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A SYNTHETIC REPLY TO THE ARGUMENT “IF IT WAS NOT GENOCIDE, WHY ARE THERE SO FEW ARMENIANS IN TURKEY TODAY?”

The Armenian issue has long been examined by both Turkish and non-Turkish scholars, often within broader contexts such as Russian expansionism and the Balkan Wars. However, certain interpretations, such as those reflected in Nicolas Tahitian’s exchange with Guenter Lewy, illustrate how key aspects of the historical record have been misrepresented, leaving a central question insufficiently addressed: why did the Armenian population in Anatolia and Eastern Thrace experience such a dramatic decline?¹ Answering only on the disappearance of the Azerbaijani population in Armenia or on the collapse of the Muslim population (Turks and

¹ Nejla Günay, “Yeniköy Anlaşması’nın Ermeniler Üzerindeki Etkileri ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Rus-Ermeni İşbirliği”, Gazi Akademik Bakış, Vol. 8, No. 16, Summer 2015, pp. 63-93 ; Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile. The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995; Yusuf Sarıay, “Rusya’nın Türkiye Siyasetinde Ermeni Kartı (1878-1918)”, Gazi Akademik Bakış, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2008, pp. 69-105. ;For an example: Nicolas Tavitian, “Correspondence,” *The Middle East Quarterly*, XIII-1, Winter 2006. At the same place, Guenter Lewy forcefully replies to other objections, but not this one.

Pomaks) in Bulgaria and Greece is not sufficient. That question must be answered directly and precisely. In 1927, there were about 140,000 Gregorian, Catholic, and Protestant Armenians in Türkiye, and about 100,000 who had converted to Islam and refused to return to Christianity in 1919-1920,² while the Ottoman Armenian population was around 1,700,000/1,750,000 (mostly in today's Türkiye) in 1914.

This article is a synthesis to establish that the relocation of 1915-1916, by the Ottoman authorities, and the subsequent massacres that happened against the will of the Ottoman government, are far from being the only reasons for this drastic reduction.

I) The migrations to the Caucasus and Iran, and the Russian-Dashnak responsibilities (1915-1918)

In 1915-1916, in a context of “war in accordion” (advances and retreats, always marked by violence on civilians)³, the Russian army and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, also known as the Dashnak party) relocated to the Caucasus (mostly today's Armenia, to a lesser extent parts of Georgia) about 300,000 Armenians from Eastern Anatolia. The half perished due to lack of food and epidemics.⁴ An internal document of the Armenian Ministry of Health, written in December 1918 (seven months after the proclamation of Armenian independence), translated into French and forwarded to the Quai d'Orsay for information, similarly gives the figure of 150,000 Armenian refugees had already perished. 50,000 others fled to Iran during the First World War,⁶ also because of the war and the mutual killings.

³ Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities. The Population of Ottoman Anatolia and the End of the Empire*, New York-London: New York University Press, 1983, pp. 122-123.

⁴ Rapport de mission du colonel breveté Lesieur-Desbière, 30 mai 1919, Centre des archives diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN), 36 PO/1/8; İbrahim Ethem Atnur, *Türkiye'de Ermeni Kadınları ve Çocukları Meselesi (1915-1923)*, Ankara: Babil, 2005; Stanford Jay Shaw, [“Resettlement of Refugees in Anatolia, 1918-1923,”](#) *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin*, Spring 1998, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Spring 1998), pp. 70-71.

⁵ Stéphane Yerasimos, [« Caucase : la grande mêlée »](#), *Hérodote*, n° 54-55, juillet-décembre 1989, pp. 155-159. On the case of Van: Justin McCarthy, Esat Arslan, Cemalettin Taşkıran and Ömer Turan, *The Armenian Rebellion at Van*, University of Utah Press, 2006, pp. 176-266, 273-276 and 279-281.

⁶ Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1967, p. 67.

Indeed, after the waves of 1914-1915⁸ and 1916,⁹ a third series of massacres and arsons by nationalist Armenians against the Muslim population took place during the Russian retreat of 1917-1918. In Erzincan, eight hundred Turks were assassinated; the whole population of Ildidja was exterminated; in Erzurum alone, “the Armenians themselves stated with pride that they had slaughtered this evening [26 February 1918] three thousand persons.”¹⁰ The countryside was not spared from the killings and material destruction.¹¹

Captain Emory Niles and Arthur E. Sutherland, in charge of the most eastern parts of Anatolia for the mission led by U.S. Major General James G. Harbord, concluded in 1919, after their investigation:

“In the entire region from Bitlis through Van to Bayezit we were informed that the damage and destruction had been done by the Armenians, who, after the Russians retired, remained in occupation of the country and who, when the Turkish army advanced, destroyed everything belonging to the Muslims. Moreover, the Armenians are accused of having committed murder, rape arson and horrible atrocities of every description upon the Muslim population. [...]

