

THE RETURN AND RESETTLEMENT OF THE RELOCATED ARMENIANS
(1918-1920)

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ABSTRACT

THE RETURN AND RESETTLEMENT OF THE RELOCATED ARMENIANS 1918-1920

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This thesis analyses the return of the relocated Armenians and resettlement of them in former their hometowns between the years 1918 and 1920, with special reference to the relative archival materials. Upon the permission given for their return on the last days of the World War I, most of the relocated Armenians did return either with the help of the Ottoman government or by their own means. The first chapter of the thesis is devoted to the preliminary developments which were influential in taking of the return decision by the Ottoman government. The following chapter elaborates the return of the Armenians from the relocation residences to their former hometowns. In the third chapter, the resettlement process and the government's attempts for care of the returnees are examined. Because it was completed in the most disastrous years of the Ottoman Empire, the return of the Armenians properly reflects the postwar Ottoman panorama with its administrative, financial and social aspects. The postwar Allied interference with and pressures on the Empire are also observable through the return and resettlement processes.

Keywords: *Armenians, return, resettlement.*

ÖZ

TEHCİR EDİLEN ERMENİLERİN GERİ DÖNÜŞÜ VE YENİDEN İSKANI 1918-1920

Günaydın, Adem

Yüksek Lisans, Orta Doğu Araştırmaları

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Bu tez, tehcir edilen Ermenilerin 1918 ve 1920 yılları arasında eski yerlerine geri dönüşlerini ve yeniden iskanlarını, çoğunlukla arşiv belgelerine atıfta bulunarak irdellemektedir. Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın son günlerinde geri dönüşlerine izin verilen Ermenilerin önemli bir kısmı, gerek Osmanlı hükümetlerinin yardımları, gerekse kendi imkanları ile geri dönmüşlerdir. Tezin ilk bölümü Osmanlı hükümetinin geri dönüş kararı almasında etkili olan gelişmelere ayrılmıştır. Sonraki bölümde, Ermenilerin tehcir edildikleri bölgelerden eski yerleşim yerlerine dönüşleri anlatılmıştır. Üçüncü bölümde ise geri dönenlerin yeniden iskanı ve korunmaları için yapılan çalışmalar incelenmiştir. Tarihinin en feci yıllarında tatbik edilen geri dönüş hadisesi, Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun savaş sonrasında karşılaştığı felaketi idari, mali ve sosyal açılardan göstermektedir. İtilaf devletlerinin İmparatorluk üzerindeki savaş sonrası müdahale ve baskılarını da geri dönüş ve yeniden iskan süreçleri üzerinden izlemek mümkündür.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Ermeniler, geri dönüş, yeniden iskan.*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMMU	General Directorate for Tribes and Immigrants
BCA	Prime Ministry Republican Archives
BOA.	Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives
CUP	Committee of Union and Progress
İSUM	İstihbarat-ı Siyasiye-i Umumiye Mecmuası
MMZC	Meclis-i Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi
NARA	National Archives of America
NER	Near East Relief
OBE	Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler
TBMM	Turkish National Grand Assembly
TTK	Turkish Historical Society
WWI	World War I

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Large numbers of scholars from both the West and Turkey have devoted voluminous literature on the relocation of the Armenians from the time of its happening till now. Many aspects of the relocation have been debated, though none of the debates have introduced a conclusion admitted mutually by the Turkish and Armenian scholars. Both sides have its own definitions and nomenclature. Basically, while the Turks refer the relocation as an instance of intercommunal warfare and a wartime relocation, Armenians call it the first genocide of the twentieth century.¹

Debates on the relocation have concentrated on several questions and have usually been reduced to the events occurred between the years 1915 and 1918. Because many Turkish historians have studied the issue with a purpose to override the Armenian arguments blaming Turks for genocide, rather than investigating the question free of daily concerns, the areas of debate have usually intensified around the questions to which Armenians paid much attention. Therefore, naturally, Turkish version of the studies on the relocation usually has a responsive character. Within this framework, the questions like the premeditation, the pre-war Armenian population and number of the losses during the relocation, treatment of the Armenians being relocated by the Ottoman officials, etc. have been examined with a view to invalidate the Armenian arguments on them. On the other hand, several aspects of the relocation remained out of the literature on the issue. Return of the relocated Armenians is one

¹ Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, The University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, 2005, p. ix.

of these aspects having no mention in the literature on relocation except for a few inadequate studies.²

After more than three years of their relocation, the Armenians were given permission for return to their former hometowns in 18 December 1918.³ Subsequent to the permission, approximately 300,000 Armenians returned from Syria and Iraq and were resettled between the years 1918 and 1920. Great efforts and expenditures were made to ensure safety of the Armenians during their return and resettlement. Abandoned properties of the returnees were mostly restituted or compensated by the Ottoman government and Armenian orphans and women were given back to their community in a large extent.

The available studies conducted by the Armenian and pro-Armenian Western researchers have mostly examined the Armenian question irrespective of return of the Armenians. Therefore, the studies made in absentia of the fact of return have evaluated the return as a sharp rupture of relations between the Ottoman Empire and the relocated Armenians. In these studies, the relocation has been taken as an event that culminated either in death or in misery of the relocated Armenians. The numbers put forth by the Armenian researchers so as to show the Armenian losses during the relocation gives no place to the returnees. Even the term “return of the Armenians” has not appeared in most of the relative sources.

² The only study fully devoted to return of the Armenians as well as Greeks is a master thesis of which reference information is; İ. Ethem Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen Rum ve Ermenilerin İskanı Meselesi*, Unpublished master thesis, submitted to Atatürk University, Institute of Principles of Atatürk and History of Turkish Revolution, Erzurum, 1991.

³ BOA., DH., ŞFR., No: 92/187.

It is clear that the return has been intentionally disregarded by the Armenian researchers in order to keep the existence of the returnees out of the debates on the relocation. They have shown great effort to curtail the returned Armenians. This is for the reason that questioning of the return would inevitably open the way for questioning of the genocide. It would be quite difficult for the Armenian researchers to explain the return of the hundreds of thousands of Armenians to Turkish territories where they were claimed to have experienced a genocide campaign.

Despite its importance for disposing of the Armenian arguments, also the Turkish researchers have not paid required attention to the issue. Similar with the Armenian publications, the Turkish publications on the Armenian question have passed over the issue of return slightly. Most of them were settled for few pages on the return. Due to this fact, Turkish public have remained alien to the fact of return and so believed in the conclusive severance of the Turco-Armenian relations after the relocation.

However, the return of the Armenians after October 1918 deserves to be regarded as the second phase of the relocation. Through the return decision, the period of relocation has ended for most of the formerly relocated Armenians. It is possible to discuss whether the return of the Armenians was premediated by the Ottoman government or not; however ignorance of the hundreds of thousands of the returnees shall inevitably cause misassessments and miscalculations on the studies searching for the truth on the relocation.

Then, this thesis based on the idea that the return of the Armenians constitutes an important part of the event of relocation and studying on it is indispensable for a comprehensive understanding of the Armenian question in general and of the

relocation in particular. The thesis is prepared with reference to the the context of the day, which was mostly defined by the postwar conditions, and under the light of the relative archival material and the newspapers of the period. By the way, the thesis covers the Armenians who returned by the agency of the government or by their own means, excluding those who returned particularly in Cilicia region by means of the occupying French and British forces. Similarly, the return of the relocated Greeks is not included in the thesis except for several mentions. This is because, though they returned together with the Armenians within the same period and under the similar conditions, the return of the Greeks has its own peculiarities, so needs a particular concentration.

1.1. The Reasons behind the Government's Decision of Return

The return of the relocated Armenians proceeded to the agenda of the Ottoman government before the end of WWI. From then till 1920s, the Ottoman governments had to make many efforts so as to complete the return and resettlement of the Armenians. Timing and motivation behind workings concerning the return were of several reasons. They, however, predominantly lied in the adverse circumstances introduced by the WWI.

The first reason was the disappearance of the milieu which had made the relocation of the Armenians obligatory in 1915. Russia's retreat from the WWI towards the end of 1917 eliminated the danger of Russo-Armenian cooperation against the Ottoman Empire. That is, return of the Armenians would not create a danger in absentia of Russia in the region. Thus, Ahmed Nesimi Bey, head of the Ottoman delegation to the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations, had ensured Leon

Trotsky, the Bolshevik People's Commissar for Foreign Relations, about the preparations that would be made for the return of the Armenians.⁴ Moreover, the return of the Armenians was issued during the negotiations made between the Ottoman Empire and Germany so as to control the advance of the Ottoman army in the Caucasia in February 1918, upon attacks of the Armenian bands against the Turks in the Caucasia to protest the Treaty of Brest–Litovsk.⁵ In the Europe, the Ottoman advance had created fear that the Turks would take revenge on the Armenians, so they had to be warned and controlled by pressure. The German–Ottoman negotiation was a result of the European fear and pressure and resulted in agreement upon the general amnesty of the Ottoman Armenians.⁶

Truly, after a short while, the government began to work on the issue. In the meeting on 18 April 1918, the Council of Ministers (Meclis-i Vükelâ) made the decision on the return of the removed Armenians, Greeks and Arabs, who were over sixty or in needy circumstances, to their original hometowns.⁷ For the implementation of this decision, the government transferred sixty million piastres from the mobilization fund.⁸ Two million liras were also allocated in August 1918 for the expenses of the return⁹. Similarly, on 15 September 1915 a remittance order has been prepared by the Ministry of War in the name of the 1st Army Corps Directorate of

⁴ İ. Ethem Atnur, “Osmanlı Hükümetleri ve Tehcir Edilen Rum ve Ermenilerin İskanı Meselesi”, *Atatürk Yolu*, November, 1994. p. 121.

⁵ Ovanes Kaçaznuni, *Taşnak Partisi'nin Yapacağı Bir Şey Yok*, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul, 2005, p. 107.

⁶ İ. Ethem Atnur, *Türkiye'de Ermeni Kadınları ve Çocukları Meselesi (1915–1923)*, Babil Yayıncılık, Ankara, 2005, p. 113.

⁷ *Meclis-i Vükela Mazbatası*, 10 Nisan 1334 [10 April 1918], 211/169.

⁸ Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives (BOA), BEO, 338597.

⁹ *Ceride-i Şarkiyeye*, 6 Ağustos 1334 [6 August 1918], cited in *İstihbarat-ı Siyasiye-i Umumiye Mecmuası* (ISUM), no. 135, 10 August 1918, p. 20.

Mobilization for the payment of 900,000 piastres from the mobilization fund to cover the costs related to the relocated Arab, Greek, and Armenian families.¹⁰

The second reason behind granting allowance to the relocated Armenians for return was the short term rehabilitation of the Turco-Armenian relations in mid-1918. Towards the end of the WWI, relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Armenians began to go well within and outside of the country because of several factors. One of them was the retreat of Russia from the War and change in the traditional Russian policy towards the Armenians after the Bolshevik regime came into power. Because the Armenian revolutionary activities had continuously been encouraged and supplied by Russia, its withdrawal from the War drove the Armenians to re-consider their relations with the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, advance of the Ottoman forces on the Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasia was terrifying for the Armenians that let them to be aware of the Ottoman entity in the region and soften their anti-Ottoman policies. Similarly, the Allied pressure on the Armenians to renounce their claims on the lands under Georgian control and to bring an end to the state of war between Armenia and the republics around her broke the Armenian faith upon the sincerity of the Allied Powers on the Armenian cause. Subsequently, the Armenians got suspicious of the changing policies of the Allies on the Armenian claim on the Eastern Anatolia and Caucasia which urged them to get in touch with the Ottoman Empire. The aforementioned developments brought Hovhannes Kachaznuni, the first prime minister of the Armenia, to the belief that the

¹⁰ Hikmet Özdemir & Yusuf Sarıncay, Ed., *Turkish – Armenian Conflict Documents*, TBMM Kültür, Sanat ve Yayın Kurulu Yayınları, Ankara, 2007, Document no: 189, p. 491.

present state of affairs required establishment of friendship with the Ottoman Empire.¹¹

With this purpose in mind, an Armenian delegation headed by Avetis Aharonian visited İstanbul in June 1918.¹² During this visit of four months, the Aharonian and the other delegates negotiated with the Sultan and the leading personages of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). During their visit, the delegation observed that the Ottomans were willing of forgetting about the past and ready to negotiate in order for improvement of relations with them. In June 4, 1918, a peace agreement was signed between the Ottoman government and the Armenian delegation to bring an end to the state of war in Caucasia and give birth to rehabilitation of relations between the two countries.¹³

During the negotiations, Armenian delegation gave particular importance to the return of the relocated Armenians to their hometowns. They asked Talat Pasha, the Grand Vizier, for the return of the Armenian immigrants in the Caucasia that was urgent for saving them from cholera and other illnesses they had caught. They were given promise that all the issues regarding the Armenians would be resolved within a month.¹⁴

Studies in favor of re-construction of Turco-Armenian friendship found support in the Ottoman and Armenian newspapers of the period. Particularly, pro-CUP daily

¹¹ Mim Kemal Öke, *Ermeni Sorunu 1914-1923*, Türk Tarih Kurumu (TTK) Yayınları, Ankara, 1991, p. 135.

¹² Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence*, University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1967, p. 230

¹³ Recep Karacakaya, *Türk Kamuoyu ve Ermeni Meselesi*, Toplumsal Dönüşüm Yayınları, İstanbul, 2005, p. 279.

¹⁴ Karacakaya, *Türk Kamuoyu ...*, p. 281.

Tanin and pro-Dashnaksutyun daily *Hairenik* pioneered the accomplishment of friendship. According to the *Hairenik*, thanks to the improving Turco-Armenian relations, Armenian question would disappear and the enmity created by the Great Powers would be forgotten.¹⁵ It continued with the words that;

The Armenian Republic owes its foundation to the Ottoman Empire. Armenian politicians must be careful about the Russian willing of establishment of an Armenian government against the vital interests of the Empire. Turco-Armenian hostility has already ended, that is, we can talk about the growing friendship. No matter how the international developments are happening, the Ottoman Armenians must keep in mind that their future is closely attached to the Turks. Political existence of the Armenians is possible only if they continue to be subjects of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁶

These efforts of the newspapers for the sake of re-establishment of the Turco-Armenian friendship had a past going back to the early months of 1918. In April 1918, *Jamanak* issued the Ottoman initiative for an internal borrowing. The newspaper wrote that this initiative was important firstly because it would yield economic advantages to the Armenians. Equally important, participation to it was also a duty of citizenship because it was an attempt to guarantee final victory of the Ottoman peoples in WWI. Besides, it was a means to recover centuries-long friendship between two nations. *Jamanak* concluded that participation to this initiative will make the Turks believe how we, the Armenians, are deeply attached to this country. What is more, participation will also make the Turks feel ashamed as they charged us for the actions conducted by the committee members.¹⁷

¹⁵ Öke, *Ermeni Sorunu*, p. 135.

¹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Treasury of Documents, *Harb-i Umumi*: 102/10, 21 vi. 1918, cited in Öke, *Ermeni Sorunu*, pp. 135-36.

¹⁷ *Jamanak*, April 1918, cited in Karacakaya, *Türk Kamuoyu...*, p. 280.

The summer of 1918 seems to be the time of penitence and confession for the Armenians.¹⁸ At the time, the Armenian newspapers continuously emphasized how the Armenian subjects of the Empire were deceived by the Diaspora Armenians and the Great Powers. According to *Hairenik*; material and moral improvement of the Armenians became possible only under the Ottoman rule. Pre-Ottoman Armenian history was full of instability and wars; but it was the era of the Turks when the Armenians introduced with civilization, welfare and freedom.¹⁹ In another issue, *Hairenik* wrote that the Ottoman Empire has saved the Armenians living loyal to the law and given them freedom in their religious and educational affairs. From then on, *Hairenik* talked that, keeping the past in mind, the Armenians must serve the Empire faithfully and be careful about inspirations by false guides. Similarly, *Puzantiyon* wrote that the Ottoman Armenians were charged with treachery because of the irresponsible activities of the Armenians out of Turkey. It concluded that, the Turks and the Armenians had common interests that would accelerate unification of them and so result in birth of a great Turkey.²⁰

The last but the most valid reason for giving allowance to return was the idea of changing the international public opinion to the benefit of the Ottoman Empire before its upcoming collapse in the War. Upon the fall and call for armistices of the Bulgarian, Austrian and German fronts in September and October 1918 it became certain that the War was irrecoverably lost. After that, the Talat Paşa cabinet resigned on 5 October 1918. Founded by Ahmet İzzet Paşa on 14 October 1918, the new

¹⁸ İ. Ethem Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen Rum ve Ermenilerin İskanı Meselesi*, Unpublished master thesis, submitted to Atatürk University, Institute of Principles of Atatürk and History of Turkish Revolution, Erzurum, 1991, p. 8.

¹⁹ Öke, *Ermeni Sorunu*, p. 136.

²⁰ *ISUM*, no: 136, 11 August 1918, p. 26.

cabinet immediately opened the door for return of the relocated Armenians and Greeks on 18 October 1918. This was a must in order to break the ice before prospective negotiations for an armistice.²¹

The goal of the government in giving permission for return was to eliminate as far as possible the negative Ottoman image in the international arena before the War ended. In the last decades of the Empire, an image of the “terrible Turk” had solidified in the West as the result of intensive propaganda. In creation of this image, the reports sent home by missionaries touching the “unhappy life of their downtrodden fellow-Christians in Anatolia” was formative.²² The 1894-1896 disturbances and the 1909 Adana events were largely instrumental in propagandizing against the Ottoman Empire.²³ As Justin McCarthy truly states, “most of what has been called the history of the Caucasus and eastern Anatolia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has in fact been mostly propaganda from the ethnic groups that vied for control of the region.”²⁴

The negative Ottoman image reached its peak level in the West by propagandizing of the process of relocation. During the years of the WWI, the Allies’ anti-Ottoman propaganda had based mainly on falsification of the relocation. Especially, in order to lay the groundwork for American participation into the War, the relocation of the Armenians was absolutely distorted. The propaganda was extremely influential in creation of Turcophobia in Europe and the United States. The

²¹ Sina Akşin, *İstanbul Hükümetleri ve Milli Mücadele*, v. I, Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, İstanbul, 2004, pp. 31-32.

²² Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres ...*, p. 7

²³ Haluk Selvi, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı’ndan Lozan’a Ermeni Sorunu*, Sakarya Üniversitesi Yayınları, Sakarya, 2004, p. 5.

²⁴ Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile, the Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims 1821-1922*, The Darwin Press, Princeton & New Jersey, 1995, p. 23

relocation was propagandized as an attempt intending complete destruction of the Christian subjects of the Empire, namely the Armenians. With regard to the Allies' point of view, the most serious crime committed by the Turks in the course of WWI was the application of the Armenian relocation.²⁵ Besides, leading members of the CUP was accused. Thus, punishment of the Turks for their crimes was declared to be as one of the Allies' central war objectives. This objective was formalized as "the liberation of nations living under the bloody injustice of the Turks."²⁶

For the Ottoman government, before the end of the War, getting rid of her image created in the West by false propaganda and dissuading the Allies from their objective of punishing the Turks were crucial. Particularly, accusations regarding the Armenian relocation needed to be got through so as to impede using of the Armenian problem as a convenient pretext in the course of peace negotiations and the postwar period, as it had been used in the previous instances. Within this framework, for the Ottoman statesmen, it was the return of the Armenians that would eliminate the accusations regarding the campaign of relocation to a certain extent and facilitate the peace process for the Ottomans.

All the abovementioned reasons were influential on the Ottoman Government's taking the return decision. However, the return decision was mostly believed to ease the Allied pressures after the War. In addition to the return attempt, to satisfy the occupation forces the Ottoman government also decided trial of the officials who

²⁵ Akşin, *İstanbul Hükümetleri...*, p. 32.

²⁶ Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: the Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*, Metropolitan Books, New York, 2006, pp. 214-215.

were thought to be responsible for the relocation which had caused decease of the thousands of the Armenians.²⁷

1.2. The Ottoman Government's Preparations for Return of the Armenians

Attempts made by the Ottoman governments for the benefit of the Armenians involved more than giving permission for return. Several procedures disadvantage to the Armenians and Greeks were abolished.²⁸ For example, Armenian officials working at the Anatolian Railways who had been prevented from taking road to Anatolia were given travel permit. Later on, the permission on travel was extended to civil Armenians. Likewise, Armenian and Greek teachers were excluded from the military-exemption tax upon the application of the Greek representatives.²⁹

Government's preparations for return of the Armenians found place frequently in the Turkish, Armenian and foreign newspapers of the period in differing coverage. Interestingly, official documents tell very little on the early preparations of the government. The Ottoman statesmen usually made use of the press to announce their workings. On 5 August 1918, daily *İkdam* talked about the return with the words;

We have received information indicating that the Ottoman Government is considering the return of the Arabs and the Armenians who had been relocated due to the necessities of war or for other reasons to their original hometowns. The supplementary information on the subject indicates that following the studies already started by the Minister of the Interior Canbolat Bey, the Armenians will be returned to their homes.³⁰

²⁷ For the trials of relocation see Ferudun Ata, *İşgal İstanbulunda Tehcir Yargılamaları*, TTK Yayınları, Ankara, 2005.

