

ITALIAN PRESS COVERAGE OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE (1915)

ՀԱՅՈՑ ՑԵՂԱՍՊԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԼՈՒՍԱԲԱՆՈՒՄԸ ԻՏԱԼԱԿԱՆ ՄԱՍՈՒԼՈՒՄ (1915 Թ.)

ОСВЕЩЕНИЕ ГЕНОЦИДА АРМЯН В ИТАЛЬЯНСКОЙ ПРЕССЕ (1915 Г.)

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Received: 05.06.2026; Revised: 09.06.2026; Accepted: 15.07.2026
Ներկայացվել է՝ 05.06.2026; գրախոսվել է՝ 09.06.2026; ընդունվել է՝ 15.07.2026
Представлено: 05.06.2026; рецензировано: 09.06.2026; принято: 15.07.2026

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DOI: 10.53548/0320-8117-2026.2-115

Abstract – Italy's neutrality at the beginning of World War I allowed it to maintain diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire. This contributed to the recording of events and helped raise international awareness of the policies implemented against the Armenian population. In this context, the activities of J. Gorrini, the Italian Consul in Trebizond, were of particular significance. His testimonies and public statements became important sources for revealing the factual nature of the atrocities being committed. Equally important was the reaction of the Italian press, which, benefiting from its relative freedom and international reputation, contributed to the dissemination of this information. The Italian press covered the topic of the forced deportations and mass massacres of the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire with particular intensity, providing detailed and comprehensive analyses. By synthesizing information from various sources, press publications enabled readers to form a more complete understanding of the ongoing processes. Italy's neutrality allowed newspapers to maintain contacts with both diplomatic circles and local sources within the Empire, which enabled them to obtain first-hand information regarding the Turkish state policy implemented against the Armenian population. The press publications of that period represent an important primary source for the study of the Armenian Genocide, as they reflect not only the immediate reactions of contemporaries to the unfolding events, but also often include official diplomatic reports, international statements, and the positions of state authorities.

Ամփոփում – Առաջին համաշխարհային պատերազմի սկզբում Իտալիայի չեզոք կարգավիճակը նրան հնարավորություն տվեց Օսմանյան կայսրության հետ պահպանել դիվանագիտական հարաբերություններ, որոնք նպաստեցին հայ բնակչության նկատմամբ իրականացվող քաղաքականության վերաբերյալ փաստերի արձանագրմանն ու միջազգային հանրության շրջանում իրազեկվածության բարձրացմանը: Այդ համատեքստում առանձնահատուկ նշանակություն ունեցավ նաև Տրապիզոնում Իտալիայի հյուպատոս Զ. Գորրինիի գործունեությունը, որի վկայություններն ու հրապարակային ելույթները կարևոր աղբյուր դարձան իրականացվող բռնությունների փաստական կողմը բացահայտելու համար: Նույնքան կարևոր էր իտալական մամուլի արձագանքը, որն օգտվելով հարաբերական ազատությունից և միջազգային հեղինակությունից՝ նպաստեց այդ տեղեկությունների տարածմանը: Իտալական մամուլն առանձնահատուկ ակտիվությամբ էր անդրադառնում Օսմանյան կայսրությունում հայ բնակչության բռնի տեղահանությունների ու զանգվածային կոտորածների թեմային՝ կատարելով մանրամասն ու համակողմանի վերլուծություններ: Տարբեր աղբյուրներից ստացված տեղեկությունների համադրությամբ՝ մամուլի հրապարակումներն ընթերցողին թույլ էին տալիս ավելի ամբողջական պատկերացում կազմել տեղի ունեցող գործընթացների վերաբերյալ: Իտալիայի չեզոքությունը թերթերին թույլ էր տալիս կապեր պահպանել ինչպես դիվանագիտական շրջանակների, այնպես էլ կայսրության ներսում գործող տեղական աղբյուրների հետ, ինչը նրանց հնարավորություն էր ընձեռում հայ բնակչության նկատմամբ իրականացվող թուրքական պետական քաղաքականության վերաբերյալ տեղեկություններ ստանալ առաջին ձեռքից: Այդ շրջանի մամուլի հրապարակումները կարևոր սկզբնաղբյուրային արժեք են ներկայացնում Հայոց ցեղասպանության ուսումնասիրության համար, քանի որ դրանք արտացոլում են ոչ միայն ժամանակակիցների անմիջական արձագանքները տեղի ունեցող իրադարձություններին, այլև հաճախ ներառում են պաշտոնական դիվանագիտական հաղորդագրություններ, միջազգային հայտարարություններ և պետական շրջանակների դիրքորոշումներ:

