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## **THE EXPROPRIATION OF CONSTANTINOPLE ARMENIANS' PROPERTY IN 1908–1924**

### ***Abstract***

Armenians and Greeks were in a dominant position and Turkish businessmen were in a less than enviable position. When the Young Turks came to power in 1908, they began to implement their plan to destroy the country's economy at the expense of Christian property. If by 1915 the Young Turks were aiming to prevent the seizure of the Armenian national properties of Constantinople, then during the First World War they began to conduct an open policy of their dispossession. The deportation, exile and murder of more than 34,000 Constantinople Armenians made their property dispossessed and facilitated their confiscation and appropriation. In 1922, following the massacre of Armenians and Greeks in Smyrna and the city's subsequent fire in September, the Kemalists sought to replicate these events in Constantinople. Despite the efforts of the allied military forces to prevent the deportation and massacre of Christians, the Ankara government remained unwavering in its stance. In its decision to deport the Christians of Constantinople, the government created a situation in the city that was so dire that it compelled the Armenians and Greeks to flee voluntarily. Following their escape, the implementation of the laws and directives passed by the Kemalist authorities enabled the government to fully seize the property left behind by the Armenians of Constantinople.

**Keywords:** *Constantinople Armenians, ethnic property, arrests, dislocation, exile, economy, Turkification*

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### ***Introduction***

Prior to the First World War, the economy of Constantinople was predominantly controlled by Armenians and Greeks. This is corroborated by the data published by Turkish historian Nedim Karayel. The aforementioned data were derived from statistical surveys conducted within the economic framework of the Ottoman Empire in 1915. These surveys indicate that 95–96% of businessmen and craftsmen in the Constantinople, Aegean, Black Sea, and Mediterranean regions were of Armenian and Greek nationality.<sup>1</sup> As evidenced in one of the documents from the political archives of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during this same period, there was a notable absence of Turkish importing merchants<sup>2</sup> in Constantinople. In 1913, Grigor Zohrap set forth a prognosis, regarding the prospective actions of the Turks, who had been unsuccessful in the economic competition. However, neither governmental assistance nor judicial partiality could provide the Muslim population with a standard of living that the Christian population had achieved through hard work. The objective of the pogroms was to impede the activities of the Christian population, even to the extent of compelling them to leave the country, thereby ensuring that their influence remained with the Turkish population. It seems inevitable that the land issue in Turkish Armenia will resurface. The massacres in Turkey would not be perceived as accidental disasters; rather, they would be regarded as economic phenomena, to which the Turkish Government gave a green light'.<sup>3</sup> The Young Turks and later Kemalist authorities sought to eliminate their formidable rivals. To displace the Christians from their positions of influence, to destabilise the economy and impoverish them, they employed the very tactics foreseen by Grigor Zohrap.

### ***Confiscation of the estates belonging to the Armenians of Constantinople in 1908–1914***

In their struggle against the Abdul Hamid dictatorship, prominent Young Turks proclaimed that those who were deprived of their land in one way or another, would be reinstated as landowners in order to garner the support of the

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<sup>1</sup> The source of the present Turkish capital is the Armenian and Greek property <https://akunq.net/am/?p=42354> (retrieved December 19, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Gust 2005, 256.

<sup>3</sup> Zohrap 2002, 531–532.

masses. However, following their assumption of power, they not only failed to fulfil their promises and did not return the lands confiscated from the Armenians during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, but, conversely, they contributed to the continued seizure of their lands even after the re-promulgation of the Ottoman constitution. It is evident that the intention of the Young Turks was to deprive the Armenians of their properties.<sup>4</sup> Only in 1913, Turkish landowners and Kurdish beys seized 30.000 peasant plots from Armenians.<sup>5</sup> The Armenians of the capital were also subjected to these land confiscations. They had become the proprietors of numerous immovable estates, including shops, buildings, hotels, restaurants, cultivable lands, and so forth, due to their economic prosperity. In 1914, the French "Annuaire Oriental"<sup>6</sup> reflected the economic life of the Ottoman Empire. The yearbook presented a list of 123 Armenian khans, multi-apartment buildings and palaces for rent. Armenian churches of the capital, charitable institutions the number of private estates in Constantinople belonging to province was 2.000.<sup>7</sup> The Young Turkish authorities in Western Armenia, Cilicia and the Armenian-inhabited regions of the Ottoman Empire primarily expropriated individual lands. In contrast, in the capital, they encroached upon nationally owned immovable estates, which enabled the continued functioning of Armenian churches, schools, hospitals and charitable institutions.

