

GERMANY'S POLICIES ON ARMENIANS DURING WORLD WAR I

(BİRİNCİ DÜNYA SAVAŞI SÜRECİNDE ALMANYA'NIN
ERMENİLERE YÖNELİK İZLEDİĞİ POLİTİKALAR)

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***Abstract:** Germany had followed a policy in support of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire due to achieving its national unity in the wake of other states; and due to only being able to partake in the international level in general and in the "Eastern Question" in particular as a powerful actor far later than other states. In the scope of this policy, Germany had changed its approach and policies in accordance with its national interests and started to intervene in and lead the Ottoman–Armenian relations. Following the changes in Germany's policy, it has been suggested by some scholars that the 1915 Relocation Law that had been put into force on the grounds of military security was allegedly applied under the direction of some German officers and executives. In accordance with the general and abstract information stated above, this paper will analyze the policies of Germany on Armenians during World War I.*

***Keywords:** Ottoman Empire, Germany, Armenian Question, World War I, Relocation Law*

***Öz:** Almanya, ulusal birliğini diğer devletlere nazaran geç sağladığı ve genelde uluslararası sistemde özelde ise Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun topraklarının paylaşım mücadelesi olan Doğu Sorunu'nda, güçlü bir aktör olarak daha sonradan yer aldığı için; Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun toprak bütünlüğünü destekleyen bir politika izlemiştir. Bu politika bağlamında; Almanya I. Dünya Savaşı süreci içerisinde kendi çıkarları doğrultusunda tutum ve politika değiştirmiş ve Osmanlı-Ermeni ilişkilerine müdahil olmaya ve bu ilişkileri yönlendirmeye başlamıştır. Bu politika değişikliğini takiben, askeri güvenlik gerekçesi ile yürürlüğe konulan 1915 Sevk ve İskânı'nın ise kimi Alman subaylarının ve yöneticilerinin yönlendirmesi ile uygulandığı ileri sürülmüştür. Yukarıda*

genel ve soyut olarak belirttiğimiz bilgiler doğrultusunda çalışmada, Birinci Dünya Savaşı sürecinde Almanya'nın Ermenilere yönelik izlediği politikalar analiz edilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Almanya, Ermeni Sorunu, Birinci Dünya Savaşı, Sevk ve İskân Kanunu*

INTRODUCTION

The Armenian Question has been one of the biggest problems for the Republic of Turkey's foreign policy and is now evaluated within the Armenian genocide allegations regarding the 1915 events. The reason for such evaluation is that the problem of conflicting interpretations of these tragic events, which occurred between the Turks and Armenians living in the same lands in the first years of the World War I, has not been solved due to various reasons. Nevertheless, these two communities had a common history for nearly a thousand years, living without having any problems all the way until the second half of the 19th century.

This problem of interpretation has not been solved; and one of the major reasons for this is, arguably, the difference between the definitions of each side about the problem. Armenians believe that the basis of the problem depends on the implementation of relocation in 1915 and argue that this implementation was the first genocide in the history. Nonetheless, did the Armenian Question really emerge in 1915, as some argue? Additionally, did the Ottoman Empire subject Armenians to relocation for the purpose of exterminating them?

Before giving answer to these questions, there is one major point that should be emphasized: those who defend Armenian allegations are far removed from the scientific thought, because they fail to analyze the 1915 events within

causal connections. In order to give a brief reminder in this context, the initial problems between Turks and Armenians emerged at the end of 18th century, when the Russians began to develop various policies for expanding in the Caucasus. Within this period, particularly between 1800 and 1836, either Russia's policies on Armenians or the occasional course of conduct of the Etchmiadzin Catholicos under Russian control were considered as the first indicators of the imminent problems. After the first quarter of the 19th century, the Armenian Question -the effects of which have extended to this day- emerged as a result of the influence of nationalist movements over the Ottoman Armenians on the one hand, and as a result of the patronage or even instigation of the great powers/states¹ over Armenians for their political and economic

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1 The Great Powers (*Düvel-i Muazzama*) were as follows: Russia (ruled by the Czar), the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Britain, France, Prussia, and the US. Germany joined among these powers after 1871. However, in the first phase of the Armenian Question, the influence of Russia, Britain, and France over the Armenians was bigger than the others.

interests, just as they had done over Serbians, Greeks, and Bulgarians. For this reason, the Armenian Question should be considered as a part of the Eastern Question that was artificially created for the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire without causing any instability in the international system. Attempting to analyze the Armenian Question without giving consideration to the Eastern Question (which shaped the Armenian Question) will result in incomplete or misleading understandings of the Armenian Question.

The main aim of this paper is to analyze Germany's policies on Armenians during World War I. In this framework, the first part of this paper will present the historical background of the Armenian Question in order to emphasize the significance of the subject matter for the major actors involved in this process. Building upon the historical basis provided in the first part, the second part of this paper specifically focuses on Germany's policies on Armenians in pre-World War I period. The third part will then examine Germany's policies during World War I and their implications on Armenian Question for the involved parties. In conclusion, this paper will present the findings of the historical policy analysis within a holistic approach and in connection with the most recent developments.

