

**THE OPEN LETTER WHICH WAS ADRESSED TO HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO
REFLECT THE REALITIES**

GERÇEKLERİ ORTAYA KOYMAK İÇİN PAPA FRANCIS'E YAZILAN MEKTUP

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ABSTRACT

On April 12, 2015 Pope Francis addressed in his Vatican Liturgy that Armenian relocation under the regime Ottoman Empire was the first genocide of the 20th century. Prior to Pope Francis's speech, the Union of Turkish Non-Governmental Organizations (UTNGO) prepared and sent a letter to His Holiness, Pope Francis proving that the Armenian allegations were far from the realities.

In this letter historical facts in Turkish-Armenian relations were discussed and Armenian allegations were evaluated. Especially the efforts of Jamal Pasha who was the army commander of the Ottoman Government's 4th Army to help the relocated Armenians and his attempts to obtain medical and nutritional aid by the help of Pope of that time and the refusal of Pope's request by the entente powers were examined.

In the conclusion section the effects of the letter on Pope Francis and the consequences of the letter were evaluated.

Keywords: Pope Francis, Armenian Relocation, Armenian Migration, Armenian Deaths, Armenian Losses.

ÖZ

Papa Francis 12 Nisan 2015'te Vatikan'da yapılan dini ayın sırasında Osmanlı yönetimi altında gerçekleştirilen Ermeni göçünün 20. Yüzyılın ilk soykırımı olduğunu ifade etmiştir. Papa Francis'in konuşması öncesinde Türkiye Sivil Toplum Birliği (TSTB) Ermeni iddialarının gerçeklerden farklı olduğunu gösteren bir mektubu kaleme almış ve Papa'ya göndermiştir. Mektupta Türk-Ermeni ilişkilerindeki tarihsel gerçekler tartışılmış ve Ermeni iddialarının değerlendirmesi yapılmıştır. Mektupta özellikle o dönemde Osmanlı Devleti'nin 4. Ordu Komutanlığı görevini yürüten Cemal Paşa'nın göç ettirilen Ermenilere yardım amacıyla yaptığı çalışmalar, o dönemin Papa'sı aracılığıyla Ermenilere ilaç ve gıda yardımı yapılması için yaptığı girişimler ve Papa'nın Ermenilere yardım için yaptığı talebin o dönemin İtilaf devletleri tarafından reddedilmesi konuları ele alınmıştır.

Çalışmanın sonuç bölümünde mektubun papa Francis üzerinde yaptığı etkiler ve sonuçları tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Papa Francis, Ermeni Sevk ve İskanı, Ermeni Göçü, Ermeni Ölümleri, Ermeni Kayıpları.

1. INTRODUCTION

His Holiness Pope Francis addressed in his Vatican Liturgy of April 12, 2015 that relocation of the Armenians under the Ottoman Empire regime was the first genocide of the 20th century. When information about the Pope's possible speech started to appear in the media, Turkish public became irritated and some intellectuals decided to write a letter to his Holiness Pope Francis explaining to him that the genocide claims are baseless. The letter was sent to Pope Francis and 24 clergymen of Vatican on April 10, 2015. I would like to thank Ret. Minister of State Sadi Somuncuoğlu, Associate Prof. Dr. Lale Olcay and Eng. Fatma Sarıkaya for helping me to prepare this letter.

UTNGO's letter consists of six sections which are "Turkish Armenian Relations", "the Armenian Uprisings During World War-I and the Relocation Decision", "Turks Massacred by Russians and Armenians", "ASALA Terror and Assassination of Turkish Diplomats", "the Khojali Massacre Perpetrated by Armenians", "the Pope and the Ottoman Government's Efforts to Help During the Famine Period in Syria" and "Armenians Raising Their New Generations with Animosity towards Turks".

At the end of the letter UTNGO emphasized that His Holiness, surely was aware how important it was to keep an equal distance to all sides and human conscience expects this from His Holiness and the just and unbiased attitude which His Holiness has been assuming all along graciously would be affected mankind and contributed to world peace.

