

“A Privilege That Cannot Be Bought”  
Jews of Turkey and Citizenship Restitutions from  
Portugal and Spain

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## Acknowledgements

I was at a notary office in Marbella, close to Malaga, for the approval of my citizenship application to Spain. After saying *si* (as I had been instructed to do) to all the questions rattled off in Spanish by the notary, he asked me to sign one final form. He then asked – in English – if I wanted to have a photo taken at that moment, as I was becoming a citizen of Spain. I was not sure: who was this photo for? Was the moment that I was signing a piece of paper emotionally important enough to merit documenting? It seemed as though the notary thought I should be emotional; he expected me to want a photo taken. A similar scenario unfolded when I swore allegiance to the Kingdom of Spain, a final speech act for citizenship, at the Spanish Embassy in London. What meaning did these ceremonies carry? I was curious what the hundreds of applicants from Turkey’s Jewish community were thinking: was becoming Spanish – and later Portuguese – emotional for them?

The help and support of my family, especially from my parents Betsi and Ceki Altaras, made this research possible. This work would not exist without the guidance and support I received from my advisor Prof Juliet Johnson. I am also thankful for comments and directions from Prof Debra Thompson and Prof Maria Popova. Working on this project, I got encouragement and motivation from my friends Majka, Abbie, Tom, Maeve, Ewa, Ria, Eran, and Deniz. I also have to thank each of the participants who talked to me for this project, opening a window into their perceptions of citizenship and justice. As vaccine apartheid takes hold around us, I expect discussions of citizenship inequality, a foundational asymmetry in the global system we inhabit, will only become more salient and commonplace.

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## **Abstract**

Jews of Turkey have been applying for restitution of citizenship from Spain and Portugal through processes formalized in 2015. Using twenty-nine interviews, I analyze applicant motivations and find that cultural connections play a minor role in applicant decisions. Unlike Sephardic Jews in other contexts, the citizenship application process did not lead to self-questioning of identity. The more important motivators were Jewish fears about the future of Turkey, the practical benefits of easy travel on an EU passport, and the desire for global mobility that allows neoliberal subjects to chase prosperity wherever it may go. While Jewish fears are mostly in the background, the other two motivations were more pressing. I place these motivations in the context of changing conceptions of citizenship in Europe and the global inequality of citizenship, crystallized in a hierarchy of passports. After acquiring Iberian citizenship, I find that Jews from Turkey relate to their new citizenships solely in practical ways.

## **Abstrait**

Les Juifs de Turquie ont demandé la restitution de la citoyenneté espagnole et portugaise, via des processus formalisés en 2015. À l'aide de vingt-neuf entretiens, j'analyse les motivations des candidats et constate que les liens culturels jouent un rôle mineur dans leurs décisions de demander la restitution. Contrairement aux Juifs séfarades dans d'autres contextes, le processus de demande de citoyenneté n'a pas provoqué une période de réflexion identitaire. Les motivants plus importants sont les craintes des Juifs concernant l'avenir de la Turquie, l'avantage pratique de voyager facilement avec un passeport de l'UE et le désir de mobilité mondiale qui permet aux sujets néo-libéraux de courir après la prospérité où qu'elle soit. Alors que la première raison est en arrière-plan pour les candidats, les deux dernières sont plus urgentes. J'analyse ces motivations dans le contexte européen de l'évolution des conceptions de la citoyenneté et de l'inégalité globale de la citoyenneté, cristallisée dans une hiérarchie de passeports. Depuis l'acquisition de la citoyenneté ibérique, je constate que les Juifs de Turquie continuent de voir et d'utiliser leurs passeports de manière tout à fait pratique.

## I. Introduction

The Inquisition against Jews in the Iberian Peninsula started in 1492. While many had to convert to Christianity, and some resettled in the Americas, others escaped to Morocco or the Ottoman Empire where they formed vibrant diaspora communities. In the Ottoman Empire and later Turkey, the displaced Jews, known as the Sephardim, continued to speak a Hispanic-based language, now usually called Ladino,<sup>1</sup> until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, despite not maintaining connections to Iberia. In the post-Franco period in Spain, especially after 1992 – the 500<sup>th</sup> year commemoration of the 1492 expulsion order – the idea of reconciliation with Sephardic Jews became a topic of discussion in Spain and Portugal. In 2015, both Iberian states, first Portugal and shortly after Spain, passed laws outlining the formal process by which descendants of the expelled could ‘reclaim’ citizenship in these states. Through an esoteric process involving a separate cabinet decision for every single individual, thousands had already applied for Spanish citizenship. The passage of the new law came with immediate approval of all pending applications. Neither law required residency and the application processes could be done almost entirely from outside Iberia. New citizens were not expected to relocate or pay taxes on income earned outside of Portugal or Spain.

Both countries are EU members whose passports give rights to similar freedoms of travel and work. A key difference between the two cases is the more stringent expectations of the Spanish law. Spain expected applicants to pass a Spanish language test and a citizenship test (created by this law) covering Spanish history and culture. The Spanish restitution process also had an expiration date, with the option of a one-year extension. The process officially closed in October 2019. Per the most recent information, Spain has given citizenship to fewer than ten thousand

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed understanding of Ladino (Judezmo/Judeo-Espanyol) see Bunis, David. 2015. “Judezmo (Ladino)” in *Handbook of Jewish Languages* edited by Lily Kahn and Aaron D. Rubin. 366-451. Brill.

descendants of the Sephardic Jews, only half of whom went through the newly established procedure (Kern 2019). On the other hand, by 2020, seventeen thousand descendants of the Sephardim had received Portuguese citizenship and over fifty thousand applications had been submitted for the ongoing application process (Cruz Cilli 2020).

Studies of citizenship policies often focus on the perspective of the state: there is a lack of bottom-up perspectives in citizenship studies, particularly in political science where scholarly interest has been on macro-developments (Pogonyi 2019). The almost simultaneous passage of the restitution laws in Spain and Portugal presents comparison cases that can show how and why applicants perceive and choose to engage with the process. Both Spain and Portugal are EU countries repairing the same historical wrong to the same group of people, offering the same global mobility advantages with different application processes. How do the procedural differences affect applicant perceptions and actions? Do applicants feel more emotionally attached to one country over another? Do they view the citizenship restitution as state recognition of their Sephardic identity? Is such recognition desired? Why have more people applied to Portugal than to Spain? What about the possibility of taking up both offers? Overall, why did many individuals in the Jewish community of Turkey show interest in these policies?

To answer these questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews with eligible Sephardim from Turkey, the origin of a large segment of applicants and home to a densely networked Sephardic community. I argue that obtaining citizenship in an Iberian state did not carry an emotional attachment for the great majority of applicants. Even when applicants felt a cultural connection – often only to Spain – they compartmentalized these sentiments from the citizenship restitution process. While I expected Ladino speakership to be a predictor of identity attachment, this was not the case. Individuals speaking Ladino, or in many cases Modern Spanish, displayed

similar compartmentalization patterns, separating possible cultural links from their application for citizenship. Even the fact that this process came about as an element of historical reconciliation did not much concern applicants, who were suspicious of the motives of the Portuguese and Spanish governments. They were not convinced that these states would allow them to become citizens simply as part of reconciliation, in which they as the aggrieved party showed very little interest. They believed (arguably correctly) that Iberian states must have other motivations like expectations of economic benefit or improving their global image, among others.

Practical advantages, often for applicants' children, were the main motivators. As much of the relevant literature suggests, applicants had a strategic or instrumental mindset. For some, this meant visa-free travel - avoiding hassle, fees, and humiliation at consulates and airports. Others saw a much larger benefit: moving up in the global hierarchy of mobility. While citizens of Turkey could only live and work in their own country, Iberians can live and work anywhere in the EU. Though none of the applicants had plans to relocate at the time of application, they wanted to have the option to do so. Older applicants wanted these freedoms more for their children who could take advantage of affordable education and "build new lives" in a European city of their choice, not necessarily in Spain or Portugal. Applicants' class position also informed what practical advantages they stressed and when they decided to apply. While extremely wealthy individuals began hiring lawyers to submit applications through an esoteric process (which I will describe in more detail) in the early 2000s, the process became more affordable and hence popular in the 2010s and reached truly mass appeal in the Jewish community after the passage of the 2015 laws that brought the cost of the process down substantially.

The Jews of Turkey are a minority that faces discrimination in many quarters and are well-acquainted with numerous outbursts of (at times violent) antisemitism.<sup>2</sup> Thus, for many applicants the new citizenship also constituted an “insurance policy” in case Turkey becomes unlivable for Jews or the state decides to expel them outright, a possibility mentioned by some interviewees while acknowledging its unlikelihood. This desire for a ‘just in case’ alternative was strong despite the existence of Israel, which fulfils a similar function for Jews of Turkey. Since most applicants have a strategic understanding of citizenship restitution, the Portuguese process, with no tests or language expectation, presented itself as the path of least resistance. I will argue that this explains the relative popularity of Portugal’s restitution offer.

This study contributes to the literatures on transitional justice and citizenship by taking a bottom-up approach to citizenship restitution. I will first give an overview of the literature on citizenship, looking at the phenomena of strategic and external citizens in particular and turning to practices of citizenship (as) restitution. This literature review will also include more detailed descriptions of the Spanish and Portuguese laws ‘restoring’ citizenship. In the next part, I will explain my methodology with details as to why I conducted semi-structured interviews, how participants were recruited, how interviews were conducted, and the positionality of the researcher. Then I interpret the results of the interviews to answer the questions laid out above concerning the motivations of application, perceptions of the restitution process and restituting country, and the intersections of the process with ethnic identity and class position. The central finding is that while the governments (and societies) of Spain and Portugal might have been focused on a historical

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this study I intentionally use the term Jews of Turkey or Jews from Turkey (*Türkiyeli Yahudiler*) instead of Turkish Jews (*Türk Yahudiler*). Turkishness, often reserved for Sunni Muslims, has at different times been imposed upon Jews in Turkey, targeted for assimilation. Their imperfect Turkishness was the cause of many of the antisemitic episodes that will be recounted in this study. While some community members and communal institutions do try to identify as Turks, researchers should refrain from imposing such terminology.

reconciliation, applicants were motivated by strategic concerns. Even those expressing some emotional attachment or cultural proximity mentally separated this identity aspect from the citizenship they received. These findings were consistent across gender and age divides. The main differences – even within a single family – had to do with which strategic motivation was most important, though almost all applicants mentioned freedom to live and work in the EU (for themselves and more often for their children), ease of global travel, and an ‘insurance policy’.

## **II. Literature Review**

Mihai and Thaler (2014, 1) note that “we are currently witnessing a veritable wave of apologies around the world.” Rushdy describes our era, after WWII, as a “guilted age,” where states have begun to admit past wrongdoing – an action that was exceedingly rare before the 1940s. These political and historical apologies for the recent, and increasingly distant, past are an expression of “a widespread global feeling of guilt, [...] a moral guilt that emerges from particular political conditions.” (Rushdy 2015, 3) In addition to a socially salient sense of guilt, the international environment has shifted such that today, apologies are not a mark of weakness but “perceived as a marker of moral strength.” (Mihai and Thaler 2014, 1). This reckoning with history has been on display in post-dictatorship Spain (Flesler and Perez Melgosa 2020).

However, offering citizenship as a means of restitution – even if the word apology is purposefully avoided – presents a separate case that needs to be put into the context of the dynamic perceptions of citizenship. Since the 1990s, there has been a sea change in the perception of multiple citizenship-holding and a massive increase in individuals with multiple passports (Aneesh and Wolover 2017; Pogonyi 2019). In the past, citizenship had mainly been “an international filing system” for states to ascertain who was theirs and who was foreign (Brubaker 1992, 31). Every

person in the nation-state system was expected to have one nation and this belonging brought with it “the right to have rights” (Arendt quoted in Harpaz 2019b, 7). Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, conceptions of citizenship changed to emphasize the individual’s relationship to rights rather than their duties to the collective. Changes such as a decrease in conscription, the rise of supranational communities like the European Union, and increased global mass migration contributed to this shift (Balta and Altan-Olcay 2016). This shift occurred in Western democracies to such an extent that “toleration of multiple citizenship has become the norm, and tens of millions of persons around the world hold citizenship in two—sometimes even three or four—countries.” (Harpaz 2019b, 1; Aneesh and Wolover 2017) In the current international system, “citizenship is no longer a thick bundle of identity, rights, duties and political engagement that connects individuals to one particular nation-state.” (Baubock 2019, 1015). This is the “de-nationalization of citizenship,” which Joppke argues is “the master trend in the late twentieth century, especially in Western Europe.” (2019, 859) Others characterize the same phenomenon, as citizenship becoming “‘de-sacralized’ and ‘lighter’ in symbolic and emotional content,” marking the rise of “strategic citizenship.” (Harpaz and Mateos 2019, 834) Although Pogonyi (2019) pushes back on this characterization, arguing that even in its lightened and instrumental form citizenship still serves a function in identity construction, he concedes that individuals increasingly value citizenship more for material benefits than as an apparatus of belonging.

