



ARMENIANS IN THE LATE OTTOMAN PERIOD

REALITIES BEHIND THE RELOCATION

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FACTS ABOUT RELOCATION



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Why Were They Relocated?

The disturbances which the European Powers and Russia stirred up across the Ottoman realm as part of an intervention strategy, fashionably called the “Eastern question”, had taken a course which threatened to culminate in the proclamation of an independent Armenian state. Armenian orchestration of great power meddling, the massacre of Muslims by armed bands of Armenians followed by uprisings at Van and Zeytun which were timed with the outbreak of World War I, and the Armenian support to Rus-

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sian armies invading Anatolia, compelled the Ottoman Government to take forceful measures.

Indeed, as the Armenian uprising raged at Van, reports that Armenians had also risen up in other provinces, that they were robbing travellers, raiding villages and killing off their population kept arriving in Istanbul. Occupied in the battlefields, the Turkish army was unable to deal with these events behind the frontlines. So, Enver Paşa, the Deputy Commander-in-Chief, sent the following dispatch to the Interior Minister Talât Bey (later, Talât Paşa) on 2 May 1915:

“The Armenians around the periphery of Lake Van, and in other regions which are known to the Governor of Van, are engaged in continuous preparations for revolution and rebellion. I am of the opinion that this population should be removed from this area, and that this nest of rebellion is broken up.

“According to information provided by the Commander of the Third Army, the Russians, on April the 20th, began expelling their Muslim population, by pushing them without their belongings across our borders. It is necessary, in response to this action, and in order to reach the goals that have been outlined above, either to expel the Armenians in question to Russia or to relocate them and their families in other regions of

Anatolia. I request that the most suitable of these alternatives be chosen and implemented. If there is no objection, I would prefer to expel the creators of these centers of rebellion and their families outside our borders, and to replace them with the Muslim refugees pushed across our borders".¹

With the above directive seen as the first signal of the decision for relocation (deportation), Enver Paşa sought to disperse the Armenians in a way that they would no longer be able to rebel. Dividing the Armenians into small communities spread across the empire instead of keeping them massed in one place would rob them of the chance to stage further uprisings. Again from this directive, it is understood that its implementation is requested only in places where the Armenians staged rebellions and disturbances. In fact, special care has been shown to this point in the first deportation.

In the face of the delicate situation, Interior Minister Talât Bey was forced to start the removal without seeking a Cabinet decision and without waiting for the legislation of a provisional act, shouldering the responsibility by himself.²

1 **Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi** (Journal of Military History Documents), 81 (December 1982). Document No. 1830.

2 Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, **Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi** (History of the Turkish Revolution), H1/3. Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu. 1991, p. 38.

Aim of the Relocation

So far as it is clear from the documents, the relocation, which Talat Bey set in motion and was subsequently endorsed by the Cabinet, was carried out solely in areas where the security of the borders were under threat. First of these was the Erzurum, Van and Bitlis area which constituted the rear of the Caucasus and the Iran front. Second was the Mersin-İskenderun area, the rear of the Sinai front. The Armenians in these areas were found to be collaborating with the enemy and were engaged in activities aimed to facilitate possible landings. The move was later expanded so as to cover Armenians living in other provinces where they rebelled, collaborated with the enemy and harbored Armenian terrorists. Although Catholic and Protestant Armenians were initially excluded from the scope of relocation, the ones engaged in harmful activities among these, too, were later sent away.

Therefore, a circular dated 22 June 1331 (5 July 1915), was sent to the provinces of Adana, Erzurum, Bitlis, Aleppo, Diyarbakır, Syria, Sivas, Trabzon, Mamuretülaziz as well as to the Directorate of Abandoned Property in Adana and the prefectures of Zor, Maraş, Canik, Kayseri and İzmit, informing them that the areas allocated for the settlement of Armenians

were enlarged out of necessity. This meant that they would be settled in proportion of 10% to the Muslim population, in the following manner:

- (1) At the eastern and southern regions of the Mosul province including the sanjaq of Kirkuk with its villages and townships as near as 80 kilometers to the Iranian border;
- (2) East and south of the sanjaq of Zor, including the settlements in the valleys of Euphrates and Habur rivers, 25 kilometers inside the border of Diyarbakır;
- (3) All the villages and towns at the east, south and southeast of the Aleppo province except the north, at towns and villages 25 kilometers from the railroads, including the sanjaqs of Havran and Kerek in the province of Syria.³

Assailed by the adverse propaganda of the Western powers and their press, Talât Bey was compelled to furnish repeated assurances that the measures taken against the Armenians were not aimed at massacring them. Indeed, in a coded telegram sent to the governors or prefects of Hüdavendigâr, Ankara, Konya, İzmit, Adana, Maraş, Urfa, Aleppo, Zor, Sivas, Kütahya, Karasi, Niğde, Mamuretülaziz, Diyarbakır,

3 T.C. (The Republic of Turkey). Başbakanlık (The Prime Minister's Office). Osmanlı Arşivi (The Ottoman Archives, hereafter BOA), Cipher Desk, No. 54/315.

Karahisar-ı Sahib, Erzurum and Kayseri, the aim of deportation was explained thus:⁴

“The objective sought by the government in evicting the Armenians from their settlements and moving them to the areas marked for re-settlement is rendering this ethnic element unable in engaging in anti-government activities and prevent them from pursuing their national aim of founding an Armenian government. The annihilation of these people is, not only out of question, but also the authorities should ensure their safety during their movement and see to it that they are properly fed, making the necessary expenditures from the

Refugee Fund. Apart from those evicted and moved, the Armenians allowed to stay should be exempt from further evictions. As communicated earlier, the government has taken a firm decision not to move families of soldiers, sufficient numbers of artisans as well as Protestant and Catholic Armenians. Firm measures should be taken against those who attack the moving parties or any gendarmes or officials who instigate such attacks. These people should be immediately expelled and court-martialed. Provinces and sanjaqs will be held responsible for the recurrence of any such events.”

4 BOA. Cipher Desk. No. 55/292.

Earlier, in a secret dispatch sent to the Ankara province on 14 May 1331 (27 May 1915), the following was noted: “The measures taken against the Armenians are solely based on the need to establish and safeguard order in the realm. That the government does not follow a destructive policy against the Armenian element is evident from the fact that Protestant and Catholic Armenians observed to have taken a neutral position for the time being were not touched...”⁵ In fact, in another coded message sent to the provinces of Erzurum, Diyarbakır, Mamuretülaziz, and Bitlis on 1 June 1331 (14 June 1915), those in charge were ordered to protect the lives of Armenians on the roads and even when measures become inevitable against deportees who try to escape or attack their guards, to make sure that the local people do not intervene. They were also ordered to prevent the outbreak of incidents between Armenians and Muslims that could result in fatalities and a bad image abroad for the Ottoman state.

In a coded telegram he sent to the 4th Army Command on 10 May 1331 (23 May 1915), Talât Bey provided information concerning the Armenians to be deported and listed the places he wanted to be evicted as follows: (1) Provinces of Erzurum, Van and Bitlis; (2) sanjaq of Maraş except the city itself: (3)

5 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 53/94.

with the exception of administrative center of the Aleppo province, all towns and villages attached to İskenderun, Beylan (Belen), Cisir-i Şugur and Antakya; (4) sanjaqs of Adana, Sis (Kozan) and Mersin (except the cities themselves) and the sanjaq of Cebel-i Bereket.