2. THE CONTENT OF THE LETTER

April 10, 2015

OUR HISTORICAL PLEA TO HIS HOLINESS, POPE FRANCIS

His Holiness, Pope Francis,

We have been informed that the sad events of World War-I will be mentioned in your Vatican liturgy scheduled for April 12. Due to our knowledge of the importance that His Holiness and the Vatican Government have given to basic human rights; to security, stability and peace, we as the Turkish Civilian Community Unions find it our duty to inform His Holiness about our views.

TURKISH ARMENIAN RELATIONS

Turkish Armenian relations have started with the Selchuk's entry into Anatolia. In reference to the Selchuk ruler Melikshah, Armenian historian Matheos of Urfa wrote: "*The Sultan's heart is full of affection for Christians. He looked upon the peoples of the lands he reached, with the eyes of a father. Thus he gained many towns and regions without waging war.*"¹

Fatih Sultan Mehmet, by establishing the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul in 1461, transferred the Armenian Religious Center to the capital city as well as granting freedom of religion, legality, and governance to the Armenian citizens of the Ottoman Empire. Upon their sincere adherence to the Ottoman Government, Armenian citizens were bestowed the "*millet-i sadika*" (highly trusted citizens) status and they were exempted from the compulsory military service. In addition, they were given highest positions at the government service. As a result there came about: 22 ministers, 33 parliamentarians, 29 pashas, 7 ambassadors, 11 consuls, 11 university academics and 41 high ranking government representatives of Armenian heritage serving the Ottoman Empire.² In the first parliament of the Ottoman Empire, 10 members of parliament were Armenians and 11 in the second.³ An unparalleled brotherly peaceful and tranquil era was achieved lasting 8-9 centuries.

THE ARMENIAN UPRISINGS DURING WORLD WAR – I AND THE RELOCATION DECISION

In the later years, noticing the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, some imperialist powers of the era planned to manipulate its Armenian citizens, to serve their expansionist aims. They had unfortunately misguided certain Armenians, preparing them through a provocative ideological training with the promise of "*establishing an Armenian state reaching from sea to sea*". As a result, while the Ottoman Government was busy fighting in 8 different fronts during World War-I, Armenian draftees left their posts at the frontline with their weapons and joined the Russian army which was waging war against the Ottoman Government.

Others started massacres in armed bands massacring hundreds of thousands of civilians in Turkish towns and villages. Army depots were burned down, logistics routes were cut-off, and Ottoman soldiers were poisoned by bread prepared by Armenian bakers; rendering the Ottoman Army unfit to fight the invading forces.⁴

The Ottoman Government held many meetings to convince these rebel bandit units to join her ranks and approached them with counseling commissions to no avail. As a result, the government closed down the Armenian Committee Centers on April 24, 1915 and apprehended 235 of the committee leaders in Istanbul. But this precaution did not bring any solution either. Finally, they decided to force the villains, instigators, and murderers away from the war zone.⁵ In order to carry out this decision the minutely detailed "migration and resettlement decree" was issued. According to this decree, the rebelling Armenians were relocated to

¹ Mateos of Urfa, *Vekayiname (952-1136) and Father Papaz Grigor's Zeyli (1131-1162)*, (Translated by: Hrant D. Andreasyan, Ankara, 1987): 171.

² Salih Yılmaz, "Statements against Turks and Supposed Armenian Genocide in a10th Grade History School Book Taught in the Armenian Republic," *Research on the Turkish World*, No. 177 (December 2008): 112

³ *Aide –Mémorie on the rights of minorities in Turkey*, Presented to the Representatives of the Members of The League of Nations (Istanbul: National Association for The Ottoman Society of Nations, 1922): 13-14.

⁴ *Ermeni Komitelerinin Amaçları ve İhtilal Hareketleri*, (Ankara: Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etütler Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2003): 164.

