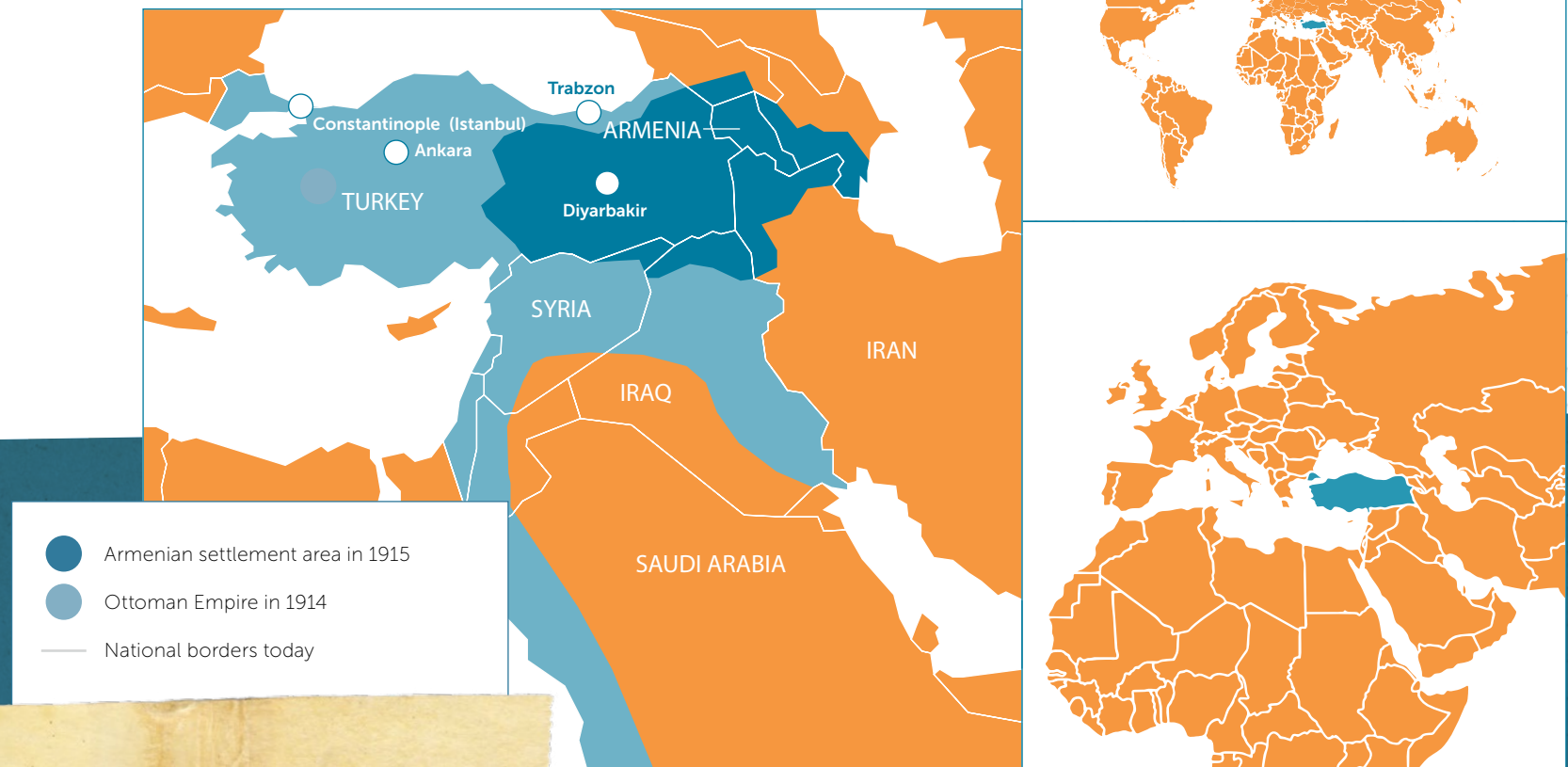
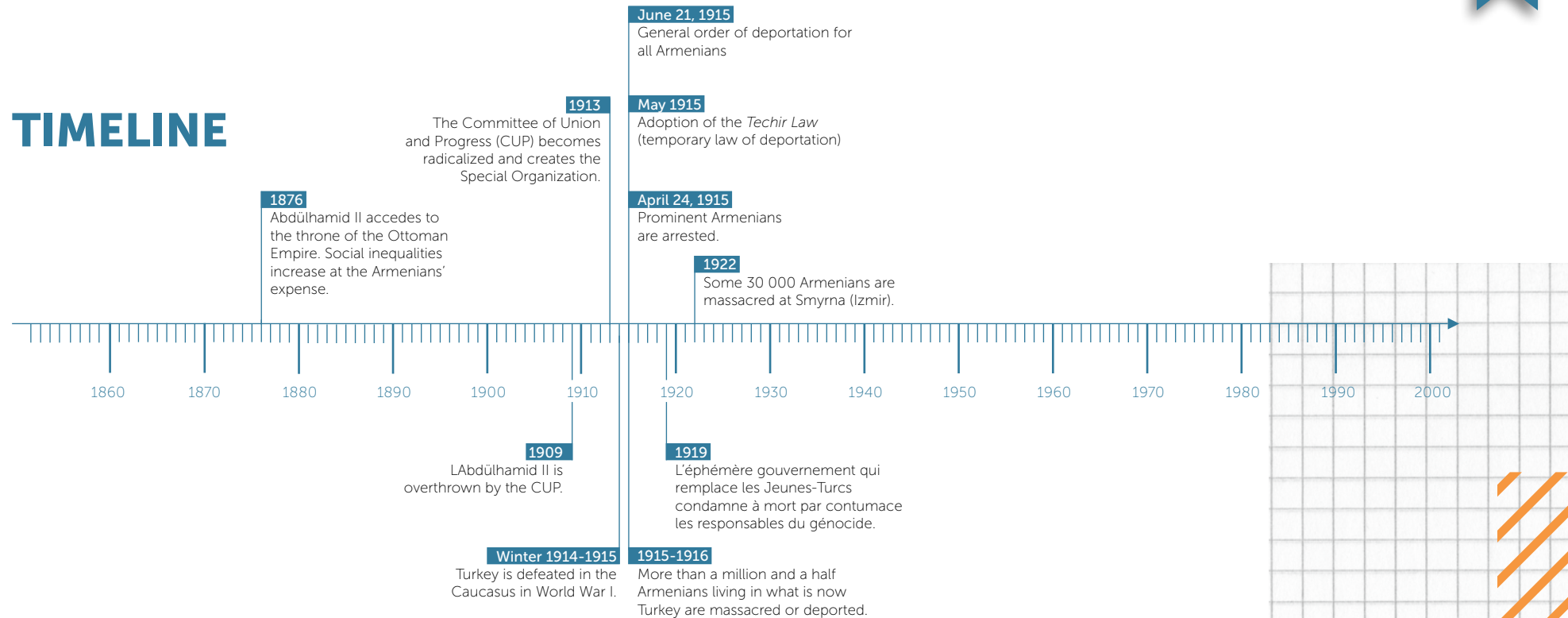


