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*Russian Consuls in Erzurum:
Intercommunal Relations in the Ottoman Borderland through
Diplomatic Reports, 1878–1914*

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Budapest, 2026.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Kovács Bálint, who first introduced me to Armenia and Armenian history, and whose support has accompanied me throughout my academic journey.

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Professor Elke Hartmann, for her constant guidance, for the many fascinating and intellectually stimulating consultations, and for her insightful comments, which have continually encouraged me to think more critically and deeply about my research.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my wife, Anasztaszija, whose unwavering support, patience, and encouragement made the completion of this dissertation possible.

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Introduction: Subject, Scope, and Purpose

This dissertation reconstructs the history of the vilayet of Erzurum in the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from a Russian consular perspective, that is, drawing primarily on reports produced by Russian consuls stationed in the region between 1878 and 1914. Situated at the crossroads of Ottoman, Russian, British, French, and German interests, Erzurum was a strategically vital borderland in which social relations, political unrest, and the possibilities of interethnic and interreligious coexistence were closely entangled with the broader geopolitical struggles of the late nineteenth century and beyond. This study examines how Russian diplomats in Erzurum observed, interpreted, and sought to influence developments in a volatile frontier province of the late Ottoman Empire.

The primary source base of the dissertation consists mainly of unpublished materials from the *Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (AVPRI) and, in part, from the *Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (GARF), both located in Moscow. These sources primarily include official dispatches, confidential memoranda, and secret correspondence exchanged between Russian consuls in Erzurum and the Russian Embassy in Constantinople. The dissertation places these rich, but underutilized, body of primary sources in dialogue with contemporary scholarship and, where available, with consular sources produced by other foreign powers, in order to compare consular perceptions with recent historiographical interpretations and to ascertain both the informational value and the interpretive limitations of the Russian consular perspective. Thus, this dissertation fills an important gap in the historiography of the late Ottoman eastern provinces.

Russia, a central actor in diplomatic rivalry with the Ottoman Empire, maintained an extensive consular network across the Sultan's domains, whose importance grew significantly after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878. Although the Treaty of San Stefano initially expanded Russian influence, its revision at the Congress of Berlin curtailed territorial gains while internationalizing the Armenian Question through reform obligations imposed on the Ottoman state. Despite the setback, these developments enabled Russia, alongside Britain, France, and later Germany, to present itself as a protector of Ottoman Christians.

Within this context, Russian consuls in Erzurum produced detailed reports on interethnic and interreligious relations, governance, and security. Rather than treating these reports as neutral or purely factual accounts, this dissertation approaches them as historically situated texts shaped

by Russian imperial ambitions. Consuls functioned simultaneously as observers, intermediaries, and political actors. Their reports not only conveyed information and contributed to the production of imperial knowledge about the borderland but also influenced local phenomena. The study therefore examines not only the discursive construction of events within Russian consular reporting, but also the performative effects of consular activity in the Ottoman borderland. Within this framework, the dissertation is guided by the following research questions:

How did Ottoman governance function, or malfunction, in the vilayet of Erzurum between 1878 and 1914, as perceived through Russian consular reports? This question examines the administrative strategies employed by Ottoman authorities to manage a politically volatile and ethnically diverse province, as well as the role of local power structures, tribal dynamics, and security forces. It also analyzes how these policies contributed to intercommunal tensions, social transformation, and episodes of violence, and how Russian consuls interpreted, evaluated, and at times distorted these developments.

Which issues most concerned Russian consuls in Erzurum, and how did these concerns reflect the broader geopolitical ambitions of the Russian Empire in Eastern Anatolia? This question explores how consular correspondence articulated Russian strategic interests and anxieties, particularly in relation to Armenian political mobilization, Kurdish unrest, Ottoman reform efforts, and the activities of rival foreign actors. It further investigates how interactions between Russian consuls, Ottoman officials, local communities, and other foreign representatives, including British and German diplomats, as well as American and British missionaries, shaped interethnic relations, local governance, and Russian policy considerations.

How did Erzurum's position as a contested borderland shape both local developments and imperial strategies? This question focuses on the spatial and transimperial dimensions of the region, analyzing how Russian consular reports portrayed cross-border mobility, divided Armenian communities, revolutionary networks, and the circulation of ideas and people across imperial boundaries. It also seeks to explain why Erzurum emerged as a point of imperial rivalry and foreign influence, and how its ethnic diversity, porous borders, and resistance to centralized control influenced the objectives of the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and the aforementioned European powers.

As the research questions indicate, spatiality constitutes a central analytical framework of this study. While the primary geographical focus remains the vilayet of Erzurum, the analysis situates the province within a wider regional and transimperial context shaped by interconnected political and social dynamics. To support this approach, the following section outlines the theoretical foundations that inform the study's interpretation of consular reporting.

Literature review and theoretical framework

This chapter provides both a critical overview of the existing scholarship and an outline of the theoretical framework of this dissertation. It situates the study within the relevant historiography on the late Ottoman eastern provinces, Ottoman–Russian comparative and entangled history, as well as Armenian studies, while introducing the key analytical concepts that structure the analysis. In particular, the chapter brings together borderland theory and entangled history. By reviewing the literature and establishing this conceptual foundation, the chapter clarifies how the dissertation engages with existing research and positions the use of Russian consular reports within a broader interpretive framework.

The Borderland

Erzurum long occupied a peripheral position within the Ottoman Empire, which makes the region particularly well suited for reexamination through a borderland perspective. Such an approach raises the question: *What makes a borderland or a border, and why is it useful to examine a region through these lenses?*

As *Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel* argue, borders are political constructs imposed by legal and state authorities, often with limited consideration for local populations. Borderland inhabitants, however, frequently reinterpret and exploit these boundaries for economic, social, or political purposes, rendering borders permeable and negotiable spaces that facilitate the movement of people, goods, and ideas rather than merely constraining them.¹ *Eric Weitz and Omer Bartov* further emphasize that borderlands are zones where states meet and where crossing a frontier means submission to a different political authority. Such regions also pose persistent challenges to effective state control and integration due to their relative distance from imperial centers.

¹ Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel, "Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands," *Journal of World History* 8, no. 2 (1997): 211–242.

Moreover, they are characterized by ethnic and cultural diversity, a condition that can often give rise to violence.²

Building on this, *Elke Hartmann* has demonstrated that the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire meet the core criteria of a borderland, making them especially suitable for this analytical framework. The vilayet of Erzurum stands out as a particularly compelling case. Historically, it functioned as a zone of sustained imperial rivalry and, by the late nineteenth century, lay at the intersection of Ottoman, Russian, Persian, British, French and German interest. The proximity of contiguous borders generated continuous political and strategic competition, while the distance from imperial centers weakened effective state control and reinforced Erzurum's peripheral character. The region was also marked by pronounced ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity, with Armenians, Kurds, Turks, Greeks, and Assyrians sharing the same space, a condition that heightened the potential for intercommunal tension. Moreover, the permeability of the Ottoman–Russian frontier enabled persistent cross-border movement.³

In addition to what had been noted, *Alfred J. Rieber's* concept of Eurasian borderlands could also be applied to the Russo-Ottoman frontier and Erzurum. He defines borderlands as volatile “shatterzones” where cultures, languages, and ethnic groups intersect. Using the metaphor of a “demographic kaleidoscope,” Rieber rejects viewing these regions as static mosaics of separate groups, instead emphasizing their fluid and shifting character. He argues that this instability complicated governance, as populations struggled to distinguish “friends” from “enemies”.⁴ However, *Gözde Yazıcı Cörüt* argues that multiethnicity alone does not cause borderland violence; it becomes destabilizing when politically mobilized to serve state agendas.⁵ *Peter Holquist* illustrates this through the Caucasus and Northern Anatolia during World War I, regions that became exceptionally violent as Russo-Ottoman borderlands. Their strategic importance and

² Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, eds., *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 1–2.

³ Elke Hartmann, “The Central State in the Borderlands: Ottoman Eastern Anatolia in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 172–173.

⁴ Alfred J. Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands: From the Rise of Early Modern Empires to the End of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5–10.

⁵ G. Yazıcı Cörüt, *Loyalty and Citizenship: Ottoman Perspectives on Its Russian Border Region (1878–1914)* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2021), 40–41.

long-standing imperial rivalries heightened tensions and led to the stigmatization of populations amidst competing political projects.⁶

The idea of being on the periphery is further developed in Janet Klein's *The Margins of Empire*, which explores Kurdish militias in the Ottoman tribal zone. Klein's emphasis on mobility, tribal politics, and cross-border dynamics foregrounds the porous and contested nature of imperial frontiers, including connections with Russian interests.⁷ Complementing this approach, the edited volume *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands*, by Lucien J. Frary and Mara Kozelsky, reconsiders the Eastern Question through a borderland lens, highlighting how imperial rivalries were experienced and reshaped at the local level.⁸ A fundamental work in this matter is Ronald Grigor Suny's *Looking Toward Ararat*, which analyzes evolving relations between Russian Armenians and the tsarist administration after 1828, showing how Russian policies were shaped by local dynamics and great power rivalries.⁹

Entangled history

As Russia and the Ottoman Empire shared a long border, their relations, the way they were governed, their socio-economic situation became a frequent subject of comparative studies. For instance, *Dominic Lieven's Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* offers a comparative analysis of empire as a political and cultural system. By contrasting Russia with the British and Ottoman Empires, Lieven examines imperial strategies for governing diversity amid geopolitical and economic pressures.¹⁰ *Adrian Brisku's Political Reform in the Ottoman and Russian Empires: A Comparative Approach* analyzes nineteenth-century reform efforts through a comparative lens. Brisku highlights both similarities and differences in reform trajectories, showing how reforms reshaped state–society relations and advanced political centralization and social transformation.¹¹

⁶ Peter Holquist, "Forms of Violence during the Russian Occupation of Ottoman Territory and in Northern Persia (Urmia and Astrabad), October 1914–December 1917," in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 334–335.

⁷ Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁸ Frary, Lucien J., and Mara Kozelsky, eds. *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014.

⁹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

¹⁰ Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (London: John Murray, 2000).

¹¹ Adrian Brisku, *Political Reform in the Ottoman and Russian Empires: A Comparative Approach* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

Finally, *Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber's* edited volume *Imperial Rule* explores imperial governance with particular attention to relations between centers and peripheries. Rieber's concept of frontier zones as spaces of negotiation offers a valuable lens for understanding how empires managed diversity, instability, and contested authority.¹²

While the comparative approach is valuable for understanding localized developments, it has limitations in capturing interconnected histories. This dissertation seeks a more integrated perspective that situates macro-level events within a broader, interrelated space. Such an approach was advanced by *Michael Werner and Benedict Zimmermann* through the *histoire croisée* framework, which emphasizes entanglements and mutual influences across historical contexts, thereby complementing comparative studies¹³ *Entangled history* emerged from *histoire croisée* and, despite their striking similarities, argues that historical ideas, identities, and debates do not develop in isolation but are shaped through contact between different cultures, intellectual traditions, and time periods.¹⁴

Entanglements of the Russian and Ottoman Empires receive focused attention in the special issue of *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* titled *Models on the Margins: Russia and the Ottoman Empire*. The contributions examine how the two empires functioned as models for one another, addressing borderlands, governance, and the management of ethnic and religious diversity.¹⁵ Michael A. Reynolds's *Shattering Empires* challenges ethnicity-based interpretations of Ottoman–Russian relations in Transcaucasia by showing how porous imperial borders enabled cross-border mobility and overlapping loyalties that complicate simple center–periphery models. The book exemplifies entangled history by demonstrating how local actors, imperial strategies, and global rivalries were interconnected, with developments in one empire continuously shaping those in the other.¹⁶

Another key contribution is *Houri Berberian's Roving Revolutionaries*, which analyzes the Russian, Iranian, and Young Turk Revolutions (1904–1911) through the transimperial activities of

¹² Alfred J. Rieber and Alexei Miller, *Imperial Rule* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004).

¹³ M. Werner and B. Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006): 30–50.

¹⁴ Jeffrey D. Burson, "Entangled History and the Scholarly Concept of Enlightenment," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 8, no. 2 (2013): 1–24.

¹⁵ "Models on the Margins: Russia and the Ottoman Empire," special issue, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2011).

¹⁶ Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 4–6.

Armenian revolutionaries. The book embodies entangled-history by revealing a web of revolutionary ideas, activists, and networks that flowed across imperial frontiers, weaving together local upheavals with wider global transformations and undermining narratives that frame these revolutions as self-contained national episodes.¹⁷

Stephen Badalyan Riegg's *Russia's Entangled Embrace* advances the framework of entanglement to analyze Armenian–Russian interactions between 1801 and 1914. Drawing extensively on Russian archival materials, Riegg underscores the asymmetrical interdependence of Armenians and the tsarist empire, while portraying Armenians as dynamic actors characterized by negotiation, collaboration, and contestation.¹⁸

Borderland and entanglement are interconnected analytical frameworks. Scholarship influenced by these approaches provides both a conceptual and methodological foundation for analyzing primary sources.

Collections of Consular Reports on the Armenian Question

Few sources bring us closer to the unfolding violence in the late Ottoman Empire's borderland than the reports written by foreign consuls stationed in those provinces. Diplomats representing Germany, Austria-Hungary, Britain, France, the United States, and Russia recorded not only events on the ground in Western Armenia, but also how their governments perceived, interpreted, and framed escalating tensions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of these reports have since been published. While they are certainly invaluable, they are mostly concerned with the Armenian Genocide or the Hamidian massacres, or they are very selective.

For instance, an extensive collection was compiled by Wolfgang Gust and includes over 700 pages of German diplomatic reports.¹⁹ Austro-Hungarian reports have been presented by Artem Ohandjanian, who shows that Austro-Hungarian diplomats also documented the systematic

¹⁷ Houri Berberian, *Roving Revolutionaries: Armenians and the Connected Revolutions in the Russian, Iranian, and Ottoman Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019).

¹⁸ Stephen Badalyan Riegg, *Russia's Entangled Embrace: The Tsarist Empire and the Armenians, 1801–1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

¹⁹ Wolfgang Gust, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915–1916* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

destruction of Armenians.²⁰ British diplomats produced detailed reports, particularly during the Hamidian massacres (1894–1896). These were published in a government report.²¹ Similarly, Alphonse Cillière, the French consul in Trabzon, also wrote about the 1895 massacres.²²

There are few published works containing Russian consular reports. One of the main collections is *Russkie istochniki o genotside armyan v Osmanskoy imperii 1915–1916*, edited by G. A. Abramyan and T. G. Sevan-Khachatryan.²³ Another valuable collection is by M. G. Nersisyan and R. G. Saakyan.²⁴ However, both focus primarily on the genocide and were therefore not directly relevant to the aims of this study. A more significant source for this study was *Sbornik diplomaticheskikh dokumentov: Reformy v Armenii, 26 noyabrya 1912 goda – 10 maya 1914 goda* (*Сборник дипломатических документов: Реформы в Армении, 26 ноября 1912 г. – 10 мая 1914 г.*), published in Petrograd in 1915.²⁵

A general characteristic of these publications, as the titles suggest, is that they selectively present reports focused on the plight of the Armenians. They tend to include only excerpts rather than complete documents and are highly curated in terms of content.

A dishonorable but necessary mention is the so-called “memoirs” of “General Mayéwski,” who allegedly served as the Russian consul in Van and Erzurum. This work was translated and published as *Les massacres d’Arménie: Par Le général Mayéwski* (St. Petersburg), and it is regrettably frequently cited even in seemingly prestigious scholarly volumes.²⁶ However, to my

²⁰ Artem Ohandjanian, *Armenia 1915: Austro-Hungarian Diplomatic Reports Prove the Genocide* (City: Society for Promotion of Armenian History and Culture / Bavigh, 2011).

²¹ Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, *Correspondence Relative to the Armenian Question, and Reports from Her Majesty’s Consular Officers in Asiatic Turkey: Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty; February 1896* (Command Papers; London: HMSO, 1896), <https://doi.org/10.25673/91457>.

²² Alphonse Cillière, “1895, Massacres d’Arméniens,” in *Massacres d’Arméniens*, ed. G. Dédéyan, C. Mouradian, and Y. Ternon (Toulouse: Privat, 2010).

²³ G. A. Abraamyan and T. G. Sevan-Khachatryan, comps., *Russkie Istochniki o Genotside Armyan v Osmanskoy Imperii 1915–1916 Gody: Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov* (Yerevan: Areresum-ANI, 1995), with a preface by M. G. Nersisyan.

²⁴ M. G. Nersisyan and R. G. Saakyan, comps., *Genotsid Armyan v Osmanskoy Imperii: Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov*, 2nd rev. ed. (Yerevan: Ayastan, 1983).

²⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, *Sbornik Diplomaticheskikh Dokumentov: Reformy v Armenii, 26 Noyabrya 1912 Goda – 10 Maya 1914 Goda* (Petrograd: Gosudarstvennaya Tipografiya, 1915).

²⁶ Mayewski, *Rus General Mayevsky’nin Türkiye Gözlemleri [Impressions of Russian General Mayewski in Turkey]* (Istanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi, 2007). Mayéwski, Général. / Général Mayéwski, “Les Massacres d’Arménie Pétersbourg” (Place: Imprimerie Militaire, 1916). / Jovan Pešalj, Annemarie Steidl, Leo Lucassen, and Josef Ehmer, eds., *Borders and Mobility Control in and between Empires and Nation-States*, vol. 46 (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

knowledge, Mayéwski was never a consul in either of these cities. Some historians have argued that the report is a falsification.²⁷

The rarity of published Russian primary sources, the questionable validity of some due to the politicization of the topic, and the selective nature of most published documents underline the importance of accessing Russian consular reports directly in the archives. The aim of this study, its focus on Erzurum, is unattainable without analyzing these reports in their full extent. Regrettably, however, limitations in accessing these materials remain, which need to be further discussed.

The Archive and the Russian Consular Reports

As demonstrated above, there is no comprehensive published collection of Russian consular reports covering the period between 1878 and 1914. This absence significantly enhances the relevance of the present study, as it brings to light a body of primary sources that has remained largely unexplored in a systematic manner.

The largest repository of Russian diplomatic documentation is the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI – *Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii*), which preserves materials dating from 1721 to 1917. Documents relating to the Ottoman Empire are dispersed across several archival fonds (*fondy*). Consequently, research on Russian–Ottoman relations—and particularly on provincial consular activity, requires careful navigation across multiple fonds in order to reconstruct a coherent picture of diplomatic practice and imperial policy.

- **Fund 89** – “*Russia’s Relations with Turkey*” (*Fond 89 – Snosheniya Rossii s Turtsiey*), which contains country-specific documents;
- **Fund 90** – “*Constantinople Mission*” (*Fond 90 – Konstantinopol’skaya missiya*), with records from diplomatic and consular missions.
- **Fund 180** – “*Embassy in Constantinople*” (*Fond 180 – Posol’stvo v Konstantinopole*), covering foreign policy institutions abroad from the late 18th to early 20th centuries, including Ottoman-based consulates.
- **Fund 154** – “*Asian Department*” (*Fond 154 – Aziatskii departament*), representing a central unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;

²⁷ Vladimir Zakharov, “Antiistoricheskaya Deyatel’nost’ Bakinskikh Psevdohistorikov,” *Region i Mir*, no. 3–4 (2015): 24.

- **Fund 149** – "*Turkish Desk*" (*Fond 149 – Turetskii stol*);
- **Fund 151** – "*Political Archive*" (*Fond 151 – Politarkhiv*), which contains many valuable reports from Erzurum and other cities of Western Armenia;
- **Fund 161** – "*Political Reports*" (*Fond 161 – Politicheskie doneseniya*), consisting of detailed political correspondence and intelligence reports.

Researchers working in this archive should be aware that accessing documents is a multi-step process that takes several days at each stage. Initially, you are provided with a *putevoditel'* (guide), from which you select the desired *delo* (file or folder). This *delo* will arrive in a few days. Once it is delivered, you must then select specific *opisi* (inventories or archival units)—these contain the actual archival sources, such as reports—which also need to be ordered separately and will arrive only after several more days. It is important to note that some documents may be in a dilapidated condition or currently under review or repair by archival staff, and therefore may be temporarily inaccessible. Others may be restricted without clear justification. Moreover, the content of the individual *opisi* is often not described in detail, so the process of selection is partly based on chance and may result in unexpected or irrelevant materials.

How to Work With Consular Reports?

This dissertation presents the findings of my archival research, focusing on aspects of history that I found to be reconstructable from the archival sources—that is, elements in the Russian consular reports that could be pieced together into a coherent narrative, while I also used relevant secondary literature or the available published sources. My aim is to provide a detailed analysis of these documents and to highlight the various themes and patterns that arise from them. These themes are determined by the research questions outlined earlier, which guided the selection and prioritization of topics.

While it may seem self-evident, it is important to emphasize that Russian consuls in Erzurum were serving Russian imperial interests after all. As such, part of my task has been to critically evaluate why certain topics were emphasized in their reports, while others, seemingly of great importance for the researcher, were neglected or omitted. This approach helps us understand the “Russian viewpoint.” But what does that, in fact, mean? Is there a Russian viewpoint at all? After all, these consuls were individuals with their own experiences and biases. Or were their

perspectives shaped by what they were expected to report amidst the great geopolitical rivalry—so much so that we can read the echoing of the same ideas over the course of 1878–1914?

A key objective of this study was to contextualize these reports and understand their place in the broader framework of Russian imperial thought on Western Armenia amidst rivalry on the borderland against the Ottoman Empire and the interconnected reasons of this rivalry, as a tool to give answers to the research questions I had devised earlier. To do so, I have used the relevant secondary literature, which has been essential in contextualizing the reports and forming a clearer picture of what occurred.

It is important to emphasize not only what was reported on in these sources but also the underlying reasons why they were reported. Therefore, critically analyzing these accounts within a broader historical and political context is essential. A thorough examination of the consular reports, especially by contrasting them with secondary literature and other foreign consular reports for a more nuanced understanding was the goal of my dissertation.

Russian consular observations in Erzurum are a reflection of a long trajectory of Russian imperial expansion toward the Caucasus and in the competition with the Ottoman Empire over regional influence. In order to properly understand the context reflected in the consular correspondence, it is essential to situate them within the larger history of Russia's southern advance and the partition of Armenian-inhabited territories. Only against this background can the logic of Russian imperial interest, and consequently the perspective shaping the reports, be fully grasped.

Russia's Expansion towards Armenia

Russia's interest in the Caucasus ridges dates back to the reign of Ivan IV. During this period, the tsar established the Kuban River valley as a protectorate of his country in the mid-1550s, bringing its inhabitants under Russian rule. This conquest marked the beginning of Russia's three-century-long struggle to dominate the Caucasus, a process that unfolded in several phases of varying intensity.²⁸ After the signing the Nystadt Peace Treaty to end the Russo-Swedish war and settling the northern question, Tsar Peter the Great turned his attention towards south hoping to take control over trade routes along the Caspian. His military campaigns were predominantly directed southward along the Caspian Sea against Persia, but these efforts met with limited success. In 1723, Peter was even compelled to sign a treaty in Istanbul recognizing Ottoman sovereignty over Georgia and Armenia—a significant setback to his imperial ambitions.²⁹ Subsequent to Peter's reign, Catherine II's policy was aimed at dual goals bolstering the military and advancing the economic prosperity of the sparsely populated southern territories of the empire through resettlement. This policy was introduced due to the threat posed by the Crimean Tatar Khanate, which held vassalage status to the Ottoman and ruled the territories north of the peninsula from the Dnieper to the Kuban River. Consequently, the acquisition of the southern steppes assumed strategic importance for the tsarina in her quest to reach the Caucasus mountains.³⁰

Russia's southern expansion during the late 18th century alarmed the Ottoman Empire, particularly due to the rapid success with which Empress Catherine II established a foothold in Ossetia. This was exemplified by the founding of the fort of Mozdok, where an Orthodox church was constructed to facilitate the conversion of the local population.³¹ Ottoman dissatisfaction with the perceived Russian threat resulted in two wars with the Ottoman Empire from 1768 to 1774 and 1787-1792. These military conflicts brought about the annexation of Crimea by Russia, granting the Tsarina control over the Black Sea region. This development marked a significant turning point in Russia's relations with the Ottomans, as the Sublime Porte began to lose substantial territories

²⁸ Z. A. Gelaeva, Y. A. Kindarova, and Y. U. Burzakanov, "Caucasian Policy of Russia in the 16th–17th Centuries," *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences* (2018): 258.

²⁹ Volodymyr Morkva, "Unlocking the Caucasus for Empire: Roots, Causes and Consequences of the Russian Annexation of the East Georgian Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, 1801," *Cappadocia Journal of Area Studies* 3, no. 2 (2021): 155-156.

³⁰ Peter Gutmeyr, *Borderlands Orientalism or How the Savage Lost His Nobility: The Russian Perception of the Caucasus between 1817 and 1878* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2017), 30.

³¹ John Frederick Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus* (London: Routledge, 2013), 51.

to the Tsar. Some might argue that this moment also signaled the beginning of the Eastern Question—a complex issue concerning the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the ensuing power struggles among European powers—which I will elaborate on later.³² Additionally, the local Nogaj and Adige tribes pledged their loyalty to the Tsarina, leading to the pacification of the Kuban steppes. Moreover, the subsequent slaughter and displacement of the local population provided space for the Russification of the area.³³ At the same time, Catherine II made great efforts to annex the Georgian Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti in order to create a buffer-zone between the Muslim powers and to open the possibility of founding a base to open new trade routes into Asia. Initially, the kingdom became a protectorate of Russia through the Treaty of Georgievsk in 1783, before losing its independence completely in 1801 and annexed by the Russian Empire.³⁴

Following the annexation of the eastern Georgian kingdom, Alexander I sought to extend his influence over the western Georgian principalities as well. Driven by expectations of material gain, the monarchy aimed to undermine Ottoman economic dominance in the region by expelling both the Ottoman and Persian powers from the Caucasus.³⁵ In pursuit of this objective, initiatives had been undertaken to realize the 'pacification' of territories such as Circassia, Kabardia, Chechnya and Dagestan in 1818 under General Aleksey Yermolov. However, the Russian conquerors met considerable resistance, especially in Chechnya and Dagestan, where warlord Imam Shamil declared a jihad against the conquerors in 1834, who had successfully resisted the onslaught of the Russian troops in the Caucasus ridges until his fall in 1859.³⁶

Russia experienced an awakening sense of civilizational mission at the end of the 18th century, prompting it to extend its domains to the Armenian-inhabited areas of the Caucasus. However, this military venture necessitated a confrontation with the regional superpower, the Persian Empire. Through a gradual progression of conflict, the military clashes between the opposing forces were ultimately fruitful from a Russian perspective. First, the Gulistan Treaty of 1813 brought the strip between Derbent and Baku and Ganja into Russian hands, and then, at the

³² Lucien J. Frary and Mara Kozelsky, "Introduction: The Eastern Question Reconsidered," in *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered*, ed. Lucien J. Frary and Mara Kozelsky (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 8.

³³ George Bournoutian, *From the Kur to the Aras: A Military History of Russia's Move into the South Caucasus and the First Russo-Iranian War, 1801–1813* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 12–14.

³⁴ Nikolas K. Gvosdev, *Imperial Policies and Perspectives toward Georgia, 1760–1819* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 54–55.

³⁵ Bournoutian, *From the Kur to the Aras*, 15.

³⁶ Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–6.

end of the Russo-Persian War of 1826-1828, the Tsar seized the territories of Yerevan and Karabakh Khanates in the Treaty of Turkmenchay. With the signing of the peace treaty, it became clear that Persia would lose its territories beyond the Caucasus and its influence in the region would be significantly reduced.³⁷

The creation of the *Armyanskaya Oblast* (a Russian administrative unit roughly equivalent to a province) was initiated by pro-Armenian Russian officials who sought to reward Armenians for their support during the Russo-Iranian wars, as well as by Russian policymakers who assumed that the Christian populations of Georgia and Armenia would prefer Russian rule and help maintain imperial dominance over the Muslim inhabitants of the Caucasus.³⁸ From the Armenian perspective, the establishment of the *Armyanskaya Oblast* inspired hopes for the eventual restoration of Armenian statehood. This aspiration was further strengthened by the fact that, under Russian rule and in accordance with the terms of the peace treaty, Armenians were permitted to leave Persia and resettle in the *Armyanskaya Oblast*. As a result, nearly 50,000 Armenians chose to emigrate to the Russian Empire. Following the Tsarist government's peace agreement with Persia, Istanbul provoked a war with Saint Petersburg over Russian interference in the Greek War of Independence. The Russian army ultimately prevailed, returning with an additional 90,000 Armenian emigrants who reshaped the ethnic composition of the *Armyanskaya Oblast*, creating a new balance between the Armenian and Persian-Muslim populations.³⁹

³⁷ Richard G. Hovannisian, "Russian Armenia: A Century of Tsarist Rule," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, no. 1 (1971): 32–34.

³⁸ George Bournoutian, *Armenia and Imperial Decline: The Yerevan Province, 1900–1914* (London: Routledge, 2018), 7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 32–34.



Figure 1. Armenian Oblast, 1828–1840. Map by Golden, 2020. Wikimedia Commons.

But the dreams and aspirations of the Armenian people for self-governance were shattered by a decree issued by the Tsar in 1840. The extremely heterogeneous Armyanskaya Oblast was abolished and divided into two vast areas that encompassed the territories predominantly inhabited by Armenians. The resulting Gruzino-Imeretinskaya Guberniya (Georgian-Imeretian Governorate) covered the entire territory of the former Armyanskaya Oblast, and the Kaspiyskaya Oblast encompassed the Karabakh territories. The decision elicited widespread discontent not only among Armenians but also among Muslims, which prompted the ruler to establish a *namestnichestvo* (Viceroyalty) instead of the general system of guberniyas (Governorates) employed throughout Russia. The viceroyalty was headed by a directly appointed Namestnik (Viceroy), Prince Mikhail S. Vorontsov, who had already demonstrated both his military skills during the Napoleonic Wars and his administrative competence while governing Novorossiia and Bessarabia.⁴⁰ Tiflis became the administrative center of the territory. Vorontsov proposed that dividing the viceroyalty into smaller administrative units would enhance its efficiency. Consequently, the Transcaucasian *Namestnichestvo* was subdivided into several *Guberniyas*: Kutaisi, Tiflis,

⁴⁰ Valerii. G. Tunyan, “K Istorii Armyanskoy Oblasti,” *Istoriko-Filologicheskii Zhurnal*, no. 1 (2017): 32–33.

Shemakha, Derbent, and, from 1849, the newly established *Yerevanskaya Guberniya*. The creation of the Yerevan Governorate inspired a renewed sense of optimism among Armenian communities regarding the potential restoration of their statehood.⁴¹

Following the annexation of Armenian territories into Russia, a significant part of the Armenian population of the Caucasus was established within the borders of Russia. Nevertheless, there were also sizeable Armenian communities living on the opposite side of the border, in the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the new Russian-Ottoman division of the historical Armenian territories brought about a completely new political situation for the communities inhabiting the region both in the Ottoman Empire and Russia. Nonetheless, for numerous Armenians, their inclusion in the Russian Empire facilitated access to the cultural institutions of the West. In doing so, the Russian rule enabled Armenians to partake in the European intellectual milieu through imperial cultural institutions. Despite the border between the Russian and Ottoman Empires, Western and revolutionary ideas alike permeated into Ottoman territories, effectively channeling the Armenian population into the European intellectual bloodstream.⁴²

The Partition of Armenia

In the middle of the 16th century, the territory of historic Armenia became entrapped between two dominant empires, both of which were driven by military conquest. The Ottoman Empire, then in its heyday, was threatening the Safavid Empire's hegemony in the Caucasus. The resulting contest between the two counties led to the partition of the historical lands of Armenia. Consequently, the western half of Armenia was eventually absorbed into the Ottoman Empire, while the eastern half came under the rule of the Persian Empire.⁴³

The political divisions were demarcated by the Akhuryan River, the Bar (Aghri) mountain range and the Godour/Zakrosh mountains, which served as natural boundaries separating the Armenian-inhabited areas from each other. The final delineation of this border was first established by the Treaty of Zuhab in 1639, which finalized the division of Armenian territories between the

⁴¹ Medzhid Gusejnov, "Sozdanie carizmom Kavkazskogo namestnichestva (1845–1846 gg.)," *Vestnik Dagestanskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Serija 2: Gumanitarnye nauki* 32, no. 1 (2017): 15–16.

⁴² Ronald Grigor Suny, *"They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 72.

⁴³ Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands*, 28–29.

Ottoman Empire and Persia.⁴⁴ However, even this border, which began taking shape in the early sixteenth century, was not a formal one, and there was no exact line of demarcation as the region was characterized by diverse social, linguistic, and political identities. Even by the nineteenth century, the borderland was not clearly defined and its limits were largely defined by local groups' shifting allegiances depending on the current state of ongoing struggle for hegemony.⁴⁵

Subsequently, these territories were also referred to as Eastern and Western Armenia in international negotiations. Western Armenia was first established as a single large *vilayet* (a major administrative province of the Ottoman Empire), then was partitioned into several smaller units called *sanjaks* (sub-provinces or districts) at the end of the seventeenth century. These areas were governed by *pashas* (provincial governors or military commanders), who were not personally appointed by the sultan but were permitted to purchase control of a territory through public quasi-auctions. Between 1639 and 1828, the Armenian *vilayets* comprised the southern portions of the Akhaltsikhe *vilayet*, the *Kars vilayet*, *Bayezid vilayet*, *Erzurum vilayet*, the northern parts of the *Van vilayet*, the eastern parts of the *Malatya vilayet*, *Bitlis vilayet*, and the northern parts of the *Diyarbakır vilayet*.⁴⁶

Russia's remarkable military achievements in the Napoleonic war brought them recognition and enabled the Tsar to uphold the prevailing European order. However, their newly acquired control over the Black Sea region posed new difficulties for the empire. The Tsarist government feared that the instability within the Ottoman Empire might attract foreign interference, jeopardizing Russia's efforts to safeguard the Black Sea shores. Consequently, Russia engaged in wars with the Ottoman Empire on four occasions during the nineteenth century to counter European efforts to challenge her authority, two of which resulted in humiliating defeats for Russia, as external powers lent support to the struggling Ottoman Empire.⁴⁷

An important milestone in the history of the Armenian vilayets in the nineteenth century was the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, which profoundly reshaped the Ottoman Empire's

⁴⁴ S. I. Musaeva and A. K. Murtuzalieva, "Sefevidsko-Osmanckie Voyny v Period Pravlennii Shakha Abbasa I Velikogo (1587–1629)," *Sovremennaiia Nauchnaia Mysl'*, no. 3 (2024): 11–12, <https://doi.org/10.24412/2308-264X-2024-3-11-17>.

⁴⁵ Sabri Ateş, *Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3, 23–24.

⁴⁶ Garabet Chichekian, *The Territorial Evolution of Armenia since 1639: A Study in Political Geography* (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 1967), 20–21.

⁴⁷ David Van Der Oye, "Russian Foreign Policy: 1815–1917," in *The Cambridge History of Russia*, ed. Dominic Lieven (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 554.

eastern provinces. Barely a decade after the Caucasus Wars, Russia launched a major military campaign driven by both strategic and ideological motives. Rising nationalist movements in the Balkans challenged Ottoman authority, while Russia sought to restore its prestige and influence after the defeat in the Crimean War (1853–1856). The growing appeal of pan-Slavism and widespread public sympathy for Orthodox Christians under Ottoman rule provided Tsar Alexander II with a powerful justification for intervention, which was framed as a legitimate and even sacred mission of liberation. At the same time, the Ottoman Empire mobilized its Muslim subjects in the Caucasus by invoking pan-Islamic solidarity, portraying Russia as a threat to Islam.⁴⁸

In February 1878, Russian troops had already reached Istanbul, while also advancing eastward into the Armenian-populated regions of Erzurum and Van vilayets. The primary objective of Russia was to consolidate their territorial claims and secure their position in the San Stefano peace treaty. This treaty would have granted Russia control over the vast majority of Armenian territories. However, the British foreign policy, along with the Austro-Hungarian interests, was not in favor of Russia's expansion. Such a course of action would have threatened the European balance of power, pursued by Britain to counter the Russian advance in Asia and the Middle-East.⁴⁹ Britain effectively asserted their interests by promising military assistance to secure Ottoman suzerainty over Western Armenia, resulting in the formulation of a new peace treaty that substantially limited Russia's territorial gains. As a result of their weariness from war, the Tsarist government had no choice but to negotiate with the British Empire and accept the more modest terms. In exchange for their support to the Ottomans, the British Crown received the island of Cyprus and the right to establish a naval base in the Mediterranean. This decision ensured the safety of the trade routes between the Black Sea and Persia/India.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Gutmeyr, *Borderlands Orientalism*, 177, 200.

⁴⁹ Nur Çiçek, “The Eastern Question in Turkish Republican Textbooks: Settling Old Scores with the European and the Ottoman ‘Other,’” in *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered*, ed. Lucien J. Frary and Mara Kozelsky (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 307.

⁵⁰ Peter Sluglett and M. Hakan Yavuz, eds., *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and the Treaty of Berlin* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011), 2.



Figure 2. Armenia divided between the Russian and Ottoman Empires. Map by Yerevanci, 2011.

Wikimedia Commons

Although the new peace treaty gave Russia less territory, Russia annexed the three Ottoman sanjaks of Kars, Ardahan and Batum. These territories were then reorganized by the Russian government into two oblasts: Kars and Batum. The demarcation line between the two countries remained unchanged until the outbreak of World War I.⁵¹

Ethnic and Religious Composition in the Eastern Ottoman Vilayets and Erzurum within

The Ottoman Empire was an enormous, multicultural entity where diverse nationalities coexisted. However, the modus operandi of an empire differed significantly from a modern nation-state. As Ronald Suny argues, “*while the nation-state is typically based on legal equality and ethnic homogeneity, empires like the Ottoman Empire were structured on hierarchy and institutionalized*

⁵¹ Candan Badem, “Forty Years of Black Days? The Russian Administration of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum, 1878–1918,” in *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered*, ed. Lucien J. Frary and Mara Kozelsky (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 222.

difference". This tension between imperial and nationalist ideals became evident in the 19th century as nationalist movements emerged across the empire. These movements began to challenge imperial rule by emphasizing the legitimacy of nations based on shared ethnicity, language, and culture. The concept of self-determination, central to modern nationalist movements, posed a significant challenge to Ottoman Empire, which encompassed multiple nationalities and had previously provided a framework for their coexistence.⁵²

In an attempt to address the challenges posed by nationalist movements, Ottoman reformers sought to modernize the empire by introducing legal equality through the Tanzimat reforms (1839-1878). However, these modernizing efforts conflicted with the Ottoman millet system, a framework that governed religious communities rather than ethnic groups, essentially reflecting the empire's diversity, flexibility and adaptability. Karen Barkey perfectly summarized the dilemma the Ottomans faced during the long 19th century in their effort to prevent destabilization: „*Ottomans engaged in a race to combine “saving the empire” with “becoming a modern nation.” It is in this contradictory duality that the Ottomans lost their empire and the best of what they possessed: their diversity, ingenious flexibility, and resiliency.*”⁵³

Each religious group of the empire had a degree of autonomy under religious leaders, but the millet system also preserved inequalities. For instance, the Kurds were both a powerful tribal group and a significant part of the empire’s rural economy, while they often clashed with Armenians. Kurdish tribal leaders, sometimes allied with the state, exercised considerable power, but the Ottoman Empire’s inability to fully integrate and govern its vast, diverse territories contributed to mounting ethnic and sectarian conflicts. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the empire's weakening central authority and increasing competition for land, especially in Eastern Anatolia, exacerbated tensions between Muslims, Christians, and various ethnic groups and resulted in further violence and instability.⁵⁴

Western Armenia/Eastern Anatolia was a region characterized by ethnic and religious diversity. It was home to various communities, including Kurds, Armenians, Turks, and many others such as Greeks, Circassians or Assyrians, which alone was a challenge for the government

⁵² Suny, “*They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else*”, 7–24.

⁵³ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.

⁵⁴ Suny, “*They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else*”, 7–24.

but their geographic distribution in many cases (in our case the Armenian-Kurdish-Turks intermixture is of significant importance) further complicated the situation in the Ottoman Empire. In several eastern districts, the largest single nationality group was either Armenian or Kurd, although in many cases this largest group was still a minority of less than so percent.⁵⁵ Data sourced from the publication of the Russian Foreign Ministry demonstrate the aforementioned phenomenon in the Erzurum vilayet as well.⁵⁶

Armenians formed a significant population in Western Armenia and had a long-standing presence in the region. They were primarily concentrated in cities like Van, Erzurum, and Bitlis, as well as in numerous smaller towns and villages. Kurds also inhabited Eastern Anatolia, particularly in the mountainous areas. They had a distinct cultural and linguistic identity and were primarily engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, and other traditional livelihoods. Turks, who were the dominant ethnic group in the broader Anatolian region, also resided in Eastern Anatolia. They had a presence in both urban and rural areas.⁵⁷

Regarding the religious composition of the Armenian population of Erzurum, it can be stated that most belonged to the Armenian Apostolic Church⁵⁸. Despite widespread Protestant and Catholic missionary activities, Protestant conversion was detectable mostly in the Erzurum sanjak due to the presence of British/American missionaries.

The Russian consul in Erzurum, Shtritter, also compiled an approximate estimate of the population in 1912. The data here seems less detailed and more like estimates, but it corresponds to earlier surveys. Based on the consul's estimates, the population in the Erzurum vilayet comprised:

⁵⁵ Roderic Davison, "Nationalism as an Ottoman Problem and the Ottoman Response," in *Nationalism in a Non-National State: The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. William W. Haddad and William Ochsenwald (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977), 31.

⁵⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, *Sbornik diplomaticheskikh dokumentov: Reformy v Armenii, 26 noyabrya 1912 goda – 10 maya 1914 goda* (Petrograd: Gosudarstvennaya tipografiya, 1915), 283–84.

⁵⁷ Richard G. Hovannisian, "The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1914," in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, vol. 1 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 205.

⁵⁸ Russian sources often call the Armenian Apostolic Church the Armenian Gregorian Church, after Saint Gregory the Illuminator, who converted Armenia to Christianity in 301 AD. However, the term Gregorian is misleading, as the Church predates Gregory and traces its origins to the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew, hence its proper name, Apostolic.

| Ethnic Groups | Approximate Armenian Population of Erzurum vilayet in 1912. ⁵⁹ |
|-----------------|---|
| Armenian | 200 000 |
| Turk | 210 000 |
| Kurd | 340 000 |

There are few sources that give us guidance about the exact number of the Armenian population. During the peace negotiations in Berlin after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878, the Ottoman delegate made efforts to downplay the size of the Armenian population in the Armenian vilayets as smaller in order to gain an advantage in the negotiations. According to the figures presented at the conference by the Ottoman authorities, there were 586,000 Armenians in the region, distributed among various provinces. According to Hovannisian's calculations, this means that the Armenian population according to the Ottoman authorities could not have been more than 1,250,000 in 1878 and this figure remained relatively stable until 1914. The first officially commissioned population census, conducted thirty years after Berlin, validated Hovannisian's calculations. According to the 1844 census, there were a total of 2,400,000 Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire, two million of which were in the Asian part of the country. Although very little is known about the methodology of the census, the Ottoman government accepted this figure as official, as the aforementioned million is also shown in the 1877 State Yearbook, while the total population of the Eastern Armenian vilayets is indicated as 1,150,000.⁶⁰

| Vilayet | Approximate Armenian Population in 1877 ⁶¹ |
|----------------|---|
| Erzurum | 104000 |
| Bitlis | 156000 |
| Van | 78000 |

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁶⁰ Hovannisian, "Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire," 205.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 205.

| | |
|-------------------|--------|
| Kharput | 88000 |
| Diyarbakır | 54000 |
| Sivas | 106000 |

In the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878, six Armenian vilayets were established: Sivas, Erzurum, Harput, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, and Van, while Kars came under Russian rule. My research focuses on the analysis of the Erzurum vilayet, but a regional approach is crucial to contextualize its political and social history, so I partially extend the scope of introduction to the neighboring Van and Bitlis vilayets as well. This extension is based on the fact that the Russian consul in Erzurum also addressed issues in these vilayets, as their consulates were subordinated to Erzurum. Erzurum was of particular interest to the Russian Empire due to its long border with Russia, and it also served as a military and economic center within the six Armenian vilayets, housing strategically significant settlements like Erzurum and Erzincan.⁶²

In the second half of the 19th century, the territorial structure of the province of Erzurum saw significant changes. Originally Erzurum was established as an *eyalet*⁶³ in 1865 and it encompassed the entire northeastern part of Asia Minor. By 1875, this eyalet was divided into six *vilayets*: Erzurum, Van, Hakkari, Bitlis, Dersim, and Kars-Çıldır. In 1888, due to further administrative changes, the *vilayet* of Erzurum comprised three *sancaks* (districts) and nineteen *kazas* (subdistricts):

Sancak of Erzurum: *Erzurum, Ovacık, Kiğı, Tercan, Hınıs, Tortum, Yusufeli (Kiskin), Hasankale (Pasinler)*

Sancak of Erzincan: *Erzincan, Refahiye, Kurugay, Kemah, Bayburt, Tepir*

Sancak of Doğubayazıt (Bayezit): *Eleşkirt, Tutak (Entap)*⁶⁴

⁶² Yaşar Tolga Cora, *Transforming Erzurum/Karin: The Social and Economic History of a Multiethnic Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2016), 55–58.

⁶³ *Eyalets* were the Ottoman Empire's earlier administrative divisions, used until 1864, when the *vilayet* system, introduced during the so-called Tanzimat reforms, replaced them as the standard provincial structure until the empire's dissolution.

⁶⁴ Mesrob K. Krikorian, *Armenians in the Service of the Ottoman Empire: 1860–1908* (London: Routledge, 2018), 39–40.

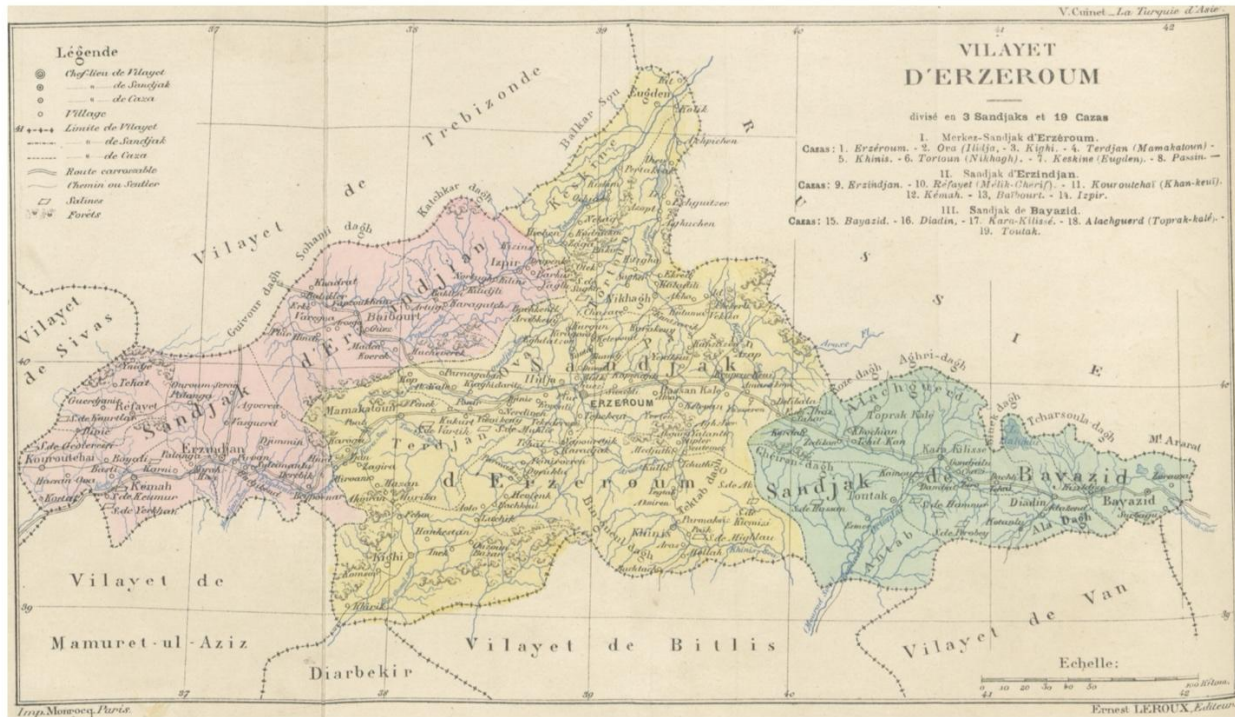


Figure 3. Erzurum Vilayet. Map by Vital Cuinet, 1890. Wikimedia Commons.

What emanates from this data is that the Armenians never made up the majority in the Erzurum vilayet but constituted a sizable minority group within the empire. Unfortunately, data is scarce on the exact ethnic composition of cities, towns, and villages, which would demonstrate the intermingling of these ethnic groups and make the visualization of their geographical position possible.

Geography of the Erzurum Vilayet

The vilayet of Erzurum was geographically fragmented, lacking any well-defined geographical center, as noted by Wilhelm Streker. It was bordered to the south by the Palandöken Mountains rising over 3,000 meters. To the north, it was separated from the Trabzon valley by a ridge.⁶⁵ At its easternmost tip stood the emblematic symbol of the Armenian people and Armenia, the biblical Ararat, comprising the Great Ararat (5165 m) and the Little Ararat (3914 m). The eastern regions of the vilayet encompassed peripheral areas, which were mostly the easternmost

⁶⁵ Wilhelm Streker, *Ocherki Verhnej Armenii* (Tbilisi, 1873), 11.

areas on the border with Iran. This is also where the Deveboynu Pass is located, separating the city of Erzurum in the Erzurum Valley from the Pasinler Valley, which also forms an excellent line of defense against attacks from the east.⁶⁶

According to a 1904 survey authored by Nikolai Mikhailovich Przhevalskii, a Russian general staff officer and geographer, the vilayet was divided into three different sancaks (Erzurum, Erzincan, Bayezit), comprising a total of 20 additional smaller administrative units. Agriculture played a significant role in the economy of all regions studied. However, it also required remarkable effort, particularly in the plains of Erzurum, Ardahan, and Kars, where winters were exceptionally cold, causing up to 50-60 days of snowfall. In more northern areas, snow persisted for up to seven months in many places. To survive the winter in such harsh conditions, the farming peasantry constructed their homes half-buried in the ground. The Araks River Basin was an exception to this harsh weather, where winters were somewhat milder, but summer days were accompanied by high temperatures.⁶⁷ The vilayet of Erzurum was particularly suitable for summer grazing and this favored nomadic groups, to the extent that the region became one of the largest livestock exporters of both cattle and horses in the empire. The processing of animal meat was also a popular occupation, as dried meat (or *pastırma*) accounted for up to a tenth of the trade with other cities or provinces. The trade between the city of Erzurum and its vilayet was much more active than that of the vilayets of Van or Bitlis.⁶⁸

The city of Erzurum was protected by thick walls, which were further reinforced by deep moats that were filled with water during a siege. Erzurum features four main city gates: Gharsa Tur, Gana Tur, Erzingu Tur, and Tevrizu Tur.⁶⁹ The Armenian quarters were located on the northern side of the town, an area that had once been suburban, established when Christians were not allowed to live within the city walls. As the urban space expanded, these quarters were incorporated into the city, becoming part of Erzurum proper and situated near the Olti Gate, which led to the newly annexed Russian province of Kars. Within these quarters stood the Armenian church of Sourp Asdvadzadzin, as well as the community's marketplaces and schools. The Gumruk road was a key artery leading into the city, with its surroundings serving as the commercial hub

⁶⁶ Cora, "Transforming Erzurum/Karin," 55–58.

⁶⁷ David Marshall Lang, *Armenia: Cradle of Civilization* (London: Routledge, 2021), 15.

⁶⁸ Cora, "Transforming Erzurum/Karin," 62–64.

⁶⁹ Hratch A. Darpasian, *Erzurum (Garin), Its Armenian History and Traditions* (New York: Garin Compatriotic Union of the United States, 1975), 17.

and home to foreign consulates, including those of the French, Russians, Austrians, and British. Additionally, there was an American presence with a station of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, established in the city in 1839.⁷⁰



Figure 4. Panorama of Erzurum. From H. Hepworth, *Through Armenia on Horseback* (London, 1898).

Reproduced on Houshamadyan.

As for the vilayet and city, in Erzurum during the 19th century, there were several major ethnic groups coexisting. These included Turks and Kurds, as well as Armenians, primarily belonging to the Apostolic and Catholic denominations, with a smaller number of Protestants. Additionally, there were smaller communities of Greeks and Persians in the region. Furthermore, in the wider sancak, there were settled Kurds and also nomadic Kurdish groups. One notable factor affecting the demographics was the migration of Armenians to Russian territories following the Turco-Russian War of 1827-1828. Around 20,000 Armenians from Erzurum and the surrounding regions relocated to Russia and established settlements there. It is worth mentioning that while estimates may differ, the overall number of Armenians in the region remained around one-third to one-quarter of the total population. Besides, there were settlements of Caucasian Muslim immigrants and Muslim migrants from the provinces of Kars and Ardahan, which became part of the Russian Empire after the 1877-1878 War. This period also witnessed significant Armenian

⁷⁰ David Low, *Picturing the Ottoman Armenian World: Photography in Erzurum, Harput, Van and Beyond* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2022), 55–56.

emigration to coastal regions of the empire and to the New World. However, the city's Armenian population received Armenian migrants from rural areas as well.⁷¹

The areas around Lake Van and the areas north of it, or the Ararat Plain, proved to be much more suitable for agriculture.⁷² Van vilayet is bordered in the west and south by the vilayets of Erzurum, Bitlis and Mosul. The vilayet as a separate entity was established in 1549. Initially, the vilayet was made up of several different districts and counties, which were then simplified into so-called *kazas*. The city center was the fortress, which towered above the city and was also visible from Lake Van, surrounded by hillsides. This lake was also touched by two *kazas* of the Bitlis region (Khlat/Ahlat), and therefore the inhabitants of Bitlis vilayet often claimed to be from the city of Van.⁷³

The excellent geographic conditions led the kings of Urartu to choose Van as their seat of power in the 9th century, but the population often fell victim to earthquakes, which appeared in Armenian folklore as dragons. Earthquakes leveled entire cities, and the most recent modern-day evidence of this extremely active volcanic activity can be seen in the destruction of Van in 1966 and Erzurum in 1983⁷⁴, in 1992 in Erzincan, 2011 in Van and the catastrophic earthquake of February 2023 which devastated large parts of southeastern Anatolia and Syria. In addition, the area was difficult to defend, its central location making it a route for the armies that often passed through throughout history.⁷⁵ In Van vilayet, in addition to agriculture, there was also a significant role for animal husbandry, mainly sheep and goats. In addition, dried fish was a much sought-after product, so it was popular to trade it, as was soda ash collected from the lakeside, which was used and sold as a purifier. Mining played a minor role in the area, but even so, silver and lead were extracted. Despite all this, there was no active commercial life in the Van area, a phenomenon illustrated by the fact that there was not even a bank in the town of Van.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Cora, “*Transforming Erzurum/Karin*”, 59–61.

⁷² Nikolaj Hovhanniszyán, *Az Örmény Genocidium*, ed. Zsigmond Benedek and Dr. Issekutz Sarolta, trans. Haraszti Lilla (Budapest: Erdélyi Örmény Gyökerek Kulturális Egyesület, 2007), 11.

⁷³ Tork Dalalyan, “Kaza of Van – Geography,” trans. Shogher Margossian, *Houshamadyan*, October 26, 2012, <https://www.houshamadyan.org/en/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-van/kaza-of-van/locale/geography.html> (accessed May 10, 2022).

⁷⁴ Lang, *Armenia: Cradle of civilization*, 9.

⁷⁵ Nairy Hampikian, “The Architectural Heritage of Vaspurakan and the Preservation of Memory Layers,” in *Armenian Van/Vaspurakan*, ed. [Editor Name] (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2000), 87–88.

⁷⁶ Robert H. Hewsen, “Van in This World; Paradise in the Next: The Historical Geography of Van/Vaspurakan,” in *Armenian Van/Vaspurakan*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, UCLA Armenian History and Culture Series, vol. 1 (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2000), 39.

Bitlis and Muş areas were initially part of Erzurum vilayet, but in 1875 they became independent districts, and later, in 1883-1884, the Siirt *sancak* of the neighboring Diyarbakır region to the west was annexed to Bitlis.⁷⁷ With this expansion, the number of vilayet's sancaks increased to four: Bitlis, Siirt, Genj, Muş, Sasun. The natural southern boundary of the Bitlis vilayet, dissected by mountains and hills, was the Taurus Mountains, which were easily crossed by both traders and passing armies. Although Bitlis was on an important trade route linking the Armenian Plateau and Mesopotamia, the Muş Plain was not a particularly busy area, so apart from a few foreign travelers (Karl H.E. Koch, Hermann Abich, Vital Cuinet, H.F.B Lynch, F. Oswald), the area was not visited by many, and little is known about life there at the time.

The area around the city of Bitlis however was excellent for the establishment of orchards due to the abundant water supply of mountain streams and other rivers. The town of Bitlis, in the center of the vilayet, was home to many Armenian craftsmen, who were engaged in leatherwork, jewelry and weapon making, among other trades. These lucrative crafts may have been the reason why, unlike in many other regions, Armenians here lived in stone houses, which could be two-storey in some cases.⁷⁸ The town itself is located in one of the most important eastern passes and its medieval fortress was once an impenetrable defense for its inhabitants.⁷⁹ It is also worth mentioning that all three vilayet were also connected to the Middle Eastern bloodstream by river. The eastern branch of the Tigris enters the province of Van and flows into the vicinity of Lake Van, while the Euphrates winds around the outskirts of the city of Erzurum.

Erzurum as a Contested Borderland

From Centre to Periphery

As a key actor in the Eastern Question, the Russian Empire closely monitored Ottoman governance in its eastern periphery driven by a desire to expand its influence through detailed intelligence written by its consuls on the administration of Erzurum. The analysis of these consular

⁷⁷ Krikorian, *Armenians in the Service of the Ottoman Empire*, 26–28.

⁷⁸ Robert H. Hewsen, *Van in This World; Paradise in the Next*, 1–2.

⁷⁹ Robert H. Hewsen, “The Historical Geography of Bagesh/Bitlis and Taron/Muş,” in *Armenian Baghesh/Bitlis and Taron/Muş*, ed. W. Seibt and Richard G. Hovannisian, UCLA Armenian History and Culture Series, Historic Armenian Cities and Provinces (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2001), 56–58.

reports corroborates existing scholarship on Ottoman borderland governance, while also illuminate what Russian consuls chose to record, how they framed their observations, and why certain developments received emphasis. By introducing concrete case studies from the Erzurum vilayet, this analysis enriches the existing body of work on individual vilayets while foregrounding an external perspective shaped by the Russian consular lens.

A recurring theme in Russian reports is the Ottoman administration's mismanagement of the vilayet and the wide range of problems that resulted from it. The empire's decentralized system, especially in the eastern provinces, delegated key functions such as taxation to local dignitaries.⁸⁰ Consequently, governance often depended on their arbitrary "goodwill" rather than on consistent central authority. Kurdish chieftains, the main beneficiaries of this arrangement, amassed considerable power, and created localized centers where the Ottoman state struggled to assert control. This decentralization fragmented authority and intensified tensions between regional leaders and the central government, fostering an environment of administrative arbitrariness that ambitious actors could easily exploit.⁸¹ Although the Tanzimat reform policies⁸² attempted to establish firmer rule in the empire, and thus in the Armenian vilayets, by introducing administrative, taxation, military and legal reforms that standardized and centralized decision-making processes, their implementation frequently depended on the cooperation of local dignitaries, such as the *valis* (governors).⁸³

These problems are present in Russian reporting too. What stands out strikingly in the 1882 reports of Russian Consul Aleksey Romanovich Dennet⁸⁴ is his portrayal the center-periphery

⁸⁰ Kıvanç K. Karaman, "Decentralized Coercion and Self-Restraint in Provincial Taxation: The Ottoman Empire, 15th–16th Centuries," *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 71, no. 3 (2009): 692–693.

⁸¹ Elke Hartmann, *Örmény élet az Oszmán Birodalomban* (Budapest: Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem; L'Harmattan, 2021), 71.

⁸² The *Tanzimat* or in other words "reorganization", was a period of reforms (1839–1876) launched in the Ottoman Empire under Sultans Abdülmecid and Abdülaziz. Aimed at modernizing administration, law, and the military while promoting equality among subjects, the reforms introduced secular courts, modern education, and infrastructure.

⁸³ Brad Ronald Dennis, *Explaining Coexistence and Conflict in Eastern Anatolia, 1800–1878* (PhD diss., University of Utah, 2015), 276–278.

⁸⁴ Aleksei Romanovich Dennet (1836–1917) was a lieutenant general in the Russian imperial army who also served as Russian consul general in Erzurum from December 1880. Of English origin, his family had settled in Russia at the end of the eighteenth century. Educated at the 2nd Moscow Cadet Corps, Moscow University, and the Nicholas General Staff Academy, he entered service in 1858, participated in the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878), and retired in 1893 with the rank of lieutenant general. See L. M. Savelov, ed., *Rodoslovnaia kniga dvorianstva Moskovskoi gubernii: Dvorianstvo zhalovannoe i vysluzhennoe: A–I* (Moscow: Izdanie Moskovskogo dvorianstva, 1914), 478.

problem, that is, the farther the province is from the center, the less effectively the intended reforms function.⁸⁵

*“The expectations of the residents, especially the Armenians, to see the reforms promised at the **Berlin Congress** implemented are diminishing infinitely and deprive them of the slightest hope for improvement. They followed with anxious anticipation the execution of the promises made at the **1878 Berlin Congress** and wondered when, finally, the Porte would turn its attentive care and concern towards its Armenian subjects living in the remote vilayets **far from the center of government**. Meanwhile, the local residents only complain about the arbitrariness and corruption of the representatives of governmental authority.”*⁸⁶

In addition, the consular narrative portrays Ottoman administrative corruption and arbitrariness not only as local dysfunction but also as evidence of a systematic failure that undermined the credibility of the international guarantees put forward at the Berlin Congress. In this sense, the reports also indirectly exposed the limits of Russian influence in the Ottoman eastern borderlands, despite the fact that the Berlin settlement had elevated the Armenian Question to a matter of European diplomacy.

*“No matter how hard I tried to find out what the duties of the Turkish governors and generals are, I still couldn't get a clear and definite understanding of them. Meanwhile, every day from morning to evening, the representatives of authority sit in their offices, always busy with something. I was told that in all branches of administration, officials only care about collecting as many liras as possible. This is partly confirmed by what happens in the courts and the main administrative council. Everywhere there is disorder and the arbitrariness of the officials.”*⁸⁷

Dennet also claimed that the plight of the local population was further exacerbated by corruption within local councils, where representatives frequently accepted bribes. In addition, lengthy bureaucratic procedures and exorbitant court fees caused plaintiffs to lose considerable sums of money, as even the simplest cases in Erzurum faced delays lasting several months.⁸⁸

In his reports, Consul Dennet contrasted Ottoman administration before and after the Tanzimat reforms. He observed that he now depended on the vali to relay complaints and prompt action, whereas earlier consuls could directly demand compliance from provincial authorities. Although the vali insisted that autonomous councils handled grievances impartially through formal petitions, Dennet regarded the new procedure as a weakening of consular influence and administrative effectiveness.⁸⁹ These changes marked both a decline in the *valis'* power and a shift

⁸⁵ Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI), f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, ll. 27–31, April 3, 1882. [See Appendix 1.](#)

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

toward centralized decision-making.⁹⁰ This loss of influence frustrated the Russian consul, especially in the post–Berlin Congress period, when Russia portrayed itself as the protector of persecuted Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.

According to Dennet’s reports, the reforms also caused the administration to become slower and more bureaucratic. At the same time, he acknowledged that the leadership of the vilayet was attempting to improve the situation, but greater structural problems precluded notable results. He explained that despite efforts by the vali, Mustafa Paşa, and some advisors to improve administration and living conditions, their ambitions were stymied by a majority he simply addressed as “*religious zealots and negligent individuals*”. The consul found it especially problematic that officials made decisions based on teachings from religious schools and the sharia.⁹¹ It must be noted that besides secular courts (*nizamiye*), the codified sharia jurisdiction (*mejelle*) also persisted, addressing areas such as civil law, including contracts, obligations, trusts, and procedural matters.⁹²

During the 1890’s the problem of powerless valis rendered the local administrations unable to give apt answers to put an end to the raging violence in Western Armenia. For instance, In 1894 Grand Vizier⁹³ Cevad Paşa warned Sultan Abdülhamid II that the empire’s provincial administration suffered from confusion and lack of coordination because the local governors kept ignoring central authority, as they knew they would not be held responsible amid the chaos. The severity of this was certainly noticed by foreign observers. Following the Hamidian massacres, in May 1895, foreign ambassadors, including the Russian representative, demanded administrative reforms from the Ottoman government and the drafting of a reform bill for the eastern provinces to improve governance and prevent unrest.⁹⁴

Dennet’s reports give us the understanding that the Russian consulate in Erzurum evaluated the inefficiencies of Ottoman governance in relation to its success or failure in implementing reforms aimed at improving Armenian living conditions. Failure to achieve these objectives led to

⁹⁰ Richard E. Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith, Brokers of Empire: Armenians and the Politics of Reform in the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 2.

⁹¹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, ll. 27–31, April 3, 1882. [See Appendix 1.](#)

⁹² Aijaz Ahmed, "Tanzimat: A Brief Outlook of Secular Reforms in the Ottoman Empire," *VFAST Transactions on Islamic Research* 9, no. 2 (2021): 26.

⁹³ The Grand Vizier was the the highest-ranking official in the Ottoman Empire, acting as the prime minister and chief advisor to the sultan. This position held significant power in governing the empire which oversaw the administration, military, and legal affairs.

⁹⁴ Abdulhamit Kırmızı, “Taming the Governors: The Swinging Pendulum of Power over the Ottoman Provinces in the Nineteenth Century,” *The International Journal of Regional and Local Studies* 6, no. 1 (2010): 12–13.

the consul's growing dissatisfaction and reinforced Russia's perception of itself as a necessary guardian of the region's Christian population. In this sense, the consul's observations not only reflect the administrative shortcomings within the Ottoman system but also reveal how consular reporting served broader Russian political aims, that is, keeping the Armenian Question on the agenda to exert influence.

Local Resistance towards Centralization

The mismanagement of the periphery allowed frontier power centers in the Ottoman Empire to retain autonomy and, at times, even engage independently with neighboring states.⁹⁵ In the nineteenth century, the Tanzimat reforms sought to reverse this by centralizing authority, standardizing taxation, conscription, and landownership, particularly in Kurdish populated regions.⁹⁶ This reorganization functioned as a citizenship project aimed at pacifying the borderlands by replacing local notables with salaried officials and redrawing administrative divisions.⁹⁷ The transformation of the region from a fluid frontier into a fixed borderland during the nineteenth century reflected the Ottoman state's effort to strengthen control over Kurdish communities and formed part of a broader trend among nineteenth-century states to delineate borders and classify populations in order to enhance governability.⁹⁸

Yet, the Kurdish nobility, which was long accustomed to hereditary privileges, fiercely resisted these measures. Despite repeated military campaigns, Ottoman efforts to modernize and assert control in the eastern provinces largely failed and revealed the limits of imperial centralization.⁹⁹ Furthermore, centralizing reforms disrupted long-standing patterns of life. Nomadic groups, predominantly Kurdish, had migrated seasonally between central Anatolia and the Cilician plains, sustaining a symbiotic exchange with the sedentary Armenian population. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, Ottoman efforts to register land and forcibly settle nomads

⁹⁵ Ali Balçı and Tocay Kardeş, "The Ottoman International System: Power Projection, Interconnectedness, and the Autonomy of Frontier Polities," *Millennium* 51, no. 3 (2023): 883, 887, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298231185974>.

⁹⁶ Yavuz Koç, "'Taxing' the Tribes in the Ottoman Empire: The Case of the Tribes of Mutki (1839–1908)," in *Histories of Tax Evasion, Avoidance and Resistance*, ed. Aaron Graham and Pieter de Marez Oyens (London: Routledge, 2022), 84–85.

⁹⁷ Metin Atmaca, "Three Stages of Political Transformation in the 19th Century Ottoman Kurdistan," *Anatoli: De l'Adriatique à la Caspienne. Territoires, Politique, Sociétés* 8 (2017): 49.

⁹⁸ Klein, *Margins of Empire*, 9–13.

⁹⁹ Nazan Özok-Gündoğan, *The Kurdish Nobility in the Ottoman Empire: Loyalty, Autonomy and Privilege* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 107–120.

undermined these arrangements, destabilized local economies, and intensified competition over land.¹⁰⁰

The Russian consular reports, besides reinforcing the narrative of Ottoman administrative weakness, which often framed unrest as criminality or tribal insubordination, also (indirectly) situated these disturbances within a broader geopolitical context. By documenting Kurdish refusals of conscription and negotiations with Russian representatives, the reports reveal the limits of governing the borderland at the intersection of imperial rivalries and local Kurdish resistance.

From the early 16th century until the beginning of the Tanzimat period, Kurdish tribal power centers remained relatively intact. However, the implementation of reforms brought about a conflict between the state administration and the Kurdish tribes.¹⁰¹ A report dated November 1876, by Consul Nikolai Leontievich Obermiller¹⁰² noted that while the Turks were actively preparing for war and sending large numbers of troops to Kars, the Kurds refused mobilization, demanding gold, weapons, and supplies in return for cooperation. The *kaymakam*¹⁰³ of Erzincan, Hussein bey was a Kurd, and during his visit in Erzurum, he conveyed to the consul that in the event of war, they were ready to rise against the sultan and support Russia on the condition that they receive arms and, if the uprising is unsuccessful, permission to resettle in the Caucasus with their herds. According to the Russian consul, another seven tribal leaders reportedly agreed to rebel unconditionally. Although it remains unknown how the Russian mission responded to these inquiries, the reports' inclusion of such details indicates a Russian interest in assessing the potential use of Kurdish groups.¹⁰⁴ While mass mobilization to fight alongside Russia never materialized, such reports reveal that the consulate was aware of Kurdish resistance to Ottoman mobilization and did not refrain from establishing contact with these groups. Finding more of such reports would be significant because research is scarce on early Russian interest and its influence in Kurdish affairs

¹⁰⁰ Owen Miller, "Uplands, Lowlands, and Mass Violence in Ottoman Cilicia," in *Armenians and Kurds in the Late Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ümit Kurt and Ara Sarafian (Fresno, CA: California State University Press, 2020), 3–4.

¹⁰¹ Zanîngeha Adiyamanê and Rahman Dag, "Ottoman Reforms and Kurdish Reactions in the 19th Century," *Nûbihar Akademî* 1, no. 2 (2015): 51.

¹⁰² Nikolai Leontievich Obermiller (Obermüller) (1835–1892) was a Russian diplomat who served as consul in Erzurum and later as consul general in Iași. His brother, Alexander Leontievich Obermiller, was a court physician and inspector of the medical department of the Imperial Court Ministry, as well as a founding member of the Russian Surgical Society and the Imperial Red Cross. See "Nikolai Christian Obermüller," Erik-Amburger-Datenbank, <https://amburger.ios-regensburg.de/index.php?id=35588>.

¹⁰³ *kaymakam*: the governor of a district (kaza), ranking below a *mutasarrıf* (district governor) and *vali* (provincial governor).

¹⁰⁴ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1089, l. 64, November 26–29, 1876.

in the Ottoman Empire to explain related issues regarding the utilization of Kurdish forces at the end of the 19th and early in the 20th century.

Nevertheless, there exists an abundance of sources documenting Kurdish resistance to state control in the Ottoman periphery. For instance, in his report of June, 1875, Consul Obermiller noted that the Dersim Kurds were “*so independent that they had never paid taxes.*”¹⁰⁵ In May 1876, Samih Paşa, *müşir*¹⁰⁶ of the Fourth Territorial Defense Unit in the Erzurum vilayet, met the Russian consul Obermiller, who reported ongoing Kurdish looting along the border and noted that several of them recently handed over by Russian authorities had returned to violence, including the beheading of Ottoman soldiers.¹⁰⁷

*“Lately, in some parts of the Erzurum vilayet and the neighboring areas, rather serious disturbances have taken place among the Kurdish nomadic population. The cause of these incidents was partly the Kurds’ habitual inclination toward plunder, and partly their discontent over the Porte’s intention to extend military conscription to the Kurdish nomads.(...)”*¹⁰⁸

As the quotation from Russian sources show, resistance against conscription culminated in a significant upheaval in the summer of 1883, during which looting also intensified. A further example of this resistance occurred when the Kurds of Sağanlı, who predominantly roamed the Malazgirt kaza near Lake Van, plundered the Armenian village of Çalgan. In response, the Kurds of Sağanlı, who had a longstanding feud with the Hasanlı clan, ambushed the Hasanlıs as they returned from their raid. The ensuing confrontation resulted in the loss of three Sağanlı leaders, who were forced to flee for their safety. In light of these events, the mutasarrıf of Bayezid summoned Sufi aga¹⁰⁹, the leader of the Hasanlı clan. Not only did Sufi aga refuse to comply with the mutasarrıf’s authority, but he also gathered over 500 well-armed men to launch an attack on the camps of the Sağanlı clan. The vali dispatched Ottoman troops and launched a punitive campaign against the Hasanlı tribe; however, according to the *mutasarrıf* of Muş, the soldiers destroyed Kurdish camps that had nothing to do with either the plundering of the Armenian village

¹⁰⁵ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1088, l. 3, June 17, 1875.

¹⁰⁶ *müşir*: the highest Ottoman military rank, equivalent to field marshal or army commander. In the 19th century, müşirs commanded provincial armies and sometimes served as military governors.

¹⁰⁷ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1089, l. 28, 14 May, 1876.

¹⁰⁸ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, ll. 120–122, August 13, 1883. [See Appendix 2.](#)

¹⁰⁹ *ağa*: a title of respect or authority used for military commanders, landowners, or tribal leaders. In eastern Anatolia it often denoted a local Kurdish chieftain or village notable (*bey*, *ağa*).

or with Sufi aga.¹¹⁰ These examples demonstrate that Kurdish groups also engaged in internal conflicts, which in turn required the repeated deployment of Ottoman troops.

In studies of the Ottoman Empire's eastern borderlands, the focus often centers on the violence and unruliness of Kurdish tribes but, other groups, such as the Karapapakh tribes¹¹¹, also contributed to violence in Erzurum. Exemplifying a typical borderland phenomenon, the Karapapakh tribes migrated from the Caucasus to the Sivas and Erzurum region, driven by the Russo-Turkish wars.¹¹² Their nomadic lifestyle made it difficult for Ottoman and Russian authorities to track them as they crossed the Russian-Ottoman borders, allowing unchecked violence similar to that of Kurdish tribes.¹¹³ The Russian administration was concerned about Karapapakh tribes near its borders due to their frequent raids along the Ottoman–Russian frontier and therefore coordinated with the Erzurum consulate to contain the problem. Obermiller communicated with the local *müşir*, who deployed cavalry units to restore order. These cases show that some Ottoman officials sought to curb violence and responded to attacks by both Karapapakh and Kurdish groups.¹¹⁴ The Russian consulate concluded that resolving the situation required the removal of a certain Yusuf Bey leader of a Karapapakh bandit group, yet his apprehension proved difficult because bribery allowed suspects to buy their freedom.¹¹⁵

Beyond highlighting the inefficiencies of Ottoman provincial governance, the Russian reports reveal the broader challenges of a porous and unstable borderland, which nomadic populations were able to exploit. They not only expose structural weaknesses along the Ottoman periphery but also demonstrate that Russia had developed a growing strategic interest in Kurdish affairs even before the war of 1877–1878, particularly in relation to Kurdish ambivalence toward Ottoman authority, an attitude Russian consul later sought to exploit, and which will be examined in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

¹¹⁰ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, II. 120–122, August 13, 1883. [See Appendix 2.](#)

¹¹¹ *Karapapakh*: a Turkic-speaking pastoral group inhabiting the Ottoman–Russian frontier region of Kars, Bayezid, and Borchalu. The name, meaning “black hat,” refers to their traditional headgear.

¹¹² Mehmet Rezan Ekinçi, “Hamidiye Alaylarında ‘Cüdi Terekemeler’: Karapapaklar,” *Mukaddime* 13, no. 2 (2022): 279–280.

¹¹³ Bournoutian, George. *From the Kur to the Aras*, 190.

¹¹⁴ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1089, II. 58–59, March 18, 1876.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Russia ante portas: The Extent of Russian Influence in the Borderland

The expansion of Russia's military and political power from the late eighteenth century onward increasingly threatened the Ottoman Empire by mobilizing support among Orthodox and Slavic populations under Ottoman rule. After the Berlin Congress, Russia had assumed the role of protector of the Armenians. This allowed Russia to use the Armenian Question as a tool to interfere in matters of the Ottoman Empire.¹¹⁶ In response to this growing threat, the Ottoman state sought to strengthen its control over Eastern Anatolia and integrate the region politically and economically. These centralizing efforts, however, provoked resistance from local actors, leading to recurrent conflicts between provincial groups and the state and contributing to long-term regional instability.¹¹⁷ Much of the local violence in nineteenth-century Eastern Anatolia stemmed from disputes over land, taxation, and opposition to state authority.¹¹⁸

I argue that an additional exacerbating factor behind the violence in the borderland was, on the one hand, the perceived Russian threat among the local population, and on the other, the broader global tensions surrounding the Eastern Question, in which Russia was a decisive actor. These forces heightened insecurity and deepened divisions between ethnic and religious groups within the empire's eastern provinces. These findings offer a new analytical perspective and contributing to a deeper understanding of the entangled histories of imperial competition and their impact on the populations of the Ottoman borderlands.

In 1875, the Russian consul reported growing agitation among Erzurum's Muslim population, marked by the formation of secret societies that allegedly plotted revenge against Christians. This unrest unfolded amid rumors of an imminent Ottoman–Russian war, as Obermiller noted that many local Muslims viewed Russia as “*the greatest source of inconvenience*”, especially

¹¹⁶ Benjamin Braude, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Abridged Edition* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2014), 44.

¹¹⁷ Brad Dennis, “Patterns of Conflict and Violence in Eastern Anatolia Leading Up to the Russo-Turkish War and the Treaty of Berlin,” in *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, ed. Peter Sluglett and M. Hakan Yavuz (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011), 278–281.

¹¹⁸ Varak Ketsemanian, *The Armenian Constitutional Order in the Late Ottoman Empire: From Reform to Crisis* (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2022), 30.

after reports circulated that 150,000 Russian troops were massed near the border in preparation for an attack.¹¹⁹

This atmosphere further exacerbated intercommunal tensions in Erzurum, and Obermiller recorded several cases of attacks against Armenians. For instance, a case of an Armenian woman who was attacked while hanging laundry, when two soldiers tore down her clothesline and assaulted her. He also reported incidents in which soldiers vandalized Armenian shops by throwing ice at their windows. The consul further observed that local Muslims routinely used offensive language to intimidate Christians.¹²⁰ Neighboring cities also saw violent acts prior to the war. Obermiller's December 1876 report describes an arson attack on a bazaar in Van by unknown assailants targeting local Christians. Armenians accused the local garrison of setting the fire to undermine their commerce; while the bazaar was burning, soldiers prevented them from rescuing their stalls and stole the money kept there.¹²¹ British consular reports also reinforce the arson in Van.¹²²

In the climate of war preparation, interethnic-interreligious conflicts became politicized, with subjects' perceptions of each other becoming ambiguous, making it difficult for elements of society to distinguish between "*friend and foe*" and creating an atmosphere of uncertainty where the loyalties of different groups could be questioned and exploited in response to political challenges.¹²³ The recurring motif of the Russian military threat in the consular reports reveals the persistence of public anxiety and rumor about a possible invasion. As victims of recurring violence, Armenians frequently petitioned the Russian consulate, reporting abuses by Ottoman soldiers who often acted violently toward local Christians. Combined with fears of a Russian invasion into the empire's eastern frontier, these tensions further undermined peaceful coexistence, as Armenians were regarded as Russia's protégés.

This notion is illustrated by an anecdote recorded by Consul Obermiller which allegedly happened in Istanbul's Pera district. Although Obermiller does not specify his source, he recounted that one day a crowd had gathered near the embassies, and as the Russian ambassador rode past on horseback, an old Turk reportedly exclaimed:

¹¹⁹ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1088, l. 31, November 4, 1875.

¹²⁰ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1088, l. 40, December 26, 1875.

¹²¹ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1089, l. 54, December 1876.

¹²² Arman Dzhonovich Kirakosian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question: From the 1830s to 1914* (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Institute, 2003), 56.

¹²³ Rieber, *Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands*, 5–10.

*“Here comes the one who holds the fate of Turkey in his hands, who appoints grand viziers and leads the Sultan by the hand!”*¹²⁴

Regardless of its factual accuracy, Obermiller’s decision to include this claim in his report to the embassy in Constantinople is itself revealing. It suggests either that Russia was perceived as a dominant force within the Ottoman Empire, or that the Russian consulate wished to project such dominance, or that Ottoman subjects believed Russia exercised *de facto* governing influence. Although Obermiller cautiously admitted that he could not verify whether the Russian ambassador truly “*led the Sultan by the hand,*” he nonetheless highlighted a telling practice: Ottoman citizens frequently appealed to the Russian consulate to resolve local disputes, a function normally reserved for district governors (*mutasarrıf*) or provincial governors (*vali*), the highest imperial authorities in the provinces.¹²⁵

What could have given rise to this notion was the professionalization of Russian diplomatic missions over the centuries, both globally and within the Ottoman Empire. By the eighteenth century, Russian consuls operated under the dual authority of the Kommerz Kollegium and the Foreign Affairs Kollegium, with responsibilities that included assisting merchants, supporting trade, gathering intelligence, and issuing legal documents.¹²⁶ These duties were codified in the 1820 Consular Charter, which emphasized the consuls’ economic and political intelligence role. During the nineteenth century, Russia rapidly expanded its consular network alongside imperial territorial growth in the Crimea, Caucasus, and Central Asia, eventually maintaining consulates across Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and beyond. In the Balkans, consulates actively advanced Russian influence by supporting Orthodox communities through schools, churches, and, at times, local rebellions.¹²⁷

By the early 20th century, the Russian consular network in the Ottoman Empire included seven general consulates, nearly twenty consulates, and numerous vice-consulates. Russian consuls in the Ottoman Empire had both trade and political duties, stemming from Russia's role as a patron of the Empire's significant Christian population. Consular jurisdiction allowed consuls to exercise

¹²⁴ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1089, ll. 23–25, April 1876.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Alexander Tchoudinov, “Russia and the Continental System: Trends in Russian Historiography,” in *Revisiting Napoleon’s Continental System: Local, Regional and European Experiences*, ed. Katherine B. Aaslestad and Johan Joor (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 62.

¹²⁷ Tatiana Zonova, “Chapter Seven: The Consular Service in Russia: Past Problems, New Challenges,” in *Consular Affairs and Diplomacy*, ed. Jan Melissen and Ana Mar Fernández (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill | Nijhoff, 2011), 173–183, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004188761.i-334.57>.

judicial authority over Russian nationals abroad, a practice that was rooted in Ottoman capitulation treaties. This ensured that Russian citizens were not subject to local laws. However, efforts from the Ottoman Empire to standardize consular laws across regions faced resistance, particularly as international norms shifted toward the principle of state sovereignty.¹²⁸

The main issue for the Ottoman Empire was the misuse of the protégé system by foreign consulates. This legal and administrative practice provided non-Muslim subjects of the empire with certain legal privileges and protections by affiliating themselves with a foreign consulate. Originally, this practice was granted to ambassadors to protect their staff, but it was soon abused. Some ambassadors sold these protections to wealthy non-Muslims, such as Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, who thus could enjoy exemptions from Ottoman taxes and legal jurisdiction. Over time, entire communities sought foreign protection for political, economic, and religious reasons, which was also useful for European powers (e.g: Britain, Germany, France) as they exploited their protective roles to further their interests by claiming authority over certain religious communities.¹²⁹

For instance, Russia asserted authority over Greeks and Armenians, while Britain extended its protection to Protestants, including protestant Armenians, and some Jews. This external interference significantly undermined Ottoman sovereignty and created divisions among its subjects. By the 19th century, the situation had escalated, with European consulates indiscriminately issuing protections. The Treaty of Berlin (1878) and other agreements ultimately symbolized the dismemberment of Ottoman territories under the pretext of protecting minorities, culminating in the independence of Balkan states and the imposition of collective European oversight over Ottoman Armenians.¹³⁰

The Tsarist regime's policy of positioning Russia as the protector of Christian populations, combined with the establishment of Russian consulates, which undoubtedly exploited the protégé system, likely fueled perceptions of an Armeno-Russian conspiracy. This perception increasingly portrayed Armenians as a fifth column within Ottoman society, a notion that became more

¹²⁸ Olga E. Petrunina, "Osobennosti rossiiskoi konsul'skoi sluzhby v Osmanskoi imperii v poslednei chetverti XVIII — nachale XX vv.," *Elektronnyi nauchno-obrazovatel'nyi zhurnal «Istoriia»* 14, no. 9 (2023): article 131, <https://doi.org/10.18254/S207987840028138-0>

¹²⁹ Cihan Artunç, "The Protégé System and Beratlı Merchants in the Ottoman Empire: The Price of Legal Institutions," paper presented at the conference *New Perspectives in Ottoman Economic History*, Yale University, November 2012, 1–23.

