

AN ARMENIAN NARRATIVE THAT CANNOT BE TRUSTED

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On 4 April 2023, *the Armenian Weekly* featured an article titled Ottoman Parliament and Senate in 1918 acknowledged the Armenian Massacres that was written by Harut Sassounian.[1] According to him, the Armenian Massacres were discussed and acknowledged by the Ottoman Parliament and Senate in 1918. To demonstrate his point, he presents some carefully selected and manipulated quotations from the parliamentary speeches by various members of the Ottoman parliament, including those that allegedly belonged to the Minister of the Interior Ali Fethi (Okyar).

Readers already familiar with Sassounians writing will recognize that he is a fanatic irredentist, and his extremist views cannot be taken seriously. Nonetheless, for readers unfamiliar with him, it is necessary to briefly examine and expose the deceptive nature of his article.

According to Sassounian, during the discussions in the Ottoman Parliament, a motion was presented that stated: A population of 1 million people guilty of nothing except belonging to the Armenian nation were massacred and exterminated, including even women and children. And in response this motion the Minister of the Interior Ali Fethi allegedly made the following statement:

> It is the intention of the government to cure every single injustice done up until now, as far as the means allow, to make possible the return to their homes of those sent into exile, and to compensate for their material loss as far as possible ☀ Yes, Gentlemen, I also say that our officials butchered many Armenians, including women and children and that their properties were plundered.

Here Sassounian mixes up two different speeches of two different persons and presents them as one single speech made by Minister of the Interior Fethi Bey to give the impression the Parliament and the Minister entirely agreed and accepted the motion,

which could not be further from the truth.

In truth, the motion was presented by 3 Greek deputies of the Ottoman Parliament (Emanuelidi Efendi, Vangel Efendi, and Tokinidis Efendi) and in response to this, other members of the Parliament criticized the motion for being biased. Ali Fethi, as the Minister of the Interior thus said:

> As you gentlemen know, within the last four years very bad and hazardous currents have passed through the atmosphere of the country and turned the country upside down. Because of this I assure you, Turkish people have suffered equal or even greater harm than the Greek, Armenian and Arab minorities. I wish that Emanuel Efendi had also mentioned that **Turkish people suffered the same, or maybe even more than all these minorities...** It is the intention of the government to cure every single injustice done up until now, as far as the means allow, to make possible the return to their homes of those sent into exile, and to compensate for their material loss as far as possible. [bold letters added for emphasis by the author]

As for the second part of the quote presented by Sassounian that reads: Yes, Gentlemen, I also say that our officials butchered many Armenians, including women and children and that their properties were plundered, it was part of a speech by Mehmet Emin Bey, the Deputy for Trabzon and it certainly was not part of Fethi Beys speech. Unlike Sassounians distorted version, Mehmet Emin Beys speech was not delivered to agree with the motion but, on the contrary, to criticize it:

> It is not right to undo one injustice by means of another injustice. I believe Emanuelidi Efendi has exaggerated on this point and understood that he departed from the issue a little bit. Yes, Gentlemen, I also say that our officials butchered many Armenians, including women and children and that their properties were plundered. But there was a beginning to all of this ☀ We are today faced with an accusation and I want to present you with a little defense.

As will be seen below, in stating that some officials took part in the killings, Mehmet Emin Bey was not saying that it had been the Ottoman Government that ordered the killings but to the contrary, some minor and local officials did so by going against the wishes of the central government and that the central government not only did not approve this, but tried to stop it whenever it had been aware of such acts by having such officials removed from their posts and putting them on trial. But before basing his opinion on this, Mehmet Emin Bey first objected to the figure of 1 million killed, which he stated was clearly exaggerated. According to Mehmet Emin Bey, there were a total of 1.2 million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire before the war based on documents captured from the Armenian Committee members. And in the post-war Ottoman borders, there were about 400,000-500,000 Armenians and about 200,000-300,000 in the Caucasus. Thus, he argued the figure of 1 million could not be accepted. He then went on to state:

> Yet when this is the case, I cannot accept the statement made by Emanuelidi Efendi that they were slaughtered merely because they were Armenians. I also assume that my Armenian colleagues do not accept that this was so ☀ Both in the Armenian

> and the Greek questions there had been evil misdeeds. Later for the events in Samsun, along with Osman Bey and Kofidi Efendi, we appealed to the government and complained. We had both the commander and district governor dismissed from their posts. So, these events were not approved by anyone... Also, there had been rebellions here and there. They too happened. I wonder if the Turks were spared from these atrocities [by the rebels] since Emanuelidi Efendi never mentions them.

In his subsequent speeches, Mehmet Emin Bey further mentioned complaining to Talat Pasha about the District Governor of Ordu for the mistreatment of the Armenians. He noted in response to his complaint that Talat Pasha had sent an inspector and dismissed the governor, and later put him on trial for his mistreatment of the Armenians.

In other words, the deputies in the Ottoman parliament, while acknowledging and regretting the loss of life among the Armenians, did not accept the Events of 1915 as a one-sided massacre but rather as mutual massacres committed by both Christians and Muslims. This is essentially not such a different position than the one maintained by modern Türkiye regarding the Events of 1915. Therefore, Sassounians presentation of the Ottoman Parliaments position is purposefully misleading.

In conclusion, Harut Sassounian makes a further addition to an already a long list of his unreliable and distorted writings. His article blatantly distorts speeches, taking separate speeches by separate persons and joining them to present a version that would support his biased views. He also ignores context and leaves inconvenient facts out of the picture to support his claims. This why he cannot and should not be taken seriously.

[1] Harut Sassounian, Ottoman Parliament and Senate in 1918 acknowledged the Armenian Massacres, *The Armenian Weekly*, April 4, 2023, https://armenianweekly.com/2023/04/04/ottoman-parliament-and-senate-in-1918-acknowledged-the-armenian-massacres/

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