²⁸ Akşin, *İstanbul Hükümetleri ...*, p. 30.

²⁹ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen...*, p. 28.

³⁰ *İkdam*, 5 August 1918.

Despite the stiff attitude of some,³¹ common approach of the newspapers towards the attempts for return was positive. A number of articles announced good news regarding government's studies for return and rendered their thanks to the Ottoman government and the Sultan Mehmed VI (Vahideddin) on behalf of the Armenians. They emphasized that though they had been removed from their hometowns, Armenian citizens had still remained loyal and deeply attached to the Empire.³²

On 6 August 1918, the Armenian newspaper *Puzantiyon* wrote that, the Armenians, who had been removed from their homeland due to the extraordinary conditions of War, had the will to return back. In case they returned home, without doubt, they would made significant contribution to the development of economy and trade within the country. *Puzantiyon* surprisingly went on that; diaspora Armenians, whose irrational acts were responsible for the tragedies of the entire nation, could not articulate feelings of the Armenians of Turkey. Thus, Armenians in Turkey, protest the publications and the operations initiated by the Armenians out of Turkey. The newspaper denounced the Allied powers, particularly Russia, for their efforts to sow the seeds of discord within the Empire by making use of the Armenians. It concluded that, it is time to gather the families here and there and reconstruct the damaged buildings.³³

³¹ For example, an article by Rene Pinun in *Louvva de L'armeni*, a periodical published in Paris, return attempts by the government was criticized seriously and considered to be means of massacring the surviving Armenians. Pinun claimed that, return of the Armenians would result in vanishing of them, while serving foundation of a Turkic confederation from İstanbul to Turkestan under the German protection. See *ISUM*, number 126, p. 4.

³² *Verchinlor*, 5 August 1918, cited in *ISUM*, number 135, 10 August 1918, p. 20.

³³ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen...*, p. 7.

Such news giving a piece of good news caused great excitement among the relocated Armenians.³⁴ Looking forward to reduction of the decision to practice, they embarked upon the preparations for return.³⁵ Positive attitude of the government encouraged them also to demand several other arrangements like finding solution for the non-Muslim schools question³⁶ and foundation of a new religious institution instead of the present Catholicate which was occupied by Sihak Efendi, who for them were indifferent to the issues of the Armenian nation.³⁷

The newspapers of the period, particularly those published in Armenian, were influential in mobilizing people and developing public opinion in favor of the return. Despite the absence of an official declaration of the government, these newspapers continuously touched upon the return. Verbal press releases were primary sources for the news of this kind,³⁸ however, there wasn't an official base recognizing them. Such news resulted in setting out of the removed Armenians for voyage back to home before the completion of governmental arrangements.

Despite several arrangements were made, the government could not venture to give a start for the return till 18 October 1918; mostly because of the war conditions. An organized and appropriate return and resettlement was not practicable in consideration of the Ottoman facilities in the period. Because of this reason, calls of the Armenians asking permission for return before advance of winter³⁹ were

³⁴ Ata, *İşgal İstanbulunda ...*, p. 19.

³⁵ Karacakaya, *Türk Kamuoyu ...*, p. 293.

³⁶ *Verchinlor*, 26 July 1918, cited in *ISUM*, no. 126, 29 July 1918, p. 20.

³⁷ *Hairenik*, 7 August 1918, cited in *ISUM*, no. 136, p. 23.

³⁸ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen...*, p. 30.

³⁹ *ISUM*, number 135, 10 August 1918, pp. 20–22.

postponed till October by the government, for completion of all necessary preparations.

Another reason of the delay was the fact that much of the abandoned Armenian properties had been confiscated by the government or distributed to the needy people within the conditions of the day. They had been distributed firstly to the Muslim emigrants coming from the Eastern Anatolia who had escaped from Russian invasion and Armenian massacres,⁴⁰ the Balkan refugees consisting of the Turks, the Bosnians and the Albanians⁴¹ and Arabs who had been relocated from Syria to the inner Anatolia.⁴² There were even Greeks who had been settled in the abandoned Armenian properties.⁴³

Moreover, some of these real-estates had been consigned to the military⁴⁴ and the government organs. Several others had been delivered to the local people.⁴⁵ Besides, the earthquake survivors and victims of misfortunes had also been settled in the abandoned estates of the Armenian and the Greeks.⁴⁶ Furthermore, a portion of the abandoned goods had been lost by reason of misuse⁴⁷, stealing⁴⁸ seizure⁴⁹ and

⁴⁰ Prime Ministry Republican Archives (BCA), 272. 11. 9. 17. 1; BCA., 272. 11. 11. 32. 15.

⁴¹ Fuat Dündar, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Müslümanları İskan Politikası (1913-1918)*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2002, pp 126, 179; BCA., 272. 11. 9. 21. 3; BCA., 272. 12. 36. 10. 1.

⁴² BCA., 272. 11. 8. 9. 22.

⁴³ Atnur, *Türkiye'de Ermeni Kadınları ...*, p. 119.

⁴⁴ BCA., 272. 12. 36. 9. 7.

⁴⁵ BCA., 272. 12. 37. 17. 5. The document includes the demand of the Mufti of Şebinkarahisar for an abandoned Armenian house as he lost his house during the Armenian uprising in the town.

⁴⁶ BCA., 272. 13. 36. 8. 3. The document orders settlement of the earthquake survivors in Burdur to the abandoned Armenian houses.

⁴⁷ BCA., 272. 10. 1. 1. 14; BOA., DH. UMVM. 158/63.

⁴⁸ BCA., 272. 10. 1. 2. 37.

⁴⁹ BCA., 272. 10. 2. 11. 6; BCA., 272. 10. 1. 8. 7; BOA., DH. UMVM, 158/9; BOA., DH. MB. HPS 95/7.

corruption.⁵⁰ There were also some Armenian estates which had been assigned as orphanage for the Armenian orphans.⁵¹ Additionally, a few portions of the movable goods of the Armenian and the Greeks had been delivered to the needy people⁵² or sold by the government.⁵³ Lastly, abandoned gardens had been especially delivered to the Muslims in order to save them from being devastated.⁵⁴

Because of this circumstance, the government's plan before giving start to the return was fulfillment of evacuation of these former Armenian real-estates. This would be performed in several ways. Repatriation of the Eastern Anatolian emigrants back to their hometowns recently recovered from Russian and Armenian invasion was one of them. Another way of doing it was constructing new villages for Muslim refugees and discharging of the abandoned real-estates by the military and government organs. According to the Ottoman statesmen, return of the Armenians without completion of evacuation would mean disorder and quarrel among the returning subjects and Muslim emigrants settling over the Armenian real-estates.⁵⁵ For that reason, the government instructed emptying of the Armenian and Greek estates before their arrival⁵⁶ and delivery of the abandoned movable goods to their Armenian and Greek owners as soon as possible.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ BCA., 272. 10. 2. 13. 6.

⁵¹ BOA., DH. EUM. VRK., 23/109,

⁵² BCA., 272. 10. 1. 8. 10.

⁵³ BCA., 272. 74. 65. 16. 9; BCA., 272. 10. 2. 14. 4.

⁵⁴ BCA., 272. 10. 1. 7. 1.

⁵⁵ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen...*, p. 3.

⁵⁶ BOA., DH. UMVM, 160/68.

⁵⁷ BCA., 272. 10. 1. 4. 14; BOA., DH. UMVM, 159/65.

On 22 August 1918, *İkdam* mentioned the studies of the government regarding the implementation of decree of return:

Works are still continuing as to how to return the Greeks and Armenians previously recorded to be returned to their hometowns. According to the information we have received, the government is going to demand an allocation of two million liras on the opening of the new term of the Assembly of Deputies to be used in the process of returning and settling these people. Considering that the real estate and the revenue-yielding properties previously left behind by some of those removed individuals have been distributed among the local people or the immigrants, a dwelling will be provided to each of the returning subjects, or the price of their previous real estates will be paid in cash to them, based on their preference. According to the supplementary information that reached us on the subject, on the request of the some of the deputies from the Prime Minister, permission is granted to those relocated individuals having a good financial status and living in places not far away from their original home towns to return without waiting for the release of the above mentioned allocation.⁵⁸

As *İkdam* touched upon, thousands of Armenians living in near places to their hometowns were granted permission before the others. These Armenians had not yet been sent to the relocation centers in Syria and Iraq and settled mostly in the residences between Konya and Adana.⁵⁹ This particular also included the Armenians whose former real-estates were neither allocated to the refugees nor were they damaged. The Armenians relocated from İstanbul were also of this type. According to *Puzantion*, a number of the Armenians from İstanbul returned back to their homes in this context.⁶⁰

In some provinces like Damascus and Mosul, local authorities facilitated the return of the relocated subjects by meeting their expenses of return. However, in several other places the local administrations warned the Armenians to wait until

⁵⁸ *İkdam*, 22 August 1918.

⁵⁹ Kemal Çiçek, *Ermenilerin Zorunlu Göçü*, TTK Yayınları, Ankara, 2005, p. 255.

⁶⁰ *Puzantion*, 28 August 1918, cited in *ISUM.*, 2 September 1918, number 155, p. 7.

declaration of governmental permission. A number of the Armenian immigrants took the road to their hometowns without knowledge of the authorities, even they warned not to do so. For example, the Armenians who had been relocated from Rumelia returned back to İzmit without permission in August 1918, where they asked for permission for their transition to Rumelia.⁶¹

In the autumn of 1918, studies for the return of the Armenians gained momentum together with the change in the cabinet. On October 14, a new cabinet was established under the leadership of İzzet Pasha, subsequent to the resignation of Talat Pasha Cabinet. It was the era of İzzet Pasha Government that the attempts resulted in the grant of general allowance for return to the relocated Armenian subjects. It should be noted that the impulse behind the attempts for the return within this period mostly lied in the idea of getting rid of the questions to be used as instruments of anti-Ottoman propaganda in the international arena.

The program of the new government gave particular place to the return of the relocated peoples. In his first speech as a prime minister, Ahmed İzzet Pasha announced that the government decided upon the return of the relocated subjects and started to its execution. Truly, on 18 October 1918, İzzet Pasha's government issued the decree of return of the Armenians and Greeks. The decision involved restitution or compensation of the abandoned properties of the returning peoples.⁶² After two days, other decisions permitted those who had been forcibly convert to return their original religion if they so desired.⁶³ A coded telegram was sent to the provinces

⁶¹ *Jamanak*, 25 Ağustos 1334 [25 August 1918], cited in *ISUM*, 29 August 1918, no. 152, pp. 4-5.

⁶² *Meclis-i Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* (MMZC), 19 Teşrin-i evvel 1334 [19 October 1918], 4th İnikad, p. 17

⁶³ *OBE*, Document no: 214, pp. 182-183.

saying that the officials negligent in this regard would be punished.⁶⁴ The Council of Ministers abolished the decision prohibiting sale of the Armenian real estates to foreigners.⁶⁵ Correspondence exchanged among various government offices about facilitating the return of the Armenians and ensuring their needs were met.⁶⁶ Through another decision of the Chamber of Deputies, the government declared the relocation and the sale of Armenian property as illegal.⁶⁷

1.3. The Decree for Return

The instructions allowing the “return of all the subjects who had been removed and sent to other places following a military decision, taken due to the conditions of the War”, had been communicated on 20 October 1918 to all the provinces and the sanjaks. The necessity of ensuring the security of the returning people on their journey and strictly implementing the said instructions without causing any delay had also been emphasized. The decree involved the articles below:

1- Based on the decision of the Council of Ministers, permission to return shall be given to all of the people willing to do so who have been removed from their places of residence and transferred to other places following the military decision taken due to the state of war.

2- Considering the insufficient means of food supplies in the provinces of Erzurum, Trabzon, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakir, and in the Sanjak of Erzincan, the individuals who were previously living in those places and who would like to return shall be given permission to do so only after obtaining information from the local authorities on the existing situation at the places in question, and they shall return in groups to be sent one after another as a means of security on the journey, food supplies, and accommodation are to be made available for them.

⁶⁴ *OBE*, Document no: 210, pp. 176-177.

⁶⁵ *Sabah*, 19 Kanun-ı Sani 1335 [19 January 1919], cited in Karacakaya, *Türk Kamuoyu ...*, p. 291

⁶⁶ *OBE*, Document no: 213, pp. 180-181

⁶⁷ Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, p. 275

3- As this decision has been taken in consideration of the best interests of the country, it shall be implemented strictly and without any delay.⁶⁸

The government issued subsequent instructions to ensure well governance of the campaign of return. A document listed the instructions sent for this purpose: “On 5 November 1918, the government instructed that the individuals who had been converted to Islam through coercion, oppression and intimidation should immediately be given permission to return back to their original religions and the developments in that regard shall be reported to the ministry on a continuous basis. On 21 October 1918 instructions were sent that the Armenian orphans currently in orphanages or near various families should immediately be given to their relatives or guardians who should apply to receive them. In the circular sent on 19 October 1918 to the provinces and the sanjaks, the government communicated that the civilian Armenian prisoners should be released immediately. The said individuals had been taken as prisoners for being Russian nationals, in retaliation for the Ottomans subjected to the same treatment. Also, according to an imperial decree issued on the occasion of the Sultan’s ascendance to the throne, concerned officials had given the instructions for the release of those who corrected their behaviour along with the political criminals previously sent under detention to various places following their conviction by the military court.”⁶⁹

Details of the execution of the return were defined through further instructions. A governmental decree dated 18 December 1918 instructed that as the process of returning the relocated individuals is exclusive to those who wish to do so nobody

⁶⁸ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 190, p. 494..

⁶⁹ BOA., HR., SYS., 2569/1.

shall be sent back contrary to his will.⁷⁰ Those who have started new commercial activities or married to local people in the places they were sent and prefer to continue living at those places were allowed by the government to choose their own places to reside.⁷¹

Needless to say, return of the Armenians would entail difficulties within the Empire. At least, it would deconstruct the order established during the years of the WWI.⁷² Returnees in large numbers would mean evacuation of the left properties by the Muslim immigrants and refugees. Establishment of new residences and allocation of new funds would also be needed. What is the worst, the victory of the Allies over the Ottoman Empire and the coming Armistice would possibly drive the returnees to indulge in extravagances in the lands where they are to return. Such an occurrence would be likely to bring about great danger for the public security within the Empire.

With an aim to prevent the rise of abovementioned extravagances, the government issued several precautions like empowerment of the constabulary with military forces. Moreover, the government sent instructions to ensure safety of the Muslim immigrants and refugees in return of the non-Muslims.⁷³

One more question to emerge in the course of the event of return was the risk of change in the population rates. During the years of the WWI, Muslim peoples of the Empire, particularly those in the Eastern Anatolia, had to leave its land to save their lives. In that circumstance, a plebiscite made in the Eastern Anatolia after the return

⁷⁰ BOA., BEO., 341055.

⁷¹ *İkdam*, 19 Ağustos 1334 [19 August 1918].

⁷² Akşin, *İstanbul Hükümetleri ...*, p. 32.

⁷³ OBE, Document no: 236, pp. 211–212; BOA., DH., ŞFR., No: 92/238

of the Armenians would reduce the Muslim population into minority position.⁷⁴ In order to overcome this question, the government narrowed the frame of the places open for return, excluding the provinces of Erzurum, Trabzon, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakir, and in the Sanjak of Erzincan. These places were said to be not ready yet to shelter the returning Armenians due to the unavailable conditions of security, food supply and accommodation.⁷⁵ According to the report submitted to the U.S. government by Emory Niles and Arthur Sutherland who had been sent to Eastern Anatolia to investigate the situation in the region in the summer of 1919, “owing to the general feeling against Armenians, who are charged with all sorts of atrocities, and to the arrival of mohadjirs (immigrants) from the Caucasus, it would seem impossible for Armenians to return at the present time.”⁷⁶ Like that, some of the Armenians residing in Mosul and Syria were not granted permission for return because they were in close touch with the Allies.⁷⁷ There was also the danger of scarcity in the region. The local authorities and the newspapers warned the government for adjournment of the return in the Eastern Anatolia because it would bring about scarcity of 400,000 people living in the region.⁷⁸

The government delivered cipher messages to the provinces and sanjaks regarding the measures to be taken to facilitate return and resettlement the returning individuals. General Directorate for the Settlement of Immigrants and Tribes communicated instructions to the governorates concerning the implementation of the return:

⁷⁴ Mehmed Cavit, “Cavit Bey’in Notları”, *Tanin*, 11 August 1945 – 9 December 1945, cited in Akşin, *İstanbul Hükümetleri ...*, p. 32.

⁷⁵ BOA., DH., ŞFR., No: 92/187.

⁷⁶ For the copy of the Niles and Sutherland Report see Justin McCarthy, “American Inveatigation of Eastern Anatolia”, *XI. Türk Tarih Kongresi*, v. V, TTK Yayınları, Ankara, 1994, p. 1836.

⁷⁷ Atnur, *Türkiye’de Ermeni Kadınları ...*, p. 117.

⁷⁸ Bakar, *Ermeni Tehciri*, p. 185.

This is further to the cipher message dated 18 October 1918. Though it was ordered that the persons who want to return to their homes from among the previously relocated people should not be prevented from doing so, and that no one should be settled in the empty houses which were among the abandoned properties and such houses occupied by the military personnel and the local officials should be emptied, it has been understood from the petitions submitted and from the correspondence going on that in some places the immigrants who had been settled in the abandoned properties became agitated and frustrated upon the abovementioned orders and they even attempted to destroy the abandoned properties. Considering the necessity for the strict implementation of the decisions taken by the government, the means for ensuring the return of the removed individuals are being planned and at the same time care is to be taken not to cause any loss of rights on the part of the Muslims who had previously been settled in the abandoned houses. Therefore, it is deemed necessary to extend the process of returning of the relocated individuals over a certain time period. Also, if it is possible, the returning people should be settled in the houses of their relatives or two families should be settled in the same house, so that none of those returning, as well as the immigrants remain homeless. Among the returning ones and the immigrants, who attempt to disturb the peace and order should be severely punished. Consequently, you are expected to take the necessary measures in order to prevent any harmful activities under the current sensitive conditions prevailing in our country.⁷⁹

Within the directions of the above instructions, thousands of the Armenians took road to their former hometowns. Further instructions also delivered to facilitate the implementation of the return and ensure safety of the returnees. The first goal was completing arrival of the Armenians to their former hometowns under protection. The following chapter is going to examine the implementation of this goal.

⁷⁹ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 192, p. 502.

CHAPTER II

THE CAMPAIGN OF RETURN

The return of the Armenians emerged as a sensitive question while the Empire was trying to overcome the disastrous consequences of the WWI. At the time, the Empire was also managing to get through the postwar Allied pressures. Without doubt, return of the Armenians would not be easier than their relocation, that is, great amount of money would be needed for the expenses of return, great effort would be needed to organize the return and resettlement of the returnees and great endeavor would be needed to settle peace among the settling Muslims, Armenian returnees, and the Muslim immigrants and refugees.

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, some of the Armenians as well as Greeks and Arabs had taken road back to home without waiting completion of the governmental preparations and allowance for return. The government had to take measures against such returns as they caused disorder on the places of return. One of the measures taken was the admonition of the administrations of the relocation residences not to allow flight of the relocated peoples and travel of them to other places without permission of the Ministry of Interior. For example, a message sent by the government to the provinces of Halep and Mamuretülaziz and the sanjaks of Kayseri, Urfa and Zor warned the authorities about the escapes and return of some relocated Armenians without permission from these centers to Gürün and Kangal, districts of

Sivas.⁸⁰ Another measure taken by the government was sending such escapees back to their relocation residences to stop further others. In some cases returning people had to travel back without intervention of the government because of the reason that they could not able to find residences to settle on. For instance, relocated peoples of Yeniköy who arrived in their hometowns before the mentioned allowance of the government had to set out a second voyage back to their relocation residences because there were no houses to reside in.⁸¹

Before the government's decision of return in October 1918, the relocated Armenians who were over sixty or in needy situation had been given allowance for return. However, they were small in number and did not bring about arduousness as much as the subjects who returned in accordance with the above decree did. The Armenians took road to their hometowns together with many questions. They were returning to the lands having more than one million frustrated and homeless Muslim refugees and immigrants.

