

TURKISH ARMENIANS, THEIR STATUS AND PROBLEMS

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Abstract:

Turkish Armenians compose major minority group in Turkey. The status of the minorities was decided according to the Lausanne Treaty. Turks and Armenians have been living together more than a millennium. During their long and common histories, Turks and Armenians developed cultures having many things in common. By the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Turkish-Armenian relations were radically changed. In the republican era, the relations were normalized and the Armenians gained equal citizenry rights with the Turks and they lived in prosperity. However, the Turkish Armenians had/have some problems to overcome. This paper aims to scrutinize the status and the problems of the Turkish Armenians.

Keywords:

Minorities, Lausanne Treaty, Armenian Patriarch, Armenian Diaspora, ASALA, Armenian Theological School, Armenian Endowment

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL RETROSPECT

In classical Ottoman rule, the Armenians, like other non-Muslim subjects, were administrated according to their 'zimmi' (protected ones) status. In this system all Christians were ruled from one religious authority regardless their religious order. To eliminate the problems of the generalization, Mehmet II inaugurated the 'Millet system' categorizing the non-Muslims according to their beliefs. Therefore, the Gregorian Armenians in the empire formed the 'Armenian Millet.'

At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, according to given rights to Russia and European states for intervention on behalf of the Christians of the empire, European powers pressured the Ottoman Empire to reform its rule for the Christians.

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Wealthy Armenian Amiras, who were loyal to the state, were middleman between the Armenian society and the state. In 1847, in lieu of the complaints by Patriarch that Amiras had authority to involve into the church affairs, limiting the power of the clergy, the Sublime Porte enacted a reform program distinguishing spiritual and administrative powers in Armenian community. With this measurement, the church retained immense power in the Armenian community.¹

Especially, when the Ottoman Empire entered into the new reform period with the declaration of Islahat Fermanı, in 1956, the Armenian community, led by the church, prepared a constitution for the Armenian Millet in 1967. Amiras were not represented during the preparation of the constitution. Therefore, the amiras used their influence at the Sublime Porte and they prevented the ratification of the constitution by Sultan.²

In 1860, second Armenian constitution was prepared and it was signed by church, the amiras, Armenian intellectuals and the artisans.³ The Porte appointed a committee which members were mostly Armenians, to examine the constitution. On March 23, 1963, the constitution was ratified and a committee of ten laymen was elected to execute the constitution. On September 20, 1863, Armenian General Assembly, empowered by the constitution, convened for the first time.⁴

In the war between 1977-78, against Russia, the Ottoman Empire was badly defeated. At the end of the war, the Berlin Conference met and the conference granted autonomies for some Balkan nations of the empire. Armenians expected similar treat by European powers, but they were disappointed when they gained few at the end of the conference.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, there were some reform movements in the Ottoman Empire for the recognition of extended rights for the Armenians. Reforms movements were stemmed from the European and Russian pressures. Berlin Conference decided reforms for the

¹ Levon Panos Dabağyan, *Türkiye Ermenileri Tarihi*, (İstanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2003), p. 573.

² Vartan Artinian, *The Armenian Constitutional System in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1863*, (İstanbul), p. 82.

³ Artinian, *The Armenian Constitutional System ...*, p. 83.

⁴ Artinian, *The Armenian Constitutional System ...*, p. 91.

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Armenians. Inspectorate of the Eastern Anatolia, which included some European delegates, was formed to direct the reform movements for the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia. The inspectorate's activities were ceased when the World

War I started.⁵

Military service of the minorities was popularly discussed after the declaration of the Second Constitutional Rule. In 1909, the Ottoman Parliament decided to draft non-Muslim Ottoman citizens into army. At the same time, Istanbul's residents who were exempted before, were also obligated for the military service.⁶

During the World War I, Turkish-Armenian relations were acute. When the Turks fought for independence, destructive Armenian activities, allying with the enemies, against the Turks created turbulence in the relations. Especially, falsification of the historical incidents and propaganda campaigns influenced the Turkish-Armenian relations throughout the decades. Abuses of the history will be discussed below in this paper.

The Turkish Republic was founded base on new and modern standards and the republic modernized its minority rule. Armenians benefited Turkey's opportunities and they were also influenced by general problems of the state.

LAUSANNE AND THE TURKISH ARMENIANS

The status of the Turkish-Armenians was decided according to the Lausanne Treaty decisions. Minority rights were one of the crucial Lausanne negotiations. Minority issue was very important for the Ottoman Empire and it was also constituted the same degree of the importance for the Turkish Republic. European powers intervened into the Ottoman Empire's domestic affairs and finally disintegrated the empire mainly supporting separatist, nationalist movements of the minorities in the empire. Turkish

⁵ For more information about the reforms, see, Musa Şaşmaz, *British Policy and the Application of Reforms for the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia, 1877-1897*, (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 2000)

⁶ See Ufuk Gülsoy, *Osmanlı Gayrimüslimlerinin Askerlik Serüveni*, (İstanbul: Simurg, 2000)

delegate at the Lausanne was very sensitive against any European political maneuver to intervene into the Turkish affairs via legislating their plans regarding the minorities. For the Turks, capitulations were over and the minorities should not have superior rights in the state.

