

AMERICAN EMBASSY*
CONSTANTINOPLE

No. 522

February 5, 1917

The Honorable
The Secretary of State,
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to report that about November 20th last the Ottoman Ministry of Foreign Affairs made an oral complaint to this Embassy concerning an alleged report of the Consul at Harpoot, relative to the Armenian deportations, which appeared in a paper published in the Armenian language at Marseilles entitled ARMENIA, in its issue of July 5, 1916. A translation of the part of this paper purporting to be a report of the Consul at Harpoot is herewith enclosed.

The Sublime Porte submitted to the Embassy the full Armenian text with a Turkish translation of the article appearing in the ARMENIA. The heading of the article is entitled "The terrible sufferings of deported Armenians on the road to banishment." This article is divided by dashes into three parts, the first of which is quoted from the JOURNAL of Paris and is a report from the correspondent at Erzeroum of the JOURNAL named Henri Barbi. The second part, separated from the first by a dash, is the alleged report from the Consul at Harpoot dated January 1, 1915. The third portion of the article in the ARMENIA contained other information connected with the deportation of Armenians in Turkey.

This matter was at first presented to the Embassy in a rather urgent manner, but after the Consul at Harpoot had telegraphed, in reply to an inquiry from this Embassy, that he had never written or given out for publication any statement concerning the Armenian deportations other than his official reports to the Embassy and the Department of State, the Foreign Office stated that it would be satisfied if Mr. Davis wrote a letter to the management of the JOURNAL, denying that he ever gave out such a report for publication. Under the impression that the whole article had appeared in the JOURNAL, the Embassy asked to the Embassy in Paris to furnish it with copies of the JOURNAL from which this article of the ARMENIA was supposed to have been taken. Four copies of the JOURNAL containing the articles of its special correspondent at Erzeroum, Mr. Henri Barbi, have been received from Paris and are herewith enclosed. In none of these articles of the JOURNAL is

* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/313

there any reference to an official report from the American Consul at Harpoot, so that the ARMENIA must have obtained its information from another source.

The enclosed translation gives in substance the first three pages of the report of Consul at Harpoot dated July 11, 1915 (forwarded to the Department with this Embassy's despatch No. 389 of August 10, 1915, Enclosure No. 1). The language is slightly different, but the essential phrases are the same. This Embassy is not aware that this report from Mr. Davis has ever been made public, so that it would be interesting to know how it reached the ARMENIA.

These copies of the JOURNAL have been shown to the Ottoman Foreign Office which now states that it will not press its complaint against Mr. Davis if he writes a letter to the JOURNAL in Paris stating that he never wrote or gave out for publication any statement such as that which appeared in the Marseilles newspaper ARMENIA. If the JOURNAL should publish such a letter from Mr. Davis, the Sublime Porte would want a copy of the paper, or if the JOURNAL does not see fit to publish a letter of this nature from Mr. Davis, a mere acknowledgment of its receipt by the editorial management of the JOURNAL, addressed to Mr. Davis, will be considered as sufficient to close the question.

This whole question could probably be allowed to gradually sink into oblivion were it not for the fact that the Ottoman military authorities have requested the Foreign Office to make representations to this Embassy concerning numerous telegrams which Mr. Davis forwards in replies to inquiries from Armenians in the United States, sent through the Department, about their relatives in the Harpoot district. The Foreign Office has presented this matter to the Embassy and has pointed out that such action on the part of the Consul at Harpoot is objectionable on the grounds that he is interfering with a purely domestic matter, and is acting on behalf of Ottoman subjects both in Turkey and in the United States without the knowledge or consent of the Ottoman Government. It is further represented to the Embassy that should Ottoman subjects living in America desire to obtain news of their relatives in Turkey, they have only to apply to the Ottoman Embassy in Washington or to the Ottoman consular offices in New York and elsewhere.

This latter claim is entirely spacious as the said Ottoman officials in the United States experience very great difficulty in communicating with their home government, and presuming that they would really endeavor to comply with the requests made to them, which is doubtful, they could only forward inquiries regularly through the Department of State and this Embassy.

Besides, a large number of the Armenians in the United States, as well as their relatives and friends in Turkey about whom they inquire, are naturalized American citizens, and consequently entitled, from our point of view, to all possible assistance from American representatives in Turkey, even though their acquired American citizenship is not recognized by the Ottoman Government. Furthermore, this attitude of the Sublime Porte is a clear indication of its desire that Ottoman subjects should in no way be aided directly by foreigners. Even if its consent to the extension

of pecuniary or other relief to Ottoman subjects has in some cases been rather grudgingly granted, nevertheless, as has often been reported to the Department, the general official attitude of the Ottoman Government now is that such needy Ottoman subjects should rather go unrelieved than that they should look to outside sources of help, administered through channels which are not entirely under Turkish governmental control.

