap, 2013), 209-214.
[100] Pekesen, *Nationalismus, Türkisierung,* 194-196.
[101] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 61-62.

by Minister of Internal Affairs Şükrü Kaya, who went to Thrace in the aftermath of the attacks, between 7 and 12 July. The report of this investigation should not be uncritically accepted however, since the Turkish government tried its best to downplay the extent of the anti-Jewish riots. The first official response of the Turkish government was on 5 July, two weeks after the start of the attacks. In a speech to the Grand National Assembly, Prime Minister Inönü condemned the attacks and promised that the perpetrators would be punished. A statement summarizing the speech was distributed to the press shortly after. The publication of this statement in *Cumhuriyet* shows that Inönü refused to acknowledge the scale of the attacks, claiming there were only a hundred refugees who had been forced to leave their homes because of a series of attacks: "*Trakyada bazı yerlerden 100 kadar yahudinin İstanbula geldiklerini haber aldım. Başvekalete vuku bulan şikayetlerde, bazı yahudiler, hususi ve mahalli tazyikler tesirile yerlerini terke mecbur olduklarını bildirmektedirler."* He added that *"Antisemitizm Türkiye metaı ve zihniyeti değildir"* – antisemitism is neither a Turkish product nor part of the Turkish mindset.[102] In the first weeks of July 1934, foreign newspapers and diplomats also referred to the events in Thrace, but these sources mention thousands of Jewish refugees. It seems that the Turkish government could no longer maintain that the attacks only took place on a small scale. Therefore the report by Şükrü Kaya estimated the amount of refugees at 3.000, which was still considerably lower than the number of 8.000 that was given by the British ambassador Loraine and the Greek ambassador Sakellaroppoulos at the same date of Kaya's report.[103]

Yunus Nadi, still editor in chief of *Cumhuriyet*, contributed to the idea that the Thracian events were not as violent as they were presented by foreign diplomats and newspapers. On 12 July, the same day that Minister Kaya presented his report of the investigation in Thrace, *Cumhuriyet* published an article titled *"Bulgar gazetelerinin yalanları"*, in which the Bulgarian newspapers are accused of spreading lies about the attacks on the Jewish community and the numbers of Jewish refugees (the Bulgarian newspapers mentioned the same amount of refugees as the British and Greek ambassadors).[104] These publications show a noteworthy shift in the way *Cumhuriyet* dealt with matters concerning the Jewish community. In 1927, Nadi had chosen *not* to support the anti-Jewish campaign that followed the murder of Elza Niyego. From 1933 onwards however, *Cumhuriyet* had become far less friendly towards the Jewish community,

[102] *Cumhuriyet,* 6 July 1934.
[103] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 62.
[104] *Cumhuriyet,* 12 July 1934.

which can be attributed to the fact that Nadi sympathized with the Nazi-movement in Germany. Already in April 1933, *Cumhuriyet* argued that the anti-Jewish boycott by National Socialists in Germany was an act of self-defence, which had been organized in an orderly fashion due to the iron discipline of the NSDAP.[105] On the 23rd and 24th of June 1934 – two days after the start of the riots in Thrace – *Cumhuriyet* published an article on Hitler and a speech by Goebbels, in which the re-armament program of Germany was defended.[106] Because *Cumhuriyet* was loyal to the Republican government, it is noteworthy that the pro-German (and anti-Jewish) attitude of Yunus Nadi and his son Nadir Nadi was not censured.

Whether this shows that the Republican government itself was increasingly anti-Jewish is topic of debate among academics. Stanford Shaw is the most prominent defender of the Kemalist government with regard to its attitude towards the Jews. He argues that – although there was Nazi-inspired antisemitism in Turkish society and press – it was always condemned by both government officials and other newspapers, such as the Kemalist evening paper *Tan*. *Milli İnkılap*, for instance, had been banned by the government soon after the anti-Jewish attacks of 1934. With regard to these Thracian events, Shaw argues that the government did much to suppress antisemitism both before and after. In his view, the statement of Inönü that 'antisemitism was not part of the Turkish mindset' was not meant to downplay the intensity of the attacks against the Jews, but to show that the government fully resisted anti-Jewish sentiments. Shaw also mentions that local officials who had either contributed to or failed to stop the riots, such as the mayor and chief of police of Kırklareli, were dismissed and that much was done to punish those who had participated in the attacks.[107]

Corry Guttstadt, Berna Pekesen and Hatice Bayraktar adopt a more critical stance towards the actions of the Turkish government considering the Thracian events.[108] Guttstadt argues that the government's actions against antisemitism in Turkish press was extremely ambivalent. Although *Milli İnkılap* had been banned, the authorities had warned Atilhan well before the ban, in order to provide him the time to distribute the newest edition. Furthermore, in 1935,

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[105] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 57.
[106] *Cumhuriyet,* 23 June 1934 and 24 June 1934.
[107] Stanford J. Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust. Turkey's Role in Rescuing Turkish and European Jewry from Nazi Persecution, 1933-1945*. (London: MacMillan, 1993), 14-33.
[108] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*; Pekesen, *Nationalismus, Türkisierung*; Hatice Bayraktar, *Zweideutige Individuen in schlechter Absicht. Die antisemitischen Ausschreitungen in Thrakien 1934 und ihre Hintergründe.* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2011).

Atilhan's antisemitic book *Yahudi Casusu* (the Jewish infiltrator/spy) was reprinted on the order of the General Staff of the Turkish army and distributed among all military units.[109] The measures that were taken against those responsible for the attacks can also be called weak. The high-ranking officials who had been arrested were already released after a few days, and no trial followed.[110] Promises to return possessions that were stolen during the riots were also not kept by the government.[111]

Pekesen and Bayraktar point out that the government played a crucial role in causing the Thracian pogroms as well. On 14 June 1934, the government passed a new Law of Settlement (*İskan Kanunu*), which was published a week later, the same day the riots in Thrace started. The law aimed to settle immigrants, refugees and non-Turks or non-Muslims in such a way that assimilation into Turkish culture would be stimulated. Article 4 of the law also stated that immigration of non-Turkish and non-Muslim groups would be stopped.[112] The law can be seen as a new impulse of the Turkification policies, which were not always successful. Thrace, as region of great military importance due to its geographical location, was a region that was particularly suited for resettlement. That Jews were to be the target was also clear: after the first world war, they had become the largest non-Muslim group in the area. On top of that, they had taken over the profitable positions in trade and commerce that had previously belonged to Greeks and Armenians. This had caused increasing antisemitism in the region, as was acknowledged by the report of Minister Kaya after the events of 1934.[113]

Nevertheless, there is no formal document that orders the resettlement of the Thracian Jews, which makes it difficult to prove an official connection between the Settlement Law and the attacks that followed. The connection becomes more plausible however, when we consider the role of İbrahim Tali Öngören, the Inspector-General of Thrace. Tali had been on tour to investigate the region in May and June 1934 and wrote a report on his findings shortly after, which was full of antisemitic rhetoric. In the report, Tali argued that Thracian Jewry controlled the economy of Thrace by extorting funds from local landowners. The most telling section of