¹³⁰ Salahi R. Sonyel, "The Protégé System in the Ottoman Empire," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (1991): 56–66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26195448>.

prevalent later in the 19th century, particularly as Armenian revolutionary activity intensified in response to escalating violence against them.¹³¹

Interconnected conflicts

Beyond the perceived Russian threat, Obermiller reported that by February 1876 the decline in public order was further aggravated by the ripple effects of news of the Bosnian uprising, which had stirred resentment among Muslims and driven them to seek revenge against “*innocent Christians*” in response to the suffering of their co-religionists.¹³² While developments in the Balkans have been extensively studied, their effect on the Ottoman Empire’s eastern periphery remain understudied. This analysis of Russian consular reports on Christian–Muslim violence offers a new perspective on how local conflicts in Erzurum both shaped and reflected broader political dynamics and underscores the entangled relationship between imperial crises and provincial unrest.

The upheaval in the Balkans stemmed from resistance to the unpopular indirect taxation system, worsened by natural disasters and rising taxes amid the empire’s financial crisis. In June 1875, protests escalated into a widespread revolt brutally suppressed by Ottoman forces and local landowners.¹³³ News of the uprising provoked outrage among Erzurum’s Muslims, particularly over reports of Muslim landowners massacred by Catholic and Orthodox rebels. Aware of the danger, Ottoman authorities, including Erzurum’s vali Mehmed Rashid Paşa, sought to restore order. Despite his assurances of addressing “misunderstandings” between Muslims and Christians, Consul Obermiller doubted the government’s ability to follow through.¹³⁴ In December 1875, although Mehmed Rashid Paşa presented a list of suspects accused of plotting a massacre against local Christians, they were later released. Obermiller expressed particular concern about the approaching spring, fearing it might embolden, as he put it, “*Muslim fanatics*” to attack Christians. In response, the Ottoman authorities reinforced the garrison in Erzurum to prevent potential

¹³¹ Klein, *Margins of Empire*, 2–3.

¹³² AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1089, l. 5, February 24, 1876.

¹³³ Robert B. Kane, “Herzegovina Revolt, 1875,” in *War in the Balkans: An Encyclopedic History from the Fall of the Ottoman Empire to the Breakup of Yugoslavia*, ed. Richard C. Hall (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2014), 136–137.

¹³⁴ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1089, l. 28, May 14, 1876.

bloodshed.¹³⁵ A few months later, the Russian consul reported an improvement in public order, attributing it to the increased military presence in the city.¹³⁶

According to Obermiller's reports, some local Muslim groups harbored resentment toward their own government for failing to protect its subjects in Herzegovina. They were reportedly discontent with the inadequate supplies provided to local conscripted soldiers in Erzurum and expressed their frustration to the conscript commanders, lamenting, "*Our soldiers are fighting the enemy, are they beggars to be sent to war in rags? This is a shame!*"¹³⁷. Indeed, despite the Ottoman army's impressive appearance following reforms in 1876, it continued to suffer from significant logistical and supply challenges, likely contributing to the soldiers' inadequate equipment for warfare.¹³⁸ The observations suggest that dissatisfaction in Erzurum was not limited to intercommunal tension but they were also compounded by the imperial center's military and financial problems.

Shortly after the Bosnian uprising, which horrified European public opinion due to Ottoman "*barbarism*", another event worsened Eastern Europe's diplomatic crisis. A Christian woman of Bulgarian-Greek origin, Stephana, became close to a local Muslim community after her father's death and was reportedly kidnapped for conversion to Islam. She was taken to Thessaloniki, where her mother, with local Christians and German Consul George Abbott, rescued her. They took her to the American consulate, allegedly stripping her of Muslim dress. On 6 May, the French and German consuls attempted to negotiate her conversion with Mehmed Refet Paşa. After their meeting, a Muslim mob killed the consuls, angered by their interference. The violent act spread internationally, once again unsettling Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire, who began questioning their safety.¹³⁹ These developments prompted major European powers, such as Germany, France, Russia and Italy, to intervene on behalf of their co-religionists by sending warships to the Salonika port as a tool to force the Ottoman Empire to handle the situation and threaten to suspend relations with the Sublime Porte. The Ottoman government's awareness of the

¹³⁵ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1089, II. 56–57, December 31, 1876 / January 5, 1876.

¹³⁶ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1089, I. 62, May 18, 1876.

¹³⁷ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1089, I. 5, February 24, 1876.

¹³⁸ Hartmann, *Örmény élet az Oszmán Birodalomban*, 52.

¹³⁹ Berke Torunoğlu, *Murder in Salonika, 1876: A Tale of Apostasy Turned into an International Crisis* (master's thesis, Bilkent University, 2009), 29–47.

urgency in addressing the situation following the Bosnian events is evident, particularly in their fear of potential European intervention.¹⁴⁰

This fear drove the authorities in Erzurum to try and assert control over the situation in an effort to prevent giving a reason for foreign interference. Despite all the efforts of the local governance in Erzurum, it was impossible to avoid the politicization of interreligious conflicts, which made the coexistence of religious groups difficult. After all, the suppression of the Slavic uprisings in Bosnia, Bulgaria, and Serbia/Montenegro served as the catalyst for the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878.¹⁴¹ This heightened awareness is reflected in the measures taken such as the reinforcement of the consular garrison in Erzurum. The local pasha in Erzurum expressed concern over the events in Thessaloniki, which had reportedly unsettled the local Muslim population. Obermiller's report describes a rumor that the vali, Samih Paşa, had assured local "fanatics" that he would block roads and use artillery should they attempt to harm Christians.¹⁴²

The authorities' response reveals that the Ottoman state's fear of external intervention by the great powers played a pivotal role in shaping its response to the atrocities. It is important to note that by the late nineteenth century, interventionism culminated in the Treaty of Berlin (1878) and signaled a break from the Vienna system of dynastic sovereignty toward the Paris system, grounded in national identity and the principle of protecting populations. The Russo-Turkish War accelerated this transformation in warfare, as demographic engineering, through the expulsion and destruction of Ottoman Muslim populations, with the aim of ethnic-homogenization, became an implicit objective alongside military victory.¹⁴³ This shift toward population politics laid important foundations for the later emergence of ethnic cleansing and genocide, dynamics that would profoundly shape the Erzurum borderland and culminate in the violence of 1915.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Fatma Yavuz, "Gunboat Diplomacy of the Great Powers on the Ottoman Empire: With Particular Reference to the Salonika Incident (1876) and Armenian Reform Demands (1879–80)," *Journal of International Eastern European Studies* 2, no. 2 (2020): 580–583.

¹⁴¹ Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878–1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3–4.

¹⁴² AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1089, l. 28, May 14, 1876.

¹⁴³ Eric D. Weitz, "From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions," *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1313–1319.

¹⁴⁴ Mujeeb R. Khan, "The Ottoman Eastern Question and the Problematic Origins of Modern Ethnic Cleansing, Genocide, and Humanitarian Interventionism in Europe and the Middle East," in *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, ed. Peter Sluglett and M. Hakan Yavuz (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011), 108.

The interconnectedness of developments in the Balkans and Western Armenia remained evident even after 1878. In 1885, for instance, Russian consular reports were concerned with the unification of the Principality of Bulgaria with Eastern Rumelia, carried out through a sudden and largely bloodless coup that delivered a symbolic blow to Ottoman authority in the Balkans. In the local discourse in the city of Erzurum, this episode was interpreted by the local Muslims as the product of Great Power intrigue. Under the initial shock, Consul Dennet reported that “*accusations against Russia resounded from all sides, charging it with this new treacherous plot against Turkish rule in the Balkan Peninsula,*” although these suspicions soon shifted toward Britain, as “*no one believed that the coup could have occurred without external instigation.*” More broadly, the crisis intensified Muslim resentment toward Christians, who were denounced as “*giaours,*” while dissatisfaction with the Ottoman state also deepened.¹⁴⁵

These cases indicate that Russia was widely perceived by segments of the Muslim population in Erzurum as a decisive external actor and a principal enemy, alongside Britain, both powers being viewed as self-proclaimed protectors of Christians within the sultan’s domains and therefore as agents of imperial dismemberment. At the same time, as the Russian reports make clear, local dissatisfaction did not focus only on foreign interference but increasingly targeted the perceived weakness and incompetence of the Ottoman government and even the sultan himself.

Rivalry, Cooperation, and the Politics of Protection in Erzurum

As the Russian reports demonstrate, alongside Russia’s growing presence, British influence and perceived interference in Ottoman internal affairs were likewise deeply ingrained in Erzurum’s local population. The British consulate therefore emerged as another significant actor in the region, shaping local perceptions and contributing to the broader framework of great-power competition in the eastern provinces.

Although Britain, committed themselves in the 1856 Treaty of Paris, which concluded the Crimean War (1853–1856), to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, they failed to prevent the Great Powers from recognizing most of the Ottoman Balkan territories as independent after the

¹⁴⁵ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1626, l. 35, November 10, 1885.

1877–1878 Russo-Turkish War.¹⁴⁶ This allowed Russia to annex significant territories in Eastern Anatolia and establish Great Bulgaria. However, fearing an overpowered Russia, Britain intervened at the Congress of Berlin, supporting the Ottoman Empire only in exchange for control of Cyprus, which signaled the end of cooperation between the two countries and the shift in British foreign policy.¹⁴⁷ This move not only strengthened Britain’s presence in the Mediterranean and its influence in the Middle East but also deepened Ottoman dependence on British support. Furthermore, Britain became increasingly vocal about the protection of Christians in the Ottoman Empire, including the Armenians, which was part of the Russian foreign policy agenda as well.¹⁴⁸ Britain and Russia started to view each other as competitors in their efforts to exert influence over Christian communities in Western Armenia. Britain's concerns about Russian expansion had already become evident during the 1831 Egyptian revolt, which was suppressed with Russian assistance but later British and French intervened too fearing the growing Russian influence in Eastern Anatolia. Maintaining the balance of power was therefore key to Britain's strategy which led to the establishment of a consulate in Erzurum in 1836 to monitor Russian activities in the region.¹⁴⁹

Ottoman subjects, seeking to resolve disputes, often turned not only to the Russian consulate but also to the British consulate for assistance. This led Russian consuls to frequently consult with their British counterparts and closely monitor their activities regarding the Armenians. Judging by the Russian reports of the years 1875-1876, British diplomats were generally better informed than their Russian counterparts as they benefited from a more extensive information network in the periphery. As a result, the Russian consulate frequently relied on second-hand information when assessing regional developments, a circumstance that raises questions about the extent of Russia’s actual influence on the ground.¹⁵⁰

These limitations were acknowledged by the Erzurum consulate itself. State Councilor Przhevalskii reported to the ambassador that “*I should also add that the English consul in Erzurum*

¹⁴⁶ Timothy H. Parsons, *The British Imperial Century, 1815–1914: A World History Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 98.

¹⁴⁷ Nazım C. Çiçektakan, *Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire: British Discourses on the “Ottomans,” 1860–1878* (PhD diss., University of Essex, 2014), 14–16.

¹⁴⁸ John McCarthy, *The British and the Turks: A History of Animosity, 1893–1923* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 1–4.

¹⁴⁹ Fatma Gencer, “British Consul James Brant and His Reports on the Problems in Erzurum and Muş,” *İçtimaiyat* 8, no. 1 (2024): 281–282.

¹⁵⁰ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1089, l. 25, April 1876.

is able to transmit to his embassy information far more complete than my own.” He claimed that this disparity was not only to superior British intelligence networks but also to material advantages. He noted that the English consul possessed funds for extensive travel throughout the district, as well as other logistical conveniences. In light of this “*odd situation*”, Przhevalskii concluded that, for the more effective fulfillment of Russian consular duties, it might be advisable to adopt certain elements of the English consular organization.¹⁵¹ How far this message circulated within the framework of Russian diplomacy remains unclear; however, it appears to be the only communication of its kind identified in this study in the consular correspondence between 1878 and 1914.

Although the Eastern Question, and the Russian-British competition within, has been thoroughly examined in existing scholarship, the following analysis of previously underexplored archival sources provide concrete cases that shed new light on how local issues were instrumentalized by the great powers in their struggle for influence in Erzurum.¹⁵² Beyond illustrating the rivalry between Britain and Russia in Erzurum, these examples reveal how geopolitical competition shaped the daily realities of local communities and situate these experiences within a broader regional and international framework.

In a correspondence dated November 1875, Obermiller reported to the Constantinople embassy that the Armenians of Muş had petitioned the Porte for permission to convert to Islam, which was largely a consequence of their inability to meet tax obligations. In addition, these communities suffered continuous raids carried out by local Kurdish tribes. The consul expressed his dissatisfaction to the embassy and stated that the Armenian population felt the need to renounce their faith because the Ottoman administration had failed to maintain law and order in the region.¹⁵³

*"If the European powers do not find it important to address this issue, this type of incident could happen again. After all, let us not forget that similar incidents have already occurred in the settlements of Geçkin, Tortum and Ispir. And these events simply attract the attention of the great powers, including Britain."*¹⁵⁴

The consul was not only concerned about the injustices experienced by the Armenians of Muş but also about the possibility of Britain gaining a foothold in influencing local Christians. Obermiller admitted that he had learned about these concrete cases of attack on Armenians only

¹⁵¹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 90–91, July 1, 1895.

¹⁵² AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1088, l. 3, June 17, 1875. / AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1088, l. 3, June 17, 1876.

¹⁵³ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1088, ll. 32–34, November 1875.

¹⁵⁴ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1088, ll. 32–34, November 1875.

from his British counterpart, which signals the British consul was one step ahead.¹⁵⁵ In the Russian consul's opinion, Britain sought to establish itself as a reliable force throughout Asia Minor to gain the support of the local population. Although Obermiller was apprehensive about British influence among the Armenians, he was also somewhat critical of Russian diplomacy, describing its relations with the Armenians as follows:

*"As for our relations with the Armenian communities, it can be said that nowadays I hear from Armenians: 'We have always turned to you, but despite the prayers of the Catholicos'¹⁵⁶, our requests to you have not brought any results. Now we turn to the English, who are waiting for nothing else."*¹⁵⁷

The consul did not specify who had made this statement, referring only to a generalized group as *"the Armenians"*. It thus remains unclear whether these words genuinely reflected Armenian voices or merely echoed perceptions circulating within the walls of the Russian consulate in Erzurum. The remark may have served to draw attention to a potential shift in Armenian sympathies toward Britain, an outcome disadvantageous to Russia. This concern was especially worrying considering that British Consul General J. C. Taylor's report from Erzurum on March 19, 1869, in which he observed that the local Armenians still regarded Russia as their only possible liberator from Ottoman rule and that British and French efforts to influence them had failed.¹⁵⁸ While Russian sympathy among Armenians was strong, another crucial message that was conveyed in this same correspondence is related to the bishop of Erzurum, Harutyun Vehabedian¹⁵⁹, who had reportedly showed a greater preference over the British by paying visits more often to their consulate that year, which was in stark contrast to the past when he had maintained stronger ties with Russian diplomats.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ The Catholicos of All Armenians is the supreme bishop and spiritual head of the Armenian Apostolic Church. From the early nineteenth century, following Russia's annexation of Eastern Armenia (1828), the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin came under Russian imperial jurisdiction, with the tsarist state exercising supervisory authority over ecclesiastical administration.

¹⁵⁷ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1088, ll. 32–34, November 1875.

¹⁵⁸ Kirakosian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question*, 39.

¹⁵⁹ Harutyun Vehabedian (1819–1910) was bishop of Erzurum from 1859. Ordained at Etchmiadzin in 1860 by Catholicos Matteos I of Armenia, he promoted Armenian religious, educational, and charitable life in the province. He restored churches and schools damaged by earthquakes, rebuilt diocesan institutions, and in 1865 encouraged thousands of Armenian refugees in Russia to return and resettle in their native communities in Erzurum. See Stepan Garibdzhanyan, *Deiateli Armianskoi Tserkvi (XIX–XX vv.): Biograficheskie ocherki* (Yerevan, 2005).

¹⁶⁰ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1088, ll. 32–34, November 1875.

Although the British and Russian consulates had opposing interests in Erzurum, they managed to cooperate when it was necessary for them to further their interests. To illustrate the interplay of British and Russian influence in Erzurum considering the Ottoman incapacity to address local disputes, I introduce two examples which shed light on the phenomenon

In June 1875, Obermiller was approached by the British consul, J. W. Zohrab, who informed the Russian consul about an Armenian woman named Varvara. Twenty years old and from the town of Muş, Varvara had been sent to Erzurum by certain Muslim notables with the intention of converting her to Islam. Although she initially refused, an investigation by the *majlis*¹⁶¹ revealed that she had been successfully converted. However, in a subsequent meeting, it was reported that she maintained her Christian faith and was released as a Christian. Due to her refusal to convert to Islam, the Muslim magistrates forbade her from returning to her parents' home and ordered her to reside elsewhere until the situation was resolved. The British consul intervened, demanding immediate action from the authorities to facilitate Varvara's return home. However, he was warned that her safety could not be guaranteed, as there was a significant risk she would be beaten to death by local Muslims upon her return. Zohrab asserted that the Ottoman Empire was either failing to comply with an established agreement between the two countries or lacked the capacity to enforce it due to its weak influence in the region. He sought Obermiller's counsel on how to proceed in such cases.¹⁶²

The second case, as described by Zohrab, took place near the town of Hınıs, where an Armenian woman was forcibly abducted. In the presence of the *majlis* and her parents, the young woman declared her intention to convert to Islam. However, this declaration should have been considered invalid due to her status as a minor. Despite this, British officials were informed that an agreement regarding the conversion of minors existed only between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, thus rendering the girl's conversion legally valid under Ottoman law. Zohrab expressed deep concern over the legal and ethical ramifications of such conversions, as well as the broader impact these practices had on Armenian communities.¹⁶³ In fact, the British consul frequently reported that the abduction or rape of young women had virtually become a common practice among the crimes committed against Armenians.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ In Ottoman administrative usage, the term *meclis* (from Arabic *majlis*) referred to an "assembly" or "council".

¹⁶² AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1088, l. 3, July 5, 1875.

¹⁶³ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1088, l. 3, July 5, 1875.

¹⁶⁴ Kirakosian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question*, 39, 57.

So, it can be seen that there was an exchange of information between the consulates regarding the plight of the Armenians, and in some ways their interests intersected. Nevertheless, this did not mean they worked toward the same goals. Armenian preference for British support apprehended Russian diplomats and was interpreted as an incursion into the Ottoman borderlands detrimental to both Russian and – perceived – Armenian interests. This is reinforced by an 1881 report by Obermiller, which argued the following:

*„Almost from my first day in Erzurum, I could not fail to notice the alarming state prevailing among the local Armenian population. This is due in large measure to expectations of reforms, stirred up by the excessive hopes of dreamers of a **political revival of ancient Armenia**. The Armenians were not able to [restrain / allay] their distrust toward the Turkish authorities themselves nor to instill in the latter any sense of the necessity of reform measures. The state of mind is also significantly influenced by the activity of the English agents here. By irritating the Turks through their interference in the internal administration of the country, the English agents—with their cautious and often inconsistent protection—instill in the Armenians excessive hopes for the patronage of Great Britain and thereby increase the hostility of the Muslim population toward them.”¹⁶⁵*

Although Obermiller acknowledged the harmful link between foreign intervention and growing local resentment, he failed to recognize that Russia also participated in this rivalry, albeit with far fewer resources. The sources indicate that this imbalance troubled Russian consuls, even as Armenians sought to navigate great-power competition by appealing to both Russia and Britain in the hope of securing protection. The rivalry between the two states ultimately damaged perceptions of Christian communities, particularly through the abuse of the capitulations system, which European powers used to claim extraterritorial privileges and weaken Ottoman authority.¹⁶⁶ The visible presence of foreign consular protection further reinforced fears of external intervention among the Muslim population, a dynamic that contributed directly to the escalation of intercommunal tension and violence in the region.¹⁶⁷

Religion as a Political Tool

Russian influence over the Armenian Apostolic Church

¹⁶⁵ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, ll. 16–17, June 25, 1881. [See Appendix 3.](#)

¹⁶⁶ Feroz Ahmad, “Ottoman Perception of the Capitulations, 1800–1914,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2000): 6–7, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26198461>.

¹⁶⁷ Mi Hwa Hong and Nam Kyu Kim, “How Do External Territorial Threats Affect Mass Killing?,” *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 4 (2019): 532–533.

The Armenian Apostolic Church played a central role in governing Armenian communal life in the Ottoman Empire, which served as the main unifying institution in the absence of Armenian statehood. After Russia's annexation of Eastern Armenia and Etchmiadzin in 1828, the Tsarist administration attempted to extend its influence over Armenians in both empires by controlling Church politics rather than supporting revolutionary groups whose actions threatened Russian interests. By emphasizing the Catholicos's primacy as the spiritual leader of all Armenians, Russia aimed to forge a religious bond with Ottoman Armenians and thereby advance its political objectives while avoiding the risks of revolutionary unrest, which was boiling under the surface due to the lack of changes in the living circumstances of Armenians after the Treaty of Berlin.¹⁶⁸

These ideas also appear in Ambassador Nelidov's 1883 correspondence, in which he proposed three measures to the Foreign Ministry: persuading the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin to compile a concise history affirming the Church's central role in Armenian life; reinforcing Etchmiadzin's image as the spiritual center for future generations; and promoting Russian schools in Eastern Anatolia through brochures and improved access for Armenian students.¹⁶⁹ Of course, it is easier said than done. The Russian authorities' inconsistent approach to Armenian ecclesiastical affairs often undermined their own objectives and prevented the Tsar's empire from achieving the desired influence. The reports introduced here illuminate this inconsistency and the disconnection between central decision-making and the insights provided by the Russian consuls in the field. As a result, rather than consolidating Russian influence among Ottoman Armenians, the empire's ad-hoc ecclesiastical policy deepened mutual mistrust and exposed the limitations of religious diplomacy as a tool of imperial strategy.

Nevertheless, Russian consuls closely followed the activities of the Armenian Church within borders and also in Erzurum. They prepared detailed reports on individual clergy members and examined their connections with the Patriarchate in Constantinople to understand whether their actions supported or hindered Russian interests. By highlighting this aspect of consular reporting, the dissertation shows that Russian diplomacy functioned not only through major treaties and international congresses, but also through careful, everyday observation of local political, administrative, and religious networks in the Ottoman borderlands.

¹⁶⁸ Paul Werth, "Imperial Russia and the Armenian Catholicos at Home and Abroad," in *Empire, Power and Ethnic Politics in Pre-Revolutionary Russia*, ed. Osamu Ieda (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2006), 203–204.

¹⁶⁹ State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), f. 568, op. 1, d. 157, ll. 1–11, 1883.

For instance, Bishop Harutyun Vehabedian's conservative alignment with Russian interests made him a favorable figure to be the archbishop of Erzurum for the Russian consulate, despite his controversial reputation. In December 1875, the consul of Erzurum, Obermiller, submitted a report to Constantinople regarding a violent incident in which the Turkish garrison attacked Armenians. The report also referenced an issue within the Armenian community in the city, which implicated Harutyun. According to the consul, "*there had always been open hostility between the two parties, but in fact both were guilty of something*".¹⁷⁰ In this case as well, the consulate was approached by the conflicting parties to seek assistance in resolving the matter. Notably, Harutyun was criticized in the report, as Obermiller noted that local Armenians were dissatisfied with the archbishop due to his "*attitude towards little boys and his passion for money*".¹⁷¹ The latter is seemingly reinforced by some research suggesting his closer relations with local notables at the expense of unprivileged community members.¹⁷²

Although it is virtually impossible to verify the validity of these accusations, the fact that the consul deemed it significant to report on Harutyun's reputation among the Armenians reflects the Archbishop's importance in the eyes of the Russian consulate. This attention suggests that his role, despite the controversy surrounding him, was seen as crucial to Russian interests in Erzurum. This notion is underpinned by British consular reports as well. In his report to the British Embassy in Istanbul, the British Consulate's dragoman in Erzurum, Mr. Maghack, alleged that Bishop Harutyun had close ties with Russia and had participated in efforts to subordinate the Armenian Apostolic Church to the Russian Orthodox Church. He further accused the bishop of pro-Russian activity and corruption, noting that the upcoming 1868 Armenian Local Council elections might allow the Ottoman authorities to replace him and his Russian-aligned associates.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 517/2, d. 2667, II. 10–11, December 20, 1876. / Tensions between Hassunists and anti-Hassunists intensified during Patriarch Hassun's participation in the First Vatican Council (1869–70), where he supported papal infallibility. Ottoman authorities backed a rival Armenian Catholic hierarchy in 1870, leading to disputes over ecclesiastical authority and property. Pope Pius IX excommunicated the schismatics in 1872 and temporarily removed Hassun, who was reinstated in 1876 after European pressure on the Ottoman government. Reconciliation with Rome was completed in 1879. See Charles A. Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans: The Church and the Ottoman Empire 1453–1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 256–74.

¹⁷¹ AVPRI f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1088, II. 43–44. 30 December 1875

¹⁷² Cora, *Transforming Erzurum/Karin*, 354.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

The case of Partoga Sura, the newly appointed leader of the Armenian school in Erzurum, seems to further substantiate suspicions regarding Harutyun's close ties with the Russian consulate. In 1877, the Patriarch of Constantinople appointed Sura to lead the Armenian school in Erzurum, a decision that Harutyun viewed unfavorably, though the Russian consul praised Sura for his intelligence and abilities. Shortly after assuming his new role, Sura contacted Armenians in Muş, encouraging them to organize a rebellion against the Ottomans. The Russian consulate in Erzurum had already taken notice of the Armenians in Muş due to the repeated raids by Kurdish tribes that ravaged their villages. Aware of Sura's influence over certain Armenian communities, Harutyun intercepted his correspondence with the Armenians of Muş and personally handed the letters over to the Ottoman authorities. This led to a local Armenian assembly that voted to remove Sura from his position, a decision that enraged him so much that he insulted the attendees as "donkeys." Aware that he could face imprisonment for inciting rebellion, Sura sought protection from the Russian consulate.¹⁷⁴

In a report from February 1876, Obermiller, besides taking account of the massacres of Armenians at the hands of Kurdish tribes, he did not refrain from criticizing the Armenians for being embroiled in internal religious conflicts within their communities in Erzurum, Muş and Bitlis. Obermiller noted that it was nearly impossible for the Russian consulate to alleviate the plight of Armenians since they proceeded to wage their own internal wars. Moreover, he even stipulated that "*they (the Russian consulate) were not inclined to back any of the parties unlike the British*". Still, the latter may seem a controversial statement in light of his following sentences in which the consul expressed his hope that the Harutyun's removal from Erzurum would placate the believers' upheaval, which had been caused by their dissatisfaction with the archbishop.¹⁷⁵

Due to the growing dissent among the Armenians of Erzurum, Patriarch Nerses¹⁷⁶ requested Harutyun to relocate from Erzurum to Muş. The archbishop knew that his departure would mark the end of his tenure in Erzurum therefore he turned to the vali, Mehmed Reşid pasha, for protection to retain his position. Subsequently, a group of local Armenians became aware of Harutyun's intentions and sought the assistance of the Russian consulate to prevent the Sublime Port from

¹⁷⁴ AVPRI f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1088, ll. 43-44. 30 December 1875

¹⁷⁵ AVPRI f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1089, l. 5. 24 January 1876.

¹⁷⁶ Nerses II Varzhapetian (1837-1884) was Armenian patriarch of Constantinople (1874-1884). He led the patriarchate through the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878) and, in its aftermath, sought to reassure the Ottoman government of the loyalty of Ottoman Armenians while distancing the church from separatist aims. See Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 26.

maintaining Harutyun's position. After this interaction with the Russian consulate, Obermiller issued a letter to Alexander Ivanovich Nelidov¹⁷⁷, the Russian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, that he refrained from providing any support to the Armenians. With regards to resolving the misery around Harutyun, he merely stated:

*"If we assume the possibility that this time the patriarch did not pay proper attention to the unanimous demand of the Armenians, then it is not difficult to foresee the most unfavorable consequence."*¹⁷⁸

Although Harutyun was not an ideal candidate for the Russian consulate in all regards, there were other applicants for Harutyun's position in Erzurum who were even less favored. For instance, Obermiller explicitly claimed that Mgridich Khrimian's¹⁷⁹ candidacy would be disadvantageous for the Russian interests in the region. He described Khrimian's stance towards Russia as "hostile" and his appointment unfavorable, even though some Armenian groups awaited his arrival so he could make peace between the two fighting parties.¹⁸⁰ It came as no surprise that the Russian authorities did not support Khrimian's appointment due to his significant influence as an educational and political figure in the Van and Vaspurakan regions, as well as being one of the founders of the first Armenian political party named *Armenakan*.¹⁸¹ From Van, Vice Consul Clayton reported that Archbishop Khrimian urged patience and peace and discouraging appeals to foreign powers, though rural Armenians still awaited Russian aid. In a February 1880 report, Clayton noted rising pro-Russian sentiment, as many Armenians, despite preferring British support, saw Russia as the only power genuinely defending Ottoman Christians.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Alexander Ivanovich Nelidov (1835–1910) was a Russian diplomat who entered the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1855 and served in Greece, Bulgaria, and Austria before becoming counselor and later ambassador in Constantinople (1874–1897). He played a central role in negotiating the Treaty of San Stefano, which he signed on behalf of Russia alongside Nikolai Ignatiev. A staunch advocate of expanding Russian influence in the Balkans and securing control over the Straits, he later served as ambassador to Italy (1897–1903) and France (1903–1910), where he died in office. See V. Fedorchenko, *Imperatorskii dom: Vydaiushchiesia sanovniki. Entsiklopediia biografii*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 2000), 114.

¹⁷⁸ AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2667, ll. 12-13. 24 February 1876.

¹⁷⁹ Mgridich Khrimian (1820—1907): Armenian Apostolic Church leader, educator, publisher; Catholicos of All Armenians (1893–1907), known as Mkrtych I of Van. Head of the Armenian delegation to the Congress of Berlin (1878); Prelate of Van (1879–1885). As catholicos, opposed the 1903 Russian confiscation of Armenian Church properties and endorsed the Armenian national-liberation movement; widely revered as Khrimian Hayrik ("Father Khrimian"). See Hratch A. Tarbassian, *Erzurum (Garin): Its Armenian History and Traditions*, trans. Nigol Schahgaldian (n.p.: The Garin Compatriotic Union of the United States, 1975), 154.

¹⁸⁰ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1089, l. 5, January 24, 1876.

¹⁸¹ Suren Sargsyan, "Armianskoe natsional'no-osvoboditel'noe dvizhenie i partiia Armenakan," *Region i mir*, no. 2 (2010): 7.

¹⁸² Kirakosian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question*, 108–109.

The Armenian Apostolic Church irreversibly became a central field through which Russia tried to extend its influence in the Ottoman eastern provinces and for that the Tsarist government aimed to use the authority of Etchmiadzin and loyal clergy to create a religious bond with Ottoman Armenians. However, the consular reports reveal how fragile and limited this strategy was. Local conflicts, disputed appointments, and the ambiguous figures easily exposed the gap between Russia's plans and realities on the ground.

The Election of the Catholicos

A similar attitude emanates from the Russian reports when it comes to the election of the Catholicos, and the Erzurum consulate's reports were also a source of intelligence on who should be endorsed by the Russian authorities as Catholicos in Etchmiadzin. An example of such an endorsed person was Harutyun Vehabedian, who was described by the consul of Erzurum, Aleksey Romanovich Dennet, in 1883 as the following:

*"The former Archbishop of Erzurum Harutyun is distinguished by common sense and is alien to the hobbies of dreamers of the restoration of Armenian independence. He does not enjoy the favor of the Armenians of Constantinople and Patriarch Nerses. In his relations with us, he is always distinguished by the spirit of benevolence. (.....), Harutyun has always been a skillful figure in practical life, keeping to the real ground and **guided not by abstract theories, but by common sense**; of all the candidates, **he probably represents the highest guarantees for us in case of election as Catholicos.**"¹⁸³*

Although Harutyun was a candidate put forward by Dennett, the Russian consul in Erzurum expressed his concern over the political and ecclesiastical implications of electing a new Catholicos of Etchmiadzin following the death of Catholicos Kevork. Dennett argued that since Etchmiadzin had come under Russian control, the Catholicos should be bound by absolute loyalty to the Russian state. However, he complained that Kevork, once elected, tended to drift away from Russian interests and developed an *"oppositional spirit"*. He attributed this to the lack of a firm and consistent system of supervision over Etchmiadzin, which allowed the Catholicos to interpret his position too independently of imperial authority. Dennett argued that Russia's future influence among the Armenians of Ottoman Turkey depended on establishing a tractable relationship with Etchmiadzin.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ AVPRI, f. 124, d. 154, ll. 3–10, March 29, 1883. [See Appendix 4.](#)

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Regarding the 1883 election, Dennett believed that electing a Russian subject over an Ottoman Armenian candidate would strengthen the government's authority over Etchmiadzin, aligning it with the "*spirit of Russian church administration.*" However, he admitted that such a choice might weaken Etchmiadzin's influence over Ottoman Armenians. The consul was especially suspicious of the advice of the Constantinople Patriarch Nerses, whom he described as the mastermind of the "*Armenian Question*" and an intriguer seeking to advance nationalist ambitions contrary to Russia's political interests. The former Patriarch Mkrtych Khrimian of Van also belonged to this category: though acknowledged for his moral integrity and eloquence, Dennett dismissed him as an impractical dreamer prone to emotional enthusiasm, yet argued he could be a useful instrument in the hands of those who could influence him. For Dennett, Khrimian's idealism made him a dangerous choice, one who might embrace opposition and even martyrdom for his principles.¹⁸⁵

Dennett could not have been more right about Khrimian. Twenty years later, when Khrimian had already been elected Catholicos for 11 years, in 1903 Russian officials led by High Commissioner Grigory Sergeevich Golitsyn¹⁸⁶ and Interior Minister Viacheslav von Plehve implemented the confiscation of the Armenian Church's properties and schools to weaken what they regarded as a center of Armenian nationalism and revolutionary agitation. They accused the Church, especially Catholicos Mkrtych Khrimian, of supporting Armenian revolutionary movements and fostering nationalist sentiment through education. Khrimian refused to comply, while mass protests erupted across the Caucasus, leading to violent clashes and casualties. The decree backfired: it unified the Armenian population against the Russian Empire, deepened unrest in the Caucasus, and strengthened Armenian revolutionary movements such as the Dashnaktsutjun.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Prince Grigory Sergeevich Golitsyn (1838–1907) was a Russian general and statesman, a veteran of the Caucasian campaigns and former governor of the Ural region. He served as governor of the Caucasus and commander of the Caucasus Military District (1897–1904), pursuing a strongly centralizing and Russifying policy. He was a chief initiator of the 1903 law on the confiscation of the Armenian Church's properties, which provoked widespread protests and an assassination attempt against him near Tiflis in October 1903. See A. V. Amfiteatrov, *Armianskii vopros* (St. Petersburg, 1906), 52–53.

¹⁸⁷ Onur Önel, *The Tsar's Armenians: A Minority in Late Imperial Russia* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 17–24. / The Armenian Revolutionary Federation, commonly known as Dashnakts'utyun or simply Dashnak, was founded in 1890 in Tiflis (Tbilisi) by Christapor Mikaelian, Stepan Zorian, and Simon Zavarian. It emerged as a nationalist and socialist organization advocating the political and social emancipation of Armenians within the Ottoman and Russian Empires, combining revolutionary activism with the goal of achieving autonomy and national

Despite Dennet's concerns, instead of Khrimian, Archbishop Magar, a Russian subject, was elected as Catholicos of All Armenians in 1885. According to reports from the Russian consulate in Erzurum, the consulate directly sought to shape local perceptions of Magar's election as both legitimate and procedurally transparent, attempting to mitigate anti-Russian narratives of interference in Armenian spiritual autonomy:

*"(...)From the very beginning, as soon as the death of Gevorg gave rise to the question of filling the vacant seat of the Etchmiadzin Catholicos, **this consulate did not cease making every possible effort to acquaint the local Armenians both with the procedure which our government decided to follow during the election of the future spiritual head of the Armenian Church**, and later, with the confirmation of the second of the two elected candidates — the Russian subject, Archbishop Magar. The majority of the local population accepted Magar's elevation with complete calm; the attempts of our ill-wishers to stir up indignation among the local clergy and population over an alleged encroachment by the Russian government upon the spiritual independence of the Armenian Church met with total failure. (...)"¹⁸⁸*

It was seemingly crucial for Russia to preserve this positive attitude among Armenians, as Erzurum's position as a potential wartime frontier amplified the value of Armenian goodwill to Russian geopolitical aims:

*"(...)The foremost importance that will inevitably belong to the Erzurum region in the event of a war between ourselves and Turkey gives every reason to value the favorable disposition of its Christian population and to strengthen still further the moral authority of Erzurum as the principal center of the Armenian nation in Asia Minor. The fresh disturbances in the Balkan Peninsula have once again revived the previously subsided expectations, in the Armenian provinces, of the reforms discussed at the Berlin Congress. **Once again, within certain circles of the Armenian intelligentsia sympathetic to us, people have begun to speak of the anticipated influence of the British government upon Turkey with the aim of compelling it to fulfill the reforms promised in Armenia.** (...)"¹⁸⁹*

This was particularly significant at a moment when renewed unrest in the Balkans revived Armenian expectations, especially among intellectuals, that the Great Powers would finally enforce the reforms promised at Berlin. In this context, Britain's growing involvement was seen by many Armenians as a possible source of protection - something that Russia sought to prevent.¹⁹⁰

Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes

rights. See Louise Nalbandian, "Armenian Revolutionary Federation, 1890–1896," in *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 151–78.

¹⁸⁸ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1626, ll. 44–46, December 6, 1885. [See Appendix 5.](#)

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

The importance of keeping Ottoman Armenians close to Russia was also reiterated in a letter by Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Freze¹⁹¹, deputy to the commander of the Caucasus Military District, written to Ivan Alekseevich Zinovyev¹⁹², the Russian Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, as well:

“(…) Given the wars that periodically arose between Russia and Turkey, we recognized the necessity of having the Turkish Armenian population on our side, as they were invariably our allies and assisted our troops. (…)”¹⁹³

This concern became more pronounced as Protestantism in Western Armenia was gaining strength, a phenomenon frequently noted in Russian reports, and one that the Ottoman government likewise perceived as a threat to its social order and to the foundations of Ottomanism.¹⁹⁴ While the challenges posed by other Christian denominations to Russia’s Armenian policy are well known, a closer look at local cases reveals how the Erzurum consulate understood these dynamics. This perspective clarifies both the limits of Russian influence over Ottoman Armenians and the ways consuls interpreted shifts in Armenian religious life caused by missionary activity. I argue that Russian consuls attributed their inability to manage church relations, and thus Armenian affairs more effectively, primarily to the “*harmful*” influence of rival churches and to the limited efforts of the Russian government to support local Armenian schools or the Apostolic Church, while largely overlooking the deeper structural problems facing Armenian communities in the borderlands.

¹⁹¹ Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Freze (1840–1918) was a Russian general of infantry and veteran of the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878). He served as assistant to the Caucasus viceroy’s chief in charge of civil administration and as deputy commander of the Caucasus Military District. Owing to the frequent absences of Viceroy Prince Grigory Golitsyn, he repeatedly acted as chief administrator and district commander. See F. A. Gushchin and S. S. Zhebrovskii, *Plennye generaly Rossiiskoi imperatorskoi armii 1914–1917* (Moscow, 2010), 339–42; and D. N. Shilov and Iu. A. Kuzmin, *Chleny Gosudarstvennogo soveta Rossiiskoi imperii, 1801–1906: Biobibliograficheskii spravochnik* (St. Petersburg, 2006), 827–29.

¹⁹² Ivan Alekseevich Zinoviev (1835–1917) was a Russian diplomat and orientalist, a graduate of the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages. He served as director of the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1883 and as ambassador to the Ottoman Empire (July 1, 1897–May 25, 1909), pursuing a cautious policy in the context of German–Ottoman rapprochement and the Baghdad Railway question. See I. V. Grigorash, “Zinoviev, Ivan Alekseevich,” in *Bol’shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia*, 35 vols., ed. Iu. S. Osipov (Moscow: Bol’shaia rossiiskaia entsiklopediia, 2004–2017), https://web.archive.org/web/20250718134219/https://old.bigenc.ru/domestic_history/text/2879293.

¹⁹³ GARF, f. 102, op. 308, d. 201, ll. 4–13, November 1903.

¹⁹⁴ Nazan Maksudyan, “Physical Expressions of Winning Hearts and Minds: Body Politics of the American Missionaries in ‘Asiatic Turkey,’” in *Christian Missions and Humanitarianism in the Middle East, 1850–1950: Ideologies, Rhetoric, and Practices*, ed. Marie I. Okkenhaug and Kirsten Sanchez Summerer (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 63.

Protestantism in Armenia emerged through missionary activity since 1820, particularly in the 19th century, spreading most successfully among Armenians facing legal, political, and socioeconomic challenges. Anglo-American missionaries played a key role, promoting Protestant teachings and Western values. Armenians called Protestants "ingliz," reflecting the English-speaking influence.¹⁹⁵ The Protestant millet¹⁹⁶ was established in 1847 and gained recognition through an imperial edict in 1850.¹⁹⁷ Mission schools spread Protestant teachings and Western values, which led to conversions despite resistance from the Armenian Apostolic Church. These schools also enabled social mobility through education but also contributed to emigration.¹⁹⁸ It can be argued that the vernacular Protestant education they spread contributed to the cultural survival of Armenian communities in the Ottoman Empire and strengthened a sense of common national belonging. In fact, the first modern literary Armenian Bible translation would not have been possible without the assistance of American educational figures in 1853. Moreover, activities of the United States were not limited to Erzurum, but was also evident in Constantinople, Marsovan, Aintab, Harput, Marash and Tarsus, all-encompassing Anatolia.¹⁹⁹

Consul Dennett Romanovich was certainly concerned about the success of English-supported Protestant propaganda among Ottoman Armenians in Erzurum. In his reports, he criticized the British for not limiting themselves to the role of observers in the region but instead acting as intermediaries between the peasant population and the Ottoman administration, especially by keeping the Armenian reforms on agenda which allow them to keep a closer relation with the Armenian populace.²⁰⁰ Dennett also reported that Lord Evert, the British consul, traveled throughout the Turkish-Armenian region, where he studied the local population and “*spread British influence*” by engaging in charitable activities, distributing financial assistance to those in

¹⁹⁵ Tigran Ghanalanyan, “Armenian Protestants,” *21st Century*, no. 2 (8) (2010): 72–73, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/armenian-protestants> (accessed January 11, 2025).

¹⁹⁶ The millet was a confessional community in the Ottoman Empire enjoying a degree of internal autonomy under its own religious and legal authorities. Before the nineteenth century, the “millet system” was not a formalized structure but rather a pragmatic framework allowing non-Muslims, primarily Orthodox Christians, Armenians, and Jews, to regulate their own affairs in matters of personal status, education, and religion.

¹⁹⁷ Hans-Lukas Kieser, “Mission as Factor of Change in Turkey (Nineteenth to First Half of Twentieth Century),” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 13, no. 4 (2002): 394.

¹⁹⁸ Federico Alpi, “Early Protestant Missionary Activity, Heresy and Church in Ottoman Armenia (1782–1909),” in *Missions and Preaching*, ed. [Editor Name(s)] (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 299–302.

¹⁹⁹ Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), 48–49.

²⁰⁰ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, ll. 39–40, June 5, 1882. [See Appendix 6.](#)

need, including large sums to those suffering from hunger.²⁰¹ We know from Przhevalskii's reports that Russian consuls did not have such means.²⁰²

Dennet regarded the spread of Catholicism and Protestantism as a direct challenge to what they believed were traditional Armenian values. He warned against the growing influence of atheism and secularization, which he saw as a grave threat to the moral and intellectual formation of the younger generation. In his view, American missionaries played a central role in this propagandistic effort; however, for the local Christian population, the official patronage extended by English consuls to all Protestants was even more consequential, as Protestant Armenians consistently received support and material benefits from them. For example, Dennet claimed that in some Protestant communities, the taxes imposed on Christians in lieu of military service were often paid by the missionaries themselves.²⁰³

Despite these apprehensions, conversion to Protestantism did not occur on a mass scale, a fact the reports themselves acknowledge. Nevertheless, the consul remained deeply concerned about the potential implications of the Western-oriented churches, fearing that they were introducing ideas that could negatively influence Armenians and detach them from their traditional religious and national foundations:

“(….)Although this effort has not yet led to results significant enough to cause a large-scale defection from the Armenian Apostolic Church, given the current political conditions, such developments deserve attention. It would be premature to dismiss their importance for our future interests in the region. The strong attachment to the faith of their forefathers, which has long served as a barrier to the success of Catholic and Protestant propaganda among Armenians, appears to be weakening under the persistent efforts of foreign missionaries. Religious indifference, if not outright atheism, spreading among the younger generation of Armenian society educated in Western Europe, threatens to make it significantly easier in the future for propaganda aimed against the Armenian Apostolic Church to take root and open a broader path to influencing the Armenian people. (...)”²⁰⁴

That same year, something even more alarming drew the attention of Russian diplomats. Alexander Ivanovich Nelidov, Russian ambassador, reported to the Foreign Ministry in 1882, forwarding a letter from the Russian consul in Trabzon. In this letter, the consul highlighted the following concerns:

²⁰¹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, ll. 41–45, (without date), 1882. [See Appendix 7.](#)

²⁰² AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 90–91, July 1, 1895. [See Appendix 8.](#)

²⁰³ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, ll. 39–40, June 5, 1882.

²⁰⁴ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, ll. 41–45, (without date), 1882.

*"In contrast to the ambitious reformist aspirations of the Treaty of Berlin, the **Western powers**, instead of improving the living conditions of the Armenians, **are in fact seeking only to instill the idea of Armenian identity**, which is necessary for the unity of the Armenian territories now scattered in different countries."*²⁰⁵

By "*Armenian identity*," the ambassador referred to the rise of national sentiment, something Russia sought to suppress to prevent secessionist movements within its borders or neighboring regions. Fearing that nationalist fervor could destabilize its control over Armenian communities or inspire other minorities within its borders, Russia viewed such developments with suspicion. But it is worth noting that the report identifies the problem in national self-determination instilled by foreign powers, instead of finding the root-cause, which was in fact the unresolved Armenian Question. True, Protestant colleges in the Ottoman Empire fostered national consciousness among Armenians by introducing Western ideas through education and the press, teaching French revolutionary principles, Armenian history and literature.²⁰⁶ However, it is important to note that the missionaries' primary objective was not the reconstruction of Armenian national identity but the spread of Christianity.²⁰⁷

Nevertheless, within Russian diplomatic circles, Protestantism and the growing presence of Western powers, especially Britain's, were increasingly associated with the radicalization of national movements. To counter such influence in Western Armenia, Nelidov emphasized in his report the need for Russian consuls from the six vilayets to visit the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin at least twice a year to help them better understand the needs of the Armenian Apostolic Church, especially concerning Ottoman Armenians, and to adapt Russian policy accordingly. Nelidov believed that regular communication with Etchmiadzin would strengthen coordination between the Church and the Russian Foreign Ministry and ensure more effective protection of Russian interests in the region. His correspondence reveals deep Russian suspicion that Western consular/missionary activities in eastern Anatolia sought to "*disrupt the innate sympathy of the Ottoman Armenians towards Russia.*"²⁰⁸

Interestingly, by the end of the 19th century, reports from Erzurum offer a more nuanced view of the relationship between Protestantism and its perceived role in fostering the Armenian

²⁰⁵ GARF, f. 568, op. 1, d. 157, ll. 1–11, September 1882.

²⁰⁶ Ayse. T. Fildis, "The American Board's Vision of Protestant Anatolia and Fostering Armenian Nationalism, 1810–90," *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 5, 735–747. (2012): 740–741.

²⁰⁷ Hans-Lukas Kieser, "Mission as Factor of Change in Turkey (Nineteenth to First Half of Twentieth Century)," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 13, no. 4 (2002): 394.

²⁰⁸ GARF, f. 568, op. 1, d. 157, ll. 1–11, September 1882.

liberation movement, referred to in the reports as “*Young Armenia*.” Dennet argues that, rather than strengthening national consciousness, conversion to Protestantism severs an Armenian’s connection to the Armenian nation and therefore cannot serve the Armenian revolutionary movement, which relies primarily on Armenian Apostolics. Drawing on Virgil’s *Aeneid*, he even invoked the warning *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes* (*I fear the Greeks, even when they bring gifts*), cautioning Armenians not to stray from the religious heritage of their forefathers as it endangers their national integrity, which was crucial for Russia:

“Even if, in the question of autonomy, they should find friends among the English, let them not forget the wise counsel: Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes. “Young Armenia” consists for the most part of Armenian Gregorians and very likely has not a single adherent among their brethren who have converted to Protestantism. Fears that Protestant propaganda plays into the hands of “Young Armenia,” alienating the Armenians from the natural sympathy toward us inherent in the Armenian-Gregorian Church, are greatly exaggerated and scarcely probable; for Protestant propaganda, while instilling sympathy for Western ideas on the one hand, on the other decisively and finally breaks their national bond, creating an unbridgeable gulf among co-religionists. In the eyes of an Armenian patriot, an Armenian Protestant has forfeited the one sacred possession preserved by the people in purity through many centuries of foreign yoke—his bond with the native Church, the Mother Church.”²⁰⁹

According to the consul, Protestant influence did not directly encourage Armenian revolutionary activity; rather, it indirectly weakened Russia’s hold over Armenian communities by shifting their loyalties towards values incompatible with Russia. The tone of the report is also telling: it reads less like a neutral diplomatic assessment and more like the advice of a concerned guardian or paternal figure, which reflects an imperial mindset in which Russia, or the author of the report, saw itself as a protector and supervisor of Armenians and saw the entanglement of Russia and the Armenian Apostolic Church as indivisible and inseparable by nature. It also addresses Armenians who steered away from this path and excludes them from the nation.

Missionary activity in the borderland

In correspondence with the embassy in Constantinople, Alexander A. Freze reported that American missionaries had been highly active in Erzurum over the previous two to three years, operating under the protection of British consuls in areas without a U.S. presence. For instance, After the U.S. consulate’s relocation from Erzurum to Trabzon in 1901, its institutions came under British protection. Freze sharply criticized American activity, claiming that missionary schools for orphans produced children who joined “*some strange fanatical sect*” rather than the main

²⁰⁹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1629, ll. 19-24, January 28, 1888. [See Appendix 9.](#)

Protestant denominations, and who were taught to despise Russia. He described the teachers, Mr. and Mrs. Stapleton²¹⁰, as “*mad fanatics*”, and the British consul as “*anti-Russian*”.²¹¹ Echoing this view, Russian Consul Aleksandr Mikhailovich Demerik²¹² remarked that the pupils of these schools simply became “*renegades*”.²¹³

In addition to Protestantism, Russia perceived Catholicism as a potential source of disruption, as a Jesuit mission was established in Istanbul in 1881. It can be argued that it was more than a religious endeavor, just like the British or American missions. The Jesuit mission also became a key player in the geopolitical and cultural dynamics of the Eastern Question. First, it aimed at connecting Armenians with the Holy See, but it quickly became a tool for promoting Catholicism, French culture, and language. This mission was an example of the strategic use of religion as soft power to advance French religious and cultural imperialism while competing with Protestant missions.²¹⁴ Alexander I. Nelidov reported in 1882 on the “*growing Catholic propaganda*” in the city of Trabzon, where Jesuit and Dominican schools for both boys and girls were opening. The same year, teachers of the Venetian monastery of St. Lazarus arrived with the aim of opening another school.²¹⁵

These developments reflected the Russian administration’s growing concern over Catholic activity in the region. However, two decades later, Consul Demerik reported that foreign influence on Apostolic Armenians had declined in Erzurum, as many “*seduced*” Catholic families had fled the Ottoman Empire during the Hamidian massacres of the 1890s. Despite this, Demerik noted three key Catholic institutions active in Erzurum in 1902: the *Order of Friars Minor Capuchin* (referred to in Russian sources as *latinskaya tserkov*, meaning “Latin church”), the *Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes* (Christian Brothers), and the *Armenian Sisters* (a local Catholic female

²¹⁰ On the lives of Dr. Ida Stapleton and Rev. Robert Stapleton, see Gretchen Rasch, *The Storm of Life: A Missionary Marriage from Armenia to Appalachia* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2016).

²¹¹ GARF, f. 102, op. 308, d. 201, ll. 27–28, July 1904.

²¹² Aleksandr Mikhailovich Demerik (1850–1914) was a Russian diplomat who served in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1879 and held numerous consular posts across the Ottoman Empire, including Beirut (1883–1887), Salonika (1887–1889), Bitola (1889–1893), Niš (1893–1896), Chania (Crete, 1896–1899), Iași (1899–1900), and Erzurum (1900–1902). In 1905, he was appointed civil agent to the Ottoman general inspector under the Mürzsteg reforms in European Turkey while simultaneously serving as consul general in Salonika. After 1910, he served as envoy to the Hanseatic cities and Oldenburg until the outbreak of the First World War. See Vladislav Kislov, “Demerik Nikolai,” <https://kraeved-gatchina.de/ocherki/vydayushchiesya-zhiteli/demerik-nikolay/>.

²¹³ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2670, l. 11, January 11, 1902.

²¹⁴ Ediz Hazır, “Religious Alliances and Imperial Ambitions: The Jesuit Mission to Little Armenia (1881),” *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 42, no. 3 (2025): 208–211, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02653788241305991>.

²¹⁵ GARF, f. 568, op. 1, d. 157, ll. 1–11, 1904.

congregation). He added that the French consul regarded the Capuchin school as unworthy of major funding, as its religious influence in the region was minimal. The *Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes* and the girls' school of *de l'Immaculée Conception* (School of the Immaculate Conception) also received modest French subsidies but functioned under difficult financial conditions. In contrast, British missionary schools across the Ottoman Empire were generally far better funded.²¹⁶ Demerik concluded that, due to their limited resources, these French-backed schools lacked the capacity to conduct significant propaganda or convert large numbers of Armenians to Catholicism.²¹⁷

Despite the limited impact of Catholic schools, Ambassador Nelidov regarded the weakness of Armenian Apostolic education as a greater obstacle to pro-Russian influence than foreign missionary activity itself. His main concern was the financial burden of tuition fees, which many local families could not afford, leaving Apostolic schools underfunded and less attractive than their Catholic counterparts. Catholic institutions, though not wealthy, often operated in better facilities and offered more favorable learning conditions. Their public religious celebrations and elaborate festivals further enhanced their appeal, as reported by Nelidov. To counter this, Nelidov urged the Russian government to subsidize Armenian Apostolic schools to make them more competitive and to promote the use of Armenian-language textbooks printed in Russian. This, he argued, would encourage Armenian children to learn Russian from an early age and pursue further education in the Caucasus rather than in Europe.²¹⁸

To demonstrate that this had long been a persistent issue, Dennet also noted it in his major 1886 report after returning from an extended visit to Harput, undertaken to investigate the epicenter of Protestant activity in Western Armenia. He emphasized the chronic underfunding of Armenian Apostolic education and the shortage of qualified personnel, which he believed contributed significantly to the deterioration of relations between Russia and the Ottoman Armenians:

“For the American missionaries, the chief instrument for spreading their teaching among the Armenian population is the school. In Harput they possess what is perhaps the largest and best-organized educational establishment in the entire region. The state of education within the Armenian Gregorian community, by contrast, is in a most pitiable condition. It had been intended to open a school that could at least to some degree compete with the educational institutions of the American missionaries, but owing to a lack of financial means, the indifference of wealthy persons toward the matter, and the absence of energetic leadership, this useful plan has so far remained unfulfilled.

For us, the question of the successes of Protestantism and Catholicism among the Armenian Gregorians cannot be a matter of indifference. The Armenian Church — its relationship to ours and to Etchmiadzin — forms the

²¹⁶ Hazir, “Religious Alliances and Imperial Ambitions,” 217.

²¹⁷ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2670, ll. 11–12, January 11, 1902.

²¹⁸ GARF, f. 568, op. 1, d. 157, ll. 1–11, 1904.

foundation of the Armenian people's sympathy toward us and their attachment to Russia. There can be no doubt that the activity of the Protestant missionaries is inevitably undermining this bond."²¹⁹

In his correspondence, the ambassador emphasized the sharp disparity between the limited means of Armenian Apostolic schools and the abundant resources of Western missionary institutions, which, he observed, "*had a great impact on both the Turkish and Armenian populations in terms of medical care because of their inexhaustible financial resources.*" Many foreign missionaries provided medical aid, filling the void left by the Ottoman government's inability to meet public health needs. Yet, these activities aroused official suspicion, as missionaries were often perceived as subversive agents seeking to convert the population and undermine state authority. Nelidov also singled out the American school in Harput ²²⁰ as particularly influential, noting its central role in missionary education and its reach across surrounding villages. He further remarked that the Ottoman Porte had initially supported such schools as a means of countering Russian influence in the region.²²¹

In response, the Ottoman Porte sought to block Russia's attempts to establish an educational foothold in eastern Anatolia, fearing that such institutions would promote a "Russophile education" and expand Russian influence. According to the ambassador's 1902 report, the Porte tried to relocate the Armenian Apostolic school from Erzurum to Harput—a move that would have crippled its operations by cutting off funding and forcing staff to leave. This plan, however, was thwarted through the intervention of the Russian consul in Erzurum, who discovered that the local British and American consuls, Harry H. Lamb and Leo Allen Bergholz, had supported the relocation. By negotiating directly with Ottoman authorities, the Russian consul secured an agreement that allowed the school to remain in Erzurum.²²²

Russian consular correspondence reveals an anxiety that Protestant and Catholic institutions, often operating under British, American, or French protection, were weakening the traditional bond between the Armenian Apostolic Church and Russia. At the same time, the reports show that Russia's primary concern was the preservation of Armenian loyalties through schooling, language, and institutional affiliation, which often remained only a plan. The struggle over

²¹⁹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1626, ll. 79–98, December 26, 1886. [See Appendix 10.](#)

²²⁰ *Harput/Kharpert* was site of an ABCFM (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) Protestant theological seminary; later, a higher educational institute was opened there named Euphrates College. See Barbara J. Merguerian, "'Missions in Eden': Shaping an Educational and Social Program for the Armenians in Eastern Turkey (1855–1895)," *Studies in Christian Mission* 32 (2006): 241.

²²¹ GARF, f. 568, op. 1, d. 157, ll. 1–11, 1904.

²²² GARF, f. 102, op. 308, d. 201, ll. 27–28, July 23, 1904.

Armenian schools and churches became a proxy for broader geopolitical rivalry. The Ottoman state also intervened selectively, sometimes encouraging Western missions to counterbalance Russia. In this sense, Erzurum was a contested imperial contact zone where religion, education, and diplomacy intersected, while also exposing the fragility of Russia's claim to be the natural protector of Armenians, which was further shaped by the domestic Armenian policy of Tsarist Russia.

Russian Diplomacy Towards the Armenians: From Protective Bastion to Subversive Element

Initially, Russian authorities portrayed the Armenians as oppressed Christians living under Muslim rule, a community whose protection, in their view, naturally fell to Russia. From the early nineteenth century and the onset of the Transcaucasian campaigns, Armenians were seen not only as co-religionists but as a strategic Christian element on the empire's southern frontier, capable of reinforcing Russian security interests against Persia and the Ottoman Empire. Over time, this perception developed into a reciprocal political imagination: many Armenians regarded Russia as their primary protector, while Russian officials increasingly framed the Armenians as a loyal and indispensable pillar of imperial influence in the Caucasus and the Ottoman borderlands.²²³

However, on March 1, 1881, everything changed when terrorists detonated a bomb under the carriage of Alexander II which resulted in his death. This unexpected event sent shockwaves through the elite in St. Petersburg and led to an abrupt shift in the political landscape. Prior to this tragedy, Russia appeared to be on the verge of adopting the "Loris-Melikov Constitution," a proposal submitted by the Minister of Interior²²⁴. The emperor had given his preliminary approval on February 16, and on the morning of March 1, Tsar Alexander II responded positively to his Armenian Interior Minister, indicating that the State-Parliamentary reforms outlined in the proposal would be adopted by the Council of Ministers in four days. The proposal sought to transform the Council of Government into a form of parliament, which could have paved the way for a

²²³ George A. Bournoutian, ed., *Russia and the Armenians of Transcaucasia, 1797–1889: A Documentary Record* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishing, 1998), 467–469.

²²⁴ Mikhail Loris-Melikov (1824–1888) was a Russian statesman of Armenian origin who rose to prominence as governor-general during the 1879–1880 crisis and was appointed minister of the interior (1880–1881) with extraordinary powers. He proposed moderate constitutional reforms, including consultative commissions with limited representation, which were approved by Tsar Alexander II of Russia on the day of his assassination in March 1881. Opposed by Alexander III of Russia, he resigned later that year. See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Mikhail Loris-Melikov," <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mikhail-Tariyelovich-Graf-Loris-Melikov>.

constitutional monarchy. The liberal elite had high hopes for this reform but following the death of Alexander II, the situation changed drastically. Alexander III, his son and successor, was young and susceptible to influence. His advisor, the conservative and anti-reformist Konstantin Pobedonostsev, persuaded him to reject the proposed reforms.²²⁵ Alexander III was convinced that the empire's stability could be preserved through the intensified repression of its non-Russian populations.²²⁶

After heeding his advisers' counsel, the Tsar removed Loris-Melikov as Interior Minister and replaced him with the ultra-conservative Nikolay Ignatev, who quickly reversed the reforms. This new political direction led to a shift in the Russian Empire's Armenian policy. The relationship between the empire and the Armenian communities continued to deteriorate during the reign of Tsar Nicholas II.²²⁷ Indicative of the changes, in 1882, the Russian Ministry of Interior issued orders to suppress the nationalist movements of minorities in the Caucasus as well as Poland. These measures virtually prohibited any reference to Armenia as a political or geographical entity, while they also banned publications that could provoke Armenian national sentiments.²²⁸ Another drastic step was the decree issued in 1884, which forced the closure of schools in Armenian parishes. Among other things, this move prompted Christopher Mikaelian, later founder of Dashnaktsutun, to produce publications against the Russian Tsarist government in protest against the decree, which he saw as unjust. The government's anti-Armenian edicts only encouraged Armenians to find their common national values and focus on the restoration of Armenian statehood.²²⁹

In a report from 1887, a clear shift in the perception over Armenians is detectable. The correspondence discusses growing Armenian dissatisfaction in the Erzurum region and the population's increasing hope for Russian protection. In contrast, however, the report of Titular Councillor N. Preobrazhenskii of the Russian consulate in Erzurum questioned whether the desire of entire Armenian villages to resettle in Russia is beneficial for the country, noting the Russian government had repeatedly indicated its reluctance to admit Armenian emigrants from Ottoman

²²⁵ Mikhail Zygar', *Imperiia dolzhna umeret': Istoriia russkikh revoliutsii v litsakh, 1900–1917* (Moscow: Al'pina, 2017), 16–17.

²²⁶ Robert Geraci, "Russia: Minorities and Empire," in *A Companion to Russian History*, ed. Abbott Gleason (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 255, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444308419.ch15>.

²²⁷ Riegg, *Russia's Entangled Embrace*, 199–210.

²²⁸ Sinan Dinçer, "An Exclusionary Border Regime: The Ottoman Case, 1890–1914," in *Borders and Mobility Control in and between Empires and Nation-States*, ed. Jovan Pešalj, Annemarie Steidl, Leo Lucassen, and Josef Ehmer (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 190.

²²⁹ Nalbandian, Louise. *The Armenian revolutionary movement*, 144.

territory into Transcaucasia. Moreover, he added that the vacated lands would likely be settled by Muslim *muhajirs*²³⁰ or Caucasian migrants which would not only create new dangers for the Christian communities staying behind, but also reduce the Christian demographic presence in the frontier provinces, undermining Russian strategic interests.²³¹

*(...) Finally, the reduction of the Christian element in the overall population of the region could only have a very unfavorable effect—both on our own interests and on those of the Christians themselves—in the event of new, unforeseen but always possible developments on our Asiatic frontier. (...)*²³²

Instead, the author of the report argued that Armenians should remain in place, forming stable, self-governing communities under the guidance of clergy and elders while maintaining loyalty to Russia. In this way, they could safeguard their rights, improve their welfare, resist foreign influence, and serve as a reliable support to Russia in military contingencies. Yet the report also acknowledges that Russian policy often misread local intentions which produced outcomes contrary to its aims, and ultimately views Armenians as both strategically valuable and, especially the intelligentsia, potentially unreliable.²³³

“Yet herein lies one of the principal difficulties of our policy in the East: that such natural development of the local population does not in fact exist, and that excessive trust and superficial attitudes toward the declarations of the Christian peoples have too often led to results entirely contrary to our expectations and historical principles.

*While the upper, educated strata of the population — including many of the clergy — seek primarily personal gain by cringing before the Ottoman authorities and renouncing all sympathy for Russia, the rural common people, often instigated by representatives of this same “intelligentsia,” daily turn to our official representatives for protection and aid.”*²³⁴

According to the Russian reports, there was a clear divide in how Russia was perceived within the local Armenian population, particularly between the intellectual elite and the ordinary rural population, most likely because the rural communities were more directly exposed to everyday violence.

By the late 19th century, Russia’s approach to Ottoman Armenians was shaped by security concerns and a desire to limit cross-border instability. The Caucasus High Commissioner tightly controlled Etchmiadzin, limiting the autonomy of the Armenian Church, and in March 1894 Sergei Alekseevich Sheremetev²³⁵ refused to allow Ottoman Armenians fleeing famine and pogroms to

²³⁰ *muhajir*: Ottoman term referring to Muslim refugees who migrated into the empire from territories lost during the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century wars, particularly from the Caucasus, the Balkans, and Crimea.

²³¹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1628, ll. 30–37, October 26, 1887. [See Appendix 11.](#)

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ Sergei Alekseevich Sheremetev (1836–1896) was a Russian general who served as assistant to the Caucasus viceroy and deputy commander of the Caucasus Military District (1884–1890), and later as governor-general of the

take shelter in tsarist territory.²³⁶ Russia feared the spread of revolutionary ideas across its porous borders, a concern heightened by the Hamidian massacres (1894–1897). In 1903, the Tiflis-based civil leadership even requested permission to expel Armenians who had settled after February 1901 and to ban further entry from the Ottoman Empire, citing lack of resources and fears that unrest in Anatolia could spill over.²³⁷ The issue became more urgent when the Ottoman authorities, between 1894 and 1896, prevented many Armenians who had fled the massacres from returning. Although the Sultan later issued a limited amnesty for repatriation, restrictions, especially on Russian Armenians, complicated their return.²³⁸

Prince Golitsyn stressed the need to resolve the refugee problem, noting that the nearly 30,000 Armenians on Russian territory were “*terribly poor*”, yet insisting that many should be prevented from settling permanently. He even enlisted the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin to reassure returnees and downplay reports of Kurdish violence.²³⁹ According to Golitsyn, Russia attempted several times, in 1898 and again in 1902, to negotiate their readmission with the Ottoman Porte, but these initiatives failed. In November 1903, the Ottoman Empire formally refused to take the refugees back, arguing it had already accepted vast numbers of Muslim refugees displaced by Russian expansion.²⁴⁰ This referred to the flood of refugees who left their homes as an aftermath of Russia’s conquest of former Ottoman territories such as Crimea and the North-Caucasus. Some scholars estimate the number of Muslim refugees at least 500 000.²⁴¹

In this context, Russia increasingly framed the Armenian Question as an internal Ottoman matter. When Britain proposed reforms in Western Armenia in 1895, Russia undermined the initiative, claiming that unrest in the borderlands was the result of British interference. Following the massacre in Sasun, Russia encouraged the Ottoman government to resist foreign involvement, including the establishment of consulates. Although the decree of October 20, 1895, allowed Armenians of “*good conduct*” to return, Ottoman authorities continued to block the process on

Caucasus and commander of the Caucasus Military District (1890–1896). A veteran of the Caucasus campaigns and the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878), he took part in operations at Ardahan and Erzurum. See “Sheremetev, Sergei Dmitrievich,” in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ Brokgauza i Efrona*, 86 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1890–1907).

²³⁶ Riegg, *Russia’s Entangled Embrace*, 199–210.

²³⁷ GARF, f. 102, op. 308, d. 201, II. 3–13, November 1903.

²³⁸ İsmail Yılmaz, “Governing the Armenian Question through Passports in the Late Ottoman Empire (1876–1908),” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 32, no. 4 (2019): 394–396.

²³⁹ GARF, f. 543, op. 1, d. 454, II. 1–9, June 12, 1898–May 26, 1900.

²⁴⁰ GARF, f. 102, op. 308, d. 201, II. 3–13, November 1903.

²⁴¹ Alan W. Fisher, “Emigration of Muslims from the Russian Empire in the Years after the Crimean War,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, no. 3 (1987): 356.

security grounds, while Russia pressed for their acceptance to ease its own economic burdens and land shortages.²⁴²

Meanwhile, the Russian state continued to attack Armenian religious life by closing Armenian parish schools during the winter of 1895-1896. Furthermore, in February 1896, the imperial leadership made a direct rejection of the *polozhenie*²⁴³ of 1836 and moved to confiscate immovable properties belonging to churches and monasteries from the Armenian clergy, offering compensation from the government.²⁴⁴ In the mid-1890s, High Commissioner Golitsyn, set his sights on seizing the properties of Etchmiadzin. Finally, in 1903, he was able to achieve his goal. However, this decision was not tolerated by the Catholicos Khrimian, who decided to protest. Faced with pressure from all levels of Armenian society to resist, Khrimian ordered the clergy to disobey any demands made by officials and, if necessary, to leave. This resulted in a volatile situation in Etchmiadzin, with upset Armenian villagers and townspeople gathering in the center of Armenian religious life without invitation. Armenians throughout the Caucasus rallied against the government, and in Alexandropol (today Gyumri), Armenians took to the streets to express their dissatisfaction with the current situation.²⁴⁵

At this point, the matter of the Armenians had become personal for Golitsyn, and he suspected subversive behavior not only among Armenian clergy and revolutionaries but also among almost every literate Armenian in the Caucasus. His infamous character prompted *Hunchakian*²⁴⁶ revolutionaries in the summer of 1904 to attempt to assassinate Golitsyn. As a result

²⁴² Dinçer, "An Exclusionary Border Regime," 187–192.

²⁴³ The Statute on the Administration of the Armenian Gregorian Church (1836) was a decree of Tsar Nicholas I of Russia that codified the status of the Armenian Apostolic Church within the Russian Empire. It affirmed freedom of worship, institutional autonomy, control over education, church landholding, and clergy tax exemptions, while simultaneously placing the church under imperial oversight: electors proposed two candidates for catholicos from whom the tsar made the final selection; school curricula required approval by the Holy Synod and the Ministry of the Interior; and a state representative attended synodal proceedings. The statute aimed to stabilize imperial rule while integrating the church into the administrative framework of the empire. See Ronald Grigor Suny, "Eastern Armenians under Tsarist Rule," in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. 2, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 109–137.

²⁴⁴ Riegg, *Russia's Entangled Embrace*, 199–210.

²⁴⁵ S. A. Luk'ianov and A. G. Udodov, "Gosudarstvenno-pravovoe regulirovanie deiatel'nosti Armiano-Grigorianskoi tserkvi v Rossiiskoi Imperii," *Mezhdunarodnyi nauchno-issledovatel'skii zhurnal*, no. 12-4 (54) (2016): 169.

²⁴⁶ The Social Democrat Hunchakian Party was founded in Geneva in 1887 by six Russian Armenians, was one of the earliest Armenian revolutionary organizations advocating the liberation of Ottoman Armenia through armed self-defense and political reform. Its program called for independence, a representative parliament, decentralization, and civil liberties, while denouncing heavy taxation and administrative abuses. The Hunchaks gained prominence after the 1890 Kumkapı demonstration in Istanbul, which publicly introduced them to Ottoman political life. See Altıntaş, Toygun. "The placard affair and the ankara trial: the hunchak party and the hamidian regime in Central Anatolia, 1892–93." *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 4, no. 2 (2017): 309-337.

of the injuries he sustained, Golitsyn left his post in July, and Illarion Ivanovich Vorontsov-Dashkov²⁴⁷ was appointed to restore order.²⁴⁸ Although the new governor announced his willingness to cooperate with anyone regardless of religion and ethnicity, it was too late to prevent the deterioration of Russo-Armenian relations.²⁴⁹ Evidence suggests that, according to a mayor of Tiflis, in late 19th century early 20th century, Armenians were even excluded from bureaucratic and professional positions in the Caucasus due to widespread stereotypes among the Russian elite portraying them as political radicals and separatists.²⁵⁰

The consular reports reveal a clear contradiction at the center of Russian imperial policy. Armenians were seen both as valuable, because they strengthened the Christian presence in eastern Anatolia, and as dangerous, especially when they organized politically outside Russian control. The cases discussed above show that Armenian radicalization was caused not only by Ottoman violence, but also by growing disappointment in Russian protection and the overall failure of European reform promises. As revolutionary movements became stronger, Russian officials no longer viewed Armenian nationalism as useful, but as a threat to stability along the Caucasian frontier. What had once been a protective relationship gradually turned into one based on suspicion, control, and security concerns rather than shared religious solidarity.

The Emergence of Armenian Self-Defense Groups

Following the 1877–1878 Russo-Turkish War, the failure of reforms and the rise of Bulgarian and Greek national movements encouraged the development of Armenian national aspirations.²⁵¹ This in turn brought about the emergence of Armenian revolutionaries as important actors operating within the turbulent "shatterzones" of imperial peripheries. The landscapes where they operated were plagued by inter-imperial rivalries, elite power struggles, and demographic shifts. They were truly a transnational phenomenon in the borderlands, as the revolutionaries

²⁴⁷ Count Illarion Ivanovich Vorontsov-Dashkov (1837–1916): Russian statesman and general of cavalry; Minister of the Imperial Court and Appanages (1881–1897); Chancellor of Imperial Orders (1881–1897); Viceroy of the Caucasus (1905–1915).

²⁴⁸ N. A. Bigaev, "Poslednie namestniki Kavkaza (v svete lichnykh vospominanii) (1902–1917)," in *Rossiiskii arkhiv: Istoriiia Otechestva v svidetel'stvakh i dokumentakh XVIII–XX vv.: Almanakh*, vol. 12 (Moscow: Studia TRITÉ: Ros. arkhiv, 2003), 404–405.

²⁴⁹ Riegg, *Russia's Entangled Embrace*, 210–221.

²⁵⁰ Geraci, "Russia: Minorities and Empire," 248.

²⁵¹ Ramazan Öztan and Alp Yenen, *Age of Rogues: Rebels, Revolutionaries and Racketeers at the Frontiers of Empires* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 3–10.

blended localized traditions of resistance with global revolutionary ideologies and crossed borders often acting vis-à-vis or in cooperation with the great powers, aiming to dismember the empire in a fight for national self-determination²⁵²

Armenian challenges to Ottoman rule have a long history, beginning as early as 1863. During this period, an Armenian delegation was sent to Constantinople to seek an audience with Grand Vizier Fuad Paşa in order to voice their problems. However, their appeals were met with silence, a response similar to what subsequent delegations in 1864 and 1867 experienced. As a result, a group of Armenians in the city of Van decided to form a self-defense organization called the Union of Salvation (*Miuthiun I Perkuthiun*) in 1872, the first of its kind in Western Armenia.²⁵³ It was no accident that this organization emerged in Van, given the region's political and social tensions. Van Province was the only place in the empire where Armenians were in absolute majority compared to Muslims, and it was also close enough to the Persian and Russian Empires to allow for possible escape, and the proximity of these countries, especially Russia, facilitated contact with Armenians on the other side of the border. Russia's role was a priority for the Armenian armed forces and their support was strongly expected, so they quickly contacted it and asked the Russian government to place consuls in Van city to facilitate contacts and offered to become Russian subjects due to their precarious situation.²⁵⁴

In April 1876, Consul Obermiller reported that a document circulating in Erzurum, allegedly written by Austrian-Hungarian Foreign Minister Gyula Andrassy, described the misery of local Christians and Muslims and claimed villagers awaited "Russian forces to bring justice and prosperity." Although its Turkish translation was banned, Armenians accessed the text through Caucasian newspapers, sparking widespread discussion in Erzurum.²⁵⁵ Another, and perhaps more significant, point in this letter is that the author's description provides insight into the growing activities of Armenian self-defense groups and the emergence of organized resistance in Erzurum. The vilayet of Erzurum and its surroundings, particularly the Muş sanjak, were highly vulnerable to Kurdish raids, as noted in numerous Russian consular reports. These repeated attacks pushed Armenians to organize self-defense units to protect their communities. Obermiller's report on

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ Justin McCarthy, Esat Arslan, Cemalettin Taşkıran, and Ömer Turan, *The Armenian Rebellion at Van* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006), 41–42.

²⁵⁴ Nalbandian, Louise. *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 79–81.

²⁵⁵ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1089, l. 23-25. April 1876

Andrássy's observations thus captures both the insecurity of daily life and the early stages of Armenian collective resistance in the region.

*"(...) secret societies of Christians are also formed in Muş, Bitlis, Erzurum and Van. Fortunately, Mehmed Rashid Paşa did not hesitate to take action against these radical movements. Most of the clandestine groups on the streets of Erzurum were exposed and covered up. Even if silence and security have been forcibly restored here, probably not for long."*²⁵⁶

In the post-war year of 1881, Obermiller reported that at a secret council in Erzurum, which deliberately excluded Armenian officials, the Vali read instructions from a telegram received earlier demanding that intensified surveillance of Armenians be implemented, the prevention of all assemblies, and the suppression of any potential unrest by all means, including force. The Porte ordered the removal and destruction of Armenian national images, particularly depictions of Vartan Mamikonian²⁵⁷, as well as the prohibition of teaching Armenian history. Strict censorship was to eliminate books and writings deemed seditious. The telegrams further indicated the Sultan's deep irritation with Patriarch Nerses and asserted that Armenians sought to undermine the empire.²⁵⁸

It is likely that the Ottoman authorities had already sensed growing unrest, as another important development in Erzurum that same year was the formation of a secret revolutionary group known as the Ararat Society.²⁵⁹ It soon changed its name to the Protectors of the Fatherland (Pashtpan Haireniats), an organization established for purposes of self-defense.²⁶⁰ According to the Russian consular reports, the ultimate goal of the revolutionaries was to separate the Erzurum region and some of its subordinate areas from the Ottoman Empire through revolutionary actions. To achieve their goals, the society reportedly planned to recruit up to 300,000 people over 30 years, each of whom was supposed to contribute 1/4 medjidie²⁶¹ annually; this money would have been used to form a war fund against the Kurds. Those joining the society were reportedly addressed with the following words: *"I enlist you in the society as soldiers. At the proper time, you will be*

²⁵⁶ AVPRI, f. 1089, op. 181, d. 2. l. 25. 14 April 1876

²⁵⁷ Vardan Mamikonian (c. 387–451) was an Armenian nobleman and military commander who led the Armenian revolt against Sasanian rule in 450–451. He was killed at the Battle of Avarayr, which became a symbol of Armenian resistance and the defense of the Christian faith and autonomy. He is venerated as a national hero and saint in the Armenian Apostolic Church. See Levon Avdoyan, "Vardan Mamikonean," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*, ed. Oliver Nicholson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1551.

²⁵⁸ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, ll. 2–3, March 7, 1881. [See Appendix 12.](#)

²⁵⁹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1628, ll. 113–119, June 30, 1883. [See Appendix 13.](#)

²⁶⁰ Varak Ketsemanian, Ümit Kurt, and Ara Sarafian, "Ideologies, Paradoxes, and Fedayis in the Late Ottoman Empire: Historiographical Challenges and Methodological Problems in the Study of the Armenian Revolutionary Movement (1890–1896)," in *Armenians and Kurds in the Late Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ümit Kurt and Ara Sarafian (Fresno: California State University Press, 2020), 138.

²⁶¹ Silver coin introduced during Abdülmecid I's reign.

given weapons and receive daily money. We are restoring the kingdom." The recruitment certificates bore the names of ancient ruling Armenian dynasties at the top such as Haikazun, Arshakuni or Bagratuni.²⁶² All of these elements emphasized the importance of aspiring for an independent Armenian state.

Based on the Ottoman judiciary investigation, the above-mentioned movement began when the organizers read newspapers in the city reading room about the postponement of the Armenian reforms due to the events in Tunisia and suddenly felt the need to raise a public movement, leading them to discuss measures to organize it.²⁶³

*(...) Regarding the above-mentioned circumstances, a judicial investigation was appointed, which established the following: Some time ago, newspapers stated that following the resolution of issues concerning the delimitation with Greece and Montenegro, reforms would be introduced in Armenia. **The events in Tunisia delayed the reform issue, and the latter were postponed indefinitely until the Greek calendar.***

*Based on similar newspaper judgments, about a year ago, a certain **Khachatur from Kurdyak, Ohanes, and Agop, reading newspapers in the city reading room, felt the need to raise public movements** and began discussing measures to achieve this. After mutual consultations, they initially communicated their free opinions to various people known for their patriotic sentiments to see if they could arouse a public response. (...)*²⁶⁴

Immediately after the movement's formation, the organizers went to Van to consult with Bishop Khrimian. The bishop replied that the Armenian people were not numerous enough to undertake such uprisings and that a catastrophe could unfold because of it. In the end, he advised them to refrain from participating in such matters.²⁶⁵ The highest local religious leader in Erzurum, Bishop Ormanian, was also informed of the formation of the organization, and he shared the news with Patriarch Nerses II of Constantinople, who in turn gave his support to the organizers.²⁶⁶ After an unsuccessful attempt to gain the support of Khrimian, among the first trips, the movement's leaders made to Russia to try to gain support for their cause.²⁶⁷ They even contacted Grigor Artsruni, founder and editor-in-chief of the Tiflis based liberal Armenian newspaper Mshak. Although the conspiracy was short-lived (May 1881 - November 1882) and the rebels were exposed despite all precautions and secrecy, their movement highlighted the many problems in the region and the potential for success of the uprisings against Ottoman rule. The Protectors of the

²⁶² AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1628, ll. 113–119, June 30, 1883.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ Nalbandian, Louise. *The Armenian revolutionary movement*, 89.

²⁶⁷ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1628, ll. 123–128, July 15, 1883. [See Appendix 14.](#)

Fatherland's activities led to the creation of the local revolutionary song "The Voice Re-echoed from the Armenian Mountains of Erzerum" ("Dsaine Hunchets Erzumi Hayots Lernereren").²⁶⁸

The Russian consul in Erzurum, Denet, considered the circumstances of the movement's conception implausible and claimed that the local Ottoman prosecution did not fully disclose all the details surrounding the conspiracy:

*"(...) It is impossible not to notice from the very beginning that the prosecution has not fully revealed all the circumstances of the conspiracy. It is unreasonable to seriously assume that the idea of organizing a revolutionary movement among the Armenian people suddenly occurred to them after reading newspapers in the city library. It is even less plausible to think that the leaders of such an enterprise could be some obscure individuals lacking moral authority or material resources. It is evident that the Turkish judicial authorities managed to uncover only a fraction of the meticulously developed revolutionary mechanism, with the main architects remaining undetected."*²⁶⁹

It is clear from Denet's reports that he suspected these individuals were not acting alone but were supported by external forces. He believed their activities formed part of a broader network operating beyond the local level. The Russian consulate viewed the British with suspicion, as they were at the forefront of imposing the Armenian reforms on the Ottoman Empire, and suspected that they might be behind the movement. Denet believed that an enterprise so directly related to the deepest political aspirations of the Armenians, and having ties to the main center of Armenian political activity in Constantinople, could not have arisen without the involvement of Britain. He was also adamant that the intentions of the conspirators were well known to the head of the Erzurum bishop, Ormanian, who was a supporter of the Constantinople Patriarch, Nerses. The consul suspected that the investigation against the budding revolutionary movement intentionally failed to uncover the connection between the revolutionaries in Erzurum and Constantinople to prevent any plans dangerous for the Armenian reform plans from arising. This is why Denet considered it possible that the "Achilles' heel" of the entire scheme had to be hidden from the Ottoman government at all costs, potentially through bribery by Britain.²⁷⁰

Erzurum was not the only place where similar groups and movements emerged. The first group which engaged in revolutionary activities was the Armenakan Party in Van, organized around Mkrtich Portugalian in 1885.²⁷¹ In addition, in 1887 the Hnchak Party was founded in

²⁶⁸ Nalbandian, Louise. *The Armenian revolutionary movement*, 89.

²⁶⁹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1628, ll. 123–128, July 15, 1883.

²⁷⁰ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1628, ll. 123–128, July 15, 1883.

²⁷¹ Sargsyan, "Armjanskoe natsional'no-osvoboditel'noe dvizhenie," 7-15.

