



FRANCO AND THE HOLOCAUST: FROM HOSTILITY TO PROTECTION OF THE JEWS

Posted on January 1, 2023 by Arnaud Imatz



I.

Nearly half a century has passed since the death of Francisco Franco, but the general-dictator remains an inevitable subject of discord for Spaniards. When the controversies subside, the mainstream media and political figures of the left and extreme left are there to reactivate them. We know about the heated debates that arose when the PSOE and its radical left-wing allies passed the Memory Laws of December 2007 and October 2022, which violated freedom of expression. Significantly, the Madrid newspaper *El País*, the government's unofficial organ, recently [saw fit to revisit](#) the French controversy surrounding Pío Moa's book, *The Myths of the Spanish War*.

A Web of Conjectures

Among the endless polemics about the Civil War and Franco's regime, there is a less frequent, but nevertheless recurrent, dispute about the Caudillo's attitude towards the Jews during the Second World War. During 2022, the subject was discussed many times in the mainstream press, especially on the occasion of the publication of the book by Enrique Moradiellos, Santiago López and César Rina, *El Holocausto y la España de Franco* [*The Holocaust and Franco's Spain*], a work whose best-known co-author Moradiellos is a notorious defender of Negrín, the Popular Front and Stalin's political action in Spain.

Recently, after *La Sexta Clave* (January 28, 2022), *Libertad Digital* (February 28, 2022), *El País* (March 12, 2022), *El Español* (February 5, 2022), *El Mundo* (February 13, 2022), *ABC* (February 10, 2022), *Hoy* (April 9, 2022), *El Periódico* (May 29, 2022), *El Diario* (June 12, 2022), *Nueva Tribuna* (July 22, 2022), etc., *El Confidencial*, in turn (October 2, 2022), has been involved in the controversy because of the information that the Secretary General of the Federation of Spanish Jewish Communities (FCJE) has just joined Vox, an openly philosemitic and pro-Israeli party, but suspected by the editor of concealing anti-Semitic and racist views. The dispute is old and the arguments do not vary much on either side.

More than ten years ago, *El País* (June 20, 2010) published a provocative and sensationalist article entitled, *El regalo de Franco para Hitler. La lista de Franco para El Holocausto* [*Franco's Gift to Hitler. Franco's List for the Holocaust*], which was echoed by *Le Figaro*, *La Tribune de Genève* and other European newspapers.

[The article was published in *El País*, June 20, 2010, by the journalist Jorge M. Reverte, a socialist, former communist, son of Jesus Martínez Tessier, who was himself editor of the phalangist daily *Arriba*, after having fought on the Eastern Front in the Azul Division. There are many Francoist personalities who changed radically and pursued brilliant political or media careers after the end of the regime in 1975. The journalist and businessman Luis Cebrián, founder of the newspaper *El País* and managing director of the Prisa Group, was first editor of the "Movimiento" newspaper, *Pueblo*, and head of the news services of Franco's RTVE. He is the son of Vicente Cebrián, who was director of the newspaper *Arriba*. The first president of the New Democracy government, Adolfo Suárez, had been secretary general of the "Movimiento" and director general of RTVE. The fathers of the vice-president and the vice-president of Zapatero's socialist government, Teresa Fernández de la Vega and Alfredo Rubalcaba, were also Francoists, as were the fathers of the president of the Congress of Deputies, José Bono, and the wives of the two socialist presidents, Felipe González and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero].

The information from the Madrid newspaper, taken up by a number of journalists and university historians, has not ceased to fuel speculation and conjecture. This campaign of media-historical-political intoxication would not be worth mentioning if it had not been initiated and orchestrated by Zapatero's socialist government, via one of the major Spanish news dailies, which is often quoted in the international press [The *El País* article of June 20, 2006 was summarized in *Le Figaro*, 20.06.2010 and *Tribune de Genève*, 21.06.2010].