This system is concretized in “the passport – that little paper booklet with the power to open international doors.” (Torpey 2000, xi) Over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these booklets, issued primarily by states to their citizens, “became a requirement for legitimate movement across territorial spaces.” (Torpey 2000, 9) The passport has become such a distillation of citizenship that dual citizens often refer to naturalization as ‘getting a passport’ (Baubock 2019; Harpaz 2019b, Pinto and David

2019). Passport-holding is intimately connected with the rights one can enjoy and one's living circumstances. Shachar calls this the birthright lottery, which Harpaz systematizes as a three-tiered global hierarchy of citizenship (Shachar 2009; Harpaz 2019b). Harpaz finds that Western members of the EU, the US, Canada, settler Oceania, Japan, and South Korea are at the top of this hierarchy (2019b). Citizens of these countries not only enjoy a higher standard of living, but crucially they also have the right to be globally mobile. Citizens of Canada can work in New Zealand with ease, while those of Switzerland can visit Iceland without a visa, and so on. Those at the top also have access to most countries of lower standing. On the other hand, citizens of the middle and lower tiers have to obtain (often expensive) visas that require extensive questioning and documentation for mere visitation, let alone residency in a top-tier country. Holders of middle- and lower-tier passports regularly experience humiliation at airports, embassies, and consulates of higher-tier states (Balta and Altan-Olcay 2016; Harpaz 2019b 59, 109). It is this three-tiered hierarchy that provides the framework for my study.

Individuals with middle and lower-tier citizenships, especially local class and ethnic elites, have formulated ways to respond to this global inequality. Migration is the most visible and heavily studied: millions have left and continue to leave their countries of birth in search of prosperity and security. However, a smaller group has been using the increased acceptability and accessibility of multiple citizenships to move up in the global hierarchy without relocating. It is often those of the middle-tier countries who employ such strategies to obtain what Harpaz (2019b) terms compensatory citizenships: citizenships that compound their rights. These second passports expand the citizenship package of the primary country, especially the right to global mobility. The lack of mobility most troubles class and ethnic elites of middle-tier countries, who desire similar status to their class counterparts in top-tier countries. Citizenship determines their ability to

participate in the global networks that are essential to acquire and maintain wealth, in addition to basic security and welfare (Brubaker 1992). Even middle and lower-tier country elites are faced with burdens when participating in these global networks of prosperity. For example, even the wealthiest citizen of India must prove to a European embassy that they have the ability to pay for their planned trip and convince a consular officer of their intent to return to India in order to get a visa. These individuals use existing privileges of wealth and increasingly, as this study shows, ancestry to obtain easier access to global mobility through acquiring a new passport. These methods result in strategic, instrumental, flexible or compensatory citizenship, or ‘citizenship a la carte’ – different terms scholars use for roughly the same idea (Balta and Altan-Olcay 2016; Joppke 2019; Harpaz and Mateos 2019).

One method is direct purchase of citizenship, offered for example, by EU members Malta and Portugal (Aneesh and Wolover 2017). Another is strategically giving birth in *jus soli* countries that give citizenship to any children born on their territory (Baltan and Altan-Olcay 2016; Ong 1999; Harpaz 2019b). After giving birth to a child in the U.S. or Canada and obtaining a passport for their newborn, the family returns to its country of origin. By using the existing wealth of one generation, this method guarantees access to global networks for the next generation. These strategies are both fully instrumental and unrelated to identity. They are also devoid of intention to relocate, at least in the short term. A third strategy, and the one most relevant for Sephardim vis-à-vis Spain and Portugal, is restitution of citizenship through ancestry or descent. This is an extension of the principle of *jus sanguinis*, whereby citizens can pass on citizenship to their descendants regardless of the descendants’ place of birth. Some states allow for broken chains of citizenship inheritance to be repaired through citizenship restitution, particularly when this breaking was the result of an injustice like the Holocaust. Such arrangements can expand ancestry

into a type of capital, which, when combined with wealth, can allow an upgrade in the global hierarchy of mobility.

Most such laws restoring citizenship to former citizens and their descendants appeared in the post-WWII era. When restoration meant forgoing an existing citizenship, such as the passport of one's current residence, these laws did not draw many applications. However, with the acceptability of multiple citizenships, interest increased (Dumbrava 2014; Axelrod 2020). While some require physical repatriation, others do not even necessitate a visit. An Argentine with Italian grandparents can obtain Italian citizenship without leaving Buenos Aires (Harpaz 2019a; Joppke 2019). Successful applicants are included under the title 'external citizens' along with emigrants and their children who continuously hold citizenship. Some policies have additional requirements like language, as in the case of Hungary (Harpaz 2019b), but many do not. Thus, these laws often open the door to tens of thousands of new citizens who have never lived in and have no intention of living in their new country of citizenship and often cannot speak an official language. External citizens generally have equal rights as settled citizens, including the right to vote, which can often be practiced at consulates (Dumbrava 2014).

One of the earliest examples is Germany. Those deprived of citizenship by the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945 had it restored by Article 116 (2) of the 1949 Basic Law (Basic Law 1949). The main groups impacted were Jews and members of the Communist and Social Democratic parties (Mission of the FRG n.d.). While Germany focuses on displaced people, Romania's restoration law is based its former borders, which allows many people in neighboring countries, particularly Moldova, to become citizens (Liebich 2009; Dumbrava 2019). The policy from 1990, "in the context of post-communist restitution," could be done remotely without having to give up other citizenships (Iordachi 2019, 178; Liebich 2009, 36). Similar attempts to "undo historic

wrongs” under communist governments were also implemented in Poland and Hungary. There are also cases where some groups are purposefully excluded. The 1990 policy of the post-communist Czech government sought to “remedy injustices caused by the deprivations of citizenship.” (Barsova 2009), but only pertains to those who lost citizenship between 1949 and 1989, expressly excluding ethnic Germans and Hungarians (Liebich 2009). A similar issue of intentional exclusion came up in Turkey, which used a 1934 law to naturalize various Turkish and Muslim migrants in recent decades but used the same law to expel Jews from the Thrace region (Kadirbeyoglu 2009). Discussing how to best accommodate emigrants in Europe, Turkish parliamentarians also explicitly wanted to avoid accidentally restoring citizenship to forcefully displaced Christians (Kadirbeyoglu 2009).

As of 2014, fourteen EU countries allowed restitution of citizenship for the redress of historical wrongs, though not all allowed dual citizenship – a notable exception being Austria’s since-changed demand for single citizenship (Dumbrava 2014). Since the passage of a September 2019 amendment, individuals (and descendants) who lost Austrian citizenship during the Nazi period can get it restored without having to give up their existing citizenship (Austrian Embassy Washington n.d.). This change has caused a wave of Jewish applicants for Austrian citizenship restitution (Axelrod 2020). There are eighteen EU countries that have citizenship laws based on ethnicity or ancestry without requiring residency (Joppke 2019). Thus, Spain and Portugal are far from unique in instituting such restitution policies: European “states often grant citizenship to wrongfully deprived persons.” (Dumbrava 2014) In fact, Spain already had experience with such policies, having implemented restitution for those displaced by its civil war. However, Sephardic restitutions are outliers in that they concern displacement that happened centuries before any of the other cases, attempting to correct a historical wrong that predates modern citizenship. The next-

closest example is Italy, which gives citizenship even to those descendants of migrants who went to the Americas before the unification of Italy (Dumbrava 2014). Most laws deal with loss of citizenship in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when formal documents of citizenship could be lost or revoked. Restitution for the Sephardim pulls back the set of examples from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to the late 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### *Why Do States Offer Citizenship Restitution?*

States propose and pass these laws for a variety of reasons. Some are interested in bolstering ethnic diasporic communities in neighboring states (though the effect may in fact be the opposite). Hungary believed that offering ethnic kin citizenship would strengthen exclave communities, but ethnic Hungarians in Serbia and Romania often use their new EU citizenship to leave their hometowns, shrinking the ethnic Hungarian communities the law intended to empower (Dumbrava 2019; Harpaz 2019b). Hungary and Romania also attempt to keep irredentist claims alive by restoring citizenship to people living in territories previously controlled by these states (Dumbrava 2019; Iordachi 2009).

There is a panoply of state motivations that can be grouped as policies concerned with recasting the national narrative following regime change; citizenship restitution to displaced people can be one tool of a broader policy of creating new national memory. Czech restitution expressly attempted to “remedy injustices caused by the deprivation of citizenships” and in doing so to create a new public memory environment that was decidedly post-communist, recognizing and undoing the wrongs of communist Czechoslovakia (Barsova 2009). Similarly, in Bulgaria those displaced in 1944-1947 and by the anti-Turkish actions right before the fall of the communist regime have been restored as citizens (Smilov and Jileva 2009). Bills introduced in Turkey’s parliament also plan similar citizenship restitutions to displaced people (Altaras 2020c). While one

bill focuses on changing public memory around the history of ethnic and political displacement, the other adds that restitution would improve Turkey's image (Altaras 2020c).

In Europe, these public memory interventions are particularly driven by a desire to fit national narratives into the larger memory culture of Europe, which is largely shaped by the experience of the core EU countries. Since European memory culture is foundationally linked to the Holocaust, this genocide and reconciliation with Jews more generally plays a central role. In post-communist Eastern Europe, this has often taken the form of memory appropriation whereby European narratives of the Holocaust serve as contentless comparison cases for 'national' suffering (Subotic 2019). In Turkey, a perennial candidate for EU membership, this has manifested in the Holocaust being commemorated for the first time at an official level (with participation by local Jews) as well as an official annual commemoration for a refugee ship that sank after being rejected for entry into Turkey (Bali 2017). As these practices of European reconciliation with Jewish and Holocaust memory spread, they also impact other states in the region. Once a handful of countries engage in these practices, others become more likely to do.

What were the motivations in Spain and Portugal? Fostering connection to a long-lost diaspora might be motivation for the Iberian states, though bolstering outside communities or irredentist ideas like some examples discussed above are implausible. Spain has been the site of contested public memory with regard to the Franco regime and attempts to find a peaceful multicultural past are tainted by the Inquisition. Spain's renegotiation of public memory culminated in the 2007 Historical Memory Law, which opened up space for confrontation with the Inquisition and Jewish expulsion. For Spain, creating a narrative as a multicultural state with a long pluralist past is also instrumentalized to improve its image damaged by suppression of Catalan separatists. For Portugal, public memory around Jewish inquisition and expulsion is rendered more

urgent by the comparably large population of *Anusim*, people who were forcibly converted to Christianity in the 16<sup>th</sup> century but continued to live as crypto-Jews.<sup>3</sup> In addition to being influenced and influencing other EU states, Portugal and Spain also impact each other. While parliamentary work on a citizenship restitution law in Spain was announced in 2012, it was only passed in late 2015. Spain's passage of the law was influenced and quickened by Portugal's restitution law, which passed in 2013 and went into effect in March 2015.

The actions of Portugal and Spain can also be understood in the larger memory culture of Europe in which reconciliation with Jews plays a central role. To be a 'modern' post-war European is to atone for crimes against Jews. The Iberian states, neutral in WWII and not sites for the Holocaust, have recently been active in commemorating their renegade diplomats that sought to use their positions to protect Jews. Thus, the restitution of the Sephardim and discourses of reconciliation with Jews also can be characterized as attempts to settle into a larger European memory culture, or at least arrive simultaneously (Flesner and Perez Melgosa 2020). The Iberian cases, though geographically in Western Europe, are still peripheral to European post-war memory culture. As recent converts from fascist dictatorship to democracy compared to 'core' EU countries, Spain and Portugal were later additions to the European project. The Jewish-specific aspect of European memory could also partly explain the exclusion of expelled Muslims from citizenship restitution despite continued demands to be included.

### *Why Do Individuals Pursue Citizenship Restitution When Offered?*

While states are motivated by ethnic or narrative motivations, individuals have a different set of motives for taking up offers of citizenship restitution. While states have a variety of reasons

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<sup>3</sup> For an excellent discussion of the experiences of crypto-Jews from the Americas applying for citizenship restitution see Benmayor and Kandiyoti 2020.

for implementing restitution, this study focuses on why individuals take these offers and how they perceive their citizenship following successful applications. Individual motivations can be grouped under strategic/instrumental or sentimental/emotional (Harpaz 2019b; Pogonyi 2019). Particularly in cases involving citizenship restitution as apology for past expulsions or transgressions, how individuals perceive restitution becomes important. Do they have an emotional response to the apology or a heartfelt connection to the state in question? While some argue that identity concerns are important (Pogonyi 2019; Goldschläger and Orjuela 2021), even these scholars concede that strategic concerns like obtaining a ‘premium passport’ predominate (as argued by Joppke 2019; Harpaz 2019a; Smilov and Jileva 2009; Dumbrava 2014; Baubock 2019; Harpaz and Mateos 2019). Some works note that motivations can differ by age: older individuals may apply for sentimental reasons while younger (often more global-minded) applicants are motivated by strategic benefits (Harpaz 2019b; Pogonyi 2019). For Spain and Portugal, the question of sentimental attachment is important as both laws expect demonstration of ‘a genuine link to the country’ (Alandete 2014). Genuine links are pervasive in citizenship-thinking by states though it appears that individuals are comfortable carrying passports that provide benefits without necessarily identifying with a country (Baubock 2019; Harpaz 2019b).

