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PUBLICATIONS

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THE REPORT OF A. SAFRASTIAN ABOUT THE UNBEARABLE CONDITIONS OF WESTERN-ARMENIANS REFERRED TO BRITISH CONSUL P.J.C MCGREGOR IN ERZEROUM (1910)

Key words: *Mush, Bitlis, Armenian vilayets, Ottoman Empire, Hamidie Cavalry, Kurdish chieftains, Agrarian problems.*

The oppressions occurring in the Armenian vilayets were connected to direct or indirect illegitimacy of different Kurdish chieftains, sheikhs and governmental officials. The Government was actualizing the extermination of the Armenians through them. Kurdish Beks making use of the permission of the Turkish authorities, sometimes their support as well, were plundering and robbing the peaceful population. The Armenians were under the constant control and total subjugation of the Kurdish authorities. They shared between themselves all the Armenian lands and forced the peasants to obey their direct authority¹.

In the present paper we intend to present and publicize some parts of A.Safrastian's report on the burdensome conditions of west-Armenians and the testimonies to the situation of taxation and oppression in the Ottoman Empire, directed to the British Consul P.J.S McGregor in Erzeroum (1910).

¹ NAA (f. 412, l.1, work 1770, p. 1–2, 19).

The Report of A. Safrastian about...

Arshak Safrastian was born on September 13, 1886 in Van. In 1904 at the age of 17, he joined the service in Baksh (Bitlis) as a translator in the British Consulate and soon was appointed to the post of Vice-Ambassador from 1907 to 1911. He bypassed the provinces of Bitlis, Van, Diarbekir and collected information about the unbearable conditions of the Armenians, the Armenian pogroms and massacres.

The documents presented have been picked out from a reliable source²; the choice of the represented parts of the publication was made by taking into consideration their readable conditions.

N 1.

1911

Turkey

BITLIS

State of affairs in Mush. Persecution

Read by Post.

of Armenian Liberals. Reports.

February 24.

Mr. Safrastian

No.4

Ref. Dispatch 12th June,

1910.

Sir,

I have the honour to report as follows upon the present state of affairs at Mush and the relations of the local authorities towards the Armenian liberals especially and the Armenian element in general.

I had the honour to inform you by a dispatch of the 12th June last, as a result of the incident occurring between Tahir Pasha, then Vali here, and the Armenian Dashnaktutiun Committee leaders in Mush the former in order to crush any resistance on the part of the latter, had sensed to get ...³ for documents against the leaders in question, which charged them, with having extorted many by force from the Armenian villagers of ...⁴. In Mush, and instead of using it for the

² NAA (f. 412, l .1, work 1770, p. 1-3, 11-12, 19-20).

³ Unreadable.

⁴ Unreadable.

Ginosyan N.

benefit of the Armenian Schools. Fund as it was meant, they appointed it for their own intimate made. From my subsequent reports you are near no doubt as to how Tahir Pasha began to persecute the Liberals and then how their persecutions caused in consequence of definite orders from Constantinople.

P.J.S McGregor Esq.,
H.B.M. Consul
Erzeroum

N 2.

I don't understand on good authority that in July last, the Minister of the Interior and the Dashnakits Central Committee at Constantinople agreed that both Tahir Pasha and ...⁵, the Armenian leader in Mush, were to be ...⁶ from this province and the dispute was thus supposed as settled.

Under the evil influence of one notorious Kurd, against whom the Dashnakits swayed a furious struggle, the judicial courts of Mush viewed the question in a different way. One examining magistrate at Mush was dismissed by the intrigues of Tahir Pasha for not having sanctioned the imprisonment of the leaders in question as the Vali wished and for his having publicly stated that the ignorant Kurdish witnesses against Karman were so well taught by somebody ...⁷ that it appeared they came not from illiterate human beings, but from a perfect atmosphere.

In vain Mr.Kharakhanian, the well-known Armenian bishop of Mush intervened in the matter, stating that the Committee was appointed for the collection of funds for the benefit of schools and that there was nothing unlawful.

It was a foregone conclusion, it seems, that Armenian leaders were to be imprisoned in order to put an end to their untiring ...⁸ in the agrarian disputes and others, which they rightly exercised on behalf of Armenian oppressed peasantry. All claims of justice and convincing proofs of honesty put forth by H. Karmen and his companions were completely overlooked by the Courts of Mush

⁵ Unreadable.

⁶ Unreadable.

⁷ Unreadable.

⁸ Unreadable.

The Report of A. Safrastian about...

and therefore they were convicted on a charge of crime and their imprisonment was ordered pending trial.

H. Karmen has already left this province soon after the departure of Tahir Pasha from here, and to Goriun and other leaders implicated in the matter, they hid themselves since the beginning of January last, upon which the authorities at Mush are reported as undertaking perquisitions and search after the old Regime in various villages of Mush for the discovery of the required leaders.

This crying injustice towards such loyal Ottomans and patriots as Karmen and the like, who since the proclamation of the Constitution have done all they could for the consolidation of the Constitutional Regime in this region in argument with the Committee of Union and Progress for the ...⁹ of illiterate ...¹⁰ and a mutual understanding among the recess, have aroused considerable discontent in all classes of Armenians who since a certain time are perceptibly growing disappointed at the procedure of the liberal government.

The hopeful prospects and enthusiasm of former days are gradually giving way to suspicions and hatred. One cannot easily understand the reasons of the present authorities for their revolution to the practices of Hamidian Government and their departure from the liberal professions of the early days of the Bad Regime.

Ordinary brigands and thieves such as Kurds of Khuyt and the notorious criminal, murderer and political agitator of more than thirty years such as Musa Bey of Khevnerare still allowed to continue freely their notorious work, whilst Armenian Liberals are being condemned to imprisonment upon ungrounded charges.

