

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND THE STAGES OF THE ARMENIAN QUESTION

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Western Armenia - the largest part (more than 270,000 square km.) of the Armenian Homeland. The overwhelming majority (about 2.5 million) of the Western Armenian population lived in their Homeland; if we were to take also into account the Armenians living in the mid 19th century beyond Western Armenia, throughout the Ottoman Empire - in Constantinople, Smyrna and other cities, towns and settlements, this number in total would be 3 million¹.

The Ottoman government, having conquered Western Armenia, instantly took up to radically alter its demographic composition, aiming to decrease the Armenian population's number in general balance. The Ottoman authorities encouraged and supported the penetration and settlement of Turkic and Kurdish elements in the regions of Western Armenia. These alien elements were settling in the Armenian villages and regions; the best arable lands and pastures passed on to their chieftains and feudal lords. In keeping to this policy, the Ottoman authorities later on, in the 19th century, in particular, began to settle Circassians in the Armenian provinces, granting them various economic privileges.

Ultimately, at the beginning of the 20th century, to be more precise, in 1912-1913, following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the first Balkan war, big numbers of Turkish refugees migrated from the Balkans and settled in different regions of Asia Minor, and penetrated further east, into the Armenian Highland, thus worsening the demographic situation in Western Armenia.

The Ottoman authorities quite often perpetrated massacres of Armenians using the hands of Turkish bands, as well as the Kurds and Circassians. In a word, hellish conditions were created for Armenians in their own Homeland.

To sum up, we might say that the Ottoman authorities, by the policy of settling alien both ethnically and religiously (Moslem) elements in the Armenian lands sought to achieve two major goals.

In spite of the demonic efforts of the Ottoman authorities Armenians still represented a relative majority in all Western Armenia's regions ("vilayets") taken together and what is more important, Armenians did remain an overwhelming majority in

¹ Հայկական հարց: Հանրագիտարան, Երևան, 1996, էջ 233:

the whole of Western Armenia up until World War I.

At this stage the policy of the Ottoman government in effecting the administrative-territorial division was very much the same. The Ottoman authorities kept remodeling and restructuring the provinces in Western Armenia, until they found the version, which matched their expansionist policy towards non-Turkish peoples: to split up the Armenian provinces into fractions, and to annex these one by one to the neighbouring provinces where alien population dominated. As a result, aboriginal Armenian areas would “shrink”, thus distorting the demographic balance of those mixed provinces.

As a consequence of the Treaty of Qasr-i Shirin (1639) signed between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, Western Armenia was divided into seven pashaliks: Erzurum, Sebastia, Van, Diarbekir (Amid), Bayazet (Daruynk), Chaldiran and Kars. In the 19th century the pashaliks were replaced by the system of vilayets - provinces. Western Armenia from that time on consisted of the vilayets of Erzurum (Karin), Kharberd, Svaz (Sebastia), Trabzon (Trapezunt) and Diarbekir (Amid). In place of the former seven pashaliks five vilayets were formed.

Pursuing the anti-Armenian policy of fragmentation of the Armenian provinces and simulated increase of the number of the Moslem population in them, sultan Abdulhamid II founded the province of Bitlis (Baghesh) in 1879-1880, for that reason severing relevant portions from the Van and Diarbekir provinces. In the 1880s, he divided the Erzurum vilayet, the biggest among the administrative units with the predominating native Armenian population into four provinces: Erzurum, Van, Mush and Hakkari. Shortly after, the province of Mush with the predominating Armenian population stopped existing, too. In its place a new, Dersim vilayet was created, where Kurds and Turks predominated.

In 1897 a new division was carried out in the territory of Western Armenia. There were constituted the vilayets of Erzurum, Kharberd, Svaz (Sebastia), Van, Bitlis (Baghesh), Diarbekir (Amid) and Trabzon (Trapezunt).

At this stage, the Armenian Question, besides the above mentioned problems, had another important aspect. The matter at issue is the legal and political status of Western Armenians. Armenians, like all the other Christian peoples in the Ottoman Empire - Assyrians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbians, Romanians, and others, were in a desperate condition and deprived of all rights. They were treated as *rayya*, inferiors, or seconds to the Turks. It is appropriate to notice here, that the condition of the non-Turkish Moslem peoples, of Arabs in particular, was none the better.

There was no constitution in the Ottoman Empire. The will of the sultan ruled in the country, while in the provinces, valis and pashas, notorious for their tyranny, were the masters. The norms of Shariah - the law of Islam, and adat - the customary law worked, which did not defend the interests of the Armenians and other Christians.

As Christians, Armenians were deprived of the right to carry weapons; hence they were absolutely unprotected against the attacks and encroachments of Turkish, Kurdish and Circassian bands. Armenians were not allowed to provide evidence in the court, did

not have the right to ride a horse: it was the privilege of the Turks or other Moslems, to whom Armenians had to give way in the street. There were a great many other restrictions and bans, humiliating and insulting the dignity of Armenians.

