MALTA DOCUMENTS - CONTINUITY OF CUP AND TURKISH REPUBLIC

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By Sait Çetinoğlu, Turkey, 15 July 2009

Sait Çetinoğlu is a Turkish scholar. His interests include The Young Turks, CUP and Kemalism. He has published many original articles based on research of the National Archives in Turkey. His book ***Economic and cultural genocide 1942-1944*** *will soon be published in İstanbul.*

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The Malta documents undoubtedly constitute one of the most revealing records about the Armenian Genocide, which is one of the most important episodes of our recent history; yet it is a reality, which we do not want to look into. To reveal the truth about 1915 is, in fact, tantamount to decode the secrets of the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. It is for this reason that the period 1915 to 1923, the date of the foundation of the Turkish Republic, is the most difficult to research due to legal obstacles. Malta documents are the most significant ones that shed light on this period of transition.
These documents give us the accounts of what 150 Ottoman government authorities and civil servants did during WWI. It is also the story of the annihilation of a people under the isolated conditions of war and seizure of their property, the story of how a new commercial bourgeoisie and a bureaucratic bourgeoisie flourished on the usurped riches of this people. The accounts of the witnesses and the victims that can be found in these documents also serve a moral lesson for us. Here we can find the clues to the hidden truths of the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, and this is the reason why so much effort is made to leave the events of 1915 to oblivion. Hence, these documents explain why Turkey would never recognize the Armenian Genocide. They also tell the story of a continuity from the Committee of Progress and Union Committee (CUP) to the Republic of Turkey, the historical roots of today's secret operations and the corruption of the state apparatus in Turkey.To be a Malta exile was almost a privilege, as they were never called "prisoner" and they themselves preferred to be called "exiles". Reading their memoirs, one can clearly see that they did not lead a life of an inmate. The description of the daily life in Malta in the memoirs of Kuşçubaşı

Eşref is one of a luxury. Many Malta inmates were able to escape very easily, because they were allowed to escape.

Many of the Malta exiles were appointed to key governmental positions after their sentence was over. When we track down the family trees of the Malta exiles in the documents we can see who the real owners of the state apparatus were. Four of the 50 key governors whose biographies are published by the Ministry of Interior were former Malta exiles, in addition to many others whose children and grandchildren later became high-level government officials.

The Malta documents provide us the story of the tragedy of a people, the story of how the fate of the Armenian people was sacrificed to the considerations of realpolitik. They are a manifestation of the immorality of the great powers, a lesson demonstrating how human rights were sacrificed for imperial interests and an unprecedented example of a crime going unpunished. They describe how the crime of genocide was rewarded by impunity and how the way to new genocides was paved. In fact, Hitler in 1939 expressed very clearly the encouraging nature of this tragedy. What happened in Algeria, Anfal, Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo and the atrocities in Darfur or Iraq today are all the outcome of such impunity.

Among others, Great Britain's policy of "neutrality", first adopted on the 16th of March 1921 - the date when GB recognized the Ankara government as a buffer against the Soviet Union and continued since then - was responsible for the genocide to be left to oblivion just for the sake of imperial interests. Armenian people were thus twice victimized, first by being subjected to genocide with the encouragement of an imperialist country, i.e. German, and then by the fact that the perpetrators of the genocide were rewarded instead of being punished, thanks to the interests of another imperialist country, this time Great Britain.

In order to track down the Malta exiles we studied the biographies of administrative and military authorities. We couldn't make use of any documents published by the General Staff as the biographies of the Liberation War commanders lacked any record about their places of service during 1915-1917. It was observed that the life stories of the government officials positioned in deportation areas were very interesting as they indicated clearly that the personnel records of *kaymakams* and *mutasarrıfs 1* determined the future career of these officials. Those who disapproved the practices lost their lives, as was the case with Ali Sabit Es-Süveydi, the deputy Kaymakam in Beşiri (a district annexed to the *vilayet* of Diarbekir), Nesim Bey, the *Kaymakam* of Lice and the *Kaymakam* of Derik. It was found in the official records of Ahmet Ferid, the Kaymakam of Foça, that he was removed from office as punishment for saving the lives of the Greeks of Foça by helping them to flee to the island of Lesbos. Some of the officials who were punished by removal only from office felt so insecure afterwards that they had to leave the country.

