

## **POLITICS AND MORALS**

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The reunification of Germany and the end of the Soviet Union enabled the Allies to bring closure to a number of issues that the Cold War had left unresolved. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall the thinking behind the reinvention of Europe has been framed by the moral effort required to understand the disasters of World War II and Soviet totalitarianism. Albeit unevenly the question of morality and politics has been under the spotlight both in terms of relations between States and between these and individual rights. Seemingly, the Rights of Man are gaining ground on the National State.

One such issue was the industrial extermination of the Jews. Incomprehensible, as absolute evil cannot be rationalized, the Holocaust remains beyond the realm of reckoning, all the more so as the western world has become so thoroughly removed from imagining, let alone experiencing, the terror of political power unleashed upon society. Nevertheless, the pariah status imparted to Jews for over one and a half millennia of Christianity has recently been acknowledged. And decades of research have unequivocally documented the legal and logistic apparatus that prepared and supported the nazi policies, from plain persecution to theft, from destitution of the attributes of any social being, such as deprivation of a personal name, to being treated as cattle for slaughter. The current international process of according compensation for damages is above all a formal acknowledgement that terrible things happened, that crimes were committed against individuals. the representatives of the guilty pay up and the representatives of the victims give acquittance.

German totalitarianism imposed war on many countries. All along, the Nazis extended "special consideration" to occupied, allied or neutral countries for being, in the words of the Reich bureaucracy, "friends or allies of Germany". As the German war effort was intimately connected with the "final solution" of the Jewish Question in Europe, these countries are now being called upon to reassess their behavior during World War II. A call that cannot go unheard,

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particularly when democracy has been sanctioned as a paradigm of the organization most favorable to Man, now, professedly, the measure of all things.

Portugal participated in World War II as a neutral country. A lucid assessment of internal and external constraints, i.e. the experience of the recent Spanish Civil War and the Iberian Peninsula's geostrategic position made that stand advisable. In 1939 neutrality was a political and juridical concept of simple, if deceptive, implementation. But, in addition to its vile plan of conquering territories and spheres of influence, Germany was engaged in total ideological warfare. As the commands of the totalitarian movement were enforced, the Nazi world vision was thrust upon conquered lands, and the values on which the western world had functioned until then were destroyed. The semantics of neutrality changed. It became a difficult position to administer, particularly as Portugal was under an authoritarian regime, governed by a dictator who operated on certainties, in this particular case a set of principles tailored to a world that the war itself was destroying.

Certainties are the enemy of truth. In the Portuguese case, hidden behind the self-satisfaction of having escaped the conflict, whilst possibly even having benefited in the process, the truth was not grasped even as the war ended: on the news of Hitler's death, official mourning was declared. And to this day, a legalist, apolitical and amoral assessment of Portuguese neutrality still prevails. Having failed to understand that winners and losers would never be equal and that the Nazi state could not be regenerated, having abstained from taking sides in the political and moral conflict brought about by World War II, Salazar relegated Portugal to the periphery of modernity and out of the history of Europe. Democracy would take another thirty years to reach Portugal. Only then would the country find the political route back to Europe.

#### A problem of refugees

We know that thousands of refugees, mainly Jewish, passed through Portugal during the years of the Second World War. Many of these lives were spared by the determined action of the three Portuguese diplomats documented in this exhibition: Aristides de Sousa Mendes,

Portuguese Consul in Bordeaux, Carlos de Sampaio Garrido, Portuguese Minister in Hungary and Alberto Teixeira Branquinho, Portuguese Chargé d'Affaires in Budapest.

Through the strength of his character, Sousa Mendes rose above the prevailing panic in June 1940 and on his own decision and risk opened Portugal's doors at the right moment to those fleeing France. He was crushed by the certainties of Salazar who was nevertheless overcome by the creation of a political fact which if reversed would raise issues that would be difficult to fit into the chosen parameters of Portuguese neutrality,

In 1944, confronted with the German occupation of Hungary and the accelerated program of the extermination of Hungarian Jews, Sampaio Garrido and Teixeira Branquinho pledged their sense of values and their courage to implementing a rescue operation programmed by the representatives of neutral countries in Budapest, with the approval and active involvement of the Lisbon authorities.

