



ARCADI ESPADA

IN THE NAME OF SPAIN

The diplomatic heroes who saved
thousands of Jews in Nazi Budapest



ALLIANCE OF LIBERALS AND
DEMOCRATS FOR EUROPE >>

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thousands of Jews in Nazi Budapest**

Arcadi Espada

(With the collaboration of Sergio Campos)

Translated by Sandra Killeen

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PART ONE

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«**I**n John Ford's film *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), Ransom Stoddard (James Stewart) becomes an archetypal hero for shooting and killing Liberty Valance (Lee Marvin), the paid stooge of the cattle barons. But Tom Doniphon (John Wayne) -literally hidden in the shadows- is really the man who shoots him. Stoddard gets Doniphon's girl and goes on to a spectacular career -governor, senator, etc. Doniphon is the unsung hero. After many years, Stoddard, following Doniphon's death tells a local newspaper editor what really happened, but the editor refuses to print it, "This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the *legend*».

Errol Morris, *The Ashtray*

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I took the long way to Budapest. The reason for my trip was Angel Sanz Briz, the young diplomat who saved the lives of thousands of Jews in the terrible Hungarian winter of 1944. I was going there to tell his story and my concern was to make it a happy one. There were some happy stories in the Shoah. Striking, insignificant. The importance of the Shoah, and its significance, lies in the Nazi success. It's true that they lost the war, but first they managed to murder six million Jews. In 1941, Heinrich Himmler, commander-in-chief of the SS, informed Rudolf Höss that Auschwitz would not merely be a "place of affliction" but the largest "killing centre" ever built. It was.

Hence, anyone wishing to write a pleasing, even optimistic and uplifting, episode about the Jewish genocide must first establish how rare this is. Journalism is always positioned at the crossroads between what's important and what's interesting. The story of Sanz Briz, like so many other heroes from the European winter, is interesting. But far less significant than the vast, mute piles of bodies that nobody could save.

However, it was not enough for me to simply state this. So, I chose to travel with a body. Someone who would whisper in my ear "Don't forget that I died" when faced with the phenomena of triumphant heroism. For the previous two years I had been working alongside other writers to trace the life of a woman born in Frankfurt in 1904, who lived in Berlin and ended up in Auschwitz, and had been Josep Pla's¹ lover in his Berlin days. It was for Aly Herscovitz that I wished

1. Josep Pla i Casadevall (1897-1981) was a Spanish journalist and author, whose works are published in both Spanish and Catalan. Particularly known for his journalism, with accounts that figure among the most vibrant and interesting

to travel to Budapest from Paris, following in the final steps of her life, from her arrest by the French police on July 22nd, 1942, probably in an apartment in Square de l'Averyon, in the Batignolles district, recorded as her last residence.

Aly was a victim of the Vélodrome d'Hiver or "Vel d'Hiv" round-up, that infamous chapter in French history that the country took half a century to acknowledge. From the early morning of July 16th, seven thousand Jews (many of them children) were hoarded together, with practically no food or water, in a heinous act of inhuman contempt. Like many of those detained, Aly was transported to the concentration camp of Drancy, a suburb on the outskirts of Paris. There on the site of a modern and well-intentioned social housing estate under construction, French collaborationism had organized its main point of departure for the killing camps.

testimonies of the twentieth century, Josep Pla was also a man of letters. With a vast literary production and a style hinging on clarity and irony, Josep Pla is considered the most prolific and important intellectual of contemporary Catalan literature. *Luca Constantini, translator of the Italian version.*

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I arrived in Cité de la Muette, in Drancy, on a summery Sunday at noon. My problems began straight away. First with the photographs. La muette is actually a housing estate today and the sole sign of the tragedy that occurred here is a set of sculptures commemorating it with an allegorical train on a track to nowhere. There is a sign stuck to the wagon that reads:

HOMMES 40 CHEVAUX en long 8²

Since the sky is stormy and sharp August light shines, I take a few style photos. Until a blush spreads over my face: I had tried to protect myself by travelling with a body, but still couldn't resist getting the best shot of things! An early lesson. I'd be ready for when I got to Krakow and saw the tourist sign with a beautiful sunset over the wires of Auschwitz. Although I had already received a lesson on the difficulties of representing death: in Jorge Semprún's pages of *La escritura o la vida* that so beautifully narrated the murder of a German soldier, while his back was turned, on the banks of a calm river as he sang *La Paloma* in a clear voice, where the deliberate ambiguity of the writing, or perhaps of life itself, makes it impossible to tell whether it was Semprún or his comrade, who ultimately pulled the trigger.

Should we equally photograph the red-tinted Taj Mahal, the Eiffel Tower, the Coliseum or Auschwitz at sunset? No. Should we photograph the body about to commit suicide through the windows of the Twin Towers with the same intention as the joyous flight of an Olympic diver towards the water of the swimming pool? No.

2. TN: MEN 40; HORSES lengthwise 8.

La Muette does not seem like a comfortable place. And I'm not just referring to the inevitable literary reference to one of the definitions of *muette*, meaning lair: I have gone to great lengths to avoid those traps. It's that the atmosphere and the buildings have the appearance of being even more social than they were back then. On the ledge of one building, on the mezzanine floor, there's a ripped-up sofa. It could be photogenic for the Museum. I take a quick wander around the perimeter. Even quicker when I come across a group of young guys who haven't gone to bed yet and are going through the usual shouting rites before the knives get taken out. There've been more than a few cases of the onlooker becoming the victim.

I returned to the car and then to Paris. I had already discarded a trip to the geriatric home in Arbonne la Forêt to speak to Robert Herscovitz's mother, who was also Aly's sister-in-law. She must have been one of the few people still alive who had known Aly; but from what she had said on the phone, she had only briefly glimpsed her on the street once. And her willingness to collaborate had been only relative. She was already very elderly and just wanted to die, she shouted to me one evening through the phone speaker her son had activated so we could hear her vigorous voice, loaded with contempt; engaging us in one more incident of what must have been a long and painful enmity, while we gasped for air in that crammed trader's apartment, marked by a nomadic chaos replete with so many echoes of the Herscovitz family's entire lifetime.

The families. Given that my job so often consists of resuscitating the dead, I am duty-bound to deal with them. There are two main groups: those who put themselves at the service of the dead and those who put the dead to their service. I prefer the latter. The dead person is the affair of the living. The instructions of the dead regarding how they should be remembered should be ignored if their heirs so choose. Memory brings with it myriad problems and benefits: it is only fair for those who are going to experience them to decide how to handle them. «In his memory...», this common invocation, only means in our own interest. In our just interest. It is not clear how a dead person should be any different for their families than for a biographer, that is, the raw material for a series of moral or economic benefits. It is worth acknowledging this and acting accordingly. The dead person will never rise up and give an opinion if not through the living. A large part of the evocative efficacy of Robert Herscovitz regarding his aunt Aly and the rest of their family (documents, photos, correspondence) was linked to his demands for compensation from the French state: the police who took part in the roundups were French, the employees of the trains that took them to Auschwitz were French. Who, in all honesty, could reproach Robert for acting in his best interests. If it weren't for the fact that she'd have to speak through her mouth, I'd say that even the dead person would be interested.

The family of Sanz Briz never knew what to do with their hero. Even now their actions are marked by uncertainty. Their case is an authentic example of the extent to which memory is a matter of any given present. According to Josep Pla's calculations, the most

important conversation in a lifetime can be wrapped up in seven minutes. I agree. I don't even need seven lines to explain why Ángel Sanz Briz, born in Zaragoza in 1910, is the main material for this book. Between June and December of 1944, while responsible for the Spanish legation in Budapest, this diplomat gave refuge and protection to thousands of Hungarian Jews threatened by Nazism. By today's standards, this would have guaranteed immediate, constant and inextinguishable honour. And yet, for years he has been a dormant hero.

The first appointment took place in Madrid, in the Salamanca district in which Pilar Sanz-Briz (hyphenated by her father when the children were adolescents) lived with her husband, José García Bañón, also a diplomat, who had worked with his father-in-law in numerous embassies. It was an interesting dinner. The maid served vichyssoise and hake in a sauce. The latter on a grand platter along with its menacing serving utensils. As per usual in these situations, the maid in pure complicity with her lordships, served me haughtily and silently: after all your glibness everyone is going to know who you are now. As we were served, my hosts looked the other way, the most painful way to look in these cases. There was a great burst of talk when Pilar alluded to some neighbours, saying of them:

—Ah, but that lot are terribly hoity-toity...

The grammar and human appeal of the hero's daughter have clearly benefited from the combination of Madrid's Salamanca district, the Quijanos (Cantabrian bourgeoisie stock) on her mothers' side and a life of travel.

Back in the drawing room, I had left a book that had just come out in Italy on the table: *Giorgio Perlasca: un italiano scomodo*, by the journalists Dalbert Hallenstein and Carlotta Zavattiero. The hors d'oeuvre had sufficed to understand that Perlasca was a sort of family taboo.

Perlasca, born in Como in 1910, a meat trader by profession who suffered Nazi persecution after the fall of Mussolini, had been given refuge by Sanz Briz in the legation. He remained in Budapest until the arrival of the Russians in January 1945, weeks after the Spanish

diplomat had abandoned both the city and the direct control over the Jews under his protection. It was well known that Perlasca had pretended to be his substitute and this impersonation had saved many lives. The book, a defence of his behaviour, included some surprisingly cruel paragraphs about Sanz Briz. One of them directly attacking the Achilles heel of his memory:

«He had but one sole objective: to leave Hungary and save his lover, a beautiful Hebrew woman, the baroness Podmaniczky, owner of the house in front of the Spanish legation».

Never before this paragraph has Sanz Briz's decision been attributed to anything but compliance of ministerial orders, in light of the imminent Russian invasion.

His daughter, Pilar, reacted with delightful moral protestations to the possibility of the aristocratic lover. And contributed some aspects of her father's life back then to the conversation. The fact that he had been married for two years, was about to have his second daughter (she would be born in October 1944) and that he had also suffered a trepanation in one ear, leaving him irritable and unable to stand noise for a long time. I observed her, touched by her vehemence, but thinking of other equally truthful situations that contradicted her. The fact that his wife, Adela, had left Budapest towards the end of winter, already pregnant. The evidence, made plain in multiple diplomatic centres around the world, that Sanz Briz was a man at least as attractive as the women procured for him. And last but..., the poetic impact of the love-war combination, that affects the protagonists of a story at least as much as its chroniclers.

Nonetheless, what truly worried Pilar was not the sentimental question, but the possibility of a woman rather than common sense or the Spanish government having given her father the order to leave; that an inconvenient shadow of frivolity might hang over the hero. I thought that Perlasca's accusation was going to be tough to

prove, there was no evidence of it apart from his word, proclaimed by proxy, and without any recordings, the publication of which had been delayed ten years (the same number Perlasca had been dead for) from the moment it had supposedly been voiced.

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In addition to the orders of his government, common sense, perhaps love, and fear may also have been decisive factors. A fear, moreover, that had a name, the fear of the Bolshevik. Our hero was qualified to feel it. On July 18th, 1936³, Ángel Sanz Briz was working in the Ministry of State. He was 25 years old and had been working in the diplomatic corps for three.

«On the date the glorious National Movement began I was in Madrid, providing my services to the Protocol Section of the Ministry of State. This situation [...] placed me in a position that allowed me to assist a substantial number of fellow countrymen persecuted by sympathisers of the Movement, in collaboration with the diplomatic delegations of Germany, Italy and Argentina...».

The paragraph, taken from his purging file, went on to give an exhaustive account of his rebel merits and formed the nucleus of the depositions Sanz Briz would make available to the authorities of the Franco regime to demonstrate his commitment to the cause. His arguments would take slightly over a year to be definitively accepted, following an initial ruling against him. The new authorities' distrust appeared to be unfounded if we take the obligatory ambiguities of the fifth-columnist⁴ into account. A letter from Agustín de Foxá,

3. July 18th, 1936 is the date of Francisco Franco's uprising against the Republic. That moment marked the start of the coup d'état and the Spanish Civil War, that concluded three years later, in April of 1939, with the conquest of the capital of the Catalan region, Barcelona. *Luca Costantini. Translator of the Italian version.*

4. The term fifth-columnist derives from the Fifth Column, referring to the group of Franco supporters operating inside the Republican borders. *Luca Costantini. Translator of the Italian version.*

a colleague in both trade and defection, cleared up any suspicion of collusion with the Republican authorities:

«None of the diplomats from Madrid have presented their resignation. To do so in that inferno would have been a death sentence. When six of us departed from Madrid, we gave our word to our colleagues not to resign, as they were left hostages. Hence, we cannot resign, but it is essential that you communicate to the Council of Burgos that of those 6, four, whose names I will give in due time, have the firm intention of boycotting the Madrid Government in every way possible.

We will only resign if sent to buy weapons. Be careful with this letter, we would not want it to compromise you. If necessary, burn it. Be extremely careful.

[...]

P.S.—The other diplomats in question are: Ramón Sáenz de Heredia, R. Martínez Artero and Ángel Sanz Briz».

There is further, compelling testimony to his conspiracy in Republican Madrid and his enthusiastic activity in the *Estación de Mediodía*⁵, at the time a sinister place in which the fate of many of those hoping to escape was determined. For instance, the testimony of the secretary of the German Embassy in Salamanca, present in the depositions document under the simple name of Fischer:

«I know for certain, from my own experience and the testimony of colleagues, that V. did excellent work close to the Red Committee of the

5. The Mediodía train station (literally meaning Mid-day), still exists today but is now known as Atocha. It is one of the oldest stations in Madrid and was inaugurated in the second half of the nineteenth century and enlarged in 1892, when it was renamed Estación del Mediodía. It was the largest central station in the city, competing with the city's other train hub, the Estación del Norte, in Carabanchel. The architecture of the central station of Mediodía is typical of the steel projects of the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867. The structure, with its outer iron shell and the large clock on its façade, is considered a work of 19th century railway architecture. In the early months of the Spanish Civil War, the station was used by the Republicans as a centre for the detention, investigation and perhaps execution of those considered Franco supporters. *Luca Costantini. Translator of the Italian version.*

Estación de Mediodía in Madrid, and that at great personal risk, due to the frequent altercations with said committee, he facilitated the departure of a great number of persecuted people from Madrid. When it came to the escape of Miss Pilar Primo de Rivera, at immediate risk of death, his collaboration with this Embassy was decisive, obtaining the diplomatic stamp for her passport that made evacuation possible».

And even Agustín de Foxá himself, in *Madrid de corte a cheka*, illuminated the Estación de Madrid with his jaundiced moon:

«The yellow moon had risen. He saw the road up to the Botanical Gardens at the entrance to the station, where he used to buy the old books by Moratín and Villaroel, and the dark stain of the Retiro park, that enclosed his childhood, and the cupola of the Observatory, where his father used to take him after school, to see the moon through the telescope. There were practically no automobiles at the station. The illuminated clock marked nine. Celia and Pilar sat on the benches, beneath the tourist posters advertising beaches and spas, and a yellowed page, with the full railway regulations in tiny print. Beside them were some provisions and a basket of chickens, gifts from the farmers around Madrid to the unions. They walked onto the platform.

—We need to get through the Controls Committee.

That would be the riskiest moment. Comrade Rico, surrounded by militiamen, was scrupulously examining each passport. Another militiaman called out to one of the travellers, a pale young man who replied in a trembling voice.

—How could you be Mexican; you're the marquis of Mezquitilla.

They arrested him. He was shaken. And so, that man already drowning in the port, tossed and turned.

—Call the Embassy yourselves.

His wife and children were already on the train. And she was waving her arms from the window. She wished to stay with her husband. They took him to the Committee and a railway man said:

—They should have just shot him on the tracks».

Stations are decisive places. They indicate the precise instant in which somebody will stop being what they were. The instant of going from life to death, for example. The Nazi crime was linked to the stations because transportation to the concentration camps was via train. In some cases, like Birkenau, the train conveniently dropped travellers at the foot of the gas chambers. If anyone got on a train in Nazi territory, their fate was sealed, which is why so many of the tales of rescue take place in stations. All the fictitious accounts written or filmed about Sanz Briz have presented him, at one point or another, at the station of Józsefváros, the point of departure for crime in Budapest, rescuing Jews on the brink of the final whistle. None of these stories, however, has achieved the level of reliability of Secretary Fischer's railway testimony. In any case, the Sanz Briz of the Budapest Winter did have a precedent in the Estación de Mediodía in Madrid. An uncomfortable precedent for collective memory. Trains, passports, embassies as refuges, lists of protected persons: Madrid and Budapest shared war, totalitarianisms and the humanitarian work of a Spanish officer.

Before arriving in the Hungarian station, this officer had already brilliantly confronted Nazism. In August of 1933, the Republic sent a group of aspiring diplomatic corps candidates on a study trip that travelled Central Europe for almost three months: Czechoslovakia, Germany and Poland. On his return to Zaragoza, the young Sanz Briz wrote a *Travel Diary* recounting the conferences given in a school in Geneva. Trade, history, social trends..., it all fit into these master classes. Sanz Briz proved himself to be an intelligent and well-educated youth, capable of ordering and presenting his ideas didactically. The memoirs, written six years before the start of the Second World War, included a four-page prologue in which the German dualism, before it became topical, was presented with rare premonitory force.

«Wannsee and Cribintzsee [Griebnitzsee]. Small boats navigate the river, carried by the gentle current. It's a holiday and Fritz and Gretchen are immersed in the cult to Nature. The lakes are like mirrors reflecting the green hills of the landscape».

Thus, began his memoirs. At night, the young candidate went to the theatre. And there, Fritz and Gretchen rubbed shoulders with eight thousand spectators raising their arms in a Nazi salute.

«This contrast constitutes the obsessive memory of our pleasant excursion through Central Europe. In Germany itself it is possibly more than an obsession. The war-mongering psychosis versus the peaceful anxiousness of Fritz and Gretchen, yearning for a life of calm and serenity, form a dualism that is too strong to build a reassuring regime on».

The Nazi crime was always surrounded by tenderness. Goethe's oak and the Buchenwald camp. The lyrical lake of Wannsee, on the banks of which a handful of Nazis decreed the final solution. There is no doubt that Sanz Briz observed this dialect with rare precocity, far before it was on the tip of everyone's lips.

Still on the trail of the dead. In the morning, before Muette, just after landing in Orly, I made my way to Fontenay-aux-Roses to walk in Léautaud's garden, burial ground of his animals and memories. A plaque overgrown with weeds attests to this: «*Dans ce pavillon... vécut Paul Léautaud... écrivain français... Étranger à toute foi et à toute inquiétude philosophique*⁶». I was like that when I was young, care-free. It has been confirmed that Léautaud died marvellously, without any deterioration. A couple now lives in the house. All living things are vulgar. That is perhaps the worst literary affliction, and perhaps the only one I haven't managed to free myself of. At sunset, back in Paris and on my way to the bistro, I walk around the Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville. Tonnes of sand have been poured over it, with the crass intention of turning it into a beach. A few indifferent youths play volleyball. I abominate and curse it. The scene is worthy of a maid's bedroom poster: the snow of Kilimanjaro sticking out behind the domes of Venice's San Marco: the mermaid of Copenhagen in the midst of a desert: or this Paris beach. My dinner, though irrelevant, triggers a thought. What if the entire reconstruction of the past is just one of those posters.

6. «In this house... lived Paul Léautaud... French author... Stranger to all faith and all philosophical concern».

Sanz Briz arrived in Budapest in May of 1942 with the rank of second secretary at the Embassy. He had come from El Cairo, his first diplomatic destination and just a few weeks earlier had married Adela Quijano, a young lady of the Catalan bourgeoisie. The Spanish legation occupied a Renaissance-style building on Eötvös Street, close to Andrásy Avenue and Budapest's Western Railway Station, in the heart of the Pest part of the city. It was not the only diplomatic building in the district: the Uruguayan embassy was housed in the building opposite, a delicate pink stone palace owned by the Baroness Podmaniczky. The head of the legation at the time, with the rank of minister, was Miguel Ángel Muguiro. Europe had been at war for two years, but Budapest was still an oasis of calm.

Diplomatic activity consisted of routine commercial exchanges: rabbit furs, Vaseline and oranges. Social life was still ongoing. Sanz Briz was, for instance, one of the hosts of three Spanish journalists invited by the Hungarian government: Javier de Echarri, director of the broadsheet *Arriba*; Pedro Laín Entralgo, member of Franco's National Movement and contributor to *Pueblo* and Enrique Llovet, Press manager of the Falange abroad. Laín summarised the meaning of the visit after a lunch, remembering the short-lived tyranny of the communist Béla Kun, saying vehemently: «The Spanish people hold Hungary in its utmost esteem, as it is the only other country, apart from Spain, to have crushed Communism in its own backyard». Poor Laín. Back then, in the spring of 1943, it was only a question of time before the Soviet Union would conquer the country and establish itself in Hungary for years and years.



Ángel Sanz Briz and his wife Adela, in their house in Budapest, shortly after the birth of their first daughter

Giorgio Perlasca had been in Budapest for a year. Ostensibly, the reason for his visit was trade-related. In the autumn of 1943, he turned to the Spanish legation for the first time in search of protection and a passport. Mussolini had fallen in the summer and he claimed to fear the Gestapo.

Until the end of the nineteen eighties Perlasca was a nobody. It would be a conversation among ladies in a Berlin *salon*, that I will describe further on, and the inexorable effect of *Schindler's List* that would bring him fame and a name. Between the end of the second world war and the publication of the first account of Perlasca 46 years of

almost complete silence went by. Approximately the same number of years as in the case of Sanz Briz. It is hard to explain the causes of such silence; this book will attempt to explain them, but they are not yet fully known. From the nineties on, a few texts by Perlasca appeared, apparently penned shortly after the end of the war. The first is the report, *A sua Eccellenza el ministro degli Affari Esteri di Spagna*⁷. The second, the so-called *Promemoria*, a more detailed description of the facts that occurred during the Budapest Winter, about which, however, there are a number of paratextual doubts.

On the first page of the report, Perlasca explains that in September of 1943, faced with the aforementioned possibility of detention by the Gestapo, he crossed the threshold of the Spanish legation for the first time:

«I presented myself to Mr. Ángel Sanz Briz, who was the first secretary to the Spanish Legation in Budapest at the time and whom I was already acquainted with, to request protection in the face of immediate danger».

Perlasca does not provide any details in the report of his reason for choosing the Spanish to ask for help. In some of his subsequent texts, he alludes to his participation as a volunteer on the Franco side during the Civil War. Indeed, this was how the ex-combatant presented himself to the Spanish authorities. Their reaction was cautious and dilatory. Muguiro wrote to Minister Jordana, detailing the request and a few days later the minister replied:

«Regarding your letter of September 25th, I will telegraph Your Excellency a resolution of the passport application once I have obtained the service details requested urgently. With reference to the rest of the consultation, as there is sustained contrary criteria Your Excellence should abstain should the case present itself».

7. To his Excellence, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain.

The «service details» probably refer to the specific participation of Perlasca in the Civil War. And the ministry definitely did not find anything in the archives to prove this participation. As for the rest, the minister's reply indicated («sustained criteria») that the Francoist authorities opposed the legation serving as a refuge and the diplomats exercising the right to asylum.

The road from Paris to Auschwitz runs through the heady fields of Champagne. It's a sunny and blustery day, an energetic invitation to travel. Travelling, going in search of something: there's nothing better in life. Travelling without raising dust is as exciting as Swedish gymnastics. There's no need for the modern-day fervour, or research or enigma: suffice to follow the trail left by any author on the landscape. Travelling through a place no-one has seen is to travel blindly. Travel should be read first; and done later. Anything else is like discovering America. As for writing, travelling delivers quantum delights: I am still in the Budapest Winter as I journey by car through the fields of Champagne and envisage the Tibidabo mountain in November out the window. And now, in this car, taking advantage of the many kilometres ahead before stopping for the night in Frankfurt, where what is to happen has already been determined, and his first visit to the Spanish legation, let me bring in Chaves Nogales and a paragraph on the siege of Republican Madrid to justify the decisive instruction sent by minister Jordana on the right to asylum. He knew exactly what he was talking about.

«The multiple crimes committed in Madrid by the bands of murderers who lorded it over the capital after the uprising caused thousands of people fearing for their lives to seek refuge under foreign roofs. The legendary right to asylum was broadly granted to all of them and some humanitarian impulse led the Chiefs of Mission to extend the limits of extraterritorial rights, sheltering thousands of Spaniards under their protection without asking them whether or not they were belligerent [...] Up to fourteen thousand went so far as to become refugees [...] The embassies, legations and consulates alone were insufficient to house so many and each country incorporated their residences into the rights of extraterritoriality, with

hundreds and hundreds of Spaniards paying their room and board as if they were in a hotel».

The truth of Chaves' account is based not only on his proven authority as a journalist, it is confirmed by various sources. There is no question that the Francoist authorities were well aware of the efficacy of the right to asylum: which is precisely why they refused to grant it. On the other hand, Chaves' paragraph again takes the similarities between Madrid in 1936 and Budapest in 1944 to a marked lack of specifics. We will see, however, that what was room and board in Madrid turned into a ghetto in Budapest.

On March 19th, 1944, the German troops invaded Budapest. They no longer trusted Admiral Horthy's government, which had kept Hungary relatively on the fringes of Nazi frenzy. The Reich wanted complete Hungarian mobilisation and to accelerate the deportations of Jews, whose lives in the country, though threatened, also represented an exception among the countries controlled by the Axis. There are three Spanish accounts of this moment. The first was by Ambassador Muguero, addressing his government. There was nothing to distinguish it from the nervous prose of any war correspondent. Nobody could avoid seeing the influence of the official neo-language of the Franco regime in the phrase «persons considered unaligned».

«A series of... German motorised divisions departing outskirts Vienna three a.m. occupied Budapest seven a.m. [...] German troops proceeding with numerous detentions, including Home Secretary, some politicians, Jews and persons considered unaligned. Kingdom of Italy legation occupied and staff detained. German Minister himself replaced by noted SS Commander. City appears normal though evacuation beginning. Telephonic communications interrupted. I fear this telegram will be delayed.».

The second account was by Eugenio Suárez⁸. At the time, a 24-year-old journalist who had been sent to Budapest by Juan Apa-

8. Eugenio Suárez (1919) was an eminent Spanish journalist. A Falangist from the beginning, he was a war correspondent from Berlin to Budapest during the Second World War. In 1952, he founded the famous magazine «El caso», that reached record publishing figures at the time. During the democratic transition he worked as a columnist for the newspaper «El País». In 2005, his memoirs were published: E. SUARÉZ, *Caso cerrado. Memorias de un antifranquista arrepentido*, Madrid, Oberón, 2005. Luca Constantini. *Translator of the Italian version*.

ricio, director-general of the regime's press office, with the goal (confessed years later) of getting him off his back. Suárez sent his articles to a number of Spanish broadsheets, while also writing long and conscientious reports for the authorities of the regime. The Hungarian experience led to *Corresponsal en Budapest*, a long, scholarly and informed journalist book in the style of his master, Eugenio Montes⁹. I spoke to Suárez on a number of occasions. The first on the beach of Salinas, when he was about to turn ninety. It was aperitif time and I remember Suárez drinking something red, probably Campari. I was being ceremonious and awestruck. Suárez was a journalist of epic proportions, a veritable legend. He had founded first *El Caso* and then *Sábado Gráfico*. If during the Franco dictatorship journalism managed to stay alive, it was thanks to his efforts. He had a somewhat sceptical opinion of Sanz Briz. And when I asked him about Perlasca, he replied laconically:

—Italian.

Invested with the double authority of both writing for the newspapers and for the mission he had been entrusted with, Suárez would take his texts to the Spanish legation and request their transportation to Madrid via the diplomatic pouch. It would appear that Sanz Briz was not terribly fond of this method.

—I think he was jealous of my reports. I don't like to boast, but I had very good information about what has going on in the city.

Suárez had been in that Budapest and spoke to me of extraordinary people. One such figure was the pouch courier. Every fifteen or

9. Eugenio Montes (1900-1981) was a Spanish politician, writer and humanist. He took part in the foundation of the Falange, the Fascist movement founded by José Antonio Primo de Rivera in 1933, and worked as a correspondent for the ABC newspaper in various European capitals. He helped spread the Falangist ideology, thanks to his close ties to Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. In 1963 he was appointed director of the Spanish Institute in Rome and in 1978 the Real Academia Española awarded him maximum honours for his humanistic activity. *Luca Constantini. Translator of the Italian version.*

twenty days, a man would turn up at the legation on Eötvös, having traversed a warring Europe by train. He was responsible for a zone that included Budapest, Istanbul, Vienna, Berlin and Paris. So important was the pouch to him that he kept it constantly handcuffed to himself, not even uncuffing it in sleep. Suárez remembered that the Budapest courier was called Antonio Martínez Tomás, from La Unión in Murcia¹⁰, and that following the war he emigrated to Barcelona where he became the president of the Press Association.

The reports courier, one of many secondary characters tempting for the author of any book to take a turn with them. So also was the recipient of the reports in Madrid, the press officer of the German Embassy, Hans Lazar. Suárez said to me:

—When the war ended I met Lazar one day in a bar in Red de San Luis. That was when I found out, to my great surprise, that he was familiar with every little detail of my Budapest reports. He praised them. The thing is, that I was sending them to Aparicio, not to Lazar! He was a peculiar man, well-informed, clever and cultured. I believe that in reality he was a double agent, ultimately in the service of the allies. He saw himself as a sort of Lawrence of Arabia, and he was highly intelligent and educated.

I haven't been able to read all of Suárez's reports. But the one he includes in his book on the Budapest situation following the German invasion contains a high-quality analysis. And his recall of that instant is moving:

«Budapest continued to party. The honeyed voice of Catalina Kárády was a variety show hit; at the Moulin Rouge, the city applauded the comic genius of a Spanish clown: Charlie Rivel. The Danube had not frozen over and the *tziganes* were composing new love songs. On March 18th I lunched with one set of friends, and dined with another: good people, happy people, inoffensive people who were committed to their jobs, happy with their

10. In the region of the city of Murcia, located in the South of Spain. *Luca Constantini. Translator of the Italian version.*

lot. Forty-eight hours later, two of them had been hanged. Another couple bore the infamous yellow star on their chest; one of the women, of exquisite education and thirty centuries of Talmudic refinement at her slim back, profound, dark eyes and graceful figure, was sent to a brothel on the Eastern front. The Germans had entered Hungary».

The young Suárez not only wrote precise reports and poignant paragraphs. He also saved Jewish lives. I will recount at least one of these, and it is a well known and solemnly acknowledged fact that anyone who saves a life, saves all of humanity. He modestly told me that he had housed the persecuted in his Hungarian villa on more than one occasion. And he mentioned the name Angyal. Georges Angyal. He lived in Geneva, where all men of a certain age and education should live. We exchanged short, specific, almost notarial questions and answers. This paragraph will suffice:

—Could you tell me the circumstances in which Eugenio Suárez saved your life?

—It was after the coup d'état of the Hungarian Nazis. There was a huge sense of insecurity. The city was swimming in armed groups. There was shooting in our district. Eugenio, on the request of my friends who knew him well, came to pick me up two days later and allowed me to stay in his villa, in a residential district, until after he left for Spain. He also drew up a certificate claiming I was his secretary.

The last account of the moment of the Nazi invasion was personal. A letter from Sanz Briz to his wife, who had been in Spain for two months.

«March 23rd, 1944

The commotion that has taken place here is incalculable. The Gestapo has detained over 500 people as hostages, approximately half of those rich Jews, and the other half a mix of politicians and aristocrats. The Badoglio Legation [the Legation of Italy] has been occupied and Ferraris, Voli and the other directors detained. They have also detained Mme. Dampierre; her husband, forewarned in time, has escaped and must be hidden away in some friend's country house. I have visited Gyula and Eva in case they

needed anything. He will go to the countryside tonight to await events. She will remain in her house in Budapest. I must confess that Eva gave me a frankly unpleasant impression in the company of that French escapee that you know of. When a woman becomes hysterical, she is incapable of behaving elegantly and with dignity in even the most important moments, because in my view the situation here is very similar to what happened in Madrid on July 18th, naturally with the exception of the barbarity and vulgarity that took place in our country. [...] The exodus to the countryside of all those with estates or properties has begun, particularly those most visible to the authorities. However, it is not so easy to get away from the capital as both the train and the roads are strictly controlled. International telephonic communications have been interrupted and we don't know whether the official telegrams we are sending these days have reached destination or not. I sent you one the day before yesterday that said, and I quote: "Letter with photos received. Still perfectly fine. In light of circumstances here I believe you must suspend trip. Love". As I was telling you above, people here are horrified by the situation that has befallen them. You must remember that there are one million Hungarian Jews in this country, 180,000 Polish refugees, Jews, French, Italians, etc., and as you know the majority, particularly the upper classes, are positively anti-German.

As you can see, the situation is not very appealing and their future highly uncertain and dark. On the other hand, the news from the Russian front is not very promising either.

Some Bolshevik patrols have already set foot in Romania, and with the fall of Vinitza the Red Army is now just over 50 kilometres from our border. A veritable party, in short. In any case, the military advisers estimate that however bad things get, it will be a couple of months before the Russians pose a serious threat to this country as they believe their main objective must be the Ploesti oil fields. Time will tell. I am perfectly fine and pleased with the food reserves I have as I may very well have to use them down the line, although I insist everything is functioning perfectly normally at present. I really liked the photos of our daughter, particularly two of them in which she is clear. I am sorry you have been indisposed and hope it is only temporary.

Anything you desire, from Ángel».

Her indisposition is likely to have lasted nine months. Adela had left Budapest with the intention of returning shortly, without

realizing that she was pregnant. Part of the language of the letter made me think how Utopian an account can be when written entirely in the style of the time.

1. «When a woman becomes hysterical, she is incapable of behaving elegantly and with dignity in even the most important moments».
2. «Naturally with the exception of the barbarity and vulgarity that took place in our country».
3. «A veritable party, in short».
4. «In which she is clear».
5. «Anything you desire, from Ángel».

In another subsequent letter to his wife, the diplomat described the situation the Jews were starting to find themselves in after the German invasion.

«The streets of Budapest are steeped in yellow stars. You would say there is nobody but Israelites in this city. New laws against them are published daily. They have taken away their automobiles, radios, telephones. Blocked their accounts. The bomb victims have occupied their homes, which they must leave within three hours, leaving half their clothes, belongings and furniture behind».

This letter from the young diplomat had an official equivalent in the report on the Jewish situation sent at the time to the authorities in Madrid by the Spanish minister, Muguero. Among the aggressions detailed in the report, these special measures against the written word stand out:

«The destruction of literary works written by Jews has begun in the fires created for this purpose. In the workshops of a cardboard factory, the destruction of works took place in the presence of Mr. Kolozsvary, Secretary of State and other figures from the Ministry and the Press. Kolozsvary-Borza made a short speech before putting the first volume into the fire, which turned out to be a book of poetry by Kiss József».

I searched, in vain, for the speech made by the Secretary of State. The presentation of merits must have been interesting to say the least. But there is no doubt that Kiss József certainly had merit. «All that remains of man is his name». A verse he wrote. Reconciling being Jewish with being Hungarian was the main characteristic of both his poetry and his life. A characteristic that ended up on a bonfire.

The list of atrocities committed against the Jews as a result of the German invasion was the last service Muguero did to the Spanish state from Hungary. At the end of June, he left Budapest. From the official correspondence we can deduce that his government was fully complicit in his departure. And it was connected to the change in the Hungarian delegation in Madrid, imposed by the German invasion and the new puppet government.

The Jewish cemetery in Frankfurt is enclosed by a stone wall containing thousands of small niches each with a tombstone recording, in alphabetical order, the name of a victim of Nazism. It is night by the time I walk along the wall and then head back for dinner. There are fireworks over the river Main. Aly Herscovitz was born here, in 1904, yet everything indicates that her time in the city was brief. In any case, there is no funerary trace of the family. Almost all the niches have one or more pebbles, that Jewish custom of paying homage and remembering the dead. Pebbles do not wither. The wall looks sober and tidy. The gregariousness of death makes me think of the old matter of Jewish obedience, the resigned and sheep-like way they went to death. Another night, months later in Madrid, the incisive intelligence of Stephen Vizinczey would come through:

—Yes, the Jews were obedient. But it wasn't only them. All society was obedient. Respect for authority, people trusted and feared at a level we would find strange nowadays. If the Holocaust is unrepeatable, it is also because the concept of obedience has flagged.

My hotel was on the outskirts of Frankfurt. It is surrounded by a park of willows and ponds that Fritz and Gretchen ran through on Sundays. But my room has a view of a shed. From early in the morning, a group of workers haul in metals and tools. I watch them from the window, with a zoological approach, like someone observing a colony of ants that comes and goes. I cannot fully work out their plan, but I'm certain they have one. Like I have mine. Today's is to reach Dresden to add more blocks to the base of this very long wall. I'm not interested in the reason I'm doing this. I never have been. I just work on commission. I pick things up and take them

to a place because someone suggests it and I'm interested in doing so. It might be a book or newspaper publisher, or a less physical entity. What I am sometimes interested in, is what happens during the transportation. Like that afternoon when rounding a corner in Cadiz, a young man leaning against the wall of a warehouse, blew through a Tuba and out came gold.

The first telegram Sanz Briz sent to his minister after taking charge of the legation following Muguiro's departure dealt with the Jewish persecution. It included a translated copy of the letter the Hungarian Primate, Jusztinián Serédi, addressed to his country, recounting the conversations he had held with the new Hungarian authorities on the spread of anti-Semitic measures. The ethical flexibility of this letter is surprising and offers a clear local example of the Catholic Church's occasional attitude to genocide. All the Cardinal's efforts were limited to ensuring that the discriminatory policy of the pro-Nazi authority differentiated between Jews and Christian Jews. Thus, for instance, the cardinal asked that Christians not be obliged to wear the yellow star:

«The six-point star is a sign, not of the Hebrew race but of its religion and therefore stands for contrast and apostasy among Christians».

Not one of the letter's eleven pages held a hint of a demand or imploration of the Nazi authorities to put an end to their acts of genocide. The «brothers» mentioned, and to whom the primate extended his deepest concern, were just brothers in religion. His correspondent, the president of the Cabinet, Döme Sztójay, was extremely frank in his reply. He categorically denied the cardinal the possibility of allowing the Christian Jews to go without the star (the pro-Nazi authority considered it a merely administrative rather than a religious symbol), although he did not oppose adding a cross to the star. The president went on to very clearly illustrate his point to the cardinal with a fluvial, Danubian, unequivocal metaphor:

«There is no questioning the impossibility of avoiding a rational resolution of the Jewish problem. It is impossible, above all, because each belligerent European state has adopted the correct means in this direction and because should the Hungarian Government choose not to adopt them, such an act would prove that it does not wish to be integrated into the new European order based on new principles: the consequences of this fact would be immeasurably serious for the entire nation as a whole. Szécheny is profoundly right when he says: “If I am on a boat with my son and somebody else’s son and water enters the boat and I find it impossible to keep them both, it’s true that if I throw my son into the water this would be published in the newspapers, but in any case, I would keep my son and throw the other boy into the water”. The lives and future of 13 and a half million Hungarians cannot be risked for the sake of a million Jews».

Sztójay’s paragraph illustrated two of the main principles of the genocide. The evidence that the Hungarian, French or German Jews were no longer attributed a nationality and that this loss immediately lowered their condition: their life was worth less than that of the Hungarians. Killing among brothers is something contenders have always striven to avoid: when an opponent is recognised as a brother, their life is more likely to be spared. The first thing Franco’s generals did to justify their *Alzamiento*¹¹ was to refer to the brothers as the anti-Spain. That is, they nipped the idea of Spaniards killing each other in the bud. The Republicans put the same theory forward, particularly from 1937 on: the Spanish nation, that is, the Republic was fighting against the major foreign powers —Italy, Germany—. There were no Spaniards on the other side.

11. L’Alzamiento Nacional was the term the generals loyal to Franco used to justify the Coup d’Etat following the declaration of July 17th to 18th, 1936. From that moment on, Spain entered its Civil War. The term “Alzamiento Nacional” was abandoned in the historiographic language used after the democratic transition. *Luca Constantini. Translator of the Italian version.*

The destruction of the European Jews raises interesting questions about national identity. Identity is a fragile and arbitrary phenomenon. Germans had participated in the defence of their country during the First World War, and some of those decorated for their patriotic value were subsequently sent to the gas chambers for being Jews. Their Germanness, so tested over time, was of little use to them in the face of the «true Germans». National identity is not therefore just an objective circumstance, resulting from the place in which a person lives or is born, shared memory or a common culture, but rather an arbitrary, ideological cut, so to speak, whereby some citizens are segregated from the rest. The mechanism was described perfectly by a nationalist politician of Catalan origin, when he came up with this definition of identity:

«A Catalanian is any person living and working in Catalonia, and wishing to be it». In this will, in this apparently inoffensive and even respectful «wishing to be it», nestles the obligatory jurisdiction of the definers: the evidence that to be German, you have to earn it!!

I am writing with half my body in Dresden, a city destroyed sixty-five years ago by the Allied bombs and in which today the only dispute is a bend in the Elba, the picturesque view of which may be damaged by the possible construction of a bridge. Drawn by identity and destruction, the most synonymous antonyms of the Spanish language, the memory of Aly Herscovitz returns to us, her admiration for Germany and its hymns ended in Auschwitz. One morning, five years ago, Sergio Campos purchased a stack of post-war postcards in a flea market in Berlin. One of them, dated May 29th, 1947, was written by Fanny Achs, from Brooklyn, to her friend Olly

Gloeckner, who lived in Berlin, probably in the Soviet zone. There are incredible paragraphs in this letter. This one:

«I was very interested to read your letter, although it is sadly depressing because it shows the conditions you were living in there. However, dear Olly, and you will understand this, it is hard for me to show the necessary solidarity with your situation. I mean naturally, and I know this, you had nothing to do with the Nazis and I doubt that you, unlike the majority unfortunately, supported them. We, those of us who were forced to abandon Germany and find ourselves forsaken, like all those who found themselves in our situation and were deported and cruelly executed without scruple in gas chambers, or some similar method - six million Jews in total- we have no interest in Germany being reconstructed so that in twenty or thirty years it can bring horror to Humanity again. We feel bitter, and we cannot forget, because the victims were our nearest and dearest. Of course, there are innocent Germans, but unfortunately they are a minority. They all calmly watched while old and helpless men were mistreated and evicted from their own homes, without their possessions, to be led to certain death. Of course, the German people now need to pay for that. Otherwise, what justice would there be? Responsibility can only be attributed to Germany's own countrymen and not other countries. From what we are hearing, they do not have the slightest feeling of guilt. Fine, enough on this subject. I just wanted to make my opinion clear to you. I will be glad when in a year and a half I can definitively waive my German nationality, as since my husband is American, I too will become American. One of my biggest worries during the war was to be considered German, as I wanted to have nothing to do with everything that was happening. I didn't want to then, and I don't want to now».

Germans, indeed, were all those living and working in Germany and wishing to be German.

Jewish persecution, along with the Soviet invasion, were at the heart of communications between Sanz Briz and his government. The Hungarian primate's letter was soon followed by a telegram describing the spread of new anti-Semitic measures, such as the prohibition of Jews speaking to each other from window to window or the creation of a room for Christian neighbours in the safer part of the shelter. His humanitarian interest was politically reinforced after July 5th, 1944. On this date, the Spanish ambassador in Portugal, Nicolás Franco, the General's brother, was in Lisbon with two eminent Jewish leaders.

There was a man and a plan behind this meeting with the ambassador. The man was Javier Martínez de Bedoya, a former Falangist from Asturias who was 30 years old, married to Mercedes Sanz Bachiller, founder of the charity, Auxilio Social, and widow of Onésimo Redondo, formally appointed to the Spanish Embassy in Lisbon as head of press though, in reality, he had been entrusted a secret mission by the Spanish Foreign Minister, Count Jordana. Eugenio Suárez was the first person to mention Bedoya to me, in our conversation in Salinas.

He could play down the role played by Perlasca, or even Sanz Briz, but he had no doubt that Bedoya had been key in the operations aimed at saving European Jews with Spanish participation. Suárez had known and had dealings with him, but his information came from a specific source.

—Bedoya wrote a very interesting sort of memoir and I tried, in vain, to get it published. In it, he had written a detailed description of the role played by himself and Minister Jordana in the operations

to save the Jews. It is a fundamental book, but I don't know how I might get my hands on a copy.

What Suárez didn't know was that the book had eventually been published under the title, *Memorias desde mi aldea*. But its impact had been non-existent. Bernd Rother, who mentioned Bedoya in passing in his canonical volume, *Franco y el Holocausto*, did not give any hint of having read it either. A completely minor fact contributed to its importance. Though published in 1996, it had been written far earlier, because Bedoya had died in 1991. Hence, before the Schindlers and the diplomatic activity aimed at protecting the European Jews had become a matter of major media interest.

Dresden's Hotel Romantik is the ideal place to write a big book. Here, there's an effective mix of Communism and democracy. The former provides deathly silence; while the latter makes the air flow merrily. It is thanks to these two conditions that I hear the moaning pleasure of a woman's siesta in the room next to mine. At dinner, old questions are posed about Nazism. And the main enigma: whether it was the work of a group of psychopaths that took control of the State or the joint action of a devastating people. Dresden is also the ideal place to talk about the European destiny. In less than 70 years, it has witnessed the passage of the gas chambers, the Allied bombs and Communism. Yet today, it forms part of a country with a risk premium the whole of Europe confides in. This book also raises some old questions. What stands out is that it suggests attributing the Spanish diplomatic activities aimed at saving Jews to both individual action and to government strategy.

Bedoya's reply to the question posed in Dresden was clear and outlined in his memoirs. And even on his face: Bedoya's face, or at least the mature Bedoya, denoted more Jesuitism than Falangism. A Lombroso-style, poetical observation of mine, obviously. A more rigorous approach would be to detect the same subtle and intricate traits in his description of the strategy that led to the Spanish protection of thousands of European Jews. According to his memoirs, it all began on October 12th, 1943. The Day of Race in Spain, he underlines. It is a paradoxical coincidence that a Pro-Semitic strategy should begin on such a day. But the chronicler seems aware of even this little detail given that a few years earlier, in a seminal article for the story at hand, published in a weekly publication called FE that aimed to appeal to both Christian virtue and the Spanish Falange, he had written:

«This is the case in Spain with our paradoxical "*Fiesta de la Raza*"¹², which in reality means the complete opposite. In reality, Spain has mixed with all races without any racist or unitary bias, without any prejudice whatsoever. (The essence of Catholicism is anti-racist)».

The count of Jordana, Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs at the time, summoned him to his house at dusk, once the day's celebrations had ended. He showed him into the sitting room:

«—Dear Bedoya, I intend to bother you again, but first allow me to ask you a discreet question: are you anti-Semitic?

—I never have been.

—In that case, I shall ask you a less personal question: do you feel there might be any element of anti-Semitism in the Falange's programme?

12. TN: Feast-day to celebrate Race.

—Absolutely not; none whatsoever.

—Good, good; could you then do a study of the essential non -anti-Semitism in said programme for me?».

There was good reason for Jordana's request. Since the spring of 1943, he had been wrestling with the Falangist wing of the government, led by the Minister of Governance, Blas Pérez¹³, who was contrary to the first repatriation measures for Sephardi Jews put forward by Jordana. It took Bedoya a week to verify that he was right and send him «four pages» on the matter. The minister called him back at the start of November. He praised his work and explained his foreign policy in light of the hypothetical victory of the Allies («the only outcome he allowed possible»). The programme included the achievement of solidarity between the Jews of the world and Franco's regime. Bedoya praised his idea, even somewhat hyperbolically, according to his chronicle. Jordana seemed satisfied, and said to him:

«—I'd like to have your support in the Jewish question. I'd like you to move to Lisbon until the end of the war to make the necessary contacts, with authorization to travel wherever necessary from there: the World Jewish Congress works in New York; the Zionist Commission in London; the Jewish Agency in Palestine. We will be able to provide you with the cover of a diplomatic post as Embassy attaché».

The Ambassador in Lisbon was the General's brother, Nicolás Franco. This situation, clearly advantageous for his capacity to operate, was extremely attractive for Jordana's purposes. By the start of 1944, Bedoya was already settled in Lisbon with his wife and his secretary, a multilingual German Jew called Ernesto Bacharach, who had links to the film industry and in whom Bedoya trusted to ease

13. Blas Pérez González (1898-1978) was Minister for Government during the Franco regime, from 1942 to 1957, and an important member of the Spanish Falange. José Luís de Arrese y Magra (1905-1986) was also a member of the Falange from 1936, a theoretician of national syndicalism and minister of various areas during the Franco era. *Luca Constantini. Translator of the Italian version.*

contacts with his «brothers in race», the terms he used in spite of his *FE* and his doctrines, to refer to them in his book. The first meeting with the Jewish representatives took place in the Tívoli hotel bar. Bedoya would have preferred somewhere more discreet. Apparently, the bar of the Tívoli had an obscene number of spies per square metre. It would appear that the Jews quickly made their requests known:

«—We'd like a gesture before signing anything, like for instance, the release of around four-hundred *haidris* Jews [sic: probably *mizrajies*] who are in Athens right now and about to be taken to Poland to be exterminated in the gas chambers».

Bedoya's account mentions an interesting piece of information here. The idea of diplomatic protection came from the Jews and not the Francoist authorities. Although it's likely that these authorities had already considered offering them help preventing deportations in exchange for the «benevolent neutrality of the world's Jews towards National Spain». The Jews' consular problems had affected Spain from the outset of the world war. The regime's attitude to these problems had changed to the rhythm of the Nazi possibilities of winning the war. This was the institutional tune. Afterwards, each man performed it in his own tone. Jordana's tone had always been one of resistance against the Nazis.

Agustín de Foxá, the great writer and diplomat in the Balkans, had also written a report on the Sephardi situation. It contained these two paragraphs:

«Five hundred thousand Jews in the Balkans and the Mediterranean basin uphold, among a people removed from our culture, the old Castilian language from the time of Cervantes, Spanish cuisine, our songs, melodies, sayings and romances, and even our customs, family morality and ways of life. [...] This civil servant, during his time in the Balkans has been moved by this echo of Spain, setting aside the race transmitting it. [...] Scattered throughout Western Europe and the Mediterranean, they will always constitute a force that for its wealth, social situation, business acuity and trading skill could help Spain, particularly if the course of war causes their opposite numbers to fail in Europe [sic]. Furthermore, their extraordinary racial solidarity causes their influence to extend to other American communities that in turn influence American public opinion through the press and finances».

Foxá's text contains an important element that helps explain the Franco government's attitude to the Jews (apart from their fear, humanitarianism and political interest). This element was nationalism. Though it may seem surprising so many years later, what resonates with Foxá and with so many other melancholic patriots, particularly Ernesto Giménez Caballero, is that the Sephardis hold the key (sometimes physical, in the shape of the key to their old homes) to a part of Spain's past. And above and beyond any racial or religious considerations, the Sephardis are Spaniards in trouble begging for the help of their homeland from afar. Not even the strictest Falangism, that of Blas Pérez or José Luis Arrese, could object to the diplomatic protection measures when in addition to the sentimental

argument, sovereign pride was also appealed to. Skilfully exploited by Jordana before his political rivals, the idea could be summarised as the evidence that only Spanish jurisdiction can comprehend a Spanish Jew.

The meeting in Lisbon's Tivoli Bar was so positive that it paved the way for the aforementioned official encounter between the ambassador Franco and the Jewish representatives in July, on which Jordana wove one of his elegant diplomatic strategies. With a view acquainting the minister Arrese, secretary-general of the Movement and under whose ministry Bedoya worked as press manager for the Lisbon Embassy, with the meeting between Nicolás Franco and the Jews, in the hopes of gaining his complicity, Jordana asked Bedoya to write a report recounting the Jewish visit and the procedures planned.

«I wrote a quick, draft report for Jordana, he approved it and it was dispatched on April 11th of this year 1944, under number 15E. Neither Arrese nor Arias Salgado [junior minister for Education: Bedoya's direct superior] ever mentioned or asked me anything regarding its contents and I became convinced that the demands of correct interministerial relations had been met».

Bedoya's skill lay in writing the report as if Jordana were unaware of either the strategy or the relations that had taken place. The report is filed in the Spanish ministerial archives and the wording confirms Bedoya's account in his memoirs. This is good for his credit, because one of the issues with his book is that due to the confidential, if not secret nature, of the activities described, many of his observations are sustained on his word alone. And sometimes not even. Shortly after Nicolás Franco had received the Jews, Bedoya claimed that they got down to work: «The first issue was to save the four hundred Jews in Greece». And according to Bedoya, he saved them in the blink of an eyelid:

«Our ambassadors in Berlin and Athens had already been mobilised previously, requesting a delay in the transportation in an attempt to take charge of them by claiming their Sephardi ancestry. The German authorities replied: "Get them out of here as soon as possible, you'll be doing us a favour!" [...] Quicker than it takes to recount it, all four hundred Greek Jews had disembarked in Palestine».

This wasn't true. The Greek Jews were deported by the Nazi authorities to various concentration camps, although the majority of them lived to tell the tale and returned to Greece after the Allied victory. The event is described in documented detail by Matilde Morcillo in her book on the diplomatic activity of the Spanish ambassador in Greece. But also by Bedoya himself, in a letter to ambassador Franco, a copy of which exists in the Foreign Ministry's archives:

«Thus, regarding the Sephardis in Athens, it was impossible to induce Turkey to allow them to travel over its territory in time. Indeed, so much time was lost that Germany ended up definitively transporting them to its territory and once there it is practically impossible, due to transportation difficulties, to think of getting them to Turkey».

It is almost quaint to see how Bedoya contradicts himself. And that a document dated the spring of 1944 should correct a book from fifty years later. Sometimes vanity and memory mix to create disturbing effects, and that is the most common risk of memorialism. In his account, Bedoya alternates unquestionable fact with blatant exaggerations. The public archives confirm some, but not always very satisfactorily.

Vanity and memories, *excursus*. A perilous alliance. In *La cruda y tierna verdad*, José Luis de Vilallonga's first volume of memoirs, there is an amusing and vivacious account of Lisbon in the decade of the 40's (and the Estoril of the time, real-life model for Bogart and Bergman's *Casablanca*). The chapter begins with these paragraphs:

«For a number of weeks, he had been staying in a very peculiar family hotel comprising a Hungarian jeweller, by the name of Gabor, who had escaped from Budapest, his wife and three daughters. His wife, called Bijou – with far better reason than my father's sister-, was a spectacular woman of incredible beauty whom her daughters called “the coronel” for her management skills, to be heard all day long. The three daughters, Magda, Eva and Zsa -who would go on to become renowned in the world of show business and money years later- were also sumptuous beauties, though with nothing in common either with their mother or each other. Magda was a red-head, with very pale skin, big green eyes and a body that was ideally suited to doing what she enjoyed most, and which I was soon to discover. Eva -who subsequently married Conrad Hilton and a number of other down-and-outs- was the prototypical American woman of European origin who rubbed her hands together every time she heard mention of money. Zsa-Zsa, the most eye-catching of the three, was terribly ordinary, a highly underrated quality that rendered her one of the most famous women in the world.

