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Steinhardt, Lawrence A., 1944.

Minutes on Conversation

with

Mr. Kemal Aziz, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

on
3.3.44

1 - GROUP OF 50 CHILDREN FROM BULGARIA

I informed Mr. K.A. of the expected arrival of the first group of 50 children from Bulgaria to-morrow.

Mr. K.A. gave immediately instructions by telephone to Sevki Bey of the Ministry of Communications, to make the necessary arrangements for their transportation from Haydarpasa to Aleppo.

2 - GROUP OF 150 CHILDREN FROM BUCAREST

Mr. K.A. confirmed the decision that, if this transport will be sent by land, visas will be granted in 2 groups of 75 each with an interval of 10 days.

I asked him to send the instructions by cable which he promised to do after the arrival of the Bulgarian Group in Istanbul tomorrow.

3 - 5000 SCHEME

Mr. K.A. reminded again that a special note should be sent by the British Embassy stating that the 5000 immigration certificates were approved for children and their conductors.

We then discussed the question of the procedure in granting visas for the groups under the Scheme.

I explained that the plan of first granting visas to the 2000 Bulgarian children and only afterwards to the others would lead to the postponement of the evacuation from Rumania and cause injustice to children in Transnistria, living in the most deplorable conditions. I proposed to adopt the procedure of granting visas every 10 days in a different country, and proposed the following schedule in the granting of visas:-

At Sofia:	1/4	1/5	1/6	a 75 - 225 children
" Bucarest:	10/4	10/5	10/6	a 75 - 225 children
" Budapest:	20/4	20/5	20/6	a 75 - 225 children
				675 children

Mr. K.A. finally agreed to this procedure, and dictated the according instructions to the Turkish Legation at once.

With regards to the conductors, it was agreed that each

group should consist of 70 children and 5 adults as conductors. If the number of adults, for whom immigrations certificates will be approved, will increase the number of 5 per group, their visas will be granted individually.

4- SHIPPING.

Mr. K.A. informed me that he had received a note from the U.S. Ambassador guaranteeing to indemnify the loss of any Turkish boat chartered for the purpose of transportation of Jewish immigrants to Palestine, through torpedo or in any other way. The note has been sent to M. Cevat Acikalin, and will be discussed with the Minister of Foreign Affairs shortly. It appears that it will be necessary to submit the demand to the Conseil de Ministres, which will be done as soon as possible.

I understand that a decision cannot be expected in the very next days.

I pointed out that the U.S. Ambassador stated that the President is personally interested in the matter of saving refugees.

Mr. K.A. replied that he would pass this information to the proper channels referring to the statement which he also had received from Mr. Packer.

5- BUDAPEST CABLE of 1.3.44

I showed Mr. K.A. the cable sent by our representative in Budapest stating that the Turkish Consul refuses to grant any transit visa because of the 'General Instructions' which stipulate that each case must be referred to Ankara by mail for decision. I referred to our conversation of the 26.2. a.c., when I was promised that Jewish refugees would be exempt from these regulations.

Mr. K.A. Immediately sent the necessary instructions.

Istanbul, 13.3.1944

H.E.

Lawrence A. Steinhardt,
Ambassador of the United States of America
Ankara

Your Excellency,

I have the honour to refer to our conversation of the 4th April a.c. and I shall be very glad if you will kindly give the necessary instructions to send the attached letter to Dr. N. Goldmann, Executive of the Zionist Organization in New York, in a way you will find possible. I am glad to be able to convey to the Executive of the Zionist Organization by this way, some information regarding your efficient activity in matters of immigration and rescuing Jewish refugees from the Balkans. Copies of your kind letter of the 3rd April have also been sent to the Jewish Agency in London and Jerusalem on the 5th April a.c.

I take the opportunity of submitting to you some statistical figures regarding the flux of immigration of Jewish refugees via Turkey in the first quarter of 1944. The following is the distribution of the immigrants according to the countries of origin:

By land:

	<u>Bulgaria</u>	<u>Hungary</u>	<u>Rumania</u>	<u>Greece</u>	<u>Total</u>
January	32	73	--	--	105
February	55	78	12	--	145
March	117	9	17	--	143
April 1-15	25	--	4	3	32
	<u>229</u>	<u>160</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>425</u>

By sea:

January	--	--	--	13	13
February	--	--	--	74	74
March	--	--	239	28	267
April 1-15	--	--	244	27	271
	<u>--</u>	<u>--</u>	<u>483</u>	<u>142</u>	<u>625</u>
					<u>1050</u>

Accordingly, the number of immigrants who passed in transit via Turkey to Palestine reached a total of 1050 persons.

These figures, although they are in no comparison with the tragic situation of Jewry in the enemy occupied countries, may only be valued in the light of the almost unsurmountable difficulties in arranging the immigration under the troublesome conditions which are now sufficiently known to you. I may say without exaggeration that it is a miracle that even this small number has escaped from the Nazi hell.