Switzerland by seven Russian-Armenian students. Interestingly, the founders had never lived in the Ottoman Empire but their empathy for their fellow Armenians in Eastern Anatolia resulted in the foundation of the organization. Their main intellectual resource was the newspaper *Armenia*, published by Portugalian in Marseille. Owing to European intellectual currents, members of the Hnchak were strongly influenced in their ideology not only by nationalist but also by Marxist principles.²⁷²

In addition to the activities of intellectuals such as Khatchatur Abovian, Mikael Nalbandian, Kamar Katiba (Rafael Patkanian) and Raffi (Hakob Melik-Hakobian), the presence of Armenian revolutionism in Russia was also reflected in the creation of two other revolutionary societies. The emergence of the "*Goodwill Society*" (Barenepatak Enkeruthiun) and the "*Loyalty to the Homeland*" (Kontora Hairenaits Siro) was not accidental, as Armenian intellectuals, citizens and merchants living in the Russian Empire frowned upon the atrocities committed against their fellow Armenians across the border.²⁷³

Not coincidentally with the emergence of Armenian revolutionary groups, Russian reports from 1887 and 1888 noted a clear deterioration in the living conditions of the Armenian population in Erzurum, and with this decline, dissatisfaction among Armenians also intensified:

*(...)There is no doubt that the principal cause of the recent conversions among the Armenian and other populations of the Ottoman Empire lies in the precarious and oppressive condition of these peoples, which has worsened in recent times — owing both to the growing disorder and financial insolvency of the Ottoman government (...)*²⁷⁴

What is even more striking is that the consul notes that the region provided "*favorable ground*" for disturbances "*should such plans ever form part of the Imperial Government's calculations.*" This phrasing implies that unrest was imagined not only as a risk for Russia, but as a potential leverage. The Armenian provinces appear as pressure points in the Ottoman Empire that could be activated or pacified depending on imperial priorities. However, Denet, on the one hand, stressed that the local population was "*little prepared for an organized uprising,*" which suggests a limited immediate revolutionary capacity. On the other hand, he warned that refusing to assist the Christian population could trigger unrest of unpredictable scale:

²⁷² Gerard Libaridian, "Ideology and Reality: Hnchakian Paradoxes at Birth," in *The Armenian Social Democrat Hnchakian Party: Politics, Ideology and Transnational History*, ed. Bedross Der Matossian (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023), 195–197.

²⁷³ Nalbandian, Louise. The Armenian revolutionary movement, 133-135.

²⁷⁴ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1629, ll. 30–37, February 4, 1888.

(...)The present state of mind among the Armenians of the Erzurum vilayet provides a favorable ground for the outbreak of disturbances in Armenia, should such plans ever form part of the Imperial Government's calculations.

*However, if it is the desire of our Government and of the Imperial Embassy to preserve tranquility in the Armenian provinces, I believe it should not be overlooked that **a complete refusal on our part to assist the local Christian population** in its efforts to improve its condition, insofar as possible, **could lead to the beginning of unrest in the region—unrest which, under present circumstances, might assume considerable proportions.***

*As I had the honor to inform Your Excellency in my dispatch of October 29, No. 530/31, **it is my opinion that the local population, both morally and materially, is little prepared for an organized uprising.** Nevertheless, I cannot yet venture to predict the extent that disturbances might reach should they indeed begin—whether they would amount to minor disorders easily quelled by the local administration, or whether they might take on a more serious character. (...)*²⁷⁵

Russian inaction in Ottoman domains, the fallacy of domestic Armenian policy reinforced Armenian revolutionary aspirations. The Russian administration was, of course, aware that the Russian Transcaucasia also became a source of revolutionary activity. Therefore, the Armenian revolutionaries infiltrating between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in both directions, facilitated by the porous borders despite government efforts to enforce tighter control, posed an enormous threat to the Russian government. This concern was explicitly articulated in Golitsyn's correspondence:

*"A peasant from Asia Minor does not become a revolutionary by himself and this is clearly the influence of individuals infiltrating from the Caucasus who dream of restoring Armenian statehood."*²⁷⁶

By this he referred to the problem of the porous border and the interconnectedness of revolutionary agitation across borders. Additionally, According to Nelidov, consuls serving in Asia Minor reported that the vast majority of local Armenians were unaware of revolutionary activities or the charges against them when brought to trial for alleged involvement. The ambassador concluded that this lack of awareness might explain why instigators in eastern Anatolia typically recruited ordinary individuals with promises, leaving them to face the consequences if apprehended.²⁷⁷ The Armenian revolutionaries, particularly the Hnchaks, focused on the peasantry due to their vision of liberating this class and the central role they envisioned for them in the future

²⁷⁵ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1628, ll. 38–41, November 12, 1887. [See Appendix 15.](#)

²⁷⁶ GARF, f. 102, op. 308, d. 201, ll. 3–13, November 1903.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

of a liberated Armenian state.²⁷⁸ Meanwhile, Russian authorities also attributed the spread of revolutionary and anti-Russian ideas partly to the influence of foreign religious missions (from Britain, France, and the United States), which promoted "*ideas incompatible with and hostile to Russia*".²⁷⁹

Russian Intellectual Thought on Revolutionary Ideology

The question of Western interference and its perceived destabilizing effects constitutes a recurring and overarching theme in Dennet's consular reports. He repeatedly returned to this issue, emphasizing what he regarded as the harmful political and social consequences of Western involvement in the Ottoman eastern provinces:

*"I have repeatedly reported to Your Excellency on the open hostility toward us that has, in recent times, been manifesting itself ever more strongly among the educated classes of the local Armenian-Gregorians. From where, if not from the West, do such anti-Russian tendencies originate? Their leading representatives, imbued with social-democratic ideas and having lost their faith in God, come here armed with the seductive illusion of restoring the political independence of Armenia, in order to propagate among the Armenian people their practical aims together with the deep aversion toward Russia and its state institutions which they have absorbed in the West."*²⁸⁰

In Russian political thought, the question of how social-democratic ideas might undermine faith, must be examined in detail in order to understand the moral stance that several Russian diplomatic actors adopted toward Armenian revolutionaries. Such an analysis also provides a broader intellectual context for this study.

The 19th century was the era of Russian Slavophilism. The Slavophiles were committed to preserving what they perceived as the distinctive traditions and culture of Russia. Their ideology rejected individualism, viewing it as incompatible with Russian communal values, and emphasized the primacy of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Slavophiles opposed socialism, which they considered an incompatible foreign ideology closely associated with modernization. Central to their ideology was the idealization of rural life, which resisted industrialization and urbanization.

²⁷⁸ Ketsemanian, Kurt, and Sarafian, "Ideologies, Paradoxes, and Fedayis," 122–123.

²⁷⁹ GARF, f. 102, op. 308, d. 201, ll. 3–13, November 1903.

²⁸⁰ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1626, ll. 79–98, December 26, 1886. [See Appendix 16.](#)

Instead, they advocated for protecting traditional peasant communities against the expansion of the working class and the socio-economic changes attributed to it.²⁸¹

Having said that, another intellectual movement emerged in Russia at the end of the 19th century, called nihilism, which was the exact contrast of the latter. The word "nihilism" was coined in Germany in the 18th century and originally referred to the rejection of existence. However, Russian nihilists rejected traditional morality, religion, and societal norms, advocating instead for radical individualism and freedom. They viewed existing institutions as meaningless and promoted moral skepticism, opposing the Tsarist autocracy, the Orthodox Church, and family structures.²⁸² Most nihilists were not enthusiastic about politics and steered away from activism, despite their controversial reputation for violence.²⁸³ As Petr Kropotkin, the famous Russian anarcho-communist, writes in his memoirs, violence did not stem from the framework of nihilism, as was commonly misconceived by many contemporaries; instead, it was spurred by the socio-political context of the Russian Empire.²⁸⁴ Others, however, argue that some ideas of the nihilist movement did influence Russian revolutionary thought and later contributed to Bolshevik ideology during the Russian Revolution.²⁸⁵

In short, these two intellectual currents advanced fundamentally different conceptions of Russia's identity, moral order, and historical trajectory. The report composed in 1883 by Consul Dennet, reflecting on the events of 1881 in Erzurum, has already been discussed in the preceding subchapter with respect to its factual content. The present analysis instead turns to its discursive dimension, examining how its language, terminology, and rhetorical choices reflect and transmit the political ideas associated with these competing intellectual movements, and how meaning is constructed through this vocabulary:

"The society took the name "Ararat Society" to give more strength to the patriotic movement, but this name was later changed to "Homeland Defense Society." To execute the above, Kurdyakoglu went to Van to consult with Bishop Khrimian. The bishop replied that the Armenian people were not numerous enough to undertake such uprisings and that a catastrophe

²⁸¹ Lori Engelstein, *Slavophile Empire: Imperial Russia's Illiberal Path* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 23.

²⁸² Kristian Petrov, "'Strike Out, Right and Left!': A Conceptual-Historical Analysis of 1860s Russian Nihilism and Its Notion of Negation," *Studies in East European Thought* 71 (2019): 74.

²⁸³ Christine Frances Donaldson, *Russian Nihilism of the 1860s: A Science-Based Social Movement* (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 1979), 32.

²⁸⁴ Pëtr Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 1st ed. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), chap. 12, accessed February 17, 2009, <https://dwardmac.pitzer.edu>.

²⁸⁵ Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 169–170.

could unfold because of it. In the end, he advised Kurdyakoglu to refrain from participating in such matters. Khachatur went from the Van Bishop to Tiflis, where he consulted with many people. He was then advised to connect with the **nihilists** and start actions only after returning to Erzurum with one of the **nihilists**, and to carefully discuss whether to organize an uprising or to suspend the movement according to the circumstances of the time, avoiding actions that could harm the population and avoiding false steps in this matter. In any case, the very fact that the Armenian movement in Erzurum, through one of its prominent figures, sought to communicate with the most vile elements of contemporary society is telling. **This alone is enough to assess the true attitude towards us by the so-called Jeune Armenie and to understand the extremely hostile tendencies towards Russia existing within certain parts of the Armenian intelligentsia. It is easy to imagine how the anti-social ambitions of nihilistic machinations and intrigues hostile to the Russian government would quickly spread to our Caucasus if an autonomous Armenia were to form within it.**²⁸⁶

At first glance, we might assume that the report finds the origins of revolutionary activities in nihilism, suggesting that, in Consul Dennet's view, the two movements shared similar violent features. However, it must be emphasized that it is doubtful whether these concepts were regarded as identical within broader Russian intellectual thought, as Dennet appears to be the only consul to employ this way of thinking in the reports I have found. Regardless, the report underscores the perceived interconnectedness of the two, describing them as “*hostile tendencies towards Russia*” that “*existed within certain parts of the Armenian intelligentsia.*” Dennet framed these actions as “*anti-social ambitions of nihilistic machinations,*” possibly referring to the promotion of individualism and rejection of societal norms by nihilists. He also framed these intentions “*hostile to the Russian government*” by which he might have meant the perceived destructive nature of revolutionary activity through the dissolution of conservatism, an idea often promoted by Slavophiles.

“The Armenian intelligentsia, educated in the West under the influence of various social theories widespread there, and with a blind disregard for Russia among the cultural strata of Western society, would not hesitate to bring all the destructive elements of socialist ideas into their newly created homeland, turning it into an inexhaustible source of turmoil and political intrigue.

A glance at the current Armenian periodical press is enough to dispel any doubts about the validity of such concerns. The British are not trying in vain to impose such a neighborhood on us, knowing well what fertile ground they would find in an autonomous Armenia for intrigues against Russia, and how difficult it would be for us to protect our Armenian population in the Caucasus from the harmful influence of such schemes. British diplomatic efforts in favor of the Armenian people are not guided by abstract ideas of philanthropy and progress, but often by subjective political goals.

²⁸⁶ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1628, ll. 113–119, June 30, 1883.

British politicians hope that by creating new sources of political difficulties for us, they will bring disorder within our borders. The notion held by some who are somewhat familiar with the situation, that the British aim to create a new Poland for us on the borders of the Caucasus, is not without some truth. Hostile influences would inevitably emanate from there into our territories, bringing with them elements of social decay influenced by socialist theories, or fostering separatist tendencies among peoples who have not yet succeeded in integrating with the native population of the empire."²⁸⁷

The transfer of revolutionary ideas across the Russian-Ottoman border by the fedayi ²⁸⁸ and the phenomenon of "*the Armenian intelligentsia, educated in the West under the influence of various social theories*" illustrate the interconnected threats perceived by the Russian administration. The rejection of social norms, inherent in nihilism, was seen as fostered by the rise of socialism, perceived as a destabilizing ideology that, in the eyes of Dennet, challenged traditional hierarchies and governance. This ideological transformation, observed by the consul, was attributed to British influence too, which was viewed as a factor exacerbating the spread of socialism and undermining Russian authority among Armenians not only in Western Armenia but also within Russia's borders. These developments increased fears of Armenian autonomy as a result of growing nationalist sentiments, which in turn threatened the stability of the Erzurum borderland.

Interestingly, Dennet also drew a parallel with Poland, another borderland of Russia, that had ambitions of its own for independence:

*"Being on the very ground where a new political entity is about to form, observing daily the various manifestations of the local Armenian intelligentsia, and noting the sharp hostility of the Jeune Armenie party towards us, one cannot help but realize that the concerns (...) are unfortunately all too real. The lack of solid moral principles, eroded by centuries of subjugation; an all-consuming passion for wealth, rivaling the love of money seen among the sons of Israel; religious instability transitioning in the younger generation, educated in Western European centers, into indifference if not outright atheism; the profound ignorance of the rural population, leaving them vulnerable to unscrupulous agitators; the greed and lack of education of the impoverished clergy; the ambition and self-interest of the higher clergy, constantly engaging in intrigues; the demoralization of the intelligentsia through government service they despise; all these factors make one doubt the Armenian people's readiness for healthy political autonomy."*²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1628, l. 123-128. 15 July 1883

²⁸⁸ *Fedayi* refers to Armenian irregular fighters who formed voluntary self-defense units in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Organized in response to violence, pillage, and mass attacks against Armenian villages in the Ottoman Empire, fedayi operated as armed bands seeking to protect local populations and advance revolutionary or nationalist objectives.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

In the following sections of the reports, Dennet referred to the moral decline of the Armenians, including the rejection of religious authority, or, as he claimed, in some cases even atheism. This idea supported his argument of labeling revolutionaries as nihilists. Perhaps this led him to state that Armenians had a “*passion for wealth, rivaling the love of money seen among the sons of Israel*”, a comparison that is not devoid of antisemitic undertones. Overall, he described “*the demoralization of the (Armenian) intelligentsia*” as caused by these factors outlined in the report, which made them incapable of developing a “*healthy political autonomy*”. What Consul Dennet meant by “healthy” was likely the opposite of the ideals promoted by Slavophiles.

Dennet’s reports were not neutral accounts but were shaped by the ideological climate of late nineteenth-century Russian political thought. By portraying Armenian revolutionary activism and Armenian intellectuals as nihilistic, socially destructive, and morally corrupt, Dennet framed it as a threat to Russia’s imperial and moral order. His language reflects anxieties about the erosion of religious and communal authority, aligning closely with conservative and Slavophile ideas. At the same time, Britain was depicted as a dominant force seeking to weaken Russia through the promotion of Armenian autonomy.

Negotiating loyalties

Early Russian contacts with the Kurds

Russian consular reports offer an illuminating perspective on the development of Ottoman–Kurdish–Russian relations in the eastern borderlands. These reports show how the Russian Empire assessed the practical governability of the Ottoman eastern provinces, treating the Kurdish question as an issue of concern alongside border security and helping to explain why it held such importance for Russian diplomats. The analysis of these sources also contributes to a broader understanding of Russian efforts to negotiate Kurdish loyalty, a still under researched area of study.

By the 1820s, Russia occupied cities such as Erzurum, Bayezid, and Kars from the Ottoman Empire during the Russo-Turkish War of 1828 although these territories were returned to Ottoman control under the 1829 Edirne Treaty. As a result of Russian encroachment on the borders, growing nationalism in the Balkans and war the strategic frontier provinces like Erzurum and Van required stable borderlands. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire attempted to enforce enforcing sovereignty

over these lands instead of granting privileges to Kurdish emirates from 1830s. Consequently, In 1839, the Ottoman Empire initiated the Tanzimat reforms to modernize fiscal and military institutions, focusing on regular tax collection and conscription by for example trying to eliminate tax farming.²⁹⁰ By 1847, Ottoman military campaigns resulted in the exile of key Kurdish leaders and the partial demolition of semi-autonomous status of Kurdish tribes which symbolized the sultan's sovereignty and reflected a broader state-building strategies to consolidate imperial power in Kurdistan.²⁹¹

The implementation of reforms, however, greatly varied across regions in the Ottoman Empire, and tribal conflicts and resistance to increased taxation remained widespread.²⁹² For instance, a report written in June 1875 by Obermiller, the consul, described the unruliness of the Kurds in Dersim, who *had never paid taxes* to the Ottoman state.²⁹³ By emphasizing that the Dersim Kurds “had never paid taxes,” the consul implicitly questioned the feasibility of Ottoman centralization itself, rather than attributing failure to temporary mismanagement or local excesses.

Other consular reports from 1876 mention instances where Kurdish villagers even chased away Ottoman officials attempting to collect taxes, brandishing sticks to drive them off.²⁹⁴ Consul Obermiller also took account of Karapapakh tribes resisting conscription and thus exiled to Persia.²⁹⁵ In general, the Kurdish nobility enjoyed hereditary privileges, such as tax exemptions and control over land revenues, which clashed with the empire's efforts to build a modern, centralized state. Eradicating these privileges was risky as it could undermine the empire's legitimacy by going back on agreements and traditions granted by the state.²⁹⁶

The dissatisfaction with modernization efforts such as conscription resulted in significant Kurdish unrest from 1876 until 1879.²⁹⁷ Obermiller reported on a major revolt from Muş through Bitlis until Hakkari in 1878.²⁹⁸ The uprising was led by Sheikh Ubeydullah, who, although he had fought alongside the Ottomans in the Russo-Turkish War, as a significant political and religious

²⁹⁰ Neslihan Özok-Gündoğan, *The Kurdish Nobility in the Ottoman Empire: Loyalty, Autonomy and Privilege* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 108–109.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 111–113.

²⁹² Djene Bajalan, *Between Accommodationism and Separatism: Kurds, Ottomans, and the Politics of Nationality (1839–1914)* (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2015), 86–91.

²⁹³ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1088, l. 3, June 17, 1875.

²⁹⁴ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2667, ll. 141–146, January 10, 1876.

²⁹⁵ AVPRI, f. 161, op. 181/2, d. 1088, l. 9, August 28, 1875.

²⁹⁶ Özok-Gündoğan, *Kurdish Nobility*, 108–109.

²⁹⁷ Behçet Kemal Yeşilbursa, “The Kurdish Uprisings in the Middle East: A Survey (1831–1979),” *Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations* 1, no. 2 (2020): 45–46.

²⁹⁸ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2667, l. 16, December 20, 1878.

figure in the region was not satisfied with the situation brought about by the Treaty of Berlin, especially in terms of the Armenian reform plans, fearing the loss of Kurdish privileges in favor of the Armenians. After quelling the rebellion, Sultan Abdulhamid II ²⁹⁹ introduced a new tribal policy to be implemented in Kurdistan.³⁰⁰

The Ottomans knew that Russian consuls had been exploring opportunities for cooperation with the Kurds at least since the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, and although I am not familiar with Russian reports from before the war, it can be suspected that considerable data had already been collected on the Kurds in Western Armenia.³⁰¹ Perhaps nothing indicates the importance of Erzurum as a center of Russian interest in Kurdish matters better than the fact that it was Auguste Jaba, consul in Erzurum from 1848 until 1866, a pioneering Russian Orientalist of Polish origin, who, through manuscript collecting, translations, and the compilation of the first major French-Russian-Kurdish dictionary, helped establish Kurdish studies in Russia.³⁰² The Ottoman authorities were aware of these Russian efforts and likewise understood that Kurdish tribes were prepared to cooperate with any external power willing to grant them the privileges they sought.³⁰³

Similar opinions had already been formulated by the Russian consulate prior to the war. For instance, in a report written by Obermiller, the leader of the Kurds of Dersim, Hussein Bey, offered thirty thousand soldiers to the Russian consulate in 1876 in the event that the Russian Caucasian army crossed the border, and an additional ten thousand provided that they received gold, horses, and other forms of support from Russia. According to the consul, Kurdish beys expressed hatred toward the Turks and offered their support to the Russian Caucasian army in exchange for weapons, ammunition, and even cannons, while also requesting permission to resettle in the Caucasus in the event of a military defeat against the Ottomans.³⁰⁴

²⁹⁹ Abdul Hamid II (1842–1918) was the thirty-fourth sultan of the Ottoman Empire, ruling from 1876 to 1909. His reign was marked by authoritarian consolidation following the suspension of the constitution in 1878, alongside continued efforts at administrative centralization and infrastructural modernization. He emphasized Islamism and the caliphal role while relying on extensive surveillance and censorship. His rule coincided with severe violence in the eastern provinces, including massacres against Armenians, and ended with his deposition after the Young Turk Revolution. See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Abdulhamid II,” <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Abdulhamid-II>.

³⁰⁰ Yalçın Çakmak and Tuncay Şur, “Margins of Allegiance and Revolt: Relations between Kurdish Tribes and the State from the Late Ottoman Period to the Early Modern Republic,” *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 16 (2022): 6.

³⁰¹ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2667, ll. 141–146, January 10, 1876.

³⁰² Tibet Abak, “*Kurdskii vopros*” i Rossiia: istoricheskie istoki i realii rubezha XIX–XX vv. (2010), unit 4, 1–6.

³⁰³ Klein, *The margins of empire: Kurdish militias in the Ottoman tribal zone*, 24.

³⁰⁴ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2667, ll. 141–146, January 10, 1876.

Obermiller considered these requests ridiculous and naive as they were well aware of Kurdish practices of shifting allegiances depending on who granted them privileges. In the same year, Ottoman officials were investing considerable sums of money to secure the support of the Kurdish tribes of the Mazgirt and Hozat districts. Nevertheless, local Kurds set fire to Turkish military barracks and a hospital in protest against recruitment. Although Obermiller reported that the Kurdish tribes of Van and Muş were more receptive to the idea of joining the Ottoman army, promising three thousand soldiers in exchange for money, he remained skeptical of Kurdish commitments.³⁰⁵

Such episodes of consular reporting reveal how local Kurdish actors attempted to instrumentalize imperial rivalries. At the same time, Obermiller's skepticism shows the incoherence of Russian frontier diplomacy, that is, while consuls gathered extensive intelligence on Kurdish tribes and at times possibly entertained the idea of cooperation, imperial policy provided no consistent framework for converting such contacts into considerable influence, despite the booming Kurdish studies in Russia. The extent of Russian intent, in the years prior to and immediately following the war, to influence and actively sway Kurdish loyalty in Russia's favor remains an underresearched area of history.

Besides, these reports also highlight the limits of Ottoman state authority in the eastern provinces, which was continually undermined by powerful local magnates who challenged provincial governors and obstructed effective administration. In response, the Ottoman leadership pursued a program of centralization aimed at counterbalancing these competing power centers and extending direct state supervision over frontier populations. These dynamics indicate that the actions of the late nineteenth-century Ottoman state reveal an imperial government increasingly relying on mechanisms characteristic of a modern nation-state, that is, it was seeking to expand its administrative reach and eliminate autonomous tribal zones that might threaten the Sultan's authority.³⁰⁶

The Hamidiye Cavalry and the Politics of Frontier Governance in the Ottoman East

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁶ Klein, *The margins of empire: Kurdish militias in the Ottoman tribal zone*, 23.

Sultan Abdülhamid II devised a system of loyalty to strengthen ties with the unruly Kurdish tribes and make them dependent on his person. Irregular cavalry units were formed, called the Hamidiye, to protect the country against foreign aggression and bolster the Ottomans military might along their borders to counter the adverse developments in the Armenian vilayets, which challenged the Ottoman authorities in governing the region.³⁰⁷ Recent research on the topic suggests that the Hamidiye were formed in Bitlis and Van provinces where the Armenian revolutionary activity was on its peak.³⁰⁸ Hence, it can be argued that the emergence of Armenian revolutionary movements caused such concern for the Sublime Porte that it led to the creation of the Hamidiye in order to keep them in check.³⁰⁹

The Ottoman attempted to expand agriculture and strengthen control by sedentarizing nomadic tribes, including Kurds in the borderland and to do that the state employed both forceful and incentivized methods to settle tribes. Some Kurdish tribes resisted these efforts, particularly the nomadic tribes that were reliant on animal husbandry and trade, as sedentarization threatened their livelihood. To entice these elements into the deal, in return for settling and adopting agriculture, leaders of the resisting tribes gained privileges and official appointments from the state. This strategy helped integrate tribes into the state's administrative and economic framework while reducing resistance to settlement policies. As land became more valuable under agrarian capitalism, the government saw this as a way to increase tax income and expand its administrative power in the borderlands. By reducing nomadism, the state aimed to better monitor its population, boost agricultural productivity, and stabilize its financial situation.³¹⁰

It was perhaps also not a coincidence that the first regiments of Hamidiye were recruited from the areas surrounding Lake Van, which were in close proximity to the Russian border and were also home to the largest Armenian communities. The Ottoman administration viewed the Armenians as potential conspirators who may collaborate with Russia to destabilize the country.³¹¹

³⁰⁷ Jeroen Jongerden, "Elite Encounters of a Violent Kind: Milli İbrahim Paşa, Ziya Gökalp and Political Struggle in Diyarbakır at the Turn of the 20th Century," in *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbakır, 1870–1915*, ed. Joost Jongerden and Jelle Verheij (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 61.

³⁰⁸ Stephan H. Astourian, "On the Genealogy of the Armenian–Turkish Conflict, Sultan Abdülhamid and the Armenian Massacres," in *Collective and State Violence in Turkey: The Construction of a National Identity from Empire to Nation-State*, ed. Stephan Astourian and Raymond Kévorkian (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2020), 28–29, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781789204513-003>.

³⁰⁹ Gözde Yazıcı Cörüt, *Loyalty and Citizenship: Ottoman Perspectives on Its Russian Border Region (1878–1914)* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2021), 26–27.

³¹⁰ Klein, *Margins of Empire*, 134–135.

³¹¹ *Ibid.* 24.

To prevent that, the Hamidiye were often given grazing lands along the Russian border to create a barrier between Russia and the Armenians.³¹² Russian consular sources compared them to their own Cossacks.³¹³ To underpin this argument, which is present in numerous scholarly works, further research needs to be carried out in Russian consular sources that demonstrate and prove Russian intent to influence the Kurdish tribes, an argument already outlined in the previous segment.

However, it could be argued that the notion of a Russian-Armenian conspiracy was merely a product of the Ottoman officials' imagination. While some Armenians indeed saw Russia as a potential ally in their pursuit of autonomy, Armenian revolutionaries at this time largely rejected this idea, particularly due to Russia's persecution of Armenian intellectuals in Transcaucasia and the emerging idea of an independent nation-state. Consequently, Russia strongly opposed revolutionary activity that could threaten social order within and alongside its own borders.

Nevertheless, suspicion of collaboration played a significant role in the establishment of the Hamidiye in 1891. As the Hamidiye expanded, the Armenian revolutionary presence was often exaggerated to secure the Sultan's approval for gradually increasing the size of the cavalry units—ultimately serving broader purposes beyond merely suppressing Armenian activities.³¹⁴ In his report to the Imperial Ambassador in Constantinople, dated February 22, 1891, No. 60. Collegiate Assessor Von Zimmermann at the Russian Erzurum consulate claimed there was a belief in Ottoman administrative circles that they could recruit up to 40 000 men for the Hamidiye.³¹⁵ Zimmermann's figure is valuable less as a precise number than as a performative claim echoed in the vilayet through which Ottoman authorities signaled ambition and deterrence, sought imperial attention and resources, and heightened the perceived urgency of “order” in the Armenian provinces.

Ceremony, Patronage, and Power: Incorporating Tribal Authority into the Ottoman Military Order

Recruitment was the crucial moment in which the Hamidiye project moved from an imperial idea into a functioning frontier institution. It was more than a technical process of raising

³¹² Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 47.

³¹³ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 83–85, February 22, 1891. [See Appendix 17.](#)

³¹⁴ Klein, *Margins of Empire*, 26.

³¹⁵ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 83–85, February 22, 1891.

manpower, it translated tribal authority into Ottoman military service through patronage, ceremony, and negotiated privilege. The Russian consular reports are particularly valuable for reconstructing this process because they do not only list regiments or numbers, but they also describe the performative routines such as summons, receptions, travel, and public display, through which loyalty was produced and displayed. These accounts of their recruitment reveal how Hamidian frontier governance was formally centralized yet practically depended on personal agreements.

The formation of the Hamidiye regiments in the early 1890s in Erzurum was preceded by a sustained recruitment campaign orchestrated through the Fourth Army Corps. Beginning in January, Kurdish tribal leaders (ağas and eşraf, often referred to as *torunlar* in Ottoman usage) from Muş, Bayezid, and other districts of Kurdistan were summoned to Erzurum to discuss Refik İbrahim Paşa's project for organizing a regular cavalry from among the Kurdish tribes. Over the following months, contingents of Kurdish chieftains and their armed escorts, well-mounted, richly attired, and equipped with government-issued rifles, arrived in waves, including members of the Hasenanlı, Cibranlı, Sipkanlı, Zirikli, and Haydaranlı tribes. The provincial governor received them with ceremonial courtesy before dispatching them to Erzincan and, later, to Constantinople to be presented to the Sultan himself. Ottoman authorities, reportedly considering the potential mobilization of up to forty thousand Kurdish and Arab horsemen, used these gestures of imperial favor to secure their loyalty. Among the Kurdish elite, this recruitment drive was reportedly met with enthusiasm and expectations of renewed privileges under the Sultan's patronage.³¹⁶

Over the following months, Kurdish beys (*tribal leaders, notables*) continued to arrive in Erzurum, from where they were dispatched to Erzincan to meet with the müşir. During the month of March, eight toruns of the Zirikli tribe arrived from the Patnos and Tekman districts of the Hınıs kaza; six toruns of the Haydaranlı tribe came from the Hamur district of the Bayezid sancak ; and three toruns of the same tribe arrived from Ardiş and Sarısu in the Van vilayet. Their kinsmen, who had arrived earlier, assembled in Erzincan and subsequently departed for Trabzon, where a special steamer had been dispatched to transport them to Constantinople.³¹⁷

On June 7, 1892, the governor of Erzurum invited the Russian consular corps to attend, in full dress uniform, the distribution of banners to the Hamidiye. The ceremony was conducted by

³¹⁶ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 83–85, February 22, 1891

³¹⁷ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 89–91, March 22, 1891. [See Appendix 18.](#)

the *müşir* of the 4th Corps, and a personal confidant of Abdulhamid II.³¹⁸ This person was Mehmed Zeki Paşa³¹⁹, not only the commander of the Army of Anatolia but also the Hamidiye cavalries were under his authority.³²⁰ He built his own power center by enjoying the trust of the Sultan through his loyalty by emphasizing the imminent danger caused by the perceived Armenian revolutionary attacks.³²¹ His embeddedness in the cultural sphere of Eastern Anatolia, as he was of Circassian origin, made him a favorable candidate for his nearly two-decade long rule in the Eastern vilayets. He was tasked with extending the arms of the state by inducing the Kurdish tribes to surrender men and money.³²²

Before the distribution of the banners, a sultan's decree was read to the regiment, which stated that the sultan had decided to organize a regiment from the nomadic Kurds. According to the *firman* (decree), each regiment was to have 550 riders. The officers and soldiers, during the training period, would receive ¼ of the regular pay, and in wartime, they would receive full pay. The Russian consular reports assumed that in case of necessity the regiments would be issued government-provided rapid-fire weapons, while many of the Kurds had bamboo lances to fight with. On the eighth, 24 banners were distributed; a few days earlier, 18 banners were seen in Van.³²³ In fact, during the distribution in Erzurum, 32 banners were not seen. Normally each regiment was preferably recruited from one tribe and commanded by the chief of the same tribe.³²⁴

The exercises they performed in front of the spectators consisted of folk games, picking up hats from the ground, and dismounting from horses which gave the impression that the training of this army in formations had not yet begun. Only those Kurds who had good horses rode in front of the spectators. Most of them, though, had such animals under them whose ribs were clearly visible,

³¹⁸ Astourian, “Genealogy of the Armenian–Turkish Conflict,” 28.

³¹⁹ Mehmed Zeki Baraz Kolaç Kılıçoğlu (1862–1943), commonly known as Zeki Paşa, was a Circassian-born Ottoman field marshal who served from 1883 to 1923. Closely connected to Sultan Abdul Hamid II through family ties, he commanded the IV Corps and oversaw the Hamidiye cavalry. He was decorated for his role in the 1894 Sasun massacres and later commanded the Vardar Army during the First Balkan War, suffering defeats at Kumanovo and Monastir. During the First World War, he served as Ottoman liaison to Wilhelm II and led the Ottoman delegation in the armistice negotiations with Russia in December 1917. He later served as Ottoman chief of the general staff (1920–1922) and retired in 1923, spending his final years in Istanbul. See Yılmaz, *Internal Colonization, Political Geography and Security in the Ottoman Eastern Provinces*, 4.

³²⁰ Yılmaz, *Internal colonization, political geography and security in the Ottoman Eastern Provinces*, 4. / See also: AVPRI f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, l. 148, June 13, 1892. [See Appendix 19.](#)

³²¹ Yılmaz, *Internal colonization, political geography and security in the Ottoman Eastern Provinces*, 181–194.

³²² Klein, *The margins of empire*, 27.

³²³ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, l. 148, June 13, 1892.

³²⁴ Metin Atmaca, “Three Stages of Political Transformation in the 19th Century Ottoman Kurdistan,” *Anatoli. De l’Adriatique à la Caspienne. Territoires, Politique, Sociétés* 8 (2017): 54.

according to the description of the Russian consul. Although each contingent sent only 50 to 80 fighters, many of whom arrived in their national attire, which were not particularly new. According to Zeki Paşa, in Erzincan, they had uniforms for all the soldiers, consisting of a short gray coat with *payuns* (decorations).³²⁵ British accounts also reinforce the poor state of the Hamidiye, adding there were large numbers of elderly and very young men in their ranks.³²⁶

These carefully staged journeys, from Erzurum to Erzincan, through Trabzon to Constantinople, can be understood as rituals of incorporation through which tribal authority was translated into imperial authority. Movement through successive administrative and symbolic centers was itself a political process, embedding Kurdish notables within hierarchies of Ottoman power and authority. The material components of these journeys such as official escorts, prescribed attire, the public display of rifles, ceremonial receptions, and the orchestration of travel logistics constituted a performative act through which loyalty was negotiated, displayed, and eventually secured.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Consul Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov³²⁷ dismissed the military value of the Hamidiye and perceived their recruitment more as a performative act:

“As a fighting force, it cannot, in my opinion, constitute a serious threat to our Caucasian heroes (i.e. Russian imperial troops from the Caucasus), for its character will, I am convinced, remain the same as that displayed by the mounted Kurdish başıbozüks (irregular auxiliary troops, literally ‘unruly heads’) during the last war.

*The Porte appears to have sought, in peacetime, to ascertain their numbers. In this circumstance, in my view, the true reason for the formation of the Hamidiye cavalry is most clearly revealed—particularly since the introduction of a uniform and standardized dress was intended to free the Kurdish horsemen from the designation “başıbozuk” and to grant them, in place of a robber-like appearance, a more respectable and officially sanctioned one.”*³²⁸

As seen above, he framed the Hamidiye project as aimed at standardizing Kurdish military capacities and, through that, the possibility of removing the widespread perception of them as robbers, as they were widely known for their violent actions against the local population.

³²⁵ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, l. 148, June 13, 1892.

³²⁶ Brad Dennis, *Kurdish-Armenian Relations in the Late Ottoman Empire: Power Structures and Interactive Behavior* (PhD diss., University of Utah, 2008), 99.

³²⁷ Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov (1852–1915) was a Russian diplomat who served for nearly twenty-five years at the Russian embassy in Constantinople as dragoman. He later held senior posts as agent and consul general in Egypt (1902–1905), minister-resident in Montenegro (1905–1909), and envoy to Brazil (1909–1915). See “Maximov, P. V.,” <http://www.rusdiplomats.narod.ru/maximov-pv.html>.

³²⁸ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 100–102, November 2, 1891. [See Appendix 20.](#)

Delegated Coercion: Hamidiye Violence and the Limits of Ottoman Authority

As the Hamidiye operated under a tribal system, each regiment led by a tribal leader who received military ranks and privileges. In return, the tribes received financial benefits, weapons, uniforms, and tax exemptions, which were instrumental in persuading nomadic Kurds to join the ranks of the Hamidiye. This political arrangement between the state and its nomadic population reinforced tribal authority and made the Hamidiye feel entitled to dominate non-enlisted ones, particularly non-tribal peasants and Christian communities, thus Armenians.³²⁹

Violence was not a by-product of the Hamidiye system but one of its central operating mechanisms, resulting from the center's delegation of authority to tribal intermediaries combined with weak oversight and selective enforcement. In this respect, Russian reports are especially valuable for understanding how vilayet authorities sought to regulate, or how unable they were to contain, Kurdish violence in Erzurum, which contributes to existing scholarship by adding individual cases from Erzurum, while also showing that consular observers interpreted the worsening of Armenian conditions as a catalyst for intensified Armenian revolutionary activity.

The creation of these regiments also resulted in the rise of agrarian capitalism as tribal leaders were transformed into landowners and took over valuable pasturelands and integrating into the expanding market economy. This shift further destabilized the region by intensifying disputes over land and resources. Although the Hamidiye reinforced Kurdish tribalism, it also undermined traditional Kurdish emirates and led to long-term changes in tribal leadership and land ownership. Their power and autonomy provoked resentment from Ottoman army officers and bureaucrats, as tribal commanders often refused to obey government officials, strengthening Kurdish influence within the Empire.³³⁰

As discussed before, although some tribes were willing to join the Hamidiye, the Ottomans were far from being successful in subjugating all the local Kurdish power centers. The Russian consul of Erzurum, Demerik reported in 1901 that an Ottoman military campaign that attempted to subdue the tribes that had not been included in the Hamidiye was entirely unsuccessful despite the

³²⁹ Michael Eppel, *A People without a State: The Kurds from the Rise of Islam to the Dawn of Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 80–83.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 80–83.

participation of a significant number of Ottoman soldiers. These military ventures to extend state control over the western provinces caused widespread suffering for the local population, for Christian and Muslim, respectively. Making no difference between robbers and regular villagers, the Ottoman army targeted any settlements where they had suspected the presence of criminals. As the consul put it, “*it was only the peaceful local population who paid the price instead of those robbers who were sought by the Ottoman army.*”³³¹ Demerik’s report exposes the limits of Ottoman military campaigns to control the very Hamidiye units created by the state.

The authorities also often turned a blind eye to the marauding, while bandits, such as Ali Riza agha, who was also major in the Hamidian cavalry, was still a free man despite being accused of murdering Armenians and plundering a settlement.³³² The continued impunity of Hamidiye figures reveals a system of selective enforcement in which state-sanctioned intermediaries were shielded from accountability.

The following episodes reveal recurring patterns: the targeting of both civilians and officials, the combination of material extraction with symbolic domination, and the consistent failure or refusal of provincial authorities to intervene. Together, they show how the Hamidiye system turned coercion into a routine tool of frontier governance and how personalized power protected perpetrators from accountability.

“The village of Kara-Choban in the Hınıs district was attacked by 200 Hamidiye horsemen of the Hasaranlı tribe with the intent of kidnapping the daughters of the village elder, Kiragos Kehya, and seizing the village’s livestock, taking away 90 sheep and goats and 350 oxen and cows. In the ensuing skirmish, two women, four children, and ten adult Armenians were killed.

*The Kurds also do not spare the Ottoman public debt administration. The crimes committed by the Hamidiye Kurds against Muslims prompted a telegram from Erzurum residents to His Majesty the Sultan. As a result, Haidar Paşa, the governor of Erzurum, was queried. Fearing a confrontation with the müşir of the 4th Corps, Zeki Paşa, he referred the telegram to the local administrative council. The council, not wanting to take responsibility for condemning the well-known attacks by the Hamidiye Kurds, decided to pass the case to the head of the gendarmerie in Erzurum, who just last year was on trial in Erzincan for killing a Kurdish bandit during an investigation.”*³³³

The attack on Kara-Choban is an example of Hamidiye violence as both economic and symbolic domination. The scale of the raid and the targeting of the village elder’s family indicate organized action aimed at subordinating local authority, while the killing of women and children suggests that terror itself was a goal of governance. The second case exposes the erosion of provincial authority vis-à-vis the center and its intermediaries. The governor’s reluctance to act,

³³¹ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2669, l. 12, June 23, 1901.

³³² AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2669, l. 15, August 1, 1901.

³³³ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 183–186, July 31, 1893. [See Appendix 21.](#)

stemming from his fear of confronting Mehmed Zeki Paşa, resulted in the deliberate deflection of responsibility across administrative bodies. Not only that, the local vali's reluctance and outright denial of growing aggression against Christians is evidently shown by the Russian reports.³³⁴

*“Near Kemah, the kaymakam (district governor) Akif Bey, travelling from Erzincan to Harput in order to collect funds, was stopped by Hamidiye Kurds. He was only able to continue his journey after paying three liras (Ottoman gold lira) for himself and his accompanying kâtip (secretary, clerk), and two meçidiye (silver Meçidiye coins) for each of the twenty-four soldiers accompanying him. Among the officers charged with approving weapons taken from Kurds in the Bayezid sancak was mülâzım (lieutenant) Şevki Efendi, who, while returning with his family from Alaşkert to Erzurum, was stripped of all his belongings by Hamidiye Kurds. The Kurdish perpetrators told him that he could report in Erzurum that he had been robbed by Hamidiye soldiers, and that they had treated him in this way because of the excessive diligence with which he had carried out the orders of his superiors. Despite these events, the müşir (field marshal / corps commander) of the 4th Army Corps continues to protect the Kurds and has reportedly recently formed a new Hamidiye regiment.”*³³⁵

Incidents such as the above underline the reversal of authority created by the Hamidiye system. The extortion of a *kaymakam* and the robbery of a commissioned officer enforcing state regulations show that Hamidiye units operated above both civil and military law. Particularly telling is the message sent to the mülâzım, Şevki Efendi: carrying out official orders made him a target. Zeki Paşa's protection of the perpetrators and his authorization of new regiments further show that impunity was built into the system.

The continuity of violence is demonstrated in a report as Nikolai Aleksandrovich Scriabin³³⁶, the Russian consul in Erzurum put it in 1909, “*masses of Armenians grew up being harassed by Kurdish tribes*”, which resulted in widespread dissatisfaction within an increasing number of Armenians.³³⁷ Scriabin also reported on the formation of the so-called *cambezar* units which were composed largely of destitute individuals and vagabonds recruited to compensate for the Ottoman state's inability to enforce authority through the Hamidiye system. These units received a modest monthly salary, along with allowances for the purchase of horses, and were tasked with collecting

³³⁴ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 92–95, June 14, 1891. [See Appendix 22.](#)

³³⁵ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 196–199, October 14, 1893. [See Appendix 23.](#)

³³⁶ Nikolai Aleksandrovich Scriabin (1849–1914/15) was a Russian diplomat and the father of the composer Alexander Scriabin. Educated at the 4th Moscow Gymnasium and the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages, he entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1878 and served in the Ottoman Empire as vice consul in Bitola (1883–1889), consul in Ioannina (1889–1898), and consul in Adrianople (Edirne). By imperial order of April 6, 1902, he was appointed general consul in Erzurum, arriving in September 1902; his tenure is generally dated from 1904. He was removed from the post in 1909 due to illness and in 1911 was appointed non-staff consul in Lausanne, where he died in late 1914. See B. Morozov, *Dvoryanskii rod Skriabinykh v XV–XIX vv. O rode kompozitora A. N. Skriabina; Moskovskoe dvorianstvo: Alfavitnyi spisok dvorianskikh rodov* (Moscow: Tip. L. V. Pozhidaevoi, 1910), 403; and Vladimir Popkov and Aleksandr Skriabin, “Nikolai Aleksandrovich Skriabin — otets geniya,” <https://muzeomania.ru/2021/10/29/nikolaj-skryabin/>.

³³⁷ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2672, ll. 4–5, January 9, 1909.

taxes and debts. Although they succeeded in extracting significant money from the Hamidiye Kurds, attempts to enforce payment by force provoked resistance, resulting in the killing of many *cambezar* members. As Scriabin noted, the lack of adequate financial and food supplies greatly limited the efforts of the vilayet authorities.³³⁸ This is to show that the Ottoman authorities were clearly unable to take control of the Hamidiye.

Since the very establishment of the Hamidiye, Russian reports described the worsening of security in the Erzurum province following Ottoman orders to send prominent Kurdish tribal leaders and their escorts to Constantinople to be presented to the Sultan. The Kurds interpreted this gesture as a sign of imperial favor and were pleased with the new arrangements as they expected the confirmation or expansion of their privileges. Instead of encouraging restraint, this policy had reinforced their sense of complete impunity. According to the Russian consular reports, Kurdish leaders openly threatened Armenians communities and they declared their readiness to massacre them at the slightest pretext. In the meanwhile, hostility toward Christians was repeatedly reignited by persistent rumors that Armenian revolutionary brigades had assembled in Persia and planned to attack Ottoman border villages to retaliate for the violence committed against their co-religionists. These rumors fueled the anger of the Muslim population and encouraged violence against Armenians.³³⁹

The unchecked violence certainly gave a new impetus for those willing to fight. Another Russian report shows the escalation of Ottoman arrests of Armenians as a result of spreading rumors that Russian protection had been promised to them through a secret document allegedly originating from Muş. Although Armenians destroyed most of the document before their arrest, fragments and testimony convinced authorities of its existence. In total, 70 Armenians were detained, including individuals accused of distributing arms. Prisoners were transported from Muş to Erzurum under heavy escort by soldiers and armed Kurds, a display that again rekindled anti-Armenian hostility among the local Muslim population. By late March, successive groups of detainees arrived in Erzurum. Among the prisoners was a Russian subject, as well as an archimandrite and a priest.³⁴⁰ These arrests exemplify a recurring pattern: the lawlessness generated by tolerated Kurdish violence was answered not with disciplining overpowered intermediaries, but

³³⁸ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2672, ll. 8–10, January 21, 1904.

³³⁹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 83–85, February 22, 1891.

³⁴⁰ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 134–135, March 28, 1892. [See Appendix 24.](#)

through punitive measures directed at Armenians who were hoping for protection from external forces.

The creation of the Hamidiye intensified both physical violence and hostile attitudes toward Armenians. These actions were both driven and exacerbated by perceptions of Armenian revolutionary intent and presumed collaboration with Russia. The archival records reveal a direct link between centrally encouraged violence and the inability of borderland authorities to restrain it. This dynamic stimulated Armenian revolutionary activity, which in turn deepened Muslim resentment against the local Armenian population, who were often not even involved in revolutionary activity. Rather than stabilizing the frontier, the Sultan's policies produced a cycle of impunity, suspicion, and coercion that undermined the possibility of peaceful coexistence and that, in the 1890s, resulted in widespread massacres throughout the Armenian-populated vilayets.

The Hamidian Massacres: Violence and Crisis in the Ottoman Borderlands

The Sasun Massacre: Tax Resistance, Tribal Power, and State Violence

The unfolding massacres in the 1890s in the Armenian vilayets have often been explained by state-centered narratives, which have tended to attribute the atrocities primarily to the characteristic policies of Abdülhamid II, that is, the activities of the Hamidiye regiments. While this is true, a closer examination of the specific local contexts is required to develop a deeper understanding. The diversity of perpetrators and root causes suggest that these incidents varied considerably.³⁴¹

For example, by the 1890s, intensified centralization efforts in regions like Sasun (Bitlis vilayet) deployed Kurdish tribes as auxiliaries to suppress local autonomy which disrupted traditional arrangements and fueled violence between Kurdish pastoralists and Armenian villagers. Consequently, Armenian grievances grew due to violence exercised by local warlords and local

³⁴¹ Mehmet Polatel, "The Armenian Massacre of 1895 in Bitlis Town," *Kurdish Studies* 9, no. 1 (2021): 59–76, 60.

corruption which led to protests.³⁴² Even elsewhere in the eastern borderlands, Kurdish tribes were harassing the civilian population, as the establishment of the Hamidiye emboldened them to feel more confident in their actions, bolstered by the perception of government sanction.³⁴³ This escalation of violence culminated in the 1894 massacres in Sasun, resulting in the death of between 5000 and 12 000 Armenians only there.³⁴⁴ However, mass violence starting from 1894 in the Ottoman Empire resulted in the deaths of around 100,000 Armenians by 1897, and simultaneously caused widespread displacement.

In his report, Consul Maximov emphasized that the massacres in Sasun in 1894 were preceded by mounting violence in 1893 across the Alaşkert, Pasinler, and Hınıs *kazas*, alongside reports circulating in Erzurum that Armenians and Kurds had killed Ottoman soldiers. The immediate trigger, however, came when the villagers of Talori refused to pay state taxes unless they were protected from Kurdish chieftains who were illegally extracting tribute.³⁴⁵

Maximov also highlighted the quasi-feudal relations binding Sasun Armenians not only to local Kurdish chiefs but also to the Diyarbakir Kurds who arrived during their summer migrations, subjecting the population to constant harassment. For that reason, he concluded that the Armenian response was spontaneous rather than premeditated. However, he also acknowledged that “*among the so-called educated Armenian youth there are hotheads*” advocating liberation, influenced by the Armenian Catholic school teacher Damadian³⁴⁶, who encouraged villagers to refuse Ottoman taxes on the grounds that they had already paid tribute to the Kurds.³⁴⁷ Notably, in Maximov’s assessment, it was not merely the presence of revolutionary leaders which caused an organized revolt in Sasun; instead, resistance emerged as a response to growing pressure, insecurity, and the collapse of everyday order in the region. This is an important contribution of the Russian sources,

³⁴² Owen Miller, “Rethinking the Violence in the Sasun Mountains (1893–1894),” *Études arméniennes contemporaines* 10 (2018): para. 15, <https://doi.org/10.4000/eac.1556>.

³⁴³ Ronald G. Suny, “The Hamidian Massacres, 1894–1897: Disinterring a Buried History,” *Études arméniennes contemporaines* 11 (2018): para. 9, <https://doi.org/10.4000/eac.1847>.

³⁴⁴ Diana Papoyan, “The Armenian Question in the 1890s and Russian Politics,” *Annual of Assen Zlatarov University Burgas, Bulgaria* 48, no. 2 (2019): 19.

³⁴⁵ Tigran Martirosyan, “The 1894 Sasun Massacre: Revisiting the Number of Victims,” *Études arméniennes contemporaines* 14 (2022): 7–53, <https://doi.org/10.4000/eac.2789>.

³⁴⁶ Mihran Damadian (1863–1945) was an Armenian educator and political activist associated with the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party and later the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party. He participated in revolutionary activity in Sasun and later played a diplomatic role advocating Armenian autonomy in Cilicia, where he declared its short-lived independence under French protection in 1920. See Richard G. Hovannisian and Simon Payaslian, *Armenian Cilicia* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2008), 483.

³⁴⁷ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, 17 December 1893, ll. 201–203.

as it allows for a more grounded assessment of actual revolutionary influence in the borderlands. Especially in view that the Sasun massacre is often seen as a Hnchak incited revolt.³⁴⁸

In the aftermath of the brutal suppression of Armenian resistance, an Investigation Commission was set up, an Ottoman-appointed body created in response to British pressure to examine the 1894 Sasun Massacre, with British, French, and Russian consuls attached only as observers. Its fundamental problem was that it was designed not to uncover the truth but to protect the Ottoman government from blame.³⁴⁹ Maximov claimed the great powers had misunderstandings about the purpose of the commission. Reportedly, the French delegates refused to gather or transmit information obtained outside formal sessions of the commission. By contrast, the Russian and British consuls insisted that the commission's mandate explicitly required delegates to seek out and supply all relevant information to ensure a genuine inquiry.³⁵⁰ The Russian consulate also reported that the work of the Ottoman investigative commission in Sasun was marked by systematic obstruction and bias, including testimonies implicating soldiers or Kurdish tribes were curtailed, confused, or punished, and several Armenians retracted statements after a single night in custody, fearing they would be killed. Armenian witnesses were often deported, intimidated, or placed under police supervision, while most witnesses were hand-picked by local authorities and repeated identical, prefabricated accounts supporting the official state narrative, that is, Sasun was a rebellion.³⁵¹

Maximov argued that the investigation directed its efforts toward depicting the Armenians as the aggressors and portraying the resistance as the work of an Armenian called Murad³⁵², whose alleged incitement formed the basis of the official narrative, which advanced two opposing versions: an Ottoman account blaming Armenian brigandage and Murad's revolutionary

³⁴⁸ Ahmet Seyhun, "A Last Attempt to Solve the Armenian Question: The Reform of 1914," in *War and Collapse: World War I and the Ottoman State*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and Feroz Ahmad (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 660, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.33676816.31>

³⁴⁹ Mehmet Polatel, "The Complete Ruin of a District: The Sasun Massacre of 1894," in *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century: Societies, Identities and Politics*, ed. [Editor First Name Last Name] ([City]: [Publisher], 2016), 188–190.

³⁵⁰ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 3–5, January 7, 1895. [See Appendix 25.](#)

³⁵¹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 55–58, March 20, 1895. [See Appendix 26.](#)

³⁵² Hampartsoum Boyadjian (Medzn Murad) (1860–1915) was an Armenian *fedayi* commander and leading activist of the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party. He played a central role in the 1894 Sasun resistance, later served on the party's central committee, and was elected to the Ottoman parliament in 1908 as deputy for Kozan. Arrested during the initial wave of repression on April 24, 1915, he was executed in Kayseri later that year. See Raymond H. Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 32; and Dikran Mesrob Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule: 1908–1914* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 16.

propaganda, and an Armenian account describing sudden attacks, village burnings, and mass killings committed jointly by soldiers and Kurdish tribes. However, the Russian consul believed these narratives never fully captured the complexity of events. He put forward that the long-standing Kurdish–Armenian tensions, Murad’s local activities, and the intervention of Kurdish notables aligned with Ottoman officials escalated the situation into armed conflict, after which the destruction of villages, the killing of civilians, and mass displacement occurred on a scale the Commission made no real effort to examine.³⁵³ The Commission declared the events of Sasun essentially “clarified,” even though fundamental issues, such as the killing of women, children, and surrendering villagers, were never investigated.³⁵⁴

By late 1894, British diplomats had compiled detailed reports on the Sasun massacre to shed light on the conflicts between Kurdish pastoralists and Armenian peasants. The reform plan of 1895 May acknowledged the massacre and pointed out the Ottoman officials’ involvement in protecting its perpetrators. As a result, diplomatic tensions over the issue of Armenian reforms increased as the Great Powers demanded reform which proposed limited administrative, judicial, and security reforms in Armenian-populated Ottoman provinces, under European supervision but Ottoman sovereignty, which increased the pressure on the Ottoman government.³⁵⁵

Despite being critical of the investigation committee for producing a prefabricated account of the massacre in Sasun, Russia’s role, similarly to that of Britain and France, was non-interventionist, acting as a constraint on any effective European common response to the Sasun massacres and the wider Armenian crisis of 1894–1896. This stance stemmed from a borderland security logic shaped by fears for imperial stability in the Caucasus, and it insisted that unrest in eastern Anatolia be addressed within the framework of Ottoman sovereignty. Russian policymakers also rejected reform proposals that risked creating an Armenian administrative unit, viewing such arrangements as a direct threat to frontier stability that could attract Armenian populations from

³⁵³ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 61–64, April 15, 1895. [See Appendix 27.](#)

³⁵⁴ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 55–58, March 20, 1895.

³⁵⁵ T. Altıntaş, “The Abode of Sedition: Resistance, Repression and Revolution in Sasun, 1891–1904,” in *Age of Rogues: Rebels, Revolutionaries and Racketeers at the Frontiers of Empires*, ed. Ramazan Hakkı Öztan and Alp Yenen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 194, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474462648-010>.

Russian Transcaucasia.³⁵⁶ In this sense, Russia treated violence in Sasun not as a trigger for intervention but as a destabilizing borderland problem to be contained.

Consequently, the Hnchakian Party organized a demonstration in Istanbul in late September to protest the lack of progress in the Armenian reform initiatives, resulting in violent clashes that caused the death of several revolutionaries and policemen. In October, Abdülhamid II announced his intent to implement reforms, which triggered a wave of anti-Armenian violence across the empire.³⁵⁷

The Erzurum Massacres of 1895: A Consular Reconstruction

Scholarly interpretations of the Hamidian massacres have emphasized that the violence of autumn 1895 differed fundamentally from that of 1896–1897, insofar as it unfolded through a chain of interconnected episodes affecting both urban and rural Armenian populations, with outbreaks in one locality often causing violence in another.³⁵⁸ Owing to the increasing number of scholarly works on individual massacres, there is a better understanding of multicausality regarding the outbreak of massacres. For instance, the Harput massacre began on November 11, 1895, when thousands of Kurdish tribesmen from the Dersim region, surrounded and entered the city after they had attacked surrounding Armenian villages. Ottoman soldiers showed minimal resistance to protect the city, and the Kurds, joined by some local Muslims, plundered and destroyed Armenian neighborhoods.³⁵⁹ The Sivas massacres were rather a case of an urban riot, a pogrom, initiated by Muslims fearful that Armenians were gaining advantages and power from the European-imposed reforms.³⁶⁰ In Bitlis, there is evidence suggesting that the massacres were initiated by local Muslim religious and urban notables, who incited the local Muslim inhabitants, accompanied by Hamidian and non-Hamidian tribes, to engage in killing and looting across the province.³⁶¹

³⁵⁶ Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 191–202.

³⁵⁷ Altıntaş, “Abode of Sedition,” 194.

³⁵⁸ Polatel, “*The Armenian Massacre of 1895 in Bitlis Town*,” 60.

³⁵⁹ Ali Sipahi, “Narrative Construction in the 1895 Massacres in Harput: The Coming and Disappearance of the Kurds,” *Études arméniennes contemporaines* 10 (2018): paras. 26–32.

³⁶⁰ Jelle Verheij, “The Year of the Firman: The 1895 Massacres in Hizan and Şirvan (Bitlis Vilayet),” *Études arméniennes contemporaines* 10 (2018): 125–159, <https://doi.org/10.4000/eac.1495>.

³⁶¹ Polatel, “Armenian Massacre of 1895 in Bitlis Town,” 63–64.

Unlike other provincial centers in the borderlands, there is no single scholarly work that has attempted to reconstruct what happened in Erzurum in the autumn of 1895. This lack of narrative makes Russian consular reports especially important. These sources record perceptions, rumors, administrative responses, and later justifications. Where available, it is therefore essential to compare Russian reports with other foreign consular observations in the scholarly literature, to ascertain a comprehensive picture of the massacre.

The months leading up to the massacre in Erzurum were already plagued by violence. On the evening of 1895 September 23rd, around 6:00 PM, two Armenians in Erzurum, lawyer Harutyun Ter Serkisyan and merchant Simon Bouyan, were fatally stabbed while returning home. Rumors suggested a political motive, as Serkisyan was known for defending Turks at court, and Bouyan was believed to be a witness who could identify the killers.³⁶² According to vali Rauf Paşa³⁶³, however, the perpetrators had come from Alexandropol (*today's Gyumri*), Russia, a town he portrayed as a center of Armenian revolutionary propaganda. Among them, he claimed, was the Russian subject known as “Jellad”, meaning “executioner.”³⁶⁴ Murders like this was a common practice for both the Hnchak and the Dashnaktsutun. They killed murdered collaborators, people they thought were spies or even priests and required wealthy Armenians to contribute to their efforts.³⁶⁵ In this regard, such actions indicate the presence of Armenian revolutionary groups without providing evidence of a broader Armenian resort to violence, highlighting the gap between revolutionary activity and communal behavior.

In this heightened atmosphere, Maximov reported that the Turkish/Muslim population was arming itself, and Armenians also possessed numerous rifles and revolvers.³⁶⁶ The emergence of paramilitary societies was a tendency observed by British observers too in other cities, such as Bitlis.³⁶⁷ The local authorities, however, promised to maintain law and order, even with military

³⁶² AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 116–118, September 29, 1895. [See Appendix 28.](#)

³⁶³ Mehmed Şerif Rauf Paşa (1838–1923) was an Ottoman statesman, senator, and liberal reformer associated with the Freedom and Accord Party and the constitutional movement of the late nineteenth century. He served as governor of Jerusalem (1877–1889), Beirut (1889), Erzurum (1895–1901), and Salonica (1904–1908), where he implemented administrative reforms, expanded infrastructure, and strengthened provincial governance. See Vincent Lemire, *Jerusalem 1900: The Holy City in the Age of Possibilities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 86, 93.

³⁶⁴ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 73–75, November 16, 1896. [See Appendix 29.](#)

³⁶⁵ Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else*, 142.

³⁶⁶ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 116–118, September 29, 1895.

³⁶⁷ Polatel, “*Armenian Massacre of 1895 in Bitlis Town*,” 63–64.

intervention if necessary.³⁶⁸ Similarly, the British consul in Erzurum also reported that the Ottoman civilian and military authorities in Erzurum were actively preparing to crush any disturbance because of the exaggerated fears of an imminent Armenian revolutionary attack.³⁶⁹ Taken together, these dynamics suggest that the period before the massacre did not simply see rising tension, but actively shaped how both authorities and local society came to view rumor, armament, and preventive repression as legitimate responses, thereby lowering the threshold for large-scale violence.

On October 9th, chaos erupted at Erzurum's weekly Monday market, a bustling event visited by many Muslim peasants from nearby villages. In the grain section, an Armenian man reportedly approached a respected Muslim elder, Salih Effendi, and shot him at close range, according to Ottoman accounts. Salih Effendi's followers retaliated on the spot, using sticks, knives, and other improvised weapons to kill the Armenian attacker. Simultaneously, violence broke out in another part of the market when another Armenian allegedly shot Halil Effendi, igniting widespread unrest. The situation escalated rapidly and was only brought under control through the intervention of police and troops under the command of Zeki Paşa, commander of the 4th Ottoman Army Regiment. Official Ottoman records documented 48 Armenians and 14 Muslims killed, while Armenian sources reported higher casualties: 60 Armenians and 15 Muslims dead. According to Maximov, the Ottoman authorities credited Zeki Paşa's swift decision to surround the Armenian quarter with preventing further Muslim casualties.³⁷⁰

In the days leading up to the atrocities in Erzurum, neighboring cities had already experienced massacres. According to reports from Mehmed Şakir Paşa³⁷¹, as cited by Maximov on October 15th, in Bayburt, along the Trabzon Road, 150 Armenians were killed by local Muslims and Lazes.³⁷² Additionally, most Armenian villages in the Bayburt district were plundered by

³⁶⁸ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 116–118, September 29, 1895.

³⁶⁹ Edip Gölbaşı, *The Anti-Armenian Riots of 1895–1897: The “Climate of Violence” and Intercommunal Conflict in Istanbul and the Eastern Anatolian Provinces of the Ottoman Empire* (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2018), 89.

³⁷⁰ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 125–126. October 14, 1895. [See Appendix 30.](#)

³⁷¹ *Kabağaçlızâde Mehmed Şakir Paşa (1855–1914)*: Ottoman general inspector appointed by Abdülhamid II to implement the 1895 Anatolian Reform Program, including in Erzurum. A senior statesman and former governor of Crete and ambassador to Athens, he oversaw administrative, fiscal, and security reforms.

³⁷² The Laz were a Caucasian-speaking Muslim population of the southeastern Black Sea coast (Lazistan) between Trabzon and Batumi. Following Russian expansion in the late nineteenth century, many resettled in Ottoman territory and developed strong ties to the Ottoman state. Along key frontier routes such as Trabzon–Erzurum, Laz auxiliaries, escorts, and irregulars participated in frontier violence and banditry, sometimes targeting Armenian and other Christian populations. See Zeki Sarigil, “Ethnic Groups at ‘Critical Junctures’: The Laz vs. Kurds,” *Middle*

Lazes. A subsequent report dated October 16th indicated that in the city of Bitlis, 120 to 130 Armenians were killed, and 20 were wounded during the atrocities on October 13th. Turkish casualties only in Bitlis reached 39 dead, with 130 to 140 wounded.³⁷³

On October 18th, at 9 a.m., Russian Consul Maximov visited Erzurum's governor Rauf Paşa and Şakir Paşa to address widespread rumors among Turks about the killing of Armenians in Tekman, Erzincan and Bayburt. He urged them to counter the belief that Armenians could be killed and robbed without consequences, as there was a belief that the authorities would not protect the Armenians.³⁷⁴ Similar news were reported by the vali of Ezurum as well to Istanbul. He wrote in his reports that Muslim seasonal migrant workers were convinced the latest massacres were approved by the government.³⁷⁵ Maximov suggested that Rauf and Şakir publicly refute these rumors in the mosque, and they reportedly agreed. However, soon after Maximov's return to the Russian consulate, massacres of Armenians began in the city.³⁷⁶

Allegedly, the general Muslim population, including the governor, blamed Armenians as instigators of the violence. Şakir Paşa went further, accusing the local Armenian Gregorian Archbishop Shishmanian³⁷⁷ of signaling the killings by instructing Armenians to lock their shops. However, according to Şakir, Armenians initiated the violence prematurely, leaving their shops open. Russian reports suggested the violence was triggered by an Armenian individual who murdered an official in Erzurum's sarai (court). The gendarmes shot the suspect while trying to escape, and killed five other Armenians in the sarai corridors, including a priest. The suspect, who allegedly attempted to kill other Ottoman officials too, prevented further investigation into the reasons behind the Armenian actions in the court.³⁷⁸

Simultaneously with the events at the sarai, looting and killings began in nearby shops, perpetrated by both local residents and Turks and Kurds from nearby villages. Maximov claimed he had informed the authorities that the influx of Muslim peasants in Erzurum could exacerbate

Eastern Studies 48, no. 2 (2012): 269–86; Ryan Gingeras, “Beyond Istanbul’s ‘Laz Underworld,’” *Contemporary European History* 19, no. 3 (2010): 215–30.

³⁷³ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 128–133, October 21, 1895. [See Appendix 31.](#)

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁵ Gölbaşı, *The Anti-Armenian Riots of 1895–1897*, 91.

³⁷⁶ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 128–133, October 21, 1895.

³⁷⁷ Archbishop Ghevont Shishmanian (d. 1917) was an Armenian cleric accused of aiding revolutionaries who was exiled to Jerusalem, from where he escaped to the Caucasus and settled in Kars. See Hratch A. Tarbassian, *Erzurum (Garin): Its Armenian History and Traditions*, trans. Nigol Schahgaldian (n.p.: The Garin Compatriotic Union of the United States, 1975), 53.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

social tensions, still, no measures were taken against them, leaving the authorities powerless to prevent the massacre. He also blamed the authorities for not monitoring resident sentiments among the Muslims despite possessing the capabilities of their secret police. The soldiers sent to put an end to the atrocities allegedly took part in the looting too and even shot unarmed Armenians attempting to escape the violence. The looting of houses and the murder of several women and children on the night of the 19th and 20th were also attributed to soldiers. Maximov consul was dissatisfied with the soldiers assigned to guard the Russian Consulate too, adding the Italian consul, Monsco appeared to have refused the services of Ottoman soldiers after witnessing soldiers tearing silk veils from Armenian women.³⁷⁹

During the massacre on 18th October, it was reported that many Armenians sought refuge in basements. There were instances of extortion by Turks who demanded money and valuables in exchange for sheltering Armenian families. It is also noted that some Turkish women participated in the looting alongside men, taking everything, they could find, including flour, coal, and groceries.³⁸⁰ During the massacres of October–November 1895, churches and monasteries across the Erzurum vilayet were systematically targeted: many were stripped of their icons, some village churches were converted into mosques, and dozens of religious buildings in Erzincan and Kiğı were looted or destroyed.³⁸¹

It was not only the city Erzurum itself which suffered, disturbances broke out in the provinces too. On the Erzurum plain (Ova), Laz bands plundered twelve Armenian villages, while in the Pasinler area nine densely populated villages were looted by Kurdish groups. In Bayburt only, initial official figures reported 150 Armenian deaths, but later information suggested up to 400 local Armenians and some 250 temporary residents, while as many as 700 Christians were reportedly killed across 167 villages of the district. Reports also described women throwing themselves into wells to escape violence.³⁸²

Drawing on the Russian consular reports, it appears that episodes of Armenian revolutionary–induced violence preceded the outbreak of the massacres in Erzurum. It is important to highlight, however, that the targeted killings of Muslim notables and Ottoman dignitaries suggest

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 144–146, November 4, 1895. [See Appendix 32.](#)

³⁸¹ Seda A. Parsamyan, “Mass Destruction of Armenian Cultural Heritage during the Hamidian Massacres (1894–1896),” *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 8, no. 2 (2023): 16, 24.

³⁸² AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 148–152, November 18, 1895. [See Appendix 33.](#)

acts of retaliation as a result of severe security issues in the borderland. To further elucidate certain aspects and the nature of the massacres, responses from foreign representatives as well as the local population are required to be analyzed in the aftermath.

The Aftermath: Humanitarian Crisis and Imperial Responses

The consular reports also depict a devastating aftermath of the massacres. Maximov describes the situation as follows:

“(...) At the Armenian cemetery, where I could go on the 20th of October, I witnessed no fewer than 220 corpses, including bodies with skulls split by axes, eyes gouged out, and ribs exposed. Among the dead was a boy of about twelve, shot through, and an eight-month-old baby. Many were killed by bullets. (...)”³⁸³

According to Maximov, Şakir pasha acknowledged the looting by soldiers, stating that about two dozen were arrested and would be tried. Despite the atrocities committed by soldiers, the Russian consul took account of the individuals among the Muslims of Erzurum who opposed the massacres. One such person requested the vali to provide guards for Armenian property worth 2000 liras, which he had been personally safeguarding. Moreover, Maximov reported that some sheltered wounded or homeless Armenians. On the 20th, the city council began distributing bread to Armenians in need. According to the reports, 85 wounded Armenians, of whom 7 died on October 20th, received care in the Turkish military hospital, the Armenian-Catholic church, and the Catholic school of Frères Chrétiens. The foreign consulates in Erzurum also covered the costs for the latter two locations. This arrangement was established by the evening of the 20th, with proper medical assistance beginning on the 21st.³⁸⁴

³⁸³ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 128–133, October 21, 1895.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*



Figure 5. Armenian Gregorian Cemetery, Erzurum, 1 November 1895. Photograph by William Sachtleben.

Reproduced in David Low, *Picturing the Ottoman Armenian World*.

The massacres in Erzurum and elsewhere in the eastern provinces exposed the Ottoman Empire's vulnerability and as imperial authority weakened, European powers expanded their political and economic influence. Diplomats and missionaries in eastern Anatolia reported on violence against Christians, and the Great Powers amplified Armenian claims to advance their strategic interests in Ottoman territories.³⁸⁵ The European powers present in Erzurum signed a memorandum about the events of the 18th, 19th, and 20th of October at the initiative of the English consul, Cumberbatch.³⁸⁶ The memorandum proposed reforms to protect the Armenian population in the Eastern Provinces from attacks by Kurds and Circassians, as stipulated in Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin, long delayed by the Ottoman Government. Istanbul viewed the plan as a threat to its sovereignty, since it required redrawing administrative borders along ethnic lines, restricting Kurdish nomadic tribes, appointing officials based on local majorities, and introducing European supervision over the reforms.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁵ Sevtap Demirci, "The Armenian Question or the Eastern Question?" in *War and Collapse: World War I and the Middle East*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and Feroz Ahmad (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 633, 639–40.

³⁸⁶ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 137–138, October 28, 1895. [See Appendix 34.](#)

³⁸⁷ İlkey Yılmaz, "Internal Colonization, Political Geography and Security in the Ottoman Eastern Provinces (1895–1899)," *Middle Eastern Studies* 60, no. 2 (2024): 181.

Notably, Consul Maximov reported that his efforts regarding the memorandum were aimed at ensuring it was “*as close to the truth as possible and less harsh towards the Ottoman government.*” Although he did not elaborate further on the reason, it may be assumed that his intention was to check British influence, which would have grown by shedding light on the atrocities and thereby gaining a pretext for intervention. Maximov sought to contain the massacres as a domestic issue. As a result, Maximov claimed he sought to supplement the memorandum with a statement asserting that there was no Armenian revolutionary agitation in Erzurum from the 18th to the 30th of October. Possibly, his intention was to mitigate the severity of the massacres to avoid intervention especially from Britain. At the same time, the Russian consul in his report to the embassy acknowledged that some Hnchakists and other leaders of the Armenian revolutionary movement had apparently been involved in the massacres and been preparing for an attack. He believed this was evidenced by the discovery a Russian military rifle of the latest model and revolvers, often used by Armenian revolutionaries who had smuggled these from Russia.³⁸⁸

The atmosphere in Erzurum remained tense even after a fortnight, as described by Consul Maximov.³⁸⁹ The tense atmosphere was exacerbated by signs of dissatisfaction within the Armenian community in Erzurum toward Archbishop Shishmanian, with some contemplating his resignation. According to Maximov's reports, this discontent arose from Shishmanian's perceived change in behavior. While he had previously proclaimed in sermons his willingness to sacrifice himself for his flock, after the tragic events of October 18th, he withdrew to his private quarters and avoided public appearances. When Maximov invited Shishmanian to visit the injured and offer blessings and comfort, the Archbishop reportedly insisted on a guarantee of safe return before agreeing. Consul Maximov advised the Armenian community to formally address the Patriarch if they wished to request the replacement of Archbishop Shishmanian. However, he noted that even influential Armenians were too fearful under the circumstances. Meanwhile, vali Rauf Paşa showed no concern over the issue with the Archbishop, as it aligned with the Turkish narrative of the events of October 18th, portraying him as an instigator of the massacres.³⁹⁰ Later Shishmanian was exiled

³⁸⁸ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 137–138, October 28, 1895.

³⁸⁹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 144–146, November 4, 1895.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

to Jerusalem after being accused of helping the revolutionaries.³⁹¹ What this suggests is that there was a breakdown between the clergyman and the local Armenian population.

Most Turks reportedly remained indifferent to the bloody events of October 18, but soldiers reportedly took part in the events. Accounts also described some Muslims spreading the word in the city that divine punishment might follow for the shedding of innocent blood. Meanwhile, the vali of Erzurum aimed to recover about 80% of stolen goods but excluded gold, silver utensils, and money taken from massacre victims. The consul doubted the success of these efforts, noting that destitute residents likely survived only due to aid provided by the authorities. According to the vali, no fewer than 100 Muslims were tried for looting.³⁹² Looting and plundering were integral to the Hamidian massacres, with numerous reports detailing Turkish soldiers' participation or orders to seize Armenian belongings. Additionally, Kurdish tribes were frequently reported to have taken valuable items from churches, often melting them down in cities. This indicates a deliberate intention to destroy Armenian material heritage.³⁹³

Additionally, there were allegations against some perpetrators of indecent acts towards women of all ages.³⁹⁴ Regrettably, this remains an understudied aspect of the Armenian Question, as Armenian women, suffered from rape, sexual abuse, abduction, and also forced conversion.³⁹⁵ Reports from missionaries, consuls and journalists detail incidents forced nudity, and public humiliation too.³⁹⁶

In the aftermath of the Hamidian massacres, Russian consular reports portrayed Erzurum as a province outwardly as no major disturbances occurred after mid-November, although Armenians remained in “*constant fear for their property and their lives,*” and the majority, having lost everything during the October violence, sought refuge in the Russian Empire. According to

³⁹¹ Tarbassian, *Erzurum (Garin)*, 62.

³⁹² AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 144–146, November 4, 1895.

³⁹³ Parsamyan, “Mass Destruction of Armenian Cultural Heritage,” 13–15.

³⁹⁴ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 144–146, November 4, 1895.

³⁹⁵ Toygun Altıntaş, “Violence, Armenian Women, and the ‘Armenian Question’ in the Late Ottoman Empire,” *Journal of Women’s History* 34, no. 3 (2022): 13.

³⁹⁶ Ayşenur Korkmaz, “The Hamidian Massacres: Gendered Violence, Biopolitics and National Honour,” in *Collective and State Violence in Turkey: The Construction of a National Identity from Empire to Nation-State*, ed. Stephan Astourian and Raymond Kévorkian (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2020), 99–100, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781789204513-005>. / See also: Benny Morris. "Collective Sexual Violence in Turkey, 1894–1924: What we know and how we know it." *Law and History Review* (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0738248025101120>.

Consul Maximov by early winter, up to 2,000 Armenians had crossed the border without passports, while the General Consulate issued more than 100 new documents, many for entire families, a number that rose to 146 by February.³⁹⁷ This exodus unfolded against a backdrop of administrative inertia: Şakir Paşa, the Sultan's Extraordinary Inspector, ignored or minimized consular reports on the massacres, dismissed some facts as fabricated.³⁹⁸ Meanwhile, the economic condition of Erzurum and of the associated Harput, Diyarbakır, and Bitlis vilayets was extremely difficult for the Christian population. The cold and the almost continuous rain had taken away all hope for a harvest that year.³⁹⁹

What can be concluded about the massacres in Erzurum is that Armenian revolutionaries were certainly present and influenced the events, and that local Muslims retaliated, joined by soldiers, as acknowledged by the vali himself. It must also be noted that there were Muslims who did not participate in the looting and killing; however, it is impossible to determine the exact extent of participation or non-participation. One thing is certain: the massacres could not have reached such a violent character without the prior exacerbation of internal tensions who lay the groundwork for an anti-Christian sentiment.

Van, The Armenian Revolutionaries and the Rise of the Young Turks in the Erzurum vilayet

The Fall and Rise of Revolutionary Activities After Massacres

Reportedly, agitation by Armenian revolutionary committees, particularly the Hnchaks and the Dashnaksutun continued to exert its influence in Erzurum despite the massacres in eastern Anatolia. An example of that was a letter intercepted by the Erzurum vilayet authorities, from Constantinople addressed to Mihran Chakhadjian, former secretary of Archbishop Shishmanian: The anonymous writer of the letter thanked him for the “*intelligence already forwarded to the Hnchaks for publication*”, and advised him the recipient to leave Erzurum if persecution intensified, and urged “*energetic measures*” against unsympathetic clerical primates, even

³⁹⁷ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 2–6, February 3, 1896. [See Appendix 35.](#)

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 31–32, May 25, 1896. [See Appendix 36.](#)

advocating their “*new baptism*,” a euphemism for murder.⁴⁰⁰ It is possible that this was the reason for exiling Shishmanian, but the Russian reports do not connect these two facts. Nevertheless, it did contribute to the perception of the Armenian clergy as a bastion of revolutionary sentiment and, by extension, of the local Armenian community as a whole. It must also be noted that many local Armenians were unsympathetic to Shishmanian following the massacres, as detailed above.

Because of the suspicion of the authorities on revolutionary agitation, Ottoman officials remained apprehensive and believed that a Hnchakist attack from Transcaucasia might occur in the spring, in which a group of 20–30 Armenian fedayis would cross from Russia to massacre unprotected Muslim women and children. They reportedly also believed that such an act would trigger a general Muslim retaliation and the wholesale destruction of Armenians.⁴⁰¹ These concerns were reinforced when vali Rauf Paşa forwarded two intercepted Armenian-language letters dated 19 March, attributed to “*Ervant Aleksandropolsky*” (also known as “*Jellad*”) which discussed internal Armenian disputes, shortages of weapons and manpower in eastern Anatolia, and plans to bring armed men from Russian territory. Because the letters explicitly referred to forming armed bands for incursions into Ottoman lands, Rauf Paşa appealed to the Russian authorities to detain the agitator.⁴⁰² Arguably, the vali’s efforts to restore peace in the vilayet yielded positive results. Maximov’s report of 25 May 1896 noted that the vali’s directives contributed to the pacification of Armenian villages and that no new disturbances had occurred since his previous reports. However, he also observed that Hnchakist agitation persisted not only in Erzurum but across Trabzon, Erzincan, and even Kars.⁴⁰³

Not long afterward, news reached Maximov that disturbances had broken out in Van, lasting from 30 May to 16 June 1896, with mass killings occurring between 3 and 14 June. Maximov claimed that around 80 Christians and up to 200 Muslims died in the city, while estimated casualties in the surrounding provinces ranged from 10,000 to 15,000 Armenians killed at the hands of Kurdish bands. An informant of the Russian consulate blamed the Sultan’s Extraordinary Commissioner, Saadedin Paşa, for obstructing the *vali* and failing to curb Kurdish violence, calm the Muslim population, or disarm Armenian revolutionaries. The consul argued, however, that

⁴⁰⁰ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 10–12, February 24, 1896. [See Appendix 37.](#)

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰² AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 17–18, February 19, 1896. [See Appendix 38.](#)

⁴⁰³ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 31–32, May 25, 1896.

Van's dispersed geography and ineffective police forces made it impossible for Ottoman officials to control events or restrain the violence.⁴⁰⁴ British and Ottoman reports indicated that revolutionary activity in Van intensified despite the security measures. Dashnak and Hnchak revolutionaries distributed propaganda, stockpiled arms, and had long been preparing for an uprising in the city. Even so, these efforts proved insufficient, and the Armenian uprising in Van was suppressed with relative ease by the Ottoman authorities.⁴⁰⁵

After the massacres in Van, Maximov reported that internal disagreements between Hnchakist and Dashnaktsutium revolutionaries surfaced in a clandestine meeting at the Lusavorich monastery near Erzurum. While the former urged targeted killings of isolated Turkish sentries, the latter warned such actions would provoke devastating reprisals and the suffering of innocent lives.⁴⁰⁶ In light of the ensuing events, it is doubtful that these claims were really uttered between the walls of the monastery, or at least not unanimously, but the Dashnaktsutium had to change its strategy to remain on surface. They adopted a more practical perspective, which included a wider organizational basis and better preparation, exploring more seriously cooperation with Kurdish tribes and groups, an active search for allies among Muslims, including Turkish liberal groups.⁴⁰⁷

The Dashnaktsutium's post-Van actions indeed revealed a conscious effort to regain the initiative: the 26 August 1896 occupation of the Ottoman Bank was designed to compel the Great Powers' attention by targeting an institution holding their financial interests.⁴⁰⁸ Similarly, the Khanasor expedition in the spring and summer of 1897—a punitive raid against the Mazrik Kurdish tribe—was presented by the party as an act of retributive justice, even as the ARF⁴⁰⁹ also tried, with limited success, to build cooperative relations with other Kurdish tribal groups.⁴¹⁰ These adjustments allowed the Dashnaktsutium to emerge from the crisis as the dominant revolutionary

⁴⁰⁴ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 43–47, June 15, 1896. [See Appendix 39.](#)

⁴⁰⁵ McCarthy, *Armenian Rebellion at Van*, 64–65.

⁴⁰⁶ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 53–56, September 21, 1896. [See Appendix 40.](#)

⁴⁰⁷ Gerard Libaridian, “What Was Revolutionary About Armenian Revolutionary Parties in the Ottoman Empire?” in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ronald G. Suny, Fatma M. Göçek, and Norman M. Neimark (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 92. / Garabet K. Moundjian, “The Hnchakian ‘Nay’ to Young Turk Overtures, 1895–1908,” in *The Armenian Social Democrat Hnchakian Party: Politics, Ideology and Transnational History*, ed. B. Der Matossian (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023), 46–49, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755651337.0010>.

⁴⁰⁸ Hovannisian, *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, 224.

⁴⁰⁹ Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, Dashnaktsutium)

⁴¹⁰ Garabet Moundjian, “Armenian Kurdish Relations in the Era of Kurdish Nationalism (1830–1930),” *Bazmaveb* 157, nos. 1–4 (1999): 292–93.

party, while the Hnchaks never fully recovered from the shock of the massacres and a split within the party followed.⁴¹¹

The decline in revolutionary activity was evident in the Erzurum vilayet, as the Russian reports reveal. Following searches in several villages of Pasinler, Ottoman authorities arrested 46 individuals, including recent arrivals from Russia, a representative of the Pasinler valley revolutionary committee, local activists, and couriers transporting revolutionary correspondence. The detainees carried weapons inscribed with slogans about Armenia's liberation, and the searches uncovered rifles, revolvers, cartridges, and manuscripts such as a statistical survey of Armenian villages and their armaments. Even so, Rauf Paşa was reportedly pleased that Armenians themselves had supplied the intelligence enabling these discoveries. Consul Maximov likewise viewed the seizure of these arms and the arrest of numerous activists as a major setback for revolutionary agitation in the Pasinler Valley.⁴¹²

In early April 1897, much as in the previous year, an arms cache of Berdan rifle barrels and cartridges smuggled from Russia and hidden in sledge runners, was discovered in a nearby village to Erzurum. Yet again, Rauf Paşa expressed satisfaction that Armenians themselves had revealed this cache, which he took as evidence that the majority did not support revolutionary agitation. On 14 April he even convened leading Muslims and Armenians in the city of Erzurum, urging them to maintain peaceful coexistence and assuring Armenians of their government's trust. He advised them to ignore rumors of an imminent renewed massacre and to continue their daily work. To preserve calm, he also ordered the arrest of several Muslims known for causing disturbances.⁴¹³

Armenian revolutionary activity in the Erzurum border region temporarily declined for two main reasons: first, as a result of coercive measures employed by the authorities; and second, because such activity was not fully embraced by the local Armenian population. As the reports indicate, there were instances in which local Armenians informed the authorities about fedayi activities. This is hardly surprising, given that revolutionary actions were frequently followed by the arrest of entire villages, effectively scapegoating the broader Armenian population as disloyal.⁴¹⁴ At the same time, it must be acknowledged that our knowledge of local perceptions of

⁴¹¹ Libaridian, "What Was Revolutionary About Armenian Revolutionary Parties," 92.