The Gabor family had arrived in Estoril with nothing but the clothes on their backs, apart from three wonderful blue diamonds that the jeweller had managed to hide in the soles of his shoes. They had all settled into four spacious rooms on the top floor, soon to become known as the *quartier hongrois*, solely accessible to those pretending to enjoy Hungarian cuisine or somehow capable of rapidly improving the economic future of the three sisters.

Every Thursday afternoon from one to four, to the great desperation of the hotel director, Bijou Gabor offered an extraordinary seasoned goulash

prepared on numerous hot plates for a dozen or so guests who were rarely invited again. On this day, Gabor, husband and father, always dined out. I soon realised that one of the four rooms was always left free in case one of the sisters -or even Bijou herself- needed a private interview with one of the guests.

Naturally, all sorts of comments were made about the Gabor girls and their parents in Estoril. That they were all communist spies, that mister Gabor had travelled to Portugal to buy the jewels of those fleeing the red terror at cut-price, that both mother and daughters worked for the American counterespionage services and for the Intelligence Service. Bijou was even accused of having orchestrated for the English the murder of Ismail Pachá, found dead in the casino gardens. But many of those who slandered the Gabors would have done anything to appear at the famous Thursday lunches».

The story continues predictably. Our first Don Juan more or less enamours one of the daughters and has some sort of vaudeville-style fling with her, given that his wife is also staying at the hotel. There's a glitch in this story, however, from the factual perspective. Least of which is his calling Jolie Gabor by the name of Bijou, because that could just be the influence of the diamonds. It's possible that Magda Gabor was Vilallonga's lover, but the truth of the matter is that on Sunday, March 21st, at nine in the morning, she left Budapest by car with Carlos Sampayo, the Portuguese ambassador. Carlos Sampayo, he was her lover. The source is irrefutable. Magda's mother! And she wasn't the only source: Eugenio Suárez also explained it in his book, though without mentioning Magda's name. Obviously, women are capable of anything, and nothing definitive can be added regarding the truth of Vilallonga's account. He certainly didn't waste any time if his tale is true. Our Don Juan arrived in Portugal in October of 1945, on his honeymoon, after marrying Essylt-Priscilla Scott-Ellis on September 27th. And on December 1st of the same year the Gabor family emigrated to America. But in any case, his real vanity issues and memory problems arrive with the famous Gabor sister, Zsa-Zsa. This paragraph:

«Zsa-Zsa, the exuberant Zsa-Zsa, she had become so friendly towards me that Magda forbade me from sitting beside her at the Thursday goulash sessions. Eva limited herself to praising my taste in ties. [...] As for Bijou, she treated me like Jewish mothers treat their exceptionally gifted children. She overfed me. In time, the Gabors ended up seeing me as Magda's steady beau, and at a certain stage I wasn't sure whether I was cheating on my wife with Magda or on Magda with my wife».

Sometimes people are taken out of tales as they overshadow them. Sometimes they are added to brighten them up. Zsa-Zsa had emigrated to America in 1941. In 1945 when the mother and her sisters travelled to America from Lisbon she was at the port to welcome them.

I tried to research among Bedoya's family, in case they still had any memories or papers. I located his daughter, Ana María, by phone one morning a couple of years ago, in Marbella. It was sunny, spring had arrived and her voice sounded chirpy and rushed. She had just opened a bar, she said brightly and then promised she would call me, seriously. I went to visit Mercedes Redondo, daughter of Onésimo and his widow, in Madrid. Mercedes was a charming lady, widow and orphan. Her father had been killed in the war on July 24th, 1936 and her stepfather, Bedoya, occupied a respected but minor place in her life. Shortly after taking a seat in the living-room of her apartment in Puerta de Hierro, she asked me.

—Have you read *El Estado Nacional*?— an essay written by her father.

—No.

—It's quite interesting— she said unaffectedly, elegantly. Mercedes held the noble title of Countess of Labajos, which Franco, using his remarkable King's prerogatives, had bestowed on her father posthumously. The countess appeared melancholic. Though habitual among the worst of humanity, it must nonetheless have been delicate to live with the place, hitched to her name, where they killed her father, Labajos, a village in Segovia, and that mid-day death when Onésimo fatally mistook the red and black of a *Cenetista*¹⁴ patrol for

14. The «cenetistas» were members or militants of the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT), the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist group, that was extremely active in Spain particularly in the first decades of the last century. Founded in Barcelona in 1910, CNT was a confederate union of autonomous syndicates, grouped together under a flag of red and black triangles, that is hardly distinguishable from the flag of the so-called Spanish Falange in its colours, which on the contrary was inspired by Fascism. Luca Costantini. *Translator of the Italian version.*

that of his Falange. The Countess was unfamiliar with this version of his death, as she wrote to me months later:

«This is the first time I've heard this version of anarchist-falangist clashes. And who mistook whom? The truth be told, I've never had more than the limited family information and the versions gleaned from books. Let me explain the family information to you. I have no recollection whatsoever of my father. I had just turned three when he died. My mother, an only daughter and orphan since the age of 14, was 25 when widowed. She remarried in November of 1939. From a very young age, I realised that to mention my father appeared like a rejection of her second marriage. My uncle, Andrés Redondo and also Eduardo Martín Calero, who were in the car with my father, were saved in Labajos. They never once spoke of this event to either me or my sister. I can assure you that my father never carried arms (I believe he was a disastrous conscript during his military service). It suits a true Castilian to die in a road ambush. "The gentleman was killed by night..."¹⁵. They have already removed the monument on the hill. The figures were terribly ugly, by a dreadful sculptor. The only lovely part of that place is the view».

One of the most solid general principles of this book is the fact that children know nothing of their parents.

And even less about their half parents! The countess was completely unaware of Bedoya's participation in the salvation of the European Jews. I would go so far as to venture that the Jews, per se and their destruction, were of very little interest to her. The countess had that visibly refined air one gets from travel. For a large period of her life, she was married to the diplomat, Temboury. And of the

15. The reference is to a verse from the work by Lope de Vega, *El caballero de Olmedo*, written in 1620 and inspired by a popular song: « Que de noche le mataron / Al caballero / la gala de Medina / la flor de Olmedo » [«They killed him by night / The young caballero / The toast of Medina / And flower of Olmedo». In L. DE VEGA, *The Knight of Olmedo*, translation by Dawn Smith]. Lope de Vega was one of the great poets and playwrights of the Golden Age of Spanish literature and the so-called Spanish Cultural Renaissance, in the 16th and 17th centuries. Luca Costantini. Translator of the Italian version.

five years spent in Paris, she retained a cyclostyled booklet, written with «admiration, but also the necessary irony such a perfect place deserves».

There was nothing of Bedoya's in the house, and I needed to get away and escape the pull of tobacco. Or, in other words: the draw of those characters that initially appear on the fringes of books and then threaten to devour them.

—Come for lunch someday.

A few months later, she reminded me of her invitation. And added:

—I've read a curious book. It's called *El frac a veces aprieta*. The author is Argamonte, the diplomat. Slightly before the Second World War he was in Berlin, and throughout it he was the Spanish ambassador in Denmark. Well, he never mentions a word about Jews.

The countess's gentle denial. Ambassador Agramonte's attitude was not unusual. Among the countries invaded by the Germans, Denmark was the only one in which the authority, the King, protected the Jews and more categorically and successfully opposed the Nazi deportation plans.

Hence, for the moment, and given the lack of any family papers, Bedoya's memoirs would have to sustain themselves, opposing the facts whenever possible. His chronicle supports the existence of a more or less improvised plan drawn up by the Franco government with a view to help save the European Jews, that was developed alongside the events that took place in the last year and a half of the Second World War, when the Nazi defeat was more than a premonition. But, like I've said, Bedoya's contribution is uncertain in some details. One such detail refers to the protection offered by Spain to the Jews in Budapest, the core theme of this book.

Dresden and Prague were stuffing me with their Baroque and their river and their empire. I can't wait to get to Budapest, where it all came to a head in the end.

The Nazis kept the existence of Auschwitz and the death camps secret until 1944. From that year on, the elite civil servant, political and journalist classes of the Allied countries began to find the first evidence that various concentration camps were, in reality, mass death factories. Nonetheless, Spanish diplomacy could always claim that it had reported the crime at an earlier date, around the summer of 1943, in a paragraph of a report from its minister of the Berlin ambassador, Ginés Vidal, alluding to the mortal activity of the Treblinka camp:

«The massive liquidation of Jews, not just those still alive of the three and a half million who were living in Poland, but those brought in from Austria, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Norway, France and Yugoslavia; a place unknown to date called Tremblinka [sic] has gained itself the bleak reputation of having been chosen for these terrible killings».

One year later, regarding Auschwitz, the young Sanz Briz informed his government in more detail of rumours that until that moment had seemed inconceivable. His first news was dated mid-July and was part of a report on the chaotic situation in Hungary following the Nazi invasion.

«They assure me that the number of Israelis deported is as high as 500,000. The rumours about their destiny are more alarming. One of the more persistent would have us believe that the majority of the expeditions of Jews (that take place in cattle cars [sic] packing 80 people into each of these in a veritable herding) travel to a concentration camp located on the outskirts of Kattowitz [35 kilometres from Auschwitz], where they are gassed to death and their bodies used as the fatty matter of certain industries. Without confirming the truth of such a barbarity, I

refer the rumour to Your Excellency due to how insistently it has spread throughout this capital».

Thus, in all likelihood, Sanz Briz was the first Spanish diplomat to inform the Francoist government of the Auschwitz killings. And he did so again the following month, in greater detail, in the so-called *Auschwitz Protocol*, supposedly written by two prisoners who managed to escape in 1944, that was being passed around various European capitals. In his letter to introduce this protocol to his minister, he wrote:

«Please find attached a report on the treatment Jews are condemned to in the German concentration camps. This report has been delivered to me by members of the Board of the Zionist organization of this capital. Its origin, therefore, make it suspect of passion».

Furthermore, in those inconceivable days, the truth was independent of whomsoever spoke it. Although the Auschwitz report had been written by two victims, it was largely true. And it had formed the documentary basis of the exiled Polish minister's condemnation, published in the *Los Angeles Times* a few months beforehand, in which the name Auschwitz was first linked to mass killings. Although it was not the first time a newspaper had talked about the gas chambers and industrial extermination. That honour, to the best of my knowledge, lies with a Montreal-based broadsheet that published the following headline in the summer of 1942:

*Nazis Massacre 700,000 Polish Jews;
Thousands Executed in Mobile Gas Chambers*

The minister who received the Auschwitz report was not Count Jordana. Jordana had died suddenly three weeks earlier, in San Sebastián. Regarding the cause of his death, the press came up with a remarkable eulogy: the minister, who was 68 years old, had apparently been killed by work. An overwhelming, inhumane job. So wrote the anonymous writer of the Mencheta agency:

«The death of the Lieutenant General, Count Jordana was undoubtedly caused by an excess of work accumulated over the past years. It could be said that the Spanish Foreign Minister lived in a state of constant vigilance in recent times, never resting, firm in his arduous task, toiling night and day».

Indeed, the obituaries insisted so much on this point that even those with no information on how the drama had unfolded became suspicious. The truth is that the most immediate cause of death was probably one described by the minister in the diary he kept right up to his last days. This was the entry for Sunday, July 23rd:

«At six am we went hunting on the Viuda de Arroyo estate, in Navalquejigo. Very agreeable and quite good hunting but almost at the end they put me in a beating on top of a rock with limited base to throw from and on shooting at a rabbit I lost my balance and shot out of there like a rocket, hitting another rock and opening up a great gash on my forehead, with a lot of bleeding and fuss, giving the boys an enormous fright; and giving myself one too as I bled a great deal».

His own son, Luis, publisher of his diaries, would add at the bottom of this entry, in brackets: «According to subsequent deductions, this accident was the cause of his sudden death a few days later».

Jordana's last days were spent between the dressings of his hunting injury and suffocating heat. His notes on the Madrid heat of the last days of July (on the eve of his death there were 52 degrees in Mora de Toledo) were constant and distressed. The minister was extremely tired. On Saturday the 29th he went home for lunch feeling very unwell with pains in his arms, «as if it were neuritis». And in the afternoon, he still had a cabinet meeting. Two days later he wrote his final diary entry: the journey to San Sebastián, where he would pass away. The newspapers made no mention of the hunting accident (it must not have seemed compatible with the tireless dedication to work), or the urgent mandate a son of Jordana's received from his mother shortly after his death:

«At the time of my father's death, my sister Pilar and I were in San Sebastián. My mother, in a reaction difficult to understand given the time she was going through, told me to run to my father's office and gather up his diaries and the copy of a letter, of the utmost importance, that he had written just a few months beforehand to General Franco. I recovered the handwritten diaries; but the lock on the drawer the letter was in had been forced and the letter taken».

The son did not offer any conclusive explanations of the truly strange event. He was more explicit about the contents of the letter. A year before, the father had written in his diary that he had given Franco a text on the Spanish political situation. The son deduced that a copy must have been held in the forced drawer. This was not a reassuring deduction, and even less so in the context of the minister's sudden death. But there was nothing else. Years later, the memoirs of Martínez de Bedoya would sustain the son's suspicions about the contents of the stolen letter. In the second conversation between Bedoya and Jordana, in November 1943, on the Jewish protection plan, the minister had confided the three axes of his foreign policy to him:

«The Generalissimo has authorised me to carry through my purpose. In short, it is a question of elaborating a foreign policy based on three cards, the only ones we have in the hypothesis (the only one I allow possible) of an Allied victory: the first consists of putting forward as a permanent argument, in the most varied of circumstances, the demands of the “balance of power” against Soviet Russia; the second consists of establishing our love of a State of Law towards which we are moving if we are not harassed (amnesty, Courts, law on individual rights, union and representative elections, treatment of war refugees, etc.); the third derives from achieving the international solidarity of the Catholics and Jews of the world».

Bedoya wrote years after this conversation. He did not clarify whether he used notes or reports from the period to put these words in Jordana's mouth. There was no further allusion in his memoir to the theoretical democratising plans nor the written transcription of the same. As for everything else, time would add a dramatic postscript to the minister's notes. The allied victory brought neither amnesty nor courts nor rights. The executions by shooting and the political persecution of the Franco dictatorship continued to the very end. Indeed: the letter to Franco had certainly been stolen.

All journeys have absurd moments. The traveller starts singing a childish song at the top of his lungs along the motorway. And cannot stop. There is secret laughter at the locals for any old silliness. He manages to pass the same corner of a random city a hundred times, without meaning to. It's caused by exhaustion, the oddness of things, a certain unabashed joy, the easy summer days. A classic absurd moment is laughter. A sudden, irrepressible, pitiless fit of giggles. I can't forget that morning that Boix and I walked into the office of an Egyptian member of the International Olympic Committee to interview him. We were writing our own *Samaranch*. We shook hands and sat down. As the conversation was to be in English, only Jaume would ask the questions. He opened his mouth but I don't recall him uttering a single word. Laughter spewed forth like vomit. The man waited a few minutes and then pointed to the exit without getting up. It is understandable that after a lifetime asking questions I often remember, in dangerously formal moments, this embarrassing scene. But today is not one of those moments. I am in Rynek Główny, the grand plaza of Krakow, and nobody is going to put me to shame for my laughter. The usual laughter I get from anything Baroque, worsened by the specific view of the Church of Santa María, that looks like what in Madrid we call a fungus: a protuberance the square could easily have suffered. And it's not the only one. I go over to the other side, as far as San Woycech, San Adalberto, they say: as if the fungus laughter hadn't been enough. And beyond it, the tower of the old city council, another. The square is vast. To create it, they must have knocked down houses, palaces, closed off streets and sliced chunks off these enormous churches that turn both

their faces and their backsides to the visitor, cleanly, without the stone ambushes and intricate web of streets usually to be found in places like this. I am doubled over by the time I proclaim it's neither fungi nor cut-outs, Rynek Główny is in fact the only square in the world to be created via panspermia. I'm going to get out of here, I'm not quite sure how. At the tourist office I've seen spectacular, general offers entitled *Communism Tours* and at the end of the summer of 1944, the Soviet bombings announced the imminence of the liberation, as such, of Budapest. This crossroads is promising, but a lovely sunlight shines over Rynek Główny, so I'll sit and savour it before proceeding to the summary execution.

Minister Jordana was replaced by José Félix de Lequerica. The first thing the new minister said was that Spain had just one foreign policy and it was the work of Franco. He had his reasons for saying so. His nomination had been interpreted as an unusual and mistaken reinforcement of the Francoist, Germanophile opinion. However, Bedoya was well aware of the rapid and intelligent adaptation capacity of that «boisterous Germanophile». His description of Lequerica coincides, in spirit at least, with the three lines José Luis de Vilallonga wrote in the volume of his memoirs that evokes the Lisbon of Bedoya and the end of the European war: «José Félix de Lequerica, the clever and slippery future minister of Franco, [was] the prototypical cynic too busy with himself to have time to hurt anyone else». Lequerica probably didn't have an active capacity for evil. It's true that in his period as ambassador in Paris he observed the Jewish tragedy with enormous passiveness and without ever losing his calm.

Apart from his ideological view on international matters, he exuded rigidity, that could perhaps be attributed to the insecurity of the new person, in the first meeting between Lequerica and the young diplomat facing the desperate situation of the Jews and the Soviet bombing in Budapest. When his minister had been in the post for just two weeks, Sanz Briz requested his authorisation to attend an important meeting. The Apostolic Nuncio, Angelo Rotta, had called on all neutral countries with diplomatic representation to present a joint note of protest to the government against the deportations of the Jews.

«... we feel obliged to vehemently protest such procedures, so unjust in their foundations —because it is absolutely inadmissible that men should

be persecuted and condemned to death for the simple fact of their racial origin— and so brutal in their execution».

When the time came for the meeting, the minister's authorisation had not yet arrived, but Sanz Briz decided to attend. Not just attend, but to sign the protest:

«All attendants approved its content and proclaimed their willingness to sign it and, in light of this, the undersigned considered it wise to adopt the same attitude in spite of not having received instructions from Your Excellency.».

The minister's reply was not exactly encouraging:

«Delay in receipt of telegram 82 if still in time should you attend meetings on behalf of Spain consider it advisable to agree on actions in friendly tone and polite indication avoiding protestation which if necessary may only be conducted through the Spanish Ambassador in Berlin».

In friendly tone and polite indication. This was, indeed, the voice of the still Germanophile Lequerica. Caused by absent-mindedness, undoubtedly. This type of man would persist for a few weeks, sending the odd telegram, like this one from early September:

«Authorised entrance [to Spain presumably] of Hungarians, Elena Bak, Presca Szego and Susana Steintiz, conditional to their holding regular documentation and not being people of Jewish condition».

The «Jewish condition» was pure Vichy-speak. Nonetheless, the Germanophile quickly transformed into the cynic. In his memoirs, Bedoya recounted some clues as to the specific circumstances of this transformation. Shortly after Jordana's death, he had received a call from Franco Salgado-Araujo, the legendary secretary of the General.

«—Bedoya, listen to me Bedoya, I've been given your Estoril telephone number by the chancellor of the Embassy. This is Franco Salgado, military

secretary to his Excellence, the Head of State. It's a question of procedure. Kindly take good note: hereinafter, everything you formerly sent directly to Jordana, you now ensure it reaches El Pardo».

Bedoya recounts that it didn't take long for him to start using this privileged channel. At the beginning of September, he communicated to Franco the desperate request of his Jewish interlocutors in Lisbon for refuge in the Spanish legation of around twenty prominent members of the Israeli community in Budapest:

«Lequerica who was acting in the traditional capacity of minister to the King in San Sebastián, came to Madrid on September 12th, returning to San Sebastián just a few hours later. It was during this brief stay at the palace of Santa Cruz that he called Mr. Nicolás Franco [the Spanish Ambassador in Lisbon] by telephone to say to him: "Tell the Jews that their issue in Budapest is all resolved"».

Lequerica had changed his mind about the people «of Jewish condition» whose entrance to Spain he had vetoed ten days earlier. In mid-September, via a verbal note, he communicated his best intentions regarding the Hungarian Jews to the North American embassy, which had expressed an interest in them weeks before.

No visible and definitive trace of the actions of either Bedoya or Lequerica are to be found in the archives. But the possibility that the group alluded to by Bedoya was the same as the group referred to by the minister in his verbal note cannot be discarded. The important thing is that while time has passed, the note has never ceased to ooze the drooling eagerness of the writer to fulfil the wishes of his new master.

«... has the honour to communicate to you that the corresponding orders to the minister of Spain in that country have been dispatched so that it may proceed to approve travel visas for all those passports of Jewish subjects presented for this purpose. Furthermore, instructions have been issued to take an active interest in proceeding close to the Hungarian government and occupying German authorities, [and] to facilitate the

exit from Hungary of the aforementioned subjects. Thus, this Ministry believes that the Government of Spain through this measure will do everything in its power to reach a positive outcome of the aforementioned problem and it has demonstrated its will to invest maximum interest and effort».

In September of 1944, the Soviet bombs reached the Spanish legation. Sanz Briz sent descriptions of the increasingly worrisome news to his minister as they occurred:

«They day before yesterday, Budapest suffered a very violent aerial bombardment. Huge number of victims and destruction. Numerous bombs exploded in the vicinity of this representation which only suffered broken windows. Other cities in Hungary have also been bombed. I beg for urgent instructions on whether to deliver funds to Swedish representative from this representation should it prove necessary to evacuate Hungary due to the Russian advance. In this event, I request authorization to burn files and passwords».

In his fifth-columnist activity during the Spanish war the young diplomat had shown courage and cool-headedness. Now he was under the bombs again. And his vulnerability mirrored that of the government of Spain. Along with Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Portugal and the Vatican, Spain was one of the formally neutral countries still present in Budapest. Nonetheless, in the eyes of the Bolsheviks who were already at the city walls, Spain was a belligerent country. None of the other countries, not even Portugal of the Salazar dictatorship, shared this condition. France made the Civil War a crusade against communism in which Sanz Briz had participated passionately.

He had been forewarning his ministry that the fall of Budapest was far more than a mere hypothesis for a long time. In a telegram dated the end of August, he had alluded to the Swedish offer to protect Spanish interests when the Soviet army entered Budapest. The telegram ended with these unequivocal words: «I believe the time has come to obtain said protection». He was not only requesting protection for himself. He was also awaiting permission from his

minister to shelter two loyal and veteran employees in the legation: Elisabeth Tourné and the lawyer, Zoltán Farkas. Minister Lequerica granted his authorisation in the first instance, but one day later conditioned his response and furthermore, regarding the bombs, advised him to take them in his stride:

«It is unadvisable to give an impression of excessive precipitation and lack [of] serenity by attempting [to] withdraw as long as you have free communication with Austria [and] until the events you foresee occur. If the front should break and Russia advance to the outskirts of Budapest, you may hand Legation over to Swedish representative authorizing Madame Tourné to reside in it, but not the legal adviser who in no way forms part of the Legation staff and his nationality does not give him the right to protection. You could, however, provide him with a special recommendation to the Swedish representative when he takes charge of Spanish interests. As has already been communicated, you may leave Budapest and start destroying part of the files of no value transferring the rest to Vienna».

Years after his death, when his odyssey in Budapest was revealed in the papers, films and books, the memory of Sanz Briz suffered due to his departure from Budapest. «There was no order», repeated Peralasca's daughter-in-law one night in her house in Padova. «That paper does not exist», she stated. Obviously, the intention was to present the Spanish diplomat's departure as if it were an escape, driven by irresponsibility, self-interest and fear. But the papers did exist (more than one) and proved that Sanz Briz made his decisions with the complicity and agreement of his government, the opposite would have been highly unlikely. This note from Lequerica, still so distant and circumspect, was the first of the papers and it established an unequivocal and authorised cause/effect relationship between the Soviet conquest of Budapest and the legation's departure. Spain was a formally neutral country, but Franco's government feared that the Soviet troops would not exactly consider it thus. There is no other possible interpretation of the indication to destroy the files: the first order anyone fearing to see their house in enemy hands would give.

Tanks. The tanks are always Soviet. There is one vigorous but isolated exception with Rommel in the conquest of Tobruk. When I walked into the tourist office in Krakow to ask about the conditions and characteristics of the *Communism Tour* they didn't offer me the tank experience. This is what they offered me:

1. *Our classics: communism tour, communism de luxe, communist welcome, communism tour & disco, communist offer for groups.*
2. *Others: Kalashnikov shots.*

Given my social democrat bent, I became immediately interested in *communism deluxe*. To put it briefly, they put you and a guide in a Trabant (a tough and rock-solid Soviet equivalent of a Seat 600), and drive you around the Nowa Huta district, paying logical Polish attention to the chimneys. There are soft drinks and the guides tell you old stories about communism. If you pay extra, you can visit «a communist apartment» where they serve you the famous cooperative gherkins and a shot of vodka. Then they let you drive the Trabant. For the more sentimental spirits, the experience of seeing communism reduced to a medieval dinner is somewhat hard to stomach. In the end, it's your youth inside that coat of armour, with its lance and its shield. While I'm debating whether to get into the Trabant or not, I am reminded of the Polish girls I met in that *communist* camp in Caprarola over 30 years ago. A place found for me for the summer by my professor, Faustino Miguélez, a Party socialist who was an expert in the worker's struggle in Seat, as sober and dry as commitment. The Polish girls were suspicious, not just as Catholics.

Sometimes, while debating the justice and beauty of communism in the group, one of them made a very slight and rapid grimace, that rendered them even more dated and ugly. A number of us had already unhappily noticed that expression. Certainly, of the entire group, made up of Italians, Western Germans, Spaniards, Japanese and even an adoptive Bolivian, they were the only communists; but I don't know what right they thought they had.

I didn't get into the Trabant.

The lawyer Zoltán Farkas and the secretary Elisabeth Tourné. Sanz Briz wished to house them in the Embassy but the minister gave permission for the woman only. He emphasised Farkas' (Hungarian) nationality and the fact that he in «no way» formed part of the legation staff. The «no way» was hurtful as the truth is that Farkas had been its legal adviser for almost twenty years. A letter dated the summer of 1940 from the Spanish representative in Budapest at the time, Miguel Ángel de Muguiró, to Juan Luis Beigbeder, Minister of Foreign Affairs, gave a detailed account of the solid link between Farkas and the national interests:

«Days before my arrival in the capital, my predecessor, Mr. Carlos Arcos and Cuadra, proposed, through dispatch n.º 64, of May 4th, 1938, that the government of the Spanish State should nominate doctor Zoltán Farkas, honorary legal adviser of this Legation, replacing the previous nomination made by the government of the Republic.

Having failed to receive any reply to this dispatch, undoubtedly, expecting said proposal put forward by my predecessor to be confirmed by me as I took charge of this Legation, nor having personally received any indication to do so, I take the liberty, in light of the time passed, to respectfully request a new nomination of Mr. Farkas, as honorary legal consultant of this Legation, given that the services he provides are extremely necessary, that he is sufficiently qualified in the legal matters brought to his attention for study, for his perfect linguistic knowledge (Hungarian, Spanish, French and German), for his complete capacity, gentlemanliness and honour and for his absolute adhesion to the national regime.

I trust my proposal shall be taken into consideration, not only for the reasons detailed above, but because this gentleman has exercised said position since shortly after the creation of this diplomatic representation.



Zoltán Farkas

The nomination arrived one month after this letter, and although it specified the merely honorary nature of his work, it would have sufficed four years later to justify refuge in the legation, not only for his «Jewish condition». There was an additional fear. Farkas had already lived through the eccentric, bloodthirsty and ephemeral Bolshevik dictatorship of Béla Kun and he probably saw the imminent arrival of Soviet tanks in Budapest as a resumption of this and sought refuge from the diplomatic statute that, though fragile and relative, the Spanish representation could certainly have given him.

Elisabeth Tourné was the other person for whom Sanz Briz requested an exception from his minister. In this case, he was granted permission to give her refuge in the Spanish legation. She had been born in 1899, was Hungarian by birth and French by marriage, and since 1917 had been working as secretary (to the chancellor, in consular jargon) with the successive Spanish diplomats. The reasons for which Tourné sought refuge are laid out in a sensational paper in the archives of the Spanish Foreign Ministry, written from Valladolid, a Francoist zone, right in the midst of the Spanish Civil War:

«CONFIDENTIAL NOTE

The secretary of National Spanish representation in Budapest is Jewish. This is the reason she facilitates the necessary passport visas to enter the free zone for all Hungarian Jews and those of other nationalities who apply for them from our representation in Budapest. The Generalissimo's representative in Hungary is unaware of this detail and signs without realising.

It is easy to verify which Hungarian Passports belong to Jews because as the official religion in the country is Catholicism, the passports of those who are not Catholics are stamped with the word "Protestant". This detail identifies the Hungarian Jews referred to without any need for further requirements. It should be remembered that the Hungarian passport is the only one to specify religion.

It would be advisable to meticulously examine the authorisations for entrance to Spain granted by Budapest, for the aforementioned reason. It is worthy of note that when the abovementioned secretary is unable to provide the visa, she sends the interested parties to Lisbon and at that point they are granted said visa without any full knowledge and guarantees of their affiliation and activities.

The same secretary also grants the visa to subjects of different nationality and to those whom the Spanish representation has not granted it in their respective countries of origin.

Valladolid, January 19th, 1938»

At that time, the head of the Spanish representation in Budapest, whom the informer accused of ignorance of Madame Tourné's movements, was Carlos Arcos y Cuadra, count of Bailén, who had been in the post for five years and had joined the Movement in the first days of the war, spurred not only by his character but by the fact that the Hungarian government had sympathised with Franco from the very beginning. The accusation was anonymous and was typical of the style of the era. Its author displayed remarkable knowledge of the diplomatic bureaucracies and a cannibalistic anti-Semitism.

I should be getting back to the streets of Krakow, because the sun is about to set. I will do so before it gets dark. For now, I have to take care of a delicate matter. I don't know who reported Madame Tourné. But I have someone in mind who could have. If I'm going to bring him into the story it is not to make him the object of plausible conjecture. I will bring him here because it is the habit of our polished world to carefully select how we position our rubbish.

In the same moral climate as the report against Madame Tourné, just three months after it had been sent, writing for a weekly in the city of San Sebastián, the journalist Antonio Martínez Tomás wrote an incredible article: «Jewish Manoeuvre Against Spain». Using the most repulsive anti-Semitic clichés, the text described the strategies set forth in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, that is, the Jewish conspiracy to take control of the world, just applied to the local Spanish circumstance. The most novel and sinister parts were the references to the theoretical Jewish activity in republican Spain, and particularly in Catalonia and the East Coast, where according to his calculations over fifty thousand Jewish vermin had already managed to settle. These were the last two paragraphs:

«As if Spain weren't already suffering enough pain with the Marxist torture, the vile and sordid Semitic parasitism feeds off her with the voracious fury of he who knows his empire in this land cannot last, and so endeavours to squeeze every last drop of juice from it. Abominable plunder, comparable to the body thieves we are told of in the darkest criminal chronicles.

But fortunately, the demise of this sinister Israeli empire is already imminent. On the upcoming day of victory, the undefeated sword of the General, like that of the Archangel, will fall on the damned head of the Israeli beast,

which has been awaiting its chance to avenge its barbaric rancour in Spain for over four centuries, on the day of victory».

The article, which also alluded to the Jews fleeing Nazi persecution, had the same goal as the denunciation of Madame Tourné: to halt immigration, the Jewish invasion, as its author would say. Martínez Tomás was 39 years old at the time and until the start of the war had worked in the editorial department of *La Vanguardia* newspaper. As soon as he could get away from Barcelona, he fled to France and from there to the Francoist zone, where he continued to write for the press. Along with Manuel Aznar and Josep Pla, he was one of those who entered Barcelona in January of 1939, shortly after Franco's troops, and took control of *La Vanguardia*. He remained there as editor-in-chief for around five years until in 1943 he began a long period of travel through Europe, beginning with his stay in Lisbon where he witnessed the final stage of the European war. He is likely to have combined journalism with other functions. Eugenio Suárez knew him as diplomatic courier, in Budapest, in the Spanish legation. On more than one occasion, he may have given Madame Tourné his other hand, as a second-rate author might put it.

Forty years after writing the article, at the height of democracy, Martínez Tomás would grant a long biographical interview to the journalist, Eva Favà. On explaining his issues with the director, Luis de Galinsoga, that would end in his removal from the editorial department in Barcelona, he stated:

«What caused such a rift between us was that he was a sly Germanophile. From the outset, I had been drawn to the Allied cause and I believed it would end up victorious, which in my mind was fair and just, and that the Nazi barbarianism would not triumph. In the end, that created such strong tension that in '43 I couldn't stand it any longer and volunteered to leave and become a foreign correspondent».

The Nazi barbarianism. Between the «Jewish manoeuvres» and these anti-Nazi declarations, 38 years had gone by, a Civil War, and even a Generalissimo. When Martínez Tomás wrote his furious anti-Semitic article, he was no longer young. In the first lines of the article, in fact, he confessed that his loathsome passion had taken seed years before. And it would continue years later. In a vivid chronicle of the outbreak of the Civil War in Madrid, published in 1939, the adjective *Jew* unashamedly reappeared, like an inexorable variation of the delinquency.

«At six in the afternoon all the ministers were already in a meeting with the revolting criminal, along with Prieto, Marcelino Domingo and Largo Caballero. Shortly afterwards, that unbelievable tomboy called “La Pasionaria” appeared.

—The people need to be armed and a general strike declared —was the conclusion reached by the meeting of criminals and Jews».

The immediate explanation for the journalist's behaviour may have been opportunism. It was simple: in 1976, Martínez Tomás was willing to die a democrat. But perhaps that's too simple. Though less dramatically, his behaviour raised the same questions as those posed in *Music Box*, the film by Costa-Gavras, and the obsessive mystery of how that affectionate and gentle grandad pushing his grandson's swing could once have been a young Nazi assassin. Both in the case of Antonio Martínez Tomás and that of Armin Mueller-Stahl, a slightly more sophisticated explanation was possible: the young man and the old man were not the same person and the idea of self possibly a cognitive illusion. When the young colleague questioned him about the past, the old Spanish journalist spoke of himself, in fact, as an illusion. When his daughter spat his Nazi past in his face, Armin failed to understand her contempt, because he was someone else then. In both cases, it is more complex than a simple lie. And the complexity contributed moral uncertainty: the worrying hypothesis of the prescription of self.

The complaint against madame Tourné did not, to all appearances, have major consequences. In

the summer of the same year, 1938, she passed the bureaucratic procedures of a sworn declaration of adhesion to the Movement and the background cleansing applied to all civil servants without any hitches. Attached to the questionnaire, in any case, was an unequivocal letter in her defence from Minister Muguiro that could be linked to the complaint:

«The behaviour of this civil servant has been praise-worthy and honourable throughout the difficult times this Representation has undergone since the start of the glorious National Movement, indeed she interrupted her holidays in Vienna at that time, immediately presenting herself in the Legation to unconditionally follow the orders of the Count of Bailén, remaining in permanent service to communicate in Bulgarian [sic] by telephone, to listen and translate the radio broadcasts, inform journalists of news and organise extreme vigilance to prevent a coup by Mr García Miranda who had the intention of taking control of this Legation by surprise».

Muguiro's letter did not deny the fact reported. That is, her activity to help the persecuted Jews from before the start of the European war. This behaviour positions her on an admirable pedestal in this story. If the Spanish legation in Budapest has gone down in the history of human dignity, it is for providing passports and refuge to Jews at risk of deportation. Well, long before the winter of 1944, there was a lone woman there, dedicated to this task.

I'm heading towards the sunset. But with regret at leaving Madame Tourné at this point. I have barely three or four traces of her. The complaint. A few mentions in the books by Perlasca. Her name in a few letters between Sanz Briz and the survivors of that winter. I know she had a son, Gaston, with whom she took refuge in the embassy and that he also helped with salvage operations. I know nothing of Monsieur Tourné, who had probably disappeared before all that. There are no longer many people alive in the world who would have known Madame Tourné. I will manage to speak to one of them yet, when I get to Budapest. A sick and confused man, who will barely remember uncertain trivialities, who will not manage to find the photos he promised among the drawers. Like so many other times, imagination could easily do the job. But what job, exactly? Sometimes, it is even called «creative imagination». What does it create? This, that I could create right now? The reader will soon understand that I have some threads to pull on. They are short but drenched in potential. She was French. I will say nothing more. The Jewish secretary of a diplomat in the Europe of the worst pogrom ever known. Every word of that last phrase drags forth thousands of stories that beg to be salvaged like souls in Purgatory. And the etymology, don't forget that the word secretary comes from secret. She lived alone with her son in a city at war. Some action would work well here: a woman slightly over 50 years old, aged by now but still beautiful, runs holding her adolescent son's arm to the entrance on Eötvös street, trying to reach the door of the Spanish legation, while the lethal Soviet planes anticipate dawn. One afternoon, someone told me that madame loved Gaston dearly, even too much: such

detrimental ambiguity in the adjective. And the beautiful handwriting of her assent to the General: in *Elisabeth*, the last two letters are dancing a waltz, a very slow one, obviously, and this is Central Europe in flames and the waltz swerves to the screech of the tank, and all of Europe knows that the part of the Danube that turned blue with blood was not in Vienna but Budapest.

Madame Tourné was responsible for taking the Spanish legation archive to Vienna. She left Budapest one Sunday and travelled the uncertain 250 kilometres, on today's roads, that separated the Hungarian capital from Vienna. The brave woman was fulfilling the first part of the order from Minister Lequerica, set down in an important telegram dated October:

«Given the military situation, you are authorised to take the measures you deem necessary to save the archives and effects of the Legation so that in the event of the imminent danger arriving you can hand over management of the Legation to the Swedish representation following consultation with the undersigned minister, and subsequently withdrawing to Vienna».

The imminent danger in question was the Soviet conquest of Budapest and the telegram from Lequerica an explicit authorisation that would in fact end up becoming Sanz Briz's irremediable behaviour.

On October 15th, 1944, the Sunday that Madame Tourné left for Vienna, the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party attempted a coup d'état that would end up pushing power definitively into Nazi hands. In the days leading up to it, Sanz Briz had been informing his government of both the Soviet advances and the imminence of the coup. Three days later, he sent the first account of the facts:

«Last Sunday, this capital taken by elements of the Arrow Cross Party incited (?) [by] Germany. Radio Station occupied by them, issuing orders contrary to Regent of Hungary. Last night, Radio Station broadcast new ruling from Regent of Hungary, ordering troops to continue fighting against Russia. I believe it is an apocryphal order. Almost impossible to obtain exact news as there's a great deal of shooting on the street. Huge persecution of the Jews has recommenced, they are being killed by the hundreds. Various Hungarian divisions appear to have abandoned the front and are moving towards Budapest to free Regent of Hungary. Budapest situation totally chaotic.».

That same day, the cabinet of Minister Lequerica slipped this line among the barrage of telegrams, without knowing when it would reach Budapest:

«Happily, Adela had baby girl. Congratulations. Sol».

She was his second daughter, Paloma, conceived in the still-happy Budapest. His chronicle to the minister highlighted the uncertain future of the Regent of Hungary, soon to be clarified by his exile, and the allusion to the new killings of the Jews. Regarding the fate of the latter, Minister Lequerica was about to undergo an accelerated transformation, that could perfectly be summed up in the following

telegram to the Spanish ambassador in Washington, Juan Francisco Cárdenas, dated October 20th, 1944.

«Jewish World Congress representative visited me to ask whether possible for our Budapest Legation to extend protection to larger number of Jews persecuted as he assured me Sweden is already doing. Claimed Sweden sent a special Delegate, Mr. Wallenberg, authorised by its government to offer protective documents, concentrating his protected persons in buildings considered annexed to the Swedish Legation in Budapest».

Minister Lequerica was quick to react, sending precise instructions three days later to Sanz Briz. His prose was silky-smooth.

«Ambassador Washington on request of World Jewish Congress representative appeals for extension of protection to greater number of persecuted Jews. Please inform how this appeal can be attended with the utmost benevolence and humanity, endeavouring to seek practical solutions to ensure this Legation is as effective as possible and firstly covers those Sephardis of Spanish nationality, secondly, those of Spanish origin and finally the biggest possible numbers of Israelis».

It would be a pointless exercise in melancholy to remember, in light of this irrevocable telegram that the person who wrote it had been the Germanophile Lequerica a few minutes before. The telegram was signed by the interests of Franco and it was in the interests of Franco that Sanz Briz started to resolutely act in defence of the Hungarian Jews. In any case, he had already expressed an extremely humane compassion regarding their fate and a sincere wish to help. In the defence of all Hungarian Jews, by the way. The Minister's instructions emphasised the Sephardi line, Primo de Rivera's decree and other such nonsense and spurred the young diplomat to act promptly and effectively to protect any persecuted Jew, whatever their group or nationality. Sanz Briz quickly replied that there were no Sephardis in Hungary and that the only effective protection formula for the persecuted was to provide them with Spanish passports.

On October 27th, the minister authorised his plans, even enthusiastically:

«Highly urgent. I approve formula proposed, investing utmost effort in effective protection and broadly authorizing you to do whatever necessary for this purpose».

While broadly authorising his ambassador in Budapest, Lequerica was also penning a long letter to his ambassador in Washington. It began as follows:

«For the last three years, Spain has been repeatedly accepting any applications presented by the Jewish communities, with our best will, resulting in vehement interventions in not only Berlin, but also Bucharest, Sofia, Athens, Budapest, etc., leading to the clear exhaustion of our diplomatic representations and occasional forceful discussions to defend these interests».

In the best-case scenario, this could be considered degenerate hyperbole. «Forceful» could not, under any circumstance, describe Spain's policy in relation to the Nazis. The witness accounts do not, for instance, indicate that the Spanish authorities' attitude to the suffering of the Greek Jews went beyond resignation, in spite of Ambassador Radigales' best efforts. The possibility of the Spanish diplomacy deploying a forceful attitude in Berlin is almost comical, although that is not to say the efforts of ambassador Ginés Vidal were not brave, merciful and full of common sense. As for Budapest, the forceful deployment had begun just twenty-four hours earlier. This was the logical result of the balance of relations between a nation of power and a secondary country, and the fact that ideological links between Nazis and Francoists were only really diluted by the incipient reality, crudely presented in the shape of defeat and destruction. Even so, Lequerica felt the need to exaggerate even further:

«Thanks to these numerous efforts, it has been possible for Israelis to cross our borders from France and continue their journey to wheresoever they

desired, while others have been effectively protected the entire time in France, Holland and other countries».

The mention of France was morally dubious. Although Lequerica could justify it by alluding to «for the past three years» at the start of his telegram. And, regarding the fate of the Jews applying for exile in the consulates, he had been capable of penning this twisted piece of prose, addressed to his consul in Paris, Rolland de Miotta:

«The Spanish government cannot place obstacles, even in the case of its subjects of Jewish origin, to prevent them being subjected to general measures, and should simply consider itself informed of said measures and ultimately not interfere with the execution of the same, maintaining a passive attitude».

Lequerica's attitude, like that of Franco's government in general, was driven by little more than opportunism and a need for survival. Both when saving Jews and when leaving them to their fate. A few days after issuing this instruction to his consul, on November 20th, 1940, Lequerica hosted a meeting at the Embassy, including the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ramón Serrano Súñer, the German ambassador, Otto Abetz, and De Miotta himself. At this meeting, in opposition to the instruction from Lequerica to De Miotta, Serrano maintained that their subjects should be excluded from the anti-Jewish regulations decreed by the French authorities.

The subsequent facts would show ambivalent results. While it's true that, on the one hand, the Spanish Jews were permitted not to wear the yellow star and did not have to register at the consuls, the archives are replete with communications from the Spanish consulates in France to the embassy reflecting the distress of so many Jews applying for a protection they never received. The case of the Rosanes is a one example. Another is the heartrending letter from their daughter Elisa, aged 19, to an unidentified Spanish authority, perhaps to Ambassador Lequerica himself:

«In May-April of the current year, the Consulate in Nice advised the Spanish Sephardis, a community we belong to, of the need to move to Spain for the duration of the current events. But, as my parents did not possess assets in Spain and given the impossibility of obtaining sufficient capital legally in France to meet our needs during this indefinite period of time and due to my father's wish to avoid turning to certain means he finds repulsive to export part of his capital, we decided to remain in Nice in the belief that our clear and clean lives, removed completely from any activity, should be sufficient guarantee for us not to fear the eventual events that might occur.

[...]

On the afternoon of the 22nd of this month, members of the German police force showed up at our home and took my parents away under an unknown pretext and since that date I have been unable to find out any news of them, and since that moment I have been completely alone and without any protection other than that which representatives of my home country might offer me. Immediately following the aforementioned event, I advised the Consul of Nice and I know that the illustrious representative of our Government took the corresponding steps with a view to obtaining the release of my parents or ascertaining the reason for the measure taken against them. As more than eight days have gone by since that fateful day and given the impossibility of obtaining anything further from the Consulate of Nice, as they have verbally informed me, I take the liberty of turning to Your Excellence, imploring you to take into consideration that I am as yet a minor, that I have no support other than that provided by my parents and that I find myself alone and unprotected, and without wishing to weary Your Excellence, I would express the full anguish and pain that torment me

I BEG YOU

Your Excellence to respectfully intervene on our behalf, demanding of the German authorities that they return my parents to me either to return to our home in Nice or so that we can depart together for Spain».

The Rosanes parents died in Auschwitz.

Perhaps they perished at sunset. They do say the Nazis were aesthetes. At number 25 on Szpitalna Street in Krakow, there's a poster promoting tourism in Auschwitz. The attraction is its crepuscular beauty, like so many other places you have to see before you die. The photo, interspersed with other images of the Taj Mahal, the Eiffel Tower, the Gizeh pyramid or the Duomo in Florence at dusk, fits right in. Actually, I fail to do it justice. In reality, Auschwitz surpasses its counterparts. At the end of the day, the sunset over the Eiffel Tower simply adds the beauty of light, emphasizing its forms to a certain extent. But, ah, in Auschwitz the twilight is semantically rounded. The death of day is death. And red is the red of the Apocalypse. In truth, watching the sun set over Auschwitz I am inclined to believe that, in reality, it's the others who are obscene. Not to mention the vulgarity: Who could possibly say the sun setting over the camp is purely kitsch?

One of the most fatal risks of irony, and it is a temptation impossible to resist, is to allow oneself to be convinced by it. Nevertheless, I survive. No, I do not believe it is morally correct for the towers of Auschwitz to be treated rhetorically like the Eiffel Tower, and there is a need to vomit on this sunset, and that is in fact what I do in the latrines of Uliza Szpitalna. But once cleaned and refreshed again, it is worth asking myself whether too much vomit might not lead to the conclusion that Auschwitz should not be represented. The root of the problem is, of course, the mistaken concept of Adornment. Not only is it possible to write after Auschwitz, but it is necessary. In reality, what else can a man write about, after Auschwitz.

From the last few days of October, and with the broad authorization of his minister, Sanz Briz set to work issuing salvation passports with the help of madame Tourné. Of the two, she was the only one with practice. In early November, the ambassador's measures had already born their first fruits, providing passports to the first hundred Jews. And, above all, the protection of around five hundred Slovakian children whose entrance into Tangier had been previously authorized by the Spanish government. With a politically obvious objective the young diplomat advised his minister to acquaint Washington with this last fact.

The safety of the Jews was not his sole concern. There was also his own. The Soviet bombings were becoming increasingly devastating. On November 4th, a huge explosion flew over the famous Margaret bridge across the Danube. According to the telegram sent by Sanz Briz, the explosion, that caused numerous deaths and injuries, had been caused by a German soldier laying mines. The commotion in the city was definitive. A few hours after informing his government of the destruction, late in the night, he sent a new telegram:

«The Russian forces are already in the suburbs of this capital. I believe I will very soon have to use the authorization granted in Your Excellence's telegram [number] 80».

The telegram to Lequerica's from his Ambassador in the United States, Juan Francisco de Cárdenas, that so vividly underlined the Spanish government's change of attitude to the salvation of the Jews, included a name that in time would be music everyone to everyone's ears, like any other legend. Wallenberg. Raoul Wallenberg. The son of a Swedish banking family, sent to Budapest by his country's government, he went on to become a symbol of humanitarian operation undertaken by the neutral nations, yet also a symbol of the collusion of totalitarianisms: in spite of dauntlessly fighting the Nazis, he was ultimately killed by the Communists, though the date and circumstances remain unclear. Wallenberg arrived in Budapest mid-1944. He brought with him a revolver, a casual suit, a tuxedo and a long trench coat. He was a compelling and attractive man and was soon surrounded by a small group of unconditional collaborators. Among these was his chauffeur, Jorge. Sazbó or Szel, depending on the novel or the real-life version.

«Engineer Jorge Sazbó was exempted from military service because his factory was of military interest. On the one hand, he felt happy; he was newlywed and could remain with his wife, sweet Eva».

I went to speak to *Eva*. She had already turned 86 years old. Not only did she live alone in the Salamanca district, but in the same block of houses as the Sanz-Briz family. I couldn't check for myself, but they could probably see each other through the windows of the enormous inner patio. The coincidence struck me as tremendously novelistic for a moment, but I violently shrugged it off, and doused the *Deplorable* in insults. *Eva* was Elisabeth Szel.

—Was *Jorge* your husband?

—Jorge Szel. That's why I've kept the name Szel. Because it was my first husband's.

She may once have been a sweet woman, or she may not. But there was no doubt that she was still very beautiful. Her blond slimness limped with great elegance. Her hip. They'd be operating on Mercedes Redondo for the same thing these days, murmured the Deplorable resentfully, as she departed. In 1961, Mrs. Szel published *Operación noche y niebla: el caso Wallenberg*, one of the first books to be written about the Swedish diplomat. She wrote it in Hungarian and her then husband, the film director and producer, Leon Klimovski, translated it into Spanish. Klimovski, by the way, was behind hundreds of films. None of them about Wallenberg.

—How strange. He had the script at home.

—Yes. But back then nobody knew who Wallenberg was and nobody wanted to pay for it.

Operación noche y niebla includes the usual, prior instructions to the reader:

«What you're about to read is a novel; I would almost call it an adventure story. I haven't managed to come up with any better way of telling the facts that occurred in the space of one year, a terrible year [1944], in Budapest. But the facts told in this novel are all —without exception— true facts».

I would like to have spent numerous afternoons with Madame Szel, poring over the lines of *Operación noche y niebla*.

—We can. I won't write my memoirs. I don't like that. It's so vulgar. Everyone has memories. Age makes the memories. No other talent is required.

Wallenberg was yet another note in the margin of my book, and for the moment I had to postpone my afternoons with Madame Szel. Nonetheless, she was kind enough to let me see six true pages

that she had written years before about the Swedish diplomat: *The Boy who wanted to be a Hero*.

«The young Raoul was not a dancer and preferred to spend long hours conversing with the girls, whom he liked to share his ideas with: “The girl who knows how to listen is always cleverer —he used to say— she’s always the most intelligent”. Viveca Lindford, the actress who would go on to marry Tyrone Power, used to say that Raoul was an “excessively serious and excessively timid” young man».

In the novel, however, the young man was as bubbly as beer. It surprised me that Wallenberg behaved in the novel the same way that Perlasca wrote Perlasca behaved: with charisma and energy, with great authority, grabbing Jewish prisoners from the death marches on the icy roads to deportation. Like Perlasca, all Wallenberg seemed to need was the fragile diplomatic invocation of the neutral countries and an obsessive courage. There was something magical and childlike in the description of his activities: the look in his eye was enough to disarm the Arrow Cross beast and return the unprotected Jews to their homes. Wallenberg, however, had an ace up his sleeve: he spoke German and even some Hungarian. Perlasca, who only spoke Italian and Spanish, had far greater merit.

In his blazing Hungarian Winter, Sanz Briz was still shackled to the routine of his telegrams and dispatches to the authorities, without anyone becoming aware of his eye's liberating and magical effect. Once assured of his government's protective intentions, he hardened his attitude towards the local Nazi leaders. His change of tone was apparent in his verbal notes, published in 2010 by the researcher, Erzsébet Dobos, in the book *Salvados: documento y memoria sobre la protección española en Budapest durante el Holocausto*. Some of these notes offered a dramatic and realistic idea of the limitations of the protection provided by the neutral countries, very far removed from the knightly fiction:

«It is with great consternation that this Spanish Embassy communicates to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs that, in spite of the Royal Government of Hungary's guarantee, many holders of Spanish passports or *Schutzbrief* issued by the same embassy have been arrested. The Hungarian authorities have made said arrests roughly and, in numerous cases, have destroyed the protective documents right in front of the interested parties, thereby destroying the only documents proving their protected status. The Spanish Embassy vehemently protests against said facts which constitute a breach of the promises made by the Royal Ministry to the Embassy».

In subsequent notes and communications, Sanz Briz reiterates the difficulty of fulfilling the mission entrusted to him: many of the Jews protected by the Spanish could not receive their Passports because the Nazis obliged them to frequently change address or had already sent them to concentration camps. A telegram dated November 9th summarised the situation to heart-breaking perfection:

«The anti-Semitic terror has become more pronounced. It has been decided that all Jews remaining in Hungary be deported to Germany. Useful men will be transported on foot and women, children and the elderly by train. All of their lives are feared for. In spite of repeated promises from the Hungarian government, the militia do not respect the Jews in possession of Spanish passports, or indeed those of other countries. The acts of cruelty are countless.».

The prose was telegraphic, but its power of conviction unquestionable. The protective activity undertaken by the neutral embassies was often reduced to a noble attempt. Shredded passports and unavoidable deportation. The Budapest Winter went down in history for the humanitarian activity of a handful of diplomats; but in reality, it was torture and death, and some sporadic life dependent on the changing mood of bureaucracy. The Hungarian government used the fate of the Jews to force diplomatic acknowledgement. The Spanish government turned to avoidance tactics. It claimed that the fact of Sanz Briz continuing in Budapest was proof that «there had not been any rupture or discontinuity at any time»; but at the same time, it had decided not to transfer the legation to Sopron, a Western town in which the desperate Nazis planned to install the foreign representations and a large part of their own governmental staff due to the proximity of the Soviet troops.

