

Turkey's Jews and their Immigration to Israel

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Turkey, traditionally, is recognized as a 'sending' country in terms of international migration flows, and in the form of both labour migration and asylum seekers, it has sent out thousands of immigrants, mainly to European countries.¹ For these reasons, existing studies on Turkey and international migration have traditionally focused on Turkish immigrants in Europe, mainly those in Germany, or on the characteristics of Turkey as a sending country characteristic.²

The migration of Jews from Turkey to Israel is the second largest mass emigration movement out of Turkey, the first being labour migration to Europe.³ The largest mass emigration of minorities from Turkey was that of the Greeks during the Turkish–Greek population exchanges of the early 1920s. However, the emigration of the Jews was not part of a government-mandated population exchange. On the contrary, the Jews immigrated to Israel of their own free will. Despite this prominent characteristic, the mass migration of Jews to Israel has failed to attract significant attention either from the perspective of policy-making or of social science, as shown by the paucity of studies on the subject. Even in terms of official documentation on the scope of migration from Turkey to Israel, the more concrete and reliable data come from Israeli sources, which can be interpreted as a natural consequence of Israel being founded by Jewish immigration (*aliya*)⁴ from all over the world. On the Turkish side, as a sending country, there is a scarcity of official documentation of Jewish emigration.

The current study gives an historical account of Jewish migration from Turkey to Israel. It examines not only the specificity of the movement in terms of size, scope, group characteristics of the immigrants and push/pull factors that motivate migration, but also the legislative and administrative measures taken by both countries in handling the movement of thousands from one to another. This examination is in three parts. In the first, background information is presented on Jewish emigration from Turkey to Palestine prior to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, and mainly focuses on the early years of modern Turkey which were marked by a nation-building process at national level and by the rise of Nazism and anti-Semitism in Europe at international level. The second part depicts the period after 1948 until today in two separate periods, since the mass migration of 1948–51 (the great wave)⁵ is different in both size and character from subsequent migrations to Israel. It gives a general description of the actors, factors and conditions involved both in the great wave and the ensuing migrations. In the third part of the study focuses on the question of how Turkey and Israel dealt with the immigration of Jews

from Turkey to Israel, summarizing the legislative changes and administrative measures taken by Turkey and Israel that affected the status of migrants.

The invasion of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War and the beginning of the Turkish War of Independence in 1919 generated a push on emigration of non-Muslims in the Balkans and Anatolia to foreign countries which continued after the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Similarly, many Jews emigrated in groups due to economic, social and political factors, to France, Italy, Greece, the USA, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, Uruguay, or Palestine.⁶ The migration flows to these countries fluctuated over time as a reflection of the intensity of the factors spurring them. Palestine was the primary destination point for Turkey's Jews.

The basic difference between the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic with respect to Jewish immigration lies in which countries received and which sent the migrants. The Ottoman Empire had mainly been a receiving country for Jews from all around the world. Although there has always been emigration of Jews, the large numbers of Jewish immigrants received is incomparable to the small scope of Jewish emigration. The empire's liberal reception policies towards Jews as well as its religious tolerance towards non-Muslims made the country a choice destination for Jewish immigrants from Europe and Russia where Jews frequently suffered under severe ethno-religious oppression. In contrast, however, Turkey was predominantly a sending country with respect to its Jewish population. Over time the number of Jews in Turkey dwindled, leaving only some 20,000–25,000 Jews in 2003 of an estimated census figure of 81,400 in 1927.⁷ Emigration was the major reason for this decline. To this day, Turkey can still be considered a sending country of Jews, as its Jewish community continues to shrink due to emigration.

Jewish emigration from Turkey to Palestine between 1923 to 1948 – that is, from the foundation of the Turkish Republic until the foundation of Israel – can be analysed at both domestic and international levels. At the domestic level, Turkey's nation-building process urged that the status of non-Muslims (and hence Jews) who were long used to living under the *millet* system be changed to a minority regime, the essentials of which were set by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. In attempts to generate this from above, the Turkish state entailed certain social, economic and cultural reforms. In this process, education was unified under a national administrative unit, Turkish was promoted as the national tongue, population exchanges were made between Greeks in Anatolia and Muslims in the Balkans, and the emergence of a national bourgeoisie and entrepreneur class was supported. All these reforms aimed at homogenization, which put pressure on minority groups to adapt to the new reforms and policies. Among the Jews who immigrated, there was a failure to adapt to the ideas of the new nation-state. There were also various incidents involving non-Muslim minorities such as the 1934 Thracian Incidents⁸ and the 1942 capital tax.⁹ Hence, emigration from Turkey to Palestine in 1923–48 had domestic dynamics shaped by Turkey's own nation-building process.

At international level, the rise of anti-Semitism and the Nazi Party in Germany in the 1920s led to gravely tragic consequences for European Jews and worldwide Jewry alike. The Nazi 1933 rise to power in Germany brought with it a systematic

anti-Semitism armed with militaristic and fascist weapons. Before and during the Second World War, Jews living in countries invaded by the Nazis were forced to flee to escape at best, harsh oppression or at worst, the methodical slaughter seen in the concentration camps and elsewhere. These developments reinforced the idea that a Jewish state established in Palestine was needed for Jews to live in a safe, liberal environment, free from anti-Semitism. Consequently, Jewish immigration to Palestine, specifically from Central and Eastern European countries, accelerated. Turkey served as a legal/illegal transit site for Jewish immigration to Palestine. However, the rise of Nazism in Europe influenced some nationalists in Turkey which so led to increasing in anti-Semitism in the 1930s and 1940s. Accordingly, Jews in Turkey joined the global wave of Jewish emigration to Palestine. Thus the Second World War and the rise of Nazism also affected Jewish emigration from Turkey to Palestine in the 1923–48 period.

