

## YOLGA INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

**Victoria:** What is your association with Galatasaray School? Did you go to that school?

**Yolga:** Oh, I did never go to Galatasaray School. But I was, has some disposition for languages. I was the best student in Lycee. Then I have been three times imposed in France, nearly twelve years as chancellor, vice counsel, counsellor of the embassy and ambassador itself.

**Victoria:** So, your French is very good?

**Yolga:** And for a total... Unfortunately I was telling to my daughter, my English is a secondary language.

**Victoria:** Oh, You are doing well.

**Yolga:** I rather ... Italian, rather Spanish, and naturally, mainly French. English I studied also. I took lessons. I went to the university in Ankara. They had English part. But...

**Victoria:** Did you ever teach in Galatasaray? Did you teach there? You didn't teach there?

**Yolga:** No, no

**Victoria:** It was just through your knowledge of French and France that you are sort of... I see.

**Yolga:** Yes. For my generation French was the main foreign language to enter to the diplomatic career. English was secondary, helpful, but not mainly.

**Victoria:** I see. How old were you when you entered the diplomatic court?

**Yolga:** I entered in 1938. I was 26 years old

**Victoria:** And what was your first posting?

**Yolga:** My first post was Paris.

**Victoria:** Ah, not bad.

**Yolga:** Late Mr. Menemencioglu, Numan Menemencioglu was the Secretary General of the Ministry. They prepared and organised an exam and I was the best... How do you call?

**Victoria:** Top of your class?

**Yolga:** Yes. So, but my French also was not as may I say normally acquired.

Dennis speaking with the crew.

**Victoria:** So, Ambassador when you entered Paris in 1938, what were the...

**Yolga:** No, 40. I entered the exams in 38. Mr. Menemencioglu was secretary general. He organised and executed the exams. And I was the best one. But not only for foreign languages, but as knowledge I acquired the best total.

**Victoria:** So, when you have arrived in Paris what year was it? When you went to Paris in a diplomatic court.

**Yolga:** In Ankara I gain the exams in 38. I worked at the ministry, at the office of the Secretary General. He was very satisfied with my acquirement. But he told me, asked me, if I knew Mr. Cevdet Durger, Counsellor General at that time in Paris. I knew him etc. But he told me that my English should be at the level of my knowledges, my French. I mean, I had to acquire more knowledge in French. And for this he was knowing, sending me in Paris to Cevdet Durgers Counsellor General.

**Victoria:** When you arrive in Paris, I'm interested more in; What were the conditions like? When you were in Paris, the war had started?

**Yolga:** The war has started nearly a year ago. But Paris was not still occupied.

**Victoria:** It was the Vichy Zone.

**Yolga:** Yes. It was still free

**Victoria:** I see

**Yolga:** Germans entered Paris 13 of June 1940. This means that two months after my arrival to the Consulate General in Paris. After that we live during all the German occupation and administration, if I may say so. Nearly four years

**Victoria:** When did you become aware of Nazi policy, regarding the Jews? The German policy towards Jews, when did you really become fully aware of what they were doing?  
Anil, repeat that in Turkish

Anil: repeating Victorias question in Turkish

**Yolga:** The first sign was that the Jews had to wear the Star of David. All the French Jews were obliged to wear them, when they go out of their home. That was the rule. The first German sign against Jews was that measure.

**Victoria:** What were your instructions from Ankara? How to handle this situation? How to handle what the Germans were doing to the Jews?

Anil repeating Victorias question in Turkish

**Yolga:** This question has been asked me several times during all last years. Ankara didn't give us any special instruments, instrumentation. But there are principles, main principles in the Turkish Administration, inside or externally. We have to defend the rights of the Turkish citizens. There is no specification for Jews or Greeks or Armenians. But if a man is Turkish Vatandas (citizen). Citizen, it is a word that I know, but I cannot remember. You know I am now 86 years old and believe me I was speaking English and also French naturally much better. You know my memory is weakening.

**Victoria:** So, what you were just talking about "No difference between the Armenians, the Jews and the Greeks" in some of the documents there is a phrase Turkey doesn't discriminate against its citizens on the basis of religion. So that's the principle that you were talking about.

**Yolga:** Yes, sir. This exactly main argument we used against the German authorities. Turkey doesn't make any discrimination for religion among his citizens. And the second argument when we were trying to save our citizens was that we were not in war. We were neutral. So we don't make any discrimination for religion among our citizens and Turkey is not in war. So they don't have the right of bothering our citizens because they are Greeks or Jews etc.

Dennis speaking with the crew. (Scene 3)

**Victoria:** Ambassador Yoga, when did you know about the concentration camps, that Jews were being taken away to camps?

**Yolga:** Well, it was nearly at my arrival that this problem was, how do you call, known by everybody. Anyway, when I was in Paris, they, Germans were catching, collecting the Jews in all regions in France. They brought them first to Drancy. This is a near-town in Paris. There was a camp. They gathered the Jews they brought from several regions a France. They sued sometimes.

Dennis, Victoria speaking with the crew.

**Yolga:** The Drancy Camp near Paris was one of the main places for concentration before sending to Germany the Jews. Any Jew who was arrested by the Germans was not sent directly to Berlin. They were gathered in Drancy, very near some 4-5 kilometres around Paris. And then by the same train some 200-300 Jews were being sent to Berlin and then distributed between several camps that you know better than me.

**Victoria:** So when did you really start pulling people out, saving people? Was it like the middle of 41, when things getting very difficult?

**Yolga:** The beginning of 41, I can say. The Germans entered to Paris 13th of June. For some times, months they were, how do you call, quiet. But then they began to gather the Jews and send to Drance first, then from there to Berlin.

**Victoria:** When you began to save the Turkish citizens, the Turkish Jewish citizens, I think they were two types of people, one that had the papers and one that didn't have the papers. Could you tell us about that?

**Yolga:** You know rather that you are like me. That Turkish citizens had two categories. The regular ones and irregular, "Gayrimuntazam Turkish" we say. Regular ones were more, how do you call, closer to us and normal citizens. But the irregulars... Since 30 years they were living with their new society, let us say. But when Germans began to gather them and send to Germany, they, how do you call, made great assault to the Turkish Consulate General. I were receiving them normally and explaining them what to do regularly. You know, to regularise their situation. They were for this object, they were showing me ...

*Pause, crew speaking...*

**Victoria:** Ambassador, this is very important for us to know. What were the conditions like at Drance when you went there? How did it smell? How did it feel and taste?

**Yolga:** I went to two places in the camp. First the directors office. I was very, how do you call, gently, regularly accepted and helped also. Director first took me in his office for chatting. Then he accompanied me to the train. Because the Turkish Jew Citizens were gathered in the train and the train ... depart for Berlin perhaps in a 2-3 days. Anyway we went to the train. We found the person who writes me his situation to the Consulate. He was with his wife and daughter. We took them. You shouldn't see their situation. They are waiting in a train to go to Berlin. The vice-council comes together with the camp director and take them in order to free them. This was unforgettable. But I didn't feel any bad smells etc. This was a train.

**Victoria:** Other neutral countries, such as Switzerland, Spain, Sweden like Raul Wallenberg, this other people did you have a cooperation in rescuing the Jews with the other neutral countries?

