NEW ARTICLE ON SULTAN ABDULHAMID II'S OUTLOOK ON THE ARMENIAN QUESTION

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Translator

In a recent article, Professor Kemal Çiçek examines Sultan Abdulhamid II and the Armenian Question within the context of the Ottoman Empire.[1] This article represents a significant contribution to the field of Ottoman Armenian studies, as it explores Abdulhamids personal views and attitudes toward the Ottoman Armenians and the complexities surrounding the Armenian Question.

After a comprehensive introduction that addresses the historical context and the position of the Ottoman Armenians within the empire, Professor Çiçek discusses the emergence of the Armenian Question following 1878 and the role of nationalist Armenian organizations, such as the Hunchak and Dashnak committees. He argues that, contrary to the persistent claims of Armenians and their Western advocates, these committees did not merely seek reforms and improvements for the Armenian population. Instead, they aimed to secede from the empire and were prepared to take extreme measures to achieve this goal. A declaration made by the Hunchaks in 1893 exemplifies this perspective; they stated that to attain their objective of liberation, they were willing to sacrifice half their nation. This aggressive and radical mindset prompted the Armenian committees to initiate violence, particularly against the Muslim population of the empire, hoping that the resulting reprisals from the outraged Muslims would lead to European intervention and ultimately secure independence for the Armenians.

After the introduction, Professor Çiçek discusses Abdulhamid IIs perspective on the Armenian crisis of the 1890s. He begins by outlining several misleading assumptions about the sultan that were propagated by the Western press, which was primarily driven by information obtained from missionaries.

The article subsequently summarizes the sultans views under eight subtitles. In the first subtitle, the author presents the sultans perspective, noting that the Ottoman Armenians were treated with tolerance and respect within the Ottoman Empire and that many of their institutions were recognized and protected by the state.

In the second subtitle, Professor Çiçek quotes Abdulhamid II who asserts that the historically tolerant and respectful attitude towards the Armenians was a legacy from his forefathers. Çiçek emphasizes that since the founding of the empire, the sultans and the

empire's religious dignitaries accorded respect and protection to the Armenians.

The third subtitle addresses Abdulhamid IIs views on the matter from a religious perspective. The sultan regarded it as his religious duty to protect and ensure the well-being of the Ottoman Armenians, as well as other peoples within his empire.

Under the fourth subtitle, Abdulhamid IIs personal relationships and friendships with Armenians are discussed. The sultan maintained numerous close friendships with Armenians, including several childhood friends. For instance, during their youth, Abdulhamid II and his brother had visited the Dadian family, staying for two nights in their mansion.

Under the fifth subtitle, Abdulhamid IIs views on the economic advantages afforded to the Armenians are examined. The sultan observed that, due to the opportunities available to them, many Ottoman Armenians had prospered and thrived, achieving an economically dominant position within the empire.

Under the sixth subtitle, Abdulhamid IIs perspectives on the Armenians within the administration of the empire are discussed. The sultan observed the significant number of Armenians holding prominent positions, including ministers, vice ministers, and even ambassadors. For instance, Mikail Portakal Pasha served as the Minister of Treasury and was responsible for managing the lands and estates belonging to the sultan. During the reign of Abdulhamid II, no fewer than 106 Armenians occupied high-ranking positions and were among the recipients of the highest salaries and honors.

Under the next subtitle, Abdulhamid IIs perspectives on the Armenian crisis and the associated committees are presented. The sultan correctly perceived these developments, which brought chaos and external intervention, as attempts to undermine his empire. Despite these challenges, he did not harbor resentment toward the Ottoman Armenians. In the case of one Ottoman Armenian who fled to the United States during the tumultuous year of 1895 and later expressed regret and a desire to return to the empire but lacked the funds to do so, the sultan personally sent a thousand francs to assist this individual in returning.

Under the eighth and final subtitle, Abdulhamid IIs grievances regarding the misleading coverage of the 1890s crisis by Western newspapers are presented. Many of these publications portrayed the entire crisis as a clash of religions. However, religious differences between Muslims and Armenians had existed since the inception of the empire, but had never posed a significant problem. The sultan noted that during the Greek rebellion of the 1820s, tens of thousands of Turks were massacred by the Greeks, yet the Western media showed no sympathy for their plight. Now, Muslims feared the possibility of experiencing a similar fate if the Armenian committees succeeded in achieving their objectives.

While a substantial correspondence among governors and diplomats addressed the crisis of the 1890s, the personal views of Abdulhamid II have so far been rarely documented and presented. Therefore, Professor Çiçeks article makes a significant contribution to the field of Ottoman Armenian studies and should be read with great interest.

[1] Kemal Çiçek, II. Abdülhamidin Ermeni Sorununa Bakışı, *Türk Yurdu*, Sayı 452, Özel Sayı: 1915 Tehciri Ve Ermeni Meselesi - Diaspora, Propaganda Ve Kimlik İnşası, Nisan 2025, https://www.turkyurdu.com.tr/urunler/550/turk-yurdu-nisan-2025

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Ahmet Can Öktem completed his undergraduate studies at Eskişehir Osmangazi University, in the field of Economics at the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, graduating in 2013. Öktem was accepted to the Masters degree programme at the Middle Eastern Technical University European Integration field at the Faculty of Social Sciences in 2014. He completed his studies in 2018. He completed the diploma programme of CIFE, Centre International de Formation Européenne, in Advanced European Studies and International Relations in 2018, which he joined in 2016. He worked as an intern at the Ministry of EU Affairs between September 2013 and December 2013. Öktem has been working at AVİM as a translator since October 2017.

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