Despite the growing difficulties, Sanz Briz was making progress. In mid-November he communicated to Lequerica that he had issued provisional passports to three-hundred Jews with family in Spain and close to two thousand letters of protection to all those who had managed to demonstrate any Spanish link whatsoever. His diplomatic solitude was increasing. The Swiss minister, Maximilian Jaeger, had left the city, leaving the diplomat Feller in his place, and the Danish ambassador had returned to Copenhagen after recovering for two weeks in a hospital from the wounds inflicted by the Arrow Cross Party members when they stole his official car. His solitude was countered, however, by the bravery and loyalty of the

legation staff. During a visit to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, with the objective of lodging an official complaint against the degrading treatment of the Spanish protected persons by the Arrow Crossists, he extracted a decision from the minister that he formally described in a telegram:

«Yesterday morning, the Order of Your Excellence was carried out. The Minister for Foreign Affairs told me he regretted the events occurred attributing responsibility to the party militia, whom he has been constantly exhorting to respect foreign documentation. As an excuse, he added that the same had occurred in other Legations and not just the Spanish. In my presence, he telephoned the person responsible for the deportations and ordered him to designate an official, accompanied by an employee of this chancellery, to collect Spanish Jews from the endless caravan travelling on foot towards the German border. This government is completely overwhelmed and incapable of having its orders executed. I regret to inform Your Excellence that the majority of the Budapest population is anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Russian troops, whose attitude cannot be any worse than that of the current governors».

The diplomat's frankness was touching. I regret to inform you, Mr. Minister, that the Bolsheviks will not be any more vile than the Nazis. For someone who had fought against them and now served a government that considered them their number one enemy, the paragraph cannot have been easy to write. But of most importance was the allusion to the caravan of Jews and the humanitarian intervention of the Spanish legation. In fact, in spite of appearances, Sanz Briz was not alone.

The chancellery employee who has going to rescue Jews was the lawyer, Zoltán Farkas. In the company of a Hungarian police official, Batizfalvy, who had always proven an effective ally of the delegations, Farkas set out on the icy road to Hegyeshalom, the last city before the Austrian border. The 150-kilometre journey passed through Piliscsaba, Komárom, Győr, Gönyü, Dunaszeg and Mosonmagyaróvá. The Spanish legation has very precise information about the route and the specific destination of their protected persons. In the verbal note that Sanz Briz sent to the minister for Foreign Affairs, he recorded that «our protected persons were today between Komárom and Győr».

From mid-October, the Hungarian police had begun to knock on the doors marked with stars and take adult men and women who were fit to work. On the Austrian border, the Reich was building arms factories, generally underground, that required thousands of workers. The Budapest Jews were the chosen workforce. Marches had to be on foot because transportation had collapsed. At the end of November, Veesenmayer, the Reich's representative in Hungary declared that a total of thirty thousand Jews had been transferred. Raul Hilberg wrote of them, and so many others, in an epitaph:

«In the work contingencies deterioration was extraordinarily high. During the withdrawal, the Axis soldiers killed them and finally a large number of them were conducted on foot to Mauthausen and further west, to a camp in Gunskirchen, on the outskirts of Wels, in Austria. When the North American forces got close to Gunskirchen, on May 4th, 1945, a strong stench enveloped them. The earth was "churned to the consistency of a hot muddy mass by thousands of feet, mud mixed with excrement and urine". Living skeletons, all with the same appearance and "mad" with hunger,

received the Americans with “cheering, wailing and shouting”. Some were eating the raw skeleton of a horse that had been dead for days. Once freed, they continued to “fall like flies”. And that was the end of the marchers».

One of the marchers to fall, though the circumstances of his death were never fully clarified, was called Arthur Leitman and he had been dragged from Budapest by the police just months before the birth of his second child, a daughter called Eva. His wife, Katharine Bohrer, did obtain Spanish protection. She had demonstrated with documentation that her mother had a business in Madrid; specifically, a Hungarian restaurant on Calle Jardín. Many years later, when she was about to turn 79, Katherine Bohrer was interviewed for the archives of the Shoah Foundation, in California. Her testimony included some unknown details about Sanz Briz’s activity:

«While I was in the safe house I’d take off the yellow star and go with Sanz Briz to the work camps [...] I didn’t realise that he was going to save people while I myself was in danger. He went on the state road, the death march passed it. He knew where they had taken the people. [...] He’d get out of the diplomatic car —it was very important to go by this car— and say: “These here are my protected persons”. And he’d take them out of the line, do you understand? It was incredible that he could do that [...] Sanz Briz spoke really good French. He’d say: “Kati...” And I’d tell them in Hungarian: “Say that you have relations in Spain and that way you can get into the diplomatic car”».

Mrs. Bohrer’s testimony was extremely important because it described an unheard-of Sanz Briz, outside of his office in the legation and directly involved, with the help of a refugee, in the salvation mechanics. No other testimony described him thus. Mrs. Bohrer had died, but her daughter Eva Leitman still lived in Madrid. Her attitude seemed exemplary to me.

—I don’t know what to tell you. I was familiar with this part of my mother’s testimony. I had always found it strange. For her to

go in the car with Sanz Briz and accompany him to the marches...
Hmmm... My mother was a tad imaginative...

—Did she ever speak to you about this?

—No, but then my mother never spoke about practically anything. The Holocaust was never mentioned in my house. When conversation touched on it the subject was changed.

—That's very common.

—Yes... But, my poor mother... Maybe what she said was true and now I'm making her look like a fibber.

There may be doubts about whether Katherine Bohrer went out onto the road. And even whether Sanz Briz did. But there are no doubts that Zoltán Farkas was the legal adviser who together with inspector Batizfalvy saved a handful of men between Komárom and Győr. And not only between Komárom and Győr, I believe.

«Vienna, November 27th, 2010

Dear Arcadi:

Last night must have been very cold in Vienna. And it snowed. In the morning, the sun was shining and the rooftops dripping. I had to walk carefully because the gusts of wind blew chunks of snow down onto the footpaths. Janos Farkas lives in the Landstraße district, in a small square called Sebastianplatz, close to my hotel. Along the way, I came across two impressive bunkers, almost intact. There are some imperial-looking houses left standing in the neighbourhood, but the profusion of functional blocks, typical of the fifties, would imply that the area was devastated in the Second World War bombings. The most interesting building in the square is where Zoltán's only son has his apartment.

Janos lives in one of the ground-floor apartments. I had imagined the serious and determined face of a businessman who has worked long and hard to make sure he owes nobody anything. The man who opened the door was affable, with that thick, greying hair typical of the people from the east. He offered me his hand, left the unlit cigarette on the table and went in anxious search of something in a bureau. It was a lighter. Despite his friendliness, Farkas seemed weary.

The house is large and bright. There isn't much furniture, and the good and antique items mix with those from Ikea. Farkas led me to the living-room. He had some old papers ready. The first, perhaps the one he considered most important, was a letter of thanks to his father, signed by a number of Hungarian citizens. And then his death certificate. As we spoke, I started to photograph it all.

His wife died three years ago and he was hit by a great depression. He warned me that he cannot do anything that will tire him. Nothing. He has dual nationality, Hungarian and Austrian, but not Spanish, in spite of his name being on Sanz Briz's list of protected persons when he was a child.

Nobody, apart from his daughter who lives in America, has ever asked him about his father. He is unaware of any story. Not that of Sanz Briz. Not that of Perlasca. He has never read a book or watched a film about Budapest in '44. Everyone who knew his father is dead. Janos showed me

a photo of Zoltán. On the day of his wedding with the Baroness, Marie-Thérèse Pitner. He is vaguely aware that his father behaved admirably with the Jews. He said he was glad but didn't add anything else about it. His own daughter seemed to know more, as in my long search to locate her father she had written me: "It can indeed be said that my grandfather saved a lot of lives!, but that's a story my father can tell far better than I can". As we know, Farkas was a known sculptor. Eugenio Suárez speaks of one of his plaques on a Street in Budapest. His son showed me one of the sculptures he's kept: a head of a young girl. The conversation was not very productive. When saying goodbye, I promised to send him a photo of the plaque sculpted by his father in the centre of Vienna.

Freyung, the street the plaque is on lies very close to the cathedral. I found it hard to find number 6, located on a corner, next to a church. The plaque dedicated to Franz Listz is in the first, big patio, which is where Listz used to live when in Vienna. It appears to be a donation from the city of Budapest. Night fell quickly. The city was closing. The queue to the Albertina was dreadful, impossible to get into the Demel, and the Bräunerhof was closed. Not even the cosy restaurant opposite my hotel had a place. I would have been sorry to have to use room service so I decided to pass the time in Hawelka, where you can only drink. To one side, a young artist was showing his work to an older, bohemian-looking man, who was speaking to him in English. To the other, there were two girls chatting. I turned on my computer and typed in the death details of Zoltán Farkas. Then I went out in search of the Burgtheater and ended up dining in a beautiful café, spoiled by an enormous screen showing two minor Spanish league football teams playing. Naturally, I ordered a Wiener Schnitzel, which as you know was Aly Herscovit's favourite dish.

Love,

Sergio Campos».

On November 17th, Sanz Briz recounted the first result obtained on the road: the liberation of 71 Jews from a concentration camp close to Budapest. The telegram underlined the fact that many had not eaten in three days. It was plausible. The victims of the death marches would travel 150 kilometres in six or seven days. And along the way they were given four rations of soup. On November 21st, Sanz Briz communicated the liberation of another thirty. On the telegram, a high-ranking ministry official, perhaps Lequerica himself, gave pencil-written orders to inform London and Washington of the operations.

It's likely that the neutral countries that had met on Rotta's request a few weeks earlier and had reiterated their demand for an end to the atrocities, were at the root of the Hungarian government's decision announced a few days later. This is how Sanz Briz explained it to his government:

«This Ministry for Foreign Affairs has brought together Representatives of the neutral countries to read out a memorandum explaining how this Government will resolve the Jewish issue. The Jews protected by neutral countries will be concentrated in a special ghetto until the time of their transfer to the protecting countries. Those who are unprotected and fit for work will be "lent" to Germany. Their ultimate fate will be resolved at the end of the war. The rest will remain concentrated in a ghetto. Some exceptions are made for those Jews providing special services to the homeland and the Christian priests of Jewish origin».

When I read this telegram from Sanz Briz, my research was already quite advanced. Until then I had had a merely popular notion about the accommodation of Jews in special houses. The belief, to put it

briefly, was that the diplomats from the neutral countries rented flats and housed the persecuted there, displaying the notices relating to extraterritoriality so that the buildings would be considered extensions of the embassies. Their decision would have been independent and completely separate to any agreement with the Arrow Cross.

The belief was based, above all, on Wallenberg's activity, as he had rented some houses in the summer, soon after arriving in Budapest. His reports and the memoirs of some of his assistants confirm this. But the Swedish embassy's activity could not be compared with any other. Regarding the specific case of the Spanish legation, we rely on Bedoya. And this surprising paragraph from his memoirs:

«As an immediate solution, I suggested following the positive experience of some countries during the persecution of the *Nationals* in red Madrid, countries that hung flags on buildings pertaining to their diplomatic representations to give refuge to the persecuted in them as refugees. Who doesn't recall, in the red Madrid, the actions of the Cuban consul, Estalella; or the Norwegian consul, Böhrj; or the Chilean Ambassador, Núñez Morgado; or those of so many other diplomats from different countries who flew flags from buildings to shelter refugees?»

The *immediate solution* did not remain a mere proposal, but according to Bedoya's account was immediately set in motion after he met with Franco in El Pardo¹⁶. And not simply put into motion, but executed with the explicit condition that in exchange, once the Soviets had taken the city, they would guarantee the lives, property and dignity of the members of the Spanish legation. The fact was that a Jewish contact of the infallible Bedoya had been ascended to the highest echelons of Soviet power:

16. El Pardo, an area in the Northern suburbs of Madrid, is the site of the Royal Palace built by Henry III of Castile in the fifteenth century, and subsequently extended by Charles I. During the Francoist dictatorship the palace became the official residence of the Head of State, General Franco, until his death in 1975. Today, the palace is again in the possession of the House of Bourbon, and forms part of the Spanish National Heritage. *Luca Constantini. Translator of the Italian version.*

«I am told that Stalin —Bedoya explained to Franco—, has given his agreement, and nominated Lázaro Kaganovich, a member of the Communist Party since 1911, to be the guarantor of his brothers in race, promising that a small, highly specialised mobile unit will enter Budapest with the vanguards to save the people and assets of the Spanish diplomats and their families, as well as all the Jews given refuge in our buildings».

That is, Spain was saving the Jews and they, via Stalin, guaranteed that the Soviets, the number one enemy of Francoism, would behave courteously and admirably, and particularly in a specialized manner. Bedoya's hyperbole («he had a very elevated notion of his fantasies»), claimed his step-daughter, Mercedes, one afternoon during one of our pleasant chats in Puerta de Hierro) not only contradicted itself as soon as it had been spoken, like a ghost exposed to light, but unfortunately, the facts of the Soviet conquest of Budapest would also contradict it, radically and drastically.

There are abundant allusions to passports, letters of safe-conduct and lists of protected persons in the correspondence between Sanz Briz and his ministry. From his personal correspondence, we can also deduce that he hid Jews in Villa Széchenyi, his house in the Buda district, and even in the Spanish legation itself, giving us an idea of his noble and humanitarian commitment. But there is no data about renting houses. For the Spanish protected persons, the houses would come into play from mid-November, coinciding with the Hungarian Nazi decision to evict the Jews from their homes and distribute them over three destinations: the road, the ghetto and what would end up being called the international ghetto. Men and women fit for work went to die in the former; the ghetto, fenced in and surrounded by walls and guard towers, was for the unfit Jews while those Jews with some form of diplomatic protection were sent to the international ghetto, spread over various blocks of houses in district XII of the city, on the Pest side and to the north of Margaret Island, where they had practically zero freedom of movement, with the exception of a short walk that took place between eight and nine

in the morning. The shelter houses were ghettoes. Slightly less brutal than the common ghetto. But ghettoes nonetheless. It's worth repeating that. And the ghettoes, of course, could only be technically and morally organised by the Nazis.

I managed to speak to a man who had spent two months, from November to January, in a protected house. His name was Jaime Vándor, he was about to turn 80 and still lived in the Ensanche district of Barcelona. He spoke Spanish with a neutral accent and had been a university professor. In the Budapest of the time, he had been 11 years old and he recalls that in a certain way he thought that was just life.

—Our house was on number 35 of San Esteban street. There were 51 people living in two and a half rooms. It's quite hard to imagine. We slept on the floor. It was a Hungarian winter and the bombings had broken all the windows. There were anti-aircraft cannons on the street below the house firing day and night. Apart from that, we were full of lice, clothes lice not hair lice, that lived in the seams and obliged you to scratch constantly. We had one toilet and there were 51 people. The added problem was that there were also people living in the bathroom: they had laid some tables on top of the bath and two people slept there. Sometimes there was water. Sometimes there was electricity.

—Did you play with other children?

—There's a huge difference between children and adults. Adults are constantly thinking about whether to do this or that. They have enormous responsibility for what's going to happen. The children allow themselves to be led because they trust their parents. In this case, their mothers because the only men in the apartment were very old. Children are also very easily distracted. Between one scare and another, we were always playing. We played chess. It was also common to collect stamps back then. I used to read a great deal: young

Hungarian classics. There were older children who taught languages to the youngest. But it would be better if I brought you a letter on life in the house on San Esteban street. A letter from my mother. I'll go find it.

I reach the killing camp of Auschwitz at mid-day on August 12th, 2011 and go straight to the building where they keep the admissions cards. I ask the person responsible about Aly Herscovitz. Just a few minutes go by before she informs me that Alma Neumanova, née Herscovici, arrived in Auschwitz on July 31st, 1942, in convoy number 12, and that she had come from the Drancy camp, in France. There was nothing else in the files. Obviously, I've been in possession of this information for a long time. It is available in various archives around the world. I am tempted to keep asking her if they have any suspicions of what might have become of her, of mentioning how strange, how can it be possible that a woman arrives from a journey and disappears, an investigation should be started, etcetera. The arduous problem of denial boils down to this situation. A woman called Aly Herscovitz arrives in this place one summer day in 1942. Where is she? But the archivist would take me for an idiot.

I leave the files billet. That's where the brothel was when Aly reached the camp. It's a little-known fact, treated with shame. There is no poster explaining what the building was previously used for and, obviously, there is no representation of what went on in it. It is the representation that I can't get out of my mind. I return, I repeat myself, I know. Auschwitz is irrepresentable. Adorno, the first one to believe it. Well, in reality, Adorno believed (or rather made believe) that Auschwitz had put an end to representation as such. And the latest contribution to this theory by Álvaro Lozano, in this little book I've been taking on my journey, *El Holocausto y la cultura de masas*. He explains his repulsion when he sees the Japanese taking photos of themselves under the «Arbeit macht frei». Yes, I've just

seen them a moment ago. They may not even have been Japanese. I myself was scandalized yesterday in Krakow by the touristic sunset over the barbed wire fences. Representation may be more or less refined. But if there is representation, there will be tourism. Sometimes, the decision is made to leave it out. Succinctly. The remains of Hitler's bunker, for instance. They say it would become a place of Nazi pilgrimage. A triumph of the murderers. The biggest victory of a criminal act is to make it irrepresentable. That would make them Gods. Jewish Gods! In reality, in Adorno, there is the same sense of devotion as to be found before a play said to be unstageable. Too magnificent! Yet, it is difficult to sustain the need for representation in the museum of Auschwitz. This display with the hair of the female prisoners. Kilos and kilos of hair, and the tourists scrutinising this messy hair as if they had climbed into a rare and tenebrous attic. The hair looks like doll's hair and the story it tells is a gothic tale of terror. The problem with placing a crime in a display.

Afterwards, I travel to Judenrampe, half-way between the actual Auschwitz, the old camp, and the modern death installation of Birkenau. This is where the convoys arrived and at the foot of the ramp the fate of the prisoners was quickly determined, on one side those who would go to work, and on the other those who would be gassed. It's almost four in the afternoon and there's nobody on the ramp. The only element of representation is a train carriage on a track to nowhere. On the running board of the carriage there are a lot of Jewish pebbles, some wrapped. I don't know if I should be unwrapping a few. On the papers, there are names, dates, symbols. Since I have to write something, I write that it's a place where the pulse is audible.

Two steps from the dead track is a little house. Modest, but well maintained. There's a family with children in the garden. This promiscuity of life and death is disturbing. The *lieu de mémoire* is expected to trace a symbolic circle in which grief can be expressed. But there is

none of that here. In reality, the train track passes by the little garden and its branch lines pass by other nearby chalets. I think of Lanzmann and his *Shoah*. His formidable method is clear here: no images from the archives, no archaeology. The Holocaust embedded in current-day life. Like this ramp crossing the garden of the house. Like the smoke and smell of the chimneys that reached both honourable middle-class and farm houses. I also think of the camp guards: they must have lived in little houses, or worse still, billets with threaded rugs, decorated with humble, good taste. But this is a pointless thought. The disquisitions on the bountiful, family life of the Nazis have filled endless, putrid and particularly stupid pages. I'm on the ramp and I still cannot say it with the killer precision of Kahneman, whom it's going to take me a year to read: «...good people do only good things and bad people are all bad. The statement "Hitler loved dogs and little children" is shocking no matter how many times you hear it, because any trace of kindness in someone so evil violates the expectations set up by the halo effect. Inconsistencies reduce the ease of our thoughts and the clarity of our feelings».

I arrive in Birkenau. The vacuum of Birkenau, where the vast majority of the Hungarian Jews went to die. The original Auschwitz, with its wrought iron letters informing of the regenerative benefit of work, is still punishment and its implications. It may indeed include death. But in a way, it is the answer to a certain human act: the act of being communist, resistant, anti-Nazi, even the intolerable act of being Jewish. Auschwitz is somehow a way in which power responds to rebellion, even nature's rebellion. But in Birkenau, punishment has become irrelevant and murder has taken on the consistency of natural fluid. Exactly. In Birkenau, people only die of natural deaths, because it is natural and recommendable to give the Jew up to death. The great contribution of genocide to the history of mankind (that a person can be murdered with complete disregard for their conduct, nature or will) is very starkly reflected in Birkenau. There is nothing

here, apart from the old control tower, the milestone indicating the place name to the traveller. Nothingness as an unrivalled representation. And it is here, in Birkenau, that denialism disappears. Denialism can question the negatives of some photos, the total sum of certain figures, even the doll's hair; but it cannot stand up to Birkenau and its desolate vastness. It cannot stand up to the evidence that now death has disappeared from here, there is nothing left. There is no possibility of explaining that Birkenau was created for anything other than mass, industrial death. But I won't leave here without granting denialism the benefit of the halo effect. Although this is not how it's usually interpreted, and it is almost dangerous to say so, some denialists are excellent people, but afflicted with a serious defect: their overriding belief in the goodness of man. The halo effect obliges them to reject the idea of the human creature being capable of abomination on such a scale. I have never seen it more clearly than one day when a nice and honourable Argentine philosopher said to me over an intellectual lunch: «The genocide was a slip-up».

Auschwitz is also a place-name. A town: Oświęcim, in Polish. Passing by a house for rent on the outskirts, I see in the cement fence posts the same design that held up the barbed wire fences of the camp. They must form part of some building tradition. Naturally, a coincidence of such importance excites my metaphoric inklings. «Yes, memory is nothing more than the utilisation of materials». But I am a fisherman. A fisherman who catches fish and then throws them back into the water. Fisherman included.

Where were we?

The last days of November 1944 are condensed into the telegraphic diary that Sanz Briz was sending with distressed regularity to his government. Stitched together, these are some of his phrases.

«As the snows have begun and railway transport is practically unusable, at personal risk of remaining blocked here, I implore Your Excellence to telegraph authorisation for me to travel to Vienna with the utmost urgency to place my equipment and property out of harm's way. The Russian column advancing from the East is now forty kilometres from Budapest. Despite the best intentions of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, incidents by irresponsible militiamen against the Spanish protected persons in the houses designated by this Government, located in a special ghetto, are a daily occurrence. This Representation protests constantly to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs tells me that Budapest has been declared a war zone and it is therefore prohibited, even for diplomats, to leave the city without a special permit from the War Ministry. Barbed wire fences and anti-tank defences have been set up beside the bridges in the city centre. The cannons can be heard non-stop. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs tells me that if the Legations are not evacuated from Budapest when this Government stipulates, the Hungarian Government will not be responsible for the incidents that occur after their departure. Mines have begun to be placed all over the part of Budapest located on the eastern side of the Danube in an area that is metres deep. It would appear that the Germans intend to destroy the city before it is occupied by the Russians. Given the rapid advance of strong Russian forces from Southern Hungary towards Budapest on the western side of the Danube, I believe the time has come to abandon this country. I beg Your Excellence to suspend encoded telegrams to this Legation. It would appear that Madame Tourné and the lawyer [Farkas] will continue to work here under the orders of the Swedish representative. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs tells me he has officially invited the legations to abandon Budapest in light of the grave situation posed by Bolshevik occupation (?). Travel tomorrow».

On December 7th, 1944, Ángel Sanz Briz abandoned Budapest in the direction of Switzerland. His minister Lequerica simply reminded him once of what he had said to him in a telegram: «...authorising you to take whatever measures the circumstances dictate». He made the journey by automobile and probably in the company of his chauffeur. As he had previously agreed with his government, he left Madame Tourné and the lawyer Farkas in the legation under the authority of the Swedish embassy. The sole representatives of the neutral nations to remain in the city were the head of the Swedish Embassy, Danielsson; the Swiss diplomat, Feller; Count Ferenc Pongrácz from the Portuguese embassy and the Vatican Monsignor Rotta. According to the last telegram sent to Lequerica, the authorities spurred his decision by emphasizing the imminent Bolshevik invasion: the demands of a transfer to the city of Sopron, to force recognition of the Arrow Cross government, were by then a distant possibility. The authorities are unlikely to have been unaware of his departure, bearing in mind that, as Sanz Briz had informed his government, a special permit from the war ministry was necessary in order to leave the city under siege.

The reasons for which Sanz Briz abandoned Budapest were obvious. In Soviet eyes, Spain was the least neutral of the neutrals. This evidence, observed from the opposite perspective, would also explain the relative comprehension among the Hungarian Nazis of the Spanish humanitarian work as, according to Sanz Briz himself, the Spanish houses in the international ghetto were generally more respected than those of other neutral countries.

The correspondence between Madrid and the legation on Eötvös street proves that the Spanish government authorised his departure, due to the circumstances, and that the personal safety of the young diplomat was among these reasons. It would probably also have authorised him to remain had Sanz Briz so requested, as he was the one in possession of the information about what was happening in the city and the timing of his decisions. Once in safety in Switzerland, the diplomat did two things that were important for the history of Spain. The first, a report he wrote for his government describing the protective work done by the legation, including a detailed list of names. The second was to go and visit Don Juan de Borbón. During his audience with the father of King Juan Carlos, he was given the text that would become the Lausanne manifesto to take to Madrid and hand deliver to Joaquín Satrústegui¹⁷. A charge that demonstrates his monarchical leanings, and one that almost had a negative effect on his career when a few months later Satrústegui revealed to the Francoist authorities that the diplomat, Sanz Briz, had been the messenger.

17. Joaquín Satrústegui Fernández (San Sebastián, October 17th, 1909-March 11th, 1992) was a monarchical and liberal, Spanish lawyer and politician, initially in favour of the coup against Franco's government, and subsequently orchestrator of a transition to democracy through the return of the monarchy. He was in close collusion with King Alfonso XIII of Spain, who had left Madrid when the Second Spanish Republic was proclaimed in 1931. In 1962, Satrústegui was one of the organisers of the Munich meetings between the anti-Francoist forces (with the exception of the Communists) intended to plan a political transition in the Iberian country. After the death of Franco, Satrústegui was elected senator for the Liberal Alliance and subsequently member of parliament for the centralist coalition of UCD. *Luca Costantini. Translator of the Italian version.*

This is a delicate moment and the story urgently requires me to return to Auschwitz and place the present tense on the big, solid, beautiful burgundy-coloured table that I write on. Outside the sweltering Barcelona August closes in but I am protected and remembering the astute words of the architect, Tusquets, according to which one of the primary conditions for man's happiness is for his body to enjoy the exact temperature at which the extremes, hot and cold, disappear. Sanz Briz has left Budapest. In his last months there, the sole purpose of his diplomatic activity was to save the Jews, following his government's orders and the *modus operandi* of the rest of the neutral country embassies. He put a very personal effort, bravery, astuteness and mercy into it. He issued passports to any Jew who asked the Embassy for help, ignoring the quotas more or less established by the Hungarian authorities. He succeeded in housing hundreds of refugees in apartments of the international ghetto, organised by the Hungarian Nazis. And even, without the knowledge or authorisation of his government, gave asylum to the persecuted in the actual building of the Spanish legation itself. He has left with the agreement of his government, but with a serious concern in his mind: the unknown fate of his protected Jews. He knows how hard it's been to keep them safe from the Arrow Cross incursions and how many times he's had to violently protest to the Hungarian civil servants for murder, abuse and mistreatment. If things were precarious while he was physically present in Budapest, it's easy to imagine what might happen now. Years later, in June of 1949, and on one of the two occasions he spoke in the newspapers about that Hungarian Winter, he evoked his departure:

«I had just one concern: what might become of those we were protecting once we had disappeared from there. The innately Spanish quixotism ever at hand to aid the weak and misfortunate, whomsoever they happen to be, provided the solution to this problem that worried me. When thousands of Hungarian peasants, in tatters and starving, fleeing the Soviet troops who were razing everything in their path, started to arrive in the city, I visited the higher Hungarian authority that had remained in Budapest, offering to do whatever was in my power to help these fugitives. That authority, a hard man, instantly thanked me for the human value of the gesture: “You are the only diplomat who has not come over here to protest and complain or ask for something: you are the only one who has come to give.” I was able to send him a donation for the starving Hungarians. I’m sure that from that moment, those notices proclaiming the protection of Spain played a decisive role in calming the hatred of the exalted racists, exacerbated by the imminence of their end. Indeed, I know for a fact that until the moment in which the Reds arrived, just two weeks after my departure from Budapest, that all of Spain’s protected persons were still alive».

The Soviet invasion took place not two, but three weeks later. And the young diplomat may well have calculated, at the time of his departure, that it would take the Soviets far less time to conquer the city and that the Jews would not for long be exposed to the last, bloodthirsty days of the Nazis. The concern about the consequences of his departure for the refugees is also reflected in another of the decisions he claims to have made: that of leaving Budapest without informing the authorities. All of these facts lead us to the tricky quid of the question: Sanz Briz left Budapest before the Soviet invasion to protect his own life. He was a responsible, intelligent and informed man, and he understood that his departure increased the risk to the refugees. He left. Four years later, he made sure to add a significant tagline to his interview with the *Heraldo de Aragón*: all Spanish protected persons’ lives were saved. But, obviously, he had no way of knowing this. Either after he left or before (even 70 years later nobody really knows how many refugees’ lives were saved). In the last few days of correspondence with Lequerica, no mention is made of

the possible fate of the Jews. And this circumstance is not a consideration in the final decision about his departure. Franco's government may possibly have considered two things at the time. Firstly, that it could not risk the life of its civil servant. And secondly, to use almost the exact words that Sanz Briz would use in his interview for the *Heraldo*, his moral commitment to the Jews ended with the arrival in Budapest of the Allied troops (in this case, Soviet): while in the face of the Nazis, Spain could enforce its condition as a neutral country, to the Bolsheviks it was simply a fascist and enemy nation.

The problem, like I said, is that on December 7th, in spite of Sanz Briz informing the government of the imminent invasion, the Soviet troops would still take twenty-two, nerve-racking days to get to Budapest and until then the Arrow Cross terror continued to exert cruel and desperate control of the situation. Sanz Briz was forced to choose between the possibility of dying or departure. He departed. Before doing so, I insist, he claims to have done everything possible to reduce the risk to those left behind: he paid the governor of Budapest («gauleiter») and left the legation, its staff and its protected persons in the hands of the Swedish embassy. And the truth is that, regardless of whether or not absolutely all refugees' lives were saved, his departure did not trigger any additional catastrophe. But it was fatal for his memory. Suffice to read Raul Hilberg, author of the landmark work on the Holocaust: *The Destruction of the European Jews*. His mention of Sanz Briz verges on the offensive.

«In the Hungarian capital, the neutral nation representatives turned to unorthodox methods to save the Jews. [...] The honorary Spanish consul was an Italian, Giorgio Perlasca, who had volunteered in the Ethiopian War and had fought alongside Franco with the Italian troops in Spain. His resources were far more limited than those of his Swiss and Swedish counterparts, yet he did what he could, issuing Spanish Passports to the "Sephardis" or anyone with business links to Spain. When the head of the Spanish mission, Ángel Sanz Briz, who had taken an interest in the destiny of the deported Jews, left Budapest, Perlasca remained, taking

charge of what was left of the legation. Every day, he collected orphaned Jews, adding protected persons to the list and he distributed medicines until January of 1945. The Papal Nuncio had issued 20,000 passports to baptised Jews. These Jews, according to Veesenmayer in his report, could mark their houses with a giant cross instead of the star of David».

Time does not treat the diplomatic heroes kindly. Just writing it, the scope of the oxymoron becomes clear.

Memory adores Jozef Gabčík however, one of the alleged assassins of Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi governor of occupied Prague. I mention him because I recently finished a book by Laurent Binet on the attack. A book written with energy, that doesn't attempt to evade the clashes between faction and fiction. But one with an important moral breach: the young Binet does not dare to do with his heroes, (even with his literature!), what history did do. That is, to demonstrate that the sole purpose served by the assassination of Heydrich was for anti-Nazis to die, including the families and friends associated with the assassins, and the inhabitants of Lidice, the exterminated Czech village; not only its people (also the passers-by who happened to be there) and objects, but the very place it stood on!; dead and disappeared, all for a false clue the Nazis followed in their investigation into the assassination of Heydrich. In the worst moment of his book, Binet imagines (!) how the perpetrators must feel guilty pangs given the consequences their feat has caused. But he is there to save them all from the depths and reassure the reader that the impact of Lidice unmasked Hitler in the court of public opinion. Summer of 1942, Aly Herscovitz arrives in Drancy, en route to Auschwitz, and apparently Hitler is still wearing the mask that the world tears off him to the cry of 'Long live Lidice!'. Binet literally writes that the assassination of Heydrich has served a purpose. But he doesn't manage to confuse anyone. All he is saying is that his book must serve. Or what's worse. The assassination has certainly served it. Or, is it not him who's writing this book? This touch of terrorist narcissism is confused with a literary touch. I understand Binet: one has to raise the hero of one's book up high. Anyone knows that. Up high, yes, always, though sometimes with their head bowed.

The diplomatic hero spent months of his slender youth issuing passports and letters of protection to the Jews of Budapest from a routine office; to conversing diplomatically with small-time Nazi chiefs, whom he bribed with displays of affection and even money; to interpreting the oscillations of the uncertain Francoist will, in its most pronounced period of floundering, clear in hundreds of telegrams, letters and telephonic conversations; and he went so far as to surpass the limits of his competence and the instructions of his government by housing refugees in his house and in the house of Spain. He didn't kill anybody, nor did he prosaically offer himself up to be killed and when he saw the tanks in the distance he considered his mission accomplished and accepted the inexorable principle of reality. He was merely a Francoist civil servant, in status and at heart, who had saved the lives of thousands of Jews: neither one thing nor the other constituted an effective safe-conduct against the Red Army. To understand the truth of this, suffice to look at time's judgment of Wallenberg, the Swedish envoy assassinated by the Soviets.

The grey hero ended up acquiring colour thanks to the political circumstances. Legends cannot be paradoxes. A Francoist against the Nazis may not be an anacoluthon but it is clearly a paradox. Sanz Briz was briefly celebrated by the Francoist propaganda in the belief that Israel might contribute to upholding a regime that felt perilously threatened by the victory of the democracies; but as soon as Israel distanced itself from Franco, not only did it allow him to fall into oblivion, but it endeavoured to prevent his memory from putting a spoke in the dealings between Spain and the Arabs. Now, I must not head off in that direction; but this tale will not end without

giving a conclusive account of the extent to which the Francoist government placed its State interests over and above the recognition History owed its civil servant.

Anti-Francoism, that is, culturally dominant Spanish history in the second half of the 20th century had it easier. For as long as it could, it completely ignored Sanz Briz. And afterwards presented his conduct (and that of other Spanish diplomats) as the result of an individual action that was independent of government orders, an absurd logic refuted by multiple documents. The obstinate resistance of the anti-Francoist movement to admit that the Franco regime saved many Jewish lives afflicts even the most conscientious and impartial historians, as is the case of Bernd Rother, for example. Overwhelmed by the documentation and testimonies he has managed to collect in his panoramic research, he concludes, almost agonisingly, in the last line, that it's true, irrefutable in fact, that Francoism saved many Jewish lives. But it could have saved so many more! Nobody questions it. But this objection would only make sense if applied to a morally immaculate government, that is, an anti-Francoist one. What was expected of evil, what fit perfectly with the myth of a Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, an expression by the way, that Franco never publicly used, was that the government actively and gleefully collaborated with the extermination of the Jews. And that did not happen. At all. It either acted with (criminal) passivity when it looked like Hitler would win the war or collaborated in their salvation when it looked to be lost.

I'm re-reading Bedoya's memoirs. His description of the fall of Budapest and the evacuation of the Embassy of Spain is pure fantasy. Moreover, he must be the only man in the world, apart from the assassins themselves, capable of pinpointing the exact day on which Wallenberg was killed: the 10th of January 1945, and at the hands, he claims of «a mongoloid unit». Truly mongoloid indeed. But as per usual in his book, fantasy disturbingly coexists alongside reality. This is what he wrote in his blustering conclusion of the salvation plan for the Jews designed together with Minister Jordana and executed by himself. He is in Franco's office, about to leave:

«—I've heard news that Hollywood is preparing a series of anti-German, anti-Japanese, anti-Italian and anti-Spanish pictures with a view to exploiting the anti-fascist dimension of the war. I think the Jews are capable of preventing the part referring to us.

—I certainly hope so—I replied.

And so it was. To the best of my recollection, from May 1945, no film ever came out of Hollywood against Franco's Spain».

He remembered correctly. The last, and main, moving picture had been *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, released in 1943, to the profound concern of the Francoist authorities. Nobody can question the Jewish influence on North American films and press. Unusually, neither Franco nor the Civil War were a big issue for the two most powerful opinion-forming industries in America. And it's hard to imagine politics being able to take categoric and effective reprisals against Francoism without previously mobilising public opinion. In any case, neither the North American film industry, nor its press nor its politics included Franco's regime in the defeat of the Axis. In Bedoya's

mind, the attitude of Hollywood and the press was the result of his agreements with Jewish organizations. One remarkable and laudable trait of his account, is his completely non-existent tendency to adorn the text with moral arguments: Bedoya does not hesitate to attribute (to himself!) the salvation of the Jews in Franco's political interest. The vast majority of anti-Francoists have never read Bedoya. Rother hasn't either. And it's a pity: they would find abundant, empirical information to satisfy their moral judgements. But even so, they would still be banal. Francoism, through the effective activity of some of its diplomats, saved thousands of European Jews, basically in Budapest. The reasons are of secondary importance. The obedience owed to the authority of men or things is derisory. And Nuremberg put paid to the plausibility of this concept with all the forcefulness of the gallows. If Francoism did good out of due obedience, then it should bear the full brunt of the principles of Nuremberg, where men were judged for their text and not their context.

Sanz Briz could never aspire to the heroic status of the lone ranger, as the anti-Francoists would have wished. There was the epically inconvenient fact of his abandonment of Budapest, an official, agreed, prudent act, distinctly lacking in romance. And then, of course, there was the eruption onto the scene of a man far better equipped for this role. Ladies and gentlemen, may I present to you, Mr. Giorgio Perlasca.

PART TWO

I should continue my journey to Krakow and reach my little hotel in Kazimierz. I must do so before Kazimierz becomes a small Village. But right now, I can't stand up from the table and I can't even begin to calculate when I will be able to do so. The reason for this is the fourteen thousand words written by the meat trader, Giorgio Perlasca, in 1945 when the World War had been over for a month, from the city of Trieste to the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alberto Martín-Artajo. So I can't move. I need to sift through his words, one by one, to find out what the Budapest Winter consisted of and how a hero is built. The fourteen thousand words began, biblically, with the description of an object: «My activity in the Spanish Legation in Budapest from December 7th, 1944, date of departure to Switzerland of the Chargé d'Affaires, Mr. Ángel Sanz Briz, until January 16th, 1945, date of the Russian troops' arrival in the neighbourhood of the Hungarian capital in which the Legation headquarters were located». Perlasca had already made his literary intentions known in an initial letter written in August of 1945 from Rome to Sanz Briz in his stuttering but intelligible Spanish: «If you or your government so wish, I can send you an account that I have already written of all the details of events that occurred in the Legation during my...rule». An offer Sanz Briz claimed himself happy to accept in his, somewhat late, reply in December: «I beg you write to me and, if possible, send me this account of the events that occurred in the Legation following my departure». Which Perlasca would finally reply to in April 1946, enclosing the aforementioned report. Sir, allow me to address you.

Why did you write this report?

It is not always necessary to begin in the beginning. In the winter of 1946 you had frequent relations with the staff of the embassy of Spain in Italy, even with the ambassador, José Antonio Sangróniz. The reason is that you wished to explain your acts in the Budapest days to the Spanish civil servants and, at the same time, hand them the report you had drawn up. Those conversations must have been frankly remarkable. And that is not just a supposition. On March 12th, 1946, Ambassador Sangróniz wrote to the Director General of Foreign Policy, José María Doussinage, a very detailed summary of those encounters. I believe we should enjoy it together. He wrote the summary after sending your report to the Spanish ministry without adding any comments, motivated by the request for explanations from his superior. Let us skip point 1, as it is mere protocol:

2nd – I, like the competent Direction of this Department in the respectful charge of Your Excellence, considered the report sent by Mr. Perlasca to be of the utmost interest, if and when the facts contained therein prove to be real and true; however, given that verification of the same was not within my power and the interested party assured me that this Department was already duly informed through the reports of our representatives in Hungary at the time, I limited myself to simply passing on this document which the aforementioned gentleman had handed to me.

3rd – In the course of the interviews I conducted with the interested party, he spared himself no praise. He also informed me that he had delivered a similar report to the competent Italian Ministry, to ensure the diplomatic Authorities of his country were aware of his actions during the fall of the Hungarian military front and the Russian occupation of Hungary, and in order that they could grant him a reward.

4th – My personal opinion of Mr. Giorgio Perlasca, which Your Excellence wishes to hear, is not very sound as it is based on the impression the interested party made on me, having listened to him over the course of two long interviews that took place with me personally, in one instance, and with the Minister-Counsellor Mr. Ranero in a second instance, who gave me a detailed account after hearing him. We both agreed afterwards on the opinion we had formed:

Mr. Perlasca is a man of very strong physical constitution and even stronger verbal expression that he uses to mercilessly pound the professional diplomats and in particular the Spaniards who were at the head of our Legation in Budapest. He does not hesitate to attribute all manner of ironic adjectives to the former representatives of Spain in Hungary.

He speaks perfect Spanish, learned while living in Spain, as a legionnaire in the War of National Liberation. He assures us that his intervention in Spain, having nominated himself representative of Spain, is a model of diplomatic competence and skill, worthy of being taken into consideration by the career diplomats: «who are the first to run away when the going gets tough».

When repeatedly asked by the Counsellor Mr. Ranero what had motivated his efforts on behalf of the Spanish interests, the subject employed various verbal connections to lead the conversation to extremes that did not succeed in specifying any compelling reason. Always in passing, he alluded to the need to compensate an Italian friend of his with 500,000 lire as, according to him, this friend had lent him his automobile to serve the Legation, and later on, due to the events of the occupation, it had disappeared. He did not ask anything for himself, he merely wished to settle the debt with his aforementioned friend. To this end, he sent a request to this Department, which this Embassy processed with Dispatch n.º 219 –Accounts– on September 15th, 1945.

5th - Mr. Perlasca, when worked up, repeatedly recalls those pseudo-diplomatic representatives who remained in the Spanish red zone when the accredited foreign Diplomatic Corp in Madrid withdrew to San Juan de Luz, and who took advantage of their diplomatic investiture to save themselves while at the same time fishing in muddy waters.

6th – In the course of the last conversation he had with Mr. Ranero, he announced that he would repeat in writing his application for compensation for the lost automobile.

Attached, I am pleased to send Your Excellence a copy of the letter addressed to me for this purpose dated last February the 26th.

In light of the possible truth of Mr. Perlasca's account, both myself and the civil servants at my orders, have endeavoured to always outwardly express our gratitude to him, although I cannot hide from Your Excellence that this has always been with certain reservations for the abovementioned reasons.

Nonetheless, should Your Excellence with more facts at your disposal, having heard those civil servants who had dealings with the aforementioned

gentleman consider that Spain's gratitude should be outwardly displayed in more than friendly words, I would be very happy to communicate this to the interested party who would as a result be very satisfied and would possibly rectify the poor opinion he has formed of professional, and in particular Spanish, diplomacy.

God bless Your Excellence. The Ambassador of Spain.

The ambassador's letter has that incomparable air of having been written as the event took place. And, with regards to you and your character, it coincides with what your books say and what those who had dealings with you at the time said of you. I like to see you strong, powerful, hyperbolic. It is true that the Ambassador insinuates that you wanted money. But you should not let this little detail worry you in the least. If the Spanish authorities decided to save the Hungarian Jews to help save the regime, how could they take the high moral ground with you over that half a million lire, claimed by a more or less interposed person.

You were not paid at that time. And never have been with money. Later on, when other Spanish authorities deemed it appropriate to commend Giorgio Perlasca rather than a Francoist, you received a decoration. But that happened many years later and we won't focus on it here. Now, I must bury myself in your report, in that document that the ambassador sent to his government in spite of all his reluctance.

You begin your report explaining to the minister that the Nazis persecuted you and that Sanz Briz provided you with a passport, trusting in your participation in the Civil War as an Italian volunteer on Franco's side. After informing that you already knew each other from before, you do not clarify how the two of you met, and I'm unable to do so either. Once in possession of the passport, you offered to help in the work being done to protect the Jews.

The chargé d'affaires was happy to hire me, obviously without remuneration, providing me with the licenses necessary for the administration and

organisation of the Spanish safe houses [...] I was, furthermore, granted another document designating me a permanent civil servant of the Legation.

Not a single trace of this contract or these licenses remains. Obviously, the Spanish diplomat would have had to inform his government of any formal contract. I accept that yours wasn't. I accept that you said you wanted to help and that he was delighted to accept. I accept all these licenses. However: please do not refer me to this document that designates you not only a civil servant, but a permanent one. If you are referring to that paper on the website of your Foundation, I would go so far as to venture that it is a forgery. The paper is written in Hungarian. It says:

Accreditation

On behalf of the Spanish Government the Ambassador of Spain entrusts Mr. Jorge Perlasca to handle matters of the Spanish State in Hungary while at the same time certifying that the abovementioned gentleman is employed by the Legation of Spain. The Spanish Government hereby informs the Hungarian authorities and asks the foreign authorities to permit him freedom of movement throughout the territory and should they prove necessary, protection and support. Budapest, November 10th, 1944.

By Order of the Spanish Government
Legal Office of the Legation of Spain
Valid for 180 days.

Let's set aside the language used, in the style of a child who's been told, let's see, show us how to write in diplomatic. The paper is of relative importance: the Arrow Cross beast ultimately supposed to read it was barely literate. Also setting aside the impossible date it bears, November 10th, 1944, when Sanz Briz was still in the legation and under whose authority nobody could have stamped the Spanish seal on a paper of this type. Not to mention its 180-day validity, that makes it about as valuable as a bingo chip. I understand that in December, you, a refugee in the legation, with Sanz Briz absent and

in the company of Zoltán Farkas, Elisabeth Tourné and her son Gaston, the chauffeur, the doorman, the orderly and the housekeeper, tried to shield your own life, stamping one of the legation seals on the makeshift document that, with the aid of someone who spoke Hungarian, because you certainly didn't sir, as we will get to later, had written; and that you even decided to backdate it to make its authority more credible. You know that this document has less to do with the protection of Jews' lives and more to do with the protection of your own. But who could reproach you this? Who could reproach you in a place that, in the words of Sándor Márai, was no longer a nation but a hunting ground? The report quickly gets to its *raison d'être*. The report's, and indeed yours, sir: the departure of the man whom you wished to impersonate and the main resulting drama:

The entire protective organisation put in place for the Hungarian Jews, who had trustingly placed themselves under the guardianship of the Spanish representation, threatened to disintegrate, leaving thousands of defenceless misfortunates to the Nazi persecutions.

Only the optimism could be questioned: that the presence of Sanz Briz may have constituted a guarantee of the protection of these defenceless misfortunates. The archives contain numerous complaints lodged by the diplomat against the passiveness of the authorities in the face of the Arrow Cross terrorism. Before the Arrow Cross and the Authorities became the same thing, of course! But, in any case, I do concede your point: obviously, the departure of Sanz Briz to Berne weakened the refugee protection and you are right when you point this out. But your own problem always seems to end up outweighing all the rest:

At the time of his departure, moreover, Mr. Sanz Briz had not given me any particular instructions in this regard.

I understand your unease but can't quite fathom why he should have given you any instructions. You were an Italian refugee helping

out in those difficult days, because you owed Sanz Briz the favour of having issued you with a Spanish passport that protected you from the Nazis. I believe he probably owed things to you too. I don't have any proof, but in that Budapest, it's likely that you were an effective procurer of provisions or any other hard-to-get goods. Sanz Briz may not have given instructions to you, but he did give them to Danielsson, the Swedish Ambassador in whose hands, with the previous agreement of both governments, he had left the care of Spanish matters. You go on to speak of this agreement a few pages later. But again there is confusion relating to what's important:

Finally, the fact that the Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs had no illusions about the effective reasons for which Mr. Sanz Briz had left for Switzerland, should not be neglected. He knew that, with that departure, the Spanish government wished to avoid a fact that implied the explicit acknowledgement of the Szálasi government, that is, the required removal of the legation to Sopron, the new seat of the Hungarian government.

No. Look here, sir. Perhaps I am saying this before I should; but I wouldn't want you to waste your time, even if it is your time in eternity. You are doing what Carmen Baroja so precisely reproached his brother's characters:

Made of snippets from here and there, one person's waistcoat, the trousers of another, each boot a different colour and a jacket from beyond the grave. People who come and go in life, from one side to another, seeing things, pulling strings, speaking, travelling. All true, all taken from reality, but not true people.

It is the most profound review I have ever read, not just of Baroja's novels, but of novels full stop. What was applicable to Baroja's characters, is applicable to you with the facts. This story of Sopron, the Szálasi government and its recognition are true, and I've already explained it. And it's true that Sanz Briz was loath to transfer the embassy there, following the example of the other neutral legations.

But all that happened in November, a full month before the facts you describe now. In terms of the Budapest winter, that was an eternity almost as long as yours. No, sir. Sopron no longer meant anything. Sanz Briz left with the knowledge, and I suspect, even the agreement of the Hungarian authorities which could no longer guarantee that his life would be protected in the imminent invasion of the city. The reader already knows that he had written to his government a few days earlier saying that nobody, not even the diplomats, could leave the city under siege without a special permit from the authorities. And you will probably say... But Sanz Briz himself says he hid his departure from the Hungarians! It's true, he did say so. In his account of the winter which he sent in November of 1963 to the Jewish historian, Isaac R. Molho which, by the way, ends as follows:

If my story is of any use to you, I beg you not to use my name in it as I have no merit, I simply followed the orders of my Government and General Franco.

But my apologies, I have to get things across whatever way I can, sometimes hammering them home. The paragraph that you are actually interested in is another one:

The fact is that in mid-December I left Budapest for Vienna, without announcing my departure to the authorities in order that they would continue to believe that I was still in the city.

Good. We should believe him. Sanz Briz spoke about Budapest publicly twice. In the interview for *Heraldo de Aragón* in 1949 and in this text for Molho. Neither of the two publications is of much interest; but it certainly is his voice speaking. We should believe him. I don't believe him. I believe his telegrams, in which life is narrated as it happens, and which specified that nobody could leave the city. I even believe, in my twisted way, that your report, which he read before speaking to the *Heraldo*, provided his memory with the oppor-

tunity to correct the facts. A clandestine departure from Budapest demonstrated maximum care of the vulnerable Jews. I don't believe him. The same way I don't believe your Baroja-style or Sopron theory either.

The report proves that you didn't have a moment's break following the diplomat's departure. History came running to meet you and found you on Légrady Karoly Street, in a building used to house the persons protected by Spain, around eleven in the morning on December 7th: the police and Arrow Cross militia were about to deport the refugees when Perlasca arrived and ordered them to stop:

The dramatic scene I encountered, along with the thought of the derision the Spanish Legation and my reputation would suffer if I abandoned the protected persons to those bandits, after they had got their hopes up for so long, convinced me of the need to do something. Thus, I sent all the protected people who had surrounded me, pleading and in tears, back to their apartments and instructed them to wait there calmly and confidently. Then I reached the police official responsible for the deportation and made the following statement to him: the house was protected by the Spanish government and this protection was acknowledged by the Hungarian government and, therefore, as the representative of the government of Spain I opposed their deportation. I added furthermore that I would only give way in the event of a written order from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs but that, without it, I would stand in front of the door to prevent the evacuation of the house. To execute the order, it would have been necessary to use violence against me. Faced with my energetic posture, the official agreed to suspend the evacuation to give me time to deal with the police and party authorities who were supervising the deportation operations in the international ghetto zone. After a heated argument and a phone call from the party delegate to the Home Secretary, I obtained a five-day suspension of any type of police operation against the Spanish protected persons and the immediate return of around 300 of them who, meanwhile, had been forced out of another two houses; and the certification, by the party leaders, stating that their organisations would respect our letters of protection in the meantime. During this time, the relations between the Legation of Spain and the Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs would need to be settled and a definitive regulation of the question

of the protected persons reached, which according to the police and the Arrow Cross party, could not exceed 300.

Sir, allow me a question before we get even more bogged down. Your report constitutes a valuable testimony of the Budapest Winter and I am satisfied to see it published in Spanish for the first time. I must add that I would consider it logical and necessary for it to have been sent, in its day, to the archives of the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and I regret not having found it there. I believe the facts you recount did somehow occur. The problem is how. There is no doubt that the Arrow Cross militia frequently harassed the protected houses. Sanz Briz himself describes it in various telegrams. Not only safe houses. The Arrow Cross went so far as to attack the Swedish embassy in search of Jewish employees. They were assassins high on the drugs of fear and death. I have no doubt that you helped out in those days at the Spanish Legation in hundreds of processes or taking supplies and consolation to the ghetto houses. Which is why you deserve the admiration of all civilized people, even mine.

Nor do I have any doubt that you found yourself embroiled, with Sanz Briz himself in Budapest, in some sort of negotiation, like the one you describe. You correctly use the number 300; although it is a number that corresponds to November, like Sopron, and corresponds to the initial number of passports authorised to Sanz Briz by the Nazis. It's interesting that the figure should appear twice in the same paragraph. But I understand that you were writing without files to hand. And I even understand rounding-off in terms that are not strictly mathematical.

Nonetheless, what I fail to understand is why you remove everyone else from the scene. In your description of your frequent dialogues and challenges with the Arrow Cross Nazis on the street or in the offices, I am always surprised by the ease with which you achieved your goals in the face of the worst and most abusive animals in Europe. I wouldn't express my surprise here if it weren't for

one objective fact, however. You didn't speak Hungarian. It's unlikely that the Arrow Cross police and militia spoke any language other than Hungarian. And even more unlikely yet that any of the heated encounters with the beasts that you describe could have taken place in Italian or Spanish, the only languages in which you could get by. There is somebody missing from your side, sir. Somebody who spoke Hungarian, was familiar with Hungarian politics and was a dap hand in the laws of Hungarian diplomacy. Sometimes, it's true, you have no choice but to mention him in your report. But always separating him. A companion. I must be frank with you: I believe the companion was actually you. The companion of the lawyer, Zoltán Farkas. There is something, sir, that I cannot forgive you, let me tell you what it is. The way you treat two of the Spanish Embassy heroes in your accounts: the lawyer Farkas and Madame Tourné. Neither of them wrote their chronicle of the Budapest winter. But, unlike in your case, the facts and accounts of others speak for them. The truth, to be short, is: in the general accounts of the winter, nothing and nobody mentions Giorgio Perlasca. With one significant exception: yourself. We will come back to this. Right now, I simply wished to shed light on a document to these two heroes overshadowed by history and by your report: the lawyer and the chancellor.

On November 16th, 1944, the Spanish Legation sent a verbal note to the Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs in protest against the treatment the Spanish refugees were receiving. Despite being in possession of letters of protection, they had been taken from their houses and taken to the death marches. The note, written in French, is signed by Elisabeth Tourné. I am not sure that she was the one who worded it. But it is likely to be from the same committed woman who was already providing persecuted Jews with passports at the end of the thirties. There is an adjective embedded in this legal prose that is too true for a diplomatic dictation:

Cette caravane sinistre continue donc sa route¹⁸.

In the margin of the page there are some phrases written in Hungarian, headed by the Latin phrase *Pro domo*, which must be attributed to the civil servants of the Hungarian ministry. In their deposition, they say:

In accordance with the orders of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Batizfalvy, police commissioner and the lawyer of the Legation of Spain, travelled the indicated route by car on November 17th and 18th.