Although it does not fall within the exact scope of our investigation one of the most salient facts impressed on us at every point from Bitlis to Trebizond was that in the region which we traversed the Armenians committed upon the Turks all the crimes and outrages which were committed in other regions by Turks upon Armenians. At first we were most incredulous of the stories told us, but the unanimity of the testimony of all witnesses, the apparent eagerness with which they told of wrongs done them, their evident hatred of Armenians, and, strongest of all, the material evidence on the ground itself, have convinced us of the general truth of the facts, first, that Armenians massacred Muslims on a large scale with many refinements of cruelty, and second that the Armenians are responsible for most of the destruction done to towns and villages.”¹²

Even Richard G. Hovannisian, basing his conclusions on documents from National Archives of Armenia, admits: “The frenzied troops and bands retreating from Erzurum killed any Moslems falling into their hands and burned the Turkish villages that lay in their path.”¹³

In such conditions, a new flow of Armenian refugees to the Caucasus was not a surprise. The Armenian authorities explained to Colonel Pierre Chardigny that 50,000 other Armenians had arrived in Yerevan in

⁷ Richard G. Hovannisian, [“The Ebb and Flow of the Armenian Minority in the Arab Middle East,”](#) *The Middle East Journal*, XXVIII, 1974, p. 20.

⁸ Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires. The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1918*, Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 156-158.

⁹ William Rupert Hay, [Two Years in Kurdistan: Experiences of a Political Officer, 1918-1920](#), London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1921, p. 192; Grace H. Knapp, *The Tragedy of Bitlis*, New York-Chicago-London-Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell C°, 1919, p. 146; Arnold Talbot Wilson, [Mesopotamia, 1917-1920. A Clash of Loyalties. A Personal and Historical Record](#), Oxford-London: Oxford University Press, 1931, pp. 31-32.

¹⁰ Vladimir Nikolaievitch Twerdokhleboff, [Notes d’un officier supérieur russe sur les atrocités d’Erzérout](#), 1919, pp. 6-11 (quotation p. 11).

¹¹ Francis Gutton, *Prisonnier de guerre chez les Turcs. Une captivité par comme les autres*, Paris, Bibliothèque du Comité d’histoire de la captivité, 1976, pp. 75-76.

¹² Justin McCarthy, [“The Report of Niles and Sutherland—An American Investigation of Eastern Anatolia after World War I,”](#) *XI. Türk Tarih Kongresi*, Ankara: TTK, 1994, volume V, pp. 1828-1829 and 1850.

¹³ Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the...*, p. 135.

in 1918, bringing the total to 200,000. Still, this figure was reduced again to 150,000 due to the 1918-1919 epidemics in Armenia.¹⁴ It is remarkable that no supporter of the “Armenian genocide” charge, including those who mention elsewhere a part of these facts, tries to make any comparison between the mortality rate of the Armenians relocated by the Ottoman authorities and those who have been moved by Russians and by the ARF. Monographs on the fate of these refugees remain to be written.

II) The “all or nothing” policy of the Armenian nationalists in Çukurova (1918-1922)

In a recapitulative note written in September or October 1921, the intelligence service of the French army observed that, when they arrived in Adana in winter 1918-1919, they found ten thousand Armenians exempted of relocation: “Most of them were big traders and their employees,” including “the Chalvardjians, millers” of Tarsus, who made during the World War “a considerable fortune.”¹⁵ (Not unlike the Chalvardjians, the Armenian millionaires of İstanbul and İzmir continued to prosper, for example Manuk Azaryan, briefly general secretary of the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1909, then Senator from that year to his accidental death, in April 1922¹⁶)

During the year 1919, the French repatriated dozens of thousands of Armenians in Adana, Tarsus, Mersin¹⁷ etc., in application of a decision taken by the Ottoman cabinet in October 1918.¹⁸ The scope of the repatriation was made possible by the fact that, as an Armenian historian admits, “Most of the Armenians from the province of Adana, for example, were not killed.”¹⁹ To increase the Armenian population of the region, the Armenian nationalists invited thousands of Armenians from Kayseri and Konya to come there. These refugees, who “cluttered Adana and the coastal cities,” were expelled by the French authorities to Lebanon in 1920,²⁰ during the Kemalist offensives on Çukurova, blocked by the French army, but at the price of considerable efforts.

