




## THE EVENTS OF 1915 AND OVERLOOKED DETAILS OF TURKISH THESIS 1915 OLAYLARI VE TÜRK TEZİNİN GÖZDEN KAÇAN AYRINTILARI

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THE EVENTS OF 1915 AND OVERLOOKED DETAILS OF  
TURKISH THESIS  
1915 OLAYLARI VE TÜRK TEZİNİN GÖZDEN KAÇAN AYRINTILARI

ARMAĞAN ÖRKİ- SİNEM YÜKSEL ÇENDEK

**Öz**

27 Mayıs 1915 tarihinde kabul edilen ve 1 Haziran 1915 yılında uygulanmaya başlanan Sevk ve İskan Kanunu (Tehcir Kanunu), Osmanlı Devleti'nin gerileme dönemi ile Birinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında özellikle Doğu Anadolu Bölgesinde ortaya çıkan Ermeni ayaklanmalarına yönelik bir tedbir olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Ermenilerin Osmanlı Devleti aleyhine dönemin büyük devletlerince kullanılmaları ise 1700'lü yıllara kadar geriye gitmektedir. Ermenilerin desteklenmesinin arkasında her bir devletin kendi çıkarları olmasının yanı sıra, devletin parçalanma döneminde azınlıkların kendi devletlerini kurma arzuları da ön plana çıkmıştır. Ermeni tehciri ile ilgili olarak ortaya atılan Ermeni tezlerinin karşısında Türk tezinin Türkçe yazına aktarılmış; ancak İngilizce yazında çok fazla yer bulamamış olmasından kaynaklı olarak çalışmanın amacı, 1915 olayları ile ilgili Türk tezinin de anlaşılmasına aracılık etmektir. Bu amaç çerçevesinde, Türk kamuoyu haricinde kabul görmeyen ya da daha kötüsü, hiç anılmayan ayrıntıların derlenmesine odaklanılmıştır. Ermeni tezini kabul eden ve Türk tezini görmezden gelen çevrelerin, ortaya konulan birtakım ayrıntılarla dikkatlerini çekmek de çalışmanın ikincil amacını oluşturmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, çalışmada ikincil kaynaklardan yararlanılarak bir derleme hazırlanmış, öncelikle Ermenilerin ne zamandan itibaren sorun çıkarmaya başladıklarına, Osmanlı Devleti'nde toplumsal yapı ile milliyetçiliğe, Birinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında yaşananlara değinilmiştir. Bununla birlikte, Ermenilerin geçmişte ve sözde soykırımın da günümüzde nasıl bir dış politika aracı olarak kullanıldığı vurgulanmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** 1915 Olayları, Tehcir Kanunu, Türk tezi

**Abstract**

The Relocation and Resettlement Law (the Tehcir Law), which was adopted on May 27, 1915 and started to be implemented on June 1, 1915, was considered as a precaution for the Armenian uprisings that emerged especially in the Eastern Anatolia Region during the decline of the Ottoman State and the First World War. The use of Armenians against the Ottoman State by the Great States of the period goes back to the 1700s. In addition to the fact that each state had its own interests behind the support of the Armenians, the desire of the minorities to establish their own state came to the fore during the fragmentation of the State. In the face of the Armenian theses put forward regarding the Armenian deportation, the Turkish thesis was located into Turkish literature; however, it has not found much place in the English literature. On account of this, the purpose of the study is to mediate the understanding of the Turkish thesis about the events of 1915. For this purpose, the focus is on compiling details that are not accepted, or worse, never mentioned, outside the Turkish public opinion. The secondary purpose of the study is to draw the attention of the circles that accept the Armenian thesis and ignore the Turkish thesis with some details. In this context, in the study, a compilation was prepared by making use of secondary sources, first of all, the time the Armenians started to create problems, the social structure and nationalism in the Ottoman State, and the experiences during the First World War were handled. Additionally, it has been emphasized that how the Armenians in the past and the so-called genocide in the present have been used as a foreign policy tool.

**Key Words:** The Events of 1915, The Relocation and Resettlement Law, Turkish thesis

### **Structured Abstract**

*This study, titled “The Events of 1915 and the Overlooked Details of the Turkish Thesis,” highlights the Turkish thesis in front of the claims regarding the Armenian deportation and focuses on the details of the Turkish thesis, especially in the English literature, by revealing the distorted facts about the deportation. The distortions determined from the date of the adoption and implementation of the Relocation Law have gained importance especially for the Armenians to be used for their own purposes by the great states of the period.*

*The Armenian thesis about the events of 1915 is that with the Deportation Law, millions of Armenians were exiled and a genocide was applied against the Armenians. The Turkish thesis, on the other hand, was shaped as not that it was a genocide, and that the deportation that covered Armenians in a certain geography for a short period of time should be evaluated under the conditions of the First World War, and the casualties during the exile were not in the numbers claimed by the Armenians. Therefore, in the study, it was aimed to provide researchers to think about the Turkish thesis against the Armenian thesis by directing some questions. The aim of the study is to contribute to the Turkish literature on the Turkish thesis, as well as to draw attention to the details of the Turkish thesis that were ignored in the face of the Armenian thesis and the inconsistencies of the Armenian thesis. For this purpose, in the study, which is a compilation of Turkish thesis, an analysis was made through case studies. The inconsistency between the time of enforcement of The Relocation and Resettlement Law and the claim of the Armenians, controversial information about the number of losses by those who accepted the Armenian thesis (first documenting the lower numbers and then the higher numbers), and the persecutions applied to the people of the region within the framework of the events in the region were some of these cases. In addition, the intervention in the internal affairs of the state under the guise of minority rights during the period of Ottoman decline and the first World War and the use of Armenians as a foreign policy tool in line with the national interests of the great powers of the period in the process of disintegration of the state come to the fore.*

*In the study, first of all, the situation before the First World War was evaluated, and the establishment of an Armenian State in Eastern Anatolia was mentioned gradually with the Eastern Question expressed in the 1815 Vienna Congress. Additionally, with the Treaty of Ayastefanos signed after the 93 war, Armenians were mentioned for the first time in a treaty and thus, Armenians started to take part in international politics. Then, the social structure of the Ottoman State was examined and what the meaning of nationalism in the Ottoman State was emphasized. The aim is to show that there was an understanding of nationalism based on religion rather than race. Following this, uprisings were discussed with international developments in the said period and the role of the Armenians was focused on. The Armenian uprisings that started in the 1890s and the functions of organizations and committees established by the Armenians in these uprisings were examined. In the environment created by the Balkan Wars in the early 1900s, Armenians also wanted to establish their own state and continued their uprisings in this period.*

*During the First World War, Armenian citizens’ attitudes and behaviors against the Ottoman State and the uprising prompted the Ottoman State, which fought on many different fronts during the war, to take measures in this regard. Because the riots did not take place in the form of individual events but by provocations by both the patriarchate and other states participating in the war. In the face of these uprisings, the Istanbul Government prepared the*

*Relocation and Resettlement Law (the Tehcir Law) dated May 27, 1915 and put it into effect on June 1, 1915. The relevant law was enforced for a short time and only Catholic and Protestant Armenians who participated in harmful activities were immigrated. With this law, it was revealed that the prevention of the riots was not very successful and it was stated that the Law was repealed in November 1915. The massacres carried out by the Armenians continued after this period and information was given about the rebellion of the Armenians in the territory of the Ottoman Empire occupied by different Allied states during the war.*

*In the ongoing part of the study, the Turkish thesis has been included. According to different sources, it was stated that the number of Armenians in the Ottoman State was 1.5 million at that time, while Armenians lost less than 600,000 in Anatolia between 1912-1922, Muslims lost more than 2.5 million in the same years. In addition to this, the aim of asking the Armenians to be removed from the battlefields was also aimed with the Relocation Law. Armenians' help and guidance to the Russian military units were effective in this. On the other hand, a deliberate exile or genocide against the Armenians has not been applied and it has been stated that the data on Armenian deaths should be considered under war conditions.*

*In the section where the opinions of foreigners confirming the Turkish thesis are discussed, the determination of an American journalist studying Armenian events in an interview with an Armenian citizen is given. Accordingly, the Armenian citizen declared that they were much more peaceful before England got involved the issue. Another journalist claimed that the events in question were caused by the Armenian uprisings. In the foreign sources discussed, it is understood that the Armenians who wanted to avoid the conditions of war were used by the great powers of the period, and that the proverbial views and discourses of the Europeans were tried to be put forward. Additionally, these sources indicate that Armenians were not massacred, but that Turks and Kurds living in the region were massacred by Armenians.*

