

# THE ESTABLISHMENT AND ACTIVITIES OF THE EASTERN LEGION IN FRENCH ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS (NOVEMBER 1918 – 1921)

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**Abstract:** *This article is the sixth and the last of a series of articles regarding the establishment and activities of the Eastern Legion. The basic aim of this article is to examine the changes in the structure of the Legion, the debates concerning its composition and activities in the Cilician region between November 1918, (when the Legion occupied the Cilician region), and the end of 1921, (when the legion was finally disbanded). In this period, first of all the French-Armenian occupation of the Cilician region and the subsequent Armenian atrocities perpetrated against Muslims are briefly examined. Then, the criticisms put forward by Armenian and Syrian committee leaders towards the Eastern Legion, which was divided into Armenian and Syrian Legions, are touched upon. The indiscipline and disobedience of the Armenian legionnaires and the subsequent reactions of the French soldiers to this situation are covered as well. Finally, the steps taken for the disbanding of the Legion is dealt with. In sum, this article analyzes developments regarding the Eastern Legion in the aforementioned period through French archival documents.*

**Key Words:** *Eastern Legion, Armenians, Syrians, Cilicia, the Armistice of Mudros, the Treaty of Ankara.*

## INTRODUCTION

Being the sixth and the last one of a series of articles that concerns the establishment and activities of the Eastern Legion and that has been published since the 23rd and 24th editions of the *Ermeni Arařtırmaları*, this article primarily aims to examine the changes in the structure of the Legion, the debates concerning its composition and activities in the Cilician region between November 1918, when the Legion occupied the Cilician region, and the end of 1921, when the legion was finally disbanded. In short, it evaluates the Legion within this time span of three years in which it was actively used. Although it might at first glance seem surprising that the two-years-period between the establishment of the Legion and it being dispatched in Cilicia has been covered in five consecutive articles while these last three years constitute the subject of a single article, such a choice relies on two important reasons. The first is that, compared to previous years, and in respect to these three years, the archives of the French Foreign Ministry, which constitute the main sources of this article,

contain much fewer documents. That is why three additional sources have been used in this article. Ottoman archival records are one of these. Where the French archives remained mostly silent on the matter of the atrocities perpetrated by the Armenian Legion against the Muslim population, the Ottoman archives proved indispensable to be incorporated. These documents were published in the second volume, covering the period between 1918-1919, of the three-volume-work entitled *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni Fransız İlişkileri (Armenian-French Relations in Ottoman Documents)*, put together by the General Directorate of State Archives.<sup>1</sup> The second source is *The Tricolor over the Taurus* authored by Robert F. Ziedner.<sup>2</sup> This publication is very important in making good sense of the French archives since it makes use not only of the Foreign Ministry correspondence, but also other French archives and various memoirs that reflected the atmosphere of that period. The third source is Ulvi Keser's *Kıbrıs Anadolu Ekseninde Ermeni-Doğu Lejyonu (The Armenian-Eastern Legion in the axis of Cyprus-Anatolia)*. This piece is the most comprehensive one among a few Turkish works on the subject of the Eastern Legion. Even though it rarely refers to the records of the French Foreign Ministry, it still bears significance by virtue of providing details of the resistance of Turkish forces against the Legion.<sup>3</sup>

The second reason why a long period of three years was covered by a single article is the necessity to sum up the resistance of the Turkish National Defence forces (Kuvva-yi Milliye) against the French occupation and their subsequent struggle in the Southern Front, which are extensively dealt with in Turkish literature. This emerges as a necessity because the volume of research and publications on that matter makes it impossible to fully elaborate on the issue without the preparation of several articles. Moreover, the existence of such literature does not require to further write on that subject on the basis of the same sources. Finally, since this article has been based on French archives, to refer to many other sources might have undermined its integrity subject-wise. Given all these reasons, this article uses French archival documents and the relatively small number of these documents resulted in this period of three years being dealt with through a single article.

After this clarification, the main themes that will be explored in this article can be summarized as follows: The first part analyzes the Eastern Legion's occupation of Cilicia and its treatment of the Muslim population in the region. Ottoman archives are largely used in this section. The second part deals with the debates that pervaded the process of separating the Eastern Legion into two divisions for some political and practical reasons: the Armenian Legion and the Syrian Legion. The third part addresses the criticisms of certain Armenian committee leaders about the Armenian Legion to French authorities and the latter's response. Next, the article explores the indiscipline and disobedience of the Armenian Legion in Cilicia that would culminate in a rebellion and it underlines the French reaction to

1 Yusuf Sarınoy (ed.), *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni Fransız İlişkileri, Volume II: 1918-1919*, Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002, Three Volume.

2 Robert Ziedner, *The Tricolor over the Taurus*, Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Publications, 2005.

3 Ulvi Keser, *Kıbrıs Anadolu Ekseninde Ermeni-Doğu Lejyonu*, Ankara: Kıbrıs Türk Kültür Derneği Yayınları, 2007, pp. 226-227.

that. While the fifth part looks into the Armenian migration to the Cilician region during the French occupation, the sixth one highlights legal problems regarding the Legions in this period and mentions the criticisms of some Syrian committee leaders on the Syrian Legion to the French authorities. The seventh and the eighth parts trace the process that resulted in the disbandment of the Eastern Legion. Being the last of the series, the article ends with an overall assessment of the Eastern Legion.

As it was with all the other articles of this series, this article also relies on authentic archival documents, which is very important so as to reflect the general atmosphere of that period as well as reveal the nature of how the French perceived the Armenians and the Syrians. These documents have been analyzed in the most objective way possible within an academic genre and the results have been noted down with very small explication. Unfortunately most of the works carried out on the Armenian problem either in the West or in Turkey have granted objectivism and the scientific attitude a lesser role, which has made it impossible to analyze the matter at hand in its full scale. Because archival documents are first hand sources to supply the researcher with authentic data, they also spare him/her from such problems objectivity. In short, this article benefits from only these first-hand sources and the developments on the Eastern Legion during these three years are analyzed within the general framework of the late 1910s and early 1920s as objective as is allowed in social sciences.

## I. THE DISPATCH OF THE EASTERN LEGION TO THE ADANA PROVINCE AND THEIR ACTIVITIES IN THE REGION

The employment of the Eastern Legion in the occupation and control of Anatolian territories began two years after its establishment, approximately in November 1918. Before that, some of the vanguard divisions of the Legion had been deployed to Syria and Palestine; yet, the attack of some legionnaires against the local Muslim population there led to the Legion being dispatched to Anatolia. It was the Armistice of Mudros, signed on October 30, 1918 that provided the legal justification for the occupation of Anatolia. This part of the article is going to briefly touch upon the subsequent occupation of Cilicia to the Armistice of Mudros by the Eastern Legion and legionnaires' activities in the region until January 1919.