From 1923 to the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, it is estimated that 7,308 Jews emigrated from Turkey to Palestine.¹⁰ Throughout the 1920s, the immigration of Jews remained slight. In newspapers of the period, frequent pointed references were made to the way some Greeks and Armenians sided with the invasion forces and against the Turkish forces during the War of Independence. Although for their part Turkey's Jews had not sided with the invaders, they were lumped in with other non-Muslims and therefore faced similar accusations. These accusations called on some of the Jews to emigrate to Palestine. In addition, some Jewish office-holders working for state-owned companies immigrated to Palestine after their appointments were terminated.

A significant rise was seen in Jewish emigration from Turkey to Palestine after the 1934 Thrace incidents. Anti-Semitic attacks on Jews in Europe and anti-Semitic publications in Turkey – especially in the Thrace region – were causing frustration among Turkish Jewry. After the Thrace incidents beginning on 3 July 1934 in Kırklareli, Edirne and Çanakkale, some Jews who had faced attacks by civilian groups went on to emigrate to Palestine either directly or via Istanbul. It is estimated that 521 Jews left Turkey for Palestine in 1934, and another 1,445 emigrated the following year.¹¹ Jewish emigration to Palestine after the Thrace incidents was generally organized by the Jewish Colonization Agency and the Palestine Aliya Anoar Organization, both of which had offices or representatives in Istanbul.

The outbreak of the Second World War in Europe in 1939 resulted in an immense wave of Jewish refugees, part of which was directed towards Turkey – naturally, as it shared borders with Europe and also pursued a foreign policy of neutrality. However, fearing that many would rather settle within its own borders, Turkey did not grant full refugee status to these immigrants.¹² Only some 800 German-speaking Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis were received in Turkey in 1933–45.¹³ However, Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust with Palestine as their destination used Turkey as a transit country en route. The Turkish government cooperated with Britain in its efforts to stem illegal human traffic to Palestine and developed a policy that combined a willingness to make some concessions with a desire to remain in control of the refugee flow.¹⁴ In consequence, around 37,000 European Jews used Turkey as a transit site to emigrate to Palestine between 1934 and 1944.¹⁵

The Jews of Turkey, on the other hand, did not go to Palestine en masse as did their European counterparts but rather joined in the wave of emigration in small

numbers. The emigration of Turkish Jews was largely illegal and unsystematic. Visas for Palestine were strictly controlled by Britain, and priority was given to applicants from Central European and Balkan countries. Permits for Turkish Jews to immigrate to Palestine were given in very limited numbers by the British authorities. Since married couples were issued a single visa for the entire family, fake marriages were performed among Jews in Turkey in order to obtain this family visa. Apart from legal means of emigration, there were also illegal ways to get from Turkey into Palestine. Some Turkish Jews emigrated there using fake documents or without passports.

The main factors behind the emigration of Turkish Jews to Palestine during the Second World War were the fear that the Nazis would also come to occupy Turkey, Zionist ideals such as helping the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine,¹⁶ and the Turkification process and nation-building.¹⁷ The 1942 Capital Tax was also a cause of this emigration. In 1943–44, around 4,000 Jews emigrated. Just after the Second World War, this emigration fell, but the decrease only continued until Israel declared independence in 1948. From 1946 to 1948, it is estimated that only 121 Jews emigrated from Turkey to Palestine.¹⁸

The establishment of the State of Israel transformed the conventional Jewish movement from Turkey into a mass wave of emigration. Jews in Turkey greeted the establishment of an official state for the Jews with great enthusiasm. Since Turkey's single-party period had ended with the Democrat Party emerging as a strong opposition party which granted more freedom and relaxed some of the more rigorous aspects of secularism, the immediate mass emigration wave to Israel following its founding was mainly due to Israel's attraction.¹⁹ Naturally, Turkish Jews immigrated to Israel not as part of an exchange of populations. They were able to travel back to Turkey and therefore they maintained their ties there.

In the great wave of 1948–51, a total of 34,547 Jews – making up nearly 40 per cent of the Jewish community in Turkey at the time – emigrated from Turkey to Israel.²⁰ From 14 May 1948 until November of that year, 4,362 Jews emigrated from Turkey to Israel.²¹ Turkey, having not recognized Israel immediately after its proclamation of statehood, suspended permits to emigrate there in November 1948, in response to objections from Arab countries. However, this restriction did not stop the emigration of Jews by illegal means. In particular young Jews seeking to avoid conscription in Turkey emigrated to Israel, sometimes using Italy or France as transit sites. In 1949 Turkey officially recognized Israel and so cancelled all the travel and emigration restrictions. The Turkish state neither promoted nor obstructed emigration to Israel but after the suspension of permits to emigrate to Israel was lifted in March 1949, a breakneck rush ensued, with around 26,000 going in that year. Jews were able to emigrate to Israel directly from Turkey without having to use transit sites. This wave continued in 1950 with 2,491 emigrants and in 1951 with 1,388.²² By early 1951, after even Jews who felt encumbered by business or family responsibilities in their desire to emigrate from Turkey to Israel ended up leaving, the mass migration was complete. After 1951, the emigration of Jews to Israel slowed down but has continued, although in lesser numbers, until the present day. However, not all the Jews in this emigration wave stayed in Israel. In the mid 1950s, 10 per cent

of the total immigrants returned to Turkey. Some returnees later re-migrated from Turkey to other countries in Europe and North and South America.²³

In the great wave of 1948–51, a large majority of the emigrants came from the lower classes.²⁴ They were by and large involved in low-skilled occupations with experience in crafts and industry, and they moved to Israel for access to better opportunities to improve their economic status.²⁵ These lower classes were less influenced by the Alliance Israelite Universelle schools and the republic's modernizing trends. Furthermore, they were less upwardly mobile and more disadvantaged in terms of access to opportunities for economic betterment. Among this group of poor emigrants, there were also those forced under the Capital Tax to sell all their property, becoming lower class in the process. In addition to the desire for prospects of a better life, there was also the impact of religious beliefs. Lower-class emigrants had a strong Jewish sense of identity deeply rooted in the traditional and religious institutions of the Jewish community. The messianic belief played a role in the emigration of lower-class Jews to Israel. Especially the elderly, notwithstanding illness or advanced years, immigrated to Israel in keeping with their belief in the promised land.²⁶ Even so, economic factors were the dominant theme among lower-class emigrants in their motivation to move. Most of the lower-class emigrants did not speak Hebrew, nor had they any knowledge of the conditions they would face on arrival in Israel.

