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## The 1934 anti-Jewish Thrace riots: the Jewish exodus of Thrace through the lens of nationalism and collective violence

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### ABSTRACT

This article analyses the causes and the dynamic process of production of the 1934 anti-Jewish Thrace riots. The article, based on the US State Department Records, British Documents on Foreign Affairs and the Turkish Republic's Prime Ministry Republican Archives as well as Turkish, US and British newspapers, argues that the 1934 anti-Jewish Thrace riots were not spontaneous occurrences caused by over-excited masses, but instead planned actions by some local state elite and Republican People's Party (RPP) local officials as well as anti-Semitic Turkish ultra-nationalists. The article argues that it was not popular anti-Semitism, but the Turkish state establishment's security concerns vis-à-vis the perceived Italian and Bulgarian threat that resulted in the riots. The local state elite and RPP local officials, who were uneasy about the economically well-off Jews, acted as ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs by allowing the ultra-nationalists to operate in the riot-prone Thrace, while the rioters mainly participated in the collective violence to receive economic gains as a result of the expulsion of the Jews.

Between late June and early July 1934, Turks in various provinces of Thrace simultaneously started an anti-Jewish campaign, which first began as calls to boycott the Jewish businesses and sending threatening letters to Jews urging them to leave the region, and then escalated to attacks, beatings and looting of Jewish businesses and homes. As a result of the violent incidents, a large number of Jews—between 3000 and 7000 according to estimates<sup>1</sup>—fled to Istanbul. In the aftermath of the riots, most of the Jews did not return to Thrace, and the region's Jewish population continued to demise in the following years.

This article analyses the causes and the dynamic process of production of the 1934 anti-Jewish Thrace riots, also known as the Thrace incidents. Drawing upon the literature on ethno-nationalist riots,<sup>2</sup> the article conceives riots as a form of collective action during which

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<sup>1</sup>The Turkish government estimated that 3000 Thracian Jews fled to Istanbul. The figure according to the British Ambassador to Turkey Sir Percy Loraine was between 7000 and 8000.

<sup>2</sup>Paul R. Brass (ed.), *Riots and Pogroms* (Seattle, WA: Macmillan Press, 1996); Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2003); Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflict and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997); Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs play a crucial role in their production. Paul R. Brass argues that given the illegitimate nature of violent movements, riot producers conceal the extent of preplanning and organization that precedes the collective violence. This makes riots appear unplanned, undirected and spontaneous expressions of the deep feelings of an aggrieved people. And he argues, 'even the most carefully planned and well-organized assaults on the other community are *designed* to appear so'.<sup>3</sup> What makes riots and pogroms in India or the United States or nineteenth-century Russia so much more difficult to analyze and comprehend is that,<sup>4</sup> as Brass notes, 'they combine objective and intentional factors, spontaneity and planning, chaos and organization'.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Stanley Tambiah in his analysis of ethno-nationalist riots in South Asia finds that the riots were not spontaneous and irrational actions of the ethnic crowds, but were results of organized and often planned actions involving local politicians and police.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Donald L. Horowitz maintains that riots, instead of being unplanned, occur in processes: from ethnic antipathy, to a precipitating event, then to a lull, while rumours start flying, and finally to sudden mass violence.<sup>7</sup> Ashutosh Varshney in his analysis of the Hindu-Muslim riots in India argues that high levels of inter-communal networks of civic life reduce the likelihood of communal violence.<sup>8</sup> However, Steven I. Wilkinson criticizes Varshney by giving the example of pre-civil war Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, and notes the fact that associational life among different communities was insufficient in itself to prevent a brutal civil war and mass violence.<sup>9</sup> Instead, Wilkinson in his analysis of the Hindu-Muslim riots in India argues that ethnic riots are often planned by politicians to achieve electoral gains by polarizing the electorate.<sup>10</sup> He maintains that 'town-level electoral incentives account for where Hindu-Muslim violence breaks out and that state-level electoral incentives account for where and when state governments use their police forces to prevent riots'.<sup>11</sup> Given the absence of competitive elections under the one-party regime in Turkey (1923–1946), the case of the anti-Jewish Thrace riots is not applicable to test Wilkinson's valuable finding on riots. Yet, along with Brass, Tambiah and Horowitz, his focus on the role of the state and specific state actors enables us to have a better understanding of the Turkish case. '[W]hether violence is bloody or ends quickly', argues Wilkinson, depends 'not on the local factors that caused violence to break out but primarily on the will and capacity of the government that controls the forces of law and order'.<sup>12</sup> Thus, he argues, it is the will of political leadership to stop a riot, instead of the state capacity, that prevents riots.<sup>13</sup>

This article, based on the US State Department Records, British Documents on Foreign Affairs and the Turkish Republic's Prime Ministry Republican Archives, as well as Turkish, US and British newspapers, argues that the 1934 anti-Jewish Thrace riots were not spontaneous occurrences caused by over-excited masses, but instead planned actions by some local state

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<sup>3</sup>Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, p. 14 (emphasis in original).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*, pp. 214–216.

<sup>7</sup>Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, pp. 71–123.

<sup>8</sup>Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup>Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*, p. 55.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 1, 49.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

elite and Republican People's Party (RPP)<sup>14</sup> local officials as well as anti-Semitic Turkish ultra-nationalists (or pan-Turkists), who acted as ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs. The RPP government, by not taking the necessary measures against the ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs, played the role of an inadvertent elite ally.

The existing literature on the 1934 anti-Jewish Thrace riots does not adequately address the causes leading to the riots. Avner Levi, for example, argues that the riots occurred as a result of Nazi-inspired propaganda, which reached out to Turkish ultra-nationalists.<sup>15</sup> Zafer Toprak, on the other hand, focuses on the question of who was responsible for the riots' occurrence. He reveals a confidential internal correspondence at the RPP in the aftermath of the riots, and holds the party's local organizations in Thrace, instead of the RPP government, responsible.<sup>16</sup> Haluk Karabatak asserts that the RPP government's Turkification policies in the 1930s, which were affected by racism, resulted in the riots.<sup>17</sup> Contrary to Levi and Karabatak, Ayhan Aktar regards neither racism nor German Nazism as a cause for the riots. Instead, he focuses on the Turkish government's security concerns vis-à-vis Italy and Bulgaria, which resulted in the government pursuing the policy of Turkifying Thrace, leading to the riots. Thus, Aktar argues that the riots were well planned, and both the RPP government and the party's local branches were responsible for them.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, Hatice Bayraktar emphasizes the Turkish government's policy of Turkifying Thrace given its threat perception from Bulgaria and Italy, and focuses on the role of the Thrace Inspector-General as a local state official during the riots.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Rifat Bali explains the reasons for the riots mainly by focusing on the RPP government's cultural and economic Turkification policies and the government's threat perception from Bulgaria and Italy.<sup>20</sup> Although making valuable contributions, none of these studies applies the riot literature to the Turkish case; therefore, they are unable to provide a comprehensive analysis of the causes and the dynamic processes of production of the 1934 anti-Jewish Thrace riots.

This article argues that three main factors led to the anti-Jewish riots. First, by 1934 Turkey had a threat perception from revisionist Italy and Bulgaria. Within this framework, the Turkish state establishment (mainly the RPP government and the military) pursued a policy of gradually Turkifying Thrace by enacting a settlement law<sup>21</sup> in mid-June of that year, which ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs seized upon as an opportunity to mobilize the masses of Turks against the Jews. The Turkish state elite's exclusionary definition of Turkish nationalism, which regarded the non-Muslim minorities as non-Turks and potential enemies of the state, while viewing Muslims as Turks,<sup>22</sup> played a crucial role in the occurrence of the riots.

<sup>14</sup>Between 1923 and 1946, Turkey was under the one-party rule of the RPP. The party's rule continued until 1950 as the RPP won the first general elections in 1946.

<sup>15</sup>Avner Levi, '1934 Trakya Yahudileri Olayı: Alınamayan Ders' [The 1934 Thracian Jews Incident: An Unlearned Lesson], *Tarih ve Toplum*, 151 (July 1996), pp. 10–17.

<sup>16</sup>Zafer Toprak, '1934 Trakya Olaylarında Hükümetin ve CHF'nin Sorumluluğu' [Responsibility of the Government and the Republican People's Party in the 1934 Thrace Incidents], *Toplumsal Tarih*, 34 (October 1996), pp. 19–25.

<sup>17</sup>Haluk Karabatak, 'Türkiye Azınlık Tarihine Bir Katkı: 1934 Trakya Olayları ve Yahudiler' [A Contribution to Turkey's Minority History: The 1934 Thrace Incidents and Jews], *Tarih ve Toplum*, 146 (February 1996), pp. 68–80.

<sup>18</sup>Ayhan Aktar, 'Trakya Yahudi Olaylarını "Doğru" Yorumlamak' [A 'Correct' Interpretation of the Thracian Jews Incidents], *Tarih ve Toplum*, 155 (November 1996), pp. 45–56.

<sup>19</sup>Hatice Bayraktar, 'The Anti-Jewish Pogrom in Eastern Thrace in 1934: New Evidence for the Responsibility of the Turkish Government', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40(2) (2006), pp. 95–111.

<sup>20</sup>Rifat N. Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları* [1934 Thrace Incidents], 3rd ed. (Istanbul: Libra Yayınları, 2012).

<sup>21</sup>On 13 June 1934, the Turkish government passed a settlement law (No. 2510) primarily aimed at Turkifying Kurds by relocating and mixing them with Turks. The law also aimed at Turkifying Thrace.

<sup>22</sup>As Michael A. Reynolds argues, 'the republican elites regarded assertions of identities other than the Sunni Turk as inherently destabilizing and subversive, and suppressed them vigorously'. In Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908–1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 260.

Second, despite their small population size of 13,000, an important segment of the Thracian Jews constituted the region's urban and wealthy section of the population. This resulted in the uneasiness of the local state elite, such as the Thrace Inspector-General İbrahim Tali (Öngören)<sup>23</sup> (1875–1952) (then the highest-ranking official representing the state authority in Thrace), RPP local officials and the Turkish Muslim rural poor in Thrace. Local state elite and RPP local officials acted as ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs, who successfully seized the settlement law as an opportunity, while framing socioeconomic grievances of the Turkish Muslim poor to mobilize them against the Thracian Jews during the riots.

Third, in the 1930s, extreme right-wing and anti-Semitic Turkish ultra-nationalist entrepreneurs inspired by Nazism, such as Cevat Rifat (Atılhan) (1892–1967), acted as ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs during the riots, and had reached out to the Turkish youth, including those in Thrace. Cevat Rifat (having links with Nazi Germany) via his journal *Millî İnkılâp* [National Revolution] utilized the Turkish state establishment's security concerns, the settlement law and antagonism of both the state elite and the Turkish Muslim rural poor towards economically well-off Jews as an opportunity to mobilize ultra-nationalism in Turkey.

