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Unknown Fronts

The “Eastern Turn” in First World War History



Edited by

Elka Agoston-Nikolova

Marijke van Diggelen

Guido van Hengel

Hans van Koningsbrugge

Nicolaas A. Kraft van Ermel



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Cover image: Austrian troops advancing in the Carpatians [between ca. 1914-1915]. Source: Library of Congress, Washington DC, George Grantham Bain Collection, LC-DIG-ggbain-18943. See also: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/ggbain.18943>, accessed 1-11-2016.

5 Perspectives from a Neutral State: Dutch Sources on the Question of the Armenian Genocide

Nicolaas A. Kraft van Ermel

Introduction

The first centenary of the First World War also entailed the first centenary of one of the major humanitarian crises of the twentieth century: the tragedy that the Armenians call the *Medz Yeghern* (the Great Crime) and what is generally called the Armenian genocide or the Armenian question. This horrific cycle of violent events has definitely been one of the unknown fronts of the First World War, especially when the latter is defined in a broad way. The centenary commemorations of the Armenian genocide have provoked intense debates, not only in Armenia and Turkey, but worldwide. Examples of this are the recognition of the 1915 events as a genocide by Pope Francis¹, but also the strong worded recognition of the Armenian genocide by German Federal President Joachim Gauck. He not only called the Armenian genocide “an example of the history of mass extermination, ethnic cleansing, expulsions and even genocide which marked the 20th century in such a horrible way”, but also spoke about German complicity (*Mitschuld*).² It is of course needless to say that these statements provoked an angry response from the Turkish government, which to this day refuses to recognize the Armenian massacres as an act of genocide. The question of the Armenian genocide thus remains a highly politicized matter.³

This politicization also has consequences for historiography on the question of the Armenian genocide. One of these consequences is that there is discord about which kind of sources are trustworthy in this matter. This article will explore whether sources from a non-combatant country during the First World War might provide more clarity to this debate. I will first expound the challenge the politicized historiography poses to the interpretation of sources and argue why sources from a neutral country might clarify this matter. I will then provide the reader with some general historical context, both on the matter of the Armenian genocide as well as the position of the Netherlands during the First World War. I will conclude by analysing two Dutch collections of sources related to the Armenian genocide and

¹ Jim Yardley and Sebnem Arsu, “Pope Calls Killings of Armenians ‘Genocide,’ Provoking Turkish Anger,” *The New York Times*, last modified December 4, 2015, accessed August 4, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/13/world/europe/pope-calls-killings-of-armenians-genocide-provoking-turkish-anger.html?_r=0.

² The original German reads: “Das Schicksal der Armenier steht beispielhaft für die Geschichte der Massenvernichtungen, der ethnischen Säuberungen, der Vertreibungen, ja der Völkermorde, von der das 20. Jahrhundert auf so schreckliche Weise gezeichnet ist.” Joachim Gauck, “Worte des Gedenkens beim ökumenischen Gottesdienst,” *Bundespräsidentenamt*, last modified April 23, 2015, accessed August 4, 2015, <http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Joachim-Gauck/Reden/2015/04/150423-Gedenken-Armenier.html>.

³ “Türkei zeigt ihren Zorn über Gauck-Rede,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, last modified April 24, 2015, accessed August 4, 2015, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/tuerkei-zeigt-ihren-zorn-ueber-gauck-rede-13558138.html>. Yardley and Arsu, “Pope Calls Killings of Armenians ‘Genocide,’ Provoking Turkish Anger.”

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will show that these can be used – with certain limitations – to shed light on the ‘question of the Armenian genocide’.

A politicized historiography

The political sensibilities also influence historiography and the viewpoints of historians on historical sources. In his widely acclaimed history of Modern Turkey, Dutch historian Eric Jan Zürcher states that the controversy in current historiography falls into three categories: firstly there is debate on the question whether deportations of Armenian civilians were a military necessity on the Caucasian front of the First World War; secondly there is a question on the number of Armenian deaths and lastly there is the question if the deportations and massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire amounted to a genocide. To prove or disprove the genocidal nature of the events one should prove that there was in fact an intent to exterminate the Armenian population.⁴

As noted above the politicization continues with the interpretation of historical sources. Scholars of the Armenian genocide tend to base their histories upon three kinds of sources: the first are sources coming from Entente powers like Great-Britain or France, or from the United States (which started the war as a neutral country, but ended as an associated power to the Entente powers); the second kind are Ottoman and the last kind of sources are sources coming from archives in Germany or Austria (who were the Ottoman Empire’s allies). Both those who consider the events to have been a genocide and those who argue that there has not been an ‘Armenian genocide’ have their distinctive views on the matter of sources: while the latter tend to view Ottoman sources as the only reliable sources and foreign sources, especially those hailing from Entente powers, as more akin to propaganda than historical record and thus biased against the Ottoman Empire. The former argue the other way around; in their eyes the Ottoman sources are inherently unreliable and foreign sources, especially those coming from German archives, are far more reliable sources.⁵ There are however historians who are convinced that there has been a genocide, who do rely on the scarcely available Ottoman sources relating to the 1915 events, Vahakn N. Dadrian for instance.⁶

In his *The young Turks crime against humanity* Turkish activist-turned-historian Taner Akçam argues that both kind of sources should be considered in tandem. First, he argues that the use of Ottoman documents has some serious problems. Some documents, like the ones related to the 1919-1921 post-war court-martial trials of the Committee of Union and Progress leadership for war crimes have since gone missing. Secondly there is ample evidence that other documents relating to the

⁴ Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 3rd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

⁵ Ibid., 116. Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks’ Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire*, Human rights and crimes against humanity (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), 25-26.

⁶ Dadrian is probably best known for Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Providence, R.I.: Berghahn Books, 1995). His oeuvre is however far more extensive.

Armenian genocide have been deliberately destroyed in an attempt to cover up the events. It seems to be that the only conclusion can be that any document coming from official Ottoman or Turkish archives should be viewed with a wary eye. Nevertheless Akçam argues that it is necessary to re-evaluate the Ottoman archives and reconsider them. His main argument is that even after deliberate cleansing of these sources there must still remain information that fundamentally contradicts the official position of the Turkish government.⁷ He continues his argument with the statement that Ottoman/Turkish and foreign sources in fact tell the same story: one of a deliberate policy of ethnoreligious homogenization in Anatolia with the aim of destroying the Armenian population.⁸ His main argument is thus that Ottoman and foreign records are not mutually exclusive and should be considered as complementary and not as contradictory sources.⁹

The way out: a neutral state's perspective

Swedish-Armenian historian Vahagn Avedian argues that the political problems related to sources in the study of the Armenian genocide can be overcome by looking to the observations of neutral states during the First World War. He argues that observations from neutral states should be free of any allegations of bias from all sides.¹⁰ (This argument might seem logical, but as I will argue below, we cannot exclude the possibility of bias in neutral sources in its entirety). He then tries to use Swedish sources to show that there were massacres in the Ottoman Empire and that there was a genocidal intent. His main sources are Swedish newspapers, reports submitted to the Church of Sweden, the Swedish Defense Ministry and the Swedish foreign ministry. The Swedish government was well informed about the massacres of Armenians and its ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in his reports stressed that this was not an act of mutual killing or (possibly defensible) measures against an Armenian insurrection. The Swedish Ambassador stressed that this was a well-planned systematic annihilation of the Armenian nation, initiated by the government.¹¹

⁷ Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity*, 25-26.