In 1908, following the Young Turk coup, the Turkish government initiated a process of confiscation of real estate owned by national waqfs on the grounds of alleged illegality. The churches and other national institutions of all the Armenian neighborhoods of Constantinople faced this problem.<sup>8</sup> In the Ottoman Empire, waqf real estate arose from donations. These properties were exempt from state taxes and duties, safeguarded from encroachment by secular authorities, and the income generated from them was allocated for the benefit of the church or charitable causes.<sup>9</sup> The administration of the estates was typically delegated to prominent clergymen or secular figures<sup>10</sup> with significant influence within the community. They were registered in their name. If in the previous Turkish

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<sup>4</sup> **Hambaryan** 1979, 48–105.

<sup>5</sup> **Kirakosyan** 1965, 55.

<sup>6</sup> *Annuaire Oriental* 1914, 1294–1303.

<sup>7</sup> *Zhamanak* № 1548, 15–28.5.1914, Constantinople, 2:

<sup>8</sup> **Andreasyan** 1912, 1.

<sup>9</sup> **Hambaryan** 2003, 328–329.

<sup>10</sup> **Marukyan, Gasparyan, Astoyan, Voskanyan** 2021, 13.

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regimes, the actions of transferring estates following the death of the original proprietors did not give rise to significant issues. However, the Young Turkish authorities recognised these estates as unclaimed and proceeded to confiscate them. The Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople had been negotiating with the Turkish authorities for years to facilitate the transfer of the national estates but the authorities, causing new difficulties persisted in confiscating these estates.<sup>11</sup>

"As a consequence of these incursions, a considerable number of national estates were lost. The Ottoman letter house, with an estimated value of 30.000–35.000 Ottoman gold,<sup>12</sup> which was registered in the name of Patrik Kyulpenkyan and belonged to St. Savior National Hospital in Galatia, was expropriated. The value of the national estates confiscated in the last few years was 100.000 Ottoman gold. The fertile farm belonging to the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem had 2.000 donums (200 hectares) of land, each of which was sold for 60 Ottoman gold, and thus the Armenian community of Constantinople had another 120.000-gold confiscated.<sup>13</sup> Prior to the expropriation of this farm, another estate belonging to Jerusalem, located in the Gum Gabu district,<sup>14</sup> had also been lost. The Armenians of Constantinople also lost Khastakhane Khan,<sup>15</sup> which was valued at 25,000 Ottoman gold,<sup>16</sup> along with the estates of St. Nicholas Church in Top-Gabu.<sup>17</sup>

Since the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid B the Bankalti Armenian cemetery founded in 1560 had been a subject of harassment.<sup>18</sup>

Under the pretext of carrying out construction, the municipality of Constantinople demanded from the national authorities to provide it with the transfer of 7.200 sq. km of cemetery land.<sup>19</sup> In contravention of the assurances proffered by the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Justice that the cemetery would be spared, the municipality initiated the demolition of the cemetery wall, graves, and the surrounding Armenian shops on 8 February 1912. This action

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<sup>11</sup> "Zhamanak", № 834, 30.6–13.7.1911.

<sup>12</sup> **Surenean** 1913, 1.

<sup>13</sup> "Zhamanak", № 1035, 17.12–1.3.1912.

<sup>14</sup> "Arevelk", № 7301, 30.4.1910.

<sup>15</sup> "Heradzayn", № 10, 1–14.2.1913.

<sup>16</sup> **Kechean**, 1912, 1.

<sup>17</sup> "Zhamanak", № 1822, 27.5–9.6.1914.

<sup>18</sup> **Miroglu** 2008, 87.

<sup>19</sup> "Rahviray", № 15, 22.2–9.3.1912.

provoked a vehement response from the Armenian community.<sup>20</sup> Following protracted negotiations, the municipality of Constantinople compelled the Armenian authorities in Constantinople to relinquish the demanded portion of the cemetery, which was valued at 15.000 Ottoman gold.<sup>21</sup>

In order to construct a road from Bera to Sisli, the Viceroyalty of Constantinople commenced the demolition of the Armenian cemetery of Khasgyugh without prior consultation with the Armenian national authorities, resulting in the scattering of the bones of the deceased. In response to the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople's objections to these illicit actions, the Viceroyalty of Constantinople compelled the Armenian authorities to relinquish 4.500 of the 80.000 sq. m. area. The Patriarch petitioned His Holiness the Patriarch for permission to perform the ritual burying the bones of the deceased.<sup>22</sup> If the municipality paid<sup>23</sup> 15.000 Ottoman gold for the Armenian cemetery of Bankalti, then the government refused to provide the previously promised monetary compensation<sup>24</sup> for the area of the Khasgyugh cemetery. The encroachments on the Armenian cemeteries of Constantinople continued. The Turkish authorities in Scutar district made a demand to the authorities of Surb Khach in order to carry out construction, they were obliged to give up one of the areas<sup>25</sup> of the Armenian cemetery in Scutar. The Armenian cemetery of Peshiktash was also facing the imminent threat of expropriation.<sup>26</sup>

In 1908–1914 the confiscation of immovable estates of the Armenian community of Constantinople was the beginning of the process of dispossession of the Armenians of Constantinople orchestrated by the Young Turkish authorities, which would gain momentum during the First World War.

