

COLLAPSE OF THE WESTERN ARMENIAN PRESS OF CONSTANTINOPLE AND SMYRNA (1915-1918) IN THE YEARS OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

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The entry of the Ottoman Empire into the First World War and committing the Armenian Genocide that had been cogitated by the Young Turks since the Adana massacres in 1909, was also a devastating blow to the Armenian press published in Constantinople, Smyrna (Izmir) and several centers of Western Armenia. The tragic fate faced by Western Armenians was to be shared by its press as well.

The Young Turks activating their genocidal policy against the Armenians of Constantinople, first began total recruitment of men whose fate had already been predetermined. Since the declaration of war the ambassadors of the Entente countries had left Constantinople and this provided the Young Turks with the freedom to realize their insane program of exterminating Armenians. In the Spring of 1915 a mixed assemblage of the Armenians of Constantinople visited the Grand Vizier Said Halim pasha and expressed their deep concern and trepidation in regard to the applied extermination policy¹, but there had been no adequate response and the genocidal actions against Armenians continued². In fact the Western Armenians had been declared outlaws.

On April 24 1915, hundreds prominent public figures of the Armenian community in Constantinople were arrested, sent into exile and killed³. The entire Armenian community of Constantinople were to be the next, as the American missionary Jacks noted⁴. In this respect J. Lepsius wrote that after some serious applications from ambassadors in Constantinople the Young Turks “abandoned the idea of imposing the general deportation methods on the Armenian population of Constantinople and Izmir. But they silently continued the deportation of the Armenians of Constantinople. A total of 10 thousand people have been deported and there is no information on their new place of residence”⁵.

¹ Զաւէն արքեպ., Պատրիարքական յուշերս, վաւերագիրներ և վկայութիւններ, Գահիրէ, 1947, էջ 98-100:

² In 1921 Said Halim was assassinated in Rome by the Armenian avenger Arshavir Shirakian.

³ These atrocities continued in the following months and the number of persecuted intellectuals increased.

⁴ Геноцид армян в Османской империи. Сб. Документов и материалов, под ред. Нерсисяна М. Г., II доп. изд., Ереван, 1983, с. 398.

⁵ Լեփսիուս Յո., Գաղտնի տեղեկագիր, հայ ժողովրդի ջարդերը, Երևան, 2003, էջ 134:

In October 1915 Prof. H. Hakobyan wrote from Constantinople: "There is no one left in Constantinople. We see no Armenian in the streets. "Indigence and anti-living conditions are terrible. Most of the provincials have been deported from Constantinople"⁶. He referred to the Armenian natives⁷ from Western Armenia living in Constantinople whose deportation had begun earlier in August 1915.

On December 7, 1915 the German ambassador in Constantinople Count Paul Wolff- Metternich reported to the Reichskanzler, that lately about 4000 Armenians also from Constantinople had been deported to Anatolia (Asia Minor-A.Kh.) and that "the remaining 80.000 Armenians still living in Constantinople" are to be gradually deported, "30.000 having already been deported during the summer and a further 30.000 having fled. Should a stop be put to this, then more severe means are necessary"⁸.

⁶ Մալեգեան Վ., Ճամբու ծայրը, հ. Բ, Փարիզ, 1955, էջ 92:

⁷ "Ernst von Nahmer, a reporter for the *Kölnische Zeitung*, stated in a confidential report dated 5-6 September 1915 that the targets of the first deportations were natives of the provinces, followed by unmarried men and married men with their families" (see: Kevorkian R., *The Armenian Genocide: A complete history*, London-New York, 2011, p. 543).

⁸ 1915-12-07-DE-001-M. Source: DE/PA-AA/R14089.Publication: DuA, doc. 209 (abbr.) No. 711, Translator: Linda Struck, see: Wolfgang Gust, *The Armenian Genocide 1915/16 from the Files of the German Foreign Office* <http://www.sci.am/downloads/musgen/WolfgangGust.pdf>