Confidential.-Taleat Bey, the ex-Minister of the Interior warmly thanked Karmen by a private letter some time ago, for his services and patriotic efforts displayed in organizing, cooperation among the races, and after the incident with Tahir Pasha. His Excellency proposed him the post of a Kaimakam in Macedonia, whereas he is now pursued as a criminal.

In my humble opinion any government in the world possessed of any sense of justice and commonsense would not behave in such an absurd manner.

⁹ Unreadable.

¹⁰ Unreadable.

Ginosyan N.

All those who know Goriun closely, agree that Pedal would scarcely submit to an unjust decision and consent to go to prison. Some weeks ago it was rumored that he intrenched himself in Sasun with his around band of 25 ready to fight any force which came to arrest him. Happily this rumor proved to be exaggerated. It is still to be feared however, about the Government persist in their blind and one-sided policy. Goriun may carry out his resolution, the consequence of which can under no circumstances be favorable to the general interests of this country.

I humbly venture to hope that sounder judgement say still prevails and has documents of the case, which have just been referred to the Indictment Court here, may equitably be revised and the decision of the Mush Court repealed by exculpating and coquetting the Armenian Committee leaders in question.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient,
humble Servant.
(SH.) A.S. Safrastian

N 3.

Bitlis
August 29, 1910

Sir,

I have the honour to submit to you the enclosed memorandum upon the present state of Hamidie Cavalry Regiments in this vilayet, which, however, must be taken with certain reserve as regards the strength in hon and horses and the real position of officers, it being quite difficult to get the exact numbers here.

Since the proclamation of the Constitution, however, these regiments have been almost completely disorganized and paralyzed, many of their higher officers imprisoned or died, hundreds of Hamidie troopers sold their horses being unable any more to maintain themselves upon plunder.

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Yusuf Bey, the Military Commandant here, told us that expected ...¹¹, of Reorganization of Hamidie Regiments has reached Gop already and in studying the question as reported by me on the 28th of April last.

I have the honour to be
Sir,
Your most obedient,
Humble Servant.
(Sd.)A.S. Safrastian.

P.J.C.McGregor Esq.,
H.B.M. Consul
Erzeroum

N 4.

The Hamidie Cavalry in the Vilayet of Bitlis

Brigande	Regiment	Regimental Centre	Strength		Commanding Colonies	Tribe
			Hon	Horses		
8 th	26 th	Gop	320	55	---	Hasananli
	27 th	Duknuk	500	150	Fetullah Bey	" "
	28 th	Kharabashehir	450?	---	Mehmed Emin Bey	" "
	29 th	Koshtian	240	80?	Khalid Bey	" "
	30 th	Gop	---	---	Ali Bey?	" "
	31 st	Khinis	---	---	Mehmed Bey?	Jibranli
	33 rd	Gumgum	350	2009	Khalid Bey	" "
9 th	34 th	Hadrag?	---	---	Mustapha Bey	Sirkanli
	35 th	Soglomaz	650	230	Kuli Khan Bey	" "
	36 th	Kizil-Ahmed	---	---	Selim Bey	Jibranli
	37 th	Hassan-Khan	---	---	Rashid Bey	Kaskanli

¹¹ Unreadable.

Ginosyan N.

N 5.

Bitlis,
October 24, 1910.

Sir,

I have the honour to report that the situation in the district of Khuyt has of late become very acutely critical again in consequence of the work and indecisive policy followed by the Government towards the Kurdish brigandage in that district.

With reference to my ...¹² of the 12th July last the aggressors and murderers of soldiers have yet not been arrested. Kurds charged with the crime above referred to having been reported as being innocent and that they are not real criminals, their withdrawal in September last after requiring ...¹³ of the expected results, the unwillingness of authorities to deal properly with several intertribal murders and lots of violence committed by Kurds in Khuyt, of which references have been made in my various dispatches during last summer have pushed those barbarous Kurds to ...¹⁴ even the Constitutional

P.J.C. McGregor Esq.,
H.B.M. Consul
Erzeroum

N 6.

Government.

Under previous Valis large areas of land in Khuyt and shote villages in certain cases unlawfully occupied by Kurds were restored to their Armenian proprietors in due course.

During the last three weeks, however, Kurds descended upon the Armenian villages of Taghavank. ...¹⁵ in Khuyt, and carried off by force almost all proceeds of the harvest and winter provisions belonging to the latter, on the ground that ...¹⁶ question were the products of lands disputed by Kurds themselves. ...¹⁷ in

¹² Unreadable.

¹³ Unreadable.

¹⁴ Unreadable.

¹⁵ Unreadable.

¹⁶ Unreadable.

The Report of A. Safrastian about...

Khuyt stated to The Armenian ...¹⁸ in Khuyt stated to that they had been told by the above mentioned.

Kurds to the effect that their forefathers and fathers (Kurds) had enjoyed the fruits of the tolls, the case was to be carried on also under the present generation. "They could recognize neither the "Hurriet" nor any other law, but their own rifles and cartridges. ...¹⁹ Bey headed by Priests of Khuyt proceeded here a weak ago and petitioned ...²⁰ Hakhi Bey, the Vali, in the above sense and in due details. Some dispatched from here on the spot have been unable to compel Kurds to restore the provisions taken off from Armenians by force, and it is to be feared that the half Christians of the ...²¹ will be left to face the severe winter in the mountains of Khuyt without grains and victuals, if strong and immediate measures are not adopted by the authorities to bring these Kurdish parasites to reason before the snowfall.

I have the honour to be
Sir,
Your best obedient,
humble Servant,
(Sd.) A.S. Safrastian

¹⁷ Unreadable.

¹⁸ Unreadable.

¹⁹ Unreadable.

²⁰ Unreadable.

²¹ Unreadable.