

Was it a genocide?

What documents from the Vatican reveal about the events of 1915-16

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One hundred years after the events of 1915-16, there are still two versions of what happened then. Almost all independent historians agree with the 1997 resolution of the "International Association of Genocide researcher", according to which the violent deportations, death marches into the Syrian desert and massacres of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire indeed fulfilled all criteria to be called a genocide.¹ Already on August 29, 1985, in an official report, the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations used the term "genocide" for the events of 1915/16, although under protest of "*some members of the subcommittee*"². But while (until the end of 2015) 25 States and even the European Parliament in its resolutions of 1987 and 2001, recognized the Turkish crimes against the Armenians officially as "genocide", others including the German Chancellor Angela Merkel are struggling on this issue. When in 2012, about 156,000 Germans in an official online- "dialogue on Germany", initiated by Merkel, demanded a "*law against the denial of the genocide against the Armenians and Aramaeans*"³, she refused the petition and called it a "*bilateral affair between Armenia and Turkey*"⁴. Indeed she deliberately avoided the term "genocide" even during the official commemoration ceremony on 24 April, 2015 in Berlin. The reason is her loyalty to Ankara. According to the official Turkish reading, the genocide was indeed a resettlement due to the events of the war, alleged Armenian revolts and an alleged collaboration with Russia. Not 1.5 million were killed, the Turks claim,

¹ <http://www.genocidescholars.org/sites/default/files/document%09%5Bcurrent-page%3A1%5D/documents/Turkish%20State%20Denial%20Open%20Letter.pdf>

² UN Doc, E/CN.4/Sub.2/1985/SR.57, § 42

³ https://www.dialog-ueber-deutschland.de/DE/20-Vorschlaege/10-Wie-Leben/Einzelansicht/vorschlaege_einzelansicht_node.html?cms_idIdea=2487

⁴ https://www.dialog-ueber-deutschland.de/SharedDocs/Blog/DE/2012-07-04_Kanzlerin_trifft_TN_Online-Dialog.html

but only about 300.000 became victim of Kurdish raids, hunger and disease: an unfortunate collateral damage, for which Erdogan even expressed his condolences in April 2014.⁵

In the last two years I located more than 2000 pages of hitherto unpublished documents on the events of 1915-16, at that time called "*the persecution of the Armenians*", in the Vatican Secret Archives.⁶ This previously unknown sources offer not only a wealth of new information, but indeed a whole new perspective which perhaps can shed light on the true nature of those terrible events. Indeed they offer answers on the four key questions regarding the Armenocide:

1. Is there any indication that the deportation of the Armenians had been planned before the alleged "uprisings" in the spring of 1915?
2. Did any action by the Armenians justify an intervention by the Ottoman state?
3. Did the Turkish measures make sense as a prevention of alleged uprisings, espionage or sabotage?
4. To what extent the Young Turk's policy in the Armenian question fulfills the criteria of a genocide?

1. Were the deportations already planned?

There is strong evidence that a violent "solution to the Armenian question" has already been planned years before the war broke out. World War I, so it seems, offered only a welcome and perhaps long-sought pretext for carrying out the proposed action.

⁵ <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/tuerkei-erdogan-spricht-armeniern-erstmals-beileid-aus-a-965828.html>

⁶ Hesemann, Michael: Völkermord an den Armeniern. Mit unveröffentlichten Dokumenten aus dem Geheimarchiv des Vatikan über das größte Verbrechen des Ersten Weltkriegs, München 2015

An examination of the ideology of the initially rather heterogeneous Young Turk movement offers the first evidence. The origins of the party "Union and Progress" (Ittihat ve Terakki, short Ittihat) can be traced back to the 19th century Paris, where a number of young Turks from wealthy families studied and came into contact with contemporary currents of European philosophy. They were inspired by both, the ideals of the French Revolution on one side and by the emerging nationalism on the other hand. The "Integral nationalism" as taught by Charles Maurras, inflated the nation to a semi-mythical status and advocated a strong national state with a homogeneous population, following just one common state religion. From this ideology the European fascism emerged after WWI. The weakness of the multinational and multireligious Ottoman Empire, often described as the "sick man at the Bosphorus", was explained by the Turkish followers of Maurras as a result of its heterogeneity. The loss of the Balkan provinces in the following years, the revolts of its Christian minorities, supported from abroad, seemed to confirm their "Weltanschauung". Their conclusion was that the Turkey of the future must belong to the Turks alone. Who was a Turk was defined, due to the lack of racial characteristics, by the religion of the majority, which was Sunni Islam. For ethnic and religious minorities was no place in this vision.