The Armenians evicted from the provinces of Erzurum, Van and Bitlis would be settled at the southern part of the province of Mosul, the sanjaq of Zor and the sanjaq of Urfa except the administrative center. The Armenians removed from the Adana-Aleppo-Maraş area would go to places marked by the government at the eastern part of the Syrian province and the east and south-east of the Aleppo province and would be settled there. To supervise the process of transportation, State Inspector Ali Seydi Bey and Hamid Bey were assigned to the Adana area and Aleppo-Maraş areas respectively. Ali Seydi Bey reported at his post, accompanied by another inspector and a special treasury official. Upon reaching their destinations, the Armenians would either be resettled at the houses they were to build at the existing towns or villages, or at new villages they would set up at government-specified places depending on the situation and conditions in the area. It was decreed that the Armenian villages would be at least 25 kilometers away from the nearest railroad. The transportation and resettlement of

the Armenians who had to be moved again were left to local authorities. Likewise, protection of the lives and property of the Armenians distributed to their final settlements were the responsibility of local officials on the route who would also make sure they were served meals and allowed to rest. The deported Armenians were allowed to take with them all their movable property. As to the unmovable, it was decreed that a detailed set of guidelines would be published and communicated to those involved.⁶

To ensure that the Armenians to be moved from the eastern and some of the south-eastern provinces to the south of the Diyarbakır province, the Euphrates River valley and to the vicinity of Urfa-Suleymaniye would not become hotbeds of subversion, the High Command issued certain warnings. In a note sent to the Interior Ministry, the High Command stated that officials should pay due attention to the following: (1) The population of Armenians in their new homes should not exceed 10% of the local tribes and Muslims; (2) Villages to be set up by deported Armenians should not have more than 50 houses; (3) Resettled Armenian families should not change their domiciles even through travel or house-moving.⁷

6 BÖA, Cipher Desk, No. 53/94.

7 General Staff. No. 1/1 File No. 207. F. 2-3. referred to by Kâmurân Gürün. **Ermeni Dosyası** (The Armenian File). Ankara. Türk Tarih Kurumu. 1985. p. 213.

Coinciding with the time the Interior Ministry was busy with these measures, Russian, French and British Governments issued a joint declaration on 24 May 1915. They charged that in eastern and south-eastern Anatolia, to which they referred as “Armenia”, pogroms were carried out against the Armenians. Ignoring the murderous campaign launched against the Turks by the Armenians they incited and supported, they stated that the Ottoman Government would be held responsible for the incidents.⁸ After the issue thus assumed international dimensions, Talat Bey decided that he could no longer shoulder single-handed responsibility for the deportation and sought to provide a legal basis for the action and thereby spread the responsibility to other Cabinet members as well.

Hence, he sent Memorandum No. 270, dated 26 May 1915, to the Prime Minister’s office.⁹ In that document, Talat Bey explained how the aggressors with designs on Ottoman territory sowed seeds of discontent among the Armenians and backed their insurgency, how the insurgent Armenians did everything to obstruct the operations of the army against the enemy, prevented delivery of supplies and munitions to the soldiers on battlefronts, collaborated with the

8 Bayur, **op. cit.**, III/3 p. 37.

9 BOA. Bâbîâlî Evrak Odası (BEO). No. 326758.

enemy and how some of them joined the enemy ranks, launched attacks against the army units and innocent civilians, committed murders, plundered cities and towns, provided supplies to enemy warships, and pointed out fortifications to the enemy. Then, he pointed to the need for effective measures for the state's security and therefore, noted that it was decided to move Armenians creating unrest in combat areas to elsewhere. Beside the details of the decision on deportation, including the places to be evacuated and the destinations of the deportees, the memo assured that they would be provided with new accommodations and land, commensurate with their former stature, from the Refugees Fund. It also assured that the needy would be given aid, and the state would support their production-oriented activities by providing tools, materials and seed. As for their property left behind, the memo assured that they would be registered in an official book, and a decree would be drafted to that effect.

The Interior Ministry's memorandum was channeled to the Council of Ministers by the Prime Minister's office with another memorandum, dated 29 May 1915, which repeated the arguments of Talat Bey, endorsed the already-started implementation and called for the provision of a legal framework for

it.¹⁰ On 30 May 1915, the Council of Ministers put its stamp of approval to what was being done. The text said the crackdown on such subversive activities, which negatively affect the ongoing struggle for the protection of the state, had been absolutely necessary and timely. It added that a decision had been taken to issue a declaration concerning the unmovable property of deported Armenians, that they would be registered by committees that would be appointed, that the deportees would be granted work opportunities suiting their positions and aid from the Refugees Fund. It finally called for dispatch of necessary directives to the officials to ensure that the deportees could be moved in security.¹¹

The directive sent from the Prime Minister's Office to the Ministries of Finance, War, and Treasury on 30 May 1915, set forth the guidelines for deportation:¹² (a) The Armenians would be moved to places reserved for them with due care to the safety of their lives and property as well as their comfort, (b) Until they were settled in their new homes, their upkeep would be provided from the Refugees Fund, (c) They would be given houses and land commensurate with their former financial status, (d) The government

10 Council of Ministers Letter. Book No. 198. Decision No. 163; Bayur, **op. cit.**, III/3. pp. 37-38; Gürün. *op. cit.*, pp. 213-214.

11 Bayur, **op. cit.**, III/3, pp. 40-42.

12 BOA, BEO. No. 326758.

would build houses for the needy; equipment and seed would be provided for the farmers, (e) Their movable property left behind would be forwarded to them; the immovable, following registry and appraisal, would be distributed to Muslim refugees to be settled there. Olive grooves, berry and citrus orchards, vineyards and such assets as shops, inns, factories and warehouses which remain outside the expertise of the immigrants would be auctioned or rented and their revenues would be collected and registered in trustee funds to be given to their owners, (f) Special commissions would implement this directive once it was drafted.

On 14 May 1915, a day after Talât Bey presented his memorandum to the Prime Minister's Office, "The Provisional Law Concerning the Measures to Be Taken by the Military Against Those Who Oppose the Actions of Government During Wartime" was enacted.¹³ The first article of this provisional law¹⁴, which entered into force with its publication in the **Takvim-i Vekayi** (Chronicle of Events) on 1 June 1915, empowered the army, corps or division commanders to take immediate military action against anyone opposing government orders, the country's security and order, and, in the event of armed attacks or re-

13 Bayur, **op. cit.**, II/3, p. 40; Gürün, **op. cit.**, p. 214.

14 **Takvim-i Vekayi**, 1 June 1915, Yr. 7, No. 2189; Bayur, **op. cit.**, m/3. p. 40.

sistance, to annihilate the rebels. The second article empowered the same commanders to deport individuals or whole populations of villages of townships and settle them elsewhere if they engage in espionage or treason. Thus, this provisional law transferred the conduct of deportation, arbitrarily started by the Interior Ministry, to the army.

With the directive dated 10 June 1915,¹⁵ properties of the deported Armenians were taken under protection. "Abandoned Property Commissions" were set up, comprising a president and a representative each from the administration and the treasury. These commissions would identify the properties belonging to Armenians in evacuated villages and towns and would keep detailed books. One of these books would be kept at the local church, one would be handed to the local government, and a third would be given to the commission. Perishable goods and livestock would be auctioned, and the proceeds would be kept in custody. In places where no commission was sent, local officials would carry out the directives. Both the commissions and local officials would be responsible for the safekeeping of the abandoned property until the return of the Armenians.

15 **Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi** (Journal of Military History Documents). 81 (December 1982) Document No. 1832.

Movement to Resettlement Areas

To be distributed to the areas of resettlement, groups of deportees were assembled at such centers as Konya, Diyarbakır, Cizre, Birecik and Aleppo sitting on the crossroads. According to the documents, the closest routes were picked for the movement of groups to cause least difficulty to the deportees. Considerations of the security of the groups also played a role in the choice of the routes. Indeed, those deported from Kayseri and Samsun were moved over to Malatya, and those coming from Sivas, Mamuretülaziz, Erzurum and its environs were moved over the Diyarbakır-Cizre road to Mosul.¹⁶ But sometimes-overcrowded roads and possible unrest at certain sanjaqs made detours necessary.¹⁷ Those going from Urfa via the Re'sulayn-Nusaybin road were re-directed to Siverek road to protect them from raids of Arab tribes and other clans.¹⁸

Groups coming from Western Anatolia over Kütahya-Karahisar-Konya-Karaman-Tarsus were sent to Zor over Kars-ı Maraş-Pazarcık road.¹⁹ In the planning of the routes, those with railroads and river transport

16 BOA. Cipher Desk, No. 54-A/157; No. 56/280; No. 56/387.

17 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 56/278; No. 56/280; No. 56/308.

18 BOA. Cipher Desk, No. 57/277.

19 BOA. Cipher Desk, No. 65/95.

facilities, considered safest at the time, were preferred. In fact, train moved all the deportees from western Anatolia to their new settlements.²⁰ Those sent over the Cizre road were also moved either by train, or riverboats called "*Shahtur*".²¹ In places lacking train or river transport, the groups were brought by pack animals or carts to certain centers and moved by train from there on.