[109] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 60-63.
[110] Hatice Bayraktar, "The anti-Jewish Pogrom in Eastern Thrace in 1934: New Evidence for the Responsibility of the Turkish Government," *Patterns of Prejudice* 40, no.2 (2006) 95-111: 97.
[111] Rıfat Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*. (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2009), 262.
[112] Yeşim Bayar, *Formation of the Turkish Nation-state, 1920-1938,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 141-142.
[113] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 65-66.

the report was titled 'The Jewish problem in Thrace', in which Tali complained about the corrupt officials acting on behalf of Jews, that were the cause of great economic losses.[114] According to Tali, '*the Jew of Thrace is so morally corrupt and devoid of character that it strikes one immediately'*. Tali's vocabulary shows the most extreme forms of antisemitism: *'The Jews represent a secret danger and* [...] *it is therefore an indispensable necessity for Turkish life, the Turkish economy, Turkish security, the Turkish regime, and the revolution in Thrace, and for Turkish Thrace to be able to recover, to finally solve the Jewish problem in the most radical way.'*[115] Tali's report was ready on the 16th of June and copies were already handed over to the ministry of interior affairs before it was officially sent to General-Secretary Recep Peker on the 10th of July. It is therefore highly likely that Prime Minister Inönü and Minister of Internal Affairs Şükrü Kaya were well aware of the report and its contents when they renounced antisemitism in response to the Thracian events.[116] In fact, *Cumhuriyet* published an article on 21 June (again, the same day the riots began), in which Tali explains that the purpose of the investigation was to research the agricultural, social, administrative and economic situation of the region. The article did not specifically mention the Jews, but it did refer to refugees coming into the region from Bulgaria and Romania, as a potential threat to the Turks of the region.[117]

In short, we can assume that the pogrom in Thrace was caused by a number of factors, among which the provoking articles in journals such as *Milli İnkılap* and *Orhun* (published by Nihal Atsız). The articles could be influential only because there already was an existing breeding ground for antisemitism in Thrace *and* because government policies not only failed to resist antisemitism, but even seemed to support it. It might have been local officials who were directly responsible for the attacks in June and July 1934, but their actions were made possible by higher ranking officials such as İbrahim Tali. In this respect, the responses of Inönü and Şükrü Kaya can be called both late and weak. Their denial of the existence of antisemitism in Turkish society only made sure it could be maintained.

In the period between the Thracian events and the outbreak of the Second World War, antisemitism remained a recurrent phenomenon in Turkish press. Particularly noteworthy is the

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[114] Bayraktar, "The anti-Jewish Pogrom in Eastern Thrace in 1934," 99-101.
[115] Tali's report, Edirne, 16 June 1934: Başbakanlık Arşivi, document 490.01.643.30.1, as translated in Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 67-68. Summary and analysis of the report can be found in: Bayraktar, *Zweideutige Individuen*.
[116] Bayraktar, "The anti-Jewish pogrom in Eastern Thrace in 1934," 108.
[117] *Cumhuriyet,* 21 June 1934.

response of CHP-newspaper *Ulus* to the Nuremberg racial laws of 1935. Editor in chief Falih Rıfkı Atay wrote and published a number of articles in which the laws were positively evaluated. Nazi-propaganda in which the Jews were accused of controlling the press as well as cultural, intellectual and economic life, was uncritically repeated. The Jewish Question, Atay wrote, was a matter of national self-defence.[118] The spread of German propaganda had its effects on Turkish society. In the 1930s, several German-Turkish friendship societies were founded in Istanbul, which – among other things – aimed to convince Turkish Jews to leave Turkey.[119]

In the summer of 1938, a new wave of antisemitic articles was published in *Cumhuriyet*. The articles were written by Nadir Nadi, son of the editor in chief. In June, he defended the *Anschluss* by stating: "*Senelerdenberi zavallı Avusturyalıların Yahudilerden neler çektiğini iyi biliyordum*" ("I know what the poor Austrians have had to suffer from the Jews for years"), again confirming Nazist conspiracy theories.[120] A month later, Nadi addressed a particular issue in Istanbul. The Tokatlian Hotel, which was owned by an Austrian German, had openly flown the swastika-flag. As a result, many Jews avoided the hotel, which was interpreted by Nadi as an organized boycott. Nadi condemned what he called "*garib bir boykot hareketi" –* a strange boycott movement.[121] According to Nadi, the matter of the swastika-flag was a foreign affair that Turkish Jews should not concern themselves with. Instead, the Jews should be preoccupied with their own Turkishness, since the Jews had not stepped forward toward Turkish society and continued to scrape the ears of Turks with their broken French and Spanish.[122] In an article on 23 July 1938, a distinction was made between two kinds of Jews: the 'Turkish Jews' (*Türk Yahudi*) and the 'Jewish Jews' (*Yahudi Yahudi*). The Turkish Jews are seen to be fellow citizens who have adopted Turkish culture, language and heritage. On the other hand, the Jewish Jews are Turkish enemies to the bone: "*fakat iliklerine kadar Türk düşmanıdır*". Although these Jewish Jews can claim to be Turk or Muslim, they "think Jewish, speak Jewish and live Jewish, even when speaking Turkish or French" ("*Yahudice düşünür ve yahudice konuşur; türkçe veya fransızca konuşsa bile yahudice yaşar*").[123]

[118] *Ulus,* 28 September 1935, as translated in Corry Guttstadt, "Turkish Responses to the Holocaust," in *Nazism, the Holocaust, and the Middle East: Arab and Turkish Responses,* ed. Francis R. Nicosia and Boğaç A. Ergene (New York: Berghahn, 2018), 48-49.
[119] Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust,* 28.
[120] *Cumhuriyet,* 13 June 1938.
[121] *Cumhuriyet,* 20 July 1938.
[122] Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust,* 30.
[123] *Cumhuriyet,* 23 July 1938.

It is by now clear that publications like those of Asaf Belge, Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, Cevat Rifat Atilhan and Nadir Nadi should not be seen as isolated examples in an otherwise tolerant society. In contrast, these publications are part of a larger development in which antisemitism became more prominent in Turkish society. A study by Hatice Bayraktar has shown the increase in the use of antisemitic stereotypes in Turkish satirist and nationalist magazines, mainly *Akbaba, Karikatür* and the aforementioned *Milli İnkılap.* Unlike *Milli İnkılap*, *Akbaba* was considered to be having close ties with the government. This study shows how, from 1933 onwards, these magazines structurally present an antisemitic image of both the Jews' appearance and their character. Stereotype characterizations include the Jews being selfish, avaricious, dishonest, amoral, unpatriotic, and without empathy.[124] Figure 1 is an example of such a cartoon, in which the Jew is being characterized as disloyal to the Turkish state – caring only about his money. The stereotype appearance is common to the stereotypes used in European journals of that time: large hooked noses, big eyes, lips and hands and thin hair.[125] It is noteworthy that the hostility towards Jewish refugees rose significantly in 1939 - after the events of the *Kristallnacht* in Germany. Caricatures of Jews were significantly greater in number than those of other minorities as well, which strengthens the view of an independent form of antisemitism - different from the more general xenophobia and nationalism in the 1920s.[126] The Turkish press in these decades was subjected to intensive scrutiny and censorship. Because these expressions of antisemitism were *not* censored, in addition to the thematic choices of the anti-Jewish caricatures, we can assume that the caricatures had a political function or at the very least, that antisemitism was tolerated to a high degree.[127]

Figure 1:
Karikatür, 27 October 1938
Caption: "Gratitude". Salamon – '*Thanks to you, I earn my living, selling 1000 flags within two days'*

[124] Hatice Bayraktar, *Salamon und Rabeka. Judenstereotype in Karikaturen der türkischen Zeitschriften Akbaba, Karikatür und Milli İnkılap 1933-1945.* (Berlin: Klaus Schwartz Verlag, 2006), 61.
[125] Ibidem, 52.
[126] Ibidem, 67-68.
[127] Ibidem, 86.