*Yolga switches to Turkish*

**Yolga:** Hayir, hayir. Sunu soyleyim. Yahudilere yardim eden, koruyan, onlari kurtarmaya calisan tek devlet Turkiye oldu Pariste. Cunku Fransiz Yahudisi var. Yabanci memleketlerden Fransa'da Yahudi vatandasi olanlar var. Fakat hic birisi bizim kadar Yahudilerle ugrasmadi. Yani bunu emin olun samimi soyluyorum, katiyen mubala yok. Aynen hakikati soyluyorum. Bir defa Fransizlar, mesala bir Yahudilere karsi bir takim hareketler yapildiginda bir tepki gosterebilirlerdi. Mesala topluyorlar, Dransaya goturuyorlar, oradan Berline gonderiliyor. Ve Berlinde konsentrasyon kamplarinda adamlari yok ediyorlar. Bunlar bilinen seyler. Bir tepki olmaz mi ? Fransada senelerce beraber yasamislar? Neyse uzatmayim?

**Yolga:** No, no. Let me say this. Turkey was the only country in Paris that was helping, protecting and trying to help the Jews. Because there were French Jews. Some other foreign countries had their Jewish citizens. But none of them had taken care of the Jews like we did. Believe me I am telling this very honestly. There is absolutely no exaggeration. I'm only telling the truth. French's could have react at the first place when

there were some actions targeting the Jews. For example they were being collected, brought to Drancy and from there sent to Berlin. Those are known issues. Shouldn't have been there a reaction? After having lived for all those years together in France? I don't want to make it to longer, sorry.

*Yolga says he has prepared 3 pages essays for this meeting. He says:*

*"French didn't show any reasonable action. And the other foreign countries beside us there were several countries having their Jews in France. I am not aware of any action of their part."*

*Reloading....*

**Yolga:** In all I wrote in several occasions or different persons in Turkey and also abroad I was very succinctly but clearly telling this; If in our works, trials in Paris in order to protect and save Turkish Jews, even if I try to how do you call, find something, I don't. Because the situation, the attitude of the German was very, how do you call, attentive towards us. We were not, how do you call, struggling with famous German armies. We had friends in the embassy or in the military organisations in Paris. The Gestapo, you know about this myth, the gestapo has several bureaus, offices in Paris. One is in Forsch Avene, another Ri de ..... near the center, and several, more distant addresses for us. But anyway I went several times Avenue Four, Ri do See Se, German Embassy. German Embassy was gone to Vichy. But the embassy stayed and the personnel was there. So to give a, how do you call, diplomatic form to trial, we went to the embassy. Then for a military site we went to Bulvar Ostman, Ri do Seese.

**Victoria:** What was the most important thing that you feel that the Turkish diplomatic court did at that time? What should the world know, that you did, that was the most important thing? And you can answer me in Turkish?

**Yolga:** Vallahi benim su 3 sayfalik yazida yazdiklarimi bir okursaniz goreceksiniz ki Turkcenin bazi seyleri vardir. Malindan oldu canindan oldu. Bu konuda mallarini ve canlarini kurtardi yahudiler.

Simdi bir vatandasimiz su yahut bu maksat tevkif edildigi zaman tabiiyatiyla bize ya yazmaya felan imkani yoksa bi arkadasiyla haber gonderir. Yahut mektup yazar. Bizim

onun uzerine yapacagimiz onceden belliydi, yani kararlasmistik. Alman resmi makamlarina muracaat edecegiz ve sunlari sunlari soyleyecegiz.

**Yolga:** If you read those 3 pages I wrote, you will realize, that there are some issues in Turkish. We say he/she lost from his/her property, lost his/her life. And there the life and the properties of the Jews were saved.

If one of our citizens was collected due to whatever reason, if he/she does not have the time to write to us, he/she was sending a notice with a friend. And all the actions we want to take afterwards were already set. We have already decided. We will apply to the official German places and say this.

**Victoria:** We understand the background, but now tell me about the night you went took the Turkish Jews off the train.