*The fact that the Turkish thesis is relatively new to be handled by foreign scientists will constitute an important stage with the increasing number of studies on this subject. Because many scientists who have proved the accuracy of the Turkish thesis continue their studies on this subject. In addition, it was stated in the works of those who defend the Turkish thesis that the Armenians were sent to the settlements where they could live while exiled, and the state had to choose this way due to the problems arising from them. Additionally, comparative analysis was carried out with the inclusion of similar historical events in the study. This analysis also showed that the Armenian deportation was never intended as a genocide. In the section where the activities of the Armenian lobbies and the Asala terrorist organization were discussed, the aim was to take advantage of the negative air against Turkey in the international public opinion in the 1970s. On the other hand, it has been emphasized that one reason why Armenians are so focused on the so-called genocide is the effort to make them forget their own massacres.*

*Finally, the study focused on the use of Armenians as a foreign policy tool, and an assessment was made whether the recognition of the so-called Armenian genocide was an extension of this. The economic support provided by the Armenian lobbies and the potential for political support during the election periods were also seen as a reason for politicians' instrumental approach to Armenians.*

## 1. Introduction

There are two internationally accepted theses on the Events of 1915. The Armenian thesis is based on “the idea of the systematic killing of minimum 1,5 millions of Armenians”. However, even a small error in the Chronicle of events is visible. In this regard, Alp (2009, pp. 5-6) reacted to the commemoration of the so-called genocide of 24 April 1915, the date of the arrest of Armenian gangs and political leaders who caused bloody violence, and emphasized that the decision of forced migration was taken on 27 May 1915. It was put into practice on 1 June 1915. As Yüksel (2013, pp. 105-106) stated, the decision taken on 27 May was reached on 30 May and could only be implemented on 1 June.

Budak (2018, p. 211) remembered that archives of different institutions and ministries such as the Directorate of State Achieves together with Topkapi Palace Museum Archive, Land Registry Cadastre Archive (Kuyud-ı Kadime Archive), Foundations Archive, Archives of the General Staff ATASE and Maritime Museum Archive are rich sources regarding the case subjected to analysis. Sarıay (2006) has compiled and published all the archival documents related to the period that can be referenced in Turkey. Türkaya Ataöv published a bibliography book on the subject in 1981 and compiled and shared eight sub-titles, Turkish publications, studies of Armenian origin, followed by American, British, French, German, Tsarist Russia, Soviet Union and others. Çolak (2002) has written the fact that the tendency towards different sources in relation to the events of 1915 can sometimes produce false (or non-scientific) results. Before the actions of ASALA and Armenian lobbies, one of the most important works related to the subject in Turkish literature is Esat Uras's book, *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi*<sup>1</sup> published in 1950.

In this study, the main purpose is to compile some details that translated into Turkish literature; but not enough in the English literature and to provide an understanding of the Turkish thesis on the events of 1915. In addition, Vidlickova's (2012, p. 14) argument was motivating in the preparation of this article:

*“(...) the individuals are likely to believe what they hear or read without verifying the sources and facts and that the parliaments, which recognized the “Armenian genocide”, did not decide according to historical research or a legal analysis and they did not establish any commission studying this problem before the decision was made. Rather, these countries seem to act according to facts based on the poor knowledge of their parliamentarians.”*

In Vidlickova's study, it was focused on understanding the Turkish thesis only, and in particular on the compilation of details that were not accepted or worse, never mentioned outside the Turkish public. Of course, history can only be written by historians who can remain neutral. In this study, however, it is aimed to present a different perspective for those who are not interested in intervening or commenting on political history. Therefore, the aim of this study is to enable the researchers who seek some answers to be inspired by the Turkish thesis. These questions can be summarized as follows:

a. If the Armenians were subjected to genocide, how could they continue their massacres in a wide time and in a wide geography? Who massacred, raped, burned and robbed Muslims in the region?

<sup>1</sup> There is no translation edition; but it's possible to translate it by Armenians in History and Armenian Problem.

b. While the Ottomans accept hundreds of years of immigrants from various regions, whether Muslims or non-Muslims, and provided foreign aid, why did they suddenly breaking the tradition of hundreds of years and targeting a group of people?

c. If the intention of the Ottoman State was genocide, why didn't it apply the decision of forced migration in all of its cities and why didn't it deport all Armenians? Catholic and Protestant Armenians, civil servants, soldiers and officers, traders, artificers, skilled workers and some others are exempted as Yüksel (2013, pp. 229-250) stated. What was the reason?

d. Since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, there are not discrimination against citizens of Armenian origin, is there anyone of Turkish origin in Armenia today? Did the Turks slaughter the Armenians with whom they lived together for centuries and then regret it and start living together again?

e. Do those who have believed in the Armenian thesis (and have forgotten massacres, wars and genocide in their history), read the Republic of Turkey's the acceptance of immigrants without religion and language distinctions and foreign aids such as confession until the Second World War to the civil war in Syria.

Firstly, the situation before the First World War, social structure and nationalism sub-headings were included in the article. Then, the situation that occurred during the war was explained and the opinions about the Turkish thesis were compiled. Afterwards, a comparison of several different incidents is shown which shows why the Turks are right when they say "so-called genocide". Finally, it was tried to draw attention to the activities of Armenian lobbies and how the Events of 1915 were used as an instrument in international relations.

## **2. The Events Of 1915**

The acquaintanceship of Turks and Armenians dates back centuries before the Events of 1915. The two communities met in the Seljuk period. When the Ottoman State took Bursa in 1326, it had a significant number of Armenian populations and with the conquest of Istanbul in 1453, Armenian families in various parts of Anatolia were inhabited here (Gündüz, 2012, p. 61). Living in peace with its neighbors from different religions, sects, ethnic origins and races for centuries, the society has entered a troubled period in the light of some external developments.

### **2.1. Ottoman State Before World War I and Armenians**

Although there are different opinions in the literature about the use of Armenians as an instrument against the Ottomans, it was understood that the first event took place before the 1800s. Sarıay (2008, p. 71) stated that in the second half of the 1700s, Katerina II and the Armenians were provoked against Muslims and Turks. Insomuch that, Uygur (2016, p. 186) stated that during the period of Petro I, the Armenian church was taken under control, used politically, and exiled tens of thousands of Armenians against the Revan Khanate after the Russian-Iranian (Safavid) War.

The Oriental (Eastern) Question came to the fore with the Vienna Congress of 1815 and it was based on the independence of the Balkan Christians, the establishment of an Armenian state in Eastern Anatolia, the separation of non-Turkish Muslims from the Ottoman State and the sharing and colonization of the Ottoman lands (Kodaman, 2010, pp.

131-132). As a result of the Vienna Congress, attempts for nationalism and democracy within Europe were suppressed; however, in the wars against the nationalist discourse within the Ottoman State, an anti-Ottoman attitude was taken (Erkan, 2010, p. 101). In other words, the results of the Vienna Congress, while maintaining the indivisibility of states within Europe, brought the division (fragmentation) for the Ottoman State.

War of '93 (The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78) “awakened Armenian dreams for independence with Russian help and under Russian guidance” according to Turkish thesis. (Center for Strategic Research, 2007, p. 4) After the war, the Armenian Patriarch went to the Russian headquarters and demanded autonomy for the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia and made the writing of Article 16<sup>2</sup> of the Ayastefanos (Yeşilköy) Treaty (Kodaman, 2010, p. 133). On this starting point, not only Tsarist Russia, but also the European states and after a while the USA became one of the parties. Perhaps the most important feature of this agreement was emphasized by Sarıay (2008, p. 76) and he stated that the Armenian name was included in the agreement and/or treaty for the first time and that the issue is now on the agenda of international politics. And Armenian issue gained an international dimension.

### 2.1.1. Social Structure

From its foundation in 1299 to the First World War, the societies of different ethnic and religious belonging in different regions came under the rule of the Ottoman State more than 600 years. Changes in the social structure have been experienced due to the requirements of the age, internal and external reasons, and regulations have been applied for various reasons in the understanding of management.

In the Ottoman State, religion became one of the tools used to differentiate between individuals and groups and was effective in determining the social status of the individual (Avşin Güneş, 2015, p. 3). The nation system, on the other hand, is a concept that emphasizes belonging to religion and sect, not race and lineage (Kurtaran, 2011, p. 59). Armenian Catholics and Armenian Gregorians, such as Latin Catholics, Greek Orthodox and Jews, were also accepted as nations (Fraser, Mango & McNamara, 2011, p. 14). Gümüş (2009, p. 167-168) stated in his example that the Greek nation was Greek and all other Orthodox Christians and explained that the nation system offers freedom in religious and cultural life.