# GENOCIDE OF THE ARMENIANS UNDER THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

## MAP OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE ARMENIAN POPULATION, 1915



## TIMELINE



## HIGHLIGHTS

### Where?

- // Ancient region of Anatolia and Cilicia, now Turkey
- // Lands occupied by the Armenians for millenniums
- // Armenian neighbourhoods and villages in the Ottoman Empire

### What?

- // Murder of more than 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire
- // Creation of concentration camps for Armenians, deportation, rape and mass murder

### When?

- // From 1915 to 1923 (period studied: events of 1915-1916)

### Who?

- // The perpetrators were the Muslim Turks in the Ottoman Empire.
- // Ismail Enver, Mehmet Talaat and Ahmed Djemal led the Turkish government from 1913 to 1918.
- // The victims were Christian Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, Chaldeans and Syrians in the Ottoman Empire.

## EXCERPT FROM AN ACCOUNT

“My father was killed in the Turkish army. It was easier to kill them there than to go and look for them. They called my mother to tell her to pick up her husband’s personal effects in Istanbul. When she got there, they told her not to go back to her village because they were slaughtering Armenians. It was easier to survive in Istanbul, which was then known as Constantinople.”<sup>1</sup>



Armenian and Syrian refugees waiting at a Red Cross camp outside Jerusalem to be “disinfected,” 1917.

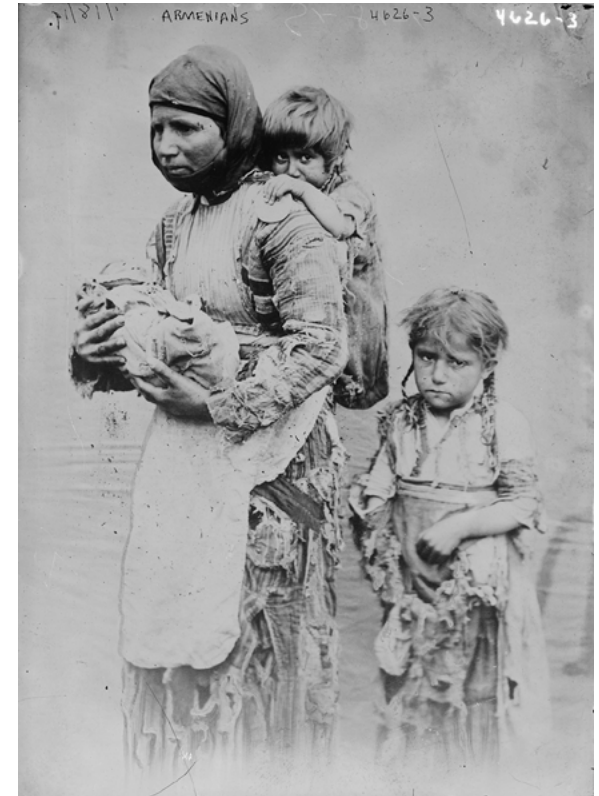
Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

KEGHETZIK ZOURIKIAN,  
ARMENIAN SURVIVOR LIVING IN CANADA (TRANSLATION)  
SOURCE: RADIO-CANADA

## ISSUE

Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the Armenians, one of the ethnic minorities in the Ottoman Empire, had been the victims of a succession of persecutions and mass murders. These trials started with the Hamidian massacres of 1894-1896, followed by the Adana and Cilician massacres in 1909, and grew worse over time. As World War I raged, more than a million and a half Armenian men, women and children living in what is now Turkey were massacred or deported between 1915 and 1923. The Ottoman government wrongly suspected that the Armenians were conspiring against them. However, the Armenians were considered pacifists and were only seeking more equal treatment under the Empire. In fact, there is a considerable amount of evidence indicating that the Turkish authorities were aspiring to expand the Empire eastward and create a state that was “ethnically, or at least religiously, homogenous;” [translation]<sup>2</sup> and that the Turkish government methodically planned these murders in order to get rid of what they called the “Armenian Problem.”

But how can we explain the extent of these crimes against the Armenians? Was the sociopolitical context part of the reason? How big a role did the political instability caused by World War I and the gradual fall of the Ottoman Empire play in these events? To answer these questions, we will focus on the events of 1915-1916. Some historians consider that the Armenian genocide under the Ottoman Empire took place over a much longer period, i.e. between 1915 and 1923 or even between the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and 1923, the year the Treaty of Lausanne was signed.



Armenian widow with her children. In 1899, after the murder of her husband in the aftermath of the Armenian massacres of 1894-1896, the family walked from their home in the Geghi region to Kharpert (Harput), eastern Anatolia (Turkey), seeking help from missionaries.

Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

### Theocracy

A form of government whose power is considered to come directly from God, represented by a religious caste or sovereign

### Infidel

Person who believes in a god other than the god perceived to be the “true” god



In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire, whose strength relied in part on the more or less harmonious cohabitation of various religious communities on its territory, was in full decline. This regime, governed by the Turks and spanning three continents at its peak (Africa, Asia and Europe), was weakened by a series of military defeats, internal problems, the increasing power of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, and the rise of nationalism among certain peoples under its governance, such as the Serbs and Greeks.<sup>3</sup> The Empire was governed by a **theocracy** in which the Sultan played a central role, acting as both ruler and spiritual leader. Abdülhamid II, who acceded to the throne in 1876, saw Islamization as a way to save the Empire. His reign resulted in increased social inequalities and tensions between the followers of Islam (the dominant religion of the Empire) and what they called “**infidels**” (members of minority religious communities), as well as violence. Armenians, a group of Christians who made up about a tenth of the total population of the Empire,<sup>4</sup> belonged to this second category. Although practising their religion and using their own language were more or less tolerated during certain periods, Armenians had to pay special taxes, they did not share the same legal rights, and they were not allowed to carry arms.

Armenian family from the city of Bitlis, 1895

Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Armenians worked in every sector of activity: they were lawyers, doctors, merchants, farmers and craftspeople. Tired of being the target of abuse and violence from Turks and Kurds, Armenians began mobilizing and demanding greater protection and more respect for their rights.<sup>5</sup> They called in vain for help from the European powers responsible for guaranteeing the safety of Christians, notably under the Treaty of Berlin of 1878. It is during this period that the first Armenian political movements, like the Social-Democratic Hentchaks party and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) saw their

beginnings. This situation irritated the Turkish authorities, who stepped up their repressive measures. In 1895-1896, in the aftermath of the Armenian peasants' revolt in the province of Bitlis, the Turks and Kurdish tribes, who had recently taken up arms, slaughtered 100 000 to 300 000 Armenians under the orders of Sultan Abdülhamid II. They also forced tens of thousands of Armenians to convert to Islam and destroyed some 2 500 Armenian villages.<sup>6</sup> These facts were at first denied by the Ottoman authorities, who later claimed that they were trying to quell a possible uprising. But as Attarian<sup>7</sup> pointed out, "the political groups that formed local resistance cells were [as yet] embryonic and very far from being able to organize resistance on any scale" [*translation*].

In the hope of advancing their cause, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, a socialist and revolutionary political movement, joined forces with the Young Turks, a revolutionary party that sought reforms and demanded, among other things, that the Constitution of 1876 be reinstated. Section 11 of that constitution recognized the free exercise of rights and freedoms for all citizens of the Empire.<sup>8</sup> In 1909, Abdülhamid was deposed, and the Young Turks, officially called the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), seized power. In the first year the CUP was in power, more than 20 000 Armenians were slaughtered in Cilicia.

Group of Armenian refugees, 1915  
Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration



Turkish nationalism grew even stronger in reaction to the fragmentation of the Empire that occurred as Balkan states successively achieved autonomy. This nationalism had its roots in the revolutionary ideas of Ziya Gökalp, a CUP sociologist and ideologist who spread racist ideas, calling Greeks, Jews and Armenians, who were ethnic and religious minorities, “foreign bodies in the Turkish body politic” [*translation*].<sup>9</sup> Beginning in 1913, the CUP imposed its new vision of the Empire. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 served as a pretext to realize its dream of extending the Empire eastward, achieve a culturally and religiously homogeneous Turkish nation and deal with the Armenian “question” once and for all. That same year, the CUP, under the leadership of Minister of War Ismail Enver, Minister of the Interior Mehmet Talaat and Minister of the Navy Ahmed Djemal—all three carrying the honorary Turkish title Pasha—secretly signed a military cooperation treaty with Germany,<sup>10</sup> which supplied them with cash and military equipment. Between April 1915 and July 1916, the CUP killed or deported more than one million Armenians. The same fate befell 500 000 Greeks and some 10 000 Assyrians, Chaldeans and Syrians between 1913 and 1918.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of World War I, the Ottoman Empire, an ally of Germany, bowed to the Allies, including France and Great Britain, and its Levant territories were confiscated. However, this did not signal the end of persecution of the Armenians. By late 1918, France was occupying one of the three administrative and military zones carved out of the territories seized. This zone included Cilicia and the so-called eastern territories. Reassured by the French presence, some Armenian survivors returned to the region, although their houses and other property were now owned by Muslims. Thanks to the joint arbitration commissions, some Armenians received reparations.<sup>12</sup> In 1919, this situation, in combination with other events, gave rise to a Turkish national resistance movement based on Gökalp’s

ideas about religion: Kemalism.<sup>13</sup> They were armed, sowed fear, drove the French out of the region and deported the Armenians. Those who remained often met a terrible end. For example, in Hadjin (Saimbeyli), almost all of the Armenian resisters, some 6 000 men, women and children, were massacred when the city fell.<sup>14</sup> In 1922, in Smyrna (Izmir), a port city with an Armenian population of approximately 30 000, the Kemalist army torched all of the Armenian and Greek neighbourhoods and slaughtered their inhabitants.<sup>15</sup> In 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed and the Republic of Turkey installed; since 1915, more than one and a half million Armenians had been murdered.<sup>16</sup>



Armenian women of Van, 1895

Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

## STAGES OF THE GENOCIDE

### TO CLASSIFY

“They scared me, forbidding me to go out alone, because I ran the risk of being killed. I was given some old, ragged Kurdish clothes so that my clothing would not betray me to the fanatics. . . . It was a sacrilege to wear such clothing, the unholy attire of an enemy Kurd. . . . Some bad people advised me and then persuaded me to convert to Islam, saying that there would soon be no Armenians left. Only the converted would be allowed to live.”<sup>17</sup>

Missak Khralia, victim of the genocide as a child, in Khralian and Karibian 2007, 79-80 [*translation*]

Armenian and possibly Turkish women with children, picking up wool to take home and weave into cloth and clothing for orphans, 1919.

Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration





Armenian refugees on a Black Sea beach with household possessions, Novorossiisk, Russia, 1920

Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

At the time of its founding in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire was characterized by great religious diversity. To preserve harmony across the territory, the Millet System was established in 1494. This system granted non-Muslim religious minorities (Islam was the religion with the most followers in the Empire) limited autonomy, in addition to a few rights and freedoms. Nevertheless, religious minorities (Christian Armenians included) needed to fulfill certain obligations, including the payment of special taxes. In addition, they occupied a secondary place in the social order. They were considered subjects who were to obey the laws of the Empire rather than citizens who could take

part in political life.<sup>18</sup> Over time, this system, which allowed for peaceful co-existence among religious communities, would instead serve to increase discrimination against non-Muslims, who had no access to legal recourse. For this reason, the Armenians, who suffered injustice at the hands of the Kurds and the Turkish government, began to demand better treatment around the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

**“The conditions created by the war provided the Turkish government with the long-awaited opportunity to settle their score with the Armenians. . . . [The Turks] criticized their ancestors for not exterminating the Christian peoples or converting them to Islam when they subjugated them. Now . . . they felt that the time had come to make up for the failings of their 15<sup>th</sup> century ancestors.”<sup>19</sup>**

Henry Morgenthau Sr., United States Ambassador to Constantinople (Istanbul) from 1913 to 1916, who worked with high-ranking CUP officials in his duties, in Dadrian 1995, 65 [translation]



**Fedayi**

Members of the resistance who carry out guerrilla actions on behalf of the people

**TO DEHUMANIZE**

**“There was no trust between the Turks and the Armenians because of the great divide that separated them. Within a short period, Turks who had previously bought Armenian bread were turning their backs on their Armenian neighbours. . . . The Turks fomented unrest, using pretexts of every sort to generate an atmosphere of hate. . . . They invented slanderous stories of all kinds, implying that the Armenian Fedayi, as well as Armenian rebels, maintained secret relations with the Russians, to whom they transmitted messages placed in the hooves or shoes of horses.”<sup>20</sup>**

Missak Khralia, victim of the genocide as a child, in Khralian and Karibian 2007, 112-113 [translation]

At the outbreak of World War I, the Armenians in Turkey and the Caucasus region found themselves in opposing camps: the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire were rivals. The Armenians in Turkey were forced to take up arms to defend the Ottoman Empire, while those in the Caucasus took up arms to fight for Russia. During the winter campaign of 1914-1915, the Turkish army attempted to break through to the Caucasus. This operation was a catastrophic failure, and the loss of human lives, enormous. The Turks made scapegoats of the Armenians, blaming them for this defeat and spreading false allegations that the Armenians had plotted against the Empire. Many historians view this defeat of the Turkish army as the event that triggered the genocide.



Armenian children walking the streets of Ekaterinodar, South Russia, for hours and asking people for a bit of bread; they smile at the camera, 1920.

Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

From that point on, Armenians were considered enemies of the state. This was not the first time that rumours of an Armenian conspiracy had been circulated. Some 20 years earlier, in 1895-1896, crowds in some provinces of Turkey were incited to attack or rob citizens of Armenian origin at public gatherings.<sup>21</sup> The Empire's laws and propaganda contributed to the dehumanization of the Armenians, who, according to the government, were second-class citizens.

Once the genocide began, many Armenian women were abducted, raped and sent to harems. There, they were usually tattooed on

the chest, arm or face to mark them as the property of a Kurd, an Arab or a Turk and to suppress their desire to escape.<sup>22</sup>

#### Ittihad

"Union and Progress" in Turkish

A Turkish naval captain with links to the Second Office of the Turkish Ministry of War reportedly said that the following propaganda was circulated throughout the Empire: "The Armenians have rallied to the enemy. They will launch an insurrection in Istanbul and kill the leaders of **Ittihad**, and they will succeed in opening the straits" [*translation*].<sup>23</sup>



**According to a report sent by German Ambassador Wangenheim on June 17, 1915, Talaat, the head of the CUP, was quoted as saying that Turkey wanted to "take advantage of the world war to eliminate its internal enemies (the Christians of Turkey), without being hindered by the diplomatic interventions of foreign states" [*translation*].<sup>24</sup>**

Armenian orphans in the refugee camp in Aleppo, Syria, 1926

Credit: L. Kashchik, Wikimedia Commons

## TO POLARIZE

**“No Armenians were allowed to stay in town; young and old, blind and lame, all had to leave without exception. The Vali of the Angora region was dismissed for refusing to execute those orders. A new Vali, a young man without experience, was sent to take his place, and he carried out the orders in the most severe and brutal manner.”<sup>25</sup>**

Christian teacher Xenidhis, who taught at a Turkish school, in Toynbee 2004, 168-169 [translation]



Armenian intellectuals imprisoned, then executed, in the night of April 24, 1915.

Credit: Wikimedia Commons

The first arrests were of **prominent** Armenians on April 24, 1915, who were charged with treason. No legal process was followed; the decision was strictly political. The authorities ordered them to turn in some of their compatriots and their hidden weapons. These members of the Armenian elite were executed over the following weeks, despite the absence of evidence against them.<sup>26</sup>

In May 1915, the Turkish government passed the *Techir Law* (temporary law of deportation), which legalized the relocation of populations suspected of treason against the Empire.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the Armenians were arbitrarily targeted by the law, which also provided justification for the establishment of concentration camps in the deserts of Syria. It was first implemented in the eastern provinces of Anatolia, the homeland of the Armenians. In some cases, the deportation order was posted in public places and, in others, a town or village crier announced the news. Armenians were usually given only a few days' notice, and rarely more than two weeks, to prepare their departure. This law was rendered obsolete on June 21, 1915, when the Minister of the Interior announced a general order of deportation for all Armenians without exception.

**Vali**

A governor of a province in the Ottoman Empire

**Prominent**

Important, widely and favourable known

**Bey**

Title given to senior officials and senior officers of the Ottoman army

Public servants were required to execute the order in order to protect their jobs, or even their lives.<sup>28</sup>

Since some Turks and Kurds were hiding Armenians, in early July 1915, the army sent coded telegrams to some Valis to instruct them to execute any Muslim guilty of this offence.<sup>29</sup>



Armenian orphans deported, 1920

Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records

**“I pretended I did not understand the orders that I had received from the Ministry of the Interior in Istanbul about the deportation of Armenians. As you know, the other provinces had already completed their deportation operations, but I had not started them. [Then], the Bey arrived. . . . He verbally transmitted to me the order concerning the assassination and the destruction of the Armenians. I told him, ‘No Atif Bey, I’m the governor, not a criminal. I cannot do that. I will step down as governor, then you will be able to come and execute the order.’”** <sup>30</sup>

Marzhar Bey, former governor of Ankara, in Akçan 2012, 195  
[translation]

## TO ORGANIZE

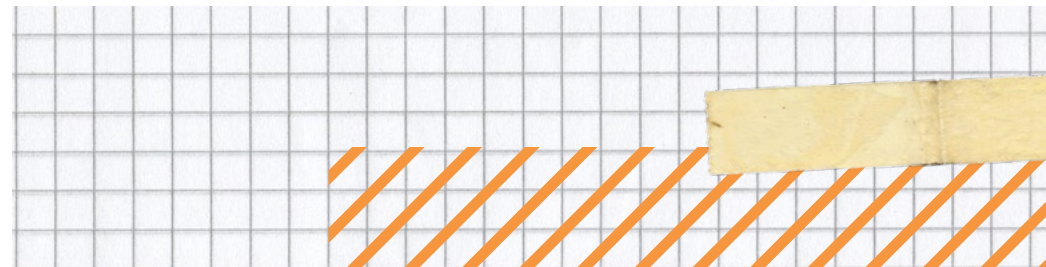
“Two days’ march from the town of Z. [Angora], near the village of X. [Yagli], we were stopped by a police officer. He had several men near him, with axes in their hands. He asked us if there were any Armenians among us. All Armenians, he said, had to turn back; the Greeks could continue on their way. . . . A few minutes later, 56 armed horsemen arrived. . . . They gave the same order, indicating that all Armenians had to turn back. . . . Mr. H. [K. Demirdjian] and Mr. J. [H. Arosian] were frozen in fear and covered in cold sweat.”<sup>31</sup>

Professor Xenidhis, who taught at a college in Turkey prior to the massacres and his arrival in the United States in the fall of 1915, in Toynbee 2004, 165-166 [*translation*]



Armenian refugees in Palestine, 1918

Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration



In 1913, the Committee of Union and Progress set up a police/paramilitary force called the Special Organization. For the most part, the individuals who made up this force were habitual criminals with no morals,<sup>32</sup> who executed secret orders coming from Constantinople (Istanbul). They reportedly received coded telegrams ordering the extermination of the Armenians.<sup>33</sup>

During this period, the CUP adopted the same strategy its predecessor, Abdülhamid II, had used in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. They armed the Kurdish tribes in the hope of exploiting the tensions between them and the Armenians. As part of their strategy, they also disarmed the Armenian soldiers of the Ottoman army on February 25, 1915, and later assigned them to roadwork, having almost all of them killed in small groups.<sup>34</sup>

A series of laws enacted in 1915 dispossessed the Armenians of everything they had. Commissions for “abandoned” property were responsible for confiscating property and liquidating it.



Survivors of the Armenian massacres of 1909 inside the courtyard of the German-Levant cotton company in Adana, Ottoman Empire, 1920

Credit: Wikimedia Commons

**TO PERSECUTE AND TO MURDER**

**“Group by group, they took us out to a valley and killed us. By a miracle I was not killed. I survived underneath the corpses. I must have been four or five years old. I was crying. A lady heard me and found me. There isn’t a night that a go to bed and don’t think about the events of those days. I am all alone in this world, completely alone. I relive everything.”<sup>35</sup>**

Testimony of a survivor, in  
Kaprielian-Churchill, 2005, 122  
[translation]

Following the execution of many prominent Armenians, massacres of the general population began. Some towns were destroyed right away, with no distinction between men, women and children.<sup>36</sup> According to several testimonies, the Turks usually adopted the same strategy. First, the police arrived in an Armenian town and summoned all men of arms-bearing age. These men, aged between 15 and 70 years, were then taken to the outskirts of town where they were executed by Special Organization squads. Then, some time later, the rest of the population—women, the elderly, children and men who were sick, infirm or had been spared by fate—were informed that they would soon be deported in order to be protected from Russian troops whose arrival was imminent.<sup>37</sup> They were given only a few days to prepare for their departure. The police, who claimed that this exile was temporary, authorized them to take only the strict minimum with them. Thus, many Armenians had no choice but to sell or abandon their houses and personal effects, when they were not simply confiscated.



Aftermath of the 1909  
Armenian massacres  
in the Christian  
neighbourhood of Adana,  
Ottoman Empire (Turkey)

Credit: U.S. National  
Archives and Records  
Administration





The day of the deportation, the Armenians were separated into small groups and escorted by the police to an unknown destination. Some were sent by train, but most had to walk. During their march, which lasted weeks, they came under attack by both Kurds and Turks. Many were robbed, raped, abducted or killed. Some Armenians were pushed off cliffs; others were drowned in rivers.<sup>38</sup> As the march continued, the last Armenian men were savagely shot by Special Organization units, who positioned themselves in strategic places to ambush the refugees. The deportees received no provisions, and many of them died of hunger, thirst or exhaustion. For the majority of survivors, the death march ended at Deir ez-Zor, a town in the searing hot Syrian desert. There and elsewhere, the Armenians ended up in concentration camps, where they were the victims of waves of murders.

In the events of 1915-1916, almost all the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were annihilated. It is estimated that about 800 000 Armenians were massacred, and between 300 000 and 500 000 perished during the deportation march to the deserts of Syria and Mesopotamia.<sup>39</sup> Added to these figures are a number of Armenians who survived (children who were abducted then “adopted,” and women who were forcibly married) but suffered severe trauma, in addition to being forced to convert to the Muslim religion and embrace Turkish culture.<sup>40</sup>

Page of illustrated magazine *Le Petit Journal*, showing the Armenian genocide, 1915

Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

“For days on end, we continued our march along the Euphrates, whose waters gradually claimed our corpses. Other corpses, left rotting, offered up a horrible spectacle. . . . But what seemed to me even more horrible was meeting pale, dishevelled, wandering women with eyes so haggard and sunken they seemed like ghosts.”<sup>41</sup>

Nvart Mahokian, a deportee from Trebizond, in Chabot, Doucet, Kasparian and Thibault 2017, 4  
[translation]