With hardly a care for nuance, the lead of the *El País* article stated: *"In 1941, Franco's regime ordered the civil governors to draw up a list of the Jews living in Spain. The file, which included the names, professional, ideological and personal activities of 6,000 Jews, was probably handed over to Himmler. After the fall of Hitler, Franco's authorities tried to erase all evidence of their collaboration in the Holocaust. El País has reconstructed this story and shows the document that proves Franco's anti-Semitic order."*

This article was actually based on four pages published thirteen years earlier, in 1997, in the magazine *Raíces*, by the president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain, general manager of the Shlumberger-Sema-Spain group, Jacobo Israel Garzón [Jacobo Israel Garzón, "El Archivo Judaico del franquismo," *Raíces*, Madrid, no. 33, winter 1997-1998, p. 57ff. See also, Jacobo Israel Garzón et Alejandro Baer, *España y el Holocausto (1939-1945)* (Madrid: Ediciones Hebraica, 2007)].

In this article, "The Jewish File of Francoism," Jacobo Israel divulged the existence of a circular from the General Directorate of Security, dated May 5, 1941, which ordered the provincial civil governors to send

information on all national and foreign Jews living in the territory. This document, which called for the creation of a "Jewish file," came from the civil government of Zaragoza (Aragon) and was found in the Archivo Histórico Nacional.

The revelation of the 1941 circular raised many questions. What were the practical repercussions of the file? Was the initiative to create it the responsibility of the government or the police authorities? To what extent did the civilian governors follow the instructions received? How many people were included in this file? The answers of the historian-journalist of El País were vague and superficial. In fact, they are not much more solid today. According to the journalist from the Madrid daily, the file was completely destroyed at the end of the Second World War, and only a few individual files have survived. It would have contained at least 6,000 individual name-cards, because this figure was included in the count of the Jewish population by country in the Wannsee protocol (January 20, 1942). And it would seem "likely" that José Finat, Director General of Spanish Security (1939-1941), later ambassador to Berlin (1941-1942), gave the entire file to the Reichsführer-SS, Himmler.

This web of conjecture is based on a certain amount of reality, but the conclusions often drawn are no less highly questionable. Who would claim to implicate the English authorities in the Holocaust just because the number of Jews in the United Kingdom was mentioned at the Wannsee conference? The journalist-historian of El País was apparently unaware that the figure of 6,000 Jews was in the public domain in the Peninsula long before the events he reported. In 1933, the Madrid press reported a Spanish Jewish community of 5,000 people. In 1934, it counted nearly 1,000 German political refugees, both Jews and non-Jews. A very low number of political exiles that the socialist editor of El País was careful not to mention. And for good reason! It alone destroys the myth of a welcoming Spanish Republic whose government of left-wing liberals and socialists received Jewish refugees from the Reich with open arms. On the contrary, before the elections of November 1933, the Spanish Republic, under the left and center-left coalition, had reinstated the visa requirement for Germans in order to curb Jewish immigration, or rather, as it was preferred to say at the time, "to avoid a saturation of the labor market." It is also highly unlikely that all 6,000 Jews remained in Spain at the end of the Spanish Civil War after the victory of the national side (there were no less than 430,000 exiles at the end of the Spanish Civil War: 270,000 crossed and re-crossed the border in a few weeks; 160,000 were permanent exiles).

The Jewish Community in North Africa was Mostly in Favor of Franco

Another important omission by the editor of *El País* was that he was unaware of the existence of the North African Jewish community in the Spanish Moroccan protectorate. This community of more than 15,000 people, much larger than the one in the Peninsula, had sided mostly with Franco and the "national camp" during the Spanish Civil War. Conversely, a considerable proportion of militant Jews or Communist sympathizers had fought in the ranks of the International Brigades, "Stalin's transmission belt" (perhaps 7 to 10% of the total number), and the majority of the international Jewish community had come out in favor of the left and the extreme left. But Jewish support for the Popular Front—we will come back to this—was not as massive and uniform as legend has it. In the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, the Jewish community in the Moroccan protectorate was considered safe and loyal by the new state, while that in the Peninsula was considered, rightly or wrongly, hostile and potentially threatening.