⁴¹² AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 86–88, December 7, 1896. [See Appendix 41.](#)

⁴¹³ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1633, ll. 5–6, April 1897. [See Appendix 42.](#)

⁴¹⁴ İlkay Yılmaz, "Security Memory, Knowledge Production, and State Formation: The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire (1876–1908)," *Journal of Genocide Research* (2025): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2025.2597574>.

the fedayi remains limited, as existing scholarship has focused predominantly on the institutional histories of revolutionary movements. In this regard, consular reports constitute an important source for reconstructing local attitudes that are otherwise largely absent from the historiography.

According to Consul Demerik, by the late 1890s the vilayet of Erzurum exhibited grave administrative and social deterioration. He argued that the restrictive policies of the Hamidian regime had produced conditions in which only Kurdish tribal elements had freedom of action, while much of the population disengaged from public life, with little public activity or political mobilization. In this context, Armenian fedayi activity was also reported to have declined. Demerik noted that those fedayi who remained in the Sasun region had become increasingly marginalized and were avoided by villagers due to intensified government scrutiny.⁴¹⁵

In contrast, in May 1901, Consul Demerik reported on the intensification of revolutionary activity. According to the consul the Ottoman authority's deliberate negligence in ignoring the plundering carried out by Kurdish tribes caused many Armenians to join the fedayi in an attempt to restore safety and public order. These groups were particularly active in the sancaks of Muş, Bitlis, Sasun, and Malazgirt.⁴¹⁶ Russian consular reports describe a pattern of revenge violence in which attacks by Armenian fedayi or villagers were followed by collective reprisals against Armenian communities, leading to widespread destruction and civilian deaths. By 1901, the consul noted that such cycles of attack and retaliation had become a normal part of daily life in the region.⁴¹⁷ From this perspective, the reports suggest that by the beginning of the twentieth century, participation in revolutionary activity re-emerged, in the eyes of Russian consuls, as a reactive strategy aimed at restoring basic security and public order.

Despite the renewed uptick in revolutionary activity, Russian consular intelligence in Erzurum noted that Ottoman authorities believed the revolutionaries lacked widespread support among Ottoman Armenians and therefore saw no need to adopt additional repressive measures. The vali of Erzurum reinforced this assessment, expressing satisfaction with public order and the apparent absence of fedayi, even as he simultaneously suspected Armenians of harboring latent revolutionary sympathies, remarking that "*deep inside, every Armenian is a fedayi.*" This statement reflects a logic of collective suspicion and stigmatization. At the same time, the Ottoman

⁴¹⁵ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1637, ll. 23–26, January 5, 1901. [See Appendix 43.](#)

⁴¹⁶ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2669, l. 9, May 1, 1901.

⁴¹⁷ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2669, l. 14, August 1, 1901.

consul in Kars warned his counterparts to remain vigilant against the danger of revolutionary diversion. Consequently, in May 1901, the vali instructed the Armenian Apostolic murahass (bishop) ⁴¹⁸ to preach obedience and loyalty from the pulpit in order to secure the allegiance of Ottoman Armenians.⁴¹⁹ These reports show that official Ottoman views on Armenian loyalty in the Erzurum region were not uniform, yet they were consistently shaped by a suspicion that the local Armenian population implicitly supported the fedayi.

From 1904 onward, however, Scriabin reported a renewed and continuous influx of Armenian militants from Russian Transcaucasia. Citing data from November and December 1903, he noted that only forty-seven well-armed Armenians had crossed the border illegally during that period. By contrast, in December 1904 alone, 167 armed Armenians reportedly departed from Pasinler after purchasing weapons from Hamidiye Kurds and Turkish soldiers. This shift was accompanied by a more alarmed posture on the part of the Ottoman authorities by 1904. Scriabin's reports emphasize an increase in clandestine Armenian gatherings, which further intensified Ottoman suspicions of an Armenian conspiracy against the empire. The perceived escalation of the fedayi threat also prompted the vali of Erzurum to travel to Bitlis. At the same time, Scriabin observed a striking degree of indifference within the civilian administration, noting that both the provincial authorities and the vali appeared reluctant to take action against fedayi activity. For instance, when a Turkish subject reported propaganda activities conducted by four Russian-Armenian citizens who were allegedly organizing secret gatherings in the Erzurum vilayet, the vali imprisoned the informant without investigating the accusation. Similarly, the *kaymakam* of Sasun, Jevat Efendi, relocated his administrative post to Semal, a village located three to four hours on foot from Sasun, claiming there was an increased Armenian revolutionary activity.⁴²⁰

In a report written in January 1904, shortly before the onset of the Ottoman campaign against the Armenian resistance movement in Sasun, Scriabin warned that the fedayi had received French-manufactured weapons and ammunition delivered by British steamships (It must be noted here the same year in April Britain and France signed the Entente Cordiale) to İskenderun and subsequently transported via Aleppo, Urfa, Diyarbakır, and ultimately to Sasun. He cited the alleged involvement of British consuls with Armenian revolutionaries, particularly W. G.

⁴¹⁸ The officially recognized Armenian ecclesiastical representative by Ottoman authorities.

⁴¹⁹ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2669, l. 9, May 1, 1901.

⁴²⁰ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2672, ll. 11–14, January 12, 1904.

Heathcote of Bitlis, who was reported to have visited Sasun to meet the ARF leader Andranik Ozanian⁴²¹ and to have inspected revolutionary outposts alongside him. This also seems to prove that by this time the ARF became the dominant revolutionary force in the borderland.

Scriabin further claimed that British consuls in Harput and Erzurum were also in regular contact with fedayi groups.⁴²² This appeared to align with broader British strategic interests, notably the desire to prevent Russian annexation of Western Armenia.⁴²³ By contrast to perceived British support to the revolutionaries, in early 1904 Russian authorities confiscated rifles and ammunition after the Russian consul in Erzurum received intelligence from Ottoman officials, thereby disrupting arms-supply networks to the revolutionaries, who had been reliant on locally manufactured ammunition.⁴²⁴ Having said that, Russian consular reports not only proved but also nuanced British involvement. During a visit to the Russian consulate, British Consul Sherly reportedly shared the contents of an anonymous ARF letter detailing coordinated uprisings in Erzurum, Van, and other Armenian-populated regions. The letter claimed the revolutionaries had access to arms, explosives, and trained forces, but Shirley declined to disclose the author's identity or the document's provenance.⁴²⁵ It appears that by facilitating the provision of weapons to Armenian revolutionaries, British diplomats sought to secure their sympathy and thereby expand their influence; however, fearing an escalation of events in Sasun, the British consul also shared intelligence with Russian authorities in an effort to encourage them to restrain revolutionary activity.

In a preemptive strike the Ottoman army besieged the Sasun region in winter 1904 and crushed the resistance by spring which led to the dispersion of locals to other parts of the region as

⁴²¹ Andranik Ozanian (1865–1927) was an Armenian *fedayi* commander and a central figure of the Armenian national liberation movement. Active from the late 1880s, he fought Ottoman forces and Kurdish irregulars and later joined the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, leading armed resistance in regions such as Sasun. During the First World War, he commanded Armenian volunteer units within the Russian imperial army and took part in operations in Eastern Anatolia, including the defense of Erzurum in 1918. After rejecting the territorial limits of the First Republic of Armenia, he continued armed struggle in Zangezur before leaving Armenia in 1919. He died in exile in the United States in 1927. See Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 42.

⁴²² AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2672, ll. 11–14, January 12, 1904.

⁴²³ Joseph Heller, "Britain and the Armenian Question, 1912–1914: A Study in Realpolitik," *Middle Eastern Studies* 16, no. 1 (1980): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263208008700422>.

⁴²⁴ Altıntaş, "Abode of Sedition," 200–201.

⁴²⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2672, ll. 68–70, December 4, 1904.

well as the death of thousands.⁴²⁶ In contrast, based on the Russian reports, in Erzurum, there had been a relative calm in December 1904 among the Armenian revolutionaries since the Ottoman authorities quelled the rebellion in Sasun. However, according to the Russian consul, these revolutionary figures did not disappear, but instead scattered among the local Armenian population. He also considered it realistic that the rural Armenian population supported these revolutionaries, as there was a significant number of rural residents in these provinces who were subjected to the unrestrained violence of soldiers.⁴²⁷

The Armenian revolutionaries operated within a highly volatile geopolitical space characterized by the intensification of great-power rivalry. While Britain sought to expand its influence, Russia mainly pursued containment, whereas the Ottoman state aimed at suppression. Russian consular reports reveal that revolutionary activity contributed above all to the collective suspicion and stigmatization of the broader Armenian population not only from the Ottoman but also from the Russian sides. In this sense, Armenian revolutionary mobilization became entangled in imperial competition, serving as both an instrument and a liability.

The Limits of Reform in the Borderland

Restoring public order in Erzurum after the massacres proved extremely difficult, a task entrusted to the vali, Rauf Paşa. He was determined to prevent retaliatory attacks against Armenians and pledged to arrest Muslim youths who issued threats, while also emphasizing cooperation with influential Armenians in uncovering additional arms caches. Despite these efforts, the population of Erzurum reportedly remained in fear of renewed violence and increasingly resolved to flee the region.⁴²⁸ Rauf's case is particularly illustrative for several reasons. As a liberal-minded reformer assigned to the provincial backwater of Erzurum, his experience reveals the limits of reformist governance in such a setting. This chapter illustrates Ottoman administrative practice, its internal idiosyncrasies, and inherent contradictions, which are central to this dissertation. It demonstrates how the borderland context constrained immediate prospects for change while simultaneously

⁴²⁶ Varak Ketsemanian, "Straddling Two Empires: Cross-Revolutionary Fertilization and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation's Military Academy in 1906–07," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 4, no. 2 (2017): 346–47.

⁴²⁷ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2672, ll. 68–70, December 4, 1904.

⁴²⁸ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 43–47, June 15, 1896.

contributing, over the longer term, to the conditions that made future transformation possible, a perspective that emerges most clearly from the Russian consular sources.

Reports of the Dashnaksutiun seizure of the Ottoman Bank in Constantinople reached Erzurum in late August and triggered alarm among both Armenians, who feared renewed violence, and local Muslims. On 28 August, a proclamation was posted on the vali's residence accusing Rauf Paşa of protecting Armenian Christians and threatening him with harm, while also declaring that Muslims would "*deal with the Armenians*" without his involvement; the rumor of this notice caused Armenians to shut their shops until the vali ordered them reopened. In response, Rauf Paşa convened the city's elders, imams, and leading Muslims, admonishing them not to imitate events in Constantinople, urging peaceful coexistence, and arrested five armed Turks. Nevertheless, on 30 August a second proclamation appeared on several mosques in Erzurum saying: "Although the vali is inclined to protect the Armenians, nevertheless the Muslims must fulfil their duty and punish the infidels."⁴²⁹

Rauf Paşa had the notices removed, summoned leading Muslims again, ordered sermons promoting peace, and appointed monitoring committees in each quarter to report agitators to the authorities.⁴³⁰ The vali's efforts to maintain order, including periodic street patrols introduced in response to recurring rumors of unrest, earned him the name "*giaour*" (*infidel*), as these precautions provoked resentment among the city's *dadaş* (armed, idle Muslims inclined to robbery) who denounced him for his perceived protection of Christians.⁴³¹

Tensions in Erzurum intensified between the civil administration and the military as well after the January 1896 incident in which deputy police commissioner Tigran Kevorkian drunkenly insulted Islam in a bath and was immediately imprisoned by Rauf Paşa. Rivals of the vali exploited the case to inflame anti-Armenian sentiment. They portrayed Kevorkian's words as representative of all Armenians and calling for a repeat of the October 1895 massacres. Reportedly the greatest rival of Rauf pasha was müşir Zeki Paşa, despite being related by marriage, who reinforced this agitation for both political and financial reasons. Officers seeking Zeki Paşa's favor reportedly monitored and reported on Rauf Paşa's every action in an effort to discredit him.⁴³² It was known

⁴²⁹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 53–56, September 21, 1896. [See Appendix 44.](#)

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴³¹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1633, ll. 2–4, March 22, 1897. [See Appendix 45.](#)

⁴³² AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1634, ll. 7–10, February 7, 1898. [See Appendix 46.](#)

to Russian consul Maximov that Zeki Paşa continually pressed the vali with demands despite the destitute financial situation of the vilayet, which made it impossible to even pay the salaries of lower-ranking officials. Rauf Paşa made every effort to ensure the proper payment of *zaptiye* wages. He reportedly had taken nothing for himself from the treasury for several months just to make sure the soldiers get their wages.⁴³³

The Ottoman administration was indeed in the worst condition. The economic devastation from the 1895–96 violence, compounded by mass Armenian emigration and the impoverishment of remaining villages, severely disrupted trade and tax revenues, resulting in long delays in salary payments across the administration.⁴³⁴ One of the most vivid illustrations reported by Maximov of this state of affairs occurred in Tercan, where officers and soldiers who had received vouchers instead of salaries pressured the local *kaymakam*, Şevket Efendi, so persistently for payment that he deemed it safer to travel to Erzurum to seek the vali’s assistance only to be told by Rauf Paşa that he could do nothing other than wait.⁴³⁵ Seeing the impossibility of his task in every way, Rauf Paşa reportedly asked the Sultan for his transfer to the Bursa vilayet, which would have meant a step back in his career.⁴³⁶ When in 1901 his request was accepted, Consul Demerik summarized Rauf’s tenure in Erzurum in the following way:

“Rauf Paşa’s departure is not a great loss for the vilayet of Erzurum. He governed it for nearly three years, and there is little to recall in the way of positive accomplishments. He began his service here rather well, by restraining venal officials and voicing an intention to improve the administrative staff, but he failed to carry this through.

In all other administrative tasks, he showed weakness—particularly in safeguarding public security and protecting the peaceful population from Kurdish brigandage. Lacking the initiative and means for independent suppression of brigandage—which, as is well known, yields little fruit—he vainly sought cooperation from the military authorities; in the end he conducted a fruitless struggle with the “local commander,” and before Zeki Paşa, the patron of the Kurds, he consistently yielded, failing to defend properly the interests of general administration against the indulgences accorded to the Kurdish-Hamidiye policy.

The consciousness of his own powerlessness eventually inspired in him such aversion to administrative affairs that during the past year and a half he virtually abandoned them altogether, entrusting everything to his mektubci, who, as a temporary functionary, gathered all business into his own hands and brought every official under his often far-from-disinterested influence.”⁴³⁷

On the one hand, the case illustrates how an individual governor sought to promote coexistence in the vilayet and protect the empire’s subjects, yet ultimately failed due to the structural constraints of the provincial power configuration. Rauf Paşa is portrayed not as inherently ineffective, but as

⁴³³ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 70–71, November 2, 1896. [See Appendix 47.](#)

⁴³⁴ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1633, ll. 2–4, March 22, 1897.

⁴³⁵ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1635, l. 9, June 5, 1899.

⁴³⁶ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1634, ll. 7–10, February 7, 1898.

⁴³⁷ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1637, ll. 109–110, September 25, 1901. [See Appendix 48.](#)

a figure constrained by competing centers of authority, particularly the military establishment and the Hamidiye-aligned networks surrounding Zeki Paşa. Recognizing his limitations, he lapsed into apathy. On the other hand, even as Rauf Paşa's governance failed, Russian consular reports began to notice the emergence of a political current emanating from Constantinople, employing for the first time in their correspondence the term "*Young Turk*," not regardless as a response to the seemingly hopeless circumstances in the vilayet.

The Emergence of the Young Turks

The Ottoman empire had encountered various social and economic problems since the mid-19th century. In response to these challenges, the Tanzimat reform program was introduced with the aim of resolving the ailments of the empire. As a result of this reform process, the first Ottoman constitution was written in 1876, which proved to be a groundbreaking achievement as the devised document championed the equality of all Ottoman subjects and created the idea of a common citizenship (*Osmanlilik*). Moreover, it allowed for the creation of the General Assembly of the Ottoman Empire which did not include a party system but was seen as the voice of the people. These developments marked a departure from Islamic trends towards a more secular approach of political representation which was derived from citizenship rather than religious status.⁴³⁸ These reform ideas were initiated by a few enthusiastic statesmen who sought to address the predicaments faced by the Ottoman government by implementing reforms that were thought to be the foundations of the West's prosperity.⁴³⁹ Nevertheless, the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 and the chaos surrounding it paved the way for Sultan Abdul Hamid II to suspend the constitution and restore the absolute monarchy. His power had remained unchallenged for 30 years, while the empire was unable to overcome its problems.⁴⁴⁰

Despite the Sultan's best efforts, the movement which attempted to modernize the empire did not die in 1878 as the reformers kept the idea of constitutionalism alive in exile too.⁴⁴¹ The growing dissatisfaction with the Sultan's monopoly of power and the obvious inefficiencies of the state administration prompted a group of liberal minded intellectuals to act and form the Young Turks, a term coined by contemporary European observers, opposition to Abdul Hamid II. The name Young Turks is misleading because it suggests that the group was made up only of Turks or Turkish nationalists. In fact, it included Arabs, Albanians, Jews, and, in its early stages, Armenians and

⁴³⁸ Cemil Koçak, "Transformation through Constitution: Young Ottomans and the Kānūn-i Esāsî of 1876," in *Dimensions of Transformation in the Ottoman Empire from the Late Medieval Age to Modernity*, ed. Seyfi Kenan and Selçuk Akşin Somel (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 431–32.

⁴³⁹ Wajih Kawtharani, "The Ottoman Tanzimat and the Constitution," *AlMuntaqa* 1, no. 1 (2018): 51.

⁴⁴⁰ Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856–1876* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 8–9.

⁴⁴¹ Feroz Ahmad, "The Young Turk Revolution," *Journal of Contemporary History* 3, no. 3 (1968): 20–21.

Greeks.⁴⁴² Although these versatile oppositionists were united by a common view in terms of achieving their goals, they often lacked unity in ideology. Within the *Young Turk* movement, a diverse range of individuals could be found, encompassing revolutionaries and proponents of gradual change, critics of religion and fervent secularists, advocates of constitutionalism opposing autocracy, and even non-Muslim federalists.⁴⁴³

The Young Turks underwent a schism upon the question how to address the issues plaguing the empire, which became apparent at the First Congress of the Ottoman Opposition in Paris in 1902. Ahmed Riza, who represented the nationalist minority, rejected granting any form of autonomy to the Armenian vilayets. Conversely, Prince Sabahaddin, who was the leader of the liberals, considered the concessions given to Armenians to be the basis for Armenian-Turkish cooperation. Over the years the nationalist minority gained an upper hand in most of the Young Turk committees, overshadowing the Ottoman liberals who sought to establish a multinational society that acknowledged the equality and difference among the various *millets*.⁴⁴⁴

From 1907, the nationalist wing, which was called Committee of Union and Progress (CUP)⁴⁴⁵, built links with junior officers in the Macedonian garrisons and turned the army into its main power base. The CUP gained influence by appealing to Muslim solidarity, military honor, and resentment against Great Power reforms, delayed salaries, and foreign inspectors.⁴⁴⁶

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation also agreed to cooperate with the Young Turks and offered their assistance in overthrowing Abdul Hamid's administration, despite having to acknowledge the inviolability of the Ottoman state's territorial integrity.⁴⁴⁷ These developments may have caused the sultan to grasp the consequences of his misrule and made timely concessions in order to prevent further escalation.⁴⁴⁸ These steps were not sufficient to defuse the dissent and

⁴⁴² Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 4.

⁴⁴³ Suny, "They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else", 149.

⁴⁴⁴ Nobuyoshi Fujinami, "Decentralizing Centralists, or the Political Language on Provincial Administration in the Second Ottoman Constitutional Period," *Middle Eastern Studies* 49, no. 6 (2013): 881–82.

⁴⁴⁵ Committee of Union and Progress / İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti / CUP: Name adopted by the core revolutionary organization within the Young Turk movement. While "Young Turks" was as an umbrella term for Ottoman constitutionalist and opponents of absolutism, the CUP meant a specific political society founded in 1889. After the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, the CUP emerged as the dominant faction within the Young Turk movement, to the extent that Western observers often conflated the two, referring to CUP members simply as "Young Turks". See

⁴⁴⁶ Denis Vovchenko, "Army and Progress? The Russian and Greek Reactions to the 1903 Coup in Serbia and to the 1908 Young Turk Revolution," *International History Review* 47, no. 1 (2025): 6–7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2024.2316741>.

⁴⁴⁷ Suny, "They can live in the desert but nowhere else", 150-151.

⁴⁴⁸ Feroz. "The Young Turk Revolution.", 20-21.

the Young Turks assumed control over the Ottoman state with relatively little bloodshed in 1908 in an attempt to restore the constitution, which they believed would strengthen the state by alleviating ethnic strife and ending national separatism.⁴⁴⁹

In June and July 1908, the catalyst for the decisive CUP action was a meeting between Tsar Nicholas II and Edward VII, which produced a new reform plan to revive the Mürzsteg program.⁴⁵⁰ The unionists⁴⁵¹ interpreted the act as a direct threat to Ottoman sovereignty in Macedonia and feared that the reforms would both detach the province from imperial control and expose CUP networks to the Sultan's secret police. By securing the loyalty of most Macedonian garrisons and armed Albanian clans, pro-CUP officers urged provincial authorities to join them in demanding the restoration of the suspended 1876 Constitution. The prospect of an armed march on Istanbul and the collapse of his authority in the provinces made Abdulhamid II capitulate on 24 July 1908, which brought about the end of his rule over the empire.⁴⁵²

Provincial Revolt and Political Mobilization in Erzurum, 1906–1907

Tension had been rising in Erzurum since 1896, particularly among Muslims, fueled by reports from Constantinople about the emerging Young Turk movement. In early December, the authorities began taking suspicious measures, including the exile of several individuals and the high-profile arrest of Kerim Bey, Erzurum's director of schools, and Setrak Pasturmadjian, an Armenian cashier accused of handling correspondence with Young Turks in Paris. The reasons for these arrests were unclear, as Ottoman officials spoke about them reluctantly and even attempted to conceal the events. Rumors circulated that Rauf Paşa was trying to secure their release, which suggests that he too was part of the reformist elite. Several military officers, including Lieutenant Mukhtar Efendi, were also detained. Maximov reported that Young Turk influence was far more widespread among officers in Erzincan than in Erzurum, and that even the majority of the troops

⁴⁴⁹ Ahsan I. Butt, *Secession and Security: Explaining State Strategy against Separatists* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), 132.

⁴⁵⁰ The Mürzsteg Agreement (1903) was a joint Russo–Austro-Hungarian reform program imposed on the Ottoman Empire, which called for international supervision of administrative, judicial, and gendarmerie reforms in the Macedonian vilayets of the Ottoman Empire, with the participation of Christian officials in order to stabilize the region while preserving Ottoman territorial integrity.

⁴⁵¹ Unionists known in Ottoman Turkish as İttihatçılar and in Russian sources as иттихадисты—was the political shorthand for individuals who belonged to or sympathized with the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP).

⁴⁵² Vovchenko, “Army and Progress?” 6–7.

stationed there were affiliated with the movement.⁴⁵³ This is to prove that the Young Turk movement had its supporters in Erzurum as a reaction to the unbearable conditions experienced by the local population.

Ten years later signs of major disturbances unfolded in Erzurum in 1906 February which were perceived by Russian observers as the manifestation of a broader systemic crisis of Ottoman governance. Scriabin emphasized ongoing Armenian revolutionary preparations, including the clandestine transport of dynamite, bombs, and other materials into eastern Anatolia.⁴⁵⁴ This shows that little had changed in this 10-year period, which certainly gave impetus for reform-minded individuals to make a difference. The late Ottoman Empire was indeed shaped by Young Turks originating from the imperial borderlands rather than from the Anatolian core and this applies to Erzurum too. However, it is true that Western Armenia was underrepresented in the Young Turk leadership.⁴⁵⁵ Still, Erzurum played a major regional role as a hub for political change in the borderland, not by producing key Young Turk leaders, but rather by producing mid-ranking officials and Armenian revolutionaries who served as catalysts for change.⁴⁵⁶ This is of course not a coincidence as Erzurum offered a setting to launch activism for a number of reasons: It had a large Armenian population which was subject to frequent Kurdish attacks. At the same time, the government used Erzurum as a place to send political exiles, especially officers from the IV Ottoman Army, which meant that many dissatisfied and/or reform-minded individuals were concentrated in the city, proving to be fertile soil for unrest that would grow beyond the control of the authorities.⁴⁵⁷

The crisis in Erzurum began in March 1906, when unrest erupted among the Muslim population of the city and its surrounding districts. According to Scriabin, the immediate triggers were excessive taxation and the Ottoman government's ban on issuing passports for seasonal labor migration to Russia.⁴⁵⁸ The latter was a major blow for many workers as Russian Transcaucasia

⁴⁵³ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1633, ll. 2–4, March 22, 1897.

⁴⁵⁴ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, ll. 10–16, February 10, 1906. [See Appendix 49.](#)

⁴⁵⁵ Erik-Jan Zürcher, “The Young Turks—Children of the Borderlands?” in *Ottoman Borderlands: Issues, Personalities, and Political Changes*, ed. Kemal H. Karpat and Robert W. Zens (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

⁴⁵⁶ Erik-Jan Zürcher, “The Unionist Presence in the Asiatic Provinces of the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1912,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 59, no. 4 (2023): 566.

⁴⁵⁷ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 109–10.

⁴⁵⁸ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, l. 68, March 17 and 24, 1906. [See Appendix 50.](#)

was where many Eastern Anatolians, for instance, masons and carpenters could utilize their professions.⁴⁵⁹ What distinguished these disturbances from earlier episodes was their rapid social expansion: workers were joined by merchants, and the movement was soon institutionalized through an association known as *Can Verir*, which claimed to represent a broad cross-section of the urban population. Demonstrations began on 5 March with mass gatherings outside the residence of the vali, Nazim Paşa, and quickly escalated into open confrontations with provincial authority. Protesters demanded the dismissal of corrupt officials, tax relief, and direct communication with the Sultan. Although some concessions were promised, their uneven implementation, combined with threats to deploy military force contributed to the radicalization of the demonstration, as noted by the Russian consul.⁴⁶⁰

The upheaval in Erzurum was primarily driven by financial issues and was less concerned with political demands. However, Ottoman sources claim that the petition submitted to the vali was drafted by dissidents personally dispatched to Erzurum by Sabahaddin Bey, who established the “*League of Private Initiative and Decentralization*” in Erzurum with the aim of turning the city into a hub for revolutionary activity in the region.⁴⁶¹ Thus, The Young Turks managed to channel the pervasive dissatisfaction with material concerns present in the region into a political movement.

Parallel reports from the Russian border-guard command reinforced Scriabin’s portrayal of the events in Erzurum. Reportedly, under the leadership of deputies elected from various villages, a large crowd appeared at the residence of the Erzurum governor-general (Nazim Paşa). Later, widows of military and civilian personnel also appeared before the vali, demanding the payment of pensions that had long gone unpaid by the government. Even more striking is that these reports highlighted openly sympathetic behavior on the part of Ottoman troops, who refused to fire on demonstrators and in some cases even sided with them. This military hesitation was interpreted in Russian reporting as a symptomatic erosion of state authority, exacerbated by unpaid wages and partly by the spread of Young Turk sympathies among junior officers. Nazim Paşa was eventually

⁴⁵⁹ Sinan Dinçer, “An Exclusionary Border Regime: The Ottoman Case, 1890–1914,” in *Borders and Mobility Control in and between Empires and Nation-States*, ed. Jovan Pešalj, Annemarie Steidl, Leo Lucassen, and Josef Ehmer, *Studies in Global Social History* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 184–220.

⁴⁶⁰ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, l. 68, March 17 and 24, 1906.

⁴⁶¹ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 109–10.

forced to step down, and until his departure, for twelve days administrative life was paralyzed, with all commercial and government institutions in the city remaining closed.⁴⁶²

The newly appointed vali, Ata Bey's countermeasures, such as restrictions on movement beyond city limits and renewed passport bans, were widely perceived as provocative and counterproductive by the local population. The same time, the authorities secretly facilitated the transfer of Armenians into Russian citizenship, ordering that any real estate or land they owned within the Ottoman Empire be immediately confiscated by the state upon renunciation of Ottoman subjecthood, a measure also applied to Armenians already residing abroad. These actions further reinforced the determination of protesters to pursue the previously articulated demands by all means.⁴⁶³

On 10 October 1906, Mufti Lûtfullah Efendi was identified as the principal leader of the spring movement in Erzurum, alongside five members of the Muslim committee, and was arrested and exiled. This poured oil on the fire, and unrest broke out once again in Erzurum. The bazaars closed, the vali himself was locked up in a mosque, and local Muslims threatened his life unless the exiled individuals were returned. During these events, even the chief of police was killed.⁴⁶⁴ Military patrols were present but did not intervene. That evening, the mufti and the other arrested individuals returned to Erzurum and were placed under the responsibility of deputies elected by the population, and the vali was released to his home.⁴⁶⁵ The vali stated that the arrests had been carried out on orders from Constantinople and expressed uncertainty as to why the military authorities had not prevented his capture or the killing of policemen. The local commander reported that he had personally protected the vali in the mosque but that troops had not been ordered to fire on the population.⁴⁶⁶

In November 1906, a new vali was elected, Nuri Bey, who sought the cooperation of the mufti and members of the Muslim committee to secure payment of a new personal tax, but these efforts were refused on the grounds of the population's economic ruin. A petition was prepared for submission to the Sultan explaining non-payment of the tax, but the population refused to include

⁴⁶² AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, ll. 102–103, April 8, 1906. [See Appendix 51.](#)

⁴⁶³ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, l. 68, April 7–10, 1906.

⁴⁶⁴ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, l. 199, October 10, 1906.

⁴⁶⁵ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, l. 201, October 10, 1906.

⁴⁶⁶ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, l. 204, October 12, 1906.

any expression of repentance for the October violence.⁴⁶⁷ Nuri Bey initially informed the central government that punitive measures were impossible under prevailing conditions. In response, Istanbul replaced local officials, banished certain officers, promised tax reductions, declared a conditional amnesty, and temporarily exempted non-Muslims from military payments in an attempt to ease tensions. Although these measures produced a brief period of calm, unrest soon resumed as dissidents raised new grievances, particularly unpaid military salaries. Revolutionary committees gradually assumed control over streets, taxation, prices, and public order, effectively replacing government authority in Erzurum. Attempts by the central authorities to restore control through administrative changes failed, while a grain shortage and mob violence in 1907 deepened the crisis. Ultimately, the government resorted to military intervention, and on 25 November 1907 troops entered Erzurum, suppressed the movement, and arrested its leaders.⁴⁶⁸

Despite the state intervention in Erzurum, Scriabin reported that a special secret revolutionary committee was formed in Erzurum from among Muslims who were in contact with representatives of the Young Turks in Paris, from where brochures of anti-government content were being obtained for distribution among the populace.⁴⁶⁹ These meetings before the put-down of the movement increasingly attracted members of the Muslim elite, where participants reportedly concluded that the sultan feared popular unrest and that it was the moment for raise their demands. They further agreed to petition the sultan for the abolition of the privileges granted to the Kurds through the establishment of the Hamidiye regiments adding:

“According to the views expressed at these meetings, it was disgraceful for Ottoman Muslims to abase themselves before a wild people of low origin, as in fact occurred not only in the everyday life of ordinary people, but also within the highest military estate, where Ottoman officers educated in military academies were compelled to bow before animal-like Kurds, elevated to the rank of pashas for reasons unknown.”⁴⁷⁰

This suggests that local Muslims were dissatisfied not only with the severe financial difficulties of the vilayet but also with broader political conditions, particularly the dominance of the Hamidiye system, which many perceived as undermining their own social position and agency within the borderland context. It is also noteworthy that, according to the reports, Kurds were often

⁴⁶⁷ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, November 30, 1906. / AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, l. 230, December 12, 1906. [See Appendix 52.](#)

⁴⁶⁸ Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 112–14.

⁴⁶⁹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, November 30, 1906. / AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, l. 230, December 12, 1906.

⁴⁷⁰ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1643, ll. 84–87. March 27, 1907. [See Appendix 53.](#)

regarded by the provincial elite as occupying a second-class status, while in practice many local Muslims perceived Kurdish groups, especially those linked to the Hamidiye, as exercising greater authority than themselves. This discrepancy between perceived hierarchy and actual power likely further aggravated existing social tensions.

Although all participants felt the need for change, their unity dissolved once additional demands were articulated beyond the Kurdish threat, which proved insufficient as a unifying force. According to Scriabin, the movement split into two camps. A smaller faction, influenced by Young Turk ideas and by contemporary developments in Persia, called upon the sultan to convene a *meclis* (assembly, parliament), thereby restoring popular representation in Constantinople. The larger group, by contrast, interpreted Muslim grievances as the result of religious decline and appealed to the caliph to re-establish strict religious norms. The latter, for instance, demanded the abolition of all “*giaour*” (non-Muslim) courts within the vilayet and their replacement with a single judicial authority, the sharia court.⁴⁷¹ The chasm between the two sides signals that the movement in Erzurum was more concerned with security, financial, and livelihood issues than with demands for wider political rights, a divergence that would become a major source of conflict in the vilayet in the ensuing years.

The Erzurum unrest through the lenses of the Russian consul exposes a rupture between civic administration and the military that was characteristic of late Ottoman imperial peripheries. In this sense, Erzurum emerges not as a marginal or reactive space, but as the birthplace of revolutionary preconditions before 1908. While the city did not produce prominent Young Turk leaders, it clearly hosted a sizeable resistance, whether reactionary or reformist, milieu extending beyond the officer corps into mid-ranking officials and urban activists. The borderland setting concentrated discontent, exiles, and competing sovereignties in ways that accelerated politicization. Strikingly, Russian reporting did not mention Armenian revolutionary presence during the revolt.

The Border as a Political Instrument: Subjecthood, Migration, and the Russian implication

⁴⁷¹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1643, ll. 84–87. March 27, 1907.

A major task in the study of the Ottoman–Russian frontier is understanding how permeability or non-permeability influenced the local population, and how border crossing was abused by the states controlling it to achieve their goals vis-à-vis that population. As discussed earlier, Eastern Anatolia and Russian Transcaucasia formed a degree of economic interdependence, sustained in part by patterns of labor migration. Therefore, the question of whether the border was crossable or not was imperative. In addition, through the Armenian population living on both sides of this border, the two empires were drawn into constant interaction and, at times, direct confrontation and opportunism, coupled with the recurring threat of a looming war between them amid the Eastern Question. What Russian consular reports offer, unlike, for example, British sources, is a perspective grounded in the reality that Russia shared an extensive land border with the Ottoman Empire. Thus, consular reports further help us understand how border permeability functioned as both a structural condition and a political instrument in the governance of the frontier.

Since the beginning of 1907, a large number of petitions from Armenians requesting acceptance into Russian subjecthood had reached the Russian Consulate, owing to the oppression they were suffering at the hands of the local authorities. However, on the basis of *decree* of 1906, Armenians were not permitted to change their subjecthood unless they agreed to expulsion from the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁷² Scriabin reported that the vali actively encouraged discord between Muslims and Christians and overtly exaggerated the Armenian threat on the state in order to obtain concessions from the sultan in favor of the Muslim population.⁴⁷³ As noted earlier, the vali’s rule in Erzurum was precarious which required him to carefully manage tensions. Scriabin claimed that Nuri Bey’s desire to remove as many Armenians as possible from the vilayet could be explained by his wish to gain popularity among Muslim revolutionaries by promising to improve their welfare at the expense of the immovable property of expelled Armenians.⁴⁷⁴

Nuri Bey’s conduct toward the Russian authorities and Russian subjects was likewise hostile and signaled the wholesale targeting of the Armenian population of Erzurum. Russian subjects, that is, in most cases Armenians, were subjected to searches, imprisonment, and trial without the participation or knowledge of the Russian consular authorities. The vali’s mistreatment

⁴⁷² AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1643, ll. 30–31, February 24, 1907. [See Appendix 54.](#)

⁴⁷³ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1643, ll. 194–195, April 6, 1907.

⁴⁷⁴ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1643, ll. 30–31, February 24, 1907.

even extended to employees of the consulate: its *kavass* was accused of corresponding with secret Turkish committees; the dragoman of complicity in the activities of Armenian revolutionaries; and the postal couriers of smuggling Armenians across the border and delivering subversive revolutionary letters.⁴⁷⁵ The governor's steps clearly indicated a belief within the vali's circle that the Russian consulate was facilitating revolutionary activity in the vilayet.

According to Russian Ambassador Ivan Alekseevich Zinoviev, Scriabin did not encourage Armenian revolutionary activity, and the accusations to that effect served as a diversionary tactic by the Ottoman authorities.⁴⁷⁶ Zinoviev added that the accusation of revolutionary intentions attributed to the Armenians had been deliberately put into circulation by the Erzurum vali, Nuri Bey, solely in order to remove responsibility from the local authorities for the disturbances that had arisen among the Muslims and to shift that responsibility onto the Armenians.⁴⁷⁷ The report argued that unrest in Erzurum stemmed from broader popular discontent rather than foreign instigation: harsh tax enforcement, restrictions on seasonal labor migration to other cities under threat of loss of Ottoman subjecthood, and official incitement pushed Armenians into despair, leading many to emigrate to Russia. Armenian petitions to the Russian consulate for resettlement were, however, consistently refused by the consulate as they had always been since the Hamdian massacres. Zinoviev concluded that these accusations were deliberately encouraged by local officials in order to compromise the Russian consul and to externalize responsibility for the unrest.⁴⁷⁸

In contrast, in a memorandum handed to the Ambassador of Russia in Constantinople in May 1907, the Ottoman Grand Vizier argued the emigration movement among the Armenians was due to the incitement of Caucasian Armenian revolutionary committees. He also blamed the Russian consuls, as well as their acceptance of certain petitions, have been regarded by the Armenians as an encouragement.⁴⁷⁹ This claim was certainly problematic, since at the same time the Russian ambassador warned the Ottoman minister of foreign affairs to take measures against the mass migration of Armenians to Russia.⁴⁸⁰ Despite the fact that the Russian authorities did not

⁴⁷⁵ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1643, ll. 194–195, April 6, 1907.

⁴⁷⁶ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1643, ll. 147–149, April 28/May 11, 1907. [See Appendix 55.](#)

⁴⁷⁷ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1643, ll. 150–151, April 28/May 11, 1907.

⁴⁷⁸ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1643, ll. 147–149, April 28/May 11, 1907.

⁴⁷⁹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1643, l. 152, May 10/23, 1907, enclosure no. 140, copy, memorandum handed by the Grand Vizier to the Russian ambassador in Constantinople.

⁴⁸⁰ Dinçer, "Exclusionary Border Regime," 211.

allow Armenian immigration, they were unable to prevent it fully, and numerous Armenians nevertheless left the vilayet, although regrettably no concrete figures are available.

The revolt in Erzurum was eventually put down by the end of 1907. A Russian press bulletin reproducing diplomatic and consular intelligence, published by the St. Petersburg Telegraph Agency in November 1907 reported:

„CONSTANTINOPLE, 28 November (SPA). — According to consular reports, the situation in Erzurum has improved significantly. With the assistance of the summoned redif (reserve troops), the vali succeeded in arresting sixty Muslims with almost no resistance. As a result, nearly all leaders of the Muslim committee have fallen into the hands of the authorities, including Mufti Haji Akif, the lawyer Seyfullah, and the freethinking preacher Hacı Şevket. Since then, Erzurum—guarded by a strong military detachment—has been in a state of complete calm.”⁴⁸¹

Scriabin reported Seyfullah Efendi, under torture, revealed the entire organization of the conspiracy and identified the members of the secret committee, among whom were many wealthy merchants. It was also ascertained that revolutionary correspondence was delivered and transported to Erzurum for the committee by a cavalry officer. This removed from Russian postal couriers the accusation, previously raised by the Ottoman authorities.⁴⁸²

The consular reports about the happenings in Erzurum suggest that Ottoman claims alleging Russian encouragement of Armenian migration are questionable. Russian policy had in fact tended to discourage the influx of Armenians into its territory and preferred to keep the Armenian population within the Ottoman Empire in order to contain revolutionary activity beyond its own borders. By limiting cross-border movement, Russian authorities sought to prevent the spread of revolutionary sentiment into the Caucasus and maintain stability along their frontier.

Moreover, the portrayal of Armenians as internal enemies appears to have served as a political strategy to deflect responsibility for deeper structural problems in the vilayet. Part of this involved blaming Armenians working for the Russian consulate for delivering revolutionary correspondence, which, as seen above from the telegraph, was later disproved by an internal Ottoman investigation as well. However, this again contributed to the stigmatization of Armenians as aiding the Russians.

⁴⁸¹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1644, l. 281, November 28, 1907, telegrams of the St. Petersburg Telegraph Agency, *Daily Bulletin*.

⁴⁸² AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1644, l. 319, December 2/19/30, 1907. [See Appendix 56.](#)

After the Revolution: Apathy and the Limits of Young Turk rule in Erzurum

The restored constitutionalism placated tensions in the six vilayets but only temporarily. In comparison to the stifling and oppressive atmosphere of the preceding months, the Russian consul Nikolai Aleksandrovich Scriabin had cabled in September 1908 that a much more peaceful atmosphere prevailed in Erzurum after the Young Turk revolution. According to the Russian consul, the police forces disappeared from the street which caused a great relief for the locals who had been busy with preparing for the upcoming local festivities rather than worrying about their survival.⁴⁸³ Similarly, the Russian consul in Bitlis reported on the cessation of Kurdish raids too.⁴⁸⁴

Despite the success of the revolution and the somewhat more peaceful circumstances, a great deal of political apathy permeated the city. The majority of administrators, military officers, and wealthy Muslims and Armenians, including the Muslim farmers demonstrated a lack of enthusiasm towards the political developments in Istanbul. Local Kurdish tribes were reported to be opposing the restoration of the constitution, fearing they would lose the privileges with the installment of the new regime. In contrast, the Young Turks and the Armenian revolutionaries demonstrated energy for achieving their political goals under the new regime. Additionally, the CUP had also organized so-called “*national clubs*” intended to provide a platform for Muslims and Christians alike to voice their opinions. However, owing to being subjected to centuries of harassment, the Armenians remained distrustful towards the Ottoman regime, despite the successful overthrow of the Sultan’s government.⁴⁸⁵

During a meeting with Scriabin in 1908 September, the vali, Vecib bey, acknowledged that retaining power was much more challenging than seizing it. This demonstrates how fragmented the political and social landscape in Erzurum remained even after the Young Turk revolution. The CUP believed that the absence of unity between Christians and Muslims might undermine the state thus attempted to bridge the gap by reportedly visiting the Armenian meetings to diminish disillusionment or concern present among them. Moreover, the Young Turks in Erzurum grew increasingly fearful that the Sultan would discard the constitutional changes and reinstate his power

⁴⁸³ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2676, ll. 49–50, September 3, 1908.

⁴⁸⁴ Manoug Joseph Somakian, *Empires in Conflict: Armenia and the Great Powers, 1912–1920* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 38.

⁴⁸⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2676, ll. 51–54, September 3, 1908.

with the assistance of his extensive network of spies. Based on his observations, Vecib bey was also apprehensive about the CUP's failure to garner support from the Muslim population, who best case remained indifferent towards the political changes in Istanbul. In order to earn the trust of the local population, the CUP established sub-committees in major cities and invited the most enlightened Young Turks to join their circles.⁴⁸⁶

The situation described in the reports indicates the uneven influence of the Young Turk regime. In the European provinces, particularly Macedonia, Albania, and Thrace, the revolutionary movement was strongest. This posed a challenge because the Young Turks sought to control the Ottoman government and armed forces while simultaneously undermining the sultan's authority. To achieve this, they needed the support of reactionary elements as well. As a result, in the revolution's early months, they showed respect for Abdul Hamid II to gain the reactionaries' backing. Although Young Turk cells also existed in Anatolia, Syria, and Iraq, particularly in military garrisons, their propaganda had little impact in the Arab provinces, where Abdul Hamid II and his followers enjoyed significant legitimacy.⁴⁸⁷

Renewed Political Representation and Electoral Practices

As previously noted, the rule of Abdul Hamid II brought about the suspension of the first Ottoman constitution thus putting an end to the First Constitutional Era and hampering the hard-earned achievements of the Tanzimat. His reign marked the beginning of a 30-year-long hiatus of the parliament inhibiting the democratic development of the empire. In contrast, the Young Turk revolution paved the way for renewed political representation where the interests of ethnic minorities of the empire may be heard. The architects of the new constitutional opted for an integrative electoral law which preserved the achievements of the first constitutional era with major improvements. The notion of a comprehensive Ottomanist vision gained prominence in political circles, which did not distinguish Muslims and non-Muslims, and inspired a sense of optimism among those layers of society who had been silent or silenced.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁷ Dimitrij. R. Zhantiev, "Dva obraza mladoturetskoi revoliutsii: Obshchestvennaia reaktsiia v Beirute i Damaské na revoliutsionnye sobytiia 1908 goda v Osmanskoi imperii," *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, no. 4 (2023): 61–63.

⁴⁸⁸ Hasan Kayali, "Elections and the Electoral Process in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1919," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 3 (1995): 267–68.

Nevertheless, the elections saw non-Muslim communities, particularly Greeks and Armenians, protest because of the lack of proportional representation since the CUP's preferred universal representation which generally favored Muslims. The elections also often involved fraud, gerrymandering, and the suppression of voters. There were reports of electoral commissions manipulating outcomes to ensure Muslim dominance in election.⁴⁸⁹ Besides the Russian consulate, other European consular representatives in Erzurum also reported on the Dashnaktsutiun and CUP Committees monitoring and controlling the elections often through all dishonest means necessary.⁴⁹⁰

The day after the Revolution, an imperial decree published in newspapers ordered the assembly of a new parliament; the same decree was communicated to provincial authorities which required them to initiate the election of deputies. Voting began in October and ended in early December. The significance of the indirect, two-stage 1908 elections was that they were the first in Ottoman history in which political parties actively competed. Most notably, the Committee of Union and Progress and the Ottomanist, decentralist Liberal Union participated in the elections. The CUP secured a comfortable majority.⁴⁹¹

The new electoral law stipulated that each *sancak* was entitled to endorse one elector (for every 50,000 male residents of all ages) who then voted for the actual deputies in the chambers.⁴⁹² The elections of electors commenced on 5th October 1908 in Erzurum. According to the law, the Erzurum vilayet was entitled to send 5 electors after every 50,000 male residents: one from Bajazit, one from Erzincan, one from Erzurum, and two from the city of Erzurum.⁴⁹³

Russian consular reports are instrumental in linking the 1908 parliamentary elections and the elected MPs in Erzurum to the preceding cycle of unrest and erosion of state authority that had unfolded in the province since at least 1906. Through the description of the elected deputies, it is possible to assess a segment of the political landscape of the Erzurum vilayet in the new constitutional era.

⁴⁸⁹ Arus Yumul, "The 1908 Ottoman Elections," *Historian* 85, no. 1 (2023): 38–43.

⁴⁹⁰ Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 63.

⁴⁹¹ Yumul, "1908 Ottoman Elections," 37–38.

⁴⁹² Kayalı, "Elections and the Electoral Process," 269.

⁴⁹³ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2676, ll. 79–81, October 6, 1908.

According to the report of the Russian consul Skryabin, the elections were marred by unfair practices due to the manipulation of the Young Turks and Dashnaks, thus they did not represent the popular opinion realistically.⁴⁹⁴ Indeed, the flaws inherent in the electoral system allowed for manipulative tactics. For instance, sparsely populated territories, with a population of merely 50,000, could endorse a maximum of 25 secondary voters who were authorized to vote for the provincial candidates. Due to the limited number of secondary voters, they could be influenced with relative ease.⁴⁹⁵ The election of deputies finished in Erzurum on 21st October and all in all 5 officials were elected who could represent the vilayet in the legislative chambers.⁴⁹⁶

Hacı Şevket Effendi emerged as the front-runner, having received 130 electoral votes. Hacı Şevket was a 35-year-old resident who had been educated in the local medreses of Erzurum. He was known for his pro-Christian rhetoric and his leadership in anti-government Muslim movements as he vehemently opposed the Sultan's absolute monarchy. He was also imprisoned before, but with the change of regime, he was released and rose to prominence. However, his ideas regarding Christian-Muslim brotherhood were met with disapproval from local religious leaders who cursed and referred to him as a "dog".⁴⁹⁷

The candidate who received the second-highest number of votes was *Seyfulla Effendi*. The lawyer, who received 120 votes, was in his fifties and was initially aligned with Hacı Şevket, but later abandoned his liberal views. According to the Russian consulate, he likely always leaned toward those in power, which portrayed him as opportunistic. Scriabin also indicated that he was closely associated with the Russian consulate.⁴⁹⁸

The third candidate *Hacı Hafız*, who received 110 votes, was a native of Kiğı from the Erzurum province. While he had served in various legal capacities in many places, he was reported to be unknown to the people of Erzurum.⁴⁹⁹

The fourth deputy was an Armenian named *Vartkes Serengülian*⁵⁰⁰, who received 75 votes. He was 40 years old and received his education at schools in Erzurum. He declared himself a

⁴⁹⁴ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2676, ll. 92–93, October 24, 1908.

⁴⁹⁵ Kayalı, "Elections and the Electoral Process," 269.

⁴⁹⁶ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2676, l. 88, October 24, 1908.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁸ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2676, l. 89, October 24, 1908.

⁴⁹⁹ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2676, l. 90, October 24, 1908.

⁵⁰⁰ Vartkes Serengülian (1871–1915) was an Ottoman Armenian political activist and deputy of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in the Ottoman parliament. Born in Erzurum and educated at the Ardzinian and Sanasarian colleges, he was active in revolutionary circles from the late 1880s and was repeatedly arrested, receiving a 101-year prison sentence in Van in 1901. Released after the Young Turk Revolution, he was elected to parliament, where he

revolutionary 18 years before while in Constantinople, from where he was sent to Erzurum after a long period of imprisonment. He was engaged in propaganda activities before being sent to Van, where he joined the Dashnaks and took part in an armed uprising. Severely injured in the fights, he was imprisoned once more in Diyarbakır, but was released after the new constitution was declared. Upon arriving in Erzurum, he was initially an outsider but managed to establish some connections with the Young Turks.⁵⁰¹

The fifth figure was Karekin Pastermajian⁵⁰², who received 75 votes. He was educated at the Sanasarian school and later went to Switzerland, where he became a revolutionary. He took part in the terrorist attack against the Ottoman Bank before returning to Europe. He only returned to Erzurum after the constitution was declared and was clearly affiliated with the Dashnaks.⁵⁰³

Considering the above, the emergence of figures such as Hacı Şevket Efendi and the electoral success of both Muslim and Armenian activists were not sudden outcomes of constitutional reform, but the result of longer-term processes of oppositional networks of Muslim reformists, Armenian revolutionaries, and Young Turk sympathizers within the army, who had gained legitimacy through confrontation with Hamidian authority.

Russian reports portray the elections less as a democratizing event than as a controlled channel through which earlier revolutionary energies were redirected into parliamentary form through electoral manipulation. In doing so, they also illuminate how Erzurum's pre-revolutionary unrest directly shaped the composition of its post-revolutionary political representation. Leading liberal-revolutionary figures of the unrest in Erzurum throughout the years 1906–1907 became bearers of political power. It must be noted that even during the revolts prior to the revolution, the protesters split into two camps, a reactionary and a reformist. The questionable fairness of the

advocated labor organization and denounced anti-Armenian violence, including the Adana massacres. Arrested on June 2, 1915, he was deported to Urfa and murdered later that year. See Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 29, 59, 63, 109, 111, 533–34.

⁵⁰¹ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2676, l. 91, October 24, 1908.

⁵⁰² *Karekin Pastermajian (1872–1923)*: Also known as *Armen Garo*, was an Erzurum-born Armenian revolutionary and leading member of the Dashnaksutium (ARF). After participating in the Ottoman Bank takeover in 1896, he returned to the Ottoman Empire following the Young Turk Revolution and was elected deputy for Erzurum to the Ottoman parliament (1908–1912). During the First World War, he played a key role in the defense of Van and later served as ambassador of the First Republic of Armenia to the United States. See Anahide Ter Minassian, *Nationalism and Socialism in the Armenian Revolutionary Movement (1887–1912)* (Cambridge, MA: Zoryan Institute, 1984), 170–175; Raymond H. Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 310–315; Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 203–205.

⁵⁰³ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2676, ll. 92–93, October 24, 1908.

elections also raises doubts about how representative they were in voicing popular opinion. This, in turn, created persistent difficulties for the exercise of authority under the CUP regime, as patterns of unstable governance were constantly reproduced.

Armenians, Kurds and the Committee of Union and Progress Beyond Elections

The elections in November 1908 provided opportunities for political figures who had been suppressed during Abdul Hamid's autocratic rule. With the restoration of the Constitution, the ARF could operate openly for the first time in the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁰⁴ Formerly imprisoned revolutionaries were able to rise to prominence due to the relatively greater freedom provided by the new constitution. The presence of Armenian revolutionary representatives indicated a brief period of strong cooperation between the CUP and the ARF.⁵⁰⁵

The Dashnaksutiun accepted and supported the idea of Ottomanism put forward by the CUP, recognized the state's territorial integrity, and disbanded its fedayi self-defense units. Despite the 1909 Adana massacre, the ARF maintained cooperation with the CUP and issued a joint communiqué, emphasizing the need for provincial reforms and denying Armenian independence aspirations.⁵⁰⁶ The collaboration between Armenian revolutionaries and the Committee of Union and Progress in Erzurum was also demonstrated by the fact that the Erzurum local subcommittee of the CUP, in coordination with Armenian volunteers, actively collected donations for the fedayi who were fighting in the Persian revolutionary movement in January 1909. In addition to providing them with necessary equipment, they also assisted in recruiting volunteers.⁵⁰⁷ A philanthropic event was also organized to raise funds for the cause. The event was attended by local officials, and lectures were given in Turkish, while members of the CUP committee were reading out articles about freedom during breaks. The *sazandaris* (musicians), who had come from Russia, chanted slogans about Muslim-Christian unity, emphasizing the importance of religious harmony in the pursuit of revolutionary goals.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁴ Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule*, 36.

⁵⁰⁵ Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 63.

⁵⁰⁶ Dikran M. Kaligian, "A Prelude to Genocide: CUP Population Policies and Provincial Insecurity, 1908–14," in *Late Ottoman Genocides: The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and Young Turkish Population and Extermination Policies*, ed. Dominik J. Schaller and Jürgen Zimmerer (London: Routledge, 2013), 77–78.

⁵⁰⁷ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2677, ll. 11–13, January 9, 1909.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

The outcomes of the elections were announced by the CUP in public street rallies in Erzurum in November 1908. Dignitaries such as the vali Tahir Paşa, the kadi, as well as officers and generals were in attendance. The majority of the attendees were Muslim. In addition to the announcement of the deputies, several speeches were delivered by these dignitaries. For example, Durakh Bey, the representative of the landowners, praised the Armenian revolutionaries for fighting for freedom, brotherhood, and equality, while criticizing the Kurds for serving the old regime with weapons.⁵⁰⁹

The Russian consulate also reported that the ARF-CUP alliance caused a discord with the Hinchaks, who “promoted exclusive Armenian identity.” On November 14, in Erzurum, a joint assembly saw heated debates where the Dashnaksutiun backed Ottoman solidarity and pledged armed support for constitutionalism, while the Hinchakians accused them of betraying Armenian interests. Despite intense discussion, no concrete resolution was reached.⁵¹⁰ This scene in the reports is indicative of the country-wide divide between the two Armenian parties in the period post 1908. The ARF and CUP collaborated in the 1908, 1912, and 1914 Ottoman elections as the CUP favored the ARF for abandoning the cause of a fully independent Armenia, which eventually resulted in significant Armenian (Dashnaksutiun) representation in the Ottoman parliament, while the Hinchaks continued advocating for independence and separatist directions, causing them to remain politically marginalized.⁵¹¹ While the Hinchaks struggled in the second constitutional period the ARF managed to grow its network and was reportedly inspired by the CUP’s modus operandi in disseminating party ideas among the local population. Therefore, the Dashnaksutiun also started a subscription campaign for its own printing press, “*Haraj*”^{512, 513}

Russian consul Scriabin’s description of the Armenian-CUP relationship took on a sharp and urgent tone in his report from the end of January 1909. Scriabin noted that the “*arrogance and striving for equality*” of the Armenians was increasingly infuriating the Muslims, including that of the more liberal Young Turks who had previously expressed support for the Armenian liberation

⁵⁰⁹ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2676, ll. 107–111, November 7, 1908.

⁵¹⁰ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 50–52, November 17, 1910. [See Appendix 57.](#)

⁵¹¹ Kemal Çiçek, “The Question of Genocidal Tendency in the Minority Politics of the Young Turks,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 33, no. 1 (2013): 8–11.

⁵¹² *Haraj* (Հարայ) means “Forward.”

⁵¹³ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 50–52, November 17, 1910.

movement. He said, "*the distrust was growing by the hour*". Furthermore, Scriabin's report indicated the local subcommittee of the CUP had established surveillance over Armenian activists and instructed its agents in the provinces to obtain information.⁵¹⁴ As a result, the Armenian communities started to prepare for the impending danger thus the procurement and distribution of weapons continued. He also attributed the heightened activity of the Armenian revolutionary groups to the growing hatred of the local Muslim population.⁵¹⁵

Scriabin explained that the vilayet authorities reported a considerable influx of Armenians bringing weapons and dynamite, much of which was intercepted by the authorities. In response, Muslims, especially the urban *dadaş*, who had been the most negatively disposed toward Armenians, also armed themselves. Realizing the gravity of the situation, the authorities prohibited Muslims from openly expressing hostility toward Armenians; nevertheless, unrest among Muslims had already spread not only within the Erzurum vilayet but also to others, such as Bitlis, Sivas, Harput, and Diyarbakır. Containing this growing animosity proved difficult, and in the city of Erzurum there were two notable instances of atrocities involving the killing of Armenians.⁵¹⁶

The Challenges of Constitutional Governance

Reaction and Mutiny in Erzurum after the Constitutional Revolution

As stated in the preceding chapter, the Young Turks consisted of multiple political factions, with different political visions regarding the future of the Ottoman state, but they shared a common goal. They were resolute in their endeavor to depose the Sultan, reinstate the constitution, and consolidate the accomplishments of the Tanzimat reform program. Nevertheless, the pursuit of a more Westernized state also led to the secularization of the state in some respects. For instance, the 1838 British-Ottoman commercial treaty allowed Westerners to trade without being bound by Sharia law. Additionally, the 1839 Gülhane edict established a new bureaucracy and conscription army modeled after Western practices, which necessitated the establishment of civic schools for

⁵¹⁴ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1645, ll. 14–15, January 19, 1909. [See Appendix 58.](#)

⁵¹⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2677, ll. 17–19, January 19, 1909.

⁵¹⁶ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1645, ll. 51–53, January 19, 1909. [See Appendix 59.](#)

training new civil servants and soldiers. Another contributing factor to the country's de-Islamization was the 1856 Islahat Fermanı (reform edict), which introduced the concept of equality between Muslims and non-Muslims. Despite being a significant milestone, it failed to take a deep root, and the Muslim population became increasingly resentful towards the Tanzimat.⁵¹⁷

Although the 1908 Constitutional Revolution was successful in terms of seizing power, it also fragmented political power in the Ottoman Empire and did not enjoy widespread support. Sultan Abdulhamid II remained on the throne but was constrained by the constitution and had to share authority with the parliament. The CUP dominated parliament, though they were not officially in power, which enabled them to pass laws and exert indirect control over the government. This resulted in the ousting of Kamil Paşa, who ran the government and associated himself with Prince Sabahaddin's Liberty Party, in early 1909. The reforms initiated by the CUP abolished censorship, encouraged new associations, and promoted centralization.⁵¹⁸

Upon assuming power in 1908, the Young Turks were perceived by the reactionary population as the embodiment of secularization, with an intention to eradicate Islam and Sharia. The Islamist press, turned against Rıza, the Young Turk movement's leader, and accused him of atheism, Westernization, and thus moral corruption because he supported women's education. In April 1909, an armed insurrection was launched by the supporters of the *ancien régime* in Istanbul on the 12th and 13th. The insurrection was sparked by military and religious figures who demanded the return to Sharia and the removal of Rıza. As tensions escalated, mobs attacked Unionist institutions, killed individuals thought to be Rıza, and targeted even his family.⁵¹⁹ The insurgency was an opportunity for those who benefitted from the former regime to replace the constitution implemented by those whom they considered “unfaithful elements” of the empire.⁵²⁰ The insurgents succeeded in taking over the capital, but the CUP recaptured it shortly after. The Young Turks were astonished that the rebels had the ability to organize such a rebellion and that there was

⁵¹⁷ Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 73–83.

⁵¹⁸ Selim Sezer, “‘A Pretty Bad Reputation’: Reflections of ‘The 31 March Incident’ on Ottoman Syria, Its Background, and Its Immediate Consequences,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 59, no. 3 (2023): 395–96.

⁵¹⁹ Erdal Kaynar, “The Logic of Enlightenment and the Realities of Revolution: Young Turks after the Young Turk Revolution,” in *The Young Turk Revolution and the Ottoman Empire: The Aftermath of 1908*, ed. Noemi Levy-Aksu and François Georgeon (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 52–57.

⁵²⁰ Bedros Der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 149–50.

significant popular support behind them. It became apparent to the CUP leaders that preserving the constitutional reform achievements would be more challenging than they had anticipated.⁵²¹

Earlier, I noted that during the disturbances of 1906–1907 in Erzurum the soldiers refused to fire into the crowd, sympathized with the revolt, and concluded that the unrest was driven by material grievances rather than political motives. Russian reports from post-revolutionary Erzurum reinforce this notion.

Notably, signs of discontent with the CUP were evident in the vilayet of Erzurum almost simultaneously to the armed rebellion in the capital. This marked a significant change in atmosphere compared to the circumstances portrayed by the Russian consulate in 1909. On April 8, soldiers in Erzurum organized a march during which they expressed support for the reactionary regime and religious traditions by shouting, “*Long live the Padishah and the Sharia*”. Fearing a military mutiny, local inhabitants shut themselves indoors and closed shops and bazaars. The soldiers also smashed two CUP clubs and threw stones at houses, and some CUP members even sought refuge at the French consulate while awaiting the end of the unrest. However, according to the Russian consulate, there was no excessive violence against the population despite the intimidating nature of the march. The vali, Tahir Paşa, and the commandant, Yusuf Paşa, attempted to calm the situation and even visited the municipality and the Armenian murahass, emphasizing their commitment to maintaining peace in the city.⁵²²

On April 12, the bazaars and shops reopened, suggesting a decline in tensions. On April 15, the vali informed the consuls that Mehmed V had ascended to the throne, a development that reportedly created unfavorable conditions for Yusuf Paşa, who was widely regarded as a reactionary figure. The Russian consul Scriabin, who attended the ceremony organized to mark the accession of Mehmed V, observed that no military parade was held. This absence pointed to a growing schism between the civil and military administrations, likely arising from tensions between loyalist and reactionary officers in Erzurum. CUP loyalists viewed Yusuf Paşa as an epitome of the reactionary movement and feared that he was attempting to eliminate them. Consequently, they approached the vali, Tahir Paşa, and requested Yusuf Paşa’s removal from office. Tahir Paşa then ordered soldiers remaining loyal to the CUP to force Yusuf Paşa to leave

⁵²¹ Zürcher, *Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building*, 73–83.

⁵²² AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2677, ll. 46–55, May 1, 1909.

his post. To avoid further repercussions, Yusuf Paşa left the city on April 20, under the cover of night.⁵²³

To apprehend the instigators of the mutiny in the Ottoman borderland, *ferik*⁵²⁴ Fuat Paşa arrived in Erzurum from Erzincan, which caused further unrest among the soldiers. Although Yusuf pasha appeared to have been personally responsible for the mutiny in Erzurum, it was reported by the Russian consul that without his presence, Tahir pasha would not have been able to peacefully resolve the tense situation in the city.⁵²⁵ Therefore, it can be inferred that Yusuf pasha was an influential and respected figure among the reactionaries, who could take control of the soldiers and prevent a major massacre of Armenians. On May 30, the Erzincan Military Tribunal issued its verdicts. A total of 289 individuals were apprehended, including 26 officers and officials, while the remaining consisted of soldiers and junior officers. Yusuf Paşa, identified as the instigator of the rebellion, underwent a trial in Istanbul and subsequently faced execution.⁵²⁶ On June 8, 1909, the Russian consulate reported that throughout the mutiny, the population was in the hands of the rebel soldiers.⁵²⁷

Of particular significance is the coexistence of parallel and conflicting agendas in Erzurum. Interestingly, in Erzurum, most soldiers (of the Fourth Army) represented a more reactionary stance towards the Young Turk regime, while in Macedonia it was the officers of the Third Army who forced Abdülhamid to restore the constitution in 1908 and suppressed the counterrevolution on April 13, 1909. However, it must also be stated that Young Turk rule also meant the end of the career for many in military ranks, as the CUP systematically tried to eradicate Sultan-loyalist elements of the former regime from the military, which caused the schism within the civilian and military administration in Erzurum as well.⁵²⁸ This conflict was also reflected in differing career trajectories between the *alaylı* (those who advanced through the ranks) and *mektepli* (graduates of

⁵²³ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁴ *Ferik* was a senior Ottoman military rank roughly equivalent to a lieutenant general, typically held by officers commanding corps-level formations or exercising broad military authority in the provinces.

⁵²⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2677, ll. 46–55, May 1, 1909.

⁵²⁶ Nejla Günay, “1909 Nisan Bunalımının Erzurum’daki Yansımaları,” paper presented at the *II. Uluslararası Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri ve Büyük Güçler Sempozyumu (Sevk ve İskân Kanunu’nun 100. Yılında)*, Erzurum, Turkey, 2015, 881.

⁵²⁷ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2677, l. 56, June 8, 1909.

⁵²⁸ Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 56–57.

military academies). The former tended to maintain loyalty to the Sultan, while the latter were more closely aligned with the Young Turks.⁵²⁹

The Erzurum mutiny underscores the uneven reach of CUP rule in the Ottoman borderlands and highlights the limited ideological penetration of the Young Turks in some military and bureaucratic circles in the region. While the counterrevolution of 1909 was militarily suppressed, it did not extinguish reactionary currents that had already been visible in Erzurum prior to 1908. After all, even in 1906–1907 the revolt in Erzurum did not primarily advance the idea of constitutional change but was rather the result of unbearable financial circumstances and security issues. The events of 1909 in Erzurum reflect broader problems in the CUP's attempts toward more secular governance, the failure of which was followed by stricter control, as the government did not trust its own population to carry through with the changes.

Centralization and Party Control in the Erzurum Administration

The recruitment of Christians for military service also aroused discontent in Erzurum among the Muslim population. Local Muslims resented the fact, in particular, that newly enlisted Christians were sent by the government to frontier posts.⁵³⁰ Although ARF leaders welcomed equal conscription, villagers in Erzurum largely resisted it, and many conscription-age men secretly left for Russia. Authorities responded by ordering border guards to monitor crossings closely and detain suspicious youths for transfer to local administrations.⁵³¹

As a result of this discontent, secret meetings were held in protest against the government's orders and against the vali among the reactionary Muslim elite. The governor, Celal Bey, was apparently highly unpopular not only among the general population but also among the Young Turks.⁵³² Consequently, a member of the CUP, Nazım Bey, upon his return from a trip to Salonika, was sent to Erzurum, and it soon became evident that he had been delegated by the local CUP as an inspector to observe the vali's handling of security issues and to report daily to the party on all

⁵²⁹ Mustafa İlter, "Making of the Unionist Bureaucracy: Purging the Hamidian Cadres, Rule of Law, and the Limits of the Unionist Power (1908–1910)," *Middle Eastern Studies* 59, no. 3 (2022): 383–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2022.2087636>.

⁵³⁰ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 33–34, October 6, 1910. [See Appendix 60.](#)

⁵³¹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 60–61, December 8, 1910. [See Appendix 61.](#)

⁵³² AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 33–34, October 6, 1910.

his orders.⁵³³ Thus, Nazım Bey exercised considerable influence in Erzurum; during this period, suspicion toward foreign representatives also intensified and gave rise to pervasive surveillance through a network of spies, restrictions on consular dragomans, and a climate of intimidation.⁵³⁴ In addition, an instruction received from the central CUP headquarters in Salonika, granted the local CUP club members the right to oversee the actions of the administration.⁵³⁵

This tight control was introduced in response to widespread reactionary tendencies reported across the Erzurum vilayet. In several districts, local officials and influential figures were said to sympathize with or actively support reactionary elements, sometimes violently, as in Hınıs, or through effective agitation, as in Bayburt, which limited the authorities' willingness to intervene decisively. Elsewhere, such as in Tercan, administrative officials were removed on account of suspected reactionary sympathies.⁵³⁶ As indicated in the Russian consular reports, it is apparent that the CUP had occupied organs of the state administration in order to exert greater control in the borderland amid widespread discontent, which was certainly not a step toward the democratization of the country.

Russian consular reports describe mounting urban unrest in Erzurum caused by sharp increases in the prices of essential goods as well. Popular anger was directed both at the vali and at the CUP as disillusionment with the constitutional regime and nostalgia for the pre-constitutional period were increasingly evident. This shift was symbolized by the muted reception of deputy Seyfulla Efendi, deputy of the vilayet, in contrast to earlier ceremonial welcomes. Rising transport costs, exacerbated by a new tax on carters, further intensified public dissatisfaction.⁵³⁷ For all this, Celal Bey was thought to be responsible by the locals, and when he departed from Erzurum for his new post in Adrianople, he was seen off only by officials and employees, while the population demonstratively stayed away.⁵³⁸

The Armenian population was also dissatisfied with him, both for his support of Kurdish abuses in the agrarian question and for his bias in all matters affecting Armenian interests.⁵³⁹ For instance, the local administration appeared indifferent in a case in the Tercan district, where

⁵³³ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 79–81, December 24, 1910. [See Appendix 62.](#)

⁵³⁴ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1647, ll. 49–59, March 9/16, 1911. [See Appendix 63.](#)

⁵³⁵ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1647, ll. 25–34, January 8, 1911. [See Appendix 64.](#)

⁵³⁶ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 60–61, December 8, 1910. [See Appendix 65.](#)

⁵³⁷ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1647, ll. 93–94, June 24, 1911. [See Appendix 66.](#)

⁵³⁸ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1647, ll. 105–106, August 5, 1911. [See Appendix 67.](#)

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*

Armenians filed a complaint against Kurdish gangs that abducted an Armenian girl. The local governor dismissed the complaint as unfounded and imprisoned the complainants. Scriabin explained that the deputies and the Young Turks were unable to overcome the routine established by the previous regime. In the provincial courts, there was still strict adherence to the practice whereby punishment was based not on evidence presented to the judge, but on preliminary protocols compiled under the old regime.⁵⁴⁰

The newly appointed vali, Mehmed Emin Bey ⁵⁴¹ was already known in Erzurum, having previously served there as head of the customs administration. He made a favorable impression on Scriabin. A well-known poet, he promised a program of just treatment toward the multi-ethnic population of the Erzurum vilayet. This stance did not appeal to local reactionaries, who feared that under Emin Bey's rule the Armenians might become emboldened. Their fears seemed to be confirmed by the fact that the new governor immediately ordered the arrest of the rather influential Avni Bey of Pasinler, who had attempted violence against the wife and daughter of an Armenian man named Aram. Scriabin claimed that such an act would have been unimaginable under the administration of Celal Bey.⁵⁴²

Nevertheless, the appointment of party delegates to keep the provincial administration in check, or the installation of politically aligned valis in Erzurum, failed to eliminate dissent in the vilayet, as Russian reports indicate, since the unrest stemmed from deeper structural problems that remained present in the borderland.

Religious Opposition in Erzurum

By 1911, the challenges encountered by the Committee of Union and Progress had created an overwhelming burden on both the political and financial landscape of the country. The Russian consulate reported that a significant portion of the directives received by CUP members in Erzurum

⁵⁴⁰ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 36–38, October 13, 1910. [See Appendix 68.](#)

⁵⁴¹ Mehmet Emin Yurdakul (1869–1944) was an Ottoman and later Turkish nationalist poet, writer, and politician associated with Pan-Turkism and the Committee of Union and Progress. Active in nationalist literary circles from the 1890s, he joined the CUP in 1907 and later served in the Ottoman parliament, representing Mosul from 1913. His poetry, emphasizing vatan (fatherland), religion, and Turkic identity, gained wide popularity during the First World War. After 1923, he continued his political career in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, supporting major reforms, including the adoption of the Latin alphabet. See Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 76.

⁵⁴² AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1647, ll. 115–116, September 5, 1911. [See Appendix 69.](#)

entailed the imposition of elevated tax rates. This, in turn, provoked discontent among the locals and resulted in a decline in the popularity of the CUP. Moreover, the situation was further compounded by the rampant misconduct and corruption exhibited by local police forces.⁵⁴³

Beside all these structural problems, ideological issues continued to resurface. The presence of reactionary sentiment in Erzurum during the time was evidenced by the formation of various religious societies that sought to sway the local population by thematizing issues that were highly valued by conservative communities. One such society was the *Cemiyeti Ilmiye*, which consisted solely of local religious leaders and was established in January 1911. Among their requests to the vali was the prohibition of women from visiting public baths and the enforcement of a law mandating that women wear headscarves when outside their homes. The society also proposed additional laws that meant to control multiple aspects of life, such as a ban on gambling games like trictrac or card games.⁵⁴⁴ These proposals illustrate the extent to which reactionary attitudes were deeply entrenched within the society and the challenges they posed to the reforms initiated by the CUP.

The Committee of Union and Progress regarded the activities of the *Cemiyeti Ilmiye* with suspicion and urged prominent figures not to join it. These individuals refused, asserting that they would serve the constitution according to their own understanding and in accordance with the teachings of the Quran, and would not accept other authority. After failing to curb the society's growing influence, the CUP leadership appeared to have yielded to pressure from conservative and reactionary circles. They realized that compromise was necessary to secure the support of groups less enthusiastic about the new constitutional order. When the *Cemiyeti Ilmiye* proposed closing shops and bazaars on the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, the CUP ultimately supported the measure, extending it to include the closure of offices and schools. Russian consular reports noted that many residents were surprised by the proposal and confused by the new political order, in which administrative authority appeared weakened while various clubs issued directives. Armenian merchants, however, did not comply with the order to close their bazaars.⁵⁴⁵ At other times, the *Cemiyeti Ilmiye* expressed their dissatisfaction with the antagonism of the CUP, which was impeding the publication and implementation of their decisions. It's worth noting that they must

⁵⁴³ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2680, ll. 1–2, January 26/February 7, 1911.

⁵⁴⁴ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2680, l. 8, February 7, 1911.

⁵⁴⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2680, l. 37, March 12, 1911.

have been an exceptionally productive organization, given that they had assembled a collection of their resolutions spanning 93 pages and submitted it for review by both houses of legislation.⁵⁴⁶

In response to mounting problems, the CUP developed a siege mentality and resorted to introducing measures to bolster the political influence of the party's sub-committees in local centers. In February 1911, the Erzurum branch of the CUP received instructions from the central committee located in Salonika. The 35 articles of these instructions were read out to club members, detailing the new situation that had been confirmed by both houses of legislation. The new law permitted clubs to monitor the activities of local administrations and prevent injustice. It also allowed for all measures of influence on the administration.⁵⁴⁷ These measures can be interpreted as a preemptive strike to assert their dominance over opposition parties before the upcoming elections and consolidate their power once and for all. The events in from 1909-1911 reveal a persistent tension between revolutionary constitutionalism and entrenched loyalties to the Sultan, Islam, and the ancien régime. Erzurum emerges in Russian reporting as a contested political space where competing visions of authority, legitimacy, and reform coexisted and collided.

Rebranding the Hamidiye: Continuity and Change under the CUP

The Young Turk era brought about a transformation in the dynamic between the state and Kurdish power centers during the Second Constitutional Era. As discussed in previous chapters, the establishment of the Hamidiye cavalry aimed to harness the military potential of the Kurdish tribes, who had been fighting as irregular forces in the Ottoman army through centuries, by transforming them into regular cavalry units. These units were intended to serve as a bulwark against a potential Russian invasion and as a check on the Armenian population by tying the Kurdish tribes directly to the Sultan. Following the Young Turk coup of 1908, the Kurdish question had to be revisited by the authorities, as previously established power links were severed, and the new regime lacked effective authority over the Kurdish tribes with the implementation of the

⁵⁴⁶ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2680, l. 23, February 11, 1911.

⁵⁴⁷ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2680, l. 23, February 11, 1911.

constitution.⁵⁴⁸ This is evidenced by Kurdish aggression present in Russian consular reporting through the years until the Great War.

Russian consular reports are particularly valuable for analyzing this phase of reform because they document the formal dissolution/renaming of the Hamidiye and reproduction of coercive power. Whereas much of the existing literature treats the replacement of the Hamidiye with the Aşiret Hafif Süvari as a rupture associated with the Young Turk reform agenda, Russian consular observers followed the process at the level of recruitment. These reports thus reveal how the irregular cavalry was not abolished but reconfigured, allowing older patronage networks, privileges, and practices of violence to persist under new institutional labels—an aspect that remains largely invisible in normative or programmatic accounts of CUP centralization.

The CUP aimed to centralize authority and created the Tribal Light Cavalry Regiment in 1910 to replace the Hamidiye. Albeit renamed, the force included many of the same tribal groups which the Hamidiye did which showed that the regime was reluctant and unable to reform Anatolia's power structure entirely. Although there were efforts to weaken local strongmen, these endeavors caused resistance and by 1914 most Kurds were disillusioned with Ottoman rule. Thus, security in Eastern Anatolia remained unstable.⁵⁴⁹

To resolve this issue, the Ottoman government attempted to address it using the Hamidian modus operandi with some modifications, which produced mixed results. According to Collegiate Assessor M. Nikolskii, the Hamidiye should not be viewed primarily from a military perspective but as a measure that sought to “*teach the Kurds how to obey the Turks.*”⁵⁵⁰ Indeed, the forces loyal to the Sultan, and their incorporation into the Ottoman army, aimed to extend state control in the eastern provinces. However, after the Hamidiye era, constitutional governments also failed to resolve the Kurdish question, which concerned not only the subjugation and sedentarization of Kurds but also land-grabbing practices that exacerbated the agrarian crisis.

From the 1870s, Armenian peasants had been losing land through overdue tax confiscations and loan defaults and were displaced by Turkic Muslim immigrants who resettled in Armenian areas, while many Armenians emigrated. The 1894–96 Hamidian massacres further intensified this

⁵⁴⁸ Yalçın Çakmak and Tuncay Şur, “Margins of Allegiance and Revolt: Relations between Kurdish Tribes and the State from the Late Ottoman Period to the Early Modern Republic,” *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 16 (2022): 9.

⁵⁴⁹ Ryan Gingeras, *Fall of the Sultanate: The Great War and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 152–53.

⁵⁵⁰ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 62–64, October 15, 1912.

tendency. Some sources claim that by 1910, about 741,000 hectares of Armenian land had been usurped and 100,000 Armenians had fled.⁵⁵¹ With the 1908 constitutional era, however, Armenians were encouraged to reclaim their lands.⁵⁵²

Consul Aleksandr Nikolaevich Shtritter provided examples of such practices in his reports from 1910 and 1911, respectively. In one of these reports, he argued that despite the introduction of the constitution, which meant to eliminate distinctions between Christians and Muslims, Armenians continued to suffer from unequal treatment:

“Armenian means guilty” (...) “In the village of Köprüköy in the Pasinler district, there was a fairly large clash between Christians and Muslims over land, during which one Armenian was injured. During the old regime, many Armenian landholdings came under temporary Muslim use. Now, as Armenians try to reclaim their property due to changes in the state system, clashes often occur, mostly not in favor of Armenians. Recently, the same thing happened: Armenians, though victims, were wrongly arrested, but the Turk, who injured the Armenian, was released within an hour.”⁵⁵³

Similar cases are detailed in another report, in which Kurds from the Pülümür kaza (in the Erzincan sancak) threatened to resettle in Dersim (the mountainous region north of Harput) and Lerdin (in the Dersim area) if the land they occupied, previously owned by Armenians, was taken from them. Likewise, Kurds from the Tercan, Eğin (now Kemaliye), and Hınıs kazas were reportedly unwilling to leave their lands and threatened open rebellion if forced to do so.⁵⁵⁴

Nikolskii further explained that Kurdish animosity toward the Turks increased with the proclamation of the constitution in 1908, which curtailed Kurdish domination over the Armenian population. However, according to the Russian consul, during the years 1911–1912 the Erzurum administration exercised caution in its dealings with the Kurds in order to avoid provoking them, often overlooking their criminal activities, including robbery and massacres.⁵⁵⁵ This stemmed from the government’s inability to exercise effective authority across the country due to legitimacy problems in several vilayets throughout the empire, which led officials to conclude that it was preferable not to antagonize the Kurds.

⁵⁵¹ Janet Klein, “Conflict and Collaboration: Rethinking Kurdish-Armenian Relations in the Hamidian Period, 1876–1909,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 13 (2007): 159–60.

⁵⁵² Stephan H. Astourian, “The Silence of the Land: Agrarian Relations, Ethnicity, and Power,” in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ronald G. Suny, Fatma M. Göçek, and Norman M. Naimark (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 59–67.

⁵⁵³ AVPRI, f. 150, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 30–31, September 29, 1910. [See Appendix 70.](#)

⁵⁵⁴ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2680, ll. 9–10, February 21, 1911.

⁵⁵⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 62–64, October 15, 1912.

After the downfall of Abdul Hamid II, the CUP renamed the Hamidiye as *Aşiret Hafif Sıivari* (simply removing the word *Hamidiye*) and attempted to attract Kurdish tribes to join its ranks.⁵⁵⁶ Nonetheless, some Kurdish tribes had previously taken pride in serving in the Hamidiye cavalry. By contrast, joining the new irregular cavalry entailed greater surveillance and state control, making it a far less attractive option.⁵⁵⁷ This was reportedly perceived as a return of state-sanctioned violence against Armenians, who feared the reappearance of the Hamidiye:

*„From the Kurds of the Hınıs, Bayezid, Alaşkert, Karaklis, and Pasinler districts a new light cavalry is being formed (hamidi-suvari). The number of recruited Kurds already far exceeds that of the former “Hamidiye” units. The Armenian population, living side by side with these new troops, is extremely dissatisfied with this order of the 4th Army Corps, all the more so since the light cavalry accepts without distinction bandits, murderers, and smugglers. **The Armenians are worried about the possible harmful effect of the Kurdish horsemen on their trade; many petition for the abolition of the Kurds’ privileged status, while others are ready to reduce or even cease their commerce altogether.**”*⁵⁵⁸

Despite the sluggish pace of recruitment, the CUP achieved a measure of success in recruiting Kurds into its ranks. By July 1911, 25 out of 64 military units had been formed, and the *beks* who assisted with conscription were appointed as officers. However, ordinary Kurds displayed a suspicious attitude toward these officers and even showed signs of disobedience. According to Russian consular reports, during the celebrations marking the formation of the new units, Kurds marched in traditional attire and wore white hats. Most rode mares, followed by foals. Somewhat humorously, the Russian consul remarked that this arrangement hardly conformed to the idea of a regular army; nevertheless, the Ottoman military leadership viewed the situation leniently and expressed hope in their speeches for the steadfast courage and loyalty of the newly established Kurdish regiments to the government.⁵⁵⁹

Organizing these units certainly proved challenging. The Russian consulate recounted a military drill during which Kurdish riders were unable to execute even the simplest formations. This was attributed not only to a lack of discipline and order among the Kurds, but also to linguistic barriers: instructors did not speak Kurdish, while the recruits did not speak Turkish. Shtritter, clearly not without bias, summarized the situation by stating:

⁵⁵⁶ Djene Rhys Bajalan, “Kurdish Responses to Imperial Decline: The Kurdish Movement and the End of Ottoman Rule in the Balkans (1878–1913),” in *Kurdish Studies Archive*, ed. Martin van Bruinessen (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 71–72.

⁵⁵⁷ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 62–64, October 15, 1912.

⁵⁵⁸ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 72–73, December 17, 1910. [See Appendix 71.](#)

⁵⁵⁹ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 27–28, July 9, 1912.

*"The light cavalry Kurds have once again proven that born robbers cannot become acceptable riders."*⁵⁶⁰

Similar views were not uncommon among other consular employees. In his report of October 1912, Nikolskii explained that the *Hafif süvari* were called upon to participate in the Balkan Wars; however, they refused and deserted. According to the report's assessor, their refusal stemmed from their inability to engage in caravan robbery in the Balkans as they did in Anatolia, where they were familiar with the local terrain and conditions.⁵⁶¹

The transformation of the Hamidiye into the Aşiret Hafif Süvari did not constitute a fundamental break with past practices, but it was rather a renegotiation and reproduction of existing power relations between the Ottoman state and Kurdish tribal elites. From the perspective of Russian consular observers, it can be concluded the Young Turk project of centralization collided with the realities of Eastern Anatolia, where sovereignty had long been exercised through intermediaries. The rebranded light cavalry units retained many of the same tribal personnel, command structures, and privileges as their Hamidian predecessors. This meant that reform functioned less as institutional transformation than as an attempt to re-legitimize indirect rule under a constitutional rhetoric. The Ottoman authorities sought stability without provoking rebellion at the expense of the local sedentary population, in particular, Armenians.

Opposition Politics: The Rise of Hürriyet ve İtilaf

By January 1912, the Erzurum branch of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) was destabilized by the growing influence of the Freedom and Accord Party (İtilaf).^{562 563} Russian consular reports noted that several CUP officers defected to the opposition, which promoted Ottomanism, decentralization, and minority rights, while those remaining in the party were internally divided. Some dismissed the parliament as futile and favored its abolition, whereas others advocated replacing the sultanate with a parliamentary democracy. Simultaneously, Unionist

⁵⁶⁰ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 65–66, October 26, 1912.