Beside this episode, the coexistence was made problematic by the crimes (assassinations, massacres, hold-ups, rapes, etc.) of the Armenian legionnaires and of the civilians supporting them, against Turkish civilians and against Armenians opposed to separatism;²¹ as well as, by the three attempts to

¹⁴ Colonel Chardigny, La question arménienne, 30 octobre 1919, Service historique de la défense (SHD), Vincennes, 16 N 3187, dossier 4.

¹⁵ Service de renseignement de l’armée de terre, Les Arméniens de Cilicie [1921], Archives du ministère des Affaires étrangères (AMAE), La Courneuve, 399 PA-AP 184.

¹⁶ S.R. Marine, Turquie, n° 532, 4 avril 1919, Centre des archives diplomatiques de Nantes, 36 PO/1/7.

¹⁷ Colonel Édouard Brémond, État des prévisions budgétaires mensuelles nécessaires au Service de l’Assistance aux déportés arméniens dans les T.E.O. nord, janvier 1920, pp. 2-4, Archives nationales, Pierrefitte, 594 AP 5.

¹⁸ Circular of Minister of Interior Ali Fethi, 23 October 1918, Hikmet Özdemir and Yusuf Sarıncay (ed.), *Turkish-Armenian Conflict Documents*, Ankara: TBMM, 2007, p. 507.

¹⁹ “Study the Armenian Genocide with Confidence, Ara Sarafian Suggests”, *The Armenian Reporter*, 16.12.2008.

²⁰ Télégramme du ministre des Affaires étrangères au chargé d’affaires français à Londres, 14 octobre 1920 ; Télégramme du général Gouraud au ministère des Affaires étrangères, 2 octobre 1920, Archives du ministère des Affaires étrangères (AMAE), La Courneuve, P 17784.

²¹ Among many other sources: François Georges-Picot, 2^e lettre à M. Pichon, 11 janvier 1919, AMAE, P 17784 ; Colonel Édouard Brémond, Historique résumé de l’installation et du fonctionnement des services administratifs dans les T[erritoires] E[nnemis] O[ccupés] nord (Cilicie), AN, 594 AP 5 ; Jugement rendu par le conseil de guerre de la Légion arménienne, n° 70, 26 février 1919 ; Id., 6 mars 1919 ; Id., 26 mars 1919, SHD, 11 J 3073 ; Capitaine Dromard, Compte-rendu au sujet des affaires de Djamili, 16 juin 1920, CADN, 1SL/1V/151 ; Roger de Gontaut-Biron, *Comment la France s’est installée en Syrie (1918-1919)*, Paris, Plon, 1922, pp. 54-55.

to create an Armenian or Christian Republic in Adana in August-September 1920, all three being suppressed by the French army.²²

In such conditions, the Ankara agreement of October 1921, on the evacuation of the region by France, included a full amnesty for political crimes (article 5) as well as civic and cultural rights for the minorities, in accordance with the Turkish National Pact; these rights were similar to the ones guaranteed by the treaties signed in 1919-1920 (article 6), for example the treaty on minorities in Poland. The amnesty prevented any blackmail by revengeful elements of the Muslim majority, who, otherwise, could have threatened their Armenian neighbors to file fake denunciations. The inclusion of guarantees in the Ankara agreement granted France the right to intervene, yet a French consul general remained in Adana and another in Gaziantep. The only threats came from the nationalist Armenians, who wanted to prevent coexistence, because it would have undermined their claims for an autonomous Armenian territory in Anatolia:

“The events that followed confirmed that this was a slogan coming from outside, and the implementation of which no one dared to escape. On December 9, heads of the [Gregorian, Catholic, and Protestant] communities explained to Mr. Franklin-Bouillon that even those Christians who were willing to stay were forced to flee, because their life was threatened.”²³

Correspondingly, *Jogovourt*, the Hunchak newspaper in Istanbul, which had advocated for mass emigration, justified itself as follows:

“We merely bowed in front of the [opinion] of the National Council of Cilicia [the joint structure of the ARF, Hunchak, Ramkavar and churches], which unanimously decided emigration. It was in a better place than us to decide, to weigh the pros and cons.”²⁴

No attempt at intimidation from the Turkish side can be invoked: As observed by one of the main French officers in charge of the evacuation, “not a single gunshot has been fired against [Christians] during the two months of the evacuation.”²⁵ In Gaziantep, despite the fights of 1919-1921, 5,000 Armenians remained there in March 1922, relieved by the Turkish authorities.²⁶ The main difference among Adana, Tarsus, and Mersin was the presence of Armenian nationalist parties, which were less important there than in the other three cities. In total, 60,000 Armenians left.²⁷