Our work on the personnel records of the government officials who served in the deportation areas revealed that some of these people fell victim to unsolved murders and no record could

be found about the details of such murders.For example, the personnel records of Mustafa Hilmi, the *Mutasarrıf* of Mardin and Ali Fehmi Bey, a member of the Transportation Committee set up within the Directorate of Immigration and Resettlement in Akşehir, it was stated that neither the reason for these persons' murder nor the murderers could be identified. There were annotations in some of the personnel records of those officials who were later murdered indicating that the murderers were the Armenian *"komitaci"s* 2. For instance Nabi Bey, who served in the police department of Konya and who was in hiding in Kars for two years as a Genocide suspect was killed by the Armenian activists in 1921.

However, most of the government officials who served during the deportations and whose names appeared in the Malta documents were rewarded afterwards by higher positions in the state apparatus. It's also not surprising to find that those government officials who were implicated in the Genocide were the ones who first joined the "National Struggle" leading to the foundation of the Republic. Of these, the governors of Bitlis, Mazhar Müfit (Kansu), and Van, Haydar Hilmi (Vaner), as well as Halis Turgut, Deli Halit Pasha, General Pertev Demirhan, Sarı Edip Efe, Ardahan deputy Hilmi are the most common names that are known.

On the other hand, some of the government officials referred to in the Malta Documents could not be tracked down due to lack of any records. Genocide perpetrators such as Salih Zeki, the Kaymakam of Develi in 1915 who was appointed as the *Mutasarrıf* of Deyr-Zor in 1916 and Mustafa Asım, the *Kaymakam* of Harput in 1914, of Akçadağ in 1915 and of Of in 1918 were the ones who used the usurped Armenian property for escaping from prosecution successfully. The Family Name Law, requiring every Turkish citizen to adopt a family name in a western style, helped the criminals in covering up their identities and thus avoiding punishment. The reappearance of Veli Necdet in the 1930's in Ankara as the Chairman of Ankara Chamber of Commerce with the family name of Sünkıtay, after serving as the Head of the Diyarbakır Post Office in 1915 and the death of Memduh Sermet, the Governor of Musul in 1915, in a road accident while he was travelling to Izmir to start a business, are only two of very meaningful cases in this respect. The Bolu deputy Habip became a reputable merchandiser in the Republican period, widely known as the "*bulghur* 3 tycoon". The fact that many of these suspects later became businessmen with close business ties with each other can also be seen as a revealing detail of the recent history of Turkey, and the Family Name Law helped them a lot in succeeding to cover up their identities.

Mehmet the Pharmacist, who later became to be known as Mehmet Eczacıbaşı, the starter of the biggest holdings in today's Turkey, is a striking example of Turkish businessmen who owe their wealth to usurped non-Muslim property. This is the origin of the common saying in Turkish, the *"tehcir zenginleri"*, or the "barons of deportation" and marks the truth about the Anatolia being a paradise of barons of deportation.

It is also not a coincidence that the heads of administrative bodies in places where deported Armenians were resettled, and government officials serving at local branches of General Directorate