Neither did the Armenians enjoy personal immunity and inviolability of the home. The acting laws, norms and customs did not grant them any of these guarantees. The sense of defenselessness chased Armenians all the way, making a nightmare of their and their family's lives. In the Ottoman Empire it was commonplace to scorn the religious feelings of Christian Armenians. Religious oppression and the policy of national discrimination and forced de-ethnicization², entwined with the severe, desperate social-economic conditions were very much the same for all Christian peoples in the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, among historians it is common to define the Ottoman Empire as a prison for nations.

The imprisoned peoples undertook attempts to remedy themselves, to somewhat improve their condition. In the the 19th century, the national-liberation spirit of the non-Turkish peoples, the Armenian people including, grew high. Their protests against the legal anarchy and despotism often took the shape of armed struggle.

In the 20s of the 19th century the Greeks rebelled. They shook off the Ottoman yoke and became independent in 1830³.

The Egyptian crisis followed this in 1831-1841, when the ruler of Egypt Muhammad Ali launched the military struggle against the Turkish sultan. Muhammad Ali was close to a definitive victory, but the interference of the Great Powers saved the sultan from imminent defeat⁴.

Armenians of Zeytun rebelled in 1862. They stood up bravely against the divisions of the Turkish regular Army, and were able to force the enemy to respect their rights and national dignity⁵.

Violent skirmishes and anti-Turkish manifestations took place in almost every province of the Empire. All of this came to show that the Ottoman Empire, typologically categorized as a country of massacres and carnages, a military-feudal political system, suffering a heavy crisis, which embraced the governmental, political, legal, social, economic, inter-ethnic, religious and spiritual-cultural spheres.

The Ottoman ruling clique, conscious of the impending serious threat to the integrity and the very existence of the Empire, endeavoring to find ways out of the existing backwardness, addressed the policy of partial reforms. By the Edict (Hatti

² See for example: E.N. Damianopoulos, *The Macedonians: Their Past and Present*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 7-8.

³ *The Greek War of Independence (1821-1830)* – J.S. Koliopoulos and Th.M. Veremis, *Modern Greece: A History since 1821*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp. 15-27.

⁴ Ch. V. *The Eastern Question*, 1. *The Egyptian Crisis, 1831-1841*, pp. 69-71.

<http://wiki.zirve.edu.tr/sandbox/groups/economicsandadministrativesciences/wiki/498e6/attachments/d9c3a/3-%20The%20Eastern%20Question%201820s%20to%201850s.PDF?sessionID=be1325d37a7c5f7b99f39de6da779933c272d74d>

⁵ Ներսիսյան Մ. Գ., *Զեյթունի 1862 թվականի ապստամբությունը, Պատմա-բանասիրական հանդես*, 4, 1962, էջ 59-68:

Sherif of Gülhane) proclaimed in 1839 by the Ottoman sultan, the so-called Tanzimat reforms⁶ were set forth in the Ottoman Empire. Yet, even limited reforms, because of the decaying and regressive Ottoman state system had never been effected. The provisions, promulgated in the second phase of the Tanzimat reforms in 1856 (Hatti Hümayun in 1856) also remained on paper⁷. As a result, no changes took place in the legal-political status and social-economic condition of the Western Armenians, in particular⁸.

In the late 1870s - early 1880s, the Armenian Question became an international issue. This was preceded by a number of events, two of which were of crucial importance.

The years of the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) went down in the history of the Ottoman Empire as years of *zulüm* - horror and autocratic dictatorship. Political killings and mass murders were one of the peculiar features of the time. Beginning with "the murder of all his brothers and members of their families"⁹, he introduced individual and mass murders into the Ottoman political "culture", as the "best" method for settling problems. One of the first killed was Midhat Pasha¹⁰, the originator of the constitution, promulgated in 1876, which Abdulhamid II was induced to "adopt" within the first year of his reign, and which function he suspended after one year by his own order. Mass murders of all the non-Turkish peoples of the Empire was made an integral part of the rule of Abdulhamid. Armenians were among the first victims of the policy. Slaughters of the Armenians, executed by Abdulhamid II, were not accidental, neither were they the sultan's caprice. They were conceptual by nature. The Syrian historian Marwan al-Mudawar wrote: "Sultan Abdulhamid II who had also been justly named al-sultan al-ahmar ("red sultan"-N.H.) reigned over the Ottoman Empire with his iron hand for 33 years"¹¹. Such was the atmosphere in the Ottoman Empire, when the concept of settling the Armenian Question through the physical extermination of Armenians began to shape. And the formula "To solve the Armenian Question by way of physical extermination of Armenians" Abdulhamid II made a cornerstone of his policy"¹². The carnivorous policy of Abdulhamid II earned him the title "bloody sultan" or "red sultan".