But the anomalies and departures from logic in the *El País* journalist's article did not end there. Jacobo Israel had suggested that traces of the missing Judaic file should be sought "in the nearly 100,000 investigations carried out by Franco's police" (in reality, nearly 130,000 are in the Archivo Histórico Nacional). However, this did not prevent the contributor to the Madrid daily from asserting, without citing any source, that in 1940 alone 800,000 investigations were carried out and more than 5 million citizens were registered. Franco's repression in the immediate postwar period (25,000 people sentenced to death, half of whom were executed, and 270,000 people imprisoned in 1939, a figure which then fell to 43,000 in 1945) had been sufficiently harsh and frightening not to need to be exaggerated.

[The repression during the Spanish Civil War claimed about 55,000 victims in the national camp and 60,000 in the republican camp. Taking into account the victims of the postwar repression, the figure of victims in the republican camp is 75,000-80,000 (historians in favor of the Popular Front put forward the figure of 110,000-130,000, echoing the estimates of exiled socialist-communist historians in the postwar period). The balance was only really upset by the settling of scores (3,000 to 4,000 deaths) and the judicial executions of Front-Populist activists and sympathizers in the immediate post-war period (24,949 death sentences of which 12,851 were commuted to prison terms, and a little over 12,000 judicial executions)].

Clearly, the editor of *El País* was not trying to be a historian, to shed light on the "shadowy areas" of Francoism, striving for axiological neutrality, but to morally discredit his alleged "descendants," the conservative-liberals, and to denounce and instrumentalize the alleged participation-collaboration of

his "ancestry" in the Holocaust. And to do so, he reactivated the old methods and legends of the Comintern: the aggression of a moderate and peaceful democracy by the reactionary right, the Franco-fascist-Nazi equivalence, the concealment of the Bolshevization of the Socialist Party, the underestimation of the development of the PCE, the denial of the sectarianism and violence of the Popular Front (2,500 to 3,500 deaths from 1931 to 1936, of which more than 400 were in the period of the Popular Front alone, from February to July 1936), etc., adding, of course, the inevitable confusion and amalgam between, on the one hand, the origins and development of the Spanish Civil War and, on the other, the Franco regime. Significantly, at the same time, the socialist government was promoting the Manichean works of Paul Preston (including *The Spanish Holocaust. Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth Century Spain*), an English activist-historian who was as bigoted as the *Washington Post* journalist and pamphleteer Herbert Southworth in the 1960s.

Uchronia is Not History

It is quite obvious that in the case of a German occupation of Spain, a "Jewish file" would have been particularly dangerous for the Jews. This point is irrefutable. But uchronia is not history. To confuse virtual history (that of Spain's entry into the World War and the collaboration of Franco and his regime in the Holocaust, as it might have been) with real history (that of a Franco who kept Spain out of the World War and who allowed the protection and rescue of tens of thousands of Jews) is at best foolishness, at worst intellectual dishonesty.

What was Franco's real attitude towards the Jews? Was he an anti-Semite or a philo-Sephardi? Before answering, let us return to the truth of the matter. Jews and Judaism were not the dictator's declared enemies. His sworn enemies were communism (in its Leninist, Stalinist, Trotskyite and anarchist-collectivist versions) and Freemasonry. An animadversion and hatred that were, after all, only a reflection of those of the "complementary enemy," who had the same feelings against the nation, the bourgeois class and against Christianity.

[There are many books on this subject, including those by Haim Avni, *España, Franco y los Judíos* (Madrid, Altalena, 1974); Federico Ysart, *España y los judíos en la II Guerra Mundial* (Barcelona: Dopesa, 1973); Chaim Lipschitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews and the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav Pub. Inc., 1984); José Antonio Lisbona Martín, *La política de España hacia sus judíos en el siglo XX* (Barcelona: Riopiedras, 1993); David Salinas, *España, los Sefarditas y el Tercer Reich (1939-1945). La labor de diplomáticos españoles contra el genocidio nazi* (Valladolid, 1997); Bernd Rother, *Franco y el Holocausto* (Madrid:

Marcial Pons, 2001); Isidro González, *Los judíos y la Segunda República: 1931-1939* (Madrid: Alianza), and *Los judíos y la guerra civil Española* (Madrid: Hebraica Ediciones, 2009)].