Yet it was mainly the local state elite, such as İbrahim Tali, and RPP local officials that acted as ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs, and created a breeding ground for the occurrence of the riots by allowing riot producers like Cevat Rifat and people who were sympathetic to ultra-nationalism to operate in the riot-prone Thrace. This article argues that it was not popular anti-Semitism but the Turkish state establishment's security concerns vis-à-vis the perceived Italian and Bulgarian threat that resulted in the incidents, while the rioters mainly participated in the collective violence to receive economic gains as a result of the expulsion of the Jews.

### Turkey's threat perception from revisionist Italy and Bulgaria in the 1930s

During the interwar period, Bulgaria was the principal revisionist state in the Balkans given its unsettled problems (i.e. economic and population losses) with Greece, Yugoslavia and Rumania since the end of World War I.<sup>24</sup> Even though Turkey signed a friendship treaty with Bulgaria in 1925, the bilateral relations were strained in the 1930s.<sup>25</sup> In June 1933, for example, Bulgaria declined the Turkish proposal to sign a bilateral non-aggression treaty.<sup>26</sup>

Turkey and the status quo Balkan states (i.e. Greece, Yugoslavia and Rumania) also had a threat perception from Italy.<sup>27</sup> Turkey, in particular, had convincing reasons for regarding Italy as a threat: Italy invaded the Dodecanese islands during the Italian–Ottoman war of 1911; the country also occupied southern Turkey during the War of Independence (1919–1922); and even after the withdrawal of the Italian military forces from Turkey in 1921, Italy maintained its military presence in the Aegean Sea in the 1920s. Moreover, Italy under Benito Mussolini's leadership starting in October 1922 focused its attention on the Balkans. For

<sup>23</sup>The Law on Last Names came into force on 21 June 1934.

<sup>24</sup>Dilek Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey, 1929–1939: Economic and Foreign Policy Strategies in an Uncertain World* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), p. 139.

<sup>25</sup>Corry Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 30.

<sup>26</sup>State Department (SD)—United States of America, Records of the Department of State Relating to Political Relations of Turkey, Greece, and the Balkan States, 1930–39, Microfilm Publication T1245, Roll 4. SD 767.7411/18. Shoemaker (Sofia) to Washington, 23 June 1933.

<sup>27</sup>Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey*, p. 114.

example, Mussolini announced in February 1924 that ‘the lines of Italian expansion stretched towards the east.’<sup>28</sup>

As a countermeasure to Italian revisionism, Turkey proposed in 1926 the idea of forming a Balkan Pact for the region’s six states (i.e. Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Bulgaria and Albania). The pact’s goal was to rule out any great power involvement in the Balkans as summarized by then Turkish Foreign Minister Tevfik Rüştü (Aras) (1883–1972) with the motto: ‘the Balkans for the Balkan People.’<sup>29</sup> Turkey was particularly concerned about possible cooperation between Italy and Bulgaria; the latter had insufficient power to revise its borders, and thus sought Italy’s alliance to realize its revisionist goals.<sup>30</sup>

In February 1934, Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia and Rumania formed the Balkan Pact. The pact’s main purpose was to protect the participant countries’ boundaries against aggression from a Balkan country (i.e. from Bulgaria).<sup>31</sup> From the Turkish perspective, however, the pact did not entirely meet the country’s security needs with respect to its Thracian frontier for the following reasons: first, Bulgaria did not join the pact; and second, the pact did not make any provisions for ‘the possibility that a non-Balkan state, acting on its own, might attack a Balkan state,’<sup>32</sup> which remained ‘the Balkan Pact’s weakest point.’<sup>33</sup>

The formation of the Balkan Pact marked a decline in Turkish–Italian relations, which further deteriorated following Mussolini’s notorious speech in March 1934 declaring Asia and Africa as Italy’s historical goals, alas, areas of Italian expansion in the future.<sup>34</sup> Thus, in the 1930s, the perceived Italian threat dominated Turkish foreign and strategic policy given the country’s geographic proximity, revisionist goals and unreliable political leader.<sup>35</sup>

The Lausanne Treaty (1923) formed an international regime and a demilitarized status of the Straits and their adjoining areas,<sup>36</sup> which made Turkish security vulnerable in case of a military attack, particularly from Thrace. Therefore, Turkey from 1933 onwards pursued an active policy to revise the status of the Straits.<sup>37</sup> While maintaining its diplomatic efforts for remilitarization, in 1934 Turkey began to concentrate its military forces in Thrace and around the Straits, ‘despite the obligation to set up no fortification.’<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the US Ambassador to

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 143–144; ‘Circular of the Director of Department II, Berlin, 10 February 1934, 9604/E677118-20 in *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918–1945, Series C, Vol. II, The Third Reich: First Phase October 15, 1933–June 13, 1934* (London: Her Master’s Stationery Office, 1959), p. 463.

<sup>32</sup>Mustafa Türkeş, ‘The Balkan Pact and its Immediate Implications for the Balkan States, 1930–34’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 30(1) (January 1994), p. 141.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>M. Mussolini’nin nutku [Mussolini’s Speech], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 20 March 1934, p. 2; ‘Italian Policy Abroad’, *The Times*, 19 March 1934, p. 13; and Dilek Barlas, ‘Friends or Foes? Diplomatic Relations between Italy and Turkey, 1923–36’, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 36(2) (May 2004), p. 247.

<sup>35</sup>Barlas, ‘Friends or Foes?’, p. 248; Foreign Office (FO)—Great Britain, FO E 854/854/44. Sir P. Loraine (Angora) to Sir John Simon, 31 January 1935, ‘Annual Report, 1934’, Doc. 151, in Bülent Gökay (ed.), *British Documents on Foreign Affairs, Part II, Series B: Turkey, Iran, and the Middle East, 1918–1939, Vol. 33, Turkey: December 1932–November 1935* (Bethesda, MD: ProQuest LLC, 2012), p. 167.

<sup>36</sup>Mehmet Gönülöbol and Cem Sar, ‘1919–1938 Yılları Arasında Türk Dış Politikası [Turkish Foreign Policy between the Years 1919 and 1938], in Mehmet Gönülöbol (ed.), *Olaylarla Türk Dış Politikası (1919–1995)* [Events in Turkish Foreign Policy], 9th ed. (Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, 1996), p. 120.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 121; FO E 1345/1345/44. Sir P. Loraine (Angora) to Sir John Simon, 20 February 1934, Doc. 84, in Gökay, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs, Part II, Series B, Vol. 33*, p. 108.

<sup>38</sup>Department of State—United States of America, Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930–44, Microfilm Publication M1224, Roll 10. SD 867.4016 JEWS/9. Skinner (Istanbul) to Washington, 29 June 1934.



Turkey Robert P. Skinner observed in June 1934 that '[i]t is well known that a mechanized military organization is being deployed in Thrace'.<sup>39</sup>

Turkey finally restored its full sovereignty over the Straits by signing the 1936 Montreux Convention. By 1939 Turkey deployed more than half of its army (i.e. of 40 divisions, 20 were with the First Army in European Turkey), the bulk of its equipment, its best commanders and all of its modern weaponry on the Bulgarian border. Meanwhile, Turkey also constructed fortified works along the Bulgarian frontier called the Çakmak line.<sup>40</sup> The US estimated in August 1939 that Turkey had 150,000 troops in Thrace (excluding the Dardanelles) in order to defend itself in case of a Bulgarian attack.<sup>41</sup>

### The Turkish state elite's exclusionary definition of Turkish nationalism vis-à-vis the non-Muslim minorities

Starting in 1934, Turkey focused on improving the infrastructure (e.g. roads, hospitals and schools) of the underdeveloped Thrace<sup>42</sup> in order to deploy its military forces in the region. Meanwhile, as a security measure, Turkey also maintained its policy of gradually Turkifying Thrace by settling Muslim immigrants from Bulgaria and Rumania in the region.<sup>43</sup>

As the modernist variant of the literature on nationalism expects,<sup>44</sup> the Turkish nationalist elite utilized state power while constructing the Turkish nation. Following the War of Independence, the Kemalist leadership pursued a policy of homogenizing the Turkish nation based on a secular Turkish Muslim identity. Given that the Anatolian Greeks and Armenians pursued separatist or nationalist ambitions during the last decades of the Ottoman Empire and allied with the occupying powers during the War of Independence, the Turkish state elite regarded them with suspicion and even as potential enemies of the state.<sup>45</sup> The Kemalist leadership regarded all Muslims as Turks regardless of their ethnicity and language, while viewing non-Muslims as non-Turks. This was even the case for the Jews, who earned the title of 'loyal *millet*'<sup>46</sup> given their alliance first with the Ottoman army during World War I, and

<sup>39</sup>SD 867.4016 JEWS/9. Skinner (Istanbul) to Washington, 29 June 1934.

<sup>40</sup>Brock Millman, 'Turkish Foreign and Strategic Policy 1934–42', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 31(3) (July 1995), p. 498. The line carries the name of its architect, then Turkish Chief of General Staff Marshall Fevzi Çakmak.

<sup>41</sup>SD 767.74/83. MacMurray (Istanbul) to Washington, 12 August 1939. The Turkish troops were not all stationed along the Bulgarian frontier.

<sup>42</sup>'Edirne'nin sevinci' [Edirne's Happiness], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 26 February 1934, p. 1. For example, Turkey invited a group of German experts in order to construct Edirne province's sewage system. See 'Edirne'nin imarı için Almanya'dan mütehasis bir heyet getirildi' [A Group of German Experts Came for Edirne's Construction], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 9 March 1934, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup>FO E 5562/5192/44. Sir W. Erskine (Sofia) to Sir Austen Chamberlain, 22 December 1927, Doc. 86, in Bülent Gökay (ed.), *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series B: Turkey, Iran, and the Middle East, 1918–1939, Vol. 31, Turkey: March 1927–December 1929 (Bethesda, MD: ProQuest LLC, 2012), p. 90.

<sup>44</sup>Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1789: Program, Myth, Reality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 10; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 1; Charles Tilly, 'States and Nationalism in Europe, 1492–1992', *Theory and Society*, 23 (1994), pp. 131–146; and Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 83–84.

<sup>45</sup>Avner Levi, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Yahudiler: Hukuki ve Siyasi Durumları* [Jews in the Turkish Republic: Their Legal and Political Situation] (Istanbul: İletişim, 1996), p. 30; Ahmet İçduygu, Şule Toktaş and B. Ali Soner, 'The Politics of Population in a Nation-Building Process: Emigration of non-Muslims from Turkey', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31(2) (February 2008), p. 364; Alexis Alexandris, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek-Turkish Relations (1918–1974)*, 2nd ed. (Athens: Center for Asia Minor Studies, 1992), pp. 52–76; and M. Çağatay Okutan, *Tek Parti Döneminde Azınlık Politikaları* [Minority Policies during the One Party Period] (Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2004), pp. 65–66.