A HISTORICAL TAKE ON THE ARMENIAN PROBLEM²

Within the context of the implementation of this plan, the Armenian committees and gangs started revolts and threats of violence and instigated terror with the aim of establishing an independent Armenian state, while the Armenian Question gained an international dimension after the Treaty of Berlin (1878). The first revolt by the Armenian committees and gangs was carried out in Erzurum on 20 June 1890. More than 40 revolts and threats of violence and acts of terror took place between 1890 and 1914. In their propaganda efforts, it was emphasized that the Ottoman Armenians fought for their independence, while the revolts started by the Armenian committees and gangs were reported in distorted ways before the eyes of the representatives and peoples of the Great Powers. The revolts were portrayed as if innocent Christians were abruptly massacred by Turks.

After the Ottoman Empire entered into the World War I as an ally of Germany, Armenians continued the same course of conduct and further instigated 21 new revolts. The issue, which concerned the Ottoman Empire the most, was related

² This article was written to upgrade the information in the following work, which was previously published: Barış Özdal, "Relocation of Armenians", *I. International Interdisciplinary Social Inquiry Conference 17-21 June 2012*, Bursa-Turkey, p. 1115-1123.

to the fact that some of the young Armenians recruited in the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia deserted the army with their guns as of 30 August 1914 and joined the armed forces of the Allies, opening a new front within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman army was forced to struggle against the revolts, the threats of violence, and terror started by the Armenian committees, while it was fighting with Russia on the Eastern front. The Ottoman government tried to suppress activities in Maraş and nearby areas close to Konya, after the Zeytun Revolt affected Antep and nearby areas.³

The decision of relocation showed that the Ottoman government came to a point of losing its control in the region due to the incidents caused by the Armenian committees and decided to execute the “relocation” policy, a method which had its place in the administrative tradition of the Ottoman Empire for a long time. In fact, the aim of the relocation policy was to ease the administration and control in a certain region by making a community, which was prone to create problems (like collaborating with enemies and presenting a great danger in the military aspect), migrate to other safer regions for the security of the state. After the Van Revolt that was started on 9 February 1915, the situation in the region could be seen more clearly and the Commander-in-Chief issued a military directive, giving orders to disarm the Armenian soldiers in the army and to discharge the Armenian officials who were also committee members. At the same time, however, the directive instructed for no harm to be done to the Armenians who were loyal to the Ottoman Empire.

However, as the events of that time clearly demonstrated, it was not enough for the Ottoman Empire just to take local and special measures against the revolts instigated by Armenian committees receiving support from Russia, Britain, France and the US. For this reason, the Ottoman government was obliged to take permanent measures and delivered a sealed circular letter signed by the Minister of Interior Talat Pasha to the provinces on 25 April 1915 in order to dispatch the Armenian committees. The sealed circular letter ordered the authorities to close the Armenian committees' headquarters and branches, to confiscate their documents, and to arrest their leaders. After the Commander-in-Chief sent a circular letter having the same content with the above mentioned letter to all of its units, the Armenian committees were dispatched on 24 April 1915 and about 235 committee members were arrested in Istanbul with the charges of performing activities against the state.⁴

3 For the original of the decision, see: BOA. DH. ŞFR. Nr. 52/286.

4 For the original of the circular letter, see: BOA. DH. ŞFR. Nr., 52/96,97,98. For Turkish and English translations of the circular letter, see: *Arşiv Belgeleriyle Ermeni Faaliyetleri 1914-1918*, Volume I (Ankara: The General Staff Printing House, 2005), p. 127-129.

Thus, “24 April”, which Armenians commemorate as “the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide” and induce many national assemblies to adopt resolutions as “the anniversary day for the Armenian Genocide”, is actually the date on which some members of the Tashnaksutyun, Hunchak and Ramgavar committees were arrested. In other words, in the context of the Relocation Law dated 27 May 1915 and the events that occurred during the implementation of this law, the prosecutions of 24 April are in fact irrelevant to the genocide allegations. Despite all measures taken, the Armenian committees continued their gruesome actions more and more aggressively each day. For this reason, Deputy Commander-in-Chief appealed to the Ministry of Interior for the providing of the security of the army and the civilians, a month after the delivery date of the above mentioned circular letter, asking for temporary relocation of Armenians from Eastern Anatolia to areas away from the conflict zone.