Let us hope now that the S/S "Tari", which you succeeded to obtain despite of all the obstacles, by your personal intervention, for the purpose of transportation of Jewish immigrants, will sail shortly and that at least 1500 Jewish children from Transnistria will be saved and brought to the country of their destination.

With my best regards and many thanks,

Sincerely yours,

Ch. Barlas



COPY

AHS File

Embassy of the
United States of America

Ankara, April 3, 1944

Mr. Ch. Barlas
Jewish Agency for Palestine
Pera Palace Hotel
Istanbul

Steinhardt

My dear Mr. Barlas:

I am indebted for your thoughtful letter of April 2nd. Will you please convey to the Executive of the Jewish Agency for Palestine my thanks for its generous expressions which I deeply appreciate. I have now reached a point in my negotiations with the Turkish Government at which I feel that I can with reasonable certainty inform you as follows:

1. The S/S TARI, a seaworthy passenger vessel with a capacity for 1500 passengers and fully equipped with life-saving devices for that number of persons, has been placed at my disposal by the Turkish Government for the purpose of a voyage from Istanbul to Constanza--or if necessary Burgas or Varna--to Haifa, to evacuate Jewish refugees from the Balkans. While the terms of the contract which are at present under negotiation between Mr. Black of the United States War Shipping Administration and the Director General of the Turkish State Steamship Lines have not yet been entirely agreed upon, Mr. Black informed me this morning on my arrival in Istanbul that most of the provisions to which I took exception a few days ago and subsequently discussed with the Minister for Foreign Affairs have been eliminated and that he is now reasonably satisfied that a contract can be signed at any time which while not entirely satisfactory to me will not be so unreasonable that I cannot conscientiously approve of it.

Under these circumstances, I consider that the S/S TARI is virtually under charter to us and as I understand that she will be prepared to sail within three or four days, I have instructed Mr. Black to prepare the contract for my signature and to submit it to me.

On the other hand, I see little object in actually signing the charter party and starting a penalty of 5,000 Turkish Pounds a day running until the German safe conduct has been received. Application has been made for a Russian safe conduct through the Russian Ambassador in Ankara and the American Ambassador in Moscow. While it has not yet been received, I have little doubt that if necessary it could be expedited by an additional telegram to Moscow.

Insofar as concerns the German safe conduct, application has been made for it through Mr. Simond of the International Red Cross through Geneva and by the State Department in Washington through neutral powers. Before my departure from Ankara, I called on the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs who has agreed to send for the German Ambassador tomorrow for the purpose of urging him to obtain a German safe conduct from his government.

I feel, therefore, that everything has been done that possibly can be done by us to insure the sailing of the S/S TARI on its mission of mercy. I am prepared to sign the charter for the vessel as soon as the safe conducts are granted or even before if there is a reasonable certainty they will be granted, but see little object in incurring an unnecessary financial obligation by the War Refugee Board until there is at least a prospect that the German safe conduct will be granted. Should the Turkish Government object to any delay in signing the charter party, I shall feel justified in signing the same in order to hold the S/S TARI even though the German safe conduct has not yet been received, but until the Turkish Government presses me to sign I can see no advantage in doing so until I have some encouraging word that the German safe conduct is to be granted, particularly as the Turkish Government will not agree to the sailing of the vessel unless a German safe conduct is first granted. If there had been any possibility - no matter how remote - that the Turkish Government might waive the requirement of a German safe conduct, it has been irretrievably lost by torpedoing of the Turkish S/S KROM a few days ago by an unknown submarine while in Turkish territorial waters.

2. As the result of two personal visits I made to the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Bulgarian S/S MILKA was allowed to enter the port of Istanbul without proper documents and although previously declared unseaworthy by the International Red Cross. In my first talk with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, he stated that as the Jewish refugees on board the S/S MILKA had not been cleared by any authorities, were without Turkish visas and without Palestine entry certificates, he would not under any circumstances permit them to land in Turkey as to do so would be to encourage the illegal traffic in refugees. He said that it was only by refusing entry into Turkey to refugees who arrived without Turkish transit visas that he could avoid a flood of illegal entries. He was quite adamant in his refusal. He said he was aware of the fact that the illegal traffic in refugees was highly organized in Istanbul and that he contemplated shortly taking the most severe action against those responsible for encouraging the same. He said that he had just received a full report from the Turkish police on this entire subject but that he had not as yet had an opportunity to study the report fully and to decide on the action he intended to take to hold those responsible for encouraging the illegal arrival in Turkish ports of vessels carrying refugees without Turkish visas.

In the course of my second talk with him which lasted for over an hour and a half, I finally succeeded in persuading him to allow the refugees from the S/S MILKA to land. After he had agreed to make this concession, he telephoned the Minister of Communications in my presence and requested him to provide the necessary four or five railroad cars immediately to transport the refugees from the MILKA to Syria. After having made this friendly gesture, he stated to me categorically that he had done so as an exception and as a courtesy to me and that he wished to make it clear that he would make no further exceptions and that if any further refugees arrived without Turkish visas that he would refuse them entry into Turkey. He added that he had done and was doing everything within his power to assist me in arranging for a large legal movement and that he would see Von Papen as soon as possible in an endeavor to obtain safe conduct for the S/S TARI, but that as long as he was engaged in increasing the legal entry and movement of refugees in to Turkey he would not tolerate any attempt to what he described as "forcing his hand" by having refugees arrive in Turkish ports or at the Turkish frontier without Turkish transit visas.