According to the Turkish historian Taner Akcam, already in July 1910 the General Assembly of the Ittihat party in Thessaloniki discussed "*as an alternative, the deportation of the Christian population ... or a violent action*"⁷. If we believe Johannes Lepsius, a year later, in October 1911, also in Thessaloniki, the Young Turk Congress postulated: "*Turkey has to be a mostly muslim nation*"⁸. In January 1914, the Russian newspaper "Golos Moskv" wrote about a "*plan to homogenize Anatolia*" and to deport the Armenians to Mesopotamia, which was of course vigorously denied by the Young Turks at that time.⁹ Only in early March 1915, the immediate implementation of this plan was decided. The Young Turk leadership wanted to use the war as a pretext for a "*general and final cleansing*": to "*completely exterminate the*

⁷ Akcam, Taner: Armenien und der Völkermord, Hamburg 1996, S. 37

⁸ Lepsius, Johannes: Bericht über die Lage des Armenischen Volkes in der Türkei, Potsdam 1916, S. 211

⁹ Cit. Kévorkian, Raymond: The Armenian Genocide, New York 2011, S. 243

Armenian race"¹⁰, as Dr. Nazim Bey, General Secretary of the Ittihat, stated at a meeting of the party council. In fact, this party decision was communicated only days later, on March 16, 1915, to the German consul Dr. Paul Schwarz by the vali (provincial governor) of Harput, Sabit Bey.¹¹ The Central Committee member Nefis Bey had spoken as early as December 1914 to the Swiss missionary Jakob Künzler about such a plan.¹²

Also, on July 16, 1915, in a telex to the State Department in Washington DC, US-Ambassador Henry Morgenthau wrote: *"It appears that a campaign of race extermination is in progress under a pretext of reprisal against rebellion."*¹³ And the Turkish Interior Minister Talaat Bey informed the German General Consul Johann Mordtmann, according to a report to Berlin, *"without reserve about the intentions of the government, to use the World War to get rid of its internal enemies - the indigenous Christians of all denominations - without being disturbed by diplomatic intervention from foreign nations."*¹⁴

This assessment also runs like a red thread through the Vatican documents. *"Armenia without Armenians' - that's the plan of the Ottoman government"*, the Abbot General of Mechitarist Order, Msgr. Ghiurekian, wrote to Pope Benedict XV on July 30, 1915.¹⁵ Of the *"plan of the Young Turks, encouraged by the support of the Germans"*, wrote the Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Chalcedon, Msgr. Peter Kojunian, in his letter to Pope Benedict XV. from September 3, 1915: *"Of the horrors of the present war, which shake the paternal heart of Your Holiness, not the least is the massacre of the Armenians in Turkey, which was ordered by the Turkish government and already performed for the most part. (...) (It is) a systematic extermination of the Armenians in Turkey."*¹⁶ A Swiss initiative of several prominent academics who fought for the

¹⁰ H.K.Kazarian: Minutes of Secret Meetings Organizing the Turkish Genocide of Armenians, in: Armenian Review 18, 3 (1965), S. 18-40

¹¹ Cit. Hosfeld, Rolf: Operation Nemesis, Köln 2009, S. 151

¹² Künzler, Jakob: Im Lande des Blutes und der Tränen, Zürich 2004, S. 34

¹³ <http://www.armenian-genocide.org/us-7-16-15-text.html>

¹⁴ PA-AA/BoKon/169; A53a, 3451; cit.: Gust, Wolfgang (Hrsg.): Der Völkermord an den Armeniern 1915/16, Springe 2005, S. 166.