Despite the war conditions, the Ottoman Government has shown due care to the orderly implementation of the transport and protection of groups from possible harm. It has used every available means to facilitate the transport. But it is understood that shortages of transport and a host of other difficulties had been encountered during the process, since railroads were kept busy by the transport of soldiers and provisions to the battlefronts. Indeed, there were great congestion at the railway stations, and transportation was occasionally disrupted due to lack of adequate number of carriages.²² Because the harvest time increased the local demand for animals and carts and limited their availability for other pur-

20 Interior Ministry, Directorate of Public Security (EUM). Dept. 2. No. 68/99. Dept. 2. No. 68/94; Dept 2. No. 68/81; Dept 2. No. 68/67; Dept. 2. No. 68/96.

21 Interior Ministry, EUM. Dept 2, No. 68/101.

22 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 54-A/393.

poses, the deportee parties could move with difficulty.²³

Despite all these, a foreign diplomatic mission acknowledged the fact that the government has succeeded in moving the deported Armenians to their new settlements in an orderly fashion. In a report he sent to Ambassador Henry Morgenthau on 15 August 1915, Edward Nathan, the U.S. Consul in Mersin, noted that the rail route was packed with Armenians from Tarsus to Adana. From there onwards, the Armenians could buy tickets and travel by train, Nathan wrote. Despite the misery caused by the congestion and tiresome procedures, the diplomat noted that the government was handling the case quite efficiently, that it did not permit violence or disorder, it provided enough tickets for the deportees and gave aid to the needy.²⁴ Observations of the American consul are supported by the reports Ottoman officials sent to the capital. In contrast, by keeping up their attacks even during the deportation, the Armenian insurgents showed how right the state had been in adopting the measure. In fact, the letter dated 12 Şevval 1333 (23 August 1915) sent by the U.S. Consul Leslie A. Davis in Mamuretülaziz, to Ambassador Morgenthau in Istanbul, details the atrocities

23 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 54-A/59; No. 54-A/96.

24 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 2D/13.

the Armenians carried out in the province center and the villages.²⁵ The letter bearing the register number 1080, had been intercepted by the Ottoman security service, translated and read, closed again and sent on.²⁶

Attacks on Armenians and Measures by the State

The need to finish transportation of Armenians quickly and the adverse conditions the war has brought were topmost among causes making it difficult to provide security for the transiting groups and to distribute food. It is estimated that some 20-21,000 Armenians have succumbed to contagious diseases on the way.²⁷

For instance, the document dated 8 Zilhicce 1333 (17 October 1915) noted that typhoid fever and dys-

25 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2. No. 68/83.

26 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2.. No. 68/84.

27 For instance, with the coded telegram dated 26 June 1915, provinces of Trabzon, Erzurum, Sivas, Diyarbakır, Mamuretülaziz and Bitlis and the prefectures of Maraş and Canik were requested to report the number of Armenians killed because of illness or rebellion since the start of the war (BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 54-A/112) Furthermore, it is understood that at Eregli and Mosul, such contagious diseases as typhus, dysentery, and malaria were pretty widespread. (Telegram dated 8 June 1915 sent to Konya, BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 57/337; Telegram sent to Zor prefecture dated 3 February 1916, BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 60/219).

entery claimed 70-to-80 lives daily among the deportees which were in Hama and ordered immediate adoption of measures.²⁸ Furthermore, a number of Armenians seem to have died in armed raids mounted mostly by the Arab tribes, particularly between Aleppo and Zor. For instance, the documents show that on the roads to Meskene just an hour to Aleppo, close to 2000 Armenians were killed in raids, launched by the Arab tribes to rob the deportees.²⁹ The same documents also note that a further 2000 deportees being sent from Diyarbakır to Zor and from Suruç to Aleppo via Menbiç were attacked and robbed by the Arab tribesmen.³⁰ Documents also cite intelligence reports to the effect that bandits had rounded up further batch of some 2000 Armenians, among the deportee groups assembled in Diyarbakır area, drove them to Mardin and killed them.³¹ On the news that a 500-strong group of Armenians were attacked and murdered by Kurds on the Erzurum-Erzincan road, a coded telegram was sent to Diyarbakır, Mamuretülaziz and Bitlis on 14 June 1915, ordering the authorities to use every means to prevent attacks by bandits and peasants during the transit of deportees, and curb those attempting

28 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 57/51, 71

29 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 59/244.

30 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 56/140; 55-A/144.

31 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 54/406, 54-A/73. No. 54-A/248.

murder and robbery.³² Another document, dated 27 June 1915, quoted Erzurum provincial officials as reporting that local bandits in the Dersim area had intercepted and murdered the Armenian groups sent from Erzurum, and it had not been possible to save them. The government responded with a strong rebuke, saying such acts were impermissible, ordering the officials to take immediate measures that would ensure safe transit of the deportee groups.³³ From the above records, it is seen that some 9,000 Armenians, or around 10,000 had died during the deportation as a result of bandit attacks. This is the final sum in Ottoman documents, which lack any other record of mass murder.

It is clear that while fighting at the front, the Ottoman state was at the same time exerting a massive effort to feed the Armenians on the move and provide them security. Indeed, once the murders and robberies became known, the government has immediately sent directives to the scenes of incident, ordering officials not to send on the deportee groups without gendarme escort, and take all necessary measures to ensure safe transit. In another directive sent to officials of every province falling under the scope of deportation, the government sought the apprehension and punishment of the bands attack-

32 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 54/9.

33 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 54/162.

ing the Armenians, while ordering stronger escort to the passing convoys. In a coded telegram it sent to the affected provinces in connection with the above directive, the government asked how many of the attackers were caught and punished.³⁴

As another measure to enforce discipline, the government set up investigation committees to identify officials who did not do their jobs properly during the transit or engaged in corruption. One such committee, led by First Judge Asım Bey of the Interrogation Court and including State Inspector Muhtar Bey of the Ankara province and Lieut. Col. Muhiddin Bey, the gendarme inspector for the İzmir area, was sent to cover the Adana, Aleppo, Syria, Urfa, Zor and Maraş areas.³⁵ Another committee, led by the Appeals Court President Hulusi Bey and including İsmail Hakkı Bey of the State Accounting Office, was dispatched to the Hüdavendigâr, Ankara, İzmit, Karasi, Kütahya, Eskişehir, Kayseri, Karahisar-ı Sahib and Niğde areas.³⁶ A third committee, chaired by former Bitlis governor Yaşar Bey and including former İstanbul chief prosecutor Nihad Bey and gendarme Major Ali Naki Bey, was sent to Sivas, Trabzon, Erzurum, Mamuretülaziz, Diyarbakır, Bitlis and Canik. In a coded telegram sent to the third committee chairman Mazhar Bey, who set up a shop in Sivas, the commit-

34 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 55-A/84.

35 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 56/186.

36 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 58/38. 56/335.

tees were requested to regularly send their investigation results to the capital.³⁷

Under directives given to the investigation committees, implicated gendarme, policemen, public officials and their superiors would be sent to the martial law courts depending on the investigation results. A list of those sent to such courts would be supplied to the Interior Ministry. The results of the investigations against governors or prefects would be forwarded to the Interior Ministry first, and any further action would wait for instructions from the Ministry. In case the martial law court presidents, judges and military officials were implicated in corruption or misconduct, they would be reported to the army commands they were affiliated to.

In the light of the investigation committee reports, many officials were relieved of their posts for misuse of power (in the form of stealing money or property from the transiting deportee groups, not providing sufficient protection and thus exposing the parties to attack, detracting from deportation orders, rape, etc.) Some were court-martialed and were handed down heavy sentences.³⁸

37 BOA, Cipher Desk. No. 56/267.

38 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 58/278; No. 58/141; No. 55-A/156; No. 55-A/157; No. 61/165; No. 57/116; No. 57/413; No. 57/416. No. 57/105. No. 59/235; No. 54-A/326; No. 59/196.