Although it is possible to classify the dhimmi (zimmi in Turkish) in the Ottoman State, it can be argued that it consists of three basic classes: Greeks, Armenians and Jews (Avşin Güneş, 2015, p. 18). Kurtaran (2011, p. 61) stated that there are four generally accepted nations and listed them as Muslims, Greeks, Armenians and Jews. The Armenian Patriarchate in İstanbul until 1908 was the place where Armenians were represented both religiously and politically, and the government's decisions on Armenians were implemented (Kılıç, 2018, p. 85). Interestingly, while in some countries people were punished for their religion, as Özkan and Kılıç (2010, p. 571) reminded, the Armenian Patriarchate was allowed to be established in 1461 just under Mehmet II.

Within the ethnic structure of the Ottoman population, different societies have interacted with each other and are accustomed to living each other's cultures. It's possible to find some facts and examples on Karpat's (1985, p. 54) book about the population by cities

<sup>2</sup> The relevant article shared by Erim in his work includes the immediate improvement in the regions where Armenians live and the protection of Armenians from Kurds and Circassians. (as cited in İltar, 1995, p. 163)



or regions. In fact, Alp (2009, p. 2) stated that some Westerners used the term Christian Turks for Armenians. The Armenians rose to important duties within the Ottoman State. Koçaş (1967, p. 4) pointed out that the administration trusted the Armenians and the loyalty of the Armenians who had no responsibility other than tax and mentioned that they lived together without any problems since the 1400s. At this point, Şahin (2008, pp. 76-77) in his study of Armenian translators explained how some Armenian translators served separatist activities from the 1800s to the Turkish War of Independence. On the other hand, according to Kılıç (2011, pp. 113-114), Evliya Çelebi, who gave an idea about the Ottoman State in *Seyahatname* in the 17th century, there was not any negative situation and Kılıç stated that Muslims and Armenians lived together in villages, towns and cities.

The aim of the census in Ottoman State was to determine the tax and military officers, as Güneş (2014, p. 226) stated. In the data of Karal and Lutfi (as cited in Shaw, 1978, p. 326) concerning the Ottoman population in which men were counted in 1831, the Muslim population was 2.501.475, while Greek Orthodox was 1.178.171 and Jewish 17.012 and Armenian - Gregorian 20.309. In this census, it does not make sense for a group to be deliberately incomplete or overrated, since Muslims are important for military service and non-Muslims for tax purposes. The state needed information on the number of Muslim men for its military security and the number of non-Muslims for its economic security. The determination of the Armenian population was also paid due to Article 61<sup>3</sup> of the Berlin Treaty. (Yıldırım, 2011, p. 96).

According to the data of 1897, the ratio of Armenian population to total population was determined as 5.47 percent (TTK, p.3). As it is understood that the Armenian population has been apparently found most today in the Eastern Anatolia region. Alp (2009, p. 3) shared that only 39 percent of the population was Armenian in Erzurum, Bitlis, Harput, Diyarbakır, Erzincan and Harran in this region. For example, in Edirne, on the western side of the state, the Armenian population remained much lower. According to the BOA data (as cited in Yıldırım, 2011, p. 94), the Armenian population was less than twenty thousand in the total population close to one million.

The number of Armenians in Marash was around 11.000 in the total population that approximately 68.000 in 1908 and in 1914 the number of Armenians in different denominations was reported to be around 22.000 within the population of 74.000 in the census of Aleppo Province and the Ministry of Internal Affairs sources (as cited in Yetişgin, 2005, p. 14). It is understood that their rates have increased from approximately 16% to 30%.

There is no exact population information belonging to any nation, not only to Armenians living under Ottoman rule. According to Memiş (2005, p. 9), it was the Armenian Patriarchate that gave the highest figure for the Armenian population during the First World War and presented an excess of 2.5 million; however, according to Ottoman statistics, this figure is less than 1.3 million. In addition, according to the report of the Armenian Patriarchate of 1921, nearly 650.000 Armenians returned to their places of residence after 1915 (Özdemir et al. 2004, p. 121).

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<sup>3</sup> w/i: 2.1.3.

### **2.1.2. Nationalism**

The idea of Ottomanism was adopted in order to avoid the possible negative effects of the nationalist movement that emerged after the French Revolution and thus it was aimed that individuals have a common consciousness (Karakoç, 2010, p. 158). It seems that this goal has not been achieved; with the influence of nationalism, divisions started within the Ottoman society (Arabs, Bulgarians, etc.).

It is known that there are different but related reasons in the formation of the Armenian issue. Çelebi (2018, pp. 22-25) listed these as colonialism and nationalism in world politics, activities of missionaries, studies based on religion, organizations, and policies organized by Western states for the interests. Among these factors, it was deemed necessary to briefly touch on the subject of nationalism in order to understand the general situation.

Under the Ottoman rule, there was no state – individual relationship based on race or ancestry, and religious affiliation was taken into account. The reason for the separation of society according to their religious identity is that people should be addressed by the state as a religious community rather than as individuals (Kurtaran, 2011, p. 62). Religion was not the only determinant in the approach towards non-Muslims in the Ottoman State. (Avşin Güneş, 2015, p. 22).

Nationalism-based separatism has been experienced on every mainland (Europe, Asia and Africa) under Ottoman rule; but there are differences in the emergence of these movements. American missionary schools can be cited as one of the long-term reasons for separatism based on nationalism. In this regard, Ortaylı (1981, p. 88) stated that these missionaries understood that they could not be successful between Muslims and Orthodox Greeks and turned towards Armenians, and that the Orthodox rulers who feared the loss of their communities complained to İstanbul. Ortaylı (1981, p. 90) also stated that the number of 400 schools in geographically focused on certain places, generally prefer regions such as Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Eastern Anatolia and Çukurova. In addition to education, missionary activities continued in orphanages and more than 10 orphanages opened by the Americans in 1902 became effective within the Ottoman borders. (Yıldız, 2015, p. 246) In addition, the idea that the American and French missionary schools in Lebanon had an impact on Christian Arabs was also shared (Fraser, Mango & McNamara, 2011, p. 22).

### **2.1.3. International Developments and Riots**

Gül (1997, pp. 139-140) states that there are three basic incentives in the formation of the Armenian uprisings: After 1877, the Armenian officers in the Russian Army communicated with the Ottoman Armenians and provoked them, the work of the American missionaries and Armenians from the US since the 19th century, the provocations that European states started after the 93 War. The process leading to the Events of 1915, as Tosun (2003, p. 144) states, is much more than a Turkish-Armenian conflict, so there is the influence of states such as Russia, France and the United States. Although attempts have been made to improve the commitment of non-Muslims by improvement steps in education and transportation issues during the reign of Abdul Hamid II, but the state has not been successful because of foreign states (İmamoğlu & Deniz, 2014, p. 591). For example, Tosun (2003, p. 146) argued that the United Kingdom was involved in breaking the influence of Russian Empire over Armenians and securing the road to its colonies. In other words, the field of

struggle of the two important states was shaped on the Ottoman Armenians. It is interesting to note that in June 1878 (after the Treaty of Ayastefanos), the British, which secured the territorial integrity of the Ottomans against the Russians, also had the right to temporarily control Cyprus, thereby reducing their promises to the Armenians (Kodaman, 2010, p. 134). Following the Treaty of San Stefano (Ayastefanos) and before the Treaty of Berlin, in İlter's words (1995, p. 165) the agreement that signed between the Ottomans and Britain gave the British the right to protect and intervene in eastern Anatolia.

In the Treaty of Berlin, Article 16 of the Treaty of San Stefano was adopted as the 61st Article without much modification (İlter, 1995, p. 167). Thus, it was continued to intervene the Ottoman internal affairs on the pretext of Armenians.

Eyicil (1999, p. 31) stated that Armenians under the influence of different states were instrumental in the political interests of those states and reminded that during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, the Russian Tsar had closed Armenian schools and banned Armenian and Armenian national activities. However, there was no similar prohibition in the Ottoman State at that time. Despite this, dozens of uprisings have taken place in four different parts of Anatolia, from 1882 to 1908 there have been close to forty mortal uprisings (Gündüz, 2012, pp. 64-65). İlter (1995, p. 170) drew attention to another issue and reminded that England, which defended the Armenian cause until 1897, had forgotten the Armenians through the Turkish-Greek War. In addition, Cornell (as cited in Kantarcı, 2006, p. 211) placed capitulations in the first place regarding the roots of the Armenian question and he stated that the Western European states had the right to judge their citizens in the Ottoman State and that they acquired sectarian protection over different Ottoman citizens. In addition to intervening in the internal affairs of the Ottoman State, the division of Ottoman citizens in terms of their religions, sects and origins was reinforced.

