

# The Relations Between the Ottoman State and the Armenian Patriarchate in the Process of the World War I<sup>1</sup>

## Birinci Dünya Savaşı Sürecinde Osmanlı Devleti ile Ermeni Patrikhanesi Arasındaki İlişkiler

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### Abstract

The Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate was the religious and political leadership authority of the Ottoman Armenians. In view of this status, the patriarchate was undoubtedly one of the important actors in the Armenian issue. Incidences during the process of the emergence and developments of the Armenian issue occasionally led to confrontations between the patriarchate and the state, and sometimes even with other powers of the Armenian population. The patriarchate, that acted as an intermediary authority for the two parties regarding both the state's expectations and demands of the Armenian population, also served as a mediating and balance enforcing authority. In view of this, the patriarchate was confronted with many problems. Although the legal status of the patriarchate did not change with the Constitutional era, the political process during this period had a major impact on the patriarchate. This study will be examining the patriarchate's expectations from the state and mutual relations since the beginning of the Constitutional era, and attempt to reveal the outcome of developments during the war on the state-patriarchate relations. In addition to patriarchate's relations with the state before and during the war, the stance of the Etchmiadzin Catholicosate towards the patriarchate and the state's expectations from the patriarchate will be among the main topics of this study.

**Keywords:** The Armenian Patriarchate, The Ottoman State, World War I.

### Öz

Osmanlı Ermenilerinin dini ve siyasi liderlik makamı İstanbul Ermeni Patrikhanesi idi. Bu konumu dolayısıyla da patrikhane Ermeni sorununun önemli aktörlerinden birisiydi. Ermeni sorununun ortaya çıkış ve gelişim sürecindeki durumu patrikhaneyi bazen devletle bazen de Ermeni toplumunun diğer güçleri ile karşı karşıya getirmişti. Hem devletin Ermenilerden beklentileri hem de Ermeni toplumunun talepleri konusunda her iki tarafın muhatap makamı olan patriklik, aynı zamanda aracı ve denge sağlama makamı statüsündeydi. Bu yüzden birçok problemle karşı karşıya kalmıştı. Meşrutiyet dönemiyle birlikte anayasal süreçte patrikhanenin konumu değişmemekle birlikte siyasi süreç patrikhaneyi de etkilemişti. Bu çalışmada patrikhanenin Meşrutiyet döneminin başlangıcından itibaren hükümetten beklentileri ve karşılıklı ilişkiler ele alınacak, savaş sırasında yaşanan gelişmelerin hükümet-patrikhane ilişkilerine etkisi ortaya konmaya çalışılacaktır. Savaş öncesinde ve savaş döneminde patrikhanenin hükümetle ilişkileri yanında, Eçmiyazın Katoğikosluğu'nun patrikhaneye yönelik tavrı ve hükümetin patrikhaneden beklentileri gibi konular da çalışmanın ana konuları arasında yer alacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ermeni Patrikhanesi, Osmanlı Devleti, Birinci Dünya Savaşı.

### Introduction

Since the constitution was reinforced in 1908, it was apparent that the spirit of solidary expected in the Ottoman society was not secured. Attempts were made to end the issues of public order that continued for many years in the Eastern Anatolian region (known in that period as vilayet-ı sarkiyeye), with various policies enforced by Abdulhamid II. However, these policies were not only insufficient in solving these problems, but also led to more serious problems in later years. Many of the problems faced in the short period from the re-

<sup>1</sup> This article was prepared based on my book that was published as my doctoral thesis under the titled given below and an extended version of this thesis. Ramazan Erhan Güllü, "Ermeni Sorununun Ortaya Çıkış ve Gelişim Sürecinde İstanbul Ermeni Patrikhanesinin Tutumu (The Attitude of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul in the Process of Emergence and Evolution of the Armenian Question) (1878-1923)", Istanbul University Institute of Social Sciences, *Unpublished Phd. Dissertation*, Istanbul 2013.; Ramazan Erhan Güllü, *Ermeni Sorunu ve İstanbul Ermeni Patrikhanesi (Armenian Issue and the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate) (1878-1923)*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları (Institution of Turkish History Publications), Ankara 2015.

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declaration of the constitution in 1908 up to World War I were a reflection of the policies introduced during the period of Abdulhamid II.

The aim of organizing Kurdish tribes in the form of military troops against the activities of the Armenian committees and the effects of European interventions in support of the Armenians in the region in the period of Abdulhamid II, was so they would become forces loyal to the central authority, and also to prevent these forces from participating in unorganized military activities. But this practice was not that successful in this period, and the tribe's opposition of the new regulations the state wanted to apply following the re-declaration of the Constitution became a major obstacle in the state strengthening its power in the region. Other tribal communities in the region- including Kurdish communities that were not members of these tribes, Armenians and Turks living in the region -were the main cause of the attacks and disruption of public order in the region.

The issue of law and order in the region also constituted the foundation of the relations between the Patriarchate and the Ottoman State during the Constitutional era. The main complaint of the Patriarchate was always the attacks by Kurdish tribes. Although the government took certain measures by constantly carrying out investigations regarding these complaints, these measures appeared to be somewhat unsuccessful. In brief, the state was unsuccessful in imposing its authority in the region.

Nevertheless, apart from the patriarchate's various justified complaints on the matter- as mentioned many times by local authorities -other aspects in the disruption of law and order, namely the Armenian Committees, and the intervention of other states in the region, especially Russia, were not mentioned. As a result, rather than which side was more justified or unjustified, the continuous lack of law and order in the region and failure to enforce state authority was their main issue. This situation that continued until World War I, was to be one of the main factors that influenced the state's policies both towards the Armenians and in the region during the war.