Upon this application, a discharge certificate dated 26 May 1915 and numbered 270, which was signed by the Minister of Interior Talat Pasha, was sent to the Prime Ministry (*Sadaret*). This discharge certificate regarding to the relocation of Armenians from certain areas was discussed and adopted at the Council of Ministers (*Meclis-i Vükela*) on 27 May 1915. Also, a law was published in the Official Gazette of the time (*Takvim-i Vekayi*) and the legal procedure related to the relocation was completed. The concerning articles of this “Temporary Law on the Military Measures to be Taken for Those Who Resist Governmental Acts”⁵ are as follows:

Article 1: The commanders of the army, army corps and divisions and their deputies are authorized and obliged to take military actions immediately against those opposing government orders, country’s defense, and the protection of peace; and against those organizing armed attacks and resistance, and kill rebels during aggressions and uprising in wartime.

Article 2: The commanders of the army, army corps and divisions are authorized to transfer and resettle, on a single basis or in mass, the people living in villages and towns who are found to be engaged in espionage or treason.

Article 3: This law is valid as of its publication date. The Deputy Supreme Commander and the Minister of War are liable for the implementation of the law.

5 “Vakt-i Seferde İcraat-i Hükümete Karşı Gelenler İçün Cihet-i Askeriyece İttihaz Olunacak Tedbir Hakkında Kanun-i Muvakkat”, *The Official Gazette (Takvim-i Vekayi)*, 19 May 1331, No 2189.

The first thing to be emphasized strongly within the context of this law dated 27 May 1915 is that the Armenians subjected to relocation were not forced to leave the territory of the Ottoman Empire; but on the contrary, they were located into the safer regions within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, when other decisions related to the implementation of this law⁶ are also analyzed, it is obvious that the Ottoman Empire implemented a temporary relocation, which was limited within its borders. Moreover, Armenians living in non-conflict zones (especially in Istanbul, Edirne, Kastamonu, Aydın, Antalya and Izmir) and also Catholic and Protestant Armenians living in the conflict zones who were not involved in the harmful activities were not subjected to the relocation.

Another point to be highlighted in the analysis of the above mentioned law is that it did not aim to destroy a group of people either due to their qualities or due to any other reasons. This law was implemented in order to relocate Armenians out of the conflict zone who, 1) collaborated with the Russian army's occupation, 2) started revolts, 3) served as guides and spies for the Russians, 4) attacked the Ottoman army with their gangs, 5) interrupted the lines of logistics and communication, and 6) attacked the Turkish-Muslim settlements, massacring and perpetrating ethnic cleansing against Turks from the Eastern Front to the south of Anatolia. For these reasons, the implementation of the relocation should be considered as an act of military necessity rather than anything else.

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During the period of the implementation of the relocation, which was stopped temporarily on 25 November 1915 and permanently on 24 October 1916, there were also various decisions taken to prevent differences in the implementation of relocation by the local authorities. The first one of these decisions was the legislation approved by the Council of Ministers upon the proposition of the Ministry Interior on 15 May 1915. This legislation drew the outlines about how

6 BOA, MVM, Book No: 198, Decision Sequence No: 163, Decision Date: 15 Receb 1333-17 May 1331; BOA, DH. ŞFR, No: 53/305; 54/20, 381; 55/107. *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler (1915-1920)*, Republic of Turkey, the Office of Prime Minister, the Department of Ottoman Achieves, Publication No: 14, p. 53, 339; *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermenilerin Sevk ve İskanı (1878-1920)*, Republic of Turkey, the Office of Prime Minister, the Department of Ottoman Achieves, Publication No: 15.

this relocation law should be implemented. The articles of this legislation are as follows:⁷

- 1- *The relocated groups can carry all their mobile and portable goods and animals with them.*
- 2- *The protection of the relocated groups, their lives, their goods, and providing them with food and rest are the responsibility of the local administrations while the groups are being transferred to the places where they are going to settle. All officials will be held responsible for any kind of weakness or neglect which may arise.*
- 3- *Upon arrival at the place of settlement, the relocated groups will either be settled in separate villages and towns, if found necessary, or in houses built in existing villages and towns. The villages will be structured in places suitable for protecting health and suitable for agriculture and welfare.*
- 4- *On constructing the villages, state lands, as well as state owned farms and villages, can be used.*
- 5- *In the new villages and towns to be constructed, in order to form the basis of population registration, as per house, the name and the reputation of the family, the age, art, the place where they came from and the place where they are settled in, will be securely registered.*
- 6- *The basic needs like feeding and housing of the arriving families will be covered by the 'Immigrants Allowance'.*
- 7- *Providing food and housing speedily, protection of their health and providing comfort to the relocated will be the responsibility of the highest local public administrator.*
- 8- *Governors are responsible of employing a sufficient number of officials to take care of the food and housing.*
- 9- *For those who are relocated, a suitable amount of land will be given, taking into consideration their economic position at the places from where they have come.*
- 10- *For those who are involved in arts and crafts, a suitable amount of capital and necessary equipment and devices will be given.*

7 For the original of the decision, see: BOA, Council of Ministers' Reports Nr. 198/24.

Apart from these above mentioned measures, the Ottoman Empire made great efforts to take the as much precautions as possible for the protection of lives and properties of the Armenians, together with its efforts on consistent and safe implementation of the relocation. For example, "Investigation Commissions" were established in September 1915 for investigating misapplications during the period of the Armenian relocation. The Commissions, consisting of the members of the Appeal Courts and of the Council of State (*Şuray-ı Devlet*) and the heads of Criminal Courts, were sent to Anatolia. Since the Ottoman government attached a great importance to the protection of lives and properties of the Armenians, the commissions dispatched people who had committed crimes or who had been negligent to stand trial, and 1397 persons were found guilty and given various punishments (including capital punishment).

