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THE 1915 EVENTS IN THE LIGHT OF THE RUSSIAN ARCHIVES AND INTERNATIONAL COURT DECISIONS

(RUS ARŞİVLERİ IŞIĞINDA 1915 OLAYLARI VE
ULUSLARARASI MAHKEME KARARLARI)

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Abstract: *There are two main points that help us better understand the developments leading to the Relocation and Resettlement Law of 27 May 1915. The first point is the alliance between the sections of the Ottoman Armenian population under the Dashnaktsutyun leadership and the imperialist European states and Tsarist Russia. The second is the policy of ethnic cleansing against the Muslim population by the Armenian volunteer committees in order to change the demographic balance in the region in their favour to achieve the aim of “Great Armenia”. Documents (correspondences between officials, field reports etc.) contained at the Tsarist Russian archives, the archives of a state that was outright at war with the Ottoman Empire, provide us evidence and context to properly understand the rationale and legitimacy of the relocation policy carried out by the Ottoman Empire concerning its Armenian subjects. National and international court verdicts, such as those of the European Court of Human Rights, in contemporary times concerning issues on genocide disputes and freedom of expression add additional perspective on the research of the relocation policy.*

Keywords: *Armenian Question, Dashnaktsutyun, First World War, Ottoman Empire, the European Court of Human Rights*

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Öz: 27 Mayıs 1915 tarihli Sevk ve İskân Kanununa giden gelişmelerin daha iyi anlaşılmasını sağlayan iki husus bulunmaktadır. Birinci husus, Taşnaksutyun liderliği tesirindeki Osmanlı Ermeni nüfusunun belli bir kesmi ile sömürgeci Avrupa devletleri ve Çarlık Rusyası arasında kurulan ittifaktır. İkinci husus ise, “Büyük Ermenistan” hedefinin gerçekleştirilmesi uğruna Ermeni gönüllü komitelerinin bölgedeki demografik dengeyi kendi lehlerini değiştirmek için Müslüman nüfusa karşı yürütmüş oldukları etnik temizlik politikasıdır. Çarlık Rusyası arşivleri, yani Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ile topyekûn bir savaşa girişmiş devletin arşivleri, Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Ermeni tebaasına yönelik uyguladığı sevk ve iskân politikasının gerekçesinin ve meşruluğunun anlaşılması için delil ve bağlam sunan belgeler (yetkililer arasında yazışmalar, saha raporları vb.) içermektedir. Günümüzde ulusal ve uluslararası mahkemelerin (örneğin Avrupa İnsan Hakları Mahkemesi) soykırım tartışmaları ve ifade özgürlüğü konuları üzerine aldığı kararlar, sevk ve iskân politikasıyla ilgili araştırmalara ilave bir bakış açısı katmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ermeni Sorunu, Taşnaksutyun, Birinci Dünya Savaşı, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Avrupa İnsan Hakları Mahkemesi

There are two main points that serve to clarify the developments that lead to the Relocation and Resettlement Law (Tr. *Sevk ve İskân Kanunu*) of 27 May 1915. First: the alliance between the large number Ottoman Armenian groups under Dashnak (Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaktsutyun) leadership and the imperialist European states and Tsarist Russia. Second is the policy of ethnic cleansing against the Muslim population by the Armenian volunteer committees tasked with altering the demographic balance in the region toward their favour in order to achieve the aim of “Great Armenia”.

Tsarist Russian archives are filled with documents that prove the first point. Russian officials wrote many reports in which they clearly enounce the goal of arming Ottoman Armenians and provoking uprisings against the Ottoman state. They corresponded amongst themselves, meeting and exchanging letters with the Dashnaks. Additionally, they also produced detailed reports of the actions of the Dashnaks along the Russian-Ottoman border. On the other hand, the striking feature of the Russian archives is that they contain thousands of documents confirming the second point. As the Ottoman Empire’s enemy during the First World War, Russia had recorded the massacres by the Armenian committees they supported to invoke the disintegration of Ottoman Empire before and after the relocation. This is understandable, because the massacres and lootings committed by Armenian committees hindered re-establishing order in the territories invaded by Russia and the violence being perpetrated reached disturbing levels for Russian officials.

To understand the relocation, one must carefully examine the period before it. Documents at the Tsarist Russian archives give first hand evidence and reveal the legitimacy of the relocation decision as the documents of a nation which was outright at war with the Ottoman Empire at the time.

Armenians in the Eve of the First World War According To Russian Military Intelligence Reports

Russian military reports between 1910 and 1913 expose the inclinations and actions of a large number of Ottoman Armenian groups right before the war as well as before the Relocation and Resettlement Law, which reveals their policy of cooperating with an enemy state had taken shape well before the war.

For example; the heading of a top-secret intelligence report prepared by Caucasian Military District Quarters in Tbilisi on 11 February 1910 reads, “Political Movements, Civil Unrest and Disorder”. The report states that the Armenians in Erzurum were rapidly arming themselves. Also, one of the Dashnak Party leaders urged the Armenians during a crowded meeting to sell their carpets or borrow money to buy arms in case of insufficient funds. Along with these developments, the report indicated that Armenians were preparing large number of explosives and stockpiling them.¹

1 For the related part of the report, please see: Russian State Military Historical Archive (RGVIA) fond 2000 opis 1 delo 7716 list 10 ob.

In a second report carrying the same date, it is stated that Dashnak militants had raided the home of a wealthy, prominent Turk (Kasım) of the region, killing him along with his family and servants. The news, which obviously perturbed Russian officials and indicated that the death of the Turkish man was a political murder, which could trigger public unrest at any moment once news of the incident spread, not only in Muş but also the surrounding cities including Erzurum. It is also repeated in this report that the Armenians of Erzurum were arming themselves.²

The increasing tension between the Muslims and Armenians of Van is highlighted in the report prepared by Vice-Consular S. Olferyev of Tsarist Russia on 28 February 1911. His remarks suggest that both sides in the city were rapidly arming themselves, with arms coming mostly from Siirt and Diyarbakır and, in case of conflict, the military headquarters was expected to take up the side of the Muslims. However, it is also stated these preparations were not intended for Armenians but rather because of developments in Syria and the Arab region.

Continuing in the Russian Vice Consular's report, he stated that he did not expect any massacre against Armenians in Van, as Armenians were in better condition than they were previously and Turks would need to exert much greater force and resources to prevent lootings by the Kurds. Furthermore, the Kurds' attacks on villages could devastate the city and harm the state treasury the most.³

In the intelligence report labelled "secret" and titled "Political Information about Turkey" prepared by Russian Caucasus Military District Quarter on 10 March 1911, the Dashnak movement had reportedly gone underground in Muş and that the Ottoman administration had taken precautions against the armed Dashnaks. Also, it is reported that Armenians in Muş were converting to the Orthodox faith⁴ and were willing to apply for Russian citizenship. Similar information is found in the report for the Armenians in Erzurum. It emphasizes that relations between Young Turks and Dashnaks were not the same as previously, and Dashnaks had petitioned a Russian invasion of "Turkish Armenia". It is stated in the report signed by a brigadier general that in case of a war, the majority of Armenians and Dashnaks were going to take the side of Russia and that the Armenians' inclinations would continue intensifying. Also, Armenians of Karakilise were also willing to accept orthodox faith in order to acquire the protection guarantees from Russia.⁵

2 For the whole report, please see: RGVIA fond 2000 opis 1 delo 7716 list 13, 13 ob., 14.

3 For the whole report, please see: RGVIA fond 2000 opis 1 delo 7716 list 187, 187 ob., 188, 188 ob.

4 What was probably meant here was that these Armenians were converting from being the disciples of the Armenian Apostolic Church to the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). For a long time, Armenian Apostolic Church, an oriental orthodox church, was considered to practice a "deviant" form of Christianity by churches belonging to other denominations of Christianity such as the Russian Orthodox Church. The wording of the intelligence report suggests that Armenians were not considered to be "proper" Orthodox Christians until their conversion to the Russian Orthodox Church.

5 For the whole report, please see: RGVIA fond 2000 opis 1 delo 7716 list 189, 189 ob., 190, 190 ob.

In another “secret” intelligence report on 3 September 1911, it is stated that the Dashnaks were bringing worrisome large volumes of arms and ammunitions to Van through Erzurum from Trabzon, and the possibility of an Armenian mutiny in Erzurum was evident, along with similar preparations in Samsun.⁶

In the “secret” intelligence report titled “Political News from Asian Part of Turkey” and dated 11 July 1912, it is stated that in case of a Turkish-Russian war, Armenians in Erzincan were going to look forward to the arrival of Russian armies and were going to give any support necessary to the Russians.