Дадрян В.Н., История армянского геноцида, Ереван, 2007, с. 291. In its efforts to deny the Declaration (May 24, 1915) of the Allies condemning Turkey in new crimes (the genocide against Armenians) against humanity and civilization, the Turkish agency "Havas" was greatly decreasing the number of the Armenians of Constantinople bringing down it from 200 thousand to 77.836 people (Ձաւէն արքեպ., նշվ. աշխ., էջ 148). Such a manipulation was determined by the goal of impending deportation of the Armenians of Constantinople. There remained last remnants of the national institutions of Armenians: already nonliving "National Constitution" (adopted in 1863 with many shortcomings as a result of the Ottoman authorities violent dictate and interference) and religious traditional centers, which became the target of the Young Turks vicious actions. In 1916 Young Turks directed their actions against the Armenian Patriarchate. By a note (July 28) addressed to the Patriarch of Constantinople the Young Turks' government announced that according to the "Regulations" of "the Armenian Catholicosate and Patriarchate" published in the same-day official newspaper "Takvim-i Vekayi", the Catholicosate of Sis and the See of Aghtamar were to be united and the patriarchates of Constantinople and Jerusalem were to be attached to them. The residence of the catholicos-patriarch would be St. Hakob monastery of Jerusalem. This religious body would be completely independent from the Catholicate of Ejmiatsin (Echmiatzin) (Տե՛ս Կանոնագիր Հայոց կաթողիկոսութեան եւ պատրիարքութեան, Երուսաղէմ, 1917, էջ 3, 14, cf. Kouymjian D., *Cilicia and Its Catholicosate from the Fall of the Armenian Kingdom in 1375 to 1915*, p. 12.

<http://armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/faculty/kouymjian/articles/2008%20DK%20Hist.%20of%20Cilicia%20to%201915%20.pdf>). S. Jevahirchyan was appointed Catholicos-Patriarchal Vicar. S. arch. Khapayan was appointed Catholicos-Patriarch of Jerusalem (Թէղդիկ, Ամենուն տարեցոյցը ("Calendar for Everyone"), Կ. Պոլիս, 1916-1920, էջ 179). Zaven patriarch was banished to Baghdad, then to Mosul. "Regulations" actually confirmed the fact of the genocide against Armenians in the Ottoman Turkey, defining that "The Dioceses were to be rearranged anew on condition that they would be at least comprised of 15.000 Armenians". Such a "regulation" was a falsehood because the genocide programme excluded the rearrangement of dioceses in Western Armenia where Armenians had been massacred or deported (Տե՛ս Գերմանիան և Հայաստանը 1914-1918, դիվանագիտական փաստաթղթերի ժողովածու, հրատարակություն և ներածութ. դոկտ. Յո. Լեփսիուսի, Երևան, 2006):

There is only scarce information from the years 1915-1918 about the Western Armenian press, its contents and relationships with the authorities. The Armenian newspapers of Constantinople and Smyrna of those years almost have not been preserved. As far as it concerns Western Armenia there neither remained a reader, nor a newspaper.

The existing data (about the Armenian newspapers of Constantinople and Smyrna) for which nowadays we mainly owe to Teodik's "Calendar for Everyone" and T. Azatyan's famous work dedicated to the newspaper "Zhamanak" («Ժամանակ» - "Time") allow us to form some opinion about this problem.

Teodik's "Calendar for Everyone" conveys irreplaceable information about the Armenian press, editors, censorship pressure and Constantinople literary and journalistic reality of the first decades of the century. He referred to four newspapers that survived during the years of World War I, namely "Byzandion" («Բիզանդիոն»), "Zhamanak", "Verjin Lur" («Վերջին լուր» "The Latest News") and "Jeride-i-sharkie" ("Eastern Herald") which was published using Armenian letters. They were in a half-dead state, enervated under the censorship whip and survived only nominally, which was planned for them by the Young Turks government. They tolerated the existence of those newspapers only for the purpose of propaganda, in order to show the seeming security and complete cultural life of Armenians in Constantinople. This press was obliged not to react to the military defeats of Turkey and its allies, to the deportations of Armenians from Western Armenia, to the mass slaughters and other realities.

With bibliographic scrupulousness Teodik enumerates the Armenian newspapers published during the decade before the Armistice, including party editions too, and he adds interesting details about their editors. Teodik also gives information, having the source value, about several newspapers published in Constantinople during the years of the Genocide, as well as much more completely about the periodicals published from 1918 till the beginning of 1920.

From the viewpoint of the Armenian press history, Teodik's information about the exiled editors (also not exiled) from Constantinople during the years of the war and concerning the few that returned from exile is very valuable. It is mentioned that E. Otyan, A. Antonyan, A. Shamtantchyan, B. Kechyan, E. Tolayan and A. Myubahyatchyan returned from exile⁹.

