

THE EVENTS OF 1915 AND THE WORD 'DEPORTATION'

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Accounts on the events of 1915 are frequently subject to distortions and errors. In order to dispel these distortions and errors, one must be very careful when choosing words or phrases to describe a specific event or fact.

When giving an account of the events of 1915, the Ottoman governments decision to move its Armenian subjects away from their residence to other places during World War I is referred to in a number of ways. Examples of this include relocation, exile, forced migration, and displacement. Alongside these, one frequently used word is deportation. This is, however, an incorrect use of this word, because the meaning of this word does not overlap with the Ottoman governments decision. In the dispute over whether or not the events of 1915 constituted genocide, individuals situated on both sides of the dispute employ the incorrect use of the word deportation. This incorrect use can be attributed to a lack of knowledge about the issue, and more so to inattention or negligence.

It became necessary to write this commentary when the deportation word was yet again used incorrectly during the hearing of the Perinçek v. Switzerland case in the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on 28 January 2015. Doğu Perinçeks public rejection to categorize the events of 1915 as genocide during his visit to Switzerland, and whether such a public rejection can be punished or not lays at the heart of this very important case.

When referring to the Ottoman governments decision to move its Armenian subjects, the applicant Doğu Perinçek (speaking in Turkish) used the phrase zorla göç, which was translated by the simultaneous interpreter as deportation. Mr. Perinçeks counsel Mehmet Cengiz (speaking in Turkish) used the word sürgün, which was again translated as deportation. Perinçeks other counsel Christian Laurent Pech (speaking in French) used the word déportation, which was translated into English as deportation. Finally, the counsel for Turkey (a third party to the case), Stefan Talmon (speaking in English) used the word

deportation.[i] All these cases of the use of the word deportation are problematic.

The primary meaning of the word deportation in the English language is: an act or instance of deporting[ii], the word deporting itself meaning to force (a person who is not a citizen) to leave a country.[iii] To put it another way, deportation means the removal from a country of an alien whose presence is unlawful or prejudicial.[iv] As such, deportation has no place when describing the Ottoman governments decision. The Armenian people were subjects of the Ottoman Empire, they were not considered to be aliens. Furthermore, during the war, they were moved within the borders of the Empire, they were not expelled out of the borders.

Mr. Perinçek used the Turkish phrase zorla göç, which can be translated as forced migration. This is not the same as deportation. Migration does not necessarily entail moving out of a country,[v] deportation does.

Mr. Cengiz used the Turkish word sürgün, which can be translated as banishment or exile. [vi] These too, are not the same as deportation. Banishment or exile do not necessarily entail being forced to move out of a country, deportation does.

Mr. Pechs used the French word déportation, which one would assume to be the same as the English word deportation. However, these two words do not mean the same thing. The French word déportation can either mean being sent away (as a convict) to a faraway place (specifically to one of the past or present overseas territories of France), or being sent to a concentration camp in another country (during World War II).[vii] The French word déportation itself poses a complication, since it has very specific historical meanings that cannot be related to the Ottoman governments decision.

The incorrect use of the English word deportation has already been elaborated above, so there is no need to further explain why Mr. Talmons use of this word is problematic.

Translation between any two languages is difficult, because each language has its own nuances that may not easily be conveyed in another language. Simultaneous interpretation is even more difficult, as the interpreter is forced continuously translate without a chance to pause and thoroughly evaluate the meaning of words and phrases.

Moving beyond the difficulties of translation, however, it should be reiterated that the English word deportation (and also the French word déportation) should be avoided in the context of the Ottoman governments decision. The use of such words leads to misunderstandings about the events of 1915. Relocation or resettlement are more appropriate words to use in this context. Relocation simply means moving or being moved to a different place,[viii] while resettlement means the act or instance of settling or being settled in another place[ix], and as such both words leave no room for misunderstandings.

[i] The speeches delivered by the mentioned individuals can be accessed on ECHRs website: http://www.echr.coe.int/Pages/home.aspx?p=hearings&w=2751008_28012015&language=en

[ii] Deportation, *Merriam-Webster.com*, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deportation

[iii] Deport, *Merriam-Webster.com*, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deporting

[iv] Deportation, *Merriam-Webster.com*.

[v] Migrate, *Merriam-Webster.com*, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/migration

[vi] Unlike its English translations, the word sürgün in Turkish carries no connotations about leaving ones country. Banishment and exile do have such connotations, but not entirely. Sürgün, *Türk Dil Kurumu* – *Büyük Türkçe Sözlük* http://www.tdk.gov.tr/index.php?option=com_bts&view=bts; Banish, *Merriam-Webster*, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/banishment; Exile, *Merriam-Webster*, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exile.

[vii] Déportation, *Le-Dictionnaire.com*, http://www.le-dictionnaire.com/definition.php?mot=d%E9portation

[viii] Relocate, *CollinsDictionary.com*, http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/american/relocation

[ix] Resettlement, *CollinsDictionary.com*, http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/resettlement

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