To understand strategic reasons for pursuing citizenship restitution, an individual’s position existing in the global mobility hierarchy is critical. While people in each tier can qualify for ancestry-based citizenship restitution, it is overwhelmingly those from middle and lower tiers who apply (Harpaz 2019b). The literature contains numerous examples of this disparity. Applicants for Romanian citizenship are mostly those lacking free movement in Europe. Argentines and Brazilians of Italian descent heavily apply for Italian citizenship while Canadians or Americans do so rarely. Applications are largely strategic for those attempting to climb the hierarchy, but for

the few applicants making lateral moves, it could be more emotionally motivated. For the Iberian cases, far more of the eligible applicants from Israel, Turkey, and Latin America have applied as compared to Sephardim from elsewhere in the EU and North America.

A further strategic motivation is acquisition of secondary citizenship as an insurance policy. This phrase ‘insurance policy,’ along with ‘just in case’ or “*por las dudas*” (due to doubts) – though the ‘case’ or *dudas* in question are rarely stated – is common in interviews asking why people apply for restituted citizenship (Joppke 2019; Tintori 2011; Harpaz 2019; Harpaz and Mateos 2019; Balta and Altan-Olcay 2016). It reveals a general unease, often connected to political events, economic expectations, or minority status. This explanation is particularly salient for Jews as unease in one’s own country is an all too familiar theme in Jewish history. It is not a coincidence that many of the cases of citizenship restitution (e.g., Spain and Portugal, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Hungary) explicitly or implicitly concern a large population of Jews. One of the classical diasporas in world history, Jews continue to live mostly in diaspora despite the decades-long existence of Israel. Thus, the precarity of living in diaspora or *galut* (exile in Jewish terminology) continues. Harpaz highlights that this Jewish insecurity does not even dissipate in Israel, where applicants for descent-based citizenship also want an insurance policy and name fear of the destruction of their country as a reason. While this fear runs counter to Zionist ideology that positions Israel at the endpoint of diasporic life where the state is the ultimate insurance policy, Harpaz (2019b) still finds it to be pervasive.

### *Sephardic Restitution*

Studies looking specifically at Sephardic restitution have tended to focus on applicants for Portuguese citizenship, and few have interviewed applicants from Turkey. One such study by Pinto

and David, based on 25 applicant interviews with Jews from Turkey,<sup>4</sup> focuses on Portuguese applications and argues that applicants want citizenship as an ‘insurance policy’ against perceived deterioration of political conditions in Turkey, particularly informed by local Jewish history (2019). I will argue that Pinto and David underemphasize rising in the global mobility hierarchy as a factor in citizenship applications and overemphasize Jewish-specific motivations.

In another study based on interviews with 28 applicants to Portugal, Kerem argues that practical advantages of European citizenship are the main draw, applicants do not have a preference for either Iberian state, both of which are EU members. Thus, they simply pick the process that has fewer hurdles, which explains the preference for Portugal over Spain (2021). Despite overwhelmingly interviewing Israelis, he generalizes his conclusions to applicants from the U.S. and Turkey without satisfactory evidence. He hyperbolically declares Turkey “an overtly fundamentalist and totalitarian dictatorship” and erroneously ascribes the decline in Jewish population to this ‘fact.’ He also paints Jews from Turkey as searching for an immediate way out by equating their case with Venezuelan applicants – a conclusion I will contest. His argument that American applicants are motivated by ethnic identity or nostalgia is similarly founded on thin evidence, relying on a single edition of a weekly newsletter from the U.S.-wide umbrella organization Sephardic Brotherhood of America, which he misidentifies as a New York burial society (Kerem 2021).

A third study focuses mainly on the assisting industries that have grown up around the Sephardic restitution process. Goldschläger and Orjuela (2021) argue that emotional attachments dominate for some applicants, even claiming that the application process constitutes identity-building, while others are motivated by EU citizenship (2021). Their privileging of emotional

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<sup>4</sup> I was one of the interviewees for this study.

factors is likely due to the fact that the study is based on ten applicant interviews in which nine of the participants were U.S. citizens, already at the top of the global mobility hierarchy (Goldschläger and Orjuela 2021). While conceding that their sample is not representative of the global Sephardic population, they use Pinto and David's work and news articles (none in Turkish) to supplement their data and make more general claims. I demonstrate that while emotional factors might be important for applicants who already have access to global mobility, for the much larger group of applicants from Israel, Venezuela, and Turkey, this argument does not hold. Moreover, the process of discovering or renegotiating Sephardic identity is not present for applicants in consolidated Sephardic communities like that in Turkey.

Another recent study by Benmayor and Kandiyoti, Sephardi Jews of former Ottoman lands themselves, relies on 55 oral histories with applicants from 12 countries including Turkey and is the only one to include applicants under the esoteric process (2020). They argue that while the Iberian laws focus on an exclusively biological idea of identity – one where bloodlines are determinative – applicants often have broader conceptions of their Sephardic identity, beyond how it relates to citizenship. Benmayor and Kandiyoti's idea of citizenship as heritage and their dialogue with the citizenship studies literature is similar to my framing. They also problematize the Iberian insistence that the Sephardim retain a nostalgia for Spain. This study gives ample voice to its narrators as I do below. Unlike my study, however, uncovering applicant motivations is not Benmayor and Kandiyoti's main focus. While they include Sephardic applicants holding many different primary passports, my spotlight on the Jews of Turkey makes untangling reasons for application easier and contextually specific.

### **III. Methodology**

This study is based on interviews conducted in February–March 2021 with 29 Sephardic Jewish participants between the ages of 20 and 80, 27 of whom successfully applied for citizenship restitution. Fifteen were women while fourteen were men. All but one participant was born and raised in Turkey, though two currently reside in the US and one in Canada (all on temporary visas), and one in Spain. One participant, who has lived in Spain for decades, is an advocate for Jewish revival in Spain who assisted citizenship restitution applicants. Another is a lawyer who has worked on assisting applicants for both Spain and Portugal for over a decade and was an early applicant himself – he is a critical source for the early process of applications recounted below. One participant, despite deep involvement in Sephardic cultural affairs, chose not to apply and his reasoning also provides context for the motivations of applicants. To enable participants to speak more freely, participant names will not be shared. Each will only be identified by a number, approximate age, and gender – this information is summarized in Table 1. Of the applicants, fifteen got citizenship from Spain, four from Portugal, and four got citizenship from both, a situation that appears to be commonplace but has gone unremarked in the academic literature and in press coverage. The pace of applications (with applicants that submitted to both countries counted twice) can be seen in Chart 1.

Of the twenty-four participants currently residing in Turkey, two live in Izmir and one lives in Bursa. The other twenty-one live in Istanbul, home to the overwhelming majority of Jews in the country. All participants are middle or upper-middle class. The participants include eight married couples who were interviewed together as they often applied jointly, yet virtually all couples had differences of opinion on what constituted their primary motivation for application. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted over video-chat. Interviews were conducted

in Turkish – the language participants were most comfortable with – and I translated all of the quotes.

Previous studies often had difficulty recruiting applicants and thus had to rely on community institutions or simply did not talk to applicants from Turkey (Pinto and David 2019; Goldschläger and Orjuela 2021). I was able to recruit a substantial number of applicants with relative ease due to my membership of the in-group. As a Sephardic Jew from Istanbul who personally went through the restitution process, I am both the researcher and a potential participant of this study. My position as a member of Turkey's often closed-off Jewish community created the trust necessary for applicants to participate. While I began by talking to a small group of people whom I already knew (such as family friends and distant relatives), I was able to quickly expand this circle by using snowball sampling whereby participants recommended new people with whom I had not had prior contact. However, as the Jewish community of Turkey is quite small and densely networked, all participants either knew or knew of members of my close family. The fact that I was also an applicant eased the flow of conversation: participants often sprinkled explanations with "I am sure you have had this too." This familiarity sometimes led to participants assuming knowledge and not explicitly mentioning details, though this was quickly solved by asking for clarification. Overall, researcher membership of the in-group helped to establish trust, recruit participants, and make conversations more honest – without the fear associated with talking to outsiders for a small and guarded community. Positionality is important to note since "oral history is a dialogic process; it is a conversation in real time between the interviewer and the narrator;" my position influences the content and form of the data generated (Abrams 2010, 19).

Oral histories can help researchers uncover micro-level perceptions, especially from minorities whose stories are often ignored by the mainstream. This framing is relevant for Jews in Turkey, whose grappling with national identity has been contentious (Neyzi 2005; Neyzi 2008). I rely on oral history style interviews to some extent as a source of information that cannot be obtained elsewhere, such as the ‘legal innovations’ that the lawyer participant explains. For the most part, the narratives allow us to understand how applicants perceived their motives and belonging at different points of the restitution process. It must be noted that oral histories reveal memory – participants are describing their motivations from possibly a decade ago with the benefit of hindsight. Their perceptions of the past are colored by their present, often as successful applicants of citizenship restitution and EU passport holders. I will quote directly from participants as much as possible to allow them to narrate their own experiences.

#### **IV. The Restitution Process from the Applicant Perspective**

This section provides the historical development of the citizenship restitution by Iberian states. The recent policies are placed into the historical context of quasi-citizenship status that Iberian and other European states gave Sephardic Jews in the final decades of the Ottoman Empire. Within this long view, I also explain that many participants began hearing about this topic much earlier than other studies mention. The discussions of restitution go back to the early 1990s and become widely known in the 2000s, though many Jews in Turkey remain skeptical of the possibility of acquiring citizenship. Applications to Spain begin in 2007 while Portugal enters the fray only in 2015. Within these processes, Jews of Turkey did not experience an intense questioning (or self-questioning) about the nature of their identity, unlike applicants from less consolidated Sephardic communities. I first provide the historical context of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and

the emergence of the esoteric Spanish process in the 2000s. Then, I explain the development of the documentation regime used by Spain and its relation to Jewish and Sephardic identity of applicants. Finally, I lay out the legal changes from Portugal and Spain that took effect in 2015, the new application procedures they stipulated, and how these laws were perceived by the participants.

### ***The Prehistory of Spanish Citizenship Restitution***

The Iberian restitution processes must be placed in the historical context of extraterritorial status that (Ottoman) Sephardic Jews acquired in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. At a time when citizenship was supposed to be explicit and “thick,” there existed vague categories like protégé or overseas subject. Portugal, and later Spain, among other European states, gave out thousands of papers with such status to Sephardic Jews in Istanbul, Izmir, and Salonika (now part of Greece). Despite not being equal citizenship like the restitution offered today, it provided various benefits to holders. Only Kerem makes this connection, though he erroneously labels the disbursements of these papers by Portugal starting in 1913 as “citizenship” (2021). Abrevaya Stein characterizes the acquisition of these status papers as “creative means Jews employed to manipulate state law to their advantage” (2016, 12); a similar argument can be made today. Much like how Jews at the time dug up (questionable) Livornese or Bayonnese ancestors, applicants to Portugal rely on difficult to prove connections to the smaller Iberian state (Abrevaya Stein 2016). My interviews show that some of these papers transformed into citizenship and holders of such papers, from Spain or Italy, did not utilize the contemporary restitution process as they already held EU citizenship.

Similar to the present case, Sephardi Jews of that era sought status to alleviate political insecurity, avoid conscription, travel with ease, and participate in global networks of prosperity

(Abrevaya Stein 2016, 18). These papers provoked resentment that turned into antisemitic vitriol in the 1920s from press and state figures, especially the papers provided by Spain as it was combined with Turkish ire against Jews speaking Ladino. Similar pronouncements in the Turkish press have also appeared recently at a lower degree. This social pressure is likely the cause behind participants' demonstration of Turkish loyalty in interviews below, just as some community members tried to demonstrate Ottoman loyalty in the press in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The connections become abundantly clear in the Spanish case as the contemporary law uses the same phrase, *Españoles sin patria*, that philosemitic Spanish senator Ángel Pulido Fernández used in the title of his book promoting a citizenship policy for the Sephardim. Spain's philosemitic efforts were met with ambivalence if not outright suspicion from Jews. Izmir lawyer Gad Franko, responding directly to Pulido Fernandez declared in 1904: "I can assure you that the Jews of the Orient have no special sympathy for your country." (Phillips Cohen 2014, 207) While interviews reveal some affinity for Spain (and not at all for Portugal), Franko's assessment, that Sephardic Jews in Turkey have no special interest in 'Spanishness' besides material benefits (now obtained from EU citizenship), is still generally correct.