Mustafa Kemal envisioned that national interests of all should not be sacrificed for group interests. Therefore, extraordinary rights for the minorities in the Ottoman Empire should be abandoned in the Republic. The minorities and the foreigners used to have some superior economic and political rights, which were dangerous for the rest of the society. Mustafa Kemal was also aware for the protection of minority rights. Earlier, when he led the National Liberation Movement, he stated that, minorities shall not be harmed and they should be protected during the war. He considered that traditions of the Turkish people already required such treat. When Vatican wrote to Mustafa Kemal for the protection of the minorities in Turkey, he answered the message on March 12, 1921, saying the protection and just treatment of the minorities were duty for the Turk because of his humanitarian and religious merits.⁷

On December 12, 1922, the status of the minorities in Turkey was negotiated at the Lausanne Conference. Chair of the meeting, Lord Curzon of Britain, stated that in recent four months, some 600,000 to 900,000 Christians were ousted from Turkey. He was personally convinced that the allies unilaterally believed that minority rights in Turkey were not under protection. He claimed that, Armenia undertook a great burden dealing with some 1,250,000 refugees poured into the country. According to him, some three million Armenians used to live in Kars, Ardahan, Van, Bitlis and Erzurum, but recently only around 130,000 Armenians lived in same regions. Lord Curzon announced that he supported the claims for an Armenian state in Asia Minor, either in North-Eastern Anatolia or in Cilicia, in the south.⁸

At the Lausanne, British led group proposed an Armenian land in Turkey, under Turkish governor general's authority, that Armenians could practice their cultural, religious and ethnic traditions in a concentrated communal environ.⁹

⁷ Mim Kemal Öke, *Yüzyılın Kan Davası, Ermeni Sorunu, 1914-1923*, (İstanbul: Aksoy Yayıncılık, 2000), p. 247.

⁸ Levent Ürer, *Azınlıklar ve Lozan Tartışmaları*, (İstanbul: Derin Yayınları, 2003), p. 235.

⁹ Ürer, *Azınlıklar ve Lozan ...*, p. 268.

Turkish delegate at Lausanne expected that minority rights would be discussed but they were shocked by proposed plans for the establishment of an Armenian state in Turkey. On December 14, 1922, Ismet Pasha answered Curzon saying that there was not any reason why Armenians should not live in Turkey in peace and prosperity as they lived for the centuries. Any attempt to give land from Turkey for the establishment of an Armenian state was a mere political intention, to shatter the Turkish territorial integrity. He stated that Turkey had good neighborhood relations with Armenia and these two countries exchanged some treaties.¹⁰ Ismet Pasha warned the British, Frenchmen and Americans that Turkish Parliament would never ratify any resolution regarding the minority rights against the nation's sovereignty. He assured the conference participants that minority problem would be solved by exchange of the population, mainly Greeks from Turkey and Turks from Greece, and Turkey could establish her civil and citizenry rules giving necessary rights to her citizens, including the rest of the minorities. He emphasized that foreign interference in this matter only could work to topple Turkey's plans to improve minority rights.¹¹

Armenian political organizations were unified and they formed United Armenian Delegate to represent the Armenians at the Lausanne. They mainly aimed to convince the delegates of the conference for the establishment of United Armenian State, including the Soviet Armenia and bulk of the land acquired from Turkey. If this plan did not work, at least, they could pressure for the establishment of an Armenian homeland in Anatolia.¹² Armenians did not secure seat at the negotiation table but their second option was defended by European powers. On December 26, 1922, the Armenian delegation was listened by sub-committee for the minorities at Lausanne. This meeting was informal and Turkish delegation was not at the present.¹³

While the Lausanne Conference met and Armenian representatives arrived to Lausanne, Turkish Armenians established the Turkish-Armenian Friendship Association in

¹⁰ Ürer, *Azınlıklar ve Lozan* ..., p. 240.

¹¹ Ürer, *Azınlıklar ve Lozan* ..., p. 239.

¹² Esat Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi*, (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1987), p. XXVII

¹³ Ömer Turan, 'The Armenian Question at the Lausanne Peace Talks' *The Armenians in Late Ottoman Period*, (Ankara: Publications of the Grand National Assembly, 2001), p. 222.

Istanbul and they opened branches in some other Turkish cities. The Association publicly announced that they were only representatives for the Armenian community in Turkey. Armenian Karabetian society, which was formed in 1919, had aimed to oust the occupying forces from Turkey. Its founder Karabetian, who was a school director, had watched the occupation of Istanbul in tears. His organization worked with Kemalist Karakol Society during the War of Independence.¹⁴

Turkish-Armenian Friendship Association prepared a memorandum to be presented at the Lasanne Conference. The memorandum argued that decision for the Armenian relocation was made merely security concern of the state that every state had right to take such precautions, when their vital interests were threatened. The memorandum considered British and other colonizer countries' treat for their colonies no better than the Young Turks treated the Armenians. Memorandum's author Mıgırdıç Agop defended that neither Turks nor Armenians were responsible for Armenian miseries during the war. Imperialistic powers were responsible for such consequences. He also blamed the extremist Armenians, who believed in establishment of greater Armenia in Turkish territories, that they foolishly became a pawn for the imperialists. He stated that the massacres could only be explained as 'oppression of Armenians by Armenians.'¹⁵

The memorandum stated that Turkish Armenians would work for goodness of their country and they would not allow subversive Armenian activities in the name of the protection of the Turkish Armenian community. The memorandum decisively pointed out that 'the Armenian Turk sees the Armenian terrorists with the same eyes that of the Turkish nationalist. We condemn any action against the well-being of Turkey with the same Turkish conscious.'¹⁶

When the negotiators at the Lausanne pressured Ismet Pasha about minority issue, he complained that they only forwarded Christian minorities' problems not even mentioning problems of around a million desperate Turkish minorities in the Balkans and elsewhere. When Venizelos complained that the exchange of the

¹⁴ Mim Kemal Öke, 'The Responses of Turkish Armenians to the 'Armenian Question', 1919-1926', *Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, (1912-1926)*, (Istanbul: Boğaziçi University Press, 1984), p. 73.