We can assume that the rise and toleration of antisemitism in Turkish society and press - whether it was supported by the government or not - put pressure on the Jewish community. In the first part of this chapter I have already concluded that the policy of Turkification hurt the Turkish Jews in several ways. In the third and final part of the chapter, I shall discuss the effects of the government's policies on Jewish migration during the 1920s and 1930s. It will then be clear to what extent the goal *"to get rid of the Jews, but at the same time make it appear that they had left on their own"* was in fact realized.[128]

Jewish migration in the 1920s and 1930s

In the early Republican period, right before World War II broke out, there have been some remarkable flows of Jewish migration, both immigration and emigration. At first, I will discuss the immigration of Jews from Germany, in particular the several hundred academics and scientists that arrived in the early 1930s. Secondly, immigration from other countries will be addressed. Thirdly, Jewish emigration in this period needs to be explained, both to Palestine and Western countries, in particular France and the United States.

The story of Germans who came to Turkey started already in the 1920s, when professionals like architects, engineers, city planners and consultants were welcomed by the Kemalist government in order to help building the modern state. Many of them resided in and worked on the new capital Ankara. After the Nazi's came to power - first in Germany in 1933 and then in Austria in 1938 - a new wave of scientists and academics followed, including Jews who had been dismissed because of their Jewishness. Most of them were appointed at the newly reformed university of Istanbul and the newly founded faculties of Ankara University. The invitations to the Jewish scholars were mostly arranged by the *Notgemeinschaft Deutscher Wissenschaftler,* which had been established in Switzerland in order to help German scientists who were dismissed after the Nazi's came into power.[129] It is doubtful however, to attribute the sheltering of German scholars to any humanitarian motive to save Jews by the Turkish state. This perspective, in which the help to the Jewish scholars is seen as an act of humanity - sometimes even compared to the Ottoman empire being a refuge for Jews after 1492 - has been put forward in a considerable number of recent publications as well as in Turkish media. An example of this can be found in the publications of the Quincentennial Foundation, which was

[128] Pekesen, *Nationalismus, Türkisierung,* 241-242.
[129] Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust,* 4.

established to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of Spanish Jews: *"History followed its course. The young Turkish Republic took the place of the Ottoman Empire. In 1933, the Great Atatürk invited to Turkey German university professors of Jewish origin who were under the threat of the Nazi persecution."* However, there is no proof of any humanitarian motive.[130] In contrast, some arguments seem to oppose it.

First of all, in the 1930s Turkey invited not only Jewish scholars, but other German scholars as well, including Nazi-sympathisers. This was the consequence of a modernization program in 1933 which had led to the dismissal of more than 150 university teachers. Turkey was in need of well-educated scholars who were ready to be appointed to major professorships. The number of foreign scholars that were appointed in these years is estimated at around 300. Including family members, teaching assistants and other personnel these scholars were allowed to bring with them, the total number of immigrants as a consequence of appointments at universities is estimated between 800 and 1000 persons.[131] A second argument which shows that there does not seem to be a humanitarian motive is that the Turkish government refused to accept a larger number of refugees, despite several attempts by Jews to convince them. In September 1933, Albert Einstein wrote a letter to Prime Minister Inönü with a request to accept another forty Jewish professors and doctors. The request was refused.[132]

The Turkish government in fact discouraged further Jewish immigration in the 1930s. Non-prominent German Jews who had already arrived in Turkey before 1933 and could not return to Germany, lived in very difficult conditions. Foreigners in general were obstructed from getting work permits, in order to reduce the labour opportunities for immigrants. In the late 1930s, when conditions in Germany and Austria worsened and other countries like Romania, Czechoslovakia and Italy also adopted anti-Jewish legislation, the Turkish government even adopted measures that were explicitly meant to prevent Jewish immigration. Even some of the accepted Jewish scholars mentioned that there was a 'nasty nationalism' in Turkey, which manifested itself in antisemitism.[133] This is backed up by another editorial of Nadir Nadi in

[130] I. Izzet Bahar, 'Turkey and the Rescue of Jews during the Nazi Era: A Reappraisal of Two Cases; German-Jewish Scientists in Turkey & Turkish Jews in Occupied France', (Phd. dissertation University of Pittsburgh, 2012), 75.
[131] Berna Pekesen, *Zwischen Sympathie und Eigennutz. NS-propaganda und die Türkische Presse im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014), 62.
[132] Bahar, 'Turkey and the Rescue of Jews during the Nazi Era', 77.
[133] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 96-97.

Cumhuriyet, in which he called the use of Jewish professors at Turkish universities an error.[134] In fact, an article of *Ha-refuah*, a journal published by the Hebrew Medical Union, claimed in 1936 '*most of the Jewish professors from Germany who are in Istanbul have decided to leave Turkey as a result of the persecutions of the Jews by Turkish physicians and medical students'*.[135]

As mentioned, the Turkish government took measures to stop Jewish immigration in the late 1930s. In an internal decree of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, immigration agencies were instructed to prevent the immigration of Jews. In a letter to the German embassy, dated May 7, 1937, the Ministry stated that the right to settle in Turkey was limited to people who belonged to the Turkish race and culture.[136] In June 1938, parliament accepted the Passport Law and the Law Regarding the Residence and Travel of Foreigners in Turkey. The Passport Law prohibited refugees without valid passport or other citizenship papers from entering Turkey, which was highly problematic for Jews who were robbed of their citizenship status in their own countries. The law also targeted former Turkish citizens abroad, who had given up Turkish citizenship and who were now prohibited to return to Turkey, with disastrous consequences for Turkish Jews on the European mainland. The Law Regarding the Residence and Travel of Foreigners on the other hand prohibited foreigners who were already living in Turkey but had lost their own countries' citizenship in the meantime to stay. This implied that many European Jews could lose their legal protection in Turkey (which did in fact happen to large numbers of German and Italian Jews, who were expelled in 1939).[137]

About a month after parliament adopted the Passport Law and the Law Regarding the Residence and Travel of Foreigners, *Cumhuriyet* addressed the issue of Jewish refugees in Europe, expressing the hope that 'the wandering children of Moses … do not turn their steps toward Turkey'.[138] The column was written as a response to the Evian conference, which was an international conference organized to solve the problem of Jewish refugees. Shortly after, the Turkish government issued a classified decree which formulated the strictest anti-immigration policy against Jews thus far: it imposed a complete prohibition on Jewish entrance - even for

[134] *Cumhuriyet,* 14 October 1937.
[135] Bali, *The Silent Minority*, 196.
[136] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 98.
[137] Ibidem, 99-106.
[138] *Cumhuriyet*, 15 July 1938, as translated in Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 101.

those who wished only to use Turkey as a transit-country.[139] The decree was not published in *Resmi Gazete*, the official Turkish journal and it remained secret until 2010, when it was revealed by the Turkish scholar Bilal Şimsir.[140] The decree, as well as the Passport Law and the Law Regarding the Residence and Travel of Foreigners, shows that the Turkish government deliberately refused to provide shelter for European Jews. It was now official policy to reject entrance to Jews.