In their memoirs published later the renowned representatives of journalism convey reliable information about the press of that period. Of cognitive value are the memoirs of E. Otyan, E. Tolayan, H. Aramyan, H. Siruni and others and the reflections on them: though they are incoherent and fragmental, they contain factually accurate details¹⁰. E. Otyan's peculiar narration leaves no doubt that the Young Turks had

⁹ Թեոդիկ, Ամենուն տարեցոյցը, 1916-1920, էջ 115-117:

¹⁰ Օտեան Ե., «Իրիկուն տոմսակ», 1915 ապրիլ 11-12, «Վերջին լուր», 1921, 25 ապրիլի: Օտեան Ե., Անիծեալ տարիներ. 1914-1919 (անձնական յիշատակներ), Թեհրան, 2005: Թոլայեան Ե., («Կառոջ»), 35 տարուայ

launched the monstrous plan of genocide with mass arrests of intellectuals as well, including the press figures. E. Otyan starts his narration by giving the gradually increasing number of names of editor-journalists and other representatives of the intelligentsia arrested on April 24, 1915 (Barsegh Shahpaz, N. Taghavaryan, V. Torgomyan, E. Tolayan, A. Antonyan and many more). “Then we understood that it was the first monstrous episode of the hellish plan to exterminate the Armenian nation, that was taking place”, - E. Otyan writes¹¹. E. Otyan himself hid for some time but then he was arrested and banished, but by chance joined those few intellectuals who survived the Genocide.

During those years the Western Armenian press of Constantinople and Smyrna, because of the Turkish censorship, could not touch upon topics evoking national feelings or have serious content interesting for the reader. The volume of the newspapers already testifies to the fact of their non-existence. This is apparent in the volume changes of “Zhamanak” that survived together with a few newspapers. Since September 2, 1914 the newspaper was published in two pages which were filled with a satirical column “Morning Tickets” by E. Otyan, and of course with political news imposed by censorship. In January, 1915 “Zhamanak” returned to its previous 4-page volume, but “Morning Tickets” by E. Otyan, as well as his satirical novel “Parish councilor’s wife” ceased to exist. Since February 21, 1916 “Zhamanak” was again confined to two pages¹², probably returning to its 4-page volume after the Armistice, in the autumn of 1918.

During the war years the misleading, misinformed propaganda of the Young Turks came to replace the press in the form of newspaper appendixes. “During those four years”, - writes Teodik, - “the delivery boys in the streets had only wet newspapers and *ilave* (appendix - A. Kh.) without a leading article, without literature and concept; colorless and deformed pieces of paper, which were everything but a newspaper”¹³. The newspapers remained silent about news like the failures of Ottoman Turkey at the front, massacres and extermination of Armenians in Western Armenia, displacement and deportation of wanderers (emigrants from Western Armenia) and intelligentsia from Constantinople, etc. It was not allowed to write about events that even indirectly could somehow be favorable for the Entente Powers. Such efforts of the newspapers were strictly prohibited by German-Turkish censors. H. Aramyan, an employee of the newspaper “Verjin Lur” that survived through 1914-1918, wrote that since the first days of the war “a strict censorship was established” and that during those days the whole Armenian press “was very reserved, cautious and discreet”. In autumn 1914 “Verjin Lur”

թատերախմբագրական յիշողություններ, հ. Ա. Ե., 2008: Արամեան Հ., Մեծ Եղեռնի պատգամ. Հայոց տանթեական, Պէյրուս, 1970: Սիրունի Յ. Ճ., Ինքնակենսագրական նոթեր, Երևան, 2006: Մեծարանք առ Երուանդ Տէր-Անդրեասեան (խմբ. Նարդունի Շ.), Փարիզ (անթվակիր):

¹¹ Օտեան Ե., «Իրիկուան տոմսակ», «Վերջին լուր», 1921, 25 ապրիլի:

¹² Ազատեան Թ., «Ժամանակ» քառասնամեայ յիշատակարան, 1908-1948, Կ.Պոլիս, 1948:

¹³ Թէոդիկ, Ամէնուն տարեցոյցը, Կ.Պոլիս, 1920, էջ 271:

had published an anti-war article translated by H. Aramyan from the German social-democratic newspaper "Vorwärts". The Young Turks' military censorship had not been satisfied with just threatening to close the newspaper. The Armenian censors of the newspaper were dismissed, and the police started chasing H. Aramyan. "Tigran Zaven [a well-known publicist-journalist, editor of the newspapers "Yerkri Dzayne" («Երկրի ձայնը» - "The Voice of the Country"), "Yerkir" («Երկիր» - "Country"), "Zhoghovurd" («Ժողովուրդ» - "People"), etc. - A. Kh.] saved me, I hardly escaped. Two policemen were chasing after me" - H. Aramyan writes¹⁴.