¹⁵ Öke, 'The Responses of Turkish Armenians ...', p. 75.

¹⁶ Öke, 'The Responses of Turkish Armenians ...', p. 75.

people would create misery for the Greeks and he defended the Armenian rights in Turkey, Ismet Pasha was surprised with Venizelos' statement because the Greek side first defended the idea of people's exchange and he recalled that the Greek invasion of Western Anatolia had dramatically worsened Armenians' situation under the Greek rule.¹⁷

On December 31, 1922, Ismet Pasha answered minority questions saying that not only minorities but also the Turks greatly suffered because of the war. Unarmed Turks led a national movement in worst conditions. He pointed out that Turkish-Jews, who preferred to distance themselves from any foreign influence not allowing the foreigners use them as a tool, had very lucrative and decent life in Turkey. After the war, for sure, the Armenians and other minorities would live in peace in Turkey as they lived for the centuries. The Turks and the Armenians could cure their wounds without foreign interference. But Turkish territories could not be distributed for the establishment of an Armenian homeland.¹⁸ Lord Curzon asked Ismet Pasha that Turkey, such a vast country, could give up a piece of land for Armenian homeland. Ismet Pasha answered him saying the Turks defended their territories at a great expense not to give away any piece of it. He proposed that Britain might find place for Armenian homeland in any of its vas colonies.¹⁹

On January 9, 1923, the Armenian homeland issue was discussed at the conference for the last time. Upon Lord Curzon's repeated efforts to bring the topic back to the table, Ismet Pasha stated that he was nothing to add to his former statements regarding this matter. After this talk, proposed Armenian homeland in Turkey was never discussed again and it was not mentioned in treaty draft.²⁰

Britain and others were not sincere in their policies defending the Armenian rights. American representative to Lausanne peace talks reported Washington that 'the Allied delegates had no intention of giving genuine backing to the Armenian question under existing conditions, but continued to use the Armenians to achieve their own military and political objectives.'²¹

¹⁷ M. Cemil Bilsel, *Lozan, İkinci Cilt*, (İstanbul: Sosyal Yayınlar, 1998), p. 275.

¹⁸ Bilsel, *Lozan ...*, p. 276.

¹⁹ Bilsel, *Lozan ...*, p. 279.

²⁰ Ürer, *Azınlıklar ve Lozan ...*, p. 240.

²¹ Turan, 'The Armenian Question at the Lausanne', p. 226.

At the Lausanne, description of the minorities in Turkey created hot debates. Turkish delegate, mainly Rıza Nur, insisted that united Turkish state could apply the minority rights only for its non-Muslim citizens. He stated that for the centuries, the term for the minorities only described non-Muslims and Muslim subjects of the empire felt that they were one and the same, although there were many racial and linguistic differences between them. The British side adamantly pressured the Turks to accept the term minorities in modern sense distinguishing racial and linguistic heritage of the people. Finally, upon Turkey's persistency, the minorities in Turkey were recognized according to religious criteria, making the non-Muslims only minority groups in Turkey.

Finally, the treaty decided that, minorities in Turkey would have equal rights with Muslims. They would retain, religious, linguistic and press freedoms and their endowments would continue to function.²² At the Lausanne, the Armenians were not separately mentioned in the treaty protocol.

According to Hovannisian the Berlin Treaty recognized an international interest for the Armenian issue in the Ottoman Empire,²³ but, 'the Lausanne treaties marked the international abandonment of the Armenian Question. When their case had first been internationalized in 1878, the Armenians had taken hope, but to no avail. If in 1878 they were deprived of fundamental rights and the security of life and property, in 1923 they no longer even existed in their ancestral lands.'²⁴

Between the years 1922-27, the Armenian Church could not elect its patriarch. In 1927, after five years of recession, Mesrob I of Muş was elected as 80th Patriarch of the Armenian Church. In the republic, the Patriarch was recognized as spiritual supervisor of entire Turkish Armenian community. When Turkish Republic adopted the civil code in 1926, some minority rights, decided at the Lausanne, were automatically replaced by this general code.

After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, Turkish Armenians gained minority rights and equality with the Turks

²² Bilse, *Lozan ...*, p. 281.

²³ Richard G. Hovannisian, 'The Historical Dimensions of the Armenian Question, 1878-1923' *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, Edited by Richard G. Hovannisian, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998), p. 24.

²⁴ Hovannisian, 'The Historical Dimensions ...', p. 37.

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according to the Lausanne Treaty. Under modern minority codes and republic's great reform movements, Armenians' status, which was heavily damaged during the war, was restored and Turkish-Armenian relations were quickly

DESTRUCTIVE IMPACTS OF PROPAGANDA MOVEMENTS IN TURKISH ARMENIAN RELATIONS AND ASALA TERROR

Politicization and distortion of the historical facts seriously damaged the Turkish-Armenian relations. During the World War I, Allies' propaganda and disinformation services were pretty active to lower enemy's morale and create conflict in adverse countries. In the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian relocation movement was a perfect opportunity for abuse for the Allies' propaganda machine. The books *Treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire*, the Blue Book, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* and *sur les Massacres d'Arménie* were written for propaganda purposes. Despite these works were war-time propaganda manuscripts, relying on biased personal accounts, later, they were popularly cited by Armenian and western scholars in their works without questioning their viabilities.