The first occupation forces began to land on the province of Çukurova on November 9, 1918, ten days after the Armistice had been signed. Through the protocol that was signed by David Beauregard, the representative of the Entente Powers, and Kaymakam Ali Bey, the commander of the İskenderun province, it was decided that the Ottoman army would evacuate the region. On November 12, the French officially occupied İskenderun, while on November 21, the divisions of the Eastern Legion that consisted of Armenians was transferred to the province. This was accounted in a telegram sent to the Ottoman Ministry of Internal Affairs by the Governorship of Adana where it was stated that the small amount of Entente Powers deployed in İskenderun had withdrawn to be replaced

by Armenian soldiers.<sup>4</sup> The Ottoman archives reveal that before the occupation spread, some Armenian battalions visited local governors to inform them about the upcoming invasion. For example, in a correspondence submitted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on December 11, there is a reference to a telegram sent by Nazım Pasha, the Governor of Adana.<sup>5</sup> In this telegram the latter states that two Armenian priests and an Armenian officer came to the Dörtöl village from İskenderun by car on December 8, and that they declared the village to be occupied in a few days and warned the local community not to clash with occupation forces.<sup>6</sup>

As correspondence went on between the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Foreign Affairs, a division of the Eastern Legion consisting of 400 soldiers under the command of three officers occupied Dörtöl. In a telegram sent to the Sadaret Makamı by the Ministry of Military Affairs on December 14, it is noted that most of these legionnaires were conscripted out of Armenians who had fled from the Çukurova region. In other words, since French authorities did not have a good grasp of the region, they chose to make use of the divisions of the Legion as occupation forces which consisted of Cilician Armenians who had relatives still living in the area. However, this triggered Armenian legionnaires to attack the local Muslim population. They were motivated by the idea of taking revenge for the Armenian relocation for which the Muslim population had been held responsible by the Armenians and the latter's raids resulted in severe consequences. As a matter of fact, these offenses started right after the Legion's vanguard troops landed on İskenderun on November 30. The French Governor of İskenderun informed the Commander of French Forces in Near East, General Jules C. Hamelin that the legionnaires had engaged in terrorist activities against Muslims and that they had been attacking the local Muslim population within the pretext of saving Armenian women from the harems.<sup>7</sup> The arrival of the actual Armenian Legion was still two weeks ahead when these developments took place. As soon as the main forces arrived, they scattered across the area and carried out usurpation, ransack and massacre in violation with the orders they received from French officers. These atrocities were recorded in detail in Ottoman archival documents. For example, on December 14, Armenian legionnaires broke into twelve houses, seized property and money and wounded a woman in her throat.<sup>8</sup>

In its institutionalization, the Eastern Legion comprised of four Armenian and two Syrian divisions. While the Syrian branches were deployed in Syria, the

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4 From the Governorship of Adana to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 27 November 1918, BOA.HR.SYP.2555-2/18, Yusuf Sarınoy (ed.), *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni Fransız İlişkileri, Cilt II: 1918-1919*, Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002, p. 3.

5 From the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Foreign Ministry, 11 December 1918, BOA. HR. SYP. 2555-2/33-36, Yusuf Sarınoy (ed.), *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni Fransız İlişkileri, Cilt II: 1918-1919*, Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002, p. 4.

6 From the Governor of Adana Nazım Pasha to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 10 December 1918, BOA. HR. SYP. 2555-2/33-36, Yusuf Sarınoy (ed.), *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni Fransız İlişkileri, Cilt II: 1918-1919*, Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002, p. 5.

7 Robert Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurup...*, p. 78.

8 From the Ministry of Military Affairs to the Sadaret Makamı, 14 December 1918, BOA.BOE.340957, Yusuf Sarınoy (ed.), *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni Fransız İlişkileri, Cilt II: 1918-1919*, Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002, pp. 6-7.

remaining four Armenian ones were sent to the Cilician region. The First and Fourth Divisions of the Armenian Legion, occupied İskenderun, whereas on December 17 the Second and the Third Divisions invaded Mersin.<sup>9</sup> In the telegram sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs by Nazım Pasha, the Governor of Adana, it is stated that 500 Armenian armed troops and around 20 officers arrived in Mersin.<sup>10</sup> However, General Hamelin was almost sure that the Armenians would act offensively and that is why he ordered the Ninth Algerian Infantry to move to the city.<sup>11</sup> On December 17 when Mersin was occupied, the Commander of the Armenian Legion, Colonel Louis Romieu set up headquarters in Adana and got appointed as the commander of the occupation forces in Cilicia by General Hamelin.<sup>12</sup>

While the invasions generated great reaction on the part of the locals, there further emerged a pessimist atmosphere because of the withdrawal of the Ottoman armies two weeks before the occupation and the obligation to disband or abolish them as envisaged in the Armistice of Mudros. The telegram sent by the Governor of Adana, Nazım Pasha, on December 20, 1918 is very important in displaying his despair. As he wrote the following lines, a battalion of 350 soldiers consisting of mostly Armenian legionnaires had been invading Adana:<sup>13</sup>

According to the statements of a British officer from Aleppo, it is understood that Antep and Maraş will be occupied as well. Then, the province of Adana, İskenderun, Antakya, Belen, Antep and Maraş will be invaded. Without any doubt, Armenia will be eventually established in these lands through the provocation of anarchy and disorder. This situation must be ended immediately. There is by no means any sign of good will in neither the current state of affairs, nor the path it is going to follow. Actually, to waste time on needless share of opinion will result in significantly dreary circumstances and fait-accomplis, which would not be possible to reverse. Ottoman administration will be limited to a small part of Asia Minor.<sup>14</sup>

It was also disturbing for the Ottoman government that most of the French occupation forces comprised of Armenians. Ottoman Foreign Minister Reşid Pasha sent a letter to the French High Commissioner Admiral Amet in which he expressed his concerns over the possibility of the occurrence of undesired events that might arise out of the fact that the Armenian occupation forces in Adana were former Ottoman citizens. Reşid Pasha further requested that for the

9 Robert Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurup...*, p. 74.

10 From the Governor of Adana Nazım Pasha to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 17 December 1918, BOA. HR. SYP. 2555-2/56, Yusuf Sarınoy (ed.), *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni Fransız İlişkileri, Cilt II: 1918-1919*, Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002, p. 11.