Franco's Philo-Sephardism

In Franco's eyes, Sephardic Jews were different from other Jews because they were somehow sublimated by contact with Iberian culture. His politico-religious (not racist) anti-Semitism was curiously combined with a philo-Sephardicism then common in much of the intellectual right of the time, which was careful to distinguish the "noble race" of the Sephardim from the "vile race" of the Ashkenaz.

According to historians who supported the Spanish Popular Front, this philo-Sephardization was merely an excuse to cover up, conceal or deny the fundamental anti-Semitism of Franco and Francoism. But this exclusive view is highly questionable. The example of two of the best-known Francoist historians, Ricardo de la Cierva and Luis Suarez Fernández, to name but two, suggests that this view should be qualified. The first, La Cierva, Director General of Popular Culture under Franco and Minister of Culture under King Juan Carlos, was known as a great defender of friendly ties with Israel and was the person appointed to officially present the Asociación de Amistad España Israel (1979). The second, Luis Suarez Fernández, former director general of the Universities, president of the Hermandad del Valle de los Caídos, closely linked to the Francisco Franco Foundation, one of the best experts on the history of the Jews in Spain, was one of the specialists chosen for the courses organized by the Asociación de los Amigos del Museo Sefardi (1988).

But let us return more directly to the political life of the Caudillo. The young commander and later lieutenant colonel of the legion, Francisco Franco, had had very cordial relations with the Jews of Spanish Morocco. The main leaders, businessmen and bankers of the Jewish community in the territory under protectorate had given valuable economic and material support to the rebel general in 1936. They had put at his disposal economic and financial means, but also a whole network of contacts essential in the management of material purchases. The great majority of the Jews of the Spanish zone of Morocco, but also Jews from the north of Italy and the sector of Zionism headed by Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, had helped the national camp. Franco was very grateful to them. After the war, some authors claimed that this help had been extorted; but they never explained why the generalissimo so openly showed his gratitude to the Jewish community of the protectorate, rewarding and decorating some of its most representative figures. The case of the banker Salama, a declared friend of the Caudillo, is emblematic in this respect.

During the Spanish Civil War, among the generals who rose up, Gonzalo Queipo de Llano, a senior Republican officer, famous for plotting the advent of the Republic, and otherwise fiercely opposed to the Falangists, stood out for his vehement anti-Semitic diatribes on the airwaves of Union Radio Sevilla. Franco took care to warn his North African Jewish friends not to pay him any mind. It was apparently at the end of June 1938, in the aftermath of the "Night of the Long Knives," that Franco first instructed Spanish legations to protect Jews of Spanish origin or of Sephardic background.

In the immediate post-Civil War period and in the early years of World War II, the Caudillo also made strong criticisms of the Jews. But they were few and far between. The best-known example is his allusion to "the Jewish spirit that allowed the alliance of big capital and Marxism" in his speech on May 19, 1939, in Madrid, on the occasion of the victory parade. Apart from two or three other similar allusions (speeches at Christmas 1939 and May 29, 1942), Franco did not elaborate on the question. In the years 1939-1942, in order to satisfy the German authorities, he tolerated anti-Semitic propaganda in publishing, and in radio and the written press; but at the same time he again let his friends in the North African Jewish community know that they should not be concerned. Ironically, it was in 1941, in the theoretically most anti-Semitic period of the regime, that Franco established in Madrid and Barcelona the Benito Arias Montano Institute of Hebrew Studies, which has since published one of the world's best Jewish publications, the scholarly journal *Sefarad*, subsidized by the Spanish state.

Radical anti-Semites did exist in Spain during World War II; but they were not numerous enough to cause the population to reject Jews, nor were the philosemites powerful enough to promote a more generous policy toward them. Antisemitism was widespread on the right, but essentially in its Christian form, and had been marginal in the parties of the left, unlike in France, where its presence had been asserted since the nineteenth century on the right (traditionalism and nationalism) as well as on the left (socialism and anarchism). Left-wing anti-Semitism was to appear in the Peninsula only belatedly, at the end of the twentieth century with pro-Palestinian anti-Zionism, and in the twenty-first century with Islamo-Leftism.