Another group of emigrants in the great wave of 1948–51 was that of young Jews. There were many sub-sets within this group, one being that of upper-middle and middle-class youth. Most of them had high school and university educations. They also had a strong sense of Jewish identity, but were more influenced by Zionism. Zionism was not a powerful mass ideology among Jews in Turkey, although during the Second World War some Jews, especially younger ones, came to find it attractive. The Turkish state did not believe that the ideology of Zionism posed a threat to its fundamental pillars.²⁷ At that time Zionist associations and groups were weak in terms of both numbers and organization.²⁸ The most prominent Zionist organizations in Turkey were Ne'emanei Tsion, Betar, Hahalutz and Irgun Tsinoi Be Kusta. These organizations not only aided illegal migration to Israel from Turkey before 1949, when restrictions on migration were lifted, but also spread the ideology of Zionism to young Jews to recruit them to move to Israel and help establish a Jewish state. Apart from Zionist ideals, some of these young Jews, who were either university students or recent graduates of universities in Turkey, emigrated to Israel to pursue careers in public service. As members of Turkey's non-Muslim minority, they believed it would be impossible for them to find positions in civil service due to discrimination against non-Muslims in state recruitment policies. Thus they sought rather to try their chances at forging a public service career path in Israel. Another subset among emigrant youth was made up of young Jewish women. These women were mainly from lower-class families who were unable to pay *drahoma*²⁹ to Jewish grooms for marriage. So that their daughters could get married to Jewish men in Israel without need for *drahoma*, such families supported their daughters' emigration to Israel. Young males at or near the age of conscription made up another subset of this youth wave. These men wanted to avoid being drafted by the Turkish military. Turkey permitted emigration to Israel, and passports were easily obtainable. However, they were given to male citizens only upon proof that their legal military

service had been fulfilled. Therefore, these young men emigrated to Israel illegally and without Turkish passports.

Migrants from Turkey to Israel in the great wave of 1948–51 were settled in various kibbutzim, moshavim, small villages or migrant camps.³⁰ Some immigrants from Turkey were involved in establishing kibbutzim or moshavim, but their number was low compared with other immigrant communities.³¹ Some of these settlements established with the support of immigrants from Turkey were Hagoshrim, Bet Netef, Burgata, Geva Hakarmel, Gazit, Tel Shahaar, Kfar Zeharia, Olesh, Tzuba, Bet Jubri, Nahsholim, Gevulot, Nir Eliyahu and Kerem Ben Zimra.³² The name Hagoshrim, given to the kibbutz where Turkish Jews were most concentrated, means 'bridge', thus symbolizing the bridge built between Turkey and Israel.

The infrastructure conditions of these settlements were poor. There was a scarcity of food, drugs and energy. There was also a cultural divide between the immigrants from Turkey and other immigrant groups. Since most of the immigrants from Turkey did not speak Hebrew when they first arrived, in the beginning communication with others was through translators. Work opportunities were also very limited and priority was given to Ashkenazi Jews. Although there were protests by immigrants criticizing conditions in the settlements, the Turkish Jews chose not to participate in these, presenting instead a more passive manner in contrast to other groups who questioned reception policies.³³ Only a small number of immigrants in the great wave stayed in the moshavim or kibbutzim, as most of them moved to small towns, such as the former Arab town of Yahud, where they found work and small houses to settle in.

By their immigration, Turkish Jews carved themselves out a place in two sectors they had never been involved in when in Turkey. One of these was agriculture. Jews in Turkey were mostly urban, and there was no Jewish peasantry in the times of the Ottoman Empire or the Turkish Republic. Instead, Jews were concentrated mostly in trade and artisanship. However, when they immigrated to Israel, they took up work in agriculture. Another addition to their occupational mix was the defence sector. Although these Jews had not pursued professions in the Turkish Army, among the migrants from Turkey in Israel several were recruited to the Israel Defence Forces as professional soldiers.

Mass immigration of Turkish Jews to Israel in 1948–51 not only affected the immigrants themselves but also caused immense changes in the profile of the Jewish community which chose to stay behind. Since Jewish community leaders moved to Israel not in the 1948–51 wave but rather in subsequent years, there was no immediate change in community leadership. The Jewish community leaders continued to serve as community representatives. The foremost shift occurred at the mass level, mainly in the class structure. Mass emigration to Israel left the remaining Turkish Jews with a more homogenous class structure. Since mainly lower and middle class Jews chose to move, Jews remaining in Turkey presented a more middle and upper class picture of a higher socio-economic status.

Another significant change resulting from the mass emigration of 1948–51 was the disappearance of Jewish communities from various towns of Anatolia and the Balkans.³⁴ If they elected to stay in Turkey, Jews from these towns usually moved to the bigger cities of Istanbul or İzmir. The development of urban Istanbul and İzmir also played a role in this internal migration. In addition, non-emigrant Jews living in

such traditional Istanbul Jewish areas as Balat, Kuledibi, Galata, Hasköy, Ortaköy largely moved to newer places such as Şişli, Osmanbey, Taksim, Nişantaşı and Kurtuluş, all districts which took on a higher socio-economic character in the 1950s and 1960s. A similar pattern emerged in İzmir, where former residents of such districts as İkiçeşmelik, Karataş and Göztepe moved within the city to Alsancak, Basmane, Çankaya and Karşıyaka. These new settlements were distinguished from the previous ghetto-like closed communities by their more dispersed and integrated character. Such internal movement also tended to weaken the solidarity of the Jewish community.