¹⁵ AA.EE.SS., Austria-Ungheria (Turchia), III, periodo 1915 pos. 1058 fasc. 458, no. 9466, pp 21-24

¹⁶ A.S.V., Segr. Stato, Questione Armena, B. S. 174, 03.09.1915, Kojunian to Benedict XV.

Armenians and contacted the Vatican in September 1915 learned from "*quite trustworthy eyewitnesses*" that "*it is nothing less than the systematic and officially ordered extermination of an entire Christian people, the Armenians, which is now set in motion, because the complete domination of Islam is wanted in the Ottoman Empire.*"¹⁷ The Superior of the Capuchin Order in Erzurum, the Austrian Father Norbert Hofer, wrote in October 1915 to the Vatican: "*The punishment of the Armenian nation (for alleged uprisings, author's note.) is merely a pretext of the Masonic Turkish government to exterminate all Christian elements in the country without repercussions.*"¹⁸ His compatriot and confriar, the Austrian Capuchin missionary Michael Liebl, learned in Samsun: "*Not the Armenians alone, the Christians have been sentenced (to death) at a secret meeting of the Young Turks, 5 or 6 years ago in Thessaloniki.*"¹⁹ A report of the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate to the Vatican from February 1916 added, "*that the government implements only the criminal legacy of (the former Grand Vizier) Midhat Pasha, who already wanted to exterminate the Christian element in Turkey. (...) It is certain that all these events took place on the direct order of the Turkish government and in cooperation with all the authorities of the Ottoman Empire.*"²⁰

In fact, the first document in the Vatican Archives which mentions the plan to deport Christians into the desert was written four month before the alleged Armenian "uprisings" (indeed singular cases of resistance) in Zeitun and Van. Already on December 6, 1914, the Apostolic Delegate for Syria, Msgr. Giannini, informed the Holy See: "*The Turkish government plans to arrest priests and sisters from the warring nations to and send them to concentration camps in the interior.*"²¹

2. Did any actions by the Armenians justify an intervention by the State?

¹⁷ AA.EE.SS., Austria-Ungheria (Turchia), III, periodo 1915-1916, pos. 1069, fasc. 462, no. 10294, pp 42-44

¹⁸ A.S.V., Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-18), Rubr. 244, fasc. 110, p 260-262

¹⁹ A.S.V., Arch. Deleg. Turchia, busta 101, fasc. 527, pp 88-89

²⁰ A.S.V., Arch. Deleg. Turchia, busta 101, fasc. 528, pp 2-4

²¹ A.S.V., Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-18), Rubr. 244, fasc 110, p.57 -58

No. Only on March 16, 1915, a few days after the party's decision to deport the Armenians (and the very day on which vali Sabit bey informed the German Consul Dr. Paul Schwarz about this plan), Marine Minister Cemal Pasha announced that "*a revolt erupted*"²² in Zeitun and demanded military action. In fact, just a handful of young deserters had a skirmish with the police. The alleged second "Armenian uprising" begun in Van on April 17, 1915. Under closer inspection, it turns out to an act of self-defense, after the Turkish vali Cevdet Bey had 80 Armenian villages in the province of Van pillaged during the two weeks before; 24,000 Armenians were massacred. When he requested 4000 young recruits from the Armenians of Van, they had every reason to fear another massacre. Instead, they built barricades around their suburb, and a week-long siege begun. It only ended when the Russian army invaded the province and the Turkish soldiers fled.

Although the course of the war caused the rescue of the Armenians in this case, there never was any evidence for a contact between the besieged Armenians of Van and the Russians. When it is true that thousands of Armenians crossed the Caucasus or entered the areas occupied by Russia to escape from the Turkish massacres, the Turkish claim of a Russian-Armenian conspiracy or planned sabotage of the Turkish war plans has just no grounds.

But even if it would have, or at least there was a legitimate suspicion, who would have been involved? At most, a few political activists and revolutionaries, but never the whole people. In addition, there were three Armenian "nations" or ethnic groups (Millet) in the Ottoman Empire who distrusted each other: The vast majority of the Gregorian (Apostolic) Armenian, the approximately 100,000 Catholic Armenians and about 50,000 Protestant Armenians. All of them were persecuted by the Turks alike. Indeed, the Catholic Armenians were rather known for their loyalty to the Ottoman state. They did not even speak Armenian, their language was Turkish. They were not interested in any contact neither to Holy Etchmiadzin nor to orthodox Russia.