11 Robert Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurup...*, p. 74.

12 Robert Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurup...*, p. 74.

13 From the Governorship of Adana to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 20 December 1918, BOA.HR.SYP.2555-2/69-70, Yusuf Sarınoy (der.), *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni Fransız İlişkileri, Cilt II: 1918-1919*, Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002, p. 16.

14 From the Governor of Adana Nazım Pasha to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 17 December 1918, BOA. HR. SYP. 2555-3/5, Yusuf Sarınoy (der.), *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni Fransız İlişkileri, Cilt II: 1918-1919*, Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002, p. 13. The original version of the telegram is present in the aforementioned book, yet it was rendered more simple through its transcription.

sake of maintaining order and peace, Armenian forces were not to be deployed in areas where Ottoman troops were being disbanded.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, he reported to Admiral Amet and to the British High Commissioner Admiral Richard Webb the activities taken up by the Armenian soldiers in Adana, Payas and Dörtöyl against civilians in details. He requested that the Armenian soldiers were pulled out of the region urgently.<sup>16</sup> Indeed General Hamelin was also discontented with the assaults and that throughout December, he inspected the troops in Adana and İskenderun in order to make them refrain from such offenses and comply with military discipline.<sup>17</sup> What is more, he began to take into consideration complaints coming from the local gentry and requests asking for the Armenian Legion to be pulled out of the region and even be sent to farther areas such as Maraş.<sup>18</sup>

Raids on the local Muslim population continued throughout January 1919. On January 1, Armenian soldiers, without informing French officers, rallied the village of Karakese, an administrative district of Dörtöyl. They broke into houses, ransacked property and killed some of the villagers. General Rupin, the Commander of the French Occupation Forces in the region immediately rushed to the barracks and prevented the participation of further soldiers into the events.<sup>19</sup> However, at every opportunity, Armenian legionnaires escaped the headquarters and went on with their rallies into villages with the arms and armoury they were provided by the French.

The deployment of French occupation forces that consisted mostly from Armenians in Cilicia encouraged Armenians living in surrounding areas. On that matter, a telegram sent by the Division Commandership of Gendarmerie in Maraş to the Ministry of Internal Affairs on January 21 is highly significant. It was stated that around four hundred Armenians living in Aleppo had been moving to İskenderun to join the Legion as volunteers and on the way they captured and slaughtered two Ottoman soldiers in the district of Afrin. Moreover, they attacked the Kefre and Baytar outposts, but the soldiers deployed there managed to defend themselves and withdraw.<sup>20</sup>

In the meantime, the commanding wing of the French occupation forces were arriving to the region towards the end of January. General Hamelin who came to Adana on December 18, was followed by Colonel Edouard Brémont who was appointed as the Governor General of Cilicia on January 30. Brémont took office

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15 From the Foreign Minister Reşid Pasha to the French High Commissioner Admiral Amet, 28 December 1918, BOA.HR.SYS 2555-2/66, Yusuf Sarınoy (ed.), *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni Fransız İlişkileri, Cilt II: 1918-1919*, Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002, p. 17.

16 From the Foreign Minister Reşid Pasha to the French High Commissioner Admiral Amet and British High Commissioner Admiral Webb, 28 December 1918, BOA.HR.SYS 2555-2/71, Yusuf Sarınoy (ed.), *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni Fransız İlişkileri, Cilt II: 1918-1919*, Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002, pp. 18-19.

17 Robert Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurup...*, p. 79.

18 Robert Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurup...*, p. 79.

19 From the district official of Dörtöyl, Midhat Bey to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 4 January 1919, BOA.HR.SYS 2555-3/107, Yusuf Sarınoy (ed.), *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni Fransız İlişkileri, Cilt II: 1918-1919*, Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002, pp. 36-39.

20 From the Commandership of Gendarmerie of Maraş to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, January 21, 1919, BOA.HR.SYP.2602-1/22, Yusuf Sarınoy (ed.), *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni Fransız İlişkileri, Cilt II: 1918-1919*, Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002, p. 24.

on February 2 along with Colonel Normand who took up the position of Deputy Governor.<sup>21</sup>

## II. THE SEPARATION OF THE EASTERN LEGION INTO TWO BRANCHES

As the Eastern Legion occupied the Çukurova region, the French government had been discussing whether to divide the Legion into two parts. As a matter of fact, from the establishment of the Legion to the occupation of Cilicia, there were serious problems between the Armenian and Syrian legionnaires especially in the camps founded in Cyprus Monarga. The solution was sought in the idea of creating separate Armenian and Syrian divisions rather than mixed ones. As it has been mentioned above, by the time it was sent to occupy Ottoman lands, the Eastern legion was de facto divided into two. As of January 1919, the French Government had been trying to formalise this separation. This part of the article deals with this process and analyses the correspondence that took place between French political and military authorities.

In a document that was sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the Ministry of War on January 22, 1919,<sup>22</sup> it was pointed out that the Armenian Committee (*Comité Arménien*) had asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to divide the Eastern Legion into an Armenian (*Légion Arménienne*) and a Syrian Legion (*Légion Syrienne*). While the Foreign Ministry forwarded this request to the Ministry of War, the latter did not welcome it. In its reply, the War Ministry stated that the Eastern Legion de facto had Armenian and Syrian troops separate from each other, and that currently four Armenian battalions were deployed in the Cilicia region whereas one Syrian counterpart was based in Syria. In short, the War Ministry decided that a formal separation would not bring any advantages to the Eastern Legion.<sup>23</sup> This correspondence is highly interesting in displaying the disagreement between the Armenians and Syrians in the Legion, as well as between the Foreign Ministry, (which argued in favour of the division), and the Ministry of War, (which found the suggestion dismissible). Yet again, the War Ministry wanted to consult the commanding wing of the French forces in the region.

As a reply, General Hamelin, who returned to Beirut in January, sent a telegram to the Africa division of the Ministry of War on January 12. Contrary to the

21 Ulvi Keser, *Kıbrıs Anadolu Ekseninde Ermeni-Doğu Lejyonu...*, pp. 226-227. The Ottoman documents refer to the titles of "Governor General" and "Deputy Governor" as "Vilayet Idare Memuru" and "Sancak Idare Memuru". On the issue of these appointments, please see the correspondence sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Ahmet İzzet, 3 February 1919, BOA. HR. SYP. 2555-3/63, Yusuf Sarıncay (ed.), *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni Fransız İlişkileri, Cilt II: 1918-1919*, Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002, p. 28.