The importance placed on community welfare associations by Turkey's Jews was reduced not only by the weakening of community bonds over time but also by the declining number of poor Jews in need of community support, as most of them ended up emigrating to Israel. Since traditional, conservative Jews tended to move to Israel in the mass emigration, this accelerated the adaptation of the remaining Jews to Turkey's integration process. In addition, Zionism as an ideology lost its significance for the remaining Jews, especially for the upper class.³⁵ After the mass emigration to Israel, the community leaders remaining tended to resist any show of support for Israel, fearing that Zionism would threaten the relationship between the Turkish state and the Jewish community. After the founding of Israel, moreover, in the eyes of the general public the previous common image of Turkey's Jews as engendering fear gave way to a Jewish image of bravery.

After the emigration of 34,547 Turkish Jews to Israel in 1948–51, in the period up to 2001 another 27,473 made their way to the Jewish state, making a grand total of 62,020 Turkish Jews who had moved to Israel since its foundation. Subsequent emigrations from Turkey to Israel after the great wave were fewer in number and fluctuated in certain periods. A total of 6,871 emigrants arrived in Israel in 1952–60, 4,793 in 1961–64, 9,280 in 1965–71, 3,118 in 19702–79, 2,088 in 1980–89, 1,215 in 1990–2000, and 108 in 2001.³⁶ The migration figures then decrease greatly. Only 68 immigrants arrived in Israel in 2002, 53 in 2003 and just 52 in 2004.³⁷

As a close look at these figures indicates, Jewish migration to Israel increased during and just after Turkish political and economic turmoil, provided Israel's own attraction factors remained stable. For instance, following the events of 6–7 September 1955,³⁸ the number of emigrants rose to 1,710 in 1956 and 1,911 in 1957, compared with only 339 in 1955. Similarly, after Turkey's military intervention of 1960, the number of emigrants shot up from 387 to 1,829 in 1961, 968 in 1962 and 749 in 1963. The 1964 conflict in Cyprus between Turks and Greeks also led to a spike in the number of emigrants, which rose above 1,000 in both 1964 and 1965. The number of emigrants also rose above 2,000 in the four years from 1969 to 1972 as a result of the 1971 military intervention and economic problems in Turkey.³⁹ Also, when street violence among Turkish leftist and rightist groups reached its worst level in 1979–80, leading to the military intervention of 12 September 1980, the number of Jewish emigrants rose by almost 1,000 a year.⁴⁰

After 1951 migrants from Turkey to Israel were different from those of the great wave of 1948–51. As stated above, the initial mass emigration changed the profile of the remaining Jewish community in Turkey. Therefore, Jews who emigrated after 1951 were mainly from the middle- or upper-middle class. In occupational terms they were mostly tradesman, but there were also many professionals.⁴¹ Job opportunities

for Jews in Turkey were very limited due to a process of modernization along with the shrinking economy of the 1970s. Traditionally, Jews would inherit small shops from their fathers or fathers-in-law. At a time when the impact of modern financial and economic mechanisms began to be felt in both foreign and domestic trade, and when foreign exchange was strictly controlled in an import-oriented economy, these Jews saw no future in the jobs they inherited from their fathers. As a result, trying their chances in the rising Israeli economy of the 1970s seemed a better bet. These emigrants were able to continue in occupations similar to those they had in Turkey, with the advantage of fitting into previously established communities of Turkish émigrés.

Some of the young Jews who immigrated to Israel in the late 1960s did so to obtain a better university education. Others arrived in Israel at a younger age to get a good education at Israeli boarding schools at intermediate or high school level. From the 1960s until the 1980 military coup, education to high school and university level in Turkey was highly politicized. There were severe ideological clashes between the right and left that frequently flared into violence. These young Jews thought that education in Israel would not only be better but also safer. As this violence spilled over the school walls into the streets, threatening the daily life of civilians, many Jews who felt endangered by the atmosphere of conflict moved to Israel. Terror began to be a factor spurring emigration, especially after the late 1960s, and it dominated the motivation to emigrate in the late 1970s in particular. In 1979–80, emigrants were dominated by families with high socio-economic status who believed Israel would offer a safer life.

The mass emigration of 1948–51 also caused splits in family ties with the remaining Jews. Therefore, in subsequent migrations, those who had remained behind in Turkey but then chose to emigrate did so to unite the family. Previous immigrants helped these newcomers, either friends or relatives, to find jobs and housing. Most of the post-1960s emigrants settled in Bat-Yam.⁴² They were mainly middle-class immigrants from Turkey who maintained close community ties amongst themselves. Upper-class families who immigrated after the mid-1970s and early 1980s tended to settle in Ramat-Aviv or Herzeliya. Although newcomers had more information about Israel than previous immigrants from Turkey, they were still not prepared in respect of knowing Hebrew. The immigrants of the great wave generally spoke Ladino within their communities and families. However, the subsequent immigrants, who were more integrated in Turkish society, knew Turkish better than Ladino, and therefore they spoke more Turkish among themselves or in their households.

Beside emigration from Turkey to Israel, there has also been migration in the opposite direction. In general, returnees to Turkey were immigrants from all periods who were unable to integrate with Israeli society. The main reasons for return migration to Turkey were polarization between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews; poor living conditions in the moshavim and kibbutzim; disappointed expectations; misinformation about conditions in Israel prior to migration; and the emerging liberal economic and social policies in Turkey.⁴³ There are no exact, reliable figures of the return rate of emigrants from Turkey to Israel, but estimates are around 3,000.⁴⁴ Upper-class immigrants living in Ramat-Aviv and Herzeliya tended to have a higher rate of return than earlier groups. Their return to Turkey was mainly due to

the post-1980s liberalization period. Even so, the rate of return migration from Israel to Turkey can be considered low in comparison with return rates among other immigrant groups and significant in indicating the successful integration of Turkish Jews in Israel.