Also, it is stated in the report that Armenian soldiers, who were serving in the Ottoman army in Erzincan, were gathering in secret meetings and discussing their stance in case of a war with Russia. During the meetings, some were suggesting escaping to Russia right away while some were opposing this idea because this would put the lives of Armenians who were going to engage in sabotage activities in danger. However, everyone had a consensus on not to go against the Russians. Also, it was chronicled that for Russians to distinguish Armenians from Turks, Armenians had decided to wear crosses under their uniforms even though this was not practiced in their culture. The author of the report (Major General Yudenich) asked this knowledge to be disseminated among Russian soldiers to assist the Russian agent in Erzincan in distinguishing and entrusting the Armenians who were planning to escape to the Russian side.⁷

Another document is the “secret” report of Russian Caucasian Military Quarter’s in Tbilisi on 12 February 1913, in which a brigadier general had chronicled developments headlined, “Political News from the Asia part of Turkey”:

“I am reporting the recent news from the Asian part of Turkey.

It is known that the domestic authorities are enforcing strict controls on Armenians, especially those travelling in Harput. They are not only searching the luggage but also the goods brought in to the city. Already, they have found the hidden arms a few times. Some Armenian culprits have been arrested. But still, step by step, the armament of Armenian population continues.”⁸

Again, another report with the same title and prepared by Intelligence Office on 26 February 1913 reports the following:

“(…) On 30 January, it’s stated that in case of a war, the Russian Military is not going to face any resistance inside Beyazit city. Even Muslims,

6 For the related part of the report, please see: RGVIA fond 2000 opis 1 delo 7716 list 266.

7 For the related part of the report, please see: RGVIA fond 2000 opis 1 delo 7716 list 331, 331 ob.

8 For the related part of the report, please see: RGVIA fond 2000 opis 1 delo 7716 list 402, 402 ob.

Turks and Kurds, are already convinced that Turkey is in no condition to fight with Russia, so they are used to the idea that they have to become a Russian citizen. The more enlightened ones are already looking forward to this.

The Christian population, Armenians, are of course looking forward to the arrival of the Russian armies and are ready to offer any kind of assistance. The Turkish Armenians, independent from their political ideas and communal status are all congruent with each other about the hatred against Turks and dreams to get rid of the Turkish authority.”⁹

The report titled “Information about Turkish Armenians” by Caucasian Army Intelligence Office on 30 April 1913 reports the following:

“The latest information about Armenians shows the number of Armenians who get excited by the Slav victories in Balkans keeps increasing.

Armenians are looking forward to the disintegration of Turkey and invasion of Russia on most of the Armenia with a surprising faith and impatience along with the increase in the risk of Armenian massacre. Armenians had gotten demoralised after an explosion which took down the whole building and created panic among the people of the whole city in Erzincan on 31 March. Apparently, three Armenian criminals, who were preparing bombs, died during explosion.

The news about explosion has seriously registered in the outside of the city as well. Armenians have gotten more afraid of the hostile actions against them by Turks, while Turks view this as an indication of the arming of Armenians in general.

As a result, the relations between Armenians and Turks have gotten tenser and the following has occurred:

The inclination to loot and murder by Turks was prevented with the efforts of several reasonable and influential Turks. A persistent rumour spread that during the levee at Sultan Bayrami¹⁰ on 14 April, a bomb was going to be thrown at governor in front of the residence. The rumour was not verified; maybe, it did not happen because of the precautions taken by the police. Lastly, some armed conflicts occurred between Armenians and Turks with some casualties in Bitlis.”¹¹

9 For the related part of the report, please see: RGVIA fond 2000 opis 1 delo 7716 list 405, 405 ob., 406.

10 It is the anniversary of the ascent to the throne of Mehmet Resat V in 1909 in terms of the old calendar.

11 For the whole report, please see: RGVIA fond 2000 opis 1 delo 7716 list 418, 418 ob., 419.

The “secret” letter sent by Russian Internal Affairs Vice-Minister to the War Minister V. A. Sukhomlinov on 16 May 1913 contained remarks on the following:

“The information that some armed Armenian groups from Russia have passed to Iran through Culfa and that their next destination is the Beyazıt in Turkey was gathered by the commander of the Yerevan Regional Gendarmerie Administration. This situation has worried Turkish authorities and made them instruct the Turkish diplomatic representations to reveal the general inclination of the Armenian population and whether there is an assistance and approval from Russia to the armament and actions against Turkey of Armenians.”¹²

Russian police and gendarmerie intelligence reports support military intelligence reports on that matter. A secret report signed by Tbilisi region gendarmerie director (who was a major) and sent to the police department dated 2 November 1912 stated that “Dashnakstuyun subcommittees in Muş, Van, Zeytun in Anatolia are gathering armed platoons to revolt against the Turks.”¹³

All resources ascertain that city of Van was the centre of Dashnak activities. Eventually, increasing weapon amassment activities had been directed towards Van. For instance, according to an intelligence report dated 8 February 1913, “in 14 January 1913, 52 Berdan machine guns, 42 7.62 mm rifles and 17000 bullets were sent to Van from Yerevan region İğdir village by Kevork the ‘blind’ and an Ottoman citizen Hayko to Van (...) These guns had been delivered for the use of Dashnaksutyun Party Van committee.”¹⁴ Both the domestic and international committees of the Party contributed to these activities. Tsarist police intelligence reports stated that the weapons were sent to “Turkish Armenia” from everywhere¹⁵ and that Armenian units passing the border were gathering in the city of Van in a similar manner.¹⁶

On the other hand, Russian government, because it was aware of the hatred of the Dashnaks against the Turks and the Ottoman government and that preparations were already underway, was trying to change its policy towards the Armenians before the First World War and benefit from their potential. Thus, we can see that the Commander in Chief ordered the Russian army “not to apply any kind of pressure, or interfere with cross border activities” against the Dashnak Party members in a “top secret” letter by Tbilisi region gendarmerie director’s dated 12 September 1914 sent to the police department.¹⁷

12 RG VIA fond 2000 opis 1 delo 7716 list 420.

13 State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) fond 102 DOO opis 1912 delo 14 list pri. 21 ob.

14 GARF fond 102 OO opis 1913 delo 14 chast 92B list 15 ob.

15 GARF fond 102 OO opis 1913 delo 14 chast 92B list 18 ob.

16 GARF fond 102 OO opis 1913 delo 14 chast 92B list 31 ob.

17 GARF fond 102 OO opis 1914 delo 343 chast 4 list 9, 9 ob.

As a result of their intense efforts, just before the war, Dashnaks were able to gather extensive number of weapons and soldiers in “Turkish Armenia”. We can easily observe from a note stating that “if the Kurds begin to use force against the Armenians, Armenians now possess enough weapons to defy attacks by the Kurds”¹⁸ from the Tsarist intelligence report dated 1914 the extent of the preparations made by the Armenians at the time.

Intelligence reports also stated that the Dashnaks “are eager for a war between Russia and Turkey and almost all the male Armenian population would voluntarily and actively join the offensive against Turkey”.¹⁹ Thus according to another report, on August 1914 “15 thousand units from the Caucasus were ready to establish armed battalions.”²⁰

As it understood from all these reports, many Ottoman Armenians, independently of political opinions and social statutes, had begun to wait for the Ottoman Empire to be split apart within the coming period of the First World War. Long time before the war, these elements within the Armenian population had been armed. This orientation had not been limited with any significant class, organisation or political movement etc. and it was widely spread over the population. On the other hand, this movement was ready to be in cooperation with the enemies of the country which they were a national subject of. Beyond not making a stand against the enemy invasion, they were in a preparation to facilitate the invasion. In fact, Armenian soldiers, who were serving in the Ottoman Army, were holding meetings on this point.

A distinctive character of this movement, which spread over the large masses, was the hatred felt against Turks and Kurds. Terror attacks had been concrete reflections of this hatred. The terror attacks carried out by the Dashnaks sowed discord among the Ottoman Muslim and Armenian populations and played a significant role in trigger mutual massacres. This process was detected by Russian authorities early on. The Russian authorities knew that Ottoman authorities and Muslim population felt uncomfortable about the situation and they predicted the results of the Armenian movement’s actions (summarized above).

Two Duties Given To Ottoman Armenians: Volunteer Militias and Mutiny

Along with these developments, according to the plans to disintegrate Ottoman Empire by Tsarist Russia and Western Powers; two duties were attributed to Ottoman Armenians during the First World War. Armenians were to weaken the Ottoman army by staging a revolt behind the frontlines. The second duty was for the volunteer militia to break through the Ottoman defence line to ease

18 GARF fond 102 OO opis 1914 delo 14 chast 79B list 6 ob.

19 GARF fond 102 OO opis 1914 delo 14 chast 79B list 54 ob.

20 GARF fond 102 OO opis 1914 delo 14 chast 79B list 55 ob.

the Russian advance. A significant number of Ottoman Armenians took active place in both duties.

