

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Struggling for a Constitutional Regime:

Armenian-Young Turk Relations in the Era of Abdulhamid II, 1895 -1909

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in History

by

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2012

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Although scholars have devoted substantial attention to Armenian revolutionary movements, the treatment of the subject of relations between various Armenian organizations and the Young Turks and their leaders, both individually or through various institutions, have received tangential consideration at best. This is largely due to the paucity of original sources for the second half of the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II given that most Ottoman, Armenian Revolutionary Federation's (ARF, also referred to as Tashnagtsutyun) as well as the Social Democratic Hinchagyan Party's archives were very hard, if not impossible, to access. These hardships were partially resolved when the Ottoman Archives were opened to the academic public in 2005, while ARF archives became accessible through special permission only. There still remains the Archives of the Armenian Patriarchates of Constantinople and Jerusalem, as well as the archives of the Social Democratic Hinchagyan Party that remain closed to the general public.

Two seminal studies by a leading Turkish historian, Şükrü Hanioglu, provided the first careful assessments regarding the Young Turks, albeit from the Turkish perspective, which relied heavily on Ottoman archival materials.¹ Yet, while both studies have added to our knowledge of what transpired at the time, they skirted much of the critical Armenian contributions that assisted the Young Turks to attain power. Hence, It is the overall purpose of this dissertation to address precisely the significant relationships between various Armenian leaders, political parties, and revolutionary movements with their Ottoman counterparts to clarify what actually occurred on the ground and to capture the reasons as to why these relations did occur. This study aims to shed light on some of the reasons that motivated Armenians and Ottomans alike to collaborate and, to the degree that it may be possible to ascertain, to identify causes for their failures.

The dissertation opens with an analysis of long-promised reform efforts, ostensibly to benefit Armenian inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire after the Treaty of Berlin (1878), and the skillful manipulations by Sultan Abdulhamid II to dilute them. An effort is made to assess carefully the palace's reliance on the Kurdish *Hamidiye* Regiments, which were used to sabotage reforms, and to understand better Constantinople's political intrigues.² Because it was during this process that the Armenian *Millet*³ [nation]—hitherto known as

¹ Şükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, New York, (London: Oxford University Press, 1995); Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparations for a Revolution: Young Turks 1902-1908*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2001).

² *Hamidiye Hafif Suvari Alaylari* in Ottoman Turkish (Hamidiye Light Cavalry Regiments), established by Sultan Abdulhamid II in 1891.

³ Millet, literally meaning nation or community. The Ottoman minorities were ruled according to a Millet System, which allowed religious leaders some leverage in governing the internal affairs of their respective communities, by reporting directly to the *Evkaf* [Ottoman Turkish for Department of Religious Affairs]. For more information regarding the Millet System in the Ottoman Empire See: Kemal H. Karpat,

the *Millet-i Sadika* (Loyal Millet)—was transformed into a *Millet-i Asiya* (Rebel Millet), the introduction examines how revolutionary agitations led to profound socio-political schisms.

Much of this rich history is described and analyzed in the six chapters that follow. In Chapter One, the history from the “May Reform Project of 1895” to Abdulhamid II’s abdication in 1909 is thoroughly discussed, placing the agitations for reforms within the overall tensions that affected the Ottoman Empire. In fact, as the Armenian Millet faced its conundrum at a time when Turks themselves wished to establish a constitutional monarchy to unite the empire and its peoples, the roles played by Armenian subjects were especially important. In turn, this vital position of instituting a constitutional regime attracted Armenian revolutionary movements to Young Turk leaders, who promised that their own revolution against the sultan would open a new era in Ottoman history. The Young Turks assured their European critics that their objective was to restore the 1876 Constitution, which was promulgated at the same time Abdulhamid II acceded the throne, but which was suspended as a result of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78. Several maintained that they were following in the footsteps of the reformist Midhat Pasha and his disciples, who became better known as the *Yeni Osmanlılar* (New Ottomans. Also known as Young Ottomans).

“Millets and Nationality: The Roots of the Incongruity of Nation and State in the Post-Ottoman Era,” in Benjamin Braude & Bernard Lewis, Eds., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publications, 1982), , 2 vols., vol. 1, 141-169; See also Kevork Bardakjian, “The Rise of the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople,” *Christians and Jews*, vol. 1, 89-100.

Despite the Young Turks initial enthusiasm to establish cordial relations with their Armenian revolutionary counterparts, strong elements of suspicions and mistrust were present. These important differences are discussed and analyzed in Chapter Two. By December 1907, Armenian and Young Turk forces managed to overcome political hurdles to form a united front, whose declared goal was to topple Abdulhamid II. How the two sides tried to overcome their mutual reservations and doubts, which colored future ties, are assessed in Chapter Three. Inasmuch as one of the chief disputes between Armenian revolutionary and Young Turk leaders were the conditions of the Armenian inhabited provinces, Chapter Four provides an examination of the situation in the eastern provinces and how the Armenian revolutionary movement was able (or at least tried very hard) to revolutionize the Kurdish and Turkish populations there, in accordance with the directives of the first anti-Hamidian conference held in Paris in 1902.

Along the same lines, the study further tackles the issue of Armenian-Macedonian relations in Chapter Five, which were blessed, and to a certain degree manipulated, by the fledgling state of Bulgaria for its own political and national gains. In fact, one could naturally speak about a Bulgarian connection vis-à-vis this cooperation, which is seldom addressed in scholarly sources.

Finally, Chapter Six brings forth a reevaluation of the reasons behind the April 1909 Adana Massacres and illustrates why the ARF continued to cooperate with the Young Turks despite the slaughters, if for no other reason than to give the fledgling constitutional-revolutionary movement an opportunity to succeed.

The dissertation closes with an assessment of Armenian-Young Turk relations. Despite outrageous developments, the CUP (Committee of Union and Progress, Ittihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti) leadership covered up the vagaries of bewildered officials, confused by the desire to investigate wrongdoings, while seeking Armenian political assistance against the Sublime Porte.

Both at the official as well as the popular levels, Armenian ties with Ottoman leaders disintegrated, which planted the seeds for fresh animosities. By 1913, the gap that separated the two nations enlarged, and while few anticipated future catastrophes, revealing signs were present that tensions simmered. Regrettably, hardly anyone exercised the foresight to prevent new tragedies.

Transliteration, Spelling, and Capitalization

The Armenian language represents certain difficulties when transliterated into the Latin alphabet. Aside from the fact that there are two distinct Armenian dialects—Western and Eastern—that utilize different orthographies and are acknowledged as such by the Library of Congress transliteration rules regarding Armenian, I devised a special transliteration format, which makes reading Armenian words somewhat easier for the non-Armenian reader.

Since the change in Eastern Armenian orthography happened during Soviet times (starting in the 1930s) and it is utilized today in the Republic of Armenia but not in other Eastern Armenian speaking communities such as in Iran, thus, Eastern Armenian orthography pertaining to the Republic of Armenia is used only for names of authors as well as their books and essays in journals. Names of authors of Eastern Armenian

extraction before the Soviet era are also transliterated in Eastern Armenian phonetic values. However, the Armenian Family name ending «եան» is, in this case, transliterated as “**ian**” rather than “**yan**”: Thus **Varandian, Rostom [Stepan Zorian], Aknuni [Khachatur Malumian]**.

All other Armenian historical figures, authors, and sources are presented in the simplified Western Armenian orthography that I utilize. Moreover, the usage of the Armenian compound vowel «ԻԻ, իւ» in Western Armenian endings «**ուրիւն**» and «**ուրեան**» etc., instead of the usual “**utiwn,**” and “**utian,**” are transliterated as “**utyun**” and “**utyau.**” Hence, **gusagtsutyun** [political party] and not **gusagtsutiwn,** and **gusagtsutyau,** and not **gusagtsutian, Hnchagyan** and not **Hnchagian.** The primary reason for this is to preserve the “**ian**” ending for person’s names, with the “**yan**” ending reserved for other grammatical forms. The same method is utilized to make the readability of names easier in transcribing Armenian names such as **Յարուրիւն,** which is transliterated as **Harutyun** rather than **Harutiwn** or **Harutiun.**

Finally, the Armenian **և** (**and**) is translated throughout the narrative as **yev** rather than **ew.** Also, names of publications such as **Դրօշակ** [Banner, Flag] is transliterated as **Troshag** rather than **Droshak** and **Hnchag** rather than **Hnchak.**

In the case of Ottoman and Modern Turkish, historical figures’ names are presented in their usual Latinized form. Thus **Abdulhamid** and not **Abdülhamit, Jevdet** and not **Cevdet.** However, Turkish authors and their works are presented according to the Library

of congress' rules regarding Modern Turkish. Thus **Hanioğlu** and not **Hanioglu**.

Moreover, Ottoman honorific titles such as pasha, bey, effendi are capitalized when they are accompanied with proper names, such as Midhat Pasha, Ismail Kemal Bey. Otherwise, they are written in lower case; **pasha, bey, effendi**.

Some Persian words are presented as they appear in English publications: Thus, *Majles* (Parliament), *anjomans* (revolutionary societies or committees), *bast* (demonstration) and *Majles-e Milli* (National Assembly).

Organization names are capitalized in cases such as **ARF Geneva Center, London Hnchag Headquarter** while **center** and **headquarter** are used when not accompanied with the full organizational name.

Finally, Publication names (newspapers, journals) are italicized only in the first instance they appear in the text of the narrative in order not to overload the thesis with too many italicized words.

The dissertation of Garabet K Moundjian is approved.

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2012

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INTRODUCTION

FROM MİLLET-İ SADİKA TO MİLLET-İ ASIYA, 1878-1895

The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed the eruption and the subsequent unfolding of three distinct revolutions within three bordering empires in the Middle East and the Caucasus. While the first two turned out to be bloody events that aimed at instituting constitutional monarchies in place of entrenched and strongly patrimonial monarchies in Russia and Iran and were able to achieve their aims initially, they were ultimately crushed by the repressive regimes of their respective states, the third, which targeted the despotic rule of Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II in June 1908, was successful in reintroducing the constitutional regime that the sultan had suspended in March 1878 as a result of the Russo-Ottoman war of 1876-1878.¹ The first two revolutions left profound impacts on the third, as six centuries of authority crumbled over a short period of time. All three revolutions were manifestations of popular unrest against the tyrannical rule of despots. Ironically, Armenian participation was a common denominator in all three. In fact, such involvement was only possible because the historical Armenian homeland was painstakingly but carefully divided among the three aforementioned empires.

¹ For the latest research and an in-depth analysis regarding the Russian, Iranian, and the Ottoman constitutional revolutions, see Nader Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the ottoman Empire and Iran*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). See also Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan: The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 38. Explaining the impact that the events at St. Petersburg had on the population in the Caucasus the author writes: “Soon afterward, the Baku proletariat moved again to action, this time by the news of the massacre of the St. Petersburg workers on ‘Bloody Sunday,’ January 9, 1905. The date marked the beginning of the Russian Revolution, which was to shake tsardom to its very foundations, and the Russian despotism would never recover from the damages it suffered in the years 1905-1907.” See also Hourii Berberian, *Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001). The information regarding the benign character of the Ottoman Constitutional Revolution, as compared to its Russian and Iranian counterparts, is detailed in Sükrü Hanioglu, *Preparations for a Revolution*, 277-278.

The Russian defeat in the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War precipitated a socialist uprising, for which revolutionary factions were agitating for some time. In the event, the revolution cleared the way for the election of a Russian legislature, the *Duma*, which was mandated to balance the autocratic rule of the Tsar. On the other hand, the popular upheaval left a significant impact, including in the Caucasus region, where Iranian migrant workers absorbed epochal lessons in how to topple a tyrannical regime. For one observer,

The Russian revolution reached Iran through these workers who returned to the country with revolutionary ideas, printed propaganda, and arms. In addition, the influence of the Russian Revolution extended into Iran through the educational contacts of Iranian students in Russian universities, business contacts between Iranian and Russian merchants, and the numerous Caucasian activists who fled persecution by the Russian government.²

After the unrest, Russian authorities reacted forcefully against revolutionary elements. Moscow ruled the Caucasus with an iron fist for almost a decade.

Simultaneously, the year 1905 witnessed clashes between the Armenian and Tatar (Azeri) populations in the Caucasus, allegedly instigated by local Russian administrators executing orders from the central government to create confusion throughout the area and

² Berberian, *Iranian Revolution*, 2.

as a retaliation against both ethnic elements participation in the anti-tsarist revolution.

Unwarranted and provoked, these bloody inter-ethnic strife lasted until 1906.³

The 1905 Iranian Revolution against the rule of the Qajar Shah of Iran, Muzaffar al-Din, opened a new chapter in the history of that country. Perhaps the most valuable realization of this dramatic change was the explicit demand, and creation, of a representative *Majles* (Parliament, from the Iranian *majles*, i.e. consultative body). While many concluded that the “ineffectual promises to meet these claims”⁴ could not possibly be fulfilled, internal developments literally ensured the establishment of representative institutions. Consequently, revolutionary *anjomans* (revolutionary societies or committees) grew rapidly, which further awakened public opinion and empowered a nascent leadership. In July 1906, a *bast* (demonstration) in front of the British Legation in Tehran attracted thousands of protesters, and forced the convening of the first *Majles-e Milli* (National Assembly).⁵ Similar gatherings occurred in major Iranian cities that gradually polarized thousands among the intelligentsia. Consequently, the August 31, 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement, which divided Iran into spheres of influence, enlarged the gulf separating Iranian leaders. Muzaffar al Din’s son, Mohammad Ali Shah, “carried out a successful coup d’état, bombarded and closed the Majles, and arrested many leaders of the

³ Ibid., 6. Berberian asserts that these ethnic battles, took the lives of more than 2,000 people and left 14,760 people injured and 286 villages plundered. Allegedly instigated by the tsarist regime as a reprisal against both ethnic groups for their participation in the 1905 revolution, Berberian alludes to an understanding by Armenians and Tatars vis-à-vis the central government’s role in instigating the strife by stating: “This background [of ethnic strife] leads to the interesting question of how Armenian political parties who took part in the conflict were able to join in the common cause with Caucasian Muslims against whom they were engaged in bloody fighting. How and why did they put aside the recent past to cooperate for the future of Iran?”

⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁵ Ibid.

constitutional movement.”⁶ Despite lofty promises, Mohammad Ali Shah embarked on a long and problematic “reign,” which planted the seeds for a revolution that would see the light of day in 1979.

Of the three revolutions highlighted above, the one led by the Young Turks was relatively bloodless, although some minor violent acts were indeed carried out in its name. A classic coup d'état rather than a full-fledged insurrection, the Young Turks toppled a 30-year rule by a despot, as the Ottoman Third Army marched from Salonika to Constantinople to champion the popular dissatisfaction against Abdulhamid and his rule.⁷ In fact, Young Turk officials promised that their revolution would open a new era in Ottoman history, and assured critics that their objective was to restore the 1876 Constitution, which was promulgated by the efforts of Midhat Pasha at the same time Abdulhamid had acceded the throne (see below). The Young Turks maintained that they were following in the footsteps of Midhat Pasha and his reformist disciples, the New Ottomans (*Yeni Osmanlılar*) who were instrumental in the promulgation of the 1876 constitution. It was, to say the least, a grandiose agenda with serious consequences even if various rulers frequently promised reforms that were seldom introduced.

More interestingly, and regardless of the lip-service in hailing the Young Turk revolution as a “positive step in the direction of reforming the empire,” of the three revolutions cited above, the Young Turk Revolution was the most troubling to the so called

⁶ Ibid., 2-3.

⁷ Hanioglu, *Preparations for a Revolution*, 265-276. The Third army, which marched on Constantinople, was formed by Young Turk officers and soldiers. Serbian and Macedonian revolutionary forces were defending its rear. Thus, the Third Ottoman Army comprised some 70,000 men. The sultan was in an awkward position, since sending the First and the Second armies against the Third certainly meant a civil war.

“Concert of Europe.” This was so because the West was content as long as the Ottoman Empire remained a weak entity that could be willfully manipulated. Most decision-makers at the time believed that a rejuvenated and revitalized Ottoman Empire, one based on revolutionary zeal and endowed with a constitutional system, would certainly jeopardize European interests, and most were ready to adapt policies that would prevent such a development.⁸

One thing that must be underlined here is that this voracious Armenian participation in the aforementioned three constitutional revolutions spread the Armenian revolutionary movement’s capacity so thin over so large a geographic area that the consequences of such an undertaking was to endanger the very existence of the Armenian people in subsequent years, especially during the First World War.

Ottoman Reforms “in Perspective”

Dating back to the reign of Sultan Mahmud II, better known as *İslahatçı* Mahmud, various Ottoman rulers had, since the 1820s, pledged to introduce socio-political reforms (*Tanzimat* in Ottoman Turkish), though few were applied.⁹ In 1826, Mahmud attempted to divest the Sublime Porte from the reactionary *Yeniçeri* (Janissary) military units [the old standing army], by unleashing 12,000 troops trained in accordance with the latest western standards against them.¹⁰ Officers serving with the janissaries opposed reforms that

⁸ These included: 1-the public debt of the Ottoman Empire funded mainly by British and French financial institutions, which siphoned almost 30 percent of the empire’s GDP; 2-the capitulations that European countries enjoyed within the empire; 3-the possibility of intervening in the internal affairs of the empire.

⁹ Sultan Mahmud II is also known as *İslahatçı* Mahmut (Mahmud the Reformer).

¹⁰ The name Sublime Porte (hereafter the porte) was used by western diplomats to denote the seat of Ottoman government. It was known as *Babiali* (High Porte) in Ottoman parlance.

contemplated changing the status quo. In reforming the army, Mahmud followed in the footsteps of his subordinate, Muhammad Ali, an Albanian notable who was the ruler of Egypt.¹¹ At the time, Muhammad Ali successfully introduced modernizing features to the Egyptian State, which dramatically improved conditions on the ground that also foreshadowed meager efforts made by his suzerain, the Ottoman sultan. Muhammad Ali's son, Ibrahim Pasha, swiftly wrestled Palestine, Syria, and Mount Lebanon from Ottoman authority, and marched all the way into the interior of Anatolia, which led to an international crisis that demanded European military intervention on behalf of the sultan.¹² Muhammad Ali's accomplishments as well as the establishment of a "Mussulman dynasty in Egypt, forming a centre of Islam in the heart of the Arab world, was clearly prejudicial to the Khalifate [sic.] of the sultan," and could only damage the Porte.¹³ His achievements were perceived as being detrimental to Mahmud's sovereignty, and concrete challenges to the latter's rapidly dwindling power.

As if Muhammad Ali's prowess were not damaging enough, the Greek war of independence, which in 1831 achieved its objective with the total independence of Greece from the Ottoman Empire, forced Ottoman rulers to herald a new wave of reformist

¹¹ For a complete account of Muhammad Ali and his reforms and rule in Egypt See Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the reign of Muhammad Ali* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

¹² *Ibid.*, 113.

¹³ Ismail Kemal [Vlora], Sommerville Story Ed., *Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey* (London: Constable and Co., 1920), 2. Ismail Kemal Bey, from the noble Vlora [Valona] family of lower Albania, was an Ottoman statesman who served as governor general of Crete and Tripoli, Libya. He was a disciple of Midhat Pasha, the hero of the 1876 Constitution, under whose tutelage he worked when the latter was governor general of the Danube vilayet (Bulgaria). Kemal Bey's memoirs is used throughout this study, since he was a major player in Armenian-Young Turk relations, especially during the period 1899-1908. More will be discussed about Ismail Kemal Bey in Chapters Two and Five. "The Porte" refers to the seat of the ottoman government and cabinet in Constantinople, which is also known as the Sublime Porte, the latter being a translation of its Ottoman name, Babiali.

actions. Abdulmejid (1839-1861), who succeeded Mahmud, continued the latter's agenda by publishing two edicts, the *Hâttî Şerif* (The Noble Rescript of 1839),¹⁴ and the *Hâttî Humâyun* (1856), dubbed the *Magna Carta* of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵ Many European politicians believed that these edicts would drastically change the political, social, and economic situations of the empire if Constantinople administered them properly.¹⁶ While sincere in his conviction to implement reforms of the first rescript, Abdulmejid fell victim to a centralized form of government advocated by several aides who were not always loyal. Even though the ruler's preferred form of government was tailored after the French model, it missed the point in term of its applicability to the realities of the empire. Centralization produced largely negative results throughout the provinces¹⁷ that, in turn, meant that Abdulmejid was not destined to achieve the implementation of his reformist ideas.¹⁸

During the reign of his successor, Abdulaziz (1861-1876), reforms were dealt yet another setback, even though "enlightened" prime ministers such as Ali Pasha and Fu'ad Pasha advocated parallel Tanzimats.¹⁹ In fact, a new law regulating the provinces was

¹⁴ Ernest Edmondson Ramsaur Jr., *The Young Turks; Prelude to the Revolution of 1908* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1957), 3. The Hattî Şerif secured: (a) the lives and honor of Ottoman subjects, (b) their property, (c) the obliteration of tax farming, and (d) the equality of all religions vis-à-vis the application of laws. Abdulmejid became known as the *Tanzimatçı* (Reformist).

¹⁵ Avetis Papazyan, *Turkakan Vaveragrakan Nyuter Osmanyan Kaysrutyan Voch-Mahmetakan Zhoghovurtneri Masin, 1839-1915* (Turkish Documents Regarding the non-Muslim Peoples of the Ottoman Empire), (Yerevan: Academy of Sciences Publishing, 2002), 22-26. This second edict was similar in content to the first, but carried articles concerning the departmentalization of the government, and a new penal code of law.

¹⁶ Ismail Kemal, *Memoirs*, 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁸ Ramsaur, *The Young Turks*, 3.

¹⁹ Contrary to common knowledge, it seems that the reformist duo of Fu'ad and Ali pashas were not the reformists they pretended to be. This is amply illustrated in Ahmed Cevdet, *Sultan Abdülhamî'de Arzlar-Ma'ruzat* (Exposes Presented to Sultan Abdulhamid), (Babiali Cultural Press, January 2010). This book is perhaps one of the most important primary source regarding the Tanzimat period. It was discovered only lately within the Ottoman State Archives Directorate at Istanbul. It is an important primary source for any

adopted in 1864, but was never implemented. Various other recommendations faced similar fates. Remarkably, and in an effort to acquaint himself with additional modernizing ideas, the sultan traveled to Europe in 1867, an unprecedented undertaking on the part of any Ottoman sultan before him, to confer with heads of state about reforms in his empire, even if the effort was marginal at best.²⁰

That the reform project in the Ottoman Empire was an arduous task is now understood from the writings, among others, of Ahmed Jevdet Pasha. One of the most prominent Ottoman civil officials whose work encompassed over fifty years of the restructuring endeavors pursued by several sultans. Ahmed Jevdet Pasha revealed many of the significant changes that were carefully vetted, including those that touched the empire's Armenian population. Reforms within areas inhabited by Armenians were part of the general reform project that had been in the works since the 1830s. One such example was the work of the *Firka 'i Islahiyye*, commanded by Ahmed Jevdet Pasha in Cilicia

Ottomanist dealing with the Reform Period in Ottoman History. Ahmed Cevdet Pasha was one of the most prominent—albeit operating within the shadows of the government—of this process. When Abdulhamid II asked Cevdet to write him a history of the Reform Projects for the period before his reign, Cevdet wrote what in Ottoman is known as the *Ma'ruzat*. That Abdulhamid II ordered the writing of such a treatise shows, if anything, that he was keen to the issue of reforms and, thus, by reading the manuscript, became well aware of the projects undertaken by his predecessors regarding reforms in the empire. The book is transcribed from the original Ottoman into modern Turkish and prepared for publication by Yusuf Halacoğlu.

²⁰ The invitation came from Napoleon III of France. Even though the sultan's travel was unprecedented—it was against protocol. Never had a sultan left his capital to travel abroad—the only tangible result of the excursion was some changes in the realm of secondary education, which brought it closer to the French Lycée System:

Ismail Kemal, *Memoirs*, 33-37. The sultan traveled to Paris to attend the Universal Exhibition there. After having a negative experience with Napoleon III, who blamed the sultan for the problems in Crete, Abdulaziz visited London, where he met Queen Victoria. Abdulaziz insisted that his return path be through the Balkans via Vienna, where Ismail Kemal was at the time serving under Midhat Pasha, the governor of Bulgaria, in the provincial capital of Rustchuk. It is interesting to note that this Danube province was selected as an experiment in reformist ideas. The liberal Midhat Pasha was given the governorship of the province where he implemented most of the reformist ideas that later constituted his liberal ideology when he became the Grand *Vezir* (Prime Minister, from vezir, minister) of the empire and pressed for the adoption of the first Constitution in 1876.

intermittently during the years 1860-64, which brought mobile *ashirets* (tribes) of Turkmens, Circassians, and especially Kurds in the Amanos mountain chain (Gavur Dağı, literally Infidel Mountain, later to be known as Jebeli Bereket, and the Kürd Dağı, literally, Kurdish Mountain), to sedentary life in the cities and hamlets of the area. This effort witnessed the incorporation of new towns such as Islahiye (literally meaning Reformed Town), Kars Pazar, Zulkadiriyye and others, to be gradually transformed too.²¹ Cilician reforms involved bringing Kurdish and other tribal elements down into the plains, and imposing upon them a sedentary way of life. Doing so, however, created a dilemma to the villagers of the plains, Armenians as well as Turks, who now were forced to compete with newcomers for scarce arable lands and other natural resources. Paradoxically, such methods clarified how centralization, along with the extraction of taxes from the newly “reformed” populations, probably started long before Abdulhamid came to power. Indeed, the Zeytun uprisings since the 1850s were an important staple for Armenians in propagating their condition in the Ottoman Empire, which gradually became untenable. Jevdet presented another view regarding the local character of the Zeytun incidents:

As to the Istanbul Armenian nationalist groups, they had obtained photographs of the Armenian notables of the four *mahalles* (sectors) of Zeytun and had sent them to France. The Ottoman Ambassador to Paris, Jemil Pasha, upon a visit to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was shown those pictures by the foreign minister as if they belonged to Armenian

²¹ Cevdet, *Ma'ruzat*, 129-205.

princes. Jemil Pasha stated to the minister: “The photographs are those of herdsmen.” Regardless of Jemil Pasha’s characterization, the French public opinion was more inclined to believe the Armenian side in the matter.²²

Interestingly, Jevdet’s affirmation that French public opinion mistrusted Ottoman tales was a rare acknowledgement of what was probably well known at the Palace, even if pride prevented anyone to declare it. Indeed, and contrary to common historical knowledge, the issue of Armenian reforms within the Eastern Anatolian provinces of the Ottoman Empire (those inhabited predominantly by Armenians) was not merely a consequence of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 or even the subsequent treaty of San Stefano as well as the Berlin Convention. It was, rather, an intrinsic Ottoman challenge based on local concerns as discussed and analyzed in this study.

The Armenian Question

Sultan Abdulaziz granted the Armenian Millet an internal constitution in 1865 that was one of the clearest illustrations of reforms pertaining to the Armenian nation.²³ An equally important development was the election of Mgrdich Khrimian as the Armenian patriarch in

²² Cevdet, *Ma’ruzat*, 139.

²³ The Ottoman peoples were ruled through a Millet (Community) system, which granted the religious leadership of the various communities some leeway in administering the internal affairs of their own community. The constitution, bearing the official Ottoman name of *Ermeni Milletini Esasi Kanunu* (Fundamental/Organic Law of the Armenian Community), was later duplicated for the other Millets within the empire, such as the Greeks and the Jews. The sultan decreed the constitution and put his official seal on it in 1865. It is to be noted that the constitution did embolden intellectuals, while at the same time it diminished the power that the Armenian *amira* (notable) and *sarraf* (wealthy, literally meaning money exchanger, banker) classes, which had up to this point been the real intermediaries with the palace regarding Armenians. In fact several members belonging to these groups were employed within the high echelons of the central government. For further information regarding the *amira* and *sarraf* classes see Hagop L. Barsumian, *The Armenian Amira Class of Istanbul* (Yerevan: American University of Yerevan Press, 2007). See also Pascal Carmont, *Lords of ottoman Armenia*, translated by Marika Blandin (London: Taderon press, 2012).

Constantinople in 1869. Indeed, Khrimian represented the voice of provincial Armenians, which was seldom heard in the capital, as he boasted provincial origins and was well informed about conditions there.

In November 1870, the National Assembly of the patriarchate appointed a special investigative commission to examine the effects of the depredation of Armenians in the Eastern provinces of the empire. After reviewing the report (*takrir*²⁴ in Ottoman Turkish), the committee recommended that the patriarch request the immediate intercession of Ottoman central authorities in the resolution of specific issues involving provincial Armenians, whose conditions were dire. The report suggested the compilation of a population census for Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire, to better ascertain basic needs. For reasons that remained unclear, no census was conducted, and while a new *takrir* describing conditions in the provinces followed in 1876, little improvements were noted there.

In Constantinople, nevertheless, Ottoman reforms reached their heyday in the following decade when the reformist Prime Minister, Midhat Pasha, finally established a constitutional government and summoned the first parliament in 1876.²⁵ Midhat's ascendance to power came on the heels of renewed separatist activities in the Balkans, as well as British political maneuvering. At the time, London was furious over the previous

²⁴ *Takrir* literally means report. However, the Ottoman administration accepted *takrirs* (petitions) from its subjects as pleas addressed to the sultan, who would consider them out of his benevolence toward his subjects.

²⁵ Ramsaur, *The Young Turks*, 8.

Ottoman government's decision to reduce drastically interest payments on the porte's foreign debt.²⁶

As mentioned above, the ensuing Russo-Ottoman war brought the debt issue out of its internal Ottoman context and transformed it into an international concern, which European powers used for their own diplomatic maneuvers for decades hence. It was during this period of the Tanzimat that the Armenian Millet of the empire secured the adoption of a special constitution for "self-governance." The procurement of the constitution in 1865—which at the time provided a sense of pride and victory for Armenians in Constantinople—"restricted the patriarch's power within the community, but, for the first time, recognized him as the sole representative of the entire Armenian population of the empire."²⁷

In Constantinople, Midhat Pasha—with the help of his Minister of War, Huseyn Avni Pasha—orchestrated a change at the top, deposing Abdulaziz in 1876 and replacing him with Abdulhamid, to ensure the continuity of his cherished reforms.²⁸ His tactical moves to establish a constitutional monarchy, the formation of the first Ottoman

²⁶ Kemal Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam, Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 143. According to Karpat, The British concern was due to the fact that most of the Ottoman debt, accumulated after 1855, was held by British capitalists. The Ottoman government's decision created a chilling effect within British stock markets. It was in order to secure this debt that the Administration of the Ottoman Public Debt Commission was formed in 1881 by several western powers, which meant direct European intervention in the Ottoman economy.

²⁷ Bardakjian, "The Rise of the Armenian Patriarchate," 98.

²⁸ Ramsaur, *The Young Turks*, 7. According to Ramsaur: "Midhat Pasha and his supporters seemed at least to have found a ruler who would cooperate with them in an effort to revive the failing empire, and the events of the first few months of the new Sultan's reign tended to bear out their belief." See also, Kemal, *Memoirs*, 109-110, 115-116. On the other hand, the deposed Abdulaziz ended his life by committing suicide. Although the post mortem was conducted by a number of European doctors called to the capital for this purpose, there were rumors that the sultan was killed on Midhat Pasha's orders. Ismail Kemal Bey confronted his friend, Midhat Pasha with this issue and was given a "satisfactory" answer, which he was in no position to denounce.

Parliament, as well as his subsequent backing of Abdulhamid to accede the Ottoman throne, brought about new hopes for Armenians and other Christian communities under Ottoman dominion. All of these measures demonstrated that Abdulhamid's reign would be one of genuine reforms, further securing the fledgling constitution and the parliament it fashioned. However, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 dealt a severe blow to the reformist statesman's career, as the conflict inflicted serious pain. It was now Abdulhamid's turn to dismiss Midhat, along with many of his supporters, and to suspend the constitution indefinitely.²⁹ Midhat Pasha was sent into internal exile and later executed, which allowed the sultan not only to dissolve the newly formed parliament but to also initiate the creation of a "police state."³⁰ Unique in the Ottoman context, this reliance on secret police units upped the proverbial ante, since none of Abdulhamid's forbearers,

²⁹ Ramsaur, *The Young Turks*, 8. Abdulaziz was succeeded by Murat V, who, because of his indulgence in alcohol—the result of being kept under house arrest for a long period of time and thus the opulent life he got used to lead—was considered to be mentally unfit to rule. Midhat deposed him and instituted his brother, Abdulhamid, instead. See also Kemal, *Memoirs*, 93, 112-115. Ismail Kemal Bey, a close friend of Midhat Pasha, tells another story. Abdulaziz at first allowed his brother, Murat, to lead a normal life. The latter stressed education and was known as an intellectual. During his visit to Europe, Abdulaziz, who included Murat within his entourage, was disturbed with the way the royal families of Europe, and especially the British, honored his brother and engaged him in political and other intellectual matters. Upon his return, Abdulaziz banned Murat from all the freedoms he previously enjoyed. At this stage Murat was afflicted with alcoholism due to his depression. It is interesting to also note that Abdulaziz himself was a patron of artists and a painter in his own right. He liked to draw marine scenes. His favorite painter was the Armenian Ayvazovskii, who was a master of marine scenes. The sultan acquired many of the latter's paintings.

³⁰ This police-state can be explained within the context of the multitude of spies from all national groups of the empire who were on government payroll and who reported to the sultan through their "intelligence" journals. This author has found several such reports from Armenian collaborators in the BOA. See, for example, BOA (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Directorate of the Ottoman Archives), 1746-521-109, Yıldız Tasnifi-Sadaret Hususi Maruzat Evrakı (Yıldız Classification-Private Papers), *Vanda icra edilen tahariyyet* (Investigations completed in Van); BOA, 2783-51-21, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı (Yıldız Miscellaneous Papers – Umumi Vilayetler Tahriratı (General Provincial correspondence), (Y.PR.M.UM), *Sasunda tenkil edilen Ermeni eşkiyasının saklandıkları yerlerin muhabirler vasıtasıyla tesbiti* (Spies report on the places of hiding of the Armenian revolutionaries who were transported to Sasun); BOA, 1730-521-93, Yıldız Tasnifi-Sadaret Hususi Maruzat Evrakı, *Van civarında tahariyyet fesadcıların hakkında* (investigations in van and its environment regarding revolutionary activities and agitators).

nor successors for that matter, had or did use such a system. Under duress, it was during Sultan Abdulhamid II's reign that the Armenian Millet, which had gained the moniker Millet-i Sadika from Ottoman authorities, that started showing signs of unrest vis-à-vis its social and political conditions. In turn, internal convulsions transformed this heretofore law-abiding community into a Millet-i Asiya, an appellation usually reserved for Christian communities of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans.³¹

The Berlin Conference

Palpable internal tensions left their impact on the Porte whose forces were tediously defeated in the short but decisive Russo-Turkish War. A subjugated Ottoman Empire thus was made to sign the Treaty of San Stefano with Russia on March 3, 1878.³² Several clauses of the treaty further complicated matters, especially as far as the Armenian population was concerned, which bode ill for future developments. Article sixteen of the treaty, for example, stated Ottoman responsibilities towards the Armenian nation in the following terms:

As the evacuation of the Russian troops of the territory which they occupy in Armenia, and which is to be restored to Turkey, might give rise to conflicts and complications detrimental to the maintenance of good relations between the

³¹ Contrary to established tradition within the historical society, the moniker sadika was not unique to the Armenian communities in the Ottoman Empire. The adjective mainly used to denote other Christian minorities in the empire, especially the Bulgarians living under Ottoman dominion. The same can be said regarding the adjective asiya. It was used repeatedly to denote rebellious Balkan Christians.

³² San Stefano, a suburb on the European side of Constantinople, indicated how near the Ottoman Empire was in terms of total capitulation. On the eastern front, the Russian armies advanced considerably, thus bringing whole regions inhabited by Armenians under their control.

two countries, the Sublime Port engages to carry into effect, without further delay, the improvements and the reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by Armenians, and to guarantee their security from Kurds and Circassians.³³

An imposed treaty was not necessarily a good omen for cornered officials whose sentiments of mistrust were hastily awakened. Although obedient citizens of the Ottoman sultan, Armenians were often mistreated by Kurds employed by the army. Often, minor incidents festered, as Constantinople ignored its constitutional responsibilities to protect all of its subjects. Isolated skirmishes received undue attention, which further polarized communities, as a series of incidents led to heightened clashes. In one such occurrence, C.B. Norman, the London *Times* correspondent at the time, reported: “I have not seen one Christian village [,] which has not been abandoned in consequence of the cruelties committed on the inhabitants. All have been ransacked, many burnt, upward of 5,000 Christians in the Van district have fled to Russian territory, and women and children are wandering about naked.”³⁴

³³ Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1980), 111. See also J[on] Kirakosyan, *Hayastane Michazgayin Divanagitutyun yev Sovetakan Artagin Kaghakakanutyun Pastatgherum* (Armenia in the Documents Pertaining to International Diplomacy and Soviet Foreign Policy), (Yerevan: Hayastan Publishing, 1972), 92. The book is a compilation of Russian documents relevant to the period 1828-1923.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 110. For a detailed account of the period between San Stefano and the Berlin Convention and the participation of the Armenian delegation in the Congress see J[on] Kirakosyan, “San Stefano Hashtutyun Dashnagire yev Angliakan Divanagitutyune” (The San Stefano Peace Treaty [of 1878] and British Diplomacy), *Banber Yerevani Hamalsarani*, No. 1 (34), 1978, 83-106; See also Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to independence: 1916-1918* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 26.

Many similar incidents were reported that, naturally, upset major powers anxious to restore global order. Concerned about Russia's gains as accorded by the Treaty of San Stefano, the Concert of Europe assumed an unexpected role when Otto von Bismarck, Germany's chancellor, moved to hold a congress on the matter. On June 13, 1878, the Concert of Europe convened in Berlin, with Bismarck presiding as an "honest broker."³⁵

An Armenian delegation headed by ex-Patriarch Mgrdich Khrimian traveled to Berlin and tried, in vain, to convince European powers of the perils Armenians would face if Article 16 of the San Stefano treaty was not swiftly implemented.³⁶ Little of Patriarch

³⁵ Walker, *Armenia*, p. 112. See also Deren Seçil, "From Pan-Islamism to Turkish Nationalism: Modernization and German Influence in the Late Ottoman Period," *Turkology Update*, Leiden University Project Working Papers Archive, Department of Turkish Studies, Leiden University; paper presented at the workshop on "Disrupting and Reshaping: Early Stages of Nation-Building in the Balkans" at the University of Trieste, Italy, 27-28 October 2000; Kemal, *Memoirs*, 84-85, 109. According to Ismail Kemal Bey, Bismarck's policy toward the Ottoman Empire was devised on the precepts of Pan-Germanic expansion to the east of which the Berlin-Baghdad Railway Project was an important factor. Since Bismarck attached great importance to having the sultan under his control, he sent one of his ablest diplomats, Joseph Maria von Radowitz, Jr., as ambassador to the Porte. Radowitz was married to a Russian woman from a noble family and had close relations with the Tsar and his aides. However, he used this to the advantage of Germany by trying to diminish Russian influence in the palace. Midhat Pasha, who closely followed issues pertaining to the construction of the Baghdad railway, was informed that Radowitz was involved in bribing [*bakşış* in Ottoman parlance] the sultan and some of his closest aides to have the project entrusted to German companies. According to Ismail Kemal, Midhat even confronted Abdulaziz with the issue of the 150,000 Turkish Gold Liras *bakşış* (bribe) and advised him to transfer the sum to the treasury department. This incident caused great animosity between him and the sultan. Radowitz was followed by Robert von Keudell who continued the work of his predecessor in the same manner as Bismarck had instructed. Ismail Kemal also asserts that Bismarck's famous utterance that "the Eastern Question is not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian soldier" was used abundantly but was misunderstood. According to Kemal, the German chancellor wanted to achieve results in the east [Pan-Germanic expansion] without costly wars or the loss of German soldiers' lives. As long as Bismarck was able to manipulate diplomacy to the benefit of Germany and to the detriment of the other European powers, his plan was sound and effective. In a nutshell, this was a perfect explanation of Bismarck's cunning endeavors to create alliances to suit his policies.

³⁶ Walker, *Armenia*, 112. Walker states: "The Armenian proposals were some form of local self-government within the framework of the Ottoman Empire, and for a strengthening of the forces of law and order. But the leaders of Europe showed little interest in the cause of the Armenians, a people who had remained pacific, despite misgovernment. From April to June [1878] the Armenian leaders were in England, and met Lord Salisbury on May 10; he gave them no more than platitudinous assurances. British policy had more important things to deal with than humanitarian matters."

Khrimian's pleas were answered, although the Armenian "cause" was addressed by Article 61 of the Berlin Convention, which stated:

The Sublime Porte undertakes to carry out, without further delay, the improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and the Kurds. The Sublime Porte will periodically make known the steps taken to this effect to the powers, who [sic.] will superintend their application.³⁷

In hindsight, this was wholly inadequate, as putative commitments empowered the Porte to address major power concerns at its own convenience. Paradoxically, diplomats attending the Congress of Berlin—with the exception of the Russian delegate—were disgruntled when they were informed about a secret treaty, which came to be known as the Cyprus Convention. When the London Globe published the text of this Convention, which was signed between the Ottoman and British governments, delegates gathered in Berlin were stunned.³⁸ According to this convention, the sultan agreed to lease Cyprus to Britain, while the latter promised to defend the Ottoman State by force of arms. This revelation unsettled several delegations though Bismarck cleverly maneuvered around a particularly vexed French delegate. Paris relented after his government was awarded some leeway

³⁷ Walker, *Armenia*, 115; Kirakosyan, *Hayastane Michazgayin Divanagitutyun*, 128.

³⁸ Kirakosyan, *Hayastane Michazgayin Divanagitutyun*, 114-115. The delegates to the Berlin Congress had signed an agreement that they were attending the congress with "clean hands." That is, their governments had not conducted nor had signed any secret agreements with other governments attending the congress.

regarding Tunisia through a separate package. In the event, the Berlin Treaty was important for Armenians because of two specific paragraphs in the text that touched on intrinsic concerns: land and protection. Using explicit language, the pact stated:

If Batum [Batumi], Ardahan, Kars or any of them shall be retained by Russia, and if any attempt shall be made at any future time by Russia to take possession of any further territories of His Imperial Majesty, the Sultan, in Asia, as fixed by the definitive treaty of peace, England engages in to join his imperial majesty, the sultan, in defending them by force of arms.

In return, His Imperial Majesty, the Sultan, promises to England to introduce necessary reforms, to be agreed upon later by the two powers, into the government, and for the protection of the Christian and other subjects of the Porte in these territories.³⁹

Indeed, the difference between article 16 of the San Stefano Treaty and article 61 of the Berlin Treaty is striking, because “in comparison with the undertaking of Russia...that of Britain was feeble, since in the former case there was an army in occupation, whereas there was no such British force to compel the sultan” in any shape or form.⁴⁰ Stunned by

³⁹ Ibid., 104, 114.

⁴⁰ Walker, *Armenia*, 115.

this language and upset at the ease with which European powers negotiated Armenian rights away, the Armenian delegation presented a letter of protest to the Congress, stating:

We had not believed that a nation like ours composed of several million individuals, which has not so far been the instrument of any foreign power... [Yet] more oppressed than the other Christian populations have caused no trouble to the Ottoman government would have to acquire the right of living its life and of being governed on its ancestral land by Armenian officials.

The Armenians have just realized that they have been deceived, that their rights have not been recognized because they have been pacific.

The Armenian delegation is going to return to the east, taking this lesson with it...⁴¹

Beyond its utility to major powers, the Treaty of Berlin paved the way for the internationalization of the Armenian question, as it joined the series of issues that engrossed officials who maneuvered within the complicated system of international diplomacy. Henceforth, Western diplomats would deal with the Armenian Question as part and parcel of the “Eastern Question,” an appellation denoting the Ottoman Empire and its future.⁴² Even Russia, which had “championed” the case of Armenian reforms and

⁴¹ Ibid., 117.

⁴² Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road*, 26.

incorporated it in the initial agreement of San Stefano, seemed more than content when the Ottomans, succumbed to British pressure at Berlin and reluctantly accepted to cede the areas of Kars, Ardahan, Artvin and Batum to it. Ironically, no major Armenian relocations occurred into Kars, Ardahan, Artvin and Batum. Russian authorities created problems to those Armenians who had settled in the area because of the war. Most were denied Russian citizenship. The only exception to this general rule was the emigration of a sizable number of Armenians from Erzerum to Akhalkalak and Akhaltsikh (the region of Javakheti in modern Georgia), while a commensurate number of Turks from those areas were relocated to Erzerum. This exchange illustrated that Russia was not keen to let the number of Armenians increase in its newly acquired territories. In fact, this decision buttressed Russia's policy to create an "Armenia without Armenians," as Moscow favored to transfer Cossacks and other peoples into its new periphery with the Ottoman Empire. Parenthetically, Abdulhamid created the *Hamidiye* Regiments as an auxiliary military force to augment the Ottoman Army, precisely because he was aware of Cossack prowess during the 1877-1878 Russo –Turkish war. What occurred in the Caucasus, therefore, served both Russian as well as Ottoman interests.

Russia's incorporation of the previously Ottoman territories of Kars, Artahan, Artvin and Batum meant that Russia was not going to press for Armenian reforms in the Ottoman Empire any longer. That task would hereafter be allocated to the British. Sarcastically, while London was mandated to advocate for Armenian reforms within the Ottoman Empire, it did not promise any substantial monetary allocations for this purpose, at a time when Ottoman finances were in shambles because of war indemnities and foreign

debts. Indeed, the British nonchalance on this matter was telling, especially since Constantinople indicated no desire to follow-up. It was, therefore, fair to ask how reforms in Armenian inhabited areas could be accomplished when the “mandated advocate,” i.e. Great Britain, was only verbally committed and showed no real interest in supporting the process? Equally important, it was also critical to inquire whether reforms could have been successfully implemented through diplomatic efforts alone, which were limited to placing pressure on the Sublime Porte? On the contrary, because London applied tactful coercion where a forceful presence was required, the end results significantly worsened conditions even further.

Thus, while the Treaty of Berlin was “a right for the Armenians, an obligation for the Ottoman Empire, and a responsibility for Europe,” it literally set the stage for future calamities.⁴³ European powers neglected their responsibilities and, because of inefficiency or other preoccupations, they may well have aroused Ottoman animosity towards Armenians that instigated massacres and, ultimately, genocide.

The Armenian Revolutionary Movement

Increasingly aware of European machinations with the porte, it was during the period after 1878 that Constantinople Armenians perceived looming dangers, which mobilized several leaders to demand genuine reforms. Indeed, the principal focal point was the fate of Armenians living in the eastern vilayets of the empire, whose rapidly deteriorating conditions—due to depredations by Kurdish tribal chieftains—required attention. Patriarch

⁴³ Hrant Bastermajian, *Histoire de l'Arménie* (History of Armenia), (Paris: 1964), 325.

Nerses Varzhabedian, in particular, was instrumental in marshalling support for this cause as the task of opening up schools and enriching the cultural lives of Armenians in the eastern vilayets was delegated to a newly formed “United Society.” Prodded by this cultural awareness that placed the burden of responsibility on Armenian shoulders, young teachers and intellectuals relocated to the interior, as the transfer wave spurred enthusiasm for the nation. This pioneering action of going back to the Armenian provinces, a movement known as *Tebi Yergir* (Back to the Interior, i.e. the eastern provinces), was a direct result of the reformist agenda imbued in the internal Armenian Constitution promulgated in 1865. Ironically, this also meant that the Ottoman government itself, by ratifying this fundamental law, bore responsibility in the dissemination of renaissance ideas within the Armenian provinces of the empire. It may thus be safe to argue that this positive trend was the turning point in the formulation of an Armenian revival throughout the eastern provinces.⁴⁴

It is especially important to note that the period from 1878 to 1891 saw no serious action on the part of the Ottoman government to hinder Armenian activities vis-à-vis the implementation reforms as promulgated by the Berlin Convention. On the contrary, the historical record indicated no malicious policies by Abdulhamid regarding Armenians during this same period. However, this didn’t mean that Kurdish harassment was not common. Moreover, this is not to say that Constantinople boasted a stellar record as its handlings of the Zeytun (near Marash) uprisings during the 1870s highlighted. Moreover,

⁴⁴ Hrach Dasnabedian, Yervant Pambukian, Ed., *Badmutyun Hay Heghapokhagan Sharzhman u Hay Heghapokhagan Tashnagtsutyun* (History of the Armenian Revolutionary Movement and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation) (Beirut: Hamazkayin Vahe Setian Printing Press, 2010), 35.

Kurdish depredations in the eastern provinces against hapless Armenians—and in some cases even Turkish and Kurdish sedentary communities—agitated informed Armenian circles and led to the formation of secret Armenian organizations in Van, like the Unity for Salvation (Miyutyun I Prgutyun) faction in 1872 and the Black Cross group in 1878, as well as the rise of the Defenders of the Fatherland movement in Erzerum in 1880-1881, among others, further emboldened Armenian extremists. These developments notwithstanding, the general Armenian population in the empire was more or less content with its day-to-day life, building on centuries of loyalty to the sultan.⁴⁵

Some explanations regarding the organizations mentioned above are in order before continuing this analysis. It is critical to note, for example, that the rebellions of the 1870s in the mountainous area of Zeytun were at best regional in nature. At the time, local inhabitants objected to paying “excessive” taxes to the central and local governments, which was the chief cause of the disturbances. Hence, it is incorrect to consider these uprisings as part and parcel of the Armenian revolutionary movement in the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, and as noted above, this taxation was the result of reforms initiated in Cilicia by the *Firka’İ İslahiye* led by Mehmet Jevdet Pasha in the beginning of the 1860s, and was not exclusive to Armenians. It must also be noted that Kurdish tribes in the area of Gyavur Dağı and Kürt Dağı (in the Amanos Mountain Range) expressed similar outrage and engaged in comparable mutinies. Zeytun Armenians insisted that their obligations were limited to a “nominal” tax introduced during Sultan Murad IV’s reign for the express

⁴⁵ For more information regarding these organizations, see Dasnabedian, *Badmutyun*, 35-61.

purpose of keeping the lanterns lit at the Aya Sofia Mosque in Constantinople. In the absence of corroborating documentation, this resolve to affirm that such a privilege was granted through an *irade* (imperial decree) by Murad IV may seem amusing, but cannot in anyway be construed as forming a core element of revolutionary activities.

As far as the Unity for Salvation interest group was concerned, hardly any reliable data surfaced after all these years to connect its members to anti-state pursuits. Aside from the fact that Garabet Isajanian was the moving force behind this society and that it was instrumental in advocating the opening of a Russian consulate in Van by writing a letter in this regard to the Russian viceroy in the Caucasus, no other information about the society emerged to confirm that it was active during the 1877-1878 War with Russia.

For its part, the Black Cross society—whose date of inception remains unknown—was a secret organization with the aim of protecting the Armenian population through armed force if need be. Secretive in nature, the society was thus named because those who betrayed it, or snitched on any of its members, would bear a black cross sign against their names in the roster of members. An assassination order was issued against such individuals though it was not known if this threat was ever carried out. Still, and regardless of its secretive nature, it was not possible to classify it as a full fledged revolutionary organization because no anti-state activities were undertaken.

The Defenders of the Fatherland (Bashdban Hayrenyats) society was established in early 1881 at the Sanasarian College in Erzerum, a year after the institution of higher learning was created in 1880. It was in this milieu that a group of students organized the society. The local Ottoman administration uncovered the organization in 1882. Although a

series of arrests ensued, with an estimated 70 to 76 arrestees given prison sentences, an appeals court—convened through the intercession of Patriarch Varzhbedian at the Sublime Porte—exonerated almost all of the detainees and set them free. Khachadur Geregtsian, the mastermind behind the formation of the society, was released in 1886 and, like similar organizations, no member of the society ever advocated anti-state measures.

For its part, the Young Armenia group (*Yeritasard Hayastan*), an Eastern Armenian gathering that sent couriers to Western Armenia to collect information on conditions that befell the nation there, was more of a “scouting” mission than a revolutionary movement. Its purpose was to document the state of affairs in what was still a largely isolated area within the empire. Nevertheless, what was fascinating about this group was its members’ first-hand knowledge of conditions on the ground, which mobilized many to become the future initiators of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, an organization that prided itself to be truly representative. Moreover, the Ottoman government itself downplayed concerns pertaining to the formation, activities, and subsequent dismantlement of the society as it considered it an insignificant, local foolish initiative.⁴⁶

What the formation of such societies demonstrated, if anything, was a process of indoctrination among the newly educated Armenian youth. It may be accurate to conclude that what emerged was an immature atmosphere where a rudimentary form of nationalism flourished, which was entirely understandable because some educated circles were literally exposed to nationalist ideas thriving in Crete and the Balkans. It was a decade later,

⁴⁶ Dasnabedian, *Badmutyun*, 61.

however, that full-fledged Armenian political parties would be formed under the leadership of engaged members.

In this respect, the 1865 internal constitution paved the way for the establishment of educational and cultural institutions in Eastern provinces and in Cilicia. These were augmented by Western educational systems ushered in by various missionary associations after the 1850s. In short, the Western Armenian intellectual mind recorded specific accomplishments as an epitome of Armenian enlightenment descended upon many who endured increasingly difficult conditions, often stifling political aspirations. Many were proud of these achievements and wished to perpetuate steady progress. One could even surmise that in later years Western Armenians were somewhat doubtful of the revolutionary zeal toward rebellion as manifested by their Eastern Armenian counterparts.⁴⁷ In fact, anecdotal tendencies that doubted Western Armenian preferences vis-à-vis what Eastern Armenians wished to accomplish within the Armenian inhabited provinces of the Ottoman Empire were increasingly confirmed in archival materials published during the last decade. In other words, the archival records of the ARF and the Hnchagyan party, for example, show that genuine revolutionary and socialist ideas were brought in by Eastern Armenians agents.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Such was the case of Hrayr of Sasun, better known through his nom de guerre, *Dervish*, who always advocated patience and a long period of preparation for any rebellion, rather than inflicting a heavy toll on the Armenian population of the mountainous area because of amateurish acts of disobedience that were sure to catch the attention of the Ottoman authorities.

⁴⁸ Yervant Pamboukian Ed., *Nyuter H. H. T[ashnagtsutyun] Badmutyan Hamar* (Documents Regarding ARF History), (Beirut: ARF Publications, 2007), vol. V, 355-366. The document is part of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) Archives that are housed in Watertown, Massachusetts. The original ARF Archives, which are housed at the Hayrenik Building in Watertown, Massachusetts, are not yet open to researchers. They are accessible only through special permission by the party's highest authority, the

a-Formation of Armenian Political Parties

It was only in 1885, consequently, that revolutionary agitation entered the Armenian psyche in the Ottoman Empire. The first manifestation of this was the formation of the Armenagan Party in Van, under the leadership of teacher Mgrdich Portukalian.⁴⁹ Still, the Armenagan party was nothing more than a provincial society, and its influence did not transcend beyond Van and its environs. After the organization was uncovered by the ottoman administration in Van, Portukalian was exiled. He settled in Marseilles, France, from where he Published a newspaper, Armenia, and continued an ad hoc relationship with his former students.⁵⁰ The first full-blown Armenian revolutionary and political party was the Social Democratic Hnchagyan party. Adhering to an adapted Marxist ideology, the party's mission envisaged a two-step action, to establish a free and independent Armenia, and to strive for the creation of a social democrat state structure for the fledgling republic.⁵¹ The Hnchagyan party masterminded and blundered the disastrous 1894 Sasun rebellion, which cost it dearly. Internal disagreements between Western and Eastern

ARF Bureau. On the other hand, eight volumes of the Archives are thus far printed under the title *Nyuter H. H. T[ashnagtsutyun] Badmutyan Hamar*. The first four volumes of the series, which will henceforth be presented as *Nyuter*, were printed under the editorship of Hrach Dasnabedian, while volume V through VIII were printed under the editorship of Yervant Pamboukian. A word regarding the difference in editorship is in place: at the time Dasnabedian edited volumes I through IV, the archival material were not yet classified. Hence, the reference to these documents is only done through the page number(s) in the printed volumes (I-IV). With Volume V and onwards, Pambukian uses a reference system that was implemented in the 1980s, whereby each document now had a seperate archival referal number attached to it as well as the page number of the volume it appears in.

⁴⁹ Portukalian was one of the first young, educated Armenians to heed to the call of the Yergir. He had settled in Van as early as 1878. After his arrest and subsequent exile, his students—who received the volatile essays he penned in “Armenia”—formed the Armenagan Party in Van in 1885.

⁵⁰ The party membership later dissolved within the Hnchagyan party and the ARF, while its remnants were later absorbed within the Ramgavar Azadagan Gusagtsutyun (literally Populist [Democratic] Freedom Party, also known as Ramgavar), which was formed in Constantinople in 1908.

⁵¹ *Dzrakir Hnchagyan Gusagtsutyun* (Program of the Hnchagyan party), 2nd Edition –abridged, (London, 1897).

Armenian leaders caused a rift that led to a split into two distinct sections.⁵² As it turned out, Western Armenian Hnchagist leaders yearned for a party with nationalist tendencies vis-à-vis the liberation of Western Armenia, while their Eastern counterparts remained unyielding on the tenets of their Marxist ideology. Naturally, the polarization continued until 1905, when the party's General Meeting in Paris tried to amalgamate competing ideological doctrines. Divergent thinking continued and the Party's Vienna General Meeting witnessed a final rupture within the party; Those advocating nationalist tendencies separated and formed the Veragazmyal Hnchagyan Gusagtsutyun (the Re-instituted or Re-formed Hnchagyan party, Veragazmyal for short) while the supporters of social democratism continued with the party's old name. After the abortive 1894 Sasun rebellion, the party concentrated their efforts in Cilicia and the capital Istanbul.⁵³

The Hay Heghapokhaganneri Tashnagtsutyun (Federation of Armenian Revolutionaries) was envisioned by Kristapor Mikayelian, a member of the Russian revolutionary organization Narodnaya Volia (People's Will).⁵⁴ Mikayelian's intent was to bring together all Armenian revolutionary societies, in order to coordinate efforts and maximize results, believing that the time was right for such an action. The Federation was

⁵² Dasnabedian, *Badmutyun*, 68-76. The problems within the Hnchagyan party were the result of acute differences between the Western and Eastern Armenian leaders. While the Nazarbekian couple (founding members of the party) and Ruben Khanazad insisted on continuing the centralized form of governance of the party (that is, all decisions to be dictated from the Centre) and abiding by Leftist, revolutionary ideology and zeal in the eastern provinces, Western Armenian Hnchagist leaders such as Mihran Damadian and Sivazli stressed the nationalist character of the popular unrest, preparedness, and "education" of the villagers. This was akin to the differences that surfaced within the ARF—such as those between Hrayr and his Eastern Armenian counterparts later on (see below).

⁵³ The Zeytun rebellion of 1895 was in conjunction with the Sasun rebellion of 1894. Both acts led to further Armenian bloodshed throughout 1895 and 1896.

⁵⁴ Dasnabedian, *Badmutyun*, 109-122.

first formed in Tiflis (Tbilisi) in the summer of 1890,⁵⁵ but early failures invited a reappraisal that, two years later, gave way to the establishment of the Hay Heghapokhagan Tashnagsutyun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation, ARF).⁵⁶ Like the Social Democratic Hnchagyan party, the ARF adopted socialism as its ideology too, which was, however, not fully integrated into the party program until 1907.⁵⁷ Unlike the Hnchagyan party, however, the ARF adopted a more nationalistic character. It also initiated a decentralized working environment that proved crucial for the successful management of different branches scattered throughout Russia, the Ottoman Empire, Iran, Egypt, Europe, and the United States. Although the ARF was also perturbed by friction between its Western and Eastern leaderships regarding issues pertaining to ideology and tactics, the Tashnagsutyun was able to solve internal difficulties albeit enduring heated debates during successive general world congresses.⁵⁸

For Hrach Dasnabedian, the official historian of the ARF, the reasoning behind the formation of Armenian revolutionary organizations could best be described as follows:

The growing appetite manifested by Russia in its wars against the Ottomans in 1828 and 1877 created hope and aspiration for Armenians in both empires. It led to Armenian migrations to the Russian dominated parts of the Caucasus.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 123-127.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 128-150. It was finally formulated and adopted during the 4th ARF General Congress held in Vienna in 1907.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 52-87.

The renaissance of the Christian people of the Ottoman Empire (Greeks, Romanians, Serbians, Macedonian, Bulgarians) were a contagious stimuli that infected Armenians...The impotence of the [Armenian] Patriarchate and its national bodies in asking for reforms for the Armenians in the interior...were enough for the creation of a revolutionary tendency within the Armenians.

Moreover, the Armenian Nationalistic Movement had a peaceful reformist attitude aiming at attaining for Armenians what already was normal for the dominant Muslim population of the Ottoman Empire; These included: human dignity, and equality within the social, economic and religious spheres.

If there was even some semblance of autonomy or freedom in the minds of some [Armenians] that was not yet formulated in a bold political, ideological platform.⁵⁹

The first years of Abdulhamid II's reign were considered normal, as he "...made a good impression... in his country and abroad. For many years there was no opposition... to his rule and foreign observers were almost unanimous in their praise for the new sultan."⁶⁰ Such appraisals notwithstanding, the sultan's good image was shattered by the Armenian massacres starting in 1894.⁶¹ Unlike the clear dictums of the San Stefano treaty, the Congress of Berlin had provided only a vague decision in addressing core concerns for

⁵⁹ Ibid., 20-22, 28-29.

⁶⁰ Ramsaur, *The Young Turks*, 9.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Armenian reforms. Moreover, it was Abdulhamid's lack of pursuing any specific reform initiatives that gave impetus to the formation of Armenian revolutionary movements. These more structured organizations appeared in the empire and abroad only to address legitimate grievances that, over time, included advocacy for autonomy or outright independence even through armed struggle if necessary.⁶² An uncompromising Abdulhamid responded by creating the Hamidiye light cavalry regiments in 1891, comprised of Kurdish tribal fighters that were technically justified to secure the border with Russia though, in reality, they were structured to resemble Russian Cossack regiments that were widely employed to subdue internal uprisings.⁶³ Inasmuch as these tactics boomeranged, a gradual and sinister blueprint of Constantinople's intentions emerged. Describing Abdulhamid's policy in the eastern provinces of the empire, for example, the historian Bayram Kodaman illustrated the sultan's real intentions. According to Kodaman, Abdulhamid disapproved of European intrigues towards his empire, as Ottoman losses in the Balkans allegedly stiffened the sultan's stance towards his eastern territories. Consequently, the ruler may well have devised policies whose major principles were summed up as follows:

1. Establish the government's military and administrative presence in Eastern Anatolia;

⁶² Luise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties Through the Nineteenth Century*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 90-178. These were: (a) The Armenagan Party, (b) The Social Democratic Hnchagyan party, and (c) The Armenian Revolutionary Federation, formed in 1890 in Tiflis.

⁶³ Stephen Duguid, "The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, No. 9 (1973), 144. Duguid alludes to Ottoman fear of a Russian encroachment on the eastern provinces and Armenian nationalist movements as a main motive for the creation of the Hamidiye corps.

2. Form military units through local means and initiatives in the absence of central army units;
3. Implement reforms in all provinces and not exclusively for Armenians as mandated by Europe;
4. Delay and procrastinate as much as possible regarding reforms imposed by European powers;
5. Deny access to officials from the western [European] provinces of the empire to their eastern counterparts;
6. Arm Muslims, especially the [Kurdish] tribes against Armenians and keep those tribes in a state of alert;
7. Protect the Muslim populations and strengthen local authorities by improving ties to the central government;
8. Interfere in all aspects of Armenian life and not let them gain momentum;
9. Weaken the power of European [and American] missionaries, or at least bring them under control; and
10. Create military units from the [Kurdish] tribes.⁶⁴

Remarkably, Kodaman never used the word “Kurdish” in describing the military units Abdulhamid intended to form and, in accordance with the official Turkish interpretation, identified Kurds living in the eastern and southeastern provinces of the empire as Turkoman tribes. In his own words:

⁶⁴ Bayram Kodaman, *Sultan II. Abdulhamidin Doğu Anadolu Politikası* (Sultan Abdulhamid II’s Eastern Anatolian Policy), (Istanbul: Orkun Press, 1983), 7-11.

That the Kurdish tribes form an arm of the Öguz people is well established in the works of many non-Turkish academics. In the 1597 Şerefnâme [Şeref Khan's History] of the Amir [Prince] of Bitlis he made this [the issue of the Kurds being the descendents of the Öğuz] clear. It is also known that the Kurds arrived into Anatolia from Central Asia as a Turkish people.⁶⁵

Knowledgeable readers can thus conclude that the crux of this policy gave Hamidiye regiments the official competences of a regular army. The formation and deployment of the Hamidiye regiments were one of the focal points of this policy, since they were the catalyst by which Abdulhamid implemented his strategy to uproot and relocate Armenian peasants from the eastern provinces. Their occupied lands would then be given to high-ranking Kurdish Hamidiye officers. Moreover, lands confiscated from Armenians would also serve to settle Turkoman and other tribal immigrants from the Caucasus at the expense of legitimate Armenian inhabitants. This policy led to the first Armenian rebellion of Sasun in the province of Bitlis (see Chapter one), which the sultan handled with an iron fist. This, in turn, led to a new wave of European intervention on behalf of Armenians.

As if to remedy Abdulhamid's egregious policies, European powers pressured the sultan in 1895 to implement a reform package for Armenians in what historically came to

⁶⁵ Ibid., 11, 143-144. What is interesting in Kodaman's account is that all the "foreign" academics he mentions are Turks: Akdeş Nimet, *Türk Kavimleri ve Devletleri* (Turkish Peoples and [Their] States); Fahrettin Kirzioğlu, *Kars Tarihi* (History of Kars); Hilmi Göktürk, *Kürtlerin Soy Kütüğü ve Soy Tarihi* (The Kurdish peoples' Roots and History); Orhan Türkdoğan *Çağdaş Türk Sosyolojisi* (Journal of Turkish Sociology); Ziya Gökalp, *Kürt Aşiretleri Hakkında İctimai Etkiler* (Social Research Regarding Kurdish Tribes). It must be emphasized that Gökalp was a nationalist CUP leader and one of the ideologues of Pan-Turkism.

be known as the 1895 “May Reform Project.” This was viewed by the sultan as an uncalled for interference in the internal affairs of the Ottoman State.⁶⁶ It was at this juncture that the first contacts between Armenian revolutionary societies and Young Turk leaders, the successors of the New Ottomans, occurred.

Methodology

This dissertation intends to shed new light on the subject of Armenian-Turkish relations between 1895 and 1909. Although key issues regarding the Young Turk Movement were studied by leading academics, no complete account of Armenian involvement in this period has been attempted. It is time to address the subject by relying on hitherto unavailable archival materials, especially Ottoman and Armenian sources. It must be acknowledged that the seminal work by Şükrü Hanioglu, who has meticulously examined the history of the Young Turks from the 1890s to the 1908 revolution was an important contribution, even if the Turkish historian had no other choice but to overlook the Armenian dimension for lack of knowledge in Armenian and the impossibility of obtaining such sources in translation.⁶⁷ It is now possible to compare and contrast Armenian primary and secondary sources to materials brought to light by Hanioglu.

However, several issues must be clarified, and the methodology pursued in this study must be elucidated. As Hanioglu suggests, it would be very linear and extremely naïve to assume that the Young Turk movement existed within a homogeneous, monolithic organization. Therefore, this very presumption of the Young Turks as a group entrenched

⁶⁶ The May Reform Project and its aftermath are dealt with in Chapter 1.

⁶⁷ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2.

in impartiality presented something of a problem, which merited careful attention. Thus far, researchers acknowledged only the struggle for leadership within the movement, especially that between Murad Bey and Ahmed Riza.⁶⁸ Abundant new materials now reveal the fallacy of this presumption and need to be meticulously assessed. The Committee of Union and Progress was an umbrella organization until 1902, and brought together groups whose only common agenda was the dethronement of Abdulhamid II, it behooves researchers to go beyond stale paradigms. Moreover, because the CUP did not maintain a constant identity—for it passed through ongoing transformations involving its ideology—it may also be fair to assume that its leadership, the ethnic origins of its leaders, and its membership were complex and, perhaps, not as well understood as generally assumed. Indeed, it may even be plausible to speak of at least three different organizations that used the name CUP, which need further investigation. Therefore, and as discussed in this study, the CUP that functioned between 1899 and 1902 probably bore little resemblance to the CUP that unleashed its fury between 1906 to 1908. The only exceptions to this rule were the individuals who remained active in the party throughout.⁶⁹

Even though this narrative addresses the Young Turk movement vis-à-vis its relations with Armenian revolutionary societies, it is important to keep Hanioglu's assessment in mind, especially for the period 1895 to 1902. Every effort has been made to take note of the Turkish historian's narratives.

⁶⁸ Mizanji Murad Bey. Mizanji was an adjective associated to Murad Bey, since he was the publisher of *Mizan* (Balance), the organ of the Young Turks expatriates first in Egypt and then in Paris. Ahmed Riza was the editor of yet another Young Turk publication, *Meshveret* (Consultation) in Paris.

⁶⁹ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 4.

Equally important is the question related to freemasonry and whether the Young Turks were connected to Freemasons in general? This question must be asked to authenticate the veracity of the “conspiracy theory” that pullulates the non-academic literature. Although some Young Turk officials clearly established close ties with freemasonic groups, a vigilant approach to ascertain facts indicated that most of these encounters were not substantial.⁷⁰ Once again Hanioglu offers a reasonable suggestion:

There is no evidence supporting the frequent assertion first made by Ramsaur that Ibrahim Temo, the founder of the Ittihad-i Osmani Cemiyeti [Ottoman Union Society], made contact with the Freemasons in Italy in 1888. The evidence suggests that the Freemasons continued to operate their own independent political organizations until 1902. This is supported by Ahmed Riza’s refusal to accept an invitation to join a Masonic Lodge in 1892, on the grounds that the Freemasons’ beliefs conflicted with his positivist tendencies.⁷¹

This did not mean, however, that some Young Turk leaders were not active in Masonic organizations, especially among those of the so-called Palace Party who merged with Turkish revolutionaries in Europe. Many Palace Party officials relocated to escape the wrath of Abdulhamid II and may have received assistance in their new lives.⁷²

⁷⁰ Ibid., 33-41.

⁷¹ Ibid., 38.

⁷² These were liberal officials who were close to the sultan and were trying to change the regime through an internal, bloodless coup d’état.

Hanioglu implies that such was the case of “Prince Muhammad Ali Halim, the leader of Freemasons in Egypt,” who was suspected by the sultan since at least the mid-1890s. The prince “had been in contact with Ahmed Riza for some time, and during the 1906 ‘reorganization’ of the Young Turks, was given important duties. Talât Bey, who had maintained correspondence with Ahmed Riza since 1903, was also in this group. In July 1903, for example, Talât joined the Italian lodge Macedonia Risorta.”⁷³ Finally, despite many differences, corroborating evidence emerged that established how “the Freemasons supported the Young Turks and were more than satisfied with the reinstatement of the constitution; Indeed, Freemasons thrived after the downfall of Abdulhamid II...,” which further deserved attention in this investigation.⁷⁴

Given the separate importance of these two issues, Young Turk movement ties with revolutionary societies and putative CUP Freemason activities, it was thus fair to ask whether any connections existed between Armenian revolutionary societies and Freemasons? It is clear that an Armenian Freemason Lodge, the Ser Otiag [the Love Lodge] was operational in Constantinople since at least the 1880s.⁷⁵ Of special interest was the fact that membership in this lodge was comprised almost exclusively of Armenian

⁷³ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 40.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷⁵ A. Fenerjian, “Ser Otiage” (The Love Lodge), *Hayrenik*, April 1955, 100-101, June 1955, 90-95, July 1955, 95-102, September 1955, 94-100, December 1955, 75-81. The series of articles represents the history of the Armenian Masonic Lodges from the 1860s to the 1920. The Hayg Otiag (Hayg Lodge) was the predecessor of the Ser Otiag. Serovpe Aznavor [also known as Aznavour], while working in Manchester, England, was a member of the Integrity Lodge and the Odd Fellows philanthropic organization. He formed the Hayg Lodge in Constantinople in the 1860s.

notables and professionals.⁷⁶ However, Hanioglu asserts that Armenian revolutionary societies approached Freemasons in Europe, and notes that “... upon learning that Armenian organizations had also approached Masonic groups in Europe to solicit their help, Ahmed Riza asserted the following:

Since these secret societies have lost their *raison d'être* in the free countries [of Europe], a number of Masonic organizations have taken it upon themselves to intervene in political affairs abroad. They have mobilized their energy to fight despotism and repression all over the world. Abdulhamid understands the importance of these Masonic groups and the respect that they have for the suppressed Sultan Murad V. For this reason, he commissioned secret agents to make inquiries about the policies and ideas of these organizations. But the Masonic groups were well aware of Abdulhamid's spying endeavors, and I trust that they will take the necessary precautions to bring their undertakings to a satisfactory conclusion.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ibid., April 1955, 100-101. The roster of members during the 1860s included names such as Harutyun Noradungian (father of Kapriyel Noradungian, who was employed by the Ottoman foreign ministry and who later became Ottoman foreign minister, 1910-1912, joined the Lodge in 1876), Hagop Kazezian (from the famous Kazezian amira family), the head of the Armenian protestant community Rev. Ghazaros Davud, and the member of the Ottoman National Debt Administration Hagop Jelali. Armenian lodges were also formed in the provinces, such as the Yeprad Otiag (Euphrates Lodge) in Kharpert (Harput), the Beirut Lodge, and the Hayastan Otyak (Armenia Lodge), formed in the Republic of Armenia in 1918, which continued its operations well into the Soviet period. It is noteworthy to underline the fact that unlike the Young Turks, who were followers of the Italian rite, Armenian lodges were under the jurisdiction of the Scottish rite. It should also be noted that the Ser Lodge of Constantinople stopped operating in 1895, due to Abdulhamid's persecution.

⁷⁷ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 39.

Over the years, anecdotal references fueled the imagination of some writers to find a “secret hand,” or a “hidden agenda,” in the workings of Freemasons and their influence on Armenian and Turkish revolutionary movements. This research effort will attempt to establish whether hidden plans existed or refute them based on a thorough scrutiny of the evidence.

Lastly, the dissertation will also examine the issue of a Zionist connection with the Young Turks, and their alleged support for the 1908 revolution. Was this yet another “conspiracy theory” to the detriment of Armenians? Although Young Turk-Zionist relations are scrutinized at some length below, it is safe to assert that these contacts illustrated how several Young Turks intended to extort exorbitant amounts of money from Theodore Herzl, the father of Zionism, in exchange for obtaining an Imperial Irade for the formation of a Jewish state in Palestine.⁷⁸ Of course, this never occurred, though the issue of Zionist influence on Young Turks was embedded in the psyche of Armenians and Turks, because a multitude of publications, mostly nonacademic, drew on conspiratorial images of Zionism as the formulator of Pan-Turkist ideology.⁷⁹ To ascertain better the authenticity of such influences, the tenets of Pan-Turkism are analyzed further in this dissertation, even if such a scheme may seem largely unfounded.

Although scholars have devoted substantial attention to Armenian Revolutionary movements, relations between various Armenian organizations and Young Turk leaders, individually and through organizations, received tangential consideration. To be sure, such

⁷⁸ Hanioglu, *Preparations for a Revolution*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 59-62.

⁷⁹ For example, see K[aspar] Derderian, *Sionizmi yev Panturkizmi Arnchutyunnere* (The Relationship Between Zionism and Pan-Turkism), (Beirut: Armenian Literary Circle, 1990).

paucity was probably and largely due to the scarcity of original sources that covered the second half of the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II, especially given that most Ottoman and Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) archives were off-limits. Şükrü Hanioglu's two volume seminal study of the Young Turk movement, provided the first careful assessments from the Turkish perspective relying on Ottoman archival materials. Yet, while Hanioglu's study added knowledge of what transpired at the time, it skirted much of the critical Armenian contributions that assisted Young Turks in attaining power. It is the overall purpose of this dissertation to address precisely many of the significant relationships between various Armenian leaders, political parties, and revolutionary movements with their Turkish counterparts, to capture better what actually occurred on the ground and why. This study thus aims to shed light on some of the reasons that motivated Armenians and Ottomans alike to collaborate with each other and, to the degree that it may be possible to ascertain, to identify causes for their failures.

The dissertation opens with an analysis of long-promised reforms, ostensibly to benefit Armenian inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire after the Treaty of Berlin (1878), and the skillful manipulations by Sultan Abdulhamid II to water them down. An effort is made to carefully assess the Sublime Porte's reliance on the Kurdish Hamidiye Regiments, which were used to sabotage reforms, to better understand Constantinople's political intrigues.

Much of this rich history is described and analyzed in the six chapters that follow. In Chapter One, the history from the May Reform Project of 1895 to Abdulhamid II's abdication in 1909 is thoroughly discussed, placing the agitations for reforms within the

overall tensions that affected the Ottoman Empire. As the Armenian Millet faced its conundrum at a time when Turks themselves wished to establish a constitutional monarchy in order to unite the empire and its peoples, the roles played by Armenian subjects were especially important. In turn, this vital position attracted Armenian revolutionary movements to Young Turk leaders, who promised that their own revolution against the sultan would open a new era in Ottoman history. Many assured critics that their objective was to restore the 1876 Constitution, which was promulgated at the same time Abdulhamid II acceded the throne. Several maintained that they were following in the footsteps of the reformist Midhat Pasha and his disciples, who are better known as the *Yeni Osmanlilar* (New Ottomans).

Despite their enthusiasm, however, the initial path to establish cordial relations between Armenian revolutionary organizations and their Ottoman counterparts was marred with suspicions and mistrust. These important differences are discussed and analyzed carefully in Chapter Two. By December 1907, Armenian and Young Turk forces managed to overcome hurdles that arose, to form a united front whose declared goal was to topple the regime of Abdulhamid II. How the two sides overcame their reservations and doubts of each other, which colored future ties, are assessed in Chapter Three. Inasmuch as one of the chief disputes between Armenian revolutionary and Young Turk leaders were the conditions of the Armenian inhabited provinces within the Ottoman Empire, Chapter Four provides a thorough examination of the situation there, to ascertain whether misinterpretations or misrepresentations were justified. How the Armenian revolutionary movement was able (or at least tried very hard) to revolutionize the Kurdish and Turkish

populations there, in accordance with the directives of the first anti-Hamidian conference held in Paris in 1902, are also addressed. Along the same lines, Chapter Five further tackles the issue of Armenian-Macedonian relations, which were blessed by the fledgling state of Bulgaria for its own political and national gains. One could naturally speak about a Bulgarian connection vis-à-vis this cooperation, which is seldom addressed in scholarly sources. Finally, the April 1909 Adana Massacres are covered in Chapter Six, to illustrate how the ARF continued to cooperate with the Young Turks despite what had happened, and in an effort to give the fledgling revolutionary movement a new chance.

The dissertation closes with an assessment of Armenian-Young Turk relations. Despite shocking developments, the CUP leadership covered up the vagaries of bewildered officials, confused by the desire to investigate wrongdoings, while seeking Armenian political assistance against the Sublime Porte.

Both at the official as well as the popular levels, Armenian ties with Ottoman leaders disintegrated, which planted the seeds for fresh animosities. By 1913, the gap that separated the two nations enlarged, and while few anticipated future catastrophes, revealing signs were present that tensions simmered. Regrettably, hardly anyone exercised the foresight to prevent new tragedies.

CHAPTER 1
REFORMS, NEGOTIATIONS, AND EARLY RELATIONS
WITH YOUNG TURKS, 1895-1899

Over the centuries, Armenian-Turkish relations underwent dramatic transformations, ebbing after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and leaving behind significant wounds that a full century failed to heal. This chapter examines the reforms that were introduced during the 19th century, and the various negotiations between the Sublime Porte and the empire's Armenian subjects. It is divided into four sections, each addressing key questions, to better ascertain whether early relations could have taken a more fruitful direction.

The chapter first focuses on the Kurdish Hamidiye Regiments and what their impact was on Armenian population. Were these regiments utilized to change the land tenure system to affect the ethno-demographic status quo of the area? Were they conceived to harass the empire's Armenian citizens and, ultimately, did they accomplish their stated objectives? This analysis is followed by a close examination of the May 1895 Reform project, to determine whether it were meaningful, destined for implementation or, as many suspected, utilized as a ploy to cajole Armenian leaders by making promises that were never intended to be put into operation. Still, because the very promise of reforms generated their own dynamics that encouraged awakened Armenian and Turkish leaders to mobilize, the chapter then focuses on the early relations with the Young Turks (1895-1898). The intent is to describe conditions on the ground, identify various contacts, and the direction of the conversations held by both parties. The chapter closes with an examination

of the negotiations of Armenian revolutionary societies with the Sultan Abdulhamid (1897-1899), to ascertain whether the Ottoman monarch really intended to see any of his oft-promised transformations as to how minorities were governed in the empire, applied. By relying on Armenian officials serving the porte, the sultan managed to create certain wedges within the community. Importantly, one of the leading Armenian parties, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, stood firm, extended a hand to Young Turk officials, and set the stage for the emergence of an alliance against Abdulhamid II, which probably set in motion a series of interrelated consequences.

To answer better many of the questions that arose, and as in every effort to introduce reforms, a painful process ensued, where negotiations with Armenian revolutionary societies became complicated and led to clashes among different personalities. Many were wary of espionage, disloyalty, and assorted other allegations of anti-state activities, which were all severely punishable offenses. Equally important, an analysis of the period highlighted how far apart many of the actors were, serving competing goals. If Young Turk officials mobilized to oust the sultan, Armenians were primarily interested in protecting and preserving their population in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire. As discussed throughout this chapter, key officials on both sides coordinated political efforts to achieve what most believed were common goals, though few agreed on what to do after the sultan was toppled.

The Hamidiye Regiments

Abdulhamid's grandiose idea to create the Hamidiye light cavalry regiments starting in 1891 must be considered within the context of the reformist policies of his predecessors.

Composed of Kurdish tribal fighters, these regiments were intended to secure the border with Russia, although few were deployed or even tasked on that front. Modeled on advanced military institutions in Europe, their structure was to be similar to that of Cossack regiments employed by the Russian Army, which were then considered elite troops for border protection.¹ For Abdulhamid, who was influenced by his brother in law, Mushir Zeki Pasha,² the formation of regiments was meant simultaneously to tame unruly Kurdish tribes. Since Bitlis was one of the last areas of the Eastern Provinces that was not yet brought under the central government's reformist policies, Mushir Zeki Pasha, the commander of the Fourth army, concentrated his efforts there. In the event, the initiative backfired, because newly formed tribal regiments embarked on a campaign of intimidation and usurpation of Armenian and, in some instances, even Kurdish and Turkish villagers. It was not long before the first Armenian rebellion occurred in Sasun, which was a direct consequence of the coercive actions by these tribal regiments. Against excessive Kurdish extortions, Armenians defended themselves, compounded by an unprecedented level of discontent, itself the result of newly imposed taxes by independent leaders of key regiments benefiting from their military might. In short, these measures amounted to an intolerable system of double taxation,³ even if there were instances where the Ottoman army interfered to return cattle abducted by Hamidiye regiments back to their owners.⁴

¹ Stephen Duguid, "The Politics of Unity," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 9, No. 2, May 1973, 144.

² BOA, 255-97-39, Yıldız Esas Evrakı, 255-97-39, *4cu ordunun muşiri Zeki Paşa Talori ve havalisinde teftiş ederek Muşa döndüğü, Askeri hareket* (Zeki Pasha, the Commander of the 4th Army, returning to Mush after inspection in Talori and its environs, Military Action).

³ The formation of the Hamidiye regiments gave the Kurdish tribes an institutional and official capacity in terms of imposing new taxes on Armenian villages. Although law abiding citizens who were already burdened by taxation from the central government, Armenians now had also to pay for their

For Bayram Kodaman, Sultan Abdulhamid was drained of European intrigues regarding his empire, as Ottoman losses in the Balkans stiffened the porte's stances in the east.⁵ Relatively isolated, the sultan reasoned that he could easily overcome problems within the eastern provinces, concerns over the indigenous populations notwithstanding. Constantinople certainly enjoyed a free hand as it further justified the distribution of the Hamidiye regiments in an area inhabited by Armenian "revolutionaries." In fact, for one observer, such activities motivated the porte to act. According to Janet Klein:

Hence, if we were to superimpose a map of the Hamidiye Regiments on a map showing the distribution of the Armenian population in the region, particularly keeping in mind where the embryonic centers of Armenian revolutionary transit and activities were located, we find a strong overlap between the two. Moreover, a document from the Ottoman archives demonstrates that the regiments as initially planned were to be organized in the Bitlis and Van provinces where the Armenian *fesad* (conspiracy, agitation) was greatest, and where they would serve to counter that threat.⁶

"protection" to Kurdish tribes. These took the form of Kurdish chieftains appointing "guards" in Armenian villages so as to protect them from other tribes. Armenian villages were thus obliged to pay the guards' salaries.

⁴ BOA, 263-97-47, Yıldız esas Evrakı, *Zeki Paşa: Kürt aşiretler, Bikranlı ve Badkanlı Ermenilerin hayvanları bölüşmek istiyor, Ordu onları alıyor ve ve Ermenilere veriyor, 1894* (Zeki Pasha: The Bikranlı and Badkanlı Kurdish tribes want to divide cattle belonging to Armenians among themselves. However, the [Ottoman] army retakes the cattle and gives them back to the Armenians, 1894).

⁵ Bayram Kodaman, *Sultan II Abdulhamidin Doğu Anadolu Politikası* (Sultan Abdulhamid II's East Anatolian Policy), (Istanbul: Orkun Press, 1983), 7-11.

⁶ Janet Klein, *Power in the Periphery: The Hamidiye Light Cavalry and the Struggle over Ottoman Kurdistan, 1890-1914*, Ph. Dissertation, Princeton University, 2002. 39.

Relying on additional Ottoman documents Klein stressed that a multi-pronged rationalization was advanced to buttress the claim that Armenians were engaged in anti-state activities. She writes:

Although revolutionary activities were admittedly small-scale and revolutionary organizations were merely in an embryonic state in the years immediately preceding the formation of the Hamidiye, they were nonetheless a clear factor in the establishment of the tribal militia, and as the movement spread and as armed activities became more prevalent in the years of the initial recruitment for the Hamidiye.

While the aims of the Ottoman government in forming the Hamidiye Regiments were multifaceted and included the suppression of the Armenian threat, with a focus soon tuned to wiping out revolutionary activities: the better monitoring, managing, and eventual settling of Kurdish nomads; and overall increased control of the eastern provinces, the methods exercised in achieving these ends were equally diverse, at least with regards to the Hamidiye.⁷

As important as these developments were, and to somehow alleviate the condition of Armenians living under the mercy of the Hamidiye regiments, Armenians sought to introduce changes. They mobilized public opinion in Europe and communicated their

⁷ Ibid., 39, 56.

views to Kurds by appealing to their sense of neighborliness. For example, the Geneva Center of the ARF collaborated with and published a periodical called *Kurdistan*,⁸ through the medium of Abdulrahman Bedirhan Bey. The latter, a son of the legendary Kurdish chief Bedirhan, whose claim to fame was his revolt against the Ottoman government during 1840-1847, was a solid ally.⁹

Abdulrahman established close ties with the Troshag center in Geneva even if Armenian-Kurdish relations enjoyed close ties before Abdulrahman Bey's arrival on the scene. In 1898, Troshag published a call by an unknown Kurdish chieftain who stressed that Kurds lived in harmony with Armenians for almost 2000 years, and that they should not be manipulated by Abdulhamid.¹⁰ The article concluded by stating: "We have to do what Armenians are doing, because we too are being usurped and oppressed."¹¹ This

⁸ Garabet Moundjian, "Armenian-Kurdish Relations in the Era of Kurdish Nationalism, 1830-1930," *Bazmavep*, 1-4 (1999), 309-310. In fact, *Kurdistan* was first published under the editorship of Abdulrahman Bey's brother, Midhat Bey. When Abdulrahman assumed the editorship of the paper, he established close relations with the Troshag Geneva Headquarters. It was under these circumstances that his famous article "Kürtlere Hitap" (A Call to the Kurds), was published as a pamphlet in Kurdish. Its Armenian translation appeared in Troshag. Armenian revolutionary cells distributed thousands of these pamphlets within areas inhabited by Armenians and Kurds in the eastern provinces of the empire. The ARF Geneva Center also housed the editorial offices of the party's organ, *Troshag*. Hence in ARF parlance the Geneva Center is concurrently means the *Troshag* editorial offices

⁹ Moundjian, "Armenian-Kurdish Relations," 281-283. See also BOA, 1716-503-98, Yıldız esas Evrakı, *Zeki Paşa: Anadoluda Osmanlı askeriyeye Kürtlerin mezalimde bulunduğu ve Ermeniler tarafından yazılan mektupların Evrupada neşredildiği* (Zeki Pasha: The publication of letters written by Armenian [revolutionaries] in European newspapers regarding Ottoman soldiers' and Kurds' meyhem [of Armenians]).

¹⁰ It is interesting that *Troshag* didn't publish the Kurdish chieftain's name. This could be either due to political reasons or that no such person existed. One cannot exclude the possibility that this first propaganda effort too was written by Bedirhan Bey.

¹¹ "Goch Kurderun," *Troshag*, 6 (86), June 1898, 51-52. In this issue *Troshag* gives a summary of the article while leaving its publication to a future issue.

anonymous plea aside, Armenian collaboration with Abdulrahman Bey resulted in the publication of the latter's aforementioned commentary, *Kürtlere Hitap*.¹²

Troshag editors welcomed Abdulrahman Bey's essay, clarifying that Armenian-Kurdish unity and collaboration deserved serious thought. Still, Troshag analyzed Kurdish aggression against the Heyidi Kurds (1830s), Nestorians (1840s), and finally Armenians (1860s and on), which culminated in Kurdish cruelty against Armenians in Sasun in 1894. Remarkably, and in hindsight, it was especially important to analyze these critical events because Kurds volunteered to implement Abdulhamid's initiative to form the Hamidiye bands.¹³ In other words, while Armenians were ready to assess close associations with Kurds, they were nonetheless wary of ulterior motives. Troshag did not miss the opportunity to report that several attempts by powerful Kurdish leaders were made during the nineteenth century to attain independence, and that Armenian peasants were always loyal to them.¹⁴ It must be noted that Abdulrahman Bedirhan Bey published his own gazette, *Kurdistan*, to enlighten the Kurdish population of the eastern provinces.¹⁵

¹² Abdulrahman Bedirkhan, "Goch Kurderun" (*Kürtlere Hitap* [A Call to the Kurds]), *Troshag*, 4-115 (June 1901), 65-67.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Moundjian, "Armenian-Kurdish Relations," 277-294. During the nineteenth century, there were several attempts by Kurdish princes to attain independence. These were:

- a) Amir [prince] Mohammad's movement during the 1830s
- b) Bedirkhan's revolt during the 1840s
- c) Yezdansher's movement during the 1850s
- d) Shaykh Obeidullah's movement during the 1880s. See also "Hay-Krdakan Haraperutiunner" (Armenian-Kurdish Relations), *Troshag*, 4-115 (June 1901), 67-68; *Troshag*, 5-116 (July 1901), 81-82.

¹⁵ BOA,1614-42-4, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı –Umum Vilayetler Tahriratı, [*Abdulrahman*] *Bedirhan Paşazade Mithatin Kürtçe olarak neşretmiş olduğu gazeta nushalarının dağıtımının engellenmesi, 1898* (The stoppage of the distribution of copies of [Abdulrahman] Bedirhan Bey's Gazette, 1898)

Whether these initiatives led to understandings were impossible to determine. Suffice it to say that the Hamidiye forces were becoming a real menace for the population and, according to a British observer, their loyalty was in doubt. Such was the case of the Haydaranli tribe, which counted some 9,000 tents and furnished ten Hamidiye cavalry regiments, even if local concerns determined its long-term outlook. Tribal rivalries between the Haydaranli and Takuri [Shekak] tribes meant that members of these groups were eager to settle scores rather than blindly serve the Sublime Porte. In fact, age-old and petty local disputes were some of the many reasons for heightened danger in the area.¹⁶ Seasoned officers who observed these clashes were flabbergasted, concluding that Kurds were unreliable, often correctly. An astute observer described how, “[in the] Russian frontier posts, many of the officers were “Jeunes Turcs” [Young Turks] exiled from some more favorable places, and very bitter against the way the Hamidiye were pampered, and readily accorded ranks which took them many years of faithful service to attain.”¹⁷

Leading European embassies, whose consulates wrote to their Constantinople chancelleries, regularly deplored Kurdish actions and demanded the Ottoman government to gain control over brigands. A few token arrests were made to alleviate foreign pressure, as was the case with Emin Pasha, a Kurdish tribal leader who had bewildered the Adiljevaz district in the summer of 1899, and who was arrested for his diligence. Consul Maunsell, for his part, reported that Ottoman authorities sought to impose stricter discipline on the Hamidiye and “to check the almost unbounded license to commit crime they used to

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ F.O.424.200. No. 88. Maunsell to O’Conor, Van, July 24, 1900 No. 31, enclosure in O’Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, August 11, 1900 No. 279.

possess,” without specifying how.¹⁸ Likewise, Zeki Pasha, then governor of Van, attempted to reduce the influence of Husseyn Pasha, a Hamidiye commander. Zeki Pasha did not back the clannish chief, which meant that tribal leaders observed more caution for some time after the spar.¹⁹ However, as the year progressed, the Hamidiye appeared to have a freer hand from the government. In fact, local authorities backed away, especially since no explicit orders emerged from the palace. The latter was aware that the Ottoman Army lacked sufficient military units in the area to enforce its will, which saw most of the province of Erzerum in a “universal state of insecurity.” “Armenian migrant workers,” wrote the Russian Consul, “were in misery as they were unable to get there,” further highlighting conditions on the ground.²⁰ It was within such a context, namely to protect themselves from Hamidiye troops, that some Armenian villagers reached out to the Russians with the request to join the Russian Orthodox Church. Equally important, many villagers favored such unions to escape heavy Ottoman taxation.²¹ Yet, this was not the primary reason for the fear that inhabited the hearts of ordinary folks.