⁵⁶¹ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 62–64, October 15, 1912.

⁵⁶² *The Freedom and Accord Party (Hürriyet ve İtilâf Fırkası)*: A liberal Ottoman political party founded in 1911 as the principal opposition to the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) during the Second Constitutional Era. Advocating Ottomanism, decentralization, minority rights, and a pro-British foreign policy, it drew support from diverse anti-CUP factions and was commonly referred to as the Liberal Entente. Its members, known as İtilâfçılar (Ententists), stood in ideological opposition to the CUP's İttihadcı (Unionist) centralism.

⁵⁶³ George W. Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman Rule, Islam and the Albanians, 1874–1913* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 190.

politicians considered how to counter the impending threat posed by Itilaf leaders arriving in Erzurum from Trabzon. In an effort to erode support for the opposition, CUP activists launched an extensive propaganda campaign across the vilayet. They spread rumors that the Itilaf intended to remove women's headscarves, hoping to discourage conservative elements from backing the opposition party.⁵⁶⁴

Shtritter observed that the bitterness of the CUP drove its members into open scandal and led them to recruit like-minded individuals of questionable reputation to prevent the Itilaf from reaching Erzurum. Although the consul did not specify the exact methods employed, these actions proved sufficient to intimidate the opposition. The Itilaf leaders in Trabzon learned of these threats and postponed their arrival. Despite their absence, the Itilaf reached potential voters through the Erzurum-based newspaper *Sadâ-yı Şark*, which had shifted allegiance to them. Fearing the erosion of local support, the CUP founded a new newspaper, *Bingöl-Necat*. Meanwhile, the government in Constantinople closely monitored developments and sought information on the Itilaf's influence with elections approaching. Nevertheless, the vali reported that Itilaf influence in Erzurum remained limited and was being contained.⁵⁶⁵

During the elections, the Committee of Union and Progress obstructed the opening of the local Itilaf club in Erzurum. After the fraudulent 1912 April elections⁵⁶⁶ which gave the CUP an overwhelming majority in the Chamber of Deputies, the Erzurum administration formally granted permission for the club to open.⁵⁶⁷ It remains unclear whether this authorization had been deliberately delayed or whether the Itilaf abandoned their efforts under pressure from the Unionists. In practice, the club never opened. Their newspapers *Sadâ-yı Şark* and *Fârik* were shut down. Facing continued threats, Itilaf leaders planned to relocate to Constantinople, while the editor of *Fârik*, defected to the Unionists and agreed to publish under their banner.⁵⁶⁸

Following the elections, in which the CUP was widely implicated in manipulation, dissent grew among opposition forces. A faction known as the "Savior Officers," composed of officers

⁵⁶⁴ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2680, l. 37. 20 January / 24 January 1912

⁵⁶⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 8–9, January 19, 1912.

⁵⁶⁶ The Russian consulate observed that the police counted the number of eligible Turkish voters in Erzurum and, in some cases, exaggerated these numbers so that the Armenians only received one deputy instead of the previous two. See: AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 8–9, January 19, 1912.

⁵⁶⁷ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, l. 23, June 7, 1912.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

aligned with the Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası, emerged to challenge Unionist authority.⁵⁶⁹ The group was led by Colonel Sadık, a former CUP member who broke with the party in May 1912, and Staff Major Gelibolulu Kemal. They approached Halil Bey, President of the Ottoman Assembly, urging the dissolution of the CUP-dominated parliament. In a gesture of solidarity with the Savior Officers, Minister of War Mahmud Şevket Paşa resigned, further isolating the CUP and forcing the Unionists to yield to İtilaf pressure. On 9 July 1912, the Unionist government of Said Paşa resigned, clearing the way for a new cabinet under Gazi Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, the celebrated war hero.⁵⁷⁰ Despite holding a majority in parliament, the CUP lost its executive authority. Although Ahmed Muhtar Paşa and his cabinet sought to remain non-partisan, they faced pressure from the Savior Officers to suspend parliament, thereby stripping the CUP of its final institutional stronghold. Isolated and driven from power, the Unionists now faced the prospect of political prohibition. On 5 August 1912, Muhtar Paşa's government dissolved the Unionist-dominated parliament and called for snap elections. These never took place, however, as the outbreak of the Balkan War, when Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria declared war on the Ottoman Empire, overtook domestic politics.⁵⁷¹ In response to the war, martial law was introduced, leading to the cancellation of the elections scheduled for 25 October. After only three months as grand vizier, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa resigned on 29 October following a series of Balkan defeats that demoralized the officer corps. The premiership then passed to Kamil Paşa.⁵⁷² This transition was intended to bring Kamil Paşa to power, as his amicable relations with the British raised hopes that he could negotiate a favorable end to the war.⁵⁷³

Let alone the declaration of war by the Balkan League, the declaration of independence by Albania on the 28th of November led to the spread of rumors regarding foreign intervention, particularly from Russia, to resolve the Armenian question. These rumors were actively disseminated by Armenian newspapers, where the possibility of foreign intervention was discussed in detail. Fearing the loss of their lands to the Armenians as a result of an imminent Russian (or

⁵⁶⁹ Gingeras, *Fall of the Sultanate*, 49.

⁵⁷⁰ Mehmet Hacısalihoğlu, "The Young Turk Policy in Macedonia: Cause of the Balkan Wars?," in *War and Nationalism: The Balkan Wars, 1912–1913, and Their Sociopolitical Implications*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and Isa Blumi (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2013), 124.

⁵⁷¹ Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey. Vol. 2, Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808–1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 290–92.

⁵⁷² Naim Turfan, *Rise of the Young Turks: Politics, the Military and Ottoman Collapse* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 196–97.

⁵⁷³ Kayalı, "Elections and the Electoral Process," 278.

any other) intervention, coupled with their disenchantment towards the Ottoman government due to the loss of their privileges, the Kurdish tribes were in the process of preparing for an armed rebellion.⁵⁷⁴ In December 1912, Kurdish leaders gathered in Erzurum under the leadership of figures connected to the Hafif süvari and organized a coordinated plan for a broader uprising, appointing representatives to mobilize tribal support across Dersim, Erzincan, Bayezid, and Van. Several Kurdish groups quickly signaled their readiness to take up arms, and attacks on government officials increased, including an assault on the kaymakam of Pasinler that authorities attempted to conceal. Provincial officials privately admitted their inability to contain the deteriorating situation without military reinforcements, revealing a sharp decline in Kurdish loyalty to the government.⁵⁷⁵

Meanwhile, Armenian revolutionaries, encouraged by the prospect of foreign intervention, began arming themselves in anticipation of Kurdish attacks, smuggling weapons from Russia and provoking frequent clashes with Ottoman border guards. Alarmed, local authorities reinforced border controls and deployed gendarmes to monitor roads and caravans, while Muslim residents grew increasingly resentful of Armenian preparations and rumors spread of an impending massacre in Erzurum. Meetings among Muslims in the Hosan Basri quarter called for retaliation, and according to the Russian consul, intercommunal relations had reached extreme tension, prompting local officials in Pasinler to appeal to religious leaders to restrain violence.⁵⁷⁶

The 1913 Coup and the Consolidation of CUP Rule

Despite the insistence of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) on continuing the Balkan War at all costs, the Itilaf Party supported the government's appeal for peace and opposed the resumption of hostilities. Its representatives accepted the surrender of Adrianople, and the other territorial concessions demanded by the Great Powers. It appeared that this position marked a political defeat for the CUP and a victory for the Itilaf, when news arrived from the capital of the attack on Kamil Paşa's cabinet. On January 23, 1913, members of the CUP stormed the Sublime Porte building while a cabinet session was in progress and orchestrated a coup against the Grand Vizier, forcing Kamil Paşa to step down and installing Mahmud Şevket Paşa until his assassination, and later Said Halim Paşa as successor, a violent event that resulted in the assassination of the

⁵⁷⁴ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 72–80, December 28, 1912.

⁵⁷⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 72–80, December 28, 1912.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Minister of War, Nazım Bey, too.⁵⁷⁷ After the coup, and particularly after Grand Vizier Mahmud Şevket Paşa's murder on 11 June 1913, martial law intensified and many who opposed the happenings were arrested. The CUP became dominated by unionists like Talât, Enver, Cemal, and Şükrü who controlled key cabinet positions.⁵⁷⁸

The news initially shocked even CUP members in Erzurum, though their supporters soon celebrated and sent a telegram pledging full sacrifice for the Balkan war effort. The Erzurum branch, however, was unprepared for the daily demands from the central government for money and supplies. As the crisis deepened, the local administration also sought volunteers in large numbers, with Ottoman agents attempting to recruit Muslim youths in Transcaucasia; according to the Russian consul Aleksandr Alekseevich Adamov, many did in fact emigrate to Turkey.⁵⁷⁹ Despite their confusion following the assassination of Nazım Bey, the İtilaf exploited the CUP government's military setbacks and launched a political counteroffensive. Its members plastered Erzurum with posters claiming Ottoman victory reports were false and spread rumors that war funds would be embezzled by Unionist officials. Opposition leader Musa Kazım Bey, the local tax collector, went so far as to confront the vali of Erzurum and openly refuse to contribute to the war effort.⁵⁸⁰

In the meanwhile, the Kurdish question continued to challenge the CUP government. In Midyat, Cizre, Hasankeyf, along the Tigris, Kurdish groups revolted, looting Christian monasteries in Deir-Mahor and Dafne and attacking the Armenian church in Pasinler too. Regular troops were dispatched from Bitlis to suppress the unrest, yet officials feared that with the spring thaw a wider uprising could spread to Bitlis, Van, and Erzurum. Although Erzurum Kurds were less visibly active than in December 1912, raids on Armenians and assassinations of tax collectors and officials persisted.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁷ Christine Philliou, "Liberalism and the Path to Treason in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1923," in *Negotiating Democracy and Religious Pluralism: India, Pakistan, and Turkey*, ed. Karen Barkey, Sudipta Kaviraj, and Vatsal Naresh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 69–70.

⁵⁷⁸ Erik J. Zürcher, "Young Turk Governance in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War," *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 6 (2019): 913.

⁵⁷⁹ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2684, ll. 2–9, January 24, 1913.

⁵⁸⁰ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2684, ll. 11–18, February 15, 1913.

⁵⁸¹ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2684, ll. 34–43, April 7, 1913.

Kurdish attacks on government officials and raids along the Tigris increased, yet the unrest did not escalate into a full rebellion. Instead, Kurdish groups turned to plundering, which affected Armenians and Muslims alike and was marked by considerable brutality. Adamov attributed the absence of a general uprising to the Kurds' lack of unity, that is, their loyalties lay with tribes and families rather than a broader national identity, weakening their ability to organize collectively. He further argued that the Ottoman government exploited these divisions through a deliberate policy of *divide et impera*, undermining the prospects for coordinated resistance.⁵⁸² This proved that Russian consuls were certainly interested in Kurdish matters. It is also noteworthy that Nazım Bey, the CUP chief in Erzurum, attributed the Kurdish unrest to emissaries allegedly financed by Russian police authorities in the Caucasus. The British vice-consul similarly reported that Russian propagandists were doing “*a good deal of business*” among discontented Hafif süvari officers in Malazgirt and Bulanık, preparing the ground for a potential Russian occupation of the territory.⁵⁸³

Russia and the Kurdish Question in Eastern Anatolia

Following the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, Kurdish intellectuals welcomed constitutional reforms, while many tribal and religious leaders, who had thrived under Sultan Abdülhamid II, viewed the changes with suspicion. Initially, Kurdish intellectuals joined broader Ottoman reform efforts, but the 1909 counter-coup exposed the fragility of the constitutional order. Some Kurdish organizations promoted education and identity, often while maintaining loyalty to the Ottoman state. However, tensions grew as the CUP increasingly viewed Kurdish initiatives as separatist. Some, like Hasan Bedirhan, turned radical and demanded more rights for Kurds. The most notable separatist was Abdürrezzak Bedirhan⁵⁸⁴, who, with hope of Russian backing, sought an autonomous Kurdish principality along the Ottoman–Iranian border. Despite these individual cases

⁵⁸² AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2684, ll. 101–115, July 27, 1913.

⁵⁸³ Somakian, *Empires in Conflict*, 51–52.

⁵⁸⁴ Figures like Abdürrezzak Bedirhan previously enjoyed Ottoman patronage but fell out of favor and instead sought Russian backing for Kurdish independence, so much so as to approach Russian officials with plans to instigate revolts and secure Russian protection. Respective rebellions in 1911 and later in 1914 failed, but Russia continued supporting Abdürrezzak by providing diplomatic protection, arms, logistical assistance, and facilitating cultural and educational efforts aimed at pursuing independence. See Djene Rhys Bajalan, “The First World War, the End of the Ottoman Empire, and the Question of Kurdish Statehood: A ‘Missed’ Opportunity?” in *A Century of Kurdish Politics*, ed. Michael M. Gunter (London: Routledge, 2020), 13–28, 21–23.

and ambitions, most Kurdish leaders remained loyal to the empire.⁵⁸⁵ However, significant defeats in the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) intensified nationalist discourse and inspired Kurdish activists.⁵⁸⁶

Kurdish nationalism gained real momentum only after World War I as a response to the Ottoman state's disintegration. Kurdish leaders, including members of the Şemdinan and Bedirhani tribes, were originally part of the Ottoman elite and only began promoting nationalist ideas when the collapse of the empire appeared seemed inevitable.⁵⁸⁷ In fact, strong religious ties to the caliphate among the Kurds limited the rise of nationalism as their primary allegiance. However, Kurdish intellectuals increasingly voiced their discontent with Ottoman policies from the late nineteenth century onward.⁵⁸⁸ Kurdish uprisings prior to World War I were motivated by the desire of local Kurdish notables to recover or expand their control of the land.⁵⁸⁹ Due to growing dissatisfaction, two separate uprisings erupted in early 1914: one in the area of Barzan in the vilayet of Mosul, and the other in Bitlis. Abdülsemam Barzani led the uprising in the Barzan area, while *Molla Selim* led the Bitlis uprising. Even though they successfully took control of the city, Ottoman troops suppressed the revolt. Nevertheless, this did not stop Kurdish efforts to challenge state authority in the region. According to current literature on the topic, both uprisings were said to have enjoyed Russian support.⁵⁹⁰

It should be noted that, according to Nikolskii, Russian agents already in 1912 reported that a rumor had spread among the Kurds that, in the event of an uprising, they would receive substantial financial support from the Russian government. However, the consular official warned against placing trust in the Kurds, despite their hostility toward the Turks. Nikolskii nevertheless argued that there was a realistic chance of securing at least their neutrality, although he noted that even if

⁵⁸⁵ Djene Rhys Bajalan, "Princes, Paşas and Patriots: The Kurdish Intelligentsia, the Ottoman Empire and the National Question (1908–1914)," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 2 (2016): 152–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2016.1138639>.

⁵⁸⁶ Djene Rhys Bajalan, "Kurdish Responses to Imperial Decline: The Kurdish Movement and the End of Ottoman Rule in the Balkans (1878–1913)," in *Kurdish Studies Archive*, ed. Martin van Bruinessen (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 57–64.

⁵⁸⁷ Hakan Özoğlu, "Nationalism and Kurdish Notables in the Late Ottoman–Early Republican Era," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 3 (2001): 383–409, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743801003038>.

⁵⁸⁸ G. Gürbüz-Küçükşarı, "Kurdish Islamo-Ottomanist History Writing and Its Transformation under the Turkish Republic (1910s–1990s)," in *Transforming Empire: The Ottomans from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean*, ed. Serpil Atamaz, Onur İnal, and Alexander Schweig (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 289, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004704374_015.

⁵⁸⁹ Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 84.

⁵⁹⁰ Barbara Henning, *Narratives of the History of the Ottoman-Kurdish Bedirhani Family in Imperial and Post-Imperial Contexts: Continuities and Changes* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2018), 322.

they could be utilized, they would not be particularly effective fighters. He added, “*much depended on how quickly Erzurum could be taken*”.⁵⁹¹ This clearly indicates the cautious, yet very much present, intent of Russia toward the Kurdish tribes.

Despite the presence of these reports, the real extent of Russian involvement in the Ottoman Empire’s Kurdish affairs remains underexplored in the existing historiography and is often treated only cursorily, a limitation that can be attributed in part to the sparse use of Russian archival materials, or that all the researcher use of the same sources. This chapter seeks to address this gap by examining evidence that suggests Russian policy contributed to the shaping of Kurdish–Armenian tensions, particularly as a means of influencing Armenian public opinion in Russia’s favor. One of the most intriguing findings in Adamov’s reports concerns his discussions with members of the local Armenian community, whose identities he does not disclose. These passages may therefore reflect the consul’s own synthesis of multiple conversations that offer insight into perceived Armenian attitudes.

According to Adamov, Armenians dismissed the Kurdish movement as ineffective, arguing that the absence of a unified Kurdish identity and leadership allowed the Ottoman government to redirect fragmented unrest against them. Some believed that only a coordinated Kurdish uprising could divert Ottoman forces long enough to prevent large-scale violence against Armenian villages before the expected arrival of Russian troops. Notably, Adamov’s interlocutors appeared to treat a future Russian intervention in Anatolia as a near certainty. Armenians in Erzurum took the Kurds’ decision not to attack the Armenian population in Bitlis as a possible sign of Russian influence too.⁵⁹²

However, the Russian consul stated that the attitude of the Armenian neutrals towards the Kurdish movement resembled that of the representatives of the Dashnaktsutiun, as evidenced by an article published in issue 12 of the Armenian newspaper “Arev”. The article attributed the Kurdish movement in Bitlis vilayet to Russia, citing the activities of Abdürrezzak bey, Simko aga, and others as evidence. The article was signed with the letter “z,” a customary signature for Rostomyan⁵⁹³, the leader of the Dashnaktsutiun Party in Erzurum. By associating the unsuccessful

⁵⁹¹ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 62–64, October 15, 1912.

⁵⁹² AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 46–55, May 5, 1914.

⁵⁹³ Stepan Zorian (Rostom or Rostomyan) (1867–1919) was one of the founders of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and a leading figure of the Armenian national liberation movement. Born in the Yerevan Governorate, he

Kurdish movement with Russia, the Dashnaks aligned themselves effectively with the Turkish authorities, who actively promoted this narrative among Turks.⁵⁹⁴

From the Armenian perspective reflected in the consular reports, both Kurdish restraint and disorder were interpreted as signs of Russian influence, and Russian intervention in Anatolia was widely seen as inevitable. These expectations reinforced Armenian reliance on Russia as an external protector, while Adamov's detailed accounts of Kurdish approaches to Russian representatives also seem to underpin this notion.

On a summer day in June 1914, two Kurdish men paid an unexpected visit to the private residence of the senior dragoman under Adamov's supervision. One identified himself as Abdulaziz, sheikh of the Haydaranlı tribe, son of Ismail, from a village on the shores of Lake Van, and the other as Abdul Hamid, son of Ali, from the same village. They sought to learn the extent of Russian support in the event of a Kurdish uprising against the Ottoman authorities. Initially, they envisaged Russian assistance in the form of weapons and military supplies, which Adamov noted could be smuggled across the Bayezid sanjak border and transported inland with little difficulty. As the discussion progressed, however, it became clear that their ambitions extended beyond arms deliveries to the prospect of a Russian occupation. This idea was reportedly encouraged in the Kurds by Russia's refusal to extradite Molla Selim to the Ottomans after the latest uprising in Bitlis.⁵⁹⁵

According to Abdulaziz, the execution of chiefs and sheikhs in Bitlis had awakened the Kurds to what they perceived as the Ottoman government's intention to eliminate Kurdish leaders and spiritual authorities in order to gain full control over the Kurdish population. He also added that the Ottomans aimed to exploit their presumed ignorance and backwardness, while ideological differences with the constitutional governments also reportedly caused discord.⁵⁹⁶ He explained

co-founded the party in 1890 with Christapor Mikaelian and Simon Zavarian. Zorian played a key role in shaping its ideology and transnational networks, editing the party organ *Droshak*, organizing clandestine activity in the Ottoman Empire, and fostering cooperation with other revolutionary movements in the Balkans. See Dominik J. Schaller and Jürgen Zimmerer, eds., *Late Ottoman Genocides: The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and Young Turkish Population and Extermination Policies* (London: Routledge, 2013), 84.

⁵⁹⁴ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 46–55, May 5, 1914.

⁵⁹⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 71–74, June 19, 1914.

⁵⁹⁶ Indicative of the utilization of religious slogans to garner the support of Kurdish tribes and justify the struggle against Ottoman rule Abdulaziz commented on the alleged Ottoman plans to break the authority of the Kurdish sheikhs as follow: *"We, the Kurds, have every reason to count on support for our uprising against the Ittihadists (CUP), all faithful Turks. This is because this party is introducing such innovations that go against Allah and the*

that he had been tasked with traveling from Erzurum to Nariman to meet a trusted representative of *Kör Hüseyin Paşa*, after which the direction of his further activities would be determined. Abdulaziz and his associates reportedly maintained contacts with Russian authorities and discussed the condition of Kurds living under Russian rule, conversations that fostered hopes for Russian occupation or, failing that, Russian suzerainty. He further stated that if Russian military support proved impossible, they were prepared to relocate to the Caucasus and Transcaucasia to escape Ottoman oppression.⁵⁹⁷

The unrest that had begun among the Kurds continued in the summer of 1914 and the Ottoman authorities remain concerned according to Russian reports, primarily due to the activities of the well-known Kurdish bey, *Kör Hüseyin Paşa*, who was a powerful Kurdish tribal chief of the Haydaran tribe and commander of several Hamidiye regiments.⁵⁹⁸ His authority and landholdings grew significantly under the late Ottoman regime. After the 1908 Young Turk revolution, he became suspicious in the eyes of the constitutional regimes for crimes committed during the Hamidian period. *Hüseyin pasha* responded publicly to accusations but he also fled to Iran with his people and livestock to leverage his return in exchange for immunity and restoration of his confiscated lands.⁵⁹⁹ During this period, *Kör Hüseyin* went further and offered the Russian viceroy of the Caucasus, Vorontsov-Dashkov, to hand over Kurdistan to Russia.⁶⁰⁰

Adamov also reported that *Kör Hüseyin* was not only inciting opposition against the government in the Bayezid sanjak but was also making significant efforts to rally other Kurdish tribes. Ottoman authorities claimed that the Russian vice-consulate in Bayezid was the main source of discontent spreading against the government. An individual by the name of Mustafa Aga, a customs officer of Kurdish origin, was also suspected by the authorities to have secret dealings with the Russian government, which had promised him active armed intervention in the event of an unsuccessful uprising.⁶⁰¹

While the sources attest that Russian diplomatic actors did not refuse cooperation with Kurdish elements, this does not mean that unrest stemmed solely from external manipulation. It

Quran, and they pose a grave threat to the complete degradation of Islam." (AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 71–74, June 19, 1914)

⁵⁹⁷ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 71–74, June 19, 1914.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Klein, *The Margins of Empire*, 128–131.

⁶⁰⁰ Michael A. Reynolds, "Abdürrezzak Bedirhan: Ottoman Kurd and Russophile in the Twilight of Empire," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, no. 2 (2011): 426.

⁶⁰¹ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 71–74, June 19, 1914.

was in fact rooted in dissatisfaction with constitutional Ottoman rule, including fractured loyalties, ideological differences, the execution of tribal leaders, and unresolved land disputes, which Russia most likely sought to exploit. The Balkan Wars and the resulting Ottoman territorial losses further exacerbated the land question. At the same time, Russia sought to use the Armenian population as leverage to press for reforms in the Ottoman Empire and to counter the growing influence of Germany in Anatolia, making selective support for Kurdish political actors a convenient means of coercion.⁶⁰² However, the Russian goal was hardly to promote Kurdish autonomy, but rather to weaken Ottoman control in the eastern provinces and to preserve the option of Russian intervention if necessary. This is clearly demonstrated by the large number of reports addressing the Kurds' lack of national identity and the fragmented nature of their tribes.

From Constitutionalism to Crisis: Erzurum on the Eve of War

After the 1908 Young Turk revolution, the ARF supported the Young Turks despite the unresolved land reform, security concerns regarding Armenians, including the horrific 1909 Adana massacres. Thus, The Committee of Union and Progress and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation became the key players in Ottoman constitutional politics after 1908. The ARF and CUP collaborated in the 1908, 1912, and 1914 elections where the Dashnaktsutiun secured significant parliamentary representation. The CUP worked with the Dashnaktsutiun since they sought reforms rather than independence, unlike the Hnchaks.⁶⁰³ On the long term, however, the unresolved issues and the rise of nationalist forces inside the CUP, those who opposed the ARF demands, strained ARF-CUP relations. The ARF's Sixth World Congress in summer 1911 authorized the Western Bureau of the ARF to terminate cooperation with the CUP if they failed to fulfill their promises. The CUP's attempts to reduce previously agreed Armenian representation during the 1912 parliamentary elections led the Western Bureau to issue an ultimatum proposing an end to collaboration. After the CUP cabinet's departure from power and its replacement by the

⁶⁰² Mehmet Polatel, *Armenians and Land Disputes in the Ottoman Empire, 1850–1914* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2025), 191–92.

⁶⁰³ Çiçek, “Question of Genocidal Tendency,” 13–14.

Itilaf, the ARF formally ended cooperation with the CUP in August. The outbreak of the First Balkan War in October reignited discussions within the ARF about advocating Armenian provincial reforms at post-war negotiations.⁶⁰⁴

Despite the fact that the ARF's willingness for cooperation with the CUP waned due to unresolved issues, they maintained constitutionalism as a central idea, while they were also emphasizing equality and peaceful coexistence. They argued that a real constitutional governance required ethnic equality which was only achievable through decentralization, autonomy and socialist ideas. Therefore, the ARF sought to pressure for meaningful reforms despite criticism of the constitutional governments.⁶⁰⁵ For instance, In January 1911, CUP–ARF cooperation was still evident in Erzurum, where the vali and CUP leader Nazım Bey hosted a joint gathering at the Artsnian Armenian School to support the *Aradj* newspaper and promote Ottoman unity between Turks and Armenians. Nazım Bey praised Armenians for embracing constitutionalism, contrasting them with other groups who had resorted to armed protest. In the meanwhile, the Russian consulate viewed the CUP–Dashnak alliance critically.⁶⁰⁶

The Russian consular reports provide a deeper understanding of the triangulated relationship between the ARF, the CUP, and Russia in the years preceding the Great War. While the existing literature offers a broad overview, the Erzurum sources at times substantiate and at other times nuance the perception over these dynamics. They reveal how local actors interpreted imperial policies and adapted their strategies in response to shifting alliances and expectations of foreign intervention.

Both the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and the Social Democratic Hinchak Party opposed Russian rule after the 1903 confiscation of Armenian Church properties, which prompted their involvement in the 1905 Russian Constitutional Revolution. Russian repression of Armenian activists also forced many revolutionaries to seek refuge in the Ottoman Empire. The ARF therefore resisted Russian political advances. At the same time, relations between the ARF and the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) deteriorated after the CUP abandoned Ottomanism in favor of Turkism, which marginalized Armenians. Therefore, the ARF formally severed ties with the CUP in 1913. Between 1912 and 1914, Kurdish uprisings in the Ottoman Empire further worsened conditions for Armenians. CUP reform policies threatened Kurdish elites, while Russia

⁶⁰⁴ Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule*, 150–51.

⁶⁰⁵ Berberian, *Roving Revolutionaries*, 120–21.

⁶⁰⁶ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2680, l. 4, February 7, 1911.

provided support for Kurdish tribes. The Armenian Reform Project of 1913, supported by Russia, intensified Kurdish resistance, and the Ottoman government at times armed Armenians for self-defense. Under increasing persecution, ARF members debated self-defense strategies, while both Russian and Ottoman authorities continued to manipulate interethnic tensions for political purposes.⁶⁰⁷

Although the CUP and Dashnaksutiun maintained dialogue on Armenian reforms, to foster unity between Armenians and Muslims, trust eroded before WWI due to some Dashnaksutiun deputies' collaboration with Russia.⁶⁰⁸ Collaboration with Russia, however, was still ambiguous for Armenian revolutionaries: although Russia initially appeared as a potential protector, tsarist policies that curtailed church authority, mistreated Armenian refugees during the Hamidian massacres, and increasingly targeted Armenian activists cast doubt on any guarantee of Armenian autonomy.⁶⁰⁹ Some scholars argue that by 1912 the direction of Dashnaksutiun politics had shifted in response to the seeming inevitability of war with Russia and Ottoman military losses in the Balkans, prompting the party to turn toward Russia and other European powers in the hope of securing support for Armenian independence. Russia, for its part, viewed this shift as an opportunity to advance the Armenian question in line with its own interests. For example, in October 1913, the Dashnaksutiun newspaper published in Tbilisi ran articles that emphasized Russia's positive influence and promoted the convergence of Armenian and Russian interests.⁶¹⁰

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The shift in Dashnaksutiun policy was certainly not even as attested by the consula reports from Erzurum. In 1911, the Dashnaksutiun in Erzurum openly expressed hostility toward the Russian regime, driven by dissatisfaction with the Armenian population of Ova in the Erzurum vilayet, which maintained close economic ties with Russia and frequently traveled there for work while expressing sympathy for Russian society. Vratsian, the Dashnak leader and an ally of the CUP, attempted in his speeches to convince Armenians that admiration for Russia was misguided, pointing out that Armenians in Russia faced arrest without trial and filled prisons in Novoherkassk

⁶⁰⁷ Garabet K. Moundjian, "The Eastern Vilayets, 1909–1914: ARF-CUP Collusion, Russian Stratagems, and the Kurdish Menace," in *War and Collapse: World War I and the Ottoman State*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and Feroz Ahmad (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 728–767.

⁶⁰⁸ Çiçek, "Question of Genocidal Tendency," 13–14.

⁶⁰⁹ Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule*, introduction.

⁶¹⁰ Olga Bikova, "Vozniknovenie partii 'Dashnaksutiun' i yeye deyatel'nost' na territorii Turtsii (po materialam dokumentov rossiyskikh arkhivov)," *Karadeniz Uluslararası Bilimsel Dergi* 10 (2011): 95.

⁶¹¹ Yazıcı Cörüt, *Loyalty and Citizenship*, 158.

and Yerevan. He used this argument to discourage commercial relations with Russia.⁶¹² At the same time, the local Dashnaksutiun newspaper *Aradj* fueled anti-Russian sentiment by condemning Russian authorities for persecuting Dashnaks, whom the paper portrayed as Armenia's most talented writers and intellectuals.⁶¹³

The Dashnaksutiun party's hostility towards Russia was further demonstrated through their Russian branches in Kars and Sarıkamış, who promised the CUP emissary Cherkes-Ali to assist the Ottoman government's military campaign by providing maps of Kars, Batum and Yerevan military intelligence and send them to Erzurum.⁶¹⁴ Additionally, the Russian consul reported on the unification of the Dashnaksutiun and Hnchak parties in Russia and their willingness to fight alongside the Ottoman Empire against Russia in the event of war.⁶¹⁵

Nevertheless, a shift can be noticed in Russian reports over the question of Russian support. In July 1913, a Dashnaksutiun assembly took place in Muş, disguised as a pilgrimage to the Surp Karapet Monastery. Delegates from various regions of Ottoman Armenia gathered for this momentous occasion. Among the attendees was Stepan Zorian (Rostom), Arshak Jamalian⁶¹⁶ and Nikola Agabalian⁶¹⁷, both members of the Horizon newspaper editorship based in Tiflis, were also present. During their journey through Erzurum, they passionately called upon fellow Armenians to arm themselves. In the midst of the fervor, one of the speakers in the crowd proposed that Russia would provide a suitable haven for Armenians. However, the Horizon editorship swiftly responded that “*less than desirable conditions awaiting their people*” in Russia. They condemned the lack of civil rights, the scarcity of land, and the influx of Russian settlers encroaching upon Armenian territories.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹² AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2680, l. 13, January 28, 1911.

⁶¹³ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 10–11, February 3, 1912.

⁶¹⁴ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2680, l. 53, April 7, 1911.

⁶¹⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 10–11, February 3, 1912.

⁶¹⁶ Arshak Jamalian (1882–1940) was an Armenian politician and prominent member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. Born in Ganja, he participated in Armenian–Azeri conflicts and later served as minister of communications of the First Republic of Armenia (April–November 1920). He died in exile in Paris. See Jon Kirakosyan, *The Armenian Genocide: The Young Turks before the Judgment of History* (Yerevan, 1992).

⁶¹⁷ Nikol Aghbalian (1875–1947) was an Armenian intellectual, literary historian, and public figure educated in Tiflis, Moscow, Lausanne, and Paris. A prominent member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and editor of *Horizon*, he served as a member of the Armenian parliament (1918–1920) and as minister of education and culture of the First Republic of Armenia (1919–1920). After Sovietization, he was imprisoned and later lived in exile in Egypt and Lebanon, where he died. See Vartan Z. Matiossian, “Nikol Aghbalian’s Ministerial Legacy (1919–1920).”

⁶¹⁸ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2684, ll. 127–135, September 23, 1913.

Nevertheless, the Russian reports suggest that this shift occurred not within Dashnak circles themselves but among the broader local Armenian population. This, however, does not imply full support for Russian sovereignty over Western Armenia, and the issue requires further inquiry.

The Armenian Patriarchate between Loyalty and Suspicion

The question of whether to rely on Russian support prior to the Great War was widely debated among members of the Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire, as reflected in the consular reports. Despite Russia's pivotal role in the reform process in the Armenian provinces, the plight of the Armenians did not improve, and Russia continued to instrumentalize the Armenian Question to advance its imperial interests.

In October 1912, the Ottoman Foreign Office appealed to Britain to assign officials to supervise reforms; however, when it renewed the request in 1913 after the CUP coup, Britain declined in order not to antagonize Russia, allowing Russian diplomacy to take the lead. The reform plan proposed by the Russian dragoman André Mandelstam sought to address Armenian–Kurdish land disputes and advocated the return of seized Armenian lands with compensation. In late 1912, the Etchmiadzin Catholicosate also petitioned the Russian viceroy of the Caucasus for assistance.⁶¹⁹ The proposal called for the creation of a single Armenian province governed by a Christian governor-general appointed by the sultan with the approval of the European powers.⁶²⁰ This plan alarmed the signatories of the Treaty of Berlin, who feared the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire in Russia's favor. The final Russo-Ottoman Reform Agreement of 1914 diluted many of Russia's original demands but retained provisions for resolving land disputes under the supervision of general inspectorates. By aligning itself with Armenian aspirations while encouraging Kurdish autonomy, Russia sought to weaken Ottoman authority and expand its regional influence.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁹ Hans-Lukas Kieser, Mehmet Polatel, and Thomas Schmutz, "Reform or Cataclysm? The Agreement of 8 February 1914 Regarding the Ottoman Eastern Provinces," *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 3 (2015): 290–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2015.1062283>.

⁶²⁰ Helmut Philipp Aust, "From Diplomat to Academic Activist: André Mandelstam and the History of Human Rights," *European Journal of International Law* 25, no. 4 (2014): 1106.

⁶²¹ Ramazan Erhan Güllü, "The Relations Between the Ottoman State and the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul (1914–1918)," in *War and Collapse: World War I and the Ottoman State*, ed. Feroz Ahmad and M. Hakan Yavuz (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2015), 851–52, <https://doi.org/10.1353/book50602>.

In assessing the realization of Russian interests in the Ottoman Empire, it is essential to examine the roles of the Istanbul Patriarchate and the Etchmiadzin Catholicosate, both of which the CUP viewed as political actors advancing Armenian claims within the empire. Through an analysis of the consular reports, this chapter sheds light on the patriarchate's possible stance toward Russian support, local attitudes, and the Russian consular perspective in Erzurum.

The resignation of the previous patriarch, Arsharuni, in September 1912, because of the documented murder of 280 Armenians as well as pressure related to his personal, ecclesiastical, and political actions, brought about the need for electing a new leader.⁶²² Zaven Ter Yeghiaian, with years of service in Erzurum, Van, and Diyarbakır, was a perfect choice for many. His linguistic proficiency in Turkish, Arabic, French, and English solidified his chances for the post. All this secured him overwhelming support in the assembly and he held the position until his exile to Jerusalem in 1916. Kegham Ter Garabedian, an ARF member of the Ottoman Parliament, devised a seven-week itinerary for Zaven, from September 9 to October 28, 1913, which included stops in key Armenian centers such as Bitlis, Muş, Erzurum, and Trabzon, which were central to the Armenian Question and the ongoing reform negotiations regarding Western Armenia.⁶²³

Ter Yeghiaian was recently elected as the Armenian Patriarch in the Ottoman capital when he arrived in Erzurum on October 13th, 1913. Before his arrival, rumors had circulated that the vali of the Bitlis vilayet refused to attend the mandatory meeting due to pressure from the Kurds, who rejected any encounter with the "infidel".⁶²⁴ Ter Yeghiaian was said to be well known for his anti-Turkish sentiment this is why Adamov consul referred to him as a Russophile whose ideas "strangely corresponded to the Russian administration's". In a correspondence seized by Russian agents, a mutasarrıf from the Bitlis vilayet reported that the patriarch spoke with the local Armenians and in his speech reportedly resonated with the Armenians as he expressed his commitment to alleviating their hardships caused by the Turks and Kurds. The patriarch, in his address to the Armenians, encouraged them to heed the counsel of the local Russian administration.

⁶²² Margaret Lavinia Anderson, "Who Still Talked About the Extermination of the Armenians? German Talk and German Silences," in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ronald G. Suny, Fatma M. Göçek, and Norman M. Naimark (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 201.

⁶²³ Yektan Turkyılmaz, *Rethinking Genocide: Violence and Victimhood in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1915* (PhD diss., Duke University, 2011), 106–8.

⁶²⁴ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2684, ll. 184–195, October 26, 1913.

Additionally, he asserted that he had taken proactive measures by dispatching emissaries to procure weapons from the Russians.⁶²⁵

Expressing his grievances because of the disrespectful reception, the patriarch brought the matter to the attention of the authorities in the capital, which compelled the vali to organize a ceremonial gathering in Muş for a meeting with Ter Yeghiaian. To prevent any recurrence, the Ministry of Internal Affairs had already instructed the vali of Erzurum to accord Yeghiaian a proper reception. Unexpectedly, the vali had orchestrated a grand celebration surpassing even the patriarch's expectations. However, Ter Yeghiaian's arrival was met with disapproval from the local Muslims. In fact, conflicts had already erupted between Christians and Muslims the previous day. Battalions assigned for the event, reported to the citadel's captain, that the soldiers refused to participate in Ter Yeghiaian's arrival. Consequently, the Ministry of War ordered the battalion's withdrawal from the city. A similar dispute arose when the vali and the commander sought to organize military music near the murahass building, inciting strong opposition from the local imams of the mosques. Meanwhile, clandestine meetings were taking place throughout Erzurum. At one such gathering a decision was reportedly made to assassinate Ter Yeghiaian during his journey to Trabzon.⁶²⁶

The presence of the patriarch alone was already a source of concern for the local Muslim population, and his explicit endorsement of the Russian regime allegedly further exacerbated the situation. The patriarch's support for the Russians, as documented by the Russian consulate, intensified the existing grievances held by the Muslim community, and is represented by his interview to Tbilisi based Armenian newspaper called *Mshak* where Ter Yeghiaian reportedly said the following:

*"The sooner Russia arrives here, the better it is for us, Armenians, as we will have the opportunity to escape from Turkish rule. However, it is incumbent upon us to do everything within our power to facilitate their mission in terms of promoting the strengthening of their cultural, commercial, and economic influence in these regions."*⁶²⁷

Nevertheless, it must be noted that his words cannot be verified with certainty. The only source reproducing the same phrasing appears to be the foreword to the 2007 Istanbul edition of

⁶²⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2684, ll. 161–169, October 6, 1913.

⁶²⁶ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2684, ll. 184–195, October 26, 1913.

⁶²⁷ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2684, ll. 184–195, October 26, 1913.

Hovhannes Katchaznoui's work on the Dashnaksutiun.⁶²⁸ It cites the dissertation of the Armenian historian K. N. Karamyan on the Armenian Question, which draws on the same Russian archival sources introduced above.⁶²⁹

Patriarch Yeghiaian's words before the war and during also do not seem to underpin what he allegedly said in the Russian consular reports. He tried to keep the Armenian community loyal to the Ottoman Empire while also responding to their hopes for more rights.⁶³⁰ While the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin, led by Catholicos Kevork V from 1912, openly supported Russia and called for an independent Armenian state under Russian protection.⁶³¹ The patriarch in his memoirs wrote that he was extremely concerned about the Dashnaksutiun's involvement with the Russian army and the creation of the Armenian volunteer units as he thought it was the perfect pretext for the Ottoman government to exterminate the Armenians once they had the chance.⁶³²

During World War I, the Ottoman government suspected the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul of collaborating with the Russian army through secret communications with the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin. The Ottoman authorities believed that Armenian churches and revolutionary committees were inciting rebellion across Anatolia and removing clergy who did not support their separatist efforts. Although the Patriarch claimed he worked to prevent Armenian recruitment by Russia, but the Ottoman elite, especially Enver Paşa, Cemal Paşa, and Talat Paşa, remained skeptical about the patriarch's sincerity and believed the Armenian community, backed by foreign powers, is an existential threat to the integrity of the empire. As the trust in the patriarch decreased, Enver Paşa warned the patriarch that military intervention would follow if Armenian rebellions spread. Self-defense uprisings in Urfa, Zeytun, Bitlis, and Van, along with the Russian takeover of Van, prompted the Ottoman government to enact the controversial relocation law of May 27, 1915, targeting the Armenian population, resulting in genocide.⁶³³

⁶²⁸ Hovhannes Katchaznoui, *Dashnagzoutiun Has Nothing to Do Anymore*, trans. L. Akalin (Istanbul: Analiz Basım Yayın Tasarım Gıda Ticaret ve Sanayi Ltd. Şti., 2007), 17.

⁶²⁹ K. N. Karamyan, *Polozhenie zapadnykh armyan, "Armyanskiy vopros" i mezhdunarodnaya diplomatiya v posledney chetverti XIX veka i nachale XX veka* (PhD diss., Yerevanski Gosudarstvenny Universitet, 1972), 86–90.

⁶³⁰ Ramazan Erhan Güllü, "The Relations Between the Ottoman State and the Armenian Patriarchate in the Process of World War I," *Asia Minor Studies* 2 (2022): 131.

⁶³¹ Onur Önel, *The Evolution of Tsarist Policy on the Armenian Question in the South Caucasus (1903–1914)* (PhD diss., Birkbeck, University of London, 2014), 140.

⁶³² Zaven Ter Yeghiaian, *My Patriarchal Memoirs*, trans. A. Misirliyan, ed. and annot. V. Ghazarian (Yerevan: Mayreni Publishing, 2002), 55–56. Originally published 1947.

⁶³³ Güllü, "Relations Between the Ottoman State and the Armenian Patriarchate in the Process of World War I," 135.

Read through Russian consular reports and Ottoman reactions, the patriarch's presence functioned as a highly charged political moment, one in which competing perceptions and expectations were both present. For Russian consuls, Ter Yeghiaian appeared as a potentially useful interlocutor whose language and alleged statements could be framed as evidence of Armenian receptivity to Russian patronage. For Ottoman authorities and segments of the local Muslim population, the same visit was interpreted as confirmation of Armenian disloyalty and foreign manipulation, which reinforced pre-existing anxieties about reforms, land disputes, and the lack of imperial sovereignty in the eastern provinces against foreign meddling. Thus, Russian consular presence did not merely record developments in the eastern provinces but actively shaped a political imaginary in which Armenian reform aspirations, Kurdish unrest, and imperial rivalry were mutually reinforcing elements of the rapidly escalating crisis in the vilayet.

German–Russian Rivalry in the Ottoman Borderland

Germany emerged as a latecomer to the world of great powers, as it had undergone unification under Otto von Bismarck's leadership in 1871. This moment marked the beginning of economic and political expansion for the newly established German Empire. With newfound confidence, Germany sought to secure its position among the major European powers, who were engaged in a fierce competition to extend their influences across the continent and beyond. To safeguard its interests and prevent its neighbors from forming an alliance against it, Germany's chancellor negotiated an agreement with Austria-Hungary and Russia. This resulted in the establishment of the League of the Three Emperors in 1873, which aimed to maintain stability in the region.⁶³⁴ Germany, while well-aware of Russia's geopolitical ambitions in the Balkans, also recognized the threat posed by Russian expansionism at the expense of the Ottoman Empire in the Caucasus and the Middle East. Germany, under Kaiser Wilhelm II, aimed to expand its influence and secure its position as a global power. It sought to establish economic and political footholds in the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the Middle East, to access resources and establish trade routes. Germany's vision of creating a Berlin-to-Baghdad railway and developing economic ties in the region clashed with Russia's aspirations for territorial gains and influence.⁶³⁵

⁶³⁴ Robert Gildea, *Barricades and Borders: Europe 1800–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 237.

⁶³⁵ Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany's Bid for World Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 36.

Between 1871 and 1890, Otto von Bismarck focused on strengthening Germany's economy and maintaining European stability, avoiding unnecessary involvement in the Eastern Question.⁶³⁶ However, the Congress of Berlin (1878), organized by Bismarck to revise the Treaty of San Stefano, aimed to prevent a major war between the Great Powers and to preserve the political status quo in Europe. The outcome reduced Russia's territorial gains and allowed Austria-Hungary to occupy Bosnia-Herzegovina. Britain gained control of Cyprus which signaled a significant shift in its policy toward dismantling the Ottoman Empire. Germany sided with Austria-Hungary against Russian interests in the Balkans. This marked a turning point in German-Russian relations, and the once close ties began to deteriorate.⁶³⁷

While Bismarck initially resisted active involvement in Ottoman affairs, pressure from German diplomats led to the introduction of German military officers to modernize the Ottoman army, which provided markets for the German weapon industry. On the other hand, Abdulhamid realized that Britain and other Great Powers were unreliable allies, therefore he sought Germany's support. Germany, lacking colonial ambitions in the Ottoman territories, emerged as a potential partner who could be a counterbalance against Britain and Russia.⁶³⁸ This partnership grew, and German influence expanded economically and militarily. German officers modernized the Ottoman military, though their reforms were limited due to Abdulhamid's fear that a powerful army could threaten his rule.⁶³⁹ Kaiser Wilhelm II, after ascending the throne in 1888, pursued a rather aggressive foreign policy (Weltpolitik), viewing the Ottoman Empire as a strategic ally, while demanding an equal place in world politics alongside Britain and other great powers.⁶⁴⁰ Germany's economic activity in the Ottoman Empire intensified with the Baghdad Railway project, while countered British and Russian ambitions.⁶⁴¹

⁶³⁶ Naci Yorulmaz, "The End of Bismarck's 'Pretended Disinterestedness' and a New Era for German-Ottoman Relations: The Ottoman Special Mission to Berlin and Reşid Bey's Report in 1881," in *Frontiers of the Ottoman Imagination*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and Cemal Kafadar (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 282–83, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004283510_014.

⁶³⁷ Mustafa Gencer, "The Congress of Berlin (1878) in the Context of Ottoman-German Relations," *Pursuit of History* 12 (2014): 295–96.

⁶³⁸ Naci Yorulmaz, *Arming the Sultan: German Arms Trade and Personal Diplomacy in the Ottoman Empire Before World War I* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 1–4, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755608348>.

⁶³⁹ Carl Max Kortepeter, "Ottoman Military Reform During the Late Tanzimat: The Prussian General von der Goltz and the Ottoman Army," in *The Ottoman Turks: Nomad Kingdom to World Empire* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.31826/9781463231804-013>.

⁶⁴⁰ Steven Press, "Buying Sovereignty: German 'Weltpolitik' and Private Enterprise, 1884–1914," *Central European History* 55, no. 1 (2022): 15–16.

⁶⁴¹ Ulrich Trupener, "Germany and the End of the Ottoman Empire," in *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, 2nd ed., ed. M. Kent (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 107–136.

The conflict of interest between the Tsar and the Kaiser is apparent in the Russian consular reports from Erzurum, especially in the context of the ongoing Armenian reforms, where Russia was particularly active. This was exemplified by the Mandelstam proposal, which Germany fervently opposed, not only due to the amicable Ottoman-German relations but also because of its own interests in Cilicia and being aware of Russia's ambitions in Western Armenia.⁶⁴²

These reports reflect the concerns of the Russian consulate regarding the imminent establishment of a German consulate in the region and the proactive engagement of the German consul, signaling Germany's reinforced commitment to exert its influence over the Ottoman borderlands against Russian motivations.

The German Consulate and the Expansion of Influence

German political and economic influence in the Ottoman Empire had expanded steadily since the late nineteenth century, yet its implications for the eastern borderlands remained unevenly documented in the existing literature. Russian consular reports allow for the examination of this process, as they record not only the intensification of German diplomatic activity after 1910 but also the perceptions, anxieties, and mutual suspicions between different historical agents.

In a report, Russian diplomat in Erzurum, Boris Eduardovich Bloom⁶⁴³ discussed the dominance of German intellectual influence in his report saying relying on the *Osmanischer Lloyd*⁶⁴⁴ newspaper in Constantinople as a primary source. In his opinion, the purpose of this German journal was to hinder the establishment of friendly relations between Russia and Turkey. However, it is doubtful there had been such an attempt by the arch enemy Russia, which had gradually pushed back the Ottomans from the Balkans and the Caucasus.⁶⁴⁵ Parallely, the Young Turk regime also

⁶⁴² Kieser, Polatel, and Schmutz, "Reform or Cataclysm?," 295–96.

⁶⁴³ Boris Eduardovich Bloom (1882–1937) was a Russian imperial diplomat (*nadvornyi sovetnik*) in the consular service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He served in Erzurum under Consul Nikolai Aleksandrovich Scriabin, later worked in the Russian mission in Bukhara, and by 1914 was listed as vice consul in Colombo (Ceylon). He was married to Ksenia Scriabin, the consul's daughter, and was the father of Anthony of Sourozh. See Vladimir Popkov and Aleksandr Scriabin, "Nikolai Aleksandrovich Scriabin — otets geniya," <https://muzeemania.ru/2021/10/29/nikolaj-skryabin/>

⁶⁴⁴ *Osmanischer Lloyd* was a German-language daily newspaper published in Constantinople from 1908 to 1918. Financed by German interests such as Krupp and Deutsche Bank, it functioned as an important pro-German press outlet in the Ottoman capital, publishing official announcements of the German embassy and commentary on German–Ottoman relations. The paper appeared in German and French and reflected growing German political influence in the late Ottoman Empire.

⁶⁴⁵ Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 26.

viewed Russia, and all the Slavs, with suspicion if not resentment.⁶⁴⁶ The vali of Erzurum, Cemal Bey, who had studied in Germany, and the military commander Elin Paşa, who had served there for three years while commanding a cavalry regiment, both spoke German and were sympathetic to Germany. They were reportedly regular readers of the *Osmanischer Lloyd*.⁶⁴⁷

This further reinforced Russian suspicions in Erzurum regarding Germany's expanding influence. Although Russia recognized Germany's growing political and economic presence across the Ottoman Empire, its potential impact on Russian objectives in the eastern borderland vilayets appears to have been limited, as consular reports from Erzurum between 1910 and 1913 rarely mention Germany.

However, the situation changed significantly in August 1913 when the local newspaper of the CUP reported on the upcoming opening of the German consulate in Erzurum. This news visibly stirred the waters at the Russian consulate, as from this point on, the activities of German consulate employees intensified and thus were closely monitored. The Russian consul, Adamov, was familiar with the German consul Edgar Anders⁶⁴⁸, who had previously served as a military officer in Baghdad and spent a considerable amount of time in Russia to learn the language.⁶⁴⁹ The consulate in Erzurum could now easily coordinate activities with another important center for German reconnaissance, the German Consulate in Tiflis, led by Count Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg⁶⁵⁰, who had a strong network of agents and contacts with Russian officers. German agents were concentrated in Abkhazia and Ajaria, where they were reportedly suspected of organizing an insurgent movement among the local Muslim populations.⁶⁵¹ This signaled that German influence extended beyond Ottoman borders into the Russian Empire, where it also generated internal challenges, thereby externalizing Ottoman domestic issues and posing a potential threat to Russia's borderlands.

⁶⁴⁶ Hasan Ünal, "Young Turk Assessments of International Politics, 1906–9," *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (1996): 33–34, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283792>.

⁶⁴⁷ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 24–28, August 8, 1910 (from the notes of the junior secretary of the Russian Imperial General Consulate, Mr. Bloom). See [Appendix 72](#).

⁶⁴⁸ The Russian reports consistently refer to him as a consul, although other sources suggest he held the position of vice-consul. For consistency, I will refer to him as a consul, following the terminology used in the Russian reports.

⁶⁴⁹ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2684, ll. 116–126, September 12, 1913.

⁶⁵⁰ Friedrich-Werner Graf von der Schulenburg (1875–1944) was a German diplomat who served as ambassador to the Soviet Union until 1941. A career diplomat active since before the First World War, he later opposed the Nazi regime and was implicated in the 20 July Plot, after which he was arrested and executed. See the website of German Resistance Memorial Center: <https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index-of-persons/biographie/view-bio/friedrich-werner-graf-von-der-schulenburg/>

⁶⁵¹ Önel, *The Tsar's Armenians*, 169–70.

In August 1913, the local CUP newspaper reported the impending opening of a German consulate in Erzurum. On 1 September, the German consul, Anders, arrived and quickly initiated diplomatic contacts with local Ottoman authorities. According to Adamov, some Armenians—most likely ARF supporters—viewed the consul’s presence favorably as a potential counterweight to Russian influence. Ovanes Tumanjants, a Dashnaktsutiun member, told a pasha that the German consul’s arrival might curb Russian machinations that had worsened Armenian–Kurdish relations. Armenian opinion, however, remained divided. During the same discussion, Tumanjants noted that the newspaper *Mshak* accused Russia of deliberately delaying a solution to the Armenian Question, while others feared German interference in Russia’s intensified pro-Armenian policies. Similar concerns circulated among local Armenians, who suspected that Germany sought to undermine reform demands, though Archbishop Sempat Saadetian expressed confidence that Armenians would not be deceived.⁶⁵²

Upon his arrival in Erzurum, Anders reportedly presented himself as an admirer of Turkish culture and society and avoided public contact with Armenians in order to prevent suspicion of pro-Armenian sympathies, even though he was formally welcomed by Chilingaryan, the chairman of the local Armenian National Committee. Despite this public distance, the German consulate considered informal contacts with the Armenian community important. Anders was accompanied by his associate Karl Lehnert, who arrived separately via Russia and, according to the Russian consul, soon involved himself in matters concerning German-speaking Armenians educated in German schools or engaged in trade with German firms. Adamov was convinced that Lehnert was as a subversive agent. The German diplomat frequently visited Mikhail Inciciyan’s lamp shop in Erzurum, which specialized in German products, spoke Armenian, and cultivated contacts within the local Armenian community, particularly among younger people. According to Adamov, Lehnert consistently sought to discredit Russia in his speeches, claiming that the tsar exploited the Armenian Question solely to expand Russian influence at the Ottoman Empire’s expense and offered Armenians no real cultural or social support. He contrasted this with German involvement in the Ottoman Empire, arguing that German investment created favorable conditions for

⁶⁵² AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2684, ll. 116–126, September 12, 1913.

Armenians and citing Adana, where a German-financed railway allegedly coincided with Armenian prosperity and stability under German consular protection, as evidence.⁶⁵³

Lehnert also contrasted Russia unfavorably with Germany, which he portrayed as socially progressive and committed to the welfare of its citizens regardless of ethnic or religious background. He reportedly concluded by urging Armenians to trust the Catholicos, claiming that he had issued a letter of recommendation for Anders and advising Armenians to follow his guidance in light of the Russian threat. The existence of such a recommendation, however, is highly doubtful, given Kevork V's well-known pro-Russian stance. At the same time, since the Catholicos resided under Russian rule, his position was constrained, and any perceived support for Russia cannot necessarily be taken as representative of the Armenian Apostolic Church as a whole or of Armenian public opinion. Lehnert further explained that the German consul's apparent indifference toward Armenians was a deliberate tactic to mislead Ottoman authorities and secure concessions on reforms. Anders allegedly recruited figures such as Sarkis Soghikian, one of the three directors of the Sanasarian School in Erzurum. According to Adamov, Soghikian received a monthly payment in return for spreading German propaganda both in local shops and within the Sanasarian School in Erzurum.⁶⁵⁴ These developments alarmed Russian diplomacy, as growing German presence challenged the assumed pro-Russian sympathies of the Armenian population. Combined with segments of the Dashnaktsutun aligning with the CUP and favoring German rapprochement, this shift was seen as a threat to Russian interests and to the security of Transcaucasia.

Anders was reported to have frequently visited local fortifications and cultivated close relations with Ottoman officers, steadily increasing his influence among them, which further heightened Adamov's suspicions of the German consulate's cooperation with the Turkish administration. By 1914, Anders had reportedly expanded his activities into the Transcaucasia and allegedly sought access to secret documents concerning Russian mobilization plans, fortifications, and troop deployments in Kars. Initial attempts in Erzurum relied on Lehnert, who encouraged Armenians with access to Russian diplomatic and military premises to steal documents, but these efforts failed. Anders then redirected his strategy through Turkish spies at local headquarters and Young Turk networks in the Caucasus, influencing Ottoman consuls in Tiflis and Kars with support from the German consul Vossfla and Count Schulenburg. His efforts yielded results in February,

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

when Tahir Bey, the kaymakam of Pasinler, attempted to smuggle military and cipher documents from the Caucasus; although intercepted by Russian authorities, the documents had already been transferred to Turkey after a warning from an Armenian informant. Reflecting on this case, Adamov advised stricter searches along routes from Kars to Sarıkamış and toward the border, emphasizing the need to search companions as well as suspects.⁶⁵⁵

The growing German presence fostered a belief among Russian authorities that every German in the region acted as a covert agent.⁶⁵⁶ Suspicion deepened when rumors circulated that some local Dashnak representatives were considering a turn toward Germany, drawn by socialist ideals and the prospect of protection for Western Armenia under German auspices. Although Adamov maintained that most Armenians continued to look to Russia, he noted that several Armenian newspapers published in Russia had begun to promote alignment with Germany. An article in *Golos Baku*, for example, argued that British–Russian rivalry would give way to German–Russian competition with the construction of the Baghdad Railway. At the same time, the authors acknowledged that reliance on Germany posed risks, as German authorities might view Armenians with suspicion as potential Russian agents. Adamov emphasized that Armenians in Turkish Armenia closely followed the Russian-Armenian press and warned that such publications could threaten Russian interests more seriously than Anders’s agents, urging the Caucasian administration to monitor them carefully.⁶⁵⁷

German activity in Erzurum illustrates how great-power rivalry turned the eastern Ottoman provinces into a landscape of mutual suspicion, which negatively shaped perceptions of Armenian communities as instruments of both German and Russian influence. Armenian political actors became caught between competing imperial agendas, where appeals for external protection risked being construed as disloyalty. In this climate, great-power intervention failed to resolve the Armenian Question and instead deepened mistrust, narrowing the space for reform and peaceful coexistence on the eve of war.

The Sanasarian School as a Site of Imperial Competition

⁶⁵⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 56–60, May 5, 1914.

⁶⁵⁶ Önoł, *Evolution of Tsarist Policy*, 178.

⁶⁵⁷ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2684, ll. 170–177, October 10, 1913.

Russian Perceptions

The history of the Sanasarian School, and more broadly of Armenian educational institutions in the eastern Ottoman–Russian borderlands, has received surprisingly limited scholarly attention, despite the significant role these institutions played in shaping intellectual formation, political socialization, and transimperial networks in the borderland. Much of the existing scholarship has focused on their cultural or national significance, while paying less attention to how imperial authorities perceived, monitored, and sought to control them. In this respect, Russian diplomatic and administrative sources are of particular importance. They provide a unique perspective that reveals how educational institutions were understood not merely as cultural institutions, but as potential instruments of political influence, revolutionary mobilization, and cross-border allegiance.

It was within this broader framework that Mgrdich S. Sanasarian, a prominent patron of Armenian education, emerged as a key figure. Born in Tiflis in 1818 to an Armenian family originating from Van, Sanasarian received his early education at the renowned Nersesian School.⁶⁵⁸ He later resided in St. Petersburg and played a pivotal role in shaping the school's vision while generously contributing to its establishment.⁶⁵⁹ Sanasarian (or, as Russian sources refer to him, Sanasarov) was an adamant supporter of educating Russian Armenians and was driven by his commitment to education and progress. However, his efforts to establish a secular benevolent society in 1865 were hindered by the Russian authorities. Despite his argument that educating Russian Armenians in commerce would secure Russia's superiority over external Armenians and reinforce its geopolitical dominance, his plans were rejected as the authorities feared it would foster Armenian self-reliance and weaken loyalty to the state.⁶⁶⁰

After the 1878 Russo-Turkish War, the Armenian Question gained international attention, prompting Western Armenians to emphasize national consciousness and rights. Ottoman Armenians saw schooling as key to their national and intellectual awakening. It was in this climate that Sanasarov's endeavors eventually paid off, and on October 1, 1881, the Sanasarian School opened its doors with 19 pupils. By 1886-1887, enrollment had risen to 158, including 35

⁶⁵⁸ Low, *Picturing the Ottoman Armenian World*, 70.

⁶⁵⁹ Tarbassian, *Erzurum (Garin)*, 103.

⁶⁶⁰ Riegg, *Russia's Entangled Embrace*, 142–45.

scholarship recipients, and it graduated its first class.⁶⁶¹ A rigorous selection process identified promising Armenian students from both Eastern and Western-Armenia who then were sent to European universities to study, guided by the understanding that they would return to Armenia and play a vital role as educators in the Sanasarian. This initiative exposed the students to European political ideas, which was facilitated by their acquisition of various languages during their studies.



Figure 6. Class at the Sanasarian Varzharan (“Armenian Youths”), Erzurum, 1893/94. Photograph by H. F. B. Lynch. Reproduced in David Low, *Picturing the Ottoman Armenian World*.

While this foreign influence certainly enriched Armenian perspectives and positively contributed to the broader intellectual landscape of Armenian culture, it also posed a threat to the Russian administration as these tendencies seemed to undermine their control over the Armenian communities both within and across borders.⁶⁶² Also, the appearance of various religious

⁶⁶¹ Robert A. Tatoyan, “Garin/Erzurum – Schools (Part I),” trans. S. Beugekian, *Houshamadyan*, June 5, 2024, <https://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-erzurum/kaza-of-erzurum/education-and-sport/schools.html>.

⁶⁶² Paul Werth, “Imperial Russia and the Armenian Catholicos”, 204–209.

denominations could potentially challenge the dominance of Etchmiadzin, and thus Russia. This concern becomes evident in a specific instance in 1882 when the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, A. Nelidov, forwarded a report from the Russian consul in Trabzon in which highlighted that, following the Treaty of Berlin (1878), Western representatives were actively promoting “*the idea of Armenian identity to erode the sense of sympathy for Russia among Turkish Armenians*”. Simultaneously, the consul stressed the significance of institutions like the Gevorkian seminary in Etchmiadzin and the Lazarevskii Institute in Moscow as bearers of crucial spiritual and cultural links for Ottoman-Armenians with Russia.⁶⁶³

Elaborating on the Lazarevskii Institute and comparing it with the Sanasarian reveals a broader theme in the Russian Empire’s Armenian policy, which raises the question: what made the Lazarevskii Institute favorable in Nelidov’s eyes? The Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages fostered Armenian integration into Russian society while serving imperial interests as it trained Armenian youth for diplomacy, administration, and academia. While advancing Russian policies, it also contributed to Armenian national awakening as it allowed for Armenian-Russian intellectual exchange which bridged the gap between the Armenian diaspora, the Russian Empire, and the East.⁶⁶⁴ For example, Garabed Yeziantz, a friend and colleague of Mgrdich Sanasarian in the Sanasarian Academy project, also attended the Lazarevskii Institute in Moscow,⁶⁶⁵ as did Mikayel Loris-Melikov.⁶⁶⁶ Both were important figures who exemplify the integration of Armenians into the Russian elite.

Contrary to the Lazarevskii Institute, the Sanasarian School quickly lost favor in the eyes of Russian policymakers. As its charter dutifully proclaimed that “*the purpose of the Sanasarian School is to educate Armenian children in accordance with the spirit and canons of the Armenian Apostolic Church...*,” one might assume this would meet the criteria for an “*acceptable*” institution for Russia.⁶⁶⁷ But, a clear indication of the Tsarist administration’s apprehension towards the Sanasarian School remained and is evident in a confidential correspondence originated from Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Freze. In this correspondence, Freze explicitly expressed his

⁶⁶³ GARF, f. 568, op. 1, d. 157, ll. 1–11, 1882.

⁶⁶⁴ Anatolij V. Torkunov, “Lazarevskiy institut vostochnykh yazykov v kontekste istorii vostokovedeniya,” *Polis. Politicheskie issledovaniya*, no. 6 (2015): 9–22.

⁶⁶⁵ Low, *Picturing the Ottoman Armenian World*, 70.

⁶⁶⁶ Önoł, *The Armenians and Tsarist Russia*, 19.

⁶⁶⁷ Khristine Najaryan, “Karini Sanasaryan varzharani gorcuneutyuny (1881–1919 t’t’),” *Tseghaspanagitakan Handes* 5, no. 2 (2017): 98.

disapproval of the board of the Erzurum school. In his views, some teachers who were employed there were "*Russo-phobic and hated everything that was Russian*" and were "*close to the Armenian revolutionaries, whom they accepted as their own students.*" In addition, another criticism was that the school, which was funded by Russian-Armenian donations, taught French and German but not Russian.⁶⁶⁸

The quoted source implies that Armenian revolutionism in any form, whether within or beyond Russian borders, was highly unsettling for Russia. Armenian self-defense groups had been sprouting across Western Armenia since the 1860s, but revolutionary activities intensified following the 1877–1878 Russo-Turkish War, the internationalization of the Armenian Question, and the failure of reforms to improve Armenian living conditions.^{669 670} Russia feared the spread of revolutionary sentiment and secessionist tendencies within and along its borders. In the post-war years, some Russian consular reports from Erzurum described Armenian revolutionaries as products of Western "*nihilistic and antisocial ideologies,*" which, they claimed, were "*causing social decay*" in Armenian society and fueling Armenian separatism.⁶⁷¹

Therefore, Russian consuls in Erzurum maintained strict scrutiny over the Sanasarian as an educational stronghold, particularly because Russian authorities were well aware of its influence on young Armenian minds. After all, one of the first self-defense groups in Western-Armenia, the *Bashdban Hayrenyats* (The Defenders of the Fatherland) was established in early 1881 at the Sanasarian in Erzurum, just a year after the institution was founded in 1880.⁶⁷²

Despite crackdowns on Armenian self-defense movements, the Ottoman administration could not curtail their development. The Hamidian massacres ushered in a new era of revolutionary activity where the ARF emerged victorious.⁶⁷³ By the time of the rise of the Young Turk regime in 1908, the ARF gained political recognition and strengthened its position as the most vocal

⁶⁶⁸ GARF, f. 102, op. 308, d. 201, ll. 27–28 (July 23, 1904).

⁶⁶⁹ McCarthy, Arslan, and Taskiran, *Armenian Rebellion at Van*, 41–42.

⁶⁷⁰ Varak Ketsemanian, Ümit Kurt, and Ara Sarafian, "Ideologies, Paradoxes, and Fedayis in the Late Ottoman Empire: Historiographical Challenges and Methodological Problems in the Study of the Armenian Revolutionary Movement (1890–1896)," in *Armenians and Kurds in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 138.

⁶⁷¹ AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1628, ll. 123–128, July 15, 1883.

⁶⁷² Garabet K. Mouldjian, *Struggling for a Constitutional Regime: Armenian-Young Turk Relations in the Era of Abdulhamid II, 1895–1909* (Master's thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2012), 24.

⁶⁷³ Gerard Libaridian, "What Was Revolutionary About Armenian Revolutionary Parties in the Ottoman Empire?" in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ronald G. Suny, Fatma M. Göçek, and Norman M. Neimark (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 92.

advocates for Armenian interests within the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁷⁴ By cementing their alliance with the CUP, the Dashnaktsutiun became the focus of growing Russian suspicion that accused them of spreading revolutionary ideas among the Armenian population. According to Russian consul A. Shtritter, a strong “*Dashnaktsutiun current*” had taken root in the school and had successfully influenced the students.⁶⁷⁵ The strong Dashnaktsutiun influence was certainly present in the Sanasarian way before the report was written as prominent figures of the 1890s ARF activities Vartkes Serengülian, Karekin Pastermadjian, Sarkis Soghikian were also the graduates of the school.⁶⁷⁶

Factional Struggles

After the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, a dispute arose between the school’s Constantinople-based board of stewards and the Erzurum-based board of trustees. The stewards opposed the involvement of the ARF youth in the school, while the Erzurum Armenian authorities and trustees, dominated by the Dashnaktsutiun, sought full control over the school’s administration.⁶⁷⁷ Concerned about the growing influence of the Dashnaktsutiun party and the next generation of students, the board of trustees in Constantinople, removed A. Khachaturyan, the Dashnaktsutiun director, and replaced him with the (as the consul identified him) “*neutral Russian nationalist*” named Kevork Abulian. Before Abulian’s arrival, rumors circulated that his life would be in danger if he insisted on suppressing the existing school direction. To ensure Abulian’s safety, the *vali* of Erzurum was asked to intervene by the Russian consulate, despite the Dashnaktsutiun party denying any involvement in such actions anymore. Upon Abulian’s arrival at the Sanasarian, he was met with silence from both teachers and students, who turned their backs on him. As a result, Abulian did not visit the school again.⁶⁷⁸

Due to the protests and the revolutionary atmosphere at the school, Constantinople decided to temporarily close the school and remove the teachers. The incident caused concern among the local Armenian population, and Reverend Grigoris Balaklian was sent from Constantinople to

⁶⁷⁴ Bedros Der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 79–80.

⁶⁷⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 13–14, March 1, 1912.

⁶⁷⁶ Dikran Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule: 1908–1914* (London: Routledge, 2017), 56.

⁶⁷⁷ Tatoyan, “Garin (Erzurum) – Schools II.”

⁶⁷⁸ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 13–14, March 1, 1912.

investigate the matter and resolve the conflict. However, somewhat controversially, before conducting the investigation, Balaklian held early exams and dismissed both teachers and students associated with the Dashnaksutiu. When Balaklian announced the school's relocation to Sivas, the local Armenians were greatly dissatisfied as many wished to continue their studies. Led by the Dashnaks, a crowd marched into the courtyard to protest the evacuation of the school. They brought back the carried-out items and locked the door.⁶⁷⁹ Despite these actions, the trustees in the capital announced that lower grades would start in Erzurum and Sivas, but this failed to reassure those who had reached high school level, as they now had to find a school elsewhere. The Russian consulate condemned these decisions as overly strict, irrational, and detrimental to Russia's interests. According to the Russian consular reports, the Dashnaks had an opportunity to demonstrate that they represented local Armenian interests, even if this led to the downfall of the so-called "Old-Sanasarian".⁶⁸⁰

One intriguing aspect of this case is the Russian consulate's protective stance toward Abulian and its request to the vali for his safety, which suggested the importance attached to securing a Dashnaksutiu-free Sanasarian School and prompting intervention in the board of trustees to initiate a top-down purge of Dashnaksutiu elements. The unexpected closure of the school by the trustees angered local Armenians whose futures were jeopardized by the excessive measures taken by investigators from Constantinople. This outcome ran counter to Russia's objective of consolidating influence through a pro-Russian educational stance, instead producing significant turmoil in Erzurum and inadvertently strengthening Dashnaksutiu support, while leaving the Russian consulate without a resolution.

Despite giving approval for the school to be relocated from Erzurum to the Surp Nshan Monastery of Sivas, the Catholicos directed the trustees to initiate the establishment of a new school in Erzurum. In compliance with this instruction, the trustees resolved the disputes concerning school properties. In 1912, the Educational Council of Erzurum, along with Artashes Rostomyan, Inspector-General of the Armenian National Schools, jointly recognized the necessity of establishing a secondary school in the region. Subsequently, they decided to reopen the Sanasarian School, simply renaming it as the "New Sanasarian."⁶⁸¹ However, over time, non-partisan Armenians in Erzurum reportedly became increasingly dissatisfied with the Dashnaks' control of

⁶⁷⁹ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 45–46, August 20, 1912.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸¹ Tarbassian, *Erzurum (Garin)*, 106.

the New-Sanasarian School. According to Consul Adamov, this dissatisfaction stemmed from the school's administration, led by Rostom, failing to maintain discipline among students, which resulted in unruly behavior and moral misconduct on school premise.⁶⁸²

Seeking to remove the Dashnaksutium committee from the management of the Sanasarian School, some members of the Armenian community appealed to Bishop Sempat of Erzurum, himself a member of the board of trustees. Tensions between the bishop and the Dashnaks intensified over a 420-lira deficit for the 1913–1914 academic year, which arose after parents—distrusting the school's instructors—enrolled their children elsewhere, reducing tuition income. Adamov reported that the Armenian National Assembly, dominated by Dashnaks, nevertheless approved a 2,135-lira budget, largely funded by the national treasury, and sought to compel the school administration to submit the following year's budget in order to retain party control. Bishop Sempat's proposed remedy was widely regarded as insufficient, particularly amid growing non-partisan Armenian opposition to Dashnak dominance in Erzurum. The Russian consulate, for its part, consistently criticized the Sanasarian School as anti-Russian due to Dashnak influence, with Adamov singling out Gabriel Noradunkian⁶⁸³, chairman of the board of trustees and briefly Ottoman minister of foreign affairs, as emblematic of this orientation.⁶⁸⁴

A dispute between the Dashnaksutium party and the school trusteeship under episcopal leadership in Erzurum in June 1914 led to the rapid rise of an Armenian Constitutional-Democratic opposition, which reportedly expanded to 800 members by mobilizing dissatisfaction with Dashnak dominance. Faced with the risk of losing control over the Sanasarian School and their majority in the National Council, the Dashnaks abandoned their insistence on keeping control over Armenian schools and stopped resisting the authority of the school trusteeship. After that, the trusteeship dismissed the largely Dashnak-affiliated teaching staff of the local Armenian schools and claimed exclusive authority over future appointments.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸² AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 66–70, June 3, 1914. [See Appendix 73.](#)

⁶⁸³ Gabriel Noradunkian (1852–1936) was an Ottoman Armenian statesman and jurist who served as minister of trade (1908–10) and minister of foreign affairs (July 1912–January 1913). A long-time legal adviser to the Foreign Ministry and chairman of the Armenian National Assembly (1894), he went into exile in Europe after 1915, where he represented Armenian interests in Lausanne and Paris and became vice president of the Armenian General Benevolent Union. See Ercan Karakoc, “Gabriyel Noradunkyan Effendi from Among the Ottoman Ministers of Armenian Origin (1852–1936)”.

⁶⁸⁴ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 66–70, June 3, 1914.

⁶⁸⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 88–92, July 12, 1914. [See Appendix 74.](#)

These scandals reveal how internal issues at the Sanasarian School could be externalized and transformed into arenas of factional struggle, in which Russian consular authority, operating through church leadership, proved unable to override entrenched Dashnaktsutium influence, it was rather the Armenian opposition which managed to achieve change. Indeed, there was little the Russian consuls could do in the absence of a coherent policy to follow. Although Adamov argued that the school was informally regarded as being under Russian consular patronage, he stressed that it had operated independently of Russian control since its founding. He concluded that Russian influence was so limited that the consulate could not even ensure the inclusion of the Russian language in the curriculum.⁶⁸⁶ This case demonstrates that Russian influence over Armenian educational institutions remained limited and largely dependent on local conditions rather than on Russian imperial will.

German–Russian Rivalry

Given the limited Russian oversight over the Sanasarian School, the situation became increasingly pressing with the growing presence of German diplomats in Erzurum, as education emerged as a potential arena of Great Power competition and through that influence over the Armenian population. In this context, and with regard to the re-establishment of the Sanasarian School, Adamov articulated a set of concerns to the Russian embassy in Constantinople, emphasizing the strategic implications of educational control in the province:

*“(…), the teaching staff and students, long before it was taken over by the Dashnaks, were imbued with anti-Russian ideas, particularly in the context of general Armenian dissatisfaction with our government's policies regarding the Armenian church's properties in the Caucasus. Given the variable moods in Armenian circles, we should take advantage of the return of the Old Sanasarian School to Erzurum to influence the direction of its policies, ensuring open patronage of this school funded mainly by Russian money. This is especially necessary because there are many reasons to fear that the school will not become a hotbed of German influence, following the example of the New School, thanks to the closer relations of the German consul with the Dashnaks.”*⁶⁸⁷

Curbing the spread of German influence was imperative for the Russian consulate to secure the appointment of a school director aligned with Russian interests. This concern was heightened by the backgrounds of the Sanasarian School's three former directors, Abulyan, Madatian, and

⁶⁸⁶AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 66–70, June 3, 1914.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Soghikian, all of whom had received their higher education in Germany or Austria. Owing to these educational trajectories, they were perceived by Russian officials as potential conduits of German influence.⁶⁸⁸ The possibility of Soghikian assuming the role of the school's director was especially concerning. This apprehension stemmed from the trust he reportedly enjoyed from Noradunkian, to whom he was believed to provide detailed reports on developments within the Armenian community in Erzurum. Adamov argued that Soghikian had considerable influence, so much so that even Bishop Sempat regarded him as a potential threat. There were fears that Soghikian might portray the bishop in a negative light to Noradunkian, thereby jeopardizing Sempat's candidacy for the patriarchal seat. Consequently, the Russian consulate considered Noradunkian's potential appointment of Soghikian, not only as director but even as a teacher upon the school's return to Erzurum, as undesirable for Russian interests. As Adamov put it: "*Removing him from school activities would facilitate our task in influencing the direction of the said school.*"⁶⁸⁹

Meanwhile, Consul Adamov also suggested ways Russia could influence the school. He argued that a Russian government subsidy should be allocated to introduce Russian language instruction, especially since the school had long taught French and, with financial support from the German consul Anders, had recently introduced German language instruction under Soghikian. Although, the director of the New Sanasarian School, Rostomyan, had begun teaching Russian on Adamov's advice from 1914 January, the consul was dissatisfied, claiming that the instruction was not being taken seriously enough. At the same time, he expressed his concern that donations from Russia meant to support Armenian schools in Turkish Armenia should not be spent without the consulate's knowledge and approval, particularly to fund schools with an anti-Russian orientation.⁶⁹⁰

Russian plans to provide financial support to the Sanasarian School ultimately never materialized, either due to the outbreak of the World War I or the absence of a clear directive within Tsarist policy. After June 1914, Russian consular reports from Erzurum ceased mentioning the institution, limiting the reconstruction of later Russian perspectives. Earlier records nevertheless suggest that Russia lacked a coherent and sustained strategy toward the Sanasarian or similar educational institutions as instruments of influence within Armenian society. This inconsistency is

⁶⁸⁸ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2684, ll. 116–126, September 12, 1913.

⁶⁸⁹ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 66–70, June 3, 1914.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

notable given repeated consular observations that Great Power rivalry shaped Armenian political expectations and revolutionary activity.

At the same time, the sources portray the Sanasarian School as a space where imperial competition intersected with Armenian political strategies. Both German and Russian were introduced as languages of instruction: German through subsidies from the German consul, and Russian through Rostomyan, a former Dashnak activist. This combination points to a pragmatic orientation within the ARF, which appears to have engaged rival powers situationally during the reform movement. Ultimately, the school's closure during wartime conscription and the confiscation of its buildings for military use marked the disappearance of a major cultural and intellectual center of Armenian communal life in Erzurum.

Reforms and Escalating Mistrust in the Ottoman Borderland

The Reform Crisis and Rising Borderland Tensions

Political instability persisted in the empire therefore the CUP resorted to extralegal measures to maintain their power. By 1913, they had seized full executive control over the empire, which setting the stage for authoritarian rule and controversial wartime policies that followed, including the Armenian deportations.⁶⁹¹ The possible causes behind the CUP's clinging to power were manifold.

In June 1913, in the aftermath of the disastrous First Balkan War—a clear sign of imperial decline, the CUP staged a coup against the government to “*save what remained.*” The CUP, which had once championed Ottomanism as an inclusive framework for all subjects, increasingly shifted toward Turkish nationalism.⁶⁹² The plan for the ethnoreligious homogenization of Anatolia was also conceived during this time.⁶⁹³

⁶⁹¹ Ellinor Morack, “Ottoman Parliamentary Procedure in the Chamber of Deputies (Meclis-i Mebusan) and the Great National Assembly of Turkey (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi), 1876–1923,” in *Planting Parliaments in Eurasia, 1850–1950*, ed. Birgitt Bader-Zaar, Dieter Langewiesche, and Peter Haslinger (London: Routledge, 2021), 228–37.

⁶⁹² Kemal Çiçek, “The Question of Genocidal Tendency in the Minority Politics of the Young Turks,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 33, no. 1 (2013): 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2013.779070>.

⁶⁹³ Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 29.

In late 1913, The Porte conceded to foreign control over Armenian provinces by giving significant concession to European powers and potentially giving green light to the reforms.⁶⁹⁴ But even before that, Russian consular reports indicate that news of possible Russian and European caused tensions as news of intervention spread in Erzurum after the proclamation of Albanian independence and raised expectations that outside powers might soon address the Armenian Question. These expectations encouraged Kurdish preparations for revolt, Armenian rearmament, and discussions of autonomy in Armenian press, developments that intensified Kurdish fears of territorial loss and sharpened intercommunal tensions.⁶⁹⁵ Meanwhile, Armenian preparations appeared to involve explosives, revealed when an accidental blast at Sarkis Kazandzhian's house in Erzincan destroyed his home and a neighboring building and caused casualties. Police discovered three unexploded bombs and identified the perpetrator as a member of Dashnaktsutiun. The incident provoked street demonstrations by the Muslim population, prompting the arrest of 150 Armenians and the deployment of patrols to restore order. Already strained by Armenian celebrations of Ottoman defeats in the Balkan War, tensions escalated further as police began systematic searches of Armenian homes with authorization from the capital. Fear of Armenian revolutionary activity and foreign intervention continued to fuel growing Muslim resentment.⁶⁹⁶

Simultaneously, ethnic and religious groups began distancing themselves from the crumbling empire. The crisis within the CUP, combined with Russia's renewed push for Armenian reforms, led some Armenian communities to favor Russian protection over loyalty to the CUP, resulting in a strained relationship between the state and its Armenian subjects.⁶⁹⁷ ARF-CUP relations began to deteriorate too due to increased Russian influence and threat on the periphery, which made the ARF appear as Russian agents in the eyes of the government, coupled with rising Kurdish activity instigated by Russia. Meanwhile, Russia's reform proposals for the region led the CUP to fear that the reforms were a step toward Russian occupation and eventual Armenian independence.⁶⁹⁸ The looming Armenian reform treaty alarmed Kurdish communities, who feared

⁶⁹⁴ Yektan Turkyilmaz, *Rethinking Genocide: Violence and Victimhood in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1915* (PhD diss., Duke University, 2011), 103–6.

⁶⁹⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2682, ll. 72–80, December 28, 1912.

⁶⁹⁶ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2684, ll. 34–43, April 7, 1913.

⁶⁹⁷ Garabet K. Moundjian, "The Eastern Vilayets, 1909–1914: ARF–CUP Collusion, Russian Stratagems, and the Kurdish Menace," in *War and Collapse: World War I and the Ottoman State*, ed. Feroz Ahmad and M. Hakan Yavuz (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 736–40.

⁶⁹⁸ Feroz Ahmad, "Unionist Relations with the Greek, Armenian, and Jewish Communities of the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1914," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Abridged Edition*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2014), 312, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781685850753-017>.

for both their existence and ancestral land rights, notably visible during the Bitlis uprising and ensuing Kurdish disobedience in general.⁶⁹⁹

Intercepted correspondence obtained by Russian consuls from the Ottoman consul in Kars suggested that, by May 1914, a notable infiltration of Armenian agents into Western Armenia was underway. Disguised as Circassian, Kurdish, or Armenian peasants, these agents carried funds and proclamations and were allegedly tasked with inciting unrest among Armenian and Kurdish populations, including the establishment of revolutionary committees in Armenian villages and, in some cases, the delivery of dynamite to Kurdish groups. In response, Ottoman authorities issued strict orders to border commanders to prevent illegal crossings. This policy led to an incident in the Pasinler district, where border guards fired on a group of Armenians attempting to cross secretly, killing one. The discovery of Russian credit notes and Armenian documents on the body raised concerns that the victim was an Ottoman Armenian returning from work in Russia, prompting the vali to order an immediate burial and confiscate the money. Adamov questioned whether such measures disproportionately targeted returning migrants, noting that clandestine crossings were often used to avoid extortion by officials amid substantial remittance flows through the Erzurum vilayet.⁷⁰⁰

By February 1914, the Ottoman leadership agreed to accept reform plans, which stipulated the appointment of European inspectors rather than governors, thereby preserving Ottoman sovereignty on paper.⁷⁰¹ The Armenian intelligentsia in Erzurum expressed skepticism toward the incoming European inspectors. They accused them of being financially motivated and unlikely to act independently of the Ottoman authorities. Adamov reported that it was this distrust that prompted Armenian political circles, including the Dashnaksutiun and Constitutional Democrats, to intensify preparations for self-defense, which they officially framed as protection against potential Muslim attacks but also interpreted as readiness for more active measures should the reform process fail, possibly to provoke Russian intervention. Whether intended or not, the reform scheme inadvertently became an instrument of Russian policy rather than a solution. It legitimized

⁶⁹⁹ Moundjian, "Eastern Vilayets," 736–40.