<sup>46</sup>Hugh Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf, and Crescent: Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), p. 24; Rifat Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni (1923–1945)* [Turkish Jews under the Republican Years: An Episode of Turkification (1923–1945)], 2nd ed. (Istanbul: İletişim, 2000), p. 62; and Levi, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Yahudiler*, p. 15.

then with the Kemalist forces in their fight against the Greeks during the War of Independence.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the Kemalist interpretation of Turkish nationalism, while pursuing policies of secularization, maintained in practice the Ottoman *millet* system<sup>48</sup> by drawing a clear line between the Muslim Turks and non-Muslim minorities. Within this framework, the Turkish state elite pursued the policy of Turkification by inducing Muslims from various countries, such as Bulgaria, Rumania, Yugoslavia, Russia and Syria, to settle in Turkey.<sup>49</sup>

It is important to note that Anatolia in 1923 was a totally different place to what it had been prior to World War I. As a result of the demise of the Christian communities, Anatolia, which was 80 per cent Muslim prior to World War I, was approximately 98 per cent Muslim in 1923.<sup>50</sup> Despite this drastic change in demography, however, the Kemalist leadership maintained its policy of forming a homogenous Turkish Muslim population in Turkey in the 1930s. This was mainly because the memory of invasion and partition of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I and the violence associated with it was alive in the minds of the state elite and Turkish Muslims.

The Turkish state elite's exclusionary definition of Turkish nationalism, which regarded all non-Muslims as foreign elements and even potential enemies of the country, played a significant role in the 1934 anti-Jewish Thrace riots. It is important to note that Jews sincerely wanted to be full members of Turkish society. For example, in May 1925 they voluntarily renounced their privileges, which had been accorded them by the Lausanne Treaty,<sup>51</sup> and supported the RPP government's Turkification policies by endorsing the dissemination of the Turkish language in their community through opening up Turkish classes, forming committees to encourage the speaking of Turkish in their neighbourhoods, or Turkifying their names.<sup>52</sup> Thus, one would not expect the occurrence of an anti-Jewish riot.

According to the 1927 census, the total Jewish population in Turkey was 81,872. Jews resided mainly in three cities: Istanbul (47,035), Izmir (18,157) and Edirne (6,098).<sup>53</sup> Although they constituted 0.6 per cent of Turkey's overall population of 13,648,270, Jews made up 5.07 per cent of the population in Istanbul, Thrace and the Dardanelles.<sup>54</sup> And Jews constituted more than 15 per cent of the population in Edirne and Çanakkale, while in Tekirdağ they were around five per cent.<sup>55</sup> The Turkish state establishment was uneasy regarding the fact that Jews, the majority of whom spoke Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) instead of Turkish, were living in a strategically important region of Thrace.<sup>56</sup> Ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs of the

<sup>47</sup>Jews having regarded Christian repression as the main threat to their presence, allied with the Turks. Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf, and Crescent*, 53–54.

<sup>48</sup>The Ottoman *millet* system divided Ottoman society according to its religious affiliation (Muslims, Christians and Jews). Each *millet* was recognized as a legal community under its own religious leadership.

<sup>49</sup>FO E 1479/1479/44. Hoare (Constantinople) to Sir Austen Chamberlain, 23 March 1927, Doc. 4, in Gökay, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series B, Vol. 31, pp. 3–4.

<sup>50</sup>Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1994), p. 172.

<sup>51</sup>Levi, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Yahudiler*, p. 68; SD 867.4016 JEWS/1. Sherrill (Istanbul) to Washington, 11 July 1932, 'Subject: The Jewish Population in Turkey'.

<sup>52</sup>SD 867.4016 JEWS/2. Sherrill (Istanbul) to Washington, 20 December 1932, 'Subject: Turkish Jews Consider Relinquishing Spanish for Turkish'; SD 867.4016 JEWS/3. George (Izmir) to Washington, 13 December 1932, 'Subject: Popularizing Turkish'; Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri*, pp. 151–152; Senem Aslan, 'Citizen, Speak Turkish!', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 13(2) (2007), pp. 263–264; and Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), pp. 250–251.

<sup>53</sup>SD 867.4016 JEWS/2. Sherrill (Istanbul) to Washington, 20 December 1932. Sherrill noted that the Rabbinate figures differed, according to which the Jewish population in Turkey ranged between 80,000 and 95,000: Istanbul (62,000), Izmir (10,000) and Edirne (around 7–8000). In *ibid*.

<sup>54</sup>Rifat N. Bali, *Musa'nın Evlatları, Cumhuriyet'in Yurttaşları* [The Children of Moses, the Citizens of the Republic] (Istanbul: İletişim, 2001), p. 174.

<sup>55</sup>Soner Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 140.

<sup>56</sup>*ibid.*, p. 141.



1934 Thrace riots viewed Turkey's aforementioned policy of remilitarization of Thrace and the Straits and the June 1934 settlement law as an opportunity to mobilize the Turkish Muslim masses against the Jews.

For example, British Ambassador to Turkey Sir Percy Loraine stated in July 1934 that the riots were 'connected with the increase of the number of garrisons in Turkish Thrace, which began to be effected about the end of June'.<sup>57</sup> The ambassador maintained that '[i]t would appear that the whole district is to become, at any rate virtually, a military zone, and that it was therefore decided to eliminate from it all possibly undesirable elements'.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, Skinner maintained in July 1934 that 'the decision to evacuate the Jews had not been reached in any spirit of anti-Semitism but with a desire to get rid of all minorities in the region named'.<sup>59</sup> As Horowitz argues, rioters want homogeneity.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, '[n]ot only do target groups flee, reducing heterogeneity as they go, but third groups—groups not targeted—sometimes also decide to leave'.<sup>61</sup>

The undesirable elements in the eyes of the Turkish state elite were all non-Muslims given that they were not regarded as Turks, who could be trusted. During the riots, along with the Jews, there were also some Bulgarians in Thrace who took refuge at the Bulgarian frontier and claimed that 'they received imperative orders from the Turkish authorities to leave their homes within twenty-four hours'<sup>62</sup> following the settlement law and militarization of Thrace,<sup>63</sup> while Loraine reported in July 1934 that a few Italians fled to Istanbul from Çanakkale.<sup>64</sup> Thus, observed the US Charge d'Affaires ad interim to Turkey G. Howland Shaw, the Turkish state leadership did not carry any anti-Semitic sentiments given that '[t]hese leaders are after all, responsible for the hospitality extended to a great number of German professors of Jewish race'.<sup>65</sup> It is important to note that there were no incidents with respect to the settlement of Jews in other parts of the country.<sup>66</sup>

### Thrace Inspector-General İbrahim Tali (Öngören): an ethno-nationalist entrepreneur during the 1934 anti-Jewish Thrace riots

In February 1934, the RPP government formed the Thrace Inspectorate-General in Edirne province in order to regulate the infrastructure and Muslim immigrants' settlement issues in Thrace's four provinces: Edirne, Kırklareli, Tekirdağ and Çanakkale.<sup>67</sup> This was followed by the government appointing the RPP Istanbul MP İbrahim Tali as the Thrace Inspector-General.<sup>68</sup> Starting in 1928, the RPP government in order to stamp its authoritarian one-party

<sup>57</sup>FO E 4633/4633/44. Sir P. Loraine (Constantinople) to Sir John Simon, 7 July 1934, Doc. 116, in Gökay, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series B, Vol. 33, p. 132.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>SD 867.4016 JEWS/10. Skinner (Istanbul) to Washington, 6 July 1934.

<sup>60</sup>Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, p. 438.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 439.

<sup>62</sup>Bulgarian Exiles Flee from Turkey: Jews and Greeks also Forced to, *New York Times*, 8 July 1934, p. 15.

<sup>63</sup>SD 867.4016 Bulgarians/1, 20 July 1934.

<sup>64</sup>FO E 4633/4633/44. Sir P. Loraine (Constantinople) to Sir John Simon, 7 July 1934, Doc. 116, in Gökay, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series B, Vol. 33, p. 132.

<sup>65</sup>SD 867.4016 JEWS/14. Shaw, Charge d'Affaires ad interim (Istanbul) to Washington, 21 August 1934.

<sup>66</sup>Turkey Shifts Jews as Moslems Return: Only Turkish Population Sought, *New York Times*, 1 July 1934, p. E3.

<sup>67</sup>Trakya'da Umumi Müfettişlik Teşkilâtı Kararlaştı [The Thrace Inspector-General Will Be Formed], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 27 February 1934, p. 1. See also *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi* [Turkish Parliament Session Report], Vol. 20, Birleşim [Session] 32 (22 March 1934), p. 152. Law No. 2393 came into force on 25 March 1934. See Department of State—United States of America, Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1930–1944, M1224, Roll 21. SD 867.9111/415. Allen (Istanbul) to Washington, 'Digest of the Turkish Press for the Period February 25–March 24, 1934'.

<sup>68</sup>Trakya Umumi Müfettişliğine İbrahim Tali bey tayin edildi [İbrahim Tali Has Been Appointed as the Thrace Inspector-General], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 20 March 1934, p. 1.

rule in Turkey established Inspectorates-General, which were 'regional governorships whose authority prevailed over all civilian, military, and judicial institutions under their domain.'<sup>69</sup>

İbrahim Tali, who participated in the Balkan Wars, World War I and the Turkish War of Independence, had close relations with the Kemalist leadership. Indeed, he was among the 18 Kemalist military officers who started the Turkish independence movement under Atatürk's leadership on 19 May 1919.<sup>70</sup> Between the years 1928 and 1932, İbrahim Tali acted as the inspector-general in the overwhelmingly Kurdish populated south-eastern Turkey.<sup>71</sup>

On 6 May 1934, the Thrace Inspector-General İbrahim Tali began a 33-day tour of the region by visiting Kırklareli, Tekirdağ, Çanakkale and Edirne provinces, respectively. During the tour, he contacted the region's Turkish Muslim villagers, local state and RPP officials, chamber of commerce members, sportsmen and students; visited schools and people's houses; and investigated the settlement of Muslim immigrants from Bulgaria and Rumania and the conduct of land distribution to them as well as the region's economical, educational, agricultural and sanitary conditions.<sup>72</sup>

Thracian Turks, who hoped for the region's socioeconomic improvement, publicly expressed their support for İbrahim Tali during his tour.<sup>73</sup> Meanwhile, the semi-official daily *Hakimiyeti Milliye* in an article emphasized the Turkish character of Thrace, by asserting that the region had always been an ancient Turkish homeland dating back more than 5000 years.<sup>74</sup> Although the article implicitly criticized Bulgaria's revisionist policies towards Turkey, it disregarded the lengthy Jewish presence in the region dating back as far as the fourth century.<sup>75</sup>

İbrahim Tali completed his tour in early June 1934,<sup>76</sup> and upon his return to Edirne he wrote a 90-page report to the Prime Ministry on 16 June 1934. In this report, the inspector-general repeatedly expressed his uneasiness regarding Thracian Jews' occupation with trade and their dominance over the region's economy by asserting that 'the Jews controlled three-fourths of the region's capital.'<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, İbrahim Tali's report was full of anti-Semitic

<sup>69</sup>Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, p. 47.

<sup>70</sup>Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*, pp. 46–47.

<sup>71</sup>The RPP government formed the First Inspectorate in January 1928 in the aftermath of the Kurdish Islamist Şeyh (*sheik*) Sait revolt against the republic in 1925. The inspectorate, which had extensive powers over the Kurdish populated region, aimed at preventing future Kurdish uprisings against the republic. See Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, pp. 21–23; FO E 5179/257/44. Mr. Hoare (Constantinople) to Sir Austen Chamberlain, 30 November 1927, Doc. 76, in Gökay, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series B, Vol. 31, p. 83.