Entente's propaganda campaigns won the hearts at the home and created a public legitimacy in treating the Turks and Turkey in a colonial behavior. Negative campaigns also influenced the Turkish Armenians and Armenians abroad for a lasting hatred and revenge.

Armenian Patriarch Gevond Turyan wrote series about the Armenian Church's political activities, for disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, in an Armenian paper *Dadjar*. In 1917, his writings were published in a book. His critical assessments about the church and the Armenian organizations antagonized the Armenians. Later, Turyan resided in the United States and he was murdered by militant Dashnaks when he attended to lead the Church sermon on December 24, 1933, in New York.²⁵

²⁵ Erdal İler, *Ermeni Kilisesi ve Terör*, (Ankara: Kök Yayınları, 1999), p. 67.

The Armenians abroad started political campaigns against the newly established Turkish Republic. The Armenians were, especially, active in Greece and they were in touch with the Greek officials when they launched anti-Turkish campaigns.²⁶ The Armenians supported the mutinies in early period of the Turkish Republic and they also involved into the attempted assassinations against the founder of the republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.²⁷

When Turkey tried to eliminate Armenian violence abroad, the country also wanted to monitor Turkish Armenians and their organizations to prevent them involving into the movements against the state. On May 4, 1924, Mustafa Kemal told to American press that, at the end of the Ottoman Empire, minority religious organizations in Turkey had openly pursued destructive policies against the state obtaining necessary support from the west. Therefore, these organizations, churches and schools, should be monitored by the state.²⁸

According to Levon Panos Dabağyan the Armenians are not one and the same. There are great differences between Caucasus Armenians and Turkish Armenians. According to him, Caucasus Armenians were abused by western powers in provocative acts against the Ottoman Empire. Armenians in Caucasus were also jealous of Turkish Armenians having great opportunities and higher life standards in the empire. For Dabağyan, Armenian Question is not an Armenian concern but it was/is a political tool for ambitious nations to weaken Turkey.²⁹

Dabağyan wrote that European agents and Armenian militias provoked people and they were responsible for the misery of the Armenians in Turkey. Many Armenians loyal to the state were murdered and suppressed by their militant brethren.³⁰ For that reason, Turkish Armenians were never sympathetic to anti-Turkish activities conducted by diaspora and Armenia.

²⁶ Uras, *Tarihçe Ermeniler ...*, p. LVI

²⁷ Uras, *Tarihçe Ermeniler ...*, p. LVI.

²⁸ İtler, *Ermeni Kilisesi ...*, p. 70.

²⁹ Levon Panos Dabağyan, *Sultan Abdülhamid Han ve Ermeni Meselesi*, (İstanbul: Kum Saati Yayınları, 2001), p. 82.

ASALA TERRORISM

Armenian hate campaigns turned out into the violent activities. Especially, beginning with 1970s, Armenian terror organization ASALA, abroad, committed bloodiest rampages against the Turks. The terrorists and their supporters tried to justify their activities stating that they were revenging the Turks who slaughtered the Armenians. Hate campaigns and terrorist activities highly disturbed the Turkish Armenians. The Armenians in Turkey opposed such activities because they were cruel and the reasoning was merely fraud. Besides, they did not want diaspora Armenians represent the interests of the Turkish Armenians.

In 1975, ASALA was, probably, established in Beirut. According to some press organs, ASALA's headquarters remained in Beirut until 1982 when Israel occupied southern Lebanon. Same year the terrorist organization moved into Damascus.³¹

This terrorist organization mainly targeted Turkish diplomats abroad. In many countries, guns were fired and bombs were exploded by ASALA, leaving terror and dead bodies behind them. The frenzy of the terrorism, unfortunately, widely speculated as right movement among the diaspora and Armenian Armenies. Popularly, diaspora Armenians considered that killed ASALA terrorists were martyrs and they held worship services for the terrorists at their churches.³²

Armenian terrorism did not only threaten the Turks but also threatened who did not support their views. ASALA declared that the countries, which helped Turkey militarily and economically, were their enemies. Therefore, ASALA warned the citizens of the countries friendly to Turkey becoming 'innocent victims' of ASALA's hatred.³³ Some foreign governments, for example, Canada, France, Italy, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland were warned by Armenian terrorists, because they trailed the Armenian terrorists. After seriously wounding Turkish diplomat Kani Güngör in Canada, ASALA issued a declaration warning the Canadian government not taking any action against the ASALA compatriots. ASALA threatened the French government that if they did not grant

³⁰ Dabağyan, *Sultan Abdülhamid Han ...*, p. 86.

³¹ Zafer Özkan, *Terörden Politikaya Ermeni Meselesi*, (Istanbul: Er Ofset, 2001), p. 186.

³² Özkan, *Terörden Politikaya ...*, p. 181.