⁶ The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art, January to April, 1841, Philadelphia, p. 538.

⁷ Cf. D. Demetriou, "Tanzimat and the 19th-century reforms were a tragedy. Turning towards the West was an imposition, not a choice". http://www.academia.edu/4590835/_Tanzimat_and_the_nineteenth-century_reforms_were_a_tragedy._Turning_towards_the_West_was_an_imposition_not_a_choice._

⁸ Even the National constitution of the Western Armenians (after several reductions and abridgements approved by Porta in 1863), in essence, concerning the Armenians living in Constantinople and being a charter regulating as educational and cultural, as well as questions relating to the church, was devoid of any political content and didn't lay down individual and national rights for the Armenians (Ա. Խառատյան, Դարձյալ արևմտահայերի ազգային սահմանադրության մասին, Լրաբեր հասարակական գիտությունների, 2008, 2, էջ 81-93:

⁹ Fuad Hasn Hafiz, History of the Armenian People, Cairo, 1986, p. 201(in Arabic).

¹⁰ He was strangled. Assassinations like this were not uncommon.

¹¹ Marwan al-Moudawar, Al-Arman throughout History, Beirut, 1982, p. 395.

¹² Ibid.

The other important event was the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878, and the defeat of the Turks. The Russian troops gained victories both on the Balkan and the Caucasian fronts. In the Balkans, the Russian troops occupied Bulgaria and advanced to the outskirts of Constantinople, while on the Caucasian war stage, they took Ardahan, Bayazet (Daruynk), Alashkert (Vagharshakert), Kars and Erzurum (Karin), i.e., a considerable segment of Western Armenia, as well as Batumi.

The Turks were forced to cease the war operations and seek for peace. The Peace Treaty between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire was signed on March 3, 1878, in the township of San Stefano in the vicinity of Constantinople. It verified the victories gained by Russian weapons. According to the Treaty of San Stefano, the independence of Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania was recognized, Bosnia and Herzegovina received autonomy within the bounds of the Ottoman Empire. Bulgaria was announced an independent principality. The Turkish troops were to leave Bulgaria; the Russian troops, instead, were to stay on for two years. Under the Treaty, Ardahan, Kars, Bayazet and Batumi passed over to Russia¹³.

In the Treaty of San Stefano a special Paragraph 16 was added, concerning the reforms in Western Armenia¹⁴. It said, "Taking into account that the withdrawal of the Russian troops from the occupied territories of Armenia bound to be returned to Turkey, may cause clashes and complications there, which may harm the good relations between the two states, the Sublime Porte undertakes to immediately carry out improvements and reforms in the provinces, inhabited by Armenians, proceeding from the local needs, as well as to secure Armenians' safety from Kurds and Circassians"¹⁵.

The parties agreed that in "Asian Turkey", that is, in Western Armenia, the Russian troops would stay on for a period of six months, during which the reforms should be accomplished. Simultaneously, the Turkish side committed not to pursue those Armenians, who, in the time of the war, had communicated with the Russians. Thus, by the Treaty of San Stefano the Armenian Question constituted part of the international diplomacy.

Another important circumstance makes the Treaty of San Stefano unique: the goodwill of Russia and the consent of the Sublime Porte that the Russian troops remain in Western Armenia at least for six more months, until the completion of the reforms. This was a kind of guarantee.

The Treaty of San Stefano, undoubtedly, was not perfect and flawless. Thus, nothing had been said about constitution of an administrative unit, which would put on a legal basis the realization of the reforms and the solution of the Armenian Question within these frames, and which would, certainly, add hopes as to its final settlement.

¹³ Дипломатический словарь, т. III, Москва, 1964, с. 122 -123.

¹⁴ Ibid, с. 123.

¹⁵ Հայաստանը միջազգային դիվանագիտության և սովետական արտաքին քաղաքականության փաստաթղթերում (1828-1923), Երևան, 1972, էջ 92:

The Treaty of San Stefano was the victory of Russian diplomacy, and it seriously worried its European opponents, who feared that the Ottoman Empire would become totally dependent on Russia, and the strategic balance in the Eastern Question would change in favor of the Russian Empire. This contradicted their interests, and they would never let it happen.

England and Austria-Hungary, supported by the German Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, were particularly active in this matter. These forces achieved an agreement on convening an ad hoc congress to review the Treaty of San Stefano. A united front of the most powerful European Powers opposed Russia. The latter, finding itself in isolation, had no choice but to consent to the convening of the congress.

The Congress met in Berlin on June, 1878. The Chairperson was Bismarck. England and Austria-Hungary (supported by Germany), France and Italy succeeded in that the provisions of the Treaty of San Stefano were reviewed, Russia's positions weakened, while their own positions and influence on the Ottoman Empire, quite understandably, reinforced.