<sup>72</sup>İbrahim Tali Bey tetkiklerine devam ediyor' [İbrahim Tali Bey Continues His Inspection], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 7 May 1934, p. 3; 'İbrahim Tali Bey Çorlu'da tetkiklerine devam ediyor' [İbrahim Tali Bey Continues His Inspection in Çorlu], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 16 May 1934, p. 1; 'İbrahim Tali Bey Tekirdağ'da vilayet işleri hakkında tetkiklere devam ediyor' [İbrahim Tali Bey Continues His Inspection in Tekirdağ], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 18 May 1934, p. 3; 'İbrahim Tali B. ikinci umumi müfettiş tetkiklerine devam ediyor' [The Second Inspector-General İbrahim Tali Bey Continues His Inspection], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 23 May 1934, p. 3; and 'İkinci Umum Müfettişi Uzunköprü'ye gelirken yollarda köylülerle temaslarda bulundu' [The Second Inspector-General Contacted the Villagers in Uzunköprü], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 8 June 1934, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup>İbrahim Tali B. Müfettişlik mıntkasındaki tetkiklerine devam etmektedir' [İbrahim Tali Bey Continues His Inspection in His Area of Inspectorate], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 17 May 1934, p. 3; 'İkinci U. Müfettiş İbrahim Tali Bey Çanakkale'de teftişatta bulunuyor' [İbrahim Tali Bey Inspects Çanakkale], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 25 May 1934, p. 3; and 'İbrahim Tali B. İkinci Umumi Mufettiş Çanakkale'de tezahuratla karşılandı' [The Second Inspector-General İbrahim Tali Bey Was Welcomed in Çanakkale with Cheers], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 26 May 1934, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup>Naşit Hakkı, 'Trakya'yı iymar azmimizdir' [We Are Determined to Construct Thrace], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 27 May 1934, p. 5.

<sup>75</sup>Edirne, in particular, played a significant role in the development of Jewish intellectual life. See Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, p. 61; Walter F. Weiker, *Ottomans, Turks, and the Jewish Polity: A History of the Jews of Turkey* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992), pp. 7–8; and Naim A. Gülerüz, *Tarihte Yolculuk: Edirne Yahudileri* [A Journey in History: Edirne Jews] (İstanbul: Gözlem Yayıncılık, 2014), pp. 177–194.

<sup>76</sup>İbrahim Tali Bey teftişten döndü' [İbrahim Tali Bey Returned from Inspection], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 9 June 1934, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup>Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi (BCA) (Prime Ministry's Republican Archives)—Turkey, BCA 490.01..643.130.01. 16 June 1934.

stereotypes, while demonizing the Thracian Jews as a separate people from the Turks; he accused the Jews of being 'without ... moral values and honor' and 'potential spies in case of a Bulgarian invasion of Turkey' as well as of 'increasing their wealth by exploiting the Turks', 'corrupting the state officials in Thrace by bribing them', 'worshipping gold', 'not sincerely supporting the Turkish revolution' and 'laying the groundwork for communism in Turkey by organizing labor clubs'.<sup>78</sup>

İbrahim Tali maintained that the Jews' successful commercial activities in Thrace constituted an obstacle for the Turkification of the region's economy. He regarded the immigration of Muslims from the Balkans as a solution to Thrace's underdevelopment problem. In his report, the inspector-general vehemently expressed his disapproval of the discrepancy between the wealthy Jews, who dominated Thrace's trade, and the poor Turkish farmers. Thus, stated İbrahim Tali, in Thrace there was 'the Jewish problem, which should be totally resolved in order to create a comfortable environment for the Thracian Turks'.<sup>79</sup> He suggested that 'Thrace's profit and sources should be handed over to the real Turkish children [population], and the entire Thracian economy should be emancipated from Jewish influence'.<sup>80</sup>

It is important to note that İbrahim Tali's views reflected the Kemalist leadership's policy of Turkifying the country's economy at the expense of the non-Muslim minorities. After Lausanne, the Turkish state elite aimed at developing a self-sufficient 'national' economy by forming a loyal Turkish (Muslim) commercial class. Thus, the RPP government focused on weakening the non-Muslims' power in the country's economy by pursuing Turkification policies.<sup>81</sup> When the War of Independence came to an end, Turkish nationalists expected that Turks would fill the vacated business positions left by the country's mercantile Greek and Armenian communities. Yet, contrary to their expectations, Jews started to fill this gap.<sup>82</sup> In addition to economic reasons, Turkish nationalists also targeted the Jews given that they now became more visible as a minority after the expulsion of the Armenians and Greeks between 1914 and 1923. As Corry Guttstadt argues, Jews 'were distinguishable from the majority of the population by their names, language, and religious rites'.<sup>83</sup> And the chauvinistic and xenophobic sentiments that were directed primarily against Christians during the War of Independence were now turned against the Jews. Moreover, 'the bulk of the Muslim refugees and *muhacir*, many of whom had settled in Thrace, were particularly receptive to chauvinistic slogans, as the Jewish population of Thrace'<sup>84</sup> as the region's Jews would find out during the riots.

In the spring of 1934, Turkish uneasiness towards the economically well-off Thracian Jews started to express itself in the form of newspaper articles. For example, in May 1934, an article entitled 'The Villagers Should Be Emancipated from the Hands of Exploiters' appeared in the mainstream daily *Vakit* newspaper, which harshly criticized the Jews of Çanakkale for

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<sup>78</sup>ibid.

<sup>79</sup>ibid.

<sup>80</sup>ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Ahmet Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene: Türk Ulusal Kimliğinin Etno-Seküler Sınırları (1919–1938)*, 5th ed. [How Happy He, Who Can Say He Is a Turk: Ethno-Secular Boundaries of the Turkish National Identity (1919–1938)] (Istanbul: İletişim, 2013), p. 114; Alexandris, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul*, p. 106; and Okutan, *Tek Parti Döneminde Azınlık Politikaları*, pp. 214–215.

<sup>82</sup>Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri*, pp. 204–205; 'Turks Order Arrest of 3 as Foes of Jews: Officials Held Responsible', *New York Times*, 15 July 1934, p. 15.

<sup>83</sup>Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, p. 8.

<sup>84</sup>ibid. (emphasis in original).

dominating the province's trade, and seizing the properties of poor Turkish villagers when they were not able to pay back their loans. The anti-Semitic *Milli İnkılâp* journal<sup>85</sup> promptly republished the article,<sup>86</sup> and called for the emancipation of Turkish villagers from Jewish economic exploitation.<sup>87</sup> In May and June 1934, *Vakit* also published several anti-Semitic articles written by Mustafa Nermi, who lived in Germany at the time, while the daily *Cumhuriyet* already supported the Nazis' anti-Jewish boycott day of 1 April 1933 as 'an act of defense'.<sup>88</sup> Thus, in the 1930s anti-Semitism found its way into the Turkish mainstream press.<sup>89</sup>

Meanwhile, in May 1934, Turkish ultra-nationalist Cevat Rifat's anti-Semitic *Milli İnkılâp* journal also started a vigorous anti-Semitic propaganda campaign by focusing on the economic disparities between the Thracian Jews and Turks.<sup>90</sup> Thus, Turkish uneasiness regarding the economically well-off Jews was already present in Thrace, which required ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs like İbrahim Tali and Cevat Rifat to mobilize the region's Turks against the Jews. The riot producers successfully seized upon the June 1934 settlement law as an opportunity to mobilize the Turks against the Jews in Thrace.

The RPP government enacted settlement laws in order to implement its Turkification policies. On 13 June 1934, the RPP government passed a settlement law (No. 2510) primarily aimed at Turkifying the Kurds by relocating and mixing them with Turks. The law also aimed at Turkifying Thrace.<sup>91</sup> Article 2 of the law No. 2510 regulated immigration, and divided Turkey into three types of zones: the first zone would be reserved for the habitation of persons of Turkish culture; the second zone would be set aside for the relocation and resettlement of populations whom it was wished to assimilate into Turkish culture; and the third zone would be prohibited to populations whose culture was not purely Turkish—thus, they might be evacuated for hygienic, economic, cultural, political, military or security reasons.<sup>92</sup>

Bayraktar argues that there was a map attached to İbrahim Tali's aforementioned June 1934 report on Thrace. According to the map, Thrace was divided into zones based on the June 1934 settlement law. She maintains that '[i]t hardly comes as a surprise that the zones bordering Greece and Bulgaria and the Çanakkale district had been classified as Zone III, the zone that could be evacuated for military or other reasons'.<sup>93</sup> According to the map, only the central part of European Turkey that was classified as Zone II remained for inhabitants whose assimilation into Turkish culture was desirable, while most of the rest of Thrace was classified as Zone I, reserved for people who had deep attachment to Turkish culture.<sup>94</sup> It is important

<sup>85</sup>*Milli İnkılâp* was a national anti-Semitic journal read by Turkish ultra-nationalists.

<sup>86</sup>'Anadolu'dan feryat: Köylüyü, bezirganların elinden kurtarmalı!' [A Cry from Anatolia: Villagers Should Be Emancipated from the Exploiters!], *Milli İnkılâp*, 2 (15 May 1934), p. 3.

<sup>87</sup>Ragıp Kemal, 'Köylü, bezirganların elinden kurtarmalıdır' [Villagers Should Be Emancipated from the Exploiters], *Vakit*, 6 May 1934.

<sup>88</sup>Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, p. 57.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup>'Köylüyü bugünkü vaziyetinden kurtarmalıyız' [We Should Emancipate the Villagers from the Present Situation], *Milli İnkılâp*, 2 (15 May 1934), pp. 3–4; 'Turkey and the Jews: İsmet Pasha against Anti-Semitism', *New York Times*, 15 July 1934, p. 12.

<sup>91</sup>Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, pp. 84–85, 88; FO E 6434/5161/44. Mr. Morgan (Constantinople) to Sir John Simon, 13 October 1934, Doc. 134, in Gökay, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series B, Vol. 33, pp. 142, 148.

<sup>92</sup>SD 867.4016/JEWS/10. Skinner (Istanbul) to Washington, 6 July 1934; FO E 6434/5161/44. Mr. Morgan (Istanbul) to Sir John Simon, 13 October 1934, Docs. 134 and 135, in Gökay, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series B, Vol. 33, pp. 148–152; and 'Turks' Zoning Hits Jews: Many Move to Istanbul to Evade New Residence Restrictions', *New York Times*, 4 July 1934, p. 34.

<sup>93</sup>Bayraktar, 'The Anti-Jewish Pogrom in Eastern Thrace', p. 110.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*

to note that there was no order on the part of the Turkish state and government demanding the expulsion of Jews from Thrace. Yet the settlement law came into force on 21 June and shortly afterwards the anti-Jewish riots began in Çanakkale, and quickly spread to other provinces in Thrace. Extreme right-wing and anti-Semitic Turkish ultra-nationalists played the role of ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs during the riots.