### **Unsolvable Issues on Law and Order**

There were many examples of unsolvable issues on law and order during the Constitutional era, and one of the most important examples that influenced relations between the state-patriarchate occurred in 1913. In May 1913, the patriarch of that period Hovhannes Arsharuni did an interview with *La Turquie* newspaper and revealed his views on current issues. The patriarch, who said the main intention of the patriarchates demands was nothing but to protect the rights of Armenians, implied that the main groups responsible for problems in the eastern provinces were the Kurds, and accusing the Kurdish tribes with harsh words, proposed that those who committed crimes against the Armenians should be removed from the region:

All we want is to protect our honor, life and property. There is not a day that goes by where the patriarchate does not receive complaints from religious officials in the province that the Armenians are suffering the attacks of the Kurds. But the state authorities are not taking any preventive measures...As known, all the Kurds are ignorant men. Many among them are rogues and plunderers. Therefore, Kurds who act in this way should be punished immediately and if necessary expelled from the region.

Following his response to the question regarding what else can be done and his assessment on the topics, the patriarch put forth these suggestions and evaluations:

- Without delay, the government must work to improve and increase the numbers of the gendarme under European supervision.
  - Schools should be opened everywhere for both the Kurds and Armenians.
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-The government should construct roads and railroads immediately for these provinces (vilayet-i şarkıyye) that have not been appreciated until now.

-First and foremost, the thing that is more urgent is punishing any person that commits a crime, without hesitation, so that this will be an example for others. There is discrimination in punishments. While the Armenians are punished for the most trivial acts, the Kurds are not punished for their actions towards the Armenians.

-As Ottoman citizens, we are fulfilling our duties, so the government is responsible for protecting us.

-A circular regarding these subjects prepared by the patriarchate will be delivered to the Sublime Porte on Saturday.<sup>2</sup>

-The government neither informed or asked the opinion of the Patriarchate regarding the reforms planned for the region. What these reforms include is unclear. These kinds of commissions were formed before for reforms, but none of these were successful. The knowledge of European experts should be referred to for this purpose.

- We are receiving information that Rumelian gendarme will be sent to Anatolia. However, we cannot trust these soldiers. "Anatolia should be under the supervision of foreign security officials."

-Undoubtedly, among government officials there are some that are capable of supervising these affairs, but certainly these should be under the supervision of expert European officials.

-The region known as the Vilayat-ı Şarkıyye includes Erzurum, Mamuret-ul-Aziz (Harput), Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Van and Sivas.

-The patriarchate demands that the issues of land are solved by the authorities, not through the courts. But the most important point is that it appears that the government will use these demands on the issue in support of the Kurds.

-Issues against the non-Muslims in the new property law should be amended. The Patriarchates are also trustees of the people they represent. However, the new law ignores this right of the patriarchate.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the patriarch's statement published in the newspaper, the memorandum presented to the Grand Vizier also led to the administration paying more attention to the patriarch's claims. In a letter written by the Grand Vizier to the Ministry of the Interior, it requested that every claim of the patriarch was investigated; memorandums were sent to the relevant provinces, and under no condition were illegal actions allowed. While it was requested that the results of investigations, as in the patriarch's memorandum, should also be sent item by item to the Grand Vizier, it also emphasized that, as in the case of other societies, disruption could also emerge among the Armenians, but that all Armenians would not be held responsible for these actions. {Legal proceedings had to be enforced on those that acted contrary to this like all the other citizens.} Pointing out that the local press in eastern regions published articles that ignited disputes for both parties, the Grand Vizier requested that more

<sup>2</sup> The memorandum mentioned by the patriarch was delivered to the Sublime Porte on Saturday May 10 1913, the day the interview was published in *Tanin*. The Patriarchate informed the Grand Assembly with the Memorandum of the Corporal Assembly of the Patriarchate on the same day. *Tanin*, no. 1596, 10 May 1913.

<sup>3</sup> "Declaration of the Armenian Patriarch" *Tanin*, no. 1596, 10 May 1913. For the Patriarch's interview, also see. Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi (History of the Turkish Revolution)*, Vol: II, Part: III, T.T.K. Publications, Ankara 1991, p. 69.

emphasis should be put on the conception of living together in the region, and that those who caused disruption and conflict, irrelevant of the group, should be prevented immediately.<sup>4</sup>

However, the measures requested were never fully enforced and the issue of law and order in the region continued. Around twenty days after these declarations and the memorandum he sent to the Grand Vizier, Arsharuni sent a report to the Grand Vizier stating that there had been no change in the situation mentioned previously and also attached a new report including incidents that had occurred after the memorandum to date.<sup>5</sup> According to the patriarch, to date no measures had been taken regarding the incidents he mentioned. He said that he had witnessed no any evidence of prosecution against the culprits of the massacre nor any measures to prevent the actions of the local officials that were participating in anti-Armenian activities. He explained that, on the contrary, these acts against the Armenians were increasing and because of this, Armenians particularly in the east began to migrate as before, and that those remaining -for example those living in the villages- were unable to leave their villages to attend to their crops. He concluded the report requesting that measures were taken immediately to prevent these courses of events.<sup>6</sup> Arsharuni, who sent the same report to European ambassadors, added a note at the end stating that as the patriarch, the only thing he could do from now on was rely on the Ottoman government and nation's sense of responsibility, and seek refuge in the justice and compassion of the civilized world.<sup>7</sup>

After the patriarch repeated complaints on similar incidents and said that precautions were not taken, the Grand Vizier asked for detailed information from officials. Upon this, the Minister of the Interior exchanged the necessary correspondence with officials in the provinces where the incidents took place, and sent a report, including the last report sent by the patriarch, to the Grand Vizier explaining all the events in detail and the steps taken regarding these complaints. In the report from the Minister of the Interior, it rejects the patriarch's claims that no measures were taken, revealed those punished according to each event and provided information on preventive measures. But the minister, who agreed that similar events were continuing between all groups of the society, gave the example of the mutual tribal dispute that had continued for a long period, and said that in such a situation it was obvious that law and order could not be enforced overnight.<sup>8</sup> The Grand Vizier demanded that those who were the cause of such complaints should be caught immediately and punished, irrelevant of who they were, and if necessary for the preventive measures to continue in a more stricter, harsher manner.<sup>9</sup> So, with the negotiations in the Assembly of Ministers, it was decided that if necessary the punishments should be increased to prevent actions that disrupted law and order, for example, a person who committed a crime like abducting a girl would receive a punishment twice more severer than before.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Memorandum from the Grand Vizier to the Ministry of the Interior dated 13 May 1913; Ottoman Archives of the Turkish Republic Prime Minister's Office State Archives (*BOA*), Sublime Porte Records Department (*BEO*) no: 4172/312841.