Unsurprisingly, the different policies regarding Jews, gradually shifting from discouragement to restriction, cornered the Jews living in Turkey to the point where many of them chose to emigrate. However, Jews leaving Turkey was not a new phenomenon. Even in Ottoman times, wealthier Jews moved their homes and businesses from cities like Istanbul to European cities, though their group was rather small.[141] In the beginning of the twentieth century, emigration towards Europe started to multiply. Probable pulling factors are the Western education in the schools of the AIU and, as a result of this, the achieved proficiency in (European) languages. French has for a long time been the common language of the Jewish community, besides Judeo-Spanish. It is plausible to think that, in their opinion, they would rather easily blend into the already existing Jewish community there. Therefore, France was by many preferred as their destination of relocation. Numbers show that the French Jewish population grew intensively in the period from 1880 until World War II. It is believed that the total Jewish community quadrupled in nearly sixty years, almost entirely due to immigration from the east which included the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. Census carried out by the German occupiers in 1940 indeed showed that about half of the 330.000 Jews living in France were born in other countries.[142] Though Turkish Jews moved to places throughout the world, for example to the United States and different places in Latin America, France definitely was one of the most popular countries. In the 1920s, France's position as main destination was even strengthened by the United States' harsher immigration policy.

Jewish emigration in the early Republican era is documented in Turkey as well. According to Guttstadt, '*the subsequent ten to fifteen years after the founding of the Republic saw an exodus of Jews out of Turkey'*.[143] For example, the Jewish community in Izmir reduced from 40.000

[139] Bahar, 'Turkey and the Rescue of Jews during the Nazi Era', 82.
[140] Bilal Şimsir, *Türk Yahudiler II.* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2010), 590.
[141] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 22.
[142] Bahar, 'Turkey and the Rescue of Jews during the Nazi Era', 105.
[143] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 23.

people in 1922 to only 13.000 people in 1934.[144] However, these numbers are estimations, since reliable sources on this subject do not exist. As mentioned earlier in this research, the Ottoman censuses where not very precise and in many cases biased by politics concerning minorities. Nevertheless, it is possible to give an idea of the population reduction on the basis of the census. According to the 1914 census, roughly 130.000 Jews lived in the areas that would later become Turkish territory after the Republic was founded. The following census, in 1927, showed a drastic decline in the number of Jews to only 81.672.[145] The numbers thus show a process in which almost half of the Jewish population got lost. The reduction is even more remarkable when compared to the total population of Turkey: in the same period, the overall population expanded from 13.648.270 to 16.158.018, a growth of almost twenty percent.[146] The Jews continued to emigrate in the 1930s, especially due to the Turkification policies and the Thrace events in particular. In the census of 1935, the number dropped to 78.730 people, while since 1927, the Turkish population again had expanded with eighteen percent.

France remained the most popular country for Turkish Jews, but we should not ignore the fact that another group – although small – headed to Palestine. Jewish immigration to Palestine was tried to be kept under control by the British, but would only be truly limited with the so-called White Paper in 1939, after the Palestinian revolt. By that time over 450.000 Jews already lived in Palestine, but not many of them originated in Turkey. In the period between the founding of the Republic and the White Paper, only around 3.500 Jews migrated from Turkey to Palestine.[147] This shows that, although Zionism had taken root in Turkey, actual migration to Palestine was far less popular than migration to France. This can be attributed to the fact that the Jewish community in Turkey was largely Sephardic, while Zionism was more popular amongst the Ashkenazi Jews.

In this chapter I have tried to show that the founding of the Turkish Republic and the following policy of Turkification had profound effects on the Turkish Jewish community, whose own identity was now threatened. Nationalist sentiments in Turkey, as well as increasing antisemitism that was, in part, imported from Europe, put further pressure on the relationship between Turkish Jews and ethnic Turks. It can therefore hardly be called surprising that many

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[144] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust,* 23.
[145] Bahar, 'Turkey and the Rescue of Jews during the Nazi Era', 108.
[146] Ibidem, 108.
[147] Weiker, *Ottomans, Turks and the Jewish Polity*, 255.

Jews already left Turkey before World War II, although not many of them chose Palestine as their destination. This would drastically change after the war. In the third and final chapter, I shall try to address the changing situation of Turkish Jews during the war which will ultimately end with the mass migration of Turkish Jews after the founding of the state of Israel.

Chapter 3 : The Jewish community during World War II

The outbreak of World War II in 1939 was a turning point for Turkey and its Jews in many respects. Of course, diplomatic relations between Turkey and the European nations were of great importance from the start. In 1939, relations between Turkey and Germany had worsened as a consequence of both the German-Russian non-aggression pact (Russian aggression greatly concerned the Turkish government) and the German attack on Poland. However, Turkey greatly depended on Germany as well, because Germany was its main trading partner. The threat of a German invasion after the completion of the occupation of the Balkans and Greece in the spring of 1941 was another reason to maintain friendly relations, which were greatly improved by the German attack on the Soviet-Union in the summer of 1941. Turkey therefore tried to maintain a status of neutrality, although in the period 1941-1944, the government favoured Germany in some respects. Examples of the pro-German attitude are the trade of chromium ore with Germany, the transfer of troops to the Russian border in 1942 (at German request) and the fact that German secret services could freely operate in Turkey.[148] Only at the end of the war, in 1945, did Turkey enter the war by declaring war on Germany - which was a formal condition for participating in the founding sessions of the United Nations.

The war also had major consequences for Turkey's policies regarding Jews, both those who lived in Turkey as those in Europe who were affected by the Nazi-occupation and in immediate danger because of the Holocaust. The war made migration much more difficult, but especially the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe made Turkey's position as a possible place of refuge and transit to Palestine of great importance. At the same time, the Nazis and their sympathizers tried to influence both the Turkish government and Turkish public opinion with regard to (Turkish) Jews. In this chapter, I will address these issues. First, I will discuss the influence of Nazi-ideology in Turkish society and politics, as well as the impact of Turkish legislation on Turkish Jews during wartime, in particular the Wealth Tax (Varlık Vergisi) of 1942. In the second part of the chapter I will deal with issues of migration and the role of Turkey regarding the Jews who tried to escape Nazi-occupied Europe. This part will end with the aftermath of World War II and the migration of Turkish Jews to the newly founded state of Israel.

[148] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews and the Holocaust*, 35-36.

