The Ladino press was created in the middle of the 19th century as a means of westernizing Ottoman Jewry. This intention is clearly stated in nos. 2 and 3. While the early newspapers, namely, Shaarei mizrach, Or Israel, El Jurnal israelit, and El Lunar, were intended for rather educated men, and even presupposed some knowledge of Hebrew, by the 1870s most Ladino periodicals (e.g. La Epoka and El Tyempo) targeted mass readerships of both sexes not fluent in any other language.

There are no reliable figures for their circulation, but it is clear that even the most popular Ladino newspapers sold only in the hundreds. Yet their actual circulations significantly surpassed these numbers, because each issue was shared by relatives and neighbors and was read out loud to the illiterate. Thus one subscription sufficed for ten or more people, a practice condemned by all editors (cf. no. 26).

Some Ladino periodicals were subsidized by Zionist organizations or, rarely, by the Alliance Israélite Universelle, but the majority fully depended on subscriptions, sales, and advertisements (nos. 9, 28, 31-33). In order to attract more readers, the editors usually published serialized novels (no. 26).

All Ottoman periodicals had to be licensed by the state (no. 3) and were subject to the censorship established in 1864. The coverage of the Russian revolution In El Luzero (no. 16) was possible only because this paper was intentionally published by its Salonican editor outside the Ottoman Empire where even the use of the word “revolution” was forbidden.

While Sephardi journalists of the first generation (e.g. Juda Nehama and Bezalel Saadi Halevy, nos. 17 and 18) participated in the establishment of European-style

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1 For a detailed treatment of the Ladino press, see Olga Borovaya, Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Lettres, and Theater in the Late Ottoman Empire (Bloomington and Indianapolis: 2011), chs.1-2.
schools, younger literati (e.g., Shemuel Saadi Halévy) were their graduates, which is why Sephardi press gave so much room to the Alliance Israélite Universelle material (nos. 19, 25, 30).

Despite the differences in their ideological stances, all Ladino periodicals had a similar structure. They usually began with editorials (nos. 2, 3), and then turned to reports on Ottoman, local, and international events (nos. 4-10). Every periodical had a rubric covering the lives of other Jewish communities in the empire and abroad, presented in the form of reports on antisemitic incidents (no. 14), news (no. 15), letters (no. 19), or travel accounts (nos. 20, 21). Their goal was to inform Sephardim of the achievements of European Jews and evoke concern for the predicament of their Russian and oriental coreligionists. Some accounts were fabricated for purely propagandistic purposes (no. 21).

Among the rubrics borrowed from European popular press, one can find Miscelanea (Diversos and Varyedades), faits divers of the French periodicals. It contained all sorts of funny or absurd materials on the events that allegedly happened abroad. These stories usually appeared in the midst of serious reports, and their sole purpose was to make newspaper reading more entertaining (nos. 22, 23). More sophisticated readers were offered long articles on serious matters (no. 24). Sephardi editors often borrowed materials from their foreign (nos. 11, 20) and domestic (nos. 8, 29) colleagues. In addition, Ladino periodicals announced charitable events (no. 13), published obituaries (nos. 17, 18), advertised theater shows (no. 28), and reported on various entertainments (no. 27).
Despite such obstacles as censorship, low circulation, and low literacy, the Ladino press was able to connect generations of Sephardim to the larger world, create a sphere of public discussions inside and between Ottoman Jewish communities, develop a reading habit for men and women, and bring into existence modern Ladino fiction. Finally, by contributing to Ladino’s re-Romanization through lexical, morphological, and syntactic borrowings and replacements, Sephardi journalists fundamentally transformed the language.

The selection below introduces periodicals published in the largest centers of Ladino printing--Salonica, Istanbul, Sofia, and Izmir--and a few other places. These articles, which appeared between 1845 and 1932, are organized in an order reflecting the structure of a typical Ladino newspaper. ²

²Preface, transcription, and translation by Olga Borovaya.