⁷⁰⁰ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 81–86, May, 1914. [See Appendix 75.](#)

⁷⁰¹ Mehmet Uğur Ekinçi, "The Impact of Foreign Policy Thinking on the Introduction of the 1913–14 Armenian Reform Programme," *Review of Armenian Studies* 45 (2022): 92.

Russia's self-assigned role as the guarantor of order and protection in the eastern provinces, while strengthening Armenian sympathies toward Russia.⁷⁰²

At the same time, some CUP members began collecting signatures for a petition protesting international interference in Armenian reform, which blamed the Great Powers in advance for any violence that might follow. Adamov urged in his reports that active measures be taken to prevent a massacre.⁷⁰³ The authorities in Erzurum covertly organized Muslim demonstrations by reportedly mobilizing military officers to stage unrest using disguised soldiers as a protest against foreign oversight.⁷⁰⁴

Rather than stabilizing the region, the Armenian reform process deepened an already pervasive climate of mistrust in Erzurum. For the CUP, externally guaranteed reforms appeared as a prelude to foreign intervention, territorial loss, and the loss of state sovereignty that could justify preemptive securitization and repression. Among Armenians, the same reforms raised expectations of protection, but the absence of enforcement caused disillusionment and encouraged self-reliance in defense. The reforms only entrenched mutual suspicion and contributed to a volatile environment in not only Erzurum but also in the region.

Political Coercion and Economic Pressure

By late 1913 and early 1914, the situation in the vilayet of Erzurum had reached an alarming state. The region had already become the hotbed of the political machinations of the CUP during the election process where the CUP achieved groundbreaking victory through dishonest means. In the Erzurum vilayet, parliamentary elections were repeatedly postponed due to persistent resistance to the CUP, which came not only from Armenian political circles but also from segments of the Muslim population, owing to the scandalous manner in which the elections were conducted. In several districts, including Pasinler and the city of Erzurum, CUP candidates failed to gain local backing even with official support. Faced with these setbacks, prominent Ittihadist figures, most notably the party inspector Hilmi Bey and the Pasinler kaymakam Tahir Bey, abandoned their

⁷⁰² AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 88–92, July 12, 1914.

⁷⁰³ MID, *Sbornik diplomaticheskikh dokumentov*, Adamov to the Ambassador, December 29, 1913 / January 11, 1914, no. 120, telegram.

⁷⁰⁴ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 88–92, July 12, 1914.

candidacies and were replaced by alternative CUP nominees, such as Seyfulla Efendi. As Russian consular reports by Adamov indicate, the CUP's eventual success was not the result of genuine electoral support but instead relied on systematic coercion, fraud, and negotiated arrangements with local powerholders. Agreements were concluded with influential neighborhood leaders, while assurances were obtained from the vali that CUP candidates would prevail irrespective of voter behavior. In the Bayezid mutasarrifate, Kurdish refusal to participate in the elections led authorities to falsify results by filling ballot boxes in advance. In Tortum and Çamurveren, support was secured through direct bribery, with Seyfulla Efendi reportedly distributing money to secure votes. Through these practices, the CUP was able to impose electoral dominance despite widespread opposition.⁷⁰⁵

Due to the sweeping victory of the CUP in the elections of 1914, the CUP-controlled parliament posed little resistance. Despite efforts by the CUP to manipulate the outcome, candidates aligned with the ARF emerged victorious during the election. However, the struggle for political representation was far from over. The ARF's refusal to accept compromises on electoral representation underscored their commitment to Armenian autonomy and resistance against perceived betrayals.⁷⁰⁶ These developments demonstrate not only that the CUP had definitively abandoned any commitment to democratic rule and increasingly relied on coercive and dishonest practices to maintain power, but also that they marked the final rupture between the ARF and the CUP.

Tensions reached a new peak with anti-Armenian agitation and covert militarization as the Ottoman Empire edged closer to war. By the order of the Committee of Union and Progress, Ahmed Hilmi Bey actively worked to foment interethnic hostility that would have negative consequences for the Armenian population.⁷⁰⁷

Reports from the Russian consul in Erzurum, telegrams dispatched between December 1913 and January 1914, indicate that Consul Adamov documented a campaign of agitation directed against the Armenians. CUP members reportedly coordinated a network of local agents and provocateurs, who were arming themselves under the directions from unionist officials.⁷⁰⁸ For instance, the CUP, under the leadership of Hilmi Bey and reportedly with support from the German

⁷⁰⁵ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 46–55, May 5, 1914. [See Appendix 76.](#)

⁷⁰⁶ Zürcher, "Young Turk Governance," 900–902.

⁷⁰⁷ Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID), *Sbornik diplomaticheskikh dokumentov: Reformy v Armenii, 26 noyabrya 1912 goda – 10 maya 1914 goda* (Petrograd: Gosudarstvennaya tipografiya, 1915), no. 111, General Consul Adamov to the Embassy in Constantinople, December 7, 1913, telegram.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 120, Adamov to the Ambassador, December 29, 1913 / January 11, 1914, telegram.

Consul Anders, orchestrated a shooting competition exclusively for Muslims to cause widespread fear among the Armenians, which prompted Adamov, who described the incident as an “*untimely and previously unheard-of amusement*”, to file an official protest to the vali.⁷⁰⁹ Adamov also reported that the CUP in Erzurum had begun to organize a certain group, ominously referred to by locals as the “Strength/Power of the Turks” (“*sila turkov*”), which had grown to over 200 members, many of whom were employed in local government or affiliated with paramilitary groups. Its leader was Hamid Paşa, the dismissed instructor of the Erzurum citadel, who held weekly military drills on Fridays to prepare its members for conflict—nominally against Russia, but with implications for internal enemies as well; Adamov added, against Armenians.⁷¹⁰ Hilmi Bey, the leader of the Erzurum CUP, even appealed to the CUP Central Committee for 4,000 revolvers, explicitly to “confront the Armenians”.⁷¹¹

Rumors of a massacre began circulating in December 1913. Muslim men were seen wearing white turbans on the orders of local religious leaders, which was perceived by Armenians also as a sign of violence, according to the Russian consulate.⁷¹² The authorities deliberately aggravated intercommunal tensions, which not only intimidated Armenians but also radicalized segments of the Muslim population.

Economic pressure accompanied political incitement. Under Hilmi’s guidance, CUP members established a covert boycott campaign aimed at marginalizing Armenian merchants. On the one hand, the campaign was being conducted covertly to avoid accusations of anti-Armenian agitation. On the other, to prevent Armenians from seeking protection from foreign powers. The evidence of this unofficial boycott was the avoidance of Armenian merchants by Muslim consumers. For instance, a merchant named Serafyan, who had been the supplier of paper and stationery for the entire vilayet administration and other Ottoman government institutions, complained to the director of the local branch of the Ottoman Bank about losing his clients. Even the carriages he owned were no longer hired by Muslims. At the same time, the CUP opposed Armenian businesses opened by Russian subjects. It published an open call in the 42nd and 43rd issues of the newspaper *Ai Bayrak*, the official organ of the CUP in Erzurum, and urged a boycott of kerosene sold by David, a Russian subject, in favor of a newly established trading cooperative that was also selling Russian kerosene,

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., no. 128, Adamov to the Ambassador, January 6/19, 1914, telegram.

⁷¹⁰ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 14–15, February 15, 1914.

⁷¹¹ MID, *Sbornik diplomaticheskikh dokumentov*, no. 128, Adamov to the Ambassador, January 6/19, 1914, telegram.

⁷¹² Ibid., no. 120, Adamov to the Ambassador, December 29, 1913 / January 11, 1914, telegram.

headed by the wealthy Erzurum notable, Tevorik Effendi Malemez.⁷¹³ The CUP organized systematic boycotts against Greek and Armenian business owners across the Ottoman Empire. The CUP's nationalist economic ideology sought to eliminate Armenians and Greeks from commerce as they had believed these measures would ensure economic independence and contribute to creation of Turkish bourgeoisie. These ideas were promoted by Young Turk theoreticians such as Akcura and Tekinalp.⁷¹⁴

The ARF Congress in Erzurum and the Collapse of Unionist–Armenian Cooperation

It was in this climate that the ARF World Congress convened in Erzurum in July 1914. Despite the war clouds looming over Europe, the congress addressed domestic repression and the CUP's obstruction of promised reforms. CUP delegates offered the Dashnaks a deal: Armenian autonomy in exchange for stirring rebellion among Russian Armenians should war break out.⁷¹⁵ The Dashnaks refused, citing the dangers of provoking internal conflict and the CUP's unreliability. This refusal, while affirming Armenian civic loyalty, marked a key rupture in Unionist–Armenian relations. Postwar Unionist trial records reveal that the CUP's actual motive for sending delegates to Erzurum was not political negotiation but covert military preparation. The congress served as cover for the formation of Special Organization units in the region. Internal CUP communications confirmed plans to intercept and eliminate Armenian participants as they left Erzurum. Although the Armenians ultimately escaped the assassination attempts, the incident revealed the extent of the Unionists' paranoia and willingness to use lethal force.⁷¹⁶

More recent research shows a more nuanced picture of the congress and what was said there. The CUP sought to ascertain the ARF's position in the event of war with Russia. The ARF promised loyalty to the Ottoman Empire if attacked but refused to commit to supporting an Ottoman invasion of Russia or inciting rebellion in the Caucasus. The cautious stance of the ARF reportedly frustrated Ottoman leaders and, according to some accounts, fueled anti-Armenian

⁷¹³ AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 18–19, February 15, 1914.

⁷¹⁴ Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule*, 263–64.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 214–17.

⁷¹⁶ Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 136–137.

sentiment. The ensuing weeks were characterized by internal debates where one faction urged swift coordination with Russia, as they believed in a quick Russian victory while the other warned against provocation as they feared Ottoman retaliation. By late August, the Western Bureau of the ARF in Istanbul, having received a letter from the ARF branch in Paris promising French support should they side with the Entente, approved the formation of Armenian volunteer legions to fight alongside Russia. This decision was made unilaterally, without consulting other branches of the organization, including those returning from Erzurum. Interestingly, the Eastern Bureau in Tiflis had already initiated talks with the Russian Viceroy about armed cooperation even before the Congress in Erzurum. By late September, all the ARF branches (including the Armenian Bureau in Erzurum) supported the decision to back the Entente. Although some figures, like Zoryan, Vratzian, and Kachaznoui, initially opposed this, they later helped organize the volunteer units. Despite calls from the ARF and the Armenian Patriarch to remain loyal to the Empire, Armenian resistance to conscription was considerable and desertion was widespread. Ultimately, the ARF's decision to support Russia undermined its previous alliance with the CUP, which led to a complete breakdown in relations, having played a significant role in the unfolding tragedy for Ottoman Armenians.⁷¹⁷

By late summer 1914, Hilmi Bey was assigned with the task and had begun recruiting the so-called Special Organization units composed of Kurdish tribes, criminals, and émigrés from the Caucasus and Rumelia. These groups would later form the backbone of the violence unleashed during the war.⁷¹⁸ According to foreign observers, Hilmi, besides local unionist representatives, including Seyfullah Effendi, were coordinators of the massacres in 1915.⁷¹⁹ As per a cable sent by Hilmi, the Unionist inspector for Erzurum, to Bahaettin Sakir testifies: “*there are individuals inside the country to be eliminated. We are pursuing this perspective!*”⁷²⁰ In Erzurum, the groundwork for this campaign, politically, economically, and militarily had already been laid.

Conclusion

⁷¹⁷ Christopher Gunn, “In Search of the ‘Immortal’ Volunteers: The Legacy of Armenian Fedayis on the Caucasus Front, 1914–1916,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 39, no. 3 (2019): 7–10.

⁷¹⁸ Akçam, *The Young Turks’ Crime Against Humanity*, 134.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.* 172.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.* 131.

Between the Congress of Berlin and the onset of the Great War, Russian policy toward the Ottoman Empire was shaped by caution and a desire to maintain the balance of power in eastern Anatolia. The Tsarist regime also preferred the preservation of a weakened but intact Ottoman Empire, as it feared that its collapse would benefit rival powers, particularly Great Britain, and provoke a wider conflict that would be disadvantageous for Russia. Nevertheless, Russia never abandoned its long-term ambitions: securing control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, maintaining influence in the Balkans, and positioning itself as the protector of Christian populations throughout the empire, whether in Europe or Asia.

For that reason, the Tsar maintained an extensive consular network, and the reports produced by diplomats were not merely observations but also a form of political practice. By emphasizing administrative failure and intercommunal violence, particularly the suffering of the Armenian population, consuls constructed a narrative that legitimized Russia's self-appointed role as protector and justified continued diplomatic intervention in Ottoman affairs.

Despite this robust diplomatic presence in the Ottoman Empire, including in the Armenian vilayets, the reports also reveal the limits of Russian influence on the ground. This is evidenced by the reliance of Russian consuls in Erzurum on second-hand information, as discussed in the dissertation, as well as by their competition with better-resourced British consular networks. Russia's influence in the Ottoman eastern provinces remained limited for it lacked the economic and commercial presence of Britain, France, or Germany, and its trade relations with the empire were minimal. The collapse of the Reinsurance Treaty in 1890 and the expansion of German economic and military influence further intensified Russian anxieties. These structural weaknesses were compounded by poor coordination within the Russian foreign policy apparatus, resulting in a fragmented and ad hoc stance.⁷²¹

This dissertation demonstrates that such incoherence extended beyond economic policy, which encompassed Russia's broader engagement with the Armenian Question and the Ottoman eastern provinces. While presenting itself as the protector of Ottoman Christians, consular reports documented widespread violence, forced conversions, abductions, and Kurdish attacks against Armenians. However, these observations rarely translated into effective measures. Instead, Russia sought to exert pressure on the Ottoman periphery while avoiding actions that might destabilize

⁷²¹ Alan Bodger, "Russia and the End of the Ottoman Empire," in *The Great Powers and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Marian Kent (London: Routledge, 2005), 80–81.

the empire. As a result, rhetorical commitments, particularly in the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War and during the Hamidian massacres, failed to produce tangible improvements in Armenian living conditions. At the same time, the Tsarist Empire attempted to compartmentalize the Armenian Question as a domestic issue, partly in an effort to contain its own “Armenian Question” within its borders, namely the emergence of Armenian revolutionary movements, many of which originated in Russian territory.

Indeed, the Russian presence ultimately proved to be more instrumental in containing Armenian political developments than in protecting the population. Moreover, this presence contributed to the stigmatization of Armenians by Ottoman authorities, who increasingly viewed them as a potential fifth column aligned with Russia. At the same time, not only Russian but also British, American, French, and German involvement intensified great-power competition in the region. As argued in this dissertation, intercommunal violence in Erzurum cannot be reduced to local antagonisms alone; rather, it must be situated within an entangled imperial context. Global crises, such as the Balkan uprisings, as well as the broader dynamics of the Eastern Question and great-power interventionism directly shaped local perceptions, fears, and actions. This process contributed to the politicization of religious identities which, fueled by both external intervention and internal instability, eroded mechanisms of coexistence and led to the gradual hardening of communal boundaries.

For this reason, religion receives special attention in this dissertation. As a key instrument of imperial politics, Russia attempted to exert influence through the Armenian Apostolic Church, particularly via Etchmiadzin and loyal clergy, in order to prevent the proselytization of Protestant denominations. However, this strategy proved fragile. Internal divisions within Armenian communities, competition from Catholic and Protestant missions, and broader imperial rivalries undermined Russian efforts to establish a stable link. Over time, Russian perceptions of Armenians shifted, from loyal co-religionists to potentially subversive actors, reflecting growing anxieties about nationalism in light of the growing Armenian revolutionary movements. Consular reports also consistently emphasized the perceived threat of Protestant missionary activity and its impact on Armenian religious unity, especially in relation to the authority of the Etchmiadzin Catholicosate. While the Russian state supported the Armenian Apostolic Church as a unifying institution, this policy remained inconsistent in practice. Despite detailed reporting and occasional

proposals by individual consuls, no sustained or coordinated effort emerged to reshape conditions in Western Armenia.

At the same time, Russian consuls expressed concern over the potential shifting of Armenian loyalties toward other powers amid the great-power rivalries of the Eastern Question. This anxiety was closely intertwined with fears of foreign intellectual currents, such as socialism and nihilism, as contemporaries described them, penetrating the Russian intellectual sphere and weakening the traditional bond between Armenians and Russians. Russian reports frequently attributed these ideas to Western influence, arguing that they “*infected*” young Armenian minds with notions of Armenian statehood which resulted in the emergence of Armenian revolutionary forces. Such developments were perceived as a direct challenge to Russia’s political objective of stabilizing the borderland and preserving the existing order.

The reports of Dennet reflect a particularly deep concern about the destabilizing potential of the region. Western Armenia was described as a “new Poland” on Russia’s doorstep, a source of possible unrest threatening the Caucasus. This perception reveals a broader conceptualization of the borderland as porous, volatile, and difficult to govern. Such views align with the dissertation’s theoretical framework, demonstrating that the “shatterzone” characteristics of the region were not only analytical constructs but also informed contemporary imperial thinking.

Russian inaction and ad hoc decision-making are also illustrated by developments surrounding the emergence of a German consular presence in Erzurum. Russian consuls closely monitored German activities, yet their responses remained largely passive, often limited to observation rather than active countermeasures. As discussed, numerous reports indicate that the German consul established close cooperation with Ottoman administrative and military authorities, while also engaging in intelligence-gathering activities in Russian Transcaucasia. However, the Erzurum reports examined in this dissertation do not reflect the existence of a coherent policy to counter these developments. While countermeasures may have existed, their assessment would require a more extensive analysis of correspondence between the Transcaucasian Viceroyalty and the Erzurum consulate, particularly in the collections of the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) in Moscow.

A similar pattern can be observed in relation to the Russian consulate’s interest in the Sanassarian College. Despite numerous reports emphasizing the importance of influencing the

institution, and despite its reputation as being close to Russia, the consulate never succeeded in establishing effective control. The influence of the Dashnaktsutiun within the school proved significant, and as relations between the movement and the Russian state deteriorated, the possibility of influencing the school's leadership diminished further. It should also be noted that, according to the reports, Russia made no substantial financial investment in the institution, which further limited its ability to exert control.

Reflecting on governance, this dissertation also demonstrates that Russian consuls showed considerable interest in Kurdish affairs, particularly in relation to tribal structures, uprisings, and the Hamidiye regiments. Kurdish actors were not merely passive subjects but actively negotiated their position, seeking support from both Ottoman and Russian authorities. While the reports indicate that there were indeed contacts between the Russian consulate and certain Kurdish tribes, these interactions appear to have been opportunistic rather than part of a coherent strategy. It is also worth noting that one of the Russian consuls in Erzurum, J. Zhaba, was a prominent Kurdologist, which further explains the depth of attention given to Kurdish issues.

The dissertation further shows that Ottoman policies, particularly the establishment of the Hamidiye regiments, intensified instability rather than resolving it since these units functioned as mechanisms of delegated violence and frontier governance, reinforcing tribal power structures and contributing to widespread abuses against deprived Armenians. This type of borderland governance lay the groundwork to the Hamidian massacres of 1894-1895. Nevertheless, the massacres are shown to be the products of intertwined reasons, not merely caused by the presence of the Hamidiye by introducing hitherto understudies archival sources which shed light on the causality of the violence in Erzurum.

For instance, the exacerbation of the affective disposition⁷²², toward the Armenian population by the local Muslim population, building up until 1895, preceded the outbreak of violence against the Armenian population. This has multiple reasons. One is the presence of foreign powers such as

⁷²² Ronald Grigor Suny often uses the term “*affective disposition*” to refer to a relatively stable, long-term emotional and cognitive orientation that shapes how individuals and groups tend to interpret situations and respond to them. Unlike short-lived emotions, dispositions develop over time and consist of a combination of beliefs, attitudes, preferences, and associated feelings. They do not directly determine behavior, but they influence what kinds of reactions are more likely under certain circumstances. In this sense, affective dispositions function as a background framework through which people perceive the world, making some interpretations and actions more probable than others, especially when activated by specific events. See Ronald Grigor Suny, “Exiting Empire: Civil Wars in South Caucasia versus Civil Peace in the Baltic Republics,” in *Ethnic Relations in the Baltic Reconsidered*, 1st ed. (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2026), 239–62.

Britain and Russia and their instrumentalization of the Armenian Question and the perceived protection of Christians to dismember the empire and to meddle with the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire, which was negatively perceived by the Muslim population. As a counterreaction to that, the emergence of the Armenian revolutionary elements further worsened this affective disposition. The case of the massacre in Erzurum exemplifies just this. There was already a violent atmosphere in interreligious and intercommunal relations in the vilayet, and the activities of the revolutionary elements gave an impetus to the outbreak of extraordinary violence.

The study of the emergence of the Young Turk movement in Erzurum is similarly situated within this context of local crisis. Russian consular reports reveal that economic hardship, insecurity, and political dissatisfaction created fertile ground for opposition before the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. However, the restoration of constitutional rule failed to resolve underlying tensions. A big achievement of the dissertation is that it raises the issue of the resistance of the reactionary element against secularization on a local level in Erzurum through the role of religious clubs, a topic which had avoided the attention of scholarly works so far. During the period leading up to the eve of the First World War, the Erzurum borderland became increasingly unstable.

Despite Russia's limited interest in occupying Western Armenia, the perceived Russian protection of Armenians was seen by the Muslim majority as an attempt to destabilize the empire by supporting Christian Armenians. This motif was present in Ottoman governmental mindset led by CUP, and portrayed Armenians as Russian-backed traitors. But, as demonstrated above Russia's actual policy was more cautious and divided, but more importantly inconsistent and ad-hoc. For instance, from 1912 to early 1916, Russia supported Ottoman sovereignty in eastern Anatolia with international oversight to protect Christians, and not annexation. Even after the war began in 1914, Russia avoided provocative actions until hostilities commenced. Once the war broke out, some members of the Russian government sought Armenian support, while others favored working with the Kurds. Although Russia armed some Armenian groups, most Ottoman Armenians did not join revolutionary activities. Unlike the CUP's genocidal policies, Russia refrained from mass deportations or massacres of suspect populations. It is noteworthy that Russia led the 1915 international condemnation of the Armenian Genocide, inserting the term "crimes against

humanity" into diplomatic language.⁷²³ Still, considering the future of the Armenian reform project and the plight of the Ottoman Empire this did not bear much significance apart from signaling the desperate need for labelling the happenings what they were.

Indicative of the haphazard, unpredictable politics of Russia is its wartime policy. Russian operational planning for an Armenian uprising in eastern Anatolia was developed by Foreign Minister Sazonov, and in Tiflis by Viceroy Vorontsov-Dashkov in September 1914 and continued into later that year. This involved forming small Armenian guerrilla cells along the Russo-Ottoman border, equipping them with weapons and cash, and smuggling arms across the border. Russian consul Adamov's report from Erzurum on 1 November 1914 highlighted Armenian expectations of Russian liberation across Erzurum, Erzincan, Sivas, and Kayseri. Even the local Dashnaksutiun leadership had aligned with Russian interests after the failed Armenian reform project. However, Adamov noted that Armenians were reluctant to act before the Russian army approached, as they feared harsh Ottoman reprisals if they cooperated with Russia. Despite these preparations, Russia's military implementation of a coordinated Armenian uprising was heavily disrupted and slowed down due to the Turkish offensive at Sarıkamış between December 1914 and January 1915.⁷²⁴

The Ottoman government feared the possible secession of its eastern provinces and suspected Armenian collaboration with Russia. A telegram dated 28 August 1914 from the Interior Minister warned provincial governors that Russia, with the help of Caucasian Armenians, was encouraging Ottoman Armenians with promises of independence. It alleged that Russian agents were infiltrating Armenian villages, distributing weapons, and preparing armed groups. According to these reports claimed Armenian soldiers would defect to Russia in wartime, while civilians would either remain passive or rise in revolt if Ottoman forces retreated, reinforcing Ottoman fears of internal rebellion.⁷²⁵ These fears contributed directly to the Ottoman decision in February 1915 to disarm Armenian soldiers serving in the Ottoman Army.⁷²⁶

⁷²³ Peter Holquist, "The Politics and Practice of the Russian Occupation of Armenia, 1915–February 1917," in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, and Norman M. Naimark (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 151–174, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780195393743.003.0008>.

⁷²⁴ Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 161–173.

⁷²⁵ M. Christian Lehmann, "Foreign Interests and State Repression: Theory and Evidence from the Armenian Genocide," *Journal of Peace Research* 60, no. 2 (2023): 307–321.

⁷²⁶ Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide*, 75–76.

As a result, by early 1915, Armenian self-protection activities intensified, particularly in the Van region, characterized by arms smuggling, attacks on Ottoman forces, and sabotage operations. This escalation occurred despite Minister Sazonov's desire to maintain control over Armenian activities within Ottoman territory. Ottoman intelligence indicated that Russia had made efforts to arm Armenian groups in Oltu, Sarıkamış, and Kağızman. However, when the Armenian uprising spread to Cilicia and Western Armenia in April 1915, following the German breakthrough at Gorlice-Tarnów in May, Russia's Caucasian army failed to provide the necessary support. The breakthrough stretched Russian military resources on the Eastern front, leading to the neglect of the Caucasian front. Despite longstanding contacts between the Dashnaks in Van and the Russian forces, Russian support was inadequate when Armenian rebels faced increased Ottoman attacks. The Ottoman authorities perceived the happenings as a Russian-initiated rebellion and responded with brutal repression that culminated in deportations, massacres, and genocide. The Armenian uprisings were violently suppressed.⁷²⁷ Already in May 1915, during the initial phase of the deportations, the interior minister declared to Erzurum that *"since the province is on the border with Russia, according to the principle that we follow, not a single Armenian is to be allowed to remain there."*⁷²⁸

Russian policy toward Ottoman Armenia during World War I was characterized more by military pragmatism than by a unified ideological framework. At the beginning of the war, Russia supported Armenian autonomy within the Ottoman Empire under international supervision, rather than seeking annexation. Despite early military successes on the Caucasus Front in 1915, Russia's Foreign Minister Sazonov maintained that an autonomous Armenia, remaining under Ottoman sovereignty but supervised by Russia, France, and Britain, was the preferred solution.⁷²⁹ General Kuropatkin proposed the creation of two governor-generalships, Erzurum and Sivas, with the administration based on Russia's 1914 Armenian reform project, which included the formation of an inspector-generalship in eastern Anatolia's six vilayets.⁷³⁰ However, the situation changed dramatically by 1916, after the Russian army captured key cities such as Erzurum and Trabzon. The signing of the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement between the United Kingdom and France, which

⁷²⁷ McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World*, 161–173.

⁷²⁸ Akçam, *Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity*, 247.

⁷²⁹ Holquist, "Politics and Practice of the Russian Occupation of Armenia," 151.

⁷³⁰ Halit Dündar Akarca, *The Russian Administration of the Occupied Ottoman Territories During the First World War, 1915–1917* (MA thesis, Bilkent University, 2002), 11–12.

divided spheres of influence between them in lieu of the Ottoman Empire, led Russia to claim parts of Eastern Anatolia, specifically Erzurum, Van, and Bitlis, only to prevent French encroachment near its borders. Sazonov himself emphasized that Russia sought to annex as little Armenian-inhabited land as possible to leave Armenia under Ottoman suzerainty.

But the evolving geopolitical situation further complicated Russia's position. The CUP believed that Russia, joined by the Western powers, attempted to dismember the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the situation was more nuanced than that. In Erzurum, Russian military actions focused primarily on securing resources and maintaining control over the local population to ensure the supply lines of the Russian army, which is indicative of Russian cautiousness. Both Armenians and Muslims were subjected to relocations and forced labor from areas near the front lines, but some argue these decisions were driven more by military operational requirements than by ethnic motivations. In contrast, policies of the CUP were more ideologically driven when carrying out similar operations. Comparing the two, it becomes visible that Russia's preference was to maintain control without fully committing to Armenian nationalist aspirations and without being engaged in systematic ethnic engineering in the territories it occupied.⁷³¹ This serves as yet another example of Russia's attitude towards the Armenian Question, one that had characterized its foreign policy for decades.

Having said that, it can be concluded that the occupation of Western Armenia was necessitated by the geopolitical rivalry and can hardly be interpreted as a grand result of centuries of political groundwork which had eventually yielded results amidst the horrors of the Great War. As I have demonstrated throughout the work, opportunism was certainly a characteristic feature of Russian foreign policy during the investigated period, but also caution, ignorance, and a *laissez-faire* attitude, which caused much suffering to the local population, especially the Armenian communities.

⁷³¹ Holquist, "Politics and Practice of the Russian Occupation of Armenia," 151.

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Figure 3. Cuinet, Vital. “Erzurum Vilayet.” Map, 1890. Wikimedia Commons. Accessed February 18, 2026. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CUINET\(1890\)_1.166_Erzurum_Vilayet.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CUINET(1890)_1.166_Erzurum_Vilayet.jpg).

Figure 4. Hepworth, H. *Through Armenia on Horseback*. London, 1898. Image reproduced on Houshamadyan. <https://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-erzurum.html>.

Figure 5. Sachtleben, William. “Armenian Gregorian Cemetery, Erzurum, 1 November 1895.” In David Low, *Picturing the Ottoman Armenian World*. London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2022. 75.

Figure 6. Lynch, H. F. B. “Class at the Sanasarian Varzharan (‘Armenian Youths’), Erzurum, 1893/94.” In David Low, *Picturing the Ottoman Armenian World*. London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2022. 69.

Appendix

In the following section, I present excerpts from the archival sources used in this study in English translation. Some spellings in the sources differ from those used in the main text of this dissertation, as I have retained the original spellings found in the documents, which may vary from consul to consul.

This section does not constitute a comprehensive source edition; rather, it includes excerpts from the most relevant portions of the archival materials. The introductory paragraphs, where the consul greets the ambassador and provides routine administrative details, have largely been omitted. Please also note I did not have the opportunity to make transcripts of all my sources for multiple reasons. In almost all cases, the reports were addressed to the Russian Embassy in the Ottoman capital. When this was not the case, it is indicated accordingly.

The archival sources were translated by me from Russian into modern English for the purposes of this study. It should be noted that, due to issues of transliteration, in some cases it was not possible to accurately reconstruct certain toponyms or personal names contained in the sources. These instances were therefore not included in the analysis, as they could not be identified with certainty.

1. AVPRI (Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire), f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, l. 27–31, 3 April 1882. Aleksey Romanovich Dennett to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) During the time that has passed since I took over the administration of the general consulate up to the present in this region, nothing has happened in the Turkish administration that would serve as proof of the sincere desire of the High Porte to make improvements for the betterment or at least the maintenance of the tolerable well-

being of the local population here. Everything has remained the same, and the state of affairs, if it hasn't worsened, has certainly not improved.

The expectations of the residents, especially the Armenians, to see the reforms promised at the Berlin Congress implemented are diminishing infinitely and deprive them of the slightest hope for improvement. They followed with anxious anticipation the execution of the promises made at the 1878 Berlin Congress and wondered when, finally, the Porte would turn its attentive care and concern towards its Armenian subjects living in the remote vilayets far from the center of government. Meanwhile, the local residents only complain about the arbitrariness and corruption of the representatives of governmental authority.

No matter how hard I tried to find out what the duties of the Turkish governors and generals are, I still could not get a clear and definite understanding of them. Meanwhile, every day from morning to evening, the representatives of authority sit in their offices, always busy with something. I was told that in all branches of administration, officials only care about collecting as many liras as possible. This is partly confirmed by what happens in the courts and the main administrative council. Everywhere there is disorder and the arbitrariness of the officials.

The Ottoman Porte seems to be imbued with the desire to improve the entire administrative system, but what has been realized here of this improvement? Judges are given unlimited power to act and decide at their own discretion. Indeed, a new statute was introduced under the name "Rustur"—this is a translation of the French code with some modifications adapted to the Turkish spirit. They established the prosecutorial office and the notarial part of the legal profession. However, the mentioned statute is abandoned in the archives, and almost no one even thinks of reading it to maintain an acceptable order in handling cases.

In Erzurum, for instance, even the simplest case is delayed for a whole month, causing material losses to everyone who is forced to seek justice in Turkish courts. I had to hear from the Vali every time a case was neglected, compelling me to turn to him for assistance and request that he order the appropriate authorities not to delay the fulfillment of our demands. He replied that they now have their own councils where every dissatisfied person can turn with their demands and where all cases are considered based on laws and justice. If the consul wants to report something regarding a case, he can write a petition, which he will pass on to the council for consideration.

In earlier times, the consul could personally insist that the Vali satisfy the just demands and had unlimited power to direct cases in a more or less just way. Now, however, all matters are concentrated in councils consisting of ignorant people, most of whom are bribe-takers. With the introduction of bureaucratic formalities and judicial fees that are three times higher than in European courts, a plaintiff is more likely to go bankrupt in the Turkish courts than to succeed in finding his indisputable right.

In former times, a consul could personally insist that the Vali satisfy certain demands, and he had unlimited power to direct matters in a more or less just way. But now, all their vision is concentrated in councils consisting of ignorant people, mostly bribe-takers. With the introduction of bureaucratic formalities and court fees, which are three times higher than in European courts, a plaintiff is more likely to be ruined by the boiling court system than to succeed in asserting his indisputable right.

In fairness, it should be noted that the current Vali, Mustafa Paşa, is a man already hardened in experience and of advanced age. Although he and some of his two or three advisors would like to bring order to the administration and improve the residents' conditions, these desires are completely paralyzed by the ignorant majority, consisting of individuals filled with religious fanaticism or of lazy, careless, and apathetic people who judge and act based on the memorized teachings from Turkish religious schools and the spiritual law interpreter called Aria. Consequently, Turkish qadis (judges) leave female orphans on the streets without a piece of bread. This religious court is responsible for all matters related to marriage and inheritance among Turkish subjects.

Turkish authorities pay little attention to treaties and agreements, and as heard, the Ottoman Empire, supported by its friends, claims to be on equal footing with other European powers regarding the jurisdiction and competence of courts dealing with foreign subjects. It intends to implement the same jurisdiction that exists in European legislation, which subjects foreigners to the laws of the country where they reside and treats them the same as local residents. These inclinations have made us particularly noticeable here in Erzurum recently. For example, at the house of one of our local Russian subjects, the customs police discovered a machine for cutting tobacco the other day. Without notifying the authorities, they themselves entered the house of the Russian subject and confiscated the machine. This incident was not reported to me by the Russian subjects of Armenian descent, and I learned about it only through other means.

The local consulate maintains couriers for communication with Sarıkamış, where our postal offices are located. Once, a courier brought mail from this city and delivered it to the authorities. At the same time, a customs official appeared in the office and declared that the courier must report to customs upon arrival in the city of Erzurum for inspection, as it often happens that couriers bring contraband and many prohibited goods alongside official mail. I told the customs official that the courier carries only official mail, which customs, of course, has no right to open

without the consulate's consent, as it is sealed with official seals. If it happens that the consul orders for his use or receives parcels in his name, these packages should be presented to customs, and when the consulate is informed about it, it will write an official declaration to customs for the receipt of items for the consul. Based on existing rules, customs must unconditionally issue all items received in the consul's name without subjecting the parcels to the usual inspection.

Despite the existing norms in Turkey, under such circumstances, the local customs begin to act, perhaps due to received orders, with the intention of not recognizing any granted privileges. We must call upon the representatives of foreign agents residing in Turkey. During my time in 1879, a box under an official seal was received by the local customs. This box contained codes of laws. It was transferred to the office of the local consulate with broken official seals and was opened.

If the officials of the Turkish administration allow themselves to act this way where agents of great powers are present, it is clear how they behave in places where there are no representatives of foreign powers and no one to protect the innocent from Turkish arbitrariness. For example, in the vilayets of Kiğı, Muş, Bitlis, and Sivas, and in other parts of the local vilayet, even the ones closest to Erzurum. (...)

2. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, ll. 120–122, August 13, 1883. Aleksey Romanovich Dennett to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Recently, in several parts of the Erzurum vilayet and in the surrounding districts, significant disturbances broke out among the Kurdish nomadic population. The causes were partly the Kurds' inherent inclination toward raiding, and partly their displeasure at the Porte's intention to extend military conscription to the Kurdish nomads.

Some time ago, the Kurds of the Hasanli clan, who roam within the Malazgirt kaymakamate near Lake Van, devastated the Armenian village of Chalgani. When the Kurds of the Sachli clan—longtime enemies of the Hasanli—learned of this, they attacked the Hasanli on their return from the raid. In the clash, the Sachli lost three of their leaders who were killed and were forced to flee.

The mutasarrif of Bayezid, having been informed of the skirmish, summoned Sufi Agha, the chief of the Hasanli clan. Not only did he fail to appear, but he also gathered more than 500 well-armed men and attacked the encampments of the Singlin clan.

Then, with the permission of the local vali, a detachment of Ottoman troops was sent to punish the rebellious chief, and they completely destroyed several Hasanli encampments. The mutasarrif of Muş, in whose sanjak Sufi Agha's clan roams, felt obliged to intercede for him, insisting that the encampments destroyed by the troops belonged to Hasanli who had taken no part in the plundering of the Armenian village of Chalgani. According to him, the raid had been carried out by a band of brigands long separated from the Hasanli clan and no longer recognizing Sufi Agha's authority.

For the time being, the matter rests there; however, information has been received that the Porte has ordered that several Kurdish chiefs in the vilayets of Bitlis, Van, and Erzurum be sought out (or arrested). (...)

3. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, ll. 16–17, June 25, 1881. Nikolai Leontievich Obermiller to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) the situation in Van continues to deteriorate. It is difficult to guarantee that similar further manifestations of brutal violence will not occur and, given the prevailing mood, become the harbingers of events whose prevention would be as desirable from the standpoint of humanity as it is necessary for practical considerations.

Almost from the first day of my arrival in Erzurum I could not fail to notice the anxious state prevailing among the local Armenian population. To a large extent this is due to expectations of reforms, fueled by the excessive hopes of dreamers of the political revival of ancient Armenia. The Armenians, for their part, do not succeed in overcoming their distrust of the Turkish authorities, while at the same time trying to persuade the latter of the necessity of reform measures.

The state of mind is also considerably influenced by the activities of local agents of England. By irritating the Turks through their interference in the internal administration of the country, the English agents, through cautious yet often capricious forms of protection, inspire the Armenians with overly great hopes of British patronage and thereby intensify the hostility of the Muslim population toward them.

One may fear that the dangerous situation could lead to a catastrophe and compel us to resort to armed intervention. Even a certain reorganization of affairs in the Turkish regions bordering the Caucasus—one that would give the relations of the Armenian population with Russia a diametrically opposite direction and remove the conditions that give our protection in this region such significance—would scarcely be advantageous to us in any respect. (...)

4. AVPRI, f. 124, d. 154, ll. 3–10, March 29, 1883 Aleksey Romanovich Dennett to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) The former Archbishop of Erzurum Harutyun is distinguished by common sense and is alien to the hobbies of dreamers of the restoration of Armenian independence. He does not enjoy the favor of the Armenians of Constantinople and Patriarch Nerses. In his relations with us, he is always distinguished by the spirit of benevolence. (...), Harutyun has always been a skillful figure in practical life, keeping to the real ground and guided not by abstract theories, but by common sense; of all the candidates, he probably represents the highest guarantees for us in case of election as Catholicos. (...)

5. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1626, ll. 44–46, December 6, 1885. Aleksey Romanovich Dennett to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) After receiving official notification from Constantinople in recent days of the confirmation of Archbishop Magar as Catholicos of All Armenians at Etchmiadzin, his name began to be mentioned during the liturgy in the local Armenian Gregorian Church.

From the very beginning, as soon as the death of Gevorg raised the question of filling the vacant seat of the Etchmiadzin Catholicos, this consulate did not cease making every possible effort to acquaint the local Armenian community both with the procedure that our government had decided to follow during the election of the future spiritual head of the Armenian Church and later with the confirmation of the second of the two elected candidates — the Russian subject, Archbishop Magar.

The majority of the local population accepted Magar's elevation with complete calm; the attempts of our ill-wishers to stir up indignation among the local clergy and population over an alleged encroachment by the Russian government upon the spiritual independence of the Armenian Church met with total failure.

A sober attitude toward the recent events in Etchmiadzin on the part of most of the local clergy and population was promoted both in deed and in word by Ter Krikor, who administered the Erzurum diocese during Ormanian's prolonged absence — a man who bore sincere sympathy toward Russia.

The foremost importance that will inevitably belong to the Erzurum region in the event of a war between ourselves and Turkey gives every reason to value the favorable disposition of its Christian population and to strengthen still further the moral authority of Erzurum as the principal center of the Armenian nation in Asia Minor.

The fresh disturbances in the Balkan Peninsula have once again revived the previously subsided expectations, in the Armenian provinces, of the reforms discussed at the Berlin Congress. Once again, within certain circles of the Armenian intelligentsia sympathetic to us, people have begun to speak of the anticipated influence of the British government upon Turkey with the aim of compelling it to fulfill the reforms promised in Armenia.

In view of such circumstances, the local Armenians are following the course of events in European Turkey with even greater tension and attention and are showing extreme interest in the outcome of the elections in England.

On November 23, the acting head of the English consulate, Deby, set out — despite extremely unfavorable weather conditions, cold and snow — for the Pasin Valley in the direction of our border.

Given the circumstances of his journey undertaken at such an inconvenient time of year for travel in this region, appropriate covert surveillance was arranged, which revealed that the purpose of his trip was to find out whether, in the villages adjacent to our border, any military preparations were being made on our side, whether any materials were being transported toward the frontier for fortifications, and also to learn what was being said about the reasons for Prince Dondukov's recent visit to this border region and the recent visit of Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich Girs. (...)

6. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, ll. 39–40, June 5, 1882. Aleksey Romanovich Dennett to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Protestant propaganda among Armenians is quite successful, aided by English consuls who, not limiting themselves to an observational role, constantly act as intermediaries between the peasant population and the Turkish administration, finding full support from the British embassy in Constantinople. The initiative taken by the English government regarding reforms in Armenia established even closer relations between the Armenian populace and English agents.

The main role in this propaganda lies with American missionaries, but for the Christian population, the official patronage extended to all Protestants by the English consuls is significant; Protestant Armenians consistently receive

support from English consuls and also benefit materially. For example, in Protestant communities, taxes that replace military service for Christians are paid by missionaries.

Our general consul reports that recently Pastor Rudolf Wall arrived from London on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury to establish communication with the Nestorians of the Hakkari region. Wall returned to London for new instructions and funding to facilitate outreach among the Nestorians.

During the retreat of our army from Erzurum, many Armenians expressed a desire to settle in Russia. They are now returning to Turkey for the remaining family members and also to sell their property. The local administration appears to have set the task of completely impoverishing these settlers under various pretexts. (...)

7. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, ll. 41–45, (without date), 1882 Aleksey Romanovich Dennett to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Although this effort has not yet led to results significant enough to cause a large-scale defection from the Armenian Apostolic Church, given the current political conditions, such developments deserve attention. It would be premature to dismiss their importance for our future interests in the region. The strong attachment to the faith of their forefathers, which has long served as a barrier to the success of Catholic and Protestant propaganda among Armenians, appears to be weakening under the persistent efforts of foreign missionaries. Religious indifference, if not outright atheism, spreading among the younger generation of Armenian society educated in Western Europe, threatens to make it significantly easier in the future for propaganda aimed against the Armenian Apostolic Church to take root and open a broader path to influencing the Armenian people. (...)

8. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 90–91, July 1, 1895. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) The secret telegram of State Councilor Przhevalskii of 28 June, concerning the interference of American missionaries in the distribution of relief to the Sasun people and the possibility of growing British influence among the Armenians of the Bitlis vilayet, compels me to report to Your Excellency that some three weeks earlier Mr. Przhevalskii wrote to me privately that “the appointment of Mr. Hempos, even as temporary vice-consul in Muş, will serve the interests of the English and harm our influence, which could easily be restored with a little effort, although we have hitherto treated this part of Kurdistan with a certain neglect.”

Sharing our delegate’s opinion that British influence in the Bitlis vilayet may develop significantly in the near future if no counter-programme is advanced by us, I take the liberty of informing Your High Excellency that such a development could have harmful consequences for our Transcaucasian frontier. For Armenian sacred sites—such as the monastery of Surb Karapet (St. John the Baptist) in the Muş district and other, less important, but still frequently visited churches—attract many pilgrims from Russia, among whom British tendencies, detrimental to us, could easily be disseminated.

For all these reasons, the opening of our consulate in Bitlis, as well as the temporary establishment of a vice-consulate in Muş, appears to me not only desirable but necessary—both for the protection of the local Christians from Kurdish-Turkish disorders and for strengthening our prestige in this region and shielding our Transcaucasian Armenians from British intrigues.

If Your Excellency were to find this proposal reasonable, I would further submit for your discretion that, in view of the known degree of sympathy for the English in that locality, it might be desirable to appoint to the new post an official who inspires distrust neither among Armenians nor among the English, and who could make use of the latter’s goodwill for his official purposes.

I should also add that the English consul in Erzurum is able to transmit to his embassy information far more complete than my own. In addition to reports received from American missionaries, he receives dispatches from his consular agent in Diyarbakır and open-sealed reports to the embassy from the vice-consul in Van.

It should also be noted that the English consul has funds for travelling throughout the district for its study, as well as other conveniences such as several tents. In view of this odd situation, and for the better fulfilment of our service, it would perhaps be desirable for us to adopt certain elements of the English consular organization. (...)

9. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1629, ll. 19-24, January 28, 1888. Aleksey Romanovich Dennett to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) In my opinion, the best means of combating Protestant propaganda is the rational organization and administration of schooling within the Gregorian Church. For these reasons, although I personally visited Harput, and being not well acquainted with the situation of the Gregorian schools there, I did not venture to answer the telegraphic inquiry of Your Excellency as to how to apply the donation of our Ministry of the Interior to the Armenian schools of Harput—5,000 rubles—and decided to await the return to Erzurum of General Dennett, who had the opportunity to become acquainted with the Harput schools on the spot.

How far a rational development of the Gregorian school system can serve as a means of combating Protestant propaganda is, it seems to me, shown quite satisfactorily by the following statistical data on the progress of missionary schooling in Erzurum—and by the considerable relative decrease in the number of pupils attending the missionary schools since the establishment in Erzurum, with the assistance of N. S. Sanasarian, of an Armenian-Gregorian school that meets almost all the requirements of modern education and stands in sharp contrast, in terms of its good organization, to ordinary Turkish schools, whether Muslim or Christian.

(...)

I speak of the last three years and of the present time. It may be that these relations will change under certain circumstances; yet I am inclined to think that Protestant propaganda in Armenia is not encouraged by the English precisely because they have become convinced—and now know—that the removal of Armenians from the bosom of the Armenian-Gregorian national church can only weaken their automatic (natural) aspirations; for, as with all religious discord—so potent in the East in dividing peoples related by language, origin, and conditions of life—it turns brothers by blood into antagonists and enemies. This is entirely parallel to what we also see in the East within Islam, between Sunnis and Shi'a. (It is well known that if you ask an Armenian-Gregorian about an Armenian Catholic or a Protestant—what nationality he is—he will never say “Armenian,” but will answer: “a Catholic” or “a Protestant.”)

It seems to me that the English have understood this truth; and in the event that they intended to stir up movements for liberation in Armenian minds, they would regard the Armenian Protestants and the American missionaries more as a vexatious obstacle than as allies and helpers. Moreover, the Armenians themselves—at least the great majority—now appear to recognize as an indisputable truth that England's self-interested policy leaves no room for disinterested, purely heartfelt, or sentimental sympathy.

Even if, in the question of autonomy, they should find friends among the English, let them not forget the wise counsel: *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*. “Young Armenia” consists for the most part of Armenian Gregorians and very likely has not a single adherent among their brethren who have converted to Protestantism. Fears that Protestant propaganda plays into the hands of “Young Armenia,” alienating the Armenians from the natural sympathy toward us inherent in the Armenian-Gregorian Church, are greatly exaggerated and scarcely probable; for Protestant propaganda, while instilling sympathy for Western ideas on the one hand, on the other decisively and finally breaks their national bond, creating an unbridgeable gulf among co-religionists. In the eyes of an Armenian patriot, an Armenian Protestant has forfeited the one sacred possession preserved by the people in purity through many centuries of foreign yoke—his bond with the native Church, the Mother Church.

Given the present tendency of Armenians to pass over to Orthodoxy, it would not occur to any member of “Young Armenia” to suggest to his followers a mass conversion to Protestantism, which would guarantee them the patronage of Great Britain. If Protestant ideas truly secured the ideals of “Young Armenia,” such a proposal would undoubtedly have been made; in reality it has not and is unlikely to appear. “Young Armenia” places its hopes not in England or in the missionaries, but in itself and its leaders, educated in France and Germany, and within inland Turkey chiefly in France, whose character is especially inclined to platonic sympathies—proof of which the Armenians perceive in the publicistic literature, as much in newspaper articles as in books.

What the Armenian Gregorians require is simply more enlightened leaders and good archpastors; and if the wealthy Armenians could renounce their indifference to everything—often even to political ideals other than monetary gain—then, having the will and the material means, Armenian-Gregorianism could slow down, and perhaps altogether put an end to, the further successes of Protestant propaganda, which has achieved such considerable results in a comparatively short time, as the numerical data set forth above amply demonstrate. (...)

10. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1626, ll. 79–98, December 26, 1886. Aleksey Romanovich Dennett to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) As is usual, upon the first news of my forthcoming journey, the town was filled with various comments about it — all the more so as the local population was still under the impression of a recent wave of suspicion caused by the arrival of Messrs. Ivanov and Kivshenko, of which I had the honor to report to Your Excellency in due time. These circumstances compelled me to request the Caucasian Command to send a topographical officer as well as

Captain Gyps of the General Staff; to take them with me, however, would have been impossible without endangering my position by compromising myself in matters of military intelligence.

The absence among my companions of any outsiders unknown to the Turkish authorities quickly dispelled their suspicions, and the local officials were entirely reassured as to the purpose of my journey.

On September 3, accompanied by two dragomans of the consulate, Turkish gendarmes, kawasses, and several servants, I departed from Erzurum. Knowing that in those remote localities which we were about to visit it was a rare event to see any Russian consular official, and that the population, forewarned of our coming, awaited our arrival with curiosity and impatience, I considered it advisable to give my journey as dignified an appearance as possible. I was also prompted to do so by the recent visit to Harput of the local British consul. It would have been most undesirable that in the eyes of the Asiatic population—accustomed to judge by outward impressions—the representative of England should appear to surpass us, creating a false notion of the superior importance of his government.

As is well known, in the East, the masses are guided by very different ideas and perceptions than in civilized Europe; much that would attract no attention in the latter acquires great importance in Asiatic lands.

The next day, after leaving Erzurum, in the village of Cinis we were met by an honorary escort from the 23rd Cavalry Regiment. The commander of the escort conveyed the greetings of müşir Nail Pasha, commander of the Fourth Army Corps, explaining that he had been ordered to remain at my disposal throughout the entire journey. The officer and his detachment had been stationed in the village for more than a week, awaiting my arrival.

On the fifth day, near Erzincan, we were received by an honorary cavalry escort under the command of the son of the divisional commander, together with the city police master and a detachment of gendarmes. In the town itself a large and comfortable residence had been prepared for me next to the governor's house. The mutasarrıf was absent, but upon his return he, accompanied by several of the most prominent city officials, paid me an official visit, which I promptly returned.

On the day of my arrival, I exchanged visits with the corps commander, who offered me a squadron of suvaris to escort me to Harput. I cordially thanked him for his offer and requested permission to limit myself to ten cavalymen under an experienced officer. Early the next morning the officer and his detachment were already waiting at the entrance of my residence. At the house where I stayed, an honor guard was drawn up, on whose right flank stood the heads of the district, officials of the local military and civil administration, and, among others, the Armenian Gregorian archbishop and the vicar of the Armenian Catholic bishop of Harput. The square in front of the town hall was filled with a dense crowd, and even the roofs of neighboring houses were occupied by spectators.

Arabkir belongs to the most beautiful cities of Asia Minor. Its climatic conditions have earned it a reputation as a remarkably healthy place. The population of the town is half Christian and distinguished by its prosperity despite the unfavorable conditions of Turkish administration. Relations between the Turkish and Christian inhabitants are more satisfactory here than in many other towns of Asia Minor. The entire local Turkish population speaks Armenian as fluently as its native tongue. From conversations with many local Armenians as well as Turks, I could not help but conclude that the local Turkish administration in the meirie is under the influence of the wealthier Armenians.

During my visit, the kaymakam did his utmost to assure me that he was most attentive to the interests of the Christian population, making not the slightest distinction between Christians and Muslims. These words were confirmed by many Armenians. The local Armenian Gregorian bishop, Iznyak, though a young man, appeared to me from several conversations to be among the most enlightened and influential representatives of the Armenian clergy, enjoying high authority among his flock. His reputation has been further strengthened by the persecutions he recently suffered from the Turkish government, which suspected him of involvement in political intrigues and in the aspirations of the so-called Young Armenia.

On the morning before my departure — it was a Sunday — I had promised to visit the Armenian Gregorian Cathedral. Upon learning of this, His Grace Bishop Iznyak expressed the wish to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in person, together with all the clergy of the city. At ten o'clock, dressed in full vestments and surrounded by the clergy, he awaited our arrival at the episcopal residence. From there, we proceeded to the cathedral — a spacious building, though far from large enough to hold all those who wished to attend the service that day. The crowd of people filled not only the entire square in front of the church but also the roofs and fences of the houses nearby.

It was impossible not to notice the sincere joy with which the Christian population greeted us in the cathedral. According to many, never before had there been such a great gathering of people around the church. Under the influence of the general excitement, not only many Turks, but even some mullahs, forgetting their fanaticism, were among those pressing inside the walls of the temple.

After the service, I returned once again to the episcopal residence, where all the notable members of the Christian community had likewise assembled. At our parting, Bishop Iznyak said that the people of Arabkir would never forget this day, nor me, in whom — as he put it — God had granted them the happiness of seeing together with

the representative of the Russian monarch, the powerful protector of their Christian Church, and that such a blessed event would always remain for him a pledge of a brighter future.

In Arabkir, one of the servants of the Armenian household where I was lodged complained that in his native village, not more than three hours from the city, it was unsafe even in daylight to travel because of incessant brigandage; only recently, according to him, the church in a neighboring village had been plundered by bandits.

For several years now, the Armenian Gregorians have been exposed to two opposing influences — on the one hand, to Catholic propaganda, and on the other, to the missionary activity of Anglo-American preachers who have chosen this city as the center of their educational endeavors. Despite their numerical superiority, the Armenian Gregorians are struggling with difficulty against these two influences. The latter has spread particularly because of the absence among them of any spiritual leader or guardian of their religious interests.

For more than two years now, this extensive Armenian Gregorian diocese has remained without a bishop, owing to the endless disputes among various factions, each of which seeks to place its own candidate upon the episcopal seat. It may be assumed that the Armenian Catholics, as well as the Armenian Protestants, who are interested in maintaining such a state of affairs, are doing everything possible to sustain the prevailing discord among the Gregorians that prevents the election of a bishop.

For the American missionaries, the chief instrument for spreading their teaching among the Armenian population is the school. In Harput they possess what is perhaps the largest and best-organized educational establishment in the entire region. The state of education within the Armenian Gregorian community, by contrast, is in a most pitiable condition. It had been intended to open a school that could at least to some degree compete with the educational institutions of the American missionaries, but owing to a lack of financial means, the indifference of wealthy persons toward the matter, and the absence of energetic leadership, this useful plan has so far remained unfulfilled.

For us, the question of the successes of Protestantism and Catholicism among the Armenian Gregorians cannot be a matter of indifference. The Armenian Church — its relationship to ours and to Etchmiadzin — forms the foundation of the Armenian people's sympathy toward us and their attachment to Russia. There can be no doubt that the activity of the Protestant missionaries is inevitably undermining this bond. (...)

11. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1628, ll. 30–37, October 26, 1887. Aleksey Romanovich Dennett to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Having recently received for consideration by the Ministry the report of Preobrazhensky dated 12 November 1887 No. 571 and the petition of the inhabitants of the village of Tvancha requesting resettlement in Russia, I, in view of these data and of the question they raise concerning the migration of Turkish Armenians into Russia, promptly provided the Imperial Consulate-General in Erzurum with new instructions. Submitting them for Your Excellency's consideration, I deem it proper to supplement them with the following reflections—my own and those based on the experience of the Imperial Embassy regarding not only this question but others of a similar nature that concern our relations with the Christian population of Turkey.

There is no doubt that the principal cause of the recent conversions among the Armenian and other populations of the Ottoman Empire lies in the precarious and oppressive condition of these peoples, which has worsened in recent times—owing both to the growing disorder and financial insolvency of the Ottoman government and, especially, to recent events that have extinguished in the eyes of the Turkish raya any hope for an improvement of their lot and have further weakened their national consciousness. Naturally, the discontent of the Armenian population manifests itself above all in heightened expectations of Russian intervention and protection—expectations deeply rooted in history and sustained by the traditions of all Eastern peoples.

The question, however, is how expedient and mutually advantageous for us and for the local population is the direction these aspirations and hopes have recently taken. Encountering in the Erzurum vilayet and neighboring regions a popular movement expressing itself in the desire of entire villages to emigrate to Russia, we are, of course, obliged first of all not to lose sight of the repeatedly expressed reluctance of the Imperial Government to permit mass immigration of Turkish subjects into Transcaucasia. Moreover, it is highly doubtful whether such emigration would truly benefit the Turkish Armenians themselves: even if Turkey were to allow their departure, it would immediately replace them with Muslim muhajirs and Caucasian settlers, and such a neighborhood would only create new hardships for the Christian inhabitants remaining behind.

Finally, the diminution of the Christian element in the general population of the province could only have the most unfavorable consequences both for our own interests and for theirs, in the event of new, now unforeseen but always possible developments along our Asiatic frontier. On the other hand, if the Armenian population were to remain

in place, guided by its own elders and clergy in a spirit of loyalty to Russia, following the advice of our agents in its daily social and political life, it would represent a serious guarantee for the defense of its own rights, for the improvement of its welfare, for self-organization over time, for resistance to foreign influence and propaganda, and for offering us tangible support in the event of military operations along our Caucasian frontier.

Yet herein lies one of the principal difficulties of our policy in the East: that such natural development of the local population does not in fact exist, and that excessive trust and superficial attitudes toward the declarations of the Christian peoples have too often led to results entirely contrary to our expectations and historical principles.

While the upper, educated strata of the population—including many of the clergy—seek primarily personal gain by cringing before the Ottoman authorities and renouncing all sympathy for Russia, the rural common people, often instigated by representatives of this same intelligentsia, daily turn to our official representatives for protection and aid.

Our very understandable inability to satisfy the endless petitions of this rightless population scarcely serves to strengthen its trust in Russia; meanwhile, the moral and social leadership of this population, which cannot belong directly to our agents, remains in the hands of that upper class of their co-nationals who consciously and consistently withdraw from our influence and guidance.

For the true benefit of Turkey's Christian population, we must not respond directly to every practical movement arising among them. We must accustom these people—while not abandoning their hopes in Russia—to place a fair share of responsibility for their misfortunes upon their own leading and notable classes, demanding from them conscientious work for the betterment of the entire nation. Such demands, presented to their leaders, would compel the latter to take their duties more seriously and, for their successful fulfillment, to seek our constant advice, guidance, and protection before the Ottoman authorities.

In view of the foregoing, I consider it entirely superfluous to enter into endless and fruitless disputes with the Ottoman authorities for the sake of satisfying several village communities of the Erzurum vilayet. I even believe that communications between local peasants and the Russian Consulate-General regarding migration to Russia or even conversion to Orthodoxy could only heighten the suspicions of the Ottoman authorities and fail to yield the desired results—instead provoking new persecutions and hardships.

As for the higher classes of Armenian society—and still more those elements opposed to us—the present movement bears within itself from the outset all the signs of failure and will result in nothing but the strengthening of their influence and the final loss of their attachment to us. Therefore, upon receiving new complaints and petitions from the Armenian population through our consular agents, the latter should direct the petitioners to their lawful and natural leaders—the bishops and the primates who sit in the mejlis—explaining to the villagers the assistance they may properly expect from these persons. At the same time, our agents should assure the petitioners that the Consulate stands ready to give the warmest support to their bishops and primates in their representations and petitions before the Ottoman authorities.

If, given the well-known sensitivity of the Christian population of the East to political questions and their experience of self-government, the peasants and lower urban classes could adopt such a view, the higher strata—the clergy and the primates who maintain constant financial dealings with the people—would finally be compelled to reckon with the legitimate demands of their fellow Armenians.

If the Turkish Armenians indeed possess the vitality necessary for rapprochement with Russia and for independent development, then such a formulation of their national question cannot inflict even temporary harm upon their aspirations. The spiritual leaders and best representatives of the Armenian Gregorians will then realize that they must either ruin the cause of their faith and nationality by their present attitude toward it, or revive it by conscientious and self-sacrificing care.

Choosing this salutary path, they will naturally be led—together with the mass of the people—toward our disinterested and benevolent guidance, justified by history and sanctified by Russia's highest traditions. Whatever the outcome of such a course, it would be incomparably more advantageous for Russia than the distorted, anti-Orthodox, and anti-traditional development of Armenian aspirations now pursued by the advanced Armenian circles along the lines and after the models already given to us in Romania, Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria. (...)

12. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1625, ll. 2–3, March 7, 1881. Nikolai Leontievich Obermiller to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) In recent times, owing to the winter, little activity has been observed in Erzurum. I personally, expecting the arrival of my successor from day to day, did not consider myself entitled to express the future view of Colonel Dennett regarding the local situation and therefore, as far as possible, refrained from reporting to the Embassy my

personal opinion on the political situation of the Young Armenian movement in Erzurum itself. Now this situation has changed. The telegraph has recently delivered into the hands of the Vali of the vilayet four urgent, encrypted dispatches from the Porte, the contents of which I consider it my imperative duty to convey with full accuracy to Your Excellency.

Upon receiving these telegrams, the Vali, Mūshir Mustafa Pasha, wished to convene a council, excluding the Armenian members from it. Thus, the political official of the vilayet, the Armenian Catholic Michel Effendi Hekmian, was not deemed worthy of either the honor or the privilege of being present at this secret meeting, at which, under the strained attention of the officials, the following decoded instructions of the Sublime Porte were read.

First: immediate and most vigilant surveillance must be maintained over the Armenians, who are plotting nothing good. Armenians must not be allowed to gather in the National Assembly. All sorts of meetings must be prevented by every means. By all measures, and in cases of necessity by force of arms, by guards and by other punishments, every attempt at rebellion must be forestalled. The very root of national agitation must be eliminated.

All historical portraits and paintings must be set aside, seized, placed under sequestration, and destroyed—such as the images of the deceased hero Vartan and of the woman weeping over the ruins of Armenia. These images only excite and agitate the Armenians. The teaching of Armenian history in educational institutions must be prohibited. It would be better to abolish all instruction than to permit it. Strict censorship must be introduced, and all books, journals, and written speeches inciting sedition must be destroyed. Second: His Majesty the Sultan is greatly irritated by the provocative conduct of Patriarch Nerses. The aim pursued by the Armenians is evident: by such means they are succeeding in ruining the age-old empire. Third: the Sultan commands that, as far as possible, officers and officials from among the Christians be replaced by Muslims, and orders that Muslim officials and officers study the Armenian language so that they may properly monitor Armenian writings and printed works in order to prevent the outbreak of rebellion. Fourth: the remaining orders concern the immediate establishment and operation of telegraphic communications between Van, Hakkari, Gevaş, Muş, and Bitlis, as well as the rapid opening of postal routes between Baghdad, Bitlis, Muş, and Van. (...)

13. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1628, ll. 113–119, June 30, 1883. Aleksey Romanovich Dennett to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Regarding the above-mentioned circumstances, a judicial investigation was appointed, which established the following: Some time ago, newspapers stated that following the resolution of issues concerning the delimitation with Greece and Montenegro, reforms would be introduced in Armenia. The events in Tunisia delayed the reform issue, and the latter were postponed indefinitely until the Greek calendar.

Based on similar newspaper judgments, about a year ago, certain Khachaturians from Kurdyak, Ohanest, and Agop, reading newspapers in the city reading room, felt the need to raise public movements and began discussing measures to achieve this. After mutual consultations, they initially communicated their free opinions to various people known for their patriotic sentiments to see if they could arouse a public response. Receiving unsatisfactory responses, they turned to the painter Mikhail to spread their views among the people. Securing his support, they commissioned him to lithograph the aids and proclamations, the first copies of which were sent to the craftsman Aleksan for signature.

However, suddenly a form of oath for those joining the society was printed. Within 40 days, 300 membership certificates were distributed. The society took the name "Ararat Society" to give more strength to the patriotic movement, but this name was later changed to "Homeland Defense Society." To execute the above, Kurdyakoglu went to Van to consult with Bishop Khrimian. The bishop replied that the Armenian people were not numerous enough to undertake such uprisings and that a catastrophe could unfold because of it. In the end, he advised Kurdyakoglu to refrain from participating in such matters. Khachatur went from the Van Bishop to Tiflis, where he consulted with many people. He was then advised to connect with the nihilists and start actions only after returning to Erzurum with one of the nihilists, and to carefully discuss whether to organize an uprising or to suspend the movement according to the circumstances of the time, avoiding actions that could harm the population and avoiding false steps in this matter.

The painter Mikhail's testimony established that the documents and data given to accomplices were confiscated and replaced with numbered ones shortly after. His testimony also revealed that the executive committee of the secret society decided to establish a committee in each city of five capable individuals to raise funds for implementing promised reforms without bloodshed, only by peaceful means.

To obtain the necessary funds to purchase revolvers for distribution to future officers of the Armenian army and for other expenses, the aforementioned council member was sent to Tiflis to open a subscription for 10,000 rubles.

The Revolutionary Committee, calling itself the Supreme Council, consists of five people who instructed Kalust to seal the membership certificates and approval of the written oaths of those admitted for a known fee. The instructions given to this agent by the Supreme Council contained strong incendiary and revolutionary content. The Supreme Council urged its accomplices to raise the banner of uprising everywhere.

A revolutionary committee was also organized in Van, and 300 membership certificates were sent to them; 2400 of these certificates were in Hachatur's house. According to the established revolutionary rules, the society planned to recruit up to 300,000 people over 30 years, each of whom was supposed to contribute 1/4 mejidie annually; this money was to form a war fund against the Kurds.

Aleksan addressed those joining the society with the following words: "I enlist you in the society as soldiers. At the proper time, you will be given weapons and receive daily money. We are restoring the kingdom." Besides, many other revolutionary ideas were spread by him. Kalust was assigned a monthly salary of three liras, nine liras of which were given to him in advance by Aleksan for the approval and distribution of previously issued certificates and replacing the certificates with numbered ones, of which he managed to distribute 80 Turkish liras.

Ohanes Kevork took the oath from the schoolteacher Kalust, who, in turn, recruited ten people into the society. Regulatory documents were also found in his house.

The aforementioned Kevork distributed 67 recruitment certificates to those joining the Armenian militia. Upon being accepted into the society, Agop expressed the following to Srapia: The recruitment certificates bore the names of ancient ruling Armenian dynasties at the top: Haikazian, Arshakuni, Papraduini, Tupinanian. They attempted to separate the Erzurum region and some of its subordinate areas from the Turkish Empire through revolutionary actions. (...)

14. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1628, ll. 123–128, July 15, 1883. Aleksey Romanovich Dennett to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Given the significance that British proponents of Armenian reforms will undoubtedly try to attribute to the events in Erzurum, as well as the intensified discussions in the foreign and our press about Armenian autonomy, I will allow myself to focus on some circumstances of the process. It is impossible not to notice from the very beginning that the prosecution has not fully revealed all the circumstances of the conspiracy. It is unreasonable to seriously assume that the idea of organizing a revolutionary movement among the Armenian people suddenly occurred to them after reading newspapers in the city library. It is even less plausible to think that the leaders of such an enterprise could be some obscure individuals lacking moral authority or material resources. It is evident that the Turkish judicial authorities managed to uncover only a fraction of the meticulously developed revolutionary mechanism, with the main architects remaining undetected.

Moreover, it seems that the authorities have decided not to investigate any connections between the plot uncovered in Erzurum and the environment in Constantinople, although it is enough to understand that an enterprise directly related to the deepest political aspirations of the Armenians must have significant ties to the main center of Armenian political activity - Constantinople. Is it conceivable that a scheme, the full extent of which is just beginning to be revealed, could have arisen without the involvement of the main drivers of the notorious Armenian question? Or that these key figures, knowing of its existence, would have allowed the revolutionary movement in the main Armenian centers, Erzurum and Van, to develop without any influence or control on their part?

I also have no doubt that all the machinations of the conspirators were well known to the head of the local Eparchy, Ormanian. This is evident from the investigation, despite the guidance provided during its proceedings. It is well known that he enjoys the full trust of Nerses and is considered one of his staunch supporters and ardent adherents of the Constantinople Patriarch. It is clear that uncovering the connection between the revolutionaries in Erzurum and Constantinople, and even more so their direction from there, is extremely dangerous for the Armenian plans. This is why the Achilles' heel of the entire scheme had to be hidden from the Ottoman government at all costs.

It is unnecessary to talk about the means by which this could have been achieved. These means are well known worldwide, especially in the East, where nothing can be done without bribes, and where theft and bribery are almost considered lawful privileges of the powerful and an inevitable tax on the weak in favor of the strong.

The recent judicial reform in Turkey, this clumsy imitation of Western European legal systems implemented in the Muslim society without any organic connection and even sharply contradicting many concepts derived from the Quran, has created a judiciary that is almost universally in constant antagonism with government officials. While studying European legal systems, they have also absorbed considerable notions of constitutional reforms, parliamentarism, representative government, and other modern theories. These individuals, mostly influenced by the ideas recently promoted by Midhat Pasha and his associates, have created a situation where, by adequately presenting the issues of reforms and gilding the proposals, it is not difficult to achieve a certain direction in such political processes. Especially since, due to the government's intention to change the existing independence of judicial officials from local authorities, there is strong resentment within the judicial department.

I will further translate the facts that hold particular interest for us, especially concerning the investigation's revelation of connections between the local leadership of the secret society and the Armenians in Tbilisi who are

Russian subjects. From the indictment, we learn that Khachatur, after an unsuccessful attempt to secure the involvement of Khrimian, went to Tbilisi where a subscription was to be opened among sympathetic Armenians to collect the necessary funds. Naturally, in the effort to conceal the connection between the local conspiracy and Constantinople, it was most convenient for the judicial authorities to direct the suspicions of the Turkish government towards the Caucasus. It is difficult to judge the accuracy of the prosecutor's indications and the alleged connections with a supposed nihilist party in Tbilisi, based on the notes of one of the prosecutors concerning the bishop of the nihilists and the necessity of consulting with them.

In any case, the very fact that the Armenian movement in Erzurum, through one of its prominent figures, sought to communicate with the most vile elements of contemporary society is telling. This alone is enough to assess the true attitude towards us by the so-called *Jeune Armenie* and to understand the extremely hostile tendencies towards Russia existing within certain parts of the Armenian intelligentsia. It is easy to imagine how the anti-social ambitions of nihilistic machinations and intrigues hostile to the Russian government would quickly spread to our Caucasus if an autonomous Armenia were to form within it.

The Armenian intelligentsia, educated in the West under the influence of various social theories widespread there, and with a blind disregard for Russia among the cultural strata of Western society, would not hesitate to bring all the destructive elements of socialist ideas into their newly created homeland, turning it into an inexhaustible source of turmoil and political intrigue. A glance at the current Armenian periodical press is enough to dispel any doubts about the validity of such concerns. The British are not trying in vain to impose such a neighborhood on us, knowing well what fertile ground they would find in an autonomous Armenia for intrigues against Russia, and how difficult it would be for us to protect our Armenian population in the Caucasus from the harmful influence of such schemes. British diplomatic efforts in favor of the Armenian people are not guided by abstract ideas of philanthropy and progress, but often by subjective political goals. British politicians hope that by creating new sources of political difficulties for us, they will bring disorder within our borders.

The notion held by some who are somewhat familiar with the situation, that the British aim to create a new Poland for us on the borders of the Caucasus, is not without some truth. Hostile influences would inevitably emanate from there into our territories, bringing with them elements of social decay influenced by socialist theories, or fostering separatist tendencies among peoples who have not yet succeeded in integrating with the native population of the empire.

Being on the very ground where a new political entity is about to form, observing daily the various manifestations of the local Armenian intelligentsia, and noting the sharp hostility of the *Jeune Armenie* party towards us, one cannot help but realize that the concerns from Kazan are unfortunately all too real. The lack of solid moral principles, eroded by centuries of subjugation; an all-consuming passion for wealth, rivaling the love of money seen among the sons of Israel; religious instability transitioning in the younger generation, educated in Western European centers, into indifference if not outright atheism; the profound ignorance of the rural population, leaving them vulnerable to unscrupulous agitators; the greed and lack of education of the impoverished clergy; the ambition and self-interest of the higher clergy, constantly engaging in intrigues; the demoralization of the intelligentsia through government service they despise; all these factors make one doubt the Armenian people's readiness for healthy political autonomy.

Despite certain undeniable qualities, such as perseverance, frugality, persistence, patience, and many family virtues, it is generally to be feared that the political organism of an autonomous Armenia would, if the comparison is allowed, resemble a person with overly developed digestive organs and powerful, capable limbs, but with a deformed and underdeveloped chest cavity, housing the noblest and most vital organs necessary for the proper functioning of the body's life forces. It is doubtful whether the hopes that the Armenian people, with political independence, would be a beneficial factor in international relations will be fulfilled. (...)

15. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1628, ll. 38–41, November 12, 1887. Aleksey Romanovich Dennett to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) The present state of mind among the Armenians of the Erzurum vilayet provides a favorable ground for the outbreak of disturbances in Armenia, should such plans ever form part of the Imperial Government's calculations.

However, if it is the desire of our Government and of the Imperial Embassy to preserve tranquillity in the Armenian provinces, I believe it should not be overlooked that a complete refusal on our part to assist the local Christian population in its efforts to improve its condition, insofar as possible, could lead to the beginning of unrest in the region—unrest which, under present circumstances, might assume considerable proportions.

As I had the honor to inform Your Excellency in my dispatch of October 29, No. 530/31, it is my opinion that the local population, both morally and materially, is little prepared for an organized uprising. Nevertheless, I cannot

yet venture to predict the extent that disturbances might reach should they indeed begin—whether they would amount to minor disorders easily quelled by the local administration, or whether they might take on a more serious character.

In any case, I believe that in the present unsettled times for the Ottoman peoples, every kind of national agitation and disorder, even if arising by chance, may grow to significant proportions. By such considerations I also explain the unusual, almost feverish activity of the local vali in persecuting Ottoman subjects—Christian Russophiles—of which I had the honor to inform Your Excellency in my aforementioned report.

Even assuming that a complete refusal on our part to support the legitimate aspirations of the local Armenians would not lead to disturbances, its certain consequence would nonetheless be the weakening of existing sympathies for Russia among the population here, especially in the villages. I do not believe such an outcome would be in our interest.

To prevent this, it seems to me necessary not to deny Tatos and his numerous supporters our assistance, but rather to prove to them, through certain—even if minor—acts, that Russia is concerned for the welfare of the local Christians and is by no means indifferent to their fate. Such acts might include, first, an appeal—if it can be obtained from the local vali—that, in the interests of Turkey itself, he should now treat the Armenians as justly and humanely as possible; and second, a petition to allow Tatos and 90 to 100 households of his fellow villagers to resettle in Russia.

Since our Caucasian authorities, as is known, do not regard the settlement of Turkish Armenians in the Caucasus as useful, it might be possible to suggest to Tatos—after securing the consent of the local administration—that he resettle in the Trans-Caspian region. A petition for such permission on behalf of the villages of Narshen and Tuvan could, in my opinion, demonstrate to the Armenian population here that the Russian Government sympathizes with their distressing situation.

There is no need to fear that such a measure would reduce the number of elements sympathetic to us in Turkey, for, first, not all would decide to emigrate; and second, should new petitions for emigration reach the Consulate, these could—without any direct refusal—be deferred for a very long time by the nature of the matter itself. Meanwhile, the permission granted to Tatos and his villagers would serve, in the eyes of the Armenians, as proof of our Government's willingness to heed the just complaints of the Ottoman Christian population.

It should likewise not be overlooked that if, under the current mood, the Armenians encounter no practical support from us, Protestant propaganda—promising the protection of Great Britain to its followers—may take advantage of the situation.

On the one hand, a mass conversion of the local Armenians to Protestantism—since religious divisions in Turkey, more than anywhere else, undermine national unity—might become a weakening factor in the Armenian-liberation movement. On the other hand, the withdrawal of Armenians from the fold of the Gregorian Church, which is almost identical with Orthodoxy, would scarcely be desirable.

In submitting these considerations for Your Excellency's enlightened judgment, I consider it my duty, moreover, to report that, as I have recently learned, the local authorities ascribe to the arrival in Erzurum of Mr. Gippius the supposed intention of our Government to support the ferment now developing among the Armenians. This circumstance may be regarded as fortunate, since it removes, to some degree, the possibility of the authorities here suspecting our Vice-Consul in Rize of any particular political mission. (...)

16. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1626, ll. 79–98, December 26, 1886. Aleksey Romanovich Dennett to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) I have repeatedly reported to Your Excellency on the open hostility toward us that has, in recent times, been manifesting itself ever more strongly among the educated classes of the local Armenian Gregorians. From where, if not from the West, do such anti-Russian tendencies originate? Their leading representatives, imbued with social-democratic ideas and having lost their faith in God, come here armed with the seductive illusion of restoring the political independence of Armenia, in order to propagate among the Armenian people their practical aims together with the deep aversion toward Russia and its state institutions which they have absorbed in the West.

The Armenian Gregorian Church, with its principle of spiritual authority concentrated in the person of the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, is for these men an unsuitable instrument. Within its canonically defined limits there is no place for the socialist theories that inspire them, and it will never renounce the ideals by which it is guided. For them, another system is required — one more free, their favorite type of church organization, devoid of any binding authority and tending almost to the complete absence of obligatory religious forms.

They find such soil above all among the Protestant communities — among their fellow countrymen who have renounced the church of their fathers, with its venerable rites, its inviolably preserved canonical rules, and ecclesiastical regulations. Nor should it be forgotten that the role of patron of the local Protestants belongs to Great Britain, and that

the Protestant community serves as the most convenient, reliable, and ever-ready instrument for her political intrigues in the East.

For the moment, the successes of Protestantism among the Armenian Gregorians cannot yet be called significant; but it cannot be guaranteed that the progress of its movement will remain as slow in the future. On the contrary, a careful consideration of the matter provides ample reason to expect the opposite. With each passing year, the rapprochement of the Armenian people with the Western European states grows stronger; the authority of the Turkish government within the country becomes ever more undermined; the propaganda of the political schemes of “Young Armenia” penetrates more easily and deeply into the Armenian popular milieu; the number of local Armenians receiving education in Western Europe increases almost daily; the exchange of ideas and communication, expanding with the telegraph network and the improvement of transportation routes, is rapidly developing.

The time is not far distant when the territory of Asia Minor — which until recently was regarded as almost inaccessible — thanks to the growing number of travelers visiting it, will become a land as familiar to Europeans as any region of European Russia itself. It is clear that, in this favorably loosened soil, the seeds of Protestant propaganda will sprout more readily, and the conditions for future missionary activity will prove incomparably more advantageous. (...)

17. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 83–85, February 22, 1891. Copy of the report from the Acting Head of the General Consulate in Erzurum, Collegiate Assessor von Zimmermann, to the Embassy in Constantinople

(...) Since January 10 of this year, Kurdish toruns have again begun to arrive here from the Muş sanjak and other regions of Kurdistan included in the district of the Fourth Army Corps. They were invited to Erzurum by the corps müşir to discuss the project of Refik Ibrahim Pasha for forming from the Kurdish tribes a regular cavalry, which at that time served, as they say here, as the only local defense—our “Cossacks,” as they were called.

From January 10 until the 6th of the present month, there arrived here nine toruns of the Hasenanlı tribe from various areas of the Muş sanjak, seven toruns of the Cibranlı tribe from the districts of Varto and Çenyuk on the Muş plain and from the Himis district of the Erzurum sanjak, three toruns of the Sipikanlı tribe from the Antab kaza of the Bayezid sanjak, and one bey from the same place.

Each of them is accompanied by a detachment of bodyguards numbering from twenty to sixty men. Both the toruns and their escorts are richly dressed, have good horses, and are armed with government-issue Snider and Martini rifles, and even some of our Berdan rifles. The governor-general receives them as courteously and attentively as he had their fellow tribesmen who arrived earlier, and two or three days after their arrival sends them onward.

Apparently, the Ottoman government takes great interest in this new project. Hasan Hayri Pasha recently declared that in the Administrative Council there exists an opinion that from among the Kurds and Arabs as many as forty thousand men could be organized into regular cavalry.

Recently, the governor here received orders to send the principal toruns and the most notable Kurds from among their escorts to Constantinople to be presented to the Sultan. The Kurds, for their part, are proud of such attention and favor so unexpectedly shown to them. For now, they raise no complaints about the new arrangements and are even quite satisfied, hoping that this will lead to the granting or confirmation of various privileges for them.

Such an attitude of the Turkish government toward them, as might have been expected, has further strengthened in them the conviction of their complete impunity. They now openly utter threats against the Armenians of massacring them all as soon as the slightest pretext appears.

All this, when considered alongside the complete amnesty granted here to the Muslims for the atrocities they committed on the day of the incident of June 8, produces a pernicious effect upon the already extremely fanatical Muslim population and greatly contributes to maintaining in it that agitated spirit which it has displayed since the above-mentioned events and which had lately begun somewhat to subside.

Apart from other causes, the persistence of hostility toward the Christians is much encouraged by the obstinate rumors circulating through the city—no one knows by whom spread—that with the coming of spring, Armenian rebel bands not accepted in Russia have gathered in Persia, numbering, according to these rumors, up to two thousand men, and that they will from there begin to attack Turkish border villages. Such and similar talk, despite its utter groundlessness, arouses violent irritation among the Muslims, and following the example of their Kurdish co-religionists, they openly utter malicious threats against the Christians, many of whom they would gladly destroy simply for the prospect of plunder.

Lately, Turks said to be lying in wait for opportunities to plunder Christian homes have begun to appear on the less-frequented streets of Erzurum. Such behavior by the Muslims has begun to alarm even the Turkish authorities,

who since the beginning of this year, as I had the honor to report previously, have been taking police measures that seem to them the most expedient for the prevention of disorders. On holidays, strengthened patrols walk through the city. It is said that soon sentry posts of soldiers will be placed in the principal quarters to provide assistance at the slightest alarm. The local newspaper has published an order for the voluntary surrender to the police of any firearms possessed by residents, otherwise they will be confiscated. One can only wish that this measure be carried out with equal fairness toward both Christians and, especially, Muslims.

Turning to the condition of the Christian population, I have the honor to report that, according to information from the Alaşkert kaymakam Ahmed Bey, he has managed, since his appointment until now, to collect from the Armenians up to 1,200 liras in bribes—imprisoning, with the help of intrigues he himself sets in motion, the more respected and wealthy Armenians and releasing them only for money. How well Christians are treated by officials subordinate to Ahmed Bey is shown by the fact that on January 12 in Alaşkert, in the village of Hızır, an Armenian named Sarkis, son of Avo, died from the beatings inflicted by representatives of the authorities. (...)

18. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 89–91, March 22, 1891. Copy of the report from the Acting Head of the General Consulate in Erzurum, Collegiate Assessor von Zimmermann, to the Embassy in Constantinople

(...) In my report of February 22 of this year, No. 60, I had the honor most respectfully to inform Your Excellency of rumors circulating in the city that in Persia armed bands of Armenian émigrés had gathered, intending to make raids from there upon Turkish border villages.

These rumors were, it is said, reinforced by the recent arrival from Persia of Armenian emissaries who were inciting their Alaşkert compatriots to rebellion and supplying them with weapons. This caused great alarm among the Muslims living near the frontier, leading them to decide to abandon their homes and move further into the interior of the country. Governor-General Hayri Pasha intended to depart on March 16 for the Bayezid sanjak, both to calm public sentiment and to take measures to prevent border crossings by rebellious Christians taking advantage of the misery of others.

This situation has not improved in the least. According to the information received, the Christian settlements here will not sow their fields this spring, for on the one hand, having repeatedly lost the fruits of previous years as a result of Kurdish oppression, and seeing the protection which the Turkish government extends to the latter, they do not dare to engage in their necessary means of livelihood; and on the other, it is difficult even to do so because of the mistrust this condition inspires in their creditors. The hatred of Muslims toward Christians has likewise scarcely diminished, and the following atrocity, which occurred in the vicinity of Erzurum, shows that the state of public safety remains the same as before.

On March 4, in Deveboynu, two hours from the city, the decapitated body of a Greek named Gora, who had arrived here from Trabzon, was found. He had lodged in the coffeehouse of one of his co-religionists; lacking proper papers, he had twice been summoned to the police and, having gone there a second time, did not return. He reportedly had thirty Turkish liras with him. Public opinion accuses a policeman named Murad, who had taken him to the police, of the murder. The murderer was not discovered by the authorities. To avoid scandal, the governor-general forbade bringing the body to Erzurum and ordered it buried at Hasankale.