Today, it is estimated that the number of immigrants from Turkey to Israel has reached around 100,000–150,000, including the offspring of the immigrants.⁴⁵ According to official Israeli statistics, in 2001 Turkey was considered the country of origin for a total of 82,400 Jews living in Israel.⁴⁶ A total of 30,600 Jews out of this figure had been born abroad, and the remaining 51,800 were Israeli born. It is estimated the current number of Jewish immigrants from Turkey living in Israel who have not given up their Turkish citizenship is around 20,000.⁴⁷ These immigrants live in Israel either with residence permits or have dual citizenship, both Turkish and Israeli.

In general, Turkish Jews in Israel were integrated into Israeli society and became 'invisible' – undistinguishable from other Israelis.⁴⁸ As a specific immigrant group they shunned involvement in mass movements, protests and political parties but rather conformed with general society. Although mainly Sephardim, they do not affiliate themselves to other Sephardic groups but rather to Turkey and Turkish culture. The process of migration to Israel transformed the Jews of Turkey into Israeli Turks in Israel. The Turkish Jews in Israel consider themselves a Turkish diaspora and try to retain their Turkish culture.⁴⁹ Although they have contact with immigrants from other countries and are involved in the activities of immigrant associations formed by the Sephardim, such as the Bulgarian and Yugoslavian associations, they maintain an identification with the Turkish–Jewish community in Israel.

In general, Turkish Jews in Israel lobby for Turkey. Either individually or in immigrant associations, they support continued good relations between Israel and Turkey. They also serve the official Turkish position in international relations in working to counter Arab, Armenian and Greek accusations against their former home.⁵⁰ They have positive feelings towards Turkey, even those who emigrated due to discrimination there. Most of them maintain ties with relatives in Turkey and even if they have none, they remain interested in Turkish news and customs and wish to revisit it. First-generation migrants who arrived after the 1970s speak Turkish at home and with other Turkish Jews in Israel. Furthermore, since their efforts to learn, read and write Hebrew were not as strong as those of some other immigrant groups in Israel, their Hebrew fluency is less than that of other Israelis. Most Turkish Jews now living in Israel did not know Hebrew when they first arrived. The immigrants who arrived in the wave of 1948–51 learned Hebrew in the migration camps. Immigrants in subsequent years learned the language in the *Ulpanim*, which are special boarding or day schools expressly established for adult learners of Hebrew.

Turkish Jews have formed various immigrant associations. Both *Irgun Olei Turkiya* (Organization of Immigrants from Turkey) and *Itahdut Olei Turkiya* (Association of Immigrants from Turkey) were founded in the late 1950s by immigrants from the mass wave, but they were short lived. These associations helped to establish a forest near Tel-Aviv named after the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In the 1970s émigrés took over *Itahdut* and renamed it

Itahdut Yotsei Turkia (Association of People from Turkey). However, its activities were also few; as its leaders were inexperienced, welfare services traditionally delivered by the Jewish communal organization in Turkey were delivered by the Israeli state, and its women members were inactive.

Itahdut Yotsei Turkia increased its activities in the mid-1980s with the Ramat-Aviv group. In 1985 the same upper-class group established the Herzeliya Culture Club for Turkish émigrés, but by 1990 it had closed. The middle-class immigrants, however, continue their activities in the Moadon Tarbut Yotsei Turkia (Bat-Yam Culture Club). The association Morit (Foundation for a Centre of Turkish Judaism in Israel) was founded in 1986 by immigrants from the 1970s with the aim of promoting Turkish culture, but it too ended operations by the mid-1990s. Israel's only Zionist organization founded by Turkish Jews is Amutat Yotsei Hatnua Hatziyonit Be Turkiya (Association of Activists for the Zionist Movement in Turkey). Turkish Jews have also published newspapers and journals in Ladino and/or Turkish such as *La Vera Luz*, *Haber*, *Dostluk*, *Gelişim*, *Sesimiz*, *Bülten* and *Türkiyeliler Birliği Bülteni*.

Beside immigrant associations, Turkish Jews, specifically upper-class ones who immigrated in 1979–80, spearheaded the establishment of a Masonic lodge called the Nur Masonic Lodge in 1985 in Tel-Aviv. This was the first Turkish-speaking Masonic lodge formed outside Turkey's borders with the initiative of Turkish Jews in Israel. There is also a chapter of B'nai B'rith International in Tel-Aviv called the Yosef Niyego Lodge.⁵¹ Most of the current members of the lodge are immigrants from Turkey, and the dominant language used in their activities is Turkish.

Immigration to Israel has been traditionally considered a unique phenomenon by experts in the field.⁵² The immigration of the Jews is not restricted and Israel's commitment to immigration is based on ideological considerations rather than economic ones. Since the founding pillar of Israel is its status as a Jewish state, Jews, wherever they are, potentially have a right to immigrate to Israel whenever they want, on fulfilling the conditions under the Law of Return. They also need not abandon their former citizenship as Israel permits dual citizenship. Today, the Law of Return, first passed in 1950 and later amended in 1954 and 1970, remains Israel's main legislation regulating its reception policies. The 1952 Nationality Law, which refers to the Law of Return, also sets forth criteria for naturalization, although it underwent few changes. In consequence of this basic legislation, immigrants from Turkey, being Jews, did not have to face questions about citizenship or reception.