Gülcü (2018, p. 1353) stated that two reasons for resorting to riots were to scare Muslims away from the region through individual actions or massacres, as in the case of Bulgaria and to attract the attention of the Western public. As it was seen that the Armenian gangs have at least partially achieved these two aims. At this point, it should be remembered that American journalist George H. Hepworth (as cited in Kodaman, 1985, pp. 572-573) stated in his report on the events that religion and race did not cause any reason and that there were no economic reasons for the Armenians who were already engaged in trade at important points and who were wealthy from the Muslim population.

It was thought to be useful to briefly touch on a few insurrections since 1890. It should be noted that many sources have reported that the first uprising took place in Erzurum in 1890. However, there was an uprising in the Zeytun region under the pretext of The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78; however, due to the measures taken, it has been prevented from achieving success (Eyicil, 1999, p. 28). On the other hand, there was a rebellion in the same region in 1878 and many civilians were massacred by Armenian gangs (Eyicil, 1999, pp. 34-35). Another uprising that caused hours of conflict in 1895 occurred in and around Bayburt (Özger, 2007, pp. 68-71). In October 1895, while thousands of people were shopping in Erzincan, Armenian gangs opened fire to civilians and tried to attract the attention of the European public (Yüksel, 2012, p. 171).

More details on the organizations involved in these attacks can be found in the book published by the General Directorate of State Archives (DAGM, 2001). In addition to the

riots since the 1860s and the legal and illegal (secret) organizations established, Özdemir (2007, pp. 132-134) mentioned and stated that the Armenagan, Hinchak<sup>4</sup> and Taşnaksütyun committees were the most important structures. 1890 is an important turning point; however, as Nalbandian (1975, p. 67) said, extensive uprisings began much earlier, in the 1860s.

1890: According to Kızılkaya (2014, p. 449), the importance of the uprising in Erzurum stems from being preliminary trial.

1893: In 1893, Hinchak launched an uprising in Yozgat and threatened Armenians who did not support to them (Yel et al., 2008, p. 51).

1894: In Sason, the Armenian gangs aroused armed attacks on the tribes in the region and provoked them successfully. Thus, they had managed to attract the attention of Europe (Gülcü, 2018, p. 1353-1354).

1895: About 5000 Armenians in İstanbul joined the event of the Sublime Porte (Babı Ali, the Ottoman Porte) organized by Hinchak (Tosun, 2003, p. 161). In İlder's words, these armed marchers planned to step on the Porte and draw the attention of Europe and intervene (as cited in Tosun, 2003, p. 161). In the same year, an uprising broke out in Zeytun, and as the first sign of this uprising, one of the two soldiers overseeing a criminal was dismembered and killed (Eyicil, 2000, p. 161). In the uprising in the region, not only armed attacks were organized, but rape and drowning of children were also applied (Günay, 2007, p. 298-300). Also, a total of 20.000 Ottoman soldiers and civilians were killed by Armenian gangs (Doğan, 2011, p. 519). In the same year, there were more than one uprising in cities such as Bitlis, Erzurum, Erzincan, Muş, Elazığ and Malatya (Yüksel, 2012).

1896: In June 1896, gangs carrying out attacks in Van were neutralized after more than a year of preparation (Gül, 1997, p. 143). On the other hand, it is understood that the attacks were carried out again shortly after this uprising and that the attacks were carried out regardless of religion, race or sect. Tosun (2003, p. 162) stated that foreign states were involved in the events and punishment of gangs was prevented by these states.

1905: An attempt was made to assassinate Abdul Hamid II, the Ottoman Sultan of the period (Tosun 2003, p. 163).

Attacks, riots and massacres by Armenians continued to be organized in various places during the 1900s. For example, only in 1906 and only in Revan, 25 villages were burned and their inhabitants were massacred (DAGM, 1995a, p. 49). The Armenians who attempted to establish their own states by taking advantage of the environment created by the Balkan Wars and made new attempts again in 1913. (Erickson, 2013, p. 103) Finally, it is necessary to mention some points about how gangs gather supporters. Özger (2008, pp. 57-60) stated that gang leaders organized the ones who did not have a good economic situation with the promise of money and work, and also convened people by exploiting religious and national sentiments and forced those who were not convinced by the use of weapons by using different sources.<sup>5</sup> These findings are reminiscent of the ways in which today's terrorist organizations acquire terrorists. Also Çabuk and Tombul (2019, p. 2) stated that the clergy who are the leaders of the society (such as the patriarch and the priest) were targeted and the

<sup>4</sup> SDHP: Social Democrat Hunchakian Party.

<sup>5</sup> For the assassinations of Armenian gangs against Armenian clergy, Armenian statesmen, rich Armenians, Armenian journalists and others w/i: Karakaya, R. (2017). *Ermenilere Yönelik Ermeni Terörü*, İstanbul.

Armenian people carried out actions to eliminate or at least frighten those who did not follow their ideas.

## 2.2. World War I and Ottoman Armenians

Those who occupied the territories where the Armenian community was in, before the First World War developed policies in accordance with their interests without distinction of religion or ethnicity. The general policy of the Russians can be summarized as follows: (Center for Strategic Research, 2007, p. 12)

*“Russia in fact was using the Armenians only for its own ends. It had no real intention of establishing Armenian independence, either within its own dominions or in Ottoman territory. Almost as soon as the Russians took over the Caucasus, they adopted a policy of Russifying the Armenians as well as establishing their own control over the Armenian Gregorian church in their territory.”*

The Washington Post (1914, p. 3) in the USA stated in its news in November 1914 that Armenian volunteers joined in the war alongside the Russians. It was also reflected in the official correspondences that the volunteers were not made up of Armenians living in the relevant geography, and that Armenians from different regions also voluntarily applied to join the Russian army (Hasanli, 2014, p. 185).

During World War I, the Ottoman State fought on many fronts. There were also war fronts in places linked to forced migration. However, the losses were not only due to migration or armed conflict. For instance, during December 1914 and the winter of 1916, 90.000 of the 150.000 troops on the Eastern Front lost their lives due to the seasonal situation (Sander, 2016, p. 374). The events that took place during the war were discussed here on the subject of Ottoman Armenians, the steps of the Istanbul Government and the issues of forced migration.

### 2.2.1. Attitude of Armenian Citizens

Multiple reasons have been identified for making the migration decision. One of them is described by Çelik (2008, p. 145): According to a text dated January 1915, Ottoman Armenian troops who came to Kars acted undisciplined, their commanders did not register, and there were robberies, murders, rape and attacks within the units. Another point for the security of the state was that some Armenians were armed against their own states for violent political purposes. (Republic of Turkey<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019) Furthermore, some Christian and Muslim Armenian origin soldiers in the Ottoman army in the region (Erzurum) attempted to escape with the effect of Russian propaganda (Kızılkaya, 2014, p. 456-457).

The riots behind the front and raids on the supply routes of the Ottoman army also made it necessary to take measures in Istanbul. (Çelebi, 2018, p. 34) As well as missionaries, the clergy were influential in the attitude of the Armenians. Regarding this period, Kılıç (2018, p. 90) stated that in the sermons given in the patriarchate, instead of giving sacred

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<sup>6</sup> RT will be used for Republic of Turkey.

words, insurrection calls were made and the patriarchate took the form of the center of various organizations.

Like the riots of the 1800s, various uprisings took place during World War I. In 1914 and 15, attacks and occupation movements were organized by gangs in Zeytun (Doğan, 2011, pp. 521-522). Undoubtedly, the uprisings that started in the 1800s ended in the early 1900s and did not suddenly start again with WWI. During the intervening period, local developments took place and all of them erupted with the participation of the Ottomans in the war. Lewy (2005, p. 84), describing what happened in Van, he stated that relations between Armenians and Muslims in the region had already been deteriorating for some time, that Kurdish - Armenian tensions had accelerated and that the Armenian population's arming speed had also increased. On April 20, 1914, attacks accelerated in Van, 4.000 armed Armenians opened fire on outposts and burned houses belonging to Muslims, and 15.000 Armenians in the countryside joined these insurgents (Lewy, 2005, p. 84). In an archive document dated March 1915, it was also remarkable that the number of genocide Muslims in Kars and Ardahan reached 30.000, and that the Armenians and Greeks in the Ottoman army deliberately enslaved the Russians and leaked information. (DAGM, 1995a, p. 50). Elekdağ's (2001, p. 73) detection is also worth reminding:

*“In March 1915, the Russian forces began to move toward Van. Immediately on April 11, 1915, the Armenians of Van began a general revolt, massacring almost all the Turks in the city and vicinity so as to make conquest easy for the Russians.”*

This event is known as Van Rebellion and is perhaps the most effective reason for The Relocation and Resettlement Law that is the subject of the study. It is doubtful that the uprisings carried out by the Armenian gangs took place while fighting on many different fronts in a wide geography from Çanakkale to Palestine. As a result of these attempts by the gangs, the Ottomans assigned some of the troops that they had to send to the front to suppress these uprisings (Türkkan Tunalı, 2017, p. 136).