### **Cevat Rifat (Atilhan) and Pan-Turkists: ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs during the 1934 anti-Jewish Thrace Riots**

In the 1930s, extreme right-wing and anti-Semitic Turkish ultra-nationalists inspired by Nazism, like Cevat Rifat, had reached out to the Turkish youth, including those in Thrace. Cevat Rifat (having links with Nazi Germany) via his journal *Millî İnkılâp* utilized the Turkish state establishment's security concerns, the settlement law and antagonism of both the state elite and the Turkish Muslim rural poor towards economically well-off Jews as an opportunity to mobilize ultra-nationalism.

Turkish ultra-nationalists, who believed in the superiority of the Turkish race,<sup>95</sup> did not regard the Kemalists as genuine nationalists given that their endeavour was to form a secular Turkish nation by adapting the modern Western state and society. Pan-Turkists also criticized the Kemalists for pursuing a passive foreign policy given that the state elite clearly refused the Turanist ambition of uniting all Turks under Turkey's leadership.<sup>96</sup> An overwhelming majority of the pan-Turkists abandoned the idea of pan-Turanism, and redefined themselves as Turkish nationalists in conformity with the Kemalist interpretation of Turkish nationalism.<sup>97</sup> Yet a small group of ultra-nationalists, including Hüseyin Nihal Atsız (1905–1975) and Cevat Rifat, continued to define Turkish nationalism with the Turkish race. In the 1930s, they tried to disseminate ultra-nationalism in Turkey by publishing pan-Turkist journals with anti-Semitic themes.<sup>98</sup>

It was Cevat Rifat's *Millî İnkılâp* journal that particularly promoted anti-Semitism in Thrace. Cevat Rifat, who was 'a guiding intellectual figure of anti-Semitic political Islam in Turkey';<sup>99</sup> fought in the Ottoman army against anti-Ottoman Arabs, British and Jews on the Sinai front during World War I. In 1933, he wrote a book entitled *Sina Cephesinde Yahudi Casuslar* [Jewish Spies on the Sinai Front], and published in Izmir (a province with an important Jewish population) an anti-Semitic journal *İnkılâp* [Revolution]. The journal praised Hitler and the Nazis in Germany, accused the Turkish Jews of betraying Turkey by not speaking Turkish, and called the Turkish youth to pursue the anti-Semitic policies of Nazi Germany and boycott Turkish Jewish businesses.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>95</sup>Günay Göksu Özdoğan, "Turan'dan "Bozkurt"a: Tek Parti Döneminde Türkçülük (1931–1946) [From Turan to Gray Wolfe: Turkish during the One Party Period (1931–1946)], 3rd ed. (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006), p. 14.

<sup>96</sup>İlker Aytürk, 'The Racist Critics of Atatürk and Kemalism, from the 1930s to the 1960s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46(2) (2011), pp. 308, 310.

<sup>97</sup>Özdoğan, "Turan'dan "Bozkurt"a, p. 13.

<sup>98</sup>Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism in Turkey: A Study of Irredentism* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1981), p. 94; Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 87–88; Özdoğan, "Turan'dan "Bozkurt"a, p. 18; and Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, p. 142.

<sup>99</sup>Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, p. 40.

<sup>100</sup>Rifat Bali, *Musa'nın Evlatları, Cumhuriyet'in Yurttaşları* [Children of Moses, Citizens of the Republic], 4th ed. (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005), pp. 232–233; Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*, pp. 76–77, 93; and Özdoğan, "Turan'dan "Bozkurt"a, p. 184.

It is important to note that in May 1933, Turkish Jews already urged the RPP government to take measures against the *İnkılâp* journal. In response to the Jews' quest, the RPP General Secretary reported on 17 May 1933 to the RPP Izmir Province Executive Committee Chairmanship that the journal was indeed 'a staunchly anti-Semitic' journal, 'imitating Hitlerism',<sup>101</sup> and ordered Recep Bey (Peker) (1888–1950), who was the RPP Izmir Province Executive Committee Chair and RPP MP from Balıkesir province, to investigate the issue.

Recep Bey contacted the journal's two prominent anti-Semitic authors, Cevat Rifat and Lemi Beys. However, in his June 1933 report to the party general secretary, Recep Bey denied the fact that Cevat Rifat and Lemi Beys pursued a pro-Hitler stance. Instead, he argued that their articles were an expression of their 'sincere feelings'. In his report, Recep Bey's biased stance towards the concerned Jews was quite notable: he accused the Jews of betraying Turks when Turkey was under allied occupation; threatened them to behave accordingly; urged them to speak Turkish and sincerely Turkify themselves in order to receive his assistance for the resolution of the problem.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, Recep Bey defended the *İnkılâp* journal's anti-Semitic stance even if he read Lemi Bey's letter of 8 June 1933 in which he made anti-Semitic remarks.<sup>103</sup> Thus, this gave a signal to the rioters<sup>104</sup> that the RPP government would condone the ultra-nationalists' anti-Semitic activities.

As a result of the support of some high-ranking RPP officials who acted as elite allies, such as Recep Bey, (*Milli İnkılâp* maintained its anti-Semitic publications until its closure in July 1934. Indeed in the 1930s pan-Turkists, via their publications, became influential over some university and high school students, teachers and university professors as well as politicians, retired generals, military officers and Turkish immigrants from Russia. Pan-Turkists particularly emphasized reaching the Turkish youth as a potential breeding ground for mobilizing ultra-nationalism in Turkey.<sup>105</sup>

Although anti-Semitism could not achieve broad support from the Turkish nation or the RPP government, it entered Turkey through foreign publications via Turkish ultra-nationalists. In the 1930s, central works of anti-Semitism were translated into Turkish and published in Turkey. For example, *Milli İnkılâp* published the translation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*<sup>106</sup> as a series, and published passages from Henry Ford's book *The International Jew* and Theodor Fritsch's *The Riddle of the Jew's Success*.<sup>107</sup>

Cevat Rifat's anti-Semitic *Milli İnkılâp* journal played a pivotal role in the Thrace riots by pursuing extensive anti-Semitic propaganda, alas, stimulating anti-Semitic feelings in the region starting in May 1934.<sup>108</sup> Cevat Rifat had direct connections with the Nazis. In the winter of 1933–1934, he went to Germany on the invitation of notorious Jew-baiter and

<sup>101</sup>BCA 490.01..590.40.1. 17 May 1933.

<sup>102</sup>BCA 490.01..590.40.1. 10 June 1933.

<sup>103</sup>BCA 490.01..590.40.1. 8 June 1933.

<sup>104</sup>Horowitz argues that in Moldova, the state authorities allowed an anti-Semitic newspaper to flourish, and this was perceived by rioters as a signal that the riot was condoned or even authorized. See Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, p. 351.

<sup>105</sup>Özdoğan, "Turan'dan "Bozkurt"a", pp. 13–14, 211; Landau, *Pan-Turkism*, p. 88.

<sup>106</sup>*The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was invented by the Czarist secret police in the late nineteenth century to provide a pretext for pogroms. See Stanford J. Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust: Turkey's Role in Rescuing Turkish and European Jewry from Nazi Persecution, 1933–1945* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 15.

<sup>107</sup>*Milli İnkılâp*, 1 (1 May 1934), pp. 8–14; *Milli İnkılâp*, 2 (15 May 1934), pp. 6–11; *Milli İnkılâp*, 3 (1 June 1934), pp. 8–9; and *Milli İnkılâp*, 4 (15 June 1934), pp. 10–11, 15.

<sup>108</sup>Turkey and the Jews: Ismet Pasha against Anti-Semitism', *New York Times*, 15 July 1934, p. 12; Erdem Güven and Mehmet Yılmazata, 'Milli İnkılâp and the Thrace Incidents of 1934', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 13(2) (July 2014), p. 190; and Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust*, p. 14.



racist Julius Streicher, who published the anti-Semitic journal *Der Stürmer*.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, Cevat Rifat received 80,000 Reich Marks from the Nazis for the German translation of his book entitled *İğneli Fıçık* [The Needled Barrel]. In December 1933, he also visited Alfred Rosenberg, the NSDAP Foreign Politics Bureau Chair and prominent Nazi ideologue, and participated in the March 1934 Congress of Enemies of Zionism, Communism, and Masonism in Munich.<sup>110</sup> Upon his return to Turkey in May 1934, Cevat Rifat renamed *İnkılâp* as *Milli İnkılâp* and based his journal in Istanbul, while writing several articles for *Der Stürmer* and *Weltdienst*<sup>111</sup> under the pen name 'Djev'.<sup>112</sup> Most of the anti-Semitic caricatures published in *Der Stürmer* appeared in *Milli İnkılâp*, with the German-Jewish names replaced by common Turkish-Jewish names. The journal persistently accused the Jews of betraying the Turkish nation; harshly criticized their growing domination of the country's trade; and argued that Jews could not be Turkified by adopting Turkish names. The journal also suggested that Turkey should not accept Jews who escaped Nazi persecution, but instead repatriate Muslim immigrants.<sup>113</sup>

In response to *Milli İnkılâp*'s anti-Semitic propaganda, on 22 May 1934, Turkish Jews once again expressed their concerns, this time in a letter addressed to Prime Minister İsmet İnönü. The Jews emphasized their loyalty to the Turkish Republic, and demanded a ban on the journal on account of its anti-Semitic propaganda. However, the RPP government maintained that there was nothing to be concerned about given that state authorities would take all necessary legal and administrative measures, and suggested that the Jews should be patient during this process. Meanwhile, *Milli İnkılâp* maintained its anti-Semitic propaganda and Atsız wrote a column threatening the Jews, who expressed their concerns regarding the journal.<sup>114</sup> However, the RPP government did not cease *Milli İnkılâp*'s anti-Semitic propaganda,<sup>115</sup> despite the fact that since July 1931 the government had been tightly controlling the press in Turkey.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, in the aftermath of the Thrace riots, *The New York Times* reported on 7 July 1934 that '10,000 copies of the newly published Turkish anti-Semitic organ, *Milli İnkılâp*, had been distributed during the last few days among the Thracian populace demanding the expulsion of Jews from Thrace.'<sup>117</sup> The Thrace riots support Brass's finding on the media's role in riot production; as he notes, '[t]he media, especially the newspapers, play important roles at all stages in the production of riots, including the planning and rehearsal stages, the instigation of riotous activity, and the interpretation phase.'<sup>118</sup> Although Aktar argues that given low literacy rates,<sup>119</sup> *Milli İnkılâp* had a negligible impact on the Thrace riots, Soner Çağaptay convincingly notes that 'an economic boycott started in Çanakkale against the city's successful Jewish community exactly at the time when *Milli İnkılâp* called for one in May 1934.'<sup>120</sup>

<sup>109</sup>Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust*, p. 14.

<sup>110</sup>Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*, pp. 89–90, 94; Bali, *Musa'nın Evlatları Cumhuriyet'in Yurttaşları*, pp. 211–256.

<sup>111</sup>*Weltdienst* was a biweekly anti-Semitic pamphlet published by Ulrich Fleischhauer.

<sup>112</sup>Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, p. 40.

<sup>113</sup>See *İnkılâp*, 6 (30 September 1933); *Milli İnkılâp*, 1 (1 May 1934); and Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*, p. 96.