By the Treaty of Berlin, Bulgaria, perceived by the European Powers as the major outpost of Russia in the Balkans, was torn apart. North of the Balkan mountains, the autonomous principality of Bulgaria was established, with the prince to be approved by the sultan, and that - with the consent of the Great Powers. The Bulgarian regions south of the Balkan mountains constituted a separate province, named Eastern Rumelia, which remained under the domination of the sultan. Bosnia and Herzegovina passed to Austria-Hungary. Serbia, Montenegro and Romania were recognized as independent.¹⁶

The Congress of Berlin addressed the Armenian Question, too. To participate in the discussion and to present the demands of Western Armenians in the Congress, a representative delegation arrived in Berlin, lead by the outstanding public and ecclesiastical figure Mkrtich Khrimyan (Khrimyan Hairik)¹⁷. He, however, was not allowed to participate in the work of the Congress, nor was his memorandum considered, the highlight of which was to grant limited autonomy to Western Armenia.

Under the resolution of the Congress, Russia returned Alashkert with the valley and Bayazet (Erzrum had been returned before) to the Ottoman Empire. Ardahan, Kars, as well as Batumi remained with the Russian Empire¹⁸.

In the Treaty of Berlin there was a specific Paragraph 61, dedicated to the Armenian Question. It differed from Paragraph 16 of the Treaty of San Stefano in several very important aspects, and this not to the benefit of Armenians. Here is what it said: "The Sublime Porte undertakes to immediately carry out improvements and reforms in the provinces inhabited by Armenians, proceeding from the local needs, as well as to secure Armenians's safety from Kurds and Circassians. On the measures,

¹⁶ Дипломатический словарь, т. I, Москва, 1960, с. 178.

¹⁷ Later Mkrtich Khrimyan was elected the Catholicos of All Armenians (1892-1907).

¹⁸ Дипломатический словарь, т. I, Москва, 1960, с. 178.

taken to this end, the Sublime Porte is bound to report on a regular basis to the states assigned to supervise their implementation”¹⁹

If, under the Treaty of San Stefano, the reforms in Western Armenia were to be carried out in the presence of the Russian troops, which, as was mentioned, was a kind of guarantee for their implementation, now, under the Treaty of Berlin, the Russian troops were withdrawn, and everything was left to the discretion of the “red sultan”. He only claimed responsibility to periodically report to the states, which only acquired supervising functions.

Paradoxical was the fact that the states entrusted the sultan “to secure Armenians’ safety from Kurds and Circassians”, whereas the sultan himself was the major instigator of all the anti-Armenian activities of the Kurds and Circassians. A perfect example for it is that, right after the Congress of Berlin, in 1891, by order of Abdulhamid II, a cavalry, named after the sultan “Hamidie”, in which exceptionally Kurds were enlisted, was set up and kept at the sultan’s expense. It consisted of 30 regiments, which were not integrated in the system of the Ottoman army. They were kept as a separate military unit, and were located in the Armenian town of Erzinkan. The foremost goal of Hamidie was to organize slaughters of Armenians on the entire territory of the Ottoman Empire, in which they succeeded ‘brilliantly’, particularly at the time of 1894-1896 and subsequent massacres.

A very important expression *territories of Armenia* mentioned in the Treaty of San Stefano was excluded from the Treaty of Berlin, there was left only *the provinces inhabited by Armenians*.

It is necessary to note that the bloody sultan Abdulhamid II banned the use of the country-name “Ermenistan” - Armenia by a special order.

If we also take into account the fact, that among the Great Powers there had always existed controversies and contradictions, it would be understandable that the sultan could benefit from these controversies, as he basically did, in order to stop the reforms and to carry on his aggressive anti-Armenian policy.

In other words, the mechanisms for reforms in Western Armenia, created by the Treaty of San Stefano were destroyed by the Treaty of Berlin. As noted by Moussa Prince, the Armenian Question fell victim of the resolutions adopted by the Congress of Berlin, for the “British-German competition and the Machiavellianism of Bismarck did not allow that Paragraph 16 of the Treaty of San Stefano be fulfilled”²⁰.

After the Congress of Berlin, the Ottoman sultan and the ruling clique were reinforced in their conviction that the “only solution” of the Armenian Question was the extermination of Armenians. It was sadistically viewed by them as a “realistic way” to free themselves from the interference of the European Powers into the internal affairs of

¹⁹ Сборник договоров России с другими государствами, 1856-1917, Москва, 1952, с. 205.

²⁰ Moussa Prince, Un Genocide impuni L'Armenocide. Dans le cadre des crimes contre l'humanité, Paris, 1969, p. 28.

the Ottoman Empire by using the Armenian Question, particularly, the demand of the reforms' implementation in the Armenian regions.

The adoption of the genocidal policy was encouraged by the fact that sultan Abdulhamid II and his political surroundings were well aware that the Great Powers were insincere in their numerous statements in defense of the Armenians, that none of them would take any definitive steps against the Ottoman Empire, and in support of the Armenians and their just claims. In their turn, the Great Powers strove to exert pressure on the Ottoman sultan, to incline him to concessions, and to still deepen his dependence on them.