“My father followed me with his gaze. He was bidding me farewell as he held a handkerchief to his eyes. I never saw him alive again after that. . . . Afterwards, I witnessed such atrocities that their memory makes my hair stand on end, even after so many years. I saw with my own eyes how the Turkish and Kurdish cowherds went into the caravans to choose young girls, mistreating them like animals and then getting rid of them. . . . In the fields, and while on the road, we saw people dressed like Turks. They were sad, beaten down, despairing, with a torrent of unwept tears in their eyes. Who were they? Their faces were different from Turkish faces.”<sup>42</sup>

Missak Khralia, victim of the genocide as a child, in Khralian and Karibian (2007), 81-82  
[translation]



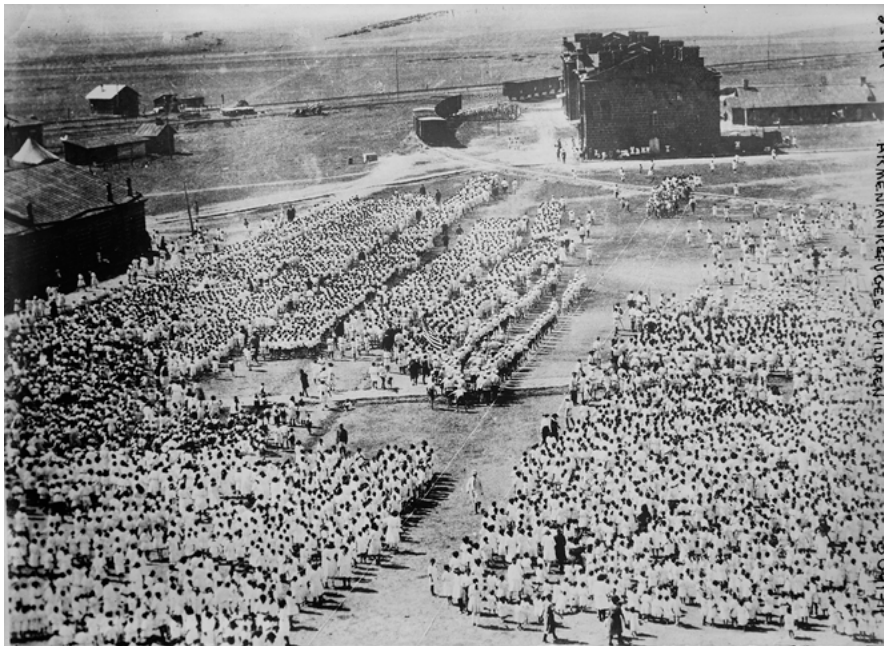
Cover page of *Le Petit Journal*, showing the massacre at Adana in April 1909

Credit: Wikimedia Commons

**TO DENY**

**“Why don’t they admit the facts? . . .  
There’s something twisted about that.”<sup>43</sup>**

Statement of a victim in the documentary titled  
*My Son Shall be Armenian*, 2004



Armenian orphans on the playground of the “Orphan City” in Alexandropol (now Gyumri), Armenia, 1919

Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

During the genocide, communities of missionaries risked their lives to inform the international community of the crimes being committed against the Armenians. France, Great Britain and Russia condemned Turkey’s actions in the wake of the events of 1915-1916. Turkey claimed that it had acted in self-defence and denied that it had orchestrated the mass murder of Armenians. Using photographs of allegedly seized weapons and translated State documents, Turkey claimed, among other things, that the Armenians had been preparing a revolt and that Turks had also been massacred by Armenians. However, the armed uprisings organized by the Armenians were isolated cases and occurred after the genocide.<sup>44</sup>

In 1919, the short-lived government that replaced the Young Turks after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I sentenced former government officials to death **in absentia** for organizing the massacre of Armenians.<sup>45</sup> The sentences were never carried out, since the individuals charged had already sought asylum abroad. To ensure that the main perpetrators of the Armenian genocide would face justice, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation ordered their deaths.<sup>46</sup> In all, six individuals responsible for the Armenian genocide, including Mehmet Talaat, the principal organizer, were assassinated as part of Operation Nemesis, one of whose objectives was to ensure that the Armenian genocide would not be forgotten.<sup>47</sup> The trial of Talaat's murderer, Soghomon Tehlirian, would later influence Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term "genocide" and whose family was murdered in the Holocaust.

Over time, the Turkish government undertook many actions in an effort to ensure that no mention of the Armenian genocide would appear in United Nations documents. It reacted strongly to the news that the genocide would be mentioned in the 1985 Whitaker report of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.