<sup>5</sup> List of gasp and other incidents presented by the patriarchate that occurred in the past month in various parts of Anatolia; *BOA. BEO* no: 4184/313733.

<sup>6</sup> The report Armenian Patriarch Hovhannes Arsharuni sent to the Grand Vizier dated 31 May 1913; *BOA. BEO* no 4184/313773.

<sup>7</sup> Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi (History of the Turkish Revolution)*, Vol: II, Part: III, p.81.

<sup>8</sup> The report from the Minister of the Interior to the Grand Vizier dated 10 June 1913; *BOA. BEO.* no. 4184/313733.

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum sent from the Grand Vizier to the Minister of the Interior dated 17 June 1913; *BOA. BEO.* no. 4184/313733.

<sup>10</sup> Memorandum sent from the Minister of the Interior to the Grand Vizier dated 23 June 1913; *BOA. BEO.* no. 4186/313930.

In the meantime, unrest began to spread not only in Eastern Anatolia, but also in other regions of the country. From the end of 1912 to mid-1913, areas in the vicinity of the Aleppo Province (particularly the suburbs of Zeitun, Marash and Aintab) became settlement areas where almost every day issues on law and order were reported to the headquarters. Incidents including the unrest between the Armenian and Muslim communities, attacks by groups on the public and deserters from the military forces led to an increasing spread of disturbance in the region.<sup>11</sup> Although the government was troubled by the disturbance, state officials not only believed that the patriarchate approached the issue one-sided and ignored the problems caused by Armenians, but also did not take the government serious any more. During these disputes, the government complained to the patriarchate regarding the Armenian representatives of Muş, Siirt and Bitlis and said that the attitude of these individuals led to an increase in disorder in the region. Although the patriarchate refrained from any official response to this complaint sent to the patriarch as a memorandum from the Ministry of Justice and Religious Sects (*Adliye ve Mezahib Nezareti*), the Patriarchate's Mixed Council (*Meclis-i Muhtelit*) published a statement in Armenian newspapers regarding the government's complaint, and sending this statement to its envoys, requested that they also issued a statement if they thought necessary. Officials believed from the stance they adopted without even responding to the government's complaint, that the patriarchate did not take the government seriously.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the government received information that the patriarchate replaced some of their representatives that resigned with certain bishops that were known for their relations with the commissions and were totally against the Ottoman State.<sup>13</sup>

Despite this complaint and efforts, the problems regarding law and order remained unsolved. When the reform project to be implemented in Eastern Anatolia was abolished due to World War I, this also led to a major effort aimed at preventing local conflict in the region coming to an end. With the beginning of the war, the country was to enter an even more problematic period.

### **Government-Patriarchate Relations Before and During the War**

When World War I began, and in the process following this, Zaven Der-Yeghiayan, who was elected as patriarch in September 1913, was the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople. Therefore, Zaven Effendi was patriarch when the "relocation and resettlement law" was introduced. Generally, information released to the public by Armenian leaders after the war began, emphasized that the Armenians would continue to work for the salvation of the Ottoman State. Emphasis in various statements by Patriarch Zaven Effendi that the Armenians would continue to be citizens loyal to the Ottoman State and recommendations that the Armenian deserters should surrender and fulfill their duty was not welcomed by the Armenian community. Despite this, the mutual attitude of good will between the government and the patriarchate continued. For example, upon the appeal of Patriarch Zaven Effendi, the prosecution cases of some Armenians prosecuted in Aleppo and handed over to the military court were dropped on the condition that they personally appealed to the government and submitted a statement.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Long correspondence between the Minister of the Interior and officials of the Aleppo Province *BOA. Dâhiliye Nezâreti Siyasî Kısım (Ministry of the Interior Political Department) (DH.SYS.)* no. 113/2-1; no. 113/2-2. Similar correspondence concerning the activities of Armenian bandits around Zeytun and Muş and regarding Armenian deserters; *BOA. DH.SYS.* no. 71-2/4.

<sup>12</sup> Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi (History of the Turkish Revolution)*, Vol: II, Part III, pp. 135-136.

<sup>13</sup> Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi (History of the Turkish Revolution)*, Vol: II, Part: III, p. 187.

<sup>14</sup> A cyphered message from the Minister of the Interior to the Aleppo Province dated 10 October 1914); *BOA. Ministry of the Interior Cypher Office (DH.ŞFR.)* no. 45/232. "The Armenian Patriarch says many of the Armenians that were investigated and punished by the martial court (*divan-i harb*) appealed for forgiveness. It

In addition, the patriarchate- as frequently encountered in previous periods -was under the pressure of the committees, and this put the patriarchate in a difficult position with the government and certain groups of the community. Since the beginning of 1914, once again the Armenian committees sought to increase their activities through churches in Anatolia. The government received information that pressure was being put especially on the Hunchakian's Armenian churches in Anatolia. For example, certain priests from the Armenian churches in Samsun and Bafra were forced to resign or replaced, and this led to unease among the Armenian people. The Hunchkians were threatening the priest of the church in Bafra and preventing him from delivering religious services in the church. Many telegraphs of complaint on this matter were sent to the patriarchate by the Armenian community.<sup>15</sup>