Unlike previous studies, I find that for most participants, the process of restitution started long before the 2015 restitution laws in Portugal and Spain. Most had heard that becoming citizens of Spain might be a possibility as early as the 1990s. From the earlier era of interest, the 1924 Spanish decree that allowed special status papers to Sephardim expired in 1930 and a similar practice by Portugal that had started in 1913 ended not long after the Salazar regime came to power (Benmayor and Kandiyoti 2020, 229; Abrevaya Stein 2016). Passports already given by Spain and Portugal in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century could be revoked, expired and not renewed, but there are some cases where Spanish or Portuguese citizenship status derived from these papers get passed down over

generations (Abrevaya Stein 2016, 4). The husband of one participant was at this status: she explained that her husband's family had obtained a Spanish passport in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during the final years of the Ottoman Empire: "for multiple generations they never took up Turkish citizenship, there was no requirement." (Participant 26) Officially, dual citizenship had been banned in Spain until recent changes for the Sephardim, hence the participant's husband and his father were not citizens of Turkey – the country they had been born in and lived in for generations.

With the transition to democracy and increased openness in Spain, the Jewish past started becoming a topic of greater interest, especially for the royal family. According to both the participant from Spain and the Istanbul-based lawyer, the king was personally influential in the restitution process. It was King Juan Carlos' much-publicized first visit to a synagogue in Madrid in 1992, on the day that the Edict of Expulsion had been signed in 1492, that started talk of historic reconciliation with Sephardic Jews and possible restitution. The king would continue to play an influential role until and including the passage of the 2015 law formalizing the process. Some in Turkey said that conversations intensified when the king visited Turkey in 1993. One participant from Izmir explains: "When the king came to visit [Turkey] all this talk started going around." (Participant 4) Another Istanbul participant who has strong business connections to Spain, visiting the country multiple times a year for decades, explains: "I heard about this [citizenship] stuff in 1992, but it was only in 2002 that I heard it seriously for the first time." (Participant 14).

However, the overwhelming majority of applicants first heard of the process between 2005 and 2010. By that point, it had become common knowledge in the Jewish community, with more than a few lawyers and middlemen contracting their services. The lawyer describes the situation that he saw starting in 2006: "There was no special law then. There was the process of granting citizenship to foreigners by cabinet decision; every country has this. This is usually a privilege

reserved for scientists, athletes, and the like.” (Participant 21) While the 1924 decree had expired, there still remained precedent for preferred status for the Sephardim to become Spanish citizens. This created the possibility of consideration through the specialized process. According to the lawyer and independently corroborated by the Spain-based participant with intimate knowledge of the restitution policy, using this process for ‘normal’ Sephardic people was a legal innovation by a handful of enterprising and well-connected Spanish lawyers who expected wealthy Sephardic individuals to pay high fees for an EU passport. Benmayor and Kandiyoti’s (2020, 229) statement, that after 1930, Spain “continued to grant special dispensations to a limited number of applicants, until the 2015 law” obscures the fact that using this process was a legal innovation of the early 2000s, and not actually a vestige of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

These Spanish lawyers began applying on behalf of small number of wealthy Sephardim, often from Venezuela, who received citizenship through cabinet approval quickly. To expand operations to Turkey, a Spanish lawyer reached out to the lawyer participant, which was the beginning for the Jews of Turkey (Participant 21). At the time, the cost of application per person was 15,000 euros, an exorbitant amount even for Turkey’s upper-middle class, however, “there were some who were ready to pay fifty thousand.” (Participant 21) Because this was not a formalized process, it included no guarantees, appeals process, or possible timeline.

Most participants mentioned that when they first heard of the process, the cost was prohibitive. “We had heard about it for years, with exorbitant prices, so we didn’t think about it” said one later applicant (Participant 10). The high cost, combined with the uncertainty, meant most waited to apply. Many reported that either they or their friends and family refused to even believe that obtaining Spanish citizenship was a possibility as almost none personally knew of a successful application. Thus, during the first years, applications were few and far between from Turkey – yet

the overall number kept increasing, making wait times lengthier. The years-long wait of applicants seemed to confirm the unlikelihood of success for the already skeptical. One participant explains that once they heard, “we told our friends, and no one wanted [to apply]. It cost fifteen thousand per person. They thought ‘they’d never give it [citizenship]’. Izmir people aren’t easily convinced.” (Participant 3). A later applicant said, “I didn’t really believe it,” while another decided “It was so expensive, so we just waited.” (Participant 15, Participant 19). One participant who heard of the process in 2007 said “we heard but were not sure it could happen, and it cost so much, so we didn’t think about it.” (Participant 20) Another summed up that “passport prices like twenty or ten thousand were mentioned, I didn’t show interest; people waited 10 years and I hadn’t heard anyone who had gotten it.” (Participant 14). These testimonies show that Jews in Turkey were suspicious of citizenship restitution. It did not make sense to them that a developed European state would give them a passport in the 21<sup>st</sup> century simply because their ancestors had been expelled from there five centuries ago. None raised any concerns about the contradiction between restitution and cost barriers since they did not view this process as “righting an injustice.” For this early period, only one participant even mentioned that “it didn’t sit right with me to get a passport from the country that threw us out,” yet even this was immediately followed by a discussion of cost and uncertainty (Participant 14). Once these barriers were removed, this participant did indeed apply. Even at this early stage, non-applicants saw Spanish citizenship as a commercially sold privilege rather than viewing it through the lens of emotional attachment or restitution.

### ***Proving Identity***

The lawyer describes that once his firm lowered its price to a quarter of the original, the number of applicants jumped from tens to thousands, which was mirrored by increases in applicants from

Venezuela and Israel, also middle-tier Sephardic population centers. The process hinged on proving one's Sephardic identity, yet Spanish law was mum on who counted as Sephardim and who did not. How many parents or grandparents had to be Sephardic? Was language ability in Ladino or Modern Spanish required? Did one have to be a religiously practicing Jew, belonging to an Orthodox congregation? These thorny questions, while relevant for applicants in places of secondary Sephardic settlement like the US (Goldschläger and Orjuela 2021), were not particularly problematic for Jews in Turkey. Every Jew born in Turkey is registered as such by the government, with national IDs reporting religious affiliation until recently, and Jews are organized under the aegis of the Chief Rabbinate headquartered in Istanbul. Despite smaller numbers of Aramaic, Arab, Romaniote, Georgian, and Ashkenazi Jews, the community in Turkey is almost entirely Sephardic such that in Turkey "Jewish and Sephardi are often viewed as equivalent" (Benmayor and Kandiyoti 2020, 237).

This question of how to prove Sephardic identity did present a challenge for the lawyer early on.<sup>5</sup> In practice, how would this communal membership be documented? He explained how his firm developed a procedure and a document checklist for the exceptional application process; the Chief Rabbinate invented a document certifying community membership (Participant 21). By

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<sup>5</sup> One group that is very much concerned with proving Sephardi identity in Turkey has been the *dönme*, a community of Ottoman Jews that converted to Islam following the failed messiah Sabetay Zvi in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. *Dönmes* created their own syncretistic and closed-off religious life, not "Muslim crypto-Jews" as Kerem (2021) suggests. While these individuals have largely assimilated into mainstream Turkish identity as (at least nominal) Muslims, some have seized on the citizenship restitution offer for the benefit of an EU passport since their ancestors were also expelled from Iberia. The group was endogamous into the 20<sup>th</sup> century despite nominal Muslim status and thus can argue ancestral Sephardic status. It was not possible to interview any *dönme* applicants, or the Jewish experts assisting them with applications, on the record due to the fact that *dönme* identity remains secret and extremely stigmatized in Turkey, often imagined as villains in conspiracy theories. However, a number of *dönme* individuals have, with help from Jewish experts, applied for and in many cases received Spanish or Portuguese citizenship through the restitution process. Kerem (2021) states that 40 *dönme* have acquired citizenship through 2 researchers he talked to; the total number is likely in the hundreds. Pinto and David suggest that the process might have "pushed Muslim Turks to claim their Sephardic origins, contributing, to some extent, to a reversal of the Jewish stigma, now associated with a privileged status" (2019, 16) but in doing so they forget the specific *dönme* identity at play, heavily stigmatized in its own right. On the history of this group see Baer (2010); on their stigmatization and appearance in conspiracies see Bali (2008).

accepting this document, the Iberian states essentially outsourced the work of genealogical confirmation to the Chief Rabbinate of Turkey – who notably *did not* turn this into a revenue generator like other institutions did. This meant Jews of Turkey by and large did not have to engage in the arduous (and problematic) genealogical research described by Benmayor and Kandiyoti (2020, 233–235), nor did they have to hire genealogical ‘experts’ from the industry as described by Goldschläger and Orjuela (2021).

Other documents such as proof of subscription to the community newspaper were used as supplementary evidence. Language proficiency – in Ladino or Modern Spanish – was not required but interest in language preservation could be used as supporting evidence of a connection to Spain. By the time most participants applied, the process had become regularized. One participant presented an interesting case as she was a convert to Judaism (and hence to Sephardic identity in a sense) following her marriage to a Sephardic Jew. When she first heard of the process in around 2008, “my husband and son applied then. We didn’t even think that I could apply. Because I’m a convert, not Jewish by birth.” (Participant 28) Only after the passage of the law did she try applying by obtaining various documents including “the Sephardic certificate [from the Chief Rabbinate] with the dates I got married and converted,” and even then “I was not sure it would happen.” (Participant 28). A year later, arriving at the Istanbul Spanish Consulate, “I got the passport with tears in my eyes.” (Participant 28). Yet even for this applicant, having gone through an emotional process that offered validation of her Jewish identity, the motives of application were entirely pragmatic. This case also belies the claim that “those acculturated into Sephardi communities but who are not of exilic Iberian Jewish descent are technically not eligible.” (Benmayor and Kandiyoti 2020) Other technical ‘violations’ include acculturated Aramaic or Arab Jews from eastern Turkey

receiving Sephardi certification from the Istanbul Chief Rabbinate, an institution to which they equally belong.

The interviews demonstrate that unlike applicants further removed from Sephardic life (e.g., in North America), the densely networked and communal Jews in Turkey already felt secure in their Sephardic identity and had no need to gain external recognition for it. This likely gave them different and more pragmatic motives for application than those from less consolidated Sephardic communities, especially those already holding passports of global mobility (such as those from the U.K. or U.S.).

### *The Slowdown, the Laws, and the Emergence of the Portuguese Option*

Returning to the timeline, many participants reported applying as early as 2007, as seen from Chart 1. After 2010, when the slowdown occurred, there was a lull in applications. All of these applications were to Spain and costs had fallen to a low of two to three thousand euros. Initially, “once or twice a month, 20-30 names were granted citizenship by cabinet decision.” (Participant 21) The new citizens were announced on the government gazette of Spain, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*. The *Boletín* was published every Friday and some participants mentioned that they would check to see if they had been granted citizenship every Friday night. However, as the number of applications increased, the process usually reserved for exceptional cases now had a backlog. Moreover, applicants from Venezuela included pleas of urgency in their application, trying to escape their country, which led to the Spanish cabinet prioritizing these applicants (Participant 21). Thus, wait times began to get longer, “cases would take 5, 6, 8 years” (Participant 21). For one couple who had applied earlier, “all together it took 3.5 years” (Participant 23) – they received their passports by 2011. For participants who had applied mere months, or just a few years later,

the process took much longer. Many who applied in the late 2000s reported to have waited between 7 and 10 years.

An additional reason for the Spanish slowdown was to plan for an orderly, standardized procedure. The use of this exceptional process had become untenable once thousands of applications were being received, so “the state [Spain] paused it and got into the preparation of a law.” (Participant 21) According to one participant with knowledge of the passage of this law, “there had long been talk of such a law, like it was always ‘almost coming’ since 2004.” (Participant 27) In 2012, an announcement was made that a law was in the works and a long process of amendments and debates started (Flesler and Perez Melgosa 2020, 21). It appears that the passage of Portugal’s restitution law in 2013, going into effect in March 2015, pushed Spain to finally pass its own law as well. As one applicant described the situation: “very quietly Portugal passed its own law,” or rather that was the view from Turkey (Participant 27). Some participants began hearing about the Portuguese law in 2015, when it was going into effect, but most reported learning of it only in 2016.

