

Spared Lives

The actions of three Portuguese diplomats in World War II

25 Jun. 1940

Telegram n° 101 from the Portuguese Ambassador in Madrid to the MNE recounting his mission to France (Bayonne), describing the chaotic situation of refugees at the border and informing that all visas granted by Portuguese Consul in Bordeaux had been declared invalid.

(AHD - Cipher, Collection of Telegrams received Madrid)

101. Just returned Madrid. As I have already had the honor of telling you I found situation at Franco-Spanish border chaotic and likely to involve us in several complications. All mass foreigners resident in France pushed by German advance fled to southern cities wishing to obtain visas for Portugal. These foreigners include large numbers of Jews and people originating in countries absorbed or conquered by Germany who, with or without reason, were trying to flee France at all costs. Our vice-consulates southern France appear to be disorientated with situation made worse by fact Portuguese Consul Bordeaux, out of his mind due events, has started giving out large of visas and instructed Portuguese Consul Bayonne to adopt same procedure. This disorientation has made a great impression on the Spanish side with a political campaign against Portugal being created immediately accusing our country of giving shelter to the scum of the democratic regimes and defeated elements fleeing before the German victory. My arrival and measures I saw fit to apply along the lines suggested by you have avoided things going any further. I spent time today in San Sebastian watching the border crossing closely and ensure that Spanish authorities are quite clear as to our government's intentions. It is understood that we have declared visas issued by Portuguese Consul in Bordeaux as being null and void. I have duly instructed the functionary sent by our Foreign Ministry. The press published an item trying to undo the harm done concerning our position subject refugees.

s) Ambassador