Armenians Spared from the Move and the Converts

As noted above, the decision for deportation was not applied to all Armenians. At first, some of the Armenians living in certain places (towns of Germeş and Birecik in Urfa, Erzurum, Aydın, Trabzon, Edirne, Canik, Çanakkale, Adapazarı, Aleppo, Bolu, Kastamonu, Tekirdağ, Konya and Karahisar-ı Sahip) were excluded from the scope of deportation.³⁹ But later, when these, too, were seen to engage in acts of treason, most of them were sent away.⁴⁰ The sick and blind were allowed to stay, and those from the Catholic and Protestant creeds, civil servants, soldiers and their families, tradesmen, some construction workers and foremen were also excluded from the scope of deportation. Indeed, with telegrams sent to the Maraş and Adana provinces, the government instructed the officials not to send away the sick, blind, invalids and the elderly and see to it that they were settled in cities.⁴¹

In a telegram sent to the concerned provinces on 3 August 1915, and in a subsequent one sent on 15 Au-

39 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 54-A/155; No. 56/114; No. 56/225; No. 56/226; No. 57/89; No. 59/218.

40 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 54-A/271; No. 54-A/272 (22 Temmuz 1331/4 August 1915).

41 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 56/27; No. 67/186.

gust 1915, officials were ordered not to deport Catholic and Protestant Armenians, settle them in their original cities and report their numbers.⁴² These were settled in various towns within their respective provinces.⁴³ Those who were mistakenly deported were sought out and settled at the cities they were at the time.⁴⁴ But when some of those allowed to stay were seen engaged in harmful activities, they, too, were deported irrelevant of their creed.⁴⁵

A coded telegram sent on 15 August 1915, to provinces of Erzurum, Adana, Ankara, Bitlis, Aleppo, Hüdavendigâr, Diyarbakır, Trabzon, Konya as well as to the prefectures of Urfa, İzmit, Canik, Kayseri, Afyon, Karesi, Maraş, Niğde, and Eskişehir delivered instructions to local authorities to keep the Armenians serving as officers, doctors or medics in the Ottoman Army in their original places and exclude

42 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 54-A/252; No. 55/20; No. 55/292 (App. XXVI).

43 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 56/112 (19 September, 1915, to Konya province).

44 On this, orders were sent to Sivas on 26 Sept. 1915 (BOA, Cipher Desk. No. 56/176). Mamuretülaziz and Diyarbakır provinces (BOA, Cipher Desk. No. 56/172); and on 14 Nov. 1915. to Konya (BOA. Cipher Desk. No. 58/2) and to Ankara provinces (BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 58/159).

45 A telegram was sent to Adana province in this direction (Cipher Desk, No. 55-A/23) on 2 September 1915. See also BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 61/186; No. 61/192; No. 61/122; No. 61/290; No. 61/210; Interior Ministry, EUM. Dept. 2. 2F/11.

them from deportation.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the Armenians employed in the main and provincial branches of the Ottoman Bank, Tobacco Administration, and some foreign consulates were allowed to stay, provided they remained loyal to the state and displayed good conduct.⁴⁷

Beside these, orphaned children and widows were allowed to stay, taken under protection in orphanages or villages, and were given material aid.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the children orphaned during the course of deportation were sent to Sivas and placed in the orphanage there.⁴⁹ An order was published on 30 April 1916, * concerning the Armenian families needing care. The order stipulated that: (a) Families whose men folk were deported or serving in the Army would be settled at villages and towns with no

Armenian or other foreign population and would be supported from the Refugees Fund; (b) if local orphanages were not adequate, children up to the age of twelve would be given to rich Muslim families for their upkeep; (c) low-income Muslim families would be paid 30 kuruş from the Refugees Fund for the upkeep of children; (d) young and widowed Armenian

46 BOA. Cipher Desk, No. 55/18.

47 BOA. Cipher Desk. No. 56/36 (16 Sept. 1915); No. 56/243 (30 Sept. 1915); No. 56/3360 (11 Oct. 1915).

48 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 54/411; No. 54/450; No. 54-A/325.

49 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 61/18-20.

women would be allowed to marry Muslim men if they so wished.⁵⁰

During the deportation, some Armenians were seen to have converted to Islam not to be sent away. But the Ottoman Government decided not to accept such applications obviously aimed at circumventing deportation. A circular, dated 1 July 1915, sent to the provinces and sanjaqs in connection with this, warned that some of the deported Armenians were renouncing their religion singly or collectively in order to be allowed to stay, that such people should in no way be trusted, that they would continue with evil deeds under the guise of Islam, and ordered the officials to deport renegade Armenians as well.⁵¹ Similarly, a coded telegram sent to the prefecture of Karahisar-ı Sahip on 29 October 1915, reveals that even conversions of soldiers' wives were not acknowledged.⁵² But with the deportation drawing to its end, the state adopted a more favorable attitude and from the end of October 1915, applications for

50 This order has been sent to the provinces of Adana, Erzurum, Edirne, Aleppo. Hüdavendigâr, Sivas, Diyarbakır, Mamuretülaziz, Konya, Kastamonu and Trabzon as well as the prefectures of İzmit, Canik, Eskişehir. Karahisar-ı Sahib, Maraş, Urfa, Kayseri and Niğde (BOA. Cipher Desk, No. 63/142) and to the Ankara province (BOA. Cipher Desk, No. 64/162) on 30 May 1916.

51 BOA. Cipher Desk. No. 54/254; 20 July 1915. No. 54-A/49; No. 54-A/232; No. 55-A/83; No. 56/88.

52 BOA. Cipher Desk. No. 58/146.

conversion were accepted.⁵³ Indeed, a circular sent to all provinces and prefectures on 4 November 1915, said that the Armenians were allowed to stay in their original places, or those allowed to return after deportation were free to convert.⁵⁴

After this circular, the applications of those who converted in Menteşe were accepted,⁵⁵ and their properties were returned.⁵⁶ A coded telegram sent to Sivas on 9 March 1916, also made clear that the properties of the Armenians allowed to stay due to conversion or other reasons would not be liquidated.⁵⁷ As for the applications from deported Armenians, their conversion were accepted after their arrival in their respective destinations.⁵⁸ Some applications, from Armenians allowed to stay, were accepted on condition that they would not bar possible future deportation.⁵⁹ When some of the converts were later deported, it was decided not to write their new religion on their identity papers and issue them documents only showing their original domiciles.⁶⁰ The purpose

53 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 57/115.

54 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 57/281.

55 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 57/344.

56 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 58/201.

57 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 61/253; No. 61/225.

58 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 59/83.

59 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 60/58; 61/221.

60 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 61/71.

was to prevent the infiltration of terrorists back into the country under the guise of conversion.

The Ottoman Government also adopted measures concerning Armenians coming from abroad or going out of the country. Male Armenians with Ottoman citizenship aged between 17 and 55 were forbidden to leave the country.⁶¹ Armenians who were nationals of neutral countries were allowed to leave on condition that they would not return until the end of the war. As for Armenians wanting to enter the Ottoman realm, they were refused permission regardless of nationality.⁶² A tactic frequently used by the Armenians to avoid deportation was showing themselves as foreign nationals. Such claims have led to serious problems during the deportation. It is understood that the American ambassador intervened on behalf of some Armenians claiming to be U.S. nationals and requested the government to halt their deportation. The government was hard put to authenticate such claims. A telegram sent to the Mamuretulaziz province on 8 July 1915, instructed the officials to list any “real” American Armenians and give up deporting them.⁶³ The U.S. consuls in the area and representatives of other countries appear to have followed the

61 Age limit has been raised to 60 from 2 Aug. 1915 (Cipher Desk, No. 54-A/251).

62 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 53/334; No. 54-A/251; No. 54-A/309.