Within a short time, however, I hope to again take up with Talaat Pasha, Grand Vizier and Minister of the Interior, the question of the extension of relief and other assistance to Armenians, and hope to be able to reach a working agreement in the manner, as Talaat Pasha of late shows a more favorable disposition towards the distribution of relief, and has already had instructions sent to Aleppo at my request to remove certain hindrances which had been placed in the distribution of relief to Armenians and others by Mr. Jackson. Now that Talaat Pasha is Grand Vizier, his favorable attitude, if continued, will have more weight and influence.

As showing the attitude of the Foreign Office in this matter of the transmission of messages concerning deported Armenians, I have the honor to transmit herewith copy and translation of an Ottoman Note Verbale dated November 8, 1916 in which the Sublime Porte replies to a complaint of this Embassy that several telegrams from the Consul at Aleppo had not been delivered to it. The Embassy has not deemed it necessary or advisable to reply to the extravagant assertions contained in this Note.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your obedient servant,

[signed] Abram Elkus

Enclosures:

- 1.- Translation of article from the newspaper ARMENIA,
- 2.- 4 copies of the JOURNAL for July 13, 17, 19 & 27, 1916 [not reproduced here]
- 3.- Embassy to Porte, September 23, 1916,
- 4.- Porte to Embassy, November 8, 1916.

ARMENIA, published in Armenian at Marseilles, France, July 5, 1916.*

Extract from article appearing in the above entitled
“The Terrible Suffering of Deported Armenians During the Road of Banishment.”
(from the JOURNAL daily, written by its correspondent
Mr. Henri Barbi from Erzeroum).

The official report of the American Consul at Harput.

The American Consul at Harput in his official report under date of January 11, 1915, writes as follows:

“During the early part of July, the first groups of deported persons from Erzeroum and Erzindjan arrived in Harput. They were in rags, dirty, hungry, thirsty and sick. They had remained two months of their journey, almost without food, without water. They gave them dry straw like animals. They were so famished that they sprang on the straw to eat, but the Zapites drove them away with rods and many of them died on the spot.

“Mothers used to propose to give their children to persons asking for them. The Turks sent their physicians to examine the physical condition of the young girls, and to choose for their Harems the most pretty among them.

“According to the stories of these unfortunates, a large part of them were killed on the road by Kurds who were incessantly attacking them, and many also had died of hunger and exhaustion.

“Two days later arrival of new groups. There were among the deported persons three sisters who knew English and who belonged to one of the wealthiest families in Erzeroum. From the twenty five persons of their family, eleven had been killed en route and the eldest of the male sex among them was eight years old. The deported persons when started on their journey from Erzeroum had horses, trunks and money. On the road everything had been seized from them, even the clothes worn by them next to their skin, and one of the young women was altogether naked.

“The daughter of the Protestant pastor at Erzeroum was in the party. All the members of her family were killed by the Kurd brigands, who were waiting for them to pass in order to kill first the men, then the women and children.”

* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/313

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September 23, 1916.

No. 1814.
Note Verbale.

The Embassy of the United States of America has the honor to again draw the serious attention of the Imperial Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the action of the censors in suppressing a large number of the telegrams which the American Consul at Aleppo addresses to this Embassy. It is scarcely necessary to point out to the Sublime Porte how seriously this action of the censors impedes the conduct of the affairs of this Embassy, and it therefore has the honor to protest most emphatically against such interference with these telegrams, and to urgently request that the necessary instructions be issued to the censors to refrain from suppressing the telegrams sent by the Consul at Aleppo.

To the Imperial Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Sublime Porte.

* Source: NA/RG59/867.4016/313

TRANSLATION*

SUBLIME PORTE

November 8, 1916

Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

No Gl. 89277.

No S1. 350.

Note Verbale.

In reply to the Note Verbale which the Embassy of the United States of America was good enough to address to it on September 23rd last, No. 1814, concerning the telegrams forwarded by the Consul at Aleppo, the Imperial Ministry of Foreign Affairs has the honor to inform it, upon the basis of a communication from Vice-Commander in Chief of the Imperial Army, that the censorship has prevented the forwarding of a telegram in which the Consul gave information relative to the movements of certain Ottoman subjects, information which refers to a question of interior order of the Empire.

This fact demonstrates once again that the Consuls of the United States continue, in spite of the formal promise made by the Embassy of the Republic, and the subsequent instructions which were given to them by the Embassy not to occupy themselves as before with affairs concerning Ottoman subjects.

In bringing the foregoing to the knowledge of the Embassy of the Republic, the Imperial Ministry has the honor to ask to kindly give urgent and categorical new instructions to the American Consuls so that these latter may refrain interfering in affairs of this nature.

To the Embassy of the United States of America.

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