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THE IMPACT OF FOREIGN POLICY THINKING ON THE INTRODUCTION OF THE 1913-14 ARMENIAN REFORM PROGRAMME

(1913-14 ERMENİ İSLAHAT PROGRAMININ KABULÜNDE
DIŞ POLİTİKA MÜLÂHAZALARININ ETKİSİ)

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Abstract: *This article aims to elucidate how the Ottoman decision-making elite approached the Armenian reform question in the aftermath of the Young Turk revolution and to demonstrate how foreign political considerations shaped the introduction of the 1913-14 reform programme known as the "Eastern Anatolian Reforms." Because of the concern that the recognition of regional and communal privileges would disrupt the unity and territorial integrity of the Empire, the decision-makers acted reluctantly to introduce special reforms for Armenians and endeavoured to resolve their problems with general or palliative measures. However, after the defeat in the First Balkan War of 1912-13, they quickly revised their preferences as a result of the change in Empire's position in international power politics, external pressures, and strategic calculations, and decided to introduce a reform programme that went beyond the limits that they defended earlier. The primary aim for the Ottoman decision-makers in so doing was, rather than ending the grievances of the Armenian citizens, to safeguard the Empire's external security and international position. Thus, it is concluded that foreign policy calculations significantly affected the solutions developed for an internal problem, and, moreover,*

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internal reform was used as a foreign policy tool. The article traces the developments regarding the Armenian reform issue in the aftermath of the Young Turk revolution and uses memoirs and newspaper articles to infer the approach and preferences of the decision-makers regarding the reform issue.

Keywords: *Young Turks, Committee of Union and Progress, Ottoman Armenians, Armenian revolutionary-political organizations, Eastern Anatolian Reforms.*

Öz: *Bu makale, Jön Türk devrimi sonrasında Osmanlı karar alıcılarının Ermeni ıslahatı meselesine nasıl yaklaştıklarını aydınlatmayı ve dış siyasetle ilgili düşüncelerin “Şarkî Anadolu Islahâtı” adıyla bilinen 1913-14 reform programının kabul edilme sürecini nasıl şekillendirdiğini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bir bölgeye ve gruba ayrıcalık tanınmasının imparatorluğun birliğini ve toprak bütünlüğünü bozacağı endişesini taşıyan karar alıcılar, Ermeniler için özel ıslahatlar yapma konusunda uzun bir süre isteksiz davranmışlar, Ermenilerin sorunlarını genel veya yatıştırıcı tedbirlerle çözmeye çalışmışlardır. Ancak 1912-13 Birinci Balkan Savaşı’ndaki yenilginin ardından İmparatorluğun uluslararası güç politikalarındaki değişen konumu, dış baskılar ve stratejik hesaplar sebebiyle tercihlerini hızla değiştirmiş ve daha önce savundukları sınırların ötesinde bir reform programını hayata geçirmeye karar vermişlerdir. Osmanlı karar alıcılarının bunu yaparken birincil amacının Ermeni vatandaşlarının şikayetlerini sona erdirmekten ziyade devletin dış güvenliğini ve uluslararası konumunu korumak olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Böylece dış politikayla ilgili hesapların ülkenin iç meseleleriyle ilgili geliştirilen çözüm yollarını önemli ölçüde etkilediği ve hatta dahili reformun dış siyasetin bir aracı olarak kullanıldığı sonucuna varılmıştır. Makalede Jön Türk devrimi sonrasında Ermeni ıslahatı meselesine dair gelişmelerin izi takip edilmiş, karar alıcıların ıslahatlara yaklaşımını ve tercihlerini anlamak için hatırat ve gazete makalelerinden yararlanılmıştır.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Jön Türkler, İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti, Osmanlı Ermenileri, Ermeni Devrimci-Siyasi Örgütleri, Doğu Anadolu Reformları*

INTRODUCTION

The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 ended the three decades of Sultan Abdülhamid II's rule and brought those who had championed reform and liberty to power. During the Hamidian era, Armenian revolutionary organizations, while continuously raising their demands for extensive reform in Eastern Anatolia, especially in European circles, had entered into collaboration with the Young Turks to change the regime. This cooperation continued for a few years after the revolution. During the Constitutional Period, Armenian political parties and the Armenian Patriarchate of İstanbul repeatedly asked the Ottoman government for a series of reforms in Eastern Anatolia. Particularly bearing in mind that the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) had long adopted an enthusiastically reformist and liberal discourse and since the late Hamidian era had been in alliance with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF/Dashnaktsutyun), which was the leading Armenian revolutionary-political organization, one would have expected the Ottoman government to accept these demands without much resistance.

However, the Sublime Porte received the Armenian demands for reform with caution and initially preferred to resort to rather general or palliative measures to resolve the problems in Eastern Anatolia. This attitude and policy changed abruptly in 1913, when the government decided to launch a comprehensive provincial administration reform. Less than one year later, it also adopted a special reform programme for Eastern Anatolia. All these sweeping reforms, which largely overlapped with the demands of Armenian revolutionaries, were introduced as a result of a remarkably swift process. The government, as well as its pundits in newspapers, presented these to both Ottoman and European public opinion as an outcome of their reformist and liberal outlook. Yet, a more detailed examination of this process displays the significant impact of foreign policy thinking on the calculations of Ottoman decision-makers regarding domestic reform.

To explain how the Ottoman decision-making elite of the time, i.e. the Young Turk governments, approached the Armenian reform question, it is necessary to investigate (1) why they did not show enough consideration to the Armenian demands for years, and (2) what were the causes and motivations that changed their strong aversion to these demands. Thus far, the predominant answer given to the first question has been the prevalence of Turkish nationalism and Islamism. According to this view, it was fundamentally these ideologies that created an exclusionary attitude towards non-Muslims and made the Ottoman decision-makers unsympathetic towards any arrangement

that could politically empower them in central or regional administration.¹ Since it is well known that the consciousness of Turkish identity was a rising trend among the Young Turks, this might seem at first glance a simple and convincing explanation. However, one should not neglect the fact that the CUP was in alliance with the Armenian nationalist Dashnaktsutyun from the late Hamidian era until 1913, that the Young Turks championed for years the idea of equality and freedom of all Ottoman citizens, and especially that they, recognising various structural problems in Anatolia, regarded far-reaching reforms necessary. Therefore, even though it is correct that the Ottoman government approached the Armenian demands with prejudice and suspicion, attributing this solely to CUP being motivated by ethnic nationalism would be a fairly narrow approach.

As for the second question above, it is indeed interesting to observe that certain reforms that the Ottoman decision-making elite had neglected, delayed, or resisted for a long time were launched rapidly in 1913-14. While their apparent objective was ensuring order, tranquillity, and a more effective provincial administration in Eastern Anatolia, when the process is examined more closely, their connections with foreign policy thinking becomes clearer. Not only were the formulation and launching of these reforms prompted by external pressures, but they were also directed at certain strategic foreign policy aims. The course of developments and the ideas of the decision-makers indicate that the introduction of a reform package in the same scope was very unlikely without such concerns and objectives.

This article aims to elucidate how the Ottoman decision-making elite approached the Armenian reform question in the aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution and to disentangle the influence of domestic and foreign political considerations over the reform process of 1913-14. It will first present the demands and activities of Armenian political actors, as well as their relations with their Ottoman counterparts, during the early twentieth century. Then, it will discuss how the Armenian reform question was viewed by the Young Turks, particularly by the Unionists, who were always the majority in the parliament and remained in power, except for a six-month interval in 1912-13. This will be followed by the examination of the reform process between late 1912 and early 1914. The article will conclude with an overall assessment.

1 The Western scholarship is abundant of studies portraying the 1908 Revolution as a nationalist one and arguing, with reference to controversial, often marginal, statements of some political figures, that their ideology drove the Young Turks to exclude and assimilate non-Turks from the very beginning. See, for example, Robert Melson, *Revolution and Genocide: The Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 11; Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London and New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 23.

ARMENIAN POLITICAL ACTORS AND THEIR DEMANDS FOR REFORM

Having adopted in 1895 a reform programme under collective pressure from Britain, France and Russia, the Porte initially took a number of steps for its implementation. Six Christian assistant governors (four Greeks and two Armenians) and a number of Christian assistant *mutasarrıfs*, district governors (*nâhiye müdürü*) and assistant district governors were appointed to Eastern Anatolia. New slots for Armenians were opened in civil offices, the police and the gendarmerie, and some steps were taken to improve finance, security, justice, education and public services in the region.² However, after a few years, the permanent Commission of Control at İstanbul ceased to convene, and the commission responsible for executing the reforms in the provinces was disbanded shortly after the death of Şâkir Pasha, the President of the Commission, in late 1899.³ As there was no longer a particular official body to superintend and execute the reforms, the Hamidian government signalled that the reform process was over. Armenians in the Empire and abroad protested this, and increasingly adopted the view that European control was essential in order for the Ottoman government to execute reforms fully.

Although Armenian revolutionary organisations were primarily concerned with Eastern Anatolia, the common goal of overthrowing the Hamidian rule brought them closer to the Young Turks from the late 1890s onwards.⁴ A delegation of Armenian revolutionaries attended to the grand congress of Ottoman opposition parties, which was held in Paris in 1902, and defended that foreign intervention should be sought to ensure the execution of reforms in the Empire. This view found only partial support among the Young Turks.⁵ Whereas the liberal wing, led by Prens Sabahaddin, agreed that obtaining foreign intervention would be useful, as long as it did not breach the territorial integrity of the Empire, the remaining members, including the Ahmed Rızâ group, which would later develop into the CUP, opposed any kind of external involvement in the domestic affairs of the country.⁶ Furthermore, the Armenian delegates openly declared in the congress that in addition to the

2 Ali Karaca, *Anadolu Islahâtı ve Ahmet Şâkir Paşa (1838-1899)* (İstanbul: Eren, 1993), 79-206; Musa Şaşmaz, *British Policy and the Application of Reforms for the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia, 1877-1897* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2000), 184-269.

3 Salahi R. Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians: Victims of Great Power Diplomacy* (London: K. Rustem & Brother, 1987), 244; Karaca, 172.

4 Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1963), 171-172.

5 Arsen Avagyan, "İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti ile Ermeni Siyasi Partileri Arasındaki İlişkiler," in *Ermeniler ve İttihat ve Terakki: İşbirliğinden Çatışmaya*, ed. Rober Koptaş (İstanbul: Aras, 2005), 16-19.

