

13 *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion in Turkey*

Rifat N. Bali

The objectives present in the Secret Protocols of Zion have been mostly achieved. The Jews have aims written in their secret Protocols for putting other nations under their domination. Going into the details of the Protocols would lead us far from our main subject. However, explaining only one of the Protocols can give us an idea about the contents of the others. Among the Protocols of Zion is the principle of engaging the minds of the people with useless entertainment or useless matters so as to distance them from any concern with serious affairs. Today the popularity of football is a perfect example which shows that this principle of the Protocols of Zion has been realized.¹

Introduction

Süleyman Arif Emre (1923–), the writer of these lines, is no ordinary politician. A graduate of the prestigious Law School of Ankara University, he served five times as a member of parliament and as general secretary of the National Order Party. Emre was the founding president of the party, established in 1970 by Necmettin Erbakan, a notorious antisemitic leader and chief ideologist of Turkish political Islam, or the National View (*Millî Görüş*). The creation of the National Order Party (January 26, 1970–May 20, 1971) marked the beginning of Turkey's venture into political Islam and was the first in a succession of political parties which, after being closed by the courts for anti-secularism, were re-constituted under different names, including the National Salvation Party (October 11, 1972–September 12, 1980), Welfare Party (July 19, 1983–January 16, 1998), Virtue Party (December 17, 1997–June 22, 2001), and Felicity Party (July 10, 2001–). Emre was involved in the founding of each of these parties. In 1974 when Bülent Ecevit (1925–2006), a leftist Kemalist² president of the Republican People's Party, formed a coalition government with Erbakan, Emre was granted the portfolio of state minister in charge of religious foundations and the Council of State, and the presidency of religious affairs. As of 2007 he served as a member of the board of the founders of the Felicity Party and as a columnist for *Millî Gazete*, the semi-official newspaper of the National View. It should be noted that the

Justice and Development Party, which won the November 2002 elections, has roots in the National View ideology; party leader Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan, however, has dissociated the party from this creed, defining it as a conservative Muslim party.

The history of antisemitism in Republican Turkey has several facets. In the formative years of the republic (1923–46), antisemitism was manifested mainly in economic stereotypes. As in Europe of that time, Jews were portrayed in caricatures as greedy, dirty usurers, who were disloyal to the fatherland.³ After the end of World War II, these images were displaced by myths promoted in radical Islamist circles, such as the blood libel and Jewish world domination, and conspiracy theories such as those found in the Protocols.

Süleyman Arif Emre's belief in the Protocols is not an isolated case. In fact, he is highly representative, demonstrating how the Protocols have been accepted as an authentic document among Islamists and among ultra-nationalist groups in Turkey.

Publishing cycles of the Protocols in Turkey

The history of democracy in the Republic of Turkey can be divided into two lengthy periods. The first began with the establishment of the republic in 1923 until the end of World War II when Turkey was governed solely by the Republican People's Party, established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic. The second was the multi-party period, which began in 1946. Between 1923 and 1945 the Protocols were published only three times, by sympathizers of the Nazis.⁴ The tract was not widely circulated in those years because Atatürk and his colleagues were trying to secularize society and the state. He therefore severely repressed the Islamic movement and refused to compromise with those who sought a return of the old regime. The Protocols became more widespread after World War II when, in an effort to implement full democracy, Turkish leaders permitted the establishment of political parties. Multi-party democracy became a springboard for the infusion of populism into politics. This was due to the sociological composition of the electoral base, the overwhelming majority of which held conservative, religious, and nationalist values. In an attempt to garner electoral support, politicians from mainstream parties which traditionally embraced secularism, began to demonstrate flexibility with Atatürk's reforms and with the republican principle of secularism. They thus closed their eyes to the growth of the Islamic movement, which eventually gained power in 2002. The popularity of the Protocols in Turkey, then, closely parallels the development of Islamism and extreme right politics. Over 58 years – from 1946 until 2008 – the tract was published 102 times, in accordance with the breakdown in Table 13.1.