Commissions were established in Adana and other cities in November-December 1921 to concentrate the Christian population in city centers and to take care of abandoned properties

²² Le colonel Brémond à M. Damadian, représentant de la Délégation de l’Arménie intégrale, 3 août 1920, CADN, 1SL/1V/135; Le général Dufieux, commandant la 1^{re} division, à M. le lieutenant-colonel Capitrel, délégué administratif du haut-commissariat en Cilicie, 21 septembre 1920, CADN, 1SL/1V/160 ; Paul Bernard, *Six mois en Cilicie*, Aix-en-Provence : éditions du *Feu*, 1929, pp. 87-91 and 107-108.

²³ Rapport d’ensemble sur les opérations de la commission, mars 1922, p. 6, AMAE, P 17787. On the wish to establish a national Home in 1921-1922: Jules Laroche, Note, 26 janvier 1922, AMAE, P 16676; Avetis Aharonian, “From Sardarapat to Sèvres and Lausanne. A political Diary. Part X,” *Armenian Review*, XVIII-3, Autumn 1965, pp. 64-66; Dzovinar Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire. Les acteurs européens et la scène proche-orientale pendant l’entre-deux-guerres*, Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne, 2004, p. 92.

²⁴ Extrait du compte-rendu du Service de renseignements de Constantinople, n° 16, 23 décembre 1921, p. 4, AMAE, P 17787

²⁵ Lieutenant-colonel Auguste Sarrou, « [Impressions d’Anatolie](#) », *Revue économique française*, XLIV-2, mars-avril 1922, p. 95.

²⁶ Bulletin de renseignements n° 284, 8-10 décembre 1921, 4 H 61, dossier 3 ; Rapport d’ensemble sur les opérations la commission d’évacuation, mars 1922, AMAE, P 17787

²⁷ Bulletin périodique n° 39, 5 décembre 1921-5 janvier 1922, pp. 2-4, SHD, 4 H 59, dossier 1.

with the explicit aim of inciting the emigrants to return after some months.²⁸ Until 1923, the Armenians of Çukurova, Gaziantep, and Killis were exempt from military service, and the emigrants' property was not seized.²⁹ Only a few hundred returned in 1922-1923. It was not the fault of the Kemalist or French authorities.

Gregorian Patriarch Zaven Der Yeghiayan made this interesting confession in his Memoirs: "By December 1921, Cilicia had been emptied, mainly through the support of the Hellenic government," which sent ships to take Armenians and Greeks to İzmir.³⁰ The Greek authorities later "emptied" Western Anatolia with much more violent methods.

III) The Greek scorched earth policy in Western Anatolia and Eastern Thrace (1921-1922)

The Armenians of Western Anatolia and Eastern Thrace were much less often relocated than those of Eastern Anatolia in 1915-1916. British Businessman Charlton Whittal, who settled in İzmir, wrote in 1921 (namely when he could not be subjected to any kind of Turkish pressure) that the "Armenians lived in peace and received fair treatment" in the whole "province of Smyrna."³¹ In the sancak (county) of Çanakkale, only 500 Armenians were expelled because of their Italian orientation, and they were settled in the neighboring sancak: Balıkesir.³² No Armenians were relocated from Kütahya, and, contrary to an enduring legend, no order to expel the Armenians native to this sancak exists; the only orders the governor disregarded concerned Armenians arriving from other parts of Anatolia, and he was never sanctioned for that. In Afyon, the Armenian population was about 8,415 in 1914; in 1919, it was estimated to be between 7,000 and 8,000 by the French army's intelligence service, as there were few relocations and no massacres in this sancak.³⁴ Near East Relief leader James Barton, hardly a supporter of the Ottoman government, admitted, concerning the relocations, that "there were almost none from Adrianople" (Edirne, Eastern Thrace).³⁵

It was different in Bursa due to the insurrections by Armenian nationalists along the strategic line connecting Istanbul with the Dardanelles (Çanakkale) during the battle of the same name.³⁶ However, according to the chair of the Armenian community, 7,002 were exempted from relocation only in the peninsula of Yalova, not counting those exempted in Bursa city, for example. Thousands of those who had been expelled were relocated by January 1919.³⁷

²⁸ Bulletin de renseignements n° 285, 11-13 décembre 1921, SHD, 4 H 61, dossier 3.

²⁹ Pierre Lyautey, *Le Drame oriental et le rôle de la France*, Paris : Société d'éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales, 1923, p. 190.