The Young Turks' military censorship had indeed become a punitive institution for reporters. On this matter Av. Papazyan noted: "From that moment on exile became an ordinary phenomenon"¹⁵.

The same censorship supported in every possible way the unsubstantiated and false information of the Turkish press on the "constant victories" of Turkey and its allies in the war.

Instead, the Turkish press was full of cheap and vulgar attacks against any information that contradicted the internal and external genocidal policy of Turkey and called for revenge addressed to the internal enemies: Armenians and Greeks.

The Young Turks almost completely liquidated the Armenian press. In 1914, 25 of more than 30 newspapers and magazines published in Constantinople stopped being published, which was nothing else but the massacre of media¹⁶. In the years, before the war several morning ["Zhamanak", "Azatamart" («Ազատամարտ» - "War for Freedom"), "Nor Ashkharh" («Նոր աշխարհ» - "New World"), "Hayrenik" («Հայրենիք» - "Motherland"), "Aravot" («Առավոտ» - "Morning"), "Arevelk" («Արևելք» - "East")] and evening ["Byzandion" and "Banber" («Բանբեր» - "Messenger") (later - "Verjin Lur")], as well as shortly issued daily "Lusardzak" («Լուսարձակ» - "Spotlight")¹⁷ newspapers were published in Constantinople. Before the war and during its initial period those newspapers were mainly closed due to administrative and censorship brutal sanctions. Through 1915-1918 only four [Byzandion, "Zhamanak", "Verjin Lur" and "Jeride-i-sharkie" in Turkish using Armenian letters]¹⁸ of Armenian newspapers (being completely deprived of informational and content features of press) were preserved in

¹⁴ Արամյան Հ., Մեծ եղեռնի պատգամ. էջ 60-62: The censorship was performed by a newly created Martial law office (Divan-ı harbi orfie), which immediately stood out for its terroristic tactics towards the Armenian press. Under its harsh control all the newspapers were bereaved of their informational independence. During 1914 were closed the majority of Armenian newspapers published in Constantinople.

¹⁵ Փափազյան Ավ., Հայերի ցեղասպանությունը ըստ երիտթուրքերի դատավարության փաստաթղթերի, Երևան, 1988, էջ 13-14:

¹⁶ See Հայոց պարբերական մամուլը. լիակատար ցանկ հայ լրագրության (1794-1934), կազմ. Լևոնյան Գ., Երևան, 1934, էջ 34-81:

¹⁷ Ազատեան Թ., op. cit., pp. 156-157.

¹⁸ Թեոդիկ, op. cit., p. 271: Through 1915-1918 "Byzandion" was edited by B. Kechyan's sons, Ashot and Paruyr. the editor-in chief of "Zamanak" was S. Gochunyan (died in 1913); that newspaper for its survival owed to his untiring efforts while he was alive. "Verjin Lur" was published since 1914 and V. Toshikyan was its editor.

Constantinople. First of all, the first two - “Byzandion” and “Zhamanak” were among the most reputable and popular Western Armenian newspapers. Together with “Verjin Lur” their preservation was necessary for the Ittihad falsified propaganda to show as if “the untroubled life” of Armenians in Constantinople, but contrary to such a falsehood, as a brutal reality, massacres and deportations had been raging all over the Ottoman Empire. Certainly the fact that those newspapers were non-party was taken into consideration. But such an approach was not an obstacle for the authorities to persecute the newspaper employees that were detestable for them, e.g. editors Ashot and Paruyr Kechyan (“Byzandion”) and E. Otyan - a member of the editorial board of “Zhamanak”. As to “Jeride-i-sharkie”, it was the only newspaper in Turkish using Armenian letters that was published in Constantinople, which could serve as an argument for the Young Turks’ hypocritical claims.