These two episodes, so different in human and political terms, are a good example of how the Portuguese policy on refugees from Nazism evolved from an initially restrictive attitude which gradually mellowed as the war progressed to some form of active engagement once the regime realized that German defeat was certain and it started to imagine that neutrality could provide a platform for political protagonism after the war.

The initial attitude was in harmony with the restrictive policies by which the other countries in Western Europe attempted to resist the destabilization caused by the expulsion of the Jews from Germany. Between 1935 and 1938 mass movements in Europe appeared to be a question of yet more refugees, with national states refusing to take part in the solution to a problem provoked by the irresponsible policy of one of their peers. Third parties were involved in the upheaval and expense for which the guilty party – the Reich – refused to pay, with the added insult that it had previously expropriated the property of those it expelled. Secondly, the people expelled were not a temporary problem: with no possibility of returning, stripped of their nationality, whoever took them in should be prepared to integrate them in their national community. And therein lay an additional problem, they were Jews.

Faced with the internationalization of the Jewish issue, Portugal did not renounce its sovereign attribute of protecting its own nationals, nor the right of asylum nor the prerogative of

granting asylum as it saw fit, i.e. PROVIDED that the way of life and the unity of the State were not disturbed. Early on the Portuguese regime marked the difference between "Portuguese nationals of Jewish extraction", protecting their interests in Germany, and refugees, a political problem it did not wish to have. "Portugal has no political or racial reasons to concern itself with a problem that does not exist within its frontiers where for that very reason it has no desire to see it emerge", as one document at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (henceforth MFA) put it in 1939. Foreign Jews were declared morally and politically undesirable by the Police of Vigilance and Defense of the State (henceforth PVDE) who sought to limit to a minimum their arrival in Portugal.

#### A Border Policy

As with its foreign counterparts, the Portuguese security police was instrumental in defining the policy of entry. This is documented in a series of Circulars with Instructions on issuing visas, which were sent by the MFA to its diplomatic missions and consular services abroad. Since 1936, with the war in Spain and the specter of a Soviet revolution there, which threatened national independence and the survival of the regime, the visa policy had assumed importance as an active instrument of national defense. That year, Russians, stateless persons and individuals documented by institutions and countries to which they did not belong – such as with the Nansen passports – could no longer be given residence permits. The consular services could only provide 30-day tourist visas, extendable to 60 days.

Meanwhile, as a result of a number of agreements signed in the late 20s the citizens of many European countries, including Germany, could enter Portugal without a visa and this had enabled many German Jews to settle here. The PVDE, however, complained to the MFA about the number of Germans arriving on short term passports which the German consulate refused to revalidate: "this refusal is given only to Jews, but the measures adopted by the police are general given the difficulty in distinguishing a German Jew from the rest [of the Germans]". The agreements on visas were to be cancelled only in September/October 1939, but a stop was put to the problem in 1938. After the annexation of Austria and the failure of the Evian Conference, on 8 October the MFA sent a Circular "in response to repeated consultations by various Consulates

concerning the treatment to be accorded to Jewish emigrants in Portugal", saying that "said emigrants may not be granted residence permits for Portugal, they will be allowed in as tourists, and then only for 30 days".

Following the fall of Poland, Portugal's unique conditions as a neutral country, beyond the sphere of German influence and with an operational Atlantic port, were objectively framed by Salazar when determining that Portugal should be a transit country. Circular 14, dated 11 November 1939, sent to posts abroad "to avoid abuses and loose practices which the PVDE deems inconvenient or dangerous", set down a list of cases for which consuls could not grant consular visas without previously consulting the MFA: foreigners of undefined, contested or disputed nationality, those whose passports bore a declaration or any sign that they could not freely return to the country from whence they came, or Jews expelled from the countries of their nationality or from whence they came. It nevertheless made it quite clear that "consuls will be very careful not to obstruct the arrival in Lisbon of passengers on their way to other countries, particularly the transatlantic air routes or to the East".

