

## ON THE ROLE OF ARMENIANS IN THE PROCESS OF MODERNIZATION OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE DURING TANZIMAT

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The problem of the role of Armenians in the process of the political modernization of the Ottoman empire during the reforms of Tanzimat (1830-1870s) yet has not been a subject of special complex study. The common view which circulates among Osmanists and Armenologists which considers them as «subjects» of reformatory activities is a result of predominantly empiric approach with using quite limited facts and does not take into account essential peculiarities of the functioning of the complicated structure - the multi-religious and multi-ethnic Ottoman society of the period of intense formative processes.

Our paper represents only a preliminary approach to the problem mentioned above. From amongst the diversity of problems connected with this topic we have chosen only three, fairly «representable» ones. We have considered and analyzed the facts according to following themes:

1. Cases of continuous personal contacts between Armenians with the prominent Ottoman officials of that period - initiators and leaders of the Ottoman political modernization (Mustafa Reshid-pasha, Mehmed Emin Ali-pasha, Mehmed Fuad-pasha, Ahmed Jevdet-pasha and Ahmed Midhat-pasha). These relations are conditionally classified as «friendship».
2. Armenians - members of the so-called «modernizing» Ottoman bureaucracy, particularly in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
3. The participation of Armenians in the struggle for the declaration of the first Ottoman constitution.

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Below we shall discuss these problems separately.

### 1.1.

Armenian as well as Turkish sources offer a considerable number of facts speaking in favor of the «friendship» as it was classified above. We had identified about two dozen such cases. Choosing as a criteria the character of personal relations these could be classified as follows:

- The Ottoman official - his personal banker.
- The Ottoman official - his personal (or family) physician.
- The Ottoman official - his closest employee.

Before we turn to the analysis of peculiarities of these relations in the groups mentioned above it should be stated that in the period preceding the reforms of Tanzimat in the Ottoman empire Sultans and highest officials have a tradition to use

Armenians belonging to the so-called class of *amira*, rich Armenians of Constantinople who had made huge fortunes due to industrial and commercial-moneylending activities, as their personal bankers. The latter are called also *sarrafs*. According to Armenian sources, in 1830s, the period of the highest power of the *amira* class, of about total 200 nearly 80 could be classified as *sarrafs*. One of the peculiarities of Armenian *amiras* and *sarrafs* in particular was their determination to stay out of political activities on the imperial scale (at the same time *amiras* almost completely regulate political processes inside the Armenian *millet*). Some cases are recorded when they refuse to be appointed on high offices in the traditional Ottoman hierarchy.

The situation had begun to change with the initiation of Tanzimat. During the celebratory act of *Gülhane hatt-e-sherif*, along with the spiritual leaders of *millets*, who according to the Ottoman tradition were the leaders of the non-Muslim communities, the delegation of Armenian *sarrafs* was present (unfortunately their names remain unknown) - an unprecedented phenomena! Here noteworthy is not only their invitation but also that the *sarrafs* had accepted it, which could testify in favor of the abandonment of their traditional positions of non-interference in the political life of the Ottoman state.

It is highly likely that this was the initiative of Reshid-pasha, the author of *Hatt-i sherif*, who willingly use the services of Armenian *sarrafs* (at least the names of three Armenian *sarrafs* are known). Later in 1850-1860s the participation of Armenian *amiras* and *sarrafs* in different *mejlises* (councils) of the central administration created by the leaders of Tanzimat in order to accelerate and deepen the reformatory process, it became a common practice which witnessed for the conscious change in their position. Of these let us mention only the case of Hovhannes Tingir, who did not belong to the top of the class of *amira*, but who was the personal banker of Fuad-pasha, one of the leaders of the second phase of Tanzimat. After the persistent efforts of the latter he became a member of the highly authoritative *Mejlis-i Vala-i Ahkiam-i Adliye* (Supreme council of legislative decrees), which, according to the Turkish historian Ali Akyildiz, was an «essential weapon at the hands of the Tanzimatists» in the realization of their program of reforms. Two more Armenian members of this *mejlis* were representatives of the well-known *amira*-families (Hovhannes Dadyan and Mihran Duzyan), who traditionally were connected with the sultans. The political rationale behind the appointment of Hovhannes Tingir is beyond doubt.

To our mind, the most noteworthy is the case of Mkrtich Muradoğlu, who was the banker of the prince Murad, known as holding liberal views (who later became sultan as Murad V), and Namik Kemal, one of the leaders of the «New Ottomans» - first Turkish constitutionalists as well. As it was demonstrated by the Turkish historian M. Kuntay who based his study on archival materials, Mkrtich Muradoğlu subsided on favorable conditions and often did not demand to return his money back.<sup>1</sup> There is information that this money was used for the financing of demonstrations of *softa* (students of the Muslim religious educational institutions) directed against the Sultan Abdul-Aziz and

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<sup>1</sup> Kuntay 1944: 262-263.

enthronement of Murad, which have also anticonstitutional character. According to information prince Murad and Mkrtych Muradoğlu were discussing the problems of the future constitution.<sup>2</sup> Mkrtych Muradoğlu was a graduate of the «Murad Rafaelyan» school at Paris, where he had studied most of the Armenian liberals of 1850s-1870s and which had a decisive impact on the formation of their attitude.