Аннотация – Нейтралитет Италии в начале Первой мировой войны позволил ей сохранить дипломатические отношения с Османской империей. Это способствовало документированию событий и помогло привлечь международное внимание к политике, проводимой против армянского населения. В данном контексте особое значение имела деятельность итальянского консула в Трапезунде Дж. Горрини, свидетельства и публичные выступления которого стали важным источником для раскрытия фактической стороны совершаемых преступлений. Не менее важной была реакция итальянской прессы, которая, пользуясь относительной свободой и международным авторитетом, способствовала распространению данной информации. Итальянская пресса с особой активностью освещала тему насильственных депортаций и массовых убийств армянского населения в Османской империи, проводя подробный и всесторонний анализ. Сопоставление сведений различных источников с газетными публикациями позволяет сформировать более целостное представление о происходящих процессах. Нейтралитет Италии давал возможность прессе поддерживать контакты как с дипломатическими кругами, так и с местными источниками информации. Последнее способствовало получению сведений из первых рук о государственной политике Турции в отношении армянского населения. Публикации прессы того периода представляют собой важный источниковедческий материал для изучения Геноцида армян, поскольку они отражают не только непосредственную реакцию современников на происходящие события, но и зачастую содержат

официальные дипломатические сообщения, международные заявления и позиции государственных структур.

Keywords – Genocide, Italy, press, deportations, eyewitnesses.

Հիմնաբառեր – ցեղասպանություն, Իտալիա, մամուլ, տեղահանություններ, ականատեսներ:

Ключевые слова – геноцид, Италия, пресса, депортации, очевидцы.

Introduction

During the First World War, the European political system saw the formation of complex diplomatic relations, within which the policies pursued by neutral states and their position in the system of international relations took on special significance. Against this historical and political backdrop, the study of the Armenian Genocide assumes particular significance, particularly with regard to the role of neutral states in documenting and transmitting information about the events to the international community. In this regard, Italy's position is noteworthy. By maintaining neutrality in the initial stages of the war, it was able to continue its diplomatic presence in the Ottoman Empire (Italy was a member of the Triple Alliance alongside Germany and Austria-Hungary until the outbreak of the First World War. However, it declared neutrality after the war began, justifying this by arguing that the alliance was defensive in nature and that Austria-Hungary's military actions did not comply with its terms), playing a significant role in gathering and disseminating information about events in the region. The article presents a detailed analysis of materials published in the Italian press, underscoring their importance for the study of the Armenian Genocide.

Coverage of the Armenian Genocide in the Italian Press from May to July 1915

During the neutrality phase of the First World War (Italy officially entered the First World War on 23 May 1915 as part of the Entente), Italy maintained a diplomatic and consular presence in the Ottoman Empire. Italian diplomatic representatives operating in various Ottoman provinces presented the violence, mass deportations and massacres committed against the Armenian population in detail in their official messages and reports. Political developments significantly influenced both the fluctuating attention the Italian press paid to anti-Armenian policies and the near-total silence that characterized certain periods.

The Italian press reacted particularly strongly after the publication of the joint statement of 24 May 1915, adopted by the governments of the Great Powers: Russia, France and Great Britain. The statement condemned the Turkish regime's policy towards the Armenian population as a crime "directed against humanity and civilization" (Геноцид армян: ответственность Турции и обязательства мирового сообщества 2002, 238–239). The following day, a number of leading periodicals, including "Il Messaggero", "L'Osservatore Romano" and "Avanti!", published the statement condemning the violence committed by the local Turkish and Kurdish

populations, as well as the involvement of the Ottoman authorities (Հարությունյան 2018, 29).

Although Italy joined the Entente on 23 May (Corriere della Sera 1915, N 142), after which Italian-Turkish relations gradually deteriorated (Although Italy officially joined the Entente in World War I on 23 May 1915, it had previously signed the secret Treaty of London with the Entente powers on 26 April regarding the division of the Ottoman Empire. This defined its share of Asia Minor. See Махмуриян 2007, 252), this did not prevent the Italian press from maintaining its interest in the Armenian issue.