⁵ Azmi Süslü, *Ermeniler ve 1915 Tehcir Olayı*,(Ankara: Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü publication no:5, 1990): 149-150;" British Foreign Office Papers", Public Record Office, No: 371/6556/E.2730/800/44.

Ottoman provinces away from the war zone such as Syria and Mosul. This measure which was taken under great difficulty and hardship was effective; extensive massacres were averted and collaboration with the enemy was prevented. The “forced migration” thus proved to have been a necessary and justifiable act.

However, upon Russian Army’s retreat following the Bolshevik revolution from the lands they had occupied and the Turkish Army withdrawal to the boundaries forced upon them by the Mondros Treaty the Armenians once again started their massacres and killed hundreds of thousands of Turks in Eastern Anatolia,.

In those years, a total of 1.294.851 Armenians were living in Ottoman lands including Syria and Palestine and 736.000 of those were living in Anatolia. Only 438.758 of those Armenians living in Anatolia were forced to relocate; the Armenians of Catholic and Protestant beliefs and those who were employed in governmental positions were left untouched. Those who were relocated were later permitted to return to their homes.⁶

Edward Nathan, the American Consul in Mersin wrote in his report to the US Ambassador in Istanbul on August 30, 1915 that “*the Armenians obtained train tickets from Adana onwards and the Ottoman government managed this event in an orderly fashion without violence or misconduct; providing enough tickets for all migrants, as well as providing aid for those in need.*”⁷ In his report of September 11, 1915, the Consul mentioned that “*a hospital is established in Damascus where he saw 50 patients who were being cared for during his visit, no massive deaths occurred in the camp and the Ottoman government distributed food among all migrants*”.⁸

Jackson, the American Consul in Aleppo wrote in the list of deportees that he prepared on February 3, 1916 that there were 486.000 Armenians alive and well. He also wrote in his report dated February 8, 1916 that there were around 500.000 Armenian deportees in their newly locations.⁹ The aforementioned reports show that most deportees had safely reached their destinations.

TURKS MASSACRED BY RUSSIANS AND ARMENIANS

According to American historian, Professor Justin McCarthy; 1.189.132 Turks were killed in the eastern provinces of Turkey and 413.000 Turks in Trans Caucasia, by Armenians and the Russians between the years 1912-1922. Thus the total number of Turks killed amounts to 1.602.132.¹⁰ To top it off, 1.604.031¹¹ Muslim Turks (3.5 times the number of relocated Armenians) had to leave their villages to escape from the Russian invasion which was spearheaded by the murdering Armenian bands. Two thirds of those Turks who had to leave their homes, (i.e. 1 million) lost their lives during migration.¹² When the number of those massacred by Armenians and Russians are added, Turkish losses exceed 2 million.

It is also stated by Bruce Fein, the Legal Advisor of American President Ronald Regan, that 280.000 Armenians remained in Anatolia and the others reached their destinations but 2.4 million Turks/Muslims had lost their lives due to the Armenian massacres.¹³

When such truth is out in the open, the Armenian allegations that Turks have committed an act of genocide should not find support especially from His Holiness, Pope Francis and a just and fair assessment is the expected by all Muslims.

ASALA TERROR AND ASSASSINATION OF TURKISH DIPLOMATS

In spite of all suffering, north-east and eastern borders of Turkey were drawn with the Gyumri and Moscow Treaties in 1920 and with Kars Treaty in 1921. After these 3 treaties, Turkey’s borders were reiterated with the Lausanne Treaty in 1923 and peace was affirmed. After a long quiet period of 50 years, ASALA Terror Organization started a new terrorist and murder campaign against the Turks. Armenian hit men executed 110 terrorist attacks in 21 Western Countries’ 38 cities between 1973 and 1984. In these attacks, 42 Turkish

⁶ Yusuf Halaçoğlu, *Ermeni Tehciri ve Gerçekler (1914-1918)*, (Ankara:Turkish History Association, 2001): 77, 81, 82, 83; Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi Şifre No: 63/119, 57/273, 62/21(Ek-XXX), 341055.