### 2.2.2. Measures and Decisions of İstanbul Government

Against the uprisings, the Government of İstanbul first took regional measures and thus aimed to suppress the uprisings (Şikalıyev, 2003, p. 219). The expected results of these policies have not been achieved. For example, in spite of the uprising in and around Maraş, some Armenians in this region were transferred to Konya; however, this decision was abandoned upon the fact that they merged with other elements in this new place where they were in collective form and created a danger (DAGM, 1995c<sup>7</sup>, p. 6).

The Relocation and Resettlement Law (the Tehcir Law) was prepared on May 27, 1915 and put into practice on June 1, 1915. The places where the forced migration decision was applied were Erzurum, Bitlis and Van behind the Caucasus and Iranian fronts and Mersin and İskenderun behind the Sinai fronts according to the BOA as cited in DAGM, 1995c, p. 8) documents; however, it has also been extended to other places where riots have taken place. According to Lewy (2005, p. 84), one of the most important factors in enacting this law was the widespread attacks in Van. Because 1 in 6 of the Muslims in the city were

<sup>7</sup> This source includes official correspondence of Armenian persons and groups who are not subjected to forced migration and whose migration is postponed.

massacred and the rest had to flee the city, plus it also paved the way for an easier occupation of western places such as Bitlis (Yüksel, 2013, p. 81).

In the law, only those who engaged in harmful activities were subject to immigration among the Armenians who were Catholic and Protestant (Beyoğlu, 2004, p. 1) In addition, the families of Armenian deputies, civil servants, soldiers and officers, those who worked in military factories, those who were weak, disabled, blind, doctors and health workers, employees of the Ottoman Bank, those who worked in the Reji Administration and consulates, orphaned children and widows, and those who did not engage in harmful activities in some places such as Istanbul, Aydin were also exempted from immigration (Beyoğlu, 2004, p. 1). In short, what the state wanted was for them to be disbanded in the areas where the insurrection took place so that they would not be able to rise again (DAGM, 1995c, p. 7).

### **2.2.3. Forced Migration**

Köksal (2006, pp. 283-284) pointed out that the concept of deportation / exile (“sürgün” in Turkish) had two meanings in the Ottoman State and explained as follows: It is an exile for the state to place some of those living under its sovereignty in another region within the framework of certain rules and for different reasons and this is how the population was shifted to Balkans and islands in the Mediterranean. He also mentioned that the other meaning of exile was a punishment and he shared examples of this in the continuation of his work. The Events of 1915, as explained below, are suitable to be interpreted as an overlapping exile in its initial meaning.

Armenians, who wish not to be subject to immigration and to protect their property, have intensely declared that they have changed their religion or denomination individually or collectively; but some of these are thought to be intimate (Beyoğlu, 2004, p. 2). There were also Armenians who fled during the migration. For example, Aslan (2011, p. 151), in his Kayseri example, reported that some of those sent to Aleppo, Syria and Mosul provinces had deserted and returned to Kayseri and 5 percent of them were distributed to villages. In the implementation of the migration, destinations were Aleppo, Raqqa, Zor, Kerek, Havran, Mosul, Diyarbakir and Cizre (DAGM, 1995c, p. 9). Muslims fleeing from the Russians and Armenian gangs headed to the west of Anatolia (Fraser, Mango & McNamara, 2011, p. 70).

Although the migration decision was adopted in May 1915 and applied the following month, violence in various parts of Anatolia could not be prevented. Anyway, Relocation and Resettlement Law was stopped in November 1915 (DAGM, 1995c, p. 11). In an archive document dated May 1916, it was stated that Armenian gangs carried out genocide against Jews along with Russians and killed the people of the region by hanging, shooting, burning, bayoneting, sword - smashing, and even in some places the bodies of those killed were fed to dogs and rape occurred without distinction between children and adults<sup>8</sup> (DAGM, 1995a, p. 52).

In 1918, the decision was taken to allow the emigrants to return again, and it was reported that they were allowed to return with their safety assured (Çelik, 2008, p. 149). On the other hand, France, which occupied parts of Southeastern Anatolia and Çukurova,

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<sup>8</sup> The attacks, massacres, rape, sabotage and other acts carried out by the Armenians until 1918 were transferred from 49 to 321 pages of the source in Turkish and also in English.

brought Armenian gangs to the places under its control (Tosun, 2003, p. 150). The Armenian gangs who were brought to Adana and its environs from the more southern regions and the Armenian villagers in the region began attacks on the Muslim population (McCarthy, 1995, p. 204) An archive document dated February 1919 regarding Armenians who were in French troops and wearing French uniforms attempted murder, assault and extortion showed that this issue was transferred to the Istanbul Government.<sup>9</sup> (DAGM, 1995b, p. 11) As in the case of Adana, massacres continued even after the implementation of the forced migration decision. Even further north, Erzurum, for example, many Muslims were robbed and killed (McCarthy, 1995, p. 200). An archival document of July 1919 revealed that the British district governor Ravlinson demanded force to prevent and punish the Armenians who were massacring (DAGM, 1995b, p. 79).

After the Armistice of Mudros signed in October 1918, Armenian attacks in the East increased and mass migration began (Özçelik, 2017, pp. 661-662). Kemal Bey (April 1919) and Nusret Bey (August 1920) were executed in connection with the events of 1915 in occupied Istanbul. however, it was shared that these trials, which were carried out without any concern for justice, were made to appear good to the Entente States (Aydın, 2015, p. 32). Throughout 1919, Armenian looting, attacks and murder continued uninterruptedly in Kars, Erzurum and the surrounding areas, and even a group of Armenians dressed in British clothes organized looting (Boy, 2017, p. 146). In the report written by James Harbord, it was stated that there was no massacre against Armenians in the Caucasian border, also (Dilek, 2009, p. 90).

Although the World War I was over, the independence struggle of the government in Ankara continued since the Turkish War of Independence was not over. In July 1920, a diplomatic note was given by the Government of Ankara to the Armenians to withdraw from Oltu; however, this request was not accepted by the Armenians (Avcı, 1994, p. 3). After the Turkish villages were set on fire by Armenians, Kazım Karabekir advanced to Kars and a peace treaty was signed with Armenia in December 1920; however, soon afterwards the Bolsheviks captured Armenia (Fraser, Mango & McNamara, 2011, pp. 236-237). In 1921, negotiations were held between representatives of the French and Turkish parliaments in London, and in the same year, French forces evacuated Adana and its surroundings and thus, the dreams of the Armenians to establish a state here have come to an end (Kartal Akgün, 2009, p. 88). The Armenian participants at the Lausanne Peace Conference claimed that they were being used as a tool by the major states in line with the content of the declaration they gave to the other participants (Akbulut, 1995, p. 37).

### **2.3. The Events of 1915 and Turkish Thesis**

First of all, it must be stated that organization process of Ottoman Armenians in Anatolia continued in the following of 1915. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (2003, p. 36) in his speech (Nutuk) on this situation in 1927, he stated that Zaven Efendi, the Armenian Patriarch, was also in these preparations. Also the Mavri Mira Board established in the Greek Patriarchate of Istanbul and supported by the Greek Red Cross and the Official Commission of Immigrants, that established and managed gangs in different provinces. He also said that

<sup>9</sup> The attacks, massacres, rape, sabotage and other acts committed by the Armenians in 1919 were cited in Turkish and also in English in the relevant source.



in 1919, Zaven Efendi announced in the newspaper *Neologos* that they had been migrating due to the national uprising that had begun (Atatürk, 2003, p. 148).

The sources of DAGM 1995a (period between 1914 and 1918) and 1995b (year 1919) for understanding the Turkish thesis contain some documents in English. These two sources convey the Armenian persecution, which is briefly mentioned in this article, through archives. Understanding the Turkish thesis will also enable the elimination of some contradictory questions.

This section of the article covers both Ottoman and Turkish views and foreign views that confirm them. It is hoped that, in possible new studies, these sources and opinions will also be considered.

### **2.3.1. Ottoman and Turkish Opinions**

According to the Armenian thesis, “1.5 million Armenians were killed in various parts of the present-day Eastern Anatolia region of Turkey”. However, according to different sources, the total Armenian population in the Ottoman State is already at most 1.5 million. Armenians in Anatolia lost less than 600,000 between 1912 and 22, while Muslims living in the same geography lost more than 2.5 million during the same period (RT Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). At this point, Talat Pasha estimated that as many as 300,000 Armenians had died and that the Ottoman government of the time had given the figure of 800,000 in order to look good to the occupying forces, Memiş (2005, p. 9) reminded.