2.1. Organization of the Return

The Ottoman Empire had a seventy-year long experience on the issues regarding the immigrants. The first body was established in 1849 to deal with the immigrants coming from Hungary. After the Crimean War, this body was developed into a new form under the name of the *Muhacirin Komisyonu* (Commission for Immigrants). Then, in 1878, subsequent to the defeat of the Empire in the 1877-1878 War, waves of immigrants from the Balkan and the Caucasian lands necessitated foundation of an all-embracing institution, the *İdare-i Umumiyye-i Muhacirin Komisyonu*

⁸⁰ BOA., DH. ŞFR., 88/272.

⁸¹ *İSUM*, number 165, 15 Eylül 1334 [15 September 1915], cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen...*, p. 30.

(Commission for the Management of the Affairs of Immigrants) in 1878. This commission also organized and managed migration of the immigrants into the remaining Ottoman lands after the defeats in the Balkan Wars and the WWI. Relocation of the Armenians was also fulfilled by this institution. *İskan-ı Aşair ve Muhacirin Müdiriyyet-i Umumiyesi* (The General Directorate for the Settlement of Tribes and Immigrants) was established at the beginning of the year 1914. In March 1916, it was transformed into the *Aşayir ve Muhacirin Müdiriyyeti Umumiyesi* (The General Directorate for Tribes and Immigrants) under the Ministry of Interior as the authority responsible for all the issues regarding the immigrants.⁸² The return and resettlement of the Armenian immigrants was also among its duties.⁸³

General Directorate for Tribes and Immigrants (AMMU) began its studies on the return before declaration of the allowance for return. Fortunately, there were available registers showing the proceedings made on the abandoned properties during the relocation and the statistics on the Muslim immigrants and refugees settling on the abandoned properties. They included information on districts, towns and houses belonging to the non-Muslim immigrants, showing which of them were bought or settled by the Muslim immigrants and refugees.⁸⁴ Hence, AMMU would be able to manage the execution of resettlement of returning peoples by making use of these registers. Furthermore, statistics indicating the number of the Armenians who were willing to return was compared with the statistics on the present situation of the

⁸² Dündar, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin ...*, pp. 57-61.

⁸³ BOA., DH. HMS., 4-2, 11-20, cited in Dündar, p. 88.

⁸⁴ Dündar, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin ...*, p. 88.

original residences of the Armenians.⁸⁵ Comparison of them indicated the residences available for return and number of the people that these residences can shelter.

With the declaration of the permission for return on 18 October 1918, studies of AMMU gained momentum. The primary goal was ensuring safety of the returning subjects during their journey back home and providing them with facilities of settlement and food at the places they intended to go.⁸⁶ Parallel with these goals, AMMU sent orders to the governorates of the provinces and sanjaks according to which returning peoples would be given food all throughout their journey, necessary measures would be implemented in order to protect the Armenians from any sort of attacks on their journey, and utmost care would be taken to ensure local order and security.⁸⁷

The AMMU delivered messages continuously further to the cipher messages dated 18 October 1918 about the essentials of the return and the measures to be taken by the local administrators. Despite the government is willing to have all the people who have been transferred to other places due to the conditions of war return to their homes, safety of them during their travel back home was absolutely imperative. Therefore, the AMMU declared the following points as essential and to be kept in consideration:

1- How many population and families are there in the centres and the subordinate administrative units of each province and sanjak and where are they from who are willing to return to their homes?

2- For those who are covered in the preceding paragraph and want to return, it is important to know where they are from, as they may be

⁸⁵ *İSUM*, number 165, 15 Eylül 1334 [15 September 1915], cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 30.

⁸⁶ BOA., DH., ŞFR., No: 92/235.

⁸⁷ BOA., HR., SYS., 2569/1.

made to return back only after making the necessary correspondence with the local administrations of the places where they intend to go, in order to learn whether it will be possible for them to settle there and whether their security can be maintained during their journey. If positive answers are received from that correspondence, the people in question may be returned after sending information on their number to the local administration of the place they are going to, and to the centre.

3- Since the heads of local administrations will be responsible for ensuring the full safety of the returning people, the process of returning shall be started only after making the necessary correspondence and acquiring the confirmation regarding the above-mentioned points, and after having the safety of their travel under the existing conditions ensured by the fully reliable officials to be chosen for that purpose and by other concerned officials.

4- The officials who fail or act negligently in fulfilling the above-mentioned duties shall be immediately reported to the centre to be severely punished.⁸⁸

Just after the permission given for return, formerly relocated Armenians began preparations for voyages back to their hometowns. As touched upon above, they would return back only after making the necessary correspondence with the local administrations of the places where they intend to go. They would be given a travel document only if positive answers are received from that correspondence. Nevertheless, thousands of returning immigrants left their relocation residences for their hometowns without considering the aforementioned requirements of return.⁸⁹ Such returns created crises in several sanjaks and provinces, particularly in İstanbul, where a number of Armenian and Greek immigrants arrived without informing authorities and having no travel documents.⁹⁰

It was certain that the process of return would bring about difficulties for both the returning peoples and the Ottoman government. One of them was the question of

⁸⁸ BOA., DH., ŞFR., No: 92/235.

⁸⁹ BCA., 272. 12. 38. 24. 17

⁹⁰ BCA., 272. 14. 74. 12. 5

how to transfer the immigrants back to their hometowns while being defeated and faced with a catastrophe. Complete collapse in the WWI and the Mudros Armistice signed after the war cut off the incomes of the Empire and prevented her from effective use of existing facilities. Available vehicles were insufficient even for transportation of the discharged Ottoman soldiers.⁹¹ No matter the arduous conditions the Empire fell down in, thousands of Armenian, Greek and Arab immigrants were to be transferred to their hometowns.

In consideration of the seriousness of the situation, the government continuously sent instructions in order for the fulfillment of the return in the most proper way. The instruction sent by AMMU on 18 December 1918 included a summary of the decisions and measures taken with the aim of eliminating the difficulties arising in returning the lands and real estates belonging to the Greeks and Armenians on their return to their hometowns:

This is to respond to the Prime Ministry's order dated 21 November 1918 and no. 340662/1070. The instructions have been communicated on the 23 October 1918 through the cipher message no. 31558 to all the provinces and the independent sanjaks to start the process of returning the Ottomans who had been relocated due to the conditions of war and for political reasons, and are now permitted by the government to return to their homes. In the same message it has been instructed that with the aim of ensuring and facilitating the journey and food supplies of the said individuals and preventing them from falling into miserable conditions, they should be sent back only after making the necessary correspondence with the local administrations of the places where they intend to go, in order to learn whether it would be possible for them to settle there and whether their security could be maintained during their journey. If positive answers are received from that correspondence, the people in question could be returned back after sending information about their number to the local administration of the place they are going to and to the centre. Through the cipher message dated 10 October 1918 and no. 31926 instructions have been given to limit the process of

⁹¹ *Ati*, 28 Teşrin-i sani 1918 [28 November 1918], cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen...*, p. 89.

returning only with those individuals who are willing to return. Those who wish to continue their work and living at the places they had been relocated will not be moved. In the cipher message dated 13 November 1918 and no. 32303, further instructions have been given for meeting, from the mobilization fund, the travel costs and living expenses of the disadvantaged ones among the returning individuals to the places they want to go to. By stating that sufficient amount of money had already been sent from the mobilization fund for that purpose. dated and no⁹²

Through the cipher message dated 07 November 1918 and no. 564 instructions have been given to immediately have evacuated the places of worship, schools, patriarchates, houses of metropolises, and houses of priests, as well as the revenue-yielding properties belonging to them, and to return all of those buildings and properties to the communities they belong to. As far as it has been understood from the proceedings implemented and the correspondence continuing till now, the given instructions have been fully complied with. A copy of the regulations, which is a combined form of the previously given instructions and which have been sent to the provinces by a circular, is attached herewith. As for the movable and immovable properties of the individuals in question and their receivables from other individuals: Those abandoned buildings, which are currently occupied, by the officials, military personnel, and the local people have already been started to be evacuated, in order to be used in settling the returning individuals. With the aim of leaving nobody in a homeless condition, necessary guidance and strict orders have been given to the local officials, as well as to the high level directors, officials, and inspectors dealing with issues of immigrants for the evacuation of the other abandoned houses and immovable properties previously given to the Muslim immigrants one after another as their real owners return. However, due to the abrogation of the provisional law dated 22 September 1916 governing the issues related to the returning of the liquidated properties and the receivables entirely to their owners, obviously there is a need for a new law which would have the same objective as the previous one. Studies are continuing to prepare such a law as soon as possible. Therefore, in future it could be possible to start the process of returning the liquidated properties and the receivables to their real owners.⁹³

In spite of the fact that the Ottoman government dedicated particular attention for fulfillment of the return in a good manner, negligent attitude on the part of the

⁹² Left empty in the original document.

⁹³ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 200, p. 536.

officials towards their duties caused problems in travels of the Armenian immigrants. Complaints about the misbehaviour of the officials rose in the newspapers and in the telegrams sent from the centres on the road of return. Despite the renewal of the instructions complaints kept on coming. Major subjects of the complaints were arbitrary attitudes of the officials and great bureaucratic requirements for getting travel document. The government developed new measures in order to adjust the complaints. For instance, a message sent by the Ministry of Interior to local administrations on 5 November 1918 instructed prevention of the above complaints:

1- It has been learnt that the Armenians intending to return are facing with great difficulties due to the obligation of acquiring travel documents, since great bureaucratic requirements are needed to be fulfilled in order to receive the said documents. Indeed, these people do not need any such documents since the government is sending them. Therefore, it will be sufficient to prepare a list of the people being sent, to be given to the convoys while they are boarding on the train.

2- It has been reported that after giving the travel documents to the Armenians, their cards for obtaining bread are taken back from them by the local administrations, as a result, these people are left without bread for days, while they are waiting for the train. The people shall be supplied with sufficient bread while they are there and on the journey after their departure. They shall be given food all throughout their journey.⁹⁴

This instruction was followed by several others, all having the same objective, namely, the prevention of the complaints by the returning Armenians. Nonetheless, complaints of the returnees never came to an end because of the human factor.

2.2. Transportation of the Returnees

Transfer of the returning Armenians and Greeks was a matter requiring great endeavor and high amount of expenditure. Thousands of immigrants had to be carried in a time when the Empire was depriving of necessary facilities to transfer even her

⁹⁴ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 197, p. 522.

forces disarmed in accordance with the Mudros Armistice. Worse still, transfer of the returning Armenians was to be completed as quickly as possible due to the advancing winter. By making full use of the existing capacities of the available means of transportation a good deal of the immigrants could be returned back. To this end, for example, necessary orders were given by the Ministry of War to the railroad commissariats to send trains twice a week to carry the returning Armenians. According to the order, the transfer of the Armenians would be carried out with maximum intensity.⁹⁵

Trains and steamers were the primary means of transportation by which transfer of the immigrants were accomplished for the most part. Common use of them also resulted in emergence of several provinces and sanjaks as centers of gathering and delivery of the returning peoples. For instance, Aydın, Bursa, İstanbul, Konya, Eskişehir and Adana served as the centers of this kind. These centers sheltered returning immigrants until they were delivered to their original residences.

In the campaign of return, trains had an overriding importance. Especially the immigrants of the inner Anatolia were carried from the transferal places to their hometowns mostly by means of the railways. During the process of relocation, Railways had been used in sending of the Armenians. Hence, transferal places, where the Armenians had been settled, naturally gathered around the railways.⁹⁶ Thus, trains

⁹⁵ BOA., HR. SYS., 2569/1.

⁹⁶ The government had taken measures to ensure location of the Armenians at a minimum distance of twenty-five kilometers from the lines connecting with the border of the Baghdad Railway, and from other railways. The villages and towns where the Armenians are to be relocated, and the Armenian villages to be newly constructed shall be definitely located at a minimum distance of twenty-five kilometers from the lines connecting with the border of the Baghdad Railway, and from other railways. See BOA., DH., ŞFR., No: 53/94, ...the said Armenians, who are currently in Afyon, should be settled in the districts far away from the railways on their arrival in Konya. BOA., DH., ŞFR., No: 62/220.

facilitated return of them back to their hometowns. Thousands of the Armenian returnees completed their voyages in Haydarpaşa station in İstanbul. Similarly, the other stations within Anatolia served most of the returnees.

Nonetheless, there were several impediments before the transportation of the returnees. One of them was the application of the articles of the Mudros Armistice relating to the means of transportation of the Empire. The said articles included handing over of the railways and steamships of the Empire to the service of the Allied forces. The Armistice also involved control of all the railways and occupation of the Taurus Tunnels by the Allies. Discharge of the army, an obligation driven by the Armistice, made things ever worse as it necessitated discharge of the labor battalions working at the railways.⁹⁷ These occurrences, reducing the Ottoman control over the railways, created difficulties in the transfer of the returning Armenians.

Occupation of the railways by the Allies caused difficulties in return of the immigrants. Although the Allied forces allowed return of the discharged Ottoman soldiers,⁹⁸ which was in their interest, they terminated the Ottoman control over the railway just after the completion of the soldiers' return.⁹⁹ They complicated operating of the railways in a degree against the related articles of the Mudros Armistice. After the Allied seizure of the railways train services were either curtailed or annulled arbitrarily and interruptions in the train services became very common. To give an example, the train between Eskişehir and Ankara was annulled without any reason.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Mehmet Özdemir, *Mütareke ve Kurtuluş Savaşı Başlangıç Dönemlerinde Türk Demir Yolları, Yapısal Ekonomik Sorunlar, 1918-1920*, Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, Ankara, 2001, pp. 27-28.

⁹⁸ Özdemir, *Mütareke ve Kurtuluş...*, p. 34.

⁹⁹ Özdemir, *Mütareke ve Kurtuluş...*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁰ Özdemir, *Mütareke ve Kurtuluş...*, p. 44.

Moreover, some services were deliberately curtailed through occupation of the stations.¹⁰¹ The Allied forces also destroyed the railways in varying degrees and ways that caused breakdowns and delays in the train services.¹⁰²

Not only the Allied forces but also the National Forces (Kuvva-yı Milliye) destroyed the railways with intent to avert misuse of them by the former. For this purpose, for example, they blew up several railroad bridges.¹⁰³ Activities of the National Forces also included devastation of telegram lines and taking away of the cables to prevent communication among the Allied forces.¹⁰⁴ Such actions of the National Forces, like of the Allied ones, resulted in the curtailment of the train services, so of the process of return.

Impediments before the train services were not limited to those emanated from the interventions by the Allies or from the actions of the National Forces. Post-War economic recession also brought about breakdowns. Decline of 446 engines available at the beginning of the WWI, to 280 engines and of 15.303 wagons to 5.270 at the end were also among the causes of the breakdowns in the train services.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, there were neither sufficient fuel to move the trains, nor engines and wagons for the peoples and goods waiting for to be transported in large numbers.

After they took hold of the railways, the Allies cancelled the previous contracts made between the Ottoman government and the railway administrations regarding the

¹⁰¹ Özdemir, *Mütareke ve Kurtuluş...*, p. 122.

¹⁰² Özdemir, *Mütareke ve Kurtuluş...*, p. 122.

¹⁰³ Özdemir, *Mütareke ve Kurtuluş...*, p. 90.

¹⁰⁴ Özdemir, *Mütareke ve Kurtuluş...*, p. 90.

¹⁰⁵ Özdemir, *Mütareke ve Kurtuluş...*, p. 120.

terms of payment.¹⁰⁶ They both increased the transportation charges and stipulated immediate payment of them in gold currency.¹⁰⁷ After the occupation, transportation charges increased at a rate of 450 %.¹⁰⁸ Then after, because the increased charges were over the capacity of the returning peoples, train services were delayed until they were paid by the government. For example, more than a hundred returning Armenians had to wait for days under rain in the station of Mardin because they were asked to pay twice as much for transportation charges.¹⁰⁹

Because of the delays resulting from increased train charges, stations turned into the places of crowd and disorder. In December 1918, a telegram was sent from Aydın province to the AMMU about making attempt in the British authorities to ensure free transportation of the needy returnees in high numbers.¹¹⁰ In response to his telegram, the governor of Aydın was instructed to meet the transportation charges from the mobilization fund since his suggestion was contrary to the articles of the Mudros Armistice.¹¹¹

In some circumstances, anxious suspense of the returning Armenians and Greeks in the stations drove them to indulge in extravagances.¹¹² In a case, the train was stranded because of lack of fuel when just it arrived at the station which was full of discharged soldiers and immigrants. Having a long wait at the station, the soldiers and

¹⁰⁶ Özdemir, *Mütareke ve Kurtuluş...*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁷ BCA., 272. 12. 38. 24. 17.

¹⁰⁸ ATASE., ISH KOL. Box: 138, Folder: 31-1, cited in Özdemir, *Mütareke ve Kurtuluş...*, p. 124.

¹⁰⁹ BCA., 272. 12. 38. 24. 17.

¹¹⁰ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 42. 17

¹¹¹ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 43. 17

¹¹² Özdemir, *Mütareke ve Kurtuluş.....*, p. 118.

the immigrants uprooted the columns of the station to use them as fuel.¹¹³ In another case, passengers of a stranded train took apart doors of the houses and fruit-trees around.¹¹⁴

Coincidence of the return of the prisoners of war, as well as the Germans and Austrians within the Empire with the returning Armenians and Greeks was among the leading factors causing delay and disorder in the process of return.¹¹⁵ In most cases, transportation of all those people had to be made on a single railway line, and other means of transportation were not available. The discharged soldiers were given preference over the returning peoples to make use of the means of transportation.¹¹⁶ Patients were also given priority in using trains and steamers.¹¹⁷

Another group of people having priority were the Allied and Armenian prisoners of War. They had to be set free according to the Mudros Armistice. During the War, approximately 10,000 British and French privates and officers were taken captives by the Ottoman Army.¹¹⁸ The number increases when Armenian prisoners are included. Under the Allied pressure, the government allocated special trains for the prisoners returning from the Syria and the Iraq fronts to İzmir. Since the priority had been given to the discharged soldiers, patients and prisoners, returning Armenians and

¹¹³ Özdemir, *Mütareke ve Kurtuluş*....., p. 88.

¹¹⁴ Özdemir, *Mütareke ve Kurtuluş*....., p. 88.

¹¹⁵ According to the Mudros Truce, the Ottoman government was obliged to set the Allied and Armenian prisoners free. Furthermore, military or civil, all the German and Austrian citizens would leave the country within a month. See Selahattin Tansel, *Mondros'tan Mudanya'ya Kadar*, v. I, Başbakanlık Kültür Müsteşarlığı Cumhuriyet'in 50. Yıldönümü Yayınları, Ankara, 1973, p. 30.

¹¹⁶ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 43. 19.

¹¹⁷ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 43. 8.

¹¹⁸ Selçuk Ural, "The Restitution Question of the Prisoners of Armenians and Allied", *Atatürk Üniversitesi Atatürk Dergisi*, Volume: 3, Number: 3, January 2003. pp. 153-154.

Greeks were kept on their transferal places or within the stations until the completion of their return.

Notwithstanding all the impediments and delays, most of the Armenians made use of the trains during their return. Transfer of the returning Armenians from the relocation residences to the delivery centers and delivery of them to their hometowns were carried out through instrumentality of the trains.

The other means of transportation used for the return was steamers. As partially touched upon above, several cities on the road of the trains and the steamers carrying the returning individuals served as gathering centers during the process of return. Transfer of the Armenians from the Syrian and South Anatolian ports to Bursa and İstanbul was fulfilled mainly by means of steamers. Distribution of them to their hometowns also was implemented largely through the instrumentality of steamers.¹¹⁹

The government allocated the steamers of the Administration of the Ship Traffic and the Admiralty for the return of the immigrants.¹²⁰ Steamers of the Şirket-i Hayriye were also of primary importance in fulfillment of the gathering and distributing processes. Private Ottoman, French and Italian steamers were also used. In addition, a few small ships, which were acquired after repeated initiatives, also were put into service for the transportation of the Greeks and Armenians from the Marmara Sea region to their hometowns.¹²¹

Despite privations of the War, the Ottoman government made heavy use of steamers in the return and distribution of the Armenian and Greek immigrants. They

¹¹⁹ BCA., 272. 14. 74. 12. 5.

¹²⁰ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 42. 20.