By 1901, several diplomats reported that new Hamidiye regiments were being formed in what was then “known [as the] cut-throats,” Kurdish warriors anxious to

¹⁸ F.O.424.200. No.11. Maunsell to O’Conor, Van, January. 6, 1900; No.1 enclosure in O’Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, January 24, 1909 No. 28.

¹⁹ F.O. 424.200. No.19. Maunsell to O’Conor, Van, January. 3, 1900; No. 5 enclosure in O’Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, March. 1, 1900; No. 66

²⁰ F.O.424.200. No.127. Lamb to de Bunsen, [Erzerum, n.d.] enclosure in De Bunsen to Salisbury, Constantinople, October 15, 1900, No. 358. See also BOA, 270-511-115, *Ermenilerin Rus Konsulun Teşvikiyle teşebbusu* (Armenians attempts are incited through the Russian Consul).

²¹ F.O.424.200. No.22. Lamb to O’Conor, Erzerum February 24, 1900; No. 2 Confidential enclosure in O’Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, March 7, 1900; No. 75 Confidential. See also BOA, 2125-4748, *Yıldız Perakende Evrakı-Arzuhal ve Jurnarlar, Ermenilerin terki tabiiyetle yabancı memleketlere göşmek istedikleri, 1902* (Armenians asking for leaving their [Ottoman] citizenship and wanting to settle in other countries, 1902).

please.²² Because colorful language like this was used frequently in diplomatic cables, it gradually became obvious that new regiments composed of particularly vicious elements suggested ulterior motives, perhaps indicative of certain designs in the mind of the sultan. Indeed, and generally speaking, weaker tribes were chosen to join the Hamidiye regiments until that time, which was a well-known fact.²³ Yet, this was now updated, with sinister consequences. As more violent combatants entered the fray, Kurdish tithe-farmers attacked impoverished Armenian villages, most of whom lost their land titles under dubious circumstances. Armenians who “lost” their land titles through such misappropriations grew in numbers during the following years, as Hamidiye regiments engaged in a systematic and largely protected pillages. Few could complain and, if hearings were held, the lopsided justice system punished victims. What the porte pursued through its Hamidiye regiments aimed to change the land tenure system. It was clear that Ottoman authorities were eager to affect the ethno-demographic status quo of the area.

The May 1895 Reform Project

Even while the Hamidiye regiments were dramatically changing the ethno-demographic status of the Eastern Provinces, the porte embarked on lofty reforms, if for no other reason than to demonstrate good intentions. In reality, Ottoman objectives were sinister, no matter how cleverly coaxed to show otherwise. Talk of reforms filled the corridors of the Palace even if a major uprising caused their haphazard implementation.

²² F.O.424.202. No.97. Lamb to O’Conor, Erzerum, December 2, 1901, No. 21, enclosure in de Bunsen to Lansdowne, Constantinople, December 9, 1921, No. 439.

²³ F.O.424.202. No.97.

On the first day of August 1894, the mountainous Armenian region of Sasun in the province of Bitlis was swarmed over by regular Ottoman troops and Hamidiye bands. The official reason given by the Ottoman government for the initial military concentration and subsequent attacks against the villages and hamlets of the area was to squelch an alleged uprising against the porte.²⁴ Official sources referred to frequent raids organized by bands of Armenian *fedayees* (partisans, also referred to as *haytugs*, hereafter fighters) against the government in Sasun, as well as the Mush district, endangering the peace and tranquility of the whole region.²⁵

In this case, the military offensive left more than 3,000 dead, as thousands of refugees saw their homes and villages methodically demolished. “For three weeks in the late summer of 1894 the district of Sasun in the province of Bitlis became the scene of horrors which recalled those of Batak,” wrote a leading historian. “The Kurds,” he continued, were “aided by Turkish troops, under the command of Zeki Pasha, [who] destroyed 24 villages, and butchered, with the most revolting cruelty, every Armenian whom they could find. Zeki was decorated for his services.”²⁶ As if the massacres were not

²⁴ BOA, 255-97-39, Yıldız Esas Evrakı, 255-97-39 (), *4cu ordunun muşiri Zeki Paşa Talori ve havalisine teftiş ederek Muşa döndüğü, Askeri hareket, 1894* (Zeki Pasha, the Commander of the 4th Army, returning to Mush after inspection in Talori and its environs, Military Action, 1894).

²⁵ William Miller, *The Ottoman Empire and its Successors*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 429. Sasun is located in the Province of Bitlis; See also Avetis Papazian, *Zhamanakagrutyun, Haykakan Hartse yev Medz Yegherne* (Chronology of the Armenian Question and The Big Calamity), (Yerevan: National Academy of Sciences, 2000), 7; *Fedayee*, from the Arabic *Fida'i*, literally means a person who is ready to sacrifice himself for a cause. Haytug, adopted by Armenians from the Serbian/Macedonian language. It was an appellation that referred to their freedom fighters. It was intermittently used in Armenian to mean freedom fighter. The adoption of this name shows the affinity that the Armenian revolutionary movement had with its counterparts in the Balkans (Serbs, Bulgars, Macedonians, etc.) This subject is discussed in detail in Chapter 5).

²⁶ Avetis Papazyan, *Zhamanakagrutyun*, 429. See also Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 120-122. According to Nalbandian, the “uprising” was organized by Murad, a devoted member of

sufficient, Ottoman authorities initiated a full-fledged deportation policy that affected a considerable part of the Armenian population, many of whom were expelled to distant locations. Undoubtedly, this step was a step in a scheme to alter the very ethnic composition of the area, denials aside. In the words of an Armenian physician, who commented on the arrival of Armenian deportees from Sasun to Urfa, conditions were appalling. “The exiles,” wrote Avedis Nakashian, “. . . arrived at Urfa. It was like a caravan of death. I shall never forget those tattered, pain-wracked victims, their staring eyes filled with horror, their gaunt faces. Women [were] clinging to their starving babies, little children with bleeding feet, men, women, and children who had been slashed with swords or beaten from head to foot. Had anything in history ever compared to it? I wondered, and I doubted if it had. Tears streamed down their faces, prayers were on their lips, and when they learned that they would be safe in Urfa, they fell upon their knees and gave thanks to the God they worshiped so devoutly.”²⁷

Eye witness reports revealed that the participation of the Hamidiye bands gave much cause for alarm, since its ranks were formed largely by recruits from poorer Kurdish tribal horseman—thieves and brigands to be more precise—for the sole purpose of pillaging and terrorizing Armenians. Thus, many believed that they were a potent

the Hnchagyan party, who came to Sasun at the beginning of 1894. Mihran Damadian, another Hnchagist leader at the time, was also instrumental in the organization of self-defense battles during the turmoil. See also Duguid, *The Politics of Unity*, 151. On the other hand, Duguid plays down the role of the central authorities. He asserts that the government stepped aside and the Kurds went ahead in committing the atrocities.

²⁷ Avedis Nakashian, *A Man Who Found a Country* (New York: Crowell, 1940), 135.

instrument in the hands of both the central as well as the local Ottoman authorities, determined to rid the region of its Armenian inhabitants.²⁸

On January 23, 1895, a commission of inquiry visited the devastated area, whose formation was triggered by reports of ongoing atrocities received by the British, French, and Russian ambassadors in Constantinople and forwarded to their respective governments.²⁹ The findings of this commission raised serious doubts about the porte's official explanation that it was responding to a "popular uprising." Instead, commissioners viewed the military campaign as one organized by army units against a peaceful and defenseless population. Moreover, Armenian revolutionary fighters' raids were not considered as sufficient reason to permit such a punitive action.³⁰ Parenthetically, several Ottoman members of the delegation that accompanied the commissioners on their journey were outraged that as soon as the official party reached the area of the so called Armenian insurgency, European members conducted their own independent investigations.³¹ This was unusual to say the least but also indicative of the mistrust then permeating Ottoman ties with leading European powers.

²⁸ Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 161.

²⁹ Miller, *The Ottoman Empire*, 429. According to Miller, the commission was appointed by the Ottoman government on the insistence of Great Britain, which demanded that British, French, and Russian delegates accompany it. See also BOA, 1552-66-10, Yıldız Esas Evrakı, *Sason Ermeni meselesine Tahkik Heyetinin tahkikat neticesini havi umumi raporun aslisi, 1895* (The original report containing the results of the Inspection Committee regarding the [uprising] of the Sasun Armenians, 1895); Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 122; Papazyan, *Haykakan Hartse*, 7.

³⁰ Miller, *The Ottoman Empire*, 429. According to Miller, "the commission officially designed as intended 'to inquire into the criminal conduct of Armenian brigands' [i.e. fedayee bands], conducted its proceedings with the partiality which might have been expected from this statement of its object, and proved as dilatory as most Turkish institutions."

³¹ BOA, 1552-66-10, Yıldız Esas Evrakı. *Sason Ermeni meselesine Tahkik Heyetinin tahkikat neticesini havi umumi raporun aslisi* (The original report containing the results of the Inspection Committee regarding the [uprising] of the Sasun Armenians, 1895).

The foreign officials were livid with what they observed and were particularly offended by Ottoman intrigues to advance a major diplomatic initiative. Ambassadors representing the three powers that were in a state of conflict over the Balkans confronted the sultan on May 11, 1895, with a Memorandum and Project of Reforms for the Eastern Provinces of Asia Minor. Carefully vetted by the governments of Great Britain, France and Russia, the document intended to punish Constantinople for its inaction, and hold The porte accountable for past treaty breaches.³² Referred to as the May Reform Project,³³ the memorandum contained twelve major reform issues, along with lengthy explanations regarding each.³⁴ In summary, the document addressed:

1. Decreasing the number of provinces;
2. Appointing suitable governors consistent with the needs of the different provinces;
3. Granting amnesty to Armenian political prisoners;
4. Providing the means for the return of Armenian refugees to their regions;
5. Appointing a permanent Control Commission in Constantinople;
6. Assigning a mobile commission to oversee implementation of reforms in the provinces;

³² F.O.424.182.182. See also J[on] Kirakosyan, *Hayastane Michazgayin Divanagitutyun yev Sovetakan Artagin Kaghakakanutyun Pastatgherum* (Armenia in Documents Pertaining to International Diplomacy and Soviet Foreign Policy), (Yerevan: Hayastan Publishing, 1972), 130-147. The book is a compilation of Russian archival documents relevant to the period 1828-1923.

³³ Supplement to F.O.424.182.182. The supplement is the main body of the reforms project. It consists of 14 one-columned pages. The original is in French.

³⁴ Kirakosyan, *Hayastane*, 130.

7. Securing reparations to Armenians in Sasun, Talori [Dalvorig] and other areas where massacres occurred;
8. Establishing laws to reduce instances of forced religion conversions;
9. Adopting measures to sustain Armenians' rights and privileges.

As customary diplomatic maneuverings were under way to refute these imposed conditions, events took on a dramatic turn at the end of September 1895, which complicated matters. On 30 September 30, the Hnchagists organized a demonstration of thousands of Armenians in front of the Sublime Porte. Unabashedly, demonstrators demanded the application of the May Reform Project, which was perceived as a provocation.³⁵ In response, Ottoman authorities retaliated, unleashing its wrath and encouraging a series of massacres in Constantinople and various provinces.³⁶ These actions did not go unnoticed by frustrated European representatives. Most concluded that the sultan was reluctant to implement the reforms they demanded and, infuriated by the new round of massacres, they decided to display their power in Constantinople. Vessels of the British and French fleets engaged in a naval demonstration in October 1895 to

³⁵ BOA, 131-94-60, Yıldız Esas Evrakı –Analitik Envanteri, , *Ermenilerin Istanbulda cikardığı karşılık ve ihtilal hareketlere dair tedbşrler, 1895* (The opposition of Armenians in Istanbul and the revolutionary movements and measures initiated by them, 1895); Miller, *The Ottoman Empire*, 429; Papazian, *Haykakan Hartse*, 7.

³⁶ Arman Kirakosyan, *Britanakan Divanagitutyune yev Arevmtahayeri Khendire: 1830-1914* (British Diplomacy and the Question of Western Armenians), (Yerevan: Gitutyun Publishing, 1999), 346. Arman Kirakosyan's book is an important source, based primarily on British governmental documents. See also Miller, *The Ottoman Empire*, 429. In Miller's own words, "the cathedral at Urfa, the Edessa of the Crusaders, was the scene of a human holocaust, in which 3000 persons perished."

intimidate the Abdulhamid. This “show of force” introduced no tangible changes, and it failed to alter conditions especially as far as Armenian reforms were concerned.³⁷

The new-year brought renewed Armenian hopes for the revival of long promised but perpetually postponed socio-political reforms. On January 3, 1896, and under intense diplomatic pressure, the sultan finally approved a plan for the establishment of a Commission of Control for the Armenian Provinces.³⁸ Within three days, however, the British Ambassador informed his government that Kurdish elements created disturbances in Sasun and Talori, while government forces sat practically idle.³⁹ He was not the only official who reported back and who lodged such a démarche with Ottoman representatives. On February 8, 1896, His Beatitude Matios Izmirlian Effendi, Patriarch of Ottoman Armenians, presented a formal takrir to Riza Pasha, the Ottoman minister of justice, in which he painstakingly enumerated both the human and property losses suffered by Armenians during the 1894 massacres and their subsequent deportations.⁴⁰

Although European powers exerted pressure on the sultan to remedy the conditions of Armenians in the interior provinces, especially in Bitlis, Abdulhamid remained adamant. A stubborn man with little or no tolerance for dissent, the sultan refused to change his instructions for massacres. About three months after the patriarch’s takrir was filed with the ministry of justice, on April 24, 1896, Robert Graves, the British consul at Erzerum, reported to his ambassador in Constantinople, Sir Philip Currie, that “a year after

³⁷ Affaires Étrangères–CP-T, 524, October 1895, 114-118; Cited in Hanioglu, *The Young Turks* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 43.

³⁸ F.O.424.186.11

³⁹ F.O.424.186.26

⁴⁰ Papazyan, *Haykakan Hartse*, 7.

the massacres in Sassoon the situation in the area and effectively the whole province of Bitlis remains very grave.”⁴¹ This was not an idle reportage but typical of numerous eye-witness testimonies that flooded chancelleries. In fact, the sheer amount of attention to similar accounts led European ambassadors to organize a relief committee, whose mandate was to provide much needed aid and shelter for thousands of homeless Armenians in Sasun.⁴² The effort was sorely needed as villages and helmets experienced starvation, assorted other hardships and, ultimately, death.

In October 1895, massacres of Armenians by Turks began in the vilayet of Trebizond as confirmed by report from Gillieres, the French Consul in Trebizond. The carnage then reached Erzinjan, Kghi, Kharpert, Malatia and almost locals inhabited by Armenians in the eastern provinces of the empire. Moreover In the province of Aleppo, peace was shattered when the Ottoman army started an offensive against Zeytun, another mountainous stronghold, inhabited almost exclusively by Armenians. The town was under siege since December 1895, nearly isolated from its surrounding villages, and experiencing one of the harshest winters on record.⁴³ On January 7, 1896, Ambassador Currie informed the British Foreign Office that the Ottoman government agreed to European mediation in Zeytun, and that the British and Italian consuls stationed in nearby Marash finally reached the town to see for themselves.⁴⁴ After complicated deliberations, Armenian inhabitants

⁴¹ F.O.244.182.196

⁴² F.O.424.186.50

⁴³ For a complete rendering of events in Zeytun, see F.O. 424.186, especially documents 4, 18, 68, and 86.

⁴⁴ F.O.424.186.98. See also BOA, 410-32-75, Yıldız perakende Evrakı, Arzuhal ve Journallar, *Zeytundeki Ermeni eşkiya ile muzekere etmek üzere oraya giden İngiliz ve Fransız sefirlerinin aff-i Umumi*

who defended the town valiantly, agreed to hand over their arms, and accepted Ottoman protection with the deployment of regular troops in their town, hoping that the army would protect them from marauding bandits.⁴⁵ Ambassador Currie confided his fear to Salisbury that once the Armenians had given up their weapons they would be at the mercy of troops as well as Kurdish tribal forces.⁴⁶ The ambassador's premonitions were well founded, since simultaneous acts of revenge were conducted elsewhere. What occurred in Zeytun spread to other cities, with identical results. In Urfa, for example, 7,000-8,000 Armenians were massacred, many of them burned alive inside a church.⁴⁷ In Van, close to the Persian border, the Armenian population lived through a similar period of terror. Since the Sasun massacres, the city and its environs were in a state of turmoil. In January 1896, Farid Saadeddin Pasha, who was instructed by the sultan to massacre Armenians living in the city, replaced governor Nazim Bey.⁴⁸ At the end of May, the onslaught of Ottoman forces started. It was met with meager Armenian self-defense initiatives. Fighting continued well into June as hundreds of Armenians were killed and scores of homes were destroyed.⁴⁹ As

etmeleri üzerine ise son verildiği, 1895 (Concerning the negotiations of the French and English consuls in Zeytun and stopping the rebellion by the consuls after agreeing on a general amnesty, 1895).

⁴⁵ F.O.424.186.130

⁴⁶ F.O.424.186.131 and 206. The latter is a telegram from Zeytoun to the British Ambassador in Constantinople, where Armenians report that they had indeed handed their arms and beg for security by the British.

⁴⁷ F.O.424.186.96. See also Miller, *The Ottoman Empire*, 429.

⁴⁸ Y. Yesayan & L. Mkrtyan, "Inknapashtpanakan Krivnere Vanum" (Self-Defense Battles in Van), *Banber Yerevani Hamalsarani* (Journal of the University of Yerevan), 1975, No. 1, 48-59. Abdulhamid replaced Nazim Bey with Farid Pasha because Nazim Bey was unable to fully implement the Sultan's policies of massacre in Van and its vicinity. Upon arriving in Van, Farid Pasha organized the Turkish populace and arranged for all Armenian deportees to return to Van and the surrounding villages in order to accomplish what he had come for. See Yesayan & Mkrtyan, "Inknapashtpanakan," 50.

⁴⁹ BOA, 329-50-47, Yıldız Esas Evrakı –Analitik Envanteri. *Van vilayetinde bulunan Ferik Sadettin ve Van Kumandani, Ferik Şemsi paşalar tarafından telegraflara göre şehrin İngiliz konsulu bu fesadın tertipcisi olan dir, 1896* (According to telegraphs received from Colonel Saadettin Pasha and the military commander of Van, Colonel Shemsi Pasha, the British consul of Van is the one who is instigating the

in Zeytun, Ottoman authorities made lofty promises to protect vulnerable populations, but failed to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities when villages surrendered their few rudimentary weapons used to defend themselves from killers lurking in their neighborhoods.

It was under these circumstances that Apraham Pasha (Kara-Kehia[ian]), a member of the amira notable community with solid political contacts, visited Ambassador Currie. Apraham Pasha confided to the British diplomat that the situation of Armenians in the interior was hopeless unless some sort of reconciliation was reached with the sultan.⁵⁰ The amira's visit coincided with the delivery of an unsigned letter mailed to the Chancellery, which requested that the British intercede in the removal of Patriarch Matios Izmirlian.⁵¹

revolutionaries, 1896). See also Yesayan and Mkrtchyan, "Inknashtpanakan" 50-54. It is interesting how the two Soviet Armenian historians try to paint a vicious picture of British the Consul at Van, James Williams. According to Russian documents utilized by the authors, Williams collaborated with Farid Pasha. He even informed the pasha of the route that the Armenian fighters were going to take when passing the border into Persia. These accounts become somehow ridiculous when one reads the Foreign Office documents within the British Public Records Office pertaining to Williams' dispatches from Van to Ambassador Currie, especially documents contained in F.O. 424, volumes 186 through 190. Moreover, one can assume that the writers were influenced by the Soviet rhetoric of their times, where they had to show that Russia was the only true friend Armenians had at the time (1896), and that other European powers—particularly England—were sabotaging Russia's efforts for the implementation of the promised Armenian reforms. See also Mikayel Varandian, *H.H. Tashnagsutyun Badmutyun* (ARF History), 2 vol.s (vol. I: Paris, 1932, vol. II: Cairo, Husaper Press, 1950). Here, Varandian, vol. I, 208. Varandian vindicates Williams and his actions by stating that he was a conscientious gentleman who was doing everything he could to save Armenian lives in Van. It seems that the Ottoman Archives are clearer in their estimate regarding the British Consul in Van (see the BOA archival document cited above). See also BOA, 325-50-43, Yıldız Esas Evrakı – Analitik Envanteri [Analytic Inventory]. *Rusya ve İran Ermeni komiteleinin İran hududu yakınında sireyet etmesi malhuz, 1896* (the Russian and Iranian Armenian revolutionaries' movement is noticed in the border area with Iran, 1896). The Ottoman action was also determined by reports received regarding the transport of arms and ammunition to Armenians in Van through Armenian revolutionary mobile groups traveling inside the Ottoman border through Russian and Persian lands.

⁵⁰ F.O. 424.186.144, February 29, 1896.

⁵¹ F.O.424.186.154. Some prominent Constantinople Armenian notables [i.e. Nurian, Maksud(ian), Kara-Kehia(ian) hated Patriarch Izmirlian. In fact, many notables considered him an ardent nationalist. Abraham Pasha's visit to Currie implies that the circumstances required a patriarch who could be approachable to the sultan and his inner circle. Izmirlian was not a person to act in such a manner. Hence the reason why many notables were apprehensive.

Against a steady tide of opposition from within the Armenian amira community, and understanding that the whole issue of Armenian reforms was untenable, the patriarch rendered his resignation to the Ottoman government on July 21, 1896.⁵² At first, authorities ignored the patriarch's resignation, though a dejected Izmirlian stayed away from his office at the Patriarchate.⁵³ It was a particularly sad development as what were strictly internal differences spilled over into the empire's political arena. Needless to say that local and foreign forces relished the opportunity to interfere and, in a bizarre twist, Ambassador Currie remarked in one of his dispatches that according to the Russian Ambassador, Nelidov, Izmirlian's resignation "had to do with the Russian government's responsibility."⁵⁴ What did the British diplomat mean when he knew the sultan was not particularly fond of Matios Effendi Izmirlian, who was exiled to Jerusalem in 1899 after Minister of Justice Said Pasha signed the order, but who returned a few years later in the aftermath of the 1908 Young Turk revolution? Izmirlian — who was very close to Currie and, therefore, at odds with the Russian Ambassador — was a leading maverick who knew how to irritate his opponents. While in Jerusalem, for example, Izmirlian made such a nuisance of himself that the Armenian Patriarchate there practically placed him under house arrest. Local police officers constantly followed him as his every move was reported

⁵² The Armenian Patriarch, as the head of the Armenian Millet, required government support to maintain his functions. The Ottoman Millet system allowed religious leaders some leverage in governing the internal affairs of their respective communities in the empire. However, they had to report directly to the Ministry of *Evkaf* (Ottoman for Department of Religious Affairs); Karpas, "Millets and Nationality," 141-169.

⁵³ F.O.424.191. 209.

⁵⁴ F.O.424.186.249 and F.O. 424.198.27.

to Constantinople. Nevertheless, he was a nationalist priest who knew how to protect his flock, even if the odds were stacked against him.

Following Izmirlian's resignation, a temporary committee was established to prepare for the election of a new patriarch under the presidency of Archbishop Partoghomios (Bartholomew) Chamichian, the locum tenens.⁵⁵ To no one's surprise, Maghakya Ormanian was elected patriarch on October 20, 1896, as a candidate who satisfied Apraham Pasha and the other Armenian notables.⁵⁶ In his interesting memoirs, Ormanian wrote a confession that acknowledged the politicization of church affairs, which he regretted, but that eventually contributed to the schisms that further divided the nation:

If we were to look logically at Izmirlian's workings, there would seem to be no problems regarding it. However, politics is not a matter of simple logic. Here, interests, and diplomacy to achieve those interests, prevail. Izmirlian put so much faith in international [foreign] intervention, that he thought it was unnecessary to think twice about his stern position with the envoys and emissaries of the Sultan. He thus closed all doors behind him. He entered the field of diplomacy yet disregarded the basic rules of that field.

He reduced Armenian issues into a matter of personal enmity between himself and the Sultan. Within the inner circles of the patriarchate, he antagonized the committee members [notables],

⁵⁵ F.O.424.186.249 and F.O. 424.198.27., 5062-5063.

⁵⁶ F.O.424.186.249 and F.O. 424.198.27., 5069-5071.

while giving credence to party representatives, who were always encouraging him to lean on foreign diplomats, and especially the British ambassador [Philip Currie], to the detriment of the others [i.e., French, Russian, German, and other diplomats]. It is no wonder that sympathizers called him “the Iron Patriarch.” Those people never assumed, that it was better to be flexible rather than as rigid as iron.⁵⁷

A pointed commentary in Hnchag⁵⁸ added the following on how Patriarch Izmirlian’s resignation was perceived in some Armenian circles:

Izmirlian’s predecessor, Patriarch Ashekian, who was elected in 1891, was obliged to cleanse the [Armenian patriarchate’s] National Council of people with real nationalistic feelings and to appoint others who were willing to become instruments in the hands of the likes of Nurian and Maksud pashas. However, when Izmirlian was elected in 1894 things changed. Europe’s eyes were on the Armenian Question and the likes of Nurian and Maksud pashas suddenly disappeared from the scene. This time, however, it was the likes of Apraham Kara-Kehiaian Pasha, who entered intra-Armenian

⁵⁷ Ibid., 5042-5044. Although an exaggeration in itself, since Ormanian had on many occasions worked closely with the government, Ormanian’s account is very telling. If it colors Izmirlian as a nationalist and revolutionary, on the other hand, it shows how reactionary he was. This was going to be a major problem for the Armenian revolutionary committees, who reached a point, as shall be seen later, to even threaten Ormanian’s life, if he didn’t change his attitude.

⁵⁸ The organ of the Hnchagyan party. Hnchag (Bell) was adopted from the Russian gologol, also meaning bell, which was the name of the publication of the famous Russian anarchist, Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin (1814-1876), who was a well-known Russian revolutionary, philosopher, and the theorist of collective anarchism.

politics at a very old age as a crony of Nurian and his faction. He was to bring shame and dishonor upon the name of his noble family. It was telegraphed to the *Times* [in London] that the Sultan had promised 10,000 gold coins to this traitor, if he secured Izmirlian's resignation.⁵⁹

Nor was this the sole bewildered voice. Ambassador Currie forwarded a dispatch to Lord Salisbury, then the British Crown Foreign Minister, in which he opined:

The secretary of the Armenian Patriarch called at this Embassy a few days ago, and said that His Beatitude was much disheartened by the inaction and bad faith of the Ottoman government in all matters affecting the Armenian question. The twelve points [May 11, 1895 Armenian Reform Project] mentioned in my dispatch No. 44 of the 17th January had been mostly rendered illusory by the numerous qualifications and conditions attached to them, and the few concessions which, after being revised by the Palace, retained any solid value, had not been executed.⁶⁰

Currie elaborated that both the patriarch and the government were apprehensive of the revolutionary committees and that, according to the patriarch, they were to wait until Easter to determine whether promised reforms would be implemented. If none were forthcoming then a strike would follow.⁶¹

⁵⁹ "Badriarkin Shurch: Verche Parin," (About the Patriarch; Let's Hope the End is Good), *Hnchag*, vol. 9, No. 7, April 2, 1896, page unknown. The passage from *Hnchag* clarifies why Abraham Kara-Kehia[ian] Pasha met with Ambassador Currie, and under what circumstances did the latter receive the unsigned letter demanding Izmirlian's resignation.

⁶⁰ F.O.424.191. 209.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

British-Ottoman relations deteriorated further after Sultan Abdulhamid II, angered over some public statements attributed to Queen Victoria, sent a letter of protest to Ambassador Currie. The sultan registered his dissatisfaction regarding “the speech that the British queen had delivered [in parliament] respecting Armenian affairs.” “His Majesty [the Sultan] thinks that it [the queen’s speech] would have a bad effect on public opinion,” wrote the ambassador, not without a little irony.⁶² Nevertheless, mounting diplomatic pressures obliged the Ottoman government to tinker with promised reforms, even if it was obvious that the sultan was only doing this because of foreign pressure.⁶³ During the first meeting with the dragomans of the British, French, and Russian embassies on February 14, 1896, the “Commission of Control for Armenian Reforms” informed the foreign dignitaries that “they were well intentioned and that the embassies should give them a free hand in their work.”⁶⁴ Ironically, the commission’s meeting coincided with the trial of several Armenian notables in Trebizond. There, Armenians demonstrated against the unjust rulings and subsequent death sentences—later commuted to permanent exile—rendered by an Ottoman court, which were not unusual sentences.⁶⁵ On February 24, 1896, the Russian Ambassador met with the sultan. According to Currie, Nelidov expressed his serious concerns on developments in the eastern provinces. In the words of the literate

⁶² F.O.424.186.185.

⁶³ BOA, 568-34-20, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı-Arzuhal ve Jurnarlar. *Ermeni Meselesi için Fransa, İngiltere ve Rusya arasında bir anlaşma olduğu ve bu husustaki mutalaat, 1896* (Concerning an agreement between France, England and Russia vis-à-vis the Armenian Question and some research material in this regard, 1896).

⁶⁴ F.O.424.186.226.

⁶⁵ F.O.424.186.228

Englishman, Nelidov was “unceasingly occupied by [the] question of reforms in Anatolia and Macedonia.”⁶⁶

Such concerns were prompted by attacks that continued unabated throughout the eastern provinces. In March 1896, for example, American missionaries in Erzerum contacted Currie regarding sorely needed protection from Turkish and Kurdish mobs.⁶⁷ A few days later the missionaries stressed that some 40,000 Armenians in the city were in dire need of relief too.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, the British diplomat received encouraging news regarding the promised reforms, such as the “enrolment of a new police force in Sivas.”⁶⁹ A memorandum by the Commission of Control for Armenian Reforms to the government listed a few of the measures that were allegedly implemented, although Currie soon realized that none were.⁷⁰ In March 1896, a new wave of massacres swept through Kharpert, which followed comparable outrages earlier in the year.⁷¹ As all of these details illustrated, little or no reforms, though oft-promised, were ever implemented. Moreover, a pattern emerged that witnesses the reliance on vicious attacks on hapless populations who, more often than not, were also burdened with excessive taxation. In time, conditions became intolerable, though few Armenians were in any position to defend or even protect themselves against repeated assaults on life and property. Simply stated, the “law” was stacked against Armenians, centuries of submission to legal authorities notwithstanding.

⁶⁶ F.O.424.186.230.

⁶⁷ F.O.424.186.288.

⁶⁸ F.O.424.186.317.

⁶⁹ F.O.424.186.308.

⁷⁰ F.O.424.186.318.

⁷¹ F.O.424.186.111., see also F.O.424.186.324.

The ARF Takeover of the Ottoman Bank in Constantinople

Consequently, not only were Armenian revolutionary organizations deeply concerned with the sultan's policies of persecution and mass murder, under the circumstances they also envisaged appropriate responses. While the Ottoman strategy was to stall the implementation of real reforms even as attempting to sabotage the whole project through a series of massacres in the eastern provinces, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, on the other hand, focused on European public opinion, aware that the latter's attention on Armenian reforms was essential. Towards that end, the ARF organized a spectacular operation when, on August 26, 1896, a group of militants took over the Ottoman Bank, the largest European financial institution in Constantinople at the time. Armenian agitators entered the bank with the intent to bomb it if the issue of Armenian reforms was not brought back to the forefront of Ottoman and European politics.⁷² In a flamboyant display of bravura, Armenian protesters entered the bank when it was full, precisely to hold as many employees and Turkish as well as European managers hostage.⁷³ The revolutionaries exchanged fire with police units that surrounded the building, which resulted in scores of

⁷² For a complete account of the Ottoman Bank takeover event, see Armen (Karekin Bastermajian), *Bank Ottoman: Memoirs of Armen Garo* (Detroit and Michigan, 1990), 96-116. The book is a translation of the Armenian original by Haig T. Papazian. Armen Garo, was an ARF member who participated in the takeover of the Ottoman Central Bank on August 26, 1896. After the 1908 Young Turk Revolution he was elected as a deputy from Garin (Erzerum) in the Ottoman Parliament.

⁷³ Since the Ottoman government had huge debts to European countries, the Ottoman Bank was chosen by the ARF as a symbol representing both Ottoman and European interests in the capital. In fact most of the officials of the bank were foreigners. So were a good proportion of its customers. The bank served the purpose of paying off Ottoman debts, through the auspices of a special commission that organized the consolidation of the general debt. Moreover, according to Armen Garo, throughout the event, the hostages were properly fed and looked after. They were removed to the central part of the building where they would be out of harm's way.

casualties mainly from the ranks of the police. At the height of the operation, militants threatened to destroy the bank, but did not execute this warning.⁷⁴

While the bank “operation” was still progressing, authorities allowed organized mobs to assault Armenian establishments, homes, and even ordinary people on the streets throughout the capital in what could only be described as retaliatory measures.⁷⁵ In such tense moments, the atrocities spread quickly to the suburbs and other seashore towns, where thousands of Armenians were murdered.⁷⁶ In the words of one analyst:

Scarcely had they [bank raiders] been shipped on board of [the] French steamer, and then the infuriated Sultan took a terrible vengeance upon their innocent compatriots. For the next two days, August 27 and 28, 1896, the streets of Constantinople were the theatre of an organized massacre. The Armenian quarter was attacked by gangs of men, armed with clubs, who bludgeoned every Armenian whom they met, and forced their way into the houses of Armenians or foreigners who had Armenian servants, in pursuit of their victims. Police officers and soldiers aided, and even directed, this Turkish St. Bartholomew.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ BOA, 442-33-1, Yıldız perakende Evrakı, Arzuhal ve Jurnallar, *Galatada Ermeni komitelerin faaliyetleri, 1896* (Armenian committees' activities in Galata, 1896).

⁷⁶ Kirakosyan, *Britanakan*, 352-354. Kirakosyan quotes from “The Constantinople Massacre,” *The Contemporary Review*, 1896, vol. 70, 458. See also *The Spectator*, September 5, vol. 77, 1896, 292 issue. The author also states, that the sultan was informed, through his spies that an operation involving the Ottoman Bank was to take place by Armenian revolutionaries. However, he did nothing to stop the event from happening, since it was to his advantage to use the act as a valid reason for a new round of massacres.

⁷⁷ Miller, *The Ottoman Empire*, 430-431.

The carnage continued unabated until the representatives of the European Powers, who had witnessed the events, sent a strongly-worded note to Abdulhamid, who immediately issued an order to stop the hostilities. The event resulted in the death of some 6.000 Armenians. In the words of a British diplomat:

it seems to have been the intention of the Turkish authorities to exterminate the Armenians. Gladstone made his last public utterance at Liverpool on behalf of the Armenians, and branded Abdulhamid II as ‘the Great Assassin,’ while the French writers pilloried him as ‘the Red Sultan.’ But no steps were taken to punish the author of the Armenian horrors.⁷⁸

In a carefully worded letter that was most probably prepared beforehand and new items were added to it as events unfolded, the attackers demanded:

1. an end of the massacres taking place in Constantinople;
2. a commitment from authorities to stop their physical assaults on the bank, threatening to blow up the building before their ammunition was exhausted;
3. written guarantees concerning the enactment of Armenian reforms with the amendment suggested by the Central Committee of the ARF in a special communication; and
4. freedom for all Armenian political prisoners detained because of current events.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Armen Garo, *Bank Ottoman*, 122.

Foreign diplomats in Constantinople offered their good offices to negotiate a peaceful end though it was difficult to determine whether they were concerned for their endangered national interests or moved by the spectacular attack. Russian Ambassador Maximof, who acted as the intermediary, secured safe passage for the militants through the city to a waiting French vessel, *La Gironde*, which was to take them to Marseilles.⁸⁰

While managing to escape from Constantinople, the militants failed to achieve their main objective, since the sultan did not implement any of the oft-promised reforms.⁸¹ To the contrary, the Ottoman response was a devastating series of massacres, which surprised few. Nevertheless, the bank attack and the massacres that followed created a ripple effect in European capitals, where an awakened public opinion focused on atrocities committed by the porte, as intellectual voices mobilized against the sultan. Many pointed to the Sublime Porte's shortcomings, promising to undertake reforms and failing to follow up, pledging to live to higher standards but tolerating worsening conditions, and guaranteeing to protect minorities though ignoring their basic rights.⁸² Disillusioned Europeans looked to alternative forces within Ottoman society, persuaded that the sultan was deliberately incapable to fulfill the most elementary responsibilities towards his subjects, especially Christians.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 137-153.

⁸¹ Kirakosyan, *Britanakan*, 352. The quote is from the American Embassy's secretary, Charles Williams. See Ch[arles] Williams, "Mother of Martyrs," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1899, vol. 83, 95.

⁸² Kirakosyan, *Britanakan*, 357-358.

Early Relations with the Young Turks (1895-1897)

Twenty years of Abdulhamid's despotic rule created epochal friction points throughout the Ottoman Empire. In the Balkans, Albanians, Montenegrins, and Macedonians relied on revolutionary tactics as their diligence ushered in concrete reforms. Arabs, too, were agitated. Armenians, representing a sizeable minority in the empire, were in the forefront of such activities as well. Even Muslim subjects of the Sultan had enough of decaying practices that left most dejected. Heavy taxation on farming, along with a systematic policy that allowed Turkish notables and Kurdish tribal chiefs to commandeer land at will, transformed Muslim peasants into impoverished masses too. Disenchanted by un-kept promises and brutal steps that stripped many of their meager possessions, the first Turkish revolutionary cells were created in 1889 in the *Tbbiye* [Imperial Military Medical Academy].⁸³ Scores of Turkish intellectuals emigrated to Europe, from where they carried on with their agitation to topple Abdulhamid, and bring about a constitutional government similar to what Midhat Pasha, the Young Ottoman leader, had achieved in 1876.⁸⁴ Many others organized at home, voicing their disgust with stifling policies that strangled creativity, and which allowed outsiders to interfere in internal Ottoman affairs. It was in this milieu, with long promised but seldom honored reforms for Armenians, and with

⁸³ For a complete account of the beginnings of the Young Turk movement, see Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000). See also Ibrahim Temo, *İttihad ve Terraki Anıları* (Recollections [memoires] from the Committee of Union and Progress), (Istanbul, 1987). The first edition of Temo's memoirs was published in Mejdidiye, Romania, in 1936.

⁸⁴ BOA, 723-7-76, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Mufetislikler ve Komiserlikler Tahrirati, *Zararlı neşriyette bulunan Gayret gazetesinin kapatıldığı ve Jön Türklerin faaliyetlerinin engellenmesi 1898* (The closure of the Gayret Gazette, which was publishing damaging writings and hindering and obstructing of Young Turk activities, 1898).

Abdulhamid's countermeasures that resulted in massacres that the first meaningful Armenian-Young Turk contacts occurred.

Ottoman and Armenian records confirm that the first contacts transpired on the occasion of the Babiali demonstration of September 30, 1895, organized by the Hnchagyan party. After the demonstration, a leaflet signed by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) criticized the gathering as a separatist activity, exhorting the populace to protect the country.⁸⁵ Despite the negative tone of the Constantinople Branch of the CUP towards the Armenian revolutionary agitation, early Young Turk leaders such as Izzet Bey in Egypt were eager to establish bridges. In the words of a leading Turkish historian:

At the peak of the Armenian Crisis [1895], the lawyer Izzet Bey, nicknamed "Persian Izzet," was also apprehended [in Egypt]. He had written and disseminated a manifesto inviting Armenians to join in common action, which the Armenians welcomed. He then sent a letter to Lord Salisbury calling for his intervention in the [Armenian] crisis"⁸⁶

While several Turkish politicians forged ties with Armenian leaders, the initiator of the genuine cooperation that emerged between Armenian revolutionary committees in Europe and Young Turk representatives in Constantinople was Mizanji Murad Bey, a proponent of a palace coup d'état [as was envisioned by the so called Palace Party,

⁸⁵ Ibrahim Temo, *Ittihad ve Terraki Cemiyetinin Teşekülü ve Hidemati Vataniyye ve Inkilabi Milliyeye Da'ir Hateralarım* (The Formation of the Ittihad ve Terraki Association and My Memoirs Concerning Services to the Nation and the National Coup D'état), (Mejidiye, Romania, 1936), 48-49.

⁸⁶ Diran Kelekian, "La Turquie et Son Souverain," *The Nineteenth Century*, 40, No. 237, November 1896, 696. Kelekian will later appear as a comrade and an important aid to Dr. Behaeddin Shakir, when the latter assumed the leadership of the Young Turk Movement in Europe in 1906.

comprised of Ottoman officials who were advocates of change themselves].⁸⁷ Murad Bey published a much-noticed editorial addressed to the Armenian committees in his gazette, *Mizan* (Balance). The column invited Armenian organizations to work with Young Turks, considering them partners in building a new country, a common fatherland no less. In Murad Bey's own words, the call to Armenians was striking:

O our Armenian Compatriots! O the committees of [the] nation
[within the fatherland] and abroad! We are addressing this invitation
to you on behalf of the Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress.
Let's devote our efforts to the future by forgetting the past. Let us
unite to rescue the fatherland from the calamity to which it is being
subjected.”⁸⁸

Given its tone as well as the rarity of such appeals, the organ of the Hnchagyan party, *Hnchag*, welcomed Murad Bey's plea, hoping that together they could topple the regime of Abdulhamid.⁸⁹ *Hnchag*, however, criticized the Young Turk leader for hinting that the 1894 massacres in Sasun were the result of Armenian revolutionary activists who had planted the seeds of hatred toward Turks in Armenian minds. The editorial stressed that Armenians did not hate the Turkish people and that their objections rested with the Sultan and his tyranny.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ “The Ottoman Turkish adjective *Mizanji*, literally meaning “from the Balance,” was in reference to the periodical, *Mizan*, which Murad Bey published first in Egypt and then in France.

⁸⁸ *Ermeni Vatandaşlarımıza Bir Da'vet*” (An Invitation to our Armenian Countrymen), *Mizan*, No.162, December 6, 1895, 2384. Cited in Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 280.

⁸⁹ The central organ of the Hnchagyan party, *Hnchag* was published in London.

⁹⁰ “Pats Namak Murad Beyin,” (An Open Letter to Murad Bey), *Hnchag*, vol. 9, No. 4, February 29, 1896, 1-3.

In March 1896, Murad Bey visited Paris where he called for a meeting of all Ottoman émigrés, as he attempted to lead the movement.⁹¹ He was immediately confronted by Ahmed Riza, who had settled in Paris long before Murad, and, to the chagrin of many Turkish intellectuals in Europe, had become the self-appointed, and somewhat absolutist despot of the movement.⁹² Ironically, both Young Turk leaders shared a common denominator, namely their desire to secure the cooperation of the Armenian committees. Both believed that Armenian influence was high within official European circles, ostensibly because of the latter's attachment to the Armenian cause as well as European interests concerning reform issues within the Ottoman Empire. Both concluded that cooperation with Armenians was necessary and, towards that end, Ahmed Riza met with the Armenians (ARF) and the British (Anglo-Armenian Committee, and Friends of Armenia) in London to determine what kind of collaboration could be established.⁹³ Ahmed Riza's positivist ideas, which rejected revolutionary tactics, along with his centrist stance on a future federative form of government, proved to be an insurmountable obstacle for cooperation with Armenians. Consequently, the latter refused to recognize him as the leader of the Young Turk movement in Europe.

Disappointed by the lack of resolve as well as the paucity of results, Mikayel Varandian reflected on these initial meetings with Young Turk leaders, setting the record straight.⁹⁴ In Varandian's own words:

⁹¹ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 82.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 83.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Varandian was an intellectual and a member of the ARF's highest executive body, the Western Bureau, which sat in Geneva.

I can't reproduce here all the personal and group negotiations that had been conducted at Geneva [ARF headquarters] during the [18]90s. It was during 1895-96 that our comrades were contacted by the likes of Hilmi Tunali,⁹⁵ a Young Turk who later organized the massacres of Bayburt [Papert, 1915] and, if we are not mistaken, even became a member of the Angora Parliament [1920].

Tunali would visit the Troshag center with his friends. Heated debates ensued about Armenian-Turkish relations. They always had a copy of Midhat Pasha's constitution in their pockets and they wanted us to accept it as it is, without other demands, such as the resolutions of article 61 of the Berlin Convention, etc.

After the event at the Ottoman Bank [August 26, 1896], our Turkish friends started to visit us more often. One day even Ahmed Riza paid a visit. Riza, who by then was acknowledged as the ideologue of the Young Turk movement, wanted the ARF to stop advocating the Armenian Cause and its revolutionary efforts inside Turkey, as well as its propaganda campaign in Europe and to unite with the Young Turks in order to topple the regime of Sultan Abdulhamid II using solely peaceful means such as

⁹⁵ Varandian, *Badmutyun*, vol. II, . 2. Varandian's account—which he had written many years later—shows some discrepancy regarding Tunali. The latter came to Europe after the palace party's failed coup d'état in September 1896. Therefore, he couldn't have visited the Troshag Geneva Center in 1895-1896. The earliest date for the visit could be 1897.

publishing articles in the European newspapers, peaceful demonstrations, and asking for European support, etc.⁹⁶

It was reasonable to assume that the Armenian self-defense at Van (May-June 1896) left a strong impact on Young Turk leaders in Europe, which demonstrated the importance of the ARF as an opposition organization that could not be neglected.⁹⁷ Moreover, Young Turk positions concerning the Armenian reform project remained much closer to that espoused by the sultan, than any of the perspectives advocated by various Armenian organizations. In the event, despite his bridge building efforts, Ahmed Riza was not willing to limit the powers of the central government, which probably meant that his overtures towards Armenians were aimed at removing Great Power intervention from internal Ottoman affairs.

Sultan Abdulhamid's reluctance to move ahead with sorely needed administrative changes, coupled with the massacres of Armenians and other minorities, continued to annoy some of his closest bureaucrats. Reformist officials such as Damad (brother-in law) Mahmud Pasha and others, who were working behind the scenes to effect a change within the government, came forward and tried to organize a palace coup.⁹⁸ This futile endeavor was to take place in September 1896, though the plot was uncovered, and 350 officials and

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Varandian, *Badmutyun*, vol. I, 172-174.

⁹⁸ ARF Archives, Section I [1895-1901], box 218, documents 57 and 58. Document 58, which is the text of an interview that Armenian representatives conducted with Damad Mahmud Pasha, is of special importance. Confiding in his Armenian visitors, the pasha announces to them his participation in the futile 1896 palace coup d'état. It seems that because he was the brother-in-law of the Sultan, Damad Mahmud Pasha was spared from being executed. However, he was kept under the watchful eyes of the sultan's spies, until he decided to escape first to Egypt and from there to Paris with the aim of assuming the leadership of the Young Turk émigré movement in Europe

military officers were arrested, many of whom were promptly exiled to remote districts like Bengasi and Tripoli on the North African coast.⁹⁹

The attempted coup was not the only sign of opposition. Several months later, disturbances took place within the Fifth Turkish Army stationed in Syria. Although minor incidents within the army were not exceptional, mostly because wages were paid notoriously late, the March 1897 uprising proved to be particularly problematic.

Damascus witnessed Ottoman army regulars as well as officers displaying overt “manifestations of disloyalty to the state,” by using “seditious language when referring to people in authority, even the Sultan.”¹⁰⁰ As a matter of fact, army units in Damascus were flooded with critical flyers and pamphlets, while newspapers published by local and European Young Turks committees printed disparaging commentaries, which hinted that they were behind the campaign.¹⁰¹

Thus, it may be argued that unrest within the army units stationed in Syria amounted to more or less a second coup attempt. Hanioglu affirmed this conclusion when he wrote:

However, the greatest organization of the CUP took place in Syria between 1895 and 1897: a coup d'état there was undertaken by an alliance of military officers, local governors, and the *Qadiriyya* [Dervish] Order.

⁹⁹ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 86.

¹⁰⁰ F.O.424.191.199.

¹⁰¹ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 105-106.

A tremendous advantage was provided to the CUP organization in Syria in the form of aid by the Comité Turco-Syrien, which later dissolved into the CUP.... Before it could organize a coup d'état attempt, this widespread CUP organization was destroyed by the palace.¹⁰²

It was at this time that the ARF distributed a leaflet in Constantinople, calling on Muslims to unite with Armenians against Abdulhamid.¹⁰³ Emboldened by the self-defense battle at Van, and particularly following the Ottoman Bank takeover, the ARF emerged as a key opposition force to reckon with. This prominence, however, took place at a time when the other main Armenian revolutionary organization, the Hnchagyan party, encountered internal division. Stricken by personality conflicts, the Hnchagyan party split into two rival groups: The Hnchagyan center in London, and the Veragazmyal (re-formed or re-constituted) faction in Constantinople under the leadership of Arpiar Arpiarian.¹⁰⁴ The division weakened the party, leaving the revolutionary field wide open for the ARF.

Ongoing Armenian rivalries gave Young Turk leaders time to organize and set the agenda for change. In January 1897, for example, a manifesto bearing the signature of the so called Ottoman Revolutionary Party was released to everyone's consternation. With a very militant wording, the manifesto called upon all Ottomans to unite, as it declared:

¹⁰² Ibid., 105-107.

¹⁰³ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 108. The source is Behaeddin Shakir's personal papers.

¹⁰⁴ Yergu Vgayatughter, "Alfaria-Arpiarianneru Shahadagutyune," (Two Documents about Alfaria's and Arpiarian's Deceit), *Hnchag*, vol. 10, No.10, 10 March 1897, 1.

Ottomans!

You see what results are achieved when you just pass your time in agony and by bending your heads for tyrants. This is a problem, since you know that Hamid has become an infuriated persecutor.

Ottomans! Everyone knows that a rabid dog must be killed.

Therefore, the Ottoman Revolutionary Committee, which thus far had been careful to avoid bloodshed, has decided that the time has come to start armed resistance against the tyrant.

Therefore, O you who bear real Ottoman hearts, we are confident that the word revolution will not have a negative connotation for you. You will continue to support us in our endeavor.... We thus declare to all those who speak against us, to the spies of the sultan, that death is awaiting them. Yes, we are ready to die in the process of eliminating scum like you. We don't fear you anymore.

O sons of liberty. Come to the Sublime Porte and bring your swords and spears with you. Don't be afraid, for we will take the lives of those who try to stand in your way.

Cowardice is not a characteristic of Ottomans and Muslims.

Let this be a warning to all accomplices of the tyrant. We are innocent from your deaths.¹⁰⁵

Troshag applauded this manifesto, admiring the circular as a “new path in a coming new century.” It concluded by stating:

In the past we had on several occasions extended our hand to the enlightened elements of the Empire. That hand was left in the air. Now, we gladly shake the hand that is being extended to us. The Ottoman Revolutionary Party passed its Rubicon. We await that its words will be soon translated into work.¹⁰⁶

As tensions rose, the Young Turk branch in Constantinople publicly challenged Abdulhamid’s authority. In March 1897, a leaflet was distributed bearing the title “Manifesto of the Ottoman Society for Union and Progress,” reaching a wide audience

¹⁰⁵ “Osmanyan Heghapokhagan Gusagtsutyán Arachin Sherchaperagane” (The First Circular of the Ottoman Revolutionary Party), *Troshag*, No. 2, January 20, 1897, 9-10. Troshag had translated the manifesto from the Ottoman Original. See also ARF Archives, Section I (1895-1901), Box No. 37, document 60, which is an unsigned, French handwritten copy of the same circular.

¹⁰⁶ “Verchabes” (Finally), *Troshag*, No. 2, January 20, 1897, 10-11. In his book *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 116, and endnote 85, 298. Sükrü Hanioglu quotes from J. Michael Hagopian, *Hyphenated Nationalism: The Spirit of the Revolutionary Movement in Asia Minor and the Caucasus, 1896-1910*, Ph.D. dissertation, (Harvard University, 1942), 207-209. According to Hanioglu: On January 20, 1897, Troshag had invited the Young Turks to join the Armenians and by assassinating the sultan to overthrow the Hamidian Tyranny. In 1898 Troshag repeated the summons for alliance through its Geneva center and received a favorable response.” (Note 85). In Hagopian’s dissertation the information is furnished as follows: “... In January 1897, Droshak asks the Osmanlı [a Young Turk publication] to join the Armenians and by assassinating the Sultan to overthrow the Hamidian Tyranny.” Both quotes refer to Troshag’s January 20, 1897 issue, pages 9-11, which contain the circular of the Ottoman Revolutionary Party (pages 9-10) and the ARF’s response to it (pages 10-11). It is interesting that Troshag’s response contains no such assertion of joining forces to assassinate the Sultan. On the other hand, the issue of assassinating the sultan is in the text of the translated circular of the Ottoman Revolutionary Party, which compares Abdulhamid to a “...rabid dog that must be killed.” Therefore, the notion that the ARF had asked the Young Turks to join it in assassinating the sultan is unfounded. This mistake started by Hagopian’s misreading of the Troshag article in question, and Hanioglu’s verbatim quoting from Hagopian. The other part of Hanioglu’s statement, that “in 1898 Troshag repeated the summons for alliance with the Geneva center and received a favorable response,” is correct. Suffice it to say that the issue of the assassination of the sultan, although unsuccessful—as shall be seen below—was undertaken in a solo fashion by the ARF in 1905.

primarily in mosques after the Friday prayers.¹⁰⁷ Bold in its call to open arms, the manifesto invited all elements dissatisfied with the sultan to join ranks, irrespective of ethnicity. This was a key point that was often overlooked but that needed to be underscored. As the pamphlet emphasized, the need was for unity among all Ottomans in the struggle against autocracy. Equally important was the Young Turk view that Armenian organizations could be brought into their camp:

FELLOW COUNTRYMEN, we have often invited you to union and agreement. Thank Heaven; our cry has not been in vain. Now the time has come for the good news. We have all understood that the greatest enemy of Islam and Ottoman country is the great assassin Abd-ul-Hamid and his crew. He wishes to burry us and our country alive in the grave, which his bloody hand has dug for us; but let him be assured that he himself will occupy it. For in whatever way possible we will remove his [sultan's] persons from our midst. We will shed blood. We will save our honor and our country.

Brothers, most of the *ulema*¹⁰⁸ of our faith and the chiefs of our army belong to our society; they share our ideas and aspirations. Fear not, when the signal is given. Invite Armenians, Greeks, and Jews and our other fellow-countrymen; for they are also children of

¹⁰⁷ F.O.424.191.163. British Ambassador, Philip Currie sent the dispatch to Prime Minister Salisbury, informing him about the distribution of the leaflet and his obtaining a copy of it.

¹⁰⁸ Ottoman term for Muslim clerics, religious leaders, philosophers, and jurists.

the country. They live in it. Their interests are mutual, and their rights equal. This is our religion and our law.

Concentrating on the elaborate spy system that Abdulhamid had devised to persecute and to coerce all anti-monarchic, revolutionary sentiments the Manifesto continued:

Ottomans, you know that for the last twenty years [Abdulhamid's] detectives and spies have sown dissention among us and prevented our unity; there is no one these scoundrels have not oppressed, no family they have not destroyed. To strengthen our security and union you must at once trample on these traitors. It is the duty of each of us to act in this way in order to be ready for the great contest that is at hand.¹⁰⁹

As a conclusion, the manifesto called upon all to join forces against the tyranny of the sultan with the aim of toppling his despotic regime:

Oh, brothers and Ottomans! The Day of Judgment is at hand. Know that to die is blessed martyrdom; to slay is heroism. We have obtained from the ulema a *fetva* [religious decree] authorizing the destruction of the traitors. The ulema of the four sects [of Islam] agree that the strife is lawful in order to free our faith, state, and country. They have given us the permit of victory. The victory will be ours, for God is the helper of the oppressed.

¹⁰⁹ Supplement to F.O.424.191. 163. The supplement is the translation of the Young Turk leaflet.

Ottoman Society of Union and Progress,
Constantinople Branch
Freedom, Equality, Justice.¹¹⁰

In contrast with these foresights, Mizan's appreciative articles about Armenians and their sufferings suddenly changed their tone, into antagonisms. For example, in its April 1897 issue, the Paris-based newspaper criticized a telegram of solidarity, which Armenian students gathered in Heidelberg had earlier sent to their counterparts at the University of Athens. Since Greece was at the time helping the Greek population of Crete to achieve autonomy and even independence, Mizan regarded the Armenian students' telegram as a provocation and a crime against the Ottoman fatherland. It further asked the ARF Geneva center, if it condoned such a treacherous show of solidarity.¹¹¹

Troshag responded on May 31, with an equally strong assessment:

We are sorry to witness that the “paternal encouragement” of Mizan and its editor have suddenly changed. Even though we don't have at our disposal a copy of the said telegram, and hence, we are unable to verify if the students had send it in their name or that of the Armenian nation, we want to make it clear to the editors of Mizan that what the Armenian students did was right, because it was in solidarity to people who want to free themselves from the sultan's yoke.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ “Badaskhan Mizanin” (An Answer to Mizan), *Troshag*, No. 8, May 31, 1897, 63-64.

Any such action has and will have our solidarity. Further, it is not only Armenian students, but students from other nationalities too that are sending such telegrams of solidarity to Greece in its endeavor to free its brethren in Crete. As a matter of fact, the whole civilized world is doing the same thing.

We answer Mizan's editors by saying yes, we can't but harbor feeling of solidarity toward the Greek people's heroic action.¹¹²

As if this vitriol was not enough, an old fashioned polemic emerged between Ahmed Riza and Murad Bey in Paris, over the perennial leadership question. Murad, who kept Riza on leash and assumed the helm of the movement, was still a proponent of a coup because of his ties with palace officials and bureaucrats.¹¹³ Fed by a stream of insiders' news he regularly received from friends in Constantinople, Riza proposed the formation of an *Assemblée Délibérante* (Consulting Assembly, a senate with no political power attached to it) rather than a parliament elected by universal suffrage, as a preferred interim option.¹¹⁴

The consequences of the abortive September 1896 coup attempt, however, changed the balance of power within the Young Turk movement in Europe. The arrival of newly exiled Ottoman officials and military officers to Paris shifted the focus of the émigré organization's strategy, as militant officers worked towards a revolution that would

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 90.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 93. Riza envisioned a senate with representatives of all ethnic groups in the Ottoman Empire.

overthrow the regime. They were not interested in penmanship, and loathed what they considered to be empty words, which was somewhat understandable since words needed to be backed-up by action. One of the exile leaders, Tunali Hilmi, was very vocal in the group that advocated action.¹¹⁵

Luckily for Murad Bey, the new arrivals did not undo his leadership, for Ahmed Riza was unable to muster full support. The French philosopher Emile Auguste, whose classes he audited at the Sorbonne, influenced Riza. Few perceived the value of such an education that, in turn, created a wedge between Riza and various militants. Consequently, anxious Young Turks sided with Murad Bey, hoping to accelerate the process of change that would overthrow the Sultan's regime.¹¹⁶ The failure of the attempted coup persuaded Murad Bey that foreign intervention was a bitter necessity. He believed that the 1896 attempt failed because of the lack of European intervention on the side of reformers and vowed to avoid a similar outcome in the future. Therefore, if a new coup was to succeed, it necessitated European backing, especially that of Great Britain. Hanioglu provides a carefully worded conclusion regarding Murad Bey's various attempts to achieve his objective when he stated:

This was the motive behind his appeals to the Armenians, his unrealized attempt while in London in 1896 to gain the audience of Lord Salisbury with a joint Muslim-Armenian delegation, and his

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 91. Cited from *Hürriyet* (Freedom), CUP's new publication.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 93. Cited from *Mizan*, No. 17, 2.

later efforts to win over Armenian revolutionary leaders such as Armen Karo.¹¹⁷

At this stage, however, Tunali and a number of his followers, who were to become known as the “activists,” left the Young Turk organization and established their own group under the name Osmanli Ihtilal Firkasi (Ottoman Revolutionary Party).¹¹⁸ According to Riza, the separatist group “fragmented our committee and caused its demise,” which meant that different political concepts within the Young Turk movement experienced the growing pains of an organization deciding on its evolving goals.¹¹⁹ While many wondered how far Young Turk leaders were willing to go to accomplish their stated target—overthrow the regime—few appreciated their flexibility on the matter, including a readiness to negotiate with the Sublime Porte.

Negotiations with the Sultan (1897-1899)

Facing the desperate situation of the Armenian peasantry and city dwellers throughout the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian revolutionary committees did not limit their diplomatic activities to the Young Turks or putative European governments willing to extend a helping hand. Concurrently, the committees followed a cautious diplomatic line, engaging the Ottoman ruler as necessary. Since May 1896, various communication channels were established between the palace and the committees, through special envoys sent to Europe by Abdulhamid. The wily Sultan tried to preempt any challenges to his rule, which was to

¹¹⁷ *Mizan*, No. 162, December 6, 1896, 2384; and Archives of the Turkish Embassy in London, Box 319, document 2. Cited in: Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 91.

¹¹⁸ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 91.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

be expected. In the event of a unified “Great Power dare,” the cunning ruler deliberated, independent negotiations with the committees offered him much needed room to maneuver. Simultaneously, the sultan initiated negotiations with Young Turks in Europe as well, as he evidently tried to undermine their anticipated opposition.

Precautionary steps notwithstanding, the sultan understood that the primary challenges to his rule arose from Armenian revolutionary agitations, as well as the Young Turk movement that aimed to establish a constitutional regime. He was equally concerned that European pressures to deal with both issues hovered over his throne.

To mitigate his perceived threats, the sultan opened a communication line with Armenian the leaders of Armenian revolutionary organizations through Herafion Nivlinsky. Little is known about this envoy, although it is assumed that he met with members of the Anglo-Armenian Committee in London, to gauge their interests. Still, Nivlinsky’s meeting with the Hnchagyan party, as reported in the Paris based New York Herald, could not be verified.¹²⁰ Hnchag denied that such a person contacted their headquarters in London for the purpose of negotiating the issue of Armenian reforms in the Ottoman Empire. British newspapers that reported the envoy’s meetings with Armenian committees first in London and later in Paris—apparently through the efforts of the

¹²⁰ “Sultani Masnavor Nergayatsutsiche” (The Special Envoy of the Sultan), *Hnchag*, vol. 9, No. 11, 31 May 1896. According to the same newspaper, which in Hnchag’s opinion is a Turkophile publication, Nivlinsky had approached the Anglo-Armenian Committee and asked its executive board to write a special letter to the sultan asking him to implement reforms in the empire out of his goodwill. The news appeared in other British newspapers too. However, after Hnchag’s clarification, the newspapers retracted their previous coverage by stating: “although the Sultan’s representative had met with the Anglo-Armenian Committee, the latter, however, had not written any letters to the Sultan.”

Ottoman embassies in both European capitals—later rescinded previous reports.¹²¹ No concrete evidence was ever found to buttress wild claims to the contrary. Some concluded that the Nivlinsky episode, and the Sultan’s tactics to misinform European public opinion, highlighted the Sultan’s mind-set as a full-fledged tyrant. Hnchag opined:

O You prosecutor, Criminal Sultan... Now that you are fallen into the trap [coup attempt of September 1896] you are trying to escape with your skin. As long as there is breath in us we will continue to struggle against you and to crush your regime, O miserable fox.¹²²

If very few Armenians fell into Abdulhamid’s political trap, his overtures towards the Young Turks were decidedly more successful, especially after negotiations started with them in mid 1897 through the offices of Ahmed Jelaeddin Pasha, head of the palace intelligence. The official soon scored a sensational success when he won Murad Bey over. The latter traveled back to Constantinople, denounced the CUP and its various activities, and was properly rewarded with a lucrative appointment.¹²³ As the ARF appeared to be well informed about the palace bribes handed out to Young Turks and some Armenians in Europe, the party launched a tactical salvo by revealing Jelaeddin Bey’s financial windfall. In a sensational Troshag entry, the ARF reported:

Jelaeddin Bey has arrived in Europe with 30,000 Osmanli [Ottoman] gold coins to buy leaders of the Young Turks. It is said

¹²¹ Ibid., vol. 9, No. 13, 21 June 1896.

¹²² “Hadug Arakelutyun,” (A Special Mission), *Hnchag*, vol. 9, No. 19, 25 October 1896.

¹²³ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 97-101.

that he has already bribed eight of them [including Murad Bey] who are on their way to Constantinople.¹²⁴

Providing additional details, Troshag gave an equally devastating account as to how Young Turk leaders were bought off by Ahmed Jeleleddin Bey, putting principles aside for convenience. The Sultan and his government, the newspaper compiled,

... are trying to destroy the Young Turk movement. The Sultan is providing amnesty to all those who want to stop attacking him from the capitals of Europe.... It was only yesterday, that Murad Bey, the leader of one faction of the Young Turks, was releasing his lightning rods against the “oppressor.” And today! He is compromising with him and is bidding adieu to his principles.

What kind of a puzzle is this? What kind of a revolutionary party are we dealing with here? Apparently this is the end of all those revolutionaries who come from the top. They were never part of the suffering population.¹²⁵

Of course, Armenian leaders were shocked to witness dramatic changes in lofty principles, even if these enunciated with great fanfare. Murad’s desertion—which paved the way for others to follow—constituted a devastating blow to the movement, though it did not completely dismantle the Young Turk apparatus. Rather, it brought back Ahmed Riza as the sole leader of the group. Soon enough, however, the reinvigorated leader

¹²⁴ “Turkio Shurch” (Regarding Turkey), *Troshag*, No. 7 (98), August 1899, 105-107.

¹²⁵ “Khagh Te Heghapokhutyun?” (A game or Revolution?), *Troshag*, No. 10, July 24, 1897, 75-77.

became the object of palace offers since the porte was relentless. Nevertheless, if winning Murad Bey over was a relatively easy enterprise, this was not to be the case with Ahmed Riza. As Riza held his ground, the Sultan retaliated by suing him and his publication, Meshveret. Ironically, the porte's heavy-handed action backfired. Few contemporaries appreciated the gravity of the situation as well as British Ambassador Currie, whose August 26, 1897 dispatch to Lord Salisbury offered rare details. The following quotes illustrated how beady-eyed diplomats assessed the situation:

The recent trial of Ali [Ahmed] Riza, editor of the Meshveret newspaper in Paris, has called public attention to the proceedings of a group of politicians, which, under the name of the Young Turkey Party, has taken upon itself to ventilate at home and abroad the evils of the Turkish system of government.¹²⁶

After reporting that the group has existed, though in an unorganized condition, for many years and that no serious attempts were made to deal with it except during the last several months, especially after the increasingly bellicose language that the movement's organs started to utilize against the character of the sultan, the British diplomat continued:

The Sultan induced His majesty to resort to measures of repression. Arrests have been growing more frequent, and two successive missions were sent this year to Paris to enter into negotiations with the leaders of the party in that capital. Nothing came of the first, but it appears that the second, under Ahmed Djelalleddin Pasha, chief of

¹²⁶ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 110.

the Secret Cabinet of the Palace [i.e. chief of intelligence] has succeeded in scattering or winning over, a considerable fraction of the group, some of whom have returned to Constantinople, while the rest are said to have been rendered harmless by the acceptance of rewards and pensions.¹²⁷

Stressing the fact that regardless of tough tactics the belligerent Ahmed Riza didn't bend, and that this act in itself had further upheld his stature, especially after the ineffective action brought against his journal at the instance of the Ottoman Embassy. The British diplomat also underlined that the same happened with the editor of the *Hurriet* newspaper in London, who remained equally obstinate.¹²⁸ Aside from this failures however, the sultan was able to garner some successes in his notorious endeavors:

Murad Bey [Mizanji Murad Bey], however, editor of the *Mizan* and a former official of the Public Debt [Administration] at Constantinople, who shared with Ali [Ahmed] Riza the leadership of the party in Paris, was induced to join the group of penitents and to throw himself upon the mercy of his Sovereign. He arrived at Constantinople a fortnight ago. It was given out that he had extorted ample promises of reform as the price of his return, including a

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., Salim Faris, a Christian Arab Young Turk revolutionary from the Lebanon and the editor of *Hürriyet* was finally subdued. He was pressured to close his newspaper. It is important to note that the Arab Awakening at this juncture was mostly due to the efforts of enlightened Christians from the Lebanon who had undergone a parallel educational renaissance through western missionary endeavors. Most of these Christians emigrated to Egypt, where they were instrumental in fermenting revolutionary agitation against Abdulhamid's despotic rule. This movement gave birth to an umbrella organization called *Turkiyya al Fatat* (literally translated as *Turkey the Maiden*).

general amnesty, freedom of the press, Ministerial responsibility, and independent Tribunals. It is even said that he has been placed upon a Commission of Reform, under whose auspices the new era is to be inaugurated.¹²⁹

Murad was thus considered a traitor by the Young Turks. Moreover, the list of lofty promises made to him seemed to be mythical.¹³⁰ On the other hand, a more drastic campaign of repression was ushered in against the suspected adherents of the party in Constantinople. Per Currie's report:

It has been credibly stated that over 1,000 persons have been lately arrested or otherwise done away with, including several of the ulema and large numbers of military and medical students. Fourteen cadets of the Military Academy have been sentenced to death for disaffection and were only saved from execution by the positive veto of the Minister of War, Said Bey, a prominent sympathizer, [who] narrowly escaped banishment to a distant Governorship.¹³¹

Abdulhamid's coercive policies were not confined to Constantinople alone. Given that the Egypt of the Khedives was off limits, the sultan also harassed revolutionaries and their

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 111. Hanioglu states: "While these events were transpiring, developments in Istanbul vindicated Ahmed Riza and his friends. Arrests continued in Istanbul during the negotiations between Jelaleddin Pasha and the CUP and gained momentum after Murad Bey's arrival in Istanbul. Murad Bey was coerced into giving an interview to an important daily, denouncing Young Turk activities against the Sultan... The palace also banished seventy-seven CUP members to Tripoli of Barbary and Fezzan; This was a terrible shock to relatives of prisoners who had been awaiting a general amnesty since Murad Bey's return."

¹³¹ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 111.

sympathizers in Damascus, whose governor was recalled on suspicion of connivance with the Young Turks or their Arab counterparts. Moreover, the palace did everything in its power to delimit the import and dissemination of foreign books and newspapers, and a complete state of panic prevailed among the remnants of the Young Turks in the capital and provinces:

It would be a mistake to confound with the mass of the malcontents, against whom these attacks are leveled, the much more weighty, though numerically insignificant, body, which is sometimes spoken of as the Reform or Constitutional Party [Palace Party]. Among the latter are to be found not a few men of the highest rank who, while occupying important offices of trust under the Sultan, have not shrunk from pointing out to His majesty the danger of the courses upon which he has embarked.¹³²

Currie further reported that a *mulla*, a member of the ulema class (apparently a high ranking one with a title equivalent to that of a vezir, told him during a special meeting that the sultan was wrong and that conducting Armenian atrocities could not be condoned by Islam. The cleric, apparently affiliated with the Palace Group, then asked Britain to help the Young Turks attain power.¹³³ This appeal to Currie highlighted the notion that liberal clergymen favored the Young Turk movement, which was gaining sympathizers within yet another segment of the Ottoman leadership, the religious establishment. Naturally, such

¹³² F.O. 424.192.95.

¹³³ Supplement to F.O. 424.192.95.

support was crucial because of the clergy's immense influence among the Muslim population at large though Currie, or anyone else for that matter, could not tell whether the mulla was truly opposed to the porte.

Muslim clergymen were not the only religious authorities eager to oppose the porte for moral as well as political reasons. Indeed, the newly elected Armenian patriarch joined efforts to guide and admonish the Ottoman opposition. In coordination with the palace, Archbishop Ormanian dispatched emissaries to Armenian organizations in Europe for assistance. Still, the patriarch's covert actions to serve as an intermediary in the putative negotiations between Young Turk officials and Armenian committees, were not kept secret for long. Soon the British embassy was able to report in detail on this effort:

The Armenian Patriarch has dispatched an emissary to visit the headquarters of the Armenian Revolutionary Societies in London, Paris, and Geneva.

I have been confidentially furnished with a copy of a report addressed to Artin [A shortened form for Harutyun] pasha by the agent in question, which has been laid before the Sultan with a view of impressing upon him the danger which exists of fresh outbreaks, and so inducing him to make the concessions which the Patriarch and Artin pasha have been endeavoring to obtain for the Armenians.

It appears from this report that the Hnchakists [Hnchagists] are not likely to take any action at present, but that the Trochakists [Troshagists, ARF], who are mainly recruited from the Armenians

of the Caucasus, are determined to make another attempt of the same nature as that of last August [the seizure and bombing of the Ottoman Bank].¹³⁴

Ormanian's efforts failed and, even worse, his decision to share information concerning potential internal Ottoman activities with the British ambassador, further jeopardized his position.¹³⁵ Ormanian believed that London enjoyed a degree of authority over Armenian revolutionary groups, which was not accurate. On August 10, 1897, Ormanian visited Currie and confided to him that Armenian revolutionaries were threatening him, ostensibly for being too subservient to the sultan. He told the ambassador of his fear that an event was under preparation that would have serious consequences unless something could be done to satisfy motivated revolutionaries. Currie concluded that the Armenian committees in London and elsewhere were resuming offensive activities.¹³⁶

Currie's suspicions were confirmed by reports out of Paris when, on April 10, 1897, the British Ambassador to France, Sir Edmond Monson, alerted Lord Salisbury of an impending development. Nubar Pasha, an Armenian notable from Egypt who had settled in Paris to guide diplomatic negotiations with concerned parties, notified Monson that two militant participants in the seizure of the Ottoman Bank were back in Constantinople. Allegedly, these men were preparing new attacks and, according to Monson, Nubar

¹³⁴ F.O.424.191.236., Currie to Salisbury, [Confidential].

¹³⁵ Even though there is no tangible evidence that Ormanian himself furnished the "confidential" report mentioned by Currie in his dispatch in F.O.424.191.236., circumstantial evidence implies that the leak was from the Patriarchate. It was either Ormanian himself, or a member of the Executive Council that was occupied by notables of the sultan's choosing.

¹³⁶ F.O.424.192.58.

appeared to be very worried that the Ottoman government knew of the militant's presence and wanted them to commit acts of violence to delay further the reforms project.¹³⁷

Currie described how a manifesto of "Armenian revolutionaries" was distributed to all embassies in Constantinople, which referred to the continuing systematic oppression of the empire's Armenian population.¹³⁸ The document apparently emphasized that European intervention, along with oft-promised reforms, proved themselves to be largely ineffective.¹³⁹ "We can't sit idle while the Armenian people are being martyred and European powers are unable to do anything...against this treatment of Christians," stated the manifesto. It concluded with a specific claim that sounded ominous: "We demand that necessary measures be taken to remedy the unbearable situation. We vow by the name of our martyrs to take necessary action if our demands are not met."¹⁴⁰

Anxieties about imminent attacks were, however, unfounded. The ARF did not engage in any violence and no similar activities were reported in the following months. Instead of staging spectacular operations in the capital as Armenian critics often alluded to, at this period of time, the ARF's attention was concentrated elsewhere. In fact, the ARF was preparing an expeditionary raid on the Mazrik Kurdish tribal dwellings in the Ottoman-Persian border area, which occupied a big portion of the party's resources. The raid was meant to be a punitive measure following the tribe's attacks on defenseless

¹³⁷ F.O.424.191. 310. [Confidential. In French].

¹³⁸ Since the manifesto was signed by the Central Committee of Constantinople, it can be assumed with certainty that it belonged to the ARF Central Committee, which, after the Ottoman Bank incident, was the most active Armenian revolutionary cell in the empire.

¹³⁹ F.O. 424.192.96. (Dated August 26)

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Armenian villagers as well as arms transporting groups from Persia, and demonstrated that the organization was committed to protect Armenian peasants and its own cadres.¹⁴¹

What the ARF manifesto letter, coupled with its activities on the ground actually accomplished, was to oblige the Hnchagyan party to clarify its own positions on a number of pertinent questions. In response to the manifesto, for example, a letter bearing the signature of the Hnchagyan party was delivered to various embassies, wherein the party disengaged itself from the ARF manifesto in question. The Hnchagists explained that they had no Central Committee in the capital. They thus concluded that they did not share most of the ideas expressed in the proposal, which was not particularly surprising given competing interests between the two groups.¹⁴² Furthermore, the Hnchagists disagreed on a sensitive point, namely the alleged ineffectiveness of European endeavors vis-à-vis Armenian reforms.¹⁴³ This particular difference was the result of lofty promises made to Hnchagyan party members by European acquaintances, many of whom were eager to reinforce the notion that these Armenians could be a viable force to the British

¹⁴¹ For a complete account of the motives, preparation for, and the implementation of this expeditionary raid, see “Khanasori Arshavanke” (The Khanasor Expedition), *Troshag*, 1897, No. 11. The whole issue of the Journal is devoted to the event. See also Varandian, *Badmutyun*, vol. I, 178-190. The Kurdish Mazrik tribe, and especially its chieftain, Sharaf Bey, who was an officer in the Hamidiye Corps, had transformed into an obstacle for ARF activities. The expedition was decided during the 1896 ARF Eastern Regional Congress through the concerted efforts of the ARF Aderbadagan (Atropatene, northwestern Iran) Central Committee representative, even though the representative from Van was against the idea at the beginning of the discussions. It was to be a show of force to convince Kurdish tribes in the area, who frequently attacked Armenian villages and were especially a menace to ARF bands transporting arms and ammunition from Persia into the Ottoman Empire, that their activities would not go unpunished. The expedition, which was executed in the early hours of August 6, 1897, was yet another “success” story for the ARF, which directed European attention and also interested Young Turk leaders in Europe. According to Varandian, the German journal *Die Zukunft* published a salutary article about the event written by a German traveler [name not supplied] who was in the area at the time. Sharaf Bey, who barely escaped with his life, would later—and most probably in retaliation-- create much havoc for Armenians, especially after 1914.

¹⁴² F.O. 424.192.97. This is yet another proof that the manifesto in question was that of the ARF.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

government's aims. In December 1897, the Central Committee of the Hnchagyan party in London informed Ambassador Currie that the party had just concluded its General Congress in the British capital, and had elected a new central committee representing its members.¹⁴⁴

If anything, the move reflected the effects of the split within the organization, rather than any political relevance for the motherland. The claim that “a central committee representing all party members,” had been elected was simply an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of any other Hnchagyan faction vis-à-vis British authorities. Clearly the London group feared that the Constantinople based Veragazmyal faction would fill the political vacuum, which was an indication of the party's disorganized state.

To garner further credulity, the Hnchagyan letter drew the British embassy's attention to information that Turks were still massacring Armenians, especially in Cilicia. Clearly, Ambassador Currie and his staff in Constantinople were aware that Armenians were in danger, although the communication emphasized that “events in Hajin [we]re a good example of this [threat].” It pointed to French reluctance to intervene and asked London to “interfere on behalf of Cilician Armenians.”¹⁴⁵ Thus, the Hnchagyan party continued its strategy of appeals to the Great Powers regarding perhaps its only stronghold in the empire, Cilicia, just as before the split that damaged its credibility.

¹⁴⁴ F.O. 424.195.16. [Dated December 18. In French].

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. The events in Cilicia, which was a Hnchagyan stronghold, were to be repeated in April, 1909 and would—as will be seen in Chapter Six—constitute one of the most problematic periods in the annals of Armenian-Young Turk relations.

In the annals of major developments that marked the year 1897, and which was dutifully noted by the Turkish historian Şükrü Hanioglu, were the arrests of several prominent Armenian operatives who played critical roles with the CUP. In Hanioglu's assessment:

In February 1897, Ottoman intelligence agents intercepted a secret message that was sent from Paris to Erzerum by the Dashnaktsutium [Tashnagsutyun] Committee. In this message the Dashnaktsutium Committee stated that its purpose was completely different from that of the CUP. However, they were still continuing their contacts with Murad Bey. They requested from their Erzerum branch to have closer contacts with banished officers who were CUP members.¹⁴⁶ After further investigation by the government, it was discovered that Setrak Pastermajian, a member of the local Dashnaktsutium branch, distributed the money sent from Europe to the Young Turks in Erzerum. He was arrested, but the local Russian Consul intervened and he was released.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, when the government learned that Young Turk cells had been formed in Mersin and Adana [in Cilicia], it arrested their members. There were four Armenians in the Mersin branch: Garabet Kilimjian, Murad Tekeian, Murad, and Setrak [no

¹⁴⁶ BOA, BBA-YEE, 36/2470-3/147/36., Governor Rauf Bey to the chamberlain's office [February 9, 1897 and April 1, 1897] No. 76, *Erzurum vilayetiyle muhabereye mahsus defterdir* (Special Registry of Communication With the Province of Erzerum),

¹⁴⁷ BOA, Mehmed Kamil Bey to Governor Rauf Bey [March 10, 1897], No. 72. Also, communication from the latter to former [March 30, 1897], No. 74.

family names furnished], and three in the Adana branch: Khatchik Babaian, a doctor named Boghos, and a pharmacist named Garabed [again no last names furnished].¹⁴⁸

Ottoman officials presented these Armenians as members of the Young Turk organization in Mersin and Adana. While some Armenians may well have been members of Young Turk committees, it was more likely that they were Reformed Hnchagyans, as the faction operated mainly through Cilicia during this period.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, credible sources indicated that the second Murad, whose family name was not given in the documents cited by Hanioglu, was non-other than Murad Boyajian, the famous Hnchag leader who was in Cilicia at the time.¹⁵⁰ A March 1898 letter from the Hnchag Center in London to the patriarch inquired about Murad's imprisonment and sought the clergyman's assistance to secure his release.¹⁵¹ This correspondence was also important because it contained a direct threat to Ormanian, which was somewhat odd. According to the dispatch:

The Hnchakian party had thus far acted diplomatically so that it wouldn't create hurdles between you and the government....

¹⁴⁸ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 120. The Sources are BOA, BBA-YEE, 36/2470-18/147/XVI, Ali Muhsin Bey to the chamberlain's office (September 10, 1898), No. 147, *Haleb ve Adana kumandan vekaletine mahsus defterdir* (Special Registry for the Aleppo and Adana Command Center). See also Tahsin Bey to Commander of Aleppo and Adana (August 23, 1898), No. 140, *Haleb ve Adana kumandan vekaletine mahsus defterdir*, BBA-YEE, 36/2470-18/147/XVI.

¹⁴⁹ "Harutyun Pasha Dadiani Panagtsutyunnere H.H. Tashnagtsutyun Hed" (Harutiun Pasha Dadian's Negotiations with the ARF), *Hayrenik*, No. 7, May 1938, 141-147. The article contains a series of letters pertaining to the negotiations. One particular letter, addressed to Patriarch Ormanian from the Hnchag center in London and dated March 25, 1898 is interesting, since it speaks about the Armenians apprehended in Cilicia.

¹⁵⁰ "Harutyun Pasha Dadiani" *Hayrenik*, No. 7, May 1938, 141-147.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

However, in the face of such blatant misrule we indicate that if our letter remains unanswered, we will restart our activities after March.

You know, dear patriarch, that in such a situation your and the patriarchate's board's honor will be questioned by the population. We know that you don't want something like that to happen.¹⁵²

How Ormanian responded is unknown but on January 6, 1898, the patriarch informed Ambassador Currie that he had submitted a new 16 points takrir to the Sultan, in which he proposed to bring some sort of relief and normalcy to Armenians in the interior.

Twelve of the more relevant measures presented to the porte sought:

1. Permission to collect funds for orphans;
2. Consent for traders to travel;
3. Temporary remission of the military tax;
4. Authorization for Armenians with claims against the government to return to their homes;
5. Return of Armenians government employees to their duties;
6. Admission of Armenian students to government schools;
7. Agreement for Armenians exiled to provinces to return to Constantinople;
8. Acquiescence for patriarchal delegates to assume positions throughout the provinces;

¹⁵² Ibid.

9. Approval to reopen parochial schools;
10. Exemptions for church properties from taxes;
11. Cessation of conversions [to Islam]; and,
12. Endorsement to print patriarchal press releases without censorship.¹⁵³

Ormanian's report drew a dark picture of the conditions of Ottoman Armenians endured as his suggestions were nothing short of an incriminating summary of the Sublime Porte's failure to provide even minimal civil and human rights to its Armenian citizens. Moreover, Ormanian's takrir left no room for doubts that the Armenian community as such was facing grave dangers and was literally on the verge of institutional destruction. In view of the pending reform programs, Ormanian's report constituted an urgent appeal to the Great Powers to follow through on their political promises by urging the Ottoman government to implement sorely needed modifications that could improve living conditions for citizens. The patriarch's initiatives were to no avail. In March 1898, Ormanian called upon Currie once again to share with him the sultan's decision to issue an Irade regarding his takrir. Even the Irade remained worthless, since the document could not guarantee the execution of any reforms formulated in the clergyman's appeal.¹⁵⁴

Ormanian's protests as well as the promulgation of the imperial Irade, provided the background for a new initiative on the part of the sultan. Once more, the porte opened direct negotiations with Armenian revolutionary committees, even if some of these actions were amusing at best. Troshag reported that a certain Bulbul Effendi [a pseudonym which

¹⁵³ F.O. 424.195.8.

¹⁵⁴ F.O. 424.195.72.

meant “canary” in Ottoman Turkish] approached the ARF’s Paris Committee as a legitimate negotiator on behalf of the Ottoman government. When it was determined that this was an exercise in futility, the ARF’s Paris committee called the episode “a Turkish hoax,” illustrative of the nonchalance involved.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, in a subsequent issue, Troshag confirmed that indeed a person named Bulbulian tried in vain to get in touch with the ARF in Paris, but was denied the opportunity since no one knew from where he materialized.¹⁵⁶

Despite the public rebuff, the Ottoman government did not give up on this endeavor. Another unidentified person wrote to the ARF Center in Geneva seeking to meet its representatives. In November 1898, an informant claimed that a “Constantinople agent” wished to establish contact with ARF leaders. He thus inquired whether the ARF would send someone to meet with this “gentleman” in Lausanne. It turned out that this gentleman was non-other than Kevork Bulbul (Bulbulian). Apparently, when his efforts failed in Paris, the enterprising Bulbul traveled to Lausanne to try his luck there. During his travels, Bulbulian evidently met several Hnchagists, and persuaded them that he was on an official business as an envoy of the Ottoman government.¹⁵⁷ Troshag relished the entertaining story and published all that was known on the whole affair. It reported that this “gentleman” was a close friend of the governor of Pera, Enver Bey, who masterminded the Armenian massacres in the capital after the seizure of the Ottoman Bank. The ARF organ

¹⁵⁵ “Herkum Me” (A Denunciation), *Troshag*, No. 2 (82), February 1898, 23-24.

¹⁵⁶ “Azt” (Announcement), *Troshag*, No. 3 (83), March 1898, 31.

¹⁵⁷ “Yerku Khosk Panagtsutyunneru Artiv” (A Couple of Words Regarding the Negotiations), *Troshag*, No. 6 (97), June 1898, 90-92.

further denounced Bulbulian and exposed him as a spy, alleging that he carried police credentials from Galata Saray (Constantinople police headquarters). Bulbulian's task was likely to gather information about Armenian revolutionaries and revolutionary cells in the Europe and the Ottoman capital that was entirely plausible.¹⁵⁸

More discreet and possibly more serious negotiations were, however, under way and it may be useful to briefly highlight them at this juncture. On June 23, 1898, the British Foreign Office received a letter from Le Parti Revolutionnaire Armenien, Comité Central, which read:

On November 20, 1897, a special envoy of the Sultan had arrived in Paris to enter into a dialogue with Armenian revolutionary societies. Our issue is not the granting of a pardon for the revolutionaries and their safe return to the country, but rather obtaining reforms promised for the Armenians in the empire. After the talks between the envoy and the Central Committee, the envoy wanted us to continue the negotiations through the offices of the Ottoman Ambassador to Paris, Munir Bey.

We reiterated our demand for the overdue reforms. At the end, Munir Bey promised an amnesty for revolutionaries and to persuade the government to quicken the pace of the promised reforms. He also promised that Armenians displaced because of massacres will return to their homes and would not be subjected to

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

hardships by the police [gendarmes]. It was decided that Munir Bey would work toward procuring an Imperial decree from Constantinople in this regard.

We have to underline, however, that these negotiations are not final, and their future depend on how the Sultan and his government react to the issue of Armenian reforms.¹⁵⁹

Munir Bey was able to procure the promised decree, which elicited the Paris Central Committee's appreciation.¹⁶⁰ Still, the note included a rare rebuke, soliciting genuine intercession rather than regurgitating past promises:

There were a lot of promises in the document, which are not implemented yet. This means that the government is not serious regarding Armenian reforms. Prisoners are not released as was promised. Even though our attitude is sincere, your government's continuation of persecuting Armenians and other violations show that it is acting contrary to the Imperial Irade. In such a situation, the final rupture of the whole negotiation process is inevitable. We ask you to transmit our note to His Majesty, the Sultan, so that he may consider the grave results of his actions.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ F.O. 424.196.82. The dispatch containing the letter is from O'Conor, the British Ambassador in Paris. It is evident that the negotiations are being conducted with the ARF.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. The copy of the decree [dated April 15] is a supplement to F.O. 424.196.82. It contains all the promises given during the negotiations. For a complete account of the negotiations between Artin Pasha Dadian and the ARF, see also *Hayrenik*, No. 7, May 1938, 141-147, No. 8, June 1938, 157-160, No. 10, August 1939, 166-175, and No. 11, November 1939, 148-166.

¹⁶¹ F.O. 424.197.45. [Dated September 18, 1898].

Not only were these officials wary of similar promises, most concluded that the Sultan's track record was not stellar. Shrewd Ottoman diplomats continued their negotiations, which literally forced the Armenian revolutionaries into passivity, or at least into a condition of relative stupor unsure on how best to proceed. Simultaneously, the ongoing campaign of repression in the eastern provinces rendered the situation of Ottoman Armenians increasingly precarious, which imposed its own urgency. British ambassador Nicolas O'Connor described the complicated diplomatic maneuvering:

Further papers have reached me showing that the Armenian Committee in Paris was still, at the beginning of this month, resolved to break off all correspondence with the Ottoman Embassy, unless full effect were given to the promised amnesty [of 17 prisoners in Constantinople and the provinces]...The Palace seems inclined to yield. The Armenian Committee has been informed, through telegraph, that their demands are admitted in principle.

From the same quarter I hear that a telegram has been received at the porte from the Ottoman Minister [Ambassador] at Washington that the Armenian Committee of New York has decided to address a petition to the German Emperor, and to take advantage of his visit to the Sultan to provoke some disturbance in Constantinople.¹⁶²

¹⁶² F.O. 424.197.54.

This was not the only reportage concerning negotiations. A month and a half later, the Hnchag Center in London drafted a letter to the German Kaiser William II, on the occasion of his visit to Constantinople. The eloquent communication chronicled for the monarch conditions that befell Armenians and reacquainted him with details included in the Treaty of Berlin concerning the question of Armenian reforms. William II was explicitly told that the pact was endorsed by all European Powers, and underlined that since the signing of the treaty in 1878 some 300,000 Armenians had lost their lives.¹⁶³ Naturally, the Kaiser was solicited not only to uphold the Berlin concordat, but also to use the opportunity of his visit to press the Sublime Porte for action.

For their part, Armenian committees in Europe remained adamant in their demand to implement belated reforms, aware that these were survival issues. Ever so slowly, Constantinople tried to appear more conciliatory too, without nevertheless changing its fundamental strategy to undermine the Armenian community. In January 1899, for example, the Armenian Patriarchate reported that authorities were slightly more moderate toward Armenians, as Ormanian confided to Currie what he had learned from palace sources. The Sultan allegedly promised to postpone the collection of military taxes for 1897 for a period of two years.¹⁶⁴ Artin Pasha, however, did not share the patriarch's optimism. The newly appointed British Ambassador Nicolas O'Connor, who replaced Currie at the Constantinople Chancellery, had meanwhile learned that

¹⁶³ F.O. 424.197.58. and enclosure 58. On Wilhelm II's visit to the Ottoman Empire, see Nazaret Naltchaian, "Kaiser Wilhelm II's Visits to the Ottoman Empire: Rationale, Reactions and the Meaning of Images," *Armenian Review*, No. 42, 1989, 47-78.

¹⁶⁴ F.O. 424.198.5.

Artin Pasha, who is officially charged with Armenian affairs, being himself an Armenian and Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, has written to his son, Diran Bey [who was in Europe negotiating with the ARF] that Armenian grievances are left without redress, the promises of the Sultan unfulfilled, and that the only answer to demands for an inquiry is to accuse Armenians of aiming at independence. He points out that such a policy is calculated to strengthen the hands of the powers that were aiming at the disruption of the Turkish Empire.

This letter is interesting only as affording corroboratory evidence from a high Turkish official to several consular reports submitted to your lordship.¹⁶⁵

Ever the optimist, Ormanian inquired with O'Connor in February 1899 whether an appeal to the Great Powers would be worth the effort, which apparently it was not.¹⁶⁶ As he was leaving the embassy building, the Patriarch saw Adam Block (the embassy's chief dragoman) and informed the latter that "Artin pasha had assured him (Ormanian) that the Ottoman government would look favorably upon such a petition."¹⁶⁷ Ormanian further revealed that he was acting upon Artin Pasha's advice, details that the dragoman promptly

¹⁶⁵ F.O. 424.198.6. Artin Pasha's letter to Diran Bey is a supplement to same document. How did O'Connor secure a copy of a personal letter that Artin Pasha had sent to his son? O'Connor is moot in this respect. Moreover, the statement in the pasha's letter that "such a policy is calculated to strengthen the hands of the powers that were aiming at the disruption of the Turkish Empire," can only implicate European powers and Russia in particular. Perhaps the elderly Armenian statesman had to include it, to show good faith toward the sultan, since his dispatches were censored.

¹⁶⁶ F.O. 424.198.31.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

shared with the ambassador. In turn, O'Connor reported to Lord Salisbury in London, clarifying Artin Pasha's educated advice to the patriarch:

It is difficult to explain the motives that prompted Artin pasha to give this advice. But probably it was connected with some palace intrigue. Anyhow the patriarch seemed only too glad to have an excuse to escape from a position which would have compromised him with the Sultan, with whom he is generally supposed to be anxious to keep on friendly terms.¹⁶⁸

Whether any of these maneuvers were meaningful to the Armenian Patriarchate, or whether said "negotiations" promised to improve conditions on the ground, were impossible to determine. The ARF in the meantime grew increasingly disillusioned, unimpressed by the vagaries of a slew of Ottoman envoys. Troshag published a summary report on these negotiations to highlight how little was achieved over the course of nearly four long years:

We had already discussed that the government of the Sultan wanted to negotiate with us [ARF]. Since lots of misguided and wrong reports were published about these negotiations in the European newspapers, we find it prudent to give our side of the story. Our

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. See also BOA, 1305-40-31, Yıldız perakende Evrakı, Arzuhal ve Jurnallar. *Ermeni Patriği Ormanian Effendinin ve Dışişler Vekil Musaidi Artin Paşanın Devlet-i Aliyeye hizmet ediyor görünerek aslında Rusyaya hizmet ettikleri ve cezalandırmamak için yalancılıktan geçinemiyorlar intibasını vermeye çalıştıkları, 1899* (The Armenian Patriarch, Ormanian Effendi, and the Ottoman Foreign Ministry's assistant minister, Artin Pasha by showing themselves as serving the interests of the Ottoman Government, are, in reality, serving the interests of Russia, and, in the meantime, and in order not to be suspected and punished, are showing themselves as barely being able to meet everyday expenses, 1899).

readers should also be aware that the ARF ceased negotiations as of March 11 [1899].¹⁶⁹

Explaining that the negotiations were the direct result of the Ottoman Bank takeover, Troshag wrote that the sultan's envoy, Diran Bey Dadian, son of Harutyun Pasha, had travelled to Geneva on October 28. He informed the ARF that any and all hostilities must stop, since the sultan was about to embark in a reform project. Diran Bey also emphasized that in a period of about nine months a new era would in Ottoman History would open.

Troshag than continued:

Troshag's representatives told Diran Bey that the issue was not to come to Geneva and negotiate with us [ARF], but to accomplish real reforms in the places where the Armenian people were really hurting, i.e. the homeland. Therefore, stopping the hostilities was going to be achieved by the committees working inside the country, if and when they see tangible results.¹⁷⁰

Three months after Diran Bey's departure from Geneva, a new envoy, Vaghinag Ajemian arrived only to repeat the same terms. He too was rebuffed since nothing had changed in the status quo. Troshag continued:

The Sultan must have long forgotten those negotiations when two events turned things upside down: First the Khanasor Expedition on

¹⁶⁹ "Turk Garavarutyan Timumnere Tashnagtsutyun Hed Panagtseluy, I" (The Turkish Government's Appeals to Negotiate with Tashnagtsutyun, Part I), *Troshag*, No. 4 (95), April 1899, 59-61. The article contains several letters exchanged between the ARF center and Diran and Drtad beys, which will be quoted in tandem.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

July 25/August 6 1897, and the Ottoman Bank takeover event and the explosion at its doors on August 6/18 [1896].¹⁷¹ These events in themselves once again made negotiating with Armenian revolutionaries a priority for the Sultan.¹⁷²

A third envoy, Artin Pasha's nephew, Drtad Bey, arrived in Geneva on October 26, 1897, to reiterate the old reforms agenda. Troshag's representatives were amazed that the Sultan still wanted to talk, after Diran Bey's "9 months" delay expired, without any noticeable improvements on the ground. On the contrary, some situations worsened, further enlarging the gulf between loyal subjects of the empire and the porte. To address the latest overtures, Troshag offered a wry comment:

Drtad Bey, who was instructed to definitely reach an agreement, implored ARF representatives to come up with a reform project, which he promised would reach the Sultan through the offices of Harutyun Pasha Dadian.

Our answer was that there was no need for such a reform project, since Harutyun Pasha and the Sultan know it very well and it has been presented to them several times through the Patriarchate in Constantinople.

¹⁷¹ The editor of Troshag is confused about the chronology of the two events. The Ottoman Bank seizure took place in August 1896, while the Khanasor Expedition took place in August 1897. To enumerate them in the sequence that appears in the editorial is thus misleading.

¹⁷² "Turk Garavarutyun Timumnere" *Troshag*, No. 4 (95), April 1899, 59-61.

Drtad Bey went to Constantinople. Troshag headquarters received a letter from him containing a letter from Harutyun Pasha himself about the situation.¹⁷³

In his letter addressed to the ARF, the pasha seemed optimistic that the reform projects he was to personally present to the sultan in the name of the National Committee of the Patriarchate was to be enforced soon. He also mentioned that as a leading figure of the Armenian community he was doing his utmost to find a solution to the situation. He however also stressed that "... anything good can only come from the sultan himself." Troshag replied with a letter that it had informed its committees in Turkey about the reform project through its circular of January 14, 1898.

The ARF also stated that in order to present a written memorandum of reforms to the government it had to confer with other Armenian parties, committees, and important national figures. Therefore, the ARF asked Harutyun Pasha if he was able to communicate with the other parties and tell them that the ARF was doing this with his consent.¹⁷⁴

Not taking no for an answer, the pasha replied once again through Drtad Bey, as he implored the ARF to contact other parties interested to learn of the pasha's good intentions towards the initiative. Furthermore, the pasha instructed Drtad Bey to request from the ARF Geneva center to collect information from their cells in the provinces in order to verify whether the sultan's promised reforms were implemented or not. He pledged to keep ARF officials informed of any new decrees the sultan was ostensibly contemplating with

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

respect with his oft-promised but never implemented reforms.¹⁷⁵ It must be emphasized that through these carefully monitored exchanges—since communications were systematically censored—Ottoman intelligence officials not only hoped to obtain critical evidence on Armenian political party cells throughout the empire, but to also establish an authentic list of members delivered by the organization itself! Ever the loyal Ottoman official, Artin Pasha didn't know that throughout the process of his negotiations with Armenian revolutionaries an extremely suspicious Abdulhamid had created an elaborate spying circle around the Armenian notable. The same was also true in the case of Patriarch Ormanian. Ottoman secret journals of the time endeavored to show that both men were in reality working for the interest of the Russian Empire and were even being paid for their services.¹⁷⁶

Given the Sultan's record of unabatedly persecuting Armenians, the ARF Geneva Center rejected Drtad Bey as a negotiator, and informed the latter that it was impossible to gather all the requested information for Artin Pasha. In short, ARF leaders saw no point in continuing negotiations, when so little was achieved in the past.¹⁷⁷ Few ARF officials, if any, trusted the sultan even if many wished to turn a new page for the sake of impoverished and suffering populations in the eastern provinces.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ BOA, 1305-40-31, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı-Arzuhal ve Jurnarlar. *Ermeni Patriği Ormanian Efendinin ve dışışleri vekilin musaidi Artin Paşanın Devleti Aliyyeye hizmet ediyor görünelek aslında Rusyaya hizmet ettikleri ve cezalandırılmemek için yalancıkıtan geçinemiyorlar intibağını vermeye çalıştıkları*, 1899 (By showing themselves as working for the benefit of the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian Patriarch, Ormanian and the undersecretary of Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Artin Pasha are in reality working for Russia, but are very careful in not showing it, 1899).

¹⁷⁷ "Turk Garavarutyan," *Troshag*, No. 4 (95), April 1899, 59-61.

A dejected Drtad Bey replied that he understood the reasons advanced by the ARF to discontinue negotiations. He nevertheless implored the ARF to give him a written statement, which he promised to deliver to the sultan, presumably to sensitize the porte on why it was critical to introduce radical transformations.¹⁷⁸ Clearly, the Ottoman agent was pressed hard for information on the party's structure and influence within the empire, which may have earned him additional praise but left conditions on the ground unchanged.

Ottoman authorities were determined in their singular objective and they seldom hesitated to disburse substantial financial outlays to accomplish them. Thus, Drtad Bey remained in Geneva for eight more months where he maintained constant contact with the ARF, passing on information forwarded by Artin Pasha from Constantinople. The data was of little practical value for the ARF, and often rather irrelevant, elaborating on tangential information like the acceptance of twenty-five Armenian students to imperial academies and institutes of higher education, which did not change conditions in the eastern provinces by a single iota.¹⁷⁹

Lest one conclude that the Geneva center was isolated from ARF cells operating in Asia Minor and Western Armenia, it may be useful to underscore how sophisticated various contacts were, as distant sections shared news of developments on the ground. Moreover, many field representatives embraced the skeptical views from Geneva, aware that Ottoman negotiators were stalling for time. Accordingly, they urged ARF Geneva

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. *Troshag* states that the issue of Armenian students being accepted at the Ottoman academies and institutes of higher education and other such positive remarks that Drtad Bey reported about were all lies.

Center to end consultations with Artin Pasha and his delegates. Most believed that the very idea of negotiations ought to be discussed at the forthcoming ARF regional congress.¹⁸⁰ To no one's surprise, the ARF congress was not in favor of meaningless discussions with Abdulhamid through his Armenian agents. Instead, the congress formulated a proposition that pledged to restart a dialogue in good faith, if the Ottoman government fulfilled three demands, over a three-month period, to persuade Armenians of its good intents:

- 1) Offer a general amnesty for all political exiles so they could return to their homeland without fear of prosecution;
- 2) Return all properties confiscated from Armenians during the massacres and deportations;
- 3) Implement a general amnesty for all Armenian political prisoners.¹⁸¹

At the conclusion of the congress, when the ARF was on the verge of presenting its demands to Drtad Bey in Geneva, the situation changed dramatically. News of fresh massacres in the Akhlat and Paghesh (Bitlis) regions (northwest of Lake Van) reached Europe, which shocked assembled dignitaries.¹⁸² Consequently, the newly elected ARF Western Bureau (one of the two Supreme Councils of the party, the other Being the ARF Eastern Bureau, in Tiflis) decided to add a fourth demand to the previous list, calling on the porte to:

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ "Turk Garavarutyan," *Troshag*, No. 5 (96), April 1899, 76-77.

¹⁸² BOA, 3227-54-125, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Unum Vilayetler Tahriratı (Y.PRM.UM). *Ahlat'da Ermeni eşkiyasını takip eden kuvvetlerin raporu*, (The report of the forces reconnoitering Armenian revolutionaries in Akhlat).

- 4) Strictly punish all perpetrators of the massacres in Khlat and Paghesh in accordance with the law, and indemnify villages that were pillaged.¹⁸³

Drtad Bey duly received a copy of the demands signed by the ARF Western Bureau on November 2, 1898 and delivered them to the porte. As anticipated, they were unacceptable, since the sultan insisted the demands be withdrawn. Through his intermediary, Artin Pasha, Abdulhamid called on the ARF to draft a petition instead. Such a supplication, it was reasoned, could implore the Sultan to fulfill the same “demands” out of his good will and righteousness.¹⁸⁴ No one could confirm whether the sultan even intended to accept the ARF as a legitimate partner for serious negotiations, though the diplomatic twist highlighted the depth to which ossified leaders sank in vain attempts to portray themselves as anxious representatives looking after popular interests.

Unrelenting, Artin Pasha forwarded a fresh note to the ARF in Geneva, which emphasized his bona fide intentions. The pasha declared that he “was conducting these negotiations for three years now with the consent of the Sultan and in order to bring peace for, and within, the [Armenian] nation,” even if living conditions for Armenians worsened during the period.¹⁸⁵ Unabashedly critical of the ARF for making the four specific demands discussed above, Artin Pasha acknowledged, albeit indirectly, that the porte never regarded the oft-debated negotiations as a serious diplomatic effort. In his own words, the pasha wrote:

¹⁸³ “Turk Garavarutyan,” *Troshag*, No. 5 (96), April 1899, 76-77.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

I could have completed the process [of negotiations] by working only with the Patriarchate and its bodies. However, I chose to include the Armenian parties because deep inside I believed that as an elderly and respected person, the ARF would willingly speak with my representatives without any preconditions.

I presented all the demands and the pains of the Armenian nation to the proper authorities. I was able to get some small reforms in return. I thought that with time peace and prosperity would come to the Armenian nation. Therefore I urge you to listen to me carefully. I honestly believe that the salvation and the peaceful existence of the Armenian people in Turkey have been guaranteed for centuries.

Moreover, The Sultan has spoken about his good intentions toward the Armenians to the Patriarch and to me. We have already witnessed his work in this regard. He still sends his orders to governmental ministries and regional governors regarding the well being of Armenians.

I hope that you will continue to have an open channel with me and I will certainly inform you of any new developments.”¹⁸⁶

The thinly veiled threat that any opposition to the sultan would undermine the basis of security for Armenians within the Ottoman Empire, spoke volumes. In yet another twist

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

to Ottoman machinations, and despite the sultan's refusal to consider the ARF demands, Drtad Bey asked for a three-month extension to instigate the petition(s). This deferment continued until March 1899 when the ARF informed Artin Pasha that it was ending all relations with him, in accordance with the decisions of its congress.¹⁸⁷

Still trying to buy more time, Artin Pasha wrote several times asking the ARF to circumvent the General Congress' decisions, and keep an open channel. In fact, the recommendation aimed to create dissent within the organization, while avoiding substantive offers. In response, the ARF ignored the pasha's latest missives and, after May 26, 1899, simply returned them unopened.¹⁸⁸

In retrospect, and as the discussion above confirms, ARF negotiators were fully aware of the Ottoman government's stalling tactics. Abdulhamid believed that Armenians engaged in negotiations posed less of a threat than those left to fend for themselves. Moreover, the porte was persuaded that a putative peace conference to be held at The Hague, where Ottoman representatives would sit next to their European counterparts, lessened or at least limited the unending pressure exerted by the Great Powers.¹⁸⁹ According to an Armenian observer, the porte's plans to discuss issues pertaining to minorities in the Ottoman Empire were not genuine, even if few realized what would actually transpire there:

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ "Turk Garavarutyan," *Troshag*, No. 6 (97), June 1899, 90-92

The Peace conference was to convene in less than two months at The Hague. The Sultan was unwilling to discuss his country's internal affairs there. The secession of the negotiations with the ARF would be a blow for his policies.

It would also mean that reforms in the Armenian Vilayets (provinces) of the empire would definitely be brought to the Peace Conference. He acted quickly infesting European newspapers with lies that the negotiations with Armenian revolutionaries were going well and that a decision would soon be reached regarding the Armenian question.¹⁹⁰

As later events confirmed, the Ottoman disinformation campaign became fully public when on May 1, 1899, the Constantinople correspondent of the *Correspondenz-Bureau* in Vienna published a telegram that stated:

Three members of the Geneva [Armenian] Committee have arrived at Istanbul to discuss Armenian reforms with governmental officials. Discussions have begun with Artin Pasha [Dadian] and Enver Bey, the governor of Pera. It is rumored that the Armenian delegates have taken upon themselves to pacify the committee members.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

As soon as the ARF understood the ploy behind this embedded factoid, it quickly refuted the sultan's telegram, affirming that negotiations had ended as of March 11, 1899.¹⁹²

On May 11, the Sultan leaked another telegram through the same channel:

The representatives who are going to discuss [Armenian reforms] with the Paris Committee and the two Committees of Geneva¹⁹³ are: Mehmed Pasha, Minister of the Interior, Artin Pasha [Dadian], adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ahmed Jelaeddin Pasha *Tufekjibashi* (Manager of the Imperial Gunpowder), Enver Bey, governor of Pera, Drtad Bey as a referee, Kevork Bulbulian, attorney. The Armenian delegates have not yet arrived. The government guarantees their freedom. Negotiations will start as soon as they arrive.¹⁹⁴

Once more, the ARF reacted promptly, as Troshag immediately refuted the telegram by wiring to the editors of *Frankfurter Zeitung* in Germany and *Le Temps* in France. While the latter did not publish the refutation statement, the former published it in its May 12, 1899, issue. Moreover, in its May 16, 1899, issue, the Constantinople office of the *Correspondenz-Bureau* partly retracted its earlier report when it announced that Armenian-Ottoman negotiations reached an impasse and that the sultan was sending

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid. It is clear that the negotiations were being conducted with the ARF. However, the mention of three separate committees, one in Paris and two in Geneva was a ploy by the Sultan to show that he was negotiating with several Armenian revolutionary organizations.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

Ahmed Jelaleddin to give them a boost.¹⁹⁵ Jelaleddin Bey's mission to Paris, proclaimed in great fanfare, added nothing new and no negotiations followed. Meanwhile, the ARF and the Hnchagyan parties intensified their collaboration with the Young Turks to create an organizational framework that promised to deliver a united front against Abdulhamid.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵“Yergu Khosk Panagtsutyunneru Artiv” (A Couple of Words Regarding the Negotiations), *Troshag*, No. 6 (97), June 1899, 90-92. See also BOA, 1314-40-40, Yıldız perakende Evrakı, Arzuhal ve Jurnallar, *Avrupada, Parisde bulunan Damad Mahmud Paşanın işinin halledilmesi için gönderilen Ahmed Celaleddin Paşanın bu konuda Cenevreden gönderdiği telegrafnamenin arzı ,1900* (Sending of Ahmed Jelaleddin Pasha to Paris, Europe, in order to create hurdles against the solving of Damad Mahmud Pasha's project, and the telegram that Jelaleddin Pasha had send in this regard from Geneva, 1900); BOA, 1320-40-46, Yıldız perakende Evrakı, Arzuhal ve Jurnallar. *Ahmed Celaleddin Paşanın [Damad] Mahmud Paşa tarafından ve imzası altında yazdırmakta olduğu istid'a namesini almak üzere esna 'yi ziyarette Salih Beyle görüştüğü ve Bulgaristanile Dersaadet'ten firar ederek Parise gelmiş olan bir takım şahislerin Paşaya takarrub teşebbusunda bulduklarından bunların men' edilmesinde hayli gücüükler cekildigine dair arzı, 1900* (Telegram explaining how Ahmed Jelaleddin Pasha visited Damad Mahmud Pasha in Paris and asked him to sign the official declaration asking the Damad to return to Constantinople, and that Ahmed Pasha was able to also see and to talk to Salih Bey during his visit to the Damad, and also about a group of people having escaped Constantinople to Paris by way of Bulgaria and their wanting to be very close to the Damad, and how it was very hard for Ahmed Pasha to forbid such a collusion, 1900).

¹⁹⁶ BOA, 3102-55-106, Yıldız perakende Evrakı, Arzuhal ve Jurnallar (Y.PRM.UM). *Avrupada firarda bulunan komite re'isler hususunda fikirler ve komite re'isleri hakkında malumat* (Regarding the leaders of the [Young Turks] who have escaped to Europe and information about them).

CHAPTER 2

TOWARD A CONGRESS OF OTTOMAN DISSIDENTS, 1899-1902

Mizanji Murad Bey's dissent and subsequent relocation to Constantinople cleared the way for Ahmed Riza to assume the leadership of the Turkish émigré community in Europe. Riza's leadership, however, was not left unchallenged because of his incessant opposition to the ideas of federalism as well as to European interference in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire, opinions that won him many foes. Moreover, his protective stance concerning the institution of the Sultanate—although he considered Abdulhamid a villain and a murderer—undermined the supremacy of a future constitutional government. On the other hand, Riza's adherence to philosophical pacifism and its evolutionary approach to problem solving antagonized the militant faction within the Young Turk movement. The one idea that brought him closer to militants was their mutual abhorrence of any federal form of government that promised autonomy to ethnic minorities.

At this stage, the Young Turks had already started to show tendencies for a strong central government for the empire. What emerged was a period of mistrust, which could only be alleviated through face-to-face gatherings that, for all practical purposes, pitted men and ideas against each other. This chapter delves into the key personalities that fed this mistrust, and provides an analysis of the first Congress of Ottoman dissidents. How various officials developed specific ideas, made propositions to address competing interests, and invested in leaders to better articulate their nascent vision are all assessed. The chapter closes with a detailed review of conditions on the ground, especially in the

eastern provinces, to better understand how mistrust and dissidence left their impacts on ordinary citizens in the Empire.

A Period of Mistrust

Calls for a strong central government for the empire preoccupied officials and it was in this spirit that Riza wrote on October 9, 1898, that if a congress of Ottoman dissidents ever convened, “the issue of Armenian reforms must never be on the agenda or be openly discussed.” He concluded by addressing Armenian dissidents: “Let all those dissatisfied be content with a congress and an executive organization, which results from the congress.”¹

According to a Turkish historian:

To advocate his point of view Riza traveled to The Hague in mid-1899 to attend the peace conference dealing with issues of reforms for Armenians and Macedonians in the empire. Although uninvited, Riza somehow made it to the podium and stated to the many European dignitaries attending that the Young Turks were not revolutionaries, but that they needed Europe's help to make Turkey a state where law ruled.²

Riza’s appearance in The Hague was not incidental. Neither was it a personal initiative, for it seemed that Young Turk officials in Egypt considered it extremely important to make their voice heard at the conference. It was for this reason that they wrote

¹ ARF Archives, Section A (1895-1901), box 872, document a-22.

² Şükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 128-129.

to Zeki Bey (Kantari), who was an agent of the Khedive of Egypt and had been working with the Young Turks since the middle of the 1890s, to request that a representative attend the conference.³ The Egyptian center's letter stated:

We are in the position of telling you [Zeki Bey] confidentially that it will be practical and quicker if someone [from Europe] attends the conference... This meeting in Switzerland will bring Armenians and Macedonians together. Our representative there must speak the absolute truth. We must have a delegate to speak with the Armenians and Macedonians... Please burn this letter after you read it.⁴

As events illustrated, Zeki Bey was successful in arranging for Ahmed Riza to attend the congress and on December 9, 1900 the Egyptian center of the Young Turks sent him a note stating that it was satisfied with the results.⁵

Contrary to what Armenian sources stated, the Turkish historian Şükrü Hanioglu related a totally different perspective regarding Riza's participation at the conference.

According to this view:

With Ahmed Riza's initiative, the CUP decided to join in The Hague Peace Conference in 1899. Although uninvited, Ahmed Riza organized a joint delegation and presented a memorandum to the

³ ARF Archives, Section A (1895-1901), box 218, documents 57 & 58.

⁴ Ibid., box 218, document 26.

⁵ Ibid., box 872, document a-5.

representatives. He convinced Minas Cheraz, a prominent figure in the Armenian movement, to join the delegation; however, Albanians to whom he had also applied spurned the offer. Besides having authorization from all branches of the CUP, he allegedly received authority from the ulema of Al-Azhar to represent them. He journeyed to The Hague with Pierre Anmeghian and met with Minas Cheraz, whose activities were being scrutinized by Ottoman diplomats.⁶

Whatever his motives, Riza's attending of the congress at The Hague perturbed the ARF. As the congress was supposed to be devoted solely to reforms for ethnic minorities in the empire, Riza's speech was booed several times. Troshag sarcastically wondered in

⁶ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 128-129. According to Hanioglu, Pierre Anmeghian was a member of the editorial board of Meshveret, the paper that Ahmed Riza published. The only mention about him is in A. Norian, *Trvakner Hay Heghapokhagan Tashnagtsutyun Badmutyunits* (Episodes from the History of the ARF), (Boston: Hayrenik Press, 1917). Anmeghian is mentioned as one of the Young Turk leaders and an editor at Meshveret, who was co-opted through the efforts of Munir Bey, the Ottoman Ambassador to Paris. He returned to Constantinople, where he was awarded a monthly stipend for denouncing his previous anti-Hamidian stance. See Norian, *Trvakner*, 217. On the other hand, relations between Ahmed Riza and Minas Cheraz are important, and must receive appropriate discussion. Cheraz was a respected Armenian activist, who had been at the forefront of Armenian issues in the Ottoman Empire. He was an advocate of the Armenian cause long before the formation of the Armenian revolutionary parties. The ARF and the Hnchagyan party also respected him. This is evident from the content of a letter addressed to him from the ARF Geneva Center, which pleads with the elderly activist to intervene on the ARF's behalf so that it could establish relations with the Anglo-Armenian Association, an organization established in 1893 and comprising British Armenophile politicians, academicians, journalist, etc. The ARF asked Cheraz if there was a possibility that the aforementioned association would start relations and cooperate with a revolutionary society. See ARF Archives, Section A (1895-1901), Box 37, document No. 2. Hanioglu states that during their sojourn at The Hague, Cheraz and Riza "also organized meetings and talks against the regime of Abdulhamid II, during which the former depicted the CUP as a positivist organization. Cheraz's proposed speech against the sultan under the auspices of Christelijke Vereeniging voor Jonge Mannen was not banned, but he was prohibited from using any pictures. Later he adopted a religious tone and focused on the perils of 'Pan-Islamism,' accusing the sultan of inciting the Muslims in Java against the Dutch. The sultan protested against both the Young Turks and the accusations of Cheraz, and the Ottoman administration applied heavy

an editorial: “What kind of a person asks others to free his people? To what degree should a person be wretched and miserable that instead of fighting an oppressor, he calls on others to do his job?”⁷

Parallel to these developments, Abdulhamid continued his persecution of the Young Turks and, according to the acting British consul in Smyrna, Hampson, who wrote to his Ambassador, O’Conor, in September 1899 that eight Turks were arrested as members of the CUP through the efforts of a spy who had been embedded within the revolutionary cell.⁸ Hampson continued that the situation in the city was tense and that the police were apprehending many suspects as CUP members.⁹ Meanwhile, on the European front, activists led by Tunali Hilmi, started publishing an English supplement of their organ, *Osmanli*, in Geneva, to attract British support for a constitutional government in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ The Geneva Center also published *Kurdistan*,¹¹ through Abdulrahman

pressure on its Dutch counterpart to extradite them. However, they left the country before any action could be taken against them.”

⁷ *Troshag*, No. 7 (98), August 1899, 105-107

⁸ F.O. 424.198.32. Ambassador O’Conor’s last name is also encountered as O’Conner. However, these instances are very rare. Therefore, the O’Conor form was chosen to keep uniformity.

⁹ F.O. 424.198.36.

¹⁰ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 117. Tunali’s activities were aimed at undermining Riza’s power. Moreover, by moving the center of his group and its organ to Geneva, he was attempting to be closer to the ARF.

¹¹ Garabet Moundjian, “Armenian-Kurdish Relations in the Era of Kurdish Nationalism, 1830-1930,” *Pazmaveb*, No. 1-4, 1999, 309-310. *Kurdistan* was first published under the editorship of Abdulrahman Bey’s brother, Midhat Bey. When Abdulrahman assumed the editorship of the paper, he established close relations with the ARF in Geneva. It was under these circumstances that his famous article, *Kürtlere Hitap* (a Call to the Kurds) was published in pamphlet form in Kurdish (in Ottoman script). Its Armenian translation appeared in *Troshag*. Armenian revolutionary cells distributed thousands of these pamphlets within the Kurdish areas in the Ottoman Empire (see below).

Bedirhan Bey, son of the legendary Kurdish chieftain Bedirhan, who had organized a massive revolt against the Ottoman government between 1840 and 1847.¹²

While in Geneva, Abdulrahman established close ties with Troshag editors. In 1898, Troshag published a call by a Kurdish chieftain (name unknown) where the latter stressed that Kurds lived with Armenians for almost 2000 years, and that they should not be toys in the hands of Abdulhamid. The article concluded by stating: “We have to do what Armenians are doing, because we too are being disparaged and oppressed.”¹³

Unsurprisingly, the collaboration with Abdulrahman Bey resulted in the publication of the latter’s famous article, Kürtlere Hitap (A call to the Kurds) in Troshag. Excerpts from the article highlighted the extent to which the Kurdish leader was willing to join forces with Armenians. In one section of the essay, the author declared:

Kurds: As human beings are obliged to prepare the means of honorably defending themselves, so is the case with societies which are obliged to defend their fatherland against enemies. You have done nothing in this regard but to serve Abdulhamid, who has dishonored you in many ways. The king’s long-term objective is to keep you in ignorance. He sometimes honors your leaders with

¹² Ibid., 281-283.

¹³ “Goch Kurderun,” *Troshag*, No. 6 (86), June 1898, 51-52. In this issue Troshag gives a summary of the article while leaving its publication to a future issue. See also BOA, 1614-42-4, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Umum Vilayetler Tahrirati, (Y.PR.M.UM), *Bedirhan Paşazade Midhatın Kürtce olarak neşretmiş olduuu gazette nushalarından dağıtımının engellenmesi (1898)* (The confiscation and the stoppage of the circulation of copies of the Kurdish language gazette published by Bedirhan Pashazade Midhat, 1898).

medals that are fit for dogs. These medals are nothing else but the price of your national dignity and your future.¹⁴

After exhorting his people as the “strongest, bravest, and the most intelligent of the tribes of the East,” Bedirhan deplored the fact that Kurds have to sacrifice the finest of their warriors to a monarch who aims at their destruction. Bedirhan then continued:

The king whom you consider the Khalifa [Caliph, successor to the prophet] has committed such crimes that would even humble the likes of Jengiz Khan. Don’t you know that serving such a despot is tantamount to God’s punishment? Other small nations are doing everything possible to fight the tyrant. How can it be then, that you are the only one that still serves him? Would your honor and bravery permit you to kill innocent Armenian women and children? You won’t build your fatherland with such acts of cowardice...¹⁵

Bedirhan then reminded the Kurds that when years ago Kurdish tribal chieftains were summoned to a meeting where the Ottoman authorities presented them with an imperial decree exhorting them to go to Van with their warriors and to exterminate Armenians, the late Kurdish leader, Sheykh Obeydullah, before leaving the meeting, stood up and said: “This Irade is against the teachings of God and the Prophet. A king who makes such a law is a despot who should not be obeyed and must be deposed. The king’s

¹⁴ Abdulrahman Bedirkhan, “Goch Kurderun,” *Troshag*, No. 4 (115), June 1901, 65-67.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

real aim is to first kill the Armenians and then to unleash his wrath upon us.”¹⁶ Bedirhan Bey then concluded:

Why didn't the late Sheykh's example engulf your sentiments? As the people of the same land you should have extended your hands to Armenians. Wasn't that the norm for centuries past? Instead, you chose to kill the only friends that you had. How are you going to live with this shame? You have to cleanse yourselves and your national honor. It was for this reason that three years ago I left Turkey and headed to Europe to start a movement. I started publishing the "Kurdistan" periodical. Listen to the advice of those Kurdish leaders whom I trust. Armenians are always ready to work and even to unite with you. Don't postpone this important collaboration. God's blessing will be with you in such a venture.¹⁷

Troshag's response to Abdulrahman Bey's article stressed that the issue of Armenian-Kurdish unity and collaboration deserved some thought:

Armenian-Kurdish reconciliation is not a new issue in our lives. (Patriarch) Nerses Varzhabedian and Mgrdich Khrimian's (Patriarch of Constantinople and later Catholicos of Armenians) views in this regard are known to many of us. Moreover, Raffi's [a renowned Armenian writer] sermons and Servantsian's (a cleric and writer-

¹⁶ Ibid.

intellectual from Van and a close associate of Khrimian) ideas have been around for a long time. Finally, during the last decade, Armenian revolutionary leaders' efforts to form coalition with Kurdish tribes are not a secret.¹⁸

Troshag then welcomed the idea of an Armenian-Kurdish unity, which until now had only been advocated by the Armenian side, and insisted that it was an important element for the victory of the two peoples:

However, it must also be understood that whenever one speaks about Armenian-Kurdish unity the French saying “parler de la corde dans la maison d’un pendu” (to speak about a rope in the house of somebody who was hanged) applies...If we are asked who has been the most vicious towards Armenians during the last half of the nineteenth century it would be impossible to find somebody who will not mention the Kurds. Therefore it is within this context that we must embark upon unity with the Kurds.¹⁹

Troshag then attempted to analyze Kurdish aggression against Heyidi Kurds (in the 1830s), Nestorians (during the 1840s), and finally Armenians (from the 1860s and onwards), which culminated in Kurdish cruelty against Armenians in Sasun in 1894,

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ “Hay-Krdagan Haraperutyunner” [Armenian-Kurdish Relations], part I, *Troshag*, No. 4 (115), June 1901, 67-68]; Part II, *Troshag*, No. 5 (116), July 1901, 81-82.

¹⁹ Ibid., *Troshag*, No. 4 (115), June 1901, 67-68; *Troshag*, No. 5 (116), July 1901, 81-82.

especially since they went ahead with Abdulhamid's initiative of forming the Hamidiye regiments that marauded and pillaged Armenian villages and settlements.²⁰

On the other hand, Troshag also underlined that during the nineteenth century, there were several attempts by powerful Kurdish leaders to attain independence, and that Armenian peasants throughout this period were always loyal to them.²¹ Troshag then concluded its analysis with these words:

Our aim must be to show the Kurds that their unity with Armenians is beneficial to both peoples. Since they understand the language of force, we must show them that we too are capable of defending ourselves and inflicting heavy casualties in the ranks of the enemy. If we do not show this to our neighbors, we will not win their trust and cooperation. Instead, we will remain a target for their attacks.²²

Similar exposes and editorials were published by Abdulrahman in Kurdistan, a gazette that was smuggled into the Ottoman Empire and secretly distributed within the Kurdish population.²³ Such publications caught the attention of Young Turk leaders and

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. See also Moundjian, "Armenian-Kurdish Relations," 277-294. During the nineteenth century, there were several attempts by Kurdish princes to attain independence. These were:

-Amir (prince) Mohammad's movement during the 1830s;

-Bedirhan's revolt during the 1840s;

-Yezdansher's movement during the 1850s;

-Sheykh Obeidullah's movement during the 1880s;

²² "Hay-Krdagan Haraperutyunner," *Troshag*, No. 4 (115), June 1901, 67-68]; *Troshag*, No. 5 (116), July 1901, 81-82.

²³ BOA, 1614-42-4, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Umum Vilayetler Tahrirâtı, (Y.PRM.UM), *Bedirhan Paşazade Midhatın Kürtçe olarak neşretmiş olduğu gazette nushalarından dağıtımının engellenmesi, 1898*

militants who were anxious to mobilize public opinion in the Ottoman Empire against the Sultan's excesses.

Damad Mahmud Pasha in Paris

As mentioned above, after Mizanji Murad Bey arrived in Paris, Ahmed Riza saw his leadership wings clipped, and it was only through Murad's defection that Riza regained the glamour he had lost. However, his new popularity was challenged once again when the Sultan's brother-in-law, Damad Mahmud Pasha and his two sons, Sabaheddin and Lutfallah Beys, fled Constantinople. They reached Paris on December 14, 1899, and it quickly became obvious that a high ranking palace official such as Damad Mahmud Pasha with his liberal ideas and reputation as one of the organizers of the 1896 infamous palace coup d'état, would strive to assume the leadership of the Young Turk movement. This also meant that Riza's leadership was once again being challenged, this time by a more acclaimed Ottoman official.

As was the case with Murad Bey, Damad Mahmud Pasha tried to pave the way for cooperation with Armenian revolutionary societies. According to Hanioglu:

The second strategy (the first being a futile approach to the British) was an appeal to the Armenians for common action. Since Damad Mahmud Pasha knew that British intervention hinged upon the participation of the Christian groups in the empire, he cultivated relations with the Armenian leaders as soon as he reached Europe.

(Obstruction against the distribution of copies of Bedirhan Pasha Midhat's Kurdish language gazette [Kurdistan], 1898).

Later Armenian journals offered “moral support” to the new group dominating the Young Turk movement. Meanwhile, the Tashnaktsutyun branch in Boston initiated an alliance with the CUP and their organization. At the same time, a certain Martos Ferciyan [Mardiros Ferjjiyan(?)] provided the central committee with an article he had written containing the same offer. Although in September 1900 the palace received news of a rapprochement between Young Turks and Armenian revolutionaries, Armenian spies for the Ottoman government in London denied this claim.²⁴

Such assessments notwithstanding, in the fall of 1900, Damad Mahmud Pasha published his “An Open Letter to Armenians,” in which he stated:

Dear Compatriots: Abdulhamid starts his 25th anniversary of the ascension to the throne with massacres in Sasun. But the European governments participate[d] at this celebration. Previously, he used his sword to kill and to imprison (through secret orders to provincial authorities) those Muslim subjects of the empire who, knowing the catastrophic end of his policies, were trying to persuade him to do otherwise. He then exiled educated Young Turk activists from Constantinople.

²⁴ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 149-150. Hanioglu’s sources are Arkivi Quendor Shteteror-Tirana, 19/58/238/4, Halil Muvaffak to Ishak Sukuti, May 2, 1900; Arkivi Quendor Shteteror-Tirana, 19/106-3/305/928; Martos Ferciyan to CUP central committee, New York, April 16, 1900.

Thus, encouraged by his ability to impose such policies, he now concentrated his efforts toward the Armenians. This time Europe raised its voice, because it was “the blood of Christians that was pouring.” This false diplomatic overture of Europe put Armenians on a road, which, alas, was to bring very dire consequences. How good could it have been to them [Armenians] if they would take the only rational course and unite their forces with us, since we were both facing the same evil? Not having any patience, Armenians didn’t opt for that route. Instead, they looked to Europe for assistance, while at the same time they condemned the Turks as barbarians, even though the Turks were not responsible for the atrocities. European diplomacy echoed Armenian sentiments through declarations and the printed media. They too didn’t know what our movement’s objectives were. This policy was a disgrace against a people whose ideas they had to hear.²⁵

Damad Mahmud Pasha then described how Armenians and Turks lived together in relative peace since at least 1453, or how Armenians and other minorities were treated with compassion while Europe during the same period of time was engaged in religious persecutions of both Catholics and Protestants. He further asserted that even at the dawn of

²⁵ Damad Mahmud Pasha, “Lettre Overt aux Arméniens” (An Open Letter to Armenians), *Pro Armenia*, No. 2, November 10, 1900, 3. See also Damad Mahmud Pasha, “Pats Namag Hayerun” (An Open Letter to Armenians), *Troshag*, No. 7 (108), September 1900, 101-102.

the 20th century, Armenians under Russian rule did not have the right to speak their own language or to openly teach their own history in their schools, all to illustrate what befell the nation when it strayed from its Ottoman roots. In the pasha's own words:

However radiant our past is, it is as much darkened today because of one person, Abdulhamid. We should not sit idle. Let us work together to rid our fatherland of a usurping despot and to reintroduce the constitution of Midhat Pasha that Abdulhamid so eagerly suspended. By leaving Constantinople, my two sons and I have no other aim but to accomplish this. All of the sultan's intrigues to frighten us will not divert us from the road we have chosen. I am convinced, as you will be too, that uniting with us will give us the force to rid our country from Abdulhamid. To Abdulhamid's rubric of "divide and rule," let us answer together: "unity is force."²⁶

Tashnaktsutyun's reply to Damad Mahmud Pasha's overture, although positive, was still sharply critical. Troshag first stressed that the Young Turk movement was not a homogeneous one and, hence, it was extremely difficult to associate with several factions who entertained drastically different ideologies and modes operendi:

[The Young Turks'] recent calls to unite with Armenians against Abdulhamid is a fresh start for such a unity. There were times when it was we who invited such Turks to join our struggle. We were

²⁶ Damad Mahmud Pasha, "Pats Namag Hayerun," *Troshag*, No. 7 (108), September 1900, 101-102.

always amazed that they remained uninterested... It is not surprising that we had incorporated the ideals of unity of all anti Hamidian forces within the Ottoman Empire into our [ARF's] program a decade ago. It is surprising that it took so long for the Young Turks to finally understand what we were saying a long time ago.²⁷

After once again being amused by the immature pleas of “let’s unite” and calling it “ a beautiful idea,” Troshag added in a serious tone: “Unite with whom? And how?”

Troshag then continued:

Armenian revolutionaries have been in the forefront of the struggle to which we are called upon to join. And where are the Turkish fighters? Thus far we have only seen individuals and groups who do propaganda work through publications. These intellectuals are cut off from the real Turkish people in the provinces and represent only a small segment of the population. The Young Turks still remain revolutionaries on paper only. They have yet to prove themselves in real revolutionary work if they don’t want to remain people of words with no action...²⁸

Troshag also admonished Damad Mahmud Pasha for using language that insinuated Ottoman tolerance in the past, when Europe was still implicated with religious and ethnic intolerance. Troshag then concluded by stating:

²⁷ Editorial, “Miutyun Turkeri Hed” (Unity with the Turks), *Troshag*, No. 8 (109), October 1900, 113-116.

Isn't this a very simplistic, rather primitive analysis of the situation that doesn't take other social and historical aspects into consideration? On what basis and through what means should a united front be formed? Give us tangible ideas that we can work with. Give us proof that by uniting with you we will not be just instruments in your hands, but that something good will come from this concerning reforms for Armenians. If such a program is devised, we swear, by the revolutionary principles to which we adhere, that we are ready to join forces with you.²⁹

If Damad Mahmud Pasha received constructive responses from Armenian interlocutors, his overtures toward the British not only remained unanswered, but were also totally neglected. Ironically, the pasha dispatched his two sons to London to secure British assistance for his new venture, to no avail.³⁰ Lord Salisbury did not even bother to meet with them, although two attempts were made to secure an audience with the latter.³¹

Needless to say that this was devastating to Damad Mahmud Pasha who was accused by German diplomatic circles as being extremely pro-British, an epithet that could not be discarded.³² Since it was impossible for him to reconcile with Ahmed Riza, the dejected pasha's only other choice was to unite with Tunali Hilmi, and the latter's activist

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 144.

³¹ Ibid.

group in Geneva.³³ Still, the price he paid was dire, because his name was now to be associated with the militant faction of the Young Turks. The only positive consequence of the humiliation was a rather successful unification of the movement under his leadership.³⁴

It was Tunali Hilmi who was the first to advocate for some sort of a conference attended by all forces opposed to Abdulhamid's rule. Troshag, probably articulating the ARF position, opened its pages to a nameless Young Turk representative, who wrote:

Tunali Hilmi, using the name of an Egyptian prince, Mehmed Ali Pasha, first published the idea in mid 1899 in Cairo, Egypt. This proclamation invited all Muslim and non-Muslim forces of the empire to convene in a special congress to find solutions to the Turkish Question.

An important development in this regard was the escape of Mehmed Pasha's son, Haydar Bey, from Constantinople. He went to Cairo and joined forces with Tunali Hilmi and his publication. Haydar Bey's escape created a big commotion at Yildiz Palace.

More important, however, were the escape of the sultan's brother-in-law, Damad Mahmud Pasha, and his two sons to Europe

³² Ibid., 143.

³³ Ibid., 145.

³⁴ Ibid. It is interesting that Damad Mahmud Pasha journeyed to Geneva in March 1900 to meet with Tunali Hilmi and his group. After the meeting, Prince Sabaheddin, according to Hanioglu, stated that

and his publication of an “Open Letter” to the sultan where he unveiled the evil deeds of his master. This gave real impetus to the fledgling Young Turk Movement...³⁵

After mentioning that here were at least 3,000 Young Turks who were imprisoned or exiled from Turkey, Troshag, in a new twist that showcased the new revolutionary character of the Young Turks, added:

It was also important that in some cases, hand-made bombs were found... It was until now thought that the Young Turks were against revolution. It is true that Meshveret, which is published in French, represents itself as evolutionary rather than revolutionary, but the Osmanli newspaper, which is published in Turkish, French, and German, describes Riza Bey's slow evolutionary approach as futile and does not agree with his approach... This shows that a significant segment of the Young Turks are pro-revolution and would go as far as organizing a bombing event... This shows, if anything, that the Young Turks are a revolutionary force.³⁶

Although laudatory of the Young Turks, and clearly given a solid reception in a leading Armenian revolutionary publication, the truth of the matter was that Damad

“there are people with courage [in Geneva], but it is not possible to form a serious party for action unless they gather under the leadership of a single person.”

³⁵ “Yeridasart Turkya” (Young Turkey), *Troshag*, No. 1 (102), January 1900, 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 1 (102), January 1900, 6.

Mahmud Pasha was reluctant to enter into a coalition with Tunali Hilmi's activists. It was for this reason that he sought to conduct secret negotiations with Armenians. What he aimed for was to distance the movement from Young Turk officials in Europe. In fact, the secret meeting was arranged by Zeki Kantari Bey, who, as mentioned above, was employed by the Khedive of Egypt to work within the Paris based Young Turk émigré circles. Zeki Bey was also a confidant of Mahmud Pasha.³⁷

The meeting, which took place at Damad Mahmud Pasha's residence in Cairo during the latter's temporary sojourn there in 1901, was the clincher.³⁸ Members of the ARF delegation that attended this critical gathering included D. Enfiyejian, Z. Kalfaian, and Sebu (Arshag Nersesian). The pasha's two sons, princes Sabaheddin and Lutfallah were also present.³⁹ Based on reports submitted by attendees, the ARF produced a twenty-

³⁷ ARF Archives, Section I (1895-1901), box 218, document No. 57. Hanioglu indicated that the khedive guaranteed Damad Mahmud Pasha's protection and financially supported him. The pasha even traveled to Egypt to establish his leadership within the Young Turk movement there. However, the sultan intervened and obliged the khedive to keep the pasha and his two sons under house arrest. Moreover, in April 1901, Mahmud and his two sons were asked by the sultan to return to Constantinople. The pasha agreed on condition that he would be given a full pardon and his wealth would be restituted. His sons, however, persuaded him otherwise. This also meant that the khedive's stipend would stop and he would be in financial distress. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 150-151. See also BOA, 1636-43-22, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Arzuhal ve Journallar, 1636-43-22, *Osmanlı İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyetinin Mısırda düzenlediği cirkin faaliyetleri hakkında elde edilen bilgilerin takdim edildiği, 1901* (Information having been delivered regarding the Ottoman İttihad ve Terakki Organization's—Committee of Union and Progress, CUP— despicable activities in Egypt, 1901); BOA, Yıldız Esas Evrakı, Anaetik İnvanteri (Y.PRM.UM), 3323-87-65, *Jön Türklerin Mısırda yaptığı neşriyyette Hidivin barmağı var, 1902* (The Khedive is behind the Young Turk's publications in Egypt, 1902).

³⁸ The pasha was under house arrest in Cairo as per Abdulhamid's request to the Khedive. The latter, however, although complied with Abdulhamid's request, nevertheless, and out of his own interests, gave the pasha a breathing space to continue his activities.

³⁹ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 150-151. For the real name of Sebu see: Yervant Khatanassian, "Two Glossaries for the Assistance of Researchers in the History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation," *The Armenian Review*, No. 3 (127), September 1979, 267-279. Concerning the meeting between the ARF representatives and Damad Mahmud Pasha, see ARF Archives, section A (1895-1901), box 218, document No. 58. The pasha sent his invitation to the ARF branch in Cairo while he was being detained there

nine-handwritten-pages précis, which is preserved in the ARF archives. According to this valuable document, Damad Mahmud confided in the Armenian delegates and asked for secrecy regarding what he was about to reveal. The Pasha's admissions were summarized in the document using his own words:

1. I am against a federative form of government, because that is very harmful for Turkey [the Ottoman Empire was also referred to as Turkey in the Armenian parlance of the time]. It refutes the union of the country. The issue is the sultan. Who says that a new sultan will act the same way [as Hamid] toward Armenians? Take for example the imprisoned Sultan Murad [V] or his son, who I think will act totally differently with you. And don't think that since he is imprisoned he does not know what is happening in the country.
2. You already know what our enemies and especially Russia intend to do. What guarantees are there that in a federative system Russian influence will not increase?
3. The constitution we strive for has already been published and put to action [reference to Midhat Pasha's constitution of 1876]. The people are ready for it and it is popular. On the other hand, a

by the khedive. The ARF Egyptian branch consulted the Geneva center, which gave the green light for the meeting to take place. However, the ARF representatives conveyed to the pasha that they would report the results of the meeting to the ARF Geneva Center, which will then decide if and how to cooperate with him and his sons. That Damad Mahmud Pasha was able to meet the ARF representatives while in Egypt showed, if anything, how loose his being under house arrest was. Although the khedive had to save face with the sultan, who was still his superior, he didn't hinder the pasha's activities.

federative system is totally alien to it [the 1876 constitution] and it can lead the country to a civil war.

4. Midhat Pasha's constitution was ratified some 25 years ago. It is our responsibility to bring it up-to-date, taking into consideration the democratic ideas of our times and perform the necessary corrections on it.
5. As to your question of "isn't the Caliphate itself an anti-democratic institution," my answer is no. In Islam, the Caliph is elected by the people and must rule with the people's consent [reference to the Islamic Shura [Consultation], institution, which translates to consultation, consultative body]. Is the situation any different in the case of the Russian Tsar, or the British Queen?
6. It is with sorrow that I have to admit, that, in exception to a very small number of people, I couldn't find real comrades among the Turkish émigrés in Europe. This puts us in great despair. Thus, we have already decided that if we are going to form a union with the Armenians, that union will be only among us and with no other Turkish émigrés. I confide in you when I say that we don't yet have a sizable organization in Turkey. However, the land is very fertile for such a venture and we can do it together.
7. Our union must be kept a secret for the time being. But let me assure you that if Hamid hears of this union he will definitely intensify his

persecution of Armenians. However, I don't think he will be able to organize a new massacre.

8. To your question why I didn't include other nationalities, like the Macedonians, in my address? My response is that I am already familiar with the Armenians and have great hopes on their revolutionary committees. On the other hand, I think the Macedonians want to unite with Bulgaria. That is why I don't want to work with them.
9. The abortive coup d'état of 1896 was the result of the lack of European intervention on the side of the reformers. A future coup could only succeed through European and especially British intervention.⁴⁰

That Damad Mahmud Pasha was skeptical and almost suspicious of Young Turk leaders can also be construed from the fact that most of its leaders were from non-Turkish backgrounds.⁴¹ As the above summary illustrated, and although the pasha opposed the sultan, he, as a member of the palace party, was an advocate of a central government based on the tenets of Ottomanism. However, for many Young Turk leaders, the very idea of Ottomanism was tantamount to the defense of Islam against Europe and its Christian

⁴⁰ ARF Archives, Section I (1895-1901), box 218, document No. 22.

⁴¹ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 168-169. Hanioglu writes: "We observe an interesting fact. None of the founders of the CUP was of Turkish origin, and they represented the important Muslim groups in which a strong sense of nationalism was yet to develop—Albanians, Kurds, and Circassians. These ethnic groups also relied on Ottoman protection against Christian groups promoted by the Great Powers' diplomacy—Greeks,

protégés such as Greeks, Serbs, Macedonians, and Armenians.⁴² Importantly, this non-Turkish but pro-Muslim “connection” was also evident in the writings of another CUP activist, Ishak Sukuti, who, in what was considered to be one of his best articles in pro-Islamic rhetoric, “asked the Albanians and the Kurds to unite with the Turkish element of the empire against the ‘menace’ of the Armenians and the Balkan Christians.”⁴³

This ideological paradigm must be carefully stressed, since it coincided with Sultan Abdulhamid’s endeavors to establish Pan-Islamism as the new credo of the Ottoman state, through the efforts of ideologues like Jamaluddin al-Afghani, who was invited to Constantinople in 1892 to reinvigorate the Sunni Muslim tradition and to unite Muslims under the banner of Ottoman absolutism, played such a unifying role.⁴⁴ Inasmuch as al-Afghani’s appeal was considerable, the Sublime Porte pained to mobilize public opinion against Young Turk leaders who, slowly but surely, gained a significant following. Al-Afghani offered religious solace, as well as continuity steeped in traditions, but the Young Turks were finally ready to offer a coherent alternative.

Serbs, Armenians. The participation in the CUP of Turks in large numbers and a sizeable constituency of pro-Ottoman Arabs established the committee as the defender of the Muslims of the empire...”

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 169.

⁴⁴ Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 199-207. Al-Afghani had left Constantinople in the 1870s because of conflicts with local religious ulema. He had a long sojourn in Egypt where he taught future ideologues and advocates of Arab nationalism, such as Muhammad Abduh and his disciple Rashid Rida. Al-Afghani’s teachings were dangerous for Abdulhamid, since the former was also an advocate of the Arab Caliphate. Abdulhamid brought him to Constantinople to control him and also to cultivate the results of his Pan-Islamist ideology; In this regard, see Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and ‘Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam*, (London: Frank Cass, 1997).

Preparing for the First Congress of Ottoman Dissidents

Under house arrest in Egypt, and subsequently in negotiations with Abdulhamid to restore his position and wealth—if he returned to Constantinople—Damad Mahmud Pasha's image was tarnished within the Young Turk movement. Many considered him a burden. Nejmeddin Arif, one of the leaders of the Egyptian branch of the CUP, wrote to Ishak Sukuti that “there [was] no hope for him, but I do not abandon hope for his two sons.”⁴⁵ Sukuti, long considered as one of the elderly and respected CUP members,⁴⁶ pushed Ismail Kemal (Vlora), to the forefront.⁴⁷ In fact, Ismail Kemal earned widespread accolades, including from princes Sabaheddin and Lutfallah, who mustered the leadership of the movement to the detriment of Ahmed Riza.

It is important to note that Ismail Kemal Bey's rise within the movement was problematic to say the least. As events after the abortive mutiny of March 31 (April 13), 1909 show, Kemal had been a spy in the employ of Abdulhamid all along. In fact, he was in the habit of sending his journals to the sultan on a regular basis. More than a hundred journals written by him were discovered by the special committee tasked with going through Abdulhamid's journals in the war Ministry building at the entrance of the Sublime Porte.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 151, 325, note no. 137.

⁴⁶ BOA, 1567-42-54, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Arzuhal ve Jurnallar, *İttihadci İshak Sukuti Beyin hastalığının ve Viyennada bir tabibin elinde tedavisi, 1901* (Regarding the Young Turk leader Ishak Sukuti being ill and also being under the care of a doctor in Vienna, 1901).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Francis McCullagh, *The Fall of Abd-ul-Hamid* (London: Unwin Brothers, 1910), 15-19, 293. The problematic aspect of Ismail Kemal Bey's spying was that Young Turk activities in Europe were an open

This fact being unbeknown to them, the princes advocated a major congress, and funded the printing of various appeals in Young Turk journals for the long awaited congress of Ottoman dissidents.⁴⁹ They especially wrote to persuade Armenian organizations to take part in such a congress. In one such appeal, they went straight to the point, calling for the adoption of a courageous position:

After the demise of this scourge to humanity, Sultan Abdulhamid, will Turks, Kurds, and Armenians embrace each other as the citizens of one country? They will understand that the enmity is the result of the policies of this one man. We reiterate our enemy is one and so is our future and goals. We have to work together so that all Ottoman subjects are free under the rule of a fundamental law.⁵⁰

Appeals to vital Armenian revolutionary societies continued in other arenas, too. Both sons of Damad Mahmud Pasha and Ismail Kemal privately met with Armenian representatives to smooth out some of their differences. The Armenian representatives gave their word to participate only after they were assured that the organizers were willing to accept article 61 of the Berlin Convention regarding Armenian reforms, as well as the May 11, 1895 memorandum of the Armenian Reform Project together with the British

book to Abdulhamid. Kemal's journals dealt with issues pertaining to the strengths and weaknesses of the Young Turk movement. He also supplies names of all Ottoman officials who were on friendly terms with the Young Turks. Moreover, and contrary to the extremely democratic devotions he was known for, Kemal goes as far as to suggest to the sultan that if the latter embarks upon liquidating the Young Turks, most of the lower classes and the reactionaries in the empire would support him as it happened during the Armenian massacres.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 173.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Appendix attached to it. Still, The princes knew well that it was going to be hard to persuade Riza and his cohorts, given existing sensitivities to Article 61 of the 1878 Treaty.⁵¹ According to *Hnchag*:

The world acknowledges the Armenian issue and it is documented in the 61st article of the Berlin Convention.... There also are the May 1895 reforms set forth by European powers and accepted by the sultan and not yet implemented. These could be achieved by keeping the Ottoman state as one unit with internal autonomy for minorities. If the Young Turks agree on these [terms], than we can work together.... We have thus far considered that there is a united party of Young Turks. Now we know that there is no such thing. There are factions and then there are personalities each with their own agenda. How can one work with such a “group?”⁵²

Regardless of Riza’s perceptions, a congress was in the offing, which dismayed Sultan Abdulhamid. The Sublime Porte panicked that such a convention was to take place in Europe, with Ottoman intelligence services concentrating on potential Young Turk, Armenian, and Macedonian participants who planned to attend and, elect a joint committee to regulate future actions.⁵³ Naturally, the sultan was not pleased and tried to exert

⁵¹ “Osmantsi Azadaganneri Hamazhoghove,” *Troshag*, No. 2 (122), February 1902, 23-26. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 182.

⁵² *Hnchag*, vol. 14, No. 3, 30 March 1901, 2-5.

⁵³ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 171.

pressure on European authorities through his embassies in Paris, London, Berlin, and Rome, to thwart the meeting.

Ottoman intelligence services even concocted a conspiracy by Young Turk leaders, to assassinate the ruler, which would have created the necessary justification to arrest Damad Mahmud Pasha and others, extradite them to Constantinople, and try them for treason.⁵⁴ As a final resort, the Ottoman embassy in Paris called upon French authorities to prevent the congress, ostensibly because a conspiracy against the life of the sultan ought to be taken seriously by a friendly power. Consequently, French police agents monitored Sabaheddin Bey's residence for any suspicious movements, although it was impossible to determine whether this was to appease the Porte or to simply keep an eye on the foreign presence in the capital city.⁵⁵

For every putative plot imagined by an isolated sultan, Young Turk and Armenian sympathizers retorted in kind. Marcel Smpad, a French Armenian activist, told French parliamentary deputies that the Ottoman government "had formed a secret police organization with the sanction of the French government to track down Young Turks and Armenians. Smpad found the idea of foreign police spying in France intolerable."⁵⁶ In response, the French government first tried to ban the conference, but later gave in because of the influence of many political figures as well as members of parliament, with the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 176.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 178.

condition that it was to be kept privy of whatever decisions were reached before they were published.⁵⁷

There were other personalities involved, including Louis Lépine, who, according to Hanioglu, seemed instrumental in preparing the groundwork for the congress, even though he was not fond of Young Turks.⁵⁸ Still, Hanioglu agreed with Troshag that it was not Lépine but the French government that gave the final consent for the conference, provided that it occurred away from the limelight.⁵⁹

The collusion between the French police and Abdulhamid's spies became evident a few months after the conference, when the Sultan decorated some high-ranking French officers in Paris through his ambassador.⁶⁰ The granting of such medals notwithstanding, the sultan's and his diplomats' maneuvers failed, and preparations for the conference went ahead as scheduled.

It was initially decided that the conference would convene on 15 January 1902, but the Armenian delegations' hesitation made this impossible.⁶¹ Organizers had sent invitations to the Reformed Hnchagyan party, Troshag, the central organ of the ARF, and

⁵⁷ *Troshag*, No., 2 (122), February 1902, 23-26.

⁵⁸ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 179-180.

⁵⁹ "Osmantsi Azadaganneri Hamazhoghove," *Troshag*, 12, No. 2, February 1902, 23; Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 179-180.

⁶⁰ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 180.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

the editorial board of Hnchag. Both Hnchag and Dashnag delegates considered it prudent to meet before the conference and to maintain a united stance throughout the conference.⁶²

There were two important reasons for the Armenian hesitation. The first was the absence of internal unity within the Armenian camp in attending the conference. The Hnchagyan center in London was totally against participating. Thus, the Armenian delegation was eventually formed and headed by ARF member Avetis Aharonian.⁶³ Several Armenian leaders in Paris were invited, though only Minas Cheraz and Garabed Basmajian agreed to be present. Both announced during the congress that they represented no Armenian political party, and that they were going to uphold what the Armenian delegation decided. Their presence was thus perceived as being partisan.⁶⁴

The second reason why Armenians were hesitant to attend the congress was that no invitation was forwarded to the IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization). Armenian-Macedonian cooperation had flourished during the previous decade, since both peoples were fighting for the same cause, and Armenian revolutionary leaders concluded that their presence was necessary to better articulate anti-Abdulhamid positions. Moreover, Armenian and Macedonian revolutionaries felt much more at ease cooperating with each

⁶² *Troshag*, No., 2 (122), February 1902, 23-26.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 182. Hanioglu states that Cheraz was the editor of *Armenia*. In fact, *Armenia*'s editor was Mgrdich Portukalian, who was exiled from Van, where he was a teacher, because of his agitation. Portukalian settled in Marseilles where he published *Armenia*, which became the de facto organ of the Armenagan Party, founded by his students in Van. See also Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 90-103. After the 1908 revolution, the remnants of the Armenakans and Reformed Hnchags later coalesced with others to found the Ramgavar Azadagan [Democratic Liberal] Party. Hanioglu apparently contradicts himself when he later mentions that other, non-partisan prominent Armenians such as

other rather than the Young Turks, perhaps as a result of the close collaboration between the two sides on the battlefield.⁶⁵ Although Sabaheddin acknowledged that overlooking the IMRO was an honest mistake on his part and implored the ARF to invite Macedonian representatives through Troshag, it was obvious that this “honest mistake” was intentional, since most Young Turks considered the IMRO a devious, separatist movement.⁶⁶

The Conference

When Armenian delegates in Paris contacted Troshag in Geneva just prior to the congress to arrange an invitation for the Macedonians, an unnamed IMRO leader forwarded a letter that stated:

It is important that you keep me informed in a timely fashion about all the details of the congress. If it so happens that the elections [for a joint committee] during the congress are not to our benefit, you must cease your participation and take the necessary steps to secure our cause. Something persuades me that it is better not to take any action until the election.⁶⁷

[Arshag] Chobanian Effendi and Sisian Effendi also participated in the conference. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 348; Varandian, *Badmutyun*, vol. I, 2-3.

⁶⁵ Perry M. Duncan, “The Macedonian Revolutionary Organization’s Armenian Connection,” *Armenian Review*, vol. 42, No. 5 (165), Spring 1989, 61-70. For an in depth analysis of Armenian-Macedonian relations, see Chapter 5.

⁶⁶ BOA, 1698-43-84, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Arzuhal ve Journallar, (Y.PRM.UM), *Fransa Sefiri, Konstansın Makedonya meselesi ve Hidivin Jön Türklerle ilişkisi hakkında görüşleri, 1901* (Regarding the meetings and talks of the French Ambassador Konstance with the Khedive [of Egypt] and the Young Turks, regarding the Macedonian Question, 1901).

⁶⁷ ARF Archives, Section A (1895-1901), box 37, document 62.

This letter illustrated how reserved and cautious ARF leaders were regarding the congress. Moreover, according to an Armenian author reminiscing about the congress:

It was impossible to reach an agreement on the main issue, because the Young Turks were unwilling to accept the use of revolutionary tactics, let alone acknowledging the existence of an Armenian problem in the empire.

However, Armenian representatives were adamant about the Armenian cause, which was guaranteed by international conventions such as the Berlin Convention. They made it clear that they were for the idea of a united Turkey and its reformation.

They also made it clear that they were ready to put all the capabilities of Armenian revolutionary cells in the country at the disposal of the Young Turks.

Ahmed Riza and his party's representatives were furious at the Armenian demands, especially those entailing the meddling of Europe in the internal affairs of Turkey.⁶⁸

The Armenian representatives, seeing that there are no real intentions for further negotiations on Riza's side, left the conference in protest.⁶⁹ On the other hand, even Hnchag, whose members had answered Sabaheddin's invitation to

⁶⁸ Varandian, *Badmutyun*, vol. I, 2-3.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

attend the congress, shared sobering news with the Young Turks by positing the following:

If today's Young Turks really want to change their country towards the better, they still have time. Our reformist ideas are not dissimilar to theirs. Their only problem is that they are evolutionists rather than revolutionists, which is necessary in Turkey's case. Things have to change soon for Armenia and Armenians, who are dying. They [the Young Turks] have to accept the fact that Turkey is a heterogeneous rather than a homogeneous entity. All minorities should have rights but must also work for the one fatherland.⁷⁰

It was in such an atmosphere that the First Congress of Ottoman Dissidents gathered on 4 February 1902, at the mansion of Germain Antoine Le Fevre Pondalis, a member of the Institut de France, in Paris.⁷¹ Ismail Kemal, himself of Albanian descent,⁷² made it clear that he would only participate in the congress on one condition:

⁷⁰ *Hinchag*, vol. 14, No. 2, 10 February 1901, 2-5

⁷¹ "Osmantsi Azadaganneri Hamazhoghove," *Troshag*, No. 2 (122), February 1902, 23-26. Here, page 23; Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 188; Ahmed Emin (Yalman), *Development of Modern Turkey as Measured by Its Press*, Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia University, 1914), 70: "In 1902, forty-seven young Ottomans, belonging to the various elements of the population in Turkey, held a congress in Paris under the presidency of Prince Sabahiddin, eldest son of Mahmoud Pasha. The Congress, which was primarily expected to find a basis for co-operation revealed the extent of agreement and disagreement existing between those who had revolted against the state of affairs in the country. In the face of the magnitude of the problems which invited their opposition, they almost appeared [a] homogeneous groups."

⁷² It is interesting to note, that even though Ismail Kemal Bey was—secretly—working for Abdulhamid, The Ottoman government was following his activities. Unlike other Young Turks who had emigrated to Europe, Kemal Bey was considered one of the closest aides to the reformist Midhat Pasha and had served under him when the latter was the governor of the province of Manastir (later Bulgaria). Moreover, his revolutionary past in Albania, put him in a totally different category from the other Young Turks. In this regard, see BOA, 1950-46-11, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Arzuhal ve Jurnallar (Y.PR.M.UM),

That all the ethnic elements in Turkey should be represented, so that the desiderata of all the people in the empire might be formulated, the Powers signatory to the treaties of Paris and Berlin should know that in the eyes of the Ottoman people they had pledged their honor [sic.] concerning the adoption of reforms for the good of the Empire.... If aid from Europe were invoked the congress might be of some value, but if it stopped at the mere expression of opinions and nothing was done [he] could not see any use in it.⁷³

Aside from the Armenians, the other “ethnic elements” that Ismail Kemal referred to, including Macedonians and Jews, among others, were not present.⁷⁴ In fact, Khalil Ghanem, an Arab Catholic, was supposed to represent the Arabs who were in fact the most populous group in the empire. Ghanem was invited not because he was a real representative of Arab nationalists, but because he was a friend and ally of Sabaheddin and Lutfallah. This limited Arab representation stood in contrast to the proportional representation afforded Armenians and Albanians in the congress. On the other hand, Albert Fua, also a close associate of the princes, was named as the representative of the Jewish minority in the empire, even though the congress didn’t even bother to mention the Jewish element in any of its declarations. Moreover, at the beginning of the congress, when

İsmail Kemal Bey adındaki şahsın Arnavutluk Kitiasında yapmış olduğu kötülükler ile diğer fenatiklerine muhteva la'iha, 1902 (The cruelties that someone named Ismail Kemal Bey in Albania] and the list of the rest of the fanatics there, 1902).

⁷³ Ismail Kemal [Vlora], ed. by Somerville Story, ed., *The Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey* (London: Constable and Company, 1920), 306.

the Armenian delegation wanted the absence of the Macedonians to be duly noted through a formal apology, the motion was vehemently refused by Young Turk minions. Sabaheddin and his brother even shortened the list of delegates from Osmanli when they became aware that the activists were going to present themselves as a separate entity rather than ally themselves to Young Turks.⁷⁵ Basically, the congress was comprised of representatives in two camps: Sabaheddin and Lutfallah along with Ismail Kemal, their associates, as well as Armenians on one side, and the activists with Ahmed Riza's group on the other. Sabaheddin and his associates outnumbered the second group. It was because of this selective representation—carefully orchestrated by the organizers—that Sabaheddin's side dominated the congress. This was the side that favored European intervention and a federative form of government, while Riza's group promoted centralization while it rejected foreign interventions in what its members considered to be the “internal affairs” of the Ottoman Empire.

The congress held six sessions. Depending on the source, either the first or the first two were held at le Fevre Pondalis' residence, while the rest were convened at Prince Sabaheddin's apartments.⁷⁶ The prince was elected chairman and, on his insistence, Sisian Effendi, a member of the Armenian delegation, and Konstantionos Satas, the “so-called”

⁷⁴ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 181-184, 194. See also *Pro Armenia*, No. 7, February 25, 1902, 53, from which Hanioglu quotes

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 182. Hanioglu stated that the princes wanted to lessen the activist representation, because of their animosity toward Armenians and especially the ARF.

⁷⁶ *Troshag*, No. 2 (122), February 1902, 24; Ismail Kemal, *Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, 307. Ismail Kemal Bey stated that only the opening session of the congress took place at Lefevre Pondalis' residence on the Avenue du Trocadéro, while the other five convened at Prince Sabaheddin's residence on the Boulevard Maiesherbes. According to Ismail Kemal, in all, forty delegates participated.

Greek representative to the congress, were elected vice-chairmen.⁷⁷ Even with the preferential treatment accorded to it by Sabaheddin and his cohorts, the Armenian delegation was obliged to leave the congress twice, on account of anti-Armenian remarks made by Ahmed Riza and his supporters.⁷⁸ When it was proposed to adopt French and Turkish as the official languages of the congress, Armenians allegedly objected, preferring all proceedings to be conducted in French. However, “after a short discussion they acceded to the general wish for two languages.”⁷⁹ Troshag presented this minor controversy under a different light: “The Armenian delegates,” it stated, “had asked that the language of the congress be French. However, upon attendance, when they saw that several of the Turkish delegates didn’t know French, they agreed upon Turkish being also an official language of the proceedings.”⁸⁰

After much deliberations and compromises on both sides, the congress was finally able to produce a program based on four principles:

1. The existence and enthronement of the Ottoman Royal House along with the obligation for obedience and loyalty to this dynasty of illustrious name, within legitimately vested orders.
2. The exalting of the religion of Islam along with [its] civilization and the protection of other religions.

⁷⁷ *Troshag*, No. 2 (122), February 1902, 23-26, here 24; Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 189. According to Hanioglu, Sabaheddin’s move was to appease the Armenians, who were very important in his schemes for European intervention.

⁷⁸ *Troshag*, No. 2 (122), February 1902, 24.

⁷⁹ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 189.

3. The granting of Muslim and non-Muslim Ottoman subjects an equal share in the material and moral benefits by trying to unite them politically.
4. The acceptance of the Constitution that had been proclaimed in the year 1293 [1876] as grounds for unity and a guiding principle in the administration of domestic and foreign policies.⁸¹

In addition to these four principles, Sabaheddin proposed the proclamation of four contentions prepared prior to the gathering. Needless to say that heated deliberations by both sides occurred and, upon the Armenian delegation's insistence that the reforms promulgated by the 1878 Congress of Berlin be included, the proclamation was adopted. Its terms encompassed the following details:

- 1- We reject the non-harmonious coexistence between the Ottoman peoples and the regime under which we have lived for the past twenty-five years. A regime of extortion that is only a source of evil in the empire and which is abhorred by humanity at large.
- 2- We aim to initiate an agreement between the different peoples and races of the empire that will provide them with all the rights and benefits without any discrimination. These rights are promulgated by Imperial edicts and international agreements that give the right to these peoples to participate in their local governments. Thus, all

⁸⁰ *Troshag*, No. 2 (122), February 1902, 23-26.

citizens will be on the same footing in terms of rights and obligations. This will in turn inspire in them a sense of loyalty and self-sacrifice toward the Ottoman throne and the ruling dynasty, which is the only elements that can keep them [the peoples], united.

- 3- We shall be steadfast in unifying the aspirations of all the peoples and the efforts of all patriots shall be directed toward these three aims: a- to guarantee the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire; b- to reintroduce peace and order in the internal affairs of the country as they are the only means to a progressive system; c- to honor the fundamental rules of government, especially the Constitution promulgated in 1876, which is the most important of all rules and which insures general reforms and the political freedom and rights of the Ottoman peoples against any repression.
- 4- We further proclaim our strong commitment to all international treaties and especially the Berlin Convention [1878], whose decisions concerning the internal reforms in Turkey should encompass all provinces of the empire. ⁸²

The proclamation concluded:

⁸¹ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 185.

⁸² ARF Archives, Section A (1895-1901), box 37, document 63. In the ARF archives, the French original of the four-point proclamation refers to “les peuples Ottomans.” It was corrected in handwritten format to “le peuple Ottoman.” Apparently, Hanioglu’s copy also has the same corrections. See, Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 186.

These being the principles upon which our agreement is cast, we are forming a committee that will work toward the fulfillment of those aims and that will establish all necessary relations with the signatories [European countries] of the 1856 Paris Treaty and the 1876 Berlin Congress to insure their moral support and benevolent conduct in terms of fulfilling the necessary internal reforms within all the provinces of the empire according to each province's needs and status.⁸³

At this juncture, an infuriated Ahmed Riza took the podium to denounce the resolution that was just adopted: "I categorically reject intervention by foreigners, under any name whatever in the domestic affairs of our fatherland."⁸⁴ Riza then explained his position based on several factors, including: the right of nations to freely conduct their domestic affairs; Because foreign powers never respected the Ottoman Empire's national interests; Even worse, since European powers advanced their own national interests under the guise of being helpful; To deny Russia a free hand to annex the Eastern Provinces; To prevent European countries from assuming that Ottoman munificence should not be interpreted as capitulation; And to underscore how patriotism and dignity mandated

⁸³ *Troshag*, No. 2 (122), February 1902, 23-26. It seems that the terms "benevolent conduct" and "moral action" in the conclusion were not mere inventions by Sabaheddin or Ismail Kemal. These were the exact words that Midhat Pasha, the Grand Vezir [Prime Minister] who had worked fervently to adopt the 1876 constitution, had himself coined it in a letter to his British counterpart, Lord Derby. His son, Ali Haydar Midhat, who was a delegate at the Paris conference, produced a copy of the letter for Sabaheddin's use. See Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 192.

⁸⁴ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 190.

Ottoman subjects not to invite Europe to play decisive roles in the affairs of the Empire.⁸⁵ Despite Riza's fiery speech, a majority of the delegates voted to adopt the two resolutions, dismissing the fear mongering.⁸⁶

Riza's maneuvers notwithstanding, the wording "all provinces of the empire" at the end of the fourth point of the proclamation, was not what Armenians aimed at. Instead, they lobbied for a clear identification of reforms in the six Armenian vilayets, which was the very heart of the Armenian cause. Moreover, for the Armenian delegates, European intervention was the only guarantee for the implementation of reforms. Therefore, Riza's stance regarding foreign intervention was incomprehensible and even dangerous, since Midhat Pasha, the author of the 1876 constitution, had himself asked for the "benevolent conduct" and the "moral action" of the British from then foreign minister Lord Derby.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Ibid. As a matter of fact, it was to be assumed that Riza was not going to allow any resolution pertaining to European intervention. This was clear in a letter he had drafted even before the congress: "I categorically reject the intervention of foreigners in the domestic affairs of [our] fatherland under whatever name or title. This article concerning foreign intervention was included in the first draft prepared by Ismail Kemal... and approved last night. Later, due to the objection of the princes and of Hoja Kadri it was removed. Only the fourth article has remained. I had objected to the fourth article, saying that the constitution recognizes international treaties and that this was enough. In response they said that our Armenian citizens would not participate unless this article, especially the [resolutions of the] Berlin Congress were mentioned [in the text]. Since their participation was requested by everyone, I had to accept this article." Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 186.

⁸⁶ *Troshag*, No. 2 (122), February 1902, 23-26. Hanioglu states that several delegates joined Riza in condemning the conclusion. These were Hoja Kadri, Khalil Ghanem, Dr. Nazim, Ahmed Farid, and Silistirili Mustafa Hamdi. Moreover, Hanioglu concluded that the four points of the proclamation and the conclusion were voted separately. The former passed with forty-two votes (more than two-thirds), while the latter passed by a majority vote only. Hanioglu also mentions that Troshag wrote that the Armenian delegates did not participate in the vote. However, according to Kurdistan, the journal published by Abdulrahman Bedirhan, the Armenians did participate and voted for the resolution and foreign intervention. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 192. It is interesting to note that Troshag does not mention if Armenian delegates did or did not vote. All *Troshag* stated was that "the conclusion passed by a majority vote." *Troshag*, No. 2 (122), February 1902, 23-26.

⁸⁷ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 192; Ismail Kemal, *Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, 105-107. Ismail Kemal had a meeting with Lord Derby while on a two-month stint in London on the recommendation of

At the height of deliberations, Armenian delegates announced they would not sign these decisions, since they literally threatened their aims, further illustrating existing gaps. As a matter of parliamentary maneuver, several Armenian participants said they would present another motion, which emphasized a federative government, while the resolution itself, and especially its fourth point, referred to a centralized government. In this context, the Armenian delegation also pointed out that the articles of internal reform of the Berlin Convention, and especially those pertaining to article 61, could not be applied to all the provinces, since it was exclusively formulated for the purpose of reforms in the six Armenian provinces of the empire.⁸⁸ Finally, the Armenian delegates stated that they would not accept the 1876 Constitution as the best suited to guarantee political freedoms and rights, because, in their opinion, the reforms proposed in the international treaties were the only genuine guarantees for such freedoms and rights.⁸⁹

It was obvious that the adoption of the four-point proclamation widened the already existing schism between Sabaheddin and Riza's groups. Still, the Armenian delegation was not ready to abdicate and renounce its rights. After Riza's fiery statement, the Armenian delegation presented its own resolution, which was composed of three main points. It clearly affirmed how Armenian leaders perceived their rights and privileges and, accordingly, asserted:

Midhat Pasha. While there he met British Foreign Minister. Lord Derby, and transferred to him Midhat's belief that Britain was the only true friend that the empire had. Midhat could confide such feelings to his aid, since Ismail Kemal was a pro-British statesman.

⁸⁸ *Troshag*, No. 2 (122), February 1902, 24.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

- 1- We [the Armenian committees] are ready to cooperate with Ottoman liberals in all projects aiming to reform the existing regime.
- 2- Aside from this cooperation, the Armenian committees will continue their independent action, since that action is aimed against the existing regime and not toward the unity and the existence of the state.
- 3- The Armenian committees have no secret agendas except the initiation of the reforms of the Treaty of the Berlin and the May 1895 Reform Project and its addendum, as well as the reform dossier handed over to the French government in this regard.⁹⁰

No delegate objected to this resolution, while a few asked why the reintroduction of the 1876 Constitution was not mentioned. Armenian attendees responded that they considered initiating reforms in all parts of the empire as a noble cause. However, they continued, the aims were specific and concerned with the long sought and oft-promised reforms in the Armenian provinces, as decided and repeatedly upheld by several international treaties. Therefore, as Armenian representatives, they could not ask Europe for the reintroduction of a constitution that was not based on international treaties.⁹¹ Naively, and after answering questions pertaining to their proclamation, Armenian delegates concluded their participation in the convention as completed.⁹²

⁹⁰ *Troshag*, No. 2 (122), February 1902, 25.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

Given the variety of contentions and the heated debates that occurred, it was not difficult to surmise that the atmosphere intensified within the congress, with the two sides polarized in their respective positions. It was even heightened when the congress refused to allow the Armenian delegation to present its own proclamation. Against the norms of parliamentary decorum and in the absence of basic cordiality, the Armenian delegation along with other Armenian invitees left the conference in protest.⁹³

Şükrü Hanioglu provides a different version of events pertaining to the Armenian delegations leaving the Congress. When the Armenian delegation presented its demands, conjectures Hanioglu, Ismail Kemal, the most liberal of the Young Turks, took to the podium and declared:

I refuse these comments on behalf of the majority. We are searching for suitable grounds for reforms that can benefit all parties and might be proper for you, and we do acknowledge that you are justified in your cause. But if you wish the creation of an [organic] law exclusively onto yourselves, I say, no! No! Always no will be our answer and we will oppose you on every occasion from this point onward. As long as you remain an element of the Ottoman state there will be a constitution for you. Just as for us.

I defend your cause, not in an effort to appease you. I am defending it on behalf of the interest of my state and government. I will defend

⁹³ Ibid. See also Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 189.

it even if you do not want me to do so. I recognize you not as an independent element but as Ottomans. You have rights as Ottomans. [However,] you do not have the right to bargain with us and make offers as if you were [representatives of a] state. The [authority] who granted the constitution was not Europe but our state. You should also bear in mind that we are not only Turks here. Greeks, Albanians, Arabs, and others are present.⁹⁴

Moreover, according to Şükrü Hanioglu: “This text [the Armenian resolution] shows how antithetical the vantage point of the Armenian committees was to the rest of the movement and how they had divorced themselves from the notion of ‘*libéraux Ottomans*.”⁹⁵

What is interesting is that Ismail Kemal never mentions in his memoirs that he had said something to this effect. On the contrary, he writes:

The majority of the Congress strenuously opposed the contentions of the Young Turks [Riza’s followers], who were already betraying their narrow and curious idea of unifying all the races of the empire by means of strong action by the central government. The Armenians, however, had no more success with their ideas, which were unrealizable merely on account of their social and geographic

⁹⁴ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 195.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

position in the empire, in which the success of a local government would absolutely depend on the organization of a well-intentioned central government in harmony with them and favorable to their development.⁹⁶

Hanioglu's interpretation aside, and while the Armenian delegation was still present, Sabaheddin Bey accepted the Armenian proposal, even though his conduct was construed as negating the principles pronounced by Riza throughout the congress. A commotion followed and Riza once again took to the podium to declare:

Here you are accepting the program of the Armenians. On the other hand they are rejecting ours. While Armenians cannot reach any accord over principles with a group that accepts many aspects of their program, it is certainly unlikely that they would reach an agreement on a program aiming at foreign intervention. How is it possible for any agreement to be accorded by two committees that reject each other's programs? According to their own words the Armenians want to reach an agreement with us in order to overthrow the present regime. This type of agreement can be reached between sovereign states or in the most extreme case between the Ottomans

⁹⁶ Ismail Kemal, *Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, 307-308.

and the Bulgarians. But I cannot imagine it between the citizens of the same state who are living in different areas of the empire.⁹⁷

It was after this speech, according to Ismail Kemal, that the Armenian delegates walked out one by one, allegedly declaring: “if you will unite then we shall come over and discuss with you.” For Ismail Kemal, this declaration was a sign of Armenians leaving the negotiation door ajar.⁹⁸

At the height of deliberations and what clearly were theatrical maneuvers on both sides, Prince Sabaheddin tried to remedy the situation by presenting a new resolution favorable to Armenians, though Ahmad Riza rebuffed him by stating that “the Armenians [were] offering their right hand to the revolutionary Bulgaro-Macedonian Committee [IMRO] and their left hand to the Young Turks.” Consequently, Riza saw no possible accord with Armenians, further widening the gap that separated him from Armenian delegates.⁹⁹

During the last session of the Congress, when the Armenian emissaries were not present, delegates voted for the creation of a central committee. It was decided that the committee would be under the honorary leadership of Damad Mahmud Pasha, and delegates further elected prince Sabaheddin, Ismail Kemal, Ali Haydar Midhat, Ismail Hakki, Huseyin Siyret, Musurus Ghikis, and Georges Fardis as members of the central

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 193-194.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 194.

committee.¹⁰⁰ Armenian delegates had informed the president that none of their members could participate in the central committee, since they were already members of established organizations. However, they had also informed the president that it would be beneficial if the newly formed committee could keep in touch with the Armenian committees, and cooperate with them whenever possible.¹⁰¹

As deliberations concluded, delegates who were literally in the minority position tried for one last time to make it clear that they were not against Europe. On the contrary, they were adamant in imitating Europe's progress in public work, education, and constitutionalism throughout the Ottoman Empire. What many rejected was European intervention in the internal affairs of the empire, as a matter of dignity and honor.¹⁰² The minority also made it clear that the congress did not achieve its goal to unite the different Young Turk factions. Furthermore, the minority reserved the right to work separately thus leaving the issue of unity to more opportune times and circumstances.¹⁰³ One of the consequences of this "appeasement" was that the Kurdish delegate to the congress, Abdulrahman Bedirhan, switched sides and joined the minority. Given his close ties with Prince Sabaheddin, Bedirhan's switching sides was ambiguous. It was in this regard that O'Connor, the British Ambassador at Constantinople, confirmed: "I have known several of the sons of Bedirhan Bey, some in office, some in exile, and one, a political refugee in

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 196.

¹⁰¹ *Troshag*, No. 2 (122), February 1902, 25.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 25-26.

England. They are all well disposed towards Christians, liberal and anxious to see the introduction of reforms.”¹⁰⁴

This certainly was an ambiguous accolade, for Abdulrahman Bedirkhan’s defection to the minority side was a big blow to Armenian aspirations for Armenian-Kurdish rapprochement, which was accomplished during the three years prior to the congress.¹⁰⁵ Armenian committees attempted to remedy the situation by establishing ties with other Kurdish leaders in the Armenian provinces of the empire, although this was a painful proposition.

At the conclusion of all deliberations, the congress adopted a final resolution, which stated:

The representatives of the Ottoman state who participated in the 4 February 1902 convention in Paris, after becoming acquainted with the above decisions register their furious complaint against the present Ottoman regime.

We are committed to work together to:

- 1- Reform the present regime to one of freedom and justice, which is guaranteed by the introduction of a constitutional system.
- 2- Remind European powers that it is their duty as well as that of the benefit to humanity to compel the sublime Porte take action

¹⁰⁴ F.O. 424.202. No. 13. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 26, 1901, No. 82.

¹⁰⁵ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 198.

on the reforms contained within international treaties so that all Ottoman subjects benefit from them.¹⁰⁶

After the congress ended, organizers dispatched a summary of the convention to European newspapers that, according to Armenian delegates, contained several inaccuracies, the most important of which was this key passage:

The Armenian [delegates] announced that they cannot align their workings with other Ottoman reformers to insure the latter's aim of transforming the present regime into a constitutional one, which Armenians contend to be banal and against their national interests.¹⁰⁷

Prince Sabaheddin authorized the damaging dispatch, which prompted the Armenian delegation to send the following response:

Mr. President:

In the summary of the proceedings of the congress, the Armenian delegates' views regarding the establishment of a constitutional regime in Turkey was misrepresented.¹⁰⁸

That section of the summary should have read thus:

On the other hand, even though they [Armenians] announced that they were ready to cooperate in all projects aiming at reforming the

¹⁰⁶ *Troshag*, No. 2 (122), February 1902, 25. This resolution is not found in Hanioglu's account of the congress, even though the Troshag article cited is listed in his sources.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

present regime, Armenians delegates stressed that as representatives of Armenian committees, they urged the congress to adopt resolutions commensurate with the Armenian committees' programs. Furthermore, Armenian delegates clarified that they were not authorized [by their organizations] to vote for decisions about the reforms in all parts of the empire. However, they also underlined the fact that they are not against a centralized, constitutional government, which would honor the implementation of local reforms as prescribed by the Berlin Convention and other memoranda pertaining to provinces populated by Armenians.¹⁰⁹

When this letter was published in *L'Européen*, Sabaheddin promised to republish a corrected form of the summary, though he never followed-up. Hanioglu presents the split within the Young Turk movement as a "victory" for Armenians," and stresses that after the congress Sabaheddin entered into negotiations with the Armenian committees. He also states that the letter from the Armenian delegation to Sabaheddin was part of ongoing negotiations, even though the letter accused Sabaheddin of erring regarding the Armenian stance in his report of the congress to the European media.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 197.

It is critical to emphasize that Armenian committees did not consider the work of the congress as a victory to celebrate. On the contrary, Hnchag summed up this negative feeling when it declared:

The congress was a total failure. The idea of being able to work with the Young Turks is not valid anymore. All utopian thinking can be discarded. It is now clear that it is impossible to work with them [Young Turks] against the old regime. We are happy that the Hnchags said this a priori, while the Armenian participants of the congress [ARF and the Reformed Hnchagyan party] assumed the same stance a posteriori by leaving the congress in protest. There was no other way. This was expected...¹¹¹

Simply stated, and unequivocally, this was a clear conclusion. Whether anything could be done to salvage discussions and negotiations was difficult to determine. What was unmistakable was the gap that existed among delegates on conditions that Armenians confronted in the Eastern Province of the Ottoman Empire and why it was so urgent to address them.

For reasons discussed above, Abdulhamid and his government were closely monitoring the congress. Ottoman diplomatic officials and secret agents were sending daily reports (known as “journals” in Ottoman parlance) to Constantinople to keep

¹¹¹ *Hnchag*, vol. 15, No. 2, 1 May 1902, 2-5.

everyone informed of what was transpiring in the congress and what the European newspapers were writing about it.¹¹²

Conditions in the Eastern Provinces

While Young Turks and Armenian committees were fencing off and ironing out differences in preparation for the expected congress of Ottoman dissidents, conditions in the eastern provinces degraded. Infuriated at the prospect of a congress that promised to tarnish his image in the west, Abdulhamid continued on with his oppressive policies, oblivious to the negative consequences such vile methods engendered. For example, the impoverished Armenian community of Dikranagerd (Diyarbakir) was ordered to pay 12,000 Turkish pounds [liras] for *bedeli askeri* (military exemption tax), even though it was still languishing from the effects of the preceding massacres.¹¹³ Usurious taxes as punishments were also applied all with similar effects on an isolated population barely able to survive such liabilities.

Humiliated by the dire conditions, Armenian committees escalated revolutionary activities throughout the region, both to oppose the porte's injurious policies as well as to

¹¹² BOA, 1455-197-84, Yıldız Esas Evrakı, Anaetik İnvanteri(Y.PRM.UM), *Paris'de Osmanlı devletine karşı yapılan mitingle ilgili gazetelerin neşriyyeti, 1902-02-17* (The publishing of articles in Parisian gazettes regarding the anti-Ottoman meeting that took place there, February 17, 1902); BOA, 1356-196-43, Yıldız Esas Evrakı, Anaetik İnvanteri (Y.PRM.UM), *Jön Türklerin Paris'de yapmış olduğu kongreyi alayca bir usulpla ele alan bir makalenin Lloyd gazetesinde neşrolduğu, 1902-02-12* (How *The Lloyd Gazette* published an article about the Young Turk meeting in Paris and the way it was handled, February 12, 1902).

¹¹³ F.O. 424.200. No.4. Jones to O'Conor, Diarbekir, December 12, 1899; No. 40 enclosure in O'Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, December 27, 1899; No. 606.

improve the morale of the population. On December 15, 1899, six Armenian revolutionaries crossed the border from Persia, and were joined by four unarmed Armenians from Van, who were imprisoned for revolutionary agitations. According to the British Consul, their probable scouting operation was to guide a much larger incoming party, though the small scouting group was quickly attacked by Hamidiye Kurds from the Haideranli tribe once on Ottoman soil. The six revolutionaries and four Kurds were killed as the Ottoman Army sent reinforcements to the border region.¹¹⁴

According to an official Ottoman report the incident is presented to the effect that twenty-one revolutionaries crossed the border on December 17—not December 15 as the British consular report states—1899 and, allegedly, all were killed in the skirmish that followed.¹¹⁵ At Arjesh, Kurds, most probably from the Kalkanli tribe, prepared for a massacre but were stopped by authorities.¹¹⁶ According to Maunsell, the Hamidiye forces were becoming a real menace for the population, as their loyalties to the central government was increasingly questionable. Such was the case of the Haideranli tribe, which numbered about 9,000 tents and furnished ten Hamidiye cavalry regiments. Tribal rivalries between the Haideranli and Takuri (Shekak) tribes were another reason for heightened danger in the area. Maunsell reported in colorful language what had occurred on the ground:

¹¹⁴ F.O. 424.200.No.7. Maunsell to O’Conor, Van, December 22, 1899; No. 49 enclosure in O’Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, January 9, 1900 No. 13.

¹¹⁵ BOA, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Arzuhal ve Jurnallar, 1556-42-43-2, *Ermenilerin Anadoluya girme ve silah sokma eylemleri hakkında* (Regarding the activity of Armenians [revolutionaries] smuggling arms into Anatolia).

I submit that this Hamidieh organization has had considerable effect in consolidating the power of various tribal leaders, who are, as a rule, also the kaimakams [commanding officers] of regiments, and have thus acquired increased influence in their tribe, without, however, any increase in their loyalty to the Osmanli Government, but rather to the fostering of what may be called the Kurdish national spirit.¹¹⁷

It was not difficult to understand that Hamidiye forces were generally free to do whatever pleased them in Armenian villages, which was the reason that Armenians had almost entirely fled from the Hamidiye controlled Sarisu plains. The few who remained were rendered subservient to Kurdish lords.¹¹⁸ According to Maunsell in the "... Russian frontier posts, many of the officers were jeunes Turcs [Young Turks] exiled from some more favorable place, and very bitter against the way the Hamidieh were pampered, and readily accorded rank which it took them many years of faithful service to attain."¹¹⁹ Clearly, neither earned reputations, nor legitimate presences among the hapless population.