In Franco's new Traditionalist Falange, a heterogeneous party re-founded in 1937 from the Falange of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the Traditionalist Communion, and all the right-wing and center-right parties, the radical anti-Semites represented only a small minority. The magazine *Acción Española* (1931) had imported the thesis of Action Française, according to which the Jew was harmful to the state (political antisemitism), but its influence was minimal. Racial anti-Semitism was marginal and its rhetoric had very little resonance in Spanish public opinion. The most widespread antisemitism was, it should be

noted, religious in nature. It held that Judaism represented a value system opposed to that embodied by Christianity. Judaism was condemned in the name of Catholicism. The Catholic Church resolutely rejected racist theories of National Socialist origin. Race was also irrelevant to membership in the Traditionalist Falange, just as it had been irrelevant to membership in the original Falange of José Antonio. Many *chuetas* from Mallorca (one of the groups descended from converted Jews), had been active members since almost the foundation of the first Falange, in 1933.

For their part, the German National Socialist authorities regularly complained that philosemitic personalities occupied key positions in the Spanish government, party and high administration. The most philo-Nazi Spaniards, such as the Abwehr agent Ángel Alcázar Velasco, spread the rumor that Franco and even the founders and intellectuals of the original Falange: Primo de Rivera, Sanchez Mazas, Ledesma Ramos, Aparicio, Ros, Montes, etc., all had the names of "descendants of converts" and were "Jews by mysticism and temperament." [Ángel Alcázar de Velasco, *Memorias de un agente secreto* (Barcelona, Plaza y Janés, 1979). The racist theme of the "descendants of the converted" was developed and systematized after the war by the left-wing anti-Franco philologist Américo Castro (see, *España en su historia*, 1948). Julio Caro Baroja, a great specialist in the question, author of *Los Judíos en la España moderna y Contemporánea*, 3 volumes (Madrid: Istmo, 1986), concludes that "it is not possible to ensure that an actual name is or is not Jewish"].

In the post-war period, various authors, such as the journalist Ramón Garriga, the national socialist author Joaquin Bochaca, or the writer Roger Peyrefitte (*The Jews*, 1971), took up the thesis of a Franco with Jewish origins, but without really providing tangible proof. Nevertheless, some went so far as to see this as an explanation for the ambiguous and contradictory policies of the Caudillo.

II.

The historian Shlomo Ben Ami, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel, underlined the paradox and the singularity of the position of the Caudillo. Conservative and pragmatic, the dictator, so often labeled "fascist," did for the Jews what the major leaders of the democracies could not or would not do. Franco's Spain saved, according to sources, between 35,000 and 60,000 European Jews. The Jews who were arrested, imprisoned and mistreated at the end of the Spanish Civil War were arrested because of their allegiance to communism or Freemasonry. Rare, if not exceptional, were the cases of Jewish refugees in Spain who were expelled or deported during World War II. Jews who arrived in Spain via the Pyrenean border were treated in the same way as the rest of the refugees. Until the

Liberation, Spain granted asylum to all Jews who arrived illegally on its territory.

Freemasonry and Communism: Franco's Two Main Targets

Franco's real leitmotif was the international Masonic-Communist conspiracy. It is symptomatic that his book *Masoneria* (written, in 1950, under the pseudonym, Jakim Boor) begins with the words: "*The whole secret of the propaganda campaigns unleashed against Spain rests on two words: masonry and communism.*" Anti-communism and anti-masonry were more important to him than any other considerations

[Franco's brother, the liberal and republican aviator Ramón Franco, hero of the Plus Ultra transatlantic flight, was a Freemason. It has often been claimed that the future Caudillo tried to join two Masonic lodges and that his application was rejected by his military peers. But this rumor has never been supported by tangible evidence].