The actual threat in response to the mobilization of committees in the country was from Russia and Etchmiadzin. During the war, the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin openly staged activities in support of the Armenian-Russian alliance. In 1914, when the preparations for war were continuing, Catholicos Kevork V, that was recognized by Russian Tsar Nicholas II, said the salvation of the Armenian people was only possible by breaking away from the Ottoman State and establishing an Armenian State under guardianship of the Russians.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, he openly implied that the Ottoman Armenians, that were spiritually members of this highest religious office, should support the Russians in the war. When Russia, that had already schemed the invasion, entered Eastern Anatolia, Armenians in the region would support the Russian army, and if an uprising against the Ottomans was necessary, the Russians would have gained the direct support of a significant military force. If Ottoman Armenians complied with this appeal, then the Ottoman state would face a serious threat in the potential war in Eastern Anatolia.<sup>17</sup>

Before the war, with the encouragement of the Catholicos and in particular the encouragement of the Armenian Revolutionary (Dashnaksutyun) Federation, volunteer corps from among both the Russian Armenians and Turkish Armenians began to be formed to support the Russian army. The process leading up to the war and the beginning of the war was classified as a period of excitement and hope by the Dashnak supporters.<sup>18</sup> These

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would be appropriate that the investigations and punishment for those who sought forgiveness was lifted, and the others punished by the martial court.”

<sup>15</sup> A telegraph sent from the Chief of Intelligence Ismail Bey to the Minister of the Interior dated 24 March 1914 and the correspondence of the same date from the ministry requesting information from the Governor of Canik; *BOA. Dâhiliye Nezareti Kalem-i Mahsus Müdüriyeti (Directorate of the Private Secretarial Staff for the Ministry of the Interior) (DH.KMS)*. no. 18/27.

<sup>16</sup> Sadi Koçaş, *Tarih Boyunca Ermeniler ve Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri (Armenian and Turkish-Armenian Relations Throughout History)*, Altınok Printing House, Ankara 1967, p. 186.

<sup>17</sup> In some studies, it states that in an interview by Zaven Effendi with the Mshag newspaper even before the war he says “The radical solution to the Armenian issue depends on joining the historical fate of all the whole of Armenia under the sovereignty of Russia.” In addition, the patriarch said “The quicker Russia comes here it will be better for us.” Hovhannes Kajaznuni, *Taşnak Partisi'nin Yapacağı Bir Şey Yok (The Dashnak Party Has Nothing More to Do) (1923 Report to the Party Conference)*, (Translation: Arif Acaloğlu), Kaynak Publications, Istanbul 2009, p. 14, Mehmet Perinçek's presentation article. “However, this information is skeptical. Apart from there being no other source available stating that Zaven Effendi openly made such an appeal before the war, taking into consideration the situation of the country, it does not appear possible that the patriarch could act in such a way. Also, the behavior and actions of the patriarch are contrary to this statement.

<sup>18</sup> Hovhannes Kajaznuni *Ibid.*, pp. 32-37. Hovhannes Kajaznuni, the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, speaks about the voluntary units during the war that he not only criticizes, but partially praises saying: “...Of course the question was it necessary to form voluntary units today is meaningless. Historical events have their own steel logic. Armenian voluntary units were formed in the autumn of 1914 and mobilized against the Turks. This was the natural and inevitable result of the psychologic environment the Armenian people nourished for almost a quarter of a century. This psychology had to find a pattern for itself, and it did. And blocking this movement (even if that's what it wanted), was not the duty of the Dashnaksutyun (Dashnak

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communities believed that whatever the conditions, establishing an Armenian state-autonomous or independent -in Eastern Anatolia was inevitable. So, the voluntary corps that were set up would constitute a significant wing of the Russian army.<sup>19</sup>

Ottoman officials believed that during this process, the patriarchate secretly maintained relations in some way with the Catholicos in an attempt of supporting developments in the region. According to investigations by the General Directorate of Security during the war, the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate was corresponding with the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin via the Italian Consulate in Istanbul. The Directorate of Security requested that the intelligence department carefully investigated incidents including Russia, that was at war with the state, receiving informing of the military situation in Turkey and transmission of other information to Russia that could be a potential threat to the country, because it was discovered that in other correspondence abroad, the Armenians transmitted various information via coded messages such as “Our son-in-law will be appointed”, “He has been appointed to serve Aragil Effendi.” Officials were requested to take necessary precautions on similar correspondence such as telegraphs etc.<sup>20</sup> According to the Ottoman State, these developments confirmed the opinion that all Armenian leaders and religious institutions, including the patriarchate, were organizing against the Ottoman State.<sup>21</sup>

Despite claims by Zaven Effendi, patriarch of that period, that on the contrary, they opposed collaboration with the Russian army and that they tried to prevent the Armenians serving the Russian army, he was unsuccessful in convincing the Ottoman State. According to this, there was no doubt that the Unionists distrusted the Armenian community. One of the main reasons for this was that the Armenians demanded that reforms in Eastern Anatolia were to be carried out under European supervision. Considering these demands as a threat to the Ottoman government, the state believed that Armenians would participate in all activities against them in the war.<sup>22</sup>

Again, according to Zaven Effendi, “Those that wanted to fight against the Ottoman State and participate in anti-Ottoman activities were Russian Armenians.” Ottoman Armenians (especially the patriarchate) were fully aware of their mistakes. In fact, because he knew that the Armenian’s actions in support of the Russians would cause more damage than

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Party). It could only use the available leverage, this could be expressed by guiding the accumulation of desires and hope, because it was capable of organizing a willing force. Its opportunities and authority were sufficient for this...” Hovhannes Kazajnuni, *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> Artashes Balasini Karinian, *Ermeni Milliyetçi Akımları (Armenian Nationalist Movements)*, (Translation: Arif Acaloğlu), Kaynak Publications, Istanbul 2007, pp. 79-89; Hratch Dasnabedian, *History of The Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaktsutiun 1890-1924*, OEMME Edizioni, Milan 1990, pp. 117-120; Maxime Gaun, “The Convergent Analysis of Russian, British, French And American Officials about the Armenian Volunteers (1914-1922)”, *International Review of Turkish Studies*, Winter 2011, Volume: 1, Issue: 4, pp. 8-43.