News of atrocities trickled out, as European embassies once again deplored Kurdish actions, and demanded the government to bring brigands under control. In response to such pressure, Ottoman authorities arrested Emin Pasha, a Kurdish tribal leader who had

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ F.O.424.200. No. 88. Maunsell to O'Connor, Van, July 24, 1900 No. 31, enclosure in O'Connor to Salisbury, Constantinople, August 11, 1900 No. 279.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

rampaged the Adiljevaz district in the summer of 1899. Consul Maunsell reported that he believed Ottoman authorities were aware and were trying to impose stricter discipline on the Hamidiye , and “to check the almost unbounded license to commit crime they used to possess.” On the other hand, Maunsell also stated that the report of twenty-one Armenian revolutionaries crossing the border from Persia turned out to be false, which raised serious questions regarding the reliability of his reports.¹²⁰

Among the many news updates that emerged from the area, the one that concerned the governor of Van stood out, as the local official actively tried to reduce the influence of Hussein Pasha, a Hamidiye commander. Mushir Zeki Pasha, the Ottoman commander of the Hamidiye in Erzinjan, did not back tribal leaders, many of whom observed caution at this time.¹²¹ Yet, as the year progressed, the Hamidiye appeared to have a free hand from the government, afflicting peasants and their landlords alike. When one factored in that local authorities seldom moved against tribal leaders without explicit orders from center, it became difficult to understand how the entire province of Erzerum was in a “universal state of insecurity.” No matter what the governor of Van hoped to achieve, Armenian migrant workers who wished to escape to Russia, for example, faced miserable conditions.

¹¹⁹ F.O.424.200. No. 88. Maunsell to O’Conor, Van, July 24, 1900 No. 31, enclosure in O’Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, August 11, 1900 No. 279.

¹²⁰ F.O.424.200. No.11. Maunsell to O’Conor, Van, January. 6, 1900; No.1 enclosure in O’Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, January 24, 1909 No. 28.

¹²¹ F.O. 424.200. No.19. Maunsell to O’Conor, Van, January. 3, 1900; No. 5 enclosure in O’Conor to Salisbury, Therapia nor to Salisbury, Constantinople, March. 1, 1900; No. 66.

Many “were unable to get there,” which further added to their sufferings.¹²² Therefore, and to protect themselves against the Hamidiye , some Armenian villagers reached out to the Russians with the request to join the Russian Orthodox Church. The villagers’ action was also prompted to escape heavy Ottoman taxation. Lamb, the British consul in Erzerum commented on this situation with the following rendition:

Since 1895 the Imperial Government had suspended the collection of the military exemption tax from those towns and villages which had been plundered during the massacres, but it is now engaged in collecting not only the tax for the current year, but also one year’s arrears; and orders have also been issued for the collection of all arrears of tithes. In theory, this action of the Government does not appear unjust, or even ungenerous, but in practice I believe a good deal of injustice is involved, the taxes being demanded from each community as a collective unit, at a figure arbitrarily assessed, and no deduction made for those members who were killed during the massacres themselves, or have died or emigrated since.¹²³

Cognizant of the effects such moves might entail, representatives of the Armenian Apostolic Church visited the area and were able to secure the allegiance of those villagers who planned to join the Russian Orthodox Church. Not only were villagers induced to

¹²² F.O.424.200. No.127. Lamb to de Bunsen, [Erzerum, n.d.] enclosure in De Bunsen to Salisbury, Constantinople, October 15, 1900 No. 358.

renounce their plans, but they were also encouraged to declare allegiance to the Imperial Ottoman government. Many announced their satisfaction with local authorities too, even if most revealed their being extremely impoverished, which made it impossible to pay taxes demanded by the government.¹²⁴

In Constantinople, meanwhile, the May 1895 Reform project was brought to a halt. Paradoxically, a fait accompli materialized out of thin air on May 28, 1899, when newspapers in the capital stated that the traveling commission entrusted with the implementation of reforms visited all areas in the eastern provinces, and put the reforms into execution.¹²⁵ While the president of the commission, high commissioner of the Ottoman government Marshal Shakir Pasha, died in Trebizond during the putative tour, the remaining members of the commission could not possibly complete their mission as they were recalled to Constantinople.¹²⁶ In an acerbic note from O'Connor to Salisbury, the British diplomat noted:

The Permanent Commission of Control, which was set up at the capital in 1895 to watch over the execution of the measures of reform, ceased long ago to have any meetings. With the dissolution

¹²³ F.O.424.200. No.22. Lamb to O'Connor, Erzerum February 24, 1900; No. 2 Confidential enclosure in O'Connor to Salisbury, Constantinople, March 7, 1900; No. 75 Confidential.

¹²⁴ F.O.424.200. No.26. Lamb to O'Connor, Erzerum, March 7, 1900; No. 5 Confidential enclosure in O'Connor to Salisbury, Constantinople, March 20, 1900; No. 92; F.O. No.67. O'Connor to Salisbury, Therapia, July 3, 1900 No. 228.

¹²⁵ F.O.424.200. No. 56. O'Connor to Salisbury, Constantinople, May 28, 1900 No. 191; Ali Karaca, *Anadolu Islahati ve Şakir Pasa, 1838-1899* (The Anatolian Reforms and Shakir Pasha, 1838-1899), (Istanbul: Eren, 1993). The book is a complete account of Shakir Pasha's life and his work regarding the implementation of reforms in Anatolia between 1895 and 1899.

¹²⁶ F.O.424.200. No. 56. O'Connor to Salisbury, Constantinople, May 28, 1900 No. 191.

of the wondering [traveling] body, which was to restore harmony in Asia Minor, disappears the last pretence of carrying out the scheme.

Shakir Pasha's Commission served only to impoverish still further the provinces he visited. A few minor points, such as the creation of "Muawins," or assistants to the Governors, which never had any influence for good, have alone been carried out, and it is no exaggeration to say that the reforms of 1895, like so many others promulgated from the time of the Hatti-Sherif onwards, have remained a dead letter.¹²⁷

Beyond the canard that attributed to the commission feats it never fulfilled, further developments between December 1899 and March 1900 in the provinces, prompted Patriarch Ormanian to tender his resignation to the Ministry of Justice. While Ormanian mentioned that his resignation was partly necessitated by the mode in which the recent election of the Catholicos of Sis had been in violation of the patriarchate's prerogatives, his initiative was also tied to the treatment of Armenians in the provinces.¹²⁸ Interestingly, it was worth noting that Constantinople's efforts to cajole Ormanian into changing his mind, failed. The patriarch stated that his resignation was directly the result of "excessive measures" in collecting the military exemption tax from overburdened peasants, along with the above-cited controversy surrounding the election of the Catholicos of Sis. Moreover,

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ F.O.424.200. No.30. Ormanian to Minister of Justice, Constantinople, Mar 21, 1900; enclosure in O'Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, March. 28, 1900 No.12 Confidential.

Ormanian underscored that the interdiction of free circulation for Armenians within the empire was yet another example of improper conduct towards loyal subjects of the Porte.¹²⁹ In turn, the Ottoman Government assured Ormanian that his authority over Sis was not in doubt, that the freedom to travel was guaranteed, and that the complete remission of military taxes was planned. Satisfied by these assurances, the clergyman withdrew his resignation although, in the reportage from Ambassador O’Conor to Salisbury in London: “It seems probable that these concessions were made in consequence of the new attitude assumed by Russia on the Armenian question.”¹³⁰

Irrespective of ulterior motives, Ottoman authorities asserted that Hnchagyan leaders were organizing revolutionary bands in Salmast, to send fighters over to Van. Avowedly, revolutionary elements targeted Hamidiye Kurds, while Ottoman authorities reinforced border guards with regular troops. Hamidiye regiments were ordered to ease off from their systematic atrocities, while, according to Tewfik Pasha, sixteen brigands, including their leader, Antranig, were reportedly killed.¹³¹ As it turned out, Tewfik Pasha’s report was wrong, since Antranig, a seasoned Armenian revolutionary and a partisan commander, was still alive. In November 1901, Antranig led his partisans in the battle of St. Arakelots Vank

¹²⁹ F.O.424.200. No.44. O’Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, April 26, 1900; No. 152 Confidential.

¹³⁰ F.O.424.200. No.57. O’Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, May 30, 1900 No. 194 Confidential.

¹³¹ F.O.424.200. No.52. Maunsell to O’Conor, Van, Apr. 26, 1900; No. 18 enclosure in O’Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, May 19, 1900; No. 174; see also F.O.424.200. No. 81. Tewfik Pasha to British Embassy, July 8/21, 1899 enclosure 2 in O’Conor to Salisbury, Therapia, July 31, 1900 No. 265.

[Monastery of the Holy Disciples], which is considered to be one of the famous battles in the annals of the Armenian revolutionary movement.¹³²

In Van itself, the populace was burdened by very high bread prices, the results of a poor harvest. According to Maunsell:

There [was] sufficiency of wheat in the town, but a ring of Armenian merchants and some others have forced up the prices and restricted sales. Some merchants have made money, but the great mass of struggling Armenian villagers, who were making some headway after the massacres, have suffered for want of food, and have got deeper into debt, and the whole forms and interesting forecast of what Armenian Home Rule would be like should it ever be called into existence.... The whole Norduz district [a stronghold of notorious Hamidieh tribes responsible for the massacres in the Van region] was severely pillaged at the time of the massacres, and has practically made no recovery since.¹³³

A fresh harvest brought down bread prices in Van and, according to Maunsell, taxes for the year were also collected.¹³⁴ In July 1900, Consul Lamb reported that 500

¹³² Avetis Papazyan, *Zhamanakagrutyun, Haykakan Harts'i yev Mets Yegherne, 1876-2000* (Yerevan: Academy of Sciences, 2000), 8; F.O.424.202. No.86. De Bunsen to Lansdowne, Constantinople, Nov. 23, 1901, No. 418.

¹³³ F.O.424.200. No.69. Maunsell to O'Connor, Van, June 19, 1900 No. 26 enclosure in O'Connor to Salisbury, Constantinople, July 6, 1900, No. 233.

¹³⁴ F.O.424.200. No. 88. Maunsell to O'Connor, Van, July 24, 1900 No. 31, enclosure in O'Connor to Salisbury, Constantinople, August 11, 1900 No. 279.

Armenians were massacred at Talori [Dalvorik] in the province of Bitlis, though Lamb, who was attacked by Kurds but managed to escape, watered down his previous report by stating that about 200 were actually killed during the massacre.¹³⁵ The number was later reduced to only thirteen killed.¹³⁶ O’Conor vindicated the sultan from any involvement in, or even knowledge of, the massacres. In one of his more garish dispatches, he stated: “I think possibly the Sultan neither knew beforehand nor abetted the massacre, as I believe he was most anxious to keep things quiet till his Jubilee; but it is the consequence of his general policy towards the Armenians, and a speedy and exemplary punishment of the delinquents is the only way he can escape the responsibility and odium.”¹³⁷

Maunsell also investigated the news of massacres in Spaghank, and asked O’Conor for a governmental commission, to investigate the occurrence.¹³⁸ However, after conferring with the Russian consul, who may have shared additional details about the incidents, he dismissed the massacres as an “issue.” According to the Russian Consul, only 5 Armenian houses existed in Spaghank. As Maunsell was not in the area, and only heard reports about the incidents, he was disposed to trust a fellow diplomat.¹³⁹ Lamb, for his

¹³⁵ F.O.424.200. No.81. Lamb to O’Conor, Erzerum, July 28, 1900 Telegraphic enclosure 1 in O’Conor to Salisbury, Therapia, July 31, 1900 No. 265. See also F.O.424.200. No.83. O’Conor to Maunsell, Constantinople, August 13, 1900 No. 54 Telegraphic; and F.O.424.200. No.90. O’Conor to Salisbury, Therapia, August 14, 1900 No. 285 Confidential.

¹³⁶ F.O. 424.200. No.109. O’Conor to Salisbury, Therapia, September 8, 1900 No.321.

¹³⁷ F.O. 424.200. No.85. O’Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, August 15, 1900 No. 55 Telegraphic. Confidential.

¹³⁸ F.O.424.200. No.86. O’Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, August 19, 1900 No. 56 Telegraphic.

¹³⁹ F.O.424.200. No.113. Maunsell to O’Conor, Van, September 4, 1900 No. 38 enclosure in De Bunsen to Salisbury, Therapia, September 18, 1900 No. 332.

part, was more cautious as he doubted the Russian information and asserted that it was a ploy to downplay the gravity of the situation. He also suspected an Ottoman cover up in cohort with the Russian consul.¹⁴⁰

Fresh reports emerged of a gradual military built up in Mush, stretched over the course of several weeks. Hamidiye regiments were also there. In this instance, the ensuing massacres resulted in 400 to 500 Armenians killed, further adding to the growing numbers of Armenian victims.¹⁴¹ The *vali* [governor] of Erzerum claimed ignorance of the “events” in Mush, where three villages were totally or partly destroyed. Other communities or townships were systematically isolated by the military.¹⁴² Ormanian wrote in detail to O’Conor about the atrocities committed by Hamidiye bands in the Mush area, and disputed the rumor that “more than a hundred revolutionaries [were] in the area,”¹⁴³ as reported by Ali Pasha, the commander of the Ottoman forces in Bitlis. This was, after all, the reason given by the government for the massacres.¹⁴⁴ It was not long after Ormanian’s missive that Ali Pasha was dismissed from his post though the sacking was inconsequential.¹⁴⁵ In fact, and irrespective of Ali Pasha’s pleas of ignorance, deteriorating conditions in Bitlis

¹⁴⁰ F.O.424.200. No.125. Lamb to de Bunsen, Erzerum, September 28, 1900 No.14 Confidential enclosure in De Bunsen to Salisbury, Therapia, October 12, 1900. No.352b Confidential.

¹⁴¹ F.O.424.200. No. 88. Lamb to O’Conor, Erzerum, July 29, 1900 No. 9 enclosure 1 in O’Conor to Salisbury, Therapia, August 14, 1900 No. 285 Confidential.

¹⁴² F.O.424.200. No. 88. Lamb to O’Conor, Erzerum, July 30, 1900 No. 9 enclosure 2 in O’Conor to Salisbury, Therapia, August 14, 1900 No. 285 Confidential.

¹⁴³ F.O.424.200. No. 88. Report by Ali Pasha, [Bitlis] July 20, 1900 enclosure 4 in O’Conor to Salisbury, Therapia, August 14, 1900 No. 285 Confidential.

¹⁴⁴ F.O.424.200. No. 88. Patriarchate, Memorandum enclosure 3 in O’Conor to Salisbury, Therapia, Aug. 14, 1900 No. 285 Confidential.

prompted Great Britain and the United States to send relief funds for Armenians affected by the atrocities. The British embassy staff members received reports that several Armenians were arrested for distributing British and US aid to Armenian inhabitants, which drew both their attention as well as ire. Three remained in prison but were placed on a clemency list as the British embassy pressed for their immediate releases.¹⁴⁶

To save face and show to the British embassy that developments were somewhat normal in Bitlis, the porte produced a pro-government letter, signed by numerous Armenian inhabitants of the district of Sasun. O’Conor suspected the letter was not a serious response and concluded that it was an Ottoman ploy of disinformation.¹⁴⁷ Simultaneously, Consul Lamb uncovered a ploy and reported to O’Conor that the signatories probably signed the letter under duress or that they were ignorant of what was really happening in other parts of the province of Bitlis.¹⁴⁸

Finally, in October 1900, the Ottoman government informed the British on alleged arms smuggling between Cyprus and Cilicia.¹⁴⁹ This was a serious matter, since Cyprus was under British rule, and Cilicia was known to harbor Armenian revolutionaries [Hnchagyan] as well as CUP agitators.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, there were fears of new massacres

¹⁴⁵ F.O.424.200. No.91. O’Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, August 21, 1900 No.57
Telegraphic.

¹⁴⁶ F.O.424.200. No.106. O’Conor to Salisbury, Constantinople, September 4, 1900 No. 318.

¹⁴⁷ F.O.424.200. No.112. De Bunsen to Salisbury, Therapia, September 16, 1900 No. 328.

¹⁴⁸ F.O.424.200. No.112. Lamb to O’Conor, Erzerum, enclosure 2 in de Bunsen to Salisbury, Therapia, September 16, 1900 No. 328.

¹⁴⁹ F.O.424.200. No. 114. Sanderson to Colonial Office, Foreign Office, October 4, 1900.

¹⁵⁰ See footnote 118 in Chapter 1.

in Diyarbakir, which were reported in Western newspapers.¹⁵¹ Such reportage of Armenian massacres left their marks in British society even if a report of Armenians burned alive that was published in the *Times*, according to Maunsell, was apparently unfounded. Maunsell stressed the author had “no reliable sources, not even rumors concerning the alleged event were abound,” which could not be verified.¹⁵²

The year 1901 started off positively on the economic front even if news of atrocities seldom abated. The year’s harvest was plentiful and a new steamer service envisaged on Lake Van that, according to Great Britain, promised to strengthen state control over the province, was welcomed by local inhabitants.¹⁵³ Fears of a massacre in Aintab turned out to be baseless as well.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, individual cases of murder and robbery of Armenians continued, as did the feuding between Hamidiye regiments for control in Erzerum and Bitlis.¹⁵⁵ Owing to the good harvest, however, living conditions improved. Yet, with the abundance in food came “the crushing severity of taxation,” whose consequences were serious. British consuls reported that “the necessities of the local

¹⁵¹ F.O.424.200. No.134. Jones to deBunsen, Kharpur, October 17, 1900 No. 41 enclosure in de Bunsen to Salisbury, Constantinople, October 30, 1900 No. 373.

¹⁵² F.O.424.200. No.151. Maunsell to de Bunsen, Van, November 10 No. 44 enclosure in De Bunsen to Lansdowne, Constantinople, November 28, 1900 No. 418.

¹⁵³ F.O.424.202. No.10. Satow to de Bunsen, Van, December 26, 1900 No. 50 enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 22 1901 No. 25.

¹⁵⁴ F.O.424.202. No.13. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 26, 1901 No. 82.

¹⁵⁵ F.O.424.202. No.13. Barnham to O’Conor, Aleppo, February 14, 1901 No. 2 enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 26, 1901 No. 82. See also F.O.424.202. No.14. Jones to O’Conor, Diarbekir, January 22, 1901 No. 1, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, March 4, 1901 No.89; No.17. “Report on the Condition of the District of Erzeroum During the Quarter ended [Ending] March 31, 1901,” enclosed in Barclay to Lansdowne, Constantinople, April 10, 1901 No.139; No.25; Satow to O’Conor, Van, April 29, 1901, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 12, 1901 No.

treasury continue[d] to be most urgent, and there [was] no doubt that the very uttermost farthing [was] exacted from the tax-payer.”¹⁵⁶ Cases of Armenian villagers beaten to death by tax-collectors were investigated with little follow-up.¹⁵⁷ It was critical to reiterate that travel restrictions for Armenians were still in force, which meant that the steamer service on Lake Van, while a potential time-saver, remained peripheral to local needs.

Armenian revolutionaries, for their part, continued their activities and frequently crossed the border through Persia. A British source was critical of their movements, commenting:

A considerable contraband movement to and fro has been signaled during the quarter, and there are not wanting signs of a continuous activity of the part of the revolutionary agencies in the Caucasus, whose ideas, I am assured, are again gaining control amongst a certain section of the Armenians, too ignorant or too desperate to take warning by the terrible lessons of 1894-95.¹⁵⁸

In Mush, the British consul suspected agent provocateurs were at work, writing: “The bands circulating in that district appear[ed] to be increasing in numbers and audacity, amounting now, it is believed, to upwards of eighty persons. Their principal recently

184; No.29. Satow to O’Conor, Van, April 29, 1901 No.10 enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 19, 1901 No. 193.

¹⁵⁶ F.O.424.202. No.17. “Report on the Condition of the District of Erzeroum during the Quarter ended March 31, 1901,” enclosed in Barclay to Lansdowne, Constantinople, April 10, 1901 No.139.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

reported exploits include the shooting of four Kurds near the village of Havadorig, several inhabitants of which have been imprisoned in consequence, and of a like number at a small village, called Sushan-medg, which was partially burned in the course of the affair.”¹⁵⁹ Armenian militants were not the only active revolutionaries in the region. Hamidiye regiments were gaining more importance as well and, ironically, not only Armenians but Kurds were also targets of robbery. According to Lamb, the Ottoman military valued the Hamidiye as a force during any future clash with Russia,¹⁶⁰ especially since the latter was expanding its consular offices and services in the eastern provinces, which did not bode well with the porte.¹⁶¹

In Bitlis, meanwhile, conditions deteriorated, with the *Mufti* [religious leader] was allowed to resume his position after he was removed for organizing a previous massacre. According to British sources, the clergyman contemplated a new wave of massacres in the city, while the local *kaimakam* [mayor] blackmailed rich Armenians with the threat further atrocities.¹⁶² Satow reported what he witnessed during his stay in Bitlis in these terms:

I saw no Armenians owing to their fear of the police, but I believe that the hope was very strong among them that a Consul would be appointed. It seems beyond doubt that the presence of a Consul with

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ F.O.424.202. No.21, Lamb to O’Conor, Erzerum, April 15, 1901 No. 2. Confidential enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 1, 1901. No. 161. Confidential.

¹⁶¹ F.O.424.202. No. 26. Lamb to O’Conor, Erzerum, May 1, 1901, No. 5 enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 13, 1901 No. 186.

power to travel about the Vilayet would have most beneficial results.¹⁶³

Satow further recorded that Armenian villagers of Arkevank were forced to pay taxes for 60 households, although only 20 households delved in the hamlet, with the remaining either perished or deported. Such occurrences were quite common with Kurdish irregulars enjoying unpunished access to Armenian dwellings. Many plundered Pertag, a small village near Mush, during their unsuccessful pursuit of Armenian revolutionists. Ottoman authorities abetted these outrages and, with respect to Armenian revolutionaries, Satow estimated that there were about 50 of them in the region.

Accordingly, “the villagers in the plain [we]re opposed to them, but I believe that they met with considerable sympathy in the villages of the Sassun Mountains, where people [thought] that their position was hopeless.”¹⁶⁴ Satow, who was closely watched by local authorities, further reported that the “Christian *Muawin* (vice-mayor) of Mush was, upon orders from Constantinople, in prison at Bitlis awaiting trial.... The policy of the Vilayet seem to prevent all those by whom information might be given as to the state of affairs from leaving the Vilayet.”¹⁶⁵ After underlining the fact that Husseyn Pasha, a Hamidiye commander in the area, seized vast pastures in the *kaza* [county] of Adeldjivaz and imposed cash payments (300 Turkish Liras), Satow concluded:

¹⁶² F.O.424.202. No. 41. Satow to O’Conor, Van, June 8, 1901 No.12 enclosure 1 in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, July 2, 1901 No. 250.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ F.O.424.202. No. 41. Satow to O’Conor, Van, June 10, 1901 No.13 enclosure 2 in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, July 2, 1901 No. 250.

I would say that the opinion I frequently heard expressed by all classes and races was, that a government which had adopted the present policy towards the Hamidieh Kurds was becoming intolerable, and that any rule, even that of Russia would be preferable to the present régime.¹⁶⁶

Incidentally, Satow referred to the same harsh treatment of Nestorian Christians, as Ottoman officials received bribes and drew up false reports but only after they compelled Nestorians to give false statements.¹⁶⁷ Bizarre and equally perplexing developments occurred simultaneously, as Persian *Milan* Kurds were settled in two Armenian and one Yezidi villages, which hinted that an effort was under way to remake the area's demographic composition.¹⁶⁸ Patriarch Ormanian received disquieting news from Sasun as well, though Constantinople denied British reports that Armenians from Sasun and nearby villages were sent to the plains of Mush.¹⁶⁹ Few realized it at the time but a systematic transfer of the Armenian population was already under way.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ F.O.424.202. No. 41. Satow to O'Conor, Van, July 10, 1901 No.15 enclosure in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, July 10, 1901 No. 256.

¹⁶⁸ F.O.424.202. No. 41. Satow to O'Conor, Van, August 20, 1901 No.19, enclosure in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, September 6, 1901, No. 328.

¹⁶⁹ F.O.424.202. No. 41. No.60. O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, September 6, 1901, No.333. The last two incidents: Resettling Kurds on Ottoman territories and sending Armenian villagers from Sasun to Mush were extremely important. They showed a pattern that grew in magnitude in years to come. The aim was to change the ethnic and demographic status quo in the eastern provinces to the detriment of their Armenian indigenous population.

For his part, O'Connor reported Rumors that Armenian and Turkish revolutionaries (Young Turks) in Harput (Kharpert) attacked an army barracks with 300 troops.¹⁷⁰ It seemed that this Armeno-Turkish agitation was a direct result of governmental actions against the renewed military buildup in Mush, especially after news reached revolutionary elements that the construction of new barracks and fortifications were under way in Sasun.¹⁷¹ Amidst a plethora of rumors, the issue of Armenian peasants attempting to join the Russian Orthodox Church resurfaced once again in October 1901, especially in the Mush area. Angered by such alleged moves, which certainly paved the way for a European inquiry into the matter, the implications preoccupied local officials. Whether Ottoman authorities pressured Armenians in Bitlis to encourage this flight, or whether Armenian agitators prodded a hapless population to seek assistance elsewhere, were impossible to determine.¹⁷² What was clear, however, was that the movement to join the Russian Orthodox Church gained momentum in Bitlis and Van.¹⁷³ In Mush alone, some 2,800 Armenians, a non-negligible figure, petitioned for acceptance into the Greek Orthodox Church.¹⁷⁴ According to British sources, the Russian embassy opposed the conversion

¹⁷⁰ F.O.424.202. No. 41. No.62. O'Connor to Lansdowne, Therapia, September 10, 1901, No. 341.

¹⁷¹ F.O.424.202. No.63. O'Connor to Lansdowne, Therapia, September 16, 1901, No.344. See also F.O.424.202. No.63. Lamb to O'Connor, Erzerum, September 5, 1901 No.8 enclosure 1 in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Therapia, September 16, 1901, No.344.

¹⁷² F.O.424.202. No.78. Lamb to O'Connor, Erzerum, Oct. 8, 1901. No. 10, enclosure in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, November 4, 1901, No. 380.

¹⁷³ F.O.424.202. No.80. Satow to O'Connor, Van, October 21, 1901. No. 24, enclosure in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Therapia, November 10, 1901 No. 387; No. 82; Anderson to O'Connor, Diarbekir, October 22, 1901 No. 28, enclosure in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Therapia, November 12, 1901, No. 391.

¹⁷⁴ F.O.424.202. No.92. Lamb to O'Connor, Erzerum, November 18, 1901, No. 16, enclosure in de Bunsen to Lansdowne, Constantinople, November 29, 1901, No. 426; Freeman to O'Connor, Mush,

movement, although no public statements were issued to discourage the adaptations.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, and as if all these disturbances were not enough, on November 15, 1901, an earthquake struck Erzerum with substantial damage to poorer houses, churches and government buildings. According to Lamb, there was “great misery” among the population as this latest calamity increased the numbers “of widows and orphans.”¹⁷⁶ Damage from the earthquake was estimated at one hundred thousand Turkish Liras with an estimated additional 12,000-13,000 needed for immediate relief operations.¹⁷⁷

The last report of 1901 from Lamb, dated December 2, indicated the formation of a new Hamidiye regiment from Kurds that were “known cut-throats.”¹⁷⁸ It was obvious that this new regiment was formed with certain designs in the sultan’s mind, something that the consul noted, and which was gaining credibility. In fact, within a year, serious fears of fresh massacres, this time in Diyarbakir, emerged. In O’Conor’s own words: “The attitude of the Government is generally unsatisfactory, and open ill-treatment of the Christians allowed to proceed unchecked.”¹⁷⁹ Pressure from the British embassy calmed such anxieties. The consul was convinced that the Ottoman governor’s office was the source of

November 20, 1901, Confidential. This last document indicates that after the initial uproar, the conversion movement remained limited to the city of Mush.

¹⁷⁵ F.O.424.202. No.96. Lamb to O’Conor, Erzerum, November 25, 1901, No. 18, enclosure in de Bunsen to Lansdowne, Constantinople, December 8, 1921, No. 436.

¹⁷⁶ F.O.424.202. No. 87. Lamb to O’Conor, Erzerum, November 15, 1901, No. 15, enclosure in de Bunsen to Lansdowne, Constantinople, November 26, 1901, No. 420.

¹⁷⁷ F.O.424.202. No.95. Lamb to O’Conor, Erzerum, November 22, 1901, No. 17, enclosure in de Bunsen to Lansdowne, Constantinople, December 8, 1921. No. 435.

¹⁷⁸ F.O.424.202. No.97. Lamb to O’Conor, Erzerum, December 2, 1901, No. 21, enclosure in de Bunsen to Lansdowne, Constantinople, December 9, 1921, No.439.

motivation for such atrocities in the first place.¹⁸⁰ Whether coincidentally or not, Armenian revolutionaries who were besieged at Arakh monastery escaped on December 9, 1901, further fueling the rumor mills. According to Freeman, then British consul in Bitlis, there was,

some ground for the supposition that they were allowed to escape on account of the presence of children in the Monastery. The Prelate, who was accompanied by police officials, was received by the leader of the band, one Antranig, of Sivas, who appears to have spoken very decidedly, in reply to the remark, that he and his men were ruining their own people. They wanted justice, he said, and they had taken up arms because they had lost all hope of obtaining it by peaceful means.¹⁸¹

Freeman reported that the partisan group killed Khalil Pasha and Sherif Agha (a local Kurdish notable) in revenge for their acts, though the Consul was suspicious of Armenian reports about revolutionaries who executed a captain in the gendarmerie as well as a lieutenant of infantry along with a score of soldiers.¹⁸² According to Freeman: “To

¹⁷⁹ F.O.424.203. No.1. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 6, 1902 No. 4 Telegraphic.

¹⁸⁰ F.O.424.203. No.3. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 13, 1902, No.7, Telegraphic.

¹⁸¹ F.O.424.203. No.16. Freeman to O’Conor, Bitlis, January 7, 1902, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 21, 1902, No. 22.

¹⁸² Ibid. The ARF regional committee decided on the assassination of Khalil Pasha, a Kurdish chieftain and commander of a Hamidiye regiment. The reason for the decision was that the pasha had killed and beheaded Serop Aghpyur, a hardened Armenian partisan from Akhlat. A fedayee band completed the execution of the order.

show the present tension of feeling among the Armenians, their extraordinary propensity for fabricating news, and the difficulty of obtaining trustworthy information, I may add that the number of killed was stated here to-day to have been four officers and twenty-five men.”¹⁸³ This was not encouraging as such doubts colored perceptions in foreign legations in Constantinople as well as diplomatic chancelleries at home.

Nevertheless, since the Hamidiye regiments transformed most of the eastern provinces into dangerous territories for Armenians and even foreign diplomats, O’Conor asked Lamb, his consul in Erzerum, to prepare a catalogue of Kurdish tribal domains and potential areas where various communities clashed. In turn, Lamb responded:

An exhaustive catalogue of all the inter-tribal feuds and sectional squabbles, even in this Vilayet, which is probably the least disturbed of any in Kurdistan, would be an impossibility, though any one traveling freely in the southern and eastern districts might largely extend the list.¹⁸⁴

Equally pessimistic reports surfaced elsewhere, as a poignant item from Diyarbakir explained:

The Christian villages all belong to some Kurdish Agha, and so long as they satisfy him, they may or may not be well treated according

¹⁸³ F.O.424.203. No.16. Freeman to O’Conor, Bitlis, January 7, 1902, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 21, 1902, No. 22.

¹⁸⁴ F.O.424.203. No.11. Lamb to O’Conor, Erzerum, December 31, 1901, No. 24, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 20, 1902, No. 18.

to the disposition of the Agha; but as the Kurds are continually fighting amongst themselves, and it is their custom in case of a quarrel to attack each other's Christian villages, these latter are far from having a comfortable existence; if, however, they were not under some Agha's protection, they would not be able to exist at all...but the state of the Christians would appear to be growing steadily worse.¹⁸⁵

A variety of causes illustrate circumstances on the ground, with a steady deterioration of living conditions for the vast majority of the Armenian population in the Eastern Vilayets. Against the menace of Kurdish and other tribal attacks orchestrated and carried out by the Hamidiye corps, it was possible to conclude that the following organizations participated in the systematic maltreatment of Armenians, either directly or indirectly:

1. Regiment of Ibrahim Pasha milli [national] tribe;
2. Regiment of Halil Bey from the Kara Ketchi tribe;
3. Kiki tribe;
4. Dakori tribe;
5. Mustapha Pasha of the Miran tribe; and
6. Tayyan Arab tribes.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ F.O.424.203. No.20. Anderson, Diyarbakir, January 6, 1902, enclosure in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 28, 1902, No. 34.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

Numerically weaker clans were most likely chosen to join the Hamidiye regiments, too, and, according to Anderson: “Care, moreover, seems to have been taken to select tribes unfriendly to each other, and, therefore, unlikely to unite only under Government orders.” Besides, “no Hamidiye officer or man appeared ever to be brought to account for his misdeeds, however outrageous.”¹⁸⁷

In the melee of diplomatic reportage, a variety of bizarre and contradictory snippets colored what passed for policy analysis. In February 1902, for example, a British diplomat stated that Armenian revolutionaries were supported by Russia, since “recent reports mentioned that 300 or more Armenian revolutionaries had crossed the Russian frontier, probably near Alashgird (Alashgerd), and were on their way to the Mush district and Sasun Mountains.”¹⁸⁸ By itself, this sensational news meant little, but fed to the paranoia that motivated decision-makers anxious to collect data from censored dispatches, it was manna from heaven. On the other hand, in Diyarbakir,

... the Vali, apparently to justify his former representations and action, was now collecting “mozbatas” [sic, *mazbata*, meaning statement] from the Christian villages in the neighborhood, to the effect that, first, there was perfect quiet; secondly, they did not wish to have foreigners in the country; thirdly, they would not allow any

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ F.O.424.203. No.30. Maunsell to O’Conor, Constantinople, February 12, 1902, No. 1, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 14, 1902, No. 60, Ottoman Minister of War.

revolutionists to enter their village. It [was] scarcely necessary to say that such “mozbatas [we]re absolutely valueless.¹⁸⁹

Equally problematic were the rumors about Armenian villagers trying to join the Russian church circulating in Bitlis.¹⁹⁰ The Mutessarif of Mush claimed that all crimes in the area were committed by Kurds, even if the evidence presented contradicted this assertion.¹⁹¹ Lamb and others reported that regular troops behaved perfectly well at Mush, which further muddied what passed for diplomatic reportage. Anti-Armenian activities were suppressed, and whatever excesses occurred at Norshen were likely the work of irregulars.¹⁹² Freeman, for his part, explained that increased inspections and control at Bitlis were in anticipation of an alleged Armenian uprising expected for the spring.¹⁹³ Various diplomatic messages filled boxes upon boxes. Anthopoulos Bey, the Ottoman Ambassador in London sent a memorandum to the British Foreign Minister, Lansdowne, about a certain Garabed, son of Johannes (Hovannes), who was arrested at Erzindjan carrying a list of Armenians residing in various provinces. Materials for bomb

¹⁸⁹F.O.424.203. No.31. Anderson to O’Conor, Diarbekir, January 28, 1902, No. 3, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 14, 1902, No. 61.

¹⁹⁰ F.O.424.203. No.37. Freeman to O’Conor, Bitlis, January 31, 1902, Confidential, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 24, 1902, No. 79. See also: BOA, 2125-47-48, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Arzuhal ve Jurnallar (Y.PRM.UM), *Ermenilerin Terki-i Tabiiyeti ve yabancı memleketlere göçmek istedikleri, 1901* (Regarding Armenians asking to be released from Ottoman citizenship and their demand to emigrate to foreign countries, 1901).

¹⁹¹ F.O.424.203. No.39. Freeman to O’Conor, Bitlis, January 29, 1902, Confidential, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 24, 1902, No. 86.

¹⁹² F.O.424.203. No.40. Lamb to O’Conor, Erzerum, February 15, 1902, No. 4, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, March 5, 1902, No. 98.

¹⁹³ F.O.424.203. No.57. Freeman to O’Conor, Bitlis, March 8, 1902, No.4, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, April 1, 1902, No. 156.

manufacturing were allegedly found at the residence of one of those indicated on the list. Moreover, at Agn, two Armenians allegedly tried to extort money from an Armenian notable, as the latter informed the police, who promptly arrested the culprits.¹⁹⁴ Likewise, and reporting from Bitlis, Freeman spoke about the trial of a Kurdish notable, Faris Agha, asserting:

Looking at the case as a whole, I have been forced to the conclusion that the charges brought against Faris were true, that the trial was, as usual, sheer make-believe, and that the least serious of his offences was selected beforehand with the view of inflicting a punishment calculated to avert the unfavorable comments which an acquittal might evoke elsewhere, and yet be a virtual triumph for the Agha and his friends. I believe it is no exaggeration to say that Faris has been a robber and tyrant.

The Aghas look upon the Armenians as their lawful prey, and the authorities connive at their misdeeds, secretly approving the repression, by oppression, of the subject race... I beg permission to add that there is no doubt in my mind of the complicity of the Vali

¹⁹⁴ F.O.424.203. No.61. Anthopoulos (Ottoman Embassy) to Lansdowne, London, April 18, 1902. Enclosed: Aide-mémoire. Communication du Gouverneur-Général de Mamouret-ul-Aziz (Kharpert).

Husni Bey in this compromise between justice to one side and
surrender to the other.¹⁹⁵

This rather explicit report from Freeman was a good example of how Kurdish tithe-farmers impoverished Armenian villages, and how honest peasants lost their land titles. Armenians losing land titles became rampant in the following years but, at the time, few connected the dots of a carefully designed system introduced to change land tenure operations that naturally affected the ethno-demographic status of the area. Interestingly, by August 1902, some 6,000 Armenian pilgrims visited Surp Garabed (St. Garabed) monastery near Mush, an outcome of the recent removal of the ban on Armenian travel.¹⁹⁶

Still, while these travels occurred more frequently, Hamidiye bands continued treating Armenians poorly in the Malazgerd (Manazgerd, Manzikert) area.¹⁹⁷ Numerous reports highlighted uninterrupted atrocities that were tolerated by authorities. In August, for example, while a pro Armenian convention was held in Brussels,¹⁹⁸ two Armenians were hanged in Bayazid. A dismayed Lamb reported: “I cannot help thinking that the execution of these men was intended as a reply to the pro-Armenian demonstrations, which have recently been reported in the European press as having taken place at Brussels.¹⁹⁹ Likewise, a traveling British diplomat reported from the southeastern part of Asia Minor:

¹⁹⁵ F.O.424.203. No.90. Freeman to O’Conor, Bitlis, June 7, 1902 No. 7, enclosure in de Bunsen to Lansdowne, Constantinople, June 30, 1902, No. 300.

¹⁹⁶ F.O.424.203. No.119. Freeman to de Bunsen, Bitlis, August 5, 1902, No. 8, enclosure in de Bunsen to Lansdowne, August 27, 1902, No. 379, confidential.

¹⁹⁷ F.O.424.203. No.103. De Bunsen to Lansdowne, Constantinople, August 2, 1902, No. 356.

¹⁹⁸ See Chapter 3 for details of the Conference.

“In Mukus, Kurds and Armenians live together happily. There [we]re no massacres here.”²⁰⁰ According to the same diplomat, in Bohtan:

The Christian population has diminished enormously. Villages shown as Christian in the War Office Route Book of 1893 are now [inhabited] entirely [by] Kurds... There is still a glimmer of national spirit among them, and a strong anti-Governmental feeling. At Heshatt, the old Agha asked me anxiously if I had met any of Bedir Khan Bey’s sons in Constantinople, and said he was waiting for orders. I gathered that one of them, Osman Pasha, occasionally corresponds with him and is engaged in some quite futile intrigue.

Such different men as Muti’ulla Bey of Mukus and the Agha-i-Sor, in conversation with me, said that the Kurdish people bore no particular enmity towards the Christians, but that the Aghas were responsible for their oppression, and that Government had set the example by showing them, during the time of the massacres and since, an easy way to become rich by simply taking everything they wanted from the Christians.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ F.O.424.203. No.120. Lamb to de Bunsen, Erzerum, August 12, 1902, No. 18, enclosure in de Bunsen de Lansdowne, Constantinople, August 27, 1902, No. 380.

²⁰⁰ F.O.424.203. No.141. Tyrell to O’Conor, Van, October 7, 1902, No.23, enclosure to O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, November 3, 1902, No. 482.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

Few could sum up as eloquently conditions to which Armenians were subjected in the Eastern Provinces of the empire. It was raw and repulsive, acknowledging what actually occurred, and how atrocities were conducted under the prodding, and with the full imprimatur, of the state.

CHAPTER 3

ON THE PATH TO REVOLUTION, 1902-1908

Immediately after the February 1902 anti-Hamidian Congress, Young Turk leaders drafted a detailed report and, in what appeared to be a major public relations effort, shared it with the British, French, and German foreign ministers. A copy of the report was also sent to Sir Nicholas O’Conor, the British Ambassador at the Sublime Porte. By sending the report to O’Conor, Sabaheddin and Ismail Kemal wanted to make it clear that they were pro-British, and that London should not doubt their commitments. European diplomats added meticulous annotations onto their copies, especially regarding the Armenian participation, which confirmed how hard the majority group in the congress worked to win over Armenians to their side. The British Foreign Minister, Lord Salisbury, for example, jotted down on his copy that “the representatives of the Armenians agreed to cooperate with the Young Turks, but made separate declarations.”¹

This chapter proposes to examine in some detail the path to revolution, focusing on seven specific concerns, including the rupture within the Hnchagyan Party, various problems that arose within the ARF, the schemes concocted between Sabaheddin Bey and Ismail Kemal Bey, the early Pan-Turkist thought within the CUP, the ARF Fourth General Congress and the issue of adopting a socialist ideology for the party and its ramifications on the membership, the Second Congress of anti-Hamidian forces and, finally, how the July 1908 Coup d’état affected the ARF.

¹ Şükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks: Preparation for a Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 12, 322; Ismail Kemal, *The Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey* (London: Constable and Company, 1920), 307.

Before addressing these key developments in detail, it is important to stress that no matter how optimistic Sabaheddin Bey and especially Ismail Kemal Bey were at the end of the February 1902 anti-Hamidian Congress, it was obvious that the Young Turk unity, towards which both men strove, failed to materialize. On the contrary, in the weeks and months after the congress, the Young Turk movement in Europe was split into two opposing camps: the Jeunes Turcs Républicains and the Jeunes Turcs Midhatistes. Republicans represented Sabaheddin's majority while Riza and his followers led the Midhatists.²

Naturally, Abdulhamid II was furious that a congress was held against his rule in Paris and, even worse, could have been so pompously publicized in European newspapers. Indeed, the sultan was enraged that Ismail Kemal, whom he still considered a personal friend as well as an advisor, was the intermediary between Armenians and Damad Mahmud Pasha. Feeling betrayed, the sultan mounted an offensive against CUP leaders through the offices of Munir Bey, the Ottoman ambassador in Paris. Warrants were issued for the arrest of Sabaheddin Bey and Lutfallah Bey, who were given a ten-day grace period during which they had to surrender and return home.³ The 1902 anti-Hamidian Congress instructed Sabaheddin Bey and Ismail Kemal Bey to initiate contacts for the formation of a central committee that would encompass Young Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Albanians and former Ottoman statesmen who were living in exile. Sabaheddin could not muster Armenian participation in the proposed central committee, since the ARF remained

² Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 8.

³ Ibid.

adamant about Macedonian participation too, something that the majority was not ready to accept. Although Sabaheddin Bey called the first meeting of the committee at his residence in Paris, during which Ismail Kemal Bey was elected as its chairman, the absence of Armenian representatives rendered the committee's much-anticipated work ineffectual. Nevertheless, both men continued their efforts, as the newly formed central committee agreed to take over the newspaper *Osmanli*, which received financial support from Prince Sabaheddin and which was then a leading publication, as its official mouthpiece.⁴ His hard work notwithstanding, Sabaheddin Bey—most probably with Ismail Kemal's blessing—secretly traveled to the Caucasus where he initiated negotiations with the ARF as he pursued crucial Armenian cooperation, since he clearly understood how critical that collaboration was to weaken and topple the sultan. Russian authorities uncovered his plans and arrested him in Tiflis, as he was unceremoniously deported to St. Petersburg as a *persona-non-grata*.

Ahmed Riza denounced Sabaheddin's tactics. His action highlighted further the overall confusion among dedicated participants eager to mobilize Armenian voices. Riza's position was not surprising as was discussed in the last chapter.⁵

That the Armenian committees—even the ARF—totally neglected the Young Turks after the 1902 congress was evident from an article in the October issue of *Troshag*, which stated: “ Thus far we have a very superficial idea about who in Europe are known as

⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁵ Ibid., Sabaheddin's arrest and subsequent deportation were published in the *Times of London* and the *New York Times* on June 7, 1902.

the Young Turks.” The detailed commentary, which exposed the growing gap between putative allies, asked a rhetorical question that also revealed the lack of clarity on the Armenian side. “Who are they and what do they think about the Armenian Question?,” the article wondered, incredulously adding: “This is important for us to know.” Apparently the motive behind the Troshag editorial was to answer an article that appeared in *Shura-i Ummet*, Riza’s new organ after Osmanli was taken over by the CUP.

In his own commentary, Riza spoke about an Armenian meeting held in Brussels and criticized the ARF for not inviting him or other Young Turk leaders. His observations, which appeared under the title “Armenian Pan-National Meeting,” underlined that because of their absence, CUP officials were unable to defend Ottoman national interests even though they had the prerogative to be involved in anything concerning the future of their country. Riza apparently wrote to several influential members who attended the Brussels conference (most probably Minas Cheraz) to press for details and, not surprisingly, received responses that stressed all concomitants’ pro reforms preferences throughout the empire. Riza added:

Therefore, the issue discussed in the meeting was not Armenia’s independence, but how to help Armenians attain reforms.

However, is this what we want? This shows that the Russian Armenians do not understand us, the Young Turks. This is also the reason why we could not really join forces with the Armenian Committees in Europe.

Is it better to put your faith in Russia and forget what we can accomplish together?

After accusing the Armenian side of putting its lot with the Russians, Riza Asked the Armenian committees what seemed for him to be a quintessential question:

How can all of these not make you wake up? There is no shortage of knowledgeable people in your committees. Instead of working to bring the sultan—who is the real reason behind the massacres—to the right path, they are overwhelmed with notions of independence. By so doing, they harm not only you but also those Turkish compatriots of yours, villagers who are as oppressed as you are. This stance really puzzles and saddens us. This kind of action is not only illogical but is too far from nationalistic feelings.

After the demise of this disaster to humanity, Sultan Abdulhamid, will Turks, Kurds, and Armenians embrace each other as the citizens of one country? They will understand that the enmity is the result of the policies of this one man. ... We reiterate our enemy is one and so is our future and goals. We have to work together so that all Ottoman subjects are free under the rule of a fundamental law.⁶

Accusing the ARF for being pro-Russian and anti-Ottoman was an imprudent mistake by Riza as the ARF was, at the time, totally engaged in anti-Russian activities. In

⁶ “Turk Heghapokhagannere” (The Turkish [Ottoman] Revolutionaries), *Troshag*, No. 10 (130), (October 1902) 156-157.

fact, ARF fighters participated in an anti-tsarist coalition conference held in Paris, whose consequences were felt in the Caucasus, especially after the 1903 tsarist decree for the confiscation of Armenian Church properties. ARF anti-tsarist activities continued well into 1912. Equally important was the anti-Armenian campaign ordered by Stolypin, the Russian minister of the interior, which led to the iniquitous trials of the ARF discussed below.⁷ As the analysis that follows illustrates, a series of critical errors placed heretofore allies on the path of confrontation, with dire consequences for minority populations of the Empire as well as significant political costs for the majority whose errors catapulted the country towards war.

The Hnchagyan Rupture

Riza's significant faux pas was not the only stumbling block that confronted Turks and Armenians at this time. The Hnchagyan organization too preferred not to respond positively to Sabaheddin's invitations to participate in the congress. As stated earlier, a Hnchagyan faction, the Veragazmyal (Reformed) group, managed to send a representative to the congress, which hinted at a possible reconciliation. Indeed, soon after news of the congress spread, the Hnchagyan leadership in London announced that the two factions reconciled differences and were finally united after arduous deliberations.⁸ The schism within the Hnchagyan party started in 1896 when nationalist elements of the party rejected aggressive socialist policies favored by Hnchagyan leaders living in London.⁹ This issue,

⁷ *Troshag*, No. 12 (153) (December 1904), 543-545 (181-183).

⁸ *Hnchag*, No. 15, vol. 1, April 1, 1902, 1-4.

⁹ Arsen Gidur Ed., *Badmutyun S.T. Hnchagyan Gusagtsutyun* (History of the S[ocial] D[emocrat] Hnchagyan Party) (Beirut: Shirag Publishing, 1962), vol. 1, 267-287.

which was to afflict the ARF as well after 1903 (see below), was due to the influence of Eastern Armenian university students—the founders, including Avetis Nazarbekian, Mariam (Maro) Vardanian-Nazarbekian, Ruben Khanazad, and others—whose Marxist-Socialist ideological preferences advocated the politics of class struggle against tsarist tyranny in the Caucasus. In contrast to the Ottoman milieu, where the Armenian revolution strove to achieve reforms and local autonomy. Leaders of the Veragazmyal faction, such as Arpiar Arpiarian, Mihran Damadian, Mihran Svazli, among others, wanted the party to engage solely in the national liberation struggle of Western Armenians. When Nazarbekian and his cohorts remained adamant towards their ideological program, the nationalists called for a general meeting in Alexandria, Egypt, where, in 1896, they adopted a totally nationalistic anti-socialist program.¹⁰ The schism within the Hnchagyan party was never solved, as the Veragazmyal faction continued to exist until October 1908, when it joined ranks with the remnants of Armenagans and other liberal Armenians (mostly from Cairo) to found the Ramgavar Sahmanatragan Gusagtsutyun (Armenian Democratic Constitutional Party).¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., 267-275. ARF Archives, Section A (1890-1901), document 1084, 1-1; Folder 3 of 3, documents 1073-2044a, 12-3-1900, Letter from Smpad to Troshag headquarters informing that the Hnchagyan Center in London had decided to assassinate Arpiar Arpiarian. This was due to the fact that Arpiar Arpiarian was the central figure of the Veragazmyal Hnchagyan faction. He was being accused of working as an informant to Ottoman police, which might have used him as an informer after arresting and then releasing him. For now, there seems to be no evidence proving that Arpiarian had acted as an informant. He finally left the Hnchagyan party altogether, but was regardless assassinated in 1908. It is still unclear if the London Hnchagyan Center or even the ARF authorized the assassination. On the other hand, Arsen Gidur implies that the schism within the Hnchagyan party was orchestrated through the offices of Ottoman ambassador to Paris, Munir Bey. He also implicates unnamed rich Armenians in Constantinople and Cairo as clandestinely working to achieve a rift within the party. See Gidur, *Badmutyun S.T. Hnchagyan Gusagtsutyun*, 320.

¹¹ Gidur, *Badmutyun*, 320-322.

In April 1902, however, London leaders informed readers through Hnchag that party unity was achieved, even if the ARF in Geneva accepted the news with some reservation. The presidency of the Hnchagyan General Congress wrote to inform the ARF that communication between the two parties could resume as soon as the congress elected a new central committee but this too was not deemed entirely persuasive by ARF leaders.¹²

ARF leaders in Geneva apparently were not ready to resume cooperation with the Hnchagyans. Troshag published a scathing editorial, which concluded that Hnchags were not yet ready for, or did not want, the unification of all revolutionary forces. Moreover, the rift within the Hnchagyan party was not solved as announced, given that two organs were published, both in London, one in Western and the other in Eastern Armenian. Troshag stated that its caution stemmed from the implication—about which rumors were circulating within the Armenian communities—that Hnchag leaders usurped around 100,000 French Francs for their personal uses.¹³

Problems within the ARF

Ironically, the alienation of the two Hnchagyan factions affected the ARF starting in 1903, when the party's regional meeting in Tiflis embarked on a similar leftist-socialist ideological rift. As was the case with the Hnchagyan party, the ARF acted as an umbrella organization for socialist Eastern Armenians and nationalist Western Armenians. The founders of the party, who were mostly Eastern Armenians and the product of the socialist-anarchist movement within tsarist Russia, were instrumental in formulating the party's first

¹² “Miutyán Panagtsutyunnere” (Negotiations for Unity), *Troshag*, No. 24 (124), April 1902, 1-3.

¹³ “Miutyán Panagtsutyunnere yev Nrants Vakhjane” (The Negotiations for Unity and Their End), *Troshag*, May 1903, No. 5 (136), 72-74.

program on nationalistic lines that favored the emancipation of Western Armenians from the Ottoman yoke.¹⁴ At first, ARF founders tried to avoid the pitfall that was to cause the rift within the Hnchagyan party, although the party's Caucasian efforts highlighted serious anxieties in 1903. Living under the tsarist regime and affected by socialist views promoted by other parties—including the socialist faction of the Hnchagyans, the Social revolutionaries [SRs] and others—the Caucasian faction of the ARF elaborated its existing program by including a socialist/revolutionary agenda in the party's fight against Russian despotism. Moreover, 1903 was crucial, since the tsar startled Armenians when he issued his imperial order to expropriate the lands and assets of the Armenian Church. Naturally, opposition to this confiscation changed everything, including how the faithful perceived the tsar. A new program was adopted, coined as the KovKasyan Tsrakir (The Caucasian Platform), which was updated during the party's Third General Congress that convened in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1904.¹⁵ Unlike the split that the same issue created within the Hnchagyan rank and file, the ARF General Congress decided that the platform would be experimentally utilized, while awaiting a final decision at the party's next General Congress.¹⁶ Between 1903 and 1907 serious concerns preoccupied Eastern Armenia. The campaign to confiscate Armenian Church properties, the rise of an anti-socialist

¹⁴ Gerard J. Libaridian, "Revolution and Liberation in the 1892 and 1907 Programs of the Tashnagtsutyun, Ed. Ronald Suny, *Transcaucasia: Nationalism and Social Change, Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), 185-193.

¹⁵ Hrach Dasnabedian Ed., *Nyuter H.H. Tashnagtsutian Badmutian Hamar* (Documents Regarding ARF History), (Beirut: Hamazkayin Press, n. d.), vol. 2, 119. The volume contains the minutes and the decisions of the ARF Third General Congress, in Sofia, Bulgaria, February-March 1904.

¹⁶ Hrach Dasnabedian, *H.H. Tashnagtsutyune Ir Gazmutenen Minchev Zh. Enthanour Zhoghove, 1890-1924* (The ARF From Its Formation to Its Tenth General Congress, 1890-1924), (Athens: Troshag Publishing House, 1988), 70-71; Dasnabedian, *Nyuter*, vol. 2, 119.

Mihranagan movement from within the party, and, finally, the Armeno-Tatar conflagrations of 1905-1906, all became litmus tests for the Caucasian Platform.¹⁷ Nevertheless, during the ARF's Fourth General Congress, the issue of how socialism affected the experimental Caucasian Platform dominated proceedings. The very idea of socialism infiltrating nationalist platforms was heavily criticized by Western Armenian factions, who considered themselves to be devoted revolutionaries fighting for the nation.

Sabaheddin and Ismail Kemal Beys' Schemes

Before addressing how this split affected Armenian-CUP ties, especially in response to early Pan-Turkish thought within the CUP, it was important to briefly discuss the schemes concocted by Prince Sabaheddin and Ismail Kemal Bey as these will shed light on the confusion that descended upon its eminent leaders.

Indeed, the 1903 death of Ishak Sukuti, one of the few statesmen that linked the Young Turks to the 1876 Midhatist Constitution and who practically was the archivist of the movement since the 1890s, challenged Young Turk leaders living in Europe. In a diabolical plot, and relying on perfectly proper diplomatic procedures, Abdulhamid's agents swiftly gained access to all of Sukuti's papers. Important documents that pertained to the internal organization of the Young Turks were thus seized, which meant that the CUP was now an open book to Ottoman intelligence officers.¹⁸ Disappointed by the breach, and in an effort to counterbalance the loss, Sabaheddin Bey, in conjunction with

¹⁷ Ibid., 71, 76-78. A decision was taken to open a second front in the Caucasus. This program, known as Govgasahay Darri Inkabashdhanutyun Kordze (The Self Defense of Armenians in the Caucasus), was adopted as a temporary decision in 1905 and was finally incorporated within the party program under the title The Caucasian Platform during the ARF Fourth General Congress, Vienna, 1907.

¹⁸ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 11.

Ismail Kemal Bey, formed the Osmanli Hurriyetperveran Jemiyeti (Ottoman Freedom-Lovers Committee) in 1904. CUP leaders continued their efforts to obtain the support of key European powers, with Osmanli replete with writings concerning the plight of Armenians in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire. One, for example, called for the removal of Enis Pasha, who was a real menace to Armenians, and was demoted from one post to another due to his overall incompetence. For one observer, the Enis Pasha debacle carried additional burdens, which were incredulous to say the least. According to Shukru Hanioglu:

In a note that they presented to the Sublime Porte, the ambassadors of the Great Powers required the dismissal of Enis Pasha, the governor of Aleppo, because of his oppression of the Christian population and the atrocities that he has perpetuated.

Enis Pasha had been dismissed of the governorship of Diar-I Bekir [Diyarbakir] due to a similar demand. The Yildiz does not appoint honest, adroit, capable, and just governors without intervention by ambassadors. Isn't this strange?¹⁹

Although Hanioglu implies that “even the most pro-Armenian journals made no such comments regarding Enis Pasha’s dismissal,”²⁰ Troshag’s reportage was not

¹⁹Ibid., 13-14; “Enis Pasha,” *Pro Armenia*, vol. 2, No. 6, February 10, 1902, 46-47. Hanioglu underlines that Osmanli’s stance regarding Enis Pasha’s removal was to show its championing of the suffering of Armenians.

²⁰ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 13.

misleading. It published the news under the title “The Call of Turkish Liberals,” which was a translation from the Turkish original authored by Sabaheddin Bey, and which announced:

Ottoman Citizens:

Ottomanism is an honorable name. Under its umbrella we consider all our compatriots: Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Albanians, Greek, Armenians, Bulgarians, and other races living in the empire, as holding each others’ hands in a fraternal stance. We have lived together under the banner of the Ottoman Empire for over six hundred years. We will continue to do so.

Yes, we admit that the last three decades were decades of disaster. We were victimized under the leadership of a band of robbers... This tyrant government lives by letting the different ethnic factions of the same country fight against each other. It fills the prisons with the sons of those ethnic groups who fight for our freedom. This government is leading the country toward disaster and destruction. It is imprisoning or exiling the best of its sons. Because of such oppression an atmosphere of mistrust is prevalent all across the country...²¹

After stressing that the Young Turks had shown no signs of worry or cries of discontent throughout this period, Sabaheddin continued:

²¹ “Turk Azadakhohneru Goche” (The Call of Turkish Liberals), *Troshag*, No. 8 (174), (August 1906), 119-122.

What good comes from covering all of this? We have to follow the examples of the people of Kastemonu and Erzerum. The people of Kastemonu were brave enough to get rid of their vali, Enis Bey without any fear of his military might. They gave an ultimatum to Yildiz. The sultan, that tyrant, faced with the uproar of so many people, finally gave in and suddenly showed a merciful attitude. He telegraphed that Enis is to be replaced.

The people of Erzerum. On the other hand, did the same thing with their vali. Once again Yildiz gave in... It is obvious that the names Kastemonu and Erzerum disturb the sultan. Yet the people of these provinces now have a better chance to live a normal life...Hurrah for the people of Kastemonu and Erzerum... We hope that soon we will be able to say hurrah to all people all over the empire.²²

Sabaheddin's pro-Armenian stance was due to Ismail Kemal Bey's influence. The Ottoman statesman considered the rapprochement with Armenians as very important in securing European support for the Young Turk cause. Both men understood that it was the 1895 Armenian Crisis, for example, that nearly caused European intervention against the Ottoman Empire. According to Ismail Kemal, who was astute to the degree of correctly assessing this possibility:

The service that the Armenians are rendering to the Turks is that it would be easier to secure the moral support of the Western Powers

²² Ibid.

should the Muslim and Christian elements [of our empire] demand the same reform with one voice. The image of our compatriots in Europe working to secure reforms would be improved.²³

Needless to say that Riza and his followers were not satisfied with these clear interpretations, and were still adamant in defending the institution of the sultanate (though not the ruling sultan). They continued to oppose any sort of foreign intervention, especially as Riza condemned revolutionary ideas and particularly the Armenian committees. It may thus be accurate to conclude that the minority view was content with ultra-conservative attitudes, which were to prove powerful enough in the future.²⁴

Sabaheddin and Ismail Kemal were busy throughout 1902 and 1903 with a coup scheme of their own. The idea was to move forces loyal to Rejeb Pasha, commander of the Ottoman army in Tripoli, Libya, all the way to Salonika or Bolayir by utilizing Greek ships to directly threaten the Sultan. As it turned out, the plot was a total failure, because the promised British assistance, ostensibly guaranteed by the permanent undersecretary of the minister of foreign affairs, Lord Sanderson, never materialized. This was very disturbing to Ismail Kemal Bey since he and Prince Sabaheddin had invested a great deal of time and money in the project. Kemal in particular, was enthusiastic as he received a written pledge from the British foreign minister, Lord Lansdowne. He even traveled to Egypt to meet with Lord Cromer, the British High Commissioner, who was apparently hesitant. Reluctantly, and following significant pressure exerted by the British Foreign Office, Cromer gave a

²³ Ismail Kemal, *Memoir*, 309.

²⁴ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 38-39.

green light for the operation.²⁵ It was not clear whether his opposition was procedural or whether he was intrinsically suspicious of the CUP.

Early Pan-Turkist Thought within the CUP

Both Pan-Turanism and Pan-Turkism—despite being very different in context as discussed below—were slowly infused within the thinking of the minority faction of the Young Turks in Europe after 1902. It was safe to state that Ottomanism—which promoted the idea that everyone in the empire was an Ottoman citizen with equal rights and responsibilities—remained the driving ideology espoused by Riza and his followers. Yusuf Akchura, one of Pan-Turkism's most ardent proponents, joined the minority's ranks at this time, which was what united Riza and activists like Tunali Hilmi around the new ideology. In fact, Yusuf Akchura became a leading member of the new coalition around Riza and other activists, which set the course for nascent developments.²⁶

Yet, because Pan-Turkism played such a critical role in the evolution of the CUP, it is necessary to elucidate what it was and how it encroached into the ideological framework of Riza's new coalition. For example, it was extremely interesting to note:

The man most responsible for first popularizing the concepts of Turan and Pan-Turkism was apparently the Jewish-Hungarian traveler and Orientalist Arminius (Hermann) Vambery...[who] devoted an entire chapter of his book *Sketches of Central Asia*, first published in 1868, to

²⁵ Ismail Kemal, *Memoirs*, 309-312. Sabaheddin Bey's father, Damad Mahmud Pasha, died in Paris at this time.

²⁶ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 39; H(rachik) R. Simonyan, *Turk-Haykakan Haraberutyayn Patmutyunits* (From the History of Armenian-Turkish Relations), (Yerevan: Hayastan Publishing, 1991), 106-121. Simonyan's book, which is based on Russian archival material, is an important source for the early phase of the formation and propagation of the Pan-Turkic ideology.

the Turanians. He contended that all Turkic groups belonged to one race...²⁷

Although Vambery in later years labeled Pan-Turkism a chimera, his previous writings were accepted as blueprints for the new ideology. No wonder that Young Turk leaders adopted Vambery's principles.²⁸

In order to distinguish the contexts of Pan-Turanism and Pan-Turkism, each term should be defined properly, given that both left their marks differently. Pan-Turkism was "...to strive for some sort of union—cultural or physical, or both—among all peoples of proven, or alleged Turkic origins, weather living both within and without the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire." On the other hand, the primary objective of Pan-Turanism was to facilitate a "rapprochement and ultimately union among all peoples whose origins [we]re

²⁷ Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism in Turkey, a Study in Irredentism* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1981), 1-2.

²⁸ Ibid. According to Landau, Vambery was a close friend to some Young Turk leaders. The latter were instrumental in adopting the tenets of Pan-Turkism as prescribed by him. The most important ideologues of Turanianism and Turkism in the second half of the Nineteenth Century were Jewish intellectuals and academicians such as Arminius Vambery, Leon Cahun, and Arthur Lumley Davids. It was through their academic endeavors that the ideology gained momentum among Turkic peoples in the Crimea and Azerbaijan from the 1880s on. It was then gradually absorbed into the Young Turk ideology in Europe and the Ottoman Empire. See Arminius Vambery, *Travels in Central Asia: Being the Account of a Journey from Teheran Across the Turcoman Desert on the Eastern Shore of the Caspian to Khiva, Bukhara, and Samarkand* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1865); Leon Cahun, *Introduction a l'Histoire de l'Asie: Turks et Mongols des Origins a 1405* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1896); Arther Lumley Davids, *Turkish Grammar* (London: William H. Allen & Company, 1836); See also Desmond Stewart, *The Middle East: Temple of Janus* (Hamish Hamilton, 1972), 185-189. According to Stewart, the Young Turks were influenced by Pan-Turanian or Pan-Turkish irredentist ideas; That is to say the notion that all Turkish-speaking Muslim peoples of Anatolia and Central Asia formed a single nation. These were the same ideas later developed by the famous Pan-Turkist Young Turk writer, Zia Gökalp. The Pan-Turanian ideas were no less racist than the Pan-German ideas of the time. As the latter were vivified in Vienna, where the Germans confronted the Serbs, the former developed in Central Asia and Salonika where the Turks confronted Russian ambitions. Arthur Lumley Davids wrote a Turkish grammar book, in which he tried to prove that the Turks were part of the Caucasian [i.e. Indo-European] race, not the Tartars as it was fallaciously propagated. The second author, Arminius Vambery was a friend of Theodor Herzl, and traveled throughout Central Asia's Turkish regions. His reports were well received in Constantinople and Salonika. The third writer, Leon Cahun, was a novelist who admired Genghis Khan. He assumed that the original Turanian race preceded the Celts, Greeks, and Latin people.

purported to extend back to Turan, an undefined Shangri-La-like area in the steppes of Central Asia.” Pan-Turanism was a far broader concept than Pan-Turkism.²⁹

The first Turkic proponent of Pan-Turkism was Ismail Gasprinskii (Gaspıralı), a Crimean Tatar who advocated the new ideology in his periodical, *Terjuman* (Interpreter), starting in 1883. Naturally, Gasprinskii exercised caution as well as self-censorship since he lived under Russian rule.³⁰ For this reason he advocated a linguistic and cultural union of Turkic peoples in Russia, for example, and his motto “Dilde, Fikirde, İşte Birlik” (Union in Language, Thought and Work) was quite trendy.³¹ Gasprinskii also relied on Islam, which was the dominant religion of Tatars in Russia, and which was popular among non-Muslim Turkic people who converted en masse at the time.³² Between 1905 and 1906, Gasprinskii organized three congresses attended by Tatar landholders and religious figures, with the aim of uniting the Tatars and other Turkic peoples of Russia. The result was the creation of a party, *İttifak-ul-Muslimin* (Union of Muslims [of Russia]). That these congresses were convened just after the 1905 Russian Revolution was not coincidental. Indeed, the defeat by Japan in the bloody Russo-Japanese War placed Moscow in a weakened position that, not surprisingly, encouraged the Russian government to unleash a

²⁹ Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism in Turkey*, 1; A. J. Toynbee, *Report on the Pan-Turanian Movement*, (London: Publication of British government, 1917), 3-4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 13. At the beginning phase of the movement the Russian authorities could not effectively censor Gasprinskii's and others' publications. The reason was that the Russian government did not have the expertise or the personnel (informants, spies) to read the Tatar language and to infiltrate the organization that was to ensue. This weakness was thoroughly remedied in the 1890s. However, It was only after the 1900s that the Russian government was able to infiltrate the movement through informants, spies and capable *Okhrana* (Russian secret police) agents; Alan W. Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars* (Stanford: Hoover Institute Press, 1987), 100-106. Gasprinskii and others were instrumental in the formation of the Young Tatars, which, in their minds, would be the Caucasian counterpart of the Young Turks in the Ottoman Empire.

³¹ Serge A. Zinkovsky, *Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 24-36; Landau, *Pan-Turkism in Turkey*, 9-10.

³² Zinkovski, *Pan-Turkism and Islam*, 8-9.

campaign to eradicate this Muslim/nationalist outburst along its southern periphery. This scorched-earth policy obliged local leaders who were active within the various movements to go into exile.³³

While Gasprinskii organized the three congresses, Yusuf Akchura was instrumental in his capacity as the most influential ideologue of Pan-Turkism between 1904 and 1908, and capable to reach Tatar landholders as well as religious figures alike with clear messages. His article, “Üch Tarzi Siyaset” (Three Modes of Politics), anonymously published in the journal *Turk* in Cairo, concluded that only Pan-Turkism could be a viable policy solution for the Ottoman Empire. In expounding his ideas, Akchura first considered Ottomanism and rejected it, since it minimized the rights of the Turks. For him, Pan-Islamism—what Abdulhamid proposed—antagonized the non-Muslim elements of the empire. Hence, “Turkism was lauded as offering the only real opportunity for union.”³⁴

Beyond non-Muslims living within the empire, Pan-Turkism was also instrumental in formulating a new identity for Turkic peoples living in a region known as Azerbaijan, under Russian dominion.³⁵ In fact, the first Azeri to embrace the Pan-Turkic ideology was Ali Bey Huseynzade (also known as Turan), a intriguing character with eclectic insights. Because the ideology was still alien to enlightened Turks in the Ottoman Empire,

³³Landau, *Pan-Turkism in Turkey*, 11; Alan W. Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, 104.

³⁴Landau, *Pan-Turkism in Turkey*, 14; Zinkovski, *Pan-Turkism in Russia*, 66-67; Alan W. Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, 109. Akchura was on the editorial board of *Shura'i Ummet*. In this article, which was likened to the Communist Manifesto for the Marxists, Akchura stated that the Ottoman Empire had three choices: 1-Pan-Ottomanism, 2-Pan Islamism, and 3-Pan-Turkism. The best choice would be “to pursue a Turkish nationalism based on race.” This was indeed a manifesto of Turkism, which was later to develop into a disastrous ideology when the Young Turks came to power. Akchura, with some of his like-minded colleagues, would be its proponents.

³⁵Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 32-36.

Huseynizade traveled to Constantinople in 1889, where he proselytized the notion of a single Turkic State. Huseynizade was also instrumental in the formation of the underground organization Ittihad-i Osmaniye (Ottoman Union), which became one of the precursors of the Young Turk movement.³⁶

Still, given that most of the Turkic peoples living in the southern belt of the Russian Empire were adherents of the Islamic faith, it was quite difficult to separate this religious factor from the nationalistic Pan-Turkist ideology. As a matter of fact, Russian Pan-Turkists used Islam to enhance and spread Turkism within the population, which was not particularly difficult to achieve given entrenched perceptions and views that blurred religion and ideology. One such advocate of Pan-Islamism was Ahmed Bey Aghayev (Aghaoghlu), a Paris educated Azeri journalist, who wrote in several French newspapers on themes that literally were variations of Al-Afghani's Pan-Islamic thesis.³⁷ Aghayev too was to change his stance and become one of the illustrious ideologues of Pan-Turkism although that would come later. The national awareness that members of the Azeri intelligentsia installed into the psyche of their brethren, was exemplified in an article in the Pan-Turkist journal *Kashkul*. In a peculiar question-and-answer format, N. Sultanov made an imaginary Azeri aware of his "national" identity. The clever and highly original mental harangue posited the following:

-What is your nationality (millet)?

³⁶ Ibid., 33.

³⁷ Ibid., 34-35. At the initial phase of his career Aghayev was inclined toward Persia as the most populous Muslim state. He even identified his allegiance to it rather than the Ottoman Empire. This also changed over time, especially when he was engulfed in Pan-Turkist ideas. Al Afghani was a Pan-Islamist ideologue a close consultant to Sultan Abdulhamid II on Pan-Islamism (see below).

-I am a Muslim and a Turk.

-Are you an Ottoman?

-No, I am a Bijanli (short for Azerbaijani).

Where is the land of the Bijanlis?

-As far as I can tell, Azeris live on the other side of the Araxes (Persia) while Bijanlis live on this side (Russian Empire). Together it makes Azerbaijan. But separately we are Bijanlis.

-Your language is Turkic, so you are a Turk?

-There is no word to describe my position. I am a Turk, but Bijanli.

-Instead of being a Bijanli Turk, why don't you solve your dilemma by calling yourself an Azerbaijani Turk?³⁸

Pan-Turkist ideas like these gained momentum especially after Akchura joined Riza's new publication, *Shura-i Ummet*. Indeed, the organ of the coalition expounded Pan-Turkist ideas in various issues, as it "declared that the non-Turkish ethnic groups' activities were 'always against the Turks' and directed to ethnic separatism."³⁹ Moreover, *Shura-i Ummet* undermined the multi-ethnic character of Ottomanism when it opined:

If there are among the Turks those who are hesitant to extend the right of citizenship to Christians, there are grounds for such hesitation. If a Christian happens to be a member of the Greek community, he looks toward Athens, if of the Bulgarian, to Sofia, and if he is an Armenian,

³⁸Ibid., 32.

³⁹ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 40.

he dreams about the establishment of an independent Armenia.

Attempting to wrist from us a piece of our homeland, it was the Greek who rebelled yesterday, and now the Bulgarians and the Armenians are engaged in armed rebellion. Turks are witnesses to all this, and naturally are saddened and feel that the Christians have hurt them.⁴⁰

Such commentary was not relegated to the periodical, as illustrated by an academic who wrote a dissertation in 1914, in which he asserted that even a wide interpretation of Ottomanism at this time was unacceptable to Christian and other non-Turkic ethnic groups. Avowedly:

[Ottomanism] assumed to mean assimilating the non-Turkish elements of the population through coercive methods, if necessary. The conclusions prompting the recourse to coercive methods were generally reached through abstract reasoning as to the rights and duties of the citizens of a state in general, disregarding the existing circumstances and handicaps. Such a policy could not work.⁴¹

The pessimism aside, proponents of Pan-Turkism portrayed the tsar and the sultan as “the two united adversaries of the nationality and race of the poor Turk,” allegedly because “a constant struggle had been taking place between the Turkish and non-Turkish elements of the empire.” Shura-i Ummet opined that “all non-Turkish ethnic groups, especially the non-Muslim ones, had been trying to destroy a body which was defended

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Emin, *Development of Modern Turkey*, 101.

only by the Turks” which was gratuitous to say the least.⁴² In one of its columns, Shura-i Ummet demanded that Turks learn nationalism as their way to salvation, asserting that other nationalities were engaged in similar activities. Allegedly, “at the Armenian, Greek, and Bulgarian schools, the pupils’ nationalist feelings are fomented against the Turkish administration, while at our schools students are not allowed to pronounce the term “fatherland!” The negligent, ignorant, and treacherous absolutism of the present regime opens the doors of the country to violent attacks and to profiteering on the part of the foreigners. Isn’t this a great fault, a crime?⁴³ Asked the columnist! This was not the extent to which extremist commentaries resorted, with even more troubling “explanations” emanating from competing sources. *Türk*, a Young Turk publication in Egypt, for example, opted for a totally different approach. The journal, a racist publication that promoted Turkism, clearly distanced itself from what it described as Riza’s more lenient coalition. It also started an anti-Armenian campaign, by calling Armenians separatists who were allegedly in collusion with European powers, and taking them to task. Unabashedly, it even advocated a boycott of Armenian goods, similar to the boycott of British goods by Indians. According to Türk:

Why can we not do it? Why should we bow before these Armenians, who make us a laughing stock though we never deserve it? The fortunes that they have made, the arts that they have mastered all arise from the fact that they have lived at our expense. Let us display zeal, let

⁴² Ibid., 41.

⁴³ Ibid.

us roll up our sleeves. Do not have any kind of relationship with the Armenians and the number of our merchants and artisans will increase as a natural consequence.⁴⁴

Beyond such infantilism, commentaries in *Türk* and *Shura-i Ummet* antagonized other ethnic groups, most of whom rejected extreme nationalism. The first to condemn the overall tone that drove such nonsensical views was Bedirhan Bey, the Kurdish representative at the 1902 Congress who had earlier sided with Riza's minority views. Bedirhan was bewildered at the extent of Turkish nationalism that Riza's new coalition advocated. Not only did he immediately cut all ties with the latter, he also vociferously condemned the racist-nationalist ideas by writing his own editorials in *Kurdistan*.⁴⁵

Bedirhan was not the only critic to speak out. Rashid Rida, a disciple of Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh, the proponent of the Salafiyyah movement stood tall against Turk's racist statements.⁴⁶ 'Abduh himself was influenced by Al-Afghani when the latter taught at Al-Azhar seminary in Cairo, and Rida, who kept a watchful eye on Arab Pan-Islamists and nationalists, started a learned debate with Turk where he criticized the latter's narrow

⁴⁴ Ibid., 69.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁶ Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot, *A Short History of Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 75-78; Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and 'Abdu: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997), Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 23-24; Zeine N. Zeine, *Arab-Turkish Relations and the Emergence of Arab Nationalism* (Beirut: Khayat's Publishing, 1958), 59-60. The Salafiyya movement advocated that Islam could embrace European modernization without repercussions concerning the Shari'ah, the Islamic Religious Law. Furthermore, 'Abduh and after him his disciple, Rashid Rida advocated the Caliphate and Pan-Islamism—but not necessarily Abdulhamid's reactionary version of it—within the framework of the Salafiyya ideology, because that was an important tool for Arabs in regaining their long-lost prestige.

Turkist ideology.⁴⁷ It may thus be accurate to state that Turk damaged the Young Turk cause within the Arab community, whose own anti-Ottoman sentiments grew over time, and which seldom abated after the fall of the empire.

Behaeddin Shakir Arrives in Paris

The arrival of Dr. Behaeddin Shakir to Paris in September 1905 gave Riza's coalition a new boost. Shakir was a medical doctor associated with the palace. Fearful that his secret association with the Young Turk movement was on the verge of being compromised, he left Constantinople and joined the émigré community in Paris.⁴⁸ By this time Riza's coalition was already in close contacts with Pan-Turkist elements in the Crimea and the Caucasus, including with leading figures like Gasprinskii, Ali Huseynizade, and Aghayev. Yusuf Akchura, who was an important member of the Paris coalition, played an important role in establishing and nurturing these ties.⁴⁹ Remarkably, these ties were established parallel to the 1905-1906 Armeno-Tatar clashes, often referred to as Armeno-Tatar wars or Armeno-Azeri clashes.⁵⁰ When Azeri and Tatar Pan-Turkists wrote to Riza in March 1906 complaining about Armenian encroachments, Behaeddin Shakir replied that: "The authors

⁴⁷ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 70. Rida formulated his anti-Young Turk position, especially when the latter started advocating a racist-Turkist agenda through its publications like *Türk* and *Shura'i Ummet*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 88, 130. Shakir's final sojourn in Paris was the culmination of a long Journey. Upon identifying him as a person who was associated with the Young Turk coalition, the authorities exiled him to Erzinjan (Yerzenga). He secretly traveled to Trebizond, from where he boarded a French vessel to Marseilles.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 157-161.

⁵⁰ Hourii Berberian, *Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 6-8. According to the author, an eyewitness estimated the total loss of Armenians and Muslims at 2,000 dead, almost 15,000 injured, and 286 villages plundered; Hagop Manjikian Ed., *H.H.T. Album-Atlas, Tutsaznamard, 1890-1914* (ARF Album-Atlas: Freedom Fight, 1890-1914) (Los Angeles: Modern Type Printing and Lithography, 1992) 48, 168-171. Between February 1905 and July 1906 twenty-one major battles took place between Armenians and Muslims in the Caucasus.

of the detestable massacres are not you, but those Armenian revolutionaries who are enjoying themselves by offending humanity.” Shakir also advised the Caucasian Muslims to delve into science and education, since their enemies (Armenians) “are superior to them in wealth and education.”⁵¹

It seems that Riza and especially Shakir—most probably out of political naivety—were playing well into the hands of Russian authorities, which were the real instigators of the ethnic strife. This divide-and-rule policy was tremendously beneficial to the tsarist regime, since the Armenian revolutionary movement had by this time become a real menace to it, especially after St. Petersburg was unsuccessful in confiscating Armenian Church properties in 1903. Russia gained from this ethnic war of attrition, which kept Muslims on the alert and curbed Turkist and Islamist agitations amongst them. However, when Shakir realized his mistake and was better informed about the enormity of the ethnic strife in the Caucasus, he recommended that Muslims ought “to come to terms with the Armenians in order to drive out the stronger enemy, the Russians, together.” He then opined: “Since the Muslims are in the majority, it would then be easy to persuade the Armenians. The means of persuasion would be ‘to put an end to Armenian wealth and influence in the Caucasus’.”⁵² ARF leaders responded to the Pan-Turkist treat through Abdullah Jevdet, who was then a close aide to Sabaheddin Bey. Jevdet conducted an interview with ARF leader Aknuni (Khachatur Malumian) after which he wrote a pamphlet addressed to Muslims in the Trans-Caucasus to stand with Armenians against the Russians.

⁵¹ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 158.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 160.

The effort was favorably received by the ARF, which found value in its message.⁵³

Moreover, in its November 1906 issue, *Troshag* criticized a circular distributed by Russian Muslims that stated:

New political calls [are heard]. This time from a newly formed organization by the name of “Self Defense,” it calls upon the Muslims of the Northern Caucasus, Daghestan, and Trans-Caucasus to unite.

This is what it advocates:

Tashnagsutyun [Armenian Revolutionary Federation], which has an organized army equipped with the newest weapons, arms depots, and even cannons, wants to move the Muslims away from the borders of the Caucasus, so that it can take over their lands and create an independent Armenia on that territory.

We are not about to give away the rights of any national entity. Our aim is to forge real and fraternal alliances with all the people of the Caucasus. If Tashnagsutyun would honestly reveal to us its real intentions, and if it becomes obvious that these intentions do not undermine the rights of any nationality in the Caucasus, we are ready to shake hands with it as well.⁵⁴

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵⁴ “Hamerashkhutyan Tserke.- Pan-Turkism” (The Hand of Harmony: Pan-Turkism), *Troshag*, No. 11 (177), (November 1906), 161-163.

Reacting to the circular, and providing a long overdue retrospective, Troshag printed the following detailed response:

We are ready to shake hands. Wasn't this what we were doing for the past sixteen years with the Turks, Kurds, Assyrians, Greeks, Macedonians, and others... We had made our aims clear in 1891. Our movement was only against the sultan and his tyrannical policies. We would never undermine the rights of other nationalities. Moreover, we said that we were ready to accept the hand of any friend who would join us in our struggle... Unfortunately, what we received as a response could especially be underlined by what Khas Mamedov, a Caucasian Muslim politician, said, which shows, if anything, the anti-Armenian sentiments harbored by Muslims in the Caucasus.⁵⁵

Boldly and without any qualms about its hidden messages, Troshag quoted from Mamedov's tract addressed to Russian officials, which asserted:

Please explain to your soldiers that we, the Turks [of the Caucasus] are giving many casualties by fighting against the Tsar's enemies, the Armenians. We are killing, massacring, and hunting them as revolutionaries and thus incapacitating them from bringing any harm to the tsarist forces. Please explain to your soldiers, that if it weren't for the Turkish element in the Armenian provinces of the empire, Armenians, as revolutionaries and enemies of the tsarist regime, would

⁵⁵ Ibid.

have been stronger than Russian revolutionaries or other rebellious nationalities. It was we, Turks, which made the Armenian revolution ineffective. Don't forget that you are indebted to us for this.⁵⁶

Having described these permutations, Troshag concluded with a reconciliatory tone:

However, let us forget the past so that this new momentum of Armenian-Turkish collaboration would not falter. Let us not open old wounds... For 16 years we have extended our hand for reconciliation. Few are the number of those who have held our hand. But we are still faithfully waiting for that moment when our just cause will engulf you all in one struggle.⁵⁷

This was a heartfelt response even if the language revealed ingrained frustration. Reconciliatory and hopeful, the ARF—through Troshag—wished to take care of every detail even if senior leaders were livid that the anti-Armenian articles mobilized the indigenous population into troublesome positions. Whether Armenian officials were conscious of the long-term consequences such declarations could have on the Turkish population was impossible to determine. Yet, because ARF leaders were preoccupied with Prince Sabaheddin's plans, few assessed those repercussions.

Prince Sabaheddin's League of Decentralization (*Ademi Merkeziyyet*)

Irritated by the popularity and growth of Riza's coalition, Prince Sabaheddin wished to regain lost ground, hoping perhaps to turn around what proved to be detrimental. His fancy

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

of Edmond Demolins and the latter's ideology of "Science Sociale," which was first advocated by Frederic Le Play and then by the Abbé Henri de Tourville, inclined him to embark on that bandwagon. Sabaheddin became a member of the Société Général des Sciences Sociales through an introduction from Demolins in 1904. The result of this mostly academic endeavor was Sabaheddin's conviction that decentralization (ademi merkeziyyet in Ottoman parlance), as advocated by Demolin's program, was what the pluralist Ottoman society needed.

One must ponder here as to why Demolin's book, *A quoi tient la Supériorité des Anglo-Saxons* (*Anglo-Saxon Superiority: To What is it Due*), would result in the adoption of divergent ideologies by different Ottoman reformers? While it was true that the British Empire—over which "the sun never set"—was the envy of Europe, and was especially begrudged by France, it was difficult to see how the paradigm could apply to the Ottoman Empire. France paid heavily, both in terms of its honor as well as in terms of lost territory to superior German forces, though the legacy of the late nineteenth century in Europe was not necessarily typical to conditions in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, nor the Caucasus for that matter.

From Demolins' perspective, the book was a call to uplift national sentiments and to utilize British methods in education, politics and military tactics to build a mighty state, presumably because these helped propel the British Empire to the forefront.⁵⁸ This was

⁵⁸ Edmond Demolins, *Anglo-Saxon Superiority: To What it is Due*, Louis Bert Lavigne trans. (New York: R. F. Fenno & Company, 1899), viii-xvii. Analyzing the concept of individual accomplishment (i.e. Private Initiative, as adapted by Sabaheddin Bey) Demolins writes: "The Anglo-Saxon no longer belongs to the communistic formation (formation communautaire), but to the particularistic formation (formation particulariste), thus named because instead of causing the community to predominate over the individual, the

exactly how Egyptian reformers, such as Ahmed Fathi Zaghlul, Qasim Amin, and Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayyid, understood Demolins' work, for example.⁵⁹

In the introduction to his Arabic translation of Demolin's work, Ahmed Fathi analyzed the weaknesses of Egyptian society, blaming it for lacking "will and determination." In one memorable passage, Fathi acknowledged: "Even our personal relations lack warmth and intimacy. There is no chivalry (*nakhwa*) among us any longer... We are so weak that we do nothing ourselves; We ask the government instead." The Egyptians, Fathi concluded, had no faith in themselves and were therefore unaware of their rights as individuals and as a nation. This argument was often used by the nationalists, but gained in effectiveness when presented in the introduction to a book that showed how people who developed the very qualities that Fathi found lacking among Egyptians, became dominant.⁶⁰

This analysis confirmed the importance of personal initiatives in terms of standing up to one's rights and striving to better the government and the state, which were the foci of Prince Sabaheddin's new program. Still, how he interpreted Demolin's work to arrive at his other core idea, namely decentralization, was impossible to decipher. Of course, there was his fascination to things British, but how he reconciled the centralistic attitude of

individual is made to prevail over the community, private life over public life, and in consequence the useful professions over the liberal and administrative professions." This is perfectly understandable within the Ottoman context—a derivative of the French educational and political system, where the state and its schools produced cadres from the dominant Turkish element for public service and the military, thus neglecting commerce, industry, and other facets of private initiative, which were filled by other minorities such as Jews and Christians. Demolins' poignant criticism and a general reading of his text, however, still did not answer the question of how Sabaheddin Bey arrived at the second pillar of his program, which was decentralization.

⁵⁹Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt and Cromer* (London: John Murray, 1968), 152; Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 204.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

British imperial rule with his scheme of decentralization was a mystery. One possible answer to this was developed by an observer of Ottoman affairs, who wrote that Demolins' book:

Was published in 1897, and translated into English immediately after. It attracted a good deal of attention at the time, and in particular aroused the interest of Muslim reformers, liberals, and modernists looking for an explanation of the backwardness of their own societies. The book was quickly published in an Arabic version in Egypt, and seems to have had no small impact on Arab and Turkish thinking. Demolins' thesis, briefly, was that the superiority of the Anglo-Saxons rested on their superior education, which developed personality and individual initiative—confidence in oneself, instead of confidence in the collectivity usual in other human societies. Within this framework of historical and educational theories, Prince Sabaheddin developed his idea of a federalized, decentralized Ottoman state. A constitutional monarchy, on British lines, would provide a minimum of central government; For the rest, the different peoples and communities of the Empire could satisfy their aspirations and safeguard their rights in regional and local government and in a public life emancipated from collective or governmental control.⁶¹

⁶¹ Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 204.

Bernard Lewis's explanation gave some credence to Sabaheddin's idea of decentralization. Nevertheless, his elucidation about decentralization and its practice in British imperial society, was not thoroughly reasoned to merit a total understanding of the prince's decentralization theory. No matter how palatable or attractive any particular initiative sounded, adopting a Western scheme within what was essentially a pluralistic society—such as the Ottoman Empire—was extremely dangerous. This was exactly what the German Orientalist C.H. Becker referred to when he stated: “One would imagine what would have resulted if such theorists had been able to put their ideas into practice, if English individualism had been introduced in a country, millions of whose inhabitants are still in a state of ethnic collectivism, not to mention the irredeemable dissolution of Turkey into various European spheres of influence.”⁶²

This was the framework in which Sabaheddin formed his new organization in 1905, named for the occasion “The League of Private Initiative and Decentralization.”⁶³ Since Riza and his coalition enjoyed a near monopoly in what passed for Young Turk affairs, which marginalized the erudite Sabaheddin, and since the Armenian committees were enraged by the burgeoning Pan-Turkist attitude within the coalition, Sabaheddin continued to advocate joint action with the Armenian committees and especially with the ARF. In yet another open letter to Armenian leaders, he condemned terrorism, especially the assassination attempt on the sultan, but invited the committees to mutual political action.⁶⁴

⁶² See C. H. Becker, *Islamstudien*, vol. I (Leipzig, 1932), 355.

⁶³ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 83, 90.

⁶⁴ ARF archives, Section II (1902-1909), box 872, document 6., “Aux Armèniens Ottomans” (To Ottoman Armenians); *Pro Armenia*, 5, No. 120, (October 15, 1905), 796. The Document in the ARF

Sabaheddin spoke passionately about his Armenian-Young Turk united front in an interview with Dikran Elmasian, a journalist who wrote for French newspapers, and stressed that his League's new program of decentralization was exactly what Armenians were aiming at.⁶⁵

To be sure, Sabaheddin's relations with the ARF were intriguing, which led Şükrü Hanioglu to delve into the record. What was sketched in the historian's analysis was a conspiratorial agenda between Sabaheddin and the ARF leadership. According to this outline, the prince sought to utilize the ARF network within the empire to establish a parallel set-up for his League. Hanioglu further asserts that the ARF—in agreement with Sabaheddin—created pseudo organizations to win over both of the Turkish as well as Kurdish populations in the eastern provinces. In Hanioglu own words:

Archives is a copy of the original open letter that Sabaheddin Bey had written. It was also published in *Pro Armenia*, the French organ of the ARF.

⁶⁵ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 84, 95-96. Also an Armenian by the name of Dikran Zaven, publisher of *Yerkri Dzayn* (The Voice of the Fatherland) in Tiflis, who had aided Abdullah Jevdet and Ishak Sukuti when they were publishing *Osmanli*, acted as an intermediary between the Young Turks and the ARF to start revolutionary movement against the sultan's regime. Ottoman authorities were alarmed. The CUP wanted all organizations to participate, however, the project remained unrealized due to the silence of Sabaheddin Bey, who wanted a joint movement between him and the ARF, and he was even ready to include Macedonian revolutionaries as far as he had the Armenians on his side. This, of course infuriated Riza and other CUP leaders who went as far as considering Sabaheddin a traitor. New research within Russian and ARF archival sources show, however, that Sabaheddin and the ARF did go as far as developing a conspiratorial collusion in the eastern provinces, which was to show results during the tax revolts of 1907 in Erzerum, Bitlis, and Van provinces. One such example was the publication of *Sabah ul Heyr* (Good Morning), an Ottoman language periodical that was printed on makeshift ARF presses in Van and distributed within the Turkish and Kurdish population in the eastern provinces. The prince was careful and instructed the ARF to act behind the scenes so as not to create suspicion within local government and Muslim circles in the provinces. He even instructed the ARF to show restraint and to forbid Armenian participation in the tax revolts. See Murat Koptaş, *Armenian Political Thinking in the Second Constitutional period: The Case of Krikor Zohrab*, Master's thesis, (Boğaziçi University, 2005); Michael, A. Reynolds, *The Ottoman-Russian Struggle for Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, 1908-1918: Identity, Ideology and the Geopolitics of World Order*. Ph.D. dissertation, (Princeton University, 2003); Pambukian, *Nyuter*, vols. 5 and 6. The issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

Sabaheddin Bey's League and the Tashnagtsutyun solicited help from intermediary organizations and set up bogus organizations to facilitate cooperation. This continued until the Second Congress of Ottoman Opposition Parties (December 1907) after which the agreement between the Tashnagtsutyun, Sabaheddin Bey's League, the CPU, and numerous trivial and bogus organizations was drawn up and made public.⁶⁶

The “bogus” organizations mentioned in the quotation, referred to the Shura'i Osmani Jemiyeti (Constitutional Ottoman League), whose Secretary-General was non-other than Dr. Abdullah Jevdet, the coalition conspirator in charge of the 1904 failed attempt to assassinate the Sultan Abdulhamid II. Jevdet's legacy was colorful and so well-known that no analyst could feign ignorance. In fact, after being kicked out of the coalition because of his adventurous and dubious undertakings—that included among other things a scheme to embezzle sums from Theodore Hertzl, the founder of the Zionist movement in exchange for an imperial irade for the establishment of a national home for the Jews in Palestine—Jevdet established close ties with Prince Sabaheddin. It was under the latter's guidance that he traveled to Egypt where he transformed the already existing League into a branch of Sabaheddin's League of Decentralization. Many Young Turks and eminent Arabs were on its board, including Ahmed Sa'ib Bey, Mahmud Mukhtar Pasha (son of

⁶⁶ Ibid., 97.