In 1880-1890 the first political parties - Armenakan, Hnchak and Dashnaktsutyun, and, later, Ramkavar - emerged on the political arena. They attached more orderliness to the Armenian liberation and self-defense struggle. Armenian self-defense, or *hayduk* detachments were formed. They set forth the goal to defend the Homeland - honor and dignity, villages and townships, houses and households, property of their Armenian compatriots, from the tyranny, encroachments and raids of the Turkish and Kurdish bandit groups instigated and supported by the Turkish authorities.

Whatever it was, it sufficed for the Ottoman clique to interpret the self-defense activity of the Armenian hayduks, or the demands of Armenians for reforms, as a manifestation of unrest, or even an attempt of a rebellion, and to use it as grounds for organizing carnages. The apex of the Armenian massacres, organized by the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19th century, were the slaughters of 1894-1896, perpetrated against unarmed people in peacetime.

The first blow was hit to Sasun, a province in the *vilayet* of Bitlis (Baghesh), which had long been known for its steadfast will to withstand the Turkish tyranny. The sultan decided that it was high time to get even with the freedom-loving Armenians of Sasun. The Kurdish bands began the assault on Sasun in 1893. They, however, were defeated and ran away. In August of 1894, the fourth Turkish Army under the command of Zeqi pasha, marched on Sasun. The Sasuntsi Armenians resisted stubbornly, and the severe battle continued for about a week. Yet, the forces were not equal, and the regular Turkish army eventually won. Sasun was demolished, 40 villages were leveled, ten thousand people killed.

The brutal actions of the bloody sultan Abdulhamid II caused serious concern in many of the European states. England, France and Russia intervened. An ad hoc committee was founded to investigate the issue. In May of 1895, in Constantinople the ambassadors of the three above mentioned state submitted to the sultan proposals regarding the would-be reforms in the Armenian provinces. Having formally promised to carry out the reforms, the sultan in reality delayed and never meant to undertake a single step. Moreover, he was waiting for an opportune occasion to resume and expand the slaughters.

The occasion turned out to be the rally, organized by Hnchak party on September

30, 1895 which gathered four thousand participants in Constantinople. It was in support of the project, put forward by England, France and Russia in May. The Turkish police and the infuriated mob attacked the gathering and began killing the unarmed people; casualties amounted to thousands. Massacres occurred in various localities of the Ottoman Empire, in which the military units of the Turkish army took their part, too. In September, 1895, slaughters were committed in Trabzon; in October - in Erzinkan, Marash, in the following months - in Sebastia, Erzurum, Diyarbekir, Bayazet, Kharberd, and other places.

The sultan's authorities attempted a massacre in Zeytun, too, but the local community had taken timely and pertinent steps to withstand the Turkish troops. Hence, when in December 1895, the military units of the Turkish army assaulted Zeytun, they met a serious resistance. The combat lasted for 4 months and the Turks failed to break the heroic struggle of the Armenians of Zeytun. At last, the European ambassadors and the Armenian Patriarchate intervened, and in 1896 an agreement of armistice was reached. By the agreement, the sultan forgave all the rebels and committed to assign a Christian ruler in Zeytun²¹.

The massacres resumed in 1896. Mass murders were perpetrated in Constantinople. Despite the stubborn and long struggle, the defenders of Van had to stop fighting. They trusted in the British Consul's intercession, and accepted the proposal of the Turks to stop the armed struggle and to leave for Persia. The Turkish side, however, did not keep to its promise and brutally attacked the Armenians, leaving Van, and killed a great many of them.

Massacres of Armenians were perpetrated in Urha (Edessa-Urfa), Shapin-Karahisar, Amasya, Mush, Marzvan and other regions, towns and villages of Western Armenia and other parts of the Ottoman Empire.

In the massacres of 1894-1896, more than 300,000 Armenians were killed. But the losses of Armenians were not confined to this. Under the existing extremely desperate conditions near 100 thousand Armenians were compulsorily converted into Islam, and about the same number forcibly left their Homeland. It was not a local massacre, but a total one, genocidal by nature.

The Great Powers, certainly, could not miss the opportunity to intervene. In December 1896 - February 1897 the Conference of the accredited to the Ottoman Empire ambassadors of England, Germany, France, Russia, Italy and Austria-Hungary was convened in Constantinople to discuss the status quo. Nothing concrete was suggested, and day after day, over and over again they kept talking about the reforms. Finally, the ambassadors passed a non-binding draft resolution on the reforms in six Armenian provinces (vilayets) - Karin (Erzurum), Kharberd, Sebastia (Svaz), Baghesh

²¹ See История армянского народа, Ереван, 1980; Armenian History in the Context of the World History, Yerevan, 2001.