<sup>20</sup> A letter from the Chief of Public Security (Emniyet-i Umûmiye Müdürü) Ismail Bey’ to the Directorate of the Headquarters of Public Intelligence Branch (Karargâh-ı Umûmî İstihbarat Şubesi Müdüriyeti) dated 31 January 1915; *Askerî Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi (Journal of Documents on Military History)(A.T.B.D.)*, Year: 32, Issue: 83, Document No: 1901, Ankara, March 1983, pp. 33-36.

<sup>21</sup> In the book “Beyaz Kitap (White Book) prepared by the government in 1916, this situation is related as follows: “... It appears that all the activities of the Armenian Patriarchate and especially the catholicos, the course of action they adopted was to destroy the government, urge the intervention of foreigners, and as a result of this establish an autonomic administration. Like the issue of reforms that have been alleged for years and the autonomy that was concealed under various ambitions, all the work and efforts of the committees and patriarchate was spent to reach this objective...” *Ermeni Komitelerinin A'mal ve Harekât-ı İhtilâliyyesi (İ'lân-ı Meşrûtiyyet'den Evvel ve Sonra) (Armenian Committee's Revolution of Actions and Movements)(Before and After the Declaration of the Second Constitution)*, (Prepared by: H. Erdoğan Cengiz), Prime Ministry Press, Ankara 1983, p. 297.

<sup>22</sup> Zaven Der Yeghiayan, *My Patriarchal Memoirs*, (Translation from Armenian to English: Ared Mısırlıyan), Mayreni Publishing, Barrington 2002, p. 33.

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benefit to the Armenians living on the Ottoman border, he tried to prevent this, and explained that they would suffer due to this through envoys he sent to Etchmiadzin and Bitlis, but was unsuccessful.<sup>23</sup>

But as Zaven Effendi said, he was neither successful in his complaints to the authorities in Russia, nor convincing the Ottoman Government that they opposed these actions. Many of the developments that occurred in the country did nothing but increase the already difficult situation of the patriarch. In the meantime, the Turk's victory in the sea battles in Çanakkale on 18 March 1915, generated a mood of optimism among the Turks that were in a state of serious moral decline since the beginning of the war. But this situation giving rise to a counter-mood among the Christian minorities, increased the distrust between the two communities even further. In particular, certain groups among the Armenians that considered the victory at Çanakkale as an unfortunate development, led to an increase in the reaction of Turks towards Armenians.<sup>24</sup> Following this, the land attacks of the allied forces on Çanakkale and their partial victory was to be welcomed with joy by the same groups.<sup>25</sup>

According to witnesses of that period, prior to the land attacks in Çanakkale, Deputy Commander in Chief Enver Pasha summoned Armenian Patriarch Zaven Effendi and informed him that while Turkey expected the loyalty of Armenian citizens in the war, it was clear from official reports that Armenians who fled to the countryside with their weapons attacked villages and killed officials, and advised the patriarch to warn his community regarding their actions in the future. In addition, Enver Pasha directly told the patriarch that if these actions became more widespread, the military would be forced to take the strictest measures permitted by the government. In response to Enver Pasha's words, the patriarch claimed that those who attempted these disgraceful actions were committee members, and told him that he would advise the Armenian people that they ignored the actions of the committees, and from now on maintained their loyalty to the state.<sup>26</sup>

However, Zaven Effendi's efforts were insufficient in ending the tension between the patriarchate and the government. In general, Unionist leaders had negative views both regarding the patriarchate and Patriarch Zaven. Cemal Pasha also shared the same views of Enver and Talat Pasha regarding Zaven Effendi, and accused Zaven Effendi of "Constantly resorting to plots that would harm the Turks."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Zaven Der Yeghiayan, *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Pomiankowski, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Çöküşü (Collapse of the Ottoman Empire)(1914-1918 World War I)*, (Turkish Translation: Kemal Turan), Kayihan Publications, İstanbul 1990, p. 139.

<sup>25</sup> In his memoirs, Arshavir Shirajyan, one of the Armenians that plotted the assassination of the Unionist leader after the armistice, it explains the elation of some Armenians on the victory of the allied states in Çanakkale in the words: "... At the beginning of 1915, the Allied States invaded some parts by bombing Çanakkale. For us, they represented civilization and the values of Western Europe. Those were such fine days! Whenever we heard thunder, as we confused this with the sound of cannons, we were elated. We would think to ourselves that at last the allied forces had entered the boundaries of İstanbul. Immediately after this, they would invade the city and come to rescue the Christians..." Arshavir Shirajyan, *Bir Ermeni Teröristin İtirafı (Confessions of an Armenian Terrorist)*, (Turkish Translator: Kadri Mustafa Orağlı), Kastaş Publications, İstanbul 2006, p. 44.

<sup>26</sup> *Talat Paşa'nın Anıları (Memoirs of Talat Pasha)*, (Prepared by: Alpay Kabacalı), Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2009, p. 61; Celal Bayar, *Ben de Yazdım – Millî Mücadeleye Giriş (I also Wrote-Entering the War of Independence)*, Vol: 5, Sabah Books, İstanbul 1997, p. 44; *Ermeni Komitelerinin A'mal (Armenian Committees Revolution of Actions and Movements)*, pp. 304-305; Joseph Pomiankowski, *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>27</sup> "... Although they are led by Patriarch Zaven Effendi, the Turkish Armenians continue to resort to plots to cause damage to the Turks..." *Cemal Paşa – Hatıralar (Cemal Pasha-Memoirs)*, (Prepared by: Alpay Kabacalı), Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Publications, İstanbul 2006, p. 415.