As it can be seen clearly in the light of the information and documents provided here, the relocation implemented in 1915 was not the starting point of the Armenian Question, as argued by the advocates of the Armenian allegations and was not genocide because the Ottoman Empire did not aim to deliberately make the living conditions worse in a way that would destroy Armenians as a group of people. This is because the Ottoman Empire tried to prevent the Armenians' separatist revolts, threats of violence, and terror through a number of administrative and military measures in the period before the World War I. Furthermore, the decision of relocation taken in 1915 was an implementation against the Armenian revolts that had been going on actually for some time and their collaboration with the enemy states. Hence, the Ottoman Empire resorted to an implementation of the relocation of the civilian communities on the grounds of security, an application which has many similar examples in the history.⁸

Moreover, the Ottoman Empire took all the legal measures necessary to protect lives and properties of the Armenian community during the implementation of relocation. In other words, the relocation, which was a temporary implementation, was not applied arbitrarily. However, despite all the legal decisions and measures taken, tragic events were experienced, since it was essential to implement the relocation swiftly before all else. But, there is a fact that should be emphasized; the Ottoman Empire made the necessary arrangements for identifying those responsible for the tragic events that occurred during Armenians' relocation and for punishing the culprits in the most severe ways. The courts punished the ones who were found to be guilty.

⁸ Some of these examples in the recent history are as follows: The practice of Russia in western Russia during World War I, the US's relocation of the American citizens of Japanese origin into the Mississippi valley during World War II, the Soviet Union's relocation of Crimean and Caucasian Turks into Asia and its banishing of Polish civilians out of their permanent residence areas during World War II.

As a result, when all the decisions taken by the Ottoman government are evaluated as a whole, it becomes apparent that it is simply not possible to characterize the Armenian relocation as a genocide. On the contrary, the implementation of relocation was a decision taken for a temporary term in order to provide the security of the Ottoman state and the said community. Then, why is the Armenian Question evaluated within the genocide allegations regarding the 1915 events?

The answer of this question is related to the Eastern Question, as we mentioned above. Until the Relocation Law dated 27 May 1915, Armenians advocated their demands in the form of an independence struggle and were motivated by the Great Powers of that time who were interested in partitioning the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, after the Relocation Law was implemented, Armenians and the Powers that supported them changed their approach, and the Armenian Question was thus transformed into allegations of extermination (which eventually turned into genocide allegations). The main reason behind this changed approach is, of course, that proclaiming that Armenians were the first nation subjected to genocide in world history elicits a powerful emotional response in people and thus influences public opinion. Amidst such emotional responses, the historical aspects of the events end up being forgotten and this makes it easier to portray as if the Relocation Law was the start of the whole ordeal. Thus, this “genocide” accusation against Turks, which is a product of international conjuncture left over from the days of Great Power machinations against the Ottoman Empire, has become embroiled in misinformation, propaganda and prejudice; all of which have hindered the real aspects of the 1915 events from being properly studied and understood.

GERMANY’S ROLE IN THE EXPANSION OF THE ARMENIAN PROBLEM IN PRE-WORLD WAR I PERIOD⁹

Turkish-Armenian relations, which started with the incursions organized by the Seljuks into Eastern Anatolia at the beginning of the 11th century, developed after the founding of the Ottoman Empire such Armenians came to be called “*Millet-i Sadiqah*,” i.e. the Loyal Nation, and these relations continued without any problems from the 14th century until the beginning of the 19th century.

9 This article was written to upgrade the information in the following work, which was previously published: Barış Özdal, “Doğu Sorunu Kapsamında Almanya’nın Ermenilere Yönelik İzlediği Politikalar - Tessa Hofmann’ın İddialarının Analizi ve Kritiği”, *Hoşgörüden Yol Ayrımına Ermeniler Cilt 1*, Erciyes Üniversitesi-Neveşehir Üniversitesi, II. Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Sempozyumu (EUSAS II) 22-24 Mayıs 2008, Kayseri: Erciyes Üniversitesi Yayını No. 163, 2009, p. 295-234; Barış Özdal, “Almanya’nın Ermenilere Yönelik İzlediği Politikaların Doğu Sorunu Kapsamında Analizi”, *Yeni Türkiye Ermeni Meselesi Özel Sayısı*, Cilt II, Yıl 20, Sayı 61, 2014, p. 1184-1196.