63 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 54/356.

deportation very closely. While the American consuls toured cities to investigate the fate of the Armenians,⁶⁴ some German officers were reported to have taken pictures of Armenians being moved by rail at Aleppo, Konya and Adana with the intention of using them to criticize the Ottoman Government. When it became clear that foreign officials were using rumors or fabricated news they gathered from Armenian civil servants to fuel a propaganda campaign against the Ottoman state abroad, the government sent coded instructions to the concerned provinces for the adoption of measures to prevent acts or incidents that the foreigners could exploit to embarrass the country.⁶⁵

Caring for the Deported Armenians

Before starting the deportation, the government sent letters to all the provinces, requesting the authorities to make necessary preparations and stock food to ensure that all needs of the passing deportee parties would be met.⁶⁶ Numerous orders and instructions were given to the Directorate for the Resettlement of Tribes and Refugees for the provi-

64 BOA. Cipher Desk, No. 54-A/291.

65 BOA. Cipher Desk, No. 55-A/217.

66 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 55/291; No. 55/341; No. 57/345; No. 57/351.

sion of supplies.⁶⁷ Director Şükrü Bey was personally charged with the task of identifying the needs and meeting them.⁶⁸ The documents show that 400,000 kuruş was sent to Konya to help meet needs of the transiting parties; 150,000 kuruş was sent to the sanjaq of İzmit, 200,000 to the sanjaq of Eskişehir, 300,000 to the Adana province, 300,000 to the Aleppo province, 100,000 to the Syria province, 300,000 to the Ankara province⁶⁹ and 500,000 to the Mosul province⁷⁰ for a total of 2,250,000 kuruş.⁷¹

While the provinces dipped into their own resources as well to supplement the state aid, there were occasional requests from the government for additional money.⁷² Meanwhile, some money sent from the United States for the Armenian deportees were distributed by American missionaries and consuls with the government's knowledge.⁷³ Beside this, documents show that

67 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 55/152; No. 55/291; No. 55/341; No. 55-A/17; No. 55-A/77. No. 55-A/135; No. 57/110.

68 BOA, Cipher Desk, NO. 55-A/16 (Telegram dated 31 August 1915).

69 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 55-A/17

70 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 53/305.

71 The 1915 budget of the Directorate for the Settlement of Nomadic Tribes and Refugees was 78.000.000 kuruş and its 1916 budget was 200,000.000 kuruş. The funds were spent for the deported Armenians, Greeks and Arabs as well as Muslim refugees coming in from territories invaded by the enemy. (BOS, BEO, No. 334063).

72 BOA, Cipher Desk. No. 53/305; No. 55-A/I 18.

73 BOA. Cipher Desk. No. 60/281.

Armenians living in the United States also collected some money and secretly delivered it to the deportees⁷⁴.

Apart from spending considerable sums of money for the deportation, the Ottoman Government either postponed or erased the debts the deported Armenians owed to the state or individual creditors. In a telegram he sent to the Maraş prefecture on 1 August 1915, Talat Bey called on the officials not to collect the debts of Armenians.⁷⁵ Another order sent to all provinces on 4 August 1915, requested the officials to postpone the farm tax and other taxes collected from Armenians subject to resettlement.⁷⁶ The government also assigned medical personnel to the deported parties to treat the sick.⁷⁷ Legal proceedings against the criminals and suspects were also postponed.⁷⁸

Property of Resettled Armenians

As noted above, with a circular published on 10 June 1915, the property of deported Armenians were put under state custody. The same circular stipulated that perishable goods, livestock, or production

74 BOA. Cipher Desk. No. 60/178.

75 BOA. Cipher Desk. No. 53/200.

76 BOA. Cipher Desk. No. 54-A/268.

77 BOA. Cipher Desk. No. 54-A/226.

78 In a letter sent by the Justice Ministry on 14 Dec 1915, the Prime Ministry was informed of the decision that the trial of the deportees would be conducted at places they were sent to, while those allowed to stay would be tried at their hometowns.

facilities which had to be kept operating would be auctioned by special commissions and the proceeds would be sent to the owners. It is understood that the Ottoman Government has shown utmost scrupulousness in the implementation of the instructions. Great care has been shown to prevent corruption. The properties were sold on market value by the Abandoned Property Commissions on behalf of the deported owners who were paid the proceeds.⁷⁹ On hearing rumors surrounding the auction, the government sent a coded telegram on 3 August 1915, to the prefectures, provinces and the Abandoned Property Commissions, banning state officials from buying property through these sales on the grounds that it will inevitably foster corruption.⁸⁰ But subsequently, the ban was lifted in some provinces on condition that the property was purchased with cash on its true value.⁸¹ The government has not withheld other measures designed to prevent every form of corruption. Indeed, a coded telegram sent on 29 July 1331/11 August 1915, to the chairman of the Abandoned Property Commission in Sivas, measures are requested to prevent corruption and embezzlement.⁸² Another telegram bearing the same date sent to all the provinces listed the measures and practices to

79 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 53/303.

80 BOA, Cipher Desk. No. 54-A/259.

81 BOA, Cipher Desk. No. 55/107.

82 BOA, Cipher Desk. No. 54-A/385.

be adopted.⁸³ This directive stipulated the following: (a) No suspicious people will be allowed to enter the evacuated areas; (b) in case some people were found out to have bought property below the normal rates, the sale would be annulled, and property will be auctioned again on true value so as to prevent the illegal acquisition of wealth; (c) deported Armenians will be allowed to take with them any property they wanted; (d) among the belongings which cannot be carried away, those that will deteriorate will be sold, but the durable ones will be protected in the name of their owners; (e) for the unmovable, care will be shown that such transactions as rent, transfer or mortgage will keep linked with the owner and transactions concluded in violation of these articles after the start of the deportation will be annulled; (f) no disputes will be allowed concerning the ownership of these properties; and (g) deported Armenians will be allowed to sell their property to anyone they wished except the foreigners.⁸⁴

The Ottoman officials have tried to implement these stipulations with utmost care. The artistic and com-

83 For the texts of the legislated laws concerning the property of deported Armenians, see "Provisional law on the property, debts and the settlement of the left assets of the people deported to other areas", *Takvim-i Vekayi*, 27 Sept. 1915. No. 2303. Yr. 7. and Y. H. Bayur. **Türk İnkılabı Tarihi** (History of Turkish Revolution) Ankara. Türk Tarih Kurumu. 1957. 111/3. pp. 45-46.

84 BOA, Cipher Desk. No. 54-A/388.

mercial institutions left behind by the deportees were turned over with their true value to the housing companies set up for the purpose.⁸⁵ The proceeds from the sold property were paid to the exiled owners through the Abandoned Property Commissions.⁸⁶

Repercussions Abroad and Relocation in Documents

Foreign observers at the areas of relocation have written that despite the difficulties entailed by the war, the Ottoman Government had carried out the resettlement in an efficient and orderly way. But some countries including Russia, Britain and the United States and the Western press in general have painted a distorted picture of the events. Although U.S. Consul Edward Nathan in Mersin reported that the transport of deportees proceeded smoothly in general, despite certain defects, and that the deportees were provided train tickets as mentioned before,⁸⁷ U.S. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau reported the events to his country in a completely different light. The American press used these reports to attack the Turks. The newspapers alleged that Morgenthau had

85 BOA. Cipher Desk. No. 61/31; No. 60/275; No. 60/277.

86 BOA. Cipher Desk. No. 57/348; No. 57/349; No. 57/350.

87 See: Interior Ministry, EUM. Dept. 2. No. 2D/13.

bribed the Ottoman Government to buy the freedom of some Armenians and sent them to America. The U.S. ambassador was also deified as the savior of British, Russian and French nationals in Istanbul. All these baseless reports, published in the newspapers, were reported to Istanbul by a Turkish citizen living in the United States at the time.⁸⁸ Beside the U.S. Ambassador,⁸⁹ the spread of the contentions that Armenians were massacred can be mainly attributed to Lord Bryce⁹⁰ and the German Protestant priest Johannes Lepsius.⁹¹ Furthermore, Arnold Toynbee,⁹² a member of the Wellington House, was another avid user of information supplied by Morgenthau. The writings of these people have become a chief source for the subsequent books written on the so-called Armenian “genocide”.

88 Interior Ministry. EUM. Dept 2, No. 2F/6.

89 See: Heath W. Lowry, **The Story Behind Ambassador Morgenthau's Story**, Istanbul, The Isis Press, 1990. In this work (pp. 69-77), Lowry says that Morgenthau's memoirs were published almost simultaneously in Europe and the United States, and reveals relations of Morgenthau with Lepsius and Bryce.

90 Great Britain, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Pallodon*, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, London, H.M.S.O., 1916.