<sup>114</sup>Atsız, 'Musanın necip (!) evlatları bilsinler ki' [Children of Moses Should Know!], *Milli İnkılâp*, 4 (15 June 1934), p. 9.

<sup>115</sup>Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*, pp. 100–101.

<sup>116</sup>FO E 4255/69/44. Sir G. Clerk (Istanbul) to Mr. A. Henderson, Doc. 197, in Bülent Gökay (ed.), *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series B: Turkey, Iran, and the Middle East, 1918–1939, Vol. 32, Turkey: January 1930–December 1932 (Bethesda, MD: ProQuest LLC, 2012), pp. 192–193.

<sup>117</sup>Jews Assailed in Thrace: Turkish Paper Urges Their Expulsion—Hebrews in Greece Alarmed, *New York Times*, 7 July 1934, p. 4.

<sup>118</sup>Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence*, p. 344.

<sup>119</sup>Aktar, 'Trakya Yahudi Olaylarını "Doğru" Yorumlamak', p. 49.

<sup>120</sup>Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, p. 143.

## The 1934 anti-Jewish Thrace riots and their aftermath

The Turkish state elite, including İbrahim Tali, RPP local officials and ultra-nationalists such as Cevat Rifat, acted as ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs, by both successfully framing the socioeconomic grievances of the Turkish (Muslim) poor and seizing upon the June 1934 settlement law as an opportunity to mobilize the Turkish masses against the Jews in Thrace.

In mid-June 1934, rumours about the Turkish government's intention to implement the settlement law and expel the Jews from Thrace started to circulate in the region. As Brass notes, 'False rumors are central in the spread of many riots everywhere in the world.'<sup>121</sup> Likewise, Tambiah argues that rumors 'generally appear anonymous in origin'<sup>122</sup> and they circulate via newspapers and pamphlets, and he emphasizes the importance of oral transmission of the rumours, particularly in situations where literacy is low.<sup>123</sup> Similarly, Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi maintains, '[r]umor derives its power from the fact that it accesses a level of consciousness in which everyone can participate, even those skeptical of the rumor's content.'<sup>124</sup>

Skinner reported on 6 July 1934 that '[t]he word was passed around amongst the Jews, generally, in some mysterious manner, that they would have to go, and being by nature a timorous people, their disposition is to take no chances but to get out as quietly and rapidly as possible.'<sup>125</sup> The ambassador noted that although the settlement law aimed at a gradual Turkification of Thrace, 'certain quarters' interpreted it 'as implying the immediate transfer from Thrace of individuals not purely Turkish.'<sup>126</sup> Skinner also argued that the decision to expel Jews was taken without consulting the prime minister, and emphasized the economic drive as a motivating force behind the rioters. He noted that many Jews received 'offers for the purchase of their property on absurdly low terms' and argued that 'there might be a concerted plan to spread undue alarm amongst the Jews, with a view to acquiring their property at low prices.'<sup>127</sup>

Likewise, the US diplomat in Istanbul Charles Allen noted on 28 July 1934 that the RPP government, which aimed at refortifying the Straits, planned a slow and entirely orderly deportation of Jews for political and military reasons. As he stated, 'the idea was ... to get rid of the Jews but at the same time to make it appear that they have left Thrace on their own initiative.'<sup>128</sup> Yet 'the movement got out of hand' given that both the officials and citizenry of Thrace moved much too rapidly, resulting in the panic of the Jews.<sup>129</sup> Similarly, the US Charge d'Affaires in Istanbul Shaw noted on 21 August 1934 that the RPP government's decision to remilitarize Thrace resulted in 'entirely unwarranted interpretations, as they were passed on from leaders to subordinates, and as rumors concerning them reached the civilian population.'<sup>130</sup> As Brass argues, rumours can spread like wildfire, and riot specialists assist the process.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>122</sup>Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*, p. 281.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., p. 281, fn 29.

<sup>124</sup>Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 82.

<sup>125</sup>SD 867.4016 JEWS/10. Skinner (Istanbul) to Washington, 6 July 1934.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid.

<sup>128</sup>SD 867.4016 JEWS/12. Allen (Istanbul), 'The Minorities', 28 July 1934.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid.

<sup>130</sup>SD 867.4016 JEWS/14. Shaw (Istanbul) to Washington, 21 August 1934.

<sup>131</sup>Paul R. Brass, 'Introduction: Discourses of Ethnicity, Communalism, and Violence', in Brass, *Riots and Pogroms*, p. 15.

The RPP government, by not taking the necessary measures against the local state elite like İbrahim Tali, RPP local officials and the ultra-nationalists, played the role of an inadvertent elite ally of the ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs. As Loraine stated on 7 July 1934, '[t]here is no doubt from the first that this sudden exodus of the Jewish population of Thrace was due to the action of the local authorities, who can hardly be supposed to have acted without the knowledge, even if not on the express orders, of the Central Government.'<sup>132</sup> Likewise, the Greek Ambassador to Ankara, K. Sakellaropoulos, reported on 12 July 1934 that the RPP government's assertion that the riots were caused by various irresponsible organizations on which the authorities were unable to impose order was unconvincing. He maintained, '[t]he authorities in Turkey, and in particular the superbly-organized police force, only fail to impose order when that is not their actual purpose.'<sup>133</sup> As Horowitz argues, riots are more likely to occur when the police are absent or allies and when politicians give them cover.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, in the 1930s, the Turkish security apparatus had been tightly controlling Turkey. For example, in July 1933 the Ministry of Interior sent a memorandum to all villages and towns in Turkey ordering the state and security apparatus to strictly control identification cards and activities of visitors in villages and towns, and to arrest them if necessary.<sup>135</sup> Given the significance of Thrace in the eyes of the Turkish state establishment, one can assume that the state elite had been paying special attention to the region's security.

Moreover, the RPP Secretary General Recep Bey's telegram on 15 July 1934 from the RPP Headquarters to the RPP local organizations in Thrace reveals the responsibility of the party's local organizations for the occurrence of the riots. He criticized the party's province chairmanships for not promptly informing the party's general secretary in Ankara regarding the riots in Thrace. It is interesting to note that Recep Bey in his telegram did not criticize the party's local offices for not prohibiting the occurrence of the riots, but for not informing the party's general secretary regarding the riots' preparation and implementation stages.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, İbrahim Tali was in Edirne when the first wave of the Thrace incidents started in Çanakkale on 21 June. The riots quickly spread to Edirne, Kırklareli and Tekirdağ.<sup>137</sup>

The Thrace riots confirm Brass's finding that 'many participants in riots whose causes have been said to be poverty and unemployment turn out to be employed.'<sup>138</sup> 'As in virtually all riots studies', argues Brass, 'there is evidence of mixed participation of all kinds of elements from teenagers to unskilled laborers to middle-class political activists.'<sup>139</sup> Similarly, Tambiah notes that rioters 'cannot be dismissed as vagrants, criminal elements, and the unemployed dregs',<sup>140</sup> but include students, workers, tradesmen, local politicians, the police and

<sup>132</sup>FO E 4633/4633/44. Sir P. Loraine (Constantinople) to Sir John Simon, 7 July 1934, Doc. 116, in Gökay, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series B, Vol. 33, p. 131.

<sup>133</sup>The Greek Consulate in Adrianople to the Greek Embassy in Ankara', 3 July 1934, in Photini Constantopolou and Thanos Veremis (eds), *Documents on the History of the Greek Jews* (Athens: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece and University of Athens, Kastaniotis Editions, 1998), pp. 241–242.

<sup>134</sup>Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, pp. 420, 481.

<sup>135</sup>BCA 030.10..206.406.29. T.C. Dahiliye Vekâleti, Emniyet İşleri Umum Müdürlüğü [Turkish Republic Minister of Interior Affairs, Directorate-General of Security Affairs], 'Yabancılar hakkında alınacak tedbir ve teyakuzlar hakkında' [Regarding Measures to be Taken about Visitors], Ankara, 31 July 1933.

<sup>136</sup>Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası Katibiummiliğinin Fırka Teşkilâtına Umumi Tbligatı Temmuz 1934'ten Birincikanun 1934 sonuna kadar [RPP Secretary General's Directives on the Party Organizations between July and November 1934], Vol. 5 (Ulus Matbaası, 1935), pp. 37–38.

<sup>137</sup>'İkinci U. Mufettiş İbrahim Tali B. mıntıkasındaki teftiş ve tetkikleri hakkında ne diyor?' [What Does the Second Inspector-General İbrahim Tali Say Regarding His Inspection on His Area?], *Hakimiyeti Milliye*, 21 June 1934, p. 3. İbrahim Tali left for Ankara on 23 June.

<sup>138</sup>Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence*, p. 17.

<sup>139</sup>Brass, *Riots and Pogroms*, p. 19.

<sup>140</sup>Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*, p. 216.

neighbours, while the unemployed and criminal elements can be found on the fringes of the crowds.<sup>141</sup> Participants in the Thrace riots ranged from poor Turkish villagers to local state officials, Turkish youth, students and Jews' Turkish neighbours. Thus, the Turkish case confirms the literature on ethno-nationalist riots, which argues that the rioters cannot be underplayed as marginal phenomena distanced from the main body of civilians.<sup>142</sup> Gains for the rioters were various, such as looting, harming of one's rivals in business, stealing the property of the weak and helpless, displacing unwanted elements from one's neighbourhood<sup>143</sup> and seizing the economic, occupational and social opportunities as a result of the displacement.<sup>144</sup>

The riots began on 21 June in Çanakkale, where around 1500 Jews lived and dominated trade. Some Jews were also providing loans to Turkish farmers. On 21 June, prominent Jews of Çanakkale received threatening letters ordering them to leave, otherwise they would be killed. The ultra-nationalist youth distributed anti-Semitic pamphlets. Turks called for a boycott of Jewish businesses, attacked Jewish homes and businesses, and looted and seized their property. Although the local Jews applied to the RPP province chairmanship and the governor, the riots continued.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, the RPP Çanakkale province chairmanship, in a report to the RPP General Secretary on 29 June 1934 regarding the riots, accused the Jews of exploiting the Thracian Turks. The report asserted that the 'exploited Turks' had started to boycott Jewish businesses about a month ago. And Jewish traders, who could not earn sufficiently as a result of the boycott, while also fearing rumours that violent incidents would occur, decided to migrate to Istanbul.<sup>146</sup>

In late June, the riots quickly spread to Edirne, where there had already been rumours that Turks would attack the Jews. Bali notes that prior to the riots, Edirne Revenue Service demanded that Jewish traders and artisans should immediately pay their taxes. This shows that some local state authorities already knew that the Jews would soon be expelled from the province.<sup>147</sup> The riots in Edirne began as calls to boycott Jewish businesses, and then escalated to prohibiting the preparation of kosher meat and inhibiting Jews from going to work by threatening them. Edirne's Jewish community applied to the governor with a quest to cease the Turks' anti-Jewish activities. The governor, however, did not take any measures to protect the Jews. While denying that the state authority was behind the riots, he argued that it was the public who demanded the Jews to leave Edirne and Thrace.<sup>148</sup>

It is interesting to note that the Greek Consul in Edirne argued that the decision to drive out Edirne's Jewish population, numbering 7–8000 people and relatively prosperous, was taken at the RPP-controlled people's houses.<sup>149</sup> 'According to the plan', the consul stated, 'the Jews will be terrorized by roundabout means of all kinds, with the toleration of the authorities, and compelled to leave Thrace by, as it were, their own will'.<sup>150</sup> The consul emphasized

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<sup>141</sup>Ibid., pp. 216–17, 276.