Ghazi Ahmed Mukhtar Pasha), Rafiq al ‘Azm, and Islamist intellectual Rashid Rida, the Ottomanized elite in the Egyptian realm.⁶⁷

It was around this time, 1907-1908, that Jevdet republished *Ijtihad* (Jurisprudence in Arabic and Ottoman Islamic parlance) as the League’s organ.⁶⁸ Shukru Hanioglu’s assessment of the organization’s bogusness derived, most probably, from Jevdet’s audacious character even if several problems muddied the analysis. For example, that the ARF was involved in such a scheme was highly unlikely, since no evidence has surfaced to date. In fact, a thorough examination of ARF archives uncovered no such documents, which was not to say that a close relationship between the ARF’s Troshag Center in Geneva and the Constitutional Ottoman League’s *Ijtihad* offices in Cairo did not exist. On the contrary, both sides contemplated joint actions within the eastern provinces, and prepared, published, and disseminated pamphlets and other materials for revolutionary agitation. This much was apparent from the series of letters bearing Jevdet’s signature that were preserved in ARF archives and written on either the League’s and/or *Ijtihad*’s letterheads:

The following letter was part of several addressed to Troshag, in which Jevdet clarified his intentions:

Cairo, March 11, 1907

Dear citizens and friends:

⁶⁷ Ibid., 98.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 58, 65, 97. Jevdet started publishing *Ijtihad* intermittently after 1904. The first issue was published in Geneva.

In the unique struggle to unite the efforts of the different people our empire to topple the Ottoman dynasty, we are forming the “Constitutional Ottoman League.” We are convinced that your and our road is the same.

We have no racial prejudices. With the greatest sincerity we want to join Armenians, Turks, Kurds, Jews, Albanians, Circassians, Greeks, and Lazes (people of Lazistan).

We address you today and want to be next to you. Give us your salutations. I give you my hand gratefully.

Secretary of the league

Dr. Jevdet⁶⁹

An equally interesting letter from Jevdet to Troshag, bearing the insignia of Ijtihad and written in 1906 mentioned the idea of forming an organization (most probably the future League).

Sirs:

We have received your urgent request and are today sending to you 2,000 copies of the brochures you requested to Geneva. Our Friend, Huseyin Tosun Bey has your request of 3,000 brochures. We still have a thousand copies of it here. We have asked the people who are delivering them to do so quickly. We are in the middle of forming a

⁶⁹ ARF archives, Section II (1902-1909), box 1716-b, document 6.

new committee, which will unite with Armenians. We will keep you updated.

Fraternally to our friends in Geneva

Dr. Jevdet⁷⁰

Still another letter illustrated Jevdet's contemplated relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens of the Empire:

Cairo, June 7, 1907.

Dear Sir:

I have your estimate of the 7th. Your decision was a little late. I went ahead and published the "call" in question with the other two articles in a separate brochure. The decision came from director of the Bibliothèqu Musulman in Elizavetpol [Ganja].

I am going to send you a copy. Please do the necessary corrections and additions. I am always ready my friends to have a perfect relationship with you as far as your aim for creating a pure and bright compatriotism for all the religious entities between the Muslim and non-Muslim element of the empire. If I address the Muslims using the precepts of the Qur'an as a means of persuasion it is in order to speak to their sentiments and thus to make a better impression upon them.

⁷⁰ ARF archives, Section II (1902-1909), box 1719-b, document 1.

I recommend to your attention the article “A State Reduced to the Level of Degradation.” Better late than never! A small flash of hope will ignite. Sooner or later that (the flash) will assassinate (the sultan).

We repeat to you that we are ready to participate in the publication in question.

Accept sirs our sincerest and fraternal salutations.

Dr Jevdet⁷¹

Beyond introductory or contemplative letters, Jevdet alluded to the distribution of pamphlets in Asia Minor, seeking to forge a joint Turkish-Armenian alliance:

Troshag Headquarters

Dear Colleague⁷²

I submit (to you) a copy of an energetic call through the person who delivers this letter to you. It would serve to print it in large font and to distribute it in Asia Minor. If you share my opinion we will print it in our own printing house on thin paper.

I tell you very sincerely that Armenians and Turks are for once united for our cause. The other elements of the empire are of secondary importance.

I wait for your response.

⁷¹ ARF archives, Section II (1902-1909), box 1719-b, document 2.

⁷² Since some of Jevdet’s letters are written to a single person (dear friend, dear colleague), it can be assumed with some validity that those were directed to Aknuni (Khachatur Malumian) who had established first contact with Jevdet.

Cordially,

Dr. Jevdet⁷³

Finally, Jevdet invited Troshag to intervene on his behalf with Armenians in Alexandria, because his books were not being sold properly, and the brochures were not being distributed as instructed. In an effort to boost sales as well as spread the message to a wider audience, Jevdet expressed his willingness to offer a fifty percent discount for his brochure titled *Uyanin, Uyanin* (Wake Up! Wake Up!).⁷⁴

The selection of the correspondence highlighted above emphasize the relationship that existed between the ARF and Abdullah Jevdet. Indeed, if such correspondence was an indication of secret dealings, then one could conclude that there was also secret collaboration between the ARF and Riza's coalition. Document boxes relating to that topic within ARF archives were replete with letters resembling those quoted above, and revealed several interesting details. For example, the following two notes to Jevdet stressed the organization's intentions, capabilities, and hopes:

Letter (1)

March 15, 1907

My Dear Effendi:

We received your letter dated March 9, [1]907. You are informing us that your aim is to facilitate the dissemination of literature that would serve to enlighten our Muslim citizens. Before we wrote to our

⁷³ ARF archives, Section II (1902-1909), box 1716-b, document 23.

⁷⁴ ARF archives, Section II (1902-1909), box 1716-b, document 22-a. The last document contains a handwritten copy of Jevdet's article "*Uyanin-Uyanin*."

Armenian friends in the Caucasus, we received a letter from them in this regard. We are very thankful for your efforts to educate our Muslim brethren in Anatolia. It is only through education that the differences between the peoples in the area would subside. One's civil rights will be protected only if his neighbor knows how to protect his. This will serve for a new freedom to take root.

We are sending you several dozen issues of Terakki.

Fazli⁷⁵

Letter (2)

[Shura-i Ummet letterhead]

November 10, 1907

Sirs:

You know that the patriotic movement in Asia Minor is in progress. You have seen the encouraging activity of their [the patriots?] work. You have also read in Shura-i- Ummet [October 15, 1907 issue, "An Letter To My Brother Ali"] the advice that we gave to our compatriots.

What is your party [ARF] thinking of doing? Where did the project of the congress reach on your part? Why haven't you responded yet to my letter of October 15?

⁷⁵ ARF archives, Section II (1902-1909), box 1716-b, document 7. Fazli was the corresponding secretary of the coalition.

You certainly do not want the current regime to perpetuate... I cannot Leave Paris at this time. I will be content to know the decision of your party.

Sincerely,

Ahmed Riza⁷⁶

These letters revealed that information circulated between different anti-Hamidian factions. Moreover, since antagonistic factions such as Sabaheddin's League and Riza's decentralization movement coalesced to form a united front in December 1907 (see below), one could discern small grudges between various secondary factions. Irrespective of such antagonisms, the common cause was to get rid of Abdulhamid and his regime. For Şükrü Hanioglu, the Sabaheddin Bey-ARF collaboration was even closer than what many assumed, when the ARF smuggled a certain Huseyin Tosun Bey to the eastern provinces of the empire to act as an agent-provocateur to rouse the Muslim population.⁷⁷ In his own words:

The Dashnaktsutium and the League of Private Initiative and Decentralization thus made a secret deal to cooperate. Both sides expected to benefit from cooperation. As an initial step and gesture of

⁷⁶ ARF archives, Section II (1902-1909), box 872-a, document 7. For similar correspondence, see also ARF archives, Section II (1902-1909), box 873, document 145 (from Dr. Behaeddin Shakir); ARF archives, Section II (1902-1909), box 873, document 159 (from Dr. Behaeddin Shakir); ARF archives, Section II (1902-1909), box 873, document 160 (from Dr. Behaeddin Shakir); ARF archives, Section II (1902-1909), box 873, document 161 (from Dr. Behaeddin Shakir); ARF archives, Section II (1902-1909), box 873, document 161 (from Dr. Behaeddin Shakir). The letters are either in French or Ottoman Turkish. The correspondence shows that Shakir was really interested in having cordial relations with the ARF. This might not have been the case with Ahmed Riza, even though he too continued his correspondence with the Armenian organization.

⁷⁷ This action was in regards to the "tax revolts" that swarmed the vilayets of Erzerum, Bitlis and also reached the south, to the vilayet of Van.

goodwill, the Dashnaksutiun smuggled a member of the League of Private initiative and Decentralization into Eastern Anatolia to organize joint revolutionary activities. The person chosen for this dangerous task was Huseyin Tosun, a former captain and French language instructor at the Military School in Tripoli of Barbary.⁷⁸

In Hanioglu's estimation, Tosun, who was a close aide to Jevdet and, like him, was expelled from the coalition by Riza, was the critical ingredient that amalgamated Armenian-Turkish cooperation in the Eastern Provinces. In fact, Hanioglu asserts that Tosun's work manifested itself in the popular uprisings of 1906 and 1907 in Erzerum and elsewhere.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, British and Armenian sources provided a totally different account, elucidating on what was actually known (see Chapter Four). Tosun, through his Armenian connections, was employed as the mail courier for the Russian consulate at Erzerum. This position allowed him to keep his identity secret, and to be able to travel unmolested—an important concern for his mission.⁸⁰ To jump from this basic reality to a convoluted theory that the events in Erzerum and Bitlis were the result of an Armenian-Turkish revolutionary collaboration under Tosun's leadership, cannot possibly stand historical scrutiny. Explaining the unrest in Erzerum in 1906-1907 the local ARF committee reported to Troshag in early 1907 that:

⁷⁸ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 97.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 98-101.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 116-117. Hanioglu's source is a coded telegram from Erzerum to the Grand Vezir's office in Constantinople. According to Hanioglu, Tosun "...first traveled to Caucasia with the help of the Tashnagsutyun Committee. He then went to Tbilisi [Tiflis] and met with Azerbaijani socialists who were printing appeals drafted by Sabaheddin Bey and sending them clandestinely to Eastern Anatolia. While he was in Caucasia, he went by the pseudonym Sheykh Ali. His Armenian friends helped him obtain a Russian passport, and he penetrated the Ottoman border with the help of ARF Tashnaksutiun guerillas."

We are not sure where these antigovernment secret meetings will lead. They have been around for almost a year now. The government officials bragged that they were going to apprehend the perpetrators. However, nothing of the sort has happened. Meanwhile the so-called secret town meetings continue... Turkish youth are in the process of organizing an armed insurrection... The government is trying to represent the movement as an Armenian, anti-government rally. It is trying everything through its agents to create an atmosphere of mistrust between Armenians and Turks...⁸¹

This was followed on January 15, 1907 with an equally interesting diplomatic message, which revealed that no matter how hard the porte tried to weaken Armenian-Young Turk ties in the eastern provinces, the relations were to continue unabated. According to the to this cable: "The local government is still trying its age-old tactic of poisoning the Armenian-Turkish brotherhood. Its efforts were partially successful in the villages, but not in the city of Erzerum."⁸²

A second report from Erzerum after the public uprising there, and dated March 22, 1907, read:

The government caved in against popular demands. However, still keeping with the old ways of doing thing, it [the government] was

⁸¹ "Turk Sharzhumi Norutyunnere" (Latest News from The Turkish Movement), *Troshag*, No. 2 (180) (February 1907) 19-20.

⁸² *Ibid.*; F.O.424.210.46. Versessian (Most probably Nersessian) to Grey, Paris, June 6, 1906 F.O.424/210/19537. This document refers to the beginning of the uprisings in Erzerum. The Armenian Union of Paris reported to the British ambassador that Hamidiye bands were oppressing Armenians in the Province of Erzerum and especially in Khnus.

masterful enough to represent the changes as something promulgated by the good will of the sultan, who, hearing the plea of his subjects, instituted reforms. Thus the sultan states that he would:

- A. Pardon persons for crimes they committed during last October;
- B. Pardon those who had been exiled;
- C. Reduce taxes for the population at large; (and)
- D. Order that personal taxes be collected only from the rich.

The sultan was under the impression that once his orders were informed to the populace through the local government they would be satisfied. But that was not so. The people dealt with the sultan's reforms as something unimportant. They believe that what they have acquired was because of their firm stance. They further believe that what they got should be the right of everybody in the empire.⁸³

An alarming report from Trebizond dated March 24, and which highlighted that the ARF was not privy to all details or organizational structure of Turkish agitators, affirmed worst fears: "We have heard that the military commander of Trebizond was shot. The vali is in fear and is not coming out of his palace...the commander was assassinated by a Turkish military officer, Haji Effendi..."⁸⁴

For reasons explained above and as reports emanating from the provinces clarified that the Armenian population was not active in these uprisings. In Bitlis, the uprising was

⁸³ F.O.424.210.46.

⁸⁴ "Turk Sharzhumi Norutiunnere," *Troshag*, No. 4 (182) (April 1907) 53-54.

instigated by Kurdish sheykhs, and not Young Turk agitators (see Chapter Four). Huseyin Tosun's cover was undermined when authorities found that he was the distributor of the revolutionary pamphlets—most probably printed by Dr. Jevdet in Cairo. According to Hanioglu:

Tosun was arrested for his role in the Erzerum uprisings. However, because Huseyin Tosun bore a Russian passport, the Russians came to be involved. Under torture, Huseyin Tosun confessed his real identity and repeated the confession in front of the dragoman of the Russian consulate. Because of his unusual status, Huseyin Tosun was separated from the other prisoners and sent to Istanbul, where he was incarcerated.⁸⁵

Hanioglu acknowledged that “an appeal appeared in every issue of Troshag between September to December 1906, asking the Young Turks to form a joint revolutionary front and to clasp the Tashnagtsutyun's hand in solidarity.”⁸⁶ According to Hanioglu's source, J. Michael Hagopian, the appeal was published in Troshag's September 1906 issue and was repeated in the October and November issues, but not the December issue.

The discrepancy notwithstanding, a detailed reading of Troshag reveals that no such appeal was published, especially since most issues contained meticulously written articles that refuted the collaboration scheme. For example, the August issue contained a

⁸⁵ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 117.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 96. J. Michael Hagopian, *Hyphenated Nationalism*, 257-258.

translation of a “call” from Turkish liberals that advocated cooperation with Armenians.⁸⁷ The September issue included a letter from Pierre Quillards, editor of Pro Armenia, inviting all anti-Hamidian forces to coalesce to topple the existing regime.⁸⁸ In the October delivery, the paper printed a call for all Ottoman revolutionary groups (not only Young Turks) to come together against Abdulhamid. This call was especially critical of the CUP, because it implied that revolutionary work could not be accomplished through publications and pamphlets using strong language.⁸⁹ As colorful as the appeal was, the October edition enclosed a report of an anti-government demonstration by recruits from Trebizond, who were allegedly destined to be sent to Yemen. There was also a report about yet another demonstration in Erzerum against the *Shahsi Vergisi* (Personal tax) concerns.⁹⁰ A month later, the November edition included essays that were critical of Muslims in the Caucasus, especially those who were advocating Pan-Islamism in Daghestan, the Caucasus, and the Trans-Caucasus, ostensibly to fight Armenians and the ARF. Hence, the ARF was critical of the CUP, which on the one hand advocated that Armenians should fight hand in hand with them, while it maintained very cordial relations with Tatars and Azeris in the Caucasus. “For what?” asked Troshag, with a dose of cynicism.⁹¹ Interestingly, the November issue reported on the Erzerum demonstration that turned into a bloody fight

⁸⁷ “Turk Azadakhohneru Goche” (The Call of Turkish Liberals), *Troshag*, No. 8 (174), August 1906, pp. 119-122.

⁸⁸ “Hraver Hamerashkhutyanyan,” 131.

⁸⁹ “[En]Timatir Darrereri Hamakhmpumn” (Unity of Opposition Groups), *Troshag*, No. 10 (176), September 1906, p. 146.

⁹⁰ “Garavarutyanyan Tem” (Against the Government), *Troshag*, No. 10 (176), September 1906, p. 149.

⁹¹ “Hamerashkhutyanyan Tserke,” 161-163.

with garrison soldiers over work stoppage concerns.⁹² By December, the paper's tone was well set that it boldly printed a report on the congress of Armenian, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Serbian, and Bosnia-Herzegovinian representatives held in The Hague, and which would mobilize the leadership (see below). Although the Young Turks were not present at this gathering, allegedly because they could not spare the time to send a representative, the Hague Congress was a success in terms of having antagonistic representatives talking to each other for the first time. This led protagonists to meet again in Geneva.⁹³

As it happened, the 1906 gathering of Armenian and Balkan revolutionary forces in Geneva created intense frictions between the ARF and Young Turk leaders even if this coalition of anti-Hamidian forces—considered by some as an unattainable dream—culminated in positive results:

Geneva, the meeting place of all rebels from the east, became the center of this meeting that was organized by the editorial board of *Troshag*. Greek, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Bosnian, Herzegovinian, and Armenian elements participated. [Young] Turks were absent, because they could not provide a representative to participate in the meeting. This was the first effective meeting that brought together elements who in the past had divergent and sometimes contradicting agendas. The

⁹² “Erzerumi Tsuytse” (The Erzerum Demonstration), *Troshag*, No. 11 (177), November 1906, pp. 164-165.

⁹³ “Tzhkoh Darrerri Hamakhmpume,” *Troshag*, No. 12 (178), December 1906, pp. 178-179.

main objective was to create some sort of modus vivendi amongst the forces struggling against the regime of the sultan. The meeting also dealt with the means by which to topple the oppressive government.⁹⁴

After much deliberation, participants formulated a united resolution that called for:

- A. Putting aside any and all infighting and animosity toward each other;
- B. Fighting against the sultan's regime in a united front;
- C. Granting self-rule for Macedonia, Armenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as a federation of all the small nationalities of the Balkans;
- D. Introducing radical changes and constitutional applications within the government of the Ottoman Empire;
- E. Struggling to attain the above objectives with a united front until the existing regime was toppled.⁹⁵

It was also decided to organize a general assembly in Geneva or another European city in December 1906 where Jean Jaurès,⁹⁶ and Francis Pressensé,⁹⁷ two prominent French activists, could also be present so as to give the gathering some international

⁹⁴ "Tzhkoh Darrerri," 178-179. Hanioglu stresses that Turks were not invited, which, according to ARF sources, was not the case.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Auguste Marie Joseph Jean Léon Jaurès. Jean Jaurès was a socialist member of the French Parliament and an Armenophile who defended the Armenian cause in the French Parliament as well as the Second Socialist International of which he was a founder. Jaurès had a profound effect on the formation of the ARF's socialist program as well as the acceptance of the party as a member in the Second International. He was assassinated in July 1914. For further details see Margaret Pease, *Jean Jaurès: Socialist and Humanitarian* (B.W. Huebsch).

⁹⁷ Francis Pressensé was a French Armenophile and a member of the French Parliament (1902-1910) who took an active part in the struggle for the Armenian cause. He worked for years at the newspaper *Le Temps*. He was also an active correspondent for *Pro Armenia*, an ARF financed propaganda journal that appeared in Paris from 1900 to 1918. In his articles Pressensé severely criticized the conciliatory stance of the great powers (including France) vis-à-vis the Turkish government, especially regarding the latter's policies towards Armenians and Macedonians. He is the author of *The Armenian Question* (1895) and *For Armenia and Macedonia* (1903).

political weight. The French activists could not attend before January 1907, which postponed the initiative and, as circumstances changed, this second gathering did not occur.

Behaeddin Shakir and the Reorganization of the CUP

Organizational hiccups notwithstanding, Behaeddin Shakir showed profound managerial abilities. He was able to take the initiative in a matter of months—to Riza’s detriment—to become the coalition’s undisputed leader. Together with Nazim Bey, who returned from London where he was a university instructor of Turkish, Shakir was able to reorganize the CUP into a fully functional apparatus with two commanding bodies: an external division based in Paris and an internal division headquartered in Salonika. Each division was equipped with its own central committee and was largely decentralized, with additional autonomous cells established in different European countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Crete, Cyprus, and Bosnia) and throughout the empire (Constantinople, Izmir, Syria, Egypt).⁹⁸

Shakir received significant logistical help from a variety of supporters, and he also tried to woo Sabaheddin Bey into his camp. When the prince responded by sending him his league’s program, and insisting that he would only join if his platform became the working blueprint for the movement, Shakir rejected Sabaheddin’s decentralization policies.⁹⁹

At this time, Shakir was inspired by the Iranian Anjomans (Revolutionary Committees), which played an important role in the constitutional revolution in Iran. Likewise, the 1905 Russian revolution stirred the motivated official, who correctly

⁹⁸ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 132, 136-141, 143-157, 161-172.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

assessed the latter's impact in the Caucasus region. Ottoman authorities were unable to stop the barrage of revolutionary propaganda emanating from Russia and, to a lesser extent originating in Iran, from spreading throughout the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, Shakir and Sabaheddin capitalized on this state of heightened popular awareness to prepare for a similar revolution. Indeed, and as discussed above, the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization further stimulated Shakir who acknowledged:

What kinds of tools are to be used? In order to answer this [question] we had to examine the policies of the committees that could provide us with examples to follow. We spent quite a long time carrying out this examination. Upon completing it we perceived that we need organization more than anything else.

Shakir then quotes from Sarafov, a seasoned Macedonian revolutionary leader, to show why the CUP needed an intricate organizational structure in order to continue its mission:

An article written two or three years ago by Sarafov, who wants to separate Macedonia from our fatherland... could give us a modest idea about organization. Sarafov's article is very useful to us in all aspects.

Look what this person says in his article: "You Young Turks do not possess an organization worthy of Europe's acclamation. To achieve that you must make many sacrifices. The accomplishment of this mission depends on great efforts over a long period. Everything

starts with the education of minds. Therefore it is necessary to carry out extensive written and oral propaganda. Minds educated by the same ideas secretly assemble under the same banner.¹⁰⁰

Shakir was convinced that it was only through such dedicated membership and a decentralized structure that the CUP organization would flourish:

In this way they establish branches throughout the country. These branches have recourse to various methods to multiply their members. In this field each branch should be granted a certain degree of freedom. This would also greatly assist in increasing the number of individuals favoring special action.¹⁰¹

Though encouraged by all of these groups, Shakir still relied on his Armenian contact, Diran Kelekian, to obtain a sorely needed alliance with Armenian committees and especially the ARF.¹⁰² In turn, this meant that he would face Riza's wrath, whose anti-Armenian sentiments were well-known. At this juncture Shakir had a wild card to play in the person of Ahmed Jelaledin Pasha, the former chief of Ottoman intelligence, who joined the Young Turk cause in Paris. To be sure, Shakir cultivated Jelaledin since his days in Constantinople, and he finally persuaded the pasha to become the de facto financier

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 137.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Diran Kelekian (also known as Dikran Kelegian), was an Ottoman Armenian writer and professor at the Ottoman University in Istanbul. He was the editor of *Jihan* (The World) since 1883 and *Sabah* [Morning] newspapers as of 1908. He had studied at the French Academy of Sciences in Marseille, then become a lecturer at the Ottoman University of Istanbul. He also worked as a correspondent for the *Daily Mail* and *Presse Associé*. He also published journalistic works in Turkish using Armenian letters and compiled a French–Turkish dictionary. For more information regarding Kelekian and his role vis-à-vis Shakir's organizational research, see Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation*, 427. See also Friedrich Schrader, *Politisches Leben in der Türkei* (Political Life in Turkey), *Die Neue Zeit* (The New Era), 1919, vol. 37, No. 2, 463.

of the movement. This gave Shakir the upper hand in dealing with Riza. Moreover, Kelekian coached Shakir on critical ideas on starting a new organization, or taking control of an existing one. Jelaleddin Pasha, however, insisted on the inclusion of the ARF and the Hnchagyan party in the new organization. He further demanded that Riza be demoted to the status of a regular member with no leadership responsibilities. It was clear that Jelaleddin Pasha was not only positioning himself to assume full authority over the new organization, but wished to appoint Shakir as second in command. Of course, the ambitious Shakir was not ready to be dealt with in such a manner, which quickly saw the demise of the whole program. Shakir, however, was able to maneuver and assume the leadership of the existing coalition.¹⁰³

Shakir's maneuverings demonstrated that he was using double standards in approaching different constituencies. While he praised Armenians for their revolutionary zeal, his writings to Turkish constituents revealed anti-Armenian sentiments. Moreover, while he advocated a coalition of all anti-Hamidian forces, he belittled Balkan Christians as nothing more than parasites weakening the body of the Ottoman state. Shakir's maneuvers were thus the epitome of opportunism and the hallmark of deceit, the likes of which the Young Turk movement had never seen since the early days of its existence.¹⁰⁴

The ARF Fourth General Congress

If Behaeddin Shakir's maneuvers to reorganize the CUP were problematic, the ARF's endless internal squabbles proved to be equally problematic, especially after the party's

¹⁰³ Ibid., 134-136, 139-140.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 173-175.

Fourth General Congress that convened from February to May 1907 in Vienna. In the aftermath of the Armeno-Tatar conflict, conditions on the ground were extremely dangerous in the Caucasus, which certainly required utmost coordination and unhesitating deliberations. Simultaneously, the Mihranian Movement—initiated by *Khmpabed* (partisan band leader) Mihran, which aimed at dismantling the Caucasian Platform, added to the divisions inside the Eastern Armenian faction as well as between the Western and Eastern Armenian sections of the party. This split was so acute that several leftist ARF members demanded the party to be divided into two, as they contemplated various options to cater to “different” causes or groups.¹⁰⁵

The ARF held sway against these acute tribulations, after Aknuni, Simon Zavarian, and especially Rostom, mediated among competing players. These senior leaders persuaded uncompromising members to tone down existing divergences between leftist-socialist and nationalist elements. The congress thus vociferously renounced and rejected any platform that might create a rift between its Western and Eastern factions and decided to fight on two fronts: one against the anti-ARF tsarist policies in the Caucasus, and, concurrently, another for reforms and local autonomy for Western Armenians.¹⁰⁶ Importantly, and despite the overt uneasiness manifested by the fedayee (fighter) delegates, the congress also adopted a socialist ideology for the organization. This enabled the party to participate as a voting member in the Second Socialist International in August 1907 as a

¹⁰⁵ Dasnabedian, *Nyuter H.H.Tashnagtsutyun Badmutyan Hamar*, vol. 3. The volume encompasses the minutes of the ARF Fourth General Congress. The congress held 313 sessions and some of the issues were discussed during several (even non-consecutive) sessions. For issues relating to leftist vs. nationalist views see pages 140-141, 145-149, 159-160, 161-168, 201. See also Dasnabedian, *H.H. Tashnagtsutyune Ir Gazmutenen*, 87.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

representative of the Russian Empire. In the opinion of most ARF leaders, joining the International was important to expand the organization's propaganda network throughout Europe, though few anticipated the long-term repercussions within the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰⁷ Still, the congress accepted Aknuni's (Khachatur Malumian) resolution to start serious negotiations with the Young Turks, to essentially affect a union of anti-Hamidian forces. It was in accordance with this initiative that Aknuni started negotiations with Riza's coalition and Sabaheddin Bey's league.¹⁰⁸

The Second Congress of Anti-Hamidian Forces

One of the key decisions emanating from the ARF Western Bureau in October 1907 motivated members to "consider negotiations with Ahmed Riza as consumed and depleted." According to the record, the ARF pledged to "continue negotiations with all elements [unhappy with] Ottoman rule, and to entice all to join forces." The ARF further proposed to hold an initial meeting with the Armenagans and Hnchagyans.¹⁰⁹

At the beginning of November 1907, the Western Bureau dispatched Aknuni to Paris where he was tasked to oversee preparations for the Second Congress of Ottoman Dissidents. He was further mandated to approach the Armenagans and the three Hnchagyan factions to present a unified Armenian front during upcoming deliberations.¹¹⁰ Two additional members joined Aknuni, namely Sarkis Minassian (AKA Aram Ashod) and the Bureau's secretary, Harutyun Kalfayan (AKA Kalfa), ostensibly to help Malumian

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 89.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ ARF Archives, Pamboukian, *Nyuter*, vol. VII, 37.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 43.

in his endeavors. The Bureau charged its representatives to establish cordial and friendly relations with all Turkish elements present at the gathering, especially student organizations that were believed to be far more receptive to revolutionary ideas.¹¹¹

Several important developments prior to the proposed congress merit attention. First, while the congress was supposed to bring together all elements vying to topple Abdulhamid and to reestablish the constitutional monarchy of 1876, many factions preferred to remain reclusive. Although the ARF invited Armenian parties to attend in a united front, this didn't happen. The Reformed Hnchagyans proposed Arshag Chobanian as their delegate though the latter declined on the grounds that he was not a party member.¹¹² The only other Armenian delegate was Hovsep Sarafian, who represented the journal *Armenia*, the organ of the Armenagan Party.¹¹³

Second, while the Macedonians were initially enthusiastic and assigned two delegates to attend—following a long internal process the Sandanski (Greek-Macedonian) and Manastir (currently Bitola, in modern Macedonia) Central Body (Serbian-Macedonian)—infighting among them prevented such a participation.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ ARF Archives, Pamboukian, *Nyuter*, vol. VII, 46-47. Kalfaian was called back later and replaced with Mikayel Der Mardirossian (AKA Mar).

¹¹² ARF Archives, Document 1715a-1, Pamboukian, *Nyuter*, vol. VI, 223. Chobanian informed the ARF Western Bureau about not attending the congress through a letter dated December 6, 1907.

¹¹³ ARF Archives, Document 872 a-9, Pamboukian, *Nyuter*, vol. VI, 229. Letter from Mgrdich Portukalian to Aknuni, dated December 10, 1907.

¹¹⁴ ARF Archives, Document 872 a-8, Pamboukian, *Nyuter*, vol. VI, 222. Letter from Macedonian leader, Dr. D. Dochkov, dated November 3/20. *Nyuter* has printed the year of the letter as 1908, while in reality it should be 1907.

Nevertheless, it quickly became clear that Aknuni 's presence in Paris was a motivating force for Ottoman dissidents to convene.¹¹⁵ Among Turkish dissidents attending the congress were three of the most influential YoungTurk leaders: Ahmed Riza, Prince Sabaheddin, and Behaeddin Shakir, even if serious disagreements existed amongst them. During the congress, it became clear that Shakir, because of his strong ties with the Ottoman military faction of the CUP in Salonika, was destined to play a pivotal role in silencing the bickering emanating from Riza and others. In fact, Shakir and Aknuni¹¹⁶ took upon themselves the task of making everyone aware that polemics and ideological trivialities were unwelcome, since the congress set for itself a serious goal: to unite all factions to topple Abdulhamid. It was within such an atmosphere that participants conducted their businesses and, at the end of proceedings, published a proclamation, which read:

The congress of anti-government parties of Turkey, held in Europe, from December 27 to 29 [1907], announces that it will create the means of reconciliation and unity between all the people of the Ottoman Empire, which had been oppressed for the past thirty years, due to the criminal activities of Sultan Abdulhamid II and his abhorring regime.

¹¹⁵ ARF archives, *Nyuter*, vol. III.

¹¹⁶ In fact, it is also clear that Aknuni played as pivotal a role as Behaeddin Shakir. This is proven through Mgrdich Portukalian's letter addressed to Aknuni, where, after being informed about the congress by his delegate, Hovsep Sarafian, Portukalian congratulated Aknuni on a job well done for being able to create unity out of a chaotic situation. See also ARF Archives, Document 873-i, *Nyuter*, vol. VI, 237. Letter from Mgrdich Portukalian to Aknuni , dated January 3, 1908.

This reign of terror has been vicious not only for the Christian peoples of the empire, whom the sultan persecuted for his own gains, but also for the Muslim population, who was living in disparity and slavery. Moreover, it was because of the policies of Abdulhamid, that the Muslims of the empire were perceived as savages by the Western public opinion. They were thus vilified for the inhumane actions of the sultan and his band of criminal accomplices.¹¹⁷

After stressing that the Ottoman people had been victims of Abdulhamid's "divide and rule" tactics, the declaration indicated that Abdulhamid was the real woe of all Ottoman constituents:

The sultan was ingenious in planting the seeds of hatred amongst the different peoples and religions of the empire. Turks, Armenians, Greeks, Bulgarians, Valakhians, Albanians, Arabs, Jews, Druzes, and Kurds saw oppression, exile, and massacre. The Armenian massacres alone were enough to proclaim him [Abdulhamid] the "Red Sultan."

Abdulhamid also made certain that during his reign no intellectuals were able to speak out. He dominated to the effect that all intellectual, economic and social progress would be paralyzed.

The sultan fears education and culture, because of their importance in the freedom of speech and self-recognition. Therefore, he made sure

¹¹⁷ "Haydararakir" (Proclamation), *Troshag*, No.1 (189), January 1908, 1-3. See also ARF Archives, Document 872 a-1, 50-977, *Nyuter*, vol. VI, 232-234.

that education would be suppressed. He closed schools, imprisoned teachers, exiled students, and censured the remaining educational institutions so that they can operate only according to his will.¹¹⁸

The proclamation then lamented the miserable condition of the press in the ottoman Empire, which was censored to the degree of becoming impotent. Abdulhamid was also represented as a person who was against the economic prosperity of his people, as well as a usurious monarch who taxed his people to such a degree that they were brought to the brink of servitude :

Newspapers and the press in general had a similar faith. They were allowed to publish only those writings that were allowed by censures. Thus, the whole empire was fortified with a wall of ignorance.

Abdulhamid is not only an enemy of mental development, but even economic prosperity. He wanted his people to live in poverty. The unjust taxes he levied through his greedy tax collectors were meant to fill his coffers. Nothing was spent on roads, canals. Abdulhamid used his revenues to feed his clique, spies, and to bribe people to his side.

As a result of all these oppressive measures, people from all walks of life and from all over the empire are migrating by the thousands to Europe and America in search of freedom, security, and means of subsistence. This immigration complemented the massacres

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

and helped in emptying the country from its most prodigious elements.¹¹⁹

The declaration also mentioned that as a result of the monarch's despotic rule his image was tarnished in Europe and the empire lost all sympathy in the west:

Turkey is also weak in terms of its foreign policy. Abdulhamid's diplomacy has rendered the Ottoman Empire into a scoundrel vis-à-vis other nations. The country lost the sympathy of the western countries. Instead of helping it [the Ottoman Empire] the West let Abdulhamid wreck havoc in his own country... Abdulhamid's policies resulted in new loses of lands for the empire. If the situation continues new lands, such as Albania, Arabia, Armenia will soon secede from the empire. This is welcomed by Western colonial powers that are always in search of new territories and markets.¹²⁰

It was for the reasons mentioned above that revolutionary agitation started to take root within different elements of the empire. Although those revolutionary cells were working alone up to this moment, now there is an urgent need for them to unite against the sultan:

Until now, revolutionary organizations fighting the sultan were working on their own. There was no unification of efforts and goals. Today, however, the unification of Muslim and Christian revolutionary

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

factions has shown that everybody in the empire is tired of the tyrant who is leading the country to the abyss. Today, everybody understands that only a complete change of government can prevent the country's collapse. It is therefore imperative that we must work together and with all our will to topple the sultan's government.¹²¹

Hence, the congress put forth its demands:

Therefore, we demand:

- 1-The abrogation of Sultan Abdulhamid;
- 2-A complete change of the administration; and
- 3-The institution of a constitutional, parliamentary regime.

The extermination of the present regime that is responsible for the current stagnation is the first condition to any reform. With all facets of its [the present regime] power, including political tyranny, police forces, and diplomatic cunning, should also be terminated. A representative regime should be installed, where all the peoples of the empire will be able to voice their rights under equal obligations, justice and freedom.

This is the united goal of this congress. We unite to conduct a general struggle, while each of the organizations preserves its independence.... We unite honestly, and fraternally. Before we embark on this struggle, we swear not to weaken. We thus say to the sultan that

¹²¹ Ibid.

we are not putting our guns down until we establish a new century for Turkey.

We call upon all interested to join us in a struggle that entails unwavering courage and lots of sacrifices. We call upon intellectuals and professionals, villagers and city dwellers...in one word to all peoples of the empire...to unite with this struggle. Let us unite under the banner of freedom...to topple a wicked regime that has tortured us all for thirty years.

Therefore, this **congress** unanimously calls upon all anti-government groups to embark upon a revolutionary struggle that has already shown its effectiveness in the Armenian-Turkish mixed operational cells. It is the government's behavior itself that leaves us no other choice but an all out revolution.

We therefore recommend the following means of struggle:

- 1-Armed struggle against the government;
- 2-Peaceful opposition to the regime through political and economic boycotts, and work stoppages;
- 3-Not paying taxes;
- 4-Propaganda within the army and its units so that they don't impede the course of the revolution;
- 5-General uprising of the population;
- 6-Other military means as circumstances dictate.

The Hamidian regime will vanish in the near future if those who have suffered from it show the necessary courage...

Hurray for the united front of the peoples of the empire.

Hurray for the united revolutionary forces.

Signatories:

Committee of Union and Progress: Official organs, "Shura-i Ummet,"
"Meshveret"

Armenian Revolutionary Federation: Official organ, "Troshag"

Ottoman Union for Decentralization and Constitutionalism: Official
organ, "Terraki"

Jewish Committee of Egypt: Official organ, "La Vara"

Editorial Board of "Khilafet," London

Editorial Board of "Armenia," Marseilles

Editorial Board of "Razmik," the Balkans

Editorial Board of "Hayrenik," United States of America

"Ahdi Osmni" (Ottoman Epoch) Committee, Egypt.¹²²

In addition to this proclamation, the congress passed resolutions with the aim of organizing its modus operandi. First, it created a Mixed Governing Committee, which stipulated:

The congress decided to form a secret mixed governing committee comprised of members of those organizations who have cells operating

¹²² Ibid.

in the empire. This committee was entrusted with the task of fulfilling the decisions of the congress through the parties operating within the country. This committee will have internal bylaws. The workings of this committee will be kept in total secrecy. Those not adhering to the secrecy provisions will be dealt with severely.¹²³

Second, the congress adopted a resolution that called for Unified Action, essentially to prevent further divisions, declaring:

The congress, being well aware of the fact that the government tries everything in its power to put one revolutionary faction against another in order to secure its position, calls upon all to not fall into such traps. Fights, such as those between Greek and Bulgarian factions in Macedonia, should be stopped. All means should be directed against our common enemy, the regime of Sultan Abdulhamid II.¹²⁴

Third, congress participants wished to honor “Victims of the Struggle” who paid the ultimate price, calling on everyone to rise to the occasion:

The congress of anti-government forces of Turkey resolves to honor all political prisoners and all those exiled who suffer outside their country because of the decisions of the corrupt regime.

Furthermore, the congress proudly remembers the heroes of all nationalities who gave their lives for the cause of freedom. In this

¹²³ Haydararagir,” *Troshag*, No. 1 (189), January 1908, pp. 4-5. See also ARF Archives, Document 872 a-1, 50-977, Pamboukian, *Nyuter*, vol. VI, 235.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

regard, it [the congress] calls upon all fighters to follow in the footsteps of these martyred heroes.

Fourth, delegates warned traitors in no unmistakable terms, as they resolve to punish collaborators:

Acting upon the recommendation of the organizing body, the congress resolves that all traitors and those who accept bribes from the government and thus become its agents will be dealt with severely.¹²⁵

Fifth, the congress adopted a resolution on the publication of revolutionary materials, announcing:

In order to give impetus to anti-government sentiments and propaganda within the empire, the **congress** decides to publish pamphlets and booklets in Turkish, Armenian, Greek, Bulgarian, Arabic, and Kurdish. These publications should be distributed to the general populace through revolutionary cells working within the empire.

It was decided to publish and to distribute brochures calling the villagers, the army and its units, the intellectuals, the clerics of all religions, petty governmental officials to a general rebellion. This is imperative, since all these segments must understand that their enemy is the oppressive regime of the sultan.¹²⁶

Sixth, attendees resolved to meet again:

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

The next congress of anti-government forces will take place at the end of next (1908) December. If need arises, the Mixed Governing Committee can expedite the meeting after consulting with the leadership of the different factions.¹²⁷

Given the breadth and scope of heated discussions at the anti-Hamdian congress, the very *raison d'être* of the assembly was summed up rather well by a poignant editorial in *Troshag* published in the wake of July 1908 revolution:

The hour has finally arrived. The regime of the oppressive sultan is coming apart... But the question today is [whether] the revolution [will] be able to be the master of the situation? Will it be able to recreate a Turkey that was agreed upon on paper [reference to the 1907 December congress]... The reactionary regime is no more.

However, its master, the sultan, is cornered in his palace and signing the declarations given to him by the Young Turks. He has not yet lost all hope of returning to power and reestablishing himself as the Caliph of all Muslims... The Young Turks seem to be showing responsible leadership at the moment. What we are asking for, however, is that real freedom be given to all the elements of the empire...

¹²⁷ Ibid.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation is working and will continue to work hand-in-hand with the Young Turks until all the popular demands of the constitutional regime are met.¹²⁸

This was a truly remarkable acknowledgement, full of hope in the possibility of a new political system that promised to respect rights, defend minority populations, and uphold the laws of the land in a fair and just way. Whether the optimism was justified was, of course, subject to speculation.

The July 1908 Coup d'État and the ARF

On July 3, 1908, disgruntled CUP elements within the 3rd Army Corps in Macedonia started the revolt.¹²⁹ On July 24 Major Ahmed Niyazi's rebel forces marched toward the capital, Constantinople, where a terrified Abdulhamid faced a fait accompli.¹³⁰ The terrified sultan caved in and announced the restoration of the constitution, which he had deliberately ignored since 1877.¹³¹

¹²⁸ "Turkio Heghaphokhutyune: Turkian Sahmanatragan" (The Turkish Revolution: Turkey a Constitutional Country), *Troshag*, No. 7 (195), June 1908, 97-99.

¹²⁹ BOA, 6169-312-63, Yıldız Mutenevvi' Maaruzat Evrakı ve Analitik İnvanterler, *Osmanlı İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti'nin Faaliyetleri ve Şemsi Paşanın Öldürüldüğü, 1908* (The Ottoman İttihad ve Terakki [Union and Progress, CUP] Organization's actions and the assassination of Shemsi Pasha, 1908); BOA, 1908-71-52, Yıldız Esas Evrakı, Analetik İnvanteri (Y.PR.M.U.M), *İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyetin İlanı Hürriyet edeceyi, 1908* (Regarding the CUP's announcement of freedom, 1908); BOA, 1909-71-53, Yıldız Esas Evrakı, Analetik İnvanteri (Y.PR.M.U.M), *Eyup Sabri ve Niyazi Beyler Muşir Osman Fevzi Paşayı Mechul Yere Götürdükleri, 1908* (Regarding Eyup Sabri and Niyazi beys taking General Osman Fevzi Pasha to an unknown location, 1908). These documents from the Ottoman Archives show how the lower ranking military personell, such as Colonels Niyazi and Enver beys assassinated the high ranking generals of the Third (Yıldırım) Army stationed in Thrace in order to gain the upper hand in the chain of command.

¹³⁰ The low ranking officers, now being the masters of the situation, took command of the Third Army and walked towards Constantinople. The army's marching towards the capital was supplimented by the CUP civil organization, which started a rumors campaign for the fall of the monarchy and the advent of Hürriyet (freedom).

¹³¹ BOA, 1910-71-54, Yıldız Esas Evrakı, Analetik İnvanteri (Y.PR.M.U.M), *İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyetin Manastır Merkezi Hakkında, 1908* (Regarding the Manastir Center of the Committee of Union and Progress, 1908).

Although Troshag was cautious after these tumultuous events unraveled quickly, it nevertheless enthusiastically welcomed the opening of a new era in Ottoman history, believing that a constitutional regime would eventually be established. The publication underlined the possibility of mishaps that might trigger animosity with the ruling Young Turks and, therefore, argued that “this path to constitutionalism [was] filled with traps [that] would require [even human] sacrifices.”¹³² According to Troshag, among the many developments under way, the most problematic was what was happening in the eastern provinces of the Empire. It reported, for example, how “Kurdish chieftains, who for centuries were used to loot and murder their Armenian subjects, could not and would not understand why these ancient privileges [we]re being taken away from them because of the newly reestablished constitution and its laws. Perhaps nothing was imposed on them during the first constitutional period,”¹³³ it lamented, cautioning officials to take necessary measures to prevent clashes.

Another perplexing announcement by Troshag was the acknowledgement that the Armenian Question, which was an international concern up to the time, became an internal Ottoman affair. Troshag argued that “henceforth it [was] the Ottoman Parliament that [was] going to tackle with all issues pertaining to minorities and nationalities from the Bosphorus all the way to the country’s borders with Russia,” and saw intrinsic dangers in such understandings.¹³⁴

¹³² “Ayzhmeyagan Bahanche” (The Important Need of the Time), *Troshag*, No. 8 (196), August 1908, 113-116.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

As the new revolutionary regime slowly imposed its will on the State, Troshag wrote about issues it claimed were essential for the country as a whole. Thus, and regarding the issues pertaining to the constitution and decentralization, Troshag hinted to the idea that the constitution could be easily manipulated by an unscrupulous majority. Even if such behavior formed the essence of democracy, Troshag alluded that a rule of the majority—in this case of the Turkish element itself—could reverse the whole course of the constitutional process. It warned against such steps and pleaded for a broad constitutional government with decentralization for the provinces. Troshag was aware, however, that this issue represented a major hurdle for Ottoman officials since no precedent existed to guide them. Therefore, what kind of decentralization should be adopted was on everyone’s mind, including Armenian leaders who were concerned of potential abuses. A Troshag editorial recommended that decentralization be thoroughly researched and built from the ground up, which naturally entailed a long and tedious journey.¹³⁵ The skepticism was certainly warranted given myriad problems that preoccupied Constantinople.

An equally important concern related to Germany’s aspirations in the region, as Troshag suggested that not all Western Powers were satisfied with the revolution, along with the changes it brought to the empire. In fact, Germany, which harbored big dreams of financial windfalls following privileged relations with the sultan and his previous regime,

¹³⁵ “Osmanian Sahmanatruytyune yev Hayere” (Armenians and the Ottoman Constitution), *Troshag*, No. 8 (196), August 1908, pp. 113-116.

was livid at the putative losses. In Abdulhamid's demise, Germany forswore its ambitions, including the long-held *Drang nach Osten* (March to the East).¹³⁶

It was also important to finally touch on the sensitive issue to allow Patriarch Izmirlian to return and, perhaps, replace the presiding prelate, Ormanian, who allegedly was in collusion with the Hamidian Regime. According to Troshag, Patriarch Ormanian was not popular and may have dabbled in non-clerical activities that drew the ire of various Armenian political organizations, which was amply documented over the years. Izmirlian, the contender and the one loved by the masses, returned to Constantinople, where he received a popular welcome. In a prophetic moment, Izmirlian declared before his departure from the capital a few years earlier that “where there [was] no justice all loyalty [was] nothing but a fake,” which certainly vindicated his return—on the wings of justice.¹³⁷

Troshag's cautionary comments notwithstanding, the ARF faced a dilemma: how to defend the new regime, especially among Armenian factions. In two circulars published in the official news outlet, the quandary was fully exposed:

(Circular 1)

Many people are murmuring that this new revolution is not going to survive. That the old regime is going to come back. That the new regime could not deliver what it has promised. Don't listen to these voices... As revolutionaries it is your responsibility to make the people

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 121

believe that a country that has given so many martyrs to this cause cannot go back.... The valleys of blood are behind us. In front of us is the sunrise of freedom...¹³⁸

(Circular 2)

Even at the beginning of this year [1908], shortly after the ARF was able to organize the congress with the Young Turks in Paris [December 1907], what criticism did the ARF not endure? Today reality shows that we were right. The ARF proved that it was the organization that helped in bringing together all prosecuted peoples and minorities of the [Ottoman] empire... Let those who breed on lies vanish.¹³⁹

As to what concerned the aspirations of the ARF from the new Young Turk regime, Troshag editorialized:

Without deviating from the main principles of our Mission statement, where it is written that the existing evils would be terminated once a socialist form of government is adopted and the goods produced by a society is distributed among those who produce it;

¹³⁸ “Shrchaperaganner H.H. Tashnaktsutyan” (ARF Circulars), *Troshag*, No. 8 (196), August 1908, 122-123. The circular is dated July 30, 1908. This letter was written by Aknuni (Malumian) who assumed the leadership position of the ARF in Constantinople at the time. It is apparent that he was taken by the fantastic events of the time and was a true believer in the achievements of the new, revolutionary regime.

¹³⁹ “Sherchaperaganner,” *Troshag*, No. 8 (196), August 1908, 122-123. The circular is dated August 2, 1908. In this second circular written by Aknuni, the author blasts the anti ARF Armenian organizations (Most probably the Hnchagyans), who, since the beginning, had blamed the ARF for its complicity with the Young Turks.

And, accepting human freedom as a basis—like the freedoms of national and religious organizations—is an unalienable right that must be preserved regardless of the number of members of such national and religious minorities;

Being convinced that the federative form of government with regional autonomy is the best for any state, especially one as diverse and multilingual as the Ottoman Empire;

Understanding also that such a system for the Ottoman Empire can be achieved gradually, over a period of time, through a process that encompasses all the nationalities and religious segments of the Ottoman society.¹⁴⁰

In a detailed and somewhat a bold declaration, the ARF required from the newly elected legislature (December 1908) that Constantinople acknowledge regional autonomy that would preserve the rights of the provinces, recognize changes in the constitution, guarantee political freedoms, allow courts of law to function independently, decrease the presence of Ottoman officials in the Eastern Provinces, grant local communities some autonomy, introduce progressive tax codes, and facilitate a slew of socio-economic privileges. Indeed, the demands were so detailed that they deserved a full reading:

¹⁴⁰ “Sherchaperaganner,” *Troshag*, No.8 (196), August 1908, pp. 122-123.

I-General Observations:

1-The Ottoman Empire will be acknowledged as an independent state as a whole as long as it is equipped with a constitutional form of government.

2-Turkish Armenia constitutes an inseparable part of the empire, which deals with its issues as a regional autonomous entity with equality for all its inhabitants.

3-The central government, based on a system of popular representation, administers the day-to-day affairs of the state, its foreign policy, the army, the monetary system, the railroad system, and postal services. All other functions are relegated to the regional autonomous governments.

Members of parliament, the judiciary, and all local executive governments must be elected on the principles of general, equal, secret and proportional representation. This principle is respected for all national and religious minorities.

II-The Rights of the Provinces

5-The provinces enjoy broad autonomy in dealing with their own affairs. These include: local roads, public health, education, and water distribution. Local police force, means of agricultural and other production.

6-Local public officials, aside from those appointed by the central government, are elected by regional councils.

7-Contrary to the workings of the old regime, when redrawing the borders of the provinces, cultural, ethnic, and ethnographic considerations must be taken into account in order to form homogeneous entities.

III-Equality of Rights:

8-There must be total equality for all nationalities and religious communities. All previous privileges must be annulled. National and religious communities in the central and regional governments must be represented proportionally.

Changes to the Constitution

9-In this regard:

A-The constitution must be looked at periodically to strengthen the autonomy of regional governments.

B-The executive government must be accountable to the parliament.

C-The sultan and the army give an oath of allegiance to the constitution.

D- The Upper House [*Aa 'yan*] must be dismantled.

IV-Political Freedom:

10-Freedom of speech, printed media, religious beliefs, the right to assemble, the right to work stoppages, as well as freedoms to personal integrity, home, mail, moving and traveling are granted. The system of internal identification cards must be dismantled.

V-Schools and Languages:

11-In this regard: Mandatory and free general education; Total freedom of cultural-educational enterprise; Equality of all educational institution; Education in native language at national schools; Teaching of official language after the fourth grade.

In Turkish schools the teaching of local languages is mandatory as of the fourth grade.

12-The cultural-educational state budget should be divided amongst the nationalities in accordance to their respective numbers. The implementation of this policy will be accomplished through specially elected local committees.

13-Knowledge of the official language is mandatory to all state officials. Local officials must also possess knowledge of local languages in the area they are employed in.

NOTE: The usage of local languages beside the state language in local courts of law, and governmental institutions. Official announcements must also be translated into the local languages.

VI-Courts of Law [the Judiciary in general]:

14-Total rearrangement of the courts; free trials.

Military Service

15-Equality in serving in the army for all nationalities, regardless of religious beliefs. Mandatory period of serving in the army must be lowered to two years.

NOTE: Local military units will serve in the area of their residence during peaceful times; Soldiers' salaries must be raised; Hamidiyye regiments must be disbanded immediately.

Officialdom [the Bureaucracy in general]

16- The number of state officials must be decreased. Salaries of high officials decreased and those of lower ranks increased.

VII-Land Issue

17-The state must provide a parcel of land for each peasant. Transform all state and imperial (*Miri*) lands to communal lands.

18-The rights to benefit from land belong to the peasants. They must be provided with as much land as they can cultivate and provide enough to feed their families without exploiting others in the process.

19-Communal lands (including forests) must be administered by committees elected by the communities involved.

20-Mines and other materials of value belong to the state. A part of the income from such enterprises is to be transferred to the communities where such enterprises are located.

VIII-Taxes:

21-Total reform of the taxation system:

NOTE: The *Aa'shar* [tax amounting to one tenth of one's income] must be lowered immediately to 1/15. Similarly, *Aghnam* [animal tax] must be lowered to 1/3; Overdue taxes must be annulled; Road and travel taxes must be stopped; Taxes in the form of stamps for judiciary purposes must cease; No taxes for work that is not paid for.

22-A progressive tax for income and inheritance must be instated. No taxation for low-income workers and peasants.

IX-Credit, Loans

23-State credit and loans with low interest.

24-State insurance against drought and other disasters.

X-Work Reform

25-Establishment of a state ministry for employment. Codification of employment laws by the state:

A-deciding hours of work for workers in cities and villages. Less working hours for workers engaged in difficult, dangerous and health risk employment;

B-Abolish night work for females and children. Females accrue maternity leave equal to six weeks after giving birth. Make illegal the employment of children under the age of 15. Institute a six-hour workday for teenagers 15 to 18 years old;

C- Sundays as a day of rest. Weekly day of rest decided for each religious community.

26- Offer employment insurance for workers as well as provide retirement benefits by employers.¹⁴¹

Inasmuch as the ARF was cognizant that these “demands” were nothing new, since they were part and parcel of the reforms projects advocated for the past two decades, few expected an enthusiastic response. As long as Abdulhamid was on the throne, many ARF leaders believed that no such reforms were destined to see the light of day. Still, most assumed that the Young Turk government would finally implement what everyone knew were necessary initiatives. Surprised by Young Turk delays and overall inaction, the ARF clarified its position in December 1908, when it cautioned that the new regime was in danger and the sultan was doing everything in his power to return to his despotic rule. The declaration equally condemned Ahmed Riza for being a mere tool in the hands of the despot. The declaration thus avowed:

The sultan is still in his palace. He is keeping everyone under his devious hypnosis. Ahmed Riza too is [acting] “up to his calling.” This opportunist and mediocre person, who has mistakenly won himself a stake amongst real revolutionaries, now considers himself “the man of the hour.” By so doing he is really exposing what he really is on the inside. Abdulhamid has fallen in love with him. This love seems to be

¹⁴¹ “Hay Heghapokhagan Tashnaktsutyun Bahanchnere” (The Demands of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation), *Troshag*, No.9-10 (197), September-October 1908, 129-131.

reciprocal. The editor of Meshveret is now a daily visitor of the palace. During his daily appearances before the sultan he is of course speaking about how much he was inclined towards the sultan. He definitely states to the sultan that in his newspaper, he, almost always, defended the imperial rights against Armenophile Europe. He also mentions to the sultan that he has always prosecuted Armenian, Bulgarian, and Macedonian revolutionaries through his pen and that he has blessed the sultan's brutal and savage response against rebel minorities.

The declaration continued its verbal assault on Riza on the grounds that the latter was a reactionary under the guise of a modern revolutionary and that he had always been a monarchist at heart:

Now he [Riza] brings his exaltations of the "Red Sultan" to a refinement by stating that the Ottoman despot is the Caliph of the earth's 500 million Muslims who look upon Abdulhamid as their father. The tenants of Pan-Islamism are thus joining hands with the patriotism of the Young Turks. The Sultan is exhilarated with joy.

There are Armenians too who are showing their love and admiration to the sultan.

The editorial then concluded by casting doubt over the whole process of the reestablishment of the new regime. However, it left room for optimism, which was based on hope and not on concrete evidence:

It [the constitutional regime] started very badly. However, it is not the time to sigh out of hopelessness. Let us be armed with patience and still be optimists...

ARF Responsible Body

September 1, 1908

Constantinople¹⁴²

It is evident that it was Aknuni who penned the above editorial. Even though many ARF leaders had their doubts regarding the sincerity of Young Turks concerning reforms in general and especially within the Armenian populated eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, Aknuni showed an explicit naiveté and optimism in this regard. His trust in his Young Turk associates—specially Behaeddin Shakir—was to finally cost him his own life in 1915. At the time however, and all the way up to 1913, he firmly believed that the well being of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire depended on a strong alliance between the ARF and the Young Turks. As the unequivocal leader of the ARF Constantinople Responsible Body, he influenced the party to adhere to this cooperation, even after the tragic events of April 1909 in Adana.¹⁴³ The path to a real constitutional regime was arduous. Regardless, key Ottoman and Armenian leaders assumed the challenges, stumbled, and regained their composure though inevitable clashes loomed over the horizon.

¹⁴² “Medz Gnjirneru Hanteb” (Facing Major Difficulties), *Troshag*, No. 11-12 (198), November-December 1908, 155-158.

¹⁴³ See Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 4

THE EASTERN PROVINCES, 1902-1908: COLLABORATING TO SPREAD REVOLUTIONARY AGITATION WITHIN THE MUSLIMS AND KURDS

Even before the 1902 anti-Hamidian congress was held, the situation in the eastern provinces was hopeless for Armenians living there. In January 1902, Muslim elements threatened to massacre Christians in Diyarbakir, which drew a stiff response from Sir Nicholas O’Conor, the British Ambassador in Constantinople. In a note to Foreign Minister Lansdowne, O’Conor lamented that “the attitude of the Government [is] generally unsatisfactory,” underscoring the “often ill-treatment of the Christians allowed to proceed unchecked.”¹

Even though the situation had somewhat improved, it seemed that the governor, who was the one responsible for heightened tensions in the area, was still pursuing a policy that raised the anxieties of the Muslim population.² At the behest of its government, the British Embassy initiated the creation of an exhaustive catalogue of all “inter-tribal feuds and sectional squabbles,” recognizing how difficult the task was, “though any one traveling freely in the southern and eastern districts might largely extend the list.”³

¹ F.O.424.203.1. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 6, 1902, No. 4 Telegraphic.

² F.O.424.203.3. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 13, 1902, No.7. Telegraphic.

³ F.O.424.203.11.Lamb to O’Conor, Erzerum, Dec. 31, 1901 No. 24, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 20, 1902, No. 18.

Armenian revolutionary agitation continued unabated in the provinces of Bitlis and Van, which, unlike other provinces, harbored large Armenian populations.⁴ As early as January 7, British consul Freeman reported from Bitlis that a group of revolutionaries who were besieged at the monastery of Arakh (Aragh, the previously mentioned Arakelots Vank, Monastery of the Apostles, near the village of Aragh in the Moush plain adjacent to the Kana Mountain of Sasun)⁵ were able to escape a few weeks earlier.⁶ The group had killed (Bshara) Khalil Sherif Agha in revenge, though their breakout was far more complicated than initially thought.⁷ According to one source:

There is some ground for the supposition that they were allowed to escape on account of the presence of children in the Monastery. The Prelate, who was accompanied by police officials, was received by the leader of the band, one Antranig of Sivas, who appears to have spoken very decidedly, in reply to the remark, that he and his men were ruining their own people. They wanted justice, he said, and

⁴ Hagop Manjikian Ed., *H.H.T. Albom-Atlas, Tiutsaznamard, 1890-1914* (ARF Album-Atlas: Freedom Fight, 1890-1914), (Los Angeles: Modern Type Printing and Lithography, 1992), 108-113. Manjikian mentions that during the period 1901-1904 there were some 15 fighters bands specializing in arms transportation from Russia (Kars and Yerevan via Alashgerd) and Persia (via Salmasd) into the eastern provinces, especially Bitlis and Van.

⁵ Garo Sasuni, *Badmutyun Daroni Ashkharhi* (History of Daron), (Beirut: Sevan Publishing, 1956), 352.

⁶ Ter Minasian, *Hay Heghapokhagani me Hushere* (Memoirs of an Armenian Revolutionary), (Beirut: Hamazkayin Press, 1974), vol. 3, 229-233. The revolutionaries, numbering about 60, were able to hold the monastery for three weeks and escape unscathed. The action was a desperate move on behalf of the ARF fedayees to bring attention to the plight of Armenian peasants in Bitlis, who were being harassed by the Kurdish Hamidiye units and *Multezims* (tax collectors).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 184, 217-218. The beheading of Bshara Khalil Agha by Antranig was in retaliation to the latter's beheading of Agpyur Serop (Serop Vartanian), a seasoned Armenian fedayee from Khlat (a county north-west of Lake Van) in 1899. Serop died after being poisoned by some Kurds.

they had taken up arms because they had lost all hope of obtaining it by peaceful means.”⁸

The Ottoman minister of war informed O’Conor that Russia was supporting the passage of Armenian revolutionaries from the Caucasus to the empire, which allegedly justified acts of retaliation against them. According to the minister “recent reports mentioned that 300 more Armenian revolutionaries had crossed the Russian frontier, probably near Alashgird [Alashgerd], and were on their way to Moush district and Sasun Mountains.”⁹ Such developments did not prevent the ARF from extending its revolutionary resistance starting in 1902.

Moreover, since the promised reforms never materialized, the Armenian population of Bitlis was in a desperate mood. The campaign within the peasantry to join the Russian Orthodox Church and even to move to Russia, or perhaps near the border, was perceived as a threat to the very existence of Armenians in the province.¹⁰ Russia was fully aware of the Armenian plight, though it never favored accepting Armenians into the Russian Church. It is worth recalling that Petersburg sent back thousands of “Armenian immigrants” who had settled inside its borders, which made the situation even worse. Ironically, the sultan’s government was against the return of these peasants and, in a move to appease Russia, granted the latter some leeway regarding the movements of its diplomatic personnel within

⁸ F.O.424.203.16. Freeman to O’Conor, Bitlis, January 7, 1902, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 21, 1902, No. 22.

⁹ F.O.424.203.30.Maunsell to O’Conor, Constantinople, Feb. 12, 1902 No.1 enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 14, 1902 No. 60.

¹⁰ F.O.424.203.37. Freeman to O’Conor, Bitlis, January 31, 1902, Confidential, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 24, 1902, No. 79.

the eastern provinces.¹¹ Conditions on the ground grew worse over time, as reported in a dispatch from Consul Anderson from Diyarbakir:

The Christian villages all belong to some Kurd Agha, and so long as they satisfy him, they may or may not be well treated according to the disposition of the Agha; but as the Kurds are continually fighting amongst themselves, and it is their custom in case of a quarrel to attack each other's Christian villages, these latter are far from having a comfortable existence; if, however, they were not under some Agha's protection, they would not be able to exist at all. This condition of things is, of course, no new one, but the state of the Christians would appear to be growing steadily worse."¹²

According to Anderson, the major cause for this situation was the six Hamidiye regiments that operated within the province, often with impunity.¹³ In general, weaker tribes were chosen to serve in the Hamidiye regiments, even if "care seems to have been taken to select tribes unfriendly to each other, and, therefore, unlikely to unite only under Government orders." Interestingly, "no Hamidiye officer or man appears ever to be brought to account for his misdeeds, however outrageous," which spoke volumes as far as

¹¹ Ter Minasian, *Hay Heghapokhagani*, vol. 3, 239.

¹² F.O.424.203.20. Anderson, Diyarbakir, January 6, 1902, enclosure in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 28, 1902, No.34.

¹³ Ibid. These were:

1. Regiment of Ibrahim Pasha Milli (National) tribe
2. Regiment of Halil Bey Kara Ketchi tribe
3. Regiment of Kiki tribe
4. Regiment of Dakori tribe
5. Regiment of Mustapha Pasha Miran tribe
6. Regiment of Tayyan Arabs

the knowledge of state officials in whatever deeds many of these individuals engaged in. Numerous reports of insecure roads filled diplomatic sources, with frequent robberies, as Muslims in Diyarbakir openly intimidated and harassed Christians.¹⁴ To show that the situation was under control within his province, the governor of Diyarbakir went out of his way,

...apparently [to] justify his former representations and action, [by] now collecting “mozbatas” [sic, *Mazbata*; officialy signed reports by residents] from the Christian villages in the neighborhood, to the effect that, first, there is perfect quiet; secondly, they do not wish to have foreigners in the country; thirdly, they will not allow any revolutionists to enter their village. It is scarcely necessary to say that such “mozbatas” are absolutely valueless.¹⁵

Whether the Governor’s justifications were valuable was, of course, debatable as were the claims made by the mutesarraf (county or district governor) of Moush, who asserted that “Kurds committed all of the ‘crimes’ in the area.” According to the British consul, however, the evidence and the existing danger of a new massacre in Bitlis contradicted the Ottoman official.¹⁶ British consular dispatches from Bitlis cautioned that increased inspections would occur in anticipation of an alleged Armenian uprising in the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ F.O.424.203.31. Anderson to O’Conor, Diyarbakir, January 28, 1902, No. 3, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 14, 1902, No. 61.

¹⁶ F.O.424.203.39. Freeman to O’Conor, Bitlis, January 29, 1902, Confidential, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 24, 1902 No. 86.

spring.¹⁷ Clearly, the local government was trying to appease Kurdish notables and to let them know that any harassment of Armenians would go unpunished. Such was the case of the so-called trial of Faris Agha. In the words of Consul Freeman:

Looking at the case as a whole, I have been forced to the conclusion that the charges brought against Faris were true, that the trial was, as usual, sheer make-believe, and that the least serious of his offences was selected beforehand with the view of inflicting a punishment calculated to avert the unfavorable comments which an acquittal might evoke elsewhere, and yet be a virtual triumph for the Agha and his friends. I believe it is no exaggeration to say that Faris has been a robber and tyrant.¹⁸

Freeman further stated that “the Aghas look upon the Armenians as their lawful prey, and the authorities connive at their misdeeds, secretly approving the repression, by oppression, of the subject race.”¹⁹ Hence Kurdish tithe-farmers enjoyed total freedom in impoverishing Armenian villagers, by taking over their land titles at will. Freeman concluded: “I beg permission to add that there is no doubt in my mind of the complicity of the Vali, Husni Bey in this compromise between justice to one side and surrender to the other,”²⁰ which were grave accusations.

¹⁷ F.O.424.203.57. Freeman to O’Conor, Bitlis, March 8, 1902, No. 4, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, April 1, 1902, No. 156.

¹⁸ F.O.424.203.90. Freeman to O’Conor, Bitlis, June 7, 1902, No. 7, enclosure in de Bunsen to Lansdowne, Constantinople, June 30, 1902, No. 300.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

To make matters worse, and in an effort to underline the extent of an alleged Armenian “treachery” or “conspiracy,” the Ottoman Ambassador in London wrote to the British foreign minister to inform him that a certain Garabed, son of Johannes (Hovannes), had been arrested at Erzindjian (Yerzinga, Erzinjan) carrying a list of Armenians residing in various provinces. The letter charged that materials for manufacturing bombs were found in the residence of one of the individuals whose name appeared on the suspected list. Supposedly, two Armenians in Agn had tried to extort money from an Armenian notable, when the latter informed the police whose units promptly arrested them.²¹

This was the first such incident mentioned in British diplomatic correspondence regarding an ARF initiative, codenamed Potorig (Storm), that was operational from 1901 to 1903 and whose aim was to oblige Armenian notables worldwide—through the use of force and assassination if necessary—to contribute money for the revolutionary cause. The initiative, which was decided upon during the Third ARF General Congress held in February-March, 1898 in Sofia, Bulgaria, was entrusted to Kristapor Mikayelian, one of the founders of the organization.²²

Yet, regardless of the military build-up in Sasun, for example, and the generally bad conditions on the ground, 6,000 Armenians visited the monastery of St. Garabed after the travel ban imposed upon them was lifted. Still, circumstances changed from one city to

²¹ F.O.424.203.61. Anthopoulos [Kostaki Pasha] (Ottoman Embassy) to Lansdowne, London, April 18, 1902. Enclosed: Aide-mémoire. Communication du Gouverneur-Général de Mamouret-ul-Aziz. The second case creates the impression that the two people arrested were revolutionaries who were acting upon orders from their committee to obtain money for their cause. In fact, Armenian committees had sometimes resorted to such actions vis-à-vis wealthy Armenians in order to incur the costs of their activities and to oblige the latter to contribute their “fair share” to the general cause.

²² Manjikian, *Albom-Atlas*, 95-97; F.O.424.205.84; Stevens to Lansdowne, Batum, August 13, 1903, No.9. According to the dispatch, an Armenian notable whose name is not supplied was murdered for not paying to the revolutionary cause and for informing the authorities.

another, and from one village to the next. Hamidiye units continued to ill-treat Armenians in Malazgerd (Manazgerd), for instance, which meant that the short interval of relative calm did not last long.²³

Elsewhere, two Armenians were hanged in Bayazid, with Vice-Consul Lamb commenting on the event: “I cannot help thinking that the execution of these men is intended as a reply to the pro-Armenian demonstrations, which have recently been reported in the European press as having taken place at Brussels.”²⁴

Noticeably, the situation of many Armenians was better in Kurdistan itself, which illustrated local involvement in the decision-making process. A British vice-consul who was traveling in the area noted: “Kurd and Armenian live together happily. There was no massacre in Mukush,” while in Bohtan “the Christian population has diminished enormously. Villages shown as Christian in the War Office Route Book of 1893 are now entirely Kurd[ish].”²⁵ More important, the Kurdish spirit of freedom manifested in this remote area of Kurdistan, which was reminiscent of Kurdish liberation struggles of decades past, surfaced:

There is still a glimmer of national spirit among them [Kurds], and a strong anti-Governmental feeling. At Heshatt, the old Agha asked me anxiously if I had met any of Bedr Khan [Bedirhan] Bey’s sons in Constantinople, and said he was waiting for orders. I gathered that

²³ F.O.424.203.119. Freeman to de Bunsen, Bitlis, August 5, 1902, No. 8, enclosure in de Bunsen to Lansdowne, August 27, 1902, No. 379 confidential.

²⁴ F.O.424.203.120. Lamb to de Bunsen, Erzerum, August 12, 1902, No. 18, enclosure in de Bunsen to Lansdowne, Constantinople, August 27, 1902, No.380.

²⁵ F.O.424.203.141. Tyrell to O’Conor, Van, October 7, 1902, No.23, enclosure to O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, November 3, 1902, No. 482.

one of them, Osman Pasha, occasionally corresponds with him and is engaged in some quite futile intrigue.²⁶

Although protected by their Kurdish chieftains, Armenians in Bohtan, like their brethren in other parts of the eastern provinces, were slowly being deprived of their lands through various stratagems. Armenians seemed to be easy prey, as verified in the following diplomatic dispatch:

Such different men as Muti'ulla Bey of Mukush and the Agha-i-Sor, in conversation with me, said that the Kurdish people bore no particular enmity towards the Christians, but that the Aghas were responsible for their oppression, and that [the] Government had set the example by showing them, during the time of the massacres and since, an easy way to become rich by simply taking everything they wanted from the Christians.²⁷

Such news trickled down to revolutionary elements, whose resolve hardened in 1903, after the futile attempt to assassinate Maghakia Ormanian, the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople. According to O'Conor, the assailant was believed to be a member of an Armenian revolutionary committee.²⁸ More often than not, Armenian revolutionaries were dubbed as troublemakers, instigating tensions. Relying on a report produced by an Armenian informant, Consul Freeman asserted that about forty revolutionaries were organized into three bands in Sasun, and that "their plan [wa]s to act according to events in

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ F.O.424.205.3. Whitehead to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 26, 1903, No.41.

Macedonia.” Moreover, “the fixed purpose of the revolutionists this time [was] to provoke such a slaughter of their race that the Powers will be compelled to intervene once [and] for all.”²⁹ Soon, thirty-two more revolutionaries arrived, with one-half sent to Van while the other half settled in Bitlis. Weapons and caches of ammunitions were brought in by special armed bands.³⁰ This was accomplished through special agreements with Kurdish tribal leaders on the periphery of the empire—the most important route being that from Salmast in northwestern Persia—since the ARF was especially keen to establish such alliances in order to facilitate the smuggling of fighters, weapons and ammunition into the empire:

It would appear that the revolutionists have an understanding with the Sheikh of Neri [in Hakkari], who has a following of about 2,000 Kurds. In accordance with this compact, the Sheikh will help or at least allow armed revolutionists to cross the Persian frontier undisturbed.³¹

The situation deteriorated when more Armenian fighters reached Moush or were headquartered in Sasun, which was fast becoming the center of revolutionary agitation. On the other hand, the government made things worse by demanding taxes from destitute peasants, based on population figures prior to the 1895 massacres.³² Patriarch Ormanian was disturbed by news of revolutionary fighters concentrated in Sasun while government

²⁹ F.O.424.205.4. Freeman to O’Conor, Bitlis, January 10, 1903, No. 1. Confidential, enclosure to Whitehead to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 27, 1903, No. 42 Confidential.

³⁰ BOA, 1346-12-108, Yıldız Mutenevvi Mairuzat Evrakı ve Analitik Envanterler, *Kafkas Ermeni Eşkiyasının Huduttan Girmesini Önlemek İçin Tedbir Alınması, 1903* (Measures taken to stop Armenian Bandits from entering through the border, 1903).

³¹ F.O.424.205.13. Freeman to O’Conor, Bitlis, January 24, 1903, No. 2 Confidential, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 26, 1903, No. 104 Confidential.

³² F.O.424.205.14. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, March 3, 1903, No. 113.

figures warned against possible disturbances in Constantinople caused by revolutionary elements.³³

Consul Tyrell reported from Van that he did not believe in the existence of Armenian bands in the area, since he could not find any evidence corroborating Turkish views regarding the matter. Tyrell further added that Armenians did not support revolutionaries, that they wished to be left alone, and that “even in 1896 the massacres in this vilayet were undoubtedly directly engineered by the Government.”³⁴ Tyrell then summed up his report by stating: “I wish to say that the continuation of the present state of affairs here depends entirely on Constantinople—on the view and on the line of action taken by the Central Government.”³⁵

In June 1903, however, several Armenians were arrested in Mamuret-ul-Aziz (Kharpert, Harput) with the usual threats of massacre. Local authorities asked an American doctor there to sign a statement explaining that “no special care” was necessary for a tortured Armenian professor.³⁶ Conditions deteriorated further when Turkish troops and Kurdish bands attacked St. Hagop monastery near Erzinjan, under the pretext that the religious institution was hiding revolutionaries.

In Sasun villagers fled to the mountains, frightened that the attacks would reach them.³⁷ Soon, an armed encounter took place between Armenian revolutionaries and the

³³ F.O.424.205.33. Marinitich to Block, [Constantinople], April 20, 1903, No.122 Confidential, enclosure to O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, April 22, 1903, No. 212.

³⁴ F.O.424.205.No.53. Tyrell to O’Conor, Van, June 5, 1903, No. 20, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, June 24, 1903, No.364.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ F.O.424.205.60. Vallon to Hampson, Mamuret-ul-Aziz, June 13, 1903, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, July 13, 1903, No.394.

³⁷ F.O.424.205.62. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, July 21, 1903, No. 411.

combined Turkish-Kurdish forces, which necessitated that Armenians retreat to Talori (Dalvorig). Simultaneously, the army distributed some 800 rifles to new Kurdish recruits, as troops besieged Sasun alleging that some 300—according to other sources as many as 1,000—Armenian fighters were stationed there.³⁸ Arming Kurdish irregulars continued when 2,400 rifles were distributed amongst three Kurdish tribes. While government representatives denied such measures, British diplomatic personnel reported that irregular elements followed a complete division of regular troops in their quest to subdue Sasun where confrontations continued unabated. Still, it was very hard to track troop movements due to the mountainous topography of the area. What was undisputed, however, was the arrival of additional troops brought as a back-up force.³⁹

On this occasion, consul Hampson reported the following from Moush:

In my humble opinion there is very little room for doubt that the authorities have made full arrangements to use the pretext of the presence of a certain number of revolutionaries in the Sasun mountains in order to give the Armenians there a severe lesson in the nature of that inflicted in 1894; and that the Kurdish tribes have been summoned to the mountains in order to assist the troops in

³⁸ F.O.424.205.70. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, August 2, 1903, No. 115 Telegraphic; F.O.424.205.72. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, August 3, 1903, No. 117 Telegraphic; F.O.424.205.78. Hampson to O’Conor, Erzerum, July 30, 1903, No. 22, enclosure 1 in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, August 11, 1903, No. 463.

³⁹ F.O.424.205.74. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, August 4, 1903, No. 438; F.O.424.205.78. Hampson to O’Conor, Erzerum, July 30, 1903, No. 23, enclosure 2 in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, August 11, 1903, No. 463; F.O.424.205.81. Maunsell to O’Conor, Constantinople, August 11, 1903, No. 42, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, August 12, 1903, No. 469; F.O.424.205.87. Heathcote to O’Conor, Bitlis, August 4, 1903, No. 11, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, August 18, 1903, No. 487.

their work. It is possible that it was intended to clear Sasun of Armenians once for all and to replace them by Kurds.⁴⁰

Although this whole operation was abandoned after the British embassy presented formal complaints to the sultan, hostilities did not end until Armenian revolutionaries retreated beyond the Russian border, following armed encounters with Ottoman troops stationed there. Moreover, and as the British vice-consul stated: “Signs have not been wanting lately of some kind of concerted movement between the ‘Committees’ in Macedonia and the Armenian revolutionaries; but any such agreement has entirely failed to be effective in these parts, so far, owing to the feeble action of the latter and the want of sympathy with them among the Christian population here.”⁴¹ Dispatching some of the Armenian fighters to Russia had weakened the Armenian resolve in Sasun. Still, the remaining fighters received reinforcements and supplies and, in the words of Vice-Consul Heathcote of Moush, who forwarded two letters on the subject, to Ambassador O’Conor—one of which was signed by some revolutionary leaders in Sasun:

Pray take some trouble to note how many persons are killed in every Armenian village each year, and how many imprisoned wholly without reason; how many Armenian women, brides, and girls are kidnapped, violated, or forced to change their religion and taken to the harems of Turks and Kurds.

⁴⁰ F.O.424.205.97. Hampson to O’Conor, Erzerum, August 23, 1903, No. 27, enclosure 2 in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, September 3, 1903, No. 529.

⁴¹ F.O.424.205.107. Hampson to O’Conor, Erzerum, September 2, 1903, No. 28, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, September 17, 1903, No. 571.

Dear Sir, the general massacres that took place in 1894, 1895, and 1896 have indeed weakened and enervated the forces of the Armenians for revolutionary organization, and prevented the execution of our plans; but don't be deceived and think that under this immovable and peaceful appearance our whole effort for self-dependence is exhausted and the whole hope for freedom is dead within the Armenian. We waited this long in the hope that Europe would consider as sufficient the amount of blood that Armenians have shed; and, in accordance with its promise and its pledged principles, would put a stop to the present hellish régime that dominated all Turkish Armenia. But our hopes are not in vain.⁴²

The leaders than stressed that they would restart their agitation and that conditions would once again be “confusing,” and that

floods of blood and tears shall again be shed, and the deadly strife shall continue till the Armenians at last attain their ideal or are sacrificed for their just rights on the threshold of the brilliant twentieth century. Hereafter we will neither petition nor beg; We will only grasp our weapons and will continue to trust our own destiny; But once again we consider it our duty to invite your

⁴² F.O.424.205.123. Heathcote to O'Conor, Bitlis, September 15, 1903, No. 18, enclosure 2 in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, October 2, 1903, No. 629, enclosure 3: Letter received at Moush by Vice-Consul Heathcote on September 1, 1903. (Seal, bearing a book, a spade, a pen, and a sword, surrounded by the inscription “A.R. Alliance, Ikatnavartsarap [?] Central Committee.”), August 13, 1903.

attention to the present bitter condition of the people, and to show you the natural course of affairs.⁴³

However, the leaders note also contained an ultimatum regarding European inaction:

But if European Governments and nations continue to neglect the humane principles which they profess and preach; If, with criminal indifference, they again betray the martyred Armenian people to the claws of the “red monster” [reference is to Abdulhamid II]; If they perform their duty as mere and heartless spectators, as they have done until now, history will consider them as such.

On behalf of the Armenian Revolutionists of Moush and Sassun,
signed by:

Hurire [Hrayr Tzhokhk, Armenag Mampre Ghazarian].

Torlkom [Torkom-Tuman Tumaniants].

Vahan [Hovsep of Shadakh].

Antranig [Toros Ozanian].⁴⁴

A prescient note in more ways than one, this dispatch highlighted Armenian concerns, and how key Armenian revolutionary leaders managed to share their grave concerns with British representatives. It highlighted, furthermore, that British embassy officials in Constantinople were privy to both developments on the ground as well as Armenian perceptions. Indeed, these views were discerning in light of what occurred next,

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

as the Ottoman military started an active patrol of the borders with Russia and Persia, where numerous skirmishes occurred between troops and revolutionaries trying to re-cross them at will.

Simultaneously, Constantinople started arming Kurdish tribes in Diyarbakir to aid the army against revolutionaries.⁴⁵ According to various reports, revolutionary elements sustained heavy losses in several attempts to cross the border and to relocate into Van and Sasun. Russian border patrols worked in a concentrated effort with their Ottoman counterparts, to stragulate revolutionaries who were besieged by the two armies. Russian troops even apprehended scores of Armenian revolutionary fighters and imprisoned them in Kars while the remnants of some groups reached their destinations despite extreme hardships and fighting.⁴⁶ With their numbers increasing and with new supplies and ammunition streaming in, Armenian fighters reasserted their control over Sasun, and some portions of the Moush plain as well as the city of Moush itself. According to British

⁴⁵ F.O.424.205.123. Enclosure 4, Hampson to O'Conor, Erzerum, October 2, 1903 Telegraphic; F.O.424.205.124. O'Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, October 2, 1903, No.630.

⁴⁶ F.O.424.205.130. O'Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, October 9, 1903, No.650; Hampson to O'Conor, Erzerum, October. 3, 1903, No. 36, enclosure 2 in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, October 15, 1903, No.670; F.O.424.205.139. Hampson to O'Conor, Erzerum, September 30, 1903, enclosure in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, October 16, 1903, No.677; F.O.424.205.140. Heathcote to O'Conor, Bitlis, October 16, 1903 Telegraphic, enclosure in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, October 16, 1903, No.681. Mobilization of regular and irregular forces implemented on account of revolutionaries having successfully crossed borders; F.O.424.205.146. Hampson to O'Conor, Erzerum, October 3, 1903, No. 36, enclosure 1 in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, October 23, 1903, No.704. Three bands had entered the Ottoman Empire between September 30 and October 2. The three Armenian bands lost over 60 fighters according to the Ottoman governor; F.O.424.205.160. Tyrell to O'Conor, Van, October 27, 1903, No. 33, enclosure to O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, November 17, 1903, No. 764. About 120 revolutionaries had been killed in the border areas. This figure is more realistic if compared to Armenian sources. Manjikian, *H.H.T. Albom-Atlas*, 108-132. Most of the border fights took place in Alashgerd where fighters groups were trying to penetrate the border via Kars. Also important were the Salmast-Van (via Iran) and the Yerevan-Arjesh and Yerevan Pergri routes. The groups led by Khan [Parsegh Tiriakian], Torkom [Touman Toumaniants], Goms (Vahan Papazian, also known as the Doctor) and Vana Ishkhan (literally The Prince of Van, real name Nigol Boghosian-Mikayelian), and Nevruz (Onnig, last [family] name unknown) suffered the highest casualty rates. As a matter of fact two of the leaders, Khan and Nevruz, were killed during these border infiltration operations.

diplomatic dispatches, Antranig and Toumanoff (Nigol Tuman, Nigoghayos Der Hovannesian) had assumed the military command of the fighters in Sasun where, according to Ottoman reports, they allegedly deployed some 5,000 to 6,000 trained fighters.⁴⁷

To make things even worse for Armenian villagers living near the border areas, Hamidiye units acted as border guards, even if their major occupation was to harass villagers.⁴⁸ Inclement winter weather, however, brought to a halt all military operations on both sides, although the two parties intended to resume activities as soon as possible. Such an assertion was substantiated by the following diplomatic dispatch: “Nothing is known here to indicate that the revolutionaries are likely to attack the Government, though doubtless they have received some reinforcements of late, and as snow has already fallen on the higher mountains, any important movement will soon be very difficult.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ F.O.424.205.151. Hampson to O’Conor, Erzerum, October 19, 1903, No.42, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, October 29, 1903, No.717. This number is totally exaggerated even if one takes into account the regular villagers who supported the fighters; F.O.424.205.156. Maunsell to O’Conor, Constantinople, November 6, 1903, No. 61, enclosure O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, November 6, 1903, No.742. In this dispatch the number of fighters in Bitlis and Erzerum are estimated at no more than 500. Armenian sources estimate the number of Armenian fighters in Sasun at about 200 fighters and 800 armed villagers; Manjikian, *H.H.T. Albom-Atlas*, 136. The British diplomats serving in the area were misinformed about the actual leadership of the Armenian armed forces in Sasun. In fact the leadership was entrusted to a military committee rather than individuals. It is extremely doubtful that Toumanoff was ever present in Sasun in 1903. He only reached the Area in 1904 commanding a revolutionary group that passed the border via Alashgerd; Manjikian, *H.H.T. Albom-Atlas*, 108; Ter Minasian, *Hay Heghapokhagani*, vol. 3, 252-260; F.O.424.205.151. Hampson to O’Conor, Erzerum, November 16, 1903, No.51, enclosure 2 in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, November 24, 1903, No.783. No estimates are available as to the number of revolutionaries in Sasun. The high number is a simple addition of the number of Armenian males in the area plus the alleged arrivals from elsewhere.

⁴⁸ F.O.424.205.159. Shipley to O’Conor, Erzerum, November 4, 1903, No.47, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, November 17, 1903, No.763.

⁴⁹ F.O.424.205.162. Heathcote to O’Conor, Bitlis, November 10, 1903, No. 21, enclosure 1 in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, November 24, 1903, No. 783.

It was also obvious that the relative calm of winter was going to deteriorate soon, since one report confirmed that “the country is quiet, but there is very general discontent with the Government, enhanced by the new taxes, as explained in my No. 38 of the 11th November. There is nothing very significant in this dissatisfaction, though it is shared by Turk, Kurd, and Christian. It is perennial here, and though the feeling is, generally, that any change would be welcome, yet that nothing can be done to improve matters.” Consul Tyrell continued his report by stating that Hamidiye leader Hussein Pasha had become the effective ruler of Adeljivas and that he had taken over the village of Kojeri, extorting its inhabitants to build his Abode using stones from the dilapidated local church.

More interesting, however, was what he reported regarding Muslim immigrants settling on Armenian lands in Malazgird: “I was also informed [while] here that a fresh immigration of *muhajirs* from Russia, chiefly Circassians – 500 or 600 families, is expected, and that arrangements are being made to settle them, chiefly in Bulanik and Khinis [Khnus].”⁵⁰ This was yet another blatant illustration of the systematic resettlement efforts encouraged by state authorities.

Describing the border areas of Bulanik and Alashgerd, Tyrell, who had recently traveled through the region, added:

There are only three or four Armenian villages in this [Bulanik] kaza [county], most of the settled inhabitants being Muhajirs of Turcoman origin. They are called Karapapak [Black hat wearers],

⁵⁰ F.O.424.206.6. Tyrell to O’Conor, Van, December 24, 1903, No. 43, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 23, 1904, No. 32.

part of them being from the Caucasus and part from Azerbaijan, and their settlements extend in[to] the Alashgird plain. Some of them are Shujas. They are better agriculturists than the Circassians and Kurds, and good gardeners as well. In Alashgird, there are several large and thriving villages and many Armenians, but the number of these last was reduced during the massacres, and they say that the plain has not yet attained the pitch of prosperity which it enjoyed before those events.⁵¹

Tyrell also reported about the Hamidiye regiments of the infamous Haideranli tribe:

I found arrangements being made to settle a proportion of Haideranli immigrants from Persia among the Yezidis... During my whole journey I had good opportunity of studying the Hamidié; and the more I see of this force, the more convinced am I of its comparative uselessness. Some of the regiments in reality exist only on paper; arms have not been issued to them, and I doubt if they would be readily procurable when wanted, though the Commandants and other Turkish officers always make out that they are stored at Erzeroum and Erzinjian ready for immediate issue... If an officer knows the number of the regiment to which he belongs, and the name of the tribe which supplies it, that is probably the extent of his knowledge, and inquiry will reveal that he is ignorant of the name of

⁵¹ Ibid.

the Agha of the tribe, of his residence, of the tribal officers, and of nearly everything concerning the regiment.⁵²

The Second (1904) Massacre of Sasun

If the year 1903 witnessed momentous events, perhaps it was a precursor to a larger campaign by Ottoman troops to once again bring Sasun under control. However, 1904 turned out to be truly tragic. Conditions in all parts of the provinces of Bitlis and Van were getting worse. In the latter, ominous echoes of trouble were reported, one declaring that “as soldiers were beating and robbing, they said: ‘This is only a foretaste of what is going to happen to you Christians in the spring,’ or words to that effect.”⁵³ Such boldness notwithstanding, Armenian revolutionary bands continued their efforts to cross the border from Russia or Persia, and it seems that some Kurdish tribes, especially those not affiliated with the Hamidiye, helped Armenian revolutionaries at this time.⁵⁴

Major tensions started in February 1904 in the plain of Moush whose “immediate cause appear to have been an affray between revolutionaries and tax-collectors, [though] a general belief was prevalent that the Kurds were ready for excesses, and that orders from Constantinople existed to which they could appeal in justification.”⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ F.O.424.206.9. Tyrell to O’Conor, Van, January 8, 1904, No. 2, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 31, 1904, No. 54.

⁵⁴ F.O.424.206.14. Evelyn Grant Duff to Lansdowne, Tehran, January 26, 1904, No. 13, enclosure in Wratislaw to Hardinge, Tabriz, December 28, 1903, No. 27. Confidential; Manjikian, *H.H.T. Albom-Atlas*, 134; Ter Minasian, *Hay Heghapokhagani*, 259-262; F.O.424.206.55. Tyrell to O’Conor, Van, April 11, 1904, No.10, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 5, 1904, No. 327. According to Tyrell: “Revolutionists are said to be continually arriving in Van, disguised as Kurds; and the Kurds are quite ready to help them to do so, allowing them to pass over the frontier, and assisting them on their way, for adequate pay.”

⁵⁵ F.O.424.206.19. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 23, 1904, No. 118.

At the time, however, the Ottoman government explained its fresh measures against the Armenians by stating that Antranig, leading almost a thousand revolutionaries in the mountains of Sasun, was committing outrages against Muslims and that Constantinople was forced to raise funds to meet the new challenge. Moreover, revolutionaries apparently attacked tax-collectors, further justifying excessive measures against everyone. Beyond these explanations, Kurds appeared to be waiting to attack Armenians, with local Ottoman authorities ready for contingency plans for a massacre to proceed with their avowals. Suffice it to say that tensions ran high as a threatening atmosphere obligated many Armenian villagers to join revolutionary forces because they feared attacks by gendarmes whose notorious revenge actions, especially on women and children, were widely known and feared.⁵⁶ In the words of the British Consul stationed in Bitlis:

The ordinary Armenian peasant is doubtless a somewhat difficult subject for taxation, especially in his present impoverished state, but, like all other peasants, he does not leave his fields and his family and take to the mountains except as a measure of despair, and the mere fact that open villages like Hunan can offer no resistance to the troops should in itself suffice to restrain the authorities from such excesses as will drive the inhabitants to the mountain fastnesses... After the complete impunity of the promoters of the

⁵⁶ F.O.424.206.19. O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 23, 1904, No. 118; F.O.424.206.21. O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, March 1, 1904, No. 141; F.O.424.206.24. Heathcote to O'Connor, Bitlis, February 13, 1904, No. 5, enclosure 1 in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, March 8, 1904, No. 155.

massacres in 1895, the Kurds naturally think that the Government is more or less indifferent to their proceedings.⁵⁷

The gravity of the situation prompted Ambassador O'Connor to meet with the sultan, suggesting that the porte negotiate with Armenian revolutionaries to circumvent an eminent bloodbath.⁵⁸ For his part, Sultan Abdulhamid apparently "entered into a desultory history of the ingratitude and infidelity of the Armenians to the Imperial House of Osman, and cited instances of Armenians who had been employed in positions of the utmost confidence by his father and himself." "Eventually," reported the Ambassador, "the monarch turned to the idea I [O'Connor] had thrown out, and remarked that it seemed to him deserving of consideration, and that it had already crossed his mind."⁵⁹

Beyond the sultan's diplomatic bravura, it was after this key meeting that the palace ordered the Armenian patriarch to open negotiations with revolutionary leaders through the ruler's representatives in Moush. Patriarch Ormanian requested that an official delegation be dispatched to concretely show the porte's honest intentions, and lodged a strong protest regarding corruption in the provincial administration as well as the general ineffectiveness of the government that was going from "worse to worst."⁶⁰ Revolutionary spokesmen rejected the patriarch's offers, stating that they would rather negotiate with

⁵⁷ F.O.424.206.20. Heathcote to O'Connor, Bitlis, February 20, 1904, No.8, enclosure 2 in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, March 8, 1904, No. 155.