Generally, the tract has been published in full text or in lengthy summarized form, in books dealing with Zionism, Judaism, the Torah, and the State of Israel, or quoted in articles published in Islamist and ultra-nationalist journals and newspapers. According to the ideological profile of the publishers of

Table 13.1 Publication of the Protocols in Turkey, 1923–2008

<i>Years/published by</i>	<i>1923–1945</i>	<i>1946–1950</i>	<i>1951–1960</i>	<i>1961–1970</i>	<i>1971–1980</i>	<i>1981–1990</i>	<i>1991–2000</i>	<i>2001–2008</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Ultra-nationalists</i>	3	–	–	3	8	2	3	1	20
<i>Ultra-nationalists/ Islamists</i>	–	–	–	2	6	–	–		8
<i>Islamists</i>	–	4	6	12	14	8	22	8	74
<i>Total</i>	3	4	6	17	28	10	25	9	102

the newspapers, journals and books where the Protocols appeared, 72 percent were Islamist, 20 percent ultra-nationalist and 8 percent ultra-nationalist/Islamist.⁵

Analysis of publishing cycles

The publishing cycles of the Protocols are closely related to internal political developments in Turkey, on the one hand, and to the situation in the Middle East, on the other. As can be seen from the table, there is a big leap in publication in the 1960s compared to earlier periods. This was due to the deep disappointment felt by Islamists after the Six Day War; in fact, in the years 1967–68 alone the tract was published seven times. Islamists had been hoping that Israel would lose the war and disappear from the Middle East. In the 1970s the increase to 28 times was due not only to the Yom Kippur War but also to the armed struggle between Turkish revolutionary leftists and ultra-nationalist militants, as well as to the beginning of political Islam, with the establishment of the National Order Party in 1970. Ultra-nationalists and Islamists believed that the struggle between extremists of the left and the right was a Zionist ploy to trigger a civil war and create chaos in order to achieve their goal of dominating Turkey. This notion was based on Genesis 15:18, in which God made the promise to Abraham: "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates." The source of the Euphrates is in southeast Turkey, and Islamists believe that Greater Israel includes part of that region.

The fall in publication in the 1980s was due to the military takeover of Turkey on September 12, 1980, after which the press was censored, all political parties were disbanded, and their leaders were held in custody for three years. The 1990s witnessed another increase in publication, for two reasons: the strengthening of the Islamist movement, and the Turkish Jewish community's celebration of the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Sephardi Jews in Ottoman lands after their expulsion from Spain in 1492. The Turkish media covered the anniversary extensively and the Islamists reacted strongly, as evidenced by the publication of the Protocols eight times in 1992 alone. The Islamists objected mainly to president Chaim Herzog's visit to Turkey and to his participation in the gala dinner held in Dolmabahçe Palace in July 1992. They also argued that the "hidden" objective of the festivities was to enhance Israel's image in Turkish public opinion.⁶

The popularity of the Protocols

The cases where the Protocols have been quoted as an authentic document are too numerous to mention. A few examples from three areas: the press, politics, and academia, serve to illustrate this phenomenon.

The press

Columnists who cited or referred to the Protocols to reinforce their arguments were obsessed with the idea that the Jews/Zionists (the two terms tended to be used alternatively or synonymously) had only one objective in mind: to dominate Turkey, thereby manipulating the economy and the media and making the Republic of Turkey subservient to Israel and "decadent western civilization." The following examples are representative of this mindset.

Expressing his dissatisfaction with the military cooperation agreement signed between Israel and Turkey in 1996, Yaşar Kaplan, a columnist with the radical Islamist newspaper *Vakit*, used the pejorative term "Salamon" for Jew, employed in the popular humoristic press to denigrate Turkish politicians: "Not one objective forecast in the Protocols has not been realized," he stated. "If we continue sleeping as we have been doing and elect as governors Salamons who are slaves of the Jews, the Jews will easily achieve all their desires."⁷