The Portuguese and Spanish laws were very similar: both passed their parliaments by unanimous consent and targeted the same population, even though not all Sephardic Jews resided in Portugal after their expulsion from Spain. Previously in Spain, a judge would have to determine whether someone qualified without much standardized guidance. With the law came lists of acceptable supporting documents. For applicants from Turkey this meant documents such as the Sephardic certificate from their Chief Rabbinate (which the community provided without a fee), a certificate of membership to the Federation of the Jewish Communities of Spain (FCJE) (which was available for purchase online (FCJE n.d.)), genealogical evidence, and ‘regular’ documentation such as criminal background checks. Portugal had much the same list, but in

practice put local Jewish communities in Porto and Lisbon in charge of the process (Kerem 2021). Jewish communities in Spain were more marginally involved and decision-making was delegated to notaries. Many applicants hired middlemen or lawyers to collect, notarize, translate, and submit documents, a growing industry that has drawn scholarly attention (Goldschläger and Orjuela 2021).

An important aspect of the passage of the Spanish law was that it came alongside the immediate approval of 4535 pending applications (Benmayor and Kandiyoti 2020, 229). By this time, Venezuelan applications had mostly been approved already and a great majority of those granted citizenship in October 2015 were Jews from Turkey. Of the 23 Spain applicants I talked to, 15 had applied before the passage of the 2015 law and only 2 had received approval before the lull. The other 12 were all approved by this single cabinet decision in 2015. Their years-long wait had finally come to a sudden, and according to all of them unexpected, end. One outcome of this decision that was unplanned concerned these new citizens' children. In the esoteric process, adults applied, and their approval meant that their children received citizenship alongside them. However, the wait times had been so long that many applicants' children had become 18 or older in the interim. The Spanish government decided that these children, mostly born in the 1990s, had to apply (again) as individuals using the new system set out by the 2015 law.<sup>6</sup>

This brings us to a critical difference between the Portuguese and Spanish laws. While both countries wanted evidence of “a genuine link” and Portugal considered language ability in Ladino as a positive factor, only Spain asked applicants to take language and citizenship tests. Spanish law required applicants to pass the A2 level of the standardized Modern Spanish exam DELE. This difference is in line with the more assimilationist immigration model of Spain while Portugal has

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<sup>6</sup> My own family, after waiting for a number of years, was among those approved at this stage, and I was one of these children excluded from family approval, having become a legal adult before October 2015.

a more multicultural approach (Carvalho 2020). While many applicants said they “understood” or that “it makes sense” that Spain asked applicants to demonstrate ability in its national language, others believed such a requirement clashed with the supposed purpose of the law, that being apology and restitution. Critics noted that Modern Spanish developed long after the Sephardim were expelled and the ancestral Hispanic language that some people did speak, Ladino, could not be substituted for this requirement. This law also created and required a citizenship test for the first time in Spain, officially called *la prueba de conocimientos constitucionales y socioculturales* (the constitutional and sociocultural knowledge test) or CCSE. This short, multiple-choice Spanish-language test asked applicants about the highest peak or largest river of Spain, the union rights granted by the constitution, or the artistic talent of Javier Bardem. Both exams require sizable fees in euros and are administered by the Cervantes Institute, Spanish cultural missions with offices around the world, including one in Istanbul. They are available at regular intervals, though the CCSE is offered less often, and results are received within weeks. The results of both exams need to be submitted for the application to be completed.

There was a period of seven months between the Portuguese law taking effect and the passage of the Spanish law that granted citizenship to pending applicants. During that time, 3 participants who had given up hope for obtaining Spanish citizenship after waiting for years with no news, became early adopters of the Portuguese process. One participant explained: “Years passed without any resolution, [so] in the meantime we applied to Portugal. Then all of a sudden Spanish [approval] and right after it came Portugal, so we got that too.” (Participant 5). She said theirs was not a rare situation; everyone in their social circle was in the same position, having obtained both Iberian citizenships. Another applicant had a similar story: “I had given up hope [for Spain] then let’s apply for Portugal before the kids turn 18 [sparing separate application costs].

But before Portugal came the Spain one did, the kids were 17. Then, when we got approval from Portugal too, we thought why not?” (Participant 20) While unremarked in the literature, it appears that a considerable number of Istanbul Jews followed this pattern: applying to Portugal in early 2015 in groups, finally receiving Spanish approval in late 2015, which was then followed by Portuguese approval in 2016. Having already paid all the fees, none turned down the Portuguese offer: interviewees summed up this approach with the Turkish saying “*fazla mal göz çıkarmaz*,” (an abundance of goods does not poke out an eye.) The attitude of double applicants illustrates the low emotional investment in the application process – if not Spain, why not Portugal?

With the passage of the Spanish law, a critical mass of applicants was approved such that virtually all Jews in Turkey knew someone who got citizenship. This ended the general skepticism that Spain would not give widespread citizenship; before 2015 the small number of approved people had been the particularly wealthy early applicants, creating suspicion that greasing wheels was necessary. After 2015, no one doubted the reality of restitution and hundreds – later thousands – of people, certain of approval, set out to obtain EU citizenship. It is at this juncture that the difference between the two laws became important. Two younger participants whose families were approved but had been excluded due to age decided to apply to Spain.<sup>7</sup> They also had some education in Spanish and saw this as an opportunity: “The [language] exam didn’t seem like a burden to me; I thought learning the language would be useful.” (Participant 22) However, even this participant noted that the citizenship test “asking things even most Spanish people wouldn’t know” was a nuisance. Applicants going through the new process also had to visit Spain to meet in person with a notary, who would grant their approval. None of the applicants viewed these meetings as emotional encounters or identity affirmations.

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<sup>7</sup> In the same position and having some experience with Spanish, I made the same choice and went through the process described above.

Eight participants applied to Spain under the new law, which ended in October 2019, and eight applied to Portugal where the process is ongoing. The post-2015 applicants I talked to are evenly split between the two countries, but participants noted that the trend among Jews of Turkey has generally been strongly in favor of Portugal. This idea is supported by large-scale data. While Spain only approved 5,800 new citizens as of early October 2019, 132,226 applications were still pending, most made in the final months. Of these, over 75,000 were from Latin America and the US (Gonzalez 2019), presumably from individuals who already spoke Spanish, which was perceived as a burden by many in Turkey. This final number is also significantly below the earlier expectations of the Spanish government which were as high as half a million applicants in three years (La Vanguardia 2018). As of August 2020, Portugal reportedly approved 20,000 new citizens and another 100,000 applications were pending (Mor 2020). As Kerem says, “Portugal had surpassed Spain in the race for passports for Sephardim” (2021).

While Spain waived exam requirements for applicants over 70, this did not induce a notable increase. Three couples who got Spanish citizenship during the mass approval and also had adult children explained that their children applied and received Portuguese citizenship instead in order to avoid the exams. Another participant who was approved by Spain in 2015 said his brother applied for Portugal. One couple applied to Portugal for themselves and their adult child but opted for Spain for their younger child, for whom exams or visits are not required. Other participants also mentioned families in their own social circles where adults applied to Portugal while some applied to Spain for their children. This might suggest that *ceteris paribus*, there is some lingering preference for Spain. Some participants attributed this to the fact that Spain is a larger and “more important” country, but it could possibly be linked to cultural affinity as well.

## **V. Applicant Motivations: Cultural or Strategic**

The falling price tag combined with the news of successful applications in the Istanbul community had convinced many of the participants to apply in the late 2000s. Yet, what motivated them to spend between two and seven thousand euros to obtain Spanish – and later Portuguese – citizenship? I first interrogate the possibility of cultural motivations for application to citizenship restitution. Despite mentions of cultural connections, especially language, to Spain, emotional reasons are a major motivation for just one of the participants. The participants also express skepticism of state intentions behind restitution. Then I turn to the three strategic motivations a combination of which motivated applicants. I begin with participants' fears about Jewish life and safety in Turkey, especially relating to uncertainty about their communal future. In turn, I discuss the interest in visa-free travel and then the more expansive goal for global mobility. I connect this latter concept to neoliberal subjecthood: highly educated individuals facing uncertain (economic) futures use their existing advantages to give themselves more choices like working in any EU country. I conclude that while Jewish fears are present for all participants at a low level, interest in ease of travel or global mobility is connected to class status, age, and education.

### ***A Cultural Connection?***

Identity – in the sense of Iberian nostalgia or “love of Spain” that preambles of the 2015 laws suggest – did not play a major role. Only one applicant, whose spouse did not share his opinion, expressed feelings of national belonging to Spain as a motivation:

“I’ll speak for myself, EU citizenship sure, but a country is apologizing to you, essentially.

And we feel very connected to Spain, through Ladino, our food, our everything, and I feel

very close to Spain personally. So, I got this very enthusiastically. Of course, there are many advantages [...] but these were not the main thing for me.” (Participant 1)

Importantly, this applicant conceived of the exceptional process, even before the passage of the formal restitution law, as an apology. One other applicant, who had applied in in the 2000s, noted that they liked the idea of an apology (though officially no explicit apology was made)<sup>8</sup>: “They are apologizing to us, saying ‘you are our old people.’ That is nice.” (Participant 6) However, this nicety did not constitute a motivation for him.

Most respondents were ambivalent, if not outright suspicious, of the idea of an apology. Moreover, it is important to note that Spain did not officially make an apology, though the preamble of the law and discourses surrounding it by officials express regret concerning the “historic injustice” of expulsion and Jewish dispossession. (Fleslen and Perez Melgosa 2020, 18-19) Portugal did make an official apology in 1996, long before the citizenship restitution law, yet this does not appear to have made an impression on Jews of Turkey who comprise much of the (supposedly)<sup>9</sup> intended audience (Fleslen and Perez Melgosa 2020, 32).

Participants were unconvinced that these states were genuinely interested in atoning for an injustice committed 500 years ago – an injustice that for many of them did not have much sentimental value. This was not because they undervalued Sephardic culture per se but because they ascribed their culture more to history in the place they inhabit now. The many aspects of the culture they practice are perceived to be results of Ottoman (and later Turkish) lives, including Ladino, arguably a quintessentially Ottoman language. If the expulsion of their ancestors from Iberia so long ago did not concern them as the putative victims, why would it concern the

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<sup>8</sup> In fact, an apology or even mentioning the word expulsion was often avoided. See Fleslen and Perez Melgaso 2020, 18–20 for an example.

<sup>9</sup> On the instrumentalization of Jewish reconciliation by Iberian states directed at improving US relations see Fleslen and Perez Melgaso (2020)

descendants of the perpetrators, they wondered out loud in interviews. When Participant 3 said, “the apology thing is silly, why would they apologize?” her spouse, Participant 4, said, “an apology could have some meaning, but I do not see this an apology.” Another remarked skeptically, “they supposedly gave this to clean off a historical stain, as if they just remembered!” (Participant 7) Most participants thought there must be some economic motive: “I don’t think they gave this as an apology, I thought they’re doing this for their economy,” (Participant 10) a position backed up by recent scholarship (Fleslen and Perez Melgosa 2020, 22). Many agreed: “I am suspicious of how sincere this apology is. It came right after an economic crisis. Seems to me they were trying to draw investment.” (Participant 14)

Some thought this was a method for Spain to avoid accepting Syrian refugees during the mass migrations of 2015 – an idea that seems to have been spun in the Istanbul Jewish rumor mill. In addition to these suspicions, many believed Spain was more interested in presenting a positive cosmopolitan image than in apologizing to expelled Jews. In addition to Participant 1, two participants expressed some interest in the apology. One applicant who said she valued the apology is emblematic of applicants who were actually concerned about the historical wrong – dismissing restitution at first but applying once the extent of advantages and certainty of success became clear: “We wouldn’t want to offend our grandparents, so forgive but do not forget.” (Participant 23) Another participant summarized this mindset: “Some did say stuff about the apology [özür geyiği] but that was an excuse: they all got it later. As if taking this citizenship means accepting an apology from Spain. If it [the citizenship] is useful, why not?” (Participant 20) Thus, even for the smaller group of Jews who claimed to refuse the restitution to avoid accepting an apology, practical benefits convinced them in time. Participant 14 sums up the dominant position: “theoretically it’s

nice but in practice I am suspicious of this apology.” The value placed (or not) on a perceived apology did not differ by gender, class, or (most surprisingly) age.

While many participants remarked on cultural similarities with Spain, they explained that these links were not the reason for their decisions to seek (or for one participant not seek) citizenship. Active in Sephardic cultural activities, Participant 16 mentioned that during multiple trips to Spain he felt a similarity: “when I saw those people, I said, this one resembles my aunt, and that one looks just like my uncle; the way they walk, wear a hat, their hand gestures.” Despite this statement, he added, “But there are religious differences, cultural differences,” and he chose not to apply: “I did not feel the need; to me everyone is comfortable in their own country [for him, Turkey], and I am not too into traveling.” Despite feeling affinity during visits, this connection did not rise to the level of national belonging. Another participant made a similar remark: “We went to Valencia and there were people who looked like Madame Rashel [generic Sephardic name]. I said I guess we came from here; I belong here. The people look just like us.” (Participant 14) Yet he explained that what convinced him to apply where possible practical benefits for his child, particularly for affordable education in Europe. Only one applicant to Portugal who visited during the application process and another who visited after becoming a citizen expressed similar sentiments for that country. Thus, these sentiments did not have bearing on applicant motivations.