The speech given by the military representative of the Dashnak Party during the United Armenia National Congress in Tbilisi in February of 1915 serves a proof of the confession of these duties:

“As it is known, Russian government has given 242900 rubles at the start of the war to arm the Turkish Armenians and prepare them for mutiny during the war. Our volunteer militia should ensure the advance of Russian armies and the invasion of Turkish Armenia by breaking through the defence of the Turkish Army and creating anarchy behind and at the frontlines while uniting with the mutineers.”²¹

The manifesto that Hovhannes Katchaznoui, the first Prime Minister of Armenia and the founder of the Dashnak Party, presented during his party's conference in 1923 in Bucharest is intriguing for the reason above. Armenian volunteers had started to gather with great enthusiasm and energy in South Caucasus during the fall of 1914, while Ottoman Empire was not in war or preparing for it. Dashnak Party, even if there was an opposing decision against the volunteer militias in its congress in Erzurum, took a large role in the creation of these militias and military actions against the Ottoman Empire. According to Katchaznoui, the South Caucasian branches and some officials of the Dashnak Party had gone against the decisions of the highest administrative branch, the congress, in the matters that needed high responsibility, and which could bring extremely serious and harmful results.

Hovhannes Katchaznoui, highlighting that the inclinations of the public had affected them too, indicates in his manifesto that the party could not resist this trend because of its “weak consciousness”, even though they wanted the formation of volunteer militias, they should have stood against their formation. The leader of Dashnaks states that they had no suspicion that the war was going to be won by the allies and the Turkish Armenians were going to get their freedom.

The Dashnaks had unconditionally relied on the Russians. As Katchaznoui states, they had daydreamed; they had relied on others to achieve their goals and gave too much importance to empty expressions and people without justification. Their hypnosis, so to speak, prevented them from seeing the hard facts of those times.

Katchaznoui thought that they had gotten above themselves and had exaggerated the power of the Armenian public, their political and military qualifications, and the Russians assistance. Katchaznoui, stating that the relocation during the summer and the fall of 1915 had eliminated the promises

21 Please see: Mehmet Perinçek, *Ermeni Devlet Adamı B. A. Boryan'ın Gözüyle Türk-Ermeni Çatışması*, 4. Basım (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, Ocak 2012), p. 55-56.

of the European diplomats about a free Armenia, highlighted that the Ottoman Empire had known what it was doing and thus had no reason to feel guilty about it then. According to Katchaznoui, the first Prime Minister of the Dashnak Armenia, relocation was an accurate and expedient policy.²²

Among the close witnesses to this mission of Armenians was A. B. Karinyan who took important responsibilities in the party and the government branches of Soviet Armenia. Karinyan thoroughly revealed the extent of relations between the Dashnaks and the Tsarist government:

“Tsarist diplomacy just before the war was not hiding its approval of Turkish Armenians to stand next to the Russia and join the military operations in the Caucasus-Turkish front in case of war. Along with this, the liberal Russian press was mentioning the heart-breaking status of the Turkish Armenians for pages and was always mentioning the historical mission of Russia for the protection of the Christian people in the Near East. The Orange Book (Periodical of diplomatic documents: Reforms in Armenia. 26 November 1912-10 May 1914, Petersburg, 1915) which was published by International Affairs Ministry during war years explicitly reveals the state of mind of Russian bourgeoisie and the Tsarist government. In the correspondences of Russian delegates abroad and the reports of agents of the consul and consular, the interest of Tsarist Russia on the ‘Armenian Issue’ is obvious.

Russian diplomacy, which took the role as the protector of the Armenians, was trying to benefit from the services of the revolutionist Armenian parties.²³ The coherent work between the Etchmiadzin Catholicos, Istanbul patriarch and the Tsarist diplomacy can be seen in the Orange Book mentioned above.”²⁴

Karinyan, by reminding of all the correspondences and meetings between Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, Patriarch of Istanbul, Dashnak officials, and Tsarist government, draws attention to the reconfiguration of “Turkish Armenia” by the Dashnaksutyun mutinies in rural areas with the help of Church officials, Russia’s intervention, and the re-emergence of the will of self-governance of Ottoman Armenians. In this manner, Karinyan explains that the Armenian movement was essentially under the leadership of Tsarist government and adds that Dashnaks had spread Turkish hatred in this manner:

“The constant propagandas of the nationalist press and the provocative guidance of the Tsarist diplomats have progressively inflicted chauvinist inclinations among Armenians. Armenian Dashnaks, with the increase

22 For the whole report, please see: Ovanes Kacaznuni, *Taşnak Partisi'nin Yapacağı Bir Şey Yok* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, Kasım 2005).

23 What is implied here are the Dashnaks, Hunchaks etc.

24 A.B. Karinyan, *Ermeni Milliyetçi Akımları, 2. Basım* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, Ekim 2006), p. 70.

in their morale due to the proclamation of the Caucasus viceroy Vorontsov-Dashkov, were confident that the war started in the west is going to affect the Near East and inevitably become the salvation for the Turkish Armenians.

Dashnak press, even before the war in Caucasus has started, was filled with pages of articles about Turkish hatred and preparing the public opinion for the oncoming war.

This situation was beneficial for the Russian government. For this reason, Armenian Dashnaks works on propoganda were awarded by the Tsarist agents who were recently examining the Dashnaks.”²⁵

Karinyan also mentions that Dashnaks were preparing volunteer militia for the Battle of Gallipoli on behalf of the Allies.²⁶

Soviet Armenian historian A.A. Lalayan reminds that imperialists had given the promise of “Great Armenia” to the influential Armenian bourgeoisie in return for the following services:

“Allies have planned to use Armenians in two ways: First one was to make them (corps of Turkish Armenians who are called volunteer militia) act against the Turkish government inside Turkey by entente states (France-Britain-Russia) ‘promising’ ‘salvation’, and even ‘autonomy’ to Turkish Armenians. Second was to use deluded Russian Armenians as scouts etc. for the Tsarist army at the Turkish front with the promise 7 provinces and even Cilicia. This was Russia’s and its allies’ draft for Armenians right before the imperialist war.”²⁷

Lalayan, stating that there are many examples of correspondences of Tsarist government on this issue, explained the campaign of the Dashnaks under the mask of the “Salvation of Armenian Brothers” to take part in the war. He indicated that the Tsarist government used the Armenians to their advantage in East Anatolia to capture the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles and reach Mediterranean Sea. Lalayan, who earlier had stated that the Tsarist government intended to provoke Armenians and even Kurds against Turkey, determines that Tsarist International Affairs Department had focused on the following three viewpoints:

“1) The necessity of solving the mutiny matter of Turkish Armenians on behalf of the Tsarist government; 2) To focus on a fallacious strategy to

25 Karinyan, *Ermeni Milliyetçi Akımları*, p. 73.

26 Karinyan, *Ermeni Milliyetçi Akımları*, p. 79.

27 A.A. Lalayan, *Taşnak Partisi'nin Karşıdevrimci Rolü (1914-1923)*, 3. Basım (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, Mart 2006), p. 30.

gain the loyalty of Armenians to the Tsar; 3) In order to benefit from Armenians (even Kurds) during war, arms and equipment should be distributed to keep them on the edge. (...)

Is it not obvious that the Dashnak Party turns the ‘salvation’ of the Turkish Armenians to a Russian weapon and associates it with ‘support’ of the Tsarist Russia is an obvious agent of Tsarist Russia?”²⁸

The declaration sent to Russian Tsar II. Nikolai from Armenian National Bureau that was under administration of the Dashnaks during the World War I, articulated thematic ideals that supported previous pronouncements:

“While glorious Russian army is fighting with Turkey which required the Germany to stand against the mighty Russia in the snowy peaks of Armenia and the Alaşkert valleys in its own territory; Armenians, following the advices of their ancestors, are risen to sacrifice their lives and existence as united for the mighty Russia and its throne.

The good news about the war with Turkey has created great enthusiasm among Armenians. Armenians from all nations were looking forward to take place in the glorious Russian army and contribute to Russia’s victory with their blood. We pray to God almighty to be victorious against enemy at the east and the west. It is our national duty to become the new glorious Russian soldier and validate the historic duty of Russia at the east. Our heart is filled with this desire.

Russian flag is going to wave freely over of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus.