In April 2002, during Israel's Operation Defensive Shield in Jenin, the entire Turkish media took a very strong anti-Israel line, accusing Israel of committing genocide against innocent Palestinians.⁸ Serdar Arseven, columnist for *Vakit*, noted that although those over the age of forty would be bored by the Protocols because of frequent past references to them, he had changed his mind after Mehmet Doğan,⁹ "the Master," advised him that it was worthwhile publishing them and other documents, "which *Vakit* could distribute as a gift to readers."¹⁰

Responding, in July 1996, to a reader who asked, "What is Zionism?" Ali Güler, a columnist with the newspaper *Türkiye* (published by the İhlas [industrial] Holding owned by conservative Islamist businessman Enver Ören¹¹), asserted that Zionism was a kind of Jewish ideal. Quoting the fifteenth protocol of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, he stated that until the World Jewish Kingdom was established, all leading figures throughout the world were in the service of Zionism, and that the Protocols had been compiled by Zionists as a means to achieve their goals. Güler then went on to list ten protocols.¹² A year later he gave a similar answer to the question, "Does Zionism have any connection to the [political] left?"¹³

Mustafa Necati Özfatura, from the same newspaper, claimed in May 1996 that the western world, all of whose institutions were at the mercy of the Zionists, was seeking to destroy the strong Turkish family structure by screening pornographic movies and sitcoms on television. The Jew, he wrote, owned much of the TV, movie, and press industry and, based on the Protocols, sought "world domination by trying to weaken the traditional values of nations and enslave them to money and lust." In fact, he said, the Jew was very close to achieving his goal.¹⁴

Mustafa Özcan, a foreign affairs analyst for the Islamist paper *Zaman*, also made several references to the Protocols. On a visit to Cairo and Amman in 1979 at the age of seventeen, Özcan had brought back a copy of the tract

for his own edification.¹⁵ During the Bosnian war (1992–95) he published an article entitled “The Protocols of the Leaders of Serbia,” clearly alluding to the Protocols, which he claimed was an authentic document.¹⁶

Politics

The Protocols have also been used by politicians belonging to the National View movement. Since the ideology of this movement is virulently antisemitic, believing in Jewish hegemony of the media, it is no surprise that a high-level official of the disbanded National Salvation Party, Yasin Hatipoğlu, referred to them. Hatipoğlu is a lawyer, a graduate of the prestigious Law School of Ankara University, a four-time member of parliament and in the past a vice president of the Turkish Parliament. In July 20, 2001, he became a member of the board of governors of the Felicity Party and an advisor to Erbakan. In 1982, when he was banned from politics following the September 12, 1980, military coup, he published two articles in *Millî Gazete*, the semi-official organ of Erbakan’s Islamic movement. In the first he defined Judaism “as the headache of the world” or “the international intrigue plotter,” as described in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Such a disciplined organization and binding mechanism could not be found in any other society or even in any state, he concluded.¹⁷

Continuing the Protocols theme in the second article, he pointed out that “at first glance these devilishly-prepared protocols give the impression that they were not produced by Jews” but this, in fact, was the intention. To prove the authenticity of the Protocols, Hatipoğlu refers to several regional and international developments that have occurred since the Six Day War, including the occupation of Arab lands, intra-Muslim conflicts, the rise of economic pressure groups, and the emergence of lobbies dominating intellectuals in various countries, in addition to chaos not only in the Middle East but throughout the entire world. All these phenomena were unfolding “according to the instructions of the Protocols” and were to the benefit of Israel. “Therefore, we can only say that, from the point of view of Jews, ‘they have achieved their goal’,” he concluded.¹⁸

Süleyman Arif Emre has also repeatedly written in *Millî Gazete* that the Jews seek to dominate the world and cited the Protocols as the source for this allegation. He stated that “the Middle East has not seen one day of peace since the establishment of the State of Israel” and, referring to the conspiracy theories that circulate in Turkey concerning Israel’s aid to the Kurds in their endeavors to establish a free Kurdistan in northern Iraq, he added: “We have to fight against a ‘second Israel’ calamity in northern Iraq.” Emre concluded: “As can be seen, the 22 protocols still apply to us. The material and moral structure of our society, of our state, is continuously being attacked.”¹⁹

The sentiments expressed in these articles, among several that have been published, reflect a widespread belief in the party, and among its grassroots.