⁷ Halaçoğlu, *Ermeni Tehciri ve Gerçekler (1914-1918)*...: 58; Dahiliye Nezareti, Emniyet Umum Müdürlüğü, February 2, Şube, No: 2D/13.

⁸ “US Archives NARA” 867.4016/193, Copy No: 484.

⁹ Hikmet Özdemir, Kemal Çiçek, Ömer Turan, Ramazan Çalık, Yusuf Halaçoğlu, *Ermeniler: Sürgün ve Göç*, (Ankara:Turkish History Association, 2004): 75; “US Archives” NARA 867.48/271, Appendix: 310.

¹⁰ Justin McCarthy, *Ölüm ve Sürgün*, Çeviren: Fatma Sarıkaya, (Ankara: Turkish History Association, 2012): 265-266; Haluk Selvi, *Geçmişten Günümüze Ermeni Sorunu ve Avrupa*, (Sakarya: Sakarya Üniversitesi Türk-Ermeni İlişkileri Araştırma Merkezi, 2006): 102

¹¹ Ömer Lütfi Taşcıoğlu, “Belgelere Göre Türk-Ermeni İlişkilerinde Katliam ve Soykırım İddiaları”, Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü PhD Thesis, June 24, 2014: 276-277; Tuncay Ögün, *Unutulmuş Bir Göç Trajedisi Vilayat-ı Şarkiye Mültecileri (1915-1923)*, Ankara: Babil Publication House, 2004): 37; “Müslüman Muhacirler”, *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, May 11, 1919: 2.

¹² Ögün, *Unutulmuş Bir Göç Trajedisi ...*,” 2004: 37; “Müslüman Muhacirler”, *Tasvir-i Efkâr*, May 11, 1919: 2.

¹³ Bruce Fein, “Lies, Damn Lies And Armenian Deaths”, *Huffpost World*, dated: July 5, 2009.

diplomatic personnel were murdered on duty, as well as 15 Turkish and 66 foreign citizens were wounded. Once, Turkey achieved to crumple the ASALA, the dirty job was transferred to the PKK terrorist organization whose most ring leaders are known to be of Armenian descent.

These bloody assassinations showed that a major change took place in the Armenian identity which was misled by the colonialists. According to this, their new identity comprised of “vendetta and hate” against the Turk. The first signs of this new identity cultivated in the new generation of Armenians were first observed during the ASALA terror between 1973-1984 and towards the innocent civilians of Karabakh in 1992 during the “Khojali genocide” perpetrated by the Armenians.

THE KHOJALI MASSACRE PERPETUATED BY ARMENIANS

The Armenians have continued their execution of Turks through the last quarter of the 20th Century. With support of the 366th Motorized Russian Regiment, they attacked the Khojali district of Azerbaijan on February 26, 1992 and mercilessly killed 613 Turks (including 63 children and 106 women), wounded 487 and took 1.275 prisoners.

After Khojali massacre Armenian army assaulted and captured Karabakh and 7 regions of Azerbaijan.¹⁴ In spite of numerous UN Security Council resolutions, Armenia continues to occupy Azeri lands. Over one million Turks, who were forced to leave their homes, still live in tent- towns to this day.

Armenia has been keeping 20% of Azeri lands under occupation for 23 years. It is understood from the AGIT Report that an ethnic cleansing has taken place in the lands occupied by Armenia where no Turks are allowed to live. Armenia has not offered any explanation regarding these established facts and the tragedy that set upon the Turks. For these reasons, we think His Holiness would keep in mind all these facts while declaring a speech in support of the Armenian claims.