⁵⁸ F.O.424.206.31. Heathcote to O'Connor, Bitlis, March 5, 1904, No.9, enclosure in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, March 28, 1904, No. 202. Muslims had informed consuls of a plan to attack Armenians. Some Kurdish leaders were opposed to the idea for the time being.

⁵⁹ F.O.424.206.25. O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, March 12, 1904, No. 166.

⁶⁰ F.O.424.206.26. O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, March 16, 1904, No. 176; F.O.424.206.29. Shipley to O'Connor, Erzerum, March 12, 1904, No.13, enclosure in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, March 22, 1904, No.195.

European consuls as mediators.⁶¹ Noticeably, and although Abdulhamid sent the most stringent orders to avoid massacres, and while the local government in Bitlis formed new gendarme battalions manned exclusively with Circassians to check the Kurdish Hamidiye forces, Consul Heathcote remarked that “it is perhaps natural that these men should avail themselves of their position as gendarmes to rob and oppress the Armenians, who dread them at least as much as the regular Kurdish Zapties [sic, Zaptiye, gendarme forces].”⁶² Meanwhile, Armenian revolutionaries had prepared themselves for the worst, and though outnumbered, they tried to calm the population as much as possible. In fact, their desire to rely on European consuls as mediators suggested that they feared conditions might worsen even more. Thus, they wanted European powers, especially Britain, to be privy of the plight that faced the Armenian nation.⁶³

⁶¹ F.O.424.206.33. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, April 5, 1904, No. 63 Telegraphic; F.O.424.206.499. Heathcote to O’Conor, Bitlis, April 9, 1904, No.13 Confidential, enclosure 1 in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, April 26, 1904, No. 301 Confidential. Concerning the failure of the patriarch’s mission Heathcote wrote: “In the first place, the refusal of the Imperial Government to give the proceedings an official character, in accordance with the Patriarch’s request that an officer should accompany his agents, will tend to throw doubt on his Beatitude’s assertions that he is acting on behalf of His Majesty; and, moreover, I understand that the Patriarch himself is not regarded with any great confidence by the authority of the Armenians in these parts, and if they suspect him of being too Turkish in his sympathies, it is probable that the revolutionaries would distrust him still more.”

⁶² F.O.424.206.39. Heathcote to O’Conor, Bitlis, March 19, 1904, No.11, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, April 6, 1904, No. 248.

⁶³ F.O.424.206.45. Heathcote to O’Conor, Bitlis, April 2, 1904, No.12, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, April 20, 1904, No. 284; F.O.424.206.46. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, April 18, 1904, No. 285 Confidential. The Porte had informed O’Conor that the number of revolutionaries was 300-400 with 100 trained peasants guarding their flank; F.O.424.206.499. Heathcote to O’Conor, Bitlis, April 9, 1904, No.13 Confidential, enclosure 1 in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, April 26, 1904, No. 301 Confidential. Heathcote remarks: “Unfortunately I have no means of ascertaining the real intentions of the effective force of the revolutionaries. As to the former, it is generally believed that they have abandoned all hope of securing reforms except through Europeans, and preferably British, intervention. If this is so, though they may have no desire to provoke hostilities, they would wish to keep the question open as long as possible, and would be likely to regret the mere offer of personal safety even if they could regard it as secure, unless it were the only alternative to immediate annihilation.” See also Ter Minasian, *Hay Heghapokhagani*, 261-289. This is a detailed account of the Sasun incidents of 1904; Manjikian, *H.H.T. Albom-Atlas*, 136-149.

Irrespective of diplomatic exchanges and high level contacts between the porte, the patriarch, and revolutionary leaders, the government's detention, and subsequent imprisonment of several members of the local council—including the bishop of Moush—because of alleged “false declarations,”—coincided with the first round of fighting between Armenians and Kurdish Hamidiye troops.⁶⁴ Aware of a particular prisoner's influence, the governor of Bitlis retrieved the bishop and ordered him to mediate with the revolutionaries. Surprising the governor, the bishop insisted that the official should accompany him to these imposed and hastily arranged negotiations, a proposition that the governor refused, alleging that the bishop was in league with the revolutionaries and wanted to trap the state's representative. The governor's intent was to put the blame of the fighting on Armenians as he further insinuated that the revolutionaries were planning to provoke foreign intervention.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, the fighting had spread and reports of burnt villages circulated in Sasun. Ironically, Constantinople insisted that the Kurds were responsible for the carnage, and that the porte was blameless. Heathcote's assessment of the situation differed somewhat:

With eighteen and twenty battalions surrounding Sasun, and with negotiations actually in progress, it would be nothing less than shameful to the Ottoman Government if it should permit the tribes to

⁶⁴ F.O.424.206.58. Heathcote to O'Conor, Bitlis, April 23, 1904, No.18, enclosure in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 10, 1904, No. 335 Confidential. Heathcote confirms too that consular correspondence had been tampered with. F.O.424.206.59. Heathcote to O'Conor, Bitlis, April 23, 1904, No.17, enclosure in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 10, 1904, No. 340. According to Heathcote: “No one here has any certain knowledge of the cause of the arrests, but some leading Armenians believe that the Bishop was charged with sending a false report;” F.O.424.206.60. Heathcote to O'Conor, Bitlis, April 23, 1904, No.19, enclosure in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 10, 1904, No. 341.

⁶⁵ F.O.424.206.71. Heathcote to O'Conor, Bitlis, April 30, 1904, No.20, enclosure in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 16, 1904, No. 367.

take the law into their own hands, and under the pretext of performing police duty, with which they ought to have no concern, to plunder, rape, and kill a population which, if in rebellion, has only been driven into that condition by the incapacity of the Government and the unbridled license which it has hitherto accorded to the Kurds.⁶⁶

Bewildered at the course of events, the governor ordered Arakel *Vartabed* (celibate priest), the superior of St. Garabed Monastery, to intervene. Commanded to represent the official and take his warning to the revolutionaries, the priest was instructed to secure formal and unconditional surrenders and, without even waiting for a definite result from his clerical envoy, the governor blamed him for being a sympathizer. In one of those moments of rage that were all too common when hatred overpowered logic, the local official ordered his already assembled Ottoman troops to attack the Armenian stronghold, with catastrophic consequences: thirty-seven villages were burned while most of their inhabitants fled to relatively safer havens in the mountains. Almost 1,000 Armenians became refugees at this initial stage of the government's anti-Armenian campaign. It was important to note that this was not an isolated case as the French consul witnessed similar incidents in the plain of Moush.

These organized episodes of systematic aggression continued through April and May 1904 with a final tally standing at over 4,000 Armenians killed and about 3,000 made homeless, refugees in their own land, not counting the thousands that sought shelter in the

⁶⁶ Ibid.

remaining villages of the plain of Moush and in friendly Kurdish territories, many of whom were driven out of their villages with no permission to return.⁶⁷ In fact, going back was futile since most of the villages were utterly destroyed, and the rest uninhabitable.⁶⁸

Regrettably, the policy to push Armenians out of Sasun, at least from the Ottoman perspective, proved successful. This was also what bewildered Europeans witnessed when they visited the area. Ambassador O'Connor's statement to the Grand Vezir was a telling illustration in this regard:

In fact, it seemed to me that the Government's policy was to drive the Armenians from the mountainous districts of Sassun to the Moush plains, where they would be under the eye of the authorities, but at the mercy of the Kurds. All that I heard pointed to the execution of the plan, and though, happily, the loss of life may not have been considerable, the ruin, poverty, and misery caused must remain, and reduce these much-tried people to the verge both of starvation and desperation.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ F.O.424.206.127. Heathcote to O'Connor, Moush, June 29, 1904, No.29, enclosure to O'Connor to Lansdowne, Therapia, July 11, 1904 No. 546. Suspects that 4,000 deaths in Sasun are not greatly exaggerated.

⁶⁸ F.O.424.206.74. O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 24, 1904, No. 391; F.O.424.206.75. O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 24, 1904, No. 392. "Memorandum by Mr. Lamb respecting affairs in Sasun," enclosure in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 24, 1904 No. 392. According to the Ottoman government the Armenians destroyed their villages in Sasun before leaving them. F.O.424.206.81. O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, June 1, 1904, No.420. "Information and assurances of the governor do not match the facts. The latter admits to 2000 refugees. However, there are too many widows and orphans." F.O.424.206.80. Tyrell to O'Connor, Van, May 14, 1904, No. 19, enclosure in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 30, 1904, No. 409; F.O.424.206.95. Heathcote to O'Connor, Moush, May 29, 1904, No.23, enclosure 1 in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, June 14, 1904, No.459. Refugees estimated at 3,000.

⁶⁹ F.O.424.206.75. O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 24, 1904, No. 392.

Indeed, the policy of uprooting the indigenous Armenian population from their ancestral homeland and repopulating those regions with Kurds and other immigrants from the Caucasus, was blatantly confirmed by additional diplomatic dispatches, including the following:

Mr. Heathcote added that neither insurgents nor fugitives would be allowed to return to their homes without special orders from here [Bitlis], since the Vali considers Armenian inhabitants of the mountains as intruders on Kurdish property, and is evidently desirous that they should be constrained to settle in the plain, although he denies that such is his wish, but professes that the refugees are themselves asking to be allowed to do so.⁷⁰

The irony described in this account, attributed in this instance to a hapless local official excelling in deciphering what Armenian victims might be thinking or even contemplating, was not lost on the diplomat. Further confirmations of systematic eradication policies became evident as soon as the assaults ended, when Kurdish Sheykhs reached Sasun to hastily divide the land amongst themselves. According to Shipley, the governor

...tried to persuade me that the Armenians of the mountainous areas were merely intruders who had settled on Kurdish lands, either unlawfully or at best as farmers on the Metayer [most probably share croppers] system. He also asserted that the judicial

⁷⁰ F.O.424.206.80. Tyrell to O'Connor, Van, May 14, 1904, No. 19, enclosure in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 30, 1904, No. 409.

examination of the refugees showed that the majority of them desired to be established elsewhere.⁷¹

Both of these assessments reflected the governor's fertile imagination, which was only surpassed by his expressed leniency toward Kurds, whose defense he openly assumed:

To the suggestion that perhaps the Kurds had committed some excesses, he replied with an effrontery that surprised us, even in a Turkish official, that no Kurds had taken part in the proceedings, and that there had been no excesses whatever except those committed by the insurgents.⁷²

Upon the intervention of European consuls to bring a solution to the refugee issue, several Armenian demands were formally lodged with foreign dignitaries, all of which further confirmed what actually had occurred and their consequences on the Armenian population. According to one dispatch:

The Armenian insurgents had presented five conditions to the French Consul, including permission for them to return to their homes under a guarantee of security by the Great Powers; the rebuilding of their houses and churches; the restoration to them of

⁷¹ F.O.424.206.89. Shipley to O'Conor, Erzerum, May 31, 1904 No. 34 enclosure in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, June 8, 1904 No. 438.

⁷² Ibid.; F.O.424.206.113. O'Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, June 28, 1904, No.513. Heathcote reported that Kurds were killing Armenians as they were allowed to do so by the local Ottoman officials, and that the plundering of villages continued. F.O.424.206.125. O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, July 9, 1904 No.544 Cipher dispatch. Tyrell reported on Sasun. He toured the area long after the events. According to him it was difficult to establish proof of a massacre. Moreover, participation of Kurds could not be established: "The villages destroyed amount to thirty-four, but it is doubtful whether the insurgents themselves did not do this."

all property and live-stock stolen from them; a prohibition of nomad Kurds coming into the district; and that, seeing the danger caused to women principally by the presence of licentious soldiers, that no barracks should be built.⁷³

When ambassador O’Conor approached the sultan to discuss the situation in Sasun and to raise some of the requests made by Armenians, the Ottoman monarch apparently “said that the stories he had heard were lies, and that the policy of the revolutionary Committees was to circulate these mendacious reports throughout Europe.” According to the British diplomat, the sultan

... did not deny that many lives had been lost on the side of the soldiers and the insurgents, and probably some innocent persons who had been forced to take up arms by the insurgents who had crossed the frontier had been killed, but he had given the most stringent orders not to allow the Kurds to approach the theatre of the disturbances, and he was confident that his orders had been obeyed.⁷⁴

The porte was not dissuaded, while the confiscation of Armenian lands continued, and not just in Sasun. In Van, a Kurdish agha had settled in an Armenian village with the help of the Agricultural Bank (Ziraat Bankası), and started to oppress its Armenian

⁷³ F.O.424.206.101. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, June 22, 1904, No. 494; F.O.424.206.121. Heathcote to O’Conor, Moush, June 22, 1904, No. 28, enclosure in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, July 4, 1904, No.533. Villagers demanded guarantees for their return to Sasun. However, “...the Government had ordered the Vali to offer to the refugees the choice of returning home or accepting new land in the plain...Vali alleged that Palace had ordered the settlement of refugees in the plain.”

⁷⁴ F.O.424.206.105. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, June 25, 1904, No. 496.

inhabitants.⁷⁵ Elsewhere, reports surfaced that indicated the return of internal refugees to Sasun proceeded “satisfactorily,” which was promptly denied by Hnchagyan party officials who, in a special letter, appealed to the British government to end the suffering and the persecution of Armenians there.⁷⁶

As for the revolutionaries themselves, many were killed during the battles, while some were arrested. An undetermined number went into hiding in the mountains, or the Moush plain. In Sasun itself, where the fiercest battles had taken place, the banner of the ARF was found among corpses, with documents and other important material, all of which was duly confiscated by local authorities.⁷⁷

How many Armenians were killed in these assaults quickly became a controversial subject, as European diplomats pressed for clarification, anxious to hold the porte accountable for its actions. Although a preliminary estimate of 4,000 was established, one prominent analyst pointed to the futility of such endeavors, asserting that

...while Captain Tyrell is investigating the 3,000 murders in Sassoun, the Armenians are being killed off in twos and threes in this Vilayet. There is no great massacre to attract attention, but here and there Kurds kill a few men, watering their fields, or cut the throats of villagers returning from the city.

⁷⁵ F.O.424.206.112. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, June 28, 1904, No. 510.

⁷⁶ F.O.424.206.108. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, June 28, 1904, No.503. Forwards letter by local Hnchagyan committee. F.O.424.206.114. O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, July 7, 1904, No.116 Telegraphic.

⁷⁷ No.122, Tyrell to O’Conor, Van, June 10, 1904 No.24, enclosure 1 in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, July 4, 1904 No. 534; Tyrell to O’Conor, Van, June 14, 1904 No.26 enclosure 2 in O’Conor to Lansdowne, Therapia, July 4, 1904 No. 534

There are more ways than one of killing the Armenians, and the present methods are much more fatal to them than the great massacres of 1895 and 1896. Men formerly well to do, and even last year living in comfort, are now penniless. The tax collectors have by every kind of torture compelled those who had money to pay the taxes for the destitute. Having bled them white for back taxes and given no receipts, they demanded in advance the taxes due at the end of this year, i.e., next March. Harvests are not yet in, and there is no ready cash in the hands of Armenians.

The Recorder of Deeds accompanied the Government officials, Kaimakam, and where the new demand was not met at once, the fields of Armenians were sold for from one-sixth to one-quarter their value to Kurds, [who] sometimes [were] buying them for less than the value of the standing crops almost ripe. Thus the Armenians have been deprived, in the name of law, of the property, which has been theirs for generations, and are reduced to absolute slavery. Those who, more bold than the rest, came into Van to make complaint and ask for mercy were immediately imprisoned and beaten. I must not write more in this strain.”⁷⁸

⁷⁸ F.O.424.208.Ussher to [?], [Van], July 26, 1904, enclosure to Brooks to Lansdowne, Duvals, Gray, January 14, 1905.

Frank testimonies like this one were not isolated, especially after the issue of securing humanitarian assistance to the refugees, failed to show results. In fact, nothing had been done since August in terms of rebuilding, and no relief payments had been received since July. By November, which meant that winter conditions had set in and snow covered the entire area, refugees were subjected to unsustainable conditions. One eyewitness avowed:

That they have more than appears to the eye, even of a careful searcher, I am convinced; but I could not find much in the houses, and I could only say that there was no visible means of subsistence for the winter, though there had been no starvation up to that time... There remain the villages of Kerdamak, Tatank, and Kistakh, in Sassun, which have received nothing, but I have satisfied myself that these villages were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable by Kurdish oppression, at some time anterior to the operations of last spring, and that the Government are legally in the right in refusing to recognize them as within the scope of the resettlement...

Eliminating the above four cases, where the obligations of the Turkish Government have not yet been fulfilled...⁷⁹

On top of all this, and against the express wishes of survivors as reported by numerous diplomatic demarches, new barracks were built either by confiscating existing houses or by material and relief funds earmarked for refugees. There were even reports that

⁷⁹ F.O.424.208.22. Tyrell to Townley, Van, December 27, 1904, No. 54, enclosure in Townley to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 7, 1905, No.95.

indicated that soldiers were destroying new homes in order to enlarge and improve their own barracks. In consul Tyrell's view:

All this raises a very grave question about relief measures. These have a tendency to pauperize the people, who look upon them as their right, and who seem to think it is the duty of foreign Governments to provide for them. And in the present state of the country, and of the attitude, both of the Armenians and the Turks, it seems as if such relief measures would be required at regularly recurring intervals – at least, there is no guarantee that all this will not happen again, when the money now spent in relief will all be wasted.⁸⁰

Few could imagine why such blatant neglect could be tolerated save for the simple reason that the Porte wished nothing more than to simply apply its systematic policy of elimination. By imposing its iron-fisted will on the hapless population, by pitting Armenians against Kurds and vice-versa, and by cajoling foreign diplomats in a classic cat-and-mouse game that pretended to be responsive when no such intentions ever existed, Constantinople highlighted in Sasun, and elsewhere, what its real intentions were.

Even with the benefit of doubt, the overwhelming evidence, as recorded by foreign diplomats, confirm, if anything, that the porte was a victim of its own machinations. Simply stated, men and women who were born and raised on their ancestral lands were uprooted and made internal refugees in their own country, which meant that the

⁸⁰ Ibid.

government now had its hands full with issues pertaining to refugees and, hence, European intervention on their behalf.

Period of Reorganization

Although the Ottoman government was successful in its efforts to quench Sasun for a second time in a decade, Armenian revolutionary zeal was not stifled by any stretch of the imagination, as later developments confirmed. The scattered revolutionaries' first operation was to assassinate Arsen Vartabed, the Catholicos of Van residing in Aghtamar, along with his secretary.⁸¹ The two were targeted as putative traitors by revolutionary forces, then led by Ishkhan, as corroborated by British diplomatic reports that were very critical of the revolutionaries' acts:

But he [the secretary] had left them, and was now supposed to be a Government informer; hence the mutilation of his body. Besides the general accusation that Arsen Vartabed did not assist the revolutionary cause, he was particularly arraigned before Ishkhan for having refused to store wheat on the Island of Aghtamar for the use of the revolutionists, and for having even removed what wheat was stored there, so as to make it impossible for them to take shelter on the island, as they had done in August last...The charges may be

⁸¹ The Armenian Church hierarchy at the time was thus:

1. The Catholicos of All Armenians sitting at Ejmiadzin as the spiritual leader of Armenians Under Russian and Persian dominion; as well as
2. The Patriarch of Constantinople as the supreme head of the Armenian Millet in the Ottoman Empire whose jurisdiction extended over:
 - The Catholicosate of Sis (Kozan) in Cilicia;
 - The Catholicosate of Aghtamar in Van; and
 - The Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem;

true: ninety-nine out of a hundred of Arsen's compatriots would do the same in his place... I wonder if the philanthropists in Europe who contribute to their funds realize the kind of crimes which they may be helping to commit.⁸²

As discussed above, the rebuilding of villages that were partially destroyed in various battles was a priority. This is illustrated by the village of Nareg, where thirty-two out of a total of a hundred and eight homes destroyed were partially rebuilt. Although Ottoman officials apprehended the main perpetrator of Nareg's fate, a man who committed suicide while in prison, others, the real culprits, went unpunished. According to one source, kaimakams Lufti and Halil effendis were not chastised by gendarmerie officers, who certainly knew what the two men organized and implemented. As soon as British Consul Tyrell left Van, Halil and the Kurds were set free, while Nareg villagers were imprisoned and the restoration of their properties stopped.⁸³ In the confusion that settled on the area, the Hnchagyan Central Committee asserted that a campaign of persecutions against Zeytun Armenians had started, and that villagers were forced to leave the area to be settled in Bazarjik. Simultaneously, the number of soldiers stationed at the garrison increased, which prompted the committee to request from the signatories of the Berlin Treaty to intervene.⁸⁴

⁸² F.O.424.208.25. Tyrell to Townley, Van, January 10, 1905, No. 2, enclosure in Townley to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 13, 1905, No.105.

⁸³ F.O.424.208.26. Tyrell to Townley, Van, January 6, 1905, No. 1, enclosure in Townley to Lansdowne, Constantinople, February 13, 1905, No.106.

⁸⁴ F.O.424.208.37. Central Hentchakist Committee to the Marqués of Lansdowne, March 29, 1905.

Other calamities followed. In Van food shortages were observed. Merchants like Hussein Pasha, who was the largest wheat supplier, raised prices, while impoverished villagers from the surrounding areas came to the city to beg for food.⁸⁵ Usher even complained of cases of starvation in his hospital:

On the 12th, 13th, and 14th March the American Mission distributed 925 piasters in a large and needy village in the Nahie [sic, *Nahiye*, a lesser county] of Archag, about eight hours from Van. On the 15th March two tahsildars [tax collectors] arrived there and took about two-thirds of the sum in the name of taxes. Money is always urgently needed, and the subordinate officials will continue to take all they can from the Armenians, unless paid sufficiently for their salaries...⁸⁶

Left unprotected and literally starving, The campaign of Armenian villagers joining the Russian Church for protection purposes was reinvigorated.⁸⁷ On the other hand, beleaguered fighters were on the move to regain popular support, a command entrusted to

⁸⁵ F.O.424.208.38. Tyrell to O'Conor, Van, March 20, 1905, No.10, enclosure in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, April 18, 1905, No.256.

⁸⁶ F.O.424.208.41. Tyrell to O'Conor, Van, March 30, 1905, No.12, enclosure in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 1, 1905, No.294; F.O.424.208.44. Tyrell to O'Conor, Van, April 18, 1905, No.16 Confidential, enclosure in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 12, 1905, No.330 Confidential. "I know by experience that Dr. Ussher's statements are unreliable, and I never accept any of them without careful personal inquiry." Tyrell thus dismisses US missionaries as one-sided. F.O.424.208.45. Tyrell to O'Conor, Van, April 20, 1905, No.17, enclosure in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 15, 1905, No.338. He also adds that news of starvation is exaggerated and that: "There remains the almost undeterminable factor of how much of the sowings are already mortgaged." This at a time when even Tyrell admitted that British relief donations were going to tax-collectors while other sums were going to non-needy people. It must be noted that Tyrell was famous for gathering his information by traveling to the areas. During this period, however, it seems that he is sitting in Van and sending his dispatches without thoroughly investigating them.

⁸⁷ F.O.424.208.47. Heathcote to O'Conor, Bitlis, April 30, 1905, No.13 Confidential, enclosure in Stronge to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 19, 1905, No.351 Confidential.

the energetic Kevork Chavush (Kevork Aramian), who, with about 50 of his most renowned and seasoned fighters, embarked on a tour of the Moush plain. Kevork's band of Sasun fighters raided Kurdish villages that were involved in the carnage of 1904 or, at least, had helped Ottoman troops commit atrocities. All together Kevork and his men conducted four important battles against government troops and Kurdish Hamidiye regiments in 1905.⁸⁸ This led Heathcote to opine:

Unless the ultimate organizers of the Armenian revolutionary movement are misled by the analogy of Macedonia, where the conditions are totally different, if only on account of the propinquity of independent nations allied by race to the various parties hostile to Turkish rule, it is not easy to see what they hope to gain from a policy of isolated attacks on the Imperial forces.⁸⁹

Most of the 1904 battles, coupled with the destitute situation of Armenian refugees, including the unattended lands, essentially meant that agricultural production was at a bare minimum. Many cities paid a heavy price. The province of Bitlis was in dire financial

⁸⁸ Ter Minasian, *Hay Heghapokhagani*, vol. 3, 315-356. Kevork's strategy was first to show the Kurds that Armenian revolutionaries were not incapacitated as the government was trying to convince them, and, second, to show the Kurds that the government was weak and thus unable to capture him or his fighters. Kevork's strategy was the result of the dwindling of the Armenian people's faith in the military might of the fighters. The 1904 events had shaken the peoples' trust, since some of the most important revolutionary leaders were killed. Among these was the legendary Hrayr Tzhokhk. See F.O.424.208.48. Heathcote to O'Conor, Bitlis, April 30, 1905, No.14, enclosure in Stronge to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 19, 1905, No.352.

⁸⁹ F.O.424.208.49. Heathcote to O'Conor, Bitlis, May 14, 1905, No.16, enclosure in O'Conor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, May 30, 1905, No.372. See Chapter 5 for the coincidence in the timing of the 1904 Sasun rebellion with the 1903 Linden-Preobrazhenie Uprising in Macedonia, which was organized by IMRO.

situation and the central government would do little, if anything, to bring some sort of order.⁹⁰

Whether the unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Abdulhamid on July 21, 1905 infuriated the sultan further, was impossible to document.⁹¹ Still, it was not long after this attempt on his life that the ruler ordered a new wave of massacres in the eastern provinces. The first wave of these heinous crimes took place in Kharpert,⁹² when a bomb explosion killed two *hojas* [clergymen, teachers], which meant that Armenians were the primary suspects.⁹³ However, there was total dissatisfaction of the government's new poll [Head] tax, criticized by Muslims and Christians alike.⁹⁴

While various local meetings did take place and a decision reached to protest the excessive nature of the tax, Armenians and other Christians were extremely cautious to take part in the planned demonstrations for fear of being prosecuted at a later stage.⁹⁵ Armenian fears were understandable, since many of their compatriots had been arrested and tortured in Kayseri (Gesaria, Caesarea), though, as usual, Constantinople denied that

⁹⁰ F.O.424.208.62. Shipley to O'Connor, Erzerum, June 8, 1905, No.19, enclosure in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, June 20, 1905, No.431; F.O.424.208.66. Heathcote to O'Connor, Bitlis, June 27, 1905, No.22, enclosure in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Constantinople, June 27, 1905, No.465.

⁹¹ For more details regarding the assassination attempt, see Chapter Two.

⁹² F.O.424.210.1. Evan Young to Leishman [US Consul to US Embassy], Mamuret-ul-Aziz, December 15, 1905, enclosure in O'Connor to Grey, January 8, 1906, No.953 Confidential, F.O. 424/210/999.

⁹³ F.O.424.210.13. O'Connor to Grey, Constantinople, March 9, 1906, No.155; F.O. 424/210/9528.

⁹⁴ These demonstrations were the first to be organized by Young Turk elements in Erzerum, Kastamonu, and Bitlis. These were the most important "Tax Revolts" of 1905-1907, in which ARF-Young Turk rapprochement and cooperation played an important role. For more details see Aykut Kansu, *1908 Devrimi* (The 1908 Revolution), Istanbul: İletişim Press, 2001, 35-95.

⁹⁵ F.O.424.210.20. Shipley to O'Connor, Erzerum, March 20, 1906, No. 6, enclosure in O'Connor to Grey, Constantinople, April 3, 1906, No.219, F.O. 424/210/12149; Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 104-114. Hanioglu speaks of joint actions between the ARF and local sympathizers of Sabaheddin Bey's League, as well as those of the CUP in the provinces. There are also indications that Young Turk leaders had asked Armenian revolutionary cells to not openly participate in such demonstrations. On the other hand, this is the first manifestation of Young Turk cells working inside the country.

such measures were authorized or even occurred.⁹⁶ Regardless, Troshag was later to applaud these popular tax revolts by stating:

History had witnessed only a few of such happy surprises. Enlightened and freedom-loving humanity salutes this beautiful step taken by the Young Turks. We are happy due to this new and powerful gain of the idea of struggle. We, after the mass movements of Erzurum, Kastamonu and Bitlis, are happy due to the victorious awakening of our neighbors, citizens, which points to their revolutionary maturity. Therefore, it is happily declared that starting from today Turkey and all its population has entered a new era.⁹⁷

Elsewhere, the porte's well publicized policy to settle Russian Muslim immigrants as well as Circassians within the eastern provinces and Syria, was carried on in a more or less systematic manner. Such a human presence led to increased agricultural production since many of the settlers were peasants able to work largely vacant lands. An interesting memorandum sent to the British embassy in Constantinople shed much light on this matter:

The Ottoman Government, on the other hand, encourage[s] this tendency to the utmost of their power, and see in these strong and hardy mountain races a strong Moslem element that, judiciously spread about and settled amongst Arabs, Kurds, and Armenians,

⁹⁶ F.O.424.210.24. Dodd to Pears, Talas, March 24, 1906, enclosure to O'Connor to Grey, Constantinople, April 9, 1906, No.239 Confidential, F.O. 424/210/12795; F.O.424.210. 31. O'Connor to Grey, Constantinople, April 17, 1906, No.264 Confidential, F.O.424/210/ 13664.

⁹⁷ *Troshag*, 31 July 1908. See also Koptaş, *Armenian Political Thinking*, 53-54.

may be counted on as loyal, and likely to allow the Christian to become active or powerful in any districts where the two may come into contact. It looks somewhat as if this immigration [of Circassians in Syria] had been encouraged with the object of creating a force on whose fidelity the Sultan can rely in the event of any serious rising of the Syrian Arabs against his authority. Round Bitlis and Van it is reported that no immigration to speak of has taken place just recently, but here, as in other cases, the local authorities have shown reluctance to give any information on the subject, and it seems likely that this district has, in common with its surrounding districts, done its share in settling a considerable quantity of immigrants. Whilst as a rule the nature of these immigrants is to be industrious, their nature and religion tend to make them domineering, and apt to bully their neighbors, especially Christians, and this tendency, combined with their thieving and predatory habits, have given rise to some complaints in several districts. They are, however, firmly supported and backed up by the local authorities, and this fact, together with their rapidly increasing numbers must without doubt considerably influence the districts in which they are being settled.⁹⁸

Not only were authorities anxious to alter the region's demographic conditions, they increasingly distorted legal cases that arose, all to further isolate the Armenian

⁹⁸ F.O.424.210.28. G.A. Lloyd: Memorandum on Immigration of Russian Moslem Refugees, enclosure in O'Connor to Grey, Constantinople, April 16, 1906, No.256, F.O. 424/210/13656.

population. In Erzerum, where Shipley had conducted investigations into the case of the public hanging of a certain Kedeshian (Khedesian), allegedly for the murder of an unnamed Arab subject,⁹⁹ and of certain other murder cases, the detention of large numbers of Armenians, as well as the instigation of a mob that attacked Armenian businesses, the local government, aside from the hanging, dismissed all such accusations. This led the British diplomat to report that even though Armenians were "...avoiding, outwardly at least, the appearance of being in direct opposition to the will of the Sultan," they faced reprimands and even chastisements. He added:

Not a single case of disorder or of insult to a Christian was brought to my notice during the whole of the proceedings. This is the more remarkable as with the exception of the few military patrols – for whose services, however, there was at no time any occasion, the town was for nearly ten days in the hands of the population, the usual representatives of the civil authority having during that period practically abdicated their functions. It was indeed commonly remarked that the town had never been so quiet and free from disturbance as during the so-called revolution. Further, beyond the order to close the shops no attempt was made by the Government, and if the helpless position of the latter be taken into consideration

⁹⁹ F.O.424.210.49. O’Conor to Grey, Constantinople, June 7, 1906, No.394, F.O. 424/210/ 20664.

for forbearance shown in this respect by the Mussulmans is, I venture to think, additionally praiseworthy.¹⁰⁰

It was a simple admission that the Ottoman government was somewhat successful to suppress the Sasun uprising for a second time in a decade and that Armenian revolutionary elements were no match to the repressive measures instituted by the porte.

Spreading Revolutionary agitation Within the Muslim Population

In July 1905, Consul Shipley sent yet another report where he underlined the dissatisfaction of the Muslim element, and revealed that Ottoman troops were increasingly dissatisfied with the policies of the local government as instigated by Constantinople. In his own words:

The Erzeroum Mussulmans, so far from abandoning the position which they have taken up of freely criticizing the shortcomings of the Administration, have only been encouraged by the success which has hitherto attended their protest to question the right of the former to impose special taxation at all, except for purely local needs. Why, they are now asking, should they have to find money for the erection of a school, say at Damascus, with which they have no concern, as if there were not plenty of deserving objects in their own district? The fact that these and similar opinions are being almost openly expressed is indicative of the extent to which the

¹⁰⁰ F.O.424.210.37. Shipley to O'Conor, Erzerum, April 12, 1906, No.7, enclosure in O'Conor to Grey, Constantinople, April 27, 1906, No.284, F.O.424/210/15441.

respect for constituted authority – hitherto a leading characteristic of the Turkish population – has been lessened, and although the Government for the moment seemed inclined to adopt a temporizing policy, it is impossible that they can acquiesce in a state of things which, if allowed to continue, can only serve to strengthen the spirit of opposition. It is, I venture to submit, here that the danger of the situation lies, for it is felt that any attempt by the Government to use coercive measures unless accompanied by the display of overwhelming force, would, in the present temper of the Mussulmans, be the signal for a dangerous outbreak.

A further very serious factor which has to be taken into account by the Imperial authorities is that the troops, both officers and men, have now become infected with the prevailing disaffection. To such an extent, indeed, is this the case, that as I had the honor to report to your Excellency in my dispatch No.7 of the 12th April last stated, the Mussulmans have acquired the conviction that under no circumstances would they be fired on by the former, and though I should hesitate considerably to hazard an opinion as to how far this conviction of theirs might find itself to be justified, it may very possibly not be far from the truth to say that the tenderness which the Turkish Government have all through shown to what was after

all an act of rebellion against an Imperial Decree, may have been largely due to the above consideration.¹⁰¹

Such revelations were troubling and surely well known to Ottoman officials. While the central government opened an inquiry into the situation with the intention of blaming Armenians as the instigators of the dissatisfaction, they were unable to conceal the fact that Imperial Ottoman soldiers were angry because most endured months of unpaid salaries. Furthermore, both Muslim soldiers and, perhaps, local authorities telegraphed to the porte the true conditions—making it clear that Armenians had no role in the current wave of dissatisfaction—on the ground, few anticipated a felicitous outcome that the government would manage to eliminate the reasons for existing grievances.¹⁰² Sometime later, when the police arrested the *Mufti* [Muslim Religious leader] and two others in the middle of the night, ostensibly because they were the central figures in arousing popular sentiment against the government, the Muslim population rose in rebellion. A large mob killed the chief of police and his son, while the police commissioner was publicly beaten to death, which were extremely serious developments. The agitated crowd captured the governor and forced him to return imprisoned leaders, all under the watchful eyes of troops that refused to intervene. British reports that provided these details clarified that Armenians were peripheral to these mob actions and, in the words of one observer:

It is a redeeming feature in the business that, although the Erzeroum Mussulmans must bear the responsibility of the crimes above

¹⁰¹ F.O.424.210.57. Shipley to O’Conor, Erzerum, July 3, 1906, No.12 Confidential, enclosure in O’Conor to Grey, Constantinople, June 15, 1906, No.450 Confidential, F.O. 424/210/23215.

¹⁰² Ibid.

referred to plunder at no time formed part of their programme, the lives and property of private persons being scrupulously respected. Throughout the affair, indeed, the Christian quarter remained so quiet that it was hardly possible to perceive that anything unusual was going on in other parts of the town.¹⁰³

These clashes in Erzerum were not the only revelations that preoccupied Ottoman officials. Reports from Van Province, where many Armenian revolutionary elements found refuge, indicated a very harsh economic outlook for the province.¹⁰⁴ In fact, the porte suspected American missionaries were helping Armenian revolutionaries, but could hardly raise the issue with the ambassador in Constantinople lest news of various atrocities surface in any exchanges. Equally troubling were Armenian loyalties, which were split between the ARF and the Local Armenagan party, and which further weakened the Armenian case. According to one source:

The Armenia [sic, Armenagans], who are the smaller faction, have their chief in Van, and an under-chief at Alakeui [Alakeoy], and wish to gain their end by European intervention and not by arms.

These intrigue in the villages alarmed the Tashnak [ARF], who are more numerous, [and who] aim at armed insurrection among all the

¹⁰³ F.O.424.210.115. Shipley to Barclay, Erzerum, October 27, 1906, No. 25 Confidential, enclosure in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, November 13, 1906, No. 754, F.O.424/210/38776.

¹⁰⁴ F.O.424.210.92. Dickson to Barclay, Van, September 24, 1906, No. 4, enclosure 1 in Barclay to Grey, Therapia, October 15, 1906, F.O. 424/210/35458. Tyrell had left Van in December 1905. His replacement, Dickson, arrived on September 6, 1906. During this time the dragoman of the consulate, Sordone, was acting Consul.

Armenians, and in some cases even go so far as to force villagers to buy arms from them. They have two Chiefs, one at Van and one in the mountains at Gargar, near Mukus. There are the armed bandits who worry the villagers. At the present moment several Kurdish Chiefs are discontented with the Government, amongst them those in the districts of Shamsdinan, Karchikan, Mukus, and Abagha. These Kurds favor the Tashnaks, and, in fact, supply them with arms and ammunition. Many of the Kurds belong to the Hamidié. On the other hand, the Kurds round Sephan [Sbahan] and Bashkala [Pashkale] are bitter against the Armenians, with the results that there are no revolutionaries about Sephan.¹⁰⁵

Naturally, such divisions existed for a variety of reasons, including the dearth of national leaders who could mobilize various revolutionary elements and, even worse, because the porte honed the skills to divide and rule. It even encouraged banditry, which justified muscled interventions, sometimes relying on its levies and at other times on rogue Kurdish elements it financed for such operations. In fact, the countryside between Van and Kars became such a dangerous domain for robberies and murder that few dared venture into the area. Although the newly settled Circassians were largely unmolested, the bulk of the atrocities were committed against Armenian villagers in the area, as the following dispatch from Khnus district affirmed:

¹⁰⁵ F.O.424.210.92. Dickson to Barclay, Van, September 24, 1906, No. 4, enclosure 2 in Barclay to Grey, Therapia, October 15, 1906, F.O. 424/210/35458.

In nearly every one of these villages are resident three or four Kurd families, who make the Armenians work for them and lend them money to pay their taxes, exacting 50 per cent or more interest, and taking it generally in kind when the harvest comes in, thus leaving the Armenians little, if any, to pay his [sic, their] taxes and live out the winter on. This, however, is considered nothing. What the Armenians do complain of is the raids of the Hassananli Kurds from the Khamur Dagh and Bulanuk districts.¹⁰⁶

By October 1906, that is two years into the post Sasun massacres, the general situation in the provinces of Van and Bitlis was as follows: Fighting between Armenian revolutionaries and Ottoman troops or Hamidiye units continued, while in Bitlis, the confiscation of Armenian lands remained a common development. This general conclusion was confirmed by a reliable eyewitness who declared:

The one indubitable fact is the yearly increasing destitution, which is chiefly due to the oppressive taxation, aggravated by the conduct of the gendarmerie employed in the task of collection. I found many evidences of the growing destitution in villages where there was comparative prosperity a few years ago. The immediate result of this is the prevalence of debt. The creditors are almost without exception Turks and Kurds who, in many cases, are gradually becoming

¹⁰⁶ F.O.424.210.92. Dickson to Barclay, Van, September 24, 1906, No. 4, enclosure 1 in Barclay to Grey, Therapia, October 15, 1906, F.O. 424/210/35458, enclosure 4. Notes on Country between Erzerum and Van.

proprietors of land formerly in Armenian hands. The system known locally by the name of “selef” contributes largely to this result. By this system money is borrowed on the security of future crops and repayment made in kind, the interest often amounting to 300 or 400 per cent. The employment of zaptiehs [sic, *Zaptiye*, gendarmerie units] in the collection of taxes is the source of oppression of the population and loss to the Treasury. As a body they are paid with extreme irregularity, and regard their employment as tax-gatherers as an excellent opportunity for enriching themselves. Extortion and bribery appear to be the order of the day, and many tales of brutality were poured into my ears... A further grievance lies in the farming of the tithes, which displays all the abuses usually attached to the system. In this district the farmer of the tithes often acts in concert with the tax-gatherer, and the latter compels the villager to borrow back at high interest the tithes he has just paid to the former.¹⁰⁷

To be sure, this was not an isolated observation, and could not be ignored by officials who received many similar dispatches from various consuls throughout the eastern provinces. In fact, as time passed, and the frequency of similar reports increased, few failed to anticipate additional clashes. Starting in 1907, diplomats noticed increased Armenian revolutionary activities throughout the provinces of Bitlis and Van, where the

¹⁰⁷ F.O.424.210.117. Geary to O’Conor, Bitlis, September 18, 1906, No. 40, enclosure to Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, November 13, 1906, No. 757, F.O.424/210/38779.

ARF had established a certain monopoly, and which bode ill for the future since internal divisions gained in notoriety. According to one diplomatic dispatch:

The Armenian revolutionists, I am informed, are quarrelling among themselves. The Tashnak, the more powerful party, appear to have assumed the government of Armenians in the Vilayet. They adjust their quarrels, draw up regulations and laws, the non-compliance with which they punish severely, in some cases with death, taxing the already overtaxed Armenian and forcing him to buy arms.¹⁰⁸

Beyond the veracity of such reportage, and irrespective of how objective the writer tried to be, the information highlighted ingrained tensions within the Armenian community. Moreover, and parallel to intra-Armenian strains, diplomats noticed a heightened dissatisfaction toward the porte within the Muslim population too. Shipley wrote to his ambassador:

The dissatisfaction to which I have alluded in my previous dispatches on the subject has, if anything increased rather than diminished...taken the shape of a definite organization for purposes of opposition to the Government. This organization, which consists, I am told, of certain representatives taken from each of the Mussulman wards of the city, appears at present to confine its activities to holding meetings from time to time at which, if my information be correct, not only the various questions which from

¹⁰⁸ F.O.424.212.22. Dickson to Barclay, Van, Dec. 31, 1906, No. 14, enclosure to Barclay to Gray, Jan. 28, 1907, No.64, F.O.424/212/3808.

time to time arise between the people and the Administration are fully discussed, but also the question as to what their attitude should be in case active measures should be decided upon by the Government with regard to the events of the 23rd October last.¹⁰⁹

No matter how convoluted these conclusions appeared to be, they critically revealed basic divisions both within the various Armenian as well as Muslim populations, which the Porte was well disposed to manipulate at will. Ottoman authorities were soon faced with yet another challenge, however, that of revolutionary propaganda, which surprised even the most diehard amongst them.

Dissemination of Revolutionary Propaganda and Literature

This Muslim agitation against the government was the result of Young Turk revolutionary literature being distributed largely among local supporters in underground and, therefore, illegal cells operating throughout the provinces. British diplomatic sources were privy to these pamphlets and regularly reported on various editions. In one example, the source confirmed that it was:

Significant that the revolutionary documents and pamphlets printed, I believe, in Europe, find their way here, and are eagerly read and discussed, while, though I am unable to furnish your Excellency with exact proofs, there is little doubt but that active correspondence in a revolutionary sense is being carried on with the disaffected

¹⁰⁹ F.O.424.212.35. Shipley to O'Connor, Erzerum, February 15, 1907, No. 5 Confidential, enclosure in O'Connor to Grey, Constantinople, February 27, 1907, No.130, F.O.424/212/ 7883.

Mussulmans in other parts of the Empire. I have already alluded to the desire for reform which has taken hold of all classes, but it is noteworthy that in all the seditious utterances which have been brought to my knowledge, expressions of disloyalty to the reigning dynasty, as such, or of a wish for a change in that direction, are entirely wanting. As far as I myself have been able to gather, the resentment of the people is chiefly directed against certain officials at Constantinople, whom they regard as thoroughly corrupt and inefficient, and to whose self-seeking they attribute the general state of impoverishment into which their country has fallen.¹¹⁰

Beyond the optimism alluded to in this dispatch, differentiating between the sultan and his alleged infamous minions, and although Constantinople tried hard to stop the spread of this kind of literature and to arrest those responsible for its distribution, the populace remained firm in its anti-government stance and even condemned the arrests. The case of a certain Sidki Effendi can be construed as a vivid example of this paradigm. The effendi was arrested for distributing revolutionary literature demanding immediate reforms, which clearly upset local authorities in Van, who had informed on him to their counterparts in Erzerum. Yet, as soon as people in Erzerum heard of his arrest, they rushed to the man's assistance. In this instance:

The immediate effect, however, of the step above referred to was that on the day following some four or five of the lower class

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Mussulman citizens, acting evidently under the orders of the revolutionary organization, proceeded to the Government buildings and, I am told, boldly demanded of the Vali why Zidki [sic.] Effendi had been arrested. A very sharp look-out is being kept at the various exits of the town with a view of preventing his deportation while the warnings given to the jailers of the prison in which he is confined as to the consequences to themselves should anything happen to him while under their charge can hardly be considered as mere empty threats, in view of the fate of the police officials on the 23rd October last.¹¹¹

Similar cases occurred elsewhere although not always with the same outcomes. Still, what the central government's idiosyncratic behavior toward manifestations of reforms by Muslim elements illustrated, was only matched by local conduct. For example, as the Porte honed its dreaded poll tax collections, a duty that fell on local authorities and which the Muslim populations adamantly refused to pay, tensions rose.¹¹² In Van, the government forced Armenians to finance a newly formed mounted gendarmerie unit, which was the height of irony since such units were used to suppress Armenian villagers.¹¹³ Moreover, as taxes were almost always collected with great severity, often

¹¹¹ F.O.424.212.40. Shipley to O'Conor, Erzerum, March 5, 1907, No.10, enclosure in O'Conor to Grey, Constantinople, March 18, 1907, No.169, F.O.424/212/9600.

¹¹² F.O.424.212.45. O'Conor to Grey, Constantinople, March 25, 1907, No.190, F.O.424/212/10468. In Shipley's words: "I can hardly emphasize the importance of this striking defeat of the Government by their Mussulman compatriots."

¹¹³ F.O.424.212.48. Safrastian to Shipley, Bitlis, February 16, 1907, enclosure 1 to O'Conor to Grey, Constantinople, April 5, 1907, No.206, F.O.424/212/11956.

relying on illegal actions like beatings and imprisonment, popular resentment was bound to increase. One dispatch highlighted the cynicism involved since many peasants resorted to mortgage meager possessions that would prevent future harvests:

The Vali was collecting arrears of taxes with great severity and in a quite illegal manner, as the arrears for several years were collected at once: in many cases oxen for plowing, seed, corn, beds, cooking utensils, etc., had been sold and in some places fruit-trees cut down and sold.¹¹⁴

Against the systematic plunder, Armenian villagers once again petitioned the Russian consulate for Russian citizenship, thinking that salvation might come their way from distant shores.¹¹⁵ This campaign of *Terk-i Tebiyyat* (literally dropping one's nationality or citizenship) was encouraged by the ARF leadership in Sasun. According to Ruben Ter Minasian, who at the time was the leader of the Sasun fighters, the plan worked and created some confusion within the local Ottoman administration in Bitlis, when thousands of Armenian peasants rushed to the official seat of government and demanded the revocation of their citizenship.¹¹⁶ No matter how satisfying the effort was, the effects of

¹¹⁴ F.O.424.212.70. O'Conor to Grey, Constantinople, May 28, 1907, No.314, F.O.424/ 212/18007.

¹¹⁵ F.O.424.212.51. Shipley to O'Conor, Erzerum, March 2, 1907, No. 9 Confidential, enclosure 1 in O'Conor to Grey, Constantinople, April 16, 1907, No.169, F.O.424/212/12809.

¹¹⁶ F.O.424.212.51. Dickson to O'Conor, Bitlis, July 6, 1907, No. 1, enclosure in O'Conor to Grey, Therapia, July 24, 1907, No. 450, F.O.424/213/25121; Ter Minasian, *Hay Heghapokhagani*, vol. 4, 59-61. See also BOA, 2125-47-48, Yıldız perakende Evrakı, Arzuhal ve Journallar (Y.PRM.UM), *Ermenilerin Terki-i Tebiyyeti ve yabancı memleketlere göçmek istedikleri* (Regarding Armenians asking to be released from Ottoman citizenship and their demand to emigrate to foreign countries. The tactic behind the Terki Tebi'at project, which was kept in secrecy with only a handful of people knowing about it (Ruben Ter Minasian, Vartan Vartabed, Kevork Chavush, etc.) was to acquire signatures of thousands of Armenian peasants and present it to the governor of Bitlis demanding the revocation of their Ottoman citizenship, so that they could emigrate to the Caucasus. Prior to the signature collecting campaign, rumors were spread to the effect that

the Terk-i Tebiyat project did not last long. Constantinople resorted to the confiscation of land, allegedly to settle up to 5,000 Muslim muhajirs from the Caucasus, which was a classic policy of retaliation.¹¹⁷ In fact, these new settlers could only rely on the government, but quickly became tools in its hands. Newcomers were encouraged to encroach not only on Armenian but also on Kurdish lands, which created inevitable frictions with the latter, already experiencing severe tensions. In turn, such incidents necessitated the creation of a joint Armenian-Kurdish retaliation, which was one of several acts that united the two communities. Indeed, Ghasim Bey, a Kurdish chief with friendly ties to revolutionary forces, led an Armenian-Kurdish armed band to destroy the homes and cattle of the muhajirs but this was too little too late.¹¹⁸ The government remained undeterred by such peripheral actions, as it pushed ahead with its relocation policy that added more muhajirs into the area, all of which was done at the expense of hapless local populations.

A Kurdish Uprising in Bitlis

In June 1907, however, Bitlis witnessed a popular uprising far greater in magnitude than what had happened in Erzerum a year earlier. Kurdish Sheykhs seized the moment and attacked the governor's residence and, in the words of a diplomat that recounted the story, events unfolded more or less rapidly:

Russia had prepared land parcels for some 500,000 settler. The campaign was "successful" in that it startled an unprepared governor, who promised to see to it that confiscated Armenian land issues were resolved.

¹¹⁷ F.O.424.212.81. Safrastian to Shipley, Bitlis, May 11, 1907, enclosure 2 in O'Conor to Grey, Constantinople, June 13, 1907, No.355 Confidential, F.O.424/212/20766.

¹¹⁸ Ter Minasian, *Hay Heghapokhagani*, vol. 4, pp. 48-50.

On the 25th instant I received a telegram from Mr. Shipley, giving Mr. Safrastian's version of the second incident mentioned by the Grand Vizier in the conversation recorded above. It appears that a serious rising took place at Bitlis on the 22nd instant, in the course of which the Vali's house was attacked and completely plundered by the mob, and a Commissary of Police and a Mussulman were killed. The Vali was wounded and had to seek protection in the military barracks. The crowd seized the telegraph office and the business in the bazaar was suspended. In other respects the town is quiet, and the soldiers have maintained order. A later telegram from Bitlis stated that the telegraph office was still in the hands of the mob, and that there were very few troops at that moment in the town.¹¹⁹

Captain Dickson reports that the revolt at Bitlis was organized by [a] Council of Sheikhs, who, after the riot had occurred, sent a telegram to the Porte demanding that the Vali should be removed. A reply was received from the Palace threatening to employ military force against the malcontents. To this the Council of Sheikhs answered that they had 15,000 Kurds under arms. The

Palace thereupon gave orders to disperse the mob, and also to disband the force of armed Kurds who, amounting to some 10,000

¹¹⁹ F.O.424.213. 4. O'Connor to Grey, Therapia, June 25, 1907, No. 390, F.O. 424/213/21.

men, were in the neighborhood and awaiting orders to come to the assistance of the townsmen... The Council of Sheikhs is showing nervousness as to the results of the inquiry of the Commission into the causes of the disturbance... condition of affairs in the district of Moush are extremely serious. Many Armenians are said to have been massacred by Kurds, and many soldiers are reported to have been killed and wounded...the town of Bitlis is perfectly quiet.¹²⁰

According to British Vice-Consul Safrastian the reasons for the uprising in Bitlis included:

The carelessness of Ferid Pasha in presence of the general misery, of Mussulmans as well as of Armenians; The emigration of Mussulmans and Armenians by hundreds; the postponement of the rebuilding of fallen and shaken houses by the Imperial grant of £T. 1,300; The forcible pulling down of houses of poor men for the widening of roads. These and such reasons seem to have prompted the outbreak of the popular impatience in such a rude manner.¹²¹

Moreover, Safrastian indicated that the uprising started on Saturday Morning, June 22: “After the prayers the Mussulmans had held secret meetings, presided over by the sheikhs, and had sworn on their religion and their nikah [wedding vows] not to withdraw their resolution of self-sacrifice until the fulfillment of their desires and demands,” which

¹²⁰ F.O.424.213.17. O’Conor to Grey, Therapia, July 4, 1907, No. 407. F.O.424/213/ 22671. Dickson is reporting from Bitlis.

¹²¹ F.O.424.213.24. Dickson to O’Conor, Bitlis, July 6, 1907, Telegraphic enclosure in O’Conor to Grey, Therapia, July 8, 1907, No. 408, F.O. 424/213/23057.

indicated how high tensions had reached. In the melee, local leaders who organized the uprising ordered Armenians to shut their shops, which further complicated matters. Still, ordering shops to be closed were mild injunctions as "...reports of serious fighting and barbarity continue[d] to come in from the Moush plain and the district round Van," confirming repeated violence against the Armenian minority populations.¹²² According to Safrastian: "The mob attacked soon the baroque of the Vali, led by Sheikh Mehmed, of Kadri [and] Sheikh Ibrahim, and [it] began to smash down the baroque. A Chief of Police of Pera, Armenag Zeki (Armenian Catholic), whom the Vali had brought with himself three years ago, was ruthlessly stabbed at the door of the baroque and the corpse thrown under a bridge. Ferid Pasha was then dragged out of the door, under strokes and a rain of stones and sticks, very coarsely insulted, and tortured at the hands of the violent mob. In the riot, which followed, a Moslem was killed [the Vali is accused of this murder by the mob]. In the course of the day the Council of Sheikhs and notables dispatched telegram after telegram to the Imperial Palace, stating all the tyrannies and 'misdeeds' of the Vali."¹²³ Safrastian continued with his report by stating that on the second Day (Sunday, June 23) Zeki Pasha of the 4th Army corps sent threatening telegrams. However, "...All is quiet in the town. Armenians are well treated, and defended by the order of sheikhs. The market is closed and business stopped, any opened shop being certainly plundered."¹²⁴

¹²² F.O.424.213.27. Safrastian to Shipley, Bitlis, June 25, 1907, enclosure in O'Conor to Grey, Therapia, July 10, 1907, No. 408 F.O. 424/213/23323.

¹²³ F.O.424.213.32. O'Conor to Dickson, Therapia, July 11, 1907, enclosure 2 in O'Conor to Grey, Therapia, July 13, 1907 No. 417, F.O. 424/213/24299.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

It was obvious that the governor was a victim too, as he followed orders from Constantinople to settle muhajirs helter-skelter, which failed to take into account Kurdish and Armenian interests. If Constantinople could easily ignore Armenian needs, reactions demonstrated that overlooking Kurdish demands was suicidal, though some of these errors could be attributed to the theoretical notion that preparing massacres was almost always a learning process. Safrastian, for his part, stressed that the new governor's duty surely included "...the protection of the peaceful inhabitants, the prevention of Moslem immigrants being settled on the lands of Christians, and the prevention of outrages by the Hamidiéh," all of which he presumably failed to accomplish.¹²⁵ Ironically, it was only when the central government announced Ferid Pasha's recall that the Sheykhs ordered the crowd to disperse, which occurred promptly. Civil authorities returned to their offices although:

The Sheikhs seem to be quite nervous about the events of the nearest future; they are encouraged by the recall of Ferid Pasha, and have received letters of congratulations and sympathy from the people of Sairt [Sghert], the Chiefs of Modky, the Sheikh of Khizan, &c. who at the same time assure the Mussulmans of Bitlis of their moral and material assistance in case of need to the people of Bitlis, and that thousands of armed Kurds are ready to come to their help from every part of the vilayet if the Sheikhs wanted them.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ F.O.424.213.47. Safrastian to Shipley, Bitlis, July 2, 1907, enclosure in O'Connor to Grey, Constantinople, July 22, 1907, No. 435, F.O. 424/213/25100.

Soon, it was also clarified that the deposed governor had pocketed most of the money sent by the porte for alleged relief efforts for Armenian populations that were being resettled, apparently with the full approval of central authorities. The governor's immoral character shocked Muslim notables because they also found out that:

The corn supply of Bitlis is in the hands of few unscrupulous merchants, who it is stated, aided by the Vali, forced the price up, prohibiting the import of corn from the other districts by pillaging the caravans in any cases desirous of sending them to Bitlis, the price of corn had risen to 24 piasters, when, at the time of the revolt, a caravan with corn going to Diyarbakir was forcibly stopped by the Council of Sheikhs, and the corn brought and sold in Bitlis, when the price immediately fell to 18 piasters. It is hard to prove that the Vali was in this ring, but he is given the credit of it and this is one of the main causes of the Moslem agitation against him, as, if he was not in the ring, he could easily have taken steps to break the ring and lower the price.¹²⁷

Naturally, there were other reasons for the discontent with Ferid Pasha, including allegations that he may have been involved in financial transactions over silver currencies. Here too the governor had cheated on the exchange rate by postponing the exchange. Moreover, the issue of the above mentioned Terk-i Tebiyyat also involved the governor, after Sultan Abdulhamid had allowed Armenian emigration to Russia at the end of 1906.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

One of the conditions for that authorization required that Armenian peasants pay all their debts by selling their properties, and renounce their nationality. Ferid Pasha was literally alarmed to lose thousands of taxpaying peasants, a major source of income for the treasury, which encouraged him to prevent the emigration of some 80,000 to 100,000 applicants. How the Pasha justified his actions were a mystery, though according to British sources, he may have used the revolts by Kurdish Sheykhs in Khizan as a useful cover.

By extending assistance to the Bitlis Sheykhs, when "...during the interval between the 22nd and 26th June, there was every chance of the riot spreading to a general revolt of the Kurds in the district against the Government," the pasha may have shot two birds with a single stone. By extending assistance to the plotters, and extracting commitments to end the revolt in exchange of leniency on the forced migrations of Armenians, the pasha may have saved the day for his immediate benefit.¹²⁸

Nevertheless, this was an isolated case that proved to be irrelevant in the larger scheme of the porte's systematic preferences, as conditions elsewhere favored its divide and rule policies. The situation in Erzerum, for example, although quite but still tense, highlighted what was going on in other localities:

Matters, outwardly at least, continue to be quiet, but the organization to which I referred in my dispatch No. 5 of the 15th February last has lost none of its activity, and the extent to which it has become a recognized institution is shown by the fact that its adherents are not openly spoken of as members of the "Comité" [Armenian

¹²⁸ F.O.424.213.51. Dickson to O'Conor, Bitlis, July 6, 1907, No. 1, enclosure in O'Conor to Grey, Therapia, July 24, 1907, No. 450, F.O. 424/213/25121.

revolutionaries].” A further very serious feature in the situation is that indications are not wanting that the Mussulmans, encouraged by the success which has attended their efforts to procure the repeal of the obnoxious taxes which were the immediate cause of the original demonstration, have now apparently become so persuaded of the weakness of the central authority as to scarcely conceal their determination not to submit to the imposition of further taxation at all unless their own consent, or that of their representatives, has been previously obtained. I may mention, as an instance of this, that the new Law on the “temettu,” or tax on professions and trades, has already been discussed by them in a sense neither favorable nor respectful, and that the belief at Erzeroum is very general that, should an attempt be made to apply its provisions to this Vilayet, serious trouble will ensue... I am able to report to your Excellency that, as far as this city is concerned, I have observed no sign of any change in the friendly attitude of the latter towards their Christian fellow-townsmen.¹²⁹

On the other hand, fighting between government troops and Hamidiye units on one side and Armenian revolutionaries on the other continued in the provinces of Van and Bitlis. In Sulukh, a village in the Moush plain, a fierce battle in May 1907 took the life of

¹²⁹ F.O.424.213.34. Shipley to O’Conor, Erzerum, July 1, 1907, No. 38 Confidential, enclosure 1 in O’Conor to Grey, Constantinople, July, 17, 1907, No. 423, F.O.424/213/ 24305.

the legendary Armenian revolutionary fighter Kevork Chavush.¹³⁰ British sources indicated that the ARF strength in Van was becoming formidable to the extent that they were able to overcome imperial troops though the death of a true hero significantly weakened revolutionary forces. More important was the infiltration of Young Turk agitation into the Van area, as duly acknowledged by diplomats reporting from the region:

Sometime in April last some Moslem revolutionary agitators were supposed to have arrived from Erzeroum to start as agitation here. They published a few lithographed papers which were left about the town, but not much was thought of the matter, as the Turks in Van are not numerous, are mostly employees, are in no way united, and have no Chiefs, religious or otherwise; the Kurds are not credited with sufficient intelligence for intrigue. I have since been informed that in April last there were meetings between the Armenian Revolutionary Committee with these agitators and some Mollahs [sic., *Mulla*, Muslim preachers] and other Turks, with a view to combination, though what the outcome was I am unable to say, but

¹³⁰ F.O.424.213.35. Sbordone to Shipley, Van, June 24, 1907, enclosure in O'Connor to Grey, Constantinople, July 17, 1907, No. 424, F.O.424/213/24306. Clash between troops and Armenian revolutionaries in the Varak Mountains; F.O.424.213.48. Safrastian to Shipley, Bitlis, July 9, 1907, enclosure 2 in O'Connor to Grey, Therapia, July 24, 1907, No. 444, F.O.424/213/25115. Forwards information obtained on the fight between troops and revolutionaries at Sulukh, in the plain of Moush; F.O.424.213.95. Heard to O'Connor, Bitlis, Aug. 16, 1907, No. 3, enclosure in O'Connor to Grey, Therapia, Sept. 10, 1907, No. 563, F.O.424/213/30901; Ter Minasian, *Hay Heghapokhagani*, vol. 4, 159-181. See also BOA, 305-279-107, Yıldız Mutenevvi Maaruzat Evrakı ve Analitik Envanterler, *Ermeni eşkiya reisi Kiforkun Muş ovasında yakalandığı, Sulukh Tartışması, 1907* (The apprehension of the Armenian revolutionary leader, Kevork [Chavuch] in the district of Moush, the battle of Sulukh, 1907). In fact, Kevork was wounded during the skirmish and died later of his wounds. Hence, the Ottoman verb *Yakalanmak* [being caught, apprehended], which is used in the Ottoman document is misleading.

lately everything tends to show that the Fedai are doing all in their power to court Moslem sympathy and union, as is shown by the enclosed Proclamations, and by the attitude of the bands of armed Fedai when they meet small parties of zaptiehs and soldiers without their officers; with these they fraternize, give them cigarettes, &c. There is no doubt that this has had a considerable effect on the lower class Turks, soldiers, zaptiehs as in talking with them they openly express more or less sympathy with the Fedai, condemning the Vali's policy; and whenever the two come together now the troops and zaptieh show little fight, and the Fedai invariable escape.¹³¹

This was remarkable, to say the least, showing considerable fissures in what passed for the security system imposed throughout the area. On June 16, 1907, an Armenian police agent was assassinated by an Armenian revolutionary fighter, ostensibly for being a spy and the role he may have played in the house search that ensued after a June 10 accidental bomb explosion incident in an Armenian home. The policeman, Armenag Effendi, had a reputation for being the governor's "pimp and spy." He was, moreover, accused of playing a notorious role in providing Armenian girls for the governor who, in turn, abused them. Armenag was warned three different times to stop his acts, though when he failed to heed such warnings, his assassination was nearly guaranteed. Beyond his

¹³¹ F.O.424.213.53. Dickson to O'Conor, Van, Aug. 4, 1907, No. 14, enclosure in O'Conor to Grey, Therapia, Aug. 20, 1907, No. 520, F.O.424/213/28512.

systematic harassment of his own kindred, traditional Armenian norms rejected such behavior, which sullied family honor.¹³²

After Armenag's assassination, the Young Turks warned the governor "that he will be treated as the Bitlis Vali was" and, according to the British diplomat in Van:

It is even said that there are Turkish members of the Tashnak Committee here, and, that if a Moslem employee, is condemned by the fedai, the sanction of the Young Turk Committee is first obtained before assassinating him... Talking to the Vali on the subject, he said that he did not fear the fedai nor the Turks, who were too few, but he did fear the military, who required paying, but as a matter of fact he is living in a perfect hell of nervousness and fear at present.¹³³

The Agrarian Problem

In August of 1907, a new British Vice-Consul, Heard, arrived in Moush where he quickly reported that "the number of independent farmers was rapidly decreasing," and it seemed evident to him that, "unless something is done to lighten the burden of taxation and free

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid. Dickson's statement that there were Turkish members in the ARF is an exaggeration. In fact there had been few cases where Kurdish peasants had joined the revolutionary party and had even fought and died alongside their Armenian comrades. These cases, however, were very few. On the Other hand, that there had started some sort of common action between the ARF and the Young Turk cells in Van and elsewhere is documented in the memoirs of Ruben Ter Minasian and other Armenian revolutionary leaders. What is also interesting is that there was a Russian collusion in terms of arming Kurds in the area. As a matter of fact, the 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement, which divided Iran into a northern (Russian) and a southern (British) zone of influence was also important, since it shows, if anything, how the two powers were against any constitutional governments being established in the Ottoman and the Qajar empires.

them from debt, they must all become practically serfs of the Kurd proprietors.”¹³⁴ Heard also dispatched a comprehensive report about the agrarian situation and the sharp decrease in the number of individual farms in Moush, which came on top of existing intra-communal tensions. In one of the more prescient dispatches, Heard dissected nascent difficulties that confronted the porte:

The tithes formerly collected by the “multezims,” or tax-farmers, are now to be paid, in accordance with a recent Iradé, by the villagers themselves. The Reises [chiefs] of villages are now being summoned to Moush and Bitlis for the assessment of the tithes, calculated on the average paid during the last five years. At first sight this appears an admirable measure, as the irregularities of the “multezims” will thus be put to a stop to. On examination, however, it will be seen that the incidence bears heavily on the majority of villages, where the number of farmers has steadily decreased during the last five years.¹³⁵

A closer examination of available data on tax collections at this time confirmed Heard’s assessment. In fact, thirteen villages saw a decrease of 587 farms, from 761 down to 174, while taxes levied on the remaining 174 had increased many fold. Primary examples among these villages included the following breakdowns that illustrates the numbers of households and the taxes that their inhabitants generated:

¹³⁴ F.O.424.213.84. O’Conor to Grey, Therapia, August 29, 1907, No.538, F.O.424/213/29280.

¹³⁵ F.O.424.213.95. Heard to O’Conor, Bitlis, August 16, 1907, No. 3, enclosure in O’Conor to Grey, Therapia, September 10, 1907, No. 563, F.O.424/213/30901.

Abkavank village

1903	53 houses	12,000 piasters in taxes
1904	53	10,800
1905	10	8,700
1906	10	6,500
1907	10	9,500

Erishtze village

1903	60	15,000
1904	55	13,000
1905	35	12,000
1906	25	24,000
1907	21	19,000 ¹³⁶

Moreover, and because fifty-nine Kurdish farmers were settled in these villages since 1904 on a more or less haphazard fashion, it was difficult for Armenian peasants to secure loans from the Ziraat Bankası [Ottoman Agricultural Bank] to meet their obligations, since Armenians competed with the Kurds for limited resources. Often, petty officials at the Agricultural Bank had to be bribed [5 Turkish Liras, for a loan of 20], which added to existing dilemmas. Still, land registry—which was needed as security against potential loans—meant that any assessments would barely cover 50 percent of a property's real value. Moreover, in those rare instances when Armenian peasants were able to get a loan, their land was seized by debtors in lieu of loan payments in arrears. Heard further indicated that:

The Mudir [director] of the bank at Moush informed [me] that it has a capital of £T. 25,000 nearly all of which is employed in districts other than Moush, which is an unnatural state of affairs. As the Armenian farmer disappears the Kurdish landowner takes his place.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

It is often unnecessary to inquire into the condition of a village. The house of the Bey or Agha may be seen from a long distance, dominating with its two or three stories [over] the miserable huts of the peasants, most of whom are literally his bond slaves. It is true he affords them a measure of protection, and it would seem that it is not until he has sunk to this level that the Armenian peasant can enjoy any degree of security.”¹³⁷

Such conditions effectively meant that landless Armenians fell into pauperism, living on charity and, in worst cases, on herbs they collected from field that were their properties not too long ago. It was around this time that cases of starvation emerged, as Kurdish notables and usurers in Moush and elsewhere confiscated large chunks of property in over thirty-two Armenian villages. Forty-five additional villages (some overlapping with the aforementioned thirty-five), of which nine were on the Bulanik plain, were taken over by Kurdish aghas and beys. This led Heard to conclude that “the free hand given to the Kurds to rob, oppress, and kill their Armenian fellow-subjects, would seem to be the result of the tacit encouragement of the Government. For the Kurd there is no punishment, for the Armenian there is no redress. The chief victims are priests and village Reises and Kehias [*Reyis, Kehya*, village heads or chiefs] of whom a great number have been killed of late years.” Wiping out Armenians was relegated to ‘*Jan Bezars*’ [who] are crack-troops formed from the regular units and used against revolutionaries. Nothing more than licensed

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Bashi-Bozouks [irregular fighters, mercenaries].”¹³⁸ Such testimony was damning to say the least, especially coming from a relatively objective source who managed, somehow, to link the dots when he addressed the muhajir issue too. According to Heard:

Few Mohadjirs, or Moslem immigrants, as yet appear to have been settled in the Moush Plain. I have only given the names of seven villages in this connection, though I myself saw some Mohadjirs in several other villages towards the eastern extremity of the plain. They appear to be plentiful in other districts, notably Boulanik. The Director of Passports told me that 2,000 came from Russia last year. It appears that they are generally settled on the farms of “Nakl-khanes” or people who have emigrated.¹³⁹

No matter how sympathetic Heard’s assessments were, conditions faced by the Armenian communities in the eastern provinces worsened, as few could collect their harvests and pay taxes as they had done previously for decades and even centuries. Increasingly destitute and literally starving, hundreds, perhaps thousands took refuge in the mountains, fearing denunciations in the hands of neighbors. Even worse, many were afraid that they would be identified as revolutionaries and revolutionary fighters, which would land them in prison and torture. In fact, many were aware that they could be dragged into *corvée* labor battalions, which was then at its height:

The road tax in this Vilayet is fixed at 12 piasters, in lieu of which the taxpayer may work for four days on the roads. This period is

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

frequently extended to as much as twelve days, and the carts of the peasants are commandeered for indefinite periods. The Kurds also frequently compel the villagers to gather their harvest and transport their grain for nothing.¹⁴⁰

The sum total of these measures against Armenian populations led to a sharp decrease in numbers throughout the Moush plain. In one area alone the decrease was measured at twenty-two percent since the 1904 massacres. In other areas, the population decrease was estimated at about 16 percent, although these figures were probably conservative.

When the dragoman of the British vice-consulate in Diyarbakir had an interview with Ruben Ter Minasian, Kevork Chavush's successor, the revolutionary leader showed him "a letter [where] it appeared that the villagers sympathized far more than I had believed possible with the fedai, whom they consulted on many points, often asking for protection." In Ruben's estimation, conditions would have been far worse if it was not for the fighters' actions—to assassinate some of the most notorious Kurdish aghas and beys who constantly terrorized Armenian peasants.

Overall, it was fair to declare that the state of affairs in the Bitlis province was in turmoil, as mobs continued to rule. Attacks on wheat and corn supply caravans working for Armenian and Turkish merchants, on the grounds that the latter circumvented government prices on the most essential staples, became frequent.¹⁴¹ Murders and robberies were numerous too. Kurds took matters into their own hands, behaving as if they were the law,

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ F.O.424.213.98. O'Connor to Grey, Therapia, September 13, 1907, No.570, .O.424/213/ 31641.

as in the case of the Sairt (Sghert) area were the “Konak [government center] has been surrounded, [the] prison broken into and prisoners released. [The] Acting Mutessarif has fled. A company of soldiers has been sent to Sairt (The last Mutessarif fled from Sairt two months ago).”¹⁴² Elsewhere, the Kurdish population was restless, as this dispatch from Bitlis confirmed:

Since their recent successful coup against the last Vali [Ferid Pasha], the Sheikhs and Notables of Bitlis have realized their power, and hold almost daily consultation on the subject of the present situation. It is said that they boast that unless the Government introduces reforms – not reforms pressed on it by the Powers, but reforms such as they consider satisfactory – they will introduce and carry out reforms on their own. It is rumored that the bazaars are soon to be closed, and a telegram dispatched to the Palace enumerating their grievances and demands. I have been told that these revolutionary ideas are inspired from Erzeroum and Van, but on this I cannot offer an opinion.

One of the Notables of the town with whom I recently had an interesting conversation spoke very plainly about the situation. He said they did not trust the Government when it promised reforms, and blamed the policy, which, after setting the Kurds against the

¹⁴² F.O.424.213.99. Heard to O’Conor, Bitlis, August 25, 1907, No. 4, enclosure in O’Conor to Grey, Therapia, September 13, 1907, No.571, F.O.424/213/31642.

Armenians to the ruin of the latter, is now setting the Kurds against each other with the same end in view.

At the present there is no anti-Christian feeling in the town like that in Moush. Indeed, in the present riot against the Vali, Christians and Moslems fraternized and I hear from a reliable source that the archives relating to the Armenian revolutionaries were handed over to the Armenian rioters.¹⁴³

In Van, where the government was almost non-existent, Armenian revolutionaries were discussing joint uprisings with CUP cells: “Incredible accounts are current here of the openness with which the fedai carry on their propaganda in Van. They are said to hold their own Courts of Justice, publish their own newspapers, and to be in communication with the Young Turkish party.” In Erzerum, where a mob-like mentality still reigned, an Armenian was publicly paraded and killed in a corn riot as police constables watched on. According to Young it was not clear:

How far the Revolutionary Committees are implicated...but the probability is on the side of their having inspired the movement, ...not the violence which followed. It is said that other individuals, at present in hiding, are marked down for the vengeance of the mob; and in view of the fact that no arrests have been made, there is poor security against some fresh outburst of lawlessness possibly quite unconnected with the motives of the last.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

To sum up, the civil authority would seem to be powerless, and the military are in unquestionable sympathy with the bulk of the population.¹⁴⁴

This incident, which was not an isolated one, prompted Armenian and Muslim merchants and notables to jointly petition Tahir Pasha, the governor of Erzerum province, which illustrated collaborative efforts par excellence. Other instances of local partnerships included the case in Erzerum that involved grain merchants. As reported in a diplomatic dispatch:

The corn merchants, alarmed at the recent riot at Erzeroum, have transferred their grain from their stores to their houses, so that at one time there was no corn to be had in the market. A bread riot seemed for a time imminent, and the danger is not unlikely to recur.

Measures have now been taken to patrol the roads and to have corn brought from Boulanik and Sairt.¹⁴⁵

That a new uprising in Erzerum was eminent is evident from the way the provincial government acted. It not only refused to pay official salaries, but sold *seneds* [future tax payment receipts], which the multezims bought for fifty percent of its value and later demanded villagers to pay the full amount of the tithes. The governor's deeds prompted secret meetings of Kurdish Sheykhs, which the local British diplomat eagerly followed, especially since it involved apathy toward the Hamidiye units: "It is said that, prompted by

¹⁴⁴ F.O.424.213.108. Young to O'Conor, Erzerum, September 11, 1907, No. 58, enclosure in O'Conor to Grey, Therapia, September 24, 1907, No.606, F.O.424/213/ 32524.

¹⁴⁵ F.O.424.213.127. Heard to O'Conor, Bitlis, September 30, 1907, No. 10, enclosure in O'Conor to Grey, Therapia, November 6, 1907, No.684, F.O.424/213/37148.

the people of Erzeroum, they are going to join in a general protest against the liberty accorded to the Hamidié, and call for the removal of Zekki [Zeki] Pasha, Moushir [highest military rank] of the Fourth Army Corps.”¹⁴⁶ When news of this putative idea leaked, government officials launched a crackdown of Young Turk members throughout the city, and about fifty to sixty Muslims were arrested. According to Shipley: “Most of these persons belong to the poorer class of shop-keepers or artisans, but among the more prominent – all of whom are alleged to have been members of the “Comité,”¹⁴⁷ was Tosun Bey (see chapter 3).¹⁴⁸ Moreover, “A group of speculators, the so-called “Compania” of Bitlis, ha[d] taken advantage of this state of things to force up the price of grain, which caused huge relief problems in Van and Bitlis provinces and even creat[ed] a famine situation.”¹⁴⁹ Consul Dickson reported that the “chief promoters are five in number, but

¹⁴⁶ F.O.424.213.109. Heard to O’Conor, Bitlis, September 3, 1907, No. 5, enclosure 1 in O’Conor to Grey, Therapia, September 24, 1907, No.611, F.O.424/213/32529. Zeki Pasha was married to a sister of the sultan [thus bearing the title of Damad, borther-in-law]. The Hamidiye regiments were under his command.

¹⁴⁷ F.O.424.213.172. Shipley to O’Conor, 2, November 22, 1907, No. 79, enclosure 2 in O’Conor to Grey, Constantinople, December 18, 1907, No.772, F.O.424/213/41867. Among those arrested were: “...Seifullah Effendi: A wealthy and leading lawyer of Erzeroum; Hadji Shevket (from the Ulema class): Alleged to have made violent attacks on the Government in the mosque during Ramazan and of inciting the rebellion; Faroukh [Farouk] Bey: Formerly an army contractor who was accused of being implicated in the murder of Kirkor Effendi, the details of which were given by Mr. Young in his dispatch No. 58 of the 11th September last; Dourak Bey: A member of the Erzeroum Municipality; (Uzun) Osman Effendi: Late Mudir of the Agricultural Bank: Accused of want of respect towards the Government; Hadji Akif Effendi: Alleged to have taken a leading part in the movement of last year; Sheikh Ahmed Effendi: A large exporter of sheep and cattle. Accusation against him similar to that against Osman Effendi; Izzet Effendi: Accused of directly instigating murder of Krikor and of desiring to compass the death of his brother Tewfik Bey, the partner of Krikor. His (Izzet Effendi’s) father is said to be the wealthiest man in Erzeroum. It was evident that the most-wealthy Moslems were implicated. The Young Turk Committee had constantly interfered with administration of affairs in Erzeroum. Shipley also suspected personal gain among the objectives of the arrests. The town had remained quiet during the arrests.”

¹⁴⁸ Vahan Papazian, *Im Hushere* (My Memoirs), (Boston: Hayrenik Printing House, 1950), vol. I, 519. Tosun Bey was sentenced to death along with seven others, while 18 of those arrested got life sentences and 14 got ten-year imprisonment. Shorter imprisonment sentences were rendered against 35 others.

¹⁴⁹ F.O.424.213.117. O’Conor to Grey, Therapia, October 1, 1907, No. 631, F.O.414/213/33246; F.O.424.213.138. Dickson to O’Conor, Van, October 29, 1907, No.22, enclosure to O’Conor to Grey, Constantinople, November 20, 1907, No. 705, F.O.424/213/38763.

they are said to have agents all over the country. They are assisted in their dealings by the Salafdars [money lender, “banker”] and Multezims, who are likely to oppose strongly any reforms touching their prerogatives. The latter are even now trying to prevent the villagers from buying their own tithes.”¹⁵⁰ In a revealing part of his lengthy and detailed report, Heard alluded to Hilmi Bey, formerly a professor of history at the Imperial College at Constantinople, who was exiled to Bitlis. The consul wrote:

[Hilmi Bey] informed me in the strictest confidence that he had seen a secret telegram received by Tahir Pasha shortly before his departure for Van from the Palace, in which it was ordered that the oppression of the Armenians was to be continued by methods “above the law” [*Kanoun Fevkinde*]. I have no reason to doubt his statement, as apart from his natural honesty he could have no possible motive in inventing such a thing.¹⁵¹

Moreover, by the fall 1907, the ARF was far more active than heretofore and brought evidence to bear as to the veracity of the porte’s true intentions. In October 1907, for example, ARF assassins executed Ali Bey, the governor of the province, for crimes committed on hapless Armenians. Yet, according to Dickson:

The “fedai” at Van have been fighting among themselves lately, and three were killed in a brawl the other night, otherwise they have been very quiet. Of course they are very proud of their achievement

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

in assassinating Ali Bey.¹⁵² There is a strong rumor here, however, that Moushir Zekki Pasha had a hand in his murder, fearing that Ali Bey might get the ear of the Sultan and compromise him.¹⁵³

By the end of 1907 social turbulences in Akhlat, where villagers were pressured to pay taxes on behalf of those who had emigrated, further heightened tensions. The villagers were the victims of constant robberies and roads were insecure for travel. In Bulanik, Kurds, Circassians, and muhajirs, all united to prey upon Armenians who, almost always, received no protection from police or gendarmerie officials.¹⁵⁴ By the beginning of 1908, British diplomacy still characterized Abdulhamid's politics toward Armenians in the eastern provinces as "the long-established and rooted policy of gradually eliminating by furtive and intangible methods the Armenian element in those regions," while on the other hand, Kurds still held the upper hand in their dealing with Armenian peasants. The latter continued on with their usury and marauding and seldom paid their proper quota of taxes.

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In Van, the year 1907 ended with a new round of fighting between the revolutionaries and troops that were aided by Hamidiye units,¹⁵⁶ whereas in the plain of Moush, the government saw to it that "as the Armenians [left] these districts the authorities did their best to replace them by Russian Mohajirs and Circassians." Once

¹⁵² BOA, Yıldız Tasnifi, Sadaret Hususi Maaruzat Evrakı, 859-515-143, *Van Valisi Ali Beyin Batumida katli hususunda* ([Report] Regarding the killing of Ali Bey, the Governor of Van, in Batumi).

¹⁵³ F.O.424.213.138. Dickson to O'Conor, Van, October 29, 1907, No.22, enclosure to O'Conor to Grey, Constantinople, November 20, 1907, No. 705, F.O.424/213/38763.

¹⁵⁴ F.O.424.213.166. Heard to O'Conor, Erzerum, November 23, 1907, No. 19, enclosure in O'Conor to Grey, Pera, December 10, 1907, No.760, F.O.424/213/41064.

¹⁵⁵ F.O.424.214.40. O'Conor to Grey, Pera, January 17, 1908, No.25, F.O.414/214/2889.

¹⁵⁶ F.O.424.214.56. O'Conor to Grey, Constantinople, February 8, 1908, No.35 Telegraphic, F.O.424/214/4509.

again, Dickson reported that famine had ravaged Armenian villages in the plain of Moush, while, ironically:

Various notables of Moush, are interesting themselves in the question of importing agricultural machinery, with the object of increasing the grain supply in the districts.

To summarize, it appears to me that the Turks are trying to replace a hostile Armenian population in the Moush Plain, Bulanik, Akhlat, and Khinis [Khnus] districts by a Russophobe agricultural Moslem population, these districts being of strategic importance to the Turks.¹⁵⁷

Dickson's meticulous descriptions of Armenian village life in the provinces of Bitlis and Van were solid examples of what decades of massacre and over-taxing accomplished. In his words:

A Christian village in Turkey is a collection of mud hovels, many of them empty or ruined (on account of massacres, or their owners having fled the country), which has more the appearance of a rabbit warren than a village, such things as gardens, orchards, or trees are rare, except in the vicinity of a large town, where the presence of European Consuls exert a protecting influence. The people themselves are no better than a set of cringing beggars, ragged and filthy. Their houses are destitute of any sort of comforts, such as

¹⁵⁷ F.O.424.214.57. Dickson to [O'Conor], Van, December 25, 1907, enclosure in O'Conor to [Grey], [Constantinople], February 10, 1908, No. 57, F.O.424/214/4708.

furniture, carpets, bedding, or food – in fact, one might well describe the Christian villages in this part of Turkey as the dens of the poorest of beggars.¹⁵⁸

Elsewhere, as in the northern areas of Lake Van, Kurds had steadily taken over Armenian villages starting in 1890. Therefore, it was obvious that in 1908 the demography and the ethnic composition of the area had changed dramatically:

At the present some of these villages are entirely occupied by the Kurds of these Chiefs, while others are occupied by Armenians who work the soil, while Hussein or Emin Pasha, as the case may be, have some families of their Kurds living gratis in the village to act as their agents and task-masters, as the position of the Armenians is little better than that of slaves. The land having been appropriated by these Kurds, they give the seed to the Armenians, who have to do the work and are supposed to receive half of the crop as their share, but as the Armenians have to pay tithes and taxes out of their half, and it is the Kurds that receive these [on account of their being Hamidiye], one can easily imagine that the Armenians do not get fat on what is left.¹⁵⁹

For all their prowess on the weak, however, Kurds were not always able to do as they pleased. Indeed, the presence of some one hundred Armenian fighters had changed

¹⁵⁸ F.O.424.214.86. Dickson to O'Connor, Van, January 31, 1908, No. 2, enclosure 1 in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, March 11, 1908, No.110, F.O.424/214/9029.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., enclosure 2.

the situation to the better, since Kurds had started to befriend them for fear of their military retaliations. This was specially so in some Persian areas near the Ottoman border as confirmed in this dispatch:

Diliman [Dilman] and Salmas [Salmast, in Persia] are used as a base by the Fedai to pass arms and men into Turkey.¹⁶⁰ They have a strong Committee there, of which one Muggerditch [Mgrdich] is the head. Formerly they were on bad terms with the neighboring Kurds, but this year they have been the best of friends.¹⁶¹

Aside from the Armenian revolutionaries and their increased propaganda in the areas north of Lake Van, Dickson also explained that “there is a fair number of Turks in the neighborhood of Arjish and Adeljivas, and this last year the Moslem revolutionary party [Young Turks], have been making efforts to gain their support, for which purpose, I am informed, various emissaries have been sent from Erzeroum.”¹⁶²

The Affair of “Tavo The Traitor”

Just months before the 1908 bloodless revolution that was to bring the joy of freedom and fraternity to Ottoman subjects and especially Armenians, a key event in Van spearheaded a new wave of fighting and massacres. In the annals of the Armenian revolutionary

¹⁶⁰ BOA, 1693-288-62, Yıldız Mutenevvi Mairuzat Evrakı ve Analitik Envanterler, *Tebrizde elli bin kadar piyade, suvari ve topçu mevcut olduğu ve ikiyüz Ermeni fida'ının Selmas'a gönderildiği. Selmas ve Hoy ahalisine silah tevzi' edilgiği, 1906* (There being 50,000 infantry and artillerymen in Tabriz, as well as 200 Armenian fighters being sent to Salmast. Also Guns being distributed to [Armenian] villagers in Khoy and Salmast, 1906).

¹⁶¹ F.O.424.214.86. Dickson to O'Conor, Van, January 31, 1908, No. 2, enclosure 2 in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, March 11, 1908, No.110, F.O.424/214/9029.

¹⁶² Ibid.

movement this event is known as the Tavo (Tavit) the traitor affair and deserved elaboration.

As was discussed in chapter three, the Fourth ARF General Congress, which was held in Vienna in 1907, witnessed bitter debates regarding the issue of accepting socialism as the party's ideology that the more nationalist Western Armenians accepted grudgingly. Moreover, the adoption of the "Caucasian Platform," which heralded the entrance of the party into a so-called "class struggle" phase in the Caucasus, further alienated Western Armenian leaders who thought of their Eastern Armenian counterparts as literary demagogues with a mission to "educate" their parochial brethren. These feelings were dangerously manifested in Van, where scores of Eastern Armenian fighters were stationed.¹⁶³

Tavo was an ARF member who was under a great deal of stress. Originally from the village of Teh, or Ther, in the Bshurig area of Bitlis Province, where Kurds became the majority after the 1894 massacres, Tavo's family—more Kurdish in its manners than Armenian—left Ther and settled in Van, where the father established a business dealing in sheep, oil, and wool.¹⁶⁴ Vahan Papazian, an ARF member with the revolutionary pseudonym "the Doctor," and an eyewitness to the event, wrote in his memoirs that Tavo's stress was due to his father being arrested by the local government. When Tavo visited Aram (Manukian) and asked for a huge sum of money to bribe officials and secure his father's release, the ARF leader answered that the organization was in principle opposed to

¹⁶³ Papazian, *Im Hushere*, 506-511.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 507.

bribery and that the issue would be solved through other means.¹⁶⁵ What Aram and the Doctor did not know, however, was that Tavo's financial quest was not to gain his father's freedom but to pay for an illegal abortion for an Armenian woman he had impregnated. When the Doctor confronted Tavo regarding his shameful act on February 18, 1908, the dejected "traitor" was infuriated, and left in a hurry.¹⁶⁶ That same day Ottoman troops suddenly surrounded the church of St. Gregory in the village of Gaghan near the city, where they uncovered a cache of weapons and ammunition, which they piled onto carts brought from the village and delivered the loot to Van.¹⁶⁷

As events unfolded and Tavo's deeds were uncovered by revolutionary elements, he was assassinated by a young ARF assassin, Dajad Terlemezian. Tavo's treason cost Armenians in Van dearly.¹⁶⁸ More importantly, it was because of Tavo's collaboration that

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 507-508.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 512-514.

¹⁶⁷ F.O.424.214.94. Dickson to O'Connor, Van, February 9, 1908, No.3, enclosure 1 in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, March 18, 1908, No.130, F.O.424/214/9844.

¹⁶⁸ F.O.424.214.98. Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, March 27, 1908, No. 77 Telegraphic. After Tavo's assassination the ensuing massacre in Van resulted in 33 Armenians killed, 6 wounded, and 23 missing; F.O.424.215.18. "Summary of a Telegram addressed by the Governor-General of the Vilayet of Van to the Grand Vizier," Van, March 27, 1908, enclosure in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, April 5, 1908, No.167, F.O.424/215/12178. Details of Tavo's assassination; F.O.424.215.61. Dickson to Barclay, Van, April 6, 1908, No. 9, enclosure 1 in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, May 3, 1908, No.233, F.O.424/215/15761. Details of Tavo's assassination: "Tavit [Tavo] was petted and almost worshipped, holding receptions every day, which were the fashionable rendezvous of Van." Dickson had an interview with Aram, Sarkis (Hovannesian), Ishkhan (Nigoghayos Boghos Mikayelian) and the Doctor (Vahan Papazian). ARF leaders left Van. They had specifically ordered not to assassinate Tavo. Terlemezian acted on his own. The vali refused shelter to Armenians fleeing from massacre. Muslims removed corpses immediately. Muslims had been given guns. "Many Armenians, however, were sheltered by Turks, particularly by officers, in their own houses." 42 killed, 6 wounded, 20 missing, not including villagers. Most of the instigators of the massacre were not natives of Van but government employees. The vali facilitated further outrages by ordering Hamidiye regiments to Van and arming the mob. The total death toll was 70; Papazian, *Im Hushere*, 525-526. ARF leaders did not tell the truth about Tavo's assassination. Papazian writes: "It was the first days of March [1908]. All of our efforts to kill the traitor had been futile. We called several youth from the "*Hadigner*" and "*Nor Serountaganner*" [ARF youth groups]. Sarkis explained to them the gravity of our situation... We gave them pistols and revolvers... The assassination took place on March 10. Dajad, who was returning from the market, saw Tavo, who called him by name and started cussing at the

the local government uncovered the ARF's organizational structure and roster of members, which helped Ottoman authorities to arrest many.¹⁶⁹ It was from these investigations that Dickson learned that the ARF intended to "obtain a better government." It was from these records that the British learned that Armenians did "not object to Turkish rule as such, but [we]re against the present system of bad government, and they [we]re at present using every effort to induce Turks and Kurds to join in their movement."¹⁷⁰

Despite the diplomatic nuance, Armenian attempts at an alliance with Muslims suffered a setback, because several Muslim citizens were killed during the hunt for Tavo. The ensuing discontent in the city and its environs made it difficult for "young Armenians in gaining a means of livelihood in this Vilayet. [It] seems to us [that this was] a great factor in the recruiting of these [as] fedai."¹⁷¹

That the ARF and its security structure in the region was now an open book for the government can be surmised by Dickson's statement that the organization was ruled by a higher body residing in Tiflis, which "leaves the local Committee at Van a fairly free hand in Turkish affairs, except in questions of high policy, which are decided by the Eastern and Western Committees."¹⁷² It would appear that the permission of the Eastern Committee has

ARF and us [ARF leaders]... When Tavo was distracted by a passing carriage, Dajad took his Browning pistol and shot him three times in the head."