Although Israel's laws on citizenship by immigration were not altered radically, there were shifts in the state's absorption policy. Immigration to Israel since 1948 until today has not been gradual, but rather in waves marked by large numbers of immigrants in short periods of time. These waves of immigration were met with a variety of reception and absorption policies. The Israeli State supported the immigrants with housing, employment, education and welfare in their first years after arrival. However, with the recent wave of migration that started in the 1990s from the former Soviet Union, the state introduced a new strategy of direct absorption.⁵³ Under this, Israel immigrants were given an 'absorption package' that included a sum of money to cover expenses for a limited period as well as other

benefits. The decision on how much the immigrant needed was generally based on the general status of Jews in the country of origin. For instance, immigrants from Ethiopia were provided with extensive absorption baskets, but those from Turkey would receive smaller baskets, whereas Jews from France received none. The status of Jews in Turkey was considered to be better than that of Jews in North Africa and Central Asia, not only in terms of economic conditions, but also in terms of social and political standing. As of 2003, however, the absorption basket became available to all new immigrants from all countries, including France and South Africa. Furthermore, immigrants from Turkey started to receive financial assistance equal to that of other immigrants.

Israel, either through municipal administration or central government (Ministry of Interior) also supports immigrant associations or cultural clubs. For instance, financial assistance is provided to publications of the immigrant associations; places for cultural and social clubs for people with similar country of origin are provided by the municipalities; and there are state-sponsored local clubs where people can gather in their spare time. Turkish Jews have the use of these facilities as well. The bulletin of the *Itahdut Yotsei Turkia* is published under the partial sponsorship of the Ministry of Interior. The place of Bat-Yam Culture Club is provided by the Bat-Yam Municipality.

In addition to changes in absorption policy, there were shifts in the manner of integration. Israel underwent versions of manipulating immigrant integration. In the initial years of the state, the 'melting pot' was the predominant Zionist ideal for the cultural integrity of the Israeli nation. Various cultural traditions of many Jewish communities which gathered from various countries were welded into one Israeli culture. The creation of the Sabra, the offspring of immigrants born or reared in Israel, reflected this ideal for a new culture for a new nation. The vision of the melting pot has been gradually replaced by a more pluralistic view of Israeli culture and society.⁵⁴ By the 1970s, the influence of particularistic traditions on the nature of public life in Israel began to increase.⁵⁵ Consequently, diversity among Jews came to be recognized. Today, there is no longer a single definition of identity in Israel acceptable to a majority of the population. Such a shift from an assimilationist to a multicultural model of integration is also observable in other traditional countries of immigrant such as Canada or Australia. It was in this framework that the Turkish-Jewish community in Israel, especially those who made the move to Israel after 1970s found a suitable social and political environment to vocalize ties with the home country and to pursue the politics of belonging to Turkish culture within Israel.

On the Turkish side, Jewish emigration to Israel was not met with special provisions or legislation but was rather considered within the general framework of existing policies and laws applicable to all groups of emigrants, regardless of religious affiliation or status of minority. The Turkish state neither encouraged nor prohibited this emigration. However, there arose a question of citizenship that immigrants from Turkey in Israel could not avoid. Turkey did not allow dual citizenship; obtaining Israeli nationality meant termination of Turkish citizenship and the closing of Turkey's doors to them. Many had relatives remaining in Turkey they wanted to maintain ties with. Furthermore, since they were insecure about their future in Israel, they wanted to keep open the option of returning to Turkey. The problem was the introduction of a law on dual citizenship in Turkey.

Turkey decided to allow dual citizenship for Turkish citizens living abroad in order that they might retain their citizenship and transfer it their children. The main motive for this policy change was that the state did not want Turkish citizens abroad to lose their ties with Turkey.⁵⁶ As part of the changes in citizenship, 1964's Citizenship Law No.403 was amended on 13 February 1981 by Law No.2383. The law allowed people seeking the citizenship of another country to first obtain permission documents to end their Turkish citizenship. If they had already obtained another country's citizenship, they would be able to retain their Turkish citizenship provided they presented the required documents within three years after they got the permission papers. In 1995 Turkish Citizenship Law No.403 was amended by Law No.4112. The amendment granted dual citizens the same set of rights as those of other Turkish citizens. The amendment embraced the rights of residence, acquiring and transferring real estate, inheritance and labour.

Apart from the policies adopted by Israel and Turkey regarding citizenship, the state of bilateral relations between these countries also affected the Turkish Jews in Israel. Relations between Turkey and Israel have long been a contentious issue of domestic Turkish politics. Islamist and extreme nationalist groups within Turkey have utilized the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as fodder for their political campaigns, usually taking sides with the dominant Palestinian view and condemning Israeli foreign policy in the Middle East. Criticisms of Israeli foreign policy have been one of the rare areas of common ground between groups on Turkey's extreme left and right. However, official Turkish foreign policy towards Israel differs from the strident voices of domestic politics.⁵⁷ Turkey has always conformed to the decisions of the United Nations. With respect to Turkish–Israeli bilateral relations, there has been improvement, and several cooperation agreements were signed after the mid-1980s in such diverse areas as culture, education, science, sports, agriculture, hydro politics, trade and defence. One of the most important aspects of cooperation between the two countries concerned the conscription of dual citizens. Conscription is obligatory and universal in both countries.⁵⁸ Before 1998, conscription of dual Turkish–Israeli citizens was regulated independently in accordance with the domestic laws of each country. Therefore, male dual citizens were drafted into military service in Israel and Turkey respectively. Under a 1998 Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs regulation, dual Turkish–Israeli citizens who had already completed their obligatory military service in Israel were exempt from their military duty to Turkey. The regulation also specified that the exemption was valid only for those who had either been born in Israel or who emigrated and settled in Israel before the age of 18.

Israel and Turkey are two relatively young states, both established in the twentieth century in the Middle East. They have regulations and policies on citizenship and international migration which are subject to constant transformation and emendation due to changes wrought by the tide of events. Yet, the two states have different tendencies in their administrative traditions.