Your will, your majesty is going to bring freedom to the nations under the yoke of Turkey.”²⁹

Correspondences of the Tsarist officials also explicitly reveal details about centre of command of the Armenian mutinies and volunteered militias. Neratov, Tsarist Russia’s International Affairs Department’s Vice-Minister, sent a telegram to the London Ambassador Benkendorf, which confirmed the connections:

“Hunchakian Party has a lot of supporters in the Cilicia, especially really numerous in the Zeytun with 3.000 people. They have committees in Adana, Dörtyol, Acin, Sis, Furnuze, Maraş and Halep. The ones who led the 1895 movement; Tokhajyan, Yenidunyan, Surenyan, Chakyrian, Yakupyan and Gasparyan can take the lead of this movement. Armenians of Zeytun states that they can increase the number of their militia to

28 Lalayan, *Taşnak Partisi'nin Karşıdevrimci...*, p. 34 – 35.

29 Mehmet Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden 150 Belgede Ermeni Meselesi, 4. Basım* (İstanbul: Kırmızı Kedi Yayınevi, Mart 2014), p. 87.

15.000 and can supply high amounts of arms without any need for military landing.”³⁰

Tsarist documents also indicate that Russia was willing to use the Kurdish leverage along with Armenian leverage. The telegraph sent by Tsarist Russia’s International Affairs Minister S. D. Sazonov’s to Istanbul Ambassador M. Girs on 17 March 1914 asks the following question: “In regards to the establishment of Armenian reforms, how do you evaluate the Kurdish movement in Bitlis?”³¹ The telegram from the III. Political Department Consultant to the Istanbul Ambassador Girs on 23 September 1914 answers the relevant questions:

“High commander in chief and the governor of Caucasus agree that it is time for the preparation of Armenian, Assyrian and Kurdish mutinies in the time of war with Turkey. Militias are going to be formed, confidential from the Iranian government, under the observance of our consuls and commander of troops in Azerbaijan. Prepared arms are only going to be distributed at the necessary time. There is credit for the monetary funding. Militias can only take action with our permission.”³²

Russian Maku Consul reported that a Kurdish mutineer Abdul Rezak had advanced against Turkey from Çaldıran with 500 armed Kurds in November 1914, and that his aim was to expel Turks from Kurdistan with cooperation of the Armenians.³³ In the telegram from Russian Commander Yudenich to General Nikolayev, he orders him to warn Drastamat Kanayan (Dro) for the Armenian militias and Abdul Rezak for the Kurds not to fight with each other while invading Van, and he also states whomever disobeyed would be refused Russia’s protection.³⁴

Unfortunately, Ottoman Armenians actively participated in both aims even well in advance of the Relocation. The matter did not fall upon the actions of a few Dashnak members. Armenians in large numbers joined volunteer militias and mutinies. Archives are filled with applications of Ottoman Armenians submitted to Russian officials in order to serve in the Tsarist army and fight with volunteer militias against the Ottoman Empire. Lists of thousands of Armenians, Ottoman citizens, were represented from diverse walks of life — teachers, scholars, doctors, other professionals, university students and ordinary villagers — which can be found in the archives.³⁵ These documents are meaningful for revealing that the threat to the Ottoman Empire was not only comprised of separatist organization leaders and militants, but also for explaining the reasons of relocation.

30 Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden...*, p. 149.

31 Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden...*, p. 86.

32 Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden...*, p.91.

33 RGVIA fond 2100 opis 1 delo 517 list 17.

34 RGVIA fond 2100 opis 1 delo 517 list 29.

35 For the examples of document, please see: Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden...*

The report titled, “Actions of the Armenian Volunteer Militia during Russian-Turkish War” by an Armenian official is significant for revealing how Armenian masses supported the volunteer movement:

“Government officials³⁶ foresaw that the war would not start before the spring of 1915. So, there was enough time to build activities on a solid ground. But events occurred faster than expected. Administrative branch had to speed up incredibly the process due to the government’s request that they could not lay down strict criteria while choosing the fighters and they had to amass all the volunteers along the border in three weeks. During the volunteer movement, Armenians showed great amount of enthusiasm; thousands of old and young, sick or healthy, trained for fighting or not, decent or wicked, virtuous or virtue-less rushed into the volunteer bureau to apply. And there was no turning back. There were Armenians coming from the most solitary parts of the world where Armenians had reached, even from New Bukhara and America. Educated or ignorant, only one thing brought enthusiasm to them, they all dreamed about one thing: breaking the chains of centuries. Night and day, for days and weeks, they remained and thus wore down the spot next to the place at which they could volunteer. They insisted, requested, sometimes threatened and even cried to volunteer. Many touching instances that revealed the hidden virtue of Armenians deep under in their souls have come to light.”³⁷

The Young Turks government, aware of this situation, tried to prevent the intervention of Russia and Europe into the Ottoman Empire’s internal affairs and the possible incidents that could happen by establishing a direct bond and making a deal with Armenians. The Ottoman government had taken suitable steps for these developments as the Armenian statesman B.A. Boryan states.³⁸ The following lines from Tsarist archives are intriguing for this reason:

“Talat Bey had called for Armenian deputies to resolve the Armenian issues, asking them to help Turks. This minister was thinking that best way for the solution of this issue was the direct correspondences between Armenians and Turks. Talat suggested the recall of the Pogos Nubar Pasha from Paris to end the contact with Europe.”³⁹

Georgian Menshevik government’s Land Department Vice-Minister had desired publicly that the Ottoman Armenians would end their volunteer movement, too. After this request, Ottoman Armenians stated that they did not accept any responsibility and could not give guarantee for the attitude of the Russian Armenians. Karibi also draws attention on disturbance of the Ottoman

36 Russian government.

37 Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden...*, p. 82.

38 Perinçek, *Ermeni Devlet Adamı...*, p. 56.

39 Perinçek, *Ermeni Devlet Adamı...*

Empire due to involvement of Karekin Pastermadjian who was a member of the Chamber of Deputies (Tr. *Meclis-i Mebusan*) as well as many Ottoman Armenians in the volunteer movement. Up to Karibi, not only the government, but also the public had envisioned this movement as a declaration of war of Armenians against Turks. Turks asked the Ottoman Armenians, the citizens of the Empire, to halt their attacks and requested them to send a committee from Salmat to Andranik Ozanyan. However, they got the answer that it was too late from then on and they could not intervene in a movement that had expanded abroad.⁴⁰

Karinyan also emphasised these efforts of the Ottoman government. Karinyan, an important statesman of the Soviet Armenia, highlighted that the Young Turk government had mentioned its requests to the Armenians about volunteer militias:

“In fact, through the period up until the start of the war, Turkish government and affective delegates of the Committee of Union and Progress party have reached the Turkish Armenians many times for them to warn the organisers of the volunteer movement with Vramstyan and Karekin Pastermadjian (and also Armen Karo) who are current members of the Turkish Parliament but still takes part in these processes; also have given promise of protection in return for ‘loyalty’. However, neither these calls of Turkish government nor the insistent requests of Turkish Armenians in person have made any change in this general mood.”⁴¹

The Turkish attempts at reconciliation having failed, Armenians under the leadership of Dashnaks started working fulfil the missions attributed to them by the Russians and the Western powers. The first step was to instigate mutinies behind the Ottoman frontlines. Vorotsov-Dashkov, the Caucasus governor of Russia, mentioned that Armenians were liable to Russians to accomplish the duties assigned to them and to initiate a mutiny in the Ottoman Empire to ease the subsequent invasion by Russia. As a response, in the letter sent to Vorotsov-Dashkov from Armenian Catholicos, stated that Armenians were ready to suppress all their pain and carry out their duty for the Russian Empire.⁴²

Boryan, an important Armenian statesman of the USSR, states in his work that it was known at the beginning that these mutinies could not achieve any success. However, these ‘activities’ were inevitably going to put Armenian people under harm’s way. Armenian masses under the leadership of Dashnaks were sacrificed for the imperialist aims of Tsarist Russia. One would have had to be rather unreasonable to not be able to see that such actions would lead to conflict with the state and intercommunal violence. The Dashnaks, pursuing destructive chauvinist policies, had organised mutinies for the imperialist states

40 Karibi, *Gürcü Devleti'nin Kırmızı Kitabı* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, Nisan 2007), p. 58-59.