To our mind, here we face the evolution of the nature of relations mentioned above, filling it with new content. The analysis of other types of contacts shall allow us to reach a more accurate assessment of the nature of this evolution.

### 1.2.

During the traditional period which precedes Tanzimat, there were many Armenians among personal physicians of the Ottoman sultans and officials of highest rank. We lack information in regard to their political activities. This situation had drastically changed in 1840-60s.

On the one hand, the doctors Servichen (Serovbe Vichenyan) and Nahapet Rusinyan - personal physicians of Ali-pasha and Fuad-pasha, who were educated in Paris, were the leaders of the movement for the declaration of the so-called Constitution of Armenian *millet* and Armenian liberals who struggle for the democratization of inner *millet* life as well.

On the other hand, they participate also in the political sphere on the imperial scale; they accompany their high-ranked patients in the trips to the conflicting regions (Lebanon, Crete) and, according to the sources, often carry out the role of advisors. Besides that Dr. Servichen was a personal friend of Midhat-pasha and had participated in the discussions of the declaration of constitution. Later he was elected as a member of the Ottoman parliament from Constantinople and appointed as a member of its upper house - senate.

### 1.3.

Among the closest staff members of the Ottoman officials in the period of Tanzimat were numerous Armenians. All they occupy different high posts in the Ottoman bureaucratic hierarchy and actually were active participants of the political modernization process (as it was shown by several scholars, particularly by Carter Findly, the Ottoman bureaucracy of the period of Tanzimat was the main driving force of the process of reformation), and were distinguished persons of liberal attitude in the inner *millet* political life.

Among them Grigor Agaton is worth to mention, who became the first Christian minister in the Ottoman history.<sup>3</sup> Another example: one of the closest employees of Reshid-pasha was Hakop Krchikyan who later had become a prominent diplomat.

<sup>2</sup> Öztuna 1967: 54.

<sup>3</sup> Before he would assume the office, he died in Paris a few months after the appointment. See: H. Asatur, Ashkharhabar matenagitutyan patmutyun [History of Bibliography in New Armenian], p. 177 (manuscript). - Ye. Charents Literature and Art State Museum of RA, Fund T. Azatyan, B. 1, 17.

But the most noteworthy case is, certainly, the long-lasting friendship of Grigor Otyan with Midhat-pasha. Otyan was the director of the department of foreign affairs of the Danube vilayet during the period when Midhat was the governor,<sup>4</sup> and later he had played an active role in the struggle for the Ottoman constitution of 1876. (The problems of the participation of Armenians in the constitutional struggle we shall discuss later). Here it should be mentioned that the Armenian sources report on frequent visiting of the house of G.Otyan by Midhat-pasha, where he communicate with Dr. Servichen and other Armenian activists.<sup>5</sup>

It could be suggested that they belong to the group of «intellectuals» who by means of their discussions contribute to his work on the planning of the reorganization of governance of some European regions of the empire on federative principles, as it is written by Niyazi Berkes in his well-known study dealing with the history of the development of secularism in the Ottoman empire and the Republican Turkey (unfortunately without references to sources).

Very few is known about this project. Some fragmentary information is extant in the memoirs of Nikolay Ignatev, the Russian ambassador to the Ottoman empire. Although that project was not implemented, it is important from the point of view of the complete characteristics of the views of Midhat-pasha regarding the possibilities of realization of more cardinal reforms in the Ottoman empire and the influence on the formation of these views by some circles of non-Turkish peoples, including Armenians as well.

Gr.Otyan was a recognized leader of Armenian liberals of the Ottoman empire and was regarded as one of the key persons of the Armenian millet. The aim of his activities inside the millet and also in the national scale was the establishment of the «rule of law and justice» according to the European example, he dreams for the times to come when «Armenian people could say to all peoples of the East – ‘We are brothers’». His hopes on the improvement of the condition of the Armenian people he connects with the success of the policy of pro-western transformations in the system of the political governance of the Ottoman empire, particularly he was hopeful on the declaration of constitution.

Worth noting that Armenian sources mention also about other well-known public figure of liberal attitude, agronomist G.Stimaradjyan, who cooperated with Midhat-pasha during this period.<sup>6</sup> Besides them, as advisors and assistants of Ali-pasha and Fuad-pasha could be mentioned officers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Hamamdjyan, Seferyan, Apro, and well-known jurist Vahan-efendi, a prominent expert in Ottoman legislation, who was the advisor of Djevdet-pasha.