³⁰ Zaven Der Yeghiayan, *My Patriarchal Memoirs*, Waltham (Massachusetts): Mayreni Publishing, 2002, p. 230.

³¹ Letter of Charlton Whittal to General Townshend, 10 February 1921, The National Archives, Kew Gardens-London, FO 371/6499/2265.

³² S.R. Marine, Turquie, n° 678, 12 mai 1919, SHD, 1 BB⁷ 232.

³³ Yusuf Halaçoğlu, *The Story of 1915*, Ankara: TTK, 2008, p. 91.

³⁴ Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities. The Population of Ottoman Anatolia and the End of the Empire*, New York-Londres, New York University Press, 1983, p. 80.

³⁵ James Barton, *Story of Near East Relief (1915-1930). An Interpretation*, New York: The McMillan Company, 1930, p. 46, n. 1.

³⁶ [Aspirations et agissements révolutionnaires des comités arméniens, avant et après la proclamation de la Constitution ottomane](#), Ankara, 2001, pp. 302-304 (1st edition, Istanbul, 1917).

³⁷ Maurice Gehri, « [Mission d'enquête en Anatolie](#) », *Revue internationale de la Croix-rouge*, 15.07.1921, p. 722.

A part of them took over the properties of the Turks, claiming they were theirs, the same year.³⁸

As a result, it is quite clear that the relocation of 1915 is not responsible for the collapse of the Armenian population in Western Anatolia. A part of the local Armenians took part in the war crimes of the Greek forces as early as 1919,⁴⁰ but, as such, this is not the reason for this collapse either. After their defeats of January and March 1921, the Greek forces (including the groups of Armenian volunteers) began a policy of scorched earth: Destroying methodically what cannot be conquered and has to be abandoned to the Turks.⁴¹ It included the exile of Christians, and they were overrepresented among the artisans and traders. “During the evacuation” of İzmit in June 1921, “Armenian bands massacred several thousands Turks” and “about 20,000 refugees, Armenians and Greeks, have been evacuated, the Greeks being taken to the Ionian islands, the Armenians will probably be sent here.”⁴²

Such practices became systematic in August-September 1922. The Greek regular army, Greek volunteers, and Armenian volunteers committed arsons, plunder, massacres as much as they could, stopping only when the advance of the Turkish vanguards prevented them from continuing.⁴³ U.S. High Commissioner Mark Bristol wrote that “[Greek] villages were burned by the Hellenic Greeks as they retreated, making it impossible for refugees to be returned to their homes even after conditions grew quiet.” He was informed by the U.S. Navy that “Greek refugees all tell the same story: ‘Ordered to evacuate by Greek military or priests. Saw towns in flames after departures.’ Say fault lies with Hellenic Greeks who burned their villages.”⁴⁵ The Greek army took the Armenian population as well. In Eskişehir, “violence was used” by the Greek forces against the Greeks and Armenians who wanted to stay⁴⁶ and the French Catholic mission, very popular in the Muslim population, was demolished by the same forces.⁴⁷ The final blow was given by the fire of İzmir (13-16 September 1922),

³⁸ Adem Günaydın, [The Return and Resettlement of Relocated Armenians](#), Middle East Technical University, master thesis, 2007, pp. 38 and 40.

³⁹ Le chef de bataillon Brissaud, chef du S.R. de Brousse, à M. le général commandant en chef des armées alliées, 4 novembre 1919, p. 3, CADN, 36 PO/1/10.

⁴⁰ Rapport adressé par le colonel Mazarakis à M. Venizelos, 28 juillet 1919, pp. 2 and 6, AMAE, P 1525.

⁴¹ See, among others: Annie Allen and Florence Billings, “Report on Certain Destroyed Villages in the Turkish War Zone in Anatolia,” in [Inquiries in Anatolia](#), Lausanne, 1922, pp. 18-24 and the previously cited Gehri report.

⁴² Telegram of Admiral Mark Bristol to the State Department, 29 June 1921, Çağrı Erhan (ed.), *American Documents on Greek Occupation of Anatolia*, Ankara: SAM, 1999, p. 92.

⁴³ Capitaine Kocher, Compte-rendu synthétique militaire n° 5 — Atrocités commises par l’armée grecque en Anatolie, 27 septembre 1922, SHD, 20 N 1112, dossier 3 ; [Report on the Turkish Nationalist Offensive in Anatolia](#), by Major H. G. Howell, 15 September 1922, FO 424/255, pp. 22-24; [“Says Greeks Burned and Pillaged Turkey.”](#) *The New York Times*, 27 September 1922, p. 2 ; Grace Ellison, [An Englishwoman in Angora](#), London: Hutchinson & C°, 1923, p. 74 ; Berthe Georges-Gaulis, [« En Anatolie : la bataille et la retraite d’août et septembre 1922 »](#), *Orient & Occident*, 15 janvier 1923, pp. 33-46 ; Émile Wetterlé, [En Syrie avec le général Gouraud](#), Paris : Flammarion, 1924, pp. 84-86.