22 Georges Clemenceau, who served as Prime Minister (Le Président du Conseil) from November 1917 to January 1920 in France, also held the position of Minister of War. This is why all correspondence from that period refer to him as both "Prime Minister" and "Minister of War". In order to avoid redundancy and prevent any confusion of terminology, "Ministry of War" will be used. Indeed, even though it may seem that correspondence took place between Prime Minister and another minister or among ministers, they were signed by the staff of the relevant ministries. While quoting from correspondence, this article opts for using names of the institutions rather than personal names except for special circumstances.

23 From the Office of the Prime Minister and Ministry of War to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7 January 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Février 1921)*, p. 2

decision reached by the War Ministry, the commanding wing asserted that such a separation within the Legion would be beneficial. They recommended that the Armenian Legion should consist of 4,124 Armenians currently based in Cilicia, while the Syrian Legion would be constituted by 698 Syrian soldiers deployed around Beirut and it would gain the same legal status with the Armenian one. General Hamelin also advised the Ministry to promote volunteer recruitments so as to enlarge the Syrian Legion.<sup>24</sup>

Since both Georges Picot, the French High Commissioner in Palestine and Syria, and General Hamelin defended the idea of dividing the Eastern Legion in an Armenian and a Syrian sub-legion, the Ministry of War then changed its position too. It was decided that by January 20, 1919 the Eastern Legion was officially divided into two branches, each enjoying the same legal status with their predecessors.<sup>25</sup> The new arrangement was communicated through a cryptic telegram to both Georges Picot and to the French missions in North and South America in order for the volunteer recruitments to be carried on accordingly.<sup>26</sup>

Prominent members of the Armenian diaspora enthusiastically welcomed the division. While Bogos Nubar Pasha expressed his gratitude for this decision in the letter he addressed to Minister plenipotentiary Jean Gout, the Chairman of the Central Committee for Armenian Volunteers Sevadjian sent a letter to Prime Minister and Minister of War Clemenceau where he remained grateful to France, which he stated to be always helpful to the oppressed people and supportive of the establishment of a fully independent Armenia.<sup>27</sup>

### III. CRITICS OF THE ARMENIAN ORGANIZATIONS ON THE EASTERN LEGION

This friendly atmosphere between Armenian organizations and the French Government did not last long as the former began to highlight material and emotional problems that members of the Armenian legion had been going through. This part of the article takes an interest in how these criticisms were reflected to the French Government and how the latter responded.

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24 From General Hamelin, Commander of French Forces in Near Asia, to the Africa Division of the Ministry of War, January 12, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 11.

25 From the Office of the Prime Minister and Ministry of War to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 20, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 16.

26 From the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Georges Picot and French Diplomatic Missions in Washington, New York, Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo, Buenos-Aires, Caracas, Quito, Havana, Port-au-Prince, Bogota, St. Domingue, St. Paul, Santiago du Chili, Mexico, La Paz and Lima, January 22, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 19.

27 From Bogos Nubar Pasha, the Chairman of the Armenian National Delegation, to Minister plenipotentiary Jean Gout of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 22, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 28; From Sevadjian, the Chairman of the Central Committee of Armenian Volunteers, to Prime Minister and Minister of War, Clemenceau, January 24, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 29.



Armenian legionnaires of the Eastern Legion had been complaining to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Chairman of the National Armenian Delegation, Bogos Nubar Pasha. A delegation consisting of members of the National Armenian Union of Egypt, which operated under the Armenian National Delegation, gave Bogos Nubar Pasha a report indicating Armenian grievances, which he, in turn, forwarded to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. First of all, Bogos Nubar Pasha claimed that Armenian volunteers who had once been praised for their bravery by English and French commanders, were now considered as auxiliary troops of an inferior race and that they were subjected to inhumane treatment.<sup>28</sup> In fact, the report asserted that French officers humiliated Armenian volunteers by stating that the Turks had had reason to massacre Armenians.<sup>29</sup>

According to Bogos Nubar Pasha, apart from this emotional degradation, Armenian volunteers suffered from a serious material discrimination, which he meant to exemplify through some comparisons. For instance, while an Algerian soldier had four-fifty francs daily allowance, an Armenian soldier was entitled to only two-fifty. Again whereas Christian and Muslim Arabs in Beirut received half-kilo flour and rice a day, five Armenians had a kilo of bread and two biscuits.<sup>30</sup>

On January 25, Bogos Nubar Pasha sent the Ministry of Foreign Affairs copies of two letters that had been sent by D.N.B. Katchedjian, the Chairman of the National Armenian Unity of Egypt, to Georges Picot and the commander of the Eastern Legion, Colonel Romieu.<sup>31</sup> In the first letter addressed to Georges Picot, in addition to the aforementioned grievances, there were complaints about Armenian volunteers who had been serving in Cilicia wearing the same clothes for the past two years and that their outfit being not appropriate for the climate of the region. The letter that was sent to Colonel Romieu had a stricter tone by claiming that Armenian volunteers who had been sent to the Cilician region were not nourished well, their accommodation problems had not been dealt with and on top of these they had been insulted many times. Moreover, the letter pointed out that if these problems were not overcome, the consequences would deteriorate and neither civil nor military Armenians would tolerate these insults.<sup>32</sup>

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28 From Bogos Nubar Pasha, the Chairman of the Armenian National Delegation, to Minister plenipotentiary Jean Gout of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 13, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Février 1921)*, p. 5.

29 From Bogos Nubar Pasha, the Chairman of the Armenian National Delegation, to Minister plenipotentiary Jean Gout of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 13, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Février 1921)*, p. 5.

30 From Bogos Nubar Pasha, the Chairman of the Armenian National Delegation, to Minister plenipotentiary Jean Gout of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 13, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Février 1921)*, p. 5.

31 For copies of these letters please see, From Bogos Nubar Pasha, the Chairman of the Armenian National Delegation, to Minister plenipotentiary Jean Gout of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 25, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Février 1921)*, pp. 21-26.

32 From the Chairman of the Armenian National Unity of Egypt, D. N. B. Katchedjian, to the Commander of the Eastern Legion, Colonel Romieu, December 30, 1918, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Février 1921)*, p. 24.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs passed all these letters of complaint on to the Ministry of War. Having looked at the issue, the latter, in his letter of reply, decided that most of the allegations were false. For example, the daily allowance paid to Armenian volunteers was two seventy-five francs, not two-fifty and this amount was determined as a result of the legal status of the Eastern Legion. Since the latter was an auxiliary force, it was perfectly normal for the government to pay these legionnaires less than what is paid to French soldiers. This arrangement had already been clearly underlined in the statute of the Eastern Legion that was prepared in 1916. Because legionnaires could not enjoy some of the side payments granted to the French soldiers, their daily earnings were relatively low.<sup>33</sup> In a report sent by General Hamelin on February 15, there were clear statements on how Bogus Nubar Pasha had distorted the realities. Hamelin argued that rather than 500gr flour and rice, it was 500gr of bread and 100gr of rice or vegetables that was given to Muslims and Christians, while Armenians received 700gr of bread and 200gr of rice.<sup>34</sup> As a result, the Ministry of War wanted to refute the criticisms of Armenian organizations and strived for the preservation of the status quo by pointing to the invalidity of these allegations.