Israel is a country which was founded solely by international migration and consequently, it has a broader scope of legislation regulating the flow of immigration over its borders. Its policies regulating immigration are diverse. Towards this end, there is even a special ministry of immigration dealing with the absorption/

assimilation of immigrants. On the other hand, Turkey has traditionally been a country of emigration. It started to enact regulations on citizenship and international migration after the 1950s concurrent with its integration into the international community's migratory regime. There is no ministry established specifically for immigration, but the Ministries of the Interior, Labour and Foreign Affairs and their various directorates deal with immigrants and emigrants among other issues in their purview. There is no coordination mechanism among these ministries. One can argue that in Turkey on international migration, there are mainly *ad hoc* arrangements.

This article demonstrates that the migration of Turkish Jews to Israel is an issue that has implications for both nations, the sender and the recipient. It also pinpoints an often neglected aspect of international relations between these two countries, which is the flow of Turkish Jews to Israel. There are common issues that both countries need to assess in their bilateral relations.

Notes

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1. One must add that Turkey's dominant character as an immigrant sending country has in recent decades seen a shift. There is growing widespread acknowledgement that since the 1990s, Turkey has become a country of immigration and irregular transit migration as well as a country of asylum. See K. Kirişçi, *Justice and Home Affairs Issues in Turkish–EU Relations: Assessing Turkish Asylum and Immigration Policy and Practice* (İstanbul: Tesev Publications, 2002).
2. A. İcduygu, Migrant as a Transitional Category: Turkish Migrants in Melbourne (Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1991); A. İcduygu, 'The Globalization of Mobility and the Politics of International Migratory Regimes: The Transit Migration in Turkey', *International Social Science Journal*, No.165 (2000), pp.357–67.
3. C. Geray, 'Türkiye'de Göçmen Hareketleri ve Göçmenlerin Yerleştirilmesi', *Amme İdaresi Dergisi*, Vol.3, No.4 (1970), p.9.
4. Aliya is a very common Hebrew term which refers to the immigration of Jews into Israel. It has a positive connotation as it means ascendancy.
5. Israel received many waves of immigrants from various countries since its foundation. The wave of 1948–51 is commonly known as the 'Great Wave,' a term used to differentiate the first wave to Israel from the consequent ones. In a similar vein, the migration from Turkey between 1948–51 is called great wave.
6. H. Nahum, *İzmir Yahudileri: 19–20. Yüzyıl* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), p.206.
7. F. Dündar, *Türkiye Nüfus Sayımlarında Azınlıklar* (İstanbul: Çiviyazıları, 2000), p.154; N. Karimova and E. Deverell, *Minorities in Turkey: Occasional Papers No.19* (Stockholm: The Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2001).
8. Jews living in several provinces of Thrace were attacked by the masses under the influence of extreme nationalist propaganda. Seeking to force out the region's non-Muslim residents, the incidents first began in Çanakkale, a southern Thrace province, where Jews received unsigned letters telling them to leave the city, and then escalated into a kind of anti-Semitic campaign involving economic boycotts, verbal assaults as well as physical violence against the Jews living in the various provinces of Thrace. It is estimated that out of a total 15,000–20,000 Jews living in the region, more than half fled to Istanbul during and after the incidents. The national authorities did not side with the attackers but swiftly intervened in the incidents. After order was restored, the governors and mayors of the involved provinces were removed from office. See H. Karabatak, 'Türkiye Azınlıklar Tarihine Bir Katkı: 1934 Trakya Olayları ve Yahudiler', *Tarih ve Toplum*, No.146 (1996), p.68–80; and Z. Toprak, '1934 Trakya Olaylarında Hükümetin ve CHF'nin Sorumluluğu', *Toplumsal Tarih*, No.34 (1996), pp.19–25.

9. The Capital Tax was a special one-time tax designed to provide additional resources for wartime expenses and respected the principle of equality in principle. However, its implementation created inequality and non-Muslims were levied five to ten times higher than the Muslim tax payers. In order to pay the tax, most non-Muslims were forced to sell off their property. Those who failed to pay the assessed amount were sent to labour camps in remote corners of the country where they were expected to pay off their taxes by working for the state. The Capital Tax was terminated in 1944 ending the levies and forgiving former tax debts. Throughout its implementation, the law effectively transferred huge amounts of capital from non-Muslim minorities to Turkish-Muslim nationals. See F. Ökte, *The Tragedy of the Turkish Capital Tax* (London and New Hampshire: Croom Helm, 1987).
10. W.F. Weiker, *Unseen Israelis: The Jews from Turkey in Israel* (London: The Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs, Centre for Jewish Community Studies, 1988), p.19.
11. R.N. Bali, 'Yeni Bilgiler ve 1934 Trakya Olayları II', *Tarih ve Toplum*, No.187 (1999), p.43.
12. Actually, Turkey's status as a safe transit site for Jewish migrants to Palestine dated back to the 1920s after the Socialist Revolution when Istanbul was used by Russian Jews on their way to the Holy Land. Even after 1948, Turkey continued to serve as an unofficial temporary asylum and safe transit country for Jews en route to Israel. See E. Frayman, M. Grosman and R. Schild, *Yüksekkaldırım'da Yüzyıllık Bir Sinagog: Aşkenazlar* (İstanbul: Galata Aşkenaz Kültür Derneği, 2000), p.12. For instance, in 1979 Turkey allowed Jews fleeing Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran to enter and stay temporarily without a visa. See K. Kirişçi, 'Disaggregating Turkish Citizenship and Immigration Practices', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.36, No.3 (2000), pp. 10–11.
13. Among the Jewish refugees received were intellectuals, scholars and artists who were recruited to lead Istanbul University's educational reform programme. These professors established universities in Turkey in 1933–45 and furthered the nation's scientific advancement. S.J. Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust* (İstanbul: İnönü Foundation, 1992).
14. D. Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel 1939–1944* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp.162–3.
15. E. Benbassa and A. Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community 14th–20th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
16. One source suggests that in 1946, only 1% of the Jews living in Istanbul were Zionists. Ibid.
17. R.N. Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), pp.405–6.
18. Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*.
19. However, it must also be noted that Jews immigrated to countries other than Israel as well. According to one estimate, between 1948–73, around 20,000 Jews emigrated to countries like France, Austria and the American continents. A.W. Liberles, 'The Jewish Community of Turkey', in D.J. Lazar, H.P. Friedenreich, B. Hazzan and A.W. Liberles (eds.), *The Balkan Jewish Communities: Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey* (New York, London: University Press of America, 1984), pp.127–70.
20. State of Israel, *Statistical Abstract of Israel 2002 No.53*, (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem: Central Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.cbs.gov.il>, 2003).
21. Weiker, *Unseen Israelis*, p.21.
22. Ibid.
23. Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*.
24. İ. Tekeli, 'Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndan Günümüze Nüfusun Zorunlu Yer Değiştirmesi ve İskan Sorunu', *Toplum ve Bilim*, No.50 (1990), p.63.
25. In 1935 the occupational breakdown of Jews in Turkey was as follows: 24% in trade, 20.5% in industry and artisanship, 4.4% in the service sector and 45.9% in unidentified occupations. This last group is argued to have had migrated to Israel after its establishment. Weiker cited in Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*.
26. R.N. Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Aliya- Bir Toplu Göçün Öyküsü 1946–1949* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2003), p.266.
27. Ibid., p.352.
28. Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*.
29. *Drahoma* is a Jewish custom. It is the dowry paid by the bride to the groom before marriage.
30. The *moshav* (plural *moshavim*) and *kibbutz* (plural *kibbutzim*) are collective forms of rural settlement introduced by veterans.
31. Weiker, *Unseen Israelis*, pp.20–21.

32. Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Aliya- Bir Toplu Göçün Öyküsü 1946–1949*, p.293.
33. Ibid.
34. P.A. Andrews, *Türkiye'de Etnik Gruplar* (İstanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1992), pp.223–4.
35. Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*.
36. State of Israel, *Statistical Abstract of Israel 2002 No.53*.
37. State of Israel, *Statistical Abstract of Israel 2005 No. 56*.
38. In 1955, in consequence of the burning in Salonika of the house where Atatürk was born, on 6–7 Sept., anti-Greek violence over the Cyprus dispute erupted in Istanbul and İzmir, and then spilled over to Jewish-owned businesses. Angry crowds in Istanbul and İzmir, inflamed by the Cyprus crisis, attacked the cultural, religious and economic presence of minorities. These mobs were only reined in after the government declared martial law. A number of people were arrested and taken into custody.
39. There were also pull factors in Israel that attracted Turkey's Jews to Israel. It should be noted that the 1967 Arab–Israeli Six-Day War that ended with Israel's victory also drew some of Turkey's Jews to move to Israel. Not only the pride felt on the Jewish side in winning a war in just six days attracted many Jews worldwide – including those from Turkey – to Israel, but also Israel's economy moved into a period of development and prosperity after the war.
40. Weiker, *Unseen Israelis*, p.22.
41. Liberles, 'The Jewish Community of Turkey', p.140.
42. Bat-Yam is Israel's most prominent settlement with a majority Turkish émigré population. It lies south of Tel-Aviv along the Mediterranean coast and resembles Turkey's İzmir province on the Aegean. Its population is generally dominated by lower- and middle-class Turkish Jews. The Russian aliya of the 1990s, however, has brought many ex-Eastern European and Russian Jews to the region.
43. Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Aliya- Bir Toplu Göçün Öyküsü 1946–1949*, p.313.
44. Weiker, *Unseen Israelis*, p.6.
45. Erhard Franz, *Population Policy in Turkey: Family Planning and Migration Between 1960 and 1992* (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 1994), p.329.
46. State of Israel, *Statistical Abstract of Israel 2002 No.53*.
47. These estimates come from interviews conducted by the author with personnel from Turkey's Embassy in Tel-Aviv on 18 June 2003. In subsequent interviews with the personnel of the Turkish Consulate in Jerusalem on 30 June 2003, the current number of Turkish citizens who emigrated from Turkey to Israel and currently reside in Jerusalem was estimated at around 1,000.
48. Weiker, *Unseen Israelis*, p.18.
49. Ç. Yetkin, *Türkiye Devlet Yaşamında Yahudiler* (İstanbul: Gözlem Gazetecilik Basın ve Yayın A.Ş., 1996), p.257.
50. A. Levi, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Yahudiler: Hukuki ve Siyasi Durumları* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1998), p.159.
51. The first Turkish B'nai B'rith lodge, number 678, was founded in Istanbul in 1911 and its first chairman was Yosef Niyego. However, after the 1938 Law on Associations abolished associations with central organizations outside Turkey, it was closed. Later, the B'nai B'rith lodge established in Israel by immigrants from Turkey was named after Yosef Niyego to honour this prominent leader of Turkish B'nai Brith.
52. J.T. Shuval and E. Leshem, 'The Sociology of Migration in Israel: A Critical View', in: E. Leshem and J.T. Shuval (eds.), *Immigration to Israel: Sociological Perspectives* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1998), p.10.
53. G. Lipshitz, *Country on the Move: Migration to and within Israel 1948–1995* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), p.2.
54. O. Ichilov, 'Citizenship Perceptions of Soviet Immigrants in Israel', *International Review of Sociology*, Vol.12, No.1 (2002), p.6.
55. D. Hacohen, 'Mass Immigration and the Demographic Revolution in Israel', *Israel Affairs*, Vol.8, No.1/2 (2002), p.186.
56. A. İçduygu, 'Becoming a New Citizen in an Immigration Country', *International Migration*, Vol.34, No.2 (1996), pp.257–72.
57. J. Salt, 'Nationalism and the Rise of Muslim Sentiment in Turkey', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.31, No.1 (1995), pp.13–27.
58. In Israel, conscription is universal and covers both men and women age 18 and older. Turkey, on the other hand, requires military service of men only, age 18 and over.