Muslims of different ethnicities, who had been at the mercy of enemy soldiers and gangs during various periods of war, easily overran the few soldiers who protected the Armenians who had emigrated because of the war and attacked the Armenians (RT Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). Karal (1975/1996, p. 210) underlined the armed resistance of the Armenians, diseases, bandit movements, lack of means of communication and the fact that part of the country was under occupation. In addition, the problem of famine that applies to everyone should not be forgotten.

One point that should be emphasized is that the Armenians wanted to be removed from the battlefield. The reasons for this were the prevention of guiding and spying for the Russian Army, the prevention of riots, the security of the inhabitants of the region, and the protection of the logistics lines of the Ottoman army (Gündüz, 2012, p. 68). It should not be forgotten that the Armenian persecution, which was mentioned in the previous chapters, continued before and after May 1915 and continued with actions such as killing, extortion, burning, cooperating with the enemy and rape. Çabuk and Tombul (2019, pp. 6-7) stated that it is a remarkable detail that many Armenian citizens were targeted by Armenian gangsters from the 1890s to the 1900s, even in Muş alone. It has been seen in several settlements during the same period.

There is no defense in the Turkish thesis that Armenians did not die. On the other hand, Kodaman (1985, p. 578) said that if the Turks had any intention of destroying it, there would not have been an Armenian in Anatolia from the 1070s to the 1900s. Furthermore, it was thought that the number of Armenians who were not deported in Maraş was close to 9000 in April 1916, which was reported by Ayna (2017, p. 442). The law, which was decided, applied and discontinued in 1915, did not prevent the Armenians from living in the region where frequent uprisings took place in 1916.

### 2.3.2. Opinions of Foreigners Confirming Turkish Thesis

First of all, it is necessary to mention a point about Andranik in the Balkans, in Anatolia and Nakhchivan, which also attracted the reaction of the Armenian side. In 1918, he was dismissed by the Armenian Corps Command because of the persecution he carried out in and around Nakhchivan (Yıldırım, 2016, pp. 67-68). Boghos Nubar stated at the Paris Peace Conference that the Armenians fought against the Ottomans on all fronts in the period from the first days of the war to the armistice (Dilek, 2009, p. 82).

The American journalist George H. Hepworth, who came to the Ottoman State in 1897 and studied Armenian events, said that in response to his meeting with an Armenian, he criticized Britain's involvement in the Berlin Treaty and that they were much more peaceful in the past (as cited in Kodaman, 1985, p. 576). Another journalist, Attila Von Orbok (as cited in Aslan, 2018, p. 74), on the other hand, argued that the events of 1915 in his country Hungary were not due to a special reason but arose from the Armenian uprisings.

The First Prime Minister of the independent Armenian Republic Hovhannes Katchaznoui, U.S. Ambassador in Istanbul Admiral Mark Bristol and others' opinions and claims can be found in *The Armenian "Genocide"?: Facts & Figures*.<sup>10</sup> In the same source, it is possible to reach the document of the German Embassy in Istanbul dated 1914, which declared that the Armenian population was less than half a million (Center for Strategic Research, 2019, p. 31).

There are multiple sources of the report prepared by General Mayweski, translated into a book and translated into Ottoman Turkish. Mayweski's report is critical to what happened in the geography of the period and to the biased rhetoric and views of Europeans. One of the relatively recent works is *Development of Armenian Matter and Social - Religious Structure of Armenians in the Provinces of Van - Bitlis Basen on the Report by Russian General Mayweski*, an article written by David Kılıç and published in 2014. In addition, different studies that benefited from this report were also included in the literature. In short, Armenians, who conformed to their religious and worldly leaders despite their presence in social life and their religious freedom, aspired to gain independence just like the Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians and for this reason, they tried to extend his activities in the Ottoman State by spreading false news in Europe (Kılıç, 2014, p. 269).

Mark Lambert Bristol can be seen as another corroborating source of the Turkish thesis. Bristol informed Washington in September 1919 that he was opposed to the sending of troops to the region because there was no violence against Armenians in the region (Dilek, 2009, pp. 91-92). Bristol also mentioned in a letter to James Barton, the US Secretary of State at the time in 1921 that the Armenians who were claimed to have been massacred had actually massacred Turks and Kurds (Hürriyet, 2000a).

The Turkish thesis on the Events of 1915 was a relatively new situation to be addressed by foreign scientists, historians and researchers. Perhaps the most important step has been taken in the United States. Historians such as Heath Lowry, Justin McCarty, Stanford Shaw and Bernard Lewis issued a statement in 1985 stating that the Events of 1915 were not a genocide (Çelikkol, 2015, pp. 18-19).

McCarthy divided what happened during the war into two periods: the Ottoman entry into the war and the Russian withdrawal from the region (1995, pp. 195-218). He referred to

<sup>10</sup> Center for Strategic Research, 2007.

Turkish and non-Turkish sources and provided information on the extent of Turkish losses and the population of the regions. McCarthy's publication describes how, after the forced migration decision, until 1919, Muslim people in the region were massacred, robbed, raped without distinction. An interview with Justin McCarthy published in 2001 is also valuable for the views of foreigners confirming the Turkish thesis. In the interview, McCarthy stated that he believed there was a genocide at the beginning of his study, but as his study progressed he realized that more Turks were dying than Armenians (Benmayor, 2001, Mar 21). In his interview, he stated that two-thirds of the Muslim population had been killed in Van province in 1915 and estimated that this had been carried out by Russians and Armenians. In the Ottoman State, which was already at war, some Armenians who saw the opportunity to cooperate with the United Kingdom and Russian Empire, started uprisings and took control of some places (2014, p. 327).

Lewy (2005, p. 135) confirmed the Turkish thesis with a historical reality. As a result of the wars that have been going on for some time, the Ottoman State lost the wars and lands in the Balkans and Tripoli, as well as in the Caucasus, the great wave of migration to Anatolia began. In other words, while the Ottoman administration decided to emigrate for its own safety, it accepted its citizens from the territories it had lost. Uturgauri's (2012, pp. 3249-3252) study of Russian immigration which began in 1918, reminding that been granted citizenship to immigrants whose origins were not Turkish or Muslim by Mustafa Kemal in 1929, was a valuable example at this point.

Erickson (2013, pp. 2-3) in his study, he reminded that social displacements were made by many states in different geographies during the said period, and he also drew attention to the geostrategic and military problems of the Ottoman State by taking the experiences chronologically. His work, in which he focuses on the military reasons underlying the decision on forced migration, is highly valued from his point of view. Erickson (2008, p. 155) also recalled that the truth about the situation in Van was ignored:

*"The Ottomans, the Russians, the Germans, the Americans, the Armenians themselves, and even an independent Venezuelan observer indicated that a large number of Armenians, who possessed large numbers of weapons, revolted in the eastern provinces of Anatolia in support of a Russian offensive. This point is often overlooked in examinations of what happened to the Armenians in 1915. In any case, the Ottomans did not have adequate forces in position to deal with the problem. In spite of months of tension the Ottoman army was largely unprepared for outbreaks of violence on the scale of the Van rebellion."*

Göyünç (as cited in Gündüz, 2012, p. 69) stated in a letter written by a German officer Schmitd that Armenians had revolted and had to be removed from the battlefield and he stated that the deaths in a mass exile under the conditions of that day were normal and that hundreds of Ottoman soldiers per month died of starvation in the same region (Euphrates).

Fraser, Mango and McNamara (2011, p. 69) with the example that Circassians, more than one million of them from Russian Empire, were expelled from the Caucasus, he stated that there was continuity in the history of large-scale deportations. It was stated that different societies that maintain good relations were filled with hate and fear under the conditions of the period, that the number of Muslims with different ethnic origins dying in Anatolia was more than the number of Armenians, and that what the Armenians experienced was used as

a propaganda opportunity by the Entente States (Fraser, Mango & McNamara, 2011, pp. 69-70).

Stone and Gauin (2009, p. 135) stated that those who were exiled were not sent to deserts, but to places where people lived. On the other hand, Salt (2014, p. 67) stated that both the Armenians and the Assyrians were spent by their former supporters and that the British aim was to prevent Russian intrigues in Eastern Anatolia. In addition, Gunn (2012, p. 144) criticized the attempt to defend the innocent murders committed by Armenian terrorists since 1973 with the lies presented in a Berlin court in 1921.