⁸ The mentioned study by Akçam is acclaimed by some, but also heavily criticized by others. The criticism is however mostly related to his own dealing with his sources and the way he structures his interpretations. A reasonable balanced review of his work is offered by Ugur Ümit Üngör. Üngör praises Akçam's thesis that the Ottoman government decreed that the Ottoman Armenians should not exceed the local population by five to ten percent of the population and that wherever these numbers were transgressed the Ottoman regime used massacre as a way to reduce the number of Armenians. On the other hand Üngör also stresses that Akçam does not really engage with existing historiography and their use of Ottoman sources, that his work suffers from conceptual confusion about the key concepts of crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing, that his work is more descriptive than analytical and concludes with the statement that his work is moralistic and polemical instead of detached and analytical. These critical remarks are serious, but since they only pertain to Akçam's work and interpretations and not to his statement that Ottoman and foreign sources should be considered in tandem, they are of little concern for this study. U. U. Üngör, "Taner Akçam. The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire," *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 5 (December 1, 2012): 1703-1704.

⁹ Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity*, xx-xxiii.

¹⁰ Vahagn Avedian, "The Armenian Genocide of 1915 from a Neutral Small State's Perspective: Sweden," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 5, no. 3 (2010): 323.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 336.

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In a general overview of sources in Dutch archives about the Ottoman Empire in the First World War Eric-Jan Zürcher also argues that using sources from neutral countries can be useful for clearing up questions about Ottoman and Turkish history in the First World War. The main argument for this is that these kinds of documents are not as biased as documents from Entente powers and can also not be accused of a pro-Turkish bias as in the case of German documents.¹² Zürcher adds to this that the Netherlands was a country of little importance during the First World War and that the same can be said for the Dutch-Ottoman relations. We should thus not expect too much from Dutch sources. However, the fact that the Dutch legation in Constantinople¹³ kept on working for the entire duration of the First World War, could potentially make it an interesting source. Zürcher furthermore states that these sources could also show how Dutch diplomats fulfilled their role as an informer to the Dutch government.¹⁴

Even though sources from neutral countries are less likely to be biased, we cannot conclude that these sources are automatically unbiased. First in neutral countries like the Netherlands there were internal debates on the question which side in the First World War should be supported (It is well known that Dutch minister of war Hendricus Colijn (1912-1913) harboured strong pro-English sentiments, while Prime minister Pieter Cort van der Linden (1913-1918) held pro-German viewpoints). Secondly, foreign powers might be in a position to influence sources in neutral countries in such a way that sources from a neutral country might become tainted. Finally, one cannot rule out internal bias from a neutral country itself.

It is however worthwhile to investigate what Dutch sources say about the question of the Armenian genocide and what conclusions can be drawn based on these sources.

Historical context of the Armenian genocide

The First World War was just one of several events leading up to the Armenian genocide. It can however, not be separated from the broader historical context of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the so-called Eastern Question. The Ottoman Empire of the 19th and early 20th century can be considered an

¹² Erik Jan Zürcher, “Welingelichte kringen? De berichtgeving van de Nederlandse ambassade in Istanbul tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog,” *Sharqiyât* 1, no. 1 (1988): 64.

¹³ The nomenclature of topographic names throughout history is a tricky matter for historians. The present day city of Istanbul has been known by many names: in a chronological order – omitting minor names in antiquity – the city has been known as Byzantium, Constantinople (from the Greek *Konstantinopoli*/Κωνσταντινούπολη) and Istanbul/İstanbul (probably a derivative of the Greek phrase *stin Poli*/στην πόλη, e.g. ‘in the City’) as its formal names. Even today many Greeks, simply refer it by ‘the City’ [*i poli*/η πόλη] colloquially. There exists however a large synchronous usage of these names with both variants of Constantinople (such as the Turkish *Konstantinîyye*) and Istanbul being used depending on the viewpoint of the author. It was not until the advent of the modern Turkish republic that the city officially became Istanbul and that, in general, the foreigners also started to refer to the city as such. In this essay I have generally followed the usage of the name in sources. Given the fact that most of my sources are Dutch, the authors preferred the ‘Christian’ name of *Constantinople* (‘Constantinopel’ in Dutch) over the ‘Islamic/Turkish’ Istanbul. Therefore, in this essay, the name Constantinople is used more often than Istanbul. Many of the official Dutch documents also use the name ‘Pera’ (the present day district of Beyoğlu) as the topographic name where the document was made. The Dutch legation was, and the present day Dutch consulate still is, located in that district of the city, in the *Palais de Hollande*.

¹⁴ Zürcher, “Welingelichte kringen?”, 65.

anachronism. The empire's institutional framework and social structure were unable to cope with the challenges of modernity and the advent of a new kind of ideology coming from Europe: nationalism. The question how to deal with this concerned both the Ottoman Empire and the European system of Great Powers. The Great Powers sought to protect their (often contradictory) interests while the Ottoman Empire withered and within it answers were sought on how to prevent the empire's further decline. From 1839 to 1876 during the era of *Tanzimât* (reorganization) reforms were introduced to emancipate non-Muslim subjects of the empire and integrate non-Turks within Ottoman society with the goal to counteract rising nationalism within the empire. This ended with the promulgation of a constitution in 1887. The first constitutional era lasted a little more than a year, when Sultan Adbülhamid II restored autocratic rule. In 1908, following a military insurrection in the European province of Macedonia, the Young Turk movement (consisting mainly out of army officers) took power not so much as a true revolutionary movement, but as a conservative movement to preserve the Ottoman state. To attain that ultimate aim the Young Turks, organized in the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), were willing to use the constitution of 1876 as foundation. Although the Young Turks sought to restore constitutionality, the second constitutional period gradually turned in a one-party state. Reasons for this are that political parties during the period were generally weak, and no party could become an independent challenger to the CUP. There was thus no real basis for parliamentary rule.¹⁵ One could add to this that the CUP held power as a secretive society with no formal power: it ruled through informal pressure on the government. This was also a destabilizing factor within the Ottoman Empire.¹⁶

In 1909 the Ottoman Empire was shaken by a counter-coup against the Young Turks. Although it eventually failed and Sultan Abdülhamid II was replaced by his brother Mehmed V, the coup shows that the modernizing constitutional regime was not broadly supported within the Ottoman Empire. The CUP did not forget this lesson and began to rely more on the army as the main source of its power. The CUP did not become a mass party: it lacked a charismatic leader and its conservative ideology had little potential for large scale participation. Also, its party program gradually became more based on a very narrow Turkist definition of Ottomanism, which left little room for non-Turkish population segments. Initially, the CUP did try to include non-Turkish elements within its structures, but the national tensions within the empire did not fade.¹⁷

Non-Turkish minorities within the empire thus had to cope with increasing difficulties: the privileges for non-Turkish Muslim groups were cancelled and the large emphasis put upon centralization and the creation of an Ottoman identity

¹⁵ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, "The Second Constitutional Period, 1908-1918," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, ed. Resat Kasaba (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 66-71, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://universitypublishingonline.org/ref/id/histories/CBO9781139054218A008>.

¹⁶ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 94.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 99, 101; Hanioglu, "The Second Constitutional Period, 1908-1918," 73, 78.