The “Eastern Question,” added into the agenda for the first time at the Vienna Congress held in 1815, was an artificial problem created by the Great Powers within the imperialist development process that targeted the territories of the Ottoman Empire. The artificial creation of this Eastern Question became the breaking point of Turkish-Armenian relations. As a result, the “Armenian Question” emerged as a sub-dispute and area of intervention within overall strategy pursued for the sake of the “Eastern Question”.¹⁰

After the establishment of German national unity on 18 January 1871 under the leadership of Prussia, Germany became an active party in the Eastern Question with its policy of “*Weltpolitik*”. If we emphasize this with a more comprehensive expression, Germany under the leadership of Otto von Bismarck was basically suspicious about the European Great Powers reaching an agreement against Germany, and worried about the cooperation of the British and the Russians in the East Problem. Bismarck saw the basic interest of Germany as agreeing upon a unanimous opinion between Austria and Russia and the preservation of the Three Emperors League. Within this context, Germany tried to cause a disagreement among the Great Powers regarding the Eastern Question in line with its strategic priorities by partially intervening in the sharing of those territories of the Ottoman Empire that remained in the Balkans. The famous sentence by Bismarck, “*all of the problems of the East are not worth the life of a single Pomeranian soldier*”¹¹ summarizes very clearly how Germany viewed the Eastern Question.

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Although Germany did not follow a policy that prevented the realization of the aspirations of the Great Powers pertaining to the Ottoman Empire, since it prioritized its own security concerns, it did not actively support them either. Another matter that needs to be noted regarding this flexible policy of

10 For detailed assessments regarding the development of the Turkish-Armenian relations, which we have conveyed in general terms, and the sources we have used for these works, please see: Barış Özdal, “Ayastefanos ve Berlin Anlaşmaları İtibarıyla Ermeni Sorunu”, *Askeri Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Ağustos 2006, Yıl 4, Sayı 8, p. 109-119; Barış Özdal, “Osmanlı Devleti’nin Taraf Olduğu Uluslararası Anlaşmalar İtibarıyla Ermeni Sorunu (1918–1922 Dönemi)”, *Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi*, Aralık 2006, Yıl 2, Sayı 4, p. 173-186 ; Barış Özdal, “Ermeni Sorununun Analizinde Önemli Bir Parametre: Tehcir”, *Global Strateji Dergisi*, 2007, Yıl 3, Sayı 10, p. 95-104.

11 Özdal, “Doğu Sorunu Kapsamında...”, p. 305.

Bismarck is the thought that one could appeal to the military power of the Ottoman Empire if Germany had to get into a war with Russia. Within this context, dispatching a German military delegation for the reforms that Sultan Abdulhamid II wanted to implement in the Ottoman army was accepted. Starting in 1882, the military delegation headed by Colonel von Kähler began the reform work in the Ottoman army and then German weapon firms started selling weapons to the Ottoman Empire, which was partly due to the impact of the 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian War.

The policies of Germany within the context of the independence demands of Ottoman Armenians were based on the principle of “non-intervention” until Wilhelm II came to power in 1888, which was a principle unlike that of the other states. In a broader sense, since Germany achieved its national unity in the wake of other states and was only able to partake in the international level in general and in the “Eastern Question” in particular as a powerful actor far later than other states, there were not any remaining non-Muslim communities on which Germany could be influential. Within the development process of the Eastern Question, France undertook the role of patron for the Catholic community, Britain acted as the patron of the Protestant community, and Russia undertook the role of patron for the Orthodox community. Therefore, Germany pursued a policy of supporting the unity of the territories of the Ottoman Empire.¹²

What was influential on Germany pursuing such a policy was the balance policy followed by the Ottoman Empire under the rule of Sultan Abdulhamid II, as well as the internal factors we mentioned above, because Sultan Abdulhamid II no longer trusted the US, France, Russia, and Britain with regards to the Armenian Question. Therefore, the Sultan pursued policies that would prevent the domestic chaos that might emerge since he worried that Armenians would be used by especially Russia and Britain to destabilize the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, he ensured the neutrality of Germany, which was waging a battle of supremacy with Britain on this issue.