Antisemitism in Turkey during World War II

The influence of Nazi-ideology on Turkish society was particularly visible in Nazi propaganda. The antisemitic, stereotypical images of Jews as mentioned in chapter 2 are an excellent example of this propaganda. Nevertheless, there is many more to say about the propaganda system of Nazi Germany. The main objective of German interests in Turkey was convincing the Turks to enter the war and fight alongside the Nazis. However, there are some nuances to make. Germany's approach to Turkey can be divided into three different phases. The first phase, starting in May 1939 with the Mutual Aid Pact[149] between Turkey and the Allies, is characterized by German attempts to infiltrate Turkish society in order to spread their ideology. Despite numerous efforts, the German charm offensive remained unsuccessful and the radical antisemitism of the Nazis was rejected, since even the German Consular Offices deemed the anti-Jewish propaganda that was imported from Germany '*unsuitable for Turkey*'.[150] During this period, the relationship between Turkey and Germany even deteriorated. The government prohibited NSDAP-activities and certain anti-Jewish publications were banned, such as *Asrın Gailesi Yahudi* (The Jew as the Plague of the Century, banned in 1939) and *Yahudi Muhaceretleri* (Wandering Jews, banned in 1940).[151] Turkish newspapers, as well as the majority of the public opinion, were largely sympathetic towards the allies. Opportunities for pro-German propaganda were therefore very limited.[152]

This all changed quickly in 1941, mainly because of the changing diplomatic relationship between Turkey and Germany. The threat of a German invasion after the occupation of the Balkans forced the Turkish government to reconsider the relationship with the Nazis. The German attack on the Soviet-Union did much to improve German-Turkish relations, which was confirmed by the treaty of friendship that was signed by the two countries in June 1941 (Turkey did, of course, remain neutral). In the period 1941 until 1943, Nazi-propaganda was at its most successful in Turkey. Public criticism of German policies or national socialism was no longer allowed. The newspaper *Tan* was suspended for three days after a number of contributions in which critiques of Germany were expressed. *Vatan*, which had published a picture from Charlie Chaplins *The Great Dictator*, was even prohibited to publish for a period of three months. The

[149] In this pact, the Allied powers gained access through the Dardanelles and Bosphorus in order to connect the Mediterranean and Black Sea.
[150] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews and the Holocaust,* 59.
[151] Ibidem, 60.
[152] Pekesen, *Zwischen Sympathie und Eigennutz*, 209-213.

most important impact of the new relationship with the Nazis was the purge of the Turkish news agency *Anadolu Ajansı*. After complaints by German diplomats that the agency did not support the German-Turkish friendship, the Turkish government acted by firing the Jewish employees of *Anadolu Ajansı*. It was in the same period that influential antisemitic publications were translated into Turkish and published, such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, *Mein Kampf* and *The International Jew*.[153]

The final phase of the war once more witnessed a change in the relationship between Turkey and Germany. After the defeat in Stalingrad and the steady progress of the Russian army in Eastern Europe, all ties of friendship were broken. In 1945 Turkey formally entered the war on the side of the allies. In this period, the Turkish government once again tried to distance itself from antisemitism and racism, which were not considered to be a part of Turkish society. In a speech to Turkish youth in May 1944, president Inönü condemned racism as *'troublesome for youth*' and a '*disturbing ideology*', emphasizing that Kemalism had nothing to do with it.[154]

Nevertheless, during the years of the war, the Turkish government adopted several measures that can be considered to have a racist or antisemitic character. These measures should not be interpreted as a consequence of Nazi-propaganda, but more as a continuation of the Turkification policies of the 1920s and 1930s. The first of these measures was the forced labor service for non-Muslim men. These men were forced to build roads under harsh circumstances. According to sources in state archives, the decision to force non-Muslims to "rapidly get roads repaired" (*Yolları sür'atle tamir ettirmek için)* has been proposed on 18 April 1941 by the National Ministry of Defense and accepted by the cabinet four days later.[155] Although such labor battalions were not a new phenomenon (they were also used in Ottoman times), they did not have a good reputation. In the first World War, many men had died in this labor service due to the hard conditions.[156] At the eve of the second World War, non-Muslims were allowed in the army, but they were not promoted into the rank of officer. Although they could get admission for the officer's exams from 1941 onwards, none of the fifty applicants graduated. Furthermore, non-Muslims in the army were almost always put to work in construction, so they did not have the possibility to wield a gun.[157]

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[153] Pekesen, *Zwischen Sympathie und Eigennutz*, 213-218.
[154] Ibidem, 219.
[155] Rıfat N. Bali, *Devlet'in Yahudileri ve "Öteki" Yahudi* (Istanbul: Iletişim Yayınları, 2004), 301.
[156] Bali, *The silent minority in Turkey*, 190.
[157] Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri*, 409.

There were different factors playing a role in the decision to reimpose forced labor. The first was imminent war threat due to the Nazi-occupation of the neighboring Balkan countries. In May 1941, the Nazis had subjugated most of the area and arrived at Turkey's borders with the occupation of Bulgaria and Greece. This meant that Turkey had to start preparing for a possible invasion, which included the swift reparations of infrastructure. These preparations had started in April 1941. The second reason shows the nationalist character of the decision. The government feared, quite similar to the attitude of the Ottoman government during the first World War, that there was a threat of subversive elements in Turkey, who might act as a fifth column by aiding the Germans in the possible scenario of an invasion. This fear was directed first and foremost at some Armenian groups, but the consequences were felt by the Jews and Greeks as well.[158] The traumatic experience of this measure was vividly described by the Jewish businessman Vitali Hakko. He describes how not only young men, but also sixty-year old men with white hairs were enlisted in the labor battalions. This is in contrast with the formal documents of the decision, which state that the forced labor was only for men born in the years 1902-1914. Hakko had not been informed when the army came to enlist him. Although he asked why he was not allowed to inform his family or where they were taking them, he did not get any answers. According to Hakko, they were taken like criminals. He was taken to Kandıra, a small town in the Marmara region, but he had no idea for how long he had to stay there. He noticed that, despite having been in the army two times earlier, this was the first time that he was in battalion with only non-Muslims. The work they had to do consisted in carrying large bricks and building roads. Hakko was forced to do this work for a period of seventeen months.[159]

In total, a number of around 5.000 non-Muslim men were put to work in the period between May 1941 and July 1942 (at which time the threat of a German invasion had passed). Given the description by Vitali Hakko, it can hardly be called surprising that the measure took a heavy toll on the morale of the affected groups. The manner in which they were enlisted as well as the hardships the men suffered once more degraded them to second-class citizens who were not trusted by their fellow countrymen.

[158] Bali, *The silent minority in Turkey*, 190.
[159] Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri*, 413-416.

