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FRANSIZ DİPLOMATİK BELGELERİNDE ERMENİ OLAYLARI 1914-1918 (ARMENIAN INCIDENTS IN FRENCH DIPLOMATIC DOCUMENTS 1914-1918)

Volume I; (*Les Evenements Armeniens dans les documents Diplomatiques Français 1914-1918*, volume I), Hasan DİLAN, Turkish Historical Society (TTK): ANKARA 2005, CIV+417 p. XVI. Series-Number 106; ISBN 975-16-1768-5(tk.)

BOOK REVIEW

Those who claim that the Armenians were subjected to genocide base their argument on two sources: First, the propaganda materials published during the First World War; second, the documents collected from the archives of relevant countries that have undergone a strict selection process and have been falsified to a great extent. Work of this kind has gone on for a long time. At first, Turkey tried to counter those theses by publishing, albeit belatedly, its own archive documents. Not satisfied with that, Turkey is now compiling and publishing relevant foreign archival documents as well. As part of this initiative that may prove much more effective in shaping the public opinion, The Turkish Historical Society (TTK) has published a book titled “**FRANSIZ DIPLOMATİK BELGELERİNDE ERMENİ OLAYLARI 1914-1918 c. I** (*Les Evenements Armeniens dans les documents Diplomatiques Français 1914-1918, volume I*)” [ARMENIAN INCIDENTS IN FRENCH DIPLOMATIC DOCUMENTS 1914-1918, V. I] prepared by Hasan Dilan. This is the first book of a six-volume series.¹

Publication of the French documents will be useful in many aspects. First of all, it will be possible to move the Turkish-Armenian relations beyond the “relocation” decision taken by the Ottoman government. Secondly, the war conditions will be reflected thanks to the documents belonging to France, the country that had set up the Legion d’Orient that was made up of Armenians. It will also be

¹ Volume II and III have also been published but not reviewed by us yet.

possible to demonstrate that the relocation decision was not taken without reason or with any intention to annihilate a people. Thirdly, it will be possible to demonstrate more openly and objectively than in the past that the Armenians who, despite the fact that they were Ottoman subjects, sided up with the big powers of the time and became an instrument for these powers' policies, had a responsibility and a role in the unfolding of these tragic events. France, especially, will be reminded of its own historical responsibility in these developments – at a time it is, at various platforms, arguing that Turkish recognition of the “Armenian genocide” should be a precondition for Turkish membership in the EU.

The book consists of mainly three sections: In the first section, the author gives a critical explanation of the bibliographical research method he used at the National Library of France (Bibliothèque Nationale de France), trying, in a way, to demonstrate how the Armenian Question should be taken up. In the second section, he gives a brief summary of the contents of the documents included in the book, specifying the dates and sources of the documents, so that even those people who do not know French would be able to use it.

The third and main section consists of the facsimile copies of the documents. The facsimile edition is to prove that the documents are published without any falsification. The book includes a bibliography and an index and consists of a total of 417 pages.

In the introductory chapter, the author gives a critical assessment of those publications that had been drawn up in the years 1914-1918 for propaganda purposes or for diplomatic reasons and came to be used as a reference source in some works to claim that the Armenians were subjected to genocide, as well as a number of booklets written by Turks during the same period. He compares them with other reference sources and gives clues as to his opinions about the “Armenian question”. With this way of thinking, the author tries, on the basis of the French documents included in the same volume, to refute the informational mistakes committed in those booklets. Such an effort will contribute positively to the objectivity of the studies on this issue even though this is an effort limited to the introductory level. The publications describe the basic framework of the Armenian question: the political struggle of the Armenians, their revolts and their stance during the First World War.

The relocation decision was taken under highly special conditions. As can be seen from the arguments made by the Armenian delegation that had tried to

become a party to the Paris Peace Conference, the Armenians had played a role towards --and contributed to the developments that led to-- the Ottoman government's relocation decision. The figures given by the same Armenian delegation regarding the human losses that occurred during the relocation were quite different than the figures being put forth today. Most importantly, it becomes evident that, contrary to the Armenian allegations, the Turkish side had no intention of committing genocide against the Armenians when it took the relocation decision.

It is a very appropriate choice that the author sets out by publishing the documents of the French Foreign Ministry first. This way, although priority is given to diplomatic documents, it is possible to gain access simultaneously to the documents of many other ministries as well. This is because, as I determined during my archival research in France, copies of the documents of other departments exist in the archives of the French Foreign Ministry (**Ministère des Affaires Étrangères au Quai d'Orsay**). However, it is very important that the archives of other departments too be scanned and the relevant documents be published separately. The archives of the Ministry of National Defense and the Ground Forces (**Le Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre à Vincennes**) (**SHAT**), especially, contain very important documents on this subject. These archives contain an abundance of documents on the Armenian activities in the Cukurova (Cilicia) region that should be published and thus made easily available to researchers.

Among the documents published by the author are diplomatic correspondences, informational notes, special reports, weekly information bulletins etc. The author, by deciding to publish one of the information bulletins titled, "Massacre in Armenia", has demonstrated that he acts without any hesitation or restriction. This can be seen as another sign of the soundness of the Turkish thesis.

One of the most important classifications of the French Foreign Ministry's archives regarding Turkey and, therefore, Armenia, is titled "The War" (Guerre 1914-1918 Turquie). The fact that the author begins the first volume under this title and places the section called "Syria-Palestine" under it, will help cast light on the First World War years when the relocation decision was taken by the Ottoman government, that is, the most problematic period in Turkish-Armenian relations. Other classifications by subject that would shed light on the Armenian question when they would be published are *N.S Turquie, Levant 1918-1929 Turquie, Syrie, Caucase-Kurdistan* and *Arménie*.

I hope that the documents classified under these headings would also be published as soon as possible as well as the relevant documents that exist in other French archives. Thus, a trouble that has been made to plague Turkey constantly will be removed with the help of the foreign and domestic reference sources. With the publication of this work, the author contributes greatly to the efforts already spent in this direction. Naturally, publication of documents could only be the beginning of a process. The important thing is to conduct further research on the basis of these documents and to produce analytical works in the subject area through objective and scientific methods.