(Bitlis), Van and Tigranakert (Diyarbakir). It was recommended to establish a Supreme Council for reforms, a Supervising Committee etc. Similar to all the previous and subsequent formulas, this, too, remained on paper.

On July 23, 1908, the Party of Union and Progress organized a revolt and seized the power. In 1909 sultan Abdulhamid II was dethroned. The Young Turks came into the arena under the motto of the French Revolution, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity". All the nations in the Empire, Moslem or Christian, vigorously welcomed the overthrow of the "red sultan". But, as appeared shortly after, the Young Turks were well disguised ardent chauvinists, who continued the policy of oppressions and slaughters, carried out prior to them by the sultans. They were the advocates of the idea of assimilation of all the nations of the Ottoman Empire to create a "pure" Turkish "entity", never stopping even before mass slaughters in order to execute that idea. Once again, the first victims to fall were Western Armenians. In 1909, the Young Turks organized Armenian massacres in Adana and regions in Cilicia, killing 30,000 Armenians.

The period between the last decades of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century was marked by periodical activation of the Turkish genocidal policy against Armenians, while the Great Powers were announcing about the "reforms" for the solution of the Armenian Question. In 1878-1914 some options of a solution to the Armenian Question were put forward by various states and political forces. The most common model of the Armenian Question was that of "reforms", which officially was set forth in the Treaties of San Stefano and the Congress of Berlin, then reiterated on various occasions with various modifications. It was planned to carry out the reforms in six Armenian provinces (vilayets): Karin (Erzrum), Kharberd, Sebastia (Svaz), Baghesh (Bitlis), Van and Diyarbakir (Amid), or in seven vilayets, adding to these the seventh vilayet of Trabzon (Trapezunt).

It was also presumed that some of the provisions of the reforms, particularly, those ensuring security of person and property, securing Armenians' safety from the raids of Kurds and Circassians, etc., would be effected beyond these vilayets, too, among all the Armenians throughout the Ottoman Empire.

This model had some advantages. To begin with, by putting forward this model the sultan had to acknowledge that in the Ottoman Empire, the conditions of Armenians were really hard, and that there existed the Armenian Question, seeking to be solved. Second, this model, basically covering the key regions of Western Armenia, as an initial step was acceptable for Western Armenians, and, formally, for the European Powers - England, Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, France.

The model of reforms had also some essential flaws in terms of the mechanisms of implementation. It had never had realistic and influential leverages, it never created

an appropriate mechanism to make the implementation of the resolutions, verified by the international documents, obligatory, inevitable and irreversible. The European Powers contented themselves merely with passing resolutions and making statements, and did not think it necessary to undertake any actual and efficient steps to facilitate the realization of the resolutions. As regards Turkey, its rulers had always adhered to the policy of hypocrisy and massacres. On the one hand, they admitted publicly the need for reforms in the Armenian regions, signed under the appropriate international documents, while on the other, they energetically and industriously perpetrated slaughters of Armenians. As a result, instead of the model of reforms, the model of mass slaughters of the Armenians was put in action.

Another option for the solution of the Armenian Question was the model of decentralization of the Ottoman empire, which became popular at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Among the adherents of the idea of decentralization of the empire was prince Sabaheddin, a nephew of Abdulhamid. In contrast to the Young Turks' doctrine of the Pan-Turkism²², the non-Turkish elements "tended to group themselves behind prince Sabaheddin", who "through his League for Private Initiative and Decentralization called for an Empire in which ethnic and religious groups would govern their own provinces on a decentralized basis. Much of the political strife which racked the Ottoman Empire after the Revolution can be traced to the struggle between these two conflicting points of view"²³.

The principle of decentralization found ardent supporters among the Arab countries, which saw in it the key to the solution of their political, economic, national and cultural problems. The position of the Arabs was very important, as they made up the majority among the peoples in the Ottoman Empire. In 1912, in Cairo, the Arabs founded "Lamarqazia" ("Decentralization") - the party for administrative decentralization of the Ottoman Empire, with branches in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq and elsewhere. The leader of the Party was a famous Arab philosopher, social scientist and publicist Rafik al-Azm. The keynote claim of 'Lamarqazia' was to transform the Arab and other non-Turkish vilayets of the Ottoman Empire into autonomous provinces with their local administration and provincial legislative assemblies. Such a status was designed for the Armenian provinces, too, as the best option and way to settle the Armenian Question

²² Propagating the monstrous idea of "a strong unified empire" in which "the non-Turkish elements would be fused with the Turks" (see: Neville J. Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I*, London, 1976, p. 59) they cynically added: "Our Christian compatriots shall be Ottomanised citizens. We shall no longer be conquerors and slaves, but a new nation of freemen" (J. Macdonald, *Turkey and the Eastern Question*, London, 1913, p. 55).