(increasingly based on Turkism) only put more stress upon the national fabric of the empire.¹⁸

The Armenian Question

The so-called Armenian question arose against the abovementioned background. Armenian nationalism was becoming a stronger force, while the Ottoman state became more Turkish in its outlook. To make matters worse, the European powers also involved themselves in this matter. While Armenian nationalist leaders and political parties within the empire sought to gain the attention of external powers to advance their situation, the Great Powers themselves had no particular sympathy for the Armenians. The Great Powers rallied around the Armenian question either to gain more influence in the Ottoman Empire (Russia) or to uphold the Ottoman Empire in eastern Anatolia and therewith protect their own interests (Britain, France, Germany). After the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 the Ottomans signed the peace treaty of San Stefano, which included a strict provision for reforms in the Armenian inhabited areas of Eastern Anatolia. With the restorative treaty of Berlin of 1887 a similar position was upheld by the Great Powers. The weak point in this last provision was that these were autonomous reforms: there was no provision to enforce their implementation. Meanwhile tensions surrounding the Armenian inhabitants of eastern Anatolia were increasing: the Ottomans saw the Armenian solicitation of foreign intervention as a reason to distrust them (the process leading to Greek and Bulgarian independence had also started with a solicitation of foreign intervention). On top of that (Muslim) Kurdish irregulars (*Hamidiye* regiments) slowly gained the upper hand in a process of systematic violence against the Armenian population. The period from 1894 onwards can be characterized as a period of several occurrences of anti-Armenian violence in the Ottoman Empires (Sasun Massacre of 1894, but also anti-Armenian violence following the 1909 counter-coup) and violent acts committed by Armenians to gain international attention for their plights (like the occupation of the Ottoman bank by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, *Dasnaksutyun*, in 1896).¹⁹

An important event in the chain leading up to the Armenian genocide was the First Balkan War of 1912-1913, which resulted in the catastrophic loss of almost all European provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The provinces lost to the Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbians were the empires most developed provinces, not by chance the provinces from which the Young Turk movement itself emerged. The First Balkan War led to an internal debate on how to deal with split loyalties within the empire, in which Turkism became an increasingly popular answer. Furthermore, the geostrategic balance of power had changed: where the most important parts of the empire had been the European provinces, now the provinces in Anatolia and

¹⁸ Hanioglu, "The Second Constitutional Period, 1908-1918," 86.

¹⁹ Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 45, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199273560.001.0001/acprof-9780199273560>; Davide Rodogno, *Human Rights and Crimes against Humanity: Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press, 2011), 187, 189-90 & 199-202.

Arab lands became more important. In addition, ethnic Turks became the empire's majority population for the first time. The Young Turk leadership drew three important conclusions from the First Balkan War: first of all the empire needed the protection of one of the Great Powers (thus explaining the Turco-German alliance of 1913), secondly the Ottoman leaders lost all confidence in the promises and assurances of the Great Powers and finally, the regime started to eliminate all major sources of confrontation with the Great Powers to prevent war and foreign intervention.²⁰ (Amongst other things this was done by initiating a Armenian reform scheme in 1914, to which we will turn later on).

The Armenian genocide did not take place in isolation, it is part of a larger process of disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and Great Power involvement. While the First World War might have been one of the key catalysts leading to the genocide, earlier time periods are also a crucial part of its history. Thus when taking Dutch sources into consideration one should not only look for documents related to the events of 1915, but at least also consider documents related to the Armenian reform project initiated after the Balkan Wars.

On Dutch neutrality

Before we can delve into Dutch archives surrounding the Armenian genocide and its direct context, we must first gain some insight in general Dutch policy surrounding the First World War. Neutrality had been a key element of Dutch foreign policy since the 19th century. This stemmed from the fact that the country bordered two spheres of influence in Europe: the British and the German. Both these countries were of great importance to the Netherlands. Germany was important from an economic perspective (as one of the main trading partners) and also held a credible land-based army which could threaten Dutch interests. The maritime superiority of the British could be a threat to the communications between the Netherlands and its colonial possessions in the East Indies.²¹

Dutch neutrality was by no means guaranteed and proved itself difficult to maintain. When war broke out in the summer of 1914 tensions in the Netherlands also heightened: a general mobilization was proclaimed to protect Dutch neutrality. The main fear was that Germany would not respect Dutch neutrality, since Germany also did not respect Belgian neutrality. Public reaction thus was one of fear: foodstuffs were stockpiled, funds in bank accounts were withdrawn, jewellery was buried in the garden, people stopped paying their bills, the stock exchange was on the verge of collapse and no one could guarantee whether wages would be paid at the end of the week.²²

²⁰ Hanioglu, "The Second Constitutional Period, 1908-1918," 90.

²¹ Duco Hellema, *Buitenlandse politiek van Nederland. De Nederlandse rol in de wereldpolitiek*, 3rd ed. (Utrecht: Uitgeverij het Spectrum, 2006), 70.

²² Remieg Aerts et al., *Land van kleine gebaren. Een politieke geschiedenis van Nederland 1780-2012*, 8th ed. (Amsterdam: Boom, 2013), 206.

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In the political sense the act of maintaining strict neutrality proved to be a great balancing act between the belligerents in the First World War. In the end the Dutch kept their neutrality not so much because of their own policies, but because Dutch neutrality was beneficial for both Germany and Great-Britain. For Germany a neutral Dutch neighbour was an important trading partner. Through trading with the Dutch the German war economy could be supplied, by partly circumventing the British blockade of shipping to Germany. The Dutch neutrality also protected one of Germany's borders against invasion by the Entente powers. For the British, the neutral Netherlands meant that the Germans had no military control over strategic Dutch harbours. However, since the British naval blockade also included neutral shipping and placed limits on products to be traded with Germany by the Netherlands, trade with Germany also proved to be a balancing act: Dutch merchants eventually chose to cooperate with the British demands to a certain extent, however not to such an extent that this would infuriate Germany. Although Dutch trading and government policy became more constricted due to these circumstances: there also existed a lively unofficial (smuggling) trade with Germany parallel to the official trade.²³

Logically, the policy of not inciting the belligerents of the First World War also extended to the Ottoman Empire. This meant that in order not to entice Germany too much the Dutch were very wary to confront the Ottoman Empire. The Dutch also held particular concerns regarding the Ottoman Empire: they were concerned that the declaration of Jihad by the Ottoman Empire might result in a pan-Islamic uprising which could endanger Dutch rule over its colonial possession in the East Indies (in which a significant part of the population was Muslim),²⁴ secondly, the Dutch were concerned about fighting near the Suez canal and about the Ottomans taking possession of said canal. These actions could threaten communications between the Dutch colonies and the mainland. A final matter of concern was the unilateral declaration by the Ottoman Empire to revoke the centuries old capitulations that granted (Western) Europeans all sorts of privileges.²⁵

Dutch involvement in the Armenian question

The first documents in Dutch archives that we will discuss are related to the aforementioned 1914 Armenian reform package. The Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913 brought the Eastern and Armenian questions back to life. There were now rumours about the partition of the Ottoman Empire. The question of reforms in the Armenian provinces of Eastern Anatolia was back on the table. Although in 1895 Sultan Abdulhamid II had promulgated a reform edict for these provinces the

²³ Hellema, *Buitenlandse politiek van Nederland*, 70-71; Aerts et al., *Land van kleine gebaren*, 206-208.

An extensive and recent study on the Dutch politics of neutrality is Paul Moeyes, *Buiten Schot: Nederland Tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog, 1914-1918*, 3rd edition. (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 2014).