From early 1940 onwards, correspondence between the MFA and the PVDE and the MFA and the diplomatic missions and consulates is clearly restrictive to Jews entering Portugal, regardless of their nationality. As the Germans advanced to the west, Lisbon accelerated the rate at which it issued new instructions, seeking to limit entries and centralize decisions. On 23 April, Portuguese consuls in the Netherlands were advised to scrutinize carefully if requested visas were for Jews as "no visa could be issued in Jewish passports without the authorization of the Foreign Ministry". This met the PVDE's wish "to avoid the entry in Portugal of individuals of that quality". On 17 May, Telegraphic Circular 17 told Consulates that "in no case whatsoever" could they grant visas in passports without prior authorization from the MFA. One week later, on the 24th, a new Circular explained to consuls that it was not a question of restricting the transit of foreigners returning to their country of origin, but of avoiding transit visas becoming residence permits.

The stamp seemed to be an efficient weapon in the defense of stability, necessary to pursue Salazar's work of "national restoration". However, the fall of France brought a huge wave of refugees who had taken shelter in that country and could but flee over the Pyrenees. Spain was

destroyed and would let anyone through who showed a transit visa or a residence permit for Portugal. At this critical point in the war, in the paroxysm of anxiety over the possibility of safeguarding neutrality, the Portuguese government decided to impose new restrictions. On 14 June, - the day the Germans entered Paris and two days after Spain went from neutral to non-belligerent - Telegraphic Circular 23 stipulated that requests for visas should be sent directly from the consulates to the PVDE, reserving only the special cases for the MFA. Consuls were only allowed to issue transit visas without prior authorization to whoever had a visa for a third country and a ticket.

Aristides de Sousa Mendes, Portuguese Consul in Bordeaux

All these instructions embodied the Portuguese authorities' wish to avoid evils. When Aristides de Sousa Mendes took it upon himself to save as many of the thousands fleeing the German advance in France as he could, by giving them visas to cross the Pyrenees, over and above disobeying instructions he was challenging a political concept and confronting Lisbon with the creation of that most difficult of precedents, the humanitarian one. The image of "Portugal, a safe haven" was born then in Bordeaux, and it lasts to this day.

We will never know how many visas Aristides de Sousa Mendes issued. The Bordeaux Register of Visas eloquently documents this situation. Between November 1939 and April 1940, about 20 visas were issued every month. In May 1940, this figure rose to 8 visas a day. Between 17 and 30 May the daily average rose to 160. Up to 10 June, the consulate issued 59 visas. On the 11th it issued 67; on the 12th, 47; on the 13th, 6, on the 14th, 173; on the 15th, 112 and on the 16th, 40; on the 17th, 247, on the 18th, 216; between the 19th and the 22nd, an average of 350 were written into the Register of Visas. From then on the concern for maintaining order could no longer be discharged, names were no longer mentioned and in the end no record was kept. The fall in numbers on the 13th probably shows the number of authorizations granted from Lisbon; and on the 16th it marks the moment when the consul, exhausted by circumstances, called in sick and must have taken the decision not to wait for the authorizations from Lisbon to give refugees a

free passage. There is no record of the visas issued under the authority of Aristides de Sousa Mendes at the Portuguese Consulate in Bayonne, or on the street or at the border in Hendaye.

The entire episode unfolded between 17 and 24 June. On 20 June, Lisbon woke up to this problem with an aide-mémoire from the British Embassy, alleging that the Portuguese consul in Bordeaux was improperly charging money "for Portuguese charity" for visas issued outside office hours. On that day, a telegram from the MFA requested the Portuguese Minister in France to look into and take energetic measures against events in Bordeaux. That same day the Portuguese Ambassador in Madrid sent a letter to Salazar saying that he would be travelling to Bayonne on the following day to speak with the consul. On 21 June a telegram arrived at the MFA from Bayonne, informing of the orders given by Sousa Mendes to issue visas indiscriminately, without charge. Lopo Simeão, a consular functionary on a special salvage mission, left immediately for Bayonne. On 23 June he sent a telegram to the MFA suggesting that the Portuguese government should punish the Consul in Bordeaux immediately in order "to offload its responsibility entirely". On the field, the Portuguese Ambassador to Madrid, Pedro Teotónio Pereira, a man of Salazar's full confidence, held endless meetings with the Spanish border authorities and the Madrid authorities, clearly demarcating the Portuguese government from the actions of its consul and annulling all visas as from 24 June. That day, orders were sent to the Portuguese Minister in France to send Aristides de Sousa Mendes back to Lisbon immediately. On 2 July Salazar informed his Ambassador in London that he had removed the consul from his post, and on 4 July he ordered disciplinary proceedings to begin.