The lawyer was Farkas and he took Jews back home with him, having freed them from the sinister caravan. We can continue now. I'm afraid there is a serious issue with the first time you claim to have left with Farkas on a diplomatic visit.

The same day, in the immediate application of the decisions made [certainly, nobody can deny that he's familiar with the mechanisms of emphasis, although less so with the possibility of it giving him away], accompanied by the lawyer Farkas, I visited the head of the Arrow Cross Party [nyila], Dr. Gera, with whom I had already dealt for previous issues relating to the protected Jews, and I gave him 25,000 pengös that Mr. Sanz Briz had left behind to be given to the Party in order to help the war refugees.

He then goes on to write that he had a top-level political conversation with Doctor Gera, on the deportations and the Spanish government's attitude, and that «a step forward was taken in gaining the understanding and support of the only person who had any influence on the government at that time». Well, congratulations again. The problem arises when we compare the description of his visit to doctor Gera with the following fragment from the manuscript that Sanz Briz wrote for Molho in the sixties.

18. «This sinister caravan continues on its route».

I found out from the newspapers that a new gauleiter had been appointed for Budapest and its province and, on reading this, I decided to pay him a courtesy call as the success of my mission was dependent on his good or bad will. One fine day, I went to see him, accompanied by an interpreter, and I was received by this gentleman, whose name I have suddenly and even discourteously forgotten. His first words, proffered in a very harsh tone, were: «What are you doing here?». I replied softly and politely that my presence in his office was solely due to my wish to pay him a courtesy call, given that as an eminent authority in Budapest, I considered it my duty to contact him. My interlocutor, in reaction to my reply, immediately changed his attitude and in a normal tone said: «Please forgive my abruptness. To date, all the foreign diplomats who have come to see me have done so to protest against the treatment received by the Jews. None of them have given a thought to the suffering of the Hungarians in the Transylvania and Bessarabia regions, invaded by the Soviets, who have been stripped of their belongings and live where and how they can, in the most abject misery». I did not turn a deaf ear on the gauleiter's observations and on my return to the Spanish legation I sent him a very friendly letter that included a significant sum of money, pleading that it be used to help the refugees from the zones occupied by the Soviet Union. From that moment on, I had more decisive help and collaboration from this important authority, who gave the express order to his militiamen to respect those buildings with a notice stating they were annexed to or quarters of the Legation of Spain.

You will have seen, sir, that Sanz Briz did not forget the interpreter, even years after the facts. Listen and learn! And forgive me. I am beginning to be overly familiar. The important thing is to clarify which of the two, whether you or Sanz Briz, paid the visit to the gauleiter and delivered the money. It is unlikely for there to have been two sweet bribes in as many weeks, for the same purpose. But, I don't think it's a major drama. These lines by Sanz Briz provide us with the key:

I did not turn a deaf ear to the gauleiter's observations and on my return to the Spanish legation I sent him a very friendly letter that included a significant sum of money.

And so it was; and I believe that Farkas delivered that sum of money by hand and that you accompanied him on his errand. It's true that you position this scene weeks later, when the Spanish diplomat had already departed and you were already calling yourself "*l'impostore*". But, the fact is, sir, that one has to learn how to read you!

I have often thought about Sanz Briz's reaction when he received this report in April of 1946. His laconic postal surprise a few months earlier, «I didn't know that you had taken charge of the Legation», must have become vivid surprise about some of the details you included. I have no idea whether he replied to you or not. If he did so, there is no trace of it in either his family files or the diplomatic archives. Initially, I harshly judged the fact that Sanz Briz had not sent a copy (that is, if he didn't) of your report to the archives of his ministry. But equally honestly, I must admit that I too would have thought twice about it, having seen and read certain fragments of your tale. I'm back on the road. I haven't forgotten that you were there. You will be Zelig. And as Zelig, you will appear to be overly impressed by the major events. But, apart from the events and the role you claim to have played in them, you were there. I am interested in the dark side of your report. When it turns the corner. Your true, dangerous, heroic knowledge of the worst crime of the century:

The persecution of the Jews who, in those times, were considered authentic bandits, offered ample opportunity to a whole range of thieves, assassins, sadists and queers to enrich themselves while sating their beastly instincts in the death and atrocious suffering of these misfortunates. More than once, I've conversed with individuals who were known to be in the habit of spending the night torturing and murdering men, women and children. Jews protected by Spain who, taken by the Arrow Cross, I managed to free after having spent hours in one of the party's numerous prisons, returned home in terrible conditions: generally, their faces would be disfigured by the blows received with multiple fractures in the joints of the thorax. In

the Radeski barracks, every night, after whipping and torturing them, a group of sadists raped dozens of young girls, some barely over ten years old, and then killed them; in other places, groups of homosexuals did the same with boys. Unfortunately, some of the Spanish protected persons of both sexes were also victims of these barbaric acts.

From your chronicle, sir, I even appreciate the name-dropping, that technique that consists of laying out an electric network of names so that the narrator takes light from them. Or, as Webster defines it: «the studied but seemingly casual mention of prominent persons as associates done to impress others». I am grateful for instance, that you illuminate yourself with, for instance, the policeman Tarpataki, who was one of the organisers of the international ghetto. At the end of the day, you retrieve Tarpataki from the pit of oblivion.

With a view to avoiding any surprises, I made certain of the police chief's collaboration, in that district, that of Major Tarpataki. One day he had confessed to me that he was obligated to carry out his unpleasant task under threat of death and that he was worried about what would happen to him once the Russians occupied Budapest. Given that I had come to know and appreciate his work to moderate actions during those tortuous days, I assured him that I would defend him (in fact, when he was taken I presented a brief in his defence to the Chief of the Hungarian political police).

A brief. A handwritten piece of paper in Italian full of crossed-out words in which you defend Tarpataki is published on the website maintained by your heirs. There is no date, nor any further paratextual information. Who knows where this paper comes from. It cannot be debated. These traces of your life that cannot be debated, because they are in all honesty, unchallengeable. They did, in fact, take Tarpataki. He was the object of a trial. And condemned to eight years of prison, in spite of a great number of people testifying in his favour. Your attitude honours you, sir. It is a pity, though not a

surprise, that the Hungarian professor, Laszlo Karsai, a specialist in the history of the international ghetto and the Tarpataki trial, after inspecting the document categorically writes:

Jorge Perlasca is not mentioned anywhere.

We're going to end up sick of each other. Let me out of here for a moment.

Kazimierz, where the majority of the Jews assassinated in Krakow lived, is one of the loveliest places in the city. I've already said that it lacks very little to become a Village. Although a lot remains to be reconstructed and cleaned. On leaving the hotel this morning, on my way to the Schindler factory, a plump mother set her daughter to shitting in a corner close to the Stara synagogue. Passers-by pass and I am a passer-by. The girl defecates and the mother cleans her bum with some papers and close attention. Then she pulls up her somewhat large knickers, and together they enter the synagogue. I observe everything closely and continue towards the Schindler factory.

The old factory is an extraordinary museum that reconstructs life in the city between 1939 and 1945. The reconstruction, achieved with newspapers, everyday objects, voices, furnishings, models, films, departs from one violently arithmetical fact: before the war, around 20,000 Jews lived in Krakow, of which around 18,800 died. The museum was conceived as a result of the spectacular success of Spielberg's film. I am writing this book because of the film, and the memory of the European diplomats who tried to save the lives of the Jewish communities was popularized thanks to this film. I'm referring to the merit of *Schindler's List*, and historical cinema in general. The downside of this merit are the problems any writer faces when he writes again about a fact already narrated by film and discovers to his desperation that to write is to correct. And that his sole task is to scrape away the successive layers of myth piled on by the emotional demands of cinema. Because while it is true that cinema retrieves a great many facts from oblivion; this is usually to move them into the even deeper realm of fiction. *Schindler's List* suffers from

the problem described by Álvaro Lozano: unlike what happened in life, they are almost all saved. As if, of the twenty-thousand Jews in Krakow only two hundred had died. No. Everyone died. And the techno-emotional issue with films is that they cannot be told with a fade-to-black. They died. The majority of their eminent persecutors died too. What a serious waste the death penalty is. It would have been of the utmost interest to have had Eichmann locked up for life, examined every fifteen minutes by behavioural scientists and subjected to the likelihood of coming to grips with the truth age brings, that weakening of the sphincters! What waste. One of these nights of travelling, of twisting and turning, when an idea becomes obsessive and all you want is to sleep like a flat white slab, I considered formally proposing to the legal world that every psychopath be obliged to donate their body to science. The death penalty our times need.

I leave Krakow early in the morning, because I want to get to Budapest by mid-afternoon. The most reasonable roads pass through Brno and Bratislava. But the map shows an almost irresistibly straight line, that cuts across Slovakia and reaches the Hungarian capital in two hundred kilometres less, though along a more difficult route. I'm going to take that road. It will be long, hot, heavy-going. The traffic jam will reach epic dimensions and last hours, because the whole of Poland has come to the shadow of the Carpathians to cool off. But the road passes close enough to Zakopane for this name to evoke another; Cassio. There are around seven more hours to go before I get to Budapest and I think there'll be room to tell his story on the road. A collateral benefit this book allows because, among other things *The Heroes of the Spanish Embassy* is a very broad title and Cassio an unknown hero.

Sergio Campos was the one to give him his name, written in the Spanish Embassy files in Berlin, stored in the archive of the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. One signature, one transcription (Cassio) and one function: *Responsible for the Interests of Spain in Warsaw*. And three reports, rather three letters, addressed to his friend, the ambassador in Berlin, Ginés Vidal y Saura, written at full speed as he fled Warsaw for Prague. The letters were more than the mere venting of emotions of the person departing a fallen city. And in addition to the frank nature of a correspondence between friends, they added the orderly structure of the report being sent to a hierarchical superior: while Cassio was describing to Ginés the scenes of moral dissolution among those awaiting the arrival of the Russians with terror, his alter ego the person responsible for interests was informing the



Cassio, during his days as a diplomat in Poland

ambassador of the political consequences of the chaos. He was doing so, moreover, in an ordered and measured style; that is, underlining the immense drama in the most effective way. In addition, the letters introduced a pleasant novelty to the story of human solidarity: from them, we could deduce that Cassio had saved the lives of numerous Jews.

Cassio came from Casimiro, from *Kazito* in Polish, in Spanish pronounced *Casyito*. From Casimiro Florencio Granzow de la Cerdá, polyglot, born in Warsaw in 1895, of a Polish father and a mother from Valencia, duke of Parcent, grandee of Spain, whose beautiful boyhood face was painted by Sorolla. He was an aristocrat,

a businessman, a cosmopolitan and a patriot. His diplomatic life began in 1919 with the creation of the Spanish representation in Warsaw: until the dawn of the Republic he was attaché and honorary consul. After working towards the Francoist insurrection, he returned in 1938 to his diplomatic post in Poland. His experience there was recorded in an unusual and little-known book, *El drama de Varsovia (1939-1944)*. No other Spanish diplomat at war, either in Budapest or Athens or Romania or Berlin or Vienna wrote about their experiences to the desperate extent of this book, sometimes an album of images from hell, others a political essay, but always an account of history coagulating into the blood of the present. To write it, Cassio drew on documents, testimonies of people he trusted and sometimes on his own observations, like in the scene from the summer of 1942 in Konstancin, a spa renowned for calming patients whose nerves had been destroyed by life:

«After going for a walk I sat to rest by a small copse of pine trees. Suddenly, a few steps from me, a girl of around ten emerged from some bushes. Her appearance was skeletal. The expression in her eyes and on her waxy-coloured face spoke of hunger and exhaustion. She could barely drag her little brother, of around six, who was completely emaciated. They came timidly closer and spoke to me. They were Jews and their parents had been exterminated in a nearby village. They had managed to miraculously escape and hide. They had been living like this for two weeks already, constantly threatened by death and hunger. They asked me to help them. Three lumps of sugar were all I had in my pocket, and I hastened to hand them over, along with a fistful of zlotys so that they could buy some food or milk in the closest shop. With unequivocal signs of gratitude, they moved away. A few moments later I heard two shots. As I quickly turned my head I was met with a horrifying scene. The bodies of the two innocents were twitching frantically on the ground: the death rattles. Meanwhile, a uniform, proud of having accomplished the entrusted mission of exterminating any Jews he came across, was whistling as he walked away, while playing with and caressing an arrogant dog that accompanied him».

El drama de Varsovia passed the necessary censorship report for publication in Spain. The first thing the censor did was to answer the usual and coded questions:

«Does it attack dogma or morality? No».

«The regime or its institutions? No».

Possibly, it may also have claimed it lacked any documental or literary value. Particularly, because it immediately went on to include the following handwritten comment:

«Extremely raw and hard book. Very passionate and in my opinion biased. Nonetheless, the superior hierarchy will determine suitability of publication».

The book, which was in fact biased as it was against killing, was published with deletions on thirteen pages. A year later, the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs convened Cassio and three other diplomats to tell their experiences in the salvation of the Jews. Unfortunately, Cassio's response, if there was one, does not appear to have been saved in the ministerial archives. The aristocrat had, in fact, a great deal to tell. This was demonstrated in his book and the three precise, moving letters he wrote to Ginés Vidal. The first was dated July 31st, 1944, in Zakopane. He had just turned 49 years old. And this was how he described the moment:

«Dear Ginés:

I left Warsaw on the 26th, on one of the last trains for Krakow, in the midst of general chaos and with just one suitcase in my hand. I spent two days resting in Krakow as the journey was terribly tiring (two days standing with no food) [...] I apologise for writing this letter with a poor-quality pen and scattered ideas. I'm weary to the bone and writing in dreadful conditions, using my suitcase as a desk. I don't, however, wish to delay writing these lines to you as I fear they will never reach you if communications are cut off, which is feared to be about to happen any moment now».

The worst of the hypotheses mentioned in this letter would end up coming true. The Warsaw insurrection of August 1st would not receive the Allied support and the slaughter triggered by the Nazis in the city would prevent their return. One month later, on August 28th, 1944, he would write his second letter to Ginés Vidal from Prague. His description of the slaughter is exhaustive. To compare the Polish resistance to the Nazis he used unequivocal Spanish heroes:

«The epic Warsaw accomplishment will certainly go down in history as proof of what a people is capable of to regain their yearned-for freedom, and can only be compared in its bravery, heroism and tenacity to the glorious Spanish episodes of the 2nd of May or the unforgettable feat of the Alcázar defenders».

Cassio paid homage to the anti-Nazis in the name of Franco. Just as Sanz Briz and the vast majority of the Spanish diplomats involved in the tragedy did. The important part of Cassio's second letter, however, lay in its impeccable analysis of the reality, which has resisted the passage of time even in episodes as sinister and manipulated as the Soviet massacre in the Katyn forest.

«The Katyn massacre should not be forgotten, as in spite of what they say in Moscow, there is no doubt whatsoever that blame for this tragedy, committed against Polish soldiers and officials, must be attributed to the Soviets. This does not mean that Germany was unaware of it, when it occurred its relations with Russia were of close friendship, although it only made the news known in a sensationalist way when it suited its own propaganda. This is why in Poland, both Russia and Germany are blamed, as at the end of the day, both have used the same methods, but Germany on an even greater scale, and it cannot therefore be considered to hold any moral authority to speak of or condemn the Bolshevik methods».

Any reader of *El drama de Varsovia* will appreciate to what extent Cassio bore witness to the tremendous events he narrated. He was not a professional writer and the narrative strategies used in his

book were somewhat shaky. One paragraph from this second letter to Ginés Vidal also served to clear up any specific doubts:

«I myself have witnessed, in Otwock, on the outskirts of Warsaw, although naturally involuntarily, one of these raids that cost a couple of thousand Israelis their lives. Also, just metres from me, on the outskirts of Warsaw, I saw a German policeman coldly kill a girl of ten and her brother of around five, who were begging for charity, for the mere fact of being Jews. And I could describe hundreds of other cases like this».

The letter also described Cassio's attitude to the tragedy. Not just descriptively. Not just diplomatically. Although never just individually, and always explicitly in the name of Spain.

«Over the last five years I am satisfied to have carried out in the name of Spain, humanitarian works, endeavouring to save many lives, sometimes successfully, other times not [...] And this task was not always easy, having had to skilfully manoeuvre to remain within the bounds of strict correction and neutrality, without awakening suspicions leading to accusations of me excessively sympathizing with the vanquished. I have the joy of having saved quite a lot of lives, at the cost of lunches and dinners and abundant beverages. All this has cost me quite a lot of money and a great deal of nerves, but I have performed what I considered an elemental duty, and as a result the good name of our Nation has also shone».

Obviously, and similarly to another celebrated case I could mention, all we have is Cassio's word. But he was telling a friend and before the Spanish attitude to those persecuted by the Nazi barbarians had not yet been completely defined by the bias of war. I tried to uncover the why and the how of this help. But it was futile. Even the visit to his son.

The current duke of Parcent lives in Madrid and when I went to see him he was already 88 years old and had just survived a heart attack. He had little memory. And the dramas of the century had obliged him to spend too much time away from his father. When Europe regained peace, Cassio emigrated to Argentina: his Polish properties had fallen into the hands of Communism. His son was left in Madrid, under his mother's care. One day in September of 1968 the phone rang and a voice brusquely said: «The duke has died». He was 73 years old. The son still kept some family letters and a number of photographs. In the majority of these, Cassio has the appearance of the happy man and bon vivant he had always wanted to be. Corpulent and overweight, due to his refined love of food.

—His father sometimes told him that he was inviting German officials to dine and that in the heat of the conversation ...

—Yes, some banquet or luncheon.

—And that as a result he had obtained the freedom of Jews and Polish political prisoners.

—Yes, sometimes freedom and sometimes a softening of the penalty. Like, for instance those that they were going to execute were sentenced instead to a life sentence.

Karol Meissner, a Benedictine monk in Lubin and grandson of the writer, Sofía Casanova, was not much help either. Cassio mentioned her in his second report:

«Returning to Warsaw, I already told you in my previous letter that the only members of the Spanish colony left there were Sofía Casanova and her maidservant, Josefa López, both elderly and in no way fit to undertake a journey amid the present difficulties, they would not have made it.

In addition, Sofía did not wish to be separated from her daughters and grandchildren who make up a large family. I left all of them living in the countryside, on the outskirts of Warsaw, and it is to be hoped that nothing shall happen to them as everything has been put in place to keep them duly protected».

They were, indeed, two elderly ladies. Although Sofía, who was 83 years old at the time and almost blind, would be long-lived and die in 1958, at the age of 97. At the end of the war, and apparently without her consent, *El martirio de Polonia* was published, a series of autobiographical notes on her experience in Warsaw in the 1930's and 1940's. It was also her martyrdom, and her memoir:

«In the Warsaw catastrophe, we left the house in flames, having lost everything. I don't even have a portrait of my mother left, nor anything that speaks of me to my grandchildren».

Sofía Casanova's life was an incessant exercise in survival. Her last article, published in the newspaper, *Abc*, dated June 9th, 1944, was entitled *Lejos y Cerca*. A 16-year-old adolescent reads *Don Quixote* aloud to her in the ruins of Warsaw until the light of day vanishes and «the last bell of eight tolls. It is curfew time in the city». It's a pity that Sofía Casanova was so old by that time and that this should be her last word on Poland.

It was reasonable to believe her grandson, Meissner, responsible for a website on the writer, might be able to offer some new data about Cassio. Meissner spoke Spanish and was a Benedictine monk in Lubin. Sergio Campos tried to go and see him but, lost on the roads of Poland, he never managed to get to Lubin. Or that's what he said. When he managed to speak to Meissner by phone, he sent me this note:

«Dear Arcadi:

The convent was further away than I thought. I got as far as a village called Lubin, but it was another Lubin. In the end, I managed to speak

to the monk by phone. He has not kept any documents whatsoever, as the writer's files burned during the Warsaw insurrection, in August of 1944. He told me that Kazito had very close contact with the Germans as he spoke the language perfectly, and that he knew a lot of them, although "he never wanted to be on the Germans' radar". He does not know how Cassio escaped from Warsaw, he had no idea that he had saved Jews, although "he was the sort of person who could have done", for his personality and his money, as he had too much of it and "did not make money for himself".

Affectionately,
Sergio»

The last letter from Cassio was headed: «Provisionally in Prague on October 31st, 1944». His first lines were categorical: «Warsaw is a dead city». Among his horrifying details, he included paragraphs dedicated to the activity of Kalmuks and Cossacks, whom the Germans had tacitly given the task of cleansing the city:

«The acts of violence, mainly against young men and women and even girls, already shaken by all they have been through, have been manifold and carried out with a savagery and barbarity, with a level of brazenness, that's hard to describe. In front of the Germans themselves, who do nothing to stop them, they have been transforming some of the trams into veritable brothels. In a number of the formerly central areas of the city, right in the middle of the street and among the ruins, they have set up these vehicles and furnished them with beds, sofas and armchairs stolen from houses, and they have turned wholeheartedly to drinking and raping defenceless women and children with the basest possible instincts, accompanying these orgies with songs to the strains of "balalaikas". ...Like I said, the German authorities -and this has been confirmed by a friend of mine, the director of a Warsaw bank- watched these scenes without blinking an eyelid, occasionally responding to the voices of these innocent victims pleading for help and imploring them; that they could do nothing, as those hordes of savages were not directly under their orders...!

The strange thing is, that once this organised sacking of the city and its inhabitants had ended, and once the Warsaw rebels had surrendered, the Kalmuks and Cossacks were taken to a barracks located on the outskirts

of the city, with their pockets full of money and jewels. Once there, with the excuse of having them undergo a disinfection process, they were made to strip and leave their clothes, and obliged to leave through the other door, where they were given clean clothes, but were not reunited with their plunder!»

Cassio wrote, among his reports and books, a remarkable contemporary chronicle of Poland. He saw and suffered events alongside many of the Polish and was able to recount it. His testimony fundamentally focuses on two essential mysteries of the last European war. The first has been broadly described: how was it possible? The second, less so: how and why did Poland, and all of Europe, go from destruction, to lasting peace? Anyone crossing Central Europe, as I am doing now, cannot avoid thinking about the mystery of reconciliation. On this vast substratum of blood, Germans, French, Polish and Russians now live in peace and trade, and that happens whilst millions of men still remember the hatred and death and many participated directly in it. The atrocities described by Cassio in the final destruction of Warsaw constitute the worst level of debasement known in my time. And yet a new civilisation pact has been built on rapid forgetfulness. This recovery supports the thesis put forward by the psychologist, Steven Pinker, in *The Better Angels*. It sustains that the Second World War was an anomalous, casual (!), peak in a profound, lasting and unstoppable process of civilization, the roots of which can be traced to the Enlightenment. And it is also compatible with the thesis of numerous historians and political scientists according to whom the Nazi barbarity was, above all, the audacious work of a band of criminals. The political scientist, John Mueller, quoted in Pinker's book, says:

«There was no momentum toward another world war in Europe, historical conditions in no important way required that contest, and the major nations of Europe were not on a collision course that was likely to lead to war. That is, had Adolf Hitler gone into art rather than politics, had he

been gassed a bit more thoroughly by the British in the trenches in 1918, had he, rather than the man marching next to him, been gunned down in the Beer Hall Putsch of 1923, had he failed to survive the automobile crash he experienced in 1930, had he been denied the leadership position in Germany, or had he been removed from office at almost any time before September 1939 (and possibly even before May 1940), Europe's greatest war would probably never have taken place».

The civilisation process fertilised the soil of forgetfulness. A soil already fertile, in any case. Anyone specialised in reconstructing the past experiences an uncomfortable paradox. They know that memory is a moral conquest, fruit of civilisation. Yet at the same time, they cannot deny the fact that forgetfulness is the fruit of evolution, adopted by natural selection, and that the species would not have existed without it.

Journeys are great fun for the mind. I have to enter Budapest now, but the thought remains swinging there, maybe hanged. To attribute the course of history to one man, as in the interpretation that Hitler and his gang were the main culprits of the Holocaust and that without Hitler, Germany would not have opted for the hecatomb, makes a redefinition of the morals of magnicide and terrorism in general obligatory. Among all the hypotheses put forward by Mueller, accident, gassing, destitution, the one that poses a worrisome moral dilemma is missing. Assassination. If the death of one man can prevent a genocide, it is not easy to see the ethical precaution that should prevent the infliction of it. The theory that tragedies such as Nazism have one author upends the comfortable avoidance of the problem inherent to many interpretations put forward by the social sciences, particularly linked to Marxism, that sustain that in an historical circumstance determined by the infrastructure, the superstructure and their ever-esoteric relations, the appearance of a man who executes history's plan is inexorable, whether he has a moustache or not. This perspective discards terrorism, not only for moral, humanitarian reasons, but also for questions of efficacy: the liquidation of the man does not automatically imply the liquidation of the problem. Returning to the case of Heydrick, the opportunity of the magnicide could then be weighed up in terms of cost/benefit: whether the death of the person responsible for the genocide makes up for the trail of death that will be triggered. The sole reservation is Kantian, of course: the imperative that man, you or any other, should be an end in himself, and

not merely a means to an end. But turning to Kant always means there's a shortage of fuel.

And it is in these talks that I get to the scene of the crime, the old illusion of my profession according to which there is another place apart from time.

Sir, here I am again. And at a key passage in your report.

«On December 22nd, the legations held a preparatory meeting to draw up a note of protest to be signed the following morning by the five Heads of Mission (SE Rotta, Papal Nuncio; SE Danielsson, minister of Sweden; Doctor Feller, chargé d'affaires, Switzerland; Count Pongraz, honorary chargé d'affaires for Portugal; Perlasca for Spain»).

It was December, and Budapest was about to fall into Soviet hands. The imminence of defeat probably led many Hungarian Nazis to lose their moral and flee. But also to levels of crime and vengeance that were beyond comprehension, and that persisted to the very last breath. Suffice to know that three days before the arrival of the Russians, in mid-January, members of the Arrow Cross entered a Jewish hospital and killed 154 people, including 130 patients. Since the start of December, Arrow Cross gangs went out searching for Jews, even in the buildings of the Red Cross, whether offices or hospitals. And halfway through the month, the Nazi authorities started to transfer children to the common ghetto, including those protected by the Red Cross. Hundreds of them were taken there. The protests of the humanitarian organisations and the neutral legations succeeded in temporarily paralysing the transfers, which began again on December 20th. It is into this context that the meeting alluded to by Perlasca needs to be fit, which ended with a communication imploring the Nazi government to show comprehension and mercy:

«It would be incomprehensible to punish innocents or take measures of retaliation against beings entirely incapable of causing the slightest harm. [...] It has been said that the Jews are the enemies of Hungary, but even

in a State of War, law and conscience condemn any act of hostility against children».

Naturally, the importance of the statement lies in its noble purpose. However, for the question at hand, the document is also relevant. It would prove that you, at some point, acted as the representative of the Spanish legation and are worthy of the title of *impostore*. I must warn you that I have investigated the aforementioned document to death. The full text is housed in the Vatican, reproduced in the *Actes et documents du Saint-Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*. A footnote says:

«Cette fois-ci, les signataires étaient: “Angelo Rotta, nonce apostolique; Carl Jvan Danielsson, ministre de Suède; Harald Feller, chargé d’affaires de Suisse; Jorge Perlasca, chargé des affaires d’Espagne; Comte de Pongrac, chargé des affaires de Portugal”»¹⁹.

However, the Vatican archives only house the transcription, not the original document or its copy. And the Hungarian archives hold neither. In the Hungarian archives there is a copy of a similar document drawn up by the neutral countries in November: there are no signatures. And when transcribed by the Vatican in the *Actes*, it includes the signature of Miguel [sic] Sanz Briz. All of this is very tedious and confusing. If you’re curious, please refer to the credits at the end of the book, where history proceeds along even more convoluted and circuitous paths. I wouldn’t want you to deduce from all of the above that I wish to kick you out of that Budapest. I will again repeat: you were there and you deserve to be honoured. But I must ascertain your exact steps and until the original of the Vatican act appears with your signature, a transcription that could have been done by

19. TN: This time, the signatories were: Agnelo Rotta, Apostolic Nuncio; Carl Jvan Danielsson, Swedish Ambassador; Harald Feller, Swiss Chargée d’Affaires; Jorge Perlasca, Spanish Chargée d’Affaires; Conde de Pongrac, Portuguese Chargée d’Affaires”.

anyone, in unknown circumstances, must be set aside. I must verify your steps, furthermore, because your autofiction always tends to evict anyone else who had been present. Anyone reading you, only you, until the end, to that voice from beyond the grave that echoes in the last and pathetic propaganda of the book by Hallenstein and Zavattiero, would think that you were alone against the criminals in that winter. And that you disabled them all with the frank Perlasca power emanating from the look in your eye. You will convince me that you replaced Sanz Briz, that you put the worst band of murderers in that terminal Europe in their place on a daily basis, that you held high-level diplomatic, and even philosophical, talks with the German authorities twenty minutes before the city fell into Soviet hands, that you freed two Jewish children from the clutches of Eichmann himself, as you have gone so far as to claim in some interviews, old by then, and giving different versions of the fact. What I do not doubt, on the other hand, as I already told you, is that you did accompany and encourage and support the lawyer Farkas in his proceedings. That lawyer who, following twenty years in the service of the legation of Spain, knew the right languages, knew the right civil servants and had all the laws he needed in his head. And who did not need any great imposture to continue doing his work in the legation in the last days of Nazi Budapest. Not even the relative imposture of personal sacrifice. Farkas, like Madame Tourné, had asked Sanz Briz for refuge in the legation because he felt safer there than in his own home. I believe Farkas was the man who substituted Sanz Briz, sir. Not only do I believe it. This letter proves it, an old piece of Hungarian paper:

«To the attention of Mr. Dr. Farkas
Embassy of Spain

I hereby inform Dr. Farkas that as of 6 this morning the evacuation of the protected houses began. At present, the evacuation is taking place on Pozsonyi Street. According to unidentified sources, all people from the

protected houses will be transferred to the ghetto. Bearing in mind, the intention of Dr. Farkas regarding the salvation of the Spanish protected persons immediate measures are required as the police are already acting on our street. Apparently, the order was issued during the night because yesterday afternoon when I spoke to the deputy commander of the district station, he was still unaware of anything. The evacuation and transfer of the people is being carried out jointly by police and Arrow Crossists.

Repeating the urgency of taking immediate action.

Yours faithfully,

Szebenyi (?)

January 4th, 1945.

Ps./ There is no bombing or cannons in our district right now».

We don't know who wrote the letter. It was probably the doorman of that house on Pozsonyi. But the letter itself, a rare and miraculous vestige, proves the decisive role played by Zoltán Farkas and Astorga in managing the Jewish salvation.

However, it is certainly not my intention to use Farkas to remove you from the stage. You were there, sir, I do know that. I'm familiar with that letter they wrote to you when Budapest had been freed from the Nazis, when you were about to return to Italy.

«Sir:

We have been made sadly aware that you are to leave Hungary to return to your homeland, Italy. We wished to take advantage of the occasion to express the affection, acknowledgement and esteem of thousands of Jews persecuted by the German Nazis and the Hungarian Fascists, who were under the protection of the Spanish legation.

We will never, ever forget that you not only toiled tirelessly where we were housed to ensure we had provisions, but that you also took children, the elderly and the sick into your care with a tenderness that we cannot express in words. We will never forget that you gave encouragement to the desperate and acted in our interests with great astuteness and even greater courage, when our situation was so desperate; and we also know how many times you risked your safety and your life to save us from the assassins. We will never, ever leave your name out of our prayers and we beg God bless you because only he can reward you».

And the other letter, too, sent to you by about twenty Jews in the Embassy on January 16th, 1945, the same day the Soviet troops took control of the zone the Spanish legation was located in. A similar letter, though signed by fewer people, placed in the hands of Farkas, and perhaps the rest of the legation employees, including Madame Tourné. Both documents were aimed at preventing problems with the new occupiers of the country, certifying an honourable past and easing departure from a Hungary threatened by imminent Communism. But their instrumental nature, similar to a safe-conduct, did not detract from the warmth or the gratitude that had inspired them.

Not only were you there, sir, but you knew how to narrate it, with a poignancy that comes through the passage of time fully intact. I don't believe there are many chronicles of that Winter comparable to yours. Particularly when you set yourself aside and allow us to see the landscape truly and heartbreakingly:

«On Christmas Day, worried because the Buda residence [where Sanz Briz lived, which was occupied by dozens of refugees] did not answer the telephone calls, I asked the German command for permission to cross the Danube and on gaining the permit I went with the lawyer, Farkas, to Buda. The residence was in a battle zone and had already suffered damage on the upper floor. We managed to crawl in on all fours and did what we could to encourage the refugees. [...] On returning to Pest, we went for a drive around the city to see what was happening: the city was under the armed Arrow Cross bands, who were killing Jews and anyone suspected of anti-fascism on the streets. The lawyer Farkas and the chauffeur, in spite of holding regular Spanish passports and the card issued by the Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, were at risk of being assassinated in the car itself, while driving down Andrásy avenue. There was such confusion that for a number of days it was impossible to know who had taken control of the city government. As it was so dangerous to leave the house after dawn, from that day on I moved into the Legation. We had no news of the Buda residence until two months later, that is, after the surrender of Buda. I knew on December 26th, at 8, that it had been occupied by the Russian troops, and that at 9 it was hit by a German incendiary shell, and had been

completely destroyed in the ensuing fire and that it had not been possible to save Mr. Sanz Briz's furnishings, other items or car, nor a small Fiat that Mr. Santelli, an Italian citizen, had lent me two days earlier.

[...] While awaiting the arrival of the Russian troops in the besieged city from one moment to the next, all traces of legality had disappeared. The German command was no longer interested in the line of fire and had abandoned all power in the hands of four or five thousand Arrow Cross militiamen, who in the absence of any energetic instructions from above, viciously plundered the city with the excuse of protecting the backs of the German and Hungarian soldiers. Each morning on the streets around the common ghetto and on the banks of the Danube, hundreds of bodies of citizens sacrificed to the racial and political furore of the Nyila terrorists were to be seen. The traditional police institution, serious and moderate, was not participating in the city control and was not offering practically any services. It was said that around three thousand policemen were barricaded in some barracks, waiting for the right time to turn the situation around. The police, aware of the severe consequences the Jewish massacre would have for the Hungarian people, was at least trying to protect the international ghetto, by positioning a hundred men in that district. The lives of the few people who had been obliged to move were subject to the will of the Arrow Cross bands.

[...]

The biggest concern was the food situation; our protected persons were completely without provisions of any sort and hundreds were dying daily of hunger and cold in the common ghetto. [...] Every night, bands of terrorists invaded the ghetto, killing and stealing the little food still left there. In the legation our meals were almost always limited to carrot soup. With a view to supplying our protected persons with the essentials to survive, we quickly created an organisation that allowed us to purchase bread, fats, sugar and other foodstuffs, at an astronomical price, that the Legation car, escorted by gendarmes, delivered to the protected houses each day».

Allow me to interrupt you, sir, but the following paragraph from your chronicle is a perfect expression of your ambivalence, your courage and your vice. You wrote:

«On January 1st, our Buick car received a direct hit from the machine gunner of a Russian plane. It had already been damaged the day before

by a grenade explosion as I was on my way to inspect and provide our houses with food: Mr. Szamosi, our brave collaborator who also acted as chauffeur, received a head wound. An employee of the Red Cross and a gendarme from the escort were fatally injured».

I have no doubt that you were one of the brave taking food to the houses. But it is really worth mentioning how you elbow your way into that moment of utmost heroism to the point that the reader skimming quickly over the pages will believe that you were in the gunned down car, thanks to the fact that you have inserted into the scene another from the previous day about which you inform us, without further detail (if you were inside the car, if the car was parked or circulating, etc.), that a grenade damaged the Buick while it was on its way to completing a humanitarian mission. Nor do I fully understand why you think so little of taking food to the houses and feel the need to put us all in our places by using the verb *to inspect*. For what stripes was this necessary, exercising as you did the authority of comfort and solidarity. Work, by the way, for which others died, as you yourself recount, though in very little detail:

«The car was written off. From that moment on, the delivery of provisions was improvised. Young protected people volunteered to come to the Legation and carry the food on their shoulders and in boxes. Many lost their lives as they were recognized by the terrorist bands and executed on the spot: but were rapidly replaced by other volunteers».

Nor do I know whether you wrote the letter you claim to have written to Minister Vajna, the only authority left in a terminal Budapest. No record of any of your “superstructural” steps remain in the Hungarian archives. Indeed, there are no records of either your steps or of you yourself. But it doesn’t matter. I am seeking those paragraphs that you wrote in 1945, when nobody else had written them yet, when it was not yet a horrifying commonplace of European barbarity that on the banks of the Danube they would tie the Jews

together in pairs, shoot a bullet into one of the bodies causing the pair to fall into the icy water. I am looking for that man who neither wrote nor lived off second-hand accounts. And not the man who had to invent a consular imposture for himself to strengthen the possibility of obtaining an income from the Spanish authorities in the hungry, post-war, Italian situation. I know. It's just an interpretation. But it's not just mine. It's also Sanz Briz's, remember: «And do not expect anything of anyone. Neither your government nor any other will acknowledge your merits». This is what I'm looking for:

«... in my daily excursions to different parts of the city, I've seen thousands of murdered bodies abandoned on the streets and the snow on the banks of the Danube reddened by the blood of so many men, women and children brutally murdered, whose bodies, tied in pairs, could be seen floating in the water close to the banks because the ice made it hard for them to sink: I had under my personal protection [personal: you had to hammer that home!: not even here are you capable of leaving your martialism behind] a young woman who had saved herself at the last minute by throwing herself into the water when they had hit her sister, to whom she was not perfectly tied, on the head with a pistol».

The problem is that the landscape, even the moral one, also disappears every time you spot a chance for personal gain. Early in the morning of January 5th, for example. The Nazi authorities had decided to put an end to the international ghetto and send the protected persons to the common ghetto. As you state in your report, the ghetto was already a common grave:

«In normal times, seven or eight thousand people had lived there and now there were eighty-thousand. There was a shortage of water, gas, light, wood, coal, food and medicines. On the streets, in the squares and in many warehouses, thousands of bodies dead of hunger and exhaustion, murdered by the Arrow Cross or killed by the bombs and air guns lay unburied. To put an extra twenty-thousand people into the common ghetto would have meant death in a matter of weeks of almost all the prisoners and the creation of a focal point of epidemics».

Early in the morning of the 5th, a group of Arrow Cross militia reached the house on Szent István Park 35. This is how you described it:

«On the 5th at 5:30 am, a young protected person reached the Legation to give warning that some houses had been occupied during the night by the police in order to transfer the inhabitants to the ghetto. The lawyer Farkas and I determined that the matter was already compromising the prestige of the Spanish State, on behalf and on the orders of which we had always stated we were acting. [...] Immediately, the lawyer Farkas and I went, in the company of four armed gendarmes. We found the house occupied by the police, who had already lined up the protected and were awaiting the order to take them. I immediately sent a policeman to tell major Tarpataki that the Spanish chargé d'affaires was in situ and expecting explanations: shortly thereafter an official arrived with an order to suspend the deportation».

Your rhetoric, sir «the matter was already compromising the prestige of the Spanish State, on behalf and on the orders of which». «Was awaiting the order to take them». «I immediately sent». Immediately. «Expecting explanations». «In situ». «With an order». «Suspend the deportation». I don't doubt that you were there. That you decisively collaborated in their salvation. But, please take note of this irreplaceable letter Jaime Vándor went to pick up for me.

«[...] I, Anna Vándor, lived with 52 people in an apartment with two and a half bedrooms. My two children and I slept and spent the day on mattresses on the floor. A wooden plank had been placed on top of the bathtub and two people slept on that too. Towards the end there was no water, which given the needs (WC) was catastrophic. We almost all had lice and fleas, but out of shame we avoided talking about it. One day a parachute fell on the building, it caused a fire and part of the house fell in, meaning we had to accommodate even more neighbours. The bombs were falling, but we were not allowed to go down to the basement. The Christian tenants took pity on us and allowed the elderly and the children to go down to the shelter. One day, by mid-morning we had counted 96 hits to our two rooms, four people were wounded and removed from the flat. Other Hungarian citizens were transferred to safer areas, but we were

prisoners, under a protection that didn't live up to this name. One of our neighbours called Berger was required to go down to the lobby and was never heard of again.

On the 5th and 6th of January 1945, all people under 70 had to be prepared for evacuation. We had already watched harrowing scenes daily from our windows. Precariously dressed Jews taken out of other protected houses, with backpacks, small children, the old and the sick exposed to the ice and the snow for hours while waiting for certain death.

Our desperation, our cries and laments are unforgettable. We owe our salvation from deportation, first and foremost, to the doorman who, in spite of the prohibition, told us the news in advance, and in second place to a lieutenant and lawyer called Georg Bárdos who, dressed as an "arrow crossist" went to the Legation of Spain at 4 in the morning. The only people left there were the secretary, Madame Tourné, her son Gaston and an Italian who spoke perfect Spanish and lived in the Consulate, hidden as a political refugee. The secretary urged this man to take on the role of senior Spanish civil servant and he, in representation of the consul who had already left our country, came to our protected house with the police, obtaining a 24-hour delay. The next day nobody came for us. It was said that this was thanks to Mr. Bárdos. Sadly, the saviour of 420 people, on returning the second night, was stopped by Nazis who stripped him in a doorway and executed him on the spot. His parents found out from a Christian friend who was had accompanied him.

After the war, on November 30th, 1947, in the same doorway of Szent István Park 35, a commemorative plaque was revealed in memory of the heroic sacrifice of Georg Bárdos. The invitation was signed by the former neighbours' committee of the Spanish protected house: the university professor, Dr. Zoltán Aszódi, the lawyer, Dr. Hugó Dukesz and the directors, Manó Gonda and Rezső Ney [...].

This is a fragment of the letter sent in the early sixties by Helene Devai and Anna Vándor to the president of the Federal Republic of Germany. You will agree with me that it contains a number of interesting details. The presence of the young Bárdos in the first place. You mention him, but without stating his name. But, above all, without mentioning the role he played. The sequence described begins with the doorman's early-morning warning, that they're coming

for you. It continues with the protected person, Bárdos, disguised as an Arrow Cross to go to the Spanish Embassy. It's around four in the morning in a city below freezing, hammered by the cannon-fire of the siege, in complete darkness and under curfew. A Jew dressed up as a Nazi walks the streets. I look at the route he must have taken on the map. There are two possibilities. Either along Csanády Street or the Térez boulevard. The distance is the same: almost three kilometres. The difference lies in crossing at one end of the Western Railway Station or the other. We don't know what route he took, but the courageous Bárdos reached the legation on Eötvös. There he found Madame Tourné, Farkas, probably, although he doesn't mention him in his account, and an Italian who speaks Spanish, which must be you, sir. Here the sequence takes a delicate turn, because the Mmes Devai and Vándor are stating something important and surprising: that Madame Tourné is urging you, sir, to take on the role of senior civil servant of the embassy. My oh my. Madame Tourné! You have written about her a number of times. And in different ways. She appeared to you to be both a «*brava vecchia funzionaria*»²⁰ and a little woman who was always in your way. A similar scenario occurred with her son, Gaston: he was both a brave youth, who «went out to recover the protected persons who had been taken» and «an idiot». I believe you had problems with them, particularly with Madame, but I cannot say what type. Unfortunately for me, I have not found any firm trace of Madame Tourné or her son, and her voice, sir, that would have been such a splendid counterpart to your excesses, can only be heard in the form of a very distant echo. Grant me that two things are surprising here. The first is that it was Madame Tourné's idea, that menacing night of January 5th, that you become, not so much the substitute of Sanz Briz, but a senior official of the Spanish Legation. Look closely at the sentence in the letter of the two refugee women: «The secretary urged this man to take on

20. TN: A good old civil servant.

the role of senior Spanish civil servant and he, in representation of the consul who had already left our country...» If this were the case, it would also mean that prior to that date you had not taken on the role of impostor and that your happy game lasted little more than one night: you mustn't forget, sir, that the Russians were just over a week away from taking Budapest.

You will argue that it is a testimony, and that testimonies can be confused, mix up facts, people, etc. You are right. But the testimony of Helene and Anna is valuable. First of all, because it does not refer to themselves, but to others, and others whose hypothetical glory does not concern them. Secondly, because their testimony is quite close to the facts: remember that the letter was written in the winter of 1960, and above all, remember that back then the account of the facts was not up for public debate, as would happen thirty years later, and the memory of others had not yet contaminated theirs. Finally, there are very precise details in Helene and Anna's letter (the names of the legation secretary and her son) that demonstrate on-the-ground knowledge. And in this respect, by the way, I cannot avoid the temptation of pointing out to you that, while knowledgeable of the context and the names, they do not transcribe yours. An Italian.

All of this waffle may be a tad wearisome for quick minds. The fact is, they will emphasise, that Bardós went to get them in the night, and that you and Farkas went with him and so the deportation of the protected persons of Szent István Park could be avoided.

Yes, the waffle. Two days later, probably masked in his disguise, the Jew Bárdos was detained by a Nazi patrol, stripped naked and shot in a doorway. Yes, the waffle. The rotten meaning between the lines that books are written on. There, where the poisonous fallacy of legend blossoms if we fail to dig.

There is a name between the lines, sir. You call him Samogyi, perhaps because of a difficult spelling, perhaps because memory is a traitor. But his name was, László Szamosi. A Hungarian Jew, born in 1913, who specialised in real estate businesses and who in October of 1944 began to collaborate with the delegation of the International Red Cross Committee. Like you, though far more modestly, he left written testimony of his heroic deed. A 21-page notebook, written at the end of 1945, which I don't believe you were ever aware of. These paragraphs will surely be of interest to you:

I made contact with Zoltán Farkas, legal adviser to the Spanish Embassy, a Christian who was an old acquaintance of mine. [...] I convinced Farkas [...] that he too should get in touch with the Committee [of the International Red Cross] on the border, give them money and make our lists respected. Farkas paid even more attention to my request when I reinforced my arguments by transferring one of my valuable lands with planning permission in Buda over to him. [...] Our trump card was a bluff that impressed even the most senior of the Arrow Crossists: to be precise, that Franco's government was the only one to have recognised the Arrow Cross Hungarian Government, and therefore, as a friend of the nation -and friend of the prime minister Szálasi- Spain had the right to special treatment. Hungary was so isolated, at that point, by the foreign countries, that we used to tell them that Franco was sending troops to support the Arrow Crossists, and they swallowed that too [...]

The Russian forces were already so close to the city that you could hear the boom of the guns and at night we could see the flashes. Back then I was fighting just to win days, with the feeling that each new day of grace might mean life: in the first days of December, when the front was just 30 kilometres from the city, the Spanish Chargé d'Affaires left the city. There we were with a Spanish Embassy without any chargé d'affaires, but thank God, with rubber stamps, printed forms, and a private car with a diplomatic

number plate! To keep up appearances, there was an Italian citizen, a certain Perlaska [sic] who had lived in the Embassy building, and without giving it any further thought we appointed him chargé d'affaires.

Between the air raids, we tried to ensure the relative safety of the Spanish protected houses by insisting all along that we were representing the only country that had acknowledged the Szálasi regime. [...] Together with Perlaska, we began to undertake private rescue missions. These were carried out until December 13th approximately. Always using the «Spanish story», we'd frequently go to see the Arrow Cross authorities and even enter into the different houses in which the prisoners were brutally tortured before being executed. In many cases, we managed to free people from the very clutches of the Arrow Cross gangs [...]

The bombing —back then only aerial— became incessant. Barricades were already beginning to be built on the streets, as the Germans managed to make the Arrow Cross chiefs believe that their glorious army was not only good enough to defend the city, but also to oblige the heretofore irresistible Russians to retreat. Anti-tank trenches and barricades sprang up all over the city, and a special permit that had to be renewed daily was required to use the diplomatic vehicle. On December 24th I convinced Perlaska to come with me to the office of the military governor, where the permit had to be renewed. But we never arrived; on Margaret Bridge the car was surrounded by a mob of soldiers and civilians on the run: the Red army was in Buda. I turned the car around and returned to Pest with the happy news, two or three days more and the entire circus would have come to an end.

I understand, sir. You called him Samogyi and he called you Perlaska. But let's not get side-tracked by nonsense and come to the point. I have the supplementary material. A series of paragraphs from *Righteous Gentile*, a book by the English journalist, John Bierman, published in 1981:

When the death marches began in early November 1944 [Szamosi] made another vital contact – Zoltán Farkas, a Gentile former acquaintance who was then legal adviser to the Spanish embassy. Through Farkas, he quickly got an introduction to the chargé d'affaires, Angel Sanz-Briz²¹.

21. Sans-Riz in the original.

Appealing to him with all the moral authority of the Red Cross, Szamosi got Sanz-Briz to agree that, in addition to the few Spanish-descended Jews already under his country's protection, he would help other Jews by issuing a substantial number of extra protective passes, without inquiring too closely into antecedents. [...]

Szamosi had constant battles with the Spanish Embassy staff, who complained that the number of protected persons seemed to be far in excess of the number of passes they had issued. They simply refused to deal with the excess. Szamosi solved this and other problems by the simple solution of getting himself taken on the staff of the seriously undermanned Embassy. This was achieved partly through his own contacts with Farkas and Sanz-Briz and partly through the good offices of the IRC representative Born, who wrote to the Spanish chargé urging him to give official diplomatic status to both Szamosi and Komoly [Otto: president of the Hungarian Zionist Federation and outstanding collaborator of the International Red Cross in Budapest, subsequently assassinated by the Hungarian Nazis]. Such a thing could perhaps only come about in the chaotic conditions then prevailing in Budapest; soon Szamosi and Komoly were on the Embassy staff and the possessors of Spanish diplomatic passports. [...]

In the first week of December things got even better: Sanz-Briz and his fellow-Spaniards fled from Budapest, rather than risk capture by the Soviets, leaving Szamosi to all intents and purposes in sole charge of the one foreign mission which recognized the Szálasi regime as legitimate. Szamosi and Komoly thus had all the embassy's stamps, seals, and printed forms at their disposal, plus the offices themselves, a car with diplomatic plates, a stock of Spanish flags and a considerable store of goodwill with their fellow Fascists of the Arrow Cross and the Hungarian Government.

Szamosi lost no time in taking full advantage of this superb windfall. To the seven hundred passes so far issued he added hundreds more. He raised the Spanish flag over the children's home in Dob Street, and also over Komoly's headquarters in Munkács Street, thus claiming extraterritorial status as well as Red Cross protection for both of them. One night when Arrow Cross gunmen burst into the home in Dob Street he indignantly read them a lecture on extraterritoriality before reminding them how close a friend Franco was to Hitler and Szálasi. Mumbling apologies, the intruders left.

In moving about the streets – now armed with three different sets of papers and dressed Arrow Cross style in a fur-trimmed coat with a countryman's hat – Szamosi would display similar audacity, striding arrogantly

through Arrow Cross cordons instead of trying to avoid them. «I was dealing with primitive people and most of the time a resolute voice and overbearing manner would do the trick», he recalls.

To keep up appearances at the embassy Szamosi felt he really could do with a genuine Spaniard to act as chargé d'affaires. Unable to find a Spaniard in Budapest, he settled for the next best thing, an Italian acquaintance named Giorgio Perlasca, who had been living for some years in an apartment in the Embassy building. «Without much ado», says Szamosi, «we “appointed” him, and I must say he made an excellent frontman». On the many protest notes which the neutral missions were to send collectively to the Hungarian authorities from this time on, Perlasca's name would appear as a signatory together with those of genuine heads of mission, such as Monsignor Rotta and Minister Danielsson. In company with Szamosi he



László Szamosi, in 1948

would go out on rescue missions to recover Spanish-protected Jews who had been taken by the Arrow Cross, even sometimes marching in to the party houses where the Arrow Cross would torture their captives before killing them. While these desperate rescue missions went on, there was still the constant problem of finding food for the children's homes and then getting it to them through the bombing, shelling, and Arrow Cross roadblocks.

It is long, sir. But you will agree with me that these are surprising paragraphs. Not just with regards to yourself. Szamosi, for instance, attributes a Gentile origin to Farkas, contradicting you, and a real estate transaction that if true, and I must honestly say to you that I don't know whether it is or not, introduces the philanthropic traits of our hero. But the most interesting part alludes to you directly, that you were there, and that you risked your life: I will never tire of remembering that. To begin with there's an amusing mystery in the tale: the arrogant striding, the resolute voice and the overbearing manner that Bierman attributes to Szamosi in his dealings with the Arrow Cross, are the very same traits you usually attribute yourself! But, of course, you must both have been energetic brave, long-legged and strong men, because I can't find any other reasonable explanation for such a coincidence. There is no need for me to underline that which, setting aside the more or less humorous mysteries, really matters: Szamosi describes how you were appointed. That *Jorge Perlasca* was a creation cooked up between him and Farkas. A ventriloquism, sir! And a written symbol too: Reading Bierman I suspect it was not necessary for you to attend the meetings of the neutral missions, coordinated by Monsignor Rotta, and that your signature sufficed. And finally, remember your language issues: like Farkas, Szamosi could also speak to the Arrow Cross beast in its own tongue.

Fortunately, there is no need for me to ask myself, as per usual, what you would say to all of this. I know. On December 23rd, 1989, the Dutch newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad*, published in the city of Rotterdam, confronted you with the story of László Szamosi,

explained by his widow. The journalists, Theo Gerritse and Joop Meyers began their report thus:

It was still early when the telephone rang on the morning of November 20th. On the other end of the line, a woman's excited voice: «Sir, this is Mrs. Szamosi in Rotterdam on the line. You brought out a nice story on Saturday about the help of a second and forgotten Wallenberg, who saved thousands of lives in Budapest. You just committed one big error. This person was not the Italian, Giorgio Perlasca -as you write-, but my father-in-law, László Szamosi.

In fact, days earlier the newspaper had published the story of the last days of Budapest according to Giorgio Perlasca. After the widow's call, the journalists asked themselves rhetorically:

Has Perlasca vastly exaggerated his role? In the four-hour conversation we had with him in Padova five weeks ago, he never mentioned the name Szamosi.

And then they referred back to the memoirs written by Szamosi, and with which his widow intended to corroborate his story: «A 21-page story (in Hungarian, and translated into English just a few years ago), that includes his trials and tribulations, and those of his family, in the period from October 1944 to January 1945». The widow's tale is piercing, sir. Regarding what Farkas and Szamosi did with you, this is what she told the Dutch:

They used Perlasca for just two weeks. He would go along in the car seated beside my husband, who was driving. This gave it a more official look when they needed to organize something. But he was not allowed to open his mouth. [...] Perlasca was a perfect façade at the time and that is what he is again now.

In any case, sir, the interesting part is that the Dutch journalists returned to Padova, where weeks before they had interviewed you:

The old Italian (81) is clearly less pleased with this second visit. Does he remember Szamosi? Yes, the name is familiar. "He was my chauffeur, nothing more" [...] There is an easy explanation for the fact that he didn't mention the name Szamosi in our previous interview: "There are so many things that simply don't come up. Moreover, Szamosi's role was pointless. At a given point I offered him the possibility of being my driver and I did him a favour". You reject all accusations against you of having played an unimportant frontman role with a wave of the hand. "I was the chargé d'affaires and everything happened under my direct responsibility. I was the head of the entire organisation".