for Settlement of Immigrants and Tribes (*Muhacirin ve Aşairin Umum Müdürlüğü*) (GDSIT), political departments of public security directorates and food supply offices were the first to join the armed forces of the Turkish national liberation movement. They were appointed to these positions by the CUP on special mission. For example Ahmet Nazif Göker from the Ministry of Food Supplies, Mustafa Maruf and Ahmet Faik Üstün were among the first who joined the armed branches of the liberation movement. Here are some further examples to how the former CUP members were rewarded with reputable positions in the society: Ahmet Faik Günday, the *Mutasarrıf* of Malatya and elder brother of Ziya Hurşit was appointed as the deputy of Ordu. İbrahim Zağra, the Edirne Mayor and Head of Resettlement Department and also one of the founders of the *Teceddüt* Party founded by former CUP leaders, was to serve for long years as the Edirne Mayor and Chairman of the Edirne Chamber of Commerce. Mehmet Şükrü Yaşin who served as the *Kaymakam* of Midyat, Malatya and Trablusşam between the years 1914-17 was later appointed as the deputy of Çanakkale. Ahmet Esat Uras who was the head of the local Intelligence Service and the deputy head of Political Affairs was first appointed as the Director of Public Security, then as the Governor, then member of Turkish History Institution and member of the Parliament. Ali Haydar Yuluğ, the deputy head of the local branch of GDSIT, took over the position of Ankara Mayor and Ali Rıza Ceylan, the head of Post Office in Van and Bitlis and M. Kadri Necip Uçok, the head of the Post Office of Sivas and the *Mutasarrıf* of Palu and Mardin served as governors of various provinces. Mehmet Ata, who served in the years of deportation at the Sivas Post Office and *Mutasarrıf* of Yozgat was appointed as a member of the parliament and the Minister of Interior. There are many more examples, such as İsmail Sefa Özler, İsmail Müştak Mayokam, Mehmet Vehbi Bolak, Mehmet Fuat Carım, Ömer Adil Tiğrel and Mehmet Fehmi Alta.

Those who were being sought after for implication in the Genocide were also among the first to join the national movement. Among these the first to remember are, Mahzar Müfit, Haydar Vaner, Arslan Toğuzata (police chief from Trablusşam), Abdurrahman Şeref Uluğ from Diyarbakır, Hüseyin Tahir Güvendiren, Halil Rifat Şabanoğlu, Rüştü Bozkurt, Ali Şuuri, the deputy of Eskişehir and Şarkikarahisar, Mahzar Germen, Tevfik Rüştü Aras, Refik Saydam, Memduh Şevket Esendal, Yenibahçeli Nail, Şükrü Saracoğlu and Hüseyin Aziz (Akyürek), a member of CUP Central Commitee and who was known to be one of the planners of the Genocide.

It was not an irony at all when two of the Malta convicts Haci Adil Bey was accepted to the Istanbul Faculty of Law and M. Reşat Mimaroğlu, a police chief, was appointed as the President of the Council of State, as this is a routine in Turkey where a leader of the military coup in 1980 was later rewarded as an honourary professor in the same faculty and a police chief was appointed as the Minister of Justice.

Furthermore, there were Malta convicts who were put on the government payroll and were paid civil servant salaries for their "services to the fatherland". We came accross their names in the "Ç Chart" of the 1955 government budget records. Among them were Nusret, the *Mutasarrıf* of Urfa, who was

executed for his crimes during the Genocide, Kemal, the Kaymakam of Boğazlayan who was referred to as being a "National Martyr", Yahya Kaptan who "fell martyr" while serving as the Commander of the Gebze area, the former Minister of the Navy General Ahmet Cemal, the former Sadrazam Talat, the former Governor of Diyarbakır Reşit, *Şeyhülislam* 4 Hayri, Ziya Gökalp, the deceased artillary major Rıza, the deputy of Kırşehir Mehmet Rıza Silsüpür (Keskinli Rıza), the deputy of Edirne Faik Kaltakıran, the deputy of Gaziantep Ali Cenani, the deputy of Istanbul Numan Ustalar, the deputy of Muş İlyas Sami, governor of Bitlis Mazhar Müfit Kansu, the Governor and the deputy of Van Hayder Vaner, Fevzi Pirinççioğlu, Arslan Toğuzata, Rüştü Bozkurt, Hacı Bedir, Mazhar Germen, Süleyman Sırrı İçöz, Rauf Orbay, Eyüp Sabri Akgöl and Bekir Sami Kunduh.