41 Karinyan, *Ermeni Milliyetçi Akımları*, p. 78-79.

42 Perinçek, *Ermeni Devlet Adamı...*, p. 56-57.

and under the direction of their diplomats' orders without evaluating the practical conditions, the power balance, and the inclinations and requests of the masses. These mutinies only benefited the financiers of the relevant countries. Dashnaks had committed crime against their own people by leaving the fate of Armenians to the imperialist states.⁴³

General Prof. Dr. N.G. Korsun, who has published works about the military history during Tsarist era and the period following the revolution, stated that in order to ease the tension surrounding the invasion of the Russian Caucasus armies; Russian military command had held back the Russians and instead provoked the Armenians in the region to propel the efforts. He showed the Van mutiny in spring of 1915 and the documents of the International Affairs Department from 15 May 1915 as examples, which were underscored in his book, used in the Red Army Military Academy:

“With respect to the proclamations of the Internal Affairs Department, at the onset of the war, especially at the beginning of the Sarikamış front, the Armenians were totally armed with new weaponry. Arming efforts also continued at more frequent intervals after the threat of Turkish invasion was eliminated in Transcaucasia.”⁴⁴

Tasked to the Russian Cossack Colonel F.I. Yeliseyev, Armenian mutiny occurring right before the invasion of Van was hugely important. The mutineers acting in accordance with Russian armies have neutralised the Ottoman headquarters in the city. Yeliseyev, who took place in the invasion of Van and closely worked with the Armenian mutineers, in his writings attracts attention to the extremely serious and important contributions of the three Armenian volunteer troop units who are defined as dangerous nemesis of the Turkish army.⁴⁵

Yeliseyev also spoke about the arranged feast with the Armenian volunteers after the Van's invasion, joined by the commanders of the Armenian volunteers, Amazasp, Dro, Keri, and the Van governor Aram Pasha. Aram Pasha, who toasted for honour of the victorious Russian armies and read the telegram that he intended to send to the Russian Tsar:

“We wish for the greatness and victories of Russia and as the delegates of national Armenia, we request you to take us under your protection on the day that your armies have entered the capital of Armenia which is the same day which is your majesty's birthday. Let the autonomous Armenia exist in the magnificent and colourful flower bouquet of the Russian Empire as a small, beautifully scented violet.”⁴⁶

43 Perinçek, *Ermeni Devlet Adamı...*, p. 57.

44 Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden...*, p. 77-78.

45 F.I. Yeliseyev, *Kazaki Na Kavkazskom Fronte (1914 – 1917): Zapiski Polkovnika Kubanskogo Kazachego Voyska v Trinadtsati Broshyurakh-Tedradakh* (Moskva: Voenizdat, 2001), p. 81-82, 101-102.

46 Yeliseyev, *Kazaki Na Kavkazskom...*, p. 97.

In the report simply titled “Armenia”, which was written in Yerevan by Bolshevik Armenians to present to Vladimir Lenin on 18 January 1921, it was stated that the Van mutiny in 1915 and participation of Armenian volunteers in military operations had engendered bitter results for the Armenians in Turkey. The Dashnaks, instead of creating good relations with their neighbours of Turks, Azeris, and Kurds; had acted as a shield for the Tsarist armies, thus committing a grave mistake by believing in the empty promises of European powers. Up until the report, the Dashnaks had placed the Ottoman Armenians in danger by creating volunteer militias with chauvinist ambitions. This movement constituted the darkest part of the Dashnaks’ deathly politics and brought painful results for Armenians. The Dashnaks had taken place next to the enemies of the state to which Ottoman Armenians were subject to, begged for the intervention of Russia to the internal affairs of the Empire, and laid the foundation for Armenians being viewed as traitors by Ottoman authorities.⁴⁷

Armenian statesman Boryan reminded that the Dashnak Party’s East Bureau and Istanbul committee had taken the decision of mutiny against Turks of East Anatolia in regard to the plans of the Russian War Ministry and for this reason 10 thousand Dashnak fighters had mutinied in Van while the Armenian volunteers units were approaching Van under the command of Andranik in April 1915. The statement of Boryan below is much more important since it reveals the core of the issue:

“When a mass of 10 thousand men mutiny against the state behind the military front and declare a claim of existence on map, then the state, by definition is going to take precautions for self-defence.”⁴⁸

Boryan stated that under these circumstances, it was going to be necessary to seek for possibilities to suppress the mutinies and protect the state. Under such circumstances, “the means justify the ends” comes into the fore. Boryan continues with the following logic:

“The mutiny of Armenians is their historical and legal right. If a state harshly crushes a public mutiny and suppresses the mutineers, this is also its historical and legal right.”⁴⁹

On the other hand, volunteer militias had organised with a great pomposity. Nikolai II called for Armenians to form volunteer militias on 17 September 1914.⁵⁰ Boryan, stating the that the Dashnaks from that moment expressed the

47 For the related parts of the report, please see: Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) fond 5 opis 1 delo 2797 list 14-15.

48 Perinçek, *Ermeni Devlet Adamı...*, p. 61-62.

49 Perinçek, *Ermeni Devlet Adamı...*, p. 62.

50 Mger Slavikovich Simonyan, “Armyanskaya Diaspora Severo-Zapadnogo Kavkaza: Formirovanie, Konfessionalny Oblik, Vzaimootnoshenie S Vlastyu, Obshestvennymi i Religioznymi Obyedineniyami (Konets XVII-Konets XX Veka),” *Dissertatsiya Na Soiskanie Uchenoy Stepeni Kandidata Istoricheskikh Nauk Krasnodarskogo Gosudarsvennogo Universiteta Kultury i Iskusstv Kafedra Istorii i Muzevedeniya* (Krasnodar, 2003), p. 40.

same slogans of the imperialist Russian czar, Britain and France, revealed the Dashnaks' willingness to act as a battering ram for invading forces. The Dashnaks labored to create the idea in Armenians' mind that in order to get rid of the Turks, they had to support the Tsarist army monetarily and perhaps with their lives. In the end, they managed to create this consciousness. As a result, Armenian volunteers fell under the command of the Tsarist army for the 'salvation' of Armenia. From that moment on, Tsar's war principles had become the principles of the Armenians. The Dashnaks started spreading the propaganda that they were with the 'civilised nations' of Europe against the 'vandal' Germans and the 'disorderly' Turks. Promises were given, and Armenians were told that they were not alone in their struggle for 'freedom'.

According to Boryan, gathering of volunteered militias did not benefit for the Armenians. The Dashnaks basically acted as the agents to the Tsarist Russia. The Dashnaks leaders such as Sahrikyan Efendi and Zoryan who lived in Anatolia saw the reality in those years and determined that the dream of "Great Armenia" was unrealistic. These leaders had opposed the Armenian volunteers in the South Caucasus while arguing for the cancelling of operations against Turks. The leaders, who warned the Caucasian Armenians to stay out of the business of the Ottoman Armenians, had insistently stated that such Dashnak politics would bring death to the Ottoman Armenians instead of freedom in 1915. Unfortunately, they could not achieve any positive results.⁵¹

Georgian statesman Karibi (P.P. Goleyshvili), who saw the volunteer movement as treason against the Ottoman Armenians, kept on stating that Jews, Poles, Greeks, and many more nationalities were working on national aims, but none had chosen the path that the Armenians had chosen. None of these nationalities had thought of organising volunteer militias against their state which was under troublesome times. None of them had openly taken the enemy side. According to Karibi, the major mistake of the Armenian leaders was to establish the Armenian volunteer militias and inflame inter-group hate as a result of these politics. In the documents published by Karibi, it can be seen that the Dashnaks, in their relations with West and Russia, had used the volunteer militias as a tool for negotiation and to make them accept their demands.⁵²

Karibi, after determining this situation, evaluated the precautions of the Ottoman government:

"Take Christian Russia or highly civilised Germany in place of Turkey. What would Russia do if Russian Poles would join Austrian Poles to organise all Poles of Europe under a state and fight against Russia? What would Germans do, if the French in Alsace-Lorraine organise volunteer militia to fight against Germany? Naturally, these two civilised Christian states would do the same thing that Turkey has done to Armenians. (...)