6 M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2-3, 34.

common goal of transforming the Abdülhamid regime, they would continue to work for the execution of necessary reforms in Eastern Anatolia as stipulated in the Treaty of Berlin of 1878.⁷ The Young Turks, who defended reforms that would apply to the whole country for the benefit of all Ottomans, objected to this.⁸

Despite such differences of opinion, the Dashnaktsutyun, the leading Armenian revolutionary organisation of the time, continued to participate in the common front against Abdülhamid, which included the CUP and Prens Sabahaddin's League of Private Initiative and Decentralization (*Teşebbüs-i Şahsi ve Adem-i Merkeziyet Cemiyeti*). Their congress in Paris in December 1907 pledged collective action, both violent and non-violent, to restore the constitution. The decision of the Dashnaks to take part in this front was rather pragmatic, as they believed that Armenian revolutionaries would never be able to supplant the Hamidian regime without the help of the Young Turks. After the congress, both the CUP and the Dashnaktsutyun worked vigorously for revolution. Other Armenian revolutionary-political formations, the Hunchaks and the Armenekan Party, on the other hand, were not ready to cooperate with Turkish revolutionaries, even though they showed sympathy to Sabahaddin's League, whose programme, emphasising minority rights and regional autonomy, was closer to their position.⁹

Their rapprochement with different factions of the Young Turks led Armenian revolutionaries to adopt a somewhat more careful discourse with regard to the territorial integrity of the Empire and build their arguments on equality, constitutionalism, proportional representation, and regional decentralisation.¹⁰ However, as the implementation of the 1895 reform programme slowed down, they redoubled their efforts to draw the attention of European governments and public opinion to this issue.¹¹ They also increased their activities in Eastern Anatolia. Consuls in the region reported that the revolutionaries were pressuring Armenian peasants to support them and purchase arms from them.¹² In order to prevent armament and border crossings from Russia, Ottoman

7 M. Şükrü Haniöğlü, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 193.

8 This difference was one of the key unresolved issues in the 1902 Congress and eventually led to its breakup. See Esat Uras, *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question* (İstanbul: Documentary, 1988), 804; Cemal Paşa, *Hatıralar*, ed. Behçet Cemal (İstanbul: Selek, 1959), 341; Haniöğlü, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 194-195.

9 Avagyan, "İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti...", 23-26.

10 Rober Koptaş, "Zohrab, Papazyan ve Pastırmacıyan'ın Kalemlerinden 1914 Ermeni Reformu ve İttihatçı-Taşnak Müzakereleri," *Tarih ve Toplum Yeni Yaklaşımlar* 5 (2007): 160.

11 "Şü'ünât," *Şûra-i Ümmet* 3 (1902), 4; "Ermeni ve Makedonya mitingi," *Şûra-i Ümmet* 41 (1903), 2.

12 Bülent Özdemir, "Osmanlı Şehirlerinde Yaşayan İngiliz Konsolosları ve Ermeni Sorunu," in *Hoşgörüden Yol Ayrımına Ermeniler*, eds. M. Metin Hülügü, Şakir Batmaz, and Gülbadi Alan (Kayseri: Erciyes Üniversitesi, 2009), 4: 367.

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security forces frequently conducted searches and operations targeting Armenian revolutionaries, which sometimes caused minor conflicts.¹³

The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the dethronement of Abdülhamid II the following year increased Armenian hopes for the improvement of their conditions.¹⁴ As the constitution and parliamentary system were back in effect, the revolutionary organisations formally renounced violence and started to operate as political parties.¹⁵ The Dashnaksutyun promised to defend the independence and integrity of the Empire as long as the constitutional regime persisted. The Revolutionary Hunchak Party changed its name to Social Democratic Hunchak Party (S.D. Hunchak). A group of revolutionaries from various groups founded the Constitutional Ramgavar Party, which would work for further democratisation and the cultural values of the Armenian community. Similarly, the Veragazmyal Hunchak Party declared that it halted revolutionary activities and would defend the rights and freedoms of the Armenians in the political sphere. The common ground of all these organisations was their support for decentralisation and, hence, the autonomy of the provinces (*vilayetler*) in Eastern Anatolia, which they all referred to as “Armenia”¹⁶, despite the Ottoman Armenians never enjoying majority status in any of the said provinces.

The jubilation and optimism amongst Armenians did not last too long, however. Only a few months after the revolution, Armenian newspapers began to comment that the constitution did not bring anything concrete to their congeners.¹⁷ Armenians from various parts of Anatolia continued sending complaints to Armenian newspapers and the Patriarchate of İstanbul. The complaints were largely related to land and security. During the conflicts in the 1890s, many Armenians had evacuated the region, and their lands were subsequently seized by Muslim groups, including Kurdish tribes and those who were settled there by the state. When Armenian *émigrés* came back after the revolution, the Muslims refused to hand back these lands. The former claimed that local authorities tended to favour the latter in these disputes.¹⁸ In addition, as they did not completely trust local authorities and the non-Muslims were not permitted to bear arms, the Armenians felt insecure against Kurdish incursions. In early November 1908, a delegation from the

13 Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians...*, 248-251, 271-275.

14 Union nationale arménienne de France, *La cause nationale arménienne: documents concernant le problème de la libération de l'Arménie turque* (Paris: [n.p.], 1945), 16.

15 Avagyan, “İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti...”, 85; Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians...*, 280; Uras, *The Armenians in History...*, 833.

16 Avagyan, “İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti...”, 33-49.

17 Cited from the Armenian daily *Puzantion* in Hüseyin Câhid, “Berlin muâhedenâmesinin 61'inci mâddesi,” *Tanîn*, 19 October 1908.

18 Erdal Aydoğan, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Doğu Politikası 1908-1918* (İstanbul: Ötüken, 2007), 150.

Patriarchate presented a memorandum to Kâmil Pasha, the Grand Vizier, requesting the appointment of new officials in Eastern Anatolia, the non-interference of Hamidiye officers in public affairs, the punishment of those who maltreated the Armenians, the renewal of trials for released culprits, the restoration of lands to their previous (Armenian) owners, aid to farmers, and remission of taxes.¹⁹

The inter-communal conflicts in Adana in 1909²⁰ further increased Armenians' mistrust towards the Young Turk rule. The S.D. Hunchak, blaming the local administration for acting lethargically in protecting Armenians, held the view that the Armenians should prepare themselves for an armed defence in a near future.²¹ Some members of the Dashnaksutyun also blamed the CUP for the incidents and insisted that it could not be trusted. However, the party's congress still decided to maintain close relations with the CUP, as it was the leading defender of the constitutional and parliamentary system, which the Dashnaks regarded essential for the Armenians' struggle for rights and freedoms.²² Despite harsh criticisms from some factions of the Armenian revolutionary movement,²³ in early September 1909, delegates of the Dashnaksutyun came together with those of the CUP and signed a protocol, which strongly underlined the integrity of the country and the preservation of the regime.²⁴ Despite mutual suspicions and disagreements, both parties acted pragmatically as there was still the threat of counter-revolution.²⁵ They also collaborated to some extent in assisting Armenian revolutionary activities in Russia.²⁶

Despite some initiatives such as the formation of a reform commission, the absence of a serious step for reforms led to more complaints on the side of the Armenians. While Armenian newspapers called the government to pay more attention to the grievances of their brethren in Eastern Anatolia,²⁷ the Patriarchate continuously reported to the Porte incidents of violence, murder,

19 Recep Karacakaya, *Türk Kamuoyu ve Ermeni Meselesi: 1908-1923* (İstanbul: Toplumsal Dönüşüm, 2005), 82-84.

20 For a recent and comprehensive account of the Adana incidents, see Yücel Güçlü, *The Armenian Events of Adana in 1909: Cemal Paşa and Beyond* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books, 2018).

21 Avagyan, "İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti...", 86-87.

22 Avagyan, "İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti...", 66-72.

23 Aydoğan, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Doğu...*, 284.

24 For the full text of the protocol, see "İttihâd-ı anâsır," *Tanîn*, 7 September 1909; Uras, *The Armenians in History...*, 836-837.

25 Murat Koptaş, "Armenian Political Thinking in the Second Constitutional Period: The Case of Krikor Zohrab" (M.A. Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2005), 109.

26 Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 99-102.

27 A typical example is [Mihran (Mihri) Apikyan,] "Ermeniler millet-i hakimeye ne dilden yalvarmalı? Ve niceye dek?" *Nevâ yâhûd Sadâ-i Ermeniyân*, 22-23 May 1910.

brigandage, and forced conversion. Under these circumstances, the CUP offered to the Dashnaks an alliance for the 1912 elections. The Dashnaks accepted the offer in return for the following promises: (1) the government would consult the Dashnaksutyyun about the governors that would be appointed to Eastern Anatolia; (2) there would be a minimum of twenty Armenian deputies in the parliament; (3) at least 30 per cent of the local gendarmerie and police in Eastern Anatolia would be composed of Armenians; (4) more Armenian officials would be employed in the region; (5) Armenian guards would be formed against Kurdish incursions; (6) lands would be restored to their previous Armenian owners and the Kurds residing there would be removed; and (7) no more Muslim migrants would be settled in Eastern Anatolia.²⁸

These were very significant promises, which would entail a comprehensive, and path-breaking, reform programme if they were ever fulfilled. However, the CUP gave only nine seats to the Dashnaks in the next parliament and did not seem enthusiastic at all to follow the rest of its promises. The Freedom and Entente Party (FEP), the main opposition to the CUP, also failed to meet the expectations of its Armenian supporters, primarily the S.D. Hunchak, during its short-lived government in late 1912.²⁹ As a result, the Armenian parties, disappointed of their hopes from the Turkish political leadership, decided to cooperate amongst each other by the year 1913.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE OTTOMAN POLITICAL ELITE TOWARD THE REFORM ISSUE

Before the Revolution

During Abdülhamid's reign, the Young Turks regarded the restoration of the constitution, in addition to its other benefits, as the cure to the Armenian Question. They believed that if the Armenians were represented in the parliament, their concerns about inequality would go away and they would become more attached to the state.³⁰ Besides, according to them, the maintenance of the constitutional system would also prevent European intervention for the recognition of special privileges for the non-Muslim communities in the Empire.³¹

28 Avagyan, "İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti...", 98-99.

29 Avagyan, "İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti...", 96-103.

30 Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians...*, 276.

31 Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 31.

Among the Young Turks, Prens Sabahaddin, the leader of the liberal League, defended the view that political unity of the Empire could better be preserved under decentralisation (*adem-i merkeziyet*), which he conceptualised as “*chacun soit absolument maître chez soi, sous la direction générale d’une politique commune*.”³² For him, due to the vast socio-political and economic differences among provinces, the decisions concerning provincial administration should be left to local governments and councils and the bulk of tax revenues should be spent in their own locality.³³ This view was adopted by the Ottoman Liberal Union, which was founded by the members of the League after the revolution, but never became popular among the Ottoman political elite. The Union could only participate in the 1908 elections, winning only one seat in the parliament, and the unsuccessful attempt of counter-revolution in the following year led to its dissolution. The idea of decentralisation as defined above was not supported by the Ottoman political elite thereafter except, though partly, in the loose anti-CUP coalition under the FEP.

Despite the bold declarations of Sabahaddin, to what extent the liberals would implement decentralisation if they ever came to power is also questionable. A few months after the revolution, Sabahaddin advised his followers “to demonstrate to our Christian compatriots the necessity of cordial unity with the Muslims and to illustrate the absolute necessity of not pursuing policies for autonomous administration or independence for all Ottoman elements, without distinction of ethnicity and faith, such as Greeks, Armenians, Bulgarians, etc., who compose the Ottoman world.”³⁴ Sir Gerard Lowther, the British Ambassador in İstanbul, also observed that he did not mean by decentralisation “autonomy of particular geographical areas—e.g., Armenia—but the conferring on the provincial authorities of the existing *vilayets* of the Empire of wider administrative powers on the lines laid down in Midhat Pasha’s Constitution.”³⁵ This stance was not too different from that of the CUP, which also defended expanding the powers of provincial governments (see below).