¹²¹ BOA., HR. SYS., 2569/1.

were particularly advantageous in the evacuation of İstanbul from the Armenian and Greeks immigrants and the Muslim refugees, which was of primary importance for the government to ensure public health and security.¹²² From İstanbul, they carried returning individuals to their hometowns along the front, namely to Bandırma, Tekfurdağı, Ordu, Giresun, Trabzon, Rize, Batum and others.¹²³ For example, the İskenderun steamer sailed with the immigrants from İstanbul to Mudanya and Gemlik on 9 December 1918 and to Tekirdağ and Bandırma on 19 December; the 64 number steamer of Şirket-i Hayriye sailed to Mudanya and Gemlik on 8 December and to Şile on 17 December; the Reşid Paşa steamer sailed to Trabzon and Batum, the Giresun steamer sailed to Trabzon and Batum on 17 December;¹²⁴ the Turan steamer sailed to Trabzon two times; and the Kızılırmak steamer sailed again to Trabzon.¹²⁵ By the way, steamers in the Van Lake were also used in the passage of the immigrants returning to the Van province.¹²⁶

The campaign of return slowed down in January 1919. It was by reason of hard winter conditions. Few steamers sailed for the immigrants during the winter months. The Gülnihal steamer transported some 2.500 Armenian and Greek immigrants, among them the Armenians held majority, to the coastal towns of Bursa on 9 January 1919.¹²⁷ Seza-yı Nur steamer transported 800 Greeks to Ayvalık coast and 579 immigrants were delivered to the Black Sea region by means of the steamers Şam

¹²² BCA., 272. 14. 74. 12. 5.

¹²³ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, pp. 93-99

¹²⁴ BCA., 272. 12. 38. 24. 5.

¹²⁵ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen...*, p. 93.

¹²⁶ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 43. 8.

¹²⁷ BCA., 272. 14. 74. 12. 5.

(Damascus) and Giresun.¹²⁸ With the coming of spring, increased number of the steamers carrying the immigrants sailed around coastline of the Marmara and the Black Sea region. To give some examples, İzmir (Smyrna) steamer sailed to Ordu, Trabzon and Rize with about 700 immigrants. Likewise, the Marya steamer transported 2.500 immigrants to Trabzon. Moreover, the Jean steamer under the Italian flag sailed for about 700 Greek immigrants who had remained in Bandırma.¹²⁹ Transportation of the returning Armenians and Greeks continued in summer. In July The Granpetro steamer carried about 2,000 Armenians from Beirut to İstanbul. Again, Gülnihal steamer sailed from İstanbul to Black Sea ports with the Muslim, Armenian and Greek immigrants. Similarly, a British steamer carried Muslim and non-Muslim immigrants to Mersin.¹³⁰ The steamships seem to be sailed for the Armenian and Greek immigrants lastly in the winter of 1919.¹³¹

2.3. Number of the Returned Armenians

Different numbers have been given about the returned Armenians. However, they are all approximate and discordant numbers. As mentioned above, the Armenian sources are extremely poor in consideration of the number of the returnees. The numbers given in the Turkish sources are also approximate and of little substance. The numbers given in the newspapers and official documents of the period are relatively more coherent and so reliable. Before discussing the total number of the returnees, exemplifying the events of return might be fruitful.

¹²⁸ *Ati*, 17 Kanun-ı Sani 1334 [17 January 1916] cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen...*, p. 94.

¹²⁹ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p.97.

¹³⁰ *İleri*, 25 Temmuz 1334, [23 July 1919], cited in Atnur, *ibid.*, p. 99.

¹³¹ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen...*, p. 99. No trace of subsequent return by means of steamers is coincided within the sources available for this study.

The first convoys of the returning individuals reached Şile and vicinities of Sea of Marmara within the first days of the campaign of return. At the same days some of the Armenians who had been relocated from Tekirdağ attained their former residences.¹³² Within the extraordinary conditions of the day, convoys of the returning Armenians arrived at İstanbul, Sivas, Mamuretülaziz, Samsun, Bursa, Edirne, İzmit, Karesi and several other places. After November of 1918, efforts for return and resettlement picked up speed. With the numbers given in *Ati*, immigrants returned by then increased to 23.594, 15.594 of them returning by means of the Ottoman government and 8,000 by their own means.¹³³ According to a different source, until the end of November, 25,000 immigrants returned and resettled by the government in easy circumstances.¹³⁴ Large numbers of the formerly relocated Armenians and Greeks of Bursa and Karesi returned and resettled to their houses. Their properties were emptied and given to them.¹³⁵ Within the same month, 260 Armenian and Greek households come back to Edirne and some 100 others to Tekirdağ. Moreover, two trains full of the returning Armenians arrived in İstanbul also in November. The government provided them necessary assistance considering their needs.¹³⁶

Even in the winter, large numbers of the Armenian immigrants were able to arrive at their former residences. In December 1918, most of the Armenian immigrants of the Black Sea region returned their hometowns with the assistance of the government. Moreover, about 1,000 Armenians were distributed to their

¹³² *Ati*, 29 Teşrin-i evvel 1334 [29 October 1918], cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 87.

¹³³ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen...*, p. 89.

¹³⁴ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 90.

¹³⁵ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 88.

¹³⁶ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 90.

hometowns by means of Seza-yı Nur steamship. A group of Armenian immigrants were transferred from Ayvalık to İstanbul with the same steamship. 61 number steamship of Şirket-i Hayriye¹³⁷ carried a group of Armenians who had arrived in İstanbul to their original residence.¹³⁸ To give more examples, some Armenians came back to Bilecik, 200 Greeks arrived in Haydarpaşa station to be distributed to their homes in Yeniköy and on the Marmara sea front and the removed Greeks of Şile attained their residences and resettled.¹³⁹ Within the same days, 26 Armenians returned to and resettled in Edirne, 18 Greeks and 14 Armenians to Malkara and 26 Armenians to Çorlu. All these peoples were given necessary aid by the government.¹⁴⁰

According to *Ati*, from the beginning of November to the 20 December 1918, 6,000 Greeks and 7,000 Armenian immigrants arrived at İstanbul. Some 1,200 of the Greeks came from Odessa by means of a French steamer and some 600 immigrants from Dobruca (Debreceen). They were largely distributed to their hometowns out of İstanbul. Among them were 1.658 Greeks and 4.100 Armenians. 3.500 Greeks and 2,000 Armenians of the rest including those came from Dobruca resettled in İstanbul.¹⁴¹ *Ati* wrote that towards the end of the December, 62,000 Armenian and Greek immigrants were returned and resettled. Among them 9.526 Armenians and 184 Greeks were sent back to İzmit to be resettled there, 239 Armenians and 711

¹³⁷ Şirket-i Hayriye is the nineteenth and twentieth-century İstanbul ferryboat company for the Bosphorus Straits.

¹³⁸ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 91

¹³⁹ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 92.

¹⁴⁰ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 92.

¹⁴¹ *Ati*, 22 Kanun-ı evvel 1334 [22 December 1918] cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Döne ...*, p. 93.

Greeks were sent to Sivas, and 600 Armenians to Van and 511 to Bitlis.¹⁴² According to *İkdam* dated 8 January 1919, approximately 10,000 Armenians returned to Sivas province from Iraq and Syria.¹⁴³ There are also further other events of return reflected in the newspapers and official documents.

The total number of the returnees was given in the newspapers periodically. According to news of *Ati* dated 4 February 1919, the number of the returnees increased to 170,000; among them 62,721 Greeks and 75,749 Armenians returned with the help of the government, and the rest 35,000 by their own means.¹⁴⁴ After a month, this number passed beyond 200,000. According to the informative letter sent from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be transmitted to the British High Commissariat dated March 1919, the number of the Armenians and the Greeks who returned by the agency of the government was 232,679. This number excluded those who returned by their own means and estimated to be doubled in the next six months.¹⁴⁵ In another letter which was sent from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the British High Commissariat dated 7 June 1919, the number of the Armenian and Greek returnees was given as 276,015.¹⁴⁶ The newspaper *İleri* wrote on 3 February 1920 that from the signing of the Armistice until present, 335,883 Armenian and Greeks had returned their hometowns with the help of the Ottoman government.¹⁴⁷ This number can be estimated to be much over 400,000 with addition of the self-returnees. Again, when the total portion of the Armenians among the

¹⁴² Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 94.

¹⁴³ Sarıhan, *Kurtuluş Savaşı Günlüğü*, v. I, p. 88.

¹⁴⁴ *Sabah*, 6 Şubat 1335 [6 February 1919], cited in Sarıhan, *Kurtuluş Savaşı Günlüğü* v. I, p. 121

¹⁴⁵ BOA., DH. SYS, 53-2/341903.

¹⁴⁶ *OBE*, Document no: 264, pp. 244-248.

¹⁴⁷ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen*, p. 99

returnees is considered, it can be claimed that approximately 300,000 Armenians returned to their hometowns.

A similar number was given by Armenian journalist Hrant Dink. For his estimations, 300,000 Armenians returned to their hometowns after the Relocation campaign. Among them, 130,000 Armenians returned Istanbul and 170,000 returned to various cities in Anatolia.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, there are those claiming higher numbers for the returnees. Turkish scholar Sedat Laçiner claims that number of the Armenians who returned to Anatolian cities and villages is not less than 500,000.¹⁴⁹

The estimations above excluded the Armenians who were transferred into the Cilicia after the Armistice with the help of the French and British armies of occupation so as to found an Armenian state in the region. The number of these Armenians was claimed to be around 120,000,¹⁵⁰ 150,000¹⁵¹ or 300,000.¹⁵² Moreover, during the National Struggle, thousands of the Armenians were sent to Antep, Maraş and Adana within the French army and massacred the Muslims.¹⁵³ However, they had to leave the region upon retreat of the French army in accordance with the Ankara Treaty signed between France and Turkish Grand National Assembly in 20 October 1921.

¹⁴⁸ <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news.php?id=26316>, Tuesday , 21 February 2006

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news.php?id=26316>, Tuesday , 21 February 2006

¹⁵⁰ Yaşar Akbıyık, *Milli Mücadelede Günay Cephesi*, Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, Ankara, 1990, p. 16; *Sabah*, 6 February 1919, cited in Sarıhan *Kurtuluş Savaşı Günlüğü*, p. 121.

¹⁵¹ In his memorandum submitted to Paris on 2 May 1921, Boghos Nubar Pasha mentioned about 150,000 Armenians who had been transferred from Syria to Cilicia and their expenses had been met by France. Özdemir et al., *Ermeniler: Sürgün ve Göç*, p. 132

¹⁵² According to a report submitted by the Near East Relief to the American Congress dated 31 December 1921, after the Armistice approximately 300,000 Armenians returned to Cilicia under protection of France and Britain. See US ARCHIVES NARA T1192. Roll 4. 860J.01/431, cited in Özdemir et al., *Ermeniler: Sürgün ve Göç*, p. 132.

¹⁵³ Özdemir et al., *Ermeniler: Sürgün ve Göç*, p. 145.

2.4. Difficulties Met by the Returnees

The Ottoman government had delivered several orders to the provinces and sanjaks for the purpose of ensuring the free travel of the returning people and providing them with facilities of settlement and food at the places they intend to go. In these orders, the freedom of conscience provided by the Ottoman Constitution was instructed to be definitely and unalterably implemented. The costs of travel of the said people were also instructed to be met by the government.¹⁵⁴

Having been defeated in the WWI, the government had lost her efficiency to put the campaign of return in the desired order. Despite the government took measures continuously, for several reasons, the return of the Armenian and Greeks proceeded at a slow pace and could not be concluded without delay and free of problems.

Returning in bad weather was one of the reasons. The process of return kept going even in unsuitable conditions of the winter. Thousands of the Armenian and Greek immigrants took road without waiting the coming of the spring so as to reach their hometowns as soon as possible. Besides, some of them set out without informing the authorities of the places where they intended to return.¹⁵⁵ Naturally, these immigrants sometimes faced with great difficulties during their voyage to home. They were exposed to rain and snow in open wagons, in the train stations or on roads.

In hard winter conditions, the returnees had to break their journey to winter at towns along their way till an appropriate time.¹⁵⁶ It was because the government did

¹⁵⁴ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 196, p. 518.

¹⁵⁵ *BCA.*, 272. 12. 38. 24. 17.

¹⁵⁶ *OBE.*, Document no: 221, pp. 191-192.

not allow transfers in bad weathers.¹⁵⁷ In the towns which served as shelter for returnees, the immigrants were gathered and boarded in the places consigned by the AMMU.¹⁵⁸

For the shelter towns along the railways and main roads, the unforeseen Armenian and rarely Greek immigrants were burdensome guests. Administration of these sanjaks mostly lacked a contingent fund to meet the boarding and accommodation expenses of their guests. The immigrants were hosted according to the sanjaks' means, which were usually insufficient. They could not be boarded regularly nor could they be provided appropriate places to stay in owing to the inadequacy of existing facilities.

Another reason causing the delay and problems was the interruptions in the train and steamer services together with the inadequacy of wagons and cars.¹⁵⁹ These means of transportation were indispensable for completion of the return. The need for them becomes obvious when the distance of the relocation residences to the original Armenian towns are considered. Most part of the Armenian and the Greek immigrants would cover the route from Iraq and Syria to the centers like Adana, Konya, Sivas, Bursa, İstanbul etc. Moreover, some of them would be delivered from these centers to their hometowns in the inner and coastal Anatolia.

The aforementioned issues concerning the transportation services badly affected the campaign of return, and of course the returning subjects. They waited for weeks in the stations so as to be collected. The period of waiting may be described as the

¹⁵⁷ For instance, because of bad winter conditions, transfer of a group of the Armenian and the Greek immigrants returning through Van to Bitlis was postponed to spring. See BCA., 272. 11. 12. 41. 3.

¹⁵⁸ BCA., 272. 74. 68. 37. 10.

¹⁵⁹ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 42. 3.

most arduous and frustrating part of the process of return. In some cases, it was a period of misery and desolation.¹⁶⁰

There were some groups of the Armenian and Greek immigrants who waited out in the cold without having sufficient food. For instance, almost 400 Armenian immigrants, who arrived in Eskişehir in order to be transferred to their hometowns, fell into wretched circumstances while they were waiting for a train.¹⁶¹ Moreover, a group of the Armenian immigrants returning through Konya to İstanbul had to travel in the wagons open to rain and wind. They fortunately welcomed and given shelter by the Muslims in Akşehir and were provided covered wagons in the rest of their way.¹⁶² Furthermore, owing to the inadequacy of the means of transportation, transfer of the Armenian and Greek immigrants who came at Kütahya was postponed by the government till a further instruction.¹⁶³ Similarly, transfer of the Armenians and Greeks in Balıkesir was adjourned because of the same reason.¹⁶⁴

Problems of the Armenians and Greeks during their return did not only emanate from bad weather conditions and inadequate transportation services. During their return, the returnees met with the events of abuse and negligence by the Ottoman officers. Attacks by the bandits also emerged as an issue making the journey of return more difficult and painful for the returning peoples. After they set out for their hometowns, the returnees in few numbers were subjected to mistreatment of officers. For example; a group of Armenians returning by train were subjected to inhumane

¹⁶⁰ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 44. 2.

¹⁶¹ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 44. 2.

¹⁶² *Sabah*, 5 Kanun-ı Evvel 1334 [5 December 1918], cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 90.

¹⁶³ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 42. 3.

¹⁶⁴ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 43. 19.

treatment by gendarmerie in their arrival at Ulukışla.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, Armenian returnees in Boğazlıyan suffered from maltreatment of the officers.¹⁶⁶ Several other groups of returnees encountered with events of this kind, about which the government received continual complaints.

Attacks by bandits to the returnees created a more serious problem for both the returnees and the government as they caused deaths. At the time, banditry was widespread throughout the Ottoman Anatolia. The gangs composed of Muslim, Greek, Georgian, Kurd and Laz bandits acted freely during and after the WWI years with weak state control. The bandits had attacked the Armenian caravans in the course of relocation and killed many Armenians.¹⁶⁷ They renewed their attacks also in return of the Armenians and killed many Armenians too. As an example, the Armenian returnees going from Malatya to Amasya in two cars were killed by the Georgian bandits of Erbaa.¹⁶⁸ In another example, the gangs composed of Greek, Armenian and Abkhaz bandits attacked a steamer sailing from Izmit to İstanbul with immigrants and passengers. The bandits seized their money and movables.¹⁶⁹ Attacks by the bandits continued after the returnees were resettled to their hometowns.

2.5. The Mixed Commissions

After the return of the Armenians started, mixed commissions were established with the decision of Council of Ministers so as to investigate the affairs concerning

¹⁶⁵ BCA., 272. 12. 38. 24. 16.

¹⁶⁶ BOA., DH. EUM. AYŞ. 20/10.

¹⁶⁷ OBE., Document no: 49, pp. 52-53.

¹⁶⁸ BOA., DH. EUM. AYŞ. 21/89; BOA., DH. EUM. AYŞ. 20/11. At the time there were four Muslim, six Greek, and three Armenian gangs in Sivas province.

¹⁶⁹ BOA., DH. KMS. 60/-2/34.

the return, boarding and resettlement of the returnees and the restitution of their properties. The commissions were also entrusted with speeding up of transfer of the returnees waiting in the stations.¹⁷⁰ Behind the establishment of the commissions, pressures from the British High Commissioner and Agents of the Armenian Patriarchate were influential.¹⁷¹ The commissions included the representatives of British High Commissariat and the Patriarchate¹⁷², in addition to the officials from the Ministries of Justice and Interior.¹⁷³ Sipat Efendi was tasked by the Armenian Patriarchate and Mr. Perring, Mr. Slate and Mr. Harikson were some of the British members of the commission.¹⁷⁴ More than 62 commissions were charged with the duty of investigation all round Anatolia and Thrace.¹⁷⁵ In addition to the mixed commissions, the British established the Armenian-Greek Section in the high commissioner's office to monitor the situation of the Armenian and Greek returnees, women and children.¹⁷⁶

The first commission was charged to make investigation around Konya, Eskişehir, Bilecik, İzmit and Ankara.¹⁷⁷ The commission checked execution of the process of return and reported to the AMMU about the faults. Sometimes, the commission demanded solutions from the AMMU for difficult issues like restitution of the Armenian children to their communities, question of the Muslim children kept

¹⁷⁰ *OBE.*, Document no: 221, pp. 191-192.

¹⁷¹ Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, p. 275; *OBE*, Document no: 232, pp. 207-208.

¹⁷² Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, p. 275.

¹⁷³ Tansel, *Mondros'tan Mudanya'ya Kadar*, p. 107.

¹⁷⁴ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, pp. 111-112.

¹⁷⁵ Kamuran Gürün, *Ermeni Dosyası*, TTK Yayınları, Ankara, 1991, p. 241

¹⁷⁶ Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, p. 275.

¹⁷⁷ *BCA.*, 272. 12. 38. 24. 13.

by the Armenians, question of the converted Armenians etc.¹⁷⁸. The commission was being continuously directed from İstanbul about the area of investigation.¹⁷⁹ For example, after completion of investigation in Konya, the commission was instructed to carry out its duty around Eskişehir, Bilecik and İzmit.¹⁸⁰ According to a telegram sent to the AMMU by inspector Refet, a member of the mixed commission, the Armenians who returned to Sivrihisar district of Eskişehir were seriously needy of being boarded. The commission decreed paying of a twenty-day wage to the Armenians by administration of the district.¹⁸¹ This commission returned to İstanbul together with some twenty Armenian orphans and delivered them to the Armenian endowed institutions.¹⁸²

The AMMU sent nine commissions to Anatolia and Thrace from December 1918 to April 1919.¹⁸³ Three new commissions were charged with making investigation in different regions of the Empire. In this context, Mr. Pening from the British High Commissariat and chief inspector Mithad Bey from AMMU were employed for Ereğli, Derince, Bolu and Adapazarı region. Münir Bey, director of the Settlement Department of the AMMU was employed together with the British member Mr. Slate, to investigate in İnebolu, Kastamonu and Ankara region. The third commission comprising Talat Bey, director of the Statistics Department of the AMMU, and the British member Mr. Harikson was charged for Çatalca, Çorlu, Kırkkilise, Edirne and

¹⁷⁸ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 45. 1.

¹⁷⁹ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 44. 11

¹⁸⁰ OBE, Document no: 234, pp. 209-210

¹⁸¹ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 44. 11

¹⁸² *Alemdar*, 3 Şubat 1335 [3 January 1919], cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 111

¹⁸³ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 111

its surroundings.¹⁸⁴ New commissions were established on the following months to be sent to Kastamonu, Eskişehir, Konya, Samsun, Ankara, Çatalca and Kırkkilise, Balıkesir, and coastal towns of the Black Sea. They carried out investigation in the regions of return till mid-1920.¹⁸⁵

According to the decision of the Chamber of Deputies, expenses of the mixed commissions would be met from the mobilization fund of the Ministry of War; in case of inadequacy of this fund, the Ministry of Finance would step in.¹⁸⁶ Estimated expenses of the first commission, which was entrusted with making investigation in Eskişehir, Ankara and Konya, was 8,000 liras. However, allocating this amount of money was insuperable for the mobilization fund as it was charged with meeting all the expenses of the returnees.¹⁸⁷ In that circumstance, the AMMU would not be able to meet even fundamental needs of the commissions. Truly, in a letter sent to the Ministry of Interior, Ahmed İzzet, director of the Accounting Department of the AMMU, proposed cancellation of the studies of the commissions if they are not going to be funded. For his opinion, inability in financing the expenses of the commission was a shame for the government.¹⁸⁸

The commissions made examinations in the regions where the Armenians suffered from misery and want or they were subjected mistreatment of the officers or were attacked by bandits etc. Information received from the local administrations about interruptions in return was imperative in establishment of the commissions.