I have read with a great deal of interest the copy of the memorandum submitted on behalf of the United Rescue Committee in Palestine to the War Refugee Board concerning the problems of the rescue of Jewish refugees from the Balkan countries. The memorandum is extremely well prepared and covers the subject fully. Unfortunately, however, it contains few constructive suggestions. As a description of the atrocities to which the Jews have been subjected, it leaves little to be desired, but in offering suggestions as to what can be done to ameliorate the situation I had hoped to find some suggestions other than those which have already been offered and put into operation.

In examining the memorandum carefully I find no suggestions which we either have not already put into effect or are in the process of effecting. Additional warnings of the most serious character have been given the Nazi Governments. In this connection, you may not be aware of the fact that the most specific warnings have been given in Ankara to the Bulgarian and Rumanian Ministers in person and indirectly to the Hungarian and German Governments. I attribute the recent change in the attitude of the Rumanian Government to the warnings given personally to the Rumanian Minister and I am satisfied that the warning given personally to the Bulgarian Minister has been effective.

Warnings have been given the German Government through its Ambassador in Ankara by means of the representative of the International Red Cross and the Turkish Foreign Minister and I have reason to believe that these warnings have been transmitted to Berlin.

As I have stated above, while the shipping problem has not yet been solved, substantial progress has been made by the charter of the S/S TARI. If a substitute vessel is provided as recommended by me to Washington the TARI can be kept in regular operation provided a German safe conduct is forthcoming.

Insofar as concerns transit facilities, as you are aware the Turkish authorities have agreed to increase them within the limits of the carrying capacity of the single track railroad from Istanbul to the Syrian frontier. Thus far the number of refugees has been within the carrying capacity of the railroad with its two trains weekly. Should the number increase beyond the carrying capacity of the railroad it will be necessary to deal with this situation perhaps by means of a shuttle service by boat between Istanbul and a Syrian or Palestinian port. In anticipation of this possibility, I have recommended to Washington that a boat be made available for this purpose and have also taken the subject up with the British Ambassador with the same purpose in mind.

While I feel that there is much more to be done, I believe we have made considerable progress during the past two months but I am hopeful that this progress is but the entering wedge in breaking down the resistance, complications, difficulties and delays which have beset our path and the like of which I have never encountered before in an extensive experience both at the bar and in diplomacy.

I am extremely appreciative of the generous cooperation which you personally and your organization have at all times extended to me. I hope that I can continue to count on your wholehearted cooperation as you can on mine.

Perhaps you will be so kind as to transmit a copy of this letter to the Executive of the Jewish Agency for Palestine both in London and New York subject to the distinct understanding that it will be treated in the strictest confidence. I have no desire for any publicity in connection with my efforts as I have felt strongly during recent months that my efforts are more likely to be impaired than aided by publicity.

With kind personal regards,

Sincerely yours,

(signed) Lawrence A. Steinhardt.



C O P Y

Istanbul, April 12, 1944.

His Excellency
Lawrence A. Steinhardt
Ambassador of the United States of America
A N K A R A

Your Excellency,

I take great pleasure in informing you that the Executive of the Jewish Agency for Palestine has instructed me by cable to convey to you its grateful thanks and wholehearted gratitude and appreciation of your invaluable efforts and successful intervention in securing a Turkish boat, the purpose of which is to transport Jewish immigrants to Palestine. This great humanitarian action on your part will enable us to rescue thousands of Jewish refugees from the Nazi heel and thus give them an opportunity to rehabilitate themselves in a land of security.

I am more than pleased to join the Executive in expressing to you my personal feelings of deep satisfaction and thanks for all your endeavours in this vital humanitarian work.

The Executive of the Jewish Agency further instructed me to transmit to you a copy of the Memorandum submitted on behalf of the United Rescue Committee in Palestine to the War Refugee Board, concerning problems of rescue of Jewish refugees from Balkan countries. My sincere hope is that the proposals contained therein will meet with your approval and that you will incorporate them in your plan of action.

May I ask you to kindly confirm the receipt of the Memorandum and if possible to give me at your earliest convenience whatever observations and suggestions that you may have on the proposals contained therein.

With grateful thanks and best regards,

Respectfully yours,

Ch. Barlas

SS
5/15/44

jewish agency

j e r u s a l e m

1987 yours 30/3 am now informed by britpass istanbul
that instructions re issuing visas on my application
without referring jerusalem or london now received stop
this modification settles matter

barlas

Ch. Barlas
Pera Palas
Istanbul, 5.4.44.



ss

5/15/44