The CUP, on the other hand, became the leading Young Turk organisation especially after its final reorganisation in 1907. As its name implies, the committee had the goal of reforming the country through bringing together

32 Quoted in Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 86. Translation of the French quote: “Everybody being absolutely the ruler of their own place under the general direction of a common policy.”

33 Nezahet Nurettin Ege, *Prens Sabahaddin: Hayatı ve İlmi Müdafaları* (İstanbul: Güneş, 1977), 159-165.

34 Quoted in Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 368.

35 Quoted in Feroz Ahmad, “Unionist Relations with the Greek, Armenian, and Jewish Communities of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914,” in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, eds. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York, NY: Holmes & Meier, 1982), 1: 429.

the communities of different religions and ethnicity under a single “Ottoman” nation.³⁶ Although the growing awareness of Turkishness among the Unionists led some circles to criticise them for being nationalist, they rejected this, calling themselves “patriotic” instead.³⁷ On the one hand, they were highly critical of Hamidian Islamism and showed willingness to improve the conditions of the non-Muslims. On the other hand, however, they expected the non-Muslims to relinquish their aspirations for autonomy or independence and stick together with their Muslim countrymen for the well-being of the common “homeland.”

A conversation between a Unionist Turk and an Ottoman Greek in Paris published in *Şûra-i Ümmet*, the official organ of the committee, is a good example to illustrate the viewpoint of the CUP with regard to the non-Muslims. At one point in the conversation, the Greek expresses his surprise that a Turk finally regards him as a fellow citizen, and complains about the maltreatment he received from the Hamidian government and Turks in general. The Unionist protagonist says in response that it is understandable to see the Turks feel offended as Christians work against the government, appeal to the Great Powers for the slightest problem and slander against the Turks in their press. The Greek replies that any community would do the same if it met the injustices that Ottoman Christians has been subjected to for centuries, and gives a fairly long list of these. He concludes that all that the Christians want from the Turks is to earn trust in their hearts by treating them as fellow citizens without assuming superiority over them. The protagonist ends his account with the words “What I did first after returning home was to send to my Greek compatriot the programme of our committee, which conformed to his desires.”³⁸ A palpable subtext of this story is that the committee acknowledged the grievances of the Christians and was ready to embrace them as equal citizens, but at the same time expected them to be loyal to the Empire.

As the Unionists acknowledged the deprived socio-economic conditions and administrative shortcomings in the provinces, they supported the principle of “expansion of responsibilities” (*tevî-i me'zûniyet*), i.e., extending the prerogatives of local governments for a more effective provincial administration. On the other hand, they firmly opposed the idea of decentralisation, which was advocated by the liberals and non-Muslim revolutionaries.³⁹ As Cemâl Pasha

36 Ahmed Rüstem Bey, *La guerre mondiale et la question turco-arménienne* (Berne: Imprimerie Stämpfli & cie., 1918), 25-26.

37 Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 40.

38 “Bolonya ormanında bir Rum ile muhâvere,” *Şûra-i Ümmet* 41 (1903), 3-4.

39 The expression “*tevî-i me'zûniyet*” was in fact included in the 1876 Constitution (Article 108), and was translated in its French version as “*décentralisation*.” Despite supporting the constitution, however, the Unionists did not embrace this translation, hence Prens Sabahaddin’s neologism “*adem-i merkeziyet*,” which, for them, implied the absence of central authority: Ahmet Bedevi Kuran, *İnkılâp Tarihimiz ve “Jön Türkler”* (İstanbul: Tan, 1945), 171-172.

wrote in his memoirs, the committee's position was that powers and responsibilities of local governments should be expanded without decreasing the control and influence of the central government over the provinces.⁴⁰ This was due to the belief that since the Empire was made up of various ethnicities, regional autonomy would disrupt its unity and bring it to collapse.⁴¹ Because of their special concern with unity and integrity, the Unionists were against granting privileges to particular regions or guarantees to particular communities. Earlier experiences had convinced them that this would not prevent but foster further rebellions and even secession. For Ahmed Rızâ, this was almost a vicious circle: "Christians acquired privileges when they rebelled [and] they desired to rebel when they acquired privileges."⁴² Thus, he argued elsewhere, reforms could have a divisive effect if not formulated as a whole for the entire Empire.⁴³ Similarly, Bahaeddîn Şâkir, one of the founding members of the CUP, responded to the supporters of decentralisation by reminding what had happened to Eastern Rumelia and Crete.⁴⁴

While endeavouring to cooperate with Armenian revolutionaries against the Abdülhamid regime, the Young Turks, especially the Unionist wing, were somewhat suspicious about their real intentions.⁴⁵ The Empire's earlier experiences of nationalist separatism, the recent memory of the violent acts undertaken by Armenian revolutionaries and their continuing efforts to obtain European support for reforms were among the factors that influenced the Young Turks' views of the revolutionaries and their demands. When, in the 11th Universal Peace Congress held on 2-6 April 1902 in Monaco, Armenian revolutionaries called for an international conference for supervising the execution of the 1895 reform project, the CUP accused the revolutionaries, with an open letter to the congress, of aiming to split the Ottoman Empire and its subjects into parts. Regarding special regulations for a region or community as deleterious, the committee declared that the provisions of the Treaty of Berlin would be executed, if necessary, in all provinces without any distinction.⁴⁶

Two years later, an editorial article in *Şûra-i Ümmet*⁴⁷ asked, "What do the Armenian revolutionaries want?" and answered this question as follows:

40 Cemal Paşa, *Hatıralar*, 342, 345-346.

41 [Talât Paşa], *Talât Paşa'nın Anıları*, ed. Alpay Kabacalı (İstanbul: İletişim, 1990), 64.

42 Quoted in Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 40.

43 Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasî Fikirleri, 1895-1908* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2008), 199-200.

44 Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 89.

45 Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 46.

46 "Şü'ûnât," *Şûra-i Ümmet* 3 (1902), 4; also see Kuran, 167.

47 "Ermeni mes'alesi," *Şûra-i Ümmet* 57 (1904), 1-2. Hanioglu indicates that the author was Sâmipaşazâde Sezâi: Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 340.

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“If they want equality, justice, freedom, and security, we recognise that they are right, and declare and pronounce that we have the same desires and opinions as them... [Or, do they want] An autonomous government in the lands that they dare to call “Armenia?” If so, the insurrection of the Armenians is not a revolution, but a war [on us].”

While denouncing the earlier massacres and blaming them on Abdülhamid, the editor also censured the revolutionaries for their use of violence and their ongoing attempts to revive the Treaty of Berlin. In conclusion, he called the “Turks, Kurds, Albanians, Arabs, in short the entire Ottoman public” to offer the Armenians rights and justice, but not independence or autonomy.

In 1906, *Şûra-i Ümmet* published a letter allegedly sent by an Ottoman Armenian living in the United States and providing advice for the long-term well-being of the Empire.⁴⁸ In addition to asking for individual rights, the freedoms of belief and publication, and the equality among men and women, it also suggested bringing all Ottoman subjects into unity, erecting sculptures of Ottomans who served the “homeland” in various ways, proclaiming national holidays, and inspiring children in schools with “brotherhood and patriotism” instead of religious fanaticism. The publication in the official journal of the CUP of such an article, preaching unity and nationhood with the words of an “Armenian,” whether real or fictitious, implies how the committee regarded the Armenians at that time. Read together with the earlier reports and articles cited above, it can be concluded that the CUP, on the one hand, did not intend to exclude the Armenians if they were willing to be a part of the Ottoman nation and, on the other hand, maintained its “red lines” concerning their demands for special rights and privileges.

After the Revolution

In line with their earlier political thinking, the Young Turks, under the leadership of the CUP, upheld after the 1908 revolution a “state-based patriotism,” which, according to them, would act as the cement keeping different religious and ethnic communities together.⁴⁹ As Hüseyin Câhid, a prominent Unionist journalist, wrote later, even though the Unionists had initially aimed to promote “Turkishness,” after the revolution they usually referred to themselves as “Ottomans,” instead of “Turks,” to discourage nationalisms in the Empire.⁵⁰ The official publication of the CUP exclaimed, “There is no longer a Macedonia, Kurdistan, Armenia, etc. today. Wherever

48 “Amerikada bir Ermeni vatandaşımızdan gelen mektûb,” *Şûra-i Ümmet* 102 (1906), 4.

49 Hasan Kayalı, *Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 3-9.

50 Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, *Siyasal Anılar*, ed. Rauf Mutluay (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası, 1976), 39.

our glorious flag floats is an Ottoman land. Our history, glorious past, present, and future are inseparably amalgamated... Our feelings and characters are alike. It is altogether the Ottoman character.”⁵¹ Primarily because of its language policies, such as advocating education in Turkish and restricting the use of other languages in official transactions, the CUP was often accused of pursuing Turkification under the guise of Ottomanisation. Yet, the members of the committee repeatedly declared that they had no such intention, and their only ambition was to establish the feeling of unity and responsibility to the “common fatherland” in the heart of every citizen. For them, the Ottoman nation needed a common language, and this would naturally be Turkish as it was the language of the state and the most widespread language in the Empire.⁵²

Meanwhile, however, the Unionists did not conceal their mistrust towards the non-Muslims, who they believed were working for their communal interests rather than the common interests of all Ottoman citizens.⁵³ In order to forestall the pursuit of ethnic interests through political activities, the CUP took certain measures that contradicted its liberal discourse. For example, the Law of Associations, adopted in August 1909, prohibited political societies violating “the laws, common decency and the unity of the state” and having “national and communal names and causes.” The last clause was passed despite strong objection and negative votes of the non-Turkish deputies in the parliament.⁵⁴

As regards the Armenians in particular, the Unionists had strong suspicions about the intentions of their revolutionaries even though the committee often co-opted with them for political purposes.⁵⁵ In his memoirs Talât Pasha wrote, “I always displayed the greatest indulgence to the [Armenian] revolutionary organisations and pretended as if I did not know their real objectives.”⁵⁶ An important cause of the suspicions about the Armenian revolutionaries must have been the historical memory of earlier nationalist revolutions, which had resulted in the formal or virtual loss of various parts of the Ottoman Europe since the 1820s. They had also sought autonomy in Eastern Anatolia and engaged in violent activities during the Hamidian period. Although the Armenian revolutionaries, who had sought autonomy in Eastern Anatolia and

51 Vicdânî, “Vilâyet-i Selâse, Kilisa mesâili, Osmanlılık,” *Şûra-i Ümmet [Daily]*, 1 February 1909.

52 Aydoğın, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Doğu Politikası...*, 40-43; Cemal Paşa, *Hatıralar*, 343-344.

53 For instance, on 7 November 1908, Hüseyin Câhid wrote in the leading pro-CUP newspaper, “No matter how strongly we hope for mutual friendship and unity among Ottoman elements in the future... we know that nobody wants and works for the survival of this state as much as the Muslim element... Other elements are almost always in pursuit of a [particular] purpose:” Hüseyin Câhid, “Millet-i hâkime,” *Tamim*, 7 November 1908.