#### IV. THE DISOBEDIENCE OF THE ARMENIAN LEGION AT CILICIA AND THE COMPLAINTS OF FRENCH MILITARY AUTHORITIES

As Bogos Nubar Pasha and other prominent Armenian leaders were determined to give a voice to the grievances of the Armenian Legion, French military authorities serving in Cilicia reported the disobedience of and atrocities committed against the local Muslim population by Armenians. Indiscipline and disobedience of Armenians since the occupation resulted in a major uprising around İskenderun in February 1919. The clash that began on February 2 between Armenian and Algerian legionnaires escalated quickly. By mid-February, most of İskenderun had been plundered; some French soldiers had been attacked and killed. These events are highly important in displaying the weakness of the French authority in Cilicia.<sup>35</sup>

A cryptic telegram sent to the Ministry of Way by General Hameln on February 2, 1919 is also very significant in displaying the disobedience of Armenian soldiers in Cilicia. It was stated that Armenian troops had been first sent to Syria but having attacked the local Muslims, they were then transferred to Cilicia where they were expected to feel more at home. To the contrary, Armenian troops increased the level of their disobedience and wanted to take advantage of being under French protection by attacking the local Ottoman population. What is more, General Hamelin also underlined that he had been receiving complaints

33 From the Office of the Prime Minister and Ministry of War to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 23, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 27.

34 From the Commander of French Forces in Near East, General Hamelin, to the Africa Division of the Ministry of War, February 15, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 84.

35 Robert Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurup...*, p. 80.

from British authorities in the region on the matter of Armenian soldiers engaging in pillaging and massacres.<sup>36</sup> In his report dated February 15, he stated that he had warned each of the Armenian troops for stopping the atrocities committed against the local Muslims, but that a great deal of them had not stopped.<sup>37</sup> This correspondence is very significant in showing the despair of French military authorities.

In a letter sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by Georges Picot on February 19, it was recorded that Armenian troops in Iskenderun had attacked Muslim neighbourhoods, soldiers had burnt down two houses and that many Muslims had been wounded while one was murdered.<sup>38</sup> Picot prepared another report where he informed the Ministry that peace was restored on February 20, the Armenian battalion was disarmed, but he went on by arguing that some Armenian soldiers could start another set of clashes in the northern part of the region.<sup>39</sup> In a cryptic telegram sent to the Ministry of War by General Hamelin on February 25, it was stated that the Fourth Division that had participated in the clashes was disbanded with its squad being allocated to other divisions, while 400 Armenians were disarmed. The telegram also requested that these soldiers be sent to southern Tunisia until the end of the war.<sup>40</sup>

In the meantime, the commanding wing of the British occupation forces in the region held their French counterpart responsible for the rebellion and its consequences and demanded that a strict position be adopted vis-à-vis the Armenian Legion. In a document dated February 20, 1919, Georges Picot pointed out that the Commander of British Forces, General Edmund Allenby had objected to the deployment of 1,000 more Armenian legionnaires to Cilicia. He added that Allenby insisted he was the man in charge on the field and that no change in the number of the troops could be made without his consent.<sup>41</sup> However, the same General Allenby had concluded in December 1918 that the volume of the Eastern Legion might not be sufficient for securing control over the Cilician region and this was why he had permitted General Hamelin to recruit volunteers among Armenian immigrants in the Near East. In fact Allenby considered these immigrants as a potential source of disorder in the British

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36 From the Commander of French Forces in Near East, General Hamelin, to the Africa Division of the Ministry of War, February 2, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 35.

37 From the Commander of French Forces in Near East, General Hamelin, to the Africa Division of the Ministry of War, February 15, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 85.

38 From Georges Picot, the French High Commissioner in Palestine and Syria, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 19, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 40.

39 From Georges Picot, the French High Commissioner in Palestine and Syria, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 20, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 41.

40 From the Commander of French Forces in Near East, General Hamelin, to the Africa Division of the Ministry of War, February 25, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 52.

41 From Georges Picot, the French High Commissioner in Palestine and Syria, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 20, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 42.

occupation zone and reasoned that it would be beneficial if they were controlled in the French army.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, after the last act of disobedience, General Allenby first wished for the removal of the entire Armenian Legion from the region, but when faced with Hamelin's opposition, he developed a new strategy. Accordingly, the reinforced British 19<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division consisting of Indian soldiers took over the military control of the area and its commander General Walter S. Leslie was appointed as the commander of the Entente Powers in the region. The control of British forces initiated a relatively orderly period until they left Cilicia in October.<sup>43</sup>

The punishment given to the divisions of the Armenian Legion who took part in the rebellion created great resentment among the prominent leaders of the Armenian diaspora. In a letter sent to Jean Gout by Bogos Nubar Pasha on February 28, the latter asserted that there had been legitimate and sound reasons for the Armenian unrest. In his words:

Was the Armenian Legion a victim of provocation? Are Armenian soldiers ripping off Turkish hands over the Armenian orphans and girls detained in the harems? Is this a consequence of intrigues forged by the Turkish administration, which continues to operate in Cilicia, and is not willing to acknowledge the presence of Armenian troops in the country?<sup>44</sup>

It is very interesting that Bogos Nubar Pasha was trying to legitimize Armenian assaults, which had been condemned even by French military authorities who had established the Eastern Legion and deployed it in Cilicia. As a matter of fact, in the same letter Bogos Nubar Pasha wanted Jean Gout to initiate an investigation on this issue and thus disclose the facts. However, by then the French authorities had already conducted an investigation and prepared some reports. In the report dated March 1, prepared by Admiral Cassard who served in Port Said and sent to the Ministry of Navy, it was suggested that Armenian troops had not been provoked, but that they had been motivated with great feeling of vengeance against the Turks.<sup>45</sup> General Hamelin sent another report on similar terms to the Ministry of War.<sup>46</sup> As a reaction to these reports, a document was sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Ministry of War, in which it was defended that while Georges Picot had asked for an increase in the recruitment of Armenian volunteers, this would not be appropriate given the circumstances and that it would be put off until 'bad elements' of the Legion were eliminated.<sup>47</sup> In short, just

42 Robert Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurup...*, p. 68.

43 Robert Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurup...*, p. 80.

44 From Bogos Nubar Pasha, the Chairman of the Armenian National Delegation, to Minister plenipotentiary Jean Gout of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 28, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 59.