Naturally, the problem was not that you ignored Szamosi in that interview. You were already an old man and it's feasible that under such circumstances there are many things that simply don't come up. What's hard to swallow is that you never mentioned him once in the hundreds of pages you wrote or dictated. The serious problem, sir, is not what Szamosi says of you, but rather what you don't say about Szamosi.

I'll go out again. I'm in Budapest, I insist. It's sunny. Pleasantly warm. I'll go to the Danube Bank to see the shoe monument. Moving and specific. It also embodies the notion of exploitation that subversively lightens the nature of man when placed at the centre of the horror. They weren't going to execute the shoes. Mass murder alludes to a lack of control, a euphoric orgy, drunken neglect. Killing is a pleasure, still. But this bureaucratic practise on the bank of the river, on the snow. Take off your shoes. Hold your father's hand. That single bullet for both which, the story goes, was fruit of a shortage of munitions, as there were so many to be killed. I will finish with some photographs of iron shoes on the river bank. With a bitter taste in my mouth. I am uncomfortable taking photos. Yet imagining is even more offputting to me and increasingly immoral. I don't know what's to become of me in this life.

In the first pages of this book, sir, I already wrote of the posthumous dagger you stabbed in the heart of your old friend Sanz Briz's memory, that phrase from the book by Hallenstein and Zavattiero, that I'm going to reproduce here in Italian so that it is all out in the open:

È venuto il momento di dire la verità. Ho coperto Sanz Briz per quarantacinque anni. Per molto tempo si è preso tutto il credito del lavoro svolto a Budapest dalla legazione, che lui abbandonò alla fine di novembre del 1944. Era diventato un uomo senza volontà, senza iniziativa e senza voglia di agire. Era demoralizzato, ma soprattutto era scettico: riteneva che tutto ciò che si faceva fosse inutile. Lui aveva un solo scopo: lasciare l'Ungheria e portare in salvo la sua amante, una bellissima signora ebre, la baronessa Podmaniczky, proprietaria della casa di fronte alla legazione spagnola dove aveva sede la legazione dell'Uruguay, i cui interessi erano protetti dalla Spagna²².

I haven't paid a visit to either Hallenstein or Zavattiero to hear their account of this paragraph, to have them demonstrate, for instance, whether these quotation marks correspond to a voice recording, notes or a memory. The majority of journalists have a strange

22. *TN*: The time has come to tell the truth. I've covered for Sanz Briz for forty-five years. For a long time, he has taken all the credit for the work done by the Legation in Budapest, which he abandoned at the end of November in 1944. He had become a spineless man, lacking any initiative or will to act. He was disheartened, but above all, he was skeptical: he believed everything being done was futile. He had just one goal: to leave Hungary and save his lover, a very beautiful Hebrew lady, the baroness Podmaniczky, owner of the house opposite the Spanish Legation and headquarters of the Legation of Uruguay, the interests of which were under Spanish protection.

dog-*don't*-eat-dog ethic, they claim. Mine is slightly different: dog does not feed off dog. But the thing is that when I went to visit his son and daughter-in-law in the house in Padova, I asked them if you had ever said that Sanz Briz left Budapest with and for the baroness. «Often», they said, and there was no further need to ask anyone else.

Furthermore, sir, you were not lying. You don't tend to lie. What you do is treat the truth in such a way that in the end it is unrecognizable. I have had to investigate the baroness. Your dagger. I don't blame you. It has been arduous and excruciatingly slow, but as with the old developing drums a human face has emerged in the end. Stunningly beautiful...? You probably exaggerate, although it is always hard to judge beauty from a former era. *Bellissima*, in any case is somewhat less objective than a fact I can give you, there was an eleven-year age difference between them, the baroness being the older of the two. In any case, Mrs. Attilané Piroška, daughter of Maximilian Schiffer and Charlotte Grunwald, Jewish on her mother's side and born in the city of Budapest on July 7th, 1899, deceased in Lausanne on February 14th, 1990, former wife of the baron Podmaniczky, whose name she kept but not the marriage, was in the world and was in that Budapest and lived in the legendary pink palace, opposite the legation of Spain, where a number of the persecuted had also taken refuge. And it is also true: on the morning of December 7th, 1944, that she left the city in the private car driven by the Spanish diplomat, Ángel Sanz Briz. The fact, the important fact from the romantic picture postcard point of view, and the one you so skilfully elude, is that they did not travel alone. They were accompanied by Gabriella Podmaniczky, the baroness's 20-year-old daughter.

Apparently, the journey lasted two and a half days. At the end of autumn they crossed a Europe being hammered by bombs (Vienna, Salzburg, Munich, until they reached Switzerland via the St.Margarethen pass) probably with Sanz Briz as the sole driver. Driving a car



The Baroness Podmaniczky

was not an easy task back then and it was subject to constant breakdowns. On today's roads the journey takes nine hours plus breaks. They didn't take much more than thirty. It seems to me they made remarkable time. Rare and remarkable. But it is the time indicated in the documents.

On December 19th, ten days after their arrival, the baroness was subjected to a meticulous interrogation by the Swiss police. There, she declared her true identity. Not a minor matter given that Sanz Briz, apart from declaring that both women were in his domestic service, had transformed the baroness into Petra (Piroska!) García in the fake passport he had issued her, all handwritten in his own

unmistakeable hand. And he had done likewise with the daughter, rendering her Gabriela Pérez, confirming a limited interest in the onomastic conflicts of his characters. The baroness stated her religion was «Israeli», but that from that point on she was going to be Catholic. That she was healthy and carried 25,000 francs and some jewels with her. And that in Hungary she had left behind houses and an estate. In the most interesting part of her statement, the baroness described «The reasons and circumstances of her escape, as well as the route followed».

Threat of deportation or death by the occupying troops. Through the mediation of the Spanish consul-general in Budapest, Mr Sanz Briz, I was provided with a fake passport stating my nationality to be Spanish. The diplomat personally accompanied me in his car to Switzerland. It is not possible to continue the journey to Spain because I do not have Spanish nationality and the legation of this country in Berne is unaware of the existence of this passport. We were known to be hostile to the Germans. I don't know where in Hungary my husband is currently to be found, as I have not had any news of him or contact. My husband is Hungarian. Place, date and time the border was passed: St. Margarethen (in the automobile of Mr. Sanz Briz, consul-general of Spain in Budapest), on the evening of 9.12.1944.

The baroness and her daughter took up residence in Berne, in the Hotel City. As they were in possession of Spanish passports they informed the border authorities that their intention was to travel on to Spain. But on their arrival in Berne, they quickly backtracked on that idea. A report from the head of the Department of Foreign Affairs, a certain Dr. Schürch, makes it perfectly and irritably clear.

Mr Sr. Sanz Briz has clarified that the ladies not only do not wish to keep their false names, but wish to register under their own. At the same time, both Mr. Sanz Briz and Mr. Rothkugel have informed me that the ladies do not wish to continue their journey to Spain but to remain in Switzerland. I vehemently told both that this was not possible. As the term of the transit visa had been renewed under false names, the Spanish chargé

d'affaires should take responsibility for it. We would allow them to issue a transit visa to Spain via France. I particularly stressed that Mr. Sanz Briz should take the necessary measures immediately, and I handed the passports to him and Mr. Rothkugel after taking note of them. Mr. Sanz Briz insistently begged me not to inform the Spanish Embassy of this matter and said he would endeavour to obtain a transit visa to Spain. I explained that I didn't understand why he could not bring the Embassy up to date on the matter of the counterfeit passports, as it was thanks to these that he had been able to save the lives of the two women. If he had been able to obtain a visa for Switzerland, then he could surely also obtain one for Spain.

Mr. von Jennen, whom I informed of the conversation, will protest before the Spanish Embassy in Berne about Mr. Sanz Briz's way of proceeding and will insist that the two ladies continue their journey. I ordered Mr. Sanz Briz to get in touch with Mr. Von Jennen.

The intention of the two women was perfectly reasonable. They had friends in Switzerland and spoke the language. The baroness had given the police a long list of her acquaintance in Switzerland. It was headed up by a baron Baczacs Bessenyei, resident at the time in Montreux, who had formerly been the prime minister of Hungary. Just days after their arrival, the baron wrote a detailed letter to the authorities, vouching for the nobility and reliability of the baroness. His conclusions, sir, can only be expressed in French:

Je m'intéresse beaucoup au sort de ces deux hongroises, qui sont d'anciennes amies personnelles et appartiennent au meilleur monde de Budapest²³.

The mother and daughter spent Christmas in the city of Lausanne. At least, there is a record of their stay there on December 20th. Their saviour, Sanz Briz, had probably also left Berne once he had completed the formalities of writing his reports to the Government of Spain on the latest unfortunate turn of events in Budapest, and logically desirous of returning home for the holiday season. From

23. I am greatly interested in learning the destination of these two Hungarian ladies, who are old friends and from the best families in Budapest.

that moment on, a tough bureaucratic tug-of-war would begin between the authorities and the women. The authorities set on ejecting them from the country, the ladies set on staying. This tug-of-war would go on for two years and in its resolution, ultimately in favor of the two women, would lie the marriage of the daughter Gabriela to a count of Italian origin and their resulting residence in Lausanne. Money was one of the most common arguments among the authorities to deny residence permits. The 25 thousand francs the baroness declared on her arrival in the country were soon insufficient. Women of the world that they were, they stayed in the Lausanne Palace (hereinafter Hotel Byron), and the bills were not generally less than 400 francs a week. They were fortunate, however, to receive decisive economic support. I know, sir, that at this point you will puff up your chest. I'm going to read you a part of the report the agent Paturel, from the local police force of Lausanne, sent to his superiors on May 24th, 1946:

On the order of the distinguished police commander and on petition of the regional inhabitant registration office and the police department for foreigners, the following information is forwarded on the so-called Attilane Podmaniczky, Hungarian refugee, 47 years old, no profession, domiciled in the Hotel Byron in Lausanne. The interested party is well known in our city and enjoys a good reputation. In light of the receipts presented, Mme. Podmaniczky regularly receives 825 francs per month from Mr. Sanz Briz, Angel, a Spanish subject, currently in San Francisco. The latter has been a friend of the P. family for many years and in his day was the chargé d'affaires in Budapest. Mme. Podmaniczky withdraws this sum through the Credit Suisse of Lausanne.

The document continues, but without any more information of interest. You always said, sir, that the baroness and the diplomat were lovers. It would be none of my business, as you can understand, if it weren't for the fact that you associated this love affair with the departure of Sanz Briz from Budapest. Let us repeat it: «Lui aveva un solo scopo: lasciare l'Ungheria e portare in salvo la sua amante,

una bellissima signora ebre, la baronesa Podmaniczky»²⁴. It's true: they did leave Budapest together. The baroness, Sanz Briz and the daughter Gabriela. It's true: the diplomat procured their departure by providing them with counterfeit passports (which, by the way, he forged in his own hand), and passing them off as his servants. Probably as his maid and his housekeeper, I am using moderate imagination here. And even less imagination, when in my mind's eye I see the car stopped at dawn in the suburbs, at the last Arrow Cross control in the city, and the sinister blockhead examining the documentation and the faces of all three, proceed!, which in Hungarian must have been *gyere!* It's true: once safe in Switzerland, Sanz Briz helped the baroness financially and not in a small way. Whatever the nature of the relationship between the two, it was certainly close. But you cannot sustain that it was this relationship that obliged him to leave Budapest. On the contrary, I can sustain that Sanz Briz delayed his departure time and again to synchronise it with his government's instructions. Proof of this lies in the telegrammes exchanged with his minister, but it is also insinuated in the actual passports themselves which include various permits to leave Budapest, the first dated November, and then successively renewed. As for the rest, sir, there is proof that takes precedence over love and it is life. There is no doubt that Sanz Briz, exposing himself first to the Arrow Cross beast and then to his own Spanish superiors, saved the lives of two Jewish women at manifest risk with his own hands. There were probably powerful reasons for him to do so. Unlike you, unfortunately, I don't know exactly what they were. What is beyond a doubt is that in that besieged Budapest, and between the spring of 1942 when Sanz Briz arrived in the city as second secretary at the orders of minister Maguiro, to the morning of December 7th, 1944, when he left forever, some bond of love, friendship or gratitude, or

24. TN: He had just one goal: to leave Hungary and save his lover, a very beautiful Hebrew lady, the baroness Podmaniczky.

all three at the same time, must have been forged between the diplomat and the baroness.

After Christmas, Ángel Sanz Briz returned to Berne. On January 27th, he was appointed secretary to the Legation of Spain. By then, the baroness and her daughter were settled in Lausanne. The diplomat would remain there for just two months, as on March 8th he was transferred to the consulate in San Francisco, from where he processed his financial aid of the baroness. It is unlikely, given the different directions taken by each of them, that they met again in person (and you must know, sir, what meaning to attach to that manner of coincidence) except in the year of 1950 to 1951 which Sanz Briz again spent in the Berne legation. Yet, I can assure you, sir, that they did maintain some sort of relationship, however tenuous. I know this for a fact. And the most remarkable part: I know it thanks to a brief love story which, knowing you, I'm sure you'll be interested in.

The granddaughter of the baroness Podmaniczky lives in Lausanne. Today she is called Beatrice von Roten, but she was born Giansanti Coluzzi. When she spoke to me by phone, after one of those frenetic searches praying to God that I'd find her because otherwise what would become of me, she told me that she had no recollection of either her mother or grandmother describing their escape from Budapest, although she had heard some vague allusions to a Spanish diplomat. She also told me that the baroness had left some papers and she kindly promised to search among these for any information of interest. A few days went by.

«Bonjour Monsieur Espada,
je vous prie d'accepter toutes mes excuses pour cette réponse tardive. J'ai demandé de l'aide à mon mari et nous avons cherchés ensemble dans les "archives" des traces de ce voyage d'Hongrie en Suisse, mais n'avons malheureusement pas trouvé de documents. Les seuls éléments qui pourraient vous intéresser sont:

1 photo de Gabrielle (ma mère) en compagnie d'un jeune homme datée de 1943

un échange intense de lettres avec ma grand-mère Piroška «avec Monsieur El Conde de Aguilar datant de 1952».²⁵

Gabriela Podmaniczky appeared in an unidentified Hungarian landscape in the company of a man. Although he was not young:

25. TN: Dear Mr. Espada, Please accept my apologies for this late reply. I have enlisted my husband's help and we have both searched for some trace of that journey from Hungary to Switzerland in the "archive", yet unfortunately we have not found any documents. The only elements that might be of interest to you are: 1 photo of Gabrielle (my mother) in the company of a young man, dated 1943; An intense exchange of letters between my grandmother Piroška "and the Count of Aguilar, dated 1952".

the man was her father, the baron Podmaniczky. Days later more photos followed. Among them, some of the baroness. There is nothing like first seeing the face of a person whose name you have written dozens of times: which refutes, obviously, the theory that an image is worth a thousand words. The baroness was what a long time ago was known as a *real lady*, and she seemed to know it. I again asked Beatrice if there were no letters exchanged between her and a man named Ángel Sanz Briz. No, just an intense exchange with this Count of Aguilar, dating from the early fifties.

I looked up who had held the title back then and, typically, his death notice appeared. Alberto Aguilar y Gómez-Acebo, count of Aguilar, had died in Madrid on July 14th, 1953. The obituaries of the *Abc* newspaper reported that he had been born in 1885 and that at the age of 20 he had entered the diplomatic corps. His destinations and ranks indicated that his career had been ornamental rather than active, unlike his intense monarchical affiliation which had procured him, among other solemn honours, the position of Head of the Queen Victoria Regina's Cabinet. The newspaper added that the death of the count had been much lamented in Madrid's social circles, and that his entire family, particularly his widow, Emilia Aramayo, had received numerous condolences.

Thus, the *échange intense* had taken place shortly before his death. It was time to ask Beatrice what exactly she meant by intense.

— There are around a hundred letters in just a few months. And they are unmistakably love letters.

The adjective had been aptly chosen then. The information surprised me. Bearing in mind Perlasca's theory, we could deduce that the baroness had specialized in the diplomatic corps and, in particular, the Spanish one. The Von Roten family (the husband, Lambert, had enthusiastically joined the investigation) agreed to send me the hundred or so letters, in case I might discover any information they had overlooked. They arrived after a few days.

While I was ordering them into piles on the table I was dubiously asking myself to what extent time resolves the issues of privacy. But instead of overthinking it, I threw myself into avidly reading them. The correspondence dated from February 2nd, 1952 to March 9th, 1953. Just over a year of letters and telegrammes from the count, written in French with the occasional paragraph in English, and a letter from the baroness, probably never sent, written in English. This was the loving correspondence between a 53-year-old woman and a 67-year-old man, marked by the adulterous count's need for discretion. Almost all the letters are, to put it plainly, banal, they allude to the logistics of their rendezvous, almost always in the beautiful Meurice, in Paris, in adjoining bedrooms. The count frequently asked her to destroy his letters as he does with hers. From the beginning, disease appears, diabetes, which will likely be the cause of his death. From the first weeks of 1953 the letters take on an increasingly pessimistic tone. The count gradually says his goodbyes. Their dates are never quite finalised and on March 9th he asks her to suspend the correspondence, because the doctor has recommended repose; he is leaving for the countryside and once there can no longer collect his lover's letters with the necessary discretion. The count would die four months later.

In some of the letters, there were allusions to Ángel Sanz Briz, in relation to the bureaucratic difficulties of the residency, proving that the diplomat, the count and the baroness knew each other. The only letter I've been able to read by the lady in question begins *My Angel*. An affectionate noun. That inevitably makes one think of the embarrassment of using it (on many other occasions one must imagine) if she really had loved another Ángel, it being his proper name.

Now then, sir, I must ask you why you remained in Budapest. I already know that you stayed to save the Jews and that you rejected the possibility of leaving the city with the diplomatic passport offered to you by the Swiss diplomat, Feller, the day after Sanz Briz's departure. But as you know, I have never been fully persuaded by your arguments on this point. Regardless of the fact that they really were willing to give you a passport, it was no longer easy to leave Budapest, a city surrounded, in December. In any case, before and after that winter, and your humanitarian work in defence of the Jews, you had an attractive reason for not leaving the city. You know exactly what I'm talking about! So many names in your chronicles, so many details, yet so laconic when it comes to one fundamental person in that Budapest of yours. Irene, meaning Peace. Irene. Irene Denes, who many years later became Boroviczeny. What I know of her significance in that winter, I know from you yourself. From this paragraph in a letter to Sanz Briz, written from Milan, after the war had ended:

«When the Russians arrived I had no money, no home and no food. The rest of the time I spent in Hungary, I was helped by my friend Weyerman, an International Red Cross delegate, some Italian and Swiss friends and Miss Irene, who as you know, has always been my guardian angel».

Allow me to make a bit of a leap in time. I know of the sentimental significance of Irene from this line in a letter you would write almost half a century later, in April of 1989, describing your return to the city, shining with tributes:

«On all the streets and squares of Budapest you were always there, in my mind's eye».



Irene Boroviczeny and Giorgio Perlasca, in the '40s, in Budapest

In that winter Irene Denes was 21 years old and she was a beautiful and refined girl. Her family, originally from the Hungarian Backsa, took refuge in Budapest and lived in a block of apartments that was almost empty due to the Jewish deportations. Liszt square was very close to the Spanish embassy and you were, as we all know, a tall, handsome, blue-eyed Italian in his thirties. Sir, I have here a long letter from Sergio Campos about Irene, who is still alive in the city of Freiburg.

«Dear Arcadi:

I carefully trimmed my beard. I decided to leave my earrings in, even though you never know how the elderly are going to react. They

might give you a kick in the ass for any little detail that disrupts their lives made rigid by habit. If they hate youthful ironmongery, you're doomed. But if their incredibly acute near vision (!) detects the ear-ring-less holes, they might take you for fake, surly and mean. So I left them in. I chose my socks with great care, the most important part of the outfit. In Germany, it's customary to remove your shoes when you enter a house.

I had just over an hour to find a florist. After some exploration, I came across one very close to the house. I chose a bouquet I thought looked elegant. Once on the street, I realised the card had the florist's name printed on it. If Irene hated this florist, because she thought it didn't have quite the right petunias for the soil in her garden, I was in trouble.

The neighbourhodd was very quiet, pleasant and leafy. To crown it all, a stream passed through it. I didn't tell you, but she lives in a little house in Freiburg, on Britzinger Str. The window facing the street was open. A woman looked out, smiled at me and went to open the door. And then she immediately shut herself in the kitchen. Irene was waiting for me in the living-room and the first thing she said to me was that I shouldn't have brought her anything. She arranged the flowers in a vase and started telling me about her ailments. She had the book by Hallenstein and Zavattiero on the table, which upset me deeply. She started telling her lifestory. Every now and then she'd remind me that what she was telling me had nothing to do with Giorgio; and that her life was of no interest to me. I tried to convince her with the utmost cordiality.

I think I managed it. She only managed to get us away from that Budapest from time to time.

—Why didn't Perlasca leave?

—It is of no interest.

—I'm sorry, but.

—He didn't want to.

—Why not?

—Full stop.

Then she'd return to the story of her life with great enthusiasm. Sometimes she interrupted herself.

—Before arriving in Budapest, Perlasca had a Transylvanian lover. And perhaps another, too.

At those times, I'd again ask her why Perlasca didn't leave Budapest.

—...

—...

—The first thing Perlasca did every day on awakening was to make sure I was still alive.

Irene has one word to define Perlasca's behaviour. «Überlegung»²⁶. Its meaning perches on the fine line between good sense and arrogance. They were dangerous times, she mutters.

Now, I have to tell you how she met Perlasca. Sorry not to transcribe her directly, but I've been cutting and pasting bits and pieces from here and there.

One day, in October of 1943, she went to the government office to run some errand. She met the director of the Italian Cultural Institute in one of the corridors, a poet from the south of Hungary. She claimed he was a *Frauenjäger*, a womaniser, a Don Juan. She was 20 years old and he invited her for an espresso. Giorgio Perlasca was in the café. The poet introduced them and then left.

The next day, the poet invited her to the cinema. When they left, she got rid of him and got on the second-class compartment of the tram. She sat. The doors closed. They opened again. Giorgio Perlasca got on, he had a first-class ticket but when he saw her decided to sit with her. They spoke in something similar to French. Before getting off the tram, Giorgio gave her his address and phone number.

Another day, she went alone to watch an Italian film. In those years they only screened Italian and German films at the cinema. When she left, Giorgio was waiting for her. It was seven in the evening and he invited her to dinner. She didn't think it was appropriate, but she was hungry.

You will think that so many meetings could not have been mere coincidence: but that's the way she tells it. After the dinner, in any case, the meetings were arranged. The next was also at the cinema. It was Sunday and pouring rain. When they left, she took him to her student lodgings. She had prepared a bite to eat in the living-room. An old bread roll, dry meat and a knob of butter. Giorgio was completely taken aback by the dinner his friend offered him and from then on invited her to dinner every Sunday. She was young and living in a splendid city, the most joyful, free and tolerant in all of warring Europe, or that's what she thought. There were no German soldiers and no generalized hatred of the Jews. Budapest was her homeland. Her fellow-students wanted to return to the provinces; but she, soon to start work as a nurse with the Red Cross, wanted to stay in the capital forever. And she had no intention of marrying yet, against

26. TN: A German noun meaning reflecting, reasoning, consideration.

her mother's wishes, who was constantly telling her that after the war all the men would be dead.

Giorgio loved Spain. He never spoke of Italy. Only of Spain. He had wanted to marry there, but he was just a foreign soldier who would have to return to his homeland at some point. Sometimes he would point to a woman on the street and say that she reminded him of his Spanish woman. He was already married back then. Even though he didn't wear a ring and his wife had never visited him in Budapest.

At this point, Irene quickly changed the subject. I can't remember what moment of her lifetime she returned to. While she was talking [about matters unrelated to Budapest], I remembered a story of trains that Irene had told a German journalist. A married woman, who was very beautiful, started to be courted by a diplomat in the savage, war-time Budapest. Flowers, gifts and messages arrived. One day she and her husband were detained by the Nazis. While waiting to be deported, they managed to get in touch with the diplomat. They were already in the station, inside the train, when the diplomat appeared. He found the husband, but the woman refused to get off the convoy: she thought he only had a letter of safe-conduct for her and that it was an act of love rather than humanity. Hence, they were both deported. To Auschwitz. Only she survived. When the war ended, the diplomat managed to find her. He proved to her, with witnesses, that the day at the station he had had two safe-conducts in his pocket. And they were happy [the diplomat and the woman].

Irene talked on. The room was very elegant, a classical arrangement with great windows open onto the garden. It was filled with light, and calm. Suddenly, Irene returned to Budapest and a memory that had erupted like an abscess. On January 12th she had turned 22. Seven friends met in her home. Perlasca gave her a shawl made of an Italian fabric and a bottle of vintage Spanish wine. They ate a few handfuls of macaroni and that bottle was enough to get them drunk. They all ended up under the table. Somebody kissed her, but she never knew who. Only that [this] had embarrassed her terribly. Outside, she was saying, the corpses were lying in the snow. Someone had also brought frozen horse meat. They came up with the absurd, drunken idea of heating it up with Irene's shawl, that ended up stained with blood.

A silence fell over us. It was partly my fault as I was mulling over all the elements this shred of memory contained, the horse blood, the wine and the kisses. Then Irene turned back to her other lives, I no longer remem-

ber which word of her monologue I latched onto to interrupt her, almost brusquely, driven by my own, secret monologue.

—First the ambassador left, then Sanz Briz, why didn't Perlasca leave?

She answered me softly, without any surprise, resigned almost.

—He didn't wish to leave...

—He was on the list of the protected, he was number 38.

—The truth is that he didn't leave. I don't know why.

—Do you have any... personal... theories?

—I don't know. It's irrelevant. I know it is incomprehensible. But I can't help you.

—I see.

—It wasn't appropriate for his family. Full stop.

And she returned to her affairs. Eight hours later, I left the house.

My dear Arcadi, perhaps you might have some theory on why the elderly, given the time left to them, do not cultivate the art of sticking to the essentials.

Hugs,

Sergio».

You will agree with me, sir, that even after so many years, Irene Denes, now Boroviczeny, remains remarkably discreet. You are also discreet. Sometimes cunningly so, however. You already know that of the texts you left behind, the only one I use is the report *A sua Eccellenza*, as it is the only one to offer me the necessary guarantees. However, from time to time, I do glance curiously through the others. You speak of Irene in *L'Impostore*. It's the only time you do. You position the scene in December of 1944, after the departure of Sanz Briz. And you say that you went towards number 10 Liszt square, where Irene was living, reunited with her parents in the city. The building she inhabited was the property of the deported Jews. And you wrote:

«A sign hung over the main door of the building and over the apartment door stating that Miss Irene Denes, fiancée of the Spanish chargée d'affaires lived in that house: which is why it was discreetly watched over by the police».

Sir, you are formidable, and again forgive my familiarity. I'd like to tell you that you are a veritable novelist. Your paragraph seems to me an elegant, and certainly from a family point of view (you were and remained a married man!), very prudent way of announcing that Irene Denes was your girlfriend. Because to deduce that she was Sanz Briz's would be a tad over the top! The scene takes place when you already "*are*", you will understand my use of italics here, the *chargée d'affaires*. The *impostore*. It makes sense. Although, I believe that here you are betrayed by the *pacte narrative*. Budapest, bombarded. Besieged. Daily deaths. Murders. Hunger, blood, snow. A non-existent government. The drastic devaluation of human life. And you go and hang a sign over the door of a refugee house and hope it will be effective. But not only that. You go too far, Perlasca. It was also being watched over (and best of all, what makes you a true genius: even «discreetly [watched over]»!!) by the police. Anyway. Sergio plucked up all his courage and one afternoon called Irene to ask her about the sign.

—I don't know what you're talking about. I've never seen any such sign.

On January 16th, at eight in the morning the Soviet troops entered Eötvös street, where the embassy was located, without meeting any resistance. Faithful to the status you confer [on yourself], you say that you lowered the Spanish flag and flew the Swedish instead. And that somewhere on the façade you put up a plaque in Russian and Hungarian that read: «Royal Legation of Sweden —Section for the protection of Spanish interests». The only explanation I can come up with for the word “plaque” lies in your character and that pompous way of referring to things, even a scribbled and probably handwritten sign. By all accounts, you handed over control (!) to an Italian refugee, Ermanno Naric, who was in possession of an official Hungarian document, written in Russian, that described him as a civil servant of the Swedish Legation for the protection of foreign interests. But as usual, your chronicle manages to get away with your exaggerations.

«At 12 noon all refugees from Casa Podmaniczky moved to the Legation building as the Russian soldiers had started raping the women».

The first actions of the Russian soldiers. Reading you, sir, I was reminded of a conversation I had with Jaime Vándor, a refugee with his mother and siblings in the Szent Istvan Park house. I had asked him about his memories of the Russian arrival:

—I saw the first Russian on January 14th. We were living in a block of houses with a big inner patio and I, looking out onto this patio, saw some Russians in the house on the other side of it with a machine gun, who were looking over a balcony or laundry area to see if there was any danger. That was January 14th: by the 15th they had already occupied our house. And

by the 18th of January they had occupied the entire ghetto, where the living conditions they came upon were indescribable. We would have to say that the Soviet army saved our lives, but those first few days were horrific, because they despoiled everything. Plus, the officials gave the troop a few days to blow off steam. Apparently, the armies that lay siege to a city build up enormous tension. And my mother only barely escaped being raped, I remember it well.

—What do you remember?

—The Russians came and said they needed some women to go down to the cellar to peel potatoes after dinner. Everyone knew what that meant. My mother was 45 years old then, which in those times was quite old. But she looked well for her age, she was quite eye-catching. So the women of the house dressed her up as an old woman, they darkened her skin with coal and put her into bed as if she were on her last legs, and they put us two boys in with her, under the covers. I remember perfectly how we were shaking and I was on her left and my brother on her right side. And when the Russians came in and saw the state of her they went away.

—Uf.

—But obviously, someone had to go down to the basement and I'll always remember that with shame, because there was a young woman there, who was a little plump, from a slightly lower class and she had nobody in the apartment to protect her. So they decided she would have to go down to the basement.

—Who decided?

—I don't know.

—But it wasn't the Russians.

—The Russians left saying that somebody had to go down. And in the end, she went. Solidarity had its limits. I still remember her name. Mancy.

—Mancy?

—Short for Margarita.

Mancy, a little plump, says Vándor in his polite and elegant reserve. There is something incredibly powerful in women. Even more powerful than sex and beauty. They clean the sick. They care for the old. They give birth to the children. They pacify the soldiers. They bleed regularly. Their dual contact with death and excrement is disturbing. Mancy is descending towards the army rabble, like the person hired to clean the toilets. Women have had to take charge of

the toilets of History. They know things that neither you nor I know, sir. At least the women we have both known. That may change in the future or perhaps it is already changing. Our nature is uncertain and it is not clear how roles are to be distributed across custom and culture.

I am going out.

Iván Harsányi is already waiting at the door of the Holocaust Museum. Yesterday I went to see him at home and he kindly offered to accompany me on my visit. Harsányi is a retired Hispanic, professor of History and specialised in relations between Spain and Hungary, on which he has written books and articles. That winter, he and his family enjoyed the protection of the legation. We had a general conversation in his faltering Spanish. I, on the other hand, speak Spanish very well. I really liked what he said about the Story.

—There are things we'll never know. But not many. We'll talk about Perlasca later.

—Everything we know about Perlasca, we know from Perlasca.

—Yes... Tricky question.

And then there was a moment of uncertainty.

—Why did you change surnames? You were previously called Hirsch.

—After the war there was a whole wave of surname changes. It became customary. I can't tell you much more.

—Hirsch is a very Jewish surname.

—Yes, yes.

—Was that the reason?

—Maybe, maybe.

—[...]

—In reality, with the arrival of the Communists, there was no persecution of the Jews. That's why there's no explanation for that surge in surname changes.

True. Sometimes things cannot be explained. At the very most, certain events can be lined up beside others. Even dislocating the

chronology. Now as I write, in this present that is not convention, an extreme, right-wing, Hungarian minister, Márton Gyöngyösi, has just declared a debate on the war between Jews and Palestines: «We need to draw up lists of Jews living here, particularly the Jews in government and in parliament, who in fact constitute a risk for Hungarian safety». Lists. The post-modern obsession! Hungary has been a strange country for anti-Semitism. On the one hand, it was the first nation to dictate anti-Jewish laws. But at the same time, until the Arrow Cross coup d'état, it was the country of the German allies where racist persecution was felt least. Harsányi has no explanation for it, and neither do I. Anti-Semitism must be like a bitter wardrobe basic for certain nations. It occasionally makes a comeback.

Professor Harsányi was an adamant Communist. He played an important role in the University and was rewarded by the regime. The apartment we were chatting in is the same one he's been living in for forty years and where he raised his children. A couple of suburban rooms, a bathroom and kitchen, maximum fifty metres. The privileges of the Communist nomenclature are joyfully proclaimed. This man was a nomenclature in himself. To observe the remains of these privileges serves above all to speculate about those who didn't have them. Yet even so, I have my doubts: I tend to believe that Communism actually distributed its fabulous misery quite equitably.

The visit to the Holocaust museum ends in the old adjacent synagogue. Diaphanous. The museum *cicerone* looks about himself in admiration and sadness.

—Beautiful, but empty.

There is no longer any worship. The community that raised and sustained it has disappeared. The vacuum is the most effective representation of Nazism. The lonely chairs of Zgody square, in Krakow. This temple with no worship. The museum director points the way towards the circular heroes' memorial, showing the portraits

of the diplomats who saved the lives of so many Hungarian Jews. There they are, indeed, Wallenberg, Perlasca... Hmm... I don't see Sanz Briz. I tell our friendly professor Harsányi to ask the director the reason for this absence. Until then, the director had behaved pleasantly. But now he started muttering something hostilely in Hungarian. Our professor looked serious and didn't know how to translate. The director took advantage to thank me curtly and exit stage.

There is no particular mystery. Sanz Briz was a Francoist civil servant. A diplomatic hero, go back and hide in the woodwork. The script of the Hungarian tributes was written by the more or less Communist left wing. Moreover, there are serious iconic issues. Sanz Briz never wore a Bogart-style trench coat like Wallenberg, that heroic dishevelment. His most outstanding iconography ranges between uniform and the Prince of Wales. And the moustache. He was a handsome man, but only for his era: his handsomeness does not withstand the test of time. One of the typical photos of Perlasca, very cleverly used by his family, shows him from behind, walking with a suitcase in his hand along the tracks crossing paths with a child; impossible to tell whether immediately after getting off the train visible in the distance or about to get on it. But the seduction of the image, his seductiveness, *cavalier seul*, is irresistible.

I bid farewell to Harsányi and walked away, under the sun, as far as the Embassy of Spain. As I walked my legs were trembling in anticipation of arriving on the scene of events. I liked the trembling, because neither age nor habit have eroded it. I was received by the cordial and well-informed chargé d'affaires, Mr. Pablo Zaldívar. Before walking through that place, I told him about the absence from the memorial of heroes. The ire of my Spanish self.

—If not in the name of our Homeland, then in the name of Science. Either way, I beg you to protest.

I have reached Eötvös, sir. I never imagined the walls of the Podmaniczky house, opposite, to be such a delicate rose pink. The street is short and, as in the past, is still lined with embassies. The civil servants tell me the fundamental structures of the building can't have changed too much since 9 pm on January 16th, (and from this moment on I'm going to write in your writing, without italics or commas or fetters, because it is mine now, whether you like it or not, so protest away, but I'm not letting go) when some armed Russian soldiers broke into the legation building and obliged the refugees to hand over watches and jewels. The intervention of a Soviet captain led them to return the stolen objects before moving them away. At 11, some artillery officials requested permission to install a telephone line in the concierge's office; Mr. Naric observed that since it was the embassy of a neutral legation it would be preferable to set up the line elsewhere. The captain replied that war allowed for no distinctions. Shortly afterwards, as the Soviets were positioning the cannons in the environs of the legation, two German grenades exploded killing two of them. The Russians immediately suspected that we were Nazis and that, by radio or telephone, we had given information to the enemy. On Mr. Naric's invitation, they inspected the entire building but found nothing suspicious. Then, after the captain's request, Mr. Naric guaranteed that there were no weapons of any sort in the building. Unfortunately, on a subsequent inspection a box of automatic pistols was discovered in the coal yard. The Lawyer Farkas said it was a collection of pistols that he himself had deposited in the coal yard with the agreement of Madame Tourné and the police officers and that the matter was of little consequence.

You will have seen, sir, that I have skipped a few sentences from your report, in which you reproach Farkas and Tourné for not having informed me, as you put it, of the existence of the weapons. Naturally.

Think about why they didn't inform you! And above all think about why they had no reason to inform you! Impostore, impostore. Sometimes I find you remarkably naive. As for the pistols, the modern and unsettling adjective *automatic* that you use in your account, doesn't match the version you give of them in your *Promemoria*, when you say that it was a box of collector's pistols, property of the minister Muguiro. But it is of little consequence. What matters is that the discovery of the weapons persuaded the Russians that we were a bunch of Nazis and snipers in contact with the enemy. The soldiers, who were all drunk, shot at me and at other refugees and separated the men and the women, claiming they were shortly going to hang them. We spent two hours in this tragic situation. The lawyer Farkas, who showed signs of being quite shocked by how events were evolving, bearing in mind his nervous disposition and the psychological exhaustion of that week, disappeared along with the two Hungarian policemen. Many of those left behind, lost their heads and caused scenes of human misery and terror.

The lawyer Farkas. I have been keeping a piece of the letter that Sergio Campos wrote to me, shortly after seeing his son in Vienna. Rhetorical needs, as you will understand. Indeed, you are perfectly equipped to understand me.

«While Janos Farkas searches tirelessly among his papers, I ask him about the death of his father. He starts to reply with another question: «Have you been on the site of the Spanish Embassy?». And he continues: «My father was in the Embassy. He had his wife and son sheltered in the basements. He was afraid that one of the Russian soldiers would shoot him, so he fled with a friend, whose name I don't recall, and was blown up by a bomb, or a grenade. He died on the street.». He insists that he died outside, on the street, and that he did not die of a bullet wound. He doesn't know if he fell

or not from the rooftop, although it is a reasonable hypothesis, as long as the grenade or bomb explosion took place there. After telling me the story, he handed me the death certificate».

So Farkas died. Like you say, after courageously and intelligently collaborating for months to save thousands of people, when the end of the sad odyssey was in sight, Zoltán Farkas, was betrayed by his nerves.

«The most likely version of his sad end is the one provided to me by the two police officers of my team [your team!], who were the last to see him alive. According to them, when the Russians discovered the box of pistols they reacted violently and the agents and the lawyer Farkas, who were in the concierge's office at the time, were handled roughly by the soldiers. Shortly afterwards, when the Russians were directing their anger at other people, the three took advantage to reach the atrium, and from there, the central staircase that led to the second floor, where the kitchens and the household staff rooms were located. They heard steps on the stairs and believing them to belong to the Russians, all three climbed onto the roof through a skylight. The police intended to reach a house belonging to the Hungarian police passport office across the roofs and they invited Farkas to follow them. Farkas refused and walked alone in the opposite direction. The police claim they didn't see him again after that. I believe that the lawyer Farkas, who was no longer a young man and wasn't very agile, in his attempt to step onto the roof of the adjacent house, must have slipped, falling to the patio below. Around 1 in the morning of the 17th I had heard a loud shout followed by a thump; at the time I thought the Russians must have surprised one of the refugees on the upper floor and that something serious must have happened. It was probably the lawyer Farkas' last cry».

I'm not entirely convinced about the truth of your version of the death of the heroic lawyer Farkas, to whom the history of human solidarity and the specific tragedy of the Budapest Jews owe homage. I don't think that one in the morning in a city at war, mid-20th century, is the best moment for a man who was no longer young (he was 44 years old and was not exactly slim) to walk along the rooftops. While it is true that there were battery-run torches by that time and

he may have used one, it's also likely that the decision was in fact tinted with that element of desperation that you give us a glimpse of, motivated by a terror of the Bolshevik that had been courted over the infernal years of the Béla Kun dictatorship and that had left a profound impression on the lawyer. Farkas was fleeing, we don't know exactly where to, or exactly why; and what's more, he was fleeing while his wife and three-year-old son Janos were left in the cellar. Given their Jewish lineage they would probably have been safer in the legation, which is why at a given moment he had asked Sanz Briz for his permission to transfer himself and his family there. However, in the face of the Bolsheviks, the Spanish legation, even masked under the Swedish flag, no longer offered the same safety as before.

The death certificate that his son Janos still has in his possession introduces relevant details about his death.

«We hereby certify that the lawyer Dr. Zoltán Farkas was found on the 18th of January of 1945 in the inner courtyard of number 11b Eötvös Street.

We have personally identified the deceased; in addition, he has also been identified by his wife and by documents found in his pockets. The personal details of Dr. Zoltán Farkas are as follows:

Place and date of birth: Cinkota, March 27th, 1900. Religion: Roman Catholic.

Wife's name: Baroness María Pittner. Father's name: Dr. Martin Farkas. Mother's name: Rosa Hirschler. Causes of death: Loss of blood.

The deceased's face, as well as the right side of his body was covered in contusions, an apple-sized hole on the right side of the forehead; 10 centimetres missing from the right side of the jawbone and there is a large bruise on this part of the face. Rigor mortis had set in when the body was found, particularly the upper limbs. No external wounds were found on the rest of the body or clothing. All these elements lead to the conclusion that death occurred on approximately January 17th early in the morning.

He was buried according to the rites of the Catholic church in Budapest on January 20th, 1945, in the courtyard of the house on number 11b Eötvös Street, given the impossibility of doing so in the cemetery due to the events of the war.

Certified in Budapest on January the twenty-first of nineteen hundred and forty-five».

So Farkas didn't die from the fall but from the wounds caused by the grenade that tore a hole the size of an apple in his head. In your tale, sir, there is no mention of German grenade explosions in the legation apart from those that had killed the two Soviets hours before the death of Farkas. The wounds bring to mind, although I had never fully forgotten it, the explanation Eugenio Suárez gave me about the death of a good friend of his.

—I was no longer in Budapest when Farkas died. But some Italian friends assured me that he was gunned down next to the legation door.

There are certain things that we will never know. Not many. The certificate gives us the news that the Jewish Farkas died a Christian. His apostasy may have had something to do with his marriage to the baroness, Maria Pittner. It tells us that death, queen of that Budapest, had overwhelmed the cemetery and that he had to be buried, provisionally, in the courtyard of the Spanish legation. Here, in this very same patio that I'm standing in now, with Zaldívar, the chargé d'affaires. After the Soviet conquest, the building was used as a hospital, and then again for the Spanish representation when diplomatic relations were re-established in 1976. The courtyard has probably undergone transformations over the years, but I have everything that's missing.

Zoltán Farkas y Astorga was one of the outstanding heroes of the Spanish Embassy and his life ended here. I have, sir, a letter from Sanz Briz to the then consul of the Budapest legation in Portugal, Jules Gulden, when the winter had ended. It describes some economic details of that lawyer's heroism.

«I have heard of my dear friend Zoltán Farkas's death. Regarding his affairs, I once intervened on his behalf. On one of my journeys to Switzerland, he entrusted me with a package of gold coins, the amount of which was unknown to me. Following his instructions, I rented a private strongbox in

his name in the Swiss Banco Popular, on Bahnhofstrasse, in Zurich, where I deposited said package. In addition, I recall that on a number of occasions Mr. Farkas brought packages to the Spanish legation that he deposited in the strongbox there, which contained objects of value belonging to some of his friends. [...] If there is one thing I am certain of, it is the honesty of my friend Farkas, who during the terrible events of Budapest before the end of the war, always endeavoured to help his friends and acquaintances, taking advantage of his position in the Spanish legation».

And I greatly appreciate, sir, what you said of him in *L'impostore*, a piece of his life returned.

«I remember seeing him on New Year's Eve of '43, in the Hotel Hungária: he was with his wife, a Christian from a Viennese aristocratic family. Despite his fifty years [he was still far from being fifty: Farkas was born at the turn of the century and so had not yet turned 44] he danced that waltz like a young man: when I congratulated him on his tireless joy, he replied that perhaps this New Year's might be his last.».

From the patio, Zaldívar took me to the cellars. Here the changes would be minimal. In the last month of the winter, the legation sheltered dozens of refugees, and the majority were accommodated here, in the cold, humid and distressing conditions that I envisage here with mere words of adornment, but what's the point. Inevitably, the paragraph from that letter sent to him by Sanz Briz from San Francisco recommending caution in the presentation of the facts to the Spanish authorities springs to mind:

«Do not forget that the decision to house people in the legation properties was my initiative alone, without prior authorization from Madrid, motivated by the terror that reined back then in the Hungarian capital».

And those paragraphs written to him in San Francisco by an Italian girl, Laura:

«We spent the terrible siege of Budapest in the cellars of the Spanish Embassy [...] Thank you, my friend, for everything you did for us, just a year

ago now. I have not forgotten the numerous times I went to bother you in Eötvös Utca and everything you tried to do to help us».

Back upstairs again, I ask the chargé d'affaires, Zaldívar, about the chancery. He points to its current location, but tells me that it's unlikely to have been in the same place in the past. Needless to say, I am looking for Madame Tourné. My search is plagued with failures. It's true that thanks to a miserable anonymous complaint, we discovered that she was the first to save Jews in that Embassy; but from that February of 1945 in which you accompanied her to see count Tolstoi, civil servant in the legation of Sweden and appointed representative of the interests of the neutral legations by the Russians, her trace vanishes. Madame Tourné did not even attend the inventory of the legation assets a few days later: she had left the keys of the safe with the maid. That inventory counted 380 gold coins, worth 20 francs each, *Napoleones* as they were called, in the office that minister Muguiro had occupied. After that February, the only place I found Madame was in this part of the letter that a certain Doctor Friedrich wrote to Sanz Briz in 1946:

«Madame Tourné is quite well, she is unoccupied now, doing just the housework. Gaston managed to get a new job in the French Legation. But I think that Madame Tourné saved a lot of foreign currency and gold, so now she won't have any problems! With the exception of Dr. Farkas, all the inhabitants of the Legation were saved».

When Sanz Briz answered this letter, the first thing he did was to ask Doctor Friedrich for the address of Madame Tourné, so that he could write to her. The truth be told, yesterday I lost all hope of finding reliable data about her and her story. I had gone as far as a suburb of Budapest in search of a man, Tibor Gérgely, a relation of Jaime Vándor, and like him he had been protected by the legation of Spain. Tibor was sick with cancer and it was hard to have an articulate conversation with him. Before the war he had been Madame

Tourné's neighbour and a friend of her son, Gaston. But his memories were mixed up.

—Why do you think Madame Tourné loved her son so much?

—They did say so, people used to say so. I don't know. Over sixty years have gone by. The truth is that she treated him in a special way...

—Were mother and son nice, were they cultured?

—Yes.

—And attractive?

—Yes, in a French way.

—Did they always live in Budapest?

—No, they moved to France after '56. I visited the son in Paris, in the early eighties. The mother was no longer alive.

—Did Gaston leave any children?

—No.

—Did he feel hurt that nobody had acknowledged what they did?

—They weren't the sort of people who seek acknowledgement.

At that point, Tibor Gergely said he had some photos of Madame Tourné and that he was going to look for them. My heart started to beat faster because I so wanted to see that French face. He came back with a disheartened expression and empty-handed.

The chargé d'affaires accompanied me out to the sunny street. You, sir, are also going to depart Eötvös, where you've lived the most important and dramatic months of your life, the memory and exaltation of which will never leave you. Doctor Gabor, a protected person, is now at the helm of the commission that will transform the legation of Spain into a hospital, after having been one of those rare asylums for humanity in the colossal destruction of Europe. These are the last lines of your report.

«I believe that heretofore I have given ample account of my work during the tragic weeks that preceded and accompanied the siege of Budapest. I dare to believe that the severity of the situation and the irrevocable need

to use any means possible to save the lives of thousands justify the unique, maybe even unprecedented, position that I assumed in the Legation of Spain in Budapest. The complete success of my work, which given its strong humanitarian purposes did not deviate from the decorum of Spain and its long-standing civil traditions, encourages me in any case to present this definitive report in the secure knowledge of having done my duty.

Please accept, Sir, the assurance of my highest esteem.

Giorgio Perlasca».

I see you, sir, walking away from Eötvös and I am sorry for you. Your general situation has already been described in the first lines of that letter you sent to Sanz Briz, that we read above:

«When the Russians arrived I found myself with no money, no home and no food».

It was the same letter, written in a spontaneous Spanish, in which a few paragraphs before you had described what had happened to Villa Széchenyi, the former residence of the Spanish diplomat.

«As for the villa in Buda, I can tell you that I went there for the last time at 1300 hours on December 25th, 1944 and there was fighting very close by. I stopped for just a few minutes to give some words of encouragement to the refugees and until February 25th, I had no more news of it. Everybody was saved except for the old aunt of Rados who was raped by the Russians and killed later on by gunfire that reached her from the battle line. The day after you left, I had to move my residence to the villa to protect it from the Arrow Crossists who wanted to get in. The counts Szecheni and Sziraki, fleeing from the Hungarian army, and other people, also took refuge there. Everything was lost in the villa fire. Of my cases, with suits, money and a small amount of gold, nothing but five handkerchiefs were saved.».

The old aunt of Rados.

There are more details of your vulnerability in the final lines of your *Promemoria*.

«Since I could not reach Liszt square [where Irene lived] I turned back and walked as far as number 44 on Izabella street. On the morning of the 18th, the Russians put me to work cleaning Király street. Around mid-day, I managed to get away and met with my friends in Liszt square. I had 3700

pengös with me, a leather bag, a kilo of spaghetti, some nuts and two packs of cigars. The adventure had ended, but the hunger was just beginning».

I look at the paths you took on the map. The long Király street that you had to clean. It all happened in one small slice of the city. One of the corners of Király intersects Lizst square. You probably managed to break away from the brigade there and find refuge with Irene, just a steps metres away. You remained in the city until the end of May. Tough months. You returned to Italy via a roundabout route through Turkey: until September, they wouldn't start to clear the bodies from the roads of Europe. In Budapest, the farewells must have been touched by the uncontrollable emotion of those who survive death and then cannot avoid separation in life. The emotion reached as far as the press, as you well know, sir.

I have an issue of the Hungarian broadsheet, *Újság*, that translated literally means *Little Newspaper*. The unlikely Campos found it in a European junkyard. On June 12th, with you already gone from Budapest, our Kis Újság opened one of its pages with the information.

How Giorgio Perlasca "Spanish chargé d'affaires in Budapest" saved the lives of 5200 people

«This morning, in a solemn act, they bid farewell to Giorgio Perlasca. In the times of the Szálasi terror, Giorgio Perlasca, placed his own life in danger to save other people from the grips of death.

Few people truly know who Giorgio Perlasca was. After decades of comings and goings, leading a pedlar's life, he reached Hungary at the outbreak of the Second World War. He, like other Italians who opposed Mussolini, was interned in a camp. Last year [1944], shortly before the events of October 15th, he was released and it was at that moment that he met Erlach [sic: Sanz Briz], secretary of the Spanish Legation. Thanks to the friendship that developed between them, after the Arrow Cross coup, he obtained Spanish protection, and remained there right up until the Spanish left the capital. Erlach [sic] was the last to leave the Embassy of Budapest; back then, the only staff member remaining in the Embassy was the cook. It was at that moment that Perlasca arrived on the scene.

He used or took advantage of the forms and stamps that were left in the Embassy to forge and then distribute the letters of Spanish protection. What happened afterwards has not been made public until now. Only now are we discovering the extraordinary merits of this person. He, formerly persecuted, played a public role and took on the mantle of “Spanish chargé d’affaires”. He visited Szálasi. And even had the audacity to make and sign agreements on behalf of Spain with the “Home Secretary”, Vajna Gábor, the “Minister for Foreign Affairs”, Kemény Gábor, and the much-feared “commander” Kovarcz Emillel as well as other bandits [all three hanged by the new regime].

When the planned persecution of the Jews began, he issued 5200 letters of protection in a short space of time for the persecuted, without any personal gain whatsoever. He got his hands on letters and he rented protected houses on Phönix and Hollán streets, where the gendarmes of Baky [a corps recruited in the rural area, arbitrary and extremely cruel, that did not form part of the conventional police force] were prohibited entry.

In early December, when the Arrow Cross terror was at its cruellest, life in the Spanish protected houses went on relatively calmly and the inhabitants living there didn’t even suspect that all of this was thanks to Perlasca, who was in constant contact with Szálasi and his thugs, whom he bribed or simply deceived frequently. Now that it has ended, with the completion of his voluntary mission, he returns to his free country. Perlasca has left and his memory will never be erased, it will stay here forever».

Well, sir, a touching and solemn farewell, no doubt. Naturally, I won’t take into consideration the paragraph from a letter you sent to Sanz Briz a few months later, from Milan:

«After my departure, the Hungarian press wrote some very nice things; but if you happen to read anything the Hungarian papers claim are my statements, there is no truth in that».

So much modesty, sir. But you give yourself away. The note, signed by the journalist Sándor Mitdraioes does not include any statements from you in inverted commas. But you, and I, and the dark Mitrai, know that all the information about the feat comes, as usual, from

you, and that your voice is camouflaged in the article. But you did well to cover your back. Had Sanz Briz read the cutting he wouldn't have believed his own eyes. The least of the matter is the strange Er-lach who usurps his name. That appears to be a simple typographic or journalist error. Nor does it matter that the newspaper claims the only person left in Eötvös was the cook when Sanz Briz left. But the fact that you take personal credit for saving 5200 people is an error of far greater dimensions. An error of the deep self-esteem you hold yourself in, sir.

I will not argue with you too much about the figure, because to do so verges on the obscene. I'm a classic in this sense: he who saves one man saves Humanity. There is only one reliable document about the number of survivors: the report Sanz Briz sent to his government, once he was safe in Berne, which lists the 2295 people who, one way or another, enjoyed the protection of the Spanish embassy. It is likely, indeed, that there is room for a few more. But it's a figure, whichever it was, that must be shared with Sanz Briz, with Elisabeth Tourné and with Zoltán Farkas, with the heroes of the Embassy of Spain.

*Mi dispiace*²⁷, it almost pains me to have to make these clarifications, but your chronicle makes it unavoidable. Your successful chronicle, sir, I will never tire of praising you for it. Because the most extraordinary thing about this sort of diary we are analysing, is that it has become a sort of bible. You said in June of 1945 that you had saved five thousand Jews through an ingenious imposture, usurping the personality of the Spanish diplomat who had fled. There is no proof of this. But the for a message to be successful in our times no proof is required; suffice for it to be appealing. The extremely early message, almost simultaneous to your heroic work, that you launched from the pages of *Kis Újság*, is the message that half the world currently repeats. And your supremacy over the rest of the heroes is absolute. Let me describe it in terms of a Google search, the

27. TN: I'm sorry.

iridium metre of our time. When I type in Giorgio Perlasca it gives me 164,000 hits and Ángel Sanz Briz gets 68,000. Neither Zoltán Farkas nor Elisabeth Tourné get relevant results. History has bowed to you.