On March 4, a sentry of the Gürcü Kapusu guardhouse stopped an Armenian, Ovanes Petrosyan, for questioning and took his watch. On March 15, near Gürcü Kapusu, an Armenian named Tigran Jivalagyan was wounded, apparently by Turks. Speaking of the condition of the Christian population, I have the honor to report that the local authorities do not allow any of the Alaşkert Armenians to leave the boundaries of the sanjak, nor even to go from one village to another. If, they say, an Armenian is met on the roads by the zaptiyes, he is beaten, interrogated repeatedly, dragged for several days from place to place, imprisoned, and greedily extorted for money. By such means the Turks hope to stop communication between the Alaşkert Armenians and Erzurum, and among themselves, thus preventing the spread and disclosure of information about their true situation.

The Kurdish beys continue to arrive in Erzurum, whence they are dispatched to Erzincan to meet with the müşir. During the month of March, eight toruns of the Zirikli tribe arrived from the Patnos and Tekman districts of the Hıms district, six toruns of the Haydaranlı tribe from the Hamur district of the Bayezid sanjak, and three toruns of the same tribe from Ardış and Sarisu in the Van vilayet. Their kinsmen who had arrived earlier gathered in Erzincan and departed for Trabzon, where a special steamer with one of the Sultan's adjutants on board had been sent to convey them to Constantinople. (...)

19. AVPRI f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, l. 148, June 13, 1892. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) On June 7, the governor of Erzurum invited the consular corps to attend, in full dress uniform, the distribution of banners to the Kurdish cavalry "Hamidiye." The ceremony took place the next day and was conducted by the Müshir (Field Marshal) of the 4th Corps, Mehmed Zeki Pasha. Before the distribution of the banners, a sultan's firman (decree) was read to the regiment, which stated that the sultan had decided to organize a regiment from the nomadic Kurds. According to the firman, each regiment was to have 550 riders. The officers and soldiers, during the training period, would receive ¼ of the regular pay, and in wartime, they would receive full pay.

Do they have their own weapons and horses? It is assumed that in case of necessity, they will be issued government-provided rapid-fire weapons. Many had bamboo lances. On the eighth, 24 banners were distributed; a few days earlier, 18 banners were seen in Van. In fact, during the distribution in Erzurum, 32 banners were not seen. It appears that the training of this army in formations has not yet begun. At least, the exercises they performed in front of the spectators consisted of folk games, picking up hats from the ground, and dismounting from horses.

Only those Kurds who had good horses rode in front of the spectators. Most of the people had such animals under them whose ribs were clearly visible. Although each finger (contingent) sent only 50 to 80 fighters, many of whom arrived in their national attire, which was not particularly fresh.

According to the müşir, in Erzincan, they have uniforms for everyone, consisting of a short gray coat with payuns (decorations). (...)

20. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 100–102, November 2, Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) I have the honor most respectfully to submit herewith to Your Excellency, for consideration and appropriate disposition, a list received by this General Consulate of the "Hafif Suvari" squadrons formed among the Kurds nomadizing in the Bayezid Sanjak.

The list presented by me contains only preliminary information: the numbers of the units, with indication of their commanders—founders of the tribes from which each regiment is composed—the tribal names, and the number of cavalymen they have promised to provide if required.

The total number of men composing the regiment is not yet known. This organization remains for the moment in the stage of a conception of the Turkish government. The cavalry bears for Turkey the honorary title Hamidiye. As a fighting force, it cannot, in my opinion, be formidable to our Caucasian heroes, for its character will, I am convinced, remain the same as that which the mounted Kurdish bashi-bozuks displayed during the last war.

The Porte apparently wished, in peacetime, to ascertain their numbers. By this circumstance, in my view, the true reason for the formation of the Hamidiye cavalry is best explained—especially since the uniform and standard dress are intended to free the Kurdish horsemen from the appellation "bashi-bozuk" and to give them, instead of a robber-like appearance, a more honorable one.

At the same time, through this new institution Turkey advertises to Europe its supposed vitality. It deserves attention that the cavalry regiments numbered 5, 6, and 7 are to consist of Kurds who, after the war of 1877–1878, migrated into Turkey from the Erivan province.

A copy of all this, together with the enclosure, will be forwarded to the Asiatic Department and to the Staff of the Caucasian Military District. (...)

21. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 183–186, July 31, 1893. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) The atrocities committed by the Kurds enlisted in the Hamidiye cavalry have increased dramatically with the onset of warm weather. They rob not only Christians but also Muslims, driving away large and small livestock and often killing people. The Alaşkert, Pasin, and Hınıs districts particularly suffer from their actions. In the first of these, the notorious robbers are the Hamidiye chiefs Selim and Eyüp Pasha, from the Zilanli tribe, with their children Resul and Ahmed.

The robberies and various outrages committed by the Kurds, which the local authorities overlook, result in the depopulation of Armenian villages: for example, the village of Khidir in the Alaşkert district, which had 45 Armenian homes, now has only one, and the village of Kùpkiran in the same district, which had 50 homes, now has only three. The rest of the inhabitants have dispersed throughout Turkey or fled to Russia.

Some wealthy Armenians are considering escaping the Kurdish atrocities by selling their properties to Kurds for a pittance. For example, Agop Agha, a resident of the village of Kadiköy in the Alaşkert district, sold his real estate, worth 800 lira, to Suleiman, a Kurd of the Zılanli tribe, for 80 lira. He did this intending to move to Russia. The Armenian bishop of the monastery of Uch-Kilise in the Alaşkert district, fearing the looting of holy relics, sent all valuable items for safekeeping to the Archbishop of Erzurum.

The village of Kara-Choban in the Hınıs district was attacked by 200 Hamidiye horsemen of the Hasaranlı tribe with the intent of kidnapping the daughters of the village elder, Kiragos Kehya, and seizing the village's livestock, taking away 90 sheep and goats and 350 oxen and cows. In the ensuing skirmish, two women, four children, and ten adult Armenians were killed. The Kurds also do not spare the Ottoman Public Debt Administration.

The crimes committed by the Hamidiye Kurds against Muslims prompted a telegram from Erzurum residents to His Majesty the Sultan. As a result, Haidar Pasha, the vali of Erzurum, was queried. Fearing a confrontation with the müşir of the Fourth Corps, Zeki Pasha, he referred the telegram to the local administrative council. The council, not wanting to take responsibility for condemning the well-known attacks by the Hamidiye Kurds, decided to pass the case to the head of the gendarmerie in Erzurum, who just last year was on trial in Erzincan for killing a Kurdish bandit during an investigation.

There is strong doubt that Alai Bey did not convey to Elin Bey a sincere account of the Hamidiye Kurds' atrocities. Meanwhile, reports about events in Sasun, where the Kurds reportedly killed no fewer than 300 Armenians, are spreading in Erzurum. According to other reports, the Kurds, in alliance with local Armenians, defeated an equal number of regular Turkish troops. It should also be noted that the successful raids by the Kurds into Russia are explained, to our extreme understanding, by the inaction or weak actions of our Cossacks guarding the border. The raiders cross the border unnoticed and return to Turkey, carrying their loot through our territory for no less than 20 versts. It is said that this happens not only at night but even during the day. (...)

22. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 92–95, June 14, 1891. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) With the coming of spring and the reopening of communications, the number of crimes here has begun to increase. Below, I have the honor to submit for the gracious consideration of Your Excellency a list of incidents of this kind that took place in April and at the beginning of May. As Your Excellency will be able to see from it, the number of major crimes has become greater. On April 4, eight Armenians traveling from Hınıs to Erzurum were robbed by Kurds near the village of Amonin-Kem.

On April 6, several soldiers entered the shop of an Armenian, Avedis. Having demanded three pieces of cloth, they asked permission to take them to their officer, allegedly for whom they were making the purchase. One of the soldiers remained in the shop until the return of his comrades, but took the goods and did not come back. Seeing that the soldier did not return, the Armenian shopkeeper went to indicate the officer's quarters. The soldier agreed to escort the Armenian to a Turkish house where he himself was staying, from which the Armenian was advised to leave — while he was still alive.

On April 8, an Armenian tailor, Martiros Zinoyan, was beaten by soldiers of the cavalry barracks for daring to demand payment for his work. The officer who witnessed the entire incident remained indifferent and ordered the Armenian to clear out and not to show himself again.

On April 11 in Erzurum, an Armenian, Misak Khojikov, who had submitted a complaint, was wounded by a passing soldier who threw a firecracker into his face.

Almost all these crimes were committed in the vicinity of Erzurum or in the city itself, giving a distressing impression of the state of public security in the areas distant from the center of the vilayet. It is impossible not to regret that, as Your Excellency will graciously perceive from the attached list of facts, as well as from those which I had the honor to submit for Your Excellency's benevolent review in my report of March 22, 1892, the troops themselves set a deplorable example to the population. This has given rise to the widespread conviction that the local administration possesses no authority not only over the Kurds, but even over the Turkish population. The degree to which the Kurds now treat government officials independently is shown by the following incident:

In the first half of last month, the mutasarrif of Bayezid summoned a bey of the ashiret to which belonged the Kurds who had recently plundered a caravan not far from Bayezid, near the place called Kechel-Ali-Dere. The bey refused to come, replying that if the mutasarrif wished to see him, he should come himself.

The situation is aggravated by the personal and undisguised fanaticism of the governor-general. Two weeks ago, not far from Erzurum, three Armenian stonemasons returning from work at the salt wells of Tatos were robbed by Kurds. They submitted a complaint to the governor-general, appearing before him in the condition in which they had been left by the robbers. Hasan Khairi Pasha did not accept their petition and ordered them to be driven out,

declaring that it was all an invention and that such things could not happen. It is said that the vali treats all Christians who have suffered from robberies in the same manner.

The expected return, on May 14, of the Kurds from Constantinople inspires great fear and anxiety among the Armenian population. Judging by rumors, those who have the means are trying to leave this place in advance. Many succeed in doing so under various pretexts — given the obstacles the local authorities create for Armenians seeking to travel — ostensibly to make a pilgrimage either to Jerusalem or to Etchmiadzin. (...)

23. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 196–199, October 14, 1893. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Near Kemah, the kaymakam Akif Bey, traveling from Erzincan to Harput to collect money, was stopped by Hamidiye Kurds. He could only continue his journey after paying three liras for himself and his accompanying katib, and two meci diye for each of the 24 soldiers with him. Among the officers tasked with approving weapons from the Kurds in the Bayezid sanjak, mülazim Şevki Efendi, returning with his family from Alaşkert to Erzurum, was stripped to the last thread by the Hamidiye Kurds. The robbing Kurds told him he could report in Erzurum that he was robbed by Hamidiye soldiers and that they did this to him because of the diligence he showed in carrying out his superior's orders. Despite all this, the müşir of the 4th Corps continues to protect the Kurds and has recently formed, it is said, a new Hamidiye regiment. (...)

24. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1630, ll. 134–135, March 28, 1892. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) In addition to my report of the 22nd of last February, I have the honor to inform Your Excellency that the rumors spreading about the Turkish Armenians being taken under the protection of the Russian government—giving rise to arrests—attribute to Armeno Grigoryan in Muş a document of high origin.

According to the information that has reached me, it was drawn up last autumn. The Turks did not manage to seize the entire act, for the Armenians succeeded in destroying it before their arrest. Unfortunately, pieces nevertheless remain in the hands of the authorities that give an idea of its scope, as well as those parts that bore the seals of the participants. Moreover, the Turks' information about this document was clarified by the testimony of certain arrestees.

A total of 70 persons were detained, not 50 as I previously reported in dispatch no. 86. Here they name, according to the opinion of some of the arrestees—but I venture to mention only the name of the arrestee Mazits Yapudji Baghdoyan, a native of Muş, detained in Bulanık, a kaza of the Muş sanjak, with several Berdan rifles, and regarded by the local administration as the principal culprit in procuring arms and distributing them to Armenians.

On March 24, those arrested in Muş are to be brought here under escort of mounted and foot zaptiyes and mounted Kurds. The numerous armed escort accompanying the prisoners from Muş makes an unfavorable impression on the Turkish population in Erzurum; it has revived among the Muslim localities a hostile mood toward the Armenians, which had subsided over the past year.

Judging by general reports, by day on the 24th, 12 people were delivered to Erzurum, by night—38, and on the 26th of March a further 15 prisoners of the same kind were brought.

The culprit of this Armenian misfortune is held in Erzurum to be the Muş Armenian Musheg Markaryan Mindoyan, who informed the Bitlis vali about Armenian undertakings. According to a report current here, as a reward for his action Musheg was received at Yıldız and given some post.

Among these prisoners there is also a Russian subject, Arshak Barsamov, concerning whose fate I reported to the Imperial Embassy in my dispatch of the 21st of last December, no. 423. Upon verification of this information, I intend to petition the vali through the General Consulate on behalf of this Russian subject. (...)

I forgot to mention that among those brought from Muş under arrest are one archimandrite and one priest, whose names are unknown to me and who are not known to the local Armenians of the Gregorian episcopate. (...)

25. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 3–5, January 7, 1895. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Supplement to the two secret telegrams of the 28th and 31st of last December, I have the honor to report to Your Excellency that at the very first meeting of the consuls and delegates, held on the 27th, a disagreement emerged in the interpretation and application of the general instruction on the spot — between the representatives of France on one side, and the English consul and myself on the other.

The French delegate Wilder, followed by the honorary consul Vergeron, attached to the ... vice-consulate, insisted that delegates had no right to communicate with local inhabitants or to present to the commission any information obtained outside its sessions; that the commission may summon witnesses only based on points raised during its own deliberations.

According to these gentlemen, “acting otherwise means that the delegates are carrying out a contre-enquête.” The English consul and I, however, relying on the clear and unambiguous instructions requiring delegates to provide the commission with all information and recommendations necessary for questioning witnesses and for local inspection in the search for truth, could not accept the French explanation.

I attempted to explain to Mr. Wilder that hearing accounts of events cannot in any way be considered an investigation (contre-enquête), for the latter means verification of accounts and the establishment of their credibility — a task which belongs to the chairman of the commission. After prolonged discussion, Mr. Wilder approached me and said that the French ambassador, at their parting, had given him a verbal statement which made it entirely impossible for him to align his actions with the provisions of the general instruction.

After such a declaration, nothing remained but to end the conversation and refer the disagreement to Your Excellency’s judgment, which I did by telegram of 27 December.

Your Excellency’s reply, as well as the answer of the British ambassador to Mr. Greaves, encouraged us both by confirming that we had correctly interpreted the instruction. The telegram of the French ambassador was apparently similar in spirit, but it did not alter the views of Mr. Vergeron and Mr. Wilder. The latter told me he must adhere to his position expressed on 27 December, since the new telegram did not state that the ambassador had withdrawn his verbal guidance.

I will not enter into an analysis of this matter, but I cannot fail to note the harmful influence this may have on the work of the two delegates, especially when the French delegate intends to remain silent in the commission. And it must be said that France seems to have no real interest in helping the Turks conceal the truth regarding the Sasun events.

Taking all this into account, I allow myself to state that one of our former representatives here, who viewed the matter passively — as recommended by Mr. Wilder and Vergeron — would now condemn us for remaining silent and agreeing with the Turkish witnesses in everything they say before the commission.

Regarding the continuing disagreements between myself and the French delegates, I considered it my duty to inform Your Excellency by secret telegram of 31 December.

(...)

I also consider it my duty to add that, while taking leave of Mr. Przhevalskii, I advised him to maintain harmony with the French delegates in the commission, if this would not hinder the commission’s principal aim: to reveal the truth in a spirit of humanitarian intention, as Your Excellency has repeatedly instructed. (...)

26. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 55–58, March 20, 1895. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) In addition to my previous reports concerning the progress of the investigation into last year’s events in Sasun, I must draw Your Excellency’s attention to the following: The investigation is being conducted under administrative pressure from the local authorities. The police closely monitor the inhabitants of the devastated villages of Kavar and Talori to ensure they do not appear in Muş, where they could present their complaints to the Turkish investigative commission. Leaving their villages is for them almost entirely forbidden, and they are kept under special surveillance. Those who nevertheless manage, by one means or another, to make their way to Muş are then tracked down and expelled from the town. This is confirmed, among other things, by the following incident.

On 20 February, the commission received a petition stating that four inhabitants of the village of Ahpik, which suffered during the events of last autumn, had arrived in Muş with the intention of appearing before the commission; but they were found by the police and imprisoned. Seeing in this an encroachment upon the freedom of the investigation, the delegates immediately demanded that these individuals be questioned before the commission in order to clarify the reason for their arrest.

The Commission agreed to this, but delayed the matter until these men were sent out of Muş, through Bitlis, to Hazo, and informed the delegates of a report from the mutasarrif, in which the latter portrayed the arrested men as bandits captured in disguise and in hiding on the plain of Muş. Private information stands in complete contradiction to this assertion; therefore, the delegates again demanded that these men be summoned before the Commission, and this was accepted. For the moment, they have not yet been returned to Muş.

The selection of persons appearing before the Commission as outside witnesses of the events is carried out, if not entirely, then at least in part by the local authorities. Until now, most of these witnesses have been brought from the nahiye of Hiyan (kaza of Kulp), to which Taleb Efendi and Sali Agha were dispatched for this purpose; the tendency of these officials became sufficiently clear in their testimony before the Commission. At the session of 14/26 March, a resident of the village of Arkhung, a certain Temo, was brought, and the Commission could give no explanation for the reason of his summons. The chairman often declares that mukhtars of the known villages have been summoned; in practice, however, other persons are brought by the zaptiyes.

The witnesses summoned in this manner fall into two categories: those who repeat one and the same memorized story although they belong to different villages and are drawn both from Kurds and Armenians; and others, belonging to the Armenians of Kavar and Talori, who in most cases do not answer the questions put to them, excusing themselves with ignorance of what occurred after their flight from the villages. In addition, some witnesses gave testimony which, for them, cannot be explained by any personal motives—such as the testimony of the priest Parsekh, and the Kurds Reshid, Omer, and Ahmed. The testimony of the latter two rests mainly on the account of two Armenians who, as it became clear during the questioning of other witnesses, had left for the region of Diyarbakır already in the autumn of 1893 and therefore could not have taken part in the events of last year.

While in Muş, Armenian witnesses are under police supervision, which cannot fail to influence their statements. At the session of 4/16 March, a certain Shahbaz from the village of Semal—whose husband, according to her, had been killed in Gelieguzan—gave definite and detailed answers before the Commission; the next day, after spending a night in Muş, she refused to add anything to her earlier statement. Returning to her village, she told her son: *“What good is it to tell the truth? They can kill us too, as they killed your father.”*

Kevo from Talori (session of 28 February), after being left overnight in the office of the police commissioner, the next day refused his earlier intention to give testimony regarding the events in Talori in 1894.

Two witnesses—Mygro from Talori and Ego from Semal—were arrested in Muş after giving their testimony before the Commission. It is difficult to suppose that all the above could be done by the local authorities without the knowledge of the investigative Commission.

The Commission is biased in its actions, as proven both by what has just been stated and by its very manner of questioning witnesses: testimony favorable to the Turks is not interrupted by the chairman and is carefully recorded by the kâtib; witnesses who speak against the authorities and the troops answer only what is asked, and their interrogation is conducted in a deliberately confusing manner, aiming to catch them in contradictions and details.

From the very beginning of the investigation the Commission divided those being questioned into two groups—accused persons and witnesses—indicating that it already possessed a preconceived view of the events in Sasun. The delegates drew the Commission’s attention to this at the session of 6/18 March.

The bias of the Commission is also visible in the fact that, without making any attempt to clarify such important facts as the killings by soldiers of women and children, as well as of those who surrendered to the troops at Gelieguzan, it declared at the session of 5/17 March that the essence of the events in Sasun had been sufficiently revealed by the investigation, and only details remained, which could be addressed after the journey to Bitlis for the questioning of Murad.

In reality, neither these questions nor the very essence of the events have been clarified: the participation of many villages—such as Ahpik, Khiting, and others—has not been touched upon by the investigation at all.

The local Armenians, it was said, were stirred by the arrival of the Commission and the foreign delegates; now, however, their mood may be described as depressed. They clearly saw that the presence of the delegates had not changed the habitual methods of the Turkish administration, and fear of responsibility compelled them to give up any political agitation. The delegates, on their part, did not consider it possible to resort to any means of stirring the Armenians, but the above-mentioned mood of the latter, as well as the actions of the Turkish Commission, forced them to take a more active part in the investigation with a view to revealing the truth.

A thorough investigation by the Commission of last year's events becomes all the more necessary because, as is known, in Erzurum clandestine investigations on the same subject are being conducted by consuls and British correspondents. The publication of testimony given in Erzurum must produce a great sensation in the British press and public, and therefore the concealment by the Commission of various facts can only cause harm and further compromise the Turkish government.

It should be noted that in Muş, contrary to the testimony of Mevlud Çavuş, only one case is spoken of—the beating of those who had surrendered to the troops at Gelieguzan. The fact of the killing of women in a church is scarcely known here. A person well informed about last year's events could not tell me in which village this incident occurred. (...)

27. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 61–64, April 15, 1895. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) The Commission continues to avoid touching upon the facts relating to the actions of the troops, and directs its efforts toward accusing the Armenians of committing acts of violence against the Kurds and of an uprising under the leadership of Murad (historically, this Murad is almost certainly Hampartsoum Boyadjian – Medz Murad, one of the leaders of the 1894 Sasun resistance) against the government. With such a direction of the Commission—resorting, moreover, to the assistance of the local authorities in the selection of witnesses—impartiality and freedom of investigation are not ensured, and the discovery of the truth is greatly hindered. Most of the Armenian witnesses are not distinguished by the sincerity of their testimony; they avoid speaking about the Kurds and blame the troops for everything. Under these conditions it is possible to make sense of the material elicited so far in the testimony before the Commission only with the help of information obtained privately. At present the Commission advances two versions explaining last year's events. The official version, found in the testimony of officials and Kurds, is, in broad outline, as follows:

In the early spring of 1894, a certain Murad Efendi appeared in Talori, preaching here and in the surrounding villages violence against the Kurds, rebellion against the government, and refusal to pay duties to the latter. Under the influence of Murad, people were carried away by his proposals and in turn drew in the Armenians of Kavar and Talori. Having armed themselves, the band appeared in May on the slopes of Antok Dağ; two Kurds were brutally killed and their corpses mutilated; one woman was raped and then barbarously murdered. Several cases of theft of livestock from the Kurds were accompanied by killings. The kaymakam of the kaza of Kulp was expelled by the Armenians from the village of Akcheser, whither he had come to collect taxes; the kaymakam of Sasun was threatened with death in the village of Kechashen.

Finally, in the last days of July the Kurds of Velikanly were robbed on their pastures located three hours' distance from Muş. Forty Kurds of the Bakaranly tribe set out to express their sympathy for the victims, but on the way, near the village of Semal, were attacked by Armenians. The Kurds of the Badikanly tribe hurried to assist the Bakaranly, and for two days there was an exchange of fire between them and the Armenians under the leadership of Murad. The Kurds were forced to yield and fled to their tents, from where, in fear, they quickly returned to their winter quarters.

Then the Armenians, having burned—on Murad's orders—their families' tents, herds, and belongings, withdrew to Antok Dağ, where they joined the inhabitants of Talori, Shenik, Semal, and Gelieguzan. The government decided to put an end to the disorder and seize Murad; troops were therefore dispatched to Talori. In Gelieguzan and in the gorge of Geliesanthese troops were twice attacked by the Armenians, who then scattered in different directions, but were later gathered by the authorities, returned to their villages, and from there distributed among the Armenian villages of the plains of Muş, Bulanık, and Hınıs.

As for Murad, having been seized with his companions in one of the caves near Talori, he surrendered to the troops, seeing any resistance on his part to be impossible.

The Armenian version is the complete opposite of the previous one. They do not know Murad and, in most cases, have not even heard his name. Quite unexpectedly, they were seized in their villages by soldiers who, according to some testimony, were mixed with Kurds. The Armenians fled to Antok Dağ; those who did not manage to escape, as well as the elderly and the children who remained in their homes, were killed or perished in the flames of the fire set by the soldiers, who burned their villages. A few days later there followed an attack by the troops on Antok Dağ, from which the Armenians scattered in all directions, abandoning in panic their families and herds. During the pursuit, many Armenians perished, including women and children, who were either killed by the soldiers or disappeared without trace. A portion of those who came out with the priest of Semal, their leader, were brutally killed in the army camp near Gelieguzan; the women, moreover, were raped by the soldiers.

The arrival of the müşir put an end to the persecution of the Armenians, who returned to their villages, but, finding there neither shelter nor the promised assistance from the government, descended to the plains, with the exception of several families who remained amid the ruins of their homes. Both of the above-outlined versions, it seems, are far from the truth. Without deciding the question, and using the data of the investigation—which partly relies on the testimony brought from Bitlis by Murad's comrade—and also taking into account private information, the events of last year may be presented in the following manner:

Murad did indeed appear in the spring of last year in Talori and the environs of the village of Kavar, and, pursuing his revolutionary aims, incited the Armenian population of the mountains, who here possess a more independent spirit than the inhabitants of the plains, but suffer from the Kurds no less than the latter. In the summer of 1893, the Armenians of Talori were plundered by the combined forces of several Kurdish tribes. At the same time,

Murad's band may, perhaps, have committed several outrageous killings of Kurds, seeking to provoke clashes between the latter and the Armenians.

The seizure of livestock by Kurds from the inhabitants of Shenik, and the subsequent skirmish between the latter and the Kurds of Velikanly—whose livestock was in turn seized by Armenians, and several of whom were killed and wounded—served as the pretext for the beginning of more serious clashes between Kurds and Armenians. At the same time, the local authorities, for whom the presence of Murad in the mountains was no secret, saw in the fact of active Armenian resistance to the Kurds the result of his propaganda. Moreover, the Velikanly, being residents of Muş and closely connected with certain influential Muslims there (Nadyr-aga, Khalil-efendi, Saleh-aga, etc.), who in turn sought to fan the affair, to present it as the beginning of an uprising, and to incite the Kurds to decisive action. Such a framing of the issue was all the more convenient for the local authorities, since it justified all previous persecutions of Armenians accused of political propaganda.

The result of the subsequent clashes between Kurds and Armenians was the withdrawal of the latter, with their families and herds, to Antok Dağ, from where they offered serious resistance to the Kurds, who enjoyed moral and perhaps material support from the local authorities and from a small detachment encamped near the village of Shenik. Murad took advantage of these initial Armenian successes to encourage them to further resistance, which, after several days of fighting, was no longer within their power, since the number of Kurds was constantly increasing as troops arrived. The attack on Antok Dağ, accompanied by skirmishes near Gelieguzan and in the gorge of Geliesan, resulted in the panicked flight of the Armenians, during which the pursuing troops committed those killings for which the soldiers are accused. The property of the Armenians, their herds, as well as the harvest which they had not managed to complete, became the spoil of the Kurds. The Armenian settlements captured by Kurds and soldiers were likewise looted and burned. The massacre of the men of Semal who surrendered in the camp near Gelieguzan has not yet been refuted.

The Armenians who fled from Antok Dağ, hiding from pursuit among rocks and bushes for 15–20 days, were obliged to suffer losses from illness and hunger, especially among the children. Until the arrival of the müşir of the Fourth Corps, Zeki Pasha, no measures had been taken to pacify the population; he was the first to issue the necessary orders.

The condition of the population of the destroyed villages is at present very lamentable. Deprived of their own shelter and means of subsistence, their families half-destroyed, many households consisting only of women and children, they have been distributed through the Armenian villages of the above-mentioned plains. Feeding the refugees of Sasun has become a new burden for these villages, already ruined by the crop failures of the two previous years (1892 and 1893). With the coming of spring they are beginning to refuse further refuge to the Armenians of Sasun; in order to resettle the latter in their own villages and ensure their further livelihood, special measures must be taken (aid in money, livestock, grain; exemption from duties for several years; protection from Kurds, etc.). These measures must be carried out without delay, so that the coming winter does not find the Sassoun people in a condition worse than now.

This report was already prepared when the chairman of the Commission informed us privately that the government has allocated 2,500 Turkish liras to aid the sufferers, which will be applied to the resettlement of the Sassoun people in their own villages, to the restoration of their dwellings, and to the return of the livestock seized from them last year. For the distribution of aid a special commission will be formed, which will include two Armenians as members. (...)

28. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 116–118, September 29, 1895. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) On the evening of 23 September, around 6:00, two Armenians were stabbed to death in Erzurum while returning to their homes: the lawyer Artin Ter-Sarkisyan and the merchant and temporary member of the Chamber of Commerce, Simon Boyayan. In connection with this murder, two brothers — Russian subjects Mishurdich and Karabet Israilov Goryutyan — were arrested. Their third brother, Hovhannes, who according to rumors circulating in the city and according to the testimony of the nephew of Simon Boyayan was considered one of the killers, managed to flee to an unknown destination.

According to rumors, the murder had a political background, since the late lawyer Sarkisyan was known here as a supporter of the Turks, while Simon Boyayan was apparently killed as a witness who could also point to the murderer. The father of the arrested men, Tudjenkudji Israil Hovhannesov, according to official records, had been recognized as a Russian subject since 1869. According to information held by the General Consulate, however, he did not possess a passport. His two sons now under arrest had never been to Russia and never possessed passports, while

the third son, the fugitive Hovhannes — who also had no passport — had been issued a document by the military authority in Akhaltsikhe, which had enrolled him among Russian reservists.

The former vali Ismail-Hakki Pasha addressed me with a request asking that the fugitive be searched for in Russia and detained, in connection with which I sent a telegram to the Military Governor of Kars. The Turkish population is armed, and the Armenians also possess a considerable number of rifles and revolvers. Ismail-Hakki Pasha promised that lawful order would be maintained even by the use of troops if necessary. (...)

29. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 73–75, November 16, 1896. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) On 15 November, the Erzurum Vali informed me of an incident that took place three or four days earlier on the Russo-Turkish border in the Alaşkert kaza. According to a telegram from the Pasinler kaymakam, twenty-two armed Armenians crossed into Turkish territory and fired a volley at the patrol that encountered them. A skirmish followed, after which the Armenians fled, leaving one dead behind.

Pursuit was difficult due to the rocky and mountainous terrain, enabling them to take refuge — according to the kaymakam — in one of the Turkish border villages. Upon the dead Armenian, a tag marked “№ 50 10 06” was found, but its meaning is unknown.

Regarding the rumors in the city claiming that Armenians had been massacred in the Alaşkert district, Rauf Pashastated that such distortions of the truth, similar to fabricated stories about disorders in Smyrna, “*are made not by the Armenians, who no longer believe such malicious inventions, but by our friends,*” meaning the English.

Four days ago, twelve Armenians were arrested in Erzurum who had gathered in a private house and proposed toasts “*to the Armenian prisoners and to a free Armenia.*” Rauf Pasha expressed the view that the Armenians who attacked the patrol, though Turkish subjects according to official data, had actually come from Alexandropol — the chief center of revolutionary propaganda, directed by the Russian subject known as “Jellad” or “Jennet,” who murdered the lawyer Harutiun Ter-Sarkisian and the merchant Simon Bozooyan in Erzurum in October last year.

From an intercepted letter, it became known a week ago that “Jellad” instructed an Erzurum Armenian to warn six Armenians who were Turkish subjects to flee the city due to imminent danger. One was arrested, but the other six fled to Russia before the search began.

Rauf Pasha wrote about this and about Alexandropol’s role in Armenian propaganda to the Porte and to the Turkish consul in the Caucasus.

If the Governor-General of Erivan is correct that an active Armenian committee is operating in Alexandropol, it is necessary that Caucasian authorities take measures to eliminate such an abnormal situation, incompatible with good-neighborly relations between the two empires. (...)

30. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 125-126. October 14, 1895. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

Every Monday, there is a weekly market in Erzurum, which is attended by villagers, predominantly of the Muslim faith, from villages often located two hours away from the city. There were many such villagers on the 9th of this October. At the market, in the grain section, one Armenian approached a respected elderly member (mullah) Salih Efendi and, without any provocation from his side, as the Turks claim, shot him at close range with a revolver. The mullah's followers, who were nearby, grabbed whatever they could find: sticks, knives, and so on, and killed the Armenian.

In another part of the same market, an Armenian man shot a well-known man from Erzincan, Halil Efendi. These murders led to a general brawl until the police and troops sent by Müşir Zeki Pasha restored order. According to official reports, 48 Armenians and 14 Muslims were killed. According to the Armenians, 60 Armenians and 15 Muslims were killed. Local authorities claim that to prevent a larger number of casualties, Müşir Zeki Pasha surrounded the Armenian quarter with troops to prevent Muslims from entering it.

Since the murder of two Armenians on September 29, the order in Erzurum has been maintained by continuous patrolling. The Armenian Gregorian Archbishop Shishmanian appealed to Lord Salisbury, asking the English Prime Minister for protection for Turkish Armenians. This letter was published in French in a Parisian newspaper on October 7.

31. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 128–133, October 21, 1895. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) On the 18th, at 11 a.m., I went together with the State Councillor to the Vali of Erzurum, Rauf Paşa, and to Şakir Paşa, in order to present him and to inform them about the rumors circulating among the Turks concerning the killing of Armenians in Temüşhan, Erzincan, and Bayburt, and to request that measures be taken to refute these rumors.

According to these rumors, *“Armenians may be killed and robbed, for the Ottoman government does nothing to protect them.”* In addition, the Turks say: *“The Russians are our friends; we have nothing to fear from them. Moreover, in Russia itself, in Batum, Muslims are strongly protected, while Armenians are beaten.”*

In view of such utterly impossible rumors, I proposed to Rauf Paşa and Şakir Paşa that a public refutation be made in the mosques. They promised to do so.

About five minutes after our return to the General Consulate, the massacre of Armenians began in the city.

The Turks, not excluding even the vali himself, are inclined to consider the Armenians the instigators. Şakir Paşa goes even further: he believes that the signal for the killings was given by the local Armenian Gregorian Archbishop Shishmanian, who, according to him, instructed his secretary to warn Armenians to close their shops. But, according to his version, the Armenian killers acted prematurely, and therefore the Armenian shops were not closed and the merchants remained there.

The Armenians, without doubt, would indignantly reject this version. What gave rise to it appears to have been the murder committed by some Armenian in the Saray, as well as the statements of several arrested Armenians. Unfortunately, the Armenian killer who attempted to escape from the Saray was shot by zaptiyes. These same men also killed five other Armenians in the corridors and stairways of the Saray. Among them was one priest. According to the Turks, these people had intended to kill several Turkish officials, though this remained unfulfilled.

By killing these Armenians, the zaptiyes deprived the authorities of any possibility of discovering the true cause of the Armenian crime committed in the government building.

Almost simultaneously with the shot in the Saray, robberies and killings began in the shops not far from it. Among the perpetrators must be counted not only several dozen local inhabitants, but also Turks and Kurds who had come from the villages. I had pointed out to the vali and Şakir Paşa the extraordinary concentration of Muslim villagers in Erzurum; but since no measures were taken against these newcomers on the 17th, the authorities undoubtedly had no possibility of doing anything within the few minutes before the massacre began.

The authorities possess both secret and open police as well as zaptiyes, and therefore have the means to obtain information about the mood of the population. It appears that they indeed had information—but about the Armenians, not about the Muslims.

The soldiers who killed several Muslim looters that day themselves became the most terrible looters. Not satisfied with this, they fired upon unarmed Armenians who were trying to escape and find refuge somewhere from the massacre. Even near our own consulate, one such elderly Armenian was killed while almost reaching his home.

Our consulate’s banker, a well-known man from Alexandropol, was also murdered. He was killed in the bazaar, and his head was cut off.

When I was finally able to visit the Armenian cemetery on the 20th, I saw no fewer than 220 Armenian corpses lying there. Among them were bodies with skulls split in half, probably by the butt of an axe; others had eyes gouged out by some blunt weapon; one corpse had its ribs exposed. I saw a boy of about twelve years old shot through by a bullet. Many bodies had their throats cut. Nearby lay a child about eight months old. Many had been killed by bullets.

I expressed to Şakir Paşa my opinion that from the nature of the bullet wounds it would be easy to determine how many people had been killed by soldiers. However, those around him hastened to declare that perhaps the wounds had been caused by revolver shots, which, in my opinion, does not absolve the soldiers of responsibility, since artillerymen themselves are armed with revolvers.

Şakir Paşa admits the fact of robberies committed by soldiers; about two dozen, according to him, have been arrested and will be brought before a military court. But in reality hundreds could be punished for such crimes—even among those sent to guard the Imperial Russian General Consulate.

The Italian consul, seeing that the soldiers sent to guard the Italian consulate had women’s clothing hidden under their uniforms, refused their services and preferred gendarmerie instead. He also told me that these same soldiers, before his eyes, were tearing silk veils from Armenian women.

The plundering of houses during the nights of the 19th and 20th, as well as the killings of several women and children, must likewise be attributed to the soldiers.

However, having mentioned the atrocities committed by Turks and soldiers, I must with satisfaction also note that among the Muslims of Erzurum there were individuals who showed themselves from a fully humane side. One such Turk yesterday, in my presence, asked the vali to give him a guard in order to protect Armenian property worth two thousand liras, which for two days he had guarded himself together with his household.

Several Turks gave shelter to wounded Armenians or to those left without homes. On the 20th, the municipal council began distributing bread to impoverished Armenians.

Eighty-five wounded Armenians, seven of whom died on 20 October, are under care partly in the Turkish military hospital, partly in the Armenian Catholic church and the Catholic school of the Frères des Écoles Chrésiennes. The expenses for the wounded in the latter two institutions were undertaken by the consulates, while the quarantine physician Grossmann undertook to supervise their recovery.

This arrangement was made by the evening of the 20th, and only from the 21st did regular medical assistance begin.

Regarding the actions of the Turkish authorities, the consular delegates limited themselves merely to excluding Armenian guards who had been in the Saray. The number of Turks killed, not belonging to the soldiers, remains extremely doubtful. The vali complains about the imams, stating that they do not provide information.

Some people assert that those Muslims killed by soldiers at the sites of looting were friends of the victims of the disturbances of 18 August, and that among the Muslims there were no victims of the disorders. The number of Muslims killed, which I previously reported, was stated by Colonel Ismail Bey of the General Staff.

From the report of 15 October: in Bayburt, located about 22 hours from Erzurum on the Trabzon Road, according to Şakir Paşa, 150 Armenians were killed by local Muslims and Laz. The latter lost only 19 killed and 16 wounded. Most of the Armenian villages of the Bayburt district were plundered by the Laz.

From the report of 16 October: in the city of Bitlis, on 13 October, 120–130 Armenians were killed, and about 20 wounded. Among the Turks 39 were killed and 130–140 wounded. (...)

32. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 144–146, November 4, 1895. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) It appears that peace has not yet returned to the city. On the third, while walking by the bazaar, I observed only six Armenian merchants. It seems that most of the market stalls were closed. The Vali personally indicated that efforts are being made to track down the murderers and thieves and to recover approximately eighty percent of the stolen goods. However, it is important to note that this effort does not include the recovery of gold and silver utensils, nor the money that was taken.

(...)

During the massacre, it is reported that many sought refuge in basements, sometimes hiding behind all the women. There were instances of extortion by Turks who demanded money and valuables in exchange for sheltering Armenian families. It is also noted that Turkish women participated in the looting alongside men, taking everything they could find, including flour, coal, and groceries. It could be argued that the residents, many of whom were left without basic sustenance, might not have managed without the aid provided by the authorities.

There are indications that Armenians are beginning to express dissatisfaction with the actions of their Archbishop and are considering his resignation. I advised those who shared this opinion to consider formally requesting the Patriarch to replace the Archbishop if they deem it necessary. However, it seems unlikely that this advice will be acted upon, given that actions taken hastily are often difficult to regulate. Additionally, influential Armenians appear to be too frightened and are primarily concerned with self-preservation.

Vali Reuf Pasha does not seem to fear such an outcome for Archbishop Shishmanian and might even be satisfied with it. This could potentially strengthen the Turkish explanation of the events of the 18th, as I have previously reported. Since October 18, the actions of the mentioned prelate seem to have been entirely devoid of dignity. Despite claims that, before the events, he professed in his sermons that he would shed his blood for his flock, it appears that since the tragic incidents, he has confined himself to his private apartment and has not ventured out at all. When I invited him through an Armenian official from our consulate to visit the ambulatory in a carriage to bless and comfort the suffering, he reportedly responded that he would only go if he was guaranteed a safe return. On November third, the Vali informed me that Shishmanian, through the British consul Cumberbatch, notified him of his intention to visit if provided with a mounted escort. The Vali allegedly refused the escort and stated that his commitments would not allow him to receive the Archbishop Sughman Grigorian within two or three days.

Most Turks reportedly remain indifferent to the bloody events of October 18, although there are still some individuals on the streets with a sinister expression among both common people and soldiers. However, there are also accounts of kind-hearted Turks spreading rumors that God may punish them for the innocent bloodshed. According to the Vali, no fewer than 100 Muslims will be tried for looting. Additionally, there are allegations against some perpetrators of indecent acts towards women and girls. (...)

33. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 148–152, November 18, 1895. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) In addition to Secret Telegram No. 1 of 14 November, I have the honor to report to Your Excellency that the information received by the consul from the local authorities regarding the disturbances of the 13th does not differ very sharply from that which has been obtained later through private channels.

Nevertheless, I must point out that the number of Armenians killed was not five, as the local authorities declared, but eight. The number of wounded was also significantly greater than what the Turks told us—22 persons rather than six. However, only five wounded Armenians came to the dispensary for assistance, two of whom were in a serious condition, and the doctor considered it necessary to advise them to remain in the shelter. All of them, as I have already reported, were wounded with cold weapons.

After the dispatch of the telegram it also became clear that reservists (redifs) dressed in military uniform were among the killers.

I cannot fail to draw Your Excellency's attention to the circumstance that the authorities quickly put an end to the killings on 13 November, whereas this had not been done on 18 October during the great massacre permitted against the Armenian population. The conduct of the authorities during those unfortunate days for Erzurum has provoked judgments among the inhabitants far from favorable to the Turkish government. Without entering into their detailed explanations, I may nevertheless cite one of the more moderate conclusions:

“On 18 October the Turkish authorities regarded the Armenians as rebels; now (13 November), after the visit of the Armenian notables and Odiyanov to the Vali and Şakir Paşa, and after the visit of the archbishop, they did not wish to allow the excesses of their co-religionists.”

Thus the rapid appearance of the Vali and Şakir Paşa in one of the bazaars where disturbances broke out in three different places is explained here, as well as their sincere desire to stop them. They themselves, together with those accompanying them, arrested the criminals. Three of them, as I had the honor to report by telegram, were subjected to corporal punishment on the spot, and three others were sent to the Saray for the same purpose. One of the Muslim killers was immediately sent to prison, and Şakir Paşa declared to many that he would be subjected to the highest punishment under Turkish law.

All measures necessitated by the disturbances are being carried out, both in the city and outside it, by agreement between Rauf Paşa, Şakir Paşa, and the commander of the troops, Ferik Yahya Paşa. From such a triumvirate one might expect at least some positive result: the beginning of the pacification of the city and at least of its surroundings.

In this sense, the order reportedly given—if Şakir Paşa is to be believed—to shoot any Muslim who appeared in the streets armed would be desirable, provided that the order were carried out strictly. Apparently relying on this measure, Rauf Paşa expressed to me the hope, as I reported in my secret dispatch of the 14th, that there would be no further disturbances in Erzurum.

Yet before this measure was adopted, the inhabitants of Erzurum had already three times suffered killings, and many who had been considered prosperous lost all their property.

Among the villages located on the Erzurum plain (Ova), twelve villages of 60–80 houses each were plundered by Laz bands. In Pasin (Hasankale) the looting likewise affected nine densely populated villages, whose names I have not yet succeeded in learning.

In my report of 20 October, I had the honor to report, according to the words of Şakir Paşa, that in Bayburt the Laz and local Turks killed 150 Armenians. Now, however, a correspondent of mine not of Armenian origin has written to me that in that same town 400 Armenian residents were killed, as well as up to 250 villagers who happened to be there. Moreover, in 167 villages of the same district, up to 700 Christians were killed.

He also confirmed the information communicated to the consul by the Armenian Gregorian archbishop in Erzurum, that several girls and women in the village of Ksant in the Bayburt district, out of fear of the Muslims, threw themselves into wells.

Even allowing for exaggeration in these figures, I cannot fail to draw Your Excellency's attention to the fact that they exceed by four times the number of victims reported by the Turks, who apparently everywhere attempted to show me fewer Armenian victims than there actually were.

It becomes evident that the killings of Christians, beginning with the Sasun events, have significantly reduced the Christian population in the region during the past two years in the country which the Turks call Kurdistan.

According to information just received, Şakir Paşa has been ordered to suspend his actions concerning the reforms until further instructions.

Meanwhile, news has spread of the murder of the monks of the Armenian monastery of the Most Holy Mother of God near Hasankale, of the looting of the monastery, and that it was set on fire by the Turks after the killings. Şakir

Paşa, to whom I reported this information, told me that he had sent one of the officers under his command to collect information, and he even suggested that the people in the monastery had suffocated in the smoke of the fire. (...)

34. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1631, ll. 137–138, October 28, 1895. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) The four European powers represented in Erzurum signed a memorandum concerning the events of 18–20 October, on the initiative of the British consul Cumberbatch.

My efforts were directed toward making the document as close to the truth as possible and less severe in its tone toward the Ottoman government.

The initiative of the British consul is also evident in those points which I have had the honor to mention repeatedly in my reports.

The official number of Turks killed became known here on the 25th, when the vali sent me the list.

The number of wounded Armenians reaches 105 persons. Of these, 67 are being treated in two dispensaries, while the others remain with their families and come only for bandaging.

I wish to supplement the memorandum of the European powers with a categorical statement that between 18 and 30 October no revolution on the part of the Armenians took place in Erzurum. This is already evident from the number of those who were killed.

However, some Hnchakists and other leaders of the Armenian movement apparently had been preparing a revolution. At least, on one of the killed priests—who had formerly been a gunsmith—there was found an oval lead stamp depicting on the upper side the Holy Virgin, and below a child, though this stamp had never been used. On him were also found a Russian military rifle of the latest model and revolvers. (...)

35. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 2–6, February 3, 1896. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) I had the honor to inform Your Excellency that Rauf Paşa also told me that no fewer than 100 Muslims would be brought to trial for the looting of 18 October.

In the secret report of 18 November, no. 495, I had occasion to mention the statement made by Şakir Paşa to the consuls that Mehmed Tani would suffer the highest degree of punishment provided for by Turkish law, as well as the official's declaration that every Muslim who appeared armed in the streets would be strictly punished and restrained.

All these measures remained unimplemented.

This situation is acutely felt by the Armenians. Seeing no punishment inflicted upon their murderers; knowing that old men of 70–80 years have been held for more than five years without proper judicial process; knowing also that local authorities extort taxes from Christians, sometimes torturing them by hanging and swinging them until unconscious; and knowing as well that the authorities do nothing to protect Christians from the Kurds, confiscating their weapons while imprisoning the Christian owners—because of all this, the Armenians consider themselves completely defenseless here.

Furthermore, my conscience compels me to state that Vali Rauf Paşa ordered the immediate release of a sixty-year-old priest, arrested with others from Sütöğ, upon learning of his detention. According to rumor, after returning to his village he was killed by the same official who had arrested him.

As a result, although the city has been calm since 13 November, the Armenians remain in constant fear for their property and their lives. Those of them who have nothing left to lose—who, after the October massacres, form the majority in Erzurum and its surroundings—are fleeing to Russia.

According to reliable estimates, up to 2,000 Armenians have reached our border without passports; since the end of October the General Consulate has certified more than one hundred Armenian passports, often for whole families.

A question naturally arises: what role is played by the Sultan's Extraordinary Inspector?

Both I and my foreign colleagues—the English and French consuls—report everything to him. Sometimes he disputes the facts, calling them fabricated; sometimes he justifies the administration's actions—whereas only thanks to my intervention were Christians and Muslims able to defend their village from the Kurds, who were armed with Martini–Henry rifles or more modern weapons.

He makes notes which lead to no consequences.

Thus, the representations of the consuls have almost no effect. Thus, Şakir Paşa's instructions have not improved the condition of the local Christians.

To hold him alone responsible is impossible, for in every matter he encounters obstacles—either in the Divan or at the Porte.

Up to now, Şakir Paşa's principal activities have consisted merely of collecting statistics, redistributing villages, and calculating administrative budgets.

36. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 31–32, May 25, 1896. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) In addition to the secret telegram of the 21st of this month, I have the honor to inform Your Excellency that Vali Rauf Paşa, already two weeks before the 19th—when the incident that formed the subject of my last telegram occurred—told me that he had noticed a considerable change in the mood of the Armenian youth.

He associated this phenomenon with the return from leave of one of my foreign colleagues. I could not deny the correctness of this observation, since neither his marriage nor his trip to London altered his tendencies, and the awarding of the Order of St. Michael and St. George may perhaps have given them even greater strength. For his part, he took measures aimed at once again admonishing the Armenians. I venture to think that these measures were not fruitless, since many of them came to me expressing their indignation toward the disturber of order and unrest, and declaring their readiness to assist in maintaining public order.

I consider it my duty to mention that the orders issued by the Vali may have a powerful influence in calming the Armenian villages, and thus far no new disturbances have occurred since the 19th, although agitation by the Hnchakists continues to appear in Erzurum through Trabzon, Erzincan, and Kars.

Meanwhile, the economic situation in the Erzurum vilayet, as well as in the connected vilayets of Harput, Diyarbakır, and Bitlis, is extremely difficult for the Christian population. Apart from the persistent attempts by Kurds and Turks to convert Armenians to Islam, the latter literally do not have a piece of bread for their daily sustenance.

The Protestants, having established a committee under the chairmanship of the English consul, have so far distributed up to three-quarters of a pound of bread per person per day. However, I do not believe that this assistance can continue for long, since over the course of six and a half months no less than £20,000 have been spent on this effort and on the purchase of necessary clothing in the Erzurum vilayet alone—if we are to believe the statements of Cumberbatch and Graves.

Moreover, the cold weather and the almost continuous five-week rain have taken away all hope for a harvest this year, even if the Christian population had seed for sowing and working animals for cultivating their fields. (...)

37. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 10–12, February 24, 1896. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) In the secret report of 3 October, No. 33, I had the honor to inform Your High Excellency that Armenians had begun leaving Erzurum for Russia with the apparent intention of not returning. This tendency continues at present.

The Vali of Erzurum, Rauf Paşa, issues them passports at his residence, while from time to time the General Consulate receives a takrir concerning individuals whom he considers politically unreliable, requesting that police supervision be established over them in Russia. Such a takrir I received on the 19th, concerning the Armenians Ohanes, son of Hamparutsm (Satchian); Ohanes, son of Bagdasar; and Arakel, son of Avedis (Vartanian).

I immediately sent a telegram and an official letter to the military governor of the Kars province regarding the execution of Rauf Paşa's request. I consider it necessary to mention that, according to Turkish information, agitation by Armenian revolutionary committees abroad—the Hnchakists and the Caucasian-Armenian Droshakists—continues in Erzurum.

Recently a letter sent from Constantinople to Mihran Efendi Chokhadjian, former secretary of the murahhas of Archbishop Shishmanian, was intercepted at the post. It had been written in sympathetic ink, and the text was restored by chemical means. In it, the author thanks the addressee for the information he provided and states that most of it has been passed to the Hnchak newspaper for publication.

He also expresses sympathy for the correspondent's difficult position and suggests that he leave Erzurum if the Turkish authorities begin persecuting him. Furthermore, he advises that energetic measures be taken against those Armenian primates who do not show sympathy for the national cause, subjecting them to what he calls a "new baptism." By "new baptism" is meant murder.

Finally, the letter states that no hope should be placed in the diplomacy in Constantinople, whose representatives, according to the author, change their positions daily. Nevertheless, the author does not abandon his undertaking and believes that the situation of the Armenians will soon improve.

The Turks believe that this letter was composed in the Armenian Patriarchate and according to the instructions of the Patriarch himself. Mihran Efendi Chokhadjian was summoned for questioning regarding the letter, which had been found in the form of a blank sheet accompanying another letter addressed to him. He denied all knowledge of it, and the Turks found it difficult to prove his responsibility, since the name of the addressee, the author's signature, and the place from which the letter was sent were all fictitious. Consequently, pending further evidence, the case has been left without result.

I consider it important to add that representatives of the local Turkish administration expect new actions by the Hnchakists from Transcaucasia in the spring. They assume that 20–30 such Armenians will come from Russia to the Turkish border and, learning the time when Muslim men are away at work, will slaughter the women and children.

Such an action, in their view, would lead the Muslims to undertake the general destruction of Armenians in both villages and towns. Perhaps such stories are exaggerated; yet I have no other intention than to identify reliable persons among those Armenian emigrants who seek entry into Russia. Thus, after 3 February, the General Consulate had processed 146 Armenian passports for entry into Russia, many of them belonging to entire families.

I consider it necessary to add that I informed Vali Rauf Paşa of this fact, telling him that if Armenians migrate from the Caucasus in entire villages, our government might be compelled to settle them in Tashkent, thereby creating a new Armenia in Central Asia. This idea greatly pleased both the Vali and Şakir Paşa. (...)

38. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 17–18, February 19, 1896. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) In the secret report of 24 February of this year, No. 68, I had the honor to inform Your High Excellency that representatives of the Turkish administration in Erzurum expect Hnchakist activity from Transcaucasia in the spring.

The possibility of a renewed Armenian movement now begins to appear somewhat likely. At least, on the evening of 4 April, Vali Rauf Paşa sent his secretary to me with two letters written in Armenian and their Turkish translations. He verbally asked me to petition the military governor of the Kars province for the arrest of the author of the letters—a local Turk known under the name Ervant of Alexandropol, said to reside in the region and known by the nicknames “Jellad” (“Executioner”) and “Jennet.”

Both letters are dated 19 March and were sent from Pertek, an Armenian village located about two hours from Kars. One of them is addressed to “Chokh,” undoubtedly a pseudonym, and the other to the initials “Ts. and A.,” residing in the village of Delibaba.

In one of the letters the author complains about discord among Armenians and calls upon them to reconcile and unite, in view of the approaching time when all forces will be needed for the struggle. In the other letter to Chokh he writes that he is being deceived: he had been told that there were 120–130 pieces, but now they say that there are only 60—apparently referring to weapons. Moreover, instead of 70 rifles, he received 70 daggers. The author also complains about a shortage of men.

According to him, only 30 rank-and-file fighters and several leaders have been sent from (...), and they have been scattered among various villages. He himself claims to have recruited 60 members and an equal number of leaders, according to Turkish information. He promises to bring with him 20 armed Russian Armenians, although originally their number had been expected to reach 120 men.

In view of the direct statement in the letter that Ervant is forming armed bands on Russian territory for an incursion into Turkey, Vali Rauf Paşa petitioned the Russian authorities for the arrest of the said agitator. He provided me with the following description: tall, blond mustache, blue eyes, about 35 years old.

He also promised to take measures on his side in Delibaba and Alacahrek, villages on the Pasin plain, where the author of the letters expects Armenian bands to concentrate.

Not having the cipher necessary for communication with our military governor in Kars, I transmitted this request to His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief in the Caucasus.

To the above I have the honor to add that one of the letters was seized by the Turkish border guard from a messenger named Setrak, who froze to death near the Turkish border, while the other was taken from two Armenians detained by the same border guard post. (...)

39. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 43–47, June 15, 1896. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) I have no doubt that our Vice-Consul in Van has reported to Your Excellency all the details accompanying the disturbances in Van, which continued from the 30th of last May until the 16th of June, during which killings and plunder took place from the 3rd to the 14th. Nevertheless, I consider it necessary to correct inaccuracies in this matter that entered my two most recent secret reports of 15 June and 6 July.

According to the information then available in Erzurum, coming from persons who did not hesitate to provide situational data, the number of victims reached up to 6,000 people. Others, more cautious, lowered the figure to 3,000, whereas the Turkish authorities asserted that the total number of dead was only 500, of whom 200 were Muslims and 300 Armenians.

Knowing the tendency of the Turks, I could place no trust in their statement and adopted for my reports an average figure. Last week it became known to me that the number of Christian victims within the city itself was about 80. At the same time, up to 200 Muslims also perished in the city. In the villages, according to the same information, up to 10,000 Christians were killed. Judging from the last letter of the dragoman of our Vice-Consulate in Van, received in Erzurum on 20 July, the Kurds killed up to 15,000 Armenians in the villages.

Allow me to mention one horrible detail that accompanied the disturbances in Van:

On 11 June, a mob of Turkish rabble approached the house of Galib Paşa, who had long served as the local mayor, and demanded the surrender of the kaçaks, as the Hnchakists and other Armenian revolutionary activists were called in Van, allegedly sheltered in his house. Galib Paşa insisted that he had no such persons, but only some Armenian neighbors to whom he had given refuge. The crowd grew more agitated and threatened Galib himself, so he judged it safer to comply with its demands.

The Christians brought out into the street were immediately cut down with knives and yataghans like sheep, to use the literal expression of the informant. Only four were left alive. The mob demanded that Galib Paşa himself slaughter them. Despite his cowardice, he refused such butchery and, taking up a weapon, shot them all. It is said that this was better for them—his Armenian friends.

The total number of peasant martyrs at that place was, according to some reports, 58, while others claimed 120.

I must also report to Your Excellency certain outstanding facts that characterize the conduct, at this time, of the English Vice-Consul in Van, Major Williams. These were communicated to me and to the acting French Vice-Consul in Erzurum, Rocferrier. The exploits of Mr. Williams in Van aroused astonishment here and indignation among the Christians of Van.

First among these I must mention that a large crowd was driven into the street, and with the assistance of the local authorities and Mr. Williams himself, accompanied by his secretary and American missionaries, several hundred Armenians, very likely of the Gregorian confession, who had taken refuge in the missionary building, were compelled to leave it. They were all unarmed. According to reports, those who were driven out in front of the building were immediately killed; others managed to flee into the mountains. This action of Mr. Williams aroused in the surviving Armenians profound distrust toward the missionaries and the English, so much so that the Americans decided to leave Van. (...)

I must also mention that, according to the French Dominican Father de France, an eminent specialist in Assyrian cuneiform inscriptions, the main culprit of the Van disturbances should be considered the Sultan's Extraordinary Commissioner, Ferik Saadeddin Paşa. According to him, Saadeddin Paşa interfered in all actions of the vali and managed to bring him entirely under his influence, while himself taking no measures for dispersing the Kurds, calming the Muslim townspeople, or disarming the Armenian revolutionary agitators—members of the Hnchak, Droshak, and Armenia organizations.

Unable to judge the responsibility of Saadeddin Paşa, I am inclined to believe that, together with other factors, the following played an important role in the Van disturbances: the scattered nature of the city, with its gardens and winter houses extending more than ten versts; the weakness of the police, which knew less about events than the officers of the foreign consulates. At least I have had occasion to inform the former Erzurum Vali, İsmail Hakkı Paşa, about a robbery near the city. He immediately summoned his police chief, who knew nothing of the matter. Having been ordered to investigate, he returned within a quarter of an hour confirming my information—though usually in a diminished form. With such a police force, neither the Extraordinary Commissioner Saadeddin Paşa nor Vali Nazım Paşa could arrest or pursue the revolutionary agitators in Van.

In my previous report I had the honor to inform Your Excellency of the marked improvement in the conduct of the Erzurum police thanks to the energy of the present Vali Rauf Paşa. (...)

40. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 53–56, September 21, 1896. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) The reports of the events in Constantinople (the occupation of the Ottoman Bank by Armenian revolutionaries: editor added this comment), which reached Erzurum in the twentieth of August, placed the Armenians in a state of alarm, as they feared a renewal of killings. These reports produced a similar effect on the local Muslims, who did not wish to lag behind Constantinople.

Thus, on the morning of 28 August, a proclamation appeared on the walls of the Vali's residence, in which Vali Rauf Pasha was declared a protector of the Armenian Christians. It threatened that he would suffer harm if he continued to act in that manner, and stated that the Muslims would deal with the Armenians without his knowledge.

The rumor of this proclamation, having spread among the Armenians, caused panic: they hastily closed their shops and had to reopen them by order of the Vali.

The next day, Rauf Pasha assembled the city elders, imams, and influential Muslims of all quarters. Surrounded by military and civil officials, he urged them not to imitate the Muslims of Constantinople, to live in peace with the Armenians, asked them to influence those among them who harbored hostile intentions toward Christians, to point such persons out to the authorities, and declared each of those present personally responsible for the preservation of order in his quarter.

After this meeting with the Muslims, the Vali summoned influential Armenian and Greek notables and advised them not to fear for their safety. At the same time, five Turks were arrested for carrying weapons in the street.

Despite the Vali's good intentions and actions, on 30 August a new proclamation appeared on the walls of the Kise-l-Mertaga mosque, situated in a prominent position near the bazaar (and, according to others, also on two additional mosques). It stated that "although the Vali is inclined to protect the Armenians, nevertheless the Muslims must fulfil their duty and punish the infidels."

This proclamation was torn down by the police and delivered to the Vali. (...)

41. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 86–88, December 7, 1896 Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) In addition to the information contained in the secret report of the 16th of last November concerning the actions of Armenians in the environs of Erzurum, I have the honor to report to Your Excellency that Vali Rauf Paşa informed me of the search conducted last week in the villages of the Pasinler kaza: Veveli Baba, Komasor, Elidjakrega, and Yüzveren.

During the inspection of these villages, forty-six persons were arrested, the majority of them inhabitants. Among them, three belonged to the group of individuals who had come from Russia; one proved to be a representative of the revolutionary committee of the Pasin Valley; several others were representatives of Diyadin dere of the same valley; among the arrested were guides and couriers for revolutionary correspondence, including one Muslim, a Terekeme, a refugee from Russia. There were also agitators who had arrived from Russia and a considerable number of members of various committees. Seven or eight others were found to possess weapons bearing Armenian inscriptions declaring that the arms were intended for the liberation of Armenia.

In these same villages fifty-nine rifles, three revolvers, and 960 cartridges were found.

In addition, several manuscripts were discovered, including a treatise on the uprising in Bulgaria and a book containing statistical information on Armenian villages in Asia Minor and the weapons in their possession.

Rauf Paşa expressed to me his particular satisfaction that all the information leading to the above results had been provided to him by Armenians themselves and on their own initiative. According to Rauf Paşa, Armenians entering Turkey from Russia, although Ottoman subjects, crossed the border unarmed and obtained their weapons either near the Turkish frontier in Russian-Armenian villages or from depots, some of which have now been uncovered.

I have the honor to report to Your Excellency that the discovery of a considerable amount of weaponry intended for Armenian revolutionary purposes in the aforementioned four villages, and the arrest of several dozen Armenians who had played various active roles in revolutionary agitation, must deliver a significant blow to this activity in the Pasin Valley, to which the revolutionaries had devoted particular attention owing to the rather large number of Armenian villages there — 10,387 Armenians, according to the records of the Imperial Russian General Consulate.

These successes of the Ottoman administration in Erzurum could not but have a discouraging effect on foreign opinion among the Armenians — something I cannot deny and must affirm in its intensity; it manifests itself through the American missionary Chambers, as the Armenians themselves assert.

I consider it my duty to add that the arrest of several of the most characteristic representatives of the revolutionary committees may lead to the uncovering of the entire system of the revolutionary association not only in the environs of Erzurum but throughout Asia Minor. Among the arrested, according to the Turkish statements, there is

no Russian subject; yet I cannot vouch for the sincerity of this claim, for otherwise it would entail the participation of the Imperial Russian General Consulate in the active investigation. (...)

42. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1633, ll. 5–6, April 1897. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) In addition to my report of the 22nd of last March, I have the honor to inform Your Excellency that during the past two weeks there has been more than one episode of panic among the Armenian population of Erzurum. The Armenians closed their shops and barricaded themselves in their homes, expecting the beginning of massacres.

The vali sent patrols through the city to calm the population, and Ferik Ziya Paşa, the commander of the troops, rode around the city monitoring the maintenance of order. The vali searched among the Armenians for the individuals who were spreading panic; several people were arrested, but the detainees were released the next day, as nothing incriminating was found against them.

In the city, a persistent rumor is circulating that the panic was provoked by a representative of a foreign power.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of last week, from Sütöğ, a village three hours southwest of Erzurum, thirty-four gun barrels without stocks and 1,400 cartridges were brought, having been found buried in the ground there. I examined the weapons: they appear to be an improved version of the Berdan system. At least, the bolt is the same, but the barrel walls are thinner and the bullet's exit point is narrower. The rifle itself is of a more recent caliber.

The rifles and cartridges were brought from Russia. According to the vali, special compartments inside the runners of sledges had been prepared for transporting them. As I mentioned above, the barrels have no stocks, and Rauf Paşa assumes that these were to be manufactured in Erzurum. Some individuals report that the barrels were brought from Kars. The Armenian who transported them over two or three trips has been detained. The sledge and the horse are also in the hands of the authorities; they belong to the committee.

Regarding the report of the 25th (13th) of February, I have the honor to forward to Your Government a copy of my confidential communication to the military governor of Kars, dated 24 February, in which, based on what Vali Rauf Paşa told me, I indicate the location of Armenian arms depots, although I do not know whether anything has been done about this.

Vali Rauf Paşa expressed particular satisfaction that the information about the "thirty-four red barrels" was provided to him by the Armenians themselves, which, in his view, shows that the majority of them do not sympathize with the actions of Armenian agitators.

In connection with this situation, on 1 (14) April, Rauf Paşa summoned influential Muslim and Armenian figures and urged them to live peacefully and amicably. He told the former that the Armenians were entirely loyal to the Muslim government, as demonstrated by their conduct regarding the discovered weapons. He urged the Armenians to have no fear, not to believe the alarming rumors being spread, and to continue their occupations calmly.

I should add that by order of the vali several Muslims without occupation, prone to causing disturbances, were also arrested. (...)

43. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1637, ll. 23–26, January 5, 1901. Aleksandr Mikhailovich Demerik to the Embassy in Constantinople

(...) The approaching end of the Ramadan fast found the local administrative class in a state of deep despondency, for rumors spread throughout the city that this time the treasury would not, contrary to long-standing custom, issue the monthly salary payment due at this season, the sum being counted against its many months of unpaid arrears. The prospect of entering the Bayram festivities in hunger produced among the mass of servants of the state a muted murmur, accompanied by predictions of the imminent bankruptcy of the entire government at the first difficulty, and even malicious wishes for the swift arrival of a foreign power capable of sweeping away the present, all-powerful administration.

These rumors, in the end, did not come true. The defterdar managed to fulfill the traditional obligation, though clearly not without difficulty; in recent times he had denied every request for loans or advances, and in order to avoid petitions had sequestered himself in the vali's office.

More striking still is the fact that government funds in the provincial treasury were depleted, although the authorities, guided by Rauf Paşa, extort from their subjects all they can, not shrinking even from the harshest measures. Among defaulting taxpayers, livestock and even the last household goods are sold at auction, despite the prohibitory provisions of the law; arrears are demanded under the influence of rumors of new Armenian massacres; peasants who

refuse payment are sent to prison or forced to host, at their own expense, a dozen or two creditors or soldiers billeted in their homes.

Such methods, however, cannot rescue the administration from the financial vise tightening upon it, for it is obliged each month to remit large sums to satisfy the incessant demands arriving from the Palace. Reality proves far more unpleasant than the optimistic forecasts in the budget for 1316, which promised an excess of revenue—despite its silence on military expenditures—amounting to 120,000 liras.

It is clear that the draining away of resources from the rural population deprives it of any possibility of gradually recovering from the consequences of the bloody year. The ruin of village households—which has also weakened the paying capacity of the town population—originated specifically in the events of 1895, when thousands of Armenian families fled their province and sought refuge on our territory, inundating Transcaucasia. This enormous loss of laborers—who were also consumers—further diminished the already limited, exclusively agricultural productivity of the vilayet and eventually brought even its sluggish commercial movement to a halt.

To these fundamental causes of economic decline must be added the isolation of the vilayet imposed by the Porte, which deems it politically unreliable and therefore obstructs all external communications, especially by restricting the issuance of passports to Armenians. The cessation of movement for the most enterprising segment of the local population imposed new fetters upon trade and cut off the inflow of money earned in Constantinople and, especially, the Caucasus. I shall pass over other disorders, but I cannot omit the chronic raids and robberies committed by unruly Kurdish tribes, which play no small role in the progressive impoverishment of the population and the deterioration of administration.

Yet it is not only in the economic sphere that the vilayet of Erzurum retrogresses. By the end of the nineteenth century it resembles an abandoned and isolated principality, wrapped in impenetrable darkness and in the tense agitation engendered by the recent regime, under which only the boldest and most ardent of the Kurds feels himself free. The disappointed indifference of the peaceful elements to everything lawful—in matters of daily life—is their revenge for the violent “reforms” in administration, the only visible remnants of which are a few mullah-teachers and voiceless Christian assistants assigned to Muslim officials.

Under such an oppressive order, not even the slightest sign of agitation is visible, nor even the simplest public movement. The so-called Armenian fedayi, those doomed and obstinate men, have long since sunk into torpor; those few who still roam the favorite haunts of Sasun are nothing more than a gathering—politically almost harmless—of various failures, beggared wanderers, fugitives from justice, and other elements alien to lawful life, led by seekers of adventure from whom the villagers, at the prompting of the authorities, shrink as from scarecrows.

On the other hand, no trace of any deliberate, constructive governmental program is visible—unless one counts the continuing petty persecutions of individual Armenians, prompted by sheer habitual suspicion or the desire to ingratiate oneself with influences emanating from the capital.

With the absence of anything else, what remains is merely the chronicle of ordinary brigandage. True, the whole country now lies under deep snow, and the authorities, deprived of coffee and tobacco until the end of Ramadan, are incapable of attending to any administrative affairs. (...)

44. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 53–56, September 21, 1896. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) According to his own account, Rauf Paşa immediately gathered the influential Muslims and imams, made strict representations to them about the necessity of living in peace with the Christians; ordered that sermons be preached on this subject in all mosques, supported by quotations from the Qur’an; and appointed seven men in each Turkish quarter to monitor Muslim sentiment and promptly report unreliable individuals to the vali.

Despite these measures, an increasing desire among the Armenians to depart for Russia was nevertheless observed. This information was gathered by Titular Councillor Belyaev during my trip to Yazığölü.

Thanks to the energetic and conscientious measures of Rauf Paşa, tranquillity in Erzurum had thus far been preserved. Whether it will continue cannot be asserted.

Meanwhile, the vali personally informed me that on the 16th two Armenians had been arrested, and in their apartments weapons were found bearing inscriptions in Armenian: “Armenian Central Society.” The vali was particularly pleased that this information had been provided by the most influential Armenians themselves. On the 19th, he reported that three more Armenians had been arrested.

At the same time, I was told that in the Armenian monastery of Surb Lusavorich, an hour and a half from Erzurum, a meeting of Hnchakists and Droshakists had been held, attended by about twenty persons. No action followed owing to disagreement: the Hnchakists insisted on carrying out a demonstration by killing isolated Turkish sentries in several places; the Droshakists, apparently justly, maintained the uselessness of such crimes, declaring that

they would provoke reprisals and the suffering of many innocent Armenians. According to the informant, these disagreements caused a quarrel between the agitators of the mentioned Armenian societies. It became known that Rauf Paşa had sent men to the monastery to arrest the suspects, but none were found there.

The acts of violence which were contemplated at the meeting cannot be foreseen, and Rauf Paşa may be taken by surprise by killings which the Muslims might carry out in retaliation for the actions of the Armenians. For this reason, as noted above, I did not dare assert that the conscientious administration of the present vali will succeed in preserving tranquillity in Erzurum.

Considering that previous attempts by the Hnchakists to incite the Armenians against the Ottoman government—except perhaps in Zeitun—resulted only in their expulsion and loss of property, and have demonstrated to the educated world their complete lack of courage, I allowed myself, for the benefit of the Armenian majority, to communicate to the vali the latest information about the intentions of the Hnchakists.

It turned out that most of this information was already known to the paşa, and that the inspection of the monastery, which I mentioned above, had been carried out—albeit belatedly—in consequence of the information he had received. Rauf Paşa expressed dissatisfaction with the conduct of the Armenian policemen. He took under consideration the question of the agitators who remain at large in Erzurum and its environs.

In conclusion to the present report, I have the honor to request Your Excellency, bearing in mind last year's losses of the Armenian population in Asia Minor, to allow me, by telegraph, to urge the leading Armenians here to watch suspicious persons among them and to report such individuals to Rauf Paşa. (...)

45. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1633, ll. 2–4, March 22, 1897. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Since my last report on the condition of Erzurum and its environs, tranquillity has continued in the vilayet thanks to the diligent administration of Vali Rauf Paşa. When patrol detachments appear in the streets from time to time, this is done as a precautionary or protective measure whenever disturbing rumors begin to circulate in the city about disorders said to have occurred in one or another part of Turkey.

These measures may perhaps provoke part of the Muslim population—always ready to appropriate the property of others, especially of Christians—to post inscriptions on the walls of mosques calling the vali a “giaour” for his solicitude toward the Christians.

Such Muslims are known here under the name *dadaş*. Possessing no occupation, they spend their time gambling or drinking. They include not only young men: among them are Turks of forty years of age. They usually go armed—though their weapons are concealed under their clothing—and are always ready to take part in acts of plunder.

Despite the vali's concern for the population, the devastation inflicted upon the Armenians in 1895 and partly in early 1896 led, as is well known, to the migration of rural inhabitants into Transcaucasia and to the departure from Erzurum—partly to Russia, partly to Western Europe—of many prosperous Armenian families. This has caused stagnation in trade, which still cannot return to normal. It should also be noted that the extreme impoverishment of the remaining villagers resulted in their failure to pay various taxes in full, which in turn produced longer intervals than before in the payment of salaries to officials. Even military contractors could only be partially satisfied by small payments toward the sums owed to them by the government—funds which the latter had borrowed from the Agricultural Bank.

All this keeps the population—especially the Muslims—in a state of tension, heightened by letters arriving from Constantinople, where, according to correspondents, a Young Turk movement is beginning to take shape.

Finally, in early December, the authorities in Erzurum began to take certain suspicious measures, including the dispatch of persons into exile. These included a physician and a senior officer. During the past month, particular sensation was caused by the arrest, on orders telegraphed from Constantinople, of Kerim Bey, the *ma'arif müdürü* (director of education) of Erzurum; together with him was detained the Armenian cashier of the Ottoman Bank, *Setrak Pastırmacıyan*.

Kerim Bey is accused of corresponding with Young Turks residing in Paris; these letters were allegedly sent to the address of *Pastırmacıyan* for delivery to him. It was impossible to learn more detailed reasons for the arrest of these two individuals, or of others, from the Turks themselves, as they speak about it very reluctantly and even attempt to conceal the very fact of the arrest.

According to rumor, Vali Rauf Paşa is making strong efforts to secure the release of both these men and is nearly prepared to vouch for their innocence.

In addition to Kerim Bey and *Pastırmacıyan*, several others were arrested, according to the vali himself, including infantry lieutenant *Muhtar Efendi* and two or three other officers. It is said that Young Turk influence is far

more widespread among the officers in Erzincan than in Erzurum, and that even the greater part of the military there belongs to this party.

One must also note the anxiety in the population caused by the present state of relations between the Ottoman Empire and Greece.

Although no fighting with the Greeks is encountered in Rumelia, the population has been greatly disturbed by newspaper reports claiming that the senior dragoman of the Russian Imperial Embassy informed the Sultan that, in the event of war between Turkey and Greece, His Imperial Majesty would dispatch troops to occupy Asia Minor in order to prevent a renewed outbreak of massacres of Christians. The population is also troubled by the severe shortage of money caused by the intensified mobilization of troops. (...)

46. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1634, ll. 7–10, February 7, 1898. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) In addition to the secret telegram of 5 February (No. 52), I have the honor to bring to Your Excellency's attention that the present agitation of the Muslims was provoked by the second police commissioner in Erzurum, Tigran Kevorkian, who, having come drunk into a bathhouse on 25 January, allowed himself, during a loud conversation with one of the bath attendants, to speak abusively about the religion of Muhammad. Of course, this was immediately reported to the authorities, and Tigran Efendi, by order of the vali, was imprisoned pending trial.

This, it would seem, was all that could reasonably be required in regard to a person who had allowed himself to express contempt toward the faith of Muhammad. But the opponents of the Governor-General, Rauf Paşa—of whom there are many here, and among whom are found above all the influential persons of the city previously removed from service for unlawful performance of their duties—treated the matter otherwise. They wished to exaggerate it, to inflame the Muslims against the Armenians, declaring that “Tigran Efendi expressed not his personal opinion, but that of all his co-religionists, who hold the Prophet in contempt, and therefore they must be taught another lesson.” By such statements they wished to produce in the city a disturbance similar to that which took place in October 1895 and as a result of which Vali Rauf Paşa removed from office, as were the valis of Sivas and Adana.

Among the more prominent persons of this sort are the wealthy Şerif, member of the Court of Appeal; his brother Ragıb Bey, former kaymakam of Pasinler; Galib Bey, former judicial investigator; and Yusuf Efendi, former secretary of the Commercial Court. Besides them, there are many officials whom Rauf Paşa keeps in service but who are under surveillance pending proof of the bribery of which the very persons I have permitted myself to mention accuse them.

Turning to the military opponents of the Paşa, who likewise have taken part in the new agitation against the Armenians, I must first mention that I have repeatedly taken the liberty of reporting to the Imperial Embassy the disagreements between the müşir of the Fourth Army Corps, Zeki Paşa, and the present vali of Erzurum, although they are related by marriage. I last had occasion to speak of this in my report of 21 June 1897.

These disagreements are explained partly by the known partiality of Zeki Paşa in favor of the Kurds, well known for their predatory habits; and partly by the fact that Rauf Paşa, especially after the division of the Rum vilayet, cannot satisfy the monetary demands of the Fourth Army Corps without selling, at public auction, the last possessions of village households in order to collect from them the arrears due. These disagreements are here an open fact, and all military officers wishing to please Zeki Paşa seize every opportunity either to inform him or to undertake something against Rauf Paşa. Such a situation renders the vali's service in Erzurum unbearable, and several months ago he petitioned the Sultan to be transferred to Brusa, a second-class vilayet, while the Erzurum vilayet is of the first class.

Two months ago, the commander of the local 7th Division, Mehmed Ali Paşa Rizvanbeković, personally expressed to me his displeasure with Rauf Paşa for failure to pay money owed to his division. For, as far as I know, the vali gave, on the eve of Bayram, 2,500 liras to some of the military, while giving nothing toward the salaries of the civil servants, and has himself not received anything for four months.

These circumstances explain, on the one hand, the participation of the military officers in drawing up the mazbata, a collective petition concerning the second commissioner Tigran Efendi, who, as I mentioned at the beginning of this report, had insulted in a public place the faith of Muhammad; and, on the other hand, the participation in this matter of the local ferik, who, according to information I have obtained, asked the authors of the mazbata to give him an official copy of it, undoubtedly with the intention of sending it to the commander of the Fourth Army Corps.

In this action I cannot but see the interference of Mehmed Ali Paşa in civil administration. In any case, it is reliably known to me that up to 5 February the riff-raff are counting on his support in carrying out the plundering and killing of Armenians, to which the Muslim population is being incited by the above-mentioned civilian agitators, who even scatter letters of this sort in the mosques.

These are the reasons why I allowed myself to address to Your Excellency the telegram of 5 February, petitioning that measures be taken in the Seraskerat to oblige the local military paşa to act in concert with the Governor-General. My English and French colleagues also sent, on 5/17 February, telegrams to their embassies with the same request.

In conclusion, I must mention that by the evening of 5 February the vali, having evidently received information that the population at large approved his actions against Commissioner Tigran Efendi, showed greater confidence regarding the preservation of order in the city during Bayram. He sent a telegram on the state of affairs to the Grand Vizier, and after Bayram intends to petition the Sultan for the exile of several troublesome individuals.

I need hardly say that the Armenians, despite their confidence in the energy and justice of Rauf Paşa—whom some Muslim fanatics call the giaour-Muslim—are extremely alarmed by all the above-described events. (...)

47. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1632, ll. 70–71, November 2, 1896. Pyotr Vasilievich Maximov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Thus, thanks to the energy of the honest and well-educated Reuf Pasha, as well as to the efforts of the new commander of the local garrison, it may be stated with some confidence that tranquility in Erzurum will not be disturbed unless unforeseen circumstances arise.

This confidence is strengthened by the fact that the police are carrying out their duties with great diligence. Unfortunately, no equally encouraging news can be given about the financial situation of the region, where many villages have been devastated or left without inhabitants due to the expulsion of Armenians.

The statements periodically published in the Constantinople newspapers — claiming that Christians are not paying taxes because they are hiding revolutionary agitators — have no foundation whatsoever in relation to the Erzurum vilayet.

Some sums did enter the treasury after the harvest, but they were far from sufficient even for the maintenance of the 4th Army Corps, whose commander, Zeki Pasha, continually presses the Vali with demands; nor sufficient for paying the salaries of the lower-ranking officials of the vilayet.

Reuf Pasha, making every effort to ensure the proper payment of zaptiye wages, has taken nothing for himself from the treasury for several months. His muavin is in the same situation. (...)

48. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1637, ll. 109–110, September 25, 1901 Aleksandr Mikhailovich Demerik to the Embassy in Constantinople:

After persistent and prolonged requests, Vali Rauf Pasha has at last obtained his recall from his post here, though with the simultaneous granting of retirement. Such an outcome of his petitions he can hardly have anticipated, for he allowed himself scarcely disguised satisfaction at the prospect of withdrawing into private life. According to private information, he recently brought down upon himself the displeasure of the Palace in the following manner: on the recent anniversary of the Sultan's accession to the throne, he invited here the divisional commander Mehmed Ali Pasha, with whom he has long been on the worst of terms, to a ceremonial banquet, and, absenting himself from the table in the presence of the consular corps, thereby publicly displaying the discord between civil and military authorities. He insisted on this inappropriate demonstration despite the remonstrances of Sultan's aide-de-camp Fuad Bey, who then apparently reported the matter to Yıldız Kiosk.

Rauf Pasha's departure is not a great loss for the vilayet of Erzurum. He governed it for nearly three years, and there is little to recall in the way of positive accomplishments. He began his service here rather well, by restraining venal officials and voicing an intention to improve the administrative staff, but he failed to carry this through.

In all other administrative tasks he showed weakness—particularly in safeguarding public security and protecting the peaceful population from Kurdish brigandage. Lacking the initiative and means for independent suppression of brigandage—which, as is well known, yields little fruit—he vainly sought cooperation from the military authorities; in the end he conducted a fruitless struggle with the “local commander,” and before Zeki Pasha, the patron of the Kurds, he consistently yielded, failing to defend properly the interests of general administration against the indulgences accorded to the Kurdish-Hamidiye policy.

The consciousness of his own powerlessness eventually inspired in him such aversion to administrative affairs that during the past year and a half he virtually abandoned them altogether, entrusting everything to his mektubci, who, as a temporary functionary, gathered all business into his own hands and brought every official under his often far-from-disinterested influence.

Rauf Pasha's arrival from his previous post in Bitlis coincided in time with the days of the Armenian massacres in Erzurum. He took no direct part in those events—which were directed by the chief commissioner, Shakir Pasha—and subsequently in Armenian affairs he remained bound by the instructions of the central government. For his own part, he did little to conciliate the Armenians with the regime, although he did not initiate persecutions against them. Personally, he bore no overt hatred toward them, but he did not conceal his distrust and contempt, maintaining relations only with soldiers and officials drawn from among them and belonging to the newly emergent educated class.

By personal order of the Sultan, Rauf Pasha's successor is to be Nazim Bey, Vali of Mosul, who has been instructed to arrive here as soon as possible.

49. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, ll. 10–16, February 10, 1906. Nikolai Aleksandrovich Scriabin to the Embassy in Constantinople:

In view of the continuing preparations of the Armenians, as evidenced by the secret transport of dynamite, bombs, and other revolutionary devices into the eastern vilayets of Asia Minor; in view of the ever-increasing abuses of the Turkish administration—an administration without finances and without justice, which even the phlegmatic Muslim population now finds difficult to endure; in view of the continued encouragement of the Kurds by the Turkish government, which, conscious of its weakness, places its hopes in these undisciplined bands whose robberies and plundering will provide many new pretexts for European intervention; and in view of many other more or less significant reasons, it must be expected that in the near future serious political disturbances will arise in the eastern provinces of Asia Minor on the basis of the glaring disorders of Turkish administration. These disturbances will inevitably bring to the forefront both the Kurdish and the Armenian questions—issues of primary importance for us.

It is evident that in such a case Your High Excellency will place demands upon the consular institutions here that would make it possible to follow these disturbances with precision, as well as to observe the development of the Kurdish and Armenian questions as events unfold.

Under the present organization of the consular establishments existing here—the General Consulate in Erzurum, the Vice-Consulate in Van, and the Consulate in Bitlis—none of them will be in a position to satisfy the requirements that may be imposed upon them.

This is made clear above all by the fact that the anticipated political disturbances will not arise from local causes within any single vilayet, but from causes common to the entire region bordering Russia—a region whose love of freedom has already shaken even the neighboring Muslim population from its formerly fatalistic submission to fate. It is evident that the unrest gradually affecting them will assume such a general character that a proper assessment will be possible only when the separate facts are illuminated through attentive and broad observation of the entire region.