**Yolga:** Simdi bugun 2000 yilindayiz, o sene 1940, 60 sene gecmis. Teferautu tam hatirlamaya imkan yok. Mesala onlar acmiydilar, yoksa beslenmisler miydi? Ona benzer teferautu maalesef kendilerine vermeye imkan yok. Yalnis sunu soyleyebilirim son derece mutlu oldular, ve unutulmaz. Ve bana da, konsolosluga da tesekkur ettiler. Yani daha fazla boyle zevlik teferauat yok. Bu gibi olaylar icin yolumuzu tespit etmistik. Once Alman sefaretatine, alman sef. Vichideydi. Fakat paristeki binalari hukümet konagi gibiydi. Orda bi suru memurlari vardi. Askerler, memurlar, gestapo vs. Bizim olcumus suydu, biz oyle yapalim ki yetkili olarak bu iste hareket ediyorlar ve resmen ne yapmalari gerekiyorsa, hangi makamlara muracaat etmeleri gerekiyorsa oralara muracaat ediyorlar. Normal varis zamaninda bir Sefafer bir tesebbus yaparken nasil hareket edilirse, oyle hareket ediliyordu. Dolayisiyla ya o pariste kalmis olan alman memurlarina, yahut gestapoya muracat ediyorduk.

Burada da aynen oyle oldu. Mektup bana geldi. Hemen atladim Volkswagen arabama alman sefaretine. Demin de soylemistim tekrar edeyim. 2 sey soyledik: Biz savasa girmemis tarafsiz bir devletiz dolayisiyla bizim vatandaslarimiza dokunamazsiniz ve turkiye din farki yoktur vatandaslar yoktur. Musevi, hiristiyan farketmez insan insandır. Dolayisiyla bu tesebbusu yapiyoruz. Bizi bi defa muharip olmadigimiz icin, bizim vatandaslarimiza dokunulmaz, sonra da biz kendimiz fark gozetmeyiz.

Ideoloji,fikir olarak bunlari ortaya koyuyorduk. Ve ondan sonra, bunlar vatandasimizdir, pasaportu var vs.. bunlari birakin. Ve onlardan yardim istiyordum. Buyukelcilik ve

gestapodan yardım istiyorduk, yerini öğreniyorduk mektubu yazan arkadaşın ve sonra gidip oradan çıkarmaya çalışıyorduk.

Türk devleti propagandasını yapmaz, ovunmez. Fakat vatandaşına en yakın ilgiyi gösteren yabancı memleketlerde devlettir. En büyük kolaylıkları gösteren. Her halukarda pariste bunu gösterdik.

**Yolga:** Right now we are in year 2000. That was 1940. 60 years have passed. There is no way of remembering the single details. For example were they hungry or not? I can't give you the little details like that. But I can only tell things. They were absolutely happy, and unforgettable. And they thanked to me and to the Counselor. But there are no enjoyable details. For this processes we have set our acting ways. First to the German Consulate, the German Chef was in Vichy. But their building in Paris was like a government building. There were lots of officers. Soldiers, officers, Gestapo etc. The following was our measure: Since they were acting official, we have acted officially and made the applications to officially necessary places. They were acting like in the normal times, like there was a normal consulate process. So we were acting accordingly and were making our applications to the officers left in Paris and to the Gestapo.

Here it was the same case. The letter has arrived. I jumped to my Volkswagen and drove to the German consulate. Like I said before, I said two things: We are a neutral country that is not in war. So you cannot touch our citizens. And Turkey does not make discriminations based on the religious backgrounds. Jewish, Christian that does not make any difference. A human being is a human being. So that is why we are making that action. First, you cannot touch our citizens because we are not in war. Second, we don't discriminate among our citizens.

So those were the ideologies and ideas that we have based on our arguments and actions. And then we asked them to release the Jews by showing their Turkish passports and proving their citizenships. And we asked for help from them. We asked for help from the Consulate and the Gestapo in order to learn the place of the person who wrote the letter, and in order to take him.

The Turkish government does not make the propaganda but it takes very good care of its citizens in foreign countries. We have proved this in Paris.