45 From Admiral Cassard serving at Port Said to the Ministry of Navy, March 1, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 60.

46 From the Commander of French Forces in Near East, General Hamelin, to the Africa Division of the Ministry of War, February 28, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 62.

47 From the Office of the Prime Minister and Ministry of War to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 5, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 68.

as it did not take into consideration the opinions of Bogos Nubar Pasha when he had brought up the complaints of the Armenian Legion, the French Government once again dismissed his interpretation of the events that shook the French authority in Cilicia to its very foundation.

In a telegram he sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on March 6, Georges Picot notes that Armenian soldiers did not even bother to apologize for their disobedience and their part in the uprising. He further added that while these soldiers wanted to leave the Eastern Legion, it was very essential that the Legion be preserved at whatever cost.<sup>48</sup>

On March 5 the Ministry of War received a very interesting telegram in which General Hamelin expressed his desire to state his opinions on this matter by virtue of his experiences even though he claimed that as a military man, he was not entitled to speak on political matters. His main concern was the intelligence forwarded to him implying that the United States wanted to make the Armenian state, which would soon be established, an American protectorate. Given that France had undertaken huge costs to consolidate its military presence in the region, such a situation would gravely harm French interests and undermine its prestige and credibility.<sup>49</sup>

On the same day General Hamelin sent another cryptic telegram to the Ministry of War. In this correspondence he informed the Ministry that 400 Armenian soldiers who had participated in the uprising in Cilicia were disarmed and sent to Port Said with a British ship by March 1. He also stated that the British commandership in the region had suggested that all Armenian troops be withdrawn, relocated in Morocco, and be replaced with a battalion of French colonial infantry. He went on by pointing out that two new British battalions had been brought to Cilicia. General Hamelin noted that he had not accepted this proposal by asserting that the foundational statute of the Armenian Legion did not allow it to be based in anywhere other than Cilicia.<sup>50</sup> All these documents testify to the distrust that French authorities harboured against the British.

## V. ARMENIAN IMMIGRATION TO THE CILICIAN REGION

In the spring of the year 1919, when British military presence in the region established a relatively quite environment, Armenian immigration to the Cilician region accelerated. Governor General of Cilicia, Colonel Brémond stated that by the end of 1919 approximately 120,000 Armenians settled in the region and that

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48 From Georges Picot, the French High Commissioner in Palestine and Syria, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 6, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Février 1921)*, p. 67.

49 From the Commander of the French Forces in Near East, General Hamelin, to the Africa Division of the Ministry of War, March 5, 1919, Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Février 1921)*, p. 73.

50 From the Commander of the French Forces in Near East, General Hamelin, to the Africa Division of the Ministry of War, March 5, 1919, Archives of the French Foreign Ministry, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Février 1921)*, p. 74.

this stood for almost one-third of the entire population of Cilicia.<sup>51</sup> According to a dairy that belonged to a Khacher Matosian, an Armenian who migrated to Adana, in September 1919 the Armenian population in the whole Cilician region, together with those settled to the east of Amanos, was about 250,000 and that most of them were Armenians who were not originally from the Cilician region.<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, among those who arrived to Cilicia was Andranik Ozanian Pasha, who had pioneered guerrilla activities against Ottoman troops during the First World War.<sup>53</sup> It is doubtlessly clear that the presence of an Armenian who earned a reputation for his atrocities against the local Muslim population in Eastern Anatolia would be highly detrimental to the already fragile state of affairs in Cilicia.

Upon the Armenian claim that Turks had been secretly arming themselves, on April 28, 1919 General Allenby and General Brémond agreed to disarm the city of Adana. Local population was ordered to hand their arms to the mission that would consist of a British battalion and an Armenian interpreter. The process of disarmament, however, was subjected to many incidents where many Muslims were attacked.<sup>54</sup> It was then followed by intense Armenian offence throughout summer and fall. In short, despite the efforts of the British forces to maintain order in the region, undisciplined and disobedient Armenian legionnaires were not prevented from committing atrocities against the local Muslim population, which was fully accounted in the Ottoman archival documents.<sup>55</sup>

## VI. STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS OF THE EASTERN LEGION AND CRITICS AGAINST THE SYRIAN LEGION

The end of World War I brought about a serious discussion on the legal status and the military assets of the Eastern Legion. The letter that was sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Ministry of War on April 7 is an important document in respect of showing the problems and the overall situation of the Eastern Legion in April 1919. Accordingly, the Eastern Legion, which was founded in 1916 and most of whose volunteers would be employed until the end of the war, was now separated into two branches. The number of Armenian volunteers who actively fought in the Armenian Legion in the First World War had risen to 3,600. Nevertheless, 2,600 of these were soldiers whose contract would expire at the end of the war. The same went for the Syrians as 650 volunteers and 350 soldiers under contract. In other words, right after the end of the war, Armenian soldiers would decrease to 1,000, while Syrian troops would number around 300. In order to prevent that, a change was introduced to the statute of the Eastern Legion so as to give the legionnaires the chance of extending their contracts for one or two years.

51 Robert Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurup...*, pp. 95-96.

52 Robert Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurup...*, p. 96.

53 Robert Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurup...*, p. 96.

54 Robert Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurup...*, p. 107. For the entire text of the disarmament decree issued by General Bremond please see Süleyman Hatipoğlu, *Fransa'nın Çukurova'yı İşgali ve Pozantı Kongresi*, Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1989, pp. 109-111.

55 Documents on that matter can be found in Yusuf Sarıncay (ed.), *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni Fransız İlişkileri, Cilt II: 1918-1919*, Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2002.