54 Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler Cilt 1 İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi* (İstanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı, 1988), 368-370.

55 Ahmed Rüstem Bey, *La guerre mondiale...*, 26-28.

56 [Talât Paşa], *Talât Paşa'nın Anıları*, 25.

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resorted to violence during the Hamidian period, no longer openly claimed autonomy or independence after the 1908 Revolution, the Turkish political elite, in light of the past experiences, regarded their requests for regional reforms as a smokescreen. They were concerned with the Armenians' potential collaboration with their sympathisers in Europe and Russia, who often made blunt declarations supporting an autonomous government in Eastern Anatolia,⁵⁷ and disgruntled with their reference to Eastern Anatolia as "Armenia."⁵⁸ Past experiences also led the policymakers to believe that regional or communal privileges would not put a check to further political demands, but, on the contrary, open new venues of opportunity for those seeking autonomy and freedom.⁵⁹

In addition to the suspicions among the political elite, the Muslim majority in Eastern Anatolia, due to the earlier conflicts and the agitations of the revolutionaries, harboured an increasingly negative attitude towards the Armenians. Besides, some of those Muslims, such as landowners and Kurdish feudal lords, were materially benefiting from the status quo. Thus, the Muslims, and naturally their representatives in the parliament, tended to oppose any significant step for the fulfilment of Armenian requests regarding land disputes and security. For example, the government decided in early 1909 to send investigatory committees to the region to find out the exact needs of the inhabitants and to resolve disputes between the two communities,⁶⁰ but this did not materialise due to strong opposition from Muslim deputies in the parliament, particularly those from the Eastern provinces.⁶¹

The lingering suspicion towards the Armenians was clearly incompatible with the CUP's objectives of erasing the negative impressions of the Hamidian rule, modernising the Empire with sweeping reforms, winning the trust and support of all communities, and strengthening their bonds with the state. The incongruity manifested itself most plainly in the committee's responses to the requests of the Armenians for Eastern Anatolia. On the one hand, it did not categorically reject them in order not to alienate the Armenians. Except for

57 For a collection of speeches by a number of European intellectuals, see *Pour l'Arménie et la Macédoine: manifestations franco-anglo-italiennes* (Paris: Société nouvelle de librairie & d'édition, 1904). Borrowing the rhetoric of Alexander Gorchakov, former Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Denys Cochin claimed in his speech that the Armenian and Macedonian questions could be solved through either "autonomy" or "anatomy," meaning partition.

58 An Armenian intellectual wrote that although the real name of Eastern Anatolia was "Armenia," this name made many Turks uncomfortable and the government advised the Armenians to use "Eastern Anatolia" or "Kurdistan" instead: [Apikyan], 22-3 May 1910. When quoting Armenian spokesmen, pro-CUP newspapers used the sign "(!)," expressing disagreement with sarcasm, next to the word "Armenia:" "Vilâyât-ı şarkiye ıslahâtı," *İntihâb-ı Efkâr*, 27 December 1912.

59 Cemal Paşa, *Hatıralar*, 342, 346.

60 Aydoğan, *İttihat ve Terakkî'nin Doğu Politikası...*, 58.

61 Cemal Paşa, *Hatıralar*, 347-348.

the ones that would entail political and administrative empowerment of the Armenians in the region, the CUP government received the requests concerning economic development, security, land disputes, public works and services quite favourably. In a protocol with the Dashnaktsutyun in September 1909, the committee agreed to the principle of “expansion of responsibilities” for the provinces. It even showed a flexible attitude towards the requests for the use of local languages in public transactions. On the other hand, the abovementioned suspicions and concerns, as well as the attitude of the Muslim population limited the government’s room for manoeuvre.

In December 1911, a delegation of the Ottoman Armenians living in Britain visited Tevfik Pasha, the Ottoman Ambassador, and complained about the indifference of local authorities to the ongoing injustices in Eastern Anatolia.⁶² Armenian politicians in İstanbul also submitted two reports to the Porte. In response, the Porte decided in January 1912 to send capable governors to the provinces of Bitlis and Mâmuretü’l-Azîz, expand the prerogatives of the governors of Erzurum, Van, Bitlis and Mâmuretü’l-Azîz in appointing and dismissing officials, appoint judicial personnel from outside the region to ensure impartiality, better subsidise the efforts to catch bandits, increase the number and quality of the gendarmerie, prevent the collection of taxes by Kurdish tribes, accelerate the resolution of land disputes in courts, and send a commission to the region to investigate needs relating to public works, justice, economy and finance.⁶³ The government’s prompt response to the appeals of the Armenians indicates its desire to improve security, tranquillity, and life conditions in Eastern Anatolia. Yet, the Porte still did not look favourably upon requests that would increase the influence of Armenians in regional administration. For example, it rejected the requests that a larger number of Armenian governors and public officials be appointed in Eastern provinces on the grounds that this would be incompatible to the principle of equality in the constitution.⁶⁴

THE ROAD TO THE REFORMS

Despite the aversion of the decision-making elite with regard to granting regional privileges, particularly those requested by the Armenians, the Ottoman government eventually introduced radical reforms regarding the administration of Eastern Anatolia in the years 1913-14. As will be explained

62 Münir Süreyya Bey, *Ermeni Meselesinin Siyasî Tarihçesi (1877-1914)* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2001), no. 103.

63 Münir Süreyya Bey, *Ermeni Meselesinin...*, no. 104; Yusuf Hikmet Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1940-67), 2/1: 51; Önder Kocatürk, “Türk-İngiliz İlişkilerinin Kopuş Sürecinde Son Aşama (1911-1914),” (Ph.D. Dissertation, İstanbul University, 2010), 439-440.

64 Münir Süreyya Bey, *Ermeni Meselesinin...*, no. 104; Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi*, 2/1: 51-52.

below, external incentives and pressures, and foreign political considerations played a crucial role in determining not only the decision to introduce these reforms, but also their scope.

The First Balkan War and Armenian Lobbying in Europe

The First Balkan War broke out on 8 October 1912, after the Porte rejected the collective ultimatum by Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro concerning the situation of Ottoman Macedonia. Within only a few months, the war proved to be a disaster for the Ottoman Empire as the Balkan allies got through the Ottoman defences and occupied almost the entire Rumelia. In addition to the psychological damage it created, the defeat against the Balkan states also revealed the Empire's precarious military situation. For the recovery to happen as quickly as possible, the Ottoman government wanted to see tranquillity and order in its territories. In Eastern Anatolia, however, Armenian revolutionaries were still active and the tensions between Muslims and Christians were acute. Despite the lack of trust concerning the goodwill and sincerity of the Armenian political parties, the circumstances made the Ottoman government anxious to come to terms with them to alleviate the situation in Eastern Anatolia as soon as possible.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, the Armenian political leadership had become convinced that neither the CUP nor the incumbent minority government under the FEP differed much from Abdülhamid in approaching the reform question.⁶⁶ Seeing the war as an opportunity to draw international attention for their cause, they hoped to convince the Great Powers to handle their reform demands for Eastern Anatolia in the forthcoming peace conference. The Armenian National Assembly in İstanbul, which included a constellation of political parties as well as members of the clergy, unanimously decided to voice Armenian grievances abroad.⁶⁷ With the encouragement of the revolutionaries, Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire, the Balkans, Iran, Egypt, Europe and the United States submitted numerous petitions to Western governments, while pro-Armenian publications in the West increased rapidly.⁶⁸ The Armenian Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin (Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin) also took its part in these efforts; upon the advice of Russia, it formed in November 1912 a delegation, led by Boghos Nubar Pasha, to lobby in

65 Ahmed Rüstem Bey, *La guerre mondiale...*, 48.

66 Mikaël Varandian, *L'Arménie et la question arménienne* (Paris: Laval, [1917]), 75-76.

67 R. Koptaş, "Zohrab, Papazyan ve Pastırmacıyan...", 164-165.

68 "Tebriz Ermenileri," *İntihâb-ı Efkar*, 28 December 1912; Roderic H. Davison, "The Armenian Crisis, 1912-1914," *The American Historical Review* 53, no. 3 (1948): 495; Dikran Mesrob Kaligian, "The Armenian Revolutionary Federation under Ottoman Constitutional Rule, 1908-1914," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston College, 2003), 258.

European capitals for reforms in Eastern Anatolia.⁶⁹ In his book, Krikor Zohrab, a leading Armenian political figure and jurist, summarised the demands of the Armenian political leadership as (1) the appointment of a governor-general with the consent of the Great Powers, (2) participation of Armenians in public offices, and (3) decentralisation.⁷⁰

The increasing tensions in Eastern Anatolia and the Armenians' engagement in lobbying at a time when the Balkan War inflicted a heavy blow upon the Ottoman Empire concerned the European Powers that the status quo in Asia Minor could not last for long. British diplomats in the Ottoman Empire were writing to London that unless the Porte satisfied its Armenian citizens with immediate and extensive reforms, they would cooperate with Russia against the Ottoman rule before too long.⁷¹ Western newspapers published reports that a large Russian force in the Caucasus was ready to enter Eastern Anatolia in case of a civil conflict.⁷²

Certain developments of the 1900s had rekindled Russian interest in Eastern Anatolia and the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. By obtaining railroad concessions for the north-east of Anatolia at the turn of the century, Russia got one step ahead of the other Great Powers in permeating the region.⁷³ The defeat at the hands of Japan in 1905 and the formation of Franco-Anglo-Russian Triple Alliance in 1907 had redirected Russian attention to the affairs of the Balkans and the Middle East. According to the understanding between Britain and Russia, the northern provinces of Persia were declared a Russian sphere of influence; thus, Eastern Anatolia became the next destination for Russian expansion.⁷⁴ Accordingly, Russian state officials began to consider a substantial revision in the government's longstanding Armenian policy. The new General Governor of Caucasus, Count Vorontsov-Dashkov, advised the government to relax the concerns of Armenian nationalism and instead use it to extend Russia's influence further into Eastern Anatolia. Michel de Giers, the Russian Ambassador in İstanbul, also found it essential for Russian interests to win over Ottoman Armenians.⁷⁵

69 Avagyan, "İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti...", 122-123; Uras, *The Armenians in History...*, 630.

70 Marcel Léart, *La question arménienne à la lumière des documents* (Paris: A. Challamel, 1913). Zohrab preferred to use a pseudonym for some reason; see: R. Koptaş, "Zohrab, Papazyan ve Pastırmacıyan...", 166.

71 Kaligian, "The Armenian Revolutionary Federation...", 249-50; Joseph Heller, *British Policy towards the Ottoman Empire 1908-1914* (London: Frank Cass, 1983), 83-84.

72 For example, see "Turks killing Armenians," *The New York Times*, 27 November 1912. This report referred to an earlier one published in *The Morning Post*.

73 Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians...*, 242-244.

74 Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence 1918* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 31.

75 Seyit Sertçelik, *Rus ve Ermeni Kaynakları Işığında Ermeni Sorununun Ortaya Çıkış Süreci* (Ankara: TBMM, 2009) 264-265.