**Victoria:** How were Paris and Marsail coordinating? The two different consulates were you coordinating your efforts of rescue

**Yolga:** No

*Dennis speaking....*

**Victoria:** What was the effect on Turkey of being neutral? How were things going in Turkey with this neutrality?

*Victoria asking the question one more time*

**Yolga:** Butun bu meseleden benim cikardigim ve sifatimi kullanarak, bir memur sifatini kullanarak acikca soyledigim sudur. Eger Inonunun savasa karsi politikasi olmasaydi, biz hicbir vatandasin ne malini ne de canini kurtarabilirdik. Cunku Almanlara gidiyorum bi tesebbusde bulunuyorum. Hep basarili oluyor. Hep musbet sonuc aldik. Musbet sonuc almadiklarimiz bize haber verilmedigi zaman. Yani bilmiyoruz, bi vatandasi tevkiye etmis almanlar Bordoda ordan almanyaya goturmusler hic haberimiz olmamis bilmiyoruz. Fakat tesebbus ederse, onlarda adami bulurlarsa adam serberst birakiliyordu. Bu ne sayede oluyordu. Inonun takip ettigi politika sayesinde. Turkiye savassa ne zaman girdi biliyor musunuz? Subat 1945

Yani benim simdi bahsini ettigim aylar seneler, 40-45 arasi. Benim paris gorevim bitti. Fransaya donuyorum. Yollar kapali savas var. Madridte ogreniyorum. Turkiye subat 1945te almanyaya savas ilan etti. Peki ondan 5 sene oncesi devre? Fransizlar ve bircok diger memleketler almanlarla savas yaptilar. Amerika savasa girdi. O zamanlar turkiye yok. Bu cok onemli bi seydi. Mesala turkiye amerika gibi dunyayi titreten bi devlet degil. Silah fabrikasi yok, parasi yok.

**Yolga:** Let me tell you very clearly the things that I have understood from all of things. If there were not the anti-war policies of Inonu, we couldn't save a single citizens life and property. Because my every attempt with the Germans was successful. There were always good results. If there were bad results, it was because of they could not notify us. So we didn't know that they took a man from Bordeaux and sent him to Germany. But if we make an attempt and if they can find the man, the man was released. And this was again thanks to Inonu's policies.

Do you know when Turkey entered the war? February 1945. So the months and years I'm talking about are always between 40-45. My Paris duty was over. I'm turning back to France. All the roads are closed. And I am learning in Madrid that Turkey declared war to Germany in the February of 1945. But the 5 years period before that? Frenchs and lots of other nations were in war with the Germans. America entered the war. Turkey was not involved at those times. That was something very important. Because Turkey is not a strong country like Amerika. We had no gun factories, no money.

[Yolga2]

Yolga was 28 when he entered the Turkish diplomatic core. He was assigned to Paris as his first post abroad.

Yolga: The Germans entered Paris 13 of June 1940. This means that two months after my arrival to the Consulate General in Paris. After that we live during all the German occupation and administration, if I may say so. Nearly four years.

Narrator: How was he to act toward Turkish Jews living in Paris. Communication was difficult. Instructions were not forthcoming from Anakara, the Turkish capital.

Yoga: Ankara didn't give us any special instruments, instrumentation. But there are principles, main principles in the Turkish Administration, inside or externally. We have to defend the rights of the Turkish citizens. There is no specification for Jews or Greeks or Armenians. Turkey doesn't make any discrimination for religion among his citizens. we were not in war. We were neutral. So they don't have the right of bothering our citizens because they are Greeks or Jews etc.

Narrator: These are abstract principles. They would soon be put to the test.

Yolga: Germans were catching, collecting the Jews in all regions in France. They brought them first to Drancy. This is a near-town in Paris. There was a camp. They gathered the Jews they brought from several regions a France.

## IMAGES OF DRANCY

Narrator: Drancy was a transit camp, a gathering place for Jews from France who would soon be shipped to concentration camps in the East. Resettlement in the East as a German euphemism for the "Final Solution to the Jewish Problem.

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