

**‘Turkish Passport’: A Holocaust story with a happy ending/  
Turkey Rising Internationally  
Notes for Hon. David Kilgour  
Main library amphitheatre  
Ottawa  
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The excellent film we just saw, sponsored by the Intercultural Dialogue Institute and Dr. Yavuz Zeybek, recalls how diplomats posted to Turkish embassies and consulates in a number of European countries saved hundreds of Jewish lives during the Holocaust. It makes us all proud to be Turkish, Turkish-Canadians or Canadian friends of Turkey.

Permit me as a Canadian born during one of the years when these heroic acts were taking place to congratulate and thank, albeit seven decades late, each and every Turkish diplomat, or more realistically their families, actively involved with saving Jewish lives.

One of Hitler’s intended victims in Poland, where his agents murdered approximately three million Jewish civilians, was Dr Truda Rosenberg, who will speak in a few moments.

Dr Rosenberg lived with her family in Lwo’w (today Lviv and part of Ukraine), which was invaded as part of Poland, first by Stalin, then by Hitler, and later by Stalin again. The Yale history professor Timothy Snyder’s 2010 book, *Bloodlands*, about middle Europe from central Poland to western Russia, details how approximately 14 million civilians, mostly women, children and the aged, were murdered by this hideous pair in seven targeted countries. Snyder has noted that the most dangerous place of all to be a disfavoured person was in Lwo’w. Dr Rosenberg was saved by multiple acts of great courage by others and herself in both Poland and Germany during five terrifying years. Her account, *Unmasked*, was published by Carleton University; the French version by the University of Ottawa.

It is true that Turkey was neutral during most of World War 11, but it did enter on the side of the Allies in February 1945. I like to think that if the much-renowned founder of modern Turkey, Ataturk, had lived beyond 1938 that his country would have entered the war at the beginning and played a major role in ending it sooner with less loss of lives. Turkey later participated with the United Nations forces in the Korean War and joined NATO in 1952, becoming an effective bulwark against Soviet expansion into the Mediterranean.

### **Turkey Rising**

Today, Turkey, its people and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan appear to be becoming more important politically and economically almost by the week. Last

year, for example, Jan Egeland, Europe Director of Human Rights Watch, observed that western countries had lost power globally, but that Turkey’s importance had grown both regionally and globally. He saw major advances in the economy, trade, investment, politics and culture in Turkey.

One catalyst occurred in September, 2010, when Turkish voters approved 26 constitutional amendments sought by the Erdogan's government. The changes were intended to bring Turkey's military-imposed constitution in line with European standards of law and democracy. The package included measures to strengthen the rights of women, children, workers and civil servants. It would also make the military answerable to civilian courts, lifting immunity from prosecution for the leaders of the bloody 1980 coup.

### **Democracy Enhancement**

A recent letter to *Foreign Affairs* magazine from Istanbul journalist, Piotr Zaleski, calls for additional democratic enhancement. The abandonment of Erdogan's policy of "zero problems with neighbours", wrote Zaleski,

occurred...As Syrian tanks rolled onto the streets of Hama, Turkish pleas for an end to the violence went largely ignored... The same scene had played out in Libya only a few months earlier. Erdoğan had been convinced that he had Qaddafi's ear, only to be rebuffed by the Libyan strongman...Having belatedly endorsed outside intervention in Libya, he warned earlier this year that the situation in Syria is 'heading toward a religious, sectarian, and racial civil war' that 'must be stopped'. In late January, (he) scolded Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki for stoking sectarian conflicts. Two weeks later, Bülent Arınç, Turkey's deputy prime minister, lambasted Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon for remaining silent in the face of the bloodshed in Syria. 'If they do not raise their voices,' he said, 'then they have to remove the word 'Islam' from their names.'... Refugee camps inside Turkey already hold more than 16,000 Syrians.

Zaleski asserts that more must be done inside Turkey, including "some measure of local autonomy and new cultural rights for Kurds" and addressing the fact that "Turkey continues to have more journalists in jail than any other country in the world, according to the Turkish Journalists Union". He also considers the justice system to be "a growing black hole. In the last three months alone, prosecutors tried to launch an investigation targeting the leader of the parliamentary opposition, subpoenaed the head of the national intelligence agency in a terror probe, and had a former military chief arrested on conspiracy charges, raising fears that parts of the judiciary have become tools in the hands of rival political and ideological forces."

Turkey's successful union of democracy and Islam has, nonetheless, become a bright beacon for many in North Africa, the Middle East and well beyond. Despite Ankara's criticism of Tehran's silence over regime violence across Syria, I believe the channels it has developed with both sides over Iran's nuclear ambitions could still provide it a role there. It is increasingly a regional and world model in the cause of human dignity for all. A new acronym for "BRICS" in the years ahead might well add a "T".

This film is another step forward in Turkey's international leadership advance.

Thank you.