91 **Le Rapport secret du Dr. Johannes Lepsius sur les massacres d'Arménie, Paris, Payot. 1918.**

92 **Armenian Atrocities : The Murder of a Nation, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1915; The Murderous Tyranny of the Turks, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1917.**

Similarly, contentions such as the massacre of one million Armenians, contained in the reports of the British consuls in Iran, inflamed the British Parliament, which protested the Ottoman Government. Furthermore, in a **Blue Book** published in Britain over the deportation, it was claimed that a third of 1.8 million Armenians said to be living in Turkey had been murdered.⁹³ Despite these biased articles, a part of the Western press conceded that the incidents were purposefully distorted. In a newspaper published in Stockholm, an article entitled “Massacres in Ottoman Provinces where Armenians Live Peacefully”, such claims were brushed off as ludicrous and reasons for their fabrication were explained.⁹⁴

The Ottoman Government has denied British allegations with a statement signed by the Foreign Ministry Undersecretary issued on 4 January 1917.⁹⁵ The statement argued that the Armenian population hardly reached a million in the Ottoman state, and the total had in fact decreased through successive emigrations before the outbreak of the war. The same document also referred to an article in **The Times**, in which Germans, too, were held responsible for the massacre of Armenians.⁹⁶

93 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2. File 1. Document 23.

94 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2. No. 2/105.

95 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2. No. 2D/17.

96 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 59/19.

From then until our day, a lot has been written in the West and the United States on deportation. But none were based on genuine documents. Hiding behind fake documents, the Armenians succeeded in deceiving the world for a long time. The tales of Armenian massacre, starting at first with a figure of 300,000 to eventually reach 3 million, have all been based on books that keep referring to each other. But as will be seen from this chapter (the extensive version of which appears in my latest book in Turkish entitled **The Armenian Resettlement and Facts: 1914-1918**) based on secret documents of deportation kept by the Cipher Office and General Security Directorate (Police), the Ottoman Government officials have repeatedly stressed that the deportation, launched as a necessity dictated by national security, was never aimed to annihilate the Armenians. On the contrary, the state has shouldered heavy financial burdens to provide security and rations for the deportees. Sure of its conduct, the government has even sought the investigation of deportation and its background, in hopes of silencing the Western allegations of massacre. On 13 February 1919, it communicated notes to the Governments of Sweden, Holland, Spain and Denmark, calling on them to contribute two independent jurists to the proposed commission.⁹⁷ In their reply sent on 6 May 1919,

97 Foreign Ministry. Truce. No. 43/17.

these states turned down the request.⁹⁸ During deportation and resettlement that lasted about a year and a half from May of 1915 to the October of 1916, the state could largely protect the lives and property of the deportees through directives sent from the center, or measures taken locally, despite the difficult conditions of the time and an ongoing war. It has shouldered administrative, military and financial burdens as if a new front had been opened. In contrast to what was being done, Russia drove about one million Muslim refugees to the Ottoman territory in hunger and misery at about the same time. Hence, the Ottoman Government had to settle and feed this flood of Muslim refugees, too.

As will be seen from the new documents to be cited below, the transfer of Armenians to their new settlements, the first planned population movement of the century was conducted in great discipline. The number of Armenians in the places they left and in those they arrived were constantly monitored so as not to allow the resettled Armenians to concentrate in one place and disperse them to different towns and villages. The table below was compiled from the documents published in this book concerning the deported Armenians and those allowed to remain behind.⁹⁹

98 Foreign Ministry. Truce, No. 43/17.

99 Meanwhile. Armenians in Kastamonu, Balıkesir, Antalya. Istanbul and Urfa. the Protestant and Catholic Armenians as well as the sick, teachers, orphans and solitary women have not been deported.

Provinces and prefectures	Deported	Remaining
Adana ¹⁰⁰	14,000	15-16,000
Ankara (Center) ¹⁰¹	21,236	733
Kalacık ¹⁰²	257	-
Keskin	1,169	-
Haymana ¹⁰³	60	-
Nallıhan	479	-
Sungurlu	576	-
Aydın ¹⁰⁴	250	-
İzmir ¹⁰⁵	256	-
Dört Yol ¹⁰⁶	9,000	-
Eskişehir ¹⁰⁷	7,000	-
Aleppo ¹⁰⁸	26,064	-
İzmit ¹⁰⁹	58,000	-
Karahisar-ı Sahip ¹¹⁰	5,769	2,222
Kayseri ¹¹¹	45,036	4,911
Mamuretülaziz ¹¹²	51,000	4,000
Sivas ¹¹³	136,084	6,055

100 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/77.

101 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/66.

102 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/79.

103 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/66.

104 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/250.

105 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 69/260.

106 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/89.

107 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/72.

108 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/76.

109 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/67.

110 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/73.

111 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/75.

112 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/70.

113 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/84.

Erzurum ¹¹⁴	5,500	–
Diyarbakır ¹¹⁵	20,000	–
Trabzon ¹¹⁶	3,400	–
Yozgat ¹¹⁷	10,916	–
Kütahya ¹¹⁸	1,400	–
Birecik ¹¹⁹	1,200	–
Konya ¹²⁰	1,990	–
Kırşehir ¹²¹	747	–
Giresun ¹²²	328	–
Perşembe	390	–
Ulubey	30	
Sürmene	290	
Tirebolu	45	

114 Interior Ministry, Cipher Desk. No. 54/9; Interior Ministry, Cipher Desk, No. 54/162 Both documents report that of the deported Armenians, a 500-strong party had been massacred by Kurds between Erzurum and Erzincan, The other document says that the Armenians sent from the Dersim area were killed to a man by the Dersim bandits. Since it is now known how many deportees were in these parties, a putative figure of 5.000 has been accepted,

115 The documents do not clarify how many Armenians were deported from Diyarbakır. But since other documents note that a total of 120,000 deportees, including those who came from other places, were sent on, it is estimated that 20,000 Armenians were sent from Diyarbakır itself,

116 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/41.

117 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/66.

118 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/93.

119 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/101.

120 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 69/34.

121 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/66.

122 Figures for Giresun, Perşembe, Ulubey, Sürmene, Tirebolu, Ordu and Görele were supplied in the same document. Interior Ministry. EUM. Dept. 2. No. 68/41.

Ordu	36	
Görece	250.	
Maraş ¹²³	–	8,845
Total	422,758	42,766

In a telegram, dated 5 October 1331/18 October 1915, sent from Aleppo by Şükrü Bey, director of the Office for the Resettlement of Tribes and Refugees, it was noted that the number of Armenians sent to Aleppo was estimated to be 100,000.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, about 120,000 Armenians had been assembled in Diyarbakır by 5 September 1331/18 September 1915, to be sent to Mosul and Aleppo, while 136,084 had assembled at Cizre by 15 September 1331/28 September 1915.¹²⁵ The documents show that some of the people from these groups were resettled at the following areas:¹²⁶

Province of Syria	37,702
Menc-Bab-Maarra prefectures	5,700
Urfa-Zor-Mosul	29,957
Kerek and Havran	65,147
Hama-Homs	12,000
Kuneytra-Baalbek-Tebek and Doma	492
Rakka and Obik	25,000

123 Interior Ministry, Cipher Desk. No. 63 /110.

124 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/80.

125 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2. No. 68/71; Dept. 2, No. 68/84.

126 Interior Ministry. EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/80; No. 69/5-6-7-8-9.

Zor	6,120
Aleppo	30,000
Total	212,118

In a telegram sent from Nizip on 21 October 1915/3 November 1915, Şükrü Bey reported that the transfer was proceeding smoothly.¹²⁷

Of the people included in resettlement but shown as remaining behind in the above list, those left in Adana were subsequently moved to areas of resettlement.¹²⁸ The number of the Armenians resettled in the south, thus, totaled 438,758 while those reaching the resettlement area numbered 382,148. So, there is a difference of 56,610 between those who set out and those who made it to their new homes.

This difference stems from the following events according to documents: 500 people were killed between Erzurum and Erzincan, 2,000 more were killed at Meskene between Urfa and Aleppo, and a further 2,000 were killed by bandits and Arab tribes near Mardin. Although no firm figures are available, it is estimated that a similar number, that is, about 5,000 or a little more, were killed in the Dersim area by bandits attacking groups of transiting deportees.¹²⁹ In the light

127 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/101.

128 Although the number of deportees arriving at Aleppo was reported to be “around” 100,000 (Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, No. 68/80), the number has been taken as 100,000.