51 Perinçek, *Ermeni Devlet Adamı...*, p. 58-59.

52 Karibi, *Gürcü Devleti'nin Kırmızı Kitabı*, p. 25, 56-57, 60-61.

The English, as recently as yesterday, have crushed the Irish with blood and fire, even if they did not cooperate with the enemy but they only requested their freedom which they had before.”⁵³

Another fact that justified the Ottoman government’s precautions and the struggle against the Dashnaks is the fact that the Muslim population in the lands that was envisaged as part Great Armenia was much greater than the Armenian population. Tsarist Russia’s International Affairs Minister Sergey Sazonov remarked that even before the First World War, except for a few great trade centres, Armenians did not represent the majority either in the Russian Armenia or in the Turkish cities. In this respect, the Russian statesman considered the other nationalities that separated from Ottoman state and established independent states to be a different case. And the reason of this was that “there is no land where Armenians can consider as theirs”.⁵⁴ The Russian military historian and general Korsun, who served in the Caucasian front, mentioned that Muslim population was five times higher than the population of Armenians before the relocation in his book “Turkey”, which is used in the military geography lessons in the Red Army Military Academy.⁵⁵

On the other hand, after the October Revolution, a report in the archives of the International Affairs Department of the Kolchak government that was created by Russian armies in Omsk with the support of the Allies, recorded that the Armenian population in Anatolia was 800,000. For this reason, according to the Kolchak government, it would have been nonsensical to establish even a principedom for the Armenians.⁵⁶

Massacre and Looting Policy of the Armenian Volunteers

The actions of the volunteer militias are key for understanding the Armenian incidents during the First World War. Boryan explicitly revealed the reasons why these troops were organised: Volunteered militias were organised to invade lands which were called “Great Armenia” and wipe out the Turkish and Kurdish population in those lands during the First World War.⁵⁷

Karinyan, who directly witnessed those days, states that the Russian successes right after the start of the First World War, especially the invasion of Van and Erzurum had emboldened the Dashnaks tremendously and continues as follows:

53 *Karibi, Gürcü Devleti'nin Kırmızı Kitabı*, p. 25-26.

54 S. Sazanov, *Kader Yılları* (İstanbul: Derin Yayınları, 2002), p. 162-163.

55 N.G. Korsun, *Turtsiya: Kurs Lektsii Po Voyennoi Geografii, Chitannyykh v Voyennoi Akademii RKKK* (Moskva: Vysshii Voyenny Redaktsionny Sovyet, 1923), p. 37.

56 “Rossiya, Turtsiya i Armeniya”, *Vestnik Narodnogo Komissariata Inostrannykh Del*, March 15, 1921, No. 1-2: p. 62. Also, in the “Armenian Issue” article of *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* printed in 1926 and in the quotations of Karinyan above, it is emphasized that the numbers of the Muslim population were much higher.

57 Perinçek, *Ermeni Devlet Adamı...*, p. 60.

“They were not hiding their secret goals anymore; they were also not seeing any reason to hide their hate against non-Christian groups in Turkish Armenia any further. Volunteers, who have found morale from Russian victories, were doing anything they could to establish their influence and were applying the method of wiping out the population which was not Armenian when they enter an invaded area.”⁵⁸

In regard to this issue, Karinyan highlighted another fact. He emphasized that the statement in the first program of the Dashnak Party, “Turkish Armenia is a part of constitutional Ottoman state with broad domestic autonomy” evolved into “independent state” after successes at the front, revealing the following which remains valid for today’s arguments:

“The mixed population in the Turkish Armenia and the rarity of the Armenian population in ‘6 cities’ were the biggest obstacles for the establishment of relevant ideal. Armenians only had modest majority in a few areas in the region. But numbers of all the other groups, especially the groups who were bound to Islam, were incommensurably high. For this reason, with the initiatives of Dashnaktsutyun Party, the previously mentioned method was enacted against the related population.

As it can be seen from the reports and orders of the Russian military offices, Armenian volunteered troops mostly focused on massacring the non-Christian civil population. Volunteered militias, who were systematically murdering the Turks and Kurds, were practicing the Dashnak program that consists of cleansing of Muslims from Armenian soil. This program was practiced so insistently that most of the time it created discomfort among officers of the Russian Army.”⁵⁹

Lalayan explicitly explained the volunteer militia’s culpability in the massacres against the Muslim public. Armenian volunteers were tasked to massacre Turkish population without mercy. Lalayan argues the results of this campaign amounted to the following:

“Speciality of this volunteer movement was that Dashnaks with the leadership of blood thirsty hmbapets (Andranik Pasha, Amazasp and etc.) have shown maximum ‘heroism’ in totally massacring Turkish women, children, old and sick. Turkish villages that were invaded by Dashnak troops were cleaned from thriving humans and turned into wrecks. (...)

For that matter, one of the results of the Dashnak movement was the massacre of thousands of Turkish labourers.”⁶⁰

58 Karinyan, *Ermeni Milliyetçi Akımları*, p. 86-87.

59 Karinyan, *Ermeni Milliyetçi Akımları*, p. 87-88.

60 Lalayan, *Taşnak Partisi'nin Karşıdevrimci...*, p. 45-46.

Volunteer militias, since before the start of the Relocation, had massacred the villages of Turks and Kurds, including the war prisoners. The lootings and massacres of the Dashnaks had even horrified the Russian officers who were using them against Ottomans. The reports of the massacres of Muslim women, children, and the elderly by Armenian volunteers were directly reported by Tsarist officials in person and many written instructions were sent to the Armenian volunteers to prevent this. In the telegram sent from Przhivalsky, Commander in chief of Russian Army's Caucasian front to the military governor in Tbilisi, it was stated that Armenian immigrants from Russia were getting ready for massacring the Turks in the following days and orders for the prevention of such thing to occur.⁶¹ In the Tsarist reports, it can also be found that the immigrant Russian citizen-Armenians were located in Pasin plains from the behind of the front and they were seizing the residences of the public and military as well as the agricultural areas of Turks by arbitrarily expelling them.⁶²

The massacre and looting attacks by Armenians exhausted the patience of the Tsarist officials. In the report written by the military deputy governor of the Kars region to the military governor of Kars before the Relocation on 4 January 1915, it is stated that some officers and soldiers were charged to be fully responsible of protecting the Muslim villages from the attacks of the Armenians.⁶³ The telegram sent from Military Governor Podgursky to the commanders of the Sarikamış, Oltu, and Kağızman regions are is as follows:

“Take any decisive precaution to prevent the attempts of looting and rapine against Muslim population by Christian population. Scare them with heavy penalties and let them know that they will be taken to military court; arrest, disarm, take the criminals to court. Deliver the low ranked ones to their troops. Notify me of the developments.”⁶⁴

While the report written to the Russian commander of the Kars Castle on 19 January 1915 indicated that the local Greek and Armenians looted the Kurdish villages and raped the women,⁶⁵ another telegram on 15 February 1915 states that these kinds of activities were naturally generating hate within Muslims.⁶⁶

Kurdish tribes that were cooperating with Russian had also suffered great damage from the massacres and lootings of the Armenian troops. There are many reports that were sent to Russian offices from pro-Russian Kurdish tribes that reveals these lootings and massacres.⁶⁷ There also are many Russian

61 RGVA fond 2100 opis 1 delo 94 list 2.

62 RGVA fond 2100 opis 1 delo 1191 list 40, 40 ob.

63 RGVA fond 2100 opis 2 delo 460 list 36, 36 ob.

64 RGVA fond 2100 opis 2 delo 460 list 75.

65 RGVA fond 2100 opis 2 delo 460 list 110.

66 RGVA fond 2100 opis 1 delo 558 list 207.

67 For example, please see: RGVA fond 2168 opis 1 delo 264 list 11, 14, 14 ob., 15, 15 ob.; RGVA fond 2100 opis 1 delo 604.

reports about Kurdish tribes that stopped cooperating with Russians and sided with Turks due to cruelties inflicted by Armenian troops. Moreover, Mshak, the newspaper of Armenian nationalists had written that Kurds, against the Armenians and Russians, had lost three out of four of their population and hundreds of their villages were ruined during World War I.⁶⁸

There were many complaints about Armenian volunteers. There was not an end to the lootings and individual and mass murders. General Nikolayev states that Armenian volunteers had even fired upon Russian troops who were trying to stop them while they were carrying off the goods that they had looted. The orders requesting that Armenian volunteers should not be let out of their stations without a document signed by their leader and that the volunteers should be disarmed and held under check until their identity was confirmed were made widely known.⁶⁹

The telegram of Ilya Zurabovich Odishelizde, Commander of the Russian Caucasian Armies, is important since it contains the witness account of a commander of an army which was fighting with Ottoman government. Armenian troops had attempted “massive brutality” while Russian armies were withdrawing:

“Armenian units, which stand now against Turkish armies, appeared to be quite unfitting for the action even against predatory Kurd gangs and absolutely unstable against Turkish regular armies by not obeying military orders once the Russian armies once they left: they collapse easily, what is described with their not being punished at all for their massive brutality over unarmed Turkish population, not excluding women and children. (...) If the army and twelve thousand Armenian citizens are forced to go back to this desert which was created by leaving Russian revolutionary troops, then they will become more brutal because of hunger, and it is hard to consider what will happen to neighbouring villages and the troops themselves.”⁷⁰

In the letter from the Ottoman Army Caucasian Front Commander Vehbi Pasha to Russian Army Caucasian Front Commander in Chief General Przhevalsky on 22 January 1918 (which is accessible in the Russian archives), the contents point to the atrocity caused by the retreat of Russian armies from another perspective:

“I sincerely thank you for your exact order to the responsible officers to withstand the atrocity against Ottoman citizen Muslims from the Armenians in the cities invaded by Russian armies and for taking strict and concrete precautions to prevent any possible inappropriate action.