The Ministry of War also underlined that with the end of the war, the Eastern legion risked dismemberment and in order to prevent that the already existing four Armenian and two Syrian battalions needed to be preserved. For that, at least 3,000 Armenians and 1,500 Syrians had to be recruited to the Legion. However, there was a serious problem to that: The Commander of British forces in Britain and Cilicia, General Allenby. The Ministry of War stated that it was against the idea of receiving volunteers from Ottoman lands. For example, when France brought up the issue of recruiting volunteers among Druses and Ensnarés in Lebanon, General Allenby did not allow it. In order to eliminate British opposition on this matter, the Ministry of War wanted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to start an initiative vis-à-vis the British Government. It further wished for the promotion of volunteer recruitments in North America through similar campaigns directed towards the American Government.<sup>56</sup> However, after the war ended, volunteer recruitments almost ceased either among the non-Muslim population in Near East or from the American continent. This, in turn, made it almost impossible for the French to come up with new forces and left them with no choice but to make use of the existing troops. In fact, in a document sent by the Ministry of War to the Military Governor of Paris and District Generals of Marseilles and Bordeaux, it was stated that until further notice all volunteer recruitment activities from France and the United States were stopped. Thus they were instructed not to receive any volunteers coming to either Bordeaux or Marseilles.<sup>57</sup>

In the meantime, in May 1919 prominent members of the Syrian organizations expressed another complaint about the Syrian Legion similar to those voiced by Armenian organizations about the Armenian Legion. On May 16, 1919, the Chairman of the Central Syrian Committee, Şükrü Ganem, sent a letter to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stephen Pichon. Accordingly, Syrian volunteers who had been cut off from the Eastern Legion were not offered new jobs in the region and that was why they went back to France in order to look for employment. Pointing to their misery, Ganem asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs to help them by making Georges Picot, the French High Commissioner on the field, to issue a regulation providing for these former soldiers be offered jobs relevant to their qualifications.<sup>58</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs quickly informed Georges Picot on the matter and asked for the cooperation of the High Commission in finding employment for these former legionnaires.<sup>59</sup>

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56 From the Office of the Prime Minister and Ministry of War to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 5, 1919, Archives of the French Foreign Ministry, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Février 1921)*, p. 99.

57 From the Ministry of War to the Military Governor of Paris and District Generals of Marseilles and Bordeaux, August 22, 1919, Archives of the French Foreign Ministry, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Février 1921)*, p. 145.

58 From the Chairman of the Syrian Central Committee, Şükrü Ganem, to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stephen Pichon, May 16, 1919, Archives of the French Foreign Ministry, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Février 1921)*, p. 123.

59 From the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the French High Commissioner in Palestine and Syria, George Picot, May 20, 1919, Archives of the French Foreign Ministry, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Février 1921)*, p. 124.

On July 27 Georges Picot's letter of reply arrived in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Picot underlined that soldiers serving in the Syrian Legion were financially in a very bad situation compared to the members of the French army. For instance a French soldier received four-sixty six francs a day, whereas a Syrian legionnaire earned two-fifty five. The difference was even bigger for officers. A French officer was given twelve-sixty a day while his Syrian fellow got three-fifty. Picot noted down that this inequality created serious discontent among the soldiers.<sup>60</sup> In order to alleviate the situation, the Ministry of War agreed to make a minor increase in the salaries of Armenian and Syrian legionnaires. From then on soldiers received an extra fifty-five cents while officers got a raise of seventy cents.<sup>61</sup> It is very significant that French authorities, who had not responded positively to such previous requests from Armenians, went ahead with Syrian wishes.

In a correspondence sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the Ministry of War on September 27, legal problems suffered by Armenian and Syrian legions were highlighted and some solutions were suggested. According to the statute of the Eastern Legion, the contracts of Syrian and Armenian volunteers were good for fighting against Turkey during the war.<sup>62</sup> However, as it has been mentioned above, the Legion continued to exist even after the war ended and the contracts of the legionnaires were extended for a year or two. In order to provide a legal excuse for the maintenance of both legions, the Ministry of War found it appropriate that a decree be prepared so as to extend the validity of the contracts of legionnaires based on the claim that clashes would continue until Entente Powers signed a peace treaty with Turkey. The last sentence of the document, however, is highly interesting: when it comes to the Armenian Legion, even though it is a valuable military asset, it might be disbanded for secret political reasons.<sup>63</sup> While these clandestine political motives were not spelled out, it is very probable that they were rooted in the disobedience of Armenian legionnaires, which resulted in a remarkable Turkish resistance against the French authority in the region making it very difficult for France to sustain the occupation. In fact, from that moment on the attitude of French authorities towards the Armenian Legion would deteriorate gradually.

## VII. THE OCCUPATION OF ANTEP, MARAŞ AND URFA BY THE FRENCH, THE END OF THE TURKISH-FRENCH CLASHES AND THE DISBANDMENT OF THE EASTERN LEGION

On September 15, 1919, as a result of the Syria Accords signed between France

60 From Georges Picot, the French High Commissioner in Palestine and Syria, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 27, 1919, Archives of the French Foreign Ministry, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 131.

61 From the Office of the Prime Minister and Ministry of War to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 1, 1919, Archives of the French Foreign Ministry, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 135.

62 From the Ministry of War to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 27, 1919, Archives of the French Foreign Ministry, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 149.

63 From the Ministry of War to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 27, 1919, Archives of the French Foreign Ministry, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 149.



and Britain, cities of Maraş, Urfa and Antep, which had been invaded by the British, were handed over to the French. As soon as British forces withdrew from the region, French forces consisting of Armenian soldiers occupied these cities. The French had full control over Antep on October 27, Maraş on October 29, and Urfa on October 31.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, the local population quickly organized a resistance movement, while forces of Turkish revolutionaries, Kuvva-i Milliye working in cooperation with the Government of the Grand Turkish National Assembly, did not remain indifferent to the invasion either. Especially as a result of the clashes in Maraş, the French military presence, including Armenian legionnaires, had to leave the city on February 11, 1920. That was followed by the liberation of Urfa from French occupation on April 11, 1920. The resistance in Antep, which began on April 1, 1920 and lasted for 11 months, ended in the French re-occupying the city on February 9, 1921 because of ammunition and food shortage. It was only after the Ankara Treaty that Antep was restored to Turkish control on December 25, 1921.

In the meantime, because of the change of government on January 20, 1920 in France, Georges Clemenceau had to leave his office to Alexandre Millerand, who also took over the position of the Minister of Foreign Affairs that was formerly performed by Stephen Pichon. André Lefèvre, in turn, was appointed as the Minister of War.