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<sup>20</sup> "Rahviray", № 4, 9–22.2.1912.

<sup>21</sup> "Zhamanak", № 1035, 17.2–1.3.1912.

<sup>22</sup> National Archives of Armenia, The Library of Catholicos of All Armenians, fund 57, list 2, patt 1, № 335.

<sup>23</sup> National-Armenian news "Rahviray" № 8, 14–27.2.1912.

<sup>24</sup> "Zhamanak", № 1822, 27.5–9.6.1914.

<sup>25</sup> "Zhamanak", № 1812, 13–30.5.1914.

<sup>26</sup> "Zhamanak", № 1019, 12–30.1.1912.

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### ***The Expropriation of the Property of Constantinople Armenians in 1915–1918***

The persecutions, arrests, deportations and confiscation of the property of Constantinople Armenians commenced in 1915, during the First World War, and continued throughout the initial months. In February, the government initiated the confiscation of both movable and immovable assets belonging to Armenian churches in Constantinople, as well as those of affluent Armenians and the goods of Armenian merchants.<sup>27</sup> Following the arrest and exile<sup>28</sup> of a select group of Western Armenians on 24 April, the arrests and deportation of Armenians from Constantinople became a large-scale operation. On average, 30 to 40 Armenians were apprehended and detained<sup>29</sup> on a daily basis, while an equivalent number of individuals who had been imprisoned were released and deported from the city<sup>30</sup> to an undisclosed destination. The Armenian population of Constantinople, terrified by the unfolding events, awaited the verdict with bated breath. The Armenian merchants who had settled in Constantinople were the first to be arrested. The valuable church furnishings that had been taken from the province were transported to the capital city and sold. Similarly, the Armenian infants who had been snatched from their mothers were brought to the capital and sold.<sup>31</sup> In September, 10,000 Armenians residing in Constantinople were forcibly displaced and killed in the mountains of Nicomedia. The shores of Constantinople were inundated with the corpses of Armenians and Greeks, which continued to float incessantly.<sup>32</sup> The city was divided into hundreds of circles and each circle was surrounded by many groups of disguised policemen. The searches and arrests that occurred during the nighttime instilled a pervasive atmosphere of fear and terror. In a relatively short period of time, all males over the age of 15 were arrested. These groups committed kidnappings and robberies. In October, more than 8,000 migrant Armenians<sup>33</sup> were exiled from the city. Famous provincial merchants Maruke Ibranosyan from Amasia, Karapet Kherpekyan and Garegin

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<sup>27</sup> "Kochnak" № 8, 20.2.1915.

<sup>28</sup> **Teodik** 1919, 1–128.

<sup>29</sup> "Hayastan" № 56, 23.9.1915.

<sup>30</sup> "Kochnak" № 49, 4.11.1916.

<sup>31</sup> **Rene Pinon** 1919, 31.

<sup>32</sup> "Kochnak", № 38, 18.9.1915.

<sup>33</sup> "Kochnak", № 44, 30.10.1915.

Aramyan from Karin, Smbat Grgyan from Baghish and others<sup>34</sup> were arrested. Gangster groups called "National Defense Committee" were engaged in criminal activities, including robbery, in the city of Constantinople. Upon entering any Armenian establishment, the perpetrators would seize whatever they desired.<sup>35</sup> In September, the government proceeded to confiscate all movable and immovable properties belonging to Armenian institutions. The Armenian girls and women of Constantinople were subjected to forced Turkification and subsequently sent to Turkish harems.<sup>36</sup> Despite the continued operation of Armenian-owned businesses, the majority of their goods was confiscated. In November, the majority of Armenians from the provinces were forcibly displaced. It was anticipated that mass deportations of Constantinople Armenians would occur.<sup>37</sup> As reported by the Turkish newspaper Tan, sealed letters were sent to the police with the phrase "On Armenians." The instructions pertained to the mass killings of Armenians resident in Constantinople. The envelopes were to be opened in accordance with specific instructions.<sup>38</sup> The Pope of Rome, being aware of the impending deportation and massacre of Christians in Constantinople, addressed and appealed to the German and Austro-Hungarian chancellors, declaring that if they did not intervene to prevent these massacres, they would be directly responsible for them.<sup>39</sup> In contrast with the appeals made by the Pope and others in defence of Constantinople Christians, the arrests and deportations of Constantinople Armenians persisted.<sup>40</sup> Turkish historian Taner Akcam, presenting Turkish and German official documents, claims that the deportation of all Constantinople Armenians was planned, but it was not carried out due to Germany's initial pressure on the Young Turk authorities and because of the subsequent course of the war for the Ottoman Empire. 34.000 Constantinople Armenians<sup>41</sup> were displaced in 1915. British diplomatic sources indicate that the arrests and exile<sup>42</sup> of the Armenians of Constantinople were still ongoing in March 1916. As evidenced

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<sup>34</sup> **Chormisean** 1975, 376.