¹⁸⁴ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, pp. 111-112

¹⁸⁵ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, pp. 113-114

¹⁸⁶ *OBE.*, Document no: 221, pp. 191-192.

¹⁸⁷ BOA., BEO., 341055.

¹⁸⁸ *OBE.*, Document no: 232, pp. 207- 208.

Moreover, complaints made by the returnees, the patriarchates or the high commissariats of the Allies in İstanbul regarding implementation of the process of return were also influential in the formation of the commissions.¹⁸⁹

In order not to give an opportunity for an intervention by the Allies, the subjects of complaints were seriously investigated and reported to the concerned departments for the measures necessary to be taken. In fact, the commissions would have to deal with a number of events during the settlement process of the returning Armenians which shall be elaborated in the next chapter. In the course of return, common issues that the commissions inspected were accommodation and boarding of the returnees¹⁹⁰ in addition to the issues of maltreatment¹⁹¹ and banditry attacks.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ *OBE.*, Document no: 232, pp. 207-208.

¹⁹⁰ *BCA.*, 272. 11. 13. 44. 11; *BCA.*, 272. 11. 13. 45. 1.

¹⁹¹ *BCA.*, 272. 10. 38. 24. 16.

¹⁹² *BOA.*, DH.EUM.AYŞ., 21/89.

CHAPTER III

RESETTLEMENT OF THE ARMENIAN RETURNEES

The final phase of the return process was resettlement of the Armenians on their former hometowns. It was much more complicated and arduous than the previous phases of the return. All the disturbances of the postwar Ottoman Empire found their reflection on the process of resettlement. At the time of resettlement, there was an Empire completely defeated at the WWI, lost her territories to a considerable extent, signed Mudros Armistice, occupied and confiscated by the Allied powers, toppled into a severe recession etc. In such circumstances, the Empire was expected to get through the resettlement of the Armenian returnees together with the returning Greeks. The number of the total returnees was estimated to be more than 350,000.¹⁹³ In addition to them, in Anatolia around 1,000,000 Muslim refugees were waiting for being settled.¹⁹⁴

Resettlement of the returnees was a much complicated and arduous process not all because of the reason that the Empire was at her very worst, but because the process included a variety of tasks needed to be accomplished at the same time. That is to say, resettlement of the returnees was the beginning step which was to be followed by the restitution of the abandoned Armenian immovable and movable properties; restitution

¹⁹³ *İleri*, 3 Şubat 1336 [3 February 1920], Number 745, cited in Sarıhan, *Kurtuluş Savaşı Günlüğü*, v. II, p. 313. Here the number of the Armenian and Greek returnees given as 335.883. However, this number did not included those who returned by their own means. According to *Atı*, approximately 35,000 immigrants returned back till March 1919 and this number may be thought to be over 50,000 in February 1920.

¹⁹⁴ Dündar, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin...*, pp. 237-239.

of Armenian women and children; evacuation of the Armenian properties held by the Muslim immigrants, refugees, military, state organs and local individuals; supplying their essential necessities; repairing and reestablishing their damaged houses, schools and churches; keeping peace among the returnees and the settling Muslims etc. Completion of all these tasks were insuperable even in the absence of the catastrophe of the Great War, but they had to be fulfilled without giving occasion for misapplication, clash among the peoples and interference by the occupation powers. This chapter, then, focuses on the application of resettlement in consideration of the context of the day.

3.1. Restitution of the Abandoned Properties

Restitution of the returnees' properties was the first task to ensure the resettlement. The returnees had to be resettled as quickly as possible in arrival of them to their original hometowns, which had been ordered to the provincial authorities through several instructions of the government. However this was not so easy under the existing circumstances.

As touched upon above, the abandoned Armenian properties had mostly been delivered to the Muslim immigrants and refugees coming from the former Ottoman lands, particularly from the Balkans and Caucasia, and to the Arabs who were relocated from Syria into Anatolia. In addition, a considerable part of these properties had either been given to military personnel and local officials as well as the needy people or they had been seized by individuals. Nonetheless, there were also the properties which were remaining empty. Because of the abovementioned reasons, the government necessarily considered extending of the returning over a certain time

period. Moreover, for the same reason, the government decreed that, if it was possible, the returning people should be settled in the houses of their relatives or two families should be settled in the same house, so that none of those returning, as well as the immigrants remain homeless.

An instruction titled “Instruction on the Restitution of Movable and Immovable Properties Belonging to Greek and Armenian Immigrants” was issued in December 1918. This and further instructions sent by the government to organize the restitution ordered that no one would be settled in the empty houses which were among the abandoned properties and such houses occupied by the immigrants, the military personnel and the local officials would be emptied.¹⁹⁵ Additionally, movable properties of the Armenians which had been disposed by the liquidation commissions in the course of the relocation were instructed to be redeemed and restituted to their original owners.¹⁹⁶ Like this, circulating properties of the Armenians also instructed to be restituted.¹⁹⁷ Registration of the properties being restituted to their original owners was also ordered. According to the aforementioned instruction dated December 1918, if the properties such as houses or shops had been repaired or enlarged through the addition of new parts, they would be recorded in the registers.¹⁹⁸ The instructions and measures regarding restitution of the abandoned properties were summarized in a governmental decree:

– Subject to the provisions stated in the following paragraphs, houses and lands of the Greeks and the Armenians shall be returned to them on their return to their home towns as mentioned above.

¹⁹⁵ BOA., DH., ŞFR., No: 92/238; *OBE*, Document no: 211, p. 178.

¹⁹⁶ BCA., 272. 11. 14. 50. 4, BCA., 272. 10. 2. 12. 1

¹⁹⁷ BCA., 272. 11. 14. 50. 4.

¹⁹⁸ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 45. 16

– The buildings of the institutions such as schools and churches, as well as the annexes of those buildings and the revenue-yielding properties of the said institutions shall be immediately returned to the communities they belong to.

– As the proceedings carried out on the properties and houses of the Greeks are of an administrative nature and as the said properties are still under the ownership of their original possessors, normally they cannot be leased, entrusted to anyone or put into the possession of others. Therefore, such actions taken on the said properties shall be rendered void and will be corrected. Those properties must be returned to their owners as they return.

As for the properties of the Armenians they may be divided into two groups. The first group consists of the properties for which the necessary corrections have not been made on the title deed registers for transferring their ownership to the Ministry of Finance or to the Foundations. Therefore, the said properties cannot be kept possession of or be leased by others, and any such action on them may be rendered void and be corrected. Those properties must be evacuated and returned to their owners when they return.

The second group consists of the properties for which the necessary corrections have been made on the title deed registers, transferring their ownership to the treasuries of the Ministry of Finance or the Foundations. Their return to their original owners is subject to the approval of the local officials of the Treasury. A law is about to be prepared to deal with such issues. If it is not possible to return the said properties to their owners when they return, the problems which may arise, until the adoption of the abovementioned law, must somehow be settled by paying the owners sums equal to the rents of the properties in question. While returning the properties to their owners, documents shall be prepared showing their status, the damages occurred to them, or the parts added to those properties by others.

– The properties previously given to the wealthy immigrants should also be returned to their original owners as they return. Regarding those properties, the provisions of the Article 4 above shall be strictly implemented.

– If the properties such as houses or shops, which should be returned to their original owners, have been repaired or enlarged through the addition of new parts by the immigrants settled in them, or if the lands or olive groves have been cultivated or cared for also by the immigrants, then the rights of both the original owners of the said properties and also of the immigrants should be protected under Mecelle, which is our Civil Law, and also according to the traditions of our country.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 200, p. 538.

By the same token, the response sent by Mustafa Arif, the Minister of Interior, to the order of the Prime Ministry dated 21 November 1918 gave further information about the measures taken with regard to the resettlement of the Armenians.

... instructions have been given to immediately have evacuated the places of worship, schools, patriarchates, houses of metropolises, and houses of priests, as well as the revenue-yielding properties belonging to them, and to return all of those buildings and properties to the communities they belong to. As far as it has been understood from the proceedings implemented and the correspondence continuing till now, the given instructions have been fully complied with. ... Those abandoned buildings, which are currently occupied by the officials, military personnel, and the local people have already been started to be evacuated, in order to be used in settling the returning individuals. With the aim of leaving nobody in a homeless condition, necessary guidance and strict orders have been given to the local officials, as well as to the high level directors, officials, and inspectors dealing with issues of immigrants for the evacuation of the other abandoned houses and immovable properties previously given to the Muslim immigrants one after another as their real owners return.²⁰⁰

Restitution of the abandoned properties was carried out in accordance with the registry books which had been held during the relocation and included proceedings and existing status of the mentioned properties. The government had ensured registering of any information regarding the Armenian properties through several orders which facilitated restitution of them in the event of return.²⁰¹ In addition to registration of the abandoned properties, the government also had employed officials for protection of them.²⁰²

However, the abandoned properties were not always registered definitively, that is, some of the registry books were either incomplete or missing. To illustrate, in his

²⁰⁰ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 200, p. 538.

²⁰¹ *OBE*, Document no: 17, p. 30; Document no: 29, p. 40; Document no: 50, p. 53; Document no: 54, p. 55; Document no: 66, p. 64; Document no: 69, p. 66; Document no: 81, p. 75.

²⁰² *BCA.*, 272. 10. 1. 6. 9.

return to the Perkenek village in Sivas, the clergyman could not able to trace any information about his spiritual clothes and other properties within the registry books.²⁰³ Similarly, the application of two Armenian returnees for compensation of their travel expenses and accommodation was not accepted by the authorities since they were not noted in the registers.²⁰⁴

In the towns where the Armenians returned, officials from local departments of the AMMU and Ministry of Finance were charged with restitution of the left properties.²⁰⁵ They would distribute the properties to their former owners with regard to the registry books and would note down the restitution proceedings into the same books in detail. The properties which were distributed before to their former owners without noting in the books also decreed to be noted fairly. Officials who act negligently in fulfilling the above mentioned duties would be severely punished because their neglect would cause damage of the treasury and peoples of the Empire.²⁰⁶ In accordance with the above instructions, Armenian returnees were restituted in different forms when they arrived at home. Restitution of the Greek returnees also fulfilled in accordance with the same forms; so it shall be touched below so as to give a full description of the application of restitution.

As mentioned above, the restitution was carried out in consideration of the current situation of the abandoned properties. Several forms of restitution were developed according to existing circumstances of the said properties. To begin with, in the cases that the movable properties like currency, jewelry, household goods, implements of

²⁰³ BCA., 272. 11. 14. 51. 12.

²⁰⁴ BOA., DH. EUM. MH. 190/1.

²⁰⁵ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 42. 18.

²⁰⁶ BCA., 272. 11. 13.45. 16.

husbandry, gains from the sale of the abandoned properties etc. were available to be restituted, in other words, if they were being saved in the revenue authorities or in the banks, and registered definitively, they were restituted at once. The AMMU had sent instructions to the local authorities defining basics of saving and registering processes, according to which “the watches and the jewellery shall be registered by defining their types and values under the names of their owners, if they are known; otherwise they shall be registered under the name of the place where they are found, and shall be put in a separate case in the bank, by being registered in the presence of a special committee”.²⁰⁷ The *Ziraat (Agriculture) Bank*, the first financial agricultural institution founded in the Ottoman Empire in 1863, and the *Deutsche Orient Bank*, the Ottoman branch of the Deutsche Bank, were instrumental in saving of the abandoned properties.

Restitution of the properties that have been protected under the given conditions was rapid and systematic. Upon the arrival of the returnees, the movable properties saved by the Commission for the Administration of Abandoned Properties were delivered. Those that had been saved in the banks were also demanded by the authorities to be distributed to their Armenian owners. For instance, the Commission for the Administration of Abandoned Properties restituted the money which had been gained through sale of the abandoned properties to their returning owners in Edirne,²⁰⁸ Milas²⁰⁹ and Canik.²¹⁰ Moreover, on 4 October 1919, provincial administration of Trabzon asked the Ziraat Bank for the money gained through sale of

²⁰⁷ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 53, pp. 154-156.

²⁰⁸ BCA., 272. 10. 2. 11. 3; BCA., 272. 74. 68. 39. 9.

²⁰⁹ BCA., 272. 10. 2. 10. 14.

²¹⁰ BCA., 272. 10. 2. 11. 11.

the Armenian properties and deposited in the said bank in the account of the Ministry of Interior.²¹¹ Like that, the money saved by the Ministry of Finance in the name of the Armenians of Adana was restituted following their return in February 1920.²¹² Importantly, the government paid attention to cure injustices towards the Armenians in terms of the sale of their properties. To give a case in point, the gains from sale of the abandoned properties that had been sold at a low price by the liquidation commissions in Eskişehir were instructed to be restituted in their real value.²¹³

Together with the movables, the real estates of the Armenians like houses, religious and educational institutions, shops, factories, hotels, casinos etc.²¹⁴ were immediately restituted if they were empty or evacuated. As mentioned before, the government had forewarned the provincial authorities through several messages instructing evacuation of the abandoned properties before the arrival of their original owners. Thanks to such messages, many of the returnees found their real estates empty or evacuated in their return. To give some example, the provincial authorities restituted empty and evacuated properties of the Armenians who returned to Karamürsel²¹⁵ and Adana²¹⁶ in November 1918; Kırşehir,²¹⁷ Bursa²¹⁸ and Tekirdağ²¹⁹ in December 1919; Niğde²²⁰ in March; Kayseri²²¹ in April; Giresun²²² and Antep²²³ in

²¹¹ BCA., 272. 10. 1. 6. 2.

²¹² BCA., 272. 11. 15. 56. 3.

²¹³ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 47. 3.

²¹⁴ BOA., DH. SYS. 53-2/341903.

²¹⁵ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 42. 12.

²¹⁶ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 42. 13.

²¹⁷ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 42. 16.

²¹⁸ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 42. 18.

²¹⁹ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 43. 16.

²²⁰ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 45. 8.

²²¹ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 46. 4.

July; Edirne,²²⁴ Sivrihisar²²⁵ and Yenişehir of Bursa²²⁶ and Bolu²²⁷ in August 1919; Konya²²⁸ in January 1920 etc.

In the events that the abandoned properties which had been sold to the local individuals were demanded back by their original owners instead of the cash gained from their sale, if possible, the government repurchased these properties so as to distribute them back. It was fulfilled in accordance with the registry books and account of the returnees. For example, the commission that was charged with the duty of the restitution in Edremit repurchased a cash box from a local individual named Hacı Şerif's son Mustafa who had bought it before.²²⁹ Not only the government but also some returned Armenians repurchased the properties they had sold in the course of relocation.²³⁰

This way of restitution, however, did not result in fruitful outcomes owing to insufficient information about fate of the sold properties. Those who had bought the abandoned properties were mostly uncertain since they had not been noted definitively in the registry books. Resistance of the Muslim purchasers not to give up the properties that they bought also emerged as impediment before restitution through repurchasing. Conversely, in some cases, lacking information was disadvantageous to the Muslim purchasers because they could not able to prove that they had bought the

²²² BCA., 272. 11. 14. 49. 11.

²²³ BCA., 272. 11. 14. 50. 4.

²²⁴ BCA., 272. 11. 14. 50. 12.

²²⁵ BCA., 272. 11. 14. 51. 2.

²²⁶ BCA., 272. 11. 14. 51. 3.

²²⁷ BOA., MV. 216/127.

²²⁸ BCA., 272. 11. 15. 55. 11

²²⁹ BCA., 272. 10. 2. 12. 1.

²³⁰ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 177

Armenian properties which were taken back by the government upon arrival of their former owners.²³¹

In many places an important part of the abandoned properties had lost by reason of seizure or stealing by local individuals and leading persons. Besides, the events of seizure and stealing happened when the commissions and the local authorities were studying in order for saving and registering both the abandoned properties and the gains derived from their sale. It was only after the return of the former owners that the amount of the properties lost through seizure and stealing came into the picture. According to the telegram sent from the governorate of Bilecik to the Ministry of Interior, only a small amount of the abandoned properties was remaining to be restituted to their former owners,²³² rest of them was not available for several reasons, one of them was of course lost through seizure and stealing. One of the ways of restitution in the events of seizure and stealing was instituting inquiries for the people who were actively responsible in seizures and losses.

In this context, trial of three leading merchants from İzmir, namely Ali Fikri Bey, Hayri Paşazade Zeki Bey and Ahmed Bey, is an outstanding example. They were tried for seizing and employing through four years the textile factories of Mardiros Sarıyan and who was sent to Syria in the course of relocation. Sarıyan demanded compensation of his loss which was around 1,400,000 liras.²³³ At the end of their trial, on 15 April 1920, Ali Fikri Bey and Zeki Bey were condemned to pay 400,000 liras to Mardiros Sarıyan as compensation of his losses.²³⁴ Within the same month, an

²³¹ BCA., 272. 11. 14. 51. 2.

²³² BCA., 272. 10. 2. 11. 14

²³³ BOA., Meclis-i Vükelâ Mazbataları (Registries of the Chamber of Deputies), 217/593

²³⁴ BOA., DH. EUM. AYŞ. 38/62

investigation was opened on Fehmi Efendi, former accountant of the Ziraat Bank, for carrying the sum derived from sale of the abandoned properties in Samsun to his own debit.²³⁵ In another example, Mehmet Rasim, the former official charged with governing Bergama, was tried for seizing the gains of the abandoned properties.²³⁶ Likewise, the government tried Officer Halil Efendi for the reason that he had taken away equipments of an abandoned oil mill in Ayvalık.²³⁷

Compensation of the cost of the properties, which were previously distributed to local individuals or state organs irrecoverably, was another way of restituting. This application was used in the cases that restitution of the properties seized by the state was by no means possible. Compensation of the Greek properties seized by a command headquarter in Ordu by the Ministry of Finance during the War may be given as an instance of the mentioned application.²³⁸

Remarkably, some provincial authorities established special commissions in order to carry out restitution of the abandoned properties by mutual agreement of the both sides, that is, original owners of the properties and those who owned it for a while through sale, seizure or governmental donation. The commission involved salaried clerks, workers and volunteer leading personages of the Armenian and Greek communities. According to a letter from the governor of Edirne province to the Ministry of Interior dated 23 March 1919, the commission established in the province was considerably influential in restitution of the properties without giving occasion to dissent. For the opinion of the governor, studies of the commission brought about

²³⁵ BCA., 272. 10. 2. 11. 6

²³⁶ BCA., 272. 10. 1. 8. 7

²³⁷ BCA., 272. 10. 1. 2. 37

²³⁸ BCA., 272. 10. 1. 3. 10

fruitful consequences and so were indispensable to put a stop to complaints of the returning Christians.²³⁹

Despite all the abovementioned instructions issued for ideal fulfillment of the application of restitution and the studies of the Ottoman government in that direction, a number of obstacles emerged as impediments before the desired outcomes. It was partly because the ability of the Ottoman government to manage events in the provinces remained limited.²⁴⁰ The provincial authorities were not eager to make effort in order to facilitate the restitution and resettlement of the Armenians, so they performed reluctantly their duty of ensuring restitution and resettlement of the returnees. Negligent attitude of them was already reflected in the correspondences between the Ottoman government and her subjects.