In its 18 July issue, the newspaper "Il Mattino" published an article entitled "The atmosphere of violence in Turkey", in which an eyewitness who had arrived from Constantinople testified that the atmosphere of terror was growing stronger day by day in all the cities of the Empire and that foreigners were rarely permitted to leave its territory (Aliprandi 2021, 64).

Referring to the large-scale violence against Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, the Italian press emphasized that the dispossession of Armenians was also an integral part of Turkish genocidal policy. This was evidenced by publications in newspapers such as "L'Idée Nationale" (L'Idée Nationale 1915, N 138, 5) and "La Tribuna" (Aliprandi 2021, 67), which stated that all Armenian property and assets were confiscated without compensation or appropriate documentation. This publication is particularly important in revealing the nature of the economic and administrative pressures exerted by the Ottoman authorities on the Armenian population.

Coverage of the Armenian Genocide in the Italian Press from August to December 1915

The crisis in Turkish-Italian relations reached its peak when Italy declared war on the Ottoman Empire (I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani, quinta serie: 1914-1918 1973, 392) on 20 August 1915. From then on, press publications not only presented the scale of the mass killings, but also emphasized the lack of an international response to the issue. Some Italian newspapers not only criticized Turkish policy, but also openly demonstrated an anti-Turkish stance. A vivid example of this was the newspaper "Il Popolo d'Italia" (Martelli 2015, 223). In an article entitled "War against the Turks" on 22 August, the newspaper's editor, Benito Mussolini, justified Italy's decision to declare war on the Ottoman Empire, writing: "There is another people (In the article, Benito Mussolini addressed the policies of the Ottoman Empire, emphasising that past barbarities were insufficient and that Turkey had filled the final black page' of its history by joining the war. Furthermore, Mussolini portrayed the empire as a cruel and oppressive entity that implemented violent and discriminatory policies towards its subject peoples, citing the Greeks as an example) who suffer the unspeakable torments of Turkish rule: the Armenians. Recently, news has emerged of the massacre of thousands of Armenians by Turkish forces. Two weeks ago, news

reached us that twenty socialists had been hanged in Constantinople for allegedly arming their homeland and plotting against the Young Turk regime. These twenty abruptly interrupted lives also demand revenge" (*Il Popolo d'Italia* 1915, N 226, 2).

The Italian press paid particular attention to the testimony of Giacomo Gorrini, the Italian Consul in Trabzon, who accurately described the persecution and massacre of the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire. Upon returning to Italy, he immediately met with the editor of the Italian newspaper "Il Messaggero" and presented the public with detailed information about Turkish criminal policy in an extensive interview. The interview was published in the 25 August issue of the newspaper under the title "Horriifying episodes of Muslim atrocities against the Armenians" (Gorrini 1940, 20; Քուչուկյան 2006, 85), presenting a number of tragic episodes about the fate of the Armenians of Trabzon in detail and emphasizing the organized nature of the violence. He emphasized that Armenians were subjected to various forms of torture and mass violence in different locations. "The Ottoman regime planned the deportation of all Armenians in the empire, particularly those in the Armenian provinces, to unknown destinations. The order to deport Armenians from the provinces was carried out immediately and in the most barbaric manner, affecting women, children, the elderly and the sick. Very few escaped the massacre". Gorrini added that, in the provinces of Trabzon, Erzurum, Van, Bitlis and Sebastia, which were under his consular control, all Armenians had been deported by 24 June, and few of them would survive the journey to Mesopotamia (Karakhanian, Viganò 2016, 81-82; Kuciukian 2000, 88; Haroutyunian 2020, 110).

It should be noted that the topic of the Armenian massacres received widespread coverage in the Italian press, particularly in publications from September to October, 1915. The Italian press did not shy away from addressing the issue of the Armenian massacres, expressing sympathy for the Armenian population and criticizing the Turkish regime. The press did not merely describe the events; it also voiced serious criticism of the European powers, accusing them of inaction and indifference. For example, the newspaper "Il Secolo XIX", in an article titled "Turkey and the Armenians" published on 1 September, presented details of ongoing violence and emphasized that the massacres were premeditated and repeated, yet widely ignored by European diplomacy. For about three decades, the Armenians had been deceived by promises of reforms that could be imposed on the Turkish government, yet no attempts had been made (Haroutyunian 2020, 110).