In fact, most of the original diplomatic interventions by the Apostolic Delegate in Constantinople, Monsignor Angelo Dolci, were concentrated on the

²² PA-AA/R 14085; A 14801, 12.4.1915, Anlage 4, cit. Gust (Hrsg.) 2005, S. 134 f.

Armenian Catholics. The reason was simply that he felt more responsible since their Church was in union with the Church of Rome. In his diplomatic démarches, he repeatedly emphasized the patriotism of the Armenian Catholics.^{23 24} And indeed Interior Minister Talaat bey promised him and his “allies” - namely, the Bulgarian Foreign Minister, the German and the Austrian ambassador - at a diplomatic reception on 30 August 1915 to spare the Catholic Armenians of Angora (Ankara).²⁵ However, only a few days later, Dolci discovered that the Turk had lied to him.²⁶ In the presence of the diplomats, he had revoked the deportation order, just to empower it again the next day. There was no exemption, no special treatment of the Armenian Catholics, but the contrary. A year later, in 1916, the Turks had not only killed 75% of the Apostolic Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, but also 87% of the Armenian Catholics.²⁷

This was confirmed by the Italian Consul General in Trebizond, Giacomo Guerrini, whose report was sent to the Vatican: *"The Catholic Armenians were treated even more brutal than any other group. They were deceived by being first calmed and then ultimately arrested in a very brutal way. I sheltered some of them and intervened to protect their rights, but unfortunately without success. The order (of the responsible authorities) has been applied to all Armenians without exception, even to women, children, elderly and sick."*²⁸

We can say for sure that the Catholic Armenians, who were always treated as a separate group in the Ottoman Empire, were not involved in any political activity of the Apostolic Armenians. On the contrary, the German conservative representative at the Reichstag, Matthias Erzberger, a devout Catholic, stated in his report to the German government (of which he sent a copy to the Holy See): *"Their distaste for any nationalist aspirations, which is generally recognized, has drawn the particular hatred of their fellow countrymen, and*

²³ A.S.V., Arch. Deleg. Turchia, busta 101, fasc. 527, S. 13

²⁴ A.C.O., Armeni, fasc. 2950/28, Dolci to Gasparri, 20.8.1915

²⁵ A.S.V., Arch. Deleg. Turchia, busta 101, fasc. 527, S. 30 (draft) and 42 f. (copy)

²⁶ AA.EE.SS., Austria 472, Dolci at Pacelli, 12/14/1915

²⁷ A.C.O., Armeni, fasc. 722/30, Nr. 2232

²⁸ A.S.V., Segr. Stato Guerra (1914-18), Rubr. 244, fasc. 110, p 165-66

namely their (Armenian Catholic, author's note) Patriarch, who banned all nationalist activities, faced great hostility (by the Apostolic Armenians, author's note) for this reason."²⁹ But also among the Apostolic Armenians, children, elderly and sick certainly neither planned or participated in any political activities and were still deported. The proximity to the Russian border did not matter either, since the Armenians were deported from all parts of Anatolia. The Armenians of Urfa were even forced to march north to Diyarbekir, which was closer to the Russian frontier – just to be massacred on their way through the mountains. The absurdity of the Turkish explanation for those deportations was noted in a report sent by the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate to the Holy See: *"It is said that the relocation of the Armenians became necessary in the eyes of the Turkish military authorities. Maybe it could be justified if it had taken place only in the war zones, but in fact even families who lived far away from the front or in areas which are predominantly inhabited by Turks, have been driven away from their homes."*³⁰