³³ Özkan, *Terörden Politikaya ...*, p. 189.

political asylum to the Armenians, who seized and occupied the Turkish Consulate in Paris, there would be confrontations between the Armenians and the French government. ASALA warned the Swiss authorities that if they did not release two Armenian terrorists, they would target all Swiss diplomats throughout the world. Germany was threatened because her assistance to the Turkish 'Fascists' and Vatican, specifically the Pope, was warned because they helped the Armenian emigrants to leave Soviet Armenia.³⁴

When the terrorist attacks started, the Turkish government monitored its Armenian citizens to prevent any support for terrorist organizations. Some terrorists were trained in Jerusalem in Armenian Church seminaries. Armenian Priest Manuel Yergatian (Haig Eldemir) was arrested while boarding a plane in Istanbul for Jerusalem with four Armenian pupils. During his trial, the students testified that Yergatian taught his students hatred and militant goals of the Armenians. Yergatian denied any of his ties with terrorist organizations, but, when the Armenian terrorists seized the Turkish Consulate in Paris, exposed his tie with the terrorists when they demanded the release of him.³⁵ Like Yergatian, few other Turkish Armenians were arrested accusing help the terrorists or working to create chaos in the country.

According to the Armenian Patriarch, youngsters and the terrorists were misled by the extremists and 'they have been fed distorted views on what happened in 1915.'³⁶ In 1984, during the his visit to the United States, Armenian Patriarch, Kaloustyan stated that 'our government insures our freedom and safety and gone are some of the restrictions that had existed in the past relative to the day-to-day life of our community organizations' and he continued saying that when Armenian terrorists killed Turkish diplomats abroad, the Turkish government increased security measurements for the protection of the Armenians and their institutions.³⁷

³⁴ Michael M. Gunter, *Pursuing the Just Cause of Their People, A Study of Contemporary Armenian Terrorism*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 3.

³⁵ Gunter, *Pursuing the Just Cause ...*, p. 133.

³⁶ Gunter, *Pursuing the Just Cause ...*, p. 136.

³⁷ Gunter, *Pursuing the Just Cause ...*, p. 137.

During the Armenian terrorist attacks, Armenian professionals, academics, economists, artisans etc. in every occasions declared their well and fair treatment in Turkey. They told western scholars and the press that, Turkish state made all opportunities avail to her Armenian citizens equal to the Turkish ones.

In his testify during the trial for Orly bombers in March 1985, Simon A. Hatchinlian, professor at the Bosphorus University, stated that he freely used his Armenian name without any hesitation because he enjoyed all types of the privileges that any regular Turkish citizen had. He said that he had never been discriminated, including in the military service, and he respected the Turks.³⁸

Violence against the minorities, especially against the Greeks and Armenians, occurred during the Cyprus crisis, and when ASALA terrorists targeted the Turks and Turkish establishments abroad. Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territories, victimizing thousands and creating more than a million destitute refugees, created anger and raised nationalistic feelings in Turkey. The Armenian Church and Armenian businesses were threatened and received hate letters.

Recently, when the terror activities hit Turkey, Turkish authorities and the public did not like to identify terrorist activities as 'Islamic terror.' Some Turkish Armenians attracted attention to term of the 'Armenian terrorism.' The Armenians complained that Turkish state and public used to use this term mistakenly in place of ASALA terrorism.³⁹

CHURCH AND ARMENIAN ASSETS

Armenians had built two churches in Istanbul before the Turkish conquest of the city and they used to live in Samatyakapı, Sulu Manastır and Balat districts.⁴⁰ After the Turkish conquest, Sultan Mehmet II invited variety of different ethnic and religious groups to live in 'world's capital,' Istanbul. Notable numbers of Armenians from Anatolia, Caucasus, Iran etc. moved into the microcosm of the universe. Living in Istanbul, being the sultans'

³⁸ Gunter, *Pursuing the Just Cause* ..., p. 137.

³⁹ Raffi A. Hermonn, 'Peki ya Ermeni Terörü' *Bianet*, Paris, 12/02/2003.

⁴⁰ Dabağyan, *Türkiye Ermenileri* ..., p. 122.

hometown fellow, granted many economic, especially tax, social and political priorities. In 1461, Mehmet the Conquer transferred the Armenian religious headquarters from Bursa to Istanbul. He granted Patriarchate power to the Armenian religious leader Hovagim Yebisgobos appointing him as Patriarch of Istanbul. He led his followers for seventeen years at the Sulu Manastir.

In the history, Mehmet II's this act shall be peerless or rare. A Muslim Sultan had established a Christian Patriarch that it was never existed before. After Mehmet II's 'millet system,' Armenian Patriarch in Istanbul was recognized as the 'head of the Armenian millet.' In short, Armenian population in Istanbul dramatically increased. After the Turkish conquest, some Greek churches were converted to Armenian churches.⁴¹ Due to their hard work and appreciation of the Ottoman rule, the Armenians were called as 'millet-i sadıka' (loyal community) in the empire that no other minority group had titled so.

The Turks and the Armenians shared many commonalities in their daily lives. Cultural influences between the Turks and the Armenians were immense. The Armenians produced many famed artisans, musicians and other professionals. Many Armenian writers, poets, troubadours, composers produced their works in Turkish. In fact, a sizable numbers of Armenian populace did only spoke Turkish. Derviş Hampar, Meydani, Şirini, Mihri, Aşık Emir were some of Turkish Armenian troubadours who produced their works in Turkish. Some composer-musicians, for example; Bimen Şen, Hamparsum Limoncuyan, Nikoşos Ağa, Tatyos Efendi, Levon Hancıyan, Udi Hrant Emre were renowned 'art music' (Ottoman court music) composers that their music found a large audience. The Armenian architects built palaces, mosques and variety of the buildings in the Empire. Famous Dolmabahçe Palace of Istanbul was built by an Armenian architect, Balyan Karabet.⁴²

Turkish Armenians run 1 Patriarchate, 2 hospitals, 57 churches, 58 endowments, 19 schools, 25 chorus, 17 associations, 2 sport clubs, 3 newspapers, 5 periodicals in Turkey. Some twenty-one Armenian daily and weekly press organs were established and published in Turkish Republic. By 1995, nine of them were still active.⁴³

⁴¹ Dabağyan, *Türkiye Ermenileri* ..., p. 126.