Germany did not support the secessionist demands of the Armenian subjects of the Ottoman Empire both during the Sultan Abdulhamid II period and during the rule of the Union and Progress Party. Within this context, Germany did not participate in the dividing up of the territories of the Ottoman Empire when Britain and Russia were deciding on the future of these territories at the Reval

12 İlber Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfusu* (İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 1998), p. 173-176; Fahir Armaoğlu, *19. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarih (1789-1914)*, 3. Baskı (Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 2003), p. 566-567.

meeting in June 1908, which in turn paved the way for the Union and Progress government to see Germany as an ally. The internal and external political problems and economic difficulties that the Ottoman Empire had in that period set forward the formation of a close friendship -even closer than during Abdulhamid II's reign- between the Union and Progress government and Germany. After 1912, Enver, Cemal, and Talat Pashas became the top decision-makers of the Ottoman Empire, and the German influence turned into an admiration of the Germans in the Ottoman Empire.¹³ In addition, Sultan Abdulhamid II had seen that Germany under the rule of Wilhelm II was a new world power with "*Weltpolitik*" after the Treaty of Berlin within the same conjuncture and pursued a strategy of containing/balancing the imperialist interests of Russia and Britain with the interests of this new imperialist state. As it is known, the Ottoman Empire used the support of France until 1871 and the support of Russia for a short time, and then the support of Britain more intensively. After the Treaty of Berlin, Germany was seen as a balancing state in relations with the other states.

After the development of the Turkish-German friendship that was desired within the context of this policy of Sultan Abdulhamid II in the aftermath of 1890, Germany started to change its attitude and policy in line with its own interests. It started to intervene in the Ottoman-Armenian relations and tried to manipulate these relations. After this policy change, an effort was made to strengthen Turkish-German friendship by granting various economic concessions such as the Baghdad Railway concession. Reform demands of Britain, France, and Russia within the context of the Armenian Question were left pending during the process until the World War I by giving duties to many German soldiers in the modernization and training of the Ottoman army.

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13 M. Şükrü Hanioglu, "Jön Türkler ve Osmanlı'da İç-Dış Politika Bağlantısı", 3. Baskı, der. Faruk Sönmezoğlu, *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi* (İstanbul: Der Yayınları, 2004), p. 57-81; Norbert Saupp, *Das Deutsche Reich und die Armenische Frage 1878—1914* (Cologne, 1990), p. 75; Doğan Avcıoğlu, *Milli Kurtuluş Tarihi 1838'den 1995'e*, 3. Kitap (İstanbul: İstanbul Matbaası, 1974), p.1075; Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfusu*, p. 197-204.

GERMANY'S STANCE ON THE ARMENIAN PROBLEM DURING WORLD WAR I

As stated earlier, Germany became an active party in the Eastern Question after ensuring its national unity on 18 January 1871. During the Bismarck period, Germany did not actively support the Great Powers even though it did not pursue a policy aimed at obstructing the wishes of the Great Powers regarding the Ottoman Empire either, due to its prioritization of its security concerns. The policies pursued by Germany within the context of the independence demands of the Armenian subjects¹⁴ were based on the principle of “non-intervention” until Wilhelm II came to power in 1888. Meanwhile, as stated earlier, Sultan Abdulhamid II recognized very well that Germany became a new world power under the rule of Wilhelm II and pursued a policy of containing/balancing the imperialist interests of Russia and Britain with the interests of a rising Germany.

Despite the German policy mentioned above, Germany pursued some strategies geared towards winning the support of Ottoman Armenians especially in Adana and Iskenderun regions during the World War I. The reason for this partial change was to prevent the manipulation of Armenians in the region by the Russians and the British.

After the start of the World War I, many German officers served in decision-making posts of almost all Ottoman units during the implementation of the Relocation Law, which was put into effect by the Ottoman Empire on 27 May 1915 due to the previously explained military security reasons.

For example, in November 1913 the Ottoman Empire made a five-year agreement with German General Otto Liman von Sanders. The general was appointed as the commander of the 1st Army in Istanbul, a member of the National Council, supervisor of all the military schools and educational institutions, organizer of promotion exams, and the official in charge of the theoretical training of staff officers. The names and duties of some of the German officers who served in the Ottoman army during the implementation of the Relocation Law are as follows: General Otto Liman von Sanders, Commander of the First Army (later on Commander of the Yıldırım Armies in Syria); General Fritz Bronsart von Schellendorf, Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Army; Admiral Souchon and his successor, Commander of the Ottoman Navy; Major Felix Guse, Executive Officer of the Third Army

14 Özdal, “Ayastefanos ve Berlin...”, p. 109-119; Özdal, “Osmanlı Devleti'nin Taraf...”, p. 173-186; Özdal, “Ermeni Sorununun Analizinde...”, p. 95-104.

Command (later on, Chief of the General Staff); General Otto von Lossow, General Freiherr Kress von Kressenstein, and Carl Mühlmann, who acted as the aide-de-camp of General Otto Liman von Sanders when he came to the Ottoman Empire; General Freiherr Colmar von der Goltz, German Military Attaché Major Human¹⁵.

The fact that many German officers were serving at important decision-making posts of the Ottoman units during the implementation of the Relocation Law have caused the claims of German manipulation in the “genocide” that is claimed to have been committed by the Ottomans against the Armenians, as seen in the Western press.¹⁶

For example, the American Ambassador Morgenthau, who was in Istanbul between 1914 and 1916, claimed that Germany was the primary architect of the relocation and the massacre of Armenians. Ambassador Morgenthau wrote in his memoirs that German Admiral Usedom told him personally that the Germans suggested to the Turks that the Armenians be relocated. American historian and missionary H. A. Gibbons also held the Germans responsible for the “extermination” of the Armenians.¹⁷ Therefore, Germany started to defend itself and started to pursue pro-Armenian policies.