²³ Neville J. Mandel, *op. cit.*, p. 59. Ruben Sahakyan, Commenting on the documents from the archive of the Armenian public-political and state figure Yakov Zavriev [Hakob Christophori Zavryan (1866-1920)] about Turks, the Turkish chauvinism and Pan-Turkism [Zavriev wrote: "Sabaheddin vainly appealed to Turks warning them to use the pattern of France or Germany (the states with predominant homogeneous national composition), in vain he urged them to renounce the centralized governance which aroused intensification of anti-state feelings. The ruling party accused him of the plot against the political system, and the Prince had to leave for abroad"] noted that Sabaheddin (1877-1948) was a political figure, opposing the Young Turks (Ռ. Սահակյան, Փաստաթղթեր Թակով Զավրիևի անտիպ արխիվից, Պատմա-բանասիրական հանդես, 2011, 2, էջ 263).

under the existing circumstances.

Armenians also supported the idea of decentralization of the Ottoman Empire, backing up both the options: the models suggested by Sabaheddin and 'Lamarqazia'. Close relations, based on the understanding of one another's views, were established between Armenians and Arabs. The best manifestation of it was the First Arabic Congress, convened on the initiative of 'Lamarqazia' on June 18-23, 1913, in Paris. In the Congress, along with the representatives of the patriotic organizations and national-political figures of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine, the Western Armenian delegate participated. The Congress once again reconfirmed the position of the Arabs in the issue of the decentralization of the Ottoman Empire.

The First Arabic Congress in the discussions specifically addressed the Armenian Question and the ways of the solution. Paragraph 8 in the adopted Resolution was dedicated to the Armenian Question, where it said, "The Congress approves of and supports the demands of the Ottoman Armenians, which are based on the principles of decentralization, and extends greetings to them with their delegate"²⁴.

The Ottoman rulers, who were advocates of the strictly centralized state structure and carried out the policy of slaughters and forcible conversion into Turks of the non-Turkish peoples, were definitively against decentralization, considering it totally destructive for the existence of the Empire. They did not only reject decentralization, but applied oppressions against the upholders of the idea. Even prince Sabaheddin did not feel safe. To escape imminent assassination, he fled out of Constantinople and settled in Switzerland.

One more option of the solution of the Armenian Question circulated. It was the so-called 'model of Mountainous (Mt.) Lebanon'. The essence of the model was as follows: in Mt. Lebanon, in the mid 19th century, in the wake of the long-lasting bloody clashes, instigated through the complicity of the Sublime Porte and the European Powers, primarily by England and France, an original way of ruling was established in 1861. The sultan, under the pressure of the mentioned European Powers, approved the Organic Statute of Mt. Lebanon, which gave that region administrative autonomy, the status of a mutasarrifiyah. The sultan appointed governor, mutasarrif, whose being Christian was obligatory, and the nominee should be approved by the European Powers which also acted as guarantors for the autonomy of Mt. Lebanon²⁵.

Karapet Artin Daudian of Armenian descent was appointed the first mutasarrif in Mt. Lebanon. After the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish war, an identical, slightly modified principle was applied to Bulgaria. As was mentioned, the Treaty of Berlin of 1878 divided Bulgaria into two parts. An autonomous Bulgarian polity was created in one of

²⁴ See: Ն. Հովհաննիսյան, Արաբական առաջին կոնգրեսը 1913 թ., Հայկական հարցը: Հանրագիտարան, էջ 51; Documents of the First Arab Congress, 1913, Beirut, 1985, p.117.

²⁵ N. Hovhannisyan, The Arabic Historiography on the New History of Armenia, in: New History of Armenia in the Works of Contemporary Foreign Authors, Yerevan, 1993, pp. 187-188.

them with the right to elect a prince, who, however, should be approved by the sultan with the consent of the European Powers. Bulgaria was granted the Organic Statute, that is, the right to have a constitution. The other part of Bulgaria, Eastern Rumelia, although under the sultan's immediate domination, yet received administrative autonomy. The governor, necessarily Christian, was appointed by the sultan, and the nominee should be approved by the European Powers²⁶.

As is seen, this model of administration - creation of an administrative autonomous unit in any region of the Ottoman Empire, with the sultan-appointed Christian governor by the consent of the European Powers, acting simultaneously as guarantors for autonomy - had had precedents. This is a most significant factor in international law. This model was, in principle, acceptable for the sultan, and was employed in the Arab and Balkan domains of the Ottoman Empire.

Western Armenians did not mind to be granted administrative autonomy, anchored on the same principles. "Inspired by the Lebanese precedence, - writes Moussa Prince, an expert in the given issue- Armenians wished to receive a modest administrative autonomy, less ambitious, than the international Statute of Mt. Lebanon"²⁷. This option of the solution of the Armenian Question was backed up by various political and clerical figures; among them was Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople Nerses Varjhapetyan, enjoying wide popularity among various Armenian circles. The Memorandum, presented at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 by the Armenian delegation, contained the principal provisions of the model of Mt. Lebanon. Yet, as was mentioned, it was not even addressed to during the discussions at the Congress.