The most common connection participants brought up was language – mostly Ladino, though a significant number had experience with Modern Spanish as well. None had any exposure to or interest in Portuguese. One said, “I had already studied Spanish at university,” (Participant 15) Another participant took numerous classes in Modern Spanish long before hearing about the citizenship process. Younger participants mentioned that when schools offered a choice of second foreign languages, they gravitated to Spanish over German or French due to the cultural proclivity

they felt. A parent reported a similar decision that she had just made for her child, who is currently in middle school. For most, this interest in Modern Spanish predated the application process entirely but some learned the language due to the new law. When Spain implemented a language test at the A2 level with its 2015 law, “7-8 women, we got together [for this challenge] and for a year took a Spanish class together.” (Participant 25) The phrase this participant used, “*baş koyduk*” implies a determined attitude to take on a challenge. This demonstrates that while participants often had familiarity with Spanish, most were not comfortable enough to sit for a test even at a low level. This is understandable as Ladino speakership in Turkey declined precipitously over the last hundred and fifty years, first displaced by the prestige language French and later (often under pressure) by the ‘national’ language Turkish. Another applicant’s phrasing here clues us in to the way Ladino/Spanish exists in contemporary Jewish spaces in Turkey: “There is a [cultural] connection of course, everyone at home can speak Spanish.” (Participant 7) While people individually are able to speak Spanish, the applicant refrains from saying “everyone speaks Spanish at home.” Ladino has lost its status as the language of daily conversation among Jews, even at home; it has become an underutilized artefact (Altaras 2020b). This quote also shows how participants often refer to Modern Spanish and Ladino together by using the term ‘Spanish.’

However, only one participant connected this language familiarity to citizenship. Most compartmentalized it as a separate aspect of their identity. The Ladino musician quoted above decided against applying, despite writing up supporting documents for other people’s applications attesting to their activity in Ladino preservation, and the other participants that applied much later stressed practical benefits as paramount. Of the younger participants, two decided to apply to Portugal to avoid the Spanish language requirement despite having learned some Spanish in school, expecting the process with fewer expectations to be quicker. While I had expected to find

some correlation between proficiency in Ladino or Modern Spanish and emotional motivation for application, this was not the case at all. The most Ladino-proficient participant was a non-applicant and several others conversant in the language did not present emotional motivations. In fact, one noted that while there is shared culture, ‘being Spanish’ still feels distant to him as he is not Catholic (Participant 16).

There was essentially no connection expressed to Portugal, even in this compartmentalized way. Most Sephardic Jews cannot trace their point of Iberian departure and none are familiar with Portuguese: for centuries, “Portugal played more of a background role in the Sephardic consciousness,” (Kerem 2021). One young participant who applied to Portugal explained: “If I had any emotional reason to apply, I would’ve researched ‘where are my people from?’ – Spain or Portugal.” (Participant 17) This statement also underlines the impossibility for most Jews of Turkey to ascertain an exact point of Iberian departure. Within single families naturally sharing the same origin, there are numerous cases (as we will see) of some members applying to Portugal and others to Spain. This was because one process happened to be more expedient at the time or for the applicant’s age. While these in-family splits could arise from some members having more interest in cultural or emotional connections, the interviews generally do not support this conclusion. Participant 12 had applied to Spain long ago but now that a language test was instituted, his brother applied to Portugal. Both the children of Participants 1 and 2, and 3 and 4, applied to Portugal despite their parents having applied to Spain, for the perceived ease of the Portuguese process.

***Strategic Motivations: Travel, Jewishness, Mobility***

Participants overwhelmingly focused on the practical or strategic benefits of acquiring what most refer to generically as an “EU passport.” Both their explicit statements and the ways in which participants describe the process support the conclusion that practical motivations are predominant. There are three different practical motivations that need to be disentangled: (1) insurance against potential persecution in Turkey, (2) ease of travel, and (3) global mobility. Looking inward, while studies of other cases have also found that applicants want instrumental citizenship elsewhere as insurance against political instability or persecution in their countries of residence, for my cases this desire is explicitly linked to fears relating to Jewishness in Turkey. Looking outward, ease of travel is a narrow motivation about avoiding onerous visa applications and fees, while a desire for global mobility is much more expansive, concerned with rights to work and live in the European Union (or elsewhere with the benefit of being European) in order to reap financial and professional benefit. The global mobility motivation allows the educated, professional neoliberal subject – an educated elite bound to place by a weak passport – to slip their bounds and live in a borderless world.

Throughout this section, I will discuss how age and class impact which practical motivation was considered more important. It appears that gender does not cause a noticeable difference. While I will discuss these motivations separately, for most participants, a combination of these factors was present. All participants noted ease of travel as well as Jewish-specific insurance concerns to differing degrees, although not everyone brought up global mobility. This latter motivation is much more important for the wealthier participants since taking advantage of this benefit often requires citizenship privileges to be combined with financial ones. Furthermore, participants with children and participants who were at the beginning of their professional lives were more likely to mention access to global mobility.

### **Fears Relating to Jewish Identity**

The uneasy position of Jews in Turkey is summed up by a Ladino saying: *El turko no aharva al djudio, ma si aharvo?* [The Turk does not hit the Jew, but what if he does hit?]<sup>10</sup> With a troubling antisemitic history over the last century, Turkey has become a place where many Jews cannot see a future for themselves and their children. Pinto and David term this phenomenon ontological insecurity and argue that it is “caused by perceived de-secularisation, authoritarianism and anti-Semitism,” thus connecting current political developments with the history of anti-Jewish actions (Pinto and David 2019, 2). Notable antisemitic episodes include the ban on speaking Ladino starting in the late 1920s, the pogrom and forced removal of Jews from the western region of Thrace in 1934, the discriminatory ‘wealth tax’ between 1942 and 1944 designed to dispossess non-Muslims, the Istanbul pogrom of 1955, and murderous attacks on Istanbul synagogues in 1986 and 2003.<sup>11</sup> These incidents demonstrate that Jewish homes and business, Jewish languages, and in extreme (though rare) instances, Jewish safety have either been under attack from the state or not protected from non-state perpetrators.

Pinto and David (2019, 5) believe the acquisition of a second citizenship thus becomes “an opportunity to cope with a highly stigmatised identity and manage ontological insecurity.” Participants want to have an ‘insurance plan,’ a way to leave if antisemitism escalates. They also argue that current political developments – other than antisemitism – cause Jews to perceive higher risk for themselves, which they believe is part of the motivation for applicants (Pinto and David 2019, 5). To analyze this claim, it is important to understand that Jews in Turkey inhabit the same socio-cultural and economic spaces as secular Turks of their own class. The Turkish government

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<sup>10</sup> The saying can also be rendered with an exclamation point at the end for a slightly different meaning: the Turk does not usually hit the Jew but when he does, it is horrible.

<sup>11</sup> For detailed discussions of each of these events see Bali (2012).

made secularization a central tenet of its national project from the early days of the Republic (arguably until the recent past). Within this context, Jews became model citizens of the state in Bali's terminology, and thus secularized along with the wider populace. Their public life was secular, their Jewishness largely cultural, and their communal life a dense web of social connections among loyal Turkish subjects who were all Jews. With this background in mind, it is not surprising that Jews mostly send their children to the same schools as their secular Turkish class-counterparts, read the same newspapers, and often have similar political fears – though there exists among Jews a strong aversion to be political agents in public (Pinto and David 2019). Thus, the (perceived) de-secularization of Turkish state and society is a fear by and large shared by secular Turks. In that sense Pinto and David's formulation somewhat overemphasizes the Jewish specificity of this situation, to the detriment of a unified phenomenon of educated middle and upper-class, largely secular citizens of Turkey seeking global mobility through passport acquisition (Balta and Altan-Olcay 2016).

In my discussions of citizenship restitution with participants, virtually all of them brought up fears relating to their Jewishness, many naming specific antisemitic incidents that had affected their families. Some viewed restitution as an unexpected Jewish inheritance that they should pass on to their children. One participant took a particularly historical view: "If you look at the last century, there is always migration, often from pressures some of which are economic. In the process that begin with the Wealth Tax<sup>12</sup> there is the expulsion of the Greeks [in 1923-4, 1964, 1974], tensions over Israel-Palestine...To me, being in diaspora means you need to have

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<sup>12</sup> The Wealth Tax incident is perhaps the most evocative for Jews of Turkey, when a large segment of the community had to rapidly sell off all of their possessions to pay for discriminatory taxes amounting to more than most individuals' assets. Hundreds of Jews, Greeks, and Armenians were sent to do forced labor when they could not pay their debt. My great-grandfather was among the forced laborers. The practice ended in 1944. Between 1947 and 1951, nearly half the Jewish population (often illegally) left Turkey to settle in Palestine (later Israel).

alternatives.” (Participant 29) The comparison to the once hundreds of thousands strong Greek community, reduced to around two thousand people today, shows the fear of expulsion is not too far outside the Jewish imagination.

Echoing Pinto and David’s arguments (2019), participants tied Jewish-specific fears to the current direction of Turkey politically. One applicant explained “Where is Turkey going? There are some worries, in case we were forced to leave, this is a B plan.” (Participant 15) Some expressed profound uncertainty about Turkey: “Ours is a country where one day doesn’t match the next and as a member of the Jewish community, to have a B plan is comforting.” (Participant 25) This opinion was shared by younger applicants as well: “Turkey’s politically pessimistic, especially for Jews, and to have a way out is good.” (Participant 7) Many participants summed up this motivation using the phrase found often in the citizenship literature: insurance (*sigorta* in Turkish). The same idea was voiced through *bulunsun*, “just in case.” The cultural particularity of Jews of Turkey is eloquently apparent from one participant’s remark that is worth sharing in the original: “*Allah lazım etmesin ama bulunsun*” [May Allah not make us need it, but just in case]. (Participant 3)

This insurance policy was not always about fleeing; “It gives us a sense of security: Maybe Spain would back us up [if something bad happened].” (Participant 6) The phrase used (*sahip çıkar*), translated as “backing up,” connotes ownership – that Spain could assert its *possession* of Jews in Turkey in order to protect them from ‘their own’ government within Turkey, of which they are legally equal citizens. Even within Turkey, Jews believe being foreigners might lend them increased security, just like during the protection papers era. These fears reveal the extent to which Jews are unconvinced by the almost century-long government discourse insisting that they are now accepted as equals; their experiences constantly show them otherwise.

Another possible advantage of Iberian citizenship that some participants mentioned is related to conscription. Military service is mandatory in Turkey for men and plays a significant social organizing role in the majority society (Altınay 2004); this role appears weak, if not nonexistent, for non-Muslims who rather perceive conscription as a nuisance, or even a burden. This perception is rooted in the fact that military service has been a space of heightened discrimination for Jews and Christians in the late Ottoman Empire and in Turkey. Both in WWI under the Ottoman Empire in “worker battalions” and under the Republic during WWII as “public worker military service”, Jews and Christians were essentially used as free menial labor in lieu of military service (Neyzi 2005; Bali 2008b). While these episodes were short-lived, non-Muslims often report discrimination while in service (Bali 2011), de facto bans on arms training for non-Muslims have been reported, and an Armenian, Sevag Balıkcı, was murdered during his service by a fellow soldier in 2011 on Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day. Thus, Jewish interest in avoiding military service is not surprising. While dual citizens do not receive full exemptions, they are eligible for shorter military service and long deferments. Turkey regularly legislates ways for men of a certain age to do ‘paid service’ (*bedelli askerlik*) where a sizable payment can cut down time in service to under a month instead of the full twelve. Avoidance of service as a benefit was brought up not by young men but by mothers of sons. It appears that Jewish mothers perceive the military service setting as potentially dangerous to their children and seek to protect them from it.

One surprising aspect of the insurance mindset, however, is a notable lack of attention to Israel as an alternative. Often, Israel is positioned (and positions itself) as the ultimate insurance policy for diaspora Jews who find themselves in danger or are forced to leave. Every participant expressed sympathy or admiration for Israel, and all had close relatives and friends living there (unlike in the EU). Yet only one mentioned ‘Israel as insurance’: “For us the emergency situation

idea is not [Spain].” (Participant 8) One mentioned that for her aunt, Israel played such a role, while another said that her sister, who was an Israeli citizen, did not feel the need to apply. One family had siblings split on this issue, but the Israel-minded one eventually applied to Portugal due to global mobility advantages. Mentions of Israel also reveal the extent to which insurance policies can be used without leaving Turkey: “We don’t have *Medina* [the Hebrew word for state used by Jews of Turkey to refer to Israel] passports.” (Participant 6) Another applicant said the same: “Israel exists of course but to become an Israeli [without moving] is very difficult.” (Participant 29) If they moved to Israel, citizenship would be forthcoming due to its Law of Return, but this does not protect Jews if they are facing persecution yet wish to remain in Turkey.