As a result of this policy change, Germany began to work to prove that it did not have anything to do with what it was accused of immediately after World War I. Within this framework, Dr. Solf, who was the German Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs at that time, wanted Johannes Lepsius to put forward the attitude of German diplomacy about the Armenian Question by publishing the documents related to the Armenian Question in the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive in 1919. Lepsius, who reviewed the documents on the Armenian Question in the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive and cherry-picked documents according to his agenda, published a highly biased and un-scientific book titled “Deutschland und Armenien 1914–1918” in 1919. Lepsius tried to prove that the German government of the time did almost

15 Celalettin Yavuz, “1915 Ermeni Zorunlu Göçüne Alman Subaylarının Bakışı”, 2006, *Türk Yurdu*, Cilt: 26, Sayı: 226; Fahir Armaoğlu, *20. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarih 1914–1980 Cilt 1*, 9. Baskı (Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları: Ankara, 1993), p. 101-102; Murat Özyüksel, “Abdülhamit Dönemi Dış İlişkileri”, 3. Baskı, der. Faruk Sönmezoğlu, *Türk Dış Politikasının Analizi* (İstanbul: Der Yayınları, 2004), p. 11-14; Oral Sander, *Anka'nın Yükselişi ve Düşüşü - Osmanlı Diplomasi Tarihi* (Ankara: İmge Yayınları, 1993), p. 265-279.

16 Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfusu*, p. 179; Selami Kılıç, *Ermeni Sorunu ve Almanya – Türk-Alman Arşiv Belgeleriyle* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2003), p. 67-82.

17 Şükrü M. Elekdağ, “Almanya Kendi Vicdanını Temizlemek İçin Türk Milletinin Tarihini Karalıyor! (1)”, *Zaman Gazetesi*, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=186251> (access date: 25. 06. 2005)

everything in order to improve the situation of the Armenians and to ease their situation through its consuls and officers in the Ottoman Empire and that therefore, Germany was totally innocent.¹⁸

On this issue, the ideas of Wolfgang Gust have been of great importance. Indeed, Gust (who has been accepted as one of the leading experts on Armenia like Tessa Hoffmann), referring to Lepsius and based on the Lepsius Archives in Martin-Luther University, suggested in his work titled as “Magisches Viereck” that the goal of Germany was “to defend itself without taking Turks into consideration”. In his personal letter to Otto Göppert, Gust also explained that Lepsius compared his own mission to creating a magical square to “absolve Germany, blame Turkey, meet the need for document flow of the bureau [the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], and win the trust of Armenians”.¹⁹ Although they were criticized by Ulrich Trumpener, Major V. Staszewski, Nobert Saupp, and Hans Barth, and although it has been proved that the archive documents used to support his claims were manipulated by Lepsius himself,²⁰ the works of Lepsius, unfortunately, are still accepted as the fundamental sources on the Armenian issue in Germany.²¹

18 Johannes Lepsius, *Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918 -Sammlung Diplomatischer Aktenstücke- (Mit Einem Vorwort Zur Neuauflage Von Tessa Hofmann Und Einem Nachwort Von M. Rainer Lepsius)* (Bremen: Donat und Temmen, 1986), p. 7-12, 16; Cem Özgönül, *Der Mythos Eines Völkermordes* (Cologne: Önel Verlag, 2006), p. 115-254; Ramazan Çalık, “Armeniermorde im Jahre 1915?”, *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, Yıl 2000, Cilt XVI, Sayı 46, <http://www.atam.gov.tr/index.php?Page=Dergiler&IcerikNo=304> (access date: 21.08.2014); Mustafa Çolak, “Kaynak Kriği ve Tehcir Olayında Belge Tahrifati -Johannes Lepsius Örneği-”, *Belleten*, Cilt: LXVI, Yıl 2002, Sayı: 247, p. 967-984; Günter Wirth, “Der Todesgang des Armenischen Volkes”, *UTOPIE Kreativ*, Heft 169, 2004, p. 1035-1038.

19 Wolfgang Gust, “Magisches Viereck - Johannes Lepsius, Deutschland und Armenien”, <http://www.armenocide.de/armenocide/armgende.nsf/GuidesView/MagischesViereckDe?OpenDocument> (access date: 21.08.2014)

20 In his work which we have cited above, Wolfgang Gust argued that the documents in the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs were manipulated by the Ministry, not by Lepsius himself. On the other hand, Cem Özgönül suggests that, in his book titled as “Der Völkermord an den Armeniern 1915/16. Dokumente aus dem Politischen Archiv des deutschen Auswärtigen Amtes”, Gust only discussed the manipulations performed by Lepsius on behalf of Germans. For detailed information on the analysis of Gust’s works and arguments, see Özgönül, *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern 1915/16...*, p. 115-121; Kılıç, *Ermeni Sorunu ve Almanya...*, p. 235-238.