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The severe defeat in the Balkan War signalled that the Ottoman Empire could not support itself for too long. Anticipating its imminent disintegration, Russia decided to act pro-actively. In order to prevent other Powers from establishing themselves in Eastern Anatolia, it was necessary to obtain the sympathy of the peoples inhabiting the region. As a result, Russia redoubled its efforts in offering protection and support to both Armenians and the Kurds.⁷⁶ In addition to the strategic and expansionist considerations, its own Armenian population in the Caucasus, which amounted to around one million, the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin, and the Armenian revolutionaries also pressured Russia to pay attention to the grievances of the Ottoman Armenians. Serge Sazonov, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, repeatedly told the Ottoman ambassador that the Armenian presence in Russia would not permit them to remain indifferent in case of conflict or revolution in Eastern Anatolia.⁷⁷

In late November 1912, Russia took the lead for reforms. Sazonov expressed to Turhan Pasha, the Ottoman Ambassador, his concerns about the situation of the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia, particularly their lack of security and the problems with local administration. He also instructed Giers to notify the Porte that unless comprehensive reforms in favour of the Armenians are introduced in Eastern Anatolia, there could be disturbances, which might lead some European Powers to intervene.⁷⁸ Gabriel Noradunkyan Efendi, the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs, promised to submit these points to the consideration of the Council of Ministers.⁷⁹

The Boghos Nubar mission commenced its visits in Paris in early December 1912. The delegation met Raymond Poincaré, the French Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Halil Rifat Pasha, the Ottoman Ambassador. The ambassador, having observed the Armenians' dedication to convince the Powers to include Armenian reforms in the forthcoming conference regarding the Balkan War, advised the Porte to satisfy the Armenian political leadership with far-reaching reforms before the Powers intervened.⁸⁰

In response to these developments, the Ottoman government hastily set about elaborating a reform project in December 1912.⁸¹ Anticipating collective

76 Reynolds, *Shattering Empires...*, 63-64, 72-73. At that time the Russians did not want a conflict between Muslims and Christians in Eastern Anatolia, as that would lead other Powers to intervene and frustrate their plans of annexation: Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 75.

77 Münir Süreyya Bey, *Ermeni Meselesinin...*, nos. 130, 147.

78 MID [Russian Foreign Ministry], *Sbornik diplomaticheskikh dokumentov: reformy v Armenii, 26 noyabrya 1912 goda-10 maya 1914 goda* (Petrograd: Gosudarstvennaya tipografiya, 1915), no. 2.

79 MID [Russian Foreign Ministry], no. 3.

80 Kaligian, "The Armenian Revolutionary Federation...", 251-252; Münir Süreyya Bey, *Ermeni Meselesinin...*, no. 110.

81 MID [Russian Foreign Ministry], nos. 4, 6, 8.

pressure from Europe, Kâmil Pasha, the Grand Vizier, found it necessary to strengthen the bonds between the Armenian population and the state through providing better administration, public works, and services.⁸² Reşîd Bey, the Minister of Interior, declared to the Armenian press that the government was considering comprehensive reforms in Eastern Anatolia “based on the principle of expansion of responsibilities.”⁸³ A special commission including leading members of the government and some Armenian intellectuals convened on 21 and 24 December.⁸⁴ The discussions yielded a draft project stipulating (1) the merging of the six Eastern provinces into two, (2) the appointment to each of one governor-general, one European inspector-general, and one reform commission with foreign experts (3) the increasing of the number of districts and sub-districts (*kazâ*), (4) the permission of the use of local languages in petitions and courthouses, (5) the employment of foreign officials in the reorganisation of the police, the gendarmerie, and the judiciary, (6) the allocation of financial resources to settle land disputes. While announcing the draft project to the press, Reşîd Bey noted that it was only recommendatory and would be evaluated by the government.⁸⁵

Even though the meetings yielded a fairly comprehensive draft for reforms, the government was undecided about the final version. Newspapers reported in January 1913 that the government was considering limiting the reforms in Eastern Anatolia to (1) the enlargement of the powers of governors, (2) the reorganisation of the gendarmerie and the police, (3) the amendment of the agriculture tax, and (4) the construction of public works.⁸⁶ For Giers, the draft was even inferior to the reform programme of 1895. He reported to St. Petersburg that although the earlier programme had established a permanent reform commission at the capital, in direct contact with the ambassadors of the Powers, this draft stipulated a commission, made up of three Muslims, two Armenians and one Chaldean, in the provinces. Besides, the draft was silent about the employment of Armenians in provincial administration and security.⁸⁷ It is also important to note that the government clearly stated that all administrative, financial, judicial, military and religious laws in force

82 Zekeriya Türkmen, *Vilâyât-ı Şarkîye (Doğu Anadolu Vilayetleri) İslahat Müfettişliği 1913-1914* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2006), 34.

83 “Şarkî Anadolu hakkında,” *Tasvîr-i Efkâr*, 18 December 1912.

84 Those who participated in the meetings were Kâmil Pasha (Grand Vizier), Reşîd Bey (Minister of Interior), Abdurrahman Bey (Minister of Finance), Noradonghian Efendi (Minister of Foreign Affairs), Maghakia Ormanian (Former Armenian Patriarch of İstanbul), Diran Kelekian (Editor-in-chief of the İstanbul daily *Sabah*), Calouste Gulbenkian (Businessman) and Nazaret Daghavarian (Former Deputy from Sivas): “Anatoli islâhâtı,” *Tasvîr-i Efkâr*, 21 December 1912 (evening edition, no. 624); “Vilâyât-ı şarkîye islâhâtı,” *İntihâb-ı Efkâr*, 27 December 1912.

85 “Vilâyât-ı şarkîye islâhâtı,” *İntihâb-ı Efkâr*, 27 December 1912.

86 “Şarkî Anadolu islâhâtı,” *İntihâb-ı Efkâr*, 11 January 1913.

87 MID [Russian Foreign Ministry], no. 8; André Mandelstam, *Le sort de l'Empire ottoman* (Lausanne and Paris: Payot et cie., 1917), 210.

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throughout the Empire would be exactly enforced in the Eastern provinces.⁸⁸ All these show the government's care to avoid creating a region with exceptional status. Although the FEP, the party in power, had a more liberal outlook compared to the CUP, and the ongoing war in the Balkans and the likelihood of international intervention in Eastern Anatolia prompted the government to come to terms with the Armenians, decentralisation did not carry the day.

Whilst the government was still elaborating on the reform project, the CUP came back to the power with a coup on 23 January 1913. The new Mahmud Şevket Pasha government could not overlook the reform issue due to similar concerns: the Russian pressure for reforms in favour of the Armenians was growing serious, and even the governments of the Triple Alliance, which were expected to side with the Ottoman Empire in a dispute with Russia, were repeatedly advising the Porte to promptly introduce the reforms to prevent Russian intervention.⁸⁹ The Boghos Nubar mission kept touring ambassadors and political figures in Paris and requesting their help for the improvement of the conditions of the Ottoman Armenians.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, the Arabs in Syria and Lebanon were demanding similar reforms and there were rumours that British and French intervention was imminent. Weakened both militarily and economically due to the Balkan War, the Empire might not have been able to defend itself if a Great Power occupied its territories with the pretext of providing security. In case of foreign intervention for reforms, the Ottoman government could lose its control over the region.

These considerations prompted the Porte to forestall the outbreak of a civil disorder in the Eastern provinces and the involvement of the Powers in the reform question at the same time. In early March 1913, delegations were sent to Europe to assure foreign governments that the Ottoman government was seriously intending to introduce reforms in Eastern Anatolia and the Arab lands.⁹¹ Considering that any further discontentment in the provinces could result in the loss of Anatolia and the Arab territories, the CUP government acknowledged the urgent necessity of improving security, administration, and economic conditions in the provinces. Since all this could not be fulfilled effectively by the central government, some, albeit limited, degree of provincial autonomy was regarded inevitable.⁹² Despite the objection of a few ministers, the Porte issued on 26 March 1913 the Temporary Law on

88 MID [Russian Foreign Ministry], no. 8.

89 Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, 2/III: 32, 42; Münir Süreyya Bey, *Ermeni Meselesinin...*, no. 113.

90 William J. Van der Dussen, "The Question of Armenian Reforms in 1913-1914," *Armenian Review* 39, no. 1 (1986): 16-17.

91 Kaligian, "The Armenian Revolutionary Federation...", 259.

92 [Mahmud Şevket Paşa], *Sadrızam ve Harbiye Nazırı Mahmut Şevket Paşa'nın Günlüğü* (İstanbul: ARBA, 1988), 46, 53; Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, 2/III: 56-57.

Provincial Administration, which reorganised the provincial government with a separate budget and enlarged responsibilities.⁹³

At first sight, this law was in line with the principle of “expansion of responsibilities,” which had been in the constitution since 1876 and defended by the CUP. The parliament had been discussing its implementation since 1908, but was never able to agree on the specifics.⁹⁴ In the end, it was due to the Empire’s international status and external pressures that this principle was finally put into effect. As explained above, the grave military and economic situation of the Empire and the threat of international isolation aggravated the concerns about a possible Great Power intervention or even annexation as a result of agitations for reform. In addition, after the disaster in the Balkan War, the government prioritised internal restructuring to bring back its strength and, as Cemâl Paşa underlined in his memoirs, to improve its international status.⁹⁵ Ensuring the unity of citizens and their loyalty to the state was still essential as before, but required new methods. While encouraging thousands of Bulgarians and Greeks living in the Western provinces to move to Bulgaria and Greece, the Porte wanted to alleviate the grievances of the minority groups that did not have a kin state in order to prevent them from seeking help from abroad.⁹⁶ Yet, the government still tended to limit regional reforms largely to economic and security measures and hoped to put an end to local demands through providing better public services and settling inter-communal disputes.⁹⁷ Although the Law on Provincial administration was an important opening towards decentralisation, it was still a carefully circumscribed one.

Following the proclamation of the law, the Unionist leadership also elaborated a strategy that would, on the one hand, break the pressure created by reform demands, and, on the other hand, put an end to the Empire’s international isolation. First of all, due to the large size of the Empire’s territories and the shortcomings in communication and transportation, it would be difficult to supervise the reforms from the centre anyway. After consultations with Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa, the Ambassador at Vienna, the government decided to adopt the Austro-Hungarian model and divide the Empire into six

93 Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789-1922* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 310-3. For the full text of the law, see Cenk Reyhan, “Yerel Yönetim Metinleri (XX): 1913 Tarihli Vilâyat Genel İdaresi Geçici Kanunu,” *Çağdaş Yerel Yönetimler* 9, no. 1 (2000): 131-152.

94 Siddık Sami Onar, *İdare Hukukunun Umumi Esasları* (İstanbul: Marifet, 1952), 553.

95 Cemal Paşa, *Hatıralar*, 83-84, 109.

96 Cemal Paşa, *Hatıralar*, 109-110.

97 Babanzâde İsmail Hakkı, “Bir bomba münâsebetiyle,” *Tanin*, 17 April 1913; Münir Süreyya Bey, *Ermeni Meselesinin...*, no. 112. For the latter aim, the number of the gendarmerie and courthouses were increased throughout Anatolia: Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi*, 2/II: 320-1; Münir Süreyya Bey, *Ermeni Meselesinin...*, no. 128.