One of the main factors supporting views of the Unionist leaders, were activities of some Armenian priests in Anatolia. Certain priests appointed by the patriarchate in Anatolia, were personally involved in these incidents. For example, Soghomon Akkalyan, who was found guilty during the Urfa uprising in 1895 and exiled to Tripoli, but was pardoned and returned to the country after the constitution, was reappointed by the patriarchate in Urfa. Akkalyan, an offender during the uprising, was to be one of the supporters and promoters of the 1915 uprising with his illegal activities in Urfa.<sup>28</sup> Talat Bey, Minister for the Interior, was extremely sensitive concerning the developments in Urfa. According to him, the Armenian movements that begun after the Ottoman State entered World War I, and the severe uprising that followed, indicated that “This province was chosen by the Armenians as the most important headquarters.” The government was to blame the patriarchate for all similar separatist movements that emerged in Anatolia.<sup>29</sup>

### The Patriarchate’s Objections to the Relocation and Resettlement Law

As known, the Armenian revolts that occurred during the war in Urfa, Zeytun, Bitlis and eventually in Van and the Armenians surrendering Van to Russian forces, led to the famous relocation and resettlement law dated 27 May 1915 being introduced by the Ottoman Government under the heading “Provisional Law concerning measures to be taken by military authorities against those who oppose government operations during wartime.” (*Vakt-i seferde icraât-ı hükümete karşı gelenler için cihet-i askeriyece ittihaz olunacak tedâbir hakkında kanun-u muvakkat*) The patriarchate began to voice its objections immediately after the law came into force. The patriarchate believed that the government intended to cleanse the historical Armenian lands of Armenians with this law. According to Patriarch Zaven, this decision by the government served to form “an Armenia without Armenians.”<sup>30</sup> Complaints by the patriarchate were to continue throughout the implementation of the law. After a while, when he realized that the government was determined, Zaven Effendi, who initially fought for the abolishment of the law by complaining to European states, had no choice but to accept the law.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Investigation report prepared concerning the Urfa incident; *BOA. Hariciye Nezareti Siyasi Kısım (Ministry of the Interior, Political Department (HR.SYS.)* no. 2883/4.

<sup>29</sup> *Memoirs of Talat Pasha*, pp. 63, 68-69. For the 1915 Urfa uprising and events in Urfa also see. *Ermeni Komitelerinin A'mal ... (Armenian Committee's Revolution of Actions...)*, pp. 338-353; İsmail Özçelik, “1915'te Urfa'da Ermeni Olayları ve İsyanı” (1915 Armenian Uprising and Incidents), *Askerî Tarih Bülteni (Military History Bulletin)*, Vol: 11, Issue: 21, Ankara, August 1986, pp. 23-34; Hilmi Bayraktar, *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Urfa Sancağı (İdari, Sosyal ve Ekonomik Yapı) (The Urfa Sanjak from the Tanzimat (Reforms) to the Republic-Administrative, Social and Economic Structure)*, Fırat Üniversitesi Orta-Doğu Araştırmaları Merkezi Yayınları (Fırat University Middle-East Research Publications), Elazığ 2007, p. 143-149. For the Armenian incidents and committee's activities in the country in general during the war also see: Nurşen Mazıcı, *Belgelerle Uluslararası Rekabette Ermeni Sorunu'nun Kökeni (The Roots of the Armenian Issue in International Rivalry with Documentation) 1878-1918*, Der Publications, Istanbul 1987, pp. 67-77.

<sup>30</sup> “...An Armenia without Armenians. This was the project of the Ottoman Government...” A letter sent from Zaven Efendi to an Armenian abroad dated 26 June 1915; James Bryce ve Arnold Toynbee, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Ermenilere Yapılan Muamele (Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire), 1915-1916 – Documents Sent from Vikont Bryce to Fallodon Vikontu Grey*, {Prepared by: Ara Sarafyan}, Gomidas Institute, London 2009, p. 47.

<sup>31</sup> For example, in a telegraph Zaven Efendi sent to Armenians in Bursa he said:

“Bursa Ermeni Murahhaslığı'na;  
Hükümet-i seniyyenin merhametine dehalet edilmiştir  
(Help was sought for the clemency of the government;  
to the Armenian Envoy from the patriarchate).”

*BOA. Dâhiliye Nezareti Emniyet-i Umumiye Müdüriyeti İkinci Şube (Ministry of the Interior Directorate of Public Security 2<sup>nd</sup> Department) (DH.EUM. 2. Şb.)* no. 12/52. 24 October 1915).

However, Zaven Effendi, who continued to complain especially to the west, appealed for intervention for the sake of Christianity, and thanked the Catholic Pope for his response to the Turkish government in support of the Armenians. Zaven Effendi, who claimed that his objections were totally ignored, welcomed the Pope's intervention with great joy, and believed that this would raise awareness among the Ottoman public. Even in the American press, it reported that "public enthusiasm in support of Armenians is continuing." While the New York Times reported on one hand "The threat that caused anger between the people was now over, and that there was belief that Armenians fulfilled the commitments they made to the Turks", it also wrote that "the actual plan of the patriarch was to organize voluntary forces consisting of Armenians from all countries to fight against the Turks." Organizing these forces in Italy was relatively easy, and the Pope's declarations supporting the Armenians played a major role in this.<sup>32</sup>