Let me take advantage to tell you something else. Your heirs, your advocates and you yourself at the end of your life, have always insisted that Perlasca never said anything. The legend suggests that once you had personally saved the 5200 Jews you embarked on a sort of proud and noble silence. The discomfort of speaking about oneself. And that you would have taken your silence to the grave, so the legend continues, had it not been for those ladies in Berlin who went looking for you. But that is untrue. You never maintained silence. You were not silent just days after leaving Eötvös, and you were not silent when they started to talk about Wallenberg or when they sentenced Eichmann. Your story, in the terms we currently know it, though summarized, appeared in the Italian newspapers *Il Resto del Carlino* and *La Stampa* in the post-war period. And for a large part of your life you have paid constant attention to the matter, as proved for example, by the letter you sent to an Italian magazine in 1957, following an article about Wallenberg. More than constant attention: you were ever on the lookout. You will see, sir. The page that *Il Resto di Carlino* dedicated to you in June of 1961 has to be understood in the context of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, begun in the month of April 1961 and which lasted until December. What's so special about it apart from sticking to the basic script of your adventure, already explained in detail by the Hungarian newspaper *Kis Újság*? Eichmann, of course. You were so detailed, so verbose and such a name dropper in your report *A sua Eccellenza* and even in the *Promemoria* and yet there was ne'er a mention of the famous name Eichmann from whose claws, we all know, you pulled two children. You never mentioned him. Until the spotlight on Eichmann was bright enough to illuminate you too.

It is true, however, that apart from these isolated mentions, the press did not follow your story. Let's say it wasn't a subject of interest. Neither your story nor that of Sanz Briz. Not even Wallenberg's, in spite of his disappearance making him unhappily popular. Don't ask me why you weren't a hot topic. It's a very difficult question. There is one answer that I'd like to give you. That back then, the press demanded more of a story than mere seduction. It demanded data, sources, proof. Nowadays, the need to feed the news machine 24/7 has weakened the filters. I would like to give you that answer, but I know it to be false: the severe press of the past is just one more myth. I have no relevant explanation for this lack of attention. Only more or less poetic hypotheses: the unwillingness of Europe's survivors to evoke tragedies that were still too fresh in their minds, the purely narrative need of the passage of time, that renders all things noble, the incredulity awoken by Auschwitz, the slowness of the film industry to latch onto the genocide. But they are simply hypotheses. There is a difficult mystery, partially nourished by the unmanageable weight of chance, when it comes to explaining why certain stories catch on at certain times in history.

Lastly. There is a delicate moral flank in your exaggerations and impostures. In the true impostures! They are based on deaths. Care needs to be taken with the dead.

A while back now, I wrote that I never travel to places I haven't read. And that if I got there unprepared, I wouldn't see anything, like a primitive animal who hasn't learned to distinguish the objects from the mass of the world. But now I find that reading too much causes the same blindness. I walk the streets of Budapest like a know-it-all zombie, in search of plaques by Zoltán Farkas, exuding a sober elegance, on Akadémia, on Andrásy, on the city wall, the latter commemorating the victorious arrival of the Spanish in a Buda under Turkish oppression, that would be commissioned from Farkas for his art and for his Astorga; I enter the decrepit doorways of Pannónia, on Wallenberg Street (where the plaque in honour of the Swede is located, wearing his romantic trench coat even in stone), I go to Szent István Park, where hundreds of Jews protected under Spanish asylum spent the winter crammed together in deathly terror; I look for monuments honouring Giorgio Perlasca, of which there are more than one, and I even go as far as the suburb, Maglódi, to the school patio that bears his name. And this is how the city, its food, its pastries, its dry, perfect tokays, its stunning views, its baths in the Gellért, its Danube, central and solemn, the true, slow, blue line and not the one that flows along a side street of Vienna, the bloodcurdling statue of Dózsa in the castle, so much passes me by without being seen; I am only looking for paragraphs, this one by Vizinczey who wrote to me before I left: «You can see Lánchíd utca 5 on the Buda side, where I almost died of hunger when I was a boy. The last time I was there, my mother lay dying and the wall was pockmarked with bullet holes -who knows if they've restored it since then... I would show you

the places I fought», the boy Vizinczey in wartime Budapest and the twenty-year-old youth in '56 against the Soviets, he was my great Hungarian, the man who taught me so much about literature that I had no choice but to give it up, he was friend and necrologist to John Weightman, victim of a similar experience, he had understood Foucault so well that he liquidated him forever in one of the most laconic and destructive texts ever written on post-modernism. I walk and walk following a mental map and the air is rarely as thick as when we climb to Buda in search of Villa Széchenyi, the residence of Sanz Briz to begin with and later of the refugees, the countess Dessewffy, always so hysterical, and of her husband Gyula, of Perlasca and in the end of the fire and the Soviet bullets. The villa, on Istenhegyi Street, had been the property of the count Zsigmond Széchenyi, a reputed hunter. To the point that the house looked like a trophy room. In 1940, coinciding with his wife's divorce, he rented it to the Spanish Embassy. The fact that it later ended up sheltering persecuted Jews would be of great exculpatory value to the count when in 1951 he had to defend himself against communist persecution and some of the protected publicly mentioned the fact. It does not bear any significant trace from back then, but I have the photo of Adela Sanz-Briz in the summer of '43, a new-born in her mother's arms, while her father looks at her with that tender perplexity of first-time parents, with Budapest in the background, already under threat, but still far from the eye of the storm. And that other photo from a Hungarian magazine showing a young count Széchenyi, at a time that seemed immobile and happy, posing in the centre of the porch, with five elephant tusks lined up on either side of him. I am digging among my own memories too, as if they belonged to others. That night from thirty years ago, the strange Magyar queer in the seat of the crammed tram, rubbing his balls and licking his lips; and the person he's staring at obscenely is me, a youngish tourist sitting opposite with

his girlfriend, on his way back to the room rented by the French professor in the still-Communist Budapest, in that house in which the bathroom was literally a cardboard box, though fitted with its toilet and its sink, the reason, perhaps, being that the entire city seemed made of cardboard to me then, touched by physical precariousness but also moral lassitude.

Ángel Sanz Briz never returned to Budapest. But shortly after leaving, he discovered that those months would prove to be the most important of his life. Like in the case of Perlasca, it has been mistakenly said that he never spoke of that period. Not true. He didn't speak much, but he did speak. The first time in June of 1949, in the long interview for *Heraldo de Aragón*. It is as much a seminal text as Perlasca's article in the newspaper. In it, the inevitable conscience-pricking about his departure:

- «—Were you there when the Russians were getting close to Budapest?
- Precisely. But when the epilogue of the Hungarian drama took place, the mission entrusted to me there on behalf of Spain, which as a Spaniard I am proud of, had been accomplished, exhausting all the possibilities.
- [...]
- I know that until the very moment of the Reds' arrival in the city, just two weeks [sic] after my departure from Budapest, all the people under Spanish protection were still alive».

And the heroes of the Spanish Embassy are mentioned here too.

- «—What help did you have in those months?
- An extremely small Hungarian staff and a couple of Spaniards who happened by there out of the blue».

The Hungarian staff could be none other than Madame Tourné and the lawyer Farkas. But the two Spaniards are more difficult to identify. In the beginning, I thought one of them might be Perlasca, Jorge Perlasca. But a few lines from the report *A sua Eccellenza* make this attribution unlikely:

«Previously, two soldiers, one of whom was called Xavier Berengueta, had deserted and provided with Spanish passports, they left Budapest for Switzerland».

Indeed. There has never been any particular information about them. There was nothing to be found about Berengueta in the military archives. The diplomatic delicacy of Sanz Briz («out of the blue») was remarkable: even with Germany on the verge of destruction, they were still deserters. The Aragonese interview ended oddly. A wink and a nudge, typical of the journalism written between the lines in a dictatorship:

«The tale of Mr. Sanz Briz comes to an end, and there's a pause. In the European cataclysm, Spain was a balsam and not salt and vinegar in the wounds of human pain. Next came the moral chaos and even words have lost their true meaning. Political uproar is about the destruction of spiritual values in the same way the maelstrom of war cut short lives and destroyed wealth. Yet every soul is a sanctuary of truth, and each heart knows the ingredients conceived in its fibres and in its blood the heat of true life. Puffed-up representatives driven by the political ambition of national egoisms, State reasons, can say what they like. But in millions of European hearts that suffered exodus, persecutions, hunger, fear and unprecedented pain, lies the shining truth that Spain was, in those days, a crucial, nobly generous and protective hand.

—Well in the UNO it would appear that Israel has been forgetful...

The diplomat does not answer. But there is a fraction of a second in which it looks as if Sanz Briz is going to forget his office and underline my question with a phrase that would possibly lack any diplomacy».

In 1948, the State of Israel formalised its diplomatic relations with the international community. With the exception of two countries: Germany and Spain. A year later, it again rejected the Spanish government's manoeuvres. And one month prior to this interview, it had contributed to upholding the international community's boycott of Spain in the UNO, which was the fact that almost broke Sanz Briz's diplomacy when speaking to his interviewer from the *Heraldo*.

The government of Israel saw Franco as a former ally of Hitler. The confidential diplomacies of Martínez de Bedoya had reached their expiry date.

The other great public telling of his experience in Budapest was written in 1963 on the request of Isaac R. Molho, director in Jerusalem of the magazine, *Tesoro de los Judíos Sefardíes*. There are no major revelations in the story compared to the data already known. What's interesting is its intra-history²⁸. It is described in the letter sent by the then Spanish consul in New York to his Minister for Foreign Affairs, Fernando de Castiella, who was also his brother-in-law. In the letter, Sanz Briz attaches his narration and explains his objective to the minister:

«In it I have endeavoured a) not to mention Germany at all; b) to do justice to Admiral Horthy and the different governments under his mandate; and c) to fully reclaim the merit of our actions, for Spain and for His Excellence the Head of State, omitting for this purpose any mention of the activity, in the humanitarian field, of the few neutral countries (Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey) under the wise and vigorous direction of the then Papal Nuncio, monsignor Angelo Rotta and his auditor, the current nuncio in Costa Rica, monsignor Verolino».

The paragraph perfectly reveals the disciplined will to use Spain's humanitarian activity for political purposes. But there is also another element of importance: the role played by the Apostolic Nunciature in protecting the Jews, corroborated by the majority of sources available, which even went so far as to politically direct all the neutral embassies as a whole. An activity that contradicts the accusations generally made against the Vatican hierarchy for its attitude to the Nazi advance and final catastrophe of the Holocaust.

28. Here the author is referring to the concept of intra-history, used by the Spanish poet Miguel de Unamuno, to refer to anything in history experienced by the people which the books and newspapers have left out, as if it were an official narration. *Luca Constantini. Translator of the Italian version.*

The absence of diplomatic relations with Israel contributed to overshadowing the memory of Sanz Briz. And it is not an empty phrase. In 1967, from the city of Lima, where he was ambassador, he wrote to the Director-General for Ibero-America, Pedro Salvador, explaining his recent «unofficial» meeting with the Israeli ambassador in Peru, Netanel Lorch:

«Mr. Lorch, who speaks excellent Spanish, told me in quite a solemn tone, that he had come to accomplish the honourable mission of informing me that his countries' competent authorities had decided to erect a plaque with my name on it at the monument built in Jerusalem, which in Hebrew they call YAD VASHEM, which in our language would be something like Valley of the Fallen, as a token of gratitude for my activity in Budapest which, as you know, resulted in Spain, via its Chargée d'Affaires in said capital, saving the lives of thousands of persecuted Jews. He added that this decision gave me entry to one of the most exclusive clubs in the world and that for this honour to be awarded to someone, a preliminary investigation for the completion of a complex file requiring the testimony of a great number of people saved had been necessary.

You can imagine my surprise on hearing this information from the mouth of the Ambassador of Israel, as the events that motivated such a distinction took place, as you know, in 1943 and 1944, that is, almost a quarter of a century ago. I thanked him for the honour which, apparently, would also be presented in the form of a diploma and medal which he wished to award me in an act expected to generate a certain amount of publicity.

Bearing in mind the state of our relations with the Arab countries and their susceptibility in all matters relating to the Israeli Republic, I expressed to the Ambassador that, while personally accepting the generous distinction offered, I was nonetheless obliged to beg him to delay the intended act until I had received the corresponding authorisation from my superiors. He replied that the diploma was being awarded to me, not in my capacity as diplomatic representative of Spain, but personally for my work to help the persecuted Jews; however, he told me he understood what I had just told him and that he would postpone the planned act until the authorisation requested had been granted.

Bear in mind that this is a two-pronged affair; on the one hand, it is in our interests to have the great services provided by Spain in its humanitarian

and Christian work to save the lives of persecuted beings acknowledged by the international Jewish community. On the other, we must consider the unease this friendly act of Israel towards a civil servant of the Spanish State may cause to the Arab countries. While I do not believe the matter will be much publicised, I am conscious on writing this of the presence of an ambassador of the UAR [United Arab Republic] whom, I'm sure, will immediately inform his Government».

Quite a long period passed. In diplomatic terms, an eloquent period. Almost one and a half months later, Pedro Salvador replied telling him that he could not answer him:

«You are perfectly aware of the hypersensitivity surrounding all matters relating to the State of Israel given the immediate repercussion any contact with it invariably has on the Arab countries. There have recently been some, perhaps excessively categorical, statements by Fraga and in this instance it was Israel and International Zionism which felt offended.

Nor are you unaware that in other matters, particularly of a cultural nature, there are relations of a certain importance and that there is no lack of allusions to the Sephardis, etc., etc. Our colleague, the Director-General of Africa and the Middle East, tends to follow a very closed criterion in dealings with Israel, but it is very probable the scenario you suggest, due to the extremely special circumstances of the same, must be handled differently.

In short, I cannot answer your question and I find myself obliged to suggest you write directly to the Minister».

I haven't found any letter from Sanz Briz to Castiella alluding to this matter. It is of course possible that such a letter was never written and that the minister and the diplomat, in-laws at the end of the day, who had always had a good relationship, though one that was not always free of honest differences of opinion, may have unofficially spoken of it. Or perhaps they never spoke of it at all. Whichever the case, Sanz Briz's behaviour was that of an astute man and an exemplary civil servant, as he had been throughout practically his entire life. A close reading of the letter might suggest that he had already accepted the honour offered by the Jewish State, an honour of

a personal nature, as he underlined; but he left the publicity of that honour and its subsequent use for political purposes to his government's discretion. According to the files of Yad Vashem, Ángel Sanz Briz was appointed *Righteous Among the Nations* on October 8th of 1966. That is, months before he wrote to his hierarchical superior requesting authorization to participate in the awards ceremony.

The distinction of *Righteous Among the Nations* had begun to be granted in 1963. The year in which Molho's interview was published. It is likely that the interview and the influence of its author had sufficed to elevate Sanz Briz to the category of Righteous. What's surprising is that is that such an acknowledgement should have remained latent for so many years. It was not only the Francoist regime that prevented it becoming public knowledge. No member of his family, not even his wife, knew about it. The diplomat's reserve was disciplined and absolute. What was purely extraordinary was that this reserve should extend to Yad Vashem too. In Autumn of 1991, and this time around a solemn ceremony in Jerusalem did take place, Yad Vashem honoured the family for being descendants of a Righteous, given the impossibility (!) of honouring the Righteous himself as he was deceased! I wrote to the person responsible, Bozena Rotman, to make sure that a mistake had not been made. Her answer was as laconic as it was irrefutable:

«The official year of the recognition is 1966».

Ángel Sanz Briz died in 1980. A rapidly-progressive stomach cancer, when he had not yet reached the age of 70. It is always too soon for men. But in this case, it was also too soon for his memory. In reality nothing had happened yet in 1980. This may seem cynical and incomprehensible given that the heroic events of the Spanish Embassy in Budapest had happened. But the facts alone were not enough, and that is one of the primary conclusions that should be drawn from this book. In 1980, Sanz Briz was dead and Thomas

Keneally's novel, *The Schindler's Ark*, narrating the humanitarian work of Oskar Schindler in the Jewish community of Krakow, had not yet been published. The book would be published in 1982 and Spielberg's film, that would exponentially multiply interest in the Heroes of the Holocaust, was released in 1993. So Sanz Briz died in complete oblivion, in a Spain immersed in its own transition, that would not re-establish relations with Israel until 1986. He died in a level of oblivion difficult to imagine. The country's main broadsheets published brief, formal texts reporting the death; but none of them, which summarized his diplomatic career and highlighted, for instance, the fact that he had been the first Spanish ambassador in China, made any mention of the Budapest facts. Not even the main newspaper of his hometown, and one of Spain's good regional newspapers, the *Heraldo de Aragón*, that thirty years previously had published the last public account of his acts, made any mention, in its long and affectionate obituary of the events that precisely thanks to that interview in 1949 were no secret to anybody.

The fate of Giorgio Perlasca's memory was very different. Particularly thanks to the conversations among a group of ladies in Berlin in the eighties. One of these was Eveline Blitstein-Willinger.

«Dear Arcadi:

I spoke to Eveline Willinger twice. The first time in a Greek restaurant in Zehlendorf, which could be called the posh district of Berlin. She came with her son, a young man wearing an enviable jacket. The second, in the outskirts, took place in one of those silent suburbs that make you want to go to work. I had a look at the books in the house. Carefully chosen and in various languages. Bernhard, Márai, Eco. And the protocols of the trial of the Auschwitz assassins, both expensive and rare.

Mrs. Willinger is an elegant woman who speaks precisely. Let's say that her reasons for pursuing an interest in Perlasca were harshly personal. Twenty-two members of her father's family were killed by the Nazis. She still has nightmares. Nazis erupting into her room and shooting her. Her family belonged to the Hungarian minority from Romania and came from Marosvásárhely, in Transylvania. She emigrated to Berlin and started to work in the university. She soon came into contact with a group of people of Hungarian origin. And they got into the habit of meeting once a month to converse about any subject. But it's perhaps better if you hear it from her. Eveline gave me a fragment of her diary where she explains how they brought Perlasca back to life:

«In general, we would meet at night and the conversation usually revolved around racial injustice and prejudice. It was already very late on one of those nights, I believe it was at the end of 1986, when we started to talk about Wallenberg and his mysterious disappearance. We speculated about what could have happened to him and how life can be so cruel for such marvellous people. Then one of our friends started to speak. She told us she had lived in Budapest and worked for the Red Cross in that terrible time, and that she had met Wallenberg. And also a man named Giorgio Perlasca. The room became silent. I had never heard the name

Perlasca and wanted to know more about him. That was the moment in which he entered my life forever. IVB promised us that she would find her old documents and papers from the period and tell us everything she knew about Perlasca. One week later, we met again in the house of Dra. Vera Braun. This time there was a smaller group of us, just six women. We listened in fascination to IVB for two or three hours, and then asked a stream of questions. But...

I feel that somehow or another I wasn't fully present. A part of me was very far away: in Budapest in 1944. On the beautiful streets of Budapest, where there was no room for the Jews. I saw the desperate women carrying their children, all those people waiting to be transported, deported, without knowing the true destination of their route. I saw many strong, young men disheartened, disoriented and incapable of helping their most loved ones, waiting without hope. Of course, I saw my grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles and cousins among them; faces I only know from photographs. Facing this sad procession of desperate souls, the well-organised criminals with shining uniforms, so sure of themselves. Bestly, the *Übermenschen*. But these dark images that obsessed me for years were now illuminated by the personality of Perlasca. It was the first time I had heard of him. But I felt very close to him, I felt his authenticity without needing proof that he did everything IVB told us. I immediately knew that I had had the honour of getting to know the story of a real person, a great man who had risked his own life to save that of innocent people, to save humanity. That is what I was thinking as IVB spoke about him, I was so excited I was shaking. The next morning, I called my sister (Dra. Maria-Vera Willinger) and told her the whole story. She immediately agreed to help finance a group with the intention of supporting Mr. Perlasca, through a monthly pension. I was happy for the first time that in such a short time I had found people as enthusiastic as me who, without proof, were willing to take action by helping Mr. Perlasca in his sorry economic situation. At the same time, I knew it was far from being enough. It was just a small economic support, but how could we also demonstrate our gratitude? I received Perlasca's brief memoir, written himself, from IVB [*Promemoria*]. And we found someone to translate the text into English».

This is the main body of Frau Willinger's text. I suppose that you will already have deduced that IVB stands for Irene Boroviczeny, who was living in Berlin at the time. What happened later was a simple series of events. They placed an ad in the Hungarian newspaper *Új Élet* asking for people who had known Giorgio Perlasca in Budapest in 1944-45 to come

forward. The Hungarian poet, Eva Láng, replied. She was perhaps the only one of the Spanish protected persons who still remembered Perlasca, even if it was a purely literary and uncertain recall, a maceration of memory. Her testimony and the translation of the Promemoria were dispatched post-haste to Yad Vashem. The women feared that Perlasca, who was already elderly, might die before completing the steps necessary to appoint him one of the Righteous. Meanwhile, each month they sent around 600 marks [around 300 euros at today's exchange rate]. The sender was always «A group of women from Berlin». As soon as they received a positive response from Yad Vashem in 1989, the tributes poured in, continued Eveline. First from Jerusalem, where he was invited to plant the traditional tree of the Righteous in his name. And then from Italy, Hungary, the United States of America and Spain.

As she spoke, the memory of Perlasca seemed to trigger a euphoric reaction in Eveline. She recalled his intensely blue eyes, that she had only known in his old age, when accompanying him to some of the tributes, speculating on what those eyes must have been like in his arrogant youth. Before finishing, as a sort of glorious final touch, Eveline said she had once asked Perlasca why he did all that. And he replied: «Because there was nothing else I could do». That's all very well. But I must warn you, dear Arcadi, that I have already heard this reply in more than one of the numerous films about our man.

Love, Sergio».

The media's acknowledgement of Perlasca, particularly in Italy, began on a precise date. April 30th, 1990, the programme, *Mixer*, by Giovanni Minoli, told his story through the account of Enrico Deaglio, who was then writing *La banalità del bene*, the first book to formalise the legend of Perlasca based on his own words, the old writings and new texts that he would add over time. In no time, the Italian would end up becoming the hero of the Spanish Embassy and the man of courage who remedied the cowardice of the Francoist, Sanz Briz. Perlasca was the hero *par excellence* of that situation, even for the Spanish state itself. Proof lies in the letter, certifying the legend, sent in May of 1991 by the ambassador in Rome, Emilio Menéndez del Valle, announcing he had been awarded the Orden

de Isabel la Católica. The letter acknowledged that Perlasca had done some of his work alongside Sanz Briz, «and later exclusively on his own initiative until he had saved 5200 Hebrews».

During his diplomatic career, Sanz Briz earned a great many distinctions, including the Orden de Isabel la Católica and the Orden de Carlos III, the maximum award granted by the Spanish State. None of them was for the mission he accomplished in the Budapest winter.

Giorgio Perlasca died in August of 1992. However, for the purposes of this book his death was a deceptive fact. His memory has never stopped growing, thanks also to the tenacious work of his Foundation, under the management of his son and daughter-in-law, another crucial difference compared to the abandonment of Sanz Briz by institutions and family alike. The posthumous victory of the Impostore over the Authentic has never once been questioned. Even now that this book is drawing to a close. On October 29th, 2012, the Hungarian translation of *L'Impostore* was presented in Budapest, in the Holocaust Memorial Centre. A very solemn, official and emotional act with the intervention of numerous figures, that lasted over two hours during which not a single person mentioned the words «Sanz Briz», not even to logically substantiate the imposture of Perlasca!

Bah. Deep down, what do I care about keeping scores, or about this sport. One needs to live. One lives off the dead. Anything one imbibes, even books, has had to die in order to nourish. Perlasca took possession of the story because he needed it more. Midway through the forties, in the terrible hunger that marked the post-war era, Sanz Briz sent him food from Washington. This is the last known communication between the two. One built his career. The other his memories. There is a certain justice. Justice does not always bear a relationship to truth. Tomorrow I will catch the return flight. I haven't yet written a single line of the book and yet the book is in its last lines. That quantum leap. I haven't yet chosen the introductory quote and I already know that it will be signed by the man who shot Liberty Valance. I will choose it because film, unlike what I do, always ends up projecting the legend. In the words of Errol Morris, James Stewart becomes a hero because the world believes he shot Liberty Valance. But in reality, it was John Wayne, hidden in the shadows, who pulled the trigger. In the film, Stewart gets the girl, Wayne's girl, and manages to build a political career that makes him a senator. Wayne, on the other hand, will remain in the shadows his whole life. He doesn't quite fit the bill of his hero and his anti-hero, comfortably ensconced in their jurisdiction, decreed by poetic justice. Film.

The problem is life. When the main hero has also conquered life and even the girls. And when another hero, who has led a life of poverty and shadows, finally manages to gain acclaim, the impostures are revealed. It is a suffocating situation. It is no surprise, then, that opinion cries out, with extravagant moral right: «Publish the legend!».

Life doesn't fit the bill. There is always a shirtsleeve left hanging, empty. There is another serious injustice in this story. The heroes of the Spanish Embassy, Elisabeth Tourné, Zoltán Farkas, Giorgio Perlasca and Ángel Sanz Briz, had two important things in common. One is that they were early, convinced, militant Francoists. Since I am already at the end, I will print a shred of legend: that day that Farkas knocked an Italian refugee to the ground with a punch on Eötvös. A refugee, already with his passport in his hand, who had dared to insult Francisco Franco. The second, is that they were four, just and honourable people, who managed to save the lives of thousands of Jews from Nazi brutality. Good Francoists, what an irremediable oxymoron. The stuff of life, that doesn't ask the printer for permission.

I walk along Andrásy on my last night, I circle the station, I cross Eötvös. It's summer, an August night, I write in winter. The most lethal printed legend is the one occupied by the living, when almost everyone died. I hear the allegretto, *just a little*, by Brahms. That snow shroud of the Budapest dead.

Barcelona, January 2013

Appendix

THE FACES OF MADAME TOURNÉ AND HER SON GASTON

Five years separate the first edition and this English edition and, as per usual in historic investigation, some relevant discoveries have since come to light.

Various passages of the book refer to the weak trail of Madame Tourné, a key person among the embassy heroes. The appearance of some photos of her is particularly moving. The author received the



Madame Tourné, seated, with Hungarian friends, in the '60s



Gaston Tourné, on the left, with his mother

photos through Erzsébet Dobos, who was so important to this book and whose research never slackens. A conversation between her and István Fehér, a neighbour of Madame Tourné and her son Gaston, made it possible to locate the photos and some, unfortunately minimal, details of her life. Among them the addresses of the apartments she occupied in Budapest, her retirement when the Spanish legation closed and Gaston's settlement in a position in the French Embassy in Hungary. Apparently, when Gaston also reached retirement age, they emigrated to Paris, where they both died, without leaving any known progeny.

THE HELP OF JENŐ SORG

A letter to Sanz Briz from the Hungarian businessman Jenő Sorg, from Paris, in 1946, already hinted at his participation in the

operations to save the Hungarian Jews. The hints have since been definitively confirmed by the discovery of a letter of thanks that Sanz Briz wrote to Sorg in December of 1944, making the admittance of Sorg among the Righteous necessary.

«My dear Mr. Director [the form used by Sanz Briz to address Sorg]

Your kindness has been of enormous help to this Legation, by providing houses for the protection of our Jews and interceding on their behalf before the authorities, thanks to which you obtained protection for 500 Jews. My deepest thanks for your courtesy and selfless endeavours. We are also extremely grateful for the provisions and heating fuel you offered to our protected Jews, in addition to the money you donated to them.

My most sincere regards, dear Mr. Director,

Budapest, December 8th, 1944»

Signed: Ángel Sanz Briz, chargée d'affaires of the Legation of Spain in Budapest

THE ARTICLE BY GIOVANNI ROSSI ON GIORGIO PERLASCA

On June 21st, 1945, shortly after the Soviet arrival in Budapest, the newspaper *Szabadság* (*Freedom*) published this article by the Italian citizen, Giovanni Rossi. According to László Csobra, author of a study of the diplomatic relations between Hungary and Italy from 1945 to 1956 (*A római magyar követ jelenti... A magyar-olasz kapcsolatok története 1945 -1956*, Budapest, 2010), Rossi and Perlasca competed for a diplomatic post in the Italian embassy in Budapest after the war, though neither were successful. Rossi's article, translated here from Hungarian, is the first refutation of Perlasca's role in saving the Jews and has the added interest of being contemporary to the facts that are the object of the dispute. A copy of the article was provided by Dr. Gábor Tóth, jurist and painter.

Who saved those who were under Spanish protection?
Szabadság, June 21st, 1945

Last week, two articles in the press paid tribute to a young Italian, Giorgio Perlasca, who, according to the articles, claimed to have been the «chargée d'affaires» of the abandoned Spanish embassy in Budapest; he had issued letters of protection to those persecuted by the Arrow Cross; and had even managed to hoodwink Szálasi and his men into believing that he would issue them «letters of protection» whenever they requested them, meaning they were indebted to him.

At this stage we have become accustomed to not reacting to the insolence of the fake heroes, and we would not bother with Giorgio Perlasca's boastful fable if it weren't for the fact that it is an insult to the memory of truly brave men who met a tragic end. Thus, we must say that the «Perlascada» is false from start to finish: the Spanish Embassy was never once left abandoned; Perlasca was under its protection, and in exchange he undertook to deliver gift-packages or money vouchers with first-aid materials to the «Spanish protected houses»; he did not give letters of protection to anybody, and he never spoke to Szálasi, who, of course, did not ask him for letters of protection as he would have had to know that the Red Army wouldn't have accepted them for the same reason the Germans and the Arrow Cross did accept them. On the other hand, it is also true that one night in December Perlasca brought a letter from the Embassy to the general headquarters of the Arrow Cross, on n°2 Boulevard Szent István, and managed to free two people «under Spanish protection», who had been detained for not wearing the yellow star. He did that, but he did not do anything else.

Everything else that was done, was carried out by those under Spanish protection, the sculptor Zoltán Farkas. Farkas, a lawyer by training, was the legal adviser to the Spanish Embassy for years, and

in November of 1944 practically obliged its chargée d'affaires, Ángel Sanz Briz, to issue letters of protection to at least those Hungarians with family or business ties to Spanish citizens. In fact, Sanz Briz did not allow letters of protection to be issued to anyone else, and in the first weeks there were no more than 300 people «under Spanish protection» in Budapest. However, Farkas —against Sanz Briz's will—, with the help of Madame Tourné, the embassy secretary, managed to offer protection to a bigger number of the persecuted. Eight houses were designated to said Spanish protection in the St. István district, but in the end even this amount was insufficient. All those who escaped from the labour brigades and the ghetto received a Spanish letter of protection. In the second half of December, Sanz Briz abandoned Budapest and entrusted the Embassy management to Zoltán Farkas. Farkas turned to the famous painter, Aurél Bernáth, for help as he had already helped him in the past, when he crossed over to Buda once again and could no longer get back to the Pest side of the city. Since then, only a few «heads of the houses» —who back then couldn't even set foot on the streets controlled by the Arrow Cross- had been able to help Farkas supply the inhabitants of the protected houses with food. When the Arrow Cross militiamen tried to take any of the occupants of the «Spanish houses» to the ghettos, Farkas managed to prevent it. He behaved with the Arrow Cross as if he were protecting the persecuted on the direct orders of Franco. The Arrow Cross didn't understand why Franco wanted to protect bearers of the «yellow star» in Pest, but they didn't dare to inconvenience their «Spanish allies». There were relatively few victims of the Arrow Cross terror among the inhabitants of the «Spanish houses». It was widely known in Budapest that «the Spanish protection was the best». And so it was, but only thanks to the skill and courage of Zoltán Farkas, who saved Spain's protected, including eminent artists, politicians, priests and other distinguished members of society, as well as thousands of simple tradesmen, workers and those fleeing the labour battalions.

Zoltán Farkas did not live to see the moment in which those he protected regained their lives of freedom. One day after the Red Army had freed the capital, the man who saved thousands of people from murderous clutches over eight weeks, slipped and fell from the third floor of the embassy, dying instantly.

Acknowledgements

It took me a long time to write this book, almost five years, and a great many people committed to it. First and foremost, Pilar Sanz-Briz, daughter of Ángel, and her husband, José García-Bañón. They supported the author's constant demands with generosity, cordiality and effectiveness, and even his impertinences, placing the documents of the family archive and their knowledge of the facts at his disposal. Their help is even more exemplary and worthy, given that they knew this book was not going to be to their liking. They were the main source of family help, but mention must also be made of the amenability of Ángela Sanz-Briz, who opened up her house and her memories of Santander one summer afternoon and of Adela, the older daughter, born in Budapest, who described conversations with her father on more than one occasion.

Franco Perlasca and Lucia Amadio, in their house in Padova, headquarters of the Foundation they run, diligently complied with their vocation, acting as guardians of their father's memory, without any, even tacit, conditions whatsoever. The translation into Italian of the testimonies collected by Erzsébet Dobos, that served to strengthen the empiric solvency of this book, is a good example of the model work they do.

Mrs. Dobos was the permanent consul in Budapest. Her knowledge of the Spanish language, Hispanophilia and complicit generosity were of invaluable help in the translation of multiple texts from Hungarian and in deciphering certain keys to the historical moment of the Budapest winter. Her book *Megmenekültek: dokumentumok és visszaemlékezések a spanyol embermentésről Budapesten, a holokauszt idején* (Salvaged: documents and memory of the Spanish protection

in Budapest during the Holocaust) is an essential bibliographic element for knowledge about the humanitarian activity carried out by the Spanish legation and it urgently calls out for translation into Spanish.

Professor Iván Harsányi was a great host in Budapest. But his generous, informed and insightful collaboration, based on his extensive historic knowledge of the relations between Spain and Hungary lasted throughout this book's journey.

Tibor Gergely, friend of Gaston Tourné and protected by the legation of Spain, would have liked to help far more than he did. Sadly, his illness prevented him from doing so and his kind grand-daughter Andy informed us of his death in mid-May 2012.

The Embassy of Spain in Budapest and the diplomat, Pablo Zaldívar opened the doors of the legendary building on Eötvös. And they undertook to work towards ensuring the memory of Ángel Sanz Briz ends up occupying its due place in the city. Another two diplomats, Jorge Dezcallar de Mazarredo and Emilio Menéndez del Valle, the latter through Carlos Carnicero Urabayen, clarified the reasons for which Jorge Perlasca was awarded the Orden de Isabel la Católica.

Jaime Vándor was ill while this book was being written. Yet he was always willing to stand up to his disease and present his theory on the importance of the oral testimonies passionately and intelligently. He is also to be thanked for two of the most vivid and disturbing moments of the enormous tragedy recounted.

Eugenio Suárez, a journalist of truly epic proportions, is the author of the best Spanish chronicle of Budapest in the European war. The author went to see him in Salinas, on the coast of Asturias, and also had long telephone conversations with him. One day, he suddenly discovered he was facing one of the Righteous, ironic and humorous, but Righteous. Georges Angyal contributed to this discovery from Geneva in writing how Suárez had saved his life.

The conversations with Mercedes Redondo y Sanz-Bachiller about her father, Onésimo, Francoism, Paris and life itself were so enjoyable... Moreover, she managed to describe the figure of her step-father with exactly the right dose of causticity and remorse. And she organised a succulent lunch with her children, that led to another with the count of Jordana, Íñigo Gómez-Jordana, that in turn...

Elisabeth Szel opened the door of her house to reveal a beautiful young girl of eighty years old. In spite of having just had hip surgery. Her first husband drove Wallenberg's car: it goes without saying that Elisabeth couldn't resist the temptation of writing a worthy novel: *Operación noche y niebla*. But in our pleasant conversation in Madrid only memory was present.

Irene Boroviczeny was generous with her time, her memories, her photos and her letters. Her ability to speak tirelessly of Giorgio Perlasca proved that she herself is one of those people whose lives would be worthy of a whole book unto itself. My stay in her house in Freiburg was an unforgettable and essential moment of this chronicle.

Alexandra Farkas and Janos Farkas showed everything they knew and didn't know about their grandfather and father. In his house in Vienna, Janos still has an incredibly delicate sculpture of a girl's face that told us as much about Zoltán Farkas as the documents he kept about this Budapest Winter's hero.

Eveline Blitstein-Willinger has succeeded in putting together a magnificent archive on Giorgio Perlasca and generously offered it. Her work in memory of the Italian Righteous has the bitter, personal undertone of her father's family, completely exterminated by the Nazis.

The journalist, Nina Gladitz, also spoke in Berlin of Perlasca and put forward her theories with complete honesty. Fernando Granzow de la Cerda, duke of Parcent, was recovering from a bad turn when we interviewed him in Madrid. But his interest and cordiality battled bravely with his fleeting memory problems and succeeded in

making the unknown figure of his father, the great Spanish chronicler of the extermination in Poland, somewhat more accessible.

From Chile, Jorge Bande sent the passport and letter of protection that saved the lives of his parents and a lovely photograph of the couple from when it seemed impossible that life could be ruined.

Antonio Yelo searched for traces of Perlasca in the Spanish Embassy in Turkey. He didn't find any, but told us of a great book, *Istanbul Intrigues*, by Barry Rubin, and revealed the great similarity between Peter Lorre and Perlasca. Julio Valdeón searched for Fanny Achs between Brooklyn and Philadelphia, and discovered she had died.

The historian, Isidro González was kind enough to provide us with a copy of the Castiella report and the journalist, Maria Favà, another of the interview with Antonio Martínez Tomás, the first news of whom came from another journalist, Jaume Fabre. The professors, Laszlo Karsai, Róbert Kis-Kapin, Isabelle Rohr, Matilde Eiroa and Paul Levine patiently answered all questions and didn't hesitate to send copies of some important documents. And Professor Szita Szabolcs, director of the Holocaust Museum in Budapest, cordially guided me through the museum halls as far as the Heroes' memorial.

Zsigmondné Széchenyi and Katalin Pákozdy cleared up the doubts about Villa Széchenyi. Karol Meissner spoke enthusiastically of Cassio and of her grandmother Sofía Casanova, and with regret about the destruction of her archives during the war. Carlos García-Alix opened another door onto the past and was the first to clear the way to the Sanz-Briz family.

This book would not have been written without Pilar Casado. Not only because she is the head of the essential archive of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. But also because she is a competent professional, who engages in the work of her researchers far above and beyond her duties. She searched, found, guided, was effective, fast, polite.

It would be futile to look back over any history without the collaboration of the employees of all the libraries and archives men-

tioned in the bibliography. Thanks too, to Google, and all those people and organisations that nourish the Internet, a technical prodigy but, above all, the biggest philanthropic work of humanity.

Stephen Vizinczey spoke and wrote of that Budapest that saw him almost die of hunger. The author would like to return to him in this book some of the unavoidable truths that he has revealed to him over so many years of reading and conversation.

Rosa Sala, Juan Abreu and Xavier Pericay read the manuscript. Rosa, also an expert in Brotherhoods, freely offered diverse analyses and documents. None of the three are exonerated of all the errors contained because for some reason directly based on their friendship, knowledge and critical quality it was given to them to read.

Pilar Cortés was editor once again. Rigour and warmth.

Verónica Puertollano was always there for anything necessary. It is increasingly necessary.

The author saw his mother and father-in-law pass away as this book was being written. He also saw his daughters enter a fierce adolescence. But he always had his wife in writing and in life.

Index

PART ONE

Chapter 2

«*Auschwitz would not merely be a “place of affliction”*». Primo Levi, introduction to Rudolf Höss, *Yo, comandante de Auschwitz*, Ediciones B, 2009.

«*The vast, mute piles of bodies that nobody could save*». «We know so much, and in such detail, about those whose lives were saved, just a tiny fraction. And so little about the overwhelming masses of men who lost theirs, of the last light in their eyes that perhaps glimpsed a final chance...!, and about the shattered aftermath». Arcadi Espada, «Gentle is death», in *Aly Herscovitz. Cenizas en la vida europea de Josep Pla*. And also, Álvaro Lozano, *El Holocausto y la cultura de masas*, Melusina, 2010: «Spielberg has made a film about the Holocaust in which practically all the Jews survive».

«*For the previous two years I had been working alongside other writers to trace the life of a woman born in Frankfurt in 1904, who lived in Berlin and ended up in Auschwitz*». [Aly Herscovitz](#).

«... her arrest by the French police on July 22nd, 1942, probably in an apartment in l'Averyon square, in the Batignolles district, recorded as her last residence». The family memoir indicates, through her nephew, Robert Herscovitz, that Aly was actually detained in Vel d'Hiv itself on going there to inquire about the fate of her mother, Chanzie

Potocker, of 59 years old, who was taken early in the morning of the 16th and who would also end up in Auschwitz. What the documents state, in any case, is that she was detained on July 22nd.

Chapter 3

«*Jorge Semprún's pages of La escritura o la vida that so beautifully narrated the murder of a German soldier, while his back was turned*». Jorge Semprún, *La escritura o la vida*, Tusquets, 1995.

«*Should we photograph the body about to commit suicide through the windows of the Twin Towers with the same intention as the joyous flight of an Olympic diver towards the water of the swimming pool?*». www.elmundo.es

Chapter 4

«*While he was in charge of the Spanish legation*». In diplomatic law, the legation has an inferior hierarchy to the Embassy. The Chargé d'Affaires is not an ambassador, but a resident minister.

Chapter 5

«*He had but one sole objective: to leave Hungary and save his lover*». Dalbert Hallenstein and Carlotta Zavattiero, *Giorgio Perlasca: un italiano scomodo*, Chiarelettere, 2010.

«*The evidence, made plain in multiple diplomatic centres around the world*». This was confirmed to be by two sources who were very close to him in very different periods of his life, and who prefer to remain anonymous.

«*The poetic impact of the love-war combination, that affects the protagonists of a story at least as much as its chroniclers*». Over dinner

one night, the film-maker, Jaime Chávarri explained the sexual morals of the victors of the Civil War which, at least over the years immediately following the war, were far laxer than is generally believed: further fruit of the intoxication of victory.

Chapter 6

«The paragraph, taken from his purging file, went on to give an exhaustive account of his rebel merits». «I believe it necessary to make the extremely perilous situation of the diplomatic civil servants, then in Madrid, very clear. This situation was triggered by the prolonged Press campaign against us, that the Madrid-based papers dedicated themselves to fully, and it culminated in the article published in *Informaciones* by the Marxist minister Prieto, who accused us of being directly accountable for the National Movement. This statement, in the mouth of a character such as him, filled us with pride and increased the danger we found ourselves even further.

In the first days of September, I was appointed secretary of the red Embassy in London, a position I accepted as my only way out of an infernal Madrid. In this city, I went out with the count Foxá, Ramón Sáenz de Heredia and Ramón Martínez Artero, among others, all stationed in different red representations abroad [...] A countless number of people, through the red consulate [the government transferred him there from his original post in the embassy], were provided with the documentation allowing them to try and leave the anti-Spain. The Carlist war cabinet, in Burgos, has entrusted me the task of making the necessary inquiries to ascertain the whereabouts and improving the circumstances of the most outstanding elements of the Partido Tradicionalista. The Bureau Espagne de París, directed by Mr. Aunós, has given me numerous tasks that I always fulfil with maximum care and

interest. [...] All of the above is an extremely faithful account of my situation at the outset of the Movement, first in Madrid and later, Abroad. I honestly believe I have fulfilled my duty as a good Spaniard at all times and that my behaviour has been worthy of my two brothers who for some months have been fighting at the orders of the Generalissimo in the advances of the Aragon front; which is why I was so saddened by my impression of the very cold welcome I received from members of the diplomatic corps' purging committee.

In the different interviews I have had with some of them, I appear to deduce that I have been put forward for severe sanctioning, with the implicit possibility of not only being separated from my career but, what is far worse, having serious doubts cast on my honour as a good Spaniard». Ángel Sanz Briz. His actions in relation to the National Movement. Salamanca, April 16th of 1937. AMAE (Archive of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs), P. 705, exp. 44665.

The diplomatic corps' court resolved Ángel Sanz Briz's situation, declaring him «Admitted» on August 22nd, 1938.

«*The other diplomats affected were*». Agustín de Foxá, letter to his brother Jaime (Guetary, September 12th, 1936). Agustín de Foxá, *Nostalgia, intimidad y aristocracia*, Fundación Banco Santander, 2010.

«*When it came to the escape of Miss Pilar Primo de Rivera*». AMAE. Letter from the German secretary Fischer to Ángel Sanz Briz, Salamanca, April 4th, 1937. AMAE, P. 705, exp. 44665.

Chapter 7

«*All the fictitious accounts written or filmed about Sanz Briz*». Diego Carcedo, *Un español frente al Holocausto*, Temas de Hoy, 2000.

Chapter 8

«Thus began his memoirs. At night, the young candidate went to the theatre. And there, Fritz and Gretchen rubbed shoulders with eight thousand spectators raising their arms in a Nazi salute». «Wannsee and Cribintzsee [Griebnitzsee]. Small boats navigate the river, carried by the gentle current. It's a holiday and Fritz and Gretchen are immersed in the cult to Nature. The lakes are like mirrors reflecting the green hills of the landscape.

If there were a Goddess presiding the party, it would be Serenity. The happy and placid faces drink from the joy of life, free of any turmoil or Dionysian excesses. Those rumours of military glories that disturbed us in the Palace of Sans-Souci cannot penetrate this peaceful scene. The good Prussian bourgeoisie, not yet recovered from the atrocious nightmare of the four-year war, throws itself into the delight of a peaceful present, wilful forgetfulness of the glorious and terrible people, fearful of considering, even just in thought, an excessively cloudy future.

But, once the sun has set, the night reigns. We go to the Radio Theatre. An inspection of troops awaits. Cheerful concession to sensuality? Beauty pageant? No. Military parade, rough and ready for war. Succession of German uniforms left in museums for twelve lustrums. The martial inspection is an historical evocation, enjoyable to begin with, as it piques the student interest. Soon the historic element fades, imperceptibly, until what is left before the spectator is none other than the apotheosis of the spirit of war.

The former generations of Germanic Warriors have paraded across the colossal stage. The public suffers all the effects of memory's power of suggestion and leaps up in a clamorous ovation when an evocation of the heroic submarine crews enter stage. But not only is everything a means, but a means to an end. And here, both the end and the means are the apotheosis of Hitlerism, in the parade of the Nazi militia, stamped with the swastika [*sic*].

The eight thousand-strong audience rise from their seats and extend their right arms in a Roman salute. The orchestra plays the Hitlerian hymn and the impressive choir of eight thousand voices soar in the song about revenge, imperial expansion, Caesarean supremacy over the world.

The show sequence has established a fatal correlation between the warrior parades of Frederick the Great and the militias of Hitler. It is all for one and one for all; it is all historic continuity with a purely military spirit. The “heil Hitler” takes on barbaric undertones. The roar unites above us a future of war and that remote past in which the Germans threatened the republican Rome and the Imperial Rome, warming their swords in the waters of the Rhine.

And what about those peaceful bourgeoisies from the lakes of Potsdam? I have here the violent, incomprehensible contrast. The image of the afternoon and the image of the night struggle to superimpose on each other and there is no way to find two homologous lines to make that task possible. Where is Germany? In the peaceful middle-classes seeking the sensual slopes of the meadow and the foliage of the tamed woods, or in this hysterical choir, of people intoxicated with an ideal of war and arrogance?

This contrast constitutes the obsessive memory of our pleasant excursion through Central Europe. It is, quite possibly, somewhat more than an obsession in Germany itself. The psychosis of war, compared to the peaceful anxiety of Fritz and Gretchen, yearning for a life of comfort and serenity forms a dualism too strong to build a reassuring regime on». Ángel Sanz Briz, *Memoria de viaje*, AMAE, P. 705, exp. 44665.

Chapter 10

«*The Spanish legation occupied a Renaissance-style building on Eöt-vös Street*». The building, from the end of the XIX century, was

acquired by the Spanish State in 1920 and is still the headquarters of the Spanish representation in Budapest.

«*Communism had to be crushed in its own backyard*». *Abc*, May 6th, 1943.

«*Giorgio Perlasca had been in Budapest for a year*». Perlasca himself claims to have arrived in October 1942.

«*The Report to Sua Eccellenza the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs*». Dated from Trieste, on October 13th, 1945. There are no major paratextual doubts about it. The Sanz Briz family has a copy of the document that is practically identical to that published in *L'impostore* (Il Mulino, 1997), that Perlasca sent to Sanz Briz, attached to a letter dated February 7th, 1946. The report, however, has a lost precedent: a first draft on the Budapest Winter that Perlasca wrote on his arrival in Turkey on June 6th, 1945, and delivered to the Spanish consul in Istanbul. There is no trace of this report in the archives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (AMAE). The Perlasca family does not have the original or a copy either.

«*The so-called Promemoria*». Perlasca's heirs claim that the original of this document was written in 1946 (as stated in *L'impostore*, Nota ai testi, XXIII), on the initiative of Jenő Lévai, the first researcher of the Hebrew persecution in Hungary. However, Lévai did not take it into consideration when writing his *Black Book* (Eugene Lévai. *Black Book on the martyrdom of Hungarian Jewry*. Ed. by Lawrence P. Davis, The Central European Times Publ. Co. [etc.], 1948) the benchmark work on the persecution of the Hungarian Jews. The original of the *Promemoria* appears to be lost and the version published in *L'impostore*, refers to a re-writing of the text, that Perlasca would have penned in 1950, according to Perlasca's family in the prologue. The original of the re-written text has not, however, been preserved either.

«As there is sustained contrary criteria Your Excellence should abstain».

This paragraph appears in the telegram finally sent to Muguiro and also in the draft, dated October 6th, 1943. But the draft, miraculously preserved in the MAE archives, is far more interesting. For two reasons: the word Perlasca, identifying the subject of the Passport applied for, is crossed out and underneath the handwritten note, «As for the rest consult», there is a typed text, «legation refuge». The telegrammes sent and received from and to Budapest are saved in a number of boxes in the AMAE. The references are R. 1549, exp. 15-16; R. 1546, exp. 15-16; R. 1593, exp. 2; R. 1273, exp. 4.

«Did not find anything in the archives to prove this participation».

However, the Perlasca family still has a lot of photographs that unequivocally prove Perlasca's participation in the Spanish war. On March 21st, 1944, Muguiro again telegraphed his minister to remind him that the matter was still pending: Perlasca had returned in search of protection: and now, due to the German invasion, the application for asylum was urgent. Nonetheless, he would not receive protection until November, when his application was included in the general applications for asylum that were overwhelming the Spanish legation in those dramatic and terminal weeks.

Chapter 11

«Paying their room and board as if they were in a hotel». Manuel Chaves Nogales, *La defensa de Madrid*, Renacimiento, 2010.

«it is confirmed by various sources». A good summary of the right to asylum, in Antonio Manuel Moral Roncal. "El asilo diplomático como condicionante de las relaciones internacionales de la República durante la Guerra Civil", in *Congreso La Guerra Civil Española 1936-1939*, Sociedad Estatal de Conmemoraciones Culturales, 2006.

Chapter 12

«*German motorised divisions*». AMAE, telegrammes n.º 9 and 10, cif. 19th, March 1944.

«*So also was the recipient of the reports in Madrid*». On Hans Lazar: Emilio Sáez Francés, *Entre la antorcha y la esvástica*, Actas, 2009. And also, José Manuel Irujo, "[Los espías Nazis que salvó Franco](#)", in *El País*, January 26th, 2003.

«*Budapest partied on*». Eugenio Suárez, *Corresponsal en Budapest*, Fundación Mapfre, 2007. The first edition: Ediciones Aspas, 1946.

«*Could you tell me in what circumstances Eugenio Suárez saved your life?*». Correspondence with Georges Angyal. August 12th and 16th, 2010.

«*The last account of the moment of the Nazi invasion was personal*». Sanz Briz Archive. The letter is dated March 21st, 1943, but that is obviously an error.

«*Badoglio*». Pietro Badoglio. Italian prime minister after the fall of Mussolini, in July 1943.

«*Ferrariis*». Carlo de Ferrariis Balzano. Chargé d'Affaires of the Italian legation in Budapest. Detained in March 1944. He has written unpublished memoirs, stored by his family.

«*Voli*». Emilio Voli. Military adviser to the Italian Embassy in Budapest.

«*Mme. Dampierre*». Wife of the French ambassador in Budapest.

«*Gyula*». Gyula Dessewffy (1909-2000). Journalist. He militated in the opposition movements against the pro-German governments. In 1939, he started directing the newspaper, *Kis Újság*. During the war, as he recounts in his memoirs, the Swedish diplomat, Per

Anger, remained hidden in Wallenberg's house. Éva Dessewffy, nee Bársony (1908-?). Wife of Gyula. She was a refugee in Villa Széchenyi, the official residence of Sanz Briz, for a number of weeks.

«*Without realizing she was pregnant*». Paloma Sanz-Briz Quijano was born in Madrid, in the clinic of Doctor Luque, on October 17th, 1944, following a normal pregnancy and birth. Hence, her mother must have left Budapest towards the end of January.

«*In another subsequent letter*». April 17th, 1944. Sanz Briz Archive.

«*The destruction of literary works written by Jews*». Extract from new rulings of the Hungarian government against the country's Jewish population, Muguero, April 1944, in David Salinas, *España, los sefarditas y el Tercer Reich (1939-1945)*.

«*The new puppet government*». At the start of the month, Muguero informed his minister Jordana that the Hungarian government wanted «an urgent reply» to its request for approval of its representative in Madrid. Hungary was aspiring to a minister-level representation, but the Spanish government did not appear convinced. Which is why Muguero added the description of other neutral nations' intentions regarding similar requests to his telegram. Within two days Jordana replied that the Hungarian representation needed to remain in the hands of an acting chargé d'affaires. At the same time, and «given the delicate nature of the problem» he recalled Muguero and instructed him «not to accept any commitment whatsoever meanwhile». The last telegram from the Spanish diplomat was extremely succinct: «I will arrive in Berlin by plane on Wednesday twenty-eighth regards to Your Excellence». He never returned to Budapest. Hence, his departure was not in fact due to his criticism of the anti-Jewish measures of the Hungarian government.

Chapter 14

«*The first telegram Sanz Briz sent to his minister*». The letter is dated May 17th, 1944, but was sent by Sanz Briz to the ministry on June 19th, 1944.

«*And therefore stands for contrast and apostasy*». Annexed to dispatch 114. AMAE, R. 1716, exp. 1-5.

«*His correspondent, the president of the Cabinet, Döme Sztójay, was extremely frank in his reply*». Döme Sztójay was Prime minister from March 22nd to August 29th, 1944.