⁴² Nejat Göyünç, *Osmanlı İdaresinde Ermeniler*, (Gültepe Yayınları, 1983), p. 73.

⁴³ See, Dabağyan, *Türkiye Ermenileri Tarihi* ...

According to the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate, there are some 57 churches and chapels administrated by 33 Parish councils in service in Turkey. Most of the churches hold services only on certain holidays because of lack of church adherents and clergy. Only twenty-five clergymen are currently available to the Armenian Patriarchate.⁴⁴ The shortage of clergymen is one of the major problems of the church. Because of non-existence of Armenian religious school in Turkey, the Turkish Armenians need to attend seminars abroad. This situation constitutes some problems and the public is not aware regarding the problems of studying abroad. The clergy, who was educated abroad, can be influenced by anti-Turkish sentiments because of diaspora's intense propaganda against Turkey.

Acquiring the Sultan's permission, in 1857, Gregorian Armenians built a church in Kınalıada. Today, this church is in service. In 1966, the Patriarch built summerhouse next to the church and Gülbenkyan Foundation built a summer camp around it for the orphans.⁴⁵

There were several Armenian hospitals in Istanbul but two of them Yedi Kule (Surp Pirgiç) and Taksim (Surp Hagop) are still in service. According to some wealthy Armenians' request, in 1833, the Ottoman government allocated the Leblebici Bostanı, one of the Sultan Beyazid II's endowments, for building Armenian hospital. A Muslim Turk Ali Necib Bey donated his lands surrounding the construction site for the hospital.⁴⁶ In 1832, Catholic Armenians opened microbiology clinic in Taksim. In 1836, the clinic was demolished and Surp Hagop Hospital was built in its place. Some forty-five houses surrounding the hospital were donated for the hospital.⁴⁷

There are 19 Armenian private lay schools active in Istanbul. Lack of students, teachers and disinterest studying in native language are major problems for Armenian schools. In 1849, the School of Gorenyan Varvayan opened in Narlıkapı and this school remained active until 1924. Yenikapı Arakeloz Hayganushyan school was opened in 1850 ran until 1939. Kumkapı Bogosyan

⁴⁴ Tessa Hofmann, *Armenians in Turkey Today*, Report for EU, The EU Office of Armenian Associations of Europe, October 2002, p. 24.

⁴⁵ Dabağyan, *Türkiye Ermenileri* ..., pp. 232-233

⁴⁶ Dabağyan, *Türkiye Ermenileri* ..., p. 304.

⁴⁷ Dabağyan, *Türkiye Ermenileri* ..., p. 312.

Varvaryan School was opened in 1832. In 1905, this school was demolished and new school building was built in its place. This school was closed in 1977 due to decreased students in number and its remaining students were transferred to Bezciyan School. Like Kumkapı School, in 1982, Gedikpaşa Surp Mesropyan, in 1980 Beşiktaş Makruyan and Nişanca Hay Avedaranagan schools were also closed, because of declined student numbers. In 1975, Hasköy Nersesyan and Kalfayan schools and orphanage were confiscated by state according to the urban development plans.⁴⁸

Armenian Balat Gorenyan, Galata Getronagan, Beyoğlu Esayan, Kocamustafapaşa Sahagyan, Üsküdar Surp Ğaç, Kumkapı Bezciyan, Bakırköy Dadyan, Feriköy Merametcian, Kadıköy Aramyan Uncuyan, Topkapı Levonayn Vartuhyan, Yeşilköy Ermeni Mektebi, Şişli Karagözyan, Ortaköy Tarkmançaz Hripsimyanz, Kalfayan, Üsküdar Nersesyan, Üsküdar Semerciyan Cemaran schools are still active in Istanbul. Catholic Armenians also run Pangaltı Mğitaryan, Samatyakapı Anarad Hğutyun, Pangaltı Anarad Hğutyun and Bomonti Mğitaryan schools. There are also 13 Armenian Alumni organizations active in Istanbul.⁴⁹

ARMENIANS TODAY AND THEIR PROBLEMS

Although the Armenians compose the largest minority group in Turkey, however, their slow increase in number threatens the effectiveness of the community. A century ago, the Armenian population in Turkey had numbered more than a million but nowadays their numbers consisted some ten thousands. Armenian population in Turkey slightly increased during the decades. In 1935, the Turkish Armenians numbered 57,000 and their population was increased less than a half almost in seventy years. Primarily the Armenian immigration abroad and conversion to Islam, especially in remote areas, were main reasons for slow increase of Armenian populace.⁵⁰

According to different estimations, some 50-80.000 Armenians live in Turkey. According to the Armenian community statistics, between 60,000-65,000 Armenians live in the country. Gregorian

⁴⁸ Dabağyan, *Türkiye Ermenileri* ..., p. 313.

⁴⁹ Dabağyan, *Türkiye Ermenileri* ...,

⁵⁰ Hofmann, *Armenians in Turkey...*, p. 18.

Armenians compose overwhelming majority. The number of Catholic Armenians is around 2,000 and Protestant Armenians are only 500.⁵¹

Vakıflı köyü in Hatay is the last Armenian village with 150 habitants in Turkey. It is estimated that several thousands of Armenians in Islamic faith retains their Armenian cultural and linguistic heritages.