²⁴ It is therefore that in the Dutch national archives there is a separate file titled 'on the Islamic character of the war of Turkey against the Triple Entente': Dutch National Archives (NL-HaNA), The Hague, 2.05.18 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken: Kabinet en Protocol, inventory number: 664 Islamitisch karakter van de oorlog van Turkije tegen de Triple-Entente.

²⁵ Zürcher, "Welingelichte kringen?", 69.

Great Powers had no intention of keeping the empire to its promises. Russia was the most willing to seek change, but did not want to entice the Armenians living in the Russian empire. France, Germany, Great-Britain and Austria did not want to risk a partition of the Ottoman Empire (possibly resulting in a general European war).²⁶ Besides the Great Powers' unwillingness to keep the Ottomans to their promises, the fact that the Ottoman government was not up to the task to initiate reforms added to the non-advancement of the Armenian question.²⁷

After the Ottoman losses in the First Balkan War Russia gave a new impetus to the Armenian question. Russia sold its proposals (raising the question of administrative reforms in Eastern Anatolia) as a humanitarian action, but they were, in fact, an attempt to gain control over the Turkish administration in eastern Anatolia. Another important reason for taking up the Armenian cause was the unrest caused by the Russian Revolution of 1905; by taking up the plight of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, the Russians sought to pacify Armenians in the Russian empire.²⁸ The pressure put on the Ottoman Empire by Russia had international consequences: Europe's great powers were now aligned in two opposing power blocks and neither of the two blocks were prepared to let the other gain an upper hand in the Ottoman Empire's internal affairs. On the other hand the Ottoman government was quite unwilling to let foreign powers interfere with the administration in Anatolia, because this interfered with their own centralizing aims and would be a continuation of the decline of the Ottoman Empire. This meant that extensive international deliberations among the Great Powers and the Ottoman Government were needed to still the new Armenian crisis.²⁹ Several different plans for reform in Eastern Anatolia were discussed and eventually an agreement was reached. The compromise was a joint Russian-Ottoman proposal. The plan entailed the creation of two large inspectorate-districts in which two foreign inspectors-general would be appointed by the Supreme Porte, with the implicit consent of the Great Powers. This meant that reforms were an autonomous Ottoman affair. The inspectors-general would have control over the local administration, justice system, police and gendarmerie and when needed could use military forces for the management of public order. They also had the right to dismiss dysfunctional officials and to replace lower officials. The positions would be created for the duration of 10 years. Besides the administrative reforms there would also be agrarian reforms, which would be a matter for the inspectors-general, also there would be an ethnic element in the public education budget based on tax

²⁶ Roderic H. Davison, "The Armenian Crisis, 1912-1914," *The American Historical Review* 53, no. 3 (1948): 481-483.

²⁷ William J. van der Dussen, "The Question of Armenian Reforms in 1913-1914," *Armenian Review* 39, no. 1 (1986): 13-14.

²⁸ Davison, "The Armenian Crisis, 1912-1914," 486-488.

²⁹ In order to not deplete the reader's patience I will not extensively treat the matter of these negotiations. The diplomatic history surrounding this question has been adequately resolved in the aforementioned studies by Davison and Van der Dussen.

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proportionality and most importantly the Kurdish *Hamidiye* irregulars were to be transferred to reserve cavalry.³⁰

After much international consideration a Dutchman, the colonial administrator Louis Constant Westenenk, and a Norwegian, Major Nikolai Hoff, were appointed as the two inspectors-general. The appointment was a delicate matter: the Ottoman Empire would not have accepted an inspector-general coming from one of the Great Powers. This would also not have been acceptable for the Great Powers themselves. The inspectors-general thus had to originate from one of the smaller European neutral countries.³¹ The choice for a Dutch and a Norwegian inspector-general can be seen as an indication of their irrelevance, because they were more or less acceptable to all interested parties.



5-1 Louis Constant Westenenk (1872-1930),

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:L.C._Westenenk.jpg, accessed October 3, 2016.

Dutch archives contain a relatively small amount of documents related to inspector-general Louis Westenenk. The

most important of these is Westenenk's own diary, which exists in two versions: a handwritten manuscript and a typed abstract meant as an official report of his activities.³² The Westenenk diary is in many ways an interesting and extraordinary document, because of its frankness, but also because of the story it tells. The diary shows a general unwillingness on the Ottoman side to implement reforms in the two inspectorates-general of Erzurum and Van. It also shows that Westenenk did not take his tasks lightly and sought to prepare himself for his new duties in the best possible way.

The unwillingness of the Ottoman side becomes apparent in several ways. When Westenenk and Hoff were selected to become the inspectors-general, they were to enter Ottoman service. This meant that they had to negotiate their own terms of service, and because the agreed reforms were supposed to be autonomously implemented by the Ottomans, also their own jurisdiction and prerogatives. The

³⁰ Van der Dussen, "The Question of Armenian Reforms in 1913-1914," 21, 23-24.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

³² A photocopy of the diary is located in the archives of the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) in Leiden. A consolidated copy of the abstract and manuscript version of the diary has been translated into English and published by W.J. van der Dussen. In this paper I will refer to this English translation, of which I am satisfied that it is an adequate rendering of the original Dutch text. (L.C. Westenenk, "Diary Concerning the Armenian Mission," *Armenian Review* 39, no. 1 (1986): 29-89.) I will refer to his diary not by page number, but by diary entry date.

first tensions between the Ottoman government and Westenenk already became apparent before he left for Constantinople to conduct these negotiations. Many people, including some Armenians, who were trying to influence him urged Westenenk to travel via Paris to meet with Hoff, who was staying in Paris at the time. To Westenenk this also seemed to be a useful meeting in preparation of his new duties. After having communicated this travel itinerary to the Turkish envoy Westenenk received a note requesting that he would travel directly to Constantinople without any delay. For Westenenk this was a clear sign that he and Hoff were to be separated for the time being.³³ After meeting with Hoff in Paris, familiarizing himself with Armenian matters and after meeting with the French *Président du Conseil* [President of the Council], François Doumergue (who assured them of French support), Hoff and Westenenk left for Constantinople.

Once Westenenk and Hoff arrived in Constantinople the unwillingness of the Ottomans immediately became apparent: for instance, Westenenk was informed that the Ottoman Grand Vizir had requested all foreign ambassadors in Constantinople not to interfere in the affairs of Westenenk and Hoff. This meant that Westenenk and Hoff were on their own.³⁴ The contract negotiations also showed the same kind of unwillingness. Earlier the Russian envoy to The Hague, M. Svetchin, informed Westenenk that his salary would amount to £400³⁵ per month and that he would also receive a car, a palace and a remuneration for installation and travel costs.³⁶ The contract negotiations took several days and although Westenenk viewed the matter as not important,³⁷ it became the main point of the negotiations. One of the Ottoman negotiators, the Polish count Léon Ostrorog, who is described by Westenenk as a stout anti-Armenian (being '*plus Turque que les Turcs*' [more Turkish than the Turks]) explained that their salaries had been fixed at £250 and £100 travel expenses. Ostrorog does not understand why a salary of £400 had been mentioned, but after conferment with the Grand Vizier it becomes apparent that the Ottomans would refuse to accept the £400 salary because it was a figure mentioned by the Russian envoy to The Hague.³⁸

Besides the salary, their official instruction was also a matter of importance. Westenenk was only willing to sign a contract of service if the inspectors-general would have enough prerogatives to perform their official functions. Whilst these affairs were being discussed minister of the Interior Talaat, who replaced Ostrorog as Ottoman negotiator after complaints had been lodged against him, Talaat Pasha gives notice that there were no objections against a salary of £400.³⁹ Eventually, after almost a month of negotiations, documents were signed and the next day

³³ Westenenk, "Diary Concerning the Armenian Mission," April 21, 25 & 27.

