
WHAT IS 24 APRIL 1915?

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History of Truth

The following article treats perceptions of and opinions on 24 April 1915, the starting date of the Armenian Genocide as acknowledged by the Armenians, and it presents various opinions on the subject after providing the historical background.

24 April is recognized as the starting day of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923 by the Armenians and is commemorated as the Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day in Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and in places where the diaspora is active.

The underlying reason of this recognition is the decision taken by the Ottoman Empire to deport the Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Istanbul on that day. While World War I was going on under very tough conditions for the Ottoman Empire, the perception of the Armenians as a threat and the activities confirming this perception were increasingly growing. The Ottoman Empire, endeavoring for its own survival, had to strive not only against the external powers but also the internals. The Committee of Union and Progress had to take certain extraordinary decisions in order to handle this situation. The deportation of the Armenian intellectuals on 24 April 1915, therefore, can be treated in this context.

Under the order of Talat Pasha, the Minister of Interior, up to 235-270 people comprising clergymen, teachers, doctors, journalists, lawyers and Armenians with strong political liaisons were taken from Istanbul into two different holding centers in Çankırı and Ayaş. The number of people taken into these centers increased in the following days. The final number is thought to be 2345. After the Deportation Law had been enacted, some of the detainees were sent to the different regions in the Ottoman Empire and some others were killed.

Some of these detainees arrested on April 24 were released before being sent to Anatolia and some of them obtained their permit to go back to Istanbul. Using the term genocide without differentiating any definitions and targeting a community as a whole when referring to these events is an important point to think over. The fact that Cherkess Ahmet was put on trial and sentenced to death after killing some Armenians who were on their way to Diyarbakır from Ayaş in

order to stand a trial is another point to take into consideration. It is also important to note that Mazhar Bay, Governor of Ankara, was replaced by Atif Bey after he defied Talat Pashas orders of exile and took the exiled Armenians under his protection.

It is without question impossible to claim that each Armenian who was exiled on 21 April 1915, a date commemorated by the Armenian Community as Red Sunday (Garmir Giragi) and passed away later on was involved in political actions that constituted a threat to the Ottoman Empire. However, it is doubtful to whether accept this particular day as the antecedent of the all events called genocide or not.

Ara Sarafyans article titled What Happened on 24 April 1915? which was published in the newspaper Agos in 2012, could be given as a local example of the opinions which take the day as the starting date of the genocide. This incident occurred between Prof. Yusuf Sarıncı and Sarafyan, who wrote his article in Agos in response to Sarıncı's article named What Happened in April 2014: The Circular of 24 April 1915, and the Arrest of Armenian Committee Members in Istanbul, in fact constitutes a tangible evidence regarding how 24 April has become different for both parties. While Sarıncı claims in his article that the detainees were not anybody but involved in destructive activities, Sarafyan asserts that such a discrimination was not regarded. Another point that the two do not agree on is the outcome of the detainees. According to Sarıncı, these people were not killed, whereas Sarafyan believes that they were. The points on which the parties do not come to an agreement demonstrates in fact how 24 April 1915 has different places in the Turkish and Armenian history writing. While talking about these opposite historiographies, third parties defending the Armenian thesis can also be mentioned. To illustrate, Donald Bloxham, who presents the concept of cumulative radicalization is one of them. Bloxham, who defines the events as increasingly radical program of deportation and murder claims that the Armenians, more than any other community within the Ottoman Empire, were subjected to such policies in an extreme and intense way and this was the result of the an increasingly discriminative attitude of the Committee of Union and Progress. According to Bloxham, who defends that the policies adopted against the Armenians began as local interventions and then quickly became a general policy, at least one million Armenians were killed and about two-thirds of this figure was exiled at the end of the period.

With the commemoration ceremony, which took place in the Holy Trinity Armenian Church of Istanbul for the first time, 24 April has become Yeggherni Zoheri Histahaki, or in other words, Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day. On that day, many people visit monuments in various parts of the world, especially in Yerevan and lay flowers at the eternal flame. 24 April is also recognized as the Assyrian Genocide Remembrance Day.

Sources [] Sarıncı, Decree of April 24, 1915 and Armenian Committee Members Arrested in Istanbul, Ermeni Araştırmaları 15/16 (2007), page 69-82.

_____,What Happened on April 24, 1915? The Circular of April 24, 1915, and the Arrest of the Armenian Committee Members in İstanbul, International Journal of Turkish Studies, Vol: 14/1-2 (Fall, 2008), s. 75-102.

Ara Sarafian, 24 Nisan 1915te ne oldu?, Agos, May 30, 2012.