Apart from foreign historians, researchers and journalists, the Turkish thesis was verified and/or the Armenian thesis was refuted in some courts. One of these was at a 1985 trial of the terror attack on Orly Airport in France by ASALA in July 1983, in which 8 people were killed and 55 injured. Some of the statements of Mumtaz Soysal, who attended the court as a witness, over two hours were also reflected in the press (Orly Saldırısı Davası: 19 Şubat-2 Mart 1985 Şahit ve Avukat Beyanları, 1985). Öymen (1985, Feb 27) stated in his column that Soysal stated that the Turkish and Armenian community had lived together for centuries and that there were people from among Armenians who had risen to the highest levels of the state, such as the minister. He also stated that about 600 Armenians who were members of an organization were killed in Istanbul in April 1915, and that they were arrested for collaborating with Tsarist Russia and opposing the rule.

Another witness in the same court was Sina Akşin. He stated that Armenians and Greeks formed the bourgeoisie of Anatolia, that they were exempted from military service and that they had good relations with Muslims, and also he said that since the second part of the 19th century, under the influence of nationalism movements from the West and with the weakening of the Ottoman State, they had cooperated with foreign powers and some of them had revolted (Öymen, 1985, Feb 27). In France, lawsuits have also been filed against the newspaper *Le Monde*, which published an interview with Bernard Lewis, who is not a citizen of the Republic of Turkey.

Another case, which was completely different from the case in France, was held at the European Court of Human Rights. Doğu Perinçek, who stated at a conference in Switzerland in 2005 that the Armenian Genocide was an imperialist lie, was sentenced. And in 2013, the ECHR stressed that this was freedom of expression, and after an appeal, Switzerland was found unfair. (Hürriyet, 2015) As a result of this case, Turkish or Armenian theses were not confirmed or refuted; however, the case seems to have given hope to at least those who advocate the Turkish thesis on the efforts of the Armenian lobby in different states.

### **2.3.3. Armenian Citizens of the Republic of Turkey**

Armenians in Turkey can be considered in two separate statutes. The first of these are the citizens of Armenia who have been in Turkey illegally, who fled their country for economic reasons and came to Turkey.

Sudagezer (2017) wrote that as many as 20,000 Armenians are immigrants in Turkey according to Armenian sources and as many as 100,000 according to Turkish sources. She also shared interviews with Armenians who came to Turkey in different years. The responses are valuable for showing Turkey's preferability. Köker (2010) reported that almost all of the migrants were women, and that these people, many of whom came from Georgia and became

fugitives, did not want to return again, and that the Armenians of Turkey looked down on them.

Apart from the Armenians who have been found illegally in Turkey, the main thing is the Armenians who are citizens of the Republic of Turkey. According to Aslan's (2011, p. 154) field work in Aksaray province, there was no attack on the Armenians living in the region and even kinship relations were established. This situation is not unique to Aksaray. It is known that there is a dense Armenian population, especially in İstanbul. The reason the exact figures are unknown is that citizens are not classified according to their ethnic identity or nation. Besides the principle of equality, such a classification is impossible due to kinship relations.

Armenians who are citizens of the Republic of Turkey do not differ from other citizens (whether they are Turkish and/or Muslim). According to IMDb (2019), Nubar Terziyan, born in Istanbul in 1909, was a film actor who starred in around 400 productions until his death in Istanbul in 1994. Ara Güler is a world-renowned photographer (Grigoryan, 2012). Hızlan (2002) commemorated many famous citizens<sup>11</sup> of Armenian origin who were involved in the art world in his column. Together with artists such as Danyal Topatan, Kenan Pars, Vahi Öz and Sami Hazinses, Armenians who are citizens of the Republic of Turkey have also been involved in politics. For example, Berç Türker Keresteci was a member of parliament who played an important role in the budget of Turkey between 1923 and 1933 and was given the surname Türker by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Hızlan, 2002). Since the 1930s, there have been deputies nominated and elected as members of parliament from different political parties. To give an example from the 2000s, it can be easily found that at least one citizen of Armenian origin was elected as a Member of Parliament from three different political parties (Justice and Development Party, Republican People's Party, People's Democratic Party).

As can be understood, the fact that citizens in Turkey are Armenians does not represent a positive or negative situation in terms of their rights guaranteed by law. A different process is also not applied according to which ethnicity, nation, religion and sect the individuals are from.

## **2.4. Evaluation with Examples**

Resorting to sampling between events and concepts is a convenient way to compare. Andrew Mango, at a conference he attended, said that when Greece gained independence, they asked the Turks to leave the region, Muslims in Hungary were forced to flee to Bosnia, Turks in Crete were massacred and none of them passed as genocide (Hürriyet, 2000b). Şıkalyev's (2003, p. 220) reminder of the betrayal is valuable at this point: If the citizens of the same state engage in activities behind the front lines in cooperation with other countries while the army of a state is fighting on the front lines, according to the law of the states, this is treason. Şıkalyev (2003, pp. 223-224) also exemplified what happened in Sudan occupied by the British, what happened in Ireland between 1841 and 1911, what happened in India, what France did in North Africa, the methods that France used at the German border in 1939 and 40, and what the United States applied to Japanese citizens.

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<sup>11</sup> Onno Tunç, Mardiros Minagyan, İrma Toto Karaca, Bedros Kuyumcuyan etc.

### 2.4.1. The Holocaust and Comparison with Other Examples

It is interesting to try to establish a similarity between the Events of 1915 and the Jews who faced genocide in various parts of Europe solely because of their faith. The best depiction of the Turkish thesis about it was found in the publication of the relevant ministry (RT Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019):

*“1. Jews did not demand the dismemberment of the nations in which they had lived. By contrast, the Ottoman Armenians openly agitated for a separate state in lands in which they were numerically inferior. The Hunchak and Dashnak revolutionary organizations, which survive to this day, were formed expressly to agitate against the Ottoman government.*

*2. Jews did not kill their fellow citizens in the nations in which they had lived. By contrast, the Ottoman Armenians committed massacres against local Muslims.*

*3. Jews did not openly join the ranks of their countries’ enemies during World War II. By contrast, during World War I, Ottoman Armenians openly and with pride committed mass treason, took up arms, traveled to Russia for training, and sported Russian uniforms. Others, non-uniformed irregulars, operated against the Ottoman government from behind the lines.”*

Adolf Hitler and The National Socialist German Workers’ Party (Nazi)’ practices have negatively affected millions of people with different identities all over Europe and have resulted in the deaths of millions of others. Bernard Lewis (2014, p. 338), referring to this situation, stated that such naming of the events of 1915 could not be proven if it was deemed that genocide was a deliberate and planned extermination or attempt to exterminate a people. He also stated that Armenians were armed and Jews were attacked because of their identity and that the Armenians remained especially in big cities without much harm (Lewis, 2014, pp. 327-328).

The genocide committed by Nazi Germany against Jews and other different groups is an unprecedented practice. While the words Nazi and Hitler gained weight in the articles on this incident, the generalizing attitude of The Defenders of the Armenian thesis in the form of Turks, Turkey and/or Ottomans constitutes a dual situation. Another notable case is the case with their surnames. In Germany, a 1938 law<sup>12</sup> mandated the addition of the name Israel for men without a Jewish name and Sara for women, so that Jews could be separated from the rest of society (Simon, 2009, p. 6). The Surname Law in Turkey (1934) prohibited the names of tribes, foreign races and ethnicities. In other words, while there is a compulsion to be who the citizen is in Germany, Turkey has taken a step towards equality of the citizens in the opposite way.

The events of 1915 are on the agenda at least for some time in the world public opinion; however, mainly France is also criticized (it can be argued that the Armenian lobbies and/or the voters has had influence) for keeping this issue warm. The Ottomans continued their rule on three mainland territories. However, today, Turkish is not the official language of any state except Turkey and TRNC. The number of people who can speak Turkish in the Balkans, the Arabian Peninsula and various parts of Africa is almost nonexistent. At the same

<sup>12</sup> The Executive Order on the Law on the Alteration of Family and Personal Names.

time, there was no concrete attempt to change the sects of Muslims in these territories and the religions of non-Muslims.. On the other hand, in countries such as Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, at least one of the official languages is French. In some countries, such as Morocco and Algeria, one of the second most widely known languages is French. However, Arabs, Greeks or other elements who lived for centuries under Ottoman rule do not know Turkish or Ottoman Turkish. France completed the assimilation implementation in a very short period of time.

Çoban, (2008, p. 63) explained what happened in Rwanda as it was intended to physically destroy the Tutsi community and that the Hutus who collaborated with them were also killed. Also Çoban (2008, pp. 63-65) also stated that the crime was done with a political purpose, that there was a preparation and planning process, that it was intended to recruit soldiers at checkpoints and to enable individuals to demonstrate the Tutsis they were neighbors with.