<sup>35</sup> "Hayastan", № 47, 22.8.1915.

<sup>36</sup> "Kochnak", № 39, 15.9.1915.

<sup>37</sup> "Armenia", № 17, 24.11.1915.

<sup>38</sup> "Kochnak", № 42, 16.10.1915.

<sup>39</sup> "Kochnak", № 31, 31.7.1915.

<sup>40</sup> "Kochnak", № 46, 19.11.1915.

<sup>41</sup> **Akcam** 2015, 493–494.

<sup>42</sup> **Viscount James Bryce** 1919, 53.

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in official Turkish documents, the arrests and exile continued until the summer months of 1916. Tens of thousands of Armenians displaced from Constantinople were compelled to relinquish all their possessions, including footwear, to the gendarmes.<sup>43</sup>

If in the center of Constantinople Armenians were displaced step by step, then the Armenians of the Armenian-inhabited villages located on the shores of the Black and Marmara seas, which are part of the city, were displaced en masse, i.e. the Armenians of Buyuk Dere and Sarriear villages.<sup>44</sup> By concealing the deadline set by the government and with the intention of realizing their personal interest, the chief of the police and other officials of Buyuk Dere gave Armenians a brief period of time to comply. Consequently, the displaced population was compelled to relinquish their belongings, including furniture, and depart. Subsequently, their abandoned properties were looted, and the hidden goods were discovered with special tools and appropriated.<sup>45</sup> In 1915–1916, the Armenian population of Gartal village was forcibly displaced, with a significant part of the village being burned to the ground and the school building being appropriated by the local authorities. The people in the village of Alemtagh, exclusively populated by Armenians, were also forcibly displaced, and all the property of the villagers was confiscated.<sup>46</sup>

As was the case everywhere, the deportations of Armenians from Constantinople were accompanied by the robbery, confiscation and appropriation of their property. This was a key objective of the Armenian genocide.

### ***Dispossession of the Armenians of Constantinople in 1922–1924***

On 9 September, the day following the capture of Smyrna by the Kemalist forces, large-scale demonstrations commenced in the Constantinople neighborhoods. Passing by Greek and Armenian houses and institutions, the Turkish mob threw stones at them, threatened them with death, demolished and destroyed everything in its path. The mob left behind stoned houses, shops, churches, wounded and killed. The police were unable to prevent these horrific

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<sup>43</sup> Akcam 2015, 493–494.

<sup>44</sup> Jakobean 2016, 539.

<sup>45</sup> Papazyan 1988, 174:

<sup>46</sup> Jakobean 2016, 597–598.



actions which lasted for two days and nights.<sup>47</sup> The Kemalist army in Izmit was prepared and poised for the signal to advance on Constantinople. It was intended that a repetition of the Smyrna disaster should occur, namely the massacre of the Armenians and Greeks of Constantinople and the subsequent setting the city on fire. The representatives of the allied armed forces were deeply concerned about the situation<sup>48</sup> in the city. In Constantinople, a clandestine organisation was responsible for the distribution of weapons to the Turks with the objective of inciting a riot, massacre and robbery of Christians. In order to forestall the advance of the Kemalist army and the deportation and massacre of the Christians, the British army disembarked on the shore. However, the situation was still alarming. The families of the British military abandoned the capital. In 1915 the Armenians of Constantinople were in a deadly trap.<sup>49</sup> The dire circumstances compelled the Christian population to flee the city.<sup>50</sup> By reinforcing the defense<sup>51</sup> of Constantinople, the English authorities were able to prevent the massacre and displacement of the Christian population in the city, but the Grand Assembly of Ankara was resolute in its decision to expel non-Muslim population from the country.<sup>52</sup> Turkish newspapers deliberately and consistently reported that Christians would imminently be deported from the capital.<sup>53</sup> Some Turkish newspapers voiced their concern, regarding the departure of Armenians and Greeks from Constantinople, citing the potential for adverse economic consequences for the country. Nevertheless, the primary propaganda disseminated by Turkish newspapers was that the city should be "cleansed" of Christians.<sup>54</sup> The situation rapidly deteriorated, prompting many residents to evacuate the city before they could sell their houses.<sup>55</sup>

In the December issue of the Turkish newspaper *Igtam* (1922), it was reported that at the Lausanne conference, the Pope of Rome presented the

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<sup>47</sup> "The Voice of the People–Zhamanak", № 1197, 12.9.1922.