Another major criticism on the relocation and settlement law by the patriarchate was concerning Armenian priests that were arrested and churches that were closed when the law was enforced. The patriarchate believed that many of the regulations involving this were deliberate and systematic. Yet, there were no laws specifically aimed at neither the priests and churches, nor an independent decision concerning this. As for the situation of priests that were arrested or questioned during various investigations and inquiries, these arrests were related to the involvement of these individuals in the investigated incidents. This was not a practice aimed solely at the priests. Moreover, these kinds of procedures were conducted based on the incidences, not the individuals. For example, it was learnt that during the deportations, a military force called the "Tent Organization" (Çadır Teşkilatı) was organized among Armenians in Konya. In investigations carried out by the police, it was discovered that this was organized by Mesrob Naroyan- who later became patriarch -and another priest called Vahan Vartabed, and both priests were arrested and sent to Istanbul. However, they were later released after being held in custody for 15 days on the condition that they remained in Istanbul.<sup>33</sup> Other clergy members were also arrested for similar reasons and accusations, some, as in this example, were immediately released and while some were detained for a longer period. A majority of these individuals were only released after the signing of the Armistice of Mudros. According to certain Armenian historians and priests, in general the arrest of priests, or priests being subjected to exile; the closure of churches especially in regions where the Armenians were being deported, or the churches being confiscated by the government meant dissolving the "Armenian church", and by doing this, the intention of the government that was deporting Armenian people from their homes, was to totally destroy their spiritual-cultural existence.<sup>34</sup> Claims that those who managed to remain or sought the means to stay were forced to convert to Islam formed a basis for the continuation of this argument. Although it was occasionally ruled that Muslim Armenians were exempt from exile during the deportations, it is somewhat difficult to say that this was a regular policy. It is clear the government, that adopted this policy which varied according to the conditions, relied on the local authorities that were more familiar with the locals and those who converted to Islam

<sup>32</sup> "Armenians Thank Pope", *The New York Times*, 21 October 1915.

<sup>33</sup> Ali Rıza Öge, *Meşrutiyetten Cumhuriyete Bir Polis Şefinin Gerçek Anıları (True Recollections of a Police Chief from the Constitutional to the Republican Era)*, *Günlük Ticaret Gazetesi Tesisleri (Daily Trade Gazette Facilities)*, Bursa 1982, pp. 251-253.

<sup>34</sup> Simon Payaslian, "The Destruction of the Armenian Church during the Genocide", *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, Volume: 1, Number: 2, Summer 2006, pp. 149-172. In an attempt of reflecting the situation of the church better, in his work Maghakia Ormanian provides information on the ratio of churches and members before and after the war in the form of a table. Malachia Ormanian, *The Church of Armenia: Her History, Doctrine, Rule, Discipline, Liturgy, Literature and Existing Condition*, (Translated from the French original to English by: G. Marcar Gregory), A. R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, London 1955, pp. 205-212.

in their provinces. It is impossible to say that, as the patriarch suggested, this situation that was under constant dispute in later periods, was the result of a policy aimed at eliminating the Armenian church and its community.<sup>35</sup>

### Preparation for a New Law on the Patriarchate

There were no regulations directly concerning the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate in the “Relocation and Resettlement Law.” However, as previously mentioned, relations between the Ottoman Government and the Patriarchate became even more critical. Throughout the enforcement of this law, the patriarchate continuously blamed and filed complaints to the government, whereas the government defended its justification and reasons for this implementation. But during the enforcement of this law, no sanctions were issued by the government regarding Zaven Effendi or the functionality of the patriarchate. Developments in affairs that concerned the government regarding the structure and functionality of the patriarchate emerged after the enforcement of the law was complete. In February-March 1916, after the migration of Armenians to Syria ended, the government began investigations on the patriarchate and prepared a new law that introduced various changes on the status of the patriarchship. Basically, the preparation of this law was a continuation of the disputes directly regarding the influence of the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin on Ottoman Armenians. In this sense, after the “Relocation and Resettlement Law”, this law can be classified as the second serious measure the Ottoman State adopted concerning the Armenians. With this new law, the government aimed to end the spiritual leadership of the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin, that was forcing the Armenians living in the Ottoman State to cooperate with Russia against the Ottoman State.<sup>36</sup> While the law was still in the stage of preparation, Minister of the Interior Talat Bey put particular emphasis on this issue. Informing Cemal Pasha Commander of the Fourth Army Corps towards the end of April 1916, Talat Bey said “All relations between the Armenians of the Ottoman State and the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin in Russia will be severed.” Specifying that the Catholicosate was the fundamental religious order of Armenians, the Minister of the Interior explained that if all the Armenian religious institutions were joined under the Catholicosate of Sis, one of the Armenian Catholicosate headquarters in Anatolia, then it would be possible to prevent the Etchmiadzin intervention on Armenians in Turkey. Moreover, the catholicos-patriarch duties were to be assigned to a single spiritual leader. According to the government’s first regulation aimed at distancing this religious headquarters from Istanbul by incorporating it under the Catholicosate, Sis (Kozan) was to be the headquarters of this new institution, and the catholicos-patriarch to be appointed had to live in Sis.<sup>37</sup> However, this idea was abandoned and it was agreed that Jerusalem would be a more suitable location for this new organization. It may be suggested that the choice of Jerusalem as the patriarchate headquarters was not only influenced by the deportation in this period of a majority of the Armenians in the Ottoman State to certain sites close to Jerusalem, but also because Jerusalem was classified as a holy

<sup>35</sup> For Armenian Muslims and the Ottoman State’s policies concerning them during World War I, see. Süleyman Beyoğlu, “Ermeni Tehciri ve İhtida (Armenian Deportation and Conversion)”, *Yakın Dönem Türkiye Araştırmaları, İstanbul Üniversitesi Atatürk İlkeleri ve İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Dergisi (Research on Recent Period Turkey, Istanbul University Journal of Atatürk’s Principles and the History of Turkish Revolution)*, Year: 3/2004, Issue: 6, İstanbul 2004, pp. 1-18; Süleyman Beyoğlu, “Müslüman Ermeniler (Muslim Armenians)”, ASAM Ermeni Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, *Ermeni Araştırmaları 2. Türkiye Kongresi Bildirileri (Institution of Armenian Research, Armenian Research 2<sup>nd</sup> Turkey Congress Reports)*, Vol: II, Ankara 2007, pp. 985-1001; Yusuf Halaçoğlu, *Ermeni Tehciri ve Gerçekler Armenian Deportation and the Truth (1914-1918)*, TTK Publications, Ankara 2001, pp. 64-65; Yusuf Halaçoğlu, *Ermeni Tehciri (Armenian Deportation)*, Bâbüâli Kültür Publications, İstanbul 2005, pp. 84-85.