The parties addressed this option once again in 1912-1914, related with the new favorable situation set in after the 1912-1913 Balkan wars and the Turkish defeats. Taking advantage of the situation, Catholicos of All Armenians Gevorg V applied to the Russian government with a request to once again put forward the issue of the Armenian reforms. Meeting the request of the spiritual leader of Armenians, the government of the Russian Empire developed the draft proposal, which was founded on the provisions of the autonomy of Mt. Lebanon. The draft was presented to the European Powers, and on July 3-24 of the same year, it became a subject for discussions at the meeting of the accredited to Constantinople ambassadors of the Great Powers.

The Russian proposal largely considered the main provisions of the draft submitted by the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople. It was proposed, that six Armenian provinces (vilayets) - Erzurum, Bitlis, Kharberd, Svaz, Van and Diyarbekir, be united and one Armenian province created, with the governor at the head. The latter - Christian of the Ottoman citizenship, or European - was appointed by the sultan for a term of five years with the consent of the European Powers. The executive power was

²⁶ Дипломатический словарь, т. I, с. 178.

²⁷ Moussa Prince, Un genocide impuni. L'Armenocide, p. 28.

all focused in the hands of the governor. Affiliated to him, an Administrative Council was founded, and six advisors, three Christians and three Moslems, were elected to the provincial council, where Christians and Moslems were represented by equal numbers, etc. The draft contained several other important proposals, of which the most worthwhile are those regarding the elimination of the notorious 'Hamidie' bands, restitution or indemnity for the appropriated Armenian lands, prohibition of settling the Moslems who had migrated from the Balkans in the Armenian province, etc. This draft proposal was the best ever put forward for the solution of the Armenian Question.

The European Powers took different attitudes towards the Russian proposal. England and France principally accepted the proposals. As regards the Triple Alliance - Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey, they were against it. In particular, they were decidedly against the unification of the vilayets and creation of a united Armenian province; appointment of a governor with the consent of the Powers; parity of Christians and Moslems in the so-called provincial and local assemblies and among government officials, etc. Germany and her allies suggested taking as a basis for the discussions the Turkish version of the draft, where there was nothing said about the creation of the Armenian province. Instead, it was suggested to restore the status of the six vilayets. Turkey was also principally against the European supervision of the appointment of the officials and implementation of the draft. The diplomatic battle around the two proposed drafts lasted for about a year. England and France were not so active, as opposed to Germany and its allies, which exerted pressure on Russia and forced it to make concessions. Nevertheless, Russia was able to compel Turkey to sign the Agreement on the Armenian reforms on January 26, 1914. The Agreement, having rejected the proposals regarding the fundamental issues of administration and management, that is, the creation of the Armenian united province, as well as the preservation of the former statuses of the vilayets, chose a new variant. Western Armenia was divided into two zones. The first zone included the vilayets of Erzurum, Svaz (Sebastia) and Trabzon, while the second took in the vilayets of Bitlis, Van, Kharberd and Diyarbekir (Amid). In each zone was appointed a General Inspector (or Governor), who should be a foreigner, i.e. could not be a Turkish citizen. He was appointed by the Ottoman government, on the recommendation of the European Powers. The General Inspector, as the governor of the zone, was given certain authority to fulfill the executive power, such as to hire and fire officials, to solve land-related controversies, etc. The members of the local councils were elected from Christians and Moslems, on the principle of maintaining the numerical equality. On that same principle, the officials were appointed. The parties agreed to abolish "Hamidie", to replace it by a reserve cavalry, etc²⁸. The Agreement, albeit a step back in a number of issues as compared with the Russian

²⁸ See Davidson R., *The Armenian Crisis. 1912-1914*, *The American Historical Review*, Washington, 1948, vol. 3, No 3; *Collected Diplomatic Documents. Reforms in Armenia on November 26, 1912-May 10, 1914*, Paris, 1915, pp. 158-180.

draft, was still acceptable for Armenians. It gave them a status and a system of administration, which - in spite of all the flaws, was more preferable than tyranny and anarchy, which dominated in the Ottoman Empire and, particularly in Western Armenia.

The Turkish government, with the consent of the European Powers, nominated Hoff, a Norwegian citizen, the General Inspector in the First Zone. The General Inspector in the Second Zone appointed was Westenenk, a Dutch citizen. Yet, none of them managed to assume the post. Shortly, World War I broke out, and Turkey and Russia, England and France found themselves in opposite, hostile factions. Turkey took the occasion to cancel the Russo-Turkish Agreement (January, 1914) on the Armenian reforms.

None of these options had ever been put into effect. Effectuated was only one - the option of mass slaughters. And, under the toll of the carnages, the Armenian Question entered the third and the most tragic stage - the Armenian Genocide.