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inspectores-general.⁹⁸ In order to balance the Russian threat, it also planned to approach Britain, who had supported the Ottoman Empire against Russia for decades. Even though the conclusion of the Triple Entente in 1907 signalled a reversal in Britain's Near Eastern policy, the Ottomans were still hopeful that they could earn British friendship, even pledge an alliance, if they took advantage of conflicting interests with Russia. With this consideration in mind, the Mahmud Şevket Pasha government gave a number of concessions to Britain in various areas such as oil prospecting and the construction of railroads and ports,⁹⁹ but desired more comprehensive cooperation, preferably over the affairs of Eastern Anatolia. According to his memoirs, Halil Bey, a prominent member of the CUP, suggested that the Grand Vizier invite a reputed and experienced British inspector-general, such as Lord Curzon, Lord Kitchener, or Lord Milner, along with a number of experts to superintend reforms in the region.¹⁰⁰ Thus, he argued, the Cyprus Convention of 1878, where Britain pledged assistance to the Ottoman Empire against Russia, would be revived. The Grand Vizier strongly endorsed this idea.¹⁰¹ Consequently, on 24 April, the Porte requested from Britain two inspectors-general for Eastern Anatolia and a number of experts of administration, security, justice, agriculture, forestry and public works, and on 15 May another inspector-general for Western Anatolia.¹⁰² With this latter request, the government made it clear once more that it was unwilling to introduce a special regime in the Eastern provinces. Indeed, as Câvid Bey, one of the more liberal members of the CUP, wrote in his memoirs, the government regarded it essential to adopt a uniform reform programme for all provinces to avoid "a second Macedonia" in the East.¹⁰³

This *démarche* to Britain, as Roderic Davison put it, "was aimed at keeping Russia and England at odds,"¹⁰⁴ and was more than a tactical move confined to Eastern Anatolia. It was rather an attempt of international balancing through cooperation in an internal issue. Mahmud Şevket Pasha told Baron Wangenheim, the German Ambassador in İstanbul, that British officials were requested particularly for provinces inhabited by Christians, i.e. Greeks and Armenians. Their employment, he continued, would assure the British

98 [Mahmud Şevket Paşa], *Sadrazam ve Harbiye Nazırı...*, 96, 150-151. This would be formalised with the imperial *irâde* dated 1 July 1913: Turkey, *Düstür Tertib-i Sâni Cild 5* (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Âmire, 1332 AH), 561.

99 Cemal Paşa, *Hatıralar*, 110-112, 125.

100 [Halil Menteşe], *Osmanlı Mebusan Meclisi Reisi Halil Menteşe'nin Anıları*, ed. İsmail Arar (İstanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı, 1986), 167-169.

101 [Mahmud Şevket Paşa], *Sadrazam ve Harbiye Nazırı...*, 35, 90-91, 96-97, 184.

102 Türkmen, *Vilâyet-i Şarkîye...*, 33-36; Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, 2/III: 60-65; Van der Dussen, "The Question of Armenian Reforms...", 17.

103 Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler Cilt 3 İttihat ve Terakki* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2000), 574.

104 Davison, "The Armenian Crisis, 1912-1914," 493.

government of the Porte's sincerity towards reform and thus make it support the territorial integrity of the Empire in case of an international dispute with regard to the situation of these communities.¹⁰⁵ In other words, reforms would operate as almost a cover to secure British support in future international disputes.

Due to the perceived Russian threat, the Porte went even further to propose alliance to Britain in June 1913. Anticipating negative reactions from other Powers, the Foreign Office declined,¹⁰⁶ but it was still inclined to send officials to Eastern Anatolia. However, upon the strong objection of Russia, who saw the region as a potential sphere of influence, the British government did not fulfil this request either.¹⁰⁷ The Porte continued its efforts for the appointment of British inspectors-general and experts until October to no avail.¹⁰⁸

In short, the Empire's fragility and vulnerability after the defeat at the First Balkan War, Russia's interest in the Armenian affairs, the imminence of Russian intervention, and the increasing possibility of European control over Eastern Anatolia, drove both the FEP and CUP governments to hastily prepare extensive reform packages for the benefit of Armenians. The CUP government, while introducing the Law on Provincial Administration, at the same time planned to establish British-led inspectorates in Eastern Anatolia. By directly involving Britain in the reform process, the government aimed to ensure its support against the Russian threat. From all these developments one can conclude that war, strategic calculations, and the relations with the Great Powers not only prompted the Ottoman policymakers to address, albeit partially, the longstanding Armenian demands for reform, but also shaped the formulation of the reforms.

The Russian Initiative

Despite the efforts of the Boghos Nubar mission in Europe, Russia did not want the Armenian reforms to be discussed in an international conference as this would involve other Powers in the affairs of Eastern Anatolia. On the other hand, it was also evident that Russia's unilateral supervision of the reforms would raise objections from other Powers. Thus, after discussions with the British government, Russia agreed that the reform issue should be settled together by the allies in the Triple Entente, which had also prepared

105 Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi*, 2/III: 65.

106 Feroz Ahmad, "Great Britain's Relations with the Young Turks 1908-1914," *Middle Eastern Studies* 2, no. 4 (1966): 321-322.

107 Heller, *British Policy towards...*, 84-85.

108 Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi*, 2/III: 149; Kocatürk, "Türk-İngiliz İlişkilerinin...", 682-683.

the 1895 reform programme and urged Abdülhamid to accept it.¹⁰⁹ However, upon German objections, the settlement of the reform question was eventually left to the ambassadors of all six Powers in İstanbul.¹¹⁰

As mentioned before, with the belief that foreign intervention could be averted if the reform question were to be tackled seriously,¹¹¹ the Mahmud Şevket Pasha government took urgent steps in this direction. After his assassination on 11 June 1913, the same government remained in power, under the Grand Vizierate of Saîd Halîm Pasha, and followed the same approach. Having received the news that the ambassadors of the Great Powers in İstanbul were about to convene to decide on a reform programme, as well as the rumours that Russia would soon provoke incidents in Eastern Anatolia to use them as a pretext for annexation,¹¹² the government shortly adopted further regulations for provincial administration and submitted them to the Powers. The regulations established six inspectorates throughout the Empire, two in Eastern Anatolia. Christian inspectors-general, who were to be selected by the Porte, would be appointed to these two Eastern inspectorates. In case of disagreement between the inspectors-general and ministries, the government would arbitrate. The inspectors-general would not be authorised to dismiss officials.¹¹³ With these regulations, the Porte hoped to pre-empt the conference by displaying its sincerity and dedication for reforms. Evidently, enlarging the scope of the principle of “expansion of responsibilities” was certainly more acceptable for the Ottoman decision-makers than leaving the entire Eastern Anatolia under direct European control.

Thus, the Russian initiative and the impending ambassadors’ conference prompted the Ottoman government to take a further step in favour of reforms. Even though the British government had not given a positive reply to its request for officials, the Porte formally established inspectorates-general and immediately reported this to the Powers. The new regulations entailed, to a certain degree, European involvement in reforms, which the Ottomans had long opposed; yet at that moment this was seen more preferable to foreign intervention. Moreover, the regulations were still formulated as general reforms for all parts of the Empire. By carefully avoiding establishing a privileged region, the Porte hoped to retain the control over the future of Eastern Anatolia and the Armenians as much as possible.

109 Mandelstam, *Le sort de l'Empire ottoman*, 208-209.

110 Davison, “The Armenian Crisis, 1912-1914,” 495-496; Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi*, 2/III: 96.

111 [Mahmud Şevket Paşa], *Sadrazam ve Harbiye Nazırı...*, 197-198.

112 Münir Süreyya Bey, *Ermeni Meselesinin...*, no. 120.

113 Mandelstam, *Le sort de l'Empire ottoman*, 224-225; Van der Dussen, “The Question of Armenian Reforms...”, 18-19; Münir Süreyya Bey, *Ermeni Meselesinin...*, no. 133; Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi*, 2/III: 119-120.

The Ambassadors' Conference and the Russo-German Understanding

The attempt of the Ottoman government to prevent the ambassadors' conference through updating its reform programme failed, as Russia rejected the Ottoman proposals. Sazonov told Turhan Pasha that the reform package was not comprehensive enough to end the grievances of the Armenians and if any disturbance took place in Eastern Anatolia Russia would have no other choice but to intervene in order to prevent the incidents from spreading into its territory.¹¹⁴ The conference began on 3 July 1913. The discussions were based on the Russian draft proposal, prepared by André Mandelstam, the Chief Dragoman of the Russian Embassy in İstanbul, in tandem with the Armenian Patriarchate and the Dashnaksutyun.¹¹⁵ According to the proposal, the six Eastern provinces would be merged into one and administered by a Christian governor-general, appointed by the Powers and assisted by an equal number of Muslim and Christian counsellors. Provincial councils, public offices, courthouses, the police and the gendarmerie would be made up equally of Muslims and Christians. Every community in the region would be permitted to open schools, collect taxes to finance them, and carry out education in their mother tongue. The Porte would not settle any more Muslims in the region. Similar regulations would be adopted in favour of the Armenians residing in other parts of the Empire, particularly in Cilicia. The implementation of all these would be guaranteed by the Powers.¹¹⁶

As Britain and France had already declared their approval of this project, it would be the attitude of the Triple Alliance, particularly of Germany, that would determine the outcome of the negotiations. The German government did not oppose the introduction of reforms in principle. As Germany was expanding its influence towards the Eastern parts of the Ottoman Empire, thanks to the good relations with the Porte and the construction of the Baghdad Railway, it was in its interest to see stability in the region. For the same reason, Germany did not want to arouse antipathy among Ottoman Armenians by thwarting the Russian initiative for reforms.¹¹⁷ However, the Allies wanted to keep the reform project moderate as they suspected that the Russians were laying the groundwork of a later annexation through suggesting a special status for Eastern Anatolia.¹¹⁸ Thus, Germany and Austria-Hungary defended

114 Münir Süreyya Bey, *Ermeni Meselesinin...*, no. 130.

115 R. Koptaş, "Zohrab, Papazyan ve Pastrırmacıyan...", 167-169; Manoug Joseph Somakian, *Empires in Conflict: Armenia and the Great Powers, 1895-1920* (London and New York, NY: I.B.Tauris, 1995), 158.

116 Mandelstam, *Le sort de l'Empire ottoman*, 217-224; Uras, *The Armenians in History...*, 638-647.

117 Davison, "The Armenian Crisis, 1912-1914," 491-493.

118 Davison, "The Armenian Crisis, 1912-1914," 496-497; Aksakal, *Ottoman Road to War...*, 73.

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in the negotiations the implementation of the Ottoman package.¹¹⁹ As Russia insisted on its own proposal, the conference adjourned without agreement.