³⁴ Ibid., May 3.

³⁵ The usage of the £-sign is used to denote the Ottoman Lira and not the Pound sterling. In his diary Westenenk uses the £-sign indiscriminately together with the French abbreviation lt. (*Livres Turque*)

³⁶ Westenenk, "Diary Concerning the Armenian Mission," March 6.

³⁷ Ibid., May 5.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., May 18.

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Westenenk left for The Netherlands to make preparations to enter into Ottoman service.⁴⁰

Even afterwards problems with the Ottoman government did not dissipate. The unfolding of the First World War created new problems. On August 5, 1914 Westenenk for the first time questioned what effect the war would have on Christians in the Ottoman Empire: “How will the Turks behave toward the Christians, now that they did not have to reckon with the Great Powers any more?”⁴¹ On August 10, Westenenk received a letter by Talaat in which he is requested to postpone his departure to Armenia because of the general mobilization and circumstances in general: both of which would make the application of the reforms of which Westenenk was to take charge impossible. The next day Talaat explained himself verbally: since the Armenian vilayets are now under military administration reforms cannot be introduced. Westenenk was however still in Ottoman service and would continue to receive his salary. When the war was finished the Ottoman government would be willing to introduce the reforms and Talaat therefore requested Westenenk to wait.⁴²

On September 8, Westenenk had a conversation with Talaat, who informed him that only half of his salary would be paid, because the Ottomans were unable to pay them. He added to this that Westenenk was now free to leave for Holland and wait out the war in his home country. On September 10, Westenenk accepted this arrangement under protest.⁴³ In his diary entry for September 11, Westenenk mentioned a conversation between his (Dutch) secretary C.L. Torley Duwel and the German ambassador Hans Baron [*Freiherr*] von Wangenheim, who supposedly said that “The Turks are mad that they have forced through the capitulation⁴⁴ in this way; they are capable of anything now.” Westenenk also described news that he heard from the Dutch consul in Tabritz that Russian officers had made it known that they would kill women and children. Westenenk speculates about the possible Turkish reaction and fears for a massacre. He also claims that he was assured that the Turkish army would come down on the Christians at the Bosphorus if Russia or Great Britain would try to force entry through the Dardanelles.⁴⁵ On September 19, Westenenk arrived in the Netherlands to wait out the war.⁴⁶

The contracts of Westenenk and Hoff stipulated that the Ottoman government could cancel their service after respecting a term of 6 months and paying a certain amount of indemnities. The Ottoman government effectuated this clause in February 1915. Following this, Westenenk’s secretary Torley Duwel was sent to Constantinople to settle the financial arrangements connected to the termination

⁴⁰ Ibid., May 24 & 25.

⁴¹ Ibid., August 5.

⁴² Ibid., August 10 & 11.

⁴³ Ibid., September 8 & 11.

⁴⁴ Wangenheim refers to the unilateral decision of the Ottomans to end all foreign capitulations in the Ottoman Empire.

⁴⁵ Westenenk, “Diary Concerning the Armenian Mission,” September 11.

⁴⁶ Ibid., September 19.

of Westenenk's as well as his own contract. In the Dutch national archives there is a report of his journey to Constantinople. The report, written in November 1915, describes Torley Duwels stay in Constantinople until September 1915. It shows that the arrangement of the last financial matters was no easy task. Torley Duwel ended his report with the following remarks:

In these for Turkey uncertain times I am of the opinion that the Porte showed loyalty, and that all civil servants that I met never showed the slightest pretence of self-interest.

This way of arranging affairs has somewhat heightened my trust in the Young Turks, but the politics of abhorrences and exterminations, which are now even more apparent than before, made my contacts with the Young Turkish party unbearable.⁴⁷

Torley Duwel apparently seems to have knowledge of information about massacres being conducted by the Ottoman government. He does however not cite his sources and is also not very specific.

As mentioned above, the Westenenk diary and supporting documentation (which is located in the Dutch national archives)⁴⁸ showed the Ottoman's unwillingness to implement the Armenian reforms in the inspectorates of Erzerum and Van. One cannot conclude from this that in the year 1914 a decision had already been reached to exterminate the Armenian population in the next year. The whole affair, and especially the way Hoff's and Westenenk's missions progressed, however adds weight to the contention that there was a genocidal intent in 1915, but it cannot be proven by this affair.

We should also be careful about working with documents related to Westenenk's mission. Although Westenenk describes himself as impartial on several occasions in his diary, I cannot corroborate his statement after reading his diary. His diary does not show a particularly positive attitude towards the Armenians, but he was clearly biased against the Turks and viewed the whole matter as a typical (Dutch) colonialist. This becomes apparent in a few statements: for instance on May 14, 1914 the diary contains a description of the opening of the parliament by the Sultan in which he describes the Sultan as "a pitiful, old squarely-fat-stuffed, childish little monkey – a disgustingly miserable appearance."⁴⁹ This colonial bias also becomes

⁴⁷ NL-HaNA, 2.05.94 Gezantschap, Consulaat, Consulaat-generaal te Constantinopel/Istanboel (Turkije), inventory number 467, Stukken betreffende de aanwezigheid van inspecteur-generaal in Armenië ter handhaving van het volkenrecht, there Verslag over een reis naar Constantinopel in 1915 door Mr. C.L. Torley Duwel.

⁴⁸ The Dutch National Archives also house a file with documentation surrounding the activities of Westenenk in Constantinople. These are mainly materials like contracts and other official documents related to the affair: NL-HaNA, 2.05.94 Consulaat Constantinopel/Istanboel, inventory number 467, Stukken betreffende de aanwezigheid van inspecteur-generaal in Armenië ter handhaving van het volkenrecht; There is also a file related to Westenenk's visit to Paris: NL-HaNA, 2.05.102 Nederlands Gezantschap te Frankrijk (Parijs), inventory number 676, Het verlenen van bijstand door het gezantschap aan L.C. Westenenk, inspecteur-generaal met betrekking tot de invoering van de hervormingen in Armenië.

⁴⁹ Westenenk, L.C., "Diary Concerning the Armenian Mission," May 14.

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apparent in his diary entry for May 21 in which he described the differences he has with Hoff about the negotiations with the Ottoman government over their terms of service, here he states that: "I don't do this in order to ridicule my Norwegian colleague, who was not at all accustomed to associating with Oriental people..."⁵⁰ Westenenk here proposes that he is in a better position to negotiate with the Ottoman government because of his experience as a colonial administrator in the Dutch East Indies. One of the clearest signs of this kind of bias is a remark made by Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands during an audience with Westenenk on June 21, 1914. The Queen remarked that it was an honour that the Netherlands was invited to put forward candidates [for the position of Inspector-general] and that she was pleased that a Dutch colonial administrator was chosen for this task. Her reason for this was that "a Dutchman could now show the world how Dutchmen in our Dutch Indies govern Mohammedans."⁵¹ A final note on anti-Turkish bias are Westenenk's remarks after he hears that the Ottoman government has bought the German navy ships Göben and Breslau: "The Göben which we had seen in May as hyper-dreadnought of the Germans, giving parties, dinner in Pera Palace, now in Turkish hands! How can this be: a razor in the hands of a monkey..." [Ellipsis is taken from the original text].⁵²

Diplomatic reports on the Armenian genocide

The Dutch National Archives in The Hague harbour the files of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Spread over several different archives are the political reports by the Dutch legation in Constantinople. These reports were written and signed by the Dutch envoy, jonkheer P.J.F.M. van der Does de Willebois, at a frequency of roughly one report per week. They were stored in the archive of the cabinet of the Dutch Foreign Ministry. Unfortunately there are huge gaps in the coverage of these reports. Several of the reports are missing and some have been stored in other files on special issues if they were considered to be relevant to that file. The archives of the Dutch legation in Constantinople however houses the original manuscripts of these reports, and it should therefore be possible to combine both archives to gain a complete insight in the political reports coming from the Dutch legation.⁵³ Currently the latter archive is in quite a disorderly state: the reports are not sorted according to their chronology and there are even individual pages about which it is difficult to say to which report they belong.

Van der Does de Willebois became the Dutch envoy in 1908 and died in 1919 in Istanbul. Zürcher describes him as an intelligent observer who was able to quickly figure out new developments and who neither had strong prejudices, other than the general European condescension usually directed towards people of the 'eastern type'. He was aided by the first dragoman of the legation: the Armenian Karabetian Efendi and his Dutch pupil J.H. Kramers, who had studied Arab and

⁵⁰ Ibid., May 21.

⁵¹ Ibid., June 21.

⁵² Ibid., August 11.

⁵³ Zürcher, "Welingelichte kringen?", 65-66.

law and who later became a scholar of Turkish, Persian and Arab at the Dutch university of Leiden. Although he is nowhere quoted as such, it is most likely that the political reports of Van der Does were partly formed by his information and opinion.⁵⁴

As noted before, one of the main interests of the Dutch in the Ottoman Empire of the First World War was the possibility that the Islamic character of the Ottoman Empire's war could lead to a pan-Islamic uprising with severe consequences for the Dutch rule over its colonies in the East Indies. The file related to this subject in the Dutch national archives contains a multitude of reports about this issue. One of the reports sent by Van der Does on November 6, 1914 states that the war, up to this point, has not exacerbated anti-Christian feelings within the Ottoman Empire. He however notices an increasing chauvinism within the Ottoman government and an increasingly noticeable pan-Islamic propaganda by the regime. This pan-Islamism, was, according to Van der Does, meant to create internal coherence among the Muslim people of the Ottoman Empire. The peoples of the Ottoman Empire also did not much care for the war effort, which was only really supported by the Young Turks and their German advisors. Van der Does concludes that the pan-Islamic campaign was only directed towards the Entente powers and was not meant to create trouble in the territories belonging to other (i.e. non-belligerent) powers.⁵⁵ We can therefore safely conclude that he meant to say that there was no direct concern for the Dutch East Indies. The reason I point towards this report because it mentions that there was no greater anti-Christian sentiment (that could lead to violence) within the Ottoman Empire than usual at the beginning of the war.

One of the first mentions of Armenians in the political reports dates from May 5th, 1915. This report mainly treats the landings by the British and the French at the Gallipoli peninsula. However, it also states that after the Defence of Van/Van Rebellion 350 Armenians of the higher classes were interned in Konya. Van der Does also tried to gain more information about what was really happening in the eastern Armenian vilayets. His main source of information in this question is the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, who informed him that the resistance offered by the Armenian population of Zeitoun and Van (and to a lesser extent in Evrek, Sivas and Erzurum) was a reaction to brutalities (torture, rape, massacre and arson) committed on behalf of the Ottoman government and directed towards the Armenian population.⁵⁶

The political report of June 23rd, 1915 mentions a conversation between Van der Does and the German ambassador Von Wangenheim, who told Van der Does that he had increasing difficulties in urging the Ottoman government to show constraint

⁵⁴ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁵ NL-HaNA, 2.05.18 Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken: Kabinet en Protocol, inventory number 664, Islamitisch karakter van de oorlog van Turkije tegen de Triple-Entente, there report November 6, 1914.

⁵⁶ NL-HaNA, 2.05.94 Consulaat Constantinopel/Istanboel, inventory number 457, Rapporten aan het Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken inzake de politieke situatie in het Turkse Rijk 1914-1920, there Political report May 5, 1915.

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in Armenian matters. In the same report Van der Does summarizes the policy enacted by the government as: “by the thousands Armenian families are driven from their domiciles to make place for Mohammedans, who were former inhabitants of territories lost by Turkey in the Balkan War.”⁵⁷ According to Wangenheim, whenever he tried to urge constraint he received the reply that in this matter the help of Germany is not needed and that the Ottoman government is capable of judging the country’s interests for itself. Wangenheim was also convinced that in the long run the current state of affairs would also be detrimental to German interests and remarked “*Wenn die Turken siegen, sind wir die ersten die sie hinauswerfen werden*” [When the Turks will win, we will be the first who they will throw out].⁵⁸ Wangenheim also mentioned the increased emphasis put on Islam within the empire and told Van der Does that he would try to counter this Ottoman policy. In his report Van der Does remarks that Germany greatly contributed to this policy and that it probably “let a genie out of the bottle that it cannot put back in.”⁵⁹ Interestingly Van der Does considers the poor condition of Wangenheim’s health to be caused in great extent by the increasing friction between Wangenheim and the Ottoman government. He also remarks that if Wangenheim’s condition does not improve this may lead to serious consequences.⁶⁰

It may therefore be no surprise that Van der Does reported in his political report dated July 15, 1915 that Wangenheim requested a temporary leave from his duties as ambassador because of health reasons and that he will be temporarily replaced by Prince Ernst Hohenlohe-Langenburg. In his report Van der Does calls this a great loss for foreigners in the empire, because Wangenheim managed to keep down chauvinism within the Young Turk government. (Since he is explicitly mentioning foreigners [*vreemdelingen*], he probably intends to refer to the unilateral declared end of the capitulations, as mentioned earlier in this paper). Van der Does tries to corroborate this point by mentioning the numerous attempts by Wangenheim to make the Ottoman government show constraint in the matter of the Armenians.⁶¹

The August 11, 1915 report is mainly about the end of diplomatic relations between Italy (fighting on the side of the Entente since May) and the Ottoman Empire. However, the report also mentions that the former Italian ambassador, Marquis Eugenio Camillo Garroni, informed Van der Does about the persecutions of Armenians. Forced by these prosecutions Armenians were by necessity obliged to convert to Islam. The report also mentions the case of Zorhab Effendi, Constantinopolitan parliamentary delegate and Armenian, who died during forced deportation to Diyarbakır [Van der Does’ handwriting at this point is almost indiscernible; the city of Diyarbakır seems to be the most logical reading, but it

⁵⁷ Ibid., Political report June 23, 1915.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., Political report July 15, 1915.

could be any city in Eastern Anatolia]. Van der Does remarks that this incident made a bad impression on him.⁶²

In his political report dated August 27, 1915 Van der Does deliberates on the question why the persecutions of Armenians take place. He attributes this to the growing unpopularity of the Ottoman war against the Entente Powers, which according to him was provoked from the Ottoman side [referring to the Naval shelling of the Russian ports of Sevastopol, Feodosia and Odessa on October 29, 1914]. According to Van der Does the persecutions of the Armenians and the appalling treatment of other Christians within the empire were a distraction from this unpopularity, which was widely shared among all layers of the population. Van der Does concludes that although the war is unpopular and that the general opinion was that the war was not fought for the Ottoman Empire, but only for Germany, there was no chance that popular dissatisfaction would lead to a change of government; because such a change could only happen with the support of the army officers (and since the Young Turks were mainly army officers, they were already running the country).⁶³

The most important political reports are dated September 1 and 4, 1915 and are titled 'the Armenian abhorrences'. Both have survived in the archive of the Dutch legation in Constantinople and in the archive of the Dutch Foreign Ministry Cabinet. The typed version in the latter archive bears a stamp indicating that the documents 'have circulated among H.M. ministers'. We may thus conclude that in addition to Van der Does, the Minister of Foreign affairs John Loudon, other members of the Dutch government also knew of the contents of these reports. The main source of information for Van der Does was the Vicar-General of the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople. According to Van der Does, although he already heard much about persecutions of Armenians, what the Vicar-General told him was beyond anything he had heard so far.