Reopening of Armenian Theological Schools

In 1954, Surp Haç Tıbrevank theology school was opened in Üsküdar, Istanbul, to raise Armenian clergy. In 1969, this school was closed, mainly, due to lack of enrolled students. Reopening of Armenian theological school is one of the recent Armenian matter, which is widely debated in Turkish public too. In general, the policies of reopening the Christian religious schools revolved around Turkey's structural adjustments for the EU membership. Minister for National Education, Hüseyin Çelik announced that he was working to eliminate the obstacles to reopen these schools. His positive approach regarding the matter created great expectations among the Greeks and the Armenians.

Armenians and Greeks have different approaches for the solution. While, Greek Patriarch wants to open the school under his control, the Armenian Patriarch, on the other hand, proposes that Armenian school should be opened as a part of divinity school of any Turkish university, under the National Educational Ministry's authority. Even Mesrob II proposed to the Turkish government that such college could be opened in Urfa as a branch to the Harran University. Mesrob met Turkish foreign minister Abdullah Gül and vice-prime minister Mehmet Ali Şahin on November 20, and he explained Armenian views on the school issue. The Armenian request was welcomed by the government.⁵² The Armenian idea seemed moderate in comparison to the Greek one.⁵³

Turkish government planed to reopen the Greek religious school after ensuring the rights of election of Turkish Mufti in

⁵¹ Hofmann, *Armenians in Turkey ...*, p. 9.

⁵² *Akşam*, October 7, 2003.

⁵³ See Hasan Oktay 'Türk Ortodoks Kilisesinin Tavrı', <http://www.haberaliz.com> for more information on the debates.

Greece by Turkish minority. Turkish Minister for Education, Hüseyin Çelik visited Athens to exchange the ideas. Greek side disappointed Çelik considering that the issue of Greek religious school became an EU problem and it was nothing to do with bilateral good-will steps. Greek authorities announced that they would not let the Turks in Greece to elect their religious leader and state would appoint the Mufti.⁵⁴

Turkey's endeavour for inclusion of the EU brings minority issues to the point. When the EU pressured Turkey to condition its policies towards Armenia according to Armenian interests in the region, on the other hand, it, in many occasions, expressed its dissatisfaction with Turkey's administration of the minorities. Tessa Hoffman, a German scholar, prepared a report for EU regarding Turkish Armenians. In many cases, she awkwardly assessed the status of the Turkish Armenians in Turkey. In her report, she blamed the Turks for genocide and mismanagement of the Armenians and she overemphasized the distinctiveness of the Armenians in Turkish society.⁵⁵ Whereas, Mesrob II stated that his lobbying in the European countries for Turkey's entry into the EU, must represent Armenian community's well integration into the Turkish society. He clearly pointed out that 'Turkish-Armenians are not part of the Armenians in Armenia. We (Armenians) are Turkish citizens and we are on the same boat. If this boat sinks, we sink, too.'⁵⁶ The Patriarch advised the Europeans to listen Turkish Armenians before judging about their status in Turkey.

In 2003 spring, Mesrob II visited Europe and he lobbied for Turkey's acceptance into the EU. He planned his visits with Turkish embassies in Europe. Before him, no Greek and Armenian patriarch did spent similar effort. Former patriarchs never informed the Turkish embassies about their visits, when they traveled the foreign countries.

Minority Endowments

Status of minority endowments consists another problem for the Turkish Armenians. According to the Vakıflar Kanunu of 1935

⁵⁴ *Radikal*, 11/13/2003.

⁵⁵ According to Hasan Oktay, Tessa Hoffman probably works for German Intelligence Service and she tries to promote the idea that the Germans were not first nation who conducted the genocide, 'AB ve Ermeni Patriği Mesrob II Efendi', <http://www.haberaliz.com>

⁵⁶ Hasan Oktay, 'AB ve Ermeni Patriği Mesrob II Efendi', <http://www.haberaliz.com>

(code for endowments), all endowments, including the Turkish and minority endowments, should be controlled by the state. In 1935, the General Directorate of Endowments ordered Muslim and non-Muslim endowments' board of trustees to inform the directorate regarding their endowment assets. In 1964, while the Cyprus problem was escalating, the government warned the endowments that they could only retain the assets, which were listed in 1935. The properties, gained after 1935, should be given back to their owners. If the donator and his heirs did not exist, state would confiscate such endowments. Additionally, In 1974, the court of appeals banned the minority endowments to gain new properties.

According to adjustment laws for EU Copenhagen criteria, Turkish Parliament passed the resolution allowing minority endowments to receive newly donated assets. Same resolution opened the judicial procedure for lawsuits to claim rights on confiscated endowment assets. Lack of judicial implementations impedes such lawsuit practices, yet.

Mesrob II complained that minority endowment policy does not fit in modern Turkey's political values. While the Muslims in Europe, according to the Patriarch, established endowments freely and an European had right to donate his property even for the animals, judicial impediments not allowing a Turkish Armenian to donate his property for Armenian endowments were not just. On the other hand, Mesrob II warned that this issue was abused by some groups. He clearly pointed out that Armenian Church would not allow quasi-EU supporters to use the endowment issue to create new problems in Turkey.⁵⁷

General Problems

In general, hostile attitudes of diaspora Armenians and Armenians of Armenia, ASALA terrorism and Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territories indirectly affected Turkish Armenians. Clearly, Turkish Armenians did never approve hostile Armenian movements against Turkey. They considered that such activities were politic not humanitarian and they damaged Turkish-Armenian relations. While Turkish Armenians opposed Armenia's claims in Turkey, they did not also want to mediate between Turkey and Armenia to end the Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territories.