Popular historian Murat Bardakçı wrote: "As a matter of fact, Atatürk's position on the Armenian question is clearly manifested in the way he gave away the property. He put the families of the persons murdered by Armenians on very high salaries and he personally signed the instructions for the transfer of seized Armenian property to these persons. Wife of Talat Pasha was receiving the salary for 'services to the fatherland' which was the highest. The same applied to the wives of Central Commitee members and those of the key members of the Special Organisation (*Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa*). The highest level of salary was assigned to Mahpeyker Hanim, the daughter of Enver Pasha."

The Malta exiles were rewarded with top level government positions. Some were appointed as Prime Minister, others as ministers or governors or members of parliament, and the like. Two of the Malta exiles, Ali Fethi Okyar and Rauf Orbay served as Prime Ministers. Others, Fevzi Pirinçioğlu, Şükrü Kaya, Abdülhalik Renda, M. Şeref Aykut, Ali Seyit, Ali Cenani, Ali Çetinkaya were appointed as cabinet members. Many of the Malta exiles later became governors or generals in the army. Also, on their return to Anatolia, there were a number of former Malta exiles who were placed in the parliament as deputies.

Not only Malta exiles played a direct role in the foundation of the Republic, but also their children and grandchildren continued to serve in important government positions up to this date. Sons of two Malta exiles sat in the Inönü's "restoration" cabinet set up after the military coup of 27th May 1960. Celalettin Uzer, the Minister of Development and Housing in the Inönü Cabinet, was the son of Hasan Tahsin Uzer, who was Enver's nephew and Vefik Pirinççioğlu, the State Minister in the same cabinet, was the son of Fevzi Pirinççioğlu, who was Ziya Gökalp's nephew. It's interesting to see that the grandfather was one of the key figures of the 1895 massacres, the son was one of the founders of the Republic, and the grandson a member of the "restoration" cabinet. Enver's brother-in-law Kazım Orbay was the Chief of General Staff between the years 1944-46 and the Speaker at the Restoration Parliament set up after the 1960 military take-over. General Fahri Özdilek, a member of the Special Organisation and an assistant to the well-known Special Organisation commander Fuat Bulca, was one of the organisers of the 27th May 1960 coup and was appointed as a Senator at the Restoration Parliament. Suat Hayri Ürgüplü one of the Prime Ministers of the 'intermediary regime" and also a

former minister, was the son of the Şeyhülislam Hayri Efendi and thus one of the symbols of the continuity between the CUP and the Republic.
We believe the reader will find many of those names referred to in the section about Diyarbakır very familiar. As a preamble, let us only point out that the Aksus and the Göksus are two families closely related to each other and Hacı Bedir Ağa's grandchildren sit in today's parliament as deputies.

Furthermore, many Malta exiles and the founders of the Republic had common ancestry. For Süleyman Nazif, Pirinççioğlu, Gökalp and Germens were relatives. So were Tahsin Uzer, Enver, Cevdet and Kazım Orbay. Ubeydullah Efendi was Mahmut Esat Bozkurt's uncle, Hüseyin Tosun was Dr. Reşit's brother and Abdulhalik Renda was Talat's brother-in-law. Also many Malta exiles were classmates, revealing the fact that they were from common social backgrounds.
In short, the Malta documents offer us the evidences of the continuity between the CUP and the Republic, where we can trace back the roots of the Genocide.

1.In the Ottoman Empire, a *mutasarrıf* was the governor of a district. This administrative unit was part of a *vilayet* (province), administered by a *vali*, and contained *nahiye* (communes), each administered by a *kaymakam*.
2.*Komitacı* - A derogatory Turkish word for a member of an armed Armenian organisation.
3.*Bulghur*: a form of wheat that has been parboiled, cracked, and dried
4.*Şeyhülislam*: the supreme religious authority in the Ottoman Empire