Franco was an assiduous reader of the *Bulletin of the International Entente against the Third International* since the beginning of the 1930s. [The International Anti-Communist Entente or Against the Third International was created by the Swiss lawyer Theodore Aubert in 1924. It was a worldwide information network about the expansion of communism]. Franco had personally subscribed to this publication, which focused on the worldwide expansion of communism, from 1934. For him, communism was the most terrible danger to Christian civilization and the main scourge of humanity. His radical anti-communism explains his policy of friendly neutrality towards Germany (official neutrality, then non-belligerence) and his decision to send men to the Eastern Front. In his eyes, the Azul Division was the Hispanic replica of Stalin's International Brigades. But it also allowed him to distance himself from the dyed-in-the-wool Phalangists, who were considered too cumbersome because of their economic and social revolutionism.

Franco's second obsession was the role and action of Freemasonry in Spanish history. He saw it as a kind of "superstate," an international, secret society with an occult and pernicious influence, a permanent threat to the Spanish nation, the main cause of the Peninsula's disasters for over a century. His declarations, speeches and articles (published under the pseudonyms of Jakim Boor, Macaulay or Jaime de Andrade) leave no room for doubt. Until his death, his anti-communist and anti-Masonic convictions would remain firm, ineradicable. He made them two of the ideological pillars of his regime. And yet, if the Spanish Grand Orient counted a great number of political and military personalities

among its members during the Second Republic, a not insignificant number of these Freemasons had chosen the cause of the national camp in July 1936.

It would be a caricature for a historian to consider only the few anti-Semitic statements made by Franco and to try to explain the policy and ideology of his regime by them. The Caudillo was one of the very few heads of state who protected the Jews of Europe during the Second World War. Numerous Jewish political and intellectual figures (including Golda Meir, Max Mazin, Elie Wiesel, Shlomo Ben Ami, Haim Avni, Chaim Lipschitz, Israel Singer, Isser Harel, Isaac Molho and Samuel Toledano) have testified to this and have even expressed their gratitude for his salvific action.

[Shlomo Ben Ami (1991), ambassador and later foreign minister; Golda Meir (Knesset, February 10, 1959) foreign minister and later prime minister; Max Mazin (1973) president of the Hebrew Association of Spain; Elie Wiesel (1990) writer and philosopher; Haim Avni (1982) professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Chaim Lipschitz (1970) historian; Israel Singer (2005) president of the World Jewish Congress; Isser Harel (1989) head of the Shin Bet and the Mossad; Isaac Molho historian; Samuel Toledano president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain].

The president of the World Jewish Congress, Israel Singer, to name but one, said in 2005: *"Franco's Spain was an important refuge for the Jews who ventured to come, escaping from the France of liberty, fraternity and equality. I don't want to defend Franco, but during the Second World War many Jews fled to Spain; and to ignore this is to ignore history."*

These unambiguous testimonies of Jewish personalities have nevertheless been swept aside and blamed on the ignorance of their authors by half a dozen historians at the turn of the 21st century. But can they be given more credence than the works and statements of historians, diplomats and politicians who, presumably, were not unaware of the meticulous investigations carried out by Mossad, one of the world's most reputable intelligence agencies?

No Jews Expelled during World War II

As early as November 1940, Franco's government recommended that Sephardic Jews residing in France declare themselves Spanish to avoid prosecution. The Caudillo used as the legal basis for his position a 1924 decree-law signed by Alfonso XIII, at the suggestion of the dictator general Miguel

Primo de Rivera (the father of the founder of the Falange, José Antonio). According to this decree-law, all Jews of Sephardic origin who wished to do so could apply for Spanish nationality, regardless of their place of residence and nationality. During the Second World War, this decree allowed Sephardic Jews to register as Spaniards in any consulate or embassy, without conditions or limitations. Madrid was careful to point out that the 1924 decree, which had been promulgated under the Monarchy and the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera, was no longer in effect after the advent of the Republic (1931).

After the French defeat in 1940, the Spanish consulates were overrun by would-be exiles. They granted a transit visa to anyone who presented an emigration visa for another country, without distinguishing between Jews and non-Jews. Some 40,000 to 50,000 Jews went into exile, a large proportion of them via Spain, where 8000 to 10,000 settled permanently.