<sup>36</sup> Zaven Der Yeghiayan, *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>37</sup> Memorandum from the Minister of the Interior Talat Bey to Cemal Pasha, Commander of the Fourth Army Corps dated 30 April 1916; *BOA*. DH.ŞFR. no. 63/136.

place by Christians. In this way, an important sacred place in Christianity was made the patriarchate headquarters, and in all likelihood, owing to this, attempts would be made to take advantage of the new patriarchate headquarters to completely escape the influence of the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin that by this time had transformed into a politically based body. After preparations for the planned regulation were complete, the regulation eventually came into force when it was published in the Ottoman Official Gazette *Takvim-i Vekayi*.<sup>38</sup> Immediately after the regulation came into force, Patriarch Zaven Effendi was dismissed from his duty and deported from Istanbul. The former patriarch first went to Baghdad, then onto Mosul.<sup>39</sup>

With Clause 1 in the preliminary draft of the “Armenians Catholicosate and Patriarchate Regulation” consisting of 39 clauses, by merging the Sis and Aghtamar Catholicosates located in the Ottoman borders, the Istanbul and Jerusalem Patriarchates were also incorporated into the Catholicosate. Therefore, not only were all Apostolic Armenians in the Ottoman State joint under a single spiritual and administrative headquarters, but all their ties with the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin were severed. The residence of the new ecumenic leader that was to carry out the duties of both the Catholicosate and Patriarchate (catholicos-patriarch)<sup>40</sup> was the Mar-Yakub Monastery in Jerusalem. His field of spiritual duty was limited to Ottoman lands (*Memalik-i Osmaniyye*).<sup>41</sup> Sahak Habayan, who was the Catholicos of Sis in that period, was appointed as the Catholicos-Patriarch. Under this official title, the patriarch was responsible for carrying out his duty in the framework of the regulations stipulated in this law and fulfilling the state’s demands. The official office for his correspondence was the Ministry of Religion (*Mezahib Nezareti*), and he only had the right to appeal to the ministry concerning religious affairs.<sup>42</sup>

### Conclusion

While examining the Ottoman Government’s activities directed at the patriarchate before and during the war in general, this summary of events emerges: There were two main factors determining the Ottoman Government’s stance towards the Armenian Patriarchate. The first is the Unionist government’s criticisms concerning the influence of civilian and political powers within the patriarchate due to certain concessions made by the Ottoman State since the very beginning (particularly with the Regulation of the Armenian Nation dated 1863), and the second was the patriarchate’s relationship with the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin in Russia, a country that the Ottoman State was at war with during that period. The government, that suspected political groups influential in the patriarchate guided the patriarch as a clergyman in accordance with their own political interests, was of the opinion that the patriarch should be the only influential authority in the patriarchate, and that the other groups should not interfere in the management of the patriarchate. According to the government, because of these affairs in the patriarchate, patriarchs failed to fulfil their religious duties and were individuals who worked for the interests of political groups simply

<sup>38</sup> For the whole text of the Armenian Catholicos and the Patriarchate’s Regulations see. *Düstur*, Tertib-i Sâni, Vol: 8, Istanbul 1928, pp. 1240-1251; *BOA. Dosya Usulü İrâdelere (İ.DUİT.)* no. 135/20; *BOA. Meclis-i Vükela Mazbatası (Records of the Council of Ministers) (MV.)* no. 244/22; *Takvim-i Vekayi (newspaper)*, no. 2611, 10 August 1916; *Tanin*, no. 2752, 11 August 1916.

<sup>39</sup> Zaven Der Yeghiayan, *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>40</sup> In this law, it states that the title of the spiritual leader of the new administration was “patriarch.” However, in correspondences between the ministries and other authorized institutions, it frequently refers to the spiritual leader using both religious titles “catholicos-patriarch” together. Zaven Effendi, patriarch of that period, emphasizes that with this new implementation by the government, this constituted the example of a spiritual leadership never seen before in the history of the Armenian church. Zaven Der Yeghiayan, *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>41</sup> *The Regulation of Armenian Catholicosate and Patriarchate, article 1.*

<sup>42</sup> *The Regulation of Armenian Catholicosate and Patriarchate, article 2.*

to safeguard their positions. The government's intention regarding the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin was to prevent the Catholicosate, the highest Armenian religious office, from influencing Ottoman Armenians in supporting Russia. With a regulation issued in 1916, the Union and Progress Government abolished practices in the administrative structure of the patriarchate that it considered corrupt even before the war. The patriarchate's objections to this regulation were to be as harsh as his reaction to the relocation and resettlement law. Given that the patriarchate would totally lose all its authority, in terms of the patriarchate this criticism was certainly not unjustified. This new administrative structure formed by the Unionists only remained in force until the end of 1918. In this short time, it was neither possible to totally establish the system, nor enforce all the provisions in the regulation. With the ending of the war and signing of the Armistice of Mudros, this regulation was not only abolished by the new Ottoman Government due to the support and encouragement of the British, but the Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate was also restored to its former functionality; the patriarchate was re-established in Istanbul, and upon invitation Patriarch Zaven Effendi, who was previously exiled, was to return to Istanbul and be reappointed as patriarch. As of this date, the administrative functionality of the Armenian Patriarchate was to resume according to the regulations in the constitution dated 1863. The process from the Armistice of Mudros to the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne was a period in which the patriarchate (in cooperation with the Rum Patriarchate), collaborated with the occupational forces. Following the success of the War of Independence, Patriarch Zaven Effendi was to be forced to resign and leave Turkey before the Treaty of Lausanne.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> For more information on this process, see. Ramazan Erhan Güllü, "Mondros Mütarekesi'nin Ardından Ermeni ve Rum Patrikhanelerinin İşbirliği (Collaboration of the Armenian and Rum Patriarchates After the Armistice of Mudros) (30 October 1918 –11 October 1922)", *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi (Ataturk Research Journal)*, Vol: XXV, Issue: 75, Ankara, November 2009, pp. 575-605.

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