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<sup>4</sup> Annuaire diplomatique de l'Empire Ottoman. Première Année, 1289 (1872-1873), Constantinople, 1872, p. 72-72.

<sup>5</sup> Kasmararyan 1910: jd.

<sup>6</sup> Sardaryan 1910: 126-127.

Indeed we did not mention all cases of close personal contacts of the leaders of Tanzimat. But the studied cases let us conclude of their specific transformation: relations built on *pure business grounds* (banker-client, physician-patient) during Tanzimat acquire the character of *cooperation on ideological one*.

## 2.

Many Armenians were involved in the Ottoman «modernizing bureaucracy» of the period of Tanzimat. Most of them (52 people) were in the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter MFA). Indeed, this is not accidental. MFA used to be the most «westernized» establishment of the Tanzimat period and had played the role of a specific «catalyst» in the process of modernization.

During this period Armenians comprise 14% of the staff of MFA and were the largest non-Muslim group; for example, Greeks comprise only 8%. Especially many Armenians work in the department of external correspondence (69% of the total staff of that department). Relatively high presence of Armenians is fixed in the department of consular relations.

Many Armenians included in the Ottoman diplomatic service at the same time were also liberally oriented activists and took part in the inner-millet struggle with conservators. Besides Hakop Krchikyan and Grigor Otyan mentioned above, the names of Sarkis Hamamjyan, Stepan Arzumanyan, Minas Minasyan and others could be referred to.

Let us focus more detailed on the case of Sahak Apro. He held the position of the chief of the department of external correspondence for 10 years and was regarded as one of the leading officers of MFA. He was not only an Ottoman bureaucrat but also had left a significant mark in the history of Armenian public and political thought being the publisher and author of the journal «Noyyan aghavni» («Noah's pigeon»), the first liberal publication not only among Armenians but also in the whole Ottoman empire. In his publications he acts as a convinced advocate of reforms in the political structure of the Ottoman empire and supports the policy of Tanzimat. Like other Armenian liberals, he was confident that by means of the liberally oriented transformations the Ottoman empire could be revitalized and the condition of Armenians improved as well.

The co-publisher of «Noyyan aghavni» was Grigor Markosyan who later became the officer of MFA.

## 3.

During the first half of 1876 were initiated active efforts for the dethronement of Sultan Abdul-Aziz, enthronement of prince Murad and the declaration of constitution, which was triggered by the rapidly expanding Eastern Crisis, in which were involved to some extent hundreds of people of different nationalities and confessions, representatives of various social strata, political groups and organizations. Armenian

liberals, according to some data, had played considerably significant role. Some directions of their participation could be highlighted.

This was, first of all, the work on different documents of constitutional movement undertaken under the guidance of Midhat-pasha, including the projects of the constitution, often backstage and remaining anonymous. Here, indeed, first of all should be mentioned Grigor Otyan. According to some sources, he had participated in the preparation of the «Manifest of Muslim-patriots», one of the significant documents of the struggle for the constitution.<sup>7</sup> Or, as it is written in Armenian sources, he was the author of articles, which were published signed by Midhat in the Paris and London based newspapers.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, even Sultan Abdulhamid II wrote in his diary that Otyan was Midhat's «compass» in the Constitutional struggle.<sup>9</sup>

There are testimonials that Otyan had played a decisive role in the work on the text of the constitution.<sup>10</sup> In all likelihood, here not the final text of the constitution is to be understood which was accepted by the special constitutional commission, since although he was its member, he was not included in the subcommission which worked on the text of the constitution. About the «great credits» of Grigor Otyan on the work over the project of the constitution which was prepared by Midhat-pasha wrote prominent Turkish historian Enver Ziya Karal, who unfortunately does not mention his source.<sup>11</sup> In the special literature is said about the existence of two variants of Midhat's project; in both cases is extant the principle of «decentralization»: was considered the granting of every confession the right to be proportionately represented in the future parliament, equal rights for Muslims and Christians, the access of the latter into high state offices, including the post of the Grand Vizier. It is easy to note that all these provisions meet the aspirations of Armenian liberals.

During the struggle for constitution Grigor Otyan was performing also important diplomatic duties. Thus he was sent to Paris by Midhat-pasha with a secret mission.<sup>12</sup>

To the list of the backroom work of Armenians during the constitutional movement belongs its financing by the liberal *sarrafs* (bankers); this episode was already mentioned. Another field of the pro-constitutional activities of Armenian liberals was the active participation of their leader Otyan in public political struggle for the declaration of constitution. He participated in the demonstrations of Midhatists demanding the dethronement of Sultan Abdul-Aziz,<sup>13</sup> and joined the discussions in the constitutional

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<sup>7</sup> N. P. Ignat'ev - N. K. Girsu, Konstantinopol', 24 maya/5 iyunia 1876 goda [N. P. Ignat'ev - to N. K. Girs, Constantinople, May 24/June 5, 1876]. - Archives of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire, Fund Kantselaria MID, file 25, sheet 204.