In 1942, the Spanish government took a new step. It granted passports and visas to the Jews of Europe in order to escape the anti-Semitic persecution of the various countries that were collaborating with National Socialist Germany. Spanish diplomats, ambassadors and consuls in Berlin, Paris, Marseille, Athens, Copenhagen, Vienna, Belgrade, Bucharest, Budapest, Sofia, etc. intervened to ensure the rights of their new nationals. Priority was given to Sephardic Jews, but protection was often extended to Ashkenazim. Between 4,000 and 8,000 benefited from diplomatic protection, and at least 6,000 to 10,000 crossed the border illegally between 1942 and 1944. The result was serious financial and other problems in a country that had recently emerged from the civil war.

Over the last thirty years, various authors (including Antonio Marquina Barrio, Gloria Inés Ospina, Gonzalo Álvarez Chillida, Bern Rother, Danielle Rozenberg and Deborah Dwork) have denounced, often virulently, the Caudillo's so-called humanitarian action as a myth, manipulation, disinformation and rehabilitation of Francoism. The regime's policy was marked, according to them, by immobility, extreme slowness, minimal involvement, voluntary passivity, procrastination, delays and always the use of extremely restrictive selection criteria. As per these authors, Franco's Spain was ultimately responsible for abandoning to a tragic fate many Judeo-Spaniards who could have been spared. According to these more or less militant historians, the number of Jews saved did not exceed 4,000 to 5,000 people (a low figure that only takes into account the refugees who benefited from the protection of diplomatic legations). Franco, they say, was not at all interested in the fate of the Jews. His only concern was to limit the Jewish presence in Spain and to avoid the risk of a permanent stay of potential enemies of the regime. In essence, they argue, far from responding to the philosemitic sensibilities of the Caudillo and his entourage, the very relative protection of the Jews was based mainly on the reason of State: the

obsessive affirmation of Spanish sovereignty, the preservation of economic interests, the taking into account of German demands, the pressure of the Allies, the recommendations of Pope Pius XII and the evolution of the world conflict on the Eastern Front.

According to these authors, the merit was due exclusively to a few diplomats who had acted behind the backs of their superiors and even against the instructions they had received. The statements of these diplomats always minimized their role in favor of Franco and were all forced and coerced. However, the morality of one of the most prestigious and great servants of the State, Ángel Saenz Briz (when he was consul general in New York), cannot be doubted. When asked in 1963 by the Israeli historian Isaac Molho about the rescue of the Hungarian Jews, Saenz Briz "Righteous Among the Nations," concluded his letter of reply with these words: *"We were able to house several thousand hunted Jews, whose lives I can proudly say are owed to General Franco... And this is all I can say. If my story is useful in any way, I ask you to use it without mentioning my name, because I have no merit in it, having limited myself to carrying out the orders of my government and of General Franco."* [Letter of Sanz Briz to Isaac Molho (15-11-1963, AMAE, leg. R7649/14), cited in Isidro González García, *Relaciones España-Israel y el conflicto del Oriente Medio* (Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 2001), pp. 215-218].

Sanz Briz was knighted and made a commander of the Order of Isabel the Catholic, and he had a brilliant career as a diplomat, which he ended as Spanish ambassador to China and then to the Holy See.

Another interesting testimony is that of the diplomat Pedro Schwartz, son of the Spanish consul in Vienna who bore the same name. In 1999, he explained: *"I was always amazed at the help Franco gave to the Jews persecuted by Nazism. The condemnations of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, which he was convinced endangered the very existence of Spain, did not come from his mouth. But as soon as the Civil War broke out, Franco and his ministers ordered the Spanish consular representatives to protect the Sephardim of the territories that fell under German control from discrimination and expropriation"* (*La Vanguardia Digital*, May 4, 1999).