The government continuously received letters from the returning peoples complaining from the indifferent attitudes of the responsible authorities. In a letter sent from Eşme village of Geyve district in İzmit to the Ministry of Interior, the Armenians returnees Antranik, Sirope and their wives complained about the governor of the district as he dissociated himself from the questions of the returnees relating restitution of their properties.²⁴¹ Similarly, in his letter to the Ministry of Interior dated 24 January 1919, Papazyan İstevan, the head of Church Community in Karahisar-ı Sahib, complained that the properties of the returnees and their heirs were not being restituted unless weeks passed. Still, many of them were deprived of their properties. “The authorities disregard our applications asking restitution of the former

²³⁹ BCA., 272. 74. 68. 40. 1

²⁴⁰ Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres...*, p. 208

²⁴¹ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 42. 9

properties belonging to our church and clubs,” said he in his complaint letter.²⁴² Another letter was sent from Kırşehir on 25 November 1918 by six Armenian women who lost their husbands in the course of relocation. In the letter they complained that their properties were not restituted though the instructions were issued to this effect.²⁴³ In order for restitution of their properties the complainant Armenians resorted to the court. In Boğazlıyan, for example, the courts received 178 applications from the complainants.²⁴⁴

In some circumstances restitution of the abandoned real estates delayed because of the reason that they were being used as orphanages for the Armenian orphans. Following the relocation of the Armenians, the government had allocated some appropriate buildings as orphanages to shelter the Armenian orphans almost in every province.²⁴⁵ Abandoned Armenian real estates have been useful for sheltering the Armenian orphans. They remained as orphanages for a while even after the return of their owners, till the arrangement of new orphanages.²⁴⁶

According to daily *Atı*, about 95 percent of the abandoned Armenian and Greek properties were restituted as of 6 February 1919.²⁴⁷ Furthermore, in his informative letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 19 March 1919, undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior reported that, excluding those whose houses vanished by reasons

²⁴² BCA., 272. 11. 13. 45. 4

²⁴³ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 42. 16

²⁴⁴ Taha Niyazi Karaca, *Ermeni Sorununun Gelişim Sürecinde Yozgat'ta Türk – Ermeni İlişkileri*, TTK Yayınları, Ankara, 2005, p. 227.

²⁴⁵ OBE. Document no: 45, p. 50; Document no: 46, p. 51; Document no 192, p. 151.

²⁴⁶ BOA., DH. EUM. VRK. 23/109; BOA., DH. EUM. AYŞ. 42/46; BOA., MV. 216/127.

²⁴⁷ *Atı*, 6 Şubat 1335 [6 February 1919], cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 177. This percentage seems to be higher than the actual number because ten thousands of returnees would arrive later than February 1919. Their properties must be more than 5 percent. British interference and pressures for completeness of the Armenians' return and resettlement seems to be the primary reason behind such overblown numbers.

like fire, downfall, etc., properties of 232.679 Armenian and Greek returnees were completely restituted. This respect said to be witnessed by Captain Lefter Redmer, who made investigations around the districts like Paşalimanı, Marmara Island, Erdek and Bandırma.²⁴⁸ Around mid-April 1918, the above number increased to 276,015.²⁴⁹ Despite the fact that some of these returnees stayed homeless for a while and were not given their properties immediately, they were all ultimately restituted. What is more, legal status of the restituted properties was secured in favor of the Armenians by means of a decree issued 8 January 1920.²⁵⁰ Then after, returned Armenians and Greeks owned the power of disposition over their properties as they did in the past.

Attempts of the government for the purpose of restitution of the properties were never adequate for the Armenian Patriarchate and the British High Commissariat in İstanbul. The former continuously complained for being not given their peoperties and about insufficiency of the studies of the government, and the latter made pressure on the government about restitution of Armenians' properties. In some cases, the British officials delivered the Muslim houses to the Armenians without correspondance with the Ottoman government, upon the false witness of the latter.²⁵¹ In his letter to Earl Curzon, Admiral Calthorpe, the British High Commissioner in İstanbul reported the government's studies on restitution of the abandoned properties:

Owing to the weakness and neglect of the local authorities, arrangements for the restitution of Christian property appears to have come to a standstill excepting during the temporary presence of British officers. In several districts, owing to growing insecurity, the returned Christian refugees are now showing anxiety to leave

²⁴⁸ BOA., DH. SYS, 53-2/341903

²⁴⁹ BOA., HR. MÜ, 5/326

²⁵⁰ *Düstur*, Tertip:2, v. XI. pp. 553-561, cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen...*, pp. 178-187.

²⁵¹ Tansel, *Mondros'tan Mudanya'ya Kadar*, p. 63.

again for the coast, rather than to be placed in possession of their lands and houses, and in some cases where the deportation and massacre of Armenians was carried out with special thoroughness, practically no survivors are forthcoming to claim restitution. Under these circumstances it is questionable whether, in the absence of any power to enforce obedience, insistence on the execution of these measures may not act merely as an irritant, but be productive of more harm than good to returned refugees.²⁵²

Calthorpe's statements, however, ignored attempts of the government for fulfillment of the restitution. In order not to cause misery of the Armenians in their return, the government evacuated the abandoned properties at the risk of Muslim's reduce to extreme poverty. The number of the Muslim immigrants who lost their homes due to the evacuation was over a hundred thousand.

3.2. Question of the Muslim Refugees

The migrations from the lost Balkan and Caucasian lands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries greatly increased the number of the Muslim refugees in what is today Turkey. The Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, the Balkan Wars and the WWI were especially decisive in the migration movements which created a new make up of population in Anatolia and Thrace. Almost one-fifth of the total Muslim population of the post-WWI Ottoman Turkey composed of the Muslim refugees.²⁵³

Settlement of the Muslim refugees, particularly of those who fled after the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-78 and the Balkan Wars was carried out mostly through establishment of new villages. On the other hand, during and after the WWI, the Muslim refugees comprising Albanian, Bosnian, Circassians, Arabs, etc. from the former Ottoman lands were settled mainly on the abandoned Armenian and Greek estates.²⁵⁴ In addition to the refugees, during the WWI, nearly 1,000,000 Muslim

²⁵² Bilal Şimşir, *British Documents on Atatürk*, v. I., TTK Yayınları, Ankara, 1973, p.57.

²⁵³ McCarthy, *Death and Exile*, pp. 335-336.

²⁵⁴ Dündar, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin ...*, pp. 213-214; BCA., 272. 12. 36. 10. 1

immigrants, who migrated from the invaded Eastern Anatolia to the inner Anatolia, were also settled firstly on the abandoned estates. For instance, abandoned villages and towns in Trabzon were allocated to the Muslim immigrants coming from Batum and its neighborhood.²⁵⁵ Moreover, the government supported these peoples with abandoned properties.²⁵⁶ In other words, the Muslim refugees and immigrants took over the established order of the dislocated Greeks and Armenians.

Existence of the Muslim population settling on the abandoned properties created a serious question during return of the Armenians. This was because, evacuation of the abandoned properties settled or held by the refugees and immigrants was imperative for restitution and resettlement of the returnees. For the Muslims, however, leaving their new estates meant upcoming of further catastrophes as they did not own any other property to survive through it, except for those left by the Armenians. They had had to leave most of their properties in their former towns. Hence, they regarded the abandoned estates, on which they were settling, as their own residences.²⁵⁷ Truly, in contemplation of living permanently, the immigrants had repaired or enlarged the abandoned houses and shops through the addition of new parts.²⁵⁸

The government had no choice apart from removing the refugees and immigrants from the abandoned properties so as to overcome the problem of the resettlement of the returning peoples, which was of primary importance for satisfaction of the Allies. On the issue of restitution, the Ottoman government faced with continual British

²⁵⁵ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 53, pp.154-156.

²⁵⁶ BCA., 272. 11. 9. 21. 3.

²⁵⁷ Dündar, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin ...*, pp. 88-90.

²⁵⁸ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 200, p. 539.

interference.²⁵⁹ It was the British pressures that urged the government to establish special commissions to oversee all questions of return, repatriation and resettlement. By the same token, continuous memorandums sent by the British High Commissariat in İstanbul asking reports on the governmental studies made for the sake of the returnees pushed the government to render accounts of the works done.²⁶⁰

Actually, repatriation of the immigrants who had migrated from the Eastern Anatolia would facilitate evacuation of the Armenian properties. Signature of the Treaty of Brest Litovsk on 3 March 1918 had opened the door for return of the immigrants. Through the agency of Treaty of Brest Litovsk, the Eastern territories of the Ottoman Empire including Kars, Ardahan and Batum, which had been lost during the Ottoman Russian War of 1877-1878, immediately fell under the control of the Ottoman government.²⁶¹ Just after the signature of the Treaty, studies so as to ensure return of the immigrants started out.²⁶² In fact, completion of the immigrants' return before the return of the Armenians was compulsory in order to forestall the potential clashes between the settled Muslim immigrants and the Christian returnees in arrival of the latter.²⁶³ It was also crucial to set a bar against reduction of the Muslim population of Eastern Anatolia into minority position in a prospective plebiscite.²⁶⁴ Nonetheless, the government could not be able to complete the return of the immigrants in the desired decree before the return of the Armenians. It was apparently due to inadequacy of facilities of the Ottoman Empire. Even only

²⁵⁹ Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, p. 275; BOA., DH. KMS. 50-1/62

²⁶⁰ BOA., DH. SYS. 53-2/341903.

²⁶¹ Gürün, *Ermeni Dosyası*, p. 234.

²⁶² BOA., DH. KMS. 53-1/81

²⁶³ Dündar, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin ...*, p. 89.

²⁶⁴ Akşin, *İstanbul Hükümetleri ...*, p. 32.

transportation expenditures of repatriation were over viability of the Empire. Nor initiatives of the government to obtain free transportation of the immigrants from the British High Commissariat turned out satisfactory.²⁶⁵ Nothing remained but to make the necessary preparations so as to obviate problems that may emerge in encounter of the returnees and settled immigrants.

With an aim to guarantee the peace of both the returning peoples and the Muslims settled in the properties of the former, the government issued necessary orders. In this context, the governmental decree dated 18 December 1918 ordered evacuation of the abandoned properties by the immigrants. The fourth article of the decree stated that;

The immigrants living in the houses of the returning Greeks and Armenians shall be moved to other houses, which are currently occupied by the local people, officials, or military personnel, or to the houses whose owners have not returned yet. If it is not possible to provide a [separate] house to each of the families, a few families may be settled in the same house, and if there are still some immigrant families left houseless, they shall be settled in the empty or abandoned houses in the immigrant villages nearby, or in public buildings. Those who cannot be settled in anywhere shall be placed in the houses of local Muslim people.²⁶⁶

According to the fifth article of the same decree, the Greeks and the Armenians would also temporarily be settled so as to have two or three families sharing the same house until the complete settling of all the Muslim immigrants. A further instruction issued in December of 1918 ordered hiring of surplus goods of the returning Greek and Armenians to the evacuated immigrants.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ BOA., HR. MÜ, 5/326.

²⁶⁶ BOA., BEO. 341055.

²⁶⁷ Bülent Bakar, "Malların İadesi", *Türk-Ermeni İhtilafı Makaleler*, ed. Hikmet Özdemir, TBMM Kültür, Sanat ve Yayın Kurulu Yayınları, 2007, p. 328.

In accordance with the orders given above the Muslim immigrants started to be evacuated from the abandoned properties and settled in any empty buildings. Houses of the local Muslims were also used for settlement of the immigrants. In addition, the government set out to establish new villages for the Muslims after March 1919. However, all these places of settlement were far below the needed. Thus, hundred thousands of the immigrants had to stay out. These immigrants founded an organization called the Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Muslim Immigrants and Solidarity.²⁶⁸ The association claimed that there were approximately 150,000 homeless immigrants because of the returning home owners.²⁶⁹

Naturally, application of the articles above faced with resistance by the Muslim immigrants in some places. These immigrants settled in the abandoned properties became agitated and frustrated upon the abovementioned instructions and they even attempted to destroy the abandoned properties²⁷⁰ and exclude the returnees from the villages they returned.²⁷¹ The Muslim resistance was noted in report of British high commissioner Admiral Calthorpe dated 18 October 1918 as an obstacle before the return of the Armenians.²⁷² The immigrants' resistance against the Greek returnees in Biga district may be taken as an instance. The dislocated inhabitants of the Haruço and Musaca villages of Biga were not permitted to enter into the villages by the settled immigrants.²⁷³ However, the government did not allow such further reactions in order to prevent any harmful happenings under the current sensitive conditions prevailing in

²⁶⁸ Bakar, "Malların İadesi", p. 329.

²⁶⁹ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, 27 Mart 1335 [27 March 1919], cited in Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, p. 276.

²⁷⁰ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 192, p. 502.

²⁷¹ *OBE*, Document no: 240, pp. 214-215.

²⁷² Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, p. 276.

²⁷³ *OBE*, Document no: 240, pp. 214-215.

the country. To this aim, it is ordered by the Minister of Interior Ali Fethi that among the returning ones and the immigrants, who attempt to disturb the peace and order, should be severely punished.²⁷⁴

The government received telegrams and letters from the homeless immigrants who were asking for new real estates and lands to settle on. For example, the Drama immigrants, who had been settled in Yenişehir district of Bursa, asked for new houses and lands as they lost their homes because of the returning home owners.²⁷⁵ Similarly, immigrants from Tekirdağ,²⁷⁶ Edirne,²⁷⁷ Eskişehir,²⁷⁸ applied the government with demands of this kind. Remarkably, the government endeavored to meet the demands despite seriousness of the general situation. The provinces and sanjaks were warned so as to care was to be taken not to cause any loss of rights on the part of the Muslims.²⁷⁹ As a consequence, construction of barracks was decided so as to save the Muslim immigrants from staying out.²⁸⁰

Consequently, though the decisive orders were delivered to the provincial authorities on boarding and accommodation of the immigrants in accordance with relating instructions and in the most proper way,²⁸¹ limited facilities of the country impeded taking the necessary steps in favor of the Muslim immigrants. It was an irony

²⁷⁴ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 192, p. 502.

²⁷⁵ BCA., 272. 11. 14. 51. 3.

²⁷⁶ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 43. 16.

²⁷⁷ BCA., 272. 11. 14. 50. 12.

²⁷⁸ BCA., 2723. 11. 14. 51. 2.

²⁷⁹ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 192, p. 502

²⁸⁰ *İleri*, 16 Kanun-i evvel 1335 [16 December 1919], cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 107

²⁸¹ *OBE*, Document no: 236, pp. 211-212.

of fate that, studies for ensuring the return of the relocated peoples caused a disadvantage to the immigrants.

3.3. Restitution of the Armenian Women and Children

Restitution of the destitute Armenian women and children was also among the priorities of the resettlement process. These women and children, whose males had either been relocated or taken into the army, had been given shelter by the Ottoman government till the return of their families or communities. At the same time, a number of them were kept by the Muslims either mercifully or forcibly. The instructions regulating both the processes of the relocation and the return continuously touched upon this issue because of its sensitiveness. Great efforts were made so as to both protect them in the course of relocation and complete their restitution free of problems during the course of return and resettlement.

The Armenian women and children had been mostly excluded out of the scope of the relocation and allowed to stay in their current residences.²⁸² Their protection was ensured in accordance with the below instructions sent from the Ministry of Interior to the provinces and sanjaks dated 30 April 1916:

- 1- The families, whose males had either been relocated or taken into the army, and therefore left without anyone to take care of them, shall be distributed in a random way to villages and districts where no outsiders or Armenians are living. Their need for food shall be met from the immigrants' fund, and their orientation to the local traditions shall be ensured
- 2- The young women and widows shall be made to re- marry

²⁸² *OBE*, Document no: 47, p. 51; Document no: 89, p. 82; document no: 92, p. 83. The government did not follow a fix policy on relocation of the destitute Armenian women and children. In some areas, they were relocated together with the other Armenians too. For complementary information see İ. Ethem Atnur. "Kadınlar ve Çocuklar," *Türk Ermeni İhtilafı Makaleler*, pp. 306-307.

3- The children below twelve years of age shall be placed in our orphanages

4- In cases where the capacities of the orphanages are not adequate, the children shall be given to the well-off Muslim families so that they may be educated according to the local traditions

5- In case no well-off Muslim families can be found, attempts will be made to distribute the children among the villagers by paying a monthly feeding cost of thirty piastres for each of them. Information shall be provided on a constant basis and by giving numbers and figures regarding the work to be done related on the said issues.²⁸³

Further instructions were also issued to guarantee their protection. Local authorities were warned to pay attention in order for saving them through averting carnal abuse of women and girls;²⁸⁴ boarding of the orphans in the orphanages,²⁸⁵ establishing new orphanages in order to shelter desolate children,²⁸⁶ and punishing those who kidnapped or violated the Armenian women.²⁸⁷ Moreover, despite its intention to cease the missionary activities within the country, the Ottoman government had given support to the studies of the German and the American missionaries with an aim to protect the Armenian orphans.²⁸⁸ In addition to the government, in many areas many of the local Muslims had refused relocation of the Armenian women and children²⁸⁹ and given shelter to them in their houses.²⁹⁰ During the return, the Armenian women and children were paid particular attention.

²⁸³ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 167, p. 443. According to Akçam, this instruction shows genocidal intend of the relocations. See Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, p. 278.

²⁸⁴ Atnur, “Kadınlar ve Çocuklar”, pp. 322-324

²⁸⁵ *OBE*, Document no: 191, p. 150.

²⁸⁶ Atnur, “Kadınlar ve Çocuklar”, pp. 307-320.

²⁸⁷ Atnur, “Kadınlar ve Çocuklar”, p. 321.

²⁸⁸ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 82, p.221; BOA., DH. ŞFR, 57/270; Atnur, “Kadınlar ve Çocuklar”, pp. 316-317.

²⁸⁹ Özdemir et al., *Ermeniler:Sürgün ve Göç*, p. 82

²⁹⁰ Atnur, “Kadınlar ve Çocuklar”, p. 320.

In the regions where the railway and sea transport were not possible the government allocated cars for transfer of the returning Armenian women and children.²⁹¹

Studies for restitution of them to their communities were set out just after the Armenians were allowed for return. Essentials of the restitution were delivered to local authorities by the AMMU through several instructions. Implementation of the restitution was also checked through instrumentality of the AMMU.

With an aim to reconstitute the Armenian orphans, it was instructed on 21 October 1918 that, the Armenian orphans currently in orphanages or near various families would immediately be given to their relatives or guardians who should apply to receive them.²⁹² While doing this, identities of the individuals who claim the guardianship of the orphans would be very carefully examined before returning the orphans to those guardians and to their own communities.²⁹³ Similarly, according to the informative letter dated 1 November 1918, sent by the AMMU to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the orphans who had previously been taken from the schools, temples, and other institutions occupied due to the prevailing state of war and been placed in orphanages or given to the families would immediately be restituted to the communities they belong to.²⁹⁴

The above and further instructions also ensured restitution of the Armenian women and girls within the Muslim houses. Like the orphans, they were ordered to be returned to their guardians or communities. Moreover, the instruction issued by the

²⁹¹ Atnur, *Türkiye’de Ermeni Kadınları ...*, p. 130.

²⁹² *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 198, p. 526

²⁹³ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 200, p. 538.

²⁹⁴ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 196, p. 515.

AMMU on 18 December 1918 announced that, those who had previously converted to Islam were entirely free in using the freedom of conscience granted by the Constitution. Accordingly, the women who converted to Islam and married to Muslim men were freed to return to their original faith. In such a case the marriage would automatically be void. The cases of those who did not want to divorce from their husbands but at the same time insisted on returning to their original faith would be solved by the courts²⁹⁵ and those women would not be forced to divorce.²⁹⁶

Emniyet-i Umumiye Müdiriyeti (The General Directorate of and Security) and the AMMU were charged with the duty of restitution of the women and the children. Local branches of them carried out the application of restitution in the provinces and sanjaks. They made investigations to determine the number and places of the destitute Armenian women and children who had been sheltered in the orphanages, taken away, sent to surrounding villages or converted to Islam. Their mission also covered identification of the original faith of the Armenian women and children held by the Muslim families.²⁹⁷ The aforementioned mixed commissions composed of Ottoman and British members also worked for restitution of the women and children. At the same time, commissions composing of Armenian members were established to take delivery of the Armenian women and children.²⁹⁸

The first step was ensuring restitution of the Armenian orphans who were being kept within the Muslim houses. This would be second restitution of the Armenian orphans. One year before the Mudros Armistice, the orphanages within the Empire,

²⁹⁵ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 200, p. 538.

²⁹⁶ BOA., DH. ŞFR. 99/110

²⁹⁷ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 190.

²⁹⁸ *OBE*, Document no: 243, pp. 217-218.

which had been established particularly during the relocation almost in every province, had had to be abolished for financial reasons. The orphans within them had been announced to be taken by their relatives and communities.²⁹⁹ By the same token, the Armenian children within the orphanages in Maraş, Urfa, Diyarbakır, Konya, Kayseri, Samsun and in some other places had been transferred to the international relief communities.³⁰⁰ Thus, a number of the orphans saved by the government had been restituted before the end of the WWI. Now, it was turn of those who was living within the Muslim houses.

With an aim to quicken restitution of the Armenians, the relative instructions of the government were publicized by the local authorities. For the same goal, General Directorate of Security warned that those who were hiding Armenian girls and boys in their houses and orphanages would be punished in case they did not returned them within fifteen days³⁰¹ to the nearest police station.³⁰² The Armenians within the orphanages or under control of the government were immediately restituted. For example, the Armenian children in Akmeşe Orphanage in İzmit were restituted to the Patriarchate on 21 November 1918.³⁰³ Similarly, Muslims in high numbers restituted the Armenian children to the local authorities. This became possible mostly by the agency of the AMMU. Under the control of the AMMU, several orphanages were established to host, save and board the Armenian children. More importantly, an appropriation of eight liras per month was allocated for each of the Armenian child

²⁹⁹ *Cemiyet-i Akvam ve Türkiye’de Ermeniler ve Rumlar*, ed. Ali Güler, Türk Metal Sendikası Yayınları, Ankara, 2001, p. 36.

³⁰⁰ Çiçek, *Ermenilerin Zorunlu Göçü*, p. 287.

³⁰¹ *OBE*, Document no: 254, p. 232.

³⁰² Sarıhan, *Kurtuluş Savaşı Günlüğü*, v. I, p. 96.

³⁰³ *BCA.*, 272. 12. 37. 23. 5.

protected in the orphanages.³⁰⁴ According to the news of the newspaper *Yeni İstanbul* dated 13 November 1918, every day destitute Armenian orphans were being delivered to the Patriarchate in İstanbul. The number of those delivered increased day by day, not only in İstanbul but all around the country. The Patriarchate continuously received information with the channel of telegrams and the Armenian newspapers about the Armenian children that were to be taken back. For example, according to the coming information, there were approximately 400 Armenian children in Konya and its surrounding villages;³⁰⁵ and the military saved 500 Armenian children in Kayseri in order to give them to their communities.³⁰⁶

The government established new orphanages for settlement of the restituted Armenian children³⁰⁷ and allocated new building sites for establishment of them.³⁰⁸ The Osmanlı Hilal-i Ahmer Cemiyeti (The Ottoman Red Crescent Society) and the Himaye-i Etfal Cemiyeti (The Society for Protection of the Children) were instrumental in establishment of the new orphanages.³⁰⁹ The Armenian children who had no one to care them or were not accepted by their communities were also sheltered in these new orphanages.³¹⁰ Moreover, they were sustained by the government with special funds. To illustrate, on 13 November 1919, the government decided to allocate 1,000 liras per month for the expenditures of the orphanages.³¹¹

³⁰⁴ *Atı*, 4 Şubat 1335 [4 February 1919], cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen...*, p. 193.

³⁰⁵ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 189.

³⁰⁶ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 191.

³⁰⁷ BOA., DH. Komisyon-ı Mahsûs, D. 1/337

³⁰⁸ Atnur, *Türkiye'de Ermeni Kadınları ...*, p. 132.

³⁰⁹ Atnur, *Türkiye'de Ermeni Kadınları ...*, p. 132.

³¹⁰ *OBE*. Document no: 254, p. 232.

³¹¹ BOA., MV. 217/112.

What is more, the concerts to be organized by the Patriarchate in aid of the Armenian returnees and children were granted tax allowance.³¹²

During restitution of the children, Turkish children in high numbers were also taken by the Patriarchate under the pretext that they were natural Armenians. While doing this, the Patriarchate was supported by the British and French commissariats in İstanbul. Relying simply on the guesswork, Turkish children were taken from their homes or from the orphanages by force.³¹³ In fact, the Ottoman government could not care for the Muslim orphans because of the intense foreign pressures.³¹⁴ In his memoirs Celal Bayar wrote that “it was dangerous for Turkish children who had dark eyes and a swarthy complexion to go out into the street.”³¹⁵ Turkish families had fear that their children would be kidnapped.³¹⁶ The reports concerning the studies of restitution of the Armenian children by the hand of the government clearly shows forcibly taken Turkish children. For instance, the report submitted by the Directorate of Police in İstanbul dated 8 January 1919 listed names and current positions of the Turkish children who were taken from their homes in Bakırköy by the Armenians who were accompanied by the French soldiers.³¹⁷ Moreover, newspaper *İleri* wrote on 3 May 1919 that 220 destitute Muslim children were brought from Kayseri and restituted to the Armenian Patriarchate in İstanbul.³¹⁸ Most of them were converted

³¹² BOA., DH. UMVM. 116/47

³¹³ Zekeriya Türkmen, “İşgal Yıllarında İstanbul’daki Uygulamalar: Mütareke Döneminde Ermeniler Tarafından Türk Çocuklarının Kaçırılması ve Hristiyanlaştırılması”, *Kök Araştırmalar Dergisi*, v. II, No. 2, Ankara, Autumn 2000, p. 271.

³¹⁴ Atnur, *Türkiye’de Ermeni Kadınları ...*, p. 130.

³¹⁵ Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, p. 279.

³¹⁶ Bülent Bakar, “An Important Question Occured after Mudros Armistice: The Question of Turkish and Armenian Orphans”, *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, v. XXI, No: 62, July 2005, p.575.

³¹⁷ *OBE*. Document no: 225, pp. 196-202

³¹⁸ *İleri*, 3 Mayıs 1335 [3 May 1919], cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 199.

into Christianity by force and torture of the Patriarchate officials while 42 of them were able to resist tortures and remained Muslim. They were settled in Muslim orphanages and undergo therapy.³¹⁹ In the cases that the origin of the children were ambiguous, the Armenians took away them. 18 children of this kind settling in Çağlayan Orphanage were taken by the Armenian Patriarchate.³²⁰

Upon the increase in such events, the government was ultimately forced to declare that there was no other way for it to interfere on the issue³²¹ and warned the provincial authorities to proceed very cautiously in order to prevent passage of the Muslim children into the hands of the Armenians.³²² Despite the preventive efforts a number of Turkish children were transferred into the Armenian community and converted into the Christianity. It was admitted by the French representative on the Sub-Commission on Minorities in the course of Lausanne Peace Conference that certain errors had been made in the implementation of restitution, but, for him, they were minor and had been corrected.³²³ However, there seems to be no concrete evidences showing corrections made.

Similar with the restitution of the children, the restitution of the women who had converted or married to Muslim men and reconversion of them to their original faith were paid great attention by the government and the Patriarchate. The British High Commissariat was also intervener in women's restitution and reconversion. The above mentioned commissions were also charged to accelerate the restitution and

³¹⁹ *İleri*, 2 Haziran 1335 [2 June 1919], cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 200.

³²⁰ *Cemiyet-i Akvam ...*, p. 39.

³²¹ Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, p. 279.

³²² *OBE*. Document no: 250. pp. 224-225.

³²³ Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, p. 279.

reconversion of the Armenian women who were willing of it. Before they were delivered to their former communities, the commissions asked the married Armenian women to be sure of their compliance whether they were willing to be restituted or not. Those who were willing were restituted; others were left to go on their new life.³²⁴

Certainly, restitution of the women was not easy as of the children was. The women in question usually hesitated on the party that they would choose. As the Acting British High Commissioner Admiral Webb reported on 27 February 1919, “great number of the women has become attached to those persons with whom they have now lived for four years; if they were to leave they do not even know ... to whence they would be returning, or who of their relatives are still alive.”³²⁵ Similarly, the succeeding Acting British High Commissioner Admiral Calthorpe reported that “independently of the unwillingness of Moslems to surrender women who are inmates of their houses and have at least outwardly professed their faith, difficulty is often encountered in persuading the women themselves to return to their families. Especially those who gave birth to a Muslim child worried to be kept at a distance by their own community in case they returned.”³²⁶

It is difficult to calculate how many of the Armenian women returned to their communities and original faith but they were allowed for it. However, it is known

³²⁴ *Cemiyet-i Akvam ...*, p. 12.

³²⁵ Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, p. 278. According to Webb’s another report, the three issues of the day were insecurity, restitution of the Armenian girls and the guns possessed by the Ottoman people. See Gotthard Jaeschke, *Türk Kurtuluş Savaşı Kronolojisi*, Publications of Turkish Historical Society, 1989, Ankara, p. 9.

³²⁶ Şimşir, *British Documents on Atatürk*, p. 57.

that many of them were restituted and reconverted by the Armenian Patriarchate.³²⁷ Supported by the British High Commissariat, the Patriarchate continuously claimed that there were hidden Armenian women within the Muslim houses. In order to overcome the groundless claims of the Patriarchate and set a bar before the British intervention, the claims were investigated by the local and the mixed commissions. Truly, most of the claims were reported to be unfounded. For instance, the claims about forcibly marriage of the Muslim men with the Armenian girls in Akmağdeni, Niğde, Arapkir and Sungurlu were reported to be not true, on 24 August 1337.³²⁸ New investigations would be made in Ankara, Sivas and İzmit³²⁹ and Şarkikaraağaç³³⁰ etc. upon such claims of the Patriarchate.

Surprisingly however, Armenians worked for these unfounded claims to be regarded as true. In that context, Boghos Nubar, head of the Armenian delegation in the Paris Peace Conference demanded restitution of the Armenian women and children within the Muslim houses. What is the worst, in the Meeting of the Union of Nations, the Roman delegate Mademoiselle Vakerosko claimed that hundreds thousands of the Armenian and Greek children and women were kept in Muslim houses and institutions in İstanbul.³³¹ Vakeroska's claim was stuff and nonsense, and immediately refused by the AMMU by means of a report titled *Cemiyet-i Akvam ve Türkiye'de Ermeniler ve Rumlar*. It was stated in the report that, let alone the fabricated hundreds of thousands, even two Armenian women and children were not left within the Muslim houses. Likewise, even if the government or the local Muslim

³²⁷ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen* ..., p. 196.

³²⁸ BOA., DH. KMS. 50/-2 / 41.

³²⁹ BOA., DH. KMS. 50/-1 / 73.

³³⁰ BOA., DH. KMS. 50/-1 / 63.

³³¹ *Cemiyet-i Akvam* ..., p. vi.

people desired hiding these destitute Armenians in order not to deliver to their communities, this would be not possible in a time when the Armenian, British and French investigators were cruising to find hidden and converted Armenians.³³²

It can be concluded that, as a result of the intensive studies of the government, the Allies and the Patriarchate, the restitution of the Armenian children and women was fulfilled significantly. Contrary to the Armenian and the Allied claims blaming the government for hiding the Armenians and questioning its sincerity in the issue of restitution,³³³ the Ottoman government spent a lot of time and effort to complete their restitution in full safety. Needless to say, efforts of the government never meant full restitution of all the destitute Armenian women and children. However, it was not possible for the government and for individuals to hide them while the British and Armenian intelligence agents were examining the Muslim houses very carefully.

3.4. Reestablishment of the Former Armenian Life

Great efforts were spent to fulfill the return of the Armenians. Equally, the restitution of the abandoned properties and destitute women and children were significantly completed by the government. The next step then was the reestablishment of the former Armenian life, which was challenging as far as the condition of the day is concerned. Accomplishment of the reestablishment depended mostly on the economic strength of the Ottoman Empire as it required expenditures in high amount. Following the resettlement of the returnees, the government worked so as to ensure safety of the Armenian subjects of the country.

³³² *Cemiyet-i Akvam ...*, p. 12.

³³³ In his report dated 13 January 1919, Admiral Calthorpe said that “despite the official assurances which report the good intentions of the Turkish officials, they are pursuing an actively obstructionist policy which they mask with words”, cited in Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, p. 279.

3.4.1. Studies of the Ottoman Government

Most of the returning Armenians owned nothing at the time they took the road for their former hometowns following the decree for return. Therefore, the travel costs and living expenses of the approximately 300,000 returning Armenians and Greeks had been met by the government from the mobilization budget.³³⁴ High amounts of money were sent to the host provinces and the sanjaks so as to ensure boarding, accommodation and free transportation of the returning Armenians and Greeks. Some of them were also supported with additional allocations.³³⁵ After a while, the government would not be able to cover the expenditures of the process of return and turn to the British High Commissariat on 7 June 1919 to assure free transportation of the returnees by means of the railways under the Allied control.³³⁶

Arrival of the returning Armenians to their hometowns did not mean a decrease in the expenditures of the government spent for the sake of the Armenians. Maintenance and resettlement of the returning peoples were also among the duties of the government that required further great spending. The returnees had to be backed until they improved their financial situation. In this context, the most disadvantaged ones among the returned Armenians were provided daily fees, namely 3 piastres for adults and 60 paras for children per day or equivalent bread and grain from the same budget for a period of maximum twenty days.³³⁷ In some cases the period was narrowed or extended in consideration of the Armenians' need into 15 days³³⁸, 25 days³³⁹ or 30

³³⁴ *OBE*, Document no: 213, p. 181; Document no: 229, pp. 204-205.

³³⁵ *BCA.*, 74. 67. 34. 1.

³³⁶ *OBE*, Document no: 264, pp. 246-248.

³³⁷ *OBE*, Document no: 224, p. 195; Document no: 251, p. 225.

³³⁸ *BCA.*, 272. 74. 68. 38. 8.

days ³⁴⁰ and more.³⁴¹ Similarly, in some cases the amount of the daily fee was increased or supplemented to meet the needs of the returnees. For example, on 9 August 1919, the AMMU asked for new supplementary fees for the enormously disadvantaged Armenian and Greek returnees in Canik until they obtained employment.³⁴²

Self-sustaining of the Armenian returnees was indispensable in consideration of the financial situation of the Ottoman Empire at the time. Permanent subvention of the returnees was by no means possible in a time when even payment of the daily fees was insuperable for the government within the conditions of the day. Thus, the returnees were to be allocated essential means of production to sustain themselves. Allocations for this purpose were particularly crucial for those who were settled in the villages. This was because; the Armenian artisans resettled in the towns were capable of making a living without support of the government.³⁴³ Like that, the Armenian merchants who received their commercial goods in their return were also able to sustain themselves. As for the unemployed returnees, the local authorities tried to find an employment.³⁴⁴

The Armenians who were settled in the villages on the other hand were much frustrated and immediately needed required means of production so as to restart their agricultural activities. According to the Ottoman statesmen, in case the Armenians were granted subvention, they would feel themselves indebted and grateful to the

³³⁹ *OBE*. Document no: 231, p. 207.

³⁴⁰ *BCA.*, 272. 11. 13. 44. 10.

³⁴¹ *BCA.*, 272. 74. 68. 42. 16.

³⁴² *BCA.*, 272. 74. 68. 42. 16.

³⁴³ Karaca, *Ermeni Sorununun ...*, p. 227.

³⁴⁴ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 103.

Empire. In this way, great material and political benefits would be obtained and the foreign interference would be disposed.³⁴⁵ To this end, the government sustained required means of substances for the returned farmers. They were given husbandry tools, wheat and barley seeds³⁴⁶ and yoke of oxen by the agency of Ziraat Bank and the Ministry of Commerce and Agriculture.³⁴⁷ Moreover, the returnees in the villages were granted 50 liras credit per house by Ziraat Bank.³⁴⁸

Exemption of the returnees from several taxes was another attempt of the government in order to facilitate their resettlement and rehabilitation. The Ministry of Interior applied the Prime Ministry on 19 March 1919³⁴⁹ and 27 September 1919³⁵⁰ for exempting the Armenian and Greek returnees from the taxes like the other immigrants and refugees. Upon the Ministry's applications, the necessitous returnees were granted tax exemption for a definite period on 14 May 1920.³⁵¹ Similarly, former tax dues of the returnees and of their religious institutions were remitted.³⁵²

Government's relief to the returning Armenians included also medical assistance which was vital at the time when millions of people deceased because of the diseases like typhoid and malaria. All the returnees were examined and vaccinated against infectious diseases in their return. For implementation of these, a commission named Emrâz-ı Sâriyye Mücadele Heyeti (The Commission for Fighting against Infectious

³⁴⁵ BCA., 272. 74. 68. 42. 13.

³⁴⁶ OBE., Document no: 254, p. 231.

³⁴⁷ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 45. 6.

³⁴⁸ BCA., 272. 11. 14. 49. 5.

³⁴⁹ OBE., Document no: 255, pp. 232-233.

³⁵⁰ OBE., Document no: 272, p. 264.

³⁵¹ OBE., Document no: 272, pp. 264-266.

³⁵² Atnur, *Türkiye'de Ermeni Kadınları ...*, p. 126.

Diseases) was also charged.³⁵³ In April 1920 the commission disinfected all of the refugee barracks and ironed clothes of the refugees.³⁵⁴ Similarly, the Armenian refugees being saved in the Armenian schools and churches were also vaccinated regularly.³⁵⁵ In the same way, upon the news that a malaria spread out in the surroundings of Çatalca and Silivri and infected to the refugees, the AMMU sent officials to the regions for rescuing them.³⁵⁶ Likewise, goods and instruments of a military hospital were allocated for treatment of the diseased ones among the Armenians returned to Van.³⁵⁷ What is more, for the needs of the Muslim and non-Muslim immigrants the AMMU was donated 3,000 clothes for children, 2,000 greatcoats, 2,500 shoes and 1,000 beddings by the Ministry of War.³⁵⁸

Maintenance of the Armenians became possible considerably thanks to the relief of Hilal-i Ahmer which went ahead with the government to ensure rehabilitation of the returned Armenians. All the facilities of Hilal-i Ahmer were mobilized for this purpose. It was quite operative in providing care to the patients among the returnees and in providing medicine, clothes, food and cleaners for them. Noteworthy studies of Hilal-i Ahmer were admired even by the Armenian and drove them to ask for its help. For example, the İstanbul Armenian Patriarchate had recourse to Hilal-i Ahmer to assure its donation of beddings, food, drink, medicine etc. for a newly constructed Armenian orphanage.³⁵⁹ The Patriarchate was given 500 underpants, 500 shirts, tea,

³⁵³ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen* ..., p. 103.

³⁵⁴ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen* ..., p. 109.

³⁵⁵ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen* ..., p. 118.

³⁵⁶ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen* ..., p. 110.

³⁵⁷ *OBE*. Document no: 254, p. 231.

³⁵⁸ Bakar, *Ermeni Tehciri* ..., p. 183.

³⁵⁹ Seçil K. Akgün, *Hilal-i Ahmer'den Kızılay'a*, v. I, Beyda Basımevi, Ankara, 2000, p. 230.

sugar, foam, and etc. to the utmost. Again, the charity commission founded by the Galata Armenian Church received 300 underpants, 300 shirts, 100 kg of foam, 550 kg of chickpea, tea, sugar and medicine in order to distribute them to the Armenian returnees. Hilal-i Ahmer also covered the Armenian returnees in the provinces. For instance, delivery of the returnees in Adapazarı was completed by means of fifty cars paid by Hilal-i Ahmer. The returnees were also provided clothes and food.³⁶⁰ In consequence of its workings in favor of the needy Armenians, the Society was returned thanks by the Patriarchate.³⁶¹

Several other civil organizations also made attempts to maintain the Armenian refugees. For example, İstanbul-based Sulh ve Selamet Cemiyeti (The Society of Peace and Salvation) attempted for construction of a hospital for the Armenians who returned in Adapazarı.³⁶² Like that, a play was organized in December 1919 in İstanbul with an aim to collect money for the needs of the refugees in İstanbul.³⁶³ Similar studies were also happening in the provinces in Anatolia. The local people rendered their assistance to their former neighbours in their return and even hosted them in their houses. In Boğazlıyan, local people collected 5.500 liras to ensure boarding of the Armenian returnees.³⁶⁴

Studies of the government in order for fulfilling resettlement of the Armenian returnees comprised also reparation and rebuilding of abandoned houses and institutional buildings which were damaged and unavailable to use. Within the

³⁶⁰ *Sabah*, 30 Teşrin-i sani 1335 [30 November 1918], cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 101.

³⁶¹ Akgün, *Hilal-i Ahmer'den Kızılay'a*, pp. 230-231.

³⁶² Sarıhan, *Kurtuluş Savaşı Günlüğü*, v. I, p. 55

³⁶³ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 103.

³⁶⁴ Karaca, *Ermeni Sorununun ...*, p. 227.

circumstances of the WWI, a portion of the abandoned buildings like houses, churches, schools, monasteries, shops etc. had been severely damaged or even destroyed. Some of them had been occupied by the military as residence, depository, military court, hospital etc. Some of them had been damaged by the local people and some others by the Muslim immigrants. As mentioned before, the immigrants settled in the abandoned properties had become agitated and frustrated upon return of the Armenians and they had attempted to destroy the abandoned properties.³⁶⁵

Following the return of the relocated Armenians and Greeks, the government gave start to reparation and rebuilding of their damaged buildings by the agency of the AMMU. The houses were repaired by the local authorities mostly free of problems and were restituted to their owners. Reparation of the religious buildings was comparatively laborious and costly, so that took up time. Therefore, their reparation required correspondences with and additional allocations from the government. For example, the Governorate of Karesi asked the Ministry of Interior for allocation of 1,000 liras for the reparation charges of the Armenian Church which had been used by the military in the course of the War. Sending of the demanded money would be possible only after several correspondences among the ministries of Interior and Finance and governorate of Karesi.³⁶⁶ This was of course due to the financial handicaps impeding expenditures of this sort. By the same way, sending of the allocation demanded by the Governorate of Urfa for reparation of the Armenian Church, of which original aspect had been changed in the course of relocation on 24 April 1919, was postponed till the next year owing to the lack of financial means.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵ *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, Document no: 192, p. 502.