Chapter 15

«*Probably in the Soviet zone*». A few lines from the letter say: «Please, write me immediately, if possible by airmail, which zone you live in (I assume the Russian zone)».

Chapter 16

«*The spread of new anti-Semitic measures*». AMAE, June 25th, 1944. R. 1716, exp. 1-5.

«*Was in Lisbon with two eminent Jewish leaders*». Eliahu Dobkin, from the Executive Committee of the Jewish Agency for Palestine and Izaak Weissmann, from the World Jewish Congress.

«*What Suárez didn't know was that the book had finally been published*». Javier Martínez de Bedoya, *Memorias desde mi aldea*, Ámbito Ediciones, 1996.

«*Bernd Rother*». *Franco y el Holocausto*, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2001, under the title *Spanien und der Holocaust*. The Spanish translation is from 2005 and is published by Marcial Pons.

Chapter 18

«*The essence of Catholicism is anti-racist*». Semanario *FE*, January 11th, 1934.

«*Are you Anti-Semitic?*». Martínez de Bedoya, *op. cit.*

«*Since the spring of 1943, he had been wrestling with the Falangist wing of the government*». The conversation between Jordana and Pérez, in Rother, *op. cit.*

«*His secretary, a multilingual German Jew called Ernesto Bacharach*». Martínez de Bedoya, *op. cit.*

«*Benevolent neutrality of the world's Jews towards National Spain*». Bedoya says that he had these words in writing and that he read them literally to the Jews.

«*Jordana's tone had always been one of resistance against the Nazis*». At least in his second term as Minister for Foreign Affairs, from 1942 to 1944.

Chapter 19

«*Setting aside the race transmitting it*». AMAE, R. 698, exp. 1.

«*What resonates with Foxá*». There is no doubt whatsoever that Foxá was perfectly familiar with the entire anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish rhetoric, as he demonstrated in his unfinished novel, *Misión en Bucarest* (Prensa Española, 1965), in which there is an abundance of repulsive paragraphs.

«*Other melancholic patriots*». Ernesto Giménez Caballero. As director of *La Gaceta Literaria*, he paid great cultural, but also political, attention to the Sephardi legacy, and had a decisive influence on the Republic's decision to grant a special legal statute to members of this Jewish community scattered through-

out the world, through the Minister for Justice, Fernando de los Ríos.

«*Sovereign pride*». See Rother, *op. cit.*

Chapter 20

«*The meeting in Lisbon's Tivoli Bar was so positive*». Bedoya erroneously dates the meeting between the ambassador and the Jewish representatives as April 8th, 1944. His error was detected, among other reasons, thanks to the letter dated April 9th from Ambassador Franco to Minister Jordana, the first lines of which say: «Dear friend and minister: Through our press officer, I have requested an audience with the “World Jewish Congress” delegate, Isaac Weisman, applying for our support in the case reflected in the attached note». Bedoya's confusion may be due to the fact that April 8th was the date on which the ambassador was informed of the need to meet with the Jews. The tone of the letter and this handwritten note in the margin: «Make you aware of what has been done in this case and what we have been doing for the Sephardis», confirm that, as Bedoya explains in his book, the ambassador was not particularly abreast of what Bedoya and Jordana had been up to.

«*I wrote a quick draft report for Jordana*». There is in fact a record of it, with number and date, in the archive of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. In handwriting, and on the first page, it says: «17-444 Jordana report», leading to the conclusion that the final version of the report was sent on this date.

«*The first issue was to save the four hundred Jews in Greece*». Martínez de Bedoya, *op. cit.*

«*Our ambassadors in Berlin and Athens*». Martínez de Bedoya, *ibid.*

«*The event is described in documented detail*». Matilde Morcillo, *Sebastián de Romero Radigales y los sefardíes españoles de Grecia durante el Holocausto*, Metáfora Ediciones, 2008.

«*A letter to ambassador Franco*». AMAE, R. 5662, exp. 25-26. The letter is an unsigned copy, but it can be attributed to Bedoya without a doubt. The details in the first lines could not have been written by anyone else: «My dear Ambassador and friend: After repeatedly telephoning you at the Ritz, with no reply, I did not have the pleasure of placing myself at your orders on the day You left. In any case, the minister has informed me that you wished to discuss the Sephardi issue».

«*So much time was lost*». AMAE, R. 5662, exp. 25-26.

Chapter 21

«*For a number of weeks, he had been staying in a very peculiar family hotel comprising a Hungarian jeweller, by the name of Gabor, who had escaped from Budapest, his wife and three daughters*». José Luis de Vilallonga, *La cruda y tierna verdad*, Plaza y Janés, 2000.

«*It's possible that Magda Gabor was Vilallonga's lover*». Eugenio Suárez says that the Arrow Cross «deliberately» mistreated the Portuguese Ambassador «because of the personal protection he gave to the pretty Hebrew lady». In addition, they slandered him in an official note in the press, without mentioning his name, communicating «the presence of a certain neutral diplomat “whose behaviour and lack of morals was repulsive to all virile conception”». Suárez, quoting «true sources», sustains that the Ambassador was the Minister for Foreign Affairs and that he ended up punching the sub-secretary that received him. Because they did not mention the name of the diplomat, Angelo Rotta also went over there «to

humbly beg a clarification» as «he could find himself affected by the suspicion». Suárez, *op. cit.*

«In 1945 when the mother and her sisters travelled to America from Lisbon she herself was at the port to welcome them.». Jolie Gabor, *Jolie Gabor. As told to Cindy Adams*, Mason/Charter, 1975.

Chapter 24

«The massive liquidation of Jews continues». The report is not dated, but the events described allow us to date it, approximately but quite definitely, around the summer of 1943. On August 22nd of that year, Federico Oliván, assistant to Ginés Vidal in Berlin, wrote a letter to an unidentified correspondent, probably the minister for Foreign Affairs, in which, after describing the desperate situation of the Jews, he includes this paragraph: «So that you see for yourself that it is not just my pessimism or exaggeration, I am attaching a copy of some paragraphs from the letter that one of our representatives in Central Europe wrote to the Ambassador today. There is no need for me to comment on it, as it very eloquently speaks for itself». According to our hypotheses, this «representative in Central Europe» was the Spanish representative in Poland, Casimiro Granzow, who, in reality, was the one to inform Ginés Vidal about Treblinka.

«They assure me that the number of Israelis deported is as high as 500,000». Dispatch from Sanz Briz to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. AMAE, July 16th, 1944. R. 1716, exp. 1-5.

«Thus, in all likelihood, Sanz Briz was the first Spanish diplomat to inform the Francoist government of the Auschwitz killings». Martínez de Bedoya explains in his memoir that he received general news of the mass murders at the start of 1944: «Finally, I would like to specify that it was Giacobi [one of his Jewish contacts in Lisbon]

who explained to me when I met him in January of this year 1944, that the gas chambers, with all of their tragic implacability, ultimately represent an almost yearned-for end to horrific suffering in a series of detention and torture camps that have been created by the Nazis in different parts of Poland». Martínez de Bedoya, *op. cit.*

«Please find attached a report on the treatment Jews are condemned to in the German concentration camps». On March 21st, 2010, the newspaper *El País* published in its usual rhetorical tone when dealing with these sorts of cases («Franco knew») an article on this report. Of the many inaccuracies in the text, two must be corrected. The first is that this report, given the July precedent, was not the first time Sanz Briz informed his government of the hypothesis of the mass killings. Secondly, the text was not hidden «in a folder with “not to be shown” written on it». Or at least the copy Sergio Campos consulted in the AMAE archive wasn't. It was included in a perfectly conventional folder labelled: «Copies and duplicates» (AMAE, R. 1716, exp. 5). Furthermore, the first page of the report entitled *Rapports sur les camps de «travail» de Birkenau et d'Auschwitz [sic]* bears the seal of the Spanish legation in Budapest and the writing: «Annexed to dispatch 160 from the Legation of Spain in Budapest, August 26th, 1944», without any further indications, unlike other documents of a theoretically confidential or secret nature.

«The name Auschwitz was first linked to mass killings». *Los Angeles Times*, March 22nd, 1944: «London, March 21st (AP) —The Polish Minister for Information today informed us that over 500,000 people, the majority Jews, have been led to their deaths in a concentration camp in Oswiecim [Auschwitz is written Oświęcim, in correct Polish script], to the south-west of Krakow. In a long report on the Nazi atrocities, the minister stated that three crematoriums have been built within the camp to dispose of the ten

thousand daily bodies. It is said that the gas chambers were adjacent to the crematoriums. The report states that men, women and children arrive in cargo trucks and are led to the gas chambers, where the execution takes between 10 and 15 minutes, but as the supply of poisonous gas is limited, some people are not dead when thrown into the crematorium».

«*Nazis Massacre 700,000 Polish Jews*». *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, July 3rd, 1942.

Chapter 25

«*Never resting, firm in his arduous task, toiling night and day*». *Abc*, August 4th, 1944.

«*I lost my balance and shot out of there like a rocket, hitting another rock and opening up a great gash on my forehead*». Francisco Gómez-Jordana Souza, *Milicia y diplomacia: diarios del conde de Jordana 1936-1944*, Dossoles, 2002.

«*According to subsequent deductions, this accident was the cause of his sudden death a few days later*». Gómez-Jordana, *ibid*.

«*The drawer the letter was in had been forced and the letter taken*». Gómez-Jordana, *op. cit*.

Chapter 27

«*The first thing the new minister said was that Spain had just one foreign policy and it was the work of Franco*». In a fragment of his inaugural speech, José Félix de Lequerica declared: «Spain has just one foreign policy, State policy, Movement policy, that is not personal, regardless of whomsoever is entrusted to implement it in their posts». *Abc*, August 13th, 1944.

«Bedoya was well aware of that «boisterous Germanophile's» quick and clever capacity to adapt.». «It was not easy to imagine who Franco might appoint Minister for Foreign Affairs in such delicate circumstances. And he surprised everyone, of course he did, by appointing a boisterous Germanophile like our then ambassador in Vichy. However, Franco's reaction was framed against a very classic psychological backdrop in him: suspicion and the search for a committed man. Against his fear of a minister who would dedicate himself excessively to the certain victors, he considered it necessary to exalt a man, one of a numerous platoon of those initially confused, who would not have correctly guessed the outcome of the war. He continued to apply that same criteria, before and after the end of the war, with a series of diplomatic appointments until 1950, such as Manuel Aznar for Washington, José M^a de Areilza for Buenos Aires, José M^a Alfaro for Bogotá and Manuel Valdés for Santo Domingo. But he got it wrong in the case of José Félix de Lequerica because he, an acutely intelligent man, overcoming his natural temperament, immediately realised that he had no cards of his own to play in the big world that surrounds us and that he had no choice but to polish up his very best Americophilia, as between a rock and a hard place, he considered it wise to choose the most powerful and youngest of the victors». Martínez de Bedoya, *op. cit.*

«The prototypical cynic too busy with himself to have time to hurt anyone». José Luis de Vilallonga, *op. cit.*

«It's true that in his period as ambassador in Paris he observed the Jewish tragedy with enormous passiveness and without once losing his calm». On November 20th, 1940, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Serrano Suñer, the Ambassador of Spain, Lequerica, the consul in Paris, Rolland de Miotta and Otto Abetz, the German Ambassador, met. At this meeting, the Spaniards sustained that their subjects should be excluded from the Anti-Jewish regulations decreed by

the authorities. Nonetheless, the facts show that Lequerica, on the orders of the Spanish Foreign Secretary, always imposed an extremely cautious attitude in this respect, in spite of the best efforts of the consuls, Rolland de Miotta and Propper de Callejón. «The Spanish government cannot raise difficulties, even in the case of its subjects of Jewish origin, to prevent them being subjected to general measures, and should simply consider itself informed of said measures and ultimately not interfere with the execution of the same, maintaining a passive attitude». (Rother, page 156). The numerous communications the Spanish consuls in France sent to the Embassy, reflect the anguish of the Jews begging for a protection they never received. One of the paradigmatic cases was that of the Rosanes couple, killed in Auschwitz.

«*The Apostolic Nuncio, Angelo Rotta, had called a meeting of the neutral nations with diplomatic representation in Budapest*». Spain, Portugal, Switzerland and Sweden were the neutral countries with diplomatic accreditation in Hungary.

«*We feel obliged to vehemently protest such procedure*» and «*the undersigned considered it wise to adopt the same attitude*». AMAE. Letter from Sanz Briz to Lequerica, August 22nd, 1944.

«*Consider it advisable to agree on actions in friendly tone and polite indication avoiding protestation*». AMAE, telegram n.º 56, August 23rd, 1944.

«*Conditional to their holding regular documentation and not being people of Jewish condition*». AMAE, telegram n.º 59, September 6th, 1944.

«*The Germanophile quickly transformed into the cynic*». Martínez de Bedoya, *op. cit.*

«*He had received a call from Franco Salgado-Araujo*». Franco Salgado-Araujo, cousin of the dictator, is the author of one of the truest

and most disturbing books on Francoism: *Mis conversaciones privadas con Franco*, Planeta, 1976.

«Hereinafter, everything you formerly sent directly to Jordana, you now ensure it reaches El Pardo». Martínez de Bedoya, *op. cit.*

«Tell the Jews that their issue in Budapest is all resolved». *Ibid.*

«He communicated his best intentions regarding the Hungarian Jews to the North American embassy». AMAE, R. 1716, exp. 4.

«But the note has never ceased to ooze the drooling eagerness of the writer to fulfil the wishes of his new master». «... has the honour to communicate to you that the corresponding orders to the minister of Spain in that country have been dispatched so that it may proceed to approve travel visas for all those passports of Jewish subjects presented for this purpose. Furthermore, instructions have been issued to take an active interest in proceeding close to the Hungarian government and occupying German authorities, [and] to facilitate the exit from Hungary of the aforementioned subjects. Thus, this Ministry believes that the Government of Spain through this measure will do everything in its power to reach a positive outcome of the aforementioned problem and it has demonstrated its will to invest maximum interest and effort». AMAE, R. 1716, exp. 4.

Chapter 28

«Huge number of victims and destruction». AMAE, telegrammes n.º 93, 97, 99f.

«I believe the time has come to obtain said protection». AMAE, telegram n.º 84, encoded, August 28th, 1944.

«He was not only requesting protection for himself». «Madame Tourné, who has been employed in this Representation for the last 24

years, and the Legal Adviser, Mr. Farkas, request authorisation to reside with their families in this Legation in the event of an invasion of Hungary by the Red Army. I beg you send an urgent reply». AMAE, telegram, n.º 95 encoded.

«*Minister Lequerica granted his authorisation in the first instance*». «In reply to your telegram n.º 95 regarding employees Tourné and Farkas, you have my authorisation». AMAE, telegram n.º 61, of September 18th, 1944.

«*It is inadvisable to give an impression of excessive precipitation*». AMAE, telegrammes n.º 63 and 64.

Chapter 30

«*Respectfully request a new nomination of Mr. Farkas*». AMAE, telegram n.º 178. Legation of Spain in Budapest.

«*For his complete capacity, gentlemanliness and honour, and for his absolute adhesion to the national regime*». Giorgio Perlasca, *L'impostore*. In the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' documents on Farkas, his second name is stated as Astorga. However, this surname is actually a mystery. Because Farkas' mother was called Rosa Hirschler. The Zoltán Farkas file in AMAE, PG 387.

Chapter 31

«*The secretary of National Spanish representation in Budapest is Jewish*». AMAE. (Madame Tourné file, PG 463). The complaint bears the stamp of the *Comisaría General de la Jefatura de Seguridad Interior. Orden Público e Inspección de Fronteras Sección de Orden Público*.

«*At that time, the head of the Spanish representation in Budapest, whom the informer accused of ignorance of Madame Tourné's movements, was Carlos Arcos y Cuadra*». On the relationship between

the Hungarian and the Spanish governments at that time: Iván Harsányi. “La diplomacia húngara sobre los grupos de poder del primer franquismo (1938-1939)” in *Acta Hispanica*, vol. V (2000), pages 7-24. and Matilde Eiroa, *Las relaciones de Franco con Europa Centro-Oriental (1939-1955)*, Ariel, 2001.

Chapter 32

«*On the upcoming day of victory, the undefeated sword of the General, like that of the Archangel, will fall on the damned head of the Israeli beast*». Martínez Tomás in *Domingo: semanario nacional*, April 3rd, 1938.

«*Along with Manuel Aznar and Josep Pla, he was one of those who entered Barcelona in January of 1939, shortly after Franco's troops, and took control of La Vanguardia*». For further details on Antonio Martínez Tomás, see the corresponding profile by the journalist, Jaume Fabre, in *Periodistes uniformats: diaris barcelonins dels anys 40: la represa i la repressió*, Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya, 1996.

«*From the outset, I had been drawn to the Allied cause and I believed it would end up victorious, which in my mind was fair and just, and that the Nazi barbarianism would not triumph*». Martínez Tomás in *Diario de Barcelona*, March 28th, 1976.

«*In a vivid chronicle of the outbreak of the Civil War in Madrid, published in 1939, the adjective Jew unashamedly reappeared*». *La Vanguardia española*, July 18th, 1939.

«*In 1976, Martínez Tomás was willing to die a democrat*». And a democrat Antonio Martínez Tomás continues to be. A stupid, recent book entitled *El franquismo, cómplice del Holocausto* (Libros de Vanguardia, 2012), written by a journalist from *La Vanguardia*, edits out all trace of Francoism in a summary and propagandist

style. With the exception, funnily enough, of Martínez Tomás, journalist of *La Vanguardia*, who is presented as a sort of Allies' spy and whose proven anti-Semitism is not even mentioned once; nor, since we're talking about summary prose, is the fact that he was a witness for the prosecution against Gaziél, director of the newspaper when the war broke out.

«The conduct of this civil servant has been praise-worthy and honourable». AMAE, annexed to dispatch 127 from the Embassy of Spain in Budapest to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. PG 463.

Chapter 33

«Madame Tourné was responsible for taking the Spanish legation archive to Vienna». AMAE, telegram n.º 70, October 13th, 1944. On October 2nd, another telegram, number 80, insisted that Sanz Briz was «fully authorised to take those measures indicated at the end of said telegram [70] and all those necessary to ensure personal safety and that of the Legation».

Chapter 34

«Happily, Adela had a baby girl». AMAE, telegram n.º 76. October 18th, 1944.

«Our Budapest Legation to extend protection to larger number of Jews persecuted as he assured me Sweden is already doing. Claimed Sweden sent a special Delegate, Mr. Wallenberg». AMAE, telegram n.º 1.007, October 20th.

«Please inform how this appeal can be attended with the utmost benevolence and humanity, endeavouring to seek practical solutions to ensure this Legation is as effective as possible». AMAE, telegram n.º 78, October 23rd, 1944.

«Sanz Briz quickly replied that there were no Sephardis in Hungary and that the only effective protection formula for the persecuted was to provide them with Spanish passports». AMAE, telegram n.º 117, October 25th, 1944: «If you deem it appropriate, passports with a validity of three months could be issued, specifying the holders are protected subjects and the impossibility of renewal without the specific order of this Ministry. However, we cannot guarantee that applications after October 15th will be accepted, date of the Coup d'état. Swedish representative has issued five thousand protective passports and Portuguese representative seven hundred. Please reply urgently».

«I approve formula proposed, investing utmost effort in effective protection and broadly authorizing you to do whatever necessary for this purpose». AMAE, telegram n.º 82, October 27th, 1944.

«For the last three years, Spain has been repeatedly accepting any applications presented by the Jewish communities». Minister Lequerica duly informed his ambassador in Washington -and also in London- of all the measures carried out by Sanz Briz. As recorded, among other documents, in this text dated October 28th and in the three-page long telegram n.º 801, sent on November 16th, 1944. Fundación Nacional Francisco Franco (FNFF), doc. 15643.

«"Forceful" could not, under any circumstance, describe Spain's policy in relation to the Nazis». On September 15th, 1961, an informative note was written, theoretically for Minister Castiella, under the subject «Political aspect of Spain's protection of the Sephardis during the II World War». The fourteen-page note is highly critical of Franco's government. It particularly underlines the anguished calls that the Berlin Embassy made to the minister imploring him to extend the period of protection for the Jews in Greece; and it clearly expounds the efforts of Ginés Vidal Saura, Federico Oliván and Sebastián de Romero Radigales (without naming them) to

save the largest possible number of Jews. «The pleas from our representatives in Athens and Berlin were anguished». The note, from the AMAE, has been kindly provided to us by Professor Isidro González. This criticism contrasts starkly with other writings that are kinder to the Francoist government, filed in the Foreign Ministry library: *España y los judíos*, Oficina de Información Diplomática, 1949. And, Emilio Bárcena, “Franco y los judíos”, in *Tierra santa*, n.º 563-564, Jan.-Feb. 1976, pages. 26-34.

«*The Spanish government cannot place obstacles, even in the case of its subjects of Jewish origin, to prevent them being subjected to general measure*». AMAE, Ministry for Foreign Affairs to the Consul-General in Paris, November 5th, 1940. R. 1716, exp. 2. Also in Rother, *op. cit.*

«*At this meeting, in opposition to the instruction from Lequerica to De Miotta, Serrano maintained that their subjects should be excluded from the anti-Jewish regulations decreed by the French authorities*». Auswärtiges Amt, Politisches Archiv (Berlin), R. 103195, November 21st, 1940. Also in Rother, *ibid.*

«*Another is the heartrending letter from their daughter Elisa, aged 19, to an unidentified Spanish authority, perhaps to Ambassador Lequerica himself*». Archivo General de la Administración (Alcalá de Henares). Letter from Elisa Rosanes, October 29th, 1943. Archivo General de la Administración (AGA), AAEE, 11329.

«*The Rosanes parents died in Auschwitz*». [The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names.](#)

Chapter 36

«*Sanz Briz set to work issuing salvation passports with the help of Madame Tourné*». AMAE, telegram n.º 129, November 2nd, 1944.
«Protection is subject to, firstly: said Jews must set forth from

Hungary to Spain before November 15th. Secondly: the Spanish Government must acknowledge the Hungarian government and support its representative in Madrid to take possession of the Legation properties and carry out its functions». The diplomatic recognition never arrived.

«*With a politically obvious objective the young diplomat advised his minister to acquaint Washington with this last fact*». AMAE, *ibid.* On May 23rd, 1944, the Spanish high commissioner in Morocco communicated to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Madrid the request from the Jewish colonies in Tangier and Tetuan for an entrance permit to Tangier for five hundred Hungarian Jewish children. In exchange, five hundred Jewish refugees from central Europe living in Tangier would leave the country and pay the maintenance costs. The person who instigated the departure of the five hundred children is known to have been Mrs. Renée Reichmann, from a family of ultraorthodox Hungarian Jews who emigrated to the United States, who was dedicated to sending humanitarian aid to the Jews in the Nazi concentration camps from Tangier. Both the high commissioner and the Spanish government agreed and procedures were begun in June of 1944 (details in Rother, *op. cit.*, pages. 364 et seq. and in Isabelle Rohr, *The Spanish Right and the Jews, 1898-1945: Antisemitism and Opportunism*, Sussex Academic Press, 2008). The Germans refused the departure, as recorded in a note in the margin of a Ministry document, dated July 3rd, 1944. Both the International Red Cross, through the mediation of its delegate Friedrich Born, and the Spanish embassy, through the lawyer, Zoltán Farkas, continued the meetings and the battle to protect the children (details in Ernő Munkács, *Hogyan történt?: Adatok és okmányok a magyar zsidóság tragédiájához*, Renaissance Kiadás, 1947, pages 208-212). The procedures gave rise to actions in the Embassy. On August 28th, Sanz Briz communicated that Hungary had approved the departure. Until

it took place, they would remain under the protection of the International Red Cross delegate in Budapest, Friedrich Born, who would also pay the maintenance costs. This latter, sent a letter to Sanz Briz on December 1st, 1944, confirming that Otto Komoly and László Samosi would be responsible for the children as employees of the Spanish legation ([The Strochlitz Institute for Holocaust Research, The Hungarian Collection, H3h8](#)). On August 31st, the delegate communicated to the Red Cross headquarters in Geneva that Germany would not authorise the departure, which is why he proposed housing them in various Red Cross houses. This organisation sent a telegram to the Jewish community in Tangier, informing them of the protection. In light of the success of the first application, the community requested the protection of another seven hundred Jews in Budapest through new entrance visas, in September of 1944. The Ministry granted the visas, but apparently the Hungarian government did not acknowledge them. Sanz Briz makes no reference to these two cases in his report of December 14th.

At the end of the war, as the documentation available in the AMAE demonstrates, (R. 1716, exp. 5), Renée Reichmann assumed that the children had been deported (letter of July 27th, 1945). This was not the case. Nor did they return to Spain, as some researchers maintain, but they stayed in Budapest under the responsibility of the Red Cross Committee. The negotiations between the delegates of the Red Cross in Budapest and the Hungarian authorities on these children is documented in the book by Arie Ben-Tov, *Facing the Holocaust in Budapest*, Henry Dunant Institute, 1988, pages 357 et seq. Giorgio Perlasca makes numerous references to «our children», located in protected orphanages.

«I believe I will very soon have to use the authorization granted in Your Excellence's telegram [number] 80». AMAE, telegram n.º 133, November 5th. Telegram n.º 80, sent by the ministry to Budapest

on October 25th, 1944, said: «If you deem the situation foreseen in my telegram n.º 70 to have arrived, you are fully authorised to take all measures indicated at the end of said telegram and all those required to ensure both personal and Legation safety».

Chapter 37

«He brought with him a revolver, a casual suit, a tuxedo and a long trench coat». Elisabet Szel, *El chico que quería ser héroe*, Manuscript.

«*He was newlywed and could remain with his wife, sweet Eva*». Szel, *op. cit.*

«*I went to speak to Eva*». The conversation took place on September 20th, 2011.

Chapter 38

«*His change of tone was apparent in his verbal notes, published in 2010 by the researcher, Erzsébet Dobos, in the book Salvados: documento y memoria sobre la protección española en Budapest durante el Holocausto*». The book was written in Hungarian (author's edition, 2010). The quotes are from the unpublished Italian translation, kindly provided by the Fundación Giorgio Perlasca.

«*The Spanish Embassy vehemently protests against said facts which constitute a breach of the promises made by the Royal Ministry to the Embassy*». Verbal note, November 8th, 1944, in Erzsébet Dobos, *Salvados: documento y memoria sobre el salvamento español en Budapest durante el Holocausto*, Author's edition, 2010.

«*The Nazis obliged them to frequently change address or had already sent them to concentration camps*». November 9th, 1944, *ibid.*

«*The Hungarian government used the fate of the Jews to force diplomatic acknowledgement*». It used the same tactic with the rest of the neutral nations. Only the Vatican went so far as to recognise the government of the Hungarian Nazis.

«*The Spanish government turned to avoidance tactics. It claimed that the fact of Sanz Briz continuing in Budapest was proof that “there had not been any rupture or discontinuity at any time”*». Telegram from Lequerica to Sanz Briz. AMAE, telegram n.º 90, November 10th, 1944.

«*He had issued provisional passports to three-hundred Jews with family in Spain and close to two thousand letters of protection to all those who had managed to demonstrate any Spanish link whatsoever*». AMAE, telegram n.º 143, November 13th, 1944.

«*The Danish ambassador had returned to Copenhagen after recovering for two weeks in a hospital from the wounds inflicted by the Arrow Cross Party members when they stole his official car*». AMAE, telegram n.º 145, November 16th, 1944.

«*Accompanied by an employee of this chancellery, to collect Spanish Jews from the endless caravan travelling on foot towards the German border*». AMAE, telegram n.º 149-150, November 17th, 1944.

«*But of most importance was the allusion to the caravan of Jews and the humanitarian intervention of the Spanish legation*». Erzsébet Dobos: «After said note [she is referring to the verbal note that Sanz Briz read to the Minister for Foreign Affairs on the same day, November 16th, alluded to in his telegram 145] the Minister for Foreign Affairs intervened and the police commissioner Batizfalvy, accompanied by the legal adviser of the Embassy of Spain, visited said towns [that the march passed through] on November 17th and 18th. On Batizfalvy and his relationship with the Spanish, see also *Die Ermordung der Europäischen Juden: eine umfassende*

Dokumentation des Holocaust, 1941-1945, Hrsg. von Peter Longerich, Piper, 1989, pages 418-421. The minutes of a meeting in the Swedish Embassy is mentioned (the date of which is corrected by Rother: November 22nd, 1944) describing the actions of the diplomats in the caravans. Batizfalvy appears, possibly due to an error, as the Spanish representative.

Chapter 39

«*Our protected persons were today between Komárom and Győr*». Dobos, *op. cit.*

«*And that was the end of the marchers*». Raul Hilberg, *La destrucción de los judíos europeos*, Akal, 2005.

«*While I was in the safe house I'd take off the yellow star and go with Sanz Briz to the work camps*». Dobos, *op. cit.*

«*Maybe what she said was true and now I'm making her look like a fibber*». Telephonic conversation, June 30th, 2012.

Chapter 41

«*It's likely that the neutral countries that had met on Rotta's request a few weeks earlier and had reiterated their demand for an end to the atrocities*». AMAE, telegram n.º 144, November 14th, 1944.

«*Wallenberg's activity, as he had rented some houses in the summer, soon after arriving in Budapest. His reports and the memoirs of some of his assistants confirm this*». Raoul Wallenberg, *Letters and Dispatches, 1924-1944*, Arcade Publishing, 1995; Per Anger, *With Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest*, USHMM, 1996; Lars G. Berg, *The Book that Disappeared: What happened in Budapest*, Vantage Press, 1990.

«*But the Swedish embassy's activity could not be compared with any other*». And certainly it was not comparable to the Spanish. Right from the beginning. From the very reasons that led Wallenberg and Sanz Briz to find themselves in Budapest that troubled winter. Sanz Briz had been sent by the routine of his career. The Swede by an express mandate of his government that consisted of saving the biggest possible number of Jews. Wallenberg had a great number of assistants at his disposal: up to three hundred people are estimated to have collaborated with him at one point or another. A salvation industry. There were never more than eight buildings under Spanish protection. The Swedes had over thirty. The protection extended by the Spanish Legation formally reached a total of around three-thousand people. The Swedes at the very least tripled that figure.

«*Who doesn't recall, in the red Madrid, the actions of...?*». The idea of spreading the concept of extraterritoriality to other buildings was even more familiar to Sanz Briz who, unlike Bedoya, knew that Madrid of the embassies, not through the accounts of others, but as an active and dangerous fifth-columnist. But in any case, in that Budapest, it had occurred to Wallenberg before anyone else. Bedoya, *op. cit.*

Chapter 43

«*Inconsistencies reduce the ease of our thoughts and the clarity of our feelings*». Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Debate, 2012. In his book, Kahneman himself defines the halo effect in these words: «If you like the president's politics, you probably like his voice and his appearance as well. The tendency to like (or dislike) everything about a person— including things you have not observed— is known as the *halo effect*».

Chapter 44

«As the snows have begun and railway transport is practically unusable».

AMAE, telegram of November 24th, 1944.

«The Russian column advancing from the East». AMAE, telegram of November 26th, 1944.

«In spite of the best intentions of the Minister for Foreign Affairs».

AMAE, telegram of November 26th, 1944.

«The Ministry for Foreign Affairs tells me that Budapest has been declared a war zone». AMAE, telegram of November 29th, 1944.

«The Hungarian Government will not be responsible for the incidents that occur after their departure». AMAE, telegram of November 29th, 1944.

«Mines have begun to be placed all over the part of Budapest located on the eastern side of the Danube in an area that is metres deep».

AMAE, telegram of December 1st, 1944.

«I believe the time has come to abandon this country». AMAE, telegram of December 3rd, 1944.

«The Ministry for Foreign Affairs tells me he has officially invited the legations to abandon Budapest in light of the grave situation posed by Bolshevik occupation (?). Travel tomorrow». AMAE, telegram of December 6th, 1944.

Chapter 45

«His minister Lequerica simply reminded him once of what he had told him». AMAE, telegram of November 27th, 1944.

«The relative comprehension among the Hungarian Nazis of the Spanish humanitarian work». «We were able to house many thousands [sic]

of persecuted Jews in these buildings who, I can state with pride, owe their lives to General Franco. The success of the initiative was so pronounced that the special Delegate, sent from Geneva by the International Red Cross, to endeavour to save the persecuted Jews, came to see me and ask me what system I followed to cause the Arrow Cross [sic], generally so arbitrary and inhumane, to respect the houses under Spanish protection». Isaac R. Molho. «Un hidalgo español al servicio de Dios y la Humanidad en Budapest», in *Tesoro de los judíos sefardíes*, Jerusalén, 1964, vol. VII, pages. 32-40.

«A charge that demonstrates his monarchical leanings, and one that almost had a negative effect on his career when a few months later Satrústegui revealed to the Francoist authorities that the diplomat, Sanz Briz, had been the messenger». Testimony of Adela Sanz-Briz.

Chapter 46

«He issued passports to any Jew who asked the Embassy for help». «I converted the two-hundred units granted to me into two-hundred families; and the two-hundred families multiplied indefinitely through the simple gesture of not issuing the Jews with any document or passport bearing a number higher than two-hundred. These documents were drawn up in the Legation of Spain in numerous series, identifying each one with the letters of the alphabet». Molho, *op. cit.*

«And even, without the knowledge or authorisation of his government, gave asylum to the persecuted in the actual building of the Spanish legation itself». «You must remember that the decision to house people in the properties of the Legation was my own initiative, without prior permission from Madrid, and motivated by the prevailing terror in the Hungarian capital at the time». Letter from

Ángel Sanz Briz to Giorgio Perlasca, San Francisco, California, December 4th, 1945, Sanz-Briz Family Archive.

«*He has left with the agreement of his government*». «The Spanish government did not wish to leave a diplomatic civil servant in Budapest who lacked any status in the eyes of the invading forces, as the situation was completely different than, for instance, that of Romania when the Soviet troops occupied the country after reaching a pact with the legitimate government that, at that time, was under King Michael». Molho, *op. cit.*

Chapter 47

«*I had just one concern: what might become of our protected persons once we had disappeared from there*». *Heraldo de Aragón*, June 12th, 1949. Fifteen years later, in Molho, *op. cit.*, Sanz Briz gave a different version of his acts in the face of «the Hungarian authority», which he identified with the *gauleiter* [German word for the local authority of the Nazi Party] of Budapest and its province. In Molho's version, that coincides with the previous in the delivery of the money and the general description of the meeting, Sanz Briz did not associate his action with his departure from Budapest, but rather implied that it had happened earlier.

«*Leaving Budapest without informing the authorities*». So he tells it in Molho, *op. cit.*: «The fact is that, mid-December, I left Budapest for Vienna, without informing the authorities of my departure in the hope that they would believe that I was still in the city».

However, it is hard to believe that this intention was possible. First of all, given the close and regular contact between the Spanish diplomat and the Hungarian authority, and because of the fact that the authority itself had recommended his departure according to Sanz Briz himself in one of his last telegrammes. But, above all, because of the difficulty of secretly leaving a city

under the control of a defence and a siege like those taking place in Budapest in the winter of '44. In a telegram mentioned above, Sanz Briz himself refers to the special permit from the War Ministry that anyone, even diplomats, wishing to leave Budapest had to have.

«*His mention of Sanz Briz verges on the offensive*». Raul Hilberg, *La destrucción de los judíos europeos*, Akal, 2005, pages 951-52. The source quoted by Hilberg to support his paragraph is the German translation of the book by Enrico Deaglio, *La banalidad del bien*.

Chapter 48

«*But as soon as Israel distanced itself from Franco*». The interview with Sanz Briz, published in the *Heraldo de Aragón*, ends thus:

«— Well in the UNO it would appear that Israel has been forgetful...

The diplomat does not answer. But there is a fraction of a second in which it looks as if Sanz Briz is going to forget his office and underline my question with a phrase that would possibly lack any diplomacy».

In 1948, the new-born State of Israel formalised its diplomatic relations with the international community. With the exception of two countries: Germany and Spain. A year later, it again rejected the Francoist government's endeavours to establish diplomatic relations. After the harmony forged in the last year of the Second World War between Franco's government and the representatives of the Jewish World Congress, the State of Israel considered the Franco regime an enemy of the same calibre as Hitler. See José Antonio Lisbona, *España-Israel: historia de unas relaciones secretas*, Temas de Hoy, 2002.

«*But it could have saved so many more!*». «Our conclusion is that, through Francoist Spain, from which practically nobody expected

any help for the Jews, more than a few persecuted were saved. But had it wished, the Government of Madrid, could have saved many more». Rother, *op. cit.*

«*What was expected of evil, what fit perfectly with the myth of a Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, an expression by the way, that Franco never publicly used*». Javier Domínguez Arribas, *El enemigo judeo-masónico en la propaganda franquista (1936-1945)*, Marcial Pons, 2009; and Gonzalo Álvarez Chillida, *El antisemitismo en España: la imagen del judío (1812-2002)*, Marcial Pons, 2002.

«*It either acted with (criminal) passivity when it looked like Hitler would win the war or collaborated in their salvation when it looked to be lost*». Some examples of this criminal passivity, as seen in the case of the Rosanes couple, appear in the book by Rosa Sala Rose, *La penúltima frontera: fugitivos del Nazismo en España*, Pàpels de Liar, Península, 2011. Also in Josep Calvet, *Les muntanyes de la llibertat: el pas d'evadits dels Pirineus durant la Segona Guerra Mundial*, L'Avenç, 2008.

Chapter 49

«*Released in 1943, to the profound concern of the Francoist authorities*».

The attitude of the major North American film studios towards Francoism can be followed in the documentary *Hollywood contra Franco*, Oriol Porta, 2008.

PART TWO

Chapter 50

«*The reason for this is the fourteen thousand words written by the meat trader, Giorgio Perlasca, in 1945 when the World War had been over*

for a month, from the city of Trieste to the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alberto Martín-Artajo». On October 13th, according to the reproduction of the report published in *L'impostore*. There is no date on our copy, photocopied and signed by Perlasca, that comes from the personal archive of Sanz Briz and present some slight differences versus the published version.

The report to the minister is the first and most important of a series of texts that Perlasca wrote on his Hungarian experience and which his family would publish in *L'impostore*, in the year 1997. And it is the only one we will use, at least relevantly, to explain his story. Unlike the rest, including the so-called *Promemoria*, which was theoretically written on the request of Jenő Lévai, though he completely ignored it when writing his benchmark history of the Hungarian Holocaust, the report *A sua Eccellenza* raises paratextual doubts that affect the time, place, writing and even the very author of the text. The version of the report we have in our possession was sent by Perlasca to Ángel Sanz Briz, attached to a letter dated Trieste, April 3rd, 1946. The Spanish diplomat kept the report together with a brief correspondence with Perlasca. There is no record of it in either the Spanish Foreign Ministry archives or any record of receipt of the report by the Ministry, either via delivery by Perlasca or a copy sent by Sanz Briz.

«*My activity in the Spanish Legation in Budapest from December 7th, 1944*». In the original, the date mentioned is December 17th, but there appears to be an obvious transcription error. December 7th is the departure date that Sanz Briz announced to his government.

«*Date of the Russian troops' arrival in the neighbourhood of the Hungarian capital in which the Legation headquarters were located*». As Perlasca himself wrote, it was not the first description he had sent to the Spanish authorities: in June he had hand-delivered a first and brief draft to the Consul-general of Spain in Istanbul (during

a stage of his long return to Italy from Budapest), of which no trace remains.

«*Perlasca had already made his literary intentions known in an initial letter written in August of 1945*». The letter is dated August 11th, 1945. Sanz-Briz Family Archive.

«*Happy to accept in his, somewhat late, reply*». San Francisco, December 4th, 1945. Fundación Giorgio Perlasca.

«*Which Perlasca would finally reply to in April 1946, enclosing the aforementioned report*». There is no record of which date the report reached the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, if indeed it ever did.

«*He wrote the summary after sending your report to the Spanish ministry without adding any comments, motivated by the request for explanations from his superior*». Letter from Sangróniz dated Rome, March 12th, 1946. The document was sent by Javier Jiménez-Ugarte, Ambassador of Spain in Sweden.

«*Was no longer a nation but a hunting ground*». Sándor Márai, *Liberación*, Salamandra, 2012.

«*The archives contain numerous complaints lodged by the diplomat*». Dobos, *op. cit.*

«*With the previous agreement of both governments, he had left the care of Spanish matters*». So Sanz Briz expressly puts it in his second-last telegram, of December 3rd, 1944. «It appears that Madame Tourné and the lawyer will continue to work here under the orders of the representative in [sic] Sweden». On October 13th, the minister Lequerica also made mention of the Swedish protection: «... that in the event of the imminent danger arriving you can hand over management of the Legation to the Swedish representation». This authorisation from Lequerica was consistent with a previous telegram in which, having consulted with Sanz Briz, the minister announced that the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs had en-

trusted its representative in Budapest with the protection of the Spanish interests if Sanz Briz should be obliged to abandon the country. Lars G. Berg, Swedish diplomat and chargée of the so-called B section of his Embassy, does not mention the Spanish legation, nor any of its members, in his book, *What happened in Budapest*, originally published in 1949.

«*But Sanz Briz himself says he hid his departure from the Hungarians! It's true, he did say so*». Molho published the account one year later. Isaac R. Molho, *op. cit.*

«*You didn't speak Hungarian*». In a note in inverted commas in *Un italiano scomodo* Perlasca says: «However, in Hungarian, in Serbian and in Turkish, all I could say was good-day, good-afternoon, see you tomorrow, etc.». The authors confirm that during the Budapest period he wrote and spoke French and German. Nonetheless, nothing in Perlasca's biography allows us to deduce where and how he learned these languages to such a level of skill. The German, Eveline Willinger, one of Perlasca's discoverers in the eighties, states he did not speak German and that they managed to communicate with each other through a strange mix of Italian and French. It is odd that Hallenstein and Zavattiero make no mention of the Spanish language: Perlasca spoke it well and was able to make himself understood in writing thanks to his participation in the Spanish Civil War.

«*There is something, sir, that I cannot forgive you, let me tell you what it is. The way you treat two of the Spanish Embassy heroes in your accounts*». In the report *A sua Eccellenza* and, above all, in the *Promemoria*.

«*The problem lies in the comparison of his visit to doctor Gera to the following fragment*». Sanz Briz Archive. Reproduced in Molho, *op. cit.*

«I didn't know that you had taken charge of the Legation». Letter from Ángel Sanz Briz to Giorgio Perlasca, December 4th, 1945. Fundación Giorgio Perlasca.

Chapter 52

«The Spanish Embassy files in Berlin, that are stored in the archive of the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs». That were kept in the old archive, we should say, because from September 12th, 2012, the contents were transferred to the Archivo Histórico Nacional and the Archivo General de la Administración. Wayne H. Bowen also consulted these documents, in an article entitled «Spain and the Nazi occupation of Poland, 1939-44» (*International Social Science Review*, v. 82, n.º 3-4, Sept. 2007), although he never mentions the rest of Cassio's work.

«Extremely raw and hard book». AGA, Caja 21/7739, exp. 5487-45. The book is definitively authorised on February 14th, 1946. It was published by SHADE, with an initial run of 2000 copies, and its retail price was 40 pesetas.

«The book [...] was published with deletions on thirteen pages». We have no way of knowing how these pages were affected. The original manuscript has been lost.

«Unfortunately, Cassio's response, if there was one, does not appear to have been saved in the ministerial archives». It is surprising that Bernd Rother should write: «Two of the four recipients had never had any contact with this problem», and that one of these two, in the opinion of the German historian, was Cassio.

«I left Warsaw on the 26th, on one of the last trains for Krakow». AMAE, R. 2299, exp. 3.

Chapter 53

«*At the end of the war, and apparently without her consent, El martirio de Polonia, was published*». María Victoria López-Cordón, Introduction to *La revolución bolchevista*, by Sofía Casanova, Castalia, 1989. Sofía Casanova and Miguel Branicki, *El martirio de Polonia*, Madrid, Atlas, 1945.

Chapter 54

«*How and why did Poland, and all of Europe, go from destruction, to lasting peace*». This is what Steve Pinker, in *The Better Angels*, calls the period begun in Europe after the Second World War. The expression and its significance are taken from John Gaddis.

«*The Second World War was an anomalous, casual (!), peak in a profound, lasting and unstoppable process of civilization, the roots of which can be traced to the Enlightenment*». «Could World War II be an isolated peak in a declining sawtooth—the last gasp in a long slide of major war into historical obsolescence? [...] Hence, the XX century cannot be considered an era of constant decline into deprivation. On the contrary. The century's lasting moral trend was humanism with an aversion to violence that began in the Enlightenment, was eclipsed by counterenlightened ideologies allied with agents of growing destructive capacity, that regained its momentum after the Second World War». Steven Pinker, *Los ángeles que llevamos dentro*, Paidós, 2012.

«*[John Mueller]: Europe's greatest war would probably never have taken place*». Pinker, *op. cit.*

Chapter 56

«*The Arrow Cross entered a Jewish hospital and killed 154 people, including 130 patients*». Ben-Tov, *op. cit.*

«It would be incomprehensible to punish innocents or take measures of retaliation against beings entirely incapable of causing the slightest harm». Actes et documents du Saint-Siège relatifs à la période de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, [vol. 10](#).

«Where history proceeds along even more convoluted and circuitous paths». On November 14th, 1944, the representatives of the neutral legations met in the house of the Apostolic Nuncio. They signed a document of protest against the persecution of the Jews. The historian, Jenő Lévai, reproduces the text of the memorandum and among the signatures he adds that of «Jorge Perlasca» as «Chargé d’Affaires» of the Spanish Legation. In the Vatican minutes referring to the Second World War, it is said that the memorandum was signed by Miguel [sic] Sanz Briz. Lévai’s error is accepted by Bernd Rother, who never questions it, perhaps due to the influence of his other sources on the role played by Perlasca: Deaglio and the «journalist» Nina Gladitz-Pérez Lorenzo. «It is a fact that Perlasca signed the note of protest against the Jewish persecution drawn up by the diplomats of the neutral nations on November 14th and published on November 17th, as the Spanish “Chargé d’Affaires”. This proves that Perlasca, one way or another, carried out an important function in the legation of Spain. From Perlasca’s signature, Gladitz-Pérez Lorenzo deduces that «Sanz Briz, fearing for his life [...] did not return (abandon) to the legation». Rother concludes:

«But, in fact, it would appear that he entrusted the Jewish protection measures to Perlasca».

«You freed two Jewish children from the clutches of Eichmann himself».

The different versions can be compared in his books and in the interviews Perlasca gave to various television channels. They can be watched on the [YouTube channel](#) of the Fundación Perlasca.

«The letter proves it, an old piece of Hungarian paper». Janos Farkas Archive.

«I'm familiar with that letter they wrote to you when Budapest had been freed from the Nazis, when you were about to return to Italy».

Perlasca Archive. The letter is written in French, on paper with the letterhead of the lawyer, Dr. Dukesz Hugó, who is one of the three signatories. And it is written on behalf of a commission of leaseholders of number 35 Szent István Park, one of the safe houses of the legation of Spain.

«A similar letter, though signed by fewer people, placed in the hands of Farkas». «Today, January 16th, 1945, on the arrival of the Soviet troops in our district, finally freeing us of the Nazi tyranny, we are duty-bound to thank you for all you have done for us, saving us from a certain death. We have never doubted your courage, selflessness or the risks you ran for us when called upon. Thus, we hereby make this solemn declaration. The undersigned, in a sign of eternal gratitude, sign this declaration». Perlasca Archive and Janos Farkas Archive.

«No record of any of your “superstructural” steps remain in the Hungarian archives». Neither Erzsébet Dobos nor Iván Harsányi, the two main Hungarian eminences on relations between Spain and Hungary in the period, have found the slightest documentary trace of the diplomatic procedures that Giorgio Perlasca claims to have undertaken in his numerous reports. On the other hand, the historian Paul A. Levine admits to not having found any record whatsoever of Perlasca in the Swedish archives. «For reasons unknown, Swedish sources are completely silent about Perlasca's activities». Paul A. Levine, *Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest: Myth, History and Holocaust*, Vallentine Mitchell, 2010. For her part, Marta Petricioli has found the name Giorgio Perlasca in some documents relating to the Italians in Budapest (on the list of passengers on the Swedish train that took him to Turkey, for instance), but she admits to not having found a single solitary word about his work in the city. «Nei documenti c'è traccia del suo nome ma non

una parola sulla sua attività». Marta Petricioli, «Budapest-Inverno: gli italiani a Budapest settembre 1943-maggio 1945: Specchio dell'Italia divisa», in *Italogramma*.

«On the banks of the Danube they would tie the Jews together in pairs, shoot a bullet into one of the bodies causing the pair to fall into the icy water». According to Randolph L. Braham, the Arrow Cross gangs tended to be made up of adolescents who would go in search of hidden Jews, both inside and outside the ghettos. The Arrow Cross were not normally happy to just kill: they enjoyed torture. Braham asserts that they executed around fifty or sixty Jews per night. The Jews who died outside the ghetto generally ended up in the morgue of the Forensic Medicine Institute, directed by the doctor Ferenc Orsós. Orsós wanted the bodies to be thrown into the Danube immediately «to avoid another Katyn» (the doctor had formed part of the international commission organized by the Nazis to determine the Soviet responsibility in the Katyn massacre; the Spanish delegate was Ernesto Giménez Caballero). Orsós took refuge in Western Germany after the war and died in the sixties. Many of the corpses not thrown into the Danube were buried at the synagogue on Dohány street. There is no need to describe the photos showing the bodies in the common graves, filled with children. Some talk about 20,000 Jews killed in the Danube (USHMM, Yad Vashem...), but without specifying any source whatsoever. Braham's count is of 3500 in two months. One of the methods used to kill these Jews, as Braham recounts, was to tie them in threes. They would shoot the person in the middle, in such a way that they would pull the other two still alive into the water with them. «Many of the most horrible of these atrocities were committed by a gang run by András Kun, a Catholic priest who was fiercely Anti-Semitic». András Kun was detained by the Russians when Budapest was taken. He was judged by a popular trial and sentenced for the murder of 500 people. He gave very

specific details of his actions and he was hung in Budapest on September 19th, 1945. See Randolph L. Braham, *The politics of genocide: the Holocaust in Hungary*, Columbia University Press, 1994.

«*Szent István Park 35*». On the façade of the main building on Szent István Park there's a plaque in memory of Giorgio Perlasca. And on the other façade, the one facing onto Újpesti Rakpart is the one dedicated to Sanz Briz: his heirs refused to have his plaque share walls with Perlasca's as they felt he had stolen part of the honour and memory that corresponded to their father.

«*This is a fragment of the letter sent in the early sixties by Helene Devai and Anna Vándor to the president of the Federal Republic of Germany*». Jaime Vándor Archive. The letter, originally written in German, is dated February 29th, 1960. Anna's son, Jaime Vándor, is unaware of the purpose for which it was written or whether it received any reply from the German president at the time, Heinrich Lübke. These are the fragments that complete it:

«Testimony. Barcelona, February 29th, 1960.

To the President of the Federal Republic Köln

We, Helene Dévai born März on November 21st, 1891 in Budapest, and Anna Vándor born

Koppel on January 5th, 1900 in Rohozna, Bukovina, declare the following true facts:

Following the occupation of Budapest by the German Army on March 19th, 1944, many Jews had to abandon their homes on April 5th by order of the German Command. In July, all Jews had to move to the so-called "Starred Houses", spread throughout the city, known as a whole as the "Mazsola Ghetto". Before October 15th, we also had to leave these properties and move to the enclosed ghetto. The people who were lucky or had contacts and could obtain a "Letter of Protection" ("Védlevél") from some of the embassies in the neutral nations, were moved to the "Protected Houses" of the respective embassy ("Védett Ház"). The

police called these houses the «privileged ghetto» (“kivételezett ghettó”).

We, the undersigned, lived in a Spanish protected house, located on Szent István Park, n.º 35. They had placed a big, yellow Star of David on the doorway. In the beginning, a policeman and an “Arrow Cross” guarded the doorway. The Jewish tenants who had not managed to obtain a Spanish Letter of Protection had to abandon their home. The Christians could decide for themselves, so some of these tenants stayed in their apartment.

In the beginning, we could leave the building for two hours a day, from 1500 hours to 1700 hours, to find ourselves some food, which by that time of the day was not possible. Later on, we were prohibited from leaving at all, meaning many literally starved to death. Policemen and “Arrow Cross” members accompanied by German soldiers often came to check documents. A Christian woman was found by coincidence in one apartment who claimed to have come to visit other Christians, but since she did not carry any documentation she was dragged to the doorway where, in the presence of many tenants, she was given 25 whiplashes.

[...]

On the terrible night of January 5th a woman committed suicide, and when two days later her son was digging her grave with other men in the gardens in front of the building, he was hit by a bullet and lost his life.

A few days later, all of the Pest part of the city was surrounded by the Russians and so they could no longer take us anywhere. On January 15th, our house was taken by the Russian troops and a few days later so was all of Pest.

The purpose of the events described is to succinctly give an idea of the life and trials of a Spanish protected house during the German occupation. We lived in hunger, without water, electricity, gas or heating, without any glass in the windows in icy weather

conditions; prisoners, crammed together, at the mercy of the Nazi and Arrow Cross abuse. With the bombing and the roar of the cannons, we were in constant terror, on top of the fear of epidemics and deportation, a situation that, had it lasted just a little longer, would have ended in our certain death.

Yours sincerely,

Helene Dévai and Anna Vándor

«*You mention him, but without stating his name*». Perlasca did state the name of Bárdos in the *Promemoria*, where he gives a somewhat different version of the facts of December 5th.

«*She appeared to you to be both a “brava vecchia funzionaria”*». *Promemoria*.

«*And a little woman who was always in your way*». Letter from Perlasca to Sanz Briz, Milan, February 7th, 1946.

«*A similar scenario occurred with her son, Gaston*». The same sources.

Chapter 57

«*A Hungarian Jew, born in 1913, who specialised in real estate businesses and who in October of 1944 began to collaborate with the delegation of the International Red Cross Committee*». Thus, the delegate of the organisation in Hungary, Hans Weyermann certifies him, in a document dated September 25th, 1945.

«*A 21-page notebook, written at the end of 1945, which I don't believe you were ever aware of*». The Hungarian original is in the hands of Miriam Eger, the daughter of László Szamosi. [The Spanish translation.](#)

«*A series of paragraphs from Righteous Gentile, a book by the English journalist, John Bierman, published in 1981*». John Bierman, *Righteous Gentile*, Viking Press, 1981.

«[Otto: president of the Hungarian Zionist Federation and outstanding collaborator of the International Red Cross in Budapest, subsequently assassinated by the Hungarian Nazis]». [Written speech](#) by Eugenia and László Szamosi, given in Hungarian at a memorial symposium in tribute to Otto Komoly on the 30th Anniversary of his death. January 1975.