⁴⁴ Mark L. Bristol, Report of operations for week ending 10 September, 1922, part four; War diary, 19 September 1922; USS Litchfield to Bristol, September 7, 1922 Corrected copy, Library of Congress, Washington, Bristol papers, containers 4 and 76, File Smyrna, Navy Messages Received 1922.

⁴⁵ Antony Krafft-Bonnard, [Les Cinq étapes d’un drame, \[de\] 1878 à 1943](#), Genève, Imprimerie du Victoria Hall, 1944, p. 24.

⁴⁶ Copie du rapport de M. Barisach délivrée au général Gouraud, 15 septembre 1922, AMAE, P 399 PA-AP 184.

⁴⁷ Ludovic Marseille, Rapport sur les événements qui se sont passés à Eski Chehir du 27 août au 2 septembre 1922, 15 septembre 1922, AMAE, P 1380.

prepared by the Greek army, perpetrated by Armenian nationalists, and to a lesser extent by the Greek army.⁴⁸ After that, only Catholic Armenians and a small number of Gregorian ones remained in the city.

In Eastern Thrace, arsons and killings took place as well, but the decomposition of the Greek forces and even more the arrival of the French-Italian mission in Edirne prevented a systematic devastation⁴⁹

Regardless, the mission recommended in vain that the Greeks and the Armenians stay: Following the “exhortations of too zealous [Greek, possibly Armenian] agents,” they followed the Greek army, before the arrival of the Turkish one.⁵⁰ And it was not “agents” alone: The Greek soldiers pushed the [Greek and Armenian] civilians [of Eastern Thrace] to flee without delay.”⁵¹

By contrast, the British High Commissioner in Istanbul, despite his negative view of the Kemalist movement,⁵² reported: “It is fair to state that the advancing Kemalists have, so far as is known, behaved with great correctness.”⁵³ The French High Commissioner made a similar observation.⁵⁴

85,000 Armenian refugees from Eastern Thrace and Western Anatolia arrived in Greece; at least 20,000 reached Bulgaria, and several hundred landed in Marseille directly in 1922 (others arrived there later from Greece). Yet, most of these refugees could have returned. A last occasion was missed

IV) The refusal at Lausanne

In November and December 1922, İsmet İnönü, chief of the Turkish delegation in Lausanne, and other members of the Turkish delegations, told Alexandre Khatissian (former Prime Minister of Armenia) and his associates that the Armenian refugees who do not wish to live in Soviet Armenia “may return [in Eastern Thrace and Anatolia] in full confidence,” and “the Armenians can take profit of the departure of Greeks, take their place in trade and the Turks will help them to do so.”⁵⁷

Meanwhile, the French delegate, Maurice Bompard, tried (in vain) to dissuade the Armenian delegations from insisting.⁵⁸ The Armenian delegations actually claimed an autonomous territory throughout the first part of the Lausanne conference (November 1922-February 1923) and were incited to do so by the Swiss-based

⁴⁸ Maxime Gauin, [“Revisiting the Fire of Izmir,”](#) *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1, Fall 2017, pp. 31-52.

⁴⁹ Excès commis par les Grecs en Thrace [1922], SHD, 20 N 1112, dossier 3 ; Rapport de quinzaine, 1^{er}-15 octobre 1922, SHD, 20 N 1102 ; Rapport sur les événements parvenus à la connaissance du commandement de la gendarmerie ottomane, à la date du 16 octobre 1922, SHD, 20 N 1101 ; Mr. Eskine to Lord Curzon, 30 September 1922, FO 424/255, p. 11 ; Paul Erio, [« “Le Journal” en Turquie — Ce qu’on voit en survolant la Thrace »](#), *Le Journal*, 29 octobre 1922, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Albert Benaroya, [« Lettre d’Andrinople »](#), *Stamboul*, 27 octobre 1922, p. 2.

⁵¹ Édouard Helsey, [« Des milliers de chrétiens évacuent la Thrace dans le désarroi la misère »](#), *Le Journal*, 23 octobre 1922, p. 1.

⁵² Salâhi Sonyel, [“The Attitude of British High Commissioner Sir Horace Rumbold Towards the Turkish National Movement,”](#) *Bellefen*, LXVII/221, April 1994, pp. 183-210.