The newspaper "L'Idea Nazionale" also adopted a similar position. In its 5 September issue, the article "The number of Armenians massacred by the Turks reaches 700 thousand", citing the testimony of an American clergyman (the source mentions his name as Black), wrote that the clergyman was preparing to submit a memorandum to the civilized world. The aim was to draw the international community's attention to the massacres committed against the Armenians and achieve condemnation of these crimes. According to the publication, these atrocities were committed

by the Ottoman authorities under the patronage of the Austro-German forces (Aliprandi 2021, 82).

In its 15 September issue, the newspaper "Il Giornale d'Italia" published of the newspaper, referred to an article in the Turkish newspaper "Tanin", titled "Call for the Extermination of Armenian Women", which stated that Turkey would not be safe until all Armenian women in the empire had been massacred or at least converted (Il Giornale d'Italia 1915, N 257, 2).

The logical continuation of this publication is the article titled "Armenian children sold at auction", which was published on the same day in the newspaper "L'Idée Nationale". While referring to the mass massacres, the newspaper simultaneously emphasized that Armenian women and girls were forcibly transferred to Turkish harems and that public auctions of children aged one to two were organized in Constantinople (L'Idée Nationale 1915, N 252, 2). The publication in question was important not only for its content, but also for the emphasis it placed on certain issues. By presenting the most extreme manifestations of violence, such as the forcible transfer of women to harems and the public sale of young children, the newspaper aimed to elicit a more emotional and moral response from European socio-political circles.

In its September issue, the Italian newspaper "Il Resto del Carlino" wrote that, despite the Turkish government's claims to the contrary, the massacres of Armenians were continuing in all the provinces of the Ottoman Empire under the direction of local authorities who were also using serious criminals released from prisons (Il Resto del Carlino 1915, N 254, 6). According to the newspaper, the Turkish government had released approximately 34,000 criminals who had been involved in the most brutal actions (Il Resto del Carlino 1915, N 254, 6). Another article in the newspaper noted that, although the Young Turks try to deny the massacres of the Armenian population, authoritative sources indicate that Turkish agents have declared that Turkey wants the final and complete destruction of the Armenian people, and that nothing can stop them from carrying out this plan (Il Resto del Carlino 1915, N 251, 3).

From the second half of September onwards, the Italian press began to address the Armenian massacres more frequently. This was largely due to a letter from Pope Benedict XV to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed V, in which the Holy See condemned the criminal actions carried out by the Ottoman Empire against the Armenians. The letter characterized these actions as a process of mass suffering, forced deportations and irreversible losses (La Questione Armenia, Documenti dell' Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV), dell' Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato 2015, 96–97). The 23 September issue of "La Perseveranza" refers to the Pope's letter to the Sultan, while suggesting that the Ottoman regime is inclined to deny the massacres of the Armenians, as it always has been. The publication also emphasized that this was not the first time the Holy See had been obliged to protest to the Turkish authorities

regarding similar events, which testified to the regime's periodic and organized policy (Aliprandi 2021, 102).

By the end of the year, the Italian press was reporting that the Turkish regime's goal was to establish Islamic hegemony throughout the empire and that this amounted to the deliberate destruction of a people (Aliprandi 2021, 140–146). Italian newspapers specifically emphasized in their publications that the Turkish authorities were continuing the wave of mass violence confident in their own impunity, which they attributed to the absence of diplomatic representations of the great powers in Constantinople. This gave the Turkish authorities the opportunity to carry out their criminal policy without external control or intervention from the international community.

Conclusion

When studying the various stages of the Armenian Genocide, materials from the Armenian and foreign press are of primary importance. In this case, our study focuses on Italian press publications based on reports from consuls and foreign missionaries. The Italian press's reaction became noticeably more active, especially after the joint statement of the Great Powers on 24 May 1915, which condemned Turkey's criminal policy. During this period, the information received was primarily descriptive, presenting the scale of the violence. Meanwhile, from August to December of 1915, due to Italy's involvement in the war against the Ottoman Empire, the Italian press became more critical. Emphasizing the inadequacy of the international response, the press simultaneously raised the issue of condemning and holding responsible those involved in the Turkish criminal policy. In this context, Pope Benedict XV's letter to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed V also played an important role. Thus, while at first the Italian press limited itself to describing the crimes committed, in the second phase it adopted a more critical stance, calling for necessity of international intervention.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my special gratitude to my academic supervisor, Doctor of Historical Sciences Armen Marukyan, for his valuable advice and insightful comments regarding the choice of topic of this article and the key issues addressed.

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