Furthermore, the Armenian and Kurdish questions that are emerging alongside these disturbances will extend beyond the vilayets bordering Russia to include the vilayets of Van, Bitlis, and Diyarbakır. The remaining Asia Minor vilayets, even if they are also affected by political movements, must nevertheless be observed separately from the above-mentioned region, since the character of the political disturbances there will be determined specifically by the Kurdish question, which has nothing in common with the other vilayets.

It is therefore evident that, for a reliable understanding and assessment of the movements among Armenians and Kurds, careful observation of the entire region is necessary, since—even if the movement appears spontaneous—the individual events and factors within it acquire meaning only in relation to the broader course of developments.

At least in practice the English have understood the role of their observation posts in the region of the Armenian and Kurdish questions in precisely this way. In Erzurum the English consulate is even called the “Consulate of Kurdistan,” and under its authority are the vice-consulates in Diyarbakır, Bitlis, and Van.

This subordination is expressed first of all in the fact that the political consular reports from Diyarbakır, Bitlis, and Van are sent to Erzurum under open seals. The consul in Erzurum, after acquainting himself with them, forwards them with the next mail to the embassy in Constantinople, either immediately or—if verification is necessary—supplementing the reports of his subordinate consuls with explanations and comments in a separate report to the ambassador in Constantinople. The reports are sent under open seals merely for the sake of speed; copies are later forwarded to the embassy through the usual channels.

In our case, however, the General Consulate in Erzurum knows virtually nothing of what is happening in the vilayets that constitute for us a single, indivisible political region—and likewise a single and indivisible military region. As a result, the Consul General in Erzurum, who is usually appointed to this position after many years of consular service, is unable to employ his professional experience for the benefit of the service and is deprived of the opportunity to take an active part even in analyzing the raw information submitted to Your High Excellency by the consulates of the region.

Moreover, being unable to verify information from the region about particular developments—as happened, for example, with the Armenian movement of 1903–1904—the General Consulate not only cannot present Your High Excellency with an assessment of the local significance of particular events related to the movement, but is often compelled simply to remain silent about them, since taken separately many such facts have no meaning and acquire significance only within the broader course of the movement, which at that moment remains unknown to the General Consulate.

Secondly, the subordination of the English vice-consuls in Van, Bitlis, and Diyarbakır to the English consulate in Erzurum is also expressed in the guidance that the latter provides to the former on all matters where unity of action and policy is of importance.

50. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, l. 68, March 17 and 24, 1906. Nikolai Aleksandrovich Scriabin to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) The dissatisfaction that arose among the Muslims of the vilayets bordering Russia toward the authorities on account of excessive taxation has intensified even further in recent times as a result of the Ottoman government's prohibition on issuing passports for departure to Russia for seasonal labor. This measure deprived several thousand Muslims of all means of subsistence.

To the unrest among the workers there was also added the merchant class, likewise dissatisfied with the actions of the Turkish authorities, which took the movement into its own hands; the society *Can Verir*, created by the merchants, came to include the majority of the inhabitants of Erzurum.

The movement, which had become general in character, first manifested itself on 5 March, when a large crowd of Muslims organized a demonstration in front of the residence of the vali. On the following day an even larger crowd gathered before the *konak*; here the demonstrators demanded from the vali, Nazım Paşa, the removal of the chairman of the municipality, to which the vali immediately expressed his consent. Moreover, he promised to petition the Sublime Porte for the remission of certain taxes imposed on the population.

Despite these promises made by Nazım Paşa, the unrest not only failed to subside but, on the contrary, increased further, as a result of the warning issued by the vali concerning the use of military force in the event of a repetition of street demonstrations. The assembly of *Can Verir* unanimously resolved to petition the Porte for the immediate recall of Nazım Paşa from Erzurum. In addition, the said assembly decided to request the intercession of the Russian ambassador in Constantinople before the Sultan on behalf of the Muslims of Erzurum.

In accordance with the adopted resolution, an enormous crowd of over 20,000 persons surrounded the telegraph office, into which six individuals from among the leaders of the movement entered. As a result of their insistent requests, the Sultan finally took to the telegraph apparatus, and all of the people's complaints, as well as the urgent request for the removal of Nazım Paşa, were conveyed to him. The Sultan promised to communicate his decision within a quarter of an hour.

The Sultan's reply, however, followed only on the following morning, that is, on 16 March, when the Secretary of His Majesty telegraphed that Müşir Zeki Paşa had been appointed to resolve the misunderstandings.

This appointment, which failed to inspire confidence among the populace, could not contribute to the calming of minds; it was decided to continue insisting before the Porte on the fulfillment of the stated demands. On 16 March the city passed entirely into the hands of the demonstrators; nevertheless, order and calm were not violated anywhere, thanks to the remarkable discipline among the Muslims. On 18 March Zeki Paşa informed by telegraph of his arrival in Erzurum and of his temporary assumption of the office of vali.

However, on the very next morning Nazım Paşa was informed by the Porte that he was to remain in the post of vali of Erzurum, as a result of which the unrest among the Muslims, which had begun to subside, assumed an even more threatening character. Fortunately, further disorders were halted as a result of telegraphic notifications received from the Porte on 22 March concerning the transfer of Nazım Paşa to another post and the dispatch to Erzurum of officials for the investigation of the matter. (...)

51. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, ll. 102–103, April 8, 1906. Copy of a secret report from the Commander of the Kars Brigade of the Separate Border Guard Corps to the Chief of the 6th District of the same Corps:

According to reports from the commander of the Karaorgan detachment of the brigade under my command, dated 22 and 28 March of the present year (Nos. 4 and 10), disturbances began in early March in many places in Asiatic

Turkey. In the city of Erzurum and in the vicinity of the villages of Hasankale, Açıveren, and other places, these disturbances—directed exclusively against the authorities—assumed a particularly acute character.

Between 5 and 10 March a popular assembly was convened in the village of Açıveren, at which deputies were elected and sent by the population to Erzurum to petition the governor to alleviate their difficult situation caused by a new poll tax. In order to increase its revenues, the Turkish government had imposed a tax of 25 kopecks per person on the entire population without exception, and in addition 23 kopecks for each window in a residential dwelling. This same measure provoked unrest everywhere.

Under the leadership of deputies elected from various villages, a large crowd appeared at the residence of the vali of Erzurum (Nazım Paşa) and demanded that the vali send a telegram to the Sultan in Constantinople describing the desperate condition of his loyal subjects. When the governor refused to send the telegram, the enraged crowd went to the post office and forced the head of the office to dispatch the telegram to the Sultan. The following day the people again gathered near the vali's residence in the hope of receiving a reply to the telegram that had been sent, but no reply was received. The assembled crowd then openly threatened the use of force and demanded the dismissal of administrative officials and certain municipal employees known for bribery. This demand was immediately fulfilled.

Several days later, widows of military and civil officials appeared before the vali demanding the payment of pensions that had long gone unpaid. Owing to the lack of funds, the vali was forced to refuse their request and, in order not to be subjected to insults directed against himself and the government, withdrew. The next day the crowd again gathered at the telegraph office and once more sent a telegram to the Sultan, but again no reply followed. By promising to fulfill their demands, the governor managed to calm the crowd somewhat, which had threatened strikes and destruction. However, when these promises were not carried out, the situation took such a turn that the vali was forced to leave his post secretly. Until he departed from Erzurum, all commercial and government institutions remained closed, a situation that lasted twelve days. According to other reports, the vali was allegedly wounded and his son killed.

At present Bekri Paşa has been appointed to the vacated post of vali of Erzurum. According to all available information, the troops evidently sympathize with this movement, since the authorities' attempts to suppress the unrest by force of arms were not always successful. In many cases the troops sided with the protesters against excessive taxation and official bribery. In the future—and in all probability very soon—major events should be expected in Turkey, since the population is so impoverished that it is incapable of meeting the government's demands for the payment of numerous taxes.

The discharge into the reserve of soldiers of the class of 1315 (1899) is proceeding as scheduled. This discharge, undesirable for the Turkish government, was caused by numerous cases of soldiers refusing to continue service after completing the required term.

In the village of Ketak (opposite Karaorgan), a company of the 4th Battalion of the 27th Infantry Regiment assembled in the courtyard before the barracks and, shouting, summoned the commander to explain the delay in their discharge. Soldiers already transferred to the reserve demanded payment of money owed to them and other allowances. Their demands were ultimately satisfied by the battalion commander. Officers in such cases remain inactive partly because their intervention would be useless, and partly because many younger officers, in their views, are Young Turks and sympathize with such movements. The recruitment of new conscripts is proceeding with certain difficulties as a result of the unrest.

The disturbances described above in regions bordering our territory are evidently spreading to our Kurds, since there is reason to suppose that our Kurds, together with Turkish Kurds, are planning raids on border settlements for the purpose of plunder. Armenians in Turkey, as partly also on our side of the border, are maintaining complete detachment from these events. For this reason relations between the Turkish authorities and the Armenians are presently very good, although a historical mutual distrust still permeates these relations.

52. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, November 30, 1906. Copy of a report of the Headquarters of the Caucasian Military District, Intelligence Section

(...) In addition to the information previously submitted to Your Excellency concerning the popular disturbances that took place in the city of Erzurum in October of this year, Court Councilor Dobyshinskii reports, in his communication of 24 November, the following.

On 15 November, the new vali, Nuri Bey, summoned the mufti and proposed that he persuade the population to pay the new personal tax. To this proposal the mufti replied that this matter did not concern him and that the vali might address the population directly on this issue. After this, the vali summoned several influential members of the Muslim committee and conveyed to them the order concerning payment of the tax; the members of the committee, insofar as is known, responded with refusal, citing the complete ruin of the population.

Following these negotiations, a prolonged conference took place between the vali and the fortress commandant, Abukem Pasha, the results of which remain for the time being unknown; only on 18 November was an order announced by the vali that after nine o'clock in the evening all coffeehouses in the city were to be closed and the population was to disperse to their homes. It is evident that this order resulted from frequent nocturnal gatherings and meetings of Muslims concerning the present state of affairs.

As yet, no measures have been taken to investigate the major disorders that occurred in Erzurum on 10 October, nor to punish those responsible for the killing of police commissioners.

Transferred from Erzurum for inactivity during the disorders were: the former commander of the 13th Nizam Brigade, Atif Pasha—to Hozat, with appointment as commander of the 38th Nizam Brigade; and the commander of the 14th Nizam Brigade, Neshad Pasha—to Harput, with appointment as commander of the 25th Reserve Infantry Brigade. They departed for their new posts, the former on the 16th and the latter on the 19th of November.

As chief border commissioner, in place of Abukem-Ahmed Pasha, Colonel of the General Staff Gassan-Fakhri Bey has been appointed—a close relative of the müşir of the 17th Corps, Zeki Pasha. (...)

53. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1642, l. 230, December 12, 1906. Copy of a report of the Headquarters of the Caucasian Military District, Intelligence Department, to the Chief of the General Staff

(...) In addition to the information previously submitted to Your Excellency concerning the popular disturbances that took place in October of the current year in the city of Erzurum, Court Councillor Dobyshinskii reports, in his communication of the 4th of the present December, the following:

In the final days of November, the vali, Nuri Bey, again summoned several members of the local Muslim committee and proposed that they submit a petition in the name of the Muslims of the city, setting forth the reasons for the population's non-payment of the personal tax and its material needs, for the purpose of presenting this petition to the Sultan. The vali further demanded that this petition also include an expression of the people's repentance for the acts of violence and the killings committed in October.

The petition was drawn up and set out the severe economic condition of the population, which has been utterly ruined and therefore is unable to pay the new tax; however, the population, under the leadership of the members of the committee, refused to include in the petition an expression of repentance regarding the events that took place in October, not considering themselves guilty in these matters. It is not yet known what response the government will give to the said petition.

According to available information, in recent times a special secret revolutionary committee has been formed in Erzurum from among Muslims who are in contact with representatives of the Young Turks in Paris, from where brochures of anti-government content are being obtained by clandestine means for distribution among the populace. (...)

54. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1643, ll. 84–87. March 27, 1907. Nikolai Aleksandrovich Scriabin to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) The remission of taxes, as well as the amnesty granted to those guilty of revolutionary activity and to the murderers of police commissioners, although they appear to have contributed to the restoration of calm among the Muslim population of Erzurum, in reality merely cast seeds onto fertile ground for future popular demands and disturbances. The sense of satisfaction derived from the sultan's favors manifested itself among the Muslims of Erzurum in a form somewhat different from that which the Ottoman government had presumably expected.

Since that time, the nocturnal secret gatherings and consultations of the leaders of the former movement not only did not cease, but were joined by elements from among the wealthy Muslims who had hitherto been justly regarded as loyal. At these meetings it was unanimously and unanimously acknowledged that the sultan feared the people, and that the most advantageous moment had arrived for the people to realize their aspirations. It was likewise unanimously resolved to petition the sultan for the abolition of the privileges granted to the Kurds through the formation of the Hamidiye regiments.

According to the views expressed at these meetings, it was disgraceful for Ottoman Muslims to abase themselves before a wild people of low origin, as in fact occurred not only in the everyday life of ordinary people, but also within the highest military estate, where Ottoman officers educated in military academies were compelled to bow before animal-like Kurds, elevated to the rank of pashas for reasons unknown.

However, unanimity and consensus were broken when further demands to the government were formulated. One very small group, infected with Young Turk ideas and seduced by events in Persia, expressed the desire to demand

from the sultan the convocation of a meclis, that is, popular representation in Constantinople. Another group, incomparably larger, attributing all Muslim misfortunes to deviation from the faith, resolved to demand from the caliph-prophet a return to former strict religious norms and, as an initial step, the abolition throughout the vilayet of all giaour courts of various instances, replacing them with a single righteous court — the sharia court. (...)

55. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1643, ll. 30–31, February 24, 1907. Nikolai Aleksandrovich Scriabin to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) A large number of petitions from Armenians requesting acceptance into Russian subjecthood continue to arrive at the Russian General Consulate, owing to the oppression they are suffering at the hands of the local authorities. These petitions, however, naturally remain without any consequence at the Consulate. Meanwhile, the Armenians consider such requests to be entirely lawful; they fail to take into account the fact that the irade of 1906, on the basis of which Armenians are permitted to change their subjecthood, makes such a change conditional upon obligatory expulsion from the territory of Turkey.

When the law of 1906 was promulgated, the Ottoman government had in mind the encouragement of Armenian emigration to other countries, with the aim, insofar as possible, of replacing them with Muslim migrants from Transcaucasia.

With the same objective, the Turkish authorities prudently issue Armenians passports for departure abroad, bearing the notation: “without the right of return to Turkey.”

Not content with these measures, the Porte has begun expelling entire groups of the most troublesome Armenians into Russian territory. For this reason, our General Consul in Erzurum already found it necessary in 1905 to draw the attention of the Russian border authorities to the need to prevent the crossing of Armenians who were not provided with passports bearing a consular visa.

Attempts by the former vali, Nazim Pasha, to insist on the admission of all Ottoman Armenians across the Russian border were unsuccessful. At the end of February of this year, a new attempt in this direction was made by the new vali, Nuri Bey; through a trusted intermediary he informed D. S. Scriabin that the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs had allegedly promised the Turkish ambassador in St. Petersburg to issue an order permitting the passage of all Armenians expelled by the Porte across the Russian border.

In view of the obvious implausibility of this claim, D. S. Scriabin replied that he had received no instructions whatsoever on this matter; at the same time, the Russian consul reiterated to our border authorities the proposal he had made in 1905 regarding the requirement of visas on Armenian passports.

According to rumors circulating in the vilayet, Nuri Bey’s desire to remove as many Armenians as possible from the vilayet is explained by his wish to gain popularity among Muslim revolutionaries, by promising to improve their welfare at the expense of the immovable property of the expelled Armenians.

It would appear that the new vali has already succeeded in winning the sympathies of Muslim revolutionaries, evidence of which, in D. S. Scriabin’s opinion, is the fact that the recent arrest in Erzurum of the most prominent member of the revolutionary organization, Seidha Haji Serdar, did not provoke any protests whatsoever on the part of his supporters. (...)

56. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1643, ll. 147–149, April 28/May 11, 1907. Dispatch of Ivan Alekseevich Zinoviev to the First Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

(...) I have had the honor to receive your letters of 4 and 14 April, Nos. 344 and 376, by which Your Excellency was pleased to inform me of the complaints submitted to you, through the Turkish Ambassador in St. Petersburg, by the Ottoman Government against our General Consul in Erzurum, D. S. Scriabin, who is alleged to have encouraged revolutionary activity among the Armenian population of the Erzurum vilayet, as well as of the desire expressed by the said Government that this agent be transferred to another post. In recent times, the Grand Vizier has repeatedly approached me concerning matters relating to our General Consulate in Erzurum; however, his complaints were directed not against Mr. Scriabin, but against certain employees of the Consulate—namely, one of the kavasses and two couriers of Armenian origin.

I have already had the honor of informing Your Excellency by telegram of 18 April / 1 May that the accusations brought by the Erzurum authorities against Mr. Scriabin appear to them to be unproven slander, and I now consider it my duty to draw your attention to the circumstances that have led me to this conclusion. The revolutionary movement that arose in the Caucasus manifested itself last year in the Erzurum vilayet, where a committee composed of various strata of the Muslim population was formed under the name “Dzhan-Verir.” This committee promptly

entered into struggle with the local authorities and the Ottoman Government, with the aim of putting an end to administrative abuses and securing the abolition of burdensome taxes that were ruining the population. Around this committee rallied the majority of the population, and its propaganda even penetrated the ranks of the Turkish army.

Seeking a means to put an end to this movement, the Sultan was compelled, in deference to the committee, to agree to the replacement of the Erzurum vali, Nazim Pasha. The commission dispatched thereafter from Constantinople to investigate the causes of the unrest attempted to attribute it to intrigues by local Armenians, but failed to do so, since all Muslims questioned individually by the commission unanimously declared that they had acted entirely independently and were guided solely by the conviction that it was necessary to defend their oppressed co-religionists.

In October of last year, orders were received from Constantinople to arrest and exile from Erzurum the Mufti and five members of the Muslim committee as instigators of the movement. This order provoked major disturbances in the city. After killing the chief of police and brutally murdering his son and the police commissioner Galib Bey, the enraged crowd surrounded the mosque in which the new vali, Ata Bey, had been forcibly confined, and restored his freedom only after envoys sent by the committee deliberately returned the Mufti.

The commanders of the local troops took no measures to suppress or limit the disorders, under the pretext that they had not been ordered to fire upon the population so long as it did not threaten the troops. The disorders passed without punishment, which served to embolden the committee. It subsequently addressed proclamations to both the troops and the population, declaring its firm intention to continue caring for the improvement of their condition. These proclamations were everywhere met with sympathy.

Having become convinced of the impossibility of halting the popular movement, the Sultan decided at the beginning of last February to abolish the personal tax and the tax on large livestock, the burden of which had long been the subject of complaints by the population. This measure had a calming effect, but all efforts by Vali Nuri Bey to induce the Muslims to solemnly express gratitude to the Sultan for His mercy proved futile.

There can be no doubt that the disturbances in Erzurum, which undermined the Sultan's spiritual authority in the eyes of the Muslims, deeply wounded his pride. In order to divert attention from these recent lamentable events, the Erzurum authorities—most likely acting on instructions received from Constantinople—resolved to resort to a method they had often employed in the past: namely, the incitement of Muslims against Armenians, upon whom they placed the blame by accusing them of revolutionary intrigues.

These incitements, together with the relentless severity with which arrears and taxes began to be collected from Armenians, drove the Armenian population to despair. From several districts, Armenian delegations appeared before Vali Nuri Bey declaring that their fellow villagers wished to convert to Islam, while in other localities Armenians announced their intention to adopt Orthodoxy and resettle in Russia.

At the same time, Armenian delegations began appearing almost daily at our General Consulate in Erzurum, petitioning for permission to resettle within our borders—a request which D. S. Scriabin was compelled categorically to refuse. It is more than likely that all these phenomena arose as a result of incitement by agents of the local administration, aimed at compromising our General Consul and shifting onto him responsibility for the allegedly anti-government movement manifested among the Armenian population.

As I have already mentioned above, the Turkish ministers have brought no accusations against Mr. Scriabin, and, as I have once again become convinced from my discussions with the Grand Vizier after receipt of Your Excellency's letter of 14 April No. 376, the Porte is unable to produce even a single fact that could serve to substantiate the complaint transmitted to you through the Turkish Ambassador concerning Mr. Scriabin's alleged involvement in revolutionary activity among the Armenian population of the Erzurum vilayet.

I will say more: even the accusations brought against employees of the General Consulate, suspected of facilitating contacts between revolutionaries and transmitting their secret correspondence, have proved to be entirely without foundation. (...)

57. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1644, l. 319, December 2/19/30, 1907. Nikolai Aleksandrovich Scriabin to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Investigations into the case of the anti-government movement in Erzurum continue to be carried out with the same degree of severity as before. One of the leaders, the lawyer Seyfullah Efendi, under torture, revealed the entire organization of the conspiracy and identified the members of the secret committee, among whom were many wealthy merchants. Owing to these same testimonies, the method by which foreign correspondence was delivered—transported to Erzurum for the committee by a cavalry officer—was also uncovered. This latter testimony officially removes from Russian postal couriers the accusation, previously raised by the Ottoman authorities, of transporting revolutionary mail.

Under this pretext, the local police conducted a series of searches of Russian consular couriers, as well as of Russian subjects. At the same time, political exiles sent to Trabzon (Trebizond) were returned from there to the Erzurum district, and were conveyed to villages and settled there with the assistance of the local authorities.

In view of the fact that persistent rumors of pogroms and massacres were circulating among the Armenians, the government on 20 November appointed Hacı [official] to the Bayezid sanjak, and information was received indicating that calm among the population of the IV Corps district was being maintained solely by the threat of a possible crossing of the Caucasian border by Turkey in the event of renewed disturbances. (...)

58. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 50–52, November 17, 1910. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Shtritter to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Sensational rumors about a war with Russia are being spread by the local club “Ittihad ve Terakki.” The possibility of such a war is explained by what they claim is Russia’s constant desire to cause difficulties for Turkey.

For example, it is said that Russia opposes the construction of automobile roads by the French because Abdul Hamid allegedly sold the concessions for building roads to the Russians. To this they also add the initial difficulties encountered by the Turkish government in securing foreign loans. These rumors are partly reinforced by an order received from Constantinople to place all the fortifications of the Erzurum fortress on immediate combat readiness. A special commission is to be sent from Constantinople to inspect the works, and Turkish troop concentrations on the Russian border are also being increased.

One of the prominent representatives of the “Ittihad ve Terakki” society, the local inspector of the Dette Publique, Nazim Bey, who is currently in Salonika to discuss and develop certain matters connected with the society, has collected 80 Turkish liras for the newly opened school of the society in Erzurum, for which he received a telegram of thanks from the local representatives. The local representatives are also working toward the opening of their own printing press, and for this purpose they have begun a wide subscription campaign throughout the vilayet. If the funds collected prove sufficient, the society also intends to open schools in the districts under the name “Meşrutiyet” (“Constitution”).

The printing press and the newspapers issued by it are expected to have a rather liberal orientation. According to reports, these newspapers will criticize the improper actions of the Vali, various judicial institutions, and similar authorities. Rumor has it that the Vali, having become acquainted with this extensive program, was greatly angered, and his relations with the society—particularly with its influential member, the former revolutionary Hacı Akif—have deteriorated.

Following the example of Ittihad ve Terakki, the Dashnak Party has opened a subscription campaign to develop its own printing press called “Arach.” The Dashnak Party, which has allied itself with the Turkish society Ittihad ve Terakki, is in conflict with the party that considers itself purely Armenian—the Hunchakians. On 14 November, a joint meeting of these parties took place. Speakers from the opposing sides defended their respective platforms. The Dashnaks argued for the usefulness of unity with the Turks through the society Ittihad ve Terakki, declaring that they had armed bands ready to defend the constitution. The Hunchakians, in turn, reproached their opponents for having sold the Armenian nation to the Turks, who, they argued, had no need of such defenders of the constitution since there already existed loyal Turkish troops devoted to it. The meeting was stormy and produced no practical results. (...)

59. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1645, ll. 14–15, January 19, 1909. Nikolai Aleksandrovich Scriabin to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) The subcommittee for unity and progress has established unofficial surveillance over Armenian activists and instructed its agents in the province to not hesitate in the face of any energy barriers. Armenians, in turn, have sensed a concluding change in their situation and are energetically preparing for the impending trials. The procurement and distribution of weapons continue feverishly. While previous confrontations with Muslims on this basis did not bother them, recent unrest in Kyge, including the dispatching of soldiers there, has forced them to exercise reasonable caution, once again cloaking their actions in impenetrable secrecy. However, it is no longer a secret to anyone that they are preparing for something particularly serious. (...)

60. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1645, ll. 51–53, January 19, 1909. Nikolai Aleksandrovich Scriabin to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) The established observation by the young Turks in the vilayet revealed a considerable influx of Armenians bringing weapons and dynamite, much of which was intercepted by the authorities. In response, the Turks hurriedly armed Muslims, especially the urban *dadaş*, known for their unrestraint and hatred towards Armenians. The actions and their reasons couldn't be kept secret, and a deep unrest among Muslims had already risen, not only in the Erzurum vilayet but also in many others like Bitlis, Sivas, Harput, and Diyarbakır.

Realizing the importance of the situation, the Turkish authorities strictly prohibited Muslims from openly expressing hostility towards Armenians. However, containing the growing animosity was difficult, and in the city of Erzurum, there were two notable instances of this hatred: one against the Russian subject Armenian Hajji-Kyureg, fortunately without fatalities, and the other resulting in the killing of the Turkish subject Armenian Yakup by a Turkish officer in the city square of Gel-bashi. Armenians, in their arrogance, reacted too late to the signs and the impending danger.

Now they have indeed quieted down, but the waves of hatred have already engulfed even clear-thinking Kurds, and a positive outcome seems unlikely. Moreover, the current circumstances hardly favor Armenians. At such a critical time, the receipt of orders from the Armenian patriarch in Constantinople by the Erzurum *murahhas* (official) not to pay the military tax is notable. According to the constitution, they are obliged to fulfill military duty on equal terms with Muslims. It is claimed that Armenians plan to protest against the military tax by closing shops and bazaars, but the situation is such that it only takes a spark to ignite the flames, if the Young Turks, well-informed about the impending unrest and sincerely wishing to avoid any disorders, fail to timely restrain the instincts of hatred. (...)

61. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 33–34, October 6, 1910. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Shtritter to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) The recruitment of Christians for military service has given rise to all sorts of rumors and discontent in Erzurum. The Turkish population, in particular, dislikes the fact that newly enlisted Christians are being sent by the government to frontier posts.

In the Erzurum vilayet Armenian conscripts have been dispatched to Nameryan, Ketek, Karaklis, and other border localities. When Armenian soldiers passed through the villages of the Pasin district, the Muslim inhabitants of these villages loudly expressed their dissatisfaction, saying: "Are Muslim soldiers no longer capable of defending their fatherland that these infidels are now being taken? It is Muslims who should defend the infidels, not infidels who defend Islam!" On the basis of this dissatisfaction, secret meetings were held protesting against the government's orders. The police discovered one such meeting and sent the instigators to Erzurum. In view of these events, the administration of Erzurum prohibited the carrying and sale of weapons without official permission.

Alongside meetings condemning the government's actions, gatherings directed against the person of the Vali have recently been observed. The impetus was given by a speech delivered at the Aziziye cemetery, about which I reported in my previous dispatch. According to rumors, a delegation was even sent to the Vali proposing that he resign. According to available information, the Vali is very unpopular among the Young Turks.

The deputies of the Turkish Parliament from the Erzurum vilayet, before leaving for the parliamentary session, attempted to demonstrate their activity. Seyfullah Efendi undertook a tour of the province, visiting the districts of Hınıs, Kiskim, and Nameryan, and everywhere explained the true meaning of the constitution and the aspirations of the constitutionalists. According to reports, the population received his visit with considerable sympathy.

Another deputy, Vardges Efendi, on 1 October, delivered a speech in the Erzurum *konak* about the general activity of the parliament during the past session and about the tasks of the forthcoming session. Invitations to this meeting had been distributed throughout the city in advance, and on the appointed day about 400–500 people gathered in the *konak*. In his speech, Vardges Efendi touched upon Turkey's foreign policy, its internal situation, finances, communications, education, administration, and other matters. The deputy criticized Turkey's policy as ill-advised. He opposed seeking loans from France and objected to Turkey's rapprochement with Germany and Austria. In his opinion, France had every right to refuse to grant the Turkish loan in view of Turkey's flirtation with Germany, which since the time of Abdul Hamid has played the role of Turkey's evil genius.

Vardges Efendi believes that the loan will not be realized at all: on the one hand, Turkey cannot provide sufficient guarantees, and on the other hand the powers have no interest in seeing Turkey strengthened. The deputy described Turkey's financial situation in gloomy terms. Turkey is poor not only because its budget shows a deficit of 9½ million Turkish liras, but also because it makes no effort to place its finances on a level with those of other powers. With such a financial burden, there can be no question of improving communications or building railways; and it would hardly be desirable to make such undertakings the property of foreign powers. The deputy also criticized the Minister of Public Education, who opposes the expansion of schools under the pretext that there are not enough qualified teachers.

According to the speaker, the deplorable state of Turkey is due not only to the government but also to the people themselves. The population expects every benefit from the government and parliament, yet does not wish to lift a finger to assist in the realization of their aims. In Erzurum, for example, there are many wealthy individuals who refuse to be of any use to the country. In conclusion, the deputy praised the administration, which, according to him, is excellent throughout Turkey; as an example he cited the Vali of Erzurum, urging those present to cooperate with him, which would serve as a guarantee of general prosperity. Those who attended the conference dispersed sad and depressed; for many it may have been the first time they had heard the truth about the real state of affairs in Turkey. (...)

62. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 60–61, December 8, Aleksandr Nikolaevich Shtritter to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Despite almost universal dissatisfaction, the skins of sacrificial rams are being zealously requisitioned by the imams and mukhtars, who act with the assistance of the police and gendarmes. A special list is being compiled of persons who refuse to surrender the skins, for later submission to the Vali.

On 30 November, conscripts arrived in Erzurum from the Amasia sanjak of the Sivas vilayet—Armenians, Greeks, and Turks alike, a total of 150 men. They are to be assigned to the 20th Artillery Regiment.

Although the leaders of the Armenian revolutionary parties publicly praise the equal inclusion of Armenians in military service in Turkey, the Armenians of the villages of the Erzurum vilayet themselves react little to this new measure. According to available information, a considerable number of those of conscription age secretly leave their villages and flee to Russia.

In response, orders have been given to the border guards to monitor crossings closely and to detain suspicious young men, delivering them to the nearest district administration.

In the Erzurum vilayet, it is planned to increase the number of policemen from 200 to 600. At the same time, the Vali has issued an order that soldiers are no longer to perform police duties or be used to maintain public order in the province. To implement these measures, it is proposed to form three regiments of gendarmes, each consisting of 600 men.

The Dashnaksakans, described as sympathizers of Russia, have opened a subscription campaign to assist their compatriots imprisoned in the Novocherkassk prison. Appeals for donations have been distributed throughout the towns and villages of the Erzurum vilayet where Armenians reside. In various districts of the Erzurum vilayet there are observable reactionary tendencies. Thus, in Hınıs, a reactionary named Saleh killed Binbashi Khalil Agha for persecuting reactionaries. In the Bayburt district, reactionary propaganda is being carried out quite successfully by Hamid Agha Malum, a resident of the village of Ksanta. Because of his influence and the number of his supporters in the vilayet, the authorities have so far refrained from taking decisive measures against him.

The Kaymakam of Tercan has been dismissed from his post for sympathizing with reactionaries. The Agricultural Bank of Erzurum, which had been granting loans to villagers secured by their arable and meadow lands, has issued a notice that if the loans are not repaid, the pledged lands will be confiscated. Despite its logic, this decision has provoked strong dissatisfaction among the villagers, who, according to rumors, are preparing some kind of demonstration. (...)

63. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 79–81, December 24, 1910. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Shtritter to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Recently, the influential member of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), Nazim Bey (a Jew by origin), returned from a trip to Salonika. The Vali has shown him considerable favor: he sent an escort to meet him and was the first to pay him a formal visit. Nevertheless, relations between the Vali and the local CUP club leave much to be desired. The club considers itself, as it were, a higher authority in relation to the Vali and closely monitors his actions.

Thus, due to the increasing number of thefts in the city, the club appointed its own representatives, who are tasked with observing the Vali's actions regarding thieves and reporting daily to the club on all of his orders. In connection with recent efforts to increase various taxes, it has been proposed to reassess land values in the Tabriz Gate quarter of Erzurum. The plots in this quarter had long ago been leased to merchants for the construction of shops and houses at a rate of 15 piastres per year per plot. The authorities now intend to increase this payment to 30 piastres.

This measure has provoked murmurs of dissatisfaction among the owners, who are unwilling to believe that the Turkish Constitution has brought not freedom but oppression. Desertions among recruits continue. Eight men have

fled from a regiment stationed near Bayezid, apparently to Russia. In the village of Inje, in the Erzurum district, the gendarmerie prevented the escape of thirty recruits. In view of the planned construction of roads, the Vali has reintroduced the road maintenance tax, which had been abolished after the proclamation of the Constitution. Orders have been issued to collect both the current year's tax and all outstanding arrears.

According to rumors, a new learned society called "Cemiyet-i İlmiyye" is expected to be founded in Erzurum, together with its own club. All members of the local clergy reportedly intend to join the new society. Its aims are described as scientific and progressive, with the goal of raising the intellectual level of the Erzurum province. However, the society also appears to have a political aspect and intends to monitor the proper functioning of the courts and the administration. At the same time, kaymakams from the Kurdish districts are gathering in Erzurum to discuss the formation of a Kurdish light militia. According to available information, the CUP club is concerned with obtaining detailed information about Russia, and for this purpose it has organized a group of individuals who allegedly obtain various types of information from a certain Kekhi, residing in the village of Sitagan in the Kars Province, Kaghizman district.

I intend to verify this information through the Military Governor of Kars, although I am almost certain that the group of persons supposedly serving the interests of the CUP is in fact nothing more than a band of smugglers successfully trafficking tea and Austrian cloth into Russia. (...)

64. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1647, ll. 49–59, March 9/16, 1911. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Shtritter to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) One of the prominent members of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), Nazım Bey, who has already been mentioned previously and who simultaneously served in the Public Debt Administration (Dette Publique), received a telegram from Constantinople instructing him to leave his position in the Public Debt Administration and report to Constantinople in the capacity of mudir (director) of the local branch of the Committee there.

Nazım Bey, still a relatively young man, a native of Salonika, and, as it is said, of Jewish origin, played a prominent role in Erzurum owing to his influence over the Vali, Celal Bey. At one time, the latter even contemplated establishing a familial connection with him by marrying his eldest daughter—rumored to be a beauty—to Nazım Bey.

However, this influence does not appear to have been beneficial, since the administrative activity of the Vali left much to be desired. Moreover, his natural suspicion toward the foreign representatives residing in Erzurum seems, under the influence of Nazım Bey, to have increased even further. It is sufficient to note that all of us here are surrounded by an entire band of spies, and every one of our steps—every unnecessary visit to a colleague—is known and taken into account. At the Vali's konak, measures are being taken to ensure that the freelance dragomans of the consulates do not linger there, and everyone is strictly forbidden to engage them in any kind of conversation.

I do not know whether the Vali's behavior will improve after the departure of Nazım Bey, but it will probably not become worse, since it could hardly deteriorate further. With the impending departure of Nazım Bey, certain changes have taken place in the club concerning its chairman and membership. Seyar-topçu Yüzbaşı Hamdi Efendi, a figure whose political orientation is not yet clearly defined, has been elected chairman, together with four members native to Erzurum. In total, the club's membership list numbers 403 persons.

Under the influence of a certain Rahim Agha, a member of the club and a native of Erzurum, strong agitation has begun against the admission—carried out under pressure from Nazım Bey—of the Vali and other administrative officials into the club's membership. Rahim Agha quite correctly argues that even when the actions of the Vali and the administration are entirely unlawful, discussion of these actions becomes impossible at general meetings where the very individuals responsible for them are present. Deliberations held in private or incomplete gatherings therefore have no practical significance.

The administration and the police have turned against Rahim Agha, and the results of this struggle will likely become apparent soon. A few days ago, the club dispatched to Russia an emissary tasked with propagating Pan-Islamism—a certain Ali Efendi, formerly a native of Russia but now an Ottoman subject, who had been residing in the village of Simo, in the Khmıs district. (...)

65. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1647, ll. 25–34, January 8, 1911. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Shtritter to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) On 8 January, an extraordinary party evening in support of the printing house Aradz took place in the hall of the Artsnoyan Armenian School in Erzurum. The event was honored by the presence of the Vali and Nazım Bey, the leader of the Union and Progress club. Nazım Bey opened the evening with a speech in which he attempted to demonstrate that, since the Constitution, Turks and Armenians have become so fused that they constitute, as it were, a

single nation—Osmanlı. He added that the Armenians were almost the only people who had truly understood the full importance of the Constitution. He described other nationalities—such as Albanians, Druze, and Arabs—as apparently backward peoples who, moreover, listen to agitators; for that reason they join the Young Turk aspirations only with difficulty and at times try to express their protest by force of arms—yet how could they possibly compete with mighty Turkey. Speeches delivered by the Dashnaksakan representatives present at the evening were in the same spirit. In those speeches, moreover, there was a note of servile devotion to the Union and Progress society, in whose wake they follow.

The day before, the Hunchakian club was formally opened. Their leader, Kozikian, had obtained the Vali's consent to send a Turkish military band in honor of the opening; later, however, due to the intrigues of the Dashnaksakans, the Vali withdrew his promise to provide the band. The opening therefore took place without music, but with fiery speeches against the Dashnaksakans and their alliance with the Union and Progress club. (...)

Kurds

The Kurds living in the group of villages Tat and Egeti in the Hınıs district, who are registered in the reserve ikhtiyat, categorically refuse to return to their units. If compelled, they threaten open rebellion. Secretly, they sympathize with the Arabs and fear leaving their families in villages with mixed Armenian populations. Rumors are circulating in Erzurum that the Kurds are strongly sympathetic to the Arabs and are even in contact with them through the well-known Kōr Hüseyn Pasha.

In Erzurum itself, especially in the bazaars, a large number of unknown Kurds have appeared, wandering about without any clear purpose. Concerned by these circumstances, the Union and Progress club persuaded the Vali to assign plain-clothes policemen to follow the Kurds, keep them under close watch, and report immediately if anything suspicious is noticed.

The Kurds of the Kiğı and Petamer districts have expressed their willingness to enter the light cavalry Hafif Süvari. Two regiments are to be formed from them. The Kurds of the Lumer district of the Erzincan sanjak declared that if the authorities attempt to take from them lands that once belonged to Armenians, they will migrate to Dersim.

In order to cope with the difficult task of satisfying both Kurds and Armenians, the head of the Tenniz district, Kamil Efendi, informed the Armenians whose plots are now occupied by Kurds that they must come to terms with the Kurds and leave them half of the occupied land; if they fail to reach an amicable agreement, they will receive none of the plots back. It is difficult to foresee how this so-called amicable settlement will end. Most likely the Armenians will not recover their plots, since the Turks fear the Kurds, while they treat Armenian claims with indifference.

Political Clubs

(...) In the Union and Progress club, in the presence of all members, an instruction received from the central headquarters in Salonika was read aloud. The instruction provides a detailed commentary on 35 articles of the new regulations approved by both chambers. It grants club members the right to supervise the actions of the administration and to ensure that the people do not suffer injustices at its hands. All measures of influence upon the administration are permitted.

The club disseminates all kinds of false reports about affairs in Yemen—at one moment claiming that Yahya and Idris are fighting one another; at another, that the government has reconciled with Idris and, together with him, has taken up arms against Yahya; then again, that Turkish troops near Hodeida have captured large numbers of Arabs; and so on.

The club has received from Salonika one thousand photographs of the newly acquired Turkish cruiser *Yadigâr-ı Millet*. The photographs are sold for the benefit of the fleet at twenty kopecks each, and officials are compelled to purchase them. In addition, at the initiative of Union and Progress, matches and cigarette paper have been subjected to small taxes in aid of the fleet.

Another newly formed club, *Cemiyet-i İlmiyye*, dissatisfied with the antagonism of Union and Progress—which delays both the publication of its resolutions and still more their implementation—compiled a ninety-three page collection of its recent decisions and sent it for approval to both chambers. (...)

Turks and Armenians

(...) Previously, Armenian recruits and reservists were for the most part sent to the frontier. Now, after the dispatch of three battalions to Trabzon and the completion of the remaining forces with reservists, crowds of Armenian recruits and reservists can be seen walking about Erzurum in military uniform.

This circumstance arouses strong dissatisfaction among the Turks. Voices are heard saying that the infidels should not be allowed such freedom, otherwise they will begin to present themselves as masters of the land. Such

Armenian freedom, it is said, is contrary to the Sharia. According to the prevailing opinion, even the slightest pretext would suffice to provoke a movement against the Armenians.

In the villages, Turks openly attempt to provoke Armenians and at times even resort to bloody reprisals. Thus, in the village of Yamrakhan in the Hasankale district, the Turks staged in the street, in the presence of Armenians, a mock comedy ridiculing Christian religious rites. (...)

(...) In the village of Arşut in the Erzurum Ovası district, inhabited by a mixed Turkish–Armenian population, during the wedding ceremony of a wealthy local Armenian, Akop Kyakhya-oglu, when invited guests with music were proceeding to the bride's house, Turkish neighbors attacked the procession with shouts directed against the freedom granted to Armenians. In the ensuing brawl they beat the Armenians and wounded four with daggers. Relations between Armenians and Turks in these villages are now extremely tense. Both the wounded and the offenders were brought to Erzurum for investigation and trial. The Erzurum–Trabzon Railway Concession: A rumor is circulating in Erzurum—apparently originating with the administration—that the concession for constructing the Erzurum–Trabzon railway has been transferred to the French, with the consent of the Russian government. Taxes: In the provincial administrative council, it has been proposed to levy the guild tax *temettu* even on foreign merchant subjects. An attempt was made to apply this to Russian subjects, but they refused. The administration has not yet approached the Imperial Russian General Consulate with this project. Subscription for the construction of a new Sublime Porte building. To the general dissatisfaction of the population, a public subscription has been opened to fund the construction of a new building for the Sublime Porte. Grumbling is heard about the constant subscription drives; it is widely believed that the Union and Progress Committee deliberately ruins buildings in order to enrich itself at the expense of the poor population. Movement among the Kurds. The provincial administration is concerned about Kurdish movement in Erzurum, Mamuretülaziz, Van, Bitlis, and Diyarbakır. According to rumor, they all sympathize with the Arabs and are allegedly preparing for rebellion. Weapons, it is said, are being supplied to them at high prices by Armenians from Russia. Arrival of Ferik Mahmud Pasha. En route to Van, the commander of the Van troops, Ferik Mahmud Pasha, arrived from Constantinople. Arrival of the new French Vice-Consul, M. Détre. On 14 February, the newly appointed French vice-consul, M. Détre, arrived in Erzurum. (...)

65. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 60–61, December 8, 1910. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Shtritter to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Despite almost universal dissatisfaction, the skins of sacrificial rams are being zealously requisitioned by the imams and mukhtars, who have the police and gendarmes at their disposal. A special list is being compiled of those who resisted handing over the skins, for subsequent submission to the Vali.

On 30 November, conscripts arrived in Erzurum from the Amasya sanjak of the Sivas vilayet—Armenians, Greeks, and Turks, a total of 150 men. They are to be assigned to the 20th Artillery Regiment. Although the leaders of the Armenian revolutionary parties publicly praise the equalization of Armenians in Turkey's military draft, the Armenians of the villages of the Erzurum vilayet themselves respond only weakly to this new measure; according to reports, a considerable number of those of conscription age are secretly leaving their villages and fleeing to Russia. In response, orders were issued to the border guards to watch crossings closely and to detain suspicious young men and deliver them to the nearest kaza administration.

In the Erzurum vilayet it is planned to increase the number of policemen from 200 to 600. At the same time, the Vali has issued an order that henceforth soldiers are not to perform police duties or be used to maintain public order. To implement these measures, it is proposed to form three gendarmerie regiments of 600 men each.

The Dashnaksakans, sympathizers of Russia, have opened a subscription to aid their compatriots imprisoned in the Novocherkassk prison; appeals for donations have been sent throughout the towns and villages of the Erzurum vilayet where Armenians reside.

In various districts of the Erzurum vilayet, reactionary tendencies are observed. Thus, in Hınıs the reactionary Saleh killed Binbaşı Halil Agha for his persecution of reactionaries. In the Bayburt district, reactionary propaganda is being conducted quite successfully by Hamid Agha Ma'lûm, a resident of the village of Ksanta; given his influence and the number of his supporters in the vilayet, the authorities have so far refrained from taking decisive measures against him. The kaymakam of Tercan has been removed from office for his sympathies toward the reactionaries.

The Agricultural Bank in Erzurum, which lends villagers money against the security of arable and haymaking plots, has published an order stating that if the loans are not repaid, the mortgaged plots will be seized. This measure,

despite its logic, has provoked strong dissatisfaction among villagers who, according to rumors, are preparing some kind of demonstration. (...)

66. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1647, ll. 93–94, June 24, 1911. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Shtritter to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) The rise in the prices of all kinds of essential provisions in Erzurum—especially at a time when such goods ought to be cheaper than ever—has greatly agitated the urban population. An order of the Vali prohibiting the import of firewood, or allowing it only in limited quantities, has almost entirely deprived the bazaar of firewood, which now appears in such small amounts that its price has risen threefold compared to last year. Since the Vali's order also concerns the production of charcoal from oak firewood, the price of charcoal has likewise risen significantly, which in turn has driven up the price of coffee, so widely consumed in Turkey.

General dissatisfaction is growing both against the Vali and against the Committee of Union and Progress; insults and curses are directed at both. The other day a crowd gathered near the konak and, upon seeing the Vali passing through the courtyard, shouted that if the order of his administration did not change they would be forced either to leave the city or to adopt foreign citizenship. According to reports, under the pressure of this discontent the Vali has again ordered that the import of firewood be permitted under the previous conditions. Disillusionment with the constitution and nostalgia for the days preceding the constitutional regime are evident everywhere.

This was especially apparent upon the return to Erzurum for the summer recess of the Erzurum deputy Seyfullah Efendi. In previous years deputies were welcomed with great ceremony, with music, delegations, and similar demonstrations. This year only his two brothers and one friend from the Union and Progress club went out to meet the deputy. The population limited itself to critical remarks that the constitution had brought prosperity only to the deputies, who receive generous salaries extracted from that very same people, whereas the welfare of the people themselves is the very last thing the deputies think about.

Alongside the general rise in the price of necessities, a new tax on carters has significantly increased freight rates from our border to Erzurum. Since in these regions there exists no distinct class of professional carters, and this work is undertaken by peasants in their spare time from agricultural labor, the transport duty—although small (about one ruble per year)—appeared unjust, and for the period of a month freight traffic between Erzurum and our border was completely interrupted. Only very recently has it begun to resume, though with significantly higher freight rates. This circumstance will of course increase the prices of goods imported from Russia, particularly kerosene, which will likely provoke further dissatisfaction among the inhabitants of Erzurum. (...)

67. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1647, ll. 105–106, August 5, 1911. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Shtritter to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) On the 1st of August of the current year, the local vali, Djelal Bey, departed from Erzurum for his new post in Adrianople. He was seen off only by officials and members of the administrative staff; the population demonstratively stayed away. Djelal Bey, especially during the last year, did not enjoy the sympathies of the population. He was accused, as I have already had the honor to report, of being responsible for the rise in prices of all essential provisions that occurred in Erzurum this year. It is true that, owing to his untimely prohibition on the import of firewood—later revoked—the price of firewood doubled. However, I cannot say that the rise in prices of fodder, meat, and butter occurred at his initiative, although, on the other hand, he also failed, as governor, to take measures to regulate the sale prices of basic necessities.

The Armenian population was dissatisfied with him for his indulgence of Kurdish abuses in the agrarian question and for his bias in all matters affecting Armenian interests. Turning to his attitude toward the General Consulate entrusted to me, I must say that he attempted to remain correct in matters and questions raised and, insofar as possible under Turkish conditions, did not delay responses to inquiries addressed to him. (...)

68. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 36–38, October 13, 1910. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Shtritter to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Over the past week, the Alaşkert Kurds formed a band and attacked the Armenian village of Tavantz in the Passin district. During the clash that followed, they abducted an Armenian girl and seized some peasant property. The following day, armed Armenians attacked the Kurds and managed to recover the girl.

The Turkish administration appears to view such clashes with an indifference hardly befitting the situation. Thus, in the Terjan district, when Armenians filed a complaint against Kurds who had abducted an Armenian woman, the local kaymakam declared the complaint allegedly improper and imprisoned the complainants. Deputy Vardges Efendi, who has now departed for Constantinople, delivered before his departure a speech given at a special gathering and greeted the Armenians residing in Erzurum.

The good intentions of the deputies and the Young Turks are still unable to overcome the bureaucratic routines established under the previous regime. In the provincial courts, strict adherence remains to the rule that punishment of the guilty must rely not on evidence presented before the judge, but on preliminary protocols compiled earlier. According to rumors, such requirements are supported by the local Vali. The Erzurum representative of the criminal court, himself a Young Turk, telegraphed a request for transfer to another post and asked that a copy of the transfer order be sent there immediately.

During the celebration of the Sultan's birthday on 11 October, the Vali gladly informed me that the arrival of French engineers for the construction of roads in the Erzurum vilayet was expected any day. There are five engineers, headed by a certain Miron. According to the Vali, a sum of two and a half million Turkish liras has already been allocated for the construction of roads in the vilayet. The proposed routes are the following: Erzurum–Trabzon, Erzurum–Rize, Erzurum–Erzincan, Erzurum–Bitlis, Erzurum–Van, and Erzurum–Ketek. While listing these directions, the Vali intentionally or unintentionally mentioned the route toward our border last.

I drew his attention to this circumstance and remarked that if the road toward our border stands last on the list, it is possible that the engineers will complete the measurement of their assigned kilometers before reaching the Ketek road. The Vali became visibly embarrassed and replied that he had mentioned the direction toward Ketek last without any intention and that he would make every effort to ensure that this road would be among the first to be constructed. Not placing too much trust in these promises, I refrain for the time being from requesting Your Excellency's special intervention. However, I respectfully ask that you use your favorable influence to ensure that this road, which would guarantee the development of our northern trade, is not placed last or forgotten entirely.

On 10 October, at the initiative of Dashnaks residing in Erzurum, a demonstrative memorial service was held at the graves of the Armenian revolutionaries Yervand Yeghishe Topchian and Aram Aramian. A crowd of about 700–800 people gathered at the cemetery. Two speakers praised the merits of the deceased revolutionaries. The first had been killed the previous year by revolutionaries of the Mihranian party; the second had been arrested as a murderer and revolutionary by the Turkish authorities of the old regime and was hanged in Erzurum.

Taking advantage of the presence of thirty Armenian soldiers at the memorial service, one of the speakers declared in his speech that Topchian's cherished dream had been the equalization of Armenian rights with those of the Turks and their admission into military service. Although the deceased had not lived to see the fulfillment of this dream, he could take comfort in the fact that Armenian soldiers now pray for the repose of his soul. (...)

69. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1647, ll. 115–116, September 5, 1911. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Shtritter to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) On 17 August, the newly appointed Vali, former governor of Sivas, Mehmed Emin Bey, arrived in Erzurum. Mehmed Emin Bey is not a new figure for Erzurum; four years ago he served here as head of the customs administration. Owing to Ramadan, the reception was rather modest; only officials and dragomans of the consulates were present, while the general population was absent. The Vali arrived with very little baggage, and therefore, due to the absence of the necessary attire, the reception of the consuls took place only on 30 August. The Vali makes a very pleasant impression: a man without particular pretensions, simple and intelligent. He speaks only Turkish and, perhaps due to the absence of an outward European polish, may prove to be a more natural person than his predecessor, who spoke two foreign languages. He is a well-known Turkish poet and speaks with particular pleasure about his literary works. He also appears to be familiar with Russian literature, as he spoke at length about Count Tolstoy and Nekrasov. Judging by his words, he has outlined for himself a program of just treatment toward his multi-ethnic subjects inhabiting the Erzurum vilayet. With regard to foreign consuls, he expressed his full readiness to be of assistance to them to the extent of his abilities and opportunities. One would like to believe that these are not merely "Oriental promises," to which Turks and Persians are so prone.

This so-called non-partisan stance apparently does not appeal to the local Progressists, who fear that under Emin Bey's rule the Armenians might raise their previously bowed heads. Confirmation of this is the fact that the new governor ordered the arrest of the rather influential Hasan-Kali bey, Avni Bey, who had attempted violence against the wife and daughter of an Armenian named Aram—an act which, during the administration of Djelal Bey, would have passed without any consequences for the perpetrator. (...)

70. AVPRI, f. 150, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 30–31, September 29, 1910. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Shtritter to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Despite the constitution introduced two years ago and the apparent equalization of civil rights between Turks and Armenians, in cases of conflict with Turks the Armenians invariably end up being declared guilty and are punished with full severity according to the old principle: “an Armenian means guilty.” Recently, in the village of Keprikot in the Pasin district, a rather serious clash occurred between Christians and Muslims over land, during which one of the Armenians was wounded. During the old regime, many Armenian landed properties passed into the temporary possession of Muslims. Now, with the altered structure of state life, as Armenian owners attempt to reclaim their lands, clashes constantly occur—ending, for the most part, to the detriment of the Armenians.

The same occurred in the cited case: although the Armenians were the victims, they were arrested, while the Turk who had wounded the Armenian was detained merely for appearances and immediately released. The festival of Sheker Bayram, following the Ramadan fast, was celebrated in Erzurum with the usual solemnity over three days. To prevent disturbances by the Turkish rabble—called here “dadashams”—and by those dissatisfied with both the new and the old regimes, the administration ordered all drinking establishments closed during the holiday and imposed heavy fines on anyone violating this order. On the second day of the celebration, at the initiative of the Young Turks of the Committee of Union and Progress, the Muslims of Erzurum proceeded to the cemetery of soldiers who had fallen at the fortress of Aziziye during the last Russo-Turkish war. There, one of the pupils of the Idadiye-i-Mülkiye school read to the crowd a speech prepared by the Committee of Union and Progress attacking the Vali of Erzurum, Jalal Bey, and the judicial institutions of Erzurum. The former was accused of actions incompatible with the constitutional regime, and the latter of partiality and injustice in the cases entrusted to them. (...)

71. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 72–73, December 17, 1910. Aleksandr Nikolaevich Shtritter to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Relations between the Dashnaktsakan and Hunchakian parties continue to be hostile. Their rare joint meetings seldom pass without scandals or fights. At one of their recent meetings, the disturbance became so serious that the Turkish police had to intervene and forcibly disperse the rivals. On 11 December the Dashnaktsakans organized a musical evening, during which speeches were delivered about the late Count Tolstoy. The proceeds from this event were intended to support the printing house Arach. Armenian and Turkish soldiers, quartered side by side in the same barracks, get along very poorly and quarrel over the slightest pretext.

Recently, because Armenian musicians refused to play at the request of the Turks in honor of the Kurban-Bayram festival, the infuriated opponents took up arms; bloodshed was avoided only because there were no live rounds in the barracks. Officers who rushed to the scene barely managed to separate the fighters. A strange order was received in Erzurum abolishing the commercial court and transferring all commercial cases to the civil chamber, with the note that the president and members of the court would forfeit their November salaries. The order was met with general murmuring, and the president and members of the court sent a telegram to the Minister of Justice. Soon a telegram arrived for the Vali stating that the abolition order had been issued by mistake and that the court would remain on its former basis. In addition to collecting sacrificial skins for the fleet, an order was also received to collect horns for the same purpose. About 3,000 pairs were collected in Erzurum. From the Kurds of the Hınıs, Bayezid, Alaşkert, Karaklis, and Passin districts a new light cavalry is being formed (hamidi-suvari). The number of recruited Kurds already far exceeds that of the former “Hamidie” units.

The Armenian population, living side by side with these new troops, is extremely dissatisfied with this order of the 4th Army Corps, all the more so since the light cavalry accepts without distinction bandits, murderers, and smugglers. The Armenians are worried about the possible harmful effect of the Kurdish horsemen on their trade; many petition for the abolition of the Kurds’ privileged status, while others are ready to reduce or even cease their commerce altogether. The inspection of the reservists (redifs) has begun, to be completed within a week, after which lists are to be submitted to the corps. Old reservists from pre-constitutional times, who had not received their discharge pay, recently gathered in a large crowd before the Vali’s house, shouting and threatening to demand their money. Many cried that if they were not paid by the Vali, they would go to the Russian Consulate, which they believed might satisfy their claims.

Rumors of a possible reaction do not cease. The Armenians, more than anyone, are disturbed by these rumors, fearing a return to the old times. In some Armenian villages great poverty is observed, and the communities are unable to support their clergy. In Tercan the Armeno-Gregorian murakhhas (delegate of the patriarchate) was forced to close his office and leave his flock; in Alaşkert the priest Hovsep, to avoid dying of hunger, converted to Islam. (...)

72. AVPRI, f. 151, op. 482, d. 1646, ll. 24–28, August 8, 1910 Notes of the junior secretary of the Russian Imperial General Consulate, Boris Eduardovich Bloom:

(...) Not a word is said about the necessity of combating the growing German influence in Turkey. At present, before our very eyes in Constantinople, a struggle for predominance in Turkey is taking place between the great European powers. On the one hand, Germany and Austria-Hungary are attempting to draw the Young Turks into their camp; on the other, Russia, France, and England are trying to prevent this development.

According to the consular official, this struggle is of great importance for Russia, since it will ultimately determine whether the Turks will become Russia's friends or its enemies. German influence is particularly harmful to Russian interests, not only in Constantinople but throughout the Ottoman Empire. German influence in Turkey has already become very deep-rooted. This presents a serious problem for Russia, which otherwise maintains a sympathetic attitude toward the new Turkish government.

The purpose of this memorandum is to draw attention to a measure that is absolutely necessary. It is a measure that Germany itself has already been employing for some time with considerable success. The newspaper *Osmanischer Lloyd*, published in Constantinople, actively works to disrupt the establishment of friendly relations between Russia and Turkey. It constantly spreads both truthful and fabricated information aimed at undermining Russian influence in Turkey. While it portrays France and England as relatively friendly powers, Russia is presented as the principal enemy. The newspaper never misses an opportunity to emphasize the alleged hostility of Russia—and the Slavs in general—toward the Turks and toward Muslims more broadly.

Its special correspondents in St. Petersburg, Warsaw, Tehran, and other cities fabricate reports written in this spirit. Certain facts and events are entirely omitted, while others are distorted or exaggerated, all with the sole aim of producing the desired impression upon the reader. The newspaper frequently writes about the alleged constant intrigues of Russia, portraying it as the mortal enemy of Turkey in the Balkans, where it supposedly seeks to arm and incite all the Balkan states against the Ottoman Empire. In contrast, Germany and Austria-Hungary are depicted as sincere friends concerned only with the interests of Turkey.

Among the themes repeatedly emphasized are the alleged dangers posed to Turkey by Pan-Slavism, Russia's supposed ambitions toward Persia, and the "noble role" of Germany as the only power genuinely opposing both Russia and England. At the same time, the paper highlights the alleged oppression of Muslims within the Russian Empire, contrasting it with the supposedly better condition of Slavic populations under Ottoman rule. Other frequently mentioned topics include the oppression of Finland, Jews, "Little Russians," and Poles.

In short, the newspaper attempts to instill an irreconcilable hatred toward Russia and everything Russian, portraying Russia as the principal enemy of the Muslim world and, above all, of Turkey. At present there are already many educated individuals in Turkey who have studied in Germany or traveled there and who therefore sympathize with the Germans and listen attentively to their views. These individuals read *Osmanischer Lloyd*, which is the only German-language newspaper published in Turkey, and naturally adopt the perspectives presented in it—both on European affairs in general and on the relations between Turkey, Russia, and Germany in particular. They generally do not read French or English newspapers; consequently, even when these papers publish rebuttals or alternative views, such readers rarely encounter them. As examples one may cite the present Vali of Erzurum, Cemal Bey, who received his education in Germany, and the acting commandant of Erzurum, Emin Pasha, who spent three years in Germany attached to a cavalry regiment. Both speak German, sympathize with Germany, and, among foreign-language newspapers, read only this German paper. (...)

73. AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 66–70, June 3, 1914. Aleksandr Alekseevich Adamov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) The Erzurum bishop Sempat, who occupies the local episcopal seat once held by the present Patriarch of Constantinople, Zaven, cannot be compared with the latter either in firmness of character, in steadfastness in defending his convictions, or in courageous advocacy of Armenian national interests before the Turkish government. On the contrary, he has the reputation among the local population of being a weak-willed man who pursues primarily his own personal interests and who, if not fearful, shows a particular inclination toward the Turks and everything Turkish.

This latter trait of his character is explained by the circumstance that during the last patriarchal elections he received half of the votes cast for Zaven (six votes out of twelve) and therefore entertains firm hopes of becoming Zaven's successor in Constantinople. For this reason he is already making every effort to secure the favor of the Turks.

Because of the fundamental contradiction between the ideas of the Dashnak party and the policy of the Armenian ecclesiastical leadership, Sempat entered into open conflict with the party at the beginning of 1912. As a result of intrigues and provocations by his opponents he was forced on 2 May 1912 to leave for Constantinople, from where he was able to return to Erzurum only in June of that year, outwardly reconciled with the Dashnaks. Since that time the bishop, while secretly harboring hostility toward them, has attempted to maintain outwardly friendly relations, recognizing that the Dashnak party, despite the decline of its prestige among the Armenian population, remains the only properly organized political force in Erzurum and therefore continues to exercise considerable influence over the internal affairs of the Armenian community.

Taking advantage of the bishop's conflict with the Dashnaks on the one hand and his desire to remain on good terms with the local Turkish authorities on the other, the German consul Percy Rumi sought to exploit the situation. Relying both on the Dashnak party and on the Turkish administration, he believed it possible to influence the bishop in a direction favorable to German interests.

The instruments for carrying out this plan were two individuals: Madatian, an Armenian closely connected with the Turks and secretly financed with German money (now a deputy), and the personal emissary and agent of the German consul Anders, Soghikian, a member of the Dashnak party and a teacher at the new Sanasarian school, which since 1912 has been fully controlled by that party. While the first attempted to encourage Sempat's pro-Turkish sympathies, the second worked to bring him completely onto the side of the Dashnaks.

Under this dual influence the bishop soon entered into opposition to Patriarch Zaven, whom the German consul considers a Russophile. Thus, when the patriarch protested against the Turkish government's refusal to allow proportional representation in the elections of Armenian deputies to the Ottoman parliament, Sempat opposed sending a collective telegram from the prominent Armenians of Erzurum in support of the patriarch. During the parliamentary elections themselves he likewise supported not the patriarchal candidate Boyadjian but the Dashnak candidate Pastirmadjian.

When it became clear that the latter's candidacy would fail, Sempat, instead of attempting to prevent or protest the election of Madatian—a candidate undesirable to the majority of Armenians—proposed that the Armenian population simply abstain from voting, thereby once again currying favor with the Turks. In this way the policy of the German consul, aimed at strengthening his influence over the spiritual head of the Armenians of Erzurum, seemed close to complete success—until the bishop suddenly broke with the Dashnak party.

Discontent among the non-partisan Armenians of Erzurum regarding the Dashnak takeover of the new Sanasarian school continued to grow, especially after it became clear that the new school administration, headed by the local party leader Artashes Rostomyan (the Russian émigré Zoryan), was unable to maintain discipline among the students. The pupils were noted for unruly behavior and were even accused of immoral conduct within the walls of the school itself.

The Armenian community therefore recognized the necessity of removing the Dashnak committee from control of the school and began pressing Bishop Sempat, as the spiritual head and chairman of the school board, to intervene. After long hesitation he realized that continued inaction would result in the complete loss of his authority and prestige among the people. Consequently he decided to abandon his previous policy and openly oppose the Dashnak party.

The immediate pretext for the open break was the demand by the school administration that the board of trustees cover the school's deficit for the academic years 1913–1914, amounting to 420 Turkish liras. The school's annual budget had previously been approved by the national council, dominated by Dashnak members, at 2,135 Turkish liras, of which 1,000 were provided by the national treasury and the remainder expected to come from tuition fees and donations. However, because many wealthy Armenian parents refused to send their children to a school run by Dashnak teachers, the anticipated tuition revenue fell short, producing the deficit.

At a meeting of the national council convened to address the matter, the Dashnak representatives attempted to compel the school board to submit immediately a new budget for the following academic year in order to secure continued control over the institution. The board, however, preferred to remove the Dashnaks entirely from the management of the school, especially in view of plans to reopen the old Sanasarian school in Erzurum, which had previously been transferred to Sivas.

Supported by the sympathy of the majority of the local Armenian population, Bishop Sempat refused the Dashnaks' demand. When they attempted to pressure him through threats and insults, he resigned from his position as bishop and chairman of the board, thereby entering into open struggle with the party.

A stormy meeting of the national council was expected on 17 June, at which it would finally be determined whether control of communal affairs would remain in the hands of the non-partisan Armenians—signifying the complete defeat of the Dashnak party—or whether the weak-willed bishop would lack the resolve to carry his struggle through to the end.

The possible return of the old Sanasarian school to Erzurum in the autumn raises another issue of importance. Even before its transfer to Sivas the school displayed a clearly anti-Russian orientation, despite the fact that it was funded by money donated by Russian Armenians. Established through the capital of the Russian-Armenian benefactor Sanasarian, the institution was administered by a committee in Constantinople under Nuradunghian. Although it existed in Erzurum since 1881, it remained outside the control of the Russian General Consulate, despite nominally enjoying its informal patronage.

The influence of the consulate was so weak that it could not even secure the introduction of Russian language instruction, which was entirely absent from the curriculum. As a result, the teaching staff and students were already imbued with anti-Russian sentiments long before the Dashnaks seized control of the school.

Given the changing mood among Armenians, Russia should take advantage of the school's return to Erzurum in order to secure greater influence over its direction and openly assume patronage of this institution founded with Russian funds. This is particularly important because there are grounds to fear that the school might become a center of German influence, especially considering the growing cooperation between the German consul and the Dashnaks.

One practical measure would be to grant a government subsidy of 600–750 rubles for the introduction of Russian language instruction at the school by a teacher specially sent from Russia. French has long been taught at the school, and recently German has been introduced with the financial support of the German consul Anders and taught by his agent Sogikian.

Finally, it would be desirable that donations from Russian Armenians intended for educational institutions in Ottoman Armenia should not be spent without the knowledge and consent of the Russian authorities, particularly when such funds are used to establish schools with anti-Russian orientations.

In connection with this matter it should also be noted that the newspaper Kavkaz reported on 30 April 1914 that the merchant A. B. Gukasov had donated 500,000 rubles for the establishment of a higher educational institution in Turkish Armenia, to be called the Gukasov Academy. The decision regarding the location of this institution—possibly in Van or Erzurum—will be made jointly by the Catholicos and the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople. Whatever the outcome, it would be advisable that such an institution not fall outside Russian influence. (...)

74. AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 88–92, July 12, 1914. Aleksandr Alekseevich Adamov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Armenians

The discord that arose within the Armenian community between the Dashnaksakan party and the school trusteeship, headed by the bishop (report of 3 June of this year, No. 445), led to a strengthening among the Armenians of Erzurum of the Constitutional-Democratic Party, which until recently had almost no followers here, and whose membership has now, within a short time, increased to 800 members. The success of the new party—into which all Armenians dissatisfied with the dominance of the Dashnaksakans hastened to enroll—forced the latter to fundamentally alter their usual tactics.

Having evaded participation in the decisive meeting of 17 June, at which the community, speaking through the Constitutional Democrats, was to pass a harsh verdict against them, the Dashnaksutiun party made concessions, especially after, on 21 June, a hand-to-hand fight broke out between its representatives and their opponents in the bishop's premises, where they had gathered to discuss the ceremonial celebration of the annual act of the Armenian schools. The Dashnaksakans, who at present have 33 representatives out of the 49 members of the Erzurum National Council, realized that further insistence on keeping the schools—and especially the Novo-Sanasarian School—in the hands of their supporters could lead to new elections to the National Council and to the loss of their current dominant position within it.

In view of this, they abandoned further disputes with the school trusteeship, which, taking advantage of this circumstance, immediately informed the entire existing teaching staff of the local Armenian schools—consisting almost exclusively of representatives of the Dashnaksutiun party—that they should consider themselves dismissed from service; the trusteeship reserved to itself the exclusive right to select teachers for the coming academic year. Despite all these concessions on the part of the Dashnaksutiun party, its opponents рассчитывают, during the forthcoming by-elections to the National Council of thirteen members—replacing those who failed to attend sessions—to bring in their own supporters in place of Dashnaksakans, thereby securing a final predominance for the opposition.

In anticipation of the arrival of the inspectors

The local Armenian intelligentsia does not place particular hopes in the inspectors, believing that Messrs. Westenenk and Hoff, having renounced some of their rights and privileges in exchange for an increase in salary, have thereby shown that they are more interested in the material side of the matter and that, for the sake of their personal benefit, they will not step outside obedience to the Turkish government.

Distrust toward the inspectors is expressed primarily in the fact that, as the date of their arrival approaches, the efforts of all Armenian circles and entire parties—such as the Dashnaksakans and the Constitutional Democrats—to bring existing means of national “self-defense” to the highest degree of readiness become increasingly evident.

According to some information, this indeed concerns self-defense in the event of attacks by Muslims on Armenians; according to others, however, the Armenians are preparing—should there be a new failure of the reforms—for active actions aimed at resolving the Armenian Question without delay by compelling Russia to intervene. Nevertheless, the Armenians intend to organize a ceremonial reception for the inspectors, wishing thereby to emphasize the special purpose of their arrival.

The Young Turks, still unwilling to abandon their covert resistance to the control imposed upon them, have decided on their part to take measures to organize a hostile demonstration by Muslims. In view of the fact that the peaceful Muslim population has nothing against the reforms, hoping with the help of the inspectors to improve its own situation as well, the members of the “Union and Progress” party in Erzurum have found it necessary to resort to the assistance of the military element.

Officers of the local garrison readily responded to the call and at present, although under the strictest secrecy, have assumed the role of agitators, promising at the necessary moment to send onto the scene soldiers in disguise, who are to portray a dissatisfied Muslim population. In connection with this, the Armenians point to the distribution of special secret packets to the mukhtars of all settlements of the Erzurum mutasarrifate; the inscription on these packets strictly forbids their being shown to unauthorized persons under threat of the most severe punishment. According to information from our military agent, however, these envelopes contain only instructions concerning the assembly of reservists in the event that mobilization is declared. The Turkish authorities are particularly interested in the future attitude toward the inspectors of the foreign consuls residing in Erzurum; accordingly, in compliance with instructions from Constantinople, every measure is being taken to ensure the placement of spies and informants in each consulate. Among other things, three individuals were designated for the General Consulate’s out-of-town premises, all serving in the police and gendarmerie, including one Armenian renegade who expressed willingness to serve even without pay.

Arrival of the director of the French railway

Max Choublier, former French Consul General in Salonica and current director-general of the Société Générale d’Entreprises dans l’Empire Ottoman, arrived from Constantinople at the end of the reporting month to investigate an incident in the Erzurum brigade of the aforementioned French road/railway company. The result of his investigation was the dismissal of the chief local engineer, the Frenchman Merlin, and the resignation without petition of his assistant, also an engineer, the Turk Suraiya Bey. The latter had acquired a reputation as the only engineer in the entire brigade who was robbed annually by Kurds during the execution of works, and always for rather large sums.

Within the Armenian community, a sensation was caused by a rumor of unknown origin that Suraiya Bey—who seeks to be known as an ardent Young Turk and is distinguished by particular hostility toward Armenians—has been taken into service by Mr. Westenenk. If this rumor were confirmed, one could say in advance that the said inspector should not count on Armenian sympathies and that he would enjoy not the slightest trust among them.

Kurds

According to information received from various sources, the Kurdish population of the Erzurum vilayet remained generally calm during the reporting month, although individual bands continued to engage in robberies on the roads and in remote villages. The Turkish authorities, not wishing to irritate the Kurds on the eve of the inspectors’ arrival, confined themselves to merely formal orders and did not undertake decisive measures to suppress brigand elements.

At the same time, persistent rumors are circulating that, in the event of complications with the reforms, Kurdish tribes may be used by the local administration to counter possible Armenian actions. Such assumptions find some confirmation in the fact that certain Kurdish elders have once again begun to enter into contact with representatives of the authorities, seeking various privileges and concessions for themselves. At the same time, it must be noted that a significant portion of the Kurdish population treats the forthcoming reforms with indifference, seeing no immediate benefit in them for its vital interests. Some of the Kurdish begs, however, express the view that the strengthening of foreign control may in the future lead to a restriction of their traditional influence and is therefore met by them with concealed distrust. For the time being, however, this mood has not taken on organized forms and does not go beyond the limits of private conversations.

General situation

On the whole, the situation in the Erzurum vilayet during the reporting month may be regarded as outwardly calm, but internally tense. The expectation of the inspectors' arrival and the political agitation associated with it, as well as the mutual distrust of various national and confessional groups, create fertile ground for possible complications. The local authorities apparently possess neither sufficient determination nor the means to keep the development of events within boundaries desirable to them. (...)

75. AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 81–86, May, 1914. Aleksandr Alekseevich Adamov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) The ferment that has arisen among the Kurds, in connection with the public execution in Bitlis of the leaders of the Kurdish movement, has not ceased and continues to trouble the Turkish authorities, although so far it has not gone beyond sullen discontent. Particularly alarming reports have been received in the vilayet concerning the activities of the well-known Kurdish bey K r H seyin Pasha, who is not content with inciting the tribal groups (aŐirets) of the Bayezid sanjak against the government but is also making considerable efforts to stir up other Kurdish tribes. According to the same information, he maintains lively contacts—through his nephews—with Kuli Khan Bey, residing in Hnıs, to whom he sent 500 Turkish liras exclusively for distribution to Kurdish spiritual leaders, i.e., sheikhs, in order to draw them into the common cause. His hostile attitude, the Turks explain as coming from outside, asserting that six Russian “commissioners” of Armenian origin are supposedly hiding there at present, and that the Russian vice-consulate in Bayezid is the chief source from which the contagion of discontent with the government spreads. On the basis of statements by a Kurdish customs official there, a certain Mustafa Agha, the authorities are convinced that he is in secret communication with the Russian government, which has promised him, in the event the planned uprising fails, active armed intervention, in order to save him from the fate of Seyyid Ali, Shamseddin, and other beys who perished on the gallows in Bitlis.

Outwardly, this heightened Kurdish mood is for the time being expressed in a complete non-recognition of the authorities, evasion of taxes and obligations, and a hostile attitude toward government representatives and officials present among the Kurdish population—not to mention the customary means of vexing the authorities in the form of brigandage and robberies. Not only the mutasarrif of Bayezid, together with his subordinate kaymakams, complain that the peaceful population can no longer endure the oppression and violence of the Kurds, but the kaymakam of KiĐı also inundates the vilayet with similar complaints, demanding the dispatch of regular troops to rein in the Kurdish beys who have “run wild.”

All these Kurdish excesses—common phenomena in recent years—would, of course, not have been given any particular significance by the Erzurum authorities if, at the same time, the commander of the Kurdish tribal regiments of “hafif s vari,” as well as the local chief of the tribal administration, had not replied to his order to bring the cavalry for training to Erzurum with the report that it was impossible to carry out the instruction because of the decisive refusal of the Kurds under his authority to assemble for the march and to set out for their assigned destination. Faced with such an energetic demonstration, the military authorities were taken aback and found no other way out than to send an urgent telegraphic report to the Minister of War about a “strike” by the Kurdish light cavalry.

Enver Pasha took advantage of Hasan Izzet Pasha’s tour of his district—Hasan Izzet Pasha being the head of the Third Inspectorate—to assign to him the difficult task of reconciling the Kurds with the government; for this purpose a certain number of Turkish orders were sent at his disposal for distribution to the most prominent Kurdish beys, including K r H seyin Pasha. According to my information, upon arriving in Erzurum Izzet Pasha recognized his mission as so little feasible that he reported to Constantinople that he had no hope whatsoever of a peaceful resolution of the question. In response, he was again ordered to act in a conciliatory spirit toward the Kurds, for which Izzet Pasha was granted broad powers: to submit all Kurdish officers for promotion at the next advancement; to promise them and all rank-and-file Kurds every kind of privilege and облегчения; to permit all “hafif s vari” regiments not to present themselves for training in Erzurum, but instead to dispatch one officer from each regiment to instruct them at their own stations, with instructions to these trainers not to be overly strict with those being trained. The only demand that Izzet Pasha must present to the Kurdish light cavalry is that each regiment agree to come to Erzurum to receive its banner, under which it could then begin training at its place of stationing.

Whether Izzet Pasha will succeed in obtaining this concession from the Kurds is still difficult to foresee, given the strong bitterness among them toward the government over the executions of the leaders of the Bitlis uprising; only one thing is certain: his failure in this regard could threaten the authorities with new complications. (...)

76. AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 2685, ll. 46–55, May 5, 1914 Aleksandr Alekseevich Adamov to the Embassy in Constantinople:

(...) Almost halfway between the Russo–Turkish border and Erzurum, at the bridge over the Araks River, lies the village of Köpri-Köy, inhabited exclusively by Armenians. At the beginning of March, acting on indications given by residents of the Muslim-populated settlement of Emrakam (located on the other side of the bridge, about the same distance from Köpri-Köy), the authorities found beneath one of the bridge’s arches the corpse of a Turkish gendarme named Kalmfera.

Because the body was found closer to the Armenian village, the Turkish authorities suspected the Armenians of murder. Proceeding with great bias in the inquiry and searches of the said Armenian village, Turkish investigating officials and gendarmes allowed themselves not only mockery of the frightened Armenians, but also violence against their wives and children—despite the fact that those brought to responsibility in the village asserted that the gendarme had been killed out of jealousy by several inhabitants of the village of Eprokom, and that his corpse had been planted on the ice near the Armenian village in order to mislead.

Turkish abuses against the defenseless villagers aroused strong indignation among the Armenians, who openly said that the authorities had set themselves the goal of forcing the Armenians to leave the village lying on the route of a Russian advance toward Erzurum, and therefore considered any means of coercion permissible.

Bishop Sempat has already several times appealed to the Vali with insistent demands to investigate the Köpri-Köy affair; but after the dispatch there of the Erzurum chief of police and also a civil inspector led to no results ... (...)

Armenian views on the Kurdish movement

I spoke with local Armenians in order to determine what they thought about the local Kurdish movement. They said that the Kurdish movement had not assumed mass proportions and that they did not wish to involve themselves in it.

They should not join this uprising, because in the absence among the Kurds of national self-consciousness and any notion of solidarity, the entire current movement is being directed by beys and sheikhs who—given the disunity of their actions—the Turkish government can easily win over with ransom payments and various favors, ultimately turning those who are now warlike against the Armenians. Thus, only in the case of a universal and widespread Kurdish uprising could Armenians, by joining them, consider themselves guaranteed against the atrocities of Turkish troops, which—under pressure of the Kurdish movement across all Armenia—would not have time to fall with all their force upon Armenian villages and would not manage to massacre all Christians before Russian troops entered the theater of the uprising.

In particular, regarding the movement of the Hizan sheikhs and beys who seized Bitlis, my interlocutors expressed the view that it had been caused, without doubt, by agents and emissaries of the present government, which sought to rely on the Kurds in opposing the implementation of the Armenian reforms promised earlier. The Kurdish beys, however, decided to use the situation for their own ends and to secure the repeal of the hurried, restrictive for them—and economically very ruinous—regulations on the tithes (ashar) and other treasury taxes and obligations that had been put into effect after the proclamation of the Constitution. In consequence, a movement that, according to the intent of the Committee of Union and Progress, was supposed to be directed solely against the reforms devised by Russia unexpectedly degenerated into an uprising against the government itself.

The Armenians of Erzurum tried to see in the fact that the Kurdish rebels did not touch the Bitlis Armenians of the same faith the hand of Russia; yet, given the absence of any discipline among the Kurdish ranks, they did not consider it possible to rely on the leaders’ sworn assurances that Armenians had nothing to fear and that their life, honor, and property would be inviolable for the insurgents.

Such is the view of the neutral Armenians. As for representatives of the Dashnak party, then, as can be seen from articles printed in issue no. 12 of the Armenian newspaper published in Baku, “Arev...” (title unclear in the text as provided), which replaced the closed “Gorts”, the Kurdish movement in the Bitlis vilayet is attributed to Russia—“for, according to the article, Russian diplomacy in recent years tried to lean on Kurdish elements, especially on feudal lords, proof of which can be seen in the activity of Abdürrezzak, Simko, Sheikh Toka, and others.” The article is signed with the letter “Z,” as is usually done by Voryam (now calling himself Rostomyan), the head of the Dashnak party in Erzurum. In attributing to Russia the unsuccessfully concluded Kurdish movement, the Dashnaks fully coincide with the Turkish authorities, who carefully spread this version among the Turks, especially after the execution of Said Ali, considered a saint, caused a certain displeasure even among the Muslims of Erzurum.

Elections in Erzurum

In the Erzurum vilayet, elections of deputies to the Turkish parliament were greatly delayed, both as a consequence of energetic opposition to the candidates of the Union and Progress party by the neutral segment of the Turkish population, and because the Armenians did not agree to send to parliament as their representatives persons favorable to the İttihadists.

Already in the previous survey I reported on the measures undertaken by the party to secure electoral success in its favor and on the failure they suffered in the Pasin kaza, despite agents sent there and the activity and support of the kaymakam Tahir Bey. The same opposition was noticeable in several other kazas and even in the city of Erzurum itself, which compelled the most prominent candidates—specifically the İttihadist inspector Hilmi Bey and the Pasin kaymakam Tahir Bey, compromised earlier by the Köpri-Köy incident—to withdraw their candidacies and finally yield their places to party members: the former deputy Seyfulla Efendi, Huseyn Tasun, the former Erzurum kadi Raif Efendi, and a resident of Kiğı, Hafız Efendi.

At the same time, the İttihadists had to change their tactics entirely. Thus, to secure a majority of votes in Erzurum itself, the İttihadist club entered into a preliminary agreement with the wealthiest and most influential persons of a certain city quarter and at the same time obtained the Vali's promise that he would at all costs push through the İttihadist candidates. In the Bayezid mutasarrifate, given the Kurds' refusal to vote for the designated persons, local authorities were instructed in advance to place into the electoral urn ballots for the party's nominees. Finally, to obtain the consent of the population in the remaining kazas, bribery was employed; and in the Tortum and [place name unclear: "Tsamervan/Çamerwan"]kazas, Seifulla Efendi distributed 400 Turkish gold liras. Thus, after considerable effort, victory for the İttihadist candidates was assured.

Meanwhile, the election of two Armenian deputies from the Erzurum vilayet presented no fewer difficulties. The misunderstanding began when the Armenian National Council of the city of Erzurum—still dominated by Dashnak party members—chose as deputies the former Dashnak deputies Garegin Pastırmacıyan and Vartkes Serengülian. The Constantinople Patriarch protested against this choice, demanding the creation of a union/assembly of representatives of Armenian Gregorian, Armenian Catholic, Armenian Protestant, and various Armenian parties, so that deputies would be chosen by a national assembly—seeing in the Council's practice an encroachment on his rights and privileges. The National Council categorically refused to annul its choice.

At this point the local İttihad club intervened, distrusting the Dashnaks and deciding to send to parliament persons loyal to itself. Thus, complete confusion immediately arose: the Patriarch favored the election of Hambartsum Boyadjian together with Vartkes Serengülian; the Dashnaks of Erzurum insisted on their second choice, Pastırmacıyan; the Young Turks advanced the candidacy of the former director of the Sanasarian School, Madatian, and the lawyer Dmrikian; while the neutral Armenians agreed to elect the neutral Kevork Metsaturian (inspector of justice) and Boyadjian.

Quite unexpectedly, the Erzurum İttihad club received a strict instruction from the Minister of the Interior to push through Vartkes Serengülian "at all costs," and therefore the Young Turks were forced, willingly or unwillingly, to campaign for this favorite of Talat Bey, in parallel with promoting Madatian. The latter had long been regarded as a sincere adherent of the Turks and a fierce opponent of the Dashnak party, and in recent times had also sought to win the favor of the İttihadists thanks to his zealous service to the German consul.

The local Armenian community considered Madatian a Turkish spy and did not wish to have him as its representative in parliament. As soon as information about Madatian's candidacy reached Constantinople, the Patriarch openly telegraphed the Armenian Gregorian bishop of Erzurum, Sempat, asking him to propose that Madatian withdraw his candidacy in favor of [name unclear in the text provided]; and in case of Madatian's stubbornness, not to regard him not only as an Armenian deputy, but even as an Armenian. Madatian declared his firm intention to stand, despite the Patriarch's prohibition, confident of full support from the Young Turks, who, to ensure his election, again postponed the voting until the end of April.

Bishop Sempat—whose role in this entire matter I shall have the honor to report separately—found nothing better than to propose that the Armenian community abstain entirely from the elections. The natural result of such a strange (not to say worse) attitude to the matter was the election, on the Armenian side in Erzurum, of Vartkes Serengülian and Hovsep Madatian. The latter, in his speech of thanks to the members of the İttihad club, solemnly swore to serve the government faithfully and truly until the end of his life. (...)