After the conference, Russia and Germany decided to resolve their differences through bilateral talks.¹²⁰ On 23 September, their ambassadors in İstanbul agreed on the following points: the provinces would be merged into two inspectorates; the inspectors-general would be appointed by the Porte upon the recommendation of the Powers; they would have the authority to appoint and dismiss officials; Muslims and Christians would have equal share in provincial councils, public offices, the police and the gendarmerie; the reforms would be supervised by the ambassadors and consuls of the Powers; and the Porte would act in agreement with the Powers for further reforms. These points were shortly agreed upon by the other four Powers.¹²¹

Although this was closer to what it had declared to the Powers by its own initiative, the Ottoman government was still not happy with the proposal. The Porte particularly found the stipulations about the inspectors-general (i.e., that two European officials, who would be equipped with large authorities over administration, security, and justice, would be selected by the Powers and would not be removed from their posts without their consent) too excessive, and believed that parity in official positions would not be welcomed by the Muslims.¹²² Governors in Eastern Anatolia were already writing to İstanbul that the Muslims received the news about the prospective reforms, particularly the employment of Christian officials in regional administration, with bitterness.¹²³ Under these circumstances, the Porte continued negotiations with the Russians and was able to extract some minor concessions.

In the meantime, as a last-ditch attempt to prevent European control, the CUP approached Armenian political leaders for bilateral agreement. Although the Armenians had no serious hopes from the government, the Dashnaktsutyun still agreed to meet in order not to be blamed for being irreconcilable.¹²⁴ During the meetings, the CUP delegates tried to persuade the Dashnaks to reject European involvement, by arguing that would bring nothing but harm to both the Turks and the Armenians, and to confide in the government's goodwill and determination for reform. They stated that since the conflict in

119. Kaligian, "The Armenian Revolutionary Federation...", 275.

120. Van der Dussen, "The Question of Armenian Reforms...", 20.

121. Mandelstam, *Le sort de l'Empire ottoman*, 234-235.

122. [Halil Mentеше], *Osmanlı Mebusan Meclisi Reisi...*, 174; Said Halim Paşa, *L'Empire ottoman et la guerre mondiale* (İstanbul: ISIS, 2000), 6-7.

123. N. Fahri Taş, *Osmanlı-Ermeni İlişkileri 1912-1914 (Vilâyat-ı Şarkîyye Islâhatı)* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi, 2006), 102; Aydoğan, *İttihat ve Terakkî'nin Doğu Politikası...*, 314; Türkmen, *Vilâyat-ı Şarkîyye...*, 46.

124. Avagyan, "İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti...", 126.

the Balkans was over, the government could deploy more forces to check Kurdish incursions and spend more energy to improve the Armenians' welfare.¹²⁵ The Dashnaks responded that they could do little to stop European involvement at that point, and they would not relinquish the demands as to European governors-general and the equal division of the gendarmerie among Muslims and Christians.¹²⁶ After the discussions ended with no result, in December, Saîd Halîm Pasha invited Boghos Nubar Pasha to İstanbul for discussion, but the latter refused, politely advising the Grand Vizier to communicate with the Patriarchate instead.¹²⁷

As the hopes to come to terms directly with the Armenians failed, the Ottoman government, despite all its unwillingness, concluded that it could not defy the Powers anymore. In a telegram to the Porte, Halîl Rifat Pasha summarised his concerns, which were shared by the Ottoman decision-makers. He wrote that due to the wars in the past two years the Empire had become so weakened that "*raison d'État*" required avoidance from any further tensions both inside and abroad. It would not be able to defend itself, he continued, if Russia invaded Eastern Anatolia by using an incident in the region as pretext. Therefore, the ambassador concluded, accepting the reform project would save the Empire from a big disaster, even if its terms injured to some degree the Ottomans' self-esteem.¹²⁸

These considerations finally led Saîd Halîm Pasha to sign the reform agreement with the Russian delegation on 8 February 1914.¹²⁹ Compared to the Russian draft project, the final agreement was far more acceptable for the Ottomans. The appointment of European inspectors instead of governors would maintain Ottoman supremacy at least on paper, and the formation of two inspectorates was more assuring than seeing the whole Eastern Anatolia under a single European inspector-general. The number of Armenians to be employed in regional offices and positions was also reduced for some provinces during the negotiations. Nevertheless, the agreement still meant a special regime for Eastern Anatolia and the political and administrative empowerment of a specific community, i.e., the Armenians. Both these consequences had long been objected to by the Ottoman decision-makers. Despite this, to prevent public discontent, pro-CUP newspapers published

125 Cemal Paşa, *Hatıralar*, 358; [Talât Paşa], *Talât Paşa'nın Anıları*, 31, 70-71; [Halil Mentеше], *Osmanlı Mebusan Meclisi Reisi...*, 175.

126 Avagyan, "İtihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti...", 125-127; R. Koptaş, "Zohrab, Papazyan ve Pastırmacıyan...", 171-172; Kaligian, "The Armenian Revolutionary Federation...", 304.

127 Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi*, 2/III: 164.

128 Münir Süreyya Bey, *Ermeni Meselesinin...*, no. 152.

129 Davison, "The Armenian Crisis, 1912-1914," 500-504; Mandelstam, *Le sort de l'Empire ottoman*, 236-238; Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians...*, 283-284.

articles exaggeratedly praising the benefits of reform and the government's reformism.¹³⁰

Within a few months, Dutch and Norwegian officials were appointed as the two inspectors-general to Eastern Anatolia. Yet, when they were on their way, World War I broke out. Although the Ottoman Empire was not a belligerent and would remain out of the war until the end of October, the government regarded the outbreak of the war as an opportunity to suspend the reform process. After all, the Great Powers were no longer in a position to impose the execution of reforms, and the recently concluded secret alliance with Germany provided enough security against a Russian occupation with the pretext of protecting the Armenians. On 8 August 1914, only a few days after the Ottoman government declared general mobilisation, Talât Pasha, the Minister of Interior, requested the two inspectors-general to wait in the capital because "the present serious circumstances make the application of the sanctioned reforms impossible."¹³¹ Following the Ottoman entry into the war, the Porte, stating that "serious and thorough reforms" would be undertaken after the war, terminated the contracts of the inspectors-general and their entourages.¹³²

To sum up, the agreement of the Great Powers on a reform scheme forced the Ottoman government to accept a special regime for Eastern Anatolia, which would go beyond what it envisaged for the entire country. Under these circumstances, in order to avoid losing its control over the region, the Porte, on the one hand, continued negotiations with Russia, and, on the other hand, requested the Armenians to declare their opposition to European involvement in the reforms issue. Yet, since the Armenian political leadership refused this and the Powers maintained their collective stance for the introduction of reforms, it reluctantly signed the agreement, which was after all more acceptable than the initial Russian proposal. As the outbreak of the World War removed international pressures, the Ottoman government immediately suspended the implementation of the reform agreement.

DISCUSSION

This article has demonstrated that the Ottoman government's adoption of a comprehensive reform programme in 1913-4 was driven primarily by

130 For example, see "Anatolî islâhâtı," *Tanîn*, 12 February 1914. Again, anticipating protests from the Muslims, the newspapers announced the agreement with slightly milder terms. For instance, this article reported that the inspectors-general would be selected by the government, although the agreement clearly stated that their names would be communicated to the Porte by the Great Powers.

131 Van der Dussen, "The Question of Armenian Reforms...", 11.

132 Ali Karaca, "Türkiye'de Ermeniler İçin Yapılan Reformlar (Örtülü Bir İşgale Doğru) ve Tehcir Gerçeği (1878-1915)," in *Uluslararası Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri Sempozyumu, 24-25 Mayıs 2001, Bildiriler*, eds. Selçuk Erez and Mehmet Saray (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi, 2001), 157-158.

concerns regarding the Empire's external security, international status, and relations with the Great Powers. Developments in the domestic political scene, on the other hand, such as the wave of liberalism after the Young Turk Revolution, the repeated requests of Armenian political spokespeople and the growing inter-ethnic tension in Eastern Anatolia, remained insufficient alone to lead the government to introduce such comprehensive reforms in Eastern Anatolia as demanded by its Armenian citizens.

The reluctance of the government to accommodate local demands was due to a number of factors. First, since past experiences had brought about the conviction that reforms on regional or communal basis could create new opportunity spaces for nationalist revolutionary movements, Ottoman political elite were very cautious in their approach to such demands. Rather than addressing the particular demands of communities, the Young Turks promoted, since their inception, the idea of civic equality, with no privileged community or region. The policies they adopted after the revolution indicate that, despite championing radical reforms, their priority was, just like Abdülhamid,¹³³ maintaining order and the loyalty of the citizens. This is why the Young Turk governments endeavoured not to lose their control and influence over the provinces and their steps for resolving local grievances did not go beyond palliative measures.

Second, the recent memories about the conflicts in Eastern Anatolia as well as the continuing Armenian agitations created a certain degree of mistrust towards Armenian political parties and the Patriarchate. Thus, decision-makers considered the grievances they voiced to be exaggerated and assumed their demands were a part of a hidden agenda. In fact, even when lobbying in Europe, Armenian spokespeople repeatedly declared that they did not have any separatist aspirations and what they only wanted was the improvement of the conditions of their brethren in Eastern Anatolia.¹³⁴ Yet, their insistence that European control was necessary for the serious and continuous implementation of reforms¹³⁵ made the Ottoman decision-makers question their real intentions. The reports sent from Eastern Anatolia regarding the activities of revolutionaries and the assistance they received from abroad must have reinforced their concerns. As indicated before, no matter how frequently it emphasised brotherhood between Turks and Armenians and blamed Abdülhamid for his reckless use of force against the latter, the CUP still harboured strong suspicions towards the Armenians. Even Mahmud Şevket Pasha, who was actually not a member of the committee and disapproved

133 Stephen Duguid, "The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia," *Middle Eastern Studies* 9, no. 2 (1973): 139-155.

134 [Mahmud Şevket Paşa], *Sadrazam ve Harbiye Nazırı...*, 183; Mandelstam, *Le sort de l'Empire ottoman*, 211.

135 Münir Süreyya Bey, *Ermeni Meselesinin...*, no. 118.

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extreme Turkish nationalist opinions voiced in the cabinet,¹³⁶ thought that the ultimate goal of the Armenians was independence.¹³⁷ Nor did he regard the grievances presented by the Patriarchate genuine; he recorded in his diary that it was the Armenians who provoked the Muslims in the first place and even if some of the complaints were true, they were overly exaggerated.¹³⁸ Similarly, in reply to the argument that the Armenians did not want independence or autonomy but only reforms, he stated that they were not sincere and working for foreign intervention.¹³⁹

Third, the Young Turk governments, due to their extreme focus on order and tranquillity, felt obliged to bear in mind the fragile balances among communities. In Eastern Anatolia, there was already a high level of mistrust and resentment among the Muslims towards the Armenians.¹⁴⁰ Reports from the region signalled that any arrangement empowering the Armenians in administration would receive strong protest. Rumours that places would be allocated to Armenians in provincial councils and offices and that land disputes would be settled by Christian governors-general created considerable displeasure.¹⁴¹ The government was not necessarily pro-Muslim; it was also concerned with Kurdish revolts and even, on occasion, cooperated with Armenian revolutionaries to suppress them.¹⁴² Besides, due to its modernist outlook, the CUP would normally be expected to have sided with the urban Armenians to curb the depredations of the tribal Kurds.¹⁴³ However, in order to assure the loyalty of the Kurds, it made certain gestures such as establishing bonds with their leaders and complying with their demands as to the appointment of local administrators and public officials.¹⁴⁴ Anticipating that the fulfilment of the Armenian demands would embitter the Muslims and result in further conflicts with the Armenians as well as protests against the government, İstanbul was very cautious in its steps regarding Eastern Anatolia.¹⁴⁵

136 [Mahmud Şevket Paşa], *Sadrazam ve Harbiye Nazırı...*, 91.

