

# Spared Lives

## The actions of three Portuguese diplomats in World War II

18 Dec. 1944

Letter from Jules Gulden, former vice-consul of Portugal in Budapest, in charge of daily affairs at the Portuguese Legation in Hungary, addressed from Geneva, recounting his departure from Hungary and the situation of the Jews protected by the Portuguese government.

(AHD - 2º P., A. 49, M 112)

Geneva, 18 December 1944

To H.E.  
Mr. António de Oliveira Salazar  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Lisbon

Excellency,

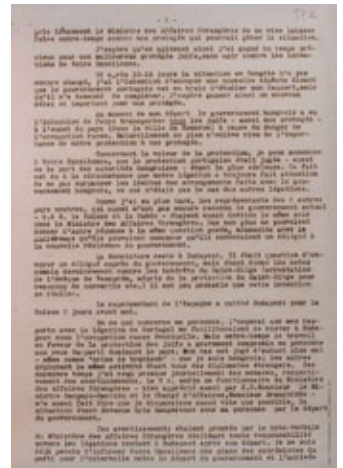
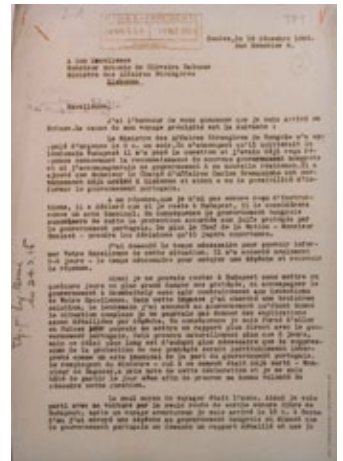
I have the honor of announcing my arrival in Switzerland. The cause of my precipitous journey was the following:

The Hungarian Foreign Minister summoned me urgently on the evening of the 8th inst. Having announced that he would be leaving Budapest the following morning he asked if I had already received a reply concerning the recognition of the new Hungarian Government and whether I would accompany this government to its new residence. He added that Chargé d'affaires Carlos Branquinho must have arrived by now in Lisbon and thus must have had the opportunity of informing the Portuguese government.

When I replied that I had not yet received instructions he declared that if I remained in Budapest he would consider it an unfriendly act. As a consequence the Hungarian government will immediately withdraw all protection afforded to the Jews under the protection of the Portuguese government. Furthermore, the Head of State – Mr. Szalasi – will take whatever decisions he thinks appropriate.

I asked him for time to inform you of this situation. He has only given me 2-3 days – the time required to send a telegram and receive a reply.

I could therefore no longer remain in Budapest without in a few days endangering our protégés even further nor could I accompany the government to Szombathely without acting against your instructions. Faced with this impasse I sought a third way. The following day I announced to the Government that in view of the complex situation I could not provide such detailed explanations by telegram. Consequently I was forced to travel to Switzerland to achieve contact the Portuguese government more directly. This will naturally take more than three



## The actions of three Portuguese diplomats in World War II

---

days but this longer delay is all the more necessary considering that withdrawal of our protégés' protection will inevitably be interpreted by the Portuguese government as being an unfriendly act. The Minister having already departed, his replacement, Mr. Bagossy, took note of my declaration and I hastened to leave that very day to show my good will in resolving this issue.

My only means of transport was by car. I left in my car by the only exit still open from Budapest. After a journey full of adventures I arrived in Bern on the 16th inst., from where I sent a telegram to the Hungarian government saying that the Portuguese Government had asked me for a detailed report and earnestly begging the Foreign Minister not to allow anything to happen in the meantime to our protégés that might worsen the situation.

I hope that by acting thus I may have gained precious time for our unfortunate Jewish protégés, without going against your intentions.

Should the situation in Hungary remain unchanged I intend, after 10-14 days, to send another telegram saying that the Portuguese government is studying my report but that it has asked me to finalize it. I hope thus to gain more time which is so important for our protégés.

At the time of my departure the Hungarian government was intending to convey all Jews – our protégés included – to the west of the country (to the town of Komaron) because of the danger of the Russian occupation. Naturally this plan in no way deprives our protégés of our protection.

As for the value of our protection I can inform Your Excellency that the Portuguese protection was judged, by the Hungarian authorities also, as being the most trustworthy. This is due to the fact that our Legation has always been careful not to overstep the limits of the arrangements made with the Hungarian government, something that was not always the case with the other legations.

As I found out later, the representatives of the two other neutral countries who have yet to recognize the present government, that is to say Switzerland and Sweden, were also summoned that same evening by the Foreign Minister. They were also unable to provide an answer to the question asked, with the difference that they were able to announce that they would be sending a delegate to the new government residence.

The Nunciature is still in Budapest. They had intended sending a delegate to the government but in view of its latest acts against the interests of the Holy See (arrest of the bishop of Veszprem, contempt for the Holy See's protection of many converts, etc.) this intention is hardly likely to materialize.

## The actions of three Portuguese diplomats in World War II

---

The Spanish representative left Budapest for Switzerland two days before I did.

As for me, I had hoped that my connections with the Portuguese legation would have made it easier for me to remain in Budapest, eventually even under Russian occupation. In the meantime my work protecting Jews has seriously compromised me in the eyes of the country's dominant party. My case is all the more serious, and could be considered a "crime of treason", because I am Hungarian: others employed in this activity were all foreign diplomats. I have been getting threats, in the form of warnings, almost every day. On the 7th inst., in fact, a functionary of the Foreign Ministry – well-liked also by H.E. the Minister Sampayo-Garrido and by the Chargé d'affaires, Mr. Branquinho, also told me that I should disappear as soon as possible, as the situation had become very dangerous for me following the Government's departure.

These warnings were proved by a verbal note from the Foreign Ministry declining all responsibility for legations remaining in Budapest after its departure. I have already had occasion to inform you of the plans of the extreme faction of the party for the interval between the government's departure and the arrival of the Russian army of occupation. These plans were already so well known, in fact, that the Swedish Minister was forced to speak about this with the Head of State, who was unable to give him any assurances except during the time when he, Mr. Szalasi, remained in Budapest.

Unfortunately we have well-founded suspicions that the two Legation employees, Peter Pajzs and Thomas Herzog (of whose disappearance I have already informed you) were executed by members of the extreme faction of the party. This proves that the present government no longer controls the situation.

As a result of all this I am thinking of staying on here in Geneva. However, should it be in Portugal's interest and also technically possible, I am ready to return to Budapest under another regime, possibly even under Russian occupation.

The offices of the legation and the consulate are still functioning under count François Pongracz, an able and educated man who studied at the diplomats' school in Vienna. He has already served under Mr. Branquinho who also liked him. I have total confidence in him and hope that he will be able to carry out his job even in these difficult times; given the absence of the government our protective actions are in any case reaching an end. Count Pongracz is perfectly aware of your instructions. In case of danger the Swedish Legation has said it will take under its protection our offices, employees and protégés.

The actions of three Portuguese diplomats in World War II

---

In the hope that you will approve my attitude in this situation I ask you to accept the expression of my highest consideration

s/ Dr. Jules Gulden  
Vice-Consul of Portugal in Budapest  
In charge of day-to-day business at the  
Portuguese Legation in Budapest