A letter sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Ministry of War on May 20, 1920 is very remarkable in revealing the attitude of the new government towards the Armenian Legion. The document starts with the suggestion of General Gouraud, Chief Commander of the Levant Army, to disband the Eastern Legion as soon as possible because of the legionnaires' disobedient behaviour as he had expressed in a letter he sent to the Ministry of War on May 1.<sup>65</sup> The Ministry of War held a similar opinion:

These negative behaviours had been observed many times since our deployment in the Levant. Especially in Cilicia, the presence of auxiliary Armenian forces did nothing but to render our control of the region more delicate. The difficulties brought about by recent developments could, to a large extent, be argued to take root in the deployment of these forces in an area predominantly populated by Turks over whom Armenian legionnaires aspired nothing but to satisfy their vengeance.<sup>66</sup>

Given these, the Ministry asserted that the Armenian Legion was not needed any longer, thus could be disbanded with a decree of the Ministry of Defence. As a matter of fact, the signing of the Sèvres Treaty at the end of the war by the Ottoman Government would leave no legal ground for the maintenance of the

64 Ulvi Keser, *Kıbrıs Anadolu Ekseninde Ermeni Doğu Lejyonu...*, p. 345.

65 For this letter, please see from the Chief Commander of the Levant Army, General Gouraud, to the Middle East Division of the Ministry of War, May 1, 1919, Archives of the French Foreign Ministry, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 180.

66 From the Ministry of War to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 20, 1920, Archives of the French Foreign Ministry, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 179.

Legion. However, the Ministry also argued that while the Armenian Legion can be disbanded, its Syrian counterpart should be preserved in order for French authorities to use it in areas that would remain under French protectorate.<sup>67</sup>

The Ankara Treaty that was signed between the Government of the Grand Turkish National Assembly and France on October 20, 1921 brought the Eastern Legion to an end. In line with Article 1 of the Treaty the belligerent status between the Parties ceased to exist. Subsequent articles dealt with the release of war prisoners, the withdrawal of French forces to the south of the border delineated by Article 8 and deployment of Turkish forces to the north of it, the issuing of general amnesty in areas to be evacuated.<sup>68</sup> In sum, this treaty acknowledged that the French occupation had ended and that French forces including Armenian legionnaires would withdraw. The last French battalion left Mersin on January 5, 1922 leaving the entire region under Turkish control.

Right after the Ankara Treaty, Armenian camps in Monarga, Cyprus were immediately closed down. In fact, the British Governor of the island, Mr. Clauson, had been for a long time complaining about Armenians attacking Greek and Muslim villages. Seeing the opportunity that rose out of the Ankara Treaty, the Governor had the camps terminated within the framework of the treaty that had been signed between the French and British Governments. All the equipment and ammunition from the camps were handed over to Lieutenant Colonel Motherwell, the Commander of British War Prisoners Camp. While all correspondence found at the camps were seized, Armenian volunteers left the island in French ships. The graves of the Frenchmen who had died in these camps were taken to the French cemetery in Larnaca thanks to the efforts of the French diplomatic mission in Cyprus in the 1940s. Likewise, Armenian graves were carried to the Armenian cemetery in Larnaca.<sup>69</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Since this article is the last piece of a series of articles that have addressed the establishment and activities of the Eastern Legion, it would be plausible to strike a general assessment of the Legion in the conclusion part.

The project of the Eastern Legion was initiated as an attempt to facilitate the shortage of military personnel that France had been experiencing in mid-World War I. After the elite forces of the French army suffered severe casualties along the France-Germany line in the first two years of the War, the French Government, for its military operations in the Middle East, opted for using local units that shared a common vision of rebelling against the Ottoman rule in the region. That is why Muslim and Christian Syrians, and Lebanese volunteers were

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67 From the Ministry of War to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 20, 1920, Archives of the French Foreign Ministry, Directorship of Political and Commercial Affairs, Serie E, Box 304, File 7, *Turquie: Légion d'Orient (1 Janvier 1919 – 4 Fevrier 1921)*, p. 179.

68 Selahattin Tansel, *Mondros'tan Mudanya'ya Kadar*, 4 Volumes, Ankara: Başbakanlık Kültür Müsteşarlığı Yayınları, 1974, vol. 4, p. 52.

69 Ulvi Keser, *Kıbrıs Anadolu Ekseninde Ermeni Doğu Lejyonu...*, pp. 522-531.

also incorporated into the Legion even though at the beginning it was decided that only the Armenians of Mount Musa would be recruited. These forces were first gathered at Port Said in Egypt and were then taken to the camps founded in Monarga, Cyprus.

France targeted Armenians and Syrians not only living in the Middle East, but also those who had migrated to the Americas and established considerable communities there throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. For that purpose, Armenian and Syrian delegations were established to engage in propaganda activities in the Americas with all their expenses covered.

Despite the intense work done by Armenian and Syrian delegations, volunteer recruitment from South America did not meet the expectations of the French Government. The main reason for that was the weak legal status of the Eastern Legion, the problems caused by the discrepancy between the rights to retirement and pension of the legionnaires with those of French soldiers, and most importantly the clashes between the Armenian and Syrian communities living in Latin America. They were actually not confined to those living in South America, but were also in effect between Armenian and Syrian soldiers constituting the Legion itself.

Being established in 1916, the Eastern Legion, along with the French army, was taken to the Cilician region so as to occupy the area within the terms of the Mudros Truce. However, the disobedience and indiscipline displayed by the legionnaires pertaining to the Armenian Legion caused discontent on the part of French and British officers. These legionnaires would often break away from their garrison, attack local Muslim population, and engage in plunder and massacres. All these assaults were accounted for both in Ottoman and French archives. The level of disobedience of the legionnaires would sometimes go as far as uprising against the French army, which resulted in the rebels being expelled to Port Said.

The French occupation which had started in Adana and its surrounding in 1918, was then extended to cities of Antep, Urfa and Maraş as a result of the Syria Accords, signed between France and Britain in September 1919, providing for the withdrawal of British forces from these cities and their replacement with French troops. Nevertheless, while there was no resistance organized during the occupation of Adana because of the lack of Turkish national awareness, this was by no means the case with respect to the invasion of Antep, Urfa and Maraş. In fact, from the occupation of Adana to those of Antep, Urfa and Maraş, Mustafa Kemal had moved to Samsun and started to organize the national resistance movement. The latter took a gained a more organized and coordinated character when the Grand Turkish National Assembly was established on April 23, 1920. With the national consciousness on the rise, the French occupation faced fierce resistance and the forces of Kuvva-i Milliye were able to repel French forces on many occasions.

With the Ankara Treaty, which was signed on October 20, 1921 between France and the Government of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, the *raison d'être* of the Eastern Legion ceased to exist, which led to the disbandment of the

Legion, termination of the camps in Monarga and legionnaires being sent back to France. Hence, buried to the dark pages of history, in its aftermath the Eastern Legion, one of the biggest legionnaire formations stational in the Middle East during World War I was buried in to dark pages of history.