<sup>48</sup> "Arev", № 59, 13.9.1922.

<sup>49</sup> Barekamd, "Hayastani Kochnak", № 44, 4.11.1922.

<sup>50</sup> **Hrach Yeruand** "Fight", № 269, 19.11.1923.

<sup>51</sup> "Verjin Lur" № 2598, 20.9.1922.

<sup>52</sup> **Angeghatci**, "Verjin Lur" № 2648, 17.11.1922.

<sup>53</sup> **Galpakchean**, "Verjin Lur", № 2647, 16.11.1922.

<sup>54</sup> "Chakatamart", № 3066, 14.12.1922.

<sup>55</sup> The Matenadaran named after M. Mashtots, Arshak Alpoyachayan's fund file 48, doc. 66/1242.

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alarming situation of Christians in Constantinople. He highlighted that, in addition to local Christians, Europeans and their religious institutions were also at risk. The Pope of Rome voiced his concern for the Armenians of Constantinople, emphasizing their status as the most vulnerable demographic in the city.<sup>56</sup> In November 1922, the Sultanate government resigned, the Kemalites assumed control, and as a result, the Christian population began to flee the city at a greater rate.<sup>57</sup> The docks of Constantinople and the ships leaving the country were full of refugees. The Kemalist authorities enacted a prohibition on the export of gold from the country.<sup>58</sup> As reported by the Turkish *Aksham* newspaper, Armenian and Greek merchants sold their goods at half price and subsequently departed from the country.<sup>59</sup> However, it is notable that they frequently chose to abandon the city, leaving their shops fully stocked.<sup>60</sup> Along with Armenian merchants and artisans a large number of Armenian intellectuals<sup>61</sup> were leaving Constantinople. In his interview with the Turkish "*Tehvit*" newspaper, Zaven Ter-Yeghiayan, the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, stated that by the end of November 1922, 15.000 Armenians had already left the city.<sup>62</sup> Contrary to the assurances of the authorities that the Armenians of Constantinople should not be displaced, with its anti-Armenian publications the Turkish press kept the Armenians in a constant state of panic. The situation was further exacerbated by the introduction of new legislative measures and directives that limited the rights of Christians. The Christians of the city were prohibited from selling or transferring their properties in exchange for a mortgage. A draft law was under discussion that would require Christians remaining in Constantinople to relinquish half of their estates to the government for the benefit of the Turkish population of Asia. At the Lausanne conference, the Turkish delegation proposed the imposition of a war tax of 40% on all property belonging to Christians in Constantinople. Furthermore, they advanced the idea of compulsory military service for Christians, anticipating that many would flee the country to avoid it.<sup>63</sup> In accordance with the decree issued by

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<sup>56</sup> "*Verjin Lur*", № 2668, 11.12.1922.

<sup>57</sup> "*Hayastani Kochnak*", № 45, 11.11.1922.

<sup>58</sup> "*Hayastani Kochnak*", № 46, 18.11.1922.

<sup>59</sup> "*Chakatamart*", № 3003, 01.10.1922.

<sup>60</sup> "*Chakatamart*", № 3070, 19.12.1922.

<sup>61</sup> "*Hayastani Kochnak*", № 44, 28.10.1922.

<sup>62</sup> "*Chakatamart*", № 3056, 02.12.1922.

<sup>63</sup> P'awstos Buzand, "*Hayastani Kochnak*", № 4, 27.01.1923.

the Kemalist authorities, Christians were compelled to pay a specific ransom in order to be exempted from military service and to be granted the privilege of emigration.<sup>64</sup>

Those fleeing from Constantinople transferred their estates and property to their relatives. However, according to the instructions prepared by the commissions of abandoned properties operating in provinces, the estates transferred to relatives were classified as abandoned properties and subject to confiscation. In these acts of transfer, only the wife, mother, and children can be considered the rightful owners. Furthermore, transfers to siblings, including brothers, could not be considered legally valid.<sup>65</sup>

In January, 1923 10.000 abandoned immovable estates of Christians were recorded in Scutar and Bera districts alone, which were already being sold at an auction.<sup>66</sup> According to the Turkish Aksham newspaper, as of November 16, 1923 the flight of Armenians and Greeks from Constantinople continued. The chairman of the gold commission Farug bey informed the newspaper that in the last few days, this commission had already confiscated the gold stores of the Armenians in the Mets Bazar. The Armenian olive grove of Taricha with 30.000 olive trees was also captured, as was, Tuzlay with 4.500 olive trees.<sup>67</sup>