137 [Mahmud Şevket Paşa], *Sadrazam ve Harbiye Nazırı...*, 124.

138 [Mahmud Şevket Paşa], *Sadrazam ve Harbiye Nazırı...*, 160, 163.

139 [Mahmud Şevket Paşa], *Sadrazam ve Harbiye Nazırı...*, 183.

140 [Mahmud Şevket Paşa], *Sadrazam ve Harbiye Nazırı...*, 135; Mandelstam, *Le sort de l'Empire ottoman*, 212-213.

141 Aydoğan, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Doğu Politikası...*, 313-315.

142 Reynolds, *Shattering Empires...*, 64.

143 Rather than being purely religiously motivated, the clashes between the Kurds and the Armenians owed much to socio-economic differences: Reynolds, *Shattering Empires...*, 52; S. Ashkan Gürbüz, "Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia (1878-1890)" (M.A. Thesis, Bilkent University, 2008), 71.

144 Reynolds, *Shattering Empires...*, 65-66.

145 As mentioned before, the government formed in early 1912 a reform commission to be sent to Eastern Anatolia. Interviewed by the Armenian daily *Jamanak*, Mustafa Fevzi Efendi, the President of the Commission, stated, "It would not work if we just met the demands of the Armenians but ignored the Kurds. We have to satisfy both sides; only then full peace can come between the two peoples:" "Anatoli islâhâtı," *Tamim*, 25 February 1912.

Although the government recognised the problems of the region in terms of security, economy, administration, and public works and services, because of these concerns, it tried to eliminate these problems through general arrangements formulated for the entire Empire. The Young Turks were eager to introduce reforms, but how they defined reforms did not overlap with what the Armenian political leadership wanted.¹⁴⁶ Instead of appointing Christian governors or employing more Armenians in public offices and security forces as the Armenians demanded, the government sought to alleviate their grievances through sending more capable officials to the region, increasing the number of policemen and gendarmes, ameliorating the justice system and enlarging the prerogatives of governors.¹⁴⁷

An anonymous article appeared in *Şûra-i Ümmet*, the official organ of the CUP, in 1902, and re-published in 1909, articulating quite succinctly how the CUP approached the Armenian Question. It starts with recounting Armenian endeavours to find support among Western governments and public opinion for the due execution of the reform project of 1895. For the author, while some provisions in the project were for everyone's benefit, others would "pave the way for the Armenians' administrative separation from other people and their achievement of privileges and independence in the future." Approving Abdülhamid's policy of at first resisting, and then not implementing this project, the article continues, "the state will, without a doubt, never agree to their independence or privileges, and to leave the other peoples dwelling in Eastern Anatolia under their sovereignty and influence." On the other hand, the author warns the reader that the reoccurrence of conflicts in Eastern Anatolia would likely result in foreign intervention. Pointing out a number of historical examples, such as the independence of Greece and Balkan countries as well as the autonomy of Crete, he underlines that foreign intervention always brought terrible consequences for the Empire. He concludes:

"The principal means to debar the occurrence of revolts and disturbances and the split of our beloved homeland into pieces is to assure the welfare and development of the true-hearted Ottoman people altogether. However, as this will not be achieved within a short period of time, without forgetting this important point, which shall constitute the essence of our efforts, we must endeavour to our best capacity against the recurrence of the Armenian incidents in order not to cause

146 For a prominent Unionist journalist, the main goal of reforms was "to rescue everyone from poverty:" Babanzâde İsmâil Hakkı, "Ermeni patrikinin beyânâtı," *Tanîn*, 11 May 1913.

147 The government's unwillingness to introduce regional reforms was noted and criticised by the Russian government, who argued that earlier experiences of reforms that led to the independence of certain regions would not recur in Eastern Anatolia because the Armenians, who were only in minority, would never think of independence: Bayur, *Türk İnkılâbı Tarihi*, 2/III: 75; G. P. Gooch and Harold Temperley, eds., *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914* (London: H.M.S.O., 1926-1938), 10/I: no. 493.

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the intervention of our external enemies, who want to take advantage of our weakness and pursue their selfish and wicked interests.”¹⁴⁸

What all these statements boil down to is that the CUP’s long-term goal was to maintain the order and unity of the Empire, and to achieve this, it advocated reforms for the *whole* country and provision of better social and economic conditions to *all* citizens. On the other hand, for the short term, it was more concerned with the threat of foreign intervention, and this is the primary reason for its anxiousness to prevent conflicts in Eastern Anatolia. In other words, if only foreign intervention was an imminent possibility, the committee would consider special arrangements for the Armenians; if not, it would stick to its policy of carrying out general reforms throughout the Empire. This is exactly what happened in the end. The quick and severe defeat in the First Balkan War, the Armenians’ search for international support to revive Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin of 1878, and the imminence of international intervention changed the calculations of the Ottoman decision-makers.

The primacy of foreign policy in the Armenian reform question manifested itself in three phases and forms: Firstly, the loss of power and prestige with the Balkan defeat made the Ottoman policymakers extremely concerned about the Empire’s security. They thought that if one or a number of Great Powers intervened in, or annexed, a part of the Empire, the terrible financial and military conditions incurred by the war would not allow the Ottomans to defend themselves. Thus, until the Empire bounded up its wounds, they wanted to avert any kind of disturbance which could be used by the Powers as an excuse for intervention or even annexation. Accordingly, the government pragmatically relaxed its categorical objection to decentralisation.¹⁴⁹ In the meantime, it endeavoured to appear conciliatory to the Armenians, as well as to the other communities demanding similar reforms, and called for their support against the “conspiracies” of foreign Powers.¹⁵⁰ Accordingly, Unionist newspapers published several articles praising the government’s reformism and claimed that the reforms being introduced in Eastern Anatolia did not result from outside pressure but merely from the government’s true will to

148 D[?], “Ermenilere dâir,” *Şûra-i Ümmet* 3 (1902), 2; later serialised verbatim in “Ermenilere dâir,” *Haftalık Şûra-i Ümmet* 197 (1909), 13; “Ermenilere dâir,” *Haftalık Şûra-i Ümmet* 198 (1909), 13; “Ermenilere dâir,” *Haftalık Şûra-i Ümmet* 197 (1909), 13; “Ermenilere dâir,” *Haftalık Şûra-i Ümmet* 199 (1909), 7. The re-publication of the article demonstrates that the CUP retained these views after the revolution.

149 [Mahmud Şevket Paşa], *Sadrâzam ve Harbiye Nazırı...*, 131. Talât Pasha also admitted in his memoirs that the defeat in the Balkan War made the Ottoman government more flexible in its attitude towards regional demands: [Talât Paşa], *Talât Paşa'nın Anıları*, 66.

150 Câvid Bey, who was in Paris for lobbying against European intervention, told the Armenian daily *Azadամարд* that the government was no longer against decentralisation, thus the Armenians should believe in the government and not pay attention to the counsels from abroad, which “are not always sincere:” “Câvid Beğ Efendinin beyânâtı,” *Tanîn*, 16 July 1913.

improve the well-being of its Armenian citizens.¹⁵¹ The fundamental aim in making all these gestures was to prevent a Great Power intervention at a time when the Empire was too weak to defend itself.

Secondly, the imminent threat of Russian intervention urged the Ottomans to approach Britain, who had traditionally supported the Ottoman Empire against Russian expansionism for decades and formally pledged this with the 1878 Cyprus Convention. In the spring of 1913, when the Armenians were lobbying European governments for reforms, the Ottoman policymakers regarded the reform issue as a means to strengthen the bonds with Britain. They believed that conferring the responsibility of supervising reforms in Eastern Anatolia to the British would put a check to a Russian intervention (for Russia would then have to deal with Britain), dispel international pressures regarding the reform question, and induce the Armenians to stop lobbying abroad. Above all, it could even lay the groundwork for a defensive alliance with Britain, which was in fact proposed simultaneously. Without the incentive of balancing the Russian threat, which appeared imminent to the Ottomans at that moment, it is doubtful that the CUP government would delegate the reforms in Eastern Anatolia to foreign experts. Unsurprisingly, Talât Pasha stated in his memoirs that the government's appeal to Britain aimed to pre-empt international intervention and revive the pledge of Britain in 1878 to protect the Ottoman Empire against Russia.¹⁵² Saîd Halîm Pasha also wrote that British supervision of reforms was expected to put an end to both Armenian grievances and Russian intrigues.¹⁵³ This strategic move of killing many birds with one stone backlashed before too long, however, when the Russian government convinced the British not to become involved and took the initiative of preparing a reform project in line with Armenian demands.

Thirdly, as Russia and Germany agreed upon a reform project, and the other Powers declared their consent, the Porte could not simply ignore it because of the Empire's precarious military and economic situation and the threat of international isolation. It still did not adopt the project outright, however. In order to reduce the degree of European control stipulated in the project, the government, on the one hand, engaged in a series of negotiations with Russia, which did yield a few concessions, and, on the other hand, approached the Armenian political leadership for settling the question without European involvement. Nevertheless, it eventually signed the reforms agreement with Russia, which included a number of terms that did not conform to the earlier approach of the Ottoman political elite towards provincial administration. In other words, strong and united posture of the six Powers not only compelled

151 "Vilâyât-i şarkiyede," *Tanîn*, 2 July 1913.

152 [Talât Paşa], *Talât Paşa'nın Anıları*, 70.

153 Said Halim Paşa, *L'Empire ottoman...*, 6.

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the Ottoman government to introduce a more radical reform scheme than it would normally adopt, but also prompted it, as a last resort, to seek bilateral agreement with Armenian leaders. As the Armenians did not give up the idea of European control, these overtures did not bear fruit, but if it did, the Ottoman government was ready to adopt a reform scheme more or less identical to the one stipulated in the agreement with Russia.¹⁵⁴ Even in that case, the original stimulus would still have been external pressure.

To conclude, this article has argued that the Empire's status in international power politics, external pressures, and strategic calculations were critical in the introduction of reforms that had long been objected to due to the concern that the recognition of regional and communal privileges would disrupt the unity and territorial integrity of the Empire. The primary aim for the Ottoman decision-makers in so doing was to safeguard the Empire's external security and international position. As the concerns about the long-term outcomes of regional reforms and the loyalty of minorities had not vanished and the new institutional framework had not yet been normatively internalised, the emergence of World War I removed the *raison d'être* of the 1914 reforms for the Ottoman government.

154 Cavid Bey declared to the Armenian press in July 1913 that the only difference of opinion between the government and Boghos Nubar Pasha was about European control over reforms: "Cavid Beğ Efendinin beyânâtı," *Tanîn*, 16 July 1913.

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