«Szamosi, for instance, attributes a Gentile origin to Farkas, contradicting you, and a real estate transaction that if true, and I must honestly say to you that I don't know whether it is or not, introduces the philanthropic traits of our hero.» Szamosi is referring to the sale of a site as payment for Farkas' work. The document accrediting this is dated December 14th, 1944, and says: «Since the government of Sztójay has taken possession, you have continued to do important work for us. Due to the orders referring to the Jews, it has not been possible to compensate you for your valuable work, but we assure you that we appreciate it and as soon as possible, we will pay you the fees you are owed». The work done by Farkas to help the Jews dates back to July 1944, when he took charge of the political and logistical operations for the refuge of 500 children on the orders of Franco's government which had been urged to do so by Renée Reichmann.

«But, of course, you must both have been energetic brave, long-legged and strong men...». Szamosi's widow had a very different opinion of Giorgio Perlasca's bravery. In her interview in the Holocaust Museum (September 12th, 1990) she said, and I quote: «And he [Szamosi] went everywhere, to the children's' houses and to see the protected houses. For a certain period of time with Perlasca, but only for a while. Afterwards Perlasca wasn't very interested in going outside because the situation was increasingly dangerous due to the bombs, because the front was closer. Every day, almost every hour, non-stop bombs. So he [Perlasca] didn't... He gradually abandoned these activities to see and bring food or something. It wasn't his

job. My husband did know where the International Red Cross warehouse was, where there was food...» In a text dated from Haifa on August 12th, 1990, that she entitled *The Szamosi Circus*, she caustically insisted on the subject: «When [Perlasca] realised what was happening around him, he was not so enthusiastic about the functions associated with his eminent title anymore [that of head of the Legation of Spain]; bit by bit, due to other commitments, he gave it up. He sat in the car on one last memorable occasion, when Szamosi drove to Buda to renew his free circulation pass. People ran towards the car. “Ask why all those people are running”, he asked Szamosi. One of the men running shouted: “Can’t you see? The Russians are here!”. When Szamosi translated this to him, he got into such a panic that, grabbing onto the steering wheel, he shouted: “Turn around!”. After that, and considering the increasingly frequent bombs, he didn’t take part in any activity at all». All of Eugenia Szamosi’s statements were made after the story told by Giorgio Perlasca had become world-famous and in reaction to it. [Transcription](#) of the interview. [Interview](#) on video.

«*A 21-page story (in Hungarian, and translated into English just a few years ago), that includes his trials and tribulations, and those of his family, in the period from October 1944 to January 1945*». In the English version of the memoirs, there is the following anachronism between scripts: «Wallenberg was the hero of the majority of the rescue work and after the liberation, he disappeared without a trace -he was kidnapped by the Russians during a provincial patrol and theoretically he was seen in a Moscow prison many years later-. A street in the area has been called after him, where the “Protected Ghetto” once stood». In 1945, obviously, László Szamosi couldn’t have seen Wallenberg in a prison in Moscow. This paragraph does not appear in the original Hungarian text. The unproven hypothesis is that someone introduced it into the translation into English years later.

Chapter 58

«I will finish with some photos of iron shoes on the river bank». The work, by the film-maker Can Togay and the sculptor Gyula Pauer, is located on the west bank of the Danube, on the Pest side, close to the Hungarian Parliament. It comprises 60 pairs of cast iron shoes, set into the concrete embankment. The text on the signs specifies that it was erected on April 16th, 2005 «to the memory of the victims shot into the Danube by the Arrow Cross militiamen in 1944-1945».

Chapter 59

«I haven't paid a visit to either Hallenstein or Zavattiero to hear their account of this paragraph». Giorgio Perlasca, *Un italiano scomodo* was published in January 2010. Its authors say the book is based on a long interview that Giorgio Perlasca granted Hallenstein a month before his death, between June and July 1992. The book does not say whether the long interview was either fully or partially recorded. Nor is any mention made of the reason eight years went by between the interview and the publication of the book.

«Rare and remarkable». To cover this journey in a car from the period in this time seems difficult. The journalist, Garriga, who knows about such things, says: «For instance, in 2004 and using the magnificent modern-day roads, vintage car lovers didn't manage to do that mileage in three days in a [Ford T from 1926](#).»

«On December 19th, ten days after their arrival, the baroness was subjected to a meticulous interrogation by the Swiss police». The Swiss documentation on the baroness and her daughter is to be found in the Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv (BAR), in Berne. Pío Baroja also gives an account of the bureaucratic difficulties of getting into Switzerland: «A form must be filled in with a portion of details

- [...] What one is asked for is rather like a layman's confession». Pío Baroja. *Rojos y blancos*. Caro Raggio, 2013, p. 200.
- «*St. Margarethen (in the automobile of Mr. Sanz Briz, consul-general of Spain in Budapest), on the evening of 9.12.1944*». BAR E4264 1985/196 46485 72, Verbal interrogation.
- «*I ordered Mr. Sanz Briz to get in touch with Mr. Von Jennen*». BAR E4264 1985/196 46485 72, Schürch Report, December 15th, 1944.
- «*“Je m'intéresse beaucoup au sort de ces deux hongroises, qui sont d'anciens amis personnelles et appartiennent au meilleur monde de Budapest”*». BAR E4264 1985/196 46485 73, Letter from G. B. Beseny to the head of the police department, Montreux, December 15th, 1944.
- «*Women of the world that they were, they stayed in the Lausanne Palace (hereinafter Hotel Byron), and the bills were not generally less than 400 francs a week*». BAR E4264 1985/196 46485 79 and 81, Expense account of room 154.
- «*I'm going to read you a part of the report the agent Paturel, from the local police force of Lausanne, sent to his superiors on May 24th, 1946*». BAR E4264 1985/196 46485 182, Report from Agent Paturel, May 24th, 1946.
- «*In light of the receipts presented, Mme. Podmaniczky regularly receives 825 francs per month from Mr. Sanz Briz, Angel, a Spanish subject, currently in San Francisco*». Ángel Sanz Briz was Spanish consul in San Francisco from January 1946 to May 1948.
- «*Proof of this lies in the telegrammes exchanged with his minister, but it is also insinuated in the actual passports themselves which include various permits to leave Budapest, the first dated November, and then successively renewed*». BAR E4264 1985/196 46485 3 and 6. The three permits are recorded in both passports with three permits

bearing the following dates: October 25th, November 24th and December 15th, 1944.

Chapter 60

«*Un échange intense de lettres avec ma grand-mère Piroška “avec Monsieur El Conde de Aguilar datant de 1952”*». Email from Beatrice von Roten, May 21st, 2013.

«*The only letter I’ve been able to read by the lady in question begins My Angel*». Letter from the baroness to the count, December 24th, 1952. Von Roten Archive.

Chapter 61

«*You rejected the possibility of leaving the city with the diplomatic passport offered to you by the Swiss diplomat, Feller, the day after Sanz Briz’s departure*».

«*In reality, I could have left Budapest a few days after you because the Swiss Chargée d’Affaires, Mr. Fehler [sic], certain [that] I was a Spanish diplomat, had granted me the visa*». Letter from Perlasca to Sanz Briz. Milan, February 7th, 1946. Sanz-Briz Family Archive.

«*Miss Irene, who as you know, has always been my guardian angel*». The same letter.

«*On all the streets and squares of Budapest you were always in my mind’s eye*». April 16th, 1989. Letter from Giorgio Perlasca to Irene Boroviczeny. Irene Boroviczeny Archive.

«*While she was talking [off-Budapest] I remembered a story of trains that Irene had told a German journalist*». Nina Gladitz. In 1989, she read an article in *El País* newspaper on Giorgio Perlasca and immediately decided to make a film about him and write a book.

First of all, of course, she wanted to meet Perlasca himself, travelling to Italy to interview him. Having fallen for the look in the Italian's eye, she set about documenting herself for the film. In an interview on September 24th, 2010, she described her difficulties in the archive of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Apparently, she was not made very welcome when she pronounced the watchword Giorgio Perlasca. She stayed in her hotel with some cold compresses on her face -it was hot in Madrid- while her husband investigated in the archive and found himself obliged to misplace some documents set aside by the archivist. She finished her film a few months later and it is currently impossible to get hold of. Mrs. Blitstein-Willinger, who did have the honour of watching it, only remembers a love story set in a magnificent Italian palace, although she was incapable of understanding its link to the history of Budapest. Nina Gladitz was very close to Perlasca in the last years of his life. She upholds her own theories on what kept him in Budapest after the departure of Sanz Briz: his love for Irene Denes, his wife's deceit (she had married him telling him she was pregnant), and his sentimental feelings towards the children due to the hardships of his own childhood: severe parents, a nanny who mistreated him, and finally, a boarding school. Nina Gladitz published an article on Giorgio Perlasca with numerous errors in relation to his role in the Spanish Embassy («Der Fall Giorgio Perlasca», in "Dachauer Hefte", n° 7, 1991, pages 129-143).

«*He was on the list of the protected, he was number 38*». The lists of Jews saved by the legation of Spain in Budapest are kept in the AMAE [Archive of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs] and were also published by Iván Harsányi: «A spanyol diplomácia zsidómentő akciói Budapesten» [Actions to save Jews under Spanish diplomatic care in Budapest"], in "Holocaust-füzetek", 1993/2, pages. 46-53.

Capítulo 62

«*Solidarity had its limits*». Interview of Jaime Vándor, Barcelona, August 21st, 2011 and November 29th, 2011.

Chapter 63

«*Iván Harsányi is already waiting at the door of the Holocaust Museum*». Iván Harsányi (Budapest, 1930) is a Professor of Modern History at the University of Pécs. He has written over four hundred scientific publications, including four monographic texts; the majority on the Hispanic-Hungarian relations. Source: *Repertorio de hispanistas en Hungría*. Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 2006. NIPO 651-06-358-0. In 2010, he was decorated with the Order of Civil Merit, by the government of Spain.

«*We had a general conversation in his faltering Spanish*». The interview took place in Budapest on August 15th, 2011.

«*[We need to draw up lists of Jews living here](#)*». *El País*, November 27th, 2012.

Chapter 64

«*After telling me the story, he handed me the death certificate*». The certificate, originally written in Hungarian, was translated into German by Josef Kavalszky. Janos Farkas Archive.

«*The most likely version of his sad end is the one provided to me by the two police officers of my team*». The version that Dr. Friedrich, one of the Embassy refugees, gives to Sanz Briz is as follows: «Now, I'd like to try and explain to you what happened to your friends after our city was freed. Your good friend and assistant, Dr. Farkas died. First thing in the morning of January 16th when the Russians were

entering the streets, he was so terribly frightened that he climbed up onto the roof and tried to escape, we didn't find his body until two days later. To date, we still don't know exactly what happened to him, whether it was suicide, a criminal death, because he was not fleeing alone but with the two detectives who had been protecting the legation in the last days. One was a Nazi [nacy] and he's now in jail!» February 14th, 1946, Sanz-Briz Family Archive.

«*It's also likely that the decision was in fact tinted with that element of desperation*». See the Chapter of *L'impostore* dedicated to Zoltán Farkas.

«*Certified in Budapest on January the twenty-first of nineteen hundred and forty-five*». Certified by three signatures: Dr. Ladislau Friedrich [e. h. Primarius], Georg Dán [e. h. röm kath. Seelesorger] Anton Spitzer [e. h.]. Janos Farkas. Archive

«*After the Soviet conquest, the building was used as a hospital*». «In 1970, diplomatic relations were re-established when a consular and commercial representative was sent. In the Property register, it says that the Spanish State recovered its property rights in February 1974. Until that date, the authorities of the Popular Republic of Hungary used the building according to their own criteria. Among these, Greek refugees were housed there». *Historia de la Embajada de España en Budapest*, typed sheets. Embassy of Spain in Hungary.

«*I have, sir, a letter from Sanz Briz to the then consul of the Budapest legation in Portugal, Jules Gulden, when the winter had ended*». May 15th, 1946, Sanz-Briz Family Archive.

«*If there is one thing I am certain of, it is the honesty of my friend Farkas*». Sanz Briz was replying to a letter from Gulden, written on March 13th, 1946 (Sanz-Briz Family Archive). In it, he asked him whether he had any knowledge of the Farkas family's

assets in Switzerland: «[László Hegyi, delegate of the Hungarian Red Cross] has asked me about them. As he is one of the closest friends of the baroness Maria Theresa Pitner, widow of our common friend, Mr. Zoltán Farkas, who died in tragic circumstances, he had been entrusted by the widow to investigate the belongings and assets that Mr. Farkas held in Switzerland. Do you know anything about this? The widow is living in difficult circumstances. Particularly, because Mr. Farkas took the assets of some Jewish friends to hide and save them. But the widow does not know where they are and one of the Jews, the baron Koranyi, has reported her and so she is being persecuted by the financial police which has already embargoed her entire fortune. Do you know anything about these assets belonging to Baron Koranyi?». The son, Janos Farkas, has a couple of receipts of payment to a Hungarian bank in his files. They appear to be annual payments made by Zoltán Farkas on the same day of each year, January 14th, and on each occasion they are for an amount of 1500 pengös, except the last, made by his wife, for 8500. It doesn't appear to be a remarkable amount. Perlasca admits that he ended his adventure with 3700 and that it was then that the hunger began. Janos Farkas was unaware of what these receipts saved by his mother might mean.

«In the last month of the Winter, the legation sheltered dozens of refugees».

«The Legation of Spain had around 4500 protected people back then who were distributed as follows: 1800, approximately, held letters of protection, 350 holders of provisional passports, around 70 holders of ordinary passports, and an indefinite number of provisional passports from Paraguay (about one hundred of the protected persons were not Jewish). The vast majority lived in the protected houses, 85 in the Buda residence, 30 in the Podmaniczky house, 60 in the Legation building. All of the “Sephardi” families, provided with ordinary passports, lived in their houses and about a hundred in churches and convents». Perlasca, report *A sua Eccellenza*.

«Do not forget that the decision to house people in the legation properties was my initiative alone». Letter from Ángel Sanz Briz to Giorgio Perlasca, San Francisco de California, December 4th, 1945, Sanz-Briz Family Archive. Eugenio Suárez speaks of other rescue work, beyond the protection in the embassy building: «I remember that the director of the *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie*, Mr. Bálogh, of Jewish race and Roman faith, actively sought out by hatred, was saved in a convent where he was taken by the automobile of the Legation of Spain. He was dressed in a priest's habit, and for a long time lived in community with certain monks». Unfortunately, Joseph Bálogh died in Sávár, in a Gestapo internment cap on April 2nd, 1944.

«Thank you, my friend, for everything you did for us». Letter from Laura Alth to Ángel Sanz Briz. December 29th, 1945. Sanz-Briz Family Archive.

«After that February, the only place I found Madame was in this part of the letter that a certain Doctor Friedrich wrote to Sanz Briz in 1946». László Friedrich (1892-1958), doctor specialised in gastroenterology. He held passport number 3 (his wife had number 4) and was on the list of 352 Jews with a provisional Spanish passport. The letter is dated February 14th, 1946. Sanz-Briz Family Archive.

«At that point, Tibor Gégely said he had some photos of Madame Tourné and that he was going to look for them». On December 10th, 2012, the granddaughter of Tibor Gégely sent me the following message: «Sadly, my grandfather passed away last May. We searched among all the documents in the apartment but unfortunately we did not find the photo».

Chapter 65

«When the Russians arrived I found myself with no money, no home and no food». Letter from Giorgio Perlasca to Ángel Sanz Briz. Milan, February 7th, 1946. Sanz-Briz Family Archive.

«On June 12th, with you already gone from Budapest, our Kis Újság opened one of its pages with this information June 12th». Translation by Erzsébet Dobos.

«Naturally, I won't take into consideration the paragraph from a letter you sent to Sanz Briz a few months later, from Milan». Letter from Giorgio Perlasca to Ángel Sanz Briz. Milan, February 7th, 1946. Sanz-Briz Family Archive.

«There is only one reliable document about the number of survivors: the report Sanz Briz sent to his government, once he was safe in Berne». AMAE. On Jewish Protection by the Legation of Spain in Budapest. Berne, December 14th, 1944. R. 1716, exp. 1-5.

«Your story, in the terms we currently know it, though summarized, appeared in the Italian newspapers *Il Resto del Carlino* and *La Stampa*». The first reference is from June 12th, 1961; the second appears in an [interview](#) with Hallenstein and Zavattiero. *Varese News*, January 31st, 2010.

«And for a large part of your life you have paid constant attention to the matter, as proved for example, by the letter you sent to an Italian magazine in 1957, following an article about Wallenberg». Letter sent from Trieste, on February 18th, 1957, to the director of the weekly, *Tempo*. In it you describe your relationship with Wallenberg and your theory about his disappearance.

Chapter 66

«The latter commemorating the victorious arrival of the Spanish in a Buda under Turkish oppression». The text reads: In memoriam. 1686-1934. Here entered the 300 Spanish heroes who took part in the reconquest of Buda».

«One of the most laconic and destructive texts ever written on post-modernism». John Weightman, «On not understanding Michel Foucault», in *The American Scholar*, v. 58, n.º 3 (Summer, 1989), pages 383-406.

«The fact that it later ended up sheltering persecuted Jews would be of great exculpatory value to the count when in 1951 he had to defend himself against communist persecution and some of his protected persons publicly mentioned the fact». There are two letters of gratitude for his work. They are saved in the State Security History Archive of Budapest. Professor Róbert KisKapin was kind enough to send us a copy of each, that he had transcribed in 2011 in *Betekintő*, the journal of the [archive itself](#). One of them is from Dr. Gyula Gabor, one of the refugees mentioned by Dr. Friedrich in one of his letters to Ángel Sanz Briz.

«I have the photo of Adela Sanz-Briz in the summer of '43». Sanz-Briz Family Archive.

«And that other photo from a Hungarian magazine showing a [young count Széchenyi](#)».

Chapter 67

«And one month prior to this interview, it had contributed to upholding the international community's boycott of Spain in the UNO». See Ranaan Rein, *Franco, Israel y los judíos*. CSIC, 1996.

«What's interesting is its intra-history. It is described in the letter sent by the then Spanish consul in New York to his Minister for Foreign Affairs». AMAE. Letter from Ángel Sanz Briz to Fernando de Castiella. November 19th, 1963. AMAE, R. 7649 exp. 14.

«Under the wise and vigorous direction of the then Papal Nuncio, monsignor Angelo Rotta and his auditor, the current nuncio in Costa

Rica, monsignor Verolino». See Giovanni Cubeddu's [interview](#) of monsignor Genaro Verolino.

«An activity that contradicts the accusations generally made against the Vatican hierarchy for its attitude to the Nazi advance and final catastrophe of the Holocaust». The Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations jointly created the International Catholic-Jewish Historical Commission, made up of three Catholic and three Jewish researchers. Their [first preliminary report](#), written in the year 2000, was highly controversial as the researchers were unable to reach an agreement on the final conclusions.

«In 1967, from the city of Lima, where he was ambassador, he wrote to the Director-General for Ibero-America, Pedro Salvador, explaining his recent «unofficial» meeting with the Israeli ambassador in Peru, Netanel Lorch». Letter from Ángel Sanz Briz to Pedro Salvador. Lima, February 4th, 1967. AMAE, R. 8546, exp. 1-2.

«There have recently been some, perhaps excessively categorical, statements by Fraga and in this instance it was Israel and International Zionism which felt offended». «Fraga stated that neither Spain nor the Spanish government had anything against the Jews, but they were against Zionism as a policy. Thus, Spain would maintain its policy of friendship towards the Arab countries and will continue to not recognise Israel». *Abc*, January 28th, 1967.

«In short, I cannot answer your question and I find myself obliged to suggest you write directly to the Minister». Letter from Pedro Salvador to Ángel Sanz Briz. Madrid, March 13th, 1967. AMAE, R. 8546, exp. 1-2.

«It is likely that the interview and the influence of its author had sufficed to elevate Sanz Briz to the category of Righteous. What's surprising is

*that is that such an acknowledgement should have remained latent for so many years». There isn't even a minimal allusion to it in the conversations between Federico Ysart and Ángel Sanz Briz. See Federico Ysart, *España y los judíos en la Segunda Guerra Mundial*, Dopesa, 1973. Nor is it mentioned in the propaganda issued by Franco's government on its relationship with the Holocaust: *España y los judíos*, op. cit.*

«*The book would be published in 1982 and Spielberg's film, that would exponentially multiply interest in the Heroes of the Holocaust, was released in 1993*». Apparently, Steven Spielberg showed an interest in the story of the «fake diplomat, Perlasca» before deciding to recreate the figure of Oskar Schindler.

Chapter 68

«*Beastly, the Übermenschen*». The supermen. Text typed by Eveline Blitstein-Willinger. The initials IVB stand for Irene Boroviczeny, the “von” is placed before her name to confuse her with a countess. The brusqueness of the procedure gives away the nature of the relations, not always easy, between the two women.

«*She immediately agreed to help finance a group with the intention of supporting Mr. Perlasca, through a monthly pension*». Eveline adds this paragraph, with the names of those involved in financing Perlasca: «I contacted various people, some of them survivors of the Holocaust who had lived in Budapest during those terrible times, like Mrs. Babette von Kibedy, who had never heard of Perlasca either. Vera and her sister [Dr. Marion Fellenzer] thought it a very good idea and immediately agreed to contribute to the fund. Their mother, Mrs. Magda Polay, who was saved by Wallenberg but who had never heard of Perlasca, also agreed to join us. For a very short period, in the beginning, Dr. Maria Hideg and Professor T. Diamantstein were also active

participants. Dr. Ruth Gross, the lawyer, Heribert Hanish and Mrs. Anne-Marie Brunner joined shortly afterwards and continue to be active members».

«The Hungarian poet, Eva Láng, replied. She was perhaps the only one of the Spanish protected persons who still remembered Perlasca, even if it was a purely literary and uncertain recall, a maceration of memory». Eveline Blitstein-Willinger Archive.

«To the attention of Dr. József Schweitzer General Rabbi

Budapest

National Institute for the Training of Rabbis

May 24th, 1988

Dear Rabbi:

I write to you in reply to the advertisement published in the May 15th edition of the magazine *Új Élet* (New Life), as I am one of the people who were saved along with their families and who owe their lives to the rescue operations undertaken by the chargé d'affaires, Giorgio /Jorge/ Per Lasca [*sic*] during the Holocaust in 1944.

Per Lasca not only took part in the expedition of Spanish letters of protection but -due to the fact of being the first of the foreign missions to recognise the Szálasi government- he could also participate in the organization of protective letters and help the protected persons.

My family got in touch with the Embassy of Spain because my aunt's brother had settled in La Coruña in the twenties and formed a family there. Referring to this fact, 15 people, family members were among the first go to the embassy and they received letters of protection that saved their lives. Later on, the Embassy issued letters of protection to all those people who were courageous enough to go to the Embassy, queue day and night and expose themselves to the risk of taking off the yellow star and being beaten by the Arrow Cross and the civil guards and run the

risk of being rounded up and taken away by them. The SS stayed away and the people in the queue had no other hope but the belief that God would protect them from the atrocities of the Hungarians usurping power.

The letter of protection saved lives: Per Lasca went personally to the brick Factory to save “the Spaniards” from the grips of the Arrow Cross and took them to the protected house, 35 Parque Szent István and the buildings where the battalion of the protected persons were lodged in houses on Jókai and Csanádi streets. Even back then he was a legendary figure, the hope of the protected persons who awaited the appearance of his car to save those in need. Early one morning, the men of the protected battalion were taken. At the station, my younger brother, my husband and my uncle were all put on the same train coach. Five young men decided to break the lock and flee before the train was set in motion. Two of them —József Schuler, heir of the Schuler Factory and Zoltán Mezei— managed to escape but as they were jumping the guards shot Schuler who died on the spot while Mezei escaped. As he didn’t have any documents or a letter of protection, I hid him in the protected house. The other three youths couldn’t escape as the older ones wouldn’t let them, they stopped them from getting out because of their fear of the reprisals the guards tended to use in similar cases. In spite of having letters of protection, they were taken via Fertőrákos to Gunskirchen and then to Mathausen. My husband and my uncle returned, but I am still waiting for my brother. I have been told that Per Lasca followed the march until the frontier but he was too late and so could not stop them from being taken across the border.

Along with other “protected” members of my family —seven people— we received shelter in building number 35 Parque Szent István. In the house, various Arrow Cross members obliged us to line up with the well-known objective of taking us to the banks of

the Danube. On these occasions, György Bárdos, student of Law, disguised in a KISKA uniform [Pro-Nazi military unit created on December 3rd, 1944, that replaced the Hungarian National Guard], exposing himself to the bombing, would race to the Embassy by bicycle to give warning, the car would arrive immediately and the personal intervention of Per Lasca would prevent the Arrow Cross gangs and once the SS from killing those living in the house and placing reinforcements in the building. On January 6th, György Bárdos sacrificed his youth to save others and in our presence, his mother threw herself from the sixth floor of the building. There is a plaque at the entrance to the house in memory of the young martyr's name.

Per Lasca's concern for his protected persons was visible in many forms. Not only did he protect us but he also procured medications and food for us. Judging from the labels, the food packs probably came from the Red Cross and the Embassy of Switzerland. In the days of the siege, without those packs, we would have starved to death.

We lived on the fifth floor, seven people in one room measuring 3x3 metres, and in total, 29 people in an apartment that consisted of two and a half rooms. I only saw Per Lasca from the second floor when we would be lined up. In my memory I see him as a young, handsome, elegant, dark-skinned man. The figure I see is based more on my idealised imagination of the person who saved my life. And in a case like this, physical appearance is of no consequence. A big person with a big heart, who was heroic and brave.

I have been through a great deal, but the magazine advertisement is yet another challenge for my conscience. What will have become of Perlasca? What will have happened to that man whom we assumed had returned to his homeland? Who would have thought that he had a different nationality? And I fear to

think that his life will have met with the same fate as Wallenberg.

This advertisement is an accusation, a test of the indifference of human beings and of oblivion because what he did for those people, his person and his acts, will not be forgotten by them. Those people did forget something: to give thanks, to locate and find that person to whom we owe our lives wherever he was in the world. I can only speak for myself and for my family.

We are willing to do anything, to make any sacrifice to safeguard his memory -it is scary to think of being able to safeguard only his memory- for future generations. Let his memory be immortalised in the place where he appeared: in Parque Szent István where we are searching for a monument to Wallenberg in vain. It is our duty to get that monument transferred to Szilágyi István avenue and have it erected on the site of his actions, close to Margaret Island, on the Banks of the Danube where he stood up to Hitler's arms and Szálasi's hordes, who declared themselves Hungarian but often acted with even more cruelty than the Nazis.

There are still many people alive, sick, a lot of them helped by the Jewish communities but they owe three months' rent to Per Lasca and Wallenberg. They wish to settle this debt and they would like to know the truth and -even though to my knowledge the religion doesn't allow it- they would like to also say a kaddish for Per Lasca. Among the protected persons of Switzerland, the Vatican, Sweden, Spain and three people protected by Japan -few of us are still alive-. They live with us.

Láng – Königsberg Éva». (Translation by Erzsébet Dobos.)

«April 30th, 1990, the programme, Mixer, by Giovanni Minoli, told his story through the account of Enrico Deaglio». Perhaps the star programme of those years, broadcast by Rai Due.

«La banalità del bene, the first book to formalise the legend of Perlasca based on his own words, the old writings and new texts that he

would add over time». *La banalità del bene* would appear in 1991. The Spanish translation is from 1997. Deaglio came to present it in Barcelona and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán was his host. It is true, however, that two years before an initial version of the *Promemoria* had been published, in diary form and in Hungarian, within the volume, *Az olasz Wallenberg*, by László Elek. Apart from the report *A sua Eccellenza* and the *Promemoria*, Perlasca is also attributed the series of autobiographical fragments that make up part of *L'impostore*, published in the early nineties in various newspapers and compiled in the aforementioned volume in 2007.

«Proof lies in the letter, giving credence to the legend, sent in May of 1991 by the ambassador in Rome, Emilio Menéndez del Valle, announcing he had been awarded the Orden de Isabel la Católica». Archive of Eveline Blitstein-Willinger. On September 14th, 2011, through his press manager, the European Member of Parliament, Menéndez del Valle said he had moving and pleasant memories of that act [the awarding of the Order], held in the Embassy residence in the Roman Gianicolo. Pleasant, because it was a symbolic way of recognising the immense humanitarian role played by Mr. Perlasca. Moved, because Giorgio Perlasca was moved and moreover it was obvious that his health was not good. Jorge Dezcallar played an important role in the decision to award the Order. At the time he was the general director of foreign policy for Africa. In a letter from Washington dated September 29th, 2011, where he was the Spanish Ambassador, he wrote: «When I became familiar with the work of Giorgio Perlasca through some Jewish friends, I felt it would be very appropriate for the Spanish government to publicly acknowledge his efforts, which helped save so many lives, just as Ángel Sanz Briz had done. We Spanish don't tend to be very generous when it comes to recognising others' merits and to me it seemed fair to stand up for someone who had literally risked their life when nobody had obliged them to. And even more so

when nobody expected it of them. Moreover, this formed part of the whole process of establishing relations with Israel, which I was personally deeply involved in and which helped put an end to an historic anomaly. Recognition of Perlasca's work -silenced for so long- would also contribute to normalising our relationship with a terrible and still close past which it was not only consistent of shadows. In the midst of that horror, the work of certain human beings reconciles one with humankind and proves that hope persists.» Prior to granting the award, the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs compiled a study. This is attested to in the interesting report by the civil servant, Mercedes Pérez-Vera, who travelled to Padova in 1990 to speak to Perlasca.

REPORT ON VISIT TO Mr. PERLASCA

On the 1st of September 1989, the Technical Secretary-General commissioned a study of the existing documentation in the General Archive of this Ministry, in relation to the Legation of Spain in Budapest, during the 2nd World War, to ascertain whether it could be considered complete or whether, on the contrary, part of said documentation might plausibly be in the hands of Mr. Perlasca, Italian citizen who at that time passed himself off as the Consul of Spain.

Based on the result of some preliminary research I wrote the Note attached as Annex I. Contact was made with the Perlasca family through the Spanish Embassy in Rome, and they believed they did possibly have documentation of interest to the Ministry and mentioned the advisability of somebody travelling to Padova with a view to photocopying what they deemed of interest.

To this end, I travelled to said city from December 2nd to 6th.

During the course of my stay, I had the fortune to conduct three long interviews in which I corroborated the thesis set forth in my previous report, that is, that Mr. Perlasca did not have any

documentation from the period in which he had acted as Spanish Consul. In his own words, in light of the imminent occupation by the Soviet army, he burned all documentation, including his own Spanish passport.

In spite of the lack of official documentary proof, the actions of Mr. Perlasca are reflected in the “Promemoria” written by the interested party himself and attached as Annex II. In the same, he provides a detailed explanation of what happened in the critical period from December 6th, 1944, date on which Sanz Briz left Budapest, and January 16th, 1945, when the Russians arrived. He also describes his relationship with the Spanish diplomat, and how he had granted him a Spanish passport on October 30th, 1944 due to the gravity of the situation. To obtain said passport, which Perlasca had first applied for in September of 1943, he referred to his position as a former fighter in the Spanish Civil War on the side of the Francoist army. This last fact, not included in his Memoir, was reported to me verbally.

To support the truth of his statements, he gave me a copy of the letters of gratitude from the Jewish protected persons, Annex III, as well as the fond letter dated December 4th, 1945, from Sanz Briz in San Francisco.

In short, there is no doubt that during the approximately 40 days in which Mr. Perlasca acted as the false Consul of Spain in Budapest, he contributed to saving the lives of thousands of Jews protected by the legation of Spain. However, it would be unjust not to acknowledge the decisive importance of the Chargé d’Affaires, Mr. Sanz Briz, who was the one to organise the humanitarian action in aid of the Hungarian Jews.

Madrid, January 9th, 1990.

«A very solemn, official and emotional act with the intervention of numerous figures, that lasted over two hours and in which not a single person mentioned the words «"Sanz Briz"». Erzsébet Dobos went to

the presentation of the Hungarian translation of *L'impostore*. Perlasca's son, Franco, named after the Generalissimo, was present. Afterwards, she wrote me this letter:

«Hi Arcadi, on Monday I went to the book presentation. It was a veeeeeeery long, very official act with a lot of speakers. The act was inaugurated by the Holocaust Museum and Documentation Centre director, Prof. Szabolcs Szita. Then, Franco Perlasca spoke, telling the story of how his father had been “discovered”. Next came the Italia Ambassador. Then the retired Rabbi, József Schweitzer. Then the former Ambassador of Hungary in Italy who had given Perlasca the award of the Government of Hungary in Rome. Then the president of the Cultural Section of the Community of Hungarian Jews, sponsor of the edition. Then somebody from the publisher's side.

However: not a word about Sanz Briz or the Embassy of Spain. And that's more than a little strange as nobody thought to ask why “impostor”. Only Perlasca was mentioned, having saved over 5000 lives, etc. What do you think of that?

Erzsébet».

Chapter 69

«Midway through the forties, in the terrible hunger that marked the post-war era, Sanz Briz sent him food from Washington». The Sanz-Briz family still has a receipt, dated July 11th, 1946. The value of the parcel was 10 dollars. Around 125, at today's rate.

Chronology

THE HEROES OF THE SPANISH EMBASSY

1880

July 30th. Birth of Miguel Ángel Muguero, Ambassador of Spain in Budapest.

1889

Birth of Elisabeth Tourné, chancellor of the Legation of Spain in Budapest.

1895

July 27th. Birth of Casimiro Florencio Granzow de la Cerda in Warsaw. Chargé d'affaires for Spanish interests in Poland.

1900

March 27th. Birth in Cinkota (Budapest) of Zoltán Farkas, honorary lawyer of the Legation of Spain in Budapest.

1910

January 31st. Birth of Giorgio Perlasca in Como.

September 28th. Birth of Ángel Sanz Briz in Zaragoza.

1917

April 1st. Elisabeth Tourné enters the service of the Spanish Consulate in Budapest.

1919

May 10th. Birth of Daimiel Eugenio Suárez, correspondent in Budapest. 1933.

THE CIVIL WAR

1936

July 18th. Start of the Spanish Civil War. Sanz Briz is in Madrid at the time, in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. His work as a fifth-columnist enables him to save numerous people from the Cheka at the Estación del Mediodía (now known as Atocha), while also issuing numerous passports, one of which was to Pilar Primo de Rivera.

August 29th. Ángel Sanz Briz is appointed secretary at the Embassy in London.

December 25th. Giorgio Perlasca arrives in Spain as a volunteer to fight on Franco's side. He joins the legionary artillery and the Flechas Negras (Blackshirts).

1938

Zoltán Farkas applied for the position of lawyer in the Spanish legation. He had previously tried it in 1930. But he wouldn't manage it until August of 1940. Honorary lawyer without remuneration.

January 19th. Complaint lodged against Mme. Tourné for issuing visas to Jews from Hungary and other nationalities to travel to Spain or Lisbon.

May. Miguel Ángel de Muguiro takes charge of the Spanish legation in Budapest.

SECOND WORLD WAR

1939

September 1st. Start of the war. Germany invades Poland.

1942

March 24th. Appointment of Ángel Sanz Briz as second secretary in Budapest coming from El Cairo, his first diplomatic posting.

April. Wedding between Ángel Sanz Briz and Adela Quijano. At the end of the month, they take up residence in Villa Széchenyi.

May 10th. Ángel Sanz Briz takes possession of his post in Budapest.

October. Perlasca arrives in Hungary.

1943

Summer. Eugenio Suárez stays in Budapest for the first time. The Swiss franc is valued at 6 pengös. When he leaves the city, shortly before the arrival of the Russians, the Swiss franc is worth 70 pengös. A lunch in the Duna Palota, the best hotel in Budapest, cost around 30 pengös when he arrived. One year later, it would cost around 100.

August 13th. The *Abc* announces the baptism of Sanz Briz's daughter, officiated by the Apostolic Nuncio, Angelo Rotta.

September. Perlasca meets Sanz Briz at the end of this month and asks him for a Spanish passport in order to escape the Gestapo should he need to. On October 8th, confirmation that there are no documents relating to him in the War Ministry and the passport application is denied.

1944

January. Muguero informs of the surprise raids in Ujvidek (now Novi Sad). Adela Quijano returns to Spain.

March. Charlie Rivel acts in Budapest.

March 19th. Military occupation of Hungary by the Germans. Muguero informs the ministry. Perlasca abandons his boarding house, the Kék Duna, along with two other Italians.

March 21st. Muguero requests permission from the ministry for the protection of Perlasca. Sanz Briz, for his part, writes to Adela, telling her about the political changes.

March 23rd. Sanz Briz writes to Adela again, telling her of the Jewish situation in Budapest.

March 28th. Perlasca applies for a Spanish passport.

Easter Week. Sanz Briz offers Perlasca refuge in Villa Széchenyi.

April 1st. Muguero says he has already received orders on the rights of the asylum-seekers and the protection the legation can carry out.

April 3rd. Joseph Balogh dies in Sávár, a Gestapo internment camp. Eugenio Suárez:

«I remember that the director of the *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie*, Mr. Bálogh, of Jewish race and Roman faith, actively sought out by hatred, was saved in a convent where he was taken by the automobile of the Legation of Spain. He was dressed in a priest's habit,

and for a long time lived in community with certain monks».

April 2nd or 3rd. Muguero requests instructions from the embassy given the advance of the Russians.

April 5th. Report from Muguero on Anti-Semitic measures.

April 17th. Letter from Sanz Briz to Adela speaking of the city bombing suffered the previous night. He again speaks of the Jews, an issue that always appears in the letters.

May 15th. The deportations of Hungarian Jews begin. In less than two months, almost half a million Jews are sent to the extermination camps.

May 20th. An anonymous note from an alleged Hungarian Christian reaches the embassy of Spain. He alerts it to the destination of the Jews deported to Poland. Muguero informs the Embassy, saying these rumours are being heard constantly.

June. Muguero leaves and Sanz Briz takes his place. The Auschwitz Protocol starts to circulate among some Budapest authorities.

June 25th. Sanz Briz informs on the anti-Jewish measures.

July. The deportations end in the first week of July.

July 5th. Meeting in Lisbon between the Spanish Ambassador in Portugal, Eliahu Dobkin from the Executive Committee of the Jewish Agency in Palestine, and Izaak Weissmann from the World Jewish Congress.

July 9th. Raoul Wallenberg arrives in Budapest. According to his friend, Per Anger, he arrived with two backpacks, a sleeping bag, a jacket and a revolver.

July 15th. Telegram from Jordana. It authorises Sanz Briz to implement proceedings for the release of the lawyer and doctor of the legation, as well as the mechanic and servants, detained for being Jews.

July 16th. Sanz Briz again informs the ministry of the rumours about Auschwitz. He informs that in the outskirts of Kattovice the Jews are gassed and the fat of the bodies is treated to be used for industrial purposes.

July 20th. Meeting between Sanz Briz and Miklós Horthy, regent of Hungary, in which the latter describes his concern about the Jewish deportations.

July 29th. Sanz Briz communicates to the ministry the actions undertaken to save the Jews by Rotta and Wallenberg. The dispatch, number 146, will not reach the Ministry until September 15th, 1944, following the death of minister Jordana. This same day, negotiations begin for the rescue of the 500 Slovakian children. The Spanish legation needs to take charge of them to send them to Tangier.

August 2nd. Negotiations for the rescue of 500 Slovakian children are restarted, initiated with Muguiro. The children could not leave for Tangier and were left in the charge of the Red Cross in Budapest.

August 3rd. Death of the count of Jordana, Minister for Foreign Affairs.

August 21st. Meeting between Sanz Briz and the diplomats of the neutral countries with the Apostolic Nuncio Rotta, on the Jewish issue. The dispatch, number 157, sent on August 22nd, did not reach the ministry until October 4th.

August 26th. Sanz Briz sends a report on Auschwitz along with his dispatch n.º 160. The dispatch reaches the Ministry on September 15th.

September. Perlasca asks Sanz Briz to negotiate a permit for him to return to Budapest due to an illness. He had been interned in a small hotel together with other Italians.

September 5th. Sanz Briz visits the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, who tells him there will be no further deportations of Jews.

September 7th. Lequerica, the Spanish Ambassador in Stockholm says the Swedish government has authorised the Swedish representative in Budapest to take charge of Spanish interests. They request confirmation.

September 12th. Sanz Briz insists on the fear among the population of the Russian advance.

September 13th. Nocturnal air-raid of Budapest, with a high victim count.

September 15th. New night-time bombardment, with many victims. A number of bombs fall close to the legation, breaking the windows. Sanz Briz asks the ministry for permission to house the Farkas and Tourné families in the legation. Dispatch 160 reaches Madrid together with the Auschwitz Protocol, sent on August 26th.

September 19th. Sanz Briz informs of the latest bombings in the last 48 hours. The minister, in San Sebastian, asks Sanz Briz that should he have to leave, and only if the situation makes it necessary, to do so without precipitating matters and observing the formalities. Madame Tourné may stay in the legation but not Farkas, as he is not a legation employee. In addition, as he is not Spanish, he may not benefit from protection.

October. Birth of Paloma Sanz-Briz Quijano in Madrid, second daughter of the couple.

October 7th. Sanz Briz informs of the rumours of a coup d'état. Budapest is surrounded by German forces to prevent the negotiation of an armistice by the Hungarian government. The Russians are 150 kilometres from Budapest.

October 13th. Perlasca escapes from Csákydoroszló, where he was interned, thanks to a Swiss legation car sent by Sanz Briz, with a secretary of the Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs who was going to visit him travelling in it. He returned to Budapest in the afternoon, to the Kék Duna boarding-house. On the other hand, Lequerica authorised the legation personnel to move to Vienna in the event of danger, leaving the building in Swedish hands, having previously obtained confirmation from the ministry.

October 15th. Coup d'état by the pro-Nazi Arrow Cross party. Ferenc Szálasi takes power. This same day, Madame Tourné leaves to travel to Vienna to transfer the legation archive. The archive would end up being destroyed in the Austrian capital bombings.

October 17th. Sanz Briz informs of the coup d'état and the aggravation of the violence against the Jews.

October 23rd. The Spanish Ambassador in Washington, on the request of the Zionist Congress, asks for protection to be extended to the biggest possible number of persecuted Jews. «Please inform how this appeal can be attended with the utmost benevolence and humanity, etc.». Lequerica sends categorical orders to Sanz Briz to offer the maximum protection he has the means to offer to the Jews.

October 25th. The ministry authorises the departure of Sanz Briz.

October 27th. Lequerica authorises the protection formula proposed by Sanz Briz and urges him to invest the utmost effort in it.

November 1st. Perlasca goes to the Spanish Embassy and receives a Spanish passport having begged Sanz Briz for it. During those first days, a young Spanish deserter of the División Azul helps out in the Embassy.

November 2nd. At 23:20 Sanz Briz informs the ministry that the Hungarian government has accepted the protection of 100 Jews

under certain terms and conditions: that they leave for Spain before November 13th and that Spain recognises the Hungarian government through its representatives in Madrid.

November 5th. Sanz Briz informs the ministry that the Russians are on the outskirts of the city, and that he will soon have to use the permit granted to him by Lequerica in his day.

November 8th. Oral note from Sanz Briz to the Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, complaining of the treatment received by the protected Jews.

November 9th. Sanz Briz informs the ministry of the aggravation of the terror against the Jews. The men will march on foot to the Reich frontiers; children, women and the elderly will be transported by train. The Arrow Cross do not respect the Spanish passports or those of other countries. «The acts of cruelty are endless». The telegram arrives on the 11th. Oral note from Sanz Briz to the Minister for Foreign Affairs complaining about the situation of his refugees.

November 10th. Lequerica asks Sanz Briz to persist with his protective work.

November 13th. At 23:15 Sanz Briz informs the ministry of how he has issued provisional passports and letters of protection. The number of passports has increased to 300 and the letters of protection to 2000. The Jews will be protected in the houses of the international ghetto while awaiting departure to their respective countries. However, even the Hungarians doubt that Germany will allow travel. Lequerica, for his part, sends a tough telegram demanding that the Spanish documents be respected and that holders of the same not be considered enemies. Veessenmayer informs the German Minister for Foreign Affairs of the actions undertaken by the Spanish embassy.

November 14th. Meeting between Sanz Briz, the Apostolic Nuncio and the representatives of the neutral nations. Joint action against the Hungarian government to protect the Jews. Telegram from Lequerica to Washington describing the orders to protest he has sent to the Spanish legation in Budapest in the face of the Hungarian authorities' refusal to recognise the validity of the Spanish passports.

November 16th. Sanz Briz informs that the legations remain in Budapest, in spite of the fact that many ministers have departed for the west. The Swiss representative has left without leaving any chargé d'affaires behind, and the Danish representative has also left after spending two weeks in hospital having suffered an attack by the Arrow Cross. Telegram from Lequerica to Washington, describing the protective measures taken by the Spanish legation. Oral note and letter of protest from Sanz Briz to the Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs protesting again about the detentions of Jews protected by Spain.

November 17th. Sanz Briz informs of the conversations held with the Hungarian figurehead, and the protest against the treatment received by Jews with Spanish documents. The Hungarian orders an official to accompany a member of the legation to the caravan of Jews travelling on foot towards the frontier with a view to rescuing as many of them as possible. In another telegram he informs of the release of 71 Jews by this representative of the legation in one of the camps.

November 21st. Sanz Briz informs the ministry of the release of around thirty Jews from the caravan marching on foot to the frontier by the Spanish legation. The list dated November 24th of Jews saved by the Vatican, and that in Yad Vashem is also recorded as saved by Spain, Sweden, etc., includes around thirty names. Oral note from Sanz Briz to the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs again informing them of the reasons for the protection of the Jews.

November 22nd. Sanz Briz informs how the international ghetto will be organised, where the Jews will only be allowed to walk from eight to nine in the morning. On this same day, Farkas participates in a meeting at the Swedish embassy. The chief of police, Dr. Batizfalvy, who helped the neutral legations a lot in their rescue work, is among the attendants. So are Wallenberg and the Swiss representative, Krausz. Batizfalvy explains the conditions in which the Jews are being transported to the border with Germany. A team with five lorries filled with provisions to be distributed among the columns of Jews marching on foot to the border is decided on. The team will be made up of delegates from each legation, who must bring with them a typewriter and blank protection papers. Batizfalvy will also form part of the team, and will travel in the Swiss delegate's car. Sanz Briz writes to László Szamosi, an official from the International Red Cross Commission about these teams and the distribution of foodstuffs.

November 23rd. The envoys from the embassies set out. In addition to the fragments of memoirs written by the Swedish diplomats, there is also a report by the Swiss delegates Leopold Breszlauer and Ladislaus Kruger dated November 28th. The journey to Hegyeshalom took place between the 23rd and the 27th and they witnessed the barbaric conditions of the marches. The Jews travelled the 200-220 kilometres from Budapest to the frontier in seven or eight days. Anyone who fell behind was liable to die executed or left abandoned to their fate. In very few cases did they receive help.

The rest of the column received three or four rations of soup during the entire march. There is also a report from the Vatican delegation, members of which included the writer Sándor Újváry, the trader Géza Kiss and the Transylvanian MP, István Biró. There are numerous witness accounts of the marches, from Jews and also from the SS.

November 24th. Telegram from Veesenmeyer. The deported Jews will no longer go to the concentration camps but will do forced labour on the German-Hungarian border. They will be men aged between 15 and 60 years old and women aged between 15 and 50. From the 27th, one hundred weekly train carriages must be ready to transport those Jews -especially the women- who are unable to undertake the march on foot.

December 3rd. Sanz Briz considers the time ripe to leave Budapest.

December 6th. Sanz Briz informs that the Hungarian ministry is inviting the embassies to abandon Budapest in the face of the Russian advance. «Journey tomorrow». Sigismund von Bibra, chargé d'affaires of the German Embassy in Madrid, sends the German Foreign Ministry a description of the actions undertaken by the Spanish Embassy in Budapest in favour of the Jews.

December 7th. Sanz Briz leaves Budapest. Letter from the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs to Roberto de Satorres, from the ministry, on how to deal with the Hungarian authorities following the departure of Sanz Briz. According to Perlasca, the same day that Sanz Briz left (that he estimates as December 1st) the building of the protected houses on Karoly ut. 33 was to be evacuated by the Arrow Cross. Perlasca found out that this same day, in the morning, the Swedish ambassador, Danielsson, went to the embassy to collect the money left by Sanz Briz (exactly 17,825 Swiss francs, according to Perlasca) without providing a receipt for it. Tourné refused to give him the money in pengös, as Danielsson wished. In the afternoon, Farkas and Perlasca delivered 25,000 pengös to József Gera for the Hungarian war refugees, as a form of ensuring good relations with the Arrow Cross. Said money was left by Sanz Briz for this precise purpose.

December 8th. The morning after Sanz Briz's departure, the raids on the houses to take away anyone without Spanish papers continued.

December 9th. Perlasca, in the Promemoria, says the Arrow Cross wanted to requisition Villa Széchenyi and take the Jews sheltered in it away. The extraterritoriality permit was renewed and there were no further problems until the arrival of the Russians.

December 10th. Meeting between Gabor Vajna, Hungarian Home Affairs Secretary and Himmler in Germany. Among other matters, they talked about «cleansing»: Jews, Communists and other enemies. The figures of Jews in Budapest are listed in detail: 120,000 in the ghetto; 18,000 in the international ghetto (referred to as the *Sonderghetto* or «special ghetto» by the Germans).

Following weeks of December. Perlasca claims he spent his time collecting Jews from their hiding places to take them to the protected houses.

December 14th. Sanz Briz reaches Berne.

December 15th. The Arrow Cross murder twenty-four Jews and throw their bodies into the Danube.

December 20th. Five people are hanged in Budapest as a reprisal for the murder of one Arrow Cross member.

December 23rd. According to Lars Berg, acting Minister for Foreign Affairs in Budapest (the government had taken refuge in another city), László Vöczköndy, declares the Swedish Red Cross illegal. All employees are on alert, taking refuge in houses other than their own. Vöczköndy was a diplomat in Stockholm when the Arrow Cross organised the Coup d'état and he was expelled from Sweden.

December 24th. A document from the neutral legations on the mistreatment of Jews by the Hungarian government is signed. The Arrow Cross arrest the leaders of the resistance and murder six of them. They occupy the Swedish Section B (responsible for the affairs of the rest of the legations that have fled Hungary),

established in the former embassy of Finland. They arrest all the diplomats and employees they can find with the apparent intention of taking them to Szombathely, where the Hungarian government was located.

December 25th. According to Perlasca, an Arrow Cross commander went to the Embassy to offer protection with a guard.

December 26th. Perlasca says he was arrested in the Mussolini ter, next-door to the Embassy and taken to the Arrow Cross Cheka on the corner of Andrássy ut. and Liszt Ferenc tér. He was released immediately. At mid-day the heavily-armed guards arrived at the embassy. Perlasca was assigned an escort of two gendarmes.

1945

January 12th. Birthday of Irene, Perlasca's friend. He used to go to see her daily, for about ten minutes, to make sure she was ok. That day, seven friends met in the house. They drank wine and defrosted horsemeat, heating it with a shawl and they all ended up under the table, where Irene received an anonymous kiss.

January 18th. Zoltán Farkas is found dead. He is buried two days later in the patio of the embassy.

February 13th. The Russians take Budapest.

May 7th. Jodl signs the surrender of Germany. End of the war.

MEMORY AND OBLIVION

1945

June 5th. Perlasca arrives in Turkey.

June 12th. The newspaper, *Kis Újság*, property of the count Dessewffy, publishes an article written by Sándor Mitrai on Perlasca. The figure of 5200 Jews saved is given for the first time. All the merit is attributed to Perlasca.

October 13th. Report from Perlasca to the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs.

December 4th. Letter from Sanz Briz to Perlasca, thanking him for a previous letter in which he had described his actions in Budapest. «Do not forget that the decision to place people in the legation properties was my own initiative, without prior permission from Madrid, and motivated by the terror prevailing in the Hungarian capital at the time».

1946

February 7th. Perlasca replies to Sanz Briz.

April 3rd. Giorgio Perlasca sends Sanz Briz his report on his action in Budapest.

November 7th. Giorgio Perlasca receives a food parcel sent by Sanz Briz from the United States.

1949

June 12th. Sanz Briz interview in *Heraldo de Aragón*, regarding his role in Budapest.

1954

October 4th. Miguel Ángel de Muguiro dies.

1961

June 12th. Article on Perlasca and Budapest in *Il Resto del Carlino*.

1966

October 18th. Sanz Briz receives the title of *Righteous Among the Nations*. The Franco government prevents the ceremony from becoming publicly known.

1969

Casimiro Granzow de la Cerda dies.

1980

June 11th. Ángel Sanz Briz dies.

1982

Schindler's Ark, the novel by Thomas Keneally is published, which will give rise to the film by Spielberg, *Schindler's List*.

1988

May 15th. Announcement in the newspaper, *Új Élet*, seeking people who had known Giorgio Perlasca in 1944-1945.

June 9th. Yad Vashem distinguishes Giorgio Perlasca as a *Righteous Among the Nations*.

1989-1990

Numerous acts paying homage to Giorgio Perlasca in Hungary, Israel and the United States.

1989

The first edition, in Hungarian, of the *Promemoria* appears, re-formatted in the form of a diary and published in the volume *Az olasz Wallenberg*, by László Elek.

1990

The documentary *Omaggio a Giorgio Perlasca* for the RAI is broadcast within the programme, Mixer.

December 6th. Giorgio Perlasca is awarded the Encomienda de Número de la Orden de Isabel la Católica, as a collaborator of the Embassy of Spain in Budapest, on the proposal of the Director-General of Africa and the Middle East of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Jorge Dezcallar.

1991

Publication of the book by Enrico Deaglio, *La banalità del bene*.

October 21st. Public act of acknowledgement of Ángel Sanz Briz in Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.

1992

August 15th. Giorgio Perlasca dies.

1993

March 30th. *Schindler's List* is released in the United States.

1994

October 16th. Act of homage to Sanz Briz in the Hungarian Parliament.

2000

Diego Carcedo publishes the novel, *Un español frente al Holocausto*.

2002

January 28th. The film *Perlasca: un eroe italiano* (in Spanish: *El cónsul Perlasca*), by Alberto Negrin and starring, Luca Zingaretti, is released.

2007

Publication of *L'impostore: le memorie dello Schindler italiano*.

2008

October 27th. Plaque commemorating Sanz Briz in the Embassy of Spain in Budapest.

2010

Dalbert Hallenstein and Carlota Zavattiero publish *Giorgio Perlasca: un italiano scomodo*.

2011

December 22nd. The film *El ángel de Budapest*, directed by Luis Oliveros and starring Francis Lorenzo, is released.

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Yad Vashem. The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority (Jerusalem)

We have also consulted the personal archives of the Sanz-Briz and Perlasca families, as well as those of Fernando Granzow, duke of Parcent, Jaime Vándor, Irene Boroviczeny, Iván Harsányi, Elisabet Szel, Eugenio Suárez, Janos Farkas, Eveline Blitstein-Willinger, Tibor Gergely, Mercedes Redondo and other people who prefer to remain anonymous.

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