<sup>142</sup>See *ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>143</sup>See Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence*, p. 97.

<sup>144</sup>See Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*, p. 330.

<sup>145</sup>Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*, pp. 138–142.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., pp. 144–145.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., pp. 168–169.

<sup>149</sup>In 1931, the RPP government closed down the nationalist Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*), and formed in their place the people's houses as the party's organizations with the goal of modernizing Turkish society.

<sup>150</sup>'The Greek Consulate in Adrianople to the Greek Embassy in Ankara', 3 July 1934, in Constantopoulou and Veremis, *Documents on the History of the Greek Jews*, pp. 239–240.

the economic drive behind the riots by stating, '[t]he plan may make provision, later, for the Jews to be forced to scatter throughout Asia Minor in such a way as to prevent them constituting, from now on, concentrated and economically powerful communities.'<sup>151</sup> Eyewitnesses confirm the consul's observation.<sup>152</sup> Indeed, Bali notes that an article entitled 'Economic War' was published on 30 June 1934 in the Edirne people's house journal, *6 Ok* [Six Arrow], criticizing the Jewish domination of trade in Thrace. The article targeted Jews by arguing that a number of 'racially inferior' people dominated the region's commerce, and had been 'exploiting and enslaving the Turks', who were indeed 'the real owners of the country'.<sup>153</sup>

The next day, a provocative, anti-Semitic article appeared in *Millî İnkılâp*. The article's author was a reader of the journal from Edirne's Uzunköprü district, Osman oğlu Rasih, who insulted the Jews by calling them the most 'dishonest nation' in the world; accused them of exploiting the Turks; and called on Edirne's society to expel the Jews by violent means.<sup>154</sup> The next day, Edirne's Turks started to attack and beat the Jews by shouting the slogan of 'Death to the Jews!' Turks looted Jewish businesses and homes, while ordering them to leave the city immediately,<sup>155</sup> while food dealers 'received orders from the nationalist pogrom bands not to sell food to the Jews under pain of severe reprisals'.<sup>156</sup> Thus, the anti-Semitic press played a significant role in inflaming anti-Jewish sentiments among Thracian Turks.

On 3 July 1934, the Greek Consul in Edirne reported the worsening situation for the Jews as follows:

... the situation prejudicial to the Jews which has recently come into being in Thrace is worsening with each passing day. Criminal elements are going around the Jewish shops and threatening the shopkeepers that if they do not close they will be beaten—to the point where this poses a risk to their lives.<sup>157</sup>

The consul also reported that the chief of police in Edirne 'claimed that he knew nothing, pretending to complete ignorance of the situation!'<sup>158</sup> Moreover, *The Times* reported on 5 July 1934 that police officers in Edirne visited Turkish Jews on 3 July and ordered them to leave the town within 48 hours.<sup>159</sup>

Meanwhile, the riots quickly spread to Kırklareli and Tekirdağ. Ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs in Kırklareli managed to bring groups to the province without attracting any attention given that the traditional Kırkpınar Wrestling Championship was held on 3 July 1934. On the night of 3 July, Turks violently attacked Jews in Kırklareli, including Rabbi Moshe Fintz, who endorsed the dissemination of the Turkish language among the Jews. In addition to beatings and looting, there were also incidents of rape. Eyewitnesses reported that the police station seemed to be abandoned on the night of 3 July and no police officers could be seen on the streets. Thus, the security apparatus acted as elite allies of the ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs by tolerating the rioters. Wilkinson argues that force on the part of the state security

<sup>151</sup>Ibid.

<sup>152</sup>See Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*, pp. 223–225.

<sup>153</sup>Atılâ, 'İktisadi Savaş' [Economic War], *6 Ok*, 1(15) (30 June 1934), p. 3 (quoted from Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*, p. 139).

<sup>154</sup>Osman oğlu Rasih, 'Kari' yazısı', *Millî İnkılâp*, 5 (1 July 1934), p. 8.

<sup>155</sup>SD 867.4016 JEWS/8. Skinner (Istanbul) to Washington, 27 July 1934, 'Turkish Government Sanctioned Thrace Pogroms Report Hints', article from 'Jewish Telegraphic Agency', 24 July 1934.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid.

<sup>157</sup>'The Greek Consulate in Adrianople to the Greek Embassy in Ankara', 3 July 1934, in Constantopoulou and Veremis, *Documents on the History of the Greek Jews*, pp. 239–240.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>159</sup>Turkish Jews in Thrace, *The Times*, 5 July 1934, p. 13.

apparatus is important in preventing riots given that rioters are generally unwilling to confront armed and determined police or soldiers who are prepared to use deadly force to cease them.<sup>160</sup> Another indication that shows the riots were preplanned was that the usual train that left Kırklareli had an extra 15 carts on the morning of 4 July.<sup>161</sup> The Greek Consul General in Istanbul, D. Kapsalis, based on the eyewitness account of a Jewish Greek merchant, reported on 5 July 1934 that

... at 9.30 on the night of July 3 a group of pupils from the secondary school began to roam the streets of the Jewish quarter throwing stones at the houses. The group of boys was joined by the people of the town and soldiers without weapons, and the enraged crowd burst into the houses of the Jews, which they looted, insulting and manhandling the tenants.<sup>162</sup>

The anti-Jewish riots came to an end on 5 July, when Prime Minister İnönü delivered a speech at the Turkish parliament about the Thrace incidents. He vehemently condemned anti-Semitism, defended the rights of Turkish Jews and assured the Jews that they were free to return to Thrace.<sup>163</sup> The Turkish state authorities and the press remained silent until the prime minister's speech. The US diplomat in Istanbul, Allen, argued in July 1934 that the RPP government intervened in the riots when it could no longer safely ignore the accumulation of masses of Jews in Istanbul and the situation in the pillaged Jewish quarter in Kırklareli. And the intervention came 'at least a week after Istanbul (and presumably Ankara) knew what was going on in Thrace, so that it can hardly be called prompt'.<sup>164</sup>

Moreover, the RPP government published a communiqué on 5 July which asserted that the foreign media reports 'exaggerated' the ill treatment of Jews in the Dardanelles and Thrace. The communiqué stated that only a few Jews were 'intimidated by irresponsible people, who will be duly punished'.<sup>165</sup> Likewise Turkish newspapers tried to make the Jewish exodus appear as an insignificant local incident,<sup>166</sup> which occurred because of the 'unnecessary fear'<sup>167</sup> of the Thracian Jews. The press tried to conceal the fact that the riots were severe throughout Thrace and the rioters well organized. Moreover, Turkish dailies even asserted that Thracian Jews left for Istanbul to make trade,<sup>168</sup> while accusing them of lying by exaggerating the incidents and causing anti-Semitism in Turkey; mocking the victims; and threatening them to obey the laws and be loyal to the Turkish nation.<sup>169</sup> For example, pro-Kemalist daily *Cumhuriyet* mocked the Thracian Jews who escaped to Istanbul, by arguing

<sup>160</sup>Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*, pp. 19–20.

<sup>161</sup>SD 867.4016 JEWS/8. Skinner (Istanbul) to Washington, 27 July 1934, 'Turkish Government Sanctioned Thrace Pogroms Report Hints', article from 'Jewish Telegraphic Agency', 24 July 1934; Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*, pp. 216–219; and Bayraktar, 'The Anti-Jewish Pogrom in Eastern Thrace in 1934', p. 97.

<sup>162</sup>D. Kapsalis, Consul General in Istanbul to the Greek Embassy in Ankara, 5 July 1934, in Constantopoulou and Veremis, *Documents on the History of the Greek Jews*, pp. 241–242.

<sup>163</sup>SD 867.4016 JEWS/10. Skinner (Istanbul) to Washington, 6 July 1934; 'Expulsion of Jews from Thrace', *The Times*, 7 July 1934, p. 11.

<sup>164</sup>SD 867.4016 JEWS.12. Allen (Istanbul) to Washington, 28 July 1934, 'The Minorities'.

<sup>165</sup>'Denies Attacks on Jews: Turkey Calls Reports Exaggerated and Promises Protection', *New York Times*, 6 July 1934, p. 3.

<sup>166</sup>'Trakya'dan gelen Yahudiler meselesinin mahiyeti: Cürüm işleyenler mahkemeye verildi' [Content of the Incident Regarding Jews, Who Came from Thrace: Court Cases Were Opened up for Those Who Committed Crimes], *Milliyet*, 6 July 1934, p. 2.

<sup>167</sup>'Trakya'dan gelen Museviler: Şükrü Kaya Bey mahalinde tahkikat yapacak' [Jews, Who Came from Thrace: Şükrü Kaya Bey Will Investigate on the Location], *Milliyet*, 6 July 1934, pp. 1, 6.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid.

<sup>169</sup>'Yahudilerin lüzumsuz telaşa düştükleri anlaşılıyor: Kırklareli'nden gelenler evleri taşlandıkları için kaçtıklarını söylüyorlar' [It Is Understood that Jews Were Unnecessarily Feared: Kırklareli Jews Claim That They Escaped Because Their Windows Were Stoned], *Vakit*, 7 July 1934, pp. 1, 10; 'Trakya'dan İstanbul'a gelen yahudiler: Dahiliye vekili dün Kırklareli'nde tahkikat yaptı' [Jews, Who Came to Istanbul from Thrace: Yesterday Interior Minister Made an Investigation in Kırklareli], *Cumhuriyet*, 8 July 1934, pp. 1, 5.



that around 1500 'unnecessarily panicked' Jews made the railway company the only winner of the incidents on account that the firm sold tickets on the black market.<sup>170</sup> Meanwhile, the daily *Vakit* declared that 'if Jews will attempt to crucify the Turkish economics and language, they would forcibly create anti-Semitism in Turkey'.<sup>171</sup> Contrary to the Turkish press, however, the Greek Consul in Edirne reported on 4 July 1934 the desperate situation of the Jews as follows:

... the exodus of the Jews, in their hundreds, continued throughout the day yesterday. They are all panic-stricken. ... these unfortunate people are being driven by the terror which has overcome them to abandon everything here and suffer great losses. Although so far no one has come to any harm, all of them—in view of the threats they have heard—have closed their businesses and locked themselves up in their houses.<sup>172</sup>

Indeed, the riots and their possible repercussions even became a source of concern for the Saloniki Jews, who feared the emergence of an anti-Jewish wave there.<sup>173</sup> *The New York Times* reported on the Jewish exodus in Thrace on 8 July 1934 as follows:

