

Kaiserlich Deutsche Botschaft*
GERMAN EMBASSY
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Cedarhurst, L.I., August 31, 1915

No. A 5317.
CONFIDENTIAL!

My dear Mr. Secretary,

With reference to my letter of July 18th[†] I beg to send you an abstract of a report of the Imperial Consul at Trebizond for your confidential information.

I am, my dear Mr. Lansing,
Yours very sincerely

[signed] J. Bernstorff

The Honorable Robert Lansing
Secretary of State
Washington, D.C.

* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/118. The original German text is not reproduced here.

† A hand written note reads "Not found"

[Hand written copy]*

Translation

Copy

Foreign Office

Copy A. 22559

Trebizond, July 9, 1915

Imperial German Consulate

After Turkey entered the war, indications of deep concern for their personal safety became noticeable among the Armenians here. Although there was absolutely no foreboding of forthcoming excesses, I nevertheless had friendly talks with the Vali here over the protection of Christians in Trebizond and the surrounding country. He gave me the most positive assurance that nothing would be done against them so long as they kept the peace themselves and showed me a telegram from the Ministry of the Interior in which Talaat Bey commends the Armenians to the special care of the authorities. As a matter of fact the Christians here presently enjoyed the greatest safety and when a few houses of Armenians were searched as a matter of necessity, it was done, as I have been assured by the Armenians themselves, with the greatest consideration. All this lacked recognition all the more as bands of Russian Armenians on the coast not only fought the Turks but indulged in the worst transgressions on Russian Mohammedans.

The Christians ill repaid the fair treatment accorded them by the Turks. They made no secret of their aversion to the Turks and sympathy with the Triple Entente, Russia especially, and the craziest rumors floating about, like the fall of the Dardanelles, Erzerum, the landing of Russians near Midia, even the flight of the Sultan to Brusa, are to be traced to them. Then came the uncovering of the conspiracy against the Young Turk Party and its leaders, the uprising of Armenians in the province of Van and disturbances in other parts of Turkey. This was what impelled the Sublime Porte to take exceptional measures against the Armenians.

On June 24th the leaders of the Armenian committee here were arrested and deported to Samsun in the interior. On the same day I hear that the wholesale deportation of the Armenians was contemplated and that a movement was on foot to use the opportunity to commit outrages on the Armenians in this place. I brought it to the notice of the Vali who briefly declared that the banishment, if any, of the Armenians would be, even in the face of armed resistance, carried out by the civil and military authorities alone, to the exclusion of any irresponsible private persons. On the 26th of June the Armenians were notified to be ready for deportation to the interior on the expiration of a term of five days. The sick only were allowed to remain

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and provisions were made for their housing in hospitals. They were forbidden to sell anything whatever. The stores and shops were to be sealed, everything in their houses brought to a designated place and there left in the care of the Government, money deposited at the Post Office for delivering in installments on the way.

About 30,000 persons were affected by the deportation order in the province of Trebizond. The moving of such great masses along the roads deficient in food and lodging and the first 300 kilometers of which must be acknowledged to be deeply infected with spotted fever was bound to work havoc among the Armenians, the women and children especially. I therefore acquainted the Imperial Embassy at Constantinople with the condition of affairs and at the same time endeavored to obtain from the Vali here a mitigation of the deportation order. He listened to my representation made in a friendly way with a willing ear and showed the best disposition to meet me half way. So the following were exempted from deportation: All children less than 10 years old, widows and orphans, all females without male protection at the time which included the families of men under arms, the sick and pregnant women and also the Catholic Armenians. Sick and pregnant women were further allowed to stay in their homes and keep with them a female relative to nurse them. Children could be housed with acquaintances. Finally the deported were also allowed, upon procuring a permit from the Chief of Police to sell their valuables and household goods. In the enforcement of these rules fair forbearance was shown in regard to the age of the children and the illness of the women.

The moving out of the city of Trebizond and adjoining country is now ended. A few suicides and a case of arson took place. There is no record of other incidents.

The Vali gave me comforting assurances in regard to the safety of the deported on the way. I rely on his energy and willingness to have seen to nothing happening to the Armenians within his jurisdiction. Large bands of footpaths led by French speaking chieftains have been seen near Erzerum and Baiburt.

To the credit of the Turkish people as a whole, it must be said that very many Turks did not approve of the expulsion of the women and children. On the other hand it was found that the Armenians did not show themselves in a very winning light. The first to beg for intervention to remain were the clergymen; it never occurred to them that their place in time of distress was by the side of their people; as exception in favor of the priests would not be procured, the coadjutor of the bishop of this city, a white bearded deacon, begged the Vali to let him embrace Islamism, and got the answer that there was nothing to prevent him doing so, that all he had to do was to profess the Mohammedan faith and undergo circumcision, that, besides, the deportation order applied not to Christians but to Armenians; an Armenian converted to Islam would then be deported as a Mohammedan Armenian. The Armenian men, after promulgation of the deportation order, never left their houses but always sent their wives out; many Government and bank employees managed to get a respite and let their families go without them.

My colleagues here reported the deportation order to their Embassies at

Constantinople by wire. The representatives of Italy and America had to confine themselves to a brief statement of the fact. The Consul of Austria Hungary called the attention of his superior officers to the great danger to which wholesale deportation exposed the women and children. My Austrian colleague pleaded with the Vali here in behalf of a few children, the American Consul in behalf of Persian Armenians placed under his protection. My Italian colleague's mind is prostrated by the fear of disturbances.

Signed. Dr. Bergfeld