Naturally the picture was the same in Smyrna, with a much smaller number of newspapers. In 1914 the three periodicals published here [“Ashkhatank” («Ախատանք» - “Labour”), “Knar” («Քնար» - “Lyre”) biweekly, and “Hay Grakanutyun” («Հայ գրականություն» - “Armenian Literature”) magazine were closed. In 1914 the daily “Dashingq” («Դաշինք» - “Alliance”) was also closed. As S. Partevyan testifies: “After about a five-year interval, after the Armistice he (the editor of that newspaper H. Mamuryan - A. Kh.) resumed his newspaper “Dashink” the name of which was changed into “Arevelyan Mamul” («Արեւելեան մամուլ» “Eastern Press”) in June of 1919”¹⁹. Through 1915-1918 no Armenian newspaper was published in Smyrna. It should be added that “Dashink” had an apparent Ramkavar or reorganized Hnchak orientation that could not be tolerated by the Young Turk authorities filled with extreme hatred towards the Armenian parties and their press. Besides, in 1915 the Young Turk authorities were going to deport and massacre the whole Armenian population of Smyrna and its outskirts²⁰. The final genocide against the whole Armenian population of Smyrna and its outskirts was committed by the Turkish slaughterers in 1922²¹.

The annihilating policy of the Young Turks against the Armenian press was much more drastic and severe in Western Armenia proper and other Armenian populated areas of the Ottoman Empire. In 1914, the year immediately preceding the Genocide of 1915, all the 18 newspapers and magazines published in those territories (Van, Kharberd, Sebastia, Tokat, Erzurum, Khotorjour, Yerznka, Nikomedia, Trapezunt, Partizak, etc.) were closed.

The Turkish censorship and the military authorities first of all directed their attacks against the party and satirical publications. The Young Turks violently turned the religious paper “Tatchar” («Տաճար» “Temple”) into an hand-reared unreligious

¹⁹ Պարթևեան Ս., Զմիռնահայ տարեցոյցը, Ա տարի, Իզմիր, 1920, էջ 90:

²⁰ Գերմանիան և Հայաստանը. 1914-1918, հ. 1, էջ 70:

²¹ M. Housepian Dobkin, Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of a City, New York, Newmark Press, 1998. Horton G., The Blight of Asia. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1926; repr. London: Sterndale Classics and Taderon Press, 2003.

publication. Just shortly before the Armistice only a small number of newspapers were published²² under the severe pressure of the Young Turks' regime.

In April 1915 was forbidden the publication of the official newspaper of Dashnaktsutyun party "Tchakatamart" («Ճակատամարտ» - "Battle") [the continuation of "Azatamart" ("War for Freedom", which resumed its publication in November 1918 under the name "Ardaramart" («Արդարամարտ» - "War for Justice") in Constantinople. The reorganized Hnchak newspaper "Aravot" and all the satirical publications, including E. Tolayan's "Kavrosh" («Կավոշ») were closed. Some remaining newspapers were subjected to strict censorship that the authorities started immediately before the war as a result of hardening of their discriminating attitude towards the Armenian press. "Any expression that was divergent from the government's point of view... any bewildered information or alternative reaction to current events often resulted in temporary suspension of a newspaper", - T. Azatyan writes²³.

Before the war "Zhamanak" was suspended by the military censorship four times²⁴. On June 11, 1913 "Zhamanak" was closed because it had printed the photos of Grand Vizier Mahmud Shevket's assassins, hanged. According to censorship rules the newspaper had to change its name, thus M. Gochunyan renamed the newspaper edited by him to "Heradzayn" («Հեռաձայն» - "Telephone") (before that he had purchased license for the newspaper with that name). Some time later the editor paid the guarantee amount, 500 gold, established by the same censorship rules and the newspaper once again started to be published with its previous name "Zhamanak" ("Time"). It should be added that in Constantinople through 1915-1918 German military officers also performed a censorship function along with Young Turk censors as a result of which the press of those years fell under double "Turkish and German censorship clutches"²⁵.

The Armenian press in Constantinople remained in the above-depicted condition till the Armistice of Mudros (October 30, 1918) and during the subsequent months it seemed that the situation would be changed, but all illusions came to an end after the Kemalists came totally to power.

*Translated from Armenian by
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²² Գերմանիան և Հայաստանը. 1914-1918, հ. 1, էջ 272:

²³ Ազատեան Թ., op. cit., p. 141.

²⁴ Նույն տեղում, էջ 141, 153-154, 157:

²⁵ Թեոդիկ, op. cit., p. 271.