The year 1942 marked the beginning of yet another measure that hit the Jewish community hard. Just four months after the release of the forced laborers, the government introduced new taxations which had major consequences for non-Muslim minorities. This Wealth Tax (*Varlık Vergisi*) was part of a large operation by the Turkish state to increase its income, of which it was in drastic need due to high inflation and the lack of international trade as a consequence of the war. At the same time, the expenses had grown enormously because of the mobilization of the army.[160] The Wealth Tax was meant to tax big agriculturalists, merchants and industrialists who were suspected of war profiteering and dealing in the black market. It therefore also aimed to respond to public indignation about war profiteering. Article 1 of the law explicitly mentions that the tax was to be *'assessed once only on the wealth and the extraordinary profits of persons possessing wealth and earning profits*'.[161] The 'extraordinary profits' referred to the profits made by war profiteering, although this was not specifically mentioned. In theory, the law should be applied equally to all citizens and was therefore similar to certain tax laws in Europe, with a few notable differences. The Turkish law forced men who could not afford to pay their taxes into labor camps (and women into municipal service).[162] Secondly, it was not possible to appeal against the amount of tax one had to pay. Thirdly and lastly, the tax was applied in a discriminating way, particularly targeting non-Muslim minorities.[163]

It is debatable to what extent the Wealth Tax should be seen as a specifically antisemitic decision. Corry Guttstadt argues that it should be seen as part of a larger anti-Jewish sentiment that had flared up due to the drastic increases of prices, which were the consequence of a shortage of goods. According to Guttstadt, the dissatisfaction for the economic situation was *'deliberately directed toward the Jews*'.[164] This dissatisfaction was expressed in antisemitic news articles and cartoons, in which the Jews were depicted as usurers and war profiteers. This new wave of antisemitism was even noticed by the German authorities, who were surprised by the sudden ferocity of aggression towards the Jews.[165]

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[160] Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust*, 38-39.
[161] 'Law Concerning the Tax on Wealth, Turkish Official Gazette no. 5255, November 12, 1942' in: Rifat N. Bali, *The Wealth Tax* (*Varlık Vergisi*) *affair. Documents from the British National Archives* (Istanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık, 2012), 17.
[162] Ibidem, 25-29.
[163] Bali, *The silent minority in Turkey*, 191.
[164] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews and the Holocaust*, 72.
[165] Ibidem, 73.

However, the law itself makes no mention of the Jews in particular and neither did Prime Minister Şükrü Saracoğlu in his speech to the Grand National Assembly, in which he explained the reasons for the law. He mentioned the dramatic consequences of the shortages of basic products and the justice of letting those who have made the most money in the war years pay for the '*1.5-2 million people who are the most affected by the crisis*'.[166] This is of course hardly surprising and does not rule out the possibility of antisemitic motives at all, but there are more indications that the Wealth Tax should be seen as a continuation of Turkification policies rather than as a proof of antisemitism. The law was implemented in a very crude fashion: the assessments of the amount of tax one had to pay were based on limited information and therefore led to arbitrary taxation: some were taxed much more than they even had, while others were taxed much less. The local committees responsible for imposing the taxes contained, not surprisingly, only Muslims. Those who were taxed more were mostly urban merchants and industrialists, simply because they had the available cash that the government desperately needed.[167] Because Jews as well as other non-Muslim minorities were widely represented in this area, they were hit hardest. This is confirmed by a telegram from the head of the British Middle-East Office John Sterndale-Bennet, who claimed that *'ostensibly the object of the tax on wealthy is financial*', but that those who were hit hardest were *'Jews, Armenians and Greeks, numbers of whom have undoubtedly amassed wealth in recent years to a greater extent than the Moslems and Turks'*.[168]

A petition by the British Women of Istanbul, which was handed over to Sterndale-Bennet has the same intent. They viewed *'with profound sorrow the impeding tragic fate of so many of the Minorities who, because they are unable to pay, will be deported into the interior for forced labor while their families are left to starve*'.[169] They appended a list of illustrative cases which show the injustice of the application of the law. The list shows the immense differences between the taxation of Muslims and minorities. For instance, a Greek wood and charcoal merchant had to pay 180.000 Turkish liras, while a Muslim grocer paid only 650 liras. Similarly, minorities who worked in a large shop with an income of 1 lira a day, were taxed for 500 liras. Muslims in that same shop were not taxed. The largest taxation that was mentioned was that of a Jewish lawyer, who was taxed for 400.000 liras.[170] The worry of the British women was not unfounded.

[166] 'Document no. 1, dated November 13, 1942' in Bali, *The Wealth Tax*, 52-53.
[167] Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust*, 40.
[168] 'Document no. 8, dated December 28, 1942' in Bali, *The Wealth Tax*, 72.
[169] 'Document no. 3, dated December 25, 1942' in Bali, *The Wealth Tax*, 57.
[170] Ibidem, 58.

In 1943, about 1.400 persons who could not afford to pay the tax were sent to Aşkale for forced labor, where 21 of them died.[171]

The law did not help the economy to recover, which the government had to acknowledge. The heavy taxes caused certain entrepreneurs to go bankrupt and the forced labor only made sure the production and trade of useful industrialists and merchants decreased. In September 1943, President Inönü pardoned all those who were sent to Aşkale. Six months later, on March 15 1944, the tax was cancelled entirely.[172] Once again however, much harm had been done already. The antisemitic atmosphere in which the law was enacted in 1942, caused a sense of insecurity among Turkish Jews, of which some sold their apartments and about 400 of them emigrated to Palestine.

Turkey and Jewish migration during and after World War II

In this part, Jewish immigration as well as emigration will be the main topics. At first, I will reconstruct the Jewish migration during World War II. Important in this respect will be the role Turkey played regarding the rescue of Jews from Nazi-persecution. These Jews can be globally divided into two groups: Turkish Jews who were living in European countries that came under Nazi-control during the war (France in particular) and foreign Jews who wanted to use Turkey as a transit-country on their way to Palestine. Finally, I will address Jewish emigration from Turkey during and after the war, in which the founding of the state of Israel played an important role.

First of all, the scholarly dispute between Stanford J. Shaw and Corry Guttstadt needs to be addressed. Shaw published his work *Turkey and the Holocaust* in 1993, stating that the Turkish government needs to be credited for their efforts in helping Turkish Jews in Nazi-occupied European countries. Overall, Shaw is very positive about the Turkish government with regard to protecting Jewish citizens. He also denies that Turkish society and Turkish policies such as the Wealth Tax were antisemitic. Guttstadt, on the contrary, heavily nuanced Shaw's statements and even claims the opposite in her work *Turkey, the Jews and the Holocaust*. In her opinion, the Turkish government put effort in preventing Jews from entering Turkey during the war, by actively rejecting their Turkish citizenship. In her book, Guttstadt explicitly condemns Shaw's

[171] Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust*, 43.
[172] Ibidem, 43.

position. She writes, for example, the following: “Although Shaw’s book is extremely controversial among experts due to numerous factual and methodological errors his theories met with enthusiastic reception in official political circles in Turkey and have become an integral component of Turkey’s self-promotion abroad.”[173] Shaw himself, however, is very clear about his point of view on Turkey’s role in World War II, especially their role in saving the lives of Jews: “The Turkish neutrality (...) did make it possible for its diplomatic agents in Nazi-occupied Europe to significantly assist in saving thousands of Jews from persecution and death and for Turkey to constitute the most important bridge for Jewish refugees fleeing from Eastern Europe on their way to Palestine.”[174] In other words, Shaw advocates that Turkey actively tried to rescue many Turkish Jews and opened its borders for Jews who continued their journey to Palestine.