68 For example, please see: Mehmet Perinçek, *Sovyet Devlet Kaynaklarında Kürt İsyanları* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, Kasım 2011), p. 35-52, 219-224.

69 RGVIA fond 2100 opis 1 delo 982 list 33; RGVIA fond 2100 opis 1 delo 982 list 3-5.

70 RGVIA fond 2100 opis 1 delo 698 list 4-5.

Caucasian Armies Commander General Odishelidze is informed by me with the request to end these actions in regard to the latest events. Unfortunately, I find it necessary and beneficial to inform your highness too about the latest events that I learned. Especially in Erzincan, after the retreat of the Russian army corps, Armenian atrocities have expanded from attacks in houses and murdering men around nooks into obvious attacks on villages, the rape of women, the murder of the male population, and the burning down of villages.”⁷¹

In the detailed report of the Russian Caucasian Army Chief of Staff L.M. Bolkhovitinov on 11 December 1915, he stated that Armenian volunteer militias had attempted to slaughter the Muslim population, stoke racist feelings, and murder or exile the population with disregard for gender and age, and wreck villages and loot goods in the regions invaded during the First World War. These practices had systematically started before the Armenian Relocation.⁷²

Erzurum 2nd Armenian-Russian Castle Artillery Regiment Commander Colonel Tverdokhlebov had witnessed, in person, the terror practiced by the Armenian troops in Erzurum and Erzincan during the end of 1917 and initial months of 1918. In the documents Tverdokhlebov talks about what he saw and witnessed, reveals the atrocities of Armenian troops perpetrated against the old, young, and female Muslim population.⁷³

Dashnak documents also contain massacre stories of Dashnaks who were under the command of the Tsarist Russia and Western imperial powers. In the 34th instruction, sent from Van regiment commander of Russian Armies to the Van Governor Aram on 22 June 1915, after the invasion of Van, it requests the Armenians in the region not to attack the Kurdish population in the region nor to loot villages. Aram, in protesting the instruction, states that the orders are not going to be followed and “criminals”⁷⁴ are going to be punished in the strictest way to make an example for the Muslims living in uninvaded territories.⁷⁵

Beyond these incidents, however, many Armenian privates, officers, and volunteers were on trial in the military courts of the Russian Caucasian Armies for massacre and looting against the Muslim population and sentenced with heavy sanctions that included the death penalty.

71 *Dokumenty i Materialy Po Vneshney Politike Zakavkazya i Gruzii* (Tiflis, 1919), p. 42-43.

72 For the whole of the report, please see: L.M. Bolkhovitinov, *Resmi Ermeni Raporu*, 5. Basım, Ed. Mehmet Perinçek (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, Kasım 2014).

73 Tverdohlebov, *I Witnessed and Lived Through (Erzurum 1917-1918)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2007).

74 Muslim people of the region opposing the violence and pressure being exerted by the Armenian groups were branded as criminals by Governor Aram.

75 Bolhovitinov, *Resmi Ermeni Raporu*, p. 107-113.

The massacres and murders of civilians from court records attract particular attention. For example, the army courts of Azerbaijan-Van Troops had found Armenian volunteer defendants from 3rd and 4th Armenian Volunteer Troops guilty of raping Kurdish women and girls, intentionally torturing 26 women and children and killing them. Defendants Martiros Akopov, Karnik Babinyats, Maksud Jezmejiyan (Cesbadi), Seno Arutunyan, Kerob Mikhitarov Manukov, Haik (Hai) Okhanyan, Sakhak Olikyan (Sakhak Holikyan), and Karapet Jamkojian (Karapetusyants-Kojin) were sentenced to death by hanging. However, due to other issues, their punishments were reduced.⁷⁶

The murders of 18 Turks by Armenians in the Trabzon's villages Taner, Kalamas, Soğütdağ, Etsesa etc. after the retreat of Turkish army also resulted in judgements.⁷⁷

According to another military judicial document, Nagobet Grigoryants, who was registered to Ali Calo village in Yeni Beyazıt and a volunteer in 2nd Armenian Volunteer Troops, had gone to Kinar village of Karakilise during daytime on 31 January 1916, stepped into one of the Kurdish houses, saw 8 and 11 years old girl and boy lying down in the room and killed them on purpose with bayonet.⁷⁸

In another judicial claim file concerning some soldiers of the 28th Caucasian Hunter Regiment, it indicated that the army privates had attempted lootings and rapes along with the Armenians, who committed murder in the Dersim region. Also, it was recorded in the claim file that none of the precautions had been effective in halting the atrocities.⁷⁹

Reports documented individual incidents in detail. A private of the 15th Turkistan Hunter Regiment (Saveliy Bagrinyants) first raped Sariye Feryuzkızı and Fikriye İsmail Kızı, who were Turks, and afterwards killed them with a gun and sharp object on the morning of 18 June 1917 near the Gurme village of Bayburt.⁸⁰

Hatchatur Saakyants, a private of 103th Petrozavod Regiment, with Ivan Zinchenko, a member of the Russian army, and unidentified two people had pre-planned and broken into the house of Şadan Razvanoğlu on the night of 11 January 1917 in Erzurum, killed Se⁸¹ Şadankızı, Ali Aytrifoğlu, Hüseyin Şadanoğlu along with the owner of the house, seriously wounded Hazminur

76 RGVIA fond 2100 opis 2 delo 1094 list I, 4, 4 ob., 7-9, 7 ob.-9 ob.

77 For the file of the 5. Army Corps Caucasian Army Prosecution Office under the date of 19 – 23 December 1917, please see: RGVIA fond 2303 opis 2 delo 314 list 1-3.

78 RGVIA fond 2300 opis 1 delo 498 list 12 ve 12 ob.; fond 2300 opis 2 delo 119 list 1-15.

79 For the writing of 1. Army Corps of Russian Caucasian Army under the date of 6 May 1917, please see: RGVIA fond 2295 opis 1 delo 616 list 19.

80 RGVIA fond 2295 opis 3 delo 772 list 1 and 3.

81 The rest of it cannot be read in the source material.

Amrokızı and Ahmet Şadanoglu. Afterwards, they had taken valuable goods and fled.⁸²

In another incident that resulted in court martial judgement, Pogos Markosyants, a soldier of the 22nd Caucasus Hunter Regiment, deliberately killed Base Alikızı who refused to hand over her ox, with two gunshots in the Lower Toros village in Erzincan on 8 October 1916.⁸³

On the other hand, according to records from the Russian military courts, there also were cases about lynch incidents, village raids and loots, and attacks against Muslim soldiers by the Russian army.⁸⁴

Also, the reports reflect the political reality that these massacres and lootings were motivated by racist hatred. The assumption is strongly plausible, as the violent massacres were carried out against civilian populations without distinguishing gender and age, and subsequently the masses were provoked into lynching. Victims were not targeted because of their political or military status but were only selected because of being Muslim (Turkish or Kurdish). Also, some of the victims were even Muslims who had cooperated with or served in the Russian armies. This issue was not only about being on the opposite, hostile side. One must wonder why those who participated and were prosecuted for these massacres and lootings were, in the main, Ottoman Armenians. Russian military and administrative officials had taken strict precautions to protect the Muslim population from these massacres and looting, yet, because of the prevailing disturbing socio-political environment at the time, the precautions intended to stem the violence and killings never took hold.

International Court Decisions

When the dates of these events in these documents are examined, it becomes apparent that most of them occurred before the Relocation and Resettlement (Tr. Sevk ve İskan) Law adopted on 27 May 1915. Documents from the Russian archives suggest that the decision and practice of relocation was intended as a precaution of war. This decision is an element of customary law that became codified in the 17th article of the Second Protocol as an appendix to the present Geneva Conventions.⁸⁵ Under the wartime considerations of those times (1915), today codified by the Second Protocol, relocation was and is justified in terms of self-defence and is therefore legal.

Also, recent international court decisions are compatible with this, such as the following:

82 RGVA fond 2295 opis 3 delo 757 list 2 ve 2 ob.

83 RGVA fond 2295 opis 3 delo 542 list 1 ve 1 ob.

84 For examples, please see: Mehmet Perinçek, *Ermeni Milliyetçiliğinin Serüveni: Taşnaklardan ASALA'ya Yeni Belgelerle, 2. Basım* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, Mart 2015), p. 133-145.