129 See: fn. 29-32.

of these data, it is estimated that about 9-10,000 Armenians were killed during their deportation. It is also understood from the documents that some others starved to death on the road.¹³⁰ Apart from these, another 25-30,000 deported are believed to have succumbed to such diseases as typhoid or dysentery,¹³¹ raising the number of casualties to some 50,000. As for the rest, some are believed to be those put on the road but later settled at the city they reached when the deportation was suspended. For instance, on 26 April 1916, instructions were cabled to the province of Konya that the Armenians on the roads within the provincial borders should not be sent on, but settled within the province.¹³² Meanwhile, it is believed that some Armenians marked for deportation had been smuggled out of the country and taken to Russia, Western Europe and the United States. In the documents there are records that about 50,000 of the Armenians under arms had defected to the Russian Army and 50,000 others were trained in the U.S. Army for the past three or four years to fight the Turks. A letter sent by an Armenian living in the United States to Murad Muradyan, a lawyer in Mamuretulaziz, contains such informa-

130 Interior Ministry, Cipher Desk, No. 57/110.

131 Interior Ministry, EUM. Dept. 2, No. 68/81; see also Interior Ministry, Cipher Desk, No. 57/51; No. 57/71.

132 Interior Ministry, Cipher Desk. No. 63/119.

tion.¹³³ The letter explicitly states that some Armenians had been spirited into Russia and the United States, and about 50,000 American-trained soldiers were about to leave for the Caucasus. All these documents make clear that large numbers of Ottoman Armenians were dispersed to many countries, headed by the United States and Russia, before and during the war. For instance, in a letter he sent to General Security Directorate on 19 January 1915, Artin Hotomyan, an Armenian on a trading visit to the United States, wrote that thousands of Armenians were being smuggled into America, and that they were living in hunger and misery.¹³⁴ The same letter informed the officials that an Istanbul-based network had been smuggling the Armenians in the Ottoman state into the United States in return for material gain. One member of the gang was identified as Aramoyis from Kayseri, the son of Karabet, a shoemaker. This man was hiding the clothes of deserting Armenian soldiers, and were helping them escape to America or other countries in return for five or ten lira, the informer wrote. At the end, Hotomyan wrote that the reason he supplied this information was not connected with any feeling of

133 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2. No. 2F/14.

134 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2. No. 2F/94.

grudge or personal hatred, and asked it to be accepted as a humanitarian duty and a service to the country.

Such information show that there is no great discrepancy between the number of Armenians deported from Asian and European provinces of the domain, and the number of those who reached their destinations, and that there had been no deliberate and systematic murders on the road as alleged. Meanwhile, since the number of deported Armenians were about half a million, the total Armenian population of the Ottoman state appears to be somewhere between 600,000 and 800,000, including Catholic and Protestant Armenians, the Armenian community of Istanbul that was likewise exempted from deportation, and finally the Armenians living in provinces partly or fully occupied by the Russian Army, like Erzurum, Van and Kars. In fact, in a 1918 report he sent to Monsieur Gout, the representative of the French Foreign Ministry, Armenian Delegation Chief Boghos Nubar Paşa gave the breakdown of Armenians dispersed to various areas after the deportation as follows:

Caucasus	250,000
Iran	40,000
Syria- Palestine	80,000
Mosul-Baghdad	20,000

The Armenian representative argued that the number of the deportees was not confined to this total of 390,000, but actually ran into 600-700,000 that he said, excluded the exiles

dispersed to here and there in the deserts.¹³⁵ But it is clear from the figures supplied by Boghos Nubar Paşa, that 290,000 were those who left Ottoman territory without being exiled -since none were sent to Caucasia or Iran. So, if one subtracts 290,000 from the “600–700,000” deportee number given by the Armenian representative, then one arrives at the 400,000-plus total we have given, using authentic data taken from the government or police archives of the time. This also proves that the bulk of the deportees had safely reached their destinations, leaving no support for the claims of genocide. Indeed, following a meeting with Zenop Bezjian, the representative of Protestant Armenians, U.S. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, has noted in his diary, his deep surprise over Bezjian’s remarks. In the following passage, Morgenthau describes his conversation with the Armenian dignitary:

“Zenop Bezjian, Vekil (Representative) of Armenian Protestants, called. Schmavonian introduced him; he was his schoolmate. He told me a great deal about conditions (in the interior). I was surprised to hear him report that Armenians at Zor were fairly well satisfied; that they have already settled down

135 Bilâl Şimşir, **Les Deport es de Malte et les allegations armniennes**, Ankara, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, 1998. p. 49 (from: Archives des Affaires Etrangères de France. Serie Levant. 1918-1928. Sous Serie Armenie, Vol. 2. folio 47).

to business and are earning their livings; those were the first ones that were sent away and seem to have gotten there without being massacred. He gave me a list where the various camps are and he thinks that over one half million have been displaced. He was most solicitous that they should be helped before winter sets in".¹³⁶

The passage above is illustrative in that it shows how the ambassador was taken aback on learning the contentment of the Armenians from the mouth of another Armenian.

As explained above, the decision on deportation had been taken after the Armenians, seeing the time as ripe for breathing life to the dream of an independent Armenia, stabbed their state in the back when it was occupied with the war. The documents reveal how the Russians deceived and instigated the Armenians.¹³⁷ Taken in by the Russian promises that the territories captured in war would be given to them and their independence would be recognized, Armenians have set up several revolutionary associations.¹³⁸ A verse written by the son of an Armenian named Murad shows the intentions of the Armeni-

136 Lowry. op. **cat.**, pp. 50-51.

137 BOA. Cipher Desk. No. 45/115 (With the telegram dated 23 Sept. 1916. the provinces of Van. Bitlis, Mamuretulaziz, Adana, Diyarbakir and Sivas were given instructions in this respect).

138 BOA. BEO. No. 328331; No. 337081; BOA. Cipher Desk, No. 56/382.

ans without any room for doubt.¹³⁹ Having started their acts of terrorism before the deportation, they were seen to keep them up during the transit of deportees as well. The fact that they have collaborated with the enemy and engaged in massacres against the Muslim population, not only at the border areas, but also deep inside were borne out by Turkish as well as Russian documents.¹⁴⁰ There are documents showing that the Armenian atrocities continued even after the war. One example what were in store for the Muslims was displayed in 1920, when a 1200-strong unit entered Nakhechevan under the command of an Armenian named Hanov.¹⁴¹ It is also clear from the cables dated 18 and 22 February 1920 and 7 March 1921 sent by Miimtaz Bey, the vice-governor of the Mamuretulaziz province, the Armenians who came under French protection were dreaming of an independent Armenia stretching from the Amanos Mountains to Adana.¹⁴²

In the end, the Ottoman Government decided on publishing the documents of 'Armenian atrocities' in a book, and sent instructions to all provinces for the

139 Interior Ministry, EUM, Dept. 2, Folder 1, doc. 45/2.

140 BOA, Cipher Desk. No. 61/50; No. 62/24; No. 63/175; No. 64/92; No. 64/163; No. 64/194; No. 66/51; No. 66/56; No. 66/192; BOA, BEO, No. 343464.

141 Letter from the Interior Ministry sent to the Prime Ministry on 1 Febr. 1920 (BOA, BEO, No. 341351).

142 Interior Ministry, EUM, No. 2 F/3; Interior Ministry, EUM. File-2 F/5.

collection and dispatch of such documents describing the Armenian acts of cruelty and the pictures of captured arms and bandits.¹⁴³ In the light of these documents, The Objectives and Revolutionary Activities of Armenian Committees Before and After the Proclamation of Constitutional Monarchy was published.¹⁴⁴

Armenians after Resettlement

During its course, there were times when the deportation was halted due to congestion or climatic reasons. With instructions sent to the provinces after 12 November 1331/25 November 1915, the officials were informed that deportation was provisionally stopped because of winter.¹⁴⁵ On 21 February 1916, all provinces were ordered to stop sending off deportees. But it was clarified that the order did not cover those engaged in anti-government activities, who would be immediately rounded up and sent to the sanjaq of Zor.¹⁴⁶ But just twenty days later, the Ottoman Government issued another general order on 2 March 1332/15 March 1916, announced that relocation was

143 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 62/21 (App. LX).

144 Istanbul, Matbaa-i Orhaniye. 1332 (1916).

145 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 57/273; No. 58/124; No. 59/123; No. 60/190.