Academia

The Protocols have not often been used by academics, with the exception of two scholars. One is Hikmet Tanyu whose two-volume, 1350-page *Jews and Turks throughout History* is considered a classic.²⁰ Tanyu (1918–92) was a Turkish nationalist and the first scholar with a Ph.D. in the history of religions. He held the chair of History of Religions in the Faculty of Theology of Ankara University from 1962 to 1982 and his opus continues to be used widely by theology students. Tanyu included in his book the complete text of the Protocols, with the following introductory comment: “Without reading and learning *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* it is impossible to understand the motives of the Zionist and Jewish movements.”²¹

The other scholar is Süleyman Sayar (1956–), an associate professor in the History of Religions Department at Uludağ University’s Faculty of Theology in Bursa. Sayar published an extremely antisemitic article in 2000 in the faculty journal, entitled “The Jewish Character: A Historical and Socio-Psychological Approach,” in which he analyzed the Jewish character according to the Old Testament and the Qu’ran. His conclusion was that the Jew had an inherently negative character. He also linked the Protocols to the Talmud and the Bible, claiming that the Jewish mentality was reflected in all of them. “The Protocols are a program that the Jews will follow on the road that will lead them to world domination,” he declared, adding that they had been compiled “by Jewish leaders” and “should be counted among the sources of the Jewish mentality.”²²

Conclusion

The Protocols have appealed mostly to Islamist and ultra-nationalist circles, which utilize them in their writings. The level of debate relating to Zionism and Israel among Islamic intellectuals in Turkey is so low that in 2000 Islamist thinker Dücan Cündioğlu hailed the publication of the third edition of the Turkish translation of sections of Theodor Herzl’s diaries dealing with his stay at Constantinople²³ as a step toward elevating the debate on Zionism to a higher intellectual level.²⁴

The Protocols influenced an entire generation of Turkish ultra-nationalists and Islamists and their impact continues to be felt. Therefore, it is not surprising that publications available in Turkish on the subject of Zionism, Judaism, and Israel are mostly popular antisemitic works and translations of antisemitic Egyptian, Iranian, and Arabic ones, and that the ultra-nationalists’ handbook is the Turkish translation of *Mein Kampf*, which became a bestseller in the country in 2005.²⁵ Moreover, Islamists tend to explain events by resorting to conspiracy theories involving Jews, Zionists, Freemasons, and Dönmes (crypto-Jewish followers of the false messiah Shabtai Tzvi). The most widely accepted one is that the establishment of the secular Turkish Republic was the result of a Jewish conspiracy.²⁶ Therefore, Islamists believe that the only

obstacles to transforming the Republic of Turkey into an Islamic Republic of Turkey are the Dönmes and Jews, who are fierce secularists.

A review of an edition of the Protocols was published in April 2004 in an ultra-nationalist Kemalist journal. The article describes the tract as offering hints of a world vision of Zionism and concludes by characterizing the Protocols as “too true to be an illusion, too perfect to be fiction.”²⁷

The legacy of the Protocols is very much alive in Turkey, evidenced in their reprinting and in conspiracy theories, which became especially prevalent after 9/11 in the Islamist and part of the ultra-nationalist Kemalist media. These theories all boil down to a common theme: the spirit of the Protocols, namely the Jews, seeks to dominate the world by all the means at their disposal.