"Reasons of humanity do not distinguish race or nationality", said Aristides de Sousa Mendes in his defense. The Portuguese government, however, was not of the same opinion, much less in the week when Spain became non-belligerent, German divisions were massing on the Pyrenees and some could almost see the Reich in Gibraltar. Tried in administrative proceedings and denied an appeal, Aristides de Sousa Mendes was banned from public service, which in the authoritarian and corporatist State of Portugal basically meant he had been banned from active life.

By acting on the scale of reality, insofar as possible assisting the dramatic situation of thousands of endangered people, knowing that he would have to confront a hierarchy that

considered diplomats as officers in plain clothing, Aristides de Sousa Mendes was crying out to Lisbon that freedom of conscience is not a matter of convenience. His crime was to have made it clear to the regime that the political structures on which its international profile and its bureaucratic lines of defense were built were but a mere construct.

The diplomat was punished but the "crime" was hushed up. Knowing that Spain would not take them back, the PVDE allowed through most of the people who arrived on the Portuguese borders. To pretend nothing had happened was the best way to minimize the precedent and to handle the discrediting fact that neither the Ministry of the Interior nor the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been able to avoid the turn of events. The regime's ability to transform vice into virtue can be seen in a cutting from the Lisbon daily *Diário de Notícias* of 14 August, which Aristides de Sousa Mendes sent to the MFA to be attached to his defense. A paean to Portuguese humanism, duly approved by the government censorship, it read "The services of the Ministry of the Interior – give praise where praise is due – have functioned perfectly. Praise for our actions, not only internally, but also on the borders, where it is particularly difficult, is general. All such references are addressed (it is only fair to say) to the organization of our international police and its illustrious Director, Captain Agostinho Lourenço. As a result of these directives, this superior direction and the number of activities, the Portuguese heart was shown once again to the world, to the extent permissible under the circumstances, in the fullness of its ideal grandeur – which was always the greatest of its greatness".

At about the same time, the French Minister in Portugal informed Vichy that according to reliable sources the "affluence of refugees of all nationalities to Portuguese territories is causing the Portuguese government grave concern and it has taken very severe measures regarding the Czechs and the Poles. The threat of loss of nationality, caused by the law of 23 July\* hanging over the French, makes this situation worse – the authorities do not wish to take responsibility for potential stateless persons whom they cannot repatriate to their countries of origin". On the subject of the nearly 600 French refugees, he said: "most of them had entry visas issued by the Portuguese consul in Bordeaux but as this functionary has been dismissed, the Portuguese

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\* Pétain's law that reviewed conditions for French naturalization since 1927 and enabled it to be taken away from all undesirables.

authorities do not recognize the validity of any visas he issued. Consequently, the refugees who are considered as having entered Portugal without papers have been placed under assigned residence. Their passports are retained by the police and only returned to their bearers when they leave the country, having settled their situation". Months later, in November, in reply to a request for information from the Vichy Interior Ministry, the French Minister said that "the Portuguese government has taken no new measures to forbid the entry of Israelites but that more and more entry visas in Portugal would not be granted to Israelites who did not have the documents needed to take them on to another country". The information was reliable: in December 1940 Telegraphic Circular 29 established that visas could only be granted by the PVDE, thus canceling the possibility that had existed until then of consuls being able without prior authorization to provide transit visas for people travelling on to other countries.