On an individual level, Shaw has a point. There were Turkish diplomats who have protected Turkish Jews, in particular those who were stationed in European countries under Nazi-control. One of these was Namık Kemal Yolga, who was Vice Consul at the Turkish Consulate-General in Paris. He played a prominent role in the issuance of visas, passports and certificates of citizenship to Turkish Jews who were no longer considered Turkish nationals and were not allowed to enter Turkey as a consequence of the passport law of 1938, which I mentioned in the previous chapter. Turkish Jews were formally required to register regularly in order to maintain their Turkish citizenship. Many of them, particularly in France, had failed to do so. Due to the efforts of diplomats and other officials at consulates, a number of these Turkish Jews who had lost citizenship were given the special status of *gayri muntazem vatandaşlar* (irregular citizens). This gave them some protection against persecution while they awaited the decision to restore their citizenship. In some cases the consuls directly issued passports to these irregular citizens in order to allow them to travel.[175] Specific cases of intervention were those that led the Turkish Consulate-General to directly protect Turkish Jews from Nazi persecution. An example of this is the case of Albert and Lily Gattegno, who had already been arrested and sent to Drancy prison camp in 1942 when diplomatic intervention led to their release. They were allowed to leave for Turkey afterwards.[176]

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[173] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews and the Holocaust*, 149.
[174] Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust*, 305.
[175] Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust*, 60-63.
[176] Ibidem, 67-79.

A second argument in favour of Shaw's position is that in his view, Turkey played a prominent role as transit country to Palestine. Shaw argues that the strategic location of Istanbul as well as the willingness of its government to help made Istanbul the center of the Jewish Agency refugee operations. It is doubtful to what extent this argument holds however. The activities of the Jewish refugee operations were executed by the Eretz Israel Delegation, which was led by Chaim Barlas. These activities aimed to rescue European Jews, particularly those who had stranded in Eastern Europe after the Mediterranean route was closed due to the war. It was however, an operation that was led entirely by Jews themselves. Shaw argues that Barlas managed to successfully convince the Turkish government of the necessity to aid the Jews, which led to the Transit Law of 1941, according to which some categories of refugees were allowed to transit through Turkey (as long as they were in the possession of valid visas to enter their destined country).[177]

Although Shaw is right that Istanbul was of great importance due to its geographic location, it seems that the operations to rescue the Jews were often more limited than helped by the Turkish government. The Transit Law, for example, in reality was far less pleasing. The Foreign Ministry in Ankara set quota for the number of visas that the consulates of Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria were allowed to assign. The refugees were obliged to leave Turkey after a stay of maximum 14 days and were only allowed to stay 24 hours in cities. Negligence of the rules or transit without permission resulted in imprisonment or expulsion. On top of that, transit through Turkey was only possible with Palestine Certificates which had been provided by British authorities before the war. Above all, Turkey did not permit the export of currency, which greatly impeded rescue activities.[178] Therefore the number of Jews reaching Palestine during the war was not as high as pictured by Shaw, who claims an estimated 100.000 Jews passed through Turkey to Palestine during the war.[179] According to Barlas, 4.850 Jews arrived in Palestine via Turkey until June 1941. Despite Barlas' efforts, Turkey thus allowed only limited transit of Jews through Turkey. Although the numbers were a little higher from the summer of 1944 onwards - after Romania and Bulgaria had switched sides and the Balkans were liberated - in the most crucial years of mass genocide, 1942 and 1943, the route through Turkey was blocked for most Jews.[180] In 1942, only 1.090 Jews travelled to Palestine through Turkey. The

[177] Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust*, 257-264.
[178] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews and the Holocaust*, 111.
[179] Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust*, 266.
[180] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews and the Holocaust*, 131.

total number of Jewish migrants who entered Palestine via Turkey during the entire war was just 16.474, including 3.234 emigrating Turkish Jews. These numbers are presented by Dalia Ofer, who based her research on the reports on activities of the Zionist organization for the years 1940-1946, which were presented at the Zionist Congress in Basel in 1947.[181] These numbers are significantly lower than the estimations by Shaw, which gives us reason to conclude that the possibilities to use legally use Turkey as a place for refuge were more limited than Shaw admits. Desperate Jewish refugees therefore sought other, illegal, ways to escape persecution in Europe.

Jews who did not get Palestine Certificates depended on illegal migration. In the decade before the war, some Zionist organizations had already arranged illegal migration by ship in order to avoid bureaucratic barriers. These immigration practices were called *Aliyah Bet*. During the war, the intensity of the refuge attempts grew noticeably. From September 1939 until the beginning of 1942, a total of fifteen ships left for Palestine. A part of them never reached their destination, however. The journey through the Black Sea, Turkish Straits and Mediterranean were dangerous because of the war zones that were present there, even with good ships. The Zionist organizations had no other choice than to buy extremely expensive but very outdated or non-seaworthy ships which made these journeys an even larger gamble. As a result of the combined risks, many of the ships sank and many refugees drowned. In December 1940, for example, the *Salvador* which left Bulgaria with 327 Bulgarian and Czech Jews, sank in the Sea of Marmara after it encountered a heavy storm. 204 passengers drowned, among them were 70 children. The survivors were financially aided by local Jewish organizations and, surprisingly, were given permission from the Turkish government to come to Istanbul, where they were allowed to get visas for Palestine. It is said that originally, Turkey wanted to return the surviving Jews to Bulgaria and consequently corresponded with Bulgaria about this matter. Apparently, this plan did not meet any success.[182]

During this period, Turkey tried to discourage illegal immigration by ship by closing its ports for the refugee ships. By doing this, ships eventually would have shortages of coal, water and food which resulted in critical situations. An example of this is the Struma disaster. This Romanian ship arrived in Istanbul on 15 December 1941, carrying 769 Jews. The ship was

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[181] Dalia Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust. Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 320.
[182] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews and the Holocaust*, 113.

heavily loaded and lacked a working engine. Therefore, the ship was stuck in the Bosporus for more than two months. The Jews on the ship reached out for help by raising a flag with "save us" on it. No one was allowed to leave the ship, despite efforts of Jewish organizations. According to the British-Turkish policy for refugees lacking Palestine Certificates, the Turkish government forced the ship to leave Turkish waters. As a consequence, the ship, still without an engine, was dragged onto the sea. There it accidentally got hit by a Soviet torpedo. Only one of the people on board survived. Horrifically, Great Britain had decided that all children and youngsters on board would receive visas for Palestine the day before the catastrophe, though this message came too late.[183]

The Turkish attitude against Jewish refugees was, in the light of previous events and policies, not surprising. This attitude is documented in different ways during this period. Following the Struma disaster, the Turkish press called the Jews inhabiting the ship "uninvited guests". A telegram from Palestine announced that the Struma victims were commemorated by a ceremony there. Only one Turkish newspaper, Ulus, published it. Consequently, the Turkish parliament debated about this "alleged Jewish propaganda against Turkey".[184] The Prime Minister of the time, Refik Saydam, confirmed in a statement that "Turkey cannot become the home of those who are not wanted by anyone else".[185] According to Guttstadt, there are good chances that the Turkish government was familiar with the extent of persecution and murder on Jews in Europe at an early point during the war. It is said that in the summer of 1942 already, Jewish organizations as well as Jewish individuals in Turkey were trying to inform the Allied Powers about the German death camps and subsequent genocide. The information came from several Jews who managed to escape ghettos or camps in Eastern Europe and made it to Istanbul.[186]

