AVRASYA İNCELEMELERİ MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR EURASIAN STUDIES

HISTORIAN AND RETIRED AMBASSADOR BİLAL N. ŞİMŞİR PASSED AWAY

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It is with great sadness that we announce the passing away of Turkish diplomat and historian Bilal Niyazi Şimşir on 20 November 2023.

Şimşir was born in 1933 in the Yılancılar Village of Osmanpazarı (Omurtag) in Bulgaria. He completed his elementary and middle school education in the private schools of the Turkish community of Bulgaria. Afterwards, he enrolled to a Bulgarian high school (Gimnazya), where he was one of the only three Turkish students amongst a total student population of 800. However, he was forced leave this high school due to the rising anti-Turkish sentiment in Bulgaria and the discrimination he faced at school. Upon these developments, in 1950, he and his family came to Türkiye as immigrants and were resettled in Gelibolu. Resuming his high school education in Türkiye after he was forced to quit it in Bulgaria due to discrimination, Şimşir graduated from the Çanakkale High School in 1950. In 1957, he graduated from Ankara Universitys prestigious Faculty of the Political Sciences and subsequently began to serve as a research assistant at the Chair in Diplomatic History of the same faculty.

In 1960, he joined the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and represented his country as a diplomat in various positions: As First Secretary and Counsellor in Türkiyes Embassies in Paris, Damascus, London, and the Hague; as Chief of Section, Head of Department, Deputy Director General, and Director General at the Ministrys headquarters; and as Ambassador in Albania, China, Australia, and South Pacific countries. He retired in 1998 after having served as a diplomat for 38 years.

His contributions during his time as a diplomat were numerous, including his efforts to have the Turkish embassies and consulates acquire permanent premises rather than stays on rent. In addition, he made efforts to reduce the embassies and consulates reliance and dependency on foreign personnel and train staff from Türkiye despite the limited personnel cadre available to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs back in the 1960s and 1970s.

Şimşirs work and success were not without many difficulties. During his active service, especially from the 1960s to 1980s, Turkish diplomats were the target of a heinous terror campaign launched by Armenian extremist organizations. Şimşir, in his double capacity as a Turkish diplomat and a historian, was a prime target for the Armenian terrorists. Fortunately for Türkiye, Şimşir survived those troubled times and managed to continue serving his country with distinction until his retirement in 1998.

In addition to his distinguished career as a diplomat, Şimşir would certainly count among the doyen of Turkish historians and certainly one of the most prolific ones. He wrote or edited more than 100 books covering a wide variety of subjects related to the Ottoman Empire, modern

Türkiye, and the Turkish minorities in the Balkans. The number of scholarly articles he authored reaches up to 250.

In fact, it can be said that it was Şimşir who introduced the publication of document collections to the Turkish historical tradition. While there may have been rare cases of publication of documents, none had been as extensive, thorough, and systematic as those published by Şimşir. As a diplomat serving abroad and historian at heart, Şimşir never failed to collect documents and material that he could gather in the countries he visited and lived. In practice, he was a successful diplomat serving and representing his country by the day, and a historian tirelessly writing and editing books and articles by the night. His ability to speak and read half a dozen languages also served him well since it was and remains a rare gift among historians.

The result of his work as a historian was an invaluable and unparalleled amount of foreign archival materials published and presented for use to the Turkish historians and public. Hundreds of historians and other scholars and thousands of books and articles have used his books and articles as points of reference, which attest to the unique value of Şimşirs works. His works cover a broad range of topics such as the Turkish emigrations from the Balkans, the Turkish War of Liberation, negotiations at Lausanne and the Treaty of Lausanne, the Aegean Issue, the Cyprus Issue, the Kurdish Question, and the Armenian Question. In addition to foreign archival materials, Şimşir also collected and published a very significant number of Ottoman and republican-era Turkish documents on a wide range of topics, once again doing an invaluable service to the Turkish academia and public.

Ambassador Şimşir was awarded with numerous awards and titles for the meticulous work he produced throughout both his professional and retired lives. For example, for his services throughout his diplomatic career and for the works he produced and the research he conducted throughout his academic life, Şimşir was awarded with the Outstanding Service Award of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye during Türkiyes Ambassadors Conference that was held on 13 August 2018.

The Turkish people and academia will always remember diplomat and historian Bilal Niyazi Şimşir with a great debt of gratitude and fidelity for the distinguished services he rendered and the invaluable works he produced for his country.

Kaynak/Source: