



## **Commentary**

**Ahval , Cengiz Aktar 13.3.2018**

### **Appeasing militarism?**

On April, 15 1915, the German Empire's ambassador to Ottoman Empire, Hans von Wangenheim, sent a report to the chancellor in Berlin, giving a plain indication of the German policy towards Ottoman Armenians: "We have to be especially careful. Otherwise, through the act of intervening on behalf of Armenians, for a perhaps hopeless cause we may incur the risk of jeopardising interests that are more important and more vital for us". This is reported in "The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Office Archives, 1915–1916" edited by Wolfgang Gust (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2012-14)

A few months later on July, 4 1915 when the genocidal roller coaster was in full swing, the ambassador wrote: "The measures of repression by the (Ottoman) imperial government against the Armenian population of the eastern Anatolian provinces are dictated by military considerations and constitute a legitimate defence; the German government is far from opposing their execution inasmuch as these measures have the objective of consolidating the internal security of Turkey and avoiding attempts of insurrection."

Wangenheim passed away a few months later in Constantinople and was succeeded by Paul von Metternich. The new envoy reacted strongly to the ongoing slaughter, but ended up as persona non grata and was removed from office in August 1916 after the top two Ottoman pashas, Enver and Talat, intervened with Berlin, which did not dare lose its ally in World War One. Berlin removed its envoy for "interfering in favour of the Christians, hurting the dignity of Turks and not acting in accordance with the interests of Germany".

Gust confirms throughout his colossal archival work what was generally known or suspected regarding the responsibility of Berlin in the annihilation of the Ottoman Armenians. Whereas German consuls in Anatolia were duly reporting the horrendous deeds to the embassy, the latter was systematically overlooking the reports, and quite the opposite, was minimizing the facts emerging from the field.

German consuls in the field were able to prove that the so-called uprisings were, in fact, nothing other than Armenians fighting to defend themselves. Furthermore, in the eyes of local German diplomats, the “uprising” was used as propaganda by the Ottoman government, providing a further argument to eliminate the Armenians. Throughout his work Gust elaborates on Germany’s responsibility in the genocide.

Next to Ottoman Armenians, several historians point to Germany’s role in the anti-Christian practices targeting the Ottoman Greeks, which started right after the end of Balkan Wars (1912-13). The forced deportation of Greeks living on the Aegean coast to inland Anatolia was recommended by General Liman von Sanders, a top counsellor and commander in the Ottoman Army.

For the German Empire, its key objectives were to ensure the extension of the Baghdad railway to Basra in the Gulf, to secure the region as a German colony, in particular cotton-producing Cilicia, and to challenge the British militarily, economically and strategically in the region as far as Suez Canal.

These objectives had priority over anything else in German policy towards its ally, before and during World War One. They amounted to the rationale behind the tolerance shown to religious cleansing practices that doubled in intensity with the entry of Ottoman Empire in the war alongside Germany.

Finally German militarism and Ottoman/Turkish militarism wed well.

Not much has changed in 100 years of “interest based” attitudes of states and their solidarity when it comes to the fate of the feeble and/or stateless. Even the arguments utilised have remained pretty much the same. The unique difference is that Germany shifted from active military alliance 100 years ago to passive military/economic support, always to the disadvantage of feeble; for the Kurds in the region, but also all those in Turkey subjected to Erdoğan’s rule.

The German state is making cold calculations. It is Turkey’s main trading partner and direct investor. Yet its interests are primarily economic, but also strategic and political. They are related to energy through the financing of the trans-Anatolian pipeline from Azerbaijan, through Turkey to Europe, to arms sales (Rheinmetall, Heckler & Koch) and to around 6,000 German companies operating in Turkey. Chancellor Angela Merkel’s moral pre-eminence vis-à-vis a bullying President Donald Trump has long gone away.

Together with Germany, we should reckon with all Western states as they all pretend to a sort of moral superiority regarding human rights. They all covet selling goods, in particular arms, and to bid for juicy engineering projects for which there is a lack of local expertise; to keep Turkey in NATO so to avoid pushing it into Russian President Vladimir Putin's laps; to reward President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for his abandoning of Turkey's EU membership objective, and in the short-run, to ensure that Turkey continues to block the mass movement of refugees, migrants, and now ex-jihadists towards Europe.

So today, NATO and the European Union regularly say they "understand" Turkey's "legitimate security concerns" and "its fight against terror", replicating the stance of the German ambassador 100 years ago when Armenian Genocide was taking place. No matter that the Syrian enclave of Afrin has never been a threat to Turkey as the Scientific Services Department of the German Bundestag [found](#) recently, pointing out that Turkey "has not yet provided concrete evidence of an armed attack on itself that would cause legitimate self-defence".

The same "understanding" goes for the widespread repression and lawlessness Turkish citizens are subjected to, following the failed so-called coup d'état of 2016.

Consequently Turkey's Western "partners" are all looking to rapidly "normalise" their relations with Ankara and continue with business as usual.

By doing so they are all ready to forget that the military attack on Afrin is such bad practice adding to the existing conflicts in Palestine and Yemen, so that now more militarist countries might dare to invade their neighbour by pretending that "terrorists" are positioned there, no matter if these terrorists are the very inhabitants.

Similarly they are all ready to overlook that any totalitarian regime can get away with repression and extra-legal deeds over its citizens as long as it categorises them as "enemies of the nation", like Hitler did with Jews and leftists.

All this is about the practice of "enemy law" applying indiscriminately to Syrian Kurds and citizens of Turkey alike.

The normalisation of relations with such a fascist regime today amounts to the appeasement of Hitler's Germany, exactly 80 years ago in Munich, with the consequences we all know. And if "normalisation" is today's catch-word for appeasement, "legitimate security concerns" are the euphemism for "authorised" mass killings.

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