It seems that we can plausibly conclude that Guttstadt's perspective on Turkey's role with respect to saving Jews is preferable over Shaw's. Shaw presents a limited view, which greatly relies on a small number of individual success stories. Of course, the individual Turkish diplomats who went to great lengths to save Jews are worthy of praise, but it must be said that their actions were not part of a general Turkish policy. Instead, Turkey had applied policies that directly aimed to limit Jewish immigration. Although there is no proof - nor any reason to

[183] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews and the Holocaust*, 114-115.
[184] Ibidem, 116.
[185] Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri*, 359.
[186] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews and the Holocaust*, 119.

assume - that these policies were directly based on antisemitic attitudes, they were the consequence of nationalist policies that originated in the 1920s. Even with respect to Turkish Jews in European countries, Turkey did little to save them. When Germany issued an ultimatum for the repatriation of Jewish nationals (in France alone, this concerned between 3.000 and 5.000 Turkish Jews) to neutral countries, including Turkey, the Turkish government did not respond. Many of these Jews had lost their Turkish citizenship due to the Passport Law of 1938. Although some of them were saved by the Turkish consulate, as was mentioned by Shaw, the Turkish government remained passive. The Germans interpreted this silence as a rejection of their ultimatum, and therefore as a permission to deport.[187]

Furthermore, antisemitism was present in Turkish society, despite denials by government officials. It was not comparable to antisemitism in Nazi-Germany, but it was noticed by Turkish Jews, which contributed to a desire to leave. In the years following the war, Turkish Jews emigrated in large numbers. In the 1930s, the number of Jews who had emigrated from Turkey to Palestine had remained relatively small, since most of them went to France in the decades before World War II. This changed in the years after the war. In the period between 1932 and 1939, 2.363 Jews had immigrated to Palestine and during the war this number slightly rose. The founding of Israel was a turning point. In the period between 1948 and 1949, 30.668 Jews left Turkey for Israel, followed by another 2.491 in 1950. Almost the entire lower class of the Jewish population left.[188] Although many left for ideological reasons, it is evident that for most of the Turkish Jews, Turkey had little to offer them. The last two decades before World War II had made them feel insecure and their trust in the secular character of the Turkish nation-state was irreparably damaged.[189]

The motives to emigrate can be illustrated by the story of Simon Geron, a Turkish Jew born in 1937 in a poor family. Of his early life in the 1940s, he describes: “Even in Turkey there was a kind of antisemitism. I felt belittled which was an experience I could never forget. When I started to go to school other students laughed at me, ran after me and even hit me. They called me ‘Dirty Jew, Coward, Heathen’. Needless to say this treatment produced in me an inferiority

[187] Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews and the Holocaust*, 211-214.
[188] Weiker, *Ottomans, Turks and the Jewish Polity*, 253-255.
[189] Erik-Jan Zürcher, “Osmaanse joden, joodse Turken” In *Joden in de Wereld van de Islam*, edited by Julie-Marthe Cohen and Irene E. Zwiep (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bulaaq, 1995), 145.

complex."[190] It is obvious that the antisemitism that Geron experienced was a consequence of the Turkification policies of the Turkish state, which were in turn rooted in late Ottoman policies. All these twentieth century policies - as I have argued in this thesis - caused discrimination towards the Jewish community. The Turkish policies during the war can only have strengthened the feeling of being unwanted. Geron describes how the founding of Israel changed the inferiority complex he experienced in Turkey: "we walked head upright in control of our destiny. We could defend our existence."[191] This sense of control was something the Jewish community in Turkey had lost, despite the long history of relative tolerance. Geron left for Israel at the age of fourteen.[192] Nevertheless, not all the Turkish Jews left. Many middle-class and wealthy Jews remained. They, unlike their lower-class fellow Jews, had much to lose. Although new waves of emigration would follow in the 1950s and 1960s, the wealthy Jews generally stayed, making the remaining Jewish community on average wealthier than it was before.[193]

[190] Simon Geron, "From Istanbul to Australia" in *This is My New Homeland. Life stories of Turkish Jewish Immigrants*, edited by Rifat N. Bali (Istanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık, 2016), 119-122: 121.
[191] Ibidem, 121.
[192] He would return little over two years later, to take care of his widowed mother, only to leave again in 1961 - this time to Australia.
[193] Zürcher, "Osmaanse joden, joodse Turken", 145.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to contribute to our understanding of the history of the Jewish community in Turkey, by looking for the causes of the migration of Turkish Jews in the years after the Second World War. I believe the migration of Turkish Jews should be regarded a consequence of growing nationalism and increasing hostility towards minorities. In that sense, the sudden explosive increase of Jewish migration in the period 1948-1950 cannot be explained by merely ideological motives following the founding of Israel. Instead, the founding of Israel offered thousands of Turkish Jews a possible better future, in a country where they would not be regarded second-class citizens. A future the secular government of the Turkish republic had failed to provide.

The traditional view of a '*remarkable spirit of tolerance and acceptance which has characterized the whole Jewish experience in Turkey*', which was expressed by the Quincentennial Foundation in 1992, might be applicable to the Jewish Golden Age of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. As I have argued in the first chapter however, much of this spirit had already faded at the turn of the twentieth century. By the time the Turkish Republic was founded, the own identity of the Jewish community was already threatened by modernization and nationalism, both of which required increasing integration, which was not welcomed by many Jews.

In the first two decades of the Turkish republic, it became clear that the promise of equal treatment of all citizens was not realized. The Turkification policies of the Kemalist regime were accompanied by hostile sentiments towards non-Muslim minorities, including antisemitism. The events in Thrace, as well as expressions of antisemitism in newspapers and magazines, show that Turkey was not immune to antisemitism, in spite of denials by the authorities. The size of the Jewish community was, unsurprisingly, already diminishing in the 1930s. The dramatic developments of the Second World War were yet another blow for the Turkish Jews. The unjust implementation of the Wealth Tax, as well as the traumatizing experience of forced labour, made all the more clear that the Jews were not treated as equal citizens.

The attitude of the Turkish government with respect to the rescue of Jews during the holocaust can be described as passive at best. Shaw's positive interpretation of the role of the Turkish

government is too limited, because of his focus on a relatively small number of individual acts by Turkish diplomats. The government's general policy was to limit Jewish immigration, which had tragic consequences for thousands of Jews. Even with respect to the rescue of Turkish Jews in Europe, who could have been saved if the Turkish government had positively replied to the German ultimatum for repatriation, Turkey remained passive.

With this conclusion, this study aims to support the contemporary series of studies that nuance the traditional view that is still widely believed in Turkey. It shows that, by the end of the 1940s, the feeling of having outstayed one's welcome had prevailed over the 'spirit of tolerance and acceptance'. All that was needed for thousands of Jews to leave was an alternative, which was provided by the founding of Israel.

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