In order to dispose of properties left by Christians, the Turkish authorities enacted a series of laws and decrees. On 14 September 1922, the Kemal authorities announced that they did not accept the document<sup>68</sup> on the invalidity of the temporary law "On Abandoned Properties", which had been adopted by the Sultanate government. On 31 October 1922, the Great Assembly of Ankara introduced amendments to the statute regulating the rules and forms of the Abandoned Property Commissions, as originally enacted on 26 October 1915. In accordance with the aforementioned alterations, the movable and immovable assets of individuals who departed the country prior to and following the conflict and resided in foreign territories were nationalised within a four-month period. As the individuals in question originated from disparate geographical regions and sought the return of their assets, on 28 June 1923, the Great Assembly of Ankara

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<sup>64</sup> "Hayastani Kochnak", № 13, 31.03.1923.

<sup>65</sup> "Chakatamart", № 3076, 26.12.1922.

<sup>66</sup> "Hayastani Kochnak", № 3, 09.01.1923.

<sup>67</sup> "Chakatamart", № 3357, 16.11.1923.

<sup>68</sup> **Barseghov** 1999, 14.

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introduced amendments to the legislation passed on April 15, 1923 which rejected any claims made by individuals who were not Muslim.<sup>69</sup> On 29 March 1923, the Grand National Assembly of Ankara enacted a new law on the disposition of abandoned properties, belonging to individuals who had fled from Constantinople and other cities. The law established the Abandoned Property Commission as the authority responsible for administering these properties.<sup>70</sup> The Abandoned Property Commissions, established by the Kemalist authorities on 15 April 1923 in accordance with the 333 Law, were tasked with the liquidation of properties belonging to Armenians and Greeks. The enactment of this law saw the Kemalists adopt the policy<sup>71</sup> previously implemented by the Young Turks in its entirety. In May 1923, the Abandoned Properties Commission issued new instructions to individuals who had departed from Constantinople regarding the administration of both immovable and movable assets. These instructions enabled the incorporation of additional state structures for the accounting and confiscation<sup>72</sup> of properties abandoned by those who had left. In November 1924, the Turkish authorities directed the Constantinople Viceroyalty to implement the recently adopted legislation, which stipulated that the city's abandoned properties were to be allocated to non-Christian individuals<sup>73</sup> affected by the war. On 16 August 1925, the Turkish authorities began to confiscate the bank accounts<sup>74</sup> of Armenians and Greeks, and in order to give a "legal" basis to the appropriation of property left by Christians, the Kemalist authorities passed 9 laws<sup>75</sup> "On Abandoned Properties" between 1922 and 1929.

In accordance with the Treaty of Lausanne, the Turkish authorities accepted that the abandoned properties confiscated by them would be returned to the owners, if they were still alive, or to their heirs. That problem was regulated by various articles of the Treaty. According to the third paragraph of Article 65 of the Treaty of Lausanne, in order for such a person to be able to exercise his right, he should have been near his property as of August 6, 1924. In order to prevent the implementation of the articles of the Treaty of Lausanne, the Kemalist

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<sup>69</sup> Uğur Ümit Üngör and Mehmet Polatel 2011, 52.

<sup>70</sup> "Chakatamart", № 3060, 19.12.1922, Constantinople, 3.

<sup>71</sup> **Onaran** 2010, 172–174.

<sup>72</sup> "Chakatamart", № 3217, 31.5.1923, Constantinople, 2.

<sup>73</sup> "Zhamanak", № 5155, 15.11.1924, Constantinople, 2.

<sup>74</sup> "Zhamanak", № 5421, 16.8.1925, Constantinople, 3.

<sup>75</sup> Uğur Ümit Üngör and Mehmet Polatel 2011, 124, 145–146.

authorities passed laws prohibiting the entry of Armenians into the country. They even banned the movement of Armenians within the country, with the aim of “preventing any Armenian or heir of a murdered person from coming and receiving his property”.<sup>76</sup> The Turkish authorities also forced the Armenian community of Constantinople to renounce the rights<sup>77</sup> of national minorities recorded in the Treaty of Lausanne.