THE POPE AND THE OTTOMAN GOVERNMENT’S EFFORTS TO HELP DURING THE FAMINE PERIOD IN SYRIA

The foreign mission chiefs speak highly of the efforts made by Jamal Pasha, (who was the commander of the Ottoman Government’s 4th Army) to help the Armenians who were relocated to Syria. When a major famine occurred in this area during those years, the food for the Christian residents including the Armenians that had resettled in this area and even for the allied and independent missions were provided from the food stores of the 4th Army. Many hospitals were established, where Armenian and Turkish doctors were allocated to aid the Armenians in need of care.¹⁵

During those years the reason of the famine in these areas was the blockade of the British and French navy fleets on the Syrian and Lebanese coasts, where most of the residents were Christian. Jamal Pasha, commander of the 4th Army, asked the Marouni Patriarch to pen a letter to His Holiness, the Pope of the time, asking for his mediation to obtain medical and nutritional aid from the USA and Spain for the civilian Christian populations of the area. But the British and the French did not allow ships sent by the USA and Spain to land on Beirut’s harbor.¹⁶ Sail boats carrying food from other coasts of Syria on the orders of Jamal Pasha, with the aim to provide food for the residents of Beirut and Lebanon in general were also sank by the British and the French.¹⁷

In an effort to lift the British and French embargo and to let the US Consul in Beirut to distribute the aid as he wished to the Christians, Jamal Pasha requested the American Embassy in Syria to mediate at the Governmental level of Britain and France. However, the US Ambassador in Syria refused to help in this matter.¹⁸

The reply of His Holiness to the Marouni Patriarch upon the letter sent at Jamal Pasha’s request states: *“The Pope has not forgotten the Christians of Syria and he will not allow them to be forgotten. Many times, He has requested permission from the Entente Powers, to provide food which would reduce their suffering; but Britain refused the request of His Holiness. Thence His Holiness’ heart is broken due to the mentioned*

¹⁴ Ömer Lütfi Taşcıoğlu, “Belgelere Göre Türk-Ermeni İlişkilerinde Katliam ve Soykırım İddiaları”, Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, PhD Thesis, June 24, 2014, p. 291.

¹⁵ Ali Fuat Erden, 1. Cihan Harbinde Suriye Hatıraları, (İstanbul, 1954): 171-184.

¹⁶ Erden, 1. Cihan Harbinde Suriye Hatıraları.. :214-221.

¹⁷ Hikmet Özdemir, Cemal Paşa ve Ermeni Göçmenleri, 4. Ordu’nun İnsani Yardımları, (İstanbul, Remzi Kitabevi, 2009): 218.

¹⁸ Özdemir, Cemal Paşa ve Ermeni Göçmenleri...,“: 222- 229.

refusal and embargo of the British government. Christians in the East will understand in due time that His Holiness has not forgotten them."¹⁹

While the Ottoman Government was unable to raise food for its own army which was fighting for its survival during these times, its 4th Army provided 300.000 Kg of provisions as well as money to the Marounis; 300.000 Kg of wheat and 500,000 Franks to the Greek community; 100.000 Kg of wheat and 80.000 Franks to the Armenian community and immigrants as aid because these Christian people were left to starve due to the Entente Powers' embargo.²⁰

ARMENIANS RAISING THEIR NEW GENERATIONS WITH ANIMOSITY TOWARDS TURKS

The Armenians have not stopped at distorting the truth, but are also raising their new generations as enemy of the Turks. Armenian children are taken to the museum in Yerevan where they are brainwashed starting from the age of 5 with the aid of visual and auditory effects some of which are forgeries.

Turkey has removed from school text books some of the historical subjects, even those that it can teach in all fairness, in an effort to comply with the United Nation's Committee for Eradication of Racial Discrimination's decision "to stop hate speech" and to comply with UNESCO's decision of "avoiding prejudice and clichés towards other nations and certain groups". In spite of these UN decisions, the Armenian school books are full of swearwords, insult, hate speech and false allegations against the Turks.²¹ Inclusion of the Armenian allegations in the school books of the countries which claim to be friends of Turkey conflicts with the International Court of Justice decision that "*forced relocation cannot be accepted as genocide*" as well as the 1998 convention of "*crimes against humanity*".

In spite of these manifest facts discovered and accepted by many non-Turkish academicians and historians, blaming the Turkish nation (which has been known for its chivalry, honesty, compassion and war ethics all through its history) with the crime of genocide, while the Republic of Armenia and the Diaspora's efforts to use Christianity and the world politics in for their ends is being witnessed with grief.