<sup>8</sup> Cheraz 1929: 21.

<sup>9</sup> [Abdülhamit II], İkinci Abdulhamidin hatıra defteri. İstanbul, 1960, s. 117.

<sup>10</sup> Nurikhan 1907: 355.

<sup>11</sup> Karal 1982: 391.

<sup>12</sup> Baykal 1948: 470-477; Beylérlian 1994: 54-55.

<sup>13</sup> Minas Cheraz 1929: 23.

commission, being a part of its liberal members along with Namik Kemal, Ziya-pasha and others.<sup>14</sup> By the way, other Armenians also were among this commission.

The support of Armenian liberals to Turkish constitutionalists is highlighted in Armenian media of 1875-1876s. They began to write more blatantly about the necessity of fundamental transformations in the Ottoman empire. The liberal newspaper «Noragir», which was publishing in Constantinople, stresses: «The absolute aim of an Armenian is to see the victory of equality and merit in Turkey»,<sup>15</sup> and the leading liberal newspaper «Masis» wrote about the necessity to introduce the principle of the «balancing of the government».<sup>16</sup>

After the government of Sultan officially recognized the necessity of constitutional reforms, actually all Armenian newspapers, not only liberal ones, appreciated the fast declaration of constitution. Liberals continue to assure their readers and Turkish authorities as well that Armenians had binded their future with the Ottoman empire and explain that since the majority of Armenians live in Asia and always must be «citizens of Turkey», they can defend their interests only by means of «close union with Turkey and friendly co-citizenship with the Turks».<sup>17</sup> Patriarch Nerses of Constantinople who was under their influence, in the summer of 1876 applied to Armenian people with a message, where he persuaded them to help strongly the Ottoman government who took the path of reforms.<sup>18</sup> However, in 1876 in the deeds of Armenian liberals new tendencies emerge. In August Minas Cheraz, who became one of the liberal leaders, in an article published in a francophone newspaper, unequivocally mentions that Armenians had more right for rebellion than Balkanic peoples, but they know that «there are many diseases which could be cured by time».<sup>19</sup> In the Autumn of that same year the leaders of Armenian *millet* which mostly consist of liberals, undertook several initiatives (drafting and delivering of petitions to the Ottoman government dealing with the persecution of Armenian population in the vilayets of Western Armenia, the meeting of the Patriarch with Midhat-pasha and the ambassadors of Russia and Great Britain).

In all likelihood, the main purpose of these actions was the desire of liberals to press on the Ottoman government and achieve the implementation of the principle of decentralization of governance. They pursue also the secularization of the state legislative system, restriction of the sphere of the usage of *shariat* only as religious law for the Muslims.

In fact, it was about different interpretations of official political doctrine of Osmanism. Liberals were against imperialist and assimilatory tendencies in the

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<sup>14</sup> Davison 1963: 48.

<sup>15</sup> Noragir [Newsletter], October 23, 1876.

<sup>16</sup> Masis [Masis - Armenian name of the Mount Ararat], 1876, No. 1835.

<sup>17</sup> Masis, 1876, No. 1895.

<sup>18</sup> Sarukhan 1912: 115-117.

<sup>19</sup> Alpoyajyan 1927: 114.

treatment of this doctrine among some governmental and public circles and were trying to reach legislative processing of those regulations which may give a chance to carry out reforms in the spirit of «brotherhood and equality» of the peoples of the Ottoman empire.

In this regard is typical the speech of S. Papazyan, a well-known figure in the session of the National Assembly (supreme consultative body of Armenian *millet*) in December 1876, some days before the declaration of Constitution. He declared: «Let us openly say to our Ottoman compatriots and try, so that they understand that we are Armenians and that we shall keep our nationality even under the Ottoman flag. The desire to merger would not be useful for none of us ..., but we [he mean peoples of the Ottoman empire - R.S.] have a unity of interests, this is why we are an integrated whole as the citizens of the Ottoman empire ...».<sup>20</sup> To that date this idea was shared by many representatives of the Armenian elite.

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Let us summarize the results of our study. The problem of «Armenians and the process of the political modernization of the Ottoman empire» could be represented as follows:

1. Armenians were involved in that process;
2. The *tendency of the graduate activization of their role in the political modernization* most vividly was manifested during the struggle for the first Ottoman constitution.

However, during that period emerges a desire to *influence* in some way on the process of modernization in order to reach its adjustment in the right direction.

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<sup>20</sup> Atenagrutyunq Azgayin zhoghovo [Minutes of the National Assembly], 1876-1877, Constantinople, 1876, p. 326.



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