Franco's, and his regime's, assistance to the Jews of Europe during the Second World War is a historically established fact. Was it done without enthusiasm or sympathy? Was it the compassion of a convinced Catholic? Was it a timely gesture to improve the image of the regime and to obtain economic assistance from the United States? Was Franco inspired by his brother Nicolas Franco, ambassador to Portugal, whom he had commissioned, along with the Phalangist Javier Martínez de

Bedoya, to negotiate with representatives of the World Jewish Congress? Did he feel closer to the Arab-Muslims, the majority of whose Moroccan leaders had also given him valuable support during the uprising? Did he consider himself primarily indebted to his Arab-Muslim comrades-in-arms, especially his friend General Mohamed Ben Mezian Belkacem? Did he feel resentful of the world Zionist organizations that had shown their sympathy for the Popular Front government? Did he give express instructions to his diplomats to protect the Jews? Did he simply turn a blind eye or tacitly consent to their action? So many questions that remain open to debate.

But the facts remain. Directly or indirectly, Franco helped the Jews during the Second World War at particularly cruel times. He renewed his consular protection in 1948 for the benefit of Jews in Egypt and Greece, then during the mass exile of Jews from Morocco (1954-1961. The Jewish population of Morocco, which amounted to about 230,000 in 1948, was no more than 10,000 in 1974); and again during the Suez affair (1956) and the Six Day War (1967).

At the end of World War II, the World Jewish Congress expressed its gratitude to the Spanish government "for its efforts;" but in 1949 Israel voted against suspending sanctions against Spain at the UN. The Caudillo felt the blow, published some articles under a pseudonym against the Jewish state, pursued a pro-Arab policy and refused to recognize the State of Israel.

But two days after his death, on November 22, 1975, a funeral service was held in his memory in the Hispanic-Portuguese Synagogue in New York, in the presence of representatives of the American Sephardi Federation, "for having had pity on the Jews." Several Spanish diplomats, whose Francoist sympathies are unsuspected, such as the chargé d'affaires at the Budapest embassy, Ángel Sanz Briz, already mentioned, but also the first secretary of the embassy in Paris, then consul in Bordeaux, Eduardo Propper de Callejón, or the chargé d'affaires at the Berlin embassy, José Ruiz Santaella and his wife Carmen Schrader, were honored as "Righteous among the Nations" by the Yad Vashem Memorial.

[Among the diplomats of the Franco regime who were involved in these humanitarian actions were Francisco Gómez-Jordana and José Felix de Lequerica (Ministers of Foreign Affairs); Nicolás Franco (brother of Francisco Franco, ambassador in Lisbon); Javier Martínez de Bedoya (press attaché in Lisbon); Ginés Vidal y Saura (ambassador in Berlin); Sebastián Romero Radigales (Athens); Eduardo Propper de Callejón (Paris); José Ruiz Santaella (Berlin); Bernardo Rolland de Miota (consul general of Paris) later substituted by Alfonso Fiscowich; José de Rojas y Moreno (ambassador in Bucharest); Julio Palencia y Tubau (ambassador in Sofia); Miguel Ángel Muguero (chargé d'affaires in Budapest); the

Italian-Spanish Giorgio Perlasca (Budapest); Ángel Sanz Briz (Budapest); Pedro Schwartz (consul general in Vienna); Sebastián de Romero Radigales (consul general in Athens); Eduardo Gasset, Federico Olivan, Alejandro Pons, etc. On Franco's diplomats see, María Jesús Cava Mesa, *Los diplomáticos de Franco* (Universidad de Deusto, 1989).

There is no doubt that the dictator, of whom the vox populi said that "a fly could not fly without his knowledge," was aware of the protection that they gave to the Jews in the midst of the turmoil. The truth, said the late Pierre Chaunu (a prestigious historian, Protestant and Gaullist) "is as nuanced and subtle as the life that God gives."

Arnaud Imatz, a Basque-French political scientist and historian, holds a State Doctorate (DrE) in political science and is a correspondent-member of the Royal Academy of History (Spain), and a former international civil servant at OECD. He is a specialist in the Spanish Civil War, European populism, and the political struggles of the Right and the Left – [all subjects on which he has written several books](#). He has also published numerous articles on the political thought of the founder and theoretician of the Falange, [José Antonio Primo de Rivera](#), as well as the Liberal philosopher, [José Ortega y Gasset](#), and the Catholic traditionalist, [Juan Donoso Cortés](#).