In their desire to bring out the true facts about the sad events of 100 years ago - before - during and soon after World War-I, the Christian, Jewish and Muslim peoples of the Turkish Republic have the expectation from His Holiness, his mention of the following facts in the historic speech that he will deliver on April 12, 2015 at the Vatican:

- a) Since all countries' archives are open, the Armenian archives in Boston should no longer remain closed,
- b) All countries' court decisions regarding this subject as well as decisions of the International Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights should be considered; especially that of the British Crown's Court which was held immediately following World War-I, as its research concluded that there was no evidence to blame the Ottoman Government's high officers detained in the island of Malta, therefore the detainees were released because no legal court case could be put together against them.
- c) The Republic of Armenia has been occupying Azerbaijani lands for the last 23 years, in spite of international justice; it has also committed ethnic cleansing on those lands; and it needs to explain why they have massacred innocent civilians in Khojali,
- d) The Republic of Armenia and the Diaspora's efforts to force political solutions on a legal matter harms peace, security and stability: This should cease as it is causing nothing but increased tension, hate and feelings of vengeance. This is wrong and dangerous politics and should be stopped immediately and permanently,
- e) In the light of these facts, that it is imperative to evaluate these events in a commission of mutually acceptable historians.

We believe that when the fact that the sides have no alternative but to patiently wait for the result of the research and deliberations to reach justice is strongly voiced, the climate of peace will be served immensely. Since it is well known that justice is the main factor in reaching a lasting solution to all hostilities, His Holiness, surely is aware how important it is to keep an equal distance to all sides. In truth, human

¹⁹ Özdemir, Cemal Paşa ve Ermeni Göçmenleri...,“: 231.

²⁰ Özdemir, Cemal Paşa ve Ermeni Göçmenleri...,“: 216, 219-220.

²¹ Yılmaz, “Statements against Turks and Supposed Armenian Genocide ”: 116-129.

conscience expects this from His Holiness. We believe that the just and unbiased attitude which His Holiness has been assuming all along graciously affects mankind and contributes to world peace.

We present our thoughts to the esteemed evaluation of His Holiness in the belief that they will serve a peaceful solution and dialogue between the involved sides.

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3. EFFECTS OF THE LETTER ON POPE FRANCIS AND THE CONSEQUENCES

Although the letter was sent to Pope Francis in due time he did not change his intention to enunciate that Turks perpetrated genocide towards the Armenians. Speaking at a mass in the St. Peter's Basilica he included the Armenian deaths, with in the context of contemporary persecution of Christians in the Muslim world.

The pope also called for reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia, but his words raised tensions between the Vatican and Ankara. Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Vatican's envoy after the Pope's speech. Vatican spokesman Rev. Federico Lombardi declined to comment on the dispute.²²

Turkey accused the Vatican of using history for political aims: by singling out Armenians and not mentioning all lost lives in Anatolia during World War I. Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said the comments were "not fitting of the Pope."²³

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavuşoglu said in a message from his official Twitter account that the Pope's declaration, was devoid of historical and legal facts, and thus was unacceptable by the Turkish government. Religious positions should not be used to spread hatred and grudges on baseless claims".²⁴

After a while both sides eased the tension and have not talked about the issue for a long while.

At the first look it can be asserted that the letter of UTNGU had no effect on the attitude of Pope Francis but it must have. At least Pope Francis and the 24 clergymen must have learned about the realities. What is more the Pope has not mentioned the Armenian deaths as genocide again since his liturgy of April 12, 2015.

This proves that if you put forward the realities based on genuine historical foreign archival documents, it becomes more difficult to assert baseless claims as realities.

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²² Pope Francis Calls Armenian Deaths 'First Genocide of 20th Century', *The Wall Street Journal*, April 12, 2015.

²³ Pope Francis Calls Armenian Deaths, *The Wall Street Journal*, April 12, 2015.

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