85 "Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II)," *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/protocolii.aspx>

- The International Court of Justice on 3 February 2015 ruled in a case opened by Croatia against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, claiming that it had violated the Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948.⁸⁶ Later on, Serbia had become a party in the case directing similar claims to Croatia. According to this key decision, the Genocide Convention cannot be applied retroactively. Furthermore, controversies about the claims on the violation of common laws about genocide are out of the jurisdiction of international courts unless they fall under the jurisdiction of the Genocide Convention. Also, the International Court of Justice maintained the threshold level for determining jurisdiction and the criteria of proof for the existence of a genocide that had been set by the Court during the Bosnia-Herzegovina-Serbia case. As such, it did not take step backwards after facing criticism for setting a very high threshold for determining genocide.

Within the terms of both Croatia's genocide claims and Serbia's "counter-genocide" claims, the International Court of Justice determined that actions as outlined in the Genocide Convention indeed had been committed, but the Court also determined that it was not proven that these actions were committed "in order to exterminate partly or wholly" the Croat or Serbian populations. Thus, the Court decided that the "specific intent" did not exist in the incidents under scrutiny to accept that the crime of genocide had been committed.

The Court articulated significant guidelines about the crime, the intent, and the proof of genocide, some of which are taken from the Court's earlier verdict of 2007. The intent of genocide and the existence of a plan about the carrying out of genocide must be proven demonstratively, referring to particular circumstances. Aiming to homogenise a special region ethnically, in operations for this purpose, cannot be automatically be called genocide. Exiling or relocating people of a specific group is not the legal equivalent of systematically destroying that specified group and it cannot by itself create similar results. The responsibility for undeniably proving a claim of genocide rests on the shoulders of the claimant.

- The decision taken by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) Grand Chamber about the Perinçek-Switzerland case in 9 July 2015 and announced on 15 October 2015 has affirmed the freedom for the expression of statements that "there was no Armenian Genocide" in Europe.⁸⁷ The ECtHR Grand Chamber found the penalisation of Doğu Perinçek in Switzerland for stating

86 "Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Croatia v. Serbia) - Summary of the Judgment of 3 February 2015," *International Court of Justice*, verdict summary, February 3, 2015, <https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/118/18450.pdf>; "Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Croatia v. Serbia) - The Court rejects Croatia's claim and Serbia's counter-claim," *International Court of Justice*, press release, February 3, 2015, <https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/118/18448.pdf>

87 "Grand Chamber - Case of Perinçek v. Switzerland (Application No. 27510/08) – Judgment," *European Court of Human Rights*, Grand Chamber judgement, October 15, 2015, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/app/conversion/docx/pdf?library=ECHR&id=001-158235&filename=CASE%20OF%20PER%20v.%20SWITZERLAND.pdf&logEvent=False>

that “Armenian Genocide is an imperialist lie” violated the Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. ECtHR did not only limit its decision to considerations of freedom of thought, but also attracted attention for the realities surrounding how to determine whether an incident constitutes genocide. The ECtHR Grand Chamber stated that it did not have the jurisdiction to adjudicate cases in which genocide has been claimed and outlined the relevant provisions of the 1948 UN Genocide Convention. According to this Convention, only the courts of the respective country where the alleged crime has taken place and international courts designated by involved parties have jurisdiction in such cases. Thus, only Turkey’s judiciaries and designated international courts can decide legally whether the incidents of 1915 rise to the status of genocide. No other court can adjudicate on this matter.

There is no valid court verdict concerning the status of incidents of 1915. The ECtHR’s verdict as such serves as a reminder that the recognition of “Armenian Genocide” by some national parliaments and various governmental offices have no legal validity and that such recognitions violate international legal norms about the legal concept of genocide.

The first instance court of the ECtHR that dealt with this case, the Second Chamber, viewed the incidents of 1915 to be legally distinct from the Holocaust that took place during the Second World War.⁸⁸ By determining that 1915 incidents were distinct in character from the Holocaust, even though indirectly, the Second Chamber suggested that there was no international legal basis for classifying the 1915 events as the “Armenian Genocide”.

Finally, the ECtHR emphasized that one cannot sustain a legitimate claim for the existence of racist hatred in denying the 1915 incidents constitute genocide, but accusations of racist hatred could be distinctively confirmed for statements about the Holocaust.⁸⁹

- The ECtHR, right after the Perincek-Switzerland case, ruled that no claim can be sustained for the right to express denying the Holocaust. The Court found the French comedian Dieudonne M’bla, who had made anti-Semitic statements and denied the Holocaust, liable for his expression.⁹⁰ Dieudonne had invited Robert Faurisson, who is known for denying the Holocaust, to one of his Paris shows in 2008. Racist jokes about Jews were made during the show. Afterwards, a French court levied a fine of 10,000 euros against Dieudonne,

88 “Second Section - Case of Perinçek v. Switzerland (Application No. 27510/08) – Judgment,” *European Court of Human Rights*, Second Chamber judgment, December 17, 2013, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22%3A%22001-139724%22%7D>

89 “Q&A - Grand Chamber judgment in the case of Perinçek v. Switzerland (application no. 27510/08),” *European Court of Human Rights*, Q&A document issued by the Press Unit of the Court.

90 “European Convention on Human Rights does not protect negationist and anti-Semitic performances,” *European Court of Human Rights*, press release, November 10, 2015, <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/app/conversion/pdf?library=ECHR&id=003-5219244-6470067&filename=Decision%20M%27Bala%20M%27Bala%20v.%20France%20-%20ECHR%20does%20not%20protect%20negationist%20and%20anti-Semitic%20performances.pdf>

who filed an appeal in 2013 with the ECtHR. He claimed the show was intended as “black humour” and that his jokes were not “anti-Semitic”. Yet, the Court disagreed, ruling that Dieudonné’s discourse constituted hate speech, which did not fall under the protection of freedom of expression, as outlined in the Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Court stated that the comedian’s use of freedom of expression typified a contradictory ideology to values of the Convention. Thus, the ECtHR’s verdict showcases that the claims regarding the 1915 Events and the Holocaust are being juridically distinguished from each other.

- The Constitutional Council of France highlighted the difference between the Holocaust and 1915 events again in a verdict issued January 8, 2016.⁹¹ The court that levied a penalty against a French citizen for rejecting the Holocaust refused this time the application of Armenian groups to have legal standing in the case. Also, the decision gave way to the French Council of State for removing Armenian allegations of genocide from history textbooks. As a result, the Constitutional Council specified that the Gaysot Law complies with the Constitution of France. It allowed Holocaust claims to be adjudicated while denying similar legal standing for the Armenian events. Therefore, the Constitutional Council delivered a verdict in line with ECtHR’s Perinçek-Switzerland case decision and allocated 6 of the 33 pages of the verdict to the legal rationale established by the ECtHR precedent. Besides the Gaysot Law approved by the Constitutional Council that subjects the denial of the genocide to punishment in the fight against racism, the Constitutional Council also cited the precedent decision of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg.

Conclusion

Considering Armenian volunteers’ actions in accordance with Russian archival documents and recent international court judgements, it is plausible to conclude the impact of the Armenian issue in the case of relocation:

Massacres on both sides occurred before and after First World War, resulting in civil chaos. Considering that more than 200,000 Armenian soldiers had fought with Tsarist Russia, many soldiers lost their lives. Second, because Armenian troops had cooperated with foreign states and had initiated actions of ethnic cleansing, there had been significant casualties on both sides of the Ottoman/Turkish State battles. Third, outside of the battlefronts between troops, violence was propelled between Armenian and Muslim populations (Turks and Kurds), with many people losing their lives during war hostilities in significant numbers on both sides.

91 Maxime Gauin, “Stopping the Censors: The Final Defeat of Armenian Nationalism at the French Constitutional Council in January 2017,” *Review of Armenian Studies*, Issue 36 (2017): 75-112.

Documents as cited extensively confirm that Armenian groups pursued a systematic slaughter targeting Turks and Kurds in East Anatolia, starting before the Armenian Relocation.

The sole responsibilities for both the war between states and the killings between Muslims-Armenians fall with Western imperialist powers and Tsarist Russia. The Great Powers, wanting to split the soils of the Ottoman Empire, propelled the extremist nationalist Armenian groups into war by provoking them. The Ottoman Empire and Muslim people took strategic precautions in that case in the hopes of suppressing the rebelling Armenian troops. Regrettably, some would manipulate the professional objective of historical inquiry to obscure the evidence which indicates that the precautions taken were not part of a deliberate genocidal campaign but of a nation's attempts to secure a fair fight in its self-defence.

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