21 Prejudicial works written by the missionaries who were commissioned in the region such as Jakob Künzler, Ernst Sommer, Brono Echart, Armin T. Wagner, and Fridtjof Nansen created resources for the other books on the alleged genocide. For detailed information on this subject, see Kılıç, *Ermeni Sorunu ve Almanya...*, p. 330-334; Türkaya Ataöv, *Ermeni Belge Düzmeçiliği*, 2. Baskı (İstanbul: İleri Yayınları, 2006), p. 41; Hans Barth, *Türk Savun Kendini* (translator: Selçuk Ünlü) (İstanbul: Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı Yayınları, 1988), p. 11-16; Özgönül, *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern 1915/16...*, p. 115.

CONCLUSION

As it is emphasized in the whole of this work, the Armenian Question was a part of the Eastern Question that was first brought onto the agenda in the 1815 Congress of Vienna and which was artificially created by the Great Powers on the subject of sharing the lands of Ottoman Empire during the development of imperialism in Europe.

While Armenians advocated their demands (gathered under the title of the Armenian Question) in the form of an independence struggle and hoped for the assistance of the Great Powers, they changed their definition of the Armenian Question and transformed it into an allegation of extermination (and later on, “genocide”) after the relocation. The most important reason for this planned change of definition by the Armenians was, without any doubt, to make the historical dimension of the subject be forgotten by portraying the enforcement of the relocation as a starting point of the whole ordeal between Turks and Armenians. Thus, what is aimed is to place the idea that Armenians are the first nation to have lived through a genocide into the individual and collective minds.

Thinking this subject specific to Germany, it is clear that Germany was an active party to the Eastern Question through its “*Weltpolitik*” as of 1890, following its achievement of national unity in 1871. However, although the policies pursued by Germany within the context of demands of independence by the Armenian subjects of the Ottoman Empire changed from time to time, it can be seen that the attitude and policies of Germany at this stage depended on the principle of “non-involvement”, unlike the other states, and that Germany pursued a policy supporting the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire.

The fact that, in the World War I, many German officers were employed in the decision-making offices of almost all of the Ottoman troops during the implementation of 1915 Relocation Law accepted by the Ottoman Empire for the military security reasons caused allegations about the guidance of Germany in the so-called genocide toward Armenians by Turks, as it is being portrayed by the Western media. Thus, Germany began to pursue pro-Armenian policies, and, as the first consequence of this change in policies, Germany gave start to various scientific and political studies just after the end of the World War I in order to prove that it had nothing to do with what is alleged to have been done to Armenians during 1915. Within this context, biased archive documents, false documents, and false photographs were used in the books prepared first by Johannes Lepsius, then by Heinrich Vierbücher, and finally by Tessa Hofmann.

As understood from the general and abstract information provided, the first fundamental goal of Germany within the context of Armenian Question was to prove that Germany was not responsible for the alleged genocide. During the period following World War II, Germany, who was found guilty of committing the Holocaust, started to become more interested in the 1915 events and Armenian allegations in the ways emphasized by this study in order to get rid of the image of being the first state to have implemented a genocide.²²

Another goal which Germany developed in parallel with its fundamental goals was to use the Armenian issue in blocking the membership of Turkey to the European Communities (and later on, the EU). After each substantial development in the Turkey-EU relations, the Armenian issue has been brought into the agenda directly or indirectly by France and Germany in particular. However, although Germany has played an important role in this process together with France, their perception on self-interests are fundamentally different; because as the most basic data, there is an active Armenian diaspora in France whereas there is a tiny Armenian community in Germany.

To emphasize more clearly, despite of the 2.5 million Turks living in Germany, the only reason for Germany to pursue such an active policy on the Armenian issue and to take the resolution numbered 15/5689 dated 16 June 2005 is the policy of absolving its own history by blaming Turkey. By accepting this resolution in question, Germany implicitly accepted the “Armenian genocide”, but the real goal is to make the German Penal Codes to accept this alleged crime explicitly.

Taken into consideration together with the so-called “Assyrian and Rum genocide” allegations which have been brought into the agenda frequently in recent years by Germany, and together with the claims of discrimination against minorities living in Turkey, it is imperative to track closely the policies developed by Germany in terms of Turkey’s national interests.

22 Murat Bardakçı stated the following in an interview: “From where do all the Armenian researchers get their financial support? Do they get it from the Diaspora? No. They get it from German foundations. Why? Because Germany looks for partners in crime in its own genocide. It is the Germans who started the genocide charges against Turkey”. Murat Bardakçı, “Soykırımını Almanya Kışkırtıyor”, *Radikal Gazetesi*, 6 Haziran 2005, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=154980>

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