### The Fortunes of War

Salazar's concern over the Iberian equilibrium, the importance of Portugal's alliance with Great Britain, and preventing Franco's regime from deviating from its traditional foreign policy to align durably with its German and Italian friends, required the joint diplomatic efforts of Portugal, Great Britain and the United States of America. These were essential maneuvers to stop Spanish vacillations in the face of growing German pressure, and defend Europe's status quo in North and Southwest Africa which was ensured by the neutrality of the Iberian Peninsula and Vichy France. Having decided to advance into the USSR Germany was now interested in the neutrality of the Iberian states, which would be decisive to break the economic blockade and guarantee the supply of important strategic materials. On 21 June 1941, when the Axis armies marched on the USSR, the worst risks of a German offensive against the Peninsula were removed.

In 1942 Spain was slowly coming round to the idea of geometric neutrality. The Allied landing in North Africa on 8 November brought effective neutrality to the Iberian Peninsula and in December the "peninsular bloc" was created. From this moment onwards, Portugal began preparing to join the winning bloc. Geometric neutrality and the primacy of the peninsular

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alliance were replaced by active neutrality. By the end of 1942, British Foreign Secretary Eden told the British House of Commons the Nazis were " carrying into effect Hitler's oft repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people of Europe", and the U.S. declared those crimes would be avenged. In April 1943 the Bermuda Conference recognized that something would have to be done about the "refugees". Mussolini fell on 25 July. Portugal then took a step forward with successive agreements with Great Britain and the USA and in October 1943, an agreement was reached concerning the use of the Azores.

Meanwhile, since the fall of Paris, the refugee organizations based there, in particular the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) had moved to Portugal where they worked from July 1940, under the institutional aegis of the Refugee Section of the Israeli Community in Lisbon. The efficiency of such organizations in financing the cost of the transit of refugees and in guaranteeing that they would be moved on to third countries proved to be vitally important in soothing the concerns of the Portuguese and contributed decisively to the progressive flexibilization of the refugee policy.

#### **THE CASE OF HUNGARY: CARLOS SAMPAIO GARRIDO AND ALBERTO TEIXEIRA BRANQUINHO**

When the Germans occupied Hungary in March 1944 it was already clear that Germany would lose the war and no longer possible to ignore the fate of the Jews. So, when movements began to eliminate the Hungarian Jews, several countries acted to try and stop it. Led by the recently created War Refugee Board the Americans repeatedly warned the Hungarian government not to collaborate in persecutory policies against Jews or others, and took steps with neutral countries to protect the Hungarian Jews.

Between March and December the Hungarian government, deeply divided and headed alternately by two pro-German Prime Ministers and a reluctant one, with the Russians on their borders and under great pressure from the Nazis, wavered in the zeal with which it handled "its" Jewish question. Taking advantage of such wavering the diplomatic representatives of neutral countries were able to join efforts to help the Jews of Budapest and - with the aid of the Allied bombings - did much to protect them from the first wave of deportations in July. From the end of

August, it being impossible to prevent the German determination to eliminate the Jews from Budapest, this effort was expressed by the issue of thousands of Swiss, Swedish, Portuguese, Spanish and Vatican documents of protection, in collaboration with the Jewish Committee "Vaa'da", under Otto Komoly.

The Portuguese government appears to have had no difficulty in authorizing its Legation in Budapest to act together with the representatives of neutral countries in protecting Hungarian Jews, granting diplomatic asylum, provisional and/or collective passports. This was done on the understanding that granting nationality was out of the question, beneficiaries undertaking not to invoke their Portuguese passport to request Portuguese citizenship and accepting that the validity of the documents expired at the end of 1944.

By this time it was a question of being on the winning side. The neutral Catholic countries – Spain, the Holy See and Portugal – toyed with the idea of an alliance under which they would convince the Allies to sign a separate peace with the Germans to avoid the destruction of Germany and stop communism. Immediately after the German occupation, in response to the Allies' representation that the Sztojay government was a puppet government, Portugal downgraded its diplomatic mission to Budapest, recalling its Minister to Lisbon, and replacing him by a Chargé d'Affaires "so as not to give the idea that it was breaking diplomatic ties but to mark the reduced independence of the Hungarian State".