⁵³ [Sir Horace Rumbold to the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, 12 September 1922](#), Kenneth Bourne and alii (ed.), *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, part II, series B, volume 29, Frederick (Maryland): University Publications of America, 1985, p. 12.

⁵⁴ Télégramme du général Pellé au ministère des Affaires étrangères, 8 septembre 1922, AMAE, P 1380.

⁵⁵ Ioannis Hassiotis, [« La communauté arménienne de Thessalonique. Organisation, idéologie, intégration »](#), *Hommes et Migrations*, n° 1265, janvier-février 2007, p. 72.

⁵⁶ Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities...*, p. 129.

⁵⁷ Alexandre Khatissian, *Écllosion et développement de la République arménienne*, Athènes, Publications de la F.R.A. Dachnaktstoutioun, 1989, p. 380.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 389-390.

International Philarmenian League.⁵⁹ Lord Curzon in December 1922 and Fascist Italian delegate Carlo Montagna in January 1923 tried to defend a project of National Home, but the Turkish delegation rejected the idea, maintaining that the Armenian issue was a minority issue, not a territorial one.⁶⁰

The Turkish offer was credible. In December 1922, the Kemalist representatives concluded a deal with the Catholic Armenian Patriarchate, preventing the mass emigration initially planned by the community.⁶¹ The same month, after the resignation in practice and the departure of Patriarch Zaven (a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation), he was replaced by Kevork Arslanyan, a former Hunchakist who gave up nationalism after the failure of the three attempts to impose a Christian Republic in Çukurova and was victim of an attempt of assassination by the ARF as well as by the most radical wing of the Hunchak.⁶² Arslanyan was convinced to join the Kemalist side in 1921 or 1922 by the general manager of the Ottoman Bank, Berç Keresteciyan (Atatürk added “Türker” to Keresteciyan’s name in 1934, as an award for his exceptional services) and by a judge at the appeal court of İstanbul, Artin Mosdiçyan, who both worked for Kemalists and were looking for notabilities able to lead the Armenian masses to the new regime instead of leaving.⁶³

Keresteciyan was the honorary chairman of the Turkish-Armenian Friendship Society (Türk-Ermeni Teali Cemiyeti), established in November 1922 by the transformation of the Karabetyan Society, a semi-clandestine group of loyal Armenians who had helped the Turkish National Movement during the war of liberation.⁶⁴ Keresteciyan took part in the Society’s meeting in January 1923. Among the participants, noteworthy were the chief of police of İstanbul and Cemal Bey, former governor of Konya, whose actions in 1914-1915 were so positive that even a significant part of the Armenian nationalists praises him to this day

Yet, the Armenian nationalists did not merely refused the Kemalist offer. In November 1922, a group of such nationalists, including at least one member of the ARF, was arrested for having tried to

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 393-428 ; Letter of the United Armenian Delegations to Lord Curzon, Tolga Başak (ed.), *British Documents on the Armenian Question, 1912-1923*, Ankara: AVİM, 2018, pp. 421-422; La Ligue internationale philarménienne à Son Excellence le président du Conseil, ministre des Affaires étrangères, 2 décembre 1922 ; Le ministre de l’Instruction Publique et des Beaux-Arts à M. le président du Conseil, ministre des Affaires étrangères, 14 décembre 1922, Délégations arméniennes réunies, Aide-mémoire pour la question du Foyer national arménien, 20 décembre 1922, AMAE, P 16677 ; Antony Krafft-Bonnard, *L’Arménie à la conférence de Lausanne*, Alençon : Imprimerie Coueslant, 1923, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Ministère des Affaires étrangères, *Documents diplomatiques. Conférence de Lausanne*, volume I, Paris : Imprimerie nationale, 1923, pp. 151-153, 184 and 240-254 ; The Marquess Curzon of Keldeston (Lausanne) to Sir E. Crowe, 9 January 1923, W. N. Medlicott and Douglas Dakin (ed.), *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, 1st series, volume XVIII, London: Her Majesty’s Strationery Office, 1972, pp. 435-436.

⁶¹ Télégramme du général Maurice Pellé au ministère des Affaires étrangères, 28 décembre 1922, AMAE, P 16677.

⁶² Rapport du contrôleur général de la police, 24 octobre 1920 ; Lettre du contrôleur général de la police au commandant Romieu, 5 novembre 1920, CADN, 1 SL/1V/222 ; Mr. Henderson à Lord Curzon, 26 décembre 1922, FO 424/256, p. 2.