The Christians who went abroad from Constantinople and then returned to the city were arrested by the Turkish police, after which they were either expelled from the country or charged.<sup>78</sup> In 1923 the Turkish periodical “İleri” wrote in one of its May issues that Christians were regularly crossing the border of the country and returning to Constantinople. Calling them traitors and enemies, the newspaper reported that another group of Armenians had been expelled from the country.<sup>79</sup> In September 1924, some of the rich Armenians who had fled Constantinople returned to the country with the help of intermediaries and bribes in order to become the owners of their property worth millions.<sup>80</sup> The return to the country of the well-known businessmen of the Constantinople market, Garnik Sepuhyan, Nasip Chezvechyan, Penon Teirmenchyan and Levon Kyumushkertan, was widely reported in Turkish newspapers, which described it as illegality and forgery. The chief of police in Constantinople promised to look into the matter. Before the investigation had even begun, the rich Armenians were expelled from the country<sup>81</sup> by order of the Ministry of the Interior.

On 23 May 1927, the Republic of Turkey passed a law that completely excluded the possibility of the return of Armenians to their historic homeland. According to that law, the executive power authorized to consider as deprived of Turkish citizenship those subjects of the Ottoman Empire who did not participate in the national struggle during the war of independence, who were outside the country and who did not immigrate to Turkish territory between 24 July 1923 and

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<sup>76</sup> **Taner Akcam** Referring to the laws of abandoned property both the Ottoman and republican governments have always reiterated the fact that their real owners are Armenians. <http://akunq.net/am/?p=26815> (last retrived 10.01.2024).

<sup>77</sup> **Ghasabyan**, 1998, 32.

<sup>78</sup> “Hayastani Kochnak” № 46, 11.12.1923.

<sup>79</sup> “Chakatamart”, № 2317, 31.05.1923.

<sup>80</sup> “Yusaber” № 7, 17.04.1924.

<sup>81</sup> “Yusaber” № 8, 18.04.1924.

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the adoption of this law.<sup>82</sup> In 1929, the new directive even allowed for the confiscation of the property of anyone travelling with a passport issued by the Kemalist authorities.<sup>83</sup>

The following examples provide an approximate idea of the extensive dispossession of the Armenian population of Constantinople. Abraham Pasha Yeremyan was one of the Armenians who became renowned for his considerable wealth. He owned the forests that extended along both sides of the Bosphorus and reached the Black Sea. These forests were expropriated by Enver Pasha.<sup>84</sup> In 1919, Abraham Pasha's wife initiated legal proceedings to reclaim the farms that had been seized from Enver's wife, Hajie Sultan. However, this initiative was unsuccessful.<sup>85</sup> The Azaryan family was among the most affluent of the Armenian population of Constantinople. As documented in the French bulletin *Annuaire Oriental*, the Azaryans possessed eight estates, private residences, and khans<sup>86</sup> within the city of Constantinople. They engaged in import and export activities on their own vessels, namely the steamships *Armenia* and *Massachusetts*, and travelled on their own steamship, the *Ararat*. In 1925, the Turkish authorities confiscated the entirety of the Azaryan family assets. Two of their impressive edifices are currently serving as Turkish museums. Until 1979 the Azaryans tried several times to regain possession of their property, but to no avail.<sup>87</sup> The Ibranosyan trade-industrial institution had 52 branches in the provinces, and 5 agencies in Europe.<sup>88</sup> The brothers were the proprietors of the Armenian steamship company "The Ibranosyan brothers". The steamships<sup>89</sup> "Amasia", "Trapizon", "Samson", "Kerason", "Turan" were their property. All the stores and industrial enterprises of the Ibranosyan brothers in Constantinople and provinces were confiscated as the property of Muslims, because they converted to Islam in order to save themselves in 1915. Garnik Sepuhyan was the proprietor of

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<sup>82</sup> **Barseghov** 1999, 15.

<sup>83</sup> The Matenadaran named after M. Mashtotc, Arshak Alpoyachayan's fund file 47, doc. 66/777.

<sup>84</sup> Siruni 1988, 223:

<sup>85</sup> "Chakatamart" № 112, 25.05.1919.

<sup>86</sup> *Annuaire Oriental* 1914, 1295.

<sup>87</sup> Hovhannes Azarian (Azaryan) and Anna Kovhomijian and their children <http://www.maggieblanck.com/Azarian/Azarian.htm> (last retrieved 19.12.2023).

<sup>88</sup> "Vastak" № 9, 05.07.1922.

<sup>89</sup> **Dadayan** 2012, 95.

a substantial apartment complex valued at 400,000 gold in Shishli, the famous khan of the place called Chakmakchilar Yogushu and the well-known store in front of it. He spent 15,000 gold to return to Constantinople in order to return to Constantinople and reclaim his property. Nevertheless, all of his assets had already been confiscated.<sup>90</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In 1908, due to the decline of the economy of Constantinople Armenians and the robbery and appropriation of their property. These actions were initially instigated by the Young Turks and subsequently perpetuated by the Kemal authorities. The culmination of this period was marked by the adoption of the law "On the Tribute Tax" by the Great Assembly on 11 November 1942. The implementation of the law provided the Republican authorities with the opportunity to assume control of the considerable wealth of the Constantinople Armenians and to Turkify<sup>91</sup> their economy. Abandoned properties commissions established on the basis of 333 law passed by Kemalist authorities on April 15, 1933 continued their activities until 1988 November, because this law remained in force until the above-mentioned date.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Stepanean 1924, 3.