Notes

- 1 Süleyman Arif Emre, *35 Years in Politics* [in Turkish], vol. 1 (Ankara: Keşif Yayınları, 2002), pp. 209–10.
- 2 Term used to designate those who support the ideology of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding father of modern Turkey. Atatürk's ideology was based on the concept of a secular republic.
- 3 See, for example, Hatice Bayraktar, *Salamon and Rebeka, Jewish Stereotypes in the Caricatures of Turkish Journals: Akbaba, Karikatür and Milli İnkılap (1933–1945)* [in German] (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2006); Laurent Olivier Mallet, “Satirical Drawings and Representations of the ‘Jew’ in Turkey between the Two Wars: From One Prejudice to the Other?” [in French], in *The Multiplication of Images in Islamic Countries: From Print to Television (17th–21st Centuries)*, ed. Bernard Heyberger and Sylvia Naef, March 25–27, 1999 (Würzburg: Orient Institute, 2003), pp. 247–66.
- 4 It was first serialized from May to July 1934 in the nationalist journal *Milli İnkılap*, published by a notorious antisemite Cevat Rifat Atilhan. Another edition was published as a book based on the version of French antisemite Roger Lambelin (1857–1929). The Turkish translation, published in 1943, was entitled *The Jewish History and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The Turkish translation of Henry Ford's *The International Jew* was published in Turkish that same year.
- 5 For a detailed breakdown of publications of the Protocols, see Rifat N. Bali, *Relations between Turks and Jews in Modern Turkey* [in French] (Istanbul: Les Editions Isis, 2001), pp. 61–68.
- 6 M. Ahmet Varol, “500 Years of the Jews in Turkey,” *Milli Gazete*, August 9, 1992.
- 7 Yaşar Kaplan, “Israeli Planes in Our Skies” [in Turkish], *Vakit*, April 18, 1996.
- 8 Serdar Arseven, “Let's Drink More!” [in Turkish], *Vakit*, April 8, 2002.
- 9 Doğan (1947–) was once a columnist for the Islamist *Zaman* and *Vakit* newspapers and long-time president of the right-wing Turkish Writers Union. He was a member of the Higher Council of Radio and Television, the supervisory board of radio and television broadcasting in Turkey, in the years 1996–2005.
- 10 Serdar Arseven, “You Jew!” [in Turkish], *Vakit*, April 12, 2002.
- 11 For more information on this group, see www.ihlas.com.tr.
- 12 Ali Güler, “The Politics of the Jews” [in Turkish], *Türkiye*, July 9, 1996.
- 13 Güler, “The Sons of the Israelis” [in Turkish], *Türkiye*, July 20, 1997.
- 14 M. Necati Özfatıra, “The West Wants to Destroy the Strong Bonds of the Turkish Family” [in Turkish], *Türkiye*, May 14, 1996.
- 15 Mustafa Özcan, “The Protocols of the Leaders of Serbia” [in Turkish], *İslâm*, no. 112 (December 1992), p. 25.
- 16 Özcan, “The Protocols” [in Turkish], *Zaman*, June 26, 1993.

- 17 Yasin Hatibođlu, "To Know the Jew ..." [in Turkish], *Milli Gazete*, January 28, 1982.
- 18 Hatibođlu, "The Protocols and the Scenes on TV ..." [in Turkish], *Milli Gazete*, April 24, 1982.
- 19 Süleyman Arif Emre, "The Protocols of Zion that Abdülhamid Hân Took Seriously" [In Turkish], *Milli Gazete*, January 17, 2008.
- 20 Hikmet Tanyu, *Jews and Turks throughout history* [in Turkish], vols. 1–2 (Istanbul: Yađmur Yayınları, 1976–77); 2nd ed. (Ankara: Elips Yayınları, 2005).
- 21 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 476.
- 22 Süleyman Sayar, "The Jewish Character (A Historical and Socio–Psychological Approach)" [in Turkish], *Uludađ Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi* 9, no. 9 (2000), pp. 307–25.
- 23 Yaşar Kutluay, *Zionism and Turkey* [in Turkish] (Istanbul: Koloni Yayıncılık, 2000).
- 24 Dücane Cündiođlu, *The History of the Back Streets* [in Turkish] (Istanbul: Gelenek Yayıncılık, 2004), pp. 261–63. First published as "A Man, a Book and a Death ...," *Yenişafak*, September 12, 2000.
- 25 For a bibliography of translations of *Mein Kampf*, see Bali, *Relations between Turks and Jews*, pp. 70–1.
- 26 Rifat N. Bali, *A Scapegoat For All Seasons: The Dönmes or Crypto-Jews of Turkey* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2008).
- 27 A. Fatih Yılmaz, "A Look" [in Turkish], 2023, no. 40 (August 15, 2004), p. 48.