However, even as costs continued to fall, many elderly members of Turkey’s Jewish community did not value the insurance policy benefit enough to get citizenship for themselves, even as their children and grandchildren did. This is especially noteworthy as this is the age group that personally experienced the worst antisemitic episodes. This mismatch reveals that Jewish fears are likely not the primary motivation for application. As one younger applicant said, “As a family, the idea of insecurity in Turkey was present in the background [for us], so just in case.” (Participant 18) Instead, the most important motivations had to do with ease of travel and global mobility.

### **Ease of Travel**

For the Izmir couple, “the difficulty of obtaining visas was important. We looked at other countries as possibilities [to ease travel]; it was too difficult to get [citizenship from] Canada. Getting visas was becoming more difficult.” (Participant 4) The participant is talking about the late 2000s, when after 9/11, visa application processes became more stringent – citizenship from a Muslim-majority country, despite personal identity as a Jew, may have compounded this

difficulty. One participant reported that “our goal wasn’t moving but living here [in Turkey] as Spanish citizens so we could go abroad with ease.” (Participant 12) To be Spanish abroad was much more advantageous than being Turkish.

The same participant also recounted a recent experience during the global pandemic, when he was traveling with Turkish colleagues to Bulgaria: “The importance of [this passport] increased in the pandemic. We were going to Bulgaria. One [Turk] had a Bulgarian passport, he was a dual citizen, he passed. The ones holding *TC* [short for Republic of Turkey, often used to refer to national ID] couldn’t pass, they had to turn back.” (Participant 12) Other participants also remarked that the value of a powerful passport became more apparent during the pandemic. When borders hardened for most of 2020 and early 2021, participants noticed they had more freedom as European citizens: some had children studying in European states and this secondary passport gave them the ability to largely come and go as they please, when their Turkish friends might not have that option.

Most participants in their 40s and 50s said that their parents did not apply for citizenship, reasoning that since they did not travel, they did not need this passport: “I asked my mom and dad and they said we can’t be bothered with this. They were 65-70, [and said] ‘what do we need this for?’” (Participant 12) The participants in their 60s and 70s that I talked to did report that they enjoyed traveling and that ease of travel was an important consideration for them. This might hint towards a class cleavage as well: while older middle-class eligible people who did not regularly travel abroad did not show interest, upper-middle class Sephardim who travel more frequently were frustrated with visa hassles and applied. One explained that her Spanish passport “has benefitted us greatly, we don’t have the burden of getting visas anymore, we have become like Europeans. We can also travel to the US more easily. First of all, we considered the possibility of

easier travel.” (Participant 23) Another participant agreed, “traveling visa-free is a delight, you feel good [about yourself].” (Participant 5).

Many participants mentioned that they did mental accounting comparing the price tag of the citizenship restitution process with the many visas they would have to get in their lives if they continued to travel on a Turkish passport. Once the application procedure appeared cheaper than a lifetime of visa fees, interest increased. Many participants noted that people holding other passports that already allowed easy travel to Europe and the US were not initially interested in Iberian citizenship (e.g., siblings, relatives, friends, and one participant himself, who held Italian,<sup>13</sup> Israeli, or Canadian citizenship). However, as application costs decreased, those holding non-EU passports allowing for easy travel also became interested in the process, motivated by EU mobility. Overall, the travel freedom was a central motivation for almost applicants.

### ***Desire for Global Mobility and Neoliberal Subjecthood***

To start, I must note that at the time of application none of the participants intended to relocate to Spain, Portugal, or any EU country for that matter. Participants over 40 made it especially clear that they would not settle outside Turkey unless they were forced. In that context, what does global mobility mean? Once participant explained:

“If the outlook is ‘I won’t live anywhere else’ this could appear needless, but if the vision is ‘I want the ability to choose our future, we could use this’ then it [restitution] is a godsend. No one can get EU citizenship from where they’re sitting for a couple thousand euros like this.” (Participant 21)

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<sup>13</sup> These Italian passports were originally acquired and retained by the processes described by Abrevaya Stein (2016)

What this participant qualifies as a different (or for the narrow-minded, lack of) vision fits into the idea of an ideal neoliberal subject. This type of person acts as “an entrepreneur of [their] possibilities [...] provisionally buying the person [they] must soon become.” (Mirowski quoted in Houghton, 2019) Buying – or acquiring – citizenship to increase one’s mobility and thus attractiveness as human capital, become ‘freer’ and have more ‘options’ are all markers of neoliberal subjecthood (McGuigan 2014). The desire for movement for the neoliberal subject cannot simply be reduced to the Jewish insurance policy; it is also about following global networks of wealth. As Bauman explains, while capital can move freely in search of better opportunities, labor is left in economic crisis (Bauman 1998). The power of the premier passport, when combined with wealth, allows neoliberal subjects to chase capital in this constant movement of prosperity. Viewed in this light, neoliberal subjects that “actively seek to invest in their selves are securing their own futures, while those who do not are left to face the consequences alone.” (Houghton 2019) This is the type of difference the participant is describing above. To activate the global mobility advantages of a top-tier passport requires wealth, thus it is not surprising that it was wealthier participants who expressed such a ‘vision.’ Combining their ‘ancestry capital’ that allows for citizenship restitution with financial capital, some Jews of Turkey are able to reconstitute themselves – and, more importantly for most participants, their children – as neoliberal subjects. This desire comes most of all from a place of economic insecurity and economic uncertainty about the future, personal or familial.

Younger participants state this mobility conception directly, often based on experience of being mobile. Having gone to university abroad, they explained the need for options: “After graduating, I looked for work in the U.S., but I wasn’t too excited to stay so I applied to some schools in Europe.” (Participant 22) Another explained that “After living in the U.S., I like the idea

of possibly working in Europe, closer to home [Turkey]. For my field France is a more viable option, but I could consider Portugal [as a citizen.]" (Participant 18) The same participant said that other young family members applied with the idea of starting Europe-based businesses or possibly living in Europe: "there is a lack of opportunity, in the economic sense [in Turkey] and you sort of have to go abroad to pursue professional opportunities." (Participant 18) Another participant similarly said that becoming a Spanish citizen "has decreased my stress of 'can I stay in the country I went to university in?' There is now an opportunity, if I wanted, for a fresh start somewhere else, and I think this is especially important for young people. You get the chance to get your foot in the door."<sup>14</sup> (Participant 7) A participant who already had ease of travel through a non-EU strategic passport became more interested in global mobility as costs dropped: "As time went on, we thought having an EU citizenship would be an added advantage. We preferred Portugal because the lines were shorter, and costs were lower." (Participant 17)

Participants over 40 expressed similar ideas not for themselves but with regards to their children. This was also an explanation offered by the non-applicant: "I don't have kids. If I was a dad, I'd have a responsibility to maybe provide this opportunity." (Participant 16) For some participants past prime working age, some without university degrees, it was not possible or perhaps simply undesirable to become a neoliberal subject. This might also be the reason they did not encourage their parents to apply. However, they wanted their educated, English-speaking children to be able to function as global neoliberal subjects. In fact, some even saw this as their responsibility, to bequeath such freedoms to their children. The ability to obtain high-quality university education cheaply and to pursue professional opportunities in the EU, and to do these things without visa barriers, were the dominant reasons. Interestingly, none of the applicants

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<sup>14</sup> The Turkish phrase here is *kapağı atmak*, literally to throw the lid (yourself) somewhere.

mentioned even in passing the possibility of retiring in the EU, which other works did remark on (Benmayor and Kandiyoti 2020; Kerem 2021). This might signal the determined rootedness in Turkey of Jews past a certain age, expressed by one participant as “I have no intention of leaving; all my social relations are here.” (Participant 12)

For their children however, participants expressed the need for options. “For our son, at some point in the future he could need it [*işi düşer*], if an opportunity arises in Europe.” (Participant 1) This sort of vague future-oriented discussion, signaling economic uncertainty, often came up: “For the kids someday [*yarın öbür gün*] it would be easy to study or work. For example, our daughter went on Erasmus and her [Turkish] friends had a hard time with visas. It’s good to have [EU citizenship] in your pocket.” (Participant 10) Some families already had children taking advantage of education in Europe and even those studying in the UK post-Brexit have said they still experience benefits. Some applicants referred to EU citizenship as a golden bracelet (*altın bilezik*), meaning a valuable skill or possession that can never loses value. Similar ideas of citizenship are present for class counterpart non-Jews of Turkey who “strategically combine privileges” to birth U.S.-born children (Balta and Altan-Olcay 2016, 939), though the privilege in question for Jews rests on ancestry. In a similar fashion to my description of neoliberal subjecthood, Balta and Altan-Olcay’s Turkish interviewees “saw themselves as ‘global citizens’, but the difficulties they had in crossing borders contradicted this claim” and thus sought to alleviate this condition at least for their children (Balta and Altan-Olcay 2016, 952). While giving birth in the U.S. can be prohibitively expensive and ‘birth tourism’ is somewhat criminalized, the Iberian restitutions give Jews of Turkey the opportunity to achieve global mobility much more easily compared to their Turkish class counterparts. In fact, as *jus soli* is mostly present in the Americas, EU citizenship without relocation is virtually outside the realm of possibility for Turks. Seeing EU

citizenship as an invaluable advantage, one participant summarized her outlook: “I am giving my kids an inheritance that cannot be bought.” (Participant 25)

## **VI. Living Iberian Lives?**

Participant interactions with the officialdoms of the respective Iberian states has shaped the way applicants perceive their new citizenships. As external citizens, their newly forged connections to Iberia or the EU (or lack thereof) also highlight the fact that their predominantly instrumental outlook continued after receiving their new citizenships. Many applicants granted citizenship during the mass approval stage visited Spain to obtain an ID card. Participants who have completed this step reported being treated well and as equals in their interactions with bureaucratic offices in Spain, even when they resorted to English. Many used this opportunity to vacation in Spain, some more than once. They reported enjoying visits to Madrid and Barcelona (none reported visiting elsewhere); despite arriving with a local passport in hand, they interact with the country as tourists due to a lack of social connections.<sup>15</sup> Language ability also presents a barrier, though a number of applicants knew enough Ladino or Spanish to carry on daily interactions. Invoking the insurance notion, one said “when I visited Spain I thought: if one day something happened, I could live here.” (Participant 19)

Despite not having previous plans to do so, two participants ended up living in Spain, both in the Catalan city of Barcelona. One studied abroad for a semester and improved in Spanish. The other moved there for a graduate degree and stayed an additional year after graduating, though she was planning to leave at the time of our conversation. The latter participant explained: “I

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<sup>15</sup> In recent years, a small but growing number of (mostly younger) Jews from Turkey have moved to Spain. While this is still uncommon, the migration of this small but growing group could give an idea of the draw citizenship can have on people who did not apply with the intention of moving but ended up doing so.

applied to schools in Europe, including one in Barcelona. I was not a citizen at the time. It just happened coincidentally that I ended up going to this school in Barcelona, and I became a citizen that summer, few months before I moved.” (Participant 22) While she felt some belonging to Barcelona as a city, she said feelings of national belonging to Spain did not form. The participant who spent five months in Spain said that he enjoyed his time, yet not knowing the language well enough and the current economic circumstances made moving to Spain undesirable. Many of the participants’ children, having received citizenship through their parents, went off to European universities as citizens: in Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and some in Spain. One participant noted that “while there was no feeling [of attachment] when we became citizens, it felt good to be a citizen when I went with my son [to Spain] to move him in for college.” (Participant 8) This participant’s older child, already a legal adult by 2015, was deterred by the exams and became a Portuguese citizen instead.

New citizens of Portugal were not legally required to visit Portugal though many did go on short trips to speed up the process. Similar to those visiting Spain, they also found interactions with the local bureaucracy overwhelmingly positive despite not speaking Portuguese. Others visited after becoming citizens with a desire to see their new country. All visitors noted that they enjoyed their time though none had social connections. Visitors to Spain or Portugal did not note particular interest in Jewish sites, with the exception of the long-term resident in Barcelona who developed an interest in local Jewish history. Some mentioned that they became more sympathetic to their new country while others became more interested in learning Modern Spanish, though only one reported interest in learning Portuguese. None initiated new investments in Iberia or the EU.

Under pandemic conditions, with Turkey’s slow roll out of a Chinese vaccine, participants also expressed interest in using their EU citizen status to get Western-produced vaccines quicker.