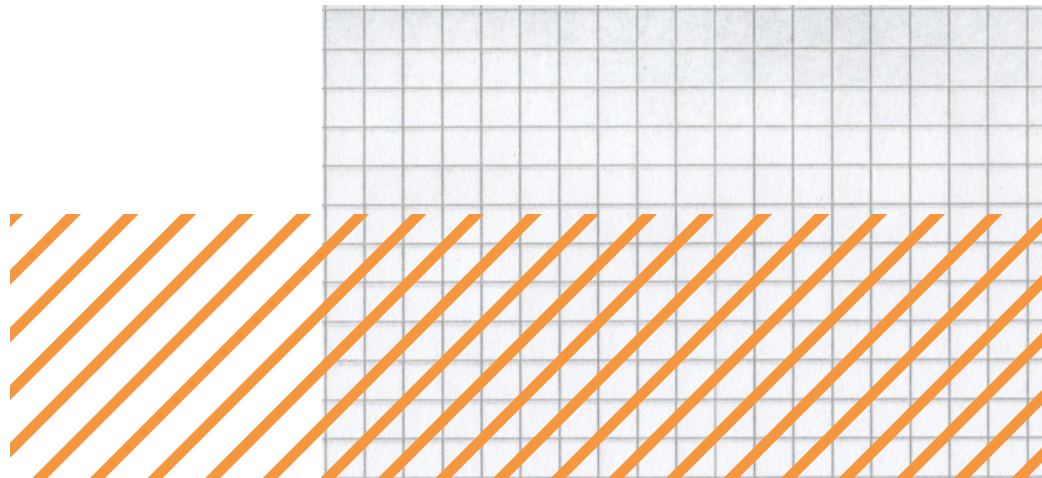
#### In absentia

In the absence of the person concerned



Armenian orphans deported, on a boat

Credit: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration



While 20 countries, including Canada, and the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights now recognize the Armenian genocide, Turkey proposes a different analysis of the facts. It maintains that a civil war and a famine also led to the death of a large number of Turks. Yet, by February 1915, the Ottoman Empire had disarmed the Armenian conscripts. Turkey actively campaigns against official recognition of the Armenian genocide. It views this as an act of Islamophobia and racism against Turks.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, it does not tolerate its citizens publicly referring to these events as a genocide. Those who do so are liable to be punished by imprisonment under section 301 (amended in 2005, then in 2008) of Turkey's Penal Code.<sup>49</sup> Countries that officially recognize the Armenian genocide also face Turkey's wrath.

**“We condemn and reject attempts by Mr. Macron, who is facing political problems in his own country, to turn historical events into political material in order to save the day.”<sup>50</sup>**

Statement made by Ibrahim Kalin, spokesperson for the Turkish presidency, after France announced that April 24 would become the national day of commemoration of the Armenian genocide, reported by Ouest France and Agence France-Presse, 2019 [translation]

**“If there is a will to put an end to the Armenian genocide issue, it will be settled when we can cry for our grandparents just as the Turks mourn theirs.”<sup>51</sup>**

Hrant Dink, a Turkish journalist of Armenian origin murdered in 2007 by a nationalist, in Matossian, 2008 [translation]



## JUSTICE

It is interesting to note that the term “genocide,” invented by Raphael Lemkin in 1943 and adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 1948, was largely based on the situation in Armenia.

Turkey’s denial of genocide prevents Armenians from claiming compensatory reparations, despite the fact that they were dispossessed of their bank accounts and movable and immovable property, as well as their historical heritage.

Since justice is based on the recognition of genocide, attempts at reparation have repeatedly failed. Although in 1919-1920, after the collapse of Unionist power, those responsible for the assassinations were sentenced, their punishments could not be carried out because they had fled from the country. At the international level, the Treaty of Sèvres, which was concluded in August 1920, could have provided a legal framework to prosecute those responsible had it been ratified, but it was blocked by Turkey. The Treaty provided for the creation of an international tribunal and the restitution of persons and property. In 1921, the new Turkish state supported the actions of the genocidal leaders by providing their families with pensions for services rendered to the nation, from funds taken from the property misappropriated from the Armenians. In its search for justice, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, which dreamed of a “free, independent and unified Armenia” [*translation*],<sup>52</sup> ordered the assassination of the individuals responsible for the Armenian genocide. The murderer of Mehmet Talaat, tried in Berlin in 1921, was acquitted based on a plea of insanity. This trial was the first step toward international justice and the punishment of State crimes. In 1923, the new Republic of Turkey signed the Treaty of Lausanne, which made no mention of the genocide, but included a declaration of general amnesty.



The eternal flame at the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial in Yerevan, Armenia, on Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, 2014

Credit: S. Ourishian, Wikimedia Commons

While the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* was adopted by the UN in 1948, the organization did not officially include the Armenian genocide in its measures, despite the pressure exerted by Armenian militants and the fact that the term “genocide” was invented by Raphael Lemkin largely based on the experiences of the Armenians. However, in 1985, the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities adopted a resolution endorsing the Whitaker report, a section of which mentions the Armenian genocide. Two years later, in 1987, the European Parliament described the massacre as a genocide.

To date, the legislatures of some 20 countries have passed laws, resolutions or motions explicitly recognizing the Armenian genocide, including Germany, Canada, France, Russia and the United States. The resolutions voted by the United States Congress, however, were rejected by the government because of pressure from Turkey. France even took legal measures to condemn the denial of this genocide, specifically the Boyer act (January 23, 2012). However, this law was quickly overturned because of its effect on freedom of expression.<sup>53</sup> All countries that have explicitly recognized the Armenian genocide have been threatened with sanctions by Turkey, which persists in denying that a genocide occurred.



Gathering of Armenians in front of the Turkish Consulate General in Jerusalem, Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, 2016

Credit: N. Z. Cohen, Wikimedia Commons

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