¹⁶⁹ BOA, 6112-312-6, Yıldız Mutenevvi Maaruzat Evrakı ve Analitik Envanterler, *Vanda Amerikan mu'esseseleri dahilindeki muzır evrak ve silah ele geçirildiği, 1908* (The confiscation of harmful literature and documents, as well as guns in the American Institutions in Van, 1908); BOA, Yıldız Tasnifi, Sadaret Hususi Maaruzat Evrakı, 2060-523-59, *Van'da musadere olan silahlar* (Arms that were confiscated in Van).

¹⁷⁰ F.O.424.215.61. Dickson to Barclay, Van, April 6, 1908, No. 9, enclosure 1 in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, May 3, 1908, No.233, F.O.424/215/15761.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² These committees were known as the Eastern and the Western Bureaus of the ARF.

to be obtained before assassinating Turkish officials.”¹⁷³ Moreover, it was revealed that there were four committees¹⁷⁴ in the Eastern provinces, located in Van, Moush, Erzerum, and Trebizond. Dickson reported:

The two latter are pacific, and confine themselves to spreading the propaganda and collecting funds. At Moush there are two chiefs, one a Russian [Ruben Ter Minasian] and one a Turkish Armenian [Mgrdich Melkonian, AKA Karmen].

Van is the most important revolutionary centre in Turkey, and here there are seven members of the Committee – four active, Aram, the Doctor, Sarkis, and Ishkan; the other three are passive. The Committees of Moush, Erzeroum, and Trebizond are subservient to the Van one.

In addition to the four chiefs above mentioned, there are at Van thirty armed revolutionary soldiers, of whom twenty-five are Russian and five are Turkish Armenians. During the winter, the whole of these “fedais” reside in Van distributing themselves about the various houses in the Armenian quarter of the garden town, moving about only at night, and then only by the gardens and by-paths, it is said that they never sleep two days running in the same house. Although practically every Armenian sympathizes in secret

¹⁷³ F.O.424.215.15. Dickson to O’Conor, Van, March 2, 1908, No.6, enclosure 1 in Barclay to Grey, Pera, April 1, 1908, No. 163, F.O.424/215/11659. The Eastern And Western Committees are the ARF Eastern and Western Bureaus.

¹⁷⁴ Actually, the four committees were known as ARF Central Committees (Getronagan Gomide).

with them, many of the richer Armenians in Van find their presence inconvenient and compromising.¹⁷⁵

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, the Tavo affair, and the atrocities associated with it, brought Armenian villagers closer to the ARF. Consequently, “practically the whole male Armenian population [was] enrolled as members of the Society.”¹⁷⁶, which meant that as the Ottoman troops surrounded the city, a spirit of total unity engulfed the ARF and the small Hinchagyan and Armenagan factions in Van.¹⁷⁷ To mitigate serious damage, since the affair created a dangerous situation for the ARF, the latter mobilized its center in Tiflis where all of its forces were mobilized and on the alert to prevent a catastrophe. Five hundred fighters were brought in from Salmast in what was a rapid redeployment into Van.¹⁷⁸

It was during the Taco debacle and its aftermath that the ARF Western Bureau approached the Young Turk parties who had participated in the 1907 anti-Hamidian Congress to issue a statement regarding the situation in Van. ARF officials managed to secure a CUP communiqué, joined by Sabaheddin Bey’s League of Decentralization, which declared:

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.; Ter Minasian, *Hay Heghapokhagani*, vol. 4, 291. It was originally decided that Sarkis too would join Ruben and Karmen in Moush. However, he was kept in Van. Ruben also complains about Moush and Sasun being relegated to a position of secondary importance vis-à-vis Van, which was considered the center of ARF regional command. However, after the reorganization of early 1908, Ruben and Karmen were appointed members of the ARF Badaskhanadu Marmin (The Responsible Body) of the eastern provinces with equal powers as those of their counterparts in Van; Hagop Manjikian, *H.H.T. Albom-Atlas*, 167.

¹⁷⁶ F.O.424.215.15. Dickson to O’Conor, Van, March 2, 1908, No.6, enclosure 1 in Barclay to Grey, Pera, April 1, 1908, No. 163, F.O.424/215/11659.

¹⁷⁷ Papazian, *Im Hushere*, 517.

¹⁷⁸ F.O.424.215.15. Dickson to O’Conor, Van, March 2, 1908, No.6, enclosure 1 in Barclay to Grey, Pera, April 1, 1908, No. 163, F.O.424/215/11659.

The Turkish parties in opposition angrily protest against all atrocities in the Ottoman Empire and especially those being committed in Van and those that were committed not long ago in Erzerum were many of our Turkish and Armenian comrades are jailed.¹⁷⁹

The Young Turk declaration was published in several European newspapers and while Constantinople tried to undermine the situation by appealing to Armenians in Van, stating that it had no quarrel with them and that it merely wanted to arrest the non-Ottoman revolutionary fighters who were the real spreaders of *fesad* (corruption), the damage was done. Representatives of the Turkish population of the city issued similar appeals but the ARF-CUP emphasis left its mark.¹⁸⁰ By the end of March the situation had calmed down a bit, although the bazaar [marketplace] in Van, where most Armenian merchants maintained shops, was still closed.¹⁸¹ Sensing a rare opportunity, the ARF, in conjunction with the Young Turks, initiated a propaganda campaign—mainly the printing and distribution of revolutionary literature—to win over Muslims, Kurds, and Young Turks, which was duly reported by Dickson to O’Conor:

Formerly the Committee [ARF] used to send bands of Russian “fedai” over into Turkey; they have now stopped this, and are devoting themselves almost entirely to the propaganda, collecting depots of arms and ammunition, and trying to win over the Kurds

¹⁷⁹ Papazian, *Im Hushere*, 518-519.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 517-518.

¹⁸¹ F.O.424.215.58. Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, April 28, 1908, No.223, F.O.424/ 215/15174.

and Young Turks.¹⁸² Now and then a particularly unpopular official or Armenian may be assassinated, but otherwise their present policy is to lie quiet and do everything in their power to gain the co-operation of the Moslems. This is shown by the numerous pamphlets, which they are publishing at present, nearly, all of which are addressed to the Moslems.¹⁸³ The entente which they had formed with the Moslems during the time of the late Ali Bey had been entirely ruptured by the recent events, and the Turks are now bitter against the “fedai” for having deceived them by collecting depots of arms unknown to them. The “fedai” are now very busy trying to explain matters and regain the confidence of the Moslems, as they realize that without Moslem co-operation and support their cause is hopeless. Personally, I think that they will be a long time in doing this, and I doubt that they will ever succeed. However, the double check to their policy and to their storing of arms, &c., leads me to

¹⁸² BOA, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Komüsyonlar Maaruzatı, 1670-15-72, *Vanidaki Ermenilerin muzir neşriyyetile müslümanları devlet aleyhine kışkırtıkları ve buna tedbir alınması isteği*, 1907 (Van Armenians trying to agitate the Muslim population against the state by distributing dangerous pamphlets and awaiting orders on how to deal with this situation, 1907).

¹⁸³ BOA, 289-174-1324.C.23, Yıldız Mutenevvi Maaruzat Evrakı ve Analitik Envanterler, *Vandaki Taşnak Komitesi tarafından ermenilere dağıtılan yazı ve Tercumesi* (Pamphlets and their translations, which were distributed to the populace in Van by the Tashnag Committee there). The indication is for the publication of *Sabah Ul Heyr* [Good Morning], which was a joint venture between the ARF and the CUP, in terms of distributing revolutionary and propaganda material within the eastern provinces, and especially in Van). It must be noted that according to Murat Koptaş, *Sabah Ul Heyr* was a CUP organization [?] operating in the Eastern Provinces. In reality, there was no such organization. The pamphlet was published in van through the ARF press and widely distributed in the city and its environs, as well as as far away as the provinces of Bitlis and Erzerum. See Koptaş, *Armenian Political Thinking*, 14. See also *Troshag*, “Nor Daknabe” (The New Crisis), No. 3, March 1907, 1.

think that they will do their best for the present to prevent any active events which might hinder their rapprochement with the Turks.¹⁸⁴

Simultaneously, the ARF issued a pamphlet titled “We and Our Adversaries,” which was distributed throughout the city where it stated that its actions were against Abdulhamid’s tyranny and had nothing to do with the population, which was a victim of the same ruthless ruler. Therefore, Armenians were storing arms not against Turks, the ARF argued indirectly, but against the Ottoman army and its cohorts, the Hamidiye regiments.¹⁸⁵ Whatever tactical advantages such a position may have accrued did not diminish anti-Armenian sentiments, as tensions grew in the city and the whole province. The government concentrated on its troop build-up in and around Van,¹⁸⁶ while the governor refused to punish Muslim instigators of the massacres.¹⁸⁷ On the other hand, Dickson, advised the government on a strategy to undermine the ARF using insights he gained from his interviews with local ARF leaders. While some of the ARF leaders—Sarkis Parseghian and the Doctor—narrowly escaped arrest, Aram Manukian, Panos Terlemezian, Krikor (who had assassinated Armenag Effendi), Meloian, and five other

¹⁸⁴ F.O.424.215.15. Dickson to O’Conor, Van, March 2, 1908, No.6, enclosure 1 in Barclay to Grey, Pera, April 1, 1908, No. 163, F.O.424/215/11659.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., enclosure 2.

¹⁸⁶ F.O.424.215.59. Shipley to O’Conor, Erzerum, April 14, 1908, No. 17 Confidential, enclosure 1 in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, April 30, 1908, No.230, F.O.424/215/15392.

¹⁸⁷ F.O.424.215.82. Dickson to Barclay, Van, April 20, 1908, No. 14, enclosure in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, May 18, 1908, No.265, F.O.424/215/17810.

Armenians were arrested.¹⁸⁸ The bazaar opened in June while searches for weapon caches continued.¹⁸⁹

According to a British consular report, British diplomats in Constantinople seemed to be more than content that the efforts of their consuls regarding the diminishing of the power of the Armenian revolutionary organizations in the eastern provinces was accomplished:

Success [was] achieved by local authorities in breaking up the Tashnak Armenian revolutionary organization in that town [Van] and the surrounding districts. Captain Dickson describes that success as extraordinary, comprising as it does the seizure of 1,300 rifles, 450,000 cartridges, 800 lb. [pounds] of dynamite, some bombs and infernal machines. They also effected the capture of the local Tashnak "fedais," or ringleaders, with the exception of a few who escaped to the district of Havatsor.

The ramification of the Tashnak organization in Van now laid bare, reveals the existence of a wide-spread conspiracy in that province, and judging by the past, the consequent resentment of the Moslems and especially their suspicions to the probable destined use of the large quantities of dynamite discovered might easily have had

¹⁸⁸ F.O.424.215.159. Dickson to Barclay, Van, May 20, 1908, No. 15, enclosure in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, June 12, 1908, No.331, F.O.424/215/21357.

¹⁸⁹ F.O.424.215.165. Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, June 22, 1908, No.347, F.O.424/215/22220. Dickson reports that searches for Armenian fighters were practically concluded. One must keep in mind that the anti ARF tone of the British was partially due to its alliance with Russia in 1907.

disastrous results for the Armenians. That no such outward incident occurred is evidently due to the fact that the local authorities, acting under instructions from the headquarters, handled the situation with considerable prudence, in drafting into the town troops from the Erzeroum district, and in not allowing the Bashi-Bazouks to take part in the search.

It is perhaps unfortunate that the premises of the English missionaries should have been used for concealing arms, and that their servants should have been connected with the revolutionary movement, but apparently, as admitted by the Vali, they were not to blame, as the same had happened in the case of Moslems.¹⁹⁰

It was obvious that the whole scheme of uncovering weapon depots was due informants. The more the government dug, the more “like a snowball, their information increased, and their success has been extraordinary.” Moreover, it was widely known that torture was routinely used in Ottoman prisons to extract additional details, apparently with some success.¹⁹¹ As to the effort to collect arms from Armenian villages, it was reported that “the Van *Redifs* [military cadets] collected the arms from the villages round Van, and it is reported that they behaved in an abominable manner, beating, pillaging, robbing, and raping.” However, “previous to the arrival of the gendarmes to collect arms, the ‘fedai’

¹⁹⁰ F.O.424.216.31. Barclay to Grey, Therapia, July 17, 1908, No.395, F.O.424/216/ 25429; Dickson to Barclay, Van, June 20, 1908, No. 18, enclosure to Barclay to Grey, Therapia, July 17, 1908, No.395, F.O.424/216/25429.

¹⁹¹ BOA, 6202-312-96, Yıldız Mutenevvi’ Maruzat Evrakı, Analetik İnvanteri, *Vanda yakalanan silah ve cebhanesinin cins ve miktarı, 1908* (The inventory and quantities of weapons seized in Van, 1908).

Chiefs, the Doctor and Sarkis and their band had been round to most of the villages to collect the arms and hide them so as to prevent the Government [from] getting them.”¹⁹²

Among the articles confiscated during the searches were piles of ARF documents and papers. Incriminating evidence, such as assassination orders was thus revealed to Ottoman authorities:

On one occasion when some officials were roughly handling some “fedai” documents Aram asked them to be more careful, as the Geneva Central Committee [ARF Western Bureau] would hold them responsible if anything got lost. Many letters, lists, and archives have been taken from time to time, some, probably the most important, are in cipher, one key has been found but some still remain undecipherable. A special police commission has come from Moush to translate the mass of documents. Among other interesting documents are the death warrants of the late Vali, Ali Bey, and for one or two officials still living. There are signed by the “fedai” Chiefs, and one or two Van Armenians. There is also a document with the terms which they would ask from the Turkish Government after their revolution should have succeeded... “*En passant*, I may

¹⁹² F.O.424.216.31. Barclay to Grey, Therapia, July 17, 1908, No.395, F.O.424/216/ 25429; Dickson to Barclay, Van, June 20, 1908, No. 18, enclosure to Barclay to Grey, Therapia, July 17, 1908, No.395, F.O.424/216/25429.

say that Terzibashian's [a conservative Armenian community leader] death warrant is among the "fedai" papers found.¹⁹³

As a sidebar to these ongoing revelations, the governor confided to the British diplomat that weapon depots were located adjacent to the Russian Vice-Consulate and on the "English Mission" premises, which were meant to emphasize major-power rivalries. The wily governor further indicated that there was evidence of money forgery, a perpetual concern to industrial powers anxious to preserve the monopoly to print and negotiate paper money. Moreover, the governor also indicated that Aram had told him, most probably under torture, that:

The present Tashnak "fedai" movement was done for, but that if the authorities had continued their search after the fracas at Sahag Bey's house on the 8th February, the "fedai" would have resisted them, and there would have been a general rising of all the Armenians. At that time they decided to mobilize all their resources and resist the Government, and he thought they would have been successful.¹⁹⁴

Although most of what the British diplomat reported was corroborated by Papazian's account—who also mentioned that he and Sarkis were hiding for one night on the premises of the English mission, it seemed that the governor and his staff were exaggerating. For one thing, the foreign diplomats protested the methods by which Muslims were "accused" of massacre, and how they were being "judged":

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

We further said that we had little confidence that the method he [the governor] proposed employing would lead to any of the Moslem instigators and assassins being punished, as the members of the Commission were the relations, friends, and associates of the instigators, and the members of the Courts of Justice were the principal instigators... This episode and others gave us the idea that the Commission was trying rather to hide than find out the truth.¹⁹⁵

As much as Tavo's fiasco had created an anti-Armenian reactionary atmosphere in Van, Bitlis was living a state of revolutionary agitation. A substantial increase in grain prices led Muslim to rise in various parts of the province:

The circumstance, however, of these simultaneous risings in Ghendj and Mhuyt leads some people to suppose that they are originating from the same source. According to the same opinion an active propaganda is being carried on among these Kurds, and that Modky is in the process of fermentation.¹⁹⁶

Still, usury methods of Armenian citizens continued, with high interest rates and taxes that burdened villagers to the degree that most left the Moush plain for good. Cases of conversion to Islam were also recorded at this time.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, local authorities

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ F.O.424.216.131. Safrastian to Shipley, Bitlis, May 9, 1908, enclosure 2 in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, June 3, 1908, No. 306, F.O.424/215/19397.

¹⁹⁷ F.O.424.216.166. Safrastian to Shipley, Bitlis, May 16, 1908. enclosure 2 in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, June 23, 1908, No. 351, F.O.424/215/22223: "Robberies of Armenians rampant; high interest rates; Armenians pay 4.5 piastres for Sheep tax, Kurds 10 paras which is considerably less, while also hiding their live-stock;" Safrastian to Shipley, Bitlis, May 23, 1908, enclosure 3 in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, June 23, 1908, No. 351, F.O.424/215/22223: "Murders of Armenians continue, while

prepared false witness reports against imprisoned Armenians, which was nothing extraordinary.¹⁹⁸ Dickson's report—a general assessment of the situation in the eastern provinces vis-à-vis Armenians—and his subsequent suggestion that unemployed young Armenians might have better chances in seeking work in Russia, were self explanatory:

Her [the porte's] policy since the massacres of 1895 has been to reduce the Armenians to a state of utter impotency and helplessness without attracting the attention that such old-fashioned methods as massacres would force...before the massacres, the Armenians were rich, owning villages, lands, sheep, oxen, &c., all the trade was in their hands, the trade was far larger, and they traveled freely about the country. The villagers tilled their own lands and lived in comparative peace with the Kurds. The surplus of young men used to leave the country to work in Russia, Constantinople, Rumania, returning to their villages after earning sufficient to live on.

implicated Hamidieh officers are set free;" F.O.424.215.74. Shipley to O'Conor, Erzerum, April 9, 1908, No. 15, enclosure 1 in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, May 13, 1908, No. 255, F.O.424/215/16963: "Grain price is increasing...Wealthy speculators aggravate the situation;" F.O.424.215.75. Safrastian to Shipley, Bitlis, March 28, 1908, enclosure 2 in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, May 13, 1908, No. 257, F.O.424/215/16965: Armenians begin leaving the Moush plain for good;" Safrastian to Shipley, Bitlis, April 4, 1908, enclosure 3 in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, May 13, 1908, No. 257, F.O.424/215/16965; Safrastian to Shipley, Bitlis, April 11, 1908, enclosure 4 in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, May 13, 1908, No. 257, F.O.424/215/16965: "Armenian conversions to Islam in Khizan on account of desperate situation;" F.O.424.216.57. Lowther to Grey, Therapia, August 10, 1908, No.457, F.O.424/216/28453.

¹⁹⁸ F.O.424.215.80. Safrastian to Shipley, Bitlis, April 18, 1908, enclosure 2 in Barclay to Grey, Constantinople, May 16, 1908, No. 260, F.O.424/215/17807.

Since the massacres of 1895 the Porte has been employing this system of organized oppression with the results above mentioned. The principal means are:

1. Heavy taxation without any compensating [of] justice or security for life or property, and bad administration.
2. Prohibition to leave the country in search of work.
3. Unrestrained tyranny and pillage by Kurds, even encouraged by the Government.

The Turks are able to hide all their oppressive and repressive measures under the mask of stamping out [the] fedai, and in this they are even encouraged by the Powers, so that so long as the revolutionary movement is prominent among the Armenians, so long will their gradual extermination continue, with the approval of Europe, until they are reduced to a state of so little importance that they will no longer be a menace to the Turks for European intervention. Whether the Powers are knowingly parties to this policy I am unaware, but if they are not, and do not desire its quick realization, I believe there is little time to spare.

Owing to the information given by the traitor David, the Turks captured many lists of names and other compromising documents,

so that they now have a pretty good idea as to who are the chief agitators in the Vilayet.¹⁹⁹

The Eastern Provinces Welcome the Revolution

News of the August 1908 revolution, and the reestablishment of a constitutional government with its most appreciated prize, *hurriyet* [freedom], reverberated throughout the Ottoman Empire. The populations of the eastern provinces, although puzzled at the speedy change of events, welcomed the epochal change with jubilation. According to a British consular source:

At Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakir, the Armenian and other political prisoners have been released, and the Moslem and Christian elements are giving themselves up to common rejoicings on the same lines as those which have taken place at Constantinople, the sea coast towns.²⁰⁰

Such sentiments were natural given the oppression most were subjected to under Sultan Abdulhamid's reign, especially as "all the prisoners condemned in February last for their connection with the disturbances of the last two years at Erzeroum have now been released."²⁰¹ Ambassador Gerald Lowther reported:

While the Moslems experience the greatest relief from the abolition of the old spy system, incalculable benefits accrue to the Armenians from the relaxation of the restrictions upon travel. They used to rely,

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ No.81, Lowther to Grey, Therapia, August 18, 1908 No. 498 FO 424/216/29302.

²⁰¹ No.79, Lowther to Grey, Therapia, August 18, 1908 No. 491 FO 424/216/29295

in great part, for their livelihood upon periodical visits to the Caucasus, where work was plentiful, and they are now at liberty to resort thither as before.

There is a considerable reactionary party in this town [Kharpert] – the Mufti, for instance, when he heard the news, exclaiming, “This is the end of Islam!” And on the 22nd August, they brought a number of armed Mussulmans into the town, which gave rise to certain uneasiness owing to the absence of an adequate Government, but the feeling appears to have been merely transient.

Several members of the League²⁰² have arrived at Samsun, where they have harangued large audiences, pointing out that the Constitution was wrung from, and not granted by, the Sultan, and asserting that the Armenian troubles of twelve years ago would have been averted had the advocates of reforms at that time pressed, not for partial, but for general reform.²⁰³

The situation was similar in Bitlis and Diyarbakir. Lowther reported:

Whereas in my above-mentioned dispatch I was able to report a much more satisfactory state of things in that district, I regret to say that the improvement was only temporary. The Modky Kurds again broke out, and committed every kind of outrage. In the Moosh plain

²⁰² In all probability, the reference is regarding Prince Sabaheddin’s League of Decentralization

²⁰³ No.97, Lowther to Grey, Therapia, August 26, 1908 No. 516 FO 424/216/30952.

Kassim Bey was tyrannizing over the Armenians in the old way, and the most oppressive methods of tax collecting came into operation.

Such was the state of affairs when the news of the re-establishment of the Constitution arrived. While the Christians were filled with joyous anticipation, the fanatical section of the Moslems jibbed at the idea of equality; the numerous ranks of robbers and murderers experienced great anxiety as to what might be about to befall them from the mysterious change and kept quiet. The Kurdish Beys and Aghas were much annoyed, as they feared it would mean a régime of law and order instead of a state of disturbance in which they could continue, as in the past, to oppress the defenseless Armenians and the subject Kurdish tribes.

At Diyarbakir the usual incredulity and astonishment were caused by the news; the Vali showed the same reactionary tendencies as to many of his colleagues, and the local members of the League have denounced him and demanded his recall. The people are unanimously in favor of the movement, the fanatical party and a few corrupt officials alone excepted.²⁰⁴

Notwithstanding inevitable troubles, the revolutionary zeal manifested itself in Kharpert, Diyarbakir, Erzerum, and Bitlis where people, both Muslim and Christian,

²⁰⁴ No.100, Lowther to Grey, Therapia, September 1, 1908 No. 533 FO 424/216/30969.

demanded the removal of corrupt officials, many of whom represented the last vestiges of the *ancien regime*:

[In Harput] The League, or people who are in complete sympathy with its aims, have taken matters into their hands and have procured the dismissal of most of the most corrupt and inefficient officials, including the Armenian Bishop, whose resignation was demanded by the crowd; but the prelate has already departed with, it is said, a considerable sum of money... At Diyarbakir the reactionary party seem to have disappeared; a meeting of all creeds was held in the Armenian church to celebrate the Constitution, and some emissaries of the Beys of Haini, who have of late been terrorizing the town, who had come to ascertain whether orders had not arrived for a massacre, returned amazed to report the phenomenon to their masters.²⁰⁵

The same situation occurred in Ererum as well:

The local Committee has been definitely constituted, and supervises the actions of the Government, though it does not unduly interfere in administrative details. Its members are respectable men of good standing, and it consists of eight Mussulmans, three Armenians, and three Catholics. At the beginning of this month service was conducted by the Armenian Archbishop for the repose of the souls

²⁰⁵ No.140. Lowther to Grey, Therapia, September 20, 1908 No. 590 FO 424/216/ n a.

of those who had perished in the massacres of 1895, and a large crowd of Mussulmans attended, some of the leaders of which subsequently making speeches in honour of those who, they said, had fallen in the cause of liberty. They hoped that the past would be forgotten, and that henceforth Turks and Armenians would work together like brothers for the good of their common country.²⁰⁶

In Bitlis, Kurdish elements were not amused at all by the new constitutional regime and the “equality” it brought between Muslim and Christian ethnic groups:

The announcement of the Constitution was followed by a violent reaction, certain Moslem elements endeavoring to prove by very convincing tokens that a constitutional régime was unsuited to that part of the country, and they took steps for bringing about a massacre. The Acting Vali was well disposed, but of too weak a character to repress it, and certain officers, adherents of the League, took matters into their own hands, and, while seeing that the town and bazaars were properly protected, gave the Sheikhs and Notables to understand that they would allow no breach of the peace.²⁰⁷

Consequently, Armenian revolutionaries, even though as baffled as the population at large from this sudden onslaught of hurriyet, laid down their arms. As days went by

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

“hundreds of fugitive Armenians returned home from Russia, and [we]re being very well received by Kurds on the road. Others [we]re going to Constantinople and elsewhere.”²⁰⁸

In his memoirs, Ruben Ter Minasian indicated that the whole hurriyet aura baffled the Armenian revolutionary fighters, since most believed that it was a new trick by the government to bring them down from the mountains and to arrest them en masse. Despite such reservations, Ruben finally agreed to come to Moush, along with some 150 of his fighters:

I wake up and hear noises outside. I look from the window and see that people are everywhere. Turks and Armenians are on the street on the roofs. Two rows of troops are outside too. I think that they have come to take me and to hang me in a celebrated mood. Vartan Vartabed arrives to escort me to the government building. I dress up and follow him. Once outside, the officers of the troops want to shake my hands...Finally we reach the Konak and go to the hall upstairs. They sit me between the Bishop and the Imam...Karmen speaks to me from behind: ‘Here is Salih Pasha. Here is the governor.’ They come and to my surprise make a gesture to embrace...I am ashamed because my clothes are dirty and sweaty... The governor goes out to the balcony where he delivers a fiery and finishes it with the words Adelet, Musavet, Hurriyet [Justice,

²⁰⁸ No.140. Safrastian to Shipley, Bitlis, Sept. 1, 1908 enclosure to Lowther to Grey, Therapia, September 20, 1908 No. 590 FO 424/216/n a

Equality, and Freedom]. Three words that were the motto of the French Revolution had finally come to the Ottoman Empire one hundred and twenty years later. They were to shake the foundations of the empire and create a new life and new institutions.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ Ter Minasian, *Hay Heghapokhagani*, vol. 4, 390-394. Ruben's characterization of the French Revolution motto as Justice, Equality, and Freedom is erroneous. In reality the French motto is composed of the words Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, which translates into Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Hence, the motto "Justice, Equality, Freedom" doesn't correspond to the motto of the French Revolution.

CHAPTER 5

ARMENIAN-MACEDONIAN RELATIONS AND THEIR BULGARIAN AGENCY, 1895-1913

Armenian and Macedonian revolutionary organizations boasted of mutually beneficial relationships dating back to the middle of the 1890's. Although both groups opted for different approaches regarding their aims towards the Ottoman Empire—Macedonian revolutionaries fighting for outright independence while their Armenian counterparts advocated a reformist agenda in the eastern provinces of the empire—their collaboration seemed to be a natural one. After all, among all Christian minorities within the empire, it was the Macedonians and the Armenians that had not yet achieved their respective goals as anticipated in the 1878 Treaty of Berlin.

That the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (MRO) and its successor, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), were regarded as assiduously nationalistic in nature was apparent if one examined how the Young Turks tried to keep a safe distance from them. Simultaneously, Macedonian revolutionaries advocated unity with Armenian revolutionary organizations, and especially the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), which also drew the ire of Young Turk officials. Still, it is critical to point out that the osmosis between the two Christian communities occurred in Bulgaria, which became the center of Armenian-Macedonian collaboration. The country was indeed a safe haven for Armenian and Macedonian revolutionaries, and while sizable Armenian communities existed in Sofia, Varna, and Philippopolis (Filipe, currently Plovdiv), further south and near the Macedonian border, was where the crux of this collaboration came to life. It was in Filipe that Macedonian revolutionary leaders like

Boris Sarafov, Gotse Delchev, and Slavi (Svetoslav) Merdzhanov, among others, established their first contacts with Hnchag and later with ARF representatives.¹

Because Armenian-Macedonian ties during this critical period was dealt with sporadically in academic sources, and while a few studies focused on particular aspects of the relationships, no complete account of the entire historiography was attempted. It was critical to tackle this subject precisely to analyze the post 1902 anti-Hamidian efforts that mobilized various nations under the Ottoman Empire. The goal of this chapter is thus to remedy the lacuna in the literature by relying on Armenian and Ottoman archival materials, along with several memoirs written by Armenian scholars specializing on the period. By relying on sources that illustrated how Filipe and Salonika (Selanik, Thessaloniki, situated in modern Greece) became the nexus of Armenian-Macedonian collaboration, the chapter purports to trace the formation of Armenian revolutionary cells in Bulgaria.² Moreover, an effort is also be made to analyze how Balkan territories, and especially the ports on the Black Sea littoral, were utilized for arms smuggling operations into the Ottoman Empire. An assessment of some of the activities attributed to Rostom (Stepan Zorian)—one of the founders of the ARF in Bulgaria—as well as Antranig (Toros Ozanian), the renowned Armenian freedom fighter who was instrumental in the establishment of an ARF military academy in Bulgaria, will also be provided to better understand features of Armenian-Macedonian ties.

¹ BOA, 2222-46-126, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Umum Vilayetler Tahrirâtı, (Y.PRM.UM) *Petrof gunlerinde hudud tecavuz etmek uzere Kostendilde Makedonya Cemiyeti fesadiye tarafından açılan deftere bazı kişilerin kaydedilmeleri, 1899* (During the days of Petrof and regarding the issue of [clandestinely] passing the border from Bulgaria to Macedonia, Names of operatives found in Macedonian registries, 1899).

² The city of Rusjuk was the center of Armenian agitation as early as the 1880's. For revolutionary activities in Rusjuk see Bülent Yıldırım, *Bulgaristandaki Ermeni Komitelerinin Osmanlı Devleti Aleyhine Faaliyetleri: 1890–1918* (The activities of the Armenian Committees in Bulgaria Against the Ottoman State: 1890-1918), (Istanbul University, Master's tthesis, 2010).

Finally, after a discussion of alleged Macedonian gains in the 1908 Young Turk Revolution—representation in the Ottoman parliament and the promise of equal rights in a future federative or confederative Ottoman Empire—the narrative will also concentrate on the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars to demonstrate how Macedonia’s Christian neighbors, including Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece, were in fact clandestinely working to annex Macedonia to their respective countries. Although Macedonia was divided in the aftermath of WWI, this chapter will also deal, albeit indirectly, with the many intrigues that involved regional actors as they exploited both the Macedonian and Armenian revolutionary movements. The discussion concludes with an appraisal of Antranig and Nzhdeh (Garegin Ter Harutyunian), two celebrated Armenian freedom fighters who actively participated in the Balkan Wars, and who led an Armenian company of fighters in the war against the Ottomans, to determine the circumstances under which they operated and their effect on Armenian-Young Turk relations.

The Genesis of Armenian-Macedonian Collaboration

Although the Balkan liberation movements inspired Armenians in the Ottoman Empire just as much as they motivated Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia, in the case of the Macedonians, it was the Armenian revolutionary movement that served as a model worthy of emulation. For a leading ARF historian:

Even though the liberation struggles of the Balkans had been a source of inspiration for the Armenian Awakening in the Ottoman Empire, it seems that the case was reversed vis-à-vis Macedonia, since the latter was inspired by the Armenian liberation struggle.

The Macedonians had to remain under Ottoman dominion until the Balkan Wars of 1912-13.³

Though few recall exact circumstances, the genesis of Armenian-Macedonian exchanges dated back to 1895, when a specific event ushered in an era of mutual collaboration. According to Mikayel Varandian:

.Macedonians were late in their awakening. They were even later than us [Armenians]. The Armenian movement inspired them greatly especially after the Ottoman Bank takeover [1896] and the ensuing fighting in Constantinople [in Samatya]. This is what the Macedonians admit to, and especially Boris Sarafov, one of the prominent Macedonian leaders.

In fact, it was after the Bank event that Macedonians started approaching Tashnag agents and proposed their intention to cooperate with us. It was at this time that the two decades long Armenian-Macedonian collaboration was institutionalized.⁴

The first meetings between Armenian and Macedonian revolutionary cadres occurred in 1896-1897 in Geneva, Switzerland, where Armenian Revolutionary Federation leaders lived. Simon Radev, a well-known Macedonian revolutionary was also a Geneva resident, along with a slew of engagé Bulgarian and Macedonian students.⁵ Naturally, clandestine meetings were arranged in Constantinople, while other gatherings

³ Hrach Dasnabedian, Yervant Pambukian, Ed., *Badmutyun Hay Heghapokhagan Sharzhman u Hay Heghapokhagan Tashnagtsutyun* (History of the Armenian Revolutionary Movement and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation) (Beirut: Hamazkayin Vahe Setian Press, 2010), 248.

⁴ Mikayel Varandian, *H.H.Tashnagtsutyun Badmutyun* (ARF History), 2 vols. (vol. I: Paris, 1932, vol. II: Cairo, Husaper Press, 1950). vol. I, 259.

⁵ Simeon Traychev Radev was a Bulgarophile Macedonian journalist and a diplomat leader and an ardent advocate for a united Macedonian state. See FO371/16651.

occurred in Bulgaria, whose government encouraged such contacts to underscore the intrinsic values of anti-Ottoman revolutionary movements.⁶ As a matter of fact, the latter were granted unhindered entry and exit privileges by the Bulgarian government, at a time when such arrangements were scarce.⁷

The Macedonian Revolutionary Organization

Before proceeding further, it may be useful to briefly state that the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization [MRO], the precursor of IMRO [Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization],⁸ was founded in 1893. Its goal was simply to liberate Macedonia from the Ottoman yoke.⁹ Although this objective coincided with the formation of an ARF cell in Filipe,¹⁰ Armenians in Macedonia at this time totaled no more than 300.¹¹ Therefore, Armenian-Macedonian cooperation germinated not as a result of popular pressure, but because of genuine affinity for like-minded views. In 1897, MRO leader Gyorche Petrov (Gyorche Petrov Nikolov) contacted a certain Leon (Levon), a chemist and a member of the Hnchag party, to help him develop explosives and to

⁶ BOA, 327-50-45, Yıldız Perakende Evraki, *Makedonya komiteleri Manastir civarında hareket ve mazbata, 1896* (Report regarding Macedonian revolutionaries actions in the area of Manastir, 1896); BOA, 3362-88-13, Yıldız Perakende Evraki, *Cenevrede neşrolan Taruşak hakkında Memduh Pashanın arzı, 1896* (Memduh Pasha's report regarding Troshag that is being published in Geneva, 1896); BOA, 2709-50-77, Yıldız Perakende Evraki, *Umum Vilayetler Tahrirâtı, (Y.PR.M.UM), Sofyadaki Makedonya Komitesi reislerinden İdama mahkum Gotse Delçef İstibe geleceğine dair haber alındığı, 1900* (Regarding news about the Sofia residing Macedonian revolutionary leader Yorgi Delchev, who is already sentenced to be hanged, coming to Istib, 1900); BOA, 3039-53-65, *Arnavut ve Bulgar Komitelerinin muzir faaliyetleri karşı alınması gereken tedbirlere da'ir şifre ve telegraflar, 1900* (Cipher and telegrams regarding actions against the revolutionary activities of Albanian and Bulgarian bands, 1900).

⁷ Dasnabedian, *Badmutyun*, 249; BOA, 1128-517-60, *Taharriye haber: Troşak [Troshag] hey'etinden mektub Bulgar fesad Komiteye*. (Investigative report regarding a letter from Troshag headquarters to Macedonian revolutionary Committee in Bulgaria).

⁸ Sometimes referred to as IMARO: Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization.

⁹ Perry Duncan M. "The Macedonian Revolutionary Organization's Armenian Connection," *Armenian Review*, vol. 42, No. 5 (165), spring 1989, 63.

¹⁰ Armen, "H. H. Tashnagtsutyune Balkanneru Mech: Enger Asadur Bedigiani Hushere" (The ARF in the Balkans: Memoirs of comrade Asadur Bedikian), *Hayrenik*, No. 12, 1933, 99-110.

¹¹ Duncan, "The Macedonian," 67. Bulgaria had a sizeable Armenian community of around 35,000. The community had grown especially after 1895, when hundreds and even thousands of Armenian deportees from Sasun emigrated there. The same thing happened after 1904-05 as a result of deportations due to the second rebellion of Sasun.

manufacture bombs.¹² Petrov visited Constantinople and met with another Armenian, Krikor, for the same purpose. The two men traveled together to Sofia where they set up a modest factory, though it was relocated in May, 1897, to the village of Sablur in the Osogovo Mountains of Bulgaria. The latter location, just on the border with Macedonia, meant that bombs could be delivered far easier. Despite the Spartan way of life Krikor and his Macedonian apprentices endured, they were able to produce substantial quantities of small and large bombs.¹³ Under pressure from the Ottoman government, Sofia raided the facility, and closed the “illicit” factory in 1899.¹⁴

This collaboration was not the only successful venture between the two sides. In 1897, Petrov made another contact with Armenians through Na'um Tufekchiev, a prominent Bulgarian arms dealer from Sofia.¹⁵ While Petrov met and subsequently befriended several Armenian revolutionaries who were members of the ARF committee in Varna, one of these men was a member of the central committee on a visit to hone revolutionary matters.¹⁶

Another prominent Macedonian, Delchev, traveled to Odessa in the spring of 1897, where he met two Armenians from the Caucasus (most probably ARF members)

¹² Ibid, 64. See also: BOA, 2288-507-143, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Umum Vilayetler Tahriratı, (Y.PR.M.UM), *Hinçak Ermeni fesad cemiyetinin Pazarçik ve Varnadan bazı Ermeni fesadçıların geldiği (Nalçacıyan, Nahabetyan)* (Some Hnchag Armenian revolutionaries—such as Nalchajian and Nahabedian—coming in from Pazarjik and Varna); BOA, 2222-46-126, *Petrof gunlerinde hudud tecavuz etmek üzere Kostendilde Makedonya Cemiyeti fesadiye tarafından açılan deftere bazı kişilerin kaydedilmeleri, 1899* (Some names being added to the lists of revolutionaries from the days of Petrof who are crossing the border, 1899).

¹³ Duncan, “The Macedonian,” 64.

¹⁴ Ibid, 65.

¹⁵ Ibid, 64.

¹⁶ Ibid. Duncan doesn't supply the name of the high-ranking ARF operative. There was no such ARF body known as “Central Committee of Geneva.” The Body in question was the ARF Western Bureau, AKA the Troshag Geneva Center.

who allegedly were “excellent pyro-technicians, casters of bombs, and masters of infernal machines.”¹⁷

Emboldened by various contacts and clearly learning from fellow revolutionaries, a small Bulgarian-Macedonian radical group was formed in Salonika in 1899, which catapulted Merdzhanov, a prominent member destined to become an important link between IMRO and the ARF, to the forefront.¹⁸ The group planned to assassinate the sultan and bomb the Ottoman Central Bank in Constantinople as well as its a branch in Salonika.¹⁹ Against insurmountable hurdles that literally prevented anyone to approach the sultan, the first project was quickly abandoned, highlighting the imperatives of zeal over practicality. The group concentrated on the second project, to attack the Central Bank, as it rapidly organized surveillance stations that monitored both facilities. Kose Aristidi, an Armenian with a Greek name, assisted.²⁰ Tunnels to both banks were dug from surveillance points, which were completed by 1900, certainly in record time.²¹ Interestingly, explosives for both operations were carried by Armenian volunteers from Russia through the port of Batumi (Batum) but, for reasons that were never elucidated, failed to reach their destinations. Turkish police authorities intercepted the Armenian volunteers, confiscated the weapons and, following an “investigation” that most likely involved torture, captured Merdzhanov and his comrades.²²

¹⁷ Armen, “Tashnaktsutyune Balkanneru Mech,” 65.

¹⁸ Armen, “Tashnaktsutyune Balkanneru Mech” *Hayrenik*, No. 3, January 1934, 155-159.

¹⁹ Duncan, “The Macedonian,” 66. The ARF later tried to assassinate Abdulhamid in 1905 (see Chapter One).

²⁰ Ibid, 66. Duncan is in confusion regarding the bombing of the Ottoman Bank Center in Constantinople. That event had taken place in 1896. See footnote 2. As to the bombing of the Salonika branch of the Ottoman Bank, IMRO operatives accomplished that in 1903. See below.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, 66-67; BOA, 2222-46-126, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Umum Vilayetler Tahrirati, (Y.PRM.UM), Merdzhanov was arrested in Constantinople. However, he was extradited to Bulgaria where he was released later, only to be caught and hanged in 1901. See below.

This set-back notwithstanding, Armenian-Macedonian cooperation continued, especially after Rostom (Stepan Zorian) arrived in Filipe in 1899 accompanied by his wife, Lisa Melik Shahnazarian.²³ The couple opened a school and Rostom looked after the growth of the organization for several years. It was during this critical period that ties with Macedonian revolutionaries, and especially Merdzhanov, became strongly fraternal. Moreover, the Bulgarian government looked favorably upon both groups, as it encouraged linkages with its own officers. In fact, Bulgarian army staffers even trained revolutionaries from both Armenian and Macedonian movements, especially in target shooting and other military tactics.²⁴ Although most of these exercises ceased after the Ottoman government complained, they continued under the guise of hunting expeditions.²⁵ Comical developments colored the times, as for example with the Armenian newspaper, *Sharzhum* (Movement), which was slated for publication in Varna. In 1898, an ARF member by the name of Varto, used significant sums from the organization's coffers to set up editorial offices and to start printing the newspaper, but regarded the venture as a personal affair. Even though Varto believed that he had the right to take such a decision, Rostom rebuffed him and strongly disapproved of his schemes, as he insisted that such a decision could only be ratified by the ARF Central Committee of the Balkans. It was under these circumstances that Varto was ousted from the organization at a time when every member was sorely needed.

More seriously, various meetings with the Macedonian revolutionary movement continued unhindered in later years in Paris, London, and Milan. These contacts were

²³ Armen, "Tashnaktsutyune Balkanneru Mech," 99-110.

²⁴ Duncan, "The Macedonian," 66-67.

²⁵ Ibid.

organized through the efforts of the ARF's Pro Armenia Committee, under the leadership of Hovannes Loris Melikov (Melikian).²⁶

Perhaps one of the most important events that characterized ARF-IMRO cooperation was the fates of ARF militants Bedros (Bedo) Seremjian and Onnig Torosian, condemned to the gallows together with Merdzhanov and Kristo Haji. Seremjian, often referred to as Bulgaratsi Bedo (Bedo the Bulgarian), along with some of his Bulgarian-Armenian comrades, joined Merdzhanov and other Macedonian revolutionaries for an operation. Ottoman troops surrounded them and, in the ensuing battle, fought until their ammunition was exhausted. Bedo, Onnig Torosian, Merdzhanov, and Kristo Haji were arrested and taken to prison in Adrianople. In his moving memoirs, Asadur Bedikian described the event as follows:

Armenian-Macedonian Brotherhood is strong and is baptized with fire. The ARF was able to carry on its revolutionary activity in Bulgaria thanks to the devoted help of Macedonian revolutionaries and the Bulgarian government.

Bedros (Seremjian) and Merdzhanov are already sent to the gallows. Riza Pasha, who is a native of Filipe and who later became a member of the Ottoman Parliament went to Edirne to visit Bedo in prison and to make sure that it was the same Bedo who had participated in the battles to defend Van in 1895. When he was convinced that Bedo was the revolutionary in question, he made all the necessary arrangements with the governor of Edirne

²⁶ Dasnabedian, *Badmutyun*, 249.

[Adrianople] to send Bedo and his friends to the gallows as soon as possible. Otherwise, if he (the Pasha) had delayed by only several days, the matter would have already been taken care of and the preparations to free the revolutionaries from prison would have been successfully implemented.²⁷

Simply stated, there was too much blood split in common, which reinforced ties as both revolutionary movements connived to better organize their forces against an Ottoman Empire anxious to crush every last breath of freedom among its subjects.

The 1899 Hague Convention

The tribulations of Ahmed Riza in securing participation at The Hague Conference of 1900 were discussed in chapter Three. After securing the leadership of the Young Turk émigré group in exile, Riza traveled to The Hague in 1900 to attend a peace conference that convened to deal with reform concerns for Armenians and Macedonians. Although Riza was not an official participant, he somehow wiggled himself to the podium, declaring that the Young Turks were not revolutionaries, and that they needed European assistance to make Turkey a state based on laws.²⁸

Riza's participation at the conference served only to infuriate the ARF and the EMRO. No meetings of minds occurred during the conference, as Turkish Armenian and Macedonian revolutionary forces dug themselves into clear and non-negotiable positions.

²⁷ Armen, "Tashnaktsutyune," 105-106. See also Hagop Manjikian Ed., *H.H.T. Albom-Atlas, Tutsaznamard, 1890-1914* (ARF Album-Atlas: Freedom Fight, 1890-1914), (Los Angeles: Modern Type Printing and Lithography, 1992), 39, 43, 45, 53. See also BOA, 3134-54-32, *Makedonya erbabi fesad, Siroz, Hristo, ve Anfokolonun Edirne'de tutulduđu, 1901* (Macedonian revolutionaries Siroz, Kristo, and Anfokolon being detained in Adrianople, 1901); BOA, 1746-503-128, *Selanık Ermeni fesadciların yakalanması için tedbirlerin alınması* (Actions being taken to apprehend Armenian revolutionaries in Salonika).

²⁸ Şukru Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 128-129.

Nevertheless, the Armenian-Macedonian revolutionary cooperation was not only further enhanced, but more importantly it was not replaced by a new entente between Armenians and Young Turk elements, at least not at this stage of the long quest for reforms.

The 1902 Anti-Hamidian Conference and the Dilemma of IMRO's Invitation

Such drawbacks notwithstanding and as mentioned earlier, attempts to establish ARF-Young Turk relations continued, most notably after Damad Mahmut Pasha extended ARF leaders an invitation to meet. The pasha admitted that he did not include Macedonians in his address, because he was familiar with the Armenians and placed great hopes on their revolutionary committees. Macedonian revolutionary forces, he reasoned, wanted to unite with Bulgaria, which excluded any cooperation.²⁹

Despite their absence from the congress, Macedonian revolutionary movements weren't spared Riza's ire, whose verbal assaults on the Armenians and Macedonians alike entertained many. Even though Prince Sabaheddin tried to remedy the situation by presenting a new resolution favorable to Armenians, it was Ahmad Riza who rebuffed him by stating that "the Armenians are offering their right hand to the revolutionary Bulgaro-Macedonian Committee (IMRO), and their left hand to the Young Turks." An enraged and obviously irritated Riza saw no possible accord with Armenians that surprised attendees.³⁰

An equally important reason why Armenians hesitated to attend the Congress was that no formal invitation was forwarded to IMRO. In light of close Armenian-Macedonian cooperation, which, as seen above, had genuinely flourished during the previous decade, both groups stood in solidarity. Moreover, Armenian and Macedonian

²⁹ ARF Archives, Section I (1895-1901), box 218, document No. 22.

³⁰ Hanioglu, *The Young Turks*, 194.

revolutionaries felt more at ease with each other rather than with the Young Turks.³¹ Even though Sabaheddin acknowledged that the IMRO oversight was an honest mistake on his part, he implored the ARF to invite Macedonian representatives through Troshag, even if such a “mechanism” was improper, to say the least. Moreover, when Armenian delegates in Paris contacted the Troshag Headquarter in Geneva just prior to the congress to arrange an invitation for the Macedonians, an unnamed IMRO leader forwarded a letter that stated:

It is important that you keep me informed in a timely fashion about all the details of the congress. If it so happens that the elections [for a joint committee] during the congress are not to our benefit, you must cease your participation and take the necessary steps to secure our cause. Something persuades me that it is better not to take any action until the election.³²

ARF delegates quickly understood that the “honest mistake” was intentional, since most Young Turks considered IMRO as a devious, separatist movement. Prince Sabaheddin was influenced in his not inviting the Macedonians by none other than his most trusted comrade, Ismail Kemal Bey [Vlora]. According to the British journalist and writer Francis McCullagh, when the abortive mutiny of April 1909 was crushed in Constantinople, it became clear that Ismail Kemal had been in the employ of Abdulhamid since the beginning. In other words, he was one of “The Eyes and Ears” of the sultan in the midst of the Young Turk movement in exile and he was feeding the sovereign with journals on a regular basis. More than a hundred journals written by Ismail Kemal were

³¹ Duncan, “The Macedonian Revolutionary Organization’s,” 61-70.

³² ARF Archives, Section A (1895-1901), box 37, document 62. The letter is dated November, 1907.

discovered by the special committee tasked with going through Abdulhamid's journals in the Ministry of War building at the entrance of the Sublime Port.³³

The issue of Ismail Kemal Bey needs some elucidation though. In 1909 Ismail Kemal (Qemali in Albanian) was a member of the Sabaheddin's Ottoman Liberal Party (Osmanlı Ahrar Firkası), which often made overtures to and retained contacts with Greek, Serb, Bulgarian, activists who supported a Balkan union. By 1910, when McCullagh wrote his book, "The Fall of Abd-ul-Hamid," Kemal Bey Qemali was in the middle of a power struggle that pitted British agents against Italians, Serbs, Greeks and Habsburgs, which may account for why Kemal did not support collaboration with IMRO. Therefore, Francis McCullagh's suggestion that he was "clearly an agent of Abdulhamid" should be taken with a grain of salt. It may have been a CUP propaganda piece that the British journalist was fed to damage Kemal Bey's chances of forging alliances in the Western Balkans, which in time would allow him to challenge Esad Paşa Toptani and eventually be declared as the chosen candidate of the European powers for Albanian leadership after the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), which suggests that Europe was attempting to position principal actors in the Balkan region during the aforementioned wars.³⁴ As future events would show, this European maneuver was to manifest itself on the ground in the case of Ismail Kemal Bey, especially after 1918, when the Albanian revolutionary leader became an important icon of Albanian independence.

The Armenian insistence to invite IMRO delegates to the 1902 Ottoman dissidents' meeting was eminently logical, spurred by the notion that the congress was

³³ For more regarding Ismail Kemal Bey and his workings see: Francis McCullagh, *The Fall of Abd-ul-Hamid*, (London: Unwin Brothers, 1910), 15-19, 293.

³⁴ In this regard, see, for example Isa Blumi, *Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative Balkan Modernities, 1800-1912*, (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2011), 118 and on.

supposed to be a gathering of all forces opposed to Abdulhamid's regime. Still, Troshag invited Macedonian revolutionaries, though IMRO politely failed to reply.³⁵

The 1903 Ilinden–Preobrazhenie Uprising and its Aftermath

If the 1902 anti-Hamidian conference failed to produce concrete results, and if the IMRO invitation oversight created a dilemma, the Macedonian rebellion a few months later caught everyone's attention.

Despite the division of labor between EMRO and IMRO, the Macedonian revolutionary organization were not operating smoothly. In fact, there were several critical issues that produced friction among various factions, the most important of which was EMRO cadres' firm beliefs that the future of Macedonia would be secured if annexed to Bulgaria.³⁶

According to Rostom, a person with first-hand knowledge of the matter, it was after the liberation of Rumelia and its annexation to Bulgaria that the idea of Western Macedonia's annexation became a valid principle for EMRO, even if the idea was rejected by IMRO. Rostom compared these frictions to similar problems within the Hnchagyan party, eventually leading to a division, followed by several assassinations. He lamented how both cases significantly weakened the two respective organizations, and wrote why he supported ARF-EMRO collaboration, all for the sake of progress. Frustrated by recriminations, he even added that Sarafov, Davidov, Liapov and others would join Gotse Delchev and other comrades inside Macedonia, to fight the Ottoman

³⁵ ARF Archives, Section A (1895-1901), box 37, document 62.

³⁶ Hrach Dasnabedian Ed., *Rostom, Mahvan Vatsunamyagin Artiv* (Rostom: On the Sixtieth Anniversary of His Death), (Beirut, Hamazkayin Press, 1979), 79. This volume contains the writings of one of the ARF's founding members, Rostom (Stepan Zorian). The article appearing on pages 76 through 81 is about the Macedonian revolutionary movement. It was written in Russian and was left unfinished. See also Dasnabedian., *Rostom: Namagani* (Rostom: Letters), (Beirut: Hamazkayin Vahe Setian Press, 1999), 284-286. Letter No. 179 is addressed to the Western Bureau (Troshag Headquarters, Geneva).

enemy. For Rostom, it was vital that the ARF and EMRO work together. IMRO stood firm on its advocacy of total liberation for Macedonia, while EMRO leaders preferred the province's annexation to Bulgaria. As if these complications were not sufficient, Macedonia became a point of friction point between the three Balkan states of Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia, each aspiring to secure a part of, or the whole province, for itself.³⁷ No wonder that the French, in their keen observation of events taking place in the Balkans, concocted the appellation *Salad Macedoine* (to infer a mixed salad of sorts) for what turned out to be one of the most critical arenas for regional conflicts.³⁸

Regardless of the amusing character of the above mentioned French epithet, starting in April 1903, Macedonian revolutionaries embarked on a very active campaign that would dramatically alter conditions on the ground. On the night of April 28 an IMRO operative, Pavel Shatev, blew up the French ship *Guadalquivir*, which had just left Salonika's harbor. Turkish police units caught the bomber while the latter boarded a train to Skopje (Uskub). That same night, another group of operatives composed of Dimitar Mecheva, Iliya Trachkov, and Milan Arsov bombed the Salonika-Constantinople railway. No human casualties occurred. Yet another militant, Kostadin Kirkovo, used explosive devices to cut off the electricity and water supply to Salonika. This action was the signal for a series of events to follow: On April 29, Jordan Popjordanov (Orcet) blew up the Salonika branch of the Ottoman Bank, utilizing a tunnel that was previously dug in preparation for the bombing.³⁹ The building, which had been inaugurated in 1863, was

³⁷ John Macdonald, *Turkey and the Eastern Question* (New York: Dodge Publishing Co., 1913), 34-39, 45-47. As a British reporter, Macdonald was well acquainted with Macedonia and its revolutionary organization. His book was the result of his years of experience in covering the events of Macedonia.

³⁸ Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts*, 57.

³⁹ G. Megas, *The Boatmen of Thessaloniki: The Bulgarian anarchist group and the bomb attacks of 1903* (Athens: Troxalia Publishing, 1994), 52-72.

completely destroyed. That same night, Kostadin Kirkovo, Vladimir Bogdanov, and Iliya Pingov detonated bombs in different parts of the city. Other activists, Dimitar Mecheva and Truchkov Iliya in particular, failed to destroy the gas plant and its reservoirs. Both were later killed in a gunfight with the army and police forces, during which some sixty bombs were detonated. There even was an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate the Ottoman governor of Salonika.⁴⁰

A few days later, the Ottoman army ambushed Gotse Delchev and several of his comrades near the village of Banitsa. Their deaths on May 4, 1903 sparked a new wave of rebellion against Ottoman forces in August of the same year. Some 900 IMRO guerrillas and 4,000 Macedonians perished as a result of what came to be known as the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising. The Krushovo republic, which IMRO proclaimed at the beginning of the rebellion, was thus a short-lived accomplishment.⁴¹

According to H.N. Brailsford, A British historian, diplomat, and political activist specializing in Balkan history: “The moment for which the Bulgarian population had been preparing for ten years arrived on the day of the festival devoted to the Prophet Elijah— the evening of Sunday, August the second, 1903.”⁴² The Secret Internal Macedonia-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (IMARO) assumed the leadership of the abortive act (what became known in Macedonian history as the Ilinden–Preobrazhenie Uprising). It was clear that the local forces were not enough to sustain a long term rebellion and all eyes were centered toward Bulgaria, from where, it was

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, 61. In fact, the whole uprising was quashed in a mere two month’s period. See also BOA, Yıldız Perakende Evrakı, Umum Vilayetler Tahrirati, (Y.PR.M.UM), 843-515-127, *Vangelo, Yorgiyef Eşkiya hakkında* (Regarding the criminals Vangelo and Yorgiev).

⁴² H. N. Brailsford, *Macedonia: Its Races and Their Future*, (London & New York: Arno Press, 1906), 148.

expected, weapons and troops filtering in would save the day. However, Bulgaria was unable to send arms, troops, and much needed supplies to rescue fellow Bulgarian rebels. When IMARO representatives met the Bulgarian Prime-Minister, Racho Petrov, he showed them the ultimatums he had received from Serbia, Greece and Romania, and which informed him of those countries' support for the Ottoman Empire, in case Bulgaria intervened to support the rebels.⁴³ At a meeting in early October, the general staff of the rebel forces decided to cease all revolutionary activities, and to disband irregular militias.⁴⁴

Thus, the Krushovo republic, which IMRO proclaimed at the beginning of the rebellion, was a short-lived accomplishment.⁴⁵

Interestingly, and as was discussed in Chapter Four, the 1903 events in Macedonia corresponded with an elevated cadence of revolutionary activities in the eastern vilayets of the Ottoman Empire. If anything, this shows that the reciprocal events were no coincidence, but most probably previously decided, concerted effort. And although fighting for “the welfare and protection of their people” against regular Ottoman troops and Hamidiye regiments earned the ARF fighters various epithets, most were dubbed as troublemakers. British Consul Freeman asserted that the fighters

plan [wa]s to act according to events in Macedonia. Moreover, the fixed purpose of the revolutionists this time [was] to provoke such

⁴³ Dimitar Gotsev , *The Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising of 1903*, Conference dedicated to the 105th anniversary of the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising, Conference paper presented at the Macedonian Scientific Institute, 2008.

⁴⁴ Georgi Khadziev, *Natsionalnoto Osvobozhdeniye i Bezvlastniyat Federalizum*, (National Liberation and Libertarian Federalism), Sofia: ARTIZDAT-5,1992, 99-148.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 61. In fact, the whole uprising was quashed in a mere 2 month's period. See also: BOA, 1322-1323, 843-515-127, Rumeli Mufettişliği Tasnifi, Manastir Evraki (TFR.İ.MN) (1904-1905, Cild II), *Vangelo, Yorgiyef Eşkiya hakkında* (Regarding the revolutionaries Vangelo and Georgieve).

a slaughter of their race that the Powers will be compelled to intervene once [and] for all.⁴⁶

Although this whole operation was abandoned after the British embassy presented formal complaints to the sultan, hostilities did not end until Armenian revolutionaries retreated beyond the Russian border, following armed encounters with Ottoman troops stationed there. Moreover, and as the British vice-consul stated:

Signs have not been wanting lately of some kind of concerted movement between the Committees in Macedonia and the Armenian revolutionaries; but any such agreement has entirely failed to be effective in these parts, so far, owing to the feeble action of the latter and the want of sympathy with them among the Christian population here.⁴⁷

The events on the Armenian Plateau led to the Second Rebellion of Sasun, in 1904, which was in itself a bloody episode that cost the lives of several thousand Armenians.

Cooperation Continues

Meanwhile, the ARF held its Third General World Congress in Sofia, where delegates reached a formal decision to work jointly with the Macedonian Revolutionary Movement and especially IMRO, after 1904.⁴⁸ A decision to assassinate Sultan Abdulhamid II was also taken during this meeting (see Chapter One). The most

⁴⁶ FO 424.205.4. Freeman to O'Connor, Bitlis, January 10, 1903, No. 1 Confidential, enclosure to Whitehead to Lansdowne, Constantinople, January 27, 1903, No. 42 Confidential (Quoted in Chapter Four too).

⁴⁷ FO 424.205.107. Hampson to O'Connor, Erzerum, September 2, 1903, No. 28, enclosure in O'Connor to Lansdowne, Therapia, September 17, 1903, No. 571 (Quoted in Chapter Four too).

⁴⁸ Dasnabedian, *Nyuter*, vol. 2, 118-119.

controversial decision of the congress was to demand substantial financial contributions from wealthy Armenian merchants dwelling in Bulgaria and elsewhere (codenamed Potorig).⁴⁹ The ARF had raised significant funds in the Balkans in the aftermath of the 1904 Sasun massacres, to rush desperately required aid to destitute refugees. Naturally, complaints abounded, and when one merchant grumbled, a special inspector was dispatched from Sofia to look into the matter. Sarafov solved the dilemma by suggesting to the ARF leadership to quickly blame the “extortion” on two Russian Armenians who, by the time a hearing was held to determine culpability, were already out of the country.⁵⁰ It was unbecoming conduct but entirely congruent with the conditions of revolutionary struggle.

As stated above, the decision to assassinate Sultan Abdulhamid II, a task entrusted to Kristapor Mikayelian by the third ARF General Congress, proved to engender its own controversy. Though Mikayelian was killed near Mount Vidosh (Vitosha in Bulgarian) when a bomb he was testing for the assassination attempt exploded prematurely, his funeral produced yet another chapter in the annals of Armeno-Macedonian and Armeno-Bulgarian fraternity.⁵¹ According to Asadur Bedigian, the emotional gathering at Kristapor’s funeral was telling:

⁴⁹ Armen, “Tashnagtsutyune,” 105.

⁵⁰ Ibid. See also BOA, 1293-1326, 1027-10-40, (1-22 Numaralı Dosyalar), Yıldız Perakende Evraki, Mufettişlikler ve komiserlikler Tahriratu, 1876-1909, (Y.PRK.MK), *Rusyadan Bulgaristana gecen Ermeni fesat komitelerimin Rusçuk tüccarlarını sıkışterdiği, 1901* (Armenian Clandestine operatives passing from Russia to Bulgaria are causing hardship to merchants in Rusjuk, 1901). The plan for collecting money from Rich Armenians was code named Potorig (Storm). It was sanctioned by a special, secretive ARF body known as Tashnagtsutyun Gamke Nergayatsnogh Marmin (The Body Representing the Will of the ARF).

⁵¹ For a full account of the events and the judicial proceeding regarding the futile assassination affair see the documents regarding the assassination, which makes up a huge file within the dossier of the ARF Fourth World Congress in Vienna, 1907: Yervant Pambukian Ed., *Nyuter*, vol. 5, 399-515.

Aknuni [Khachatur Malumian], who had arrived from Geneva, represented the [ARF] Western Bureau. Hamo Ohanjanian had arrived from Tiflis as the representative of the [ARF] Eastern Bureau. He was keeping a low profile and meeting only with ARF members and Macedonian revolutionary leaders.

The best and most expensive coffin was bought. All of Sofia's carriages (almost 150 in number) were rented. Kristapor's funeral was a singular event in Sofia. It attracted much attention and interest. The main boulevards were full with people. The Maria-Luisa Boulevard was cordoned off by Macedonian revolutionaries. Boris Sarafov sent the best flower bouquet. On the ribbon was written: To the father of Armenians and the elder brother of Macedonians.

Aknuni was the main speaker at the cemetery. He called Kristapor a man-maker. Aknuni then addressed the Macedonians present by saying: We are leaving Kristapor's body as a relic with you until the day arrives when we put him to rest in his beloved Armenia.

S. Kirov spoke on behalf of the Macedonian organization. Sarafov was unable to speak.

The Turkish Ambassador had requested from the Bulgarian government not to allow an eye-striking funeral. Nevertheless, the government neglected the ambassador's request. It only informed

Sarafov that it would be better if he did not speak at the procession.⁵²

Whether such outpouring of political emotion was conducive to foster even closer ties was impossible to determine. Nevertheless, the ARF strengthened its presence in the Balkans, and established a by-weekly organ in 1905. The first issue of *Razmig* (Fighter), the new organ of the ARF Balkan's Central Committee, appeared on October 15, 1905. The required capital to launch *Razmig* was secured locally, through the sale of shares whose face value was to be paid by the newspaper over time. When the enterprise barely managed to cover costs, investors simply ignored the inconvenience, further confirming the notion that Macedonian as well as Bulgarian-Armenian support was amply sufficient to overcome such pecuniary concerns.⁵³ It was another, though perhaps clearer, illustration of how the ARF managed its contacts in Bulgaria, as it extended useful bridges of cooperation with Macedonian revolutionary movements.

Antranig's Mission to Bulgaria

Of all the contacts established between the two communities, Toros Ozanian's May 1906 visit, stood out. When the famous Armenian revolutionary and freedom fighter arrived in Filipe, a visit that was kept secret for some time by orders from the Bulgarian government, ARF members were elated. Most could finally meet their hero who, it must be acknowledged, was not simply on a relaxing trip. From his hideout in the nearby village of Sadovo, Ozanian, better known as Antranig, cultivated relationships with

⁵² Armen, "Tashnagtsutyune," 106-107.

⁵³ Ibid., 108.

Macedonian revolutionaries, especially after Rostom had left the Balkans for the Caucasus.⁵⁴

Ozarian was anxious to assess intrinsic capabilities first-hand, and wished to meet with Bulgarian officials to determine whether mutually beneficial steps were possible. In a letter addressed to Khachatur Malumian (Aknuni)⁵⁵ Ozarian wrote that EMRO leader Boris Sarafov suggested that he meet with the Minister of War of Bulgaria, to acquaint himself with the higher circle executives of the Bulgarian government. General Sazof, the Minister of War, was already abreast of Ozarian's arrival, and was probably briefed by a senior EMRO leader, Liapov.

The coveted meeting occurred on May 30, 1906, in the presence of Liapov as well as Yervant Alajajian, a member of the ARF Balkans Central Committee. According to Ozarian, the minister asked pertinent questions regarding the Armenian revolutionary movement, and the difficulties the latter encountered within the Ottoman Empire and especially in its eastern provinces. Antranig stressed that his diplomatic answers satisfied the minister, though he was careful not to reveal much details. Moreover, when Sazov queried Ozarian about the ARF's arming tactics and whether the organization was financially solvent to carry on with the endeavor, Ozarian managed to put his interlocutor at ease.⁵⁶

During the three-hour meeting, Sazov proposed an accord with the ARF, along the following main lines:

⁵⁴ ARF Archives, Document 1148-54, *Nyuter*, vol. 5, 368. Rostom's departure to the Caucasus and from there to Iran was for the purpose of directing ARF efforts in collusion with Iranian constitutional revolutionaries. A project that would occupy an important proportion of ARF resources from 1907 to 1912, when the Iranian revolution was finally suppressed through Russian military power.

⁵⁵ The letter is dated May 2/15. Antranig probably wrote it after returning to Filipe.

⁵⁶ ARF Archives, Document 1148-58; *Nyuter*, vol. 5, 369-371.

1. ARF arms shipments from Vienna or elsewhere could be brought through Bulgaria without paying any taxes as merchandize destined for Macedonian revolutionaries. The government would then take care of transporting the weapons to a port of the ARF's choosing.⁵⁷
2. The Bulgarian government proposed to accept and train au gratis twenty students per year in the Bulgarian Reserve Forces Academy. The Bulgarian government was ready to train at least four hundred Armenian youths [the number would grow to much more than that] in military combat and assigning special officers to them.
3. The Bulgarian government wanted the ARF to have more cordial relations with the Macedonian revolutionaries and to express complete eagerness for that purpose. In return it was to provide the ARF with explosives as well as trained cadres in using new machine-guns that would ultimately be delivered to the ARF.⁵⁸

Whether these points illustrated exclusive support to Armenian revolutionary movements or whether Sazov was preparing for a Bulgarian-Turkish debacle were difficult to determine. Suffice it to say that the Bulgarian Ministry of War was

⁵⁷ It seems that Antranig had shopped around and had become somewhat fond of the Bulgarian Männlichen rifle, which was cheaper than its Austrian counterpart and of equal quality if not better. Besides, these rifles could be bought (or given freely) by the Bulgarian government with their accompanying ammunition.

⁵⁸ ARF Archives, Document 1148-58; *Nyuter*, vol. 5, 369-371.

simultaneously preparing for an imminent confrontation, which Sofia concluded might happen in no more than two to three years.⁵⁹

The nonconformist Antranig was impressed by the Bulgarian minister's overtures, as he quoted verbatim comments he must probably received from Sazov. According to Antranig, Sazov declared:

I am extremely happy that I had the pleasure of meeting the most illustrious Armenian hero and freedom fighter of the Armenian revolutionary movement. In the name of the Bulgarian intelligentsia and the highest state authorities, I promise to do whatever I can to lend a helping hand to your endeavors.⁶⁰

Antranig's letter then offered the following commentary on these remarks that are worth underlining:

It was clear from the minister's utterances that he was not conveying a personal message. Rather he was passing on an official statement, since we later knew that he had already met and had consulted with the Prince [Ferdinand of Bulgaria] before meeting me.⁶¹

Antranig was eager to persuade the ARF Western Bureau, then headed by none other than Aknuni, who expressed reservations on the venture and, perhaps, was partially motivated by his own interactions with Ittihadist elements in Europe. After all, Aknuni

⁵⁹ ARF Archives, Document 1148-58; *Nyuter*, vol. 5, 369-371.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 370.

⁶¹ *Ibid*.

was the chief ARF negotiator with both Prince Sabaheddin and Beaheddin Shakir, and he seldom appreciated being upstaged. Even by a national hero like Antranig.

It was also important to keep in mind that the Second Conference of Anti-Hamidian forces was to convene in December 1907, just after the ARF's Fourth General World Congress. The latter was scheduled to vote on whether to embark on a bona fide full cooperation with the Young Turks, which may have colored the Aknuni-Ozanian clash. As a matter of fact, the ARF 4th General Congress, held in Vienna a few months later, became a point of friction for Antranig to the extent that he, at one point, presented his resignation from the party.⁶² The problematic issue, as was alluded to before in this narrative, was the adoption by the congress of a socialist ideology for the party as well as the embracing of a Caucasian Platform, which was to drench the organization into the myriad intricacies of the Russian and Persian constitutional revolutionary movements.

For Antranig and many other nationalist elements within the party—Especially Western and even Eastern Armenians—these moves were tantamount to deviations from the real ARF program that concentrated all the party's efforts for the cause of Western Armenians in the eastern vilayets of the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the congress also adopted a resolution of open-ended fraternity with other anti-Hamidian revolutionary movements (Macedonians, Albanians, Young Turks), which proposed joint ventures in assassinating Ottoman officials.⁶³

⁶² The ARF archival material are at best ambiguous regarding Antranig's resigning from the party. They convey a scenario whereby Antranig resigned from a special committee that was tasked with organizing armed-struggle operations in the eastern provinces. However, the archival material also mention that the ARF Western Bureau sent several of Antranig's close associates (Rupen Zartarian, the editor of *Razmig*, being one of them) to Varna, where he was living with his sister and recuperating from an illness, to change his mind and return to the party.

⁶³ The congress also adopted a resolution to bolster the smuggling of revolutionary literature into the Ottoman Empire and to even publish such literature in places such as Van and Erzerum. *Sabah ul Heyr* (see Chapter Four) was such a publication emanating from Van. See also Pamboukian, *Nyuter*, vol. 5, 15-

Moreover, Antranig was also enraged when the Western Bureau refused to lend the Macedonian revolutionary leader Boris Sarafov a sum of 50,000 French Francs, which the latter had asked for through Antranig as a debt to be paid later. Instead, the Western Bureau decided to present Sarafov a sum of only 5,000 Francs as a grant. Sarafov was assassinated several months later, in December 1907. The ARF Western Bureau sent a flower bouquet to his funeral as well as condolatory telegrams to his father and sister. The ARF Bureau also decided that Antranig, Rupen Zartarian, and Mardiros Haroutyunian (from Berlin) should be present at Sarafov's funeral and represent the party.⁶⁴ Such measures meant that Antranig who felt alienated from the party and had thus rendered his resignation, was deemed unacceptable and returned to him. Moreover, the Western Bureau sent several prominent ARF members to appease Antranig and to calm him down, though the latter was furious.⁶⁵ Regardless of the remedy brought to Antranig's case, the rift between him and the ARF, which started between late 1907 and early 1908, was not to end. In fact, Antranig's movements illustrated that he preferred to work on his own, and without party supervision.

On the other hand, it was not clear whether Antranig was able to procure any weapons shipments through his Bulgarian connection. The ensuing 1908 revolution in Constantinople, along with the declaration of the second constitutional congress in the Ottoman Empire, made any such cooperation between the ARF and Bulgaria meaningless. The Balkan states, seizing the opportunity of the Young Turk revolution

56; ARF archives, Document 44. This is a registry of all decisions by the ARF Western Bureau between 1907 and 1908. Especially important are decisions in sub-documents dated 12 (October 18, 1907), 13 (October 29, 1907), 15 (November 7, 1907), 17 (November 19, 1907), 18 (November 30, 1907), 22 (December 14, 1907), 25 (January 20, 1908), 29 (February 13, 1908), and 30 (February 20, 1908).

⁶⁴ ARF archives, General Document 44, Sub-Document 21 (December 12, 1907) in Pambukian, *Nyuter*, vol. 7, 44.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

and the consequent power vacuum in the Ottoman capital, joined a new rampage to annex parts of Ottoman Macedonia, which further complicated matters. For his part, Antranig, who remained in Bulgaria and maintained strong ties with his hosts, eventually headed an Armenian company under Bulgarian command in the 1912 offensive against the Ottoman army.⁶⁶ His contributions proved valuable, especially when Armenian and Balkan revolutionary forces who gathered in Geneva, failed to agree on the best options to pursue the Young Turks. Antranig's actions in Bulgaria bolstered the ARF's resolve at the December 1906 Geneva assembly of anti-Hamidian coalition, which was sometimes considered an unattainable dream. The coalition thus gradually mustered the necessary energy to move forward. Geneva, opined an astute editorialist, assembled rebels from the East:

Greek, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Bosnian, Hertzegovinian, and Armenian elements participated. Turks were absent, because they could not provide a representative to participate in the meeting. This was the first effective meeting that brought together elements who in the past had divergent and sometimes contradicting agendas. The main objective was to create some sort of Modus Vivendi amongst the forces struggling against the sultan. The meeting also dealt with the means by which to topple the Hamidian regime.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ See below.

⁶⁷ Editorial (author unknown), "Tzhkoh Darrerri Hamakhempum" (A Gathering of Unsatisfied Elements), *Troshag*, No. 12 (178), December 1906, 178-179. According to Hanioglu, The Young Turks were not invited to this meeting. Once again, Ottoman intelligence was aware of this conference, which convened to formulate a united stance in preparation of the second La Hague Conference, which took place in June 1907. See BOA, 2781- 219A-10, Yildiz Perakende Evraki, Mufettişlikler ve komiserlikler Tahiratı,

The convention was relatively successful and, after much deliberation, participants formulated a united resolution that:

- A. Set aside any and all infighting and animosity toward each other;
- B. Determined the fighting against the sultan's regime in a united front;
- C. Declared self-rule for Macedonia, Armenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as a federation of all the small nationalities of the Balkans;
- D. Introduced radical changes and constitutional applications within the government of the Ottoman Empire; and
- E. Continued the struggle to attain the above objectives with a united front until the existing regime was toppled.⁶⁸

It was also decided to organize another general assembly during December 1906, invite two prominent French activists, Jaurès and Presanssè for guidance, and to accommodate the latter in case of preventions. However, neither militant made it. Consequently, the proposed meeting withered.⁶⁹

(Y.PRK.MK), *Cenevrede yakında bir Ermeni Kongresi yapılacağı konusunda gazetelerde yer alan haberler* (Newspaper articles and other news regarding an Armenian congress to be held soon in Geneva).

⁶⁸ "Tzhkoh Darrerri Hamakhempum," *Troshag*, No. 12 (178), December 1906, 178-179.

⁶⁹ That the Ottoman authorities were closely following the ARF activities at La Hague is evident from Turhan Bey's report to the central government. See: BOA, 1652-15-58-6, 1294-1341, (1-16 Numaralı dosyalar), Yıldız Perakende Evraki, Komisyonlar Maruzatı, 1877-1923 (Y.PRK.KOM), *Lahey Konferansında Ermenilerin Nelidof Ve Baron Marsaliyle yaptıkları görüşmelerin akım kaldığı hususunda Turhan Pashadan gelen haber, 1907* (Turhan Pasha's report regarding Armenian maneuvers with Nelidov and Baron Marsali remaining unproductive in The Hague, 1907); BOA, 1621-15-36, 1293-1326, (1-22

The ARF Military Academy in Tupnitsa, Bulgaria

The Geneva deliberations seldom prevented the consummate Antranig from setting markers. Indeed, his most important accomplishment was the establishment of the ARF Military Academy, which necessitated great sacrifices. While politicians haggled, Antranig acted, mindful of what was needed on the ground. His astute venture was considered of utmost importance to prepare educated military cadres, though ARF committees in the United States of America subsidized the project.

As in every such venture in need of financial and political backing, ARF officials engaged in intensive negotiations, while several letters were exchanged between the ARF Western Bureau (Geneva), the ARF United States Central Committee (Boston), the ARF Balkans Central Committee, and the ARF Eastern Bureau (Tbilisi). All were keen to see the project through, aware that a military academy in Bulgaria would add real value to revolutionary prestige. Whereas the ARF United States Central Committee sponsored its finances, it also proposed to send several young cadres to train at the nascent academy, with the bulk of the cadets to be drawn from the ranks of regions that were under the jurisdiction of the ARF's Eastern Bureau. Local candidates from Filipe as well as cadres from Egypt were to participate as well. The venture encountered difficulties, since the ARF Eastern Bureau was not enthusiastic and refused to allocate the promised manpower. As a matter of fact, the combined number of potential cadets from the USA and the Caucasus reached fifteen, which was not a particularly positive figure given what Antranig wished to produce. Following political haggling that illustrated the pettiness of

Numaralı Dosyalar), Yıldız Perakende Evraki, Mufettişlikler ve komiserlikler Tahriratu, 1876-1909 (Y.PRK.MK), *Sofya Ermenilerinden Lahey konferansına telegraf gönderildiği ve benzeri fesatların önlenmesine çalışıldığı, 1907* (Regarding Sofia Armenians sending telegraphs to The Hague and our actions against such intrigues, 1907).

so-called sophisticated cadres, the venture finally took off in late 1906, and completed one ten month cycle by July 1907. Since the ARF United States Central Committee failed to fulfill its financial obligations, the vital ARF Military Academy in Bulgaria was abandoned, a victim of shortsightedness par excellence.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, that the Bulgarian government gave the go ahead for the project only after the ARF promised to keep utmost secrecy. A property in the village of Tupnitsa within the remote Rila Mountains area was secured for the project and the academy actually operated for a single year under miraculous circumstances. It graduated 80 officers that assumed leadership positions within the ARF's military apparatus in the next decade that, at least from such a perspective, was a tribute to the great Antranig.⁷¹ Moreover, and this too must be recognized, the academy functioned rather well because of the leadership of Colonel Boghos Boghosian of the Bulgarian army, who was the critical go-between between his government and the ARF since 1901. As several Armenians were active in the ranks of the Bulgarian army, the aforementioned Bedros Seremjian, himself a graduate of the Bulgarian Military Academy with an officer's rank, played a useful role too. Simply stated, the Bulgarian government secretly approved the scheme of Armenian and even Bulgarian officers to lend their expertise in training Armenian cadets that, alongside local elements including young men from the Caucasus, the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and even as far away as the United States of America, all responded to Antranig's calls. One of the most prominent cadet-

⁷⁰ ARF Archives, document 1148-61, *Nyuter*, vol. 5, 373-379.

⁷¹ BOA, 6090-311-86, Yildiz Mutenev'i Maruzat Evraki, Analitik Envanteri, (Y.MTVI), *Bulgaristan dahilinde Ermenilerin gizli bir mektep bulunduđu ve bu hususta tahkikat yapılması, 1907* (Regarding Armenians opening up a secret school inside Bulgaria and our investigation results, 1907). The information contained in this document shows that Ottoman intelligence was aware about the military school and was meticulously collecting information and reporting it to Constantinople.

officers was Garegin Nzhdeh, who became Antranig's second in command during the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars.⁷²

According to Ottoman sources, fifty graduates from the military academy comprised a company under the leadership of Col. Boghos Boghosian of the Bulgarian army that, not surprisingly, were dressed in regular Bulgarian army uniforms and transported to the Rila Monastery area where they continued their military training. Several of the promising cadets were later accepted into the Bulgarian Officers' Academy and continued their education in Radomir.⁷³ What is equally interesting was that aside from the Ottoman government, Russian authorities were also distressed by this endeavor. Accordingly, Russian officers agreed with their Bulgarian counterparts to keep the Armenians within Bulgarian territories, to prevent them from reaching the Caucasus.⁷⁴ Ottoman sources claimed that a second school, one of an entirely different nature, operated in Bulgaria and that raised serious concerns as well. This venture allegedly

⁷² In fact, Nzhdeh had problems with some of the cadets while attending the Academy. He asked for and was transferred to the Bulgarian Reserve Forces Academy and graduated from there with the rank of Second Lieutenant. In 1912, when the Armenian company was made part of the regular Bulgarian army, Nzhdeh was appointed its commander, while Antranig was given the honorific title of *Volvod* (also *Voyvod*, *Voyvoda*, Commander of Partisan Forces). It was only at the end of 1912, and in honor of his valiant actions during the war, that Antranig was given the rank of Second Lieutenant. See Avo, *Nzhdeh: Gyankn ou Kordze, Nshkharner, Vgayutyunner* (Nzhdeh, His life and Work: Relics and Testimonies), (Los Angeles: Arax Printing, 1990), 21-22, 36-51; Armen, "Tashnagtsutyune," 109-110; Manjikian, *Albom-Atlas*, 182-186. All indications show that Boris Sarafov was instrumental in securing the Bulgarian government's approval for the opening of the military academy. Macedonian revolutionaries were educated there too. Finally, after the liquidation of the academy on orders from the Bulgarian government (under extreme diplomatic pressure from the Ottoman government), the rifles and other instructional materials were assumed by the Bulgarian (Balkan) Central Committees of the ARF and were used to train members under the pretext of hunting expeditions; Dasnabedian, *Badmutyun*, 60-61. During the ARF Forth General Congress (Vienna, 1907), Antranig presented a detailed memorandum regarding the military school. It is apparent that Antranig tried to secure the Western Bureau's blessing for the venture, but Khachatur Malumian (Aknuni) did not encourage it. This shows that there was friction between the two regarding the academy. However, Antranig went ahead with the project, since he had assurances regarding the project from the highest authorities within the Bulgarian government. The course was designed on the basis of ten months of instruction.

⁷³ BOA, No. 297/78, Yıldız Mutenevvi Maruzat Evrakı (Y.MTV.), *Bulgaristan Komiseri Ferik Sadık Pashanın mabeyn'i Hümayun ve Cenebi'i Mülükhane Baş Kitabet'i Celilesi Aliyesine*, 30 Nisan 1907 (Correspondence from General Sadik Pasha, Military attaché to Bulgaria, to Turkish Military Headquarters, dated April 30, 1907).

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, No. 311/185, Leff. 2. See also, Davidson, "The Armenian Crisis," 486.

specialized in the manufacture of explosives and bombs, which also preoccupied Ottoman authorities.⁷⁵

The 1907 Second Anti-Hamidian Congress and the Second Constitutional Period

As stated above, the ARF Fourth General World Congress, which was held in Vienna in 1907, decreed that:

Being well aware of the fact that the government tries everything in its power to put one revolutionary faction against another in order to secure its position, the congress calls upon all to not fall in such traps. Fights, such as those between Greek and Bulgarian factions in Macedonia, should be stopped. All means should be directed against our common enemy, the regime of Sultan Abdul Hamid II.⁷⁶

Although such a conclusion was elementary, the mere necessity to reiterate it once again illustrated significant gaps among protagonists, which were cleverly exploited by Constantinople. In the event, the Fourth ARF World Congress decided that the Party's Constantinople Responsible Body would henceforth oversee future relations with the Young Turks, hoping that proximity might favorably influence Ottoman decision-makers.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ BOA, 1293-1326, 1876-1909, (1-22 Numaralı Dosyalar), 2474-22-36, Yıldız Perakende Evraki, Mufettişlikler ve komiserlikler Tahrirati, (Y.PRK.MK), *Filipede bir Ermeni mektepinde dinamit ve bomba i'mal edildiği istihbaratın Bulgar Emaratince Araştırılması, 1907* (The Bulgaria principality is looking into the issue of Armenians manufacturing bombs and other explosive devices in a secret school in Filipe, 1907).

⁷⁶ "Miyatsyal Ashkhadanki Goch" (A Call for Unified Action), *Troshag*, No.1 (189), January 1908, 1-5.

⁷⁷ Dikran Mesrob Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule: 1908-1914*, (New Brunswick & New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 5.

Parallel to the ARF assembly, the Second Anti-Hamidian Congress convened in Vienna, Austria between December 27 and 29, 1907.⁷⁸ To no one's surprise, the most important resolution passed by delegates was the call on Abdulhamid II to abdicate, although an equally valuable initiation was debated to usher in a new constitutional government. It was significant to note that the rebellion within the Ottoman army, which started in June 1908 in Salonika, ultimately compelled the sultan to accept the reinstatement of the constitutional monarchy.⁷⁹ Regardless of the new situation, and contrary to the stance of their Armenian counterparts, IMRO leaders viewed the Young Turk revolution with suspicion and tried to resist it since they still aimed for the total independence of Macedonia. However, never-ending disputes among the Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek factions within the Macedonian revolutionary movements worked against the creation of a united front. In the end, Macedonians too went with the flow, as they tried to campaign for political goals that could only be accomplished within the Ottoman parliament. Like Armenians, Macedonians participated in the elections even though ethnic and religious divisions within their ranks was to their disadvantage. Armenians secured almost fourteen seats versus twenty two for the Macedonians distributed as follows: Eight Albanians, seven Greeks, four Bulgarians, and three Serbians.

Notwithstanding this electoral victory, and long before parliamentary elections were held, divisions surfaced. As early as September 12, 1908, Bulgaria took over the

⁷⁸ Ahmet Bedevi Kuran, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda İnkılap Hareketleri ve Milli Mücadele* (Regime Topping Movements and the National War in the Ottoman Empire) (Istanbul: Çeltüt Printing, 1959), 443-449.

⁷⁹ Kaligian, *Armenian Organization*, 2; BOA, 1907-71-51, *Manastır mantakası kumandanlığının vekilinin arz ettiği İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyetinin Meşrutîyyetin İ'lanını istyeyen arzı, 1908* (Regarding the declaration of the constitution that the İttihad ve Terakki Committee advocated for by the Ottoman military commander of the Manastir Area, 1908).

Eastern Rumelia railways because of a work stoppage and, even more ominously, announced its complete independence from the Ottoman Empire on September 22, 1908. On October 5, a new “Monarchy” was proclaimed, according to which Southern Bulgaria—which until then was under nominal Ottoman suzerainty—was annexed to Bulgaria. A day later, that is on October 6, 1908, the Austrian Empire announced its annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, while Greece seized Crete. This brought forth a full-fledged Balkan crisis though none of the Great Powers responded favorably. Against such nonchalance, Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece started military preparations to reinforce political decisions, to secure by sheer military force what officials eager to distance themselves from the Ottoman Empire craved most. As it turned out, preparations were not in vain, since the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars affirmed what most suspected.⁸⁰

As soon as the Young Turk revolution transpired, Macedonian revolutionaries operating from both within Bulgaria and Macedonia sided with Bulgaria. Militant leaders gathered in Filipe, where it became clear that war preparations were urgently needed, and where close associations were activated between Macedonian and Armenian revolutionaries in Bulgaria to foresee subversive acts in Constantinople.⁸¹ When Ottoman spies learned that such preparations were under way, a trained officer was dispatched to Sofia, ostensibly to investigate and, if possible, disrupt any concrete

⁸⁰ Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılap Tarihi* (History of the Turkish Revolution), vol. 1, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu [Turkish Historical Society] Printing, 2009), 429-479.

⁸¹ BOA, 1293-1326, (1-22 Numaralı Dosyalar), 2510-22-72, Yıldız Perakende Evraki, Mufettişlikler ve komiserlikler Tahrirâtı, 1876-1909 (Y.PRK.MK), *Bulgarların Filipede yaptıkları miting, 1908* (The meeting that the Bulgars [Macedonians] convened in Filipe); BOA, 1293-1326, 1876-1909, (1-22 Numaralı Dosyalar), 2511-2-73, Yıldız Perakende Evraki, Mufettişlikler ve komiserlikler Tahrirâtı, (Y.PRK.MK), *Bulgar komite Kongresinde aldığı kararların esasını Bulgar halkını harbe hazırlama konusunun teşkil ettiği ve bu konudaki düşüncüler, 1908* (Information and some thoughts regarding the decision that was taken at the Bulgar [Macedonian] revolutionaries congress [in Filipe], regarding publicizing the issue of war and preparing the people for it., 1908).

plans.⁸² It was yet another example of how prescient Armenian and Macedonian revolutionary officers were, since every single decision, measure, or plans for an operation targeting the porte, elicited a sustained Ottoman response.

An Epilogue: Antranig and the Balkan Wars, 1912-1913

Even though the period after 1909 is outside the parameters of this study, Antranig's future accomplishments in the Balkans somehow needs to be addressed, in order to bring this episode to closure. Hence, One of the most interesting—albeit puzzling—events of the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars was the participation of an Armenian company alongside the Bulgarian army. There was no evidence that the ARF Constantinople Responsible Body (Gosdantnubolso Badaskhanadu Marmin), led by none other than Aknuni, sanctioned such a venture. According to Dasnabedian, “the final rupture between the ARF and the İttihad ve Terakki Camiyyeti (Committee of Union and Progress) took place in June or July of 1912. The Tashnag party was once again transformed into an underground organization.”⁸³ Antranig, who construed this rupture as a sufficient reason for his unit to join the Bulgarian army, filled a critical leadership vacuum against Ottoman forces.

Though this was an unconventional move by every stretch of the imagination since such decisions were reserved to ARF higher bodies, Antranig nevertheless informed the ARF Balkan Central Committee about the formation of the Armenian company, his planned activities and, most important, his liaison efforts with Macedonian revolutionary

⁸² BOA, 1293-1326, (1-22 Numaralı Dosyalar), 2562-2-124, Yıldız Perakende Evraki, Mufettişlikler ve komiserlikler Tahrirâtı, 1876-1909 (Y.PRK.MK), *Bulgar cetelerin Osmanlı vilayetlerine muzir evrak soktukları ve bazı şekavet faaliyetlerinde buldukları, 1908* (Regarding Bulgar revolutionaries smuggling damaging literature into Ottoman provinces and their provocations, 1908); BOA,), 1293-1326, (1-22 Numaralı Dosyalar), 2533-22-95, Yıldız Perakende Evraki, Mufettişlikler ve komiserlikler Tahrirâtı, 1876-1909 (Y.PRK.MK), *Balkan-Ermeni İttihad Komitesinin Darsaadette cinayet işleyeceği ve Sofyaya bir zabıt gönderilmesinin geraktığının bildirilmesi, 1908* (Regarding the Balkan-Armenian joint revolutionary committees' activities in Constantinople and the need to send an officer to Sofia, 1908).

⁸³ Dasnabedian, *Tashnagsutyuan Gazmagerbagan Garuytsi*, 374.

groups. The latter, also in an equally unconventional move since it had not consulted about this with the ARF pertinent bodies, in this case the Western Bureau and the ARF Constantinople Responsible Body, which should have sanctioned such a decision, accepted Antranig's proposal with utmost enthusiasm.⁸⁴

The 1912-1913 wars comprised two successive military conflicts that deprived the Ottoman Empire of almost all of its remaining territories in Europe. The First Balkan War was fought between members of the Balkan League—Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro—against the Ottoman Empire, whereas the Second Balkan War began when Serbia, Greece, and Romania quarreled with Bulgaria over the division of their joint conquests in Macedonia. The Armenian company that fought alongside the Bulgarians would be part of the Makedono-Odrinsko Opalchenie (Macedonia-Adrianople Volunteer Unit), which also included several Macedonian companies. According to Armen Suni, a medical doctor and the non-commissioned health and sanitation officer of the Armenian company, “The Armenian Company, numbered no more than 230 men, officers included. The company underwent intensive training under the leadership of Garegin Nzhdeh, an Armenian Captain [sic.] in the Bulgarian Army. Within 2 weeks it had its first victory in the Kirjaali sector against General Mehmet Yaver Pasha's Third Turkish Army Corps, who was later forced to surrender.”⁸⁵ This eyewitness account confirmed that Armenians were fully engaged in battle even if their relatively small numbers were not decisive.

⁸⁴ Avo, *Nzhdeh*, 36-48.

⁸⁵ Armen Suni, *Haygagan Vashde Antranigi Arachnortutyamp 1912-1913 Tyaganneru Balkanyan Baderazmnerum* (The Armenian Company in the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars under the Leadership of Antranig), (Baku: 1914), 38. See also Arsen Marmarian (Vahan Totovents), *Zoravare yev Ir Baderazmneru* (The General [Antranig] and His Wars), (Bolis [Constantinople], 1920), 226; Vahakn Dadrian, *Warant for Genocide: Key Elements of Turko-Armenian Conflict* (New Brunswick & New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 108.

It was critical to note that some 8,000 Armenians were conscripted in the different Ottoman armies deployed throughout the theaters of operations. Ironically, and no matter how reluctant most of these conscripts were, they fought better than others. Indeed, in the words of a leading historian of the period, who quoted a battlefield Ottoman commander, General Yaver Pasha, the Armenian soldiers provided “valiant service in the Balkans.”⁸⁶ On either side of the conflict, Armenians were dedicated, even if Antranig’s troops were far more motivated, led by a gutsy officer sharing with his men a long-term salutary vision for the nation.