146 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 61 /72.

terminated “due to administrative and military reasons”, and the provinces were told not to send away Armenians on any account.¹⁴⁷

Meanwhile, because the Armenian population was largely sent to Syria and nearby provinces, the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul was abolished and moved to Jerusalem on 28 July 1332/10 August 1916. In a parallel move, Sis and Akdamar chapters were combined and likewise transferred to Jerusalem.¹⁴⁸ Sahak Efendi, the former Catholicos of Sis, was appointed as the head of the new patriarchate.¹⁴⁹

The Decree for Return

After the end of World War I, the Ottoman Government issued a decree, announcing that the deported Armenians were free to return. In a letter to the Prime Minister's Office dated 22 December 1334/4 January 1919, Interior Minister Mustafa Paşa informed that the necessary instructions were sent and preparations were made to arrange the transport of Armenian deportees who wished to return

147 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 62/21 (App. LX).

148 For the new regulations set for Armenian Patriarchate in 1916, see Bayur, **Türk inkılabı Tarihi** (History of the Turkish Revolution), III/3, p. 57-59.

149 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 66/202; No. 66/220; No. 63/136.

to their original places.¹⁵⁰ According to the government decree for return dated 18 December 1334/31 December 1918, (a) only those who wished to return would be sent, and no others would be touched; (b) necessary measures would be taken to ensure that those repatriated would not suffer on the roads and on their return would find shelter and livelihood; to prevent any surprises, returning deportees would be sent only after the officials of the place of return were contacted and necessary measures were completed; (c) those returning under these terms would be given back their homes and land; (d) any refugees settled in the homes of returning deportees would be evicted; (e) not to leave anyone without shelter, several families would be provisionally accommodated together if necessary; (f) buildings like churches or schools and their revenue-bringing assets would be returned to the community; (g) if so wished, the orphaned children would be given to foster parents or the community to be looked after; (h) those who had converted would be able to return to their former religion if they wished; (i) of the women converts, those married to Muslim men would be free to take up their former religion; if they return to their original faith, the wedlock with their husbands would automatically dissolve; matters pertaining

150 BOA, BEO, No. 341055. This letter from the Interior Ministry has been transferred by the Prime Minister's Office to the Justice Ministry.

to those who do not want to return to their original faith or part with their husbands would be settled by courts; (j) untouched Armenian property would be returned to their owners, while the return of the property turned over to the Treasury would be subject to the approval of the local estate officials; detailed guidelines would be published for such transactions; (k) the real estate sold to (Muslim) refugees would be handed back to the returnees; article 4 will be strictly implemented in this respect; (l) if the refugees had done repairs or extensions to the houses and shops in their possession to be returned to their former owners, officials would see to it that rights of both sides would be safeguarded; (m) the cost of transport and food for the needy returnees would be met from the War Ministry funds; (n) the Government would be told how many people were sent back, and with immediate effect would be sent regular reports on the 15th and the end of each month, showing the number and destinations of returnees sent back; (o) the Armenians who left the Ottoman country by themselves would not be allowed to return until further notice. The articles of the above decree also applied to the returning Greek refugees.

Conclusions

One can conclude that the deportation of the Armenians who betrayed the Ottoman armies on the Caucasus front in World War I and assisted the Russian occupation of the Ottoman provinces of Van, Kars and Erzurum should be seen as legitimate self-defence to which every nation is entitled. The armed terrorism carried out by secret societies and armed bands of independence-seeking Armenians instigated by great powers such as Russia, Britain, France and Germany, bent on partitioning the Ottoman state, has resulted in the massacre of large numbers of defenceless Turks. The massacres carried out in the Kars, Van, İzmit, Erzurum, Bitlis and other Ottoman provinces assumed dimensions, which caused even the commanders of the Russian occupation forces to revolt.¹⁵¹ Indeed, documents expose that in Kars and Ardahan alone, about 30,000 Muslims were murdered by the Armenians and Russians,¹⁵² with the number going up to several hundred thousand when calculated for all Ottoman provinces.

As a precaution, the Ottoman state had to recourse to forced resettlement, starting with Armenians in the areas closest to the theatre of war. When the Ar-

151 Foreign Ministry, Great War, Folder 173/5.

152 Foreign Ministry, Great War, Folder 122/4; Folder 122/6.

menian gangs kept up their atrocities and continued to supply information to the foreigners detrimental to the security interests of the country, the scope of the deportations was expanded to include all other Armenians, except the populations of İzmir and İstanbul, as well as the Protestants, Catholics, orphans, solitary women and the sick. The Armenians known to be loyal to the state were also excluded.

The deportation, of course, was painful. Displacing thousands of people suddenly and resettling them is not an easy task. Yet, advance planning of the routes and staging areas, wide use of railway stations as dispatch centers, the use of trains to transport the bulk of deportees, distribution of rations by the state, assignment of medical personnel and gendarmes to the departing parties, have turned the deportation into one of the most orderly population movement of the past century. Of course, during the deportation, moving groups occasionally came under attack from vengeful people and about 9-10,000 Armenians were massacred.

Besides, there had been deaths due to contagious diseases, which is normal in such massive population movements as seen during the immigration of European Turks to Anatolia. No doubt, none of these were things desired by those who gave the order for deportation. Indeed, the government continuously

took measures against corruption, and those seen to have engaged in immoral behaviour were punished. With the end of the war, the decree permitting the return of deportees was issued.¹⁵³ Those who converted to avoid deportation were allowed to return to their original faith. Orphaned Armenian children kept by Muslim families were turned over to a commission set up by the Armenians;¹⁵⁴ the returnees received state rations for a while,¹⁵⁵ committees were set up to investigate complaints and identify those who have mistreated the Armenians,¹⁵⁶ their property were returned to those who came back,¹⁵⁷ travel expenses of the returnees were met,¹⁵⁸ they were exempted from certain taxes,¹⁵⁹ their belongings kept safe at public offices were returned,¹⁶⁰ and commissions were set up to look into matters concerning the return of property.

All these show, once again, that the Ottoman Government had no intention to subject the Armenians to genocide, that it resorted to deportation as a precaution for its security and implemented it only

153 Foreign Ministry, Truce, No. 43/34.

154 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 96/248.

155 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 96/279.

156 BOA, Cabinet Letters, No. 213/60.

157 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 99/35.

158 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 95/124.

159 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 95/124. Interior Ministry, Political Div.. No. 53/2.

160 BOA, Cipher Desk, No. 96/230.

during the war, and that it allowed the Armenians to return after its end. In fact, large numbers of Armenians accompanied Russian, British and French forces that occupied Turkey at the end of the war, and again large numbers of Armenians left Turkey after the occupation forces withdrew. The decisions and measures mentioned above are not the ones that a state aiming at genocide would normally take. Secret documents, kept in the archives of the Cipher Office and Directorate of General Security attached to the Interior Ministry, do not contain even a single article that might be regarded as suggesting an intention of massacre or genocide. Documents show that deportation was closely monitored and photographed by many foreign observers and diplomats, particularly the U.S. consuls. Strangely, however, in Europe and in the United States, deportation has been presented to the public as genocide against the Armenians, with the claim largely based on the reports of the U.S. ambassador in Istanbul and some Western journalists. This hostile attitude may be attributed to the feeling of frustration when the Ottoman Government launched deportation as a means of disrupting the plans for the partition of the country.

Some historians of the countries that accuse Turkey of genocide have been studying the Ottoman archives for years. Researches of foreign scholars

have been published in their respective countries and have made important contributions to the understanding of history. The archive documents made available to historians were referred to as first-hand sources in the books they published. That makes it difficult to understand how the Western critics can cast doubt on the authenticity of the documents concerning the Armenians in the Ottoman archives to which over 6,000 foreign scholars have attached great importance. It is surprising and saddening to see that books published by Turkish researchers are undermined with the same political bias that prevailed in 1915. I think it will be futile to propose a comprehensive joint research by American, European and Turkish scholars, extending from the outbreak of the first Armenian rebellions, to the end of the deportation; from the sources of Armenian arms, to the charges of genocide, with unrestricted access to the Ottoman, Russian, German, British, French and American archives, as it will be rejected just like the Ottoman proposal in 1919 for the appointment of a neutral commission to investigate the allegations. How else the blood-baths carried out by the French in Algeria, by the British in India and Africa, by the United States against the so-called “Indian” population, by Germans against the Jews, by Russia also against the Jews and later the Turks can be erased from public memories and guilty consciences?