⁶³ Haut-commissariat de la République française en Syrie et au Liban — Service des renseignements, Renseignements arméniens, 27 janvier 1923, pp. 1-3, AMAE, 399 PA-AP 162.

⁶⁴ Silvart Malhasyan, *İstanbul’da 1922 Yılında Kurulan Türk Ermeni Teali Cemiyeti ve Faaliyetleri*, Master thesis, İstanbul University, 2005; Mim Kemal Öke, “The Responses of Turkish Armenians to the ‘Armenian Question’”, *Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey (1912-1926)*, Ankara, Boğaziçi University Publications, 1992, pp. 73-76.

⁶⁵ « [Pour le rapprochement entre Turcs et Arméniens](#) », *Stamboul*, 15 janvier 1923, p. 3.

assassinate Kemalist personalities.⁶⁶ In February 1923, after the interruption of the negotiations at Lausanne, Archak Torkomian, aka “General” Torcom, the former military attaché of the ARF-ruled Republic of Armenia (1918-1920), in the service of Greece since 1921, prepared a new Armenian volunteers units for Athens in case the hostilities would resume.⁶⁷ Then, in May 1923, when, dashing such hopes, the Lausanne conference restarted, the ARF tried to assassinate İsmet İnönü.⁶⁸ In these conditions, it is understandable that the Turkish delegation was less generous in its offer for a return in June 1923 than during the first part of the conference. Eventually, as it is known, the [Lausanne peace treaty](#) was signed in July 1923. Its articles 37 to 41 guarantee the civic and civil equality for the minorities, as well as freedom of religion and cultural rights.

Conclusion

The military casualties are not included, because there is no satisfactory study so far. Regardless, the facts exposed here are enough to demonstrate that the forcible relocation of 1915-1916, no matter how tragic it was, cannot explain the whole demographic decrease, or even most of it. The questionable care for the refugees relocated by Russia and the ARF, then the disastrous policies pursued after the armistice of 1918 by Armenian nationalists and the Greek government largely contributed to the collapse of the Turkish Armenian population, and eventually undermined the possibility for a return. Such Armenian nationalist policies continued even after 1923, for instance with the six attempts of the ARF to assassinate Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, from 1924 to 1927⁶⁹ or the participation of the ARF to a Soviet-sponsored front of Kurdish nationalists, Armenian nationalists and Turkish monarchists, against the new Republic.⁷⁰

The [encouraging evolution](#) of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan who, without exactly abandoning the “genocide” charge, admitted that many more researches are necessary and that Armenian nationalism, as well as Tsarist policies, are largely responsible for the fate of the Ottoman Armenians, allow to hope that the Armenian National Archives will be opened and that the historiography in Armenia will at least admit that the facts exposed in this articles deserve to be studied and spread to the public. In particular, Mr. Pashinyan [declared](#) in Zurich on 24 January 2025: “We need to understand what happened, why it happened, and through whom we perceived the events.” An in April 2024, Antranik Kocharyan, chairman of the Defense committee at the Armenian Parliament [stated](#):

“This is a simple goal for us to know the addresses and locations of each of our 1.5 million compatriots. It is very important for the building of our relations [with Ankara] in the future as well. April 24 is approaching. Was it 1.5 million, two million or less? It should be strictly addressed. But if we don’t record it, the other side can always say that no such thing happened.”

⁶⁶ Telegram of Admiral Bristol to the State Department, 6 December 1922, National Archives and Records Administration, RG 59, M 353, microfilm 48; [« Un complot arménien »](#), *Paris-Midi*, 1^{er} décembre 1922, p. 1 ; [« L’affaire du complot »](#), *Stamboul*, 1^{er} décembre 1922, p. 3.

⁶⁷ [« Le général Torcom »](#), *Aiguillon*, 1^{er} février 1923, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Paul Dumont, « İsmet İnönü et son temps dans les archives publiques françaises », in Hâmit Batu and Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont (ed.), *L’Empire ottoman, la République de Turquie et la France*, Paris-Istanbul: ADET/Les éditions Isis, 1986, p. 466 ; Bilâl Şimşir, *Şehit diplomatlarımız (1973-1994)*, Ankara-Istanbul: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2000, volume I, pp. 60-61.

⁶⁹ Bilâl Şimşir, *Şehit diplomatlarımız (1973-1994)...*, volume I, pp. 61-73.

⁷⁰ Gwynne Dyer, [“Correspondence,”](#) *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3, October 1973, pp. 379-382.

The Armenian National Archives, as it has been seen, contain documents on the Russian-Dashnak relocation, which will very probably be opened to all researchers, not only the nationalist Armenians.