No one sees a difference between Hutus and Tutsis. France directly or indirectly caused millions of people to die or leave their home in Rwanda. While the Nazis committed genocide against Jews, France also took a hard stance against those who fought for independence in Algeria and committed genocide along with war crimes. Today, military operations to the countries of the region are still appropriate to be read as a product or tradition of the colonialist understanding.

## **2.5. Initiatives of the Armenian Lobbies**

As well as the Armenian lobbies, Nemesis and ASALA are terrorist organizations formed with the same claims. Nemesis has assassinated some Armenians, including Hemayag Aramiantz, Mıgırdıç Harotunyan and Vahe Ihsan Yesayan, starting in 1920 (Avcı, 2010, pp. 385-386). From 1973 to 1984, ASALA carried out attacks on Turkish diplomats, civilian families and even citizens of that country in the USA, Austria, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Lebanon, Vatican City, Iran, Spain, Switzerland, Netherlands, Portugal, Canada, Serbia, Greece. Akşin (2015, p. 95) listed the possible reasons why ASALA suddenly started armed and bomb attacks in the mid-1970s as follows: Parallel to the Cyprus issue, the desire to benefit from the anti-Turkish opposition in Europe, the support that Greek Cypriots can offer for revenge, the support provided by the USSR to the Marxist terrorist organization, the issue that in Lebanon, which has a large Armenian population, terrorists can be easily trained. As Abdurrahmanlı (2019, p. 65) stated, in 1979 ASALA and PKK terrorist organizations became involved and decided to support each other as a detail that should be taken into consideration.

According to a strange example found by Memiş and Köstüklü (as cited in Memiş, 2005, p. 8), Armenian losses during migration were stated as 600,000 in the 1918 edition of Encyclopediä Britannica, but in the 1968 edition it was shown as 1.500.000. As can be seen, recorded and even published information has been altered for some reason. Armenian lobbies, whose origins date back to the end of the 1880s, began to increase their activity in the United States in the 1970s with the deterioration of Turkish - US relations (Kantarıcı, 2001, pp. 149-155). During the same time period, the terrorist organization ASALA stepped up its activities and attacked civilians.

More than the current number of Armenian population live in the Russian Federation (1.5 million), USA (1 million), France (500 thousand) and the common characteristic of the majority of countries whose parliaments adopted resolutions describing the Events of 1915 as genocide is the high number of Armenian people in these countries (Çelikkol, 2015, p. 21). In addition, in countries such as Germany, Austria and Luxembourg, where the Armenian population was not large, but where xenophobia and Islamophobia were widespread, the Armenian thesis was a popular topic (Çelikkol, 2015, pp. 27-28). Çelikkol, who served as Turkey's ambassador to the United States for one term (2015, pp. 23-24) discussed with U.S. Senator Robert Dole. In summary, the senators also knew that the bill was wrong; however, due to voter pressure, they acted in accordance with the Armenian thesis.

## **2.6. The Use of the Events of 1915 as an International Political Instrument**

Foreign policy instruments used in international policies have changed over time, while some have declined in importance and some have increased in popularity. All options, no matter what class they are under, are tools that can be referenced by case. For example, Balcı and Yeşiltaş (2005, p. 191) on the example of Japan, he stated that foreign aid policies are used effectively in ensuring national interests. Ergun (2007, p. 77) on the other hand, he exemplified the use of these foreign aid for economic and military purposes based on the relationship between Japan and the People's Republic of China. Economic sanctions, such as embargoes, which can be interpreted as the opposite, are effective foreign policy instruments. Different foreign policy instruments related to the post-Cold War period, from television productions to tourism, have also been mentioned.

In short, it can be argued that states have a number of instruments for their foreign policies, which are roughly divided into military and non-military. Given the costs of war, the war option can be considered a last resort. Diplomatic, political, cultural, economic instruments are less costly than the war option, and so it is understood that they see value. For example, Kazgan (1970, p. 313) stated that during the Ottoman period, nationalism was used by Russian Empire and Britain as a foreign policy tool, and the state was thus fragmented.

The Events of 1915 is also a political instrument that lobbies and other interest groups (Armenian diaspora) engaged in against Turkey. On the other hand, it is more than an international political issue in itself. For example, although there are fewer Armenian lobbies in Germany compared to France, the economic and political impact of the Holocaust and the effort to integrate the Turks in Germany made the Armenian thesis an opportunity for Germany (Gümüş, 2015, p. 159). In other words, this situation is presented as a justification for Germany's defense of the Armenian thesis. Like Germany, many states have been inclined to this thesis for different reasons and have adopted it as law when necessary to ensure their interests.

With the Ottomanism policy in the Ottoman State, following the Greek independence after the Peloponnese Rebellion, Armenians took the majority of the state levels where the Greeks were located before. (Çelik, 2008, p. 158) For example again Çelik (2008, pp. 159-162) stated that Gabriyel Efendi had served as a civil servant in various levels of the state and had reached the position of Minister. According to Şikalıyev (2003, p. 218) Armenian gangs



continued Armenian propaganda to cover up the massacres they carried out. At this point, even as the war was going on, propaganda about the Armenians was continued and many publications<sup>13</sup> were issued. On the other hand, in the document of the BOA (as cited in 1995c, p. 34) dated 1 June 1915 issued an order not to borrow from those who were exiled. It is understood that this forced migration application, adopted in May, implemented in June and terminated in November, does not carry a genocide aim, and that those who cooperate with the enemy are temporarily deployed to different regions. On the other hand, it appears to have been used as an instrument for the other sides of the war.

The view put forward by realist theorists that states are selfish is also seen in their approach to the Events of 1915. The impact of pressure groups and the expectation of possible interest are sufficient to change the decisions of real and legal persons. For example, as Aydođan (2012, p. 68) stated, The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) initially argued that Turkey could not be held responsible for events during the Ottoman period, but later changed its view and began to argue that Turkey should accept the so-called Armenian genocide.

It looks ordinary for some states to consider the Events of 1915 as contrary to the Turkish thesis and to accept them as a foreign policy instrument. States use terrorist organizations or third states as tools. It supports divisive activities by taking advantage of differences in a country to create confusion. So it is normal to try to take advantage of a never happened genocide. France, the United States, Argentina and other states have the possibility to take steps to the detriment of Turkey. And also their aims can be pleasing the voters in their countries or providing financial support from lobbies.

In short, 1915 Events adopted by some states as an instrument of foreign policy and impose a number of things in Turkey or used to break up Turkey's potential. Both economic support provided by the lobby, getting the votes of the defenders of Armenian thesis next political elections, as well as breaking the power of Turkey in international politics could be the purposes of these states. Under the realist theory, this is acceptable as states are in constant competition; but it cannot be considered as ethical and innocent. Particularly in scientific (and impartial) publications, it is a negative situation that the Turkish thesis is completely disregarded and the Turkish side's arguments are not taken into consideration.

### **3. Conclusion**

Political expectations, economic interests, targets for international competition and the like, and the Armenian thesis are kept alive by some states and state institutions. The Events of 1915 have been and continue to be used for many years as an international political instrument.

Intense propaganda works have yielded results and the number of sources and data transfer related to the Turkish thesis in foreign literature is almost finished. However, the Armenian uprisings that started before WWI and the efforts to gang up on them have cost millions of lives, directly or indirectly. The Ottomans first tried to prevent this situation with regional measures, but decided to force emigration due to the fact that the gangs had external support and the state had to keep troops on different fronts because of the war. The decision to emigrate was not applied for every Armenian and it was stopped in a short time, too.

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<sup>13</sup> w/i: abuk, 2019, pp. 311-315.

During the war, millions of people from different groups and identities died or migrated all over Anatolia and Thrace. According to official sources, the majority of these were Turks. The Armenians who lived together for centuries were not systematically killed; and the best example is the Armenian citizens who were given important duties in the early years of the Republic of Turkey. Furthermore, in the following years, many Armenian citizens from art to politics were appreciated by the society and continued their professions. Today, just as in the Ottoman period, there are people who have sought refuge in the country for various reasons. This is also a sign that tolerance is a social tradition.

In addition to these, when the questions mentioned in the introduction are taken into consideration again, it is concluded that the resources used in the review are sufficient to answer these questions even by themselves. As a matter of fact, when the policies of the Republic of Turkey on minorities, the proposals for opening the archives related to the so-called Armenian genocide and an impartial handling of this issue by historians are taken together, the Turkish side's goodwill towards the solution of the problem is shown. As a result, this study will enable the Turkish thesis to be included in the literature in English against the Armenian thesis and could constitute an important step towards increasing the possibility of acceptance of the Turkish thesis.

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