What actually occurred on various battlefields earned Antranig his well-deserved reputation. But it is useful to revisit the key development that crowned his fame; After capturing Dedeaghaj and entering the village of Osmanjik, Armenians were stationed near Merhamlu village on the banks of the Maritsa (Merich) river.⁸⁷ Leon Trotsky—who at the time was a correspondent for the *Kiev Thought* (Киевская Мысль) working under the pen name Andit Odon—interviewed Antranig. His reportage revealed that:

Antranig, a hero of song and legend stood at the head of the Armenian volunteer troops formed in Sofia. He is of middle height, wears a peaked cap and high boots, is lean, with graying hair and wrinkles, fierce moustaches and a shaved chin, and has the air of a man who, after an over-long historical interval has found himself once more.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Roderick Davidson, “The Armenian Crisis,” 491.

⁸⁷ Dadrian, *Warant for Genocide*, 109.

⁸⁸ [Leon] Trotsky, “The Balkans and the Balkan War: Antranig and His Band,” *Kiev Thought* (Киевская Мысль), No. 197, 19 July 1913.

When Trotsky pressed Antranig to explain his motivation vis-à-vis his participation on Bulgaria's side and against the Ottoman army, the latter affirmed:

I never engaged in hostile acts against the peaceful Turkish population; I only fought against the beys and against the government. I am not a nationalist. I recognize only one nation: the nation of the oppressed.⁸⁹

This was enlightening in more ways than one, as it partially explained the war hero's differences with the ARF, as well as his ideological ease with the Macedonian revolutionary movement. While the Bulgarian government granted Antranig Bulgarian citizenship at the end of the war, and although he settled in Varna, where he lived with his sister, Nazeli until the beginning of WWI, he never felt beholden to a particular government.

In 1914, and contrary to the wishes of the hosting Bulgarian government, Antranig abandoned his relatively comfortable zone, and traveled to Tiflis by way of Costanzia-Batumi finally arriving in Transcaucasia. The call of the oppressed mobilized him once again as he assumed command of the First Armenian Volunteer Unit serving within the Russian army in the Caucasus. Antranig was accompanied by Garegin Nzhdeh, Krikor Amirian, and several of the ranked Armenian cadres of the Bulgarian army.⁹⁰

Conclusion

Armenian-Macedonian relations were part of the revolutionary zeal of the period as both peoples harbored legitimate grievances overlooked by the 1878 Berlin pact. Moreover, it was obvious that the relationship was blessed and even nurtured by the Bulgarian

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Avo, *Nzhdeh*, 53.

government, which tried to use it as a trump card against Constantinople. In fact, and regardless of intentions, Armeno-Macedonian relations were predicated to the policies of the Bulgarian government that seldom wasted an occasion to take advantage of an opportunity. Sofia's readiness to coral anti-Ottoman forces within its territories was entirely understandable and eminently logical. Likewise, Ottoman awareness of secretive activities perpetrated by Armenian and Macedonian revolutionaries in Macedonia and even within Bulgaria proper indicated the amateurish character of both revolutionary groups. Even Antranig's activities, which created serious problems for the fledgling Armenian revolution, fit into this overall pattern. The legendary Armenian hero, a maverick par excellence, was fascinated by his own accomplishments rather than managing the task at hand as envisaged by the ARF. He was enthralled by Bulgarian intrigues to the detriment of the Armenian cause, which limited his independence and, perhaps, reduced his potential.

Moreover, the ARF Balkans Central Committee's public flyer, published at the end of the war in 1913, was yet another illustration of how the glorification of the Armenian Company and its travails during the first and second Balkan wars damaged the already dented Armenian-Young Turk relations. It partially read:

Compatriots, Volunteers: There will come a beautiful day, when darkness and the long night of repression is destroyed and replaced with the sun of a new life. At that time, the Armenian nation will remember its sons who fought and fell in Macedonia, since their souls will then be united with the souls of those who fought and fell for the creation of a beautiful Armenian sunrise.

Hurrah for those Armenian volunteers who participated in the battle for the liberation of Macedonia. Hurrah for the leaders of the Armenian Company, Antranig and Nzhdeh...

ARF Balkans Central Committee

November 8, 1913

As mentioned above, Antranig's symbolic participation in the Balkan wars on Bulgaria's side occurred at a time when some 8,000 Armenian soldiers were serving in the Ottoman army in the Balkan theatres. His heroic actions, which turned into a debacle, failed to protect or serve Armenian interests.

Moreover, the deep sense of Ottoman/Turkish victimhood after the Balkan wars shaped the thinking and actions of the CUP and radicalized its leadership. This victimhood was to be utilized to justify the ruthless survival policies of the CUP, above all in terms of the Armenian Question in the eastern provinces of the empire.

CHAPTER 6

REEVALUATING THE APRIL 1909 ADANA ORDEAL

The year 2009 marked the centennial of the Armenian massacres in the city of Adana in the Ottoman province by the same name.¹ Much has been written about the subject by Armenian, Turkish, and foreign scholars ever since the event occurred. Enough time has now elapsed to reevaluate the event. However, instead of dealing with the day-to-day happenings of the tragedies that befell the city and its hapless inhabitants, this chapter evaluates the Armenian and Turkish historiographies concerning the incident.² It further pinpoints the maladies and discrepancies that mire the respective historiographies, especially those issues that remain particularly problematic in the Turkish version for what is a painful chapter in the contemporary narrative of the Ottoman Empire.

Prelude to Tragedy

The beginning of this historical event occurred in Istanbul. A chronology of the occurrences illustrates that the July 1908 Young Turk revolution defined the powers of the absolutist monarch, Abdulhamid II, who, on seeing the triumphant march of the Third Army Corps under the leadership of Ahmed Niyazi Bey to Constantinople, capitulated. The ruler's sudden move ushered in the Second Constitutional Period in Ottoman history.

¹ The province of Adana is more commonly known in Armenian as Giligia (Cilicia in English), Çukurova (Chukurova) in Ottoman and Modern Turkish.

² Estimates vary about the Armenian death toll from 18,000 to 40,000. The latter is the figure supplied by Austrian diplomats in the Ottoman Empire. For more details on the Austrian perspective see Austro-Hungarian Empire, Foreign Office Archives, Document 412, enclosure number 287, Consul Nikolaus Daras (Mersin) to Ambassador Pallavicini, Constantinople, April 30, 1909, in French.

A new parliament convened in December 1908. It took about three months to form a new cabinet under the premiership of Huseyn Hilmi Pasha.

The constitution was supposed to balance the absolutist power of the monarch. Abdulhamid II, who was not ready to give up his control and authority. Outwardly, he maintained the character of a changed man, but connived to keep the Young Turks at bay. The monarch capitulated because to do otherwise would have meant his end. His fears, it seems, were mostly due to reportage carefully lifted by Palace aids from the journals of Ismail Kemal Bey, who had exaggerated the strength of the Salonikan Army marching on the capital, Constantinople. However, when the wily ruler understood that he was a victim of a mere bluff, and that he could withstand the onslaught by relying on regiments loyal to him in the capital, he immediately started scheming to reclaim his position.³

Abdulhamid accomplished this through the revival of his old system of spying. Did he receive his journals after the revolution? The answer is an unequivocal yes.⁴ That his spies would follow Abdulhamid to the end can also be surmised from the fact that after the 1908 revolution all of them had practically lost their employment.⁵ They were

³ Francis McCullagh, *The Fall of Abd-Ul-Hamid*, (London: Unwin Brothers, 1910), 19. McCullagh was a British journalist who at the time was stationed in Constantinople. Aside from being an eyewitness to the events he wrote about, he also gathered a lot of pertinent and important information from the interviews he conducted from those close to the sultan as well as several Young Turk leaders. McCullagh was confident that the sultan's journalists kept on feeding him with information, and that the monarch was paying them out of his own pocket so that his spies could continue their work.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 20-21. In fact, Abdulhamid's eunuch, Nadir Agha, and his secretary, Esat Bey, were the individuals through whom the sultan kept on receiving the journals.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 61. According to McCullagh, these spies numbered about 50,000, which might be an exaggeration.

eager to have the despot back in order to reclaim their previous lucrative positions. They were thus ready to do everything for this end.

On the last day of March 1909, Constantinople experienced one of its most harrowing periods. It may be accurate to state that the March 31, 1909, reactions were truly nothing more than a desperate cry by *gerici* (reactionary) forces, against newfound liberties initiated by the revolution.⁶ That an aggravated sultan was behind the “coup” can thus be surmised with some accuracy, although no concrete proof is available to buttress this assertion.⁷

Likewise, while speculation on Constantinople Young Turk involvement with the Armenian massacres that transpired concurrently in Adana may be entertained by some scholars, that issue is equally difficult to consider, ostensibly because CUP leaders were fleeing for their lives during the following two weeks.

In July 1909, on the first anniversary of the 1908 July Revolution, the CUP center in Salonika published a proclamation in which it accepted responsibility due to the inefficacy of the members of the CUP cabinet, stating:

⁶ The incident is referred to as the “Mart 31 Vuku’asi” in Turkish historiography. The date is April 13 according to the new calendar. For a presentation of the Constantinople events with some analysis on ARF-CUP relations see Kaligian, *Armenian Organization*, 13-43.

⁷ It seems that money played an important role in inciting for the mutiny, since most of the petty officers and soldiers who mutinied and who were later arrested by General Mahmud Shevket’s battalions, carried similar banknotes on them [5 Turkish Liras on regular soldiers and 15-20 Turkish Liras on officers]. It is possible that Abdulhamid utilized the offices of the newly formed Ittihad-i Muhammed-i (Mohamedean League) to distribute money amongst soldiers to create the chaos that would usher in the re-establishment of the Shari’a law and the return of his absolutist monarchy. This last piece of information was derived from Nadir Agha, during his interrogation after the mutiny was crushed. See, McCullagh, *The Fall of Abd-UL-Hamid*, 41-42, 47,50-53.

It was the cowardice, indecision, and incapacity of these men [Huseyn Hilmi Pasha and his cabinet members] who were believed to be able men and who had been in office for a year [sic.], that opened in the bosom of the Fatherland those two almost mortal wounds: The Constantinople Mutiny of April 13 [March 1] and the tragic atrocities of Adana.⁸

Still, why was Adana targeted, and who was behind the calamity that ensued? To better answer these questions, an examination of the two historiographies is provided next, emphasizing mainstream as well as non-conventional interpretations.

The Dominant Armenian Historiography

The dominant school within Armenian historiography is that of Vahakn Dadrian, later complemented by Tanır Akcam. Starting in the 1970s, Dadrian maintained that since the 1890s, the Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Empire formed a linear vector leading all the way up to the catastrophic events that transpired between 1915 and 1923, universally characterized as the Armenian Genocide.⁹ According to this perspective, what transpired in Adana and its environs in April 1909 were a key link in a chain of events that included the Hamidian massacres, both in 1894-1896 and 1904-1906. According to Dadrian, the victimization of Armenians during the Adana Massacres is expressed from a sociological point of view:

⁸ McCullagh, *The Fall of Abd-Ul-Hamid*, 59.

⁹ See Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic conflicts from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996). The theme is found in chapter 10 of the book, “The 1909 Twin Adana Massacres,” 179-184; See also: Taner Akcam, *A Shameful Act* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

Intergroup or inter-national tensions have a way of accumulating and persisting without exploding into a cataclysm, when there is some parity in the alignment of powers pitted against each other, or when there is credible external deterrence to compensate for any disparities in such alignments. Otherwise, such tensions are deliberately brought to a breaking point, with a view of producing an explosion, by the substantially more powerful antagonist, bent on exploiting the vulnerabilities of the correspondingly more impotent victim group. This pattern of perpetrator behavior appears to be the dominant principle in the resolution of lingering intergroup conflicts through various types and degrees of victimization.¹⁰

In his exhaustive book, *History of the Armenian Genocide*, Dadrian characterizes the Adana Massacres as a “rehearsal for the Genocide.”¹¹ If one considered the events of Adana as an initial phase, even a rehearsal of what was to come in 1915, the very uniqueness of the genocide may be undermined. Moreover, the particularities of the Adana events—as discussed below—characterizes the exclusivity of the tragedy even within the context of the history of Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, from Dadrian’s perspective, Muslim migrant workers toiling in Adana tilted the existing balance

¹⁰ Vahagn N. Dadrian, “The Circumstances Surrounding the 1909 Adana Holocaust,” *Armenian Review*, 41, No. 4-164, 1988, 11. Also cited in Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics*, 443.

¹¹ Dadrian, *History of the Armenian Genocide*, 181.

of power to create a Turkish dominance, which literally disfavored Armenians and led to the massacres.¹²

Although plausible, this school of thought focuses on Turkish responses to earlier clashes, most notably those of 1894-1896 and 1904-1906, after Armenian uprisings in Sasun. The Sasun uprisings occurred throughout the Vilayet of Bitlis and were a direct response to Sultan Abdulhamid II's total neglect of long-promised reforms as pledged in the 1878 Treaty of Berlin and his launching of the Kurdish Hamidiye Corps in 1891 as a means to suppress Armenian revolutionary activities in the eastern provinces.¹³ Thus, the fighting in Sasun was not the result of rebellions nor was it due to Armenian demands for independence. Indeed, the thesis that the Armenian rebellions were manifestations of independence from the Ottoman Empire is confusing and do not correspond to reality as was explained in chapters one and four. Consequently, it may be correct to conclude that the dominant interpretation of the Adana Massacres in Armenian historiography raises more questions than providing irrefutable evidence of liability.

A New Approach to Armenian Historiography

The dominant Armenian school of thought was formally challenged by Raymond Kevorkian, which was later buttressed by Bedross Der Matossian, both of whom argued that what transpired in Adana in April 1909 amounted to collusion between local CUP

¹² Ibid., 13-14. For complete accounts on these massacres see chapters 1 and 4.

¹³ This statement goes totally against the current analysis of some historians who try to show Abdulhamid as a monarch who embraced reforms. See for Example Şükrü M. Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

leaders and Muslim elites.¹⁴ A word of caution is in order here. While Kevorkian pinned down the particularities of the Adana Massacres, he fell short in analyzing the role of the CUP leadership in Constantinople. Moreover, he tangentially aligned himself with the dominant school interpretation, as he assigned responsibility to the CUP itself.¹⁵ This was where Der Matossian diverges from Kevorkian and introduces a new historical paradigm, which not only reassigns the blame away from the Constantinople CUP, but also builds a new case on the notion that the culprit in agitating for and organizing the massacres was the local Muslim landed elite, the *Aa'yan*.¹⁶ Der Matossian explains his concept within the framework of “public spheres and violence,” which is a new approach in analyzing the Adana events, and that must be the starting point for a new discourse if and when the topic is revisited.¹⁷ Indeed, Der Matossian relies on Armenian literature that focused on the Adana tragedy. He affirms:

Another major point that the scholarship on Adana does not discuss is the relationship between the concept of public sphere and violence. In addition, the public sphere(s) after the revolution

¹⁴ Raymond Kevorkian Abd-Ul-Hamid and Paul Paboujian, ed.s, “La Cilicie: Les Massacres D’Adana au Mandate Francais, 1909-1921” (Cilicia: From the Adana Massacres to the French Mandate), *Revue d’Histoire Armenienne Contemporaine*, Paris, 1999. See also Raymond Kevorkian, *Le Génocide des Arméniens* (The Genocide of the Armenians), (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2006). The particularities of the Adana events will be dealt with when discussing issues pertaining to the Turkish historiography of the events. See also Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics*, 2009.

¹⁵ Kevorkian, *le Massacres de Cilicie*, 141.

¹⁶ *Aa'yan* is an Arabic word (also used in Ottoman Turkish) to denote landed aristocracy, or notables. These were people whose wealth was solely based on land and agriculture. They had not yet diversified their income by joining in the technological advances and using agricultural products in manufacture. This pattern was dominant not only in Cilicia, but in Anatolia and the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. See more about their role in the Adana events of 1909 below.

¹⁷ Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics*, 443-447. The problem is also pertinent to Turkish historiography as well.

became a medium through which the unsatisfied elements [i.e. Aa'yans, the clergy, tribal chieftains, among others] began voicing their opposition to the occurring changes.¹⁸

I argue that in the case of Adana, the creation of a multiplicity of public sphere(s) as a result of the revolution, coupled with the drastic changes in the dynamics of power, was a huge incentive for the enactment of violence. Of course one wonders why Adana and not Damascus or Erzerum? As previously discussed, this is because of the complex ethnic composition of the population of Adana and its economic centrality, which attracted thousands of migrant workers.¹⁹

To be sure, such an interpretation requires archival documents pertaining to the era—aside from those created by foreign dignitaries serving in the Ottoman Empire or letters and memoranda prepared by the Armenian Patriarchate and the Armenian political parties—which were difficult to come by. Armenian scholars worked with the meager fare, which concentrated on eyewitness accounts and memoirs. While these sources certainly enriched various dossiers of documentation regarding the Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Empire, the Adana calamity did not stand out as being all that different. There

¹⁸ This means that for the Turkish notables in a place like Adana Province, the whole idea of Armenians being able to achieve equality in all spheres of life, and that this equality would be nurtured and protected by the new constitutional regime, was an anathema to an existing order or way of life that had regulated ethnic relations in the Ottoman Empire for centuries. See more about this below. Although Dadrian too stresses the economic prowess of Adana as a reason for the massacres, his account doesn't stress the agency of the massacres to the Aa'yan and their fear of losing their centuries old privileges.

¹⁹ Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics*, 445-447.

were many eyewitness accounts and memoirs dealing with the disasters, both during and after their occurrences, which prevented a more original assessment. In fact, most of these memoirs were written between 1908 and 1912, which gave them added importance since they were fresh reflections of events under discussion.²⁰

A final issue must be clarified before proceeding with the analysis: this narrative skirts the problematic statistical data to address the number of people massacred, killed, or maimed on both sides, for a specific reason. Indeed, because the very notion of massacre ought not to be qualified by the number of people killed. Rather, what preoccupies this narrative are the political, social, and communal issues that led to the massacres themselves. An analytical approach to decipher those concerns are important.²¹

Moreover, it is also useful to underscore that what occurred in Adana entailed heavy material losses, which were unsurpassed up to that time in the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, and besides condemning many Armenians to refugee status, a whole sector of the city was burned or demolished. Hundreds of businesses were devastated. Although a lone Armenian writer assessed the impact of this loss on the nation, albeit as a poetical

²⁰ One such memoir that was lately translated in an abridged form to English is Hagop Terzian, *Gilgio Aghede (Cilicia 1909: The Massacre of Armenians)*, translated by Stepan Melkonian, edited by Ara Sarafian (London: Gomidas Institute, 2009).

²¹ See Garabet Moumdjian, "Taşnaklarla İttihatçıların Abdülhamit'e Karşı İttifakı" (The Agreement of the Tashnags [ARF] and the CUP Against Abdulhamid), Tayman, Enis. *Tempo*, January, 1, 2009. http://www.tempodergisi.com.tr/toplum_politika/12820. Web, 15 July 2012. When asked by Tayman regarding the exaggeration by the Armenian side of the number of dead in the Adana massacres, Moumdjian answers: "Regardless of the numbers issue, which is between 20,000 and 40,000 according to Austrian diplomatic source, let's take a conservative number, say 4,000 [which is closer to the Ottoman estimate]. Now can you envision 4,000 people in one place and then envision all of them dead in that same place? Can you envisage the horridness of the carnage?"

rendition,²² no academic study focused on the loss that accompanied the carnage. Suffice it to say that thousands of Armenians lived as refugees in makeshift camps on the outskirts of Adana for a long period of time. Some, if not most, were not able to rebuilt even when WWI started in late 1914.

As the evaluation of the Adana events of 1909 are studied more deeply within the context of the new political order of the day, new revelations are in order. The most important political activity upon which the Armenian political parties embarked after the 1908 constitutional revolution in the Ottoman empire was the land reform issue. This necessitated the re-acquisition of lands that had been seized from Armenian peasants in the eastern provinces of the empire during the three decades of Abdulhamid II's rule. This justified demand of the Armenian political elite, was also supported—at least verbally and in some cases through action—by the CUP center in Salonika. However, this decent Armenian demand was the main reason that brought the ire of Kurdish, Circassian and other landed Aa'yans against the Armenian population. The inter-ethnic strife emanating from this agrarian reform initiative became so corrosive that it pitted the Aa'yans against Armenian peasants and ignited animosities that would haunt the Armenians in the years to come.

From this perspective, the inter-ethnic friction in Adana in 1909 was to be instructive. However, no one at the time took notice of this new dimension in term of projecting its future manifestations in the realm of inter-ethnic rivalry and hence,

²² Marc Nichanian, *Writers of Disaster: Armenian Literature in the Twentieth Century* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2006). The book contains an extended excerpt in translation from Zabel Yesaian's, *Averagnerun Mech* (Amid the Ruins [of Adana]).

heightened levels of animosity within the ethnic components of the empire. What is even more interesting is that the same problem showed its ugly face once again a couple of years later during the Balkan Wars, where the case was reversed and large scale ethnic cleansing and deportations of the Muslim population of the Balkans took place. If anything, the Balkan experience was yet another episode of this acerbic inter-ethnic strife was supposed to be instructive, if means were to be found to limit and even to eradicate it in the future. Once again no one heeded to the looming danger, which was to be detrimental to the very existence of Armenians in the empire during World War I. To sum it up, the Adana massacres of 1909 were supposed to make the Armenian political parties and especially the CUP leaders cognizant regarding its future ramifications. The Muslim landed aristocracy was so bewildered of the constitution and what it envisaged to offer the Christian minorities of the empire, that it was ready even to take up arms and to revolt against the constitutional regime, embodied by the CUP, to regain its centuries old status quo over Christian minorities of the empire. This seemed especially true in case of the Kurdish chieftains in the eastern provinces, who even went as far as collusion with the utmost enemy of the Ottoman Empire, the Russians, in order to restrict the advance of the constitutional regime and its Christian cronies.²³

²³ In this respect see Michael A. Reynolds, *The Ottoman Struggle for Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, 1908-1918*, Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2003.

Problems within the Existing Turkish Historiography

If Armenian historiography articulated specific differences in opinion on the Adana Massacres, how did Turkish historiography perceived the same events, and what were the problems that afflicted it?

Whereas the dominant thesis in Armenian historiography tended to deal with Adana as part and parcel of the sum total of massacres that led to the 1915 catastrophe, the “official” Turkish historiography, on the other hand—and for a long time—dealt with the issue from the catharsis of its nationalistic history.²⁴ The first Turkish historian to deal with the Armenian issue, inclusive of the Adana debacle, was Esat Uras.²⁵ Uras’s initial work was published in 1953. The thesis was inherited and substantiated by Salahi R. Sonyel, especially with respect to the Adana tragedy.²⁶ Both advanced the thesis that Armenian revolutionaries (*Komiteci*) organized the population for rebellion and independence from the Ottoman Empire.²⁷ Therefore, any calamity that befell Armenians was of their own making. This was, at best, a linear thesis that perceived everything in black and white. No

²⁴ During the last two decades several monographs have emerged by Turkish historians that deviate from the “official” Turkish historiography. The concern here, however, is regarding changes within the official Turkish historiography, which tends to be monolithic and dogmatic in its approach to key events. See for example Ayşe Hür, “31 Mart İhtilal-i Askeriyesi” (The March 31st Military Coup.), *Taraf Gazetesi (Taraf Gazette)*, <http://www.taraf.com.tr/makale/375.htm>. Web, 15 July 2012.

²⁵ Esat Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi* (The Armenians in History and the Armenian question), (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1987). See also the book’s English translation, Esat Uras, *The Armenians in history and the Armenian Question*, (Ankara: Documentary Publications, 1988). See also Christopher J. Walker, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 1 (1990), 165-170, for an informative review about Uras’s book.

²⁶ Salahi R. Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians: Victims of Great Power Diplomacy*, (London: Rustem Brothers Publishing, 1987). The important chapter of the book in this case, which also appeared separately in the Turkish journal *Belleten*, is: “The Turco-Armenian Adana Incidents in the Light of Secret British Documents, July 1908-December 1909,” *Belleten*, No. 201, Vol. LI, December 1987, 1291-1338.

²⁷ *Komiteci* in Ottoman and Modern Turkish parlance is a word used by Turkish authors to denote a person who is a member of a revolutionary organization.

shades of gray whatsoever were allowed within such interpretations that further relied on a methodology that begged to be critically analyzed. Regrettably, Turkish historiography is still enshrined in the Uras perspective.²⁸

A typical illustration in this regard is a speech by Yusuf Halacoğlu, the former Director of the Turkish Historical Society, and who served on the faculty of Ghazi University in Ankara where he occupied the post of Advisor to the University Rector, before running for the Türk Büyük Millet Meclisi (TBMM, the Turkish Grand National Assembly, Parliament). Halacoğlu hails from Sis (Kozan) in the Province of Adana. That, perhaps, colored his views, when, on December 12, 2009, he declared:

Armenian Cruelty in Adana in 1909 was discussed at a conference titled “The Atrocities of the Armenians in Anatolia.” Former President of the Turkish Historical Society, Yusuf Halacoğlu, stated that in the 1990’s he bought some 3,200 confidential documents from the Russians in exchange for \$500.

During his lecture organized by the “Brotherhood Cultural Society” and “The Association of Adana Greater Municipality” that was held at the Adana Municipal Theater Hall, Halacoğlu claimed that he bought the documents about the savagery perpetrated by the Armenians in Anatolia.

²⁸ Necla Günay, “1909 Adana olayların Maraş’taki Yansımaları ve Maraş Divan-i Harbi Örfisi’nin Yargılamaları” (Reflections of the Adana Events of 1909 in Marash and the Trials of the Court Martial of Marash), *Ermeni Araştırmaları Dergisi* (Journal of Armenian Research), No. 29, 2008.

According to the Russian documents that were bought by Halacoğlu during the disintegration of the Soviet system in the early 1990's, Armenians in Anatolia were, from time to time, used by France, England, America and the Russians in accordance with the latter's own interests.

"Turkish history is not racist in any period," noted Halacoğlu. "Various countries played the Anatolian Armenians and used them," he stressed. Halacoğlu lectured that starting in 1900, Armenians bought some 600,000 hectares of land in Çukurova [Cilicia], and that separatist Armenian organizations were behind this land buying deals as per the Russian documents he possesses, which also show that Armenians were heavily arming themselves there.²⁹

Beyond questionable purchases of "Soviet" documents whose authenticity is highly doubtful, the extensive quotations and gratuitous analyses associated with what could have been forged documents, reveals yet another flaw in this logic. Indeed, any contention that a single approach to interpret the history of events that occurred a century earlier indicates lack of creative and critical thinking. Almost sixty years after Uras wrote his outlook, one is bewildered to confront similar views, even if the "packaging" is updated. Necla Günay,

²⁹ See the article regarding the conference and Halacoğlu's remarks at <http://www.cukurovatv.com.tr/578-ermeni-vahseti-anlatildi-haberi.html>. Web, January 10, 2010. The "Russian documents" Halacoğlu refers to are dealt with below.

a historian teaching at Gazi University in Ankara, still presents a highly contentious interpretation of the 1909 Adana Massacres, which read as follows:

During their congress convened in Paris in 1905, Armenian Komitecis decided to create an independent state in the province of Adana, with Marash included. Armenians started preparations to attain this objective. The Ottoman State announced the Constitution in 1908. The general pardon that was announced subsequently made it possible [resulted in] for the Committee leaders to return back. It was during this period of uforia [sic.] that Armenians were armed. Since travel became easy, they came together in Adana. The April 13, 1909 events put Armenians in Adana into motion. Events that couldn't be stopped started. The events didn't remain in Adana. They reached all the way to Marash.³⁰

While the passage in itself was telling, the author first assumes that Armenian komitecis were a bunch of united factions, and further concludes that they decided to have an uprising as early as 1905 after their Paris gathering. Following this convoluted logic, the so-called Armenian komitecis apparently decided that Adana was the best theatre for this uprising, which is debatable to say the least. Allegedly, they also believed that the volatile

³⁰ Necla Günay, "1909 Olayların Adana Çevresindeki Yansımaları ve Yargalamaları" (The Reverberating effects of the 1909 Events Around Adana and How They Were Adjudicated), in Kemal Çiçek, Ed., *1909 Adana Olayları/Makaleler* (Essays regarding the 1909 Adana Events), (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 2011), 283-322. It must be noted that the book contains the papers presented in an international historical conference held in Ankara in 2009 and organized by the Turkish Historical Association (Türk Tarih Kurumu) on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Adana events. While Kemal Çiçek and others (including this author) produced revisionist essays, there were still academics, like Günay, who were rehashing old stereotypical discourses reminiscent of Uras and Sonyel.

constitutional period was ideal to arm ordinary people, as well as to gather their leadership in Adana. Finally, this train of thought ostensibly led this “awakened Armenian leadership” to channel an “uprising, in the aftermath of the March 31, 1909, developments.”³¹

These interpretations require responses. First, it would probably be safe to assume that no Armenian “leader” would contemplate a revolution in an area where Armenians represented no more than one out of seven among the total population. Although statistics create their own set of dilemmas, this roughly 14 percent figure was derived from a 1914 British Foreign Office document, which was based on a pamphlet by the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs that provided demographic details for the Adana vilayet.³² Actually, while the number of Armenians in Adana Province was much larger than what the British document implied, the fact remains that Armenians could not possibly engage in an uprising where they were a distinct minority.

Based on statistics published in Constantinople in 1912, Pierre Andre Redan estimated the population of Cilicia (that is, the provinces of Adana, excluding Marash and Aintab), at around 400,000,³³ of which 215,000 were Christians (Armenians, Greeks, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Syrians, and Maronites) and 185,000 Muslims (Arabs, Turks,

³¹ Necla Günay is not being singled out here. In fact she should be appreciated for writing an ethnographic volume about the Armenians of Marash, almost pioneering the genre in modern Turkish historiography: Necla Günay, *Maraş Ermenileri* (Marash Armenians), (Istanbul: IQ Kültür Sanaat Yayıncılık, 2007).

³² FO 371.4229.86552., Admiral Calthorpe to Lord Curzon, dispatch, Constantinople, 24.5.1909, enclosed with a pamphlet from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on population statistics, dated 14.3.1914.

³³ Pierre Andre Redan, *La Cilicie et le Problème Ottoman* (Cilicia and the Ottoman Problem), (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1921), 15.

Tatars, Kurds, and Cherkez (Circassian).³⁴ Armenians, therefore, were one of the six Christian communities where other groups were certainly well represented too. To conclude that Armenians took advantage of their relatively limited demographic presence to organize a military uprising is optimistic at best.

Moreover, and this too ought to be re-emphasized in academic studies, Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were totally opposed to what became known as the March 31, 1909, attempted coup, which aimed at toppling the very constitutional order they dearly supported. Why would Armenian leaders back constitutional reforms that promised to protect them and improve conditions for Armenians while simultaneously undermine them through a putative coup? In fact, Armenian officials perceived the constitutional order as an important means to solve the thorny reforms issue, which remained a priority.

Inasmuch as contemporary Turkish historiography skirts this existential problem, one wonders why its proponents would advance the notion that Armenians used an event they were against to start a revolution they did not support, given that such a course nearly guaranteed their own demise? This linear hypothesis evaded equally problematic developments within Armenian political circles. Rivalries between the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, Tashnags) and the Hnchag party, for example, were a staple of intra-Armenian politics. By not researching the nuances and the differences between the two most prominent Armenian political organizations and their stance vis-a-vis Turkish political entities—ARF with the CUP, and the Hnchags with Sabaheddin—

³⁴ Puzant Yeghiaian, *Adanayi Hayots Badmutyun* (History of Adana Armenians), (Antilias: Catholicosate of Cilicia Press, 1970), 148-151.

Turkish historiography looked at the whole rather than the parts, which also meant to treat Armenians as a whole. This is an issue that definitely needs to be remedied in the future.³⁵

Moreover, 1905 and 1909 were extremely different times in the Ottoman Empire. Preoccupied by the 1905 Russian Revolution as well as the beginning of the Persian Constitutional Revolution, along with the Armeno-Tatar debacle in the Caucasus that started at roughly the same time, Armenian revolutionary forces were utterly focused on these cataclysmic developments. Adana and its province were certainly important but not on top of any Armenian revolutionary leader's "agitation list." To claim otherwise would truly be misreading.

Lastly, and perhaps far more critical from a Turkish historiography perspective, there was no "vision" of a Young Turk revolution yet. The Young Turk insurgency happened some three years later. Taking such important considerations into account, which "komitacis" were Turkish historians referring to when they asserted that armed uprisings were being organized? Were they referring to the Tashnag party? If so, it was critical to note that the ARF was in cahoots with the Young Turks at the time, and had as much to lose from such an anti-revolutionary coup—albeit abortive—as the one that took place in Constantinople on March 31. Were Turkish historians who advanced this thesis

³⁵ Thus far, the only Turkish publication that focuses on the issue presented above and tries to amend the existing historiography is Kemal Çiçek, in *1909 Adana Olayları*. See especially the articles by Kemal Çiçek and Garabet Moumdjian, which expound on the need to remedy the existing Turkish historiography regarding the 1909 events.

referring to the Hnchagists? They too were, at the time, in a coalition with Sabaheddin's faction within the Ottoman Parliament.³⁶

It follows, then, that if the Armenian rebellion in Adana was concocted by the ARF, the party would have been illogically acting against its own interests. If the alleged uprisings were concocted by the Hnchagyan party, then how could one explain that an Armenian faction that was in cohort with Prince Sabaheddin in parliament could fight against the same monarchists who were allegedly the instigators of the very revolt in Adana and its province?³⁷ These elementary questions highlight various shortcomings in the Turkish thesis that are, regrettably, perpetuated by contemporary Turkish analysts who may benefit from a fundamental revision of their outlook for no other reason than historical accuracy.

A brief examination is also in order regarding the fictitious Armenian komitacis meeting in Paris that allegedly reached momentous armed uprising decisions. In fact, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation held its Third General World Congress in Sofia between February and March 1904, where the main focus of delegates was the second rebellion in Sasun and the impending Armeno-Tatar hostilities in the Caucasus. Cilicia was not even given a marginal importance during this congress.³⁸

³⁶ The faction was under the leadership of Prince Sabaheddin. At the time the prince had formed the Osmanlı Ahrar Firkası (Ottoman Freedom Seekers Party). The Hnchagyan party joined him, while the ARF remained true to its coalition with the CUP. Aside from the Hnchagyans, the Greek minority of the Ottoman Empire too aligned itself with Prince Sabaheddin. See George Gavrillis, *Understanding the Greco-Ottoman Conflict: Statist Irredentism, Belligerent Democratization, or a Synthesis?* See http://blogsocinova.fesh.unl.pt/djustino/files/Greoc_turk_irredent.pdf. Web, January 10, 2010.

³⁷ The ARF had never been a "big player" in Adana or Cilicia. The area was a Hnchagyan bastion.

³⁸ Hrach Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Tashnagsutium: 1890-1924* (Milan: Oemme Edizioni, 1989), 71-77.

Moreover, while the Hnchagyan party held a congress in Paris in 1905, which, as was explained in chapter Three, turned into a heated gathering, as a full-fledged schism occurred among senior officials. The general meeting could not remedy the rupture and the party emerged divided into two factions. One of the new factions, under the leadership of Arpiar Arpiarian, Mihran Damadian and others, renamed itself the Reformed (Veragazmyal) Hnchagyan party. How is it even conceivable that a fully disunited and dysfunctional Hnchagyan party could embark on a complex strategy concocting a rebellion in Adana and its province when it was fighting for its very existence?³⁹

The very idea of an “independent Armenian state” was nowhere to be found in the programs of Armenian revolutionary/political parties at this time.⁴⁰ Rather, both the Hnchagyan party as well as the ARF were focused on self-rule and autonomy for the Armenian population within the Ottoman Empire.⁴¹ In both cases, however, Cilician Armenians were not part of the “envisioned” Armenian self-rule area, which was focused on the eastern provinces that constituted the historical Armenian lands.⁴²

³⁹ The rupture within the Hnchagyan party was the result of differences between its socialist ideologues residing in Europe and its nationalist leaders working within the Armenian inhabited provinces of the Ottoman Empire. See http://www.hunchak.org.au/aboutus/historical_turabian.html. Web, January 10, 2010.

⁴⁰ Aside from their initial demand for autonomy and/or independence, both parties revised their political programs after 1908 to reflect a determination for reforms that would benefit the Armenian as other peoples of the Empire.

⁴¹ See http://www.hunchak.org.au/aboutus/historical_nalbandian.html, Web, January 10, 2010. See also Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation*, 33-35.

⁴² The only time that Cilicia was ever envisioned as part of an independent Armenian state was in the aftermath of WWI, when Boghos Nubar Pasha advocated the inclusion of Cilicia within the post-war Armenian state that was to be created. This was sarcastically presumed to be “an Armenian Empire” or an “Armenia from sea to sea” by the French mandatory power over Cilicia at the time.

Turkish historiography and Bishop Mushegh Seropian

Because Adana was more or less congruent with the historical Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, careful attention to what was reported by Turkish historians on the subject may also be warranted. As amply documented, an Armenian population existed in the area for a long time, although a mass of Armenians settled there from Armenia proper after that region was devastated by Seljuk invasions starting with the Battle of Manzikert in 1071. An Armenian Principality was established in Cilicia in 1080, which became the nexus of a kingdom that lasted for over two centuries, until it was absorbed by Egyptian Mamluks.⁴³

With this drastic change, and in the absence of an Armenian governmental apparatus, the Armenian church—whose headquarters were relocated from Etchmiadzin to Sis (Kozan)—assumed a leadership role. Naturally, this evolution resulted in the Armenian Church assuming a political role in Cilicia, which reinforced Armenian clergymen's positions as sources of authority within the nation.⁴⁴

Within this context, Turkish historiography presents Mushegh Seropian, the bishop of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Cilicia, as a revolutionary leader as well as an alleged instigator of the movement for independence. Bishop Seropian apparently, and according to Turkish sources, spoke about the Armenian nation's glorious past in his sermons. He might have seemingly sought to reinvent the long demised Armenian

⁴³ George A Bou noutian, *A Concise History of the Armenian People* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishing, 2006), 99.

⁴⁴ The Armenian Church had to assume such a role because it was pertinent to the Ottoman Millet System. For a survey of the role of the Armenian Church, see also James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915–1916*, (London: Gomidas Institute, 2005), Documents 119-129, Bryce: Armenians, XV- Cilicia (Vilayet of Adana and Sanjak of Marash).

kingdom, which was the reason why, Turkish historians affirm, Seropian cajoled Armenians to buy weapons and to prepare for a revolution. Turkish historians go so far as to state that Bishop Seropian was himself involved in the arms sales in Adana and its province after 1908, even if the evidence is scant.⁴⁵

Was this Turkish thesis true? What was known about the bishop was that he was a fervent Hunchagyan and an avowed anti-Tashnag.⁴⁶ As one of the members of the Hunchagyan party, and as a member of the Armenian Church, Seropian probably spoke about “the glorious Armenian past in Cilicia.” He may have even persuaded his folks to be armed and ready just in case they had to defend themselves. However, presenting him as the epicenter of all revolutionary activities in Cilicia and to attribute to him the role of the leadership of a so called uprising for independence is exaggerated.⁴⁷ In fact, one Turkish notable from Adana insisted that Armenians could not venture into such an absurd idea as total independence from the Ottoman State. Remarkably, Burhan Nuri posed the rethorical question: Can the Armenians establish a state? He then answered:

If the Armenians intend to form a state, the land for that state should not be in the Ottoman Empire, rather [,] they should look for it in the poles, in the desert lands of Africa and immigrate there. They cannot

⁴⁵ Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, 1317-1318.

⁴⁶ Kooshian, *Armenian Immigrant Community*. The adjectives used to denote Bishop Seropian are taken from Louise Nalbandian, *the Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

⁴⁷ Sonyel states that Major Charles Hotham Montagu Doughty-Wylie, British Consul General in Mersin, in one of his dispatches had named Bishop Mushegh “a foolish Firebrand”... whose ultimate end was to declare himself “King of Cilicia.” The citations are from F.O. 424.220, page 70. One must be careful of how to interpret such data. Any historian would see that Wylie’s remarks are somewhat sarcastic. As such, they make good anecdotal reportage. Using them as genuine historical statements, however, shows only desperation in proving a point of view.

reach their goal scattered in Istanbul, Adana, Aleppo, Diyarbakir, Bitlis, and Van.⁴⁸

Even if such a movement existed, as Turkish historiography sustained, logic implied that the “leader” of such an uprising had to be present on the ground when the alleged rebellion began. It so happened that Bishop Mushegh Seropian was not even in Cilicia at the time but in Egypt, on an ecumenical visit.⁴⁹ Why would the “leader” of a rebellion be absent from his putative moment of glory?

Lastly, it is also important to vouch for Bishop Mushegh Seropian’s character, perhaps relying on Bahri Pasha, the former governor of Adana Province. In an interview to the Armenian newspaper *Zhamanag* after the massacres, Bahri Pasha stated:

Our friendship [with Bishop Mushegh Seropian] had begun for simple reasons, the similarities of ideas and character was the pivot of our friendship. I have found in the character of Bishop Mushegh the smart, working, sincere and vehement clergyman, with whom I had sympathized so much.

⁴⁸ Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics*, 474.

⁴⁹ Seropian was at the time in Egypt trying to raise funds for building an agricultural school on the Telan property in Sis (Kozan), which was given back to the Armenian Catholicosate of Sis after a lengthy legal battle. For more information on the Telan property case, see Tetsuya Sahara, “A Hidden Agenda: Dispute Over the Armenian Landownership on the Eve of the Adana Incident 1909,” in Kemal Çiçek, Ed., *1909 Adana Olayları*, 87-126. This act was in itself a point of contention that rallied the local landlords and notables against Armenians. Although Bishop Mushegh tried to return back as soon as he heard about the events in Adana and its environs, the local Turkish authorities vehemently opposed his return, and they compelled Doughty Wylie to keep the Bishop on the ship that had brought him from Egypt. Thus, Seropian could not land in Cilicia. He was then summoned to Constantinople by the patriarch and then left for the USA in 1910 to assumed the bishopric of the Armenian Church there. His work within his new role, although interesting from the perspective of intra-Armenian divisions of which he was part and parcel because of his political convictions as an Hnchagyan, are dealt with in George Byron Kooshian’s dissertation cited above.

Under my personal responsibility I implemented, in the most difficult conditions [the building of]schools, churches]. My thoughts about his administrative abilities are so high that I would have wished that he would have become the Patriarch.⁵⁰

A cautionary note regarding the governor is in order. Since Bahri Pasha is perceived negatively in various Turkish sources, it is indeed important to present what commentary the historian Christopher Walker offers regarding Bahri Pasha's character:

But on the proclamation of the constitution, Adana was appallingly governed; its governor, Bahri Pasha, was so corrupt that dishonesty and venality had become a way of life there. Notions of "constitution" and "justice" were fictions.⁵¹

A final assessment of Bishop Mushegh Seropian and his adherence to the tenets of the newly established constitutional regime came by way of his pastoral letter to Armenians in Adana province, where he stated:

Freedom would not have meaning if justice and social equality do not come and complete that political trinity [Liberty, Fraternity, Equality], which shines the fate on the horizons of civilization and

⁵⁰ Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics*, 449. The quote is from an article by L. Papazian, "Shahegan Desagtsutyun me Adanayi nakhgin Vali Bahri Pashayi Hed" (An Interesting interview/meeting with the former vali [governor] of Adana, Bahri Pasha), *Zhamanag*, June 15, 1909, No. 191, 1-2. As mentioned above, Suleyman Bahri Pasha is usually presented negatively in Turkish historiography. He is considered a corrupt Ottoman official. Moreover, after ruling the province of Adana for almost eleven years, he was forced to resign his post, thus making the local CUP branch the sole administrator of the province until the appointment of the new Vali, Jevad Bey. See the section on the role of the CUP in the Adana Massacres below. Turkish historiography also implies that Bishop Mushegh Seropian had some financial dealings with Bahri Pasha and that both men profited from their association.

⁵¹ Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia*, 183.

advancement. The first fruit of freedom is the abolishment of despotism...let us not become spoiled by the freedom, let us not be corrupted by it [,] rather [,] let us work seriously to benefit from it both mentally and economically. Generally for the Ottoman people and especially for the Armenians, freedom is not an aim [,] [but] rather a means for a higher endeavor. Justice and social equality are the elements that make up those aims.⁵²

Ironically, and as illustrated in the ecumenical address, the most influential leader of the Hnchagyan party in Cilicia, Bishop Mushegh Seropian, was, after all, a proponent of the new constitutional regime regardless of his party's alignment with Prince Sabaheddin's opposition the newly formed Ottoman Parliament.⁵³ It is important for contemporary historians to note this critical assessment, because Armenians, regardless of their political affiliations, sided with the new constitutional regime. While Turkish historiography may not recognize this salient constant, this was the only way to answer the age-old Armenian activism regarding equality and self-rule within the confines of a modernized Ottoman state.

⁵² Mushegh Seropian, *Adanayi Charte yev Badaskhanadunere. Nakhentats Barakaner* (The Adana Massacres and Those Responsible: Precedent Circumstances), (Cairo: Ararat S. Tarpinian Publishing, 1909), 26.

⁵³ The Hnchagyan party didn't participate in the 1902 or the 1907 anti-Hamidian conferences (see Chapters Two and Three), which paved the way for the establishment of the second Ottoman constitutional period. From the start, the main contention between Prince Sabaheddin and Ahmed Riza, was the issue of confederation and decentralization versus centralization. In other words, what would the future constitutional Ottoman state be like: A confederative state with local self rule for the different ethnic elements comprising the state, or a centralized behemoth that would engulf all citizens within the melting pot of Ottoman Citizenship?

Weapons Everywhere!

While both Armenian and Turkish historiographies rely heavily on foreign documents pertaining to the era to provide evidence of various assertions and interpretations, several also examined Western sources to eliminate alleged biases. Sonyel's writing, for example, seem to be totally based on "secret" British documents.⁵⁴ The concern that Armenians were being heavily armed in Cilicia was largely based on consular reports from Doughty-Wylie, the British Consul general in Mersin. The same Wylie is often cited by Armenian writers as well, to prove their points of view. Consequently, selective manipulations of specific documents for historiographic purposes became the norm, setting dangerous precedents. Naturally, since all men could technically bear arms under the new constitution, Wylie was credited to have reported that some 40,000 guns of different makes and calibers, were introduced into Cilicia after the establishment of the second constitutional regime.⁵⁵

The problem, of course, was that Wylie's numbers seldom matched even those of the official Ottoman authorities.⁵⁶ Furthermore, and amazingly, here was a gross assumption that all guns imported into the province ended up in Armenian hands. This was yet another significant illustration of questionable deductions that besmirched Turkish

⁵⁴ Secret, in this case, means that the documents in question were secret at the time they were written. Wylie, as the British Consul General in Mersin, was tasked with sending "confidential" reports to his superior, Ambassador Lowther in Constantinople.

⁵⁵ The information is from Nejla Günay, "1909 Adana Olaylarının Maraş'taki Yansımaları ve Maraş Divan-ı Harbi Örfisinin Yargılamaları" (The Effects of the 1909 Adana Events in Marash and the Adjudications of the Marash Court Marshal in That Regard), *Ermeni Araştırmaları Dergisi* (Journal of Armenian Studies), No. 29, 2008, 89. It was rehashed from Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, 1269, and referred to a British Foreign office document by Wylie.

⁵⁶ Ottoman official sources estimate the number of guns imported to Adana province at 13,000. See Günay, *1909 Adana olayların*, 90.

historiography. Besides, weapons were a source of self defense in a state where Armenians were the victims of several massacres since the 1890s.

In the words of Hagop Terzian, an eyewitness to the massacres:

On the second day of the ceasefire, word came that the government was demanding our weapons. The people didn't want to surrender them, but the British consul [Wylie] arrived saying, "I can promise you, in the name of my government, that nothing further will happen. Surrender your weapons." It was under these circumstances that we were forced to surrender all our weapons. Had we not handed them over before the arrival of the Ottoman Army, there is no doubt that there would not have been a second massacre, which was a hundred times worse than the first [one] and [which] destroyed Adana.⁵⁷

Therefore, had Armenian inhabitants not handed their weapons to local authorities, the mere presence of said arms would have been a real deterrent. One may infer from such reasoning that the second phase of the massacres would not have been as disastrous.

A "Game" of Numbers

Turkish historiography repeatedly made the case that Armenians invited their people to become a majority in Adana province. This, according to Turkish historians, led to

⁵⁷ Terzian, *Cilicia 1909*, 35-36.

suspicious on behalf of the Turkish population living in the province.⁵⁸ Ironically, and as such claims were elevated to academic levels, one is obligated to underline that in the aftermath of the 1894-1896 Sasun massacres Armenians were officially deported to Cilicia and adjacent areas or they might have even fled the carnage into more secure areas. As mentioned in Chapter One, In his memoirs, Avedis Nakashian, an Armenian physician practicing in Urfa, commented on the arrival of Armenian deportees from Sasun as follows:

The exiles arrived at Urfa. It was like a caravan of death. I shall never forget those tattered, pain-wracked victims, their staring eyes filled with horror, their gaunt faces. Women clinging to their starving babies, little children with bleeding feet, men, women, and children who had been slashed with swords or beaten from head to foot. Had anything in history ever compared to it? I wondered, and I doubted if it had. Tears streamed down their faces, prayers were on their lips, and when they learned that they would be safe in Urfa, they fell upon their knees and gave thanks to the God they worshiped so devoutly.⁵⁹

These refugees were not the only arrivals to the city. During the second half of the nineteenth century, some 20,000 Turkish and other Muslim muhajirs settled in the Adana

⁵⁸ This is a main theme and overtly recurrent in Turkish historiography. See H. Erdoğan Cengiz, *Ermeni Komitelerinin Amil-e Hareket-i İhtilaliyyesi* (The Armenian Committees' Motives for Revolutionary Actions), (Ankara, 1983), 73-74.

⁵⁹ Avedis, Nakashian, *A Man Who Found a Country* (New York: Crowell Press, 1940), 135.

province, mostly concentrated in and around Sis, the seat of the Armenian Church.⁶⁰ This resettlement would later become a point of friction, especially since it touched upon the crucial point of ownership of the Telan property in that city, a controversial development to say the least.⁶¹

The fluctuating number of Armenians revolves mainly around the figure of migrant workers who came to Cilicia on a seasonal basis during harvest time. Every spring, some 30,000 to 40,000 such migrant peasants arrived in Adana Province from as far away as Bitlis, Erzerum, Harput, Sivas, Bayburt, and other areas, to till and cultivate the region's famous cotton fields. Many also toiled in different factories scattered throughout the province. The ratio of Muslim migrant workers (Turks, Kurds, Cherkez, and others) compared to Armenians was at two to one ratio, which meant that the case of Armenian migrant workers being brought to Adana province to inflate the number of Armenians weakens the Turkish thesis.⁶² Tragically, many of these poor peasants were victimized during the massacres, in what was truly a heartbreaking episode.

As stated above, it is not the purpose of this narrative to address the total number of victims who were massacred. what ought to be underlined were those preferences relied upon by Turkish historians. Disappointingly, dubious methodologies are used with respect

⁶⁰ Hilmi Bayrakdar, "Kırım ve Kafkasya'dan Adana Vilayeti'ne Yapılan Göç ve İskanlar, 1869-1907" (The Emigration and Settlement from the Crimea and the Caucasus to The Province of Adana, 1869-1907), *Türkiyyat Araştırmaları Dergisi* (Turkish Research Center Journal), No. 22, Autumn 2007, 405-434.

⁶¹ Sahara, "Armenian Landownership," 87-126. According to Sahara, the Telan property was a perfect example of how ottoman authorities manipulated the land ownership issue. They settled the muhajirs on the property belonging to the Armenian Church. Decades later this illegal seizure of the land had already become somewhat "official." The burden to prove that the land belonged to it was carried by the Armenian Church.

⁶² Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics*, 447-448.

to the number of Armenians in the Province. By implying that there was a concerted political and social effort to resettle Armenians in Adana Province, allegedly for a proposed insurgency with the ultimate aim of achieving total independence from the Ottoman state, Turkish historians conveniently overlook what actually occurred on the ground. Simply stated, all available data confirms the 2 to 1 ratio of Turks and Armenians in the Province.

Adana as an Agricultural and Industrial Center

The reforming process in Cilicia, which was accomplished during the 1860-1861, and then again in 1862-1864 period through the efforts of the so-called Reforming Expedition (Firka-i Islahiye, See Introduction) under the command of Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, left their marks on the province.⁶³ Although noble in its approach, the reforming zeal of the Firka-i Islahiye brought about several very important social, demographic and ethnographic changes.⁶⁴ One such aspect was the transforming roaming Kurdish tribes into sedentary elements that would henceforth pay taxes to the central government, as was the case with Armenian and Turkish peasants in the province. By ardently transforming wandering tribesmen into sedentary villagers, the reforming expedition created the nexus of what was later to become an agrarian issue, since sedantization wetted tribal appetites to acquire

⁶³ Ahmet Cevdet, *Sultan Abdulham'ide Arzlar-Maaruzat*, 129-205. The pages are the section devoted to the reforms in Cilicia.

⁶⁴ Changes involved included bringing mobile ashirets (tribes) of Turkmens, Circassians, and especially Kurds in the historical Amanos mountain chain (the Gavur Dağı and the Kürt Dağı) to sedentary life in the cities and hamlets of the area, as well as the incorporation of new towns such as Islahiye, Kars Pazar, and others.

land for agriculture. Established tribal leaders thus became major landowners, which, in turn, became the catalyst for a new class that later became known as the Aa'yans.

Indeed, this process of sedantizing the tribal elements is at the crux of the Cilician problem of 1909. According to Yusuf Halacoğlu, Armenians went on a land-buying spree as soon as the second constitutional period was ushered in, even if scant documentary evidence existed to support such claims.⁶⁵ When asked by this author during an informal discussion in May 2010 at his office at Ankara's Gazi University, whether the alleged "land ownership" could not be rental agreements, Halacoğlu demurred. In fact, most official documents in Armenian possession from this era, and which this author has seen and examined hundreds of, were in the form of *Miri*⁶⁶ long-term land lease agreements.⁶⁷ Halacoğlu explained that the central Ottoman government and Sultan Abdulhamid II knew about the land acquisition by Armenians, and that they dealt with the issue by collecting back the land ownership *Tapus* (property deeds), again without documenting his assertions.⁶⁸ Recalling *Tapus* and handing owners the aforementioned rental agreements instead—a truly mind-boggling process—may well have occurred, but no evidence exists to back such claims. If it were true, and simply for the same argument, a whole new debate and research field would open, as this was a totally new approach for a central government engaged in bias against a segment of its own population. By not allowing Armenians to

⁶⁵ According to Halacoğlu, Armenian land acquisition amounted to hundreds of thousands of hectares of agricultural land. His source for such an assertion are the "infamous" Russian Consular reports mentioned above, which have not, as of yet, been made public.

⁶⁶ The Ottoman term *Miri* is generally understood as land that belongs to the government.

⁶⁷ Land rental agreements that spanned over 99 years.

⁶⁸ *Tapu*, property deeds, i.e. registered and official land ownership documents.

have access to the legal rights to acquire land, Constantinople would have breached its own fiduciary responsibilities—something no government opted to engage in for obvious reasons.

As stated above, and unlike the rest of the eastern vilayets that were almost devoid of industrial enterprises, and where inhabitants solely relied on mostly archaic agricultural cultivation, Cilicia was a vibrant area with a cosmopolitan character surpassed only by Constantinople and perhaps Izmir. With an area encompassing some 50,000 square-kilometers, the province of Adana was one of the most advanced areas of the Ottoman Empire. According to both Ottoman and European statistics, Cilicia was one of the richest provinces in the empire and, at a time when the Ottoman government was literally sinking under the pressure of its European debts, the Cilician economy, based on its agricultural production, chiefly cotton, tobacco, and cereals, was both thriving and salvaging the monetary needs of the Sublime Porte.

Moreover, many European enterprises had established local branches in the province of Adana, with France holding the lion's share of those businesses.⁶⁹ With almost 2,600,000 hectares of arable land, Cilicia produced and exported 100,000 tons of cereals, and 120,000 bales of cotton per annum.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Cilicia accommodated some 500 miles of railway, which crossed the province of Adana, and Constantinople was accessible through the Bozanti -Yeniye line. Before the war, the railway system was a profitable

⁶⁹ R[uben] K. Sahakyan, *Türk Fransiyakan Haraberutyunnere yev Kilikian 1919-1921 T[vakannerin]* (Turkish-French Relations and Cilicia, 1919-1921), (Yerevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences Press, 1970), 61-63.

⁷⁰ Redan, *La Cilicie*, 115-116.

government owned business that added overall value to the region, and benefited the porte as well.⁷¹

Cilicia also boasted several sea-ports, especially in Mersin, Alexandretta, Ayas, and Payas, with the first two exporting some 1,575,300 tons each year, and an annual import volume of 515,800 tons. Customs revenues for both ports were estimated at 1,059,500 Ottoman piasters.⁷²

Companies like the Régie de Tabac, Tripani, Deutsche Levant Cotton Company, Simeon Oğlu, Bodur Oğlu, Ashekian, and others employed thousands of workers.⁷³ Armenians played an important part in this burgeoning industrial complex and paid taxes to the porte as required by law. While the proclamation of the constitution in 1908 provided an extra impetus for Armenian businessmen in the province, especially in terms of advancing and even enlarging their agricultural and/or industrial endeavors. On the other hand, Turkish notables who simply could not compete, frowned upon their fellow citizens' successes. It was this perception, laced with undeniable envy, which propelled the Turkish gentry to conclude that Armenians infringed on their "rights" under the ancien regime.

The CUP, Its Local Branch, and the Notables

After the establishment of the second constitutional regime in Constantinople, becoming a member of the CUP was the thing to do, akin perhaps to Frenchmen joining the Jacobin Clubs within the context of the French Revolution. CUP membership throughout the

⁷¹ Edouard Brémond, "The Brémond Mission, Cilicia in 1919-1920," *The Armenian Review*, vol. 29, 355-356. Also see: Yeghiaian ed., *Adanayi Hayots Badmutyun*, 153.

⁷² Yeghiaian, *Adanayi Hayots Badmutyun*, 154-155.

⁷³ The valley of the Jihun (Ceyhan in Ottoman and Modern Turkish) River provided fertile ground for the tobacco crops for this company.

empire grew to between 700,000 and 800,000 over a period of less than a year.⁷⁴ This meant that regardless of past associations or even political motivations, many members of Ottoman society tried their luck by “betting on the winning horse.” This also meant that many opportunists found their way into the rank and file of the CUP.

A case in point was the Adana CUP regional branch that is especially pertinent to this research endeavor. A certain Ahmet Tosun, a previous officer at the Salonika Department of Agriculture who was exiled first to Diyarbakir and then to Payas, and who was saved from further exile by then governor Bahri Pasha, took it upon himself to establish a local CUP branch. All that was needed was a roster of a hundred members to accomplish this end, which was easily accomplished, including three Armenians. The latter, Garabet Gogderelian, Garabed Chalian, and Sdepan Bezdigian, sat on the Regional Executive Body of the Adana CUP Chapter.⁷⁵

Ahmed Tosun, who had changed his name to Ihsan Fikri, established the newspaper *I'tidal*⁷⁶ and assumed its editorship. *I'tidal* hastily became the organ of the regional CUP in Adana.⁷⁷ While the technical creation of local branches progressed under opportunistic endeavors, and regardless of what was transpiring in Constantinople regarding the future shape of the Ottoman state, there were pockets that were not ready to accept a harmonious common life between different ethnic communities based on equality and decentralization. Fikri Bey, it seemed, was in league with such cohorts, even though he

⁷⁴ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, 86.

⁷⁵ Terzian, *Adanayi Hayots*, 33.

⁷⁶ The word means moderate as denoting a political stance.

⁷⁷ Seropian, *Adanayi Charte*, 19.

was also the regional leader of the CUP. He even accepted as member Abdulrahman Baghdadizade, whose father, Abdulqadir Baghdadizade, was the most influential landlord in Adana. Abdulqadir was also an ardent opponent of the CUP and, as a respected notable, retaliated against Fikri Bey by establishing the Zira'at Klüpü (The Agricultural Club), which was to serve as a rallying point for all those landlords who had lost influence because of CUP initiatives.⁷⁸

Polarizing steps followed this confrontation when the former police chief in Adana, Zor Ali, who was dismissed after the 1908 revolution in Constantinople, joined what was known as Fedakârini Millet (The Martyrs of the nation),⁷⁹ which was a Branch of the Ittihad-i Muhammadi of Constantinople,⁸⁰ itself a bastion of reactionary elements and an anti-CUP movement that incorporated the Adana Muslim notables and *softas*.⁸¹ It was these forces that were responsible for incinerating the anti-Armenian movement in the wake of the March 31 coup that occurred in Constantinople.

Although much of these polarizing developments introduced religious dimensions, it is important to stress that this religious zeal ought not to be overstated. In fact, an examination of the Greek minority case in Adana clarified this point. In the words of Hagop Terzian:

This happened while the Greek sat peacefully in their homes giving a thousand thanks that they hadn't been born Armenian, and they

⁷⁸ Ibid, 84.

⁷⁹ Self-sacrificing people

⁸⁰ Union of Muhammedians (Muslims)

⁸¹ The word is used to denote Seminary students at Muslim religious colleges.

turned over to the mob any Armenians who sought safety in their houses.⁸²

This affirmation highlighted that the bulk of the massacres was directed against Armenians and, to some extent, Assyrians in the city, whereas Greeks enjoyed some immunity. Thus, the animosity was not directed towards all Christian elements in the city, since Greeks were largely spared. That Ihsan Fikri Bey was playing both sides perfectly illustrates his opportunism. Indeed, he sided with the notable landlords during the massacres, and accused Armenians of being the instigators of incidents, which clearly showed that the local CUP under his leadership shared almost no political or ideological affiliation with the CUP center in Constantinople.

Rumors and their Relationships to Communal Violence

Irrespective of ideological discrepancies, rumors and their affinities to communal violence played essential roles in the events that unfolded in Adana in April 1909.⁸³ According to Kamuran Gürün, one of the few Turkish authors who focuses on this critical aspect of the massacres:

In the beginning of 1909 there were rumors circulating in Adana, that soon the Armenians will rebel and annihilate the Turks, that the European fleet would invade the province upon this pretext, and that they would insure the establishment of Armenia. The Turks paid so

⁸² Terzian, *Cilicia 1909*, 29.

⁸³ See Brad Dennis, "The Evolution of the Interpretation of the Adana Massacres of 1909: Towards an Understanding of the Political Dynamics and Motivations for Violence," in Çiçek, *The 1909 Adana Incidents*, 127-154.

much attention to these rumors that some of the notables attempted to send their families to safer areas.⁸⁴

Ihsan Fikri himself was part of the problem in spreading rumors, when he wrote that Garabed Gogdelenian, a member of his own CUP Adana provincial Board, was coming to town with 500 Armenian fighters to start a revolution.⁸⁵ This particular rumor is tied to the core issue of obtaining weapons, allegedly because Armenian fighters were coming to town to attack the military depot, and to empty its contents. There were even rumors making the rounds that Armenians had dug up an underground tunnel to reach the weapons depot, which was to aid them in their quest for independence, that was of course, patently false.⁸⁶

Conclusion

Was the CUP leadership in Constantinople to blame for the Adana Massacres? The quick and short answer to this question must be negative because leading CUP members at the time were trying to find a place just to hide and the last thing on their minds was to order fresh atrocities. Ironically, several chose to hide in Armenian homes, fearing the sultan's reactionary forces.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the CUP leadership tried somehow to cover up the events, even when the Ottoman Parliament sent special investigators to Adana.⁸⁸ No matter

⁸⁴ Kamuran Gürün, *The Armenian File: The Myth of Innocence Exposed*, (London: Rustem Publishing, 2001), 185.

⁸⁵ "Sefahat Ihtilaldan Ma Baad" (Debauchery After the Uprising), *I'tidal*, April 28, 1909, No. 35, 4.

⁸⁶ Duckett Ferriman, *The Young Turks and the Truth about the Holocaust at Adana in Asia Minor During April 1909*, (London, 1913), 14. See also Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics*, 461.

⁸⁷ For example, rumor has it that Talaat hid at the home of Krikor Zohrab, the Armenian Member of Parliament from Constantinople, who was also a close friend.

⁸⁸ The Armenian envoy was Hagop Babikian, A CUP member and an MP from Edirne.

how unpalatable for CUP officials, the massacres disgraced the new government and blemished its credibility. It was to restore that lost trustworthiness, or at least as much of it as could be salvaged, that the government announced trials for senior civilian as well as military officials. Constantinople suspected that a few were implicated in the massacres and, as it turned out, the courts-marshal condemned 124 Muslims and 7 Armenians to be executed.⁸⁹

In clear terms, what happened in Adana Province and especially in the city itself was the rise of a burgeoning Armenian bourgeoisie that jeopardized the very tenets of a Muslim landed aristocracy. This was a unique case, which had no antecedents in socio-economic developments in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire.⁹⁰ That the actions of this landed aristocracy were camouflaged by religious fanaticism is further substantiated by Tachat Ramavarma Ravindranthan, who writes:

But the support of the mutineers, i.e. the Constantinople Softas and others, was expressed through religious fanaticism and terrible massacres of Armenians [that] took place in Adana and Alexandretta. The Adana Massacres had been in preparation for some time, but the revolt in Constantinople ignited the spark. In Alexandretta, the Muslims surrounded the city and destroyed many Armenian farms in

⁸⁹ Akcam, *A Shameful Act*, 69–70.

⁹⁰ It must be underlined here, that from this standpoint the Adana massacres are important in analyzing the anti-Armenian stance of the Kurds in the Eastern Provinces, especially when the issue pertained to land reforms and the return of lands grabbed from Armenians since the 1890s. It could also be argued that this issue in itself led to a certain communal fanaticism, which was manifested during the Armenian Genocide and the deportations of Armenians during 1915-1916.

the vicinity and it was only the dispatch of a British war vessel, on April 18, which finally brought the situation under control.⁹¹

Beyond this revolting rise of the landed aristocracy—which was in contempt of the new constitutional order—it is also important to inquire whether the new government was ready and capable to face such challenges to its policies? The answer to this question is also negative, especially since the very existence of the new regime was at stake concomitantly to the massacres started in Adana.

It may be worth recalling that Armenian parties continued with their previous alignments after the Adana massacres, with the ARF coalescing with the CUP while the Hnchagyans remained committed to the opposition, even though Prince Sabaheddin and Ismail Kemal Bey had to flee the empire.⁹² More telling, however, was that other minorities, such as the Greeks, had put their lot with the counter revolutionary coup and fully supported the mutiny, yet remained unscathed during the Adana debacle. The following quotes from the main Greek newspaper of the day, *Neologos*, is exemplary illustration of the Greek position:

The Army has gained the great prize for patriotism, and April 13 [March 31], 1909, ought to be henceforth marked with no less

⁹¹ Tachat Ramavarma Ravindranthan, *the Young Turk Revolution: July 1908 to April 1909 [and] its Immediate Effects*, Master's thesis, (Utah State University, 1965), 283-284.

⁹² Prince Sabaheddin's Osmanlı Ahrar Fırkası was abolished after the 1909 coup. It was only in 1912 that it resurfaced under the name Hurriyet ve İtilaf Firkası (Freedom and Coalition Party) but was defeated in the elections. See Feroz Ahmed, "Unionist Relations with the Greek, Armenian, and the Jewish Communities of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914," Benjamin Braudie and Bernard Lewis, eds., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire, The Functioning of a Plural Society*, Vol. I, (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1982). See also Ali Birinci, *Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası: II. Meşrutiyet Devrinde İttihad ve Terakki'ye Karşı Çıkanlar* (The Freedom and Coalition Party: Those Who Opposed the CUP During the Second Constitutional Period), (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1990), 43-63.

splendor than July 24, 1908. The Army was inspired yesterday by its love of the country and by no other sentiment. It simply demanded the establishment of the real constitution and Liberty.⁹³

The same can be said regarding the Greek newspaper, *Prodos*, which demonstrated a similar attitude regarding the mutiny and the mutineers:

The Army has proven once more that it is worthy of its traditions.

Thus, it deserves our respect and confidence.⁹⁴

Thus, the ARF commitment to the new constitutional regime underscored, if anything, that the future of the state and the new regime were far more important than what had transpired in Adana. Thus, Armenian and CUP officials sought to place the Adana “debacle” in a larger context, regardless of the pain and suffering it cost. While Turkish historians may find such an analysis incredulous, it necessitates that they reexamine more closely Armenian declarations on the matter, including the following letter addressed by the ARF Western Bureau to its Constantinople representative Khachatur Malumian (Aknuni):

Regardless of Hilmi Pasha’s⁹⁵ official declaration [regarding the massacres (in Adana) and its instigators], and regardless of Ferit Pasha’s⁹⁶ announcement, we wanted to start a new public awareness campaign regarding the Adana Massacres. However, your veto is

⁹³ McCullagh, *The Fall of Abd-Ul-Hamid*, 59.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa, Grand Vizir (Prime Minister) of the Ottoman Empire.

⁹⁶ Minister of Interior in Hilmi Paşa’s cabinet.

really disturbing us. You seem to be against any such articles in Troshag, even though in your letter to us you were the one who were clearly and equivocally against the Ittihad's politics. It seems to us that what Rupen [Zartarian] wrote and we published in Troshag's previous number was not as strong as your condemnation of the Ittihad in your letter. Therefore, when we intensified our campaign we were not informed of what was transpiring between you and the Ittihad center. You were not divulging any particulars of your negotiations with them, even though comrades Mikayel [Varandian] and others were asking you to keep them abreast and current vis-à-vis your negotiations. Now you only inform us that it is not wise and that we shouldn't incite [the] Ittihad against us. We ask you to write to us in a more specific way about what stance we should maintain regarding the Young Turks. It seems that you want us to refrain from any provocative writings or political maneuvers.

ARF Western Bureau

Geneva, June 4, 1909⁹⁷

Obviously, the Constantinople ARF representative wished the ARF Bureau to remain calm and not provoke international public opinion against the Young Turks. Therefore, in response to the counter-revolution and despite the Armenian massacres in Adana, few were surprised when the CUP and the ARF concluded a new agreement in

⁹⁷ Pamboukian, *Nyuter*, vol. VII, 251.

September 1909. A series of meetings in March 1910 in Salonika allowed both parties to work together for progress, the constitution, and unity.⁹⁸ Still, the important aspect of the agreement was that the ARF was to test the willingness of the CUP vis-à-vis the latter's readiness to pursue the project for Armenian reforms that sorely lacked since their proclamation at the 1878 Berlin Conference. Both parties affirmed that rumors of Armenian efforts toward independence in Adana and its province were false.⁹⁹ In fact, the progressive elements in the CUP—Talât, Enver, and others—strived for and were successful in appointing an Armenian, Bedros Halajian Effendi, who was close to the ARF, as a minister in the government formed after August 6, 1909, which was in all probability an attempt to demonstrate that the CUP was close to its Armenian ally.¹⁰⁰

What truly stood out the in the case of the 1909 massacres in Adana and differentiated them from their predecessors in 1894-1896 or 1904-1906 in the eastern provinces was their zeal as well as the aggressiveness of mobs carrying them out. Beyond similarities, however, key particularities of the case are noteworthy because so much more transpired in Adana. Thus, a reassessment is in order, if not a full revision of archaic historical analyses. Indeed, the burden in this case falls on Turkish historians to provide a fresh narrative that takes all the above mentioned particularities into account, and to carefully examine various linkages between the CUP and Armenian political parties as well as the misplaced fears of the Turkish landed aristocracy in Adana.

⁹⁸ Dikran Mesrob Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule, 1908-1914*, (New Jersey: Transaction Publishing, 2008). See also: Akcam, *A Shameful Act*, 70.

⁹⁹ Akcam, *A Shameful Act*, 70-71.

¹⁰⁰ Bedros Halajian.

CONCLUSION

After a hiatus that lasted thirty-one years, parliamentary elections in the Ottoman Empire were held in November 1908, and of eleven¹ Armenians elected, 4 were Tashnags and 2 represented the Hnchags. The ARF, as well as the Reformed Hnchagyans and the Ramgavars were in the nascent CUP coalition, while the Social Democrat Hnchagian Party coalesced with Prince Sabaheddin's opposition group.² Importantly, the era of revolutionary struggles was over, as Armenians pursued their civil rights through the emerging constitutional mechanism that pledged genuine reforms for all Ottoman subjects.

Nevertheless, the ARF remained committed to the ideal of a federative Ottoman Empire, a pledge that was ascertained during the party's September 1909 Fifth General World Congress held in Varna, Bulgaria, in 1909, which emphasized that self rule within the Armenian populated areas of the empire (i.e. eastern provinces) was possible as well as likely. Critically, ARF leaders pledged to pursue this aim through the constitutional parliament, to illustrate further their commitments to coalition allies. Therefore, the

¹ There is no straightforward answer as to the real number of Armenian deputies in the newly elected Ottoman Parliament. Sources mention numbers varying from 11 to 14. The problem seems to arise from the fact that there were Armenian deputies who were members of the Ittihadist (CUP) party, such as Hagop Effendi Bedigian, who in 1909 was selected to sit on the inquiry delegation to Adana after anti-Armenian events transpired there in the wake of the March 31 [13 April] counter-revolution in Constantinople. On the other hand, there were also Armenian deputies not affiliated with any Armenian parties. Such was the case of the famous Armenian jurist and writer Krikor Zohrab, and Nazaret Daghavarian. For more details on the discrepancy in the number of Armenian deputies see: Murat Koptaş, *Armenian Political Thinking in the Second Constitutional Period: The Case of Krikor Zohrab*, Master's thesis, (Boğaziçi University, 2005), 57-64; Ali Birinci, *Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası* (Freedom and Coalition Party), (Istanbul: Dergâh Yayınevi, 1990). The ARF delegates were Karekin Bastermajian (AKA Armen Garo, from Erzerum), Vartkes Serengulian (Erzerum), Arshak Vramian (Onnig Tertzagian, from Van) and Vahan Papazian (Koms, the Doctor, from Van), while the Hnchagyan deputies included Hampartsum Boyajian (Medzn Murad).

² Prince Sabaheddin's opposition coalition, which in 1908 was known as the League of Private Initiative and Decentralization, was restructured in 1911 as the Liberty Union Party. See Birinci, *Hürriyet ve İtilaf*.

programme change that the Fifth General Congress adopted underlined a key provision—not to secede from the Ottoman Empire—that, was an oft-lobbed accusation. In fact, the specific reference was carefully rewritten to reflect the pledge, as follows:

Turkish Armenia is an inseparable part of the Ottoman Constitutional state, which is built on the notion of broad regional autonomy. Political and social freedom, based on a local autonomy and federative association, within the boundaries of a democratic Ottoman state, in which all elections take place on the basis of a general, equal, direct, secret, and proportional suffrage, without discrimination by race, religion, or gender. ³

This revised article was in effect as two semi-autonomous Armenian supra-provinces were declared in Erzerum and Van, when WWI commenced several months later. The revised article remained unchanged until May 1918, when the Independent Republic of Armenia was announced in an untimely fashion, due to military and political conditions.

* * *

As this study encompasses some thirty years (1878-1909) of the history of Armenian national struggles within the Ottoman and the Russian empires, the

³ Hratch Dasnabedian, *H.H. Tashnagtsutyun*, 334. See also *Dzrakir 1907* (Program 1907), (Geneva: Troshag Publication, 1907), 17.

concentration focused on the 1895-1909 period, when formative relations occurred between Armenian revolutionary societies and the Young Turk movement. One of the quintessential questions that imposed itself in the course of this investigation was to ask whether Armenians gained anything from their coalition with the CUP, especially in terms of their struggles to obtain a better and honorable life for themselves within the Ottoman Empire? Moreover, what did the ARF, the foremost Armenian revolutionary organization at the time, achieve by throwing in its lot with the Young Turks and with the CUP after 1908?

From an Armenian point of view, it is interesting to note that even a century after these events, any assessments of these questions still manifest themselves as volatile and hotly debated matters. The “verdicts” most often rendered in this regard condemn the ARF as the culpable, ostensibly for tangling itself into a horrid mess by collaborating with the CUP, thus jeopardizing the very existence of the Armenian people. By extension, such accusations further stress that the ARF was implicated in aiding a nationalist Turkish cabal to assume absolute power in the Ottoman Empire in 1913, which entered WWI as a German ally. As a logical conclusion to this pattern, the charges further emphasized, led to the ultimate Armenian ordeal during WWI: the annihilation of most Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire, the deportation of survivors, as well as the uprooting of the nation from its millennial ties to its original homeland.

This assessment necessitates elucidation. While it is often easy to appraise and evaluate events in retrospect, especially since the elapsed time makes such criticisms

possible, it is much more difficult to reach sounder assessments when one experiences them. Being in the thick of epochal changes, and, most importantly, being able to foresee a favorable outcome a propos one's actions is almost impossible, especially since political situations contains too many variables to deal with effectively. The reality of the times was such that the ARF leadership was catapulted to the apex of the situation, while the other prominent political entity, the Hnchagyan party, was inundated into a quagmire of internal strife and divisions that weakened and rendered it ineffective. Moreover, the other two Armenian political organizations, the Veragazmyals and the Ramgavars, had also sided with the ARF in its coalition with the CUP. Hence, it was only logical that Hnchagyan altercations with ARF leaders, as well as its relations with the CUP during the formative 1908-1914 period, ought to be taken with some caution.

Indeed, it is eminently fair to ask why ARF leaders chose to associate themselves with the CUP, and not with Prince Sabaheddin's more liberal coalition? The answer is that while both the CUP and Prince Sabaheddin's factions showed modernized and liberal tendencies at the beginning of the new constitutional era, the ARF's decision to link itself with the CUP occurred primarily because of Aknuni's firm belief that the Unionists, regardless of their narrower vision vis-à-vis self-rule and autonomy for ethnic communities within the empire, seemed destined to become the new political masters of the Ottoman Empire. Hence, Aknuni's judgment was more or less correct at the time, even though it later proved to be disastrous. It is not surprising that Aknuni paid the ultimate price for his

decision.⁴ The bitter irony of exterminating the Armenian intelligentsia of the Ottoman Empire in 1915 could be considered the CUP's cataclysmic political error, as it eliminated an intelligentsia that firmly believing in the future of the Ottoman constitutional regime. After all, these were the same leaders and intellectuals who stood firm with the CUP and did not abandon the coalition even when warning signs emerged. By purging Aknuni and his allies, the CUP deprived itself of an Armenian leadership that believed in an Ottoman constitutional government, even when many Ottoman leaders were hopeless regarding it.⁵

Vahan Papazian, an ARF leader who was involved with the Armenian revolutionary-military struggles against the Hamidian regime in Van and who later was elected as a deputy from Van to the Ottoman Parliament, provided a rare insight that demonstrated Aknuni's buoyant belief in the CUP and the future of the constitutional empire. Reportedly, when Ghevont Maloian, the ARF's leader in Van after the formation of the constitutional regime, wrote to the ARF Responsible Body in Constantinople, which was headed by Aknuni, to seek authorization to purchase weapons for self defense purposes. Aknuni reacted firmly and went as far as accusing Maloian for being naïve and intransigent in his judgment. He chastised Maloian, emphasizing: "We are living in a time

⁴ Although still considered a "friend" of the Minister of Interior Talât Pasha, Aknuni was one of the intellectuals who were apprehended in April 1915 and sent to Ayash and Chankırı. He was later executed after a military tribunal in Diyarbakir condemned him to death. Garabet Moumdjian, "Tracing Ottoman Documents: A Letter Delivered 95 Years Late," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies (JSAS)*, 18:2, June 2009, 127-140.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Hayg Tiriakian, an ARF leader and the writer of the letter, expresses the futility of CUP's policy of exterminating the Armenian intellectuals who remained steadfast in Constantinople in April, 1915. See Garabet Moumdjian, "Tracing Ottoman Documents: A Letter That Was Delivered 95 Years Late," *JSAS (Journal of the Society of Armenian Studies)*, 18:2, 2009.

when the Turkish police itself will defend the honor of Armenian woman.”⁶ This quotation confirms that Aknuni—who by 1909 was the preeminent ARF leader in the Ottoman Empire—believed that armed struggle, which was an important part of the modus operandi of the ARF before 1908, had ended. It is clear that Aknuni espoused a progressive approach, even a way of thinking that was practical, though few CUP leaders shared his enthusiasm.

Still, it is important to recognize that throughout the formative years of Armenian-Young Turks relations, the Hnchagyan party, regardless of its internal schisms, remained aloof toward the Young Turk Movement. This Hnchagyan posture was demonstrated in the writings of one leader of the era, Sdepan Sabahgolian, who questioned the 1876 Midhatian constitution and called it a useless maneuver by the upper class. In Sabahgolian’s own words:

It was the upper class that usurped the places in the [Ottoman] Parliament. There were also some Armenians in there. But what could 5 or 10 MP’s do? Speak out about atrocities against Armenians? Wasn’t it after all the majority who was to decide in accordance to the tenets of democracy as is the case in Europe? This is rubbish!... And now, a new group of reformists is trying to do the same thing; Establish a Parliament. What change will that bring if the main issue, the

⁶ Vahan Papazian, *Im Hushere* (My Memoirs), (Bostont: Hairenik Press, 1952), vol. 2, 36.

sultan, will remain intact [reference to Riza's political thinking of defending the patrimonial position of the monarch].

If the young Turks of today really want to change their country towards the better, they still have time. Our reformist ideas are not dissimilar to theirs. The only problem is that they are evolutionists rather than revolutionists, which is necessary in Turkey's case. Things have to change soon for Armenia and Armenians, who are on the verge of dying. They have to accept the fact that Turkey is a heterogeneous rather than a homogeneous entity. All minorities should have rights but must also work for the one fatherland.

The world acknowledges the Armenian issue and it is documented in the 61st article of the Berlin Convention... There also is the May 1895 reform project set forth by European powers and accepted by the sultan and not yet implemented... These could be achieved by keeping the Ottoman state as one unit with internal autonomy for minorities. If Young Turks agree on these than we can work together.

One more thing. We have thus far considered that there is a united party of Young Turks. Now we know that there is no such thing. There are factions and then there are personalities each with its/his own agenda. How can one work with such a “group?...”⁷

To say that the ultra nationalistic tendencies of some Young Turk leaders, including those promoted by Ahmed Riza and later Behaeddin Shakir, shaped Hnchagyan views would be an understatement. Indeed, the Hnchagyans saw no prospects to work with the Young Turks, which led them, during the parliamentary elections in late 1908 and thereafter, to join forces with Prince Sabaheddin, whose faction became the leading opposition group on account of its union with Ottoman Greeks. Sabahgulian, a leading figure within the Social Democrat Hnchagian Party, declared his and his party’s opposition to the CUP and urged other Armenian political parties (i.e. the ARF, Ramgavars, and the Reformed Hnchagyans) to join with the his party in opposing the CUP.

The ARF’s stance toward a coalition with the CUP could also be explained by the anti-ARF policies of the tsarist regime in the Caucasus at the time. Under the circumstances, it seemed that there were no other choices but to coalesce with the CUP, which implied making Constantinople the new nexus of the party’s activism. It was in such an atmosphere that the Party’s Fifth General World Congress in 1909 affirmed on the one

⁷ Sdepan Sabahgulian, “Yeridasart Turker,” (Young Turks), *Hnchag* 13th year, No. 7, December 15, 1900; 14th year, No. 1, January 10, 1901; No. 2, February 10, 1901; No. 3, March 30, 1901.

hand its adherence to the constitutional regime in the Ottoman Empire, while on the other hand it declared that it will continue its struggle against tsarist despotism, which persisted well into 1912-1913. In fact, Stolypin's pressure was so strong that Troshag characterized the party's New Course (i.e. being pro-Ottoman and anti-Russian) as follows:

There is nothing new in the New Course. The Russian Winter is continuing. It is a harsh "Winter" especially for Russian Armenians. The [tsarist] dungeons are still chock full... There are new arrests and punishments every day.⁸

The ARF had acted as an anti-tsarist element in the Caucasus during the 1905 Russian Constitutional Revolution. Largely overlooked, this tsarist regime was implicated in the 1905-1906 Armeno-Tatar ethnic strife, which created havoc for Armenians and Azeris alike.⁹ The ARF stood against the "scanty policies of tsarism, which aimed at transforming the Turkic population of the Caucasus into a hurdle against Armenian reformatory aspirations."¹⁰ No wonder then that after the 1908 revolution, Constantinople and the Ottoman territories became the new center of gravity not only for the ARF, but also to the Hnchagian party, as most of their cadres fleeing the oppressive "Russian Winter" found refuge in Constantinople. This was an ironic development, since the roles were now reversed and the Ottoman Empire became a free haven where the ARF could

⁸ "Rusasdan: Stolipinits Hedo (Russia: After Stolypin), *Troshag*, July-September 1911, (7-12), 90.

⁹ "Stolipin -Vorontsovian Rezhime yev Tashnagtsutyune" (The Stolypin-Vorontsov Regime and the ARF), *Troshag*, 1909 February-March (2-3), 17.

¹⁰ Ibid.

work as a legal, parliamentary political entity, while its remnants in the Caucasus were obliged to operate in extreme secrecy.¹¹

As the above clearly illustrate, the Armenian liberation struggle within the Ottoman Empire was nothing if not a reformist initiative, with the ultimate aim to attain sorely needed political and social improvements within the very fabric of Ottoman society. This assessment, of course, runs contrary to assertions made in Turkish historiography, which tints the Armenian struggle as a separatist movement geared towards an outright severance of Armenian-inhabited areas in the eastern provinces from the Ottoman state. On the contrary, and as documented throughout this study, Young Turk leaders such as Prince Sabaheddin, Behaeddin Shakir, and to some extent even Ahmed Riza endeavored for harmony and accord with Armenian revolutionary leaders because of their reformist agenda, while at the same time they totally abhorred their Macedonian counterparts who strived for outright independence.

Such an appraisal contains a contrary view that also required elucidation. Here, the question that imposes itself is the following: Were the Young Turks sincere in their zeal to form a united front with the Armenian revolutionaries and were they anxious to fight for the betterment of life for all citizens within the Ottoman Empire? There could be no uniform reply to such a multi-pronged question. Nevertheless, it is possible to provide a carefully assessed response by looking at the different layers and shades of ideological and

¹¹ *Rapport présenté au Congrès Socialiste International de Copenhague par le parti Arménien Daschnaktzoutioun, Turquie-Caucase-Perse* (Report Presented at the [Second] International Socialist Congress in Copenhagen by the ARF, vis-à-vis Turkey [Ottoman Empire], the Caucasus, and Persia), 4-11.

political differences that leaders such as Prince Sabaheddin, Behaeddin Shakir, and Ahmed Riza displayed during different times and under different circumstances in the years when the two sides interacted.¹² It is thus safe to assume that what formed a common denominator, something that was mutually agreed upon, was that Abdulhamid ought to go. All of the other important questions regarding the future form of government within the Empire were left for the future. For instance, both the 1902 and the 1907 anti-Hamidian congresses could not articulate, in tangible terms, what form of government the future Ottoman state would hold. Moreover, the ebb and flow between the notions of federalism and self-rule on the one side, and a centrist form of government on the other, were all hotly debated during the conferences. This meant that regardless of their differences, Young Turk leaders were especially adamant in securing Armenian participation in their scheme to overthrow the Abdulhamid regime. Even the nationalist Riza was aware of this fact and pursued it because it was the only portal through which Young Turk leaders could enter European chancelleries and make themselves heard.

Could it be then, that the whole project of presenting such a fraternal attitude toward their Armenian counterparts was only a ploy to assuage the latter into believing that Young Turks harbored only genuine intentions toward their Armenian counterparts? Did the ARF really swallow this bait? As explained above, questions like these played heavily

¹² The negative oratory of Ahmed Riza regarding Armenian demands for a federative government and self-rule in the provinces during the 1902 congress is by now clear for the reader. Suffice it to say that it was the same Riza, who after returning to Constantinople and being elected as the president of the new Ottoman Parliament, became a regular visitor of Abdulhamid and his successors. This notion of *Padişahım Çok Yaşsa* (Live Long My King) shows, if anything, that Riza was either “acting” the role of an anti-monarchist revolutionary, or that he underwent a total metamorphosis within a short period of time after his return to the homeland.

within the intra-Armenian psyche, which partially explained various dilemmas that emerged.

What could be said about European rivalries, intrigues, and political actions in all this mix? Regardless of Bismarck's oft-misconstrued utterance that "the whole Eastern Question [was] not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian soldier," during the period under discussion, Britain, France and Russia were knee-deep in the Ottoman quagmire. They not only meddled in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire but were part of the problem rather than the solution. This inference can be substantiated by the fact that even after they secured crushing economic capitulations from the Empire in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European powers held the Ottoman state hostage, as they imposed heavy reparation payments that, by design, ensured insolvency.¹³ It is fair to conclude that for Britain, France, and Russia, the Armenian Question was important as long as it granted opportunities for political and economic intrusions in the internal affairs of a rival. European powers were not interested in the fate of Armenians although many Europeans, individually or through charitable organizations, displayed genuine concerns. Leaders, on the other hand, focused on interests. It is from this point of view that European intrigues ought to be carefully re-evaluated, for regardless of inherent rivalries, Britain and France almost always feared ascending Russian influences among the significant Armenian populations in the Ottoman Empire.

¹³ Ahmed Cevdet, *Ma'ruzat*, 22-65.

Moreover, that the Armenian liberation struggle as a whole was tied to its Macedonian counterpart is also a question worthy of attention. Aside from being an amalgamation of like-minded revolutionaries that demanded change under any circumstances, the Macedonian Revolutionary Movement, which later morphed into the IMRO and then the MRO, espoused a unique perspective that was tied more to the Balkan Peninsula and the fate of Christian minorities there. Since the 1878 Berlin Convention initiated the autonomy of Bulgarians and Serbs, Macedonians aspired for a similar goal. It was in this context that Macedonian attitudes toward the Ottoman Empire differed from those that Armenians sought. Taking into consideration the attitude of European powers regarding the Macedonian Cause, one could see that Macedonia was itself a victim of a two pronged imperialist action. According to Greek and Bulgarian aspirations, Macedonia would only be liberated to become a part and parcel of one or the other. This was akin to the Russian policy of liberating Western Armenia, or parts thereof, only to bring it within the confines of the Russian Empire. The complexity facing both cases are apparent. It was under such intricate and serious conditions that both revolutionary movements maneuvered. When one adds the Young Turk factor into this mix, what clearly emerges is nothing short of an extremely convoluted situation, especially since the Young Turks wanted to work with the Armenians to the detriment of the latter's Macedonian allies. One must not forget that in the end, the meager, albeit not sanctioned Armenian participation in the Balkan Wars—on the side of the Bulgarian-Macedonian alliance—factored in the final rupture of ARF-CUP relations themselves.

Although Armenian political/revolutionary parties welcomed European intervention for the betterment of Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire, One must also remember that both the ARF and the Hnchagyan party leaned towards leftist, socialist ideologies that meant, if anything, that both parties were somehow cognizant of Western imperialist motives vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴ Moreover, that the years 1909 to 1915 saw no Armenian revolutionary agitation as was the case during the reign of Abdulhamid II, confirmed that the Armenian parties truly believed in the new constitutional system and worked in earnest to maintain it. In fact, the Armenian organizations openly declared their devotion to the newly established constitutional regime and ceased to pursue any armed struggles, since they were now recognized as legal political entities.¹⁵

Naturally, serious questions arose in the case of the April 1909 Adana massacres. However, rather than focusing on the tragedy itself, which is thoroughly studied by leading historians, this narrative took a completely different trajectory and studied both Armenian and Turkish historiographies. As documented in this study, the Adana massacres offers a paradigm that ought to be examined from the perspective of the local Turkish/Kurdish landed elites. In fact, Armenian fears were genuine, as many lost ground to more successful Armenian entrepreneurship, as the latter took advantage of opportunities offered under the new constitutional government. Hence, Adana, in this respect, is to be reckoned with as a vivid snapshot of what the new heightened tone of inter-ethnic strife was to look like in the years to come, especially since the issue of the return of usurped Armenian lands was one

¹⁴ *Rapport présenté au Congrès Socialiste*, 12.

¹⁵ Murat Koptaş, *Armenian Political Thinking*, 4.

of the main issues that Armenians pursued after 1908. Naturally, such a reinterpretation opens doors for fresh investigations, especially if Ottoman archives become more readily available to further confirm the findings presented in this research endeavor.

* * *

Was the revolution that toppled Abdulhamid's long reign anticipated? Were the Armenian fighters in Sasun aware that the promising day would arrive in July 1908? Ruben Ter Minasian himself was puzzled at the sudden change that Ottoman officials in Mush demonstrated toward him on the day he was summoned to the city center to celebrate the new order. As soon as telegrams were received about the glorious revolution at Constantinople and in the remote corners of the eastern provinces, Ottoman officials were more than ready to show themselves in a manner commensurate with the realities of the new constitutional regime and to embrace their Armenian "brethren" within the confines of the newly declared rubrics of *Hürriyet*, *Adelet*, *Musavat* (Freedom, Justice, and Equality).

What was unclear, nevertheless, was whether this new regime intended to usher in an era of security and prosperity for the peoples of the Ottoman Empire. Subsequent developments illustrated that such was not to be the case. What the future was to bring were even more horrendous tragedies than what the past had already presented...

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