

An International Imperialist Strategy: The Question of Orient

The Ottoman state has been betrayed so many times by its subjects of different nationalities under its rule as well as by the western powers to which it had granted political and economic privileges. Armenians too appeared on this stage. They allowed themselves to be deceived by certain powers intending to use them as a tool for disintegrating the Ottoman State and thus betrayed the Ottoman state which had offered them the possibility of living in peace and prosperity under its own equitable government.

It is from the second half of the 19th century that people started talking about an Armenian question.

If so wished, one might find the beginning of this question in the Edict of Islahat (betterment) of 1856 or in the Turco-Russian War of 1877-78 and the subsequent Treaty of St. Stephanos of March 3, 1878 as well as in the Peace Conference of Berlin dated July 13, 1878. Some articles were first inserted into the Treaties of St. Stephanos and Berlin providing that conditions should be bettered in places inhabited by Armenians and then Great Powers interfered in the internal affairs of the Ottoman state on the basis of such articles and thus gave rise to the Armenian Question.

In fact, the Armenian Question was part of the larger Question of Orient. The imperialist European states, called as the Great Powers (Russia, Britain, France and Germany) vehemently supported the nationalist and secessionist movements originated amidst the non-muslim subjects with the aim of breaking up the Ottoman state in conformity with their interests and attempted to establish states in the Balkans under their influence.

It is known that the Armenian question did not stem from the social, cultural, economic, administrative and political status of those Armenians living in the territory of the Ottoman state and that its underlying cause was an artificially created international imperialistic strategy by the name of the Question of Orient namely a policy of balance of powers.

As a term of diplomatic history, the Question of Orient expresses the effort on the part of the western powers to disintegrate the Ottoman state in the second half of the 19th century. The meaning of the Question of Orient to non-muslims was in brief to disintegrate the Ottoman state and effecting of some reforms that would produce concessions and privileges in their favour, to lead eventually to autonomy and independence. (Bayram Kodaman: "fiark Meselesine Tarihi Gelişimi". [The Question of Orient and its Historical Development]. Tarihi Gelişimler içinde Türkiye'nin Sorunları Sempozyumu, Ankara, March 8-9, 1990, pp. 59-63; Bayram Kodaman: "Ermeni Meselesinin Doğuş ve Sebepleri". [The Reasons giving rise to the Armenian Question]. Türk Kültürü, (219), March-April 1981, pp. 240-249; Yılmaz Öztuna: XX. Yüzyılın Son Çeyreğinde fiark Meselesi. [The Question of Orient in the Last Quarter of the 20th Century]. Ankara, 1989; Cevdet Küçük: "fiark Meselesi Hakkında Önemli Bir Vesika".

[An Important Document concerning the Question of Orient].İ.Ü. EdebiyatFakültesiTarihDergisi, (32), March 1979, pp. 607-638.)