Thousands of refugees are arriving from the Dardanelles. Two trains from the Adrianople region arrived today, crowded with Jewish families, many of whom, fled, leaving all their property behind. Synagogues, hotels and private homes are crowded to capacity with refugees. Some reported they left home hurriedly, carrying a few possessions in ox carts, but were attacked and robbed before reaching their destinations. Refugees from Luleburgas, Canak [*sic*] [Çanakkale], and regions near by [*sic*] claim Jews resident there have been driven to panic by ill treatment from aboriginal Turks who have been robbing them and attacking them.<sup>174</sup>

Between 6 and 10 July, Minister of Interior Şükrü Kaya and İbrahim Tali visited Thrace in order to investigate the riots.<sup>175</sup> Following the investigation, the RPP government ordered the arrest of Kırklareli province's governor, chair of the chamber of commerce, and police chief for their roles in spreading the rumours and their failure to suppress the resulting riots.<sup>176</sup> However, they were set free a few days after being arrested, despite the fact that some of the stolen goods were found at the house of the police chief.<sup>177</sup> Around 60 people were sent to prison after being judged guilty of attacks on Jews, while the RPP government demanded that thieves return, under penalty of long imprisonment, goods stolen from Jewish citizens.<sup>178</sup> The government banned *Milli İnkılâp* for its vigorous anti-Semitic campaign resulting in the Jewish exodus from Thrace.<sup>179</sup> However, in the end, only six people of unimportance were sentenced to imprisonment from three to six months in relation to the riots.<sup>180</sup> As Horowitz argues, punishment or careful investigation after a riot is unusual if the authorities are supportive or tolerant of violence.<sup>181</sup>

On 14 July, Kaya issued an official statement regarding the riots, which maintained that anti-Semitism had been present in Thrace since the time of World War I. Although the Turkish

<sup>170</sup> 'Trakya'dan İstanbul'a gelen yahudiler', *Cumhuriyet*, 8 July 1934, pp. 1, 5.

<sup>171</sup> Selami İzzet, 'Yahudi hadisesi' [The Jewish Incident], *Vakit*, 8 July 1934, p. 3.

<sup>172</sup> 'The Greek Consulate in Adrianople to the Greek Embassy in Ankara', 4 July 1934, in Constantopoulou and Veremis, *Documents on the History of the Greek Jews*, pp. 240–241.

<sup>173</sup> 'Jews Assailed in Thrace: Turkish Paper Urges Their Expulsion—Hebrews in Greece, Alarmed', *New York Times*, 7 July 1934, p. 4.

<sup>174</sup> 'Jews Flee to Istanbul', *New York Times*, 8 July 1934, p. 15.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*; SD 867.4016 JEWS/12. Allen (Istanbul), 28 July 1934, 'The Minorities'.

<sup>176</sup> 'Turks Order Arrest of 3 as Foes of Jews: Officials Held Responsible', *New York Times*, 15 July 1934, p. 15.

<sup>177</sup> Bayraktar, 'The Anti-Jewish Pogrom in Eastern Thrace in 1934', p. 97.

<sup>178</sup> 'Turkey Protects Jews: Jails 60 Persons for Attacks in Thrace—Orders Return of Loot', *New York Times*, 11 July 1934, p. 13.

<sup>179</sup> 'Milli İnkılâp mecmuası kapatıldı' [Milli İnkılâp Magazine Has Been Closed Down], *Cumhuriyet*, 17 July 1934, p. 2.

<sup>180</sup> Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey*, p. 148; Bayraktar, 'The Anti-Jewish Pogrom in Eastern Thrace in 1934', pp. 97–98.

<sup>181</sup> Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, p. 364.

state suspended it, he argued, anti-Semitism had once again penetrated the country during the last few years, and anti-Semitic articles published recently in certain journals troubled the reciprocal sentiments of Turks and Jews. The Jews, however, were not blameless in the emergence of anti-Semitism given that they persisted in preserving a foreign language and culture, and as a result, 'a presumption against certain of them arose that they were spies, and dangerous to the security of the country in the demilitarized zones.'<sup>182</sup> The Turkish case confirms the literature on ethno-nationalist riots, which notes that state authorities usually blame the victims and hold them responsible for the riots.<sup>183</sup>

After the official statement on 14 July, the press ceased reporting on the riots. Moreover, the Turkish state itself pursued a policy of denial as if nothing had happened in Thrace. For example, a state report on Edirne for the year 1934 stated, '[s]ecurity in our province is at a level that one can be proud of'.<sup>184</sup> Another report by the Inspectorate-General of Thrace in August 1935 asserted that between April 1934 and July 1935 no incident occurred in Thrace.<sup>185</sup> Despite his role in the riots, İbrahim Tali continued to be the Inspector-General of Thrace. Moreover, he even stated to the *Cumhuriyet* daily in July 1934 that the Thracian incidents occurred because of 'the unnecessarily feared Jews' and maintained that 'there is neither a Jewish problem nor can there be one. You can write that today in Thrace and Çanakkale everything is normal'.<sup>186</sup>

The US Vice Consul in Istanbul, Howard Elting Jr., reported in August 1934 that the Turkish state did nothing 'to assist the Jews who fled to reestablish themselves but that on the contrary the affair is being hushed up in order that, by the hands-off policy of the authorities, they may be discouraged from returning permanently'.<sup>187</sup> Moreover, Turkish Prime Minister İnönü toured Thrace in December 1934 during which he neither mentioned the Thrace riots nor met any Jews in the region. 'I am very pleased to see the results that I received [in Thrace]', he stated, and argued that many Muslim immigrants had been settled in the region in an orderly manner.<sup>188</sup> Thrace's Jews, who did not feel reassured by the Turkish state's policies, did not return to the region and the remaining Jews started to migrate to Istanbul and Izmir. By the year 1935, Thrace's Jewish population had dropped from 13,000 to 7555. It continued to decline and finally dwindled in the following years.

Meanwhile, Turkey maintained its policy of repatriating Muslims from Bulgaria and Rumania to Turkey, and settled them in Thrace.<sup>189</sup> In 1934, around 100,000 Muslim immigrants came to Turkey and an overwhelming majority of them settled in Thrace.<sup>190</sup> Indeed, İbrahim

<sup>182</sup>SD 867.4016 JEWS/11. Skinner (Istanbul) to Washington, 16 July 1934, 'Subject: Agitation Amongst the Jews in Thrace'.

<sup>183</sup>Leonidas E. Hill, 'The Pogrom of November 9–10, 1938 in Germany', in Brass, *Riots and Pogroms*, p. 107.

<sup>184</sup>BCA 30.10..64.432.17. 'Edirne ilinin genel durumunu bildiren rapor 1934' [Report Showing the General Situation of Edirne Province, 1934].

<sup>185</sup>BCA 30.10..72.475.2. 'Trakya Umumi Müfettişlik bölgesinin bugünkü genel ve iskân durumunu gösteren rapor' [Report Showing the Thrace Inspector-General Region's Current Situation and Settlements], 28 August 1935.

<sup>186</sup>'Trakyalı Yahudiler: İbrahim Tali Bey izahat veriyor' [Thracian Jews: İbrahim Tali Bey Explains], *Cumhuriyet*, 15 July 1934, pp. 1, 3.

<sup>187</sup>SD 867.9111/420. Elting (Istanbul) to Washington, 'Digest of the Turkish Press for the Period July 15–August 11, 1934'.

<sup>188</sup>'Başbakanımızın Trakya için dedikleri' [Prime Minister's Statements on Thrace], *Cumhuriyet*, 12 December 1934, p. 1.

<sup>189</sup>'Memlekete muhacir akını: Bu sene Balkanlardan 50,000 kişi gelecek' [Flow of Immigrants to the Country: This Year 50,000 People Will Come from the Balkans], *Cumhuriyet*, 11 August 1934, pp. 1, 4; FO R 6062/243/7 p. 153. Mr. Morgan (Angora) to Sir John Simon, 26 October 1934, Doc. 138, in Gökay, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series B, Vol. 33; FO E 6434/5161/44 p. 148. Mr. Morgan (Istanbul) to Sir John Simon, 13 October 1934, Doc. 134, in Gökay, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series B, Vol. 33, p. 153.

<sup>190</sup>'Muhacir iskânı: 1934'te 100 bin muhacir geldi 30 bin daha gelecek' [Settlement of Immigrants: In 1934 100,000 Immigrants Came, 30,000 People Will Come], *Cumhuriyet*, 11 November 1934, pp. 1, 6.

Tali in a report to the Prime Ministry in November 1934 proudly reported that all state assistance was being provided to Muslim immigrants who settled in Thrace.<sup>191</sup> Likewise, Turkish Minister of Interior Şükrü Kaya stated on 13 November 1934 that 'there are 1,000,000 Turks in Bulgaria, 400,000 in Rumania, 200,000 in Yugoslavia and from 20,000 to 30,000 Turks in other countries throughout the world';<sup>192</sup> and declared Turkey's desire to repatriate all these people. In another report on 4 February 1935, İbrahim Tali stated that out of 100,000 migrants, 90,000 would be settled in Thrace, while the remaining would be sent to eastern Turkey. The report estimated that in the coming four years, 173,000 migrants could be settled in Thrace (45,000 in Edirne; 44,000 in Kırklareli; 44,000 in Çanakkale; and 40,000 in Tekirdağ),<sup>193</sup> while in May 1935, the RPP government declared Kırklareli a military zone in which only Muslims were allowed to live.<sup>194</sup>

## Conclusion

The 1934 anti-Jewish Thrace riots were among the most dramatic incidents in the history of Turkish–Jewish relations, resulting in the virtual disappearance of the Jewish community in Thrace, and their concentration in Istanbul and Izmir.<sup>195</sup> Drawing upon the literature on ethno-nationalist riots, this article has argued that the 1934 anti-Jewish riots in Thrace were not spontaneous occurrences caused by over-excited masses, but instead planned actions by some local state elite, RPP local officials and anti-Semitic Turkish ultra-nationalists. The article has maintained that it was not popular anti-Semitism but the Turkish state establishment's security concerns vis-à-vis the perceived Italian and Bulgarian threat that resulted in the riots. The local state elite, including İbrahim Tali, and RPP local officials who were uneasy about the economically well-off Jews acted as ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs by allowing the ultra-nationalists to operate in the riot-prone Thrace. The RPP government, by not taking the necessary measures against the local state elite, RPP local officials and ultra-nationalists, played the role of an inadvertent elite ally of the ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs, while the rioters mainly participated in the collective violence to receive economic gains as a result of the expulsion of the Jews.

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<sup>191</sup>BCA 30.10..72.472.8. 'Merkez İskân komisyonunun kararları hakkında' [Regarding the Decisions of the Central Settlement Commission], 28 November 1934.

<sup>192</sup>SD 867.401/22. Skinner (Istanbul) to Washington, 13 November 1934, 'Repatriation of Turks from Balkan Countries'.

<sup>193</sup>BCA 30.10..72.474.6, '1935 ve sonraki yıllarda Edirne'ye gelecek göçmenlerin yerleştirilmeleri' [Settlement of Immigrants, Who Will Come to Edirne in 1935 and the Following Years], 4 February 1935.

<sup>194</sup>*The Times*, 22 May 1935, p. 11.

<sup>195</sup>Weiker, *Ottomans, Turks, and the Jewish Polity*, p. 247.