One could say that the Armenian question has been solved in accordance with the infamous "la tranquillité règne à Varsovie" [silence reigns over Warsaw]. According to the reports received by the Patriarchy in the Armenian Vilayets in Asia there are no more Armenians left, and according to their estimate, as a consequence of large scale massacres and flight when possible, Turkey's Armenian population, once 2 million strong, now amounts to one million, mainly women and young children. The massacres are executed by the gendarmerie or by Kurdish hordes led by the gendarmes. The men are gathered outside of the villages and murdered there, the young women and girls of marriageable age are being raped and robbed, the other women and children are being transported to other territories, often located in the desert, where many

⁶² Ibid., Political report August 11, 1915.

⁶³ NL-HaNA, 2.05.18 BUZA/Kabinetsarchief, inventory number: 606, Politieke berichten 1915 juli-dec, there Political report august 27, 1915.

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*starve to death. Two bishops were killed; one was hanged, on the manner of death of the other bishop no further information was available.*⁶⁴

To this information one could add an undated report by Van der Does of an eyewitness story by Mr. Von Rakowsky, a Hungarian citizen and delegate to the Imperial Council of Austria (*Reichsratabgeordnete*) who travelled through Persia, Kurdistan, Afghanistan and returned to Constantinople via Mesopotamia and Asia Minor.⁶⁵

Beside many roads in Mesopotamia Mr. v. R. [Von Rakowsky] noticed many sites where the bodily remains of the Arm. [Armenian] women and children were buried. These bodies were insufficiently covered with earth so that dogs and wild animals could remove this with little effort, tear apart the bodies and partially eat them. He also found many bodies of women and children who were not buried at all. From credible persons he heard that the women and children, and to mention the fate of the men, died of hunger and hardship or had even been killed by their guards.

In the immediate surroundings of the Aleppo train station he found such a mass grave where many hundreds of women and children had been buried after being killed.

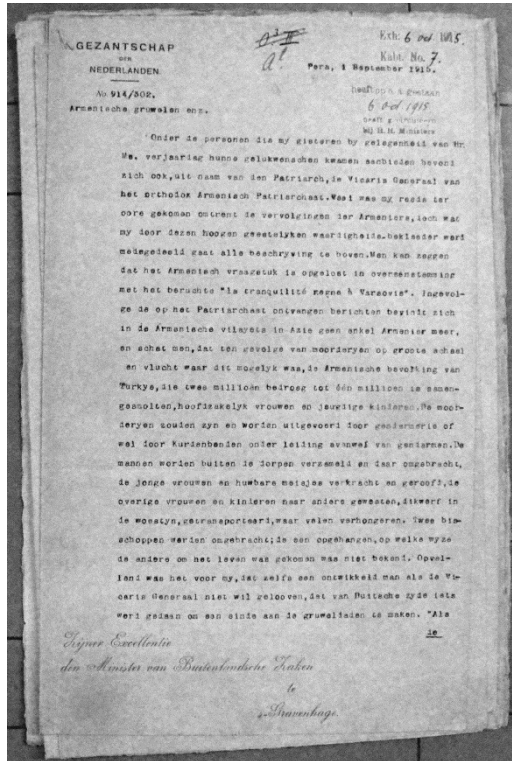
The brutalities committed towards them and the miseries that they suffered, according to said gentleman, surpassed, everything one could think of and about which one heard in Constantinople.

*All sorts of infectious diseases, mainly Typhus, were endemic when Mr. v. R. travelled in Mesopotamia.*⁶⁶

⁶⁴ NL-HaNA, 2.05.18 BUZA/Kabinetsarchief, inventory number 742, Stukken betreffende de Armeense nationale minderheid in Turkije en de Nederlandse bemoeienissen met het bestuur van Armenië en de Nederlandse bemoeienissen met het bestuur van Armenië, there Political report September 1, 1915.

⁶⁵ To be able to fully estimate the value of Von Rakowsky's report it is necessary to ascertain his background and the reasons for his travel throughout the Ottoman Empire. However, I have been unable to do this. The Von Rakowsky referred to by Van der Does, is probably the same Hungarian deputy Stephan Rakowsky who in 1914 duelled with the Hungarian prime-minister István Tisza on a matter of honour. If this is the case it is unlikely that Von Rakowsky was a member of the Austrian Reichsrat, but instead a member of the Hungarian Diet in Budapest. It might be possible that Von Rakowsky left other witness reports at other foreign legations in Constantinople.

⁶⁶ NL-HaNA, 2.05.94 Consulaat Constantinopel/Istanboel, inventory number 457, Rapporten aan het Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken inzake de politieke situatie in het Turkse Rijk 1914-1920, there undated report about travel by Mr. Von Rakowsky.



5-2 The report entitled ‘the Armenian abhorrences’ sent by Van der Does to the Dutch Foreign ministry on September 1, 1915.

The aforementioned September 1st report also describes a conversation between Van der Does and the acting German ambassador Hohenlohe. The latter told the former that “it was very difficult to be certain of the particulars of all that happens within the Armenian vilayets” and he could not assure Van der Does that “the Vicar-General had committed the act of overstatement.”⁶⁷ Hohenlohe also stated that he was currently working towards ending all doubt about German responsibility in this matter, although he could not say how.⁶⁸ The German ambassador’s course of action becomes apparent in the political report dated September 4th, 1915: the German ambassador delivered a memorandum to Grand Vizier. The memorandum, written in French, is attached to the report; the report also mentions a previous memorandum delivered by Wangenheim on July 4th. According to Van der Does the memorandum “did not contribute to making the Turkish government cease further abhorrences, but had to give it the impression

⁶⁷ NL-HaNA, 2.05.18 BUZA/Kabinetsarchief, inventory number 742, Stukken betreffende de Armeense nationale minderheid in Turkije en de Nederlandse bemoeienissen met het bestuur van Armenië en de Nederlandse bemoeienissen met het bestuur van Armenië, there Political report September 1, 1915.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

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that the Embassy only meant to absolve itself of all responsibility.”⁶⁹ Van der Does further concludes that the Germans were not willing to risk their alliance with the Ottoman Empire in the Armenian matter.⁷⁰