Minister Sampaio Garrido had been in Hungary since 1939 and no doubt had seen a lot, for the persecution of Jews was not introduced to the government of Regent Horthy by the Germans. In the midst of the climate of terror caused by the Gestapo's arrival in Budapest, Sampaio Garrido had taken the initiative of sheltering a group of people who were probably friends of his in the Portuguese Legation. At the beginning of May, however, he had to inform Lisbon that the Legation had been attacked by the Gestapo and his guests taken to the Budapest Police from where he had had great difficulty in removing them. Although surprised, the government in Lisbon was not angered. Gently calling the attention of its Minister to the fact that he "should" have warned the MFA, it undertook to honor the protection granted by Garrido to his protégés.

Alberto Teixeira Branquinho took over his mission as Chargé d'Affaires in Budapest on 5 June and with it the responsibility of protecting "its" refugees. In August, when the situation again worsened, the new Chargé d'Affaires, invoking the actions of the Swedish Minister in Budapest (Carl Danilsson, a personal friend of Teixeira de Sampaio, Secretary General of the MFA) obtained permission from Lisbon to widen the nature and quantity of Portuguese protection, mainly by issuing *Schutzpässe*. These protection papers did in fact protect many Jews until Regent Horthy's deposition by the national socialist Szalasi, Prime Minister and self-proclaimed vice-regent. At the end of October, Szalasi decided that he would only respect protection papers issued by countries that recognized his government as legitimate. At that point, the Portuguese Government recalled its Chargé d'Affaires.

After 29 October the Portuguese representation in Budapest was in the hands of the vice-consul, Jules Gulden, who continued to keep an eye on the Portuguese protégés. In his book *AMERICAN JEWRY AND THE HOLOCAUST, THE AMERICAN-JEWISH JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE, 1939-1945*, Yehuda Bauer says "Jules Gulden not only offered hundred of visas to Portugal but also issued 1200 protection papers". In a letter he wrote to the MFA on 18 December about the situation he had left behind in Budapest, Jules Gulden, now a refugee in Geneva, did not mention the subject.

After the departure of its representatives, Lisbon continued representations in Berlin to protect the refugees left behind in the Portuguese Legation and to protect the bearers of Portuguese protection papers. There could be no disrespect for the prerogatives of sovereignty. Officially, Portuguese diplomatic action in Hungary helped save about 1000 people.

### **SPARED LIVES: THREE PORTUGUESE DIPLOMATS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

When selecting the documents shown in this exhibition concerning the actions of three Portuguese diplomats we were guided mainly by the possibility of providing a direct reading of two revealing moments in the administration of Portuguese neutrality.

In the case of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, events moved very rapidly, positions became extreme, and the documents of the proceedings against him will show even the most inattentive reader the moral and political framework in which events unfolded. We have restricted ourselves here to adding some documents which contribute to put the case in context as to the prior attitudes of the Portuguese authorities vis-à-vis the refugee question. In conclusion we thought it interesting to show the point of view of the Portuguese Consul in Marseilles who, quite extraneously to the Sousa Mendes case, wrote to Lisbon at the end of 1940, criticizing the visa policy and requesting to be replaced.

In the case of Hungary, the correspondence exchanged between Lisbon and the Portuguese Legations in Budapest, Berlin and Bern – where Sampaio Garrido, having left Hungary, spent almost all the summer of 1944 – enables us to follow the story on a day to day basis. This was a process where the personal commitment of two diplomats galvanized by the arrogance of the German occupiers and by the terror of the persecutions against the Jews in Budapest, found an echo in an administration that was politically oriented to transform its now uncomfortable neutrality into peace credits.

On 18 May 1945, in a speech on "Portugal, War and Peace" delivered to the National Assembly, Salazar said "History, serene and impartial, as writers say it is, will one day catalogue our acts in this war and classify our neutrality". We hope this exhibition will contribute as well.

Lisbon, 19 July 2000