³⁶⁶ BCA., 272. 74. 69. 52. 21; BCA., 272. 74. 69. 53. 4.

³⁶⁷ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 48. 9.

Notwithstanding the financial straits, the government was expected to repair all the damaged buildings. For example, reparation of the Hasköy Armenian Church and School in İstanbul was demanded by the Armenian Patriarchate.³⁶⁸ Likewise, the destroyed Armenian Church in the Alaaddin Hill in Konya was also waiting to be rebuilt.³⁶⁹

In some cases, however, the government had to quicken the payment of the demanded allocations owing to the Allied pressures. For example, the persistent demand of the British Military Forces on sending of 10,000 piastres needed for reparation of the Armenian Protestant Church of Antep forced the Ministry of Interior to expedite transfer of the mentioned demand.³⁷⁰ Still, the motive behind reparation facilities did not wholly emanate from the foreign pressures, but it was a legal responsibility according to the governmental decree issued on 8 January 1920. The ninth article of the decree ensured compensation of the damages on the Armenian immovable properties by responsible people. In absence of them the government would assume the responsibility.³⁷¹

3.4.2. Studies of the Armenian Patriarchate

The Armenian (Gregorian) Patriarchate made every endeavor for the return and resettlement of the relocated Armenians from its very beginning to its completion. Studies of the Patriarchate varied from boarding and accommodation of the returnees

³⁶⁸ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 117.

³⁶⁹ BCA., 272. 11. 13. 48. 12. According to this document, the Armenian Church in the Alaaddin Hill was destroyed in the course of the relocation without decision of the local administration under the surveillance of chief-architect Bekir Bey by a group of detainees who had been released from the prison by an official named Muammer Bey.

³⁷⁰ BCA., 272. 11. 14. 50. 7.

³⁷¹ *Düstur*, Tertip: 2, c. XI. p. 556, cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 181.

and the orphans to granting them financial and medical assistance. The Patriarchate also made efforts to make use of the occupying Allied forces in the country for the benefit of the Armenian refugees. Several commissions were established under the supervisorship of the Patriarchate and charged with the issues of the Armenians. However, studies of the Patriarchate usually and naturally concentrated on the returnees in İstanbul.

The Patriarchate organized a meeting on December 1918 with the participation of the Armenian clergymen in İstanbul, the Armenian deputies and some wealthy Armenian tradesmen with an aim to evaluate the current developments about the studies of the Ottoman government on returning the relocated Armenians. At the end of the meeting the participants returned their thanks to the government and declared their loyalty to the Empire. They also declared that they would fulfill whatever they were expected to do.³⁷² With the arrival of the first Armenians, several meetings were also held so as to negotiate the issues like the settlement of the returnees, boarding of the orphans and restitution of the converts. Moreover, participants decided establishment of commission in Beyoğlu, Samatya, Kumkapı and Galata Armenian churches for the Armenian refugees in İstanbul.³⁷³

By the instrumentality of the mentioned commissions, thousands of the Armenian refugees and orphans were placed in the Armenian churches, schools, orphanages and newly constructed barracks. They were all boarded and accommodated by the Patriarchate. However, it was not possible for the Patriarchate to overcome all the expenses of the Armenians under its protection. Thus, it received financial assistance

³⁷² *Sabah*, 25 Teşrin-i evvel 1334 [25 October 1919], cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, pp. 115-116.

³⁷³ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, pp. 117-118.

from several sources involving the Armenian in İstanbul and in diaspora. To give some examples, the Patriarchate received a grant of 50,000 liras from an Armenian notable in İstanbul. By the same way, the Bulgarian Armenians established a commission in December 1918 and sent money for the returning Armenians. In July 1919, they sent further 28,000 liras to the Patriarchate for the same purpose. Furthermore, the Armenians in London and Manchester sent 400,000 pounds to the Patriarchate. The Armenians in Paris also collected and sent money to the Patriarchate.³⁷⁴ All these revenues were spent for the Armenian refugees and orphans in İstanbul.

The Armenian Patriarchate was also influential in restitution of the Armenian children to their communities. It did not only receive the restituted children, but also searched for the thousands of others who were said to be hidden by the Muslims.³⁷⁵ For that purpose, the Patriarchate instructed its provincial branches and the commissions about ensuring restitution of the hidden Armenian children in their vicinities.³⁷⁶ During their studies, the government made things easier for the commissions. For example, the coded message sent from the Ministry of Interior to the governorate of Kayseri dated 5 February 1919 ordered that the Armenian girls and boys within the Muslim families would immediately be delivered to the said commission³⁷⁷ and all the facilities would be shown to them.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁴ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, pp. 118-123.

³⁷⁵ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 193.

³⁷⁶ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 192.

³⁷⁷ *OBE*. Document no: 243, pp. 217-218.

³⁷⁸ BOA., DH. EUM. AYŞ. 21/58.

In order to sustain the needs of the Armenian children, whose number reached thousands, the Armenian Patriarchate organized a lottery of 100,000 liras with the permission of the government.³⁷⁹ Some civil organizations like the Armenian Red Cross and the Society of Women made contribution in meeting the needs of the children, but they were never enough. However, despite all its revenues, some of which were given above, the Patriarchate could not able to cover the needs of the Armenians under its protection and had to ask the Ottoman government for its subvention.³⁸⁰ By the way, it seems that the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate exempted itself from liability for the Armenian returnees who were wholly Gregorian. Exemption of the Catholic Armenians from the relocation may be regarded as the reason of its indifference.³⁸¹ Following the Armistice, the Catholic Patriarchate established a commission not to save the Armenian returnees but to fix losses of its institutions and members.³⁸²

3.4.3. The American Aid

As a result of the intensive efforts and a well-prepared organization, the Ottoman government completed return and resettlement of the formerly relocated Armenians significantly. At the same time, utmost care was paid so as to ensure maintenance of them. More importantly, despite the financial troubles, a sizable portion of the government's budget was devoted for fulfillment of the return and resettlement processes. However, the above studies were never adequate for completion of the

³⁷⁹ BOA., MV. 43/15.

³⁸⁰ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, pp. 189-190.

³⁸¹ For the exemption decision of the Catholic Armenians from the relocation see *OBE.*, Document no: 76, p. 76

³⁸² Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 119.

resettlement processes which necessitated much more financial and administrative devotion. The efforts of the Armenian Patriarchate also were far off from being adequate. Thus, there was serious need for additional financial assistance to keep up the Armenian refugees.

The return and resettlement of the Armenians were usually fulfilled under the surveillance of the officials from the British High Commissariat in İstanbul. They witnessed misery of the returnees and studies of the government for the maintenance of them. However, it is not possible to talk about any financial aid granted by the British authorities for the Armenian returnees. They tried to ensure the maintenance of the returnees through ensuring evacuation, restitution and compensation of the abandoned Armenian properties and restitution of the Armenian women, children and converts.³⁸³ Similarly, the French agents ignored the needs of the Armenian returnees. They even asked the Ottoman government for 50,000 liras for reparation of the destroyed Armenian houses in Adana which were occupied by the French troops.³⁸⁴

As compared with the Britain and France, Americans rendered noteworthy assistance to the Armenian refugees in İstanbul and Anatolia. The American Committee for Relief in the Near East, Near East Relief (NER) in short, was instrumental in distribution of the American aids to the refugees.³⁸⁵ At the beginning of the relocation, the Ottoman statesmen like Enver Pasha, Talat Pasha and Said Halim Pasha had looked upon the American aid with disfavour. They had thought that the Armenians would interpret the American aid as the American support on their

³⁸³ Tansel, *Mondros'tan Mudanya'ya Kadar*, p. 72.

³⁸⁴ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 144.

³⁸⁵ The Near East Relief was a relief organization established during World War I with rallying support of Henry Morgenthau, the American ambassador to the Ottoman Empire during the relocation. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Committee_for_Relief_in_the_Near_East.

cause, thus creating more problems. Therefore, they had tried to block the American aid.³⁸⁶ However, inadequacy of the state resources had not allowed persistence in this attitude³⁸⁷ and around half a million Armenians had received the American aid.³⁸⁸ During the return, the NER received red-carpet treatment in İstanbul where it opened a unit early in January 1919. In order to make contribution to its workings, the Ottoman government exempted goods, grains and other commodities brought by the NER from customs duty.³⁸⁹ In 1920, the NER organized its operations in three geographical divisions: İstanbul and Anatolia, Syria and the Levant, and the Caucasus.³⁹⁰ The İstanbul and Anatolia division took care of mostly the Armenian refugees.

The committee gave start to its studies in İstanbul in January 1919. It launched a nation-wide campaign for \$30,000,000 to aid the Armenians and Syrians, which was initiated in New York. According to the Committee, the money would be spent in accordance with the statement below:

There are nearly 4,000,000 souls to be fed, clothed, and started on a new life. Of these, 2,900,000 are destitute and must be fed as soon as the funds are provided. It will cost exactly \$5 a month for six months to feed each of the destitutes. This makes a total of \$4,500,000 for six months for food supplies. Four dollars for each person will be needed for clothing and bedding, making another item of \$8,000,000. One million seven hundred and seventy thousand persons are at an average of 4 miles from home and must be taken back at a cost of \$3 for each person, thus requiring \$5,310,000 for this purpose. For these repatriated persons 50,000

³⁸⁶ Çiçek, *Ermenilerin Zorunlu Göçü*, pp. 258-259

³⁸⁷ Çiçek, *Ermenilerin Zorunlu Göçü*, p. 260.

³⁸⁸ Çiçek, *Ermenilerin Zorunlu Göçü*, p. 250.

³⁸⁹ Bülent Bakar, *Ermeni Tehciri ve Uygulaması*, Unpublished dissertation submitted to the Marmara Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü, İstanbul, 2003, p. 175.

³⁹⁰ Merrill D. Peterson, *Starving Armenians*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville and London, 2004, p. 108.

temporary houses will be needed to replace the ones destroyed by the Turks. These will cost \$50 each, making a total of \$2,500,000. It will also cost \$4,000,000 to provide orphanages for 400,000 orphans. Finally, to make these people self-supporting as soon as possible, another \$2,500,000 must be spent for seeds, farm implements, etc. This makes a total of \$36,810,000 of which New York's quota is \$6,000,000.³⁹¹

Within the few days the desired money was collected. On 31 December 1918 Dr. James L. Barton, the Director of the NER, took his passage to İstanbul, together with his wife and officials and nurses from the American Red Cross in a ship carrying goods, grains and other commodities.³⁹² In mid-February the ship reached İstanbul.³⁹³

In collaboration with the Ottoman government, the NER managed to deliver cereal at the rate of 5,000 tons a month. By the end of 1919, about 30,000 metric tons of food and clothing arrived in İstanbul. Beginning with February 12, the Armenian and Greek refugees and orphans were provided flour, canned foods, condensed milk, trucks, ambulances, sewing machines, oil stoves, yards of cloth, blankets, hospital cots, tents, X-ray machines and coal.³⁹⁴ They were also given daily bread and meal.³⁹⁵ Furthermore, according to report listing services given by the NER in the year 1922 in whole Anatolia, the NER gave aid to 22,211 refugees, 36,231 individuals were given medical assistance and 737 individuals lined in the NER's hospital.³⁹⁶

The primary aim of the NER actually was to alleviate the suffering of the Armenian people. Thus, its activities were limited with the regions having needy

³⁹¹ "Near East Report for Syria", *The New York Times Current History Magazine*, April-May-June 1919, in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Committee_for_Relief_in_the_Near_East.

³⁹² Jaeschke, *Türk Kurtuluş Savaşı ...*, p. 12.

³⁹³ *İleri*, 17 Şubat 1335 [17 February 1919], cited in Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 147.

³⁹⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Committee_for_Relief_in_the_Near_East.

³⁹⁵ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 148.

³⁹⁶ Özdemir et al., *Ermeniler: Sürgün ve Göç*, p. 157.

Armenians like Syria and the Caucasus. This fact was confirmed by the Peterson with the above words that “Nearly all of this relief was dispensed to Armenians. The money had been raised from the American people for Christian Armenians and Syrians, not for Turks or Russians or even Greeks, though the latter had Orthodox faith in their favor. Admiral Bristol complained on the discrimination, but, knowing his feelings toward Armenians, NER officials paid no attention to him.”³⁹⁷ Equally, Turkish historian Türkkaya Ataöv argued that “the Turkish citizens were starving while the Armenians were fed by American relief workers with money raised as a result of Turkish propaganda.”³⁹⁸

Notwithstanding the Peterson’s and Ataöv’s statements, services of the NER in İstanbul did not wholly exclude the non-Armenians refugees and orphans. To illustrate, Greek, Muslim and Jewish orphanages were also given daily bread and Muslim refugees were granted daily meal.³⁹⁹ By the same way, the NER and Directorate of Immigrants in İstanbul assisted each other in their studies for the sake of maintenance of the refugees in İstanbul.

Resettlement of the Armenian returnees became possible with the help of all the above efforts. The Ottoman government had to overcome a number of tasks so as to complete the process of resettlement. The returnees in great numbers were paid attention and given aid as much as possible within the conditions of the day. The ultimate goal was ensuring maintenance and safety of the returnees in their hometowns. However, financial facilities of the Empire rarely allowed completion of this goal. In many cases, they suffered during their return and resettlement, like the

³⁹⁷ Peterson, pp. 108-109.

³⁹⁸ Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, p. 57.

³⁹⁹ Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 148.

Muslim peoples of the Empire. The relief given by the Ottoman government, by the Patriarchate and by the NER was beneficial but never enough.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

After more than three years of their relocation, the Armenians were given permission for return to their former hometowns in 18 December 1918. With this permission the period of relocation has ended. The decision of the government for return was issued just before the signature of the Mudros Armistice, though preparations were given start much before. There were several reasons behind taking this decision. One of them was that the reasons which had driven the Ottoman government to take decision of relocation were no more valid in the conditions of 1918. Retreat of Russia from the WWI in 1917 had removed the danger of the Armenian-Russian flirt against the Ottoman armies; upon which the Ottoman government had stipulated the return of the Armenians in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Moreover, getting through the probable Allied pressures after the War was impulsive in this decision. The Return of the Armenians was thought to serve to the elimination of the image of “terrible Turk” which had been installed in the West particularly owing to the relocation of the Armenians. In order to overcome this image the government had no other choice apart from giving allowance for return. Additionally, rehabilitation of the Turco-Armenian relations for a short time period in mid-1918 was also influential.

Subsequent to the permission, hundreds of thousands of Armenians returned from Syria and Iraq and were resettled between the years 1918 and 1920. The government established a well-arranged campaign and made great efforts and expenditures for

completion of the return and resettlement of the peoples in such huge numbers. The campaign included ensuring safety of the returnees, restitution and compensation of their properties, return of the Armenian orphans and women to their community, etc.

As mentioned above, the returnees were given assistance by the government. New houses were built for the homeless returnees and household requirements were provided to the needies. The poor returnees were paid daily fees for a month and given credit so as to ensure their livelihood. Those who were resettled in the villages were provided means of agriculture, seeds and yokes. In this way, the returnees would be able to sustain themselves.⁴⁰⁰ The government had to overcome all these endeavours while it was struggling to overcome the most disastrous years of its history. Despite the financial crises the government fell into after the War, 1,150,000 liras was spent for the expenditures of the returnees.⁴⁰¹

The Ottoman government faced with permanent Allied interference in the affairs of the return. Especially, the British High Commissariat in İstanbul put pressure on the government through continuous memorandums calling for immediate actions on especially the restitution of the abandoned properties, return of the Armenian women and children to their communities,⁴⁰² and dressing and boarding of the returnees.⁴⁰³ In many cases the British interference particularly in the abovementioned issues brought about victimization of the Muslims, that is, they were forced to leave their properties to the Armenians or their children were taken in order to be delivered to the Armenians. As the Minister of Interior Mustafa Arif truly says, “considering the

⁴⁰⁰ *OBE*, Document no: 254, p. 229.

⁴⁰¹ Gürün, *Ermeni Dosyası*, p. 241.

⁴⁰² Atnur, *Tehcirden Dönen ...*, p. 139.

⁴⁰³ *OBE*, Document no: 254, p. 229.

many kinds of difficulties and lack of means of transportation caused by the extraordinary conditions which have lasted for four years, there is no need to explain how great efforts are being expended in order to fulfil the duties undertaken. Obviously the achievements obtained under the said conditions may never be undervalued.”⁴⁰⁴

Approximately 300,000 Armenians returned to their former hometowns. More or less number of population than the given may also be claimed. However, this number decreased day by day in Anatolia. Many of them left their homes for USA, European and other countries. According to the 1927 census, nearly 140,000 Armenians were living in Turkey.⁴⁰⁵ This number of population decreased in accordance with the migration of the Armenians to the other countries.

The return of the Armenians needs much more attention for comprehensive understanding of the Armenian question. Studies made without considering the return shall inevitably be lacking and cause perversion of the truth. Moreover, studying the return of the Armenians shall make the Armenian claims of premeditation and the Armenian losses more questionable. Laçiner’s questions are considerably proper to question the Armenian claims under the light of the return fact and give an end to the thesis.

If half a million people returned to Anatolia how can you talk about a genocide? If these people had experienced a genocide campaign and saw more than 1.5 million killings, why did they return to the Turkish territories? Is there any Jewish who returned to the Nazi state or even to Germany after the Nazi rule? If more than 500,000 Armenians returned to Anatolia and they could

⁴⁰⁴ BOA., HR., SYS., 2569/1; cited in *Turkish – Armenian Conflict*, p. 525.

⁴⁰⁵ Muammer Demirel, “Türkiye’de Kalan Ermeni Nüfus”, *Atatürk Araştırmaları Merkezi Dergisi*, v. XXI, July 2005, No: 63, pp. 488-491.

survive under Turkish rule, it means that the Armenian killings are exaggerated. I do not ignore the communal killings. More than 520,000 Turkish and Kurdish were massacred by the Armenian gangs and Turkish and Kurdish gangs attacked the Armenian villages and immigrants during the First World War. However no one could hide the fact that many Armenians were saved by their Muslim neighbors, and most of the Armenians survived after the Relocation Campaign. Even they preferred Turkey to live instead of Armenia, Europe or the Middle East. Armenian historians show great effort to curtail the returned Armenians fact.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁶ <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news.php?id=26316>, 21 February 2006

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Appendix C:

Document on Delivery the Armenian Children to the Commissions Consisting of Armenians



BOA. DIR. SPR. no. 96/76

Appendix E:

Document on Protection of the Returning Armenians

ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԱՐԽԻՎ



ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԱՐԽԻՎ



ԽՈՐՀԱՆՈՒՄ

ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԱՐԽԻՎ

Մեզ հասել է Ձեր 1992 թվականի օգոստոսի 26-ից 27-ը ընկած օրերի մասին
 արձանագրությունը, որով Հայաստանի Հանրապետության արևմտահայկական
 տարածքներում գտնվող հայկական բնակավայրերում ապաստանած հայերի
 անվտանգության և կյանքի պահպանման համար անհրաժեշտ միջոցառումներ
 իրականացնելու մասին Ձեր կողմից ընդունված որոշումների մասին
 Ձեր արձանագրության մեջ ակնհայտ է արտահայտվում Հայաստանի
 Հանրապետության կառավարության և ժողովրդի կողմից հայերի
 անվտանգության և կյանքի պահպանման համար անհրաժեշտ
 միջոցառումներ իրականացնելու անհրաժեշտությունը։

Ձեր արձանագրության մեջ ակնհայտ է արտահայտվում Հայաստանի
 Հանրապետության կառավարության և ժողովրդի կողմից հայերի
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 միջոցառումներ իրականացնելու անհրաժեշտությունը։

Ձեր արձանագրության մեջ ակնհայտ է արտահայտվում Հայաստանի
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Ձեր արձանագրության մեջ ակնհայտ է արտահայտվում Հայաստանի
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Ձեր արձանագրության մեջ ակնհայտ է արտահայտվում Հայաստանի
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 անվտանգության և կյանքի պահպանման համար անհրաժեշտ
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Ձեր
 խոսք

ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԱՐԽԻՎ

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Appendix F:

Document on Exempting the Returning Armenian and Greeks from Some Taxes

Handwritten document in Ottoman Turkish script. The text is arranged in several paragraphs, with a prominent signature and seal on the right side. The seal features a crescent and star above the calligraphic text 'خالدی' (Khalidi). The document appears to be an official decree or exemption document.

BOA. DH. 373, nr. 53/2

Appendix G:

Document on Assistance Provided to the Armenian and Greek Refugees



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