<sup>91</sup> Melkonyan 2008, 127–143.

<sup>92</sup> Onaran 2010, 174.

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## ՊՈԼՍԱՀԱՅՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՈՒՆԵԶՐԿՈՒՄԸ 1908-1924 ԹԹ

### ԱՆԱՀԻՏ ԱՍՏՈՅԱՆ

#### Ամփոփում

Առաջին համաշխարհային պատերազմից առաջ Կ.Պոլսի տնտեսության մեջ հայերը և հույները տիրապետող դիրք էին գրավում, իսկ թուրք տնտեսավարողները հայտնվել էին աննախանձելի վիճակում: Երիտթուրքերը 1908 թ. իշխանության գալով՝ սկսեցին իրականացնել քրիստոնյաների ունեցվածքի հաշվին երկրի տնտեսությունը թրքացնելու իրենց ծրագիրը: Եթե մինչև 1915 թ. Կ.Պոլսի հայկական ազգապատկան կալվածքների գրավումով երիտթուրքերը նպատակ ունեին կանխել պոլսահայերի տնտեսական զարգացման ընթացքը, ապա Առաջին համաշխարհային պատերազմի տարիներին սկսեցին վարել նրանց ունեզրկման բացահայտ քաղաքականություն: Ավելի քան 34.000 պոլսահայերի տեղահանությունը, աքսորն ու սպանությունը տիրազուրկ դարձրին նրանց ունեցվածքը և հեշտացրին դրանց բռնագրավման ու յուրացման գործը: 1922 թ. սեպտեմբերին Ջմյուռնիայի հայերի և հույների կոտորածից և քաղաքի հրդեհից հետո, քեմալականները ծրագրել էին նույնը կրկնել նաև Կ.Պոլսում: Թեև դաշնակից երկրների զինված ուժերը կանխեցին քրիստոնյաների տեղահանությունն ու կոտորածը, սակայն Անկարայի կառավարությունը հաստատուն մնալով Կ.Պոլսի քրիստոնյաներին տեղահանելու իր որոշման մեջ՝ այնպիսի վիճակ ստեղծեց քաղաքում, որը հայերին և հույներին ստիպեց կամավոր թողնել քաղաքը և հեռանալ: Նրանց փախուստից հետո, քեմալական իշխանությունների ընդունած օրենքների և հրահանգների գործադրումը հնարավորություն տվեց ամբողջապես տիրանալու պոլսահայերից մնացած ողջ ունեցվածքին:

**Բանալի բառեր՝** պոլսահայեր, երիտթուրքական իշխանություններ, ունեզրկում, բռնագրավում, քեմալականներ, տնտեսության թրքացում:

## КОНФИСКАЦИЯ ИМУЩЕСТВА КОНСТАНТИНОПОЛЬСКИХ АРМЯН В 1908–1924 ГГ.

АНАИТ АСТОЯН

### Резюме

До Первой мировой войны армяне и греки занимали доминирующее положение в экономике Константинополя, а турецкие бизнесмены оказались в незавидном положении. Младотурки, придя к власти в 1908 году, начали реализовывать свой план по тюркизации экономики страны за счет имущества христиан. Если до 1915 г. младотурки стремились предотвратить экономическое развитие константинопольских армян путем захвата их имений, то в годы Первой мировой войны они стали проводить открытую политику лишения их имущества. Переселение, изгнание и убийство более 34.000 константинопольских армян привели к лишению их собственности и облегчили ее конфискацию и присвоение. После резни армян и греков в Смирне и городского пожара в сентябре 1922 года кемалисты планировали повторить то же самое в Константинополе. Хотя вооруженные силы Антанты предотвратили депортацию и резню христиан, правительство Анкары, оставаясь непоколебимым в своем решении о депортации христиан Константинополя, создало в городе ужасающую ситуацию, которая вынудила армян и греков добровольно покинуть как город, так и страну. После их побега реализация принятых законов и директив кемалистских властей дала возможность полностью завладеть всем имуществом, оставленным константинопольскими армянами.

**Ключевые слова:** *Константинополь, константинопольские армяне, младотурецкие власти, лишение имущества, экспроприация, кемалисты, тюркизация экономики.*