One said, “I wish there was some EU vaccine right, but no such thing exists.” (Participant 1) Another remarked that “We thought about going even, to get the vaccine or we were curious, maybe the consulate could have some information about vaccinating us. But then we got vaccinated here anyway so we dropped this.” (Participant 5) A few months after my interviews, hundreds of Jews of Turkey holding EU passports did actually use their freedom of travel to drive to Bulgaria and get vaccinated with a Western vaccine of their choice. Beginning with younger people, eventually hundreds of Jews took advantage of this situation within a matter of weeks, until the Bulgarian government announced it was limiting vaccination to full time residents (Klein 2021).<sup>16</sup>

While external citizens of both states have the right to vote and both countries allow citizens to vote through consulates or by post, no participants have voted in any election. Since obtaining citizenship, almost all participants have had the chance to vote in at least one national election (in addition to EU and local elections). Yet only one participant even attempted to vote, and was ultimately deterred by administrative hurdles. Another said: “I read up a bit [on the election] but then thought I don’t live there; I don’t know enough.” (Participant 17) The lack of electoral participation once again signals a general lack of personal investment in the country of citizenship and the EU as a polity. One summed up: “We don’t particularly care what goes on over there.” (Participant 26)

On treatment of new citizens and administrative hurdles, almost all Spanish citizens complained about the Istanbul consulate. Previously only handling tourist applications, this consulate now has thousands of local citizens it needs to serve and according to participants it has

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<sup>16</sup> A smaller number of wealthier individuals used their visa-free access to the US to get vaccinated there. Non-Jewish dual EU-Turkey citizens and Turkish citizens holding valid Schengen visas were also able to go to Bulgaria for vaccination.

not done so well. Participants explained that employees at the consulate often refuse to speak to them in English or Turkish and snipe at them when participants' Spanish skills are not good enough for bureaucratic business. Many participants noted rudeness from consular workers who are supposed to work on their behalf. In one case, the consulate refused to reschedule an automatically assigned swearing in ceremony (the final step to become a citizen) for children who had a conflict as they were competing in an international sporting event. None of the participants ascribed any emotional value to this ceremony. Numerous participants did not even mention it as part of the steps towards citizenship. For these applicants, swearing allegiance to the king of Spain was not a meaningful experience but an administrative nuisance. For some it had to be rescheduled, which caused annoyance with Spanish bureaucrats.

On consular treatment, one participant said that a consular employee assisting his mother told her, "We are here doing you a favor and you still complain." (Participant 7) Cases of consular workers yelling at or hanging up on applicants and citizens seeking assistance have been reported (Altaras 2020a). One participant qualified consular behavior as "disgusting" and another as "frankly rude," while a third summed up his interactions by saying: "At the consulate they make us [Jews] feel that they [consulate staff] are displeased that we have been granted equal rights." (Participant 14) All participants making these statements explicitly said that they received much better treatment at government offices in Spain and in Spanish consulates in other cities. Such consular treatment would naturally hamper any feelings of national belonging that could arise. No such complaints were voiced by any Portugal applicants though new citizens of Portugal did not express national belonging either.

On the question of national belonging, it is important to highlight many participants' qualification of their current status as having "become *like* Europeans" and "become almost *like*

Spanish,” or “it is *like* you’re from there.” (Participants 23, 19, and 7) Even after having been citizens for up to a decade, participants still did not ascribe themselves identity as Spanish, Portuguese, or even European. Europeanness functions both as a legal status, allowing for ease of travel and global mobility, but it is also a discursive status upgrade. To be treated as European in spaces like airports is an improvement on the experience of being treated as a citizen of Turkey. Discourses of Europeanness in Turkey are enmeshed in cultural contentions – to be European or Middle Eastern – and with Turkey’s (at least on paper) ongoing attempts to become an EU state. Embedded within this society, Jews of Turkey appear reluctant in asserting themselves as European.

In fact, in our conversations many wanted to clarify their continuing commitment to Turkishness. The desire to perform Turkishness, even to a researcher of the in-group, underscores the extent to which Jewish loyalty to Turkey is under constant questioning. This is not surprising as recent news coverage of thousands of Jews of Turkey becoming Iberian citizens has energized charges of disloyalty to Turkey (Abrevaya Stein 2016, 129). Such attacks have a long history in Turkey as they were also made concerning Spain in the 1920s and more recently concerning Israel. While craving the benefits of EU citizenship, participants still want to fulfill the role of dutiful Turkish subjects and thus insist on their Turkish identity. The desire, especially by communal leadership, to contest charges of disloyalty and appear as contented and ‘grateful’ Turkish subjects is well-known (Baer 2020). This is embodied in Chief Rabbi Ishak Haleva who has refused Iberian restitution; even on a trip to Portugal he felt the need to declare “I’m a Turkish Jew, period” presenting this as a reason to not get Portuguese citizenship (Liphshiz 2016). Haleva is operating under an anachronistic conception of citizenship in which dual citizenship is associated with disloyalty. This performance of loyalty is doubly ironic as it is his Rabbinate that prints certificates

for his congregants to seek Iberian citizenship. This could suggest that a cultural motivation – performing Turkishness – would predispose Jews of Turkey to not apply for restitution.

## **VII. Conclusion**

Spain and Portugal have been granting citizenship to descendants of Jews exiled from Iberia in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century for over a decade. The processes were formalized and standardized by laws that took effect in 2015. These laws follow a general lightening of citizenship norms, especially in the EU, and are part of the ongoing wave of apologies and reparations of historical wrongs. Having been disconnected from Iberia for hundreds of years, Sephardic Jews have crafted a unique identity and language. Much of this culture was developed after the expulsion, in the context of the Ottoman Empire and later Turkey. My interviews show that even as some Jews of Turkey feel cultural connections or more generally an affinity towards Spain (generally not for Portugal), they do not consider themselves *españoles sin patria* like the Spanish law assumes.

Beginning in the early 2000s, members of the Jewish community in Turkey began showing interest in acquiring Spanish citizenship. When the Portugal option appeared in 2015, interest shifted to that country. In their application decisions, price and expected practical benefits were paramount. Unlike Sephardic descendants in more dispersed settings, applicants from Turkey did not have to engage in difficult and costly genealogical procedures to prove their identity and thus the process did not necessarily constitute a cultural Sephardic awakening for this community. The reasons for application were a combination of Jewish fears of life in Turkey, ease of travel, and global mobility. Desires to insure oneself against possible antisemitic persecution was in the background for many applicants while the other practical reasons were front of mind. Holding a

Turkish passport often meant visa applications and fees, and possibly mistreatment at consulates and airports. This could be avoided by holding an EU passport. However, global mobility went beyond simple travel. Applicants sought to give themselves or their children as much choice as possible to go after economic prosperity wherever they can find it. This is a result of neoliberal promises of a borderless world; having absorbed such a worldview, some applicants wanted to use the EU passport to remake themselves into neoliberal subjects. The importance of the tiers of citizenship was once again on display during the COVID19 pandemic, as some countries had earlier access to more trusted vaccines. Some new EU citizens sought to use their passport to get the best healthcare available. These Spanish and Portuguese Jews of Turkey do not appear to have developed national identification after acquiring citizenship. Applicants were mostly interested in affordable education and ease of travel, and those are the ways they have utilized their passports. None have voted in any elections, including at the EU level. None have permanently relocated to the EU, and only 2 lived in Spain for a limited amount of time. None have become more invested in learning their new ‘national’ languages – previous levels of interest (or often disinterest) continue.

The Spanish and Portuguese restitutions and the way applicants from Turkey view them reveal the wide gap between holders of top-tier and middle-tier citizenships. Citizens of middle-tier countries are grasping at the advantages of premier passports by whatever means necessary. Due to exigencies of European memory culture and the particular economic circumstances of Iberia, among other reasons, the ancestry of Jews in Turkey has allowed them to access these benefits when combined with some financial investment. This case is merely a demonstration of the underlying inequalities of the global citizenship regime. Descent-based restitution is only one

minor edit to this complex system, though it has made a large difference in the lives of the beneficiaries in Turkey I discuss.

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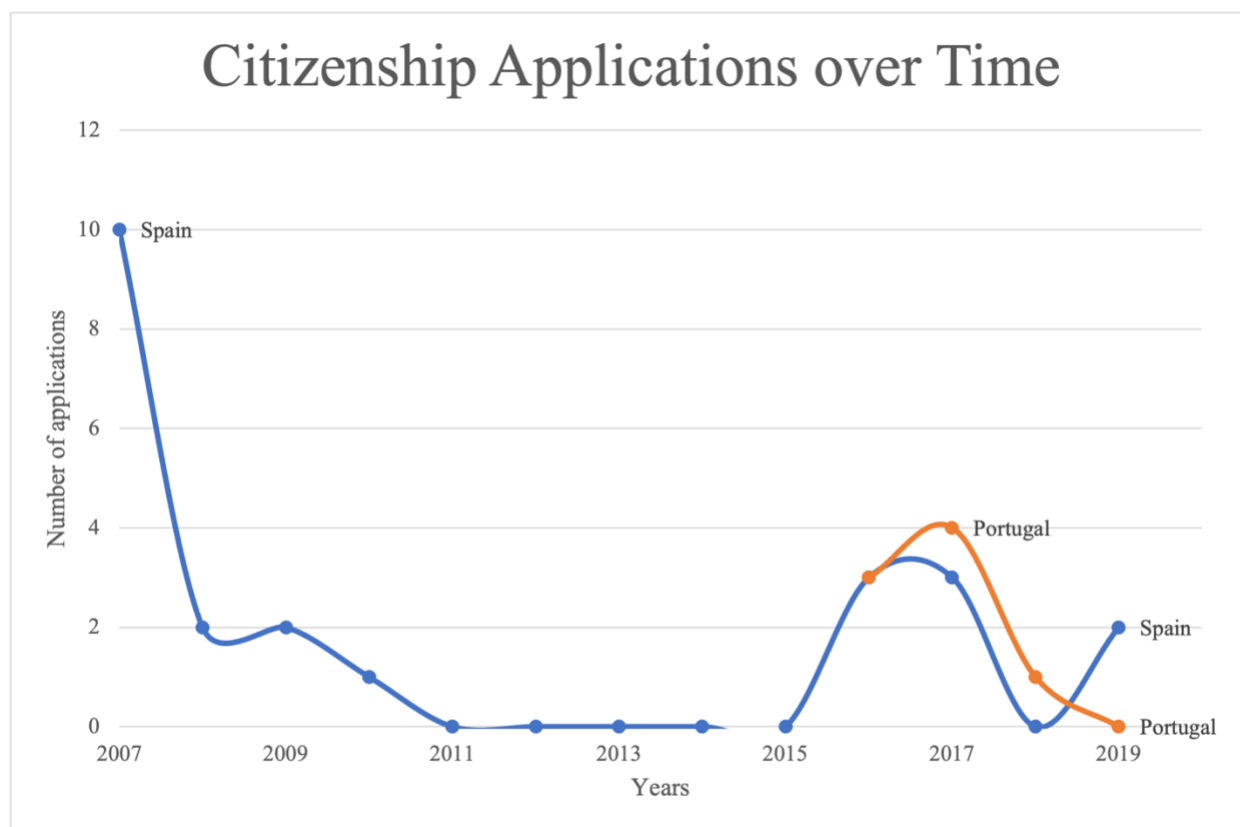
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Table 1

No.	Age	Gender	Application	Application Year	Second Application	Additional Notes
1	45-55	M	Spain	2007		Their adult child applied to Portugal
2	45-55	F	Spain	2007		Their adult child applied to Portugal
3	45-55	F	Spain	2007		Their adult child applied to Portugal
4	45-55	M	Spain	2007		Their adult child applied to Portugal
5	65-75	F	Spain and Portugal	2007	2016	
6	65-75	M	Spain and Portugal	2007	2016	
7	20-30	M	Spain	2016		
8	45-55	F	Spain	2009		Their adult child applied to Portugal
9	45-55	M	Spain	2009		Their adult child applied to Portugal
10	45-55	F	Portugal	2017		Applied to Spain for younger child
11	45-55	M	Portugal	2017		Applied to Spain for younger child
12	45-55	M	Spain	2007		Brother applied to Portugal
13	45-55	F	Spain	2019		
14	45-55	M	Spain	2019		
15	45-55	F	Spain	2016		
16	65-75	M	Non-applicant	N/A		
17	20-30	M	Portugal	2016		
18	20-30	F	Portugal	2018		
19	45-55	F	Spain and Portugal	2010	2017	
20	45-55	F	Spain and Portugal	2008	2017	
21	45-55	M	Spain	2007		Lawyer, assisted applicants
22	20-30	F	Spain	2016		
23	65-75	F	Spain	2007		
24	75-80	M	Spain	2007		
25	45-55	F	Spain	2017		
26	45-55	F	Spain	2017		
27	45-55	M	N/A	N/A		Spain resident, assisted
28	45-55	F	Spain	2017		
29	45-55	M	Spain	2008		

*Chart 1*