⁵⁷ Hasan Oktay, 'AB ve Ermeni Patriği Mesrob II Efendi', <http://www.haberaliz.com>

Armenian Olympics of 2003 is good example for Turkish Armenians' dilemma.

They did so, because they did not want to be perceived that there were political ties between Turkish Armenians and Armenia. In every occasion, Turkish Armenians declared that they were as

sensitive as any regular Turk against the Armenian occupation.

In 1998, when Mesrob II, who studied abroad, was elected as Patriarch, he was portrayed in the press as an Armenian extremist. But in every occasion, he advocated the Turkey's national interests. He moderately complained about the problems of the Armenian minority in Turkey. He paid great attention to diaspora Armenians' and foreign governments' anti-Turkish activities and he condemned such activities.

Mesrob II complained that some groups in Turkey considered him working for the interests of Armenian republic, while some Armenia's Armenians and diaspora Armenians considered him working for Turkish intelligence service. He explained his dilemma considering him at the cross-fire and, at the same time, a lover in between two lovers.⁵⁸ The Armenian Patriarch in Istanbul considered Armenia's territorial claims in Turkey absurdity of a handful people. He defended that, as an ordinary citizen, there was not any piece of the Turkish land to be given to Armenia.⁵⁹

Armenian Olympics of 2003 is good example for Turkish Armenians' dilemma. When the Turkish-Armenians attended the Armenian Olympics in Yerevan, they were discriminated by their blood brothers, who came from USA, Europe, Russia, Middle Eastern and neighboring countries. When the Turkish sportsmen spoke Turkish, others condemned the Turkish-Armenians speaking the enemy's language. Armenian International Magazine in the United States wrote that many diaspora Armenians and Armenians of Armenia considered that even if the Turkish Armenians did not speak Turkish, they were not trustworthy because they live, or they choose to live, in Turkey.⁶⁰ Ironically, diaspora Armenians who could not speak Armenian language and only spoke their host countries' languages condemned the Turkish Armenians speaking

⁵⁸ Hasan Oktay, 'AB ve Ermeni Patriği Mesrob II Efendi', <http://www.haberaliz.com>

⁵⁹ Hasan Oktay, 'AB ve Ermeni Patriği Mesrob II Efendi', <http://www.haberaliz.com>

⁶⁰ *Hürriyet*, 12/05/2003.

Turkish. A British Armenian protested that he could not tolerate to hear the Turkish language while an American Armenian justified speaking of the English was not same thing speaking of Turkish because Turkish was enemy's language. During Turkish soccer team's games, they were badly treated by their competitors. Hrant Dink commented that to prove their die-hard Armenian consciousness, Armenia's Armenians and diaspora Armenians always tend to ignore and suspect the Turkish Armenians considering them as second class weak Armenians. He also complained that the Turks also ignore the Turkish Armenians for nationalist reasons.⁶¹

Many Armenians in Armenia, especially the elderly ones, speak Turkish in privacy at their homes. To prevent foreign language speak at homes, the Armenian Language Directorate started 'our language at our home' campaigns. The authorities monitored the public places and private enterprises day and night establishing night squads to enforce the ban of speaking foreign languages.

The Armenian Patriarch reacted also against the diaspora's anti-Turkish campaigns. Due to pass of 'Armenian Genocide' resolution from House Sub-Committee in 2000, Mesrob II sent a letter to the American Congress not to pass this resolution. The Patriarch stated that the matter, which was discussed at the Congress should be discussed by historians not by politicians. He concluded that such activities never helped the Armenians, although, they harmed peace, friendship and damaged Turkish-Armenian relations.⁶²

On January 30, 2001, 90 Armenian delegates from different sectors of the Armenian community met under the Patriarch leadership to condemn French National Assembly's ratification of so-called 'Armenian Genocide' resolution. The meeting declared that historians should discuss the 1915 events not the politicians. As ordinary Turkish citizens, the Turkish Armenians can only accept their problems to be discussed at the Turkish Parliament in Ankara. This statement announced that Armenians in Turkey were as free as any Turk and they were disturbed by French attitude to patronage the Turkish Armenians.

61 *Hürriyet*, 12/05/2003.

62 *Armenpress*, December 2, 2003.

In December 2003, Pendik Municipality in Istanbul organized a meeting regarding minority problems. The director of Armenian weekly *Agos*, Hrant Dink assessed that education was primary concern to implant the multi-cultural structure in the society. He stated that the Turkish society should be proud of itself, because in this society, diverse cultures and religions had lived together in peace. But he did not agree that same thing was valid in recent history. According to him, the minorities are well treated in the society but they have some problems in relations with the state.⁶³

In sum, the Turkish Armenians, who flourished the Turkish culture, compose the major minority group in Turkey. Although, their numbers and their influence in the society are not as great as they were in the past, however, the Turkish Armenians are still important part of the Turkish society and state. Disintegration of the Ottoman Empire created great chaos for its people. The Turks and the Armenians were victims of the political consequences of the shattered empire. Today, benefits and problems of the Turkish Republic influence the Turkish Armenians equally as they influence any regular Turk. As Armenian Patriarch described, the Turks and Armenians are on board same boat, if the boat sinks, everybody losses.

⁶³ *Hürriyet*, 12/05/2003.