Indeed, the extermination plans of the Young Turks were not even limited to the Armenians. Besides them, Christians of any denomination, especially Assyrian and Aramaeans, were deported and massacred: *"It is written and reported that the Turks massacred the Armenians. The truth is that the Turks murdered not only the Armenians but also other Christians: Syrian Catholics, Syrian Monophysites, Chaldeans, Nestorians etc."*, wrote the Syrian Catholic Patriarch Ignace Ephrem II Rahmani to the Holy See: *"All Christians who lived in the numerous villages of this area were equally killed, including a large number of non-Catholic Armenians and monophysite Syrians"*³¹ Similarly, Capuchin Father Liebl stated in a report to the Apostolic Delegate on March 3, 1916: *"In contrast to the assurance of the Turkish officials I tell you that it is in fact a religious persecution and that the Armenians are only persecuted because they are Christians."*³² The only way to avoid the deportation, which was offered at least to women and children, was the conversion to Islam. Those who denied their Christian faith were then given into Muslim households, as concubines or

²⁹ AA.EE.SS., Austria-Ungheria (Turchia) III periodo 1916 pos. 1075 e 1077, fasc. 466, no. 15412, p 10ff.

³⁰ A.S.V., Arch. Deleg. Turchia, busta 101, fasc. 528, pp 2-4

³¹ A.S.V., Seg. Stato Guerra (1914-18), Rubr. 244, fasc.111, S. 84-97, here: p 92 f.

³² A.S.V., Arch. Deleg. Turchia, busta 101, fasc. 527, S. 88-89

slaves of Muslim men. Until today, the Turks failed to explain the political or strategic necessity of this purely religious measure.

3. Did the Turkish measures make sense as a prevention of alleged uprisings, espionage or sabotage?

„The Ottoman government decided to immigrate the Armenians who were involved in the uprising to a safer place, namely Syria and Libanon... The Immigration process was carried out in a successful way as most of the Armenians were transferred safely to Syria“, a brochure published in 2009 by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, "An Outline of 2000 Years of Turkish History", claims.³³ But it certainly requires a high degree of cynicism to describe the death marches, survived by only 20 % of the deportees, as a "safe" and "successful".

A different view on the alleged "immigration process" offers the Austrian Capuchin, Fr. Norbert P. Hofer OFM Cap., Superior of the Capuchins of Erzurum, in a report he sent to the Vatican in October 1915 in which he states:

"The word 'deportation' means:

- 1. The absolute separation of men from their wives and mothers from their children.*
- 2. Threats and blandishments of the Turkish officials to force them all to renounce their religion. Those who did this -and there were many- were sent immediately in exclusively Muslim villages, from where they never returned.*
- 3. The abduction of women; they are first selected according to their physical properties and were either sold to a harem or forced to satisfy the unworthy desires of Turkish officials or guards.*
- 4. The little girls are often given as maidservants in Turkish households that agree to educate them as Muslims. Some of them were sent even to Constantinople. Elsewhere, all Christian boys are circumcised, and then given*

³³ Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Culture and Tourism (ed.): An Outline of 2000 Years of Turkish history, Ankara 2009, p. 122

*into Turkish homes. After completing the selections, the survivors are forced to surrender all their possessions, houses, money and move inland. They are accompanied by brutal gendarmes and must constantly wander from village to village, to an unknown destination. Completely demoralized by their pain and the sudden separation, their body is often no longer able to withstand the harsh climate and other adversities, and so many of them die on the way. Others are also massacred."*³⁴

This report was confirmed by the Apostolic Delegate in Constantinople, Monsignor Dolci, when he reported on August 20, 1915 to Rome. *"It is impossible to get an idea of what is happening in the interior. The entire Armenian population is systematically driven brutally from their towns and villages and deported to unknown places. Sometimes they allow those unfortunates, the elderly, sick, children and their urgent items to be transported with carts. But in most cases, all those poor people have to march in larger groups on foot through the dry landscape, where many of them are killed by complete exhaustion, suffering and privations of all kinds after a few days. To others, armed escorts are given under the pretext of protecting them, but unfortunately often enough those escorts turn out to be the greatest danger for the deportees. Indeed many caravans, as soon as they arrive in more remote areas, were massacred by their guides (the gendarmes, author's note)."*³⁵[Xviii]

The detailed eyewitness accounts that are preserved in the Vatican archives actually leave no doubt that the Turks did not intend a "successful immigration process" of the Armenians but the extermination of the Christian element in Anatolia. This alone explains the Turkish *modus operandi*, which always proceeded in the same way:

- a. Search for alleged weapons in order to have a pretext for the deportation.
- b. Arrest and subsequent murder of the Armenian notables.
- c. Arrest of Armenian men in the age between 16 and 70 under the pretext of their recruitment. Few were actually committed to road works and

³⁴ A.S.V., Arch. Deleg. Turchia, busta 101, fasc. 527, S. 245-246

³⁵ A.C.O., Armeni, fasc. 2950/28

support services. The greater part was led outside their towns or villages and massacred at some distance.

- d. Call for deportation of the women, children and elderly. Whoever voluntarily converted to islam, was exempted and transferred in Turkish families. All others were sent on a sometimes several weeks long march through the highlands of Anatolia. In most cases they had to leave their property behind; those who were allowed to take it with them were robbed on the way.
- e. In various raids, the groups of deportees were progressively decimated and robbed of their most personal belongings. Women were raped or robbed and sold into slavery or prostitution. The "police escort" of the deportees offered no protection, but usually took part in the raids, as the General of the Mechitarist Friars, Msgr. Ghiurekian, stated in his letter to Pope Benedict XV: *"Not only Kurds and brigands, but gendarms and government officials come together to plunder them and to dishonor the women and girls."*³⁶ The Armenian Catholic Patriarchate added: *"Everyone knows that the government at the beginning of the war released criminals from the prisons to form the Cetes' hordes ("special units" of the "Teskilat Mahsusa", author's note), which were used in the eastern provinces, mostly inhabited by Armenians. These Cetes' began to pillage the villages of the Armenians, to dishonor their women and young girls and assassinate their notables."*³⁷ In addition, water, bread and shelter were denied to the deportees. Who did not fall ill on the way from the well-spread epidemic diseases or died of hunger and exhaustion, reached their destination, the Syrian desert, often naked, emaciated and burned by the sun.³⁸
- f. Only about 20% of the deportees reached their destination, one of the concentration camps in the Syrian desert. Those who did not fall victim to hunger, physical weakness and disease during the winter of 1915/16 was either massacred in or near the camp or sent on another death

³⁶ AA.EE.SS., Austria-Ungheria (Turchia), III, periodo 1915, pos. 1058, fasc. 458, no. 9466, S. 21-24

³⁷ A.S.V., Arch. Deleg. Turchia, busta 101, fasc. 528, S. 2-4

³⁸ A.S.V., Arch. Deleg. Turchia, busta 101, fasc. 527, S. 88-89; A.S.V., Arch. Deleg. Turchia, busta 101, fasc. 527, S. 120-143

march even deeper into the desert before the next summer. Not more than 3% of the original deportees survived the following year (1916).

Given these facts, it is downright perfidious to speak of a "successful, safe transfer", as the Turks did, when the death rate was indeed close to 97 %.

4. ... Or was it genocide?

The "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide", adopted by Resolution 260 (III) A of the U.N. General Assembly on 9 December 1948, defines genocide as

"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."*³⁹

Dozens of documents from the Vatican archives describe the massacres of the convoys of Armenian deportees by gendarms, soldiers, militia, and government. The whole deportation process itself obviously only served the purpose to decimate the Armenians so that only a part of them reached the overcrowded concentration camps in the Syrian desert, where the killing continued. The denial of food and water - the Armenians were even prevented from drinking from rivers! - and the forced marches through the mountains led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands, the continuing harassment and rape, of theft of all clothes and the torture and brutality of the gendarmes caused mental harm and madness and lead to the suicide of thousands. The Capuchin Superior Fr. Norbert Hofer, in his report to the Holy See, quotes the Austrian Lazarist Father D. Dunkl, who, on his way from Jerusalem to Vienna, travelled

³⁹ <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html>

through Aleppo and witnessed in which state the Armenians arrived there on their way to the Syrian desert:

"Normally, only the women arrive in Aleppo; the men died before, either from their suffering or they were massacred.

In the courtyard of a 'Khan' (caravansery) near Aleppo he (P. Dunkl, author's note) saw, sitting on the bare ground, in the midst of their own excrements, several hundreds of women, including many mothers with their already dead or still surviving children at the breast. All of them were to die in an apathetic state or verge. A protestant deaconess - which, incidentally, tried to alleviate by all means the suffering of those unfortunate women - said that she had to remove about twenty bodies from this courtyard every day.

A Catholic nun who had recently arrived in Aleppo, told us that she was expelled with six other sisters from Tokat. All of them were stripped and had to undertake the journey of over a week to Aleppo completely naked. Five of her companions died on the way, exhausted from the tortures they had to endure. One went mad near the city (Aleppo, author's note) and drowned herself in a river. The narrator was able to seize the clothing a corpse lying on the street, got dressed and fled into the city, where she was received by other nuns who had arrived earlier. "⁴⁰

The total number of victims is estimated in the Vatican documents as far beyond a million. A report by the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate, which was written in February 1916, already mentioned "almost 1,000,000"⁴¹ [xxiii] victims even before the massacres in the Syrian desert. Monsignor Dolci estimated already on December 20, 1915 about 1.1 million dead⁴² [xxiv], while Capuchin Father Michael Liebl stated on September 30, 1917, after the massacres: *"Of the 2.3 million Armenians living in Turkey, one and a half million have been exterminated by the Turks."*⁴³[xxv], herewith confirming the number calculated by modern-day genocide researchers.

⁴⁰ A.S.V., Segr. Stato, Guerra (1914-18), rubr. 244, fasc. 110, S. 260-262

⁴¹ A.S.V., Arch. Deleg. Turchia, busta 101, fasc. 528, S. 2-4

⁴² A.C.O., Armeni del Patriarcato 1891-1926, rubr. 105, 3, Nr. 37021

⁴³ A.S.V., Arch. Nunz. Monaco di Baviera, busta 342, fasc. 1, S. 5 ff.

The "*forcibly transfer of children of the group to another group*" is another sad chapter of the Armenocide: "*A large number of Armenian children (the witness believed that there were 1000) were circumcised on the birthday of the Sultan and made into Turks. Many women and children were forced into Turkish homes*", reported the Roman Catholic priest John Straubinger from Rottenburg, a German military chaplain in Turkey, to the Apostolic Delegate⁴⁴[Xxvi]. "*Hunger and threats drive (Armenian women, author's note.) in the homes of Turks. The children then become automatically Turkish or were, as so-called 'war orphans', turkified under force by the government*" the German Reichstag member Matthias Erzberger wrote to the Vatican, to add in an enclosed document: "*Now are thousands of orphans slaves in Muslim families*"⁴⁵ [xxvii]. A report by the Armenian Catholic Patriarchate states: "*The women and girls left behind without any protection were often enough kidnapped, either still in their village or on the road, and taken to Turkish harems. Everywhere the local authorities snatched children of both sexes from their mothers' arms and handed them over to the Turks. (...) The forced conversions of women and young girls go into the thousands. (...) The propaganda of forced conversion runs until today, advocated by the highest representatives of the Turkish government*"⁴⁶ [xxviii], a fact that also the Capuchin Father Michael Liebl from Samsun confirmed: "*The girls and young women were most violently forced into the harems and married to Turks.*"⁴⁷ [xxix]

So was it a genocide, which took place in the Ottoman Empire in 1915-16? The documents from the Vatican archives leave no doubt that the Armenocide meets almost all the criteria defined by the United Nations.

⁴⁴ A.S.V., Arch. Deleg. Turchia, busta 97, fasc. 503, S. 268 ff.

⁴⁵ A.A.E.E.S.S., Austria-Ungheria (Turchia), III periodo 1916, pos. 1075 e 1077, fasc. 466, no. 15412, S. 10ff.

⁴⁶ A.S.V., Arch. Deleg. Turchia, busta 101, fasc. 528, S. 2-4

⁴⁷ A.S.V., Arch. Nunz. Monaco di Baviera, busta 342, fasc. 1, S. 5 ff.

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The cited documents were from the Vatican Secret Archives (ASV), the archives of the Vatican Secretariat of State (AA.EE.SS.) and the Archives of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches (ACO).