A final report dated October 26th, 1915 informs the foreign minister of the passing of Baron von Wangenheim, who suffered a stroke the day before and never regained consciousness. Again, Van der Does points out that this was a great loss to all foreigners and Christians within the Ottoman Empire, because “his vigorous personality, infused the Turkish government with a certain awe and managed, to a certain extent, to keep down chauvinism and fanaticism.”⁷¹ Van der Does’ positive opinion stands in stark contrast to those who had dealings with the German ambassador, one of whom was the American ambassador Henry Morgenthau. In his memoirs, which are most certainly not devoid of a strong anti-Turkish and anti-German bias, he describes Wangenheim’s course of action in the Armenian matter in a completely different way: “... as time went on, it became more and more evident that Wangenheim had no desire to stop the deportations.”⁷² He also views Wangenheim to be an overly ambitious person, after mentioning that Wangenheim’s task was to make sure that Turkey joined Germany in the First World War he remarks: “Wangenheim believed that, should he succeed in accomplishing this task, he would reap the reward which for years had represented his final goal – the Chancellorship of the empire. His skill at establishing personal relations with the Turks gave him a great advantage over his rivals. Wangenheim had precisely that combination of force, persuasiveness, geniality, and brutality needed in dealing with the Turkish character.”⁷³ Unfortunately, the reasons for Van der Does’ positive opinion of Wangenheim remain unclear, what might have played a role is that the German ambassador was one of the main sources of information for the Dutch legate. Zürcher has noted this last fact in his general evaluation on First World War era sources about the Ottoman Empire in Dutch archives; he notes that relations between the Dutch envoy and the German embassy were cordial.⁷⁴

The Dutch diplomatic documents about the Armenian genocide seem to corroborate the general outlook of historiography that considers the events to have been a genocide: namely, that at first there were massacres of Armenians in the Eastern vilayets of Anatolia and that subsequently Armenians were driven from their houses and either killed or violated or deported to the Syrian desert, where many starved or died of exposure. The report of September 1, 1915 speaks of a systematic policy of deportations which, when measured against the generally

⁶⁹ Ibid., September 4, 1915.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ NL-HaNA, 2.05.18 BUZA/Kabinetsarchief, inventory number 606, Politieke berichten 1915 juli-dec, there Political report October 26, 1915.

⁷² Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1918), 373. (The memoirs have also been published in the United Kingdom as: Henry Morgenthau, *Secrets of the Bosphorus* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1918).)

⁷³ Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*, 7-8.

⁷⁴ Zürcher, “Welingelichte kringen?”, 78.

accepted yardstick for Genocides (the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide⁷⁵), contains clear indications that could amount to the verdict that the Armenian massacres were indeed a genocide. However, taken on their own, the Dutch sources are insufficient to make such a claim: the reports are too fragmented to draw a conclusion of that kind. Furthermore, they are insufficient to solve the aforementioned historiographical problem regarding sources on the Armenian genocide. The reason being that in the end, one of the main sources (the Armenian patriarchy of Constantinople) used by the Dutch legation to prepare its report, will be immediately dismissed by opponents of the genocide thesis because of its ethnic origins. Furthermore, the other main source seems to be the German ambassadors Wangenheim and Hohenlohe-Langenburg, which means the Dutch sources are susceptible to the same criticism as mentioned with regards to German sources. The same could be said about the travel report by Von Rakowsky.

Conclusion

Information in Dutch official documents regarding the Armenian genocide is reasonably well documented: The documents are either related to the 1914 Armenian reform package or to the events of 1915 itself. From these sources one can draw the conclusion that the Armenian genocide came about due to a larger process that increased tensions between Armenians and the Turkish government: the Westenek diary clearly shows an unwillingness from the side of the Young Turk government to deal with the Armenian question in the manner prescribed by the Great Powers. At the end of his mission, Westenek clearly worries about the situation now that the First World War is in full swing and the Ottoman government is less constrained by the European Great Powers, and already speculates about a possible violent end to the Armenian question.

Diplomatic reports from 1915 clearly show that there were anti-Armenian persecutions and these sources seem to corroborate the general Armenian genocide thesis, especially when these sources are read in conjunction with existing historiography supporting the genocide thesis. The sources make clear that the events regarding Armenians in 1915 were not just acts of violence, but part of a general policy conducted by the Young Turk government. One of the reasons given for this policy was that using violence against the Armenians was meant to distract the rest of the population from the unpopular war against the Entente powers.

⁷⁵ According to Article II of this convention the genocide 'means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such : (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948*, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%2078/volume-78-I-1021-English.pdf>

II. Diplomats

We must however be cautious about relying on the Dutch sources: first of all the Westenek-diary clearly shows a Dutch colonial and anti-Turkish bias. Secondly, the political reports written by the Dutch envoy in Constantinople are very fragmented and not very detailed. A further problem is that in the end, the Dutch envoy based his reports on sources which will immediately make them suspect to some of the sides in the Armenian genocide debate; he relies mainly on the Armenian patriarchy of Constantinople and the German ambassadors in Constantinople. Neither source is beyond reproach.

Although these sources by themselves do not prove or disprove the genocide thesis, the sources do provide an extra set of information in this matter. One can only hope that with the passing of time the matter of the Armenian genocide becomes less politicized and that historians from Turkey, Armenia, the Armenian diaspora and other countries can overcome their differences and come to an understanding. This process has to start with the matter of sources, since these form the basis of any sensible historiographical judgement.

This study can also be a source of inspiration for further research in other related matters. For instance, the Dutch national archives also hold material pertaining to Dutch policy in the matter of the Armenian genocide. These should of course be viewed from the context of Dutch neutrality politics. There are also documents related to other national issues in the Ottoman Empire, for instance the position of the Greeks and the unsuccessful attempt by the Greek government to gain a new province in Asia Minor following the First World War, which failed and eventually ended in the tragedy of the burning of Smyrna in 1922. (The Dutch national archives also house documents by the Dutch consulate in said city). In this last matter, Dutch sources might also provide an interesting new perspective.

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One hundred years ago Europe unleashed a storm of violence upon the world: The First World War had an enormous impact on the lives of Europeans, European history and culture. To this day, the iconic images of trench warfare in Belgium and France are burned onto our retinas, the names of its major battles, such as The Somme, Verdun and Ypres, are etched in our consciousness, as are the stories of modern warfare's greatest horrors: the usage of poison gas and new technical means such as aerial warfare and the tank.

In recent years it has become clear that this is only a small part of the Great War's history. In many senses there were other fronts: both geographically, as well as thematically the war was fought on fronts that have remained relatively 'unknown' to date. From a geographical perspective there were many other fronts on the European continent alone, there was fighting in the Balkans, in Romania and in the borderlands of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires (an area that is today part of Poland, Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic States). Outside of Europe there was also warfare in European colonies in Africa and in the Middle East. Seen from a thematic angle, these 'unknown fronts' relate to the life and conduct of civilians and diplomats who lived and worked in the war. Civilians might serve as (para)medical professionals or might have fallen victim to one of the war's many violent episodes. Diplomats might have served the interests of their countries of origin in one of the many belligerents, yet, their documents can also shed light on different aspects of the war. Then there are soldiers themselves, whose voices have not always been heard. Yet another unknown front, is the life and work of intellectuals, who did not partake in violent actions, but often took up the weapon of the pen to wage their war.

Since the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Iron Curtain, many aspects of the Eastern fronts of the First World War have come to light and new sources have been uncovered. So to speak, there has been an 'Eastern turn' in First World War historiography. The scholars who contributed to this volume, all historians or literary scholars, have researched new sources on those Eastern fronts and have given new valuable insights in several 'unknown fronts' of the Great War, but also had to conclude that there are still many unanswered questions that need further inquiry. A revision of historiographical insights on the First World War is however warranted.

